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TEHRAN TIMES



Iran says will actively participate in Syria talks in Astana

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Iran consults with Russia, Turkey in Astana ahead of Syria talks

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Iranian and Turkish delegations held talks on Saturday in Astana, Kazakhstan, ahead of the planned talks between the Syrian government and opposition groups on Sunday.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Jaber Ansari and Turkish Undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry Sedat Onal were heading the Iranian and Turkish delegations.

Prior to the talks with the Turkish side the Iranian diplomatic team held talks with Russian officials in the Kazakh capital.

Under a plan introduced by Iran, Russia and Turkey in Moscow on December 20 a ceasefire was declared in Syria on December 30. Under the initiative, known as the Moscow declaration, the warring sides are preparing to arrive in Astana for talks.

Iran, Russia, and Turkey as the main powerbrokers in Syria will act as intermediary between the Syrian government and opposition groups in Astana.

Iran and Russia have been backing the central government during the six years of conflict in Syria. However, Turkey has been siding with armed opposition groups seeking to ouster the Bashar al-Assad government. Turkey changed the tact as the Syrian forces, backed by the Russian air force, succeeded to recapture the strategic city of Aleppo. →2

Govt. pledges support for Plasco victims



President Rouhani is condoling a fireman over the death of his colleagues in a huge inferno in the Plasco business center.

ATR says aircraft deal with Iran imminent

Turboprop maker ATR has completed commercial negotiations with Iran Air for the sale of at least 20 aircraft and expects to be able to sign a contract very soon, the head of the Franco-Italian aircraft maker said on Friday.

The deal will come after Iran, which had not directly purchased a Western-built plane in nearly 40 years, signed contracts with Europe's Airbus (AIR.PA) and U.S. rival Boeing last year to purchase about 180 jets.

That became possible after an agreement between Iran and six major powers lifted most international sanctions imposed on Tehran.

"We have concluded the negotiations and we should sign the contract imminently," ATR Chief Executive Christian Scherer said. Scherer was responding to some Iranian media reports on Friday that ATR had already announced the signature of the keenly awaited deal.

Iranian officials said in December that a deal for 20 twin-engine turboprop ATR 72-600 aircraft was close.

Iran Air and ATR have spent months negotiating a firm order for 20 ATR 72-600 aircraft worth 540 million euros (\$576 million) at list prices, with options for another 20.

All three manufacturers have received U.S. Treasury export licenses to sell to Iran, a step required even for European firms since all modern Western aircraft rely on many U.S. parts.

Even so, industry sources say all three may need further approvals or extended cover in order to complete deliveries. (Source: Reuters)

Zarif slams global indifference toward Rohingya sufferings

Iran has criticized the international community for turning a blind eye to the plight of Myanmar's Rohingya Muslims, urging the Muslim world to unite in support of the persecuted minority.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif made the comments at a special meeting of foreign ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, on Thursday.

Zarif further condemned the global media blackout on the sufferings of Rohingya Muslims, saying "Unfortunately, horrific images of drowned Muslim children on seashores have made no headlines in media worldwide."

The top Iranian diplomat also censured the international community's indifference to the plight of the Rohingya and called on the United Nations to focus on the crisis gripping the Muslim community.

Rohingya Muslims have been deprived of their inalienable right to citizenship while facing systematic discrimination, violence and hatred, Zarif added.

He further urged the OIC member states to pressure Myanmar's government to respect the Rohingya rights, calling for the urgent dispatch of humanitarian aid to the Muslims inside Myanmar and those forced to take refuge in neighboring states.

Rohingya Muslims 'dying appalling deaths'

Speaking at the opening of the event, Malaysian Prime Minister Najib Razak urged Myanmar to end its crackdown on Rohingya Muslims.

"Many have suffered appalling deaths, and those that have lived through the atrocities have witnessed or endured unspeakable cruelty," he said.

Myanmar's treatment of the Rohingya was a "stain" on the 10-member the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), he added.

He further said, "OIC member states are well aware that terrorist organizations such as Daesh could seek to take advantage of this situation."

(Source: Press TV)

Ex-Congressman sees no major foreign policy shift under Trump

INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Former U.S. Congressman James Charles Slattery says he remains hopeful that there will be no serious changes in U.S. foreign policy under President Donald Trump, who officially took power on Friday.

"It is going to be difficult for a period of time to know exactly what policy is going to be. But I remain hopeful that Trump will not make many serious changes in U.S. international policy," Slattery tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

The former congressman calls Trump a "unique character who believes in communicating directly to the people without filter through the twitter world."

Following is the full text of the interview:
■ **Trump has been critical of NATO, calling it obsolete and insisted he will only help members that pay their "fair share".**

Do you think that relations between the U.S. and fellow NATO members will undergo changes during the Trump presidency?

A: It is appropriate for President Trump to remind the NATO members that they do have an obligation under NATO agreement to spend approximately 2% of their GDP on defense. Most are failing to do this. They are no longer destitute countries. Today many EU countries are just as well off economically as the U.S. and should be contributing more to the defense of Europe during this time of rising alarm about Vladimir Putin's intentions. I believe that NATO could become stronger in the next few years depending on what Russia does in Ukraine and in Europe.

NATO will survive the Trump presidency but we may have some difficult conversations with friends. General Mattis, who will be secretary of defense, is a strong supporter of NATO.

■ **Trump has promised to abandon the Trans Pacific Partnership trade deal and this has unnerved certain U.S. major trade partners and allies including Japan. What is your prediction?**

A: The TPP will probably be renegotiated in the next few years and will ultimately be approved. Trump and his team will soon figure out how important the TPP is for Asia. I think the Trump team will also conclude that it is a good agreement for American workers and businesses and good for the countries of Asia.

■ **Trump has said he is seeking a re-negotiation of the hard-won nuclear deal between Iran and great powers. What do you think of him?**

A: I remain hopeful that Trump will also recognize that the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) is also in the best interest of the P5 plus 1 and Iran and Israel. →13

Turkish bill leaves no place for checks on presidential powers: HRW

A Human Rights Watch official has expressed concern over parliamentary approval of a controversial package of constitutional reforms that would grant additional executive powers to the president, saying the new mechanism leaves no place for any check on presidential powers, Press TV reported on Saturday.

Emma Sinclair-Webb, Turkey director of New York-based rights group, said on Saturday that the new charter does not ensure strong checks and balances on the power de-

spite the government's insistence.

"According to the Turkish model that is outlined in this amendment, you don't have any such check on presidential powers," she pointed out.

Sinclair-Webb also feared that ordinary people would not be sufficiently informed about the implications of the constitutional amendments.

"There is no possibility under a state of emergency for an effective public debate in the media about the changes that are being

brought in," she said.

Earlier on Saturday, a total of 339 Turkish legislators voted for a constitutional reform bill with 142 against the changes.

The constitutional changes would allow Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to serve two five-year tenures in office, meaning he could be leading Turkey until 2029.

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



© Tehran Times/Mahdi Pedramkhoo

Horse-riding competition in Ahvaz

Third week of horse-riding competition was held in Ahvaz, capital of southwestern province of Khuzestan on Friday.

A total of seven Iranian provinces took part in the competition.

Persian horses have a good temperament, together with great stamina. They are sure footed and extremely intelligent.

Horse-racing is one of the most ancient past-times, dating back to some of the earliest civilizations of man.

Anti-Trump protesters flood Washington

World leaders react to Trump's inauguration

By staff & agencies

Donald Trump took over as United States president in the same way he conducted his upstart campaign, with a mixture of blustery salesmanship and naked contempt for the established political order.

In doing so, he sent a clear signal to the country and the world: He plans to govern as he campaigned, refusing to align himself even with his own Republican Party and taking his message directly to the American people.

He did nothing to dispel concerns that he would bring the cult of personality he built over the election campaign into the White House, and he offered little in the way of olive branches to the tens of millions of Americans who did not vote for him in the most divisive election in modern U.S. history.

A former reality TV star, Trump offered an apocalyptic vision of reality: an America besieged by crime, immigration, terrorism and unfair trade deals.

"The American carnage stops right here and stops right now," he pledged, as he presented himself as a champion of the ordinary American.

The gloomy picture Trump sketched of the nation flies in the face of evidence that the economy is in healthy shape, crime is down and the nation is relatively safe and secure.

After warning the public on the extent of the problems, Trump suggested, as he did during his campaign, that he and his "movement" are the only solution. He did not mention the Republicans in Congress with whom he will partner to govern and certainly not the Democrats who have fiercely opposed him.

Trump campaigned as an outsider, railing against the sins of both his Republican Party and the Democratic Party. And, it became clear as he delivered his speech on the steps of the Capitol that he intends to remain that outsider, the rebel leader who takes power with one foot still on the battlefield. →3

Russia, Iran divided over U.S. presence in Astana talks

POLITICS TEHRAN — The desk Kremlin has announced it welcomes the participation of Washington in the Astana talks on the Syrian crisis, but Iran's stance is complicating the issues.

"We will welcome that [the participation of the U.S. in the talks]. The situation is very complicated. You know that there is also Iran like a very important player in the Syrian issue. Iranians are not welcoming this," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told BBC in an interview.

"So it is a very complicated issue for a very careful play."

This is the first time since the December trilateral talks in Moscow that the Kremlin is openly referring to disagreements with Tehran over the U.S. presence in the Astana peace talks, due Jan. 23.

Peskov also referred to the issue as one possible "cause of disagreement between Moscow and Tehran..." emphasizing that it won't be possible to bring the Syrian crisis to a halt "without the United States."

Prior to Moscow's formal stance, senior Iranian officials had rejected the participation of Washington in the Astana talks.



Kremlin's spokesman says Russian will welcome the contribution of the U.S. to the Syrian talks in Astana and disagrees on this with Iran.

"We are against the presence of the U.S. in the Astana talks and have not invited the Americans," said Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

In the same vein, Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani had ruled out any role for the White House in the talks due to Iran's disagreement.

"Because of Iran's disagreement, no joint invitation by three countries of Russia, Turkey and Iran who took the initiative has been extended to the American side," Shamkhani, who coordinates political, military, and security affairs between Iran, Russia, and Turkey on the Syrian crisis, was quoted as saying.

All through the path to the Astana talks, Russia has been unpredictable, and at time impulsive.

Following a tripartite meeting between foreign ministers of Iran, Russia, and Turkey, a ceasefire was declared only by Russia and Turkey.

Embracing the U.S. contribution to the crisis can be linked to the new Trump administration, what Moscow has been showing to favor for closer ties with the country.

However, it seems to be remain to be seen what Russia has in mind.

Historical clues would say the Russians are not wedded to any partner, and Tehran knows this more than anybody else.

Flags at half-mast after deadly Tehran building collapse

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's Foreign Ministry ordered flags to be flown at half-mast at all Iranian embassies after a building engulfed by massive blaze collapsed in downtown Tehran on Thursday.

"Following the Saturday national mourning declared by the government, all embassies and consulates of the Islamic Republic of Iran were ordered to fly the flags at half-mast," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Saturday.

At least 16 firefighters have been reportedly killed and some 75 injured with some more still unaccounted for.

Death toll is expected to rise as rescue operation continues around the clock at the site.

Also, visitors can sign memorial guest books at Iranian embassies abroad, the spokesman said.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif expressed sorrow over the incident, offering condolences to the families of the victims.

Admiring messages of condolence have poured in.



Iran's embassy in Denmark

"I was deeply saddened by the news of the loss of lives as a result of the collapse of a multi-story building in Iran," said President of the Republic of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev.

Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov offered deepest condolences to his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani over the incident.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim in a message to Iranian First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri condoled with families of the victims.

Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's office in a message offered condolences to Iranian nation and government over the horrifying incident.

"I would like to express my deepest condolences and grief on the sad occasion," said Foreign Minister of Slovenia Karl Erjavec in a message on Friday.

Also, a number of foreign ambassadors to Tehran extended condolences. British Ambassador to Iran Nicholas Hopton tweeted, "So sad about the tragic loss of life in the building that collapsed near the embassy today. My sympathy to all those affected."

The French embassy in Tehran in a tweeted message expressed sympathy with families of the victims of the incident.

Reformist council picks controversial MP as new head

POLITICS TEHRAN — The desk Coordination Council of the Reformist Front has appointed a controversial parliamentarian to lead the body four months away from the presidential and city council elections.

Mahmoud Sadeqi, current representative of Tehran, will head the council for a three-month period, replacing Gholamhossein Karbaschi, a dynamic former mayor of Tehran.

Sadeqi is the secretary general of

the Islamic Association of University Instructors, a pro-reform, leftist bloc mainly consisting of academic figures.

Overseen by the Supreme Reformist Council for Policy-making, the council acts as a coordinator between different reformist groups and parties at elections.

The rotating head of the coordination council automatically doubles as deputy head of the policy-making council.

"During the presidency of the Islamic

Association of University Instructors over the council, we will focus on upcoming elections in addition to the routine agenda pursued earlier," Sadeqi said on Saturday.

Over the past few months, Sadeqi has been one of the most controversial parliamentarians for his remarks about former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and incumbent Judicial Chief Sadeq Amoli Larijani.

He roundly blamed the Judiciary

for inaction on proven corruption by Ahmadinejad, demanding that he stand trial for the case.

Sadeqi also requested Amoli Larijani to brief the parliament on banking accounts affiliated with the Judiciary chief, though the allegations were rejected as "lies."

Days after, Sadeqi rebuffed security officers who arrived at his home on November 27 for unspecified reasons by citing parliamentary immunity.

Iran condemns terrorist blast in Pakistan's Parachinar

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi condemned on Saturday a terrorist blast in Parachinar, a city in northwestern Pakistan.

"Terrorism is the most serious security problem in the region and the world which has targeted peace

and security of the countries and people, therefore collective and comprehensive efforts are needed by the international community to fight it," Qassemi explained.

The blast occurred at Eidgah market on Saturday morning and left at least 20 people killed and many

others injured.

According to Daily Pakistan, the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban claimed responsibility for the blast.

Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif have expressed condolences over death of the victims.

Iran consults with Russia, Turkey in Astana ahead of Syria talks



➔ Russia has also invited the new U.S. government to join the Syria talks. However, Iran has openly opposed the U.S. involvement in the talks, saying it will derail the peace process.

UN will attend Syria talks

The UN Special Envoy for Syria Stefan de Mistura will also head the UN delegation to the Astana talks.

"In light of the complexity and importance of the issues likely to be raised in Astana, and of the senior level at which the conveners of the meeting will be represented, the secretary-general has

asked Mr. de Mistura, to lead the UN team at the talks," Stéphane Dujarric, the spokesman for UN secretary general, said in a statement on Thursday.

"The secretary general is looking forward to the Astana meeting being a positive step, ahead of the resumption of intra-Syria negotiations in Geneva," he added. In this regard, Moscow welcomed the participation of de Mistura. "We welcome the decision of UN secretary general to send de Mistura to the Syrian-Syrian talks in Astana," Russian permanent diplomatic missions in Geneva said in a statement.

Tehran says will actively participate in Syria talks in Astana



POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian desk Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Jaber Ansari said on Saturday that Iran will actively participate in the Astana talks on Syria.

"We will participate in these negotiations with full preparedness and we will attend the talks as representatives of a government which has announced since the beginning of the Syrian crisis that the conflict has no military solution and should be settled peacefully and through serious political dialogues," he told IRIB in Almaty,

Kazakhstan. He said, "Continuation of the Syrian crisis will bring no result but killing [the people] and devastation for an Islamic country."

Under a plan introduced by Iran, Russia and Turkey in Moscow on December 20 a ceasefire was declared in Syria on December 30. Under the initiative, known as the Moscow declaration, the warring sides — the government and opposition groups — are scheduled to sit for peace talks in Astana on January 23.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Intelligence minister: No report of sabotage at Plasco

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's minister of desk intelligence has said that the ministry has not received any reports that the recent conflagration in Plasco building, which was burnt down on Thursday, was caused by sabotage.

Mahmoud Alavi, who was speaking while visiting the site of collapse of the 17-floor building on Saturday, said no evidence has either been found to point to sabotage attempts, ISNA reported.

A clothing business center, the Plasco building collapsed after its upper floors burned in flames for about four hours on Thursday.



Trump statements less than a president's: commentator

POLITICS TEHRAN — A leading Iranian desk political commentator has said that U.S. President Donald Trump's inauguration speech was not worthy of his status as a president.

"The words lacked technical value and basics of governing. He was talking like one who is running a presidential campaign," Ali Khorram told ISNA on Saturday.

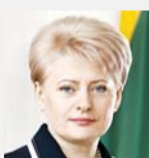
"Trump is a populist demagogue," Khorram said, adding that the Trump did not mention any details about his plans.



MP stresses necessity of Syrian ceasefire

POLITICS TEHRAN — A member of the desk National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Majlis has stressed the necessity of the ceasefire in Syria, saying it is a prerequisite for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the country.

Iran's long-held policy that ceasefire and evacuation of terrorists from Syria should be prioritized "over talks, political reform, and elections is a fair policy", Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh told Mehr news agency on Saturday.



Lithuanian president hopeful to visit Iran

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Lithuanian desk president has expressed hope to visit Iran this year, ILNA reported.

Dalia Grybauskaitė expressed her wish to visit Iran in a meeting with Ramin Mehmanparast, Iran's ambassador to Poland and non-resident ambassador to Lithuania on Thursday.

Expressing satisfaction over growing economic ties and the resumption of joint economic committee sessions, Grybauskaitė hoped that Iran and Lithuania manage to bring to fulfillment their previously-arranged mutual economic cooperation plans.



Electronic voting operational for council elections

POLITICS TEHRAN — The e-voting for desk the upcoming council elections has become final and is completely operational, said the head of IT committee at the election headquarters.

"We are also in talks with the Guardian Council over if and how to hold the upcoming presidential election entirely electronically," Amir Shoja'an told IRNA on Saturday.

Shoja'an underlined that the Interior Ministry is fully prepared to offer electronic voting facilities at 10,000 polling stations around the country.



'Trump's remarks reaffirm U.S. non-commitment to sanctions lift'

POLITICS TEHRAN — The vice-chairman of desk the Majlis Economic Committee on Saturday said the recent remarks by new U.S. President Donald Trump indicated once again that Washington had never intended to remove the sanctions against Tehran.

"The United States has not taken even one step in line with its commitments under the nuclear deal and it has not removed any sanctions," Seyed Nasser Moussavi Laregani said, Fars news agency reported.

