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Iran-EU trade up 78% in 2016: Eurostat

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The European Union's trade with Iran amounted to €13.7 billion in 2016, a 78 percent rise compared to 2015, based on the latest figures released by the European Union's statistics agency Eurostat.

The figure was €7.68 billion in 2015, Tasnim news agency reported. Iran's exports to the EU stood at €5.46 billion in 2016, with 4.5-fold rise from €1.23 billion in the preceding year. The noticeable increase is due to the EU's resumption of oil imports from Iran. After the lifting of sanctions against the country in January 2016, Iran's been trying to regain its traditional clients in countries like Greece and Italy as a priority.

While the EU's imports from Iran rose noticeably in 2016, its exports to the country increased just by 27 percent and reached €8.24 billion from €6.45 billion in 2015.

In April 2016, Iran and the EU issued a joint statement in Tehran setting the road map for cooperation. The statement was released by Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini who visited Iran along with seven European commissioners.

The two sides taking stock of their long standing relations, based upon mutual respect and interests, reiterated their intention to develop a broad and comprehensive agenda for bilateral cooperation.

Image of the Year Celebration opens with tribute to Abbas Kiarostami

A R T **TEHRAN** — The 14th edition of the Image of the Year Celebration was inaugurated at the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) with a tribute paid to the great filmmaker and photographer Abbas Kiarostami on Sunday.

A number of friends, colleagues and coworkers gathered to talk about Kiarostami, the great personality they miss after 14 years of collaboration at the Image of the Year event.

"76 Minutes and 15 Seconds with Kiarostami", a montage film made by Kiarostami's close friend Seifollah Samadian was screened for the participants.

The title of the film refers to the duration of Kiarostami's life, 76 years and 15 days, and shows a picture of Kiarostami as a filmmaker, photographer, poet, graphic designer, video artist and even a carpenter.

"Today we are missing the one who was with us for the past 14 years. I hope the film has not made you sad, and even if you do not feel proud of living in the era of such great people, (at least) you feel happy about it," Samadian, who is also the secretary of the event, said after the film screening.

Cinematographer Mahmud Kalari, a long friend of Kiarostami congratulated Samadian for celebrating the 14th year of the event, and said, "I cannot hide my feelings after watching the film made by Sadamadian, a friend of 40 years. **→16**



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Syrian forces foil ISIL infiltration attempt in Dayr al-Zawr

Syrian government soldiers have reportedly thwarted an attempt by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists to establish a foothold in the country's beleaguered eastern city of Dayr al-Zawr, killing a large number of the terrorists in the process.

Army troops managed to push the extremists back as the latter mounted an offensive against Panorama neighborhood on the southern outskirts of the city, located 450 kilometers northeast of the capital, Damascus, Syria's official news agency SANA reported.

Syrian fighter jets also carried out a string of aerial attacks against terrorist positions in the districts of Maqabir, al-Hamidia and al-Sina'a in Dayr al-Zawr.

The development came a day after Syrian forces intercepted and shot down an ISIL drone as it was flying in the skies over Dayr al-Zawr airport.

Elsewhere in the western province of Homs, Syrian army units could establish control over much of al-Bayarat area in the western suburbs of the ancient Semitic city of Palmyra on Sunday.

Syrian army soldiers, supported by fighters from allied popular defense groups, conducted a major operation in Turfah al-Gharbia village, purging a vast expanse of land from foreign-sponsored militants.

Moreover, Syrian army troops targeted a number of pickup trucks equipped with heavy machine guns in Kafr Zeitta town of the country's west-central province of Hama, destroying the vehicles and eliminating dozens of terrorists.

Scores of ISIL terrorists were killed in Wadi al-Azib district of the same province, when fighters from popular defense groups staged a surprise attacks against the terrorists.

Separately, five terrorists were killed and their munitions destroyed when Syrian army soldiers struck militant outposts in al-Dahr al-Aswad Hill on the western outskirts of Damascus.

(Source: SANA)

Britain will become more inclined toward U.S.: academic

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Nader Entessar from South Alabama University tells the Tehran Times that Britain's foreign policy "will become more aligned with that of the United States" after Brexit.

Entessar also says "since Washington and London have had a "coordinated approach to Iran for several years now, the contours of UK's relations with Iran will not change dramatically."

Following is the text of the interview:

■ What will be the impact of Brexit on the British foreign policy, particularly toward Iran?

A: Britain's foreign policy will become more aligned with that of the United States. Of course, this is not a major shift from the UK's foreign policy approach, which has generally

been more American-centric than Euro-centric. With respect to Iran, I think Britain will try to play it both ways. But if shove comes to push, it will side with the United States in its approach towards Iran, although it will take a more nuanced tone than Washington's Iran policy.

■ What is the impact of Trump's election on Iran-England relations?

A: Since Washington and London have had a coordinated approach to Iran for several years now, the contours of UK's relations with Iran will not change dramatically. However, if the Trump administration's bellicosity towards Iran intensifies, it will have negative spill-over effects on Britain's relations with Iran.

■ Can Brexit facilitate London's arms exports to Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region more easily?

A: Prior to the Brexit, Britain was already a major exporter of conventional weapons to several Arab countries in the Persian Gulf.

With or without the Brexit, Britain will continue to be a principal weapons exporter to those countries and a major source of cash income for the United Kingdom.

■ Can Trump's election affect Iran-EU relations?

A: There are already indications that the EU will want to strengthen its commercial relations with Iran, and the EU officials will do their utmost to continue Brussels' tepid rapprochement with Tehran by highlighting the differences between the EU and the United States in their foreign policy approach towards Iran. However, we have to remember that the Europeans have caved-in to Washington's demands and threats in the past and may do so again if the Trump administration pressures them to change course on Iran. I don't think Europe has the wherewithal to act as a truly independent player in its relations with Iran.

U.S. officials' behavior shows hostility: Zarif

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Sunday that U.S. officials' behavior shows hostility towards the Iranian people.

Zarif was pointing to the visa ban against seven Muslim-majority countries including Iran by the Trump administration.

On February 3, U.S. District Court Judge James Robart of Seattle, Washington, ruled

in favor of a lawsuit seeking to overturn the President Donald Trump's order.

During a meeting with a number of Iranians living in states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, Zarif said that the Iranian people have proven that they resist threats.

The Iranians are symbols of "perseverance" and "honesty", he pointed out.

Zarif also said that Iran's diplomatic mis-

sions in foreign countries are duty bound to defend the Iranian people's rights and support the country's experts and entrepreneurs in line with expanding economic and scientific cooperation.

"Efforts should be within the framework of attracting investment, transferring technology and helping employment and improvement of the people's living conditions," he said.

Air relief for flood-stricken areas

Flood-stricken areas in the southern province of Fars are being provided with air relief.

Torrential rain and heavy flood has stricken the province since Friday, causing widespread devastation and massive damages to villages, cities, roads, and infrastructures.

The flood destroyed some 1,000 houses in the city of Jahrom and resulted in emergency evacuation of people from five villages.



© Mizan/ Mohammad Hadi Khasravi

Sovereign funds pulled \$38 billion from global markets in 2016: report

Sovereign wealth funds pulled \$37.8 billion from global stock and bond markets in 2016, data from research firm eVestment showed on Monday, although fourth quarter flows showed a slowdown in the rate of redemptions.

Oil-backed sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) have been under pressure since oil prices tumbled from their mid-2014 highs of \$115 a barrel, and 2016 marks their third year of net selling.

However, sovereign investors' redemptions from third party fund managers have slowed year-on-year, down from \$45.7 billion in 2015. The rate of selling steadily reduced over the course of 2016, with fourth quarter redemptions of \$4.9 billion, down from a revised \$7.2 billion in the third quarter, eVestment said.

This could be related to a rebound in oil prices from a low of \$27 a barrel in January 2016 to around \$57 a barrel in December after oil producers reached a deal to cut output.

Peter Laurelli, global head of research at eVestment, which collates data from 4,400 firms managing money on behalf of institutional investors, highlighted the correlation between oil prices and flows.

"If you look at when the price of oil began to fall in 2014, along with the rise in strength of the U.S. dollar, that moment coincides very closely with the shift of SWF flows to external institutional managers from positive to negative," he said.

Redemptions peaked in the third quarter of 2015 at \$20.1 billion, though there have been no net inflows since second quarter 2014.

In fourth quarter 2016, the biggest redemptions came in U.S. equity and global equity mandates, which saw net outflows of \$3.3 billion and \$1.1 billion respectively. Passively-managed emerging market equity mandates lost \$1.4 billion.

U.S. and global equity markets have rallied to record levels since Donald Trump was elected as U.S. president in November, but Laurelli said decisions to redeem assets were not short-term in nature.

Fixed income mandates, which had attracted a total \$2.5 billion of net inflows in the third quarter, switched to net outflows of \$13.5 million in the fourth quarter.

(Source: Reuters)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Iran’s accession to ITER being finalized

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran’s joining to ITER (International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) is in its final stages, the spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran said on Monday.

Only one last step remains before Iran fully joins the project, Behrooz Kamalvandi was quoted by ICANA as saying.

He explained that Iran’s membership in ITER has to be considered by an expert committee of the project as the final step.



Iran summons Turkish envoy over remarks by Ankara officials

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Foreign Ministry **d e s k** on Monday summoned Turkish Ambassador to Tehran Riza Hakan Tekin over recent, unfriendly remarks by Turkish officials about Iran.

Accordingly, Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia, the Pacific, and Commonwealth Affairs Ebrahim Rahimpour conveyed Tehran’s deep concern over the remarks, Fars reported.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu had each recently questioned Iran’s foreign policy in unfriendly tones, in response to which Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Monday that “Tehran’s patience has a limit.”



Mogherini to Pence: Iran deal should be preserved

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Vice-President of the **d e s k** United States of America Mike Pence met with High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini to talk about a whole range of different issues, including the Iran nuclear deal, aka the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

As chairperson of the Joint commission, Mogherini stressed the need to preserve and fully implement the Iran deal, the European External Action Service reported on Monday.



Private drones banned from flying over Tehran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Private drones and **d e s k** quadcopters have been banned from flying over the capital Tehran, the deputy commander of the Sarallah Headquarters said on Monday.

Brigadier General Alireza Rabie said the drone owners need to obtain permission to fly drones over the capital city, Tasnim reported.

The Sarallah Headquarters of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps is in charge of ensuring security in the capital city, the official added.



Boy injured in landmine explosion in Iran

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — A youngster has been **d e s k** severely injured in a landmine explosion in the southwestern Iranian province of Khuzestan, ISNA news agency reported on Monday.

The boy had taken his sheep out somewhere in Fakkah to graze when he trod the mine, a local health official at Shush County said.

The boy’s left arm is badly injured and shrapnel have also hit his face and belly, the local official said, adding the boy has been taken to Ahwaz for treatment.



Popular front to hold national congress

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Popular Front of **d e s k** Islamic Revolution Forces is going to stage a congress on Wednesday with 2,500 members from all over the country, Mehr reported.

The congress will be held from 7:30 to 17:00 in Shahr-e Aftab fairground, near the mausoleum of the late Imam Khomeini, Reza Rusta Azad, a founding member of the front said.

He said during the congress, the front will draft a charter and statute and also hold election to appoint members to its central council.

Leader urges swift action on environmental problems in Khuzestan

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Leader of **d e s k** the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has called on officials to take immediate action about the environmental problems that residents of the southern Khuzestan Province are facing, ISNA reported.

Torrential rains last week combined with dust pollutions caused blackouts across Khuzestan. The downpours also caused floods in other southern provinces.

Touching upon the latest floods in southern Iran, the Leader said “flooding is a great calamity” that inflicts heavy losses upon people and their families, adding that government officials have a duty to provide aid to the flood-stricken people.

The officials, he said, who have people on their minds, cannot be indifferent in the face of such hardships.

Ayatollah Khamenei also described the current situation in Khuzestan “truly heartbreaking”, stressing that the authorities are required to put their best efforts to find a solution.



Due to its arid climate, Khuzestan has, for many years, been suffering from dust pollutions that made it very difficult for its citizens to breathe once in a while. The

dust storms that frequently hit Khuzestan are said to originate in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.

The Leader of the Revolution called on

Turkey advised not to try Iran’s patience

BY: Ali Kushki

TEHRAN — One day after Turkey accused Iran of fueling sectarianism in the Middle East, Tehran advised Ankara not to try to test its patience, saying it will not be boundless.

“Iran’s patience is not infinite,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said at a press conference on Monday in Tehran.

“We hope they act more tactfully and vigilantly, otherwise we will not remain silent.”

In a speech on Sunday during the Munich Security Conference, Turkey’s Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu claimed that Iran was “undermining” regional stability through pursuing what he called a “sectarian policy”.

Similar charges had already been hurled at Tehran by Turkish

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during his Arab states tour last week.

On Monday, Turkish Ambassador to Tehran, Riza Hakan Tekin, was summoned by Iran’s Foreign Ministry concerning the remarks.

Recent developments between the sides come as an unfortunate turn as Iran was among the first countries sympathizing with the Erdogan administration after the failed July 15 putsch.

Turkey and Iran do not agree on the war in Syria, which is fought by numerous foreign-backed militants.

While Tehran backs President Bashar al-Assad, Ankara demands

Assad resign unconditionally.

The two neighbors also diverge on declaring a “safe zone” in northern Syria, where U.S.-backed Kurdish Peshmerga forces fight terrorist groups.

Last week Erdogan took his proposal to Sunni Arab states of the Persian Gulf region to create a safe zone of 3,475 square miles that includes the Syrian town of Manbij.

Qassemi rejected the safe zone initiative as it complicates the situation further.

“The idea is wrong and unacceptable to us as it adds to problems,” the bespectacled

Tehran summoned Turkish ambassador after Ankara accused Iran of fueling sectarian policies in the Middle East.

No change in language of former and new U.S. officials, Iran says

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — Secretary of the Supreme **d e s k** National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said on Monday that the “content” of former and new U.S. officials’ language about Iran has not been changed.

“No change has been made in the content of former and new U.S. officials’ language,” he told reporters on the sidelines of his visit to industrial projects in Alborz province.

The top security official said various figures in the United States have always “adopted hostile approaches towards independent countries.”

However, he said, U.S. President Donald Trump’s comments on the chaotic situation in the Western countries is something new that had not previously been stated by U.S. officials.

“Such comments show that the U.S. has stopped making efforts to whitewash the chaotic image of the



country.”

■ **Government making every effort to remove obstacles to economic activities**

During his visit to Alborz province, Shamkhani also highlighted the importance of boosting capability in various areas, especially in the economic sector.

National power can be boosted with reliance on “internal capacities”, Shamkhani stated.

He also attached great importance to economy as a key component of national and international security.

“Economic security will lead to improvement of business atmosphere and removal of impediments to production and investment,” the former defense chief remarked.

Shamkhani noted that the government is making every efforts necessary to remove the obstacles to economic activities and increase employment opportunities.

He added that the private sector can prove more effective by using knowledge-based products and focus on research and development.

Zarif says Iran not an easy prey for adventurers

POLITICAL **TEHRAN** — The Iranian **d e s k** foreign minister said on Monday that his country is not an “easy target” for those who have an eye for it thanks to the country’s capabilities.

He made the remarks in an interview with the BBC’s Chief International Correspondent, Lyse Doucet.

Here is a transcript of the interview.

I certainly hope that prudence will prevail, because Iran is not an easy target. We’re not going to provoke anybody; we’re never going to instigate any hostility. We’ve never started a hostility and we’re not planning to do one. But we will defend ourselves. I do not believe that people looking at our history, people looking at our capabilities will ever make the decision to engage in that misadventure.

■ **Iran test-fired a ballistic missile; the U.S. imposed new sanctions and**

in president Trump’s words ‘put Iran on notice’. Are you worried about an escalation?

A: Well, missiles are our defensive means. We are not seeking to provoke anybody.

■ **Is it unwise perhaps, in current context to engage in that kind of act? Illegal or not?**

A: We’re a sovereign state. For our defense and for being ready to defend ourselves. You see, if you were in Iran for 8 years, where everybody in the international system, including the U.S., do you remember the tilt towards Iraq.

■ **You’re talking about the 1980’s.**

A: I’m talking about the 1980’s. Our people do not forget the fact that they were being bombarded. Everybody was providing assistance to the aggressor and no one, absolutely no one, gave us even the rudimentary means of defense.

■ **The Saudis and the Americans and the Israelis are now talking about options on the table, consequences, if you don’t do certain things?**

A: Well, first of all we’re not talking about the law of the jungle, we’re talking about international law. And according to international law, those options are a violation of international law, and I advise them not only to respect international law, but to be prudent enough not to get themselves in serious trouble.

■ **But the directory is changing, because no longer is the U.S. the country that you concluded a historic nuclear deal with, under the last administration’s John Kerry, you’re now talking about the U.S. officials who are putting you on notice.**

A: Well, I believe that the previous administration reached a nuclear deal with Iran because it didn’t have any choice. It

the government officials to stop blaming the previous administrations and make concerted efforts in order to find solutions to the environmental problems of the southwestern province.

According to Iran’s Health Ministry, at least 80,000 people die in Iran annually as a result of environmental pollution.

Eleven cities in Khuzestan faced power outage after last week’s intense dust storm, leading to water shortages when water treatment plants went offline.

On Saturday, President Rouhani attended an emergency session of the Crisis Management Center in Tehran, where he ordered Vice President Es’haq Jahangiri, Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani-Fazli and Khuzestan Governor Gholamreza Shariati to find a solution to the province’s problems as soon as possible.

Rouhani also expressed sympathy with the people of Khuzestan and assured them that the government was determined to deal with the environmental issues.

spokesman stressed.

Addressing the Munich conference, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called on countries to stop “finger pointing”, taking a dig at certain regional actors including Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Israel.

The top diplomat proposed a “regional security arrangement” and a “modest regional dialogue forum” as key to restore peace in the region.

The prospect of an immediate end to conflicts in the region seems remote, notably due to an anti-Iran regional front led by Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel.

In Munich, Israeli and Saudi representatives called for a new push against Tehran as the international community needed to set clear “red lines” to halt Iran’s actions, which Iran rejects categorically.

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National power can be boosted with reliance on “internal capacities”, Shamkhani stated.

He also attached great importance to economy as a key component of national and international security.

