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Dust storms take Rouhani to southern province

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Recent dust storms took President Rouhani to southern Iran where repeated electricity and water outages threw normal life out of gear in 11 cities of Khuzestan province, including provincial capital Ahvaz.

During his visit to the province, which took the brunt of the unbearable, unhealthy weather, Rouhani pledged to complete water and sewer projects and unveiled a backup electricity system for Ahvaz's water treatment facilities.

He also said planting vegetation has already started in the area.

High humidity, coupled with heavy dust storms, hit the area for days, causing five power plants to stop operation.

Accompanied by several cabinet members, Rouhani also promised to start a project in 15 days to collect gas flares operating in the oil-rich area in an effort to reduce poisonous gases which cause acid rain and respiratory complications.

Rouhani also criticized, inter alia, dam construction by neighboring countries such as Turkey and Iraq for dust storms over the past years that dried up Hour-al-Azim wetland in Khuzestan.

"While we are unhappy with the occurrence of dust storms, this does not discourage us to address it," he promised. **→2**

Zarif urges regional co-op on environment



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Exports of oil products hit unprecedented 450,000 bpd

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran has exported 450,000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil products for the first time on average during the current Iranian calendar year, ending March 20, 2017, IRNA quoted an oil official as saying.

According to Abbas Kazemi, the managing director of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company, the exports of oil products even exceeded a 600,000 bpd record in some cases.

"Our policy is to boost the production level to keep the 600,000 bpd as the country's constant exports figure for such commodities," he said.

Kazemi further said that after the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) the country's oil industry has gone through major reform so that the projects in this area witnessed a significant acceleration in progress.

"We have received a lot of proposals from various countries like China, Japan and South Korea regarding the development of the country's refineries and we are negotiating with some of them," he noted.

Iran holds 13 percent of the total share of oil products exports from the Middle East, Kazemi said in October.

According to the official, by exporting 450,000 barrels of gas oil and fuel oil on a daily basis, the country is now a net exporter of oil products.

Syria peace talks end in Geneva following Astana progress

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The UN-brokered peace talks between the Syrian government and opposition forces resumed in Geneva on Thursday February 23, following a 10-month break caused by the escalation of violence in the country.

However, progress in resolving the six-year-old Syrian crisis was recently made in the Kazakh capital, Astana.

The ceasefire has generally been in force in Syria since December 30, despite the sides reporting frequent violations. Russia, Iran and Turkey have become the guarantors of the ceasefire, which was also supported by a UN Security Council resolution.

UN's special Syria envoy, Staffan de Mistura, began the fourth round of talks in Geneva in an opening session that brought the opposition and government delegations together at UN headquarters.

"I ask you to work together," he urged the delegations. "I know it's not going to be easy to end this horrible conflict and lay the foundation for a country at peace with itself, sovereign and unified."

He added that "it is your opportunity and solemn responsibility not to condemn future generations of Syrian children to long years of bitter and bloody conflict."

The opening ceremony on Thursday was delayed by several hours after a disagreement between the High Negotiations Committee (HNC), an umbrella group of armed and political factions, and de Mistura over the structure of the opposition delegation.

The disagreement came after de Mistura included two other groups in the talks – the Moscow and the Cairo platforms, the two pro-Russia, government-tolerated opposition groups, who sat separately from the HNC.

"The HNC was in contact with the Cairo and Moscow platforms in previous meetings. There are ongoing efforts to join these platforms within the opposition delegation so that we are represented as one delegation," Naser al-Hariri, head of the HNC delegation, told reporters ahead of the opening session. **→2**

136 Turkish diplomats, relatives seek asylum in Germany

More than 130 Turkish diplomats, soldiers and their family members have sought refuge in Germany since last July's failed coup, according to German government data in documents seen by AFP on Friday.

"The government is aware of 136 asylum applications filed by diplomatic passport holders from Turkey. They also include family members," said the interior ministry in a written reply to a query from a lawmaker.

The ministry said however that it did not have data on how many among the applicants are diplomats and how many are soldiers stationed at NATO (North Atlantic Treaty

Organization) bases.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government has accused the United States-based Islamic preacher Fethullah Gulen of having orchestrated the putsch, and launched a sweeping crackdown against his followers.

Some 43,000 people in Turkey have been arrested over their suspected links to Gulen's movement, and 100,000 fired or suspended. Many of them are teachers, police, magistrates and journalists.

The scale of the crackdown has raised international concern, with Germany among the most vocal in raising questions over the

mass arrests.

That and a string of other spats have contributed to fraying ties between Ankara and Berlin.

Turkey has also been pushing for Berlin to extradite alleged supporters of Gulen and Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) militants.

In its written note, the interior ministry said it extradited 60 people back to Turkey in 2015 for various offences including terrorism and murder.

Data for 2016 would only be available in 2018, it added.

(Source: BBC)

Can you make money in a collapse of the euro?

By James Mackintosh

As Europe is roiled by fears of a breakup of its currency, investors and lawyers have begun digging through bond documentation in the hope of finding ways to protect themselves against the possible return of the franc, lire and Deutschmark.

The plethora of bonds available offer many ways to bet on the possibility of the end of the euro. One opportunity comes from ancient bonds dating from before the single currency was created, another from bonds sold under English rather than French or Italian law. But so far, investors seem to be making significant bets on only the simplest option -- that of switching to the bonds of safe countries such as Germany, even though the safety that its

bonds appear to offer could prove illusory in a worst-case European breakup.

There is no surefire way to protect an investment against what would be the biggest default in history -- the redenomination of French or Italian bonds from euros into new francs and lire. Even though the bonds would be paid in full in francs or lire, investors paid in the devalued currencies would still class it as a default.

There's no blueprint for splitting up a currency, so any form of protection is inherently speculative. Even if investors protect against one form of breakup, they would remain exposed if the currency union fell apart in a different way.

The aim is to protect against the deval-

uation of new currencies that might be introduced for economically weaker countries such as France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Any new currency in Germany and other strong countries, such as the Netherlands and Austria, would be expected to rise in value.

One intriguing option involves two-decades-old corporate bonds that were originally sold in francs, lire, Deutschmarks, Austrian schillings or Dutch guilders. Dozens of these survive, and their legal position is far clearer than for euro-denominated bonds. Typically, they promise to pay in the legal tender of a country: if Germany switches to the Deutschmark, old Deutschmark bonds will repay in Deutschmarks. **→13**



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Samanoo festival celebrated in northeastern Iran

Samanoo festival, a joyous occasion where people cook Samanoo – a traditional Iranian sweet paste made entirely from mashed germinated wheat – was celebrated in Daraq, North Khorasan Province, on Thursday. Some 60 participants took part in the cooking festival.

Suicide bombers kill scores near Al Bab

Two suicide car bombings have gone off near Al Bab, killing scores of people, just a day after the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists were pushed out of the northern Syrian town.

Friday's first bombing killed 53 people in the village of Sousyan, 10km northwest of Al Bab, and struck Syrian rebels battling ISIL, local sources said.

The second explosion took place a few hours later and left eight dead, according to the Aleppo Media Center and Thiqa News agency, media platforms operated by activists.

The first suicide bomber targeted a checkpoint manned by Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters that was crowded with civilians early on Friday.

The Turkish-backed rebels on Thursday drove ISIL from Al Bab, the group's last significant stronghold in northwest Syria, along with two smaller neighboring towns, Qabasin and al-Bezah, after weeks of street fighting.

Referring to the first bombing, the medical charity Ambulanciers Sans Frontieres said 45 people, mostly civilians, had been killed and about 70 others were wounded.

The car bomb hit outside a security office where civilians had gathered seeking permission to return to Al Bab.

A rebel fighter with the Sultan Murad Brigade near Al Bab told Reuters news agency: "It was done on a checkpoint but there were a lot of families there gathered and waiting to get back to Al Bab. Therefore, we have many civilian casualties."

"There are still lots of cells inside Al Bab. It is very dangerous. Our search-and-clear operation is still under way."

ISIL claimed responsibility for the first attack via social media.

On Thursday, several Turkish-backed Syrian rebels were killed by a mine in Al Bab while clearing the town of unexploded ordnance after ISIL retreated, according to reports.

(Source: agencies)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Palestinian issue
Iran' top priority:
cleric

POLITICS TEHRAN — Tehran's interim Friday desk prayer leader has reiterated Tehran's unwavering policy in backing the Palestinian people against the Zionist regime of Israel, saying the issue of Palestine is the Islamic Republic's first priority.

Pointing to a recent conference on Palestine in Tehran, Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Movahedi Kermani expressed his gratitude to the high-ranking foreign officials and guests participating in the international event, Mehr reported.

He said the issue of Palestine is closely related to Islam, which says the domination of the unbelievers over Muslims is prohibited.



Five politicians
say won't run for
president

POLITICS TEHRAN — On Friday, the Razavi desk Shrine Guardian said he won't be running for the post of president in the May elections.

Ebrahim Raisi said he considers service to the lovers of Imam Reza more strongly than being president, Tabnak reported.

MP Masoud Pezeshkaini also said he would not run for president this year.

Also, Parviz Fattah, head of Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation, made remarks to the same effect.

Also, sources close to Reza Taqavi, head of Friday prayer leaders policy making council, and Mohsen Rezaee, Expediency Council secretary, have said they won't contest the president election.



Iranian, Saudi
officials discuss Hajj
pilgrimage

POLITICS TEHRAN — Delegations from Tehran desk and Riyadh held their first round of talks about conditions for a dispatch of Iranian nationals to Saudi Arabia for Hajj pilgrimage later this year.

The meeting co-chaired by caretaker of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization Hamid Mohammadi and Saudi Hajj and Umrh Minister Mohammed Saleh bin Taher Bentin was held in Jeddah on Thursday evening, Tasnim reported.

The Saudi Hajj minister expressed hope that this year's Hajj ritual would be held with participation of Iranians.



Iran's IAEA envoy
appointed as G77
chairman

POLITICS TEHRAN — Reza Najafi, Iran's desk ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency, has been appointed by consensus as the chairman of Group-77 for a one-year term, ILNA reported.

The Group of 77 (G-77), as the largest Third World coalition in the United Nations, was established on June 15, 1964 by seventy-seven developing countries, including Iran, that were signatories of the "Joint Declaration of the Seventy-Seven Countries" issued at the end of the first session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Geneva.



IRGC identifies '3
major economic
corruption networks'

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Islamic Revolution desk Guards Corps has identified and arrested the members of three major economic corruption networks, an IRGC official for intelligence affairs said on Thursday.

Also, a person who owes 40 trillion rials (more than 1 billion dollars) to the banking system was arrested and handed over to judicial authorities, Hossein Nejat said, Fars news agency reported.

Nejat further pointed out that through IRGC attempts, 157 immoral channels on Telegram have been identified and their administrators arrested.



'Islamic Coalition
Party promoting Iran
ties with China'

POLITICS TEHRAN — A member of the Islamic desk Coalition Party has said the party makes attempt to promote relations between Iran and China.

Speaking in a meeting with Iranian ambassador to China Ali Asqar Khaji on Friday, Hamid Reza Taraqi said his party's policy is to defend Iran's dignity and interests in political talks, ISNA reported.

He said his party's meetings with members of the Chinese ruling party have yielded good results in areas of economy, politics, and fight on corruption.

Zarif urges regional co-op on environment

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian desk Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called for collective efforts on Monday to be made by all neighboring countries to tackle environmental challenges.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran extends its hand of cooperation to neighboring countries in order to provide the youths of the region with a better future and counter threats against the present and future generations through a joint action plan," he said during a speech at the opening ceremony of 16th international exhibition on environment.

He added that cooperation in helping settle environmental crises is a security and political necessity. "Not only is it an environmental necessity, but it is also a matter of security."

The minister also criticized regional "wrong policies" for causing environmental crises such as desertification, dust storms and water shortage.

Saddam's war against Iran in the 1980s, the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent rise of terrorism in Iraq have diverted attention from environmental degradations for more than three decades.

Environmental cooperation by all regional countries is a necessity regardless of political approaches, the minister noted, adding, "Now we know that we all are boarding the same ship and we either return safe or end up living in an uninhabitable earth and would inevitably die."

The top diplomat further reminded that cooperation in the sphere of environment can lay the ground for "building trust" among countries in the region.

Zarif also expressed hope that common



challenges in various areas including economy, security and environment would be settled.

"I seriously hope that the kind of appreciation we now have for environmental issues on international scale would develop for other issues such as poverty, fighting terrorism and extremism," the foreign minister noted.

The international exhibition on environment started on February 24 and will run until February 27.

Three hundred domestic companies and 20 foreign ones from Germany, South Korea, Britain, Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, China, Sweden, Finland, France, Japan, Russia, Norway and Austria have participated in the exhibition.

Over the four-day event companies and organizations would introduce their

achievements in environmental fields, namely new energies, recycling, water and wastewater treatment, pollutant monitoring devices, etc.

Dust storms and unhealthy air pollution are throwing life out of gear for residents in southwestern Iran for a couple of years now. The dust storms are believed to originate from hot spots - mostly totally dried up wetlands - located in Iraq and Iran.

Nuclear deal streamlines environmental co-op

Addressing the event, Department of Environment chief Masoumeh Ebtekar said the nuclear deal has paved the way for international cooperation in the environmental field.

She also said, "The issue of environment does not involve one nation or region

and requires international support and determination."

UNEP ready to support Iran

United Nations Environment Programme Executive Director Erik Solheim, for his part, said, "We are ready to support Iran and the Department of Environment to step forward towards protecting the environment."

He expressed hope that as Iran succeeded in reaching a nuclear deal it will succeed in resolving environmental issues as well.

Solheim corroborated Iran's attempts to bring the issue of sand and dust storms to international attention. "What Iran is doing indicates that they are after improvement."

Italy, Iran set to foster environmental co-op

Italian Minister of the Environment Gian Luca Galletti, for his part, highlighted that Iran and Italy have recently agreed to foster cooperation on greenhouse gas emission, traffic management and energy efficiency.

"We are also hammering out and discussing the possibility of initiating projects on waste management," he added.

Iranians well recognize importance of the environment

Jochen Flasbarth, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety of Germany, pointed out that Iranians have well recognized the importance of the environment.

"Environmental pollution, namely air pollution, is among global threats and tackling them require solidarity like what we did in Germany and improved air quality," he said.

Iran says it has increased precision of its long-range ballistic missiles

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran now desk has long-range ballistic missiles with greater precision, its defense minister said on Thursday, rejecting reports that Tehran has halted its missile program after a recent missile launch that drew a response from Washington.

"We have increased the range and precision of our long-range, ground-to-ground ballistic missiles," Hossein Dehqan was quoted as saying in an event in Noushahr, northern Iran.

"We have achieved greater precision in longer ranges," he added.

The Iranian army has also managed to increase the shelf life of its missiles up to 20 years, Dehqan explained.

On Jan. 29, Iran launched a new type of medium-range ballistic missile, prompting an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on Jan. 31. A day later the White House issued a strongly worded statement, putting Iran "on notice". President Trump tweeted a similar statement soon after.

Days after the missile test, American intelligence officials claimed that Iran had quickly cleaned up the same site and prepared another missile on the same



launchpad near Semnan, about 140 miles east of Tehran, before it was removed.

Washington called on the Security Council to look into the missile launch, arguing that it violated UNSC Resolution 2231, which backs an international nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers.

The resolution calls upon Iran "not to undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles designed to be capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using such ballistic missile technology," until eight years after the implementation of the deal.

Syria peace talks end in Geneva following Astana progress

I → The progress recently made in Astana has led to a feeble ceasefire, although de Mistura warned at the Munich Security Conference on Feb. 19 that "even a ceasefire cannot hold too long if there is no political solution".

The talks in Geneva were guided by UN Security Council Resolution 2254, which aims to create a new, credible, inclusive and non-sectarian system of governance, a process for free and fair elections, and a new constitution. De Mistura insisted that only the Syrian people could write a constitution.

De Mistura's plan did not explicitly call for a political transition. Head of the opposition Syrian National Coalition, Anas al-Abdah, said, "We are fully committed to the Geneva talks and prepared to discuss a political solution and transition. But we cannot address the profound security threats while Assad remains in power".

The EU has put pressure on the HNC to acknowledge that they are close to military and political defeat and that they must be open for compromise.



Nevertheless, there's little willingness to retreat from the position that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad must go.

The Geneva talks follow weeks of difficult negotiations in preparation. The government and the opposition remain far apart on key issues. Though no breakthrough is expected, de Mistura says he is determined not to lose the momentum towards a resolution: "I think it will be worthwhile. We are going to give it a serious try."

Post-JCPOA Iran bolstered against enemies: deputy FM

POLITICS TEHRAN — Deputy desk Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has said that the nuclear deal has bolstered Islamic Republic's confidence in defying its enemies and the hegemonic powers, ISNA reported on Friday.

In remarks made during his visit to Khorasan Razavi Province, Araqchi hailed the nuclear agreement - officially known as the JCPOA or BARJAM - and called for unity in the face of threats posed against the country.

BARJAM is an international agreement on the nuclear program of Iran reached

in Vienna on 14 July 2015 between Iran and five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States—plus Germany. Under the accord, Iran received sanctions relief in exchange for limiting some aspects of its nuclear program.

"Due to the might of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the resistance of the [Iranian] nation, world powers were drawn to the negotiating table and, as a result, BARJAM was achieved," Araqchi said.

He further said that since the agree-

ment, the world sees Iran in a much more positive light. "This is while Iran was regarded as a 'threat' for the region and the world," he stressed.

"Before BARJAM, the whole world was united against Iran and was on the side of America," he said, "but following this international agreement, all of the countries in the world have been on the side of Iran and against America."

This is while U.S. President Donald Trump has numerously dismissed the Iran nuclear deal as "disastrous" and promised to do something about it. His remarks, however,

provoked a backlash from other countries involved, which urged the new U.S. president to stick to the international accord.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Araqchi thanked the proponents of the deal as well as its opponents - who are called Delvapasani (the concerned) in Iran. "They [the opponents of the deal] made us aware of the accord's shortcomings," he said.

"However, some factions have sacrificed national interests for partisan interests," he said, while urging them to be more nationalist.

Nuclear chief: We should not let Trumpism into domestic policy

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Salehi, director desk of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said on Thursday that Iran should not let "Trumpism" infiltrate into its domestic policy.

"We should not let Trumpism infiltrate into our domestic policy, because the enemy seeks to create division" in the

country, he told a conference at Tehran University.

He said causing "disappointment" among the people is an aspect of Trumpism, urging the media to cover more positive reports.

Pointing to the future presidential election, he said the political groups and factions should prioritize national

interests over partisan tendencies.

Iran will hold its next presidential election on May 19, 2017.

Iranian officials have said that the election would be held earlier than usual so as not to coincide with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan which starts in late May.

Dust storms take Rouhani to southern province

I → A budget of nearly \$8 million has been allocated to fight the challenge in the short-term, incommensurate with the scope of the issue, the president explained.

The province has had its fair share of dust storms over the past 16 years and domestic resources account for 35 percent of dusts raised in the area.

Part of the challenge is due to lack of consideration for environmental concerns.

Construction and industrial projects in the area for long were implemented with

total disregard for water resources and environmental damage.

Stricter measures have been taken to prevent further costs.

Iraqi forces enter first residential neighborhood in west Mosul

Iraqi armed forces are pushing deeper in the western Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh)-held half of Mosul, entering the first residential neighborhood in the area in yet another blow to the terror group in its last urban stronghold in the state.

