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Azadegan oilfield's tender to be held soon: Zanganeh

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Oil desk Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh announced on Tuesday that the process for holding a tender for the development of Azadegan oilfield has been started, Shana reported. "The qualified companies have been determined and the tender will be held very soon," the minister added.

Azadegan oilfield has been the priority for the Iranian oil ministry to go on tender based on the country's new oil and gas contract model, known as IPC.

Earlier this month, Zanganeh announced that the tender for development of Azadegan oilfield will be held by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20). Anglo-Dutch Shell, France's Total, Italy's Eni, Malaysia's Petronas, Russia's Gazprom and Lukoil, Austria's OVM, Germany's Wintershall, as well as companies from Spain, Poland, China, Japan, India and some other countries were initially announced by Iran's Oil Ministry as the companies prequalified for the country's first IPC tender.

Azadegan is an oilfield Iran shares with Iraq at the western part of Iran's southwestern region of Karoun.

Iran's first tender based on the country's new model of oil contract has been already postponed several times.

Rouhani touts economic gains



Iran seals its status as truce guarantor in Syria

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran desk has officially become a country guaranteeing the truce in Syria, along with Russia and Turkey, Head of the Russian delegation and Presidential Envoy for Syrian settlement Alexander Lavrentyev said on Wednesday in Kazakhstan's capital Astana.

"Very importantly, today's consultations have resulted in the Iranian delegation's decision to officially sign a document on joining the agreement in the form of a guarantor country," the envoy said.

The next expert consultations on the Syrian peace talks will be held in Tehran in April, according to Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Akyzbek Kamaldinov. The fourth round of Astana-hosted peace talks is scheduled for May 3-4.

According to Lavrentyev, there is no threat of disruption of the intra-Syrian negotiations in Astana.

"The Astana process continues and is moving forwards. I would not talk about any threat of derailing the talks," he emphasized. "We have a lot of work to do. There are many issues concerning the ceasefire and all other issues related to the Syrian settlement, which we need to discuss. Naturally, we will do that," he said. **->2**

ARTICLE
By Hossein Askari
 Contributor Professor of Business and International Affairs at George Washington University

Trump's 'beautiful' deals with Arabs will boomerang

President Trump has said time and again that he would bring his deal-making talents, which he claims to be second to none, to his new job as president of the United States.

As with everything else, Trump has spared nothing when it comes to detailing his approach to the Middle East. He has promised much. At the press conference with Prime Minister Netanyahu, he went beyond a Palestinian-Israeli peace accord to predict "a much bigger deal, a much more important deal, in a sense. It would take many, many countries and it would cover a very large territory." He has promised to lead the fight with the support of the GCC to eradicate ISIS and all those he has labeled "Islamists." After a telephone conversation with King Salman of Saudi Arabia, a White House press release stated that the two leaders "discussed an invitation from the king for President Trump to lead a Middle East effort to defeat terrorism and to help build a new future." President Trump has stated that he will create safe zones in Syria and Yemen and he will get the Persian Gulf countries of the GCC to pay for it. He then went on to insult them by adding "because they have nothing but money." He has promised to defend Saudi Arabia against Iran if the Saudis pay for it. "Well, I would want to help Saudi Arabia. I would want to protect Saudi Arabia. But Saudi Arabia is going to have to help us economically. They were making, before the oil went down, now they're making half but they were making a billion dollars a day." He added that such action against Iran would depend "on what the deal is." He has put Iran on notice and told Iranian leaders that they are playing with fire. And he has gone out of his way to demonize Islam and applaud Sisi, the most oppressive dictator in the Middle East. Is this a coherent strategy? Will it succeed? **->6**

Lake Urmia comes back to life slowly but surely

PERSPECTIVE
By Gary Lewis
 UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative

Life has returned to the dying Salt Lake in North-West Iran. The effort to restore what had been broken is succeeding.

Returning to the barren landscape after almost four years, I was able to see water. Not nearly enough, but much more than last time. The lake is reviving. And this revival is the result of an immensely successful collaborative effort involving many players – some Iranian, some foreign.

Lake Urmia was once Iran's largest lake. In its prime, it was the second largest saltwater lake in the world. But years of man-made disruption – from the frenzy of 60 years of dam-building to the massive over-use of feeder rivers – had diverted the natural flow of sweet water from the surrounding basin into the salty lake. As a result, it simply dried out. It died at the hands of humans.

I remember standing on a dead, flat, salt bed – which is what the exposed bottom of the lake has become. The water had all gone. But the wind hadn't. And that gusting wind was whipping up all the exposed salt granules and blowing them into my face, into my lungs and onto the agricultural lands

which surround the lake. It was like what I imagined a scene from the planet Mars might resemble.

I also remember thinking that if the lake dried up two main things would happen. One is that salt from the dried lake bed would blow around and get dumped on farming land and crops in what essentially becomes a salt dustbowl in a fairly large radius around the lake. Secondly, we could expect people to get sick. For example, in the vicinity of the dried-out Aral Sea in Central Asia, we already see people afflicted with allergies and respiratory diseases including cancers.

Please read the full article on www.tehran-times.com

G20 should resist protectionism to keep markets open: Bundesbank

FRANKFURT (Reuters) - The world's top economies should recommit to maintaining open markets and cross-border trade, the head of Germany's Bundesbank said on Wednesday, challenging the new U.S. administration's more protectionist stance on the eve of a key meeting.

Finance chiefs of G20 nations, meeting in the German town of Baden-Baden on Friday and Saturday, should also push ahead with new banking rules as deregulation, advocated by the new U.S. administration, could easily sow the seeds of a fresh economic crisis, risking serious harm to prosperity, Jens Weid-

mann told a conference.

Seeking to put 'America first', U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has advocated increased trade barriers and measures to protect U.S. business interest, challenging a G20 consensus to keeping markets open, upholding cross border trade and resisting protectionism.

"It's now all the more important that these achievements are not given up," Weidmann, who also sits on the European Central Bank's Governing Council said.

"Open markets and a competitive economic system are the pillars on which the

prosperity of our economies rests," Weidmann said. "Free trade and competition result in a quantifiable increase in prosperity, particularly for those who have to consider their spending carefully."

While Trump has chastised free trade, already pulling out of a key trade deal and proposing a border tax on imports, any attempt to dilute a G20 commitment to free trade will likely face resistance, putting the onus on host nation Germany to seek a compromise.

Weidmann also warned the U.S. against easier bank regulation, arguing only for fine tuning.

ARTICLE
Katya Bohdan
 Freelance Journalist

The unfathomable soul of Iran

The very first time I travelled to Iran, I was absolutely amazed at how open and inclusive its community was, how safe the country was and how astonishingly beautiful. Sadly, it is blatantly misrepresented in most Western media, a tendency I would gladly counter as a journalist in the making.

So far I have been to Iran twice and both times I have been embraced by the Iranian community, famous for its unfaltering and sincere hospitality. Iran is an unusual, incomparable place. From a vibrant metropolis like Tehran to the ruins of Persepolis, one of the greatest civilizations of the past, Iran is a true mystery, a riddle that can't and shouldn't be solved.

One of my Iranian friends in Belgium once warned me that Iran is a dangerous place. "You see, when you go there for a first time, you will come back for a second time, and then a third, and then a fourth, and then a hundredth. It just keeps calling you back. You can't stay away". I guess he was right, because here I am once again, and I still recall his words vividly, like a mantra.

I'm only in my twenties, but I can't say I've ever been to a more compelling place than Iran. It's highly unusual for a stranger, a foreigner, to feel completely at home in a country that is not their own. But not once have I felt unwelcome or even homesick. Iranians whom I have encountered here are wonderful people. They're open and outgoing, and at the same time they're humble and generous. They adorn and contribute to the inimitable beauty of the country more than any impressive mosque or attraction.

And this is just my personal, subjective experience, of my encounters with Iranian people, of places I've visited and things I've seen. **->1**



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Iran boosting defense power ceaselessly: IRGC chief

POLITICS TEHRAN — Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari has said Iran is not wasting a moment to improve its defense capabilities as in the missile and drone industries.

"Because of the morale for defense and for countering tyranny, we have no problem in the defense arena, and are growing and developing every day in the field of defense weapons like missiles and drones," the IRGC commander said, Tasnim reported on Wednesday.



Iran envoy: Saudi Arabia needs new attitude to improve ties with Iran

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia has underlined the necessity for Saudi Arabia to change its attitude to improve relations with Tehran, Fars reported.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran dismisses any competitive attitude and confrontation with Saudi Arabia and believes that the national interests of Iran and Saudi Arabia and the interests of the region require both countries to opt for the path of talks and cooperation with pragmatism and prudence," Ali Ahani told a meeting in Paris on Wednesday.



Ex-IRIB chief to run for president

POLITICS TEHRAN — A former head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) announced on Wednesday that he would seek the presidency in the May election.

Ending months of speculation, Ezzatollah Zarghami said he has finally accepted the calls for standing as a candidate for the 12th presidential election, slated for May 19, Nasim reported.

In a short statement, the former IRIB chief said he has felt called upon to "fix" the country's management structure on a macro scale and to solve the people's problems.



200 Afghan prisoners in Iran repatriated

POLITICS TEHRAN — An Iranian judicial official in the northeastern province of Khorasan Razavi on Wednesday said that at least 200 Afghan prisoners were transferred from Iranian jails to their country to continue prison terms in their homeland.

Talking to IRNA, Deputy Prosecutor of Khorasan Razavi Mojtaba Andalib Toulai said the Afghan prisoners were repatriated according to a settlement reached on exchange of a number of prisoners between Iran and Afghanistan five years ago.

He said the Afghan officials also repatriated 23 Iranian prisoners since last March.



Parliament speaker: Better Pakistan-Iran ties to serve regional peace

POLITICS TEHRAN — The speaker of Pakistan National Assembly has stressed that stronger relations between Iran and Pakistan would serve regional peace.

"Iran and Pakistan are intertwined by stronger multi-dimensional relations," Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said in a meeting with Iran's parliamentary delegation in Islamabad, ISNA reported.

He appreciated Iran's geopolitical significance, and said, "Iran's role is central to unifying the Muslim world."

Sadiq underlined the need for pro-active parliamentary diplomacy to further cooperation between the two Muslim countries.



Ansari: Rouhani to win in first round

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani's deputy for legal affairs has said Rouhani will be the winner of the upcoming presidential election in the very first round.

Speaking to ISNA on Wednesday, Majid Ansari said his judgment was based on his "view of society", adding Rouhani "will lead with good vote".

Nevertheless, he observed that "the slandering current has prepared a lot to deface Mr. Rouhani and his government."

Commenting on Rouhani's record, he said the conclusion of the nuclear deal was even greater than the nationalization of oil.

Zarif calls on Turkey to act more 'seriously' in region



POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called on Turkey to pursue a more realistic approach to regional developments, emphasizing that "self-restraint" is an integral part of neighborhood.

"We hope our friends and brothers in Turkey take a more serious stance on regional issues," Zarif told reporters on Wednesday.

"Our relations with our neighbors are premised upon common understanding, an important part of which is self-restraint," the top diplomat added.

A recent strain between Iran and Turkey comes as an unfortunate turn, considering Iran was among the first countries sympathizing with the Erdogan administration after the failed July 15 putsch.

Late February, Tehran summoned the Turkish ambassador in Tehran over comments made by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and President Tayyip Erdogan during the Munich Security Conference.

Accusing the Islamic Republic of destabilizing the region, Erdogan and Cavusoglu questioned Iran's foreign policy in unfriendly tones.

The stance drew a strong response from Tehran, who said there is a cap to the country's patience.

Reacting to the anti-Iran comments, Zarif called Turkey an "ungrateful neighbor".

"They accuse us of sectarianism but don't remember we didn't sleep on the night of the coup," Zarif said, referring to the July 15 coup in Turkey.

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

While Tehran backs President Bashar al-Assad, Ankara demands Assad to resign unconditionally.

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

A month ago, Erdogan took his proposal to Sunni Arab states of the Persian Gulf region to create a safe zone of 3,475 square miles that includes the Syrian town of Manbij. Tehran is strongly against the safe zone initiative backed by Ankara.

Turkey's regional policies have confused Tehran, Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia-Pacific Affairs Ebrahim Rahimpour said last week.

Regional rivalry between Iran and Turkey is nothing new, but political analysts have linked Ankara's tougher rhetoric to U.S. President Donald Trump's approach to the Middle East.

Trump has been sharply critical of Iran, including a nuclear deal it clinched in 2015 with major powers, while Turkey, a NATO ally, is hoping for improved ties with Washington after a chill caused partly by U.S. criticism of Ankara's human rights record.

On March 1, Erdogan and his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani agreed to improve ties, including in the fight against terrorism.

The meeting took place on the sidelines of the Economic Cooperation Organization's 13th plenary in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Rouhani touts economic gains

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani highlighted gains in Iran's economy on Wednesday, pointing out in particular how his administration has been shoring up economic growth without too much help from oil revenues.

Rouhani made the remarks on the sidelines of the last cabinet session before the Iranian New Year, March 21, and just a little over two months before the May presidential elections.

"Now we are less reliant on oil and more on taxation, exports surpass imports, and good steps have been made toward growth," the moderate president told a clutch of reporters surrounding him.

Self-sufficiency in the production of wheat, increasing oil and gas outputs, growing gas condensates exports, and retrofitting of road, rail, and air transport systems were among economic gains he bragged about the most.

In its latest report, the International

Monetary Fund has forecasted that Iran's real GDP growth will rebound to 6.6 percent in 2016/17.

"Maintaining the growth rate that was launched in the (current) year is the main economic issue for the country and all economic policies should be designed around this axis," Rouhani told the parliament in a speech broadcasted live by state television in December.

The administration has particularly devoted substantial energy to curbing inflation, vital for the ailing economy which indicated signs of a rebound on the back of a 2015 international nuclear deal.

The country's inflation declined to single digits and has hovered in the 9.5 percent range, year-on-year, since mid-2016.

It is expected to temporarily rise to 11.9 percent by end-2017/18 reflecting recent liquidity growth and pass-through from exchange rate depreciation, before returning to single digits on the back of

prudent fiscal and monetary policies.

After struggling for years under sanctions, Iran's economy has picked up following the removal of most of the restrictions under the nuclear deal in January 2016.

Iran reached an agreement with five veto-holding powers of the UN Security Council, United States, Russia, China, United Kingdom and France plus Germany, to limit its nuclear program in return for lifting crippling international sanctions on the country's economy.

The deal was supposed to release tens of billions of dollars belonging to Iran that had been frozen in foreign banks, and allow the oil-rich country to trade freely with customers around the world, including with the Chicago-based aircraft manufacturer Boeing and the French Airbus.

But Rouhani is under pressure to sustain economic growth as his critics say he has failed to improve living standards

as much as hoped after the lifting of sanctions.

Banking ties with the international community still face bottlenecks and the prospect is far from certain.

Early March, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei chided the country's sluggish economic recovery despite the lifting of sanctions, calling upon the government to champion greater self-sufficiency.

"Of course the government has taken remarkable steps but if the resistance economy had been implemented fully and widely, we could witness a tangible difference in people's lives," he was quoted as having said.

The "resistance economy" promoted by the Leader is aimed at making Iran's economy more self-sufficient. The term was used for the first time in 2013 by the Leader to highlight the importance of domestic production as a tool to reduce dependence on foreign resources.

Iran to further boost defense capabilities

POLITICS TEHRAN — Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan hailed on Wednesday Iran's military achievements in the current Iranian year which will end on March 20, saying that the Islamic Republic will continue boosting its defensive capabilities, ISNA reported.

Iran's defense capabilities, including its new weapons and warfare products, show a huge growth compared to the previous year, he emphasized, announcing plans to bolster the country's defense capabilities and the Armed

Forces' combat and operational power in the incoming year.

"In the coming year, the efforts by Iranian experts in the area of military technology will bear fruit and the combat and operational power of the Armed Forces will boost remarkably," he said.

General Dehqan further said that defense industries have made huge progress in different missile, aerospace, telecommunications, electronics, optics and engineering fields in recent years.

His remarks come days after Iran unveiled an advanced tank named

"Karrar", designed and built by domestic military experts. The defense ministry also launched the tank's serial production.

"Due to its unique features, Karrar is among the most advanced tanks ever built in the world and is able to meet the needs of the Armed Forces," the defense minister said during a ceremony on Sunday.

The domestically manufactured tank is equipped with an electro-optical fire control system and laser range-finder and is capable of hitting moving and fixed targets, he further explained.

Iran also unveiled other homegrown weapons and military equipment in the departing Iranian year, including Emad, which is a liquid-fuel, intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) with a claimed range of 1,700 km and 750 kg payload. It also unveiled Zolfagar missile, which is capable of hitting targets at a distance up to 700 km with a zero margin of error, and launched its mass production line.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Dehqan said Iran's defense ministry has had close cooperation with various countries across the globe.

Iran seals its status as truce guarantor in Syria

1 → Map separating rebels from terrorists

At the third Astana talks of March 14-15, the three guarantors have worked on a map that separates Syrian opposition from terrorist groups. According to the head of the Russian delegation, the separation issue is particularly important.

"The work on it has been in progress for quite a long time already," the Russian diplomat noted. "For six months, we have been trying to separate the moderate opposition from the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra, particularly cooperating with the United States. Only after agreements were signed on December 29, 2016, we managed to facilitate the work."

The diplomat said that both Turkey and Iran have provided detailed information and that now the maps are combined that indicate the areas controlled by the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra. According to Lavrentyev, Jordan, whose representatives attended the meeting as observers, has been very helpful in this matter, providing additional information.

"This work is highly important as it may help us ensure security in the regions controlled by the moderate opposition," the Russian diplomat added. "We have also been trying to persuade the Syrian armed opposition to provide us assistance in defining areas controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra."

Plan for prisoner swap
The participants in the international

meeting in Astana have also formulated proposals on exchanging prisoners in Syria, Kamalidinov stated.

"The talks in Astana have resulted in the signing of a deal on setting up a group for monitoring ceasefire, composed of Iran, Russia and Turkey, which will be subordinated to the UN, and also proposals on exchanging prisoners were outlined," he said.

The representatives of the Syrian ceasefire guarantor-states have also discussed a range of other issues, including "the implementation of military agreements reached earlier at the Astana platform, and considered the ways of enhancing trilateral joint steps on settling the Syrian crisis," according to Kamalidinov.

Syria's new Constitution
Russia's delegation has proposed a project of setting up a constitutional commission to draft Syria's new Constitution, Lavrentyev said on Tuesday.

"Now we have proposed a project for discussion and consideration to set up a constitutional commission to deal with drafting the Constitution. I would like to emphasize that this does not mean that we're imposing a specific solution of this

issue," Lavrentyev stressed.

The draft document concerning the constitutional commission has been handed over to the Syrian government for consideration, according to the Russian envoy.

The Syrian government negotiator Bashar al-Jaafari said on Wednesday his delegation had not yet discussed a constitutional commission for the war-torn state during the latest talks in Astana.

