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Pakistani Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq (L) meets his Iranian opposite number Ali Larjani on April 22 in Tehran.

Iran developing new attack helicopters: commander

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force Airborne Unit has said that Iran is manufacturing homegrown attack helicopters equipped with state-of-the-art missile systems.

In an interview with Tasnim news agency published on Saturday, General Mohammad Rahmani Qahroudi said the IRGC is currently working on several projects to manufacture helicopters and other weapons. General Qahroudi noted that his forces have concluded the research and designing phases of Shahed-278 and Shahed-285 helicopters, adding that the local manufacturer HESA will mass produce the helicopters.

The state-of-the-art Shahed-285 helicopter is reportedly capable of taking part in sea and airborne combat operations.

A homegrown missile system, dubbed Sadid, will be mounted on the helicopters, the general said, adding that the missile system has been well paired with the aircraft.

Qahroudi also hailed the country's progress in the field, saying that the Islamic Republic celebrates its considerable achievements in designing and producing arms and ammunition for the airborne unit.

The Ground Force Airborne Unit was established as an independent branch of the IRGC in early 2016.

Iran says its military might poses no threat to other countries as its defense doctrine is entirely based on deterrence.

Personality of political leaders affecting ties between states: expert

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Mehran Kamrava, a professor of the Middle East Studies in Georgetown University of Doha, is of the view that personality of political leaders greatly affect the nature of ties between countries.

"It appears that we are entering a period in which the personality of political leaders has an important impact on the nature of relationships between countries," Kamrava told the Tehran Times when asked about the result of the constitutional referendum in Turkey in which President Erdogan's Justice and Development Party narrowly won.

Following is the text of the interview:

■ **The Turkish constitutional referendum ended up in Erdogan's victory by the**

slimmest margins. What message does the weak result carry?

A: The results indicate the growing polarization of the Turkish society between Erdogan's supporters and opponents. The results convey to Erdogan that he is not universally popular and that indeed his measures are opposed by a sizeable segment of the Turkish electorate.

■ **How can it affect Erdogan's policy at home?**

A: Clearly, the president sees that he has the backing of the population for his domestic political reforms. The Turkish system has been steadily changing from a parliamentarian to a presidential system. This gives the president the approval to

make the necessary changes to the system to make it an executive presidency like that of the United States or France.

■ **Can one expect a more aggressive approach by Erdogan after the referendum?**

A: I don't think so. Erdogan's foreign policy pursuits have been pretty aggressive so far, very proactive, and often erratic. I don't think these will change any time soon, nor do I think Turkey's foreign policy will necessarily become more aggressive as a result of the vote.

■ **How the referendum can affect Iran-Turkey relationship?**

A: It is too early to tell. My sense is that there are a lot of other issues that are far more consequential and more **→13**

U.S. economy off to slow start in spring, Markit finds

A pair of surveys of American businesses fell to seven-month lows in April, suggesting a setback for the U.S. economy at the start of the second quarter.

IHS Markit said flash readings for both the manufacturing and service side of the U.S. economy dipped. The Markit flash U.S. manufacturing index slipped to 52.8 from 53.3 in the prior month. The services gauge moved down slightly, to 52.5 from 52.8.

Still, any reading above 50 indicates more respondents believe business conditions are getting better instead of worse.

A variety of tools to measure the U.S.

economy have given mixed signals recently. Retail sales fell and hiring slowed sharply in March, for example, but layoffs remained near a 45-year low, the number of open jobs rose and sales of previously owned homes touched a 10-year high.

Although companies are excited about a pro-business Trump White House and consumer confidence recently hit the highest level in more than a decade, it hasn't translated into stronger spending by households or the private sector.

The failure of a Republican effort to replace Obamacare and slow going on tax reform has also dimmed enthusiasm among investors.

The "data suggest the U.S. economy lost further momentum at the start of the second quarter," said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit.

The most worrisome sign was a slowdown in hiring that appears to have extended from March into April. If the Markit surveys are any indication, the U.S. could report another weak month of job creation for April, Williamson suggested.

The more subdued pace of business may just be another blip in an eight-year-old expansion that continues to chug along steadily if not spectacularly.

(Source: marketwatch.com)

Scholar Gonul Donmez-Colin praises Iran film diversity

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — Film critic and author Gonul Donmez-Colin who specializes in the cinemas of the Middle East and Central Asia complimented Iranian cinema on its growing diversity over the past few years.

As a frequent visitor to the Fajr International Film Festival Donmez-Colin is currently in Tehran to attend the 35th edition of the event.

"Iranian cinema is interesting. It is getting richer and richer and more diverse every year with masters and newcomers and new ideas," she told the Tehran Times in an interview at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex on Saturday.

Donmez-Colin, who is also the festival programmer of the Mannheim-Heidelberg Film Festival in Germany, said, "I am attending for two purposes. First of all, I am a film scholar and I have written several books on cinema of this region especially Turkey and Iran, and the second reason is to choose Iranian films for the Mannheim-Heidelberg festival." **→16**

Post-JCPOA petchem industry promising: Zanganeh

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The future of Iran's petrochemical industry is promising **d e s k** after the implementation of JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action which lifted sanction against Iran in January 2016), Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said on Saturday.

The minister made the remarks on Saturday in the inaugural ceremony of the 13th edition of Iran Petrochemical Forum (IPF) which will wrap up today, Shana reported.

Given that Iran ranks the first and fourth in the world in terms of gas and oil reserves, respectively, no country enjoys feedstock as much as Iran to develop its petrochemical industry, Zanganeh highlighted. Addressing the same ceremony, Marziyeh Shahdaie, the managing director of National Petrochemical Company (NPC), said considering existence of proper infrastructure as well as ample feedstock in the country in post-sanction era, achieving the goal of annual petrochemical output of 72 million tons seems accessible in the current calendar year (started on March 21).

The official put the country's annual petrochemical production at 50 million tons in the past calendar year and said that 21 million tons of petrochemical products worth \$9.4 billion were exported in the previous year.

The 13th edition of IPF plays host to 101 participants, representing 76 foreign companies from 18 Asian and European countries.

ISIL emir killed, 10 extremists arrested in stealth army operation

The Lebanese Army on Saturday killed an Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) emir and arrested 10 suspected militants during a stealth operation in the northeastern border town of Aarsal, a source told The Daily Star.

The Lebanese Army confirmed the operation in a statement, saying that Hasan al-Mallees was killed in the operation. It said that the alleged Syrian Qalamoun ISIL emir had taken part in the 2014 clashes with the Lebanese Army in Aarsal.

The army identified the ten "dangerous terrorists" as Syrians Fawzi al-Sahli, Alaaeddine Al-Halabi, Ahmad Miman, Abdullah Hesian and Mohammad al-Sahli. Several Lebanese were also identified, including Wael al-Fleiti, Hussein al-Fleiti, Amin Hmayyed, and Mahmoud al-Fleiti.

The Hezbollah-affiliated War Media Center identified the ISIL emir as a Syrian fugitive from the Al-Halabi family who went by the nom de guerre "al-Mallees."

It said he was from the Syrian town of Qara in a rural Damascus province near the Lebanese border.

"He is one of the terrorists who issued a fatwa to execute Lebanese servicemen," it added.

Nine soldiers have been held captive since militants belonging to ISIL and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham — formerly the Al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra) — briefly overran the northeast border town of Aarsal in August 2014.

More than 30 soldiers and policemen were initially captured but most were released. Some were killed in captivity, however, and nine army personnel are still being held by ISIL.

The media center said that the army raid targeted the house of a "suspected terrorist" identified as Wael Deeb Fleiti in Aarsal's Wadi al-Hosn neighborhood, adding that an army intelligence unit also took part in the raid.

It said that Fleiti, "one of the most dangerous terrorists," was arrested with his brother Hussein, along with a number of Syrian and Lebanese fugitives. **→13**



Salt sculpture festival held at Kaji wetland

A salt sculpture festival opened at Kaji wetland, eastern Iran, on Friday.

Artists from 11 provinces competed against each other in 30 groups during the two-day event.

This is the first time the festival is taking place on the national scale and it has all the potential to go international in the coming years.

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ELECTION COUNTDOWN



Ex-minister made Raisi campaign chief

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ebrahim Raisi, a **d e s k** presidential hopeful, on Saturday appointed former transport and urban development minister as his election campaign chief.

According to Mehr news agency, Ali Nikzad, minister from 2009 to 2013, also used to act as caretaker of the Ministry of ICT under the previous government. Before that, he was the governor general of Ardabil province.



Badamchian: Raisi might step down in favor of Mirsalim

POLITICS TEHRAN — The deputy chairman **d e s k** of the central council of the Islamic Coalition Party has said Ebrahim Raisi might step down in favor of Mostafa Mirsalim in the presidential election.

Speaking to ILNA on Saturday, Assadollah Badamchian also said it would be a mistake if debates on presidential election are not aired live.

"There is no use to debates which have been edited.... The IRIB is serious about this.... The Interior Ministry also should not accept it."



Leader's office chief highlights police role in elections

POLITICS TEHRAN — The director of the **d e s k** Supreme Leader's office on Saturday highlighted the role of police during the election time, IRNA reported.

"The police have a very effective role in the health and security of the election," Mohammad Mohammadi Golpaigani said in a conference.

Elsewhere in his speech, he said the Leader has always stressed maximum participation in elections. He added Ayatollah Khamenei has said if somebody stands against people's votes, he will stand against him.



Lots to be drawn on presidential hopefuls' TV programs

POLITICS TEHRAN — Lots will be drawn **d e s k** to decide the sequence in which presidential hopefuls present their programs on the national TV.

The drawing ceremony will be cast live on TV Channel 1 at 22:00 on Sunday, the IRIB news agency reported on Saturday.

Also, the IRIB monitoring council announced on Saturday night it will decide whether to cast the presidential debates live.

The council added that most of the candidates are in favor of casting their debates live.



96.5% of council candidates qualified

POLITICS TEHRAN — 96.5 percent of those who **d e s k** registered their names for candidacy in the council elections countrywide have been qualified, according to the head of central council for monitoring council election.

There is, however, no exact information about the number of those who have been qualified and the number will be announced soon, Mohammad Mahmoudi Shahneshtin told Tasnim on Saturday.

He also pointed out that the reasons for which some candidates were disqualified will be clarified to them.



Live airing of debates should be thoroughly studied: minister

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's interior minister has **d e s k** said before casting live the presidential debates, all the aspects of the plan should be thoroughly considered.

"Live debates in [2009] had heavy costs and we should consider their entire aspects beforehand," Abdol-reza Rahmani Fazli said on Saturday, ISNA reported.

In the meantime, he said no entity has the right to censor the debates except in occasions when "they are against morals or contain accusations or slanders."

VP Jahangiri: Iran, Georgia are 'politically determined' to expand ties

Iran, Georgia sign MOUs in areas of agriculture, communications, and tourism

POLITICS TEHRAN — Vice **d e s k** President Es'haq Jahangiri said on Saturday that top Iranian and Georgian officials have the "political determination" to expand relations.

Jahangiri made the remarks in a joint press conference with Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili in Tehran.

The vice president hailed the prime minister's visit to Tehran as a "turning point" in relations.

He also said the two countries share many commonalities and have common stance on many international issues.

"There is a good ground for the two countries to expand economic, political and cultural cooperation," Jahangiri noted.

Iran has already expressed its readiness to connect the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea through the North-South Corridor, which would connect Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Iran on its path.

The vice president also said other countries such as China and India are



Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili (L) and Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri

willing to use the Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor as an alternative route.

"The most important issue is the issue of North-South corridor and connection of the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea through Iran-Armenia-Georgia or Iran-Azerbaijan-Georgia," the vice president explained.

Kvirikashvili also said that Georgia is ready to remove obstacles to expansion of relations with Iran and take step to increase economic cooperation.

The Iranian and Georgian officials also signed four memorandums of understanding in the areas of sports, agriculture, communications, and tourism.

Kvirikashvili's trip to Iran came three days after Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's visit to Georgia.

The prime minister also said Iran's private sector can export its goods to Europe through Georgia.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani met separately with the Georgian prime minister and discuss bilateral ties.

Pakistan's speaker in Iran as Sharif heads to S.Arabia

By Ali Kushki

TEHRAN — As the Pakistani Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq arrived in Tehran on Monday for a five-day visit, Islamabad agreed with its former Army Chief General Raheel Sharif to head to Saudi Arabia to command the Saudi-led coalition against Yemen.

Heading a senior parliamentary delegation, Sadiq is in Iran at the invitation of Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani who visited Islamabad in November 2014.

Sadiq met with Larijani on Saturday, a running theme of which was the urgency of peace and stability for the region, in which security continues to remain elusive.

"Iran and Pakistan both can be consequential and create stability in the region," Larijani said in a joint press conference after the session, adding, "ways to achieve lasting security in the region were discussed in the meeting."

The speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly, for his part, stressed the importance of taking steps to reinforce unity among Muslims and fight terrorism.

Sadiq further said his country attaches importance to bolstering relations with Iran, adding that the two sides would not allow minor differences to turn into major issues.

In a separate meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif late on the day, Sadiq underscored that the two Muslim countries hold similar ideas about restoring peace and stability in the region.

Zarif, for his part, expressed Tehran's readiness to shore up bilateral relations in political, economic, security and parliamentary areas, highlighting, "Security of Pakistan is of high importance to Iran."

The high-level meetings come amid Iran's growing concern over Islamabad's decision to send the former army chief to lead the Saudi-led alliance, what is believed to complicate relations between the two neighboring countries.



Ayaz Sadiq (L) meets Zarif on April 22 in Tehran.

Reportedly, Sharif flew to Saudi Arabia in a special plane from Lahore with his family members after having received an approval from the General Headquarters (Pakistan Army), according to Defense Minister Kh Asif on Friday.

Iran has voiced strong opposition to the alliance, which it says is used to launch airstrikes against the defenseless Yemeni people.

Attacks by the Saudi-led coalition have claimed the lives of more than 10,000 people and pushed the impoverished country to the brink of famine.

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Trump doesn't understand international relations: Iran's Shamkhani

POLITICS TEHRAN — A senior **d e s k** Iranian official has criticized U.S. President Donald Trump's contradictory words, saying he "does not have a clear understanding of international relations."

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani made the remarks in an interview with the French daily Le Monde, which was published on Friday.

Shamkhani's remarks came after Trump said Iran is violating the "spirit" of the nuclear agreement it struck with world powers in 2015.

"Iran has not lived up to the spirit of the agreement," Trump said on Thursday at the White House, contradicting what his own State Department said earlier in the week.

"The U.S. Department of State certified to U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan today that Iran is compliant through April 18th with its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)," the department said on Tuesday.

Shamkhani further said that Trump's words and deeds have always been contradictory, adding that he only looks at matters economically.

He also referred to the Trump administration's efforts to re-impose sanctions against Iran, saying, "We are aware that the U.S. is leading an economic warfare on Iran. They, however, have found themselves in new circumstances today. The Europeans are no longer interested in accompanying the U.S."

"We do not seek tension in the region, as we consider it to be to the detriment of regional stability," the official noted.

Under a historic nuclear agreement signed between Iran and six world powers in 2015, Tehran pledged to limit some aspects of its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.

Iranian officials, however, say the U.S. has been putting obstacles in the path of the deal's implementation.

Following Trump's controversial remarks about Iran's lack of commitment to the "spirit" of the deal, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif hit back at the U.S. president, saying it is Washington that needs to meet its end of the deal.

"We'll see if U.S. prepared to live up to



letter of JCPOA let alone spirit. So far, it has defied both," Zarif tweeted on Friday.

"Should I use my highlighter again?" he added, referring to a tweet he had posted earlier highlighting parts of the text of the JCPOA, under which the U.S. administration is committed to support the successful implementation of the accord.

Iran foiled 30 bombing plots last year: intelligence minister

POLITICS TEHRAN — Intelligence Minister **d e s k** Mahmoud Alavi said on Friday that 30 bombing plots were foiled in Iran during the past Persian year of 1395, out of which five of them were publicized only.

The new Persian year started on March 21.

Alavi said there were no worries about "terror" or "bombing" in Iran thanks to the vigilance of its security forces.

Iran's Intelligence Ministry issued a statement in June last year announcing it had foiled one of the "biggest

terrorist plots of Takfiri-Wahhabi groups" in Tehran and some other cities.

"Under the criminal plot of the anti-Islamic Takfiri terrorist group, a series of bombings in several spots of the country had been planned for the coming events in Tehran and some other cities and the devil actions of the Takfiri terrorists were foiled... and the terrorists were arrested and a large amount of explosives were seized," the statement said.

Supreme National Security Council Secretary Ali

Shamkhani also confirmed in June that some suicide attacks had been foiled in Tehran during the holy month of Ramadan.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps also announced in June that its forces had killed five members of the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) in the northwestern border city of Sardasht.

In another clash in the southern city of Khaz on June 13, police forces killed five members of a terrorist group which is an offshoot of Jaish ul-Adl.

Araqchi: MKO nuclear accusation is 'farcical'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian **d e s k** Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has said that accusations by the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO or MEK) that Iran

has developed hidden nuclear activities in Parchin are "farcical" and repetition of a "failed scenario".

Araqchi said that such claims indicate the MKO's lack of political maturity.

The International Atomic Energy Agency's Director General Yukiya Amano issued a statement in January confirming that Iran has fulfilled its obligation under the Joint

Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Analysts say the MKO is making such remarks in order to win support by some hawks in the Trump administration and Congress.

Taliban fighters attack Afghan army base, 'killing 140'

Afghan government officials say the death toll has jumped to 140 following Friday's assault on an army base in the northern Balkh province.

Another 160 people were wounded in the attack, Mohammad Ibrahim Khair Andesh, the head of the provincial council, announced on Saturday.

The attack, responsibility for which has been claimed by the Taliban, happened at an army command center a few miles from Mazar-e Sharif, the capital of Balkh.

Two of the attackers blew themselves up and seven were killed in the assault, which lasted several hours and targeted soldiers at a mosque and a dining facility, the Afghan defense ministry said.

One of the assailants was detained.

"There were about 10 fighters. One of them detonated his explosives and another went head. That's when the firefight erupted," Ghulam Hazrat, a witness, told Al Jazeera.

Fighters in three military vehicles with forged documents launched the attack by shooting a rocket at the entrance of the base, a military official told DPA news agency.

The source said 10 fighters first targeted the mosque, where army staff were performing Friday prayers, before moving on to the dining facility, the source said.

Several military helicopters hovered over the facility during the attack and ambulances later took away the bodies of the victims, an AFP news agency correspondent said.

Taliban's claim

The Taliban claimed that more than 500 soldiers were killed and wounded.

The group also claimed that four of the attackers were soldiers who had served at the base and had knowledge of the facility.

Zabihullah Mujahid, Taliban spokesman, claimed responsibility for the assault.

"Our fighters have inflicted heavy casualties on the Afghan army sta-



tioned there," he said.

The Taliban released a picture of the purported attackers, dressed in military gear, with their faces blurred.

"During Friday prayers, the mosque here would be very busy. Several hundred people would come in from other places as well," an Afghan national who serves in the army told Al Jazeera on condition of anonymity.

"So this was a well-planned attack. There is a possibility as well of insiders helping the fighters. Otherwise how can someone attack a large military base with such heavy security?"

He said two attackers detonated their suicide vests, and after that eight others went further and launched a gun battle. They killed most of my friends."

