

4 Iran plans to launch 3 trade offices in Europe by late Sept.

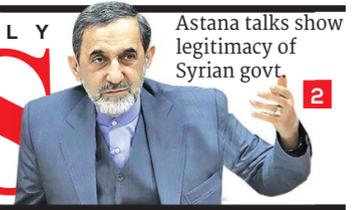
12 Healthcare reform plan available to Islamic, regional countries: minister

15 All systems go for Iran at WABA

16 "The Salesman" nominated for Oscar

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Astana talks show legitimacy of Syrian govt.

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No serious threat to nuclear deal: Zarif

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Tuesday that there is no "serious threat" to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action if efforts are made to protect it.

Zarif made the remarks at a meeting of Tehran's chamber of commerce.

"The JCPOA is not facing serious threat if we make efforts to guard it," the minister noted.

Under the JCPOA, the official name for the nuclear deal, Iran put some limits on its nuclear program in exchange for a termination of all nuclear related sanctions.

Zarif who was Iran's chief negotiator with great powers and the European Union said sanctions against a country causes concern in the world and the JCPOA calmed the global atmosphere.

"The success of the JCPOA was soothing the international psychological atmosphere about Iran and due to this reason, the ill-wishers of the Islamic Republic made the most efforts before the conclusion of the JCPOA to prevent this calm atmosphere," the chief diplomat explained.

Though the nuclear deal has led to the lifting of oil, transport, and insurance, and financial sanctions on Iran some banks are still refusing to do transactions with Iran, fearing a punishment by the United States.

Zarif said the nuclear deal was able to remove economic pressure against Iran to some extent.

The nuclear agreement, clinched in July 2015, went into effect in January 2016.

Choice of Mashhad as Islamic Culture Capital celebrated

Iran, Russia, Turkey agree on mechanism to ensure Syria truce



See page 16

IRNA/Mohsen Bakhsandeh

Palestinians bring anti-settlements rally to Knesset

Palestinian citizens of Israel have gathered outside the Knesset in West al-Quds (Jerusalem) to protest against the demolition of Palestinian homes.

The rally at the Israeli parliament on Monday came a day after Israeli authorities approved building permits for 566 settler homes in occupied East al-Quds, a move that has drawn condemnation from Palestinian leaders.

The Jewish settlements are considered illegal under international law.

The approval of the building plan on Sunday came after the inauguration of President Donald Trump in the United States, with Israeli officials saying the permits had been held up until the end of Barack Obama's administration, which had recently been critical of Israeli settlement activity.

"The rules of the game have changed with Donald Trump's arrival as president," Meir Turgeman, al-Quds (Jerusalem) deputy mayor, told AFP news agency.

Turgeman said that city officials approved the plans that had been previously postponed at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's request following a United Nations Security Council resolution in December against Israeli settlement building.

The new permits are for homes in the settlement neighborhoods of Pisgat Zeav, Ramot and Ramat Shlomo, according to Turgeman, who also heads the planning committee that approved them.

Turgeman said plans for about 11,000 other homes were also in process in East al-Quds, though he did not say when they could proceed.

U.S. embassy

In a separate development, the United States said that it is in the early stages of talks to fulfill President Donald Trump's pledge to move the American embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to al-Quds, a move opposed by the Palestinian leadership.

"We are at the very beginning stages of even discussing this subject," said White House spokesman Sean Spicer.

Hundreds of Palestinians protested against the plans in cities across the occupied West Bank, including East al-Quds, on Sunday.

Trump reportedly spoke to Netanyahu earlier on Sunday.

Al-Quds (Jerusalem) mayor, Nir Barkat, welcomed the Trump administration's announcement. (Source: Al Jazeera)

U.S. cannot unilaterally renegotiate nuclear deal: professor

INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — A professor of the State University of Minnesota says the new U.S. administration under President Donald Trump cannot unilaterally seek a renegotiation of the nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"The United States cannot unilaterally renegotiate the JCPOA. Trump clearly does not understand this," William O. Beeman tells the Tehran Times.

The nuclear deal, signed between Iran, great powers, and the European Union, has been endorsed by the UN Security Council.

However, Beeman says, Trump and the Republicans "can try to do other things to disadvantage Iran, but as long as Iran adheres to the JCPOA it will stay in place."

Following is the text of the interview:

How do you assess Trump's remarks about the JCPOA?

A: Nor did he understand the return of Iran's own assets in conjunction (but not as a result of) the JCPOA. The other parties to the JCPOA will not abandon it. Trump and the Republicans can try to do other things to disadvantage Iran, but as long as Iran adheres to the JCPOA it will stay in place.

Trump has been talking tough on China and there was a phone call between him

and the Taiwanese president. In light of these developments what is your prediction of Sino-U.S. relations?

A: This has made the Chinese very nervous. Trump has campaigned on the very simplistic notion that the Chinese are cheating the United States in terms of trade, so these moves toward Taiwan might be seen as a negotiating tactic. There will be much more negotiation with China. However, Trump forgets that the Chinese hold huge amounts of U.S. debt. It is a big leverage point for the Chinese. However, the Chinese holdings of U.S. debt has now fallen. Japan is now the largest foreign holder of U.S. debt. →13

Top Iranian handicraft exporters, associates honored

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Top Iranian handicraft exporters and associates, including managers of exemplary online crafts stores, were honored in a ceremony held in Tehran on Tuesday.

Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization Director Zahra Ahmadipour, Deputy Director Bahman Namvar-Motlaq, and Handicrafts Exporters Association Director Majidreza Hariri attended the ceremony, among other cultural officials and activists in the sector, according to Mehr news agency.

Amid honorees were Adel Bashiri-Jalal, a major exporter of ceramics and potteries; Seyyed Zia Ziaratnia who exports traditional jewelry; Mohammad-Taqi Mohammadi, a

glasswork trader; and Seyyed Morteza Naqibi who runs an online crafts shop.

Addressing the audience, Namvar-Motlaq stressed the need for boosting handicraft exports, highlighting that the annual value of handicraft exports (excluding rugs and carpets) should reach \$1 billion as the sixth five-year development plan (2016-2021) has projected.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the official attached importance to the promotion of Iranian crafts in overseas bazaars and marketplaces, particularly in Europe and the U.S.

He put the spotlight on the private-sector potentials as well, urging all the beneficiaries to seize the opportunity provided in the wake

of the landmark nuclear deal.

Based on recent statistics compiled by the CHTHO, Iran has exported handicrafts worth around \$200 million since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2016).

The official figures also suggest that exports of handicrafts have been on the rise over the past three years, witnessing an overall 59 percent of hike.

Over the past couple of years, dozens of Iranian handicrafts have gained the UNESCO Seal of Excellence. For instance, in 2010, a total of 65 handicrafts on various themes including enamel, tile, metalwork, leatherwork, wood carving received the privilege.



Tehran Times/Masoud Saki

An Iranian artist draws a teahouse painting at an exhibition of works of this form of Iranian painting at Tehran's Niavaran Cultural Center on January 23, 2017.

The teahouse has had various functions in different eras during its 400-year history in Iran. Teahouses used to be places where people gathered to spend their leisure time listening Iranian traditional storytellers narrating stories from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. People talked and exchanged views, and along with lute, wise and generous people who helped poor people.

Teahouse painters emerged in such an atmosphere. They listened to the discussions and tales, using them as subjects for the paintings they drew on the walls, tiles, stones and canvases.

Syrian peace talks have wrapped up in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana, with Iran, Russia and Turkey agreeing on the establishment of a trilateral mechanism to support the ceasefire in the country and monitor possible violations.

The final joint statement, which was read by Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov on Tuesday afternoon (local time), underlined the importance of maintaining the national sovereignty of Syria.

The trio stressed that there was no military solution to the Syria conflict and it can be only resolved through a political process based on full implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254.

The three countries also agreed to work out a trilateral agreement with the goal of supervising the ceasefire in the country to guarantee all parties' commitment to Syria truce and prevent possible violations of ceasefire.

Elsewhere in the statement, Iran, Russia and Turkey backed participation of Syria's armed opposition in United Nations-sponsored negotiations on Syria, which are scheduled to be held in the Swiss city of Geneva next month. →13

EDITORIAL
By Hassan Lasjerdi
Tehran Times editor-in-chief

Regional troika one step closer to stability in Syria

The Astana meeting which was held with the participation of Iran, Russia, Turkey, the Syrian government, opposition groups and the UN envoy was wrapped with issuing a statement.

The statement highlights some important points such as the necessity of stabilizing the ceasefire, paying attention to peaceful strategies, fighting terrorism and maintaining Syria's territorial integrity along with a continued inter-Syrian dialogue.

Given the above-mentioned points, the Astana meeting can be considered a successful step in the political procedure of the Syrian developments and the troika efforts in line with continuation of previous actions which were based on reducing the hostilities between the Syrian government and the opposition and fulfill demands of the opposition through dialogue.

Many experts do not think much is to be gained from the talks due to the heavy load of demands brought in by the sides, even pointing to a possible failure of the talks. However, it seems through good management conducted by Iran, Russia, and Turkey, the two conflicting sides have managed to reduce the amount of their demands to more reasonable levels.

Nevertheless, the troika's insistence upon establishing mechanisms to help sustain the ceasefire and prevent any provocative moves by the conflicting sides shows that the three countries are serious in their pursuit of the ceasefire. The ceasefire is a necessary step to create enough grounds for the Syrian government and the opposition to continue their negotiations until a positive result comes by.

The liberation of Aleppo in December has tipped the scales in against the rebels, putting them in a passive and susceptible state. Thus, the opposition is trying to disturb the situation in a bid to gain advantages, particularly when it comes to developments in the battlefield. →13

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Iran names negotiators for Hajj talks

POLITICS TEHRAN — The names of **d e s k** members of an Iranian delegation planned to travel to Saudi Arabia on February 23 for talks on the Hajj pilgrimage of Iranians have been given to the Arab country, the representative of the Leader in Hajj and pilgrimage affairs said on Tuesday.

Ali Qazi-Askar hoped that the negotiations would yield good results and lead to the successful management of the Hajj pilgrimage, Tasnim news agency reported.



Iranian official meets Syrian chief negotiator in Astana talks

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's deputy **d e s k** foreign minister for Arab and African affairs met on Tuesday with Bashar al-Jafari, head of the Syrian government's delegation to the Astana talks.

During the meeting which took place on the sidelines of the meeting in Kazakhstan, Hossein Jaber Ansari and al-Jafari discussed the latest situation in Syria as well as the outcome of the negotiations, IRIB reported.

They also exchanged views on main points of the first day of intra-Syrian talks in Astana, which seeks to settle the Syrian crisis through diplomacy.



Iranian delegation in Moscow for human rights talks

POLITICS TEHRAN — An Iranian **d e s k** delegation arrived in Moscow on Tuesday to attend the third round of consultations on human rights between the Islamic Republic and the Russian Federation.

The Iranian team is headed by Zahra Pishgahi Fard, the director general of human rights and women's affairs at the Foreign Ministry, Mehr reported.

The two countries have seriously criticized the UN's instrumental use of human rights and hold common views on the rights of minorities, the family, religious tolerance, and fight against extremism.



Iran calls for Muslim unity to eradicate terrorism

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Iranian culture **d e s k** minister has called for solidarity of Muslims to help uproot terrorism and extremism in the region.

"Unity is a workable approach to help overcome terrorism and extremism in the Islamic world," Reza Salehi Amiri said on Tuesday, addressing a ceremony in the holy city of Mashhad, Fars reported.

The Iranian culture minister underlined that today the Muslims face an enemy who tends to portray a violent picture of Islam.

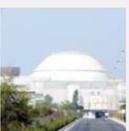


Iranian MP urges Muslim unity

POLITICS TEHRAN — An Iranian lawmaker **d e s k** who is a member of the executive board of the Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union has said Islamic countries are in need of unity in the face of the current global situation.

The way to boost unity among Islamic countries is to strengthen the basics that create unanimity, Kazem Jalali said on Tuesday, Mizan reported.

The Islamic Inter-Parliamentary Union is holding a summit in Mali, which started on Monday and will last until Saturday.



Unit 1 of Bushehr nuclear plant halted for overhaul

POLITICS TEHRAN —The deputy head of **d e s k** the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran has said Unit 1 of the Bushehr nuclear power plant has been shut down for overhaul and fuel replacement.

Mohammad Ahmadian said on Monday that a total of 6600 million kilowatt-hour power was generated by the unit and delivered to the countrywide power grid since March 2016 to January 2017, IRNA reported.

Ahmadian explained that fuel replacement at the power plant takes place every ten months.

Zarif talks sense on sluggish banking



Iran's Zarif says it takes time for normalization of banking relations with the international community given that Iran has been away from the system for years, thus, not keeping abreast of regulation updates.

correspondent banking activities of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's second term (2009-2013).

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's **d e s k** Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif launched a strong defense of the 2015 international nuclear deal with world powers, blaming long parting from the global banking system as one cause for the sluggish opening in international banking ties after the accord.

Zarif was making the comments in a speech to members of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture on Tuesday.

"We weren't involved in banking developments that happened in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and new regulations introduced thereafter," he explained.

While the nuclear accord removed all banking prohibition and authorization regimes on financial transfers to and from Iran and sanctions on banking activities, some banks are still skeptical it is now safe for them to restore trade ties with the country.

Large European banks cite concerns over falling foul of fines by the U.S. and have largely shown reluctance to work with Iranian counterparts with full capacity.

One more reason for the banking bottleneck, Zarif noted, is the drop in the number of shrinking

"With regard to banking transactions, the number of correspondent banks gradually decreased from 670 to 50 in 2009 and 2010."

However, the smiley minister emerged quite upbeat about full, yet gradual re-engagement with the global banking network considering the changed, positive stance toward the post-deal Iran.

"BARJAM (Persian acronym for the nuclear deal) has stopped and reversed the trend (shrinking banking activity)," he stressed.

"It takes some time to return to the beginning stage."

Positive signs are already emerging.

Back in February 2016, global transaction network SWIFT reconnected a number of Iranian banks to its system, allowing them to resume cross-border transactions with foreign banks four years after the banks were cut off from the network.

Also, in June the Financial Action Task Force, an international group that monitors money laundering worldwide welcomed Iran's adoption of, and high-level political commitment to, an Action Plan to address its money laundering deficiencies, suspending counter-measures for twelve months in order to monitor Iran's progress in implementing the Action Plan.

Astana talks show legitimacy of Syrian govt.: Velayati

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Akbar **d e s k** Velayati, the senior foreign policy advisor to the Leader, said on Tuesday that Astana talks show that all sides have acknowledged the legitimacy of the Syrian government.

The talks between the Syria government and some armed opposition groups in Astana, Kazakhstan, started on Monday and lasted until Tuesday. The talks were brokered by Iran, Russia and China.

The meeting followed a meeting in Moscow on Dec. 20 according to which the three countries of Iran, Russia and Turkey issued a declaration to silence the guns in Syria and bring the warring sides

to the negotiating table. Talking to reporters after a meeting with a number of Iraqi Yazidis in Tehran, Velayati said it is not "logical" to expect that all the differences be bridged with holding this meeting.

However, he expressed hope that the Astana meeting would result in continuation of ceasefire in the country.

The fact that the Syrian government and the opposition groups accepted a ceasefire was a "useful" step, the veteran politician noted.

Velayati said that such meetings should be held in future.

On why Iran opposed the participation

of the U.S. in the Astana talks, he said it is because the U.S. has been supporting terrorism in Syria.

■ **'Mosul will be liberated like Aleppo'**

During his meeting with the Iraqi Yazidis, Velayati said Daesh will lose its last base in Iraq when Mosul is liberated.

Mosul in Iraq is like Aleppo in Syria which was liberated in Dec. 2016, he added.

Velayati also praised Yazidis' efforts in fighting terrorism.

Elsewhere, he said that Iran supports maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity.

He said failure of the

terrorists in Iraq is definite.



Iran, Russia, Turkey release joint statement on Syria Astana talks

POLITICS Iran, Russia, and Turkey **d e s k** - the three sponsors of the Syria talks in Astana— issued a joint statement on Tuesday to set up a trilateral commission to cement and monitor the ceasefire that came into effect in Syria last month.

The statement was released after two days of talks between the Syrian government and the opposition in Kazakhstan.

The talks was aimed at bringing the Syrian government and the opposition together in order to end the long-lasting conflict in Syria, but neither side endorsed the final statement.

According to the statement, Russia, Iran and Turkey agreed that there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict and that it can only be solved politically.

The joint statement is as follows:
JOINT STATEMENT BY IRAN, RUSSIA, TURKEY ON THE INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON SYRIA

IN ASTANA, JANUARY 23-24, 2017

The delegations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Turkey, in line with the Joint Statement of their Foreign Ministers made in Moscow, on December 20, 2016 and the UN Security Council resolution 2236;

Support launching the talks between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the armed opposition groups in Astana on January 23-24, 2017;



Appreciate the participation in and facilitation of the above-mentioned talks by the UN Secretary-General Special Envoy on Syria;

Reaffirm their commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, non-sectarian and democratic State, as confirmed by the UN Security Council;

Express their conviction that there is no military solution to the Syrian conflict and that it can only be solved through a political process based on the implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 2254 in its entirety;

Will seek, through concrete steps and using their influence over the

parties, consolidation of the ceasefire regime established pursuant to the arrangements signed on December 29, 2016 and supported by the UN Security Council resolution 2336 (2016), contribution to minimizing violations, reducing violence, building confidence, ensuring unhindered humanitarian access swiftly and smoothly in line with the UN Security Council resolution 2165 (2014) and protection and free movement of civilians in Syria;

Decide to establish a trilateral mechanism to observe and ensure full compliance with the ceasefire, prevent any provocations and determine all modalities of the ceasefire;

Reiterate their determination to fight

Reformists would endorse Rouhani in upcoming election: Aref

POLITICS TEHRAN — Mohammad Reza Aref **d e s k** head of the Hope parliamentary group, has said that the reformists would support President Hassan Rouhani in the upcoming presidential election, ISNA reported.

During a press conference on Tuesday, Aref said the policy-making council of the reformist movement would support Rouhani provided that he expresses his readiness to run against for the presidential post.

"We will not pass over Rouhani," he said.

The key reformist lawmaker said the most important challenge to President Rouhani is pushing for voter turnout, emphasizing that efforts should be made for a huge turnout in the upcoming election.

"We give good grades to the [current] administration's performance," he said, reaffirming the Hope faction's



support for Rouhani.

Answering a question on the possibility of Rouhani's disqualification, Aref said it is highly unlikely that he would not be among the candidates approved by the

Guardian Council unless he wouldn't wish to take part in the election due to fatigue.

Welcoming principlists who support the Rouhani administration, Aref said, "We are ready to cooperate with [such] factions in the presidential and city council elections."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the senior MP honored the memory of Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani and admired him for playing a key role in uniting various political movements.

"Finding a replacement for Mr. Hashemi is not an easy thing to do," he said, noting that the former head of the Expediency Council had unique characteristics, which all members of the council respected.

Aref further said that Ayatollah Hashemi's absence is difficult for the reformists as well as the whole country.

Trump's secretary of state and CIA picks clear hurdles

The foreign affairs panel in the United States senate has narrowly endorsed Rex Tillerson as secretary of state, while the senate confirmed Mike Pompeo as head of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Monday green-lighted Tillerson, a former ExxonMobil boss whose nomination has been controversial largely because of his lack of government or diplomatic experience, and because of reported links to Russia.

The move cleared the way for a confirmation vote by the full chamber, which is controlled by Republican allies of Trump.

The vote in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was 11 to 10, along party lines, setting up a period of debate and a subsequent vote on an as-yet-undetermined day.

Tillerson received a major boost when Senator Marco Rubio, one of three Republicans who had expressed doubts about him, announced he would support him despite serious reservations.

Rubio said that given "uncertainty" about the direction of U.S. foreign policy, "it would be against our national interests to have this confirmation unnecessarily delayed or embroiled in controversy."

Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham, two other Republicans who had expressed reservations about Tillerson's dealings with Russia, gave their blessing on Sunday.

The committee's Democrats all voted against Tillerson. Questions about Russia dominated his confirmation hearing earlier this month after allegations that the Kremlin



Rex Tillerson

meddled in the election.

The committee endorsement of Tillerson followed a 66-32 Senate vote confirming Mike Pompeo's CIA appointment.

Pompeo, 52, is a former Army captain who graduated first in his class from the United States Military Academy at West Point. He later attended Harvard Law School and worked as an executive in the defense industry.

A staunch critic of the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, he has served on the House Intelligence Committee.

Pompeo opposes closing the U.S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay and has called for the execution of fugitive U.S. intelligence contractor Edward Snowden, whose revelations exposed massive electronic surveillance by the



Mike Pompeo

National Security Agency.