Speaking in the Kazakh capital, Jaafari said the only document the Syrian government delegation had discussed with Russia was related to de-mining cultural heritage sites.

"Work on it is under way. Something will be absolutely unacceptable for them while something, as I believe, will be taken into account and something will be used in the course of the Geneva talks whose new round will open on March 23," the head of the Russian delegation said.

The Syrian armed opposition has not yet looked at Russia's draft of the Syrian constitution, however the issue of establishing a constitutional commission is being discussed now. In general, several documents are considered at talks on

Syria in Astana, according to Lavrentyev.

Syrian opposition to meet Russia, Iran and Turkey on March 16

The Syrian armed opposition will hold a meeting with the three truce guarantors, Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Anuar Zhainakov, said on Wednesday.

Previously, the Syrian opposition had announced that it had decided to boycott the talks, blaming what they call Russia's unwillingness to end air strikes against civilians in rebel-held areas and its failure to put pressure on the Syrian army to abide by a widely violated ceasefire.

"As for the participation of armed opposition representatives in the talks, representatives of the Southern and Northern fronts are expected to arrive tonight," he said. "Tomorrow they will hold consultations with expert from the ceasefire guarantor countries on compliance with the cessation of hostilities."

Information on the composition of the opposition delegation will be available later and the talks will continue on Thursday March 16, as confirmed by Zhainakov. However, there is no information yet on participation of the Russian, Iranian and Turkish delegations on March 16.

The international meeting in Astana on the settlement in Syria began on March 14. Delegations from Russia, Iran and Turkey, as well as from the UN, the U.S. and Jordan are working in the capital of Kazakhstan.

The next expert consultations on the Syrian peace talks will be held in Tehran in April, according to Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister Akylbek Kamalidinov.

Dutch vote in test of anti-immigrant sentiment in Europe

Dutch voters cast their ballots on Wednesday in a crucial legislative election, with pollsters predicting a close result and a fragmented parliament.

The vote, which has been overshadowed by a diplomatic row between The Netherlands and Turkey, has essentially come down to a tight race between Prime Minister Mark Rutte's center-right party and that of far-right, anti-Islam populist's Geert Wilders.

Ahead of the vote, opinion polls showed Rutte's liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD/Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie) narrowly leading the race, and even if Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV/Partij voor de Vrijheid) emerges as the biggest party in parliament, it is unlikely to obtain the majority of the 150 seats enabling it to form a government. Most parties have pledged not to govern with the PVV.

Most polls opened at 7:30am (06:30 GMT), while an initial exit poll was expected immediately after 9pm (20:00 GMT) when the last voting stations close.

Overall, some 13 million people are eligible to vote and 28 parties are competing for the 150 seats in the Dutch lower house of parliament.

Divisive campaign

Wilders has vowed to shut mosques, ban the Quran and close the country's borders. He also wants to pull the country out of the European Union, an institution that it helped found, in a so-called Next.

Rutte, seeking to lead The Netherlands for a third successive term, is a liberal free-market championing this year's election on a pledge of safety and stability.

Analysts said his uncharacteristically strong stand since the weekend in a diplomatic crisis with Turkey - when Dutch authorities expelled one Turkish minister while another was refused permission to fly into the country to



attend a political rally - has boosted his image with voters.

"When people look for leadership, they look to me," Rutte told a final debate late on Tuesday.

Final polls released late on Tuesday appeared to show Rutte pulling away from Wilders, crediting the VVD with coming top with 24 to 28 seats.

Wilders was seen as slipping yet again and barely clinging on to second place with between 19 and 22 MPs. That would however still be well up on the 12 MPs his party has in the outgoing parliament.

The Dutch pride themselves on their consensus politics, and reportedly it takes an average of three months of hard-bargaining to cobble together a coalition. Observers predict this time round however, four or even five parties may be needed to reach the 76-seat majority.

While traditional Labor has fallen sharply this year in the polls, the left-wing GroenLinks and its charismatic young leader Jesse Klaver are enjoying a huge boost.

The 30-year-old Klaver said it was "time for a new leadership" and called

for The Netherlands to welcome more refugees.

He has boosted his party in the polls, and may win 16 to 18 seats, which could place him in a powerful kingmaker role.

Following last year's shock Brexit vote, and Donald Trump's victory in the United States presidential polls, the Dutch elections are being seen as a litmus test of the strength of far-right and populist parties ahead of other polls in Europe this year, namely in France and Germany.

(Source: agencies)

South Korea to hold presidential election on May

South Korea will hold a presidential election on May 9 to replace impeached Leader Park Geun-hye, who was dismissed last Friday over a corruption scandal, the Yonhap news agency has reported.

Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn, who has also been acting president since December, said earlier he would not run in the election.

Hwang became acting president when parliament impeached Park in December and later emerged in opinion polls as a top conservative candidate, though he had never declared an intention to run.

Prosecutors said on Wednesday that they planned to summon and question Park next week.

Park lost her presidential immunity from prosecution after the Constitutional Court ruled on Friday to formally end her rule over allegations she colluded with a longtime confidante to extort money from businesses and allowed her to pull

government strings from the shadows.

Prosecutors said they told Park's lawyer they would summon her next Tuesday as a suspect. No further details were provided.

Dozens of high-profile figures including some top Park administration officials and Samsung heir Lee Jae-yong have already been indicted.

Park could also face extortion, bribery and other criminal charges. She has denied any legal wrongdoing and expressed defiance toward her corruption allegations.

"Although it will take time, I believe the truth will certainly come out," Park said after leaving the presidential Blue House on Sunday.

Her comments raised worries about a deepening of the national divide over her fate. Three people died and dozens were injured in violent clashes between Park's supporters and police after Friday's ruling.

(Source: agencies)

Saudi Arabia: Trump meeting a 'historic turning point'

The House of Saud regime has called a "historic turning point" in relations with the United States after a meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman at the White House.

The meeting on Tuesday was the first since Trump's January 20 inauguration with a prince who is leading the kingdom's efforts to revive state finances and is also its defense minister.

"The meeting today restored issues to their right path and form a big change in relations between both countries in political, military, security and economic issues," a senior adviser to Prince Mohammed said in a statement.

The talks appeared to signal a marked difference from Riyadh's often fraught relationship with the previous administration of Barack Obama, especially following the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Referring to a U.S. travel ban on

six Muslim-majority countries, the adviser said that Prince Mohammed did not regard it as aimed at "Muslim countries or Islam".

The senior adviser said Prince Mohammed "expressed his satisfaction after the meeting on the positive position and clarifications he heard from President Trump on his views on Islam."

The two leaders also discussed opportunities for U.S. companies to invest in Saudi Arabia.

Obama late last year suspended the sale of U.S.-made precision-guidance munitions to the Saudis, a reaction to thousands of civilian casualties from Saudi-led air raids in Yemen.

U.S. officials said Trump was considering ending that ban and approving the sale of guidance systems made by Raytheon Co.

The U.S. State Department has approved the move, which awaits a final White House decision, the officials said.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Donald Trump's 2005 tax return leaked to media

The United States President Donald Trump paid \$38m in taxes on more than \$150m of income in 2005, the White House has said, acknowledging key details it previously refused to release.

The revelation came as a response to an MSNBC report on Tuesday that the U.S. broadcaster had obtained two pages of his returns.

MSNBC host Rachel Maddow said she received the documents from investigative journalist David Cay Johnston, who said on her show that he received them in the mail.

According to the leaked pages of the tax return, Trump and his wife Melania paid \$5.3m in regular federal income tax, and an additional \$31m in the alternative minimum tax (AMT) - which the president wants to eliminate.

The returns showed Trump paid an effective federal tax rate of 25 percent in 2005 after writing off \$100m in losses.

The White House said in a statement that Trump took into account "large-scale depreciation for construction."

It said the former reality TV star, as head of the Trump Organization, had a responsibility "to pay no more tax than legally required".

Trump's refusal to release his tax returns despite dec-



ades of precedent featured heavily in the 2016 presidential race. He said he could not release the filings as he was under audit.

Democrats hinted that by not releasing the documents, Trump may be trying to hide that he pays little to no tax, makes less money than he claims, or gives a negligible amount to charity.

In January, Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway said the White House would not release the documents.

Trump said his taxes are not of interest to the general public.

"You know, the only one that cares about my tax re-

turns are the reporters," he said during a news conference after his January 20 inauguration.

In the run-up to the November election, The New York Times published what it said were leaked tax filings from 1995 that revealed a deficit big enough for Trump not to pay federal income taxes for up to 18 years.

In the first presidential debate, when Trump's rival Hillary Clinton accused him of not having paid federal tax in years, he responded, "That makes me smart".

He added that Tuesday's revelations could actually play out in Trump's favor.

"The way MSNBC hyped it beforehand, and the skilful way the White House handled it, could bolster Trump's base, who'll say 'look, it's more fake news, there was nothing to see here'."

"Incidentally, at least for a while, it took the focus away from the controversy over the plan to replace the Obamacare system that will leave millions of people without healthcare coverage."

The White House lashed out at MSNBC over the leaks.

"You know you are desperate for ratings when you are willing to violate the law to push a story about two pages of tax returns from over a decade ago," it said in a statement.

(Source: agencies)

32 killed in Damascus court house bombing

Two suicide bombings hit Damascus Wednesday including an attack at a central courthouse that killed at least 32 people, as Syria's war entered its seventh year with the government now claiming the upper hand.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the blasts, the second wave of deadly attacks in the capital in less than a week after twin bombings killed 74 Saturday.

Wednesday's first attack saw a suicide bomber rush inside the building and blow himself up when police tried to prevent him from entering the courthouse in the center of Damascus, state media reported.

A police source told AFP that 32 people were killed and 100 wounded.

The second blast hit a restaurant in the western Rabweh neighborhood, wounding 25 people, the source said.

"We were terrified because the sound of the explosion was enormous," a lawyer who was in the courthouse during the first attack told AFP.

"We took refuge in the library which is on a higher floor," the lawyer said, speaking on condition of anonymity. "It was a bloody scene."

State television broadcast scenes from the building showing blood smeared on the floor of the lobby but also splattered across its ceiling.

It interviewed a man receiving treatment with a bandage over his eye who said the attacker was wearing a military jacket.

"He had his hands up and screamed 'God is greatest' and then the blast happened," he told state television.

"I fell to the ground and blood came out of my eye."

AFP correspondents in Damascus said the streets emptied after the two blasts, with several roads also blocked by security forces.

(Source: AFP)

Explosion hits security convoy in southeast Turkey

At least two soldiers have been killed in an explosion on a highway in southeast Turkey, according to security sources.

The troops on Wednesday were carrying out operations to detect mines in the region when suspected fighters from the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) detonated a previously planted mine, Turkey's private Dogan news agency reported.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for the attack, which targeted a vehicle loaded with soldiers as it passed by a road linking the cities of Mardin and Diyarbakir.

Ambulances rushed to the scene following the blast. PKK fighters have launched a series of violent attacks since 2015, when a fragile peace process with the government collapsed.

More than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict since the PKK took up arms in 1984.

Turkey, the United States and the European Union consider the PKK a "terrorist group".

(Source: agencies)

Ahlam Aref Ahmad al-Tamimi on FBI's Most Wanted list

The FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) has placed a Jordanian woman who assisted in the 2001 suicide bombing of a Jerusalem restaurant on its "Most Wanted Terrorist" list.

The United States case against Ahlam Aref Ahmad al-Tamimi was filed under seal in 2013 but announced publicly by the justice department on Tuesday.

The charge against al-Tamimi stems from an August 9, 2001, bombing at a Sbarro pizzeria that, in addition to killing 15 people, also injured some 120 others. Two of those killed were U.S. nationals.

After her capture, Tamimi, now in her mid-30s, pleaded guilty at trial in Israel and was sentenced in 2003 to 16 life prison terms.

The criminal complaint unsealed on Tuesday charged al-Tamimi, who worked as a journalist at a television station in the occupied West Bank, with conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction outside the U.S. against U.S. nationals.

Federal prosecutors accuse her of having agreed in the summer of 2001 to carry out attacks on behalf of the military wing of the Palestinian Hamas movement and having travelled with the restaurant bomber to Jerusalem.

Prosecutors say that she instructed the bomber to detonate the explosive device, which was hidden in a guitar, in the area.

Al-Tamimi was freed from prison in 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange between Israel and Hamas.

She was returned to Jordan, and though the justice department says it is working to bring her into custody, Jordanian courts have said their constitution does not allow for the extradition of Jordanian nationals.

Mary McCord, the acting head of the justice department's national security division, called al-Tamimi an "unrepentant terrorist".

"The charges unsealed today serve as a reminder that when terrorists target Americans anywhere in the world, we will never forget - and we will continue to seek to ensure that they are held accountable," McCord said.

Al-Tamimi faces a possible execution or life in prison if she is captured, tried and convicted in the U.S.

(Source: agencies)



Iranian-Russian trade may reach \$10b in 3 years



The volume of bilateral trade between Iran and Russia may reach \$10 billion in three years, Iranian Ambassador to Russia Mehdi Sanaei said Tuesday.

"The growth of Iran's trade relations with Russia was the biggest last year in comparison with any other country... It seems to me that this trend will continue, and we will reach a considerable trade of \$10 billion in the coming two or three years," Sanaei said at the round table organized by Rossiya Segodnya International Information Agency.

On Monday, Iranian Communications and Information Technology Minister Mahmoud Vaezi said that the

road map toward the development of cooperation between Iran and Russia in the medium and long-term perspective may be signed during the upcoming visit of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to Russia in late March.

According to Vaezi, Iran and Russia are seeking to develop relations in all spheres, including political, economic, cultural and diplomatic cooperation between the countries' regions. (Source: Sputnik)

Iran's oil output exceeds 3.8m bpd in February: OPEC

ECONOMY TEHRAN — According to OPEC's latest monthly report published on March 14, Iran's oil output in February reached 3.814 million barrels per day (bpd), a 36,100-bpd rise compared to January. The country's output stood at 3.778

million bpd in January; OPEC data indicates that the February figure is 976,000 bpd more than that of the 2015 average.

The increase comes at the time that recently Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh announced that

Iran has managed to increase its exports to 3 million bpd, its highest level since 1979.

In the meantime, Iran's heavy oil price increased by 2.4 percent to \$53.16 per barrel during February compared to the preceding month.

Iran wants to increase its production to 5 million bpd by 2021. However, it needs investments by foreign investors to achieve that target. This will not be a new high in production for Iran, because it used to pump in excess of 6 million bpd in the 1970s.

Iran may cap output if OPEC remains committed to cuts

Iran will be capping its crude oil output at 3.8 million barrels per day (bpd) in the second half of the year if fellow OPEC members stay committed to the cuts they had pledged, Iran's Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said on Tuesday, as quoted by state news agency IRNA.

"If OPEC members stay committed to the agreement [on freezing output], Iran will produce 3.8 million bpd of oil in [the] second half of the current year," Zanganeh said, as reported by Reuters.



OPEC decided to curb its total output by some 1.2 million bpd in the first half of this year, with the option

to extend the supply-cut deal into the second half of 2017. In the November agreement, Iran was allowed to slightly raise its production and keep it capped at 3.797 million bpd between January and June, while other fellow OPEC members – except for exempt Libya and Nigeria – all had to cut their respective production.

Although the cartel is expected to decide on a possible extension in May, speculation is rampant whether the cuts should or would be extended and wheth-

er OPEC's efforts are not all in vain, given the rise in U.S. shale output.

Since most of the Western sanctions on Iran were lifted in January last year, the Islamic Republic has been trying to restore its crude output and exports to pre-sanction levels, and used this bargaining chip in obtaining a kind of leeway in the OPEC production cut deal. Most recently, Iran was said to have ousted Iraq from the no.2 spot of crude suppliers to India, behind Saudi Arabia. (Source: oilprice.com)

Fed expected to raise rates as U.S. economy flexes muscle

The Federal Reserve is expected to raise interest rates for the second time in three months on Wednesday, encouraged by strong monthly job gains and confidence that inflation is finally rising to its target.

A rate hike at the conclusion of the Fed's latest two-day policy meeting is already baked into bond yields and financial markets overall, with investors putting the likelihood of such a move at 95 percent, according to CME Group's FedWatch program.

Attention is turning instead to whether the U.S. central bank will signal an even faster pace of monetary tightening this year than the current three rate hikes that it projected at the December policy meeting.

"Expectations have some catching up to do regarding the Fed's need to 'lean into the wind' of rising inflation, strong growth, robust sentiment, easy financial conditions, and the likelihood of fiscal stimulus in 2018," analysts from Goldman Sachs wrote ahead of the meeting.

They said they regarded a fourth rate increase this year as a "close call."

A rate increase on Wednesday would push the Fed's target overnight lending rate to a range of between 0.75 percent and 1.00 percent, still low but approaching the range that the central bank has typically operated within.



The Fed is scheduled to release its latest policy statement along with updated economic forecasts at 2 p.m. EDT (1800 GMT). Fed Chair Janet Yellen is due to hold a press conference half an hour later.

The U.S. economy has flexed its muscle in recent months, with job gains above 230,000 in both February and January. Consumer confidence also has risen and inflation has been firming.

Fed policymakers are also pleased by an improving global economic outlook, with euro zone growth edging up and China looking more stable than a year ago. Over the past two years Fed policymakers had worried that a weak global economy would limit U.S. growth and hold down inflation, leaving no compelling reason to raise rates.

The Fed's growing comfort with the economic outlook does not mean it will tighten monetary policy faster than planned.

The solid U.S. job gains have had little impact of late on the unemployment rate, indicating that there may be more sidelined workers ready to reenter the labor force as jobs become more plentiful.

That has been a key goal for Yellen and one that may keep the Fed on the "gradual" rate hike path it has committed to in prior policy statements, said Beth Ann Bovino, U.S. chief economist for S&P Global Ratings.

"If the incoming data show the economy heating up faster than we expect, the Fed may want to do more," Bovino wrote in a recent analysis. But "the fact that more folks are coming into the labor force may dissuade the Fed" from moving faster than currently anticipated. (Source: Reuters)

Gold rises on European poll worries; investors await Fed

Gold prices edged up on Wednesday on uncertainty over the outcome of the Dutch elections, while markets awaited clues on the pace of U.S. interest rate hikes this year.

With an immediate rate increase by the Fed seen as a done deal, investors are focusing on what message the central bank will deliver when it concludes its meeting later on Wednesday. In December the Fed forecast three rate rises this year.

Spot gold edged up 0.3 percent to \$1,201.64 per

ounce by 0313 GMT.

U.S. gold futures were down 0.1 percent at \$1,201 per ounce.

"We do not think much will change throughout much of Wednesday ahead of the Fed rate decision and policy statement," INTL FCStone analyst Edward Meir said.

"Our bias is still somewhat constructive on gold given that we think the Fed will shrink from coming across as too aggressive." (Source: Reuters)



Oil prices jump after data shows surprise U.S. stock draw

Oil prices rebounded from three-month lows on Wednesday after industry data showed a surprise drawdown in U.S. crude stockpiles and as Goldman Sachs put a positive spin on OPEC's compliance with output cuts.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude was trading up 83 cents, or 1.7 percent, at \$48.42 a barrel by 0536 GMT. That came after the contract fell for a seventh session on Tuesday in its longest losing streak since January 2016.