The Iraqi forces recaptured a military base and a village southwest of Mosul and entered the residential neighborhood, Sami al-Aridhi, a lieutenant general in the Counter-Terrorism Service, said on Friday.

The latest gains came a day after Iraqi ground troops, backed by the air force, managed to regain full control of the Mosul airport following heavy clashes with ISIL terrorists, who had planted mines and booby traps throughout the disused complex.

The Popular Mobilization Forces, called Hashd al-Sha'abi in Arabic, also helped secure the main roads west of Mosul, largely cutting the Iraqi city off from its ISIL bastion in neighboring Syria.

Iraqi federal police and elite Rapid Response units of the Interior Ministry are now engaged in clean-up operations inside the airport, which will serve as an army airbase in the area in the operations to liberate Mosul's western half.

On a separate front, Iraqi forces with the Counter Terrorism Services (CTS) on Friday recaptured the Ghazlani military base, a gain which facilitated their push towards the southwestern Mosul districts of Tal al-Rumman and al-Mamoun, Reuters quoted a military spokesman as saying on Friday.

"Our forces are fighting Daesh (ISIL) terrorists in Tal al-Rumman and al-Mamoun. We will eliminate them soon



and take control over the two districts," said CTS spokesman Sabah al-Numan.

Reports say the terrorists operating in the area have resorted to bomb attacks and drone operations to slow down the advances of CTS forces.

"There is a resistance there. The drones are particularly annoying today," said Major General Sami al-Aridi, a senior CTS commander.

The military operations west of Mosul come after Iraqi forces managed to drive ISIL out of the eastern sector of the city, which is divided by Tigris River.

The offensive for western Mosul is

estimated to be more difficult than the battle in city's eastern sector given the old neighborhoods and narrow streets in the current operation zone.

Meanwhile, there are also concerns over the situation of some 750,000 civilians trapped in Mosul's western districts.

International aid organizations have warned against the mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of civilians from Mosul in the wake of the final stage of the battle to recapture the city from ISIL.

Makeshift camps are being built up in nine cities near Mosul, and tents are

being pitched in existing camps to accommodate up to 400,000 internally displaced people.

The ISIL terrorist group usually uses civilians in the areas under its control as human shields as a strategy to prevent the army forces from advancing. The terrorists also step up their acts of terror across the country whenever they come under pressure on the Mosul battlefield.

In another development on Friday, ISIL terrorists carried out an assault on a border security checkpoint near Jordan on Friday, killing at least 15 guards.

(Source: agencies)

Iraq air force struck ISIL targets in Syria: PM

The Iraqi air force struck members of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group inside neighboring Syria on Friday, officials said, adding that the targeted militants were responsible for recent bombings in the Iraqi capital Baghdad.

The strike was announced by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in a statement and is believed to be the first of its kind by Iraqi jets on Syrian territory.

"We ordered the air force command to strike Daesh (ISIL) terrorist sites in Huseibeh and Albu Kamal, in Syrian territory," the premier said.

"We are determined to track down

terrorists trying to kill our sons and citizens wherever they are," he said.

Both locations cited by Abadi are very close to the border and lie in the Euphrates Valley, facing the remote western Iraqi town of Al-Qaim.

Huseibeh is a town in Iraq but an area that lies on the Syrian side of the border bears the same name.

Extremists have lost most of their urban bastions in the vast western province of Anbar since Iraqi forces mounted a counter-offensive following the capture by ISIL of around a third of the country in 2014.

The Joint Operations Command (JOC) coordinating the fight against

ISIL in Iraq released its own statement stating that the strike took place on Friday and Joint Operations Command contains some video footage.

"Baghdad witnessed terrorist attacks using car bombs in Bayaa and Habibiyyah," the statement said, referring to bombings that killed dozens last week in the Iraqi capital.

The February 16 car bomb blast in Bayaa killed at least 52 people and was the deadliest such attack in Baghdad since a suicide truck bomb explosion in the Karrada neighborhood set teeming shopping arcades ablaze and killed more than 320.

"After a few days of investigation,

(the security forces) reached them and found their location," the JOC said.

"This morning, the heroes of the air force attacked enemy targets with F-16s inside Syria, in the Huseibeh and Albu Kamal areas," it said. "Their hideouts were completely destroyed."

But they continue to move relatively easily in desert areas and have hideouts from which they harass the security forces.

A security official speaking on condition of anonymity said it was the first time Iraqi aircraft had hunted ISIL targets across the border in Syria.

(Source: AFP)

Trump wants to make sure U.S. nuclear arsenal stands at 'top of the pack'

The United States President Donald Trump said he wants to ensure the U.S. nuclear arsenal is at the "top of the pack," saying the United States has fallen behind in its weapons capacity.

In a Reuters interview, Trump also said China could solve the national security challenge posed by North Korea "very easily if they want to," ratcheting up pressure on Beijing to exert more influence to rein in Pyongyang's increasingly bellicose actions.

Trump also expressed support for the European Union as a governing body, saying "I'm totally in favor of it," and for the first time as president expressed a preference for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but said he would be satisfied with whatever makes the two sides happy.

Trump also predicted his efforts to pressure NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies to pay more for their own defense and ease the burden on the U.S. budget would reap dividends. "They owe a lot of money," he said.

In his first comments about the U.S. nuclear arsenal since taking office on Jan. 20, Trump was asked about a December tweet in which he said the United States must greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capacity "until such time as the world comes to its senses regarding nukes."

Trump said in the interview he would like to see a world with no nuclear weapons but expressed concern that the United States has "fallen behind on nuclear weapon capacity."

"I am the first one that would like to see ... nobody have nukes, but we're never going to fall behind any country even if it's a friendly country, we're never going to fall behind on nuclear power."

"It would be wonderful, a dream would be that no country would have nukes, but if countries are going to have nukes, we're going to be at the top of the pack," Trump said.

Russia has 7,000 warheads and the United States, 6,800, according to the Ploughshares Fund, an anti-nuclear group.

"Russia and the United States have far more weapons than is necessary to deter nuclear attack by the other or by another nuclear-armed country," said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the independent Arms Control Association non-profit group.



The new strategic arms limitation treaty, known as New START, between the United States and Russia requires that by February 5, 2018, both countries must limit their arsenals of strategic nuclear weapons to equal levels for 10 years.

The treaty permits both countries to have no more than 800 deployed and non-deployed land-based intercontinental and submarine-launched ballistic missile launchers and heavy bombers equipped to carry nuclear weapons, and contains equal limits on other nuclear weapons.

Analysts have questioned whether Trump wants to abrogate New START or would begin deploying other warheads.

In the interview, Trump called New START "a one-sided deal."

"Just another bad deal that the country made, whether it's START, whether it's the Iran deal ... We're going to start making good deals," he said.

The United States is in the midst of a \$1 trillion, 30-year modernization of its aging ballistic missile submarines, bombers and land-based missiles.

Trump also complained that the Russian deployment of a ground-based cruise missile is in violation of a 1987 treaty that bans land-based American and Russian intermediate-range missiles.

"To me it's a big deal," said Trump, who has held out the possibility of warmer U.S. relations with Russia.

Asked if he would raise the issue with Putin, Trump said he would do so "if and when we meet." He said he had no meetings scheduled as of yet with Putin.

Speaking from behind his desk in the Oval Office,

Trump expressed concern about North Korea's ballistic missile tests and said accelerating a missile defense system for U.S. allies Japan and South Korea was among many options available.

"There's talks of a lot more than that," Trump said, when asked about the missile defense system. "We'll see what happens. But it's a very dangerous situation, and China can end it very quickly in my opinion."

China has made clear that it opposes North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and has repeatedly called for denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and a return to negotiations between Pyongyang and world powers.

But efforts to change Pyongyang's behavior through sanctions have historically failed, largely because of China's fear that severe measures could trigger a collapse of the North Korean state and send refugees streaming across their border.

Trump's meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe earlier this month in Florida was interrupted by a ballistic missile launch by North Korea.

Trump did not completely rule out possibly meeting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un at some point in the future under certain circumstances but suggested it might be too late.

"It's very late. We're very angry at what he's done, and frankly this should have been taken care of during the Obama administration," he said.

According to Japanese news reports, the Japanese government plans to start debate over the deployment of a U.S. missile defense system known as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, or THAAD, and the land-based Aegis Ashore missile defense system to improve its capability to counter North Korean ballistic missiles.

The strength of Trump's remarks in favor of the European Union took some Brussels officials by surprise after his support for Britain's vote last summer to exit from the EU.

"I'm totally in favor of it," Trump said of the EU. "I think it's wonderful. If they're happy, I'm in favor of it."

Statements by him and others in his administration have suggested to Europeans that he sees little value in the Union as such, which Trump last month called a "vehicle for Germany."

(Source: Reuters)

We have no plans to interfere in Syrian domestic affairs: Putin

Russia's task in Syria is to preserve the legitimate power in the country and eradicate terrorism, Russian President Vladimir Putin said at a meeting with officers of the Northern Fleet.

"We have no plans to interfere in Syrian domestic affairs. Our task is to stabilize the legitimate power in the country and to strike a decisive blow on international terrorism," Putin said at a meeting with the Northern Fleet servicemen.

"The sooner political settlement starts in the country, the more chances we and the international community will have to put an end to the terrorist plague on the Syrian territory," the president said.

He expressed hope for the success of the intra-Syrian talks starting in Geneva on Thursday, adding that Russia and the international community are interested in the victory over terrorism in Syria.

"But we will not and should not interfere in Syria's domestic affairs," Putin said.

Syria has signs of confessional division, Putin said.

"I am particularly concerned about confessional division, that is when representatives of one confessional group are concentrated in some regions of the country (Syria), whereas representatives of another (group) - in some other (regions)," Putin said. "It is a prototype of possible negative consequences for that country."

Syria is a multiethnic and multi-confessional state, or "a secular state as it used to be for a long time and it was a guarantee of the country's territorial integrity," the Russian leader said.



Along with this, the Syrians should decide on the issue of the country's territorial integrity, he said.

"We should make every effort to avoid any external interference in the resolution of the key problem, the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity," Putin told servicemen. "And our task, as we have been doing this particular work, is to fight against terrorist groups."

Russian Northern Fleet's operation has caused enormous harm to militants in Syria, Russian President said.

"You have coped with the set tasks and done enormous, considerable harm to international terrorist groups, their bases, ammunition depots, equipment and infrastructure," Putin said.

The president congratulated the officers on Defender of the Fatherland Day and had warm words for them for their work.

■ **4,000 Russian nationals fight among militants in Syria**

At least 4,000 Russian nationals fight among militants in Syria, Russian President Vladimir Putin said.

"It is no less important for us that, unfortunately, a large number of militants, who came from former Soviet republics and from Russia itself, have accumulated in Syria," Putin said.

"According to our preliminary information, there are thousands of them, approximately nearly 4,000 Russians and about 5,000 nationals from republics of the former Soviet Union, according to the information of the General Staff's GRU Main Intelligence Administration, FSB (Federal Security Service) and other our special services."

(Source: TASS)

Israel denies visa to Human Rights Watch

Israel is refusing to issue visas to the international staff of one of the most prominent international human rights NGOs - Human Rights Watch - accusing the group of an "extreme, hostile and anti-Israeli agenda."

The Israeli accusations against the non-governmental organization (NGO), which documents human rights abuses around the globe, follows a growth in official hostility to local human rights activists under the right wing government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

Human Rights Watch condemned the move as "ominous turn" adding it "should worry anyone concerned about Israel's commitment to basic democratic values."

The new policy emerged after Israeli authorities turned down a visa for its new Israel and Palestine director, Omar Shakir who is a United States citizen. The rejection had been advised by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In a letter rejecting Shakir's visa application - and seen by the Guardian - Israel accused the New York based group of "public activities and reports [and being] engaged in politics in the service of Palestinian propaganda, while falsely raising the banner of 'human rights'."

The group denied the claim pointing out it had written critical reports on human rights violations on both sides.

The denial of the visa was confirmed in a letter on February 20 when Israeli authorities informed it the request had been rejected because HRW is "not a real human rights group", the group said in a statement. Israeli foreign ministry spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon confirmed the decision.

HRW, he said, had "demonstrated time and again it is a fundamentally biased and anti-Israeli organization with a clear hostile agenda."

(Source: The Guardian)



Inflation rate stands at 8.7% in Iran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The Central Bank of Iran **d e s k** (CBI) has announced that the inflation rate for the 12-month period ended in the last day of the eleventh Iranian calendar month of Bahman (February 18) compared to the same period in the previous year hit 8.7 percent, Tasnim news agency reported.

The CBI had put the inflation rate for the 12-month period ended in the last day of the tenth calendar month of Dey (January 19) at 8.6 percent compared to the same period in the past year.

Meanwhile, the CBI put the point-to-point inflation rate at 7.1 percent in Bahman.

The central bank of country has announced that the inflation rate in the past Iranian calendar year, which ended on March 19, 2016, stood at 11.9 percent.

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



Over \$4b of facilities granted to industrial sector

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Since the beginning of the **d e s k** current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2016), some 153 trillion rials of facilities (about \$4.04 billion) has been paid to domestic industrial sector, Iranian deputy industry minister announced.

As IRNA quoted Hossein Ayoubi-Mehrizi addressing a conference in Kashan, a city in the center of Iran, the provided loans have been granted to 21,000 medium and small-sized production units of the Iranian industrial and agricultural sectors.



Exports via railway jump 55% in 11 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Exports of goods via railway **d e s k** increased 55% in Iran during the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2016-February 18, 2017), compared to the same period of time in the previous year, IRNA quoted a railway official, Hossein Ashouri.

As he said, in the said time, 10 million tons of goods including cement, iron ore, coal, and tiles were exported majorly to Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and Turkey.



Iranian, French auto part companies sign joint-venture deal

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's Rise Investment and **d e s k** Strategy Extension Company (RISECO) and France's Mecaplast Group signed a joint venture deal on manufacturing auto parts, IRNA reported on Friday.

The deal, which was signed by Rise Holding Group's Chairman of the Board Hamidreza Samadi and Mecaplast's CEO Pier Boulet in Paris, focuses on production of automotive engine and decorative parts.

As Samadi informed, according to the penned deal, 30 percent of the jointly manufactured products will be exported.

The signing ceremony was also attended by Iran's Ambassador to Paris Ali Ahani.

Chinese companies to fuel hiring growth in 2017: Survey

More than half of firms on the Chinese mainland are expected to take on staff this year, according to a recruitment survey released Thursday.

The report by global recruiters, Michael Page, surveyed nearly 1,000 employers and found that 55 percent of domestic firms set to recruit more staff this year, compared to 41 percent of multinational corporations.

Peter Smith, managing director of Michael Page East China, said, "The reason for the gap is that domestic companies are more optimistic about the economic outlook while the multinational corporations are struggling to achieve a better performance and to reduce the labor costs in China."

According to the 2017 China Salary and Employment Outlook from Michael Page, 44 percent of local companies will be offering salary increases of six percent to ten percent.

"As domestic companies mature, they are turning their efforts to employee retention and building a strong portfolio of business leaders. They continue to invest in recruiting and retaining quality professionals across all departments and levels of seniority," Smith added.

In 2017, key sectors in China set to hire aggressively include renewable energy, financial technology and financial payment processing, digital media and consumer electronics.

Primary manufacturing and industrial sectors will continue to struggle as demand weakens.

"We also notice that the establishment of Shanghai Free Trade Zone has had an impact on the recruitment market, especially in logistics, real estate, digital marketing, e-commerce and health-care," said Xu Weiwei, director of Michael Page China.

(Source: China Daily)

Mineral reserves to reach 1.078b tons by Mar. 20: official

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The **d e s k** annual amount of newly-found mineral reserves in Iran will reach 1.078 billion tons by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2017), IRNA quoted Asadollah Keshavarz, the director general of Mineral Discoveries Office in the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade, as saying.

Mehdi Karbasian, the head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), announced in last July that 34 mining and mineral industries pro-

jects, costing \$7.2 billion, would become operational in the country by the end of the current calendar year.

Back in last May, Karbasian said that Iran had offered \$40 billion in mining projects to foreign investors.

The value of minerals Iran exported during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, - December 20, 2016) has witnessed a 50 percent jump, According to Iranian Deputy Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Jafar Sarqini.

The country has exported some \$750 million worth of such products in

Boosting economic bonds with Iran top priority: Azeri min.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Azerbaijan **d e s k** has expansion of economic ties with Iran among its top priorities, Minister of Economic Development of Azerbaijan Shahin Mustafayev avowed in Iran-Azerbaijan joint business forum held in Urmia, the capital city of north-western Iranian province of West Azarbaijan, on Thursday.

As IRNA reported, addressing the mentioned forum, which was also attended by Iran's Communications and Information

Technology Minister Mahmoud Vaezi, the Azeri minister, who led a 50-member economic delegation to Iran, underscored the two countries' determination for developing their trade ties and called Iran, Azerbaijan's brother.

Mustafayev and Vaezi are the co-chairmen of Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Committee.

As previously reported, the visiting delegation comprised of Azeri investors and entrepreneurs met their Iranian coun-

Asian markets dip as investors cash out after dovish Fed minutes

Shares in Asia lost ground Friday as dovish signals from the U.S. Federal Reserve weakened the dollar, with possible consequences for the competitiveness of Asian exports.

The Nikkei Stock Average NIK, -0.45% was down 0.2% with the S&P/ASX 200 XJO, -0.79% off 0.7%. Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index HSI, -0.62% was down 0.5%.

The minutes from the U.S. Federal Reserve's latest meeting released earlier this week suggested the next interest-rate increase would come "fairly soon." Some investors interpreted that as a dovish signal that the Fed was backing away from a rate rise in March.

The U.S. Dollar Index was flat in early Asian trade at 101.070 after slipping overnight. The dollar has perhaps lost some ground on mixed messages on tax reform from the U.S. administration, said Sean Callow, senior currency strategist at Westpac.

Yet the Australian dollar was down 0.1% against its American counterpart after touching three-month highs. Against the Japanese yen, the U.S. dollar fetched \$112.83 in Asian morning trade.

Softer expectations for Fed rate in-

creases have also hit U.S. Treasury yields, with that on the two-year note dropping to 1.192% from 1.224% Wednesday.

In other currency news, U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin backed away from labeling China a currency manipulator, saying Thursday that a decision would be reached on the matter before the U.S. Treasury makes its usual report in April.

However the Chinese currency, the yuan, barely moved on the comments.

South Korea's benchmark stock index, the Kospi SEU, -0.64% , declined 0.5% despite consumer confidence rising for the first time in four months, and coming off an eight-year low in January.

Trump is set to address Congress on Tuesday, and may outline some of his policy intentions. Yet there is skepticism in Asia about how helpful these policies might be.

Markets are reacting to the risk of delay in fiscal stimulus spending and the unwinding of some of the optimism that followed President Trump's encouraging comments on tax reforms, said CMC Markets chief market analyst Ric Spooner.

(Source: The MarketWatch)

RBS reports £7b loss and says it will not make profit until 2018

Royal Bank of Scotland has reported losses of £7bn for 2016, taking its losses since its 2008 government bailout to more than £58bn.

The taxpayer-backed bank has also admitted it will not return to profit until 2018, indicating that it will report 10 years of losses before it returns to the black.

"The bottom line loss we have reported today is, of course, disappointing but given the scale of the legacy issues we worked through in 2016, it should not come as a surprise," said the RBS chief executive, Ross McEwan, who was paid £3.5m for 2016.