Lebanon, Iraq call for unity to combat 'terror'

Lebanon and Iraq on Saturday stressed the need to coordinate and unify efforts to fend off "terrorism," calling for more Arab solidarity.

"Combating terrorism is not the responsibility of one state but requires collaboration and coordination between all countries," President Michel Aoun said during a meeting with visiting Iraqi Foreign Affairs Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari.

The president expressed hope that the upcoming Arab summit, which will be held in Jordan in March, would be able to "represent the much-needed Arab solidarity to fend off the circumstances that all Arab countries are passing through."

"We reached an understanding on the need to maintain the Arab League as a form of unity between Arabs. We don't dismiss the existence of division, as there are various regimes and backgrounds, but what unites us is more than what divides us," Jaafari told reporters at the Baabda Palace.

The diplomat handed Aoun a letter from his Iraqi counterpart President Fouad Masoum, congratulating Aoun on his election and the desire to promote bilateral ties between the two countries.

Masoum also invited Aoun to visit Baghdad.

Jaafari thanked Aoun for Lebanon's support for Iraq in regional and international arenas, adding that his country has no desire to interfere in the local affairs of any Arab country.

The meeting highlighted the local developments in both countries and the regional circumstances.

Jaafari underlined the "brotherly ties" between Lebanon and Iraq.

A statement issued by Prime Minister Hariri's office said the meeting with Jaafari discussed ways to boost bilateral ties between the two countries in all sectors.

He also invited Hariri to visit Baghdad.

Jaafari's talks with Speaker Nabih Berri also included the possibility of appointing a Lebanese ambassador to Iraq.

The visit includes meetings between the Iraqi diplomat and high-ranking Lebanese officials.

The flurry of diplomatic activity in Lebanon comes after a political breakthrough that led to the election of Aoun as the country's 13th president and the formation of Hariri's Cabinet.

The visit follows a trip by Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit, who departed Lebanon Saturday after a one-day visit where he met with Aoun, Hariri and Berri.



He expressed optimism from Rafik Hariri International Airport on the situation in Lebanon.

■ Battle to recapture all of Mosul ends within months

Jaafari arrived in the Lebanese capital on Saturday on a short visit at the head of a delegation.

Jaafari said in remarks after meeting with Berri that his country "was completely controlling the security situation in Iraq and achieving brilliant victories."

He added that the "day will come that will see Daesh (ISIL) outside Iraq."

Jaafari unveiled that the battle to recapture all of Mosul will end in the coming months.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh), which seized large parts of Iraq and Syria in 2014, is under intense military pressure in both countries and has lost significant territory in recent

months. United States-backed Iraqi forces recently announced the recapture of the eastern side of Mosul, the northern city where they have been waging a three-month-old offensive.

Jaafari denounced Turkey's military intrusion into a town near Mosul in the north of the country.

Turkish troops have been stationed in the town of Bashiqa since before a recent offensive against ISIL in northern Iraq.

Turkey and Iraq have summoned each other's ambassadors in a mounting diplomatic stand-off, as Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi warned Turkey that it risked triggering a "regional war" by keeping troops on Iraqi territory.

However, Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said earlier this month that an agreement had been reached with Ankara over an Iraqi demand that Turkish forces withdraw from the Bashiqa camp.

(Source: Daily Star)

Suicide bombers blow themselves up in Saudi Arabia

Two suicide bombers have blown themselves up in a confrontation with security forces in Saudi Arabia's second city of Jeddah, local media reported.

Sabq, a news website affiliated with the kingdom's interior ministry, reported on Saturday that security officers surrounded a house in Jeddah and exchanged fire with two men, who then detonated explosives that images showed completely destroyed the home.

There was no immediate comment from the House of Saud regime's interior ministry.

Since 2014, the Saudi regime security forces have grappled with sporadic attacks by followers of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh), which is based in Syria and Iraq, and say they have arrested hundreds of its members.

Local ISIL affiliates have carried out

several deadly shootings and bombings in the kingdom. Many of the attacks have targeted security personnel and Shia-Muslim mosques.

Last year a suicide bomber was killed and two people were wounded in a blast near the United States consulate in Jeddah, the first bombing in years to target foreigners in the kingdom.

ISIL Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi has called for attacks against Saudi Arabia, which is a member of a U.S.-led coalition purportedly bombing his fighters in Syria and Iraq.

The House of Saud regime itself practices the radical ideology of Wahhabism, the basis for the activities of Takfiri terrorist groups such as ISIL throughout the world. Riyadh is also accused of providing financial support for such terrorists fighting in Syria and Iraq.

(Source: agencies)

Bus crash in northern Italy kills 16 people

A bus carrying Hungarian teenagers crashed and caught fire on a motorway in northern Italy, killing 16 people.

The bus was returning to Budapest from France, where the students had been on a mountain holiday.

Some 36 injured people were taken to a hospital following the accident near Verona on Friday night.

"Many children among the victims of the accident in Verona, a bus catches fire on impact with a pillar," national police said on Twitter.

Police Commander Gerolamo Lacquanita said the bus crashed and burst into flames just before midnight. No other vehicles were involved and it was not clear why the bus went off the road, crashing into the barriers.

Lacquanita said the cause of the crash would be investigated. "We

are not aware of other vehicles being involved, it seems to have gone off the road of its own accord."

He said some people had minor injuries, but others were more serious.

The French bus driver, together with his family, could be among the victims, Italian news agency Agi said.

It was carrying about 50 passengers, most of whom were Hungarians aged between 16 and 18. Police say 16 badly burned bodies have been pulled from the wreckage.

The report said some students were thrown from the vehicle and others were trapped inside the bus when it caught fire.

Police were awaiting the go-ahead from the prosecutor to analyse the charred remains of the vehicle.

(Source: agencies)

Turkish MPs approve bill to create executive presidency

Turkey's parliament has approved a draft bill that would dramatically expand the president's powers - paving the way for a referendum later this year.

The government insists the proposal to create an executive presidency will ensure simpler, more stable and more effective administration, but critics say it will give Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan more power that is unchecked.

Erdogan became Turkey's first president elected by popular vote in 2014, after serving three terms as prime minister. If passed, he could stay in office until 2029.

"A new door in Turkish history and in the lives of the Turkish people has been cracked open today. With our people's 'yes' vote, this door will be completely opened," Justice Minister Bekir Bozdogan wrote on Twitter.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP/Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi), said after the voting that his party would fight the changes in their referendum campaign.

"This is a betrayal by the parliament of its own history. Our people will certainly thwart the game that was played in parliament... We will go



from door to door and explain this to our people," Kilicdaroglu said.

Parliament approved the 18-article constitutional change, which was submitted in December, with 339 "yes" votes. The number of MPs who voted against the bill was 142.

Since last month, each article of the bill was put to vote in the 550-seat parliament, where the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP/Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) enjoys a comfortable majority with 317 seats.

At least 330 votes, a three-fifths majority, were needed to adopt the constitutional change.

The AK Party passed the bill with the support of most MPs from the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP/Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi).

The changes were also opposed by the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HDP/Halklar'n Demokratik Partisi).

Immediately after the bill was approved, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim

said the "last word" would be had by the people in a referendum, expected to be held in April.

"No one should have any doubt of this: On the issue of constitutional change, the most correct decision will certainly be given by the people," he said.

The bill would create an executive presidency for the first time in modern Turkey and give the president the power to appoint and fire ministers.

In addition, the post of prime minister will be abolished for the first time in the country's history and replaced by a vice president, or perhaps several.

The president will be allowed to issue decrees and retain ties to a political party. Also he or she will have broad authority over the high council of judges and prosecutors.

If the changes are passed in the referendum, Turkey would head to general and presidential elections together in November 2019, and proposed powers would be granted to the president elected.

The bill indicates a person can be elected president for two, five-year terms. Erdogan's existing time as president will not be counted.

(Source: agencies)

Anti-Trump protesters flood Washington

1 →

Continuing the populist themes from his campaign, he condemned the politicians who he said have for years prospered at the expense of the public.

■ America first

Trump was sworn in as the 45th president of the U.S. at Capitol Hill, pledging to embark on "a great national effort" to rebuild the country.

In his inaugural address, Trump vowed that he would take a decision that puts "only America first."

"We assembled here today are issuing a new decree to be heard in every city, in every foreign capital and in every hall of power," Trump said. "From this day forward a new vision will govern our land. From this moment on, it's going to be America First."

His proposals though for ramped-up infrastructure spending, strong border controls and the strong isolationist tone of his speech may not jibe with traditional Republican priorities.

At the same time, however, Trump has assuaged nervous Republicans by selecting a Cabinet that has largely affirmed bedrock conservative principals, and he plans to quickly begin signing executive orders designed to roll back some of former President Barack Obama's progressive policies.

In Trump's speech, historians said, there were echoes of Franklin D. Roosevelt with Trump mentioning "the forgotten" Americans left behind by the forces of trade and globalization, of Richard Nixon's "silent majority", and of Ronald Reagan's pledge to restore the nation's greatness.

Trump spent little time trying to expand his appeal to the majority of Americans who view him unfavorably, according to opinion polls. Instead, he appeared to speak directly to his most fervent supporters.



His speech perhaps was most reflective of Reagan's 1981 address, in which the then-president spoke of "economic affliction" and "idle industries." But Reagan inherited an economy struggling with stagflation and an unemployment rate of 7.5 percent. By contrast, under the departing Obama, the economy has added private sector jobs in 80 consecutive months and the unemployment rate stands at 4.7 percent.

■ World leaders react to Trump's inauguration

Meanwhile, the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States has drawn mixed reactions from world leaders, with some optimistic about better ties with Washington, while many others are extremely concerned.

The leaders of Mexico, Canada, Britain, Japan, India, as well as the Pope offered well wishes and congratulations to America's new commander in chief, who was sworn in on Friday.

In a series of tweets, Mexico's President Enrique Peña Nieto congratulated Trump and said "we will work to strengthen our relationship with shared responsibility."

"Sovereignty, the national interest and the protection of Mexican citizens will guide our relations with the new U.S. administration," Nieto said.

However, former Mexican President Vicente Fox took to Twitter to criticize Trump. "America was already successful, then you happened!" he tweeted.

Anti-Trump sentiments are particularly high in Mexico and some other Latin American countries. During his presidential campaign, Trump said Mexico is sending its rapists and criminals to the U.S. and vowed to deport millions of undocumented Central American immigrants from the U.S.

Mexican demonstrators built a wall outside the U.S. embassy in Mexico City on Friday, in a symbolic move to protest Trump's campaign pledge to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexican border and crackdown on immigrants.

Argentinians burnt an American flag in front of the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires. Panamanians chanted slogans against U.S. interventions in the region and burnt an effigy of Trump.

Thousands of people in several other countries, including in Britain, Australia and New Zealand have also rallied to express their anger over Trump's presidential inauguration.

Russian President Vladimir Putin made no comments about Trump's inauguration. His spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, said Putin was unlikely to watch the inauguration live, but view it later on the news.

"Donald Trump," said Peskov, "is not our soul mate." That was a frosty change from the surprisingly warm endorsement Putin gave Trump during the campaign.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov expressed hope that Trump will work with Putin on solving the Ukrainian crisis and other problems, although he warned against expectations of quick progress.

Trump has also caused concern in Eastern and Central European countries that he might abandon their security needs at a time they are especially worried about Russia.

■ Anti-Trump protests

In another development, hundreds of thousands of people from all over the United States pack into downtown Washington on Saturday for a women's march in opposition to the agenda and rhetoric of President Donald Trump.

The Women's March on Washington, featuring speakers, celebrity appearances and a protest walk along the National Mall, was planned as a counter-argument to Trump's populist presidential campaign, in which he angered many on the left with comments seen as demeaning to women, Mexicans and Muslims.

It comes the day after the nation's capital was rocked by violent protest against Trump, with black-clad anti-establishment activists smashing windows, setting vehicles on fire and fighting with riot-gear-clad police who responded with stun grenades.

Inflation rate in Iran's urban areas drops to 6.9%

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The Statistical Center of Iran (d e s k) announced that the inflation rate in urban areas of Iran for the 12-month period ended in the last day of the tenth Iranian calendar month of Dey (January 19) hit 6.9 percent, IRNA reported.

The figure shows a 0.3 percent drop compared to the 12-month period ended in the last day of the ninth calendar month of Azar (December 20, 2016).

Meanwhile, the center put the point-to-point inflation rate for urban areas at 6.4 percent in Dey, showing 0.6 percent fall from its previous month.

Financial nominees prove just how disconnected Trump is from reality

"We are transferring power ... back to you, the people," Donald Trump told the nation on Friday. "For too long, a small group in our nation's capital has reaped the rewards of government, while the people have borne the cost. Washington flourished, but the people did not share in its wealth." Not any more, he pledged.

Well, now the work begins, and last week we got the first chance to see the men, Steve Mnuchin and Wilbur Ross, most charged with fulfilling Trump's vow.

In the past, Trump told Americans during his inauguration, the victories of Washington power brokers "have not been your victories. Their triumphs have not been your triumphs." And many Americans, especially the blue-collar and lower-middle-class voters who gave Trump his victory, certainly share that view.

Yes, the economy has staged a remarkable recovery during Barack Obama's eight years at the helm, and the unemployment rate shrank. But many Americans don't feel better off in large part because wealth gains went to those who had enough capital to invest in the stocks when the Standard & Poor's 500-index began its remarkably long bull run in March 2009, buying when assets were at their very cheapest. People such as Trump's treasury secretary pick Mnuchin (net worth in the hundreds of millions) and commerce secretary Ross (a multibillionaire). Mnuchin is so rich he forgot to disclose \$100m of assets ahead of his confirmation hearing.

At least the first phase of Senate confirmation hearings for both men should reassure Americans that they have a solid working knowledge of business and finance — unlike, say, Rick Perry, the would-be energy secretary who didn't know until recently what the energy department did.

The reality is that both Mnuchin and Ross are competent and knowledgeable.

But they just don't sound like the kind of guys who will lead the type of Washington upheaval that Trump promised to deliver. When Trump's supporters cheered his pledge to make sure they share in the nation's riches, did they have in mind that their leader would appoint a treasury secretary who made a fortune from OneWest, a California bank that became notorious for its particularly aggressive approach to foreclosures?

California's attorney general, Kamala Harris — who has since won election to the Senate and will be among those voting on Mnuchin's nomination — found evidence of "widespread misconduct" in OneWest's business practices, although her agency never pursued any formal charges. The justice department is still reviewing claims brought by whistleblowers against OneWest in federal court, based on allegations that the bank didn't deal with applications for loan modifications properly, potentially harming thousands of ordinary Americans.

Ross, with fewer skeletons in his closet than Mnuchin, has had one of the smoothest rides of all of Trump's nominees thus far. Yes, he has outsourced a few thousand jobs, and — having worked to restructure bankrupt companies — his business practices have cost other jobs. But he has won the support of at least some union leaders, including the United Steelworkers of America.

But were eager Trump voters really signing up for a billionaire bankruptcy/restructuring expert as the country's chief trade and economic policy role when they voted for him? The kind of guy who takes a firm stance when it comes to when to keep a business open, with how many workers and at what wages? Ross — who I first interviewed back in 1990 — is the kind of individual who is very clear to whom the fruits of economic activity belong. Perhaps it doesn't belong to Washington bureaucrats, but it certainly does belong to "winners" — people such as Trump, Mnuchin and Ross himself, who also sought out ways to make money from the 2008 economic collapse.

Of course, Trump may not end up with exactly what he expected. Certainly, both Mnuchin and Ross appear or have adopted a more commonsensical approach to economic or trade policies than has their new boss — at least, if one judges by Trump's public bombast.

In his comments to the finance committee, Mnuchin emerged as a defender of the Internal Revenue Service and argued for boosting the agency's resources, and even spoke favorably about some aspects of the Dodd-Frank financial reform bill, which congressional Republicans are eager to demolish (just as soon as they have finished eviscerating Obamacare, that is).

While Ross publicly defended Trump's views on trade imbalances with countries such as China, telling senators that while the US may adhere to the rule of law, some other countries are governed by "the law of the ruler," he also has — at least in the past — put forth some views that may make him unpopular amid some of a Republican administration filled with deregulatory zeal.

In a 2009 interview, discussing the state of Wall Street following the financial crisis, he told me that he thought the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act (which separated investment banking from commercial banking, and the return of which figures such as Elizabeth Warren clamor for) was "a big mistake" and led "in no small part to this problem with the banks". At least at that point, he believed that banks such as JP Morgan Chase had become "too big to fail but probably too big to manage; too complicated to manage".

These two appointees — some of the most qualified nominees, however controversial, of all those that Trump has put forward — could even succeed in irking the new president, it seems.

But ultimately, the appointments are a reminder of just how disconnected from reality the new president is. Despite the blue-collar campaigning, he returned home to live in the penthouse of Trump Tower. And ultimately, while most of the Americans whose fates now lie in his hands couldn't even muster a few thousand dollars in a financial emergency, he has entrusted the decisions about how the economy will work and how the financial system will operate to men who simply can't relate to that kind of universe. (Source: The Guardian)

IDRO signs 19 MOUs with giant automakers in post-sanction era

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Head of Iran's Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) Mansour Moazzami told Tasnim news agency on Saturday that as of the implementation of Iran's nuclear deal with the world powers in January 2016 his organization has signed 19 MOUs with the world's renowned carmakers and is holding talks to make them finalized.

As he informed, the MOUs have been inked with Peugeot, Citroen, Renault, Hyundai and an MOU with Volks Wagon is on its last steps to be signed soon.

"Peugeot and Citroen possess a 50-percent share in their MOUs with us, while Renault owns a 60 percent stake," he said.

Moazzami added that the first car model manufactured by collaboration of a foreign carmaker will enter the Irani-



an market within two months, while joint products with Citroen and Renault will be introduced to the market in the upcoming Iranian calendar year (starting March 21, 2017).

Noting that cooperating with foreign-

ers will bring technology and investment to Iran, he noted that all the signed MOUs require exports of 30 percent of the manufactured joint products which will pave the way for Iranian products to the global market.

48 countries to take part in Iranian agricultural congress

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Representatives from 48 countries are to participate in Iran's 8th Annual International Congress of Arman Sabz Adineh which is to be held on January 26 at Tehran's IRIB International Conference Center, ILNA reported.

The event seeks indigenization of modern technology in Iran on the way to improve the quality of domestic agriculture products.

