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Protesters make their mark on Trump's inauguration

Calling out incoming United States President Donald Trump on climate change, race, his treatment of women and more, protesters pitching diverse causes but united against the incoming president demonstrated in the early hours of Inauguration Day, intent on making their mark as Trump prepared to take office.

Spirited demonstrations unfolded at various security checkpoints near the Capitol as police in riot gear helped ticket-holders get through to the inaugural ceremony. Signs read "Resist Trump Climate Justice Now," "Let Freedom Ring," "Free Palestine."

The DisruptJ20 coalition, named after the date of the inauguration, had promised that people participating in its actions in Washington would attempt to shut down the celebrations, risking arrest when necessary.

Lines for ticket holders entering two gates stretched for blocks at one point as protesters clogged entrances.

Trump supporter Brett Ecker said the protesters were frustrating but weren't going to put a damper on his day.

Black Lives Matter and feminist groups also made their voices heard.

Most Trump supporters walking to the inauguration past Union Station ignored protesters outside the train station, but not Doug Rahm, who engaged in a lengthy and sometimes profane yelling match with them. ➔13



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Tehran Times/Majid Haghdoost

Nation grieves fallen firefighters

Fajr music festival ends in shock over Tehran building collapse

T A R S K TEHRAN — The 32nd Fajr International Music Festival came to end on Friday night with a big shock over the collapse of the Plasco Building in Tehran after a fierce fire in the 17-storey commercial center on Thursday.

All the festival's closing performances were dedicated to the victims of the incident.

In a statement published on Thursday, the organizers expressed their condolences over the deaths of some firefighters who lost their lives during the rescue operations.

The Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri also sent a message of condolences to the families of the firefighters.

"Today the people of Iran and the world are worried for the lives of the brave firefighters trapped under rubble," reads part of the message.

"The disastrous incident in Tehran depicts a tableau full of pain and sacrifice, which is unique in its kind. The sudden collapse of the building has led to a great loss and the firefighters who made the ultimate sacrifice to save the lives of the people have painted this tableau with the beautiful colors of fire and blood. May God bless their souls," the message says. ➔16

UN Security Council confirms Iran's compliance with nuclear deal

The UN Security Council has confirmed that Iran has complied with the provisions of the historic nuclear deal with the P5+1 countries, Press TV reported on Friday.

Speaking at Wednesday's meeting of the council, UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Fletman briefed the council on its Resolution 2231 which endorsed the deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Feltman described the nuclear agreement as "a good example of how multilateral diplomacy, political will and perseverance can resolve the most complex issues."

"It is imperative that its participants, the United Nations and the broader international community continue to support the full implementation of this historic multilateral agreement for its full duration," he said.

"It's comprehensive and sustained implementation guarantees that Iran's nuclear program remains exclusively peaceful," Fletman pointed out.

Feltman said Iran has not received any unauthorized nuclear-related items since the agreement was signed, adding that no information was received regarding Iranian ballistic missile activities in violation of the resolution.

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, reading a statement on Wednesday, lauded the deal as "a major achievement" and said all participants have fulfilled their commitments.

Mogherini pointed to "a staggering 63 percent" growth in EU-Iran trade in the first three quarters of 2016 as an example of the results of removal of bans against Iran.

During his election campaigns Donald Trump threatened that he would "tear up" the deal or try to renegotiate its terms if elected president. He has also referred to the nuclear agreement as "the worst deal ever negotiated."

Mogherini said in an interview on Wednesday that the JCPOA is neither unilateral nor bilateral, meaning that it cannot be renegotiated by one party alone. "So it is a multilateral framework and we are ready protect and to preserve it," she added.

Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council -- the United States, France, Britain, Russia and China -- plus Germany started implementing the JCPOA on January 16, 2016.

West minus U.S.: Hashemi Rafsanjani's foreign policy

Iranian Diplomacy — When Seyyed Hossein Mousavian was appointed as Iran's ambassador to Bonn, then capital of Germany, the European power became the gateway for relations between Iran and the West, minus the United States of course. However, efforts were made through this gateway to find a way for détente with the U.S. That proved futile in spite of Mousavian's efforts and follow-ups by then-president Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Five years ago, Mousavian told a conference in Florida that the best chance for rapprochement between Iran and the U.S. emerged during Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency. Everyone was stunned.

Later, when he published his book, Iran and the United States: the Failed Past and the Road to Peace, it turned out that in 1993, Rafsanjani had even sent his brother, Mohammad Hashemi, to Germany with a letter written to inform Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Iran's readiness to put an end to two decades of hostility with the U.S. The U.S. president Bill Clinton did not want that and it never happened. In an interview with Sergei Barseghian, the former ambassador and nuclear negotiator tells us about the pursuit of the "West minus U.S." strategy alongside efforts to reduce animosity with the United States, under the Hashemi Rafsanjani administration.

■ **In your book, Iran and the United States ..., you refer to the period when Ayatollah Khamenei became Iran's Supreme Leader and Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani became the country's president as the 'beginning of a new era'. The two Ayatollahs had different viewpoints regarding the U.S. How was Iran's foreign policy shaped? Was the 'West minus US' doctrine being pursued in parallel with efforts to reduce hostility with the US?**

A: In 1990, when I was about to leave

Iran for the mission to Germany, Ayatollah Hashemi told me that the Supreme Leader's policy, hence our benchmark policy, was 'West minus U.S.' Utmost efforts had to be taken to improve ties with Europe. In the meantime, if an opportunity came up for détente with the U.S., it had to be seized. At the time, all European countries involved in talks with Iran stated that the two issues of the U.S. and Israel would have significant impact on ties between Europe and Iran. Thus, the main topics in European talks with Iran revolved around the peace process, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and human rights. These talks were often in line with Washington and Tel Aviv, blocking any improvement in ties between Iran and Europe.

During my mission in Germany, Chancellor Helmut Kohl had been convinced about maximal expansion of ties with Iran and he was absolutely ready for it. ➔13

Iran wrestling teams win 'Takhti Cup'

T S P O R T S Iranian wrestling Greco-Roman and Freestyle teams claimed the title of the 37th edition of 'Takhti Cup' on Friday.

In the two-day competition held in Mashhad's Shahid Beheshti Hall, Iranian Greco-Roman Team A defeated Georgia 7-1 and claimed the title.

The Iranian B Team finished in third place after defeating Turkey 5-3.

Also, Iran Freestyle Team A crowned the title, beating Armenia 8-0 in the final match. The Team B lost to Kazakhstan 5-3 and came fourth.

Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Masoud Soltanifar attended the competitions.

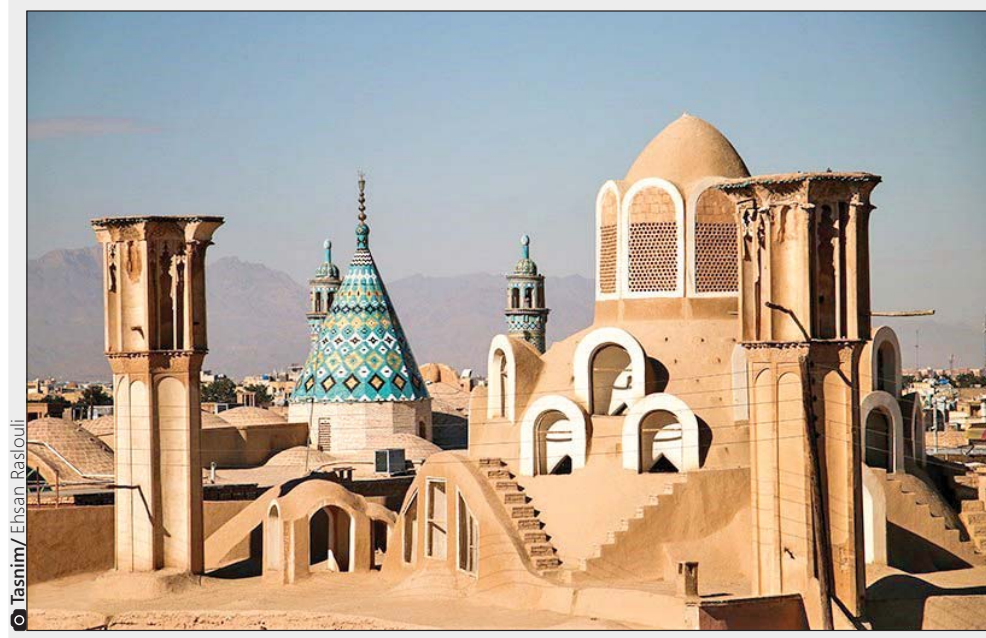
Takhti, the most famous wrestler in Iranian history, died on January 7, 1968. He claimed the gold medal in Melbourne 1956 Olympic Games and won two silver medals in 1952

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.



Tasnim/Ehsan Raslouji

Boroujerdiha House enjoys splendid 19th-century Iranian architecture

The picture shows rooftop of the historical Boroujerdiha House (Khane-ye Boroujerdiha in Persian), a major tourist destination in the city of Kashan, central Iran, on December 26, 2016.

In the foreground stands the mausoleum of Emamzadeh Soltan Mir Ahmad with its conical dome and minarets dominated in blue. The picturesque roof is embellished with a six-sided, domed wind tower flanked by two other mudbrick ones.

Boroujerdiha House enjoys a splendid 19th-century Iranian architecture, featuring intricate tilework, stucco, motifs, mirror work, and frescoes. The two-story monument has a relatively-vast courtyard, on center of which is a rectangular fountain pool.



Leader writes to European Muslim student associations

TEHRAN — Students are expected to pursue scientific, religious, and ethical edification, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei wrote to Europe-based Islamic student associations on Friday, his website reported.

“It is expected that you impact your surrounding atmosphere — by means of words and deeds — and attract more followers to the path of God,” Ayatollah Khamenei wrote.

“In the asymmetric war of the front of Kufr (disbelief) and arrogance against the raised flag of pure Islam, this is the duty for us all.”



Friday prayer leader praises firefighters

TEHRAN — A day after the Plasco business center in downtown Tehran was burned down and left many firefighters dead the interim Friday prayer leader of Tehran praised firefighters for their sacrifices.

“Firefighters are always on the forefront for sacrifice,” Kazzem Seddiqi said, condoling the families of the lost firefighters, Mehr reported.

He wished for the souls of the firefighters to be resurrected with the souls of martyrs.

The cleric also said, “Officials should not sit idle until another mishap takes place. They should think of preventing disasters.



Velayati replaces Rafsanjani in Azad University

TEHRAN — Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei appointed his senior foreign policy advisor Ali Akbar Velayati as the head of Azad University’s board of founders, the Leader’s official website reported on Friday.

Velayati thus replaced the late Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani who held the position since 1980, the year when he founded the non-governmental university.

Currently about 1.6 million Iranians study in the Azad University. Ayatollah Rafsanjani died in Tehran on January 8 after a cardiac arrest.



Leader, president voice deep sorrow over Plasco disaster

TEHRAN — In separate messages on Thursday Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani expressed deep sorrow over the burning and collapse of the 17-story Plasco building in downtown Tehran which buried more than 20 firefighters.

The Leader called the incident “painful” and said rescue operations should be prioritized.

Rouhani ordered Abdolreza Rahmani-Fazli, the interior minister, to explore the causes behind the incident and to provide a report on it as soon as possible. The shopping center collapsed after a four-hour blaze. Officials said Friday they were losing hope of pulling any survivors from the rubble of the collapsed building. Rescue workers, soldiers and sniffer dogs were still frantically searching through the wreckage of the building.



Interior Ministry to announce council elections signup on March 25

TEHRAN — The Interior Ministry will announce the signup days for council elections on March 25, spokesman Salman Samani told Mehr on Thursday.

“From that date, we will also have four days to form administrative delegates in all cities around the country,” he said.He added the time for candidates to sign up for the elections is the last week of the Iranian month of Esfand, which will end on March 20.

The elections will be held on May 19.



Zarif confers with Pakistani PM advisor

TEHRAN — Iran’s foreign minister held a meeting with advisor to the prime minister of Pakistan on foreign affairs Sertaj Aziz in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur late Thursday, IRNA reported.

Mohammad Javad Zarif’s meeting with Aziz was held on the sidelines of the OIC extraordinary session in the country which discussed crisis facing the Muslims minorities in Rohingya in Myanmar as well as latest developments in Palestine.

The two officials underlined expansion of cooperation between the two countries, as well.

UN-endorsed nuclear deal not up for renegotiation: top MP



TEHRAN — A senior Iranian parliamentary has said the international nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers has the endorsement of the UN Security Council, pointing out that it cannot be unilaterally cancelled.

“BARJAM (Persian acronym for the deal) is endorsed by the UN Security Council’s resolution,” Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the head of the Iranian parliamentary committee for national security and foreign policy, was quoted as saying on Friday.

“The Americans have no other choice but to honor the deal, and in case they wish to disrupt the game, they will be the first loser themselves.”

According to the nuclear deal struck in July 2015 between Iran and the U.S., Russia, China, France, England and Germany sanctions on the strategic Middle East country of Iran were lifted in exchange for Tehran rolling back parts of its nuclear program.

On Jul. 20, 2015, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 2231 (2015) endorsing the deal, affirming that conclusion of the accord marked a fundamental shift in its consideration of the Iranian nuclear issue.

However concerns loom large as to what happens to the deal - hailed by former U.S. President Barak Obama as a signature foreign policy achievement - left in novice hands of President Donald Trump.



Senior Iranian parliamentary says Washington cannot abrogate or renegotiate the deal as it is endorsed by the United Nations Security Council’s resolution.

Trump had censured the deal during his campaign trail as “the worst deal ever negotiated” and a “disaster”

He also had spoken of decision to renegotiate the deal.

In comments on Tuesday, President Hassan Rouhani said in a press

conference that the talk of renegotiating was “meaningless.”

Also, Rex Tillerson, Trump’s nominee for secretary of state, said last week that he would recommend a “full review” of the nuclear deal though he did not call for an outright rejection.

Iran, ROSATOM sign roadmap for nuclear cooperation



TEHRAN — The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) and the Russian ROSATOM signed on Thursday a roadmap for cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

The document was signed in Russia by Behrouz Kamalvandi, the AEOI deputy chief, and Nickolay Spasskiy, ROSATOM deputy director general, as a follow-up to a memorandum of understanding in Nov. 11, 2014.

Also, the two sides finalized a pre-project contract for the retrofitting of two gas centrifuge cascades in the Fordo facility.

The documents were approved and prepared for signing as a result of recent negotiations between the AEOI and ROSATOM.

The agreement is in line with a 2015 international nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers, which resulted in removal of sanctions against Iran in exchange



Behrouz Kamalvandi (L) and Nickolay Spasskiy, ROSATOM deputy director general, sign a roadmap in Moscow on Jan. 19.

for limits on the country’s nuclear program.

Under the deal, Iran has committed to convert the Fordo facility into a nuclear, physics and technology

Iran summons Danish envoy over embassy attack



TEHRAN — On Thursday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry summoned Danish Ambassador to Tehran Danny Annan over attack on Iran’s embassy in Copenhagen.

“Following four anti-revolutionary elements’ attack on our country’s embassy in Copenhagen on the current day [Thursday], the ministry’s director for Northern and Eastern European affairs summoned the Danish ambassador to Tehran and strongly condemned this action which is contrary to the international regulations,” Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi stated.

Qassemi criticized the Danish government for its “poor performance in providing security for the embassy and its staff”

The official also called on the Danish government to “counter the elements behind the attack”

The spokesman added the Danish ambassador called the act “unacceptable” and pledged to pursue the issue and announce the results.

According to Press TV, Danish police have arrested six people who were involved in the attack and described four of them the Iranian expatriates seeking asylum in Sweden and two others holding Swedish residency.

The incident saw the invaders entering the mission’s courtyard earlier in the day, putting up profane placards and forcing down the Iranian national flag from the flagstaff.

Copenhagen police superintendent Henrik Stormer said the detainees were being held in police custody.

Russia opposes pressure on Iran for missile program



TEHRAN — Russia’s Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Vladimir Safronkov has said that Russia is against any attempts “to make pressure on Iran in the aspect of its missile program or conventional arms sector”.

During a session of the UN Security Council on Wednesday, he said, “Any threats to cancel work on lifting unilateral sanctions and on returning Iran to the world’s economic market are inadmissible, incorrect and speculative,” Tass reported.

Non-government agencies are trying to make use of provisions of the Iran nuclear deal for boosting the guarantee system of the International Atomic Energy Agency and for promoting nuclear disarmament, he said.

The Russian diplomat called on the UN Secretariat to oversee these “arbitrary actions” which run counter to Item 27 of Resolution 2231 approved by the UN Security Council in support to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear program.

“There the unprecedented nature of JCPOA provisions is clearly-defined in the context of continued attempts to impose exclusive agreements of this plan in other formats,” Safronkov said. “Meanwhile, certain non-governmental agencies are working out steps so as to use the JCPOA measures for strengthening the IAEA guarantee system, even with the aim to promote nuclear disarmament.”

Iran could have first female presidential candidate



TEHRAN — The Islamic Republic’s first and only female minister, who had headed the Ministry of Health and Medical Education between 2009 and 2012, could also become the first woman in Iran to be running for presidency, ISNA reported.

Speculations have surged over possible candidacy of Marzieh Vahid-Dastjerdi in the next presidential election which will be held on May 19.

Under Iran’s law, the Guardian Council, a body of jurists and clerics, vets all candidates before any elections. It has rejected candidacy of women for presidency up until now. However, last month, the council indicated that it might alter a masculine definition of “statesmen” so that women could run for presidency for the first time.

Abbasali Kadkhodaei, spokesman of the Guardian Council, said last month that women could run in the upcoming presidential election, but whether they would be approved by the council is still in debate.

However, Vahid-Dastjerdi on Friday dismissed speculations about her

candidacy as “untrue”.

Recently she has taken a harsher tone in criticizing the current administration. Earlier this week, she said “the nation deserves a much better government than the Rouhani administration.”

Vahid-Dastjerdi is also the spokeswoman of the Popular Front of Islamic Revolution Forces (PFIRF), a political group launched by principlists in a bid to retake presidency from the self-described moderate president.

Founded in late 2016 by ten figures from different spectrum of conservative groups, the faction aims at uniting conservatives to introduce a single candidate in order to challenge President Rouhani who will most likely seek a second term.

It is headed by Hojatoleslam Mohammad Hossein Rahimian, and its members are Yahya Ale Es’haq, Mehdi Chamran, Hamid-Reza Haji Babaei, Reza Roosta Azad, Mahmoud Khosravi Vafa, Mehdi Mohammadi, Ali Reza Marandi, Nader Talebzadeh and Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi.

