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Novel on blight of war tops at Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards

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British presence in Persian Gulf unlikely to affect power equation: Shireen Hunter

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Shireen Tahmasb Hunter, a professor of political science at Georgetown University, is of the opinion that the British presence in the Persian Gulf "is unlikely to dramatically affect power equation in the region."

In an interview with the Tehran Times, she says "the recent decision by Britain to expand its presence in the Persian Gulf is only" intended "to show" that it "is still relevant."

Following is the text the interview:

■ What are the reasons behind Britain's direct involvement in the Persian Gulf region?

A: Britain has always wanted to be considered a global player and not just a European power. This is why Britain has never been happy about the EU's common security and foreign policy. The desire to continue to be seen as a global player is now stronger after Brexit. Given Britain's history in the region, the Persian Gulf seemed to be a good place to demonstrate Britain's global significance. Additionally Britain as the former colonial power has many economic and other interests in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Thus, a more pronounced British involvement in the region is partly to reassure its Gulf allies. ➔13

Iran sympathizes with Russia over plane crash



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Iran expects ATR deal to be signed next week

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran desk will start the final round of negotiations with plane-maker ATR in Tehran on Wednesday and a deal is expected to be signed next week, Deputy Transport Minister Asghar Fakhrieh Kashan said on Sunday.

"As per previous talks with ATR, buying 20 airplanes from the company, which is a subsidiary of Airbus, has been finalized, but Iran Air – Iran's flag carrier – is allowed to buy 20 more airplanes from the company," IRNA quoted him as saying.

As the official explained, Iran Air will buy a 320 Airbus aircraft, two 330 ones, and five ATR airplanes by the end of current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2017).

Addressing the financing issues, Fakhrieh Kashan said that Iran Air will supply 15 percent of the required fund for purchasing the aircrafts and the rest will be secured via foreign finance.

Iran Air and Airbus signed a firm contract for 100 aircrafts, building on an initial commitment signed in January 2016 in Paris. The agreement signed by Farhad Parvareh, Iran Air Chairman and CEO, and Fabrice Bregier, Airbus President and CEO, covers 46 A320 Family, 38 A330 Family and 16 A350 XWB aircrafts.

ARTICLE

By Shirin Hakim and Kaveh Madani

Dreaming of blue skies: Tehran's battle for clean air

Tehran's wet streets provide temporary relief to millions who have been tolerating unbearable levels of pollution. In today's Tehran, precipitation is associated with romanticism and blessings, washing away polluted skies briefly before reality sets in again. Pollution has plagued Iran's capital for years, manifesting in various health problems amongst locals, closing of schools, and transforming daily activities into questions of life and death.

Nested on the southern portion of the Alborz mountain range, Tehran's prime location historically provided protection and freshwater sources to Iranians, earning the title as the nation's capital in the late 18th century. The Alborz Mountains, which once stood as an emblem of protection for the Iranian people, have become a key obstacle in pollution alleviation. Strong winds from the western and southern belts of Tehran blow pollution from industrial factories to the center, which become captured by the mountain range in the north and east in what some refer to as a "gas chamber".

Last month, a natural-color image produced by NASA revealed an alarming grey streak of heavy smog over Tehran. This same smog resulted in 412 Iranian lives lost in the last few weeks in the nation's capital from pollution-related causes. ➔12

Rouhani offers Christmas greetings to Pope, Christians

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has congratulated Pope Francis ahead of Christmas and the new Gregorian calendar year, expressing hope that the world would see peace and justice.

In his message on Saturday,

the Iranian president expressed his felicitations over the auspicious birth anniversary of the prophet of friendship and brotherhood, Jesus Christ.

He expressed hope that the New Year would be one of spirit-

uality, tolerance, progress and dignity along with peace and justice for all humans across the world.

The Iranian president also hoped that interaction and kindness would be further

promoted among followers of all divine religions and called on all moderate, wise and justice-seeking well-wishers to tread the path of patience and dialogue in 2017.

(Source: Press TV)

Ex-FM says deep state in U.S. promotes conflict with Iran

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki has said that the hidden masters who rule the United States are beating the drums against the Islamic Republic and the nuclear agreement.

"They urged both Democrats and Republicans to vote in favor of the renewal of anti-Iran sanctions," Mottaki was quoted by Mehr news agency as saying on Sunday.

He said that the U.S. has taken a hostile atti-

tude towards Iran ever since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Mottaki strongly criticized U.S. President Barack Obama for not vetoing the renewal of the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA), saying, "The ministers of the American president had promised to prevent the extension of ISA into law."

The U.S. Senate passed a legislation on December 1, extending ISA for another 10 years. The measure passed the Senate floor by 99-0.

Obama, however, declined to sign or veto

ISA, and the legislation – which renews restrictions on Iran's missile program – automatically became law.

The decision provoked an angry reaction from Iranian officials who say the legislation violates the nuclear deal – also known as the JCPOA.

The JCPOA was signed between Iran and six world powers on July 14, 2015.

Under the deal, Tehran agreed to limit certain aspects of its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief.

Iran allows free foreign exchange at banks in move to unify rates

Iran authorized some banks on Saturday to deal in foreign exchange trading at a free-market rate, the central bank said, as authorities try to unify exchange rates.

Iran operates two exchange rates, a free market rate, which was at around 40,140 rials to the dollar on Saturday and an official rate used for some state transactions, set by the central bank at

around 32,300 rials.

In recent months, the central bank has raised the official rate gradually to shrink the gap between the two. It has said it wants to unify the exchange rate, to make the economy more efficient and create a level field for private firms competing with state institutions with access to cheaper foreign exchange.

A statement on the central bank's website on Saturday said some banks were authorized to trade in foreign exchange at a "rate set by agreement between the bank and the customer" and that it would fulfill the banks' foreign exchange requirements at the market rate.

It said the directive aimed "to channel foreign exchange opera-

tions by individuals and entities to banks and decrease their risks".

The rial has suffered under years of economic sanctions, but the central bank has been keen to dampen any sharp rise in the currency due to optimism over the lifting of the sanctions after Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2015.

(Source: Reuters)

Syrian army kills dozens of ISIL terrorists east of Aleppo

The Syrian army has killed dozens of terrorists in military operations against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group to the east of the recently-liberated city of Aleppo.

Syria's official news agency SANA quoted a military source as saying that Syrian forces attacked ISIL positions and supply routes in the eastern countryside of Aleppo on Saturday.

The source further said that some 50 terrorists were killed as the Syrian troops targeted convoys of ISIL terrorists in the villages of Mashrafeh Abu Jabar and Bihan on the outskirts of Air Force college, east of Aleppo City.

According to the report, a car bomb and two machine gun-equipped vehicles as well as a large amount of weapons and ammunition were destroyed in the attacks.

The Syrian military announced on December 22 that it had regained full control of the northwestern city, having completely cleansed its eastern side of militants for the first time since 2012.

Elsewhere in Syria, the Syrian army also carried out counterterrorism operations in the eastern countryside of Homs, killing and injuring dozens of the Takfiris, according to the report.

A military source said the Syrian troops in Tifour area, east of Homs city, advanced towards the al-Soud hills and the village of Shrifra, southwest of Palmyra (Tadmor), killing 15 militants and wounding scores more.

The Syrian forces had thwarted a terrorist attack on Jub al-Jirah district in Homs, leaving 20 terrorists dead on Friday.

The Syrian troops fired artillery shells at the terrorists in the village of Kherbet al-Nagous, 80 kilometers north of Hama City, a military source said, leaving nine militants dead.

Syrian sources also reported that Ali Kabkab (aka Abu Fahd), one of the commanders of the so-called Jaish al-Islam Takfiri group, had been killed along with two of the militants on the outskirts of Douma in the Damascus countryside.

Since March 2011, Syria has been gripped by militancy it blames on some Western states and their regional allies.

(Source: Press TV)



Pope Francis: Christmas has been 'taken hostage' by materialism

Birth of Jesus should remind world of the suffering of children today, pontiff says in Christmas Eve address at Vatican.

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST
(CONSULTANT SERVICES)
Iran Azarbaijan Power Transmission project Finance
CONSULTING SERVICES
Project ID No.: IRN-0105
➔ See page 5

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Military advisor hails victories of resistance movement in Aleppo

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Major General d e s k Yahya Rahim Safavi, the military advisor to the Supreme Leader, hailed on Sunday the victories of the resistance movement in Aleppo, predicting that the victories will continue.

Rahim Safavi said that the victories in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon were achieved through reliance on the “resistance school of thought”, Tasnim news agency reported.

“The honorable martyrs who sacrificed themselves during the Sacred Defense (defense against the invading Saddam army in the 1980s), initiated the resistance school of thought which led to great victories in Aleppo, Iraq, and Lebanon,” noted Safavi, the former IRGC chief.

He added that the entire Iranian nation is indebted to the martyrs for sacrificing themselves in fighting the enemies of Islam.



Iran to hold Mokran investment summit

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran will hold the d e s k first International Summit for Presenting Investment Opportunities & Sustainable Development of Mokran Shores in Chabahar on January 23-24, Mehr reported on Sunday.

The summit aims to introduce investment opportunities of the region to local and international investors and facilitate access to the development plans of the Islamic Republic in the region.

The bid has so far attracted a large number of local as well as foreign investors to the Chabahar Free Trade Zone.



Younesi congratulates birth anniversary of Jesus Christ

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Ali Younesi, special aide to president for religious and ethnic minorities, has congratulated the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ to Iranian Christians, including Armenians, Chaldeans and Assyrians, ISNA reported.

“I wish all Iranian followers of monotheistic religions a merry Christmas on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ, the messenger of kindness, humanity and love,” Younesi said in a statement issued on Sunday.

“The divine religions have come to fight extremism, violence, oppression and injustice,” he said, adding, “Prophet Jesus Christ (PBUH) also preached to the public about justice, peace and freedom.”



Popular Front of the Islamic Revolution comes into existence

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Popular d e s k Front of the Islamic Revolution on Sunday issued a statement officially announcing its existence, Tasnim news agency reported.

“The Popular Front of the Islamic Revolution – which is a popular movement – in its first step, will found Popular Assembly of Revolutionary Forces,” read part of the statement. The popular front is headed by Hojatoleslam Mohammad Hossein Rahimian. The members of the front are Yahya Ale Eshaq, Mehdi Chamran, Hamid-Reza Haji Babaei, Reza Roosta Azad, Mahmoud Khosravi Vafa, Mehdi Mohammadi, Ali Reza Marandi, Nader Talebzadeh and Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi.



Police to establish security headquarters for 2017 presidential election

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s police have d e s k announced that a security headquarters would be founded to ensure the security of the upcoming presidential election, IRNA reported.

“The Election Security Headquarters will be launched by NAJA in order to provide the security of the election before, during and after it,” said police spokesman Saeed Montazer al-Mahdi during a press conference on Sunday.

Presidential elections are scheduled to be held on May 19, 2017.

Iran set to stage military exercise in southern provinces

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s military will d e s k start a five-day military drill in southern areas where the Bushehr nuclear plant is located, Farzad Esmaili, commander of the Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base, announced on Sunday.

The annual maneuver, called Modafean-e Aseman-e Velayat-e 7 (defenders of the sky of Velayat-e 7), will start on Monday in three provinces of Khuzestan, Hormozgan, and Bushehr.

In addition to regular army forces, divisions from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and Basij will participate in the war game, in an effort to create more coordination among different parts of the country’s integrated air defense network, the commander explained.

“Upwards of 17,000 personnel of the Armed Forces will participate in Modafean-e Aseman-e Velayat-e 7 either directly or indirectly,” Esmaili told a press conference in Bushehr.

Staged in an area of 496,000 km2, the war game will cover parts of the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf as well as the three islands of the Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa.

A wide gamut of air defense systems, including radars, anti-missile defense units, low-, medium- and high-altitude missiles, and surveillance equipment will be used in the drills, Esmaili said.

All heavy and light equipment used in the maneuver are homegrown, the commander said, adding the S-300 air-defense system will not be deployed.

Instead of the Russian air-defense system, Iran is likely to utilize its first vertical-launching air defense system, Bavar-373 (Belief 373), developed as a possible alternative to the Russian system.

Parts of the system were put on display in an exhibition held on the occasion of National Defense Industry Day, which fell on August 21 this year.

Also, the Fakour Command Post which Iran unveiled in 2015 will be field-tested, according to Esmaili.



“Upwards of 17,000 personnel of the Armed Forces will participate in Modafean-e Aseman-e Velayat-e 7 either directly or indirectly.”

Iran sympathizes with Russia over plane crash

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Ministry d e s k spokesman Bahram Qassemi expressed sympathy with the Russian government and people over a plane crash on Sunday.

The Russian Defense Ministry Tu-154 plane with 92 people on board crashed in the Black Sea en route to Syria shortly after refueling at an airport in the resort city of Adler.

Sputnik reported that most of the passengers were members of the Alexandrov Ensemble, who were traveling from Moscow to Hmeymim airbase in Syria to take

part in New Year celebrations.

Earlier in the day, a source in Russia’s security services told RIA Novosti that a technical failure and a pilot error are considered as main possible causes of the crash.

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a nationwide day of mourning in Russia on Monday.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has also sent a message to Putin telling his Russian counterpart that he is “extremely sad” over the plane crash. Emphasizing that the mishap will not hinder the two countries’ joint war against terrorism, Assad said Damascus and

Moscow were partners in the “fight to lay the foundations of stability, security and peace” in Syria, Press TV reported.

Russia and Iran are the main allies of the Syrian government in its war against terrorists, mainly ISIS and al-Nusra Front, and the militants backed by the West and certain Arab countries.

The tragedy of plane crashed happened just a few days after Syria, along with a support by Russia and Iran, succeeded to liberate the strategic city of Aleppo from the grip of militants and terrorists.

Rouhani, Putin lay emphasis closest consultation

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — In a phone conversation on Saturday Hassan Rouhani and Vladimir Putin, the Iranian and Russian presidents, said the two countries will continue cooperating and holding consultations.

It was the first dialogue between Rouhani and Putin since Syria succeeded to fully liberate the strategic city of Aleppo from the capture of terrorists with a help by Russia and Iran.

Rouhani said that liberation of Aleppo bore the message that the terrorists cannot achieve their vicious plots.

Rouhani also pushed for political dialogue to settle the Syrian conflict, suggesting that Kazakhstan is a good



place for talks between the Syrian government and armed opposition groups.

The Syrian Army issued a statement on Saturday announcing that the city of Aleppo has been fully liberated and returned to the control of the government.

Pointing to the assassination of Russian Ambassador to Turkey Andrei Karlov, Rouhani said terrorists have resorted to new methods.

Ambassador Karlov was shot dead by a so-called off-duty Turkish police officer at an art gallery in the Turkish capital Ankara last week.

For his part, Putin insisted that concurrent with the war on terrorists, talks between the Syrian government and armed opposition groups should start.

Top IRGC commander says military precedes politics

‘U.S. and terrorists understand language of power only’

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The deputy commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps has said politics and diplomacy come next to military power, warning that officials should not trust Washington.

“Power should lead politics and diplomacy,” said Hossein Salami in a television program broadcast on Saturday night.

The commander cited the current situation in the region as evidence for the failure of diplomacy, and rapped the U.S. and terrorists for acting unfairly.

“The Americans and terrorists don’t act fairly and justly, and understand the language of power only.”

In making the comments, Salami was

referring to the recent liberation of Aleppo by the Syrian army, a stronghold of terrorists for nearly five years.

The loss of Aleppo, he added, was an end to ambitions nurtured by the U.S. to create a new order in the Middle East, he stated.

“The Americans planned to expand their move into Lebanon and Iraq just to reach Iran and create a new order in the Middle East.”

Last week IRGC chief Mohammad Ali J’fari in comments called Aleppo “the frontline of the Islamic Revolution and

said the security of Iran has expanded much beyond its territorial borders.

■ **‘Missile capability deterring enemies’**

Talking on the power-politics dichotomy, Salami further related a secure Iran to its missile capability that has created and boosted deterrence.

“Today, our missile capability has turned into a deterrent power well perceived by the enemies of Iran.”

“Iran’s missile capability has depicted nuanced pictures in the minds our ene-

“Today, our missile capability has turned into a deterrent power well perceived by the enemies of Iran.”

Zarif wishes peaceful world in new Christian year

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian d e s k Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif congratulated on Sunday the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ (PBUH), wishing a “peaceful” world in the year 2017, which starts next Sunday.

“Wishing a very Happy Christmas and peaceful 2017 to all. May the miracle birth of Jesus Christ bring peace to our troubled world,” he said in a post on his Twitter. Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani also issued a message on Saturday congratulating the parliament speakers of



the Christian world on birth anniversary of Jesus Christ.

“Teachings of the divine prophets promise peace, justice and salvation of the human society which is needed in the current world more than anytime else,” he wrote in the message.

Iranian MPs back Citizen Rights Charter

TT **POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian MPs issued a d e s k statement on Sunday expressing support for the Citizen Rights Charter declared by President Hassan Rouhani on December 19.

The statement was signed by 166 MPs.

“We [the lawmakers] praise the president for his efforts to prepare the Citizen Rights Charter and support the charter and express readiness to help implement it,” the statement read.

The statement said that defending the Iranian people regardless of age, gender, religion and ethnicity is a principled policy of the Islamic Republic.

The MPs expressed hope that the Citizen Rights Charter would turn into a role model at international level.

The charter, which comprises 120 articles, insists on the right to a “decent life” such as right to clean water, health services, freedom of speech, clean environment,

holding rallies, access to information, etc.

In his speech at the ceremony held to unveil the charter, Rouhani said the executive body is duty bound to implement all the terms in the charter.

The president called on the Judiciary and Legislative bodies to help the government in applying the charter.

Rouhani said the charter provides the “main basis for development of the country”.

All 92 on Syria-bound Russian military jet killed in crash, including 60 from Red Army Choir

A Russian military plane carrying 92 people, including dozens of Red Army Choir singers, dancers and orchestra members, crashed into the Black Sea on its way to Syria on Sunday, killing everyone on board, Russian authorities said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said one of its TU-154 Tupolev planes had disappeared from radar screens at 0525 MSK (0225 GMT), two minutes after taking off from Sochi in southern Russia, where it had stopped to refuel from Moscow, on its way to Syria.

Major-General Igor Konashenkov, a ministry spokesman, told reporters that nobody had survived.

"The area of the crash site has been established. No survivors have been spotted," he said. An unnamed ministry source told Russian news agencies no life rafts had been found, while another source told the Interfax agency that the plane had not sent an SOS signal.

In televised comments, President Vladimir Putin, speaking in St Petersburg, declared Dec. 26 a national day of mourning.

The jet, a Soviet-era Tupolev plane built in 1983, had been carrying 84 passengers and eight crew members.

At least 60 were members of the Alexandrov Ensemble, better known internationally as the Red Army Choir, and were being flown out to Russia's Hmeymim air base in Syria to entertain troops in the run-up to the New Year.

Nine Russian reporters were also on board as well as military servicemen.



Konashenkov said fragments of the plane had been found at a depth of about 70 meters in the Black Sea about 1.5 km (1 mile) off the coast near the city of Sochi.

"The search operation is continuing," said Konashenkov. "Four ships, four helicopters, and a plane and a drone are working in the area," he said, saying a military commission had flown to Sochi to look into what happened.

Six ships from Russia's Black Sea fleet were on their way to the crash site, and more than 100 divers were being drafted in to search the area along with a mini-submarine.

Konashenkov said four bodies had been recovered from the sea. Russian news agencies cited a higher figure.

Russia's RIA news agency, citing an unidentified security source, said preliminary information indicated that the plane had crashed because of a technical malfunction or a pilot error. Another source told Russian agencies that the possibility of a militant act had been ruled out. The weather had been good.

Konashenkov said the plane had last been serviced in September and undergone more major repairs in December 2014. He said the pilot was experienced and that the plane had about 7,000 flying hours on its clock.

According to the defense ministry's passenger manifest, Elizaveta Glinka, a member of Putin's advisory human rights council, was on the plane.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov

told reporters it was too early to say what had caused the crash. Putin was being kept constantly informed of the latest developments, Peskov said.

Russian military investigators said in a statement they had opened a criminal investigation into the crash.

The Kremlin said Putin expressed his deepest condolences to those who had lost loved ones in the crash and ordered Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev to head a government investigatory commission.

Russia's Defense Ministry regularly flies musicians into Syria to put on concerts for military personnel. The base they were heading for, Hmeymim, is in Latakia province. It is from there that Russia launches air strikes against Syrian rebels.