Brent futures were up 76 cents, or 1.5 percent, at \$51.68, after settling down 43 cents at \$50.92 on Tuesday, their lowest finish since November.

U.S. crude stocks fell by 531,000 barrels last week, industry group the American Petroleum Institute said on Tuesday after settlement.

That compared with analyst expectations for an increase of 3.7 million barrels. If the draw is confirmed by government data on Wednesday, it would be the first drawdown after nine consecutive builds.

U.S. gasoline and distillate inventories drew more than expected, the data also showed.

Oil tumbled on Tuesday after OPEC reported a rise in global crude stocks and a surprise output jump from its biggest member, Saudi Arabia, further pressuring prices that have erased nearly all of their gains since OPEC announced output cuts in November.

Secondary sources had said Saudi output fell in February to 9.797 million barrels per day (bpd), but Riyadh told OPEC it rose to 10.011 million bpd.

In an effort to dispel market concerns, the Saudi energy ministry said the "difference between what the market observes as production, and the actual supply levels in any given month, is due to operational factors that are influenced by storage adjustments and other month-to-month variables."

Influential U.S. investment bank Goldman Sachs cast a positive light on the numbers, saying compliance with production cuts remains high. Market rebalancing is still progressing and the bank expects demand for oil to finally exceed supply next quarter.

"Our expectations that inventories will draw through 2017 therefore leads us to expect that Brent time-spreads will continue to strengthen with the forward curve in backwardation by 3Q17," Goldman said in its research note. (Source: Reuters)

China's premier says no hard landing, but growth target not easy

Premier Li Keqiang said on Wednesday that forecasts of a hard landing for the world's second largest economy should stop, though domestic and external risks remain and meeting the target of 6.5 percent growth for this year won't be easy.

"Almost every year I have heard a prediction of the Chinese economy having a hard landing," Li said at his annual news conference at the end of the annual meeting of China's parliament.

"But I believe that our economic performance in the past several years...should suffice to put a full stop to such prophecies of a hard landing."

China has cut its economic growth target this year to around 6.5 percent from its 2016 goal of 6.5 to 7 percent, while pushing through reforms to tackle rising debt and guard against financial risks.

"As for the projected target of GDP growth this year at about 6.5 percent, I have read some foreign media describing it as a move by the Chinese government for moderate downward adjustment of GDP growth," Li said.

"I should point out that 6.5 percent growth is not low speed and will not be easy for us to meet"

China's gross domestic product grew 6.7 percent last year, supported by record bank loans, a speculative housing boom and billions in government investment.

Looking ahead, the head of a government research center said the risk of a steep slide in China's economy has reduced, adding that the country had moved through an "L-shaped" pattern of slowing to now "horizontal" growth. (Source: Reuters)

Germany to press G20 to sign off on free trade amid worries about U.S. stance: sources

Germany will press G20 members to sign off on a set of principles including free trade at this week's meeting of the group's financial leaders, in what the Trump administration may perceive as a challenge to its more protectionist stance.

In an unusual move, Germany, the host of the meeting, will stress the importance of global free trade in a document separate from the group's main communique, G20 sources said.

The move underscores Germany's desire to rebuff any explicit U.S. demands to water down the group's commitment to free trade, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel prepares for her first meeting with President Donald Trump on Friday.

Attaching a separate document also would allow Germany to clarify its priorities and avoid them from being overshadowed by what could be a more heated debate on protectionism and currency policy.

It is rare for a G20 chair country to issue a document separate from the main communique, especially one that differs on the tone and priorities.

Group of 20 finance leaders meet in Baden-Baden, Germany, on Friday and Saturday. It will be their first meeting attended by representatives of Trump's administration.

A draft of the main G20 communique seen by Reuters appeared to accommodate Trump's views on trade by dropping a phrase resisting "all forms of protectionism."

But any attempts to dilute the commitment to free trade will likely face resistance from emerging economies reliant on global exports, including China, putting the onus on Germany to seek a compromise.

It's unclear if Trump and his team, which has espoused fair trade more than free trade and has discussed a border tax on imports, would sign the document.

The document, which is currently being circulated among G20 members, lays out a list of about 10 principles on how a "well performing economy" should act on areas of fiscal, monetary and trade policies, the sources said.

It highlights areas Germany places importance on, such as the need for countries to make their financial system resilient to shocks and to refrain from excessive fiscal loosening through "prudent management of public finances," the sources said.

"Among the most important issues from Germany's point of view, regarding the world's economy, is the issue of resilience. That's our top priority," one of the sources said.

Germany often argues that economies should not rely too much on short-term stimulus and take steps to strengthen fundamentals so that their economies are resilient against shocks. The sources spoke on condition of an-

onymity because they are not authorities to speak to the media.

Germany hopes to have G20 members sign off on the document in Baden-Baden, though some government officials concede not all countries would back it this week.

"Let's see if we'll get everyone on board in Baden-Baden or only after at the summit of leaders (in July)," one official said.

Merkel underscored the importance of free trade in a speech to business leaders in Munich this week. Her talks with Trump in Washington are expected to touch on a range of issues, including defense spending.

Causes of friction between Berlin and Washington also include an accusation by senior Trump adviser Peter Navarro that Germany profits unfairly from a weak euro and a threat to impose 35 percent tariffs on imported vehicles. (Source: Reuters)

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Trump's 'Beautiful' Deals with Arabs Will Boomerang

1 → His contradictory rants about the region assumes that Middle Easterners and Muslims are all stupid, have no day-to-day memories of what has been said, have no pride or dignity and that they are only looking to the White House for orders for what to do next! To make the point, let's focus on just a few connected pronouncements.

President Trump has business interests in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which include real estate projects in Saudi Arabia and a licensing and management contract for a golf course and luxury villas in the UAE (Dubai). If Trump is true to his past, we assume that he wants to grow these interests while president and even more so when he is out of office. So what has he been saying about these relations? He apparently likes Saudis: "Saudi Arabia — and I get along great with all of them. They buy apartments from me." "They spend \$40 million, \$50 million. Am I supposed to dislike them? I like them very much." He is prepared to defend them (and we assume defend his business interests especially in the future if he "saves" them while he is president). "They [Iran] are looking to go into Saudi Arabia ... They want the oil, they want the money ... they want a lot of other things ... That's phase one — to go into Saudi Arabia and, frankly, the Saudis don't survive without us. And the question is, at what point do we get involved and how much will Saudi Arabia pay us to save them? That's ultimately what's going to happen." In fact, President Trump has offered to defend Saudi Arabia in any regional conflict. President Trump's position is crystal clear. Saudi Arabia cannot defend itself but can pay the U.S. for its defense.

Crimes against humanity

America will defend you as long as you pay. It all depends on the "deal." Don't worry, Saudi friends; we won't even gently mention your shortcomings that confront many American values. No human rights issues. No religious freedom issues. No matter what crimes you support in Bahrain, crimes that most classify as crimes against humanity. No matter how many civilians you kill in Yemen.

No matter how much you support extremists and terrorists who pose an existential threat to many societies and countries, including ours. Just pay and we will be there. Trump's approach to Saudi Arabia will further encourage Saudi branding of America as mercenary, a country with no principles but always available to the oppressor as long as they pay. It is precisely such an image that attracts terrorist recruits.

President Trump's love for Persian Gulf Arabs goes beyond Saudi Arabia and the UAE. He loves Kuwait too. In 2011, "If you look at these nations, they wouldn't be there except for us, you take a look at Kuwait. I mean, we handed Kuwait back to the people that right now essentially own Kuwait, because it's really ownership more than anything else... We handed it back... They never paid us [for ousting Saddam Hussein]." We should at least correct President Trump's inaccuracy here — the Kuwaitis and the Saudis in fact overpaid the U.S. for this operation! And we should add that after the liberation of Kuwait U.S. companies received a number of lucrative contracts (in some cases, contracts that were signed even before the start of the war).

Yes, some Persian Gulf countries already looked at the U.S. as a mercenary, but now the President is actually broadcasting that America has guns for hire. He has handed all those opposed to America many sound bites they can use for recruiting terrorists and he has eroded America's appeal and credibility to the millions who live under oppression in the Middle East.

The President has also embraced other Arab dictators outside the Persian Gulf. He has a special affection for the most oppressive dictator in the Middle East — President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi of Egypt. Republican Presidential Nominee Trump met him in September at the time of the UN General Assembly. Trump advertised their 'chemistry' and said, "I thought it was very productive. He's a fantastic guy... I thought it was a great meeting. We met for a long time, actually. There was a good chemistry there. You



President Trump has offered to defend Saudi Arabia in any regional conflict. President Trump's position is crystal clear. Saudi Arabia cannot defend itself but can pay the U.S. for its defense.

know when you have good chemistry with people. There was a good feeling between us." Trump has gone on to even applaud how Sisi executed the military coup that removed Egypt's first civilian president from power, a bloody coup where more than a thousand protestors were killed. "He took control of Egypt. And he really took control of it." Trump has expressed confidence and "strong support for Egypt's war on terrorism, and how under a Trump administration, the United States of America will be a loyal friend, not simply an ally, that Egypt can count on in the days and years ahead." What's more, the Trump administration is apparently considering a request made by President Sisi and King Salman of Saudi Arabia to designate the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization simply because the Brotherhood wants the installation of democratic Muslim

governments, something that Sisi and his Persian Gulf supporters fear. Most Muslims would not agree with this initiative and would interpret it as yet another indication of Islamophobic policies.

What does all this convey to the Middle East and to the broader Muslim World about U.S. values and policies?

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) is believed to have said that "Somoza [the Nicaraguan dictator] may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch." Well, it would appear that nothing much has changed! U.S. talk about freedom, democratic values and human rights are just that — talk. The negative fallout of supporting America's dictators mattered less 80 years ago. There was no ISIS, Al-Qaeda or similar terrorist organizations hell bent on kicking the U.S. out of the Middle East and other Muslim countries. There was

no internet and 24-hour instant news in the world. We live in a different world!

Terrorist organizations

These terrorist organizations have been born and nurtured because of oppressive and corrupt rule and economic and social stagnation in the Muslim countries of the Middle East. Terrorists have filled a vacuum to oppose Muslim dictators by promising a return to the past, a time when Muslim societies flourished. Unfortunately, most Muslims have not studied and discussed the meaning of the Quran to see how Islamic teachings apply in today's world and don't realize that extremists are opportunist charlatans who are using religion to replace one set of dictators with themselves, something that will drive Muslim communities further down the abyss.

The U.S. and its allies have been caught in the Middle of this struggle simply because of their past and continuing selfish support of oppressive dictators while espousing freedom and human rights. Recently, this support has even turned into in-your-face praise for the likes of Sisi. Victories on the battlefield in Mosul and elsewhere will not extinguish extremism and terrorism. Terrorists will continue their murderous rampage in other places and will get even more recruits with the passage of time.

To defeat terrorism and extremism, the Muslim World needs peaceful reform. Peaceful reform begins with a timetable for Muslim dictators to relinquish power in favor of representative governance. In Islam, God's greatest gift to humanity is freedom, something that no one can take away. Muslims countries must then establish the institutions that are the foundations of flourishing societies — institutions that are similar to those recommended by Adam Smith but with an even higher dose of justice and morality. This will take much time. The U.S. can help and support such a peaceful reformation and transformation in the Muslim World in the context of Islam, or it can continue to selfishly support oppressors, denigrate Islam and face increasing terrorism and eventually be a partner to unimaginable violence.

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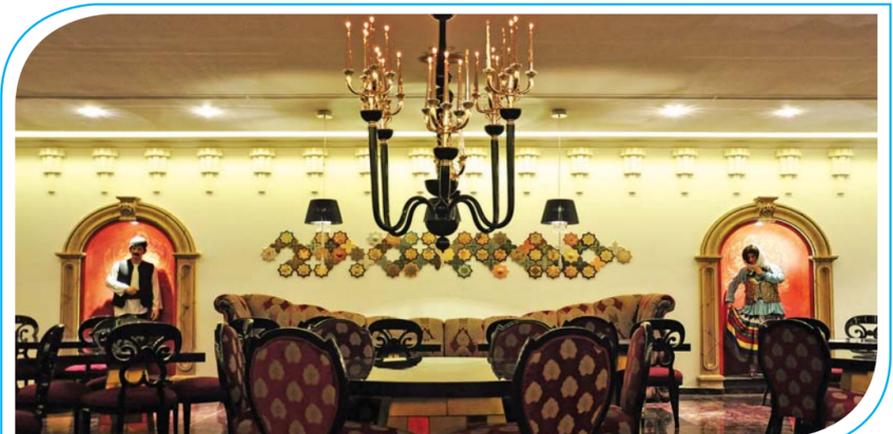


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INTERVIEW

By Mohammad Mazhari

Iran enjoying strategic advantages over Saudi Arabia

King Salman wants to achieve several goals in China. There is an important economic agenda of course, in terms of Saudis investment in China that serves to strengthen the energy transfer from the Persian Gulf to China as Saudis look forward that change.



Saudi Arabia's King Salman began his first official visit to East Asian countries, placing China at the priority which puts it in the spotlight once again as Beijing has intensified its diplomatic efforts and become increasingly vocal on many regional issues, especially its offer to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia. We asked James M. Dorsey about different aspects of King Salman's visit to China and his effort to loosen China's affiliations with Iran.

How would you see Trump's policy toward Saudi Arabia? Is he ready to guarantee safety of the Saudi kingdom against any threat or he would head to confront this country as a source of radicalism in the region?

I think it is too early to conclude what Trump's policy will be ... I think certainly what we see at the moment is that is greater US support for the Saudis in the war against Yemen and with regard to Iran there is greater alignment in the US – Saudi policy. Now I don't think that Trump administration and Trump himself is very far in terms of looking at what are sources of radicalism. And there is a little evidence to support the point that Trump administration is going to diverse compass US policy.

What's the main goals of Saudi king's visit to China? Does he try to possibly upset Chinese relations with Iran? Why china would prefer its ties with Iran kept alive?

First of all, I think that China feels that it is in a bind, as it has equal relation both with Saudi Arabia and Iran; two countries which are rivals and have a dispute between them. That why you saw an offer by Chinese foreign minister on eve of the visit by King Salman to mediate between two parties.

I think King Salman wants to achieve several goals in China. There is an important economic agenda of course, in terms of Saudis investment in China that serves to strengthen the energy transfer from the Persian Gulf to China as Saudis look forward that change. It also serves to enhance prospect Saudi IPO which has initiate to public offering Aramco the Saudis national oil company. And it has also designed to attract Chinese investment in the kingdom and at the same time it tries to restructure and diversify its economy and Chinese investment will obviously help that process.

There is also of course the aspect of Saudi-Iranian relationship and Saudi Arabia wants to position itself as a key ally to China as you have seen in recent

joint military exercises and talking of developing a military relationship. So those are central factors.

Why would you believe that Saudi Arabia is a potential loser in the likely battle against Iran, despite its modern arms and fighters which it has bought from western countries?

I don't think that regional power is simply built of military power. Regional influence is built of multiple things. Both countries as you see have militaries and if the battle hardened, they are well-equipped and well-trained, but I think Saudi Arabia's disadvantage is that Iran is much more populous country. It is a country with already diversified econo-

my and industrial base while Saudi Arabia lacks these factors. And a country with a sense of empire and a geography that makes it a crossroad as well as a very deep-rooted culture and identity. Its geography which makes it a potential linkage between Europe and Asia is very important. And these are the advantages which Iran has compared to Saudi Arabia.

How would you assess Iran's position in the ME and its future position in the Eurasia?

Iran is a very key country. It does have issues to deal with, one advantage that Saudi Arabia has of course is that the majority of Muslims of Eurasia are Sunni Muslims.

And area encounters rebellion and sectarian dispute between Sunnis and Shias which means that if some countries are in Iran's favor, more countries are in Saudi's favor. Having said that there is also a going concern in Sunni Muslim countries as well as elsewhere about Sunni ultra-conservative interpretation of the faith. And so it depends on how Iran reintegrates into the international community and depend on how Saudi Arabia develops and its ability to review its relationship with conservative Ulemas in order to be diversified and restructure its economy and upgrade its autocracy.

James M. Dorsey is a scholar and award-winning journalist. A senior fellow at Singapore's S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies and co-director of the University of Wuerzburg's Institute of Fan Culture.

Iran is a populous country with already diversified economy and industrial base while Saudi Arabia lacks these factors.

Military escalation: Why Trump's Syria 'surge' will fail

By Rep. Ron Paul

Last week President Trump significantly escalated the US military presence in Syria, sending some 400 Marines to the ISIS-controlled Raqqa, and several dozen Army Rangers to the contested area around Manbij. According to press reports he will also station some 2,500 more US troops in Kuwait to be used as he wishes in Iraq and Syria.

Not only is it illegal under international law to send troops into another country without permission, it is also against US law for President Trump to take the country to war without a declaration. But not only is Trump's first big war illegal: it is doomed to failure because it makes no sense.

President Trump says the purpose of the escalation is to defeat ISIS in Raqqa, its headquarters in Syria. However the Syrian Army with its allies Russia and Iran are already close to defeating ISIS in Syria. Why must the US military be sent in when the Syrian army is already winning? Does Trump wish to occupy eastern Syria and put a Washington-backed rebel government in charge? Has anyone told President Trump what that would cost in dollars and lives – including American lives? How would this US-backed rebel government respond to the approach of a Syrian army backed up by the Russian military?

Is Trump planning on handing eastern Syria over to the Kurds, who have been doing much of the fighting in the area? How does he think NATO-ally Turkey would take a de facto Kurdistan carved out of Syria with its eyes on Kurdish-inhabited southern Turkey?

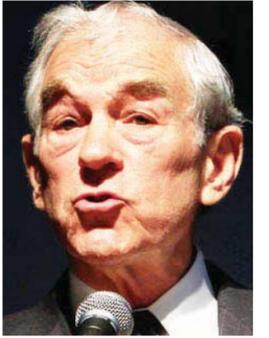
And besides, by what rights would Washington carve up Syria or any other country?

Or is Trump going to give up on the US policy of "regime change" and hand conquered eastern Syria back to Assad? If that is the case, why waste American lives and money if the Syrians and their allies are already doing the job? Candidate Trump even said he was perfectly happy with Russia and Syria getting rid of ISIS. If US policy is shifting toward accepting an Assad victory, it could be achieved by ending arms supplies to the rebels and getting out of the way.

It does not appear that President Trump or his advisors have thought through what happens next if the US military takes possession of Raqqa, Syria. What is the endgame? Maybe the neocons told him it would be a "cakewalk" as they promised before the 2003 Iraq invasion.

Part of the problem is that President Trump's advisors believe the myth that the US "surge" in Iraq and Afghanistan was a great success and repeating it would be the victory that eluded Obama with his reliance of drones and proxy military forces. A big show of US military force on the ground – like the 100,000 sent to Afghanistan by Obama in 2009 – is what is needed in Syria, these experts argue. Rarely is it asked that if the surge worked so well why are Afghanistan and Iraq still a disaster?