"Our government is lying and not being clear about the death toll. It was a massacre."

The base in Balkh is home to the Afghan army's 209th Corps as well as to a contingent from the German army. No German soldiers were affected by the attack.

Few thousand troops

General John Nicholson, the top United States commander in Afghanistan, praised Afghan commandos for bringing what he called Friday's "atrocious end."

In February he told the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee in Washington, DC that he needed "a few thousand" more troops to help train and assist the Afghan forces.

The U.S. has about 8,400 troops in the country, with about another 5,000 from NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies assisting

a much larger Afghan force in the war against the Taliban and other armed groups.

The last major attack against a military site in Afghanistan was in early March when fighters disguised as doctors stormed the Sardar Daud Khan hospital - Kabul's largest military hospital - in Kabul, killing dozens.

Afghan security forces, beset by killings, desertions and non-existent "ghost soldiers" on the payroll, have been struggling to beat back the Taliban since U.S.-led NATO troops ended their combat mission in December 2014.

According to U.S. watchdog SIGAR, casualties among Afghan security forces rose by 35 percent in 2016, with 6,800 soldiers and police killed.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Trump has 'dangerous mental illness': experts

A group of American psychiatrists have warned that the United States President Donald Trump has a "dangerous mental illness" and is unfit to lead the country.

Over thirty mental health experts said at a conference at Yale University that Trump was "paranoid and delusional" and that they were responsible for warning Americans about the "dangers" Trump poses.

"We have an ethical responsibility to warn the public about Donald Trump's dangerous mental illness," Dr. John Gartner said at Yale's School of Medicine in New Haven, Connecticut.

Gartner said Trump's false claim about having the largest crowd at his inauguration was just one of many that served as warnings of a wider problem.

Gartner leads a group of mental health experts that believes Trump suffers from a combination of an-



ti-social personality disorders and extreme narcissism and is unfit for the job. He started an online petition earlier this year on calling for Trump to be removed from office.

"Worse than just being a liar or a narcissist, in addition he is paranoid, delusional and grandiose thinking and he proved that to the country the first day he was President. If Don-

ald Trump really believes he had the largest crowd size in history, that's delusional," he said.

"As some prominent psychiatrists have noted, [Trump's mental health] is the elephant in the room. I think the public is really starting to catch on and widely talk about this now," said Dr. Bandy Lee, an assistant clinical professor at the Yale Department of Psychiatry.

James Gilligan, a psychiatrist and professor at New York University, told the conference he had worked with some of the "most dangerous people in society," but that he was convinced by the "dangerousness" of Trump.

"I've worked with murderers and rapists. I can recognize dangerousness from a mile away. You don't have to be an expert on dangerousness or spend fifty years studying it like I have in order to know how dangerous this man is," he said.

(Source: Independent)

12 killed in Venezuela as protests continue

Twelve people were killed in Venezuela's capital Caracas overnight following two days of mass street protests against Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro's beleaguered government.

Six people were also injured in the escalating violence, the public ministry said in a statement. The latest figures raised the total number of deaths during growing protests to 20 over the past three weeks.

Venezuelan Vice President Tareck El Aissami said the country is facing what he calls an "unconventional war" led by opposition groups working in concert with criminal gangs.

Riot police firing tear gas fought running street battles in the east, west, and south of Caracas with demonstrators demanding the removal of Maduro, witnesses quoted by AFP news agency said.

The public ministry said 11 people died in El Valle - a working class neighborhood near Caracas' biggest military base - all men between the ages of 17 and 45. Another death was reported east of Caracas in El Sucre.

A probe was ordered "to investigate the deaths

of 11 people and the injuries caused to six others", the ministry said.

Opposition leaders said some people were hit with an electrical current in El Valle while trying to loot a bakery protected by an electric fence.

Resident Carlos Yanez said the scene was "like a war".

The opposition accuses the left-wing government of sending gangs of armed thugs to attack them, and says security forces have been repressing protesters.

Video taken by locals showed residents throwing bottles and other objects out their windows at the gunmen in the streets below, shouting "murderers".

At one point, demonstrators throwing Molotov cocktails managed to set fire to one of the armored police trucks firing tear gas at them, lighting up the night sky.

There was a heavy security presence Friday on the streets of Caracas, as residents and workers cleaned up the destruction left by the clashes and bouts of looting.

The two sides looked set to spend the day re-

grouping after massive protests on Wednesday and Thursday erupted into unrest in the flashpoint western city of San Cristobal and several other cities.

Call for more protests

Meantime, opposition leaders have called new protests for Saturday and Monday.

On Saturday, they plan to march in silence to the Catholic Church's episcopal seats nationwide. They also intend to erect roadblocks on Monday to grind the country's traffic to a halt.

Protesters blame Maduro - heir of the leftist Bolivarian Revolution launched by the late Hugo Chavez in 1999 - for an economic crisis marked by severe shortages of food, medicine, and basic goods.

Maduro says the protests seeking to remove him are part of a United States-backed coup plot.

On Thursday, the president said the opposition had agreed to new talks, but his opponents denied the claim, saying the only way forward was new elections.

Senior opposition leader Henrique Capriles slammed Maduro as a "dictator" and "mythomaniac".

(Source: Al Jazeera)

France on edge as presidential vote looms

France was on edge on Saturday on the eve of its most unpredictable presidential election in decades, which will take place under heightened security after the extremist killing of a policeman.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh)-claimed slaying of the officer on Paris's Champs Elysees avenue thrust questions of security to the fore of campaigning after nine months of relative calm.

Nearly a quarter of voters are still undecided, and surveys showed until now the French to be more concerned about jobs and the economy than terrorism. But analysts warned Thursday's shooting could change that.

The top two vote getters in Sunday's tight, four-way contest will head to a run-off on May 7.

Authorities in Paris have offered additional guards for hundreds of polling stations in the capital, which will come on top of an already major security plan across the country.

"An extra guard or reinforcement of staff will be provided to any polling station that needs it," Paris town hall official Colombe Brossel said.

On Sunday, around 50,000 police and 7,000 soldiers will be deployed to protect voters around France.

Voters headed to the polls on Saturday in many of France's overseas territories like Martinique and Guadeloupe in the Caribbean, as well as in the United States.

France was still shaken two days after 39-year-old gunman Karim Cheurfi shot dead a police officer and wounded two others before being killed, in an attack that sent tourists on the Champs Elysees rushing for cover.

Far-right Leader Marine Le Pen moved quickly to present herself as the strongest defender against extremists in a country under a state of emergency since a string of terrorist attacks that began in 2015, which have killed more than 230 people.

Don't give in to fear

Meantime, the 48-year-old leader of the anti-immigration National Front (FN) called for France to "immediately" take back control of its borders from the European Union and deport all foreigners on a terror watch list.

"This war against us is ceaseless and merciless," she said, accusing the Socialist government of a "cowardly" response to the threat.



Centrist Emmanuel Macron and conservative Francois Fillon also hastily convened televised briefings in which they vowed to protect the country.

"Some haven't taken the full measure of the evil," 63-year-old Fillon said, promising an "iron-fisted" approach.

Macron, a 39-year-old moderate whom Fillon has portrayed as too inexperienced for the top job, said France was paying for the intelligence jobs cuts made when Fillon was prime minister between 2007 and 2012.

Describing the Champs Elysees shooting as an attack on democracy, he urged voters: "Do not give in to fear."

Communist-backed firebrand Jean-Luc Melenchon, 65, was the only one of the four to stick to his schedule. He called for a "Europe of rebels", during a rally in Paris with Pablo Iglesias, the head of Spain's far-left Podemos party.

"Several Europes are possible, it doesn't have to be just their Europe," said Melenchon, a Eurosceptic who has pledged to renegotiate treaties with the bloc.

Exploiting attack

Elsewhere, A BVA poll conducted on Thursday and Friday showed Le Pen and Macron tied on 23 percent, ahead of Melenchon with 19.5 percent and Fillon on 19 percent.

Though the race has four main contenders, a total of 11 are in the running, most of whom are polling in single digits.

Police continued on Saturday their probe as a clearer picture has emerged of Cheurfi's violent past.

He was arrested in February on suspicion of plotting to kill police officers but released because of a lack of evidence.

A serial offender, he spent nearly 14 years in prison for a range of crimes including attacks on the police. He had shown "no signs of radicalization" while in custody, said France's anti-terrorism prosecutor Francois Molins.

The shooting came days after two men were arrested in Marseille on suspicion of planning an imminent attack and follows a series of deadly strikes around Europe in the past month, targeting Stockholm, London and the Saint Petersburg metro.

Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve accused Le Pen of attempting to make political hay out of the killing, saying she was "seeking, as she does after every tragedy, to take advantage of it".

Adelaide Zulfikarpasic of BVA pollsters said: "If it were to benefit someone that would clearly be Marine Le Pen who has dominated this issue throughout the campaign, or Francois Fillon."

U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted that he thought the attack in Paris "will have a big effect" on the election.

Some voters, though undecided, were unmoved by the latest attack on French soil.

(Source: AFP)

Tehran hosting 48 foreign companies in horticulture fair

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The second edition of Iran Green Trade Fair (IGTF 2017) is hosting five domestic exhibitors and 48 foreign companies, IRIB reported.



The exhibitors from countries including the Netherlands, Germany, India, Italy, France and Japan are showcasing their latest achievements and products in the three-day event which kicked off at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Saturday.

This trade fair aims to bring the Iranian and international horticulture industries together; to boost Iran's production of vegetables, fruits, flowers and plants.

The fair covers various sectors including flowers and plants, greenhouse construction, irrigation, gardening equipment and related industries, soil, seeds, and etc.

PBOC's Zhou signals China 6.5% GDP growth target 'within reach'

People's Bank of China Governor Zhou Xiaochuan said the nation's expected 6.5 percent growth target for this year is "within reach" and financial risks are well under control.

China is fully confident of preventing and eliminating systemic risks, and will keep pursuing a prudent and neutral monetary policy, the central banker said in a statement dated April 22 on the International Monetary Fund's website during his Washington D.C. meeting with the IMF committee. The country will keep applying a "full range" of monetary policy tools to keep liquidity broadly stable and to guide market interest rates in a reasonable manner, Zhou said in the statement, adding to a reiterated pledge on active fiscal policy.

Zhou's statement struck a positive tone, saying that the nation's corporate and financial risks are in check and economic growth resilient. Figures released on April 17 showed China's economy accelerated for a second-straight quarter as investment picked up, retail sales rebounded and factory output strengthened amid robust credit growth and further strength in property markets.

China will further improve its macro-prudential policy framework, a system it has used to gauge risks to the financial system, to address potential systemic risks, Zhou said. China will continue to encourage de-leveraging and preventing asset bubbles, while excess capacity in the coal, steel and other industries will be tackled, Zhou added.

Earlier also in the IMF meeting, Finance Minister Xiao Jie voiced similar confidence about reaching the growth target based on the current economic situation, according to a statement on the ministry's website. (Source: Bloomberg)

South Korea gets ready to embrace coinless society

South Korea has become the latest country to consider scrapping physical cash.

As of Thursday, shoppers at some stores across the country can load loose change from small purchases onto prepaid cards instead of filling their pockets with coins as part of a country-wide trial. Some of the country's biggest convenience stores are taking part, according to the Yonhap news agency.

If the trial is successful, bank officials plan to allow change to be transferred straight into the shoppers' bank accounts by next year.

Customers' convenience has been cited as the major reason for the move, however there are other considerations, not least the cost of producing coins.

The country reportedly spent 53.7 billion won (\$47m; £36.7m) on producing coins in 2016.

Cha Hyeon-jin, an official handling the issue at the Bank of Korea (BOK), predicted that there is a "good chance" that the move to go coinless could possibly lead to a "cashless society" in the coming years, according to the Yonhap news agency.

South Korea is reportedly among the least cash-dependent countries in the world. Pre-paid cards are already widely used to pay for public transportation and taxi rides. Only some 20 per cent of Korean payments are made using paper money, according to the Bank of Korea.

Various countries around the globe are looking at ways to go cashless in response to changing consumer behavior and evolving technology.

Using physical cash is often seen as a burden by both consumers and retailers, while experts have praised contactless payments for both their speed and security.

Last year, India abruptly abolished the country's largest currency note. The move was aimed at curbing corruption in the country but was also intended to encourage a shift to digital transactions.

Closer to home, Sweden has been leading the race to become the first country to go cashless.

According to the Riksbank, the country's central bank, the amount of notes and coins in circulation has fallen by 40 per cent since 2009, partly driven by the decision to eliminate Sweden's largest denomination bill.

The UK might have longer to wait for digital currency, but contactless payments are on the rise. According to the UK Cards Association (UKCA), overall contactless payments came to a total of £25bn of spending in 2016, up from £7.75bn in 2015.

(Source: Independent)

Industry sector attracts \$5.6b in foreign investment post-sanctions

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran could manage to attract \$5.6 billion of foreign investments in various domestic industrial projects as of the removal of international sanctions in January 2016, Iranian Industry Minister Mohammadreza Nematzadeh announced in a press conference on Saturday.

of Finance has ratified cooperation of foreigners on Iranian projects via supplying 30 to 100 percent of the required financial resources for implementation, Nematzadeh said.

According to the latest report of Iranian Finance Ministry, the country approved attraction of \$12.48 billion of foreign investments as of the implemen-

Inflation rate stands at 6.9% in urban areas

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The Statistical Center of Iran announced that the inflation rate in the urban areas for the 12-month period ended in Farvardin, the first month of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-April 20), hit 6.9 percent, Mehr news agency reported.

The center also put the point-to-point inflation rate in the urban areas at 9.4 percent in Farvardin.

Inflation rate in the urban areas for the 12-month period ended in Esfand, the last month of the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), was reported 6.8 percent.

The Statistical Center of Iran has put the country's inflation rate at 9.8 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1395, showing 4.5 percent drop from its preceding year.

It is while Central Bank of Iran (CBI) had previously put the country's infla-



tion rate at nine percent during the past calendar year.

Iran, accordingly, could manage to experience a single-digit inflation rate after 26 years in 1395.

On June 14, 2016, Finance and Economic Affairs Minister Ali Tayyebnia said the country planned to reduce the inflation rate to a single digit by the coming two months.

The goal was achieved in the third Iranian calendar month of Khordad (ended on June 20, 2016) when the inflation rate hit 9.5 percent.

Market Scramble: Iranian fund sets sights on Japan stocks

With the grip of Western sanctions easing, Iran is ready to ramp up economic activities overseas, including investment in the Japanese stock market.

The state-owned Iran Foreign Investment Co. is armed with assets of some \$5 billion. The fund has target-

ed mainly the financial and resource sectors in Europe, the Middle East and Africa but is now looking at Japan, according to Director of Investment Vahid Sharif.

The sudden interest in Japanese stocks is not just because of their



tation of its nuclear deal with the world powers, Mehr news agency reported in early April.

According to the report, with \$3.96 billion of investments, Germany ranks first

among the foreign investors.

The value of attracted foreign investment in Iran stood at \$3.1 billion in 2013, \$2.1 billion in 2014, and \$2.05 billion in 2015, the report added.

Iran plans to export \$3.5b worth of foodstuff this fiscal

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's Industry, Mines and Trade Ministry has it on the agenda to export \$3.5 billion worth of food products during the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2017- March 20, 2018), ISNA reported on Friday quoting an official at the ministry.

According to Mehdi Sadeghi Niaraki, the director general of the Industry, Mines and Trade Ministry's Department of Food, Medicine and Health Industries, the country's food industries' exports reached \$2.7 billion during the last calendar year's first 11 months (March 20, 2016-February 18, 2017) which was fairly close to the last year's anticipated goal of \$3 billion.

Based on the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO), Iran's exports of foodstuffs during the last Iranian calendar year stood at \$2.77 billion to



register an 8 percent rise compared to the preceding year.

TPO also put the weight of exported goods in this category at 1.178 million tons during the mentioned time span.

Oils, essences and extracts, various food products, grain products, biscuits, bread, pastries, dairy products, food pastes, pasta and yeast, tomato paste, sugar and its products have been announced as the main contributors to the increase in exports in this area.

Malaysia reaches deal on \$2.5b of 1MDB bonds

The battle over the repayment of 1MDB bonds may be coming to an end.

Malaysia has reached an agreement to pay Abu Dhabi \$2.5 billion as partial debt settlement for embattled government fund 1Malaysia Development Bhd., according to a person familiar with the matter.

Under a deal that's expected to be announced Monday on the London Stock Exchange, Malaysia will pay Abu Dhabi \$1.2 billion before the end of this year, said the person, who asked not to be identified as the information isn't yet public. Malaysia will also assume the

coupon obligations for two dollar bonds issued by 1MDB and co-guaranteed by Middle Eastern sovereign wealth fund International Petroleum Investment Co., the person said.

1MDB and the Malaysian finance ministry will pay the \$2.5 billion through proceeds raised from the sale of units Brazen Sky Ltd. and 1MDB Global Investment Ltd., the person said. The two countries also agreed not to pursue legal action before December 2020 as they negotiate the dispute over \$3.5 billion linked to the two bonds, the person said.

1MDB and IPIC were locked in a tussle

that spilled over to repayments on two sets of bonds issued by the Malaysian state fund that led to a default in April 2016. The agreement removes a key hurdle amid investigations from the U.S. to Singapore, Hong Kong and Switzerland into money laundering and embezzlement linked to 1MDB.

Representatives from 1MDB and the prime minister's department couldn't be immediately reached for comment by phone or email.

Singapore's Straits Times reported Friday that both parties are expected to reach a settlement agreement on 1MDB

debt as early as that day.

A brainchild of Prime Minister Najib Razak to attract foreign investment, 1MDB accumulated billions of dollars in debt after its 2009 inception. A Malaysian parliamentary committee identified at least \$4.2 billion in irregular transactions.

A proposed settlement is being handled by the 1MDB board and management, along with the prime minister's department, Malaysia's Second Finance Minister Johari Abdul Ghani said in a text message response to questions on Friday.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Lloyds bank bailout repaid in full, says Philip Hammond

The government has recouped the £20.3bn it ploughed into Lloyds Banking Group during the financial crisis, the chancellor has said.

Just days after admitting that the taxpayer faced multibillion-pound losses on its stake in Royal Bank of Scotland, Philip Hammond said the government had now "recovered every penny of its investment in Lloyds".

Speaking on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund meeting in Washington on Friday, Hammond said the government was "not in the business of owning banks" and on the brink of selling off the last of its stake.

The Treasury is able to make its claim by including £400m in dividend payments received from Lloyds as well as from selling shares in the bank. It also does not take account of the £3.6bn cost incurred to bail out the bank, although the Office for Budget Responsibility has said it still expects the government to make £100m when fees from Lloyds are included.

The taxpayer stake stood at 43% at its peak and, according to Hammond, now stands between 1% and 2%. The City ex-



pects the remaining shares to be sold in the coming weeks. António Horta-Osório, the bank's chief executive, said it was a "moment of huge pride for all of us at Lloyds" that the government could say it has already reclaimed its money.

Even so, it has taken much longer than expected during the financial crisis and has only been possible because Hammond was able to sanction the recent sales at a loss

because of profits made from earlier transactions when the share price was higher.

The repayment has not been achieved in the way Hammond's predecessor, George Osborne, envisaged. Osborne promised a discounted share offering to the public which had to be abandoned last year amid market turbulence. Instead, the shares have dripped out to the stock market.