The participating foreigners are reportedly from South Korea, Hungary, Canada, France, Finland, India, and etc.



China to improve government service for new economy

China will improve its services for the new economy to accelerate new growth, according to a government document.

China will continue to enhance administrative efficiency to better serve rapidly-growing emerging industries and upgrade old ones, said the document of the State Council, made public on Friday.

To reduce restrictions on the new economy, China will step up the process of approving, revising and abolishing laws and regulations, and allow local authorities to implement their own rules to test new business models in low-risk sectors, including logistics, education and tourism.

Support for innovation and business

registration will also be strengthened. Regulators responsible will take a more inclusive attitude to encourage innovation, while ensuring fair and open market entry, strengthening risk control, and improving the social credit system.

The government will also promote effective flows of knowledge, technologies, information and data resources, and push for more rapid translation of scientific results into productivity.

In the face of economic downturn pressure, China's policymakers have pinned high hopes on the new economy to drive up growth, and carried out an array of measures to boost innovation and stimulate market vitality.

(Source: China Daily)

Tehran to host Do-WinTech 2017

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The eighth edition of Iran's Doors and Windows Technology International Exhibition (Do-WinTech 2017) is due to be held January 24-27 in Tehran, Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) of Iran reported.

During the four-day event, over 58 foreign companies from Turkey, China, Germany, Bulgaria, Italy, Belarus, Spain, Poland, Slovenia and Belgium will gather with 364 domestic exhibitors at the Tehran International Permanent Fairgrounds to showcase their latest prod-

ucts and services. The exhibition will cover a variety of areas including porticos and frames, machinery and manufacturing tools, assembly and production lines, robotic systems and industrial automation, sliding doors and etc.

Introducing the industry's potentials and capacities, identifying problems, obstacles and weaknesses of this sector and familiarizing visitors with the role of this industry's products in optimizing energy usage are among the main goals of the exhibition.

Greece names ex-business leaders to run state holding fund

Greece has picked two former business leaders to run the fund it set up last year to speed up privatizations and make the best use of the country's assets to comply with its international bailout.

Athens was meant to appoint the board of directors for the fund, which will oversee the country's privatization agency (HRADF) and its bank rescue fund (HFSF), and have it fully operational by the end of last year.

Greece and its lenders did agree a five-member supervisory board for the privatization and investment fund in October and this has now appointed George Diamantopoulos, former Chief Executive at Kraft Foods in Greece, as chairman.

Rania Aikaterinari, an engineer and former deputy CEO at Greece's dominant power utility Public Power Corp., is taking over as Chief Executive Officer, the fund said on Friday.

Privatizations, a key pillar of Greece's bailouts, have raised little so far since the country's first international rescue in 2010 due to political resistance, red tape and a strongly-unionized public sector.

Proceeds from will be used to reduce the country's debt, which at 180 percent of GDP is the highest in the Eurozone, and boost investments.

The board members will have a four-year term, while its full composition will be announced next week.

(Source: Reuters)

Trump's vow to break from OPEC oil imports echoes old refrain

U.S. President Donald Trump's pledge to make America independent from OPEC isn't a new refrain in Washington.

His "America First Energy Plan" posted on the White House website Friday doesn't just echo his own campaign pledges but also President George W. Bush's vow to cut imports from the Middle East when he famously said the nation was "addicted to oil." Shipments from OPEC rose 10 percent during Bush's time in office.

It's not an easy task. It would mean replacing about 3

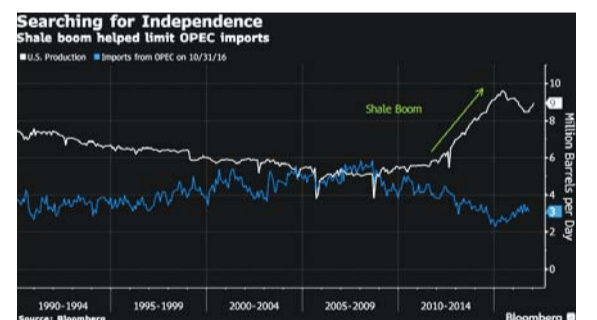
million barrels a day of imports. That's about three times as much as East Coast refineries consume.

Saudi Arabia and Venezuela lead the pack of OPEC suppliers to the U.S. They account for more than half of U.S. imports from the 13-nation group.

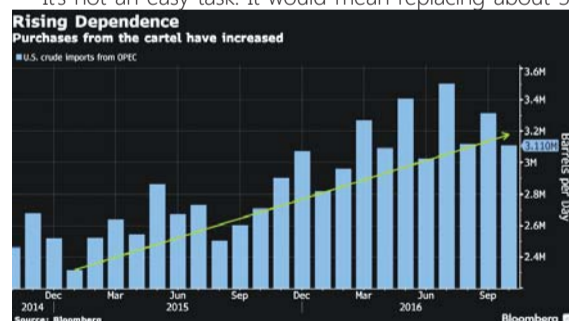
Bush said he would put the country on course to reduce oil imports from the Middle East by more than 75 percent by 2025. His bold statement evoked a reaction from leaders of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

"We do believe that energy issues cannot be handled in a unilateral way," said Edmund Daukoru, then-Nigerian minister of energy and secretary general of OPEC. "We all have to work together towards global energy security."

President Trump's goal may not be completely unobtainable as U.S. oil production has been on the rise and signs point toward possible energy independence. To achieve that, though, the country may need to reconsider a push for exports that was supported by Republicans. Since scrapping restriction on sales to countries other than Canada at the end of 2015, U.S. crude exports have risen to more than 700,000 barrels a day.



Source: Bloomberg



Source: Bloomberg

Merkel vows to find compromise with U.S. on trade

German Chancellor Angela Merkel vowed on Saturday to seek compromises on issues like trade and military spending with U.S. President Donald Trump, adding she would work on preserving the important relationship between Europe and the United States.

"He made his convictions clear in his inauguration speech," Merkel said one day after Trump vowed to put "America first."

She added: "I say two things with regards to this (speech): first, I believe firmly that it is best for all of us if we

work together based on rules, common values and joint action in the international economic system, in the international trade system, and make our contributions to the military alliances."

"And second, the trans-Atlantic relationship will not be less important in the

coming years than it was in past years. And I will work on that. Even when there are different opinions, compromises and solutions can be best found when we exchange ideas with respect," Merkel said.

(Source: Reuters)

HSBC cutting around 100 senior banking jobs globally



HSBC has begun cutting around 100 senior jobs in its investment banking division worldwide this week, according to sources with direct knowledge of the matter.

The cuts affect bankers at managing director and director level in the lender's Global Banking and Markets division, the sources said, declining to be identified due to the sensitivity of the matter.

"We review on an annual basis performances across Global Banking & Markets and make appropriate changes to strengthen and grow the business," a spokesman for the bank said in an emailed statement.

Apple files \$1b lawsuit against chip supplier Qualcomm



Apple Inc filed a \$1 billion lawsuit against supplier Qualcomm Inc on Friday, days after the U.S. government accused the chip maker of resorting to anticompetitive tactics to maintain a monopoly over key semiconductors in mobile phones.

Qualcomm is a major supplier to both Apple and Samsung Electronics Co Ltd for "modem" chips that connect phones to wireless networks. The two companies together accounted for 40 percent of Qualcomm's \$23.5 billion in revenue in its most recent fiscal year.

Uber pays federal trade commission \$20m for overstating drivers' income



Uber, the tech-based taxi company, has agreed to pay \$20 million to settle a lawsuit with the Federal Trade Commission, who accused the company of greatly overstating driver income.

Uber lured potential drivers with fake promises, saying a "median driver" would make \$90,000 annually, driving their own car. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission, however, discovered that the company's projections were wildly optimistic, to the point of being fraudulent.

In fact, a median Uber driver grosses about \$62,000 per year in New York City, and about \$53,000 in San Francisco, according to the FTC website.

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Africa's object lesson in democracy

A postelection crisis in Gambia has stirred the country's neighbors to intervene, sign of a stronger commitment to democracy in Africa.

When a group of African nations stands up to a dictator, the world should take notice – perhaps a lesson about democracy has taken root on the continent. That seems to be the case involving Gambia, one of Africa's tiniest nations but one whose current political drama has the potential for big meaning.



Gambia held an election on Dec. 1 and its longtime ruler, President Yahya Jammeh, surprisingly lost the vote. At first he conceded to his opponent. But then he had second thoughts. Jammeh demolished the electoral commission, clamped down on dissent over social media, and extended his rule.

But he did not count on one thing.

Four of Gambia's neighboring states in West Africa – Senegal, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, and Liberia – have each learned from hard experience from past leaders who failed to follow the will of the people and did not hand over power peacefully. Violence was the result. These nations are now leading an effort to oust Jammeh and install the winner of the election, Adama Barrow.

At first this group tried diplomacy. Its leaders, who represent the 15-member Economic Community of West African States, met twice with Jammeh to persuade him to step down. When that failed, they decided to prepare a military invasion and asked the United Nations Security Council for approval.

One of democracy's basic cornerstones – a peaceful transfer of power after a fair election – really means something to Gambia's neighbors. In fact, more than two-thirds of Africans prefer democracy, according to a poll by Afrobarometer. Africans "have more than our fair share of brave, determined, principled, stubborn,

wily citizens who will keep us from sinking too far into the mire," writes journalist Simon Allison in the African Arguments website. In Gambia itself, people showed unusual courage in voting against Jammeh, who came to power in a 1994 coup. Since his electoral defeat, many of his key ministers have fled rather than remain loyal.

(Source: The CSM)

Donald Trump's inauguration: A declaration of political war

The presidential handover observed all the usual civilities, but the tone of Trump's speech marked a frightening change in America.

In its outward details, the orderly transfer of American presidential power accomplished in the inauguration-day scene on Capitol Hill today felt time-honored. The ceremonial essentials of the occasion – the stars and stripes banners, the dignitaries and the prescribed rituals of the swearings-in – were familiar and traditional. Political rivals took their places on the podium as they do every four years, shook hands and applauded one another, offering gracious compliments and providing a show of national dignity.

Yet all this was in fact a sham. Donald Trump's inaugural address was a declaration of war on everything represented by these choreographed civilities. President Trump – it's time to begin to get used to those jarringly ill-fitting words – did not conjure a deathless phrase for the day. His words will not lodge in the brain in any of the various uplifting ways that the likes of Lincoln, Roosevelt, Kennedy or Reagan once achieved. But the new president's message could not have been clearer. He came to shatter the veneer of unity and continuity represented by the peaceful handover. And he may have succeeded. In 1933, Roosevelt challenged the world to overcome fear. In 2017, Trump told the world to be very afraid.

■ Trump's speech

Trump's speech was by turns bitter, blowhard and banal. It boiled with resentment and contempt for politics, and the checks and balances of the U.S. system. It was aimed at those who voted for him, not at those, the majority, who did not. It said barely a word about race. Its America First nationalism was crude and shameless. The speech seethed with scorn for everything about the capital city that he now seeks to bend



The power of the presidency has grown over the decades, and the 2016 election has now put the Republicans in charge of all the arms of government.

to his will. It was, though, almost wholly empty of detail or of clarity about how its goals would be achieved. Even before he opened his mouth, Washington was on edge about what a Trump presidency might mean and the world was on edge about what is happening to America. Everything Trump said confirmed that those instincts were correct.

■ A new path

Presidents have often come into office promising to take the nation on a new path. But if Trump can be believed, his election and his speech signal the biggest shake-up in Washington in

living memory.

The vital question for the future is whether Trump can be believed. In his speech he mocked those who have been all talk and no action. But there is a risk he could be a victim of that too. He raised the bar for his own presidency to a very high level by insisting that everything would change "right here, right now". But will it? The power of the presidency has grown over the decades, and the 2016 election has now put the Republicans in charge of all the arms of government. But Trump is not, at least not yet, a dictator. He has to govern

with a Congress that does not share all his priorities – in some cases, Trump's priorities may even be preferable – and according to law that is interpreted by the courts. The states have a lot of power to defy him, as California seems determined to do in the case of the planned wall with Mexico.

It has been argued that voters chose Trump knowing that he would challenge the system, but confident that the system would protect the voters from the worst consequences. That may prove right. But Trump should not be underestimated. He is a proud disrupter not a diffident conformist. He is – and intends to be – different from the presidents of the past: in his personality, his working style, his ways of communicating and, most important of all, in his political aims. Those who support him and those who fear him are agreed on that. Yet he has arrived in the White House with low ratings and amid a deep sense of division. His inauguration was boycotted by several leaders and will be protested against by tens of thousands. His attempts to overturn America's political hierarchy and culture will enthuse some – the stock market is thrumming – but terrify others.

The realities of Trump's disruptive intentions will be revealed in the weeks and months ahead. The first down payments on his turbulent agenda can be found on the White House website. Domestically, the biggest program will be the infrastructure projects that formed the only detailed pledge of the inaugural address. Beyond America's shores, much is still guesswork: the probable clash with China poses the biggest threat of all; whether Trump gets his way on Russia may depend on his more skeptical cabinet.

"The time for empty talk is over," said President Trump today. "Now arrives the hour of action." At home and abroad, and in the light of today's speech, that is a truly terrifying prospect.

(Source: The Guardian)

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INTERVIEW
By Marjohn Sheikhi

Former U.S. diplomat: Turkey more reliable than U.S. for Syria talks

Former U.S. diplomat James Jatras in an interview with MNA said Moscow's decision to replace Washington with Ankara for the upcoming Astana talks on Syria proves to be more promising for a positive result.

At the end of a trilateral meeting held in Moscow on December 20, foreign ministers of Iran, Russia and Turkey issued a joint statement that highlighted the revitalization of a political process to end the Syrian crisis. The statement, later supported by UN's special envoy on Syria, Staffan de Mistura, underscored, among other topics, the three countries' "full respect for the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity" of Syria, the inevitability of a political solution, and the importance of expanding ceasefire and unhindered humanitarian assistance.

Most notably, the statement reiterated Iran, Russia and Turkey's determination to fight jointly against ISIL and al-Nusra terrorists and to separate them from armed opposition groups. Following this, the three sides became all the more determined to hold a meeting in Kazakh capital Astana, where representatives from the Syrian government and the opposition groups that are not blacklisted as terrorists in the UN, will be given the opportunity to sit down for Syrian-Syrian dialogues to reach a political solution to six years of conflict.

The Astana meeting on Syria is slated for 23 January where President Hassan Rouhani, President Vladimir Putin and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan will observe the talks between the Syrian sides.

In an interview with Mehr News Agency, former U.S. diplomat and policy adviser for Senate Republican leadership James George Jatras voiced cautious optimism toward the upcoming Astana talks, noting that the replacement of Washington with Ankara in the talks was a wise move by Moscow that finally decided "the Obama Administration could not be a productive interlocutor" for settling the Syrian conflict.

He further maintained that Moscow, closely working with Damascus and Tehran, have the upper hand in the talks and the participation of the incoming Trump administration could be a positive sign if "Trump keeps faith with his campaign promises to work with Russia and destroy, not just contain, Daesh" and relinquish the policy of "regime change" and "nation-building".

The following is Mehr News Agency's interview with this Amer-



If Erdogan has abandoned unreal, maximalist goals, he can secure terms that wind the war down in a way that lessens the terrorist blowback.

ican specialist in international relations and government affairs, James Jatras:

■ **What are the possible points of agreement that the sides will reach at the meeting? Do you think Astana talks would eventually lead to a positive result?**

I am cautiously optimistic that there can be a positive result. The key is that after repeated rounds of the "Geneva Process" between Lavrov and Kerry, Moscow finally decided that the Obama Administration could not be a productive interlocutor. They decided to deal with Ankara instead, and despite the notoriously erratic course of Erdogan during the almost six years of war, he's turned out to be more reliable than Obama and Kerry. The first evidence of that was the relatively quiet wrap-up of east Aleppo, which was far less than the humanitarian catastrophe many in the west predicted, and perhaps were hoping for.

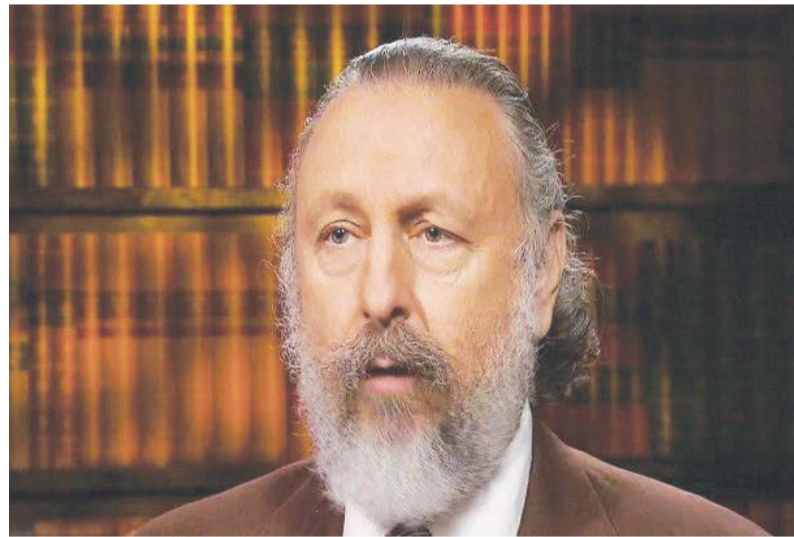
■ **How do you assess the role and impact of each side on the process of the negotiations?**

Moscow, closely working with Damascus and Tehran, have the upper hand. Most importantly, the Assad government stays. There will be no "regime change." Turkey remains the odd man out in the tripartite discussion between Moscow, Tehran, and Ankara. On the other hand, in these talks, Ankara, and only Ankara, speaks for the "opposition" – that is, the terrorists fighting against the Syrian government. If Erdogan has abandoned unreal, maximalist goals, as appears to be

the case, he can secure terms that wind the war down in a way that lessens the terrorist blowback Turkey has already experienced.

■ **Besides Russia, Iran and Turkey, what other countries may participate in the Astana meeting and what message would their presence in the talks convey?**

If Moscow-Tehran-Ankara agreement can be replicated countrywide, and if Trump makes good on his pledge to work with Moscow to destroy Daesh, we could see this war wind down quickly.



Unity of purpose among Syria, Russia, and Iran has been essential to Syria's success on imposing their terms on their adversaries.

