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TEHRAN TIMES



Bahrain will face fallout of extreme moves 2

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Bahrain executions spark protests

Hezbollah condemns the execution in Bahrain

Bahrain has executed three anti-regime activists over their alleged role in a 2014 bomb attack, amid widespread public anger against the death verdicts, sparking protests and stoking tensions between the country's majority and its Sunni rulers.

The three Shias faced the firing squad, six days after a court upheld their death sentences over a bomb attack in March 2014, the prosecutor's office said.

Bahrain, which has been ruled by the Al-Khalifa dynasty, has a majority Shia population which has long complained of marginalization.

It has been rocked by sporadic unrest since March 2011 when security forces brutally crushed an Arab Spring-inspired uprising.

The executions triggered protests in villages, where demonstrators blocked roads with burning tires and police retaliated by firing tear gas, according to posts on social media.

Pictures shared online by activists also showed relatives of those executed weeping over their deaths.

Authorities in Bahrain do not permit international news agencies to cover events independently. →13

Iran: Banking bottleneck still ahead

Iran's 9-month oil revenue reaches \$29b

ECONOMY TEHRAN – Iran has collected \$29 billion of oil revenue during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2016), IRNA quoted Amir Hossein Zamaninia, the deputy oil minister for international affairs and trade, as saying on Saturday.

According to Zamaninia, the figure is expected to rise significantly in the upcoming months due to the agreement between OPEC and non-OPEC countries on November 2016.

The official noted that with the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), all sanctions related to oil, gas and petrochemical industry have been lifted and Iran has strongly returned to the global oil market.

"Iran's oil and gas condensate exports dropped to 1.398 million barrels per day in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 19, 2016) before the implementation of JCPOA, but after removal of the sanctions the figure nearly doubled," he said.

Iran's total crude oil and condensate sales reached around 2.8 million barrels per day in September 2016, nearly matching a 2011 peak in shipments before sanctions were imposed on the OPEC producer.

The country was also recently exempted from the OPEC deal agreed in November 2016 to reduce production by 1.2 million barrels per day for six months, an accord aimed at addressing the global oversupply and bolstering low oil prices.



See page 2

© Tehran Times/Asghar Khamseh

ARTICLE
By Mahmood Khaghani
Oil expert

Time for private sector economic diplomacy

Airbus, the French-based plane maker, delivered the first new plane openly purchased from a western manufacturer since 1979 to Iran on 12th Jan. 2017. Iran Air has said it hopes to receive "at least two more from Airbus" by the start of the Iranian New Year in March 2017, and a total of six A320 aircraft in calendar year 2017.

Iran Air also expects to receive another three larger A330 planes in 2017. While all EU business communities welcomed the good signs of JCPOA implementation one of EU based entities, the International Research Network (IRN), confirmed its program on holding Iran Business Symposium (IBS) during 21-23 Feb. 2017 in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The IBS is highlighting the fact about the EU's interest to further open the gates for doing business as usual with Iran.

The channels of communications between Iran the EU, UK, and U.S.

The historic nuclear deal, or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has opened the channels of communications between Iran and the 5+1 nations. This line of communication, according to many observers, is beyond the issue of the implementation of the agreement. The IBS organizer has been quoted as saying that the reason for their plan for holding IBS is the fact about the high-level political consultations between the EU and Iran on November 8-9, 2016 in Brussels which showed, the Iran - EU programme now includes more economic cooperation, dialogue on regional issues particularly in the Caspian and Middle East regions.

Trump's pre-electoral promise

Trump's pre-electoral promise to renegotiate the deal that he designated as "disastrous," met with no immediate reaction from Tehran & Brussels, as Iran and the EU preferred to wait and see what would be the new administration's approach when they are in office. →4

'Eden Again', a project to promote the restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshlands

INTERVIEW
By Farnaz Heidari

Lands covered temporarily or permanently by water (except for lakes, reservoirs, and streams) and located away from coastal areas are called inland wetlands. They include marshes, prairie potholes (depressions carved out by glaciers), swamps (dominated by trees and shrubs), mud flats, flood-plains, bogs (rain-fed, peat-rich areas), wet meadows, and the wet arctic tundra in summer. Some wetlands are huge, others are small.

Despite the ecological importance of year-round and seasonal inland wetlands, many are drained, dredged, filled in, or covered over.

The Tehran Times conducted an interview with Dr. Suzanne Alwash, the writer of "Eden Again: Hope in the Marshes of Iraq" that

published first time in 2013.

Suzanne Reynolds Alwash was raised on a small family farm nestled amongst the thickets along Cottonwood Creek in Wilmer, Texas. She graduated from Southern Methodist University with degrees in English and geology and went on to obtain a doctorate in marine geology from the University of Southern California, where she served as chief scientist aboard their research ship R/V Velerio IV under the guidance of Dr. Donn Gorsline.

After that, Suzanne worked as an environmental geologist for several decades, cleaning up pollution on land and sea, and consulting on wetlands restoration projects in coastal southern California. Suzanne currently teaches Earth Science at Mount San Antonio College and resides on the edge of the Bolsa Chica wetlands of southern California with

her daughters, Hannah and Norah.

Suzanne's husband, Azzam Alwash was born in 1958 in Kut, Iraq, he spent his youth in the town of Nasriya on the edge of the Mesopotamian Marshlands. In 2001, Azzam and Suzanne founded the Eden Again Project to promote the restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshlands. In 2004 Azzam founded Iraq's first environmental organization, Nature Iraq, with Suzanne serving as its Senior Technical Advisor.

Nature Iraq has been designated as a national focal point for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; accredited by the United Nations Environmental Program, and is in the process of becoming BirdLife International's designated country partner. Now in its eleventh year, Nature Iraq continues to work throughout Iraq to address its diverse environmental issues. →12

Interpol arrests key player involved in oil corruption case

POLITICS TEHRAN — Commander of the Interpol Office of the Iranian Police has reported that a major player involved in the oil corruption case has been arrested and extradited to Iran by the Interpol, IRNA reported.

"The aforementioned person was tracked and arrested in one of the countries in Central America, and was handed over to [Iran's] judicial authorities," Brigadier General Mas-

soud Rezvani said on Sunday.

Rezvani noted that following Iran's request, the Interpol pursued the oil corruption case which led to the extradition of one of the major players involved in the case.

"This person was first tracked and arrested in Eastern Asia, but unfortunately due to collusion that took place, he escaped, but was once again tracked and arrested by the police in one of the countries in Central America," he said.

He underlined that the international police is determined to arrest fugitive criminals and hand them over to the country.

The senior police chief also said another fugitive was arrested in Azerbaijan last week and was extradited to Iran.

The infamous name that pops to mind over the oil corruption case is Babak Zanjani – a well-known tycoon who has been sentenced to death over corruption charges. →13

OPINION
By Ali Kushi
Head of the Politics Desk of the TehranTimes

Nuclear deal showed diplomacy prevails

For one year now, the world has been reveling in the ease brought about by the historic, UN-endorsed nuclear accord between Iran and the five veto-holding powers of the U.S., China, Russia, England, France, plus Germany.

Capping nearly 24 months of high-level negotiations between the signatories, the deal went into force on Jan. 16, 2016, ending one of the most challenging dossiers of the twenty first century.

And the first anniversary comes right days away from the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States on Jan. 20.

The coincidence should be the first political lesson to learn for the politically novice Trump who emerged heavily critical of the pact during his electoral campaign.

Here is the point: diplomacy prevails and it prevails only if all sides involved in an accord keep their side of the bargain.

Iran has so far remained strongly committed to the 2015 nuclear deal as verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency. It removed the sensitive core of its Arak nuclear reactor, shipped out its excess heavy water to international markets, dismantled a number of its centrifuge machines, and is in talks to redesign the reactor, as stipulated in the agreed-upon document.

Yet, there are still issues that continue to unsettle the Iranian side. Hurdles to smooth banking transactions are not fully cleared. Approval of other anti-Iran bills like the ISA by Washington is eating into the efficiency of the pact, scaring off investors eyeing on the Iranian market.

For the two sides to address the remaining challenges, they need to once again show strong will to reach the common ground.

The rule of thumb, if pursued, will give Trump a chance to introduce himself as a man of politics rather than a real estate tycoon.



© IRNA/Vahid Khademli

Woman weaves double-sided silk carpet

A rural woman is seen behind the warps, weaving a special kind of carpet in Duydukh village, North Khorasan Province.

The Turkmen inhabitants of the village earn national and somewhat global reputation for their indigenous double-sided silk carpet designs that are named after their village.

Roughly 80 percent of their products are exported.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani to hold press briefing on JCPOA anniversary

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Rouhani is to hold a press conference on Tuesday, the day marking the anniversary of the Implementation Day of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Domestic and foreign correspondents will be present at the press conference, ISNA reported on Sunday.

The JCPOA, the official name for the nuclear deal, was reached on July 14, 2015 between Iran on one side and the P5+1 (the U.S., UK, France, Russia, China, and Germany) on the other.



Iran responds to FIFA criticism of stadium use as hanging court

POLITICS TEHRAN — The stadium had been left abandoned, Fars Province Justice Department announced on Sunday in response to the International Federation of Association Football's criticism why Iran recently used a soccer stadium to execute a hanging sentence.

"The place was only chosen for being set off by walls, for ensuring security rules, and to carry out the punishment of the murderer of a six-year-old child," IRNA quoted the judicial department as having said.



Iran to import 130 tons of uranium soon

POLITICS TEHRAN — The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran has announced that the country will receive 130 tons of uranium in the near future to increase its reserves to 350 tons.

"130 tons of uranium will soon arrive in the country according to an agreement made by members of the JCPOA Joint Commission," Ali Akbar Salehi said on Sunday, addressing a ceremony in the central city of Natanz which is home to uranium enrichment facilities.



Nation observes 7th day service for Rafsanjani

POLITICS TEHRAN — A large memorial service was held on Sunday afternoon to mark the seventh day after the death of Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

The ritual was at the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini, where Rafsanjani was laid to rest. During the service, former Majlis speaker Ali Akbar Nategh-Nouri delivered a speech, where he praised the late ayatollah for his services.

The ayatollah died on January 8 after he suffered a cardiac arrest. He was buried two days later.



Tehran renews support for political solution to Iraqi problems

POLITICS TEHRAN — The chairman of the Iranian Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has reiterated Tehran's support for a political solution to Iraq's dilemmas.

"Iran supports opportunities for negotiations to settle problems in Iraq," Alaeddin Boroujerdi said on Sunday, addressing a conference titled "Baghdad Dialogue Conference and Post-Daesh Iraq", Fars news agency reported.

The senior legislator, in the meantime, voiced Iran's readiness to share parliamentary experiences with Iraq.



IRIB share of national budget doubled

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Majlis on Sunday finished its address of the next fiscal year's national budget bill after 49 sessions held over 21 days, IRNA reported.

One of the points about the day's outcome that made it to the headlines was that the lawmakers voted to double the share of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting of the budget.

The current year budget of the IRIB was 15 trillion rials (\$263 million) and it was set at 30 trillion (\$526 million) for the next year.

Rouhani calls for strong ties with Albania

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that the post-JCPOA atmosphere is a good opportunity to expand Tehran-Tirana relations.

"The post-JCPOA period is a good opportunity to expand and deepen Tehran-Tirana cooperation in various areas, especially the economic sphere, and the opportunity should be used by the two countries' private sectors," he said during a meeting with Albanian Foreign Minister Ditmir Bushati in Tehran.

Rouhani also said expansion of academic and scientific ties is important.

Elsewhere, the president highlighted the necessity to fight violence, extremism and terrorism. "Terrorism is an international problem and it is one of our major duties to fight violence and terrorism."

He added Iran is ready to cooperate with various countries in fighting terrorism.



Albania plans to open embassy in Tehran

For his part, Bushati said his country is a strong defender of the fight against terrorism and extremism.

He also said Albania is determined to expand relations with Iran.

Elsewhere, he extended condolences over the passing of Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Council and former president of Iran who passed away on January 8 of cardiac arrest.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also held a separate meeting with Bushati on Saturday.

Zarif said that the European countries are suffering from the spread of extremism and terrorism.

The chief diplomat also said there are many opportunities for expanding relations.

Bushati also said Albania prioritizes expansion of relations with Iran especially in economic sphere and plans to open embassy in Iran.

Iran: Banking bottleneck still ahead

POLITICS TEHRAN — Just days away from the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the U.S., Iran is lamenting that it still faces difficulties in conducting banking transactions expected to terminate after an international nuclear deal with world powers.

However, it is far away from an impasse.

"Our banking friends say although banking problems still persist, we face no deadlock in nowhere," said Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi on Sunday, speaking to a press conference.

Araqchi was making the comments one day before the anniversary of the international nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers of the U.S., China, Russia, England, France, and Germany went into force on Jan. 16, 2016.

Under the deal, Iran accepted some limits on its nuclear program

in exchange for relief from economic sanctions.

While the deal terminated all European provisions on banking ties with Iran, international banks have given the cold shoulder, fearing fines by Washington, which has left its primary sanctions in place.

"The most important hurdle to removal of banking sanctions is the U.S. primary sanctions, imposed after the (1979) revolution," noted Araqchi who acted as top negotiator in drafting the nuclear deal.

Other issues such as introduction of new money laundering regulations and measures to dry up financial resources of terrorists over the past decade has added complexity to the banking dilemma with Iranian banks being kept out of involvement.

"Our banks have been away from this atmosphere due to sanctions, and are updating themselves little by little," he

said.

Having said that, Tehran has managed to find ways to conduct banking transactions by bypassing the U.S. financial system, thus finalizing huge deals with international American and French plane makers.

"There are legitimate and legal alternatives that we can use to do banking transactions without using the U.S. financial system," as manifested in deals with Boeing and

Airbus, explained the deputy foreign minister for legal affairs.

Still concerns over smooth banking ties with Iran loom large given the hostile approach shown by the incoming Trump administration that has vowed to renegotiate the deal.

Citing the multilateral nature of the UN-endorsed accord Iran has said there is no room for questioning the deal.

Araqchi reiterated the remarks by the Leader that if the U.S. abrogates the nuclear deal Tehran will "set fire" to it.

"The most important hurdle to removal of banking sanctions is the U.S. primary sanctions, imposed after the (1979) revolution."

Bahrain will face fallout of extreme moves, Iran says of executions

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Iranian Foreign Ministry strongly condemned on Sunday the execution of three political activists in Bahrain, saying the country will see the consequences of its "extremist actions"

"Once again, the Bahraini government showed that it is not after peaceful solution and a way out of the crisis by taking this inconsiderate action," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi remarked.



He added, "Lack of transparency in the procedure of unfair trial of these citizens has been approved by the international circles and all the human rights' institutions in various parts of the world."

He said that the Bahraini government always adopts "repressive" strategies and kills opponents "brutally".

"Undoubtedly, the Bahraini government will see the consequences of extremist actions and behaviors by following this path," he said.

The Bahraini government increases exerting pressure, imposing restriction on the opposition leaders and executing political prisoners while the Bahraini people and their political and religious leaders highlight the importance of settling crises through interaction, Qassemi said.

Bahrain executed on Sunday the three anti-regime activists over their alleged role in a 2014 bomb attack.

According to the Bahrain Mirror news website, the authorities have refused to return the bodies of the three activists to their families.

'Iran will support Bahrainis' demands'

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, a senior advisor to the parliament speaker, said on Sunday that Iran provides the Bahrainis with "political" and "spiritual" support to uphold their rights in conformity with the UN human rights charter.

He said that execution of the three Bahrainis is clear example of human rights violation.

"The Bahraini government should rely on its people instead of foreigners," noted Amir-Abdollahian, who was Iran's ambassador to Bahrain from 2007 to 2010.

Amir-Abdollahian said that Iran does not interfere in Bahrain's affairs, however will defend the Bahraini people's "rightful demands".



Vacancy Announcement

The Mission of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in IRAN is seeking to fill the following vacant position in Tehran:

Communication and Media Officer

Main responsibilities

- Develops and maintains professional relation with print, broadcast and online media, and responds to media queries/requests
- Contributes to elaboration and implementation of public communication strategies and plans of actions
- Creates media content on ICRC humanitarian mandate and work
- Liaises with public relations departments of partner organizations
- Contributes to the development and production of dissemination materials for public audience
- Facilitates workshops/events for selected audience

Minimum required knowledge & experience:

- University degree or professional qualification in journalism, public relations and communications, or social sciences
- 4 - 6 years work experience in a similar function
- Fluent in spoken and written English and Farsi
- Excellent verbal and written communication and presentation skills
- Excellent analytical and reporting skills
- Confirmed capacity to analyse the social environment
- Ability to multi-task and work under pressure
- Ability to anticipate and plan, organized, autonomous, meets deadlines, team player, shows initiative, flexible
- Knowledge of humanitarian affairs, and working experience with an international organization is an asset

It should be noted that the position might require travelling (on mission) outside and inside the country.

All interested applicants should submit a letter of interest and a résumé in English to the following email address:

teh_hr_services@icrc.org

ALL submissions MUST be received by the closing date of 26 January 2017

Please be informed that only shortlisted candidates will be notified for further process.

Washington protesters vow to fight for civil rights under Trump

U.S. civil rights activists vowed to defend hard-fought gains in voting rights and criminal justice during the presidency of Donald Trump, kicking off a week of protests ahead of the Republican's inauguration.

About 2,000 mostly black protesters ignored steady rain to march and rally near Washington's Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, as speakers urged them to fight for minority rights and President Barack Obama's signature healthcare law, which Trump has vowed to dismantle.

The Rev. Al Sharpton, the rally's organizer and a veteran civil rights leader, said Democrats in Congress needed to be sent a simple message: "Get some backbone."

"We march in the driving rain because we want the nation to understand that what has been fought for and gained, that you're going to need more than one election to turn it around," he said.

The rally drew fewer people than organizers had initially expected, but Sharpton said afterwards he was satisfied with the turnout, given the rain and temperatures hovering just above freezing.

"I really didn't think we'd get those kind of numbers," he said in a telephone interview.



Trump, a New York real estate developer, won with a populist platform that included promises to build a wall along the Mexican border, restrict immigration from Muslim countries and dismantle Obamacare.

His choice of Senator Jeff Sessions, an Alabama Republican, to become attorney general has raised concern among

many on the left that Trump could weaken voting rights for minorities and roll back criminal justice reforms.

"We will march until hell freezes over, and when it does, we will march on the ice," said Cornell William Brooks, president and chief executive of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

The rally also included the Hispanic group La Raza, politicians, relatives of African-Americans slain by police, the National Urban League, Planned Parenthood and the Human Rights Campaign, an advocacy group for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender civil rights.

The rally came hours after Trump blasted U.S. Representative John Lewis after the Georgia Democrat and civil rights campaigner said Russia's alleged hacking aimed at helping Trump put his legitimacy into question.

Trump replied on Twitter that Lewis should focus instead on his Atlanta district. "All talk, talk, talk - no action or results! Sad!" he wrote.

About 30 groups, almost all of them anti-Trump, have gotten permits to protest before, during and after the inauguration. Thousands of demonstrators have vowed to shut down the inauguration.

Washington police and the U.S. Secret Service plan to have some 3,000 extra officers and an additional 5,000 National Guard troops on hand for security.

By far the biggest event will be the Women's March on Washington the day after the inauguration, which organizers say could draw 200,000 people.

(Source: Reuters)

Protesters call on Bibi to resign over corruption allegations



Protesters have gathered on the streets of Tel Aviv, calling for the resignation of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over growing allegations of corruption.

"You take from the poor to give to the rich," and "Send Netanyahu to prison" were among the slogans the demonstrators chanted during their Saturday march.

Netanyahu is currently under investigation for several separate charges of corruption. One involves him allegedly proposing commercial favors to an Israeli newspaper owner in return for positive coverage.

Last week, a recording emerged of Netanyahu offering the owner of the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper a reduction in the circulation of the pro-Netanyahu newspaper, Israel Hayom, if Arnon Mozes' paper took a more favorable stance towards

him. A drop in the circulation of Hayom would be a direct benefit to Mozes as it is his main rival in advertising revenues.

Another investigation is related to charges of receiving illegal donations and gifts amounting to around some \$100,000 in cigars and alcoholic beverages.

He is also under investigation over suspicions that he accepted one million euros (about 1.1 million dollars) from French fraudster Arnaud Mimran for campaign funds during the 2009 Israeli elections.

The Netanyahu family has faced scrutiny over accusations that their lifestyle is are out of touch with regular Israelis. Netanyahu's wife, Sara, has also come under fire for her lavish tastes and abusive behavior toward staff members.

(Source: AP)

21 killed, dozens hurt as multiple bomb attacks hit Iraq



Three bomb attacks have struck several areas across Iraq, leaving nearly two dozen people dead and 46 more wounded.