Hammond said: "We are now past the point where we have recovered the taxpayers' investment. We still hold a small shareholding of between 1-2% but the taxpayer has now recovered every penny of its investment in Lloyds."

"Recovering all of the money taxpayers injected into Lloyds marks a significant milestone in our plan to build an economy that works for everyone. While it was right to step in with support during the financial crisis, the government should not be in the business of owning banks in the long term."

On Tuesday, Hammond admitted the Treasury had little hope of selling its 73% stake in RBS above the 502p average price per share paid during the financial crisis.

RBS shares were trading around 240p on Friday with Lloyds trading at 64p, below the 73.6p average price paid during the financial crisis.

Both banks will publish their results next week for the first three months of 2017. Lloyds has already admitted it will have to take a fresh £350m hit for the payment protection insurance mis-selling scandal – taking its total bill to more than £17bn.

(Source: Guardian)

Singapore raises voice against rising protectionism

Rising protectionism in the West has become a threat to Asia's prosperity, Tommy Koh, ambassador-at-large for Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said.

"I worry about the rise of protectionism and economic nationalism in the U.S. and in Europe. I see this as a direct threat to the prosperity and prospects of Asia," Koh said at the Credit Suisse conference on megatrends, held in Singapore.

"Asia has been able to make enormous progress because of the liberal economic order that the U.S., U.K. and other countries created at the end of the Second World War. And this liberal world order seems to be in jeopardy."

Protectionist rhetoric ramped up during the U.S. presidential election last year.

Then-candidate Donald Trump ran on a platform promoting "fair trade" practices that would prove

better for the U.S., with much of the rhetoric aimed at China and Mexico.

Although Trump has since walked back some of the rhetoric – earlier this month he said he wouldn't label China a currency manipulator – he has continued to target U.S. trade partners, calling Canada's actions on dairy a "disgrace" on Thursday and launching a probe of cheap steel exporters, including China.

(Source: CNBC)

Iran's crude exports set to fall in May to 14-month low

Iran's crude oil exports are set to hit a 14-month low in May, a person with knowledge of the Middle Eastern country's tanker loading schedule said, suggesting the country is having problem to raise exports after clearing out stocks stored on tankers.

Part of the drop may also be attributable to a decline in demand, as loadings bound for India are set to slump to a one-year low after a dispute over the award of a contract for a gas field and Japan's orders fall by more than half from April.

Iran is also putting about 3 million barrels back into storage in May, according to the source, underlining how much oil remains available in the market despite an agreement between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and non-OPEC producers to cut output and boost prices.

Crude oil loadings from Iran are expected to total nearly 1.7 million barrels per day (bpd) in May, with almost 100,000 bpd being put into storage on tankers, according to the source.

Loading figures for condensate, an ultra-light crude, were not available for May.

In April, the country is expected to export 1.8 million bpd of crude and a little over 370,000 bpd of condensate, down sharply from a six-year high of nearly 2.9 million bpd reached in February for both forms of oil.

In March, Iran loaded around 2.6 million bpd a day of both crude and condensate, mostly the former, according to the source. No barrels of either crude or condensate were put in storage in March and April.

The final figures for February exports were significantly higher than preliminary numbers reported earlier by Reuters and show Iran took full advantage of its exemption from the production cuts by OPEC and non-OPEC producers, including Russia.

Still, Indian buyers are cutting purchases after state-owned refiners agreed to cut their annual im-



ports deal with Iran by a fifth to put pressure on Tehran to award the Farzad B gas field to an Indian consortium.

Crude liftings for India in May are expected to about 370,000 bpd, while in April Indian customers are lifting nearly 470,000 bpd of both crude and

condensate.

Japan is scheduled to lift nearly 40,000 bpd in May, the lowest since March.

Loadings of crude and condensate for China this month are to hit a four-month low of a little over 500,000 bpd. (Source: Reuters)

Oil dives, sending U.S. crude below \$50 for first time in two weeks

Oil prices tumbled more than 2 percent on Friday, notching the biggest weekly decline in more than a month on mounting evidence that U.S. production and inventory growth were offsetting OPEC's attempts to reduce the global crude glut.

Brent futures settled at \$51.96 a barrel, down \$1.03, or 2 percent at the market's close. U.S. crude futures ended at \$49.62 a barrel, down 2.2 percent, or \$1.09.

Volumes were heavy, with more than 665,000 WTI futures changing hands, surpassing the daily average of 525,000 contracts.

For the week, Brent fell 7 percent,

while U.S. crude lost 6.7 percent. It was the largest percentage drop for both benchmarks since the week of March 10, when rising concern about the supply glut undermined big bets on an oil rally.

Those speculative bets have been on the rise again. On Friday, the U.S. Commodities Future Trading Commission (CFTC) showed total long positions in U.S. crude rose in the week to April 18 to their highest in more than a month at 355,077 contracts. But oil has sagged in recent days, much as it did in March.

Many in the market still expect the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to renew its production

cuts for another six months. On Friday an OPEC and non-OPEC member technical committee recommended extending cuts of almost 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) at the upcoming May 25 meeting.

Still, shipment data shows more oil transiting world oceans than when cuts were put in place.

"The reason that we're seeing the selloff today and really for this week has been related to the fact that we're seeing higher waterborne imports arriving from the Middle East," said Matt Smith, director of commodity research at Clipperdata.

"We should continue to remain well

supplied at least over the next few weeks."

In addition, Russia's Energy Minister Alexander Novak declined to say whether Russia would adhere to an extension, saying global stocks were declining.

Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at Nordic bank SEB, does not expect OPEC to roll over its cuts, saying it could potentially leave the cartel vulnerable to "more stimulus of the U.S. shale oil sector."

U.S. production, already at its highest since August 2015, looks likely to keep rising. U.S. drillers added rigs for a 14th consecutive week, Baker Hughes said on Friday. (Source: Reuters)

Exxon won't get drilling waiver for Russia, Mnuchin says

Exxon Mobil Corp. won't be allowed to bypass U.S. sanctions against Russia to resume drilling for oil in a joint venture that seeks to tap billions of barrels of that country's crude.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said the decision was made after consultation with President Donald Trump. Exxon initially requested the drilling waiver in 2015 and pushed for approval every few months since then, according to a person with knowledge of the matter who wasn't authorized to speak publicly.

The waiver request drew criticism from a cross-section of leading U.S. policymakers, from Republican Senator John McCain, who wondered in a tweet whether Exxon was "crazy," to Senator Bob Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat and sanctions hardliner who sits on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

"We understand the statement by Secretary Mnuchin in consultation with President Trump," Alan Jeffers, an Exxon spokesman, said in an emailed statement. The 2015 request "was made to enable our company to meet its contractual obligations under a joint venture agreement in Russia, where competitor companies are authorized to undertake such work under European sanctions."

Investors shrugged off the Treasury Department's decision; Exxon shares were little changed at \$80.80 at 3:22 p.m. in New York on Friday.

Prior to Friday's rejection, Exxon received three waivers to conduct unspecified paperwork for its venture with Moscow-based Rosneft PJSC, according to filings with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. The waivers were approved twice in 2015 and again in October. The first came just months after the U.S. and European Union imposed wide-ranging sanctions that shut down a drilling project by the two companies in the Kara Sea, the documents showed.

The documents on file specify "limited administrative actions" but add no other detail. (Source: Bloomberg)

Russia lost global leadership in oil output to Saudi Arabia in February

Russia has lost the leadership in global oil production as Saudi Arabia topped production in February, the figures of Russia's Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) showed on Friday.

Russia was the biggest oil producer in the world for two consecutive months in December 2016 and January 2017.

According to Rosstat, both countries reduced their output in one month, Russia produced 9,671 million barrels per day in February, while Saudi Arabia's daily production stood at 9,797 million barrels.

The Russian agency added that the total output of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) also decreased down to 31,958 million barrels per day in February from 32,097 million barrels per day in January.

Both Russia and Saudi Arabia are cutting their oil output to support global crude oil prices within the framework of the OPEC agreement supported by 11 non-cartel states. (Source: Sputnik)

India plans auctions for 4 gigawatts of wind power

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government is seeking to step up the pace of auctioning power-purchase contracts for wind-energy plants, building on a contest that reaped record-low prices for solar farms earlier this month.

The government plans to offer deals covering almost 4 gigawatts of wind capacity in the current fiscal year ending March 2018 in addition to 750 megawatts of solar capacity it will tender next month, Ashvini Kumar, managing director at Solar Energy Corp. of India, the country's implementing agency for renewable targets, told reporters in New Delhi.

Modi is seeking to expand renewables to help balance India's burgeoning needs for electricity against efforts to clear the skies of pollution. The government has a goal to install 175 gigawatts of renewable capacity by 2022 and is prodding local authorities to step up the pace of permitting renewables.



"The ministry of new and renewable energy has written to all states to indicate their requirement for green power to consolidate demand, as more tenders would be brought out," Kumar said.

SECI, which conducted Asia's first onshore wind auction in February, received bids to supply wind power for 3.46 rupees (5 U.S. cents) a kilowatt-hour, much lower than feed-in tariffs of 4 rupees to 5 rupees prevail-

ing across India's most windy states.

According to Kumar, the government thinks that 5 gigawatts to 6 gigawatts of wind capacity can be added every fiscal, and companies could be able to reach the government's goal over the next four years.

Modi's goal calls for a doubling of India's wind capacity to 60 gigawatts and a 10-fold increase in solar projects to 100 gigawatts. (Source: Bloomberg)

that "consensus is building."

The need to extend the agreement, which was planned to cut off some 1.8 million bpd from global supply, became evident before the end of the first quarter, when it emerged that instead of declining, global supplies had actually increased.

This was primarily attributed to excessive stockpiles and refinery maintenance season, which in the U.S. led to a string of seven-figure inventories increases, making markets nervous. Now that refinery maintenance is gradually ending across the world, demand for the commodity should pick up, especially in the second half of the year. (Source: oilprice.com)

Russia hits 250,000 bpd oil production cut milestone

Russia has cut 250,000 bpd of its crude oil output, with another 50,000 bpd to go as per its agreement with OPEC, Energy Minister Alexander Novak told media, adding that the other 50,000 bpd will be cut by the end of the month.

The undertaking took as basis the country's record-high October output, which exceeded 11 million bpd. Earlier this month, Novak said that the ministry will start discussing Russia's possible participation in the production cut extension that is currently being negotiated by OPEC members in order to increase prices further, having failed to push them up to \$60 a barrel since the start of the year.

Novak said last week that "It still re-


mains unclear whether the agreement should be extended. We'll have consultations with our companies and other countries in the nearest future, and we have to see how the situation unfolds in April and consider outlooks for May and June."

Separately, however, Novak said that crude oil output in Russia should hit a record-high 549 million tons (about 4 billion barrels) this year, despite the cut.

Just yesterday, Kuwait's Oil Minister Essam al-Marzouq said that Russia had given its preliminary consent to the extension. The minister was speaking on the sidelines of a conference in UAE, where Saudi Arabia's top oil official confirmed that talks are ongoing and



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National Iranian Drilling Company

Public Calls For Quality Evaluating Of Tender(First Publish/Seconed Publish)

Two-Stage(Semi-compressed)

TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE (Rial)	DESCRIPTION	Tenders Portal Reg. No.	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial					
80,915	2,832,000,000	81,569,520,000	DRILL PIPE	1,482,704	TenderNo.:FP/17-96/003 Indent No.:48-22-9422018	1
149,200	5,222,000,000	201,060,000,000	DRILL PIPES	1,482,707	TenderNo.: FP/17-96/004 Indent No.: 48-22-9422020	2
157,155	5,579,000,000	218,916,000,000	DRILL PIPES	1,482,712	TenderNo.: FP/17-96/005 Indent No.: 48-22-9422021	3
99,530	3,533,000,000	116,640,000,000	DRILL PIPES	1,482,714	TenderNo.: FP/17-96/006 Indent No.: 48-22-9422023	4

Brief description of subject:
National Iranian Drilling Company(NIDC) address pasdaran Blev., Airport Saqrah, Ahwaz, Iran hereby intends to purchase its requirements from qualified and interested tenderers through two-stage public tender (semi-pressed) upon following terms and conditions:

A) Qualitative evaluation of tenderer:
The evaluation is based on article (j) implementing regulations of the law of tenders and also carried out base on worksheets qualitative evaluation inquiry in the tender documents. Minimum acceptable point of quality is 60.

B) Preparation of tender documents:
Purchasing of documents:
In order to receive the tender documents, 510,000 Rials should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.
Receiving of documents:
Tenderers must obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum one week after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Hall No.:113, 1thfloor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN
Notice: Only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and receive tender documents from foreign procurement department in due date will be known as tenderer from tender committee.

C) Delivery of call quality evaluating:
Tenderers shall submit the completed documents including qualificaion worksheets in form of software in CD and documentary within 14 days from last day of document recived deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1thfloor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN.

D) Tender Guarantee:
Type of guarantee:
A)Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activites licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranain Drilling Company.
Duration of credit guarantee:
This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on WWW.NIDC.IR
Foreign Procurement Dept.(DRILLING PROJECTS)
National Iranian Drilling Company

Why America wants to cozy up to Turkey

For most of the past century the story of Turkey has been one of looking to see where it fits in the world. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire which stretched from south-eastern Europe to Iraq, Ataturk decreed in the 1920s that the new republic should isolate itself from the turbulence of its former imperial possessions in the Middle East.

This turned out to mean membership of the NATO alliance, close relations between the Turkish military and Washington, and the ambition to join the European Union.

For a country that was overwhelmingly Muslim, this was a brutal dislocation from the Islamic world. Still, Ataturk had single-handedly beaten off the greedy European powers to create the Turkish Republic, so the military had enough prestige to dominate the state for a generation or two.



It is this dislocation, keenly felt in the Turkish heartland outside the major cities, which spurred the rise of the Justice and Development Party (known as the AKP) of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has overseen Turkey's dramatic reconnection with its Islamic heritage. At the start of his political career, Erdogan cast himself as an Islamic democrat, an attractive label in Europe with some similarity to the Christian Democrat politicians in Germany and Italy who formed the nucleus of European integration.

■ A new stage

The referendum held last Sunday, which created a powerful executive presidency for Erdogan, by a slim majority of 51.4 per cent to 48.6 per cent, marks the start of a new stage in Turkey's story. While reaction from European states has generally been muted, the official verdict of the election monitors is that it took place on an "unlevel playing field" tilted in favor of Erdogan. If the margin of victory had been greater, these concerns might have been fewer, but in the eyes of some Europeans, Turkey's brand of democracy is not up to the expectations of the European Union.

For Erdogan, the subject is closed, though he has to deal with the consequences of a vote that reveals a nation sharply divided. In his view, a win is a win, as evidenced by the 52-48 result of the British vote to leave the EU, and Turkey is facing huge challenges from the Syrian war, a huge influx of refugees, the renewed Kurdish insurgency and economic uncertainty. No one doubts the scale of the challenge; the issue is whether the political background – a state of emergency following last year's attempted coup – was appropriate for holding a constitutional referendum.

Ultimately, these concerns may be quietly buried. Turkey first applied to join the EU 30 years ago, but membership is not a political possibility for the Europeans, even though the process is still officially in train.

Of more immediate concern to European countries is the status of the agreement on migrants worked out last year with the German chancellor, Angela Merkel. Turkey agreed to act as gatekeeper to Europe and stop migrants moving westward in return for \$6 billion in funding and a promise of visa-free travel in the EU. Visa-free entry is a difficult concession for European politicians to swallow, given the rising levels of anti-foreigner sentiment in Europe. But the prospect of a new migrant surge is also worrying, with elections due in France and Germany.

It looks like Erdogan has the upper hand. He could, if he wanted to, sever the link with the EU on the grounds that Europe is never going to welcome Turkey as a member. But economics suggest caution: 44 per cent of Turkish exports go to the EU, and this is not a market that any Turkish leader could willfully neglect.

■ Diplomatic messages

A clue as to how the West will treat Turkey comes from Washington. While European countries were drafting diplomatic messages urging Erdogan not to ignore that 48.6 per cent who voted No, the White House announced that Donald Trump had called Erdogan to congratulate him on his victory. While some in the United States have called this a betrayal of American values of democracy and freedom, others have seen it as a clear sign of the meaning of "America First" in foreign policy.

Turkey is a valued U.S. ally, and particularly needed in resolving the Syria crisis, yet relations have become strained by the U.S. military's choice of the Kurdish-led militia, the Syrian Democratic Forces, to spearhead the conquest of the ISIL stronghold of Raqqa.

Turkey sees the SDF as allies of the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and therefore a threat to the survival of the state.

In these circumstances, it is in America's interest to cozy up to Erdogan to make a new start. Of course, Washington has always tempered its proclaimed idealism with realpolitik. But there is no doubt that under Barack Obama the congratulations would have been mixed with expressions of concern about democracy and human rights.

Here one can see the hand of the generals Trump has brought in to his administration, who all have long experience of NATO politics. But there is also a deeper change. The spread of the so-called universal values of liberty and equality around the world after the end of the Cold War has stalled and may be going into reverse.

Erdogan also believes that the people are reassured by a strongman at the top, and echoes can be seen in Xi Jinping, Chinese leader, and the Indian prime minister, Narendra Modi, who has the image of a strongman even if Indian democracy remains vibrant.

Trump has not hidden his admiration for Putin and aspires to be a strong leader too. How the West responds to Erdogan's new powers will be closely watched around the world.

(Source: The National)

Was the Paris attack an ISIL attempt to influence the French election?

Was the terrorist attack in Paris on Thursday night executed by Islamic State (ISIL) in a deliberate attempt to influence the presidential election in France, which starts on today?

The suggestion may seem far-fetched, and it would be a significant shift for a group known more for nihilistic ultra-violence than efforts to manipulate western political process, but it is not impossible.

We still know relatively little about how strategic and tactical decisions are made at the top levels of ISIL. We knew more about al-Qaida. Osama bin Laden, the founder of the group and the mastermind behind the 9/11 attacks in New York, was not averse to exploiting a western electoral calendar. In 2004, days before the U.S. election, Bin Laden released a video statement explaining why he had targeted the west and promising further attacks. Some then suggested Bin Laden had sought to help George W Bush get re-elected, arguing that the U.S. president's polarizing strategies and interventions helped terrorists.

No evidence has ever emerged to back this contention. It is more likely Bin Laden's intervention was simply aimed at getting maximum publicity for his extremist vision of the world.

ISIL, formed of a group that split from al-Qaida, has broken with terrorism tradition many times before, so it is possible, if unlikely, that it has embarked on a new, ambitious strategy.

■ A political motive

As with Bin Laden's earlier intervention, it may superficially appear the group could have a political motive. Any terrorist attack linked to ISIL, so the thinking goes, will rally voters behind Marine Le Pen and her extreme rightwing Front National. A Le Pen victory would send an uncompromising message to France's large Muslim minority about their place in the country, raising tensions, easing recruitment for extremists, increasing the likelihood of further attacks and thus accelerating a cycle of violence.

ISIL has made no secret of its desire to widen existing social, racial and religious fractures in France and other western states. Part of this is pragmatic: these nations are contributing to the offensive that is putting the group under tremendous pressure in its strongholds in the Middle East. Part is strategic: creating chaos and anarchy is part of a long-term expansion plan outlined by key terrorist thinkers. And part is ideological: ISIL aims to destroy any "grey zone" in which different cultures and faiths can co-exist.