The last big TU-154 crash was in 2010 when a Polish jet carrying then-president Lech Kaczynski and much of Poland's political elite crashed in western Russia killing everyone on board.

Russian news agencies cited Denis Manturov, the Russian Transport Minister, as saying on Sunday it was premature to talk about withdrawing the TU-154 from service.

On Dec. 19, a Russian military jet crashed in Siberia with 39 people on board as it tried to make an emergency landing near a Soviet-era military base. Nobody was killed in that incident, though 32 people were airlifted to hospital.

(Reuters)

Assad tells Putin he is saddened over Russian plane crash

Syrian President Bashar Assad said on Sunday he was saddened by the crash of a Russian military plane on its way to Syria as its crew had wanted to celebrate his army's victory in Aleppo, but the fight against militants would not be affected.



In a condolence message sent to Russian President Vladimir Putin, Assad said the two countries were partners in the "fight to lay the foundations of stability, security and peace" in Syria. Russian-backed government forces ousted the last rebels from the city of Aleppo on Thursday after years of fighting.

The Russian TU-154 plane carrying 92 people, including dozens of Red Army Choir singers, dancers and orchestra members, crashed into the Black Sea on its way to Syria Sunday, killing everyone on board, Russian authorities said.

(Source: Reuters)

Giant WWII bomb forces mass Xmas evacuation

Authorities in the German city of Augsburg are preparing to evacuate more than 54,000 people from their homes to defuse a giant 1.8-tonne bomb from World War II.

Officials have sealed off the city's medieval cathedral and city hall. All people in the surrounding streets must be out by mid-morning.

The evacuation will affect some 32,000 households in the center and will involve some 4,000 police and firefighters, according to the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle.

The evacuation is one of the biggest in Germany, where it is not unusual to find bombs from the war.

In 2011, about 45,000 people were evacuated to remove a bomb in Koblenz. Augsburg officials have kept some schools open for evacuees who cannot stay with family or friends. Pets will be allowed and public transport is free.

Police say it was impossible to say exactly how long it would take to make the bomb safe.

Augsburg, in Bavaria in the south of Germany, was heavily bombed during the war, and large parts of the city were destroyed on 25-26 February 1944, when the city was attacked by hundreds of British and the United States bombers.

(Source: Sky News)

Christians flock to Bethlehem to mark birth of Christ

Thousands of pilgrims and tourists from around the world together with local Christians have gathered in the biblical town of Bethlehem (Beit Lahm) in the occupied Palestinian territory of West Bank to celebrate Christmas Eve in the traditional birthplace of Jesus.

Security was tight in Bethlehem on Saturday after recent deadly attacks on Christian targets in neighboring Egypt and Jordan by armed fighters.

Yet the faithful braved the chilly weather outside the town's Manger Square as traditional Christmas songs like Jingle Bells played in Arabic over loudspeakers and scout groups paraded with bagpipes and sang carols.

Christmas festivities have brought a boost of holiday cheer to Christians in the Holy Land, who make up just a small percentage of the population.

Despite the Christmas cheer, Middle East politics looms large in the background: the concrete barrier that surrounds parts of Bethlehem is just one prominent reminder.

It was built by Israel last decade during the second intifada, or uprising.

(Source: agencies)

All ISIL members should be burned if claims on Turkish soldiers are true: MHP leader

All members of the terrorist organization should be burned if video released by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist showing two Turkish soldiers being burned alive is true, Devlet Bahçeli, the leader of the opposition Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi) said in a party meeting over the weekend.

"If this atrocious video going around on social media is true, then all these bloody-handed ISIL terrorists, inside and outside [Turkey] should be wiped out," he said.

A video released by ISIL terrorist group last week showed two men dressed in Turkish military uniforms being set on fire. The video went viral on social media and caused public outrage, while the Turkish Armed



Forces still hasn't issued a confirmation.

Opposition parties have called on the government to issue a statement, while Defense Minister Fikri Isik said they can only confirm that three Turkish soldiers were currently in the hands of ISIL.

"Is this video true? What is the latest about our soldiers who are being held hostage by ISIL?" Bahçeli asked, and said "al-Bab should be demolished on these inglorious terrorists."

Expressing his sorrow over martyred soldiers in the ongoing Euphrates Shield Operation to capture al-Bab from ISIL, Bahçeli said the operation must certainly continue and "be crowned with victory."

(Source: Hurriyet)

Anger in Afghanistan at female pilot's U.S. asylum bid

There was an angry reaction in Afghanistan to news that the first female fixed-wing pilot in the country's air force was requesting asylum in the United States after completing an 18-month training course.

The Afghan defense ministry confirmed on Sunday that Captain Niloofar Rahmani, 25, had sought asylum after the Wall Street Journal quoted her as saying that she feared her life would be in danger if she returned home.

A recipient of the U.S. State Department's "Women of Courage" award in 2015, Capt. Rahmani had been a symbol of efforts to improve the situation of women in her country, more than a decade after the fall of the Taliban regime.

Mohammad Radmanish, a defense

ministry spokesman, said the government hoped that her request would be denied by U.S. authorities who have spent billions trying to build up Afghan security forces.

"When an officer complains of insecurity and is afraid of security threats, then what should ordinary people do?" he said. "She has made an excuse for herself, but we have hundreds of educated women and female civil right activists who work and it is safe for them."

Capt. Rahmani, who graduated from flight school in 2012 and qualified to fly C-208 military cargo aircraft, had been in the United States on a training course and had been due to return home on Saturday.

In a conservative country notorious



for the restrictions placed on women, Rahmani's story stood out as a rare example of a woman breaking through in areas normally reserved for men.

Frexit: Le Pen promises to take France out of EU & NATO

French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen said that NATO exists only 'to serve Washington's objectives', and that she planned to hold a Brexit-style referendum, in an interview with a Greek newspaper.

Le Pen, the leader of France's far-right National Front and a candidate for the 2017 presidential elections, is known for her Euroscepticism and anti-immigrant views. Together with France, she also suggested that Portugal, Italy, Spain, Ireland, Greece and Cyprus should also leave the European Union.

"Frexit will be a part of my policy," she said in an interview with Dimokratia. "The people must have the opportunity to vote for the liberation from slavery and blackmail imposed by technocrats in Brussels to return sovereignty to the country."

Along with her main rival, the center-right Francois Fillon, Le Pen has called for closer ties with Russia and has criticized NATO expansion into eastern Europe. Le Pen said that she would take France out of the alliance if she became president because, as she said, its existence is no longer needed.

"It was established when there was a risk from the Warsaw Pact and the expansionism of the communist Soviet Union," said Le Pen. "The Soviet Union no longer exists, and neither does the Warsaw Pact. Washington

maintains the NATO presence to serve its objectives in Europe."

On the topic of immigration, Le Pen said she supported measures to restrict the flow of asylum seekers into Europe.

"I am against the policy which would promote the entry of immigrants into Europe, which cannot accept them ... this tsunami of migrants should be limited. Europe does not have the power to ensure they all find work and opportunities to enrich themselves. Immigrants are illegal since once they set foot on European soil ... they have violated the law. They must be sent back to their homeland."

However, when asked whether the National Front has ties to the far-right Greek party Golden Dawn, a group often described as extremist, Le Pen said she "neither has nor wants" relations with them.

Le Pen is running against former Prime Minister Francois Fillon of the Republican Party in the French presidential elections due to be held in May next year. A left-wing candidate for the Socialist Party has not yet been nominated, as incumbent President Francois Hollande has stated he would not be running for a second term.

(Source: RT)



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Blow to EU credibility as trade deals made even more bureaucratic

A new European Court of Justice recommendation may make it more difficult for the EU to seal any major trade deal with anyone, including the UK over Brexit. It means up to 48 different European governments could hold a veto over future deals, in a sign of deepening EU bureaucracy.

The EU's credibility has been dealt a significant blow. Eleanor Sharpston QC, an advocate general at the European Court of Justice (ECJ), has recommended that an EU trade deal with Singapore can only be finalized by the EU's member states, and not by EU institutions in Brussels acting alone.

Sharpston's opinion is not binding until the court issues its official judgment, which is expected in early 2017. However, the Luxembourg-based court follows the views of advocate generals in most cases. The implications are enormous. It means that any future EU deal could have to push through very muddled waters indeed. It would have to be approved by the multiple, diverse interests of 38 national and regional parliaments, at least five regional and linguistic parliaments in Belgium and at least five upper houses in Germany and Italy. How then can other non-EU countries expect to have confidence in deals negotiated with EU bureaucrats in Brussels? Already, the advocate general's ruling on Singapore is being seen as a serious spanner in the works for the UK and it's impending Brexit.

The UK may now have to brace itself for an even more complex, more drawn-out affair than even pro-Remain campaigners anticipated. In a year of sweeping nationalism and anti-EU sentiment across the bloc, such a ruling throws into sharp relief one of the major failings of the EU project: indecision stymied by unwieldy bureaucracy. Anti-EU politicians have been quick to take advantage. Indeed, European officials have already been humiliated earlier this year. A much-vaunted trade deal with Canada, CETA, was almost entirely derailed when the tiny Belgian region of Wallonia rejected the terms. It sparked what some saw as a European constitutional crisis. Such high farce could be a sign of things to come for British Prime Minister Theresa May. Mrs. May has indicated that she intends to begin negotiations with the EU in March 2017. Some of her senior ministers have claimed that a deal would only take a couple of years. This would seem highly unlikely if the European Court of Justice rules in favor of Sharpston's recommendation. *(Source: Sputnik)*

Algeria's Sonatrach to boost output 20% with new projects

Algeria's state energy producer Sonatrach Group plans to increase output of natural gas and crude oil by 20 percent in the next four years as new projects start up. Salah Mekmouche, the company's vice president of exploration and production, said.



Sonatrach will bring on stream Tiguentourine, In Salah and Timimoune natural gas projects as well as oil wells of the Berkine basin, after spending \$9 billion a year on exploration and development projects since 2015, Mekmouche said in an interview at the company's Rhourde Nouss gas field southeast of Algiers. Sonatrach also plans to increase production from old oil wells in Hassi Messaoud, he said.

Sonatrach plans to "invest as little as possible and produce as much as possible," Mekmouche said.

Algeria is Africa's biggest natural-gas producer and a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Its crude production increased to 1.16 million barrels a day in November, the highest since 2013, after three years of declines and no change in 2015, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

The nation hosted OPEC members meeting in November when they agreed to the outline of a deal to cut production for the first time in eight years. Brent crude has rallied 48 percent this year as OPEC will cut output as of Jan. 1 amid a global glut.

Sonatrach will produce 69 million tons of oil equivalent this year, up from 67 million tons last year, according to company data. Gas output will increase to 132.2 billion cubic meters from 128.3 billion in 2015, the data show.

Sonatrach plans to drill 290 wells in 2017, up from 253 wells in 2016, according to Khelil Kartobi, head of Sonatrach's drilling division. Of the 290 wells next year, 100 will be for exploration, he said. The company has 100 drilling rigs and another 19 are owned by foreign companies. *(Source: Bloomberg)*

Boeing looks ahead to China, which could become its first trillion-dollar market

Donald Trump might have a problem with Boeing, but the U.S. aviation giant is looking ahead—towards China.

In 2016, China bought 164 airplanes from Boeing, amounting to about \$11 billion, and making the country its largest customer. Boeing hopes to keep it that way.

"This is a great opportunity to strengthen Boeing's deep and historical ties with China. More important than just a market, it's about working shoulder-to-shoulder with all of our Chinese partners," said Raymond Conner, vice chairman of Boeing, at a recent U.S.-China relations event in New York.

Boeing expects China to become its first trillion-dollar market. It projects the country would need more than 6,000 new commercial airplanes to accommodate its expanding aviation needs for the next two decades. And Conner said China would account for 30 percent of all of Boeing's 737 airplane deliveries produced in Washington, as well as about 25 percent of all airplane models made in Washington and South Carolina. Such orders would continue to support 150,000 U.S. jobs a year, said Conner. *(Source: Forbes)*

Inflation rate hits 8.6% in Iran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has announced that the inflation rate for the 12-month period ended in the last day of the ninth Iranian calendar month of Azar (December 20) compared to the same period in the previous year hit 8.6 percent, IRIB news reported on Sunday.

The CBI has announced that the inflation rate in the past Iranian calendar year, which ended on March 19, 2016, stood at 11.9 percent.

On June 14, Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ali Tayebnia said the country planned to reduce the inflation

rate to a single digit by the coming two months.

The goal was achieved in the third Iranian calendar month of Khordad (ended on June 20) when the inflation rate hit 9.5 percent.

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a recent statement has predicted an inflation rate of about 9 percent for Iran in 2016 and 2017.

Curbing inflation was one of the major promises by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani during his presidential campaign. Under the previous administration, inflation skyrocketed to cross 44%.



Modi says won't hesitate on tough decisions to help economy

India will not hesitate to make tough decisions to help support its growing economy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday, alluding to his recent scrapping of 500 and 1,000 rupee banknotes to tackle endemic corruption.

Modi told an event organized by the Securities and Exchange Board of India, India's capital markets regulator that his government would continue to follow sound and prudent economic policies to ensure that India's long-term prospects are bright.

"We will not take decisions for short-term political point scoring . . . We will not shy away from taking difficult decisions if those decisions are in the interests of the country," Modi said.

"Demonetisation is an example. It is a short-term pain but it will bring long-term gain."

Modi announced the shock move to ditch 500 and 1,000 rupee notes with a combined value of \$256 billion on Nov.

8, saying the large denomination notes fuelled corruption and fraud and were even used to finance attacks by militants who target India.

With the cash economy estimated to account for a fifth of India's \$2 trillion gross domestic product, the decision has disrupted the daily lives of hundreds of millions of Indians.

But economists and some businesses say it could ultimately help broaden the formal economy and improve tax compliance.

Modi said the government had transformed the economy in less than three years by cutting and achieving fiscal deficit targets, keeping the current account deficit low, boosting foreign exchange reserves and lowering inflation.

"Developed countries and emerging markets are both facing slow growth. Against this background, India is being seen as a bright spot. Growth is projected to remain among the highest in the world," he said. *(Source: Reuters)*

Dozens of UK banks and financial firms 'looking at moving to Ireland'

Banks and financial institutions make up the overwhelming majority of more than 100 companies inquiring about relocating to Ireland after Brexit, the head of the agency tasked with bringing foreign investment into the republic has confirmed.

Martin Shanahan, the chief executive of the Industrial Development Agency (IDA), said many of the corporations looking to move were based in the City of London.

Shanahan said that while Ireland would try to make capital out of the UK voting to leave the EU, Brexit was not

the outcome he or anyone else in Ireland favoured.

He also said the IDA did not fear a Trump presidency would shut down American multinational investment into Ireland.

The IDA has a target to create an extra 80,000 jobs in the country by 2019, many of them from new US firms setting up their European base in Ireland.

Shanahan told the Guardian that Ireland's low 12.5 percent corporation tax remained sacrosanct as one of the Irish Republic's key fiscal policies.

PICTURE OF THE DAY **TEHRAN TIMES**/Majid Haqdoost



23rd Intl. Printing Exhibition inaugurated in Tehran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The 23rd International Printing, Packing & Related Machinery Exhibition of Iran kicked off at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Sunday, IRIB news reported.

Some 660 Iranian and foreign companies are reportedly participating in the four-day event. The exposition is hosting 220 foreign companies from Britain, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Austria, France, Egypt, Taiwan, China, and Turkey.

Foreign trade and commerce delegations from different countries are paying visit to the exhibition.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Toyota announces new executive to lead Brazil operations

Toyota Motor Corp said on Saturday that a new chief executive officer will lead its Brazil operations beginning Jan. 2.

The Japanese carmaker said Rafael Chang would take over the company's largest South American operation. He will replace Koji Kondo, whom the company praised as leading Toyota through difficult years as demand for autos in Brazil has fallen by half in the last four years.

Toyota, Brazil's fifth-largest automaker by units sold, said Chang, after a stint of leading the carmaker's operations in Venezuela, would help the company expand even more quickly.



Eurogroup's Dijsselbloem says Greek debt relief talks can resume

Eurogroup chief Jeroen Dijsselbloem said talks about initial Greek debt relief measures would be resumed after being frozen mid-month over Greece's decision to pay pensioners a Christmas bonus.

Dijsselbloem said creditors had agreed to recommence talks after he received a letter from Greek Finance Minister Euclid Tsakalotos reaffirming the government's commitment to reforms demanded as part of Greece's third bailout.

"I'm happy to conclude that we have cleared the way ... to go ahead with the decision-making procedures for the short-term debt measures, which will be conducted in January," Dijsselbloem said in a statement.



Bosnian region passes tight budget for 2017

Bosnia's autonomous Serb Republic passed a restrictive 2017 budget of 3.2 billion Bosnian marka (\$1.7 billion) early on Saturday, up 2.3 percent from this year and with a meagre surplus which will be used to cover a mounting debt.

Passing the budget was a key condition set by the International Monetary Fund to unlock cash under its \$53 million euro (\$576.72 million) loan deal for Bosnia. It was approved with 45 votes for and 20 against in the 83-seat regional parliament.

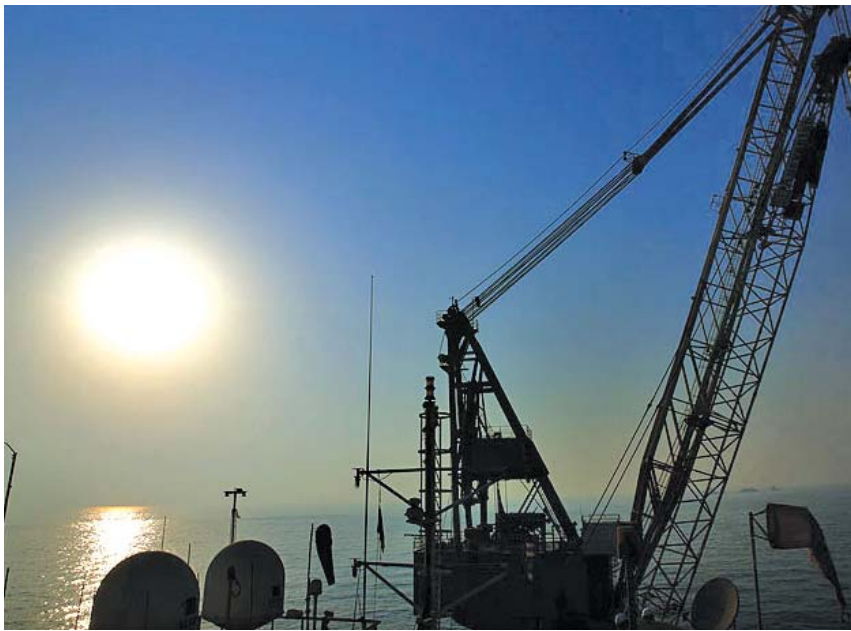
South Pars platform 17B installed on offshore spot

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Platform 17B of Iran's South Pars gas field (in the Persian Gulf), which had been loaded at Bandar Abbas yard on October 18, was installed on its designated offshore spot on Sunday morning, Shana news agency reported.

The 2,300-ton structure, the last platform of South Pars phases 17 and 18 of development, is scheduled to go operational by the end of current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2017), adding 500 million cubic feet (about 14.5 million cubic meters) of gas per day to the capacity of South Pars, according to Hassan Boyeri, the operator of phases 17 and 18.

Phases 17 and 18 are set to produce 56.6 million cubic meters of sweet gas, 75,000 barrels of gas condensate and 400 tons of sulfur per day in addition to one million tons of ethane and 1.05 million tons of propane and butane per annum.

The phases' daily gas production is 46



million cubic meters at present.

Some 70 percent of the equipment applied for constructing platform 17B have been domestically manufactured and just those equipment that manufacturing them required some high technology have been imported, Mohammad Meshkinfam, the managing director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), told the Tehran Times in a press conference in Bandar Abbas after loading the platform.

The official further said that construction of platform 17B has taken 31 months.

Meshkinfam put the cost of constructing each platform of South Pars gas field at \$150 million.

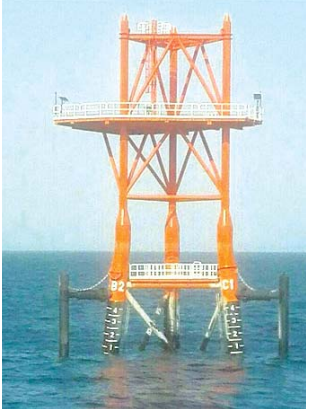
South Pars gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

POGC installs flare jacket of SP phase 13 platform

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC) finished installing the flare jacket 13B of South Pars phase 13 of development on its spot in Persian Gulf waters, Shana reported on Saturday.