Well, Syria of course, but unity of purpose among Syria, Russia, and Iran has been essential to their success on imposing their terms on their adversaries. Turkey has been forced to come to terms, the Obama Administration has been dealt out, and other powers – notably Saudi Arabia and Qatar – need to consider how disruptive they intend to be even though they cannot prevail in their initial goals. Qatar is probably smart enough to figure that out. Saudi Arabia probably isn't, as its behavior in Yemen shows.

■ **In case of the U.S., some Western media reported that Russia has invited the incoming Trump administration to Syrian peace talks, interpreting it as a sign of enhanced cooperation between Putin and Trump. How do you evaluate the possible involvement on the part of the U.S. on the course of negotiations?**

It's too soon to tell, but the invitation – as, I assume, only an observer for now – is a positive sign. If Trump keeps faith with his campaign promises to work with Russia and destroy, not just contain, Daesh, their participation could be



If Trump keeps faith with his campaign promises to work with Russia and destroy, not just contain, Daesh, their participation could be a big positive.

a big positive as opposed to the Obama approach, which could only be a "spoiler."

■ **Delving a little deeper into this topic, Donald Trump had strongly criticized Obama's policy in Syria during his presidential campaigns, saying President Assad's ouster should not be a primary U.S. interest. Do you believe that, in case of attending the Astana talks, Trump administration would stick to this position or would carry on with the same policy that Obama supported?**

If the incoming administration limits itself to those goals, it could be a big success. However, it's not clear to what extent other "baggage" might complicate things. There are many "Iran hawks" coming into the Trump administration. The ridiculous and false phrase "Iran is the world's leading sponsor of global terrorism" is commonly heard. Recently, a group of former officials, including many close to the incoming Trump team, issued a letter calling for what amounts to "regime change" in Iran. In effect, it's a call for Trump to destroy his administration over Iran the way George W. Bush destroyed his in Iraq. On the other hand, Trump himself has noted that Iran, along with Syria and Russia, are fighting Daesh. He has said that the days of "regime change" and "nation-building" are over. As a businessman, he's smart enough to know that dumping a few trillion dollars down the drain will ruin his primary goal to restore the American economy

and create jobs. He has to choose. Unfortunately, even in his own administration he may find himself lonely. We shall see.

■ **How do you predict the fate of Syria in the wake of the Astana meeting and with Russia and Turkey proclaimed as guarantors of the signed ceasefire agreements?**

If a tripartite Moscow-Tehran-Ankara agreement that showed a partial success in Aleppo can be replicated countrywide, and if Trump makes good on his pledge to work with Moscow to destroy Daesh (and hopefully al-Qaeda and its many offshoots), we could see this war wind down quickly. To be sure, some resistance will continue in the eastern part of the country. Pacifying Syria also depends to some extent on events in Iraq, notably in Mosul (where lack of reports in our media suggest things are not going as well as hoped). But the prospect exists to liberate and restore peace to the major populations centers, which would be a great start.

James George Jatras is a specialist in international relations, government affairs, and legislative politics. He served for many years (1985-2002) as policy adviser and analyst for the Republican leadership in the U.S. Senate; before that (1979-1985), he was a U.S. Foreign Service Officer with the U.S. Department of State, with service in Mexico and in Soviet affairs and public diplomacy. He is currently Deputy Director of the American Institute in Ukraine, a privately funded American NGO.

How Trump's win, Aleppo victory could push Saudi Arabia into Iran's embrace

Donald Trump's win in the US presidential election and the brilliant military victories of the Russian-backed Syrian Arab Army (SAA) in Aleppo could prompt Saudi Arabia to tone down its assertive rhetoric and seek compromise with regional players, former Iranian diplomat and political analyst Seyed Hadi Afghahi suggested in his interview with Sputnik Persian.

Citing Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, the political analyst noted that Tehran and

Riyadh could team up to resolve ongoing crises in Syria, Yemen and Bahrain.

"I do not see any reason why Iran and Saudi Arabia should have hostile policies towards each other. We can in fact work together to put an end to the miserable conditions of the people in Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and elsewhere in the region," Mohammad Javad Zarif told the World Economic Forum Wednesday, as quoted by Reuters.

There are certain preconditions

for the potential thaw, Afghahi believes.

According to the former diplomat, at the end of the day, member states of [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council which includes Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have realized the seriousness of the situation.

On the one hand, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies have abandoned their hope to topple Bashar al-Assad; on the other, Riyadh has been heavily struck by the slump in oil prices and the Gulf's stock-market crash.

"The brilliant victories of the Syrian [Arab] Army and its allies, the liberation of Aleppo, as well as Trump's harsh rhetoric toward Saudi Arabia and its regional allies – all of the above prompted the GCC countries to think seriously about their position," Afghahi underscored.

He noted that the PGCC leaders fear that a new republican system could eventually replace their monarchies.

"Therefore, the PGCC [leaders] have decided that it is necessary to ease tensions through dialogue and resolve their conflicts [in the region]," he pointed out.

Afghahi noted that a heated debate about the fate of the region is going on among the PGCC countries and that some of them, particularly Kuwait, have sent a number of "requests" to Tehran.

"Iran and Saudi Arabia were able to actually stop impeding the process of the presidential election in Lebanon. We have a success story," Zarif said in Davos on Wednesday.



According to the former diplomat, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani responds to these requests.

However, there is still a long way to go for Iran and Saudi Arabia to bury the hatchet, the political analyst underscored.

A détente between Tehran and Riyadh will require certain efforts as well as sincerity and political will, he said, envisioning that Oman and Kuwait as well as non-regional influential powers such as Russia

could play an important role as mediators.

Citing Zarif and Rouhani, Afghahi underscored that Iran is open to dialogue with Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies. He recalled that Tehran has repeatedly called upon Riyadh to solve regional disputes via diplomatic means. Unfortunately, the Saudi leadership turned a deaf ear to Iran's peace initiatives and continued to fund extremists, thus far creating opportunities for

an upsurge in terrorism in the region, Afghahi remarked.

However, this policy has failed, and backfired at Riyadh, the political analyst highlighted, pointing to the fact that Saudi Arabia will eventually face a financial crisis.

Echoing Zarif, the former diplomat stressed that Iran and Saudi Arabia have a success story of mutually beneficial collaboration.

"Iran and Saudi Arabia were able to actually stop impeding the process of the presidential election in Lebanon. We have a success story," Zarif said in Davos on Wednesday.

Afghahi specified that Tehran and Riyadh have recently managed to reach a compromise on the presidential election in Lebanon. As a result, Saudi-backed Saad Hariri assumed the post of Prime Minister after Michel Aoun was elected President of Lebanon.

According to the political analyst, Iran and Saudi Arabia may use this precedent as a starting point for their collaboration on Syria during the upcoming peace conference in Kazakhstan's capital Astana.

"Therefore, I can say that now the conditions for bilateral dialogue between Tehran and Riyadh on establishing relations and resolving regional crises, are more favorable than before," Afghahi underscored.

(Source: Sputnik)



A détente between Tehran and Riyadh will require certain efforts as well as sincerity and political will, where Oman and Kuwait as well as non-regional influential powers such as Russia could play an important role as mediators.

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The only things you can control in life

By Catherine Goldberg

In my experience, life can be pretty complicated. Although most of us have plenty to manage in our day-to-day lives—jobs, relationships, family, exercise, sleep, you name it—there are really only a few things we truly have control over. I changed my life by identifying these variables and learning how to master them. And I think you can too.

Happiness and success (however you define either one) have a lot to do with each other. In fact, greater happiness has been found to lead to greater success. I think both can be achieved with some simple and straightforward habit hacking, or making small tweaks to your routine which, little by little, add up to major changes in how you're living your life.

We make millions of little decisions all the time, and the result of each one is either net positive, net negative, or neutral. The more net positive decisions we can make (and the fewer net negative ones), the better. Net positive decisions—brushing your teeth before bed, eating healthy meals, and regularly going to the gym—help you feel good and bring you one step closer to your goals despite the effort they entail.

Net negative decisions, such as filling up on food that doesn't make you feel good, skipping the nightly teeth-brushing, letting that downer friend cramp your style, or forgoing the gym—make it difficult to reach your goals because your decisions don't make you feel good, empowered, or confident. They take more out of you than they give, interfering with your energy levels, sapping your motivation, and clouding your focus.

While the healthier choice may seem harder, it pays off bigger. And you'll be surprised by just how easy these choices can be once you make the effort. By learning how to master things that are within our control, you will start to make more net positive decisions, fewer net negative ones, and find that empowering, positive behaviors become second nature. So let go of all the stuff you can't control and start using your time to master what you can control. Before you know it, you'll be living your best life ever!

1. Your breath

Most people don't even think about their breathing (I myself used to talk for many seconds at a time and forget to breathe!). Breathing is obviously important, but so is the ability to focus on it. Can you feel your chest expand when you inhale, and get softer when you exhale? Where do you feel the rise and fall most? Breathing is the ultimate hack to relax and slow racing thoughts. As soon



Net positive decisions—brushing your teeth before bed, eating healthy meals, and regularly going to the gym—help you feel good and bring you one step closer to your goals despite the effort they entail.

as you experience something unpleasant, just take a few deep breaths and focus not on how horrible the situation was, but on your breathing. When you focus on your breath, you can count "one" as you inhale, "two" as you exhale. When you get to 10, start over. I bet you'll start to feel better and more grounded immediately.

2. Your self-talk

We all have a voice in our heads. That voice can often be critical and get in the way of our happiness and success. Try to count the times you engage in negative self-talk each day. It may surprise you how often you criticize yourself. If you can learn to recognize this Debbie Downer of an inner voice and replace it with encouraging statements, your attitude will start to change. Try talking to yourself with compassion. For example, instead of

telling yourself you're not good enough, remind yourself that you are worthy of love and attention, or that it's okay to make mistakes—we all do!

3. Your gratitude

If you can practice being grateful on a daily basis, your happiness and productivity will increase. Cultivating gratitude trains us to focus on hope, to remain inspired, and to be optimistic, lending us the courage and resilience to persevere in the face of setbacks (on top of giving us a mood boost that keeps us coasting).

4. Your body language

According to social psychologist Amy Cuddy, you can demonstrate power and confidence simply by changing the way you hold your body. For example, adopting a powerful stance—arms on your hips and feet planted wide, causing

you to take up more space—increases testosterone and decreases the stress hormone cortisol. The result? This "power posing" will make you feel more confident. Think about this before you meet with a potential client, go to a job interview, or even just before you leave the house.

5. Your mental and physical fitness

I don't know about you, but I come up with my best ideas while I'm on the elliptical. Exercising is a chance to just listen to my music and think about nothing. It's glorious. You don't have to go to the gym, but we all ought to take 20 minutes out of our days to get up and move. Motion helps free your mind and body to better tap into your creative potential. Walking has literally been found to increase creativity. Getting in some movement will help creativity and also focus.

Giving your brain a workout is as easy as it is important for you to do. Whether you play Sudoku, do crossword puzzles, or read non-fiction books, your brain will feel the difference. You can get a similar benefit from meditation. Just 20 to 30 minutes has been shown to increase focus, reduce stress and anxiety, and even dial down physical pain.

6. Your diet

Even though it might taste great, junk food is a net negative. It makes your brain and body slow and sad. Consuming too much sugar has been linked to all kinds of medical conditions (including metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular disease), not to mention mood swings and crashes that kill productivity. Plus, processed foods have been proven to exacerbate, if not cause, chronic diseases like diabetes, obesity, and even breast cancer. Simple fixes like keeping a bag of carrots or a bowl of fruit handy help you pick up the healthier choice when we're depleted and hungry and reaching for the closest snack. Easy-to-whip-up, convenient-to-carry portable snacks can be delicious and nutritious.

7. Your sleep

Sleep is critical for focus, concentration, job and academic performance, keeping your appetite under control, and a host of other positive health outcomes. In order to hack sleep, you have to set a routine. I'm asleep by 9 p.m. and I wake up to watch the sun rise. Watching the sun rise is beautiful, and it's a net positive that I'm grateful for. If your brain can't calm down while you're trying to fall asleep, tell yourself, "I'm proud of the work I accomplished today, I'm going to let my brain and body rest now." Or try other trusted get-to-sleep-ASAP methods, including cutting back on alcohol (since people who booze more sleep less).

(Source: greatist.com)

Say cheese?

Dairy products don't seem to harm the heart. But plant-based fats are probably a better choice than cheese.

Health-conscious consumers know to steer clear of diets that include lots of meat—especially fatty, salty processed meat. But what's the deal with dairy? Nutrition experts have long recommended low-fat milk and yogurt as good choices for getting the two to three daily servings of dairy recommended by federal dietary guidelines.

Over the past few decades, Americans have been spooning up more yogurt and drinking much less milk. But the biggest change by far has been in our cheese consumption, which has skyrocketed since the 1970s.

Dairy products—especially cheese—are a major source of saturated fat in the average American diet. Saturated fats tend to raise harmful LDL cholesterol, which can boost heart disease risk. But research on the role of dairy in heart disease risk has been mixed and has spread some confusion. Are full-fat cheese and yogurt okay, or should you avoid those foods? A report that pooled data from three large, long-term Harvard studies offers some insight and advice.

Dairy fat and heart disease

In a nutshell, researchers found that dairy fat was not associated with a higher risk of cardiovascular disease (defined as nonfatal heart attack, fatal heart disease, and stroke) when compared with the same amount of calories from carbohydrates. However, replacing about 5% of calories from dairy fat with a similar amount of unsaturated fat from vegetables or vegetable oil was linked to a 24% lower risk of cardiovascular disease.

"Overall, the results are consistent with current dietary recommendations to consume mostly unsaturated fats rather than saturated fats," says Dr. Frank Hu, professor of nutrition at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and senior author of the study. Published in the August 2016 American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, the study looked at more than 220,000 women and men in the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study, the Nurses' Health Study, and the Nurses' Health Study II, all of which explore the role of risk factors (especially diet and lifestyle) in major chronic diseases. The participants filled out food questionnaires every four years for up to 26 years. The dairy products they tracked included skim and low-fat milk, whole milk, cream, ice cream, yogurt, cottage and ricotta cheeses, cream cheese, and other cheese.

The analysis also suggested that replacing dairy fat with other animal fat (that is, from meat) would slightly raise the risk for cardiovascular disease. Several earlier studies have suggested that diets that include dairy products—even full-fat dairy—don't seem to raise heart disease risk and may even help reduce risk for obesity and type 2 diabetes.

More than just the fat

The explanation for these observations isn't entirely clear, but the other nutrients in dairy products could play a role, says Dr. Hu. Milk is a good source of calcium and potassium (two minerals important for blood pressure control) as well as protein, which can help you feel satisfied and less likely to overeat. Both yogurt and kefir (a tangy dairy drink) also contain live bacteria known as probiotics thought to be beneficial to the digestive system and possibly even the cardiovascular system. But at this point, we know far too little about which types of bacteria might be helpful—or how they function and survive either in foods or in your body—to give any advice about specific brands of yogurt or other products, Dr. Hu notes.

He recommends up to two servings of dairy daily for most adults. "But I wouldn't choose full-fat milk or eat a lot of cheese," he says. Pizza, which is probably the biggest cheese vehicle in the American diet, is especially unhealthy because it's typically made with a refined white-flour crust and often topped with unhealthy meats, such as pepperoni or sausage, he notes. You're much better off enjoying a small piece of cheese as a snack with fruit or whole-grain crackers, or sprinkled on a salad.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

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Iran's 10-month handicraft exports hit \$200m

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Iran has exported handicrafts worth around \$200 million since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2016), CHTN reported on Saturday.

"The value shows roughly ten percent rise in comparison to the same period in the previous year," Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization Deputy Director Bahman Namvar-Motlag said.



Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization Deputy Director Bahman Namvar-Motlag in an undated photo

Exports of handicrafts have been on the increase over the past three years, witnessing an overall 59 percent hike, the official explained.

CHTHO has already announced that highly sought-after handicrafts such as traditional glassware, potteries, ceramics, and kilims (flat tapestry-woven carpets) constitute the lion's share of exports.

Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Germany are the main importers of Iranian handicrafts.

Some \$28.970 billion worth of non-oil goods were exported from Iran during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year, according to the Iran Customs Administration.

Brexit effect drives tourist spending in the UK

The sharp decline in the British pound has sparked an influx of Asian and American tourists looking for cheaper luxury goods.

After Britain's vote to leave the EU, the pound plummeted to its lowest level against the dollar in 31 years and more than \$2 trillion was wiped off the global stock market.

However, one upside to the weak pound is that more tourists have been inspired to visit the UK. Data from tax-free shopping firm Global Blue showed that spending from tourists in 2016 jumped by 14 percent, up from 2 percent in 2015.

Tourist spend for the month of December alone rose by 23 percent year-on-year, driven in large part by Asian and American shoppers who have continued to seek out luxury bargains. Chinese shoppers, who account for the largest group of international tourists spending in the UK, spent 46 percent more in December than they did a year ago, with spending by Americans — the second largest group — rising by 77 percent in the same period.

In addition, visitors from countries like Taiwan, which is typically a smaller spending market, spent 177 percent more, whilst tourist spend from Hong Kong visitors grew by 115 percent.

Certainly, exceptional demand from tourists over the festive period helped Burberry post a better-than-expected rise in quarterly sales on Wednesday. The company reported that comparable sales in the UK, which make up about 10 percent of its business, rose by 40 percent in the three months to the end of December.

Historically Britain's strong currency has been a barrier for many with a desire to visit. "The weakened pound has extended the opportunity to a wider group of travellers who have made the most of the favourable exchange rates allowing them to visit the UK," says Gordon Clark, Global Blue's managing director for the UK and Ireland.

(Source: businessoffashion.com)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic center of Mexico City and Xochimilco

Built in the 16th century by the Spanish on the ruins of Tenochtitlan, the old Aztec capital, Mexico City is now one of the world's largest and most densely populated cities.

It has five Aztec temples, the ruins of which have been identified, a cathedral (the largest on the continent) and some fine 19th- and 20th-century public buildings such as the Palacio de las Bellas Artes. Xochimilco lies 28 km south of Mexico City.



Palace of Fine Arts (Palacio de Bellas Artes) in Mexico City

With its network of canals and artificial islands, it testifies to the efforts of the Aztec people to build a habitat in the midst of an unfavorable environment. Its characteristic urban and rural structures, built since the 16th century and during the colonial period; have been preserved in an exceptional manner.