ISIL has a deep knowledge of and



It would be a significant shift for the terrorist group if the attack was intended to influence voters.

interest in French politics. A number of French militants who made their way to the ISIL strongholds in Syria in recent years have risen up the group's hierarchy to fill key posts. Many of these men have been killed, but not all. There is Boubaker al-Hakim, a French-Tunisian who arrived in Syria in 2013 and has terrorism form going back 15 years or more in his native land. There is also Abdelilah Himich, alias Abu Sulayman al-Faransi, who was born in Morocco but grew up in southern France. Himich has been linked to the attacks in Paris in 2015 and in Brussels four months later.

ISIL still has resources, despite the best efforts of French security agencies. Himich created a brigade of foreign fighters in Syria which, U.S. officials say, may have once numbered 300 members. Some of these were involved in recent European plots. Most are dead or detained, but not all. One of the pair held this week in

Marseille on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack may well have been in Syria recently. The group also appears able to attract enough volunteers in France to maintain a fairly high tempo of attempted and successful attacks.

But there is still no real evidence to indicate that ISIL has attempted to manipulate any electoral process, in France or elsewhere, in favor of anyone.

■ Propaganda by deed

A better explanation for the spate of violence in the last week is simply that the priority of terrorists, including ISIL, is to maximize the publicity generated by any single attack. For all its nihilism, terrorism remains "propaganda by deed".

One way to grab attention is to strike symbolic targets – the Houses of Parliament in London, for example. Another is to inflict mass casualties in places that people believe are safe – planes, nightclubs, schools. A third is

to make sure an attack will, thanks to modern technology, be highly visible. The attacks on luxury hotels in Mumbai, India, in 2008, and a shopping mall in Nairobi in 2014, both broadcast in real time over three days, are an example of this. Now witnesses with mobile phones can do what TV cameras once did. The internet is already full of clips captured on the Champs Élysées on Thursday night.

Or terrorists can exploit timing. Last year's attack in Nice killed 82 people on 14 July, France's Bastille Day holiday and a fundamental date in the republican calendar. An attack days from one of the most contentious European elections for decades was always going to guarantee massive publicity, whatever the number of casualties. This appears to have been the goal of this most recent attack, and, as a glance at Friday's front pages shows, it is one ISIL has once more successfully achieved.

(Source: The Guardian)

Can Saudi Arabia young prince make his vision come true?

Two years into his campaign as change agent in this conservative oil kingdom, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman appears to be gaining the confidence and political clout to push his agenda of economic and social reform.

The young prince outlined his plans in a nearly 90-minute conversation Tuesday night at his office here. Aides said it was his first lengthy on-the-record interview in months. He offered detailed explanations about foreign policy, plans to privatize oil giant Saudi Aramco, strategy for investment in domestic industry, and liberalization of the entertainment sector, despite opposition from some religious conservatives.

Mohammed bin Salman said that the crucial requirement for reform is public willingness to change a traditional society. "The most concerning thing is if the Saudi people are not convinced. If the Saudi people are convinced, the sky is the limit," he said, speaking through an interpreter.

Change seems increasingly desired in this young, restless country. A recent Saudi poll found that 85 per cent of the public, if forced to choose, would support the government rather than religious authorities on policy matters, said Abdullah al-Hokail, the head of the government's public opinion center. He added that 77 per cent of those surveyed supported the government's "Vision 2030" reform plan, and that 82 per cent favored music performances at public gatherings attended by men and women. Though these aren't independently verified numbers, they do indicate the direction of popular feeling, which Saudis say is matched by anecdotal evidence.

"MBS," as the deputy crown prince is known, said that he was "very optimistic" about President Trump. He described Trump as "a president who will bring America back to the right track" after Barack Obama, whom Saudi officials mistrusted. "Trump has not yet completed 100 days, and he has restored all the alliances of the U.S. with its conventional allies."

■ Additional U.S. support

A sign of the kingdom's embrace of the Trump administration was the visit here last week by U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis. While the Obama administration had criticized the Saudi war in Yemen, Mattis discussed the possibility of additional U.S. support if the Houthi fighters there don't agree to a UN-brokered settlement.



"MBS," as the deputy crown prince is known, said that he was "very optimistic" about President Trump. He described Trump as "a president who will bring America back to the right track" after Barack Obama, whom Saudi officials mistrusted.

Mohammed bin Salman has been courting Russia, as well as the United States, and he offered an intriguing explanation of Saudi Arabia's goal in this diplomacy. "The main objective is not to have Russia place all its cards in the region behind Iran," he said. To convince Russia that Riyadh is a better bet than Tehran, the Saudis have been "coordinating our oil policies recently" with Moscow, he said, which "could be the most important economic deal for Russia in modern times."

There's less apparent political tension than a year ago, when many analysts saw a rivalry between Mohammed bin Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin

Nayef, who is officially next in line for the throne but is less prominent than his cousin. Whatever the succession proves to be, the deputy crown prince appears to be firmly in control of Saudi military strategy, foreign policy and economic planning. He has gathered a team of technocrats who are much younger and more activist than the kingdom's past leadership.

Reform plans appear to be moving ahead slowly but steadily. Mohammed bin Salman said that the budget deficit had been cut; non-oil revenue increased 46 per cent from 2014 to 2016 and is forecast to grow another 12 per cent this year. Unemployment and housing remain problems, he said, and improvement in those areas isn't likely until between 2019 and 2021.

The biggest economic change is the plan to privatize about 5 per cent of Saudi Aramco, which Mohammed bin Salman said will take place next year. This public offering would probably raise hundreds of billions of dollars and be the largest such sale in financial history. The exact size of the offering will depend on financial-market demand and the availability of good options for investing the proceeds, he told me. The rationale for selling a share of the kingdom's oil treasure is to raise money to diversify the economy away from reliance on energy. One priority is mining, which would tap an estimated \$1.3 trillion in potential mineral wealth.

The instigator of this attempt to reimagine the kingdom is the 31-year-old deputy crown prince. With his brash demeanor, he's the opposite of the traditional Bedouin reserve of past Saudi leaders. Unlike so many Saudi princes, he wasn't educated in the West, which may have preserved the raw combative energy that is part of his appeal for young Saudis.

The trick for Mohammed bin Salman is to maintain the alliance with the United States, without seeming to be America's puppet. "We have been influenced by you in the U.S. a lot," he said. "Not because anybody exerted pressure on us — if anyone puts pressure on us, we go the other way. But if you put a movie in the cinema and I watch it, I will be influenced." Without this cultural nudge, he said, "we would have ended up like North Korea." With the United States as a continuing ally, "undoubtedly, we're going to merge more with the world."

(Source: The Washington Post)

Trump, a symptom of what?

A radical message from a half-century ago

By Ira Chernus

You could hear the deep sadness in the preacher's voice as he named "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today — my own government." With those words, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., launched a scathing indictment of America's war in Vietnam. It was April 4, 1967.

That first antiwar sermon of his seemed to signal a new high tide of opposition to a brutal set of American policies in Southeast Asia. Just 11 days later, unexpectedly large crowds would come out in New York and San Francisco for the first truly massive antiwar rallies. Back then, a protest of at least a quarter of a million seemed yuge.

King signaled another turning point when he concluded his speech by bringing up "something even more disturbing" — something that would deeply disturb the developing antiwar movement as well. "The war in Vietnam," he said, "is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit."

Many of those who gathered at antiwar rallies days later were already beginning to suspect the same thing. Even if they could actually force their government to end its war in Vietnam, they would be healing only a symptom of a far more profound illness. With that realization came a shift in consciousness, the clearest sign of which could be found in the sizeable contingent of countercultural hippies who began joining those protests. While antiwar radicals were challenging the unjust political and military policies of their government, the counterculturalists were focused on something bigger: trying to revolutionize the whole fabric of American society.

Why recall this history exactly 50 years later, in the age of Donald Trump? Curiously enough, King offered at least a partial answer to that question in his 1967 warning about the deeper malady.

"If we ignore this sobering reality," he said, "we will find ourselves... marching... and attending rallies without end." The alternative? "We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values."

Like many of my generation, I feel as if, in lieu of that radical revolution, I have indeed been marching and attending rallies for the last half-century, even if there were also long fallow periods of inactivity. (In those quiet times, of course, there was always organizing and activism going on behind the scenes, preparing for the next wave of marches and demonstrations in response to the next set of obvious outrages.)

If the arc of history bends toward justice, as King claimed, it's been a strange journey, a bizarre twisting and turning as if we were all on some crazed roller-coaster ride.

The Trump era already seems like the most bizarre twist of all, leaving us little choice but to march and rally at a quickening pace for years to come. A radical revolution



The Trump era already seems like the most bizarre twist of all, leaving us little choice but to march and rally at a quickening pace for years to come.

in values? Unless you're thinking of Trump's plutocrats and environment wreckers, not so much. If anything, the nation once again finds itself facing an exaggerated symptom of a far deeper malady. Perhaps one day, like the antiwar protestors of 1967, anti-Trump protestors will say: If the American system we live under can create this atrocity, there must be something wrong with the whole thing.

But that's the future. At present, the resistance movement, though as unexpectedly large as the movement of 1967, is still focused mainly on symptoms, the expanding list of inhumane 1% policies the Republicans (themselves in chaos) are preparing to foist on the nation. Yet to come up are the crucial questions: What's wrong with our system? How could it produce a President Trump, a Republican hegemony, and the society-wrecking policies that go with them both? What would a radically new direction mean and how would we head there?

In 1967, antiwar activists were groping their way toward answers to similar questions. At least we have one advantage. We can look back at their answers and use them to help make sense of our own situation. As it happens, theirs are still depressingly relevant because the systemic malady that produced the Vietnam War is a close cousin to the one that has now given us President Trump.

■ Diagnosing our deep sickness

The Sixties spawned many analyses of the ills of the American system. The ones that marked that era as revolutionary concluded that the heart of the problem was a distinctive mode of consciousness — a way of seeing, experiencing, interpreting, and being in the world. Political and cultural radicals converged, as

historian Todd Gitlin concluded, in their demand for a transformation of "national if not global (or cosmic) consciousness."

Nor was such a system uniquely American, they discovered. It was nothing less than the hallmark of Western modernity.

In exploring the nature of that "far deeper malady," Martin Luther King, for instance, turned to the European philosopher Martin Buber, who found the root of that consciousness in modernity's "I-It" attitude. From early childhood, he suggested, we learn to see other people as mere objects ("its") with no inherent relation to us. In the process, we easily lose sight of their full humanity. That, in turn, allows us free rein to manipulate others (or as in Vietnam simply destroy them) for our own imagined benefit.

King particularly decried such dehumanization as it played itself out in American racism: "Segregation substitutes an 'I-it' relationship for the 'I-thou' relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things." But he condemned it no less strongly in the economic sphere,



Capitalists use technology, German-American philosopher Herbert Marcuse explained, to build machines that take charge both of the workers who run them and of aspects of the natural world. The capitalists then treat those workers as so many things, not people.

where it affected people of all races. "The profit motive, when it is the sole basis of an economic system," he said, "encourages a cutthroat competition and selfish ambition that inspire men to be more I-centered than thou-centered... Capitalism fails to realize that life is social."

Another influential thinker of that era was a German-American philosopher, Herbert Marcuse. (Some radicals even marched in rallies carrying signs reading "Marx, Mao, Marcuse.") For him, the dehumanization of modernity was rooted in the way science and technology led us to view nature as a mere collec-

tion of "things" having no inherent relation to us — things to be analyzed, controlled, and if necessary destroyed for our own benefit.

Capitalists use technology, he explained, to build machines that take charge both of the workers who run them and of aspects of the natural world. The capitalists then treat those workers as so many things, not people. And the same hierarchy — boss up here, bossed down there — shows up at every level of society from the nuclear family to the international family of nations (with its nuclear arsenals). In a society riddled with structures of domination, it was no accident that the U.S. was pouring so much lethal effort into devastating Vietnam.

As Marcuse saw it, however, the worst trick those bosses play on us is to manipulate our consciousness, to seduce us into thinking that the whole system makes sense and is for our own good. When those machines are cranking out products that make workers' lives more comfortable, most of them are willing to embrace and perpetuate a system that treats them as dominated objects.

Marcuse would not have been surprised to see so many workers voting for Donald Trump, a candidate who built his campaign on promises of ever more intensified domination — of marginalized people at home, of "bad hombres" needing to be destroyed abroad, and of course, of nature itself, especially in the form of fossil fuels on a planet where the very processes he championed ensured a future of utter devastation.

One explanation for the electoral success of Trump was the way he appealed to heartland white working-class voters who saw their standard of living and sense of social status steadily eroding. Living in a world in which hierarchy and domination are taken for granted, it's hardly surprising that many of them took it for granted as well that

the only choice available was either to be a dominator or to be dominated. Vote for me, the billionaire businessman (famed for the phrase "You're fired!") implicitly promised and you, too, will be one of the dominators. Vote against me and you're doomed to remain among the dominated. Like so many other tricks of the system, this one defied reality but worked anyway.

Many Trump voters who bought into the system will find themselves facing even harsher domination by the 1%. And as the Trumpian fantasy of man dominating nature triggers inevitable twenty-first-century blowback on a planetary scale, count on growing environmental and social disasters to bring disproportionate pain to those already suffering most under the present system. In every arena, as Marcuse explained back in the 1960s, the system of hierarchy and domination remains self-perpetuating and self-escalating.

(End of part one)

State Dept. sued over refusal to release records on George Soros Foundation

By Whitney Webb

The U.S. State Department is being sued for refusing to release information regarding funding it has given to organizations affiliated with billionaire investor George Soros. These organizations are known to have connections with groups that are seeking regime change in Macedonia.

For much of this year, prominent Macedonian politicians and journalists have been publicly speaking out against organizations linked to controversial billionaire George Soros, accusing the organizations of fomenting regime change and undermining the country's national sovereignty.

The evidence for Soros-backed political meddling was substantial enough to open an ongoing U.S. congressional investigation into the matter, particularly the granting of State Department funds to Soros-linked organizations that stand at the heart of the scandal.



Now, conservative watchdog foundation Judicial Watch has decided to get involved, filing a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit on Wednesday against the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The lawsuit seeks "records and communications relating to the funding and political activities" of the Open Society Foundation, the most well-known of all Soros-linked organizations, as well as its affiliates operating in Macedonia.

Soros' Open Society Foundation is believed to be one of the largest "philanthropic" organizations in history, with branches in 37 countries and an annual operating budget of approximately \$930 million, a budget set personally by Soros himself.

While Soros' influence on European politics has remained relatively secretive for years, recently leaked documents have shed light on the billionaire's potent influence on international political figures.

Judicial Watch decided to move ahead with legal action after both organizations failed to respond to a FOIA request they submitted on Feb. 16, a week after the State Department denied that U.S. government assistance had been given to partisan causes in Macedonia, particularly to groups that oppose current Macedonian Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski.

However, while the State Department has denied funding partisan causes, they did admit to providing several massive grants to Soros organizations, including \$4.8 million in USAID funding to the Foundation Open Society – Macedonia (FOSM) and a \$9.5 million grant for a new project through which the FOSM is also a beneficiary.

During the time that the State Department and USAID were funding FOSM, the Forum Group (another Soros-linked NGO) and USAID commissioned the Centre for Applied Non-violent Action and Strategies (CANVAS), a Serbia-based regime change specialist group, to recruit Macedonian youth to the opposition, offering rewards of up to \$1,500 for suggestions as to how to protest against the existing government more effectively.

Macedonia, however, has been a particular focus for regime change efforts due to Gruevski's open support for the Turkish Stream pipeline, a Russian project that would export gas to Europe. The project is strongly opposed by the United States.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov alluded to this in 2015, when he stated that the reason for the foreign-funded push for regime change was "a desire to influence it in connection with its refusal to join anti-Russian sanctions, support of the South Stream and willingness to be involved in the implementation of other options of fuel delivery, including the so-called Turkish Stream."

Soon after, Russian Ambassador to the European Union Vladimir Chizhov told Bloomberg TV that this suspicion was "logical," adding that "If you look at the geography of the region, Macedonia is the best place for constructing the extension of the newest energy infrastructure project in the region, the so-called Turkish Stream."

Macedonia is not alone in asserting that Soros-linked organizations are fomenting opposition to ruling parties that oppose the "global order." Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has been particularly vocal in his condemnation of Soros, calling him a "predator" this past February and accusing him and his organizations of "trying secretly and with foreign money to influence Hungarian politics."

While Soros' influence on European politics has remained relatively secretive for years, recently leaked documents have shed light on the billionaire's potent influence on international political figures. The "Podesta emails," for instance, leaked by Wikileaks, exposed deep connections between Soros and the Hillary Clinton-led State Department under the administration of former President Barack Obama.

One of those emails showed that Soros had directly advised Clinton on handling unrest in Albania — advice she later acted on. Through other leaks, Soros was also revealed to have played a major, yet shadowy role in the 2014 coup in Ukraine.

(Source Mint Press)

Ivanka Trump appoints aides from former President Bush's administration

US President Donald Trump's daughter Ivanka Trump, who has recently taken up an unpaid job as a White House adviser, is increasing the staff with officials from former president George W. Bush's administration, media reported.

Apart from Dina Powell, senior counselor to the president for economic initiatives and Ivanka's close aide, who served as assistant to the president for personnel in Bush's team, Ivanka hired Margaret

Spellings, who worked as an education secretary at Bush's office, as a chief of staff, Politico reported.

Another member of Ivanka's team will be Julie Radford, who was recruited in February by Powell, the newspaper specified.

On November 8, 2016 Trump won over his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton in the US presidential election. Trump's inauguration was held on January 20. (Source Sputnik)



The Main(e) lesson Trump should learn from William McKinley

By Daniil Davydoff

Maritime incidents — the RMS Lusitania, Pearl Harbor and the Gulf of Tonkin — heralded U.S. involvement in several twentieth-century conflicts. April 20 marked the start of one such conflict, the Spanish-American War, which followed the sinking of the USS Maine in 1898. Although the war took place nearly 120 years ago, it can serve as a lesson to our current administration. Like Much like William McKinley's administration, the Trump administration faces a potential maritime crisis amidst public concern over the country's foreign-policy passivity. Unlike McKinley's administration, however, Trump's administration cannot afford to handle a crisis — this one in the South China Sea — or its aftermath the same way.

The Maine was sent to Cuba to defend U.S. interests following unrest in Havana in January 1898. After the vessel exploded, the popular conclusion was that Spain was to blame, and both expansionist and humanitarian sentiment drove the United States to declare war in April. By July, Spain had surrendered and withdrawn from Cuba; the United States annexed the Philippines,



Guam and Puerto Rico.

Islands are also at the core of the current South China Sea dispute. The Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands, as well as Scarborough Shoal, are within a maritime territory of some 3.5 million square kilometers claimed by China. Despite contestation by the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei, China has escalated the dispute in recent years

by building and militarizing artificial islands in the area. With the United States seeking to prevent Chinese expansion and conducting patrols, tensions and the possibility of a miscalculation or confrontation are high.

International fronts

Politically, the comparison between the two eras can be drawn out on the domestic and the international fronts. Like Trump, McKinley had an "America first" perspective on economic policy at home, with trade protection and growth of U.S. businesses a top priority. As with the Bernie Sanders movement, McKinley likewise had to contend with the competing populism of William Jennings Bryan during his presidential campaign.