According to the operator of South Pars phase 13, Payam Motamed, the 532-ton structure was constructed during a 4-month period by Iran Marine Industrial Company (known as Sadra).

The jacket was loaded on November 11 from Sadra industrial yard in southwestern province of Boushehr and due to weather conditions it was installed on Saturday December 24.



"The construction of flare jacket 13D is also almost in its final stages and hopefully it will be installed in its place by mid-February," Motamed said.

Phase 13 development plan is aiming for a daily extraction of 56 million cubic meters of gas. With this phase going fully operational 50 million cubic meters of sweet gas and 75,000 barrels of gas condensate will be produced daily and also 400 tons of sulfur, one million tons of ethane and one million tons of propane and butane are to be the annual output of this phase.

Saudi newspaper says report on huge Aramco stake sale was wrong

Major Saudi Arabian newspaper al-Eqtisadiah retracted a report on Sunday that said state oil giant Saudi Aramco planned to sell 49 percent of its shares over the next 10 years.

The report published on Saturday was "completely wrong and far from reality" and not based on a verified source, the newspaper said, apologizing for the mistake.

The company aims to sell some of its shares in 2018 in what could be the world's biggest initial public offering.

Aramco's chief executive Amin Nasser said in October a flotation of up to five percent was being considered, although the exact size would be determined by the Saudi Supreme Council.

(Source: Reuters)

Chinese firms face competition in developing Iranian oilfields

Iran plans to ask international oil companies to bid for the second phase of development of its Yadavaran and North Azadegan oilfields, a senior official said on Saturday.

That means Chinese firms China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC) and Sinopec, which have played a leading role in developing the fields until now, will have to compete with other firms if they want to maintain that position.

"CNPC would like to extend its North Azadegan contract, but we have announced that ...they should take part in the bidding for a new contract," Gholamreza Manouchehri, deputy head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA.

"The Chinese have finally accepted

this proposal," Manouchehri said.

He gave no details on the timing of the tender.

President Hassan Rouhani officially launched the first phases of the Yadavaran and North Azadegan fields as well as the North Yaran field in November, as the country ramps up its production after the lifting of sanctions.

Yadavaran will have a production of up to 115,000 bpd in its first phase and North Azadegan's output is 75,000 bpd, the Iranian oil ministry's news agency SHANA said.

The Chinese firms helped Iran develop the fields after Japanese and European companies pulled out of the country due to sanctions over Iran's nuclear program.

Iran said in December 2007 that Sinopec would invest around \$2 billion to develop the huge Yadavaran oil field.

CNPC signed a deal with Iran in January 2009 to develop the North Azadegan oilfield, a project also worth \$2 billion in its first phase.

In April 2014, however, Iranian news agency Shana reported that Iran had terminated CNPC's contract to develop the Azadegan field after the Chinese energy giant ignored repeated appeals to work on it.

While the Chinese companies took part in the first phase of development of the fields, there had been "some criticism of their performance," IRNA said on Saturday, without elaborating.

"There have also been talks with

Sinopec regarding the Yadavaran field for which an international tender is set to be held," Manouchehri said, according to the IRNA report.

Yadavaran has reserves of 31 billion barrels of light and heavy crude oil while North Azadegan has 5.7 billion barrels of crude reserves.

Separately, the head of a regional state oil firm in central Iran said 20 tenders would be held to develop new gas and oil fields and boost production at existing ones, the semi-official Mehr news agency reported.

Salbali Karimi, chief executive of the Iranian Central Oil Fields Company, said the projects would require \$2 billion in investment to boost crude output by 100,000 barrels per day.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia's Rosneft says has flexibility on oil output levels

Rosneft's plans for next year allow it to be flexible with production volumes, Russia's top oil producer said after Moscow clinched a deal with OPEC to cut production to bolster weak oil prices.

State-controlled Rosneft, which accounts for over 40 percent of Russian oil production, said its board has looked into plans for 2017-2018.

"The plan is formed on the basis of actual long-term development program and takes into account changes in Russia's fiscal law and a possibility of carrying out a maneuver with the production volumes in order to boost sales efficiency in the first half 2017," the company said in a statement.

It did not mention the OPEC agreement and a spokesman declined to elaborate on the statement.

OPEC and non-OPEC producers, including Russia, reached their first deal on Dec. 10 since 2001 to curtail oil output and ease a global glut after more than two years of low prices.

Russia, in line with the OPEC deal, will cut its oil output by 200,000 barrels per day (bpd) by the end of the first quarter. The decline will amount to 300,000 bpd thereafter from the level of 11.247 million bpd reached last October.

Rosneft's Chief Executive Igor Sechin, a powerful ally of



President Vladimir Putin, has been a staunch opponent of OPEC, saying that the group has lost its sway over global oil markets as shale oil production in the United States has risen dramatically over the past few years.

In October, Sechin said Rosneft would not cap oil production as part of a possible agreement with OPEC.

Following the Vienna deal, Russia's energy minister said on Dec. 14 he had reached a framework agreement with oil companies on how to implement an output cut, but the producers said there were still details to be worked out.

(Source: Reuters)

India's top oil producer spends \$1.2 billion to buy gas block

India's biggest oil and gas producer will pay as much as \$1.2 billion to buy a majority stake in a gas field off the country's east coast, aiming to boost production as the country seeks to cut energy imports.

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corp. Ltd.'s board approved the purchase of an 80 percent stake in Gujarat State Petroleum Corp.'s deep-water block in the Krishna Godavari basin, it said in a statement on Friday. The New Delhi-based company will pay \$995.26 million for the Deen Dayal West Field, the largest discovery in the KG-OSN-2001/3 block, with estimated natural gas reserves of 1.1



trillion cubic feet.

It will pay another \$200 million for six other discoveries in the block located in the Bay of Bengal. The block has likely total reserves of at least 11.2 trillion cubic feet, according to GSPC's annual report for the year ended

March 31.

"The acquisition fits well with the strategy of ONGC to enhance natural gas production from domestic fields on a faster pace," the company said, adding that trial gas production from Deen Dayal West Field has already started.

The deal will help expedite production of gas from the block critical to achieve Prime Minister Narendra Modi's goal of reducing import dependency of hydrocarbons by 10 percent by 2022.

The companies will share infrastructure and reduce costs in an area where both have spent or plan to spend at least \$3 billion each. The deal is critical for GSPC, a company owned by the government of the western state of Gujarat, as it is at least four years behind schedule in starting commercial gas production despite having completed construction of a processing platform, gas pipeline and an onshore terminal.

ONGC said the acquisition will help it develop faster its discoveries in the Yanam and Godavari areas as well as gas discoveries in its KG-DWN-98/2 block.

(Source: Bloomberg)

REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST (CONSULTANT SERVICES)

Iran Azarbaijan Power Transmission project

Finance

CONSULTING SERVICES

Project ID No.: IRN-0105



The Azarbaijan Regional Electric Company (AREC), a subsidiary of Tavanir, is an Iranian public sector company which is wholly owned by the Ministry of Energy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has received financing from the Islamic Development Bank toward the cost of the *Azarbaijan Power Transmission project*, and intends to apply part of the proceeds for consultant services. The services include **Audit of Project's Financial Statement and preparation of its Report**. Please refer to the General Procurement Notice for this project that appeared in Iran daily newspaper, AREC website, www.devbusiness.com and www.isdb.org, dated 3 December 2012.

The Azarbaijan Regional Electric Company (AREC) now invites eligible consultants to indicate their interest in providing the services. Interested consultants **who has experience of auditing specifically preparation of audit report for at least one project funded by Multi-Development Banks or any international organizations** must provide information indicating that they are qualified to perform the services (brochures, description of similar assignments, experience in similar conditions, availability of appropriate skills among staff, etc.).

Consultants may associate to enhance their qualifications and clearly specify the type of association (a joint venture or sub consultancies) *as well as the nature of its business (commercial or not-for profit)*.

A consultant will be selected in accordance with the procedure sets out in the Guidelines for the Use of Consultants under Islamic Development Bank Financing (current edition).

All procedures of holding the qualitative assessment (from receipt and delivery of qualitative evaluation inquiry as well as preparation of a qualified bidders list) will be done via State E- procurements system website, www.setadiran.ir.

Regarding the unregistered bidders, registration on the mentioned site and reception of an electronic signature certificate in order to make the participation in the tender possible must be done.

The propagation date of invitation was at 8:00 AM on Thursday, 22.DEC.2016.

- The interested consultants are able to receive the qualitative evaluation inquiries from 8:00 AM on 22.DEC.2016 until 19:00 PM on 14.Jan.2017.
- The consultants must send the response to qualitative evaluation inquiries from 15.Jan.2017 until 19:00 PM on 04.Feb.2017
- Contact number of client is +9841-33281263 and the contact number of procurement and contracts manager is +98914-1056846
- Contact number of supporting center: +9821-27313131
- Contact number of registration center of Tehran: +9821-85193768, +9821-88969737
- Contact number of registration center of Eastern Azarbaijan: +9841-35268459
- Contact information of the centers located in other cities can be found in www.setadiran.ir website.

www.Tavanir.org

www.lets.mporg.ir

www.azrec.co.ir

Does the French Socialist primary matter?

By Hugo Drochon

Seven candidates are standing in the 2017 French Socialist Party presidential primary, which includes the Socialist Party and a number of smaller pro-government Green parties, formally known as the “Popular Alliance.” But one can be forgiven for not recognizing many of them. And three recognizable names will not be on the ballot this January: François Hollande, Emmanuel Macron, and Jean-Luc Mélenchon.



Hollande is only the second president since the birth of the Fifth Republic in 1958 not to seek a second term. The other was Georges Pompidou, who died in office in 1974. Hollande is also the third president to have served only one term. The others were Valéry Giscard D’Estaing in the 1970s and Hollande’s immediate predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy. The fact that the two most recent presidents have not lasted indicates how difficult governing France has become.

■ Hollande’s decision

Hollande’s decision not to run again should have surprised no one: with a 4% approval rating, he would have faced a humiliating defeat in the election’s first round. While his presidency has been widely criticized, it also had significant achievements: making France a party to the Paris climate agreement, and restoring some balance to social-welfare spending. And although government debt has continued to rise, the unemployment rate is starting to fall – though too late for Hollande to benefit.

Hollande’s biggest flaw was that he could not incarnate the presidency: he simply did not look or sound particularly presidential. His shrill voice lacked the gravitas associated with the office, and he seemed statesmanlike only in situations that naturally created that image for him, such as the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and, more controversially, France’s intervention in Mali in 2013.

Since those occasions, Hollande has been embroiled in a damaging debate about revoking French terrorists’ citizenship; and he committed a serious PR blunder by candidly commenting on the French political scene for a book by two Le Monde journalists, appropriately titled A President Shouldn’t Say That. He has also faced street protests for attempting to reform the labor market – a politically hazardous move that has taken down many previous French governments.

Since Hollande dropped out of the running, Macron, his centrist former economy minister, has been urged to run in the Socialist primary, now that he can do so without betraying the president under whom he served. But he has consistently ruled it out, and launched an independent bid for the presidency in November, most likely with an eye toward the long term. Having openly predicted that the left will lose the 2017 election, he is cutting his ties to Hollande’s government so that he can position himself as the left’s savior in the 2022 presidential race.

Like Macron, Mélenchon is also standing for the presidency outside of the Socialist fold. In recent years, the far-left, anti-austerity, and anti-Europe former Socialist minister has cornered what is left of the Communist Party and united the various other anti-capitalist parties behind him.

■ The contest

Thus, the contest will most likely be between Manuel Valls – who was Hollande’s prime minister until he resigned earlier this month – and Arnaud Montebourg, Valls’s former minister for “national recovery.” Valls is currently leading in first-round polls, but the two candidates will be running neck and neck in the primary’s second round.

If Valls wins, Macron will come under renewed pressure, because he is the other major representative of the Socialists’ “social-liberal” wing – although Valls is much more authoritarian than Macron on “Republican” issues such as secularism and national security.

If Montebourg prevails, however, the political squeeze will be on Mélenchon, because Montebourg represents the more conventional left: he notably quit Valls’s government in 2014 because it was pursuing austerity and supply-side policies, rather than the Keynesian fiscal stimulus he advocated.

The Socialist primary’s outcome will matter only insofar as it exposes the split within the party between those who favor a traditional statist approach and those who advocate more market-friendly alternatives. In pursuing the latter, Hollande’s presidency marked a rupture in Socialist politics; the party never explicitly endorsed this new trajectory, and many on the French left now resent Hollande for what they see as a betrayal of their principles.

With French politics divided between the left, right, and far right, a split within any bloc almost guarantees that bloc’s exclusion from the second round of next year’s presidential election. Notwithstanding the left’s calls for unity, the Socialist primary will not bring people together. Moreover, the Socialists have not helped themselves by excluding – with the claim that primaries are not an “open bar” – three candidates from smaller parties that had already run a primary to select their own leaders.

With at least two candidates already running on the left, the outcome of the Socialist primary is irrelevant to national politics. The second round of the presidential election will be between the Republican Party’s François Fillon and the far-right National Front’s Marine Le Pen.

(Source: project-syndicate.org)

Someone tell Trump that Israel’s annexation of Jerusalem will sow seeds of perennial conflict

By Nasim Ahmed

Donald Trump’s imminent arrival in the White House has become a source of anxiety and panic. For certain, there are many things to be worried about including his pledge to create a Muslim database and to ban Muslims from entering the U.S. Though his pledges alone are of grave concern, they are far from being the most disconcerting.

Trump will in all likelihood push America towards dangerous levels of illiberalism and intolerance. Not only will he make life for minorities in the United States extremely difficult, he will also embolden reactionary forces within the U.S. that will continue to play a prominent role in U.S. politics years after he has gone.

However, the gravest threat posed by Trump is not domestic, but international. President Obama, despite his many faults, couldn’t be accused of being ignorant of the Middle East or the nature of the threat posed by terrorism. Trump on the other hand is the complete opposite; one might even say he is delusional about the problems of the Middle East as well as being delusional about his ability as president to solve them.

Trump’s lack of knowledge isn’t of course the main problem – it’s also his temperament. Trump’s eccentricity has become a cultural meme. A cocktail of Trumps brashness, bravado and impenetrable confidence is a toxic mix, which if inhabited by a person about to occupy, what still remains the most powerful position in the world, will prove disastrous.

It’s not too much of an exaggeration to suggest that Trump suffers a personality disorder to match the mythical Greek character Narcissus himself. The self-obsession of Narcissus, from which comes the word and illness of “narcissism”, resulted in his own death.

Trump regularly shows that the only thing more dangerous than an ignoramus with power is an ignoramus with power enthralled by his own “achievement” and self-belief. Only yesterday, he called for the expansion of the United States’ nuclear capabilities until the world “comes to its senses”. Putting aside the obvious peculiarity of an incoming president announcing policy over Twitter, most will agree that it is he who needs to come to his senses.

■ Trump’s worldview

Trump’s worldview is informed by misinformation, lies and conspiracies.



Informed by a cabinet that is the least educated but wealthiest in U.S. history, Trump will have very little knowledge about the history of the conflict and the consequences of his actions.

He has not only surrounded himself with conspiracy theorists, he is known to have pushed 58 conspiracies while he was on the road to the White House. His record is only matched by other extremist reactionary forces of this world that also view the world through a lens of misinformation, lies and conspiracies.

Despite his election victory – which capitalized on fear not facts – Trump does not actually speak for the vast majority of Americans. His entire political campaign and initial pledges is that of a man locked in battle with extremist and reactionary groups. He is in a symbiotic relationship with militants like Daesh (ISIL) that need a Trump-like figure to support their propaganda that the West is at war with Islam, just as Trump needs Daesh to justify his crazy policies and appease his own extremist constituency. In doing so, the next President of the United States will be fuelling the dangerous narrative of a clash of civilizations, which is exactly what Daesh (ISIL) will be hoping for. The depressing consequence will be more terrorism not less.

This alone should give us pause for concern. However, Trump would not be Trump if he did not attempt the challenge that has eluded so many previous U.S. presidents – the Palestinian question. Here,

too, Trump is attempting the unthinkable; to legitimize Israel’s annexation of Jerusalem by pledging to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to occupied Jerusalem.

The consequences of this move are extremely grave to say the least. Trump will not only be going against the position of previous U.S. administrations, the international community and undermining international law, but he will also be setting himself against 1.6 billion Muslims and 50 Muslim majority countries in the world. It’s a recipe for disaster that will plant the seeds of conflict for generations to come.

While many would agree that the status quo can no longer be sustained, a unilateral move to relocate Washington’s diplomatic mission to Jerusalem will encourage more occupation, colonization and suppression of human rights and is therefore terribly misguided and dangerous. However, knowing what we already know about Trump, this kind of gung-ho approach to the Middle East should not surprise us.

Informed by a cabinet that is the least educated but wealthiest in U.S. history, Trump will have very little knowledge about the history of the conflict and the consequences of his actions. His designated ambassador to Israel, David

Friedman, makes Netanyahu look like a left-wing dove. Friedman, according to the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, hails from the Israeli camp that opposes the two-state settlement, has denigrated Obama as an anti-Semite, supports settlements and advocates annexation and questioned the citizenship of Israeli-Arabs. The article concludes that “he is not an ambassador that a rational U.S. administration would send if it had any plans whatsoever to advance the peace process.”

■ International law

It goes without saying that Trump has acquiesced to Israeli propaganda and believes that an “undivided Jerusalem” should be the capital of Israel. It is also clear that Trump completely disregards history and international law. As another article neatly summarizes, Israel’s annexation of Jerusalem is not recognized by the international community and goes against international law.

Israel’s annexation is strictly forbidden in the UN Charter and subsequent treaties and instruments, including the Rome Statute that created the International Criminal Court. Moreover, military occupiers may not radically alter the way of life of the people they occupy (see the 1907 Hague Agreement and the 1949 Geneva Accords for examples). Israel’s occupation of the Palestinians has become illegal because of extensive apartheid policies.

Trump also seems to not be perturbed by the consequences of this unilateral move. The Secretary-General of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Saeb Erekat, has warned that the PLO will revoke all previously signed agreements with Israel as well as the PLO’s 1993 recognition of Israel if Trump follows through on his pledge to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Before warning that “any hope of peace in the future will just vanish,” he said that such a move would indicate the U.S.’s acceptance of “Israel’s illegal annexation of East Jerusalem.”

Trump has flung himself onto the international stage without a life vest. While he may not drown, he will certainly pull everyone else down to survive. His machismo approach to politics will be disastrous for the region and the international community. The President-elect would be best advised to rethink everything he knows about the Middle East and reconsider his approach towards Muslims and Palestine. The least he should do is not make things worse, which unfortunately for everyone else seems very unlikely.

(Source: middleeastmonitor.com)

Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar are suffering,the world mustn’t look away

By Rushanara Ali

Two sets of high-definition images of Myanmar taken from outer space: both are shot in the morning, both show the same villages populated by Rohingya Muslims of Rakhine state. The first set, collected from 2014, displays a small collection of homes where the virtually stateless minority has settled. The buildings, lying between trees and set back from dirt roads, number more than 100. In the second set of images, taken in the past two months, the homes have vanished, and all that remains is square patches of burnt earth.

Provided by Human Rights Watch, the images reveal 430 buildings that have been destroyed in three different villages, and support the claim from a United Nations official that Myanmar is seeking the “ethnic cleansing of the Muslim Rohingya” from its territory.

After nine border officers were killed on 9 October, the region’s Muslim minority – already excluded, impoverished and persecuted – has once again fallen victim to a sharp increase in targeted violent attacks. Over the past two months, around 10,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh and, according to Amnesty International, eyewitness accounts from those refugees suggest that “Myanmar’s security forces, led by the military”, are “torching hundreds of homes”.

■ The human rights group

The human rights group has also accused the Myanmar military of “firing at villagers from helicopter gunships,” carrying out “arbitrary arrests”. The UN has added torture, summary executions and the destruction of mosques to this list.

In Rakhine state, the camps where Rohingya Muslims had been forced into living were horrific. There are an estimated 1 million Rohingya Muslims – just one of many ethnic minorities groups – living in Buddhist-majority Myanmar. Despite living in Rakhine state for generations, Rohingya Muslims are seen by many in the country not as fellow citizens but as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.