A car bomb exploded on Sunday near a checkpoint in the town of Khalis, located roughly 15 kilometers northeast of Baqubah, Diyala's provincial capital.

The blast claimed the lives of nine people and injured 20 others, among them security forces.

Meanwhile, the Arabic-language al-Sumaria television network reported that the explosion had led to the closure of the road connecting the cities of Kirkuk and Baghdad.

Another car bomb explosion also ripped through central Baghdad, killing six people and wounding at least 13 more.

A third bombing also took place near a restaurant on Baghdad's Saadon Street, where six people lost their lives and 13 others sus-

tained injuries.

No group or individual has claimed responsibility for the attacks, but they have the hallmark of the ISIL (Daesh) terrorist group that has been leading a campaign of death and destruction in Iraq over the past few years.

Daesh has recently increased its terrorist activities across Iraq in revenge for the blows it has been suffering at the hands of Iraqi forces, particularly in the northern city of Mosul.

Iraqi army soldiers and allied fighters launched the Mosul liberation operation on October 17, 2016, and since then they have made major gains against Takfiri elements.

On Saturday, the Iraqi forces managed to establish full control over the University of Mosul, and hoisted the national flag over buildings inside the educational installation.

(Source: Press TV)

With eye on Trump, French summit tries to revive Mideast peace

Diplomats from 70 countries gathered in Paris Sunday to try to revive Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts amid fears of a new escalation if Donald Trump implements a pledge to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Neither Israel nor the Palestinians are represented at the conference, which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has dismissed as "rigged" against the Jewish state.

Opening the meeting, French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said the international community wanted to "forcefully reiterate that the two-state solution is the only solution possible" to the seven-decade-old conflict.

In a TV interview later, Ayrault warned that moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem would have "extremely serious consequences" and predicted Trump would find it impossible to do so.

"When you are president of the United States, you cannot take such a stubborn and such a unilateral view on this issue. You have to try to create the conditions for peace," he told France 3 TV.

Both Netanyahu and Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas have been invited to meet with President Francois Hollande to discuss the conclusions of the Paris talks.

Abbas, who has backed the meeting, is expected to travel to Paris in the coming weeks but Netanyahu rejected the offer, French diplomats said.

Three French Jewish groups called for a protest Sunday outside the Israeli embassy in Paris to denounce the conference.

The meeting is mainly symbolic, but comes at a crucial juncture for the Middle East, five days before Trump, who has vowed unstinting support for Israel, is sworn in as U.S. president.

Israel fears the conference could produce measures that could be put to the Security Council before Trump takes over.

The French have insisted they have no such plans.



"France has no other desire than to serve peace, and there is no time to lose," Ayrault said.

Peace efforts have been at a standstill since a U.S.-led initiative collapsed in April 2014.

Tensions are again running high after a wave of Palestinian attacks and Israel's ongoing expansion of settlements on land the Palestinians want for their state.

■ 'Could destroy peace hopes' -

On Saturday, Abbas warned that peace could be dealt a mortal blow if Trump moves the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, recognizing the contested city as Israel's capital as he indicated during campaigning.

Such a move would mark a radical departure from U.S. policy and the UN's position that the status of Jerusalem can only be decided in negotiations.

"Any attempts at legitimizing the illegal Israeli annexation of the city will destroy the prospects of any political process, bury the hopes for a two-state solution, and fuel extremism in our region, as well as worldwide," Abbas warned during a visit to the Vatican.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, who rebuked Israel recently over its settler activity on Palestinian territory,

will join the talks on his farewell tour, along with delegates from the U.N., EU and Arab League.

A draft conference communique called on Israel and the Palestinians to restate their support for two states and to refrain from "unilateral steps that prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations."

Netanyahu has lashed out at the Paris meeting, saying only direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians can bring peace.

■ 'One-state reality' -

Israel fears being further isolated by the conference, which comes hot on the heels of a landmark December UN resolution criticizing the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

The vote passed after the Obama administration -- in a parting shot at Netanyahu after years of frustrated mediation efforts -- took the rare step of abstaining rather than using its veto to protect Israel.

Explaining the U.S. abstention, Kerry warned last month that settlement expansion, terrorism and violence were "increasingly cementing an irreversible one-state reality" that would never yield real peace.

Trump, who had urged the U.S. to veto the text, has said "there's nobody more pro-Israeli than I am".

His choice for ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, is a hardliner who says he looks forward to working from "Israel's eternal capital, Jerusalem."

The city's status is one of the thorniest issues.

The Palestinians regard Israeli-annexed east Jerusalem as the capital of their future state, while Israel proclaims the entire city as its capital.

Nathan Thrall, senior Middle East analyst at the International Crisis Group, dismissed the conference as "inconsequential".

"If there are no consequences, if nobody is listening, if they are repeating the same thing they said over and over again, it amounts to a charade," he told AFP.

(Source: AFP)

Netanyahu's media scandal: Who bribed whom?

The smell of scandal has swirled around Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for years. But only now is the smell starting to turn to a stench, say analysts.

Netanyahu and his wife, Sara, have long been known for cultivating close relations with Israel's leading business families. Those ties, many Israelis assumed, explained why the famously parsimonious couple managed to indulge such expensive tastes.

Past investigations have looked into first-class transatlantic flights and stays at top hotels, but foundered on a lack of evidence that the Netanyahus had traded the high life for favors.



Until recently, most of the Israeli public had been amused, rather than outraged, by stories of astronomical bills at the prime minister's residence for wine, ice-cream and hairstyling.

But the latest revelations have the potential to be far more damaging. This week one Israeli commentator suggested Netanyahu's conduct risked being compared to the behavior of a head of a "banana republic".

Police are pursuing two parallel investigations, dubbed cases 1,000 and 2,000. The latter may turn out to be the most serious.

In the first case, according to leaks, Netanyahu accepted gifts from wealthy businessmen worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. The prime minister allegedly offered his benefactors assistance in return.

Arnon Milchan, an Israeli billionaire and Hollywood film producer, who has previously ousted himself as a former Mossad agent, is said to have sent Netanyahu cigars and champagne. In exchange, reports say, Netanyahu successfully lobbied John Kerry, the United States secretary of state, on behalf of Milchan for a 10-year US visa.

In another case, the Australian billionaire James Packer is believed to have showered Netanyahu's family with gifts, as he tried to gain permanent residency, and tax status, in Israel.

Netanyahu's lawyers do not deny that he received the gifts but say they were not intended as inducements.

The second case relates to audio recordings of lengthy meetings between Netanyahu and Arnon Mozes, the owner of the Yedioth Ahronoth media group, which includes Israel's largest paid-for newspaper.

According to details that emerged this week, Mozes reportedly offered favourable coverage to help Netanyahu stay in power and even suggested that his company would hire journalists of the prime minister's choosing.

In return, Mozes is said to have asked Netanyahu to promote legislation to end the free distribution of a popular rival daily, Israel Hayom, forcing it to become a paid-for title. Netanyahu is alleged to have responded positively to the proposal.

In one of the recordings, as elections neared in early 2015, Netanyahu can reportedly be heard warning that he will "deal" with Mozes if Yedioth Aharonoth campaigns against him.

On Wednesday, a former deputy chief of Israel's supreme court, Elyahu Matza, told Army Radio that on the basis of these reports it would be "clear to any novice jurist" this was a case of bribery.

Netanyahu is expected to be questioned by police for a third time on the allegations in the next few days. His lawyers have indicated that they will argue that Mozes was the one extorting Netanyahu, which is why the prime minister's officials recorded the conversation.

But Matza discounted such a defence. "An office holder threatened with extortion goes to the police," he said. "If he's prime minister he can turn to the attorney general. If he'd done so, he would have remained above any suspicion, but he didn't."

Oren Persico, a reporter with Seventh Eye, an Israeli media watchdog website, characterised Mozes' offer, from what is known so far, as worse than bribery. "It looks more like a mob-style operation to offer Netanyahu protection from Yedioth Ahronoth if the prime minister helped damage a media rival," he told Al Jazeera.

The recordings were found on a phone during a search of the belongings of Ari Harow, Netanyahu's former chief of staff, during a separate fraud investigation.

On Saturday, channel 2 TV produced transcripts of parts of the conversation. Netanyahu can reportedly be heard telling Mozes: "We are talking about moderation, about a reasonable media, we need to lower the hostility towards me."

Mozes responds about forthcoming elections: "We need to make sure you will be prime minister."

On Sunday, as more jurists publicly condemned the tapes, Netanyahu told party officials: "There's a campaign of biased leaks, intended to mislead the public and distort the true picture, as if there were offenses here that didn't happen."

The attorney general, Avichai Mendelblit, reportedly waited some six months after the recordings came to light to authorise an investigation.

The foot-dragging has fuelled concerns that Mendelblit, who was appointed by Netanyahu, is too close to him to act impartially.

On Wednesday justice ministry officials and police investigators said they had opposed the delay in questioning Netanyahu and believed it had harmed the investigation. Meir Gilboa, a former head of the police national fraud squad, told the Haaretz newspaper: "The long delay seems blatantly implausible."

Iranian trade-marketing delegation to visit China, Japan in March

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) plans to dispatch a trade and marketing delegation to Shanghai and Tokyo, the organization's portal reported on Sunday.

The visit will be paid from March 4 to 11, 2017, simultaneous with the 42nd International Food and Beverage Exhibition, FOOD EX JAPAN 2017.

The TPO delegation seeks to study the two countries' markets to expand trade and commercial ties in a bid to promote Iran's exports of non-oil products to those destinations.

The Iranian business people intend to pay visits to Chinese and Japanese industrial factories as well.

3rd Iran Ridex to get underway in Tehran today

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The third International Exhibition of Motorcycles, Parts, Accessories, Electric and Hybrid Vehicles (Iran Ridex) will start today at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds, the portal of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) reported on Sunday.

The participants of the four-day event include 60 Iranian and 45 foreign manufacturers from China and Taiwan.

Iran Ridex is Iran's leading international event that focuses on motorcycles, bicycles, scooters, skates, jet ski and related industries and equipment.

UK regulator doubles meetings with industry

The Financial Conduct Authority has doubled the number of meetings it will have with asset managers about investment market reforms, due to unforeseen demand from the industry.

The UK regulator initially scheduled four days of meetings with investment executives to be held at Andaz, a luxury boutique hotel near Shoreditch in London, and in Edinburgh, to get feedback on its interim report into the workings of the asset management industry.

On the back of higher than anticipated interest among asset management professionals in response to the report and its recommendations, the FCA has more than doubled the number of sessions to be held to nine.

The report, published last November, was sharply critical of many industry practices, including how much retail investors are charged in actively managed funds; conflicts of interest in the investment consulting business; and the absence of any relationship between fund charges and investment performance.

The sessions, which will begin on Thursday, will cover fund governance, clearer fees for retail investors, and better performance for institutional investors. Up to 35 organisations will attend each meeting. The regulator will also accept written submissions on its findings until February 20.

Amanda Rowland, a partner in the asset management regulation team at PwC, the consultancy, said many in the industry had not yet decided on formal responses to the consultation, and the FCA's proposals on value for money, charges and transparency would be important discussion points.

(Source: Financial Times)

Bank earnings will rise with interest rates - but that's Yellen and the Fed, not Donald Trump

By Tim Worstall

It's entirely true that bank earnings are likely to rise substantially in the next few years. Some are describing this as a result of Donald Trump's coming ascendancy to the presidency but it's not really that at all. Instead it's the turning of the business cycle and the coming rises in interest rates that will do it and that's much more to do with Janet Yellen and colleagues at the Federal Reserve than it is to do with whoever is President. There might still be a small effect from spending plans but even those are really in the hands of Congress, not the executive. The important point here being that bank profitability is about the difference in interest rates, between what they pay and what they charge. And this near decade past has seen a deliberate squeeze on those margins--as the level of rates rises we will expect to see a widening of their interest rate margin.

So this is true: Investors betting U.S. banks will reap huge profits as interest rates rise under Donald Trump were surprised Friday by just how optimistic the nation's biggest lenders are about the year ahead.

Bank of America Corp. boosted its forecast for interest income, the money it gets from making loans and holding debt securities, predicting it'll jump by about \$600 million in the first quarter. Brian Kleinhanzi, an analyst at Keefe, Bruyette and Woods, told clients that's more than he expected and will help the shares outperform. JPMorgan Chase & Co. also sounded a note of confidence, and financial stocks rose more than other sectors.

The effect is going to be there, definitely, it's the cause ascribed there which I think is at variance with the evidence.

As interest rates creep higher and the president-elect promises fewer regulations, the outlook for U.S. banks appears bright.

Optimism for financiers' rosier future was abundantly reflected in quarterly earnings released by some of the nation's largest banks Friday as Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase beat analysts' earnings estimates.

As my colleague Antoine Gara points out, JP Morgan's results were good: Expense cuts combined with an adrenaline shot of growth fuelled by rising interest rates is proving to be a potent combination for American banks.

However, as I say, this has not a lot to do with President-elect Donald Trump. This is about rising interest rates, little else.

(Source: The Forbes)

Albania calls for co-op with Iran in energy, agriculture, tourism

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania Ditmir Bushati has voiced his country's interest in cooperation with Iran in energy, agriculture and tourism sectors, the portal of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (IC-CIMA) reported.

During his two-day stay in Tehran at the top of a high-ranking trade-political delegation, the Albanian official made the remarks in a meeting with the chairman of ICCIMA Gholam-Hossein Shafeie on Saturday.

In the meeting, which was aimed for expansion of economic relations between the two countries, the two sides stressed the need for removing trade barriers, and also exchange of information and trade delegations between Iran and Albania.

Bushati mentioned the lack of knowledge regarding trade capacities and investment opportunities as the main reasons for low volume of trade between the two countries and emphasized the need for holding more economic meetings, exhibitions and conferences.

Time for private sector economic diplomacy



However, Federica Mogherini, the EU foreign policy chief and chair of the Joint Commission tasked with overseeing the implementation of the JCPOA, explicitly emphasized the multilateral character of the Iran deal, codified by a UN Security Council resolution. So, it was also emphasized by Iran that there is absolutely no reason for Iran or the EU sides to renegotiate the deal.

Trump's foreign policy
The nominee for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, last March told CNBC that ExxonMobil would consider doing business in oil-rich Iran if the opportunity arose. He also had said: "We'll wait and see if things open up for U.S. companies. We would certainly take a look because it's a huge resource-owning country." But, during his recent confirmation hearing on January 11 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Tillerson said that he would recommend a "full review" of the nuclear deal between Iran and world powers.

I asked Chris Cook, Senior Research Fellow of University College London of what Tillerson meant by 'full review', since this expression received a universally negative reception in Tehran.

Mr. Cook explained: "The expression 'full review' is ambiguous and is carefully addressed to Mr. Tillerson's Senate audience many of whom are extremely hostile to Iran. Mr. Tillerson is a very astute businessman with long experience of negotiation with heads of state. He is more aware than anyone of the binding nature of contracts and the fact that the JCPOA is non-negotiable."

He added: "Tillerson will in my view carefully reconsider (as would anyone taking up such a post) every aspect of the existing JCPOA deal. Only then will he be in a position to decide what additional agreements should or could be negotiated bilaterally with Iran."

Impossible to renegotiate
Renegotiating the current agreement according to many observers may be impossible as it is the product of lengthy and intensive negotiations between multiple parties. The lifting of the sanctions significantly provided economic opportunities for European and other companies to benefit.

Retired General James N. Mattis as Donald Trump's Secretary of Defence, despite having negative views on Iran, has defended the deal. According to news media he has said: "I don't think that we can ... take advantage of some new [president] - Republican or Democrat - and say, well, we're not going to live up to our word on this agreement. I believe we would be alone if we did, and unilateral economic sanctions from us would not have anywhere near the impact of an allied approach to this."

It is further reported that this view is shared by Senator Bob Corker and others as they have accepted the fact that the Iran deal, (JCPOA), is a broad multilateral agreement involving the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and Germany (the so-called P5+1), along with the European Union.

The EU's commercial and economic interests

The EU's interests has been emphasized by pursuing and developing its commercial and economic relations with Iran. The fact that EU politicians take into consideration, is the fact that EU has been affected seriously and directly by the turmoil and civil wars in the Middle East. EU is also concerned for its vast investments in the Caspian region's energy sector. They, also see Iran as a potentially rewarding market for EU businesses. On October 25, 2016 the European Parliament (EP) adopted a forward-looking report on relations with Iran. So, it has been analyzed that the EU will not be following the U.S. new administration policies in case they are defined against doing business as usual with Tehran. However, after the death of Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, EU experts have suggested that the EU may be in a hard position if Iranian hardliners sabotage the implementation of the deal as a response to American unilateral non-performing on its commitments. One EU businessman has been quoted as saying let's hope wise people in Tehran would control the situation in the face of possible provocations from the new Trump administration in White House and his supporters in Congress.

I asked Mr. Cook his view of the potential effect of the recent tragic death of Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, he said: "I believe that Ayatollah Rafsanjani's passing creates a vacuum which may be filled either positively or negatively. The global oil market has recently passed a historic turning point or point of inflection and I do not believe we will see oil prices sustained over \$50/barrel in the future. This limits the scope for competition and conflict for \$ profit and I take the optimistic view of a positive outcome through a new era of 'least resource cost' energy co-operation."

When I asked him to explain what he means, he added: "If I am right - and this is a point I outlined briefly to the Secretary of the Council of Expediency, H. E. Rezaei a few years ago in Tehran - then Iran is perfectly placed to mobilise the immense productive capacity, revolutionary fervour and remarkable reserves of the Fifth Fuel to develop and build out throughout the region an energy infrastructure which is fit for the 21st Century, and support ideas and concepts like Caspian Energy Grid (CEG)."

The Fifth Fuel
At a workshop during summer 2016 at ADA University in Baku I was pleased to once again meet U.S. former extraordinary ambassador to the Caspian region, Steven Mann with whom I had engaged as a friendly adversary many times during his diplomatic service, and who is now advising ExxonMobil's regional operations. During his presentation Ambassador Mann referred to the Fifth Fuel, which is an expression describing savings to be made from efficiencies in energy production. It seemed to me from my energy engineering background that the Fifth Fuel is better seen as a form of intellectual energy now fuelling 'smart' energy production, transmission and use.



Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Chairman Gholam-Hossein Shafeie (R) and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania Ditmir Bushati met in Tehran on Saturday

Shafeie for his part, expressed Iran's interest for cooperation with Albania saying, "Iran and Albania are gateways to the Middle East and Southeast Europe, and the two countries' private sectors should use the ca-

pacities." "Considering the great potentials for economic cooperation, the trade turnover between the two countries is not satisfactory," he added.

Energy as a Service

As an advisor to Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines & Agriculture (ICCIMA) Education & Research Institute and the Research Institute for Energy Management & Planning (RIEMP) of Tehran University, I was privileged to attend the World Energy Congress in Istanbul in October 2016. I was struck by the view expressed at WEC by David Hobbs, (Head of Research of King Abdullah Petroleum Studies and Research Centre), that the market for electricity as a commodity has failed and that a market for electricity as a service is now emerging. 'Energy as a Service' put into words the market mechanisms for energy diplomacy which I was involved in initiating while in office. The first of these became known as the Caspian Oil Swap and comprised the supply of Russian, Kazakh, Turkmen and Azeri oil into northern Iran in exchange for oil delivered by Iran from the Persian Gulf.

Secondly, I was involved with the concept of a swap of natural gas into Armenia for a supply of electricity into Iran. Finally there was a swap of natural gas supplied to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic for natural gas imported into Iran from the Republic of Azerbaijan which was described at the time as Energy for Peace. Now I am happy to say that President Rouhani's administration has begun to extend such energy swaps in new ways. I am also of the view that in case the government of Turkmenistan realizes the benefits of having cooperation with Iran in the field of Energy Swap in the framework of Energy as a Service, would be happy to exchange gas for petrochemical products or to become shareholder in Iran's privatized petrochemical industry or power generation projects.

Resource resilience

Collaboration has been ongoing for some time between influential Iranian and EU as well as UK research institutes to develop policies aimed at resource resilience, and this was the reason for my presence in Baku and my coincidence of views with Ambassador Mann.

At a WEC Round Table participants were fascinated to hear of the first 'Smart Trade' in 1778 by the Scottish inventor James Watt, who swapped the use of his innovative steam engine to pump water out of tin mines in exchange for a third of coal savings - Pumping as a Service, as it was explained by Mr. Chris Cook during ECO and International Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) roundtable on the margins of the WEC on 12th Oct. 2016.