“One cannot see [enough] efforts for solving people’s problems,” said Vahid-Dastjerdi, adding that the popular front seeks to cooperate with “anyone who cares about the revolution and the country.”

The move came after months of speculations that had been built up over the possible candidacy of former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad whom the Leader advised not to run in the upcoming election.

Back in September, he wrote a letter saying he will follow his advice.

“You recommended that it was not in [my] interests to run in the elections and I stated my obedience,” he wrote.

The Leader, too, revealed that he had advised Ahmadinejad not to run.

“Someone came to see me and considering his own interests and the interests of the country, I told him he should not

participate in that matter [elections],” Ayatollah Khamenei said.

“I didn’t tell him not to participate, I told him I won’t recommend him participating,” he added.



Most ISIL commanders in Mosul killed in battles

Iraqi army forces recapture more areas in Mosul

A senior Iraqi general says most of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group commanders in Mosul have been killed in battles with armed forces over the past three months.

"The majority of (ISIL) commanders have been killed in the eastern side," Lieutenant-General Abdul Ghani al-Assadi from the elite Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) told reporters, while touring the newly retaken areas in the northern Iraqi city.

Since October 2016, the Iraqi army, backed by volunteer forces, has been pushing to drive ISIL terrorists out of their last urban stronghold in the state.

"God willing, there will be an announcement in the next few days that all the eastern bank is under control," Assadi added.

Meanwhile, Iraqi government forces have regained control of more areas in the eastern and northern sides of Mosul in northern Iraq, as fierce clashes continued against the Takfiri ISIL terrorists in their last urban stronghold in the crisis-ridden country.

The commander of Nineveh Liberation Operation, Lieutenant General Abdul Amir Yarallah, said on Friday that soldiers



from the 71st Brigade of the 15th Division and the 76th Brigade of the 16th Division in the Iraqi Army had liberated al-Araby al-Oula neighborhood in eastern Mosul from ISIL grip, Arabic-language al-Sumaria television network reported.

The high-ranking Iraqi military commander went on to say that government forces had inflicted heavy losses on ISIL

ranks during the operation, before they hoisted the national flag over a cluster of buildings in the area.

Earlier, Iraqi army soldiers recaptured a pharmaceutical plant on the northern outskirts of Mosul from ISIL terrorists.

Iraqi troopers also completely freed al-Hurra neighborhood in the northern part of Mosul, and raised the Iraqi flag on

some of its buildings after heavy clashes with ISIL terrorists that left dozens of the terrorists killed and wounded.

The Iraqi Air Force also announced in a statement on Friday that its fighter jets had killed 59 ISIL terrorists and destroyed eight explosive-laden vehicles during a series of airstrikes across Mosul.

Furthermore, the Iraqi Joint Operations Command (JOC) stated that government forces are trying to liberate the last four remaining neighborhoods of al-Rashidiya, Baisan, al-Araby and Ghabat in eastern Mosul.

The JOC statement put the number of liberated eastern Mosul neighborhoods at 61 out of the entire 65.

The commander of Mosul Operations, Major General Najm al Jabouri, also said the United States-led military aircraft had targeted 21 ISIL boats in al-Rashidiya district northeast of Mosul as the slain terrorists were fleeing across the Tigris river.

Iraqi army soldiers, supported by Popular Mobilization Units (PMU/al-Hashd al-Sha'abi) fighters and Kurdish Peshmerga forces, launched a joint operation on October 17, 2016 to retake Mosul from ISIL terrorists.

(Source: agencies)

America urged Saddam Hussein to attack Assad in Syria

The United States of America urged Iraqi longtime dictator Saddam Hussein to attack Hafez al-Assad's Syria because of the closure of Iraq's oil pipeline, a secret 1983 intelligence report has revealed.

A report, by former senior CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) official Graham Fuller, said the U.S. should consider 'urging Iraq to take the war to Syria', noting that Saddam was 'fighting for his life' in the Iran-Iraq campaign.

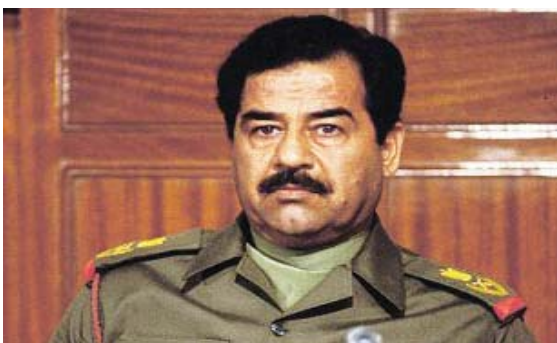
Through the closure of the pipeline, Fuller said Syria had a 'hammerlock' on U.S. interests in both Lebanon and in the Persian Gulf.

With that being the case, he said the U.S. should consider 'sharply escalating the pressures against Assad' from three border states hostile to Syria - Iraq, Israel and Turkey.

Faced with 'three belligerent fronts', Assad would probably be forced to abandon his closure of the pipeline, the report claimed.

It hoped it could convince Iraq to co-operate as the closure of the pipeline had brought the country 'to its financial knees', impelling it towards dangerous internationalization of the war in the Persian Gulf.

It noted that Iraq might not 'readily wish' another campaign but said Syria was already fighting a one-



front war in Lebanon and could 'ill-afford to broaden' its conflict.

It also said Syria was struggling to keep control over a population that detested the Assad regime.

It went on to say Iraq had enough military firepower to devote up to one half of its air force against Syria.

By demanding the reopening of the pipeline, Iraq would have the support of 'virtually every Arab state, except Libya', the report said.

The report added that if the U.S. wanted to 'rein in Syria' it needed to do so by showing 'real muscle' and highlighted the need to strike a 'sharp blow' to Syria's prestige.

ia's prestige.

Elsewhere, the report stated that Israel should 'welcome the chance to humble Assad' by raising tensions among Syria's Lebanon front without actually going to war. It said Assad was now Israel's greatest problem, not Iraq.

Lastly, it said that Turkey, angered by Syrian support to Armenian terrorism, to Iraqi Kurds and to Turkish terrorists operating out of northern Syria, had often considered launching unilateral military operations against terrorist camps in northern Syria.

It said the use of all three states was essential to enacting change and forcing Assad to back down.

Bringing in Iraq, it said, was the most challenging aspect of the plan.

To do so could only be done by a 'reorientation of U.S. policy towards Iraq' and might include 'more active U.S. participation in supplying high-tech items' to Iraq's modernization efforts.

It concluded by saying that the U.S. might need to give more support to Iraq in the war against Iran.

The Iraq-Iran war started on September 22, 1980 and did not end for eight years.

The war finally ended with a United Nation-brokered ceasefire which was accepted by both sides.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Fighting erupts in Turkish parliament over Erdogan powers bill

Turkish Members of Parliament (MPs) have once again engaged in physical violence after a female lawmaker handcuffed herself to the parliament's podium in protest at a constitutional reform package under debates.

Independent legislator Aylin Nazliaka attached herself to the microphone on Thursday, forcing the deputy parliament speaker to call recess twice.

The row erupted among female lawmakers during the recess as efforts failed to convince Nazliaka to end her protest.

The lawmakers started shoving and slapping each other after one legislator proceeded to unscrew the microphone.

Two legislators, including Pervin Buldan, a deputy speaker from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP/Halklar'n Demokratik Partisi), and Gokcen Enc, with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP/

Adalet ve Kalk'nma Partisi), were hospitalized following the brawl.

It was the third such fight during parliamentary debates over the controversial bill proposed by the AKP.

If adopted both in the parliament and a national referendum, the new constitution would cancel the parliamentary system of government in favor of a presidential one.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the AKP's founder, has long pushed for the constitutional amendments, arguing that a strong presidency will make Turkey stronger.

On January 11, Turkish lawmakers got engaged in physical violence, pushing each other and exchanging blows during a round of voting.

The opposition lawmakers accused the ruling party of breaching the law on secrecy of ballot by displaying



their votes.

So far, the parliament has approved seven out of the 18 articles of the draft constitution.

Under the new mechanism, Erdogan would be allowed to serve two five-year tenures. With the exception of his current mandate, he could thus be leading the country until 2029, with the next elections being scheduled for 2019.

The reforms would also enable the president to appoint and dismiss government officials at his own discretion.

The president would further be able to be a party member, thus giving Erdogan a permit to return to the leadership of the AKP, which he himself has founded.

Under the new charter, the number of parliamentarians will be increased from 550 to 600, as well.

The AKP has only 316 deputies eligible to vote on the bill, which needs 330 'Yes' votes at every parliamentary hurdle. The party, therefore, relies on its allies from the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP/Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi) for approving the bill.

The AKP and the MHP say the changes will create a strong executive leadership vis-à-vis the fragile coalition governments of the past.

The proposed reform package has been met with strong opposition from the Turkish legislature's second- and third-biggest parties, the Republican People's Party (CHP/Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) and the HDP.

Critics say such changes to the constitution will fuel authoritarianism as it places too much power in the hands of the president.

(Source: Press TV)

Turkey can no longer insist on Syria settlement without Assad: Turkish deputy PM

Turkey can no longer insist on a resolution of the conflict in Syria without the involvement of President Bashar al-Assad, as the situation on the ground has changed dramatically, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek said on Friday.

Turkey has long insisted that Assad must go for sustainable peace to be achieved in Syria. But it has become less insistent on his immediate departure since its recent rapprochement with Russia, which backs the Syrian leader, and ahead of peace talks planned in Kazakhstan next week.

"As far as our position on Assad is concerned, we think that the suffering of (the) Syrian people and the tragedies, clearly the blame is squarely on Assad. But we have to be pragmatic, realistic," Simsek told a panel on Syria and Iraq at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

"The facts on the ground have changed dramatically, so Turkey can no longer insist on a settlement without Assad, it's not realistic," he said.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's spokesman said last week that Turkey still believes a united and peaceful Syria is impossible with Assad, but wants to proceed "step-by-step" and see the outcome of the peace talks in Astana.

Turkey and Russia brokered a ceasefire in Syria which has largely held in the run-up to the Astana talks, a process which follows the defeat of the Syrian opposition in the northern city of Aleppo last month.

(Source: Reuters)

Four dead, more than 20 hurt when driver ploughs into Australian pedestrians

A man deliberately drove into pedestrians, killing four and injuring more than 20, in the center of Australia's second largest city of Melbourne on Friday, but police said the incident was not terrorism-related.

Police eventually rammed the car and shot the 26-year-old driver in the arm, before dragging him from the vehicle and arresting him. Police said the man had a history of family violence and was wanted over a stabbing earlier in the day.

Pursued by police cars, the man had been seen driving erratically before speeding into a pedestrian mall, ploughing into people, police said. A shop video showed several people diving into a convenience store as the car raced along the footpath.

One of the dead was a child. Four children, including a three-month-old baby, were taken to Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital, said a hospital spokesman.

"We're not regarding this as a terrorism-related incident," Victoria state police commissioner Graham Ashton told reporters on Friday.

Police had earlier chased the driver, who was wanted over a domestic assault and driving offences, Ashton said.

Video from a witness showed a maroon colored car driving around in circles in an intersection outside Flinders St railway station in the city's central business district, with the driver shouting at people and hanging his arm out the window.

Two people approached the car, apparently trying to stop it before it drove off with police chasing.

Melbourne is hosting the Australian Open tennis grand slam and is packed with thousands of tourists, only a few blocks from where the incident occurred. Police said the tennis tournament continued as normal.

Australia, a United States ally, has been on heightened alert for attacks by home-grown radicals since 2014 and authorities have said they have thwarted a number of plots. There have been several "lone wolf" assaults, including a 2014 cafe siege in Sydney that left two hostages and the gunman dead.

Friday's incident initially raised fears about the possibility of another attack.

Last year, in attacks claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group, trucks were driven into crowded pedestrian precincts in separate incidents in Nice and Berlin, killing scores.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. air raids kill scores of ISIL terrorists in Libya

More than 80 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists have been killed in United States air raids on camps operated by the armed group inside Libya, according to U.S. officials.

The Pentagon said on Thursday that B-2 bombers and U.S. drones had targeted overnight two camps southwest of the city of Sirte, a former bastion of ISIL in the North African country.

Ash Carter, the U.S. defense secretary, said on Thursday that some of the ISIL terrorists were believed to be actively planning attacks against targets in Europe, without offering any details.

"We need to strike ISIL everywhere they show up," Carter said on his last day office.

"And that's particularly true in view of the fact that we know some of the ISIL operatives in Libya were involved with plotting attacks."

Earlier on Thursday, Peter Cook, the Pentagon's press secretary, said the attacks were authorized by outgoing U.S. president Barack Obama and were in conjunction with Libya's United Nations-backed government of national accord.

Last month, forces aligned with Libya's internationally recognized government took full control of Sirte from ISIL.

Sirte fell after a sustained offensive starting in May 2016, including U.S. air strikes targeting tanks and other vehicles used by ISIL.

ISIL had seized control of Sirte, the hometown of Libya's former leader Muammar Gaddafi, in 2015.

(Source: agencies)

Siemens finalizes deal with Iran for manufacturing electric locomotives

T**I****ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Germany's Siemens has finalized a deal with Iran's Mapna Group for manufacturing of electric locomotives and also transferring relevant knowledge to the country, IRNA reported on Friday. According to Saeid Mohammadzadeh, the managing director of Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (IRIR), the contract is ready and it will be signed next week.

Addressing the press in the northeastern city of Mashhad, Mohammadzadeh noted that a significant part of the project is gaining to be carried out by Iranian experts and work force.

Mentioning other railway projects in the country, the official said the finance for signaling of the Tehran-Mashhad railway has been secured and hopefully the project will be inaugurated by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2017).

Earlier in November 2016, Bloomberg reported that Germany has agreed to provide Iran with a 1.2 billion euro (\$1.27 billion) credit line to help finance the development of the Tehran to Mashhad railway.

Also this week Monday, Iran and Germany inked an agreement on the expansion of cooperation in rail, air and sea transportation.

Based on this agreement, which was signed in Tehran by Iranian Transport Minister Abbas Akhoundi and the visiting German Federal Minister of Transport and Digital Infrastructure Alexander Dobrindt, the two sides agreed to set up a taskforce to develop mutual cooperation in different transportation areas.

George Soros: Theresa May won't last and Donald Trump is 'would-be dictator'

Theresa May will not remain in power long as Brexit cripples her government, while Donald Trump is a "would-be dictator" who is "going to fail", the billionaire investor George Soros has told the Davos world economic forum.

On the eve of Trump's inauguration as president, Soros delivered a scathing assessment, saying the "impostor and con-man" was "gearing up for a trade war" which would have "a very far-reaching effect in Europe and other parts of the world".

The "would-be-dictator ... didn't expect to win, he was surprised", Soros told an audience of business leaders and journalists in Davos where the World Economic Forum is being held.

"I personally have confidence that he's going to fail ... because his ideas that guide him are inherently self-contradictory," added Soros, who was a supporter of Trump's Democratic rival Hillary Clinton during the 2016 US presidential election campaign.

Soros said he expected financial markets to "not do very well" because of the uncertainty generated by the Trump administration.

On Theresa May and Brexit, Soros predicted economic upheaval in Britain and substantial difficulties in bringing about a clean break with the European Union – and the prospect of the UK quickly joining again or entering a successor arrangement once the referendum mandate of leaving the EU was fulfilled.

"In my opinion is unlikely that prime minister May is actually going to remain in power. Already she has a very divided cabinet, a very small majority in parliament. And I think she will not last," he said.

"At the moment the people in the UK are in denial. The current economic situation is not as bad as was predicted and they live in hope. But as the currency depreciates, and inflation will be the driving force, this will lead to declining living standards.

"This is going to take some time, but when it does happen they'll realise that they are earning less than before because wages won't rise as fast as the cost of living.

"The divorce is going to take a very long time. It's much harder to divorce than to get married, so I think the desire for rapprochement will develop, and in theory or maybe even in practice you could have a situation in 2019 or 2020 when Britain will leave the EU, because it does have to take place, but they could leave on a Friday but join over the weekend and have the new arrangement in place in Monday morning."

Soros said he hoped both sides would realize they must find some common ground and find common ground to avoid a bitter divorce.

The future for Europe looked bleak, Soros said, after a disastrous 2016. Europe had become too complicated, leaving people alienated and anti-European parties gathering force.

May, speaking earlier at the forum, said Britain had voted with "determination and quiet resolve" to leave the EU but it was "overwhelmingly" in Britain's interests for Europe to succeed.

"Britain must face up to a period of momentous change. It means we must go through a tough negotiation and forge a new role for ourselves in the world. It means accepting that the road ahead will be uncertain at times, but believing that it leads towards a brighter future for our country's children, and grandchildren too.

"We are going to be a confident country that is in control of its destiny once again."

(Source: The Guardian)

Iran, S. Korea sign MOU to reinforce economic bonds

T**I****ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran and South Korea signed an MOU on expansion of economic ties and transfer of data in Seoul on Friday.

According to IRNA, the MOU was signed by Deputy Minister of Strategy and Finance of Korea In-Chang Song and Deputy Finance Minister of Iran Mohammad Khazaie on the sidelines of a conference about making investments in Iran.

The MOU requires both sides to transfer investment making data and also make direct investments in each other's countries.

The MOU also includes expansion

of mutual commercial relations as well as sharing related knowledge and science.

As reported, more than 200 South Korean entrepreneurs and businessmen attended the conference which was held in South Korea's Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA).

Addressing the conference, Iran's Ambassador to South Korea Hassan Taherian introduced opportunities in Iran available for foreign traders and businessmen in post-sanction era and announced that the Islamic Republic plans to offer implementation of Iranian construction projects at the value of \$150 million to \$200



million to foreigners per annum.

Song, for his part, called Iran a strategic economic partner of South Korea.

Highlighting attraction of long-term

foreign investments as Iran's main policy during post-sanction era, Khazaie expressed satisfaction about South Korean business people's participation in the conference.

Armenia presents benefits of multimodal transport of goods to Iran's Ambassador

Minister of Transport, Communication and Information Technologies of Armenia Vahan Martirosyan has met on Friday with Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran Seyyed Kazem Sajjadi.

According to the release of the ministry, at the meeting attended also by rail operator of Armenia South Caucasus Railway (SCR) CEO Sergey Valko, Minister Martirosyan has presented the benefits

of the multimodal transport of the goods through the territory of Armenia, specifically the program of the transport of the goods from Iran to Europe and back via Armenia with Valko indicating some of the benefits of the mentioned route.