A series of violent clashes in 2012 left 100,000 displaced. The following year I visited Myanmar with Refugees International and the Burma Campaign UK. During this trip we heard stories of how Rohingya communities had fled from violent attacks to the remote areas of the countryside. In Rakhine state, the camps where Rohingya Muslims had been forced into living



Over the past two months, around 10,000 Rohingya Muslims have fled to Bangladesh and, according to Amnesty International, eyewitness accounts from those refugees suggest that “Myanmar’s security forces, led by the military”, are “torching hundreds of homes”.

were horrific, and in many cases people were cut off from life-saving humanitarian aid and access to healthcare.

I travelled by boat to a UNHCR-supported camp in Pauktaw, and have vivid memories of the shores near the camps being covered in feces, with dead rats floating just meters from where children were bathing to keep cool in the unbearable heat. I can also remember the exhaustion, the trauma and the fear on the faces of so many who had only known lives of segregation and are subjected to racial discrimination everyday. I also remember being told of stories of loved ones being killed, of children dying for lack of access to healthcare, and of women dying at child birth.

■ The citizenship law

Since Myanmar passed the citizenship law in 1982, full citizenship in Myanmar is based, according to Burma Campaign UK, on being a member of the “national races” – a category awarded only to those who are “considered to have settled in Myanmar prior to 1824, the date of the first occupation by the British”. In Myanmar’s national census of 2014, the Muslim minority group was

initially allowed to self-identify as “Rohingya”, but the government later reversed this freedom and deemed that they could only be identified as “Bengali”.

This has left the Rohingya open to discrimination and mistreatment. Denied the right to education and equal employment, and given only limited access to healthcare, they have endured intolerable conditions. In Myanmar in 2013, I walked around hospital wards that segregated the sick by their religion.

Many Rohingya Muslims flee Myanmar by boat from the Bay of Bengal in the hope of reaching Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia or Indonesia. As their situation has continued to deteriorate over the last year, thousands have attempted to cross a stretch of water that is three times more deadly for refugees than the Mediterranean. According to the UN, they are often “stranded at sea on overcrowded boats, controlled by traffickers and people smugglers”, with many “beaten and held hostage for ransom”.

Despite last year’s historic elections – which supposedly began the end of 50 years of military rule – the rights and freedoms of Rohingya Muslims have not improved. Eight months before polling day, the president of Myanmar revoked all temporary registration cards, leaving many Rohingya Muslims without any form of identity document and hence unable to cast their vote.

Despite her election victory, human rights campaigner Aung San Suu Kyi – who’d been under house arrest for 15 years – was prevented from becoming president and instead assumed the role of “state counsellor”. There was a great sense of hope that once in office, the Nobel peace prize winner would stand up against any rights violations against Rohingya and other persecuted minorities. However, with control over national security still in the hands of the military, not much has changed – in fact the treatment, support and defense of Rohingya Muslims has deteriorated. Journalists are not allowed to enter the region.

Two weeks ago, 70 British parliamentarians wrote to the UK foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, urging the government to intensify its pressure on the Myanmar government to allow full humanitarian aid and access to Rakhine state. We are still waiting for a reply. Britain, along with the international community, needs to urgently listen to these voices and increase its efforts to ensure that alleged abuses are investigated, and that the violent campaign against Rohingya Muslims is ended. Minorities in Myanmar deserve the chance to live in peace.

(Source: The Guardian)

By Sophie Mangal

Hashtag #lasttweet began to appear in Twitter frequently after government troops engaged the final phase of Aleppo's liberation in recent weeks.

Bana al-Abed, an alleged seven-year old resident of the largest city in Syria, was the first who created an Internet hysterical fit designed to discredit the process of recapturing Aleppo.

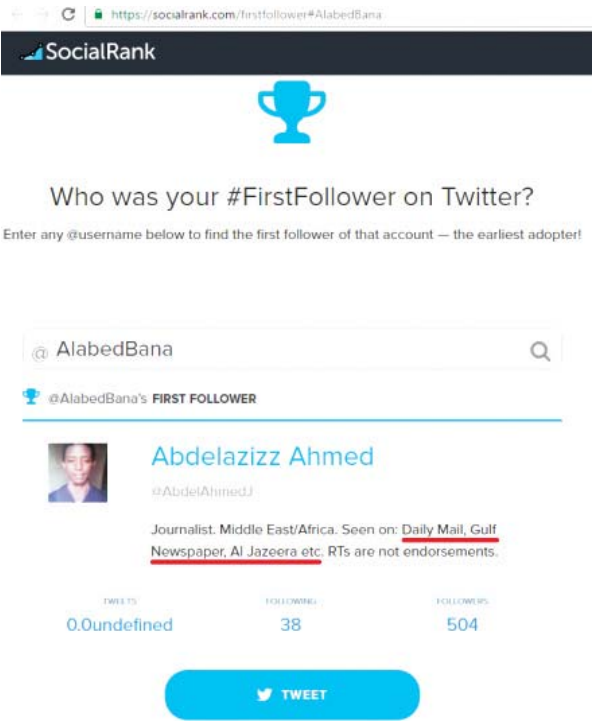
Her Twitter account was registered in September, 2016, amid intensified fighting in Aleppo. There are many details of the horrors of war on her page. And the girl blames not the terrorists but the Syrian government and its allies.

Tweets are actively retweeted and not only by the Syrian opposition, but also by the mainstream Western media. For example, The Washington Post called Bana the Syrian Anne Frank(who wrote a diary in Nazi-occupied Netherlands).

At the same time, no one draws attention to the strange nuances. First, tweets appear very often. It seems that the little girl posts the information about the situation in the city 24/7. Aleppo is a city of constant fighting, with no constant energy source and water supply, and there is often lack of food and medicine. The more so, no one can easily access the Internet and cellular network due to damaged infrastructure.

Second, her account looks perfect in terms of English language. Third, celebs, Western journalists and popular opposition bloggers contribute to the viral dissemination of Bana's posts. It took just three hours to collect more than 3,700 likes and more than 5,000 retweets after the publication of one of the first tweets of Bana. According to Social Rank website, the request "Who was your first follower?" shows the first subscriber of Bana was an Al-Jazeera journalist Abdul Aziz Ahmed.

Moreover, J.K. Rowling promised to send the girl a Harry Potter book and by doing so the writer made a very good ad and emphasized the problem of Bana.



Social Rank website shows the results of the request

Despite the fact that Syria has always been at a high level of literacy of the population (more than 90 percent in fact), Aleppo has been involved in the civil war for four years. At the same time we are forced to believe that the seven-year-old child has such a good command of a foreign language that she is ready to read a book of several hundred pages in the original language.

Speaking of the language it should be noted that

The Aleppo social media disinformation hype: 7-year-old Bana Al-Abed's last tweet

a Syrian activist Maytham Al Ashkar who is originally from Al-Zahraa in northern Syria, currently in Beirut, but often travelling to Damascus and Aleppo contacted the 7-year-old Twitter star, Bana Alabed, on November 27, offering to evacuate her family from eastern Aleppo. After a month, someone who identified herself as Bana's mother responded. When he got contacted by Bana's account, he started to chat in Arabic since they are all Syrians and Arabic is their mother tongue. However, it was obvious that the person behind the account preferred English as a language of communication.

Bana Alabed @AlabedBana Nov 17
Next to our house. I thought the bombs hit me. I don't know if there are people inside this house. - Bana #Aleppo



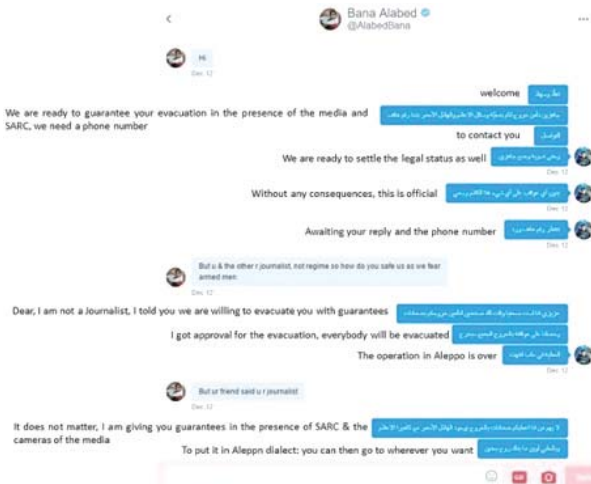
The more so, according to the media, Bana's mother studied law. This means that she has studied the Syrian curriculum for 12 years, which is all in Arabic, plus 4 years at university, where all the subjects are taught in Arabic.

The girl and her mother didn't arrange the possibility of evacuation which could be provided by the journalist. So, Maytham Al Ashkar decided that the girl is just a face, a tool used by the British intelligence (British – because of the strong relationship between the Bana's account and the White Helmets funded and sponsored by the UK).

It should be noted that not only Bana writes these tweets but also her mother Fatima al-Abed who is a teacher at a local school. It is she who helps her daughter to write so grammatically right. Nevertheless, all this raises a number of questions: who and where from is really writing on behalf of Bana? There are a number of other controversial issues. Inside Syria Media Center will try to investigate the Bana project.

On November 27, Bana reported that her home had been destroyed after the shelling. The house is allegedly located in Joured Awaad quarter in the eastern part of Aleppo. Meanwhile, about 20 shellings performed by the anti-government forces were registered in the provinces of Aleppo on November 26. The armed groups of the fired multiple launch rocket systems against Bayada and Salah al-Din quarters of the Aleppo city. In addition, terrorists of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and ISIS several times fired multiple launch rocket systems, tube artillery, mortars and small arms against Shurfa inhabited area, Binyamin, Dahiya al-Assad, Jamaiah Fahat, Amri, Ashrafiyah, Art Sabah, Akyl, 1070, Hai Zahraa Awad, Kastello trade center, al-Assad military acade-

my, area of the former military school, and Higma school in the Aleppo city.



Twitter conversation between Maytham Al Ashkar and al-Abed's account

At the same time, the activity of the government troops was concentrated in the area to the south of the city of Hanano. So, the question arises: why does the girl insist on her house was fired and ruined while none of the parties opened fire near her house.

It is also unclear why the walls and the furniture in Bana's room are not affected by the attacks, and always look like new, despite the fact that the girl is constantly complaining that she frequently has to move into a new house. Moreover, the curtains on her photos are always tightly closed and the girl is always clean dressed.

On November 22, Bana published a video which showed her walking down the street in a terrorist-controlled district. Very few people are seen in the area. Getting into the shot, some of the occasional pedestrians are trying to get out of sight. They don't really care for a little girl being shot. At 0.59, a head appears from a corner and immediately disappears. This looks really suspicious. A high quality of the footage, professional editing, and a tripod (the video is really smooth) – all these prove that the video was staged.

Bana's tweets are written in English and the girl keeps alleging that Bashar al-Assad "kills children, bombs schools, shells neighborhoods and hurts Aleppo's residents". She constantly accuses the Syrian AF of aggressive actions. The little girl's account is politically straight with messages including popular hashtags. However, in her interview to BBC, Fatima al-Abed stressed that Bana's twitter wasn't a propaganda campaign and wasn't linked to terrorists.

Meanwhile, there are a lot of photos not connected to Bana. For instance, the photos of children allegedly killed in the airstrike at an Idlib school. It's unknown how the footages got into the hands of Bana's parents, and why the family didn't want to leave east Aleppo for government-controlled areas if they really were there.

Everything becomes clear when you see the Facebook page of Ghassan, the girl's father, with lots of his friends tied to various radical groups fighting in Syria.

Besides, some media reported that Bana's tweets are written by the popular Syrian opposition blogger Abdel Kafi al-Hamdo (https://twitter.com/Mr_Alhamdo). Creating his account in October, 2016, a teacher and an activist gained as much as 17,000 followers.

The propaganda pouring from Bana's Twitter was

mentioned at a high political level. In his interview to the Danish channel TV2, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad stressed that the terrorists and their allies promoted Bana's tweets.

The Hollywood-stylish Bana's "death" should also be mentioned. First, the girl's Twitter became inactive just after the government offensive on east Aleppo started. But soon BBC reported that the girl and her mother were alive and that they had come to a safe place. The account was restored and a new Tweet appeared: "Under attack. Nowhere to go, every minute feels like death. Pray for us. Goodbye – Fatemah".

The ban provoked mass hysteria in the social media, the hashtag #whereisBana quickly became trending. At the same time, Bana's fake accounts started to post messages about her "death", which were allegedly written by her mother.

As of today, it should be noted that the project is still active. "Last tweets" have been repeatedly appearing. Probably, the world will witness other news from Bana, whose messages remind us of the story of "Aleppo's last hospital".

Till now Bana remains a mystery. The city is completely under government control but no proof of Bana and her mother's existence in the city has emerged. It is possible that the girl left Aleppo for Idlib alongside the most radical militants (as pointed out by NBC report) or headed to Turkey in the company of other armed groups. The latter suggestion is supported by the call for help directed at Turkish

Bana Alabed @AlabedBana Nov 27
Tonight we have no house. It's bombed & I got in rubble. I saw deaths and I almost died. - Bana #Aleppo



Bana's tweet when she lost her home

President Recep Erdogan and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu that Bana published on Twitter.

Locating Bana and showing that she is safe and can start a new, more quiet life, should be of utmost interest for the Syrian authorities. On the other hand, the rumors could be disproved by finding the flat in the eastern quarter of Joured Awwad and proving that exploiting children's death is nothing but another propaganda plot of the Western media, and that the Bana project is closed, because it seems now it is still alive.

Well, the latest news said Bana met Turkey's President Erdogan. Happy to see that the project is dead. You should say a lot of thanks to Russian-Turkey-Iran's deal, little Bana!

(Global Research)

Were "CIA Dirty Hands" behind assassination of Russia's ambassador to Turkey?

By Stephen Lendman

Russia's investigation will get to the bottom of what happened, why and who was responsible.

Though unknown at this point, it has the earmarks of a CIA plot to undermine growing Russian/Turkish ties, notably their cooperation in Syria, adversely affecting Washington's regional imperial agenda.

The assassination happened in the wake of Aleppo's liberation, a major defeat for Washington, NATO, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

It came on the eve of Russian, Turkish and Iranian foreign ministers meeting in Moscow (America, Britain and France excluded) "to discuss in trilateral format the situation in and around Syria first and foremost," Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov explained.

On Tuesday, they'll meet in Moscow "to try to reach an agreement on a lasting ceasefire, on resolution of some humanitarian issues with eye of reaching political settlement."

"We have the basis for that and it is United Nations Security Council resolution 2254," he added. Cessation of hostilities and conflict resolution would be a major step toward defeating Washington's regional imperial agenda.

If Trump normalizes ties with Russia, both countries cooperating in combating terrorism, it'll represent a major change

of US foreign policy for as long as it lasts. Deep state dark forces in Washington want it prevented.

According to Tass, Russian ambassador to Turkey Andrei Karlov "was assassinated on Monday in the country's capital of Ankara by former special task police force officer Mevlut Mert Altintas," citing Turkey's interior minister Suleyman Soylu.

Karlov was killed during the opening ceremony of a photo exhibition called "Russia through Turks' eyes," dedicated to normalized bilateral relations between both countries.

He died later at an Ankara hospital, Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova explained.

Putin commented on his assassination, calling it "undeniably a provocation aimed at derailing the normalisation of Russian-Turkish relations and the peace process in Syria, which is actively promoted by Russia, Turkey, Iran and other countries interested in the settlement of the internal conflict in Syria."

"There can be only one response – stepping up the fight against terrorism – which the criminals will find out firsthand."

"Russia's Investigative Committee has already opened a case on the murder, and has been tasked with forming a working group which will promptly leave for Ankara to take part in the investigation of this crime together with Turkish partners."

"This was just agreed during a



telephone conversation with the President of Turkey. We must find out who directed the killer's hand."

Separately, Turkish President Erdogan said "(w)e are determined to maintain our

ties with Russia."

Karlov's strategically timed assassination was likely aimed at undermining Russian/Turkish relations – especially after Aleppo's liberation and US electors confirming

Trump's triumph.

The provocative scheme seems destined to fail as decisively as the campaign to deny America's president-elect the office he won.

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23 genius ways to use baking soda in your everyday life

One way to channel your inner MacGyver: Get familiar with baking soda ASAP. You probably have a box of it tucked away in your kitchen cabinet for cooking and baking. But the unassuming ingredient can be used in so many different ways, from making DIY shampoo to clearing a clogged drain. Check out 23 tried-and-true uses for baking soda below.

■ Grooming

1. Suds up

When it comes to shampoo, try DIY-ing from time to time—or when you're in a pinch. Baking soda, when mixed with plenty of water (think 1 tablespoon of baking soda per one cup of water), gives store-bought shampoo a run for its money. Don't be alarmed if you don't get tons of suds—it's still working its magic.

2. ...or make dry shampoo

Dry shampoo is basically a godsend, so running out of the stuff can make for the worst kind of morning. Luckily baking soda's a great alternative—just work it into your roots to help soak up some oil, stat. A word to the wise: Brush thoroughly to avoid the telltale white residue.

3. Knock out BO

This may be your cue to ditch your deodorant—baking soda can keep your pits so fresh and so clean. Use a makeup brush to smooth it under your arms, and consider adding a drop or two of an essential oil to the mix for a pleasantly fragrant formula that you can tailor to your preferences. You can also mix it with coconut oil and shea butter for a deodorant that resembles the kind you usually find in the store.

4. Zap your zits

Breakouts got you down? All you need is a baking soda paste—mix one teaspoon baking soda with one teaspoon water. Dab it onto trouble areas, and in a few days you should be breakout free thanks to baking soda being both an antiseptic and anti-inflammatory.

5. Soak in it

Slipping into a warm bath is relaxing enough on its own. Add baking soda to easily rinse away any oil and sweat on your skin. Bonus: It'll also help soothe sunburns and itchiness (including bug bites). Go on, take the time to treat yourself!

6. Clean hair brushes

Baking soda can leave your hair brush looking just as good as the day you bought it. Once you remove the strands of hair, make a paste with a cup of water and a teaspoon each of baking soda and shampoo. Dab the paste onto an unused toothbrush and start scrubbing those bristles to clean and disinfect.

■ Health

7. Boost gum health

Baking soda can do your mouth a whole



Smelly gym gear? Stained clothes? Knock them both out with a baking soda paste. Use one-part baking soda, one-part water and rub the resulting paste into the smelliest or stained areas. Let it sit for five minutes, then wash it off with cold water.

lot of good—health experts believe it may help treat gingivitis. Use baking soda and hydrogen peroxide to whip up a paste that you'll work into your gums. Leave it on for a couple of minutes, then rinse it off.

8. Protect your teeth

This one's geared mostly toward moms-to-be experiencing morning sickness—though it could come in handy if you've got a stomach bug. Not only is throwing up unpleasant (to say the least), but it could actually damage your teeth if you're not careful. Dental health experts suggest a pretty simple solution: Dissolve a teaspoon of baking soda into a cup of water and rinse your mouth out before you brush your pearly whites. The baking soda rinse will neutralize the acid in your mouth after vomiting.

9. Soothe razor burn

Say sayonara to rashes after using a razor. To soothe irritation, add one tablespoon of baking soda to one cup of water, apply to the affected area, then let it dry before washing it off.

10. Relieve heartburn

There's no need to buy Tums or Alka-Seltzer when you have a box of baking soda at home. The next time you feel the first signs of heartburn, mix a half teaspoon of baking soda into a glass of water. The drink should reduce acid buildup and soothe your stomach.

■ Home

11. Clean your fridge

Don't forget your fridge during your

next cleaning sesh. The USDA recommends wiping down the insides with a mixture of hot water and baking soda to get rid of any pesky germs and odors.

12. ...and keep your fridge fresh

There's no excuse for a smelly fridge. All it takes to keep odors out is a box of baking soda. Just open it up and stash it on a shelf—because no one wants to smell the leftovers from Taco Tuesday.

13. Get rid of grease

So you cooked up a storm, and your kitchen has seen better days. Clean up your counters and stovetop with three things: baking soda, vinegar, and a little elbow grease. Start by applying white vinegar to the greasy surface. Let it sit for 10 minutes, then scrub it with a damp sponge or cloth that has baking soda sprinkled on it.

14. Wipe walls

Whether you've scuffed up your walls or they've fallen victim to crayon-carrying tots, rest easy—you don't need a fresh coat of paint. Just put baking soda on a damp sponge and scrub away.