The loss, the bank said, was caused by £10bn of one-off items, including £5.9bn for potential fines and legal costs, largely related to an upcoming penalty from the US Department of Justice for mis-selling toxic bonds in the run-up to the crisis.

"These costs are a stark reminder of what happens to a bank when things go wrong and you lose focus on the customer, as this bank did before the financial crisis," said McEwan.

"This is a bank that has been on a remarkable journey. We still have further to go. But the next three years will not be the same as the past three," he added.

He set out plans to cut £4bn of costs in the next four years, including £750m in 2017. While refusing to disclose how many jobs would be lost a result, the New Zealander said: "There will be job losses that we have to go through."

Ninety thousand jobs have gone since the bank was



bailed out in 2008 as it pulled out of risky businesses and sold off huge parts of its the business to reduce the number of employees to 80,000. Five hundred and 40 branches have been shut since 2014 to take the network – which also includes NatWest – to about 1,200.

Union officials urged the bank to slow down the cost-cutting program and put a moratorium on branch closures. The Unite national officer, Rob MacGregor, said: "Its ruthless approach to pay for the mistakes of the past jeopardizes customer service and risks leaving communities and businesses reliant on their local bank branch high and dry."

McEwan, who took over when Stephen Hester left in 2013, said he intended to stay in the highest profile job in UK banking to see through the return to profitability. "We've



the mentioned period, the official said.

"Added up by the mining industry's exports, the total value of exports in

this area reaches \$5 billion which stands 16 percent higher than the figure for the same period last year," he added.

terparts in joint economic conferences in north-western Iranian provinces of Ardebil and West Azarbaijan.

As the Azerbaijani ambassador to Tehran Bunyad Hasanov announced in late January, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev will be in Iran for a formal visit in the near future, seeking stronger ties with the country.

In a December 2016 meeting attended by Vaezi and Aliyev in Baku, the two sides underscored the importance of all-en-

compassing relations, particularly in the economic sector.

"Economic relations between the two countries have made great progress as compared to the previous year," Vaezi was quoted as saying at the time.

Earlier in February 2016 during President Aliyev's trip to Tehran, the two sides signed 11 memorandums of understanding in areas of transportation, electricity swap, health and medicine, oil, gas, and petrochemicals, etc.

Gold hits 3-1/2-month high as 'Trumpflation trade' fades

Gold hit its highest in about 3-1/2 months on Friday as the dollar headed for its first week of decline in three after the new U.S. finance chief poured cold water on the "Trumpflation trade" that had boosted the greenback this year.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said on Thursday that any steps U.S. President Donald Trump's administration takes on policy would probably have only limited impact this year, though he wants to see tax reform passed by August.

The comments suggested much work was still needed on the sweeping tax-reform plan that Mnuchin called his main priority, and which investors had bet would stoke growth and inflation this year.

"We've got a vacuum of (U.S. domestic) policy, real (interest) rates going down, the dollar going sideways and geopolitical (jitters) around the world ... all helping gold," ICBC Standard Bank analyst Tom Kendall said.

"There is apparently a move of institutional investor money into gold and there are usually very good reasons for that."

Spot gold had risen 0.6 percent to \$1,256.31 per ounce by 1059 GMT, hav-

ing touched its highest since Nov. 11 at \$1,257.19 earlier in the session.

U.S. gold futures rose 0.5 percent to \$1,257.30.

Also supporting bullion were tempered expectations of a U.S. rate hike in March after minutes from the Federal Reserve's latest policy meeting sounded less hawkish than expected.

The minutes showed policymakers felt it was appropriate to raise interest rates again "fairly soon", but saw only a "modest risk" that inflation would increase significantly and believed the Fed would "likely have ample time" to respond.

"Even in the event of a rate increase, we doubt the precious metal will lose much ground ahead of the key presidential elections in France in April, coupled with the Washington gridlock that seems to be calcifying," INTL FcStone analyst Edward Meir said.

On the political front, Trump on Thursday called China "grand champions" of currency manipulation, doing little to raise confidence on trade relations between the world's two biggest economies and spurring safe-haven flows into gold.

(Source: Reuters)

done all the hard work in the last three and half years. I can sense this bank is on the turn."

His pay was the same as 2015 while the bonuses for staff fell by 8% to £343m. Eighty-seven bankers received more than £1m (£850,000) although the bank said the average salary was £32,620.

The two main items McEwan is trying to resolve is the settlement with the US Department of Justice over residential mortgage-backed securities, for which the bank took a £3.1bn hit, and the sale of 300 branches to meet state aid requirements imposed by Brussels.

Last week, the Treasury announced a plan intended to free RBS of spinning out those branches, known as Williams & Glyn, although the bank admitted 0 this may not be resolved until the fourth quarter of the year.

Until these issues are resolved, the chancellor, Philip Hammond, has said he will not be able to sell off any of the 73% stake in the bank. Its shares fell 2% to 244p after the results were announced, more than half the 502p average price that taxpayers paid during the £45bn bailout.

The annual report lists a number of legal matters the bank is still trying to resolve, including a court case by shareholders over the 2008 rights issue, the sale of interest rate hedging products to small businesses, investigations related to terrorist financing in the US and providing redress to small businesses badly treated by its now-defunct global restructuring group (GRG). Last year, RBS set aside £400m for GRG.

(Source: The Guardian)

UK mortgage approvals hit 12-month high in January: BBA

British banks approved the most mortgages in a year last month and consumer borrowing saw some of its fastest growth of the past decade, industry data showed on Friday, contrasting with earlier signs of slowing momentum.

Strong consumer demand has driven Britain's economy since June's Brexit vote, but in the past couple of months retail sales have dipped and house price growth has been slowing, as higher inflation gnaws at Britons' disposable income. Friday's figures from the British Bank-

ers' Association, however, suggest there is still some residual momentum in the property market, and a continued willingness of households to borrow.

The BBA said its members gave the green light to 44,657 mortgages in January, up from 43,581 in December and the highest number since January last year, when 45,794 were granted.

Unsecured consumer borrowing grew at an annual rate of 6.7 percent - a figure that has only been beaten twice in the past 10 years, in September and October

2016 - bolstered by the fastest growth in personal loans and overdrafts in a decade.

The Bank of England forecasts household incomes will cease growing in inflation-adjusted terms later this year, and says it will keep a close eye on the extent to which households will seek to bridge the gap by borrowing more.

The BBA also reported a strong appetite from existing home-owners to take advantage of low interest rates and refinance their mortgages.

The boost in new mortgage lending comes as most economists expect house price growth to slow to around 2-3 percent a year this year and next, from around 7 percent in 2016, according to a Reuters poll this week.

"Markedly weakening consumer fundamentals, likely mounting caution over making major spending decisions, and elevated house price to earnings ratios are likely to weigh down on house prices," said IHS Markit economist Howard Archer.

(Source: China Daily)

Saudi Arabia’s oil wealth is about to get a reality check

Saudi Arabia has said oil giant Saudi Aramco is worth more than \$2 trillion, enough to consume Apple Inc. twice, and still have room for Google parent Alphabet Inc.

The kingdom may have to settle for less. A lot less.

Industry executives, analysts and investors told Bloomberg their analysis -- based on oil reserves and cash flow projections under different tax scenarios -- suggests Aramco is worth no more than half, and maybe as little as a fifth, of that amount. This means Saudi Arabia would earn a fraction of the \$100 billion implied by its valuation if it sells 5 percent to the public in 2018, as planned.

For example, Wood Mackenzie Ltd. came up with a rough valuation of Aramco’s core business of \$400 billion, according to clients who attended a private meeting at the oil consultant’s City of London office this month and asked not to be named. The Edinburgh-based company, popular for its analysis and valuation of energy companies and assets, declined to comment.

An Aramco spokesperson said the oil producer doesn’t comment on rumors or speculation.

While there’s a lot of guesswork involved in sizing up a company that’s never divulged financial statements and may have its tax rate cut before the initial public offering, this valuation gap reveals the hurdles Saudi Arabia could face in preparing for the post-oil era.

A profitable IPO is meant to anchor a sovereign wealth fund that will, if things unfold as envisioned, generate enough investment income at home and abroad to dominate state revenue by 2030. Demand for oil will peak just before then, according to Royal Dutch Shell Plc projections, as alternative fuels and electric cars gain popularity, putting Middle East energy producers on shakier footing.

■ Doubts emerge

Even within the Saudi government, doubts are emerging. A person familiar with the flotation, who asked not to be named, said last week Aramco in its current form would probably be worth about \$500 billion because a lot of its cash goes toward taxes and future investors won’t have a say on investments in non-core areas. Another person familiar with IPO talks put the figure at a little less than \$1 trillion if investors base the valuation on Aramco’s ability to generate cash.

Selling a 5 percent stake would therefore raise at least \$25 billion, still enough to match Alibaba Group Holding Ltd’s unparalleled 2014 offering and dole out



millions of dollars of fees to the advisers hired to manage the sale, namely JPMorgan Chase & Co., Moelis & Co. and independent consultant Michael Klein.

The \$2 trillion estimate was initially put forward by Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman last March. There are two key issues, according to interviews with a dozen industry analysts, investors and executives, who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity of the matter.

The first is that it’s premised on a simple calculation: Take the 261 billion barrels of reserves Saudi Arabia says lie under oil fields like the onshore Ghawar and offshore Safaniya, and multiply by \$8 (a benchmark used to value reserves). An independent auditor is assessing Saudi reserves, the second-biggest worldwide, before the IPO.

■ Oil’s future

By that logic, though, Russian producer Rosneft PJSC’s market capitalization would be \$272 billion instead of \$64 billion, and the valuation of Exxon Mobil Corp., the world’s largest publicly traded energy producer, would be 53 percent smaller than it is.

The rationale also assumes Saudi oil, due to last about 73 years if pumped at the existing pace, will be viable for decades even if global warming curbs the world’s appetite for crude.

Toyota Motor Corp. wants to rely on hydrogen to all but replace traditional-engine models by 2050. Use of gasoline, which accounts for one in four barrels consumed globally, is already peaking according to the International Energy Agency. Officials including Bank of England Governor Mark Carney have warned investors it’s a matter of time before reserves are “stranded” in the ground.

The second factor throwing doubt on the Saudi valuation is the centrality of tax and dividend policy in as-

sessing a company’s fair value. Aramco, formally known as Saudi Arabian Oil Co., pays a 20 percent royalty on revenues and an 85 percent income tax. Levies this big reduce cash available for dividends to shareholders, diminishing the appeal to overseas investors.

■ Different math

Wood Mackenzie, according to two clients, said it based its calculation on the current tax rate, a cost of capital of 10 percent and an in-house oil-price forecast. It used a so-called discounted cash flow method to value Aramco’s upstream business, which is very sensitive to taxation.

So if Aramco CEO Amin Nasser follows through with plans he unveiled in Davos last month to lower taxes “to be aligned with other listed companies,” Wood Mackenzie’s estimate also stands to rise. But the scope for loosening levies may be limited because oil is the lifeblood of a budget the government is struggling to balance due to depressed oil prices.

Wood Mackenzie’s estimate also doesn’t factor in Aramco’s downstream, or refining, operation. That business is similar in capacity to that of Texas-based Valero Energy Corp., which has a market value of about \$30 billion.

Another caveat is that traders tend to demand discounts for political risks surrounding state-linked companies. A corruption scandal ensnaring Brazil’s Petroleo Brasileiro SA sent shares sliding to a 16-year low early last year. Investors in Rosneft, meanwhile, have to contend with sanctions that limit the stock’s upside versus emerging-market peers.

Allianz Global Investors, which owns energy shares including Exxon, Shell and BP Plc, is unlikely to buy Aramco stock at the IPO, according to energy analyst Rohan Murphy. “We have generally found investing in companies so closely tied to the state to be unattractive,” he said.

While Saudi Arabia is relatively stable in the turbulent Middle East, it’s not immune to concern that decisions on oil output will be guided more by geopolitics than what’s best for minority shareholders.

The kingdom’s oil wealth also enabled it to appease its 32 million people as unrest flared regionally during the so-called Arab Spring. At issue is whether Saudi royals can sustain this calm as the government slashes fuel subsidies and imposes value-added taxes.

In the end, Aramco’s market size may struggle to equal two Apples and a Google in rankings of the world’s biggest companies.

(Source: Bloomberg)

60% of foreign investment attraction forecasted for new power plants realized

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — An Iranian energy official said **d e s k** 60 percent of the foreign investment foreseen for the construction of 8700 megawatts capacity of new power plants in the country by the end of current calendar year (March 20) has been already realized, IRNA reported.

According to Mohsen Tarzatab, the managing director of Thermal Power Plants Holding Company, Iran has negotiated with companies from various countries including Japan, China, Turkey, Belgium and South Korea so far.

“The projects are estimated at about \$6 billion but the cooperation with the foreign partners will not be in the form of financing,” he said.

The official noted that the negotiations with some of the companies have been finalized and some are still undergoing.

“The Korean companies will construct 1500 MW of capacity in the upcoming year (starting from March 21) and the talks with the Turkish and Belgian companies are underway,” he announced.

Iran says oil prices over \$55 per barrel harmful for OPEC

Iran said on Thursday an increase in oil prices to more than \$55 per barrel was not in the interest of OPEC as it would lead to a rise in output by non-OPEC producers, the semi-official Fars news agency reported.

«If oil prices specifically surge over \$55 or \$60 per barrel, non-OPEC producers will increase their crude production to benefit the most from the price hike,» Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh was quoted by Fars as saying.

«OPEC is determined to reduce its production to help manage the market.»

Benchmark Brent crude oil was trading up \$1.18 a barrel at \$57.02 as of 1429 GMT.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries agreed on Nov. 30 to cut output by 1.2 million barrels per day for the first six months of 2017, in addition to 558,000 bpd of cuts pledged by independent producers such as Russia and Oman.

OPEC Secretary-General Mohammad Barkindo said that January data showed conformity from participating OPEC nations with output curbs had been above 90 percent and oil inventories would decline further this year.

Iran was exempted from the production cut as Tehran argued its output should be allowed to recover after the lifting of international sanctions in January last year.

(Source: Reuters)



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Why Guantanamo Bay must be closed for good

This week, we have seen reports that a former British inmate of Guantanamo Bay, Jamal Udeen al-Harith, carried out an ISIL suicide attack in Iraq.

Some will undoubtedly use this news to make the argument that Guantanamo Bay should remain open, that it should be increasingly used to house the current crop of terrorists and that no further inmates should be released.

Indeed, President Donald Trump has made some of these arguments, and Republicans have put pressure on him to expand the prison in Cuba.

No one is more outraged than me, a counter-extremism specialist, by the reports that a former Guantanamo prisoner joined ISIL and carried out this attack. But keeping the prison and expanding it would not be in the best interests of U.S. or European security.

While military prisons were designed to prevent deaths in war and to speed up the conclusion of conflict, it is clearer now than ever that they do not adequately address the global terrorist insurgency we have faced over the last 15 years.



After Harith was suspected of having links to al Qaeda and the Taliban in 2002, he was taken into American military custody and shipped off to Guantanamo Bay without trial.

Such extrajudicial methods came at the expense of the rule of law and the traditional criminal justice system to prosecute Harith for terrorism-related offenses. It means he was never proven to be a terrorist. It also means we immediately undermined a key aspect of our democracy: a ready-made, values-based alternative narrative to extremism.

■ The approach of Guantanamo

The approach of Guantanamo Bay is entirely designed to punish inmates and to gather intelligence. That has notoriously involved the use of torture, including waterboarding, electric shocks, humiliation and sleep deprivation.

While some claim that such an approach has prevented terrorist attacks -- indeed, it is another controversial approach to counterterrorism that the President seems to think of value -- it is also clear it has led to false testimony and has wasted considerable military and security resources, not to mention the illegality and immorality of war-on-terror-era torture.

Moreover, and specific to Harith, it seems he was one of the many recipients of millions of pounds in compensation doled out by the British government in 2010 because of alleged British complicity in torture.

Because of Britain's collective failure to balance national security with civil liberties, a significant amount of money has inevitably ended up in the hands of our enemies.

Whichever way you look at it, torture is an expensive mistake and not one to return to in any situation. It is a small mercy that Trump has deferred to Defense Secretary James Mattis on this point, and we should ensure Guantanamo Bay does not take us back to this era.

■ The biggest issue with Guantanamo

Perhaps the biggest issue with Guantanamo Bay is that no time is devoted to deradicalizing inmates. This means that Harith's ideological support for Salafi terrorism was left unchecked. Given that the ideology that underpins both al Qaeda and ISIL is Salafi terrorism, it is entirely to be expected that previous supporters of al Qaeda may find renewed vigor in their beliefs once ISIL declared its so-called caliphate and feel ideologically obliged to join up as foreign fighters.

It is not so much that Harith was lying in wait for a decade; rather that without ideological refutation and personal rehabilitation, ISIL was the next logical step for him.

Prison systems around the world are starting to adapt to their role in counter-extremism and are now assessing ideological commitment and deradicalizing inmates as part of a broader rehabilitative approach. This will keep our societies safer in the long term by reducing recidivism rates among terrorists. A return to Guantanamo Bay policies without deradicalization will put that in jeopardy.

Extending the use of Guantanamo Bay and torturing suspected terrorists might sound like tough talking on terrorism. But whichever way you look at it, it is a stupid move with dire consequences.

The killing of Iraqi civilians and military personnel could have been avoided had we realized this sooner. Instead, the West should pursue a counterterrorism approach that maintains the moral high ground by being consistent with human rights norms and get smart on Salafi terrorist ideology.

(Source: CNN)

Slower may be better in going at ISIL



By Paul R. Pillar
Former CIA veteran

A couple of tendencies that are all too common in policymaking and policy debate tend to make for unwise foreign commitments or overextended foreign expeditions. One is to treat a goal that is at most an intermediate objective as if it were an end in itself. Doing so obfuscates clear analysis of means and ends, overlooks other ways to achieve the same ends, and distorts perception of the costs and benefits associated with achieving the immediate objective. The other tendency is to give insufficient attention to what comes after achieving the immediate objective. One only has to recall the example of insufficient attention given to what would come after the objective of overthrowing Saddam Hussein to appreciate the problems involved.

One could add a third phenomenon, which is less common but sometimes arises, which is to try to fulfill a campaign promise for the sake of fulfilling a campaign promise.

■ A larger burden

All three factors appear to be present now with the issue of next steps for the U.S. military in Syria in going after ISIL. The head of U.S. Central Command is saying, "It could be that we take on a larger burden ourselves." His comment comes amid the Department of Defense coming up with a plan requested by President Trump, who promised during the campaign to hasten the defeat of ISIL.

Of course ISIL is a horrible group, and everyone not in it agrees that the world will be better off without it. But before U.S. forces take up any larger share of the burden of fighting it, three realities ought to be carefully considered.

One is that the ISIL mini-state in Syria



The ISIL problem will not go away when the mini-state is extinguished. The problem will continue in the form of the ideology and the inspiration, and probably also in the form of insurgency in the lands in which the mini-state has existed.

and Iraq already is well on the way to being extinguished, at the hands of the forces already engaging it. This should not be surprising, given the group's lack of external support and the way its brutal methods lose it any support among the populations with which it has come into contact. The issue involved in considering any escalation with U.S. forces is not whether the mini-state will be killed off, but only how quickly it will be.