President Trump's escalation in Syria is doomed to failure. He is being drawn into a quagmire by the neocons that will destroy scores of lives, cost us a fortune, and may well ruin his presidency. He must de-escalate immediately before it is too late.



Forgotten Land

By Zahra Emamzadeh

Isn't it the time for Muslim states to find some way to their failure in dealing with the Israeli regime's occupation of Palestinians lands? Although holding conferences and delivering speeches are worthwhile, what is the practical outcome of such events for Palestine and the Palestinians?

Apparently the issue of Palestine as the most significant matter of the day in Islamic world seems to be totally forgotten.

The 6th international conference on Palestine was held in Tehran, Iran, to support the Palestinian intifada (the first intifada took place between 1987 and 1993, and the second one in the

The very same countries that are supporting occupiers for their settlements are talking about democracy and human rights;

2000s and today we witness the third intifada against Israel), with more than eighty delegations from all around the world on 21st and 22nd of February, 2017. As Press TV reporter pointed out around 700 foreign guests and representatives of the pro-Palestinian organizations were slated to take part in the event. The Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei delivered a speech at the opening ceremony of the conference, where high-ranking Iranian officials also took part, including President Hassan Rouhani, Parliament Speaker



Ali Larjani, Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larjani and some other politicians. Kazem Jalali was also the conference's spokesman.

The Islamic Republic of Iran held the conference to remind the Muslim states the priority of the Palestine, as the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani deemed the issue of Palestine as a priority for Iran, and he also pointed out that "it is the duty of the Islamic world to defend the rights of the Palestinians and pay for this."

Today the world's news media often talks about Palestinian refugees as a major concern for Palestinians; what has been forgotten is the most significant issue of returning the land of Palestine to its real owners; along with their homes and their life. The countries which provided the Israeli regime with green light and with whatever it needed to attack the Palestinians are talking to help to the refugees today... what an irony!

The very same countries that are supporting occupiers for their settlements are talking about democracy

and human rights; what is it Israel is doing in Palestinian land if it isn't violation of human rights? Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larjani truly pointed to human rights in Palestine; "today, the Zionist regime of Israel has increased exerting pressure against the Palestinians in a way that it has expanded settlements in West Bank and Quds contrary to human rights."

The Muslim world needs to call the Muslims weekly and daily and even every moment just to remind them not to forget the holy land of Palestine. The mere awareness of Palestinian refugees is not enough: Palestinians need to take their lands back.

Eight years ago when Obama took US presidency, in his speeches, he constantly opposed Israeli settlements, but what happened? Today with the new US president in office, what is go-

The conflict between two most powerful countries in the Middle East, namely, Saudi Arabia and Iran, has been in sheer advantage of Israeli regime.



ing to happen with his radical and racist positions? Muslims should not remain silent and must take real actions.

Few months ago, "A-monitor" published an article entitled "have Arab leaders forgotten about Palestine?" stating that, "in the Palestinian leadership, there is a deep sense of frustration with the Arab states' current attitude toward their cause and the current diplomatic stalemate."

Did all of their attempt fail? The Arab states' leadership senses that the occupation by the Israel army is only deepening, as is the daily humiliation of their people. The expansion of settlements is constant and systematic, in order to prevent Palestinian statehood. Palestinians are killed on a daily basis by soldiers and settlers; and yet the leaders of the Arab governments are only paying lip service to the Palestinian statehood aspirations. A year ago the Hindustan times,

an Indian website, had reported that, for the first time and since the creation of Israel in 1948, Israel is sitting pretty. For all practical purposes it has been let off the hook by once-hostile Arab governments who are now busy fending off internal turmoil or feuding with their fellow Muslim neighbors. The Palestinian issue is well and truly forgotten and several Arab nations are quietly cozying up to their Zionist arch-enemy.

The conflict between two most powerful countries in the Middle East, namely, Saudi Arabia and Iran, has been in sheer advantage of Israeli regime.

It has to be kept in mind that no resolution has been realized about Israel without the participation of the American president. From Richard Nixon to Jimmy Carter to Bill Clinton and to Barack Obama, whatever little steps were taken by Israelis in reaching to settlements could not have been achieved without direct US involvement at the highest level. What America is doing in Palestinian land is defiantly violating the human rights!



For all practical purposes it has been let off the hook by once-hostile Arab governments who are now busy fending off internal turmoil or feuding with their fellow Muslim neighbors.

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مالکین محترم املاک مبلیه و غیرمبلیه، مسکونی، اداری و تجاری، ویلا و مستغلات شما را جهت اجاره به سفارتخانه ها و شرکت های خارجی نیازمندیم.

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6 ways to cut back at work and be instantly happier



Instead of taking on the whole project, I offered my mentorship and material support when employees needed it, but let them handle any tasks they wanted to try themselves.

I've always been busy and achievement-oriented; I was the college kid with a high GPA, multiple on-campus jobs, and a full course load. When I graduated, it was only natural that my industriousness would continue into adult life, but I was still struggling to make ends meet, so I started working more and more hours. I relocated to a larger city with more opportunities, took on two part-time jobs—one an overnight shift—and redoubled my efforts.

It wasn't long before this perseverance became a real problem. For two years, I had a near-constant headache and neglected my relationship. When my partner and I went out for a dinner date, I was unable to leave work behind—I was always concerned that a client might email me. I stopped doing things I loved, including spending time outside, reading for fun, and connecting with friends. Finally, I reached a breaking point: I physically couldn't keep up with the pace I'd been setting for myself and started missing deadlines. I was constantly sick. I realized I'd lost control and finally admitted that I had a problem... even as peers continued to compliment me for my ability to work so much.

It took me months to start changing course. Like many in my generation, I still had six-figure student loan debt, but when I was being honest with myself, I knew that stability would elude me until I changed my habits to make them more sustainable.

Finally, nearly a year after I first began to flounder, I'm in the process of making some concrete changes, so I can get more enjoyment out of time I spend doing something other than work. Here's what I'm doing... if you're going through something similar, these tips might help you too.

1. Put self-care on the schedule

For people battling work addiction, any

time spent outside of work can be anxiety-inducing, but self-care is vitally important. It's still hard for me to relax, so for now, I'm focusing on activities like horseback riding that demand my full attention, so I can't get distracted. When I'm riding, if I don't focus on the moment, my ride can be less than enjoyable at best, and dangerous at worst. I'm still working toward enjoying unstructured time—right now it makes me very uncomfortable to have nothing on the schedule—but my hope is that by getting more comfortable with not working, I can get more comfortable with actual leisure.

2. Learn to unplug

A big part of learning how to be engaged in the world outside of my work has been to commit to other activities and to hold myself accountable, so I'm spending a minimum of one hour per week unplugged—my phone is not allowed to come with me on a date, a hike, a class, or any other activity. During that time, I just can't work. My goal is to eventually be in a place where I don't actually need to schedule that time and to learn how to push work completely out of my mind when there's nothing I can do about it.

3. Learn to change the way you talk to yourself

For me, the hardest part about addressing my addiction to work is the whirlwind of feelings every time I work... and every time I try to take a step back. Like most people in this world, my financial situation makes it impossible for me to go cold turkey, so it is crucial that I have help learning to manage my emotions. The biggest struggle I have is feeling guilty whenever I take time for myself. I have a hard time focusing on activities that are important to non-work-related parts of my life.

My first goal in therapy is to learn to deal with the guilt. We discuss where it

comes from, and I'm learning to change the way I talk to myself. While I still often find myself thinking things like, "You're being lazy and wasting time. You could be working and earning money right now," or "You're broke! How can you afford to just sit around doing nothing?" I'm actively working on interrupting those thoughts with new ones like, "You are not doing this alone. Let your partner help," and "No one can work 24 hours a day. You are not being lazy by letting your mind rest." One of the most important things to remember is that taking real breaks actually helps me be more productive when I am working.

4. Recruit supporters

One of the most isolating aspects of work addiction is that being hard-working and industrious is seen as virtuous, even when it's out of control. There are always people complimenting my ability to focus for long hours. It's nice to feel admired, but these people unintentionally reinforce my addiction instead of helping me change habits. When I decided to make a change, I talked to my partner and my mother about what I was dealing with, and about what I was trying to do. I asked them to help me hold myself accountable for taking time to do other things. And they've been doing it. They remind me that the work will still be there when I come back, that my bank account is doing OK, and that taking a break will help me be more productive later. They also commit to coming with me to non-work-related activities if they can make the time.

5. Set firm boundaries

One of the hardest things is that these days, there are lots (and lots) of tools that allow you to work from almost anywhere, and I was taking full advantage of them. One of the most important steps I've taken is removing my work email account from

my phone. If I'm not in my office, I'm not checking or responding. I thought that by making this change, my career would suffer—after all, who would want to work with someone who doesn't get back to them right away? But what I found instead is that it didn't take long for my boss and coworkers to get on board... and even take similar steps themselves.

6. Learn to delegate and say no

Last year, if my staff had come to me with a big project idea—like securing grant funding to make important changes—I would have tackled the project almost all on my own. I would have researched options, scheduled meetings, written proposals, and sent them out, asking my team for their feedback occasionally and then calling it a collaborative effort.

But last month, when my staff asked what we could do to improve our workplace, I turned the question back on them, asking what they would like to see happen and what they thought was possible. The result so far has been that my employees have come up with some very creative solutions that my company might actually be able to implement, and I'm not overworked trying to make it happen. Instead of taking on the whole project, I offered my mentorship and material support when they needed it, but let them handle any tasks they wanted to try themselves.

I still struggle with wanting to take it all on, and I find myself resisting putting too much time into projects that really belong in someone else's hands, but I keep reminding myself that letting them do their thing is giving my staff ownership over our workplace, and showing them that I have confidence in their abilities. The sky is not falling. In fact, it's been great—both my staff and I are thriving.

(Source: greatist.com)

Which cheeses are lowest in cholesterol and fat?

By Jennifer Moll

Who doesn't like to sprinkle a little bit of cheese on their favorite dish? Although delicious and high in calcium, cheese can also introduce saturated fat into your diet – which can adversely affect your lipids if you consume cheese on a regular basis. There are many types of cheeses available for your cooking pleasure – whether you are having a craving for a tangy cheddar cheese slice or a milder dollop of ricotta cheese to add to your dish.

If you are looking to use cheese in your cholesterol-lowering diet, these tips will provide you with the cheeses that are highest and lowest in saturated fats, as well as general tips on how to add cheese to your healthy diet – without adding extra fat and calories. Here are the lowest in fat?

Which cheeses

The more commonly used cheeses in foods, such as mozzarella, cheddar, Monterey Jack, blue cheese, provolone, and Swiss, all contain similar amounts of saturated fat (3.7 and 5.9 grams per serving). However, it appears that provolone and mozzarella cheeses contain lower amounts of saturated fat, whereas other cheeses, such as American and Monterey Jack, contain slightly higher amounts of fat. For instance, one ounce of provolone cheese contains 4.8 grams of saturated fat compared to up to 5.5 grams of saturated fat for the same sized piece of American cheese. In this case, by replacing the type of cheese you add to your sandwich or soup, you would be cutting the amount of saturated fat added – as well as calories.

Other types of cheeses, such as part-skim ricotta cheese and cottage cheese, have even lower amounts of saturated fat per serving. Compared to one cup of shredded cheddar cheese, which contains about 24 grams of saturated fat, one cup of cottage cheese contains 6 grams of saturated fat. If you were to select low-fat versions of these products, the saturated fat content would be cut almost in half.

Helpful tips for adding cheese to your low-fat diet

Fortunately, there are other ways you can cut saturated fat and calorie content of the cheeses that you add to your foods. Try these helpful tips if you want to add cheese to your cholesterol-lowering diet:

Look for low-fat versions of your favorite cheeses. Sometimes, substituting a cheese for one that is slightly lower in fat, such as ricotta or cottage cheese, may not be feasible in some foods. In these cases, you may want to check to see if a low-fat version of your favorite cheese is available. If the cheese product is low-fat, it will likely say so on the product's packaging. There are many low-fat cheese that tastes just the same and have a similar consistency to their full-fat counterparts – making them an excellent substitute for cheese lovers that just can't let go of their favorite cheeses in their cholesterol-lowering diet. However, you should always check the food labeling for fat content, too, in order to make sure that you still not introducing too much fat into your diet.

Use a cheese substitute. If you enjoy adding cheese to your dishes – and are watching your fat intake -- you might want to entertain the possibility of experimenting with cheese substitutes. These foods are made from plant products, such as soy, so they lack the saturated fats that full-fat dairy products contain. Even though they are not dairy-based cheeses, they can still help to create a terrific dish without adding excess fat to your dish.

Include smaller portions. If low-fat cheeses and cheese substitutes aren't appealing to you, there is always the option of reducing the amount of your favorite cheese added to some of the foods that you eat. For instance, instead of heaping three slices of Swiss cheese onto your sandwich, add just one slice. In the case of adding shredded cheese, where you can definitely get carried away with adding too much, use a measuring cup or spoon to add your cheese instead of your fingers and eyes, which have a tendency to underestimate the amount you are adding. Many food manufacturers have also pre-sliced cheeses that are thinner than their regular counterparts – allowing you to enjoy a complete slice of cheese without having to cut up cheese slices to cut your fat intake.

(Source: verywell.com)

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Intl. figures to celebrate Noruz at Golestan Palace

HERITAGE TEHRAN — The Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization is slated to host an international feast to celebrate Noruz at Tehran's Golestan Palace on March 26.



An interior view of the historical Golestan Palace in the heart of Tehran

Ambassadors, envoys and cultural figures of several countries have been invited to the event that includes variety of side-section programs such as live performances and crafts exhibits, CHTHO Deputy Director Mohammad-Hassan Talebian announced on Tuesday.

Back in November, UNESCO approved Noruz collective feast of 12 nations, inscribed the ancient feast on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Noruz was initially registered on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009, as a common tradition for Iran, Azerbaijan, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. Later in 2014, Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Iraq put in requests to be added to the list.

UNESCO has it that Noruz promotes the values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families, as well as reconciliation and neighborliness, thus contributing to cultural diversity and friendship among peoples and various communities.

China-S.Korea spat could boost Thai tourism, travel group says

Thailand's pivotal Chinese tourism sector is on the rise and may get an additional boost due to tensions between China and South Korea and the banning of Chinese tour groups to South Korea this month, the head of a Thai travel group said on Tuesday.

Overall tourism accounts for 12 percent of Southeast Asia's second-largest economy but Chinese tourism, the biggest foreign group, slumped in the final quarter of 2016 after a Thai crackdown on cheap Chinese tour packages.

"Chinese tourist numbers have recently increased by 15-20 percent to about 80 percent of last year's levels, which is very encouraging," Ronnarong Chewinsiriamnuai, president of the Thai-Chinese Tourism Alliance Association, told Reuters.

He said tensions between China and South Korea over Seoul's decision to deploy a U.S. missile defence system, which Beijing says threatens its security, could further boost Chinese tourism. (Source: Reuters)

Bisotun bears testimony to eloquent art scene of prehistoric Iran

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Bisotun bas-relief bears exceptional testimony to the distinctive visual arts in prehistoric Iran. It is nestled on an elevated limestone cliff of a mountain of the same name in Iran's western Kermanshah Province.

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage site, the inscription is a patchwork of immense yet impressive life-size carvings depicting the king Darius I and several other figures. It was the first cuneiform writing that was deciphered in the 19th century.

Darius I, byname Darius the Great (r. 522-486 BC) was one of the greatest rulers of the Achaemenid dynasty, who was noted for his administrative genius and for his great building projects.

The inscription, measuring about 15 meters high and 25 meters wide, was created on the order of King Darius I in 521 BC. It bears three different cuneiform script languages: Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian.

Much of it celebrates his victories over numerous pretenders to the Persian Empire's throne. It is unique, being the only known monumental text of the Achaemenids to document a specific historic event, that of the re-establishment of the empire by the king.

UNESCO has it that Bisotun bears an outstanding testimony to the important interchange of human values on the development of monumental art and writing, reflecting ancient traditions in monumental bas-reliefs.

Once deciphered in the 19th century, it opened the door to previously unknown aspects of ancient civilizations. In that sense, the inscription at Bisotun has had a value for Assyriology comparable to that of the Rosetta Stone for Egyptology.

According to legend, the figure represents Gaumata, the pretender to the throne whose assassination led to Darius' rise to power. This symbolic representation of the Achaemenid king in relation to his enemy reflects traditions in monumental bas-reliefs that date from ancient Egypt and the Middle East, and which were subsequently further developed during the Achaemenid and later empires.

The massive site of Bisotun also features vestiges of Old Persian history, art and architecture, amongst them is the Statue of Hercules that was discovered around 1957.

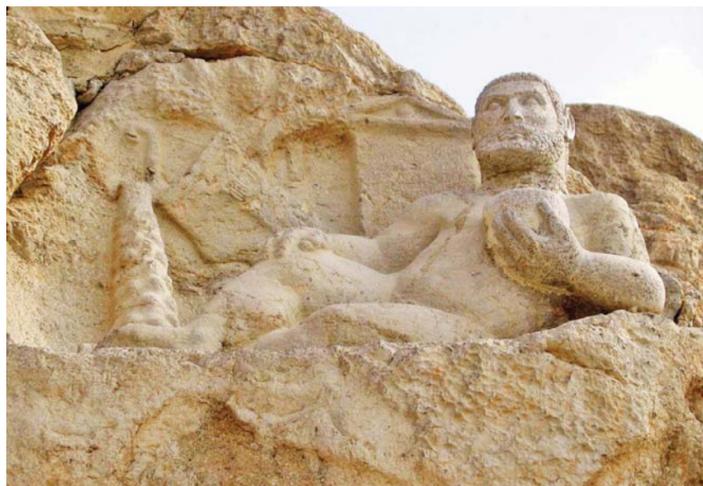
Under visitors' eyes

Here is a select of comments that



A view of Bisotun bas-relief in Kermanshah Province, western Iran. It is associated with the Achaemenid king Darius I and bears three different cuneiform script languages.

Placed on one of the main routes linking Persia with Mesopotamia, the inscription is illustrated by a life-size bas-relief of its creator, the Achaemenid (Persian) king Darius I, and other figures.



The Statue of Hercules carved on a rock cliff of Bisotun

visitors to the UNESCO World Heritage site have posted to TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

'World-famous Darius I bas-relief carving'

About 60 meters above the road the world-famous carving presenting Darius I receiving chained supplicants, surrounded by inscriptions in three different 'lost' languages.

Bring binoculars to fully enjoy the beauty of this scene. (Wim Antwerp from Belgium, visited Sep. 2016)

'Beautiful but difficult to see much of it'

A lot of points for the beauty and history of these wonderful carvings, but it does detract that you can not only get close enough to see them, you are further impeded by the scaffolding.

