



Japan to offer €2m to Iran for nuclear safety cooperation

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida said Wednesday that Japan has decided to offer Iran around €2.05 million (\$2.2 million) in the field of nuclear safety to help the Middle Eastern state steadily implement its historic nuclear deal with the West.

"We agreed that bilateral relations are steadily making progress in a wide range of areas, including on cooperation for the steady implementation of the nuclear agreement," Kishida told a joint news conference in Tokyo after his talks with Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif.

Zarif said at the outset of the meeting, which was open to the media, that he welcomes Japan's "constructive contribution" that "strongly pushes the implementation" of the nuclear agreement.

The nuclear deal Iran struck with six major powers in July last year limits Iran's nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of most international sanctions. The deal has been endorsed by the UN Security Council.

Since the deal, Japan has been stepping up relations with the oil-rich country, lifting its sanctions on Iran in January and signing a bilateral investment pact the following month. ➔2

Shell signs oil, gas MOU in Iran

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Iran planning to become medical sciences powerhouse

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Iran's **d e s k** is planning to be turned into a powerhouse in the global medicine industry, deputy health minister Mohammad-Baqer Larijani said on Wednesday.

Underscoring the importance of going international by careful planning and overcoming the challenges to become a scientific powerhouse, Larijani stated that "we should strive hard to achieve what we have in mind," Mehr news agency reported.

"Other countries in the region are not waiting for us to make improvements rather they all are doing their best to surpass us by being among world top universities so we should take it very serious," Larijani noted.

"We need to empower our universities by setting clear targets and identifying the challenges we might face and our weak points and strengths," he added.

"We have the potential but we have not been very successful in attracting international students so we should become a study-abroad-destination choice for students worldwide rather than being a country that solely provides students to other countries," he stated. ➔13

London in no position to accuse Iran of regional meddling, Tehran says

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's **d e s k** Foreign Ministry has reacted to recent anti-Iran comments by British Prime Minister Theresa May, saying England which has bred insecurity and waged wars in the region itself in no position to launch accusations against others.

"Countries whose irresponsible interventions in other countries have caused insecurity, war, violence, and terrorism to increase are not in a position to accuse others of interference in regional affairs," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi.

Qassemi was making the comments in response to remarks by May during the GCC's annual summit in the Bahraini capital Manama on Wednesday.

Recommending ongoing vigilance towards Iran, May had said she is "clear-eyed" about what she called "the threat" Iran poses to the region.

Tehran sees the remarks in line with England's efforts to clinch more arm sales deals with Arab countries.

"It seems that such comments aim to pave the way for conclusion of new, hefty arm sales contracts between England and some littoral countries of the Persian Gulf," he added.

During the meeting, May had called for deeper military cooperation with members of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council.

May said Britain planned to invest more than \$3.7 billion in the region over the next decade.

Scholars, experts discuss principles common to Islam and international humanitarian law

The Centre for Comparative Studies on Islam and International Humanitarian Law, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Red Crescent Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran hosted an academic conference in Qom to celebrate ten years of collaborative research on humanitarian principles in Islam and international humanitarian law (IHL) in Iran.

The conference started on December 7 and will last until on December 8.

ICRC president Peter Maurer attended the opening ceremony.

"A decade of collaboration between scholars of Islam and experts on IHL represents a milestone for the ICRC and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as a whole. The dialogue between these experts and scholars aims to dispel misconceptions and identify shared values, particularly with regard to the protection of human dignity in situations

of armed conflict. At a time when the devastating human cost of armed conflict is affecting millions of civilians, this collaboration is of paramount importance," Maurer explained.

The conference brought together prominent IHL experts, scholars of Islam and religious leaders from more than 20 countries to shed light on Islamic humanitarian heritage and to identify humanitarian principles common to Islam and IHL. ➔13

Opening up, Iran has opportunity to commercialize its science and technology skills

The Islamic Republic of Iran has developed the science and technology skills necessary to be a global player in more than oil and gas, but must invest more in innovation to compete effectively in the global economy, according to an UNCTAD report.

Since 2005, when UNCTAD last assessed the country's policies on science, technology and innovation (STI), Iran has had one of the world's fastest growing scientific outputs, climbing from 34th to 16th position in terms of scientific publications.

Its population now has the world's second-highest number

of engineer graduates per capita, says UNCTAD's new Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Review for Iran.

"Iran's impressive human resources position it well to seize the opportunity of reconnecting with the global economy, and its policies on science, technology, and innovation will be critical to its success," said Shamika Sirimanne, Director of UNCTAD's Division on Technology and Logistics.

"UNCTAD is happy to support and to work with Iran at this important moment in their history," Ms. Sirimanne said ahead of

the report's launch in Tehran on Tuesday.

Iran has shown it can do top-notch research and work with technology, even in emerging sectors like nanotech, but the challenge now is to commercialize this knowledge, the report finds.

In place since 1980 and strengthened in 2008, sanctions may have limited Iran's access to foreign finance, technologies and markets, but they also forced the country to become self-reliant. Iran is now the most economically diverse oil-producing country in West Asia.

Iran's Vice President for Science and Technology, Sourena

Sattari, said: "The Iran STI Policy Review, prepared by UNCTAD, is a constructive effort to provide Iran with an assessment of its policies and actions. The report proposes some policy recommendations to increase STI effectiveness in creating more economic and social impacts and to fully benefit from our STI capabilities."

"I wish to show my appreciation for all the efforts undertaken by UNCTAD's team of experts to formulate the present STI Policy Review and hope the constructive cooperation will be an ongoing one in different STI related areas," Dr. Sattari added. ➔14

Israel lawmaker suspended for voting against outpost legalization bill

Israel's ruling Likud coalition has suspended a veteran legislator from activity on a parliamentary committee after he broke ranks and voted against a bill authorizing illegal West Bank settlement outposts built on privately-owned Palestinian land.

Likud Coalition Chairman, David Bitan, decided on Tuesday to suspend 73-year-old Benny Begin from the Constitution, Law, and Justice Committee for three weeks, a day after he refused to raise his hand in support of the so-called Regulation Bill during the Knesset plenum.

The legislature decided to advance the controversial motion, which critics have described as illegal land grab, by 60 votes to 49.

Israeli opposition figures have slammed the suspension.

"The fact that they're suspending Benny Begin says everything about the Likud of today. [Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu exploited Begin's integrity for his own needs during the [March 2015] elections – and now runs roughshod over him and the truth in his decisions," said Tzipi Livni of the opposition Zionist Union.

Begin has stated that he does not regret voting against the Regulation Law, saying the bill "is very bad for Israel."

"For the first time in 50 years, the Knesset is being asked to legislate a bill, which negatively impacts the rights of the Arab inhabitants of Judea and Samaria.... Unfortunately, under the auspices of this mechanism of coalition discipline we reached a very problematic area. Unfortunately others chose differently than me. I think I behaved properly..." he said.

The so-called Regulation Bill is a revised version of legislation that, in its original form, defied the Israeli supreme court's decision on the evacuation of the illegal Amona settlement outpost, located northeast of Ramallah in the central West Bank and allowed construction on private Palestinian land. ➔13



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Fall stages symphony of colors in northern Iran

The northern province of Mazandaran turns into a symphony of colors at Fall as leaves lose life.

Winding routes and rivers become extraordinary beautiful, so different that contemporary Iranian poet Mehdi Akhavan Sales called Fall "the king of seasons."



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Iranian security forces eliminate terrorist team

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian security forces have recently confronted and eliminated a three-member terrorist team near the country's western borders, a security official said on Wednesday.

Hossein Zolfaqari, the deputy interior minister for security affairs, said Iranian security forces spotted the group when they attempted to cross the country's borders, Tasnim reported.

According to Zolfaqari, the Intelligence Ministry was in charge of tracking the group.

The deputy foreign minister did not provide further information on the details of the operation.



IAEA's Amano may visit Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Yukiya Amano, the managing director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), has expressed interest in visiting Iran this month, Iranian nuclear chief Ali Akbar Salehi said on Tuesday.

Salehi said Iran welcomes the decision by the head of the international nuclear watchdog to visit the country, IRIB reported.

This will be Amano's second visit to Tehran in 2016. He visited Iran in January, when Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers went into effect.



Gheibparvar appointed new Basij chief

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — In a decree on Tuesday the Supreme Leader appointed Qolamhossein Gheibparvar as the new head of the Basij Organization, Fars reported.

According to the decree, former Basij chief Mohammad Reza Naqdi was named as the commander the IRGC unit for cultural and social affairs.

Naqdi had been heading the Basij since 2009. Before Naqdi, Basij Organization went under the name "Basij resistance force".

Gheibparvar was formerly the commander of Fars Province Fajr Corps and IRGC Ground Force Training Department in reverse chronological order.



Russia to modernize Iran's aircraft navigation system

POLITICS Russia's defense manufacturer Almaz-Antey and Iran's Shiraz Electronics Industries signed an agreement on co-operation, the press service of the Russian company said on Wednesday, TASS reported.

The goal of the agreement is to use the capabilities of Almaz-Antey and Shiraz Electronics Industries "for developing the aircraft navigation system of the Islamic Republic of Iran and also advancing the results of joint scientific research and developments on the markets of third countries," the company said in its report.



May: Iran nuclear deal vital

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — British Prime Minister Teresa May told Arab leaders of the Persian Gulf region on Wednesday that the landmark nuclear agreement with Tehran was vitally important for regional security.

"That was vitally important for regional security," May said as she was addressing the summit of the regional Arab countries in Bahrain.

She was expected to say later in a discussion about regional security that the Iran deal provides an opportunity to develop relations with Tehran and engage on issues of concern, the government said.



Russia says informed Iran of U.S. suggestion on Syria

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Russian deputy foreign minister for African and Arab affairs on Wednesday said his country informed Iran of the U.S. suggestions on Syria when he recently visited Iran, Tasnim reported.

Mikhail Bogdanov on Tuesday met with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Jaber Ansari in Tehran.

Over the past week Russian President Vladimir Putin sent two envoys to Iran over Syria. One was Bogdanov and the other was Alexander Lavrentiev, the Russian president's special envoy for the Middle East.

Tehran says decisions on Senate bill made

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran has come up with decisions on how to react to an anti-Iran act by the U.S. Senate which it says infringes an international nuclear deal finalized last year with six world powers.

"Participating members unanimously agreed that the implementation of the act (the Iran Sanctions Act) infringes BARJAM (the nuclear deal), and reviewed and ratified proposals to react America's moves," according to the official presidential website on Wednesday.

Every move by the U.S. will be monitored and commensurate reaction will be considered, the report added.

No further details were given of the session.

The body will hold another session next week.

The supervisory board includes President Rouhani himself, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, Defense Minister Hossein Dehqan, Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani, Ali Akbar Velayati, senior foreign policy aide to the Supreme Leader, and Saeed Jalili, the former nuclear negotiator under Ahmadinejad.

The bill, called the Iran Sanctions Act, by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives has incensed Tehran which says it violates the terms of the nuclear deal which removed sanctions against Iran in exchange for it pursuing a limited nuclear program.

The ISA, originally introduced in 1996, extends sanc-



tions against Iran for another 10 years if signed into law by President Barack Obama before the end of 2016.

"If Obama signs ISA but uses waiver rights to cease its implementation, it still infringes the nuclear agreement and we will react to it," Rouhani said on Tuesday at University of Tehran.

At dispute is nuclear-related sanctions on Iranian individuals and entities.

Washington will violate the JCPOA if it does not remove all individuals and entities set forth in the ISA in connection with Iran's nuclear program, as stipulated in the nuclear deal.

Iran to UN: U.S. will be responsible for consequences of breaching JCPOA

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran's Ambassador to the UN Gholamali Khoshroo has said that an implementation of the Iran Sanctions Act will be a violation of the JCPOA which the U.S. will be responsible for its negative consequences.

"Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran considers the recent approval of the U.S. Congress and extension of the Iran Sanctions Act by the end of the year 2026 in contradiction to the U.S. obligations under the JCPOA," he wrote in a letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Khoshroo urged Ban to call on all the signatories to the JCPOA, especially the U.S., to remain committed to the nuclear deal.



He also asked Ban to report this recent action of the U.S. Congress and probable violations of the deal by the

U.S. in the future to the UN Security Council.

The U.S. Senate voted on Thursday ISA for another 10 years. It was first approved by the House of Representatives.

Iran's top officials, including President Hassan Rouhani, have said if the ISA is implemented it will violate the nuclear deal. Rouhani has asked his U.S. counterpart Barack Obama to use his authority to veto the ISA.

The ISA was first adopted in 1996 to punish investments in Iran's energy industry.

In July 2015, the UN Security Council turned the JCPOA into international law by endorsing resolution 2231, setting the stage for the lifting of the Security Council sanctions against Iran.

Trump election won't impact nuclear deal: British ambassador

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — British Ambassador to Tehran Nicholas Hopton said on Wednesday that the ascendancy of Donald Trump to U.S. presidency will not impact the implementation of the nuclear deal, ISNA reported.

Hopton made the remarks on the sidelines of the ceremony for signing a memorandum of understanding between the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and Royal Dutch Shell for development studies on three oil and gas fields in Iran.

Ambassador Hopton noted that the British government as well as its partners in the European Union support the full implementation of the deal negotiated between Iran and six major powers - the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany.

The deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), went into force in January.

Under the deal, Iran is tasked to curb some aspects of its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.

The British ambassador further said that his country will take necessary measures to ensure that the deal is fully implemented.

He went on to say that the JCPOA benefits all sides and guarantees the security of the Middle East.

Ever since the JCPOA went into effect most sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic over its nuclear program have been lifted.

However, the implementation of the historic accord has been facing some setbacks.

Trump said in his presidential campaigns that he wants to renegotiate the terms of the deal.

Also, the U.S. Congress recently voted to extend the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) for another ten years, a move which Iran describes as a violation of the JCPOA.

The ISA was first adopted in 1996 to punish investments in Iran's energy industry.

Iranian senior officials have vowed a firm response if U.S. President Barack Obama signs the ISA into law.

Meanwhile, Obama's office has indicated that he would sign the sanctions act, arguing that there is nothing in the act contrary to the JCPOA.

On Wednesday, Iran's Ambassador to the UN Gholamali Khoshroo wrote a letter to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, urging him to call on all the signatories to the JCPOA, especially the U.S., to remain committed to the nuclear deal.

"Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran considers the recent approval of the U.S. Congress and extension of the Iran Sanctions Act by the end of the year 2026 in contradiction to the U.S. obligations under the JCPOA," he said.

Iran seeks active Japanese involvement in Mideast

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Wednesday that Japan should play a more active role in helping establish peace in the Middle East region.

"We expect Japan to play active role in establishing stability in the region and use its political connections and contacts with other actors in the region and encourage them to stop supporting terrorists," Zarif said during a meeting with Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida in Tokyo.

Zarif said Iran is ready to cooperate with Japan to help stabilize the region.

He added, "There exists a readiness

for trilateral and multilateral cooperation in line with restoring stability and economic progress in Afghanistan."

Iran's chief diplomat also said Tehran is willing to expand relations with Japan in various spheres, especially in economic and banking areas.

For his part, Kishida said Japan supports a full implementation of the nuclear deal which was signed between Iran and the 5+1 group in July 2015.

The nuclear deal known, as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action went, into effect in January.

Kishida also called on Iran to play a more active part in helping promote international peace.

False accusations favor no regional country: Iran to S. Arabia

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Foreign Ministry told Saudi Arabia on Tuesday that leveling "false accusations" is in favor of no country given the volatile situation in the region.

The comments by the Foreign Ministry came as a court in Saudi Arabia sentenced 15 men to death on charges of spying for Iran.

"In a situation that the world of Islam and the region need unity and avoidance of bringing up issues that lead to tension, fabricating and releasing false accusations benefit no regional country," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi re-

marked.

Qassemi said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has done no activity contrary to international regulation and diplomatic principles in Saudi Arabia and such accusations are baseless and politically motivated."

Saudi Arabia seeks to increase tension in the region by leveling "false accusations" against Iran, he added.

"The principled policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran toward the Persian Gulf littoral states is based on good neighborliness, mutual respect and non-interference in other countries' internal affairs," the Foreign Ministry official pointed out.

Members of election supervisory committee picked

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — An official with the Guardian Council said on Wednesday members of a central committee to supervise the integrity of the next year's presidential election has been named.

"Members of the central supervisory committee for the 12th presidential election and midterm parliamentary elections were named in the Guardian Council's today session," said Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei,

the body's spokesman.

The supervisory board includes Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, Ebrahim Raeesi, Mohammad Reza Alizadeh, Abbas Ali Kadkhodaei, Mohsen Esmaeeli, and Siamak Rahpeyk, the official said.

Except Raeesi, the other six are currently member of the Guardian Council.

Iran will hold the next year's presi-

dential election on May 19, 2017, one month earlier than usual so as not to coincide with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan which starts in late May.

Under Article 99 of Iran's Constitution, the responsibility to supervise elections lays with the Guardian Council.

The body consists of six theologians appointed by the Supreme Leader and

six jurists nominated by the Judiciary and approved by parliament.

All bills passed by parliament have to be approved by the council which has the power to veto them if it considers them inconsistent with the constitution and Islamic law.

It can also bar candidates from standing in elections to parliament, the presidency and the Assembly of Experts.

Japan to offer €2m to Iran for nuclear safety cooperation

I→ Tokyo is pushing Japanese companies to do business amid intensifying foreign competition for access to the Iranian market.

The ministers' meeting came after Japanese

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed his readiness to visit Iran. Abe told of his willingness to travel to the country and boost economic ties during talks with Iranian President Hassan Rou-

hani on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York in September, according to a Japanese official.

(Source: The Japan Times)

Syrian army soldiers take full control over Aleppo's Old City

Syrian government forces have reportedly liberated the entire neighborhoods in Old City of Aleppo as part of a large-scale military operation to flush foreign-backed Takfiri militants out of the strategic northwestern city.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said on Wednesday that Syrian soldiers had established complete control over the historic area after militants withdrew in the face of army advances overnight.

The Britain-based monitoring group noted that the Takfiri terrorists "were forced to withdraw from the Old City neighborhoods of Aleppo for fear of being besieged."

The Observatory said the militants withdrew from the last parts of the Old City after Syrian army units, in cooperation with allied fighters, restored security to Agyul and Bab al-Hadid neighborhoods of Aleppo, located some 355 kilometers north of the capital, Damascus, late on Tuesday.

The Syrian forces also secured the safe departure of more than 200 civilians from the liberated areas, and captured a number of terrorists there.

Earlier on Tuesday, the Syrian army had liberated Karm al-Dada, al-Sha'ar, al-Mar-jeh and al-Sheikh Lutfi districts in Aleppo as well as Tallet al-Shurta hill east of Aleppo.

The Syrian army and allied fighters from popular defense groups are now in control of more than 75 percent of eastern Aleppo.

There are reports that over 300 civilians have left militant-controlled eastern districts of Aleppo to safe districts over the past 24 hours.

Meanwhile, other reports say foreign-backed militants have called for a five-day truce in the face of the government forces' steady gains in the northern city.