“Economic security will lead to improvement of business atmosphere and removal of impediments to production and investment,” the former defense chief remarked.

Shamkhani noted that the government is making every efforts necessary to remove the obstacles to economic activities and increase employment opportunities.

He added that the private sector can prove more effective by using knowledge-based products and focus on research and development.

tried, the hushes, the crippling sanctions; that existed. Those sanctions produced the exact opposite political outcome. They put economic pressure on Iran, but the Iranian people resisted, the Iranian people stood up against those pressures.

We would advise everybody that the nuclear agreement is a reasonable agreement. It’s not everything that they wanted, nor was it everything that we wanted. But it’s a reasonable middle ground and I believe that if the previous administration had other options, they would have exercised them.

So it’s not like we’re moving from very friendly relations into a hostile relations. U.S. policy towards Iran has never been friendly for the past 38 years. It’s always been hostile and our people have shown that hostility doesn’t receive a positive response from the Iranian people.

claiming that Iran destabilizes the region.

Earlier in February, the White House said it is considering a proposal that could lead to potentially designating Iran’s IRGC as a terrorist organization.

This is while the Islamic Republic has repeatedly assured other nations, especially neighboring countries, that its military might is of defensive essence and poses no threat to other countries.

Iraqi forces battle their way toward Mosul airport

2,000 ISIL terrorists defending west Mosul: U.S. official

The United States-backed Iraqi forces fought the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group militants on Monday to clear the way to Mosul's airport, on the second day of a ground offensive on the terrorists' remaining stronghold in the western side of the city.

Federal police and elite interior ministry units known as Rapid Response are leading the charge toward the airport, located on the southern limit of the Mosul, trying to dislodge the militants from a nearby hill known as Albu Saif.

The Iraqi forces plan is to turn the airport into a close support base for the onslaught into western Mosul itself.

ISIL terrorists are essentially under siege in western Mosul, along with an estimated 650,000 civilians, after they were forced out of the eastern part of the city in the first phase of an offensive that concluded last month, after 100 days of fighting.

"They are striking and engaging our forces and pulling back towards Mosul," Major Mortada Ali Abd of the Rapid Response units told a Reuters correspondent south of Mosul. "God willing Albu Saif will be fully liberated today."

Helicopters were strafing the Albu Saif hill to clear it of snipers, while machine gun fire and rocket propelled grenades could be heard. The advancing forces also disabled a car bomb - used by the militants to obstruct attacking forces.

The Iraqi forces have been advancing so far in sparsely populated areas. The fighting will get tougher as they get nearer to the city itself and the risk greater for the civilians.

Up to 400,000 civilians could be displaced by the offensive as residents of western Mosul suffer food and fuel shortages and markets are closed, United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq Lise Grande told Reuters on Saturday.

Commanders expect the battle to be more difficult than in the east of the city, which Iraqi forces have taken control of last month after three months of fighting, because tanks and armored vehicles cannot pass through its narrow alleyways.

The militants have developed a network of passageways and tunnels to enable them to hide and fight among civilians, disappear after hit-and-run operations and track government troop movements, according to residents.

Western Mosul contains the old city center, with its ancient souks, government administrative buildings, and the mosque from which ISIL Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared his self-styled caliphate over parts of Syria and Iraq in 2014.

The city is the largest urban center captured by ISIL in both countries.

ISIL terrorist outfit was thought to have up to 6,000 fighters in Mosul when the government's offensive started in mid-October. Of those, more than 1,000 have been killed, according to Iraqi estimates.

The remainder now face a 100,000-strong force made up of Iraqi armed forces, including elite paratroopers and police, Kurdish forces and well-trained Shia paramilitary groups.

The westward road that links the city to Syria was cut



in November by the Shia paramilitary known as Popular Mobilization Units (al-Hashd al-Shaabi). The militants are in charge of the road that links Mosul to Tal Afar, a town they control 60 km (40 miles) to the west.

■ 2,000 terrorists are in Mosul

An estimated 2,000 ISIL terrorists are left in west Mosul to defend their bastion against a massive offensive by the Iraqi security forces, a senior U.S. intelligence official said on Monday.

"There's about 2,000 remaining," the official told reporters on condition of anonymity during a trip to Iraq by the new Pentagon chief, Jim Mattis.

The estimate which the U.S.-led coalition supporting Iraqi forces gave before the October 17 launch of a huge operation on Mosul was that the city was defended by 5,000 to 7,000 extremists.

■ New gains

Meanwhile, Iraqi government forces, backed by volunteer fighters from Popular Mobilization Units, have made new territorial gains on the outskirts of the city of Mosul as they have launched a new phase of joint operations to flush ISIL terrorists out of their last urban stronghold in the war shattered country.

Commander of Nineveh Liberation Operation Lieutenant General Abdul Amir Yarallah said on Sunday that security personnel had regained control over Kantirah and Abyadh villages south of Albu Seif village on the outskirts of Mosul, located some 400 kilometers north of the capital, Baghdad, hoisting the national flag over several buildings there.

The Iraqi military commander added that government forces had inflicted heavy losses on ISIL ranks and military equipment during the operation.

Earlier, pro-government fighters from Popular Mobilization Units, had established complete control over Burnt Hills near Bakhirah village in the western suburb of Mosul.

Iraq's Joint Operations Command (JOC) also announced that federal police forces had retaken the villages of al-Kafour, al-Jamasah and al-Bajwari and regained control over a section of the road linking New Mosul district to Baghdad.

Lieutenant General Yarallah said in a statement that Iraqi forces had liberated the villages of Azbah and al-Laz-zakah from the grip of ISIL. Iraqi government forces have also recaptured a major power plant in Lazzakah district.

■ 350,000 children trapped in western Mosul

Elsewhere, an estimated 350,000 children are trapped in the western part of Mosul as Iraqi forces and their allies launch a fresh offensive on ISIL in the strategic city, Save the Children has warned.

Save the Children's Iraq Country Director Maurizio Crivallero said that escape was not an option for most families, who would have to risk summary execution by ISIL terrorists, sniper fire and landmines, but they are also running out of food, water and medicine.

"This is the grim choice for children in western Mosul right now: bombs, crossfire and hunger if they stay, or execution and snipers if they try to run," Crivallero said, adding, "Safe escape routes for civilians must also be established as soon as possible." (Source: agencies)

Turkish soldiers accused of Erdogan assassination attempt, go on trial

The trial of more than 40 Turkish soldiers accused of attempting to assassinate President Recep Tayyip Erdogan during last year's failed coup started on Monday, with prosecutors seeking life sentences, according to the indictment obtained by Reuters.

Under tight security, the defendants were bussed in to a courthouse in the southwestern city of Mugla, not far from the luxury resort where Erdogan and his family narrowly escaped the soldiers, fleeing in a helicopter shortly before their hotel was attacked.

More than 240 people were killed during the July 15 failed coup, when a group of rogue soldiers commandeered tanks, warplanes and helicopters, attacking parliament and attempting to overthrow the government.

On Monday, prosecutors in Mugla charged 47 suspects, almost all of them soldiers, with multiple charges including attempting to assassinate the president, breaching the constitution and membership of an armed terrorist organization, according to the indictment.

Turkey says the coup was orchestrated by the United States-based Muslim cleric, Fethullah Gulen. The cleric, who has lived in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania since 1999, has denied the charges and condemned the coup.

Since the failed coup, more than 40,000 people have been arrested and more than 100,000 have been sacked or suspended from the military, civil service and private sector.

Turkey launched its first criminal trial related to the coup in December and more trials are expected.

It was not immediately clear how the suspects would plead in the case. One of the lawyers said they were due to begin their testimony later in the day.

■ Snipers, special forces



The suspects, who include Erdogan's former aide-de-camp, were wearing suits when they were brought from prison to the courthouse. They were met by a crowd of some 200 people waving flags and calling for their execution.

"We want the death penalty. Let the hand that tried to harm our chief be broken," said one of the protesters, 61-year-old Zuhail Ayhan, referring to Erdogan. "I'd give my life for him."

Turkey formally abandoned the death penalty as part of its 2002 European Union (EU) accession talks. Since the coup, crowds have repeatedly called for it to be restored, a move that would likely spell the end of Turkey's bid to join the EU.

The area around the courthouse was cordoned off and patrolled by dozens of security force members, including police and Special Forces. Snipers stood on nearby rooftops.

The courthouse in Mugla was too small to handle the number of defendants and authorities said the trial was being heard at the conference room of the chamber of commerce next door.

According to the indictment, some 37 soldiers were charged with a having a direct role in the storming of the luxury Grand Yazici Club Turban, others are those who provided assistance to the operation.

The soldiers in helicopters descended on the hotel in Marmaris, on ropes, shooting, just after Erdogan had left.

In an interview with Reuters after the coup, Erdogan said his faith as a Muslim helped him and his family escape unscathed. (Source: Reuters)

Washington prepares to bring North Koreans to U.S. for talks

Preparations are under way to bring senior North Korean officials to the United States for talks with former U.S. officials, the first such meeting in more than five years, The Washington Post reported.

The talks would be the clearest indication yet that North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un wants to communicate with the new Trump administration.

Planning for the "Track 1.5 talks" is still in a preparatory stage, the Post reported, citing multiple people with knowledge of the arrangements.

That name, reflecting planned contact between former U.S. officials and current North Korean ones, is a reference to what are known as "Track 2" talks involving former officials on both sides.

The U.S. State Department has not yet approved the North Koreans' visas for the talks, the newspaper said.

A State Department spokesman commented to Reuters only that Track 2 meetings "routinely" take place on a variety of topics around the world and occur independent of the U.S. government.

A White House official commented that the U.S. government had no plans to meet with North Korea.

North Korea's testing of an intermediate-range ballistic missile drew international condemnation last week. The U.S. President Donald Trump told a news conference after the test: Obviously North Korea is a big, big problem and we will deal with that very strongly. (Source: Reuters)

Famine declared in part of South Sudan's Unity state

Famine has been declared in two counties of South Sudan, according to an announcement by the South Sudan government and three United Nations agencies, which says the calamity is the result of prolonged civil war and an entrenched economic crisis that has devastated the war-torn East African nation.

The official classification of famine highlights the human suffering caused by South Sudan's three-year civil war and even as it is declared President Salva Kiir's government is blocking food aid to some areas, according to UN officials.

More than 100,000 people in two counties of Unity state are experiencing famine and there are fears it will spread as an additional one million South Sudanese are on the brink of starvation, said the announcement.

"The concern is not just about the 100,000 civilians that are facing famine at the moment," said Al Jazeera's Hiba Morgan, reporting from Juba. There are about one million more people that are on the brink of famine.

"Also, one out of every three households in South Sudan is currently facing food insecurity."

"Our worst fears have been realized," said Serge Tissot, head of the Food and Agriculture Organization in South Sudan.

He said the war has disrupted the otherwise fertile country, causing civilians to rely on "whatever plants they can find and fish they can catch".

■ Man-made famine

Roughly 5.5 million people, or about 50 percent of South Sudan's population, are expected to be severely food insecure and at risk of death in the coming months, said the report.

It added that nearly three-quarters of all households in the country suffer from inadequate food.

If food aid does not reach children urgently "many of them will die," said Jeremy Hopkins, head of the UN children's



agency in South Sudan.

Over 250,000 children are severely malnourished Hopkins said, meaning they are at risk of death.

It is not the first time South Sudan has experienced starvation. When it fought for independence from Sudan in 1998, the territory suffered from a famine spurred by civil war.

Anywhere from 70,000 to several hundred thousand people died during that famine. But Monday's declaration of starvation is solely South Sudan's creation, and a UN official blamed the country's politicians for the humanitarian crisis.

"This famine is man-made," said Joyce Luma, head of the World Food Program in South Sudan. "There is only so much that humanitarian assistance can achieve in the absence of meaningful peace and security."

"This famine is not caused by draught, it is not caused by floods," Al Jazeera's Morgan said. "It is basically caused by the conflict which resulted in a collapsing economy."

"The conflict made it impossible for many people to farm, especially in the equatorial regions, which was previously stable until the conflict broke out in July."

Nowhere else has civil war caused such a drastic decline in South Sudan's food security than in Central Equatoria state, according to the report.

Traditionally South Sudan's breadbasket, Central Equatoria has been hit by fighting and ethnically targeted killings that began in July 2016 and have displaced over half a million residents and disrupted agricultural production.

South Sudan's widespread hunger has been compounded by an economic crisis, as well. South Sudan is experiencing severe inflation, which has made food unaffordable for many families.

"There is 800 percent inflation in this country at the moment, food market prices have become unaffordable for a lot of people," Al Jazeera's Morgan said.

When The Associated Press news agency visited the western town of Aweil in September, the price of food had risen ten-fold in the previous 12 months.

Although it is not as significant as the effects of war and inflation, some of South Sudan's hunger crisis is the direct result of the government's action.

South Sudanese government officials have blocked or placed constraints on the delivery of food aid to areas of the

country, according to a UN official who insisted on anonymity because of lack of authorization to speak to the media.

But Al Jazeera's Morgan said the reason behind the lack of humanitarian access is a lot complicated.

"There is fighting between the government and various armed groups," she said.

"So it is quite hard to bring humanitarian aid to the areas affected by this famine. Humanitarian organizations do not know who is operating some parts of the country at any given time, they don't know how to communicate with people in charge, and this causes some kind of a barrier for humanitarian aid."

South Sudan's rural demographics is also an obstacle in front of food aid, Morgan said.

"Most civilians are basically in the bush, most of South Sudan's population, 70 percent, is in the bush. It is very hard for the aid to reach these people."

On Monday, the UN agencies said that unimpeded humanitarian access "is urgently needed".

Tens of thousands of people have died since civil war broke out in December 2013, and the UN warns that South Sudan is at risk of genocide.

Since fighting in the capital of Juba killed hundreds of people in July, the war has uprooted more than three million people.

United Nations officials have contested that hunger in South Sudan is even more shocking because of the country's fertile land conditions. During her farewell briefing in November as head of the UN mission, Ellen Loj said that South Sudan has the resources and climate to feed itself.

"When I am flying up country, I am always surprised to see all that fertile land and there is not anything," Loj said.

"You could feed yourself plenty and I hope peace will come to South Sudan."

(Source: Al Jazeera)

NEWS

Inflation rate in urban areas drops to 6.8%

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Statistical Center of Iran **d e s k** announced that the inflation rate in the urban areas for the 12-month period ended in the last day of the eleventh Iranian calendar month of Bahman (February 18) hit 6.8 percent, Tasnim news agency reported.



The figure shows a 0.1 percent drop compared to the 12-month period ended in the last day of the tenth calendar month of Dey (January 19). Meanwhile, the center put the point-to-point inflation rate for urban areas at 7.1 percent in Bahman, showing 0.8 per-cent rise from its previous month.

Gold prices steady, focus shifts to timing of US rate hikes

Gold prices held steady on Monday, with investors looking ahead to a clutch of speeches from U.S. Federal Reserve officials later in the week for clues on the timing of possible interest rate hikes. Spot gold had inched down 0.1 percent to \$1,233.61 per ounce by 0538 GMT, while U.S. gold futures fell 0.4 percent to \$1,234.8. "We expect muted trading to start the week in Asia with a U.S. holiday today, although a break in gold of \$1,231 may flush away some nervous long positions," said Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at OANDA.



Bullion may break support at \$1,233 per ounce, according to Reuters technical analyst Wang Tao. U.S. markets are closed on Monday for the Presidents Day holiday. At least five Fed officials are due to speak this week, while Fed Board Governor Jerome Powell appears on Wednesday. Cleveland Fed chief Loretta Mester said on Monday she would be comfortable raising interest rates at this point if the economy kept performing the way it did. Speculation the central bank could hike as soon as March has generally underpinned the greenback. The dollar was mostly unchanged against a basket of currencies at 100.92. Bullion is highly-sensitive to rising U.S. interest rates, as these increase the opportunity cost of holding non-yielding bullion, while boosting the dollar, in which it is priced. "On the fundamental side, although a stronger dollar and buoyant U.S. equities could potentially act as a drag on gold, other variables will likely prevent a more significant selloff," said INTL FCStone analyst Edward Meir. Concern over U.S. President Donald Trump's policies, as well as elections in Europe, fueled gold's rise to a peak of \$1,244.67 on Feb. 8, the strongest in nearly three months. The metal has risen nearly 8 percent in 2017. "In the short term, bullion prices could be underpinned by political issues ... However, the end of the year story will likely be a bearish one simply because of the interest rate hikes that may be injected into the economy and also a stronger dollar," said OCBC analyst Barnabas Gan. Meanwhile, data showed on Friday that speculators cut their net long position in COMEX gold for the first time in three weeks in the week to Feb. 14. In other metals, silver fell 0.2 percent to \$17.96 per ounce, while platinum shed 0.4 percent to \$997.24. Palladium slipped 0.3 percent to \$773.10 per ounce, after touching its highest since Jan. 24 at \$795.1 in the previous session.

(Source: Reuters)

Spain's trade deficit falls 22.5 percent in 2016

Spain's trade deficit fell 22.5 percent to 18.8 billion euros (£16 billion) in 2016, the second lowest since 1997, as exports rose to their highest level on record while imports shrank, the economy ministry said on Monday. In 2016, exports were up 1.7 percent to 254.5 billion euros, while imports fell 0.4 percent to 273.3 billion euros, the ministry said. In December, exports rose 2.9 percent from the previous year to 20.7 billion euros while imports rose 5.6 percent to 23.2 billion euros, sending the deficit 36.4 percent higher than a year earlier to 2.4 billion euros.

(Source: Reuters)

Japan to receive 1st naphtha cargo from Iran since 2011

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Japan **d e s k** will receive a naphtha cargo from Iran this month, as the first shipment of the product from the Middle Eastern country since 2011. Naphtha is a flammable liquid made from distilling petroleum. It looks like gasoline. Naphtha is used to dilute heavy oil to help move it through pipelines, to make high-octane gas, to make lighter fluid, and even to clean metal. Japan's Mitsubishi is to receive the

naphtha cargo from Iran, a source with direct knowledge of the matter told S&P Global Platts. This will be Japan's first import of Iranian naphtha since the country last imported 47,212 million tons in 2011, according to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry data. Japanese trading houses and refiners did not import any of Iranian naphtha since the EU imposed in mid-2012 its ban on P&I reinsurance cover for Iranian oil shipping, market sources said.