Most importantly, on foreign policy, both men share a certain personal reluctance on international involvement coupled with a mandate — and high-level support—for forceful action in case of crisis. Just as the explosion of the USS Maine provided hawks in the McKinley administration with a justification for a military response to Spain, a crisis in the South China Sea today could prompt a comparable reaction from the new government. Rex Tillerson has already stated his support for a policy of strong

responses to further Chinese construction and militarization of contested islands. James Mattis and new National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster, meanwhile, may play the role of the erudite Theodore Roosevelt in pushing for a tough approach. Steve Bannon has gone one step farther than any other officials.

In March 2016, he claimed there was "no doubt" that the United States would be involved in a South China Sea war in the next 5-10 years.

Due in part to Roosevelt, the U.S. Navy was well prepared for the Spanish-American War, yet poor planning and organization overall cost the United States dearly. Many U.S. troops and most mounts never left Florida due to transportation constraints, supplies and the fact that armaments were inadequate. Also, the majority of U.S. soldiers perished due tropical diseases that flourished in Cuba's rainy summer season. In this context, whether current officials fan the flame or a crisis comes about in some other way, the new administration needs to consider all the ways in which the so-called "splendid little war" would be neither splendid nor little today if a South China Sea crisis is handled poorly. →13

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Diet sodas may be tied to stroke, dementia risk

By Jacqueline Howard

Gulping down an artificially sweetened beverage not only may be associated with health risks for your body, but also possibly your brain, a new study suggests.

Artificially sweetened drinks, such as diet sodas, were tied to a higher risk of stroke and dementia in the study, which published in the American Heart Association's journal Stroke on Thursday.

The study sheds light only on an association, as the researchers were unable to determine an actual cause-and-effect relationship between sipping artificially sweetened drinks and an increased risk for stroke and dementia. Therefore, some experts caution that the findings should be interpreted carefully.

No connection was found between those health risks and other sugary beverages, such as sugar-sweetened sodas, fruit juice and fruit drinks.

"We have little data on the health effects of diet drinks and this is problematic because diet drinks are popular amongst the general population," said Matthew Pase, a senior research fellow in the department of neurology at Boston University School of Medicine and lead author of the new study.

"More research is needed to study the health effects of diet drinks so that consumers can make informed choices concerning their health," he said.

The new study involved data on 2,888 adults older than 45 and 1,484 adults older than 60 from the town of Framingham, Massachusetts. The data came from the Framingham Heart Study, a project of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and Boston University.

In the older-than-45 group, the researchers measured for stroke and in the older-than-60 group, they measured for dementia.

"The sample sizes are different because we studied people of different ages," Pase said. "Dementia is rare in people under the age of 60 and so we focused only on those aged over 60 years for dementia. Similarly,



Studies have shown an association between the intake of sugar-sweetened beverages and adverse health effects, such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke, and possibly even heart failure.

stroke is rare in people aged under 45 and so we focused on people older than age 45 for stroke."

The researchers analyzed how many sugary beverages and artificially sweetened soft drinks each person in the two different age groups drank, at different time points, between 1991 and 2001. Then, they compared that with how many people suffered stroke or dementia over the next 10 years.

Compared to never drinking artificially sweetened soft drinks, those who drank one a day were almost three times as likely to have an ischemic stroke, caused by blocked blood vessels, the researchers found.

They also found that those who drank one a day were nearly three times as likely to be diagnosed with dementia.

Those who drank one to six artificially sweetened beverages a week were 2.6

times as likely to experience an ischemic stroke but were no more likely to develop dementia, Pase said.

"So, it was not surprising to see that diet soda intake was associated with stroke and dementia. I was surprised that sugary beverage intake was not associated with either the risks of stroke or dementia because sugary beverages are known to be unhealthy," Pase said.

In response, Lauren Kane, a spokeswoman for the American Beverage Association, issued a statement from the group that said low-calorie sweeteners found in beverages have been proven safe by worldwide government safety authorities.

"The FDA, World Health Organization, European Food Safety Authority and others have extensively reviewed low-calorie sweeteners and have all reached

the same conclusion -- they are safe for consumption," the statement said.

Separate previous studies have shown an association between the intake of sugar-sweetened beverages and adverse health effects, such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, heart disease, stroke, and possibly even heart failure.

"This article provides further evidence though on artificially sweetened beverages and their possible effects on vascular health, including stroke and dementia," said Dr. Ralph Sacco, professor and chair of neurology at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, about the new study.

Sacco was a co-author of an editorial published alongside the study in the journal Stroke on Thursday.

"We believe the pathways of which artificially sweetened beverages would affect the brain are probably through vascular mechanisms," Sacco said.

"When the authors controlled for hypertension and diabetes and obesity the effects diminish, which implies that some of the effects of artificially sweetened beverages could still be going through a vascular pathway," he said about the new study. "Many strokes are caused by hardening of arteries; and the risk of dementia is also increased by the hardening of arteries in large and small vessels. So, I believe the mechanisms may be through vascular disease, though we can't prove it."

Heather Snyder, senior director of medical and scientific operations at the Alzheimer's Association, called the new study "a piece of a larger puzzle" when it comes to better understanding how your diet and behaviors impact your brain.

"It's actually really more of your overall diet and overall lifestyle that is linked to cardiovascular disease and diabetes risk, and we do know that heart disease and diabetes are linked to an increased risk of dementia," said Snyder, who was not involved in the new study.

(Source: CNN)

5 food choices to help ease arthritis pain

For many years, people have claimed that certain foods in their diet reduced pain and joint inflammation from arthritis. Researchers continue to investigate whether foods and spices actually may play a role in relieving joint pain and, if so, how they work.

"Mostly it's just healthy eating, with a lot of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts and seeds," says registered dietitian Ruth Frechman, spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Fruits, veggies and whole grains are natural inflammation fighters that can also help control your weight. "It's important to stay at a healthy weight to ease up some of the stress on the joints," Frechman adds. For every 1 pound of weight you lose, you reduce the load on your knee joint by 4 pounds.

■ Foods to try to ease arthritis pain

Remember, there's no magic food," stresses Frechman. But growing evidence suggests that following a healthy diet and adding in specific foods and spices could help fight inflammation and joint pain.

- **Broccoli, Brussels sprouts and cabbage.** These veggies are part of the cruciferous family, and they are full of a compound called sulforaphane, which helps slow cartilage damage in joints due to osteoarthritis, according to a 2013 study involving mice. Admittedly, it's an early study.

- **Fatty fish.** Fatty fish like salmon, tuna, trout and mackerel are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which help fight inflammation. Try adding fish to your diet a couple of times a week. If you're not a big fan of fish, ask your doctor about taking an omega-3 supplement.

- **Garlic.** Garlic is a member of the allium family—which also includes onions and leeks. These items contain a compound called diallyl disulfide that may help with a number of diseases—including arthritis. "This compound may have some effect in limiting cartilage-damaging enzymes," says rheumatologist Scott Zashin, MD, clinical professor at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas.

- **Turmeric.** One of the best-researched inflammation fighters isn't a food at all, but a spice. Turmeric contains a compound called curcumin. A 2012 review published in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences said that "curcumin could be beneficial in the management of chronic inflammatory-related joint disease," but authors warned that there is a considerable lack of data regarding side effects and safety. The compound has, however, been used for centuries in India to ward off inflammatory diseases. You'll find this yellow spice in Indian cuisines—particularly curries.

- **Vitamin C.** Antioxidants in vitamin C may slow the progression of OA, research finds. A 2011 study from the University of South Florida reported that people who took vitamin C supplements were 11 percent less likely to develop knee OA than those who didn't take the supplements. You can get vitamin C from strawberries, kiwi, pineapple, or cantaloupe. However, Frechman warns against taking supplements with much higher doses than 65 to 85 milligrams, because in large doses vitamin C can increase the risk of kidney stones.

(Source: arthritis.org)



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NEWS IN BRIEF



Kyrgyzstan to simplify visa process for Iranian visitors

TOURISM TEHRAN — Kyrgyzstan will simplify desk bureaucracy for Iranian visitors and business travelers in a bid to deepen bilateral ties, its foreign minister said on April 19.

The scheme is aimed at preparing favorable conditions for Iranian investors and tourists, ILNA quoted Erlan Abdyldaev as saying. He made the remarks during a joint press conference with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif in Bishkek.

Iran issues month-long visas on arrival for Kyrgyz visitors that can be extended up to 90 days.



Europe's aviation industry heads to Belfast to plan future flights

BELFAST (Travel Daily News) — Belfast will become the center of the European aviation industry this weekend when the city hosts the three-day Routes Europe forum (23-25 April).

Routes Europe brings together airlines, airports and tourism authorities to plan new flights and strengthen existing routes. It meets in a new location every year to highlight different markets to the aviation industry.

Visitors highly welcome Iranian crafts exhibit in Netherlands

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A recent exhibition of Iranian handicrafts at the Iran-Netherlands Trade and Cultural Center in Leiderdorp was highly welcomed by visitors, an official with the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization said.

A total of 26 artisans from across the country showcased wide-ranging handicrafts such as traditional jewelry, leatherwork, metalwork, miniature, pottery, ceramics, and hand-woven products, Pouya Mahmoudian who presides over the CHTHO Exports Department said on April 19.

Organized by Touring & Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran in close collaboration with the CHTHO, the week-long event opened its doors to the public on April 14.

Titled "Persian Culture Week", it featured a photo gallery on various Iranian crafts and tourist destinations as well.

Leiderdorp is located in the western Netherlands, in the province of South Holland near the city of Leiden.

ROUND THE GLOBE
City of Valletta

The capital of Malta is inextricably linked to the history of the military and charitable Order of St John of Jerusalem. It was ruled successively by the Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs and the Order of the Knights of St John.

Valletta's 320 monuments, all within an area of 55 ha, make it one of the most concentrated historic areas in the world.

Malta's capital Valletta is a fortified city located on a hilly peninsula between two of the finest natural harbors in the Mediterranean. The Siege of Malta in 1565 captured the European imagination and mobilized the resources needed to create the new city of Valletta, founded soon after, in 1566.



The Knights of St John, aided by the most respected European military engineers of the 16th century, conceived and planned the city as a single, holistic creation of the late Renaissance, with a uniform grid plan within fortified and bastioned city walls. Since its creation, the city has witnessed a number of rebuilding projects, yet those have not compromised the harmony between the dramatic topography and the Hippodamian grid.

The fabric of the city includes a compact ensemble of 320 monuments that encapsulate every aspect of the civil, religious, artistic and military functions of its illustrious founders. (Source: UNESCO)

Annual handicraft exports at \$237m: tourism chief

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Iran exported \$237 million of handicrafts in the past Iranian calendar year, which ended on March 20, IRNA quoted the head of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization as saying.

The country fetched over \$8 billion in tourism revenues last year, CHTHO Director Zahra Ahmadipour added in an address to a provincial meeting in Shiraz on April 19.

Elsewhere in her remarks, she expressed satisfaction over the domestic sales of handicrafts in marketplaces which had been set up during Noruz, the new Iranian year holidays.

Ahmadipour who doubles as vice president announced such marketplaces earned 450 billion rials (some \$12m), while saying that exports and domestic sales of handicrafts are projected to increase.

Exports of handicrafts have been on the rise over the past three years, witnessing an overall 59 percent hike, the CHTHO announced in January. Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Germany are the main importers of Iranian handicrafts.

Over the past couple of years,



Photo shows a collection of Iranian potteries that are meticulously inlaid with enamel

dozens of Iranian handicrafts have been honored with the UNESCO Seal of Excellence. In 2010, a total of 65 crafts on various themes including enamel, tile, metalwork, leatherwork, wood carving received the privilege.

Iran to join ancient civilizations forum in Athens

HERITAGE TEHRAN — An international forum on ancient civilizations will be held in Athens on April 24, with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif representing Iran amongst counterparts from nine other countries.

An initiative of Greece Foreign Minister Nikos Kotzias in close collaboration with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, the event will also convene top officials from Egypt, Bolivia, India, Iraq, Italy, Mexico and Peru, IRNA reported on Saturday.

"It is a great prospect and opportunity to turn it into a great institution which will prove to international institutions that one does not only need hard power, military or economic power, but also soft power, which

should be upgraded," Kotzias said in a press conference on Friday.

"In culture, Greece is a great power. Our heritage is particular and it is one sector where we can and should play a role in world affairs. It's a sector in which Greece has a lot to offer," he said, adding the initiative could gain a wider scope, highlighting the importance of culture for Greece.

The ten countries are heirs to the illustrious Egyptian, Roman, Persian, Chinese, Mesopotamian, Mayas, Incas civilizations, and those of the Indus Valley. According to Greek Reporter, they represent over 40 percent of the world population the substantially contribute to international political developments in the Americas, Europe,



Asia and Africa, reported. Titled "Ancient Civilizations Forum", the event will be held at the Zappeion monument in the heart of Athens.

Paris terrorist attack threatens city's rebounding tourism, travel experts warn

Following Thursday night's terrorist attack in Paris—the latest in one of the world's most popular cities for tourists—both Parisians and travelers have been on edge as authorities continue to investigate the shooting.

The incident shut down the crowded, tree-lined Champs-Élysées, one of the main arteries in Paris and a tourism magnet, just three days before the upcoming French presidential elections.

"Nobody wants to be afraid when they go to take the metro or are out for dinner, but there is a nagging worry in the back of everyone's mind," Melanie Mathis, an American national living in Paris, told Fox News. "You think twice about going certain places or being in large crowds."

Terror attacks have become increasingly frequent in France, leaving many wondering just how safe the beautiful city really is. Long one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, France received 83 million foreign visitors last year, according to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, that number is down from 2015, when France reported more than 85 million tourists.

Le Pen calls for France to restore border controls after ISIS-claimed attack

Just two months ago, French statistics agency INSEE reported that tourism had sharply rebounded in 2016, after two consecutive quarters of decline linked to terrorism attacks. The news came at a welcome time—tourism is the biggest industry in the Ile-de-France region, which includes Paris, and as recently as late 2016, the region reported a devastating 750 million euros (over \$802 million) in lost revenue.

"Paris has been on the downside since



French police patrol the Champs Elysees Avenue the day after a policeman was killed and two others were wounded in a shooting incident in Paris, France, April 21, 2017.

November 2015, followed by the Nice truck attack in 2016, but we were seeing slowly travelers returning back to Paris," New York-based travel agent Ginny Caragol, Executive Director of Valerie Wilson Travel, told Fox News.

While Caragol noted a decline in French bookings following the Bataclan attacks, that trend was beginning to reverse. With these recent incidents, the agency has yet to receive requests to cancel future bookings, although, says Caragol, "this could change."

Adds Mathis, "A lot of people dream of traveling to or around France and the thought of that being taken away or diminished by terrorist threats is simply unacceptable."

France in particular, and Paris in gener-

al, has experienced a recent uptick in terrorism, with incidents including the March 2017 Orly attack; the February 2017 Louvre attack; a July 2016 attack at a church in Normandy; the July 2016 Nice truck attacks; the November 2015 attacks (including the Bataclan theater), and the Charlie Hebdo attack in January 2015.

Meanwhile, just this week, two men were arrested in Marseille on suspicion of planning another imminent attack before the Presidential election.

Paris unveils plans to secure Eiffel tower with bulletproof glass wall

The U.S. State Department has not issued an alert for Americans traveling to France, although the France page contains a warning for those traveling or living in France, saying "When traveling or living in

Brexit makes campsites cool again as Britons tighten belts

Before last year's Brexit vote, Scott McCready was struggling to fill his holiday cabins on the coast of southwest England. Now the site is fully booked with British tourists avoiding more expensive foreign trips following a plunge in the pound.

This turnaround in the 10 months since Britons decided to leave the European Union reflects a jump in demand for "staycations", with British consumers seeking ways to make their money go further as rising inflation squeezes their incomes.

McCready, who gave up a job in IT to build his site between ancient wood-

lands and a creek in the county of Devon, recalled the hectic days after last June's referendum.

"My phone just took off," he told Reuters. "It was like someone flicked a switch. We were booked out for the rest of the summer and now this year we're having to turn people away."

The reason why Britons and some Europeans have flocked to his 24 wooden lodges in Newton Ferrers, once a quiet fishing village 370 km (230 miles) from London, is straightforward.

The referendum result caught financial markets off guard, sending the pound

down about 20 percent against the dollar and 16 percent against the euro at one point. That rapidly pushed up the cost of holidays to the United States and continental Europe, both popular destinations for Britons.

Since then, sterling has recovered some of its losses but remains down about 14 percent against the dollar and 8 percent against the euro.

So about 15 km away, Chris Duff is enjoying a similar jump in demand at his 90-lodge Thatches park, where he is investing to upgrade facilities which include a swimming pool and a fitness suite. "If

we could, we would like to expand," he said.

Britain's \$2.6 trillion economy surprised almost all forecasters by withstanding the initial shock of the Brexit vote, a point made by Prime Minister Theresa May on Tuesday when she called a snap June 8 election.

"Despite predictions of immediate financial and economic danger since the referendum we have seen consumer confidence remain high, record numbers of jobs and economic growth that has exceeded all expectations," she said. (Source: Reuters)

Cosmic magnifying glass reveals supernova explosion 4b light years away

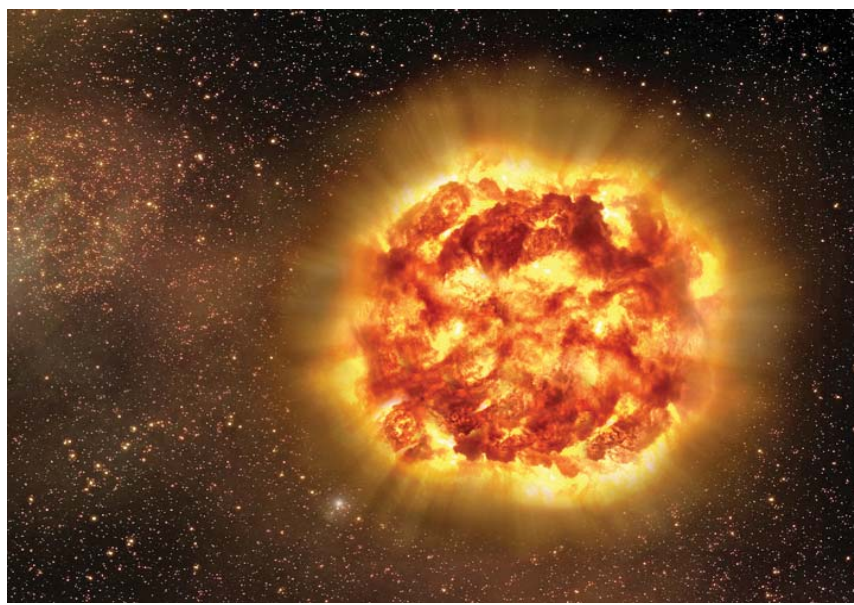
Scientists have observed a supernova explosion from 4 billion light years away in an extreme case of gravitational lensing — where distant objects are magnified by galaxies bending the light emitted from them.

In a study published in the journal *Science*, researchers announced an extreme case of gravitational lensing. In it, they were able to take four images of a specific type of supernova — Type Ia. These exploding stars are well understood and have, over the past 20 years, been used to study the expansion of the universe.