15. Clear the air

When a room smells more funky than fresh, you know you've got a problem. Luckily there's an easy fix—as far as stamping out the smell goes. Just squeeze 10 drops of your favorite essential oil into a box of baking soda, and the bad odors will be gone in a few hours.

16. Stop carpet stains

Few things are better than a glass of red wine after a long day, except of course

when that vino spills on your carpet. In that case, quickly grab vinegar and baking soda. Pour the vinegar over the stained area and then sprinkle baking soda on top. The two work together to soak up the stain so that spill can stay a secret.

17. Clean produce

Once you've gotten your fruits and veggies home, clean 'em! Add two to three tablespoons of baking soda to a bowl of cool water, then throw your produce in. See you never, dirt and pesticides.

18. ...and just about everything else

Experts call baking soda an all-purpose cleaner for good reason: It works on just about every surface. Simply mix it with water or combine with liquid soap and essential oils for a cleaning paste that'll tackle everything from toilets to grimy surfaces.

19. Keep steel and silver shiny

You don't want those surfaces to lose their luster. To keep them bright, you'll need an aluminum pan (or a pan lined with aluminum foil), boiling water, and (you guessed it!) baking soda. Place the tarnished silver or steel in the pan, then pour in the boiling water and baking soda—use a quarter cup for every four cups of boiling water. It'll start bubbling, and after a few minutes, most silver and steel will look good as new.

20. Care for your clothes

Smelly gym gear? Stained clothes? Knock them both out with a baking soda paste. Use one-part baking soda, one-part water and rub the resulting paste into the smelliest or stained areas. Let it sit for five minutes, then wash it off with cold water.

21. Clear clogged drains

One of the worst things about cleaning the bathroom is dealing with gross drains. Those slimy hairballs? Shudder. Your plan of action: Pour one cup of baking soda into the drain, followed by one cup of hot vinegar. Finish up by pouring boiling water down the drain. No more showering with ankle-deep puddles at your feet.

22. Extinguish grease fires

Cooking oil gives an irresistible flavor to some of our favorite foods, but when that oil gets too hot, you can have a grease fire on your hands. And that's one type of fire you can't douse with water. Instead, extinguish it with baking soda. Be generous with the amount you throw on—you'll need a lot to put it out.

23. Freshen up the litter box

Anyone with cats knows that cleaning the litter box is the worst part about having feline friends. But there's a simple way to eliminate those pesky odors: Sprinkle baking soda at the bottom of the litter box. The baking soda soaks up the scents, making your home the cat's meow. (Source: greatist.com)

Ways to eat less around family and friends

By Malia Frey

You're probably great at sticking to your diet when you're alone in your own home. But do you notice that you eat more when you're with others? If so, you're not alone. Many dieters struggle to stick to a healthy eating plan when they are in social situations, particularly if those situations are stressful. But that doesn't mean you can't take control. With a little bit of planning, it's possible to eat less around family and friends.

■ How family and friends can ruin your diet

A simple family dinner or a night out with friends might not seem like a big deal, but researchers have found that it can have a significant impact on your calorie intake. In one study, researchers looked at the way that we change our eating habits to match the eating habits of the people around us. They found that our friends and family are especially influential. We tend to change the amount of food we eat and the type of food we eat to match the choices made by our closest companions.

Of course, that can have good or bad consequences if you're a dieter. If you surround yourself with healthy moderate eaters, then they may influence you to eat a healthy moderate diet as well. But if you live in America, that may less likely to happen. One recent news report claims that Americans eat 3,770 calories per day on average, more than any other country. Recent data from the USDA puts the number closer to 2,700 per day, but that calorie count is still way too high for most dieters.

■ How to eat less around family and friends

If you're trying to lose weight, you don't have to avoid all events with your family and friends in order to reach your goals. The best way to eat less in social situations is to make a plan in advance. Use these tips to develop a strategy that meets your specific needs.

- Always know your energy balance numbers. To lose weight successfully, you need to manage your energy balance every single day. So before you meet with friends or family, make sure you know how many calories you've consumed that day and how many you can afford to consume at the event. This way you can make informed choices as you socialize.

- Use a mobile app for weight loss. The most convenient way for most people to manage their energy balance is with a mobile app for weight loss. These convenient smart phone tools go with you where ever you are, so you can always check in to see how your calorie balance looks in the moment.

- Ask for support. One of the best ways to manage family stress is to ask for help. There are specific phrases you can use to get diet support from your family. You can also get diet help from friends to help keep your weight loss plan on track.

- Be clear about your goals. Believe it or not, the way you set your weight loss goals can have an impact on whether or not you reach them. If you set a weight loss goal that is specific, relevant and measurable it becomes easier to follow your plan during challenging moments. You can even set a short-term goal for the evening and post it in a place where you see it periodically to keep yourself motivated.

- Don't allow yourself to be pressured. There will be times when your well-intentioned family members may push food on you or say offensive things that compromise your weight loss commitment. Don't give in to the pressure. Bolster your self-confidence by reminding yourself of your previous successes and stay committed to your plan.

Remember that it is normal to want to eat more in social situations. But if you can learn to eat less around family and friends, you'll lose weight faster and keep the weight off for good. (Source: verywell.com)

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10 hot titles of IT world

Here are high rated IT titles in the world that reviewed by savvy tech users:

1 Microsoft wins a whopping \$927 million contract from the United States Department of Defense (DoD) for five-year providing technical support and consulting. Under the contract with the Defense Information Systems Agency (DISA), Microsoft will provide consulting services that include software developers and product teams "to leverage a variety of proprietary resources and source code" and Microsoft premier support services, such as tools and knowledge bases, problem resolution assistance from product developers.

2 Opera announced that their data-saving app Opera Max reached 50 million active users. Along with that it updated the app which now has VIP mode for unlimited data savings and privacy.

3 Sony has launched the Cyber-shot HX350 super zoom camera in Europe.

The successor to the HX300 comes with a massive 24mm to 1200mm (35mm equivalent) f2.8-6.3 ZEISS Vario-Sonnar T* lens with a 50x optical zoom. The lens is optically stabilized to reduce blur at the telephoto end. The Cyber-shot HX350 is priced at €449 and will be available in January 2017.

4 SK Hynix, the world's second largest memory chip maker, will invest 2.2 trillion won (US\$1.8 billion) to build a new fab for NAND flash memory to meet increasing global demand. The new fab will begin construction in August 2017, with an estimated completion date in June 2018.

5 As part of its ongoing legal dispute with Nokia, Apple has stopped selling Nokia-owned Withings' products from its online, and (presumably) retail stores. Withings makes stuff like the Body Cardio Scale, Smart Body Analyzer, and Wireless Blood Pressure Monitor. Now, you can no longer buy any of these through Apple.

6 Amazon Echo is sold out until next year. Echo is out of stock at Amazon until January 21st. There is some good news. Amazon will honor the current 22% sale on pre-orders. This means that you can reserve an Amazon Echo device for \$139.99. If you absolutely need to have an Amazon Echo device now, you just might luck out at Best Buy, Lowe's, Staples, Sears and Toys 'R' Us.

7 6-inch Samsung Galaxy S8 Plus to be released next year. The latest rumor comes from Korean website MK News, and has it that Samsung is planning to release a "Galaxy S8 Plus" with 6-inch screen, fingerprint scanner embedded in display, without physical Home key.

8 Red Hat, the leading Linux company, saw its third quarter of fiscal year 2017 grow by 18 percent year over year to \$615 million. Up. Still, Wall Street had expected Red Hat to make \$618.5 million -- and the market immediately punished it with a 13.9-percent stock price drop.

9 Samsung Smart TV update forces users to see ads. Samsung recently updated its televisions to make viewing ads mandatory if you want to use the Smart TV features. If you haven't recently invested in a set, it may be time to take Samsung permanently off your screens — at least until it stops requiring you view ads in perpetuity on hardware you already paid for.

10 FBI looks into Chinese hack targeting federal insurance. Reuters sources understand that the law enforcement agency is investigating how the intruders got in, and that the FDIC believes the Chinese military sponsored the attacks. While the full details of the initial hack aren't available, it took a while to recover. The FDIC took until "at least" 2012 to make sure that its systems were clean, according to an internal probe.

Nintendo plans to release more than 3 iOS and Android games every year

You can expect more than Animal Crossing, Fire Emblem, and one other Nintendo game to hit your iPhone in 2017.

Nintendo president Tatsumi Kimishima said the company will launch more than three games for tablets and smartphones each year, according to an interview with Japanese newspaper Sankei (as noted analyst Kantan Games consultant Dr. Serkan Toto has translated it). This counters a Kimishima quote from December 22, when he told Japanese news site Kyoto Shimbun that the company will launch only two or three mobile games every year. The company had previously promised to release mobile versions of its social-life simulator Animal Crossing and strategy battler Fire Emblem for mobile devices, but with Super Mario Run performing so well, Nintendo is going to expand its publishing strategy in the \$36.6 billion smartphone-gaming market.

In the Sankei interview, Kimishima also attempted to alleviate some concerns among investors about Nintendo's approach to mobile. While Super Mario Run is likely a hugely profitable game, investors aren't happy that it has only one \$10 purchase available to consumers. Instead, Nintendo's stakeholders want the publisher to embrace free-to-play with microtransactions, which enables players to spend thousands of dollars on a game. Kimishima explained to the newspaper that future business models will depend on what kind of game the company is making.

But the Nintendo president did say that he wants to establish its mobile business as strong source of revenue distinct from its console and software business. That is slightly different from in the past, when Kimishima said that one of the primary goals of making Nintendo games for mobile devices was to get players interested in 3DS, Wii U, and — soon — Switch games.

(Source: theverge)

Is this the age of the smart wallet, or are they more trouble than they're worth?

By Jack Schofield

Wallets and their contents - cash, cards, tickets, receipts etc - will eventually be replaced by smartphones that work with electronic payments system. But while those have been available for years in some countries, most men still carry traditional wallets. That being the case, there should be a market for "smart wallets" that connect to smartphones, so you can find your wallet if you lose it, and track it if it's stolen.

The latest example is Wallor, which is the first in the world with Bluetooth, GPS, and full RFID protection, according to company CEO, Viorel Cretu. It also has an anti-theft alarm. The Wallor wallet is currently on Kickstarter, and at \$20,994, has already passed its modest \$15,000 funding target.

Smart wallets usually use Bluetooth 4 to connect to an Apple or Android smartphone. You get an alarm if the wallet is more than a certain distance away, which may mean you've left it somewhere. If you've got the wallet but can't find your smartphone, you can use the wallet to make it ring, to help you find it.

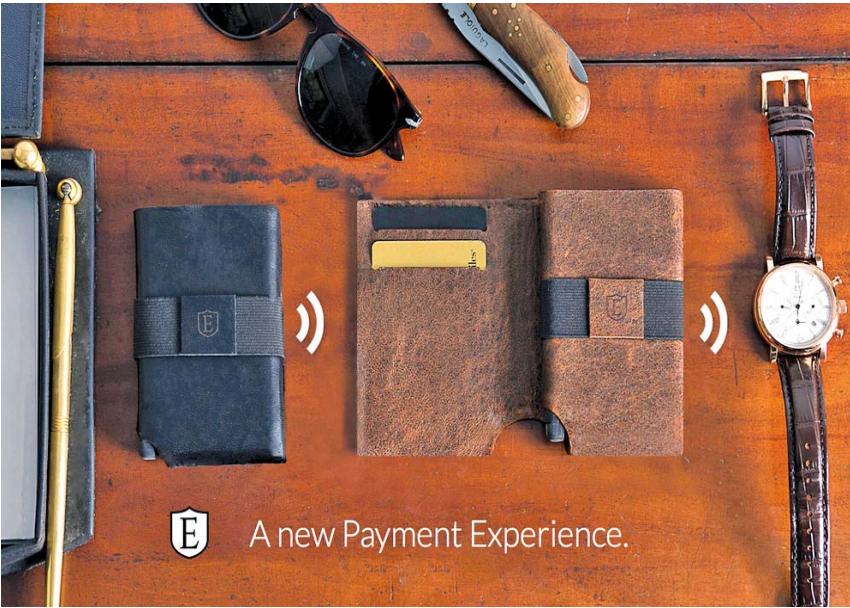
When a smart wallet includes GPS - usually the crowd-sourced type - you can track its movements. This is useful if someone has stolen it.

Of course, Wallor isn't the first company to announce a smart wallet. Rivals include Cashew, Ekster, SmartWallet, Walli, and Woollet. It's also far from being the first to use Kickstarter. In fact, in 2014, Kickstarter published a long article that wondered Why are there so many wallets on Kickstarter? There were 17 at the time, though they weren't smart wallets.

Yancey Strickler, Kickstarter's co-founder, told Bloomberg: "As we started looking into it, we realized that this was kind of the training-wheels product for a product designer. It's basically a learning tool."

SmartWallet was one of the earliest smart wallets and was able to grab the most obvious name. SmartWallet included both Bluetooth and GPS tracking, and - unusually - a 1000mAh battery for charging a smartphone. The project raised \$36,237 from 315 backers on Kickstarter and \$11,964 on Indiegogo. Its estimated delivery date was February 2015.

The bad news is that, according to



The company's home site lists half a dozen staff and an office in San Jose, and its Cashew wallet featured on Android Authority. SF Gate, Trusted Reviews and half a dozen other sites. How Revol can afford to develop and manufacture a smart wallet, plus phone apps, is the (roughly) \$64,000 question. I hope the staff have other sources of income.

Entrepreneur: "Either through incompetence, poor planning or something more insidious, no one who ordered one of these wallets 16 months ago has ever received one. And what happened to the crowdfunding cash raised remains unclear."

The Walli smart wallet was far more successful in raising \$217,363 on Kickstarter and \$521,962 on Indiegogo. It even shipped some wallets, as you can tell by @mywalli's Twitter feed. However, many of its responses are "please email support@mywalli.com" to people who are asking about shipment dates or unable to get something to work.

The Walli's party trick is monitoring "the pocket you use the most. With our patent pending technology, Walli pockets are smart and send signal to your phone when your credit card/ID is missing for too long," the website says.

Revol Inc's Cashew is a smart wallet

with Bluetooth and crowd-based GPS, and its party trick is fingerprint recognition. "In case someone tries to tamper with the latch, a notification is sent immediately to your phone," says its Kickstarter page. Cashew raised \$47,054 from 382 backers, and \$14,461 on Indiegogo, with estimated delivery dates of October 2016 and February 2017 respectively. The company also had a "Thanksgiving sale" on Twitter, offering wallets at \$119.

The company's home site lists half a dozen staff and an office in San Jose, and its Cashew wallet featured on Android Authority. SF Gate, Trusted Reviews and half a dozen other sites. How Revol can afford to develop and manufacture a smart wallet, plus phone apps, is the (roughly) \$64,000 question. I hope the staff have other sources of income.

Woollet is another smart wallet with Bluetooth and crowd-based GPS, and this one features "a self-charging battery". It

raised \$332,694 from 2,627 backers on Kickstarter, possibly because "Woollet is brought to you by the team behind the successful Sherlybox and Clime projects".

Woollet did actually ship its smart wallet, but some comments on Kickstarter describe it as a "seriously poor product," "far from what was promised" and "really bad quality for the price". One buyer commented: "My Woollet was stolen last on Sunday, in Paris. The Woollet app told me it was still in Ireland. What a piece of [expletive deleted] this really is. You had one job woollet, one job."

Another disgruntled backer said got an apologetic email from Woollet which said: "we've made huge improvements in both the product and the way we manage the business". It offered him a free second-generation model, adding: "if you like it, would you consider changing your review on our Facebook profile?"

Buyers' experiences with Ekster smart wallets - which raised €331,946 from 3,009 backers on Kickstarter and \$965,000 on Indiegogo - are better. There are complaints but also some positive views, and at least it shipped in volume.

By this point - sorry Mr Cretu - I'd lost interest in smart wallets, which don't seem as easy to pull off as their promoters think. Even if they work properly, they're expensive for what they do, and they're probably superfluous. At least, I've managed to survive several decades without losing a wallet, or having one stolen (touches wood).

There are also simpler solutions, like TrackR, which is a little widget you can attach to your key-ring or bag ... or pop in your current wallet. In fact, Ekster's smart wallet is based on TrackR and uses its smartphone apps, so this looks like the way to go.

TrackR says it has shipped more than 4.5 million devices, and you can get a TrackR Wallet for \$29.95, or a promotional pack of eight for \$99.95. This is cheaper than the average smart wallet, and you could tag your keys, suitcases and dogs as well.

If you've bought a smart wallet that's worth the money, please let me know in the comments below. If not, my next product hunt will be into trackers, so let me know if you've found something better than TrackR....

(Source: zdnet)

Russia's MegaFon to acquire majority stake in Mail.Ru for \$640 million

MegaFon, a leading Russian telecom group, intends acquire a majority stake of Mail.Ru Group, Russia's main Internet group. The announcement was made today following a meeting of MegaFon's board of directors. The acquisition plan still needs to be approved by the group's shareholders, who will meet on Jan. 20, 2017.

According to the plan, "MegaFon will acquire 11.5 million Class A shares and 21.9 million ordinary shares of Mail.Ru Group,accounting for approximately 63.8% of the voting shared of Mail.Ru Group," the telecom group stated this morning.

The transaction, if confirmed, will amount to \$640 million, including \$540 million to be settled when the deal is sealed and another \$100 million to be paid one year later.

The shares will be sold by New Media and Technology Investment LP, New Media Technologies Capital Partners Limited and Ardoo Finance Limited.

These entities are part of the USM, a holding company controlled by Russian billionaire Alisher Usmanov. However, should the transaction be confirmed, Usmanov would still keep an indirect interest in Mail.Ru Group, since USM holds more than 56% of MegaFon.

The acquisition plan comes as both companies are developing collaboration to jointly develop new products and organize "significant synergies."

In particular, the two companies have agreed to



launch a special offer for V Kontakte's mobile users. The new service, branded 'VK Mobile', will benefit from the infrastructure of Megafon and its affiliate Scartel.

V Kontakte (VK.com), Russia's leading social network far ahead of Facebook, is a property of Mail.Ru Group, along with two other major social networks, Odnoklassniki and Moi Mir, as well as a variety of sites, apps, games and instant messengers.

Mail.Ru Group and MegaFon have also teamed up to jointly develop predictive data analysis tools, aiming to improve user segmentation.

Even after the potential acquisition, however, the two companies will "continue operating as separate entities

Firefox will support Windows XP and Vista until September 2017

Numerous web browsers have already stopped supporting Windows XP and Vista, but not Firefox. To this day, Mozilla's latest software can work with your decade-old PC. However, even that team has its limits -- it's phasing out support for XP and Vista starting next year. Mozilla will start by moving users on these operating systems to the Extended Support Release in March 2017, limiting them to feature updates that can be "several cycles" behind the curve. And while the company plans to unveil a final support end date in the middle of that year, it'll effectively cut the cord in September, when it stops delivering security updates.

This doesn't mean that Firefox will

stop working on XP or Vista in September, of course. But when security flaws are hard to avoid, it'll be impractical to keep using Firefox on those platforms when you could remain permanently vulnerable to exploits. There aren't likely to be many people who both run a 10-year-old operating system and care enough about their web experience to use a recent browser, so the impact may be limited. However, it's still a big deal if you're stuck on a work PC or otherwise haven't had a chance to upgrade to a newer version of Windows. Like it or not, you'll probably have to consider a new OS (or a new PC) if you want to experience the modern internet next year.

(Source:Mozilla)

Cyanogen to shut down services by year's end

The startup announced late Friday that "as part of the ongoing consolidation of Cyanogen," it's shutting down all services and nightly builds on December 31.

"The open source project and source code will remain available for anyone who wants to build CyanogenMod personally," the brief announcement read.

That means owners of devices that run the Cyanogen OS, including the OnePlus One and Lenovo ZUK Z1, won't get further updates and will have to move over to the open-source CyanogenMod ROM, which isn't a commercial OS and is run by a community of developers.

Those developers, however, responded Saturday to the shutdown news saying the loss of Cyanogen Inc.

is a "death blow" to CyanogenMod. The blog pays respects to the community that served for more than eight years and but bids farewell Cyanogen-Mod and touts the next open-source Android project called Lineage.

The news follows a long mostly-insider company drama that reportedly included the naming of a new CEO and the layoff of huge portions of the staff. While it once claimed to be "putting a bullet through Google's head," with a better version of Android, its focus now is reportedly building Android OS modification for parts manufacturers.