The monuments, groups of buildings or sites located at the heart of the contemporary urban agglomeration amply illustrate the origins and growth of this city that has dominated the region for many centuries.

(Source: UNESCO)

FITUR showcasing 'full-of-charm' Iran

TOURISM TEHRAN — A total of 19 Iranian tourism-associated businesses are showcasing handicrafts, traditions and tourism potentials of the country at the 37th FITUR tourism trade fair in Madrid, Spain.

The state-run and privately-owned companies, spearheaded by the Touring & Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran, have held variety of live performances, meetings and workshops on handicrafts, Mehr news reported on Saturday.

Iran's Ambassador to Spain, Mohammad Hassan Fadaifard, paid a visit to the country's pavilion, saying it is "a favorable opportunity" for the tourism sector to represent the "full-of-charm" in the international scale.

Iran's pavilion has been divided into several sections, adding up to 304 square meters in area.

The 5-day event, which wraps up today, features 9,672 companies directly or indirectly involved in tourism, representing 165 countries or regions from every continent.

In the wake of the nuclear deal in January 2016, Iran expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots, including 21 ones that have been placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list.

Iran has launched extensive plans



Detail shows the façade of the IFEMA exhibition centre in Madrid, which bears a banner for the 37th FITUR international tourism fair.

to bolster its tourism sector. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision plan, Iran is expecting to increase the number of tourism arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20

million by 2025.

In July 2016, Iran increased its visa on arrival extension from 1 month to 3 months.

For the time being, citizens of about 190 countries can obtain visa on arrival at the country's airports with one-month validation.

Ancient Iranian artifacts: Statue of the goddess Narundi

The statue of the goddess Narundi is one of the few surviving examples of cult statues of deities. It shows the extent of Mesopotamian influence in Iran, and more specifically in the metropolis of Susa, an influence still felt even during its periods of independence.

This statue of the goddess Narundi displays numerous iconographic and stylistic features that recall the Mesopotamian world.

A rare cult statue

The head of this statue was found on the acropolis at Susa, southwest Iran, by Jacques de Morgan in 1904, and the body in 1907.

It would have belonged to a sanctuary, part of which survives in a pedestal or podium of several stone steps, on which the stone lions flanking the statue would have served as bases to support poles.

The goddess's attitude and dress and the decoration are all Mesopotamian, as

is the use of materials of different colors to create a more life-like appearance. The inlays of the ears and eyes, most probably of precious stones and metals, have been removed.

The headdress with three pairs of horns worn by the statue was an attribute of Sumerian gods of high rank, and her garment, the kaunakes, is also of Sumerian origin. Depicted at a ceremonial banquet, the goddess holds a palm frond and a goblet.

She is seated on a low throne with armrests which is decorated with snarling lions, two of them bearing spears or poles. Beneath her feet lie two lions.

In Mesopotamia, the lion was the attribute of the goddess Inanna or Ish-tar, goddess of war, and fertility. On the throne are two inscriptions, one in Akkadian giving the name of the donor, "Puzur-Inshushinak, prince of Awan," the other in Elamite, the local language, giv-

ing the name of the goddess, Narundi.

A distinctive culture with strong Mesopotamian influence

During the third millennium the city of Susa developed a new and distinctive culture marked by elements borrowed from Mesopotamia and traditions from the high plateaux of Iran.

From the Sumerian world the Susans took the principle of a pantheon reflecting a cosmic order governed by divinities connected by family ties, and also the practice of making offerings of sculptures at shrines: statues of gods or worshippers and reliefs commemorating ceremonies.

After the conquest of Susa by the Akkadian Empire, the Susans adopted the Akkadians' script and administrative system, and the city became an important crossroads on the network of trade routes between the Indus and the Near East.

(Source: Louvre)



IN FOCUS

TEHRAN TIMES/Fatemeh Abedi



Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization Director Zahra Ahmadipour (R) visits a carpet-weaving workshop during her sojourn to the central city of Arak on January 19, 2017.

Melania Trump's hometown hopes new-found fame will boost trade, tourism

SEVNICA, Slovenia (Reuters) — "First Lady" apple pies in the Kruhek bakery in Melania Trump's hometown of Sevnica in Slovenia are selling like hot cakes.

"We sell more than a hundred a day so the pies are our main product these days," said Sergeja Gorenjec, a saleswoman at the bakery. "Our workday is longer but we are glad and proud of Melania."

Tourist numbers have doubled over the past year, when interest in Melania rose during her husband Donald Trump's presidential election campaign, said tour guide Janez Levstik. He did not give figures.

"We were a bit unprepared for the attention at first but now we are getting used to it and we expect tourist numbers to increase further in the future," said Mojca Pernovsek, the head of local tourism bureau KSTM.

As Donald Trump was sworn in as the 45th president of the United States, the local municipality invited tourists and journalists to Sevnica on Friday to join in the celebrations.

Melania cakes, Melania pancakes and Presidential Burgers are among the offerings in the restaurants and cafes in the town in southeastern Slovenia, on the banks of the river Sava and surrounded by forest-covered hills.

It was there that Melania, born in 1970 when Slovenia was part of Yugoslavia, spent most of her youth in a flat in the town center before moving to the capital Ljubljana to attend high school.

She started modeling at 16 and pursued her career in Milan and Paris before moving to New York in 1996. Her parents, former car dealer Viktor Knavs and his wife

Amalija, live in Sevnica when not in the United States with their two daughters.

"So far we've had mostly Slovenian tourists but we expect to get more from abroad in future, particularly from neighboring countries," said Levstik.

Visitors will see no photographs of Melania in the town of about 5,000 people - they were removed after her lawyer issued a warning in November that using Melania's photo for commercial purposes without her consent was not allowed.

But as well as the "First Lady" pies, made from local apples and complete with a letter M on top and a paper U.S. flag attached, they can sample local wine, tea, chocolate, sausages and honey. Other local products include face creams, lingerie, shoes and furniture.

Thai visa incentives may last longer

The Tourism and Sports Ministry of Thailand will propose to the cabinet next Tuesday to extend visa incentives for at least another three months in a bid to lure more foreign tourists and drive the industry during the low season.

The plan is expected to offset the sharp drop of Chinese tourists following the government's zero-dollar crackdown in late September last year, said Tourism and Sports Minister Kobkarn Wattanawangkul on the sidelines of Asean Tourism Forum 2017 in Singapore.

The cabinet last year waived visa fees and halved the visa-on-arrival fee to 1,000 baht for tourists from 19 countries from Dec 1, 2016 to Feb 28, 2017.

This special visa scheme benefits visitors from Andorra, Bulgaria, Bhutan, China, Cyprus, Ethiopia, India, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, the Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Romania, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Taiwan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

The Tourism Department forecast a 13% drop in Chinese tourists this month, which is still lower than in November, which plunged 30% and was the biggest monthly contraction for Chinese arrivals to Thailand.

(Source: Bangkok Post)

Atlas V rocket blasts off with missile warning satellite

An Atlas V rocket blasted off Friday night on a \$1.2 billion mission to upgrade the satellite system charged with providing early warning if a ballistic missile — potentially one carrying a nuclear warhead — were launched at the United States.

The 19-story United Launch Alliance rocket thundered from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station at 07:42 P.M. ET, powered by a Russian main engine generating 860,000 pounds of thrust.

The Air Force's third Space Based Infrared System satellite, or SBIRS, was dropped off in orbit 44 minutes later, on its way to a surveillance post more than 22,000 miles above the equator.

Infrared sensors

From that height, infrared sensors on the Lockheed Martin-built satellites will repeatedly scan sections of the planet, while simultaneously being able to stare at smaller areas of interest.

The sensors pick up heat from missile launches large and small, helping to warn troops in harm's way and leaders as high up as the president and secretary of defense about where a missile started and where it is going.

"Hundreds of launchers and missiles are currently in range of our deployed



The 19-story United Launch Alliance rocket thundered from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station at 07:42 P.M. ET, powered by a Russian main engine generating 860,000 pounds of thrust.

forces," said Col. Dennis Bythewood, director of the Remote Sensing Systems Directorate at Los Angeles Air Force Base. The new warning satellites, the first

of which launched in 2011, are replacing older spacecraft launched under the Defense Support Program, which dates to the early 1970s.

Spot on the Earth

"In recent years, there's been more use of SBIRS for intelligence," said Brian Weeden, technical adviser at the Secure World Foundation in Washington, D.C. "You can imagine that there might be a lot of things that you could detect if you have a really sensitive infrared detector staring at a spot on the Earth.

Air Force and Lockheed Martin say data from the sensors also supports civilian first responders, for example helping to identify hot spots in a forest fire.

The "sensors are quite capable," Blythewood said.

A fourth Space-Based Infrared System satellite is expected to launch this November to complete the Air Force's global constellation.

Friday's launch was the first of potentially more than 30 from the Space Coast this year. A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket is targeting launch from Kennedy Space Center as soon as Jan. 30.

(Source: USA Today)

New genetic engineering technique could help design, study biological systems

A new technique will help biologists tinker with genes, whether the goal is to turn cells into tiny factories churning out medicines, modify crops to grow with limited water or study the effects of a gene on human health.

The technique, published Jan. 20 in *Nature Communications*, allows scientists to precisely regulate how much protein is produced from a particular gene. The process is simple yet innovative and, so far, works in everything from bacteria to plants to human cells.

"Basically, this is a universal toolkit for modifying gene expression," said Sergej Djuranovic, Ph.D., an assistant professor of cell biology and physiology at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, and the study's senior author. "It's a tool that can be used whether you are genetically engineering cells to produce a particular organic molecule, or to study how a gene works."

The ability to control the amount of protein produced from a particular gene would be a boon to biologists who design or redesign biological systems - such as the set of biochemical reactions that make up cellular metabolism - to produce a desired product. For example, some drugs - including antibiotics such as vancomycin and cancer drugs such as taxol - are produced by cells as byproducts of metabolism. By fine-tuning certain genes a biologist could maximize the quantity of medicine produced.

Djuranovic himself is interested in modulating gene expression to study disease-related genes, such as ones implicated in cancer.

(Source: EurekAlert)

Europe's Galileo satellites hit by anomalies

The European Space Agency opened an investigation on Thursday into anomalies that have affected five of the first 18 Galileo satellites in orbit.

The agency, which launched the navigation system last December, said however that the failures are not affecting the satellites' proper functioning.

The Galileo system, named after the Italian engineer and astronomer, is designed to provide commercial and government customers with more precise location data than GPS.

The European agency said in a statement that a total of nine onboard atomic clocks have failed, but insisted it "is confident that the clock issues will be resolved."

Each Galileo carries four atomic clocks. The nonfunctioning ones are three rubidium devices and six passive hydrogen maser clocks, the agency said.

"No individual Galileo satellite has experienced more than two clock failures, so the robust quadruple redundancy designed into the system means all 18 members of the constellation remain operational," the ESA said.

The launch of the first satellites was hit by delays and several failures, with two satellites ending up in the wrong orbit.

But the ESA managed to launch four satellites on a single rocket last November and expects to have a full complement of 24 satellites, plus spares, in orbit within four years.

The ESA said it is confident "that the clock issues will be resolved and remains committed to launch the next four Galileo ... satellites before the end of this year."

Galileo's free consumer signal will provide location data offering precision within about one meter (3 feet, 3 inches), compared with 5 meters (16 feet) or more for GPS. A premium service eventually will offer even greater precision to paying customers and police, fire departments and government agencies.

(Source: AP)

Ants are expert navigators, even walking backwards: study

Despite their tiny size, ants are sophisticated navigators that can find their way even while walking backwards, and these skills could help inspire better robots, scientists say.

The findings in this week's edition of the journal *Current Biology* are based on a colony of desert ants that were studied to see how they navigated home while carrying pieces of a cookie.

Carrying small bits, they walked forward. But with larger pieces, they dragged them backwards toward their nest, occasionally dropping the food to check the sun's position and reorient themselves.

Researchers said this practice of checking the environment and matching their progress against their memories of their surroundings shows the insects' mental capacity is more complex than previously thought.

"Ants have a relatively tiny brain, less than the size of a pinhead. Yet they can navigate successfully under many difficult conditions, including going backward," said co-author Barbara Webb, a professor at the University of Edinburgh's School of Informatics.

"Understanding their behavior gives us new insights into brain function, and has inspired us to build robot systems that mimic their functions."

Researchers say the ants' process could be useful to people, because it could help them develop new computer algorithms to guide robots.

The research team included scientists at the University of Lincoln, Australian National University, and the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS).

(Source: AFP)

Humans, not climate change, wiped out Australian megafauna

New evidence involving the ancient poop of some of the huge and astonishing creatures that once roamed Australia indicates the primary cause of their extinction around 45,000 years ago was likely a result of humans, not climate change.

Led by Monash University in Victoria, Australia and the University of Colorado Boulder, the team used information from a sediment core drilled in the Indian Ocean off the coast of southwest Australia to help reconstruct past climate and ecosystems on the continent. The core contains chronological layers of material blown and washed into the ocean, including dust, pollen, ash and spores from a fungus called *Sporormiella* that thrived on the dung of plant-eating mammals, said CU Boulder Professor Gifford Miller.

Miller, who participated in the study led by Sander van der Kaars of Monash University, said the sediment core allowed scientists to look back in time, in this case more than 150,000 years, spanning Earth's last full glacial cycle. Fungal spores from plant-eating mammal dung were abundant in the sediment core layers from 150,000

years ago to about 45,000 years ago, when they went into a nosedive, said Miller, a professor in the Department of Geological Sciences.

Abundance of spores

The "abundance of these spores is good evidence for a lot of large mammals on the southwestern Australian landscape up until about 45,000 years ago," he said. "Then, in a window of time lasting just a few thousand years, the megafauna population collapsed."

The Australian collection of megafauna some 50,000 years ago included 1,000-pound kangaroos, 2-ton wombats, 25-foot-long lizards, 400-pound flightless birds, 300-pound marsupial lions and Volkswagen-sized tortoises. More than 85 percent of Australia's mammals, birds and reptiles weighing over 100 pounds went extinct shortly after the arrival of the first humans, said Miller.

The ocean sediment core showed the southwest is one of the few regions on the Australian continent that had dense forests both 45,000 years ago and today, making it a hotbed for biodiversity, said Miller, also associate director of CU Boulder's Institute of Arctic and

Alpine Research.

Density of trees

"It's a region with some of the earliest evidence of humans on the continent, and where we would expect a lot of animals to have lived," Miller said. "Because of the density of trees and shrubs, it could have been one of their last holdouts some 45,000 years ago."

Scientists have been debating the causes of the Australian megafauna extinctions for decades. Some claim the animals could not have survived changes in climate, including a shift some 70,000 years ago when much of the southwestern Australian landscape went from a wooded eucalyptus tree environment to an arid, sparsely vegetated landscape.

Others have suggested the animals were hunted to extinction by Australia's earliest immigrants who had colonized most of the continent by 50,000 years ago, or a combination of overhunting and climate change, said Miller.

(Source: CU Boulder Today)

Scientists searching for life on nearby 'super-Earth'

Scientists are currently searching for life on a nearby exoplanet that sits squarely within the "Goldilocks zone" — the sweet spot in space where conditions are just right for water to exist.

The "super-Earth," dubbed Wolf 1061c, is one of our closest neighbors and is located in a star system roughly 14 light-years away from our own, according to Sci News.

A team of researchers from San Francisco State University has been analyzing the planet and its atmosphere in hopes

of finding proof that it's habitable. While they haven't found any evidence yet, the group did discover that Wolf 1061c is lying directly in the "Goldilocks" or "life" zone, which is defined as the region in a galaxy where life is most likely to emerge.

Follow-up studies

"(Wolf 1061c) is important because it is so close and that gives other opportunities to do follow-up studies to see if it does indeed have life," explained Dr. Stephen Kane, lead author of the study.

While scientists have been aware of the exoplanet since 2015, the fact that it is located in the "habitable" region of space — much like Earth is in our solar system — has not been known.

"When scientists search for planets that could sustain life, they are basically looking for a planet with nearly identical properties to Earth," Kane explained. "Like Earth, the planet would have to exist in a sweet spot often referred to as the 'Goldilocks zone' where conditions are just right

for life. Simply put, the planet can't be too close or too far from its parent star."

Dr. Kane and his team will be publishing their findings in the next issue of *Astrophysical Journal*.

The researchers have already studied Wolf 1061c's dim M-dwarf star — referred to simply as Wolf 1061 — and discovered that it provides perfect conditions for the planet to harbor liquid water, much like Venus once did before our Sun vaporized its oceans.

(Source: New York Post)

Commercial Structures to Be Affected by Foreign Exchange Policies in Coming Year

Exchange rate is one of the most important fields which can link economic relationship of each country with the other countries in world. In general, changes in exchange rate cause a great and widespread impact on domestic and foreign sectors of economy. Broadly speaking, any change in exchange rate will affect imports and exports (trade balance) on the one hand and will influence power of domestic competitiveness (production and employment) and domestic inflation on the other hand.

Currency fluctuations cannot always be considered as a negative development for the countries. Increase of value of currency transactions for the export-based countries and/or countries with the positive trade balance can be considered as a turning point in evermore materialization of their trade and business policies. For example, China, as one of the largest exporters of products to the United States, will take maximum advantage of change of U.S. dollar value in line with materialization of its trade and business objectives. In contrast, import-based countries will suffer from this situation significantly. Perhaps, currency coverage management, which has faced with increasing value of dollar, is of paramount importance at this juncture.

The importance of managing Foreign Exchange Market is of paramount significant for Iran's economy from different aspects. However, Iran's economy should

inevitably be turned into an open and competitive economy in coming years and in the long-term horizon.

With due observance to the said issues, suitable ways will be provided for diversification of economic activities, production growth, growth in exports of different types of non-oil goods and services due to the inter-linkage with global markets and taking advantage of trend of business and international capital-oriented transactions.

Considering the Iran's business record in recent years and improvement of trade balance, increased U.S. dollar value can be considered as a trump card for Iran's foreign trade in the current situation.

If Islamic Republic of Iran managed to join World Trade Organization (WTO) in coming years, increased transactional exchange rate will lead to the advantage of competitive price for Iranian producers in comparison with the value of national currency. This condition will yield positive results for Iran's economy when per capita export exceeds the import volume; otherwise, it will lead to the imports inflation and also reduced purchasing power of consumer.