Binoculars are a good addition, maybe even they could set up one of those telescopes that are on many high buildings so that you can look at the city, but in this case, you could look at the writing and carvings. The lower carvings are easier to see and appreciate. Love that angel of the right side of the arch. (Miriam D. from Colorado, visited May 2016)

'Stunning engravings, both in design and size'

These rock engravings from direness eras are very impressive, in particular those from the time of Darius I. You cannot access the finest carvings which are high up, so bring a good telephoto lens if you have one. (Peter from London, visited August 2015)

Tehran, Shanghai heritage museums set to broaden ties

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Directors of the National Museum of Iran and the Shanghai Museum are set to widen ties in various spheres, as cultural interactions between the two countries are deeply rooted in time.

National Museum of Iran Director Jebreil Nokandeh and Shanghai Museum Director Yang Zhigang signed a memorandum of understanding in Tehran on March 12. The officials also exchanged views on the formation of a joint exhibit, which will revolve around Silk Road as the main theme.

"The continuation of such cultural relations would have resulted in more closeness and mutual understanding between the two ancient cultures," ISNA quoted Nokandeh as saying on Monday.

For his part, Zhigang called cooperation between the two institutions a factor for reinforcing bilateral relations.

Exchanging expertise and know-how as well as organizing master classes, workshops, training courses and joint exhibits are among arenas that the MOU touches upon.



National Museum of Iran Director Jebreil Nokandeh (L) and Shanghai Museum Director Yang Zhigang ink copies of the agreement in Tehran on March 12.

Titanic for tourists: London tour company booking trips to explore the world's most famous shipwreck

Resting at a depth of 13,000ft (4,000m), the RMS Titanic continues to captivate the public more than a century after it sunk to the bottom of the North Atlantic Ocean. It has now been announced that those still intrigued by the vessel will be able to see it for themselves, by joining diving trips to the shipwreck in 2018.

Commencing in May next year, London-based tour operator Blue Marble Private will run eight-day journeys that will culminate with an up-close encounter with what is the most fabled vessel of modern times. Open to just nine clients at a time, groups will begin their experience by flying by helicopter or seaplane from St John's, Newfoundland to the expedition support yacht set somewhere above the wreck.

There will be time to adjust to this new environment, with this small group of privileged visitors being taught about the ship's workings on their second day on board by its crew and guest explorers, scientists and expedition crew.

Those who wish to engage more directly with the workings of the ship will have the opportunity to take part in orientation sessions and can "assist" the crew in planning a dive, operating the sonar and using the undersea navigation system.

It's on days three to six that the expedition is at its most exciting, however. Should weather conditions allow, that is when up to three passengers at a time will clamber aboard a specially designed titanium and carbon fibre submersible to see the decaying remains of the Titanic itself.



A rare lithograph pre- maiden voyage poster of RMS Titanic that sold for a world record £60,000 in 2010

Accompanied by a pilot and deep ocean expert, they will sail over the ship's deck and should even be able to glimpse its still recognisable grand staircase from amongst the detritus.

Dives will take place throughout the day or night, dependent on when weather conditions are most favourable, and Blue Marble Private's clients will be expected to contribute to the mission (if even in just a cursory way) by assisting with sub-sea communications and undertaking basic tasks.

Buffering their descents will be lectures, discussions, mission updates and dive briefs with deep ocean explorers and scientists, all intended to give them a deeper appreciation of the efforts required to make the

dive possible. After a debrief and a further day at sea, groups will return to St John's.

As well as being a true once-in-a-lifetime experience for the few who avail of this package, seeing the Titanic in person remains a truly privileged experience shared by very few people on the planet.

The doomed vessel, which measured more than 880ft long and 100ft tall, went down with the loss of more than 1500 lives on April 15, 1912 during her maiden voyage from Southampton to New York.

Next summer's trip marks the first time since 2005 that it has been possible for the public to dive to the site of the Titanic, and far fewer people have seen the wreckage than have travelled to space or summited Mount Everest.

All going well, the package should also be made available to a limited number of customers in summer 2019.

The complexity of the trip and the scarcity of places also go some way to explaining its prohibitive price: it costs \$105,129 (£86,500) per person.

There is a greater significance to that cost than might be immediately apparent, however. Adjusted for inflation, the price is equivalent to the \$4,350 a first-class passenger would have paid to sail on the Titanic's maiden voyage in 1912.

Obviously, however, all will hope and expect for these forthcoming expeditions to prove far more successful.

(Source: The Telegraph)

ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic center of Lima

The historic center of Lima, known as the "Ciudad de los Reyes" (City of Kings), is located in the Rimac valley, Peru. The urban area was founded by Spanish conqueror Francisco Pizarro in January 1535 on the territories led by the Chiefdom of Rimac.

Lima was the political, administrative, religious and economic capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru and the most important city of the Spanish dominions in South America. The city played a leading role in the history of the New World from 1542 to the 18th century when the creation of the Viceroyalties of New Granada (1718) and of La Plata (1777) gradually put an end to the



omnipotence of the oldest Spanish colony on South America.

Although urban development in the 20th century - the construction of the Avenida Abancay in 1940 - has whittled away at this immense domain, San Francisco still presents an ensemble of convent buildings that is remarkable for its surface area, its coherence, the beauty of the architecture and the richness of interior decorations.

The architecture of the other buildings is often representative of the same period. Thus, despite the addition of certain 19th-century constructions (such as Casa Courret in the Art Nouveau style) to the old urban fabric, the historic nucleus of the town recalls Lima at the time of the Spanish Kingdom of Peru.

(Source: UNESCO)

Scientists catch star and possible black hole in a rapid, dangerous dance

Scientists have caught sight of a star extremely close to what they think is a black hole, whizzing around it at an extraordinary speed — at least twice an hour. As NASA put it, "This may be the tightest orbital dance ever witnessed for a likely black hole and a companion star."

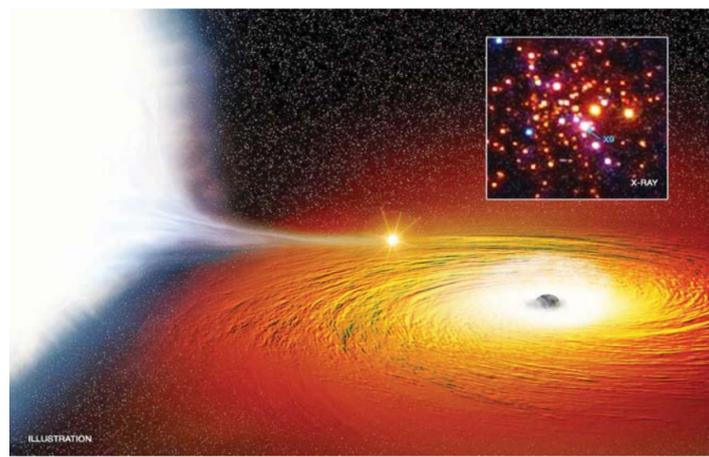
The pair is in our galaxy, in an area dense with stars some 14,800 light-years from Earth.

Researchers believe the object is a black hole, although other explanations are possible, Michigan State University's Arash Bahramian tells The Two-Way. He's the lead author of a recent paper in Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society detailing the team's findings.

They're confident the star caught in the dance is a white dwarf, which is the dense remnant of a star, like our sun, after it has died. The white dwarf is close enough to the black hole that it is "pulling matter from the white dwarf onto itself," another indicator of how close the pair is, Bahramian says.

Identified system

It's the first time that they've identified a system like this one, although they expect there are others. "So that's why it's exciting that we found one, so that we can say they exist," he says.



cept there are others. "So that's why it's exciting that we found one, so that we can say they exist," he says.

In 2015, scientists uncovered evidence that one of the objects in the system might be a black hole, because of its "extreme radio brightness." Bahramian

says that prompted the researchers to seek observations from three different telescopes: NASA's Chandra X-ray Observatory, NASA's NuSTAR and CSIRO's Australia Telescope Compact Array.

They were able to observe variations in the brightness every 28 minutes, point-

ing to an extremely fast orbital period of this binary — a term for a pair of celestial objects orbiting each other.

Rapid orbit

Bahramian said they think the star involved is a white dwarf because it would need to be small to fit into such a rapid orbit. The scientists also found evidence of large amounts of oxygen in the system, an element found in white dwarfs.

"Probably the white dwarf was with another binary with another star, and the black hole started interacting with the binaries. So because of the crowded region within the cluster, they interact with each other and a strong gravitation of the black hole pulled the white dwarf out of that binary and made a binary with it, while the other third possible star was kicked away from this system."

It's unclear how this dangerous dance will end. Bahramian explains that "we expect that in the future, the white dwarf will lose so much mass that it will become just a very dense planet-like sphere." He adds that it is "unlikely for it to actually fall toward the black hole."

(Source: npr.org)

Nobel Prize winner Sir Fraser Stoddart hopes to turn gold mines green

A British Nobel Prize winner is hoping to revolutionize the mining industry with a new technique for extracting gold that does away with poisonous cyanide.

Sir Fraser Stoddart, the Scottish-born scientist who won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 2016, is behind a new start-up that is testing a starch-based method of separating gold from ore.

The "serendipitous discovery" by Sir Fraser's research team at Northwestern University in Chicago is being developed by his company Cycladex in Nevada.

The technique uses a hydrogen peroxide-based substance that combines with a cornstarch-derived compound to extract gold at ambient temperatures.

Cheaper technique

Cycladex believes its technique is cheaper than current methods and could eventually replace the cyanide leaching process that has been used in most gold mines for the last 120 years.

"It's a very much greener way of extracting gold," said Sir Fraser. "Almost inevitably it's my hope as a person concerned about the environment that this will put increasing pressure on the gold industry to move away

from cyanide use."

Cyanide has been blamed for contaminating waterways and poisoning wildlife.

Sir Fraser said he was confident his technique stood "a pretty good chance of becoming the new method" industry-wide. "That's my dream," he said.

Cycladex has won a \$1m grant from the National Science Foundation in the US and is now working with Comstock, one of the world's oldest gold mining companies, on a trial that could move to a commercial scale with 18 months.

Further partners

The company is now looking for further partners, and has also teamed up with a miner in Slovakia, where the use of cyanide is banned.

Sir Fraser, who recently met with both Barack Obama and Chinese premier Li Keqiang to discuss his work, said the chance discovery of the technique showed the importance of allowing scientists to pursue research without being set onerous goals.

"Politicians think they can tell the science community what to target," he said. "More funding that is given with much less direction would in the fullness of time - pro-



vided it went to research groups with good track records - be very much more productive for society in general."

The Nobel Prize winner's collaborator is Roger Pettman, a former research student of his, who developed non-stick, biodegradable chewing gum, and now serves as Cycladex's chief executive.

(Source: The Telegraph)

Earth's lost history of planet-altering eruptions revealed

Enormous volcanoes vomited lava over the ancient Earth much more often than geologists had suspected. Eruptions as big as the biggest previously known ones happened at least 10 times in the past 3 billion years, an analysis of the geological record shows.

Such eruptions are linked with some of the most profound changes in Earth's history. These include the biggest mass extinction, which happened 252 million years ago when volcanoes blanketed Siberia with molten rock and poisonous gases.

"As we go back in time, we're discovering events that are every bit as big," says Richard Ernst, a geologist at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, and Toms State University in Russia, who led the work. "These are magnificent

huge things."

Eruptions occurred

Knowing when and where such eruptions occurred can help geologists to pinpoint ore deposits, reconstruct past supercontinents and understand the birth of planetary crust. Studying this type of volcanic activity on other planets can even reveal clues to the geological history of the early Earth.

Ernst presented the findings this month to an industry consortium that funded the work. He expects to make the data public by the end of the year, through a map from the Commission for the Geological Map of the World in Paris.

"This will probably be the defining database for the next decade," says Mike Coffin, a marine geophysicist at the University of Tasmania in Hobart, Australia.

Surprisingly, the ancient eruptions lurk almost in plain sight. The lava they spewed has long since eroded away, but the underlying plumbing that funneled molten rock from deep in the Earth up through the volcanoes is still there.

Ernst and his colleagues scoured the globe for traces of this plumbing. It usually appears as radial spokes of ancient squirts of lava, fanned out around the throat of a long-gone volcano. The geologists mapped these features, known as dyke swarms, and used uranium-lead dating to pinpoint the age of the rock in each dyke. By matching the ages of the dykes, the researchers could connect those that came from a single huge eruption.

Siberian event

Each of those newly identified erup-

tions goes into Ernst's database. "We've got about 10 or 15 so far that are probably comparable to the Siberian event," Ernst says, "that we either didn't know about or had a little taste, but no idea of their true extent."

They include a 1.32-billion-year-old eruption in Australia that connects to one in northern China. By linking dyke swarms across continents, scientists can better understand how Earth's crust has shuffled around over time, says Nasrddine Youbi, a geologist at Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakesh.

Technically, the eruptions are known as 'large igneous provinces' (LIPs). They can spew more than one million cubic kilometers of rock in a few million years.

(Source: nature.com)

Shatel Mobile to Unveil SIM Cards with mobile number prefix 0998

Shatel Mobile is set to unveil soon a new SIM card with the unique mobile number prefix "0998" licensed by Communication Regulatory Authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the operator's CEO said.

According to Shatel Mobile Public Relations, Arash KarimBeigi also noted that "the new SIM cards to be issued by Iran's first FULL MVNO operator, would provide the company's subscribers with certain services including call, Messaging, cutting edge wireless mobile telecommunications technologies like 3G, 4G/LTE and 4.5 G as well as connection to portable mobile 4G network, LTE-TDD and public Wi-Fi.

He pointed to the success of Shatel Communication Development Company (Shatel Mobile) to receive Full Mobile Virtual Network Operator License from CRA and added "unlike Light MVNO, the first type of mobile virtual network operators (Full MVNO) are equipped with new technical facilities as well as Core network equipment. Meanwhile, Full MVNO operators use the current radio infrastructure of wireless mobile telecommunications networks to provide their subscribers with innovative and distinguished services.

Shatel Communication Development Company offers wireless mobile and portable communication

services via Shatel Group's mobile telecommunication networks, TD-LTE and public Wi-Fi. This enables the company to provide its subscribers with convergent mobile and fixed wireless service.

Shatel Communication Development Company was established in 2015 as the mobile network of Shatel Group. The company is mainly focused on new generations of wireless communication services on mobile phone networks, TD-LTE and public Wi-Fi. The company managed to receive Full Mobile Virtual Network Operator License from Communication Regulatory Authority of the Islamic Republic of Iran in April 2017.

Peugeot 2008 on IKCO's Production Line

2008 rolled out IKCO's production line with the efforts of IKCO and Peugeot's experts less than six months after its production began in Europe.

The preparations for the assembly line of IKCO and Peugeot joint product (Peugeot 2008) began after the two

sides signed an agreement last year to restart their cooperation and based on the schedule, the first 2008 rolled out the production line in March.

Invested by the joint venture between IKCO and Peugeot (IKAP), the production line is set to produce over 30,000 vehicles each year.

TAM Iran Khodro Company managed to win the tender bid for setting up Peugeot 2008's body line last year after putting behind Chinese companies and European car manufacturers.

The company has set up the line with a main focus on taking advantage of lo-

cal experts to fulfill the goals projected in the resistance economy guidelines.

IKAP has been established with the direct and equal investments by IKCO and Peugeot as part of larger a plan to produce new French vehicles inside Iran and then to export them to the regional countries.

IKCO "Relief & Rescue" Festival during Nowruz Holidays Kicks Off

Iran Khodro Sales and After-Sales Services (ISACO) in cooperation with Iran's EMDAD Khodro Company will launch "Relief & Rescue" Festival during Iranian New Year in 1396 (to start March 20, 2017), the Public Relations Dept. of IKCO reported.

Offering quality relief and rescue services to the noble nation of Islamic Iran has been cited as the main objective behind organizing this Festival which will start as of Esfand 25 (March 15) and end up to Farvardin 15

(April 3).

In this comprehensive plan, 411 ISACO's agencies will take part, showing a considerable 20 percent growth as compared to a year earlier.

Moreover, 233 authorized sales stores and also 2,080 relief and rescue camps have announced their readiness for offering quality after-sales services to the dear customers of IKCO, the report added.



Spiders eat 400-800 million tons of prey every year

It has long been suspected that spiders are one of the most important groups of predators of insects. Zoologists at the University of Basel and Lund University in Sweden have now shown just how true this is - spiders kill astronomical numbers of insects on a global scale. The scientific journal The Science of Nature has published the results.

With more than 45,000 species and a population density of up to 1,000 individuals per square meter, spiders are one of the world's most species-rich and widespread groups of predators. Due to their secretive lifestyle - many spiders are nocturnal or live well camouflaged in vegetation - it was previously difficult to demonstrate their ecological role, but zoologists at the University of Basel and Lund University (Sweden) have now used calculations to conclude that spiders indeed have an enormous ecological impact as natural enemies of insects.

The researchers used two calculation methods based on different models, which consistently showed that the global spider population (with a weight of around 25 million tons) wipes out an estimated 400-800 million tons of prey every year. More than 90% of that prey is insects and springtails (Collembola). Furthermore, large tropical spiders occasionally prey on small vertebrates (frogs, lizards, snakes, fish, birds, and bats) or feed on plants. The large range of the global prey kill estimate is due to the fact that rates of prey kill can vary widely within specific ecosystems, and these variations must be taken into account for ecological projections.

(Source: EurekAlert)

Decline of bees threatens evolution of plants, study suggests

The feared demise of bumblebees could bring the evolution of the plants they pollinate grinding to a halt - leaving them vulnerable to new diseases and other threats - a new study suggests.

Researchers in Switzerland tested what happened when field mustard plants were pollinated solely by bumblebees or hoverflies over nine generations.

But perhaps the most alarming finding was that the plants left to the hoverflies showed a 15-fold increase in the ability to self-pollinate.

This means the plant reproduces itself, without any genetic input from another plant.

If this asexual reproduction becomes commonplace, the plants would struggle to evolve to adapt to new threats, for example from pests moving into an area as the climate warms.

The decline in bee populations has been causing alarm, partly because of their key role as the pollinators of food crops.

The European Union is currently considering whether to license the weedkiller glyphosate, the main ingredient of Roundup, which has been linked, controversially, to cancer in humans and sub-lethal effects on bees.

Other chemicals used by farmers are thought to have had a devastating effect on bee populations.

Professor Florian Schiestl, of Zurich University, told The Independent: "Bumblebees and hoverflies have different preferences when they visit the flowers. Those preferences decide which plants are being visited by the pollinator and that means which plants mate with each other."

(Source: The Independent)

Antarctic penguin numbers double previous estimates: scientists

Almost six million Adelie penguins are living in East Antarctica, more than double the number previously thought, scientists said Wednesday in findings that have implications for conservation.

Research by an Australian, French and Japanese team used aerial and ground surveys, tagging and re-sighting data and automated camera images over several breeding seasons, which allowed them to come up with the new figure.

They focused on a 5,000 kilometer (3,100 mile) stretch of coastline, estimating it was home to 5.9 million birds -- some 3.6 million more than previously thought. On this basis, they estimate a likely global population of 14 to 16 million.

Before, population estimates only took into account breeding pairs, said Australian Antarctic Division seabird ecologist Louise Emmerson.

"Non-breeding birds are harder to count because they are out foraging at sea, rather than nesting in colonies on land," she said.