Second, if our main concern is with how ISIL could endanger American lives through acts of terrorism, we should realize that the connection between that danger and the fate of the mini-state in Syria and Iraq has always been tenuous at best, and less than is commonly

supposed. There has been more of a tension than a direct connection between ISIL fomenting terrorism in the West on one hand, and on the other hand the group using its available resources to defend and shore up the mini-state. To the extent the overseas terrorist threat has materialized, it has been far more a matter of inspiration and ideology than of organizational dependence on a piece of real estate in the Middle East.

Third, the ISIL problem will not go away when the mini-state is extinguished. The problem will continue in the form of the ideology and the inspiration, and probably also in the form of insurgency in the lands in which the mini-state has existed.

How Europe can defend itself

Say this for Donald Trump: He is forcing Europeans to think more seriously about how to protect and defend their continent.

The U.S. president's disparagement of NATO goes too far, and his focus on getting Europeans to spend more on defense is misplaced. That said, European nations have for too long treated their defense budgets as an extension of social policy. Expenditure on personnel is more than 50 percent of military spending in nearly all EU countries, compared with about a quarter in the U.S. Meanwhile, spending on equipment and R&D is barely 20 percent in Europe, compared with around 30 percent in the U.S., and only about 22 percent of equipment procurement is collaborative.

The European Commission has a proposal to make European defense spending more rational. But such top-down efforts generally haven't amounted to much. There

are actually hundreds of cooperative military projects in Europe, such as the European Air Transport Command in the Netherlands. Many of these efforts are bilateral and ad hoc. Without a more coherent framework, they won't close the large gap in military spending and capabilities between Europe and the U.S., or make European militaries more effective.

NATO works, despite strains, for two main reasons: a clear mission -- the collective security guarantee enshrined in its charter -- and American leadership.

Any EU plan for collective defense would require similar purpose and direction. Yet France, which will be the largest military force in Europe after the UK leaves the EU, has always seen an EU defense policy as a counterweight to American-dominated NATO rather than a goal in itself. Germany, meanwhile, has been reluctant to take charge, as other nations are wary of letting it.

Things may now be changing. Between Brexit and Trumpism, European nations may be finally getting realistic about the urgency of preparing for threats from both within and outside the continent. NATO's intervention in Libya showed that European nations are willing and capable of leading such missions.

None of this is to say that the EU needs its own army. It is only to point out that Europe needs to do more to ensure its collective security, and that part of the answer lies in a more flexible (and less America-dominated) NATO. As Europeans consider any changes, their focus should be less on whether NATO members meet the alliance's requirement for overall defense spending and more on how and where they spend their money. The better Europe is able to defend itself, the better off it -- and the U.S. -- will be.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Sitting by as disaster unfolds

Millions face starvation, but the world is turning away. We are too late to prevent this severe food crisis – but we can and must act now to save lives



People die because of disintegrating governments as well as poor rains.

Agencies began warning about the risks in South Sudan almost two years ago. In November, Médecins Sans Frontières warned that malnutrition appeared to have wiped out young children in parts of Borno state, Nigeria. Yet even now, attention is minimal and the response limited. Our unwillingness to recognize such creeping disasters – compared with, say, earthquakes – is remarkable; one expert has described it as “no corpses, no food aid’ myopia”. Their gradual nature gives us a greater opportunity to intervene but seems to reduce our inclination to do so.

■ Mass starvation

When the pictures of starving children with bloated bellies appear, we have already failed. In 2011, “the best chronicled descent into mass starvation in history” saw a quarter of a million people die in Somalia, many of them before the famine was declared, despite scores of warnings. Never again, people said – but here we are again, and the indifference is equally pronounced. The UN says it needs \$4.4bn by the end of March to avert a catastrophe. So far, it has \$90m in hand. Pledges need to be fulfilled, and quickly; and much more is

needed. The department for international development announced £100m in “new humanitarian support” for South Sudan, but it soon emerged that the money had already been allocated to the country.

Those at risk need more than emergency support, of course. The international community must continue to pursue peace and, in the meantime, do their utmost to ensure aid can be delivered. Supporting longer-term development work is essential.

The shortfall must also be put into context: there have been massive increases in global humanitarian aid, but they have not kept up with the rising tide of need. Even the best-intentioned perhaps feel too overwhelmed by the world's other woes to register this fresh human misery. Populist politicians such as Nigel Farage grumble that “charity begins at home”, meaning it should end there too. There are concerns that the United States, currently Nigeria's biggest donor, will scale back aid in Africa. In the UK, Conservative MPs seek to end the commitment to spend 0.7% of national income on aid.

Defenders say that it is in the developed world's own interests to promote the well-being and stability of other communities, but it is also a question of basic human decency. As the UN secretary-general António Guterres stated, there is no excuse for inaction in a world of plenty. The growing food crisis not only has the makings of a tragedy, as he warned, but of a scandal.

(Source: The Guardian)

INTERVIEW

By Mohamamd Mazhari

Bahrain regime to be tougher in 2017 realizing its fail



Saeed Al-Shahbi is one of first political figures in Bahrain who was forced to a self-exile after Manama regime imposed a death sentence against him. Shahabi and many other protesters inside and outside Bahrain protest discrimination, injustice and brutality of the ruling Al Khalifa regime in the tiny Persian Gulf Arab country.

After 14 February 2011 uprisings erupted across Bahrain, the regime showed an oppressive reaction by deploying Saudi regime army forces in the country suppressing massive peaceful rallies. It has also put pressure on different political parties and religious figures including Sheikh Ali Salman and Sheikh Issa Qasem; whereas the latter has been under an imposed siege for over 7 months now and has been stripped of his Bahraini nationality by a court ruling.

As the tough responses by Al Khalifa dynasty is increasing day by day, we have talked to Saeed Al-Shahabi to ask him share his views about the current situation and what may happen in future in Bahrain.

■ What Bahraini people seek to achieve from protests? Would they seek introducing reforms to the current establishment or they seek to topple the system and instate a new system?

It is clear from the beginning of the revolution on the 14th February 2011 that the people had reached stage of despair with the regime that this regime is not reformable. They had tried various methods of reform for about 50 years, and the regime had the chance to reform itself from 1922 until 2017 that is about 90 years, however it became clear that it is not possible. This tribal dictatorship cannot be reformed. In fact, none of despotic regimes and dictatorships in the world have been

reformed. You cannot transform a dictatorship into a democracy. You cannot expect from despotism and tyranny to give people freedom and respect freedom of opinion and expression. Any attempt to reform these kinds of dictatorships is futile. So the people were clear in their demand that they want fundamental change and this process is unacceptable and intolerable. If reform was possible they would have done so. They tried that in the 90th and the uprising of 1994 - 96 was a clear example of that and we were there in the 80th and 70th and we did our best to push through some degree of reform plan based on constitution in 1973 but the regime proved that it is impossible.

■ Why western powers such as UK and the USA support Bahraini regime despite its violation of human rights?

They have some reasons; First of all, there is a lack of loyalty to the principles, so the western countries especially UK and USA are simply not loyal to democracy and human rights principles and they just use these values and exploit them but only where it is in their interest. When they come to Saudi Arabia or Bahrain or other friendly countries, though they are the most despotic countries, the most vicious systems they neglect their principles and values of modern democratic governance.

The second reason is greed of these countries, they think that they are ready to support these dictatorships as long as they remain a source of financial interest for the



west, because they have oil especially Saudi Arabia and of course UAE, Qatar and Bahrain and because they have plenty of reserved money, US and UK would never ignore all that money. This is why you see a lot of investment today in UK. If you go to a street in London, you can see the high-rise buildings, football stadiums, crossing of river Thames and any big enterprise you see is invested hugely by those countries in different sectors.

And the third and final factor is the misconception by the western countries. They imagine that they can ensure stability of the region under rule of these monarchies. But the reality opposes this approach. You cannot have stability and security without democracy. These despotic states have exported only extremism in past decades as you have seen. Extremist ideologies and terrorism in the Middle East are outcomes of supporting these dictatorships. If the west is serious about achieving peace and harmony and defeating terrorism, then they must stop supporting these dictatorships.

■ How do you evaluate reaction by international institutions to Al-Khalifeh cruel crackdown on protesters?

There is hypocrisy and double standard. Hypocrisy in their dealing. They know that Al-Khalifa regime is killing people. They know that Bahraini prisons have at least 5000 prisoners, large amount of them are imprisoned because of expressing their opinion. They know that people have been killed outside the rule of law which is termed as "extra judicial killing". They know that this regime has destroyed the country and represents just a minority of Bahrain while the majority is opposing it. They also know that

They had tried various methods of reform for about 50 years, and the regime had the chance to reform itself from 1922 until 2017 that is about 90 years, however it became clear that it is not possible. This tribal dictatorship cannot be reformed.

down on the oppositions harshly, but they chose to ignore it and they don't want to see what is going on. They just want to have business as usual with the most vicious government in the Middle East.

■ How have Bahraini authorities handled protesters? There have been stories in the media that they use unconventional weapon against people.

The regime has broken all possible redlines, so you are not allowed to have right of assembly, the right of expression or to hold meeting or criticize. This regime has tightened restrictions on liberties yet it has managed to avoid sanctions thanks to western support. They used all possible means to crack down on protesters, they used tear gas that was proven by the University of Dublin 2012 that is up to 10-times more toxic than normal tear gas in order to quell anti-government protesters. They used shotguns against demonstrators and you can see in photos people bodies are wounded by small bullets. They used extensive number of foreign mercenaries to surround villages and towns like Doraz which is under the oppression for six months. They use also foreign experts in security fields, for instance, British personnel are work-

ing behind the scene to direct the operation against Bahraini people. Recently we understood that the regime has had links with Israeli government to provide security technology and follow effective methods of suppressing and cracking down on Bahraini nation, because of similarities between these two regimes especially in their occupation policy. So these regimes are using every means to crack down on protesters knowing that it will be always protected by western powers.

■ Do you expect to see more clashes in future? What is protesters' strategies to confront the regime?

In the last months we have seen escalation of brutality by the Al-Khalifa; we saw executing people on January 15th and on February 9th also killed three people - we don't know where - but Bahraini authorities say that they killed them in the sea. So the regime has committed serious crimes against humanity as torture is practiced so commonly among Bahraini security forces.

What I expect this year is more repression, more killing. We are bracing ourselves to more retribution and revenge by Al-Khalifa regime.

We expect to see more cruelty, more torture, more killing and viciousness from the regime this year, because it knows well that it cannot continue much longer.

However, people are no longer afraid of the Al Khalifa's suppression and they cannot give up their demands because of regime's brutality and the more vicious Bahraini regime becomes the braver people become, because they don't want to repeat experience of last decades and They will not let the regime prevail the country again and it must go... This is the strategy of revolutionaries. They will persist, they will have potions, will continue to be in the streets and they will go to jail and continue demonstrate until the Al-Khalifa are removed from power because otherwise they will remain under the threat of mass killing, mass execution, destruction of identity of country as well as its historic values and religion.



The regime has broken all possible redlines, so you are not allowed to have right of assembly, the right of expression or to hold meeting or criticize.



We expect to see more cruelty, more torture, more killing and viciousness from the regime this year, because it knows well that it cannot continue much longer.

‘Safe Zones’ in Syria: Blessing or a cunning plan?

By Anna Jaunger

It is not a secret that on January 25, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump proposed to set up so-called "safe zones" in Syria. In addition, recently, he said that Persian Gulf States would pay for them.

Nowadays, it is unclear whether these plans are directed to the benefit of the Syrian people, or it is just

another maneuver to delay the process of the peaceful settlement of the Syrian crisis.

Talking about the reasons of his proposal, Donald Trump confined himself to a massive influx of refugees from Syria and Iraq in the EU. According to him, "safe zones" are able to defend Europeans from terrorists, who sneak into Europe disguised as migrants.



It is not allowed to set up such zones in places, where the Syrian Army conducts combat operations against terrorists. This will eliminate the possibility of effective fighting against extremists, who may take shelter from the air strikes in these zones.

According to reliable sources, a few days ago, the United States and Turkey made arrangements for joining efforts to establish such zones.

According to Reuters, Trump is expected to order the Pentagon and the State Department in the coming days to come up with a plan for the zones. However, it isn't clear, what these safe zones mean for Trump. If this is the territory, in which the civilian population would be guaranteed safety, it is one matter. If this plan includes the establishment of no-fly zones, it is a different one.

After Trump's statement about his plans to establish a so-called "safe zone" in Syria, foreign media reported that Donald Trump intends to establish no-fly zones in it. In addition, the protection of these areas is likely to require the deployment of the U.S. military in the region. Barack Obama once tried to avoid this for fear of getting bogged down in the Syrian conflict.

Apparently, in any case, it is not allowed to set up such zones in places, where the Syrian Army conducts combat operations against terrorists. This will eliminate the possibility of effective fighting against extremists, who may take shelter from the air strikes in these zones.

However, the initiative of the U.S. president on the establishment of "safe zones" was supported by Turkey. In addition, according to reliable sources, a few days ago, the United States and Turkey made arrangements for joining efforts to establish such zones.

Meanwhile, it should be mentioned that the King of Saudi Arabia, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, during a telephone conversation with Donald Trump, also supported the establishment of "safe zones" in Syria and Yemen. So, why did Saudi Arabia support this idea?



What is its real aim? It is known that Saudi Arabia financed and armed terrorists in Syria throughout the conflict.

Apparently, the idea of "safe zones" only seems like a step aimed at the settlement of the issue of refugees. In fact, there are many pitfalls, which the U.S. administration prefers not to talk about.

It's most likely that the idea about the establishment of the "safe zones" was suggested because of the desire of some countries to continue to provide support to illegal armed groups, and to slow down the process of political settlement of the Syrian crisis as much as possible. It is possible that the establishment of such zones means that it can actually be created an enclave, where militants and terrorists will be under the protection of their powerful patrons on the territory of Syria.

Apparently, the idea of "safe zones" only seems like a step aimed at the settlement of the issue of refugees. In fact, there are many pitfalls, which the U.S. administration prefers not to talk about.

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How to align your shoulders

Improper shoulder posture can put unwanted strain on your neck and back, causing chronic pain, and in some cases, tension headaches. Computer work can cause or worsen bad posture by encouraging slouching and allowing the muscles to atrophy. By testing your shoulder alignment, stretching muscles, and regularly exercising your shoulders, you can fight bad posture and relieve shoulder pain.

■ Reestablishing shoulder alignment

1. Strengthen your mid back. Part of being able to pull back your shoulders and keep them properly aligned is having strong muscles in your mid back region between your shoulder blades. The main muscles groups there are called the paraspinals, rhomboids, trapezius and infraspinatus. When these muscles are too weak, they allow the shoulders to slouch forward. When they're strong, it's easier to hold and maintain good posture.

- Rowing machines are excellent for building strength in the muscles between your shoulder blades. Start with light weights and lower reps and slowly progress to heavier weight and more reps over the course of four to six weeks.

- Doing the "reverse fly" with free weights is also great for strengthening the rhomboids and trapezius muscles. Sit on the edge of a bench with your waist bent forward and looking at the floor. Grab dumbbells in each hand and lift them laterally out and up off the floor, causing your shoulder blades to retract. When your arms are parallel with the floor, hold for a few seconds then slowly lower the dumbbells.

- Swimming is an excellent exercise because it works virtually all your muscles, especially those of your shoulders, spine and legs. Swimming also forces you to have good posture in order to stay above the water line and swim in a straight line.

- Swimming, rowing exercises and yoga classes will also help to make your thoracic spine (and many other areas of your body) more flexible.

- Use a back stretcher, which is a curved lumbar stretcher you place on the ground and lie on for several minutes a day (start out with one minute, gradually increasing to five minutes). Lie down face-up on a back stretcher beneath your middle back. Slowly extend your back on it. This helps offset the constant forward slouched position.

2. Make your thoracic spine more flexible.

Although your thoracic spine (mid back) naturally curves forward somewhat, too much slouching can create a hump that's stiff and painful.[2] The inflexible hump (medically called a kyphosis) then forces the shoulders and neck forward. As such, try to make your thoracic spine more flexible by extending it (reversing the curve) so that it's easier to realign your shoulders.

- Lay on a large exercise ball with your feet on the floor and looking up at the ceiling. Slowly roll (extend) your mid back over the top of the ball so your head gets closer to the ground.[3] When you feel a nice stretch (not painful), hold it for 15 seconds and repeat 10 – 15 times per day.

- Do the "Superman" pose. Lay face down on some padded flooring with your arms outstretched above your head. Lift your chin, arms and as much of your legs off the ground as you can — simulating Superman flying. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat 10 – 15 times per day. Make sure you place a pillow under the stomach so as not to hyper extend your back as you raise your head, arms and legs.

3. Stretch your chest and neck muscles. In addition to weak muscles in the mid back, overly tight muscles in the chest also contribute to pulling the shoulders forward and out of alignment. Ironically, this posture is relatively common in men who go to the gym, but spend too much time on their chest (pectoral) and anterior shoulder muscles and not enough time on their rhomboids (between the shoulder blades) and posterior shoulder muscles. The solution is to avoid overworking the pectorals and make sure they are well stretched and pliable. A similar problem occurs when the muscles of the lower neck (trapezius and levator scapulae) become too tight / strong — they pull up on the shoulders and make it look like the person is always shrugging.

- To stretch out your chest muscles, stand in a



Part of being able to pull back your shoulders and keep them properly aligned is having strong muscles in your mid back region between your shoulder blades.

doorway or against a corner and raise the arm closest to the wall to shoulder-height. Your arm should be bent at the elbow. This posture resembles half of a football goal post. Rest your arm against the wall or doorframe, and use it to gently stretch your shoulder for 30 seconds. Turn your head and look in the opposite direction of your shoulder to intensify the stretch. Then switch to the opposite shoulder and repeat. Stretching five to 10 times daily will help loosen your chest muscles and allow your shoulders to retract.

- Once your neck is warmed up, start stretching it by laterally flexing your neck and head (bending it sideways) — try to bring your ear closer to your shoulder. Hold for 30 seconds and do both sides five to 10 times daily. Loosening your neck muscles will allow your shoulders to gradually lower.

4. See a chiropractor. A chiropractor is a spinal specialist trained at assessing posture. Not only can they tell you if your posture is poor, but they can usually pinpoint the cause and offer natural solutions. Chiropractors can diagnose spinal abnormalities that cause misaligned shoulders (scoliosis, osteoporosis, hyperkyphosis), typically with x-rays. They can also make your spine more flexible and functional with manual joint manipulations called spinal adjustments.

- A chiropractor may apply joint manipulation to the middle back to relieve shoulder pain. The middle back is often overlooked as an area of focus for shoulder pain; however, recent research indicates that thoracic spine manipulation is effective for shoulder pain.

- A misaligned shoulder may also be due to a slight dislocation called a subluxation, where the joint is not quite aligned properly. Ask your chiropractor to check both shoulder joints in addition to your spine.

- Sometimes misaligned shoulders are due to issues lower in your body, such as a short leg or an unlevel pelvis. Adjusting the pelvis to realign it and adding a lift to your shoe can help balance your lower body, which positively impacts your upper body.

- Keep in mind that spinal adjustments can't reverse deformities such as scoliosis and are not indicated for an osteoporosis-related hyperkyphosis.

In addition to weak muscles in the mid back, overly tight muscles in the chest also contribute to pulling the shoulders forward and out of alignment.