In particular, the safety and the easy access of multimodal goods transportation was highlighted. The minister suggested the Iranian Ambassador to present the opportunity to the business

community of Iran and encourage closer cooperation in the sphere of cargo transportation.

The Ambassador of Iran stressed he had visited Yeraskh station and got familiarized with the terminal capacities, expressing readiness to present the advantages of the transport route to Iranian businessmen as an efficient model.

The release next said Minister Martirosyan suggested to organize a round ta-

ble discussion with the participation of the business representatives of the two countries to reinvigorate the business links.

The Ambassador of Iran on his part informed about the planned visit of the delegation of Iranian businessmen to Armenia. Preparation works of the Iranian Communication Minister's visit to Armenia were on the agenda of the meeting as well, the ministry said.

(Source: panorama.am)

Fed's Yellen says unwise to allow U.S. economy to run 'hot'

With monetary policy still modestly accommodative, the U.S. central bank should continue to raise interest rates slowly to keep jobs plentiful and inflation low, Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen said on Thursday.

"I think that allowing the economy to run markedly and persistently "hot" would be risky and unwise," Yellen said in remarks prepared for delivery to the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research.

While there are no signs as yet that the Fed is behind the curve or the economy is in danger of a sudden surge in inflation, she said, "I consider it prudent to adjust the stance of monetary policy gradually over time."

The Fed last month raised its short-term interest-rate target for only the second time in a decade, but signaled it would likely speed up the pace of rate hikes this year. Rates are currently targeted at between 0.5 percent and 0.75 percent.

With unemployment, at 4.7 percent, near what many economists including Yellen see as its long-run sustainable level, and inflation closing in on the Fed's 2-percent goal, most Fed officials expect to lift rates three times over the course of the next 12 months.

Some left-leaning economists and activists have urged the Fed to keep rates low to provide more opportunities for the jobless and to push up on wages, whose growth has been tepid.

Meanwhile Republican Donald Trump has promised a set of economic policies including tax and regulatory reform aimed at boosting economic growth.

Yellen for the second time in two days warned that a delay in tightening monetary policy could drive up inflation and force the Fed to jack up rates in response, sending the economy into a tailspin that might have

China's economy grows faster than expected but Trump concerns and debt cloud outlook

China's economy grew faster than expected at 6.8pc in the fourth quarter, boosted by higher government spending and record bank lending, giving it a tailwind heading into what is expected to be a turbulent year.

But Beijing's decision to priorities its official growth target could exact a high price, as policymakers grapple with financial risks created by an explosive growth in debt.

China's debt to GDP ratio rose to 277pc at the end of 2016 from 254pc the previous year, with an increasing share of new credit being used to pay debt servicing costs, UBS analysts said in a note.

The fourth quarter was the first time in two years that the world's second-largest economy has shown an uptick in economic growth, but this year it faces further pressure to cool its housing market, the impact of government efforts at structural reforms, and a potentially testy relationship with a new US administration.

"We do not expect this [fourth quarter] rebound to extend far into 2017, when a slowdown in the property market and steps to address supply shortages in the commodity sector ought to drag again on demand and output," said Tom Rafferty, regional China manager for the Economist Intelligence Unit.

The economy expanded 6.7pc in 2016, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Friday, near the middle of the government's 6.5-7pc growth target but still the slowest pace in 26 years.

Economists polled by Reuters had expected 6.7pc growth for both the fourth quarter and the full year.

Housing helped prop up growth again in the fourth quarter, with property investment rising a surprisingly strong 11.1pc in December from 5.7pc in November, even as house prices showed signs of cooling in some

major cities.

Consumer spending was also strong, with retail sales in December rising at their fastest pace in a year on stronger sales of cars and cosmetics.

■ Stability

Fixed asset investment grew 8.1pc, the slowest pace since 1999, as investment by private firms slowed again in December on a monthly basis. Private sector fixed asset investment fell to 4.07pc from 4.93pc in November, according to Reuters calculations based on statistics bureau data.

Consumption contributed the bulk of growth last year, but income growth did not pick up, and a measure of China's income inequality rose slightly last year, the statistics bureau said.

Amid signs of stabilization, policy sources told Reuters that China's leaders would lower their economic growth target to around 6.5pc this year, giving them more room to push reforms to contain debt risks.

They will not want to let growth fall too sharply, however, ahead of a key party meeting in the autumn when a new generation of leaders will be picked.

"Economic stability is always important but will be an even higher priority ahead of the 19th Party Congress," said Tim Condon, Singapore-based economist at ING.

In a sign of the tasks ahead, the People's Bank of China unexpectedly cut the amount banks must keep in reserve on Friday, a measure aimed at easing tight liquidity ahead of the upcoming Lunar New Year holiday.

"Today's move seems to suggest that liquidity conditions are tighter than authorities' expectations, as capital outflows remain strong," said Zhou Hou, senior emerging markets economist at Commerzbank in Singapore.

Capital outflows have been putting strong downward

been avoided if the rate hikes had been more gradual.

But, she said, it "will not be easy" to find a path of rate hikes that can foster strong jobs growth and 2-percent inflation, given the uncertainties of global growth, slow domestic productivity growth, and a change in fiscal policies, among others.

In addition, the downward pressure that the Fed's \$4.5 trillion balance sheet has been exerting on rates for the last several years is declining, she said, making calibrating rate hikes more complicated.

The Fed consults a range of policy rules, including one developed by Stanford Professor John Taylor, to guide its decisions on rates, Yellen said. But those rules cannot be mechanically implemented because they do not take into account the lack of flexibility the Fed has in dealing with shocks when rates are low, nor many other important factors, she said.

(Source: CNBC)

pressure on the yuan, which lost nearly 7pc last year, making it the worst performing major Asian currency.

■ Risks increase

Rapid monetary expansion and expectations of slower economic growth at home, along with a rising US dollar, also hit the yuan.

"The key risk to the Chinese economy in 2017 and 2018 is the possibility that faster-than-expected US interest rate increases could intensify Chinese capital outflows and increase stresses on China's financial system," said Bill Adams, senior economist at US-based PNC Financial Services Group.

China's sluggish exports could also come under fresh pressure if US president elect Donald Trump follows through on pledges to impose tough protectionist measures.


"Relations with a Trump administration is the biggest known unknown. Trump advisers and cabinet-nominees have identified the US-China relationship as in need of adjustment to support the president elect's objective of a manufacturing renaissance," said Mr Condon.

China's central bank could slightly tighten credit conditions this year to encourage debt-laden companies to deleverage, but it is unlikely to rush to raise interest rates despite an expected pick-up in inflation, policy insiders said.

"Looking at the economic forces out there both globally and domestically, I think that China will face a few headwinds. Externally, mainly from a change in the climate in the US with regards to China's exports... [and] within China I think we will see a bit of impact from the slowdown in property investment," said Louis Kuijs, head of Asia economics at Oxford Economics in Hong Kong.

(Source: The Telegraph)

NEWS IN BRIEF




U.K. retail sales fall most since 2012 as store prices rise

U.K. retail sales fell at the fastest pace in almost five years in December as consumers bought less of everything from household goods to clothing and food.

The volume of goods sold in stores and online fell 1.9 percent from November, the Office for National Statistics said on Friday. That was the biggest drop since April 2012 and far exceeded the 0.1 percent decline predicted by economists. Sales excluding auto fuel declined 2 percent.

Possible explanations include rising prices and consumers scaling back purchases after taking advantage of Black Friday discounts the previous month, statisticians said. The fourth quarter as a whole saw sales rise 1.2 percent, meaning the sector made a 0.1 percentage point contribution to gross domestic product.




GE profit rises 36%, but sales slow

General Electric Co (GE.N) reported a 36 percent jump in fourth-quarter earnings on Friday, helped by strength in its power and renewable energy businesses, and it affirmed its growth and profit forecasts for 2017.

The Boston-based maker of power plants, aircraft engines, locomotives and medical equipment said revenue fell 2.4 percent to \$33.1 billion, slightly below Wall Street expectations of \$33.6 billion.

Net income from continuing operations attributable to GE shareholders rose to \$3.48 billion, or 39 cents a share, from \$2.57 billion, or 26 cents a share, a year earlier.



Philippine Peso rated Asia's most resilient currency for 2017

Asia's worst-performing emerging-market currency in the past year is being tipped as the one likely to suffer least from the global slings and arrows of 2017.

The Philippine peso, which weakened 4.6 percent in the past 12 months, is forecast to be the most resilient to external risks this year, according to a Bloomberg survey of 10 foreign-exchange analysts. The Thai baht and Indian rupee together rank second, while China's yuan is last.

"External factors won't impact the peso much because the nation doesn't largely depend on trade, especially with China or the U.S.," said Tsutomu Soma, the general manager of the fixed-income department in Tokyo at SBI Securities Co.

8-month exports of electricals up 20% on year

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's desk eight-month value of electrical products exports rose by 20 percent year-on-year, IRNA reported on Friday.

According to the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) of Iran, the country has exported some 24,400 tons of electrical goods valued about \$200.7 million during the first eight months of the current Iranian year (ended on November 20).

Despite the rise in the value, the volume of exports in this group of commodities which includes all sorts of wires and cables, switchgears and industrial electrical equipment, telecommunication equipment, and all kinds of chandeliers, lamps and lighting covers, fell by 24.9 percent in the mentioned time span.



Meanwhile, some \$2.1 million worth of chandeliers, lamps and decorative lights were exported during said time which indicates a 25 percent decline in terms of volume and also a 48 percent value fall compared to the last year's first eight months.

Iraq, UAE, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Armenia were among the main export destinations for these commodity groups.

Iraq topped the importers' list with \$210,000 worth of purchases followed by Afghanistan which imported some \$180,000 worth of such goods.

The country has also exported some \$8.7 million worth of telecommunications electrical equipment to different countries including Uganda, Iraq, China, Afghanistan and Indonesia.

Oil price rises for second day ahead of producers' compliance meeting

Oil prices edged up for a second day on Friday on expectations that a weekend meeting of the world's top oil producers would demonstrate compliance to a global output cut deal, but a larger than expected rise in weekly U.S. crude stocks capped gains.

International benchmark Brent crude prices were up 68 cents at \$54.84 a barrel at 0950 GMT.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil futures were trading up 63 cents at \$52 a barrel.

"Prices were pushed down a bit too far and hopes will rise that the OPEC/non-OPEC

meeting this weekend will show that these producers actually give some proof that they cut production," said Hans van Cleef, senior energy economist at ABN Amro.

A weekend meeting in Vienna of members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and some producers outside of the group, including Russia, will establish a compliance mechanism to verify producers are sticking to a deal to reduce output, OPEC's secretary general told Reuters.

However, higher crude oil and gasoline stocks in the United States weighed on prices on Friday.

U.S. crude inventories rose unexpectedly last week as refineries sharply slowed production, while gasoline stocks soared amid weak demand, the Energy Information Administration said on Thursday.

Crude inventories rose 2.3 million barrels in the week to Jan. 13, compared with analyst expectations for an increase of 342,000 barrels.

The data showed much larger than expected builds in gasoline stocks, with inventories on the U.S. east coast, the biggest demand region, swelling to the highest weekly levels on record for this time of year, when refiners typically begin

storing barrels ahead of the summer driving season.

Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at SEB Markets, said Brent crude was starting to move into a trading range centred around \$55 a barrel as the production cut deal had placed a floor price of \$50 a barrel, while U.S. shale oil producers were capping the upside at \$60 a barrel.

"As a new consensus is starting to form, the fog around the oil market balance is starting to clear and the oil price is likely going to start to stabilize," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

China-U.S. trade tensions top Big Oil's worry list

Oil executives and Middle East producers are concerned that trade tensions between the United States and China risk clouding the outlook for global energy demand growth and a recovery in the price of oil.

"It is not unique to our country to feel a certain level of anxiety (about tensions). But there is a lot of wisdom on both sides... I hope this anxiety will prove unfounded," Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih told Reuters.

Chinese President Xi Jinping offered a vigorous defense of free trade in Davos on Tuesday, underscoring Beijing's desire to play a greater global role as the United States turns inward.

"The two largest economies need to sort out their differences for the wellbeing of the global community," Falih, who sets energy policies for the world's largest oil exporter, said on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Xi cautioned other countries against blindly pursuing their national interests, in an apparent reference to the "America first" policies of Donald Trump.

Trump, who will be inaugurated as U.S. president on Friday, campaigned on a promise to confront China more aggressively on trade, including by levying new tariffs on goods from abroad.

(Source: Reuters)

Saudi oil shipments soared ahead of OPEC production cut

Saudi Arabia's crude exports surged to a 13 1/2-year high in November, just before it led global producers in restricting supplies to curb the worst glut in decades.

The world's biggest exporter shipped 8.26 million barrels a day, according to data published on the website of the Joint Organizations Data Initiative in Riyadh. That was the biggest outflow for any month since May 2003.

OPEC decided at the end of November to restrict supplies by 1.2 million barrels a day starting this month, with Saudi Arabia instrumental in the plan. Despite the extra barrels exported, Brent crude oil prices did rise that month, mostly because of the announcement of supply restrictions. Non-member producers, including Russia, pledged additional curbs.

The initial signs are that producers are honoring their commitments to cut output this year. Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih said at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Thursday that there's been "very strong" compliance with the plan. The producers' pledges are to restrict what's pumped out of the ground, rather than what's loaded on tankers.

Saudi Arabia's oil production edged up to 10.72 million barrels a day in November, from 10.62 million in October, the JODI data show. The output data tracked exactly what the country told the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, according to a monthly report the producer group published on Wednesday.

One reason for the increase in cargoes could have been a surge in natural gas usage rather than crude domestically. The nation's Wasit gas plant has had an "immense impact" since coming online last March, leading to the substitution of gas for oil in power generation, OPEC said in its report. That potentially frees up more oil for export markets.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Siemens gets first H-class turbine order from greater China

German industrial group Siemens received its first order from greater China for its flagship H-class gas turbine, its most powerful and efficient turbine.

Siemens will supply the turbine to Castle Peak Power, a joint venture of China Southern Power Grid and CLP Power Hong Kong, for the Black Point Power Station in Hong Kong.

On the Chinese mainland, Siemens faces tough competition from domestic rivals including Shanghai Electric.

The Hong Kong order is Siemens' 80th for an H-class gas turbine worldwide.

(Source: Reuters)

PIAGET



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David Cameron is not the man to lead NATO – just look at his record

By Mary Dejevsky

For the transatlantic alliance to survive the Trump presidency, it will need a head who is far more dynamic and free-thinking than the former prime minister.

A few weeks ago, when much of the Western world was pre-occupied with other things, an idea reached the fringe of the news – and vanished. A classic example of kite-flying, the report suggested that the former Prime Minister David Cameron was being touted as the UK’s nominee to be the next head of NATO.

That the idea was more serious than perhaps it seemed was confirmed last week, when Julian Lewis, the chairman of the Commons defense select committee, spoke out – rather disloyally some might think – to argue against it. Cameron’s talents, Lewis said rather cuttingly, did not include “wisely judging strategic issues”. He also warned of the risks to Europe’s security that might result if the U.S. turned away, in the light of president Donald Trump’s description of NATO as “obsolete”.

Now it is possible to argue that the circumstances in which Cameron resigned militate against a return, let alone such an early return, to public life. Equally, six years as prime minister of a major OECD country provides a particular sort of experience that few people have and it seems a waste for it not to be used.

■ Cameron still 50

Cameron is still only 50. It appeared initially that he intended to remain in politics, contributing from the back benches – as the former chancellor George Osborne is now doing to some effect. But he soon concluded – wisely – that remaining in parliament was going to do him, and his successor, no favors. His every word would be parsed for its helpfulness or otherwise to the new government. So he is now in private life, devoting time to his brainchild, the National Citizen Service trust, and giving speeches for handsome reward.

His situation, of course, highlights the difficulties faced by politicians who reach, and leave, high office young: what are they to do with themselves thereafter? It was a problem faced by Tony Blair, and now confronts Barack Obama. But head of NATO?

First, there is the objection raised by Lewis. Perhaps unfairly, Cameron will always be judged by the decision to hold that ill-fated in-out referendum and his failure to secure a majority for remain. That defeat annuls in the public mind, not just in Britain, anything else Cameron might have achieved as prime minister.

Rather than the competent, safe pair of hands Cameron appeared during the coalition years – how much of that was due to his coalition partners? – his promise of a referendum now looks reckless and his failure to win it negligent. Neither would be a recommendation to head the transatlantic alliance.

But there are other reasons why, even if Cameron eyes a return to public life, the defense alliance is probably not the job for him. As prime minister, he appeared to get along with almost all those he had to deal with – except, conspicuously, the top brass.

Here, there were tensions, about structures, procurement and cost-effectiveness, from the start.

■ Complicated relations

It was unusual for a Conservative prime minister to have such complicated relations with the military – and in terms of cost-effectiveness and the top-heavy nature of the UK armed forces – he was largely right. But the lack of sympathy on both sides at national level would not bode well for peace and harmony within the alliance.

Then there is the new context created by the presidency of Donald Trump. NATO looks set for a period of uncertainty, at very least; possibly some radical rethinking of its funding and purpose. Broaching and implementing change would probably not play to Cameron’s strengths which, as prime minister, tended more to calmly steering the ship of state along a familiar course. If the transatlantic alliance is to survive the Trump presidency, it is going to need someone more combative and free-thinking at its head.

(Source: The Guardian)

Regional support for Gambia’s elected leader

President Adama Barrow of Gambia was sworn into office on Thursday in a most unusual way. Because his predecessor, the erratic dictator Yahya Jammeh, has refused to concede since losing an election on Dec. 1, Barrow took the oath of office in a hastily arranged ceremony at the Gambian Embassy in neighboring Senegal.

“This is a day no Gambian will ever forget,” Barrow said. “This is the first time since Gambia gained independence in 1965 that Gambians have changed their government through the ballot box.”

There is no doubt that Barrow is the legitimate leader of Gambia, a former British colony. But it remains unclear how soon he will be able to govern the tiny West African nation, which has been ruled by Jammeh, who seized power in a coup, since 1994. Jammeh initially accepted his loss. His defeat was stunning because until last year, the opposition had never been seen as having a viable path to electoral victory in Gambia, a repressive state where political rivals have been jailed and sent into exile. He later claimed the results were invalid.