"However, our study in East Antarctica has shown that non-breeding Adelie penguins may be as, or more, abundant than the breeders."

"These birds are an important reservoir of future breeders and estimating their numbers ensures we better understand the entire population's foraging needs."

Adelie penguins, slick and efficient swimmers, live on the Antarctic continent and on many small, surrounding coastal islands. They spend the winter offshore in the seas surrounding the pack ice. Seabird ecologist Colin Southwell said the research had implications for conservation, with more birds potentially interacting with humans in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean than previously thought.

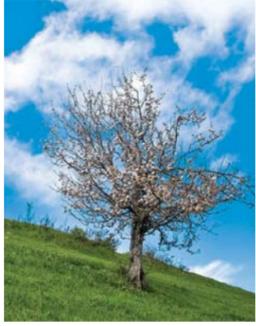
He said the rocky, ice-free areas preferred by penguins for nesting were also favored by research stations due to ease of resupply.

(Source: AFP)



Things to do on the first day of spring

Spring is finally near, and if you live in a snowy state with cold winters, you probably can't wait for spring to finally arrive! We would like to give you some fun ideas for things you can do



to celebrate the first day of spring on March 20th, even if there is still a bit of snow and slush on the ground! It won't be long before we're all outside enjoying the beautiful spring weather. If it's too snowy or cold to celebrate the very first day of spring, start planning all of the fun you will have when spring finally does arrive in your hometown!

Spring is in the air

Whether or not it looks or feels like spring in your

hometown, spring is in the air, and March 20th is the date that proves it. Help bring in the spring season with some of our ideas that you can enjoy on the first day of spring, or shortly after.

- Start your spring cleaning. Before it gets too nice outside to be indoors, now is the perfect time to clean out your cupboards and your garage and finish up your spring cleaning. Consider donating any unused or unwanted items to charity, including unwanted cars, trucks, SUVs, RVs, boats, or motorcycles.

- Play a sport. Whether or not you enjoy playing sports, finding something you can do outside will help you celebrate and appreciate the opportunity to be outside after being cooped up all winter long. Play catch, shoot some hoops, or take your bike off the bike rack—allow yourself to enjoy springtime!

- Volunteer. If the cold weather was enough to keep you indoors all winter long, consider putting your time to use with volunteering at an organization of your choice.

- Clean off your patio furniture or invest in a new set. Get your patio furniture ready to go outside by cleaning it off or purchasing a set if you don't have one. Even a set of plastic chairs will do the trick, but having something available that allows you to sit outside and enjoy the weather is ideal! If you have kids and they don't have a park nearby, consider purchasing a swing set for them to play on.

- Buy a new book. Or check one out at the library so you have something to read outside on a sunny spring day. Get out any spring-themed books for your kids.

- Plan a trip. Whether you're planning a full road trip or a day trip to a state park, now is the time to start planning when you can gather your family up for a car ride to explore something outdoors.

- Put out your birdfeeders and start leaving snacks for other animals such as squirrels, rabbits, ducks, and deer.

- Start taking walks. It's good for your circulation, and it also gives you a chance to step outside and enjoy the warmer days.

- Keep a steady bouquet of fresh flowers in your kitchen at all times. It will remind you to bring spring indoors, too!

- Keep a candy dish filled with jelly beans in your home.

- Learn how to build a kite and fly it.

- When the snow is gone and the temperatures get warmer, plan a family picnic, even if it's just to a park down the road that has a bench to sit at. The grass may still be too wet for a blanket!

- Plan a garden, and plant it when the weather finally allows!

- Plant a family tree, whether it's an apple tree, plum tree, or pear tree, since they can be planted in early spring.

- When weather permits, ditch your clothes dryer and start air-drying your linens. Not only will it give your linens a fresh scent, but you'll save on energy.

- Organize your home. Get all your big chores out of the way before the warm weather and sunny skies are in full force.

- On the first day of spring, plan a fun family activity to celebrate the new season. Take a walk, go out to dinner, or simply watch the rain fall, but do what you can to appreciate the first day of spring!

Happy spring.

(Source: wheelforwishes.org)

LEARN ENGLISH

Heating

A: It's freezing in here! Can I **turn up** the heat?

B: Don't touch that thermostat! You don't pay the bills around here!

A: Dad! Are you serious? What's the point of having central heating if we can't use it! Look, I can see my breath!

B: Put on a sweater! I'm not gonna let you **run up** my heating bill just because it's a bit **chilly**.

A: Dad! I'm gonna **catch a cold**!

B: When I was your age, my parents didn't have central heating like you do! We had a **furnace** in the center of the living room and that was it. We used it to cook, heat the house and even dry our clothes! We never caught a cold. You should be **grateful**!

Key vocabulary

turn up: increase the intensity of a device

run up: acquire bills or debts

chilly: very cold

catch a cold: become infected with a cold

furnace: a piece of equipment used to heat a building

grateful: thankful

Supplementary vocabulary

wood stove: a metal closed fire chamber that burns wood fuel for heating and cooking

thermos: container lined with insulating material that keeps liquids hot or cold

fireplace: a structure, made of stone or brick, for holding a fire at the base of a chimney

frost: a deposit of tiny ice crystals formed when water vapor condenses at a temperature below freezing

sub-zero temperatures: cold temperatures, below zero degrees Celsius

(Source: irlanguage.com)

You spring forward for daylight saving time because of energy policy, not farmers

When I got back from my run this morning, my husband was scrambling to get our son out the door for soccer practice. He asked the time, and I told him that it was almost 10:30 am. "Real 10:30 or fake 10:30?" he asked. It's a fair question. Half of our clocks - the digital ones connected to phones and computers - sprung forward automatically last night while the other half - some old digital clocks combined with a handful of analog clocks - still have the "old" time this morning. That's because on March 12, time sprung ahead in some parts of the world, ours included, for Daylight Saving Time (DST).

Before 1966, laws setting dates for DST were somewhat fluid. The United States officially adopted DST during World War I - after Germany did so - but the unpopular law was removed soon afterward. It continued to be observed sporadically in some states until World War II when President Franklin D. Roosevelt again signed temporary DST into law. As before, the law didn't continue after the war.

That changed in 1966 when President Lyndon Johnson signed a bill into law calling for Daylight Saving Time to begin on the last Sunday of April and end on the last Sunday of October each year. The dates were tweaked again, twenty



years later, under Ronald Reagan who amended DST to begin at 2 a.m. on the first Sunday of April and end at 2 a.m. on the last Sunday of October. Just about twenty years later, President Bush signed the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (downloads as a pdf) which, among other things, extended DST by four weeks. That's the same schedule we're on today.

The beginnings of Daylight Saving Time are often credited to Benjamin

Franklin. The idea appeared in his 1784 essay, "An Economical Project," though many are quick to point out that it was considered to be satire. In the essay, Franklin calculates the hours spent burning candles and declares:

An immense sum! That the city of Paris might save every year, by the economy of using sunshine instead of candles.

Whether or not Franklin actually inspired DST, it's clear that the underlying

concept is what drives DST today: energy savings.

If you find yourself reading back up to see where you missed the bit about the farmers, there's no need: despite popular opinion, the adoption of DST in America had nothing to do with accommodating farmers. In fact, according to Tufts University professor Michael Downing, "That's the complete inverse of what's true. The farmers were the only organized lobby against daylight saving in the history of the country." Why? Among other reasons, it left them with an hour less sunlight to get crops to market.

Instead, the DST has long been linked to energy policy. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 was no exception. The Act took several years to nail down, largely because of a controversy over whether energy policy should favor fossil fuels or solar and wind power. The result was a mish mosh of new rules and tax credits, including a number of credits written as energy policy incentives.

One popular tax credit in the Act was for fuel efficient vehicles (hybrid vehicles). The credit, which allowed up to \$3,400 in tax credits on qualifying vehicles, expired in 2010. Today, other tax credits still exist for some vehicles, including plug-in electric drive cars.

(Source: Forbes)

Power to the people: Electrify Africa now

By Kofi Annan

In Côte d'Ivoire, children carry backpacks to school with built-in solar panels. When they get home, they plug the panels into lamps so they can do their homework.

On the other side of the continent, rural households pay as little as 50 cents a day for solar electricity systems that power three lights, five phone-charging connections and a radio.

Across Africa, these and many other ingenious solutions are helping to meet the continent's huge energy needs much faster than conventional means.

That speed is critical. Africa's energy needs are not only huge, but they are also urgent. Day after day, the continent's lack of modern energy is holding back economic growth, job creation, sustainable agriculture, health and education.

The challenge for governments, their development partners and the private sector is how to electrify millions of African households, remote communities and small-scale entrepreneurs as quickly as possible. To meet that challenge, countries need to consider every available option, including off-grid household systems and mini-grids, as well as the expansion of national grids.

It's a huge task. But we know it can be done because it's happening already, as we show in Lights, Power, Action: Electrifying Africa, a new report released this month by the Africa Progress Panel, which I chair.

Many countries have set ambitious targets for increasing energy access or for advancing other elements of the energy transition. Governments are amending electricity laws and improving regulatory frameworks, clearing a path for investors. Independent power producers are increasing the involvement of the private sector and showing how to scale up renewable power generation capacity.

On-grid solutions -- as in energy generated in large power plants and carried to homes via power lines -- will always form the base of the energy supply in Africa. But African countries grappling with limited financial resources, weak energy planning and rapid economic growth each need to choose the mix of energy technologies that will increase access fastest while offering the best value for money.

New technologies offer promising ways to close



Africa's energy gap more quickly than would be possible by relying on grid connections alone. Off-grid solar power and mini-grids, as standalone sources of energy generating power where it's needed, have vast potential to advance access to electricity in sub-Saharan Africa.

Off-grid solar products can act as rungs on an "energy ladder," providing a range of energy services to households and enterprises with different energy needs and incomes. Families can take advantage of innovative pay-as-you-go schemes, often using mobile phone payment to move from solar lighting onto systems that are a step-up and able to generate enough power for several household appliances.

Community services such as schools and health clinics can also be powered using off-grid solar energy, which can also improve the productivity of farms and small companies. Technological innovation means that mini-grids can also offer sustainable permanent alternatives, especially as reliable and affordable products come on-stream that are attractive to small and medium-sized enterprises operating far from the national grid.

In short, off-grid and mini-grid power has a crucial role to play in meeting the three great energy challenges that African governments face: providing all their citizens with access to secure and affordable energy; building the energy infrastructure needed to drive inclusive growth and create jobs; and limiting carbon emissions.

To make that happen, African governments need to

support the development of an enabling environment through which companies can enter energy generation, transmission and distribution markets, climb the value chain and build the investment partnerships that can drive growth and create jobs.

To tap the potential of new energy technologies, African governments need all the support they can get. Bilateral and multilateral donors have pledged billions of dollars to Africa's energy transition, but little of that money is moving yet. Donors need to realize that Africa's energy imperative is urgent.

As well as opening up the continent to the radical possibilities of off-grid and mini-grid technology, African governments have a vital task to undertake, one that goes to the heart of the continent's energy problems: fixing national energy grids that are unreliable and financially fragile.

Many energy utilities suffer from mismanagement and inefficiency. A lack of accountability and transparency nurtures corruption. These are serious and persistent problems, yet they are solvable, as many countries are demonstrating. Governments are showing leadership. But they need support to put in place the integrated plans and policies that can scale up Africa's energy transition.

On-grid and off-grid, we have the technologies that Africa needs to bring energy to everyone. Let's get to work.

(Source: CNN)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Shiraz hosting intl. congress on social studies on health

The First International Congress on Social Studies on Health for medical students opened in Shiraz, Fars province, on Wednesday, IRNA news agency reported. Shiraz University of Medical Sciences is playing host to the event and officials from the Health Ministry along with professors of anthropology and sociology will attend the congress, the event scientific secretary Sulmaz Qahramani has said.

کنگره بین المللی دانشجویی مطالعات اجتماعی سلامت در شیراز گشایش یافت

به گزارش خبرگزاری ایرنا کنگره بین المللی دانشجویی مطالعات اجتماعی سلامت چهارشنبه در شیراز گشایش یافت. دکتر سولماز قهرمانی دبیر علمی کنگره گفت: این کنگره به میزبانی دانشگاه علوم پزشکی شیراز و با حضور مهمانانی از وزارت بهداشت استادان مردم شناسی و جامعه شناسی برگزار می شود.

ENGLISH PROVERB

Waste not, want not

■ **Explanation:** if you do not waste anything, you will always have enough.

■ **For example:** Always save the fabric scraps left over from your sewing projects; you can use them to make something else. Waste not, want not.

PHRASAL VERB

Cheer somebody

■ **Meaning:** to shout encouragement at a person or team to help them do well in a race or competition

■ **For example:** They gathered round the swimming pool and cheered him on.

ENGLISH IDIOM

Bear in mind

■ **Explanation:** if a person asks you to bear something in mind, they are asking you to remember it because it is important

■ **For example:** You must bear in mind that the cost of living is higher in New York.

Pakistan rejects report about deployment of troops in Saudi Arabia

Pakistan Defense Minister Khawaja Asif Wednesday said Pakistan has no plans to send troops to Saudi Arabia as he rejected media reports about the deployment of the Pakistani soldiers in the Persian Gulf Kingdom to guard its southern border in the ongoing conflict with Yemen.

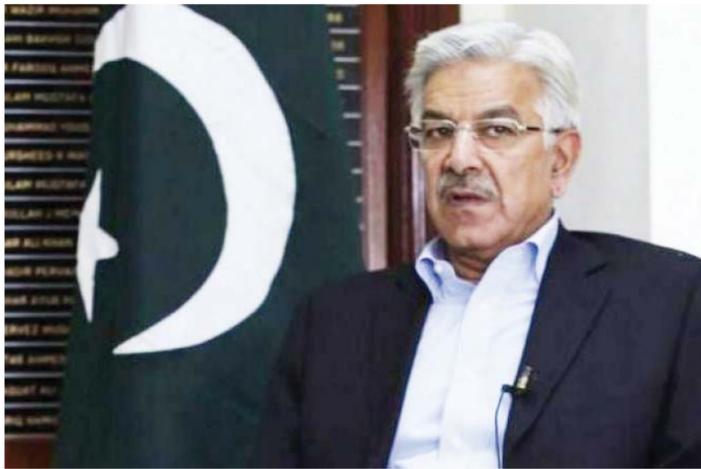
Asif spoke in the National Assembly in response to a question raised by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) lawmaker Shafiqat Mahmood, who referred to media reports that an army brigade was being sent to the Kingdom, Indian Express reported.

"No military personnel have been sent to Saudi Arabia in perspective of the Saudi Arabia-Yemen conflict," Asif said.

"It is our policy not to get involved in Saudi Arabia-Yemen conflict. If any decision had to be taken, it will flow through the parliament," he said.

The parliament had asked government not to get involved in Yemen conflict after a policy debate in 2015. Saudi had pressed Pakistan to join its coalition which carried out deadly air strikes against Sanaa. Asif said that Pakistan would not play a partisan role in the war but try to be a peace-maker if needed.

The minister also informed the house



that under a 1982 agreement between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, about 1,000 Pakistani security personnel including technicians, doctors and engineers were in that country.

Pakistan had to face displeasure of Saudi Arabia and its ally UAE after refusing to send the troops in 2015.

Earlier, an online news site had reported that Pakistan was sending a brigade of combat troops to shore up Saudi's vulnerable southern border from reprisal attacks mounted by the Houthis in Yemen.

The area of deployment for the Pakistani troops is politically sensitive in Islamabad as about two years ago the

Pakistani parliament dismissed Saudi Arabia's request to join its deadly air raids against Yemen.

The alleged plan is the latest twist in a brutal and devastating two-year war, which has killed more than 12,000 people in Yemen, injured over 40,000 and brought the impoverished nation to the verge of famine.

The House of Saud regime began its deadly campaign against Yemen in late March 2015 in a bid to restore power to Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Yemen's president who has resigned and is backed by Riyadh. The campaign also seeks to undermine the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement.

The Ansarullah and their allies in the Yemeni army have increasingly been retaliating with cross-border missile strikes on targets deep inside the kingdom.

Two years ago, the Pakistani parliament decided against a possible deployment of troops after four days of debate which was dominated by fears of further stoking sectarian violence in the country.

Generals argued then that their troops were overstretched with campaigns against the Pakistani Taliban in the Northwest Tribal Areas.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. Tillerson starts north Asia tour amid Korean tensions

The United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has set out on a three-leg tour to Asia as the new top U.S. diplomat amid tensions over North Korea's missile launches and nuclear tests.

Tillerson started his six-day sweep on Wednesday in Japan and he will move on to South Korea, and later, end his tour in China.

Analysts says the perceived threat from by North Korea, which is in part triggered by U.S. military provocations and is driving the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia towards war, will be on top of the former oil executive's agenda.

South Korea and Japan, which jointly host 77,000

US troops, are concerned about whether the Trump administration is committed to the countries' alliance.

North Korea, which is equipped with nuclear ballistic missiles, has warned Washington of retaliatory attacks if the U.S. Navy violates its sovereignty during joint war games with South Korean forces.

Pyongyang has repeatedly slammed the annual war games as a rehearsal for invasion of the North and called on the U.S., Japan and South Korea to stop provocative military exercises.

However, the U.S. military has furthered its threats by deploying an advanced missile system to South Korea.

The recent deployment of the U.S. Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) to South Korea, not only raised the ire of North Korea, but was also met with strong opposition from China and Russia.

Beijing and Moscow say the U.S. THAAD's special radar system not only compromises their security, but also, destabilizes regional military balance.

The U.S. and China are also at loggerheads over Beijing's territorial claims in the South China Sea.

However, at the same time, the U.S. acknowledges that its economy is dependent on China, making the political equation ever more complicated.

(Source: agencies)

Kim Jong-nam's identity confirmed with DNA: Malaysia

DNA tests have confirmed that the man killed last month at Kuala Lumpur's airport was Kim Jong-nam, the estranged half-brother of North Korea Leader Kim Jong-un, Malaysia's deputy prime minister said.

In a statement on Wednesday, Deputy Prime Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi said police "confirmed that the identity of the body is Kim Jong-nam based on the sample taken from his child."

He did not say when and where the DNA sample was taken.

Kim Jong-nam - who was carrying a passport bearing the name Kim Chol - was killed at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on February 13.

He was allegedly murdered by two women - an Indonesian and a Vietnamese - who reportedly smeared his face with VX, a chemical classified by the United Nations as a weapon of mass destruction.

VX is a fast-acting toxin that causes respiratory collapse and heart failure.

Tiny amounts of the poison are enough to kill an adult, whether it is inhaled or absorbed through the skin.

The women told diplomats from their home countries that they thought they were participating in a prank for reality television.

Malaysian police have since identified seven other North Koreans wanted in connection with the killing. Four of them are believed to have left the country on the day Kim was killed.

Police say the other three, including a North Korean diplomat and an employee of Air Koryo, North Korea's state airline, are believed to be in the North Korean Embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

Although Malaysia has never directly accused North Korea of being behind the attack, some analysts speculate that it orchestrated it. North Korea has fiercely denied that accusation.