■ Understanding the causes of misaligned shoulders

Ask your doctor if you have scoliosis. Scoliosis is a condition of unknown cause that leads to an unnatural curve (deformity) of the spine, usually in the thoracic (mid back) region. One of the telltale signs of scoliosis is uneven shoulders. Not only does one shoulder sit lower than the other, but the related shoulder blade often appears more prominent (sticks out more) than the other. Misaligned shoulders and upper bodies is usually what tips off a school nurse or family doctor that a child has scoliosis.

- Scoliosis appears and progresses during childhood (early teens), then stabilizes once adulthood is reached and the skeleton stops growing.

- Scoliosis is thought to be a little more common and have the potential to become more severe in young girls.

- If scoliosis is the cause of misaligned shoulders, then virtually nothing can be done to correct it. Instead, the focus should be on making sure the shoulder is strong and fully functional. Practicing good posture is especially important so the misalignment doesn't get worse.

Try to prevent osteoporosis. Osteoporosis, also called brittle bone disease, involves a lack of normal bone mineralization. Without enough minerals, such as calcium, magnesium and boron, bones are much more susceptible to breaking, particularly in the hip and spine. Compression-type fractures in the mid back (thoracic region) are most common, which tends to cause a humpback (hyperkyphosis) and push the shoulders and neck too far forward. Once the humpback forms, only corrective surgery can help realign the spine and shoulders.

- Osteoporosis is most common among elderly Caucasian and Asian women, especially those who are slender and inactive.

- To help prevent osteoporosis, make sure you get adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D, and exercise on a regular basis.

- Good sources of calcium include: low-fat dairy products, green leafy vegetables, canned salmon, tofu and fortified cereals and juices.

(Source: wikihow.com)

How showering at night helps you sleep

A hot morning shower can wake you up and even boost creativity, according to some research. But if you want to improve your sleep, showering at night is the way to go. Experts say there's evidence that a night shower can help you drift off, if you time it just right.

The main trick is to not start too late. "You don't want to get yourself up right before bed," says Dr. Dianne Augelli of the the Center for Sleep Medicine at NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center. That's because body temperature plays an important part in regulating circadian rhythm, which tells the body when to feel sleepy or alert.

During the day, body temperature naturally rises until the late afternoon, when it reverses and begins to fall. "Cooling down is a signal that tells us we're supposed to go to sleep," she says, so interrupting this process can make it harder to fall asleep.

■ Showering earlier

Showering earlier in the evening gives your body a chance to cool off and can even trigger sleep, says Shelby Harris, director of behavioral sleep medicine at New York's Montefiore Medical Center.

Several studies have shown that warming your body by taking a bath can help induce sleep when there's enough time to cool off afterward. While much of the research has focused on baths, a 20-minute shower would have similar effects, Harris says.

Time your shower so you're done about an hour and a half before you want to hit the sack, Harris recommends. That way, by the time you lay down in bed, your body will be cool, dry and ready for sleep.

As a bonus, you can fold the very important step of washing your face into your nighttime shower.

According to the National Sleep Foundation, cleansing before bed can help clear your skin and reduce breakouts, guard against wrinkles and help night creams and moisturizers work more effectively.

(Source: Time)

Mosquito spit vaccine would fight malaria, Zika, West Nile, too

Mosquito-borne diseases kill hundreds of thousands of people every year. Malaria killed 438,000 people in 2015, according to the World Health Organization.

Mosquitoes spread viruses including Zika, yellow fever, dengue, West Nile virus, chikungunya and Japanese encephalitis.

There's a good yellow fever vaccine, but it's in short supply. And the same mosquitoes that spread yellow fever spread Zika, dengue and other viruses. Malaria spreads in many of the same regions, although it's carried by different mosquitoes.

"Mosquitoes cause more human disease and death than any other animal," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases, part of the National Institutes of Health.

■ A single vaccine

A "single vaccine capable of protecting against the scourge of mosquito-borne diseases is a novel concept that, if proven successful, would be a monumental public health advance."

The team at NIAID is starting a phase 1 trial, the earliest step in human tests, of the vaccine. It's meant to show mainly that the vaccine is safe. If it is, the vaccine will be tested in more people to see whether it works.

The vaccine, called AGS-v, is being developed by Imutex Ltd., a joint venture of London-based pharmaceutical company SEEK and a company called hVIVO.

The "test vaccine contains four synthetic proteins from mosquito salivary glands," NIH said.

"Mosquitoes cause more human disease and death than any other animal."

The "proteins are designed to induce antibodies in a vaccinated individual and to cause a modified allergic response that can prevent infection when a person is bitten by a disease-carrying mosquito."

■ Mosquito saliva

Mosquito saliva carries chemicals to help stop blood from clotting and to open up tiny blood vessels. It stimulates an immune response, and the vaccine is designed to take advantage of that.

The NIH team will recruit human volunteers to get either two doses of the vaccine or a placebo. They'll then have to show up again to be bitten by mosquitoes to see whether their bodies respond differently to the bites after vaccination.

The "mosquitoes will not be carrying viruses or parasites, so the participants are not at risk of becoming infected with a mosquito-borne disease," NIH said in the statement.

(Source: NBC News)

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10 hot titles of IT world

By Alireza Khorasani

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

1 Amazon is doubling down on its refusal to turn over voice records from an Echo device to Arkansas police, who believe the digital voice assistant may help solve a hot tub murder from last November. In a new filing in Arkansas state court, Amazon claimed records from the Echo should receive special protection under the First Amendment since what others say to the device—and the answers its assistant “Alexa” provides—are a form of free expression.

2 Waymo, the self-driving car unit inside Google’s umbrella company Alphabet, announced that it has filed a lawsuit against Uber, alleging that parts of Uber’s autonomous driving technology, specifically LiDAR, infringe on patents held by Waymo.

3 If you are thinking about buying the Nintendo Switch, I don’t think it’s battery life should play a big factor in your final determination. Nintendo’s new console can play Zelda on battery power for about 3 hours, and that’s long enough for me so far. The \$300 hybrid handheld/home system launches March 3, and maybe you’re thinking that 3 hours doesn’t sound like a long time.

4 After four months of being slowly released, Twitter announced that its Periscope Producer service is now available to everyone, allowing broadcasters to incorporate high-quality live video from sources other than their mobile device — it’s supported on the web, iOS, and Android.

5 Facebook is done with testing Audience Network mid-roll video ads and is making it available to “eligible” publishers starting today through its Audience Network. What this means is that now when you watch videos on other websites or apps, you not only could see Facebook ads before it starts, but also midway through.

6 Google and its early-stage incubator, Jigsaw, have launched a new tool that uses machine learning to help publishers combat online abuse. With Perspective, Google is offering online publishers an API they can integrate into any of their platforms that facilitate user comments.

7 Qualcomm has launched an accelerator to help hardware companies develop head-mounted displays for virtual reality. The company is launching the Qualcomm Head Mounted Display (HDM) Accelerator Program that spreading its bets around and encouraging the VR ecosystem could help the fledgling market grow.

8 Google’s Messenger app has received a new update. The app is now called Android Messages. “A new name! Messenger is now Android Messages, the messaging app built for Android,” the change-log for the update says.

9 Google Allo will soon be available on your desktop and laptop. No word on when this will officially release.

10 Samsung Galaxy Book to be an LTE Windows 10 tablet with stylus pen. Galaxy Book will have LTE connectivity, and its stylus should work just like the S Pen of a Galaxy Note smartphone.

Modern Nokia 3310 will remain a feature phone

Nokia fans are undoubtedly excited about the Finnish company’s upcoming launch event scheduled for February 26. At least three Android smartphones will be introduced by HMD Global later this week, as well as a feature phone.

News about the revival of the Nokia 3310 emerged last week, but aside from information about its price, little else was known. With only a couple of days left until the official reveal of the modern Nokia 3310, we have learned a bit more about the sturdy handset.



Despite the fact that numerous reports claimed the modern Nokia 3310 might be an Android device, the same source that confirmed the handset would be announced at MWC 2017, now says it will remain a feature phone.

However, HMD Global will slightly change the phone’s looks to bring it up to date with the new design language. Subtle changes will make the modern Nokia 3310 lighter and thinner than the original model. The size of the keys will be adjusted as well.

As opposed to Nokia 3310’s monochrome display, the modern version will pack a slightly larger color display. Still, the resolution will not be improved by much, so that it won’t affect battery life. One thing that remains a mystery is whether or not it will come with a removable battery.

Lastly, there will be plenty of color variants to choose from, as HMD will launch the modern Nokia 3310 in black, blue, gray, green, red, and yellow. The €59 price tag has been confirmed as well.

(Source: Gizmochina)

Microsoft invests in drones

By Paul Sowers

AirMap, which provides an airspace management platform for drones, has raised \$26 million in a Series B round led by Microsoft Ventures, with participation from Qualcomm Ventures, Airbus Ventures, Rakuten, Sony, Yuneec, General Catalyst, and Lux Capital.

Founded out of Santa Monica, Calif. in 2014, AirMap is just one of a number of players in the burgeoning drone industry.

The startup touts itself as an airspace intelligence platform that creates the technology for developers and drone operators to ensure that their UAVs fly safely. Part of this involves enabling drones to communicate with each other. AirMap’s data and services are embedded into drones, ground control stations, and flight apps, and the company is already working with the likes of Intel, 3D Robotics, Aeryon Labs, and DJI. More than 125 airports also use AirMap’s airspace management dashboard, according to the company.

While the likes of Amazon, Google, and Facebook have recently associated themselves with drone technology for various use-cases, Microsoft has been fairly quiet on the drone front. It does have a research project that it calls the Aerial Informatics and Robotics Platform, which is essentially a simulator-based environment that enables researchers to write code to control and train aerial robots — in fact, Microsoft recently



open-sourced this system. The fact that Microsoft’s VC arm is now serving as lead investor in AirMap suggests that the company could be ready to ramp up its drone activities.

“AirMap is a leader in low-altitude airspace management and will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the drone industry,” said Nagraj Kashyap, corporate vice president of Microsoft Ventures. “We’re excited to support their growth and, by extension, the growth of commercial and recreational applications for both piloted and autonomous drones. We believe that by investing in companies like AirMap, Microsoft’s resources, platforms, and AI technologies can help

fuel the future of the drone ecosystem.”

AirMap’s other investors are notable, too — Qualcomm is a major chipmaker with a recent history of partnering on drone projects. Airbus has demonstrated similar interest and recently announced plans to have a self-piloted car prototype ready by the end of 2017. Yuneec is a major Chinese aircraft manufacturer.

“The strategic partners participating in our Series B financing reflect the diversity of the drone ecosystem and the potential of drones to benefit every sector of our economy,” explained AirMap CEO Ben Marcus. “Very soon, millions of drones will fly billions of flights. This is a future that depends on safe, autonomous drone

operations at scale. AirMap’s technology will make this future possible, allowing the drones of today, and the autonomous drones of tomorrow, to take flight.”

Drone technology is ripe for investment, with the likes of Boston-based deep learning startup Neurala recently raising \$14 million for its Brains for Bots software development kit (SDK) that lets developers access AI smarts — including computer vision capabilities — that they can integrate into their products.

Recent estimates suggest that opening U.S. airspace to drones could generate more than \$82 billion for the U.S. economy over the next decade.

(Source: venturebeat)

AMD announces Ryzen, reveals three new CPU models

After four years in development, AMD has finally taken the wraps off the Ryzen series of x86 CPU. The company also revealed details of the first batch of CPU that will be going on pre-order today.

The Ryzen series will come in three variations, Ryzen 7, Ryzen 5, and Ryzen 3, with Ryzen 7 being the enthusiast series and the Ryzen 3 being the budget offering. For now, AMD has only announced Ryzen 7 processors, with Ryzen 5 and Ryzen 3 to be announced later this year.

The Ryzen 7 series for now includes three models, the flagship 1800X, the 1700X, and the cheapest 1700.

The 1800X is an 8-core, 16 thread 95W TDP part with 3.6GHz base clock speed and 4.0GHz boost clock speed. Compared to the similarly specced Core i7-6900K, the 1800X posted identical scores in Cinebench single-thread test and 9% increase in the multi-threaded test. To put this context, the Core i7-6900K is a \$1050



part whereas the 1800X is priced at \$499.

Moving on, the 1700X is also an 8-core, 16 thread 95W part with 3.4GHz base clock speed and 3.8Ghz

The Huawei Watch 2 gets revealed prior to MWC announcement



Mobile World Congress, one of the largest trade shows for the world of mobile technology, will soon be underway.

Huawei’s main focus will likely be on the P10 smartphone, but along with that, we’re also expecting the company to take the wraps off of the Huawei Watch 2.

The press renders come by way of famous leaker Evan Blass, and they leave nothing to the imagination in regards to what the Watch 2 will be bringing to the table. The appearance of the Huawei Watch 2 is a complete departure from the original Watch, featuring a rugged body, two physical buttons for performing various actions, and what looks to be a proprietary rubber watch band. Although easily swappable watch bands are usually preferred by most customers, it looks like the proprietary nature of the Watch 2’s bands will allow for nanoSIM card functionality so that you can use the Watch 2 as a standalone device.

In addition to the nanoSIM support and sportier design, the leaked images also showcase three color options for the Watch 2 - black, bright orange, and a grey model with speckles of white scattered throughout.

(Source: phonearena)

Galaxy Tab S3 images reveal advanced stylus support, AKG audio tuning



Samsung won’t be completely absent from Mobile World Congress at the end of this month. At the upcoming event, the Korean company will reportedly unveil the Galaxy Tab S3, a tablet seemingly aimed at productivity.

In addition to its ability to dock with a keyboard, the Galaxy Tab S3 will seemingly come with more advanced stylus support. As the photos show, the new Samsung stylus looks alarmingly similar to Microsoft’s Surface Pen, right on down to the tab at the pen’s base.

It’s unclear if the stylus will come with the Galaxy Tab S3, or if Samsung will offer the accessory separately.

As we saw in the image shared by Evan Blass earlier this week, the Galaxy Tab S3 will feature a very familiar design, with capacitive buttons and the oval fingerprint sensor/home button combo on the front.

Elsewhere, our photos confirm the device will come with audio features tuned by AKG, a company known for manufacturing microphones, headphones and wireless audio systems. The images also reveal the Tab S3 will come in two colors, silver and black (the colors will likely have fancier names).

(Source: technobuffalo)

Archos 101 Saphir rugged tablet goes official



Archos joins the pre-MWC fever with the announcement of the 101 Saphir rugged tablet. It has a 10.1” display, MediaTek chipset with 1GB of RAM, a 6,000 mAh battery, but most importantly - a drop and water-resistant body.

The 101 Saphir has a 10.1” IPS screen of 1280x800px resolution and runs on the MT8163 chip with quad-core Cortex-A53 CPU at 1.3GHz, Mali-T720MP2 GPU, and 1GB of RAM.

The 101 Saphir has the same IP68 rating for water and dust resistance, and its design is shock-proof, too. Archos subsidiary Logic Instruments, which has a rich experience in embedded and rugged mobile systems for hostile environments, is responsible for the durable design.

Archos will ship the 101 Saphir this June, while its pricing and market availability will be detailed at the MWC.

Recently Archos also announced the 50 Saphir rugged smartphone. It’s a rather balanced smartphone with a 5” IPS screen of 720p resolution, MT6737 chip (4x 1.5GHz A53 CPU, Mali-T720MP), 2GB RAM, and 16GB expandable storage.

It also comes with a 13MP camera, an impressive 5,000 mAh battery, and Android 6.0 Marshmallow.

(Source: Archos)

CloudFlare leaked sensitive data across the internet for months

CloudFlare, a multibillion-dollar startup that runs a popular content delivery network used by more than 5.5 million sites, accidentally leaked customers’ sensitive information for months, the company said Thursday. The firm has since fixed the issues at the heart of the problem, CloudFlare said.

The leaked data included “private messages from major dating sites, full messages from a well-known chat service, online password manager data, frames from adult video sites, hotel bookings,” according to Tavis Ormandy, the Google security researcher who spotted and reported the issue last week. “We’re talking full https requests, client IP addresses, full responses, cookies, passwords, keys, data, everything.”

In a tweet posted Thursday, Ormandy pointed to sites including Uber, 1Password, FitBit, and OKCupid, as having spilled data. Indeed, even sites seemingly protected by HTTPS, a security measure designed to keep hackers and spies from snooping on Internet traffic, were affected.

CloudFlare responded promptly to Ormandy’s notification early Saturday morning. Within hours, the security team disabled several new features to its service—for those inclined: email obfuscation, server-side excludes, and automatic HTTPS rewrites—that had caused the problem to surface.

It took a week, however, for the team to fully remedy the issue, CloudFlare said. Search engines such as Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft’s Bing had inadvertently

stored leaked data as part of their web crawlers’ caches, and the CloudFlare team had to work with them to scrub these indexes.

The memory leakage issue, known technically as a buffer overrun, began in September when CloudFlare swapped a new bit of code (an HTML parser) into its system.

In a technical post-mortem of the incident, John Graham-Cumming, CloudFlare’s chief tech officer, detailed what went wrong. “The engineers working on the new HTML parser had been so worried about bugs affecting our service that they had spent hours verifying that it did not contain security problems,” he said.

(Source: fortune)

New Solar System found to have 7 Earth-size planets

Astronomers have just identified a nearby Solar System hosting seven Earth-sized planets. Most intriguing: Three planets that orbit its central star — known as TRAPPIST-1 — may even be within a habitable zone. That means they fall within a region that could support life as we know it. As such, these newfound worlds are good sites to focus a search for alien life.

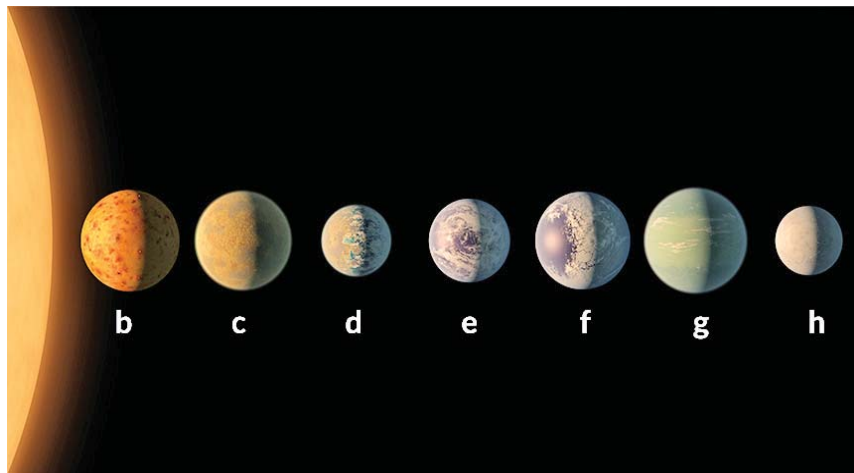
TRAPPIST-1's big planetary family also hints that many more cousins of Earth may exist than astronomers had thought.

"It's rather stunning that the system has so many Earth-sized planets," says Drake Deming. He's an astronomer at the University of Maryland in College Park. It seems like every stable spot where a planet could be, there is an Earth-sized one. And that, he adds, "bodes well for finding habitable planets."

■ Dwarf star

Astrophysicist Michaël Gillon works at the University of Liège in Belgium. He was part of a team that last year announced they had found three Earth-sized planets around TRAPPIST-1. This dwarf star is only about the size of Jupiter. It's also much cooler than the sun. And it's a relative neighbor to Earth, a mere 39 light-years away in the constellation Aquarius.

Follow-up observations with the



Spitzer Space Telescope and additional telescopes on the ground now show that what first had appeared to be a third planet is actually a quartet of Earth-sized ones. Three of these may be habitable.