On Thursday, troops from Senegal and Nigeria crossed into Gambia as part of an admirable effort by the Economic Community of West African States to uphold the will of Gambian voters. It was not clear whether they planned to eventually escort Barrow to the capital, Banjul, or how or when Barrow intends to assert control. The American government and the European Union on Thursday called on Jammeh to step aside. Patricia Alsop, the American ambassador to Gambia, echoed the plea Barrow made to his country’s security forces to stay in their barracks. “It is now more important than ever that all Gambians come together in support of Adama Barrow, the democratic choice of the Gambian people,” she said in a statement.

The uncertainty Jammeh has created by refusing to step down has led at least 26,000 Gambians to flee the country, exacerbating the brain drain of one of the poorest and least developed nations on the continent.

(Source: The NYT)

Recep Tayyip Erdogan is about to make himself a virtual dictator in Turkey

By Michael Daventry

As you read this, a rapid and turbulent revolution is underway in Turkey. The country’s ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party is pushing proposals through parliament that would radically alter the system of government.

By abolishing Turkey’s long-established system of collective cabinet government, the AK Party says it will stabilize the country and streamline decision-making. But the proposed law will pool power in the hands of the president and dramatically reduce the top job’s accountability to parliament. In effect, it codifies a system of one-man rule for Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

It wipes out the century-old role of prime minister and transfers its functions to the president. It strips Turkish MPs of their duty to scrutinize the executive and abolishes the vote of confidence needed for governments to take office. It grants the presidency new powers to directly appoint a vast range of public officials – cabinet ministers, provincial governors, and judges to the highest courts in the land.

Simply put, the government’s plans are an enabling act: they are designed to strengthen the individual over the collective. Powers and duties that are presently distributed among the prime minister, the cabinet and senior judges are being rerouted to one man.

■ Rushed through Parliament

The AK Party says the proposed law will equip a strong leader to generate the stability that people in Turkey crave. This month Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet ?im?ek said his administration wants to abolish Turkey’s “two-headed” political model that causes paralysis if the president and prime minister ever disagree.

That message has a powerful appeal for a country like Turkey, which has been rocked by political turmoil, the need to care for millions of Syrian refugees, and repeated terror attacks that have killed one person on average for each day of the last 18 months. But it is difficult to



The proposed law will pool power in the hands of the president and dramatically reduce the top job’s accountability to parliament. In effect, it codifies a system of one-man rule for Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

argue the system is not being tailored specifically for Erdogan himself, not least because it eliminates the few remaining checks on his power.

AK Party officials have made much of their proposal’s 9th article, which makes the presidency liable for prosecution for the first time. They correctly point out Turkish presidents can only face trial on suspicion of treason and that they were proposing to make the office holder liable for any offence.

But an investigation into suspected wrongdoing would take much, much longer than before. Under the present rules, the process for MPs to investigate and topple a government minister takes 18 days. Under the AK Party’s proposals, it would take up to 10 months.

By contrast, Parliament is making great haste with the reforms, burning the midnight oil for seven nights in row last week to debate measures that would strip away their own powers. Such breakneck

speed makes the proposals all the more bewildering.

■ A climate of intimidation

The government party is a few seats short of the 330 votes needed to put their proposals to a public referendum. The leader of the MHP, a small far-right party, has promised to provide the numbers to help them over the line. But an executive presidency for Erdoğan is deeply unpopular among the MHP’s extensive grassroots network and its MPs are under immense pressure to oppose it. There have been reports of MPs being intimidated, with whips deploying tactics like man-to-man marking and videoing the voting booths to flush out any rebels among AK Party and MHP lawmakers.

That might explain why the AK Party leadership is pushing the proposals through parliament as quickly as it can. But it is not just the MHP’s grassroots that are disgruntled.

Many of Erdogan’s former comrades-

in-arms – like his predecessor as president, Abdullah Gül – are opposed to an executive presidency. “Everyone knows that I see a parliamentary system as a better, more suitable system,” Gül told an audience at London’s Chatham House in November 2014. “To be able to have that sort of a presidential regime, you need to check everything. You need to have your balances in the right place.”

But these days, Gül keeps very quiet. Such is the extent of the crackdown following last July’s coup attempt, and the environment of fear and intimidation, that not even an ex-president is willing to speak out.

Loved by one half and loathed by the other, Erdogan is the country’s most divisive politician. He could squeeze out a victory in April’s referendum. That result would strip away the few powers that keep him in check. For Turkey’s massive, disenchanted minority, that result would leave no hope.

(Source: Telegraph)

What defines victory for Iraq in Mosul

As Iraqi forces end Islamic State’s hold in the country’s second-largest city, politicians are racing to avoid the old mistake of continuing Shia-Sunni divisions. Political reconciliation is the best weapon against terrorist groups.

Some of the most welcome images coming out of the war against Islamic State (ISIL) have been pictures of Sunni civilians, especially children, flashing V signs at Iraqi Army soldiers during the ongoing liberation of Mosul, Iraq’s second-largest city.

The soldiers are mainly Shias yet they have acted with patriotic discipline as they steadily defeat the terrorist group, aid the city’s Sunni residents, and reunite Iraq.

Iraq will need more examples of Shia-Sunni reconciliation as it prepares for the fall of ISIL, which took Mosul in 2014. To many Iraqis, the nearly 14 years of sectarian strife triggered by the 2003 U.S.-led invasion have only created openings for the rise of such terrorists. A military defeat of ISIL (and before it Al Qaeda in 2008) will not be enough. The political vacuum caused by religious competition must be filled with a common identity, one based on shared civic values and a dispersal of power under Iraq’s embrace of democracy.



In recent weeks, the hard work toward reconciliation has picked up as the Army retakes Mosul. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has further united the various militias fighting ISIL to operate under Army command. And a prominent cleric, Ammar al-Hakim, who heads the largest Shia parliamentary bloc, is working with Sunni leaders to come up with a “national settlement,” or a

power-sharing plan that ensures Iraq’s political unity and respect for minority interests.

Mr. Hakim has also traveled to Iran, Jordan, and other Middle Eastern states to gain their support. The effort is under the watchful eye of the United Nations office in Iraq as well as other foreign diplomats. Meanwhile, the United States and its allies have helped rebuild a professional Iraqi military.

Much still needs to be done to dispel distrust between Sunnis and Shias, as well as with ethnic Kurds in the north. In the Iraqi parliament, however, old divisions may be breaking down, perhaps enabling compromises on such issues as a fair distribution of oil wealth. The tone of reconciliation has been set by Hakim’s call for an agreement that defies a “win-lose” approach, or what he calls “no victor, no vanquished.”

Even after its defeat in Mosul, ISIL may still pose a threat by its use of suicide bombers. But such violence can be overcome by political and social reconciliation among Iraqis. By the time of its next elections in 2018, Iraq may even have major political parties that cut across religion divides. That would deserve a victory sign.

(Source: The SCM)

An end to cosy consensus in the European Parliament

By Benedict Spence

Antonio Tajani’s election as president brings some welcome debate.

If the EU is an institution sliding towards crisis, its parliament has done little to arrest the fall. The bloc is not just reeling from the forthcoming departure of the UK but from an apparent failure of confidence in the union among several member states. Avowedly Eurosceptic parties are on the rise and yet the European Parliament has, until now, displayed little awareness that it needs to become more representative and responsive.

Last week there was a sign of change: Antonio Tajani was elected the parliament’s new president. Tajani, an Italian former European commissioner, is a controversial figure. His election represents a shift from rule by consensus to adversarial politics, which may bring credibility to a body stifled by convention. The European Parliament is the weakest of the central institutions. It is not a full legislative body with the right to propose laws. Yet it still has an important role to play, having gained increasing power with successive institutional treaties. It now has a veto on most legislation — including, importantly, trade deals. If the UK signs a trade pact with the EU after



Brexit, the parliament will need to assent. It is also supposed to play a key role in representing European public opinion and in holding the European Commission, the EU’s executive branch, to account. It has not done well on either account. European voters have shown considerable suspicion about federalizing power, but the parliament has given Eurosceptic views insufficient voice.

The stitch-up that brought Martin Schulz, Tajani’s predecessor, to the parliament presidency was a model of cosy insider politics. Schulz was kept in the job as a consolation prize after his centre-

left grouping came second in the 2014 parliamentary elections. The candidate of the victorious center-right European People’s party, Jean-Claude Juncker, was appointed commission president.

■ Grand coalition

Since then the parliament has been run by a “grand coalition” of the center-left and center-right groupings, which have divided up the top jobs between them, isolated the Eurosceptic minority and failed to subject the commission to sufficient scrutiny. Europhobes wanting to portray the parliament as a prime example of a self-reinforcing EU clique received plenty of

material. Tajani’s election has to some extent broken that mold. It involved a deal between the liberal centrist group, the EPP, and the more rightwing and Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), which contains the UK Conservatives and the harder-right Polish Law and Justice party. The inclusion of the ECR in the alliance may raise eyebrows; so may Tajani himself. The president starts his term with the so-called “dieselgate” scandal hanging over him. He was the European commissioner responsible for setting regulations for car exhaust pollution while Volkswagen was breaking the law in the U.S. by evading official tests for emissions of nitrogen oxide.

So be it. Electing a president in a divided parliament will always involve some horse-trading, and may produce unexpected leaders. At least with Tajani’s elevation the dealmaking has produced an outcome conducive to debate rather than cynical conformity. It remains to be seen whether the new ruling coalition can do a better job of scrutinizing the commission and representing Europe’s voters. In itself, it is a broad alliance including many centrist federalist members. Yet the shift from a grand coalition to a leadership with a distinctive identity brings hope that an often overlooked part of the EU machinery can play a more constructive part.

(Source: FT)

US young generation seek Russia-Iran in circle of friendship

INTERVIEW

by Lachin Rezaian

A former US army psychological operation officer and counter-terrorism analyst said American younger generation is by instinct more inclusive and are looking for ways to include Russia-Iran in the circle of friendship, and they voted for Trump largely because of his desire for this also.

Criticizing the US Congress, Scott Bennett said the key to getting a “yes vote” in the Congressional hearings for the elected ministers of President Trump is essentially to say nothing and commit to nothing, and smile and nod in “bobble-head” approval to the puppets in Congress who ask the questions.

Pointing to the boycott by Democrats of Trump Presidential Inauguration due on Friday, Bennett said it will be celebrated and lamented by many as the death of the Democrat party.

“It will be celebrated by Republicans because it is an “abandonment of the field” by Democrats, and confirmation of an emotional breakdown and child-like tantrum by the Democrats in a desperate attempt to somehow hurt Donald Trump,” Bennett said in an exclusive interview with Tehran Times:

■ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has said he believes US representatives should be invited to the Astana meeting on Syria. Iran rejects any participation

picture of the current Middle East community of nations, the issues, and the potential solutions.

■ If Trump attends Astana meeting, it may lead to the resumption of Russia-US ties. Do you think it can also provide grounds for Iran-US relations?

President Trump, like many Americans, knows two things: 1) America has suffered a distorted information environment with regards to Iran by the media and virulent Zionist fanatics; and 2) every American under the age of fifty years of age has absolutely no problem, prejudice, or passion towards either Russia or Iran, and this is the future Americans want to pursue. Americans under fifty have not suffered the emotional hysteria, blind hatred and political schizophrenia of the “cold war” of America towards Iran and Russia, and they certainly do not wish to become—and in fact will not allow—politicians and a media from trying to lobotomize them into this mindset.

Obama himself has said that the younger generation is “by instinct more inclusive” and this means they are looking for ways to include Russia-Iran in the circle of friendship, and they voted for Trump largely because of his desire for this also. Fortunately, for Americans, President Trump’s “business man” acumen enables him to analyze people, countries, and projects from a pragmatic political perspective, rather than an emotional one, and this will be his policy in the future.

say and do, and follow his policies and philosophy, not their own.

■ How do you evaluate over the situation of Trump’s elected ministers? Would they be able to get yes vote?

The key to getting a “yes vote” in the Congressional hearings is essentially to say nothing and commit to nothing, and smile and nod in “bobble-head” approval to the puppets in Congress who ask the questions. Simply speaking in “plain-vanilla” language, without a lot of facts or details and little or no passion, and go around in circles, pleases the empty headed American Congress, who are more interested in hearing their own voices and pleasing the money-lenders who fund their re-election campaigns. Now of course there are some psychotic, homicidal maniacs—such as Senator John McCain—and homosexual cheerleaders—such as Senator Lindsay Graham—who desire only war and conflict and cultural destruction in America, but they are an aberration and not respected by the majority of Americans.

Like Ronald Reagan in the 1980’s, President Trump will implement far-reaching and profound pro-business, anti-tax, anti-regulation and big government policies, as well as a pro-peace, non-interventionist foreign policy in the coming year. Once the positive effects and friendly thaw in relations begins to appear to Americans, they will exuberantly



President Trump will order every member of his cabinet to implement his personality, his political philosophy, his policy agenda into all the agencies of the federal government, and not to pursue their own agenda or prior goals or ideas.

one” dialogue with America—and the world. As history shows, President Franklin Roosevelt did this in his “fire-side chats” on the radio with Americans, and Ronald Reagan also did this on TV from the Oval Office. These acts of open, transparent, intimate conversations with Americans was what made them two of the most loved and respected and successful Presidents in American history. The same will occur with Trump—and more so—given the renaissance in the American identity, peace with other nations he wishes to secure, and hope for the future that he passionately believes in.

■ Dozens of democratic lawmakers are boycotting President-elect Donald Trump’s inauguration, accusing Trump of preaching policy of division and hate, his insults to some US democratic representatives and saying his election has depended on the foreign interference of Russia’s leaders. What do you evaluate this?

This boycott of the Presidential Inauguration by Democrats will be celebrated and lamented by many as the death of the Democrat party. It will be celebrated by Republicans because it is an “abandonment of the field” by Democrats, and confirmation

Democrats will only be hurting themselves, because the American people have no patience or respect for this behavior. They expect and demand their politicians to behave like aristocrats, like statesmen, like leaders worthy of the great trust and faith put into them by the Voter American voter. By boycotting Trump, they are instead contradicting and degrading everything they are expected to uphold, preserve, and protect.

The other fantasy—or lie—the American public is refusing to accept from the mainstream media or the psychotic politicians is the “Russian hacking of the US election and connection to Trump”. Ironically, the vast majority of Americans have said, regardless of how Trump was elected, they are more than happy is was elected. Americans are relieved because of the great fear they had that Hillary Clinton was preparing to lead America into endless wars in the Middle East, China, and Russia—which would have effectively destroyed America, if not the world. This hell was avoided, and the God of the Universe heard the prayers of Americans—and the world—and has spared us this destruction. Americans—and the people of the world—are now

fanaticism and obsession for empire which started on September 11, 2001 when the greatest deception in history occurred in the false-flag attacks upon the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The final hope of course is that European leaders are being replaced, such as in France, Britain, and Germany, and they will join President Trump into lifting the sanctions against Russia, creating new relations with Iran, and combining their wisdom to work together on terrorist problems through diplomacy, rather than interventionism, regime change, and reckless wars.

Dr. Scott Bennett, formerly of the US Army 11th Psychological Operations Battalion, attempted to blow the whistle by contacting the commercially-controlled media and writing to US politicians after being sacked from his job as terrorist finance investigator after he proved too zealous at the job. He also tried to expose Union Bank of Switzerland for financing terrorism (Al Qaeda, Benghazi, ISIL) through the US and Allies, Saudi, Qatar, Turkey, Israel back in 2012; then thrown in prison for it. Bennett had a background in advertising, before being fast tracked into the US military PSYOPS division, receiving



Boycott of Presidential Inauguration by Democrats will only hurt themselves, because the American people have no patience or respect for this behavior. They expect and demand their politicians to behave like aristocrats, like statesmen, like leaders worthy of the great trust and faith put into them by the Voter American voter.

by US representatives at the scheduled Syria peace talks in Astana. Do you think Trump will attend the meeting, regarding that he had told during his presidential campaign that Russia and Iran are fighting against ISIL and this is in our interest?

President Trump has said one of his top priorities is to establish a positive working relationship with Russia in order to fight and destroy the ISIL terrorists. He has also expressed a willingness to work with “other countries” who are willing to do this.

Therefore, it would be a natural and intelligent choice for President Trump to send US representatives to participate in these discussions, and I believe he will.

Despite the criticisms of Trump’s past statements and concerns regarding Muslims in general, I believe this prior confusion can be cleansed with clear facts, history, and honorable sources of information which, can help President Trump assemble a complete

■ Some of Trump’s choices for his cabinet members have taken opposite positions in their hearings comparing to Trump’s during his presidential campaign. What are the outcomes and reasons for their disagreement on JCPOA, Russian issue, etc.?

Trump’s cabinet members are saying things now, in front of Congress and the Senate hearings, largely to simply “get approved”. Most of their statements are calculated simply to get them a “passing vote” and will not reflect the philosophy of Donald Trump.

President Trump will order every member of his cabinet to implement his personality, his political philosophy, his policy agenda into all the agencies of the federal government, and not to pursue their own agenda or prior goals or ideas. So many members of the Trump cabinet, although distasteful and ignorant as they may be towards Russia and Iran, will have to report to President Trump on everything they

support President Trump even more. This naturally will mean that any politician—especially Republican—who stands against Trump and his cabinet picks, will be most likely voted out of office in the coming year.

■ How do you think about Trump’s situation in the current US community, regarding his low popularity rate and his attacks to CNN and many other things, and what will be the nation’s reactions and especially those who voted for him?

President Trump knows, and has passionately and publicly proclaimed, that CNN is “fake news”, and has invented all kinds of lies and deceptions and distortions about him. He has stated he will also continue to communicate on his own, acting as his own Press Secretary in a way, on Twitter and social media. This means he will have a direct access to the American heart and mind, and will cultivate a positive and transparent “one-on-



President Trump knows, and has passionately and publicly proclaimed, that CNN is “fake news”, and has invented all kinds of lies and deceptions and distortions about him.

of an emotional breakdown and child-like tantrum by the Democrats in a desperate attempt to somehow hurt Donald Trump. But instead,

hoping and praying that Donald Trump will wisely lead America along a new path of tolerance, peace, and prosperity, and abandon the

a Direct Commission as an Officer, and held a Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmentalized Information (TS/SCI) security clearance.

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How to create a fitness challenge with your family

By Catherine Holecko

1. Set a fitness challenge goal

Setting up a simple, fun family fitness challenge is the perfect way to get everyone in the household motivated to get healthy. You can use a game or family project to really affect positive change for everyone.

Start by holding a family meeting to kick off your challenge. Solicit everyone's ideas — little kids too! — for a goal to work toward. You might want to target healthy eating, increased physical activity, new strength goals, or less screen time. If you need ideas for specific aims, try this list of suggestions. You might decide to work toward a particular event (like a 5K run you'll do together), or jump-start a change that will become a regular part of your healthy lifestyle. If that's the case, make sure that's clear to the kids: This is not something that you're doing just temporarily to earn a reward. It's a new way of living.