■ Russian colonel killed in Aleppo

Meanwhile, Russia's Defense Ministry said: a Russian army colonel, working as a military advisor in Syria, has succumbed to injuries sustained during a militant mortar attack in Aleppo several days ago.

"Ruslan Galitsky passed away in hospital as a result of his serious injuries. Russian army medics fought for several days to save his life," the ministry said in a statement released on Wednesday.



Russia is engaged in an aerial campaign against Takfiri terrorists in Syria since September 2015.

On Tuesday, Russia and China vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution which would have mandated a seven-day ceasefire in Aleppo, saying the draft proposal put to vote did not include any talk about the exit of gunmen from the eastern neighborhoods of Aleppo.

Moscow and Damascus are against lengthy pauses in anti-terror battles in Aleppo, saying such truces would merely help the Takfiri militants rebuild their strength.

In a Wednesday statement, the Kremlin said a possible United States-Russia deal on the exit of militants from eastern Aleppo was still on the agenda, adding that Russian and American experts remain in contact over the issue.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov further said those militants who refuse to leave eastern Aleppo are "terrorists" who are siding with the notorious Fateh al-Sham (Jabhat Fateh al-Sham/Front for the Conquest of the Levant) terrorist group, formerly known as al-Nusra Front (Jabhat

al-Nusra).

■ Israel warplanes hit airbase near Damascus: Syria state TV

Elsewhere, Syria's state television said Israeli military aircraft have targeted an airbase near the capital Damascus.

The attack took place on Wednesday, the television reported, verifying earlier unconfirmed reports that the Israeli air force had launched the raid against the el-Mez-zeh outpost from the Lebanese airspace.

Large explosions rang out after the attack. Syria's al-Ikhbariyah television channel said the explosions hit fuel depots at the base.

Lebanese al-Mayadeen channel, meanwhile, reported that Israeli airstrikes had hit an important Syrian military airport in the capital.

Last week, Israeli fighter jets carried out missile attacks from Lebanese skies against two targets close to the highway connecting Damascus to the Lebanese capital Beirut. Syria's official news agency SANA cited an unnamed military source as saying that the missiles fell on the Saboura area west of Damascus.

The source said the Israeli assault was an attempt to "divert attention away from

the successes of" government forces on the battleground against Takfiri militants.

Devoted to the cause of ousting the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Israel has been a staunch supporter of the Takfiri terrorists fighting in the country. The regime provides treatment to the terrorists in the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, parts of which it has occupied since 1967.

In the past, Israeli jets have time and again carried out sorties inside the Syrian territory under various pretexts. Back in May, an Israeli strike against Damascus claimed the life of Mustafa Badreddine, a senior Hezbollah commander.

Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement, which fought off two Israeli wars in 2006 and 2008 at home, has been successfully helping Syria to defend itself in the face of terrorists and to prevent the spillover of the crisis into Lebanon.

■ Reports of Turkey border guards killing Syrians denied

In a separate development, a senior official from Turkey has rejected accusations that its border guards shot dead dozens of Syrian refugees and beat many others attempting to cross into the country this year.

Yasin Aktay, vice chairman of the ruling AK party, told Al Jazeera the allegations of deadly or excessive force against civilians fleeing the Syrian war were "fabricated".

The SOHR said in a statement on Tuesday that Turkish snipers had targeted refugees - alleging 163 killings in total, including 31 children and 15 women, since the beginning of 2016.

"The Turkish Ganderma killed dozens of civilians, and beat dozens [of] others leading to permanent deep scars in their bodies, while others were arrested and turned back to the Syrian lands," said the Observatory, a Britain-based war-monitor group that relies on activists on the ground for information.

Aktay, however, adamantly denied that Turkey had any "policies against civilians".

He added Turkey - which hosts up to three million Syrian refugees - is trying to create a safe zone in a northern Syrian border area as part of an initiative to help "without them coming to Turkey".

"We are trying to create a zone free from 'terrorism' and attacks," Aktay said.

(Source: agencies)

Scores killed in Indonesian earthquake

Scores have died and dozens were feared trapped in rubble after a strong earthquake struck off the coast of Aceh province on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, officials and local media said.

The province's army chief, Major General Tatang Sulaiman, told the DPA news agency that 97 people have died in the shallow 6.5-magnitude undersea quake that struck early on Wednesday.

The national disaster mitigation agency on the other hand, said that 78 people have suffered serious injuries from the quake.

Aiyub Abbas, the district chief of Pidie Jayat, said that hundreds of people in the district had been injured and dozens of buildings had collapsed.

There was an urgent need for excavation equipment to move heavy debris and emergency supplies, Abbas said.

Said Mulyadi, deputy district chief of Pidie Jaya, told

the AFP news agency that seven children were among the dead, with a local hospital overwhelmed by the number of people arriving with injuries.

The quake struck at dawn, as some in the predominantly Muslim region prepared for morning prayers.

No tsunami alert was issued and there was no risk of a tsunami, according to Indonesian authorities.

But mosques, homes and shops were flattened in the quake, with images from the worst-hit areas showing significant damage.

The local disaster management agency said that rescue efforts were under way to save those trapped beneath collapsed buildings.

"Some people are still trapped inside shop houses, and we are trying to evacuate them using heavy machines and by hand," local agency head Puteh Manaf said.

Seismologists said the earthquake was felt across

much of Aceh province, which was devastated by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

At least five aftershocks followed the quake, said Erida Wati, local head of the Meteorology, Climatology and Geophysics Agency.

Indonesia experiences frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide.

Aceh lies on the northern tip of Sumatra island, which is particularly prone to quakes. In June, a 6.5-magnitude quake struck off the west of Sumatra, damaging scores of buildings and injuring eight people.

A huge undersea earthquake in the Indian Ocean in 2004 triggered a tsunami that engulfed parts of Aceh.

The tsunami killed more than 170,000 people in Indonesia and tens of thousands more in other countries around the Indian Ocean.

(Source: agencies)

Rohingya crisis: Myanmar bans workers going to Malaysia

Myanmar has banned workers from going to Muslim-majority Malaysia as relations sour between the neighbors over a bloody military crackdown on the Buddhist country's Rohingya Muslims minority.

The move came after Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak lashed out at Myanmar's de facto Leader Aung San Suu Kyi for allowing "genocide" on her watch during a rally on Sunday in capital Kuala Lumpur that drew thousands of people.

"We want to tell Aung San Suu Kyi, enough is enough ... We must and we will defend Muslims and Islam," Malaysia's Najib Razak said at Sunday's 5,000-strong rally.

"The world cannot sit and watch genocide taking place."

The crowds were protesting against a military crackdown in Myanmar's western Rakhine state that has pushed more than 20,000 Rohingya Muslims into Bangladesh.

A Malaysian government minister has also called for a review of Myanmar's membership inside the regional ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) bloc.

Late on Tuesday, Myanmar's immigration ministry said that it had ceased issuing licenses for its nationals to work in wealthier Malaysia - for years a top destination for migrant labor.

Malaysia already hosts tens of thousands of Myanmar workers, most of whom take on low-paid jobs in factories or in the food and hospitality industries.

According to Malaysia, some 56,000 Rohingya have arrived on its shores in recent years, many taking perilous boat journeys to flee poverty and discrimination in Rakhine state.

■ Gang rape, torture and murder

Survivors of the latest military crackdown in Rakhine told horrifying stories of gang rape, torture and murder at the hands of Myanmar security forces, while dozens have died trying to cross the river that separates the two countries.

Buddhist-majority Myanmar has long discriminated against the Rohingya and the recent crisis has galvanized protests in Muslim countries around the region, including Malaysia.

Myanmar officials have denied the allegations of abuse, and Suu Kyi has told the international community to stop stoking the "fires of resentment".

■ Kofi Annan urges Myanmar army to act within rule of law

Elsewhere, former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan has called on Myanmar's army to act within the rule of law amid a heavy crackdown on the Rohingya Muslims in the northwestern state of Rakhine.

Annan, who is the head of a panel tasked with finding a solution to the ongoing violence in the Muslim-majority state of Rakhine, said on Tuesday that allegations of human rights abuses by Myanmar's forces had "deeply" concerned him.

"Wherever security operations might be necessary, civilians must be protected at all times and I urge the security services to act in full compliance with the rule of law," Annan told reporters in Yangon, Myanmar's commercial capital.

The former UN chief made the remarks after meeting with Myanmar's State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and the current commander-in-chief, Min Aung Hlaing, on his second visit to the country.

Myanmar's soldiers have been accused of raping Rohingya women, burning homes and killing civilians since October.

On October 9, Myanmar's military launched a fresh wave of crackdown on the Muslims in the wake of an attack on the country's border guards that left nine policemen dead. The government blamed the Rohingya for the assault.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has said that some 21,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh in recent weeks. The United Nations has warned that human rights violations against the Rohingya in Rakhine could be tantamount to "crimes against humanity".

According to the UN, the Rohingya are one of the most persecuted minorities in the world. (Source: agencies)

Yemeni forces kill Saudi soldier in retaliatory attack on Jizan

Yemeni army and popular committees have intensified their retaliatory attacks against the House of Saud regime's military positions, leaving at least a soldier dead.

According to Yemen's al-Masirah TV, a sniper of the Yemeni army killed a Saudi soldier in the Faridah military base in the kingdom's southwestern province of Jizan on Wednesday.

Yemeni forces also launched rocket and artillery attacks at the military bases of Faridah, Hamraa and al-Ghawya in the same province. Meanwhile, a barrage of Katyusha missiles fired by the Yemeni army and Ansarullah (Houthi) fighters hit the Tansab military base in the Saudi province of Najran.

The Yemeni forces also inflicted heavy losses on the Saudi-backed mercenaries fighting in the war shattered Peninsula country. Yemen's army also fired a home-made ballistic missile at the mercenaries' positions in a valley in Khabb & Sha'af district of Jawf province, leaving an unspecified number of them dead and wounded. Three rockets also hit militant positions in Mafrag al-Jawf district in the same province.

In Bayda province, several Saudi-backed militants were also killed and injured as the Yemeni troops fired artillery shells at their positions in Zi Naem district. The militants' military vehicle was also destroyed in the attack.

The Yemeni army also launched rocket and artillery attacks at the mercenaries' positions in Salb Mountain of Nihm district, northeast of Sana'a province.

The attacks come in retaliation for the brutal Saudi military campaign against its impoverished neighbor, Yemen, which was launched in March 2015 to reinstall the former Yemeni government. On Wednesday, Saudi warplanes bombed the districts of Zahir, Qatabir and Baqim in Yemen's province of Sa'ada.

A woman and three children lost their lives in the Saudi air raids on Baqim, al-Masirah reported.

The House of Saud regime's military aggression has left at least 11,400 civilians dead, according to the latest tally by a Yemeni monitoring group.

(Source: Press TV)

Heavy clashes in Mosul district as Iraqi troops advance against ISIL

Fierce clashes have erupted in Mosul's al-Salam neighborhood, as Iraqi forces make gains against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists deep inside the northern city and advance closer to the Tigris River, which divides the city into eastern and western sides.

The Iraqi army's 9th Armored Division announced the recapture of al-Salam Hospital in eastern Mosul on Tuesday.

However, fighting continued on Wednesday in the al-Salam neighborhood, where the five-storey medical institution is situated. The ISIL elements were said to have been using the hospital's upper floors and roof as sniper positions for some time.

"We advanced in al-Salam district but the situation is difficult, there is heavy fighting," said Iraqi Brigadier General Shaker Kadhem, adding, "We took control of al-Salam Hospital, which was a command center for Daesh (ISIL)."

He further noted that the latest push in Mosul was aimed at meeting up with the elite Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) forces on the banks of the Tigris in Mosul's southeast.

A senior unidentified CTS officer also



said the fighting in al-Salam district was fierce and the Iraqi army had called for backup.

"The 9th Division's situation is difficult and they have called for support. We are sending a regiment there," he said, noting that the soldiers "are surrounded now in al-Salam Hospital... [and] we are on the way so we can open a passage for them."

Meanwhile, the ISIL-affiliated Amaq news agency reported that the Takfiri terrorists had carried out five car bombings in the al-Salam area over the past 24 hours.

The Iraqi Federal Police also confirmed that several car bombs were exploded while bombers set off their explosives in the flashpoint district around al-Salam Hospital.

According to an unnamed military source, three Iraqi soldiers were killed and 40 others sustained injuries in ISIL attacks on Wednesday.

On the same day, the Iraqi forces liberated eight villages in northern Mosul from the grip of ISIL terrorists.

The Iraq Special Forces further managed to wrest control of the al-

Elam neighborhood in eastern Mosul.

The commander of the Nineveh Liberation Operation, Lieutenant General Abdul Amir Yarallah, announced in a statement that the area was "fully liberated" and the Iraqi national flag was raised over its buildings.

Yarellah also went on to say that ISIL terrorists "suffered losses" without elaborating further on the subject.

Mosul fell to ISIL in 2014, when the terror outfit began its campaign of death and destruction in the country.

The Iraqi army troops and allied fighters have been leading an offensive to retake Mosul since October 17.

The Iraqi forces made quick gains on Mosul's southern and northern fronts when the city's liberation operation was launched.

However, the Iraqi troops' advance has been slowed down due to the presence of hundreds of thousands of civilians, many of whom are prevented from leaving Mosul by ISIL.

The United Nations said on Wednesday that more than 82,000 people have been displaced by the Mosul offensive.

(Source: Press TV)

NEWS

Shell signs oil, gas MOU in Iran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Royal Dutch Shell signed an initial memorandum of understanding (MOU) with National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) on Wednesday to conduct development studies on three oil and gas fields in Iran, Shana reported.

The document was signed by Director of Iran's Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC) Seyed Nouredin Shahnazizadeh and President of Department for Iran Affairs in Royal Dutch Shell Hans Nijkamp. NIOC's Managing Director Ali Kardor also attended the signing ceremony.

Based on the MOU, the Anglo-Dutch company will carry out development studies on South Azadegan and Yadavaran oilfields and Kish gas field.

South Azadegan and Yadavaran are two of the five oilfields, dubbed the West Karoun oilfields, Iran shares with Iraq at the western part of Iran's southwestern region of Karoun, and Kish gas field is a giant gas field close to Kish Island in the Persian Gulf.

Iran's 8-month copper concentrate production up 14% yr/yr

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's copper concentrate production in the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-November 20) reached 715,078 tons, registering a 14 percent rise compared to the same period last year, IRIB news reported on Wednesday.

According to the report, the country has produced 626,130 tons of copper concentrate in the first eight months of the previous year.

Iran's copper concentrate output stood at 88,329 tons in the eighth calendar month of Aban (October 21-November 20).

Afghanistan, ECO states to develop ICT solutions to attain SDGs

The Economic Cooperation Organization Science Foundation (ECOSF) member countries including Iran are developing Information Communication and Technology (ICT) solutions to attain Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the region.

In this regard, Appldea2R Contests will be conducted in the ECO member states this include; Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to develop applications, be it for the web, a personal computer, a mobile handheld device, console, SMS, or any software platform broadly available to the public (solutions) related to one or more of the SDGs.

The Apps submitted in the contest should address at least one of the 17 SDGs, either for awareness creation or to contribute to progress towards meeting the SDGs.

The Economic Cooperation Organization Science Foundation (ECOSF), Mehran University of Engineering and Technology (MUET) Jamshoro (Pakistan), and Technology Times (TechTimes) signed an agreement in Pakistan to develop cooperation and collaboration to develop ICT based solutions for achieving United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The organizations together mutually agreed to organize software applications contest among ECO member countries titled "Appldea2R" (Application Idea to Reality) to raise awareness or to monitor progress to attain SDGs.

The Appldea2R'17 Contest will be an open opportunity to university students all over the ECO member states to get themselves involved in awareness raising and solution providing on SDGs. Also to become the future ambassadors to promote and popularize SDGs, developing technologies to facilitate and monitor the progress on SDGs, getting empowered with the skills and confidence to develop System Apps for sustainable development.

This joint initiative will help the ECO member states to understand the key indicators of SDGs and play their role to achieve these SDGs. (Source: thenews.com.pk)

Dollar edges up vs yen as traders eye ECB meeting for cues

The dollar edged back up towards a 10-month high against the yen on Wednesday, while most major currencies appeared to be looking ahead to Thursday's European Central Bank policy meeting.

The ECB is widely expected to announce an extension to its quantitative easing programme, but there is uncertainty over whether the size of the monthly asset purchases will be kept steady or scaled back, and over whether a formal signal on the eventual end of the asset-purchase programme will be sent.

If the ECB does say it will start to scale back its asset purchases - so-called tapering - the euro would be likely to rebound following a 4 percent fall against the dollar over the past month, analysts said.

On Wednesday it edged up 0.1 percent to \$1.0724. The European currency had slumped on Monday to \$1.0505, its lowest since March 2015, in a knee-jerk reaction after Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi lost a referendum on constitutional reform and said he would resign.

But it quickly jumped back to a 3-week high of \$1.0797 on the same day as a worst-case political scenario for Rome appeared to have been averted for the time being, and as investors turned their attention to the ECB. (Source: Reuters)

Iran invites Japanese companies to invest in its mining, infrastructure projects

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— "The Islamic Republic invites Japanese companies to invest in its mining and infrastructure projects including those to develop Iranian railway network and ports," Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafeie said in Iran-Japan Business Forum in Tokyo, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

"The ground is set for Iranian and Japanese engineering and technical companies to collaborate, especially in infrastructural projects," Shafeie added.

Referring to the implementation of Iran's nuclear deal, the ICCIMA head underlined that attraction of foreign investments has been Iran's top priority in post-sanction era.

Iran-Japan Business Forum, organized by Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) and Embassy of Islamic



Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafeie

Iranian cabinet approves currency change

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The administration of President Hassan Rouhani approved a measure on Wednesday calling for the change of the national currency from the rial to the toman.

One toman would be worth 10

rials, or around 3,200 to a dollar at official exchange rates, and 3,900 to a dollar at unofficial rates.

However, the approval should be ratified first by the parliament and then endorsed by the Guardian Council to take effect.

Baghdad to host Iran's specialized expo in mid-Dec.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's 3rd specialized exhibition of industrial equipment and production lines' machineries will be held in Baghdad International Fairgrounds in mid-December, the Public Relations Department of Trade Promotion organization of Iran (TPO) announced. As reported, the Iraqi

Republic of Iran in Japan and supported by Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry of Japan and the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was held on Wednesday.

Iran safe for investment: Zarif

In his speech during the forum, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif assured Japanese investors that Iran is a safe and secure place for them to make their investments, IRIB news reported.

He noted that Iran and Japan have the potential to bolster their cultural and politico-economic relations thanks to their commonalities.

Zarif, accompanied by a 70-member high-ranking politico-economic delegation, started its three-leg visit to India, China and Japan late Friday to balance communications and interactions with different countries around the world.

Marriott 'very keen' to pursue opportunities in Iran

Marriott International, the US-listed hotel operator, said it was "very keen" to enter the Iranian market pending the removal of legal barriers, with a spokesman from the hotel chain saying there is strong demand in Iran for hotels.

Alex Kyriakidis, president and managing director for the Middle East and Africa at Marriott, said that Iran represents a "substantial market" to be responded to in terms of demand for hotels.