This reminded me of a conversation earlier this year with Iran's Deputy Energy Minister Houshang Falahatian, who explained that he could double the efficiency of much of Iran's generation fleet (with payback in less than two years even at Iran's subsidized prices) if only he had the billions of Dollars, Pounds or Euros necessary to acquire the technology. Since Iran is unwilling, unable or both to borrow dollars, pounds or Euros to fund the technology Falahatian was therefore very interested in the possibility of a swap of efficient power generation provided as a service in exchange for the value of gas savings.

Private sector energy business diplomacy

My career in Iran's Petroleum Ministry (NIOC) which led to senior level posts including Director General for Caspian Sea Oil & Gas Affairs during the exciting period following the break-up of USSR, provided me with opportunities to gain experience through the framework of the regional Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) which Iran was able to develop a constructive doctrine of energy co-operation which came to be known as Energy Diplomacy. I can testify that the election of President Trump was as much a surprise in Iran as it was everywhere else. Now that the president-elect has appointed most of his administration, there is a great debate in Tehran as to whether Trump represents an opportunity or a threat to Iran. With reference to above discussions I am one of those optimistic people with views that Iran as the case have been so far with EU may have a successful energy diplomacy with the U.S. too. Why?

Iran benefited from sanctions

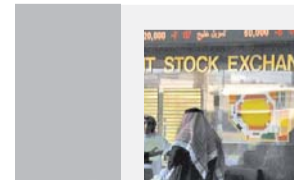
It is widely recognised in Tehran that without U.S. physical sanctions Iran would not have been as successful in developing industrial and intellectual capacity (the Fifth Fuel). Moreover, some also believe that U.S. financial sanctions acted to prevent an outflow of hard currency from Iran by corrupt members of the previous administration who are now under investigation. This would have drained Iran economically in the same way that post-Soviet looting destroyed the Russian economy. In other words, the U.S. sanctions regime was a tactical success, in that it led to negotiations, but was a strategic failure on a historic scale.

Dialogues instead of sanctions

While the outgoing President Obama declined to sign the Iran sanctions renewal, friends I have consulted with diplomatic experience in Tehran do not believe that an additional bilateral deal between the U.S. and Iran is inconsistent with the JCPOA. Virtually everyone to whom I have spoken, with the exception of a few with vested interests in continued sanctions, are of the view that if newly elected U.S. administration is willing to negotiate in a rational, business-minded and objective way, they will be well received in Tehran.

I believe that Tillerson in his new job as secretary of state could drive pragmatic commercial engagement between U.S. business communities and Iran. While competition and conflict will remain in many areas, all nations have a common interest in reducing use of finite resources and a common understanding that the more expensive finite resources become then the more profitable it is to save them.

I have long believed in energy and business for peace, and I look forward that IRN may organise the next Iran Business Symposium in Tehran in years to come that a historic US high level business executives fly on board of the first Boeing airplane on delivery to Iran for participating in such symposium to explain new era for doing business following the conclusion of a transformative and truly smart deal between our two great nations.



Kuwait stocks extend advance as banks weigh on UAE markets

Kuwait's main stock gauge, the Middle East's best performer this year, rose for an eighth day, while shares in the United Arab Emirates fell as investors prepared for the release of bank earnings. Kuwait's SE Price Index advanced 1.7 percent to the highest level since August 2015 as 98 of the measure's 182 members gained, the most in almost a year. Traders exchanged 560 million shares, more than three times the 30-day intraday average. Emirates NBD PJSC, the U.A.E.'s biggest bank, will probably release its 2016 earnings this week. The Dubai-based lender declined 1 percent.



UK inflation on the rise keeps balance tilted toward BOE hike

Faster U.K. inflation is putting the Bank of England on track for a rate hike. Eventually. That's according to the latest Bloomberg News survey of economists, which has 65 percent forecasting that the next move in the benchmark interest rate is more likely to be an increase rather than a cut. But any such move may be some time away, with the median forecast in a separate poll showing no rate change until 2019. BOE policy makers are facing a sharp pickup in consumer-price growth because of the pound's drop since the Brexit vote, with data next week forecast to show an acceleration to 1.4 percent, the strongest since 2014.



Silk Road route back in business as China train rolls into London

When the East Wind locomotive rumbles into east London this week, it will be at the head of 34 carriages full of socks, bags and wallets for London's tourist souvenir shops, as well as the dust and grime accumulated through eight countries and 7,456 miles. The train will be the first to make the 16-day journey from Yiwu in west China to Britain, reviving the ancient trading Silk Road route and shunting in a new era of UK-China relations. Due to arrive on Wednesday, the train will have passed through China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, Belgium and France before crossing under the Channel and arriving in the east end of London at Barking rail freight terminal.

Iran produces over 37.6m tons of petrochemicals in 9 months

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's desk output of petrochemical products stood at over 37.6 million tons during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2016), Shana reported citing Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC).

According to NPC Managing Director Marziyeh Shahdaie, Iran is producing 65 million tons of petrochemical products annually and the country plans to triple its installed capacity of petrochemical complexes in the next ten years.

"Iran has reached 70 percent self-sufficiency in manufacturing equipment needed in petrochemical industry," Shahdaie has stated.

The country needs \$20 billion of investment for completion of unfinished petrochemical projects across the country in 5 years, the official said last August.

After the implementation of Iran nuclear deal, NPC has received high



willingness from European companies for cooperation with Iran in the

petrochemical sector both in financing and licensing, Farnaz Alavi, the

NPC director for planning and development, announced last month.

China's top coal province to cut 20m tons of capacity in 2017: Xinhua

China's top coal-producing province Shanxi will cut 20 million tons of output capacity this year, state news agency Xinhua reported.

Tackling excess coal production capacity will remain the provincial government's priority in 2017, Xinhua quoted Shanxi Governor Lou Yangsheng as saying on Saturday.

The reduction cuts should be achieved through market and law-based means, Lou said, while mergers and acquisitions in the sector would also be encouraged.

Shanxi, in the country's north, accounts for about a quarter of coal production in China, which has been

working to curb excess capacity and a supply glut of the fossil fuel. The province shed 23.25 million tons of coal production capacity and shut down 25 coal mines last year, Xinhua said.

The province plans to cap output and consolidate the industry around big producers over the next four years in a bid to boost efficiency, according to a blueprint by the provincial government. The province's annual coal output would be capped by 2020 at 1 billion tons and capacity at 1.2 billion tons annually by 2020.

(Source: Reuters)

Bangladesh tenders to sell 170,000 barrels naphtha

Bangladesh Petroleum Corp (BPC) issued an international tender on Sunday to sell 170,000 barrels of naphtha for Feb. 20-22 loading from Chittagong, a senior company official said.

The tender will close on Feb. 1 with validity up to Feb. 9.

The tender comes at a time when Asia's naphtha crack fell five percent on Friday to \$105.60 a ton after a near 16 percent spike in the previous session to a one-year high.

Last month, state-owned BPC sold a cargo of the same size to trading company Vitol at a discount of \$1.63 to Singapore quotes.

Bangladesh's sole Eastern Refinery,



which has a capacity of 33,000 barrels per day, produces 1.26 million barrels of naphtha a year.

BPC imports 600,000 tons of Murban crude from Abu Dhabi National Oil Co and another 600,000 tons of Arab Light from Saudi Aramco annually for the refinery.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran's 1st oil, gas, petchem technomarket due in late-Feb.

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's first specialized oil, gas and petrochemicals techno market is due to be held February 20-22 in Pars Special Economic Energy Zone in the country's southwestern province of Boushehr.

According to ISNA, the country's presidential office for science and technology and Persian Gulf science and Technology Park will collaborate in holding the event.

The techno market covers upstream, midstream and downstream sectors in oil, gas and petrochemicals, which includes mechanical equipment, materials, instrumentation and industrial automation, electrical equipment, chemicals, processes, environmental and HSE, information technology, engineering services, offshore services, management services and organizational systems.

S.Korea's Dec. Iran crude imports surge 648.2% on year

South Korea's Iranian crude oil imports in December soared nearly eight times greater than a year ago, and its 2016 crude imports from Tehran more than doubled from 2015 levels, following last January's lifting of sanctions targeting the Mideast nation.

The world's fifth-largest crude importer brought 1.55 million tons of Iranian crude in December, or 367,317 barrels per day (bpd), compared with 207,629 tons a year ago and 1.73 million tons in the previous month, customs office data showed on Sunday.

In November, South Korea's Iranian crude imports more than quadrupled from a year earlier as Hyundai Chemical's new condensate splitter boosted the country's ultra-light oil demand from the Middle Eastern country.

South Korea's crude oil import data usually includes condensate, but it does not provide a breakdown.

South Korea is one of Iran's major oil customers. Seoul imported 14 million tons, or 281,187 bpd, of crude from Tehran in 2016, up 145.4 percent from 5.7 million tons, or 114,595 bpd, in 2015.

Iran, a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), was exempted from a supply cut deal agreed by OPEC members last year, capitalizing on the exemption by shipping 13 million barrels of oil from floating storage, according to industry sources and data.

Meanwhile, crude imports from Saudi Arabia in December rose 6.7 percent from a year earlier to 4.01 million tons, or 948,936 bpd. Imports from Korea's top oil supplier in full-year 2016 increased 5 percent from 2015 to 43.81 million tons, or 879,832 bpd.

(Source: Reuters)



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Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner will rule Trump's America

By Anushay Hossain

Despite ethical concerns around Donald Trump appointing his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, as senior adviser in his administration, both Kushner and his wife, Ivanka Trump, have stepped down from their respective businesses, sending a clear signal they are getting ready to enter the crucial roles they will have in Washington.

Ivanka Trump said on "60 Minutes" she would "be a daughter" when her father becomes president, but her actions have often suggested otherwise. She stumped for her father during his election campaign and worked extensively on his behalf on causes such as child care and climate change.



In August, Ivanka even got her father to unveil his policy proposals to lower child care costs, a policy that she partly crafted and included as a part of her father's political platform. She declared child care as a "top concern" of hers and pointed out how her father is "in a very unique position to do something about this problem."

"Little focus has been put on how best to alleviate enormous financial burdens child care places on low-income and middle-income families," Ivanka Trump said, flawlessly following up on the theme of empowering working mothers, whom she introduced at the Republican National Convention. As recently as last month, Ivanka was personally calling members of Congress about child care legislation and tax deductions.

Her expected work on climate change was also widely noted in the press after her meeting with actor and environmental activist Leonardo DiCaprio. She was even rumored to be her father's choice as his climate czar.

So it is confusing, to say the least, to hear her now say that she will not be working in her father's administration.

However, the truth is it really does not matter if Ivanka takes on an official role within the Trump White House or not.

President in-law

The New York Times has already crowned her the most influential first daughter since Alice Roosevelt Longworth. And with Kushner being called the "president-in-law," the two are set to become the most powerful couple in Washington.

Jared Kushner, whom many credit with having won the presidency for Donald Trump, is also expected to be his father-in-law's point policy person on the Middle East, with Trump even stating he believes Kushner could broker peace between the Israelis and Palestinians.

This almost delusional faith in his family members, particularly his children, and reliance on them in business and now politics, has become a trademark of Trump's. His children make up his closest circle, and they are the only ones who appear to be able to provide him with any kind of check and balance.

This makes Ivanka and Jared perfectly positioned to influence the incoming President in ways even his closest advisers Kellyanne Conway, Steve Bannon or Reince Priebus could never manage.

"They're ideal politicians," journalist Peter Davis says. "Because you come away from any interaction thinking they're great and nice and don't have any deeper feeling about them".

In other words, they are much more likable than Donald Trump. That's not hard to see, and it makes the couple a critical asset to the entire Trump family and brand.

And with Melania and Donald Trump adamant on spending as little time in Washington as possible, Ivanka and Jared will effectively be the de facto first couple of the United States, wielding more power together than any first daughter and son-in-law in presidential history.

As Vanity Fair explains: "The Bush daughters got more attention for their college-age shenanigans than anything else while their father was in office. Chelsea Clinton and the Obama girls were too young to play any role other than First Daughter while they occupied the White House. But the Trumps, fiercely insular, and the Trump-Kushners, intensely striving, are different. And they are about to occupy an unprecedented place in American history."

While presidents giving jobs to their kids is nothing new -- George W. Bush worked on his dad's campaign in 1988 and even helped staff the White House -- Washington has never had a president like Trump, and so has never seen the kind of formalized and powerful roles Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump are set to enter.

The President's ear

Even if Kushner's appointment as senior adviser ends up getting blocked and Ivanka gets no formal title, these two will never be far from the President's ear. And that's a huge advantage for Trump. Ivanka and Jared almost make you forget that one of the most unpopular presidential candidates in recent US history is about to become President.

Even an avid Hillary Clinton supporter such as myself can see how the couple give Trump's White House a much more appealing image than Donald Trump could ever construct, providing a dangerous distraction from the fact they will have unlimited opportunity to advance their own political and business agendas.

So are the Trumps paving the way for a new brand of American political dynasties that defy ethics and conflicts of interests? That remains to be seen. But one thing is crystal clear: When it comes to Donald Trump's America, Ivanka and Jared will be ruling it.

(Source: CNN)

Abadi enlists neighbors to support unified Iraq

By Ali Mamouri

Amid fears of interference by neighboring countries in determining the future of Iraqi territory being liberated from the Islamic State (ISIL), Baghdad has launched an intensive diplomatic effort to improve and cement relations with states in the region.

The political map in Iraq in the post-ISIL era is yet to be shaped. Will Iraq remain unified based on a political system of partnership between the Shias, Sunnis and Kurds? Will the Sunni areas be granted some sort of autonomous rule similar to the Kurdistan Region model, or will the country head toward division and secession by Sunnis and Kurdish areas? Such fears prompted Baghdad to launch a diplomatic offensive to build strategic relations with neighboring states to deter them from taking actions supportive of the inclination toward separation and division in the liberated areas.

In this regard, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi met Jan. 9 in Baghdad with his Jordanian counterpart, Hani al-Mulki, and other members of a delegation that included Jordan's ministers of energy and mineral resources, media, finance, trade and supply, agriculture, industry and transport.

Jordanian government spokesman Mohammed Hussain al-Momani said in a press statement that the two sides would discuss "ways to resume work on joint projects that had been approved earlier, primarily the oil and gas pipeline project from Basra to the port of Aqaba." The pipeline project is of great strategic significance, linking Jordanian interests to a unified Iraq and making the specter of partition something to avoid. The oil lies under the predominantly Shia south but must be transported through predominantly Sunni Anbar province.

National reconciliation project

In December 2016, numerous



There is no doubt that cementing relations at the political and economic levels with Iraq's neighbors would directly contribute to improving the situation in the post-ISIL period.

Iraqi officials visited Amman to call on the kingdom to take an active role in supporting a unified Iraq as part of its planned national reconciliation project for the post-ISIL period. Ammar al-Hakim, the head of the National Iraqi Alliance, visited Dec. 7 and shortly thereafter several Sunni leaders did the same, including parliament Speaker Salim al-Jabouri; Osama al-Nujaifi, the head of the Mutahidoun bloc; and Saleh al-Mutlaq, the head of the Arab coalition.

In the same vein, there has been a clear effort at rapprochement between Turkey and Iraq, after an escalation of hostile rhetoric between the two sides in the last months of 2016 over Turkish troops on Iraqi soil, ostensibly to train Kurdish and Arab fighters for the battle against ISIL in Mosul. On Jan. 7, Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim visited Baghdad and met

with Abadi and President Fuad Masum and Jabouri.

Abadi and Yildirim held a joint press conference in which the latter confirmed Turkish support for Iraq's unity. "We will not allow any action threatening Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Yildirim said. For his part, Abadi said, "Iraq's request for the withdrawal of Turkish troops from Bashiqa was agreed."

These conciliatory actions reflect the two countries' need to expand economic relations, as both Iraq and Turkey face economic crises with the potential to lead to social crises. They also share an interest in fighting terrorist and other armed groups, which have become of particular concern in Turkey.

ISIL has been conducting random operations in different countries, including Turkey, as its caliphate project shrinks

under intense attack, and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has established a prominent presence in Sinjar, in Iraq's Ninevah province.

It is therefore in the interest of both Baghdad and Ankara to advance a unified Iraq capable of preventing the spread of terrorist groups from Iraqi territories to neighboring countries.

Al-Monitor learned from a source in Iraqi intelligence who requested anonymity that the recent rapprochement between Iraq and Turkey was the result of ongoing efforts by the intelligence apparatus to resolve disputes between the two countries behind the scenes with Abadi's support and guidance.

The source said that efforts are also being made for a rapprochement with Saudi Arabia, which in October 2016 withdrew Ambassador Thamer Sabhan, the first Saudi ambassador to Iraq since 2003, after Iraq demanded he be replaced because of "overstepping the limits of diplomatic representation," according to the Iraqi Foreign Ministry. Riyadh has yet to appoint a new ambassador.

U.S. Ambassador to Baghdad Douglas Solomon said Dec. 21 that Saudi Arabia desires to improve bilateral relations with Iraq, following a meeting with Abdul Aziz al-Shammari, Saudi Arabia's charge d'affaires in Iraq. Solomon, who served as a former ambassador to Kuwait, Jordan and Turkey, said that many politicians in these countries are keen on stabilizing the situation in Iraq.

There is no doubt that cementing relations at the political and economic levels with Iraq's neighbors would directly contribute to improving the situation in the post-ISIL period. It all, however, boils down to the Iraqi government's ability to do so successfully. The pertinent issue is whether the Iraqi government will continue down this path or embark on a new chapter in the opposite direction.

(Source: Al Monitor)

Ban Ki-moon leaves a legacy of mediocrity

From the Middle East to Myanmar, Thailand to the South China Sea, we find only a litany of UN failures.

Ban Ki-moon ended his decade as secretary-general of the United Nations amid praise from many quarters, but this was mere diplomacy. Astute witnesses to his two terms in office know that, given the chance to stop wars, forge peace and foster international fraternity, to make the world safer and more equitable to all, he accomplished precious little. His primary goal on taking office at the beginning of 2007 was to bring lasting peace to the Middle East. In this too he failed. Ban's achievements in the area of environmental protection, specifically the Paris Protocol on climate change, allow him a legacy that is mixed at best.

Unceasing challenges

One might sympathize with Ban after what he aptly described as a decade of unceasing challenges. Conflicts constantly boiled up around the world and more often than not resisted all efforts at resolution -- in Syria, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Congo just name a few.

Syria in particular, though, demonstrated the ineffectiveness of Ban's UN. Just hours before he left office a truce in the fighting suddenly became possible not through the auspices of the UN but through agreement within a coalition of combatants.

The UN resolutely failed to get the warriors negotiating and Ban was hapless in pushing members of UN Security Council to work out a solution.

It is difficult to fairly gauge Ban's inability, over the course of his 10 years in office, to muster the necessary cooperation for such resolutions among world leaders, and yet there was failure elsewhere too.

Most worryingly, North Korea is today more of a



Conflicts constantly boiled up around the world and more often than not resisted all efforts at resolution -- in Syria, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and Congo just name a few. Syria in particular, though, demonstrated the ineffectiveness of Ban's UN.

nuclear threat than ever. The Myanmar army is involved in atrocities that some describe as genocide. More by luck than design, the squabble over territory and sovereignty in the South China Sea has calmed, though,

again, no thanks to the UN but rather to the good sense of the belligerents themselves. In Asia and elsewhere, it is the shared desire for peace and stability that's prevented conflict, not the authority of the UN or its once-vaunted peacekeeping troops.

It is interesting that Ban devoted much of his second term to human rights in Thailand, Cambodia, Bangladesh and the Philippines. Post-coup Thailand has, rightfully, come under strenuous criticism from the UN regarding rights, especially the curtailing of free speech. It appeared that Ban had decided, as an Asian, that his lasting legacy should entail the safeguarding of democratic rights in Southeast Asia (certainly a goal more easily accomplished than pacifying the Middle East). In pursuing this aim, however, Ban rarely took non-Asian countries to task for similarly trampling on basic freedoms. Their exclusion from his diatribes was sorely noted here.

Ban's successor as UN secretary general, Antonio Gutierrez, assumes office with the Syrian crisis entering a risky new phase, other zones of conflict still simmering and terrorists at large everywhere. It's his turn now to face the challenges, but there is one area in which he is expected to do better than Ban. As the UN's long-time High Commissioner for Refugees, Gutierrez visited Myanmar refugees camped on the Thai border in 2006. A relative handful of them have returned home since October, but even the repatriation of a few is a positive development. Far more daunting will be the migration crisis afflicting Europe, yet there is confidence that the new UN chief, a former prime minister of Portugal, is better poised to tackle that task too than was his predecessor.