Spell out exactly what you're hoping to achieve and what you'll need to do to get there. For example, if you choose healthy eating, what does that mean? Maybe you'll cut back on fast food, add more vegetables to your daily menu, pack nutritious lunches for school and work, or drink more water. Make sure you're specific and that everyone is clear on the objective.

2. Make a fitness challenge plan

How will you track your family's progress during your fitness challenge? Plan whether you'll log minutes of exercise, steps taken (use a pedometer or other activity monitoring app so you'll know), pounds/inches lost, new foods tried, personal records bested, and so on. Use whatever method works for your family's particular wellness goal. There are even games and other products you can use to keep tabs on what you're working on. Try these for healthy eating and these for kids' activity tracking.

But an old-fashioned star chart certainly works too. Your chart, ruler, or



other tracker will serve as a visual reminder of what you're working on, and how far you've come. Post it in a prominent place. Then set a regular interval for a fitness challenge check-in. That's when you'll record your progress and troubleshoot any problems you're having. Maybe you'll log your daily steps each night at bedtime, or have a family meeting on Sundays at which each family member can share the progress he or she has made toward your group goal. Take this opportunity to cheer each other on!

3. Choose a fitness challenge reward

What are you striving for as you complete your family fitness challenge? Aside, of course, from the reward of better health, a more tangible prize can also help motivate your crew to keep going. So can the promise of an exciting experience.

Rewards can be something different for each person in your family, or a group gift that you can all enjoy together. Food isn't a good choice, because it promotes the idea that eating can change your mood, and that you "deserve" high-fat, high-calorie treats when you do something good.

But almost anything else goes. What motivates your kids: Cold, hard cash? A new toy? A special outing? Best of all, choose a whole-family reward that reinforces your healthy lifestyle goal. That could mean a family pool pass, an outdoor toy you can all share, or a picnic at the best playground around.

4. Claim your fitness challenge prize

Once you've met your goal, it's time to celebrate. You did it! Give each other a hearty round of congratulations and enjoy your fitness challenge prizes.

It's also important to talk with your

kids about what you learned from this effort. Maybe it's that you tried a challenging new workout and liked it, or that you really can get up at 5 a.m.! Ask them to share their own surprise lessons: Did someone discover a new favorite vegetable dish or master a new physical skill? That's worth cheering for!

After you've tasted success, don't rest on your laurels or allow backsliding. Keep the momentum going: Start again with a brand-new objective. If your first challenge prompted you to change your exercise habits, maybe your second one can tackle a healthy eating habit.

Or, stick with your original plan, but set the bar higher. If you successfully reduced your family screen time by a few hours a week, say, you could continue cutting back. Or if you completed a 5K, sign up for another one. Maybe you'd like to finish faster, but that's not necessary; keeping up your new fitness habit is more important.

No matter what goal you set, come up with an enticing new reward to go with it. Good luck!

(Source: verywell.com)

You might decide to work toward a particular event like a 5K run you'll do together, or jump-start a change that will become a regular part of your healthy lifestyle.

Can you sidestep Alzheimer's disease?

Alzheimer's disease is characterized by progressive damage to nerve cells and their connections. The result is devastating and includes memory loss, impaired thinking, difficulties with verbal communication, and even personality changes. A person with Alzheimer's disease may live anywhere from two to 20 years after diagnosis. Those years are spent in an increasingly dependent state that exacts a staggering emotional, physical, and economic toll on families.

A number of factors influence the likelihood that you will develop Alzheimer's disease. Some of these you can't control, such as age, gender, and family history. But there are things you can do to help lower your risk. As it turns out, the mainstays of a healthy lifestyle — exercise, watching your weight, and eating right — appear to lower Alzheimer's risk.

■ 5 steps to lower Alzheimer's risk

While there are no surefire ways to prevent Alzheimer's, by following the five steps below you may lower your risk for this disease — and enhance your overall health as well.

- Maintain a healthy weight. Cut back on calories

and increase physical activity if you need to shed some pounds.

- Check your waistline. To accurately measure your waistline, use a tape measure around the narrowest portion of your waist (usually at the height of the navel and lowest rib). A National Institutes of Health panel recommends waist measurements of no more than 35 inches for women and 40 inches for men.
- Eat mindfully. Emphasize colorful, vitamin-packed vegetables and fruits; whole grains; protein sources

A person with Alzheimer's disease may live anywhere from two to 20 years after diagnosis. Those years are spent in an increasingly dependent state that exacts a staggering emotional, physical, and economic toll on families.

such as fish, lean poultry, tofu, and beans and other legumes; plus healthy fats. Cut down on unnecessary calories from sweets, sodas, refined grains like white bread or white rice, unhealthy fats, fried and fast foods, and mindless snacking. Keep a close eye on portion sizes, too.

- Exercise regularly. This simple step does great things for your body. Regular physical activity helps control weight, blood pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol. Moderate to vigorous aerobic exercise (walking, swimming, biking, rowing) can also help chip away total body fat and abdominal fat over time. Aim for 2 1/2 to 5 hours weekly of brisk walking (at 4 mph). Or try a vigorous exercise like jogging (at 6 mph) for half that time.

- Keep an eye on important health numbers. In addition to watching your weight and waistline, ask your doctor whether your cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, and blood sugar are within healthy ranges. Exercise, weight loss if needed, and medications (if necessary) can help keep these numbers on target.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

6 questions everyone should ask while searching for a therapist

By Jagger Blaec

Finding a new therapist can feel like going on a series of bad first dates, especially if the mental health care professionals you try out to start are nowhere near a good fit. During my journey, I turned to friends who had similar experiences, and I learned that I wasn't the only one who was struggling to find a match for mental health maintenance. So don't feel bad or give up if you haven't found your doctor yet. As a 30-year-old woman, it took me over two years to find "The One."

1. Are they tech savvy?

Ok, so this is still up for debate in a lot of psychiatric circles, as some professionals claim that texting with your shrink can negatively impact professional boundaries. But these days, quick-hit communication is part of life. Personally, I have terrible social anxiety and hate phone calls outside of a work setting, so having to actually call my doctor would just increase my anxiety, which isn't exactly the point of communicating with a therapist. For me—and most other millennials—our primary means of communication is via text or email. So if you're addicted to Snapchat and your doctor is from the Stone Age, it's probably not going to fly.

2. Does their expertise match with my needs?

For me, finding a doctor who was "culturally competent" was a must. This meant that when a black girl walked in their office, they wouldn't treat me like some far-out creature. Other folks I've talked with were adamant that the therapist they selected focused on PTSD. Not everyone in the field is equipped to deal with trauma... which can actually lead to more trauma.

3. Are they the right fit emotionally?

After two years of searching—and a number of encounters with therapists who couldn't really identify with my issues—I finally found a therapist I was optimistic about. But once I actually found them, getting to therapy induced an entire new set of new anxieties. Would they think I was unstable and toss me away into an asylum if I was upfront and honest about all of my irrational fears? Any therapist worth their salt will make you feel comfortable and let you know it's OK to open up.

4. Where can I find a good one?

When I moved to a new city not long ago, I didn't have the slightest idea of where I could find a new shrink. I obviously turned to Google, but the search term "Portland psychiatrist" returns a whopping 536,000 results, which only increased my feeling of being overwhelmed. After several unsuccessful attempts of going directly through my insurance provider assistance program, I eventually turned to Psychology Today, where I was able to narrow down my search and actually filter physicians based on their areas of expertise.

5. Can I afford this... and what are my options if I can't?

Although I am now blessed to have insurance, the psychiatrist I found is not in network. I chose someone out of network, because the in-network providers just weren't compatible, and I had already exhausted all my options. Prices I encountered ranged from \$500-\$800 dollars a session out-of-pocket before I finally found a physician who was a fraction of that cost but also open to a sliding scale.

Many health providers and organizations will evaluate your financial situation and work with you at a rate you can afford, or at the very least provide access to resources if you think you won't be able to cover the cost. To start with you can check out these 81 awesome mental health resources for when therapy is just too expensive.

6. What are their politics?

As I navigate white supremacy and microaggressions on a daily basis, I needed someone who could empathize with or at least recognize what I was experiencing. Where I live now isn't very diverse, so when I began my search, I knew I would encounter a lot of white health professionals. It didn't strike me as a problem at first, but as I began to meet with them, the sessions began to do more harm than good, as I had to sit through additional microaggressions or stop and educate the person who was supposed to be helping me. This soon became the most challenging part of the entire search.

That was until a friend told me she came up with a system that required meeting with the potential doctor candidate with a list of her own qualifications to measure their ability to identify with her culture and politics. If you add this phase of interviewing to the search process, you can uncover whether or not there is any chemistry to build a relationship through therapy.

(Source: greatist.com)

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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 Microsoft released Windows 10 Creators Update Build 15014 to Fast Ring PC and Mobile testers on January 19.

Microsoft's latest Windows 10 Creators Update test build: Ebook support is in. My People sharing is out until later this year.

2 IBM wrapped up 2016 with a better-than-expected fourth quarter earnings, despite seeing revenue drop for the 19th consecutive quarter.

The company reported net income of \$4.5 billion, or \$4.73 a share. Non-GAAP earnings were \$5.01 a share on revenue of \$21.8 billion, down 1.3 percent annually. For 2016, IBM reported net income of \$13 billion, or \$13.59 a share, on revenue of \$79.9 billion.

3 LG's Music Flow speakers will soon be Google Home speakers.

An LG employee revealed in a forum post that LG will not only add Google Home, which presumably means Google Assistant voice functionality, but it'll also add Google Chromecast multiroom audio to Music Flow.

4 Facebook bans known protest-tracking tool for law enforcement.

Facebook has blocked Media Sonar from accessing its data, according to Motherboard, a month after Twitter cut off its access. The Canadian company is known for selling social-media-monitoring tools to law enforcement agencies, who mostly used them to track activists of color and keywords such as "BlackLivesMatter" in the past.

5 NPD estimates video game industry raked in \$30.4 billion in 2016, That's only \$200 million more than last year, though hardware sales took a hit.

6 Google is putting legacy Drive apps out to pasture. Google will completely shut down the older versions of Drive, Docs, Sheets and Slides for both Android and iOS on April 3rd. People don't even have that long until they can no longer use them, though: starting on March 1st, users will get prompts forcing them to upgrade if they want to continue using the applications.

7 Investigation clears Tesla for fatal Autopilot crash and the NHTSA found no defects in the automaker's Autopilot system.

Last May a Tesla Model S ran into a tractor trailer in Florida while in Autopilot mode. The collision resulted in the death of the driver Joshua Brown and prompted an investigation by the NHTSA (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).

8 Samsung will explain the Galaxy Note 7 explosions Sunday night.

A press conference in Seoul will be livestreamed at 8PM ET on January 22nd. It seems likely that the battery will take the blame.

The other side about Samsung Scandal is that South Korean judge refuses arrest of Samsung boss.

9 Alibaba backs Olympics through 2028.

For 12 years, the Chinese e-commerce giant will supply technology to the International Olympic Committee to help organize the Games, support a new shopping platform for merchandise and run a Chinese version of the Olympic internet TV channel.

10 The head of a government-run policy institute said that the country could completely eliminate the need for credit cards, debit cards and ATMs in the next three years by switching to biometric payments.

Amitabh Kant said that even electronic payment methods may be "totally redundant" by 2020. Instead, all Indians will need for transactions is their thumb or eye.

Last week's top IT news headlines in Iran

By Shataw Naseri

1 1- Following the ICT cooperation agreement between Iran and Syria, the launching license of the third mobile operator in Syria was handed over to Tehran. Furthermore, Syria's ICT Minister called for Tehran-Baghdad-Damascus optic-fiber line to be established by Iran.

2 The first virtual reality and new technologies laboratory with special application in urban planning and architecture was launched and operated on Karaj Campus of Tehran University of Art.The lab is currently equipped with the latest virtual reality head-mounted displays (HMD), laboratory motion detectors with six degrees' freedom (6DoF) and 3D Leap Motion tracking systems, as well.

3 Based on the fulfillment of Sixth Development Plan goals, by 60-times increase of international communication transit capacity through Iran by 2021, Tehran will boast of a revenue exceeding \$1.5 trillion. Thus, based on Article 83 of the Sixth Development Plan, the ICT Ministry could escalate the bandwidth transmission capacity to 30 Tbps.

4 According to the latest figures obtained from IRNIC, there are 800,000 Persian domains across the nation, of which ".ir" is the leading one.

5 criticizing Iran's banking system, Head of IT Organization stated that there are 1.2 million shops in Iran, whereas more than 3 million POS systems have been installed, a fact which imposes a large cost upon the country.

Trump steps into security bubble; will he bring his phone?

A few hours after President-elect Donald Trump was briefed by intelligence officials about Russian meddling in the election, an Associated Press reporter called his cellphone seeking an interview.

The call went to voicemail and the reporter did not leave a message. About an hour later, Trump called back.

It's hard to imagine many politicians — particularly one about to become president of the United States — calling back an unknown number on their cellphone.

With Trump, it's simply how business gets done, whether he's fielding calls from real estate partners and longtime friends or foreign leaders and congressional lawmakers in the weeks after the election.

But as Trump prepares to take the oath of office Friday, the future of his ever-present Android smartphone is now a matter of national security. On Thursday, he told a friend that he had given up his phone, as security agencies had urged him to do. It was unclear whether he was following the lead of President Barack Obama, the nation's first cellphone-toting president, who exchanged his personal device

for a Blackberry heavily modified for security purposes.

The friend who spoke with Trump spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity in order to disclose the private conversation.

The presidency has long been a lonely, isolating office, with security concerns keeping the commander in chief at a distance from the public. Under Obama, worries about cyber intrusions — particularly by foreign governments — pulled the president's technology deeper into the security bubble as well. Many of the functions on Obama's Blackberry were blocked and only a handful of people had his phone number or email address.

Trump doesn't email, but he uses his phone to tweet — something he's made clear he plans to continue in office. He's known to make calls early in the morning and late at night, often seeking input from multiple sources when making a decision. Sometimes he leaves a voicemail.

Christopher Ruddy, the CEO of Newsmax and a friend of the president-elect, described Trump's phone etiquette, as "just like one of his speeches, it's very stream of consciousness."



Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., called Trump "amazingly accessible," saying the president-elect picks up his phone even when he doesn't know who is calling.

"My phone says, No Caller ID, so I'm not saying that it has anything to do with me," Corker said. "Nobody knows who it is that's calling when I'm calling."

Foreign leaders and diplomats took advantage of Trump's accessibility in the days after his election as they scrambled to find ways to reach him. Some called into Trump Tower hoping to be transferred to the president-elect's office. Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull got Trump's cellphone number from the golfer Greg Norman.

Trump's accessibility can cre-

ate headaches for his aides, who can't always control who he's speaking to or what he's saying. After actress Meryl Streep blasted Trump during a Golden Globes speech earlier this month, a New York Times reporter called the president-elect at midnight to get a response. Trump's criticism of Streep dominated the news the following day, overshadowing his team's planned agenda.

For Obama, getting to use a Blackberry in office was considered a victory. He later switched to an iPhone that allowed him to send and receive email from a limited group of people, surf websites and read the news.

But Obama wasn't known to use his cellphone to make or

receive telephone calls, according to individuals familiar with his technology use. Even senior government officials didn't have the number and instead reached the president through the White House switchboard.

The president also used the switchboard to place his calls, said the individuals, who weren't authorized to speak publicly and requested anonymity.

Obama had a phone in his control that he used to tweet, one of the only devices with access to the official presidential Twitter feed due to hacking concerns. But Obama rarely hit "send" on a tweet himself, and never without coordinating it with his staff, the individuals said.

If Trump does get rid of his cellphone, it could end up with a home not far from the White House.

Curators at the Newseum, which chronicles the First Amendment and the evolution of electronic communication, reached out to Trump's campaign in November about the prospect of acquiring his Android phone. They haven't heard back, said Carrie Christoffersen, the museum's curator of collections.

(Source: AP)

Swiss cops use anti-drone guns at the World Economic Forum

Swiss authorities have added another security measure for this year's World Economic Forum in Davos: anti-drone guns. Bloomberg has spotted local police preparing HP 47 Counter UAV Jammers to make sure no unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) gets too close to the venue, whether it's sent by a spy organization or just a nosy onlooker. That's the same jammer the German police used in Berlin when President Obama visited the country. The publication says authorities decided to bring in an anti-drone technology, because people with malicious intent could use UAVs to monitor security positions or even to launch attacks.

WEF spokesman Georg Schmitt explained:

"While drones have great potential, they have -- just as every new technology or aspect of the Fourth Industrial Revolution -- also a potential downside. The forum takes the safety and security of its participants seriously. It is therefore normal that we take any potential issue into account and prepare for it."

The HP 47 can block drones up to 1,000 feet away from sending data, including video feeds, back to their operators. It can also disable operators' remote access to their UAVs, as well as trap the machines within an

invisible fence. Once the drones are trapped, authorities could either capture them with a net or shoot them down with the help of snipers.

A consulting firm told Bloomberg that it's much too early to estimate the size of the anti-drone market, but jamming devices are clearly becoming more popular as drones become more common. Both the military and private companies are developing their own guns and jammers. The Dutch National Police, however, resorted to training eagles to take down drones during emergencies.

(Source: bloomberg)

Android Wear 2.0 smartwatch coming from Tag Heuer in May



pattern at the moment. The delay of Google's wearable operating system was largely seen as a contributing factor in the declining smartwatch space, but certainly not the sole driver.

In a recent interview with Swiss paper Neue Zürcher Zeitung, TAG Heuer CEO Jean-Claude Biver still appears bullish about the technology's potential, tossing out some positive projections, while casually announcing the second generation of the company's Connected device, due out in May.

While Biver didn't mention Android Wear 2.0 by name, it seems likely that the sequel to the brand's luxury \$1,500 smartwatch will arrive with the latest version of Google's OS. While discussing the product, the CEO noted the difficulty in distinguishing its devices, given the fact that all hardware producers — Apple included — are essentially working with the same technologies and constraints.

(Source: techcrunch)

Windows 10 is spamming Chrome users with a Microsoft shopping app

Microsoft really wants you to install and use its products on your computer. Beyond the myriad Start menu ads plaguing Windows 10, now users have to contend with pop-ups for Redmond-made stuff if they have Google's Chrome browser installed as well. Myce reports (image below) that when Chrome is pinned to the taskbar an ad for Microsoft's Personal Shopping Assistant extension hovers over the browser's familiar icon.