"Today, Marriott International, being a United States publicly-floated company, is precluded from doing business in Iran. Depending on what happens in the future and what agreements are reached between the United States and Iran, if the doors open legally to do business in Iran, we would be very keen to pursue that opportunity," he said.

His comments put Marriott on a long list of compa-



nies waiting either for more sanctions to be lifted in order to be able to legally do business in Iran, or waiting for other companies to first enter Iran in order to get a better feel for the market.

In late October, a top spokesman at Viceroy Hotel Group, told Gulf News the company was eyeing Iran, but would prefer to see other hotels' experience in that market first before launching a property there.

Until there's a legal framework for Marriott to enter Iran, the operator said it plans to capitalize on a growing number of visitors from the country to its hotels.

Marriott's Kyriakidis was speaking on Tuesday in Abu Dhabi at a press conference to formally launch the operator's latest hotel in the UAE capital. The property is owned by developer Bloom Holdings.

(Source: gulfnews.com)

PICTURE OF THE DAY IRNA/Marziyeh Soleymani



The 10th International Flour and Bakery Industry Exhibition of Iran (ibex 2016) is being held at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds from December 6 to 9.

Rouhani to lead trade delegation to Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — A high ranking trade delegation headed by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is due to leave Tehran for Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan on December 21, Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA)'s portal reported.

During the four-day tour, the Iranian delegates will explore avenues of economic cooperation and expand ties with their foreign counterparts.

After the implementation of JCPOA, Iran is exchanging delegation with various countries across the world aiming to unshackle its economy from years of west imposed sanctions.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Monte dei Paschi bolsters European stocks, ECB looms

European shares followed Asian stocks higher on Wednesday, buoyed by reports Italy would step in to rescue troubled bank Monte dei Paschi and expectations the European Central Bank would extend its bond-buying stimulus scheme this week.

Italian government bond yields fell, narrowing the premium investors demand to hold them rather than benchmark German debt, to its tightest for about a month.

The pan-European STOXX 600 index rose 0.8 percent, led by banks .SX7P, and Italy's FTSE MIB share index .FTMIB gained 1.2 percent, hitting its highest for six months.



Cerberus Capital to buy majority stake in Staples' European unit

Office supplies retailer Staples Inc said it would sell a controlling interest in its European business to an affiliate of private equity firm Cerberus Capital Management LP.

Staples' European unit consists of retail, contract, and online businesses in 16 countries, generating aggregate annual sales of about 1.7 billion euros (\$1.82 billion).

Staples will retain a 15 percent stake in the business, the company said on Wednesday.

Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed. The deal comes two months after smaller rival Office Depot Inc said it would sell its European operations to investment company Aurelius Group.



Bonds slump in India as policy makers unexpectedly hold key rate

Indian sovereign bonds reversed gains after policy makers surprisingly kept interest rates unchanged ahead of a probable increase in U.S. borrowing costs this month. The monetary policy committee led by Reserve Bank of India Governor Urjit Patel unanimously left the benchmark repurchase rate at 6.25 percent, according to a central bank statement in Mumbai on Wednesday. The outcome was predicted by only eight of 44 economists in a Bloomberg survey, while 31 expected a cut to 6 percent and five saw a reduction to 5.75 percent. The yield on government notes due September 2026 jumped 16 basis points to 6.36 percent as of 3:12 p.m. in Mumbai, according to prices from the RBI's trading system.

Austrian energy giants due in Tehran on Saturday to investigate co-op

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Austria's desk OMV along with some other leading energy companies of the country will arrive in Tehran on Saturday to participate in Iran-Austria Joint Energy Committee meeting for investigating the two countries' energy cooperation road-map.

Jochen Penker, the director of European and international energy policy at the Austrian Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and Amir-Hossein Zamaninia, the Iranian deputy oil minister for international and trade affairs, will co-chair the committee meeting.

Optimizing fuel consumption, investing in the oil and gas projects, environmental issues and gas exports to Europe are among the subjects to be discussed in the gathering.

OMV said in mid September that it



had received 1 million barrels of crude oil from Iran in a spot delivery at the Italian port of Trieste which the energy group

would send to its two refineries in Austria and Romania.

According to Reuters, The delivery was

Iran's first to OMV since 2012, when sanctions were imposed on the country. OMV is in talks with Iran about future deliveries, although no such contract has been signed yet, a spokesman said at the time.

The delivery included Iranian heavy and light crude, he added.

OMV has been present in Iran since 2001 when it implemented operations at the Mehr exploration basin in the western part of the country, which became the first contract of the company with Iran, Trend reported.

The Austrian Company earlier signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) as it looked to revive its activities in Iran. The deal covered several areas ranging from oil and gas field evaluation to crude oil and petroleum product swaps.

Iran, Russia to hold 1st Joint Energy Committee meeting next week

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Chaired by Iran's Deputy Oil Minister Amir-Hossein Zamaninia and Russian Deputy Energy Minister, the first Iran-Russia Joint Energy Committee meeting is due to be held in Tehran on December 12, Shana reported on Wednesday.

As a subsection of the 13th Iran-Russia Joint Economic Committee meeting which is scheduled to be held from December 11 to 13, the first joint energy meeting aims to boost cooperation in this sphere.

Iranian Communications and Information Technology Minister Mahmoud Vaezi and Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak are to co-chair the 13th Iran-Russia Joint Economic Committee meeting.

Heading a 300-member trade delegation Novak will leave Moscow for Tehran to attend the 13th joint economic



meeting on December 11.

According to Mehdi Sanaie, Iran's ambassador to Moscow, Vaezi and Novak will sign several documents under the framework of the 13th Joint Economic Committee meeting among which a €1.289 billion agreement for the construction and commissioning of four units of thermal power plants in Iran's southern city of Bandar Abbas as well as agreements on standardization, metrology and assessment of goods can be mentioned.

Iran and Russia have been trying to revive their sanction-hit economic ties in past few years so that according to new statistics the value of trade between the two countries in the first nine months of 2016 has increased by 70 percent compared to the same period in 2015.

PICTURE OF THE DAY SHANA/Azadeh Abdolhanezhad



Located in southern province of Fars, Parsian Gas Refinery Company is Iran's third largest gas refinery with a nominal capacity of 82 million cubic meters per day. The refinery produces some of the world's finest gas condensate which is mostly being sent to South Korea and Japan.

Kremlin says Putin personally agreed oil output cuts

President Vladimir Putin personally agreed planned Russian oil output cuts based on a consensus he had reached with big oil firms about co-operating with OPEC, the Kremlin said on Wednesday.

"We already announced earlier that the theme of output cuts was agreed by the president with all the leading oil companies," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on a conference call.

"The president personally carried out those contacts and the decision was taken personally by the president on the basis of a consensus that was reached with the heads of the oil companies."

Peskov said every \$5 increase in the price of oil meant extra income for the state budget as well as for Russian oil firms.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil steadies on doubts output cut will end global glut

Oil prices steadied on Wednesday as investors waited to see if OPEC and Russia would deliver promised production cuts designed to end a supply overhang that has weighed on the market for more than two years.

North Sea Brent crude oil was up 10 cents a barrel at \$54.03 by 0950 GMT. U.S. light crude was up 15 cents at \$51.08 a barrel.

Oil prices surged as much as 19 percent after the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and Russia announced last week that they would cut production next year in an effort to prop up markets.

But doubts have emerged over whether the planned cuts will be big enough to

rebalance the market.

Since the deal was announced, both OPEC and Russia have reported record production and output elsewhere is also resilient.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration said on Tuesday it expected domestic crude oil production for 2016 and 2017 to fall by less than previously expected.

"Investors are torn between hopes that producers will cut enough production to balance supply and demand, and fears that they won't," said Tamas Varga, senior analyst at London brokerage PVM Oil Associates.

OPEC and non-OPEC oil producers meet this weekend in Vienna to agree

details of the output cut, which targets an overall reduction of around 1.5 million barrels per day (bpd).

OPEC member Nigeria, exempt from the cuts, said on Wednesday it hoped to boost its oil production to 2.1 million bpd in January, up from 1.9 million bpd now.

"We will see whether belief in the (OPEC production) deal will hold," said Eugen Weinberg, head of commodities research at Commerzbank in Frankfurt. "There is a big discrepancy right now between expectations, perception and reality."

Despite widespread skepticism, many analysts say 2017 will likely see a more balanced oil market.

"Oil markets are on track to tighten

over 2017, which will be accelerated by OPEC's decision to reduce production alongside non-OPEC countries," said BMI Research. "If effectively implemented, we expect the global oil market will return to balance in Q1 2017."

Oil production has been outpacing consumption by one to two million barrels per day since late 2014.

"The average annual oil price will be higher in 2017 than in 2016, with Brent at \$55 per barrel for the year," BMI Research said. The average 2016 Brent price has so far been \$44.47 per barrel.

(Source: Reuters)

India's ONGC exploring swap deals to import gas from Myanmar

A unit of Oil and Natural Gas Corp Ltd (ONGC) is in early talks with Gazprom for supply of natural gas through a complex swap involving Russia, China and Myanmar, the head of the unit said on Wednesday.

The unit, ONGC Videsh Ltd, and two other state companies, GAIL and Engineers India Ltd, first discussed the idea with Gazprom a few months ago, said Narendra K. Verma, ONGC Videsh's managing director.

"Myanmar is sending gas to China through an



existing pipeline ... if Russia can provide equivalent gas to China, then we can reverse the flow of gas from Myanmar to China and bring that gas to India," Verma told reporters on the sidelines of India's Petrotech energy conference.

"For that we'll need a pipeline from Myanmar to India."

He said this was the best way of getting Russia to help India with its gas needs, but would need the cooperation of China and Myanmar.

(Source: Reuters)

Google to be powered 100% by renewable energy from 2017

Google's data centers and the offices for its 60,000 staff will be powered entirely by renewable energy from next year, in what the company has called a "landmark moment".

The internet giant is already the world's biggest corporate buyer of renewable electricity, last year buying 44 percent of its power from wind and solar farms. Now it will be 100 percent, and an executive said it would not rule out investing in nuclear power in the future, too.



"We are convinced this is good for business, this is not about greenwashing. This is about locking in prices for us in the long term. Increasingly, renewable energy is the lowest cost option," said Marc Oman, EU energy lead at Google. "Our founders are convinced climate change is a real, immediate threat, so we have to do our part."

Technology companies have come under increasing scrutiny over the carbon footprint of their operations, which have grown so fast they now account for about two percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, rivalling the aviation industry.

Oman said it had taken Google five years to reach the 100 percent target, set in 2012, because of the complexity involved with negotiating power purchase agreements. "It's complicated, it's not for everyone: smaller companies will struggle with the documents. We are buying power in a lot of different jurisdictions, so you can't just copy and paste agreements."

The company's biggest demand for energy is its data centers and it admits their overall thirst for power is growing, despite experiments to improve their efficiency through AI.

In 2015, Google bought 5.7 terawatt hours (TWh) of renewable electricity, a little less than the 7.6TWh generated by all of the UK's solar panels that year. The majority of the power comes from wind farms in the U.S.

(Source: The Guardian)

Venezuela's Maduro proposes summit of OPEC, non-OPEC oil producers to fix prices

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro has suggested that countries making up the OPEC group of oil producers and oil-rich non-OPEC nations should hold a summit to set out a pricing strategy for the next decade.

The proposed meeting should be held in the first quarter of 2017, Maduro said late Tuesday. "I plan to propose in writing that we should hold a summit of heads of state and government from the OPEC and non-OPEC member states in the first quarter of 2017 to discuss how to stabilize the oil market and protect fair prices in the next 10 years," Maduro said, as quoted by the national news agency AVN.

Speaking in the northern state of Carabobo, Maduro said he had discussed ways of shoring up crude oil prices and OPEC's recent agreement on output cuts in a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Energy ministers of OPEC and non-OPEC oil producing countries will convene in Vienna on December 10, in a follow-up to the OPEC's deal to set an oil production ceiling at 32.5 million barrels a day to raise the prices. Some non-OPEC oil producers agreed to decrease their output by a total of 600,000 barrels a day, with Russia agreeing to take half of that from the market.

(Source: Sputnik)

Announcement: Limited International Tender Notice- Prequalification of Bidders

MARAND GLASS FIBER DEVELOPMENT COMPANY (MGF Co.) affiliated to Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) of IRAN, intended to award the contract for Construction of Glass Fiber Production Plant through a tender bid. In this regard and in accordance with clause No. 26 of tender law and its bylaws, prequalification assessment of Applicants will be done.

- 1- Employer/Client: MARAND GLASS FIBER DEVELOPMENT COMPANY.
- 2- Project: Design and Construction of Glass Fiber Production Plant.
- 3- Location: Zonouz Industrial Zone, Marand City, East Azerbaijan Province, ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN.
- 4- Contract: Engineering, Procurement, supervision, commissioning, performance test, training and startup, with respect to Laws and Regulations of the I.R. of Iran.
- 5- Plant Capacity: 30000 Metric Tons per year Fiberglass.
- 6- Estimation of the investment: about 40 million Euro for the subject of tender.
- 7- Prequalification categories: Design and engineering, technology transfer, supply and procurement of equipment and machinery, commissioning, supervision, financial position, heating up, operation and training.
- 8- Due for acquisition of documents: MARAND GLASS FIBER DEVELOPMENT COMPANY (MGF Co.) affiliated to Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) of IRAN, intended to award the contract for Construction of Glass Fiber Production Plant through a tender bid. In this regard and in accordance with clause No. 26 of tender law and its bylaws, prequalification assessment of Applicants will be done. 7 days from the date of announcement through the following websites: http://www.idro.org/enidro/Pages/Tender_Projects.aspx, <http://www.mgfd.ir/endownload.html>, <http://iets.mporg.ir>.
- 9- Delivering filled documents: during 3 weeks from announcement the filled documents should be posted to the following address:

No. 3, 23rd Alley, janbazan Blvd., Farshi Moghaddam St. (16th), North Kargar, Tehran 1438753665, Iran. Tel: (9821)88229035, Fax: (9821)88021677, email: info@mgfd.ir, glass.marand@gmail.com

Why does Donald Trump lie about voter fraud?

The long-running Republican war against the right to vote has now gone national at the instigation of President-elect Donald Trump, who has promoted the lie that millions of illegal votes were cast in the presidential election.

There is not a scintilla of evidence for this claim, and Trump's own lawyers have admitted as much, stating in a court filing opposing a recount in Michigan that "all available evidence suggests that the 2016 general election was not tainted by fraud or mistake." Yet one after the next, leading Republicans are spreading this slander of American democracy, smoothing the way to restrict voting rights across the country.

On Sunday, Vice President-elect Mike Pence told ABC's George Stephanopoulos that it was Trump's "right to express his opinion as president-elect." When pushed to admit that the illegal-voting claim was not true, Pence shifted the burden of proof away from Trump, even though Trump has accused millions of Americans of committing a crime. "Look," Pence said, "I don't know that that's a false statement, George, and neither do you."

Paul Ryan, speaker of the House, told CBS's "60 Minutes," "I have no knowledge of such things," before defending Trump's claims as "giving voice to a lot of people who have felt that they were voiceless." (As recently as October, Mr. Ryan's spokeswoman noted that "our democracy relies on confidence in election results" and that Ryan was "fully confident the states will carry out this election with integrity.")

Reince Priebus, currently the chairman of the Republican National Committee and Trump's pick for chief of staff, told CBS's John Dickerson that "no one really knows" if millions of people voted illegally. "It's possible." It's equally true that no one really knows for sure that Reince Priebus wasn't snatched away and replaced with a doppelgänger hatched by aliens — it's possible, isn't it?

■ Ballot security

This is how voter suppression efforts start. First come the unverified tales of fraud; then come the urgent calls to tighten voter registration rules and increase "ballot security," which translate into laws that disenfranchise tens or hundreds of thousands of qualified voters. That's already happened in Wisconsin and North Carolina, in Ohio and Texas, where Republican lawmakers pushed through bills requiring voter IDs or proof of citizenship; eliminating early-voting days and same-day registration; and imposing other measures. Virtually all these laws aimed at making voting harder for citizens who happen to be members of groups that tend to support Democrats.

→13

Is Turkey at the end of its EU adventure?

By Ali Bayramoglu

The European Parliament has voted overwhelmingly in favor of freezing Turkey's European Union accession talks, citing numerous examples of Ankara's "disproportionate" and "repressive" measures under the state of emergency.

Specifically, the group noted Turkey's breaches of basic rights and freedoms, "severe restrictions" on freedom of expression and the media, the arrest of 10 Kurdish lawmakers and some 150 journalists, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's stance in favor of reinstating the death penalty and "statements disputing the Treaty of Lausanne, which defines the borders of modern Turkey and has contributed to safeguarding peace and stability in the region for almost a century."

No doubt, those are all realistic observations. The question now is: How will the resolution bear on EU-Turkey relations and what will the consequences be?

The Nov. 24 resolution is not a binding one, but rather a recommendation to EU leaders, who are scheduled to meet Dec. 15-16 in Brussels. The summit is not expected to result in a decision to suspend Turkey's accession talks, yet how exactly the vote will impact the balance remains unclear. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has warned Ankara against underestimating the vote because, although not binding, "It will produce effects in the capitals" of EU states.

■ Refugee deal

The Turkish government, however, has not only played down the resolution, but adopted a defiant stance, making the issue a tool in domestic politics. Shortly after the vote, Minister of EU Affairs Omer Celik called the resolution "null and void," while Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said it had "no importance" for Ankara. Then Erdogan stepped in, drawing a bargaining link with the refugee deal that Turkey had struck with the EU in March. "If you go any further, the border gates will be opened," Erdogan said, threatening to unleash a new wave of refugees on Europe. Given Europe's need for Turkish cooperation to



European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has warned Ankara against underestimating the vote because, although not binding, "It will produce effects in the capitals" of EU states.

curb the influx of refugees, the threat is not groundless. Yet the EU has certain principles and balances, which means that interest-based bargaining could be possible only for a certain period of time and under certain conditions.

European Parliament resolutions are important because they reflect prevailing political sentiments in Europe and even serve as a harbinger of the course of events. Thus, the Nov. 24 vote carries symbolic significance in terms of EU principles, values and ties with Turkey. The vote is important for Turkey, no matter how much Turkish leaders try to ignore it. And in the context of Turkish democracy, its importance is not only symbolic but very much tangible and even alarming. Why?

Twelve years have passed since December 2004, when the European Parliament convened in an exactly opposite climate with an exactly opposite

sentiment to approve overwhelmingly a resolution urging the start of accession talks with Turkey "without undue delay." Much of those 12 years saw a Turkey devoted to reform. The EU played a crucial role in the country's democratic, economic and political progress until the 2010-2011 period.

In terms of democracy, the EU provided Ankara with tailwinds for constitutional and legal amendments, a relative demilitarization process, the expansion of basic rights and religious, cultural and political freedoms, and efforts to seek a political settlement to the Kurdish question. Ankara's adoption and application of the EU's Copenhagen criteria meant a parallel course of remarkable democratization.