Pompeo becomes only the third member of Trump's cabinet to take up his post, as the president's Republican Party has pushed hard to speed up confirmation of his nominees.

Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly were sworn in Friday, Inauguration Day.

Republicans were also hoping to get Trump's pick for U.S. attorney general, Senator Jeff Sessions, installed swiftly.

The Senate Judiciary Committee is scheduled to vote on Sessions on Tuesday, the same day that the Foreign Relations Committee votes on South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley's nomination to be U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. (Source: agencies)

May's govt. loses court ruling on Brexit vote

Britain to introduce Article 50 legislation "within days"

Britain's Supreme Court has ruled that the government needs approval from the Parliament before proceeding with its Brexit plans, rejecting an appeal by Prime Minister Theresa May who had argued otherwise.

The court's Tuesday ruling means that May should wait for the Parliament's green light before invoking the Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty, the first step in taking Britain out of the European Union (EU).

This undermines the outcome of last year's historic EU referendum, where nearly 52 percent of Britons voted to end their country's decades-long membership in the 28-nation bloc.

The ruling follows a similar decision by Britain's High Court in November, where three senior judges ruled that the parliament, not the government alone, can trigger Article 50.

May appealed that decision, saying the lawmakers who oppose the outcome of the referendum "need to accept what the people decided."

The MPs have indicated in the past that they would give the go-ahead to May before the end of March, May's deadline to begin the negotiations with the EU.

The Supreme Court's conclusion came days after May laid out her plans for a "clean" Brexit on January 17 and said she would ask for the Parliament's approval after reaching an agreement with the EU.

She says the process would take at



least two years.

The premier threatened to walk away from a "punitive" deal with the EU and use low corporate taxes to attract business and investment from around the world.

May's plans were met by strong criticism from the head of the Labor Party Jeremy Corbyn, who attacked her for proposing a "bargain basement" plan.

The opposition leader said the PM's threat of turning Britain into a "low-pay tax haven on the shores of Europe" was "demeaning."

Meanwhile, Brexit Minister David Davis said on Tuesday the government will introduce "straightforward" legislation within days seeking parliament's approval to trigger Britain's divorce with the European Union.

"We will within days introduce legislation to give the government the legal power to trigger Article 50," Davis told parliament.

"This will be the most straightforward bill possible to give effect to the decision of the people and respect the Supreme Court's judgment." (Source: AFP)

Maryam Safdar named in Panama Papers as beneficiary

The daughter of Pakistan's prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, was involved in the Panama Papers scandal, a German newspaper said, as it backed up an earlier claim.

German daily *Suddeutsche Zeitung* on Monday posted documents on Twitter confirming that Maryam Safdar is the beneficial owner of offshore companies named in Panama Papers.

Al Jazeera searched the database of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) that includes 11.5 million documents leaked from the Panama-based law firm Mossack Fonseca, and found Safdar's details.

Safdar was listed as the beneficiary of Nescoll Limited, an offshore company registered in British Virgin Islands. Her brother Hussain Nawaz Sharif was listed as the signatory.

In all, Sharif's daughter Maryam and sons Hasan and Hussain owned at least three off-shore holding companies registered in the British Virgin Islands, the leaked documents show.

According to the ICIJ, a non-profit group in the United States, these firms were involved in the purchase and mortgage of at least \$13.8m in Britain's properties. One of the holding companies also bought shares in another, Liberia-based, company for \$11.2m in August 2007, the documents show.

Owning off-shore companies is not illegal in Pakistan, but the Sharifs are being challenged on the source of the funds. Opposition politicians allege the funds were gained through corrupt



practices during Sharif's previous two stints as prime minister in the 1990s.

Allegations of corruption against the Sharif family are being heard in Pakistan's Supreme Court.

Prime Minister Sharif told the court in a written submission last year that the leak was not the proof against him, as his children were not his dependents.

He said he was not holding any off-shore companies. Sharif also claimed that he had paid tax and declared all of his assets in 2013.

The Panama Papers leak revealed how Mossack Fonseca allegedly helped current and former world leaders, as well as businessmen, criminals, celebrities and sports stars, evade or avoid tax via anonymously-owned shell companies and offshore accounts.

The story garnered wall-to-wall coverage and dominated front pages of newspapers across the world.

ICIJ coordinated the reporting, with 376 journalists from 109 news organizations and 76 countries poring over the files. (Source: agencies)

U.S.-led airstrikes killed 820 Syrian civilians

Syrian army, allies kill dozens of militants in, round Dayr al-Zawr

More than 800 Syrian civilians have been killed during the 28 months of United States-led coalition airstrikes in the country, says a Britain-based monitoring group.

According to the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), 310 of the 820 civilians killed by the coalition were women and children.

The observatory also reported that the airstrikes had caused a vast amount of damage to civilian property.

It said that since the U.S.-led coalition began its attacks, 6,909 members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh), Fateh al-Sham, and other terrorist groups had been also killed.

The monitoring group further went on to strongly condemn targeting civilians under any pretext at any time by the international coalition.

The U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against what are said to be the ISIL terrorists inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from Damascus or a UN mandate.

The coalition has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been accused of being largely incapable of fulfilling its declared aim of destroying ISIL.

Earlier in the month, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu accused the U.S.-led coalition of having made no positive contribution to the counter-terrorism fight in Syria.

Syria has been fighting foreign-sponsored militancy over the past almost six years. Unit-

ed Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura estimated in August last year that more than 400,000 people had been killed in the Syria crisis until then. The UN has stopped its official casualty count in Syria, citing its inability to verify the figures it receives from various sources.

■ Militants killed in Dayr al-Zawr

Meanwhile, Syrian government forces have launched a series of operations against foreign-sponsored militants in the country's eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr, killing and injuring dozens of the extremists.

At least a dozen ISIL terrorists were killed in the Maqabir district of the provincial capital city of Dayr al-Zawr, located 450 kilometers northeast of the capital, Damascus, on Monday as Syrian troops and fighters from allied popular defense groups launched an offensive in the area, Syria's official news agency SANA reported.

Syrian army units also managed to lay siege to separate groups of Takfiri militants in the al-Ma'amel and Soriyeh Juneid regions, killing dozens of the terrorists in heavy clashes that ensued.

Considerable amounts of military hardware and munitions were destroyed in the Syrian army operations as well.

Moreover, Syrian military aircraft bombed an ISIL command center close to the Albu Awad Mosque in the town of Al-Muhasan, located along the Euphrates River, killing 12 terrorists. There were four high-ranking militant commanders among the slain

extremists.

Seven Syrian soldiers, however, lost their lives when ISIL terrorists mounted a surprise attack against their position in Sawaqah School.

Elsewhere, in the northwestern province of Aleppo, Syrian soldiers regained full control over the towns of al-Dar'ia and Khan Hafira in addition to Rasm al-Alam and surrounding farms.

Syrian warplanes also pounded a number of ISIL hideouts in the Kasara al-Bahr area of the strategic and mountainous region of Qalamoun, located about 330 kilometers north of Damascus, and killed scores of militants.

Additionally, Syrian army soldiers engaged militants from the terrorist group of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly known as the al-Nusra Front, in the al-Farhaniyah and Um Sharshouh villages of the central province of Homs, killing and injuring many of them in the operations.

■ Jabhat Fateh al-Sham cuts ties with allied terrorist group

Meanwhile, Jabhat Fateh al-Sham terrorists say they have broken ranks with the Salafist Jund al-Aqsa terrorist group after the latter engaged in heavy exchanges of gunfire with Ahrar al-Sham Takfiris on the outskirts of Aleppo.

■ Turkey not to hand over al-Bab to Syrian forces

In a separate development, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus said on Tuesday that his country's military forces will



not hand over the northern Syrian town of al-Bab to Syrian government forces once an operation against ISIL and Kurdish fighters is over in the town.

Kurtulmus also said the United States-led military coalition had not honored its pledge to sufficiently support Turkey's operation to seize the town.

On August 24, 2016, the Turkish air force and special ground forces kicked off an operation inside Syria in a declared bid to support the Free Syrian Army militants and rid the border area of ISIL terrorists and fighters from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/Yekineyen Parastina Gel?) and Democratic Union Party (PYD/Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat).

The offensive was launched in coordination with the U.S.-led coalition, which has purportedly been fighting ISIL terrorists since 2014.

The incursion was the first major Turkish military intervention in Syria, which drew strong condemnation from the Syrian government for violating the country's sovereignty. (Source: agencies)

Iraqi forces gear up for western Mosul liberation operation

Iraqi forces have begun preparations for an offensive to purge the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists from the western part of Mosul after wresting full control over the eastern part of the strategic city.

Iraq's Mosuliya TV quoted the commander of Nineveh Liberation Operation, Lieutenant General Abdul Amir Rashied Yarallah, as making the announcement on Tuesday.

Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, are "preparing an operation in the next two, three days, to back up the operation to retake the right bank" of the city, he said.

Mosul is split by the Tigris River, with its eastern half known as the left bank and the western side as the right bank. The city is considered as ISIL's last urban stronghold in Iraq.

On Monday, Iraqi officials said that Mosul's eastern part had been completely retaken from ISIL after more than three months of fighting.

Since October 2016, a 100,000-strong force of Iraqi army troops and allied fighters has been leading the Mosul operation, the second phase of which began late last month. Advances have gathered pace over the past few days.

■ 750,000 civilians living in militant-held western Mosul

Separately on Tuesday, the United Nations and several international and local aid organizations said in a statement that an estimated 750,000 civilians are still living in the ISIL-controlled western Mosul.

United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq Lise Grande expressed concern about the living condition of the civilians amid soaring prices of basic goods and intermittent water and electricity supply, saying the locals "are at extreme risk and we fear for their lives."

"We don't know what will happen in western Mosul, but we cannot rule out the possibility of siege-like conditions or a mass exodus," Grande said.

She further expressed hope that "everything is done to protect the hundreds of thousands of people who are across the river in the west."

Most of the Iraqis, who are trapped in Mosul, are believed to have been prevented from leaving the city by ISIL, which has routinely used civilians as human shields.

Defeating ISIL in Mosul would deal a crushing blow to the Takfiri outfit, which launched its campaign of terror in northern and western Iraq in 2014.

■ Serial blasts in Iraqi capital

In another development, chain explosions killed at least six civilians in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad, leaving dozens of others injured.

The casualties occurred on Tuesday in three explosions across the city, Iraq's al-Sumariah news network reported.

The first blast saw explosives loaded onto a vehicle being set off at an automobile showroom in the al-Nahdah neighborhood in the city's central area.

Casualties were also caused after a blast rocked the capital's al-Sa'adoon neighborhood and a booby-trap went off in the Iskan neighborhood in the city's western part.

No immediate claims of responsibility were made. But ISIL terrorists have been taking Baghdad under almost daily bombing attacks in an apparent retaliation for an ongoing operation to retake the northern city of Mosul from them. (Source: agencies)

Tzipi Livni cancels Brussels trip amid threat of arrest

Israel's former foreign minister cancelled a trip to Brussels after Belgian prosecutors confirmed they wanted to question her over war crimes allegations.

Tzipi Livni was expected to meet Jewish leaders in the city on Monday, but cancelled ahead of time.

A spokesman for the event said Livni cancelled for "personal reasons" but local newspaper *Le Soir* said prosecutors had been hoping to question her over allegations of war crimes in the 2008-9 Israeli war in Gaza, when she was foreign minister.

"We wanted to take advantage of her visit to try to advance the investigation," a spokesman for Belgium's federal prosecutor Thierry Werts told the AFP news agency.

Livni is named along with other political and military leaders in a complaint filed in June 2010 over alleged crimes committed during the Gaza war.

More than 1,400 Palestinians, mostly civilians, died during the Israeli offensive between December 27, 2008 to January 18, 2009.

Thirteen Israelis, including 10 soldiers, also died.

Belgian authorities have the right to detain a suspect in its territory on crimes related to international law, as one of the victims had Belgian citizenship.

The Belgian federal prosecutor's office believes Livni, now a Member of Parliament and opposition leader, is not protected by immunity.

The Belgian-Palestinian Association supporting the complaint said in a statement it wanted to hold Livni responsible for her role in the war, as well as Ehud Olmert and Ehud Barak, then prime minister and minister of defense.

In December 2009, Livni cancelled a visit to London after being informed that she was the subject of an arrest warrant issued by a British court over her role in the same war.

An Israeli foreign ministry spokesman said the planned interrogation was "a cheap publicity stunt with no legal basis". (Source: AFP)



French trade delegation to be in Tehran on Saturday

ECONOMY TEHRAN — A French trade delegation, *d e s k* comprised of representatives from six French companies, will arrive in Tehran to meet their Iranian counterparts at the place of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) on Saturday January 28, the portal of TCCIMA announced on Tuesday.

The Joint Iran-France Chamber of Commerce will host the meeting.

The visiting French companies are reportedly active in energy, transportation, forestry, baking industry, aviation industry, mining machineries, healthcare products, home appliances, and etc. and plan to explore avenues of further ties with Iranians.

Iran plans to launch 3 trade offices in Europe by late Sept.

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran plans to establish three *d e s k* trade offices in Europe, an official in Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) told ISNA on Tuesday.

TPO's Director General for trade with Europe and the U.S. Abolfazl Koudeie informed that his organization is to launch the trade offices in the green continent by the end of the first half of the upcoming Iranian calendar year 1396 (September 21, 2017).

"We also plan to set up three trade offices in Ukraine, Armenia, and Tajikistan," he added.

He noted that the trade offices will be founded by cooperation of Iranian private sector on the way to boost Iran's commercial ties with the globe.

Koudeie reminded that an Iranian trade office was inaugurated about four months ago in Germany and in the presence of Iranian Industry Minister Mohammadreza Nematzadeh.

IRISL launching new container service connecting France, Iran and Asia

Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) is launching a new service that connects the French port of Le Havre with Iranian, Middle Eastern and Asian ports.

Before the international embargo and sanctions, Iranian container services called at Le Havre every week between 2006 and 2009, connecting the main Iranian ports.

The service will begin in February and will be operated by HDASCO Line (Hafez Darya Arya Shipping Company), also named HDS lines, a container carrier under the IRISL Group.

This new service times are as follows: 19 days between Le Havre and Bandar Abbas for example. It will call at the following ports: Bandar Abbas, Asaluyeh, Bandar Imam Khomeini, Bushar and Khorramshahr in Iran and the port of Um Qasr in Iraq.

The service will also call ports of Malta/Khor Fakkam/Jebel Ali/Xingang/Busan/Qingdao/Shanghai/Ningbo/Yantian/Port Kelang.

"This is a great opportunity offered to the French importers and exporters who wish to develop their trade with Iran," said Jean-Marc Peltier, liner department manager, Worms Services Maritimes Agency - Le Havre.

"This country, which has around 80 million inhabitants, is a high-potential market, especially regarding the sectors of chemistry, agri-food (flour, milk, etc.) cosmetics, electrical appliances, retail and of course automotive trade as well as oil and gas industry.

(Source: Seatrade Maritime News)

Inflation rate stands at 8.6% in Iran: CBI governor

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The *d e s k* inflation rate for the 12-month period ended in the last day of the tenth Iranian calendar month of Dey (January 19) compared to the same period in the previous year hit 8.6 percent, Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Governor Valiollah Seif announced on Tuesday.

The official put the point-to-point inflation rate at 9.6 percent in Dey, IRNA reported.

The Statistical Center of Iran has an-

nounced that the inflation rate in urban areas of Iran for the mentioned period hit 6.9 percent, IRNA reported on Saturday.

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.

The CBI has announced that the in-



flation rate in the past Iranian calendar year, which ended on March 19, 2016, stood at 11.9 percent.

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its last December statement has predicted an inflation rate of about 9 percent for Iran in 2016

and 2017.

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

After U.S. exit, Asian nations try to save TPP trade deal

Australia and New Zealand said on Tuesday they hope to salvage the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) by encouraging China and other Asian countries to join the trade pact after U.S. President Donald Trump kept a promise to abandon the accord.

The TPP, which the United States had signed but not ratified, was a pillar of former U.S. President Barack Obama's policy to pivot to Asia.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has touted it as an engine of economic reform, as well as a counter-weight to a rising China, which is not a TPP member.

Fulfilling a campaign pledge, Trump signed an executive order in the Oval Office on Monday pulling the United States out of the 2015 TPP agreement and distancing the United States from its Asian allies.

Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said he had held discussions with Abe, New Zealand Prime Minister Bill English and Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong overnight about the possibility of proceeding without the United States.

"Losing the United States from the TPP is a big loss, there is no question about that," Turnbull told reporters in Canberra on Tuesday. "But we are not about to walk away ... certainly there is potential for China to join the TPP."

In Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying did not say directly whether China would be interested in joining the TPP but that at a time of economic uncertainty the Asia-Pacific should make its own contributions to growth with openness.

"We think that in the present situation, no matter what happens, all should keep going down the path of open, inclusive, continuous development, seeking cooperation and win-win," Hua told a daily



news briefing.

Obama had framed the TPP without China in an effort to write Asia's trade rules before Beijing could, establishing U.S. economic leadership in the region as part of his "pivot to Asia".

China has proposed a counter pact, the Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP) and has championed the Southeast Asian-backed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Hua said efforts on FTAAP should be stepped up, adding China hoped talks on RCEP could be concluded at an early date.

Meetings planned

New Zealand's English said the United States was ceding influence to China and the region's focus could switch to alternative trade deals.

"We've got this RCEP agreement with Southeast Asia, which up until now has been on a bit of a slow burn, but we might find the political will for that to pick up if TPP isn't going to proceed," English said.

Malaysia's trade minister said negotiators from the remaining TPP countries

would be in "constant communication" to decide the best way forward.

"Notwithstanding the current position of the new U.S. administration on (TPP), we will continue to engage with our American colleagues to strengthen our bilateral trade and economic relations, given the U.S.'s importance as our third-largest trading partner and a major source of investment," Mustapa Mohamed said in a statement.

The TPP, which has been five years in the making, requires ratification by at least six countries accounting for 85 percent of the combined gross domestic product of the member nations.

Australia held open the possibility of China, the world's top exporter, joining a revised deal.

"The original architecture was to enable other countries to join," Australian Trade Minister Steven Ciobo told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on Tuesday.

"Certainly I know that Indonesia has expressed interest and there would be scope for China if we are able to reformulate it."

Japan has led the push for the partnership, which includes Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru and Vietnam.

"There is no change to our view that free trade is the source of economic growth," Japanese Economy Minister Nobuteru Ishihara told reporters.

When asked whether Japan would be open to negotiating a bilateral trade pact with the United States, Ishihara said it was uncertain whether U.S. trade officials would start such negotiations.

Japanese Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Koichi Hagiuda said separately that Japan was not considering moves with other TPP members based on a lack of U.S. involvement.

"As Prime Minister Abe has made clear, TPP without the United States is meaningless and the balance of interests would crumble," he told a news conference, adding Japan would keep explaining the benefits of the pact for America.

Abe had made TPP a core of his economic growth policies and along with the Obama administration, viewed it as strategically vital in the face of a rising China.

Trump took office on Friday and pledged to end what he called an "American carnage" of rusted factories and crime. He vowed to bring jobs back by renegotiating what he called bad multilateral trade deals in favor of bilateral ones.

New Zealand Trade Minister Todd McClay said he had talked with a number of TPP-member ministers at the World Economic Forum in Davos last week and he expected they would meet in coming months.

"The agreement still has value as a FTA (Free Trade Agreement) with the other countries involved," McClay said in an emailed statement to Reuters.

(Source: Reuters)

China says it will lead the world economy if western nations stand down

A top Chinese diplomat has said that China is ready to lead the world economy if other nations should retreat from globalization.

Zhang Jun, the Chinese foreign ministry's head of international economic affairs, told foreign reporters in Beijing that "if it's necessary for China to play the role

of leader, then China must take on this responsibility," reports the Wall Street Journal.

Zhang's comments come just days after President Donald Trump pledged to put "America first" in his inaugural address, which followed Chinese President Xi Jinping's plea for the continuation of global trade

at last week's World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

"If people want to say China has taken a position of leadership, it's not because China suddenly thrust itself forward as a leader," Zhang told the reporters. "It's because the original front-runners suddenly fell back and pushed China to the

front."

In addition to Trump's protectionism, British Prime Minister Theresa May recently gave a speech detailing how her government intends to take the U.K. out of the European Union and the EU's Single Market.

(Source: The Fortune)

Quality Assessment Announcement for

(Tender No: 95/HE/1067)

Ports and Maritime Organization



This is hereby to announce that Ports & Maritime Organization (PMO) of I.R.Iran intends to proceed with manufacturing, purchase, shipment and delivery of 4 of pneumatic grain unloader units with 250 ton / hr capacity for Nowshahr and Anzali Ports based on the quality assessment procedure and through a two-phase public international tender.