The add-on itself has been around for about a year, but a recent update is triggering the spam. Expectedly, the Chrome Web Store is rife with complaints about the extension. Maybe if it was something genuinely useful it'd be a different story, but this is a crappy price comparison app. C'mon, Microsoft. The fear, noted by Thurrott, is that third-party developers could be given access to this and the OS would be overrun with similar garbage.

A particularly dire scenario could see Microsoft could charge extra for an ad-free version of Windows -- a similar move to what YouTube did with YouTube Red, and Amazon does with Kindle devices.

(Source: Thurrott)

Call for Qualitative Evaluation of Bidders
Engineering- Procurement- Construction-Finance (E.P.C.F) Of
The Common Conveyance System of agricultural and potable water From
Karun III Dam to Izeh District and Construction of the Water Treatment Plant

Islamic Republic of Iran
Ministry of Energy
Khuzestan Water & Power Authority (KWPA)

In compliance with Article 12 of the law of tenders (Act of 1383 S.H.) and the relevant implementing regulations and accordance with paragraph (d) of Article 82 of the Fifth Development Plan Of Islamic Republic of Iran and based on obtained permissions, Khuzestan Water and Power Company (KWPA) intends to Evaluation of Bidders for Finance, Engineering, Procurement & Construction of "The Common Conveyance System of agricultural and potable water From Karun III Dam to Izeh and Construction of the Water Treatment Plant" with the following terms:

- 1- The name and address of the Tender Holder: Khuzestan Water & Power Authority (KWPA). Golestan Blvd, Ahvaz, Iran.
Tel: +98 611 333 7001-5 Fax: +98 611 333 1001
- 2- The brief description of the works:
2-1- Financing, Engineering, Procurement and Construction of the Intake, Pump station, tunnels, water treatment and water conveyance.
2-2- According to obtained permissions, The Contractor is responsible for Foreign financing, equivalent to 85% of the amount of contract.
- 3- Project Location: Khuzestan Province, From Karun III Dam to Izeh.
- 4- The estimated value of the Project Cost: 385 million Dollars.
4-1- Repayment of the "Total amount and Interests" of the Financing Facilities will be guaranteed by the Iran's Organization of management and programming, in the context of Article 62 of the Public Audit Act.
- 5- Time schedule to carry out the work: 42 Months
- 6- The criteria and procedures in respect of evaluation of the qualities of bidders: Consortium of Local and Foreign Contractors who have adequate experience in the design and construction of the conveyance systems, tunnel, pump station, water treatment with the following requirements and according to the rules and regulations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including Act on the Maximum Use of Iranian Technical, Engineering, Productive, Industrial and Executive Capabilities in Implementation of Projects ... (adopted 1391 Iranian Calendar) can participate in the qualitative evaluation:
6-1- Foreign contractors have to have the appropriate Technical and Financial Requirements and must be approved by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran and have to submit the letter of Preliminary Agreements of the bank for financing of the 85% of total project cost and with Local EPC Contractors which have the Grade 1 in Water or Participation of Local Contractors Grade 1 in water with sub-gardes including 1) Dam construction and appurtenant structures and 2) Water and sewage facilities and the Local Consultants Grade 1 in fields of 1) Dam construction and 2) Water and Sewage facilities with Technical and executive authentic experience.
- 7- The place, date and respite provided to obtain tender documents: Eligible bidders can obtain the documents from Pars Jooyab Consulting Engineering Co., Unit 15, 7th Floor, No 35, Gornam St., Fatemi Sq., Tehran, Iran, Tel: +98 31 36 69 13 21; on working time from Date 23.01.2017 to 02.02.2017. Document will be available only for those who have the letter of introduction and the document of money deposit to account number 7250897717 in Mellat Bank the amount of 1.000.000 IRs.
- 8- The place, date and respite provided to obtain tender documents: Eligible bidders after obtain and study of the RFQ Documents have to submit the Requested Evaluation Documents no later than 18.02. 2017, on working time in sealed package to the Office of Contract Affairs, 2nd Floor of Main Building of Khuzestan Water & Power Authority (KWPA)- Golestan Blvd- Ahvaz.
- 9- For more information and to express their questions, bidders can Contact Pars Jooyab Consulting Co. in above mentioned Address.

Public Relations of
Khuzestan Water & Power Authority (KWPA)

The world may see a mass extinction of primates if humans don’t act

In a bleak new study published this week in the journal *Science Advances*, 31 top primatologists warn that the planet could see a mass extinction of nonhuman primates as a consequence of human activities.

Some 60 percent of species are in danger of becoming extinct, the researchers write, and a full 75 percent are in decline. If the effects of habitat loss, hunting and man-made climate change aren't mitigated, they say, our closest animal cousins will start to vanish in the next 25 to 50 years.

"This truly is the 11th hour for many of these creatures," University of Illinois anthropology professor Paul Garber, who co-lead the study, said in a statement.

The study is one of the most comprehensive surveys of the world's 504 non-human primate species. It's a big group, ranging from tiny, nocturnal lorises to the gargantuan great apes and spanning most of the planet's tropical and subtropical regions. Researchers are still uncovering new species; just last week, scientists named a new type of gibbon that dwells in southwest China.

Bleak outlook

But the outlook for most populations is bleak. Only 200 of those newly named gibbons, *Hoolock tianxing*, are known to be living in the wild, according to the BBC. Other numbers are far smaller — as



The vast majority of primate species live in just four countries — Brazil, Indonesia, Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of Congo — and in those nations, they are confined to shrinking forest homes.

of 2014, just 50 of Madagascar's northern sportive lemurs remained.

Garber and his colleagues catalogued the ongoing threat to primate populations, of which there are many: hunting for bushmeat and body parts to sell on

the black market, the illegal trade of primates as pets, the increased instance of anthroponotic illnesses (diseases transferred from humans to animals) and the wide-ranging effects of climate change.

Perhaps the biggest problem is habitat

loss from the expansion of cities, industrial agriculture, ranching, logging, oil and gas drilling, mining, dam building and road construction, which are carried out "in needlessly destructive and unsustainable ways," Garber said.

The vast majority of primate species live in just four countries — Brazil, Indonesia, Madagascar and the Democratic Republic of Congo — and in those nations, they are confined to shrinking forest homes.

Primate species

But the future is grim not just for primate species but for all creatures in tropical and subtropical forest ecosystems, according to the report. The problems facing primates, Garber and co-author Anthony Rylands argue, mirror the threats to biodiversity at large.

"Many people would say, 'Oh, dear, you know, this species is in trouble and that species is in trouble,'" Rylands said in a video released by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which publishes *Science Advances*.

"But few people can see the really big picture, which is that human activities ... are resulting in the demise of tropical forests around the world, and this has serious consequences for not just the primates," he said.

(Source: *stltoday.com*)

Scientists will live in a dome for 8 months to simulate Mars

Six carefully selected scientists have entered a man-made dome on a remote Hawaii volcano as part of a human-behavior study that could help NASA as it draws up plans for sending astronauts on long missions to Mars.

The four men and two women moved into their new simulated space home Thursday afternoon on Mauna Loa, settling into the vinyl-covered shelter of 1,200 square feet, or about the size of a small, two-bedroom home, for an eight-month stay.

They will have no physical contact with people in the outside world and will work with a 20-minute delay in communications with their support crew, or the time it would take for an email to reach Earth from Mars.

The NASA-funded project will study the psychological difficulties associated with living in isolated and confined conditions for an extended period.

"We're hoping to figure out how best to select individual astronauts, how to compose a crew and how to support that crew on long-duration space missions," said principal investigator Kim Binsted, a University of Hawaii science professor.

Sending humans to asteroid, Mars

NASA hopes to send humans to an asteroid in the 2020s and Mars by the 2030s.

The team members on the dome project include engineers, a computer scientist, a doctoral candidate and a biomedical expert. They were selected from 700 applicants who were subjected to personality tests, background checks and extensive interviews.

This image provided by NASA shows the planet Mars. A group of NASA-funded researchers are entering an isolated geodesic dome perched on a remote Hawaii volcano to study human behavior for future long-term space exploration, including future.

"When I started, my biggest fear was that we were going to be that crew that turned out like Biosphere 2, which wasn't a very pretty picture," said mission commander James Bevington, a space scientist.

Biosphere 2 was a 1990s experimental greenhouse-like habitat in Arizona that became a debacle. It housed different ecosystems and a crew of four men and

four women in an effort to understand what would be needed for humans to live on other planets. The participants were supposed to grow their own food and recycle their air inside the sealed glass space.

Carbon dioxide level

But the experiment soon spiraled out of control, with the carbon dioxide level rising dangerously and plants and animals dying. The crew members grew hungry and squabbled so badly during the two years they spent cooped up that by the time they emerged, some of them weren't speaking to each other.

The University of Hawaii operates the dome, called Hawaii Space Exploration Analog and Simulation, or HI-SEAS, and NASA has dedicated over \$2 million to the various studies at the facility.

Scientists previously lived in the dome for two other long-term NASA-funded stays — one of them lasting a year, the other eight months — to study food requirements and crew cohesion.

(Source: *phys.org*)

Earth sets a temperature record for the third straight year

Marking another milestone for a changing planet, scientists reported on Wednesday that the Earth reached its highest temperature on record in 2016, trouncing a record set only a year earlier, which beat one set in 2014. It is the first time in the modern era of global warming data that temperatures have blown past the previous record three years in a row.

The findings come two days before the inauguration of an American president who has called global warming a Chinese plot and vowed to roll back his predecessor's efforts to cut emissions of heat-trapping gases.

In reality, the Earth is heating up, a point long beyond serious scientific dispute, but one becoming more evident as the records keep falling. Temperatures are heading toward levels that many experts believe will pose a profound threat to both the natural world and to human civilization.

Planetary warming

In 2015 and 2016, the planetary warming was intensified by the weather pattern known as El Niño, in which the Pacific Ocean released a huge burst of energy and water vapor into the atmosphere.

But the bigger factor in setting the records was the long-term trend of rising temperatures, which scientists say is being driven by increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

The heat extremes were especially pervasive in the Arctic, with temperatures in the fall running 20 to 30 degrees Fahrenheit above normal across large stretches of the Arctic Ocean. Sea ice in that region has been in precipitous decline for years, and Arctic communities are already wrestling with enormous problems, such as rapid coastal erosion, caused by the changing climate.

"What's going on in the Arctic is really very impressive; this year was ridiculously off the chart," said Gavin A. Schmidt, head of the Goddard Institute for Space Studies in Manhattan, a unit of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration that tracks global temperatures.

The hottest day

But Arctic people were hardly alone in feeling the heat. Drought and starvation afflicted Africa. On May 19, the people in the town of Phalodi lived through the hottest day in the recorded history of India, 123.8 degrees Fahrenheit.



El Niño has now ended, and climate scientists almost universally expect 2017 to be cooler than the year before. But the scale of the heat burst has been startling to many of the experts, and some of them fear an accelerated era of global warming could be at hand over the next few years.

Even at current temperatures, billions

of tons of land ice are melting or sliding into the ocean. The sea is also absorbing most of the heat trapped by human emissions. Those factors are causing the ocean to rise at what appears to be an accelerating pace, and coastal communities in the United States are beginning to spend billions to fight increased tidal flooding.

(Source: *The NYT*)

Asthmatic children more likely to become obese: new research

Asthmatic children are more than 50 percent more likely to become obese within ten years of being diagnosed, according to new research.

Scientists believe children may be at greater risk of gaining excess weight because difficulty breathing causes them to take less exercise.

However, the ten-year study of more than 2,000 children also revealed that asthmatics can reduce their chance of becoming obese by 43 percent by using reliever inhalers during asthma attacks. A side effect of many asthma medications is weight gain, researchers from the University of Southern California also found.

Prescribed inhalers

One in five British children aged 10 and 11 are obese, while one in 11 are prescribed inhalers and other asthmatic medicines.

Scientists behind the study said they could not be sure of the exact causal dynamic between asthma and unhealthy weight gain.

"Asthma and obesity often occur together in children, but it is unclear whether children with asthma are at higher risk for onset of obesity or whether obese children develop asthma, or both," said Dr. Zhonghua Chen, who led the research. His team examined the medical records of 2,171 five to seven-year-olds who were not obese when they joined the Southern California Children's Health Study (CHS).

At the beginning of the trial, over an eighth, or 13.5 percent, had asthma. Over a ten-year follow-up, researchers found a sixth of all the children had become obese.

The findings were confirmed using a different group of nine to ten year olds who were followed until they left school. Senior author Professor Frank Gilliland said the fact reliever but not preventer inhaler medications reduced obesity was a surprise.

Childhood obesity

He said: "Early diagnosis and treatment of asthma may help prevent the childhood obesity epidemic. "Part of the problem may be a vicious cycle where

asthma and obesity negatively affect each other.

Having asthma and being obese may also contribute to the development of other metabolic diseases, including prediabetes and Type 2 diabetes in later life.

Dr. Erika Kennington, Head of Research at Asthma UK: "Asthma is a complex condition that affects 5.4 million people in the UK, yet years of research underfunding means it remains a relative mystery.

"Our research tells us that children who are obese are more likely to get a diagnosis of asthma, and that if you have asthma and you are obese, your symptoms are likely to be more severe.

"In the meantime, getting an early diagnosis and ensuring that asthma is well-managed is crucial in minimizing asthma symptoms and the risk of a potentially life-threatening asthma attack." The University of Southern California study was published in *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*.

(Source: *The Telegraph*)

The best locations for thermal power stations in Iceland

A new research article, with lead authors from the University of Gothenburg, gives indications of the best places in Iceland to build thermal power stations.

In Iceland, heat is extracted for use in power plants directly from the ground in volcanic areas.

Constructing a geothermal power station near a volcano can be beneficial, since Earth's mantle is located relatively close to the crust in those areas, making the heat easily accessible. This means that the boreholes do not need to be very deep and the pipes to the power plant can be short.

But placing a power plant near an active volcano is not without risk, as an eruption can easily destroy any man-made construction in its way.

The scientists have now studied three different parts of the divergent ridge (area where the ocean plates are slowly sliding away from each other) that crosses Iceland from southwest to northeast. The slow movement and separation of the ocean plates can cause cracks in Earth's crust, through which hot magma from the planet's interior rises to the surface. As a result, a large number of volcanos have emerged along the divergent boundary.

"The study includes data with extremely high precision. Data from 1967 to the present, together with the very best modelling software, have yielded the best picture to date of the anatomy of the divergent boundary," says Md. Tariqul Islam, lead author of the article, which has been published in *Journal of Geophysical Research*.

(Source: *EurekAlert*)

Heartbeat passwords could be used to keep your medical records safe

Whether it's instantaneous diagnoses or simply making patients more directly responsible for their own wellbeing, there are plenty of things that are exciting about the tech-driven healthcare revolution. But one major question mark regarding individuals' access to their health records is the issue of security and privacy — and how to put this into place in an affordable way.



According to a new piece of research, investigators at Binghamton University in New York think the best way to do it might be by using a patient's own unique, distinctive heartbeat as a form of password.

The "proposed solution applies one extra layer of security protection on patients' health data collected from emerging wearable gadgets or mobile devices," Zhanpeng Jin, assistant professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, told *Digital Trends*. The "key goal is to reduce the computational overhead involved in protecting the sensitive personal health data."

The idea revolves around the fact that, in many cases, electrocardiograms (ECGs) have been collected from patients for a clinical diagnostic purpose. As a result, there is the added possibility of reusing them as a security key for protection purposes with a minimum cost.

This isn't the first time Jin has investigated the possibility of biometrics to establish a person's identity. Previous work, which this current project builds on, involved reading a person's unique "brain prints" to grant them access to computers or buildings.

"Compared to existing biometric approaches, no matter the conventional fingerprint or the advanced brain print we proposed before, ECGs are more vulnerable to variations, which may be caused by individuals' physical activities (or) mental states," Jin said.

(Source: *Digital Trends*)

Scientists can't decide if fish feel pain

Have you ever gone fishing? Did you keep the fish and eat it? Or did you pull the hook out and toss it back into the water?

At this point, as a prey animal, you know what comes next. A sharp stab, a warm trickle, and then unfeeling, endless oblivion. You make your peace.

But then, imagine the big ugly human just plays with you for a few minutes while you gasp, unable to breath. Then there's a yank and your lip splits further (OW!) and you fly, splat, back to the blue deep. You think 'What the heck?' and then realize it's over and swim away. You're relieved, but still, what a jerk!

But the December 2016 issue of the journal *Animal Sentience* suggests that my moral intuition may be based on a fallacy: that catching a fish hurts the fish. You see, for a fish to hurt, it has to be able to feel pain.

The neurobiologist Brian Key, writing under the succinct title "Why do fish not feel pain?" lays out a compelling case that our finned, gilled, and scaled cousins simply don't have the brain structures to feel pain.

Human pain, he argues, happens in the cortex. That's the region of your brain associated with complex, conscious experience and thought. It's a complex system (even for a brain system), with a great deal of back-and-forth flow of information.

(Source: *Business Insider*)

Tehran building collapse: Pray for firefighters

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Plasco building, a shopping center in downtown Tehran, collapsed at Thursday noon after a huge blaze, leaving dozens injured, missing, and dead.

The 17-storey building turned into piles of rubble within seconds after fighting the blaze for more than three hours.

Flames of fire which seemed to be under control at the beginning eventually led to the building's sudden collapse and unfortunately a number of firefighters, salespersons and other people got trapped in the rubble. Plasco is a commercial building survived from 1960s with some 600 shopping centers and clothing workshops filled with stacks of clothes which are believed to intensify the fire.

Apparently the building wasn't equipped with proper fire alarms, fire controlling systems, and safety provisions. Despite repeated warnings issued by fire department it was still operating.

According to the Emergency Medical Services director, Pir-Hossein Kulivand, so far some 51 victims have received outpatient care and 33 hospitalized, of them 28 were discharged.

"Sadly one of the firefighters, Behnam Mirzakhani, who suffered burns up to 60 percent of his body passed away on Friday at the hospital," Kulivand regretted. In spite of long ongoing rescue operations the rescue forces and fire fighters have not succeeded in rescuing or finding the missing firefighters yet. Pictures of shocked firefighters mourning their colleagues after the massive collapse has gone viral on social media and people offer their heartfelt condolences to them and saluting their outstanding bravery.

Tehran City Council member Eqbal Shakeri explained that the fire is still blazing in various parts due to the gasoline widely spreading throughout the huge piles of rubble.