(Source: The Nation)

Africa's unique vulnerability to violent extremism

By Mohamed Yahya

Africa bears the brunt of lives lost, economies ruined, and relationships fractured by terrorism. It is the continent where al-Qaeda launched its war against the United States in 1998, by bombing the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; where Boko Haram kidnapped 276 Nigerian schoolgirls in 2014; and where 147 students were killed in their sleep at Kenya's Garissa University in 2015.

While these attacks did garner the world's attention, most people do not realize that, in the past five years alone, 33,000 people have died in terrorism-related violence in Africa. Violent extremism and groups espousing it are threatening to reverse Africa's development gains not only in the near term, but also for decades to come.

African countries are particularly

vulnerable to violent ideologues, owing to the prevalence of weak institutions and ungoverned territory where extremist groups can germinate. Add to this the mismanagement of ethnic and religious diversity, stir in a large and growing cohort of unemployed and digitally connected youth, and the continent offers ideal conditions for mayhem.

Putting "hard" security

Emulating countries elsewhere, African governments have responded to violent extremism primarily by putting "hard" security first. But this strategy has not reduced extremist groups' potency or limited their reach. In fact, there is evidence that an exclusively military response can be a waste of resources, or even do more harm than good. What is missing is a deeper examination of root causes, particularly underlying development challenges.

Some people claim that the connection between socioeconomic conditions and

violent extremism is specious, because most poor and marginalized communities do not join terrorist groups. But this argument fails to address the relevant issue: poverty, social marginalization, and political disenfranchisement are the fertilizers extremist groups need to take root and grow. Around the world, policies and operational responses to violent extremism are largely informed by theory, rather than drawing on thorough empirical evidence of the personal motivations and structural factors that drive people to commit terrorist acts.

I recently visited Galkayo, in North Somalia, to interview captured al-Shabaab fighters as part of an ongoing United Nations Development Program study of the roots of African extremism. What struck me was that, apart from their being imprisoned, these young men seemed entirely normal, and their individual journeys toward extremism were not particularly informed by religion.

Rather, what united the young al-Shabaab fighters I spoke to was a shared experience of deprivation. They had all grown up surrounded by conflict, and none of them had ever been given a good reason to view the government as a positive force in their lives. When I asked whether they went to public school, most could not even fathom the idea of free education or health care. These children and young adults are by-products of a failed state and society; they have spent their entire lives in an environment that is ripe for terrorist recruitment and exploitation.

Just as tuberculosis infects a body already compromised by HIV, extremism thrives under the right conditions, such as those created by the conflict in Somalia, or the political fragility and social neglect in northeastern Nigeria, where many interviewees cited scarce access to both religious and secular education.

Aid drawn partly from obscure tranche devoted to conflict, stability and security sparks concerns about transparency and Bahrain's poor human rights record

The government is facing fresh questions about Britain's aid strategy after it emerged that a controversial multi-million pound programme of support for Bahrain's security and justice system is being bolstered this year, even as the Gulf state reverses reforms to a key intelligence agency accused of torture.

Data provided under the Freedom of Information Act reveals that Bahraini authorities will this year receive a further £2m of British funding, including aid money drawn from the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, a pot of aid money

Human rights campaigners have expressed concerns that funding projects through the CSSF raises the risk of UK complicity in abuses, or involvement in the whitewashing of those abuses.

Last year, Britain spent £2.1m on a package of "reform assistance" to the Bahraini security sector, overseen by the Foreign Office. Programmes funded by the CSSF were titled "reform and rehabilitation system" and "sharing UK experience and best practice", according to details published online by the Foreign Office but subsequently deleted. A £500,000 component listed under the category "public order" has alarmed rights activists, who have been heavily critical of Bahraini riot police's suppression of pro-democracy activists.

MPs probing the CSSF, a financial pool worth more than £1bn a year, expressed frustration after an evidence session with the national security strategy committee in which they questioned Mark Lyall Grant, the national security

adviser to the prime minister. The MPs said he provided scant details about how the money is spent.

During the session, Labour MP Julian Lewis said there was "a high degree of ambiguity" about the status of the fund. He asked: "Shouldn't we make up our minds... that either the expenditure of £1.1bn in this financial year will be disclosed in full to this committee, or shall we tear up the fiction that we are in any way able to hold you to account as to how you are spending this very large sum of money?"

Lyall Grant replied: "I understand exactly what you're saying and it may be that if we meet in private then it will be possible to share more information with you."

The CSSF, which operates in more than 40 countries, is overseen by the National Security Council, a cabinet committee including senior ministers, military chiefs and secret service heads.

The Labour party has claimed that the fund offers further evidence of the "militarisation" of Britain's development budget, while NGOs have privately expressed reservations about the lack of transparency surrounding how the reserves are spent. One international NGO described the funding as "a black hole."

The programme was launched in April 2015 to replace a fund known as the conflict pool, which was also subject

Human rights abuses in Bahrain cast shadow over £2m UK aid support



to accusations of a lack of transparency. The pool was criticised by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact for performing poorly.

Human rights group Reprieve said of UK aid to Bahrain: "It's troubling that the government sees fit to keep spending taxpayers' money on these programmes, given such apparently poor results - and given the clear risk of complicity in abuse. If ministers are determined to wave through more security aid to Bahrain, then they must urgently make that funding conditional on an end to the worst abuses - including the politically motivated use of the death penalty."

The Bahraini government continues

to curtail freedoms of expression, association and assembly and crackdown on dissent, according to Amnesty International.

Torture and other abuses remain common, said Amnesty, with authorities frequently using excessive force against demonstrators. Dozens of people have been killed since February 2011, when Bahrain's Shia majority launched protests aimed at securing a greater political voice in the Sunni-ruled kingdom.

Responding during the evidence session to a question from MPs about the assessment of human rights risks in projects in Bahrain, Lyall Grant said:

"There will be occasions when the Na-

tional Security Council decides that we should discontinue a programme. We did that with one of the prison programmes in Saudi Arabia earlier this year, for instance. But in Bahrain those programmes are seen to have some effect and we are continuing with them."

A Foreign Office spokesperson said: "The UK continues to work closely with the government of Bahrain to encourage progress on human rights, which includes building effective and accountable institutions, strengthening the rule of law, and police and judicial reform. Any assistance we give to the government of Bahrain complies with the UK's domestic and international human rights obligations."

Fahad A al-Binali, first secretary at Bahrain's embassy in the UK, said co-operation with Britain had focused on areas of police and security reform as well as the justice system. Bahrain had drawn on the UK's experience to meet an urgent need to establish institutions that could gain public confidence, he added.

"There is an acknowledgement that more needs to be done, but, at the same time, there is demonstrable evidence from the reports of these institutions that a lot of progress has been made," said al-Binali.

He added that Bahrain's security forces were operating against a backdrop of rising attacks on the police and

large quantities of bomb-making material being recovered.

Sayed Alwadaei, director of advocacy at the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, said a new environment for abuse was being created after the Bahraini government moved last week to return the powers of arrest to its National Security Agency. An independent inquiry commission backed by the UK had called for the agency, accused of being central to torture at the height of the 2011 Arab Spring protests, to be deprived of those powers.

"We have been saying for a long time now that the UK should suspend its technical assistance to Bahrain until guarantees including the visit by the UN special rapporteur on torture are enforced," said Alwadaei.

"Without such guarantees, the UK's work with the ombudsman and police is just window-dressing. The UK continues to be part of the human rights problem in Bahrain, when it should be a part of the solution."

Kate Osamor, Labour's shadow international development secretary, said: "The militarisation of the foreign aid budget sets an alarming precedent whereby an increasing proportion of aid money is being delivered to middle-income conflict states. The backdrop to all of this is an ever decreasing level of transparency and oversight."

(Source: The Guardian)

I am extremely concerned about the situation of Bahrain: Ayatollah Khamenei

On Sunday, Al Khalifa regime in Bahrain executed 3 young activists who were allegedly involved in a car bomb attack on police forces in 2014. The execution acme amid public anger as well as international protests whereas Dr. Agnes Callamard, UN Special Rapporteur on Extra-Judicial Executions and Director of Global Freedom of Expression in Columbia University called execution of Abbas al-Samea, Ali al-Singace and Sami Mushaima as evident "torture, unfair trial and flimsy evidence" describing that "these are extrajudicial killings."

With the rise of oppression and violence of the regime against people in Bahrain, including massive detentions, torture and revoking nationalities, concerns for the tiny Persian Gulf island are voiced amid silence of the West and supports of countries such as the UK and the U.S.

Here is a review of concerns Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei has expressed on situation of Bahrain in recent years.

■ The U.S. seeks to pass off the Bahraini uprising as a Shia-Sunni conflict

In terms of its nature the issue of Bahrain is essentially the same as the issues of other regional countries. That is to say, the issue of Bahrain is not at all different from the issue of Egypt and Tunisia. It is all about a nation whose government ignores its rights. What is the goal of the popular uprising of the Bahraini people? Their main demand is that there should be elections in which each person can have one vote. Is this too much to expect? In Bahrain there is a superficial democratic façade, but the Bahraini people cannot really vote. They are being oppressed. Westerners took this opportunity to interfere in the affairs of the regional countries by bringing up a new issue: the Shia-Sunni issue. Just because the poor people of Bahrain happen to be Shia, nobody in the world should support them. The

TV channels that used to cover the details of the regional issues should now be silent about the events in Bahrain. They should not reflect the killing of the people of Bahrain. And then some people in Persian Gulf States - whether politicians or journalists - start talking nonsense, saying that the issue of Bahrain is a Shia-Sunni war. What Shia-Sunni war? It is the protest of a nation against the oppression that is being imposed on it, just like what happened in Tunisia and Egypt and just like what is happening in Libya and Yemen: there is no difference.

The Americans would be happy to use their propaganda machines in the region and pass off the issue of Bahrain as a Shia-Sunni conflict. They would be happy to both block the support that is offered to the oppressed Bahraini people and to change the nature of issues and promote them. They ask why Iran is supporting the people of Bahrain. Well, we support everybody. We have been supporting the Palestinian people for 32 years. Which country, which government and which nation has offered support to the Palestinian nation during the past 32 years? Are the Palestinian people Shia? Our people made a lot of efforts regarding the issue of Gaza. Once our youth went to the airport, prepared to go to Gaza. They wanted to go to Gaza and fight Israel. They thought they could do so, but they would not let them in. We told them not to go. We stopped them because we did not want them to get blocked outside the borders of Gaza. There was no chance they would let anybody in. Our people expressed their emotions in the case of Gaza, Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia and other places. But they were not Shia. Therefore, this is not a Shia-Sunni issue. They are making spiteful and malevolent efforts to present the issue of Bahrain as a Shia-Sunni issue. Unfortunately, some people who do not have any evil motives fell into this trap. If there are benevolent people



involved in this issue, I would like to tell them, "Do not make this a Shia-Sunni issue." This would be the greatest service to America. This would be the greatest service to the enemies of the Islamic Ummah who are trying to present the anti-tyranny movement of a nation as a Shia-Sunni Conflict. This is not a Shia-Sunni conflict.



We do not distinguish between Gaza, Palestine, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain and Yemen. Oppression against nations should be condemned everywhere. We approve of national movements that shout Islamic slogans and seek freedom. After the tanks of the Saudi government were deployed in the streets of Manama in Bahrain, the Americans showed how shameful they are when they announced that they do not consider the Saudi involvement in Bahrain as foreign interference. But when our marja taqlids, religious scholars and benevolent people tell them not to kill the people, they accuse us of interference. Is this interference? When we tell an oppressive regime not to kill its own people, they call this interference, but when a foreign government deploys its tanks in the streets of Bahrain, they say they

do not consider it foreign interference! Such moves, such statements and such propaganda show how shameful the Americans and their regional subordinates are. Of course we believe that the Saudi government made a mistake. It should not have done this. It will only become hated in the region. The Americans are thousands of kilo-

meters away from this region. Being hated in the region may not be very important to them. But the Saudis are living in this region. If nations of the region hate them, they will have to pay a huge price. They made a mistake, and anybody else who follows them will make the same mistake.

March 21, 2011

■ Any popular uprising driven by determination will definitely achieve victory

I am extremely concerned about the situation of Bahrain. The people of Bahrain are being oppressed. Certain promises are made to them but these promises are not kept. The Bahraini nation is an innocent and oppressed nation. Of course any movement that is carried out for the sake of God and is driven by determination, will definitely achieve victory. This is true everywhere

and Bahrain is not an exception.

Aug 31, 2011

■ People of Bahrain have been the most oppressed

Of course, among the nations the people of Bahrain have been the most oppressed. This is because there has been a news blackout in the world on the issues of Bahrain. According to no human and global logic is their demand illegitimate. Their demand is legitimate, but they have been oppressed. They have been totally ignored by the media and they have even been the target of constant negative propaganda. Of course, this propaganda is futile and by Allah's favor, the Bahraini people will achieve victory as well.

Feb 3, 2012

■ Mainstream Media tries to isolate people of Bahrain and their movement

As an obvious example, notice that today all media companies of the world are trying to isolate the people of Bahrain and their movement. What is the reason? The reason is that the issue is a Shia-Sunni issue: they want to foment discord. They want to draw lines and separate Muslims. There is no difference between pious Muslims who have a tendency towards this or that Islamic denomination. Islam is the aspect that all of these denominations have in common. Unity of Islamic Ummah is the aspect that all of them have in common. The secret behind victory and the continuation of the movement is reliance on God, trust in Him and maintaining unity and cohesion.

Jan 30, 2012

■ Uprising in Bahrain will never die

We expressed our view in a clear way. We were never intimidated by the frown of the so-called powers of the world. We did not pay attention to their frown, and we never will. We announce our righteous position in a

clear way. The righteous position is that the people of Bahrain have the right to protest. You can discuss this with any insightful person in the world. Explain their situation to him. Explain the way the oppressed Bahraini people are being governed. Explain what the rulers did to take advantage of this small country. Then see if they condemn the ruling system or not. They are making a mistake: confronting the people is useless. You may pressure the people violently and manage to put down the uprising for a short time, but the uprising will not die out. You will further infuriate the people on a daily basis. One day you will lose control of the situation, and it will be impossible for you to set things right. They are making a mistake. Both the Bahraini government and those who send forces to Bahrain are making a serious mistake. They think they can annihilate a popular movement through these things.

April 23, 2011

■ People of Bahrain are seeking democracy

On the issue of Bahrain, what do the people of Bahrain want? The people of Bahrain say that every individual from among the nation should be given a vote in order to elect the government. A vote for each person. Well, are you not speaking about democracy? Are you not saying that you are the emblem of democracy? Are you not saying that you want to defend democracy? Very well, is there any kind of democracy which is clearer than this? Not only do they not give them the right to vote, but they also pressure, insult and humiliate the majority of the population. These people form the majority of the population. These people who are asserting their rights form 70, 80 percent of the population. The oppressive minority has the power in his hands and he is doing whatever he wants to them.

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مالکین محترم

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ویلا، مستغلات، اداری و تجاری) به ما بسپارید.

بهترین مشاوره، برترین سرویس، بالاترین رضایت

مالکین محترم املاک مبلمه و غیر مبلمه، مسکونی، اداری و تجاری، ویلا و مستغلات
شما را جهت اجاره به سفارتخانه ها و شرکت های خارجی نیازمندیم.

مالکین محترم

ویلاهای شما را جهت اجاره به منزل سفیر و مدیران
شرکت های بین المللی در مناطق شمالی تهران
نیازمندیم.

How we 'fixed' our diabetic dad - and saved his life

When their father, Geoff, was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes at the age of 50, brothers Ian and Anthony Whittington were not hugely surprised, and for 10 years, they drifted along and watched from the sidelines.

"Dad had always been the 'big man'," says Anthony, 39. "As kids, we thought it was funny. Dad could drink more than anyone, he could eat more than anyone. It was his identity. That's our dad and that's what he does."

"As we got older, of course we worried," adds Ian, 37. "But everyone around us would say, 'If he doesn't want to change, you can't change him. He has to do it himself.'" So nothing much was done - and Geoff joined the 3.5m adults in the UK who manage their diabetes with ever-greater doses of medication and regular check-ups.

"We were all resigned to our family roles," says Anthony. "I was a busy financial adviser with four kids of my own. Ian was a busy cameraman with jobs all over the world. Dad was a funny fat guy who drank too much."

The wake-up calls were different for both of them. For Anthony, it was a family trip to Chessington zoo in 2013. By then, Geoff weighed 127kg (20 stone), had high blood pressure, atrial fibrillation (abnormal heart rhythm), plus everything diabetes could throw at him - a swollen prostate, poor circulation, ulcers on one foot and a bone deformity on the other.

"We were walking around this theme park when the bones collapsed through his foot," says Anthony. "I remember him grabbing a railing, the blood in his sock, getting him back to the car. Suddenly, this thing that the doctor was managing was very clearly something that wasn't being managed. Dad was seeing people at the foot clinic who had had a limb removed - and the average lifespan after amputation for a diabetic is two years. We were losing him."

When Anthony called his brother to say time was running out, Ian needed no convincing.

"The rock bottom for me had been my wedding," says Ian. "Dad stayed up longer than everyone else - he was always the last one in the room, sitting there with a bottle of brandy. I remember looking at him and it was just horrendous. He was crumpled. He couldn't get up and dance because of his feet, but he was quite emotional. He said something along the lines of: 'I've done my job. You're my greatest achievement.' It was as if that was it. He didn't need to exist any more."

In 2014, when Geoff was 62, his sons stepped in with their own special intervention that included a complete lifestyle overhaul, multiple health consultations, family holidays and heart-to-hearts, pacts, promises and pretty much constant rows. Two years later and 45kg (seven stone) lighter, Geoff raced through a 100-mile cycle ride from London to Surrey. He has now been taken off all his diabetes medication as well as his blood pressure pills. He says his sons saved his life - and it's no exaggeration.

As a professional cameraman, Ian filmed most of the journey, and their documentary, *Fixing Dad*, aired on BBC2 last summer. Anthony's wife, Jen, a fitness trainer, co-produced the film. There's also an app for those wishing to do the same,



Geoff Whittington and his sons, Ian, left, and Anthony. Photograph: Linda Nyland for the Guardian

and a book, written by Jen, that includes a meal and exercise program, plus advice on the mental leaps needed to fix a stubborn family member. The "fixing" terminology couldn't be more apt for a man like Geoff - who has spent most of his life fixing things for others.

"Everyone described Dad as 'generous to a fault,'" says Anthony. "He'd pay the parking fines of complete strangers. As kids, we saw him stop the car in the street to chase after muggers. I remember when my wife, Jen, was having a bad day after our first child was born. I was at work so she phoned my dad. We were living in Surrey at the time and Dad said: 'I'll come over now. Is there anything you need?' It turned out he was 100 miles away, but he told Jen he was just down the road."

"We owed Dad a lot," Ian agrees. The

couldn't pass a McDonald's without pulling in, and there was always a can of Coke rolling round the floor of his van.)

So what made him agree to this project? Was it to save himself or to please his sons? "I suppose a little bit of both," he says. "I certainly didn't think it could help or change anything - I didn't know anyone who had reversed diabetes. As far as the filming part was concerned, I ignored it, as that was never going to make it on to the TV. It was another of their little projects that was never going to go anywhere! But they asked me to go along with it for a period of time, like a contract, and I agreed."

They kicked off with a roadtrip to the Pyrenees. "Dad's surroundings weren't helping him, so we wanted to get him away from his takeaways, his TV dinners

When their father's diabetes threatened his life, Ian and Anthony Whittington stepped in with a radical diet and fitness plan. It was a hard slog, but it worked.

boys had grown up in Bromley and their parents divorced when they were eight and 10 years old. "It changed the dynamic massively. We were with Mum in the week and Dad at the weekend - and we got into this pattern of Dad not being able to do enough for us. We didn't miss holidays that richer kids were going on because Dad put it on a credit card. If we wanted to do something, he let us. He was spoiling us, really, and by the time we were adults, his debts were so bad, he was a BT engineer in the day and working nights on the Underground and as a security guard. We felt a lot of guilt about that."

So why was Geoff so good at looking after others, but hopeless looking after himself? Perhaps, with busy, grown children, he felt a bit redundant. "I think I'd reached the point in my life where my children were happy, they had their jobs, they were OK. I'd worked all my life, I'd done my job and I wasn't needed," says Geoff, who has been married to Marilyn, the boy's stepmother, for 20 years.

"My wife was going to be the one to suffer if anything did happen to me, but I suppose I didn't give it much thought. My life involved working very long hours, which meant a lot of driving around, and a lot of stopping and eating." (His sons claim Geoff

and fridge full of cellophane," says Anthony. "The old, fun Dad was disappearing, and we wanted to find that sense of adventure. We got him cooking, cycling, tombstoning. I'm not sure jumping into ice-cold water in the Pyrenees in February is the best thing for someone with atrial fibrillation, but I've never seen him as elated as when he got out of that plunge pool."