*Therefore, in order to carry out the quality assessment, all local and foreign manufacturer companies are invited to refer either to the central secretariat of the PMO, at the below mentioned address and upon presenting an introduction letter and the original bank receipt of 500,000 Iranian Rials paid to the Siba account No. 2176459001009 by Bank Melli Iran to receive a CD containing the Quality Assessment Forms and tender documents or the relevant website, ITS.MPORG.IR, maximum till Monday 30th /Jan/2017.

*Place and closing date for submitting the quality assessment documents and completed worksheets: central secretariat of the PMO and to the last working hour on Saturday 4th /Mar/2017.

It should be emphasized that the relevant receipt against submitting of the said documents and forms must be kept for further steps.

*The question & answer session will be held at 10 A.M. on Saturday 18th /Feb/2017, at the PMO Directory General for Equipment Supply & Engineering office and attendance of the informed technical and commercial representatives of all manufacturer companies of the aforementioned equipment which are willing to participate in quality assessment of tender is obligatory (together with a written introduction letter).

* The tender winner shall pay for newspaper advertisement costs

*Address of the announcing organization: Ports and Maritime Organization, No.1, Dr. Shahidi St., Haghani Highway, Vanak Sq., Tehran, Iran.

Fax: (+98) 21-88651194 Tel: (+98) 21-84932351

E-mail: Technical@pmo.ir

TIMES OF OMAN



Oman-Iran trade exceeded \$1b last year: Omani commerce min.

Trade between Oman and Iran exceeded \$1 billion by the end of October last year, according to Sultanate's Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Masoud Al Sunaidy.

Speaking on the sidelines of Iran Solo Exhibition that showcased only Iranian products at the Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre, Al Sunaidy said the bilateral trade was expected to grow further this year.

"Bilateral trade between Oman and Iran exceeded \$1 billion by the end of October last year. In 2015, it was nearly \$560 million," he said.

"We have seen the Iranian expo progressively bolstering the trading relationship between the two countries. A further growth in bilateral trade between the Sultanate and Iran is expected this year," he added.

Sunaidy also said the shipping line between the Port of Sohar and Bandar Abbas is now vibrant.

The third edition of the exhibition was inaugurated on Sunday by Sunaidy and Iranian Industry Minister Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh.

Nematzadeh, for his part said that, "This expo, which is better than the last two editions, is an indicator of the growing trading relationship between the two countries. We hope that there will be a good opportunity for people to visit Iran." (Source: Times of Oman)

Karoon Petrochemical Co., first producer of isocyanates in Middle East

By Mahnaz Abdi

MAHSHAHR — Karoon Petrochemical Company, located in Iran's southwestern port city of Mahshahr, is the first producer of isocyanates in the Middle East, according to the company's managing director, Alireza Sediqzadeh.

Isocyanates are a family of highly reactive, low molecular weight chemicals widely used in the manufacture of flexible and rigid foams, fibers, and coatings. They are increasingly used in the automobile industry and building insulation materials.

Karoon Company has two phases of production conducted through joint venture with Chematur Engineering AB (CEAB) of Sweden and at the cost of €350 million, managing director of the company said in a press conference on Monday and elaborated on the two phases as follows.

The first phase produces 40,000 tons of toluene diisocyanate (TDI) per annum, of which 70 percent is domestically consumed and the rest 30 percent is exported to other countries including Iraq, Turkey, India, Russia, Azerbaijan, Albania, Greece, Sweden, Peru, Kenya and Nigeria, with Iraq standing on top of them, Sediqzadeh explained.

■ 'Karoon to become first MDI producer in Middle East, West Asia'

The second production phase of the company is to produce 40,000 tons of diphenyl diisocyanate (MDI) per year, making Karoon the first producer of this product in the Middle East and West Asia, the managing director further highlighted.

Implementation of the second phase project was started in Iranian calendar year 1390 (March 2010-March 2011), Sediqzadeh said and announced that this phase started trial production in the past Iranian month (ended on January 19) and it will be officially inaugurated during the Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-10, marking the victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution).



The second phase is currently working with 50 percent of its capacity, he added.

■ 'Isocyanates production to save \$300m annually'

Elsewhere in his remarks, the managing director of the company said that by working at full capacity, the two phases will save about \$300 million annually for the country through reducing reliance on import of isocyanates.

Iran's petrochemical sector's exports has increased by seven percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (ending December 20, 2016) compared to the same period last year. The country exported 16 million tons of petrochemical products in the mentioned period.

Some 40 million tons of petrochemicals were produced in Iran during the said time span to register an eight percent rise compared to the previous year.

Oman targets 1 million bpd oil output in 2017

Non-OPEC producer Oman intends to pump an average of 1 million bpd this year, despite the 45,000 bpd production cut it had pledged with the OPEC-non-OPEC deal, a senior official at the oil and gas ministry said on Monday.

"Production-wise, we are going to maintain the one million barrels per day. Our share in production cut is 45,000 barrels a day and we have already started reducing the production. But we see this as a short-term (phenomenon)," local media quoted oil ministry undersecretary Salim Al Aufi as

saying at an event.

Oman was part of the group of 11 non-OPEC producers - including Russia - that had agreed to act jointly with the cartel to cut oil supply. The non-OPEC countries had pledged a total production cut of 558,000 bpd.

Last year, Oman's production exceeded for the first time the average of 1 million bpd, namely 1,004,300 bpd—an increase of 2.6 percent, Times of Oman reports, quoting data by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

In the first six months of this year - the initial period in which the production cuts are in force - Oman's target production is 970,000 bpd, the ministry official said. After June, the country can go back to its original production target, pending any extensions of the agreement.

Oman will boost its oil and natural gas producing capacities, according to Al Aufi.

Referring to the oil supply cuts, the Omani official said that all oil exporting countries, including OPEC, have already

cut back 1.5 million bpd, compared to the commitment to reduce output by 1.8 million bpd.

Al Aufi's view of the cuts so far is exactly the same estimate that Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih gave last week. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, al-Falih said that there had been "very strong compliance" by OPEC and non-OPEC oil countries to the production cuts, and that the producers had gone "extra miles", with the majority exceeding their commitments.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Oil prices rise as OPEC output cuts drain stocks

Oil prices rose on Tuesday on evidence the global market was tightening as lower production by OPEC and other exporters drained stocks, but an increase in drilling in the United States could keep a lid on prices.

Benchmark Brent crude LCOc1 was up 40 cents at \$55.63 a barrel by 0840 GMT. U.S. light crude CLc1 was 40 cents higher at to \$53.15.

Ministers from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and big producers outside the group said on Sunday that, of the almost 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) they had agreed to remove from the market starting on Jan. 1, 1.5 million bpd had already been cut.

The supply balance already appears to be tightening.

Bernstein Energy said global oil inventories declined by 24 million barrels to 5.7 billion barrels in the fourth quarter of last year from the previous quarter. Still, this amounts to about 60 days of world oil consumption.



"This is the biggest quarterly decline since the fourth quarter of 2013, confirming that inventory builds are now reversing as the market shifts from oversupply to undersupply," Bernstein analysts said in a note to clients.

So far OPEC members appear to be sticking to

the deal.

Iraq's oil minister said on Monday most oil majors working on its territory were participating in oil output reductions agreed as part of the deal.

But the reduction in supply by oil majors is being offset by an increase in U.S. production as prices rise.

U.S. drillers added the most rigs in nearly four years, data from energy services company Baker Hughes showed on Friday, extending an eight-month drilling recovery.

The country's oil production has risen by more than 6 percent since mid-2016, though it remains 7 percent below the 2015 peak. It is back to levels seen in late 2014, when strong U.S. crude output contributed to a crash in oil prices.

Fawad Razaqada, an analyst for Forex.com, said it could take a while before the impact of higher U.S. production is felt in the market.

"The trend therefore remains bullish for oil," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

Asia grabs record North Sea crude oil as OPEC cuts supply

Asia's oil refineries are turning to the North Sea for crude supplies like never before as their primary suppliers restrict output in an effort to eliminate a glut.

Crude exports to Asia from the North Sea are poised to reach a record 12 million barrels in January, data compiled by Bloomberg show. Tankers hauling 9 million barrels from fields off the coasts of Norway and the U.K. already sailed east, and at least another 3 million barrels are set for export within the next week. If all the oil flows move as planned, about two fifths of January supply underpinning the Brent crude benchmark will go to Asia.

"In the absence of enough supplies from the Middle East, Asia is turning to the North Sea and West Africa to meet its demand," said Ehsan Ul-Haq, principal consultant at KBC Advanced Technologies. While China's oil production has declined, the Atlantic Basin remains oversupplied, he said.

North Sea crude suppliers are among those reaping the benefits from output cuts by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and 11 other nations in an effort to steady

global oil markets. The group's supply cuts have increased the relative value of Middle East oil to a 16-month high, while producers including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are restricting eastbound cargo flows. That means North Sea grades are becoming somewhat more affordable for refiners in Asia, where China is guzzling crude at record levels.

■ Supertankers depart

Oil prices have risen by about 20 percent since the end of November, when the output reductions were agreed. Meanwhile, a pile-up of tankers that had been storing oil in north west Europe when prices were low has dissipated as cargoes have found buyers.

Since Jan. 7, four crude-laden supertankers have departed from Hound Point, off the coast of Scotland, bound for destinations in China, Singapore and South Korea. A smaller Suezmax-class ship, Gener8 St. Nikolas, left Teesport, England, for China on Jan. 14. The vessels, chartered by companies including BP PLC and Unipet, the trading arm of China Petroleum and Chemical Corp., are carrying Forties and Ekofisk crudes, two of the four grades used to price the

global benchmark Dated Brent. Glencore PLC has chartered an additional supertanker to haul North Sea oil to Asia later this week.

While a big increase in North Sea oil flow was expected since output of some grades has been increasing, the destination of that oil depends in part on prices.

Brent normally trades at a big premium to a regional benchmark for the Middle East grades, acting as a brake on flows to Asia. Since OPEC cut output that advantage diminished rapidly, making the west-to-east trade more appealing. Brent futures fell to as little as \$1.47 a barrel more than their Dubai equivalent on Monday, according to data from PVM Oil Associates Ltd. As recently as April they were almost \$4 higher.

■ North Sea flows

Monthly shipments of key North Sea grades Brent, Forties, Oseberg and Ekofisk to Asia reached a previous record of 10 million barrels in October. This compares with an average of about 6 million barrels a month, or roughly 200,000 barrels a day, for all of

2016, according to data compiled by Bloomberg.

Usually, the cargoes being shipped to China are finding buyers while en route, according to Nevy Nah, an analyst who covers refined products at London-based consultancy Energy Aspects Ltd., and two physical oil traders directly involved in the market. China's independent "teapot" refiners, which can refine oil quickly, boost purchases of crude that's already in transit so they don't have to tie up money for long periods of time, Nah said.

China's crude oil demand in December grew by more than 12 percent to a record 36.4 million tons, or about 8.6 million barrels a day, data from the nation's Customs General Administration show. Its oil refineries also increased runs to a record 11.3 million barrels a day, ahead of clean-fuels requirements that took effect this month.

"Traders are moving more cargoes from the North Sea without first securing a customer, marketing cargoes as the vessel makes its more than 30-day journey to Asia," Nah said.

(Source: energyvoice.com)

Analyses of energy cycle offer a new explanation of climate change

Researchers know that more, and more dangerous, storms have begun to occur as the climate warms. A team of scientists has reported an underlying explanation, using meteorological satellite data gathered over a 35-year period.

The examination of the movement and interaction of mechanical energies across the atmosphere, published Jan. 24 in the journal Nature Communications, is the first to explore long-term variations of the Lorenz energy cycle—a complex formula used to describe the interaction between potential and kinetic energy in the atmosphere—and offers a new perspective on what is happening with global warming.

"It is a new way to look at and explain what people have observed," said Liming Li, assistant professor of physics at the University of Houston and corresponding author of the paper. "We found that the efficiency of Earth's global atmosphere as a heat engine is increasing during the past four decades in response to climate change."

In this case, increased efficiency isn't a good thing. It suggests more potential energy is being converted to kinetic energy—energy that is driving atmospheric movement - resulting in a greater potential for destructive storms in regions where the conversion takes place.

"Our analyses suggest that most energy components in the Lorenz energy cycle have positive trends," the researchers wrote. "As a result, the efficiency of Earth's global atmosphere as a heat engine increased during the past 35 years."

In addition to Li, researchers involved in the work include Yefeng Pan, first author and a former doctoral student at UH; Xun Jiang, associate professor of earth and atmospheric sciences at UH; Gan Li, Wentao Zhang and Xinyue Wang, all of Guilin University of Electronic Technology; and Andrew P. Ingersoll of the California Institute of Technology.

The researchers used three independent meteorological datasets to track variables including three-dimensional wind field, geopotential-height field and temperature field at points across the globe from 1979 to 2013. They then used the data to compute the Lorenz energy cycle of the global atmosphere. Such an energy cycle in the atmosphere significantly influences weather and climate.

Previous studies have covered only five-year and 10-year periods before 1973, Li said. "Now we can investigate the Lorenz energy cycle of the global atmosphere during the past 35 years, using satellite-based observations," he said.

While the researchers reported that the total mechanical energy of the global atmosphere remains constant over time, there has been a significant increase in what they describe as "eddy energies," or the energies associated with storms, eddies and turbulence.

Li said the positive trends for eddy energies were especially pronounced in the southern hemisphere and over parts of Asia, and the researchers point out that intensifying storm activity over the southern oceans and increasing drought in Central Asia contribute to the positive trends.

"This is a new perspective to explain global warming from an energy standpoint," he said.

(Source: phys.org)

Rosneft CEO asks Putin to meet with privatization deal participants

NOVO-OGARYOVO (Sputnik) — Rosneft CEO Igor Sechin has asked Russian President Vladimir Putin to meet with the participants of the deal to privatize 19.5 percent of Rosneft shares - Glencore, the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and the Intesa bank.

He said Rosneft was planning new projects with the participation of these companies.

Rosneft produced 210 million metric tons in 2016, with 67 billion cubic meters of gas, Sechin told Putin.

"We added approximately 4 percent of production, and the overall liquid equivalent for the year totaled 265 million tons. This is a record figure for the company. At the same time, oil production amounted to 210 million tons, and 67 billion cubic meters of gas."

Total investment amounted 750 billion rubles (\$12.6 billion), Sechin said in remarks quoted by the Kremlin website, mostly aimed at increasing drilling in Western Siberia and on new projects.

Rosneft plans to ramp up its investment program to 1.1 trillion rubles this year and 1.3 trillion rubles in 2018, he added.

Other plans for 2017 outlined by Sechin include increasing oil deliveries to China to 31 million tons this year.

Total denies plans to exit Nigeria

TOTAL Nigeria PLC said it has no plans to leave Nigeria. The company stated this at the celebration of its customers' service day at Onigbagbo Total service station in Ikeja. This came as the company insisted that Total was not ready to exit Nigeria, as widely speculated.

The Managing Director, Mr. Jean Philippe Torres, who spoke at the ceremony after engaging it petrol dispensing and other customer services, stated that the company is determined to reciprocate good services to customers.

His words: "This event is to remind our customers of how significant they are to us. We at Total are keen to delivering good and satisfactory customer service."

"We want to make Nigerians understand that we are part of the communities. Once again, the main issue for us in Total is to tie the link with our esteemed customers and tell them that they are king at Total and that is the case."

He added, "There were rumors that we wanted to leave the country. That is not the case. Total wants to stay in Nigeria."

Commenting on alleged under-dispensing of petroleum products at the company's filling stations, Torres explained that Total was not in any way linked to undermining credibility in its services to customers.

(Source: vanguardngr.com)

How the UN Security Council is perpetuating South Sudan's conflict

By Amir Idris

The Security Council has failed to impose an arms embargo on the conflict-hit state.

Despite warnings by the United Nations of a possible genocide in South Sudan, the Security Council voted on December 23, 2016, to reject a U.S.-sponsored resolution calling for an arms embargo and targeted sanctions. Russia and its allies in the council accused the United States of ignoring the call for a national reconciliation made by President Kiir in a speech on December 14. They seem to question the credibility of the UN warning. Instead, they claimed that President Kiir's initiative should be given the chance to restore peace and stability in the country.

The eight members of the Security Council who abstained—including China and Russia, which hold vetoes at the council—appear to view South Sudan's crisis through the discredited colonial prism.

It is a popular but wholly mistaken assumption that South Sudan is a country inhabited by an array of tribal groups accustomed to communal violence. Hence, any attempt to intervene to restore law and order through a political mechanism is bound to fail.

Indeed, the call for a national reconciliation in the midst of worsening humanitarian and security conditions is welcome, but not durable. National dialogue and reconciliation cannot precede a political process geared toward addressing the underlying causes of the crisis.

In his speech proposing a national reconciliation, President Kiir called upon South Sudanese political, civic and religious entities to participate in a national dialogue to restore peace and reconciliation among warring communities. The proposed national dialogue seems to include those who reside inside the country and exclude those remaining abroad—where his main opponents, including former vice-president Riek Machar, are based. The president's call infuriated his opponents and galvanized his supporters, perhaps even deepening the political divide.

Three problems

There are three problems with Kiir's proposed initiative. First, it frames the crisis in South Sudan as a communal instead of a political one. Second, it excludes the voices of those who have been victimized by the utterly inhuman violence manifested in systematic gang raping, mass displacement, and ethnically targeted killings. Third, it reinterprets the peace agreement signed in August 2015 and renders its political components—in particular the formation of an inclusive transitional government of national unity—irrelevant. It therefore perpetuates and legitimizes the status quo.

The documented, ongoing mass atrocities in South Sudan are manifestations of how the post-independence state was framed and constructed. It was a product of a specific mode of governing marked by ethnic sentiment, political loyalty, and public corruption. Hence, it is inaccurate to interpret the ongoing crisis as an ethnic or communal conflict, ignoring the political nature of it. The call for a national dialogue purposely ignores these realities and assumes that conflicting ethnic communities can be reconciled by engaging their civic and religious leaders in a dialogue, without addressing the political and ideological causes of the crisis.

The civil war

The civil war in South Sudan has forced more than 200,000 to seek refuge at UN peacekeeping bases in the country and 1.2 million to flee to neighboring states. Without taking this sad human tragedy into account, the national dialogue—which seems to be unwisely backed by regional and international actors—will remain merely political rhetoric as long as those civilians cannot return to their original homes. The voices of the victims of the conflict cannot be excluded from any credible national dialogue that is expected to lead to a national reconciliation.

Instead of seeking a well-devised political strategy to revive the peace agreement, the president's call for a national dialogue and the Security Council's failure to endorse the proposed arms embargo mean peace looks unlikely.

The agreement called for constituting an inclusive government of national unity to engender political, economic, and security reforms. The collapse of the transitional government in July 2016 not only hinders these desirable reforms but also shatters the opportunity for a successful national reconciliation.

There is no easy path to sustainable peace in South Sudan. The difficult path to lasting political stability and national reconciliation has to take into account the underlying causes of the tragedy.

The failure to reach a consensus on the fundamental contentious issues of governance; rule of law; inclusivity of the government; and adherence to the democratic values of justice, freedom, equality, and citizenship are at the center of the unfolding political crisis. It is still the responsibility of the United Nations and Troika countries—Norway, the UK, and in particular the new U.S. administration—to engage directly in devising an effective political mechanism to revive the peace agreement. Short of this, the status quo will continue to produce violence, displacement and death in South Sudan.

(Source: Newsweek)



President Salva Kiir

Turkey's new constitution would end its democracy

By Noah Feldman

With all eyes on the U.S. as it inaugurates a new leader, Turkey is preparing to amend its constitution to make its president even more powerful than the American executive.

There's nothing inherently wrong with replacing parliamentary government with a presidential system. The problem is timing and context: Turkey's proposed changes, which will go to a national referendum after being approved by parliament, follow the unsuccessful coup against increasingly autocratic President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In practice, a revised constitution would make it much easier for Erdogan to consolidate power entirely, taking Turkey out of the democratic column and making it into a dictatorship, pure and simple.

Constitutional revision

The proposed constitutional revision has lots of moving parts. But the most important is to transform Turkey's modified parliamentary system into a presidential one. The president's powers now are, in principle, much more limited. He governs alongside a prime minister chosen by the parliamentary majority, who in turn appoints a cabinet that's responsible to parliament. An important practical and symbolic mechanism of parliamentary oversight of the government is the right of parliament to demand that cabinet ministers appear before it to answer inquiries -- a right known as "interpellation."