Iran Economic Outlook Conference Secretary of Iran Economic Outlook Conference Amir-Reza Hassani said: "Iran's economy experienced negative economic growth from 1960 to 1972 i.e. only

for 12 years, but despite this negative growth, the country's positive economic growth showed lackluster and poor performance.

Speaking in a press conference, he said: "A number of 417 key phrases were uttered in the previous edition of Iran Economic Outlook Conference in a way that approx. 75 percent of objectives of this sector have been materialized."

Although it dates back to the issue of investment and economic activists, investors should be informed to use related information appropriately, he maintained.

Therefore, given the approval of budget bill of the country in each year, it is tried to organize the Conference at Shahid Beheshti Conferences Hall on Feb. 27, 2017.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the secretary of the Conference added: "Dimensions affecting macroeconomics in industries and economy of the country was unveiled in the previous edition of this prestigious Conference. Accordingly, eight effective factors have been identified and will be introduced on the day of this Conference."

It should be noted that Iran Economic Outlook Conference will be held on Feb. 27 and will address the prospects of Iran's economy.

Servin Aqajani, Senior Expert Official in Energy & Economic Advisor in the Middle East

IKCO to Display Cars in Oman

Iran Khodro Industrial Group will showcase its cars in the Islamic Republic of Iran's Solo Exhibition in Muscat, Oman.

The exhibition is attended by Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh, Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Ali bin Masoud al-Saneed Oman's Minister of Commerce and Industry.

The exhibition will be held with the participation of 90 Iranian companies, of which Iran Khodro Industrial Group in an area of 3000 square meters will present its cars such as Dena, Soren, Samand and Runna.

In the meantime, the company's sales and after-sales service subsidiary will present the latest achievements in this

exhibition.

Oman as one of the most important commercial partners of Iran in the Persian Gulf can offer IKCO an interesting market.

Moreover, in terms of political, religious and economic ties, the two countries are in a good status and IKCO, as the biggest carmaker in the region also

looks forward to expand its market share in Oman.

Dena is IKCO's latest sedan and the company plans to produce and market the car in the industrial area of Duqm in Oman.

The Islamic Republic of Iran's Solo Exhibition in Muscat Oman will be held on 22-27 January, 2017.

Sixteen dead, mostly Hungarian teenagers, in Italy bus accident: police

Sixteen people were killed and about 40 injured after a bus carrying Hungarian students burst into flames on a highway in northern Italy, police and the fire service said on Saturday.

The bus went off the road near a highway exit close to the city of Verona overnight. The local highway police chief said it was carrying mostly teenage students, teachers and parents.

"Many children among the victims of the accident in Verona, a bus catches fire on impact with a pillar," national police said on Twitter, adding they had come to Italy from France.



Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijarto told a news conference that the teenagers were from a Budapest secondary school, returning from their annual ski camp in France.

He added that there was uncertainty over the exact number of passengers in the bus, but it was higher than the director of the school had known about.

Szijarto said that one of the victims, whose life was at risk, was being kept in coma, and that all of the injured were in hospital.

The minister added that twelve passengers were "well" and were staying in a hotel in the southern part of Verona.

Local highway police chief Girolamo Lacquaniti told SkyTG24 television some people had minor injuries, but others were more serious.

Lacquaniti said the cause of the crash would be investigated. "We are not aware of other vehicles being involved, it seems to have gone off the road of its own accord."

Police released photographs and television footage of the burned-out hulk near a road bridge. The wreckage had been removed from the road by around 0800 GMT.

"With my prayers, I am with the families and friends shocked by the tragedy," Prime Minister Viktor Orban said in a statement sent to the national news agency MTI.

(Source: Reuters)

LEARN ENGLISH Canceling an Appointment

A: Hello, Samantha speaking.

B: Hi Samantha. This is Angela calling.

A: Oh, hi Angela, what's up?

B: I'm just calling about our meeting today. I wonder, is it possible to **reschedule** our appointment in the afternoon? I have a bit of an emergency that I need to take care of.

A: Let me see, it shouldn't be too much of a problem...

B: I'm really sorry, I hope it doesn't **inconvenience** you too much, it's just this thing **came up**, and...

A: Angela, you know what, I can't **make it** to our meeting, either. Why don't we **postpone** it to tomorrow afternoon at the same time?

B: Sounds great. See you tomorrow.

C: Angela... Angela, look up! See that lady over there who is trying on a red leather jacket? Isn't that Samantha?

B: What? **No wonder** she told me she couldn't make it to the meeting, oh, no, I think she saw me...

Key vocabulary

what's up: what is the matter

reschedule: schedule something for a different time

inconvenience: cause problem or trouble

come up: occur in an unexpected way

make it: come

postpone: decide to do something at a later time

no wonder: not surprisingly

Supplementary vocabulary

scheduling conflict: two or more appointments scheduled at the same time

call off: cancel

double-book: have two appointments or meetings at the same time

push back: move a meeting or appointment to a later time

rain check: a promise or offer to do something in the future that is not possible to do now

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Without water,
everything
withers

Govt. pledges support for Plasco victims



Mayor Qalibaf (L) is explaining the situation to President Rouhani and Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli(R).

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Three days **d e s k** after Plasco building's deadly collapse in Tehran the government has pledged to provide support for families who either lost their loved ones or their jobs and money in the incident.

Death pension would be paid to the families without any legal formalities from now on, Labor Minister Ali Rabiei said on Saturday.

He pointed out that those who had lost their businesses at the building can receive low-interest loans worth of one billion rials (nearly \$25,000).

"People who have lost their jobs [due to the incident] can file an unemployment insurance claim," Rabiei said.

Those who agree to employ the unemployed workers of Plasco can

also get loans, the minister said, adding Tehran's governor would temporarily allocate a place to the clothing workshops to carry on the businesses.

Additionally, insurance companies would cover all the healthcare expenses for victims who suffered injuries in the accident.

Three bodies found, the rest are still missing

With fire erupting in the building on Thursday morning the building collapsed despite the firefighters' 3-hour effort to extinguish it.

The collapse inevitably trapped at least 15 to 25 firefighters and unknown number of shop owners who in spite of repeated warning refused to evacuate the building.

Painstaking searches to find bodies



Labor Minister Rabiei

buried under piles of rubble are still underway.

According to the Emergency Medical Services director, Pir-Hossein Kulivand, so far some 121 individuals sustained injuries who are all discharged from the hospital except for two.

Sadly one of the firefighters, Behnam Mirzakhani, who suffered burns up to 60 percent of his body passed away on Friday at the hospital.

The tragic incident has inflamed national and international sentiment with photos of firefighters looking shock or mourning their lost friends and colleagues. In order to honor the memory of the brave firefighters who lost their lives the government has declared one day of national mourning.

Operation teams have so far succeeded in pulling out 3 dead bodies out of the rubble but due to the major injuries they have sustained they are remained unidentified and are taken to forensics for identification.

However the still blazing fire, boiling temperature which reaches to 600 Celsius degrees, huge heap of rubble, and thick smoke have slowed down the rescue operation so far. Unfortunately as the time passes firefighters must give up hope to find their colleagues alive.

Tehran's mayor Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf has said that the rescue operation might take some six days.

President Hassan Rouhani also attended the scene on Saturday to check up on the operation progress.



Tehran Times/ Mohammad Moheimani



Tehran Times/ Asghar Khamseh

Some people just read more slowly than others

The San Francisco Public Library newest book is actually one of its oldest: More than a century old.

The book was actually checked out of the library 100 years ago by Phoebe Marsh Dickenson Webb, according to local station ABC 7.

Ironically, the book is titled "40 Minutes Late." It's a collection of short stories that took a long time coming back to the library.

Dickenson's great-granddaughter, Judy Wells, hopes people give her dear departed relative some slack, since Dickenson was 83 when she borrowed the book 100

years ago. She died before the book's due date.

"It's hard to come back as a ghost and return your late library book," Wells told ABC 7.

Another great-grandchild, Webb Johnson, found the book in a trunk of Dickenson's things back in 1996. He kept it for a while and even read it himself, he told the San Francisco Chronicle.

Head City Librarian Luis Herrera didn't read the family the riot act for keeping a book out for 100 years. He was just happy to get it back.

The current fine rate is 10 cents a day, which would

work out to around \$3,650, according to the Chronicle. However, the library's current amnesty program for overdue books means Dickenson's descendants won't have to pay a fine at all.

Now, 100 years later, it's possible that "40 Minutes Late" could go back in circulation, or be put on display. Dickenson's great-grandson, Webb Johnson, recommends it highly.

"I really enjoyed reading it, it's one of the reasons I held on to it," Johnson told ABC 7.

(Source: Huffington Post)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

Iranian entrepreneurship fund allots \$1.5m to save wetlands

An Iranian entrepreneurship fund called Omid (literally meaning hope), has allotted some 50 billion rials (nearly \$1.5 million) with the aim of saving wetlands nationwide, ISNA news agency reported.

In a ceremony held on Saturday the Department of Environment (DOE) and Hope entrepreneurship fund signed a memorandum of understanding to create job opportunities which can replace the current water reliant jobs such as farming for people living in the proximity of the 12 wetlands such as Urmia and Hamoun.

DOE Chief Masoumeh Ebtekar expressed hope that the newly signed agreement would help local people to stay in their home towns and at the same time help restore the wetlands and save them from getting drier.

صندوق کارآفرینی برای حفاظت از تالاب ها ۵ میلیارد تومان اختصاص داد

به گزارش خبرگزاری ایسنا صندوق کارآفرینی امید ۵ میلیارد تومان در راستای حفاظت از تالابهای کشور اختصاص داد.

روز شنبه طی مراسمی تفاهم نامه همکاری بین سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست و صندوق کارآفرینی امید به منظور ایجاد شغل های جایگزین کشاورزی برای روستاییان در جوامع محلی و روستاهای اطراف ۱۲ تالاب از جمله هامون و ارومیه امضا شد.

معصومه ابتکار رئیس سازمان محیط زیست گفت: امیدواریم این همکاری به ماندگاری مردم در روستاها کمک کند و همچنین موجب حفاظت و احیای تالاب ها و جلوگیری از خشک شدن آنها شود.

ENGLISH PROVERB

Black sheep of the family

■ **Explanation:** the worst member of the family, a disreputable or disgraced member of a family
■ **For example:** Mary is the black sheep of the family. She's always in trouble with the police.

PHRASAL VERB

Call round

■ **Meaning:** to stop at a house or other place for a short time to see someone or do something
■ **For example:** She called round for a chat.

ENGLISH IDIOM

Bane of one's life

■ **Explanation:** something that causes your problems or your unhappiness
■ **For example:** The heating system is always breaking down. It's the bane of my life!

Myanmar defies OIC call to stop atrocities against Rohingya

Myanmar has defied a call by Muslim governments to stop atrocities against Rohingya Muslims, slamming instead Malaysia for hosting a meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

At an extraordinary OIC meeting in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday, the Malaysian premier called on Myanmar to end its crackdown on Rohingya Muslims and stop the "unspeakable cruelty" against them.

Myanmar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Saturday said it was "regrettable" that Malaysia had called the emergency meeting to discuss the plight of the Rohingya.

The ministry accused Malaysia of exploiting the crisis "to promote a certain political agenda" and disregarding alleged efforts of the Myanmar government to tackle the crisis.

Myanmar's military began its crackdown in Rakhine State after an attack on the country's border guards on October 9 left nine police officers dead, which the government blamed on the Rohingya.

There are reports that at least 400 people have been killed, more than 2,500 houses, mosques, and religious schools



destroyed, and three villages completely wiped out during the military siege.

The Myanmar government has also blocked humanitarian and media access to Rakhine which is home to about 1.1 million Rohingya.

Rohingya Muslims have been subjected to executions, rape, and arson attacks since October, according to refugees and

rights groups.

In its meeting, the OIC which represents 57 countries called on the United Nations to intervene in Rakhine State, where it said the escalation of violence against Rohingya Muslims could lead to "genocide."

The organization's special envoy to Myanmar, Syed Hamid Albar, said the

world body should act to resolve the conflict, which is no longer an internal issue but an international concern.

"We don't want to see another genocide like in Cambodia or Rwanda," he told Reuters. "The international community just observed, and how many people died? We have lessons from the past for us to learn from and see what we can do."

On Friday, a United Nations human rights investigator slammed Myanmar's campaign and called on the military to respect the law and human rights.

Many of Myanmar's Buddhists name the minority group of Rohingya Muslims as Bengalis, shorthand for illegal immigrants from neighboring Bangladesh, even though the community has lived in Myanmar for many generations.

The United Nations has described the Rohingya as one of the most downtrodden communities around the globe.

The prime minister of Muslim-majority Malaysia has been a vocal critic of Myanmar's government since the country's army launched a harsh crackdown on the Muslim community in the state of Rakhine in October 2016.

(Source: Press TV)

Fearing arrest, Israeli ex-min. cancels trip to Belgium

Former Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni has canceled a planned trip to Belgium over fears that she would get arrested and questioned for war crimes.

Livni, currently a member of the Israeli parliament, was planning to travel to Brussels on Monday but was facing arrest and questioning for war crimes committed during the last Israeli war on the Palestinian territory of the Gaza Strip.

A Belgian Justice Ministry official had earlier said she would be detained and questioned on arrival in Brussels. A spokesman for Belgium's federal prosecutor Thierry Werts also said, "We wanted to take advantage of her visit to try to advance the investigation" into the Israeli war on Gaza in late 2008 and early 2009, when she was

foreign minister.

The investigation is reportedly being conducted pursuant to a complaint filed in June 2010. She is named in the complaint along with other Israeli political and military officials for involvement in the regime's war crimes during the war on Gaza, which killed over 1,400 Palestinians, mostly civilians.

The war also wounded over 4,300 other Palestinians, also mainly civilians. According to the Journal of Palestine Studies, the three-week war displaced 100,000 Gazans and destroyed or damaged over 50,000 residential units, 34 hospitals and 214 schools as well as hundreds of public and private institutions.

In Brussels, Livni was planning to attend a conference

organized by the so-called Jewish Association.

A spokesman for the event said she "cancelled three or four days before," Israeli media reported, without providing information on when the unidentified spokesman announced the cancellation. He was cited as saying that Livni had canceled the trip for "personal reasons."

The Israeli Foreign Ministry has criticized the prospect of Livni's arrest in Belgium as an "abuse of the Belgian legal system."

Livni had canceled a trip to London in December 2009 because she faced arrest there over her role in the same war.

(Source: Press TV)

Deadly blast rocks market in Pakistan's northwest

A bomb blast ripped through a vegetable market in Pakistan's northwestern region in a predominantly Shia area, killing at least 22 people and wounding about 90 others.

The explosion occurred on Saturday morning at the Eidgah Market in Parachinar city, the capital of Kurram Agency, where a large number of people had gathered to buy fresh produce.

Local official Kurram Ikramullah told Al Jazeera as many as 87 people had been wounded, some in critical condition.

"The bomb seems to have been

planted in vegetable crate," Ikramullah said. "There is a high possibility that the vegetables were brought from outside the agency."

Lashker-e-Jhangvi, a banned armed group that has attacked minority Shia Muslims in the past, claimed responsibility for the attack.

"That was our combined work with Shahryar group of Mahsud Taliban," Ali Sufyan, a spokesman for the group, wrote in a text message to an Associated Press news agency reporter.

The Pakistani military media wing, In-

ter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), said in a statement some of the wounded would be airlifted to hospitals in Peshawar, capital of northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Kurram has been the scene of increased attacks in recent years and the army has carried out a major operation against fighters in the region.

Pakistan has battled armed groups since 2004, a campaign that has claimed the lives of tens-of-thousands of civilians and security forces.

Last year, the country recorded its lowest number of killings since 2007 when the Pakistani Taliban was formed.

But remnants of armed groups are still able to carry out periodic bloody attacks.

"Terrorists largely eliminated by our security forces and the remaining will soon meet their fate if we all together rise against them," Iqbal Zafar Jhagra, the provincial governor, told local Geo television.

(Source: agencies)

Ex-Congressman sees no major foreign policy shift under Trump

1 → When he reviews his options he will surely conclude that revocation of the JCPOA would be dangerous for our allies, Israel and the region. General Mattis has been highly critical of Iran since 1983 when U.S. Marines were killed in the bombing in Beirut. ... he has grievances with Iran but he has also indicated that the JCPOA should not be rejected by Trump. There is growing indication even in Israel that the Iranians are complying with the JCPOA and that the U.S. and her allies should recognize this and make sure they comply with the JCPOA as well.

■ Does Trump's criticism of China and his overtures toward Taiwan indicate a change in Sino-U.S. relations?

A: I don't think Trump will throw the two-China policy



away when he becomes president. He understands how complicated this part of the world can be.

Finally, Trump is a unique character who believes in communicating directly to the people without filter through the twitter world. It is going to be difficult for a period of time to know exactly what policy is going to be. But I remain hopeful that Trump will not make many serious changes in U.S. international policy.

Let me conclude by observing that few people know exactly what Trump will be doing. But I believe he is surrounding himself with some first class advisors who will ultimately conclude that most of U.S. policy is stable and make sense.

Anti-Trump protesters flood Washington

3 → The protests illustrated the depth of the anger in a deeply divided country that is still recovering from the scarring 2016 campaign season. Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton, the first woman nominated for president by a major U.S. party.

The organizers of Saturday's march said they had extensive security plans in place, and would have both visible and hard-to-spot security workers along the route.

The event, the brainchild of Hawaiian grandmother Teresa Shook, was intended as an outlet for women and men who consider themselves feminists to vent their frustration and anxiety over Trump's victory. It spotlights the fierce opposition Trump faces as he takes office, a period that is typically more of a honeymoon than a hate fest.

A recent ABC News/Washington Post poll found Trump had the lowest favorability rating of any incoming president since the 1970s.

Women reached by Reuters gave a host of reasons for marching, ranging

from inspiring other women to run for office to protesting Trump's plans to repeal the 2010 Affordable Care Act, which among other things requires health insurers to cover birth control.

Overall, the women said they hoped to send a unity message to Trump after a campaign in which he said Mexican immigrants were "rapists," discussed banning Muslims from entering the United States, and was revealed to have once bragged about grabbing women by the genitals and kissing them without permission.

■ 200 anti-Trump protesters arrested in Washington

Meantime, more than 200 protesters have been arrested in demonstrations during U.S. President Trump's inauguration in Washington.

Washington police said they arrested at least 217 people, accusing them of acts of vandalism and destruction of property. They were protesting against Trump's inauguration.