If those planets have Earthlike atmospheres, their surfaces may even host oceans of liquid water. Or at least that's what Gillon and his colleagues reported online February 22 in *Nature*. Their data

Follow-up observations with the Spitzer Space Telescope and additional telescopes on the ground now show that what first had appeared to be a third planet is actually a quartet of Earth-sized ones. Three of these may be habitable.

also offer signs of a seventh, outermost planet.

All seven planets were detected by watching how their star dims as each passes — or transits — in front of it. Scientists measured how much of the star's light each transit blocked from Earth's view. Knowing how big a planet would have to be to do that, the astronomer calculated that all seven must have roughly the same radius as Earth.

■ Planet orbit

Those dips in starlight also showed how fast the planets orbit their star: The innermost one makes a round trip in 1.5 Earth days. The outermost one takes roughly 20 days.

The planets' masses range from about half to 1.5 times that of Earth. To figure that out, the researchers looked at the way the six inner planets tug on each other. The mass and size data then allowed the team to calculate the planets' densities. All of this suggested that the inner six are rocky, as Earth is.

The length of each planet's day — how quickly it spins on its axis — may sync with its sun's orbit. That would make the innermost planet's day 1.5 Earth days long and the outermost one's 20 Earth days long.

(Source: *Science for Students*)

Modern living is killing our sense of smell, says leading scientist

Modern life is ruining mankind's sense of smell and making people crave salty and fattening food, a leading scientist has said.

The harsher, simpler smells caused by pollution, uncollected rubbish and even messy homes are corroding our ability to detect the nuanced hues of nature and are making people ill, according to Dr. Kara Hoover, an expert in olfactory evolution.

She told a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Boston that those with an impaired sense of smell are more likely to be obese because they tend to prefer richer tasting food.

They are also at higher risk of mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

■ Sense of smell

"Our sense of smell evolved in a very rich landscape in which we were interacting regularly with the environment," said the Durham University academic.

"Now today we're not interacting with the environment and we're in very polluted places."

A poor sense of smell also affects people's ability to taste, which means they are likely to seek out stronger tasting food, which is very often salty and fatty.

By contrast, people with a powerful sense of smell are more likely to have lower body weight, previous re-

search has indicated.

Those who have suffered from a loss of smell often have increased anxiety over their own body odour because they don't know if they smell bad or not, said Dr. Hoover, adding: "They're anxious about not being able to smell danger like gas leaks or smoke."

"They suffer from poor quality of life and depression because they're no longer engaging with food or loved ones in terms of their sense of smell."

Last week the Mayor of London threatened to ban older diesel cars on days when air pollution levels are too high.

■ Toxic smog

Sadiq Khan was responding to a series of toxic smog alerts in the capital, where pollution has been linked to around 9,000 early deaths a year.

New research this month also suggested that diesel pollution could double the chances of developing dementia.

Poor air quality has already been linked to a higher chance of suffering a heart attack or stroke.

People from poorer backgrounds are in general more exposed to pollution, with bus passengers confronted by eight times as much as car drivers.

Those living in dirty areas or where rubbish is not



collected regularly are also more likely to suffer impairments to their sense of smell.

Dr. Hoover has recently conducted research comparing the smelling ability of Homo sapiens with two now extinct human sub-species, Neanderthals and Denisovans.

In doing so she discovered that the Denisovans, from Siberia, had a "less functional" sense of smell compared with early modern humans and Neanderthals, meaning they were unable to smell grass.

(Source: *The Telegraph*)

Bees show unexpected ability to learn

Entice them with a sweet reward and bumblebees can be trained to roll a ball into a goal, revealing unexpectedly complex learning abilities for an insect, researchers said Thursday.

The findings in the U.S. journal *Science* offer the first evidence that bees can learn a skill that is not directly related to their typical duties of foraging for food.

Even more, bumblebees appeared to learn best by watching the behavior of other bees, and sometimes even improved on their predecessors' techniques.

Until now, the ability to learn how to solve a complex problem by reaching a goal was known to be possible in humans, primates, marine mammals and birds. But insects were not necessarily considered part of this elite group.

■ Small brains

"Our study puts the final nail in the coffin of the idea that small brains con-

strain insects to have limited behavioral flexibility and only simple learning abilities," said co-author Lars Chittka, a professor at Queen Mary University of London's School of Biological and Chemical Sciences.

Previous studies have shown bees could learn to pull on a string to get a food reward and perform other simple tricks, but these studies were limited in scope because the "learning processes involved might be used in tasks encountered by bees naturally," said the study.

Researchers wanted to explore whether or not bees could learn to manipulate an object — in this case a small, yellow ball — unlike anything they knew in their daily lives.

"We wanted to explore the cognitive limits of bumblebees by testing whether they could use a non-natural object in a task likely never encountered before by



any individual in the evolutionary history of bees," said joint lead author Clint Perry, also of the QMUL School of Biological and Chemical Sciences.

The bees were trained, one at a time, to roll the ball, which was about the same size as the bees themselves.

The ball had to be pushed to a specific target before a sugar solution would be awarded to the bee.

Some bees were trained by observing

a bee that had already learned the technique.

■ Hidden magnet

Others were shown how by a hidden magnet beneath the platform that moved the ball. A third group received no instructions at all.

The bees learned most efficiently from watching other bees, it turned out.

Sometimes, they even found better ways to get a treat, for instance by choosing one of a selection of balls that was already closer to the goal than the others, instead of picking the ball that was furthest away as the trainer bees consistently did.

The "bees solved the task in a different way than what was demonstrated, suggesting that observer bees did not simply copy what they saw, but improved on it," said joint lead author Olli Loukola.

(Source: *japantimes.com*)

Saving the manatee: Should they stay listed as endangered?

In the next several weeks, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is expected to make public its final decision on whether to "downlist" the manatee from an endangered to a threatened species -- a marker of progress in the species' recovery.

The agency invited public comment last year after it proposed reclassifying the aquatic creatures, which weigh half a ton and range up to 13 feet long.

Nearly 4,000 people weighed in. One comment captured the appeal of the endearing animal: The "manatee has become a living icon of Florida as much as orange juice, Mickey Mouse and the beaches."

The government's decision will come amid signs that the manatee is thriving. For the third straight year, spotters counted more than 6,000 manatees navigating Florida's waters. But some believe reclassification is premature.

■ Refuges and sanctuaries

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages manatee refuges and sanctuaries, last year proposed reclassifying the West Indian manatee from endangered to threatened -- a less serious status. The Florida manatee is a subspecies of West Indian manatee.

The Endangered Species Act defines an endangered



species as one currently in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. A threatened species is one that is likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future.

The designation came with federal restrictions on such things as boat speed and waterfront development that are credited with protecting the species and reversing its decline. The agency said it will continue to lead efforts to increase the population and reduce threats.

The agency pointed to "significant improvements" in the manatee population and habitat conditions. "The

manatee's recovery is incredibly encouraging and a great testament to the conservation actions of many," Cindy Dohner, the Southeast regional director for US Fish and Wildlife, said at the time.

"One of the things we deal with is ... people assume if a species comes off the endangered species list ... it is a failure," said Gil McRae, head of the commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute.

■ Species reclassified

Part of government's job, McRae said, is to make conservation improvements that get species reclassified as soon as possible.

His thoughts were echoed by Christina Martin, an attorney for the Pacific Legal Foundation, which has pushed for the manatee's status change. "There is a limited amount of resources available to protect all the species," she said, adding officials should "focus on the species most in need of being saved from going extinct."

The foundation has represented residents who formed the organization Save Crystal River. Martin said Save Crystal River is concerned the federal government "might adopt more and more restrictions that would be harmful to their community."

(Source: *CNN*)

Researchers gain insight into a physical phenomenon that leads to earthquakes

Scientists have gotten better at predicting where earthquakes will occur, but they're still in the dark about when they will strike and how devastating they will be.

In the search for clues that will help them better understand earthquakes, scientists at the University of Pennsylvania are studying a phenomenon called aging. In ageing, the longer that materials are in contact with each other, the more force is required to move them. This resistance is called static friction.

The longer something, such as a fault, is sitting still, the more static friction builds up and the stronger the fault gets.

Even when the fault remains still, tectonic motion is still occurring; stress builds up in the fault as the plates shift until finally they shift so much that they exceed the static friction force and begin to slide. Because the fault grew stronger with time, the stress can build up to large levels, and a huge amount of energy is then released in the form of a powerful quake.

"This aging mechanism is critical in underlying the unstable behavior of faults that lead to earthquakes," said Robert Carpick, the John Henry Towne Professor and chair of the Department of Mechanical Engineering and Applied Mechanics in Penn's School of Engineering and Applied Science. "If you didn't have ageing, then the fault would move very easily and so you'd get much smaller earthquakes happening more frequently, or maybe even just smooth motion. Aging leads to the occurrence of infrequent, large earthquakes that can be devastating."

Scientists have been studying the movement of faults and ageing in geological materials at the macroscale for decades, producing phenomenological theories and models to describe their experimental results.

(Source: *EurekAlert*)

Accuracy of voice biometrics can diminish as we age: study

The accuracy of detecting voice biometrics may decrease as we age according to new research from a fraud detection firm.

Pindrop presented its findings at the RSA security conference in San Francisco last week, where the firm demonstrated the existence of slight changes to the human voice's speed and pitch over months and years. The changes are minute and wouldn't be so obvious to our ears, but voice detection systems may be thrown off.

The researchers claimed that error rates in voice biometrics can double over a two-year period. As part of the research, principal research scientist Elie Khoury and the team studied Barack Obama's daily addresses between 2009 and 2017 for changes in his speech patterns. They claim that his voice accuracy rating declined 23 percent over the eight years.

They further examined a two-year dataset of 122 different speakers, speaking English, French, German, Spanish, Dutch, and Italian. The team found that error rates typically doubled over the two years. They also found female voices aren't prone to as much change as male voices.

Of all the demographics, men over 60 experienced the most change in the voices.

Ageing has been deemed the main cause of the changes. We use up to 100 muscles when we speak and all muscles become weaker as we get older. "(The) vocal cords and cartilages of the larynx also change as we age," said Khoury. Emotions, health problems, and stress can also contribute to variations in speed and pitch that can reduce biometric accuracy.

There are a number of implications that these changes in our voices could have. Numerous forms of biometrics are often seen as replacements for traditional passwords.

(Source: *Digital Trends*)

Fracking led to more than 6,000 spills in 10 years, study finds

Spills related to fracking are more frequent than previously thought, a new study finds — and understanding the causes of these spills may help prevent future incidents.

In a study published Tuesday in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology*, a team of researchers identified 6,648 spills in Colorado, New Mexico, North Dakota, and Pennsylvania between 2005 and 2014. The researchers calculated that between 2 and 16 percent of wells will spill contaminated water, hydraulic fracturing fluids, or other substances every year, with the majority of incidents occurring in the first three years after a well becomes operational.

The definition of a spill varies from state to state, presenting a challenge for the study's authors in comparing states. But analyzing this data, they say, is vital to addressing the challenges posed by fracking spills and makes a data-driven conversation about fracking possible.

"Analyses like this one are so important, to define and mitigate risk to water supplies and human health," said Kate Konschnik, director of the Harvard Law School's Environmental Policy Initiative, in a Duke University news release. "Writing state reporting rules with these factors in mind is critical, to ensure that the right data are available — and in an accessible format — for industry, states and the research community."

(Source: *The CSM*)

The art of Turkmen horse breeding

Turkmen horses are one of the most beautiful horse breed of Iran dominantly found in Turkmen Sahra, a region located in northeastern Iran bordering Turkmenistan.

The Turkmen horse was originally an oriental horse breed from the steppes of Central Asia which is now extinct. Some horses bred in Iran and Turkmenistan today are still referred to as Turkmen, and have similar characteristics.

The Turkmen horse is noted for its endurance, bravery and smartness. It has a slender body and the breed is actually one of the toughest in the world.

They have a reputation for speed, endurance, intelligence, and a distinctive metallic sheen. Many theories have been formulated to explain why hair of the Turkmen horse and its descendants shines, but none explain why the this breed in particular benefitted from this genetic difference and why other horses would not.

Although Turkmen horse breeding is a very popular among the Turkmen people the officials won't take it very serious.

Here are some photos depicting Turkmen horse breeding in Raz and Jargalan, North Khorasan province.



PHOTO

Mohsen Rezaei

Tehran Times photographer



Trump accuses China of being ‘grand champions’ of currency manipulation

The United States President Donald Trump has risked reigniting a simmering feud with Beijing after accusing China of being the “grand champions” of currency manipulation.

After months of turbulence and uncertainty between the world's two largest economies, relations appeared to settle two weeks ago after the U.S. president and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping held their first telephone conversation since the billionaire's inauguration.

However, in an interview with Reuters on Thursday that also saw Trump reiterate his desire for U.S. nuclear supremacy, the U.S. president, who has attacked China over trade, Taiwan, North Korea and the South China Sea, threatened to undermine the tentative rapprochement with his latest verbal assault against Beijing.

“I think they're grand champions at manipulation of currency. So I haven't held back. We'll see what happens,” Trump said.

The president's comments were reported just hours after the incoming treasury secretary, Steven Mnuchin, made apparently contradictory remarks signaling that the White House had no immediate plans to label China a currency manipulator -- something Trump had pledged to do on his first day in office.

Beijing offered no immediate official reaction to Trump's comments but Chinese scholars expressed frustration at the president's allegation. “He has such a big



mouth. What can we do about it? Let him talk,” said Zhu Feng, a professor of international relations at Nanjing University.

Economists both within and outside China reject Trump's claim -- repeatedly aired during his campaign -- that China is guilty of purposefully forcing down the value of its currency, the renminbi or yuan, in order to boost its own exporters and hamstringing U.S. manufacturers.

“The logic of Trump's claim is that he believes other countries keep their currencies artificially cheap to increase their exports to the U.S. [But] as a matter of fact, the Chinese yuan has seen a 13%

devaluation since last year,” Zhu said, pointing out that Trump had previously also accused South Korea and Japan of manipulating their currencies.

Christopher Balding, a Peking University finance professor, said: “China is clearly manipulating its currency, there's no two ways about it. But at this point they are essentially propping up the value of their currency rather than manipulating it lower to gain an unfair trade advantage.

“To some degree Trump is correct, that of any major economy they probably are the grand champions of currency

manipulation,” he added.

“But we need to very clearly distinguish between manipulating a currency to gain an unfair trade advantage -- which they were pretty clearly doing maybe a decade to five years ago but they are clearly not doing that these days -- and propping up the currency.”

Over the past year, China's central bank has spent billions of dollars in foreign exchange reserves in the past year to shore up the yuan to counter capital outflows, Reuters reported.

Experts believe Beijing will react cautiously to Trump's latest attack so as not to further inflame the situation.

“I think they're handling it actually, very, very well,” said Balding. “They've learned to manage the situation so that when Trump says something crazy or tweets out something crazy they take the high road and they let it blow over ... They haven't taken the bait.”

Trump also told Reuters that he wants the U.S. to expand its nuclear arsenal, in his first comments on the issue since taking office.

In statement, the Arms Control Association said Trump's position was misguided: “Mr. Trump's comments suggest, once again, that he is ill-informed about nuclear weapons and has a poor understanding of the unique dangers of nuclear weapons.”

“The history of the cold war shows us that no one comes out on ‘top of the pack’ of an arms race and nuclear brinkmanship.”

(Source: *The Guardian*)

UN slams Israel for ‘lenient sentence’ handed down to soldier

The United Nations has slammed the Israeli regime for a “lenient sentence” handed down to an Israeli soldier over the killing of a Palestinian.

“We are deeply disturbed at the lenient sentence that's been given by the Tel Aviv Military Court earlier this week to an Israeli soldier who was convicted of unlawfully killing a wounded Palestinian in an apparent extrajudicial execution,” said Ravina Shamdasani, the spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, during a news briefing in Geneva on Friday.

On March 24, 2016, Israeli Sergeant Elor Azaria shot Abdel Fattah al-Sharif point-blank in the head in Tel Rumeida neighborhood of al-Khalil (Hebron) in what has been de-

scribed by the UN as an “extrajudicial execution” of a young man who was already shot and incapacitated.

“A sentence of 18 months to be handed down for such a serious human rights violation is unacceptable,” the UN official said, adding that “the punishment, which is excessively lenient, is difficult to reconcile with the intentional killing of an unarmed and prone individual.”

The UN rights official said Israeli officials had been contacted numerous times over the impunity of Israeli military forces and the disproportionate sentences handed by Israeli courts.

Nearly 280 Palestinians have lost their lives at the hands of Israeli soldiers since September 2015, when tensions in-

tensified after Tel Aviv regime forces imposed restrictions on the entry of Palestinian worshipers into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East al-Quds (Jerusalem).

“More than 200 Palestinians have been killed since the most recent upsurge in violence began in the West Bank in September 2015. Sergeant Azaria is the only member of the Israeli security forces to have been brought to trial for such a killing,” the UN official said.

Palestinians say the short prison sentence handed down to Azaria proves that the Tel Aviv regime condones violence, giving its forces the “green light” to commit more crimes against Palestinians.

(Source: *Press TV*)

Srinivas Kuchibhotla: U.S. murder possible hate crime

A U.S. man has been charged with murder after opening fire in a crowded bar in Kansas, killing an Indian man and wounding two other men in an attack some witnesses said was racially motivated.

Srinivas Kuchibhotla, 32, died at a hospital while Alok Madasani, 32, and Ian Grillot, 24, were in a stable condition after the attack on Wednesday night in Olathe, Kansas.

Witnesses said the gunman shouted “get out of my country” before he opened fire.

Barman Garret Bohnen told the Kansas City Star newspaper that Kuchibhotla and Madasani had stopped at the bar for a drink once or twice a week.

“From what I understand when he [the gunman] was throwing racial slurs at the two gentlemen, Ian stood up for them,” Bohnen said.

Suspect Adam Purinton was taken into custody on Thursday and later charged, authorities said.

Asked if the shooting could be a hate crime, FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) special agent Eric Jackson told a news conference it was too early to determine.

Kuchibhotla was a software engineer at Rockwell Collins, an avionics and information technology company, his manager Rod Larson told the newspaper.

“He was very sharp, a top-of-his-class kind of guy,” Larson said. “His personality was exceptional. He was the kind of employee every manager would want. I couldn't say anything slightly bad about Srinivas.”

India's Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj tweeted “I am shocked”, and said she would help the family to bring the 32-year-old's body back to Hyderabad.

Grillot said in an interview from his hospital bed that when the shooting broke out, he hid until nine shots had been fired and he thought the suspect's

gun magazine was empty.

“I got up and proceeded to chase him down, try to subdue him,” Grillot said in a video posted on the Kansas City Star's website. “I got behind him and he turned around and fired a round at me.”

Grillot said the bullet went through his hand and into his chest, just missing a major artery.

“It's not about where he [the victim] was from or his ethnicity,” Grillot said. “We're all humans, so I just did what was right to do.”

United States Senator Jerry Moran of Kansas posted a statement on Facebook about the shooting, expressing concern for the safety of other immigrants.

“I strongly condemn violence of any kind, especially if it is motivated by prejudice and xenophobia,” Moran said.

A GoFundMe page has been set up to collect money to fly Kuchibhotla's body to India. The page has crossed its original

\$150,000 goal, raising nearly \$200,000 in eight hours.

The U.S. embassy in New Delhi condemned the shooting.