Shakeri went on to say that "the rescue forces are tunneling from the adjacent buildings and have found out where the missing firefighters or people might be." The large heap of rubble and thick smoke have made it pretty time consuming and difficult to clear away the debris and searching through it.



Three hours after the fire broke out in Plasco building the whole 17-storey building fell down and turned into a huge pile of rubble. IRNA/ Ahmad Moeini Jam



A picture of Plasco building taken in 1964. Built in 1962, the building used to be one of the tallest one in its time which was later dwarfed by other buildings constructed in the capital. IRNA photo



The fire first started on one of the upper floors of the building at about 8 a.m. and soon engulfed other floors. The fire department soon attended the scene and attempted to put out the fire. IRNA/ Ahmad Moeini Jam



Massive crowds of people thronged around the building and despite police efforts to disperse them the crowd swelled minute by minute. IRNA/ Ahmad Moeini Jam



Rescue and relief forces are offering rescue services to those who suffered injuries at the scene. IRNA/ Marziye Soleimani



Families of firefighters and those others who have gone missing after the building collapse are desperately worried. IRNA/ Hossein Afkhami



People are waiting in long queues to donate blood for those who are wounded at the building collapse. IRNA/ Mehdi Ghorbani



The rescue operation lasted all through the night and all rescue and emergency services, firefighters, along with officials attended the scene. IRNA/ Mohammad Reza Alimadadi



People gathered at a fire station in Tehran and light candles to sympathize with firefighters and their families. IRNA/ Hossein Afkhami

Protesters make their mark on Trump's inauguration

➔ Outside the International Spy Museum, protesters in Russian hats ridiculed Trump's praise of President Vladimir Putin, marching with signs calling Trump "Putin's Puppet" and "Kremlin employee of the month."

More demonstrations were planned for later in the day. For one DisruptJ20 event, a march beginning at Columbus Circle outside Union Station, participants were asked to gather at noon, the same time as Trump's swearing-in as the 45th president.

The route for the march, which organizers called a "Festival of Resistance," ran about 1.5 miles to McPherson Square, a park about three blocks from the White House, where a rally featuring the filmmaker and liberal activist Michael Moore was planned.

Along the parade route, the AN-SWER Coalition anti-war group planned demonstrations at two locations.

Protesters and supporters of Trump clashed on Thursday evening outside a pro-Trump event in Washington. Police used chemical spray on some protesters in an effort to control the unruly crowd. Hundreds gathered outside the National Press Club in downtown Washington, where the "DeploraBall" was being held. The name is a play on a campaign remark by Hillary Clinton, who once referred to many of Trump's supporters as a "basket of deplorables."



The demonstrations won't end when Trump takes up residence in the White House. A massive Women's March on Washington is planned for Saturday. Christopher Geldart, the District of Columbia's homeland security director, has said 1,800 buses have registered to park in the city Saturday, which could mean nearly 100,000 people coming in just by bus.

■ **Robert De Niro, other stars lead thousands in NYC Trump protest**

Elsewhere, thousands of defiant New Yorkers filled Trump's backyard on Thursday on the eve of his inauguration for a

star-studded, full-throated statement of protest.

Joined by celebrities, government leaders and union organizers, angry protesters flooded Columbus Circle, Broadway and several blocks of Central Park West.

"There are those who are working to divide us," said "Sex and the City" star Cynthia Nixon. "We are not going back. We're not turning around."

Singer and actress Cher, who told the crowd she has lived through 12 Presidents, said protesters have to use their anger for good.

Demonstrators, led by filmmaker Michael Moore, Mark Ruffalo, Robert De Niro and Sally Field, crowded in front of Trump International Hotel and Tower to speak about a variety of issues including health care, labor rights, climate change and protection for immigrants, lesbians and gays.

"We stand together, making sure there is no hatred in our city, in any city," Mayor de Blasio said. "Donald Trump always said he built a movement. Well, now it's our turn to build a movement."

MoveOn.org, Greenpeace USA and Planned Parenthood of New York City will be among the groups participating.

Among the speakers was actor Alec Baldwin, who addressed the crowd as himself and his "Saturday Night Live" Trump alter ego.

"Donald Trump and Steve Bannon and Mike Pence think you are going to lay down," Baldwin said. "But New Yorkers never lay down."

De Niro, who famously said last year that he wanted to punch Trump in the face, took a more peaceful approach.

"Whatever happens, we Americans, we New Yorkers, we patriots stand united for the rights of our citizens," De Niro said.

Moore urged participants to call Congress every day to voice their concerns.

Moore called for 100 days of protest against Trump as he kicks off his presidency.

(Source: agencies)

Russia says ready for constructive dialogue with U.S.

With Donald Trump almost inaugurated as the 45th President of the United States, Russia has said it will be ready to contribute to a constructive dialogue with Washington.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Moscow and President Vladimir Putin have time and again stated that Russia is "ready to walk its part of the path to move the dialogue with Washington into constructive mode."

The move, Lavrov added, is aimed at finding "effective answers to the challenges of terrorism and other multiple modern challenges first of all."

The Russian foreign minister made the remarks at

the opening ceremony of political consultations among members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Moscow on Friday. Lavrov also stated that Moscow would keep an eye on "the pre-election declarations" of Trump, which included a joint fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group.

Trump has called for better relations between the Kremlin and the White House.

The ties between Washington and Moscow have deteriorated over the conflict in eastern Ukraine since 2014.

The United States, the European Union and some other Western countries have imposed several rounds of sanctions against Russia over accusations that Moscow has been involved in the crisis in Ukraine, which has killed nearly 10,000 people to date. The Kremlin strongly rejects the allegations.

On Thursday, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev described degrading Russo-U.S. relations as a major foreign policy blunder of the administration of former U.S. President Barack Obama.

(Source: Press TV)

U.S. drone strikes killed 117 civilians during Obama's presidency

The outgoing United States President Barack Obama ordered at least 526 drone strikes during his presidency, killing as many as 117 civilians, according to a new report by U.S. spy agencies.

The number of drone strikes during the Obama administration was 10 times more than the number carried out during the presidency of President George W. Bush, according to the intelligence community's report. The annual report was required by Obama's executive order signed last year, and comes just hours before the end of his term.

U.S. officials said the White House called intelligence

agencies to push out the report, saying if it wasn't released now it may never be under Incoming U.S. President Donald Trump. The report says as many as 117 civilians have been killed in American drone and other counter-terrorism attacks in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya and elsewhere.

Those numbers were greeted skeptically by human rights organizations, which estimated 380 to 1,000 civilian casualties were caused by U.S. strikes.

The Center for Civilians in Conflict said the figure of civilian casualties in the report falls well short of numbers reported by most independent observers. "They know,

better than anybody, how many civilians are actually killed, and it's important for official figures to match reality," said the center's executive director, Federico Borello.

The U.S. military, along with the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), conduct drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Libya.

Trump has not addressed the drone policy specifically, but he has said he wants to "take out terrorists" and expects he will continue using drones in counter-terrorism operations.

(Source: Press TV)

West minus U.S.: Hashemi Rafsanjani's foreign policy

➔ He expressed interest to mediate in order to resolve hostilities between Iran and the U.S. Ayatollah Hashemi welcomed the proposition but the U.S. President Bill Clinton turned it down. At the time, we told Kohl that Iran was ready to join a workgroup for negotiation over all the four disputed areas and cooperation on the fight against terrorism, WMD, and improved human rights. We were also to prove, in the workgroup, that Iran would never sabotage the peace process and Israel itself was the side to blame. It was a very intelligent initiative because Kohl was the most powerful European leader who was playing a pivotal role in improving the ties between Iran and Europe.

We had already managed to accelerate expansion of ties with Germany. We had lifted the credit restrictions of the German Euler Hermes insurance. Other European insurance firms had immediately followed suit. It had opened the gate for European credit to be invested in Iran's post-war reconstruction projects. In two years, 1990 to 1992, Hermes provided covers for Iran worth approximately DM14b. Kohl and Hashemi had begun regular telephone conversations. It was the first direct and regular conversation between a European leader and Iran's president. I tried to elicit the German side's evaluation after each conversation. I daresay, no exaggeration intended, that Mr. Kohl was drawn to Hashemi after the first conversation and enthusiastically pursued the continuation of the talks. Tehran welcomed Kohl's proposition for conflict resolution between Iran and the U.S., giving him a constructive offer. When the U.S. rejected the initiative, it became clear that U.S. did want hostility with Iran and it was not the other way around. Iran's goodwill and the test of

mediation led German officials to show more resistance against pressures from the U.S.

■ **From Hashemi Rafsanjani's point of view, Germany was the springboard for establishing ties with Europe. Even Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher had told you that Hashemi Rafsanjani was one of the most intelligent and competent leaders he had worked with, during his sixteen-year term. What happened that Germany became the beginning of the end to ties between Iran and the West at the end of Hashemi's presidential term, following the Mykonos incident?**

A: Yes. It was in October 1990 when I visited Mr. Hashemi before my departure for Germany. He said Germany is the gateway of establishing ties with Europe for us and our ties with Europe would be the major part of relations with the West. From then on to September 1993 when the Mykonos crisis took place, mutual relations between Iran and Germany expanded miraculously fast. In about two years, joint economic and cultural committees were revived, a large number of ministers made visits, and economic ties reached an unprecedented DM10 billion record, and so on. The assassination of Shapour Bakhtiar in Paris and Kurdish leaders in the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin were bombs placed under the foundation of modern Iran-Germany and Iran-Europe relations.

However, not only did we prevent the collapse of relations, we also expanded the ties in spite of Mykonos trials. Ayatollah Hashemi practically played a key role in the process of crisis management and continued expansion of ties. Iran's Intelligence Minister [Ali Fallahian] visited Germany after the Mykonos assassi-

nations— first visit ever made by an Iranian Intelligence Minister to Europe and a NATO state. German ambassadors in Washington, London, and Tel Aviv were summoned in protest. The initiative was an important beginning that led to a significant shift in security ties between Iran and Europe/NATO.

However, our problems were not limited to Mykonos assassinations. Events like the assassination of Farrokhzad, the discovery of a missile cargo destined to Munich, the Faraj Sarkohi episode, and constant arrests of German nationals in Iran, were grenades that shook the foundations of a new chapter in relations between Iran and Germany, and Europe. Foreign Minister Mr. Velayati, deputy minister Mr. Vaezi, and all ambassadors of Iran in Europe made fruitful efforts to realize our diplomatic strategy. Nonetheless, the concomitance of these bitter events not only injured 'soldiers of the diplomatic front' that worked for improvement of ties with Europe, but also crippled the establishment's strategy of 'West minus U.S.'

■ **In 2011, you told a conference in Florida that the best chance for rapprochement between Iran and the U.S. emerged during Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency. Given Hashemi Rafsanjani's power and influence inside Iran, could one conclude that the American side failed to seize the opportunity?**

A: Yes, because the post-war era had begun. The era coincided with the leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei and presidency of Mr. Hashemi. These two figures were the main bulwarks of the Revolution after the death of Imam Khomeini. The [new] Supreme Leader had no trust in the U.S. and deemed every effort futile. Ayatollah Hashemi

took some big steps to expand ties with Russia, China, and India. At the same time, the 'West minus US' strategy was being pursued in full force. Meanwhile, Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani was always looking for ways to reduce U.S. hostility against Iran.

U.S.'s call on Iran to help release Western and American hostages [in Lebanon] was the first chance to test the chances and Ayatollah Hashemi did not turn it down. With the Supreme Leader's green light, Iran used its utmost capacity and released the hostages. Mr. Vaezi and I were in charge. The commander of IRGC Quds Force and the Intelligence Ministry also collaborated in full capacity. After the hostages were released, European countries expressed gratitude and responded with goodwill in expanding ties with Iran. However, the U.S. did not show reciprocal goodwill and increased its hostility instead. If the Americans demonstrated goodwill at the time, a domino effect would launch and the situation would change.

■ **How do you evaluate Hashemi Rafsanjani's role in the synthesis of the Islamic Republic's diplomacy? How did his realism and pragmatism shape Iran's post-war diplomacy?**

A: During the war with Iraq, almost all Eastern and Western powers sided with the aggressor [i.e. Iraq] and against Iran, the victim of the invasion. Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani took control of the country's executive affairs after the war and revolutionized [our] relations with the Muslim World, Russia, India, China, Europe, and other countries (excluding the U.S. and Israel). These landmark achievements were not possible without support from the Supreme Leader.

Nation grieves fallen firefighters

■ **SOCIETY TEHRAN** — The death of about 25 fire-fighters in Tehran on Thursday saddened the Iranian nation.

The firemen were fighting the horrifying blaze for four hours which had engulfed the 17-story Palasco building in downtown Tehran. Suddenly, the building collapsed and buried firemen inside.

On Friday, the cabinet of ministers declared Saturday as a public mourning in memory of the firefighters.

The firemen were killed as they were evacuating people from the building, which housed hundreds of clothing warehouses as well as a shopping mall and other businesses.

Scores of workers and dozens of trucks were searching the ruins Thursday and Friday. Officials said that 25 people were still unaccounted for in addition to the firefighters.

ISNA reported on Friday evening that remains of bodies of two firefighters were taken out of the debris.

■ **Condolences come from around the world**

Political leaders and fire departments worldwide have expressed condolences over the tragic death of the firefighters.

Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Prime Minister Binali Yildirim, and Russian Emergencies Minister Vladimir Puchkov sent condolence messages to the bereaved families and the Iranian nation.

The German embassy in Tehran also expressed its empathy by saying "we share the sorrow for those firefighters who have endangered their lives and got injured to fight the blaze in the Plasco building."

Moreover, the London Fire Brigade tweeted: "Our thoughts are with the friends and families of the firefighters who have died following the fire and building collapse in Tehran."

The Huntersville Fire Department, North Carolina, the U.S., tweeted: "Our thoughts & our prayers are with Iran & the many firefighters lost in the Plasco building fire & collapse."

Syrian rebels bitterly divided before new peace talks

➔ "Warplanes, which may have been Russian or coalition aircraft, struck a Fateh al-Sham camp in Jabal al-Sheikh Suleiman," the Britain-based group said.

The Takfiri group, formerly known as al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), along with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh), is not a party to a countrywide ceasefire deal reached between Damascus and militant groups on December 30, 2016.

■ **33 Daeshis killed in Homs**

Also, over 30 ISIL terrorists have been killed when they engaged in fierce exchanges of gunfire with Syrian army soldiers and pro-government fighters from popular defense groups in the country's central province of Homs.

The SOHR said that at least 18 ISIL terrorists had been killed as they sought to advance near the Tiyas Military Airbase, also known as the T-4 Airbase, west of the ancient Semitic city of Palmyra (Tadmor).

The Brittan-based SOHR monitoring group's head, Rami Abdel Rahman, said 12 pro-government fighters had also been killed, including seven in a bomb attack.

ISIL has tried for weeks to cut off the Syrian army's access route to the airbase, but to no avail in the face of strong resistance shown by government forces.

Additionally, Syrian soldiers killed more than 15 ISIL terrorists, and destroyed an armored vehicle and seven pickup trucks equipped with heavy machineguns south of Sharifa village, situated about 60 kilometers west of Palmyra.

A Syrian military source, speaking on condition of anonymity, also told Syria's official news agency SANA that the army had established control over a number of strategic hills and checkpoints along al-Phosphate road in Homs province.

■ **Mass grave found in Aleppo**

Meanwhile, the Syrian army forces have discovered a mass grave at a school in the eastern sector of Aleppo City, which was liberated from the militants late last year.

According to a letter sent by the Syrian army to United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, the victims had been executed by the Takfiri Fajr al-Islam militant group.

The letter said certain countries consider the terrorist group as moderate fighters and equip them with arms and technical support.

■ **Aleppo reconstruction**

Elsewhere, in a Friday interview with Iran's Fars News Agency, Aleppo Governor Hussein Diab said clean-up and reconstruction operations in Aleppo have made signification progress.

He said the reconstruction process will include the entire Aleppo province with a primary focus on urban services.

The operations include removing the debris, cleaning up the streets, providing security for vehicles and reopening schools after four years, Diab said.

He said 20 schools have been reopened for 5,000 students and three health centers have started providing medical services to the citizens.

Following the liberation of Aleppo in late 2016, the Syrian government adopted a plan of action meant to restore public services and security to the northwestern city.

■ **Lavrov 'optimistic' on Syria peace process**

Meantime, on Friday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov expressed optimism over the prospect of peace process on Syria, saying the meeting in the Kazakh capital Astana on January 23 is as an important step toward establishing a framework for talks taking place in Geneva.

"As you know an inter-Syrian meeting between the Syrian government delegation and armed opposition will take place next week in Astana. We view this meeting as an important input into work on parameters of integral political reconciliation in the Syrian Arab Republic which will continue at larger events in Geneva in the beginning of February," he added.

Russia is currently in talks with Iranian officials on preparations for the upcoming Syria peace talks, among them the possible United States presence in the discussions.

(Source: agencies)

A rare Real defeat and an ageless Pharoah

A tiger and his principality patrons, a baby-faced debutant and some Toffees, and a vintage pharaoh star in FIFA.com's latest stats review, which does not make positive reading for a studious Spaniard and his heavily-inked countryman.

44 years and two days was the age at which Egypt's Essam El-Hadary became the oldest player in CAF Africa Cup of Nations history on Tuesday. When first-choice goalkeeper Ahmed El-Shenawy went off injured in the 25th minute against Mali, El-Hadary came on to smash the record set by compatriot Hossam Hassan, who was 39 years and six months when he rose from the bench against Senegal in the 2006 semi-finals. El-Hadary, whose international career appeared to be over until a surprise recall last year, has expressed his desire to become the oldest player in FIFA World Cup™ history. Faryd Mondragon, at 43 years and three days, took the record of Cameroonian Roger Milla when he came on for Colombia against Japan in 2014.



40 matches unbeaten – a record for a Spanish club – was the run that came to an end for Real Madrid at Sevilla on Sunday. Three days earlier, against the same side, late goals from Sergio Ramos and Karim Benzema snatched Zinedine Zidane's team a 3-3 draw in the Copa del Rey, which saw them break the 39 games Barcelona went without defeat until a well-taken Cristiano Ronaldo goal grabbed Madrid victory in El Clásico in April 2016. The 31-year-old Portuguese broke the deadlock at the weekend, tying Emilio Butragueno's record of 56 for the most penalties scored in La Liga. However, Sergio Ramos put through his own net in the 85th minute – it was the 30-year-old's first goal for Sevilla since he scored in a 2-2 draw against, ironically, Real Madrid in 2005 – and Stevan Jovetic secured the upset in stoppage time. Los Merengues followed that up by losing 2-1 at home to Celta Vigo in the first leg of their Copa del Rey quarter-final, meaning they have already lost as many games this year, as they did in the whole of 2016.