Tehran, Paris sign MOU on railway co-op



ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Islamic **d e s k** Republic of Iran Railways (IRIR) and French National Railway Company SNCF signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Sunday for enhancement of railway cooperation, IRIB reported. According to the IRIR's office of public relations, based on the MOU six task forces will be formed to work in various

sectors including express railways, station services, suburban train lines, consulting for structure renewal, crisis management and rail transport machinery. The MOU was signed by Iranian Railways deputy head Ahmad Khodaei and a member of SNCF's board of directors. A delegation of the French railway officials and French parliament members also attended the signing ceremony.

IRClass receives authorization from Iran; opens office in Tehran

Indian Register of Shipping (IRClass), a leading classification society, has received authorization as a Recognized Organization from Iran's maritime administration – Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO). Strengthening its presence further in the Middle East, IRClass has also set up an office in Tehran to offer its services to the Iranian maritime sector. This move is the latest in a series of steps taken by IRClass to enhance its global footprint. The RO agreement was signed on Sunday, 5th February 2017 at a ceremony held in Tehran, Iran by Mohammad Rastad, member of the board of directors, on behalf of the PMO and Suresh Sinha, Managing Director of IRClass.



"The Middle East is a key focus market and we see significant potential for growth. India and Iran

Saudis lose South Korea oil market share to Iran

The recently-voiced question of just how much patience Saudi Arabia will have for other Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members not pulling their weight under the cartel's oil cutback agreement has taken on an added gravitas with news that the kingdom is losing a significant share of South Korea's oil market to Iran. Preliminary customs data published by the Oilprice.com website show that Iran exported around 1.79 million tons of crude oil to South Korea in January, double the normal amount. By contrast, South Korea's imports of crude oil from Saudi Arabia dropped by 17.3 percent in January compared to December 2016, to 785,084 barrels per day (bpd), because the kingdom is engaged in the OPEC cutbacks. South Korea's total crude imports increased by 14 percent annually to 2.93 million bpd in January, with Iran being the biggest beneficiary of the increased consumption (to the tune of a 147.7 percent rise in exports). Platts notes that Iran's exports in January rose by 3 percent and is the only Middle Eastern producer to experience an increase last month as rival producers in Iraq, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates withstood a fall in loadings due to their participation in the OPEC cutback agreement. But even though the nations cited by Platts may be playing ball, their contribution to OPEC is tenuous at best: Kuwait Oil Co. last week announced that it will raise the Persian Gulf nation's

Oil rises, but U.S. drilling drags on prices

Oil prices rose on Monday but the gains were limited as investors gauged whether an increase in U.S. drilling rigs and record stockpiles would undermine efforts by producers to cut output and bring the market into balance. Brent futures were up 23 cents at \$56.04 a barrel at 0750 GMT, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude was up 19 cents at \$53.59. Both contracts earlier fell slightly in quiet trading. "Sustained gains above \$55 a barrel, and a hoped for rally to \$60 a barrel, (are) both proving incredibly tough nuts to crack," said Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at futures brokerage OANDA in Singapore. "At the crux of the matter is that 90 percent OPEC compliance is being balanced by ever increasing U.S. shale production," he added. U.S. energy companies added oil rigs for a fifth consecutive week, Baker Hughes said on Friday, extending a nine-month recovery with producers encouraged by higher prices, which have traded mostly over \$50 a barrel since late November. "Assuming the U.S. oil rig count stays at the current level, we estimate U.S. oil production would increase by 405,000 (barrels per day, or bpd) between 4Q17 and 4Q16 across the Permian, Eagle Ford, Bakken and Niobrara shale plays," Goldman Sachs said in a research note. Overall, 2017 U.S. production will rise by an average 130,000 bpd from a year ago, the note said. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other producers, including Russia,



Tehran, Baghdad ink MOU on oil export pipeline project



ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran **d e s k** and Iraq signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday to study the construction of a pipeline to export crude oil from the northern Iraqi fields of Kirkuk via Iran. The agreement, signed in Baghdad by the oil ministers of the two countries, also calls for a commission to solve a conflict about joint oilfields and the

possible transportation of Iraqi crude to Iran's Abadan refinery, the Iraqi oil ministry said in a statement, Reuters reported. Iraqi Oil Minister Jabar al-Luaibi said in the statement that he also agreed with visiting Iranian counterpart Bijan Namdar Zanganeh to cooperate on the policies of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

share strong historical ties both in terms of trade as well as culture. The trade between two countries is expanding rapidly. We are confident that this development will further the cause of increasing trade and benefit the maritime industry in both countries," said Sinha. A customer meeting was also organized by IRClass – at which sharing of IRClass' capabilities and expertise took place with senior representatives from the Iranian maritime community. IRClass has also been engaged with Iranian Classification Society and had signed a memorandum of understanding for cooperation in January 2015. (Source: dailyshippingtimes.com)

Iraq too is preparing for a busy future, and last week its oil minister Jabar al-Luaibi announced plans to acquire a fleet of oil tankers to transport crude to global markets: "The ministry is keen to restructure ... by building and buying a large fleet of tankers." It is unclear what the main driver of the cutback deal, namely Saudi Arabia, thinks of these developments; but last week Herman Wang, OPEC specialist at S&P Global Platts, told CNBC that while the Saudis are doing the most to make the cutback agreement a success, "how long Saudi Arabia is willing to shoulder the burden of these cuts if it proves some of their cohorts are not fully complying with the deal remains to be seen." (Source: shipandbunker.com)

agreed last year to cut output by almost 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) during the first half of 2017. Estimates indicate compliance with the cuts is at around 90 percent, while Reuters reported last week that OPEC could extend the pact or apply deeper cuts from July if global crude inventories fail to drop enough. But rising U.S. output helped boost crude and gasoline inventories to record highs last week, amid faltering demand growth for the motor fuel. Saudi Arabia's crude oil exports in December fell to 8.014 million bpd from 8.258 million bpd in November, official data showed on Monday. The U.S. market will be closed on Monday for the Presidents Day holiday. (Source: Bloomberg)

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Macron could be the antidote for far right in Europe

Munich Security Conference showed that even those populists with only a relatively small share of the vote can shape debate in pressing mainstream parties to adopt different policy agendas

By Andrew Hammond

The annual Munich Security Conference concluded on Sunday after discussions among a first-class international line up, including U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov. Unusually for this event, the focus was on domestic policy as much as international relations. Debate centered on growing concern outlined in the Munich Security Report 2017 that especially with Donald Trump's election, "the world is facing an illiberal moment... across the West and beyond" and in a post-truth age.

With populist groups now part of government in around a dozen Western democracies, this theme is a fitting one for such an important event given that Europe in 2017 is the primary test bed for whether anti-establishment forces will continue to make political ground. Starting with the Netherlands next month, where polls indicate the far right Freedom Party will emerge as the largest single party, mainstream politicians are under pressure from insurgents championing Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant platforms.

However, while it is left and centrist parties bearing the brunt of this battering, the Munich conference has highlighted that a key political dividing line is increasingly "less between left and right but between a liberal cosmopolitan pole and a populist or even xenophobic authoritarian one". In this dichotomy, it is populist parties making the running by dismissing pluralism, liberalism and cultural modernization, and revolting against what they perceive as threats to the nation state, including international

institutions such as NATO and the EU.

■ Washington's objectives in Europe

A good case in point is National Front leader Marine Le Pen in France, currently leading the polls. She has questioned the need for NATO in the 21st century, asserting that it now exists to serve "Washington's objectives in Europe", and called instead for closer ties with Russia. She has also called for a French referendum on the country's EU membership – if she pulls off an upset victory this spring, it would be a more savage blow to the bloc than Brexit, not least given France's Eurozone membership.

The conference also highlighted that even those populists with only a relatively small share of the vote are sometimes exerting a defining influence by shifting debate or pressuring mainstream parties to adopt different policy agendas. This is exemplified by Germany where incumbent Angela Merkel is presently tipped to win power again but is facing her toughest ever election fight and could yet lose out. This is partly because of growing support for the far-right Alternative for Germany party, a group founded in 2013 as an anti-euro body. It has led opposition toward the Chancellor's immigration policies and is polling around 15 per cent across France with seats in more than half of state legislatures.

However, there do appear to be limits to the spread of this conservative breed of anti-establishment politics. For instance, December's presidential election in Austria saw the convincing defeat of the Freedom Party leader, Norbert Hofer, who would have become Europe's first far-right head of state since 1945.

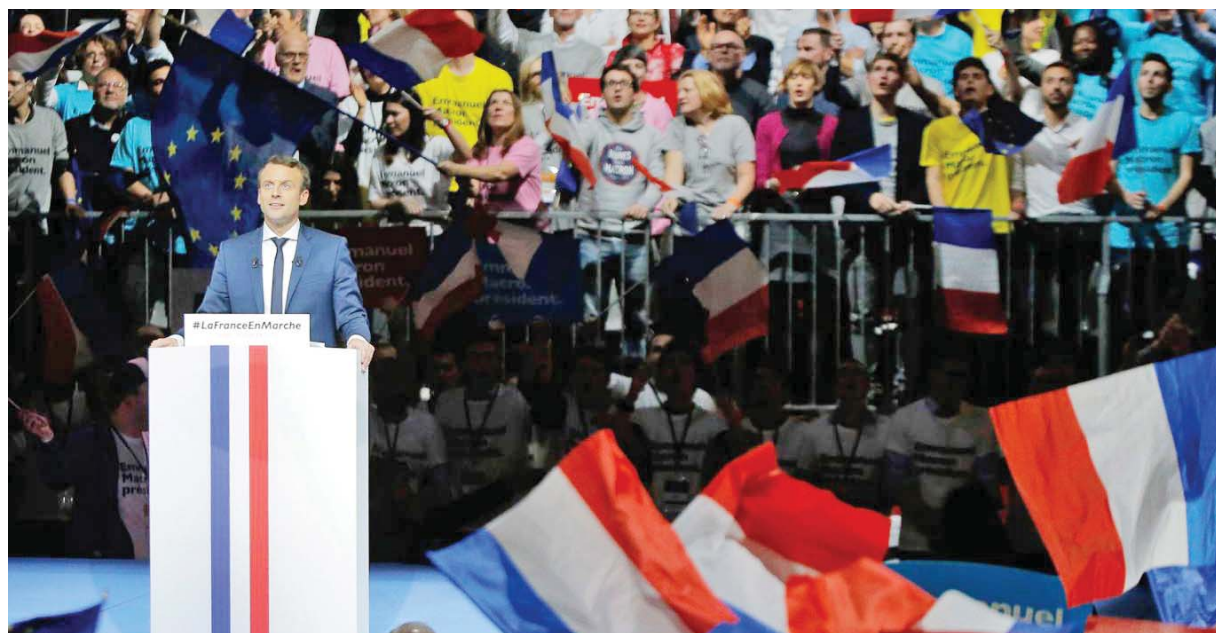
In France, support is on the rise for an insurgent, albeit of a liberal centrist stripe, in presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron, who is now second in polls behind Le Pen. Macron is a 39-year-old former cabinet minister, who is pro-EU, and running as an independent.

■ A vacuum of power

His rise partly reflects a vacuum of power in the political center ground created by scandals surrounding center-right François Fillon's candidacy; and also the fact that the Socialists have chosen far-left contender Benoît Hamon. Should Macron get through to the run-off election in May (in which the two candidates with the largest votes from the first round in April go head to head), polls indicate he could win handsomely if the other candidate is Le Pen. One survey last week suggested most voters would rally around him and that he could win as much as 63 per cent, although such polls should be taken with caution at this stage of the race.

The next few weeks will tell if the "Macron bubble", as some critics call it, has staying power. For now at least he is proving a foil to far-right populists by positioning himself against the old left and right and rejecting traditional "class politics" through his new "En Marche" political movement.

What Macron's success also appears to underline is that politicians of the center ground benefit from having an optimistic, forward-looking vision for tackling complex, long-term policy challenges such as tackling stagnant living standards and re-engaging people with the political process, to help build public consensus and confidence around solutions to them.



The Munich conference has highlighted that a key political dividing line is increasingly "less between left and right but between a liberal cosmopolitan pole and a populist or even xenophobic authoritarian one".

Tackling these first-order challenges is a significant hurdle that centrist politicians across much of the world are widely perceived to have failed on, helping give rise to perceptions of a broken process and that democracy itself is failing.

This has fuelled the rise of more extreme populist politicians with the often half-baked, damaging agendas they champion. Contrary to what some of this ilk assert, there is no "silver bullet" agenda that can address, overnight, challenges

such as stagnant living standards.

Instead long-term concerted efforts are needed to better address these issues through a range of educational, home affairs, economic and other policies. Collectively, as Macron appears to appreciate, such an agenda can move towards demonstrating more effectively how a fair, inclusive democratic politics can help overcome or ameliorate the multiple challenges that many people are experiencing in a world changing fast

in the face of globalization.

Taken overall, forthcoming European elections will test the limits to which there are still buffers to the spread of far right anti-establishment politics in Western democracies and beyond. The key race to watch will be in France where an insurgency victory by Macron would be a fillip to liberal, centrist politics despite his rejection of the political establishment in the country.

(Source: Independent)

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By Prof. James Petras

President Trump: Diplomacy and democracy in America

Trump's setback on his National Security Adviser Flynn has put the prospects for improved, less bellicose foreign affairs in danger. It heightens the risk for a nuclear confrontations and domestic repression.

Spain, Canada, France and 18 other members fulfilling their commitments would add over \$100 billion to NATO's budget – reducing U.S. foreign imbalances.

Of course, it would be far better for all if NATO was disbanded and the various nations re-allocate these many hundreds of billions of dollars for social spending and domestic economic development.

Trump has announced a major effort to reduce U.S. trade imbalances in Asia. Contrary to the claims, often made by foreign trade 'experts' in the mass media, China is not the only, or even the largest, among the 'offenders' in exploiting unbalanced trade with the U.S.

China's current account trade surplus is 5% of its GDP, while South Korea's is 8%, Taiwan's 15% and Singapore's is 19%. Trump's target is to reduce the U.S. trade imbalances to \$20 billion dollars with each country or 3% of GDP. Trump's quota of \$100 billion dollars stands in marked contrast to the 'Asian Five's' (Japan, China, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore) current trade imbalance of \$700 billion dollars in 2015, according to the International Monetary Fund.

President of drug trafficking.

Trump has promised to alter U.S. trade and immigration policy with Mexico. Despite the widespread opposition to Trump's immigration policy, he lags far behind Obama's massive expulsion of immigrants from Mexico and Central America. America's deportation champion was President Barack Obama, who expelled 2.2 million immigrants and their family members in eight years, or approximately 275,000 a month. In his first month in office, President Trump has deported just one percent of Obama's monthly average.

President Trump promises to re-negotiate NAFTA, imposing a tax on imports and enticing U.S. multinational corporations to return and invest in America.

There are numerous hidden advantages for Mexico if it responds to Trump's policies with its own 'reciprocal protectionist' economic measures. Under NAFTA, 2 million Mexican farmers went into bankruptcy and billions of dollars have been spent importing (subsidized) rice, corn and other staples from the US. A 'Mexico First' policy could open the door for a revival of Mexican agriculture for domestic



The rabid, ceaseless mass media blitz forced the resignation of Trump's National Security Adviser, Ret. General Michael Flynn, on the basis of an 18th century law (the Logan Act) that prohibited private citizens from discussing policy with foreign leaders.

In sum, Trump is moving to reduce external imbalances by 85% in order to increase domestic production and create jobs for US-based industries.

■ Trump and Latin America

Trump's Latin America policy is focused primarily on Mexico and to a much lesser degree on the rest of the continent.

The White House's biggest move has been to scuttle Obama's Trans-Pacific Trade Partnership, which favored multi-national corporations exploiting Chile, Peru and Mexico's work force, as well as attracting the neo-liberal regimes in Argentina and Uruguay. Trump inherits from President Obama numerous military bases in Colombia, Guantanamo, Cuba and Argentina. The Pentagon has continued Obama's 'cold war' with Venezuela – falsely accusing the Venezuelan Vice

President of drug trafficking. This would also decrease out-migration of Mexican farm workers. Mexico could re-nationalize its oil industry and invest in domestic refineries gaining billions of dollars and reducing imports of refined petroleum products from the US. With an obligatory import-substitution policy, local manufacturing could increase the domestic market and employment. Jobs would increase in the formal economy and reduce the number of unemployed youth recruited by the drug cartels and other criminal gangs. By nationalizing the banks and controlling capital flows, Mexico could block the annual outflow of about \$50 billion dollars of illicit funds. National-popular policies, via reciprocity, would strengthen the election of new leaders who could begin to purge the corrupt police, military and political leadership.

In sum, while the Trump policies may cause some short-term losses, it can lead to substantial medium and long-term advantages for the Mexican people and nation.

■ Democracy

President Trump's election has provoked a virulent authoritarian campaign threatening our democratic freedoms.

Highly coordinated and endless propaganda by all the major media and the two political parties have fabricated and distorted reports and encouraged elected representatives to savage Trump's foreign policy appointees, forcing resignations and reversals of policy. The forced resignation of National Security Advisor



Michael Flynn highlights the Democratic Party's pro-war agenda against nuclear-armed Russia. Liberal Senators, who once made grand speeches against 'Wall Street' and the 'One Percent', now demand Trump reject working with Russian President Putin against the real threat of ISIS while supporting the neo-Nazis in Ukraine. Liberal icons openly push for sending more U.S. warships in Asia to provoke China, while opposing Trump's policy of favorably re-negotiating trade deals with Beijing.

There are many hidden dangers and advantages in this partisan political warfare.

Trump has exposed the systemic lies and distortions of the mass media, confirming the distrust held by a majority of Americans for the corporate news media. The low opinion of the media, especially held by Americans in the economically devastated center of the country (those described by Hillary Clinton as the 'deplorables') is clearly matched by the media's deep disdain for this huge portion of the electorate. Indeed, the constant media chatter about how the evil 'Russians' had hacked the U.S. presidential elections giving the victory to Donald Trump, is more likely a 'dog whistle' to mask their unwillingness to openly denounce the 'poor whites' – including workers and rural Americans – who overwhelmingly voted for Trump. This class and regional element goes a long way to explain the constant hysteria over Trump's victory. There is widespread fury among the elites, intellectuals and bureaucrats over the fact that Clinton's big 'basket of deplorables' rejected the system and rejected its coifured and manicured media mouthpieces.