The new draft would shift the basic structure of the system by abolishing the office of prime minister and giving the president the authority to appoint the members of the cabinet. As part of this change, the parliament's right to interpellate cabinet ministers would be removed.

Americans would find that aspect of the change unremarkable. The U.S. president appoints his own cabinet, albeit with the advice and consent of the Senate. Cabinet secretaries appear before Congress by courtesy, not by an inherent congressional right to question them.

But the proposed Turkish Constitution goes further still in allowing the president to be the head of a political party. That means the president could exercise direct control over what candidates his party runs for office. Erdogan could handpick parliamentarians from his own party, who would be extremely unlikely to exercise a check over him, because he could also kick them out of the party.

In practice, of course, the U.S.



Turkey's proposed changes, which will go to a national referendum after being approved by parliament, follow the unsuccessful coup against increasingly autocratic President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

president is also the head of the party to which he belongs. But in the U.S. system, that doesn't give him the authority to pick congressional candidates. That power lies with primary voters, donors and party leaders.

The changed system

Under the changed system, Turkish presidential elections would take place at the same time as parliamentary elections, every five years. That would make it difficult for voters to express dissension at the national level during the president's term, because there would be no midterm elections.

A further proposed change sought by Erdogan's AK Party is to give the president power over the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors. Erdogan has already effectively taken control by purging that body in the aftermath of the coup. The proposed amendments would make that control permanent.

In the U.S. presidential system, of course, the executive appoints federal judges and senior federal prosecutors. As long as they subsequently serve

their terms on good behavior, they can function relatively independently. The trouble is that, as Erdogan's purge shows, there's no similar long-term guarantee of de facto independence in the Turkish system. Erdogan's judges and prosecutors would be seen as political functionaries, and might well actually be subordinate to the executive. A proposed nominal guarantee of judicial and prosecutorial "impartiality" is only as good as political reality makes it.

Perhaps the most clever and pernicious element of the proposed change is that it limits the president to two terms -- but only starting with ratification and new elections. That would allow Erdogan to remain in power until 2029, when he'll be 75. By then he would have been running Turkey as prime minister or president for a whopping 26 years. That's not a recipe for democracy, to put it mildly.

The entire reform package must pass the parliament with 330 votes out of 550. The ruling AK Party doesn't have enough votes on its own, but it can reach the threshold by getting the votes of the

nationalist, far-right MH Party. Then the package would go to a referendum.

In 2010, Turkish voters approved constitutional reforms pushed by the AK Party, by 58 percent to 42 percent. The vote is unlikely to be so lopsided this time. In practice, the vote will be a referendum on Erdogan himself.

Absent the failed coup, it seems conceivable that Erdogan could have lost a bid to make Turkey into a presidential system designed to maximize his power. But the coup unfortunately provides ammunition for the argument that he needs greater authority to run the country.

If the presidential change prevails in Turkey, and is used to subvert democracy still further, it will contribute to the perception in many places that the presidential form of government is simply a prelude to autocracy. Traditionally, the U.S. system has stood as a bulwark against those arguments. Whether it remains so is the most significant question of Donald Trump's presidency that has just begun.

(Source: The Bloomberg)

Democrats urged Obama to cease Yemen war role before Trump took over

by Julian Pecquet

Twenty-five House Democrats unsuccessfully wrote to President Barack Obama earlier this month to urge him to end U.S. support for the Saudi-led campaign in Yemen before Donald Trump took over.

The Jan. 13 letter, led by habitual Yemen war critics Ted Lieu, D-Calif., and John Conyers, D-Mich., raises concerns that the United States is abetting "war crimes" by supporting Riyadh's imprecise bombing campaign.

"These airstrikes — which have killed children, women, doctors, newlyweds and funeral mourners — are likely war crimes," the letter states. "We respectfully ask you to do the right thing before you leave office and stop the U.S. refueling of Coalition aircraft that strike civilian targets in Yemen."

News of the letter comes as the Trump administration signed off on its first airstrikes in Yemen, which are separate from the Saudi campaign and target different actors. Six al-Qaeda fighters were reportedly killed Jan. 21 in a pair of U.S. strikes in the Sawmaa region of Al-Bayda province, while a local military instructor for al-Qaeda had been killed by a drone strike in the same province Jan. 20.

Trump himself has said little of substance about the war in Yemen, but is expected to support the Saudis as long as Riyadh pays up.



The United States is abetting "war crimes" by supporting Riyadh's imprecise bombing campaign.

"Right now if you look at right now, we ... already defend Saudi Arabia, right now, we're defending them. Every time there's a problem we go in and defend," he told Fox News a year ago. "And frankly, as far as I'm concerned, that's all fine."

Congressional concerns about the Saudi-led effort have been growing since it began in March 2015. More than 10,000 people, half of them civilians, have been killed since then, according to the United Nations.

In September, 27 senators voted to reject a proposed \$1.15 billion tank sale to Saudi Arabia in a rare public rebuke of a U.S. ally. The vote was not enough to stop the sale but sent a clear signal to the White House that congressional patience with Riyadh was fraying.

Three months later, the Obama administration blocked a sale of precision munitions to Riyadh because of "very significant concerns about the high rate of civilian casualties" and cut back on intelligence sharing. The U.S. Air Force has since continued to refuel Saudi warplanes, however, sparking the latest letter.

"We are extremely puzzled that the Administration decided to continue the U.S. military operation of refueling the very same aircraft that strike civilian targets in Yemen," the letter states. "This approach sends a mixed signal to Saudi Arabia and is logically and internally inconsistent."

Signing the letter were three members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, which has jurisdiction over U.S. foreign aid and arms sales: Lieu and Reps. Karen Bass, D-Calif., and David Cicilline, D-R.I. Two freshmen also signed on: Reps. Jamie Raskin, D-Md., and Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash.

(Source: Al Monitor)

Migrant rush means no time to waste for Brexit

How worrying that for every extra day it takes to complete Brexit hundreds more EU immigrants will be moving into Britain.

The warning from the Leave Means Leave campaign illustrates starkly that all those who are delaying or trying to derail Brexit are actually working against the national interest.

Whether it's those taking action in the Supreme Court or those in Parliament who wrongly believe that they know best what's good for the future of our country, they are all making matters worse.

Although some, especially the misguided leader of the Labour Party, would argue perversely that unfettered immigration is good for Britain.

However tricky the planning, however sapping the negotiations, however painful the realization that we might just have to walk away with no deal at all, Theresa May must not hesitate to do what the majority voted for.

As Shakespeare put it in Macbeth: "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly."

She has seen already how quickly he is acting, so she should take a leaf out of his book and let nothing — absolutely nothing — stand in her way.

With UKIP leader Paul Nuttall fighting Labour in the Stoke-on-Trent by election she will see Corbyn's party sinking to new lows.

And if she needs to call a general election in April or May to get an even stronger mandate for Brexit then she should not hesitate. Every day counts.

(Source: express.co.uk)



By Chris Miller

Why the Black Sea?

When Americans think about the world, they divide it into discrete regions: Europe, spanning from Norway to Greece; the Middle East, stretching from Morocco to Iran; and the Asia-Pacific, covering Japan through Indonesia, or sometimes even to India. This mental map of the world is profoundly powerful and entirely imaginary. Powerful, because where we place countries affects how we treat them. Imaginary, because our mental geographies are not the only way of seeing the world. Often, they are not even the best way.

No region of the world is more divided in Americans' mental map than the Black Sea. We place the countries that surround the Black Sea coast into three different categories. Romania and Bulgaria are in Europe, members of NATO and the European Union. Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia are the former Soviet Union; for better or for worse, they are still defined by the historical legacy of Soviet rule. And Turkey, embroiled by Kurdish insurgency and at war in Syria and Iraq, is increasingly seen as one of the main powers of the Middle East.

There is much sense, of course, in this tripartite division of the region, since it accurately describes at least some of these countries' current domestic politics and international orientation. But think-

main reasons to look at the Black Sea as a coherent region, rather than merely as a medium-sized body of water: security, energy, and European and Eurasian integration. Each of these themes is shared across the Black Sea region. Unless we recognize the interconnections—and treat the Black Sea as a whole—we cannot fully understand the region. Why the Black Sea? We may see it as a body of water that separates Europe from Asia, or that divides the Middle East from the former USSR. But all sides of the Black Sea's shores share many of the factors driving political and economic change in the region.

Black Sea security

Take security. A ring of smoldering conflicts surrounds the Black Sea. In Moldova, a 25-year-old frozen conflict divides the country into two pieces. Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula was annexed by Russia, and the Donbass region remains occupied by Russian-backed separatist forces. Russia's main supply route to its forces in Syria runs through the Black Sea via the Bosphorus and Dardanelles to the Eastern Mediterranean. In the Caucasus, ongoing conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh and between Georgia and the breakaway regions South Ossetia and Abk-



Russia and the West never agreed about the Black Sea. Are Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in Russia's sphere of control, or are they on track to join Western institutions?

has recognized the Baltic states—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—as part of the European system, and disagreements between these countries' ethnic majorities and Russian-speaking minorities have been managed along the West's preferred methods.

Russia and the West never agreed about the Black Sea. Are Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in Russia's sphere of control, or are they on track to join Western institutions? Such disagreement exists, largely because in the 1990s, neither the West nor Russia seriously imagined that these countries would want or could be prepared to join Western institutions. (In the 1990s, the debate was whether Poland would join NATO.) At the same time, Turkey had long sought to join the European Union, but was held at bay by Western European voters who feared a wave of Turkish immigrants. This confusion added an additional level of geopolitical complication. Lacking a clear set of rules, the Black Sea region's existing conflicts continued to smolder. The wars in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014 were sparked by local disputes, but they only occurred because of this larger disagreement about how the Black Sea region should be governed.

Today, the situation is as confused as a decade ago, but far more tense. Both Russia and Ukraine are building up their military power in the Black Sea. NATO has stationed additional forces in Romania and has considered adding to its naval presence. Over the past year, Turkey and Russia have swung between tentative friendship and near-open conflict. Ankara relies on NATO defense commitments even as it seeks to maintain its privileged position in the Black Sea itself. And Russia's expansion of its military role in Syria adds to the importance the Kremlin attaches to Black Sea naval supply routes. The Black Sea is more militarized and less stable than at any point since the Cold War's end—and perhaps since the late 1940s.

Black Sea energy

The question of security and in-

security in the Black Sea overlaps with other areas of conflict and cooperation. One key and contested theme is energy. A significant share of Russia's gas exports run via the Black Sea region, primarily through Ukraine. Gazprom, Russia's state-owned gas monopoly, says it wants to cut off gas transit through Ukraine, a move in part designed to place pressure on Kyiv's Western-oriented government. To make such a switch possible, Russia is looking to build new gas pipelines: some further north, but some also located in the Black Sea region. For years, Russia promoted the South Stream pipeline, which would have shipped gas via an underwater pipeline intersecting the Black Sea from Russia to Bulgaria, and then on to other European countries. Despite some support for the project in Bulgaria and elsewhere, it was scrapped in 2014 under pressure from Western leaders who wanted to punish Russia for annexing Crimea.

Since the cancellation of South Stream, the Kremlin has turned its attention to a new pipeline, Turk Stream. This pipeline would also bypass Ukraine via an underwater, trans-Black Sea link, distributing gas from Russia via Turkey and onward to European customers. This pipeline, too, is partly a geopolitical game. Russia froze the project after tensions with Turkey spiked in late 2015, only to restart it when ties improved in 2016. Many experts, however, consider the project economically unjustified given low energy prices and ample existing pipeline capacity. It remains unclear if the pipeline will be built.

Other countries also view the Black Sea as a strategic energy corridor. Just as the Kremlin seeks to bypass Ukraine by using other Black Sea routes, so too do Western governments look to the Black Sea as a route for transporting energy from the gas-rich Caspian Sea region to Western markets. Already, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline transports oil from Azerbaijani oil fields to global markets, bypassing Russia.

Potentially more significant are efforts to construct gas pipelines originating in Azerbaijan or even Turkmenistan, transiting through Turkey and supplying gas to Western consumers. The Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), for example, is intended to give Azerbaijan a means of breaking Russia's monopoly on gas exports from the former USSR to the West. If Iranian gas ever reaches Europe, it too will transit the Black Sea. So long as Europe relies on natural gas for energy, the Black Sea will remain a crucial energy transit corridor.

European and Eurasian integration in the Black Sea

Energy is not Europe's only interest in the Black Sea. The region is one of three areas of instability positioned along Europe's southern border. Coupled with the Eastern Mediterranean (Syria, Lebanon, Israel) and the countries of North Africa, political and economic chaos in the Black Sea risks spilling into the European Union.

The threat of instability along its border is a major reason why the European Union involves itself so much in the Black Sea region. Indeed, except for the Balkans, all potential members of the European Union ring the Black Sea, including Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and (for true optimists) Turkey.

The European Union has already signed Association Agreements with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. These agreements do not guarantee these countries future membership in the European Union, but they do provide

leaders are overcome. Nonetheless, geographic and economic realities mean that ties between Turkey and Europe are likely to persist. The migration deal struck earlier this year by Erdoğan and German Chancellor Angela Merkel is a good example for why cooperation between Turkey and the European Union will continue.

For this reason, Europe's foreign policy is likely to remain focused on the Black Sea for some time to come. Yet, the Black Sea is also one of two regions that Russia hopes will participate in its own Eurasian Union. Armenia has already signed up, and Russia is pushing hard for Moldova to join. Moscow would also like Ukraine to join its Eurasian project, though this looks unlikely given how strongly Ukrainian public opinion turned against Moscow thanks to the war in the Donbass.

Even if Europe and Russia manage to agree on Ukraine—a prospect that does not look likely—the broader question of Europe's relations with the other countries of the Black Sea is unlikely to go away. The door to European Union membership formally remains open, particularly for Moldova, a small country on the EU's border. And the EU has no model for stabilizing European countries on its border that does not involve expanding its own institutions. The Association Agreement that Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia signed with the European Union is unlikely to be the final step of their integration with Europe.

Why the Black Sea matters

Rarely has a region figured so prominently in American foreign policy without our even realizing it. We treat Turkey as separate



The geography of the Black Sea matters not only because the region is increasingly at the center of the United States' foreign policy, but we continue to wrongly see the region as divided into unconnected chunks.

wide access to European markets as well as aid and technical assistance. Moldovan and Georgian citizens have received the right to travel to the European Union without needing to apply for a visa, a right that Ukrainians may receive in 2017.

Major political groups in each of these countries describe accession to the European Union as a long-term goal. Amid Brexit and a continent-wide populist backlash, further EU expansion looks unlikely in the short term. But it is worth remembering that in 1989, as communist regimes crumbled across Central and Eastern Europe, the idea that Poland or Romania would join the European Union also seemed like a long-term prospect at best. As it happened, the long term came sooner than many expected.

Turkey has been a candidate for EU accession since before the Cold War ended, yet its membership, while still in theory under negotiation, looks unlikely. Unlike tiny Moldova and Georgia, Turkey's population is the size of Germany's, so its accession would drastically shift the balance of power within Europe. It would also likely lead to a flood of unwelcome economic migrants to wealthier European countries. That means full EU membership is unlikely, even if current political disagreements between Turkey's increasingly authoritarian President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other European

from Ukraine, Romania as wholly distinct from Georgia, and Russia as an aggressive "lone wolf" in the region. These are different countries, of course, with diverse historical traditions and political structures. But from security to energy to the future of Europe, the Black Sea operates as a united region far more than Americans usually realize. We underestimate regional connections and fail to understand the linkages that drive regional politics.

The Foreign Policy Research Institute's Black Sea Initiative, launching this month, will cover these issues in depth. Each month, we will publish an essay on a key Black Sea region issue, looking both at how specific Black Sea countries view the region and examining themes that cut across national borders. These essays will be written by top American and European analysts and by leading experts from the Black Sea region. Our aim is to show that from energy to economics, from security to geopolitics, the region's relevance is far broader than most people realize. The future of Europe and Eurasia is being contested in the Black Sea.

Chris Miller is Research Director of the FPRI Eurasia Program where he serves as the editor of the *Baltic Bulletin* and our *Black Sea Initiative* publications. He is also the Associate Director of the *Brady-Johnson Program in Grand Strategy* at Yale University.

(Source: Eurasia Review)



Energy is not Europe's only interest in the Black Sea. The region is one of three areas of instability positioned along Europe's southern border.

ing only in terms of Europe, the Middle East, and the former USSR misses many, perhaps most, of the dynamics that unite the region. Only several hundred miles separate Turkey's great Black Sea port of Trabzon from Tiraspol, the border city serving as capital of Moldova's breakaway Transnistria region. Burgas, Bulgaria's biggest port and an oil-refining hub, is a one-day sail from Georgia's Batumi, formerly the greatest oil port of Tsarist Russia. Sochi, the host of Russia's 2014 winter Olympics, is located due north of Rize, the home province of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The geography of the Black Sea matters not only because the region is increasingly at the center of the United States' foreign policy, but we continue to wrongly see the region as divided into unconnected chunks. Beyond geographic proximity and historical connections, however, there are three

hazia continue to attract the interest of outside powers, Russia chief among them.

All of these conflicts—frozen to various degrees—are usually seen as the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, remnants of the retreating Russian Empire. This is true, but it misses their Black Sea context. It is not a coincidence that all the ongoing post-Soviet conflicts (including, it is worth noting, Russia's ongoing struggle to pacify and integrate its own North Caucasus) occur around the Black Sea.

Why is this case? Primarily because the Black Sea area is where Russia and the West failed to agree on post-Cold War "rules of the game." In Central Asia, the West never seriously expected to wield dominant influence or to transform local governance. The civil war in Tajikistan, therefore, was resolved in the 1990s along Russian lines, with relatively little Western input. Similarly, Moscow



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نادرینیا: ۰۹۱۲۸۴۴۰۱۵۲

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ویوی عالی، خوش نقشه
استخر، لابی، ۲ پارکینگ
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شما را جهت اجاره به سفارتخانه ها و شرکت های خارجی نیازمندیم.

مالکین محترم

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

Understanding head injuries

By Jonathan Nadler

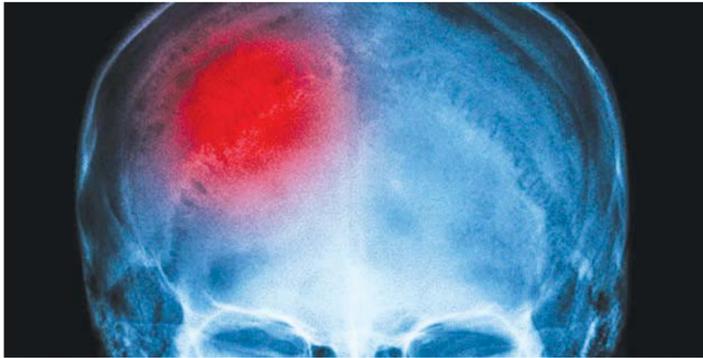
Spring season is here, and I am reminded of the story of Natasha Richardson (Liam Neeson's wife), who tragically died of a head injury while skiing without a helmet in 2007. Here in the emergency department, we see many patients with concern for head injuries. We factor what may have caused the injury, your age, what we find when we examine you, the timing of the incident, the medicines you take, as well as some other factors, when deciding whether to do a CT scan or admit you to the hospital.

When a head injury causes bleeding in the brain

Ms. Richardson died of an epidural hematoma, one of several types of brain bleeding, but arguably one of the most severe.

Bleeding inside the skull can occur in several different areas. The brain is covered by three layers of tissue called the meninges. If bleeding occurs between the skull and the outermost brain tissue layer (the dura), it is called an epidural hematoma. These usually occur from high-pressure bleeding from an artery and can rapidly expand, putting pressure on the brain tissue and leading to death within hours. These types of bleeds are almost always treated surgically. Epidural hematomas usually result from high impact mechanisms, and trauma to the sides of the head, near where the larger arteries lie.

Bleeding underneath the dural layer of tissue, outside the brain tissue, is usu-



ally from a subdural bleed. This is generally a low-pressure bleed from a vein. When found, they may be monitored or treated surgically, depending on the size of the bleed as well as many other factors. This type of bleeding is more common after age 60, as the veins in the brain become slightly more taut due to natural shrinking of the brain tissue. These tight "bridging veins" are more easily sheared with a fairly low impact.

Bleeding inside the brain can be divided into subarachnoid or intraparenchymal, depending on the exact location. These bleeds, when caused by trauma, are generally treated without

surgery unless they are very large.

Blood thinners such as Coumadin, Xarelto, Eliquis, Lovenox, or even Plavix put you at higher risk for dangerous bleeding after an injury. There are reversal agents for some of these medicines, but not all.