In terms of economy, the membership talks became a major stability factor and growth booster for the Turkish economy. In the words of prominent Turkish economist Seyfettin Gursel, "Starting in 2005,

foreign direct investments increased five of six times, exceeding \$15 billion. ... Let's note that 75% of foreign investments came from Europe. This is a huge boon for an economy with a big savings deficit and therefore an external deficit, because it contributes to financing the external deficit without increasing the external debt, supports investment and provides technology transfer."

He continued, "Moreover, as the negotiations advanced and the Turkish legal system aligned with European legal norms, the process [was] seen as the guarantee of a democratic system and a functioning market economy. It was thanks to this guarantee that local banks and companies were able to easily borrow from the international market thus far."

In political terms, the EU precipitated a big political split within Turkey's Islamic tradition. Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party moved away from narratives and policies that were unwelcoming to the West and portrayed the EU as a "Christian club." Though this course stemmed from identity and existential needs, it activated a drive to reconcile religious, national and local values with universal ones. As a result, Turkey won for some time the title of a "model country" demonstrating that Islam and democracy could coexist. The EU-Turkey relationship nurtured anticipation, prospects or dreams of building a bridge between West and East, between the Christian and Muslim civilizations, especially the Middle Eastern countries in Turkey's neighborhood.

■ The violence waves

No doubt, the collapse of this dream and the severe damage inflicted on the sole bridge of hope was not caused only by Erdogan's authoritarian shift. The violence waves, security-centered policies and introversion trend have stemmed from various sources from West to East. Still, Turkey holds one major individual responsibility, which is its shift away from both the EU and its norms and Turkey's own endeavor to synthesize Western and Eastern values.

→13

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INTERVIEW

By Ali Kavoosi Nejad

In the first part of our interview with Pakistani Ambassador to Tehran Mr. Asif Durrani, you read his views mostly on the relations between Pakistan and India and the long dispute over Kashmir. In second and final part of the interview, Mr. Durrani discusses in more detail the relations between Iran and Pakistan and areas of cooperation existing between the neighboring countries.

■ **After the removal of international sanctions against Iran, what changes have been made in the commercial and economic relations between Iran and Pakistan?**

It has been very heartening that the international sanctions imposed on Iran have been lifted and we must congratulate Iran for being successful by holding negotiations. We hope that problems associated with the implementation of JCPOA will be resolved soon.

Iran and Pakistan have good relations in commercial field but after the international sanctions, the trade between the two countries decreased. Before the international sanctions the trade between the two countries was 1.5 billion dollars and during sanctions the trade volume fell to 500 million dollars. It is hoped that after the removal of sanctions, trade between the two countries would increase substantially.

To increase the trade transactions, there are banking problems and issues, and the bank officials are trying to tackle these hurdles. The central banks of the two countries are in contact and it is hoped that these barriers would be removed soon. Traders and businessmen of the two countries have shown great interest

to increase the trade. H.E Hassan Rouhani, the President of Iran, had a visit to Islamabad in March and held talks with Mr. Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the two sides agreed to raise their trade to 5 billion dollars in the next five years.

We consider our relations as very important. Both can enter into fruitful cooperation through trade. Pakistan is negotiating much needed electricity with Iran. Pakistan has signed the gas pipeline agreement, as it badly needs energy and Iran can meet its demands easily. We could not complete the gas pipeline project because of sanctions on Iran as no international company was willing or would invest in the pipeline project. However, now the situation has changed and work on pipeline would start soon.

Pakistan, in addition to supplying the needed rice to Iran, can export the engineering, industrial and agricultural items as well as medical and surgical equipment. Moreover, Pakistan exports surgical equipment to the western countries as well. Pakistan manufactures world class sports goods and gears for international brands. In the textile and knitting sector, Pakistan had good performance and exported textile and garments throughout the world.

I hope that since Iran and Pakistan have always enjoyed friendly relations, these relations will continue to grow further in the future as well. Both countries should step towards a free trade and increase their trade transactions.

Energy main Iran-Pakistan field of cooperation



Mr. Rouhani had a visit to Islamabad in March and held talks with Mr. Nawaz Sharif, the prime minister of Pakistan. The two sides agreed to increase the trade transactions of the two counties.

■ **What are the impediments on the way to implement the peace pipeline between Iran and Pakistan and when this pipeline will be operational?**

Due to the International sanctions against Iran, no company was ready to invest or participate in the bid for construction of the gas pipeline

project. After the removal of sanctions, the government of Pakistan has negotiated with a Chinese company for the construction of the pipeline and hopefully work on the pipeline will be carried out soon. It is hoped that by the end of 2018 the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project will be operational.

■ **Iran and some regional countries showed their interest to join China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Can any other countries in the region including Iran join the corridor?**

China aims to have access to the markets of Middle East and North Africa through Pakistan and since Mr. Rouhani and Mr. Nawaz Sharif highlighted the importance of connection between Chabahar and Gwader ports, Iran can play an important role in this significant economic project.

■ **What is your opinion about making peace and stability in Afghanistan and also Iran joining the negotiating countries on the issue of Afghanistan?**

There are many tensions and insecurities in Afghanistan and all the

negotiating parties agree that we must do something to stabilize the current situation in Afghanistan and for a permanent peace in the region. After the 11 September, the use of military power in Afghanistan intensified the insecurities. Pakistan has accepted more than 3 million Afghan refugees in last 37 years, among which half

of them are still living in the country illegally.

Taliban have some bases in Afghanistan from where they carry out their activities. China's joining the Peace Talks for Afghanistan is a positive development. Iran is one of the neighbors of Afghanistan and if it joins the negotiations it can contribute to improving the situation.

The government of Pakistan wishes that the problems in Afghanistan should be resolved by its own people through peaceful talks.

On the existence of Daesh in Afghanistan, it can be said that some factions of Taliban are active in Afghanistan under the name of Daesh. But, it cannot be said with certainty that Daesh has established its bases in Afghanistan.

■ **What do you like about Iran? And have you been outside Tehran?**

I love and adore Persian carpets. On my second posting to Iran, I first travelled to the Imam Reza shrine and had a meeting with the Governor General of Razavi Khorasan. After that, I went to Tabriz city and in recent days I had a visit to Sistan and Baluchistan and the cities of Chabahar and Zahedan. In this visit I also met the Governor General of Sistan and Baluchistan. From there I went to Gwadar, Pakistan. The purpose of this visit was to explore the possibilities of expanding the commercial and economic relations between the two neighboring countries. Another objective of visiting Sistan and Baluchistan was to promote border trade.



It cannot be certainly said that Daesh has been successful in finding a place in Afghanistan.

Trump threat would be 'opportunity as well'

INTERVIEW

By Mohammad Maleki

Tehran Times asked Iran's former ambassador to Moscow in 1980s to talk about important foreign policy issues and the latest developments in the region. Mr. Nasser Nowbari believed that Mr. Zarif's rather beleaguered reaction to Trump election to presidency in the US would be seen as a suboptimal response, tailoring any foreign policy toward the US to JCPOA, violation of which would be an anathema to the proponents at home and to Mr. Zarif and his entourage as well; "he has largely been a minister of JCPOA, missing diverse issues in the Middle East on which the basis of broad maneuverings would be lain; however, the response to president-elect was fraught with fears and did not see clearly other possibilities of the situation where Trump's threats would be well worked to opportunities."

■ **How would you see the future of the JCPOA and its possible outcomes to Iran's economy in upcoming months?**

The diplomatic machinery should adapt to new conditions; now they are in a *terra incognita* where a change in strategy proves inevitable actually to exert some influence on international new order; it should be noted that Trump focuses on economy, and the foreign policy should be directed in a path to hit common views with Trump administration. His remarks so far on Syrian crisis are good omens, since he would work with Iran in more amicable terms than Obama and possible Hillary Clinton administration. Trump's criticism that Obama and his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton funded extremists in Syria by American tax-payer money, and believes an ISIL-ruled Syria would be still more dangerous terrain than when ruled by Assad. He explicitly sends signs that he would work with Russia to come to a settlement in Syrian battleground; this makes him, willy-nilly, a player friendly to Iran, a fact which should not be gone

a little change of strategies would rule out the differences and bolster common positions with Trump.

■ **Would Trump administration ignore JCPOA in the future?**

Trump would claim that he and his administration had not hit the accord and thus evade from responsibilities; an error of judgement in Rouhani's government is that they had already acted according to JCPOA without getting strong assurances from the other parties to JCPOA that they will also follow the suit; now they had postponed implementing the deal well up to the time Trump assumes power in the White House; the real problem is in our foreign policy. I believe Mr. Rouhani should explain to the public that the government had been in some part of the path off the course and that it had worked to review the path with objective to prevent further damage.

■ **Mr. Rouhani has only few months to rule the country and JCPOA; how would you interpret Iran-west cooperation on JCPOA implementation?**

I think President Rouhani has the time to restore public trust on his administration through talking directly and honestly to nation to communicate the fact that it had been on the wrong track; only after that would the cabinet assume accurate arrangement according to the necessities of the situation. A trade-oriented mind like Trump's would welcome tradeoff, to which Rouhani's administration would respond, setting aside all fears of outbreak of war, in a time when Trump's policy in the Middle East would be the nearest to Iran's in unprecedented degree; Trump seeks to destroy ISIL and a possible Assad restoration to Syria; with such friendly terms, a change of

strategy would prove inevitable.

■ **You have said earlier in an interview that whenever Russia-US had a détente, Tehran felt itself pushed on edges; how Tehran would respond should a US ruled by Trump comes to find Russia an ally in the Middle East, to keep at least a level of influence in the region and to secure its national interests?**

Still I believe such détente precipitated Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran back in 1980 when Soviet Russia and the US had in a tacit agreement in abandoning Iran to its own means; whenever both hegemonies come to accord in international community, Tehran will suffer consequences and should face challenges; a Trump-Putin honeymoon is and should by no means be palatable to Tehran politicians, and should be viewed as a bad omen. Our problems with Russia will escalate whenever Moscow takes a more cooperative *modus operandi* than when it opts to more competitive one; however, Tehran should brace for dire situations through wise diplomacy and active engagement to secure its place; a weak diplomacy will hasten a downturn in Moscow's favor of Tehran. We should abandon passive play in favor of finding ways to approach to Trump's friendly gestures at least in Syria; a conflict of interests between Moscow and Washington will provide time for Tehran to act with calculation to translate them into opportunities.

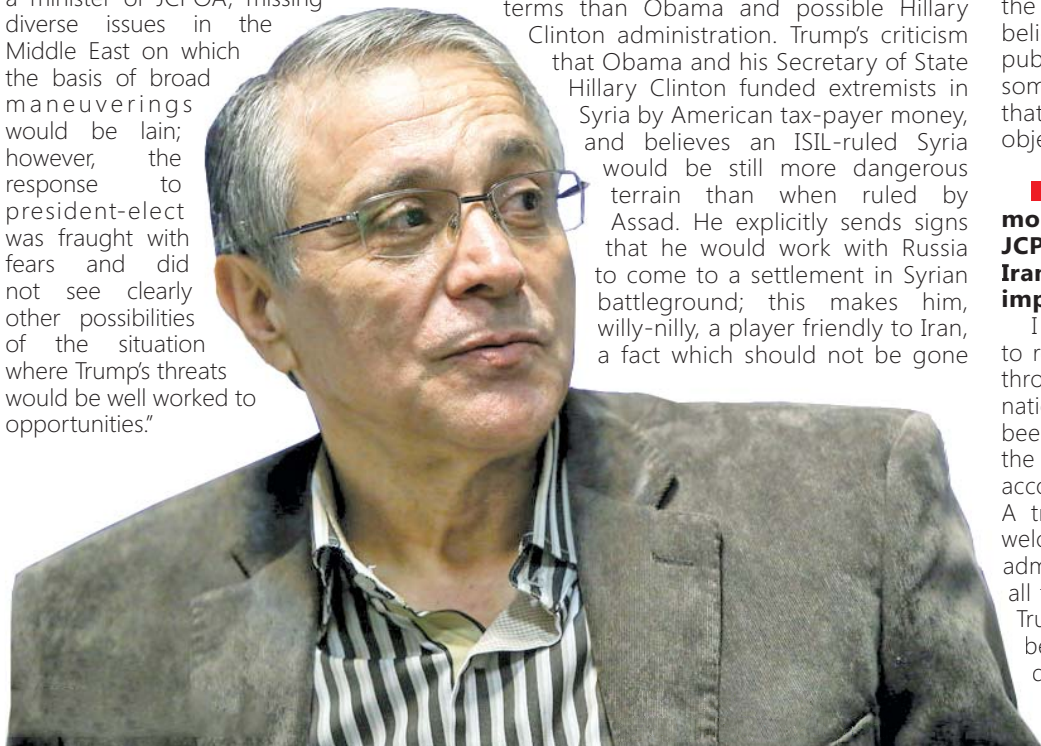
■ **During US election campaign, Arab states of the region provided lavish support for Hillary Clinton. Should we assume that a Clinton defeat will definitely be a cause for deterioration of the US relations with**

these countries? How Tehran should act or not act?

I believe Foreign Ministry's response to Trump election was awkward, only communicating fears and deepest horrors of a worst scenario to the international community which would be precipitated with a Trump election. This would be seen an Achilles' heel of Iran's foreign policy and west would thus use the JCPOA accordingly to pressure Tehran; the new *terra incognita* where Mr. Zarif and the whole foreign policy generals are is where Trump is in conflict with Saudi rulers; however, a mindset stuck in the JCPOA and its existence, would miss these clues to the fact that the new zeitgeist is already on the horizon, and where new situations would be welcomed as net opportunities; Tehran would solve with Washington its only point of difference; in other issues of the Middle East, Trump would come closer in policies to Tehran more than any other country; Tehran should be open to any foreign policy change toward new conditions, otherwise it will only be a target of pressures and threats with a west turning indifferent to hostile over the time.

■ **Would Trump revive a Bush-era aura in the Middle East?**

Bush had largely seen the political terrain in a military-security worldview; however, Trump is more business-minded and seeks to maximize odds of Americans in economic terms; Iran would also be a source of attraction for such mentality; campaign promises would be a short-term histrionics and would fade away as the election dust clears; a good policy plan would see Trump more of an opportunity than threat, provided that JCPOA does not adumbrate the horizons of the Foreign Ministry.



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The health advantages of marriage

By Robert H. Shmerling

“My wife and I were happy for 20 years. Then we met.” That’s just one of many Rodney Dangerfield jokes that don’t exactly paint a rosy picture of marriage. But, according to a new study, being married might just save your life.

Okay, that might be an overstatement. But there is fascinating — and compelling — research suggesting that married people enjoy better health than single people. For example, as compared with those who are single, those who are married tend to

- live longer
- have fewer strokes and heart attacks
- have a lower chance of becoming depressed
- be less likely to have advanced cancer at the time of diagnosis and more likely to survive cancer for a longer period of time
- survive a major operation more often.

This doesn’t mean that just being married automatically provides these health benefits. People in stressful, unhappy marriages may be worse off than a single person who is surrounded by supportive and caring friends, family, and loved ones. Interestingly, many of these health benefits are more pronounced for married men than for married women.

■ A newly recognized “marriage benefit” for the heart?

A recent study of 25,000 people in England found that among people having a heart attack, those who were married were 14% more likely to survive and they were able to leave the hospital two days sooner than single people having a



heart attack.

This study was presented at a medical conference, so the results should be considered preliminary. But it does raise some questions. For example, were the heart attacks of single people more severe than those in people who were married? And was the health of the single heart attack victims worse before the heart attack than that of the married group?

The headlines describing this study might have single people feeling even more pressured than before to find a marriage partner. I think that would be unfortunate, as a study of this type can only conclude there is an “association” or link between marriage and better health outcomes after a heart attack — but it cannot say with confidence that marriage is the reason for that benefit.

■ How does this work?

Given the growing body of evidence linking marriage with better health, it’s

worth asking why such a connection might exist. A number of researchers have explored this question. Here are some of the more prominent theories.

It’s all about immune function. Studies have found that people in happy relationships have stronger immune function than those who are not. And, cortisol tends to be released in lower amounts in married people as compared with those who are single. That may be important because cortisol levels tend to reflect levels of stress, and high cortisol levels can impair immune function.

Your behavior improves with marriage. Married people may take fewer risks, eat better, and maintain healthier lifestyles, on average, compared with single people. There is also evidence that married people tend to keep regular doctors’ appointments and follow doctors’ recommendations more often than single people.

Mental health is better when you’re

married. Poor social supports (as might be more likely for those who are single) have been strongly linked with higher rates of depression, loneliness, and social isolation, which have in turn been associated with poorer health outcomes.

Married people have better health before getting married. It’s reasonable to wonder whether people with medical problems (or who are prone to them due to unhealthy habits) are less likely to get married; that would leave healthier people getting married and that could account for the “marriage health benefit.” But, some studies have actually found that unhealthy men tend to marry at a younger age and divorce less often than healthy men.

None of the evidence in support of these theories proves (or refutes) a health benefit to marriage. So, if there is a health benefit to marriage, the precise reason is not known. But researchers continue to study the question.

■ What’s next?

I think that in the future we will have a better understanding of the health effects of social supports, including marriage. Then, our focus can turn to another important question: so what? If marriage is truly a predictor of better health, can this knowledge be used to improve health? For example, if a single person has a heart attack, is there some way that this “higher risk” individual can be treated differently to improve the outcome?

It seems likely that Mr. Dangerfield’s comments about marriage were mostly (or totally) for laughs — but even if his marriage made him miserable (as he so often suggested), it may still have been good for his health.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

Eating handful of nuts a day can keep the doctor away, research proves

By John von Radowitz

A handful of nuts a day can help to keep the doctor — and the undertaker — away, research has shown.

People consuming at least 20 grams of nuts daily were less likely to develop potentially fatal conditions such as heart disease and cancer, the study found.

Being nuts about nuts reduced the risk of heart disease by nearly 30%, the risk of cancer by 15%, and the risk of premature death by 22%.

The same amount of nuts — equivalent to a handful — was also associated with a halving of the risk of dying from a respiratory disease. Diabetes risk was cut by nearly 40%.

Study co-author Dagfinn Aune, from Imperial College London, said: “In nutritional studies, so far much of the research has been on the big killers such as heart diseases, stroke and cancer, but now we’re starting to see data for other diseases.

“We found a consistent reduction in risk across many different diseases, which is a strong indication that there is a real underlying relationship between nut consumption and different health outcomes. It’s quite a substantial effect for such a small amount of food.”



The team, whose findings appear in the journal BMC Medicine, analysed published data on more than 800,000 participants from around the world.

The study covered all kinds of tree nuts, such as hazelnuts and walnuts, as well as peanuts, which are technically legumes.

Mr Aune added: “Nuts and peanuts are high in fibre, magnesium, and polyunsaturated fats — nutrients that are beneficial for cutting cardiovascular disease risk and which can reduce cholesterol levels.

“Some nuts, particularly walnuts and pecan nuts, are also high in antioxidants, which can fight oxidative stress and possibly reduce cancer risk.

“Even though nuts are quite high in fat, they are also high in fibre and protein, and there is some evidence that suggests nuts might actually reduce your risk of obesity over time.”

(Source: *Independent*)

Doing this before bed might be killing you

Using a cellphone before sleeping affects your brain health and sleep patterns.

If you’ve been having trouble falling asleep at night, it might be because you have been staring at your screen instead of counting sheep before bed.