For the first time there is a political debate over freedom of speech at the highest levels of government. The same debate extends to the new President's challenge from the enormous, uncontrolled police state apparatus (FBI, NSA, CIA, Homeland Security, etc.), which expanded massively under Barack Obama.

Trump's trade and alliance policies have awakened the U.S. Congress to debates over substantive issues rather than internal procedural quibbles. Even Trump's rhetorical policies have aroused mass demonstrations, some of which are bona fide, while others are bankrolled by billionaire supporters of the Democratic Party and its neo-liberal expansionist agenda, like the 'Grand Sugar Daddy of the Color Revolutions' George Soros. It is a serious question whether this may provide an opening for genuine grassroots democratic-socialist movements to organize and take advantage of the rift among the elite.

The bogus charges of 'treasonous' communication with the Russian Ambassador against Trump's National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, while still a civilian, and the convoking of the Logan Act against civilians discussing foreign policy with foreign governments, opens up the possibility of investigating legislators, like Charles Schumer and several hundred others, for discussing U.S. strategic policy positions with Israeli officials...

Win or lose, the Trump Administration has opened a debate on the possibilities of peace with a nuclear superpower, a re-examination of the huge trade deficit and the necessity to stand-up for democ-

racy against authoritarian threats from the so-called 'intelligence community' against an elected President.

■ Trump and the class struggle

The Trump socio-economic agenda has already set in motion powerful undercurrents of class conflict. The media and political class have focused on conflicts over immigration, gender issues, and relations with Russia, NATO and Israel as well as intra-party politics. These conflicts obscure deeper class antagonisms, which grow out of Trump's radical economic proposals.

President Trump's proposal to reduce the power of the federal regulatory and investigatory agencies, simplify and lower taxes, curtail spending on NATO, re-negotiate or scrap multilateral agreements and cut the budgets for research, health and education all seriously threaten the employment for millions of public sector workers and officials across the country. Many of the hundreds of thousands of protesters at the women's rallies and marches for immigration and education are public employees and their family members who are under economic threat. What appears on the surface to be protests over specific cultural, identity or human rights issues are manifestations of a deeper and more extensive struggle between public sector employees and the agenda of a privatizing state, which draws its class support from small business people attracted by lower taxes and less regulatory burdens, as well as private 'charter school' officials and hospital administrators.

Trump's protectionist measures, including export subsidies, pit the domestic manufacturers against multi-billion dollar importers of cheap consumer goods.

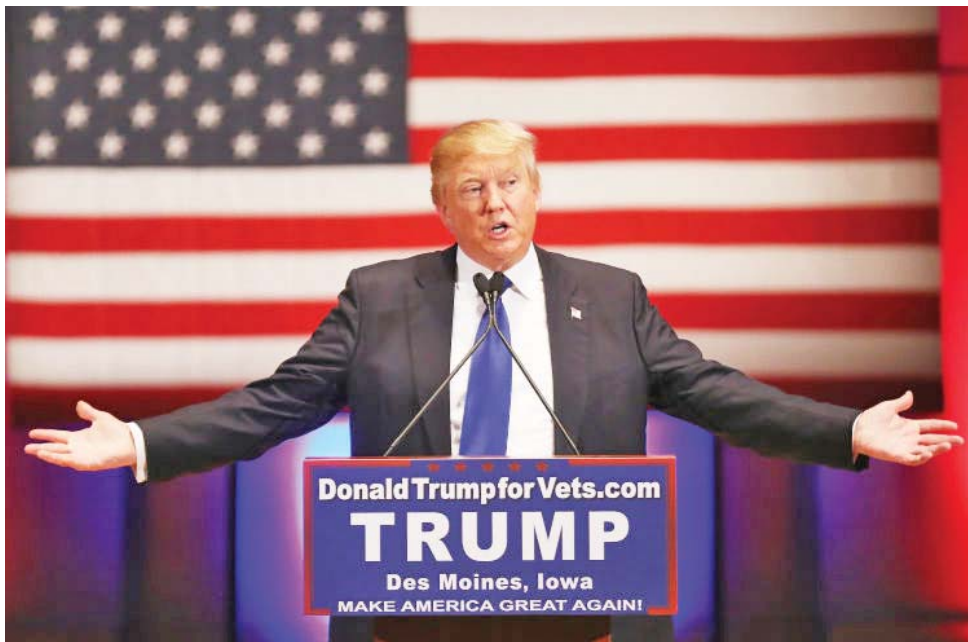
Trump's proposals for deregulated oil, gas, timber, more agro-mineral exports and major infrastructure investments are supported by bosses and workers in those sectors. This has provoked a sharp conflict with environmentalists, community-based workers and producers, indigenous peoples and their supporters.

Trump's initial effort to mobilize domestic class forces opposed to continued budget-draining overseas warfare and in support of market relations-based empire building has been defeated by the combined efforts of the military-industrial complex, the intelligence apparatus and their supporters in a liberal-neo-conservative-militarist political elite coalition and their mass supporters.

The evolving class struggle has deepened and threatens to tear apart the constitutional order in two directions: The conflict can lead to an institutional crisis and toward the forceful ouster of an elected president and the installation of a hybrid regime, which will preserve the most reactionary programs of both sides of the class conflict. Importers, investors and workers in extractive industries, supporters of privatized educations and healthcare, warmongers and members of the politicized security apparatus may take total control of the state.

On the other hand, if the class struggle can mobilize the public sector workers, workers in the commercial sector, the unemployed, the anti-war democrats and progressive IT entrepreneurs and employers dependent on skilled immigrants, as well as scientists and environmentalists into a massive movement willing to support a living wage and unify around common class interests, deep systemic change becomes possible. In the medium term, the unification of these class movements can lead to a progressive hybrid regime.

(Source: Global Research)



Trump's insistence on Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada, France and 18 other members fulfilling their commitments would add over \$100 billion to NATO's budget – reducing U.S. foreign imbalances.

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How to reap the health benefits of power naps

Top 6 tips for effective mid-day power naps



By Mark Stibich

Napping can be a great way to refresh your mind and body, increase productivity, and enhance your creativity. Napping puts the body in a relaxed state, which counteracts the effects of daily stress. Studies have even shown that napping can actually decrease your risk of serious health concerns like the risk of dying from heart disease. But effective napping is as much an art as it is a science. Not just any mid-day nap provides with the multitude of health benefits you constantly hear about.

■ Naps and the 5 stages of sleep

Not all sleep is created equal. This is especially true because of the five stages of sleep, each of which is characterized by different physiological changes. When it comes to reaping the benefits of napping, it's all about experiencing the right stages of sleep.

For instance, if your nap takes you from stage 1 sleep (just drifting off) to stage 2 (when brain activity slows), you will wake up feeling energized and more alert. If your nap takes you into stages 3 and 4 (deep sleep), however, you will not wake easily and will likely feel groggy and tired. Sleep stage 1 typically lasts about 10 minutes while stage 2 lasts another 10 minutes. That makes the 20-minute "power nap" an ideal practice for people looking to increased alertness and motor learning skills. But just how should you prepare for a 20-minute power nap?

■ How to nap effectively

There is some controversy surrounding advice on the best way to take a nap.

What it comes down to is that everyone is different. For instance, while the average duration of stage 1 and 2 sleep is about 20 minutes, not everyone glides effortlessly from one stage to the next in the same amount of time.

If your nap takes you from stage 1 sleep (just drifting off) to stage 2 (when brain activity slows), you will wake up feeling energized and more alert. If your nap takes you into stages 3 and 4 (deep sleep), however, you will not wake easily and will likely feel groggy and tired.

Additionally, there are other factors that can affect your body's reaction to a mid-day snooze, like whether you're chronically sleep deprived or if you had a full night's rest the evening before.

■ Top 6 power nap tips

The best nap is the one in which you fall asleep quickly and stay asleep for the shortest amount of time, while still waking refreshed. You can experiment with the napping techniques below to see what works for you. Here are 6 ways to become a successful power napper:

● Choose the best time for a nap:

Assuming that you follow a fairly normal nighttime sleep schedule, prime time for power naps is typically in the middle of the day from about 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. when your energy level dips due to a rise in the hormone melatonin. Try to schedule your dedicated nap time during those hours.

● Avoid napping before bed: You might not always be able to get your power nap in during the optimal mid-day hours, and that's okay. But if you miss your prime nap time window, be sure not to take you nap within three hours of bedtime as it may interfere with important nighttime sleep.

● Commit to a 30-minute maximum:

When taking a nap longer than 30 minutes, you run the risk of heading into deep sleep, which can leave you feeling tired and groggy. Most people find that their optimal power nap is achieved somewhere between 20-30 minutes. Some people even find naps as short as 1 to 2 minutes to be effective. Experiment with power naps of different durations to find what works best for you.

● Set an alarm:

When you're tired, it can be easy to sleep past your 30-minute maximum. To avoid oversleeping (and the grogginess that can follow), set an alarm to wake you. While many dedicated power nappers claim that they have trained themselves to nap only for the amount of time they set aside, it's always best to have a backup plan.

● Opt for darkness: In most areas of the world, mid-day naps occur during sunlight hours, which is not the most conducive atmosphere for effective sleep. To provide optimal darkness during daylight hours, use a face mask or eye pillow. Opting for darkness can not only help you fall asleep faster, but it can make

your sleep more effective.

● Find a quiet place: Just as darkness can make for more effective naps, a quiet napping space is also a must. Some people find that they need complete quiet to nap effectively, while others enjoy the hum of white noise which can not only be calming, but can also help block out other disturbances. It's also best to assure that you will not be disturbed for the duration of your nap.

■ Try a caffeine power nap

While most experts agree that effective naps can be a healthier option than relying on another cup of coffee, some people swear by using the power of a quick snooze and some caffeine together. A "caffeine nap," or as some affectionately call a "nappuccino," entails getting a quick caffeine boost followed by a power nap immediate after. The theory behind caffeine naps is that the alertness boosting effect of caffeine kicks in somewhere between 10 and 20 minutes after its ingested leaving just the right amount of time for a power nap.

Proponents of caffeine naps say that they feel extra energy from both the nap and the caffeine from the coffee. Researchers in Japan found that subjects using a caffeine nap rated highest in decreased sleepiness and increased productivity as compared to subjects taking a nap and washing their face or taking a nap and being exposed to bright lights.

To try a caffeine power nap, add a quick drink of caffeinated coffee or espresso (preferably one that has little to no added sugar) to the top power nap tips above before getting settled in for your nap. While you might find that the caffeine boost wakes you up, we still suggest setting an alarm for your optimal nap time.

(Source: verywell.com)

Being bilingual may delay Alzheimer's and boost brain power

Research suggests that bilingual people can hold Alzheimer's disease at bay for longer, and that bilingual children are better at prioritizing tasks and multitasking.

Learning a second language and speaking it regularly can improve your cognitive skills and delay the onset of dementia, according to researchers who compared bilingual individuals with people who spoke only one language.

Their study suggests that bilingual speakers hold Alzheimer's disease at bay for an extra four years on average compared with monoglots. School-level language skills that you use on holiday may even improve brain function to some extent.

In addition, bilingual children who use their second language regularly are better at prioritizing tasks and multitasking compared with monolingual children, said Ellen Bialystok, a psychologist at York University in Toronto.

"Being bilingual has certain cognitive benefits and boosts the performance of the brain, especially one of the most important areas known as the executive control system," said Bialystok on Friday at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Washington, DC.

"We know that this system deteriorates with age but we have found that at every stage of life it functions better in bilinguals. They perform at a higher level. It won't stop them getting Alzheimer's disease, but they can cope with the disease for longer."

In her research, published recently in the journal Neurology, Bialystok looked at 211 people with probable Alzheimer's disease, 102 of whom were bilingual and 109 monolingual, and noted the age at which the patients' cognitive impairment had started. Her results showed that bilingual patients had been diagnosed 4.3 years later, on average, and had reported onset of symptoms 5.1 years later than monolingual patients.

She said switching between different languages seems to stimulate the brain so that it builds up a cognitive reserve. "It is rather like a reserve tank in a car. When you run out of fuel, you can keep going for longer because there is a bit more in the safety tank."

The effect was greatest for people who had to use the language every day and choose between two sets of words all the time. Nevertheless, learning a language at school and continuing to practice it was also useful, she said. "It works best for people who speak two languages every day, like immigrants moving to a new country who speak their own language at home. But every little bit helps."

Bialystok said her team was now researching whether using two or more languages resulted in any physical changes to the brain, in addition to improving cognition. Early results suggest that it may change brain size.

Another study of bilingual people carried out by Judith Kroll, a psychologist at Penn State University, supported the idea that speaking more than one language keeps the brain in shape and bolsters mental function. She found that bilingual speakers could outperform single-language speakers in mental tasks such as editing out irrelevant information and focusing on important details. Bilinguals were also better at prioritizing and multi-tasking, she said.

"We would probably refer to most of these cognitive advantages as multi-tasking," said Kroll. "Bilinguals seem to be better at this type of perspective-taking."

Her findings conflict with the idea that speaking several languages confuses the brain and might even hinder cognitive development. "The received wisdom was that bilingualism created confusion, especially in children. The belief was that people who could speak two or more languages had difficulty using either. The bottom line is that bilingualism is good for you."

When speaking to each other, bilingual people can quickly switch between two languages, usually choosing the word or phrase from the language that best expresses their thoughts. But bilinguals rarely slip into a second language when speaking to people who only speak one language.

"The important thing that we have found is that both languages are open for bilinguals. In other words, there are alternatives available in both languages," said Kroll. "Even though language choices may be on the tip of their tongue, bilinguals rarely make a wrong choice."

"The bilingual is somehow able to negotiate between the competition of the languages," Kroll said. "The speculation is that these cognitive skills come from this juggling of languages."

(Source: Guardian)

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Intl. Congress of Jundi Shapur opens today

HERITAGE TEHRAN — The first edition of the d e s k International Congress of Jundi Shapur commences today at the Jundi Shapur University of Technology in the city of Dezful, southwestern Khuzestan Province.



A poster for the 1st International Congress of Jundi Shapur

Gunde-Shapur was home to a teaching hospital, and also comprised a library and a center of higher learning. It has been identified with extensive ruins south of Shahabad, a village 14 km south-east of Dezful, to the road for Shush, in the present-day province of Khuzestan.

The congress is co-sponsored by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology; the Committee of Culture and Civilization of Iran and Islam; and the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution.

Russia, Qatar plan to simplify visa regime: ambassador

MOSCOW (TASS) — After scrapping visas for holders of diplomatic passports, Russia and Qatar plan to ease further visa travel requirements for citizens of both countries, Russian Ambassador to Qatar Nurmakhmad Kholov told TASS on Monday.

An agreement to abolish visas for holders of diplomatic passports was reached during the visit of Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani to Russia in January last year.

“This agreement was preceded by a long and work since the migration policy in the country (in Qatar) had been very strict until the recent times,” Kholov said in an interview with TASS. “Today, when the diplomatic missions of our countries managed to establish clear-cut cooperation on this issue, relevant departments plan in perspective easing visa regime for ordinary citizens.”

The diplomat said that starting this year all Russian tourists flying to other countries via Doha will be able to obtain 72-hour valid visas to Qatar.

“It became possible thanks to our partners from Qatar Airways, who are interested in the increase of tourists from Russia and an increase in the passenger air traffic,” Kholov added.

ROUND THE GLOBE

Ancient Merv

Merv is the oldest and best-preserved of the oasis-cities along the Silk Route in Central Asia. The remains in this vast oasis span 4,000 years of human history. A number of monuments are still visible, particularly from the last two millennia.

Inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage, the property is located in the territory of Mary velayat of Turkmenistan. It has supported a series of urban centers since the 3rd millennium BC and played an important role in the history of the East connected with the unparalleled existence of cultural landscape and exceptional variety of cultures which existed within the Murgab river oasis being in continually interactions and successive development.



Ruins of the Great Kiz-Kala fortress, part of Ancient Merv State Historical and Cultural Park, a World Heritage site in Mary, Turkmenistan.

It reached its apogee during the Muslim epoch and became a capital of the Arabic Caliphate at the beginning of 9th century and as a capital of the Great Seljuks Empire at the 11th-12th centuries.

Today “Ancient Merv” is a large archaeological park which includes remains of Bronze Age centers (2500-1200 BC) such as Kelleli, Adjı Kui, Taip, Gonur, and Togoluk; Iron Age centres (1200-300 BC) such as Yaz/Gobekli Depes and Takhirbaj Depe; the historic urban center and the post-medieval city, Abdullah Khan Kala. The inscribed property covers the area of 353 ha with a buffer zone of 883 ha.

The walls of the post medieval city are of exceptional interest, since they continue the remarkable continuous record of the evolution of military architecture from the 5th century BC to the 15th-16th centuries AD.

There are also major monuments from different historical periods in the oasis. Among them it can be mentioned the Koshks, one of the most characteristic architectural features of the oasis, fortresses and many fine mosques and mausolea. (Source: UNESCO)

Restoration of Sassanid-era Qa’leh Dokhtar castle projected



An undated photo depicts ruins of Qa'leh Dokhtar, a Sassanid-era castle in southern Iran.

HERITAGE TEHRAN — The d e s k ancient Qa'leh Dokhtar castle in the southeastern province of Kerman is projected to undergo restoration.

The provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department has allotted 10 billion rials (about \$265,000) to implement the restoration plan, CHTN reported on Sunday.

Situated on a mountain slope neighboring the Firouzabad-Kavar road, Qa'leh Dokhtar (literally meaning the Maiden Castle) was made by

Ardashir I, the founder of the Sasanian Empire (224–651) in 209 CE.

Based on narratives, the castle is named after the ancient Iranian goddess Anahita, to whom the term “Maiden” refers.

The entrance to the castle is through a tall gateway within a large, rectangular tower. Inside, a broad stairway leads up to a rectangular hall, with blind niches on either side or two large buttresses at the east end.

The fortified palace contains many of the recurring features of Sasanian

architecture such as long halls, arches, domes, recessed windows, and stairways.