4 goals without reply is what Everton banged past Manchester City to hand Pep Guardiola the heaviest league defeat of his eight-year managerial career. New signing Ademola Lookman came on for his debut in the 90th minute and scored, with just his second touch, to seal the Toffees' biggest defeat of Manchester City since a Gary Lineker hat-trick inspired victory by the same score in 1986. The 19-year-old winger's strike left Claudio Bravo having conceded 13 goals from the last 21 shots on target he has faced. The result meant Guardiola unwantedly tied his record high for league losses in a season – Barcelona and Bayern Munich also lost five times in 2008/09 and 2014/15, respectively. The man who turned 46 on Wednesday has 17 matches to go to avoid registering six defeats in a campaign for the first time.

4 goals in 41 minutes is what Monaco scored at the Velodrome – the fortress at which Marseille had previously conceded only one goal in ten Ligue 1 games. A Thomas Lemar gem broke the deadlock in the 15th minute before Falcao's 12th goal in 14 French league appearances this season made it 2-0. Although Marseille pulled one back, Bernardo Silva's brace earned Leonardo Jardim's side a 4-1 victory which, coupled with Nice's unexpected goalless draw at home to rock-bottom Metz, catapulted them top on goal difference. Monaco have now netted a whopping 60 goals in Ligue 1 this season – 21 more than Paris Saint-Germain, who have the second-most. The next highest-scoring team in Europe's big five leagues this season is Barcelona on 47.

Quick hits
52 points from his opening 21 English Premier League matches is what Chelsea's Antonio Conte has seized, equalling the record Jose Mourinho set with the same team.
35 different clubs is what Lionel Messi has scored against in La Liga following his goal for Barcelona against Las Palmas, tying Real legend Raul's all-time record.
9 goals in his last six starts is what Kostas Mitroglou has after he got the comeback going for Benfica, as they reversed a 3-0 deficit to draw with Boavista and netted a hat-trick in the 6-2 win over Leixoes. (Source: FIFA)

Vintage Federer hammers Berdych to reach fourth round

A rampaging Roger Federer delivered a stunning reminder of his class at the Australian Open on Friday with a crushing 6-2 6-4 6-4 win over Tomas Berdych to storm into the fourth round.

Playing only his third tour match since coming back from a knee injury, Federer was expected to be tested by the hard-hitting Czech but he sent the 10th seed packing after a 90-minute masterclass at a floodlit Rod Laver Arena. The 35-year-old Swiss, seeded 17th, had shown rust in his earlier matches but was in spell-binding touch with 40 winners, wrapping up the match with an imperious crosscourt backhand.

Federer will meet fifth seed Kei Nishikori for a place in the quarter-finals. (Source: Reuters)



An ugly win is still a win, says Wawrinka

Stan Wawrinka was not fully convincing in his four-set victory against Serbian Viktor Troicki but the fourth seed refused to fuss over the nature of his win after securing his place in the fourth round of the Australian Open on Friday.

Wawrinka produced an error-ridden first set, then had two opportunities to serve out for the match in the fourth only to be broken by the 29th-seed, who also then saved a match point.

The Swiss then advanced with a 3-6 6-2 6-2 7-6(7) victory.

The 31-year-old U.S. Open champion was not prepared to dwell on the issues he had in putting away the Serb, instead preferring to put the result in the win column and begin preparations for fourth round opponent Andreas Seppi.

"It doesn't matter the way you're playing, especially the beginning of a grand slam. It doesn't change anything," Wawrinka told reporters.

"The goal is to win those matches. I don't really care if I play really well, well, or okay. I want to win. I want to get through those matches. I want to go as far as possible.

"That's what matters at the end of the day," Wawrinka's uncomplicated approach has been evident for a number of years.

While he remembers the victories, like at Melbourne Park in 2014 when he clinched his first grand slam title, he has stated numerous times that last year's performance has no relevance to this year's.

He also does not take an overly analytical approach to the draw, telling reporters before the tournament that while he may look at who is playing who, he can not worry about a potential fourth round clash if he does not get past the first.

Despite having won the previous seven encounters against Troicki, the Serb could have been exactly one of those opponents



he could have lost to had he not focused on the match.

Wawrinka was broken three times by the Serb in the first set alone while he committed twice as many (14) unforced errors as the 30-year-old from Belgrade.

The Swiss, however, adjusted to the

windy conditions and felt by the end he was playing well and had rhythm, despite having some blips when he served for the match at 5-4 and 6-5 in the fourth set then dropped a match point in the tiebreak.

"Yeah, it was not always the best tennis, but ... I'm really happy just to get through,"

Wawrinka said.

"(It) was close. Tough tiebreak for sure. Served twice for the match. But it's not a big deal.

"At the end I won in four sets. I'm still here."

(Source: Reuters)

Manchester City paid record sum for 13-year-old Burns - report



Premier League high-flyers Manchester City paid a record 175,000 pounds (\$215,000) to sign 13-year-old defender Finley Burns from third-tier Southend United last week, the Times reported on Friday.

The newspaper said the overall cost of the transfer could rise to more than 250,000 pounds if Burns goes on to sign professional terms at the Abu Dhabi-owned club.

No fee or details about subsequent payments were given by either club at the time of Burns's signing.

The Times said City's outlay was unprecedented for a 13-year-old, with the club paying almost 150,000 more than they were obliged to under the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP).

The plan governs the compensation given to clubs who lose academy players.

"There were four or five Premier League clubs after Finley in the end and it's extremely difficult to keep hold of a boy once that's happens," Southend's head of youth football Ricky Duncan said last week.

"He would have had a 10-day window of opportunity to look elsewhere at the end of the season so this was the best way to do it. He's a great kid from a nice family and everything was sorted out amicably which is how it should be."

City have paid big sums on young players in the past, spending a reported 200,000 pounds for Spanish youth player Brahim Diaz in 2013 and 500,000 pounds on winger Jadon Sancho in 2015.

Both players were 14 at the time of their transfers.

(Source: Reuters)

'Costa is happy at Chelsea' - Conte responds to China rumours



Chelsea manager Antonio Conte believes Diego Costa wants to stay at Stamford Bridge as he prepares to welcome the striker back into his matchday squad.

The Spain international missed Saturday's win over Leicester City following a training ground bust-up with Conte, with reports suggesting Costa's head had been turned by an offer from Chinese Super League outfit Tianjin Quanjian.

Conte, however, insists a back injury was the reason for his top scorer's absence at the King Power Stadium, and has confirmed the injury has cleared up ahead of Sunday's clash with Hull City.

And the Italian also claimed that the forward will not be leaving the club

anytime in the near future.

Speaking at a press conference, the former Juventus boss said: "I think the player wants to stay at Chelsea. He is happy to play with us. This idea [China] is far from his mind.

"I read a lot of speculation about Diego but right now the most important thing is he trained with us & doesn't have pain."

Costa's return is set to give the Premier League leaders a boost as they host the Tigers, though Conte would not reveal whether the former Atletico Madrid star would start.

"We'll see. I don't want to give an advantage to our opponent," he said when asked about how much of a role Costa would have this weekend.

(Source: Goal)



@memphisdepay Thanks for all the memories during my time as a Red Devil. I will never forget all your support at Manchester United. ?? #RedDevils #ManUtd



@d_degeaofficial Today I met Sam, this great young goalkeeper. I hope that my gloves help him to save everything! @manchesterunitedfoundation



@waynerooney Proud to announce that my testimonial match raised £1.2 million for the chosen children's charities. @waynerooneyfoundation

Carlos Queiroz would consider South Africa job: report

T T S P O R T S Iran head coach Carlos Queiroz **d e s k** admits he would “have to consider” any offer from the South African Football Association (Safa) to coach the team.

The former Real Madrid and Portugal coach has been in charge of Iran for the past seven years but tendered his resignation earlier this month, fueling speculation that he could replace the recently dismissed Shakes Mashaba as South Africa’s head coach.

Queiroz still has to finalize matter with the Iranian Football Federation over the termination of his contract, but admits a return to South Africa is enticing.

“At the moment, as you can understand, I have ethical duties and obligations with my present contract and I’m not in a position to make comments about that in a public way,” he told EWN Sport when queried about the position.

“But if South Africa, or any other country, remembers your name and trusts your name as a person to coach the national team; for a coach it’s always an honor and something really very special. You are coaching the flag and the nation, and the expectations and the dreams of one entire country,” he added.

The 63-year-old added further fuel to the flames by describing how “special” South Africa is to him.

“First of all, everybody knows that South Africa is like home for me,” he continued. “I was born a few kilometers from the border (in Mozambique). I’m an African person, a white African person. I have family, I have roots and I have so many links with Africa to consider that position.

“Apart from the football matters, it is something special for me,” Queiroz said.



Iran learn Asian Girls’ U18 Volleyball opponents

T T S P O R T S Iran have learned their group stage **d e s k** opponents for the 11th Asian Girls’ U18 Volleyball Championship.

In the drawing of lots which took place in Chongqing, China, Iran have been pitted against powerhouse China and Hong Kong at Pool A.

Defending and successive five-time champions Japan have been drawn with New Zealand and Samoa in Pool B, with Thailand, Kazakhstan and Australia in Pool C. Pool D comprises Korea, Chinese Taipei and Uzbekistan.

The competition will be held in Chongqing, China from March 5 to 13 which is the Asian qualification round for the 2017 FIVB Volleyball Girls’ U18 World Championship in Argentina, asianvolleyball.net reported.

The pool round-robin preliminaries will take place between March 5 and 7. Iran and hosts China set up the curtain-raisers on March 5, while Japan take on New Zealand, Kazakhstan face Australia and Uzbekistan challenge Korea.

Only top two teams from each pool after the



preliminaries will advance to round of the last eight teams in Pool E and F, while the teams finishing third will be relegated to the 9th-12th classification round. Teams playing each other in the preliminaries will not meet again, but their early results will be taken into

consideration for ranking classification.

Top four teams from the Asian meet will make the cut for the 20-team 2017 FIVB Volleyball Girls’ U18 World Championship from August 18 to 27 in Rosario & Santa Fe, Argentina. At the previous world meet in Lima, Peru two years ago, five Asian teams had qualified for the top-flight competition. Japan, Thailand, China and Korea qualified through the Asian Girls’ U18 Championship in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, while Chinese Taipei also joined the fray as one of the two teams with the best world rankings.

Since the tournament’s inception in 1997 in Yala, Thailand, only two teams, Japan and China, had captured the titles. Japan made their presence felt to clinch the first crown. China underlined their supremacy over the biennial tournament for four times in a row 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005. Japan roared back to make it five in succession including a hard-fought 3-1 win over hosts Thailand in the previous edition in Nakhon Ratchasima.

Igor Kolakovic: Iran volleyball federation asked me four-year plan

T T S P O R T S Serbian volleyball coach Igor **d e s k** Kolakovic says that Iran Volleyball Federation has asked him to send them a short plan for a four years period.

Kolakovic emerged as a candidate to replace Argentine coach Raul Lozano as well as Bulgarian coach Radostin Stoychev.

He was the coach of the Serbia men’s national volleyball team and led the team at the 2006 FIVB

Volleyball Men’s World Championship and 2014 FIVB Volleyball Men’s World Championship.

“The federation of Iran contacted me on December 30th with an official e-mail to start negotiation,” Kolakovic told Tehran Times.

“They asked me to make and send them a short plan for a four years period which I did. A few days ago they informed me that I should come to Tehran for a meeting in the federation. That is all for now,” he added.



Iran’s Alireza Jahanbakhsh scores a FIFA 17 goal



T T S P O R T S Sure, FIFA 17 is very **d e s k** realistic. But there are times when you take a freekick and wonder whether physics would allow something like that to actually happen in the real world.

Actually, we should rephrase that, there are times when you are watching someone else take a freekick on YouTube and you wonder whether physics would allow something like that to actually happen in the real world.

Anyway, Alireza Jahanbakhsh goal against Go Ahead Eagles suggests that those long-range, curving, dipped wondergoals can happen - and when they do, they’re pretty special.

The clip shows AZ Alkmaar winger Alireza Jahanbakhsh scoring his side’s

second in their 3-1 win over Eredivisie rivals Go Ahead Eagles. The footage captures the Iranian picking the ball up near the halfway line before charging towards goal with real intent.

Finding himself a good distance from goal, the 23-year-old decides to try his luck and smashes the ball at the keeper.

His shot flies into the air before seemingly changing it’s mind and flying back down into the corner of the net.

The effort is so surprising there is simply nothing Theo Zwartthoed in the GAE goal can do other than admire the strike.

Incredible effort.

The 23-year old has scored 6 goals and provided 7 assists in 24 appearances for AZ in this season so far.

Iran’s Mahdi Pourrahnama One to Watch for 2017



Iran’s Mahdi Pourrahnama has been named among Ones to Watch for 2017 by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC).

Selected in partnership with the World Taekwondo Federation, the Ones to Watch athletes are individuals who have the potential to make the headlines in para-taekwondo 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.

IPC has already named Iranian Para-archer Zahra Nemati, powerlifter Siamand Rahmand, Para-shooter Sareh Javanmardi, and sitting volleyball player Morteza Mehrzad among the Ones to Watch.

(Source: Paralympic)

Lack of power and passion hint at the possible decline of Novak Djokovic

The fallout from Novak Djokovic’s loss to Denis Istomin in the second round of the 2017 Australian Open is likely to ripple through tennis for a little while yet. It might take him weeks or several months to recover, or he could hit back hard at the next opportunity, which will be the defence of his title in Indian Wells, starting on 9 March.

Last year, he annihilated Milos Raonic in the final there for the loss of two games; the odds of a repeat coronation are longer than the Yarra River.

It was impossible to tell from his downbeat demeanour after losing in five sets to Istomin – whom he had beaten out of sight in five previous matches - how deep the bruises went, but one thing was obvious: the old certainties about him have splintered. No longer is his progress to the final of any tournament he enters taken for granted; now there is not just doubt about his winning titles, but even contesting them.

This Djokovic is some way removed from the player who, only a year ago, embarked on a campaign to win a calendar slam with such vigour he turned bookmakers into cowards. He arrived in Melbourne this time without Boris Becker, who had helped him to win six of his 12 slams, and the German remarked on Thursday, “I could tell in the first set he was way too defensive and way too passive.”

Becker’s departure from the Djokovic box after three interesting years followed the Serb’s hooking up with a former fringe player from Spain, Pepe Imaz, who became his life coach. The player who once used to rip his shirt to shreds when driven to the limit on court, eyes bulging and fists pumping, has acquired a softer mien, reaching out to the crowd with upward arms gesture of shared love. That is admirable, but we should learn over the next 12 month sor so if it presages the decline of Djokovic as a player and his simultaneous growth as an individual.

Physically, even, he does not carry the same presence. A respected former player said before the start of this tournament that he met Djokovic at a reception and was surprised to notice the lack of definition in his arms. He has always been wiry, but never thin. His strength was elastic, perfect for his calling. But, even before he lost to Istomin, there were moments in the second-set tie-break of his first-round match against Fernando Verdasco (who held five match points against him in Doha recently) when he looked exhausted.

On Thursday, he finished well enough but his lateral movement was passive rather than explosive. The miracle returns were missing. So was the growl and the frightening passion. He some times would get into trouble against lower-ranked players, but usually found a way to extricate himself from embarrassment, especially over five sets. He did it across the long haul here last year to beat Gilles Simon in the fourth round, overcoming the weight of 100 unforced errors.

This, though, is a different Djokovic. This is a player whose belief in miracles seems dented. And that painful realisation comes at the end of the toughest six months of his career.

In his press conference, he was calm and philosophical. When I asked him if this defeat hurt more or less than it might have done a year ago when he was at his imperious best, he replied, “I didn’t understand your question.” He went on to say he was not used to losing at a tournament where he has won six titles, which is understandable – but there was something about his demeanour that hinted at relief – just as when the burden of chasing the calendar slam ended for him at Wimbledon.

After so many years on the tour, and expectations rammed to the highest level every time he plays, Djokovic might be embracing a return to his version of ordinariness, a place where he can rest from the journey for awhile. It would go against his competitive instincts to meekly accept defeat – as lesser players do when it becomes commonplace – but he is an intelligent man and will understand that he is more vulnerable now than he has been since his irresistible rise began in 2011, when nobody was safe from his racket, not even Rafael Nadal on clay.

As with Roger Federer and Nadal once their hegemony began to slowly crumble, the locker room senses blood again. Djokovic’s slump, however temporary, will stiffen sinews and bring a brightness to the eyes of the advancing brigade of young challengers, such as Alexander Zverev and Dominic Thiem. Nadal plays Zverev next. Thiem plays Benoit Paire. Those are winnable matches that could launch the fledgling aspirants into the second week of the tournament – and then we might learn if they are capable of building a serious charge to a major title in an era that seems ready for change.

It is a measure of Djokovic’s greatness, paradoxically, that his peers, critics and fans regard his third implosion in three consecutive slams as a cause for concern, rather than an aberration. This was supposed to be his time, the post-Nadal-Federer reign, with Andy Murray tugging at his purple robes occasionally but mostly falling short.

Djokovic’s loss to Istomin, the most inexplicable of his career, means he will be hard-pressed to challenge Murray for supremacy in the rankings until at least the French Open in May, given he lost so many points here as a quickly-beaten champion and has a swag of points to defend on the American hardcourt swing, then the European claycourt season ahead of Roland Garros.

That proved to be the highpoint of his 2016 season: securing ownership of all four majors at once. It was a phenomenal effort – but one that drained him to the point of meltdown at Wimbledon.

Injuries and off-court issues complicated his life and his tennis, which he briefly put back together by winning the Rogers Cup in Canada, only to suffer another setback when Juan Martin Del Potro dumped him out of the Rio Olympics.

He bombed in the Paris Masters but came again to reach the title-decider of the ATP World Tour Finals in London, where Murray beat him soundly. When he got revenge in a three-hour final in Doha, they looked set for a confrontation on roughly level terms in Melbourne, where they contested the final a year ago. But Istomin, 117 in the world and in the draw thanks to a wildcard, did not read the script.

With his coach and mother looking on in disbelief and joy, the Uzbeki played the match of his life and Djokovic was left shattered and confused. You would not bet he cannot come back; neither would you bet that he will ever be so dominant again.

(Source: Guardian)