“The United States is a nation of immigrants and welcomes people from across the world to visit, work, study, and live,” MaryKay Carlson, the U.S. charge d'affaires, said in a statement.

“U.S. authorities will investigate thoroughly and prosecute the case, though we recognise that justice is small consolation to families in grief.”

Hate crimes against Muslims in the U.S. shot up 67 percent in 2015 to their highest levels since the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, according to FBI statistics released in 2016.

Overall, 57 percent of the 5,850 reported incidents were motivated by race or ethnicity, while 20 percent were related to religion.

(Source: *agencies*)

Can you make money in a collapse of the euro?

➡ A pair of almost identical zero-coupon bonds issued by Deutsche Bank in 1996 show both the possibilities and the drawbacks. They promise to repay in 2026, one of them in the “legal tender of the Republic of Italy,” and one in Germany's currency. Investors who expect a breakup can buy the Deutschmark bond in the hope of being paid back in a far more valuable currency. Those confident that the euro will stay together can pick up 0.2 percentage points a year of extra yield by buying the lire bond, and be paid at the end in euros. Compare this with 2012, when the Greek crisis made a euro breakup seem to many to be imminent, and the lire bonds yielded a full percentage point more.

If 0.2 points seems like a paltry premium for Italian currency risk, it is. Italian 10-year government bonds offer a premium over German bunds of almost 2 percentage points, and while that includes default risk as well as currency redenomination risk, the spread between the two is much easier to trade. The lack of trading in obscure corporate bonds gives them a wide bid-offer spread, and most of the bonds would be impossible to buy in significant size.

Worse, in a euro breakup scenario, banks would suffer horribly as their cross-border exposures fell out of balance. Almost all the outstanding pre-euro bonds are from banks.

Euro-denominated bonds that are governed by

international law offer a different form of protection: the English courts. Michal Jezek, a credit strategist at Deutsche Bank, estimates that a bit less than half of Italian corporate bonds and a third of French corporate bonds are under English law.

Even these are rife with legal uncertainty, because of the question of what would follow a French or Italian exit from the euro. If the euro disappeared altogether, the legal principle of *Lex monetae*, or “the law of the currency,” would lead to each bond being redenominated into its national currency -- although complexities would abound for a euro bond issued by the Dutch subsidiary of a French company, for example.

If the euro continued to exist in some form, the international courts would have to decide whether the euros the bond promised to pay were French euros, which would turn into francs, or European euros, which don't.

“You have to ask whether the word ‘euro’ [in a bond contract] is a reference to the lawful currency for the time being of France or Germany or whether it meant ‘the single currency,’” says Tolek Petch, a solicitor at U.K.-based law firm Slaughter & May and author of a book on the law of euro breakup. If the former, English law would convert the bond into francs or Deutschmarks, just as local law would; if the latter, the bond would stay in the rumple euro.

The decision might come down to how the bond was

sold, Mr. Petch suggests, with a wide syndication by international banks in London probably staying as euros, while a Paris issue to French investors would be more likely to be treated as francs, even if sold under English law.

For the moment, investors are sidestepping these issues and trading the French election as a bet on French government bonds versus Germany's. On Wednesday, the withdrawal of centrist candidate Francois Bayrou was seen as a blow to the chances of far-right candidate Marine Le Pen, and French bonds narrowed the yield gap over German bonds.

Even this trade has some legal uncertainty, as Germany could slash its government debt after a breakup and rise in the Deutschmark by repaying in a now-cheaper euro-equivalent basket of currencies.

Ms. Le Pen's chances of winning the French presidency, pushing a referendum bill through a hostile parliament and then persuading the French people to vote to ditch the euro are slim, to put it mildly. Italy's Five Star Movement may be a more potent threat to the euro's future, although Italian elections haven't yet been scheduled. If “Frexit” or “Italexit” start to look like a serious prospect, bondholders will rapidly re-discover the importance of governing law and legal definitions of currencies -- and the deep uncertainty they bring with them.

(Source: *Wall Street Journal*)

North Korea mocks China for ‘dancing to U.S. tune’

North Korea has lashed out at its only real ally, accusing China of “dancing to the tune of the U.S.” over its decision not to import any more coal from the country.

Without naming China, KCNA, North Korea's official state news agency, said on Thursday a “neighboring country” had taken “inhumane steps” to block trade.

On Friday, the Global Times, a provocative state-sanctioned tabloid, shot back. It said the ban had “left Pyongyang reeling with pain and fury.”

“Beijing routinely finds itself on the frontlines in terms of worldwide attention. Just as it does in the same calm and steadfast fashion with which it handles the Trump administration, Beijing will always be confident when it comes to tackling tough issues with Pyongyang,” the Global Times said.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs was more measured in its response, with a spokesman saying it was ready to work with North Korea “for healthy and sound development” of bilateral relations.

China said on Saturday it would halt all coal imports from North Korea through the end of 2017, with the statement coming on the heels of Pyongyang's most recent missile test.

Analysts said the move showed that Beijing was fed up with the Pyongyang regime.

Coal is North Korea's main export and an important source of foreign currencies for its fragile economy. Most of North Korea's exported coal is shipped to China -- its main ally and economic benefactor.

“This country, styling itself a big power, is dancing to the tune of the U.S. while defending its mean behavior with such excuses that it was meant not to have a negative impact on the living of the people in the DPRK but to check its nuclear program,” the KCNA report said.

■ Utterly childish

China's Ministry of Commerce said the decision was made to comply with a United Nations Security Council resolution that China helped draft and pass last November.

Resolution 2321 imposed some of the toughest sanctions yet against the North Korean regime, after it disregarded an earlier UN test ban, detonating what it said was a nuclear warhead in September 2016.

The resolution included an explicit target of reducing coal imports by 62%, said Kevin Gray, a reader in international studies at the University of Sussex in Britain.

Gray said the ban could also be read as a form of “payoff” for the United States President Donald Trump's recent acceptance of the One China policy.

Trump has repeatedly called on China to take a tougher line on its unpredictable neighbor.

In an interview with Reuters news agency published Thursday, Trump said that China has “tremendous control” over North Korea and could “solve the problem.”

“I have had a very good phone call with President Xi and I have had very good talks with him and the call is a start,” Trump said in response to a question on China's coal ban.

“But we have a very big problem and a very dangerous problem for the world with North Korea.”

Analysts, however, say Trump may overestimate how much sway China has over its unruly neighbor.

Relations between Pyongyang and Beijing have been frosty since Kim Jong Un succeeded his late father as dictator, promptly purging several key government figures -- such as his uncle Jang Song Thaek -- with strong ties to China.

The murder of the Kim's older brother in Malaysia, who was living in China and advocated Chinese-style economic reforms, is likely to have further soured ties.

However, North Korea appeared untroubled by China's latest move, saying the ban would have little effect on its nuclear weapons program.

“It is utterly childish to think that the DPRK would not manufacture nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic rockets if a few penny of money is cut off,” the KCNA report said.

(Source: *CNN*)

Over 12,000 civilians killed in Saudi war

Almost two years into the House of Saud regime war on Yemen, a rights NGO (non-governmental organization) says the Saudi regime's military campaign has cost the lives of more than 12,000 civilians.



In a report released on Thursday, Yemen's Legal Center for Rights and Development, an independent monitoring group, put the civilian death toll in war-torn country at 12,041.

The fatalities, it said, comprise 2,568 children and 1,870 women.

The rights body said the bombings have also wounded 20,001 civilians, including 2,354 children and 1,960 women, while more than four million others have been displaced.

Recounting the damage to Yemen's already-flimsy infrastructure, the center said Saudi regime strikes had razed 270 medical centers, 25 media institutes, more than 402,076 houses and 706 mosques.

Armed with American and British ammunition and European warplanes, among other Western-supported military hardware, the kingdom launched the campaign against Yemen in March 2015.

The offensive is aimed at reinstalling the former Yemeni government, a close Riyadh ally.

(Source: *Press TV*)

Giant-killers and goal gluts

A hypersonic hat-trick by the Bay of Biscay and an insane game by the Pennines feature in FIFA.com's latest stats review, along with an almighty upset and a pioneering female coach.

103 years: that is how long had passed since Queens Park Rangers became the last non-league side to reach the FA Cup quarter-finals until Lincoln City repeated the feat on Saturday. The Imps, founded in 1884 and now in the English fifth tier, played in front of 482 spectators two months ago against Nantwich Town, but they were not overwhelmed playing in front of close to 20,000 against Premier League opposition on Saturday. Sean Raggett's unanswered, last-gasp goal came with Lincoln's only shot on target at Burnley, and made them only the third non-league



team in history to eliminate four league sides in an FA Cup campaign. Lincoln's reward was a last-eight date with Arsenal, whom they beat 1-0 in their last meeting – albeit 102 years ago.

20 matches is what it took Sydney FC to suffer their first loss of the 2016/17 A-League season, with their dream of becoming the first team in history to survive a regular-season campaign without defeat ending in the backyard of their bitterest rivals. Western Sydney Wanderers had this term won just one of nine home games, while Sydney FC had scored ten goals in their previous three visits. However, Vedran Janjetovic and Brendon Santalab – both former Sky Blues players – kept a clean sheet and scored the only goal respectively to grab the Wanderers their first victory in the Sydney Derby in ten attempts. Sydney FC now require 11 points from their remaining seven outings to break Western Sydney's record for most points in a 27-round campaign.

8 goals is what made Manchester City's 5-3 defeat of Monaco the highest-scoring first leg of a knockout tie in UEFA Champions League history. The last time part one of a knockout tie in Europe's top club competition produced more goals was in 1990 – the group stage did not exist in the European Cup – when Emilio Butragueno and Hugo Sanchez helped Real Madrid smash Swarovski Tirol 9-1 in the second round. Kylian Mbappe, at 18 years and two months, became the second-youngest Frenchman to score in the tournament – after a 17-year-old Karim Benzema – to give Monaco a 2-1 lead. Falcao then missed a chance to double the lead when Willy Caballero ensured Manchester City's goalkeepers have saved the last five penalties they have faced in the Champions League. Falcao did atone by converting a breathtaking chip to complete his double, make it as many goals in Manchester on Tuesday night as he did during a year at Old Trafford, and put Monaco 3-2 up. City nevertheless netted thrice in 11 minutes to emerge victorious, with Sergio Aguero's brace taking him joint-third on the list of the Champions League's highest-scoring South Americans, level with Rivaldo (27) and behind Kaka (30) and Lionel Messi (93).

4 minutes and 43 seconds is what it took Kevin Gameiro to score La Liga's fastest hat-trick in 22 years. It narrowly beat the treble David Villa netted for Valencia against Athletic Bilbao in 2006, and was shy only of the one Bebeto bagged for Deportivo La Coruna against Albacete – in just under four minutes – in 1995. It took Yannick Carrasco merely 13 seconds into the second half to put Atletico Madrid ahead at Sporting Gijon on Saturday – it was the quickest goal after the restart in La Liga since Recreativo Huelva's Javier Camunas stunned Numancia in 2009. Sporting Gijon equalised immediately, but Gameiro became only the fourth substitute in La Liga history to score a hat-trick to power Atleti to a 4-1 win that extended their unbeaten run in the competition to eight matches. The 29-year-old France forward started and scored in Los Rojiblanco's 4-2 success at Bayer Leverkusen in the UEFA Champions League on Tuesday. Gameiro has now posted five goals in his last 142 minutes of action.

0 women had coached a men's team in continental club competition until Chan Yuen Ting became the first. A teenage crush on David Beckham got the 28-year-old interested in football, and she admitted to crying when England, whom her idol was captaining, lost 2-1 to Luiz Felipe Scolari's Brazil in the 2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan™ quarter-finals. Ironically, Chan found herself coaching against Scolari – there was a 40-year age gap between them – as Eastern SC and Guangzhou Evergrande did battle in the AFC Champions League. The Hongkongers, who were once coached by Bobby Moore, ultimately finished the contest having had two players sent off in a 7-0 defeat.

Quick hits
29 years and 210 days was the age that made Hoffenheim coach Julian Nagelsmann younger than the average age of the team he was pitting his wits against (Darmstadt's average age was two weeks' older) – a German Bundesliga first.

6 clean sheets: that is what Feyenoord achieved to become the first team in the Dutch Eredivisie's 61-year history to begin a calendar year with. Brad Jones, for his part, became the Rotterdam giants' first goalkeeper since Ed de Goey in 1996/97 to keep 14 shutouts in a season.

(Source: FIFA)

Mats Hummels on life at Bayern, Carlo Ancelotti and winning titles

With a five-point advantage at the top of the Bundesliga, a 5-1 lead over Arsenal FC from the first leg of their UEFA Champions League tie and a DFB Cup quarter-final against FC Schalke 04 to look forward to, the 2016/17 season appears to be going according to plan for FC Bayern Munich.

To be in such a strong position approaching March is one of the reasons why Mats Hummels agreed to trade the black and yellow of Borussia Dortmund for the red and white of Bayern in the summer.

Back where his career began, Hummels spoke to bundesliga.com to discuss how far he has come and how far he hopes to go as Bayern prepare to face Hamburger SV in their next Bundesliga fixture this weekend.

■ Mats Hummels, you joined Bayern from Dortmund in the summer. Have your expectations been met?

I think so. For me personally, everything's gone well. I found my feet quickly, which was certainly helped by knowing some of the team and the coaches already. Many of my friends and family still live in Munich.

■ How do you assess the season so far?

The results have been in keeping with what we wanted to achieve. We're top of the Bundesliga and have a good chance in all the three competitions we're in. Of course there's always room to improve. We always want to get better and be even more dominant.

■ You didn't move abroad or have to learn a new language, but changing clubs is still not necessarily simple...

Well, I already knew some people here, which gives you a positive feeling right from the start and made things easier. I didn't arrive as a young player looking to build on little experience. But the whole package was ideal, which has been the main reason for this good start.

■ You came to Munich as the captain of a well-known club. A captain is expected to be a top earner with the power to speak on certain situations. Was it difficult to have a slightly different role at Bayern?

I've never been one to express my opinions loudly on the training ground. Of course it's sometimes necessary to make yourself heard. As with other teams, we also talk a lot together, and I give my opinion when I feel it's necessary. We do this in smaller groups, though. We have an excellent captain in Philipp Lahm, who's vastly experienced and fulfils the role very well.



■ Do you ever have to bite your tongue?

Perhaps there has been the odd situation where I might have said something like a captain. In Munich, however, there are so many experienced players and a coach with great international experience. When I think of something, most of the time somebody else has already thought of it too! (laughs). This is a comfortable situation for me.

■ Have you changed your game at Bayern?

I may not play a long ball as often as before, because that's not necessary given the playing style of our strikers. On the whole, though, a centre-back's duties rarely change.

■ Some suggest that Bayern are not as dominant as in previous years, but results would suggest otherwise...

It's difficult for me to draw comparisons because I wasn't here before last summer. It may be possible that Bayern aren't as dominant as before. In general, however, I get the impression that across Europe a

lot of the top teams are less dominant this season. Perhaps more and more teams are simply very well organised. This is also true in the Bundesliga. Sometimes there are surprise results, too, which are great for the fans.

■ What do you make of Carlo Ancelotti? In recent years you had a lively coach in the shape of Jürgen Klopp. Ancelotti seems to be the opposite...

This is a question of personality. Carlo Ancelotti has had a lot of experience in professional football - more than 20 years. He seems to exude peace and calm. This doesn't mean that he fails to intervene if he sees the need, but he does this in his own way.

■ Apparently you enjoy football both as a professional and as a fan, watching games at home as often as possible?

That's right! There are occasional days when I can rest and regenerate at the same time the football's on. Watching it helps me relax. I've been watching as much as possible recently: Bundesliga 2,

the Bundesliga, the evening game. I even watch the second tier game on Monday when it's on.

■ You once said you feel like you are 33 years old...

I said that after the sixth day of the winter training camp! (laughs) Everyone feels exhausted then. We worked hard. Everyone was feeling older.

■ What age do you plan to play until? Former Bayern star Ze Roberto is still playing well into his 40s...

That's not something for me! (laughs) But I don't have a strict career plan. I still have a few years to go and we can see how it goes.

■ And back to the present, how do you see this season going?

We can only tally up our points at the end of the season. At the moment we're doing well in all competitions and can still win all the titles available to us. This is certainly our goal, but we're not the only ones.

(Source: Bundesliga)

Leicester should name stadium after sacked Ranieri - Mourinho

Leicester City should honour sacked title-winning manager Claudio Ranieri by naming their stadium after him, Manchester United's Jose Mourinho said on Friday as English football reacted to news of his shock departure.

Ranieri was axed on Thursday, 298 days after he pulled off one of the most remarkable stories in world sport by leading 5,000-1 outsiders Leicester to the Premier League title.

Even in the precarious world of football management Ranieri's fall from favour was extraordinary and managers expressed their solidarity on Friday.

Mourinho, himself sacked by Chelsea in December 2015 having taken the club to the title the season before, said Ranieri "wrote the most beautiful history" in the Premier League.

"He deserves the Leicester stadium to be named 'Claudio Ranieri Stadium'," he told reporters, sporting the initials CR on his shirt during his news conference.

"I was sacked as a champion (by Chelsea), a giant negative as I thought - peanuts compared to Claudio. He is paying for his success," he said.

Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp likened Ranieri's sacking to the extraordinary political events of 2016.



"Am I surprised that things like this can happen? No. Not just in football," Klopp, whose side go to Leicester on Monday, told a news conference. "There have been a few strange decisions in 16/17 - Brexit, Trump and Ranieri.

Antonio Conte, whose Chelsea side are favourites to take Leicester's title, added his tribute.

"He reached a dream to win the title, I'm disappointed as a friend and as a coach," he told reporters. "Very, very sad."



♥ @alirezahaghighi_official Fast Recovery with The Best And Positive Person "Prof Dr. Gumbiller". ...

♥ @luisnani Nice moment at the end of the match! Cheers bro @cristiano ...

♥ @juventus Respect between two legends. ...

Alireza Haghighi dreams of playing in World Cup again

S P O R T S **d e s k** Alireza Haghighi, who was Iran's No. 1 in 2014 FIFA World Cup, is currently without a team while an injury is the latest blow he has suffered.

Haghighi became the first Iranian goalkeeper to join a European club when he signed for Russian outfit Rubin Kazan back in 2012 although he failed to make a single top team appearance in an ill-fated two-year stint.

He then moved to play for Covilho and Penafiel in Portugal before signing for Maritimo in January 2016. After having appeared to claim the starting job in pre-season the arrival of Brazilian Eduardo Gottardi led him to terminate his contract with the club.

"Maritimo was one of the worst experiences in my career. Fortunately there was a term in my contract which allowed me to leave the club but the transfer window was closed and I couldn't move to another club. However I had two offers from Portuguese teams but I didn't want to stay in Portugal anymore.

"After I left Maritimo, Sunderland was the first team who offered me a contract as a second choice keeper but I was eager to have more playing time so I rejected it.

"During the last week of December I got two offers, one from Championship side Wigan Athletic and another one was Port Vale in Championship. Wigan's second choice keeper who was on loan from Liverpool got injured and the club officials offered me a contract but at the end some tax issue blocked my move to the team.

"A couple of days later I was on the verge of joining Port Vale and I even signed the contact but then it was another misfortune. The club haven't got the permission to sign a non-European player as they had never signed a non-EU player before.

"It was not the end of the story as I took part in the training session of a Greek Super League side. Everything was going well and I was on the verge of signing a contact when I got injured in a friendly match playing for them.