Cyanogen, the company, formed in 2013 with the aim of commercializing the already popular CyanogenMod.

(Source: cnet)

Wind tunnel testing underway for next, more powerful version of NASA’s SLS

As engines are fired, software written and hardware welded to prepare for the first flight of NASA’s Space Launch System (SLS), engineers are already running tests in supersonic wind tunnels to develop the next, more powerful version of the world’s most advanced launch vehicle capable of carrying humans to deep space destinations.

“Aeronautics leads the way in the design of a new rocket,” said Jeff Bland, SLS discipline lead engineer for Integrated Vehicle Structures & Environments at NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

Manufacturing is well underway on the initial configuration of SLS. It is 322 feet tall and able to lift 70 metric tons (77 tons). For the first test flight of SLS, the rocket will carry an uncrewed Orion spacecraft beyond the moon and then return to Earth, deploying 13 small science and technology satellites in deep space during the journey.

■ The next generation
The next generation of NASA’s Space Launch System will be 364 feet tall in the crew configuration, will deliver a



105-metric-ton (115-ton) lift capacity and feature a powerful exploration upper stage.

On SLS’s second flight with Orion, the newer rocket will carry up to four astronauts on a mission around the moon, in the deep-space proving ground for the technologies and capabilities needed on NASA’s Journey to Mars.

The new wind tunnel tests are for the

second generation of SLS. It will deliver a 105-metric-ton (115-ton) lift capacity and will be 364 feet tall in the crew configuration — taller than the Saturn V that launched astronauts on missions to the moon.

The rocket’s core stage will be the same, but the newer rocket will feature a powerful exploration upper stage. On SLS’s second flight with Orion, the rocket

will carry up to four astronauts on a mission around the moon, in the deep-space proving ground for the technologies and capabilities needed on NASA’s Journey to Mars.

■ Upgraded rocket

Scale models of the upgraded rocket in crew and cargo configurations are being carefully positioned in wind tunnels for test programs to obtain data needed to refine the design of the rocket and its guidance and control systems, said Dr. John Blevins, SLS lead engineer for aerodynamics and acoustics at Marshall.

During hundreds of test runs at NASA’s Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia, and Ames Research Center in Silicon Valley, California, engineers are measuring the forces and loads that air induces on the launch vehicle during every phase of its mission.

Dr. Patrick Shea inspects a nearly 4 3/4-foot (1.3 percent scale) model of the second generation of NASA’s Space Launch System in a wind tunnel for ascent testing at NASA’s Ames Research Center in Silicon Valley, California.

(Source: spacecoastdaily.com)

3.5 trillion insects take to skies every year over UK to migrate

After a decade of insect migration monitoring, researchers have revealed that trillions of high-flying insects take to the skies every year to migrate.

High-flying insects are defined as insects capable of reaching over 492 feet in the air, while larger insects are categorized as weighing at least 10mg.

In a study published in the journal Science, researchers detailed that about 3.5 trillion aerial bugs fly over southern England, a movement that equates to 3,200 tons of biomass flying to and from the UK. The number of insects migrating is over seven times larger than the mass that 30 million songbirds total as they leave UK each autumn to head to Africa.

“Insect bodies are rich in nutrients and the importance of these movements is underappreciated,” said study author Jason Chapman.

He also added that given the mass the insect movement represents, the migration represents the most important of the yearly animal movements that occur on land ecosystems, if densities were extrapolated to represent all airspaces above continental landmasses.

The researchers were not able to record exactly where

the insects were flying from and where they are headed but evidence points to a general area over UK involving the North Sea and the English Channel.

Additionally, when they examined observations on insect movement above radar sites within southern England, the researchers saw that there were differences in mass migrations depending on the season. According to their findings, insects generally head to the north during spring while they are southbound in the fall. Seasonal figures varied from year to year but overall, larger insects fly north in springtime while southward movements are observed in the fall.

■ Importance of insect migration

According to study author Gao Hu, a lot of the insects they were able to study serve an important ecological service necessary for maintaining ecosystems healthy, like pollination, crop pests predation and providing food sources for bats and birds.

Ka Lim, also an author for the study, added that insect migration can be an important indicator regarding the state of the environment as the movement is highly sensitive to climate conditions.

“Global climatic change could cause decline of many



species, but equally other highly adaptable species thrive and become agricultural crop pests,” he said.

Until now, not a lot was known about the migratory activities of nocturnal insects like agricultural pests and no research has been done whatsoever to determine the numbers of migrating insects active during the day.

(Source: Tech Times)

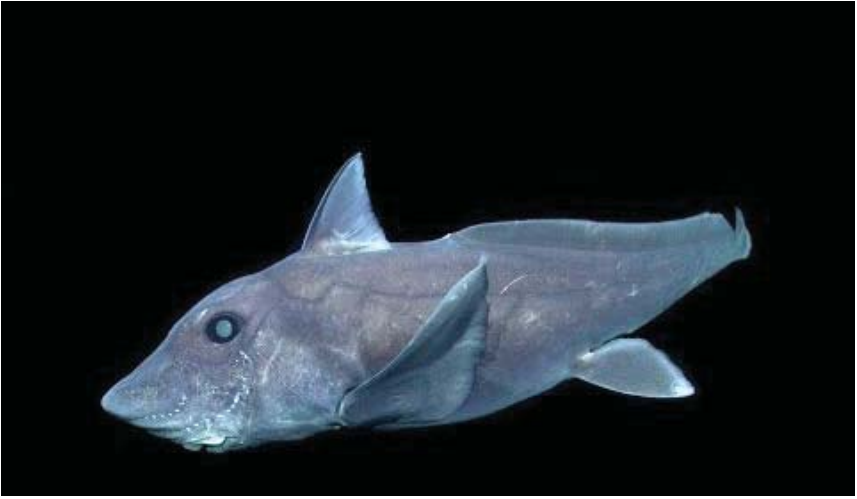
Don’t hate on deep-sea critters, they’ve got to be weird to survive

You can count on the deep ocean to spawn surreal creatures that, depending on your point of view, look very beautiful or very unnerving.

A deep-sea fisherman in Murmansk, Russia, has taken to sharing some of his most striking catches on Twitter. The animals featured in Roman Fedortsov’s pictures have recently inspired comparisons to the movie Alien and Jim Henson’s fantastical creations.

But don’t take these fish at face value. Some of them may actually be a bit deformed in the pictures because their swim bladders — the gas-filled organ that helps them move up and down through the water — expanded at surface pressure, distending their bellies. “Fishes with swim bladders become distorted when brought up to the surface if they live at depth, and that certainly appears to be the case here,” Paul Snelgrove, a marine biologist at Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada, told Popular Science in an email.

Other stars of Fedortsov’s Twitter feed don’t use swim bladders to control their buoyancy, so they may have changed less as they were brought up



from the ocean’s depths. Let’s face it, though — all of these guys are pretty weird looking, regardless of the state of their swim bladder.

■ Under different conditions

But that’s because they’ve adapted to live under very different conditions than their surface-dwelling kin. The deep sea is cold and dark. The pressure is immense, and meals are hard to come by. Some

of the very features that make deep-sea critters appear bizarre to us actually help them survive in this extreme environment.

Many have big eyes to capture every scrap of light. Others sport lean bodies that persist when food is scarce. Down on the seafloor, spindly legs and light frames help animals sit without sinking into the soft, muddy bottom, Snelgrove says.

To “know the exact species is often difficult without having the specimen in hand,” Snelgrove says. But the bounty appears to include fish called grenadiers (or rattails), chimaeras (distant relatives of sharks), sea spiders, sea cucumbers, skates (which are related to rays), and basket stars.

This pointy-nosed blue chimaera was filmed cruising through the waters around Hawaii and Central California in 2009. The video, recently released by the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute in California, appears to be the first footage of this species, and evidence that it dwells in the Northern Hemisphere. Also called ghost sharks, chimaeras are notable for their sensory dots, which sense water movement, and the retractable sex organ found on males’ heads.

Even the humble sea cucumber becomes more impressive when seen drifting through its home waters. These sea cucumbers were spotted in the Cascadia Basin in the Northeast Pacific Ocean more than a mile and a half below the surface.

(Source: Popular Science)

Banking Checks to Be Collected in Bank Shahr’s Branches in Near Future

The Deputy Chief Executive of Bank Shahr for Planning, Urban Development and IT Affairs Gholam-Hossein Tabeshfar revealed the preparation of IT infrastructure of the bank for offering quality banking services in the field of collecting interbank checks in the very branches of Bank Shahr and said: “The bank has planned to collect interbank checks at branches of Bank Shahr before termination of the current Iranian calendar year in 1395

(to end March 19, 2017).”

Once this modern banking service is put into operation, dear citizens can change banking checks pertinent to Bank Shahr to cash money coupled with depositing the money into their account, he maintained.

Turning to the positive performance of the bank and also its VTM (Virtual Teller Machine) devices, he reiterated:

“Currently, dear customers of the bank can refer to the branches of Bank Shahr for doing the following services: depositing money into personal account, opening the banking account, receiving financial turnover and other services.”

He put the number of Shahr NET installed across the cities at approx. 350 which are offering quality banking services to the noble nation.

Winning Legal Licenses to Open Three Iranian Bank Branches in Germany

Effective steps have been taken in the field of obtaining legal licenses in opening branches for three Iranian banks in Germany.

Chief Executive of Parsian Bank and Member of Representatives Board of Tehran Chamber of Commerce Kourosh Parvizian announced the above statement and said: “Trade and business ties between Iranian and German companies failed due to banking problems.”

In Sept. of current year, Germany’s Minister of Economy in Bavarian State Elise Ayinger traveled to Iran, based on which, opening Iranian banks in this Bavarian state was put forward, he maintained.

For his part, the minister of Bavarian state of Germany said: “In this regard, opening branches of Iranian banks in Munich is of paramount importance for German companies.”

Given the above issue, three banks named “Middle East Bank”, “Parsian Bank” and “Sina Bank” are after winning necessary licenses to set up branches in abroad, he said, adding: “Moreover, a high-ranking Iranian delegation, headed by Masoud Khansari as member of Representatives Board of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, traveled to Germany and Austria and the issue of opening bank branches in Bavaria was discussed as

well.”

In the end, Chief Executive of Parsian Bank and Member of Representatives Board of Tehran Chamber of Commerce Kourosh Parvizian said: “Commissioning branches of Iranian banks in Munich requires a comprehensive economic planning. However, Iranian bank branches in German Bavarian state will be inaugurated in the very near future, provided that existing obstacles should be settled.”

Report finds additional radioactive materials in gas-well drill cuttings

Hydraulic fracturing has boosted U.S. energy production while coming under scrutiny for its potential environmental impacts, mostly related to the wastewater the method generates. Now, a report in the ACS journal Environmental Science & Technology Letters takes a look at solid waste from horizontal gas wells. The study found that some well waste from the Marcellus shale in Pennsylvania contained radioactive material not previously reported, with the potential for leaching from landfills into the environment.

Drilling horizontal wells for hydraulic fracturing operations results in a large amount of gooeey solid waste, or drill cuttings. In 2011, natural gas exploration and extraction in the Marcellus Shale formation produced an estimated 2.37 million tons of cuttings in Pennsylvania alone with almost all of it ending up in landfills, according to a review published in Environmental Practice.

A few studies have found naturally occurring radioactive materials in the solid waste, but the research only focused on several long-lived radioactive isotopes including uranium-238 and radium-226. Andrew W. Nelson and colleagues wanted to investigate whether other radioactive isotopes might be in drill cuttings and whether they could impact the environment.

The researchers devised a method to test the drill cuttings from horizontal wells in the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania. In addition to uranium-238 and radium-226, the researchers report the samples contained elevated levels of the environmentally persistent radioactive isotopes uranium-234, thorium-230, lead-210 and polonium-210. A simulation of leaching over a range of acidity levels suggested that at low pH, uranium isotopes readily leached from drill cuttings, which raises questions as to whether uranium will seep into the environment from a landfill. Other isotopes appeared less leachable under the conditions tested.

(Source: EurekAlert)

Phosphorus: The key to life on Earth as we know it?

Researchers talk about oxygen playing a significant role in kick-starting animal life on Earth, but a new study suggests a different element might also be of crucial importance.

The story of the origins of animal life on Earth has long been a hazy one, but some pieces of the puzzle may be coming into focus.

Life on Earth was simple, with single-celled organisms dominating the planet for billions of years. Then, sometime around 600 million years ago, the multicellular organisms that we call animals burst onto the scene. It all seems a bit sudden in the fossil record, so what happened?

Scientists suspect global environmental turmoil that occurred around that time had something to do with it. One of the main changes researchers suggest may have triggered the surge of animal evolution is a dramatic change in oxygen levels.

The sequence of events that occurred so long ago has mystified scientists, but a team of geochemists may have just found a crucial clue: A spike in phosphorus levels that occurred around 800 million years ago.

And, they say, this may have been a key step in the story of the origins of complex animal life, a story that set the stage for life as we know it on Earth today.

Christopher Reinhard, a geochemist at Georgia Institute of Technology, Noah Planavsky, a geochemist at Yale University, and colleagues compiled about 15,000 samples from the sedimentary rock record to build a picture of the evolution of phosphorus levels across the last 3.5 billion years of Earth’s history.

The “first thing that jumped out at us is there’s a change in the average amount of phosphorus that’s moving through these kinds of environments,” Dr. Reinhard says.

(Source: CSM)

Scans unveil secrets of world’s oldest mummies

More than 7,000 years after they were embalmed by the Chinchorro people, an ancient civilization in modern-day Chile and Peru, 15 mummies were taken to a Santiago clinic last week to undergo DNA analysis and computerized tomography scans.

The Chinchorro were a hunting and fishing people who lived from 10,000 to 3,400 BC on the Pacific coast of South America, at the edge of the Atacama desert.

They were among the first people in the world to mummify their dead. Their mummies date back some 7,400 years -- at least 2,000 years older than Egyptians.

Now, researchers are hoping to use modern medical technology to reconstruct what they looked like in life, decode their genes and better understand the mysteries of this ancient civilization.

The 15 Chinchorro mummies, mostly children and unborn babies, were put through a CT scanner at the Los Condes clinic in the Chilean capital.

“We collected thousands of images with a precision of less than one millimeter,” said chief radiologist Marcelo Galvez.

The “next phase is to try to dissect these bodies virtually, without touching them, which will help us preserve them for another 500,000 years.”

Using high-tech computer processing, researchers are busy reconstructing the mummies’ muscles and facial features.

“We want to see what they physically looked like, to reconstruct them and bring to life someone who died thousands of years ago,” said Galvez.

(Source: AFP)

A living fossil at Tehran Zoo

By Farnaz Heidari

With its large yellow crown, Grey Crowned Crane has an odd charm of its own. It is one of the world's rarest birds, with two subspecies: East African crowned cranes (*Balearica regulorum gibbericeps*) and South African crowned cranes (*Balearica regulorum regulorum*).

The reasons for the species' decline are not known for certain but International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) says the species is threatened by the loss and degradation of wetland breeding areas through drought-related changes in land-use for cultivation, drainage and overgrazing, as well as through the heavy use of agricultural pesticides, declines in fallowing practices, high sedimentation rates (due to deforestation, uncontrolled grass and deep litter fires in the breeding season), dam construction (for hydroelectric power generation and groundwater extraction, leading to changes in hydrological regimes such as unseasonal flooding).



The species is also threatened by live-trapping (for trade), egg-collecting and hunting, and by indirect disturbance from the hunting of large mammals or ducks in wetlands and the activities of fisheries.

■ Grey Crowned Cranes at Tehran Zoo

Some individuals of Grey Crowned Cranes now fare better at Tehran Zoo, their distinctive plumage is one the most attractive among a colorful group of birds. Tehran Zoo decided to make a better enclosure for them by many simple works such as making hand-made nests, using timbers for resting times and landscape design.

Grasslands, marshes, flooded fields and temporal pools are the best habitats for them in the nature.

■ African Crowned Crane

The African Crowned Crane is the only crane to perch in trees, favoring solitary trees with wide views. They are considered to be "living fossils" among cranes, having flourished in the Eocene period some 54 to 38 million years ago and surviving the ice age. During their mating dance, two cranes hop and jump gracefully with each other, their wings partly spread.

■ To the brink of extinction

The distribution range of Eastern and Southern Africa subspecies recorded in Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Angola.

The fad for acquiring wild cranes (they do not breed in captivity) from bird smugglers, nobbling their wings so they can't fly and keeping them as trophies in private gardens and the grounds of hotels, schools, even foreign embassies, has driven them close to the point of local extinction.

Recent efforts to save the Grey Crowned Crane focus on reducing the impact of the captive crane trade on wild cranes by targeting supply within Africa and demand both within Africa and globally. Efforts focus on understanding the complex supply and demand chains that affect cranes; creating awareness of the status of Africa's resident cranes and the threat that trade poses to wild populations; and advocating for changes in policies and legislation that govern the trade in cranes, both locally and internationally.

Maurice Wanjala, founder of the Kipsaina Cranes and Wetland Conservation Group in Kenya, is working with local communities to conserve wetlands along the Kipsaina River, an important area for Grey Crowned Cranes.

In Uganda, Jimmy Muheebwa, Project Coordinator for Nature Uganda, works with nearly 200 sites in the country, promoting conservation and restoration of wetlands critical to both cranes and people. Restoration of papyrus in degraded wetlands, with the goal of developing products from the papyrus to support local populations is the other plan for conservation. Fortunately many ranch owners in Africa no longer allow trapping on their properties but the situation is still so hard for Grey Crowned Cranes.

Armenia engineers want to cause rain in Iran's arid-climate provinces

Barva Company of Armenia plans to export atmosphere-affecting devices to Iran, company president and CEO Aram Vardanyan told Armenian News-NEWS.am.

Barva manufactures hail suppression stations that turn hail into rain.

At present, the company is developing devices that condense water vapors in the atmosphere, and turn them into rain.

Barva already has exported about fifty hail suppression devices to West Azerbaijan Province of Iran. But these rain-making devices also have interested this country's Sistan and Baluchestan Province, where the climate is arid.

"Now, we are refining this technology, so we can offer it to our Iranian partners in the best form," added Vardanyan.

(Source: Armenia News)

Dreaming of blue skies: Tehran's battle for clean air

A deep-seated look at the perplexing love-hate relationship Iranians share with their alarmingly polluted capital city

➔ Despite the alarming immediacy of these recent reports, many Iranians have become increasingly indifferent to this jaunting reality. Pollution and its ramifications are now reported as lightly as a forecast in the daily weather report, though they pose severe threats to public life, education, commerce, health and transportation.

While air pollution exists throughout the year, the situation is exacerbated in the winter months, when temperatures close to the ground are colder than those above. This restricts the natural flow of air distribution, locking harmful pollutants in a position to be inhaled by the general public.

Tehran's pollution issue is provoked primarily by the millions of cars on the roads, poor quality of petrol, and industrial pollution from factories surrounding the city. The more than 3 million cars and motorcycles overburdening Tehran's streets in stifling daily traffic, burn low standard fuel that contributes to more than 80% of the pollutants in the air. Further, hefty energy subsidies have promoted over consumption at a low cost amongst the public. Locals blame the government for continuing to expand car manufacturing industries instead of taking stricter measures to put the one million outdated cars off the streets.

Decades of crippling sanctions are partly to blame for the poor quality of petroleum, as trade embargos on Iran's oil industry limited the import of European refined oil and led the nation to transform local petrochemical factories into oil refineries. Lead, sulfur dioxide, and benzene, all cancer-causing agents, are found at two to three times the safe levels in Tehran's air leading to 80,000 premature deaths in 2012 alone.

Though government efforts have begun to phase out old vehicles and replaced low-quality gasoline with triple high-standard (Euro-4 grade) fuel imports, progress has been slower than expected. Dust storms originating in



© Mizan/ Hassan Shirvani

neighboring Iraq across the southwestern border of Iran only make matters worse. Tehran's geographic location subjects the city to a realm of environmental issues that cannot be easily revised.

Government officials have in previous years discussed relocating the capital, but this has ignited fury over the hefty costs and impracticality that such a feat would entail. Due to declined oil revenues, the nation has less financial resources to allocate towards long-term goals. A 15-member committee to discuss whether Tehran should remain as the nation's capital is due to reach a consensus by next year, but leaders are largely divided on what to do.

Tehran is the heart of the nation, home to government offices, leading hospitals, universities, and the majority of business affairs. If a disaster were to strike Tehran, this would paralyze the entire nation and wreak havoc in all sectors of society. Thus, decentralizing the capital city can strengthen national security, but this is economically and politically prohibitive.