But in this case, the supernova was magnified by more than 50 times, and produced four separate images. This provides scientists the opportunity to measure exactly how much the light was distorted by space. By using these measurements — along with future observations of other supernovas — scientists will be able to work out how fast the universe is expanding with incredible accuracy.

Gravitational lensing

Gravitational lensing allows scientists to study the distant universe. Galaxies bend the light that travels through them, creating a curve in space time. This is one of the foundations of Einstein's theory of general relativity. The resulting curve creates a lens that deflects the path of the light passing by, creating a cosmic magnifying glass that scientists can use to



study distant objects.

However, this only really works when the object of interest is sitting directly behind a galaxy — the pair must be in

near-perfect alignment.

Ariel Goobar, professor in experimental particle astrophysics at Stockholm University, Sweden, and lead author of the new

Gravitational lensing allows scientists to study the distant universe. Galaxies bend the light that travels through them, creating a curve in space time.

study, tells *Newsweek* in an email interview: "These are the kinds of well-calibrated explosions that have been used to accurately map the expansion history of the universe. It was thanks to observations of Type Ia supernovas that it was discovered that the expansion of the universe accelerates, a Nobel Prize-winning realization in 2011, and often attributed to the existence of a mysterious dominant component in the fabrics of the universe, 'dark energy.'"

Fleeting event

But studying a Type Ia supernova comes with problems. Because it is a fleeting event, if and when it lines up with a galaxy, scientists must work fast to study it. In September, Goobar and his colleagues detected a supernova that had come into alignment with a foreground galaxy. They set up several telescopes, including the Hubble Space Telescope, to make detailed measurements of the explosion.

"What these observations show is that the supernova light is split into four separate images, corresponding to four different paths of the light around the lensing galaxy," Goobar says. "This presents us with an exciting possibility. Since the light beams travel through different paths, corresponding to different lengths, time differences in their arrival could arise.

(Source: *Newsweek*)

Sunflower seeds traced as source of toxic mold, potent liver carcinogen

Michigan State University researchers have shown that sunflower seeds are frequently contaminated with a toxin produced by molds and pose an increased health risk in many low-income countries worldwide.

Michigan State University researchers have shown that sunflower seeds are frequently contaminated with a toxin produced by molds and pose an increased health risk in many low-income countries worldwide.

In the current issue of *PLoS ONE*, the team of scientists documented frequent occurrence of aflatoxin — a toxin produced by *Aspergillus* molds that commonly infect corn, peanuts, pistachios and almonds — in sunflower seeds and their products. This is one of the first studies to associate aflatoxin contamination with sunflower seeds.

The study was conducted in Tanzania, but the problem is by no means isolated there. Chronic exposure to aflatoxin causes an estimated 25,000-155,000 deaths worldwide each year, from corn and peanuts alone.

Since it is one of the most potent liver carcinogens known, the research to detect and limit its presence in sunflower seeds and their products could help save lives and reduce liver disease in areas where sunflowers and their byproducts are consumed, said Gale Strasburg, MSU food science and human nutrition professor and



one of the study's co-authors.

Aflatoxin contamination

"These high aflatoxin levels, in a commodity frequently consumed by the Tanzanian population, indicate that local authorities must implement interventions to prevent and control aflatoxin contamination along the sunflower commodity value chain, to enhance food and feed safety in Tanzania," he said. "Follow-up research is needed to determine intake rates of sunflower seed

products in humans and animals, to inform exposure assessments and to better understand the role of sunflower seeds and cakes as a dietary aflatoxin source."

Smallholder farmers in Tanzania grow sunflowers for the seeds, which are sold to local millers who press the seeds for oil and sell it to local consumers for cooking. The remaining cakes are used as animal feed.

The seeds become infected by *Aspergillus flavus* or *Aspergillus parasiticus*, molds that produce aflatoxin. This contamination has been well studied in other crops, but there is little research published on sunflower seed contamination.

Juma Mmongoyo, a former MSU food science doctoral student and lead author of the study, analyzed aflatoxin levels of seeds and cakes in seven regions of Tanzania in 2014 and 2015. Nearly 60 percent of seed samples and 80 percent of cake samples were contaminated with aflatoxins.

In addition, 14 percent of seeds and 17 percent of cakes were contaminated above 20 parts per billion, the level considered safe by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Some samples had levels of several hundred parts per billion.

(Source: *phys.org*)

Breakthroughs arise from a precise mix of old and new knowledge: study

"If I have seen further," wrote Isaac Newton in a 1676 letter to Robert Hooke about studying the nature of light, "it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Now, a study of nearly 30 million research papers and more than 5 million patents offers clues as to where more of these giants might be lurking.

A paper published by researchers at Northwestern University's Institute on Complex Systems in the journal *Science Advances* on Wednesday reveals that the most-cited papers rely on a specific mix of old and new research that the authors say is "nearly universal in all branches of science and technology."

The study addresses a question that lies at the heart of the scholarly enterprise: Today's research constitutes the basic building blocks for tomorrow's discoveries, but what should the composition of those blocks be? The findings point to ways to improve how researchers can assemble the richest combination of knowledge on a topic, and may also reveal deeper patterns in how humanity acquires knowledge.

"We're very interested in trying to understand where knowledge comes from, particularly breakthroughs — these in-

sights in science and technology that are the ones really move the needle in terms of people's thinking," says Brian Uzzi, a professor at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management and a co-author of the paper.

Gathered data

To find out, the researchers gathered data on citations. "What do scientists and scholars do when they start a new project or work on a new idea?" asks lead author Satyam Mukherjee, now a professor at the Indian Institute of Management Udaipur. The "first thing we do is to perform a literature review and look for related works in the past and also in recent times."

The researchers examined all 28,426,345 scientific papers in the Web of Science, an indexing service for research papers in the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities, from 1945 to 2013, and all 5,382,833 U.S. patents granted between 1950 and 2010. They found that the papers and patents with the highest impact, defined as garnering the top 5 percent of citations in their field, tended to cite relatively new information, but with a long, diminishing tail into past work.

"Our research indicates that one



needs to see the entire arc of a given idea or concept over time to use it most effectively in one's own work," says Professor Mukherjee.

The researchers were surprised by their findings' universality. The sweet spot — or "hotspot," as the researchers call it — between old and new research held for papers in physics, gender studies, and everything in between, from the postwar

era to the present.

"I was expecting that the patterns would vary drastically by time period and academic field," says mathematician Daniel Romero, now an assistant professor at the University of Michigan's School of Information, who worked on the study as part of a postdoctoral fellowship at Northwestern.

(Source: *The CSM*)

Official Reveals €60m Worth of Investment by Foreign Investor in Gilan Prov.

About €60 million worth of investment was made by a foreign investor in Gilan Province.

Managing Director of Gilan Province Regional Power Company (P.J.S) Eng. Azim Bolbolabadi announced the above statement.

Speaking at 2nd Working Group Meeting on Power and Energy in Crisis Management and Passive Defense in Gilan Province, he expounded on the priorities of the company and said: Gilan Province Regional Power Company will take giant stride in the current year 1396, named after the Year of Resistance Economy, Employment and Job Generation."

He pointed to the construction of renewable power plants as the most important priority of the company in current year and said: "According to the sublime recommendation of supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, the company has undertaken to change its



policy in the current year in line with realizing most of its objectives."

Gilan Province enjoys high potential in the field of construction of renewable power plants, he said, add-

ing: "In the meantime, this province has the potential in the field of wind energy, exceeding 3,000 megawatt capacity."

Suitable ways have been paved for foreign investors in this province, so that land acquisition is the main problem facing the company, he maintained.

Relying upon the assistance of the Almighty God, the ground will be broken for the construction of the first renewable power plant in this province, he said, adding: "Golden opportunity has been provided for this province in this regard in a way that €60 million worth of investment has been provided in this respect."

In the end, Managing Director of Gilan Province Regional Power Company (P.J.S) Eng. Azim Bolbolabadi said: "With the coordination made in this regard, Gilan Province will witness giant development in the field of production and employment."

Scientists one step closer to turning on the world's largest X-ray laser

Scientists say they've reached a milestone on the way to switching on the world's biggest X-ray laser, designed to capture images of structures and processes at the atomic level.

The DESY research center near Hamburg, Germany, said Wednesday it successfully fired electrons through a 2.1 kilometer (1.3 mile) particle accelerator.

It plans to increase the energy of the electrons and generate the first X-ray laser light next month.

Once the European XFEL project begins operation later this year it will produce up to 27,000 X-ray laser flashes per second.

Scientists hope it will open up new areas of research, like mapping the atomic details of viruses and deciphering the molecular composition of cells.

Institutions from Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland are involved in the project. (Source: *Popular Mechanics*)

The seafloor is eroding faster than scientists thought

A trip to a coral reef off the coast of the Florida Keys, an outdated nautical chart and an argument with a boat captain led biogeochemist Kimberly Yates to make a startling discovery: The seafloor around parts of the continent is breaking away, much more than scientists had previously assumed.



Yates, an oceanographer with the U.S. Geological Survey's St. Petersburg Coastal and Marine Science Center, was in the region for a research trip. She jumped off the boat and was swimming in the water to look for a spot to place some equipment. When she finally did, she signaled to the captain several times to bring the boat over — but he refused. Finally, she swam back to the boat and asked him why he wouldn't navigate that way.

"He said he couldn't take the boat there because the water is too shallow. He had looked at the nautical chart and said that there was only around 2 feet of water there," Yates recalled. "But it was much deeper — I had to put him in the water with me and show him that there was around 12 feet of water in that spot. We came back thinking either that nautical chart was wrong, or we've lost about 10 feet of seafloor since it was made."

Over the next two years, Yates and her team traveled to five reef tracts in the Florida Keys, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Maui, Hawaii. In all five, they found evidence that the reefs aren't the only victim of erosion: The seafloor is eroding, as well, increasing the depth of the water in those areas. As this becomes more common, it could pose a risk to coastal communities that are already vulnerable to sea-level rise and lack the protection of natural buffers.

"At current rates, by 2100 sea floor erosion could increase water depths by two to eight times more than what has been predicted from sea level rise alone," Yates noted in a statement.

Yates and her colleague David Zawada came to this conclusion by studying nautical data stretching as far back as the 1800s. It was collected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, USGS, and the Army Corps of Engineers.

(Source: *Scientific American*)

A better way to predict the environmental impacts of agricultural production

Consumer goods companies often rely on life-cycle assessments (LCA) to figure out the potential consequences of how they design products and source ingredients. This kind of assessment, while sophisticated, often lacks detail about how the products affect natural resources such as land, water and biodiversity.

A team of researchers from Stanford University and the University of Minnesota, in a partnership called the Natural Capital Project, along with researchers from Unilever's Safety and Environmental Assurance Centre, developed a new kind of assessment to integrate these impacts in a more detailed way. They call it Land Use Change Improved Life Cycle Assessment, or LUCI-LCA. It's designed to help researchers or companies more accurately predict impacts of new designs and sourcing.

The researchers tested this new LCA by evaluating the potential environmental impacts of two bio-plastic products that could be produced from sugarcane grown in Mato Grosso, Brazil, or from corn grown in Iowa. Their approach -- which includes more accurate data about the regional land composition than the traditional LCA -- came to different conclusions about which option would be more environmentally responsible. The group published the results in the April 21 issue of *Nature Communications*.

The "size and reach of multinational companies is stunning, on par with that of many nations," said Gretchen Daily, professor of biology at Stanford and senior author of the paper. "When we think about how to bring human activities into balance with what Earth can sustain, corporations have a major role to play in decoupling economic growth from environmental impact."

(Source: *EurekAlert*)

Iranian firms to attend Russia aviation and space exhibit

SOCIETY TEHRAN — A number of Iranian knowledge-based companies will attend the Russian International Aviation and Space Salon, MAKS, which is due to be held from July 18 to 23.

The main objective of MAKS is to demonstrate achievements of Russian high tech and receptiveness of the domestic Russian market to joint projects with foreign partners.



MAKS provides a unique opportunity to experts in the field and businessmen for establishing multi-level connections, further developing industrial cooperation and finding new business partners. The key role of the Aviation Salon as a generator of new alliances and productive ideas is recognized worldwide.

MAKS will be held in Zhukovsky – the town synonymous to the aviation science and technology – at the airfield of the country's central test base – Gromov Flight Research Institute. Guests of the Salon can familiarize themselves with the biggest Russian scientific, production and experimental hubs located in the close proximity.

LEARN ENGLISH Talking To Your Roommate

A: Charlie, do you have a second?
B: Yeah what's up?
A: Well, I went and paid the **bills** today and you still haven't given me your half.
B: Yeah I wanted to talk to you about that. I agreed we would go **halves** on all the bills, but frankly I think it's unfair.
A: Unfair! Why?
B: Well, you have long hair and use the hairdryer every morning. I don't. You leave your computer on all night downloading torrents. I don't. You see **what I'm getting at** here?
A: You leave the air conditioner on day and night! You also take 30 minute showers which means you are using **way more** gas and water than me!
B: Well, while we are at it, stop bringing your friends over for drinks every weekend. You always leave a **mess** and keep me up all night!
A: Maybe you should just **move out** and find another place.
B: Maybe you should move out!

Key vocabulary

bill: a document that shows how much you must pay
go halves: divide equally
what I am getting at: what I am trying to say
way more: much more, a lot more
mess: if there is a mess somewhere or a place is a mess, things there are dirty or not neatly arranged
move out: to vacate a residence, cause to leave
Supplementary vocabulary
landlord: one that owns and rents land, buildings, or dwelling units
lease: a contract granting use or occupation of property during a specified period in exchange for a specified rent
utility: a commodity or service, such as electricity, water, or public transportation, that is provided by a public utility
dower: the rights of a widow in the property of her husband at his death
breach of contract: a legal violation of an established contract between two parties

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Together towards clean planet: Iran marks Earth Day

By Maryam Qarehgozlou

TEHRAN — Iran marked the Earth Day 2017 in a ceremony held at the Department of Environment here on Sunday with the national theme of "together towards clean Earth".

Every year, more than one billion people across the world mark the event by showing support for environmental protection on April 22. Earth Day aims to encourage people across the world to be more environmentally friendly. This might mean increasing the amount they recycle or volunteering for green project.

Individuals, groups join hands for a clean Earth

In a statement made on the occasion of the Earth Day, the environment chief Masoumeh Ebtekar expressed hope that individuals and groups treat the Earth in a way to have a better planet to live as without collective collaboration having a clean Earth would become a dream that can never come true.

The catastrophic effects of unsustainable development on the Earth is now more obvious than ever and has reached an alarming level, Ebtekar said, adding, humankind is using energies, water, and food unsustainably.

Human beings need to reconsider the way they are treating the Earth and today is the day they can ponder about it, she highlighted.

Waste management is at the core of Iran's activities to have a clean earth, she said, adding, this is a priority for the government and laws to support it have been approved so far.

"We are also making plans with Ministry of Information and Technology to co-conduct project to recycle e-waste,"

Ebtekar noted.

Iran lags behind other countries in waste management

Deputy Environment Sa'eed Motesaddi regretted the fact that Iran is lagging behind other countries in waste management.

"While many are crazy about setting up incinerators, constructing sanitary landfills, or composting in Iran there is a

great emphasis on recycling worldwide," Motesaddi said.

Recycling is a process converting waste materials into new materials and objects which contrary to waste disposal can save material, he said, stating, "So with a greater emphasis on recycling we can also take advantage of the other methods as well."

"One of the reasons as to why some

consider recycling not economical is that we do not let the private sector to get a hold on the waste management sector," he lamented.

Knowledge-based companies can pave the way

Knowledge-based companies and experts can help pave the way to advance the science of waste management, "we have to come up with better ideas than constructing landfills or building incinerators," he reiterated.

Soil, symbol of productiveness

Soil is a symbol of productiveness, but unlike air pollution which is easily noticeable soil pollution is hard to notice for the public and many don't know the soil they are setting foot on has lost fertility, he warned.

Motesaddi went on to say that "Some 16 million tons of soil suffer erosion in Iran annually and unfortunately the overuse of pesticides has worsened the situation."

Overuse of some of chemicals, ceaseless cultivation of food crops, and depleting soil of nutrients have resulted in soil degradation, he said, adding, however still some 30 to 40 percent of the agricultural products go to waste which is unsustainable use of the soil.

"Just like the clean air bill which turned into a law recently we have also proposed clean soil bill which we hope to be passed soon to help improve the soil status in general," he noted.

We all are responsible

"We all are responsible for what we produce," Motesaddi highlighted, "we are not allowed to pollute the water, soil, or air with our waste and we have to feel responsible for it even without any laws or prohibitions."

Tehrani citizens waste 200 hours per year in traffic: councilor

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Tehrani citizens waste an overall 200 hours per year of their life in traffic congestion, the head of environment committee of the City Council of Tehran has said.

Considering the city's 9 million population with over 18 million vehicle trips per day, they waste 6

million hours each day in traffic congestion, ISNA quoted Mohammad Haqqani as saying.

"And if you regard the working days in each year, over 200 hours of their life is wasted in traffic congestion."

The increase of traffic congestion will lead to more

air pollution and endanger Tehran environment as well, he regretted.

He said that Tehran's highways and streets are crowded most of the time during days and nights and the term of 'rush hour' is not suitable for this city, he said.

Coin toss decides winner of small Illinois village election

MARION, III. (AP) — The flip of a coin on Thursday decided the next leader of a tiny town in southern Illinois after an election earlier this month ended in a tie.

Williamson County Clerk Amanda Barnes said Bryan Riekema let fellow candidate Tammy O'Daniell-Howell choose heads or tails before the coin toss. She picked heads.

Barnes said she "let it just fall to the

ground" and it landed on heads, making O'Daniell-Howell village president in Colp, home to about 250 residents.

After her victory, O'Daniell-Howell said she made a promise to Riekema, that if she won she would work to find a place for him on the village board.

"I intend to honor that promise," said the lifelong resident of the village. "We need young voices, we need change, and

we need growth."

O'Daniell-Howell has been the village clerk since 2009. Riekema describes his occupation as "geek." He attended Southern Illinois University on a swimming scholarship and stayed in the area after earning a bachelor's degree in chemistry.

O'Daniell-Howell said her long-term plans for the town include creating a community center, which would also

function as a storm shelter.

Barnes said she let both candidates inspect the 2016 North Dakota quarter before she tossed it.

"It was the shiniest one I found in the office," she said, adding the event "went very smoothly."

The candidates each received 11 votes in the April 4 election. Illinois law calls for coin flips to settle ties.