Experts say the VX nerve agent used to kill Kim was almost certainly produced in a sophisticated state weapons labora-

tory, and North Korea is widely believed to possess large quantities of chemical weapons.

Officials say that Kim Jong-nam's body has been embalmed and that his relatives will be given two to three weeks to claim it.

The killing triggered a bitter diplomatic spat between Malaysia and North Korea, with each country expelling each other's ambassadors and refusing to allow each other's citizens to leave.

There are nine Malaysians in North Korea - three embassy staff members and their family members. About 315 North Koreans are in Malaysia.

The two countries have also scrapped visa-free travel for each other's citizens.

A leading regional security expert told the AFP news agency last month that it would not have been difficult to get VX into Malaysia in a diplomatic pouch, which would not be subject to regular customs checks.

Kim Jong-nam reportedly fell out of

favor with his father, the late Kim Jong-il, in 2001 when he was caught trying to enter Japan on a false passport to visit Tokyo Disneyland.

Kim Jong-nam was not known to be seeking political power, but his position as eldest son of the family that has ruled North Korea since it was founded could have made him appear to be a danger to his half-brother Kim Jong-un.

North Korea has blamed the United States and South Korea for the high-profile murder.

Kim In-ryong, North Korea's deputy United Nations ambassador, told reporters that "from A to Z, this case is the product of reckless moves of the United States and South Korean authorities".

Washington and Seoul were trying to tarnish the North's image and bring down its social system, Kim said on late Monday in New York.

(Source: agencies)

Israel ex-defense chief says Erdogan seeking 'neo-Ottoman empire'

Israeli ex-defense minister Moshe Yaalon accused Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday of seeking a "neo-Ottoman empire" while warning of growing instability in the Middle East.

Yaalon, seeking to build a campaign to become Israel's next prime minister, spoke of his concerns while addressing regional issues in a meeting with foreign journalists.

The ex-minister, forced out of office last year as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to expand his right-wing coalition, accused Erdogan of pursuing "hegemony by establishing (a) neo-Ottoman empire using the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, not just within Turkey."

He also accused NATO-member Turkey of working against Western interests.

His comments came with Turkey and the European Union undergoing an explosive crisis after key EU members the Netherlands and Germany blocked Turkish ministers from holding rallies to back constitutional changes expanding Erdogan's powers.

He said he believed the situation had evolved in that way because of what he called former U.S. president Barack Obama's administration's decision to "disengage" from the Middle East.

"And the vacuum has been filled by these three elements struggling for hegemony in the region," he said.

Yaalon also took implicit shots at Israel's influential far-right while seeking to build his campaign to become the country's next premier.

With four-term premier Netanyahu's legal woes mounting, challengers have circled in anticipation of the possibility that he would be forced to resign.

Yaalon, who has also served as military chief of staff, has sought to present himself as a practical and experienced hand who can move the country away from what some see as a drift too far to the right.

Earlier this week, he quit Netanyahu's Likud party and has announced plans to start his own.

"All the slogans, the ideas which are good for likes on Facebook, this is not a policy," Yaalon said, implicitly referring to far-right figures such as Education Minister Naftali Bennett, who also aims to be premier.

"I've heard too many slogans in our politics in the last couple of years, ignoring the reality on the ground, ignoring the facts - at the end, ignoring our interest."

Yaalon said those advocating drastic steps such as annexing most of the occupied West Bank - as Bennett has done - were more concerned with populist rhetoric than solving the problem.

The 66-year-old clashed with Bennett and other hard-liners before leaving the government last year,



particularly over the case of an Israeli soldier caught on video shooting dead a wounded Palestinian assailant as he lay on the ground.

Yaalon and top military brass condemned the actions of the soldier, since convicted of manslaughter, while Bennett and others defended him.

Yaalon said the conflict with the Palestinians should be managed for now to avoid further eruptions of violence.

"We are not going to reach a final settlement in the coming future," he said.

(Source: AFP)

1,000 flights canceled by Northeast US storm

The air tracking service FlightAware.com says airlines have canceled more than 1,000 U.S. flights on Wednesday after grounding more than 6,200 flights on Tuesday, most of them because of the storm in the Northeast.

Most of Wednesday's cancellations are morning flights.

FlightAware CEO Daniel Baker predicts "relatively normal" operations on Thursday. The airlines have cancelled nearly 9,000 flights in the last three days.

The storm dumped 2 feet of snow in some places. The big Northeast cities were spared the worst of it, but enough snow fell to make for slow commutes Wednesday morning.

The snowfall was on track to be one

of the biggest on record for Burlington, Vermont. The National Weather Service says it got 25.6 inches of snow as of Wednesday morning, with more expected to fall.

(Source: AP)

China calls for return to talks on Korean nukes

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang called on Wednesday for all parties to return to talks amid rising tensions over North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs.

Li said China was a strong supporter of the United Nations resolutions aimed at nudging the North toward ending its programs, and had "fully complied" with economic sanctions on Pyongyang.

He acknowledged the rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula and northeast Asia in general, saying any conflict would be disastrous for all sides.

"It's just common sense that no one wants to see chaos on his doorstep."

"So what we hope is that all the parties concerned will work together to deescalate the situation, get issues back on the track of dialogue and work together to find proper solutions," Li said at his annual news conference held on the final day of the annual legislative session.

China is Pyongyang's most important diplomatic ally and economic partner, and has been under pressure from the United States to use its influence to rein in actions by the North seen as provocative.

China followed the latest round of missile launches by the North last month by suspending imports of North Korean coal, depriving Kim Jong Un's regime of a crucial source of foreign currency.

China has long urged a resumption of six-nation denuclearization talks on hold since North Korea withdrew from them in 2009.

Hoping to kick-start discussions, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi last week suggested that North Korea might suspend its nuclear and missile activities in exchange for a halt in joint U.S.-South Korea military drills.

The U.S. swiftly dismissed the proposal and Li did not repeat it.

However, the premier did indicate that China was growing weary of the constant tensions and threats of conflict surrounding its formerly close communist neighbor.

"It's just common sense that no one wants to see chaos on his doorstep," he said.

(Source: NBC News)

France plans to close another migrant camp

French Interior Minister Bruno Le Roux said Wednesday that security forces would start dismantling another migrant camp on the north coast near the port of Dunkirk "as soon as possible" after clashes there.

The number of people staying in the Grande-Synthe camp has swelled to about 1,400-1,500 since the destruction last October of the squalid so-called "Jungle" camp along the coast near Calais.

(Source: AFP)

UN envoy urges speedier Syria talks to avoid seventh year of war

Negotiations to end the war in Syria must speed up, UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura told Reuters on Wednesday, on the sixth anniversary of the start of the conflict.

So far talks to end the war, which has killed hundreds of thousands, driven 5 million into neighboring countries and left 13.5 million in urgent need of humanitarian aid, have gone almost nowhere.

"It's becoming one of the longest and most cruel wars of recent years," de Mistura said. "That's why there is a need for an acceleration of any type of negotiations - in Astana, in Geneva, in New York, wherever."

De Mistura is trying to mediate a political agreement between Syria's warring sides, and after a procedural round of talks in Geneva ended on March 3, he plans to bring the negotiators back for in-depth discussions on March 23.

(Source: Reuters)

The unfathomable soul of Iran

Iran has left me slightly stupefied; its modern cities and remnants of ancient civilizations, the magnificent kaleidoscope of colors in mosques all across the country; the dazzling, crowded bazaars; the vertigo of patterns in the hand-woven, famous Persian rugs; the fleeting scents of colorful spices; the warm sun and varying landscapes, from snowcapped mountains to deserts under a scorching hot sun.

Iran manages to completely amaze in its magnificent grandeur and elegant beauty around every corner. From traditional Islamic architecture and every subtle detail in the handmade mosaic to splendid constructions dating back to 2,500 years ago, to modern tall buildings and roads of a vibrant metropolis.

For me, Iran has been a collision of sensations, an eye-opening experience that has made me more open-minded and left my blood boiling with energy and determination. Its people emboldened me with their kindness and acceptance, their pride and dignity in the face of numerous setbacks and changes. I feel like this world doesn't deserve Iranian people.

Iran has a strong, powerful, warm, beautiful and enigmatic soul; it's the cradle of civilization with a history so old that it's almost impossible to perceive, were it not for tombs of ancient kings and ruins of Persepolis for us to stare in awe at.

I will greatly miss it when I will return home to Belgium. Briefly travelling or even working in a country, you never expect to establish lasting friendships as a fleeting passerby. But it's different in Iran. Not only have I made friends for life here, I even feel part of a family now.

We can never really tell when will be the very last time we see a place or a person. I genuinely hope this time won't be the last time I will see Iran.

Katya Bohdan is a journalism student from Belgium who picked her internship with the Tehran Times. Our Politics Desk had the privilege of her company for the past two months.

Mikaël Silvestre: Qatar 2022 crucial for football's globalisation

Former France defender Mikaël Silvestre believes Qatar hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup will be a significant milestone in the process of the globalisation of football, of which he is both a staunch proponent and a beneficiary.

Silvestre – who was part of the France squad that reached the 2006 FIFA World Cup™ final – first made his mark on the international stage in 1997 at the FIFA World Youth Championship in Malaysia, and wound up his decorated professional career in 2014 with a season-long stint in the inaugural edition of the Indian Super League.

During a visit this week to the offices of the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), the 39-year-old former Manchester United and Arsenal player also said the passion for football in the host nation of what will be the first ever FIFA World Cup™ in the Middle East has impressed him during his regular visits as guest speaker and media pundit.



"The 2022 FIFA World Cup is very important for the globalisation of football, as an Arab country will be hosting it for the first time ever," the five-time English Premier League winner said in an exclusive interview with www.sc.qa. "The entire Arab world will be making an important statement if Qatar delivers the best ever World Cup from an organisational point of view. I am happy to see that a lot of effort is going into the preparations to ensure the competition will be a success."

The 2008 UEFA Champions League winner also reminisced about his international tournament bow in Malaysia, to underpin the strategic importance of awarding hosting rights of major tournaments to countries outside Europe.

"The tournament was a big success because of the huge passion for the game in Malaysia. A lot of future stars were born there. Thierry Henry, Nicolas Anelka, David Trezeguet, William Gallas and Willy Sagnol were my teammates," he said.

"Malaysia was the first big stage for all of us. We were at the threshold of turning professional – some of us had almost signed professional contracts. Argentina also had a gifted generation coming through the ranks."

The man with 40 international caps and 361 appearances in a decorated nine-year career with Manchester United said Qatar, like Malaysia, is equally passionate about football.

"As a regular visitor to Qatar, I am amazed to witness the rich football culture in Doha concentrated in a compact geographical space," said the Frenchman. "I have been here in 2013 as a speaker at the Doha Goals event and visit the country periodically as a media pundit for beIN's live football broadcasts, and whenever I am here I admire the overwhelming passion for the sport."

Silvestre, who moved to Arsenal from Old Trafford in 2008 and spent two seasons at the north London club, also dwelt on his experiences in a third Asian country – India – which is close to his heart.

"Playing in India for Chennaiyin FC was a very enjoyable experience as the country has a fast-growing football scene," he said. "In addition to being the defensive partner of player-manager Marco Materazzi, I did a lot of Italian-to-English translation for my Indian teammates at the club," he said with a smile.

Silvestre said that the bond he shared with Italy's 2006 FIFA World Cup™ winner Materazzi underscored football's role in bringing people together. "The incident between Marco and 'Zizou' in the 2006 final was unfortunate, but despite that I was able to have a great relationship with Marco in India. This shows that football is bigger than politics and war," he said.

(Source: AFC)

Rostov pitch banned by Russian Premier League

FC Rostov have been banned from hosting league games at the Olimp-2 Stadium due to poor pitch conditions, less than a week after Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho complained about the playing surface.

United drew 1-1 against the Russian side in their Europa League last-16 first-leg tie last Thursday after UEFA, European soccer's governing body, had deemed the pitch playable.



"The ban is imposed until the identified shortcomings are eliminated and the fields are brought into line with the established requirements of the regulatory documents," the RFPL said on Wednesday.

Mourinho had been critical of the pitch and was unhappy with the hard and patchy playing surface being used for the game.

"It's hard for me to believe we are going to play on that field, if you can call it a field,"

Mourinho had said prior to the draw.

"I just had a quick contact with one gentleman from UEFA when I was looking at the pitch And when I told him about my concerns, the gentleman told me the players are insured -- if something happens, no problem."

The Russian Premier League told the BBC that Rostov would have their pitch inspected again on March 24, with their next home game on March 31 against FC Krasnodar.

United and Rostov play the second leg of their Europa League clash at Old Trafford on Thursday.

Rubin Kazan's Central Stadium has also been banned by the Russian Premier League.

(Source: Reuters)

FIFA ethics chiefs facing uncertain future

The two FIFA ethics chiefs responsible for banning some of the sport's most prominent figures following a corruption scandal face an uncertain future and may not have their mandates renewed, sources with knowledge of the matter have told Reuters.

Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter, his right-hand man Jerome Valcke and former European soccer boss Michel Platini are among dozens who have been banned by the ethics committee in the last four years.

The scandal has also led to the indictment of several dozen soccer officials, mainly from Central and South America, in the United States. Blatter, Valcke and Platini, who have denied any wrongdoing, were not among them.

The sources said that a change of personnel could lead to a two-year delay in ongoing investigations as the new incumbents would have to familiarise themselves with both the ethics committee set up and the cases themselves.

The mandates of Cornel Borbely, a Swiss attorney who heads the investigatory division of the ethics committee, and Hans-Joachim Eckert, a German judge who heads the adjudicatory chamber, expire in May.

The sources told Reuters that neither have so far been invited to the next FIFA Congress on May 11 in Bahrain, where their mandates would be extended for another four years.

According to the FIFA statutes, the 37-member FIFA Council has responsibility for proposing candidates for the two roles and the final decision is made at the Congress by representatives of the 211 national federations.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

FIFA would not comment directly on whether Borbely and Eckert would be nominated for reappointment, saying in a statement that the continental confederations had been asked to put forward names.

"In line with our good governance processes, a consultation process has started and the confederations have been asked to provide candidates," it said.

"Please understand that we can't speculate about any matters that are subject to the decision of the Congress' delegates. We have no further comments."

Sources said that both Borbely and Eckert wanted to continue. Under FIFA statutes, they are each entitled to



two further four-year mandates.

The sources said that FIFA president Gianni Infantino could easily end speculation about their future with a statement of support and an invitation to Congress but this had not been forthcoming.

FIFA reformed the ethics committee in 2012 in response to a series of corruption cases.

Eckert has headed the adjudicatory chamber since then while Borbely has led the investigatory chamber since 2014 after the resignation of the original head Michael Garcia.

Infantino has already overseen a drastic restructuring of FIFA since he was elected in February last year and several key heads of department have

left, in some cases abruptly.

Last year, the committee investigated Infantino's own conduct, focusing on some of the flights he had taken during the opening months of his presidency and his failure to sign an employment contract. It found no evidence of wrongdoing.

Last May, the FIFA Congress gave the FIFA Council power to appoint or dismiss members of independent bodies such as the ethics committee and the audit and compliance committee.

Domenico Scala resigned as head of the latter in protest, saying FIFA had taken away the independence of its watchdogs.

(Source: FIFA)

Man United boss Jose Mourinho 'scared' by envy over Paul Pogba



Jose Mourinho has again said criticism of Paul Pogba is motivated by envy but insisted the Manchester United midfielder "doesn't give an ass to what people think."

Pogba, who returned to United from Juventus for a world-record fee in the summer, faced criticism after his performance in the 1-0 FA Cup quarterfinal defeat to Chelsea on Monday.

Mourinho, though, said after the game that the France international was "by far the best player on the pitch" and hit out at pundits, saying: "The specialists will say a lot about him and it comes from

envy. They will never ever earn 10 percent of what he does."

Speaking at a news conference on Wednesday to preview the Europa League clash with FC Rostov, Mourinho said: "I feel the world is losing balance. Envy coming to certain levels. I am scared for the next generation.

"[It's] not Paul's fault he gets 10 times money and some ex-players need money. I and the club are very happy with Paul.

"Because of his personality he doesn't give an ass what people think."

(Source: Soccernet)

Renato Sanches can succeed Xabi Alonso at Bayern - Rummenigge



Renato Sanches is the natural heir to Xabi Alonso when the Bayern Munich midfielder retires at the end of the season, the club's CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge has told Sport Bild.

Alonso, 35, announced on Friday that he would retire at the end of the season.

Portugal international Sanches, 19, has struggled to live up to expectations since arriving from Benfica in the summer, starting only four Bundesliga games.

But Rummenigge said: "We hope Renato Sanches follows in Alonso's

footsteps -- that's why we signed him.

"He has all the necessary qualities, but we will have to be patient with him."

Bayern boss Carlo Ancelotti has ruled out either selling Sanches or sending him out on loan.

And before Alonso's decision to retire was confirmed, Sanches was backed by teammate Franck Ribery, who said: "It's been a tough year for Renato.

"Perhaps it will be easier for him next season if Xabi Alonso isn't with us any longer."

(Source: ESPN)

Nadal, Federer set up California clash with wins

Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal powered to third-round wins at the BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells on Tuesday to set up a mouth-watering rematch of their recent Australian Open final.

Fifth seed Nadal defeated fellow Spaniard Fernando Verdasco 6-3 7-5, while ninth seed Federer served impeccably to get past American Stevie Johnson 7-6(3) 7-6(4) and book the 36th showdown of their famous rivalry.

The last time they met, Switzerland's Federer claimed a record 18th grand slam title in a rousing 6-4 3-6 6-1 3-6 6-3 triumph over Nadal in Melbourne in January.

Federer, 35, lost only five points on his first serve in his double tie-breaker win over Johnson in a match completed without a service break.

Fourteen-times grand slam winner Nadal, 30, was comfortable as usual in the California desert, dismissing compatriot Verdasco to keep his Round of 16 date with the Swiss maestro.

It was the 50th win at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden for Nadal, who has lifted the trophy three times, in 2007 (over Novak Djokovic), 2009 (Andy Murray) and 2013 (Juan Martin del Potro).

"History says that this tournament works well for me," Nadal, who holds a 23-12 winning record over Federer, told reporters.



Federer has also enjoyed his time at Indian Wells, winning four times with the last triumph coming in 2012.

Three-time defending champion Novak Djokovic also had reason to celebrate as the second seed ran off the last five games to overcome big-hitting Juan Martin del Potro 7-5 4-6 6-1 in a bottom half of the draw stacked full of top players.

"It was definitely difficult to overcome this challenge tonight," Djokovic said. "The third set was probably the best tennis that I played this year and I'm just glad I was able to

pick up my game."

The victory gave Djokovic a chance for revenge as he next meets young Australian Nick Kyrgios, who defeated the Serb at this month's Mexican Open on his way to the semi-finals.

Kyrgios prevailed 6-3 6-4 over Alexander Zverev in an entertaining first tour-level meeting between the young guns.