While they were away, they talked about Geoff's mother - a shop worker who would do anything for anyone, and who died from septicemia at 69, when her stomach ulcers went undetected.

"It needn't have happened and that upsets me more than anything else. I didn't want my sons to feel like that about me," says Geoff. On the last night, they went through photo albums and looked at old family pictures, as well as pictures of his grandchildren. "We said: 'This is all about your family, who don't want you to be dead in two years,'" says Anthony. "We made a pact and Dad promised to commit to this - we made him swear on the only book he has ever read - *Shadow the Sheepdog*."

Back in the UK, the brothers dug out Geoff's bike and got him back on it - at first with Anthony running behind pushing him up the hills. "After just three weeks, he was

at his foot clinic and they said, 'My God, we're not having to scrape the ulcers as much. The bloodflow is there - what have you been doing?'" says Anthony. "That gave Dad hope. It kept him going."

Discovering a very low-calorie diet that was having some success in reversing diabetes was another breakthrough. The Diabetes UK-funded study by Professor Roy Taylor at Newcastle University put patients on an eight-weeks 800 calories per day diet. This was followed by a long-term, low-carb regime, as close monitoring of Geoff's blood sugar levels showed that carbs were causing significant spikes.

It wasn't easy. There were a lot of rows. "We were turning our relationship on its head and it got to the part where we were very obviously being the parents and Dad resisted that," says Anthony.

"It almost felt like bullying at times, with both of them firing at me together," agrees Geoff. A typical example is early on when the two were coming to Geoff's so he bought a Chinese takeaway. "It was a treat and I'd tried to pick foods that were 'compliant,'" says Geoff.

"But he'd bought enough for 20 people," says Ian. "The whole table was covered and so we had a go at him. He wouldn't talk to us for two days!"

This, says Ian, is why families are in a stronger position than health professionals. "The way you eat is incredibly emotional and if you criticize somebody around food, you can upset them very quickly. You need to get over that a bit. Families can cross the line and go where professionals are never going to be able to go. We could say things that a doctor could never dream of saying. You can't be nicey-nicey all the time. You've got to challenge each other. Something we'd say to anybody is don't be afraid of that conflict."

When they meet, they are still bickering over a toffee bonbon that Geoff had eaten the previous day while babysitting for Ava, Anthony's seven-year-old daughter. (Ava had a bag full of them.) Ava promptly told her dad. A series of angry messages were exchanged, with Geoff telling Anthony to find another babysitter. ("He's not the finished article," sighs Anthony. "But he's in reverse gear.")

Despite the odd slip, everyone appears to be glowing with good health. Anthony and Ian also lost 32kg (five stone) between them - they didn't ask Geoff to do anything they couldn't do themselves - while Marilyn has lost 19kg (three stone). The couple cycle together, cook together, and they have ditched the takeaways and TV dinners. "We sit at the table and eat now and we talk about food," says Geoff. "We really enjoy it."

With the new book out, the father-and-son team are about to mentor four new families through a similar health overhaul, and are travelling the world as speakers at medical conferences. Anthony has resigned from his career in finance and Geoff has been able to say goodbye to his punishing night shifts.

And in between this, Geoff is back fixing things again. "I just renovated Ian's shed, rebuilt the roof and I did Anthony's garage, too. I've put shelves up for him. Before all this, I couldn't have got on a ladder. It has been the best three years of my life - and I just feel terrific."

(Source: *The Guardian*)

Cognitive therapy improves behavior issues in kids with night terrors

By Lisa Rapaport

Young children who receive cognitive behavior therapy to help them cope with night terrors may have fewer behavior problems tied to poor sleep than kids who receive therapy that doesn't include advice on how to manage symptoms, a recent study suggests.

The study focused on 90 children, ages 4 to 6, with severe and persistent fears that interfere with normal functioning and cause considerable stress for kids and their families.



These night terrors affect about 10 percent of children, and are much more debilitating than the occasional nightmares that wake kids every so often.

Researchers randomly assigned the children into two groups. One group received cognitive behavior therapy involving structured play with their parents designed to build coping skills. The other group received non-directive therapy involving playtime with parents but no guidance on how to manage the sleep issues.

Four weeks after treatment, all of the children had significantly fewer nighttime fears and sleep disruptions. With cognitive therapy, however, parents reported more improvements in sleep and behavior.

This suggests that cognitive behavior therapy, an established treatment for older kids with sleep problems, may also work with young children when a play component is added, said lead study author Michael Kahn.

"The take-home message for parents is that sleep problems in the preschool age can be successfully treated with very brief interventions," Kahn said by email.

"Parents could try addressing the problem on their own by being aware of their own cognitions and knowledge regarding sleep (for example, understanding the importance of regular bedtime routines), by speaking to their child about it and trying to find creative solutions that would help him or her to spend the night in their own bed (e.g., using a stuffed animal, a flashlight, placing a picture of the family near the child's bed, etc.), and by limiting the extent of their accommodation to the child's attempts to avoid falling and staying asleep in his own bed," Kahn added.

For kids receiving cognitive behavior therapy in the study, researchers encouraged parents and kids to role play with dolls in a doll house bedroom to practice bedtime routines. Children would act out going to sleep and parents would gradually play smaller and smaller parts at bedtime and during the night to model the independent sleep habits they wanted kids to develop.

During these games, kids could earn rewards like stickers after successfully completing sleep exercises.

Children assigned to the control group didn't get guidance on how to practice a good bedtime routine or cope with nighttime awakenings.

Researchers measured sleep using devices that track sleep, called actigraphs, and by asking parents how well children slept.

The actigraph measurements didn't show more sleep improvement with cognitive behavior therapy, but parents in this group reported greater reductions in kids' sleep problems and co-sleeping, researchers report in *Sleep Medicine*.

The researchers admit that because they used a variety of different therapy approaches, it's difficult to pinpoint how each treatment component may have influenced how well kids managed to sleep through the night in their own beds.

The study may also have been too small to determine statistically meaningful differences in some of the interventions tested.

Even so, the findings add to a large body of evidence suggesting behavior therapy helps reduce bedtime problems and nighttime awakenings, said Jocelyn Thomas, a psychology researcher at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia who wasn't involved in the study.

"This treatment is based on the theory of learned behavior and involves teaching the parent to manage the child's behavior," Thomas said by email. (Source: *Reuters*)

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10 hot titles of IT world

By Alireza Khorasani

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

- 1** Snapchat hires former Sony Entertainment exec Michael Lynton as chairman.
Mr. Lynton is not expected to play a direct management role, but rather focus on matters involving strategy and governance in support of Evan Spiegel, Snap's chief executive.
Snap is expected to go public — with an eye toward being valued at \$30 billion or more — this spring.
- 2** New Moto phone(s) will be announced at MWC 2017, they could announce the Moto G5 and Moto G5 Plus.
As its name suggests, the Moto G5 Plus should succeed last year's Moto G4 Plus. Its highlight features seemingly include Android 7 Nougat, a 5.5-inch 1080p display, an octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 625 processor, and a 3080 mAh battery.
- 3** Nintendo's new Switch gaming console will allow for remote parental controls via a smartphone app.
Parents using the app will be able to set limits for their child in regards to how long they can play on the Switch for or how late in the day they'll be able to use it.
- 4** Barnes & Noble pulls Nook Tablet 7-inch from sale due to faulty charger.
The bookseller's latest attempt to compete with Amazon's Kindle Fire tablets suffers a major setback as reports of the charging adapter breaking force the company to halt selling its new \$50 slate.
- 5** Android Wear 2.0 to launch in February.
After many delays, Google's wearable platform will receive a major update in February according to an email sent to developers.
- 6** Hacked Yahoo Data Is for Sale on Dark Web.
Hold Security firm said that hackers were actively trying to sell the stolen Yahoo data for as much as \$200,000, although current bids are coming in at \$20,000 to \$50,000 since the data is much less valuable now that Yahoo has changed the passwords.
- 7** A new study by the McKinsey Global Institute shows Robots will take jobs, but Not as Fast as Some Fear.
The report, which was released last Thursday, breaks jobs down by work tasks — more than 2,000 activities across 800 occupations, from stock clerk to company boss.
- 8** "Father of Android," Andy Rubin, will be producing a brand new smartphone for a company called Essential Products Inc. This is a small company made up of 40 employees, many of whom previously toiled for Apple, Samsung and Google.
While one prototype reportedly carries a 5.5-inch display, Essentials is also rumored to be testing a feature similar to Apple's 3D Touch.
- 9** FCC Chairman and net neutrality champion Tom Wheeler will be stepping down next week when the Trump administration takes office. Wheeler's Open Internet Order, which passed in 2015, was instrumental in keeping the internet a level playing field, but the Republicans have already indicated that rolling back the legislation will be a top priority for them once the GOP regains control of the agency.
- 10** The largest NHS trust in England has been hit by a cyber-attack that could affect thousands of files across at least four London hospitals.
Barts health trust, which runs five hospitals in east London — the Royal London, St Bartholomew's, Whipps Cross, Mile End and Newham — has sent a message to staff urging them not to open email attachments from unknown senders.

IT IRAN

22% of over-6-years-old Iranian Internet users read online mass media

By Shataw Naseri

According to estimates on online content consumption in Iran, 22% of the Internet users older than 6 years, read online newspapers, magazines as well as digital books, Mehr News Agency reported.

Online content consumption across the nation based on Iran's ICT indicators monitoring system till the end of last year was announced by the Official Portal of Measuring Information Society.

This portal uses the results of a survey on households and individuals benefit from ICT.

According to the results, 57.4% of Iranian households have access to a computer and 55.5% of households use the Internet. Furthermore, 45.3% of Iranians over 6 years old are Internet users.

Moreover, Iranians' access to ICT tools compared to three year ago shows that the number of mobile users has increased by 15% and Iranian households' access to computer has escalated by 25%, as well.

The number of Iranian computer users has increased by 20% compared to three years ago and, also, the number of Internet users has grown by 51%. Furthermore, the households' access to the Internet has escalated by 46% during these two years.

Following the escalation of online content consumption, 59% of Iranian Internet users adopt online music, video and games. However, solely, 7% of over-6-years-old Iranian Internet users watch TV on the net.

Based on Iran's resistance economy as well as Sixth Development Plan goals, the volume of online content production has to reach 10 times of the current amount by 2021, this is while, according to Iran ICT indicators monitoring system, the amount of online content production by the Iranian Internet users is 8%.

Your WhatsApp messages can easily be spied on, and Facebook made sure to keep it that way



In a lot of people's minds, Facebook is this huge cyber villain that gathers data on everyone and keeps tabs, not unlike Orwell's Big Brother. And after coming across some information in The Guardian, we can't really blame them.

Facebook repeatedly claimed that no one can spy on WhatsApp messages, not even its own staff. These claims came after the company was in the hot seat, due to its acquisition of the IM service and its questionable change to WhatsApp's privacy policy. However, a security backdoor has been discovered in the WhatsApp service that allows Facebook and third-party hackers to intercept and read said encrypted messages.

WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption relies on the generation of unique security keys through the use of the Signal protocol. That's the same system that's used by the Signal messaging app that Edward Snowden vouched for. There's one key difference in WhatsApp's implementation, though.

WhatsApp has the ability to force the generation of new encryption keys for offline users, without the knowledge of neither the sender, nor the recipient. It can then make the sender re-encrypt the messages with the new keys and send them again if they were not marked as delivered prior to that. The recipient is not notified about the new encryption keys, and the sender is only prompted if they have specifically opted-in to encryption warnings in the settings, and only after the message has been successfully sent. This means that, by the time the sender is notified of the change, a third party could have received the new messages already.

The vulnerability was discovered by Tobias Boelter, a cryptography and security researcher at the University of California, Berkeley. "If WhatsApp is asked

by a government agency to disclose its messaging records, it can effectively grant access due to the change in keys," he said for the Guardian. Boelter contacted Facebook about the backdoor back in April 2016, but he was told by the company that this is actually "expected behavior" and it isn't being actively worked on.

Boelter's finding were confirmed by Steffen Tor Jensen, head of information security and digital counter-surveillance at the European-Bahraini Organisation for Human Rights. He said for The Guardian: "WhatsApp can effectively continue flipping the security keys when devices are offline and re-sending the message, without letting users know of the change till after it has been made, providing an extremely insecure platform."

But what we've said so far, you could assume that this exploit could be used to spy only on single messages, and not entire conversations. However, Boelter thinks otherwise. "This is not true if you consider that the WhatsApp server can just forward messages without sending

the 'message was received by recipient' notification (or the double tick), which users might not notice," he said. "Using the retransmission vulnerability, the WhatsApp server can then later get a transcript of the whole conversation, not just a single message."

Other cyber-security experts also commented the issue for The Guardian. Professor Kirstie Ball, co-director and founder of the Centre for Research into Information, Surveillance and Privacy, called the backdoor "a gold mine for security agencies" and "a huge betrayal of user trust." She believes that users should be concerned about it, and said: "Consumers will say, I've got nothing to hide, but you don't know what information is looked for and what connections are being made."

Jim Killock, executive director of Open Rights Group, said: "If companies claim to offer end-to-end encryption, they should come clean if it is found to be compromised — whether through deliberately installed backdoors or security flaws. In the

UK, the Investigatory Powers Act means that the technical capability notices could be used to compel companies to introduce flaws — which could leave people's data vulnerable."

When The Guardian asked specifically whether Facebook or WhatsApp had accessed users' messages, and whether either has done so at the request of a government agency, it was directed to Facebook's page that details the number of government requests for Facebook data.

The whole Facebook/WhatsApp privacy saga started in 2014, when Facebook acquired the messaging service, but Zuck and company have been on watch-dog radars a while before that. We don't doubt that the existence of this backdoor will certainly add some more fuel to the fire.

And finally WhatsApp answered with a statement on the matter. Here's the full print: "The Guardian posted a story this morning claiming that an intentional design decision in WhatsApp that prevents people from losing millions of messages is a "backdoor" allowing governments to force WhatsApp to decrypt message streams. This claim is false.

WhatsApp does not give governments a "backdoor" into its systems and would fight any government request to create a backdoor. The design decision referenced in the Guardian story prevents millions of messages from being lost, and WhatsApp offers people security notifications to alert them to potential security risks. WhatsApp published a technical white paper on its encryption design, and has been transparent about the government requests it receives, publishing data about those requests in the Facebook Government Requests Report."

(Source: phonearena)

Phone hacking Israeli firm Cellebrite gets hacked, 900 GB of user data stolen



And now in ironic news, Cellebrite, an Israeli company specializing in data extraction and phone hacking services for governments and law enforcement, has been hacked. Motherboard has obtained 900 GB of the company's data through an undisclosed source and has verified its legitimacy, with the company itself later confirming the data breach.

Cellebrite became famous after being linked to FBI's attempts to hack San Bernadino killer Syed Rizwan Farook's iPhone. Its main product is a device called the Universal Forensic Extraction Device (UFED), whose purpose is extracting data from locked mobile phones. According to Motherboard, the data appears to come partly from the company's my.cellebrite domain, the user section of their website, and includes pieces of evidence from hacked mobile phones, along with usernames and passwords for accessing

the company's website.

The company issued a statement on its website confirming the data breach and stating that an investigation is underway. The press release claims the stolen information is from an older account database and includes basic contact information of some users and hashed passwords of those who haven't yet migrated to the newer system. The company is currently contacting affected customers, but still advises all users to change their passwords as a precaution.

The data leak reveals that, besides its ties to US law enforcement, the company has also worked for countries such as Russia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. While these countries are known for their authoritarian practices, the type of services Cellebrite has performed for them isn't yet publicly known.

(Source: Motherboard)

Mark Zuckerberg will testify in a \$2 billion lawsuit



Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg will testify in court on Tuesday, January 17 for a potentially explosive lawsuit that claims the Oculus VR startup he acquired for \$2 billion was based on stolen technology.

The more than two-year-old suit against Facebook by game maker Zenimax has culminated with a public trial by jury in a Dallas court that began on January 9. Zenimax is seeking \$2 billion in damages against Facebook, which is the amount the social networking giant initially paid to buy Oculus in 2014.

Representatives for Zenimax confirmed to Business Insider that Zuckerberg will take the stand on Tuesday, followed by Oculus cofounder Palmer Luckey later in the week. The trial began on January 9; Oculus CTO and former Zenimax employee John Carmack was the first to testify on January 10.

Facebook tried to argue that Zuckerberg shouldn't have to answer ques-

tions about his acquisition of Oculus, but the case's judge overruled the request. Luckey's testimony will be his first public appearance since he admitted to secretly funding a political group that created anti-Hillary Clinton memes in September.

At the center of the lawsuit is Oculus CTO John Carmack, who previously ran a video game company within Zenimax called id Software and is best known as the mastermind behind video games like "Doom" and "Quake."

Zenimax has accused Oculus executives of knowingly stealing its software and trade secrets through the hiring of Carmack and five of his employees from id Software. It claims that Carmack violated his employee agreement with Zenimax by sharing confidential information that Oculus then used as the basis for its VR software.

(Source: businessinsider)

Amazon wants government permission to run mystery wireless tests in rural Washington

Amazon is preparing to test experimental wireless communications technology, including mobile devices and fixed-base stations, in rural Washington and Seattle, the company disclosed in government filings this week.

The filings do not specify what the tests would be for, but they hint at a new type of technology or wireless service, noting that the project would involve prototypes designed to support "innovative communications capabilities and functionalities."

Even more intriguing is that Amazon listed Neil Woodward as the main contact on the filings. Woodward, a retired NASA astronaut who joined Amazon in 2008, is now a senior manager for Prime Air, the team in

charge of Amazon's drone-delivery effort, according to his LinkedIn page.

That suggests the tests could involve some kind of communications system to control Amazon's delivery drones. But the details in the filings could also point to a wireless service designed to work with mobile handsets, such as Amazon's Kindle tablets, or perhaps the Echo home speakers that Amazon sells.

The first tests would take place indoors at Amazon's Seattle headquarters and would then expand outdoors, to around the company's customer service facility in Kennewick, 220 miles from Seattle.

According to the documents, which Amazon filed with the Federal Communications Commission on

Wednesday, the tests would involve "low-power, temporary fixed-base transmitters and associated mobile units indoors at and near its company facilities in Seattle, Washington."

Each location would feature three fixed transmitters and 10 mobile units, the documents show.

The testing would be limited to Amazon employees, and Amazon said it would retrieve and recover all devices that didn't meet FCC regulations.

"The temporary base stations will typically transmit on average for only five minutes per hour per day per week on any specific channel or band," the documents say.

(Source: TechCrunch)

Climate change shows in shrinking Antarctic snows

Vast icy rock peaks tower above Argentina's Carlini research base in Antarctica. But scientists who have worked there for decades say the glaciers are less icy than they once were.

For international experts stationed at the base, the frozen southern continent is a good gauge of climate change.

"When I used to come to Antarctica in the 1990s, it never used to rain," said Rodolfo Sanchez, director of the Argentine Antarctic Institute (IAA).

"Now it rains regularly -- instead of snowing," he told AFP during an Argentine government visit to King George Island, off the tip of the western Antarctic peninsula.

Scientists monitoring conditions at the base say the average temperature here has increased by 2.5 degrees Celsius (4.5 degrees Fahrenheit) over the past century.

The "glacier used to reach all the way to the shore," Sanchez says. "Now there is a 500-meter (550-yard) wide beach."

Dark scars of rocks

Dark scars of rock are showing through what were once spotless sheets of white snow on the glaciers' flanks.

"Antarctica is a thermometer that shows how the world is changing," said Adriana Gulisano, a physicist at Argentina's National Antarctic Directorate.

"There is no place where climate change is more in evidence."



Scientists at the Carlini base say a pair of yellow-throated King penguins have swum up to mate nearby for the past three years.

Although the theory is not confirmed, they suspect another sign of climate change. The species had previously been thought to be restricted to warmer spots

on the Falkland Islands and the Argentine mainland.

Technician Luis Souza, 56, has divided his time since 1979 between Buenos Aires and the Carlini base, where he has studied migrating birds: cormorants, gulls and penguins.

"There are more and more birds com-

ing here every year," he said.

More crucially, scientists say melting ice is disrupting the breeding of krill, a shrimp-like creature that serves as food for numerous species.

"Less ice means fewer krill for the whales, penguins and seals," said Sanchez. "The whole food chain is affected."

Scientific research

Various countries maintain bases in Antarctica, a shared space for scientific research under a 1959 international treaty.

Former military bases have become laboratories for research into the planet's future.

The Carlini base's red cabins nestle at the foot of a mountain range known as "The Three Brothers."