The construction is uniform of roughly shaped stone and mortar, but the surfaces were obviously all finished with a thick coating of plaster or stucco, giving a smooth and elegant appearance, which could have been decorated with ornamentation or painting.

Arts under Sassanid rule

Under the Sassanians, Iranian art experienced a general renaissance. Architecture often took grandiose proportions, such as the palaces at

Ctesiphon, Firuzabad and Sarvestan. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, one of the most characteristic and striking relics of Sassanian art are rock sculptures carved on abrupt limestone cliffs, for example at the historical sites Bishapur, Naqsh-e Rostam, and Naqsh-e Rjabab.

Metalwork and gem engraving became highly sophisticated. Scholarship was encouraged by the state, and works from both the East and West were translated into Pahlavi, the language of the Sassanians.

Iranian scientists stumble upon 1500-year-old celestial observatory

Archaeologists and historians has recently discovered an observatory from the 3rd or 4th century during excavations in the south of Iran.

Traces of the ancient observatory were found during the excavation of the Paregan mound in the province of Hormozgan in southern Iran.

The remains likely belong to the reign of the Sassanian dynasty from 224 to 651 CE,

Ali Asadi, the head of the archaeological team, told Tasnim news agency.

The Sassanian Empire was the last imperial dynasty in Persia, now modern-day Iran, which ruled before the rise of Islam.

“Judging by the location of ceramics, this object belongs to the reign of the Sassanian dynasty,” Asadi said. “However, scientists continue to work on the dating

of the found artifacts.”

According to Asadi, the first time the Paregan mound attracted the attention of historians was back in 2005, during an archaeological analysis of this area in Hormozgan Province. In 2011, the first phase of excavations began.

Unusual cyclic structures were also found in the mound. “We can conclude that this structure served

as an astronomical observatory,” the archaeologist added.

To verify data on the findings, Asadi’s research team initiated the second stage of excavations. The archaeologists have already received a license from Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization and started the excavating process.

(Source: Sputnik)

UK enjoys record tourism as fall in pound boosts visitor numbers

By Katie Allen

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) says weaker sterling since Brexit vote led to 37.3m visits to UK in 2016, with big rise in North American tourists

Sterling’s slide since the EU referendum has lured bargain-hunting tourists to the UK, with overseas visitors hitting a record high last year.

Official figures showed there were 37.3m visits to the UK in 2016, up 3% on the previous year and the highest since records began in 1961.

The UK proved particularly popular with North American visitors, after the valued of the pound dropped to three-decade lows against the dollar after the vote for Brexit in June. Americans visiting Britain paid less for hotels and got more pounds when they exchanged their holiday money.

Figures from the ONS showed a rush in the run-up to Christmas, with visits from North America up 15% in the final three months of 2016, compared with the same period a year earlier.

The pound has also been down sharply against the euro prompting visits from the rest of the EU to rise 8%



York Minster, Yorkshire enjoyed a record 476,000 visits in the three months after the EU referendum. Photograph: Humphreys Owen Humphreys/PA

in the last quarter on a year earlier.

The tourism minister, Tracey Crouch, sought to emphasize that other factors apart from the weak pound were drawing in visitors.

“As these record-breaking figures show, the UK is one of the world’s must-visit destinations,” she said. “Our country has so much to offer tourists

from home and abroad, from thriving cities to stunning scenery and renowned cultural attractions.”

Figures suggest one of the big beneficiaries from the influx of overseas tourists was Yorkshire, which enjoyed a record 476,000 visits in the three months after the referendum. That was a 12% increase on the same period

Egyptian tourism shows signs of recovery

Tourists have slowly started returning to Egypt, easing pressure on a key sector battered by years of turmoil and the 2015 bombing of a plane carrying Russian holidaymakers.

“There is an increase in the number of tourists. This situation was much better in January than in previous years,” tourism ministry spokeswoman Omaima al-Husseini said.

Visitors from China, Japan and Ukraine account for a large part of the growth.

China’s top public travel agency, China International Travel Service, reported a 58% increase in tourists flying to Egypt, compared to 2015.

“There are more bookings between October 2016 and January 2017 than last year,” said Egyptian federation of tourism chief Karim Mohsen.

“There is an improvement, especially in cultural tourism in Cairo, Luxor and Aswan,” key historical sites, he said.

The uptick is a sign of hope for a country also reeling from the shock of an economic reform program that has

triggered massive inflation.

Once a key foreign currency earner, the tourism sector crashed in 2011 after a popular uprising overthrew veteran strongman Hosni Mubarak, ushering in years of sporadic unrest.

Recoveries in the sector since then have been set back by new crises.

In June 2015, a massacre of tourists at a Luxor temple was narrowly averted when assailants armed with assault rifles and explosives bungled the attack and were intercepted by police.

But in October that year, Islamic State group jihadists, who are waging an insurgency in the eastern Sinai Peninsula, struck again. They bombed a Russian airliner carrying holiday makers home from the popular Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh.

All 224 people on board were killed. Russia suspended flights to Egypt, and Britain cut air links with Sharm el-Sheikh.

Visitor numbers plunged from 9.3 million in 2015 to 5.3 million the following year, Hussein said.

But industry officials have cautiously welcomed what they say is a noticeable improvement since October.

In December 2016, 551 600 tourists visited Egypt, compared with 440 000 the year before, according to the government’s statistics agency.

“Activity has picked up a bit in the winter of 2016-2017,” said Tamer al-Shaer, vice president of the Blue Sky travel agency.

He said that included a 30% increase in Ukrainian tourists and a 60% increase in visitors from China, with daily flights to Aswan, a southern city rich in ancient sites.

Japan’s HIS travel agency said the number of tourists heading to Egypt “multiplied by four to five times” last year.

Since charter flights from Japan to Egypt resumed in April 2016, they have been on average 80% full, said a spokesman for the Japan Association of Travel agents.

Egypt hosted a record 14.7 million foreign tourists in 2010, a year before

Mubarak’s overthrow and the ensuing economic nosedive.

Restoring even two-thirds of that number is a key government goal, but it hinges on Russia and Britain resuming flights, Hussein said.

“There are ongoing negotiations... we hope the issue will be resolved as soon as possible,” she said.

More than 60% of tourists arriving in Sharm el-Sheikh by plane used to come from Britain or Russia.

“So long as the Russians do not come back, there will be paralysis,” the tourism federation’s Mohsen said. “Russians and Britons are the backbone of Sharm el-Sheikh.”

Other European countries such as Germany and France have registered a slight increase in reservations to Egypt.

In early February, four other European countries to wit Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden eased travel warnings against travel to south Sinai, where Sharm el-Sheikh and other resorts are situated. (Source: Daily Mail)

Russian scientists slowed down aging

A group of Russian and Swedish scientists just published a breakthrough paper, reporting results of a joint study by Lomonosov Moscow State University and Stockholm University. The article was published in the U.S. journal Aging.

The major goal of the study was to investigate the role of intracellular power stations -- mitochondria -- in the process of ageing of organism. Importantly, scientists made an attempt to slow down ageing using a novel compound: artificial antioxidant SkQ1 precisely targeted into mitochondria. This compound was developed in the Moscow State University by the most cited Russian biologist professor Vladimir Skulachev.

Experiments involved a special strain of genetically-modified mice created and characterized in Sweden. A single mutation was introduced into genome of these mice resulting in the substantially accelerated mutagenesis in mitochondria. This leads to accelerated aging and early death of the mutant mice. They live less than 1 year (normal mouse lives more than 2 years).

■ Age-related defects
The mutation promotes development of many age-related defects and diseases indicating that the major defect of these mice is indeed aging.

Starting from the age of 100 days one group of mutant mice was treated with small doses of SkQ1 (approx. 12 micrograms) added into their drinking water.



Per scientists' hypothesis, the compound must protect animal cells from the toxic byproducts of mitochondria -- free radicals (reactive oxygen species). Another

group of animals served as a control group receiving pure water.

Differences between the two groups became obvious starting from the age

200-250 days.

Animals in the control group aged rapidly as expected. They were losing weight, their body temperature decreased, severe curvature of the spine (as a result of osteoporosis) and alopecia were developing, their skin became thinner, and in case of females estrus cycle was impaired. Finally their mobility and oxygen consumption were decreased.

■ Typical traits
The development of all these typical traits of ageing was dramatically decelerated in the group treated with SkQ1. Some of the ageing traits did not appear in that group at all.

Professor Vladimir Skulachev, the creator of SkQ1 molecule design and co-author of this study, says: "This work is quite valuable from both theoretical and practical points of view. First, it clearly demonstrates the key role of mitochondrially produced reactive oxygen species in the process of ageing of mammals. At the same time our study opens the way to the treatment of aging with mitochondrially targeted antioxidants.

We are also very honored to cooperate within this project with such prominent Swedish scientists as prof. Barbara Cannon who has such title as the President of Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in her CV and prof. Jan Nedergaard, Head of Wenner-Gren institute".

(Source: EurekAlert)

Animals in the control group aged rapidly as expected. They were losing weight, their body temperature decreased, severe curvature of the spine (as a result of osteoporosis) and alopecia were developing, their skin became thinner, and in case of females estrus cycle was impaired.

Does your computer keep crashing? Blame cosmic rays that interfere with circuitry

Having a computer that keeps crashing is a frustrating problem, but it doesn't necessarily mean that there's something wrong with your device.

As it turns out, some of these crashes are caused by electrically charged particles from cosmic rays that pass through the Earth's atmosphere and interfere with devices' circuitry in single-event upsets.

At the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Boston, professor of electrical engineering and member of Vanderbilt University's Radiation Effect Research Group Bharat Bhuvra gave a presentation on the worsening problem of SEUs.

■ Electrically charged particles
In the presentation, Bhuvra described how these electrically charged particles from cosmic rays can cause low-grade havoc on devices such as laptops, smartphones, and other personal electronic devices.

Unless you're an astronaut floating in space, it is unlikely that this by-product of cosmic rays will cause any serious harm to your body. However, electronic devices aren't so lucky.

Even just a fraction of secondary particles including energetic neutrons, pions, muons and alpha particles have enough energy to interfere and wreak havoc on your device. In the event of an SEU, these particles in-

terfere with your device's integrated circuitry and alter bits of the stored data from a single pixel in a photo and even cause a complete device crash.

It may seem like a trivial problem to individuals with longer patience with their devices, but with the world getting more and more reliant on these devices, Bhuvra believes that it will only continue to get worse.

What's more, the difficulty lies in detecting the problem as they are very difficult to predict and can only be determined if all other possible causes have been eliminated.

■ Possible images
To illustrate the possible damages that can arise from SEUs, Bhuvra described an event in Belgium when an SEU added more than 4,000 votes to a candidate in an electronic voting machine bit flip in 2003. In another event in 2008, a passenger jet flying to Perth appeared to be affected by an SEU that caused the autopilot to disengage, making the plane dive 690 feet in just 23 seconds.

Cosmic rays are high-speed atomic nuclei with energy at almost the speed of light and are produced by a variety of events in space such as supernova explosions. Cosmic rays originating from our Solar System generally come from explosive events from our sun and have commonly low energy, while galactic cosmic rays are



seen to be powered by black holes at the center of other galaxies or generated by shock waves coming from supernova explosions such as the Crab Nebula cluster.

Though the Earth's atmosphere and magnetic field usually shield humans from cosmic rays, unprotected astronauts beyond the planet's magnetic field are exposed to serious danger as these rays can break apart molecules in living cells.

(Source: Tech Times)

Smartphones to become pocket doctors, can be used to diagnose illness

Smartphones will soon become mobile laboratories which can monitor bone density, calculate red blood cell levels and even predict if an asthma attack is imminent.

Scientists are repurposing the technology which already exists within phones, such as accelerometers, camera flashes and microphones to use as medical tools.

Professor Shwetak Patel, of the University of Washington is currently devising an app which can detect red blood cell levels simply by placing a finger over the camera and flash, so that a bright beam of light shines through the skin. Such a blood screening tool could quickly spot anemia.

He also believes that in future users will be able to bang phones against their bones to check for osteoporosis and use the microphone to test lung function.

Speaking at the AAAS annual meeting in Boston, Prof Patel said: "If you think about the capabilities on a mobile device, if you look at the camera, the flash, the

microphone, those are all getting better and better.

■ Sensors can be repurposed
"Those sensors on the mobile phone can actually be repurposed in interesting new ways where you can use those for diagnosing certain kinds of diseases.

"You can do pulmonary assessment using the microphone on a mobile device, for diagnosing asthma. If think about people having an asthma attack, if you could monitor their lung function at home you can actually get in front of that, before somebody has an asthma attack."

Motion sensors can also be repurposed. A new app in development by the University of Washington would allow someone to tap their elbow on their phone to create a frequency response.

"If you think about the arm is just a rigid surface and if there is a hollowing of the bone or a reduction in density which is osteoporosis, that frequency changes," added Prof Patel. "It's like taking a pitch-



fork and you hitting it and it has some frequency and pitch to it and if you were to follow it out that frequency changes.

"You can start to do remote disease management outside of the clinic. This could really change how we diagnose and screen diseases. Now the patient is empowered to be able to collect this data."

Beth Mynatt, of Georgia Institute of

"Midea" Co. Activity in Iran to Change Consumers' Attitude on Chinese Quality Products: CEO

"Midea" Group's activity in Iran will change the attitude of Iranian consumers on Chinese high-quality products.

Chief Executive of "Midea" Group of Companies in Iran Reza Jaberri announced the above statement in the inaugural ceremony of the official agency of this prestigious Chinese-based company in Iran and said: "Given the brilliant history of BANIAN Company in country's home appliances market, we are confident that cooperation of "Midea" Company, as the largest producer of home appliances in world and BANIAN Company, as the most reliable and authentic distributor and supplier of home appliances in Iran, will lead to the customer's satisfaction."

Strategies of BANIAN Company and Midea Group is common, focused on creating value for Iranian consumers, he said, adding: "The creation of value is possible under the auspices of production of high-quality products and also supply of product with fair and rea-



sonable price."

At the first stage, the company has decided to boost quality of products and will make its utmost effort to change the attitude of Iranian consumers on Chinese products, he maintained.

Turning to the brilliant history of activity of Midea Company and said: "As a worldwide prestigious company in the field of manufacturing high-quality home appliances, more than 1,000 different brands of the company have thus far hit the home appliance market in world."

The company has focused on research and development (R&D), he said, adding: "Unlike other Chinese companies, this company is competing with other Chinese companies to produce high-quality products, so that it spends four percent (4%) of its total income for boosting research and development activities annually."

In the end, Chief Executive of "Midea" Group of Companies in Iran Reza Jaberri said: "This prestigious Company has decided to materialize most of its objectives in worldwide in the best form possible in current year."

(Source: The Telegraph)

Magnetic implant could deliver personalized doses of medication

In five years' time, a magnetic implant may deliver your personalized dose of medication. The device has been developed by researchers from the University of British Columbia (UBC) and could help ease treatments for patients required to take many pills or undergo regular intravenous injections.

At just six millimeters in diameter, the device is made of a silicone sponge and magnetic carbonyl iron particles encased in a round polymer. It's designed to fit just under a patient's skin. When activated by a magnet passed over the outside of the skin, the sponge deforms and its drug contents are dispersed through a small opening in the polymer casing.

A major benefit beyond its minimal invasiveness is that, unlike similar devices, which need a power source to disperse medication, the UBC device needs only an external magnetic field. This can be used to control dose sizes through magnets of varying strengths.

"We had a prior work on magnetic drug delivery device that contains a membrane and a drug reservoir," Mu Chiao, a UBC professor of mechanical engineering who supervised the project, told Digital Trends. "It was quite challenging to make that device. So we thought about combining drug reservoirs and the membranes into one. The device was loaded with docetaxel, a prostate cancer drug, and administered to animal tissue in laboratory trials. The researchers demonstrated that the magnet was able to function and the drug didn't lose its potency, proving effective against cancer cells after repeated uses.

The implant is still at least five to ten years from commercialization, the researchers hope to target procedures that are close to the skin, such as long-term hormone treatment.

(Source: Digital Trends)

It will take 40 years before dolphins recover from Deepwater Horizon spill: study

In April 2010, the Deepwater Horizon oil spill changed the Gulf of Mexico in ways that we're still trying to understand. Over the course of 87 days, more than 134 million gallons of oil spilled into the sea. This kind of environmental disaster doesn't end when the cleanup crews head home; it's felt for many years beyond, and marine creatures like bottlenose dolphins are proving that point.

A new international assessment coordinated by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and many partners looked at more than five years of data and analysis to understand the long-term impacts of the spill on the health of marine mammals like dolphins and whales.



According to the study, the dolphin population in the Barataria Bay area of the Gulf will have suffered a 50 percent population drop in the decade following the spill. A full recovery is expected to take at least 40 years.

"Despite all the uncertainties, it is clear that many populations of marine mammal were badly affected by the oil spill, and that these negative effects will persist for many years into the future," says Dr. Len Thomas in a press release from University of St. Andrews — home of the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) and the Centre for Research into Ecological and Environmental Modelling (CREEM), both of which were partners in the research.

(Source: Mother Nature Network)

Perovskite mixed into solar ink can print 20.1% efficient solar onto glass or plastic

A University of Toronto Engineering innovation could make printing solar cells as easy and inexpensive as printing a newspaper. Dr. Hairen Tan and his team have cleared a critical manufacturing hurdle in the development of a relatively new class of solar devices called perovskite solar cells. This alternative solar technology could lead to low-cost, printable solar panels capable of turning nearly any surface into a power generator.

"Economies of scale have greatly reduced the cost of silicon manufacturing," says University Professor Ted Sargent (ECE), an expert in emerging solar technologies and the Canada Research Chair in Nanotechnology and senior author on the paper.

"Perovskite solar cells can enable us to use techniques already established in the printing industry to produce solar cells at very low cost.

Today, virtually all commercial solar cells are made from thin slices of crystalline silicon which must be processed to a very high purity. It's an energy-intensive process, requiring temperatures higher than 1,000 degrees Celsius and large amounts of hazardous solvents.

In contrast, perovskite solar cells depend on a layer of tiny crystals — each about 1,000 times smaller than the width of a human hair — made of low-cost, light-sensitive materials. Because the perovskite raw materials can be mixed into a liquid to form a kind of 'solar ink', they could be printed onto glass, plastic or other materials using a simple inkjet process.