Around 500 people, wearing masks, marched through the city's downtown

with some of them smashing windows and blocking traffic.

Officers in riot gear used pepper spray, tear gas and stun grenades to disperse the crowd, some of whom were armed with crowbars and hammers, according to authorities.

The U.S. Secret Service, Washington police and other law enforcement agencies used nearly 28,000 officers to tighten security in a roughly three-square-mile (7.8 square km) of downtown Washington.

Before he took the oath of office, protesters descended on Washington with a message for him: "You're not my president."

■ Anti-Trump protests on streets of Europe's capitals

Elsewhere, thousands of women took to the streets of European capitals to join "sister marches" in Asia against newly installed U.S. President Trump ahead of a major rally in Washington expected to draw nearly a quarter of a million people.

Waving banners with slogans like "Special relationship, just say no" and "Nasty women unite," the demonstrators

gathered outside the American embassy in Grosvenor Square before heading to a rally in central London Trafalgar Square.

Worldwide some 670 marches were planned, according to the organizers' website which says more than two million marchers are expected to protest against Trump, who was sworn in as the 45th U.S. president on Friday.

Celebrities including rights activist Bianca Jagger, singer Charlotte Church and actor Ian McKellen expressed their support for the protest on social media.

Several marchers wore pink "pussy" hats, and carried banners with slogans like: "this pussy bites back" after the emergence of a 2005 tape in which Trump spoke of women in a demeaning way sparked widespread outrage.

In Europe, marches also took place in Berlin, Paris, Rome, Vienna, Geneva and Amsterdam.

Around 2,000 people marched in Vienna, according to estimates by the police and organizers, but sub-zero temperatures quickly thinned the crowd to a couple of hundred.

Gambia's Yahya Jammeh confirms he will step down

Gambia's President Yahya Jammeh, who for weeks had refused to step down after losing the recent election, has confirmed that he has decided to relinquish power.

"I have decided today in good conscience to relinquish the mantle of leadership of this great nation with infinite gratitude to all Gambians," he said in a statement broadcast on state television early on Saturday.

The announcement came after hours of last-ditch talks with regional leaders and the threat by a regional military force to make him leave.

The new president, Adama Barrow, had earlier declared that "the rule of fear" was over and that Jammeh, who ruled the country for 22 years, had agreed to leave.

Barrow was sworn in at Gambia's embassy in Dakar in neighboring Senegal on Thursday.

A State House official close to the situation told the AFP news agency that Jammeh would leave within three days, possibly on Saturday with Guinean President Alpha Conde, who had travelled to Gambia's capital, Banjul, for negotiations.

Earlier on Friday, Gambia's chief of defense forces Ousmane Badjie pledged his allegiance to the country's new president, a major shift as mediation continued to persuade Jammeh to cede power.

Jammeh had rejected Barrow's December 1 election win, despite significant pressure from regional powers and the United Nations, sparking a major crisis.

At least 46,000 people have fled Gambia for Senegal since the start of the crisis fearing unrest, the UN's refugee agency UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said, citing Senegalese government figures.

Celebrations erupted in Banjul, meanwhile, where tensions have run high especially since the declaration of a state of emergency by Jammeh made on Tuesday.

Barrow, a real estate agent turned politician, had flown into Senegal on January 15 to seek shelter after weeks of rising tension over Jammeh's stance.

West African troops had entered the country to bolster the new president, but military operations were suspended in favor of a final diplomatic push to convince Jammeh to exit peacefully.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, Barrow said that he hoped the 15-nation Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) could find him a safe haven.

Jammeh started negotiations with ECOWAS on Thursday. He demanded an amnesty for any crimes that he may have committed during his more than two decades in power and that he be permitted to stay in Gambia, at his home village of Kanilai.

Those demands were not acceptable, said Marcel Alain de Souza, head of ECOWAS.

Jammeh's continued presence in Gambia would "create disturbances to public order and terrorist movements" he said.

(Source: agencies)

South Korea: Minister arrested over 'artist blacklist'

South Korea's culture minister resigned after being arrested for allegedly creating a "blacklist" of nearly 10,000 artists who voiced criticism of impeached President Park Geun-Hye.

Cho Yoon-Sun - the first minister in active service arrested in South Korea - is accused of creating the vast catalogue to starve the artists of government subsidies and private investment, and place them under state surveillance.

The list's existence sparked widespread anger, raising the spectre of Seoul's 1960-80s army-backed rule - including under dictator Park Chung-hee, the impeached leader's late father - when news, the arts, and entertainment were heavily censored.

Shortly after her arrest, Cho tendered her resignation, which was immediately accepted by Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-Ahn, Yonhap news agency said.

The Seoul Central District Court said it issued a warrant to arrest Cho on charges of abuse of authority and perjury following a request from prosecutors.

The court also ordered an arrest warrant for Kim Ki-choon, a powerful former chief of staff for Park. Kim is accused of ordering Cho to create the list of "left-leaning" artists.

Kim, 78, a former top intelligence official, came under fire for his alleged involvement in human rights abuses committed under Park's father.

"Charges are verified ... and there are risks of the accused seeking to destroy evidence," a court judge said in a statement issuing the warrants for Cho and Kim.

Prosecutors questioned Cho and Kim as part of their probe into a wider political scandal involving Park and her secret confidante, Choi Soon-sil, who is currently on trial for abuse of power and coercion.

Park stands accused of colluding with Choi to coerce top local firms, including Samsung, to "donate" nearly \$70m to non-profit foundations Choi allegedly later used for personal gain.

Park was impeached by parliament last month and Seoul's Constitutional Court is currently reviewing the validity of the motion, with the frequency of hearings sparking speculation it might reach a verdict before mid-March.

The scandal has seen a number of former senior officials and presidential aides arrested.

But the Seoul Central District Court this week rejected a prosecution request for the arrest of Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong, who is accused of bribing Choi in a bid to seek governmental favors, citing lack of evidence.

(Source: agencies)

Swansea stun Liverpool with unlikely win at Anfield

Struggling Swansea's first league win at Anfield blew a huge hole in Liverpool's title ambitions as Fernando Llorente struck twice in a shock 3-2 victory.

The Swans, bottom of the table before kick-off and without a victory in 15 previous league visits, became the first team since Manchester United a year ago to inflict a home defeat on the Reds.

They did it the hard way as well as after Llorente had put them into a surprise 2-0 lead just after half-time a double from Roberto Firmino levelled things up, with the visitors indebted once again to Gylfi Sigurdsson for their winner.

Llorente's good recent form has seen him score seven times in the last 10 Premier League games and despite interest from Chelsea it is imperative to Swansea they keep hold of him as they fight for top-flight survival.

The ease with which he scored his two goals will be of concern to Jurgen Klopp, whose side have conceded more goals league than any of their top-seven rivals.

A minor positive for the Reds boss will have been a return to form for Firmino, who had scored just one in his last 10 matches as his dip mirrored the injury-enforced absence of fellow Brazilian Philippe Coutinho - with whom he has a close relationship on and off the field.

Coutinho's first Premier League start since Nov. 26 appeared to re-energise his compatriot, restored to his preferred central role, but it still failed to enliven a lacklustre first half memorable only for an Adam Lallana bicycle kick and Swansea debutant Tom Carroll hitting the post with a deflected shot.

Swansea manager Paul Clement's game plan of putting men behind the ball and stifling Liverpool's play was not anything which had not been seen before at Anfield but they succeeded in preventing their hosts having a first-half shot on target for the first time in the league since November 2015.

Following such mediocrity after the break things escalated quickly with three goals in eight minutes.

Dejan Lovren carelessly headed behind and from Sigurdsson's corner Llorente stabbed home in a goalmouth scramble in the 48th minute. Four minutes later the Swansea striker outjumped Georginio Wijnaldum to power in a header from debutant Carroll's cross. Firmino's close-range header from James Milner's left-wing cross reduced the deficit soon after and the Brazilian bettered that with his second, brilliantly chesting down Wijnaldum's cross and smashing a half-volley past Lukasz Fabianski.

The momentum seemed to be with Liverpool but Swansea refused to back down and when Reds centre-back Ragnar Klavan diverted the ball to the unmarked Sigurdsson he made no mistake in the 74th minute.

Fabianski saved Origi's shot on the turn and Lallana saw a header bounce back off the crossbar as Swansea hung on to record back to back league away wins for the first time since May 2015 and breathe new life into their survival bid.

(Source: PA Sport)

Pep Guardiola: Maybe I am not good enough for Manchester City players

Pep Guardiola has defended the quality of Manchester City's players and questioned whether he is a good enough coach for them.

The City boss has all-but ruled his side out of the Premier League title race ahead of Saturday's clash with second-placed Tottenham Hotspur who are three points clear of his side.

City came in for plenty of criticism following their 4-0 defeat to Everton last Sunday but Guardiola said it was disrespectful to say his current squad isn't what he has been used to with previous clubs Barcelona and Bayern Munich.

"They are good players. I have respect for the guys, so why would I say the guys are not good?" he told a news conference.

"I don't understand the lack of respect for the professionals when they have amazing players and they are not good enough for me. Maybe I am not good enough for them.

"They are Manchester City players, top players, they have a lot of quality. They showed that many times in the past and this season. I like to work with them and I want to help them and I am going to until my last day here and I want to stay as long as possible more than ever.

"When you say that it is that they don't have the same quality as Bayern Munich and Barcelona and that teams when they play good they play good.

"The times we play good the passing was much quicker than both teams, but we are not consistent. We win three games and we arrive at the fourth game and we are not sure if we are going to win and that is a big problem."

Guardiola also said that making regular changes to his defence could have made it difficult for goalkeeper Claudio Bravo to settle into the first team.

The Chilean No. 1 has come in for fierce criticism after the defeat at Goodison Park where the four goals were the only four shots that Everton had on target.

Asked if defensive changes could have contributed to Bravo's struggles, Guardiola said: "Maybe, maybe. Yeah, maybe.

"[I take] all the responsibility as a manager. You have to accept what happens right now about my job, of course, I'm willing to accept that." In the first moment I reacted like 'Ahhhh it's a pity', the second time I looked at myself, and what I want from my players, to let them know individually what they can do better. So always five minutes after the game finishes I say what can I do to get the team better.

"I never in my life blame bad results [on the players], the reason why, I don't do it, I never do, say the reason why we lost is because of Claudio Bravo. It's one of the reasons why, but there are many many other reasons why." (Source: ESPN)

Australian Open: Rafael Nadal survives five-set thriller against Alexander Zverev

Rafael Nadal delivered a resounding message to his Australian Open rivals by coming from behind to win a five-set thriller against Alexander Zverev.

Nadal defied doubts about both his fitness and form during a pulsating four-hour contest on Rod Laver Arena, at the end of which he had beaten the talented Zverev 4-6, 6-3, 6-7 (5-7), 6-3, 6-2.

The Spaniard will now continue his pursuit of a 15th grand slam title against either sixth seed Gael Monfils or Germany's world No33 Philipp Kohlschreiber.

When the final point was won, Nadal thrashed his arms in delight as the 30-year-old moved into the last 16 of a grand slam for only the second time in six attempts.

More than just his progress, however, this victory could do wonders for confidence given Nadal, back from another injury lay-off had lost his last three five-setters at major tournaments.

Zverev showed here why he is considered a multiple grand slam winner of the future but the 19-year-old looked to be struggling with cramp at the end, as Nadal twice came from a set down to go through.

Asked how he won, Nadal said: "By fighting. And by running a lot. I think everybody knows how good Alexander now is.

"He is the future of our sport and the present too. It was a tough match for me, I was not playing my best and not feeling well because I was losing too much court.

"Then I changed the dynamic in the third, I was feeling better [and] I had more time to control the points from the baseline.

"After losing the tie-break, I said: 'I need to fight for every point. Forget the result.' And that's what I did."

One break was enough to settle each of the opening two sets but Zverev showed nerves of steel in the third, pulling 6-5 ahead in the tie-break before driving home a backhand winner.

Nadal stormed 3-0 clear in the fourth and then served out, leaping up to finish



a backhand smash and then jumping a second time, this time to punch the air in celebration.

The Spaniard broke again at the start of the decider but Zverev hit back, opening up 0-40 at 2-1. He missed the first chance by framing a forehand into the crowd, and then a second, but grabbed the third when Nadal sent an anxious forehand long.

At 2-2, a scintillating game, lasting nine minutes, ensued. A wide Zverev backhand gave Nadal break point but the Spaniard's

pass hit the net. Nadal had a second break point but this time Zverev unleashed a backhand winner cross-court.

And then at deuce, Nadal chased down a Zverev volley and whipped it down the line. This time he won the break as a Zverev forehand landed long.

Zverev hobbled into the changeover, mentally shot and perhaps physically worn down, as the physio enveloped his left thigh in spray. Nadal held for 4-2 and, with his opponent on the ropes, went for the kill.

He sent one forehand left, one forehand right before driving a winner into the gap. He guided a backhand lob over Zverev's head and then cracked a forehand down the line. He chased down Zverev's drop-shot and patted it away for a winner.

One more rasping forehand and he had the second break, victory within his grasp. All that was left was for Nadal to serve out and when a tired Zverev forehand hit the net, his match was finally won.

(Source: Guardian)

Mario Balotelli asks 'Is racism legal in France?' after accusing Bastia fans



A furious Mario Balotelli asked fans if racism was "legal in France" after the Nice striker accused Bastia fans of abusing him during his team's 1-1 Ligue 1 draw on Friday.

The Italian posted a message on his Instagram page on Saturday, saying the incident was a "real shame".

"Yesterday the result against Bastia was right ... we will work more and try to get our objective ... the referee was good too but I have a question for French people ... Is it normal that Bastia supporters make monkey noise and 'uh uh' for the whole game and no one of the 'commissions discipline' say nothing?" Balotelli, on loan

from Liverpool this season, wrote.

"So is racism LEGAL in France? Or only in Bastia? Football is an amazing sport ... those people like Bastia supporters make it horrible."

Bastia were docked two points by the French League in the 2007-08 season after fans racially abused a Libourne St Serin player during a Ligue 2 game.

Officials from the club or the French League were not immediately available for comment.

Nice are top of the Ligue 1 standings with 46 points from 21 games. Bastia are 15th on 21 points.

(Source: Reuters)

'Juve have won the Scudetto of getting criticised' - Allegri blasts unnecessary



Massimiliano Allegri says Juventus have won the "Scudetto of getting criticised" after pessimism surrounding their form of late, insisting they have no reason to panic.

Doubts have loomed over the Bianconeri's ability to defend their title following their 2-1 defeat at the hands of Fiorentina.

The Turin giants hold a one-point lead over Roma at the top of the table with a game in hand, but have been less dominant than in previous seasons, suffering four defeats so far this term. But Allegri insists last weekend's loss does not affect their confidence as they prepare to face Lazio and urges calm over predicting their position at the end of the season.

"A team does not lose its quality just be-

cause it loses a game. We need to keep our heads and remain focused," Allegri told a press conference.

"Juventus have won the Scudetto of getting criticised, at least. We are still one point clear at the top but we need to start digging deep for wins if we are to stay there.

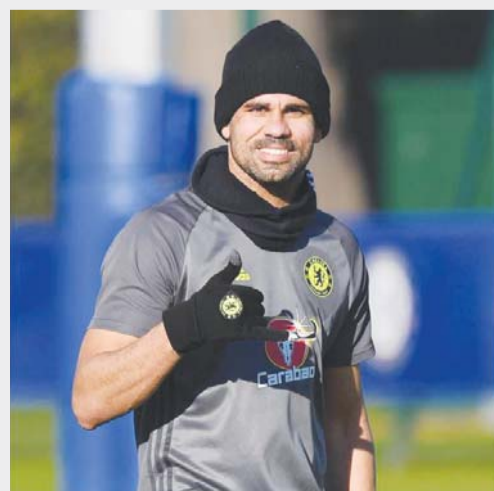
"Nothing should be taken for granted in Serie A. We need to go out there and show why we are the best. Our results are there for all to see. Winning five titles in a row, it is normal for the bar to continue rising.

"Defending must be done as a unit. We have conceded sloppy goals recently and that needs to change."

(Source: Goal)



@liverpoolfc We have a new Academy Coach - his name? @stevengerrard!



@chelseafc Diego Costa is fit and available for Sunday's game having recovered from a back injury! ??#CFC #Chelsea



@r19Always play till the end!!!! #19

Iran learn AFC Women's Asian Cup 2018 qualifying opponents

Twenty-one nations learned their opponents for the AFC Women's Asian Cup Jordan 2018 qualifiers when the official draw was held in the Jordanian capital of Amman on Saturday.

The Teams

Korea Republic, Thailand, Vietnam, Jordan, Myanmar, Chinese Taipei, Uzbekistan, Philippines, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Bahrain, Islamic Republic of Iran, India, Palestine, DPR Korea, Guam, Iraq, Singapore, Syria, Tajikistan and the United Arab Emirates.

Draw Result

Group A: A1 Jordan A2 Philippines A3 Bahrain A4 Iraq A5 UAE A6 Tajikistan (hosts)

Group B: B1 Korea Republic B2 Uzbekistan B3 Hong Kong B4 India B5 DPR Korea (hosts)

Group C: C1 Thailand C2 Chinese Taipei C3 Lebanon C4 Palestine (hosts) C5 Guam

Group D: D1 Vietnam (hosts) D2 Myanmar D3 IR Iran D4 Syria D5 Singapore

The three highest-ranked women's national teams from the last AFC Women's Asian Cup – Japan, Australia and China PR – received automatic qualification into the eight-team finals. The group winners of each of the four qualifying groups will qualify for the finals in Jordan.

Jordan as hosts also received automatic qualification, but they have expressed interest to participate in the qualifiers. Therefore, if case they finish top of their qualifying group, the runner-up team will also advance to the final competition. The qualifiers will kick off on April 3, 2017.

The finals, which will be held from April 7 to 22, 2018, which will also serve as the Asian qualifiers for the FIFA Women's World Cup France 2019.

Match Schedule:

Group A

April 3: A3 v A1, A4 v A6, A2 v A5
April 5: A1 v A5, A2 v A4, A3 v A6
April 7: A5 v A3, A6 v A2, A1 v A4
April 10: A4 v A5, A6 v A1, A2 v A3
April 12: A5 v A6, A3 v A4, A1 v A2
Groups B through D



April 3: BCD3 v BCD 2, BCD5 v BCD4
April 5: BCD4 v BCD1, BCD5 v BCD3
April 7: BCD1 v BCD5, BCD2 v BCD4

April 9: BCD2 v BCD5, BCD3 v BCD1
April 11: BCD4 v BCD3, BCD1 v BCD2

(Source: the-afc)

Granatkin Memorial tournament great for Iran U-18 football team: coach

Iran U-18 football coach Abbas Chamanian said that Valentin Granatkin Memorial has been great for them to gain experience.