One thing to note is that while all of these types of bleeding can be seen on CT scanning, occasionally very small bleeds can be missed. Additionally, sometimes bleeding occurs several hours to days after the initial injury (delayed bleeding). Routine admission is not recommended, but if symptoms are suddenly worsening after being dis-

charged from a hospital, please return to the emergency department for a repeat evaluation.

Concussions

Many people are worried about concussions, in part because there has been much press about them in football players and children. I see many people come into the ED, requesting a CT scan to see if they have a concussion. Unfortunately, we can't see a concussion on a CT scan. A concussion is defined by a constellation of symptoms, generally: headache, dizziness, nausea, difficulty focusing, light sensitivity, and problems with balance and coordination. Symptoms usually last a few days, but can sometimes last weeks or even months. The most important factor that we know of right now to prevent long term problems, is to rest your brain after a concussion, to allow it to heal, and to avoid another injury on an already bruised brain. It's okay to sleep, and frequent awakenings are no longer routinely recommended.

If you unfortunately need to be seen in an emergency department after an accident, know that we have guidelines (such as the Canadian CT head rule) that help us determine who needs CT scanning. We factor the risks of radiation against the likelihood of an injury, and so please do not take personally when we decide that you do or do not need to have an imaging test.

Please wear a helmet when you're out on those slopes. Stay safe!

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

While all of these types of bleeding can be seen on CT scanning, occasionally very small bleeds can be missed.

Peer pressure can make you healthier... here's how

By Alexis Dent

It's easy to set healthy goals, but actually achieving them is much, much harder. Whether you're trying to make progress on your physical fitness or maintain your emotional well-being, it can be incredibly tempting to cheat... especially if you're the only person who knows what you're trying to do. I've definitely had some ambitions I let slide before, so a while ago, my therapist introduced me to my new favorite way to stay on track: having an "accountability partner"—someone who I can trust to keep me moving on a healthy path and who will call me out if I start to waver.

At the time, I was struggling with body dysmorphia, and my therapist encouraged me to remove all the full-length mirrors from my house. But to ensure I wouldn't cheat, she made me turn over my mirrors to someone who could be my accountability partner. I chose my mother, who hid all my full-length mirrors for me, so I could no longer scrutinize my thighs every night before bed. Before I knew it, I'd forgotten to even want a full-length mirror, and over time, my body dysmorphia went from

overwhelming to essentially irrelevant in my daily life.

Making those positive changes toward a healthier body image would have been much harder—maybe even impossible—without someone else making sure I didn't cheat. I know myself; without an accountability partner, I probably would have pretended to follow my therapist's directions... and then kept on doing what I was doing, making no improvement whatsoever. But because I had someone I care for right there to keep me accountable, I made progress in an important aspect of my health.

Having an accountability partner can be great for your emotional or mental wellness, but it's also a great strategy for achieving fitness and diet goals. When you're trying to make significant changes in your daily routine, going it alone is hard. Having trustworthy people in your corner will make sure that you stick to the goals and resolutions you've made for yourself.

Be specific when setting your goals (and let your accountability partner know all about them).

I use the SMART method of goal-setting,

an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound. Specificity is crucial to achieving goals; without it, it's easy to fall victim to aimlessness. Saying «I'm going to lose weight» is too vague—it's much more effective to say «I am going to lose 11 pounds in three months by combining a healthy diet and Pilates classes.» That way, your weight loss goal is specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and yes, time-bound. And when you share your super-specific goal with your accountability partner, they'll know more precisely how to help you should you start falling off-track.

Demand answerability

If you're going to have accountability partners, they need to follow through. Checking in once in a while isn't good enough; a good accountability partner will check in regularly with friendly questions and statements to ensure you're making progress. When I was training for my first half-marathon, I had a friend who was an avid runner push me to reach my goals. If I skipped a long run one day, she'd refuse to hang out with me until I took care of busi-

ness. It sounds silly, but it worked! I didn't want to let myself down... and I definitely didn't want my karaoke partner-in-crime to go MIA on me for slacking.

«How many times have you been to the gym this week?» is a perfect way for an accountability partner to check in for a fitness goal. «What has your diet been like this week?» «Find any good Whole 30 recipes?» «How are you keeping up with your 8-week fitness plan?» A great accountability partner will know what to ask and will not let you slack—even when you want to. The only trick is, you have to pick someone who you really want to be honest with.

Peer pressure works

No, not all peer pressure is bad peer pressure. Having a partner who is down for participating right alongside you while you achieve your goals is the best accountability partner there is! But if your partner of choice isn't able to jump right into your brand new workout regimen, that's OK. As long as you have someone cheering you on, you're well on your way to achieving your goal.

(Source: greatist.com)

5 steps to get your kids to eat more veggies

By Natalie Monson

Most meal directors, also known as multi-tasking parents, would welcome the chance to offer more vegetables to their children and have those vegetables eaten willingly. We secretly hope that the vegetables that we present will be eaten without threatening, shouting, and/or tears from any of the parties involved.

Having several vegetable delivery routes in your arsenal is definitely an advantage to you in your goal for reaching the MyPlate recommendation of having half of the plate filled with vegetables and fruit at each eating occasion.

So, here is a 5 step plan to add more vegetables for you and your family that will get rave reviews from the toughest of critics.

Step 1: Serve them as a supporting role

Always have a side of vegetables. Whether they're raw and with or without dip, steamed with a sprinkle of cheese, mashed, added to a pasta salad with whole

wheat pasta, or made to look like a forest, be creative and keep presenting them to your family. A study done by the University of Arizona showed that exposure to a food in childhood, regardless of whether the child liked it at the time, is related to liking that food in adulthood.

Step 2: Serve them in a starring role

Make the vegetable(s) the entrée with vegetarian fare, or give them part of the limelight in the entrée. If you're serving pizza, chop bell peppers, spinach, artichoke hearts, and more to add to your toppings. When you are making a casserole, pick vegetables you chop and throw in.

Serving a marinara? Add carrots, bell pepper, and zucchini.

Step 3: Serve them behind the scenes

Sometimes, hiding the vegetables has its advantages. Yes, continue to present vegetables for your children to try, but there are so many opportunities to incorporate vegetables into food where your child just won't notice that they're there, and you get to boost the flavor and nutrition of your meal.

You can also use vegetables to replace grains in some recipes. Your family may not notice the substitution, or they may notice and enjoy the new flavors.

Step 4: Serve them as extras

Add an "extra" of powerful green vegetables to your set of favorite smoothie ingredients. The greens add almost no flavor but they pack in the nutrition. Greens such as spinach and kale provide iron, calcium, vitamins C, A, and K, antioxidants, and fiber.

Step 5: Serve them as cameo appearances

Did you know that vegetables can make cameos as ingredients in delicious baked goods? Zucchini muffins, fruit and veggie smoothie muffins, and zucchini carrot muffins make delicious snacks or breakfast fare. I like to replace the all-purpose flour called for in recipes with white whole wheat flour, whereas some people like to use a combination of half all-purpose flour and half whole wheat flour. You can experiment to see what works for you. I also often use applesauce for the oil in baked goods.

With the right plan, you can get your kid to love vegetables.

While your kitchen wins at home may not bring the paparazzi out in droves, you'll feel as though you are a superstar when you succeed at serving your children vegetables that they will eat and enjoy.

(Source: verywell.com)



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10 hot titles of IT world

By Alireza Khorasani

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

- 1** Samsung will announce Galaxy S8 on March 29 in simultaneous launch events in New York and London. S8 will be available in week 17 of this year starting at \$849.
- 2** Google and LG are planning to mark the launch of Android Wear 2.0 with a pair of smartwatches.
- 3** Pokémon Go, the once popular global game phenomenon, has launched in South Korea six months after it came out in the US and Europe. Niantic said the delay was caused by the translation into Korean.
- 4** The purchase of Yahoo's operating business by Verizon has been pushed back to the second quarter of 2017, as the company made a net earnings loss of \$214 million for FY2016. The Sunnyvale, California company earned \$162 million during the final three months of 2016 from revenue of \$1.47 billion.
- 5** After President Donald Trump took the oath of office, the White House's Spanish-language website has been down and the associated Twitter account empty. Under both George W. Bush and Barack Obama, the White House maintained a Spanish-language version of its official website, while the Obama administration also updated its companion Twitter account, @LaCasaBlanca.
- 6** LG Display reports record fourth quarter profit of \$778 million. The world's biggest liquid crystal display maker said its fourth-quarter operating profit rose 180 percent from a year earlier in its largest quarterly profit ever, due to a pickup in panel prices.
- 7** Trump appoints Pai to head FCC and beat-down net neutrality. Ajit Pai, a Republican and FCC member, doesn't believe in net neutrality at all. Trump had always opposed net neutrality. In November 2014 when the FCC ruled for net neutrality, Trump tweeted, "Obama's attack on the internet is another top down power grab."
- 8** Saudi Arabia warned organizations in the kingdom to be on the alert for the Shamoon virus, which cripples computers by wiping their disks, as the labor ministry said it had been attacked and a chemicals firm reported a network disruption. An alert from the telecoms authority seen by Reuters advised all parties to be vigilant for attacks from the Shamoon 2 variant of the virus that in 2012 crippled tens thousands of computers at oil giant Saudi Aramco.
- 9** Qualcomm fights back against Apple. Qualcomm issued a statement saying that Apple had mischaracterized the negotiations and agreements between the two firms. Just a few days ago Apple is taking chip supplier Qualcomm to court. At issue is more than \$1 billion in royalties that Apple allegedly says it is owed by the company.
- 10** A plan to rely on biometric recognition to further automate airport border processing raises privacy and ethical concerns about data security, according to an expert. But another information security analyst says the plan – which would involve 90% of passengers being processed through Australian airport immigration without human involvement – would not present any more privacy concerns than current border control regimes.

As attacks grow, EU mulls banking stress tests for cyber risks

By Francesco Guarascio

The European Union is considering testing banks' defenses against cyber attacks, EU officials and sources said, as concerns grow about the industry's vulnerability to hacking. Cyber attacks against banks have increased in numbers and sophistication in recent years, with criminals finding new ways to target banks beyond trying to illicitly obtain details of their customers' online accounts. Last February \$81 million was taken from the Bangladesh central bank when hackers broke into its system and gained access to the SWIFT international transactions network. Global regulators have tightened security requirements for banks after that giant cyber fraud, one of the biggest in history, and in some countries have carried out checks on lenders' security systems. But complex cyber attacks have kept rising, as revealed in November by SWIFT in a letter to client banks and by the theft of 2.5 million pounds (\$3 million) from Tesco Plc's banking arm in the first mass hacking of accounts at a Western lender. Banks "are struggling to demonstrate their ability to cope with the rising threat of intruders gaining unauthorized access to their critical systems and data," a report of the European Banking Authority (EBA) warned in December. The next step from European regulators to boost security could be an EU-wide stress test. The European executive commission is assessing additional initiatives to counter



cyber attacks, a commission official told Reuters. "These include cyber-threat information sharing or penetration and resilience testing of systems." The European Central Bank announced last year it would set up a database to register incidents of cyber crime at commercial banks in the 19-country euro zone. But exchanges of information among national authorities on cyber incidents remains scant. The Commission is studying whether

EU-wide tests would help step up security, a source at the EU executive said. This would be in addition to controls already carried out by national authorities. EBA, which is in charge of stress-testing the bloc's banks, is expected to detail in summer the checks it intends to conduct in the next exercise planned in mid 2018. EBA tests banks' capital cushions and can conduct checks on specific issues. Last year it monitored risks caused by fines, as EU lenders faced sanctions

from U.S. regulators. An EBA official said cyber security was on the agency's radar but no decision had been made on a possible stress test. The body's chairman, Andrea Enria, has urged EU states to stress-test their financial institutions for cyber risks. Lloyds Banking Group is working with law enforcement agencies to trace who was behind a cyber attack that caused intermittent outages for customers of its personal banking websites almost two weeks ago, according to a source familiar with the incident. Lloyds said it would not speculate on the cause of the attack. No customers suffered any losses. As European banks keep relying on digital infrastructure that is "rigid and outdated", according to EBA, regulators are considering new technologies that could boost security. Blockchain, the technology behind the most successful virtual currency, Bitcoin, is being closely monitored in Brussels "to establish the advantages and possible risks" but also to weigh possible moves to enable blockchain where it is hindered, the Commission source said. More than 1 billion euros have been invested in blockchain startups, a World Economic Forum report said. The EU agency for network and information security (ENISA) said in a report last week the technology offered new opportunities and could cut costs, but may also pose new cyber security challenges, mostly caused by its decentralized network. (Source: Reuters)

Apple outs iOS 10.2.1, macOS 10.12.3, watchOS 3.1.3, tvOS 10.1.1

Apple just released the iOS 10.2.1 update. It follows on the heels of iOS 10.2, the larger release that hit in December and introduced the new Apple TV app, new Emoji, updates to Photos, Messages, Movies, Mail, Accessibility and more. Today's update is much smaller, as the name implies. According to Apple, iOS 10.2.1 includes "bug fixes and improves the security of your iPhone or iPad." It's not immediately known, but I'm curious if anything inside of the update helps solve some of the battery life issues related to the iPhone 6. Apple had been working on a software patch that was supposed to help it diagnose issues, though it was otherwise issuing battery replacements to iPhone 6s owners. macOS 10.12.3 improves automatic GPU switching on the latest MacBook Pro models and resolves some



issues with Adobe Premiere Pro on the same laptops, fixes an issue that prevented searching for scanned PDFs in Preview, resolves a compatibility issue with PDFs that are exported with encryption enabled, and also fixes an issue that prevented "some third-party applications" from importing images from digital cameras. watchOS 3.1.3 follows the pulled release of 3.1.1 last month, which unfortunately bricked some Apple Watches. The 3.1.1 version never got re-released and there wasn't a 3.1.2 going out either, in a bit of an odd situation. Anyway, watchOS 3.1.3 is just focused on bug fixes and performance improvements, with nothing less vague to talk about. Finally, tvOS 10.1.1 is in the same boat, with "general performance and stability improvements" coming your way if you own a fourth-generation Apple TV. (Source: Apple)

Google completely revamps Google Voice



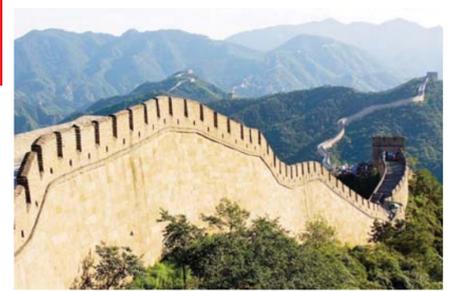
Google had put its Voice product on hold for more than a few years. Google Voice is a VoIP-centric platform for virtualizing a phone number whether it be for carrying a second number around, keeping your actual number private from sketchy craigslist sellers, or using Google's free visual voicemail alternative. Over the past few years, Google's had growing success with the Android platform, not to mention the other projects like Google Photos, Android Wear, and the widely acclaimed success of the Google Chromecast as well as more recent ambitions like Google-Fi and Google Home. It seems that Google found more value in concentrating on these other huge overtakings while putting Google Voice on hold. Now that all these projects are operational and established, Google is now able to focus some of its resources into updating a popular product for US-based Googlers. Google Voice has been revamped from the ground up with a new, clean interface and material-UI design language for its Android, iOS and Web applications. Three tabs (in the mobile app) now separate messages, calls, and voicemails into their own tabs. Conversations are no longer a mishmash of messages, jumbled up into clumps as Google Voice now supports threaded message conversations. Also new is official support for photo MMS and group MMS messaging. Previously, support for this was somewhat botched and didn't work with recipients of certain carriers. (Source: blog.google)

Semiconductor business carries Samsung to strong full-year profit



Samsung Electronics has posted its most profitable year since the heady days of FY2013 when its mobile business was firing on all cylinders, on the back of its semiconductor business contributing 13.6 trillion won to a total operating profit of 29.24 trillion won. The mobile unit added 10.8 trillion won in profit, while its consumer electronics and display panel business contributed 2.6 and 2.2 trillion won, respectively. Revenue for the full year was flat, with 202 trillion won in sales booked during 2016, compared to 201 trillion won last year. The semiconductor business increased sales to 51.2 trillion won, while mobile saw a slight drop to 100 trillion won for the year. For the fourth quarter, overall revenue remained flat, at 53.3 trillion won, while profit jumped from 6.1 trillion won in 2015 to 9.2 trillion won this quarter. Compared to last year, semiconductor profits grew from 2.8 trillion won to 5 trillion won, mobile slightly increased its profit to book 2.5 trillion won for the fourth quarter, and the display panel unit more than quadrupled its 0.3 trillion won last year to claim 1.3 trillion won. "Fourth-quarter earnings were driven by the components businesses, mainly the memory business and the display panel segment, which manufactures OLED and LCD screens," the company said in a statement. "Robust sales of high-end, high-performance memory products and expanded process migration in V-NAND, plus strong shipments of OLED and large-size UHD panels contributed to profitability. (Source: Samsung)

China just made VPNs illegal



Chinese authorities block access to big-name websites such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and numerous others, and to thwart these restrictions, many residents on the mainland use virtual private networks. Starting this week, that could be a crime. Use of VPNs and special cable connections in China must now be approved by the government, essentially making these services illegal in the country. China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology announced the new rules on Sunday, as reported by the South China Morning Post. Calling it a "clean-up" of the country's internet connections, the Ministry said the new rules would go live immediately and be in place until March 31st, 2018. VPNs are already subject to government scrutiny and interference in China. The most recent, large-scale crackdown on VPNs happened in March 2016, during the National People's Congress meeting in Beijing, SCMP says. Last week, in stark contrast to the Ministry's new VPN rules, Chinese leader Xi Jinping defended the tenets of globalization at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. "We must redouble efforts to develop global connectivity to enable all countries to achieve inter-connected growth and share prosperity. ... Pursuing protectionism is like locking oneself in a dark room. While wind and rain may be kept outside, that dark room will also block light and air," he said. China isn't the only country that censor internet access: Authorities in Egypt, Russia, Cuba, Bahrain, Turkey, Vietnam also routinely interrupt connections, particularly during times of political strife. (Source: Reuters)

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Early meteorite bits reveal clues about Solar System's evolution

Many meteorites found on Earth are remnants of one titanic Solar-System collision that took place more than 460 million years ago. But for the first time, researchers have specifically targeted meteorites that fell to Earth just before that asteroid collision and found that the composition of those earlier space rocks is quite different than those today.

By sifting through the minuscule remnants of those ancient Solar-System crashes, called micrometeorites, the researchers found that the most common types of meteorites today used to be quite rare — and the rarest ones used to be common. Understanding the make-up of asteroids provides insight into the history of Solar-System collisions and the evolution of the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, scientists say.

"We spend lots of time studying the debris from the big asteroid destruction event 466 million years ago, but recently, we went a little bit further back in time," said Philipp Heck, a researcher at The Field Museum in Chicago and lead author of the new research paper. "We found it very different from what comes down today."

■ Flying debris

Meteorites come from flying debris after a collision of two bodies in the Solar System, and their makeup reflects the asteroid, comet, moon or planet that



Meteorites come from flying debris after a collision of two bodies in the Solar System, and their makeup reflects the asteroid, comet, moon or planet that suffered through the crash.

suffered through the crash. The rarest meteorites found on Earth today come from differentiated or partially differentiated bodies — big clusters of dust and debris that got hot enough to form (or partially form) a core, mantle and crust,

as on Earth, Mars or the asteroid Vesta. It's much more common for meteorites today to come from undifferentiated bodies, which remained mixtures of rock, dust and metal.

But according to the new research,

that type of meteorite, called an ordinary chondrite, used to be much less common than ones from differentiated bodies were. By avoiding the most recent meteorites, researchers can get a glimpse of more collisions in the solar system's past.

"This is not an event, what we're looking at — this is basically the background," Heck said. "You can say these are tails of different events; the results of different (collision) events in the solar system, in the asteroid belt, that generated fragments ... and those fragments arrived to Earth."

■ Asteroid populations

A few events and asteroid populations seem to dominate that background, he added: 34 percent of the micrometeorites came from partially differentiated bodies, which had partially melted and begun to separate out, whereas only 0.45 percent of meteorites today are that type. This indicates that many more of those bodies were experiencing collisions in the past, Heck said.

The researchers also found micrometeorites that originated from a collision at Vesta, the brightest asteroid visible from Earth, billions of years ago, as well as meteorites that the researchers think came from the formation of the Flora asteroid family, also about a billion years ago.

(Source: space.com)

Scientists engineer first semisynthetic organism with three-base-pair DNA

Researchers at The Scripps Research Institute (TSRI) claim to have created the first stable semisynthetic organism with extra bases added to its genetic code. The single-celled organism is also able to continually replicate the synthetic base pair as it divides, which could mean that future synthetic organisms may be able to carry extra genetic information in their DNA sequences indefinitely.