The new perovskite solar cells have achieved an efficiency of 20.1 per cent and can be manufactured at low temperatures, which reduces the cost and expands the number of possible applications.

(Source: nextbigfuture.com)

Hijabs and modest style made a powerful statement at New York Fashion Week

In just two seasons, Indonesian Muslim designer Anniesa Hasibuan has made the hijab her trademark – and dazzled New York fashion week’s catwalk this week by styling it with flowing, iridescent gowns fit for a princess.

Like in her New York show last fall – which cemented her status as a rising star – all of the models who showcased Hasibuan’s Autumn/Winter 2017 collection sported lustrous grey hijabs that sculpted the facial features while carefully covering the hair.

Other than the hijab, the traditional head and neck covering many Muslim women wear, the 30-year-old designer’s clothes evoked nothing of the “modest Muslim” style that sometimes stirs controversy and exacerbates anti-Muslim sentiment in Western countries.

On the contrary, Hasibuan’s collection features shimmering, on-trend pleats, silver and golden ruffles, and long trains adorned with pearls, glitter or embroidery that recalled royalty of the Middle Ages.

The models were not chosen at random – the young designer held casting calls specifically seeking first and second-generation immigrants, seeking to show that “fashion is for everybody.”

“There is beauty in diversity and differences – something we should not be afraid of” she said through an interpreter.

“I believe being a fashion designer can bring a lot of changes – and beautiful changes, of course.”

■ Growing fame

She unveiled her second New York collection amid controversy over U.S. President Donald Trump’s recent executive order on immigration, currently blocked by a U.S. court that bars refugees and migrants from seven Muslim-majority nations. The decree ignited mass protests and global condemnation.

Hasibuan, however, aims to keep her work, which is primarily geared toward Muslim women, “separate” from politics.

“I’m here bringing the beautiful voice of the Muslim women, the peace and the universal values that fashion can offer,” she said.

Her dream, she said, would be to dress Kate Middleton, whom the designer said is “like a queen,” adding that she admires the Duchess of Cambridge for “her elegance.”

Hasibuan won worldwide praise for her fall collection in New York last September, the first to feature a hijab in every look.

Since then she has opened new stores in her home country Indonesia as well as in Malaysia, Turkey and Abu Dhabi – proffering modern Islamic clothing dripping in glamour.

Chiara Sari, Indonesia’s vice consul in New York, donned a white hijab atop a black, velvet top and black pants to attend the show, pulling her contemporary look together with a statement necklace.

The hijab, Sari said, is Hasibuan’s “trademark, and I don’t think she will lose that.”

Since Trump’s contentious decree Sari said she has spent significant time reassuring her fellow Indonesians in the United States, while also urging them to “avoid traveling abroad” to reduce the risk of not being able to re-enter.

For Sari, Hasibuan’s growing fame is a gift. “Hopefully that will increase familiarity with Islam in general, especially now when it is getting a lot of bad press,” she said.

(Source: star2.com)

LEARN ENGLISH

No Smoking!

A: It smells like an **ashtray** in here!

B: Hi honey! What’s wrong? Why do you have that look on your face?

A: What’s wrong? I thought we agreed that you were going to quit smoking.

B: No! I said I was going to **cut down** which is very different. You can’t just expect me to go **cold turkey overnight**!

A: Look, there are other ways to quit. You can try the **nicotine patch**, or **nicotine chewing gum**. We **spend a fortune** on cigarettes every month and now laws are **cracking down** and not allowing smoking in any public place. It’s not like you can just **light up** like before.

B: I know, I know. I am trying but, I don’t have the **willpower** to just quit. I can’t fight with the **urge** to reach for my **pack of smokes** in the morning with coffee or after lunch! Please understand?

A: Fine! I want a divorce!

■ Key vocabulary

ashtray: a receptacle for tobacco ashes and cigarettes and cigars

cut down: reduce the amount taken or used

cold turkey: immediate, complete withdrawal from something

overnight: suddenly or surprisingly quickly

nicotine patch: a patch that slowly releases nicotine into the body

nicotine chewing gum: gum that slowly releases nicotine into the body

spend a fortune: to spend a very large amount of money on something

crack down: to act more forcefully to regulate or repress

light up: to start smoking a cigarette

willpower: the strength of mind to carry out a decision

urge: a strong impulse, inner drive, or yearning

pack of smokes: a box of cigarettes

■ Supplementary vocabulary

drag: smoking a cigarette once, a puff, share a cigar with someone

tar: a solid, sticky sub- stance that remains when tobacco is burned; it accumulates in the lungs of smokers and is considered carcinogenic

lighter: a mechanical device for lighting a cigarette, cigar, or pipe

match: a thin strip of wood or cardboard tipped with a chemical that ignites when scraped against a rough or specially treated surface

stogie: informal of saying cigarette

butt: the end of the cigarette which contains the filter and is placed in the mouth to smoke

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Data bank on talented, educated women unveiled

WOMEN TEHRAN — A **d e s k** comprehensive data bank containing information about Iranian talented and educated women was unveiled on Monday.

The data bank has been developed to provide women with equitable opportunities and introduce capable and educated women to national officials, IRNA quoted Shahindokht Molaverdi, vice president for women and family affairs, as saying.



Although developing the data bank should not be translated as creating jobs for women, it lays the groundwork for both state and private sectors to utilize the information for decision making on women’s employment, she pointed out.

The data bank is primarily based on confidence in the users which will be verified in the next stage, Molaverdi explained.

In the next phase, different groups form social networks will be linked to the bank, she concluded.

Congress to outline “third model for women”

WOMEN TEHRAN — An international congress **d e s k** titled “the third model for women” aimed at outlining a pattern of life for women which dismisses models introduced both by Eastern and Western schools of thought will be held in Tehran on Feb. 28.

The event will be participated by educated Iranian and non-Iranian women, Mehr news agency reported on Monday.

The concept of the third model for women was raised initially on March 6, 2012 by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Iraq: Sunni women tell of ISIL detention, torture



A woman fleeing the fighting between the Islamic State and Iraqi Security Forces in Intisar neighborhood in eastern Mosul on November 7, 2016.

of gender-based violence. However, not enough is being done to tackle the stigma around sexual violence, and there is a lack of awareness about appropriate services and psychosocial or mental health support, medical professionals and service providers in Kirkuk said. Available services continue to be outstripped by needs, they said.

A psychiatrist at an international organization providing psychosocial support in one of the larger displaced people’s camps in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq said that too little has been done to inform men about how to support female victims of gender-based violence. She said that very often, male relatives will forbid women from getting counseling and vocational training, even if the women want the services.

The women interviewed are all patients at the Kirkuk Center, where a staff of 12 provides psychological and behavioral counseling to women and children. Dr. Abd al-Karim Kalyfa, who runs the center, said in January that the center was at that time treating 30 patients, 15 of them children, suffering from trauma related to their experiences living under ISIL. In 2016, he said, his center treated about 400 patients who had come from ISIL-held territory. ISIL fighters had raped at least two of his current patients, he said. He knew of one other organization in the Kirkuk area providing services to victims of sexual assault but said there was far too little support available to provide needed mental health care to displaced people who had lived under ISIL.

Another medical professional in Kirkuk who is providing social support to women and children who have been traumatized by their experience under ISIL said that services provided by the federal government focus on pharmacological treatment, not on psychosocial therapy and counseling.

A program manager at an international organization providing services in one of the larger displaced people’s camps in northern Iraq said that the group has been able to create effective safe spaces and start vocational projects for women. But it has not yet been able to provide more long-term psychosocial support and other services for survivors of gender-based violence, because it is struggling to find female staff with the needed language skills, experience, and professional qualifications.



The leader has said that the first model for women, which emerges from Eastern school of thought, considers woman as an element on the margins of the society playing no active role.

The second model concentrates on women according to Western viewpoint which considers woman as a creature based on her gender not humanity. Based on this ideology, women are considered as a tool for men or a means at the service of capitalism.

However, according to the leader, the third model considers women as the elements of revolution who are neither inclined toward East nor West.

took over the city in 2014. Their families had intended that they marry, but once he became an ISIL fighter, Suad said, she and her parents informed him that they no longer wanted the union to take place. But on a morning in January 2016, he arrived at her home with his brother and cousin and demanded that Suad marry him or he would kill her parents. Her family acquiesced to this threat, and her cousin took her to his home where he forced her to marry him and raped her. She became pregnant. After eight months, Suad said, she escaped in the middle of the night and fled with her parents to Kirkuk. She gave birth a month later, but the baby boy died four days later, she said.

■ Fawzia

Fawzia, 45, is from Daquq but was living in Hawija when, in early 2015, ISIL fighters approached her husband and asked him to act as a spy in their neighborhood. He refused and was detained for 10 days beginning on February 7, 2016, in a village outside the city, escaping immediately after he was released. Fawzia said that three ISIL fighters occupied her house for three days during this period, put her two children under house arrest, and forced them to stay in one room. She said that she saw ISIL fighters bring a different girl each day to the adjacent room for about an hour. She said she was able to see the girls when the door to her room was open. She estimated that they were about 16 and said she heard them crying through the wall. She believed the fighters had sexually assaulted the girls.

After the three days, Fawzia said she told the fighters to stop bringing girls to her house. One of them hit her with his hand and the butt of his gun, and said that their leader would come and marry her. They also warned her that if she tried to escape to Kirkuk, ISIL operatives in the city would find and kill her. On the fourth morning, during the 5 a.m. prayer, when all the ISIL fighters were at the local mosque, Fawzia fled with her children to Kirkuk. She broke down into tears as she completed her story.

When I arrived at the first Peshmerga checkpoint, I was so scared that they [ISIL] would find out I had escaped that I didn’t register myself I am so scared here in Kirkuk that I have spent the last year staying inside my relatives’ house. I don’t even leave to go to the store, and if I must leave, I spend the whole time looking over my shoulder. They might know where I live and come kill me.

■ Mariam

Mariam, 25, said that in March 2016, her husband fled Hawija, fearing possible execution because he was a former policeman. Three days later, she said, about 20 ISIL fighters found her at home with her daughter and dragged them outside, hitting her head and shoulders. The ISIL fighters blew up her home, forcing her to watch as punishment for her husband’s escape. She moved in with her brother-in-law, she said, but within a few days two ISIL fighters arrived and told her she was an apostate because her husband fled, but that she was still young and had to marry one of them. She agreed, telling them to come the following day, and went into hiding that night. Over the next three months, Mariam said, she moved repeatedly. She unsuccessfully tried to escape the area three times but finally fled with her 3-year-old daughter to Kirkuk.

U.S. defense secretary: Not in Iraq to seize oil

The United States Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, on an unannounced visit to Iraq, said the United States does not intend to seize Iraqi oil, shifting away from an idea proposed by President Donald Trump that has rattled Iraq's leaders.

Mattis arrived in Baghdad on Tuesday, as the battle to oust the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group fighters from western Mosul moved into its second day, and as the Pentagon considers ways to accelerate the campaign against ISIL in Iraq and Syria.

Under the president's deadline, Mattis has just a week to send Trump a strategy to ramp up the fight and defeat ISIL.

And any plan is likely to depend on U.S. and coalition troops working with and through the local forces in both countries.

"We're going to make certain that we've got good situational awareness of what we face as we work together and fight alongside each other," Mattis said.

His key goal during the visit is to speak about the military operations with political leaders and commanders on the ground, including his top commander in Iraq, Lieutenant-General Stephen Townsend.

Asked about the tensions, Mattis said he has been assured that the travel ban - which has been stalled by a legal challenge - would not affect Iraqis who have fought alongside U.S. forces.



■ Not here for oil!

Those efforts could be complicated by Trump's oil threat and his inclusion of Iraq in the administration's travel ban - twin blows that have roiled the nation and spurred local politicians to pressure Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to reduce cooperation with Washington.

"I think all of us here in this room, all of us in America have generally paid for our gas and oil all along, and I'm sure that we will continue to do that in the future," Mattis told reporters travelling with him.

"We're not in Iraq to seize anybody's oil."

His comments may provide some reassurance to the Iraqis. But the tensions come at a critical point in the war against ISIL, with two key battles in the works: the fight to take control of west Mosul, and the start of a campaign in Syria to oust ISIL from Raqqa, the capital of its self-declared caliphate.

Abadi has taken a measured approach, but the issues can roil already difficult internal politics.

Trump brought up the oil issue during the campaign, and he mentioned it again late last month during a visit to the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency).

"To the victor belong the spoils," Trump told members of the intelligence community.

He said he first argued this case for "economic reasons", but added it made sense as a counterterrorism approach to defeating ISIL "because that's where they made their money in the first place".

"So, we should have kept the oil," he said. "But, OK, maybe you'll have another chance."

■ New plan to fight ISIL

Meantime, Trump has signed an order on January 28 that gives Mattis and senior military leaders 30 days to come up with a new plan to beef up the fight.

Mattis would not discuss specifics, saying he wants to gather information first. But, he has been talking with military leaders about the possible options, and has largely supported the U.S. strategy of fighting ISIL with and through local forces.

The military options range from putting more troops in Iraq and Syria to boosting military aid to Kurdish fighters backed by the U.S.-led coalition.

More specifically, officials have talked about expanding efforts to train, advise and enable local Iraqi and Syrian forces, increasing intelligence and surveillance, and allowing U.S. troops to move forward more frequently with Iraqi soldiers nearer the frontlines.

There are more than 5,100 U.S. forces in Iraq, and up to about 500 in Syria.

(Source: agencies)

Trump baffles Sweden with crime comment, says it was based on TV report

A day after falsely suggesting there was an immigration-related security incident in Sweden, the United States President Donald Trump said his comment was based on a television report he had seen.

Trump, who in his first weeks in office has tried to tighten U.S. borders sharply for national security reasons, told a rally on Saturday that Sweden was having serious problems with immigrants.

"You look at what's happening last night in Sweden," Trump said. "Sweden. Who would believe this? Sweden. They took in large numbers. They're having problems like they never thought possible."

No incident occurred in Sweden and the country's baffled government asked the U.S. State Department to explain.

"My statement as to what's happening in Sweden was in reference to a story that was broadcast on @Fox-News concerning immigrants & Sweden," Trump said in a tweet on Sunday.

Fox News, a U.S. channel that has been cited favorably by Trump, ran a report on Friday about alleged migrant-related crime problems in the country.

A White House spokeswoman told reporters on Sunday that Trump had been referring generally to rising crime, not a specific incident in the Scandinavian country.

Sweden's crime rate has fallen since 2005, official statistics show, even as it has taken in hundreds of thousands of immigrants from war-torn countries like Syria and Iraq.

Trump's comment confounded Stockholm. "We are trying to get clarity," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Catarina Axelsson said.

Sweden's embassy in the United States repeated Trump's tweet about having seen the Fox report, and added, "We look forward to informing the U.S. administration about Swedish immigration and integration policies."

Trump has been widely criticized for making assertions with little or no supporting evidence.

He has said more than 3 million people voted fraudulently in the U.S. election, which officials say is false, and incorrectly stated that he won by the most decisive margin in decades.

Swedish Foreign Minister Margot Wallstrom appeared to respond to Trump on Saturday by posting on Twitter an excerpt of a speech in which she said democracy and diplomacy "require us to respect science, facts and the media."

Her predecessor was less circumspect.

"Sweden? Terror attack? What has he been smoking? Questions abound," former Foreign Minister Carl Bildt wrote on Twitter.

Other Swedes mocked Trump by posting pictures of reindeer, meatballs and people assembling IKEA furniture.

(Source: AFP)

'I'm a Muslim Too,' New Yorkers rally against Muslim ban

Hundreds of New Yorkers have staged a rally to voice solidarity with Muslims, in the wake of the United States President Donald Trump's entry ban against people from some Muslim nations.

The protesters marched on Times Square while shouting "I'm a Muslim Too," denouncing Trump's executive order last month that banned travel from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen.

Organized by music producer and businessman Russell Simmons, the event also featured an speech by Mayor Bill de Blasio and Hollywood actress Susan Sarandon.

"Here's the message I want to give as mayor of this city, to everyone who's here. Regardless of your faith or your background or where you were born, this is your city," de Blasio said.

"And to everybody, this is your country too. This is your country too. And think about the origins of this country - a country founded by people fleeing religious persecution. A country founded to respect all faiths and all beliefs. This is who we are as Americans, and this must be protected," he added.

Sarandon also took the stage, calling on all Americans to speak up against Trump, arguing that silence makes them "complicit."

Simmons, meanwhile, said that Trump was going to "leave a legacy of hate in America," although the country was moving towards "greater love."

■ Not My President

Also on Sunday, thousands of demonstrators across the U.S. marked President's Day by staging rallies against



Trump's presidency.

Marking the federal holiday, which is held on the third Monday of February, protesters descended upon the streets of at least 25 cities to protest the new Republican president's dividing policies on immigration.

More protests were scheduled in New York, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Chi-

cago, Kansas City, Denver, Milwaukee, Salt Lake City and Atlanta on Monday.

The Muslim ban, which was introduced on January 28, has stirred outrage both inside the U.S. and abroad.

Traditional U.S. allies like Britain and Germany have also criticized the ban, asking the Trump administration to reconsider it.

Millions of People across the world have held demonstrations to condemn the ban, which also barred Syrian refugees and halted all refugee admission to the U.S. for 120 days.

The ban was put on hold by a federal judge earlier this month. Trump has pledged to introduce a revised version of the measure after losing an appeal bid to reinstate it.

(Source: USA Today)

Iraq: Sunni women tell of ISIL detention, torture

■ Hanan

Hanan, 26, said she tried to escape from Hawija on April 21, 2016, with her children and about 50 women and four men from several Sunni families. Her husband had fled several weeks earlier. She said ISIL fighters arrested the group in Qayyarah, 65 kilometers north, and took them to an abandoned house, where they locked the women and their children in a room. On the first day, Hanan said, an ISIL guard took her and her daughter, 8, and sons, 6 and 3, to a separate room. ISIL fighters told her she was an apostate because her husband had fled ISIL-controlled territory and that she needed to remarry the local ISIL leader. She said, "Kill me, because I refuse to do that."

The fighters blindfolded her, beat her with plastic cables, and suspended her by her arms for some time - she could not estimate how long - in front of her children. Then they took her down, took off the blindfold, and one of the fighters raped her in front of her children:

The same guy raped me every day for the next month without a blindfold, always in front of my children. My daughter suffers from an intellectual disability so she doesn't really understand what she saw, but my older son brings it up often. I don't know what to do.