We’ve all been guilty of spending too much time reading on our laptops or smartphones right before bedtime. Instead of relaxing us, all too often we discover that it’s a lot more difficult to fall asleep. That’s because being exposed to a screen light can seriously disrupt natural sleep patterns and can even be more harmful to our health.

According to a study from Boston’s Brigham and Women’s Hospital, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, using an iPad or a similar electronic device directly affects users’ alertness for the next day.

The research compared the sleeping patterns of those who read printed books versus those who read from a device with artificial light. Participants who read on light-emitting devices took longer to fall asleep, had less REM sleep [dream state] and had higher alertness before bedtime. It was also shown that after an eight-hour sleep period, those who read on the light-emitting device were sleepier and took longer to wake up. The effects in the real world may actually be even greater



than what was achieved in the controlled study group.

Studies have linked reduced sleep with obesity and diabetes. Scientists have also discovered that interrupted circadian rhythms may lead to increased risk of breast cancer and prostate cancer.

Lack of sleep is also associated with a number of other ailments. For example, research indicates that people who get less sleep (six or fewer hours a night) have higher blood levels of inflammatory proteins than those who get more. The C-reactive protein, which is associated with risk of heart attack, was higher in people who got six or fewer hours of sleep a night. Getting a good night’s sleep can also increase creativity, help athletic performance, sharpen attention span, decrease stress levels and fight depression.

(Source: *Medical Daily*)

Why you might have high blood pressure without knowing it

“Masked hypertension” is more common than health experts thought

By Amanda MacMillan

Health experts often assume that blood pressure measured in a medical office or hospital may be higher than usual, thanks to the anxiety brought on from being in a doctor’s office (a phenomenon known as white-coat hypertension). As a result, physicians may not take borderline-high blood pressure too seriously in otherwise healthy adults.

A new study suggests that white-coat hypertension is actually less common than its exact opposite: a condition known as masked hypertension, in which blood pressure measurements at the doctor’s office are actually lower than those taken at other times of the day. Doctors may be missing a significant percentage of people who should be monitored (and potentially treated) for high blood pressure, the authors say, especially among young, normal-weight patients.

For the new study, published in the journal *Circulation*, researchers from Stony Brook University and Columbia University recruited 888 healthy men and women with an average age of 45. They asked participants to wear a portable blood pressure cuff for 24 hours as they went about their daily activities to monitor their ambulatory (around-the-clock) blood pressure. Multiple blood pressure readings were also taken during three separate visits to a clinic to represent measurements taken in a doctor’s-office setting.

When the researchers compared those numbers, they found that ambulatory blood pressure—an average of all measurements taking while they were awake—tended to be higher than their in-office averages, not lower. On average, ambulatory systolic readings were 7 points higher than those taken in clinical settings, while diastolic readings were 2 points higher.

Masked hypertension was more common in men than in women, and in younger adults who were not overweight.

About 16% percent of patients who had normal in-office readings turned out to have high blood pressure the rest of the day. Overall, masked hypertension affected about 15% of all study participants, while white-coat hypertension affected only 1%.

Masked hypertension was more common in men than in women, and in younger adults who were not overweight. As participants grew older and heavier, the gap between their in-office and ambulatory blood pressure narrowed and, in some cases, disappeared or reversed.

“These findings debunk the widely held belief that ambulatory blood pressure is usually lower than clinic blood pressure,” said lead author Joseph E. Schwartz, PhD, professor of psychiatry and sociology at Stony Brook University, in a press release. “It is important for healthcare providers to know that there is a systematic tendency for ambulatory blood pressure to exceed clinic blood pressure in healthy, untreated individuals evaluated for hypertension during well-patient visits.”

The findings were true among white, African American, and Hispanic participants, although the authors say they should be confirmed in more diverse study populations. (The majority of patients in this study were white.) They also note that this trend may not apply for people who have previously been diagnosed with, or are currently being treated for, high blood pressure.

Ambulatory blood pressure is generally recognized as a better predictor of future cardiovascular disease than in-office blood pressure readings; previous research has shown that elevated blood pressure throughout the day significantly increases the risk of cardiovascular events, compared to consistently “normal” readings. Unless doctors recognize a potential problem during an office visit, though, most patients are never given ambulatory tests.

The study authors suggest that many adults—especially young and normal-weight people whose in-office readings put them in the prehypertension category—would likely benefit from completing a 24-hour monitoring.

When seeing patients for routine physicals or other reasons not related to heart health, “physicians should probably be more concerned that the clinic [blood pressure] underestimates, rather than overestimates, the patient’s average daytime [blood pressure],” the authors wrote.

They hope that their findings will encourage doctors to recommend this next step for more people, and that future research will determine if and how people with high ambulatory blood pressure should be treated.

(Source: *Time*)

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Milan expo showcasing Iranian handicrafts

THE HERITAGE TEHRAN — A wide range of traditional d e s k Iranian handicrafts have been put on show at the 21st International Craft Selling Exhibition (L'Artigiano in Fiera), which opened its doors to the public on December 3 in Milan, Italy.

"A total of 19 Iranian craftspeople and artisans from provinces of Mazandaran, Isfahan, Tehran, Hormozgan, Zanjan, Kerman, East Ararbaijan, Ardebil, Golestan and Alborz are showcasing their native crafts at the exhibit," an official with the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization said on Tuesday.

Iran's pavilion offers woodcarving, needlework, leatherwork productions along with glassware, traditional jewelries, miniatures, ceramics, potteries, precious stones & semi-precious gemstone plus various types of Persian rugs, Mehr quoted Pouya Mahmoudian, the director of the CHTHO Exports Department as saying.

Over 3,000 companies from 110 countries are in attendance within 14 halls of the exhibit that runs through December 11, she added.

The organizers say L'Artigiano in Fiera is also confirmed as a crossroads of style and latest trends, featuring three large themed areas of Home Furnishing, Fashion&Design, and Creative Passion.

Heavy flooding in Thailand kills 14, inundates tourist isles

Floods in Thailand have killed 14 people and badly affected southern holiday islands as the country heads into the December-January high season for tourism, authorities said on Tuesday.

A low pressure system has brought heavy rain to parts of the south including the islands of Samui and Pha Ngan in the Gulf of Thailand, and floods have also severed the rail link to the south and Malaysia beyond.

Tourism has been a rare bright spot for an economy that has struggled to gain traction since the army seized power in a bloodless coup in 2014 to end months of political unrest.

The death on Oct. 13 of long-reigning King Bhumibol Adulyadej plunged the country into grief and also raised questions about tourist arrivals though authorities say the country is open for business despite a year of mourning.

"There has been heavier rain than usual which has caused drainage problems," Nongyao Jirundom of the state Tourism Authority of Thailand on Samui island told Reuters.

(Source: Reuters)

ROUND THE GLOBE Budapest urban landscape

Budapest, including the Banks of the Danube, the Buda Castle Quarter and Andr ssy Avenue, has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

This stretch of the Danube has been the location of human settlement since the Paleolithic. It was the site of the Roman city of Aquincum, situated to the north of the inscribed property which comprises parts of two originally quite separate cities: Buda on the spur on the right bank and Pest on the plain on the left bank.



A view of the Hungarian Parliament Building that is a popular tourist destination in Budapest.

Pest was the first medieval urban center, devastated in 1241-2. A few years later the castle of Buda was built on a rocky spur on the right bank by King Bela IV. Thereafter, the city reflected the history of the Hungarian monarchy.

After the end of the Turkish occupation, recovery did not really begin until the 18th century. In the 19th century, the city's role as a capital was enhanced by the foundation of the Hungarian Academy, housed from 1862 in a neo-renaissance palace, and by the construction of the imposing neo-gothic Parliament building (1884-1904).

Budapest has retained the separate structural characteristics of the former cities of Pest, Buda and Obuda. One example thereof is the Buda Castle Quarter with its medieval and characteristically Baroque style, which are distinct from the extended and uniquely homogeneous architecture of Pest (with its historicizing and art nouveau styles) which is characterized by outstanding public buildings and fitted into the ringed-radial city structure. All this is organized into a unity arising from the varied morphological characteristics of the landscape and the Danube, the two banks of which are linked by a number of bridges.

(Source: UNESCO)

Gonbad-e Qabus: Outstanding, innovative example of Islamic architecture

THE TOURISM TEHRAN — The d e s k one-millennium-old Gonbad-e Qabus in northern Iran is of high architectural importance as an exemplar yet innovative design of the early-Islamic-era architecture.

Also called Gonbad-e Kavus, it has been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage site. The brick tower is located in a city of the same name.

The UNESCO comments that tower bears testimony to the cultural exchange between Central Asian nomads and the ancient civilization of Iran.

The long-lasting structure capped by an eye-catching conical roof boasts intricate geometric principles and patterns which embellishes parts of its load-bearing brickwork.

Narratives say the tower has influenced various subsequent designers of tomb towers and other cylindrical commemorative structures both in the region and beyond.

Two encircling inscriptions in Kufic calligraphy date the tower to 1006-7 CE while commemorate Qabus Ibn Voshm-gir, Ziyarid ruler and literati (reigned 978-1012).

The UNESCO also credits Gonbad-e Qabus as "an outstanding and technologically innovative example of Islamic ar-

chitecture that influenced sacral building in Iran, Anatolia and Central Asia."

Here is a select of comments that visitors to the historical tower have posted to TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

■ **Iran's magnificent, mysterious tower**

Looking somewhat like a rocket ship about to take off from its artificial hill, this enigmatic tower is reputed to be the world's tallest structure built exclusively of unglazed, fired brick and Iran's earliest building bearing its own date...

While the inscription calls the tower a "castle," the interior is totally vacant with no visible signs it was ever intended as a living space nor that access to the top was ever planned...

Although now surrounded by a somewhat nondescript city of the same name, this magnificent and historically important tower is well worth a special side trip when visiting Iran. (David P. St. Petersburg, Florida; visited May 2015)

■ **1000 years old, and still perfect**

A tower in excellent condition, built by a civilization 1000 years ago, the echoes are fun and we met some fantastic people while taking photographs, Iran and especially this region is fantastic. (Garyje from Ireland, visited July 2015)



An undated photo depicts some travelers visit the one-millennium-old Gonbad-e Qabus in northern Iran.

Tehran exhibit puts spotlight on tribal Persian carpets

THE HERITAGE TEHRAN — An Exhibition of d e s k hand-woven Persian carpets, rugs, and kilims by Iranian tribes and nomads including Bakhtiari, Qashqai, and Shahsavan is currently underway at Tehran's Qasr Garden Museum.

In addition, the exhibit showcases a variety of lavishly designed floorings by countrywide urban craftspeople who are native to Kerman, Qom, Tabriz, Tehran, Hamedan, Shiraz, Gorgan, and Mashhad.

Organized in close collaboration with the Cultural



Five ways to shop for best vacation package

By Freda Moon

Sometimes budget travel means spending as little as possible to take the longest, farthest, most ambitious adventure possible. Other times, you just need a break. If the goal of a trip is to relax and spend focused time with family, you have to be realistic about scheduling and budgetary constraints and honest about your tastes and you need to seize any window of opportunity. Here are some lessons this vacation-package skeptic learned from her first experience with what the industry calls "bulk" travel.

■ **Make a list**

If you have only a few days for your trip, spend as little time as possible in transit. Use Google Flights' highly customizable search parameters to explore your options. Add the name of your home airport, pull down "nonstop flights" and select a duration of six hours or less.

By leaving the destination blank, Google will return a list of places matching your requirements. From there, you can further narrow the search using the "Interests" tab. The Frugal Family's search for "beaches" and a nonstop flight from the Bay Area turned up a handful of destinations in Hawaii, Mexico and Central

America, for example.

■ **Window shop, within reason**

Armed with your list of potential destinations, begin plugging your dates into sites selling vacation packages. There are dozens, but opening a manageable number of browser tabs (five or six, max) is adequate for comparison shopping. Initially I was most intrigued by sites like Costco and Groupon, which I don't typically turn to for travel. But there are also niche sites, like Last Minute Travel, which caters to the spontaneous, and Cheap Caribbean, which specializes in a single region. It's likely, however, that your best option is a site like Priceline, Kayak or Booking.com that you're probably already using for the rest of your travel.

■ **What Does the Package Include?**

Every "bundle" includes at least airfare and hotel, but some offer a rental car, tours and more. In the case of the Frugal Family's recent trip ["What's an Unlikely Vacation Bargain? Hawaii"], which was booked through Expedia, adding a car increased our price by \$300 to \$400. I was confident I could get a better rate on a stand-alone rental. Using Priceline's "Name Your Price" feature, I reserved an economy car for just \$21 a day, a reminder that buying in bulk isn't always best.

■ **Beware of resort fees**

Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, the event will come to an end on December 9.

Amongst principal characteristics that tribal and urban Persian carpets have in common are distinctly floral designs, representing leaves, buds and flowers along with a tendency to naturalistic drawings with graceful and often intricate lines sketched through vivid natural colors.

The museum is located on Motahari St., Police Square.

Timing is everything

The scourge of the budget traveler, resort fees have proliferated in recent years. These fees are mandatory; they apply whether you're using the services they supposedly cover: Wi-Fi, parking or equipment, like snorkeling gear.

Worse, the charges — typically \$10 to \$40 per night — are often hidden in small print. In the case of Expedia, the site contradicts itself. At the top of its vacation-package search results it specifically states that prices include "taxes and fees;" but further down the page, beneath where the room price is listed, it adds, "Plus \$30 daily resort fee."

■ **Timing is everything**

Plane tickets are almost always most expensive during what Cheapair.com calls the "Hail Mary" window of 0 to 13 days before a flight, when airfare is \$75 to \$200 more, on average, than during the "Prime Booking" window of 21 to 112 days out.

According to Cheapair's analysis of three million trips, the best flights — those nonstop morning flights that would get us to Hawaii by midday — are often hundreds of dollars more when purchased last-minute. Because convenience was a priority this trip, I booked as soon as possible, 12 days before our trip was to start. A few days later, our package had jumped from less than \$2,000 to \$2,607, well outside my \$2,400 budget.

(Source: The New York Times)

Mausoleum of Daniel at Iranian plateau edge

THE HERITAGE Each year a large number of d e s k travelers and pilgrims visit the southwestern Iranian city of Shush where is home to the mausoleum of Daniel, the well-known biblical prophet.

The mausoleum architecture which is of no great antiquity is surmounted by a massive cone in white plaster. There are two courtyards, each encircled by adjoining chambers and porches.

In addition, the premises offer some accommodations to pilgrims who are willing for an overnight stay. Shush, which was once a crossroads of various civilizations, is sprawled on parts of ancient Susa at the edge of the Iranian plateau in the lower Zagros mountain range.

Susa bear exceptional testimony to the Elamite, Persian and Parthian civilizations and cultural traditions.

UNESCO says the region contains several layers of superimposed urban settlements in a continuous succession from the late 5th millennium BC until the 13th century CE.

IN FOCUS



New study hints at efforts to develop drought-resistant crops

As part of an effort to develop drought-resistant food and bioenergy crops, scientists at the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratory have uncovered the genetic and metabolic mechanisms that allow certain plants to conserve water and thrive in semi-arid climates.

Semi-arid plants such as agave have adapted to survive in areas with little rainfall by developing a specialized mode of photosynthesis called crassulacean acid metabolism, or CAM. Unlike plants in wetter environments, CAM plants absorb and store carbon dioxide through open pores in their leaves at night, when water is less likely to evaporate. During the day, the pores, also called stomata, stay closed while the plant uses sunlight to convert carbon dioxide into energy, minimizing water loss.

ORNL scientists are studying the unique metabolic mechanisms that allow CAM plants to conserve water, with the goal of introducing water-saving traits into bioenergy and food crops. The results of the team's latest study, which focuses on agave, are published in *Nature Plants* as the journal's cover story.

Bioenergy crop yields

The CAM photosynthetic process, discovered in the 1950s, has largely remained a scientific curiosity, but researchers are now examining it as a potential solution to maintaining food and bioen-



ergy crop yields during water shortages and drought.

"Today's demand on agricultural systems to provide food, feed, forage, fiber and fuel call for more comprehensive re-

search into understanding the complexities of CAM plants," said ORNL coauthor Xiaohan Yang. "As we uncover each layer of the CAM process, our studies aim to speed up the evolution of crops to give

The CAM photosynthetic process, discovered in the 1950s, has largely remained a scientific curiosity, but researchers are now examining it as a potential solution to maintaining food and bioenergy crop yields during water shortages and drought.

them the ability to thrive in more arid environments as the availability of freshwater becomes limited."

To gain a comprehensive view of the complex CAM system, the team used ORNL's mass spectrometry to compare the molecular traits of agave with a control plant, *Arabidopsis*, which uses a more common photosynthetic process.

Genetic behavior

The team evaluated genetic behavior that signals stomatal movement in each plant over the same 24-hour period. Their study revealed that the timing of daytime versus nighttime stomatal activity varied significantly between agave and *Arabidopsis*. The research also pinpointed which genetic and metabolic mechanisms signal CAM plants to open and close their stomata.

"Further research is required to understand how this molecular timekeeping regulates CAM, but the results of this study provide new insights into the complexity of CAM biodesign, featuring an integrative understanding of CAM at the molecular level," Gerald Tuskan, ORNL Corporate Fellow and coauthor, said. The "transfer of CAM molecular machinery into energy crops would facilitate their deployment onto marginal lands and would simultaneously reduce competition with food crops."

(Source: *EurekAlert*)

New insights into skin cells could explain why our skin doesn't leak

The discovery of the shape and binding capability of epidermal cells could explain how skin maintains a barrier even when it is shedding.

The study is also helping us to see how the cells that make up our skin can switch on a mechanism to make a kind of glue, which binds the cells together, ensuring that our skin maintains its integrity.

The authors of the study say their new understanding of how epidermal cells form a barrier may explain the paradox of how we can shed them without compromising our skin's integrity. It could also help us to understand what happens when it forms incorrectly, which could lead to conditions like psoriasis and eczema.

Humans lose 200,000,000 skin cells every hour. During a 24-hour period, a person loses almost five billion skin cells. It has been a challenge for scientists to explain how this colossal shedding process can occur without there being a break in the skin barrier.

Dead epidermal cells

Scientists have previously known the epidermis consists of a thick outer barrier of dead epidermal cells, which are constantly shedding. What they've known less about is a secondary barrier deeper below the surface in the epidermis that is made up of only a single layer of

cells, which forms a much thinner, though no less important, protective barrier.

Now, a team from Keio University in Japan, working with a researcher at Imperial College London, have discovered that the shape of the epidermal cells combined with their ability to temporarily glue together, may explain how they form this strong barrier.

The researchers suggest that a shape of an epidermal cell is actually a flattened version of a tetrakaidecahedron - a 14-sided 3D solid made out of six rectangular and eight hexagonal sides. The authors came to their conclusion after studying skin cells in mouse models using a confocal and two-photon microscopes, and developing mathematical models.

Minimal surface area

The tetrakaidecahedron shape was first proposed in 1887 by William Thomson (Lord Kelvin), a Scotch-Irish mathematical physicist and engineer. He claimed that the tetrakaidecahedron was the best shape for packing equal-sized objects together to fill space with minimal surface area.