The cells of all organisms contain genetic information in their DNA as a two-base-pair sequence made up of four molecules — A, T, C, G (Adenine, Cytosine, Thymine, and Guanine). Each of these is known as a nucleotide (consisting of a nitrogenous base, a phosphate molecule, and a sugar molecule) and are specifically and exclusively paired, so that only A is coupled to T and C is coupled with G. These nucleotides are connected in a chain by the covalent (electron-coupled) bonds between the sugar of one

nucleotide and the phosphate of the next, which creates an alternating sugar-phosphate "backbone."

■ Synthetic bases

The team from TSRI have added two synthetic bases that they call "X" and "Y" into the genetic code of an E. coli carrier organism — a single-cell bacteria — and then chemically tweaked it to live, replicate, and survive with the extra DNA molecules intact.

"We've made this semisynthetic organism more life-like," said Professor Floyd Romesberg, senior author of the new study. "We can now get the light of life to stay on. That suggests that all of life's processes can be subject to manipulation."

Building on previous work on the development of X and Y in 2014, the team demonstrated at the time that engineered E. coli bacteria could hold the artificial base



pair in their genetic code temporarily, but would then lose them when the organism divided.

■ Genome's stability

"Your genome isn't just stable for a day," said Romesberg. "Your genome has to be stable for the scale of your lifetime. If the semisynthetic organism is going to really be an organism, it has to be able to stably maintain that information."

(Source: New Atlas)

Scientists discover prehistoric giant otter species in China

Six million years ago, giant otters weighing more than 100 pounds lived among birds and water lilies in the wooded wetlands of China's Yunnan Province.

That's according to new research from a team of scientists who discovered a well-preserved cranium of the newly-discovered species in an open lignite mine in 2010. They recently published their findings in the Journal of Systematic Palaeontology.

The researchers concluded that this wolf-sized prehistoric creature is "two to three times larger than any modern otter species," Denise Su, the head of paleo-

botany and paleoecology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, tells The Two-Way.

The fossilized cranium was nearly complete, but flattened to about an inch and a half thick. "The bones are pretty fragile, so we couldn't really reconstruct it physically," Su said. "So what we did is we took CT scans of the cranium, and then we digitally reconstructed it."

The cranium was particularly interesting because it revealed that the animal's teeth had "some badger features," Su explains. The species name Siamogale melillutra, is a nod to that — in Latin, meles

means badger and lutra means otter.

■ Dental mystery

And the completeness of the cranium provided the researchers with important information about how otters evolved, Su said. It shed light on a dental mystery in particular.

The giant otters possessed large bunodont, or round-cusped, teeth. Scientists have wondered whether different species of otters inherited these teeth from a common ancestor, or evolved them separately because they were eating similar things — a process known as convergent evolution.

But by comparing this specimen to modern and other fossil otters, Su says they found "these bunodont teeth actually arose at least four different times within the greater otter lineage." That finding suggests they emerged because of convergent evolution, rather than inheritance from a common ancestor.

The scientists initially found other bones from the species in 2009, including an upper arm bone. Su remembers looking at that bone and thinking, "This looks like an otter but it's huge ... is this really an otter?"

(Source: npr.org)

Tejarat Bank Wins Golden Statue in 12th Festival of Champions of Industry

Tejarat Bank won the golden statue and Plaque of Honor in 12th Festival of Champions of Industry in banking industry sector, Public Relations Department of the bank announced.

The bank was introduced as top and forerunner

bank in the sector of outstanding brands in Iranian market in line with social responsibilities, environmental activities and development of its financial supermarket.

The 12th Festival of Champions of Industry was held

in the presence of Eng. Hashemi Governor General of Tehran Province.

It should be noted that the Festival is held annually with the aim of introducing top and most successful economic enterprises in related field.

IKAC's Revenue in Last Year at \$460b

Revenues of Imam Khomeini Airport City Company (IKAC) in the last Iranian calendar year in 1394 (ended March 19, 2016) stood at \$460 billion.

Chief Executive of IKAC Mahmoud Navidi announced the above statement in his weekly press briefing and said: "72 percent of revenues obtained by the company is related to the aviation sector while the rest 28% is related to both purchasing products from stores and parking lots."

He put the average non-aviation incomes of other airports in world in the past year at more than 45 percent (45%).

The revenue of airports in non-aviation sector has increased since 1970, he said, adding: "Income rate of non-aviation sector of airports has increased from five percent in 1970 to 45 percent in 2015."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the senior official of the company put the debt rate of airlines to Imam Khomeini Airport City

Company at approx. \$400 million, so that Iran Air (Iran's national flag carrier) accounts for the maximum debt share in this regard."

He pointed to the construction of a terminal at the company entitled "SALAM" and said: "5,000 billion rials credit is needed for the completion of construction operation of this giant project, so that construction of this terminal is underway with 44 to 45 percent physical progress."

Planning is underway for meeting demand of 60 million passengers per year in this terminal, he said, adding: "Presently, we are seeking competent and qualified contractors for transferring this project within the framework of Build-Operate and Transfer (BOT) basis."

In the end, Chief Executive of IKAC Mahmoud Navidi put the cost needed for the construction operation of this terminal at \$1 billion.

CII CEO Reveals Stocks Purchase of Insurance Firms by Foreigners

Talks are underway on the purchase of stocks of domestic insurance firms by foreign companies.

Chief Executive of Central Insurance of Iran (CII) Abdol-Nasser Hemmati announced the above statement and said: "Although constructive negotiations have been held in this regard, talks have not yet been finalized."

Speaking in his news conference among correspondents, he pointed to the latest situation of compensating PLASCO Building inferno and said: "According to the latest statistics, 210 trade units in this building had been insured against fire."

Given the above issue, 14 insurance firms are follow-

ing up insurance case of trade units in the building, he said, adding: "Of total 600 trade units in the building, 35 percent of which had insurance policies."

It should be noted that all firefighters also had been covered under insurance services (life and accident), he maintained.

CII, as the insurance industry's regulator, requires insurers to separate life insurance reserves, mainly to stop them from using the resources to cover losses in other categories.

The regulator is also planning to boost the share of life insurance in the insurers' portfolio. Separating the reserves is of high importance for promoting the category, as insurers are expected to meet their long-term

commitments.

Hemmati announced earlier that the regulator will issue no new license for general firms.

In response to a question on the case of inflated and unconventional salaries started from the Central Insurance of Iran (CII), he said: "Effective steps have been taken in this regard and there is no worry about this."

In the end, Chief Executive of Central Insurance of Iran (CII) Abdol-Nasser Hemmati said that giant steps have been taken in the field of compensating the respected insurers in case of accidents and incidents in the current Iranian calendar year in 1395 (to end March 19, 2017).

Camera able to capture imagery of an optical Mach cone

A team of researchers at Washington University in St. Louis has built a camera apparatus capable of capturing moving imagery of an optical Mach cone. In their paper published in the journal Science Advances, the team describes their image capturing system and other possible applications of the technology.

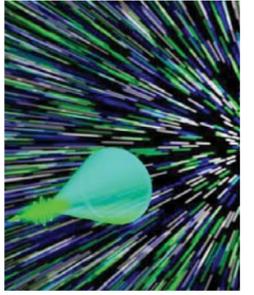
Most everyone knows that when an object like a jet moves faster than the speed of sound, an acoustic cone is created in its wake that can be heard as a sonic boom. Scientists have theorized that the same type of phenomenon could occur with light, but until now, have not been able to prove it by capturing images of it in action. In this new effort, the researchers have done just that, and have developed an image capturing system capable of taking images of other ultrafast events, as well.

To capture imagery of an optical Mach cone, the researchers approached the problem from both sides — by developing a superfast imaging system and by slowing down light.

The second part was easy; all they had to do was shine a laser through a medium — in this case, a tunnel with dry ice particles that was placed between plates made of aluminum oxide powder and silicone rubber. The light from the laser subsequently traveled faster as it moved through the tunnel compared to the plates, allowing for the formation of an optical Mach cone.

To capture imagery of the cone, the researchers installed three CCD cameras next to the cone-generating apparatus, one of which was a streak camera (it works by converting photons to electrons and bending the path they take).

(Source: phys.org)



China wants to fetch rocks from the moon

Late in 2013, China became the third nation to land a rover on the surface of the moon, following the United States and the former Soviet Union. By the end of 2017, China National Space Administration plans to send up a second mission and return with samples. And that is only the beginning of China's space aspirations.

In what was the first soft landing on the moon since the Soviet Luna 24 touched down on Aug. 22, 1976 (the last of 20 successful missions), China's Chang'e 3 arrived in lunar orbit on Dec. 6, 2013 and landed on the surface days later.

The rover, called Yutu or Jade Rabbit (after a Chinese myth about a white rabbit that's a pet of the moon goddess Chang'e), experienced an array of technical difficulties soon after its landing. One such issue was an electrical shutdown following a cold lunar night, however, the challenges were addressed and the rover went on to become the longest operating moon rover ever, finally shutting down in August 2016 after 31 months.

Some of the photos from the Yutu rover were analyzed and discussed in a 2015 paper published in the scientific journal Nature Communications, which identified a new type of basalt found on the lunar surface that had not been previously examined.

The new lunar explorer, Chang'e 5, will be significantly more complicated than the previous Chang'e 3. "With a weight of 8.2 tons, the lunar probe is comprised of four parts: an orbiter, a returner, an ascender and a lander," said China Aerospace Science and Technology Corp. consultant Ye Peijian, according to official state broadcaster CCTV.

(Source: The CSM)

Chimpanzees are forcing us to redefine what it means to be human

Primatologist Frans de Waal says chimpanzees can do almost everything that was once considered a distinctively human trait.

The idea that only humans make tools is today "an unsustainable position," de Waal writes by email. "Then we also got the apes-have-no-theory-of-mind claims, which now have been seriously weakened, the culture claims, the idea that only humans are great at cooperation, and so on, none of which really holds up."

De Waal's latest book—"Are We Smart Enough to Know How Smart Animals Are?"—describes a monumental shift in our understanding of animal intelligence in recent decades. In one fascinating part, he takes on a theory about tools by pointing to new observations of chimps, a species that shares 99% of the same DNA as humans.

Anthropologist Kenneth Oakley laid out the old viewpoint in his 1957 book, "Man the Toolmaker," which argued that mankind was the only animal that systematically made tools.

That stance was challenged by anthropologist Jane Goodall's observations of chimps in the wild. When, in 1960, she described chimps stripping leaves from a stem to make a tool to dig for termites, her colleague Louis Leakey telegraphed: "Now we must redefine tool, redefine Man, or accept chimpanzees as humans."

Still, Oakley wasn't convinced. In subsequent writings, he dismissed Goodall's observations as "a far cry from the systematic making of stone tools, the earliest known examples of which ... evidently require much premeditation, a high order of skill and an established tradition implying some means of communication."

Thus, whether man is the only true tool-making animal remained an open question. Yet today, per de Waal, we can answer with a definitive no.

(Source: Business Insider)

Healthcare reform plan available to Islamic, regional countries: minister

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Iran's healthcare reform plan is available to Islamic and regional countries, Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi said on Tuesday.

Iran's healthcare reform plan which was endorsed by the World Health Organization twice has led to a decrease in medical and health-related expenses for Iranians, Qazizadeh-Hashemi added, IRIB reported.

He further highlighted that "as Iran's Health Minister I declare our readiness to share our achievements and experiences with world leaders and my colleagues, active in healthcare sector, worldwide."

The healthcare reform plan kicked off on May 4, 2014 with the main goals of decreasing the out-of-pocket expenses for the patients, promoting natural birth, and supporting underprivileged patients suffering from rare or incurable diseases.

One of the most important changes occurred within the framework of the healthcare reform plan was the reduction of out-of-pocket expenses for those living in rural areas to less than 3 percent and their insurance coverage free of charge.

Some 11 million people living in underprivileged areas are now under the coverage of health insurance services within the framework of healthcare reform plan, and furthermore, the number of cesarean sections to deliver babies have dropped by 11 percent in Iran since launching the healthcare reform plan in the country.

Explosive announcement of baby's gender earns man a ticket

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A western Nebraska man is in trouble after using an explosive rifle target to announce the gender of his baby.

The Omaha World-Herald reports that Jon Sterkel and his wife, Ashley, thought the target would be a fun way to announce they are expecting a boy in June.

When Sterkel shot the target Saturday on rural land outside Scottsbluff, blue chalk powder packed around the rifle target erupted. Several people called police with concerns about the explosion.

Sterkel called the Scotts Bluff County Sheriff's Office to explain after he heard a news report on the explosion.

In return, Sterkel received a misdemeanor ticket for using the exploding target without a permit.

LEARN ENGLISH I'm Sorry

A: Steven! Where have you been? I've been trying to **get a hold of** you for hours!

B: I... um... there was an emergency at work, so...

A: I was waiting for you in the restaurant for three hours! And you didn't even have the **decency** to call me! **Do you have any idea** how embarrassed I was?

B: Honey, I promise this won't happen again, it's just that I...

A: Yeah, right. I've heard it all before. I'm not going to take any more of your **empty promises**. This is the fifth time you've stood me up in two weeks! You need to **get your priorities straight**. I'm tired of you **putting your job first** all the time!

B: Come on, Veronica, that's not fair. I do care about you a lot, you know that. I tried to...

A: You know what? Maybe we should just **take a break**. I need some time to think about where this relationship is **heading**.

B: But...Veronica, would you just listen to me? There was a fire alarm at my office building today and I was stuck...

Key vocabulary

get hold of: find or contact someone

decency: polite or moral behavior

do you have any idea: do you know

empty promises: words etc. that are not sincere, or have no effect

stand (someone) up: fail to keep the appointment to meet someone

get your priorities straight: realize what is more important

put something first: to consider someone or something as the most important person or thing

take a break: stop seeing each other or going out with each other for a short period of time

head: go towards a specified direction or place

Supplementary vocabulary

break up: end a relationship

cheat on (someone): to be unfaithful to your husband, wife

get back together: restart a relationship that ended

ex: someone's former wife, husband, girlfriend, or boyfriend

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Plasco tragedy — Day 6: 11,000 tons of debris removed, 6 bodies discovered

SOCIETY TEHRAN — After six days of continuous rescue operation following to the inferno in Plasco building some 11,000 tons of debris have been removed and six bodies found so far.

The 17-story building, a shopping center located in downtown Tehran, caught fire on Thursday and after three hours it collapsed while a number of firefighters and ordinary people trapped under the debris.

Unfortunately due to the damages their bodies suffered by the massive piles of debris and the fire their identities have remained unknown so far and they are transferred to the forensics for identification.

Moreover, 202 people have suffered injuries due to the fire and the collapse; 154 received outpatient care, 48 were transferred to the hospital, two of whom have not been discharged yet and sadly, Behnam Mirzakhani, one of



the firefighters, passed away due to the severe burns he sustained during the rescue operation.

Earlier it was announced that some 15 to 25 firefighters and other people might be trapped under the debris and because

of the searing heat any hopes to find any of the victims alive is almost faded.

Tehran fire department director has said that the rescue operation would take two more days to complete.

It was also pointed out by Tehran forensics department director general Masoud Qadi-Pasha that it is most likely that the bodies are burnt into ashes and won't be found anymore.

The money and personal belongings found at the scene are safe with the police and will be brought back to their owners.

Coordinated by the health ministry and universities of medical sciences 10 teams of psychotherapist comprising 20 experts also attend the scene to help firefighters, other victims and the missing people families to cope with current situation and the pain they are going through.

A public funeral will be held on Thursday for the late firefighters at the University of Tehran and they will be laid to rest on the same day.

Australia zoo urges people to catch deadly spiders as antidote runs low

SYDNEY (Reuters) — An Australian zookeeper on Tuesday urged people to catch and donate deadly funnel-web spiders, to help replenish stocks of antidote running low after a spate of spider bites.

The Australian Reptile Park, the country's sole supplier of funnel-web venom to antidote producers since 1981, relies on the public to hand in spiders that are milked for the venom used to produce an antidote.

The anti-venom program was now at risk after too few spiders were donated last year and a recent heat wave encouraged more spider activity and bites, the park's general manager, Tim Faulkner, said on Tuesday.

"We rely on community support to keep this program

alive," Faulkner said in a telephone interview.

"We have tried to catch enough spiders ourselves and we just can't."

Funnel-web spiders live throughout southeastern Australia, but the only known killer is the Sydney funnel-web spider, found in the Sydney region and as far north as Newcastle and south to Illawarra, the park says on its website.

"The large fangs and acidic venom make the bite very painful," it said, noting that a major bite can cause death within an hour if left untreated.

After milking the spiders, the park delivers the venom to a division of the blood plasma and vaccine maker CSL

Ltd, which converts it into the life-saving antidote.

Australia has had two funnel-web spider attacks in two weeks, media have said, one of them involving a woman bitten by a spider while she was asleep.

Despite the terrifying reputation of Australian wildlife, nobody has died from the bite of a funnel-web spider since the anti-venom program began in 1981.

Catching venomous spiders is safe, as long precautions are followed, Faulkner said.

"With an appropriate jar and a wooden spoon, you can flick the spider into the jar so easily," he said.

"We've been doing this for 35 years and no one's been hurt."

IN FOCUS @ Mizan/Mohammad Reza Sharif



Dammed water once again started flowing in the Zayanderud River, central city of Isfahan, early Tuesday morning. The river was unfortunately completely dried up and it will run for 22 days for agricultural use.



ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Free tuberculosis testing at Tehran subway

Temporary units which test for tuberculosis (TB) free of charge are set up at three stations of Tehran subway, IRIB reported on Tuesday.

The units are designed to heighten public awareness with experts explaining TB risk factors, its diagnosis, prevention and reasons for developing such a disease using brochures.

The scheme is co-planned by Tehran subway company department for social and cultural affairs and western Tehran healthcare center.

استقرار پایگاه های تست بیماری سل در مترو تهران

به گزارش خبرگزاری صدا و سیما پایگاه های تست بیماری سل در سه ایستگاه مترو تهران در حال ارایه خدمت به صورت رایگان هستند.

این برنامه با حضور کارشناسان با توزیع بروشور ارایه توضیحات در جهت آشنایی بیشتر شهروندان تهرانی با بیماری سل، راه های تشخیص این بیماری، علل بروز و راه های پیشگیری از ابتلا به این بیماری طراحی شده است.

این برنامه به همت معاونت فرهنگی و اجتماعی شرکت بهره برداری مترو تهران و مشارکت مرکز بهداشت شمال غرب تهران برگزار شده است

ENGLISH PROVERB

There's many a slip twixt cup and lip

■ **Explanation:** something that you say in order to warn someone not to be too confident about the result of a plan, because many things can go wrong before it is completed

■ **For example:** We still might finish in time for the deadline, but there's many a slip twixt cup and lip.

PHRASAL VERB

Call in (a loan or debt)

■ **Meaning:** to officially tell someone to pay back money you lent them

■ **For example:** The bank can call in the loan at any time.

ENGLISH IDIOM

Bang one's head against a brick wall

■ **Explanation:** to waste one's time trying hard to accomplish something that is completely hopeless

■ **For example:** I've been banging my head against a brick wall trying to explain the internet to my grandmother!



Every action has a reaction. We have one planet; one chance.

UN seeks nearly \$5 bn for Syria refugees

United Nations agencies and aid groups appealed on Tuesday for \$4.63 billion (4.31 billion euros) in 2017 to help Syrians who have fled their country's war and sought refuge in neighboring countries.

The appeal is on top of the \$3.4 billion that the UN estimates is needed this year for the 13.5 million people still in Syria who have been affected by the conflict.

"Syrian refugees and host communities need our support now more than ever," UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi told an international aid conference in Helsinki.

"The international community must send a clear message that it stands with them and provides the urgently-needed support."

The appeal, by the UN and 240 partner agencies, is for what is called the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for 2017 and 2018.

The \$4.63 billion figure is the amount set for 2017. A funding figure has yet to be set for 2018.



The program aims at financing and organizing aid for 4.7 million refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt.

These countries, which have borne the brunt of the refugee crisis sparked by the Syrian conflict, are struggling to meet the chal-

lenges triggered by the influx.

Grandi recalled that only 59 percent of the \$4.54 billion target set for 2016 was actually met, leaving a \$1.8 billion shortfall.

"Last year we reached funding percentages of close to 60 percent. I think that we can all do better," he said.

In addition to Syrians who have fled abroad, some 13.5 million people within the country are in desperate need of humanitarian assistance.

They include 6.3 million who have been internally displaced and 4.6 million who are in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

"Civilians continue to be targeted in brutal attacks," Stephen O'Brien, emergency relief coordinator for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, told the conference.