She said that the other women were taken out of the communal room, sometimes daily, other times less

often, and that one of them, from Hajj Ali who had an 11-month-old daughter, had told her that another fighter was raping her and that he was going to force her to marry him. She suspected that all the other women were being raped as well.

A month after she was captured, Hanan's father was able to locate her and gave ISIL a car and paid US\$500 for her release, she said. He was forced to sign a document stating that if she escaped ISIL-controlled territory, he would be killed. The ISIL fighter who had been raping her said he wanted to marry her, but she and her father refused, she said. In January 2017, she said, she escaped with the rest of her family to Kirkuk. She said she did not know what happened to the other women, but heard from the woman from Hajj Ali's family that she had been forced to marry her rapist.

■ Karima

Karima, 17, said she fled Hawija toward Kirkuk with 16 family members in June 2016. As they left Hawija, an ISIL sniper shot her mother in the neck, killing her. Most of her family members escaped but ISIL fighters captured Karima and her brothers, ages 6, 11, and 13, and held them in an abandoned home near Hawija without food and with very little water. They were interrogated about their father, a former Iraqi policeman who was able to flee earlier. Her captors hit her and her 13-year-

old brother once each with a gun butt to the shoulder during an interrogation, she said. After three days, they were released and escaped to Kirkuk.

■ Aisha

Aisha, 25, said she tried to escape Hawija in October 2016 with her family and two other families. While they were waiting for smugglers to show them a safe route, she said, ISIL fighters appeared and opened fire on them, shooting her 6-year-old son in his back. She said that the men in the group escaped, but the ISIL fighters rounded up all five women, hitting Aisha with gun butt on her shoulder. The ISIL fighters took her son to a Hawija hospital and locked up the women in a room in an abandoned house about a 30-minute drive away.

She said that three female ISIL guards came and lashed each woman 65 times with a thin cane, saying that if they even winced, they would get more lashes. Aisha said ISIL held her for 12 days and was only released after her family paid about US\$2,000. The other women were still there, and she does not know what happened to them.

She rushed to the hospital and found her son, who had survived four operations, and finally escaped Kirkuk with her son. She showed Human Rights Watch her son's wounds.

(Source: Human Rights Watch)

Fresh ceasefire appears to hold for now in eastern Ukraine

Ukrainian troops and Russian-backed separatists appeared to be respecting a new ceasefire attempt on Monday after international powers called for shelling to stop and for the withdrawal of banned heavy weapons.

In recent weeks, the area around the government-held town of Avdiivka has seen some of the heaviest artillery fire of the past two years, refocusing global attention on a simmering conflict that has strained relations between Russia and the West.

Violence has since lessened, but the close proximity of the opposing sides and continued use of heavy weapons prompted the leaders of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine to call on Sunday for renewed efforts to implement the terms of the much-violated Minsk peace agreement of 2015.

As of Monday morning, each side acknowledged that the other was complying.

"Today, as of 1200 (1000 GMT), the enemy has not used heavy weapons," Ukrainian military spokesman Oleksandr Motozyanyk said.

In Avdiivka, a Reuters witness said no artillery or gunfire could be heard. "The ceasefire was announced yesterday at 1700. It's being respected for now," the head of the local administration, Pavlo Malykhin, told Reuters.

Senior separatist official Eduard Basurin said shelling from the Ukrainian side had stopped at midnight on Sunday, separatist website DAN reported.

"The withdrawal (of heavy artillery) will happen after 24 hours of ceasefire and the main condition is that it be synchronized: if we withdraw, then the Ukrainian side withdraw also," he said.

Around 10,000 people have been killed since fighting erupted in eastern regions in April 2014, following a pro-European uprising in Kiev and the ouster of a Moscow-backed president.

The French and German governments on Monday criticized Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to temporarily recognize travel and other documents issued by the separatist regions, saying this ran contrary to the Minsk accord.

In a separate development, the Kremlin said it had no prior knowledge of a peace plan by a Ukrainian lawmaker, reported in The New York Times, and said it was absurd.

(Source: AP)

Egypt court upholds death penalty for 10

Egypt's Court of Cassation has upheld the death sentences issued against 10 defendants who had been convicted of murder-related charges in a soccer stadium massacre some five years ago.

The final rulings were issued on Monday, confirming the same verdicts which had been handed down by a lower Egyptian court in June 2015, when 11 people faced capital punishment, including one in absentia. However, the court today ordered a retrial for the eleventh suspect, who is still at large.

The ten defendants were found guilty of premeditated and attempted murder, thuggery, vandalism and mugging.

The tragic incident, the country's deadliest sports-related violence, occurred in the northeastern city of Port Said on February 1, 2012, when thousands of al-Masry soccer team's fans stormed the stands and pitch following their team's 3-1 victory against Cairo's al-Ahly, violently attacking the defeated team's spectators, using knives, swords, clubs, rocks, bottles and fireworks.

The rioting claimed the lives of 74 al-Ahly supporters, and inflicted injuries on more than 500 other people. Seventy-three suspects, including nine police officers and two officials from Port Said's al-Masry club, were also charged in the wake of the massacre.

The court on Monday also issued 15-year prison terms for 10 other defendants and five-year terms for 15 others. One defendant also received a one-year jail term while 21 others were acquitted.

Monday's verdicts were warmly welcomed by the family and relatives of the victims, celebrating outside the court in Cairo.

(Source: Press TV)

U.S. Navy test-fires four nuclear-capable ICBM missiles

The United States Navy has test-fired four nuclear-capable ballistic missiles from a submarine in the Pacific Ocean amid simmering tensions with Russia, China and North Korea.

Four Trident II D missiles were launched successfully from an Ohio class ballistic missile submarine in the Pacific Test Range over a three-day period since Thursday, the U.S. Navy said in a statement.

"An Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine assigned to Submarine Group 9 completed a Follow-on Commander's Evaluation Test (FCET) Feb[ruary] 16, resulting in four successful test flights of Trident II D5 missiles," the statement added.

The test launch of the nuclear capable missile system was part of regular tests that "are conducted on a frequent, recurring basis to ensure the continued reliability of the system," said John Daniels, a spokesman for the Strategic Systems Program, which oversees the Ohio-class Trident submarine program.

The "test flights were not conducted in response to any ongoing world events or as a demonstration of power," Daniels said.

Trident II D is a submarine-launched ballistic missile that can carry multiple thermonuclear warheads. They are deployed with the American and British navies.

The tests come days after North Korea announced the successful test of its long-range ballistic missile in the Sea of Japan and after Russia reportedly deployed cruise missiles in violation of a 1987 treaty between Washington and Moscow.

(Source: agencies)

Dani Alves says he quit Barcelona because they were ‘false and ungrateful’

Dani Alves has slammed his former side Barcelona for their ‘false and ungrateful’ attitude towards him, claiming it was the reason why he ultimately decided to depart for Juventus.

The Brazilian was able to bring an eight-year spell at the Nou Camp to an end last summer after activating a peculiar termination clause in his contract.

Months of speculation meant it came as little surprise to the press but, considering their troubles at right-back this season, Barcelona were evidently not prepared.



Alves, 33, says the La Liga champions only have themselves to blame with regards to his exit, claiming the hierarchy have ‘no idea’ how to treat their players properly.

The defender told ABC: ‘During my last three seasons I always heard that ‘Alves was leaving’, but the managers never said anything to me. They were very false and ungrateful. They did not respect me.

‘I was only offered to renew when the FIFA transfer ban came in. That was when I went and signed a deal with a termination clause.

‘Those who run Barcelona today have no idea how to treat their players.’

One person who would have been glad to see Alves pack his bags and leave the Spanish top flight was Cristiano Ronaldo. The pair had been involved in a bitter feud for several seasons with Alves regularly taunting the Real Madrid star via the media.

But Alves claims his apparent disregard for Ronaldo was invented by the press and says that he actually has a tremendous amount of respect for the four-time Ballon d’Or winner.

‘If people only knew how much I respect Cristiano Ronaldo. I will repeat it to make myself clear: I respect Cristiano Ronaldo.

‘When I spoke about him being too selfish, when you win you are going to be the star but when you lose they will go for you, so I said it in a very respectful way.

What happens is that the press portrayed them differently, saying that I had spoken ill of him. And Ronaldo believed it. That’s why he did not greet me at the Ballon d’Or gala in 2015.’

(Source: DailyMail)

‘This ship has sailed’, Budapest 2024 bid chief tells radio

The Hungarian capital has likely lost its chance to organize Summer Olympic Games in 2024, the bid’s chief told local radio late on Sunday after a nascent political movement collected a quarter million signatures to force a referendum on the bid.

Budapest was considered a long-shot candidate next to powerhouses Los Angeles and Paris but the eastern European city pinned high hopes on the International Olympic Committee’s new frugal bid concept, known as Agenda 2020.



A political accord behind the bid once included most parties, the government and Parliament, which voted to support the candidacy in 2015. That broad unity evaporated as the new political group, called Momentum, tapped into popular dissent.

Budapest Mayor Istvan Tarlos flagged he might withdraw from the 2024 race but rejected responsibility for allowing the bid to fall apart, saying it was always a national matter in Hungary.

Balazs Fúrjes, a government commissioner for special projects and the chief organizer of the 2024 bid, told Inforadio on Sunday that he saw no chance for a Hungarian Games in 2024.

“The Mayor is right, this issue belongs to all of us,” he said. “The Hungarian Olympic family, the capital, Parliament, and the government have all made unified decisions. Now I see that cause ran aground, even though a 120-year-old Hungarian dream had a palpable chance of coming true.”

He said Agenda 2020 and internal political unity were both necessary to allow any chance for a small, poorer country like Hungary to host the Games.

“Now that unity has gone up in the air, and lacking that we stand no chance against Paris or Los Angeles. This ship has sailed, it seems. The Budapest Olympics can soon wrap it in, although now it would have really had a chance.”

He said even a favorable referendum result would not save the situation now.

“I would have been the first to propose a referendum had it not been for the complete unity that formed in the Budapest city council and a decisive majority in Parliament,” he said. “With no unity the Budapest bid suffers such a blow that a referendum to heal that would be too little too late.”

(Source: Reuters)

Is Ibra the Premier League’s greatest ever free transfer?



Zlatan Ibrahimovic’s FA Cup winner against Blackburn on Sunday was his 24th goal for Manchester United since joining from Paris Saint-Germain last summer.

The big Swede arrived with a point to prove, and is proving it perfectly, outshining United’s more expensive signings despite not costing a penny in transfer fees.

But where does Zlatan rank in a list of the Premier League’s best free transfers? Sportsmail takes a look at the men who arrived for nothing, and left a big mark.

10 Mark Schwarzer (Middlesbrough to Fulham) Starting our list, something of an unsung hero in Australian goalkeeper Mark Schwarzer. Now 44, he is known for winning Premier League titles in back-to-back years with Chelsea and Leicester, without playing a single minute for either side.

But before his bench-sitting prowess took over, Schwarzer was a dependable Premier League keeper. After more than a decade at Middlesbrough, the Aussie moved to Fulham on a free in 2008. He was No 1 at Craven Cottage for five straight seasons, during which time Fulham never finished below 12th. The season after he left, they were relegated.

9 Kevin Davies (Southampton to Bolton) If you cast your mind back long enough, there was actually a time when Kevin Davies wasn’t associated with Bolton. In fact, the one-cap England man had actually played for four clubs - Chesterfield, Southampton twice, Blackburn and Millwall - before Saints let him go for the second time in 2003.

Sam Allardyce offered him a chance at Bolton, and the rest is history. Though never prolific, the target man led the line for a decade, never playing fewer than 30 league games in any of his 10 seasons at the club. With 67 goals he is by far the club’s leading Premier League scorer.

8 Demba Ba (West Ham to Newcastle) Having been denied a move to Stoke because of a failed medical, Ba was prolific for West Ham in his half-season, but failed to keep them in the Premier League. Newcastle pounced, and picked up the talented Senegalese striker for free.

His start was explosive, with two hat-tricks in his first nine Premier League games for the club. Ba only stayed 18 months, before moving to Chelsea, but in that time he netted 29 times in 51 league starts, a quite brilliant record.

He is in the club’s top 10 all-time Premier League scorers, despite only playing there for a season and a half.

7 Michael Ballack (Bayern to Chelsea) When Ballack arrived at Chelsea in 2006, he already had a reputation as one of the world’s best midfielders, having starred for Bayer Leverkusen, Bayern Munich and Germany. Securing his services without a transfer fee was seen as quite the coup for the west Londoners.

And Ballack lived up to the billing. His first season saw Chelsea win a domestic cup double, and in his four years at the club he racked up over 150 appearances, and 25 goals, lifting the Premier League title in his final season.

6 Gianluca Vialli (Juventus to Chelsea) Signed from Juventus in 1996, Vialli was a genuine superstar when he arrived at Stamford Bridge, an Italy international who had just lifted the Champions League.

The striker didn’t actually score that many goals for Chelsea - 40 in 78 games is an extremely impressive return, but doesn’t put him all that high on a list of west London’s greatest. But he helped Chelsea to a first trophy in 25 years in his first season, and would become player manager in his final year. That’s quite an impact for a free transfer.

5 Gary McAllister (Coventry to Liverpool) Already 35, McAllister’s best days looked to be behind him when Gerard Houllier made him a surprise signing in 2000. Having last won a major trophy almost a decade earlier, with Leeds in 1992, it was a strange move for the man who had spent four years fighting relegation with Coventry.

But McAllister turned into a brilliant acquisition, playing 49 games in his first season and leading Liverpool to five trophies in a calendar year. He scored the only goal in the UEFA Cup semi-final win over Barcelona, was named man of the match in the final, and also played a role in the League Cup and FA Cup wins. He retired after just two seasons at Anfield, but by then had become a club legend.

4 Ruud Gullit (Sampdoria to Chelsea) If Vialli was a big-name signing, the man who brought him to Stamford Bridge was perhaps an even bigger one. Gullit had won the European Championship with Holland and won European Cups with Milan.

He was runner-up to Eric Cantona as Footballer of the Year in his first season, and was the first foreign manager to

lift the FA Cup, helping transform Chelsea into the modern club they are today.

3 Zlatan Ibrahimovic (PSG to Manchester United) A giant of European football, with titles in Holland, Italy, Spain and France, Ibrahimovic arrived with all his showmanship, but with plenty of doubters. Now 35 years old, he had been impressive in Ligue 1, but there were questions over whether that would prepare him for Premier League football.

Four goals in his first three games quietened the critics, and 24 in 36 so far suggest he is still a star, whether he stays beyond this season or not. The only thing that keeps him down in third, rather than the top of the list, is his inability to lift his team - United finished fifth last season, and despite Zlatan’s goals, they are sixth in the table now. He needs to lift them back towards a first title since Sir Alex Ferguson to really cement his place at the top of the list.

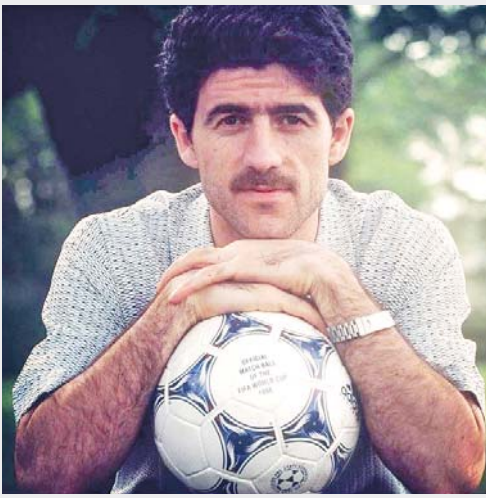
2 Jay-Jay Okocha (PSG to Bolton) So good they named him twice. When Sam Allardyce plucked Okocha from PSG on a free transfer, there was amazement around the league - this was a man who had been Africa’s most expensive ever player when the Parisiens spent £10m on him in 1998.

Okocha became a legend at Bolton, alongside fellow free transfers Ivan Campo, Fernando Hierro and Youri Djorkaeff, and helped the club to three top-half finishes in a row. He is best remembered for a handful of stunning strikes and sensational tricks, which made him a favourite among fans.

1 Sol Campbell (Tottenham to Arsenal) Not just the most controversial free transfer in English football, but also the best. Having once promised never to play for Spurs’ north London rivals, Campbell opted to cross the divide, and to do it for nothing. He has never been forgiven at White Hart Lane.

But Campbell answered his critics on the pitch, winning the Double in his first season at Highbury and helping the Gunners to their first ever Champions League final, in which he scored. Most impressively, he was the rock at the heart of the Invincibles defence - which, fittingly, won the title back at White Hart Lane.

(Source: DailyMail)



@fifaworldcup Happy 43rd birthday to Karim Bagheri! The midfielder, who was famous for his powerful long range shots.



@m10_official We’ve had hard days here at Arsenal after our last match! But we have to find focus again, Gooners!



@johnterry.26 You can’t beat that feeling in the tunnel before a game @chelseafc

Iran's Persepolis, Zob Ahan to start ACL Matchday One on Tuesday

S P O R T S The Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex **d e s k** will see a clash of Asian giants on Tuesday in Group D when Tehran powerhouse Persepolis face Saudi heavyweights Al Hilal in what looks to be one of the stand-out ties of Matchday One.

Persepolis lost out on the 2015-16 Persian Gulf Pro League on goal difference to Esteghlal Khuzestan, but their second-place finish ensured a return to the continental stage after missing out last year.

Two-time Asian champions Al Hilal do hold the psychological edge over Persepolis as far as the form book is concerned having won two and drawn one of their four previous AFC Champions league encounters. The Riyadh club also eliminated Persepolis in the Round of 16 two years ago in a 3-1 aggregate win.

Also, Zob Ahan to face Al Ain in Group C at Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium on Tuesday.

Last November inaugural AFC Champions League winners Al Ain failed to add to their 2003 crown when they suffered heartbreak in the 2016 final, and they will begin the first steps to redemption against Iran's Zob Ahan.

The Garden City club have suffered from inconsistent domestic form, losing to Al Jazira and Dibba in recent times, but they did defeat Al Shabab in their most recent UAE Pro League outing last Thursday. And current AFC Player of the Year Omar Abdulrahman is a playmaker who can change a match in an instant.