Have an idea?
Be in touch!
lifestyle.tehrantimes@gmail.com

First Announcement

N.I.O.C
1396.250

National Iranian Drilling Company

Public Calls For Quality Evaluating Of Tender(First publish/seconded publish)
Two-stage(semi-compressive)

TENDER GUARANTEE	ESTIMATED VALUE (Rial)	DESCRIPTION	Tenders Portal Reg. No.	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial				
51,885	1,816,000,000	P/F:"YANCHE NG SANYI"ANNUAL AR BLOWOUT PREVENTER	1482119	Tender No.:FP/12-96/002 Indent No.: 08-22-9145318	1

Brief description of subject:
National Iranian Drilling Company(NIDC) address pasdaran Blev., Airport Sqare, Ahvaz, Iran hereby intends to purchase its requirements from qualified and interested tenderers through two-stage public tender (semi-pressed) upon following terms and conditions:
A) Qualitative evaluation of tenderer:
The evaluation is based on article (J) implementing regulations of the law of tenders and also carried out base on worksheets qualitative evaluation inquiry in the tender documents. Minimum acceptable point of quality is 60.
B) Preparation of tender documents:
Purchasing of documents:
In order to receive the tender documents, 510,000 Rials should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.
Receiving of documents:
Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum one week after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Hall No.:113,1 th floor, Foreign Procurement Dept. National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahvaz, IRAN
Notice: only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and receive tender documents from foreign procurement department in due date will be known as tenderer from tender committee.
C) Delivery of call quality evaluating
Tenderers shall submit the completed documents including qualificaion worksheets in form of software in CD and documentary within 14 days from last day of document received deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1th floor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahvaz, IRAN.
D) Tender Guarantee:
Type of guarantee:
A)Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activites licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranain Drilling Company.
Duration of credit guarantee:
This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.
More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on WWW.NIDC.IR
Foreign Procurement Dept.(DRILLING PROJECTS)
National Iranian Drilling Company

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

University of Tehran among world's 500 green institutes

The University of Tehran is among the 500 green institutes worldwide announced by the University of Indonesia Green Metric overall ranking 2016, IRNA reported on Sunday.

The world's green universities are ranked according to six deciding factors contributing to sustainability including setting and infrastructure, energy and climate change, waste and water management, transportation and education in more than 10,000 universities worldwide.

While University of California Davis came in first with a total score of 8398, the University of Tehran ranked 431st with a total score of 3108.

دانشگاه تهران در میان ۵۰۰ موسسه سبز جهان

به گزارش خبرگزاری ایرنا دانشگاه تهران در فهرست ۵۰۰ موسسه برتر

جهان در نظام رتبه بندی «گرین متریک» قرار گرفت.

این نظام از ۶ شاخص کلیدی محیط زیست و زیرساخت، انرژی و تغییرات اقلیمی، مدیریت پسماند، آب، حمل و نقل و آموزش برای رتبه بندی بیش از ۱۰ هزار موسسه در دنیا استفاده می کند.

در حالی که دانشگاه کالیفرنیا با کسب امتیاز ۸۳۹۸ موفق به کسب رتبه ی نخست شد دانشگاه تهران با ۳۱۰۸ امتیاز در جایگاه ۴۳۱ قرار گرفت.

ENGLISH PROVERB

Where there's a will, there's a way

■ **Explanation:** if you truly want to do something, you will find a way to do it, in spite of obstacles

■ **For example:** I have no doubt that Bob will find a publisher for his novel. Where there's a will, there's a way.

PHRASAL VERB

Chime in

■ **Meaning:** to say something in a conversation, especially to agree with what someone has just said

■ **For example:** 'We'll miss you too,' the children chimed in.

ENGLISH IDIOM

Beat a hasty retreat

■ **Explanation:** someone who beats a (hasty) retreat runs away or goes back hurriedly to avoid a dangerous or difficult situation

■ **For example:** The thief beat a hasty retreat as soon as he saw the security officer.

Peaceful outcome for Korean peninsula still possible: Pence

Denuclearization of the Korean peninsula can still be achieved peacefully because of Washington's new engagement with China, the United States Vice President Mike Pence said on Saturday, despite growing fears North Korea could soon conduct a new nuclear test.

South Korea is on heightened alert ahead of another important anniversary in the reclusive North that could be the trigger for a new nuclear test or launch of ballistic missiles, with a large concentration of military hardware massed on both sides of the border.

Tensions have risen sharply in recent months after Pyongyang conducted two nuclear weapons tests last year and carried out a steady stream of ballistic missile tests in defiance of United Nations resolutions and sanctions.

The U.S. President Donald Trump has vowed to prevent North Korea from being able to hit the United States with a nuclear missile but his deputy said in Sydney on Saturday a peaceful outcome was still achievable because of warming ties between Beijing and Washington.

"We truly believe that, as our allies in the region and China bring that pressure to bear, there is a chance that we can achieve a historic objective of a nuclear-free Korea peninsula by peaceful means," Pence said.

"We are encouraged by the steps that China has taken so far," he said at a joint news conference with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Earlier this week, Trump praised Chinese efforts to rein in "the menace of North Korea" after North Korean state



media warned the United States of a "super-mighty preemptive strike".

Trump hosted Chinese President Xi Jinping at his resort in Florida earlier this month and, while taking a hard line with North Korea, has focused his efforts on trying to convince China to put more pressure on its ally and neighbor.

However, Trump has also ordered what he has described as an "armada" to waters off the Korean peninsula as a warning to North Korea. There was some confusion about the whereabouts of the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier strike group earlier this week.

■ Pilot ejects

While it was thought the carrier group had been steaming toward the Korean peninsula, it had in fact been completing a training exercise with the Australian navy.

Pence said the carrier group was now expected to be in waters off the Korean peninsula before the end of the month, "within days".

On Friday, the U.S. Navy said a pilot from the USS Carl Vinson had ejected safely while conducting a routine flight south of the Philippines.

It said the incident occurred as the F/A-18E was on a final approach to the carrier.

The pilot was recovered by helicopter without injury. The statement did not say when the incident occurred.

In the face of the U.S. moves, North Korea said on Friday the state of affairs on the Korean peninsula was "extremely perilous".

The North will celebrate the 85th anniversary of the foundation of its Korean

People's Army on Tuesday and has marked important events in the past by launching missiles or conducting nuclear tests.

Tuesday's anniversary also comes as the North finishes winter military drills and as South Korea and the United States wrap up annual joint military exercises.

South Korea's Unification Ministry spokesman Lee Duk-haeng said on Friday all those military exercises meant there was a lot of military equipment gathered in North Korea, as well as the South.

Satellite imagery analyzed by 38 North, a Washington-based North Korea monitoring project, found some activity under way at North Korea's Punggye-ri nuclear test site, but the group said it was unclear whether the site was in a "tactical pause" before another test or was carrying out normal operations.

U.S. officials have also said there was an increased level of activity by Chinese bombers, signaling a possible heightened state of readiness. Russian media has denied reports Moscow was building up its forces near the Korean border.

China's Defense Ministry, however, said its forces were maintaining normal combat preparedness.

North Korea remained defiant.

"Now that we possess mighty nuclear power to protect ourselves from U.S. nuclear threat, we will respond without the slightest hesitation to full-out war with full-out war and to nuclear war with our style of nuclear strike, and we will emerge victor in the final battle with the United States," the North's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

(Source: Reuters)

Romanian border police find 111 migrants in back of truck

Romanian border police say they have stopped 111 asylum seekers hidden in the back of a large truck who trying to illegally leave Romania and head toward Western Europe.

Border police said on Saturday statement they discovered the group late on Friday crammed into the vehicle at the Romanian-Hungarian border. The migrants, aged 2 to 53, included citizens of Iraq, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

The Romanian driver, who is being investigated as an accomplice, told police he was unaware that anyone was hiding in the truck.

Police say the migrants were trying to reach the "Schengen zone" which allows for unimpeded cross-border travel.

(Source: AP)

ISIL emir killed, 10 extremists arrested in stealth army operation

➔ They are wanted for arms smuggling and supporting extremist groups.

The Syrians had allegedly entered the country through the Lebanese-Syrian border to the northeast and were apprehended in a "swift and sudden raid" in the northeast border town.

No casualties from the raid were reported on the army side, the statement added.

The Lebanese Army and security forces have been cracking down on sleeper cells as part of a comprehensive security plan.

The eastern border region with Syria often witnesses skirmishes between militants holed up in the rugged mountainous area and Lebanese Army units positioned on the border.

(Source: Daily Star)

Israeli warplanes attack Syrian army positions in Golan Heights

Israeli warplanes have once again launched an attack against Syria's Golan Heights after mortar fire from the country landed in an open area in the occupied Syrian territory.

The official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA), citing unnamed military sources, said Israeli fighter jets had fired two missiles at a military position in the vicinity of Khan Arnabah town in the countryside of Quneitra, the capital city of southwestern Quneitra province, at about 18:45 p.m. local time on Friday, causing material damage.

The Israeli military also confirmed the aggression in a statement, saying the attack was conducted shortly after three mortar shells allegedly fired from Syria hit an open area in the northern occupied Golan Heights.

The statement, however, added that the projectiles had caused no injuries or damage, and they were likely not intentional, but a spillover from the Syrian war.

Meanwhile, Syria's state-run television, while confirming the Israeli airstrike, said that such desperate attempts would not dissuade the Syrian army from continuing to crush the terrorist groups that act as Israel's proxy in the region.

The border separating Syria and the Israeli-occupied part of the Golan Heights has been tense since foreign-backed militancy gripped the country in 2011, claiming the lives of hundreds of thousands of people so far.

Back in April 2015, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu officially admitted for the first time that the regime's military had conducted strikes in Syrian territory.

During the past few years, Israel has frequently attacked military targets in Syria in what is considered as an attempt to prop up terrorist groups that have been suffering heavy defeats at the hands of the Syrian military.

Damascus says Israel and its Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups operating inside the country, while the regime's military carries out such sporadic strikes against Syrian government forces. The Israeli regime has even set up field hospitals to treat wounded militants evacuated from Syria.

Moreover, the Syrian army has repeatedly seized huge quantities of Israeli-made weapons and advanced military equipment from the foreign-backed militants inside Syria.

Israel seized the Golan Heights from Syria after the 1967 Six-Day War and later occupied it in a move that has never been recognized by the international community. The regime has built dozens of illegal settlements in the area ever since and has used the region to carry out a number of military operations against the Syrian government.

(Source: agencies)

Russian hacker sentenced to 27 years in U.S. prison

A federal judge has handed down the longest sentence ever imposed in the United States for a cybercrime case to the son of a member of the Russian Parliament convicted of hacking into more than 500 U.S. businesses and stealing millions of credit card numbers, which he then sold on special websites.

Roman Seleznev was sentenced to 27 years in prison and ordered to pay nearly \$170m in restitution to the businesses and banks that were the victims of his scheme.

Seleznev is the son of Valery Seleznev, a Russian Parliament member.

Prior to his sentencing, Roman Seleznev asked U.S. district judge Richard Jones for leniency. He apologized to his victims and said he was remorseful for his crimes, and he urged the judge to consider his medical problems, the result of being wounded in a bombing in Morocco in 2011, in deciding his prison term.

"I plead, pray and beg your honor for mercy," he said.

But Jones told Seleznev that the bombing "was an invitation to right your wrongs and recognize you were given a second chance in life." But instead, Jones said Seleznev "amassed a fortune" at the expense of hundreds of small business.

"You were driven by one goal: greed," Jones said.

After sentencing, Seleznev's lawyer, Igor Litvak, read a hand-written statement from his client that said the long sentence was a political prosecution at a time of strained U.S.-Russian relations.

"This decision made by the United States government clearly demonstrates

to the entire world that I'm a political prisoner," Seleznev wrote.

"I was kidnapped by the U.S. Now they want to send a message to the world using me as a pawn. This message that the U.S. is sending today is not the right way to show Vladimir Putin of Russia, or any government in this world how justice works in a democracy."

Seleznev said he is a citizen of the Russian Federation and he said he wanted to send a message to that government: "Please help me. I beg you."

U.S. lawyer Annette Hayes said Seleznev's statement was "troubling". He told the judge that he accepted responsibility and then sent his lawyer out claiming the case was political, she said.

"He was treated with due process all along the way just as any U.S. citizen would have been," she said.

■ Unprecedented prosecution

Seleznev was first indicted in 2011 on 29 felony charges and captured in 2014. U.S. Secret Service agents, with the help of local police, arrested Seleznev in the Maldives as he and his girlfriend arrived at an airport on their way back to Russia.

The agents flew him to Guam, where he made his first court appearance, and then to Seattle, where he was placed in federal custody.

Russian authorities have condemned the arrest of Seleznev as an illegal kidnapping.

The indictment grew to 40 counts in October 2014, and his trial was held last August. A jury found him guilty on 38 charges, including nine counts of hacking

and 10 counts of wire fraud.

"This is truly an unprecedented prosecution," Norman Barbosa, deputy U.S. attorney, told the judge before sentencing.

For 15 years, Seleznev broke into the payment systems of hundreds of businesses. He had more than 2.9 million unique credit card numbers in his possession when he was arrested. His thefts resulted in about \$170m in business losses.

"That is a staggering amount," Barbosa said. "It exceeds any loss amount this court has ever seen."

Seleznev was "living like a mob boss" and spent money on fast cars, expensive boats and luxury trips around the world, he said.

Prosecutors asked for a 30-year sentence to send a message to hackers around the world.

"Never before has a criminal engaged in computer fraud of this magnitude been identified, captured and convicted by an American jury," prosecutors told the judge in a presentence memo.

Litvak had urged the judge to consider Seleznev's life story in his decision.

Seleznev's parents divorced when he was two years old; his alcoholic mother died when he was 17; he suffered a severe head injury in a bombing in Morocco in 2011; and his wife divorced him while he was in a coma, Litvak told the judge.

Seleznev continues to suffer after-effects from the bombing, including seizures, Litvak said.

To prove his commitment to helping fight cybercrime, Seleznev recently arranged to give the U.S. government four

of his laptops and six flash drives, and he has met with officials to discuss hacker activities, Litvak said.

Prosecutors said his offer to help fight hackers came too late.

In another case involving an alleged Russian hacker, the U.S. issued an indictment to Peter Levashov, who goes by several aliases. Levashov is accused of controlling one of the world's top generators of spam and online extortion, officials said on Friday.

Levashov, 36, from Saint Petersburg, was arrested at Barcelona's El Prat Airport on April 7 by Spanish authorities acting on a U.S. warrant. The U.S. is now seeking his extradition.

A U.S. federal grand jury returned the eight-count indictment in the northeastern state of Connecticut on Thursday. The charges include fraud, identity theft and conspiracy.

Prosecutors accuse the purported hacker of controlling the Kelihos network of tens of thousands of infected computers, stealing personal data and renting the network out to others to send spam emails by the millions and extort ransoms.

The U.S. justice department shut down the botnet on April 10.

Levashov has not been tied to alleged Russian interference in last year's U.S. presidential election.

But his operation allegedly depended on sending spam emails that allowed hackers to penetrate the computers of the Democratic Party to steal data.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

ISIL-linked Abu Sayyaf leader killed on Philippine resort island: army

A leader of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh)-linked Abu Sayyaf group has been killed in a shootout with Philippine soldiers on the island of Bohol, where the military is hunting down insurgents planning to kidnap tourists, the military and officials said on Saturday.

Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesman Brigadier General Restituto Padilla said "one lawless element" was killed in the clash but he could not give the man's identity.

Bohol Governor Edgar Chatto identified him as Abu Sayyaf leader Joselito Melloria, who was among the mil-

itants involved in a kidnapping plot on the island.

The military said operations were continuing on Bohol where troops last week killed six Abu Sayyaf bandits in a clash, including their leader, who was directly involved in the kidnap and killing of Canadian and German nationals.

(Source: Reuters)

Personality of political leaders affecting ties between states: expert

➔ important in influencing Turkish-Iranian relations: the Kurdish issue, Syria, Iranian gas exports, developments in the South Caucasus. Of these, it does not appear that the constitutional changes will have a noticeable impact on the very complex relations between the two countries.

■ U.S. State Department spokesperson Mark Toner had a quite negative reaction to the referendum's result, saying the U.S. is concerned over the level of democracy in its ally Turkey. What is your analysis of such remarks?

A: Mr. Toner should worry about democracy in the United States, not elsewhere. Since the attempted coup in Turkey last year, Erdogan has blamed the U.S. for domestic instability in Turkey and the fundamental nature of this relationship has not changed since Trump came to office. Also, with the likes of Putin, Trump, and Erdogan, it appears that we are entering a period in which the personality of political leaders has an important impact on the nature of relationships between countries. Both Trump and Erdogan have very strong personalities (as does Putin), and the resulting clash of personalities may have consequences politically.

The Main(e) lesson Trump should learn from William McKinley

8 ➔ ■ Formidable military bases

To begin with, today's rising China is not yesterday's declining Spain, and has a formidable industrial base and military. There is no question that, at the very least, U.S. casualties could easily surpass the three thousand that amassed during the Spanish-American War in almost any conflict scenario. Another Battle of Manila Bay, where the Spanish Pacific squadron was destroyed at the cost of one American life, is highly unlikely.

China would also have several other advantages, including the "home court" advantage that Spain never had. Furthermore, the proximity and strategic importance of the theater to China would also mean that the country has a great deal more at stake than Spain did in Cuba. The United States maintains the best naval fleet in the world, but China's cyber capabilities could even out the playing field by disabling or even taking control of critical technology aboard U.S. vessels. As yet an untested strategy in battle, high-profile private and state-sponsored hacks have already shown the power of asymmetric cyberwarfare in the political and commercial realms. Finally, China's other major asymmetric advantage is its control of production of more than 85 percent of the world's rare earth minerals. Considering how much modern technology — including military technology — is reliant on these materials, America's dangerous dependency on them could mean U.S. planners would have to make the most of a limited supply or resort to outdated weapons and tactics.

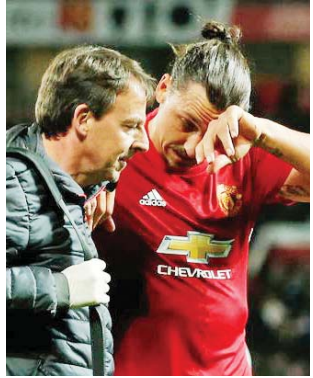
The lesson to glean from these differences is a simple one: a very specific set of circumstances allowed the United States to achieve its military aims in the Spanish-American War despite serious failures in planning. Anything less than a well-thought-out strategy cannot achieve the same results today should China cross a red line established by the new administration. Perhaps more on this issue than on any other, Trump and his cabinet need to have a consistent game plan and consider the guidance of diplomatic, military and intelligence experts, even if the overall approach is dictated by administration objectives.

(Source: The National Interest)

Can United cope without Ibrahimovic?

Manchester United booked their place in the Europa League semifinal with victory over Anderlecht, a game in which fortunes contrasted for a pair of strikers at opposite ends of their careers.

By resting 35-year-old Zlatan Ibrahimovic for Sunday's victory over Chelsea, Jose Mourinho made it clear where his priorities lie for the remainder of the season. He wants to win the Europa League to guarantee a place in next year's Champions League and likely sees victory in the competition as a likelier way of getting there than through a top-four finish in the Premier League.



Thursday, though, was a disastrous evening for Ibrahimovic. After playing badly and missing chances that could have wrapped up a United win, he suffered a long-term knee injury at the end of normal time. Though he shrugged off a stretcher, instead hobbling off the pitch, his season is seemingly over.

All season, Ibrahimovic has had one eye on the Europa League final in his native Sweden. The striker had joked that, if United reached the final and he scored, plans would have to be made for a second statue in his honour outside the Friends Arena in Stockholm.

While United fans will be disappointed by the news of his absence, especially while doubts over his future at the club remain, it's unlikely that many will be upset that Mourinho will now have to rely upon Marcus Rashford to lead the line.

The 19-year-old has scored three goals in his last four games, meaning he is going into Sunday's Premier League game against Burnley with plenty of confidence.

More than his goal tally, Rashford's all-round performances have seen him show fantastic form over recent weeks. His pace absolutely terrifies defenders; David Luiz struggled to keep up with him last weekend, so Burnley centre-back -- and lifelong United fan -- Michael Keane knows he'll have his hands full if Rashford starts at Turf Moor.