"Meanwhile I had some offers from Iranian clubs Naft Tehran, Sepahan and Tractor Sazi but I can't see myself playing in any other shirt except Persepolis.

Haghighi, who has not been invited to Team Melli squad by Carlos Queiroz in the recent call ups, believes

that he can play for Iran in the World Cup again.

"After all this I've not lost my hope. Now I'm recovering from injury and I keep working hard in order to get back on the pitch. I want to return to Iran national team and play in the World Cup again," he concluded.

Ansarifard shines in Europa League, Rostov handed Man United draw

S P O R T S **d e s k** Greek champions Olympiacos have progressed into the UEFA Europa League Round of 16 after humiliating Turkish club Osmanlispor 3-0, courtesy of two goals from Iranian star Karim Ansarifard in his European competition debut.

Olympiacos handed a fair draw as they will face another Turkish side Besiktas in the round of 16.

Rostov, who have got another Iranian striker Sardar Azmoun in his squad, set up a comfortable 5-1 aggregate win over Sparta Prague and booked their place in the round of sixteen.

The Russian club handed a tough draw as they will take on three-time European champions Manchester United in the round of 16.

Rostov dropped into the Europa League after finishing third in a Champions League group containing Atletico Madrid, Bayern Munich and PSV Eindhoven.



"It is a bad draw in every aspect," said Mourinho. "It is far and difficult -and comes in a bad period."

"They had a very good Champions League campaign," added Mourinho.

"They beat Ajax and Anderlecht in qualifiers, managed important results against Bayern and Atletico, got third position to knock PSV out.

"The team is very defensive and physical. A bad draw." Here is the full draw:

Celta Vigo (Spain) v FC Krasnodar (Russia)
Apoel FC (Cyprus) v Anderlecht (Belgium)
Schalke (Germany) v Borussia Moenchengladbach (Germany)
Olympique Lyon (France) v Roma (Italy)
Rostov (Russia) v Manchester United (England)
Olympiacos (Greece) v Besiktas (Turkey)
Gent (Belgium) v Genk (Belgium)
FC Copenhagen (Denmark) v Ajax (Netherlands)

Tractor Sazi beat Siahjamegan in Iran Professional League

S P O R T S **d e s k** Tractor Sazi defeated Siahjamegan thanks to a late goal from Farzad Hatami in 22nd round of Iran Professional League (IPL) on Friday.

In the match held in Mashhad's Samen Stadium, Hossein Badamaki gave the led the hosts but Mohammadreza Mehdizadeh cancelled out his goal just before the interval.

With one minute remaining, Farzad Hatami scored the winning goal with a header.

The match was originally scheduled for last week but postponed due to heavy snow.

Tractor Sazi remain second, six points adrift of IPL table-topper Persepolis.

"Siahjamegan played very well but



we could earn three points in the last minute of the match. I am satisfied with my players," Tractor Sazi coach Amir Ghalenoei said.

Iran, Romania football federations ink MoU

The Iranian and Romanian football federations signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) as part of efforts to boost cooperation between the two countries.

The MoU was signed on Thursday at the headquarters of Iran Football Federation in Tehran, the capital of Iran.

The signing saw the participation of Iranian Football Federation president, Mehdi Taj, and his counterpart Razvan Burleanu.

"Iran and Romania football have so many common characteristics, and the European country is available to travel for our teams," Taj said.

"To develop football in the various areas focusing on the area of girls and women's football development, coaching, and refereeing are our priorities," he added.



Iran can also help Romania in beach soccer and futsal since the teams have won medals in the last year, Taj stated.

(Source: Tasnim)

Beach volleyball going from strength to strength in Iran

Last week's successful Kish Island 3-Star FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour event is a cornerstone of the Iran Volleyball Federation's plans to develop beach volleyball at the heart of the Persian Gulf and beyond.

The federation is now seeking to strengthen its coaching staff in a bid to take its beach volleyball teams to the next level. The successful candidate will be responsible for organising training camps between events on the international circuit, and the ability to set up a training programme around the events in Europe, which traditionally hosts a high number of competitions, will be key. Qualified candidates should contact the Iran Volleyball Federation directly.

Volleyball is an immensely popular sport in the country and the Iran Federation's ambition is to push beach volleyball up to the same heights. The second edition of the World Tour event in Kish Island is part of a long-term plan for beach volleyball in Iran - it is also a natural development for the sport following the country's participation in the Asian Volleyball Confederation's beach volleyball programme.



Kish Island provides an ideal setting for beach volleyball and the federation has invested in infrastructure for the sport locally. And with a young population and six thousand kilometres of coastline on

the Persian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and Caspian Sea, Iran is ideally suited to the sport.

There has also been a new emphasis on providing training for players and coaches with the introduction of a beach volleyball league last year.

The event in Kish Island has helped promote beach volleyball to a wider audience in the country. And local youngsters made the most of the event to spend time with some of the teams participating in the tournament. "A target is very important for everybody," said Iran Federation President Dr. Mohammad Reza Davarzani.

"When kids see they can go to the Olympics and to high level championships, they will try to prepare. When children see players here, it is a motivation."

For Davarzani, hosting the world's best beach volleyball players in Kish Island also provides local players with an opportunity to learn and gain more experience. And the federation's ambitious plans aim to get Iranian beach volleyball teams to the top of the sport very soon.

(Source: FIVB)

Persepolis and Al Hilal's opposing styles evened things out

Persepolis and Al Hilal's 2017 AFC Champions League meeting in Muscat on Tuesday saw the clash of two sides with vastly opposing styles end in deadlock with a 1-1 draw. Table-toppers in their respective leagues, both sides move on with confidence following 90 minutes where both sides will feel they executed their tactical plans to perfection.



Saudi-side Al Hilal sought to impose themselves from the start, dominating possession from the start to end with 58.6% of the ball over the course of the tie. The Blue Wave spent a lot of the match in the front foot, attempting 18 crosses to their opponents' six and carving out the clearer of the game's opportunities.

However, for all of Al Hilal's dominance of the ball it was their Iranian rivals who looked set for the win until Carlos Eduardo's late headed intervention. Playing on the counterattack throughout, Persepolis created more shooting chances than their rivals over the course of the 90 minutes and got three shots on target to their rivals' two. Branko Ivankovic will surely be delighted with his side's excellent use of their limited possession.

Particularly important to the team were Mohsin Mosalman (pictured right) and Ramin Rezaeian on either side of the midfield diamond. With Kamaledin Kamyabinia holding at the base of midfield, the duo were expected to provide additional defensive cover while also shuttling forward to support the side's attacking trio when possible.

It was a responsibility they managed to execute to perfection, with Mosalman pushing forward more to eventually score his side's one goal on the night having previously gone close. Rezaeian, meanwhile, was the side's defensive enforcer with his tally of four tackles more than any of the game's other participants. With Hilal threatening to pin their opponents back, the duo's energy was crucial to Persepolis maintaining an attacking threat throughout.

The duo's role was particularly important given their opponents' determination to push their full-backs forward to support the attack. Both Yasir Al Shahrani (left) and Mohammed Al-Burayk (right) were integral to Hilal's attempts to make the pitch as wide as possible in their build up play in order to create space for their attacking team-mates. Only midfielder Salman Al Faraj (99) enjoyed more touches of the ball than Al-Burayk (96) and Al Shahrani (98) on the night.

Both Mosalman and Rezaeian, then, were particularly important in providing protection to their defence with Al Hilal's trio of creative players behind the striker seeking to utilise the space created by their advanced full-backs. The duo's diligent support for Kamyabinia saw their direct opponents' contributions limited, with Carlos Eduardo, Nawaf Al Abid and Nicolas Milei limited to just two shots from open play over the 90 minutes.

By allowing Al Hilal into wide areas and crowding the center of the park, Persepolis were able to comfortably negate their opponents as an attacking threat for long periods of the game. It was then up to Mosalman in particular, as the more offensive of the duo, to lead the charge forward on his side's behalf. With 45.8% of his passes heading in a forward direction, Mosalman was the most vertical of his side's midfield players while maintaining a pass completion percentage of 79.2%. His forward drive eventually led to his 68th minute drive giving Persepolis the lead heading into the game's final stages.



While his side were eventually able to equalize, Al Hilal coach Ramon Diaz will be disappointed with the ease Persepolis were able to restrict the number of clear opportunities. With the exception of a header from a free-kick shortly before half-time, Hilal were largely unable to carve out clear cut chances prior to their 82nd minute equalizer. Having reached the knockout stages in each of the last eight editions of the tournament, they will once more be among the fancied sides this year but will need to offer more in attack than they showed on this occasion if they are to go deep in this edition of the competition.

(Source: the-afc.com)

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NEWS IN BRIEF



Iranian doc “Janbal” to compete in CPH: DOX

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian documentary “Janbal” directed by Mina Bozorgmehr and Hadi Kamali-Moqaddam will go on screen at the Next Wave section of the Copenhagen International Documentary Festival – CPH: DOX, which will be held in the Danish capital from March 16 to 26.

“Janbal” is about the inner fantasy world of Musa, an artist who lives on the island of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf. CPH: DOX is the third largest documentary film festival in the world.

WHAT’S IN ART GALLERIES

Calligraphic painting

■ Sobhan Gallery is showcasing calligraphic paintings by Mohammadreza Javadinasab in an exhibition entitled “How Far Will This Motif on the Wall Take Me”.

The exhibition will run until March 3 at the gallery located at 4 Besat Dead End, Pishtaz Alley, off Abbasi St. off Sadr Highway.

Painting

■ An exhibition of paintings by Omid Hallaj is currently underway at Iranshahr Gallery. The exhibition entitled “Confessional” will run until March 17 at the gallery located at 69 Sepand St., off Karim Khan Ave.

■ Paintings by Mohammad Khalili, Arash Emdadian, Aidin Khankeshipur, Jaleh Talebpur, Atusa Jan-Nesari, Vajid Amini and Afshin Chizari are on display in an exhibition at Hoor Gallery. The exhibit named “Mount Qaf” runs until March 13 at the gallery, which can be found at 12 Naeimi Alley, North Mirza Shirazi Ave., off Motahhari St.

Multimedia

■ Seyhun Gallery 2 is playing host to an exhibition of paintings, sculptures and performance art by a group of artists including Marjan Torabi, Mojgan Habibi, Maryam Razavi, Leili Ameri, Elham Alirezai and Maryam Kuhestani. The exhibition named “Avat” runs until March 8 at the gallery located at 24 Sinai Alley, off Keyhan St. and Moqaddas-e Ardabili Ave.

Photo

■ Photos by Hamid Mahdavi and Pegah Qadiri are currently on display in an exhibition at Ruberu Gallery. The exhibition named “Silence” will run until March 10 at the gallery that can be found at 7 Kianpur Alley, Enqelab Ave.

■ A collection of photos by Tayyebeh Ezzatollahinejad is on display at Barsam Gallery. The exhibition will run until March 1 at the gallery located at 22 Parastu St., Vali-e Asr Ave.

French artist to live enclosed in block of stone for a week

PARIS (Reuters) — French artist Abraham Poincheval embarked on a new feat on Wednesday by enclosing himself inside a block of stone for a week, adding to the two weeks he previously spent inside a sculpture of a bear.

Poincheval is to live entombed in a body-shaped slot carved out from a limestone boulder from Feb. 22 to March 1, at Paris' Palais de Tokyo contemporary art museum.

He will eat stewed fruit, soups and purees stashed in cubby holes inside the stone block, which is also equipped with an air vent and items such as a log book.

The artist, who has made a name for himself living in enclosed spaces, told journalists that the best way to understand objects was not from a distance but by entering them.

Italian maestro Damiano Giuranna’s new master classes restart in Tehran

A R T **TEHRAN** — A new series of master d e s k classes by Italian maestro Damiano Giuranna restarted at the Culture and Art Applied Science University in Tehran on Friday.

Topics on conducting are scheduled to be discussed at the classes, which will end on Sunday, the university announced in a press release on Thursday.

Last December, Giuranna who is the conductor of the World Youth Orchestra held master classes at the university on violin, viola and orchestral performance.

The master classes are being organized based on an agreement signed between the university and the World Youth Orchestra, which is located in Rome.

Based on the agreement, a number of Iranian students will be selected to attend master classes and also to perform with the World Youth Orchestra in future concerts.

The master classes have been arranged in collaboration with the 5Khat Music Academy in Tehran.

Last August, the World Youth Orchestra performed joint concerts with the Tehran Symphony Orchestra at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall.

Seventy-five young musicians from the five continents founded the orchestra in 2001.



Italian maestro Damiano Giuranna conducts musicians from the World Youth Orchestra and the Tehran Symphony Orchestra during a joint concert at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on August 10, 2016. (Honaronline/Bahareh Asadi)

German pianist Martin Kohlstedt performs in Tehran

A R T **TEHRAN** — The d e s k young German experimental pianist Martin Kohlstedt gave an improvised performance in Tehran’s Rudaki Hall on Thursday.

Kohlstedt, who said he was happy to be in Iran, continued his performance with a composition recalling his childhood. His performance was filled with mystery, joy and excitement, the Persian service of Honaronline reported on Friday.

Addressing the audience, he explained that most of his music is created continuously on the spur of the moment and actually, each piece depends on the audience and the country in which he gives his performance.

He continued with a composition about which he said he had no idea how it would turn out. However, it was a cheerful and energetic piece.

Kohlstedt also said that he met



Iranian pianist Peyman Yazdanian the day before and he was happy to call him on stage for the performance.

Yazdanian accompanied Kohlstedt on stage for a joint performance, receiving rapturous applause from the audience. The two gave their improvised performance, and a quick and energetic piece it was.

The entire performance was part of the first Saba Music Festival, a festival established by the Music College of the Academy of the Fine Arts of the University of Tehran and will end today.

Leader meets religious poets

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — d e s k Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei met a number of religious poets on Thursday commemorating the martyrdom of Hazrat Fatima (AS), daughter of Prophet Muhammad (S), the Leader’s official website announced on Friday.

The Leader emphasized the need for religious poetry and said, “Admiring and mourning for the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S) and his infallible household is an important part of the religious poetry but prudent and logical words must be used in this field”.

Ayatollah Khamenei said that it is religious poets’ great responsibility to connect the events of the early days of Islam to the events of the present time and added, “Prophet Muhammad (S) and his infallible household were all fighting against oppression, blasphemy and dissention, and that is why they were martyred by the cruel rulers of their time”. The Leader said, “Fighting against the



oppressors is not just restricted to swords. Today, dissemination comes first in the world, and one can fight against the oppressors through words and poetry”.

He asked the poets to make good use of Islamic rules and teachings to reinforce concepts in their works.

The Leader further expressed happiness over the development of religious poetry and the increasing number of active poets in composing religious poetry and said, “Good poetry is quite influential and everlasting and today, we need poets like Hafez and Sadi, and this is quite achievable through more study of the poetry by the great poets.”

Oscar best actor race is tale of two opposites

aggregator RottenTomatoes.com.

If all goes well for Washington, 62, he would join the likes of Meryl Streep and Jack Nicholson among a rare group of actors who have won three Oscars.

Affleck, 41, the younger brother of actor Ben Affleck, is seeking his first ever Oscar. He had swept 90 percent of prior awards and critics prizes until losing to a stunned Washington at the Screen Actors Guild ceremony in January.

Affleck’s early wins came despite 2010 sexual harassment allegations that resurfaced as his Oscar prospects gathered steam. Two civil lawsuits alleging unwanted advances were filed by female crew members on an earlier Affleck film, and were settled out of court for undisclosed sums. Affleck’s lawyer at the time denied the allegations.

“It doesn’t help, but I don’t think it’s going to be a key factor at the Oscars,” said Tim Gray, who covers awards for



Actor Denzel Washington. REUTERS/Mario Anzuoni

Hollywood trade publication Variety.

Gray likened the Affleck case to that of filmmaker Roman Polanski, who won a best director Oscar in 2002 despite a 1977 rape case.

“When Polanski got the Oscar for ‘The Pianist,’ nobody predicted he was going to win. But it felt like Academy voters were sending a message that they were voting on the work, not a person’s character,” Gray said. The other lead actor contenders --

Late David Bowie honored with two wins at BRIT Awards

LONDON (Reuters) — Late music icon David Bowie was the big winner at the BRITs in London on Wednesday, taking the British male solo artist and album of the year prizes at the UK’s top music awards.

Bowie, a pop chameleon who won legions of fans with his ground-breaking music, released his last album, “Blackstar”, days before his death from cancer at age of 69 in January 2016.

At the British Record Industry Trust (BRIT) awards, Bowie beat off competition from the likes of grime artist Skepta, rapper Kano and singer Michael Kiwanuka in both the “British male solo artist” and “Mastercard British album of the year” categories.

“He’s always been there supporting people who think they’re a little bit weird or a little bit strange, a little bit different, and he’s always been there for them,” Bowie’s son, Duncan Jones, said as he collected the album award. “This award is for all the kooks and all the people who make the kooks.”

Held in the capital’s O2 arena, the televised BRITs are the mainstream British music industry’s top awards ceremony. The evening saw performances from Katy Perry, Robbie Williams, Bruno Mars and Ed Sheeran.

Bowie, a pop chameleon who won legions of fans with his ground-breaking music, released his last album, “Blackstar”, days before his death from cancer at age of 69 in January 2016.

Perry, who wore an armband reading “Persist” when she performed the song at this month’s Grammy Awards, was joined by two giant skeletons. British media and viewers taking to social media said the skeletons appeared to be dressed in outfits similar to what U.S. President Donald Trump and British Prime Minister Theresa May wore when the two recently met in Washington.

Singer George Michael, who died in December, was honored with a tribute of his song “A Different Corner,” performed by Coldplay frontman Chris Martin. Clips of the ex-Wham! singer appeared on stage, speaking as well as singing the same song.

Rural Cuban “Van Gogh” transforms ramshackle home into art museum

MORON, CUBA (Reuters) — Lack of money has not kept Remigio Hernandez from making striking art. Without formal training or access to supplies, the Cuban artist has still managed to turn his ramshackle home into a museum featuring sculptures made from scraps of aluminum, busts molded from mud and portraits daubed onto discarded televisions.

“Museum of Baby”, in the sleepy town of Moron in central Cuba, is named after Hernandez’s late wife Barbara, or “Baby”. In one life-size sculpture, she gallops off on a white steed into paradise. In a painting, she is the Mona Lisa.

“I go looking for things thrown away in the rubbish, aluminum, cardboard, and I find ways to recycle them,” says Hernandez, dubbed locally “The Van Gogh of Moron”.

Frowning, the 64-year old says he is happy to remain penniless in a world where greed and ambition have caused so many wars and tragedies. Family and religion are his subject matter.

“I want distance myself from all that

and live dedicating my painting to poverty, humility,” he said.

“What I have is a history, and I consider history to be greater than fame or money,”

Hernandez has lived alone with his dogs since his wife died three years ago. He scrapes a living by giving cars and walls a new lick of paint or painting small landscapes and portraits.

But in a country where the average state salary is around \$25 per month, his clients give him whatever they can, sometimes just donating him leftover paint.

The artist gets basic foodstuffs from the “libreta”, or rations book, supplementing that with bananas and mangos from his back yard.

His passion for making art is all consuming. Hernandez has no mattress, just a bed frame covered with metal sheets. When an acquaintance gave him a large piece of cardboard to make it a tad more comfortable, he used it instead to paint a religious scene inspired by a canvas by El Greco.