Below the structures, the shore is strewn with black volcanic rocks.

The population of scientists and military logistics personnel at the 13 Argentina bases in Antarctica can reach 1,000 at busy times.

Supplies are brought in by boat or helicopter. Garbage is stored and taken away by an icebreaker.

Other kinds of experts are also busy in Antarctica, a continent roamed by dinosaurs 75 million years ago.

The "signs are under the ice," said paleontologist Marcelo Reguero cryptically. He has been working in Antarctica since 1986.

(Source: AFP)

More crucially, scientists say melting ice is disrupting the breeding of krill, a shrimp-like creature that serves as food for numerous species.

This star has a secret – even better than ‘alien megastructures’

When Yale researcher Tabetha Boyajian first focused on the star KIC 8462852 via the Kepler Space Telescope in September 2015, she didn't know what to make of it.

The lighting of the star was mysterious – it was far too dim for a star of its age and type, intermittently dipping in brightness. Theories around Tabby's star, as it was nicknamed, quickly piled up, with some scientists attributing the atypical lighting to surrounding cosmic dust or nearby comets. But more excitable space enthusiasts predicted alien activity, arguing that only orbiting alien structures could block a star's light so effectively.

The so-called alien megastructure hypothesis persisted longer than most extra-terrestrial-based theories, simply because scientists had few alternative ideas to explain the star's peculiar blinking – until now. And the latest theory is almost as intriguing as the alien hypothesis.

Dr. Boyajian and her team weren't the first to spot the star: it was actually discovered in 1890. But their questions about the star's light pattern – and the subsequent alien-related theories – made the star, well, something of a star.

A really weird star

"We'd never seen anything like this star," Boyajian told the Atlantic in October 2015. "It was really weird. We thought it might be bad data or movement on the

spacecraft, but everything checked out."

KIC 8462852's story became more intriguing in January 2016, New Scientist reports, when a comparison of the first image taken of Tabby's star, in 1890, with one taken in 1989 revealed that the star had dimmed 14 percent in the interim 100 years. And over one particularly confusing two-day period, the star dipped in brightness by 22 percent.

Tabby's star kept scientists scratching their heads all last year. Volatility in light patterns are typical for young stars, but KIC 8462852 is mature.

Brightness changes

The "steady brightness change in KIC 8462852 is pretty astounding," Ben Montet, a scientist at the California Institute of Technology, said in an October statement. "It is unprecedented for this type of star to slowly fade for years, and we don't see anything else like it in the Kepler data."

Now, a team of scientists from Columbia University and the University of California, Berkeley, say they have found a reasonable explanation to KIC 8462852's strange lighting.

"Following an initial suggestion by Wright & Sigurdsson, we propose that the secular dimming behavior is the result of the inspiral of a planetary body or



bodies into KIC 8462852, which took place ~ 10-104 years ago (depending on the planet mass)," the three authors write in a study to be published Monday in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society.

"Gravitational energy released as the body inspirals into the outer layers of the star caused a temporary and unobserved brightening, from which the stellar flux is now returning to the quiescent state."

(Source: The CSM)

Why do female killer whales experience the change of life?

Menopause is a mystery to evolutionary biologists, but new insights could come from a long-term study of killer whales.

In these whales, the explanation may lie in a combination of conflict and cooperation between older and younger females, according to a report published Thursday in the journal Current Biology.

Killer whales are one of only three species known to have menopause — the others are pilot whales and humans. Researchers have long wondered why it was that these few species evolved to have females that spend so much of their lives unable to have babies.

Killer whales start reproducing around age 15, but stop having calves in their 30s or 40s, even though they can live for around a century.

A team led by behavioral ecologist Darren Croft of the University of Exeter decided to search for answers with the help of an unusual long-term study of killer whales in the Pacific Northwest. There, since the 1970s, researchers have carefully collected information on the births and deaths of individual whales that live in family groups.



Intriguing clue

Contained within the data is an intriguing clue about why female whales may stop reproducing later in life.

When older females reproduce at the same time as their daughters, who live alongside them, the calves of the older mothers are nearly twice as likely to die

in the first 15 years of life. But when older mothers had calves in the absence of a reproducing daughter, their calves did just fine.

"It's not that older mothers are bad mothers, that they're not able to raise their calves as younger mothers," says Croft. "It's that when they enter into this

competition with their daughters, they lose out and their calves are more likely to die."

The competition may center on access to food, says Croft, because there's good reason to believe older females feel more pressure to share their precious fish with the others around them.

Killer whales

That's because, in killer whales, females mate with males from other groups but then rejoin their families. That means when a new calf is born, its father is not around, and females start their lives in a situation where their relatedness to the group is rather low.

As a female grows older and starts having calves that stay with her, however, she develops more kinship ties to those around her. "It may be that older females are more likely to share, and younger females are less likely to share food," says Croft. That would mean younger females would have more resources to lavish on their own calves.

It's clear that in these whales, older females play an important role in the survival of not just their own calves, but all of the family members they live with.

(Source: npr.org)

PGPICO Director Named Top Iranian Public Relations Dept. Manager

Director General of Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (PGPICO) Abdol-Rasoul Dashti was introduced at top director in 14th Public Relations and Intl. Affairs Conference.

As held in Tehran Olympic Hotel, the director of Public Relations and Intl. Affairs Department of the company was introduced as top Public Relations Dept. manager in the country at the final evaluation of Jury Board of the Conference.

He is one of the most experienced and competent experts with proven track in Public Relations Department of the Iranian oil industry which has thus far pub-



lished tens of articles in the oil and petrochemical fields.

Dr. Bashir Secretary of Scientific Committee of the Conference was the first speaker in this Conference who called on directors of Public Relations Department of companies to pay due attention to the "Relationship-Based Economy" in the year named after the "Resistance Economy, Action and Implementation".

It should be noted that Dr. Firouzabadi, Director of Iranian Cyberspace Organization, was the special guest of this prestigious Conference who urged public relations managers to do their utmost efforts in line with materializing objectives of their organizations.

Soil fungi help tree seedlings survive, influence forest diversity

A new paper published Jan. 13 in Science reveals that the relationship between soil fungi and tree seedlings is more complicated than previously known. The paper was co-written by Ylva Lekberg, an assistant professor of soil community ecology at the University of Montana.

Lekberg and her collaborators studied 55 species and 550 populations of North American trees. Scientists have long known that plants and soil biota can regulate one another, but the new findings highlight the complexity of the feedback loop.

"Fungi differ in their ability to protect tree seedlings from pathogens, and this has implications for seedling recruitment and therefore forest community patterns," Lekberg said.

Most plant roots are colonized by mycorrhizal fungi, but tree species associate with different fungal groups. The researchers showed that ectomycorrhizal fungi that form a thick sheet around root tips are better able to protect trees from pathogens than arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi.

Thus, while ectomycorrhizal tree seedlings actually prefer growing next to parent trees, arbuscular mycorrhizal tree seedlings can only establish outside the control of parents' enemies. This can have consequences for how temperate forests are structured and their overall diversity.

"Our findings show that to appreciate the complexity in nature, we need to better understand and consider interactions between plants and soil biota," said Lekberg, who works in UM's Department of Ecosystem and Conservation Sciences in the W.A. Franke College of Forestry & Conservation. She also works with the MPG Ranch, a research and conservation organization in Montana's Bitterroot Valley.

(Source: EurekAlert)

Sometimes nature is morbid, biologist says

If you ever had a photo of an animal carcass stashed away on your computer or phone because you were too mesmerized to trash it, and you were too terrified about what others would think to share it, you are not alone.

The photos depict a kind of heavy metal version of your typical nature documentary. Swollen, shriveled, gnarled, bloody, stringy, flattened, crusty, sometimes frozen in place: the pictures aren't conventionally pretty. But beyond the gore, each photo contains a story — not just about the lives of the animals involved, but about those making and sharing the photos. So even if you're not sitting on a stash of decaying animal photos, for those of you with an inquisitive mind and a strong stomach, now is your moment.

Other biologists followed. And once Anne Hilborn, a Ph.D. student at Virginia Tech, who has a loyal Twitter following, chimed in, photos from all over the world started rolling in.

"Everyone started sharing pictures of dead animals, more or less decomposed," Dr. Fattebert wrote in an email. "There's obviously an aesthetically macabre side to it — I think some of these images are pure gold!"

The hashtag's initial momentum surprised him, but he was glad it happened. "Death is inherent to life, and we have to deal with it more often than not. And it's sometimes disgusting, yes," he wrote. "I think this hashtag has opened a window on this side of life science."

Emanuele Biggi, a naturalist and conservation photographer, shot this image of a mass mortality of thousands of frogs in a pond in Aveto Regional Park in northern Italy. "Sometimes climate change is striking in an odd way, surprising the frogs with extreme cold and ice while they're already breeding into water," he wrote in an email.

(Source: The NYT)

Paper centrifuge can spin at an astonishing 125,000 revolutions per minute

Who said that all the technology we cover here in the "Cool Tech" section of Digital Trends has to be overly complicated — or rely on anything more than some fishing wire and paper, for that matter?

Manu Prakash, professor of bioengineering at Stanford University, is responsible for creating a range of astonishingly advanced pieces of scientific equipment at bargain basement prices. His latest impressive feat? A so-called "paperfuge" centrifuge based on a classic children's toy, the whirlingig.

A centrifuge is a piece of equipment that rotates an object very rapidly around a fixed axis, thereby separating out cells of different weights so they can be studied. They are frequently used in labs for analyzing everything from blood to stool samples. As with a lot of specialized laboratory equipment, however, centrifuges can be expensive, and they require electricity to work.

Neither of those two limiting factors are true of Prakash's creation, which is nonetheless able to hit an astonishing 125,000 revolutions per minute — thereby providing the necessary centrifugal forces. To build it, all Prakash and his team required were two circles cut out of paper, Velcro to attach tiny tubes, wooden handles, and two strands of wire to connect them.

By separating the handles, the blood samples are given the kind of high-end spin treatment normally only achievable in a lab. The results potentially enable access to an important piece of equipment, usable as a diagnosis tool, all over the world.

(Source: Digital Trends)

All north Indian cities fail to meet air quality standards, report finds

Not a single city in northern India meets international air quality standards, according to a Greenpeace report that estimates air pollution kills more than 1 million Indians each year and takes 3% off the country's GDP.

The report released this week also shows that levels of the most dangerous airborne pollutants grew by 13% in India between 2010 and 2015 but fell at least 15% over the same period in China, the US and Europe.

It adds to a growing body of research showing the problem of toxic air is not limited only to the Indian capital, Delhi, but afflicts almost all the country's large cities, particularly in the north.

Air quality data gathered for 2015 from state pollution control boards and under freedom of information laws showed "there are virtually no places in India complying with World Health Organization and national ambient air quality (NAAQ) standards, and most cities are critically polluted", the report said.



"Except for a few places in southern India which complied with NAAQ standards, the entire country is experiencing a public health crisis due to high air pollution levels." The report added that "deaths due to air pollution are only a fraction less than the number of deaths caused by tobacco usage", citing the Lancet's global burden of disease study, which shows about 3,283 Indians die each day due to exposure to outdoor air pollution.

In all of the 20 cities monitored in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the level of PM10 – airborne pollutants such as dust, mold and chemical droplets less than 10 micrometers in diameter – exceeded international limits by at least 100%.

Ghaziabad, an Uttar Pradesh city that borders Delhi, exceeded the limits by more than 400%, the report showed.

But the PM10 limits were also exceeded in cities where the problem is less publicized, such as Hyderabad, Pune and Thane, where pollution density was about twice the safe level.

Cities in the south-western state of Karnataka generally enjoyed good air quality, with 12 of the 21 places with monitoring stations, including Mangalore and Mysore, recording PM10 levels well below the safe annual average limit of 60 micrograms.

Delhi's average level of PM2.5, the smallest and most harmful pollutants, was 128 micrograms in 2015 compared with 81 micrograms in Beijing that year.

Poor air quality is the result of several factors including road dust, open fires, vehicle exhaust fumes, industrial emissions and the burning of crop residue.

This week, Delhi's high court directed administrators in Punjab, an agricultural northern state where crop burning each October sends torrents of smog billowing across north India, to cease the practice from this year.

"We are of the view that the air quality of Delhi and nearby states is already deteriorating day by day and has attained alarming proportions," the court said on Thursday.

India's Supreme Court has also banned fireworks from Delhi after last year's Diwali festival caused levels of some pollutants to reach 42 times the safe limit and forced the closure of schools, construction sites and a coal-fired power station.

(Source: The Guardian)

LEARN ENGLISH Making an Appointment

A: Hello, Fairbrook Consulting, how may I help you?

B: Yes, this is Julianne Horton, and I'm calling to arrange an appointment with Ms. McNealy.

A: Certainly, what day were you thinking of?

B: How's Thursday? Does she have any time available then?

A: Um... let me double check...unfortunately, she's booked solid on Thursday, how does next Monday work for you?

B: Actually, I've got something scheduled on Monday. Can she do Tuesday?

A: Sure, Tuesday's perfect. May I ask where you're calling from?

B: Sure, Merton Financial Advisors.

A: Oh, actually, Tuesday's no good. Sorry 'bout that.

Key vocabulary

appointment: an agreement to meet someone at a particular time

available: not busy, willing to talk to someone

double check: check again

booked solid: having no available place or time

work for you: be okay with you

scheduled: planned at a specific time

no good: not okay

Supplementary vocabulary

fully booked: booked solid; having no space or time available

fit you in: find time to see someone in a busy schedule

unavailable: not available

occupied: busy doing something

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Be kind to me!

Green tax should help expand environmental infrastructure: official

By Maryam Qarehgozlou

TEHRAN — Municipalities should spend taxes collected from pollutant industries to develop environmental infrastructure in cities, deputy director of Iran's Department of Environment Saeed Motesaddi said on Sunday.

He made the remarks at a press conference held on the occasion of the national clean air day, Jan. 18.

"Municipalities are required to set priorities depending on each region's environmental problems and spend the green taxes on them to improve the environmental status of each area," he noted.

For example in a city like Tehran which is constantly grappling with choking air pollution the municipality must develop public transportation with green taxes.

"We estimate that green taxes amount to some 50 to 70 trillion rials (nearly \$1.25 to \$1.75 billion) annually while only some seven trillion rials (nearly \$175 million) was collected last year (Mar. 21, 2015 to Mar. 19, 2016)," he said.

Motorcycles, construction suites worsen air pollution

Talking on the causes of air pollution Motesaddi stated that some 11 million



motorcycles are in the country, 3.5 million of which are in Tehran which normally produce five times more pollution than a standard car.

"Other sources for air pollution include construction sites," he said, adding, "both demolishing and constructing processes are harmful to environment as taking away construction debris and at the same time bringing

building materials from and to the site are both done by clunker trucks overnight which produce a great deal of pollution in cities."

There are more than 100,000 old trucks in Tehran moving across the city at nights and they need to be disciplined by the municipality in no time, he added.

Measures taken to address air pollution

Launching 440 nationally integrated vehicle inspection centers, replacing some 38,000 clunkers with new cars nationwide, switching from mazut to natural gas in power plants, offering incentive payment to encourage people to use electric motorcycle and hybrid cars, monitoring pollutant industries and shutting down those which do not comply with environmental regulations are some of the measures taken to address air pollution so far, Motesaddi highlighted.

He further urged the public to help save energy during autumn and winter by turning down the thermostat even by 1 to 2 degrees as it could help the power plants to totally switch to natural gas instead of mazut which is extremely pollutant.

Administration assigned by environmental protection laws

In line with the environmental policies Iran is pursuing last week the Majlis approved bills, mandating the administration to ensure the implementation of regulations designed to protect the environment ranging from wetlands to forests and move towards sustainable development. The bills have been drawn up within the framework of the sixth five-year national development plan (2017-2021).

'Eden Again', a project to promote the restoration of the Mesopotamian Marshlands

Please tell me how the project of Eden again moved from theory to practice?

A: Eden Again began as a project undertaken by Iraqi expatriates living in the U.S., Europe, and Australia who were concerned about the devastation caused by the drying of the marshlands during the 1990s. Knowing that it was not possible for the people who had been driven from the marshlands during this time period to speak for themselves, we tried to organize international public opinion against these actions and to encourage re-flooding of the marshlands. In 2003, some members of this movement returned to Iraq to assist with restoration of these vitally important wetlands. They formed the group Nature Iraq, which has both scientific and environmental activists, and which now forms one of the backbones of the new environmental movement in Iraq.

What are the most characteristic features of Mesopotamian Marshlands?

A: The marshlands themselves are very characteristic of reed wetlands throughout the world, their unique value lies in their location, their place in human history, and their current socioeconomic importance to the local population. First, these are the largest freshwater wetlands in the Middle East, and represent a vitally important rest stop for migratory waterfowl and for endemic birds and other species. Secondly, these wetlands represent the homeland of the ancient Sumerian people and all of the shared human history that is represented therein. Thirdly, before they were dried in the 1990s possibly 500,000 people subsisted on the wetland economy of buffalo milk, reed weaving, fishing, birding, date palms, and rice harvesting in the wetlands and their periphery. Perhaps 10,000 of those have returned since 2003.

Please tell me a brief history about destruction of the entire wetland ecosystems in Iraq. Why this plan carried out?

A: Desiccation began during the Iran-Iraq war, as military maneuvers along the border to rout deserters living in the marshlands. Desiccation intensified after the Gulf War in 1991 as the Baathi regime tried to control the rebel population. Over 6,000 square miles were dried out through a combination of dams, hundreds of kilometers of drainage canals, groundwater pumping, etc.

How much local people were affected by this problem?

A: It is estimated that 500,000 people were left homeless and without even water to drink, ending up in refugee camps in neighboring countries (mainly Iran) or moved up the river to forage or work as servants. Now possibly 100,000 have returned to live within or on the edge of the restored marshlands.

How scientists could assess the condition of Mesopotamian Marshlands in recent years?

A: Re-flooding has been substantial, with up to 75% of the area re-flooded, and with vegetation and wildlife returning quickly, although biodiversity has of course been reduced and many species, once commonly observed, have not yet been seen. Great difficulties remain, especially consistent water supply – there is a great need for international water treaties between Turkey, Syria, and Iraq and also between Iraq and Iran. An even greater concern is the lack of hydraulic connection and hydraulic flow-through between the restored marshes. What is needed is a series of interconnected wetlands, where animals can freely migrate, with water flowing through at a fast enough pace to maintain oxygenation and low salinity, but in poor years what we may end up with is a series of poorly oxygenated salt ponds.

What were the first steps of rehabilitation process in Iraq?

A: One of the truly unique aspects of this restoration is that 100% of the actual effort towards re-flooding was undertaken by the local inhabitants themselves, mostly during the chaos of the latter half of 2003. Although it has led to a rather disorganized restoration effort, from a scientific viewpoint, it has



also generated a restoration that is owned by the locals – they restored the wetlands to restore their livelihoods and their way of life.

Please point to some of your actual activities for remediation.

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Growing number of Democrats boycotting Trump inauguration

A growing number of U.S. Democratic lawmakers have declared their intent to boycott the inauguration of Republican President-elect Donald Trump in a sharp break with tradition.

More than a dozen Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives have so far issued public announcements stating that they would not attend the January 20 ceremony after an extremely divisive election campaign, according to media reports.

It is a departure from lawmakers of both parties putting aside their personal feelings to watch the new president take the oath of office. While the majority of Democrats still plan to attend the event, the fact that even a handful are making a point of boycotting shows the depth of antipathy toward the president-elect.

The boycott movement began with Illinois Rep. Luis Guterrez who announced on a CNN program in December that he would not go to the inauguration because Trump continued "to spew hatred, bigotry and prejudice."

Instead, Guterrez plans to attend the anti-Trump Women's March on Washington on January 21.

"I went to George Bush's inauguration, and I work with Republicans all the time," Guterrez said in a speech on the House floor this week. "But this is different. I never thought George Bush was trying to



make my own country hostile toward me, personally, to my wife, to my daughters."

Since then Guterrez has started a trend.

"I will not be celebrating or honoring an incoming president who rode racism, sexism, xenophobia and bigotry to the White House," said Rep. Barbara Lee, a Democrat from California.

"He called women 'pigs,' stoked Islamophobia and attacked a Gold Star family. He mocked a disabled reporter and appealed to people's worst instincts. I cannot in good conscience attend an inauguration that would celebrate this

divisive approach to governance," Lee added. "On Inauguration Day, I will not be celebrating. I will be organizing and preparing for resistance."

Meanwhile, more Democrats have said they would skip the ceremony since Rep. John Lewis of Georgia, a key civil rights figure, told NBC News in a taped interview on Friday that he did not consider Trump to be a "legitimate president."