"The suffering of the Syrian people -- the majority of whom remain inside the country -- continues unabated. It's imperative that we step up our collective efforts," he said. (Source: AFP)

Poll: Trump gets historically low approval rating during first days as president

President Trump is getting historically low approval ratings during his first few days in the White House, according to a new poll released on Monday.

The poll, conducted by Gallup, found that 45 percent of Americans approved of Trump's first weekend as president. The same percentage of people disapproved of Trump's first days.

Former President Obama had a 67 percent approval rating during his first days in 2009, and former President George W. Bush had 57 percent support in 2001.

The approval ratings are similar to a slew of polls that came just before Trump's inauguration that found he also had the lowest pre-inauguration approval rating for a president-elect in decades.

An ABC News/Washington Post poll found that 40 percent of Americans approved of Trump during his presidential

transition. About 80 percent approved of Obama during his own transition in 2009.

The Trump team has disputed the significance of these polls.

"Presidents are not judged by their likability ratings among contemporaries or the crowd sizes at their inauguration. They're judged by their accomplishments," top adviser Kellyanne Conway said Sunday morning.

On Trump's first full day as president, hundreds of thousands of people flooded Washington, D.C., to attend the historic Women's March. The protesters left their signs -- some of which directly referenced Trump -- outside the White House at the end of their march.

Nearly 3 million people participated in similar marches worldwide.

Politico first reported the new poll on Monday.

(Source: The Hill)

Boko Haram using babies to avoid detection in Nigeria suicide bombings

Female suicide bombers in Nigeria are reportedly using babies to avoid detection before blowing themselves up.

Officials warned of the "dangerous" trend after female attackers used the tactic in a blast which took place in Madagali on 13 January 2017.

Two women, who were each carrying a baby, walked through a checkpoint and had been mistaken as civilians, according to the BBC.

Moments after, the two women detonated their devices, killing themselves, the two babies and four others.

The terrorist group Boko Haram is widely suspected of carrying out the attack, though no responsibility has been claimed.

Boko Haram is known for using women, including young girls, as suicide bombers.

Madagali is considered to be at the heart of Boko Haram's insurgency, which aims to establish an Islamic state

in the country.

The north west of Nigeria, and particularly Borno State has been one of the most affected regions by the Islamist militant's campaign.

Suicide attacks on crowded areas such as markets and places of worship are commonly deployed by Boko Haram, which specialize in kidnapping and using women and young girls to carry them out. Approximately 15,000 people are thought to have been killed by the militant group, labelled by the Institute of Economics and Peace as the world's deadliest terrorist group.

In recent months, the Nigerian government has been fighting the group in a major counter-offensive, recapturing much of their former territory. However, the insurgents have ramped up their suicide bombings in response.

(Source: International Business Times)

Gambia's Adama Barrow names Fatoumata Tambajang as VP

The Gambia's President, Adama Barrow, has named senior politician Fatoumata Tambajang as deputy leader, as regional troops continued security sweeps to prepare for his return to the country from neighboring Senegal.

The announcement of Tambajang's appointment will be followed by the unveiling of the rest of Barrow's cabinet later on Tuesday, according to presidential spokesman Halifa Sallah.

Tambajang, a former minister and United Nations Development Program staffer, was the architect of an opposition coalition that helped Barrow defeat longtime ruler Yahya Jammeh in a December 1 presidential election.

She made headlines last month when she told The Guardian newspaper that Jammeh, who came to power in a 1994 coup, would be prosecuted for alleged crimes committed by his regime.

Following her comments, Jammeh, who had initially conceded defeat, announced he no longer recognized the result, triggering a protracted political crisis which ended when he fled into exile late on Saturday.

Barrow, who fled to Senegal earlier this month for security reasons, was sworn in as president on January 19 at The Gambia's embassy in Dakar.

His return date has not yet been fixed, and the ap-



pointment of his cabinet is aimed at filling a void created by his absence.

The armed forces have pledged loyalty to him, though troops from West African regional bloc ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States), which entered the country last week to pressure Jammeh to step down, continued clearing the presidential compound in advance of Barrow's arrival.

They also took over a Republican Guard barracks

training center in Bakau, just outside the capital, Banjul.

On Sunday, a Barrow aide accused Jammeh of plundering millions of dollars from the state coffers in his final weeks in power before flying to Equatorial Guinea.

In addition to the accusations surrounding Jammeh's wealth, sections of the security services under the ex-ruler personal control have been accused of carrying out extrajudicial killings, torture and arbitrary detention during his rule, rights groups say.

A truth and reconciliation committee is Barrow's "preferred method" of dealing with grievances against the previous government, according to his spokesman, but many Gambians take the harder line of his new vice president.

Critics have also raised concerns over a statement issued by the United Nations, regional bloc ECOWAS and the African Union that seemed to offer Jammeh comfortable guarantees in return for his exit.

The statement said "no legislative measures" would be taken that against Jammeh or his family, noting that he could return when he pleased and that property "lawfully" belonging to him would not be seized.

(Source: agencies)

Moqtada al-Sadr warns U.S. on Israel embassy move

Moving the United States embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to al-Quds (Jerusalem) would be a declaration of war on Islam, influential Iraqi cleric Moqtada al-Sadr said on Tuesday.

"Transferring the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem would be a public and more-explicit-than-ever declaration of war against Islam," he said in a statement.

In a break with previous administrations, new U.S. President Donald Trump

has pledged to recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's capital and relocate the U.S. embassy there from Tel Aviv.

Sadr, called for the "formation of a special division to liberate Jerusalem were the decision to be implemented."

Sadr said the Cairo-based Arab League as well as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the world's main pan-Islamic body, should take a decisive

stand on the issue or dissolve themselves.

The Najaf-based cleric also called "for the immediate closure of the U.S. embassy in Iraq" should Washington go ahead with its promised embassy transfer in Israel.

The final status of al-Quds (Jerusalem) is one of the thorniest issues in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Israel considers al-Quds -- including the eastern Palestinian sector it

annexed in 1980 -- as its indivisible capital. The Palestinians want to make east al-Quds the capital of their future state.

The White House Sunday appeared to play down suggestions that a move was imminent, with press secretary Sean Spicer saying: "We are at the very beginning stages of even discussing this subject."

(Source: AFP)

U.S. cannot unilaterally renegotiate the JCPOA: professor

The Chinese strategy since the U.S. election in November is to reduce its U.S. debt holdings to allow the yuan to rise in value. Some people claim that the Chinese are trying to make the yuan more attractive to other nations, with the idea that the yuan could replace the dollar as the principal international currency.

In view of Trump's remarks about NATO do you think U.S.-NATO relations will face difficulty during the Trump presidency?

A: Before answering these questions I want to tell you that there is a great deal of confusion about Trump's views on foreign policy. Many people feel that he has a very poor grasp on foreign affairs. In some cases he is

just ignorant about current policy. In other cases he is not thinking carefully about the consequences of single actions. His nominee for Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, is even more ignorant. He is a very successful oil executive, but his knowledge of foreign affairs is mostly limited to commercial contacts he has had. He is not a student of diplomacy or of the history of U.S. foreign relations. So many feel that we are in line for a troubled and confused period in U.S. foreign relations during the Trump presidency.

?Trump is reflecting a populist view in the U.S. that says that the United States should not have to pay for the defense of other nations. NATO was largely established to prevent the spread of Communism, so that

particular function has been eliminated. When the United States thought that any action of the Soviet Union was a threat to the United States, this spending was seen as justified. The perceived threat of Russian encroachment on Ukraine and in Asia of North Korea and Chinese expansion in the South China Sea has renewed a sense of importance for NATO and other defense agreements. But in general, Trump reflects a conservative viewpoint that the United States taxpayer should not be paying for the defense needs of other nations. At the very least the United States will be rethinking its NATO agreements. I don't think that NATO will be dissolved, but there will be serious discussions about its functioning and financing. ?

Leading French candidate: Europe needs new military alliance

Conservative French presidential hopeful Francois Fillon, worried about the direction of the new United States government, wants a new European military alliance to protect the continent.

Fillon outlined the plan in an interview with Le Monde and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung ahead of a meeting Monday in Berlin with German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Fillon accused the U.S. of aggravating the Islamic extremist threat, and said that President Donald Trump has an "aggressive discourse" that should push Europe to "organize itself" instead.

Fillon did not explain how the new alliance would work with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), which Trump has called obsolete.

Fillon, a former prime minister and leading contender for France's April-May election, also calls for warmer relations with Russia.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Pakistan tests second nuclear-capable missile this month

Pakistan successfully tested a new nuclear capable surface-to-surface missile on Tuesday that is able to deliver multiple warheads and evade radar detection, the army's media wing said.

It was Pakistan's second missile test in a month.

The Ababeel missile can reach targets at a range of 2,200 km (1367 miles), over three times the distance between Islamabad and New Delhi, capital of Pakistan's rival, and was heralded in an army statement as a way of "enforcing deterrence".

The test follows the firing of Pakistan's first submarine-launched cruise missile on Jan. 10.

India last year tested a locally designed anti-ballistic missile system, according to media reports, which could in theory intercept a nuclear-carrying ballistic missile.

The latest missile tests are expected to fuel already heightened tensions between nuclear-powered neighbors Pakistan and India.

The countries have fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947 divided the Indian subcontinent into Muslim-majority Pakistan and Hindu-majority India.

(Source: Reuters)

Regional troika one step closer to stability in Syria

This brings with itself more responsibility for those countries who are backing the armed opposition forces.

Last but not least, the latest developments in the Syrian crisis over the past twelve months show that most actors are increasingly moving toward peaceful, non-violent solutions to the conflict.

In such a situation, all peace-making efforts are focused on the way opposition forces react to the ceasefire initiative. There are two possibilities: they either respect the ceasefire or breach it.

However, it still remains to be seen which way the opposition choose.

Iran, Russia, Turkey agree on mechanism to ensure Syria truce

The statement said the three countries "support the willingness of the armed opposition groups to participate in the next round of negotiations" under UN auspices in Geneva on February 8.

The opposition has reportedly expressed dissatisfaction over the statement.

Mohammed Alloush, who headed the Syrian opposition delegation to Astana talks, said the opposition had reservations about a final communiqué of the talks, adding that opposition groups had submitted a separate ceasefire proposal.

He said Russia was expected to respond within a week to the ceasefire proposal offered by opposition groups.

Analysts say the latest attempt at negotiating peace, which is a first united cooperation among Tehran, Moscow, and Ankara, has "sidelined" the United States. While the U.S. ambassador to Kazakhstan was in attendance, he was there only as an observer.

Last month, Iran, Russia, and Turkey worked out a deal enabling the evacuation of civilians and militants from Aleppo as the Syrian forces were about to retake the northwestern city from Takfiri militants. That also paved the way for a ceasefire applying to the entire country, which has been largely holding.

In contrast, numerous rounds of UN-brokered talks and attempts by other players to enforce a ceasefire have failed in the past.

The talks mainly focused on consolidating the newly-negotiated ceasefire.

On Monday, Syria's Minister of State for National Reconciliation Affairs Ali Haidar said the talks were also addressing the prospect of the Syrian government and opposition carrying out joint anti-terrorism efforts and an absolute differentiation of the opposition from terrorist groups. The ceasefire and the talks have already excluded the Takfiri terrorist groups of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) and al-Nusra based on a consensus between Damascus and its opponents.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's point man on Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev, who is heading the Russian delegation, said, "If at the beginning, the members of the [opposition] delegation were somewhat under stress, the level of distress significantly decreased."

(Source: agencies)

Ecclestone exit sets F1 on a new course

Bernie Ecclestone's ousting as Formula One supremo will take the sport in a different, digital direction under new American owners Liberty Media but there is much work to be done in the months and years ahead.

"F1 has huge potential with multiple untapped opportunities," said new chief executive Chase Carey after ending 86-year-old Ecclestone's 40-year reign on Monday.

"We will work...to enhance the racing experience and add new dimensions to the sport and we look forward to sharing these plans over time."

Carey, appointed Formula One chairman in September after serving as vice-chairman of Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox, and Liberty Media's chief executive Greg Maffei have both said there is a lot they want to do differently.

Maffei has spoken of more races in Latin America, Asia and the United States while Carey has indicated that Liberty wants to safeguard the sport's historic venues in Europe, ramp up marketing efforts and engage the fans more.

There has been talk of treating every race like a Super Bowl, creating a buzz that extends far beyond the racetrack, but without 'Americanising' the sport's fundamentals or alienating the purists.

Liberty Media has plenty of experience and resources, with interests in the Atlanta Braves baseball team, satellite radio service Sirius XM, entertainment group Live Nation and minority interests in Time Warner and Viacom.

Where Ecclestone's business model was based on television rights and ever-increasing hosting fees that have left circuits with little chance of making a profit, Liberty have emphasized a shift toward sustainability and new revenue streams.

"Less than one percent of revenues are from digital," Maffei said in September after Liberty agreed to acquire the commercial rights from CVC Capital Partners.

"They really have no organized digital effort. I think there's a lot of things that can be done around gaming, VR (virtual reality) and AR (augmented reality)."

"There's an enormous amount of video feed and data about the races that we are already capturing that we are not in any way processing incrementally for the dedicated fan," he added.

Where Ecclestone was often at odds with the teams, adopting a divide and rule approach, Carey has sounded more collegiate and inclusive with talk of cost controls and ensuring a fairer share of the spoils.

That will be easier said than done, with the likes of glamor team Ferrari in particular handsomely rewarded for historic performances while smaller teams struggle to survive.

The appointment of Ross Brawn in a management role overseeing motorsport activities has also raised hopes among fans and participants preparing for the first race in Australia in two months' time. Brawn worked closely at Ferrari with Jean Todt, now the head of the governing FIA, and was also a principal at Honda before leading his own team and then Mercedes.

Zak Brown, the newly-appointed American executive director of McLaren, backed Carey and his team to do what was needed.

"Over the next decade I expect the way Formula One is run will become both freer and more fan-friendly," said Brown.

"Fan engagement is where it's at these days, and it's clear that the Liberty Media guys get that."

(Source: Reuters)

Venus reaches first Melbourne Park semi in 14 years

Venus Williams continued her astonishing late-career revival by felling Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-4 7-6(3) on Tuesday to reach her first Australian Open semi-final in 14 years and become the oldest woman to reach the last four at Melbourne Park in the professional era.

The quarter-final will hardly be remembered as a classic, with both Venus and the 24th-ranked Russian surrendering serve with alarming regularity despite perfect conditions for tennis at Rod Laver Arena.

In the end it was 36-year-old Venus' experience that proved decisive when the pressure rose, and Pavlyuchenkova crumbled with a double-fault on match point to boost the American's hopes of a maiden title at Melbourne Park.

"Oh my gosh I'm so excited," said the seven-times grand slam champion after closing out the one hour and 48-minute tussle.

"I want to go further. I'm not happy just with this."

"I'm just so excited that I have another opportunity to play again."

Following her run at Wimbledon, 13th seed Venus has now made the semi-finals at two of the last three grand slams.

She was 22 when she last made the semi-finals at Melbourne, during a run to the 2003 final where she was beaten by younger sister Serena, the current world number two, in three sets.

Venus will play an all-American semi-final against Coco Vandeweghe, who thrashed former French Open champion Garbine Muguruza 6-4 6-0 in the following quarter-final at Rod Laver Arena. The mouthwatering prospect of a repeat of the 2003 final against Serena beckons if the second seed can get there as well.

Venus has stormed through the Melbourne Park draw without losing a set and was never truly threatened by Pavlyuchenkova who let herself down with nine double-faults.

Both players struggled to hold serve but Pavlyuchenkova buckled at the bigger moments.

When serving at 5-4 to stay in the first set, she double-faulted and butchered a forehand to offer three set points.

Venus needed only one, hammering a backhand return down the line and giving a yelp in triumph.

There was no more resilience on serve in the second set, with both players trading breaks to move to 4-4.

Pavlyuchenkova double-faulted to fall back to 0-30 at 6-5, two points from elimination, but bravely rallied to take Williams into a tie break.

The Russian led 3-1 before it all fell apart.

She double-faulted to allow Venus to draw level and the American spanked a huge return down the line to edge ahead.

Venus hammered a forehand winner to bring up three match points and Pavlyuchenkova surrendered the match meekly with her ninth double-fault.

(Source: Reuters)

Tennis-Back to the future as Federer storms into Melbourne semis

Four-times champion Roger Federer continued to roll back the years as he took apart Mischa Zverev 6-1 7-5 6-2 with a clinical display of all-court tennis to reach his 13th Australian Open semi-final in 92 minutes on Tuesday.

Chasing an 18th grand slam title, and first since 2012, the 35-year-old Federer neutered his left-handed German opponent's serve-volley game to set up a last-four meeting with fellow Swiss Stan Wawrinka.

"I think it definitely went as good as it possibly could have gone," Federer told reporters.

"I had to adapt my style. It was a nice match. I think I played great."

Looking in form as imperious as in his heyday of a decade ago despite missing the back half of last season after knee surgery, Federer is now one match away from a potential final against his old rival Rafa Nadal.

Wawrinka, the 2014 champion, will want to have a say about that as will Nadal's quarter-final opponent, Milos Raonic.

But with both Williams sisters also still standing in the women's draw, it would be easy to imagine it was 2007 not 2017 at Melbourne Park.

Zverev's serve-and-volley game is a throwback to an even earlier era and the world number 50 contributed fully to an entertaining, if brief, contest with his fine volleying and net play.

The unorthodox game helped the left-hander beat world number one Andy Murray on Sunday, one of two stunning upsets along with the early exit of Novak Djokovic which have opened up the draw for Federer and Nadal.

Against Federer, though, it took Zverev 15 minutes to hold serve and get on the scoreboard and by that stage he was already 5-0 down in the opening set.

"I think he did not really let me play," said Zverev. "He just has so many more options, how he can, like, outplay me or pass me. It was different, definitely different."

LEAPING BACKHAND

The Swiss needed four more minutes



to wrap up the set with a leaping backhand at the net but Zverev gradually found his touch and broke for 3-1 in the second set.

Federer broke again straight away but Zverev, who admitted after beating Murray that he had no Plan B, continued to charge to the net to greater and greater effect.

The Swiss bided his time, though, and a couple of brilliant backhand passes gave him another break before he served out the set with less than an hour on the clock.

A third set studded with deft shot-

making went with serve until another Federer backhand gave him a break for 5-2 and a rasping crosscourt winner, his 65th of the match, sent him into a 41st grand slam semi-final.

"I'm happy, I never thought I was going to be this good," Federer said. "And here I am, still standing, in a semi against Stan, it couldn't be cooler for the both of us."

"I think him and Rafa know my game best. Stan and I practiced so much together. Yeah, I guess those two guys know me very well."

Federer has been such an extraordinary

player that he has all but lost the ability to shock with his feats on court.

Andy Roddick, who was inducted into the tennis Hall of Fame on Tuesday and lost a Melbourne semi-final to Federer a decade ago, offered some welcome perspective.

"Everyone here is going to talk about it in every story they write for the rest of this tournament, and I still don't know if that's enough," the American told reporters. "It's pretty amazing."

(Source: Reuters)

Leekens resigns as Algeria coach



Georges Leekens has resigned as coach of Algeria after just three months in charge of Les Fennecs, following their group stage exit from the CAF Africa Cup of Nations.

Leekens, who has taken charge of only six games with the North African side, leaves with just a pair of wins over Mauritania during his latest spell - having coach them for four months in 2003 - and departs Gabon 2017 early having seen his side enter as one of the pre-tournament favourites.

"For the good of all I decided to quit even though I do it with heart ache," the 67-year-old told the Algerian Football Federation's (FAF) official website. "I wish all the success in the world to the

national side.

"Given the pressure on the federation and the national team, I preferred to end my contract out of friendship for the president of the FAF who deserves respect."

Monday night's 2-2 draw with Senegal, having twice led through Islam Slimani, saw them crash out of the tournament without a victory - suffering a 2-1 defeat to Tunisia and being similarly held to 2-2 draw in their opener with Zimbabwe.

The Belgian's first game in charge was their 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™ meeting with Nigeria, where a 3-1 defeat left them bottom of Group B and five points adrift of qualification. Their next encounter comes against Zambia on 28 August.

(Source: FIFA)

Final Draw to take place in State Kremlin Palace



Hopeful nations across the planet with an eye on 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™ now know where their path to potential glory will be laid out in front of them at the Final Draw - inside the concert hall at Moscow's State Kremlin Palace.

The 32 successful teams are set to gather on 14 December 2017 to see the eight groups mapped out, ahead of their return seven months later.