This large-scale institutional confusion

manifests on a smaller scale within the lives of individuals. Iranians shamelessly admit to their love-hate relationship with Tehran despite its problems. Locals are well aware of the threats Tehran's toxic air has on their lives, dread the traffic and over crowdedness, but still choose to stay for the job opportunities and better living conditions. Migration to cities, namely Tehran, has been on the rise for this reason. Living elsewhere provides prospects of a less polluted environment and cheaper real estate, but at the cost of accessibility to many essential services only in Tehran.

While some locals have become desensitized to this very real issue, others are sincerely concerned and have turned to social media to express their frustration. Iran's national Etemaad paper published a piece on its first page entitled "We are all to blame", reminding the Iranian public that they are also accountable as the government can only do so much. Grassroots efforts to tackle pollution like "car-free Tuesday", which is supported by the Department

of Environment, are taking root in Iran's major cities including Tehran. Local cartoonists often depict the eerie Tehran sky in their pieces, musicians ranging in age relay their grief through song, and art exhibitions by locals including children reflect the extent to which pollution has negatively impacted their lives.

Authoritative figures are reiterating the personal responsibility in resolving pollution. This includes Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who has said it is religiously forbidden to drive vehicles in such excruciating pollution without valid rationale. Legislation is also following suit. In October, the Iranian parliament passed a new Clean Air Bill including an annual 5 percent increase in allocations for transportation services in the metropolises, motor vehicle inspections every two years instead of five, and economic benefits for companies that decide to go green. Previous attempts to implement clean air acts have been meager due to lack of enforcement.

Tehran's pollution issue sheds light on the endemic issue of decision-making myopia that has plagued Iranian affairs. Exhibited both in the management and habits of the general population, short-term thinking comes with a great cost, contributing to a loss of \$30 billion dollars this year. Tehran's sustained presence as the nation's capital is grounded on a principle of "survival of the first". Business as usual continues, because as a nation with a weakened economy, short-term gains are hastily prioritized over long-term sustainable goals.

Shirin Hakim (<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/people/s.hakim16>) is a doctoral researcher at the Centre for Environmental Policy of Imperial College London, working on environmental issues in Iran.

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Iranian envoy, West Asian IUCN director talk environment

THE ENVIRONMENT DESK TEHRAN — The Iranian envoy to Jordan, Mojtaba Ferdowsipour, and the director of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) at Regional Office for West Asia, Fadi Shraideh, talked about environmental issues in Amman.

The two discussed ways to develop environmental cooperation and conservation and holding workshops in the region, according to ISNA news agency.

Stressing Iranian environmental experts' great potential and high position in the region, Shraideh underscored the importance of holding workshops and conducting research projects to address water scarcity and desertification which has severely affected the area.

The IUCN Regional Office for West Asia was established in October 2004 covering the region of West



Fadi Shraideh (L) and Mojtaba Ferdowsipour

Nature village, a safe habitat for endangered wildlife

THE ENVIRONMENT DESK TEHRAN — Dehkadeh Tabiat (literary meaning nature village) is actually a private wildlife reserve stretching over 10 hectares of land in the north-central province of Qazvin.

The nature village is not just a zoo to put up animals for exhibition and making money, it rather provides shelter for animals that are rescued from smugglers, became orphaned, or somehow injured and then removed from their natural habitat and can't return back to the nature again.

It is run under the supervision of Mr. Nader Noori, an environmentalist who holds a degree in civil engineering, along with his American wife, four children, mother, nieces and nephews.

In addition to its tourism potential the village is also a research and rehabilitation center.

The village is operating for six years now. It is designed in three sectors, two of which are yet to be constructed. The two remaining sectors are designated to carnivores and endangered animals.

The first sector which is up and running is comprising of various habitat allocated to reptiles, birds, amphibians, frugivores, etc. The leopard habitat will be soon prepared and a butterfly garden is being designed.

There are also an artificial waterfall made out of the rocks existed in the region, a safari park, a market, and a museum in the village.

Interestingly enough, there is no sign forbidding the visitors from feeding the animals; instead one can buy foods available at the market in the village and feed the animals.



Pope urges end to Syria fighting in Christmas message

Pope Francis has urged an end to the fighting in Syria as he gave his Christmas address at The Vatican, saying "far too much blood has been spilled" in the conflict.

His traditional "Urbi et Orbi" (To the City and The World) message on Sunday was linked by a common thread of war, violence and suffering.

"It is time for weapons to be still forever, and the international community to actively seek a negotiated solution," he told some 40,000 people gathered in St. Peter's Square.

Francis, marking the fourth Christmas season since his election in 2013, also urged Palestinians and Israelis, facing renewed tension after a United Nations resolution condemning Israeli settlements on occupied land, to have the courage to put aside hate and revenge and "write a new page of history".

"Peace to those who have lost a person dear to them as a result of brutal acts of terrorism, which have sown fear and



death into the hearts of so many countries and cities," he said.

Security was heightened for the Christmas weekend in Italy and at The Vatican after Italian police killed the man

believed to be responsible for the Berlin market lorry attack while other European cities kept forces on high alert.

Speaking in Italian from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, he called

for immediate assistance to the exhausted population of the city of Aleppo, which Syrian government forces recaptured last week after four years of devastating fighting with foreign-backed rebels.

At his Christmas eve Mass on Saturday, Francis said the feast had been "taken hostage" by dazzling materialism that puts God in the shadows.

On Sunday, he also called for an end to "fundamentalist terrorism" in Nigeria, a reference to Boko Haram, which has killed 15,000 people and displaced more than two million during a seven-year insurgency to create an Islamic state.

Francis further appealed for an end to tensions between the government and opposition in Venezuela, for harmony in Colombia, which recently ended a war with FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas, and an end to strife on the Korean peninsula and in Myanmar.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Tunisia security forces warn of returning extremists

Tunisia's security forces called on the government on Sunday to take "exceptional measures" to combat the return of extremists fighting for extremist groups abroad.

Tunisia has witnessed a wave of extremist attacks since its 2011 revolution, including on foreign tourists, and the United Nations estimates that there are more than 5,000 Tunisians fighting for extremist outfits, mainly in Iraq and Syria.

The warning came a day after Tunisian authorities said they had arrested three people including the nephew of Anis Amri, a national suspected of carrying out a deadly truck attack on a Berlin Christmas market this week.

Hundreds of people gathered outside parliament in Tunis on Saturday to

protest against letting extremists back in the country.

President Beji Caid Essebsi said earlier this month that Tunisia would refuse to pardon Tunisians who fight for extremist organizations.

"Many of them want to return, and we can't prevent a Tunisian from returning to his country," he told AFP, "but we will be vigilant."

Following a storm of criticism in the press and on social media, on Dec. 15 he told Tunisian local television that "we will not be indulgent with the terrorists".

On Friday evening, the country's Interior Minister Hedi Majdoub told parliament 800 Tunisian nationals who had fought for extremist groups abroad had since returned to the country.

(Source: AFP)

Buhari: Last Boko Haram base taken in Sambisa Forest

Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari says the army has seized one of Boko Haram's last bases in northeastern Borno state.

If confirmed, the claim would mark a key stage in the government's months-long offensive against the armed group.

A long campaign in the 1,300sq km forest in Borno led to the "final crushing of Boko Haram terrorists in their last enclave in Sambisa Forest" on Friday, Buhari said in a statement on Saturday.

He congratulated his troops for "finally entering and crushing the remnants of the Boko Haram insurgents at 'Camp Zero', which is located deep within the heart of Sambisa Forest".

"The terrorists are on the run, and no longer have a place to hide. I urge you to maintain the tempo by pursuing

them and bringing them to justice," he said.

The seven-year-old conflict with Boko Haram has killed more than 15,000 people and displaced more than two million in the northeast of Africa's most populous nation.

Boko Haram controlled a very large expanse of Nigeria's northeast in early 2015, but the fighters were pushed out of most of that territory over the last year by Nigeria's army and troops from neighboring countries.

They moved to a base in the Sambisa Forest, a former colonial game reserve.

The military has said in the last few days that the fighters are running away from the forest into surrounding areas and people have been told to be vigilant.

(Source: agencies)

Israel summons 14 ambassadors after UN settlement vote

Israel has summoned the ambassadors of the United Nations Security Council member states that voted in favor of a resolution condemning settlement activity, a foreign ministry spokesman said.

By way of rebuke of the vote, Israel's Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman also announced on Sunday that Israel was cutting civilian coordination with Palestinians.

Foreign ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon said that the 14 envoys of UN Security Council members will visit the ministry in Jerusalem (al-Quds) throughout the day. The United States envoy was not summoned.

The Council passed the measure on Friday after the United States abstained, enabling the adoption of the first resolution since 1979 to condemn Israel over its settlement policy.

The resolution demands "Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem".

It says settlements have "no legal validity" and are

"dangerously imperiling the viability of the two-state solution".

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who had rejected the resolution as a "shameful blow against Israel", repeated on Sunday the Israeli claim that U.S. President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry were behind the resolution.

"We have no doubt that the Obama administration initiated it, stood behind it, coordinated the drafts and demanded to pass it," Netanyahu said at the beginning of the weekly cabinet meeting.

"This is of course in total contradiction to the traditional American policy of not trying to impose conditions of a final resolution. And, of course, the explicit commitment of President Obama himself in 2011 to avoid such measures."

While the resolution contains no sanctions, Israeli officials are concerned it could widen the possibility of prosecution at the International Criminal Court.

They are also worried it could encourage some

countries to impose sanctions against Israeli settlers and goods produced in the settlements.

Earlier on Sunday, army radio reported that Lieberman ordered Israeli security establishment to cease to all cooperation on civilian matters with the Palestinians, while retaining security coordination.

Israeli officials refused to comment on the report.

The measures taken on Sunday join Netanyahu's order to review engagements at the United Nations, including funding for UN agencies and the presence of its representatives in Israel.

Rightwing Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan said on Saturday night that Israel should "announce a full annexation of settlement blocs" in response to the resolution.

Education Minister Naftali Bennett of the far-right Jewish Home told army radio that his party would "soon propose a bill to annex Maale Adumim", a settlement city east of Jerusalem (al-Quds).

(Source: agencies)

Yemeni army snipers shoot dead six Saudi soldiers

Yemeni army snipers have shot dead six Saudi soldiers in the kingdom's Najran Province in a fresh wave of retaliatory attacks.

According to Yemen's al-Masirah television, three of the Saudi troops were killed at the Shaja' military base in Najran on Saturday night.

Earlier in the day, Yemeni snipers shot and killed three other soldiers at the military base of Tal'a in the same province.

Yemeni armed forces also launched rocket attacks at positions of Saudi-backed mercenaries near Khadra border crossing in Najran, killing and wounding a number of them.

Also on Saturday night, army troops and allied force attacked the Saudi bases of Samnah and Afra in the kingdom's

southwestern province of Jizan, leaving an unspecified number of military personnel there dead and injured.

The Yemeni army also fired several artillery shells at Saudi military positions in Jizan.

According to the report, massive explosions also hit the Saudi army's weapons warehouses to the west of Qais Mountain in Jizan.

The Yemeni attacks come in retaliation for Riyadh's nonstop military campaign against its impoverished neighbor.

Most recently, the House of Saud regime fighter jets pounded the Razih district in Yemen's Sa'ada province and Nihm district, northwest of the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, on Sunday.

There were no immediate reports of

possible casualties.

The House of Saud regime has been engaged in a deadly campaign against Yemen since March 2015 in an attempt to reinstall the former Yemeni government.

The offensive has claimed 11,403 lives and left 19,343 others wounded, according to figures compiled by the Legal Center for Rights and Development, a Yemeni non-governmental monitoring group.

■ Yemen wants UN action

In a statement on Sunday, the Yemeni Human Rights Ministry condemned the Saudi regime for its crimes during the war on Yemen, particularly its use of internationally-banned weapons against civilians.

The statement further called on the

United Nations to adopt measures aimed at putting an end to Saudi brutalities, saying the world body should launch an "unbiased" investigation into the deadly Saudi-led offensive.

The ministry also urged the removal of Riyadh's blockade against Yemen as well as swift aid delivery to the violence-stricken civilians.

The statement came days after Human Rights Watch censured Saudi-led forces for using cluster bombs during the "unlawful" campaign against Yemen.

The New York-based rights body said "cluster munitions are prohibited weapons that should never be used under any circumstances due to the harm inflicted on civilians."

(Source: Press TV)

British presence in Persian Gulf unlikely to affect power equation: Shireen Hunter

'London only wants to show that it is still relevant'

■ Why is England returning to the region again?

A: The recent decision by Britain to expand its presence in the Persian Gulf does not mean that its position will return to the pre-1968 period, when Britain decided to withdraw from East of Suez. It is only to show that Britain is still relevant and shore up the Persian Gulf states.

■ Can Britain's presence in the Persian Gulf affect the security order in the region?

A: The more pronounced British profile is un-

likely to dramatically affect power equation in the region, at least not in the short term. However, its presence could act as a tripwire in case of a confrontation in the Persian Gulf and could turn a local incident into a much larger conflict and invited external intervention. But most likely it would act as a deterrent against attacks say on states like Bahrain or the UAE. It would however, limit Iran's ability to retaliate should it be subject of provocation by any of the Gulf States.

■ Some argue that England will replace the U.S. in the Persian Gulf. Do you agree with such a view?

A: It is unlikely that Britain could replace the United States, especially in case of a major Middle East war. However, should U.S.-China relations deteriorate and American focus turn even more towards the Pacific region, Britain and potentially even France could take up some of America's functions. However, neither country can financially afford a very large presence unless it is subsidized by the Gulf Arabs.

Donald Trump plans to shut down his charitable foundation, which has been under scrutiny for months

The United President-elect Donald Trump said he plans to shut down his charitable foundation, a decision that comes after repeated controversies over how it collected and disbursed funds.

In a statement on Saturday, Trump offered no timeline for when his foundation would close down, but said he had directed his attorney to take the steps needed to close the charity. It was also not immediately clear when the foundation would be able to dissolve, given an ongoing investigation in New York.

"The Foundation has done enormous good works over the years in contributing millions of dollars to countless worthy groups, including supporting veterans, law enforcement officers and children," Trump said in the statement. "However, to avoid even the appearance of any conflict with my role as President I have decided to continue to pursue my strong interest in philanthropy in other ways."

The Donald J. Trump Foundation has come under intense scrutiny this year after a series of reports in The Washington Post detailing its practices, including cases in which Trump apparently used the charity's money to settle lawsuits involving his for-profit businesses.

New York's attorney general has been investigating the charity after some of these reports, and a spokeswoman for that office said the foundation could not officially shut down until that probe is over.

The foundation is unusual in that it largely collects and donates money from other people. In fact, in the six years from 2009 to 2014, Trump told the Internal Revenue Service that he'd given his namesake foundation no money at all. The biggest donors in recent years were Vince and Linda McMahon, the pro-wrestling moguls, who gave the Trump Foundation \$5 million between 2007 and 2009. Trump recently nominated Linda McMahon to head the Small Business Administration.

Trump said on Saturday that he was "very proud of the fact that the Foundation has operated at essentially no cost for decades, with 100% of the money going to charity." The Trump Foundation has no paid employees and a board of five, consisting of Trump, three of his children and a longtime Trump Organization employee. They all work a half-hour per week, according to an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) filing.

The president-elect added that "because I will be devoting so much time and energy to the Presidency and solving the many problems facing our country and the world, I don't want to allow good work to be associated with a possible conflict of interest."

The foundation told the IRS it had \$1.16 million in total assets by the end of 2015, the most recent tax filing available. A spokeswoman for Trump said they had no additional information on Saturday regarding where any remaining money might be sent.

Trump's foundation has admitted in IRS tax filings for 2015 that it violated a prohibition against "self-dealing" that says nonprofit leaders cannot use their charity's funds to help themselves, their relatives or their businesses.

In these tax filings, the charity checked "yes" in response to a question asking whether it had transferred any income or assets to "a disqualified person" — a description that could have meant Trump, a relative or a Trump-owned business.

Trump has not said what exactly he did to violate the rule, or what he has paid the IRS in penalty taxes as a result. The IRS has not commented when asked whether it was investigating the Trump Foundation.

Trump's charity has been prohibited from fundraising by the office of New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman (D), an action that came after The Post reported that the foundation had failed to register with the state. This meant the foundation had dodged annual audits required in the state of New York.

Schneiderman's office is also investigating the Trump foundation after reports in The Post describing apparent cases of self-dealing that date back to 2007. The Trump Foundation spent \$30,000 to buy two large portraits of Trump himself, including one that was hung up in the sports bar at a Trump-owned resort. Trump also appears to use \$258,000 of his foundation's money — legally earmarked for charitable purposes — to settle lawsuits involving two of his for-profit clubs.

In addition, the Trump foundation gave a \$25,000 gift to a campaign committee backing Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi (R) even though nonprofits like the charity are not allowed to give political gifts. That gift was made as Bondi's office was considering whether to investigate fraud allegations against Trump University. A consultant who works on Bondi's office has said that Bondi was not aware of the complaints when she solicited the donation from Trump. Ultimately, Bondi's office did not pursue those allegations.

The move to shut down Trump's foundation, first reported on Saturday by the New York Times, comes as the president-elect and his family are facing intense questions regarding how they will avoid conflicts of interest while he is in the White House.

In another case of Trump apparently trying to wrap up lingering questions and legal issues before he takes office, he agreed to settle fraud claims against his defunct Trump University real estate seminars. A federal judge this week gave preliminary approval to a deal in which Trump would pay \$25 million as part of the settlement.

Earlier this week, Trump's eldest son, Eric, said he was suspending his charitable foundation after facing questions about whether donors could receive special access.

The Eric Trump Foundation, founded in 2007, raises more than \$1.5 million a year through a golf tournament and other events, and it passes on the bulk of its money to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, a pediatric-cancer center in Memphis.

The president-elect was critical of the decision regarding his son's foundation, describing it as unfair in a pair of messages this week on Twitter.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Regional success boosts Thailand's hopes

With just a point from five games in Asia's ongoing third-round qualifying for the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™, Thailand's hopes of a maiden passage to world football's extravaganza look slim. With the competition now past the midway mark, the War Elephants are staring early elimination in the face, heading into March's double-headers.

Kiatisk Senamuang's side may be at the bottom of the group, but they are certainly not out. And they received a massive morale-booster after lifting the 2016 AFF Championship trophy, which concluded on 17 December. Under the former international striker who is nicknamed 'Zico', the Thais excelled throughout, as they won the regional showpiece for a record fifth time, surpassing four-time winners Singapore to become the tournament's most successful team.

Senamuang's charges entered the four-week regional campaign on the back of a spirited 2-2 draw against Australia in Russia 2018 qualifying. Not surprisingly, they made light work of their group with three straight victories, including routing Indonesia 4-1 in the opener. They would continue

that form in the semi-finals, dispatching hosts Myanmar 6-0 over two legs to set up a rematch with Indonesia in the final. A much-improved Indonesia caused problems for the Thais in the first leg, as they won 2-1 at home. However, Thailand bounced back to triumph 2-0 on home soil in the return to successfully defend the title.

"We dedicate this success for the new king and the [late] king," said Senamuang, under whom Thailand claimed back-to-back championships. "The win is a new year's gift for all our fans. I want to take the team forward, and I want the fans to trust me."

■ Trustworthy icon

The competition saw ace striker Teerasil Dangda further cement his place as the team's talisman. Having scored a brace against the Socceroos as Thailand grabbed their first point in Round Three of World Cup qualifying, the 28-year-old flexed his muscles in the regional competition, smashing home six times to fire his team to the title. By doing so, Dangda made a piece of history of his own, as he tasted his first AFF Championship success, despite finishing the tournament's top-scorer in both 2008 and 2012.

Dangda broke into the national team as a teenager in 2007 when Senamuang was the team captain. Seven years on, he established his undisputed place as the team's top goal-getter when the latter took up the national team reins. Since then, a resurgent Dangda has helped Thailand into Asia's final qualifying round for Russia 2018 before shining throughout the 2016 AFF Championship. If playing alongside Senamuang in his early days presented Dangda with an opportunity to learn directly from the goalscoring legend, then working under the guidance of the former skipper adds to his belief that the team are heading in the right direction.