"It will be the first one that I miss since I've been in the Congress," said Lewis, who first won election to the House in 1986. "You cannot be at home with

something that you feel that is wrong, is not right."

Trump on Saturday morning returned fire on the top Democrat in a series of tweets on Saturday. "Congressman John Lewis should spend more time on fixing and helping his district, which is in horrible shape and falling apart (not to mention crime-infested) rather than falsely complaining about the election results."

Arizona Rep. Raul Grijalva took to the House floor a week before the inauguration to declare that he would go back to his Tucson-area district instead, meeting with constituents.

"My absence is not motivated by disrespect for the office or motivated by disrespect for the government that we have in this great democracy. But as an individual act, yes, of defiance, at the disrespect shown to millions and millions of Americans by this incoming administration and by the actions we are taking in this Congress," Grijalva said.

Reps. Jared Huffman, Mark DeSaulnier and Mark Takano of California, Katherine Clark of Massachusetts, Lacy Clay of Missouri, Nydia Velazquez of New York as well as Kurt Schrader and Earl Blumenauer of Oregon have also announced boycotts by issuing statements or speaking to media outlets.

(Source: agencies)

Trump aides deny summit with Putin planned

Two top aides to President-elect Donald Trump denied a published report that he is planning to hold a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin weeks after taking office.

The Sunday Times of London reported that Trump had told British officials that such a summit was being planned, to be staged in the Icelandic capital of Reykjavik.

"The story is a fantasy," one Trump aide told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity. Another said the report was not true.

Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20, has spoken of seeking warmer relations with Russia.

He told the Wall Street Journal on Friday that he would "at least for a period of time" maintain sanctions against Russia put in place by President Barack Obama for cyber hacking.

But Trump suggested to the newspaper that he might lift the sanctions if Russia proved helpful in the fight against ISIL terrorist group militants and on other U.S. objectives.

Two of Trump's cabinet picks, Secretary of State nominee Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary nominee James Mattis, have signaled a far harsher tone toward Moscow in their Senate confirmation hearings.

U.S. intelligence agencies blame Russia for cyber hacking that interfered with the U.S. presidential election. Trump has said he accepted the intelligence agencies' conclusion.

(Source: Reuters)

Nearly 100 refugees missing after boat sinks off Libya

Nearly 100 people are missing after a boat packed with refugees and migrants sank off the Libyan coast, killing at least eight, according to the Italian coastguard.

Search operations continued after nightfall in poor weather and sea conditions, officials said on Saturday.

"The bodies of eight people have been recovered. Four people have been saved,

and they say 107 migrants were onboard the boat," the coastguard's press office said.

A French warship, patrolling under the European Union's Frontex border operation, picked up the survivors and two merchant ships were heading for the area, located about 50km north of the Libyan coast.

A Frontex jet and an Italian naval helicopter also joined the search and rescue

operation.

On Friday, around 550 refugees and migrants were picked up from four inflatable dinghies by Italian coastguard vessels, an Italian naval ship, an NGO boat and a merchant vessel.

In recent years, Italy has been on the front line of refugees and migrants arriving across the Mediterranean Sea and has been pushing for agreements with govern-

ments in North Africa to facilitate returns.

People smugglers have exploited the chaos in Libya since the 2011 ouster of leader Muammar Gaddafi to traffic refugees and migrants in boats to Italy 300km away.

According to the Italian interior ministry, over 180,000 refugees and migrants landed in Italy last year, an annual record.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Africa's unique vulnerability to violent extremism

6 → The UNDP's primary research into extremists' personal motivations based on more than 350 interviews with formerly active violent extremists in prisons and transitional centers in Cameroon, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, and Uganda is the most extensive project of its kind in Africa, if not globally.

A flexible marketing strategy

Our preliminary results suggest that the ideology behind violent extremism is delivered with a flexible marketing strategy, whereby extremist groups tailor their message for potential recruits.

For the unemployed or the poor, they offer paid jobs; for marginalized ethnic and religious minorities, they offer recourse through violence; and for the middle class, they offer an adventure, a sense of "purpose," and an escape from mundanity. The ideology mutates to exploit its intended recruit's vulnerabilities.

Our research, which will be completed in early 2017, aims to shed light on individual journeys to extremism, through the words and perspectives of people who have been involved in terrorist organ-

izations in Africa. It will also provide communities, other researchers, and policymakers with empirical evidence on which to base their future interventions.

One thing we already know for certain is that poverty and underdevelopment can no longer be ignored if we are ever to combat violent extremism effectively. Addressing these issues, rather than just strengthening military and law-enforcement capacity, must be a high priority for any plausible strategy.

(Source: newstimes.co.rw)

Interpol arrests key player involved in oil corruption case

1 → One of Iran's richest men, Zanjani was arrested in December 2013, being accused of withholding money owned by the Ministry of Petroleum. He was sentenced to death in March 2016 over a number

of charges including forgery, money laundering and disrupting the country's economy.

Earlier this month, the Ministry of Petroleum announced readiness to cooperate with the Judiciary to return the \$3.8

billion that Babak Zanjani owes to the national treasury.

According to a statement issued by the ministry, less than \$600 million of Zanjani's debts to the government has been paid back.

Judiciary spokesman Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i has also said there are other people involved in the oil corruption case whose roles in the case are being investigated by the Judiciary.

Bahrain executions spark protests

1 → The executions came a day after demonstrations broke out across villages following rumors they were going to be put to death.

They are the first in six years in the Persian Gulf kingdom, according to London-based human rights group, Reprieve.

"It is nothing short of an outrage -- and a disgraceful breach of international law -- that Bahrain has gone ahead with these executions," Reprieve director Maya Foa said in a statement.

Reprieve said the executions went ahead "despite serious concerns that their convictions were based on evidence obtained under torture."

Black day -

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, head of advocacy at the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy, said: "This is a black day in Bahrain's history."

"It is the most heinous crime committed by the government of Bahrain and a shame upon its rulers," he said.

Scores of men and women had taken to the streets Saturday after the families of the three were summoned to meet them in prison, a measure that usually precedes the implementation of death sentences, witnesses said.

"No, no to execution," the protesters chanted.

Later Saturday, a policeman was wounded when his patrol came under fire in the Shiite village of Bani Jamra, said the interior ministry.

The outlawed Al-Ashtar Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack in a purported statement, saying the "heroic operation" was a warning to authorities not to harm "brothers sentences to death."

Authorities have said that the trio and fellow defendants belonged to the same clandestine group which has killed several bomb attacks in Bahrain.

The high court Monday upheld the death sentences against the trio convicted in a bomb attack in March 2014, which killed three policemen, including the officer from the United Arab Emirates.

The executed men have been named by activists as Sami Mushaima, 42, Ali al-Singace, 21, and Abbas al-Samea, 27.

Seven other defendants received life terms.

The Emirati officer was part of a Saudi-led Persian Gulf force which rolled into Bahrain in March 2011 to help put down a month of protests.

Bahrain is a strategic ally of the United States and home to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet.

Lebanon's Hezbollah slammed the executions of the

"innocent" men as "part of the big crime committed by the regime against the Bahraini people."

"It is clear that this execution will destroy every chance for a political exit out of Bahrain's crisis, and leads the country into an unknown future, threatening stability in Bahrain and the whole region," said the resistance movement.

Brian Dooley, director of Human Rights Defenders at the Washington-based Human Rights First, Saturday urged the United States to use its influence.

"Washington should warn its Persian Gulf Arab ally that this would be a reckless, frightening level of repression to pursue, likely to spark rage and further violence in an already volatile region," he said in a statement.

Since the 2011 uprising, Bahrain has arrested and put on trial hundreds of Shiites and cracked down hard on the opposition, despite repeated appeals by international rights groups.

Cleric Ali Salman, the head of Al-Wefaq largest opposition group, was arrested in December 2014 and subsequently sentenced to nine years in prison after being convicted of inciting hatred.

(Source: AFP)

Netanyahu's media scandal: Who bribed whom?

3 → Yousef Jabareen, a member of the Israeli parliament belonging to the Palestinian Joint List party, told Al Jazeera: "If Israel were a properly run country, the evidence against Netanyahu would already be sufficient to force him to resign. It is difficult, however, to have confidence in either the attorney general or the prosecutors. The legal authorities have been under relentless attack from Netanyahu's government for years and their independence has been severely undermined."

From the outset of the allegations, Netanyahu has denied any wrongdoing, posting on Facebook: "There will be nothing because there is nothing."

The background to the case is a decade-long war for readers between the two biggest-circulation newspapers in Israel. Persico said that until the late 2000s the Yedioth Ahronoth group had enjoyed near-monopoly status in Israel's print media. Netanyahu had grown increasingly concerned about the bad coverage he was receiving from the paper and the support it was offering his political rivals.

"After he lost the election to Ehud Barak [in the late 1990s, after his first term as prime minister], Netanyahu was rumored to be telling friends he needed his own paper to limit Yedioth Ahronoth's influence," said Persico.

In 2007, as Netanyahu prepared for a return to power, his political patron Sheldon Adelson, a US casino billionaire, launched the Israel Hayom newspaper. Freely distributed, it soon had a circulation of up to 400,000 a day, making it more widely read than Yedioth Ahronoth.

Israel Hayom's barely disguised cheerleading for Netanyahu quickly earned it an unofficial title - the "Bibi-paper", after Netanyahu's nickname.

Rival politicians have complained that Israel Hayom's backing helped Netanyahu to win the 2009 election and has kept him in power since. They have alleged that Israel Hayom's staunch support for Netanyahu was a form of illicit election funding by Adelson to bypass local political funding laws.

Persico agreed. "The Israel Hayom paper was effectively a political gift from Adelson, a propaganda tool to serve the interests of Netanyahu and his family."

Freedom House, a US-based civil liberties watchdog group, downgraded Israel's press status to "partly free" last year because of Israel Hayom's "growing impact".

Adelson's paper was never profitable. An investigation by Haaretz this week showed that he sunk some \$190m into it in its first seven years to keep it afloat. The losses continued to grow.

But Yedioth Ahronoth possibly paid a higher price, as its ad revenues plummeted with its falling circulation.

"Adelson's pockets are very deep," said Persico. "He and Netanyahu used Israel Hayom to bring Yedioth Ahronoth to its knees financially." It was this prolonged financial crisis at the paper, added Persico, which drove Mozes into making Netanyahu the offer currently under investigation.

A key meeting between the Yedioth owner and Netanyahu occurred in late 2014, around the time the Israeli parliament was considering legislation specifically to curb Hayom's activities and thereby strengthen Yedioth. Netanyahu publicly opposed the bill, while rival parties in his government coalition supported it, giving it a good chance of success. It was never brought to a final vote, because Netanyahu called elections in early 2015, before the legislation could pass.

The election effectively killed the negotiations between him and Mozes.

Isaac Herzog, the leader of the opposition Zionist Union party, said this week that Netanyahu's use of Israel Hayom as a bargaining chip in the talks confirmed claims that "the editorial offices of Israel Hayom were and are run by Benjamin Netanyahu".

But Jafar Farah, head of Mossawa, an advocacy group for Israel's large Palestinian minority, said the talks between Netanyahu and Mozes were only "the tip of the iceberg".

"This is more than just about Netanyahu," he told Al Jazeera. "The recordings throw a glimmer of light on the systemic corruption in Israel. The main political players are connected to networks in the media and big business, and behind the scenes they fight each other for control."

Since his 2015 election victory, Netanyahu has reserved for himself the communications ministry and required of his coalition partners that they agree to any media initiatives he proposes.

Critics have argued that Netanyahu is using the ministry's powers to pressure media companies, especially Israel's two loss-making commercial TV channels, to give him more supportive coverage.

Herzog demanded this week that Netanyahu immediately relinquish the communications ministry or he would petition the courts. The question now is whether these new cases will bring down Netanyahu.

Jabareen noted that as a legislator he was not allowed to receive a gift of more than \$70 without declaring it. "That alone should give us a sense of the magnitude of what Netanyahu has done," he said.

Netanyahu's closest allies, however, have claimed that he is the victim of persecution. David Bitan, chair of his Likud party, told reporters: "In other countries, people do that [topple governments] through military coups. But we took it a step further. We do this through police coups."

The analysts who spoke to Al Jazeera believed Netanyahu might be able to weather the storm, given an apparent lack of interest so far from the public, his close ties to the attorney general, and little appetite among his government coalition partners for early elections.

Farah said Netanyahu would also distract public attention from the allegations by focusing on "security" matters. "The occupation has served Netanyahu and his predecessors well at times like this," he said. "They can always escalate things with the Palestinians to prevent public pressure building for dealing with corruption."

If Netanyahu is indicted, he would almost certainly have to step down. That is what happened to his predecessor, Ehud Olmert, when he was charged - and later convicted - of receiving cash in envelopes from a businessman.

Olmert succeeded Ariel Sharon, who was himself the subject of a series of police investigations that were dropped when he fell into a coma in 2006 and later died.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Aubameyang: Dortmund not on a level with Barca, Madrid or Bayern

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang is happy to stay at Borussia Dortmund "for now" but accepts the Bundesliga club are not on the same level as Europe's elite clubs.

Aubameyang is currently on international duty at the Africa Cup of Nations, where he opened the scoring for hosts Gabon in Saturday's 1-1 draw against Guinea-Bissau.

After the match, the 27-year-old was once again asked about his club future having done much to previously spark speculation himself.

Last month he reiterated his desire to represent Real Madrid on account of a promise he made to his grandfather but he urged the speculation to stop for the time being, while offering a frank assessment of Dortmund's standing - Thomas Tuchel's men lie sixth ahead of the Bundesliga season's resumption.

"For now, I want to stay in Dortmund," Aubameyang told RMC. "I think we'll stop talking about Madrid. This is not the time to talk about it, especially since I feel really good in Dortmund."

"The challenge is even more beautiful. Of course we are one of the top clubs, but not really like Barca, Madrid or Bayern."

"It would be nice to win titles with this team, with Dortmund. I hope to do so."

Aubameyang also addressed recent reports linking him with a big-money move to the Chinese Super League.

Shanghai SIPG were claimed to have tabled an offer in the region of €150million for the star forward, who it was suggested would have earned an annual salary of €41m, although Dortmund denied receiving an offer.

"I was on vacation sleeping and my brother called me," he explained.

"He said to me, 'Have you seen the proposal you have just received?'. So I looked on the internet."

"It amused me. It is nice to see that people are willing to put so much money on the table for you, but whether it is true or not is the question that must be asked."

"I do not pay attention to it. I have other objectives, which are my priorities."

(Source: Goal)

Liverpool withdraw Matip amid eligibility uncertainty

Liverpool have withdrawn Joel Matip from their squad for Sunday's Premier League trip to Manchester United because FIFA have not confirmed he is eligible to play club football while the African Nations Cup is taking place.

The Cameroon centre back was one of seven players who opted not to play for his country at the tournament in Gabon.

Cameroon's football association (Fecafoot) had previously threatened to take action against the absentees and can ask world soccer's governing body FIFA to suspend them from club football for the duration of the tournament, which ends on Feb. 6.

Liverpool said on Sunday that they had not received confirmation from FIFA that Matip was eligible for club selection.

"Liverpool... can confirm Joel Matip has been withdrawn from selection for today's Premier League fixture at Manchester United as the club continues to seek clarity from FIFA 'as to the player's eligibility,' the club said on their website (www.liverpoolfc.com).

"The Cameroon Football Federation have failed to confirm that Matip can therefore play club football during the period of the Africa Cup of Nations."

"Liverpool have subsequently repeatedly sought, as a matter of urgency, clarity from FIFA in this regard."

"It is Liverpool's view that the player should be available for club football during the period of the competition and will continue to work for a speedy and unambiguous resolution."

Matip has not played for Cameroon since Sept. 2015.

(Source: Reuters)

Everton hammer Manchester City to put dent in title hopes

Everton hammered Manchester City 4-0 to put a huge dent in Pep Guardiola's title hopes.

Raheem Sterling had a penalty appeal turned down early on when he tumbled between Leighton Baines and Joel Robles, but it was Everton who took the lead.

Gael Clichy's error in midfield allowed Everton to slice through the City backline, giving Lukaku the chance to side-foot past Bravo. Two minutes after half-time, Kevin Mirallas made it two after some sloppy defending from City, and youngster Tom Davies dinked an excellent third that he was at the heart of creating.

New signings Morgan Schneiderlin and Ademola Lookman started on the bench for the home side, the Frenchman making his debut just after the hour mark and the 19-year-old coming on to grab the fourth goal despite being on the pitch for little more than added time.

TALKING POINT

How has Pep Guardiola produced such a mediocre side? It's clearly too early to draw any conclusions about Guardiola's time at City, but he is nonetheless deserving of severe criticism. He has taken a side that was mediocre under Manuel Pellegrini, and made it worse.

John Stones is a misfiring synapse, David Silva is still under-performing in most matches, and the defence is pitiful. We can expect real improvement over the next 12 months, but such poor performances are inexcusable.

MAN OF THE MATCH

Tom Davies (Everton): The England Under-19 captain appeared a little out of his depth at the start of the match, and was lucky not to get booked at the start. However, as Everton showed that Manchester City had nothing of merit to offer, he started to gain in confidence. His goal was a superb effort, and Everton might have another youngster to pin their hopes on.

KEY STATS

Everton scored from their first four shots on target.

(Source: Eurosport)

Chinese Super League rules on number of foreigners to be reduced - reports



The transfer plans of Chinese Super League clubs have been thrown into disarray less than two months before the start of the new season after media reports claimed the Chinese Football Association (CFA) is about to reduce the number of foreign players teams can field in each match.

Chinese media have reported that the CFA will allow only three foreigners to play in any Chinese Super League game, although clubs will still be allowed to have five non-Chinese players on their books.

The move -- which has yet to be officially announced but is being widely reported -- would see the end of the existing ruling,

which allows Chinese clubs to field four foreign players in each game, with one of the slots taken by a player from another Asian nation. They can also have a fifth foreigner on the bench.

Under the proposed new rules, the Asian slot will be removed and clubs will be required to field one Chinese under-23 player in each match and have two in their 18-man matchday squad. All five foreign players will be allowed to be included in the squad but only three can be fielded at any one time.

Clubs have already started implementing their transfer strategies and the move, should it be officially

ratified, is sure to cause consternation within the league.

The transfer window opened on Jan. 1 and many of the 16 top-flight sides have brought in players from Australia, Uzbekistan and South Korea to fill their Asian spots. The new season will kick off on March 4.

CSL clubs have spent record-breaking sums so far this year, with Shanghai SIPG at the forefront having forked out an Asian record €60 million to sign Oscar from Chelsea and an additional €7m to take on Uzbekistan's Odil Ahmedov from FC Krasnodar.

Their signings come after Andre Villas-Boas joined the club at the end of last year as head coach and the signing of Hulk from Zenit St Peterburg in June for a then-Asian record fee of €55m. Shanghai Shenhua, meanwhile, reportedly made Carlos Tevez the highest-paid player in the world when signing him from Boca Juniors last month.

As a result, speculation has been rampant that Chinese clubs will spend huge sums on some of the world's biggest stars, and the proposed move is certain to have a major impact on the transfer market for what remains of the current window.

(Source: ESPN)

Bayern Munich to sign Hoffenheim's Niklas Sule and Sebastian Rudy



Bayern Munich have confirmed Hoffenheim duo Niklas Sule and Sebastian Rudy will move to the Allianz Arena in the summer.

Bayern president Uli Hoeness had warned last month that his club's move for Germany defender Sule, 21, could be under threat due to Hoffenheim's asking price -- reported to be €25 million -- but an agreement has now been reached and he has put pen to paper on a deal until 2022.

Versatile Germany international Rudy, whose Hoffenheim deal was due to expire in the summer, was also reported to be close to agreeing a move to Bayern and the 26-year-old has signed a contract until 2020.

Bayern CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge told the club's official website: "We're very

satisfied and delighted Niklas Sule and Sebastian Rudy are joining us. Signing two Germany internationals is an investment in FC Bayern's future." Sebastian Rudy joins us on a free transfer. In the case of Niklas Sule we have reached a fair and serious agreement with TSG Hoffenheim."

Rudy said: "It's an absolute dream for me to go to Munich. FC Bayern are one of the greatest clubs in the world."

Sule, who had been linked with Chelsea, added that he feels "a little wistful" about leaving Hoffenheim after coming up through the youth ranks but said the move gives him the opportunity of "maturing further with one of the best teams in the world."

(Source: ESPN)

Ronaldinho hoping to return to football with Copa Libertadores team - agent



Ronaldinho is planning to join a club that can offer him Copa Libertadores football with Uruguayan side Nacional an option, his agent and brother Roberto de Assis has said.