The team says the epidermal cells' unique tetrakaidecahedron-like geometry means that it can always form a very tight, cohesive bond with the epidermal cells sur-



rounding it. This is because the mix of rectangular and hexagonal sides enables the cell to always be tightly connected to the cells surrounding it.

The team also discovered that these cells manufacture proteins, which act as a temporary glue that binds the cells together in what are called 'tight junctions', which are depicted in the video. The combination of the cells' geometry and tight junction formation means that the skin barrier can maintain its integrity even though it is very thin.

(Source: *Imperial College London*)

Polar bear numbers to plunge a third as sea ice melts: study

Polar bear numbers could drop a third by mid-century, according to the first systematic assessment, released on Wednesday, of how dwindling Arctic sea ice affects the world's largest bear.

There is a 70 percent chance that the global polar bear population — estimated at 26,000 — will decline by more than 30 percent over the next 35 years, a period corresponding to three generations, the study found.

Other assessments have reached similar conclusions, notably a recent review by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which tracks endangered species on its Red List.

The IUCN classified the sea-faring polar bear — a.k.a. *Ursus maritimus* — as "vulnerable", or at high risk of extinction in the wild.

Satellite data

But the new study, published in the *Royal Society's Biology Letters*, is the most comprehensive to date, combining

35 years of satellite data on Arctic sea ice with all known shifts in 19 distinct polar bears groupings scattered across four ecological zones in the Arctic.

"Polar bears depend on sea ice for most aspects of their life history," the study notes.

Most importantly, they use it as a floating platform to hunt seals, which can outswim them in open water.

Researchers led by Eric Regehr of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Anchorage, Alaska projected three population scenarios out to mid-century, and all of them were bad news for the snow-white carnivores.

The first assumed a proportional decline in sea ice and polar bears.

Despite year-to-year fluctuations, long-term trends are unmistakable: the ten lowest Arctic ice extents over the satellite record have all occurred since 2007.

The record low of 3.41 million square kilometers (1.32 million square miles) in



2012 was 44 percent below the 1981-2010 average.

This week, the U.S. National Snow and Ice Data Center reported that sea ice extent in October and November was the lowest ever registered for both months.

The global average

The culprit is global warming, which has raised the region's surface temperatures by more than two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) compared to the pre-industrial era level, twice the global average.

On current trends, The Arctic could see its first ice-free summers sometime in the 2030s, according to climate scientists.

In the second and third scenarios, the same sea ice projections were matched with available data about changes in specific polar bear populations spanning at least a decade, in small areas in one case, and across the four larger "eco-zones" in the second.

Averaging all three scenarios, the probability that polar bear numbers would drop by a third in 35 to 41 years is more than 70 percent, the study concluded.

Unfortunately, polar bears face other threats besides a habitat radically altered by the release of heat-trapping greenhouse gases.

In the 1980s and 1990s, females and pups were found to have accumulated high levels of toxic PCBs in their tissue and organs.

(Source: *phys.org*)

IIC's Devotee Co-Worker Donates Body Organ of Daughter

In a philanthropic move, the devotee co-worker of Iran Insurance Company (IIC) donated body organs of his young daughter, who had died as a result of brain disease, to the needy patients, Public Relations Department of the company opined.

Mohammad-Reza Zare'ei, who is one of managers of the company in Gha'emshahr branch and also an

AVM expert in insurance industry, said: "My daughter named "Sheyda Zare'ei" was put under surgical operation in Tehran's Gandhi Hospital due to brain disease and finally, physicians confirmed her brain death."

He noted: "We donated her body organs to the needy patients for the sake of God and will of my deceased daughter," he maintained.

Before her death, my daughter had registered her name as member of Iranian Body Organ Donators' Association and had said to her mother that her body organs, after death, should be donated to the needy patients according to her will, the father quoted.

It is hoped that her divine act took place on Azar 16 (Dec. 6) which will please the Almighty God, her father ended.

DAY Insurance Co. Wins 3rd Top Public Relations Rank in Nationwide

Concurrent with organizing 23rd National and 9th International Insurance and Development Conference, DAY Insurance Company managed to win top 3rd rank among public relations departments in 4th Insurance Industry's Public Relations Festival, Public Relations Department of the company reported.

The 4th Insurance Industry's Public Relations Festival was held on Saturday Dec. 3, 2016 at Tehran's Milad Tower concurrent with honoring Day of Insurance Industry entitled "23rd National and 9th Intl. Insurance and Development Seminar".

At the closing ceremony of this prestigious festival, a plaque of ap-

preciation and statue of the festival was awarded by Mr. Abdol-Nasser Hemmati General Manager of Central Insurance of Iran (CII) to Mr. Jalal Mehdi Public Relations and International Affairs Department manager of DAY Insurance Company.

It should be noted that Exempla-

ry Insurance Industry's Public Relations Festival is held every year with the aim of encouraging insurance activists and praising top insurance works produced in the field of information services as well as showcasing high potentials and capabilities of insurance industry.

The Earth is about to turn into one massive "hot lava"

When it comes to measuring carbon dioxide emissions, most of us look to the sky to gauge the escalation of global warming. However, according to a new study published in *Nature* late last week, we should be looking at the ground beneath our feet. Essentially, terrestrial soil acts as a great carbon container —second only to the ocean's carbon-trapping abilities. As global temperatures increase and cause organic microbes to break down, what was once an excellent carbon absorber could eventually become its greatest source. This is particularly true in the Arctic, where rising temperatures are currently melting the permafrost at an alarming rate.

After compiling 49 studies from around the world that focus on this topic, climate scientists have come to the conclusion that this massive reversal could unleash 55 trillion kilograms of carbon and methane by 2050.

The study's lead researcher, Tom Crowther, equates this amount to adding another United States to the planet. Only in this case, the greenhouse gases won't be spewing just from cars, planes, and factories, but from the earth itself. Crowther said in a statement that this unprecedented increase would be "about 17 percent more than the projected emissions due to human-related activities during that period."

Releasing more greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere will only trigger an increase in global temperatures, which in turn will trigger terrestrial soils to release more gasses, creating that catastrophic snowball effect we've all feared.

At this moment, we still have the unique ability to prevent the worst possible outcome. Incorporating these soil findings into the larger climate change picture should only make the need to act all the more urgent. With climate change denier Donald Trump heading to the White House and threatening to pull out of the historic Paris Climate Agreement, the responsibility will land on everyday citizens to demand government accountability.

(Source: *The GOOD Magazine*)

Virgin Galactic's second SpaceShipTwo performed its first glide flight

Virgin Galactic's spaceplane, SpaceShipTwo, went on its first free flight on Friday, performing an unpowered glide over the Mojave Desert. The vehicle, named VSS Unity, was dropped from its carrier plane, WhiteKnightTwo, and flew for 10 minutes on its own before landing successfully at the Mojave Air and Space Port.

The flight comes more than two years after the company's first SpaceShipTwo experienced a failure mid-flight — killing its pilot and injuring its co-pilot. It marks a major step forward for the company, which has been working to launch sub-orbital flights for several years.

Virgin Galactic unveiled SpaceShipTwo earlier this year, and received approval from the Federal Aviation Administration back in August to begin test flights. This was the fifth time that VSS Unity and WhiteKnightTwo have flown together, but this is the first time that it's been separated from WhiteKnightTwo.

Before the drop test, Richard Branson addressed the crowd, saying that he hoped to "see out here a lot over the next few months." According to the company, the "data as well as feedback from our two pilots indicate that today's flight went extremely well," but also indicated that it will be examining the data that was collected closely. With this week's success, the company will conduct several additional glide tests before moving on to the next phase of testing, where the rocket engine will be ignited in the air.

Since its accident in 2014, the company has worked to correct the problems that contributed to the breakup of the aircraft, which included design and pilot errors.

(Source: *The Verge*)

SpaceX aims for December 16 return to flight, customer Iridium says

Tech billionaire Elon Musk's SpaceX hopes to return its Falcon 9 rocket to flight on Dec. 16, said Iridium Communications Inc, which plans to have 10 of its satellites on board for launching.

The launch is contingent on approval by the Federal Aviation Administration, which oversees U.S. commercial space transportation, Iridium said on Thursday.

"We are looking forward to return to flight," SpaceX President Gwynne Shotwell said in a statement from Iridium.

SpaceX suspended flights after one of its rockets burst into flames on Sept. 1 as it was being fueled for a routine prelaunch test at Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida.

The company traced the explosion to a fueling system problem that caused a pressurized container of helium inside the rocket's upper stage to burst.

The accident destroyed a \$200 million satellite owned by Israel's Space Communication Ltd.

"We are confident that SpaceX understands its fueling process now and will do it successfully for our launch," Iridium spokeswoman Diane Hockenberry wrote in an email to Reuters.

Iridium's satellites, however, will not be aboard the rocket during the prelaunch engine firing, she added.

SpaceX declined to comment about the status of its accident investigation or what measures it will take to ensure the problem will not reoccur.

The company uses extremely cold liquid propellants loaded just prior to blastoff to increase the rocket's power so it can fly back to Earth and be reused.

U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration advisory panel last month publicly questioned the safety of SpaceX's fueling process, especially since the company has been hired to begin flying astronauts to the International Space Station in 2018.

(Source: *Reuters*)

Helicopter crash in Tehran leaves 2 dead, 6 wounded

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Over a helicopter crash in Tehran **d e s k** on Tuesday two died and 6 got injured and transferred to the hospital, Mehr news agency reported.

The helicopter which belonged to Iranian Helicopter Support and Renewal Company, called PANHA, crashed into the Chitgar recreational and artificial lake with 8 passengers on board.

Fire Department spokesman Jalal Maleki explained that soon after the crash rescue divers and relief forces were dispatched to the scene and recued six of the passengers right away.

Not much longer the other two passengers were found too and all the victims were transferred to the hospital, Maleki said, adding, afterwards the wreckage of the helicopter was hoisted out of the lake.

According to Mojtaba Khaledi spokesman for emergency medical services two of the passengers aging 54 and 46 died at the hospital due to the gravity of their injuries and the rest are hospitalized for head injuries but their condition is satisfactory.The cause of the incident is under investigation.

Russian company signs deal with Iran on aeronavigation systems development

MOSCOW (Sputnik) — Russia's arms producer Almaz-Antey signed an agreement with an Iranian holding on modernization of Iran's aeronavigation systems through joint research and development projects, the company said Wednesday in a press release.

"JSC Concern VKO Almaz-Antey (the Russian Federation) and Shiraz Electronics Industries (the Islamic Republic of Iran) signed an agreement on the cooperation on joint research projects, development, manufacturing, deliveries and maintenance of ground and onboard civilian equipment and its components for air traffic management, communications, navigation and surveillance (CNS/ATM)," the press release said.

The company added that the ultimate goal of the joint projects was the modernization of Iran's aeronavigation systems.

Shiraz Electronics Industries (SEI), the biggest company within the state-run Iran Electronics Industries holding, specializes in military and civilian electronics, lasers, avionics, sonars and various navigation systems. Almaz-Antey, Russia's biggest defense contractor, is the main manufacturer and systems integrator for the state aeronavigation regulator.

LEARN ENGLISH

Dropping Out of College

Aaron: Mom, I have something to tell you and you're not going to like it.

Margo: What is it?

Aaron: I'm **dropping out** of college. I want to get out into the real world and get a job. I'm wasting time in school.

Margo: You'll get a better job if you stay in school and **graduate** with a **degree**. You'll have more **earning power** and better long-term **prospects**.

Aaron: I'm sick of school. All of my friends are earning money, buying cars, and living life. I feel like **life is passing me by**.

Margo: Your friends didn't go to college and got a job right out of high school.

Aaron: That's right. There's nothing wrong with that.

Margo: No, there isn't. And right now, they seem to be living the **high life**. They don't have any responsibilities and can **blow** their **paychecks** on having fun. Once they have a family, their paychecks **won't stretch very far**. With a degree, you'll **out-earn** them **right out of the gate** when you graduate in two years.

Aaron: I don't want to wait.

Margo: This is all about **delayed gratification**. A little suffering now will **pay off** in the **long run**. Trust me. Two more years and you'll be done

Aaron: Yeah, maybe I can stick it out for two more years and then no more school – ever!

Margo: Unless you decide to go to **graduate school**...

Aaron: Mom, **don't push it**.

(Source: eslpod.com)

Words & phrases

drop out: to leave a school or university before your course has finished

graduate: to obtain a degree, especially a first degree, from a college or university

degree: the qualification that is given to you when you have successfully completed a course of study at a university or college

earning power: the ability to earn money, buy things etc.

prospects: chances of future success

life is passing me by: It means that the person is missing something important in his or her life, not experiencing the things that he or she wants to

high life: the enjoyable life that rich and fashionable people have

blow: to spend a lot of money in a careless way, especially on one thing

paycheck: he amount of wages someone earns

won't stretch very far: won't be enough to buy or pay for something

out-earn: earn more

right out of the gate: right from the beginning

delayed gratification: the ability to resist the temptation for an immediate reward and wait for a later reward; generally, delayed gratification is associated with resisting a smaller but more immediate reward in order to receive a larger or more enduring reward later

pay off: if something you do pays off, it is successful or has a good result

long run: a relatively long period of time

graduate school: a college or university where you can study for a master's degree or a doctorate after receiving your first degree

don't push it: to not expect so much out of one act

Iran, Cyprus agree on boosting genetics, metabolomics co-op

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Tehran **d e s k** University of Medical Sciences Endocrinology and Metabolism Research Institute and Cyprus Institute of Neurology and Genetics inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to bolster cooperation on genetics and metabolomics here on Tuesday.

The MOU was signed between the Cypriot Chief Executive Medical Director Leonidas A. Phylactou and Mohammad-Baqer Larijani, the director for teaching affairs at the Health Ministry with Cypriot envoy to Iran Andreas P. Kouzoupis and Iranian deputy health minister Mohsen Asadi-Lari in attendance, according to Khabaronline.

"We have held various meetings and discussed the two countries' possible cooperation before signing the MOU," Larijani said, adding, "The newly signed MOU is focusing on improving genetics and metabolomics sciences."



Mohammad-Baqer Larijani

London mayor to double funding to tackle air pollution

Campaigners, health charities and neighborhood groups have welcomed plans by the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, to more than double funding to clean up the capital's dirty air.

London is one of the most polluted of dozens of cities in the UK that breach EU standards on nitrogen dioxide (NO2), a toxic gas caused by diesel vehicles. Air pollution has been linked to nearly 9,500 premature deaths in the city each year.

Funding for air quality measures over the next five years will be more than doubled to £875m, under plans announced on Wednesday, up from the £425m committed under the former mayor Boris Johnson.

If approved at a Transport for London board meeting next week, most of the money – £312m – will be spent on cleaning up TfL's 9,300-strong bus fleet. A further £65m will be used to compensate and encourage taxi drivers to switch from the oldest black cabs – those more than 10 years old – to new ones capable of zero emissions, meaning they will either run on batteries or hydrogen.

Local neighborhood schemes will receive £14m for tackling some of the worst pollution hotspots outside the city center. Plans will also be published next year to cut the number of buses running along Oxford Street, which researchers have said has the worst NO2 pollution in the world.



Khan said: "With nearly 10,000 Londoners dying early every year due to air pollution, tackling poor air quality is a public health emergency that requires bold action. I want London to be a world leader in how we respond to the challenge of cleaning up our air, and today I'm announcing that TfL will be doubling spending on improving London's air over the next five years."

The new money comes days after the mayors of four major world cities – Paris, Madrid, Athens and Mexico City – pledged to ban diesel cars by 2025.

Khan's plans stops short of that, though the mayor is bringing in an "ultra low emissions zone" a year earlier

Opening up, Iran has opportunity to commercialize its science and technology skills

→1 With global trade growing at its slowest pace since the financial crisis began, businesses are seeking new opportunities for growth, and Iran's \$400 billion economy holds the promise of a lucrative market of nearly 80 million consumers.

Iran will face serious competition from foreign companies. Good policy can facilitate more innovation by Iranian companies, helping to boost growth and create more jobs.

Tehran has taken important steps since 2005 to put in place the right policies on science, technology and innovation, the report says, but needs to better align these with other key policy areas such as trade, investment, industrial development, education, and competition.

Foreign direct investment, for example, will be most useful for Iran if it leads to genuine collaboration on technology and innovation, rather than just an increase in productivity. Iran has set up institutions to promote technological development and innovation, but could do more. Some key institutions remain too focused on production, the report says.

However, Iran has increasingly shifted its focus from research and education toward technological development and a stronger emphasis on innovation. The econ-

omy has seen 2,700 knowledge-based firms worth \$6.6 billion spring up in recent years.

But new knowledge-based firms cannot transform the economy on their own. Large established industries, such as oil and gas, automobiles and steel, should also invest more in innovation.

One of the report's recommendations is to increase spending on research and development to 2.5% of gross domestic product, with an emphasis on increased private sector spending. Currently, the figure sits below 1%, most of which comes from government or state-owned companies.

"Research and development is important, but is not a silver bullet," said Michael Lim, an UNCTAD economist and one of the report's authors.The key is not just to create a product that works, it is to create something that sells in markets or solves practical social and environmental problems.

"Iranian companies can boost their competitiveness by improving design capacity and softer, non-technical skills like marketing and management," Mr. Lim added.

To create an environment where innovation and creativity can flourish, Iran needs to strengthen systems that support innovation. And this entails promoting

"So far Iran has made some notable improvement on genetics and metabolism sciences and by sharing our findings with world credible institutes we can help develop such sciences in our country," he added.

"Under the terms of the MOU we are going to exchange faculty members who have expertise in the [aforementioned] fields as well as organizing student exchange programs," Larijani highlighted.

By forming joint working groups the centers will also take on conducting joint research projects, he pointed.

Phylactou, for his part, expressed hope that the MOU would pave the ground for the future development of the fields both in Iran and Cyprus.

Metabolomics is the scientific study of the set of metabolites present within an organism, cell, or tissue and genetics is the study of genes, genetic variation, and heredity in living organisms.

than planned and has more than doubled its size. Owners of older diesel cars will have to pay £12.50 on top of the existing congestion charge to enter the zone.

The extra funding was welcomed by campaigners, though some called on the mayor to go further and ban diesel vehicles.

"Good job Sadiq," said Simon Birkett, founder and director of Clean Air in London, but added: "We won't be happy though till you ban diesel in London by 2020."

Dr. Samantha Walker, Asthma UK's director of research and policy, said: "It is clear that action is needed and we welcome the extra investment to help clean up the air we breathe."

Leah Davis, acting director of the NGO Green Alliance, said: "This injection of funding is a welcome contribution to cleaning up London's dirty air. It will help to make delivery of the mayor's commitments on air quality possible."

The mayor also urged the government to do more to improve air quality, including introducing a scrappage scheme for the most polluting cars, a measure that officials have ruled out. On Tuesday, children and the British Lung Foundation delivered a petition signed by more than 20,000 people to 10 Downing Street calling for more action on dirty air.

(Source: The Guardian)



collaboration between industry and universities and research institutes, and strengthening the business environment, for example.