A controlled Kyrgios put on a masterful display, mixing strong serving with an array of showman shots to beat Germany's 19-year-old Zverev, a friend from their junior tennis days.

"I thought I just competed well," Kyrgios, 21, said. "He's got a big game. I was happy with my performance."

Fourth seed Kei Nishikori of Japan also cruised into the fourth round with a 6-2 6-2 rout of Gilles Muller of Luxembourg.

Muller, who won his first ATP World Tour title in Sydney at the start of the year, made only 49 percent of his first serves and Nishikori broke him four times.

Nishikori next faces American Donald Young, who needed seven match points to complete a 6-4 1-6 6-3 victory over 14th-seeded Frenchman Lucas Pouille.

American Jack Sock joined the Round of 16 by knocking out Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria, edging a third-set tie-breaker to advance 3-6 6-3 7-6(7).

(Source: Reuters)

Iran learn opponents at FIFA U20 World Cup

S P O R T S Iran have learned their opponents at the 2017 FIFA U20 World Cup in South Korea. Amir Hossein Peyrovani's boys have been drawn in Group C along with powerhouse Portugal, Zambia and Costa Rica.

The pairings were drawn by some famous personalities including two amazing FIFA Legends, Diego Maradona, who won the 1979 FIFA U-20 World Cup, and Pablo Aimar, who won the 1997 edition. Also acting as draw assistants were the Mayor of Suwon City and owner of Suwon City FC, Tae Young Yeom; Vice-chairman of FIFA U-20 World Cup Korea Republic 2017 Local Organizing Committee, a living legend of Korean Football who was a former Korean national football team player and a head coach, Bumkun Cha.

The FIFA U-20 World Cup Korea Republic 2017 will bring some promising matches. Hosts Korea Republic will take on Guinea in the opening match on 20 May, with Group A also including England and Argentina in what turned out to be a mouth-watering group.

The groups
Group A: Korea Republic, Guinea, Argentina, England
Group B: Venezuela, Germany, Vanuatu, Mexico
Group C: Zambia, Portugal, Iran, Costa Rica
Group D: South Africa, Japan, Italy, Uruguay
Group E: France, Honduras, Vietnam, New Zealand
Group F: Ecuador, USA, Saudi Arabia, Senegal

The 2017 FIFA U20 World Cup will be played in six venues across Korea Republic from 20 May to 11 June 2017.



POT POT POT POT

Iran names squad for World Cup qualifiers against Qatar, China

S P O R T S Carlos Queiroz has named his 19-man Iran squad for the 2018 FIFA World Cup qualification tournament with Qatar and China in Group A.

Team Melli will play Qatar on March 23 in Doha and host China five days later in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Team Melli has been drawn along with South Korea, Uzbekistan, China, Qatar and Syria in Group A of the third round of the competition.

Asian powerhouse Japan has been pitted against Australia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Thailand in Group B.

The winner and runner-up of each group (four teams in total) will qualify for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, while the third-placed teams of each group (two teams in total) will head to the play-off round of the 2018 FIFA



World Cup qualifiers. The winner of the Asian play-off round will then

face twice the fourth-placed squad in the fifth round of the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) qualifying games.

Iran squad:
Goalkeepers: Alireza Beiranvand, Rashid Mazaheri, Mohammadreza Akhbari

Defenders: Vouria Ghafouri, Ramin Rezaeian, Jalal Hosseini, Morteza Pouraliganji, Ezatollah Pourghaz, Mohammad Ansari, Pejman Montazeri

Midfielders: Ehsan Haji Safi, Omid Ebrahimi, Mehdi Torabi, Morteza Tabrizi, Sasan Ansari, Ezatollah Pourghaz

Strikers: Vahid Amiri, Mehdi Taremi and Ehsan Pahlevan
 The Iranian foreign-based players will be added to the team.

Iran sustains 2nd defeat in Asian women's handball games



The Iran women's national handball team has sustained its second consecutive loss at the 16th edition of the Asian Women's Handball Championship in South Korea, going down to the hosts.

On Wednesday, the Iranian squad, which had lost to China 8-33 in its opening Group A match two days earlier, slumped to the South Korean side 22-44 at Suwon Gymnasium in Suwon, located about 30 kilometers south of the capital, Seoul.

The Iranian sportswomen will take on counterparts from Vietnam in their third

encounter of the tournament on Friday. The 16th edition of the Asian Women's Handball Championship kicked off on March 13 in Suwon, South Korea, and will wrap up on March 22, 2017. The tournament is being held under the aegis of Asian Handball Federation.

The Iranian team has been pitted against China, South Korea and Vietnam in Group A of the competition.

Hong Kong, Japan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are drawn in Group B. (Source: PressTV)

Sevilla boss Jorge Sampaoli: 'A dream has gone' after Champions



Sevilla coach Jorge Sampaoli has insisted his team's Champions League exit at the hands of Leicester City was "undeserved." Leicester won the second leg 2-0 at the King Power Stadium, securing a 3-2 aggregate success.

Midfielder Samir Nasri and Sampaoli himself were both sent off in the second half, as the Premier League champions held firm following goals from Wes Morgan and Marc Albrighton.

Goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel was again the hero, saving a penalty from Steven N'Zonzi after also keeping out a

Joaquin Correa spot kick in the first leg. "The setback of the first goal caused the team to get cold feet," Sampaoli said at his postmatch news conference. "Their goalkeeper was very important in both matches, saving two penalties. Beyond the pain, the players have to stick with their work."

"With 10 men, we still forced Leicester back to their goal, we were all over them in the second half and created dangerous situations, but it was difficult because they were playing at home."

(Source: Soccernet)

Juventus' Gigi Buffon: 'I want to avoid Leicester' in UCL quarterfinals

Of all the European giants that Juventus could face in the Champions League quarterfinals, goalkeeper Gigi Buffon is most concerned about Leicester City.

Last year's surprise Premier League winners will join the likes of Barcelona, Real Madrid and Bayern Munich in Friday's draw after overcoming a first-leg deficit to beat Sevilla 3-2 on aggregate on Tuesday.

And speaking after Juventus saw off Porto in the night's other game, Buffon said Leicester present an unknown quantity.

"I want to avoid Leicester," Buffon told Mediaset Premium. "They have enthusiasm and passion, but also the weapons to hurt a side that wants to take the initiative. We'd have everything to lose against them."

Buffon kept a clean sheet as Juventus won Tuesday's second leg 1-0 to complete a 3-0 aggregate victory over Porto, who had Maxi Pereira sent off.

"All games at this level are tough, regardless of the first leg result and them going down to 10 men here too, the moment the tension drops, you can pay for it," Buffon said.

"We have improved a lot, we gained confidence and



that was the objective we had set ourselves five years ago when we started this journey, that Juventus had to be in the top eight of the Champions League every year.

"If you get into the top eight every year for a decade, eventually you are likely to win it."

Juventus manager Max Allegri was less confident in Juventus' chances to bring home the trophy this season after what he saw as a less-than-ideal performance.

"We need to improve the quality of our football,

which in the second half today left a lot to be desired, as the result isn't everything," Allegri said. "The more you try to force things, the worse they come out."

"The guys played an intelligent first half without running any risks, but in the second half against 10 men we weren't giving the moves any pace and defended badly too, as we risked conceding a couple of times."

"We have to do one thing right: either attack and score more goals or decide to keep the ball and do that until the opposition falls asleep with boredom, but today we did neither properly."

"We had to make the full-backs run and then go into the space when it opened up, but instead we had too many short passes, trying to force our way through, and it wasn't the right way. It also left us open to the dangerous counter-attacks."

"It was the maximum result with the minimum effort, fine, but we didn't do it well in the second half. If we're going to control the situation, control it well. Instead we were too hasty and in a way it's fortunate, as now we can work on it in training and fix this problem."

(Source: ESPN)

Kiyotake: There is great pressure on Japan

Most football fans around the world expect Japan to be one of the Asian representatives at the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™. After finally breaking through to the elite stage for the 1998 World Cup in France, the one-time sleeping giant of Asian football has made up for lost time with five consecutive appearances among world football's elite.

But at the halfway point of the Russia 2018 campaign, Japan face a significant challenge if they are to make it six from six. Japan sit second on goal difference in an intensely fought group, where just one point separates the top four sides – a quartet also comprised of a rejuvenated Saudi Arabia under Netherlands' 2010 FIFA World Cup Final coach Bert van Marwijk, West Asian up-and-comers United Arab Emirates and continental champions Australia.



Japan travel to United Arab Emirates next week, where a poor result – with just two automatic qualification berths available – would leave little margin for error. There is also a small matter of revenge after Japan saw their reign as Asian kings extinguished by UAE at the 2015 AFC Asian Cup.

Japan attacking midfielder Hiroshi Kiyotake says the intensity at the summit of Asian Zone Group B is evidence of rapidly developing standards across the world's most populous continent. "It will not be easy to go through this final round of qualifiers, because without a doubt the level of Asian football is rising," Kiyotake told FIFA.com. "And I also feel the presence of big pressure put upon the Japan national team during qualifiers."

Saitama Stadium on the outskirts of Tokyo, with its relentless distinctly Japan-flavoured cacophony of noise, has normally been a fortress for Samurai Blue. But Japan's intimidating record at their regular home has been dented during the current World Cup cycle, with a draw against modest Singapore and a crucial defeat UAE among the low points for new coach Vahid Halilhodzic.

Kiyotake, however, says the current crop of players is among the most experienced Japan have ever had. After seven years in the national team, and nine years on from his international bow at youth level, Kiyotake is worldly enough to make that judgment.

"The Japan national team currently has the biggest number of players playing abroad compared to recent years," says Kiyotake. "Including J-League players, there are many players with good skill and, at the same time, having good self-management."

Japan's Class of 2010 returned from the World Cup in South Africa as their nation's first to progress to the knockout stage on foreign soil. Twelve months later Kiyotake was part of the Samurai Blue environment for the first time, and though he only featured for a handful of minutes at Brazil 2014, he is now an increasingly key component of the side.

But how has the national team changed since he first joined the team? "It is difficult to answer because the coach has changed and players have changed as well," said Kiyotake. "But I can say that the individual skill of players has improved. And I also feel that the players are more thoughtful showing well thought-out play. The environment of the team helps me to play, because there are still many players who I know from the beginning."

Japan's new wave
 Kiyotake has been part of the modern breed of Japan players with an increasing presence in European club football over the past decade, most notably in Germany and England. The Oita-raised Kiyotake has just returned to newly-promoted J-League side Cerezo Osaka after a brief unsettled spell at Sevilla, which followed on from four strong campaigns with firstly Nuremberg, and then Hannover.

Kiyotake says it has helped him develop both on and off the field, an experience undoubtedly shared by the numerous national team colleagues based in the Old Continent: "I have definitely grown as a player with the experiences I've had in Germany and Spain. I also strongly feel that I have also grown as a person, because daily life presents different ways of thinking in comparison to Japan."

Kiyotake believes the team ethic of Japanese players is among their most prized attributes. "The Japanese player will respect both individual and collective discipline, and also has flexibility during the game," he said. "They have good technique and quick decision taking."

"Personally I think that I have to continue improving and learning to be able to show the good characteristics of the Japanese player, and combine that to the team I'm playing for. That thinking allows me to keep myself challenging and playing positively."

(Source: FIFA)

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Songwriter Afshin Yadollahi dies at 48

A R T TEHRAN — Poet and songwriter Afshin Yadollahi died in a car crash in the early hours of Wednesday. He was 48.

The songwriter accompanied by his wife and brother-in-law was driving his car back home from Hashtgerd, a town near Tehran, late at night when a truck crashed into his car. His wife and her brother were badly injured in the incident.



Yadollahi, who was also a psychiatrist, began his professional activity with the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) in 1997. His very first songs were performed by singers Khashayar Etemadi and Shadmehr Aqili.

Theme songs from the TV series "The Tenth Night" and "Zero Degree Orbit", both directed by Hassan Fathi, were composed by Yadollahi. Vocalist Alireza Qorbani sang the theme songs.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Iranian doc "Starless Dreams" to go on screen at CPH: DOX

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian director Mehرداد Oskui's acclaimed documentary "Starless Dreams" will be screened in the Artists and Auteurs section of the Copenhagen International Documentary Festival - CPH: DOX, which will open today in the Danish capital.

"Starless Dreams" shows the lives of seven young teenage girls sharing temporary quarters at a rehabilitation and detention center on the outskirts of Tehran.

In addition, Iranian documentary "Janbal" directed by Mina Bozorgmehr and Hadi Kamali-Moqaddam will go on screen in the Next Wave section of the festival, which will run until March 26.



Sahifeh Sajjadih published in Spanish

CULTURE TEHRAN — A Spanish version of Sahifeh Sajjadih, a collection of prayers attributed to Imam Sajjad (AS), the fourth Imam of the Shia, has recently been published by Fatima Publications in Spain in collaboration with Iran's Cultural Office in Madrid.

The book has been translated by Spanish translator Leila Gonzalez Gomez.



Iran's cultural offices in 31 countries to celebrate Noruz

CULTURE TEHRAN — Iran's cultural offices in 31 countries are scheduled to observe Noruz, the celebration Persian New Year from March 20 to April 2.

Musical and theatrical programs and cultural festivals and exhibition will be held by groups from Iran during the celebration, Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, which is the main organizer of the programs, announced on Wednesday.

The programs will be held in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, South Africa, the Philippines, Kirgizia, Thailand, Azerbaijan, India, Turkey, Russia, and 19 other countries.

Iran guest of honor at Beijing book fair 2017



A R T TEHRAN — Iran has been selected as the guest of honor at the Beijing International Book Fair, which will be held in the Chinese capital from August 23 to 27.

Iran was informed of the choice during a meeting between Iran Cultural Fairs Institute (ICFI) director

Amir-Masud Shahramnia and several officials from the Beijing fair in Tehran on Tuesday.

"Being selected as the special guest of honor will provide a good opportunity for Iran to boost cultural ties. It also gives the publishers a chance to exchange information and introduce their latest productions,"

Shahramnia said at the meeting.

He added, "Iran and China have good potentials to develop joint cultural collaborations and Iran has always had a positive attitude towards China. The two countries enjoy good economic ties and we hope to increase our cultural activities as well."

In his brief remarks, Radio, Film and

Television Administration of Import Secretary Jiang Mao Ning also said that the lengthy relationship between the two countries indicates the deep bilateral ties, and that China is seeking more cultural relations with Iran.

He gave assurances that selecting Iran as the guest of honor will help achieve the goals.

Tehran Inter-Orchestra makes debut concert at Iranian Academy of Arts

A R T TEHRAN — The Tehran Inter-Orchestra, a private ensemble established by musician Vahid Eftekhar-Hosseini, made its debut performance at the Aseman Hall of the Iranian Academy of Arts on Monday evening.

A repertoire of pieces by Estonian composer Arvo Part, Italian-born French composer Jean-Baptiste Lully and German composer Johann Sebastian Bach was performed during the concert conducted by Nader Mashayekhi, a former conductor of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra, the Tehran Inter-Orchestra announced in a press release on Tuesday.

The orchestra also played two bricolage pieces by Mashayekhi. Austrian musician Renald Deppe, who plays the saxophone and



clarinet, accompanied the ensemble in this part of the performance.

"The Tehran Inter-Orchestra was established in the private sector and does not have governmental support," Mashayekhi said after the performance.

He added that the orchestra had to overcome many obstacles to be established and to perform the concert.

Get your own facts, ignore media, Palestinian artist Halaby tells successors

DUBAI (Reuters) — Palestinian painter Samia Halaby has blunt advice for aspiring Arab artists — get your inspiration first-hand, whether from ordinary people or historical documents, avoiding the "lies" of the media.

Halaby, who made her name with abstract paintings, drew on both kinds of source for her most overtly political project, a series of drawings of the 1956 massacre of Palestinians by Israeli border police at Kafr Qasem.

The drawings, and a separate exhibition of her multicolored abstracts called "Illuminated Space", make up a Halaby double bill on display at Dubai's Ayyam Gallery for Dubai Art Week.

"My advice to young aspiring artists in the Arab world and other similar countries that are torn by political, economic and social problems

caused by imperialist challenges is to concentrate on history and its details, and to not follow the existing media, because there are a lot of lies," she told Reuters.

"They should be attentive to their surroundings and their societies ... specifically the common class of society."

The Kafr Qasem project grew out of a visit in 1999 to the village where, on Oct. 29, 1956, Israeli border guards killed 48 people and an unborn child.

More than half the dead were women and children.

The victims were returning home from work across the de facto border between Israel and Jordan, unaware that they were infringing a military curfew declared on the eve of war with Egypt. Israel's late president, Shimon Peres, formally apologized for the massacre in 2007.

Paul McCartney should wait to get back Beatles songs, Sony/ATV says

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Paul McCartney, who has waited decades to reclaim ownership of hundreds of the Beatles' songs, should wait a little longer rather than continue his U.S. lawsuit against Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC, the defendant said.

In a filing on Monday with the U.S. District Court in Manhattan, a lawyer for Sony/ATV said the publisher has never challenged the validity of McCartney's notices to terminate its copyrights in the songs, starting in October 2018.

As a result, McCartney's Jan. 18 lawsuit "impermissibly seeks an advisory opinion on a hypothetical claim" and should be dismissed for the time being, the lawyer, Donald Zakarin, wrote.

Lawyers for McCartney had no immediate comment on Tuesday.

The rock legend, 74, was outbid by Michael Jackson in 1985 for the rights to songs credited to McCartney and John Lennon such as "I Want to Hold Your Hand," "Yesterday" and "Hey Jude".

These rights were rolled a decade later into Sony/ATV, a joint venture with Sony Corp (6758.T). Jackson's estate sold its stake in that venture to Sony for \$750



Paul McCartney celebrates after performing with Ringo Starr (not pictured) during the 2015 Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony in Cleveland, U.S. on Ohio April 18, 2015.

(Reuters/Aaron Josefczyk)

million last year.

McCartney sued 1-1/2 months after a British court rejected similar claims against Sony/ATV's Gloucester Place Music unit by Duran Duran, saying the pop group's contracts were governed by English law and

barred members from reclaiming their songs.

Zakarin said McCartney's claims are also governed by English law, and that he should wait for Duran Duran to finish its appeal rather than engage in "forum shopping" in the United States.

"A dismissal without prejudice now would spare this court the need to issue a decision that may be unnecessary pending the outcome of Gloucester while assuring that, if and when a claim is ever ripe, U.K. law will have been settled," Zakarin wrote.

Revisions to U.S. copyright law in 1976 let authors reclaim song rights after certain periods of time elapsed. McCartney wants the court to declare he would not breach any contract by exercising termination rights. His case could affect other artists who signed contracts outside the United States.

U.S. District Judge Edgardo Ramos is scheduled to consider Zakarin's letter at an April 5 conference, ahead of an expected formal motion to dismiss McCartney's lawsuit.

The case is McCartney v Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC et al, U.S. District Court, Southern District of New York, No. 17-00363.



Wishing a happy new year

The Tehran Times staff and managers gathered together on Wednesday on the last working day of the current Iranian calendar year 1395, ending March 20, 2017, wishing a happy new year to each other and all.