Former Barcelona man Ronaldinho, 36, has not had a club since playing for Brazilian side Fluminense in 2015.

However, the ex-Brazil international is targeting a comeback this year, according to De Assis, with a move back to South America the aim for his client.

"The project is to play in 2017," Assis told Ovation Digital. "After a quiet year in which we had the opportunity to fly around the world, travel, see other

countries we did not know, to be with people, to feel their affection, that's the idea."

"The 2017 project is to play again and see how things happen. We think he will play in a team that is in the Libertadores. I spoke to some intermediaries [about Nacional], but things are still very quiet. When something official arrives, the club will be able to speak."

Coritiba, who are not in the 2017 Copa Libertadores, have reportedly confirmed their interest in Ronaldinho, while the playmaker has also been linked with a move to Chapecoense.

(Source: Socceret)



@djokernole My favorite friend from Melbourne. I am so happy every time we connect. #treehugger #botanicalgardens



@thibautcourtois Great victory to bounce back after our loss against Tottenham! Congrats to @marcosalsonzo28 and @pedro17_ for their goals!



@mancelotti ?Well done! We are ready to fight for all titles during the second part of the season.

Iran's Siamand Rahman and Morteza Mehrzad among Ones to Watch



SPORTS Iranian powerlifter Siamand Rahman and sitting volleyball player Morteza Mehrzad have been named among Ones to Watch for 2017.

The over 107kg powerlifter wrote his name into the history books after doing what no man had ever done before – he cleared the bar at 310kg in the men's over 107kg, setting a new world record and claiming his second consecutive Paralympic gold.

Mehrzad also did a good job in the 2016 Paralympic Games helping the Iranian team win gold medal for sixth time.

Selected in partnership with the World Para Powerlifting and World Para Volleyball, the Ones to Watch athletes are individuals who have the potential to make the headlines in powerlifting and sitting volleyball during the next Paralympic cycle ahead of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

With one eye on the next Paralympic Games, many of this year's Ones to Watch are young athletes who will develop between now and Tokyo 2020. Others are Paralympic and world medallists looking to stay at the top of their game.

Until 19 January, the IPC will announce Ones to Watch athletes in two sports each day.

Around 230 athletes from 22 sports will be named Ones to Watch for 2017 in an effort to make it easier for the public and media to understand which athletes to look out for.



Iran loses to Azerbaijan in Valentin Granatkin



SPORTS Iran U-18 football team was defeated against Azerbaijan 1-0 on Sunday in the 17th edition of Valentin Granatkin Memorial.

Dogukan Oksuz scored the only goal of the match in the 77th minute at the St. Petersburg Sports and Concert Complex in front of 300 spectators.

The Iranian team started the competition with a 2-1 loss to Zenit and

was held to a 1-1 draw by Slovenia.

Abbas Chamanian's boys humiliated Moldova 5-0 in its last Group D match and finished in third place in the group.

Iran has been scheduled to face India on Tuesday in the match for the positions 13 to 16.

The traditional International Youth Football Tournament got underway in Saint Petersburg from January 8 to 17 commemorating the first FIFA Vice-President Valentin Granatkin.

Mashhad to host 'Takhti Wrestling Cup'



SPORTS The 37th edition of the International Senior Freestyle, Greco-Roman and Pahlavani Wrestling Tournament 'Takhti Cup' will be held on January 18-20, 2017 in Mashhad, Iran.

A total of 36 teams including 23 foreign teams and 13 Iranian teams will participate in the prestigious tournament.

Takhti, the most famous wrestler in Iranian history, died on January 7, 1968. He claimed the gold medal in

Melbourne 1956 Olympic Games and won two silver medals in 1952 Helsinki and 1960 Rome Olympic Games.

He won two World Championships gold medals in 1959 Tehran and 1961 Yokohama. The freestyle wrestler has also seized a gold medal in the 1958 Asian Games held in Tokyo, Japan.

Takhti Cup is an important annual wrestling event in Iran, is held in the memory of the late Iranian wrestler Gholamreza Takhti.

Iran's famous volleyball captain faces ban for swearing

Captain of Iran men's national volleyball team Mir Saeid Marouf Lakrani is facing an indefinite ban after being charged by the Islamic Republic of Iran Volleyball Federation (IRIVF) for using offensive language.

The 31-year-old, who plays for Paykan Tehran Volleyball Club owned by Iranian automobile manufacturer Iran Khodro, used foul and abusive language against referee supervisor Hossein Pourkashiyani at the end of the match between his team and Shahrdari Tabriz Volleyball Club on January 11.

Paykan lost the game, which was staged in the 17th week of the Iranian Volleyball Super League, to the Tabriz-based team 2-3 (21-25, 25-21, 23-25, 25-19 and 11-15).



The IRIVF's decision came as Marouf had earlier got involved in a brawl with Parseh Tehran Volleyball Club libero player Ali Hosseini, caused constant

tensions with referee Farhad Shahmiri during a fixture between Paykan and Sarmayeh Bank Volleyball Club that prompted Shahmiri to give up the task, and started a chain reaction of fights with Saipa Tehran Volleyball Club, which is owned by Iranian automobile manufacturer SAIPA, players and head coach Masoud Armat.

The IRIVF Disciplinary Committee is scheduled to convene on Monday to discuss the proper punitive measure against Marouf.

Marouf was selected as the Most valuable player in the 2013 Asian Men's Volleyball Championship. He was introduced as the Best setter in at 2014 Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) World League.

(Source: PressTV)

Esteghlal completes signing of Server Djeparov

Uzbekistan attacking midfielder Server Djeparov joined Iranian popular team Esteghlal in the January transfer window.

The 34-year-old player has joined the Blues on an 18-month contract for a \$500,000 transfer fee.

Djeparov has won the Asian

Footballer of the Year award twice, first in 2008 and the other in 2011.

He started his professional career with Uzbek football club Navbahor Namangan in 2000, scoring 7 goals in 46 matches.

Djeparov has played for Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor Tashkent, Bunyodkor and

Lokomotiv Tashkent, South Korea's FC Seoul, Seongnam FC and Ulsan Hyundai and Al-Shabab FC of Saudi Arabia.

Server Djeparov has made 121 appearances for Uzbekistan national football team and scored 25 goals.

(Source: Tasnim)



Costa, like Ronaldo and Rooney, can make his own mind up - Scholes

Paul Scholes sees similarities between Diego Costa's situation at Chelsea and experiences he had at Manchester United with Cristiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney.

The Blues striker has become embroiled in a heated debate regarding his future at Stamford Bridge, with the riches on offer in the Chinese Super League said to have turned his head.

He played no part in a 3-0 victory over Leicester City on Saturday, with his absence put down to a back complaint.

Speculation regarding an imminent exit refuses to go away, though, with the winter transfer window open and Chelsea having already seen Oscar and John Obi Mikel leave Stamford Bridge for Asia.

Scholes saw Ronaldo and Rooney caught up in similar storms during his time at Old Trafford, with the latter twice requesting a transfer while the former completed a then record-breaking switch to Real Madrid.

He insists that he never discussed the matter with those in question, with it up to individuals to decide their own fate.

Asked on BT Sport whether he spoke to Rooney and Ronaldo during periods of uncertainty, Scholes said: "No, not one bit. Why?"

"They're old enough to make their own minds up. If they don't want to play for the football club any more, so what?"

"My job on a Saturday afternoon - and a Tuesday/Wednesday night - was to go out and try to win the game with my team-mates.

"Whoever I'm playing with - doesn't matter who it is. I don't care as long as we win the game."

Chelsea did not appear to miss Costa too much against Leicester, but the Spain international has netted 14 Premier League goals this season and been a key figure in their title bid.

The Blues are next in action on January 22 when they welcome Hull City to Stamford Bridge, with plenty of focus likely to be placed on the team sheet for that fixture.

(Source: Goal)

Iranian kurash wrestler Dalirian named world's best

Iranian athlete Mostafa Dalirian has been named the world's best kurash wrestler for the year 2016, thanks to his impressive displays at 2016 Taiwan Beach Kurash International Championships and 2016 Cheongju World Martial Arts Masterships.

Reza Nasirnejad, a senior official at the Islamic Republic of Iran Judo & Kurash Federation, said on Saturday that Dalirian scooped the honors at the Extraordinary Congress of Kurash Confederation of Asia in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, earlier this month.

Nasirnejad added that he maintained his position in the confederation's presiding board even though the number of its members was reduced to five from the original thirteen.

The top Iranian sports official was also elected the President of the Organizing and Training Committee and Disciplinary Committee at Kurash Confederation of Asia.

Experienced Mohammad Reza Minookadeh was picked the head of the Referees Committee as well.

Nasirnejad further noted that the northeastern Iranian city of Bojnourd, situated about 701 kilometers northeast of the capital Tehran, is set to host the 2017 Asian Junior Kurash Championship, while an international beach kurash tournament is slated to be staged in the Caspian Sea coastal city of Chalus next summer.

Additionally, Komil Ruziev was elected the new president of Kurash Confederation of Asia, replacing Haider Farman who had held the post since 2013.

The Turkmen national wrestling competition, kurash (also written as goresh), is a kind of wrestling on belts that has ancient roots, and dates back to as early as the 3rd century BC. Wrestlers need to earn points by forcing the opponent to touch the mat with any part of the body except a foot.

Kurash competitions are staged in four formats, namely round, shootout, mixed and team.

During the round format contests, athletes compete with all wrestlers in the same weight category. If there are many wrestlers in one weight division, the participants are divided into two groups. Wrestlers who earn the first and second places in each group will be in action for the final showdowns.

Wrestlers are eliminated from the rest of the competition once they lose in the shootout format.

In the mixed format, wrestlers start with the round format for the preliminary round and then shift to the shootout format.

According to the team format, only one athlete from each weight category of a team is allowed to participate. Participating teams will fight one-on-one in the competitions.

(Source: PressTV)

Paykan signs French midfielder Jeremy Manzorro

Jeremy Manzorro attacking midfielder Jeremy Manzorro has joined Iranian football club Paykan.

The 25-year-old player has joined Paykan on a six-month contract.

Manzorro started his senior career at Stade de Reims in 2009 and joined Bourg-Péronnas in the Championnat National after three years.

The French player has also played for Bulgarian clubs Chernomorets Burgas and Slavia Sofia and Greek side Anorthosis.

Paykan is fourth in Iran Professional League with 26 points from 16 matches.

The Iranian football club has already signed Levon Hayrapetyan from Armenia and Nigeria's Godwin Mensha.

(Source: Tasnim)

Ozil: I am very comfortable in London

The World Cup winner, along with Alexis Sanchez, is out of contract at the end of next season and recently insisted he would not recommit until he is given assurances over Arsene Wenger's future at the club.

Ozil and Alexis are reportedly demanding huge pay rises to bring their wages level with the Premier League's top stars, with the former currently understood to be taking home £140,000 a week and the latter around £10,000 less.

But, in a possible hint towards penning fresh terms, Ozil has now underlined his happiness in England, telling the German FA's official website: "I've simply arrived in the Premier League since last season.

"I've remained injury-free for the most part and I feel very comfortable in London now as well."

Ozil was taking part in a question-and-answer session after being named German Player of the Year for the fifth time in six years, trumping Real Madrid's Toni Kroos to the award.

He continued: "As one of the more experienced players in the team, I try to pass on advice to the younger players. Even if I'm not the most vocal player on the pitch, my voice is heard in the team. And I try to help our younger players every day.

"I've changed a few things in my life this past year, for example my diet and my training. That helps me to regenerate fast after games and it reduces the chance of getting injured."

(Source: Goal)



Poem of the day

The waves run high, night is clouded with fears,
And eddying whirlpools clash and roar.

Hafez

Prayer Times

Noon:12:14 Evening: 17:35 Dawn: 5:45 tomorrow Sunrise: 7:13 (tomorrow)

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Dutch musician tracing piano Napoleon gave to Iranian king

T I A R T TEHRAN — Dutch pianist Rembrandt d e s k Frerichs has said that he is searching for a piano that Napoleon Bonaparte presented to an Iranian king.

Frerichs made the remarks on the sidelines of a concert with his fellow musicians Tony Overwater and Vinsent Planjer of the Rembrandt Frerichs Trio at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on last Friday.

"We have heard about a piano that Napoleon presented to an Iranian king in 1806," Frerichs said,

"We are on track to find this piano. Perhaps it is kept at a museum or somewhere else. If you know where it is, please tell us! We are eager to perform with it," he added.

The piano was the first of its kind known to have arrived in Iran.

According to the Encyclopaedia Iranica, it was a gift from Napoleon to the Qajar king Fath'Ali Shah.

The piano was a small 5-octave instrument and must have been hopelessly out of tune by the time of its arrival in Tehran. It is unlikely that it was ever put to any use.

No one knows about the fate of the instrument.

The Rembrandt Frerichs Trio is among the groups participating in the 32nd Fajr International Music Festival currently underway in Tehran.

Iranian kamancheh virtuoso Hesam Inanlu also accompanied the trio in a part of their performance at the festival.

The trio has previously performed concerts with some Iranian musicians, including kamancheh virtuoso Kayhan Kalhor and tar master Hossein Alizadeh.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Fajr cancels Tajik singer Davlatmand Kholov's concert over stroke

T I A R T TEHRAN — Tajik singer d e s k Davlatmand Kholov's concert at the 32nd Fajr International Music Festival was cancelled on Sunday three days before his planned performance at Tehran's Vahdat Hall after he suffered a stroke last week, the organizers announced.

Kholov is an expert in Falak, a kind of folk music common in the southern Tajikistan. He is also an old hand at playing dotar and setar.

The festival opened in Tehran on Friday and will run until Jan. 20.



Three foreign artists to compete in Fajr

T I A R T TEHRAN — Three artists from d e s k Belgium, Brazil and the U.S. will be competing in the 9th edition of the Fajr International Festival of Visual Arts running in Tehran from January 22 to February 18.

Belgian cartoonist Luc Descheemaeker, Brazilian cartoonist Silvano Mello, and American photographer and artist Eric Tomberlin are the foreign artists competing in the festival.

Over 90 Iranian artists will also be competing in the festival this year. The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art and the Niavaran Cultural Center will be hosting the event.



Winners of Persian painting biennial honored

T I CULTURE TEHRAN — Winners of the d e s k 10th edition of Iran's National Biennial of Persian Painting were honored during a ceremony held at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on Saturday.

Fatemeh Bahari received the first place award in the illumination category and Mehdi Mahdavi won the first place award in the category of tash'ir (a form of simple illumination decorated with tiny irregular patterns).

In the category of gol-o-morgh (a unique style of Persian painting featuring bird and floral motifs in different colors), the first place award went to Ehsan Fattahi and Zobeir Saeidi received the first place award in the miniature section.

Turkish artist Havva Marta brings "Simorgh", "Things" to Tehran gallery

T I A R T TEHRAN — The Turkish artist Hava d e s k Marta is displaying a selection of paintings from her series "Simorgh" and "Things" in an exhibition at Tehran's Did Gallery.

Entitled "Simorgh and Things", the exhibition opened on Friday.

Marta's "Simorgh" inspired by a mythical bird of the same name in Persian literature features her personal image of Simorgh.

"Part of this exhibit shows my studies about Simorgh, which is of great significance in Persian literature and of my own interest as well," she has told the Persian service of Honaronline.

She added that she has viewed the world and the bird through her own perception and that she has focused on pictorial aspects of the Simorgh through her studies.

Her other works highlight the things that pass by unnoticed most of the time: small things, light things, and laughable things.

"I mainly have focused on colors, symbols and their reflections in a way to make the visitors ponder more, and this tendency towards symbols is like an incident which visualizes the depth of words," she described.

Born in Samsun, Turkey, Marta is a graduate of the Ondokuz Mayıs University (19 May University). She has held several solo exhibits in several Turkish cities and has attended several group exhibits in different countries.

The exhibition runs until Jan. 24 at the gallery located at No. 18 West 19 St., Ettehad St. in the Tehran Pars neighborhood.



The Turkish artist Havva Marta poses beside a work from her series "Simorgh" on display in an exhibition at Tehran's Did Gallery on Jan. 13, 2017. (Honaronline/Sara Sassani)

Gothenburg festival to screen Iranian films

T I A R T TEHRAN — A lineup of five Iranian d e s k films will go on screen in the various sections of the 40th Gothenburg Film Festival, which will be held in the Swedish city from Jan. 27 to Feb. 6.

Behnam Behzadi's social drama "Inversion" will be screened at the Festival Favorites section.

The movie starring Ali Mossafa and Sahar Dowlatshahi is a tale of three siblings, which masterfully features Tehran's air pollution.

"Parting", a joint production of Iran and Afghanistan by Navid Mahmudi, will compete in the New Voices section.

"Parting" is about teenage lovers Nabi and Fereshteh who are separated by her family's flight from Afghanistan.

After years apart, Nabi decides to find Fereshteh and risk the hardship of flight and resettlement in Europe with a hope of a better life.

"76 Minutes and 15 Seconds with Abbas Kiarostami", a montage film made by Iranian world-renowned filmmaker Kiarostami's close friend Seifollah Samadian, and Kiarostami's last film "Take Me Home" will be shown in the Master section of the festival.

In addition, Manijeh Hekmat's 2002 film "Women's Prison" will go on screen in the Commemorative Retrospective section.

The film tells the story of a stern warden, who comes to an Iranian women's prison on a mission to repress a rebellion.



Alireza Aqakhani (R) and Sahar Dowlatshahi act in a scene from "Inversion".

PICTURE OF THE DAY Honaronline/Bahareh Asadi



Iranian folk music ensemble Rastak gives a concert during the 32nd Fajr International Music Festival at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on Jan. 14, 2017.

David Bowie and Leonard Cohen nominated posthumously for Brit Awards

NEW YORK (ABC News) — David Bowie and Leonard Cohen are among the nominees for this year's Brit Awards, which honor British and international musicians.

The nominees for next month's ceremony were announced on Saturday, with David Bowie up for two posthumous awards.

The influential rock icon — who died at the age of 69 in January 2016 — received nominations in the British Male Solo Artists and British Album of the Year awards.

From David Bowie and Leonard Cohen to George Michael and Prince, it was a tough year for losing musical icons.

Bowie, who was honored at the 2016 Brit Awards with a tribute performance

by Lorde of Life on Mars?, is up against Craig David, Kano, Michael Kiwanuka and Skepta in the Male Solo Artist category.

His album "Blackstar" will fight it out with The 1975's "I like It When You Sleep". "Blackstar" was released just two days before Bowie's death.

Canadian singer-songwriter Cohen, who died in November 2016, was nominated in the International Male Solo Artist category, alongside Bon Iver, Bruno Mars, Drake and The Weeknd.

Skepta and Little Mix lead nominations

Bowie and Cohen qualified for the nominations because they released albums during the qualifying timeframe — with both putting out music shortly before they died.

Wildenstein art-dealer family acquitted of tax fraud charges in France

PARIS (Reuters) — Wealthy French art dealer Guy Wildenstein and seven others were acquitted of tax fraud charges on Thursday thanks to a legal loophole the Paris court acknowledged might not be understood by the general public.

Wildenstein and two family members, as well as their financiers and lawyers, were accused of deliberately understating to tax authorities the real value of family riches inherited about a decade ago and placed in trusts abroad.

The trial concerned more than 500 million euros of various goods and prosecutors asked that Guy Wildenstein, 71, get two years in jail and a fine of 250 million euros (\$267 million) if convicted. The other faced various similar charges, including complicity in fraud.

The case did not produce a guilty

verdict because France's tax legislation at the time lacked clarity on the declaration of inheritance assets parked in financial trusts, the court said.

The law was amended in 2011 to close this loophole.

"The court is perfectly aware its verdict may run counter to public belief and be misunderstood," Judge Olivier Geron said.

He said it seemed clear there was an effort to hide assets, but the way it was done was not technically illegal at the time.

Prosecutors accused Wildenstein of deliberately failing to report the full extent of riches inherited from his father Daniel Wildenstein, who died in 2001, and after the death of a brother, Alec, a few years later.

Kidman says comments about Trump support weren't endorsement

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Nicole Kidman says her comments that Americans should support President-elect Donald Trump were merely a statement of her belief in democracy, not an endorsement of the incoming president.

The Oscar-winning actress's earlier remarks sparked both criticism and praise online after they were aired by the BBC earlier this week.

Kidman tells Access Hollywood that her comments were misconstrued. She says, "I was trying to stress that I believe in democracy and the American Constitution, and it was that simple."

When an interviewer pressed her for more details, Kidman threw up her hands and said she was done commenting on the topic.

Kidman was born in Hawaii to Australian parents and holds dual citizenship in Australia and the U.S.

Kidman won an Oscar for 2002's "The Hours" and currently stars in "Lion."