UNCTAD's STI Policy Reviews assist developing countries to leverage science, technology and innovation in pursuit of sustainable development. Since 2008, UNCTAD has worked with 10 developing countries to improve their STI policies, helping their industries and companies to compete more effectively in today's knowledge-based economy.

(Source: UNCTAD)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

Iran, Cuba bolster health co-op

Tehran and Havana signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Monday to enhance bilateral cooperation in the health sector, IRNA news agency reported.

Iranian Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi and Cuban Minister of Public Health Roberto Morales Ojeda inked the MOU in Havana with the two countries' presidents Hassan Rouhani and Raul Castro in attendance.

The MOU is seeking bilateral cooperation in various healthcare issues including treatment, research projects, training programs, and pharmaceuticals.

Other MOUs are due to be signed in fields of agriculture and environmental technologies and banking sector on Tuesday Cuba local time.

ENGLISH PROVERB

Rotten apple spoils the barrel

■ **Explanation:** a dishonest or immoral person can have a bad influence on a group

■ **For example:** Helen is the rotten apple that spoils the barrel in our office. Everyone sees her come in late to work and take long coffee breaks, and they think, "Why can't I do the same?"

PHRASAL VERB

Bring somebody/ something along

■ **Meaning:** to take someone or something with you when you go somewhere

■ **For example:** You're welcome to bring along a friend.

گسترش همکاری های ایران و کوبا در حوزه سلامت

به گزارش خبرگزاری ایرنا تهران و هوانا روز دوشنبه در جهت ارتقای همکاری های دوجانبه در حوزه ی سلامت یادداشت تفاهم همکاری مشترک امضا کردند.

این یادداشت تفاهم همکاری مشترک بین حسن قاضی زاده هاشمی وزیر بهداشت، درمان و آموزش پزشکی ایران وروبرتو مورالس اوچدا وزیر بهداشت عمومی کوبا، در حضور رائول کاسترو و حسن روحانی روسای جمهوری اسلامی ایران و کوبا امضا شد.

این سند در جهت ارتقای همکاری های دو کشور در زمینه های مختلف بهداشتی از جمله درمانی، پژوهشی، آموزشی و دارویی به امضای طرفین رسیده است.

سایر اسناد همکاری دو کشور شامل همکاری فناوری زیستی، فناوری کشاورزی، و بانکی

نیز روز سه شنبه به وقت کوبا امضا خواهد شد.

ENGLISH IDIOM

Bag of bones

■ **Meaning:** to say that someone is a bag of bones means that they are extremely thin

■ **For example:** When he came home from the war he was a bag of bones.

Pakistan: PIA PK661 crashes with 48 people on board

A commercial aircraft carrying 48 people onboard crashed in northern Pakistan near the capital Islamabad, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) said.

PK 661 went down on Wednesday on a domestic flight from the mountainous northern city of Chitral to Islamabad, aviation authorities said.

Pakistan's army has recovered 21 bodies from the wreckage, according to a statement released by the military.

The flight departed from Chitral around 1530 local time (1030 GMT) and was expected to land in Islamabad around 1640.

Junaid Jamshed, Pakistan's singer-turned-preacher, and his wife were also on-board the plane that came down near the town of Havelian in Abbottabad district.

A PIA spokesperson told Al Jazeera it was too early to ascertain the cause of the crash.

"PIA aircraft ATR-42 (AP-BHO) crashed near Havelian at 1642 hours, 42 passengers, five crew members and one ground engineer were on board," the spokesperson said in a statement.

"Rescue efforts are underway, and

we are ascertaining the extent of damage to life of those on board the aircraft."

There are unlikely to be any survivors, a government official on the scene said.

"All of the bodies are burned beyond recognition. The debris is scattered," Taj Muhammad Khan, an official based in the Havelian region, told Reuters news agency.

Khan added witnesses told him "the aircraft has crashed in a mountainous area, and before it hit the ground it was on fire".

Jamshed rocketed to fame in Pakistan in the 1980s and 1990s as the singer for the Vital Signs pop band. He launched a solo career later with a string of chart-topping albums and hits.

Jamshed gave up music in 2001 and announced that he was devoting his life to spreading Islam.

Deputy Commissioner Chitral Osama Warraich was on board the flight.

An eyewitness, Sannan Abbas, told Al Jazeera that locals carried out the initial rescue efforts.

Al Jazeera's Kamal Hyder, reporting



from Islamabad, said the pilot had sent a distress signal before the plane crashed.

Some relatives of those onboard have gathered at Islamabad airport but were getting very little information or assistance from authorities, according to Al Jazeera's Hameedullah Khan.

Pakistan's Dawn News reported that 40 ambulances were dispatched from Islamabad and a helicopter will be used to put out the fire. It added that due to darkness and remoteness of the crash site, rescue efforts were proving to be

very difficult.

Pakistan's last major air disaster was in 2015 when a Pakistani military helicopter crashed in a remote northern valley, killing eight people including the Norwegian, Philippine and Indonesian envoys and the wives of Malaysian and Indonesian envoys.

The deadliest crash was in 2010, when an Airbus 321 operated by private airline Airblue and flying from Karachi crashed into hills outside Islamabad while about to land, killing all 152 on board.

(Source: agencies)

Rodrigo Duterte defends police accused of killing mayor

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte staunchly defended more than two dozen policemen accused by the government's main investigation agency of killing a jailed mayor linked to illegal drugs.

Duterte said on Wednesday he still believes the accounts of the policemen, who said Mayor Rolando Espinosa Sr and another inmate, Raul Yap, died in their cells when they shot it out with police during a November 5 raid in a jail in central Leyte province.

The president said he was willing to go to jail for his policemen.

After weeks of investigation, the National Bureau of Investigation said on Tuesday it determined the two inmates died in a police "rub-out" and not a shoot-out.

The NBI, the equivalent of the United States' FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation), said the policemen probably placed pistols and illegal drugs in the cells of

the two dead inmates to justify the police raid.

"What the police stated is the truth for me," Duterte said in a speech. He added he would not allow the policemen to go to jail.

The NBI findings cast a black mark on Duterte's deadly anti-drug crackdown, which has alarmed western governments and human rights groups. There have been suspicions that some of the more than 4,000 slain drug suspects may have been killed deliberately by law enforcers and did not die in gun battles as claimed by police.

NBI spokesman Ferdinand Lavin said on Tuesday that the bureau filed murder complaints against the policemen at the Department of Justice last Friday. Prosecutors will rule whether there is enough evidence to indict the policemen.

All the policemen involved in the raid at the jail con-

spired to kill Espinosa and Yap and cover up the murders, Lavin said.

Espinosa's death has sparked skepticism even among politicians backing Duterte's crackdown because of the apparent brazenness of the killings. He had surrendered to the national police chief in a nationally televised event after he and more than 160 other officials were named publicly by Duterte in August as part of a shame campaign.

Espinosa was later released, but was re-arrested and jailed in October after being indicted on drug and fire-arm charges.

His son, an alleged drug lord, was arrested in the United Arab Emirates in October and has been repatriated to the Philippines, where he has acknowledged past involvement in illegal drugs.

(Source: agencies)

Time magazine names Donald Trump Person of the Year



Time magazine has named the United States President-elect Donald Trump its Person of the Year for his shocking upset election victory that rewrote the rules of politics.

"When have we ever seen a single individual who has so defied expectations, broken the rules, violated norms, beaten not one but two political parties on the way to winning an election that he entered with 100-to-1 odds against him?" the magazine's managing editor, Nancy Gibbs, said on Wednesday on NBC's Today Show.

In a phone interview on the program, Trump welcomed the move as "a very, very great honor". "It means a lot," he added.

Gibbs said Trump's Democrat rival in the election, Hillary Clinton, was the No 2 finalist and noted the choice of Trump this year was "straightforward".

"The Hackers," ranked after Clinton. Gibbs said that referred to "a new cyber security threat we saw this year of state-sponsored hackers looking to delegitimize an American election." She said this was "something new this year and something very disturbing."

Among the other finalists who he beat were German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The Time cover reads, "Donald Trump: President of the Divided States of America", and the cover image features a photograph of the president-elect sitting in his private residence at Trump Tower.

Trump went from fiery underdog in the race for the Republican presidential nomination to defeating Clinton in the November 8 election. He won 306 electoral votes, easily enough to make him president. Clinton won the popular vote.

Gibbs said Clinton "came closer than any woman ever has to winning the White House, and in the process revealed, I think, both the opportunities and the obstacles that women face in the public square".

The magazine said its Person of the Year, an annual tradition that dates back 90 years, "had the greatest influence, for better or worse, on the events of the year".

"So which is it this year: better or worse?" Gibbs wrote.

(Source: agencies)

UN prosecutors demand life sentence for Gen. Ratko Mladic

The United Nations prosecutors on Wednesday demanded a life sentence for Gen. Ratko Mladic, telling judges that they should convict and imprison the former Bosnian Serb military chief for orchestrating atrocities throughout Bosnia's 1992-95 war.

Prosecutor Alan Tieger told judges at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia that it would be "an insult to the victims, living and dead, and an affront to justice to impose any sentence other than the most severe available under law: A life sentence."

Tieger was speaking at the end of prosecutors' closing statements at the conclusion of Mladic's trial on charges including genocide, murder and terror.

Mladic's defense attorneys will deliver their closing statements before the three-judge panel retires to consider verdicts, which are expected late next year.

Mladic faces 11 counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide linked to his command of troops accused of atrocities including indiscriminately shelling and sniping in the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, and murdering thousands of Muslim men and boys in Srebrenica in July 1995, Europe's worst massacre since World War II.

The 74-year-old Mladic insists he is innocent and often appeared unmoved by the prosecution's final statement. He spent part of the morning in court on Wednesday leafing through two newspapers, some-



times looking up at a computer screen when prosecutors displayed images of Bosnian Serb army orders. As Tieger delivered his sentence demand, Mladic stared at him across the courtroom.

On the final day of prosecutors' closing statement, lawyer Adam Weber told judges that Mladic played a key role in the deadly siege of Sarajevo during the war, saying it was the general's "personal approval that was necessary" for Serb forces to shell the city using specially modified munitions.

Another prosecutor, Peter McCloskey, went on to outline Mladic's role in the Srebrenica slayings, saying that "we see Mladic commanding his forces in an organized and systematic capture, detention, transportation,

execution and burial of over 7,000 able-bodied men and boys of Srebrenica."

Mladic's trial, which started more than four years ago, is the last case still underway at the tribunal, which convicted and sentenced 83 suspects. Among them was Radovan Karadzic, the former Bosnian Serb leader who was sentenced to 40 years in March for genocide and other crimes.

Tieger reminded judges that four of Mladic's subordinate officers have been convicted by the tribunal and sentenced to life for their role in the Srebrenica genocide.

Mladic insists he did nothing wrong during the war that left 100,000 dead, claiming that his military campaigns were intended to protect the Serb people as Bosnia disintegrated following the breakup of Yugoslavia and that he did not have a hand in some of the worst atrocities.

But in an emotional finale to his closing statement, Tieger said there was no doubt Mladic was guilty and focused in on the victims.

"No-one can fathom the extent of the individual tragedies of the victims in this case," he said, referring to slain children, beaten prisoners and women who were raped.

"The litany of tragedies goes on and on," Tieger said. "No-one can fathom the extent of the suffering for which Ratko Mladic is responsible."

(Source: Times Colonist)

Scholars, experts discuss principles common to Islam and international humanitarian law

➔ The president of the Iranian Red Crescent Society, Seyed Amir Mohsen Ziaee, referred to the escalation of armed conflicts in recent years, and said, "Common religious values and beliefs can help reducing the level of hostilities and bring us closer to peace. This conference is a step forward to discuss the importance of dialogue between religions and IHL in order to strengthen respect for human dignity".

Since 2006, the Iranian Red Crescent and the ICRC have jointly supported the academic work of the Centre for Comparative Studies on Islam and International Humanitarian Law. This work helps build bridges between Islam and IHL, as part of efforts to promote respect for human dignity and protect civilians and other non-combatants in conflicts throughout the world.

(Source: ICRC)

Is Turkey at the end of its EU adventure?

➔ That Turkey has entered a course of regress from the gains it had made with the EU is plain as day. The toll of what is already lost and will be lost in the future includes democratic, economic and political gains alike.

And here lies the two-pronged significance of the European Parliament's vote. The resolution represents a critical threshold in the "rupture" in Turkey-EU ties, which has been debated for some time. Apart from recommending the suspension of membership talks, the resolution's impact in the EU and Turkey seems bound to further erode Turkey's weakening bonds with democratic values and a market economy. This is already evidenced by Ankara's serious breaches of basic rights and freedoms, a trend toward a single-party state, foreign capital flights from Turkey, the free fall of the Turkish lira and inclinations toward economic introversion. The bells seem to be tolling for Turkey.

(Source: Al Monitor)

Why does Donald Trump lie about voter fraud?

➔ While federal courts have struck down some of these laws, more keep popping up. In Michigan, lawmakers are pushing to fast-track a voter-ID requirement even though there was no evidence of voter impersonation there. In New Hampshire, the incoming governor, Chris Sununu, wants to do away with same-day registration, also despite the lack of any evidence that it resulted in fraud.

Under a Trump administration, anti-voter efforts could become national in scope — through congressional legislation, a hostile Justice Department or a Supreme Court nominee with little regard for voting rights.

Undermining the integrity of the electoral process and making it harder to vote is threatening to all Americans, regardless of party. The cynical Republicans now in power figure that all they have to do is fool the public long enough to win the next election. It's outrageous, but it's hard to see why they would stop when lying has gotten them this far.

(Source: The NYT)

Israel lawmaker suspended for voting against outpost legalization bill

➔ The supreme court decision had stipulated that the evacuation of Amona "must occur before December 25".

The new bill has eliminated the clause that called for the 330 residents of the unlawful Amona settlement outpost to be moved to a nearby hill for eight months, after which they would be forced to move a second time.

More than half a million Israelis live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds (Jerusalem).

Palestinians want the West Bank as part of a future independent Palestinians state, with East al-Quds as its capital.

However, the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestine has created a major obstacle to that goal.

(Source: Press TV)

Iran planning to become medical sciences powerhouse

➔ Compared to 2007 the number of the Iranian scientist among world's top one percent scientists by citations jumped 10 fold becoming 100 in 2016, he highlighted, adding, similarly the number of the Iranian universities among world's top one percent universities grow 5 times and became 30 over the same period.

He further pointed out that updating and upgrading "Education in Iran" website (a website designed and run by the Health Ministry and Tehran University of Medical Sciences) for introducing Iran's university of medical sciences to the world, allocating budget to some 17 universities of medical sciences for international students, and preparing standard curriculums are of the ways to attract students from other countries.

Mentioning the memorandums of understanding signed for administrating international tests in Iran Larjani explained that they are negotiating with various institutes to standardize medical tests.

Shanghai Shenhua’s Gus Poyet confirms talks for Boca’s Carlos Tevez

New Shanghai Shenhua coach Gustavo Poyet has confirmed that the club are negotiating with Boca Juniors striker Carlos Tevez for the upcoming season over a deal worth a reported €40 million per season.

Poyet told ESPN Sports Center in Argentina that “it would be a pleasure to have him for the next season.”

Former Manchester United, Manchester City and Juventus forward Tevez returned to Boca, his boyhood club in Argentina, in 2015. Club president Wu Xiaohui has confirmed that talks are in progress and added that he would like to have Tevez “as soon as possible.”

Former Real Betis and Sunderland manager Poyet is looking to add talent to his squad as he prepares to take Shanghai into next season’s Chinese Super League and the Asian Champions League qualifying rounds after the club finished the campaign last month in fourth place.

“We have done a lot of work and it’s safe to say that there has been a definite breakthrough in the negotiations,” Wu told Shenhua News.

“But for a variety of reasons, we have not nailed down the deal. Their club have problems that are still yet to be solved and I will spare you the details.

“We will continue to put greater effort into this and strive to give our supporters a pleasant surprise as early as possible.”

Poyet said he did not yet know details of the extent of negotiations. “I know what you [reporters] know,” he told ESPN. “I was asked about it and I said that there was no need to consult because it is obvious that I want to bring him here. Now it is up to them [club administration]. Nothing is confirmed as yet. It is something that will take time, but evidently the club are also interested in bringing him in and they are negotiating.”

The Uruguayan said he would have preferred that the news had not leaked.

“First of all, one tries to not discuss it, but once the media finds out, the negotiations get complicated,” he said. “But there are legal steps that must be followed. First one has to speak with the club and with the player because there are many people involved. I think that one could speculate, but out of respect for both Boca and Tevez, we must wait and the process must be done properly.”

Tevez, 32, had admitted back in September that he had been pondering retirement after Boca Juniors were ousted from the Copa Libertadores semifinals by Independiente del Valle in the summer, but was persuaded to continue playing for the club.

“To have him here would be a pleasure,” Poyet said. “Here he would find other South American players such as Colombians Fredy Guarin and Giovanni Moreno, who played for Racing. My assistant is Argentinean [Mauricio Taricco], so he would not feel alone. It would not be a complicated situation for him.

“As for the details, I do not know how the negotiation is going, nor the subject of money, but I hope it can get done.”

Boca Juniors president Daniel Angelici said he does not know anything about the potential offer.

The former Argentina striker joined West Ham in 2006 along with Javier Mascherano from Brazilian club Corinthians, before moving to Manchester United on a two-year loan deal after just one season.

He won back-to-back league titles and was a Champions League winner before joining crosstown rivals Manchester City where he won a third league title in the 2011-12 season. In his Premier League career, he scored a total of 84 goals in 202 games.

Tevez went on to ply his trade in Serie A with Juventus in 2013, and won consecutive league titles, and then opted to rejoin his boyhood club Boca.

Poyet also said he is interested in former Huracan striker Ramon Wanchope Abila, who is currently with Brazilian side Cruzeiro, because he feels Wanchope would pair well with Tevez -- although he admitted he is not sure whether he has reached his cap on foreign players.

(Source: ESPN)

Djokovic splits with coach Becker

Tennis world number two Novak Djokovic has split with coach Boris Becker three years after adding the German multiple grand slam winner to his team.

Serbian Djokovic, who won six of his 12 major titles after hiring Becker but has suffered a slump in form over the past six months, confirmed their parting of ways on his website on Tuesday.

“After three very successful years, Boris Becker and I have jointly decided to end our cooperation,” Djokovic, who lost his number one ranking to Andy Murray last month, said.

“The goals we set when we started working together have been completely fulfilled, and I want to thank him for the cooperation, teamwork, dedication and commitment.”

The pair joined forces in December 2013.

After winning the Australian Open for a sixth time and then claiming a first French Open this year Djokovic, 29, was on course to complete calendar year Grand Slam -- a feat last managed in 1969 by Australian great Rod Laver.

But he bowed out in the third round of Wimbledon to Sam Querrey, lost in the first round of the Rio Olympics to Juan Martin del Potro and then went down to Stan Wawrinka in the U.S. Open final. Without a title since July, Djokovic also saw an 8,000-point ranking lead over Britain’s Murray vanish.

Murray dethroned Djokovic after 122 weeks at the summit in November and then beat him to win the season-ending ATP World Tour Finals, snapping the Serbian’s four-year domination of the London tournament.