"Once a football player, always a football player," said Dangda in a previous interview with FIFA.com. "He [Senamuang] deeply knows Thai people's habits, attitudes and the ways of football. Coach Kiatisk has changed players' ways of playing. He pointed out both the outstanding and defective sides of each player, and the whole picture of the team. He brought players' abilities and competencies to the forefront, and shaped us to be the greatest we can be."

■ Emerging talents

While Dangda was the standout, a series of hopefuls emerged and shone, as the War Elephants retained the title. Notably, 24-year-old Siroch Chatthong and Charyl Chappuis were given surprise starting places ahead of Sarawut Masuk and Pokklaw A-nan in the decisive second leg against Indonesia. The duo duly repaid the coach's faith through their eye-catching performances, with Chatthong bagging both goals.

"We went in with Siroch and Chappuis and I am happy they did very well," said Senamuang. "The players were tired after playing so many matches in just over a month."

It remains to be seen if Thailand can revive their fortunes heading into the next Russia 2018 qualifiers against Saudi Arabia and Japan. However, with momentum from their AFF Championship performances, Senamuang's side are more than capable of causing a surprise or two.

(Source: FIFA)

Luis Enrique coy over new contract: Barcelona job 'costs me a lot'

Barcelona manager Luis Enrique remained coy over the prospect of signing a new deal at the club beyond the end of the season.

Luis Enrique, 46, has found great success at Camp Nou, winning the La Liga and Copa del Rey double in both his seasons in charge -- as well as the 2015 Champions League and Club World Cup. But, with his contract coming to an end this summer, pressure is mounting for him to pen an extension.

However, the Spaniard wants to carefully consider his future before committing.

"I have no doubt that I'm at the best team, with the best club, with the best players, in my house and with my family, winning things and being very involved," Luis Enrique told Barca TV.

"But there is also one thing about this job that is very hard, it costs me a lot and it's a negative that I have to factor in when considering the next few seasons."

After the winter break, Barcelona return to action against Villarreal on Jan. 8 hoping to close the gap on Real Madrid at the top of the table.

"I am aware that I am either here [with Barcelona] or nowhere," Luis Enrique added. "I have time and the club will stand by me."

(Source: Soccernet)

Jurgen Klopp on Liverpool title hopes: Let's do it



Jurgen Klopp says Liverpool are aiming for title glory this season, but cannot be weighed down by the failures of previous generations.

Liverpool have not won a title since the 1989/90 campaign, but are currently second in the Premier League table - six points behind leaders Chelsea - ahead of the Christmas fixtures.

Manager Klopp insists the club is equipped to challenge for top spot until the end of the season, but says players and supporters should focus on the present and not think about the last 26 seasons.

"We are not the last 25 years. We are now. We are this generation," he said in an exclusive Christmas interview with Sky Sports' Jamie Redknapp.

"As much as we love all the guys from the past which created this club, we cannot make their job. We have to do our job.

"Let's do it and let's try it. We are good enough and the club is big enough. We have the owners we need because they don't want to sell players. Nobody should leave here because of money. We are not the best-paying club in the world, but we can pay enough to stay.

"This moment at Liverpool is fantastic and we have to use it. We are in the present really good and the future is bright, so go for it.

"That doesn't mean that we can't lose games. What

really makes the joy a little bit smaller is when we lose a game people say 'that's like the season 2004-05 when we lost to I-don't-know where'.

"It's not, it's never the same. We do not have it in our DNA that we lose a decisive game.

"We are young enough, we are good enough, we are strong enough and we have an outstanding, skilled team. The only problem is there are a few teams around that have not a worse team, too.

"It's still football. The more you wish doesn't make it more likely, but it's still possible and we will stay in the race, for sure."

Liverpool have already beaten title rivals Chelsea and Arsenal this season, but have suffered disappointing defeats against Burnley and Bournemouth.

And Klopp insists they will need an element of luck if they are to go on and lift the Premier League trophy in May.

"We have played a really good season until now, but becoming a champion means you need to play a really good season plus having luck in the right situations. No injuries and a little bit of luck in this game and that game.

"Whenever you look back it always looks like Manchester United or whoever did everything right in each game, but they won a lot of games in the last minute and you think it's quality, but it's coincidence most of the time. Very often it's individual quality in a moment or it's coincidence. You need

to have the luck.

"But you need to be prepared for these moments. You need to make the percentage of coincidence and luck as small as possible. All the rest need to be planned and what we can plan, we do. But then you can still lose a game like we did at Bournemouth.

"A lot of people, especially around Liverpool because they have waited so long for it, will say 'that's the game where we lost the championship'. No, it's not like this."

Klopp also admitted that Chelsea have been the best team in the Premier League so far, but maintains there will be plenty of twists in the title race.

"When they go on like this they are the deserved champions, nobody could have a doubt about this," he added.

"I am pretty sure that until now Chelsea are maybe the team that have had the most luck with injuries. We lost Phil (Coutinho) and Daniel (Sturridge) and Danny Ings in difficult moments when you really could use them.

"If it's Hazard and Costa at Chelsea, is it the same afterwards? It's a long season and they all have to play us again and not only us, they have to play Arsenal again and all of the others.

"Of course they are the team to beat because they are very experienced, maybe the most experienced team in the top flight at the moment."

(Source: SkySports)

Lampard to stay in close contact with Chelsea



Former England midfielder Frank Lampard says he will be "in close contact" with his old club Chelsea as he decides on his next career move.

The 38-year-old left New York City in November and media speculation has mounted that he could return to the London team in a coaching role or some other capacity.

Lampard watched Premier League leaders Chelsea's 1-0 home win over West Bromwich Albion earlier this month and was an onlooker at training on Wednesday when manager Antonio Conte said he was in good enough shape to continue his playing career.

"I'm still waiting for the five-year contract to come through from Chelsea, they haven't called yet," Lampard joked during an interview on Sky Sports television on Saturday.

"Whatever happens, in some capacity I will be at Chelsea, whether that's with my season ticket watching them...I don't

know. I will be in very close contact.

"Whether I have a role is not all in my hands so I can't go any further than that. I am very relaxed about it which is a nice place to be.

"I'm not kind of eager that the end of my career is coming and thinking, 'What's going to happen now?'," added Lampard.

"If the right thing comes then I'll take it. Obviously Chelsea, I would love that, but it doesn't always work that way."

Lampard won three Premier League titles and the 2012 Champions League with Chelsea and is the club's all-time record scorer with 211 goals. He also netted 29 times in 106 appearances for England.

"I've taken this Christmas to enjoy family, a couple of beers and an extra turkey and I'll make a decision in January whether I carry on playing -- I have a few options -- or finish and move on to whatever the next thing will be," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

Michael Schumacher's son steps closer to Formula One



Mick Schumacher could follow in father Michael's footsteps after signing a deal in F3 that takes him closer to Formula One.

MICHAEL SCHUMACHER'S SON Mick has taken a step closer to Formula One by signing a deal to race in the Formula Three European Championship next season.

The 17-year-old Schumacher has signed a deal with Prema Powerteam, where he will follow in the footsteps of Williams' F1 rookie Lance Stroll.

F1's youngest ever race winner, Red Bull star Max Verstappen, was an F3 driver in 2014, alongside Esteban Ocon, who will race for Force India in the premier class in 2017.

Schumacher has previously raced in ADAC Formula 4 and the Italian F4 Championship with

Prema.

And the teenager believes the move can help him on the way to F1, where his father dominated for over a decade with Benetton and Ferrari on his way to a record 91 race wins and seven world titles.

He said in a statement: "F3 will be the ideal step for me to make, and I am totally fired up for the new year to start.

"I am also really happy about staying with Prema, because this is such a professional team and I will again be able to learn a lot.

"The next season will surely be challenging, but the tests we've been doing in the past weeks proved the F3 car is extremely fun to drive. I can't wait for 2017 to begin!"

(Source: the42)

Jose Mourinho: Ligue 1 better without Zlatan Ibrahimovic leading PSG

Zlatan Ibrahimovic's departure from Paris Saint-Germain has made Ligue 1 a more interesting league, Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho says.

Ibrahimovic left PSG in the summer after having won four straight league titles at the Parc des Princes, along with both French cups the previous two seasons.

But this year's French table is much more competitive, with Nice holding a two-point lead over Monaco, who are a further three on top of PSG.

And Mourinho says Ligue 1 fans should be thankful that Ibrahimovic is no longer around to help PSG dominate.

"First of all I think people in France have to be happy that he left, because now you have a league. With him, no league," Mourinho told SFR Sport.

"With him, it's Paris and Paris... league, cup, league cup, super cup... everything.

"And now you have a league. A league that I watch. I watch now, I'm interested. Nice, [Mario] Balotelli, Monaco,

my friend Leonardo [Jardim], Paris. Now I watch Ligue 1. So you have to thank him that he left.

"And now, with us, phenomenal. And he's not just about goals, he's about the passion he brings to training sessions.

"And with me, I keep saying that I had him when he was 25, 26, maybe 27, and now I have him in the last period of his career, and I prefer this player."

(Source: ESPN)

Sepahan hold by Esteghlal, Tractor edges past Naft

SPORTS Sepahan football team **d e s k** was held to a 1-1 draw against Esteghlal in the 15th week of Iran professional League (IPL) in front of more than 30,000 fans at Isfahan's newly renovated Naqsh-e Jahan stadium on Sunday.

Jalaleddin Alimohammadi put the host in front in the 70th minute with a rocket shot inside the box. In the final ten minutes Esteghlal put pressure on Sepahan defense to get back on level terms. In the second minute of stoppage time Behnam Barzay put the ball into the back of the net with a wonderful header from a cross by Kaveh Rezaei.

Esteghlal and Sepahan finished the first half of the season in 7th and 8th place respectively with 22 points.

Elsewhere in Tehran, Tractor Sazi beat Naft Tehran 2-0 thanks to goals from Mehdi Sharifi (63) and Mohammad Nouri (72). Tractor is now just two points behind league leader Persepolis.

Machine Sazi vs. Saipa clash which was schedule to be held in Tabriz on Sunday was postponed due to bad weather condition.



Persepolis interested in Nigerian striker Mensha

SPORTS Persepolis football **d e s k** team is interested in signing Paykan striker Gowdin Mensha.

Persepolis striker Mehdi Taremi has been linked with a move to Greek side AEK Athens in the transfer window.

Iran Professional League (IPL) pacesetter needs to strengthen the attacking line since the team will start its campaign in the AFC Champions League from February.

Mensha has scored six goals in 12 matches for Paykan.

Paykan football club has not officially received a request so far, the Tehran-based team said.



Fan dies after Esteghlal's late equalizer

SPORTS An Esteghlal fan **d e s k** died after Behnam Barzay scored his injury time equalizer against Sepahan.

In the match held in Isfahan's newly renovated Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium on Sunday, the fan passed away after collapsing in the stands.

Esteghlal coach Alireza Mansourian extended his condolence and said that the club's thoughts are with all the friends and family of the fan.

Esteghlal and Sepahan finished the first half of the season in 7th and 8th place respectively with 22 points.



Iran beach soccer team to play friendly matches against Lebanon

The national beach soccer teams of Iran and Lebanon are going to hold two friendly football matches within the next few days as part of preparations for the upcoming 2017 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Beach Soccer Championship.

The matches will take place on December 28 and 29 in the southern Iranian port city of Bandar Abbas and at the request of the Lebanese Football Association.

The 2017 AFC Beach Soccer Championship will take place from January 21 to 29 next year in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The Iranian outfit has joined squads from Chinese Taipei and Vietnam in Group B of the upcoming event. The Persians will play counterparts from Chinese Taipei in their opening match at Jumeirah Beach in Dubai on January 21.



Australia, Lebanon, Thailand, and the UAE are in Group A. China has been drawn in Group C along with

Indonesia and Oman. Group D consists of Japan, South Korea, and Uzbekistan.

The Iranian men's national beach soccer team is Asia's best. According to the latest monthly rankings released by the Beach Soccer Worldwide (BSWW), the Iranian squad collected 1,785 points to maintain its place as the best squad in Asia and claim the fifth spot in the world.

On November 5, the Iranian outfit achieved a commendable second-place finish at the Samsung Beach Soccer Intercontinental Cup Dubai 2016.

In final match in that event, Iran played against South American powerhouse Brazil at the Dubai International Marine Club in the UAE. Team Melli lost the match 2-6 to the Reis da Praia.

(Source: PressTV)

Iran's offer not satisfying: Andrea Anastasi



Gdansk coach Andrea Anastasi says that he negotiated with Iran Volleyball Federation but was not satisfied with their offer. The Italian coach was one of Iran's

options to replace Raul Lozano in Iran national volleyball team but two parties did not reach a satisfactory conclusion.

"It was a very serious negotiations. The federation negotiated me as the first option. Of course it was not the first time in history. I think it was for the third time they negotiated with me," Anastasi told sportowefakty.wp.pl.

"I had the opportunity to meet with the man who had an important role in the Iranian federation. He came to Gdansk. We had a nice meeting where we talked about the shape and development of the team."

"I received the offer, but it was not satisfying. After a few days I wrote an email to the federation and thanked them for their interest. This was not what I wanted to do in the future," Anastasi stated.

(Source: Tasnim)

Iran's Mehdi Taremi on AEK Athens's radar



Iran's Persepolis football team striker Mehdi Taremi has been linked with a move to Greek side AEK Athens.

(Source: Tasnim)

The 24-year-old striker has scored seven goals for Iranian giant in 15 matches in Iran Professional League (IPL) current season.

Taremi won the Best Striker Award of the 14th edition of the IPL at the end of the 2014-15 season with 16 goals in 25 matches.

Taremi has made 16 appearances for Iran national football team, scoring seven goals.

The player was supposed to join Turkey's Caykur Rizespor at the beginning of the season but the move was cancelled.

The Greek giant has already linked with Iranian international players Karim Ansarifard and Soroush Rafiei.

Leicester City boss Claudio Ranieri: 2016 the best year of my career

Leicester manager Claudio Ranieri insists 2016 was the best year of his career after claiming the Premier League title.

The Foxes shocked the world by picking up the trophy last season and, although their title defence has stuttered as they sit in 15th place with only four wins from 17 games so far, the Italian coach is still on a high from their success.

"I never won a [league] title before, so for this reason it's the best [year]," he told Sky Sports. "But I also can't forget where I started from, like Jamie Vardy [who began in non-league] and I slowly, slowly climbed through the leagues and after 30 years I won the title. It means I worked so hard, and for this reason I'm very pleased.

"I'm also pleased with a lot of people from the club and the chairman because I wanted to come back to England. I love the spirit, the atmosphere and everything around the football here."

"When I arrived I met the people in Leicester and felt a fantastic electricity. The chairman always gave us a lot of positive energy, which is important for the manager and all the staff around me. It was an amazing, amazing year."

As a result of winning the title, Leicester qualified for the Champions League for the first time and starred in the group stage to seal progress to the round of 16 where they have drawn La Liga side Sevilla.

Ranieri, though, insists the Foxes have

already matched his expectations and are focused on ensuring Premier League survival for another year.

"We are underdogs because it's the first time we've played in it [the UCL]," he said. "A lot of people say Sevilla is a good draw, but they won three [Europa League] titles in a row! It's not easy for us, but it's a little dream. The most important thing for me was to get to the knockouts."

"With the Premier League it's 40 points to be safe. I hope the match against Stoke [a 2-2 draw after Leicester had been two goals down] was right for us and changed our mood and try again to start now."

(Source: ESPN)



The Week in Quotes

"I was lost for words and can't thank the players enough. I had no idea this was going to happen. We have already raised half for the operation with various activities. We have been going to a lot of lengths to try and achieve this. It is a long operation with a lot to go through afterwards, but hopefully, we will reach the goal that we have set out to do, which is for Jessie-Leigh to take her first steps."

Wolverhampton Wanderers supporter Chris Smith speaking emotionally to the club's official website after players at the English Championship club raised £8,000 for his daughter Jessie-Leigh, who suffers from cerebral palsy, as a surprise Christmas gift. The funds raised will help Jessie-Leigh have an operation to help her live more comfortably and potentially allow her to walk.

"It was an extremely tough match. We were up against very difficult opponents who were able to get back into the game. They're a very good side and they were in great physical shape. Personally, I'm very happy because I got three goals."

A relieved Cristiano Ronaldo was full of praise for Kashima Antlers after leading Real Madrid to victory over the Japanese champions in the FIFA Club World Cup final last weekend.

"I hope we can bring some joy, particularly over Christmas and new year, but over the long term, between now and the end of the season. The club itself seems to be very ambitious. Certainly the chairman and the owners seem to be taking the club forward in the right direction. I like the look of the squad and that's probably the reason that I am here because I feel the club can go forward from here, and hopefully, I can help it go forward."

New Crystal Palace manager Sam Allardyce tells the club's website of his hopes for the English Premier League outfit after succeeding Alan Pardew on Friday.

"He is a natural born leader. I could say, jokingly, that he is the general and we, the staff and players, are his lieutenants and soldiers. On the field, he never loses his nerve and, above all his other qualities, he is a good man."

Portugal assistant coach Jorge Rosario gives rare insight in his long-standing relationship with head coach and friend Fernando Santos.

"I would like him to play up front with me just behind to knock balls deep for him. I'd leave him all alone with the goalkeeper. I saw that he's trained a bit with [Borussia] Dortmund and Manchester United. Speed isn't everything, but he'd be a great striker at Atletico. Usain Bolt would be perfect for our game. Me behind and him up front. The best!"

Antoine Griezmann tells France Football that he would enjoy playing the beautiful game with world and Olympic champion sprinter Usain Bolt.

"My gut was telling me I needed to explore something to continue to help evolve myself as a player and challenge myself a little bit more. Every training is competitive. Going into a competitive environment like that where I need to show my best self every single day is going to definitely challenge me and make me prove my best every single day. I like that challenge. I also want to prove that I'm one of the best, if not the best in the world at my position, and I think there's no better way than to go in and play with the best."

Despite falling to defeat in extra time, forward Shuhei Akasaki reflected on the positives after his club Kashima Antlers gave Real Madrid all they could handle in the final of the FIFA Club World Cup Japan 2016.

"We would like him to end his career as a Barca player. We think he will stay at the club for the rest of his career. Leo Messi and Barca go together. He is the best player, we are the best club. I think he is convinced he is in the best team. I think he's convinced that he couldn't be in a better place."

Speaking at his 2016 review, Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu remains confident that Lionel Messi will see out his career with the Spanish giants.

"It is our dream to win the Premier League. It is our premier competition. For us, it is our first step. I am very happy here - me and my staff as well as my family. I think we find that we are in a very good place to ensure we can work hard. It is a big club with lots of supporters and it is a fantastic club to achieve big things with. We finished third in the league last season. It was a tough summer because the way that we finished the season was bad. We showed some weakness at the end of the season that we need to try and work out, which is always important. When you compete with a big side, it is always difficult, but it shows we are a better team than last season. We have had some problems in the last months after Man City. There were more things that maybe made it difficult for us to compete at our best and I think now we are in a good position to try to achieve good results. We need to work hard because teams like Chelsea, Liverpool, Man City, they have all improved. It is true that the Premier League is tougher than last season because all the big teams are improving their squads, but we are confident in ours."

Tottenham Hotspur manager Mauricio Pochettino tells Sky Sports of his desire to lead the North London outfit to the English Premier League title.

"His training was special, detailed and pretty demanding - but absolutely ace. We did everything with the ball. With Heynckes during preparation, we would run like scared rabbits three times a day. But that was so everyone was 100 per cent fit."

In a conversation with the Stoke Sentinel, Stoke City and Switzerland winger Xherdan Shaqiri speaks fondly of his time working under coaches Pep Guardiola and Jupp Heynckes at former club Bayern Munich.

"We have to look at the amount of assists he created in other seasons [as well as goals] because this season he's created a lot, surely more. But I don't focus on the details of goals or assists. At the end of the day, I don't think [how many goals he's scored] is important. He's a fundamental player for us, not just going forward, but also in defence and I am happy with how he's playing. He's an ambitious player and his objective is to improve his numbers and I am sure he will."

Speaking at a midweek news conference, Barcelona manager Luis Enrique tells reporters that he is not worried with Neymar's current goalscoring form at the club.

"As a Chelsea man it is great to see, all credit to everybody there. Nobody would have fancied them to be anywhere near winning the league at that point and now they look the dominant team. I don't like to tempt fate, but I can't see anyone who has got the consistency to close the gap, so I fancy Chelsea strongly now." Former Chelsea midfielder Frank Lampard tell Sky Sports he is confident his old club can push on and win the English Premier League title.

(Source: FIFA)