Hosts Russia will kick off the action on 14 June 2018 at the city's Luzhniki Stadium, just 5km away from the draw venue along the banks of the Moskva River. The palace's ornate concert hall, which holds 6,000 people, has played host to musical acts ranging

from Luciano Pavarotti and Placido Domingo to Julio Iglesias and Elton John, as well as operas, ballets and the likes of Cirque du Soleil, in the past.

So far, the hosts are the only side of the 211 FIFA Member Associations to have a seat booked at the draw, with all six confederations currently competing to earn their spots at the global showpiece.

However, almost all have reached a stage in qualification where tickets to Russia 2018 are on the table and one thing is for sure - come November, we will know all the names in the hat as the intriguing business of deciding the groups beckons.

(Source: FIFA)

Instagram



♡ @cristiano My team



♡ @jeromeboateng Happy birthday, @arjenrobben



♡ @marquinhos5 Legend in the dressing room @davidbeckham

All systems go for Iran at WABA

Iran have been among the best teams in Asian basketball for the past decade but that guarantees nothing at the upcoming WABA Championship.

The event tips off on Sunday in Amman, Jordan, and while Iran have announced a roster that has players with experience, there are also newcomers that have to prove they belong.

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The event tips off on Sunday in Amman, Jordan, and while Iran have announced a roster that has players with experience, there are also newcomers that have to prove they belong.

All of the players will be hoping to impress new coach Mehran Hatami, the 52-year-old who turned out for Team Melli at the Asian Games and FIBA Asia Championships during the 1990s.

As a coach, Hatami is best known for having led the country's U18 team four years ago. He's taking nothing for granted.

"WABA is an unpredictable competition," he warned. "All the teams are ready and well prepared for it."

Because Lebanon is the host of the FIBA Asia Cup 2017, four teams will now qualify for the continental Championship at the WABA event.

Hatami is cautious, but also feeling good about his charges.

"Our players are ready," he said. "They've been playing a lot in the local league and they're in great shape."

While some of the big names in Iranian basketball are not with the team now, there was a lot of promise shown by those that played last year.

At the FIBA Olympic Qualifying Tournament (OQT) in Italy, players like Jamshidi, Kazemi and Yakhchali had some terrific moments. The country nearly upset Mexico and reached the Semi-Finals but fell, 75-70.

One of the veterans in that team was Oshin Sahakian. He's looking forward to WABA.

"We have some young players in the camp who are trying hard to make a position and have a place in the



national team," he said. "They are motivated and that's something good for us."

Experience tells Sahakian to be wary of all opponents. Yes, Iran have been one of the dominant sides in the Asian game since 2007 but they cannot rest on their laurels.

"We all believe in this team and the coaching staff. I'm sure the team will be very competitive in Jordan and hopefully just like last year emerge victorious." - Iran Basketball Federation president Mahmoud Mashhoun

"WABA has always been a tough competition and therefore we have to double our efforts and concentrate more," he said. "The whole team is ready for the WABA

Championship, we know this year's competition won't be an easy one at all, but we're the Iran national team."

To be anxious and nervous ahead of a tournament like the WABA Championship is not unexpected, even for a team like Iran. Even so, there is also a lot of confidence.

That self-belief is heard in the voice of Mahmoud Mashhoun, the president of the country's basketball federation.

"We all believe in this team and the coaching staff," he said. "I'm sure the team will be very competitive in Jordan and hopefully just like last year emerge victorious."

(Source: FIBA)

Esteghlal banned from signing players in January transfer window

SPORTS Esteghlal football club have been **d e s k** banned from signing players in this season's winter transfer window after failing to pay to a former player.

Esteghlal, who are struggling financially, made German midfielder Adil Chihri's payment with delay hence FIFA's Dispute Resolution Chamber (DRC) banned the Blues from signing new players in the current transfer window.

Esteghlal's officials notified the ban when they wanted to receive new signing Server Djeparov ITC.

Esteghlal cannot file an appeal on this case as it is a final decision made by the Dispute Resolution

Chamber (DRC).

Esteghlal coach Alireza Mansourian, whose team's performance in the first half of the season couldn't meet the fans, expectation, was optimistic after signing Djeparov and Andranik Teymourian but now he can't use his new players.

The Blues are currently in the 4th place of the Iran Professional League table with 28 points from 18 games, 13 points behind the league leaders and arch rivals Persepolis. Esteghlal will take on Qatari side Al Sadd in the crucial AFC Champions League play-off match in Tehran on February 2.



Siamand Rahman sympathizes with families of Iranian firefighters

SPORTS Siamand Rahman, strongest **d e s k** Paralympian ever, sympathized with families of Plasco victims.

Plasco Trade Center, the 17-storey building collapsed on Thursday while a number of firefighters were in the center to rescue those trapped in the huge fire.

"I think the firefighters are the real heroes who risk their lives every day to save life and property. All my thoughts and prayers are with all the families and friends of the victims," Rahman said.

Rahman also hopes to win the 2017 Laureus Sportsman of the Year with a Disability Award.

The ceremony has been scheduled for 14 February in Monaco, France.



The six shortlisted athletes are Siamand Rahman (IRI), Ihar Boki (BLR), Omara Durand (CUB), Marcel Hug (SUI), Sophie Pascoe (NZL), Beatrice Vio (ITA).

"I am hopeful to win the prestigious award. It would be a great honor for my country," he told Paralympic.ir.

The Iranian made history at Latin America's first Paralympics when he became the first athlete to lift over 300kg. He produced arguably the best performance of Rio 2016 when he lifted a world record 310kg to take gold in the men's over 100kg powerlifting event.

"I had promised to make history for my people and I am happy to accomplish that. Now, I am training for the Para powerlifting World Championships which will be held in Mexico City in September," he added.

Iran's Amir Abedzadeh joins C.S. Maritimo

Portuguese football club Maritimo completed the signing of Iranian goalkeeper Amir Abedzadeh.

The 23-year-old goalie has joined C.S. Maritimo on an 18-month contract for an undisclosed fee. Abedzadeh replaced his countryman Alireza Haghighi in the Portuguese team.

He is the son of former Iranian national team goalkeeper Ahmad Reza Abedzadeh.

Club Sport Maritimo, MHM, commonly known as Maritimo, is a Portuguese sports club, founded in Funchal, Madeira, in 1910. Maritimo is best known for its football team that currently plays in the top-flight competition, the Primeira Liga.

(Source: Tasnim)



Syrian keeper Ibrahim Alma linked with Naft Tehran

Syrian international goalkeeper Ibrahim Alma has been linked with a move to Iranian football club Naft Tehran.

The 25-year-old goalie will reportedly join Naft Tehran on a four-month contract.

Alma currently is custodian of Al-Ittihad of Syria.

The Syrian club has allowed the keeper to join Naft Tehran on loan.

Ibrahim Alma has made 23 appearances for Syria national football team.

Afghan keeper Owais Azizi also was a target for the Iranian club in early January.

Naft Tehran is eighth in Iran Professional League (IPL) table.

(Source: Tasnim)



U23 wheelchair basketball defeat Australia at Asia Oceania Zone



SPORTS Iran wheelchair **d e s k** basketball team defeated Australia 65-61 in the U23 Asia Oceania Zone qualifying tournament for the U23 World Championships on Tuesday.

Iran defeated host Thailand 73-41 Monday morning and then humiliated India in the second match 89-7.

Six countries are participating in the championship, which started on Monday in Bangkok, Thailand.

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

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.

Chicharito: I've achieved more than I ever dreamed of

A free-scoring striker with Manchester United, Real Madrid and now Bayer Leverkusen, Javier Hernandez has made his mark in Europe's biggest leagues. Better known as Chicharito ("Little Pea"), the front man is up there with the best footballers Mexico has ever produced. Sitting down for an interview with FIFA.com, the 28-year-old Tri centre-forward spoke frankly and with some remarkable insight about the secrets of a position that is a lot more demanding than it seems, while also touching on his past, present and future at club and international level.

FIFA.com: You've been a professional player for ten years now. Did you expect to have the career you've had?

Javier Hernandez: The fact is that it's been better than I ever dreamed it would be. My dream was to play in the first division and score a goal on my debut. I wanted to be a champion with the best club in Mexico, and I made that happen too. I pictured myself as being an important player for my club and to make the national team, and I ended up winning the title, being the leading goalscorer and going to the World Cup (South Africa 2010). It's been amazing. It really has.



And you also went to Europe.

Yes, but before that I scored a goal at the World Cup against the team (France) that my grandfather also scored against (Tomas Balcazar, at Switzerland 1954). Then I went to Manchester United, where I won two Premier League titles and played in a Champions League final. Then came Real Madrid - a club anyone would want to play for - and scoring the winner in the derby against Atletico. Now I'm playing in Germany and I can't complain about anything.

How has it been for you in Germany, having played for two of the biggest clubs in the world?

The Bundesliga has always appealed to me a lot. It's a league that combines the best of both England and Spain. It's not as physical as the former or as attractive as the latter, but it's a mix of the two.

And I have to say that they've treated me amazingly well. We finished third last year and even though we didn't start this season quite so well, we're right in the mix to be up there with the best.

In tactical terms, in what ways do these leagues differ when you're a striker?

They're very different, as are the teams I've played in, which means that I've had to adapt. For example, at Manchester we played 4-4-2 with two wide men who hit crosses into the box. The No9 wasn't expected to create the play and I had to become more of a finisher. It was totally different at Real Madrid, so much so that my first two goals both came from shots from outside the box, which would never have happened in the Premier League for me. You get more time in Spanish football and you've got the freedom to try more things out. Here at Leverkusen the coach's philosophy is that we all have to win the ball back and do our bit in creating play. Good players have to work on all the attributes they have because you don't play how you want to play; you have to play for the team.

Don't you honestly miss being in among the goals, though?

Who doesn't like scoring? I think if you ask them, even 'keepers would like to get a goal or two (laughs). And that's what strikers get judged on after all. You can play badly but score three goals and everyone congratulates you. I like coming off the pitch feeling that I've given my all. It might sound like a cliché, but what I want to do is help my team. If I score and we lose, then what's the point? Look at Cristiano (Ronaldo), who was named The Best for his all-round play but who also won the EUROS and the Champions League. If he hadn't, then he wouldn't have got that recognition. Goals are the icing on the cake, the reward for all your hard work, and if you're playing well, then the goals will come. But if I'm playing badly and I'm not scoring, then I don't feel quite so happy (laughs).

You've told us about your experiences as a striker in Europe. Can you tell us what it's like to lead the line for Mexico these days?

It's great! The coach, Juan Carlos Osorio, is very adventurous in his approach. He likes to attack and he wants us to keep pushing forward the whole time. That boldness means he has a huge amount of confidence in the Mexico players and you can see that on the pitch, because he gives you a lot of freedom. He does a lot of preparation and he sets matches up in a way that allows us to be comfortable on the pitch and to play an attacking game.

Staying on the theme of El Tri, the team recently ended its losing streak against the USA. Was that a release for you?

Not at all. You might find this hard to believe, but we don't even talk about things like that. We knew we were coming up against a good side, who were at home too, and that we needed the three points to make a good start to the Hexagonal (the final six-team phase in the CONCACAF qualifying competition for the world finals). So we just focused on the game and not on all the stuff surrounding it. We worked on the tactical, physical and mental side of things so that we could win a very important game for us, which is just what we did, without worrying about what was going on around it.

You said that you've achieved more in your career than you could ever have dreamed of. Has the time come for El Tri to finally fulfil their dreams at Russia 2018?

I'm going to be very honest here: ever since I was a boy I've always believed that Mexico's time would come at each and every one of the World Cups they've played in (laughs). If everything goes as planned and we make it to the World Cup, I think we've got the talent to take that step forward, especially if we get the little bit of luck that we haven't had in the past.

(Source: FIFA)



Poem of the day

Words and what they try to say swept
out the window, down the slant of the
roof.

Rumi

Prayer Times

Noon:12:17 Evening: 17:44 Dawn: 5:42 tomorrow Sunrise: 7:09 (tomorrow)

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JANUARY 25, 2017

Choice of Mashhad as Islamic Culture Capital celebrated

CULTURE TEHRAN — Representatives of 51 Muslim countries gathered in Mashhad on Tuesday to celebrate the choice of the northeastern Iranian city as the Islamic Culture Capital for 2017.

Over 100 Iranian and foreign officials attended the celebration held at the Qods Hall of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS).

"The choice of Mashhad as the Islamic Culture Capital for 2017 can help the voice of Muslim unity be heard in the world," said Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Reza Salehi-Amiri, at celebration.

"There was an approach to dialogue in the teachings of Imam Reza (AS)," he mentioned and asked the Muslim countries to hang on to the affinities among the Islamic nations.

Salehi-Amiri said, "Muslim nations are currently facing a common enemy and it is those who present a harsh image of the merciful religion of Islam to the world."

The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) selects the Capital of Islamic Culture every year for the Arab nations and the Asian and African regions.

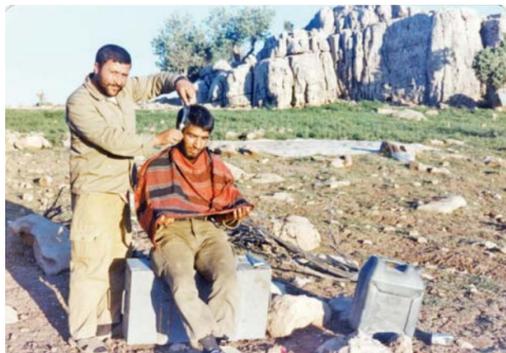
Salehi-Amiri also held meetings with three cultural officials on the sidelines of the celebration.

The meetings were organized with Syrian Minister of Tourism Bishr Riyad Yazigi, Mauritanian Minister of Culture and Crafts Muhammad al-Amin Walad Sheikhuna and ISESCO Deputy Director General Amina Al Hajri.

In the meeting with Yazigi, Salehi-Amiri pointed to the Syrian historical sites destroyed by ISIS and stressed Iran's readiness to help Syria restore the sites after the terrorist groups are wiped out the country.

Eternal Frames Festival to put spotlight on photos of martyrs

ART TEHRAN — A festival featuring photos of the martyrs of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, the war veterans and their families has been established under the title of "Eternal Frames".



An Iranian soldier cuts the hair of his fellow in a file photo during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

"Many organizations and foundations have failed to preserve the photos of the war (1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war) and there is the need to organize and select the remaining photos kept in homes," secretary of the festival Barati (first name not given) said in the press conference held at the Basij News Agency on Tuesday.

"Based on this project those photos that might be in danger of being lost and destroyed will be collected and preserved in a safe place," he added.

The revolution, soldiers and the Sacred Defense (the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war is known as Sacred Defense in Iran), martyrs and martyrdom, the war veterans and the prisoners of war, as well as the families of the martyrs and war veterans are among the major topics of the festival.

Interested individuals are asked to submit their photos to the secretariat from January 31 until May 24, the day which marks the liberation of Khorramshahr in 1982, after the city was captured by Iraqi forces on October 26, 1980.

The first five top winners will receive professional cameras.

"The Salesman" nominated for Oscar

ART TEHRAN — Oscar-winning director "The Salesman" is among the five contenders for the Oscar in the best foreign language film category at the 89th Academy Awards, the academy announced on Tuesday.

"Land of Mine" from Denmark, "A Man Called Ove" from Sweden, "Tanna" from Australia, and "Toni Erdmann" from Germany are other nominees in this category.

A Memento production, "The Salesman" is about Emad and Rana who move into a new flat in the center of Tehran. An incident linked to the previous tenant dramatically changes the young couple's life.



Shahab Hosseini (L) and Taraneh Alidusti act in a scene from "The Salesman".

The film brought Farhadi the award for best screenplay and the Palme d'Or for best actor for Shahab Hosseini at the 69th Cannes Film Festival last year. Farhadi's "A Separation", a drama about a breakup,

won Iran its first and only ever Oscar in 2011.

The 89th Academy Awards will be announced the winners in the Dolby Theatre at the Hollywood & Highland Center on February 26.

Books on teahouse paintings unveiled in Tehran center

ART TEHRAN — A three-volume set of books on teahouse paintings written and compiled by researcher Hadi Seif was introduced during a ceremony held at the Niavaran Cultural Center on Monday.

Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Ali Moradkhani, Niavaran Cultural Center Director Abbas Sajjadi and Malek Museum and Library Director Seyyed Mojtaba Hosseini were among the participating guests at the ceremony.

The books have been published by the Niavaran Artistic Creations Foundation Publishers.

Speaking at the ceremony, Seif said, "I remember once I was visiting the Reza Abbasi Museum (in Tehran) when my artist friend Bahman Parsa said, 'How long must Iranian researchers wait for works by Western researchers? There are many tableaus in this museum, which are not known to others.' This was a big blow for me to wake up."

He added, "I have written 34 books in this area and they are all dear to me. The society needs to be made aware of its lost identity."



Seif is among those who helped hold a workshop during the years 1997 to 1999 in Niavaran Cultural Center attended by a number of veteran teahouse painters. The paintings are currently being preserved in Niavaran.

Moradkhani also said that the works must be preserved for future generations, and hoped

additional works on the subject of teahouse paintings would be produced.

The ceremony ended by honoring veteran teahouse painters Mohammadreza and Mostafa Hamidi.

The teahouse has had various functions in different eras during its 400-year history in Iran. Teahouses used to be places where people gathered to spend their leisure time listening to a naqqal (Iranian traditional storyteller) narrating stories from Ferdowsi's Shahnameh. People talked and exchanged views, and along with lutis (wise and generous people), helped poor people.

Teahouse painters emerged in such an atmosphere. They listened to the discussions and tales, using them as subjects for the paintings they drew on the walls, tiles, stones and canvases. Sometimes, teahouse owners commissioned the painters to draw the stories.

With their own unique perspective not used in other styles, teahouse painters drew motifs entirely based on their imagination. The themes of such paintings are epics, traditions and religion.

PICTURE OF THE DAY Honaronline/Gatha Ziatabari



Thespian performs a street theater during the 35th Fajr International Theater Festival in the courtyard of Tehran's City Theater Complex on January 23, 2017.

Fajr filmfest secretary announces enhanced content in this year's entries

ART TEHRAN — The secretary of the 35th Fajr Film Festival, Mohammad Heidari, said on Tuesday that there has been a major boost to the content of the entries this year.

About 30 films will be screened in the official competition of the Fajr festival, Iran's most important event in the motion picture industry.

Speaking during a press conference at Tehran's Espinas Hotel, Heidari gave complete support for the festival's selecting committee and said that no organization has influenced the committee's decisions.

"The films were selected based on their quality, subject and concept," he added.

An opening ceremony will be held at Tehran's Milad Tower on January 29 and screenings will begin on January 31.

The festival's catalogue titled "The 35th Frame" will soon be published.

The 35th Fajr Film Festival will be held in Tehran and several other Iranian cities from January 31 to February 10.

Play voicing issues of transgender Iranians on stage at Fajr

ART TEHRAN — A play on stage in the Plus section at the 35th Fajr International Theater Festival is attempting to transform public opinion about the tragic lives of transgender Iranians.

Saman Arastu, 49, is the writer and director of the play titled "Be the One that You're Not," which had two performances at Fanus Theater on Monday and Tuesday.

"The story of the play is about transgender people in later life after changing their gender," Arastu told the Persian service of ILNA on Tuesday.

"Due to a lack of awareness on the part of their families and society, they are forced to live in a way that is exasperating: for example, imposing marriage or wearing of certain attire upon the transgender people by their families," he added.

"The layers that the cast and I extract from the lives of transgender people to show on the stage are very bitter," he stated. "We feature the

hidden violence in society with all its severity, and afterwards, we feel depressed because the play is a bit heavy going."

As a transgender person, Arastu who decided to legally change gender in 2008, called all the Iranian movies and documentaries produced on transgender people "flawed, biased and unscientific."

"Not as an artist but as a transgender person, I am not happy about making such movies and documentaries about transgender people, because these productions do not have a scientific basis; the filmmakers have only taken money to produce a film while they have little knowledge about the issue," he mentioned.

It was difficult for Arastu to get the festival organizers' approval for the play.

He said that "Be the One that You're Not" could draw more attention if the organizers would allocate the central hall of the City Theater Complex to the play.



Saman Arastu acts in a scene from "Be the One that You're Not".

Over 20 groups from around the world are currently participating in the Fajr theater festival, which will run until January 31.

NEWS IN BRIEF



"A House on 41st Street" to compete in Indian festival

ART TEHRAN — "A House on 41st Street" directed by Hamidreza Qorbani will be competing in the Bengaluru International Film Festival running from February 2 to 9, 2017.

The film will go on screen in the Asian Cinema competition section.

A middle-class family in Tehran falls apart when one brother kills another brother over a bounced check in this Qorbani's directorial debut.