Djokovic did not reveal whether he would replace Becker and there was nothing to suggest long-term mentor Marian Vajda would be leaving his entourage, although the Belgrade native indicated he wanted to make his own choices.

“My professional plans are now directed primarily to maintain a good level of play, and also to make a good schedule and new goals for the next season,” Djokovic said.

“In this regard I will make all future decisions.”

(Source: Reuters)

Europa point will do it for draw-weary Manchester United



Jose Mourinho’s Manchester United face Zorya Luhansk on Thursday knowing that a draw in the frigid Ukraine will propel them into the knockout stages of the Europa League.

The Premier League side however will want to go through in style with victory, even if Europe’s second-tier competition does not feature at the top of their priorities in Mourinho’s first season in charge.

The Old Trafford side will also be eager to end a bout of frustrating draws, the latest being a 1-1 stalemate at Everton at the weekend when Mourinho’s men conceded an 89th-minute equalizer from the spot.

The Zorya match — Thursday is the last phase of Europa League group games — will take place in Odessa, southern Ukraine, a four-hour flight from northern England and where temperatures will hover around freezing by evening kickoff.

Zorya might already be out of the competition, but United’s French forward

Anthony Martial is not expecting the Ukrainians just to lie down.

“It is very different, not just the supporters but the weather. Over there, it’s really cold at this time of the season,” Martial told MUTV.

“But it’s down to us to come to terms with that, adapt to the environment we find ourselves in and get the victory we need.”

He added: “We’re expecting a difficult encounter. Things went quite well for us in the home game (1-0 to United) but it’ll be different over there.

“They’ll be in front of their own supporters and will be determined to make life difficult for us to get a result, so we’ll be on our guard.”

United will also go through to the last 32 with defeat if Feyenoord fail to beat Fenerbahce at home in the other Group A fixture.

Fellow Premier League representatives

Southampton face the Israeli side Hapoel Beer-Sheva at St. Mary’s Stadium knowing that victory or a 0-0 draw will put them in the last 32, where eight clubs who failed to progress from the Champions League will enter the fray.

“It’s a huge game on Thursday and that’s all anyone is worried about now,” young midfielder Sam McQueen, fresh from signing a new four-and-a-half-year contract with the club, told Southampton’s website.

“It’s a huge competition. You’re playing against a lot of different styles, which is only going to help me grow personally, as well as the team against new challenges.

“I think we’ve done well so far, but we wouldn’t be doing ourselves justice if we don’t win and get through the group.”

They may not be European household names but Ireland’s Dundalk and Qarabag of Azerbaijan can make a slice of history.

No Irish side has ever reached the

knockout stages of a UEFA club competition but domestic champions Dundalk can change that if they win at Maccabi Tel Aviv and AZ Alkmaar do not at home to Zenit St. Petersburg.

A score draw for the Irish would also suffice if AZ loses in the Netherlands.

Qarabag will definitely qualify with a home victory in Baku over Fiorentina, who are all but through.

The European minnows, which are in the Europa League group stage for a third straight campaign but have yet to make it to the round of 32, are impressive at home.

Qarabag are unbeaten in five European home matches since a 1-0 loss to Tottenham Hotspur in last season’s group stage.

In all, 11 last-32 places are still up for grabs. Ajax, Roma, Zenit and Schalke are among the sides already through, but Inter Milan is early casualties with nothing to play for.

(Source: AFP)

AC Milan deal closing postponed to March 3



The closing of the deal for the acquisition of Italian soccer club AC Milan will be postponed to March 3, the holding company of former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi and the Chinese consortium seeking to buy the team said in a joint statement.

The statement on Wednesday confirms what sources told Reuters earlier this month.

Under a new agreement between the two parties, the Chinese investors will pay a further 100 million-euro (\$107 million) downpayment to Berlusconi by Dec. 12, they added, on top of the 100 million eu-

ros already paid in two previous tranches.

The investors, backed by Haixia Capital and entrepreneur Yonghong Li, signed an accord in August to gain full control of the Serie A team, through investment vehicle Sino-Europe Sports Investment Management Changxing (SES).

The deal was originally supposed to close on Dec. 13 but SES was struggling to get approval from the Chinese government for the deal.

In the note SES said that management of the team “will continue to be based on shared decision making”.

(Source: Reuters)

Julian Draxler has ‘weak character’ and I would not sign him - Lothar Matthaus



Former Germany captain Lothar Matthaus has warned clubs against signing Wolfsburg’s Julian Draxler, saying he has a “weak character.”

Draxler, 23, appears to be nearing an exit from Wolfsburg less than 18 months after joining from Schalke.

The club are facing a relegation battle but are reportedly prepared to do so without the Germany international.

“He is also to be held responsible for where Wolfsburg stand right now,” Matthaus wrote in his weekly column for Sport Bild.

“I say very clearly: I would currently not sign Draxler as a top club because of

his weak character.

“He might be a talent, but he has not shown he can make a difference at the highest level on a permanent basis.”

In the summer, Draxler was denied a move after a controversial interview in which he hit out at sporting director Klaus Allofs for denying his wish to leave.

Although he is under contract until 2020 and is believed to have a €75 million release clause to be activated next summer, Matthaus believes Wolfsburg would be happy to recoup the €40m they paid for him.

(Source: Soccernet)

New York FC’s Villa earns MLS MVP honors

New York City FC standout David Villa was named Major League Soccer Most Valuable Player on Tuesday after scoring 23 goals this season.

Villa, a forward, received 25.9 percent of the vote in winning the Landon Donovan Award, the MLS announced.

New York Red Bulls striker Bradley Wright-Phillips (19.3) was second and Red Bulls midfielder Sacha Kljestan (17.6) placed third. Toronto FC forward Sebastian Giovinco

(16.3) was fourth and Montreal Impact midfielder Ignacio Piatti (7.7) fifth.

Villa, 35, completed his second season with New York City FC and helped the club finish with 54 points, an improvement of 17 from 2015.

Villa finished one goal behind Wright-Phillips, the MLS leader.

(Source: Reuters)



Our priority is to win the ACL title: Branko Ivankovic

TIPS Persepolis football team head coach Branko Ivankovic stated that his side's priority in the next season is to win the AFC Champions League title.

The Croatian trainer, who nearly missed last season's Iran Professional League title at the final week, also wants to win the league title this season. Persepolis is currently at the top with 26 points after 12 weeks.

■ AFC Champions League

Playing in the Champions League is such an honor for us and will definitely motivate my players. However our objectives is on another level, we need to qualify for the last eight while fighting to win the title in the next year. That is not easy at all since other Asian teams have greater potential, facilities and preparatory procedures.

We need to strengthen our side in the winter transfer window so that we have a better performance against our Asian rivals.

■ Chinese offer for Mohammad Ansari

There is lucrative offer for Mohammad Ansari from a Chinese club. That is a good news because it shows that we have great players and when we play in the AFC Champions League the number of these offers will definitely increase. But on the other hand, it is dangerous because they want our best player and this will affect the team's performance.

Ansari will earn three times more than he receives at Persepolis from the Chinese club. He will think about it regardless of moving there or staying here and this is not just about us, I remember when Real Madrid offered to sign Luka Modric from Tottenham he didn't have concentration as he was thinking over his future but he finally moved to Santiago Bernabeu.



AFC releases slot allocation for 2016-17

TIPS The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) draw will be held at 1600hrs (local time), December 13, 2016 at the Hilton Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

AFC has finalized the slot allocations for the 2017 edition of the AFC Champions League (ACL).

Korea Republic, Japan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran lead the way with three teams from each country gaining direct access to the AFC Champions League group stage, while the quintet will each have one representative in the competition's initial play-off stage

(3 group stage + 1 play-off).

Esteghlal Khuzestan and Persepolis secured their slots in the ACL as Iran Professional League champion and runner-up respectively.

Zob Ahan will take part at the group stage as Hazfi Cup champion and Esteghlal will partake at the ACL Playoff as third-placed team in domestic league.

The official draw for the AFC Champions League A club, who will be allocated a slot in any of the below stages depending on their Member Associations' (MA) ranking, will progress from one level of the competition

to the next one as follows.

Preliminary Stage 1 => Preliminary Stage 2 => Play-off Stage => Group Stage.

Losing clubs from an MA with an ACL direct slot will not participate in the AFC Cup, while losing clubs from an MA with an ACL Playoff slot will join the AFC Cup Group Stage, the-afc.com wrote.

If a club from an MA with an ACL Playoff slot qualify for the ACL Group Stage, then their allocated AFC Cup Group Stage slot will be given to the next eligible club in their MA (standby club).

UWW President Lalovic sends encouraging note to Iran's Aramideh

TIPS Iranian youth wrestler Abolfazl Aramideh received an encouraging note from United World Wrestling (UWW) President Nenad Lalovic.

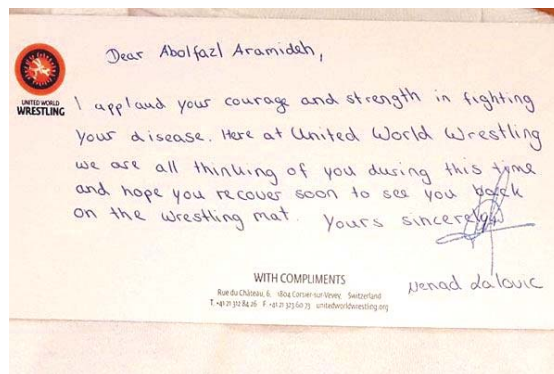
In July, the 15-year-old Iranian freestyler pinned Abdymalik Karachov (KGZ) to win bronze at the Cadet Asian championships in Taiwan but soon after he fell ill.

"I applaud your courage and strength in fighting your disease. Here at United World Wrestling we are all thinking of you during this time and hope you recover soon to see you back on the wrestling mat."

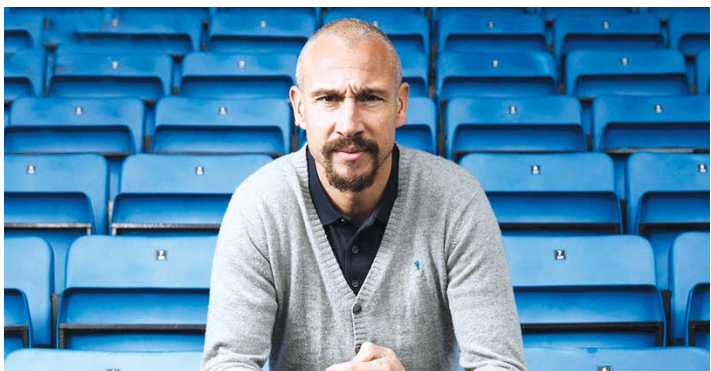
Lalovic wrote a note sent to Iran Wrestling Federation.

The wrestler also received Endurance Trophy in November from Masoud Soltanifar, Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs, on behalf of the United World Wrestling.

Online support for Aramideh has also been pouring in for weeks, including a message from 2012 Olympic champion Jordan Burroughs (USA) delivered to Aramideh on Instagram.



Not extending Man United stay my only regret - Larsson



Henrik Larsson enjoyed a distinguished playing career, but the Sweden great says he regrets not prolonging his stay with Manchester United in 2007.

Larsson won four league titles, two Scottish Cups and two Scottish League Cups with Celtic and is third on the Bhoys' all-time leading goalscorer list.

He departed Parkhead a hero in 2004 for Barcelona, where he added a pair of La Liga titles and the Champions League in a two-year spell.

Larsson's career appeared to be winding down when he signed for Helsingborgs in 2006, but a surprise two-month loan to Old Trafford materialised the following January.

At the end of that season, United won the Premier League title and were beaten in the final of the FA Cup, the first played at the redesigned Wembley, by Chelsea. And Larsson wishes he would have been among those celebrating victory in England's top-flight.

"That's the only regret I have in my career," he told FourFourTwo magazine.

"I should have stayed as it would have meant I got a Premier League winners' medal and I would have stayed for one more season.

"But I still had a contract with Helsingborgs and I feel that when you sign a contract, you have to see it out.

(Source: Goal)

Eriksson replaces Seedorf at Shenzhen FC



Sven-Goran Eriksson has replaced Clarence Seedorf as the new head coach of Chinese second division side Shenzhen FC, it has been announced.

Under Seedorf, Shenzhen failed to secure promotion to the Chinese Super League last season, and Eriksson, who recently left Shanghai SIPG, has now been tasked with taking his new club into the top-flight.

"It will be a new challenge for me," the Swede said.

"I share the same target as the club has: to bring the team to the Chinese Super League. I believe that if we work closely with the players, the fans and the club, we can accomplish it. Football is not

only about 11 players, but it is a sport that needs everyone to work as one.

"Shenzhen is a big metropolitan area, I know the history of it. I spent the last week hanging around the city and I found myself very fond of it. It has been developing very fast. I like it here very much. I appreciate the club's ambitions and although there will be lots of pressure and expectation, I am happy to face it."

While at Shanghai, Eriksson's side finished second and third in the league, and made it through to the quarter-finals of the 2016 AFC Champions League.

(The-afc.com)

Iran's Sajjad Esteki on radar of big European handball clubs



Iranian international handball player Sajjad Esteki has caught the eye of some of Europe's biggest clubs.

The 26-year-old player, who plays for Dinamo Bucuresti at the moment, scored 13 goals against Portugal's Braga at the VELUX EHF Champions League and moved up to the top of the top-scorer table.

Hungarian Veszprém Barabás, SG Flensburg-Hande-

witt of Germany, Paris Saint-Germain of France, Ukraine's Motors and Barcelona of Spain have shown interest in signing the Iranian sharpshooter.

His older brother Allahkaram is also a member of Dinamo Bucuresti team. Turkish and Qatari clubs are interested in hiring the 28-year-old player.

(Source: Tasnim)

Is Pep Guardiola tinkering too much with Man City?

Saturday's 3-1 defeat to Chelsea left Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola in a spot of bother. He had formatted a team specifically for the task of coping with Chelsea's 3-4-3 system, and the subsequent loss prompted inevitable criticism. Guardiola, they say, can be too much of a tinkerer.

In truth, the weekend defeat was tough to analyse. On paper, it was indeed a crushing defeat against the new Premier League title favourites, but it wasn't as comprehensive as the scoreline suggests. City dominated the first half, went 1-0 ahead and would probably have wrapped up the game comfortably, had Kevin De Bruyne not contrived to miss an open goal early in the second half. The subsequent collapse, though, was concerning.

It's also worth reiterating that Guardiola has lost only two Premier League matches so far. Both defeats, 2-0 away at Tottenham and Saturday's loss to Chelsea, eventually seemed resounding, but City performed well in both matches, created plenty of chances and would have arguably snatched a draw on another day. Pushing forward late on left them exposed to counterattacks, and in the final 10 minutes, they appeared rather ragged in both matches.

Results such as these happen, however, and every club is capable of slipping up against dangerous opponents. The real problem so far has been something different: City have unnecessarily dropped points in three home matches.

Against Everton, Southampton and, most surprisingly, Middlesbrough, Manchester City have drawn 1-1. These are the type of matches City need to win convincingly, wrapping up victory with a minimum of fuss. It's these matches too in which Guardiola's tinkering might have been most harmful.

The midweek Champions League draw with Celtic was yet another 1-1 draw. In isolation, it didn't matter; the game was meaningless. But it was two more dropped points and another confusing system from Guardiola, with youngster Tosin Adarabioyo flanked by full-backs Gael Clichy and Bacary Sagna in a three-man central defence and Pablo Zabaleta surprisingly deployed in midfield.

Guardiola has become such a tinkerer relatively recently in his career. He experimented increasingly toward the end of his time with Barcelona, and while always trying surprise systems with Bayern, he was most unpredictable during his final campaign in Bavaria. What's crucial, though, is that both teams always had a defined Plan A, a reliable, easily understood system to fall back upon. In part, that was because of what came before he arrived.

As Guardiola acknowledged throughout his period with Barcelona, he didn't invent their footballing philosophy, which essentially dated back many years to Rinus Michels' reign as manager in the mid-1970s. There was unquestionably a Guardiola style of play, one based upon ball possession more than ever before, but Barcelona's DNA was about passing football, specifically about midfielders who were brilliant in possession. Sergio Busquets, Xavi Hernandez and Andres Iniesta were raised in the Barcelona school, and helpfully, all three highlighted Guardiola as one of their major inspirations.

At Bayern, things were slightly different: It was an unfamiliar environment for Guardiola, and he could depend less upon players who instinctively understood what he demanded. However, there had been a significant shift in Bayern's play a few years earlier, when they started playing a possession-based game comparable to that of Guardiola's Barcelona.

The presence of former Barca coach Louis van Gaal had helped this shift, as had the fact that many Bayern players were schooled by their Barca equivalents in Spain's 1-0 World Cup semifinal victory in 2010. Jupp Heynckes, who came between Van Gaal and Guardiola, was more flexible. Bayern could out-pass teams or counterattack against them effectively. But broadly speaking, Bayern were in the Barca template, and Guardiola could tinker with a default system.

Manchester City are a different case entirely. In terms of footballing superclubs, City are the new kids on the block. They have a grand history, FA Cup victories stretching back more than a hundred years and four league titles. But there's no footballing culture at Manchester City like there is at Barcelona or Bayern, and no default style of football is ingrained in the club.

Guardiola's predecessors, meanwhile, haven't particularly contributed to a change in mentality. Roberto Mancini liked possession football, and so did Manuel Pellegrini. But neither were truly visionary in their approach, and it often felt that both sent out teams that were the sum of their parts, sometimes less. The things that turn good teams into great teams -- fluid formations, cohesive movement, attacks starting from defence and defence started from attack -- weren't present.

City were also too dependent upon individuals. In a sense, aside from the simple fact that they often dominated possession, they were the polar opposite of a Guardiola side, and therefore, he is starting at Year Zero with Manchester City.

For all their recent trophies and their excellent squad, this is a team that badly requires a proper identity. That, of course, is precisely why they've hired Guardiola, the most revered coach in European football and a strict ideologue who believes deeply in his way of playing. Although City have occasionally this season exhibited football that makes you think "Yes! That's Guardiola's influence," there isn't yet a default system.

Does a team need a default system? Judging by recent football history, yes. Teams have never experimented more in a tactical sense, but it's difficult to find a truly outstanding side in the past few years who haven't had a standard formation at one particular point. Guardiola's Barcelona were fundamentally a 4-3-3, Heynckes' Bayern a 4-2-3-1, Jurgen Klopp's Borussia Dortmund a 4-2-1 and Guardiola's Bayern a 4-1-4-1.

Perhaps you can go back further and point to Sir Alex Ferguson's Manchester United side during the Cristiano Ronaldo era. When he rotated positions with Wayne Rooney and Carlos Tevez seamlessly, you were never entirely sure when United would play in a 4-4-2 or a 4-3-3. Even then, however, the defence base remained in place.

Once you start switching from a back four to a back three, things become much trickier. City's defensive effort Saturday suggested immaturity. Players simply looked uncomfortable in basic defensive situations, and for that, Guardiola must take his share of the blame.

Is Guardiola tinkering too much? No. But is he tinkering too early? Quite possibly. For all the variations, Guardiola hasn't yet defined his theme.

(Source: ESPN)