Iran finished 14th in the tournament, which was held in Saint Petersburg, Russia on January 8 to 21.

"After the first match I said at the press conference that the Granatkin Memorial is a great opportunity to gain important experience for us. And that's what we managed to achieve here – we learnt a lot," Chamanian said.

"I would like to thank everyone who is involved in making this tournament happen. I personally liked that we could analyze the way all sixteen participating teams were playing. The tournament timing looks optimal for us, because it fits the gap between the Asian Cup and the Youth World Cup," he added.

"Coming here we knew it would be hard, harder than many other teams with regard to one-on-one duels against taller and physically stronger opponents. Nevertheless, we see the Saint Petersburg tournament as a perfect experience. I hope that it will be helpful in the future and that we'll be able to correct mistakes that we revealed here," he went on to say. (Source: Tasnim)



Iran futsal coach Nazemosharia extends contract

Iran futsal coach Mohammad Nazemosharia signed a new contract on Saturday.

The contract will keep him at the helm of the Iranian futsal team until 2020. Nazemosharia replaced Jesus Candelas in Team Melli in September 2015. He led the team to secure the 2016 AFC Futsal Championship title after edging out host Uzbekistan 2-1 in the final match.

Under guidance of Nazemosharia, Iran also made history, winning the Colombia 2016 FIFA Futsal World Cup third place.

Futsal is a popular sport in Iran and the Iranian team is the most decorated in Asia, winning 11 titles at the AFC Futsal Championship out of 14. (Source: Tasnim)

Iran wheelchair basketball to participate at U23 Asia Oceania qualifying



S P O R T S Iran wheelchair basketball team traveled to Bangkok, Thailand Friday night to take part in the U23 Asia Oceania Zone qualifying tournament for the U23 World Championships.

Six countries will participate in the championship, which will commence on the 23rd January in Bangkok, Thailand.

The six teams from across the Zone will be competing for three spots at the U23 World Championships in Toronto this June. The competing teams are: Thailand, Iran, Australia, China, India and Japan.

"I can say we are 90 percent ready for the competition," Iran coach Hassan Palar told Paralympic.ir. "Our main goal is winning the title as well

as booking a place in the U23 World Championships."

Traditionally Australia, Iran and Japan have been favorites to win the tournament. However at the last Zone tournament China showed that they are also to be taken as a serious opponent when they defeated Japan in their final pool game but after a successful Kitakyushu Cup last December, Japan are expected to continue their strong form in the tournament in hope to guarantee them a place at the U23 World Championships.

The tournament promises to have high level games with many close results. A simple loss of concentration from any team could easily see them eliminated from the medal round and consequently miss the opportunity to go to Canada.

Branko Ivankovic and Carlos Queiroz voice deep sorrow over Plasco disaster



S P O R T S Persepolis head coach Branko Ivankovic and Team Melli boss Carlos Queiroz expressed deep sorrow over the burning and collapse of the 17-story Plasco building in center of Tehran which buried more than 25 firefighters.

"This couldn't be worse, I hope we do not experience such disasters again. Firefighters are always in danger but the reason they do their job is just the love they have for people," Branko Ivankovic, who went to one of Tehran's fire stations to show his condolence with the firefighters, said.

Team Melli head coach Carlos Queiroz, whose argument with Branko Ivankovic became a hot topic in the local media, also expressed his condolence over the tragic death of the firefighters.

"Dramatic pictures taken from a

place very close to the tragedy show two firefighters in rescue action shortly after the building collapse.

"All words are few to exalt the courage and sacrifice of these men. Also, time to support all those who are suffering and once again to present condolences to all families and friends.

"May God have mercy on all those who have left. Our thoughts and prayers are with all the victims and disappeared, as well as with their families," said Queiroz in a statement on his official Facebook page.

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

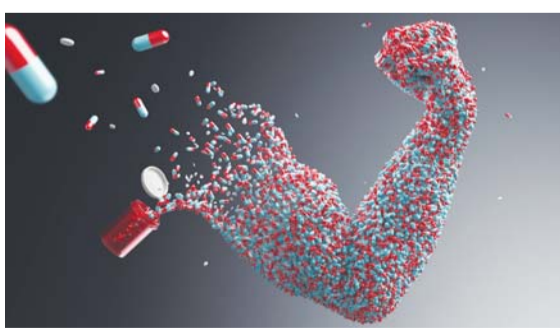
Nine Iranians face disciplinary action for doping

S P O R T S Seven Iranian athletes and two coaches faced disciplinary action for performance-enhancing drug use.

The seven athletes faced a four-year ban from sport while two coaches received a lifetime ban from the sport of athletics.

The name of Iranian athletes and coaches are as follow:

- Reyhaneh Khatooni (cyclist) – four years – for the banned substance clenbuterol
- Alireza Haghi (cyclist) – four years – for high levels of testosterone
- Saeid Nezamabad (handball player) – four years –



for high levels of testosterone

- Amirhossein Mohammad Maleki (kabaddi player) – four years – for norandrosterone and hidroclorotiazida
- Ali Kiadaliri (weightlifter) – four years – for the banned substance stanozolol
- Mehdi Nabiollahi (weightlifter) – four years – for the banned substance metandinon
- Mostafa Afzali (athletic) – four years – for the banned substance stanozolol
- Hamid Ebrahiminejad (athletic coach) – lifetime suspension
- Pouria Ahmadi (athletic coach) – lifetime suspension

Andranik Teymourian joins Iran's Esteghlal



Iranian popular football team Esteghlal completed the signing of Andranik Teymourian on Saturday.

The 33-year-old midfielder joined Esteghlal from Machine Sazi on a six-month contract for an undisclosed fee. Teymourian started his playing career

with Oghab F.C. in Iran's Azadegan League, and continued his professional career playing for F.C. Aboomoslem in the Iranian Premier League.

He represented Iran national football team in 2006 and 2014 World Cups. Teymourian signed a two-year deal

with FA Premier League club Bolton Wanderers after the 2006 World Cup and has also played at Fulham and Barnsley.

Ando has played in Iranian clubs Tractor Sazi and Saipa and Qatari clubs Al-Kharitiyath and Umm Salal. (Source: Tasnim)

Former referee Collina among committee chairmen named by FIFA

Former World Cup referee Pierluigi Collina is among nine new committee chairmen who have been named by football's governing body FIFA.

FIFA has reduced its number of standing committees from 26 to nine under reforms which were passed by its Congress last February in response to the worst corruption scandal in its history.

Forty individuals and two sports marketing companies were indicted in the United States while other officials, including former FIFA president Sepp Blatter, have been banned by FIFA's own ethics committee.

Italian Collina, who refereed to the 2002 World Cup final between Brazil and Germany, will head the referees' committee which interprets the laws of the games and chooses officials for the World Cup and other FIFA tournaments.

Collina was previously head of refereeing at European football body UEFA, where Gianni Infantino was secretary general before he was elected FIFA president last February.

Canada's Victor Montagliani, head of the CONCACAF Confederation which runs the sport in North and Central America and the Caribbean, will head the new football stakeholders committee, arguably the most important of the nine.

Former Brazil international Cafu and English Premier League chief executive Richard Scudamore, are among the members of the committee which will deal with a number of key issues in the sport and is due to hold its first meeting in March.

FIFA says the committee deals with "the relationship between clubs, players, leagues, member associations, confederations and FIFA as well as with issues relating to the interests of club football worldwide."

In practise, the committee will have to address issues such as the financial gulf between the richest leagues and the rest, working conditions for players and fixture congestion which creates conflict between clubs and national associations.

Other members include Bobby Barnes, a former English footballer who is now on the board of the world players' union FIFPro, Bundesliga chief executive Christian Seifert and former Netherlands goalkeeper Edwin van der Saar.

Alejandro Dominguez, head of the South American Football Confederation CONMEBOL, will chair the finance committee and African football boss Issa Hayatou will head the associations committee. (Source: Reuters)





Poem of the day

At every instant and from every side, resounds the call of Love:
We are going to sky, who wants to come with us?
Rumi

Prayer Times

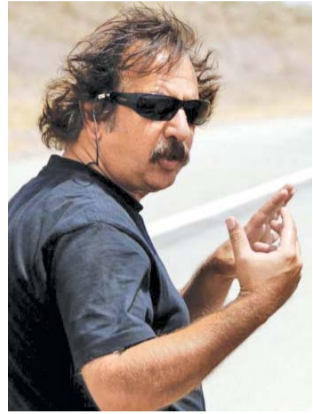
Noon:12:16 Evening: 17:41 Dawn: 5:43 tomorrow Sunrise: 7:10 (tomorrow)

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Majid Majidi to make his first English-language film in India

A R T TEHRAN — Majid Majidi, the Iranian director of acclaimed movie "Muhammad (S), the Messenger of God", is in India to study the locations for his first English-language feature film, "Floating Garden".



The film is to be shot across Mumbai, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan and Kashmir, India's Trans Asia News Service reported on its website on January 20.

Majidi has been visiting India very frequently in order to find suitable locations.

This is a project the filmmaker decided to start nearly a decade back when he visited Kashmir.

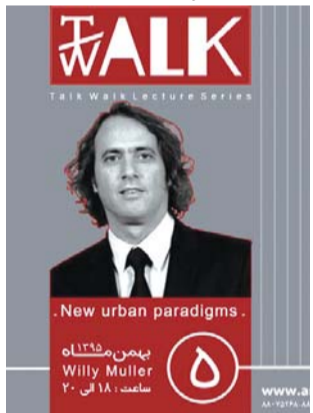
The leaked pictures trending online show Bollywood star Deepika Padukone is up for the new project with Majidi.

Majidi's "Children of Heaven" earned Iran's first Oscar nomination in 1999 and his "The Song of Sparrows" was nominated for a Golden Bear award for best film at the Berlin film festival in 2008. Reza Najafi won the festival's Silver Bear for best actor for his role in the film.

"Baran", "The Color of Paradise", and "The Weeping Willow" are Majidi's other noteworthy credits.

Willy Muller to discuss new urban paradigms in Tehran

CULTURE TEHRAN — The Barcelona-based renowned Argentine architect Willy Muller is scheduled to deliver a lecture about urban paradigms in Tehran on February 3.



The lecture program titled "Urban Paradigms: Towards the Extreme Urbanism?" has been organized by the Contemporary Architects Association of Iran.

"During the first decade of the XXI century we have witnessed one of the most singular demographic events of the last centuries: for the first time in history there are more people inhabiting urban environments than the rural ones," he wrote in the preface to his speech.

As a consequence, on the one side the exponential growth of many metropolitan populations is reaching levels of unprecedented social complexity, and on the other side the geographical environment in which societies are settled is ever more compromised, insecure and threatened," he added.

He pointed out to Lagos, Manila, Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong, Mumbai and Tokyo as cities that are starting to manage an unknown type of urban complexity and added, "We are facing limit situations of obsolescence and change of paradigms, where the classical models of success will not be sufficiently useful."

Muller is the founder of the Willy Muller Architects, a Barcelona-based office dedicated to architecture and urbanism design. The office has been awarded with a series of international prizes for its works and architectural competitions.

It also has representative offices in Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong, Saint Petersburg and several other cities.

Javad Bahrami wins top prize at Damonfar festival

CULTURE TEHRAN — Young artist Javad Bahrami won the top prize at the 6th Damonfar Visual Arts Festival, the organizers announced on Friday.

The Damonfar Visual Arts Festival is dedicated to artists under 25 years of age and the first place winner will get an opportunity to travel to Germany to visit the Faber-Castell factory.

The participants including the artists and the jury members were asked to observe a moment's silence for the victims who lost their lives in the collapse of the Plasco Building in Tehran after a fierce fire broke out in the 17-storey commercial center on Thursday.

Damonfar Managing Director Seifollah Puya-Rad, in his brief words, called the paintings by the young artists thought-provoking issue, adding, "The young artists act like a mirror reflecting the society. We must hand the society to them so that they make the future. Therefore, the officials need to pay due attention to the hidden words in the paintings and study them."

He also asked the public sector to support those members of the private sector active in promoting art.

Painter and art expert Aidin Aghdashlu, who presided over the jury of the festival, asked the participating young artists not to feel despairing if their works were not selected.

"You must work and work and work and be hopeful of the future. You must know that Aghdashlu could not sell his works either when he was 20," he told the young artists.

"The young artists need to be more patient and make more efforts. Many 20-year-old artists are better than me when I was 20. And if they continue this way they will have a brighter future," he asserted.

The Damonfar Company is the Iranian representative of France's Pebeo and Germany's



Javad Bahrami (3rd R) poses with the organizers of the 6th Damonfar Visual Arts Festival at Tehran's Mellat Cineplex on January 20, 2017 after accepting the top prize of the event.

Faber-Castell, two companies that manufacture art materials.

Juergen Braun, a Faber-Castell official also attending the ceremony, said supporting the Damonfar festival is one of the major goals of the company.

He said that the company showcases the film of

the festival all across the world every year to make people acquainted with the Iranian artists.

Several artists were also honored on the sidelines of the program. The ceremony ended by honoring veteran artist Mohammad-Ebrahim Jafari for his lifetime achievements.

Fajr theater festival offers sympathy to Plasco victims' colleagues

A R T TEHRAN — The organizers of the 35th Fajr International Theater Festival paid a visit to Fire Station 46 in Tehran on Friday night, expressing their sympathy to the firefighters who lost two of their colleagues in the collapse of the Plasco Building.

They also placed flowers in front of the pictures of the deceased

firefighters as well as lighted candles in memory of the victims of the tragedy, some Persian media announced on Saturday.

Fire Station 46 commander Jabbarzadeh expressed his thanks to the organizers and said, "This is our job and we are always on call; your sympathy encourages us to be of service to our people."

The Plasco Building, a 17-storey commercial center in downtown Tehran, collapsed after a raging fire on Thursday.

Dozens of rescue teams are currently trying to unearth about 50 people buried under the rubble.

The Fajr theater festival opened on Friday in Tehran and will run until January 30.



The organizers of the 35th Fajr International Theater Festival pay a visit to Fire Station 46 in Tehran on January 20, 2017 to express their sympathy to the firefighters who lost their colleagues in the collapse of the Plasco Building.

PICTURE OF THE DAY

Tehran Times/Saeid Goli



Art aficionados visit an exhibition of theater posters and pictures at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran on January 20, 2017. The showcase, which has been organized on the sidelines of the 35th Fajr International Theater Festival, will run until January 30.

Uproar in France after Polanski Is Named Host of César Awards

PARIS (New York Times) — French feminists are protesting the announcement this week that Roman Polanski would preside over next month's César awards, France's version of the Oscars.

Mr. Polanski was convicted on charges of having sex with a 13-year-old girl in 1977; he fled the United States for Europe before sentencing the next year.

Laurence Rossignol, France's minister for families, children and women's rights, on Friday called the decision to ask Mr. Polanski to preside over the Feb. 24 ceremony "shocking and surprising." She added that it furthered "a culture of rape that we're

moving on from" and said the choice showed "an indifference toward the charges against him."

A leading French feminist organization, Osez le féminisme (Dare to be feminists), also spoke out. "Regardless of the quality of Mr. Polanski's films, we can't remain silent about the fact that 40 years ago he escaped American justice," the group's spokeswoman, Claire Serre-Combe, told Agence France-Presse.

Last month, Poland's supreme court rejected an extradition request for Mr. Polanski, 83, from the United States. The filmmaker is a dual citizen of Poland and France, which does not extradite its citizens.

Behind the Big Mac: McDonald's gets movie and literary spotlight

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — The man who turned a popular California hamburger stand into the McDonald's global fast-food empire is having a posthumous Hollywood moment.

Michael Keaton plays Ray Kroc, a hard-drinking, somewhat desperate middle-aged milkshake equipment salesman who 60 years ago out-hustled the McDonald brothers to gain control of their namesake brand in "The Founder," which is opening in U.S. movie theaters on Friday.

Kroc, who died in 1984, convinced Richard and Maurice McDonald to let him franchise their clean, quick-service restaurants that helped end the U.S. carhop era. He then wrested so much control over the brand that the brothers agreed to be

bought out in 1961 for \$2.7 million. "I'm drawn to stories about polarizing, difficult men," said screenwriter Robert Siegel, who also wrote "The Wrestler."

"Keaton is good at that oily charm," Siegel told Reuters.

The film closes with the bombshell allegation that Kroc cheated the McDonald brothers out of what would have been a massive annual royalty payment.

The McDonald brothers' survivors, who struck a rights deal with the film's producers, have made that charge. However, it was not confirmed by other sources or in media interviews with the brothers themselves, whose major complaint appeared to be Kroc's appropriation of the McDonald's founder title.

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Drawing

■ Baharm Kalthornia is displaying his latest drawing series "Suspicion's Share" at A Gallery.

The exhibition will run until February 10 at the gallery located at 7 Arshad Alley, off Azodi St., Karim Khan Ave.

Photo

■ A collection photos titled "It Happened at the Urban Margins" by Hamed Rasti is currently on display in an exhibition at Sobhan Gallery.

The exhibition entitled "Maze" runs until December 22 at the gallery, which can be found at 4 Besat Dead End, Pishtaz Alley, off Abbasi St. off Sadr Highway.

Sculpture/jewelry

■ An exhibition of sculptures and jewelry by Amir-Hossein Delbari is currently underway at Saless Gallery.

The exhibit will continue until February 7 at the gallery located at 148 Karim Khan St.

Actor Kazem Afrandnia to undergo operation today

A R T TEHRAN — Actor Kazem Afrandnia will undergo an operation today after he had a stroke a few days ago, his son said on Saturday.

"My father has been admitted to the ICU in Tehran's Shohada-ye Tajrish Hospital and will have an operation today according to the doctors," Abrash said in a press release on Saturday.

The doctors will decide about his situation after the operation, he added.

Afrandnia has played in many films and several TV series including "Killing the Rabid Dogs" (2001) by Bahram Beizai, "Kanimanga" (1987) by Seifollah Daad and "Mirza Noruz' Shoes" (1985) by Mohammad Motavassellani.