Former AFC Champions League runners-up Zob Ahan, meanwhile, are well-placed in the Iran Pro League in fourth spot, but have hit a patch of poor form picking up just a point from their last four games. The 2010 finalists were eliminated by Al Ain in last year's Round of 16 and the Iranians will be keen to avenge that 3-1 aggregate defeat.



Iran's Esteghlal Khuzestan edges Al Fateh of Saudi Arabia: ACL

S P O R T S Esteghlal Khuzestan from Iran beat **d e s k** Saudi Arabia's Al Fateh on Tuesday in Group B of the AFC Champions League.

Abolfazl Alaii scored in the 80th minute with a header to ensure Iranian champions Esteghlal Khuzestan took all three points in the 2017 AFC Champions League opener at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The continental debutants from Ahvaz were on top for much of the tie but could not find the breakthrough until 10 minutes from time when defender Alaii rose highest to nod home Peyman Shirzadi's inswinging corner at the back post.

Alaii won Man of the Match award at the end of



the match.

"I would like to dedicate the victory to Khuzestan's people. We are proud of the valuable win and it was a great step toward the AFC Champions League qualification," Esteghlal Khuzestan coach Sirous Pourmousavi said.

"Al Fateh are a great team and were more experienced than us," he added.

Al Fateh, who are making their second appearance in the competition after 2014, see their winless run in the AFC Champions League stretch to seven games after they failed to pick up a victory in their inaugural campaign.

The first game decides team's fate: Branko Ivankovic



S P O R T S Persepolis head **d e s k** coach Branko Ivankovic believes that despite being in the toughest group of AFC Champions League, his side will make every effort to qualify for the next round and make the Iranian fans happy.

"This group which contains Persepolis as the best Iranian team, Al Hilal as the Saudi Arabia champions, Al Rayyan as the QSL champions and Al Wahda as one of the best Emirati teams is definitely the group of death in this season's AFC Champions League," Ivankovic said.

"We cannot host Al Hilal at Tehran's Azadi stadium due to some political issues, unfortunately and we lack the support of our fans. The most

important game is the match against Al Hilal since it is our first game. As you know the first game is always the most important match as it could decide the fate of a team in the tournament," the Croat added.

"We have the full respect for Al Hilal as they have a great squad but we have our own strategy. We would like to make our fans happy with a decent performance. We need to grab the points from the very first in order to ensure the qualification from this group," he added.

Persepolis will open their campaign against two-time continental champions Al Hilal at Muscat's Sultan Qaboos Stadium on Tuesday at 19:00 local time.

20 countries to participate in 2nd International Fajr Cup: IRIWF



The Islamic Republic of Iran Weightlifting Federation (IRIWF) says a total of 20 different countries have already expressed their willingness to take part in the second edition of the International Fajr Cup, which is scheduled to be held next month in southern Iran.

The IRIWF public relations department announced on Sunday that contestants from Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, England, Hungary, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Serbia, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Yemen as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran will vie for top honors during the upcoming competition.

Meanwhile, USA Weightlifting, which is the national governing body overseeing the sport of weightlifting in the United

States, has voiced its readiness to participate in the event and even submitted its list of weightlifters and members of the technical team to the IRIWF. The request needs to be reviewed by Iranian Foreign Ministry officials before final approval and visa issuance.

The second edition of the International Fajr Cup will begin in the southwestern Iranian city of Ahvaz, located approximately 830 kilometers southwest of the capital, Tehran, on March 9, and will finish on March 14, 2017.

Participants at the forthcoming International Fajr Cup will be in action in men's 85-kilogram, 94-kilogram, 105-kilogram and over 105-kilogram weight categories. The top three athletes will be awarded cash prizes.

(Source: PressTV)

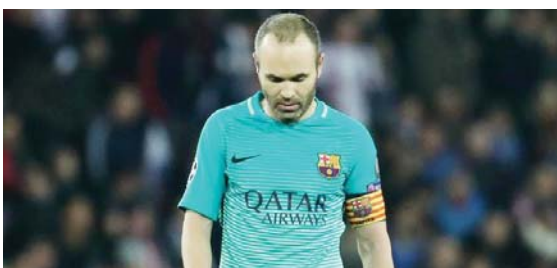
Barcelona captain Iniesta backs coach after fans vent frustration

Barcelona captain Andres Iniesta and the club's president have rallied behind coach Luis Enrique after fans vented their frustration at a tough week with boos during their 2-1 home win in La Liga on Sunday.

Just days after a 4-0 drubbing by Paris Saint Germain (PSG) in France in the Champions League last 16, Barcelona needed Lionel Messi to convert a 90th minute penalty to beat struggling Leganes.

Iniesta acknowledged the defending Spanish league champions were rattled after the defeat to PSG but backed the coach and team to restore the side's winning mentality.

"We have not lost confidence in ourselves or in the manager," Iniesta told reporters after his 400th league match for "I think it's a one-off situation we're going through."



Iniesta said it was understandable the team carried a Champions League hangover into the Leganes match.

"We knew it was going to be difficult after what happened in Paris," the Spain international said. "We're humans and these things affect us."

Barcelona sit second in the league table, a point

behind arch rivals Real Madrid who have two games in hand. The side has also earned a place in King's Cup final in late May.

Enrique has steered Barcelona to eight competition titles out of a possible 10 since taking over in 2014, but the thrashing by PSG marked the biggest humiliation of his coaching career.

Enrique's contract expires this summer, but Barcelona president Josep Maria Bartomeu said he had no intention at this stage of searching for a new coach.

"In the last few years, he has won almost all competitions," Bartomeu told reporters. "The Barca supporters are very happy with him."

"We will speak to him in April to see how he feels," Bartomeu said. "The priority is still for Luis Enrique to continue."

(Source: Reuters)

Mercedes re-sign Toto Wolff and Niki Lauda to confirm F1 commitment

Mercedes have signed new deals with their executive director of motorsport, Toto Wolff, and the team's non-executive chairman, Niki Lauda, to retain the pair until 2020, confirming the stability of the team up until the end of the manufacturer's current commitment to Formula One, which runs until 2020 – when the current commercial arrangement with Formula One Management concludes.



The team will launch their new car for the season on Thursday at Silverstone and retaining the long-standing presence of Wolff and Lauda at the top of the organisation as they face a new formula this season and readjust after the departures of Nico Rosberg and Paddy Lowe over the winter will help ease the transition.

The three-times world champion Lauda, who owns a 10% share in the team, got to Mercedes at the end of 2012 and was joined just before the opening of the 2013 season by Wolff, who has a 30% stake, after the departure of Ross Brawn. They have overseen a remarkable period of dominance, with the marque winning all three drivers' and constructors' championships since 2014, with Lewis Hamilton taking two of the former.

"The last few years have been some of the most enjoyable I have had in Formula One," said Lauda. "Toto and I formed a perfect partnership at Mercedes and we have a great team on every level that has delivered results. I must thank Dieter [Zetsche, chairman and CEO of Daimler AG – the team's majority shareholder] and the other members of the board of Daimler for renewing their confidence in us."

Rosberg, who won the championship last year and then retired has been replaced by Williams' Valtteri Bottas, while Lowe, who is set to join Williams for 2017, has been replaced by the former Ferrari technical director James Allison.

"In 2013, we restructured the management of the team with the clear goal of improving our performance," Zetsche said. "Since then, however, the results have exceeded our expectations. A key factor in this success has been the combination of Toto's entrepreneurial skills and Niki's experience. Their renewed commitment gives our programme important continuity for the next four years."

Wolff, who is effectively the team principal, was insistent it had been a collective effort. "Winning is never down to single individuals," he said. "It is about the right group of people coming together, aligning themselves with a common objective and then combining their talents to achieve that target. Each day I come to the factory, I am humbled to have the privilege of representing this inspiring group of people."

(Source: Guardian)

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti could resign if no deal for Francesco Totti

oma coach Luciano Spalletti has said his future at the club will depend on what happens with Francesco Totti in the summer.

Totti, 40, signed a one-year contract extension last June, and Spalletti said he would walk away in protest if the captain was not offered another year on top of that.

"Don't ask me about how well my team is doing, ask me about Totti," he said at a news conference after Roma's week-end win over Torino in which Totti made his 11th appearance of the season.

"It is only right that his contract is renewed. Totti doesn't have a contract with this club, he has a pact of love with this city, and this is something that has to continue."

"I will go even further: if they send him away at the end of the season then I am not staying, not even if I win the Treble."

"I don't want him to retire while I am the coach."

Spalletti's comments came at the end of a week in which it appeared that the club's bid to build a new stadium on the outskirts of Rome may be scuppered.

Restrictions on construction in the Tor di Valle area have been reported as the city council disputes Roma's revised plans.

But general manager Mauro Baldissoni told Mediaset the project was "moving on" and said: "We never wanted to comment on what has been said in recent months about the stadium because we have been doing our talking with the institutions in the relevant places."

"But our silence has only forced us to have to listen to ridiculous things in an industrial quantity, even from people who have not read a single line of our project."

"It's up to the institutions to do their jobs without being influenced. We will take all the steps necessary, even judicial ones, if we reach a position which we do not agree with."

"The project for the new stadium is moving on, also because we have already invested €60 million in it."

(Source: ESPN)



Writers Guild of America West honors Kiarostami with lifetime achievement award

A R T TEHRAN — Celebrated Iranian auteur Abbas Kiarostami was honored posthumously with the Jean Renoir Award for International Screenwriting Achievement at the 2017 Writers Guild of America Awards on Sunday.

His son, Ahmad Kiarostami, accepted the award from actress Shohreh Aghdashloo on his behalf, WGA West announced.

Kiarostami, whose 1997 film “Taste of Cherry” won the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival, died last July.

“Abbas Kiarostami was, as Martin Scorsese put it, ‘one of those rare artists with a special knowledge of the world,’” WGA West President Howard A. Rodman told the Variety earlier in January when the WGA West announced its plan to honor the filmmaker with this award.

“As a founding father of the New Iranian Cinema, Kiarostami navigated tricky political and cultural terrains with courage and grace. Yet the impact of his work – and his life – is felt far outside the borders of his native land. Kiarostami’s films were fiction, were documentary, were transcendent. He expanded cinematic narrative for all of us, even as he raised the rhythms of ordinary life to the level of high art.”

The winners of the 2017 Writers Guild Awards for outstanding achievement in writing for film, television, new media, videogames, news, radio, promotional and graphic animation categories were announced at concurrent ceremonies at the Beverly Hilton in Los Angeles and the Edison Ballroom in New York City.



Ahmad Kiarostami, the son of auteur Abbas Kiarostami, accepts the Jean Renoir Award for International Screenwriting Achievement during the Writers Guild of America Awards on behalf his father on February 19, 2017.

Berlin Hafez Institute to commemorate poet Parvin Etesami

A R T TEHRAN — The **d e s k** Hafez Institute (Hafis Institut) in Berlin will commemorate Persian poet Parvin Etesami (1907-1941) on March 12.

The commemoration has been organized in collaboration with the Iranian Cultural Office in Berlin to celebrate her 110th birthday.

Hafez Institute director Thomas Ogger and ethnologist Sedigheh Mousavi of the University of Tübingen are scheduled to deliver lectures. Additionally, a

documentary about the life of Parvin will be screened during the celebration, which is slated to be held at the Hotel Steglitz International.

Parvin was one of the most prominent Persian poets of the 20th century. Her poetry is based upon themes of social, humanitarian and mystical concepts, and contains no allusions to romantic love or feminine sentiment. Her first collection was published in 1935.

“Lego Batman” stays no. 1, conquers “The Great Wall”

NEW YORK (AP) — “The Great Wall” was a hit in China. In North America, it was a dud.

The most expensive film ever made in China and with a budget of \$150 million, “The Great Wall” was intended to prove that the world’s no. 2 movie marketplace could produce Hollywood-sized blockbusters of its own. Though it ran up \$171 million in ticket sales in China, “The Great Wall” pulled in \$18.1 million in its North American debut over Presidents Day weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday.

That was good enough for third place, falling behind last weekend’s top two films, “The Lego Batman” and “Fifty Shades Darker”. The Warner Bros. animated release easily led the box office again with \$34.2 million in its second week, sliding only 35 percent. Universal’s “Fifty Shades Darker” sold \$21 million in tickets in its second week. The sequel continues to play well overseas, where it led international business with \$43.7 million over the weekend.

Slammed by critics, “The Great Wall” didn’t measure up to its initial ambitions. It was produced by Legendary

Entertainment, which has since been acquired by Chinese conglomerate Wanda Group. The film, directed by Zhang Yimou, originated with an idea by Legendary chief executive Thomas Tull, who exited the company last month.

But “The Great Wall” isn’t a bomb. It has made \$244.6 million overseas and performed over the weekend in North America slightly better than some pundits expected.

“This is absolutely a strategy that’s worldwide,” said Nick Carpou, distribution chief for Universal. “Worldwide, we are one of many markets.”

Universal could still claim four of the top 10 films, the other two being “A Dog’s Purpose” (\$5.6 million in its fourth week) and “Split” (\$7 million in its fifth week), so far the top film of 2017.

More East-West productions like “The Great Wall” are sure to follow. Studios already regularly partner with Chinese film companies on everything from “Transformers: Age of Extinction” to “Warcraft”, a flop in the U.S. and Canada with \$47.4 million, but a \$220.8 million hit in China.

Paramount CEO Grey to depart as soon as next week

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Brad Grey, the chairman and chief executive officer of Viacom Inc’s (VIAB.O) Paramount Pictures film studio is expected to leave with an announcement coming as early as next week, according to two sources familiar with the situation.

Grey’s departure from the studio, which he has headed for 12 years, comes after years of underperformance, producing box office bombs such as “Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Out of the Shadows” and “Ben-Hur”.

Viacom Chief Executive Bob Bakish will work with an interim management team at Paramount, according to one of the sources.

A spokeswoman for Viacom declined to comment. A spokesman for Grey declined to comment.

Paramount was at the center of a bruising power struggle between Viacom’s controlling shareholder, Sumner Redstone, and his daughter, Shari, and Viacom’s former chief executive, Philippe Dauman.

The battle began when Dauman, who resigned in August, proposed selling a stake in Paramount against Redstone’s wishes.

Last month, Grey helped to arrange a deal for two Chinese film companies, Shanghai Film Group (SFG) and Huahua Media, to invest \$1 billion in Paramount, giving the studio much-needed cash and support as it attempts to grow.

As part of the agreement, SFG and



Chief Executive Officer of Paramount Studios Brad Grey poses at a premiere of the film ‘Arrival’ in Los Angeles, California, November 6, 2016. (Reuters/Danny Moloshok)

Huahua Media will finance a combined 25 percent of all of Paramount’s films for the next three years, with the option to extend to a fourth year. The Chinese studios will share in the economic returns of the films, but details were not provided.

During his tenure at Paramount, Grey was responsible for a seven-year marketing distribution deal with Marvel and the 2008 acquisition of DreamWorks SKG for \$1.6 billion, from which Paramount got the Transformers franchise.

However in recent years, the studio has struggled.

Viacom’s Bakish is making Paramount a focal point in his strategy to turn around the New York-based media company’s declining ad revenue and ratings.

Dubber Iran Bozorgmehri-Raad dies of heart failure

A R T TEHRAN — **d e s k** Voice actress Iran Bozorgmehri-Raad died of heart failure in Tehran’s Parsa Hospital on Monday morning. She was 78.

Bozorgmehri-Raad, who was also a stage actress, was hospitalized a few days ago after she suffered a stroke.

She had lent her voice to many famous Western actresses specifically to the British actress Jean Simmons for her roles in “Spartacus”, “This Earth Is Mine”, “Adam and Eve”,



“Cage of Gold”, “Androcles and the Lion”, and “Until They Sail”.

Photos of Iran’s latest presidential election candidates appear on book

CULTURE TEHRAN — A book containing photos of the candidates who registered for Iran’s 11th presidential election in June 2013 will soon hit bookstores under the title “I am the President of Iran”.



Taken by photojournalist Amir Narimani, the book will contain 96 photos of the 82 candidates who registered with the Interior Ministry in Tehran during five days in May, the Persian service of ISNA reported on Monday.

The book will begin with an introduction by Narimani, and continue with the regulations to be observed in Iran’s presidential election.

The photo series will start with a photo of an unknown candidate and continue with photos of other candidates based on the day and time of their arrivals.

Narimani also will provide readers with more information about each candidate, their personal information, their goals and the reasons behind their candidacy.

Other interesting points to be mentioned in the book are the outlandish promises made by the candidates such as turning the entire country into a big potato farm, destroying and rebuilding Iran, or supporting polygamy in Iran.

The book is due to be published by Pargar Publications and will soon appear in bookstores.

NEWS IN BRIEF



New director selected for Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art

A R T TEHRAN — **d e s k** Ali-Mohammad Zare’ was appointed as director of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on Monday.

He was selected by director of the Office for Visual Arts, Majid Mollanoruz, who himself held the position since 2014.

Zare’ was the deputy director of the Office for Visual Arts.

Image of the Year Celebration opens with tribute to Abbas Kiarostami

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I feel deeply happy and proud and have watched the film several times in Iran and other countries. This is the best film and the best window to help know Kiarostami,” he added.

He also mentioned that Kiarostami was a filmmaker who was seeking the answers to his personal questions through making his films. “He knew what concepts the answers carried and what forms they made.”

IAF Director Majid Rajabi-Memar, in another part of the program said that he heard the news of Kiarostami’s death when he was in South Korea. “It was interesting for me that in all the meetings the South Korean officials expressed condolences to me for losing a world famous artist.”

Actor and photographer Reza Kianian was next called on stage to unveil the two posters designed for the 35th Fajr International Film Festival scheduled to be held in Tehran from April 21 to 28.

The poster of the major section of the festival portrays a work from Kiarostami’s photo series “Snow White”, while the second one bears the image of the filmmaker, which has been designed for the sidelines of the festival named “The Friend’s Home Is Here”, referring to the title of Kiarostami’s acclaimed film “Where Is the Friend’s Home?”

The photos from the Plasco building tragedy and the death of Iran’s ex-president Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who died of a heart attack in early January, are displayed on the margins of the event, which will be running until March 10 at the forum located on Musavi St., Taleqani Ave.