Opposition players know exactly what he is going to do when he gets the ball -- try to run past them -- yet, even with the advantage of possessing this information, they still have a hard time stopping him.

It would be unfair to reduce Rashford's strengths to pace and goals, though. He's been on dead-ball duty recently and while he's failed to clear the first man on occasion, he's largely helped United look more dangerous from set pieces. He also has fantastically skillful feet, is able to shift the ball at speed and unafraid to try tricks and new things.

In the absence of Ibrahimovic, Mourinho may be tempted to play Anthony Martial, Henrikh Mkhitaryan and Jesse Lingard behind Rashford against Burnley. The prospect of such speed in attack will be mouthwatering for fans.

Defensively, United are struggling. Marcos Rojo is the latest central defender to find himself ruled out with injury, meaning that Eric Bailly, who may start to feel the tiredness having played 90 minutes in all six of United's games this month, is almost the last man standing.

On a more positive note, Luke Shaw put in a bright performance against Anderlecht, while Matteo Darmian and Ashley Young are also options alongside Antonio Valencia for the full-back positions.

United may be in a good position in the Europa League, but a finish in the top four isn't beyond them and Mourinho won't want to put all of his eggs in one basket where Champions League qualification is concerned. Four points behind Manchester City with a game in hand, United travel to their great rivals next Thursday. Liverpool, meanwhile, are six points ahead but have played two games more.

With tricky fixtures remaining, including games at Arsenal and Tottenham, it's easy to see why United aren't favourites to do finish in the top four, but it's not an impossibility, so Mourinho will be looking for a win at Turf Moor.

It should be an evenly-matched affair. While United boast the best points-per-game record on the road this season, Burnley's home form is strong, with Sean Dyche's men picking up more points at home than either Manchester club.

Burnley have had over a week to prepare for the game, while United have just two days' rest. But there is hope the tide is turning for Mourinho. Following the important win over Chelsea, it is to be hoped that momentum will counterbalance any tiredness the players are feeling.

(Source: Soccernet)

Juventus agree to sign Rodrigo Bentancur for €9.5m from Boca

Juventus have agreed an initial €9.5 million fee with Boca Juniors for the transfer of Rodrigo Bentancur this summer.

Bentancur, 19, joined Boca's youth academy at a young age and made his first-team debut in April 2015, aged just 17.

The midfielder, who has played eight times for Uruguay Under-20s, will join Juventus from next season.

A statement read: "Juventus Football Club S.p.A. announces that the agreement with Asociación Civil Club Atlético Boca Juniors for the definitive acquisition of the registration rights of the player Rodrigo Bentancur Colman has been finalised. The transfer fee of € 9.5 million will be payable in two financial years.

"The purchase value may increase in the course of the duration of the contract on achieving given conditions based on a certain number of official games played by the player. Moreover, in case of a later transfer of the player, Boca Juniors will be entitled to receive 50% of the amounts collected by Juventus.

"Juventus and the player have signed a 5-year contract of employment starting from 1 July 2017 and expiring on 30 June 2022."

(Source: ESPN)

Sharapova should not get French Open wildcard, says rival Radwanska

Former world number one tennis player Maria Sharapova should not be fast-tracked into next month's French Open as she returns from a doping ban, insists Polish rival Agnieszka Radwanska.

With double French Open champion Sharapova currently unranked, all eyes will be on the French Tennis Federation (FFT) next month when it decides whether or not to hand the 30-year-old a wildcard into the tournament.

A decision will be announced during "the week of May 15", the French federation, which organizes the tournament, said in a statement to Reuters on Friday.

Sharapova makes her comeback to the WTA Tour after 15 months out in Stuttgart next week, after gaining a wildcard, and has also been given invites to play in Madrid and Rome.

Roland Garros organizers will be wrestling with the moral conundrum surrounding a wildcard -- or free entry into the French Open -- given that Sharapova is the biggest draw card in women's tennis right now, and arguably much needed given the absence of Serena Williams who earlier this week announced her pregnancy.

Regardless, Radwanska believes entry to the year's second grand slam tournament would be a step too far.

"Now in Germany, next in Spain, but so far she hasn't been invited to play at slams in Paris and London and in my opinion that's how it should remain," world number eight Radwanska told Poland's sports daily Przegląd Sportowy.

"She should win her place thanks to good results." Sharapova was originally banned for two years following a positive test for the newly-banned drug Meldonium at the 2016 Australian Open but the sanction was reduced to 15 months by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

Last week she criticized the International Tennis Federation (ITF) for not doing enough to warn her that Meldonium -- a product she had used legally throughout her career to combat health issues -- had been added to the World Anti-Doping Agency's list of banned substances in late 2015.

Sharapova, 30, is likely to receive a lukewarm reception



in Stuttgart next week with several players, including another former world number one Caroline Wozniacki, also questioning whether she should have received a wildcard.

Men's world number one Andy Murray has also voiced his disapproval about the return of Sharapova who was caught out by the sport's anti-doping laws after failing to realize that Meldonium, previously legal, had been added to the banned list.

"I'm not hiding my views. I think the same as Andy Murray," Radwanska, who has beaten Sharapova only twice in 15 attempts, told the newspaper.

"This kind of entry into the tournament should be available only for players who were dropped in the ranking due to injury, illness or other random accident.

"Not for those suspended for doping. Maria should rebuild

her career in a different way, beginning with smaller events.

"She wouldn't have a chance for (a wildcard) from my hands (if I was a tournament director)."

With the main draw deadline passed Sharapova's hopes of playing in the tournament she won in 2012 and 2014 could rest with FFT president Bernard Giudicelli who last month admitted the decision was "complicated".

The absence of three-times winner Serena Williams, could be a factor as the women's game is short on big personalities.

Playing through the qualifying tournament is also a possibility for Sharapova, although in order to have a high enough ranking for the May 1 deadline to enter that she would probably have to win the Stuttgart title.

(Source: Reuters)

Fallen FIFA boss Blatter says met U.S. lawyers, but is not a suspect



Disgraced former FIFA president Sepp Blatter said on Friday he had met lawyers from the U.S. Justice Department but was not a suspect in their soccer-related corruption investigations.

The 81-year-old, banned for six years by FIFA's own ethics committee at the height of a scandal engulfing world soccer's governing body, told journalists he had met the U.S. lawyers in October or November, without going into further details.

Several dozen soccer officials, including some from FIFA, were indicted in the United States in 2015 on corruption-related charges.

Blatter was not among them, although he subsequently said his lawyer had advised him not to travel abroad.

"I have had very little contact from my American lawyers because I was never a person of interest under scrutiny by the American justice," he told a group of international reporters on Friday.

"I have been investigated in two or three matters ... but there is no wrongdoing." There was no immediate comment from the U.S. Justice Department.

■ "STILL POPULAR"

Blatter and Ex-UEFA president Michel Platini were banned from all football-related activities in 2015, initially for eight years, over a 2 million Swiss franc (\$2 million) payment FIFA made to Platini in 2011, with Blatter's approval, for work done a decade earlier.

Blatter said on Friday he had become

a "punching bag" for all FIFA's problems but that he was still generally liked by his Swiss compatriots.

"Here in the city of Zurich and Switzerland in general, I am not only accepted but they like me," said Blatter, who has denied all charges against him.

"I don't have the impression that I am a rejected man. Why should I be rejected? I have done a good (job at) FIFA ... I feel that wherever I go the people and young people recognize me and want to take a picture and say hello. There are still fans who write to me."

He said Swiss prosecutors had not contacted him over a separate case initiated in September 2015 against him relating to accusations of criminal mismanagement and misappropriation.

"I have never heard anything, my lawyer has heard nothing about that," he said. "That does not surprise me, because there was no reasons to open a case against me."

"I have been interviewed and I will be interviewed in future but not in these cases; I am interviewed in cases concerning the activities in FIFA, as a person of information."

Swiss authorities have also opened investigations into the decision to award the 2018 and 2022 World Cups to Russia and Qatar respectively, into Germany's successful bid to host the 2006 World Cup and against former FIFA secretary general Jerome Valcke.

(Source: Reuters)

Michele Scarponi: Italian cyclist dies in training crash



Italian cyclist Michele Scarponi has died aged 37 after being involved in a collision with a van during a training ride.

A statement from his Astana team said the crash happened close to Scarponi's home in Filottrano.

Scarponi won the 2011 Giro d'Italia after Alberto Contador was stripped of the title and claimed victory in stage one of the Tour of the Alps on Monday.

"This is a tragedy too big to be written," said the Astana statement.

The statement described Scarponi as a "great champion" and a "special guy", adding: "The Astana Pro Team clings to the Michele family in this incredibly painful moment of sorrow and mourning."

Scarponi leaves behind a wife and two children. After finishing fourth in the Tour of the Alps behind British winner Geraint Thomas on Friday, Scarponi returned home by car with his masseur before heading out for a ride on Saturday.

"Devastated to hear the news about Scarponi. Can't believe it. My thoughts with all his friends, family and team," Thomas posted on Twitter.

"Terrible news to wake up to. One of the smiles, happiest guys in the peloton. Rest in peace," said British cyclist Alex Dowsett.

Spanish rider Contador said: "Paralysed and speechless with the news about Scarponi. Great person and always with a contagious smile. Rest in peace, friend."

Astana team-mate and compatriot Fabio Aru said: "Endless tragedy. There are no words. Rest in peace, my friend."

■ Career

Specialist climber Scarponi turned professional in 2002 with the Acqua & Sapone-Cantina Tollo team, finishing 18th in his debut Giro d'Italia.

In 2007 he was banned for 18 months after being implicated in Operation Puerto - a major Spanish doping scandal involving some of the world's top cyclists at the time.

Scarponi admitted his involvement in the scandal but denied doping, having been charged with using or attempting to use banned substances and possession of those substances.

Returning in November 2008, he won the Tirreno-Adriatico stage race in 2009 before initially finishing second in the 2011 Giro d'Italia.

He was later awarded his first Grand Tour title after original winner Contador was stripped of his title by the Court of Arbitration for Sport in 2012 after a positive test for clenbuterol at the 2010 Tour de France.

Scarponi was suspended for three months in 2012 by his then team Lampre for visiting doctor Michele Ferrari - who is banned for life by the US Anti-Doping Agency for his role in Lance Armstrong's doping programme.

Following fourth-placed finishes at the Giro d'Italia in 2012 and 2013, Scarponi joined Astana in 2014, primarily riding Grand Tours as a domestique and helping team-mate Vincenzo Nibali to victory in the 2014 Tour de France and 2016 Giro d'Italia.

(Source: BBC)

Murray to play Barcelona in bid for claycourt time

World number one Andy Murray will play next week's Barcelona Open in a bid to build match fitness and clock up much-needed claycourt time ahead of next month's French Open.

Murray on Friday took the late decision to play in Spain after a surprise defeat at the hands of Spaniard Albert Ramos-Vinolas in the last 16 of the Monte Carlo Masters.

Murray had been scheduled to play just Madrid and Rome ahead of the French Open. The Scot had suffered an elbow injury in March, and only made his return from a five-week layoff on Wednesday in Monaco.



It has been a tough start to 2017 for Murray after finishing last year as the world's top-ranked player. His run of 28 consecutive wins was brought to an end by Novak Djokovic in Doha in January, while unheralded Mischa Zverev ended Murray's hopes of a maiden Australian Open title in Melbourne.

Murray won his first tournament of the year in Dubai last month, but a week later suffered a shock defeat to world number 129 Vasek Pospisil - his first loss to a player outside the top 100 in six years.

(Source: Reuters)

'FA Cup success not enough for Arsenal'

Arsenal have not progressed since their back-to-back FA Cup wins and success this season would paper over the cracks, says Charlie Nicholas.

Arsenal face Manchester City at Wembley on Sunday in the semi-final of the FA Cup and are seeking a third win in the competition in four years.

But with their consistent top-four finishes in jeopardy, former Gunners striker Nicholas says another piece of silverware in the competition would not make up for several seasons of under-performing in the Premier League.

Asked if booking a place in the FA Cup final would silence the critics, Nicholas said: "No. Absolutely not. You look back at the two wins in two years, that feels like a long time ago."

"It gets you through with something to look forward to, to have a winning mentality and it's vital that you get that."

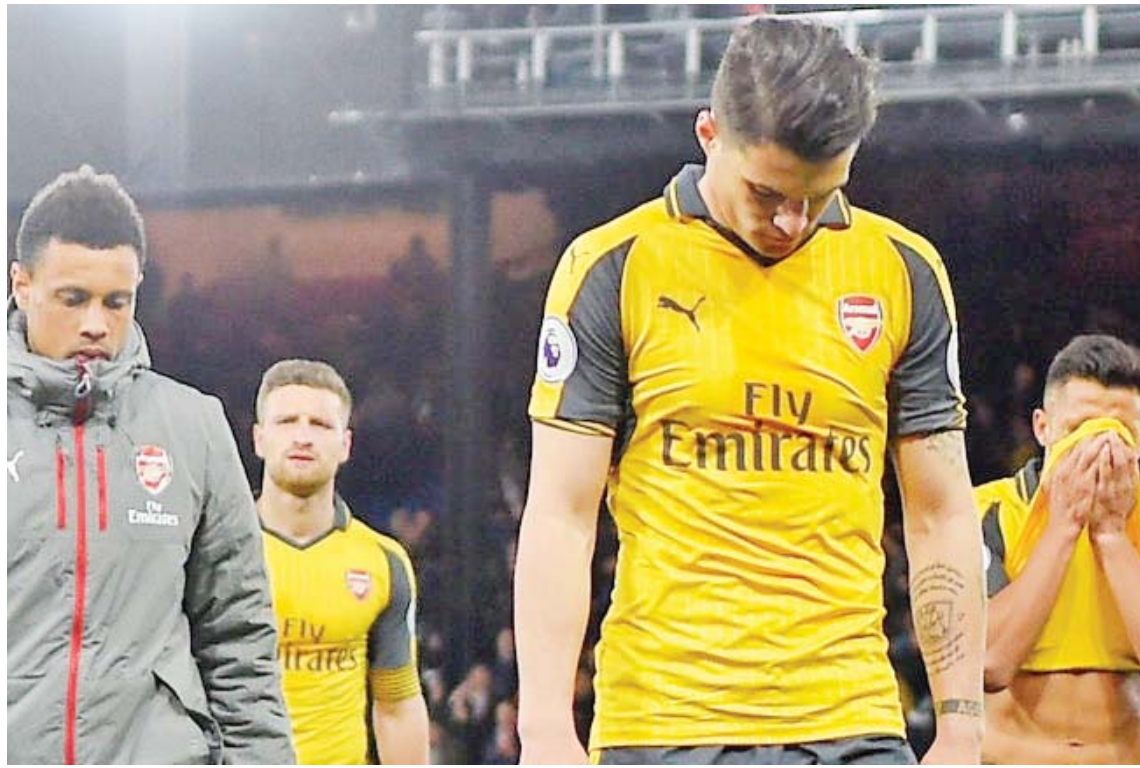
"There are a lot of people jealous about the consistency that Arsenal have had over the last 20 years, and it's something I've always applauded."

"But this team is getting weaker, and yet they're spending more money on it. The younger players who have now got to the age where their potential has gone, have not progressed to the stage Arsene Wenger would like."

"He can't camouflage it anymore. The fans will bite your hand off to win the FA Cup, of course they will, but it has to be a win while showing there is progress."

"Two years ago they had back-to-back FA Cup wins, and it hasn't gone forward."

Asked if an FA Cup win would cover up the cracks, Nicholas added: "I would agree. We're at a crossroads with Arsenal, and for the first time under Arsene we're saying they're not two players short,



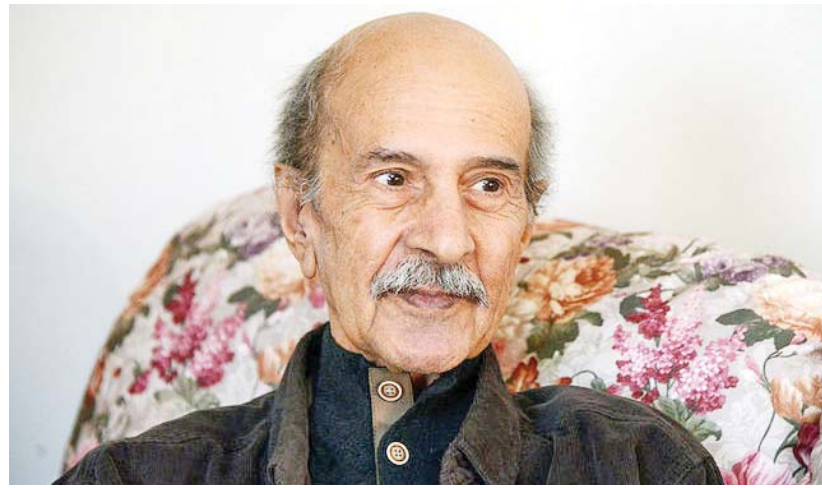
they're probably five short."

Merson disagreed, insisting: "If Arsenal beat Tottenham in the FA Cup final, the fans would write off this season."

"But Arsenal don't want to play Tottenham at the moment, not at all, and if they were to lose to Tottenham in the final, that would be it. Lights out."

(Source: SkySports)

Iran fencing veteran Bijan Zarnegar dies



SPORTS Former Iran fencer **d e s k** Bijan Zarnegar died of gastrointestinal cancer at the age of 78 on Friday.

Zarnegar, who lost a two-year battle with cancer, will be buried in Tehran's Behesht Zahra Cemetery on Sunday.

Zarnegar started fencing when he was 18 years old while studying at the Police University in Tehran. He worked as a police officer while he was practicing fencing. Zarnegar competed in the individual and team foil, epee and sabre events at the 1964 Summer Olympics.

He became Asian fencing champion in 1968 in the Men's individual epee and was captain of the Iranian national fencing team from 1969 to 1979 and again from 1989 to 1995.

Zarnegar led the Iranian women fencing team in the 1974 Asian Games, where the foil team won a gold medal.

This is particularly important as it is the only gold medal that Iranian women athletes have ever won in international competition. Iranian sports family express condolences over the death of the veteran fencer.

Persepolis to face Al Hilal without three key players



SPORTS Iran's Persepolis **d e s k** have a difficult task against Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia because their three key players are absent for the crucial match.

Persepolis captain Seyyed Jalal Hosseini and the team's playmaker Soroush Rafiei are suspended for the match after receiving second yellow card during Al Rayyan match in Tehran.

The Reds' defender Mohammad Ansari is also a doubt for this

match due to a foot injury.

Persepolis will meet Al Hilal in Matchday 5 of the AFC Champions League at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat, Oman on Monday.

Persepolis drew 1-1 with Al Hilal on Matchday One and to seal their last 16 berth must overcome their Saudi opponents.

If Persepolis fail to defeat Al Hilal, Al Rayyan would also advance with a win over Al Wahda.

Luis Enrique: Barcelona must beat Real Madrid to keep title hopes alive

Luis Enrique says that any result other than a win against Real Madrid in Sunday's Clasico would leave Barcelona's La Liga title hopes in tatters.

Recent defeats at Deportivo La Coruna and Malaga have seen Barca lose ground on league leaders Madrid, who begin this weekend with a three-point cushion at the top of the table.

A defeat at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday could therefore leave Barca six points adrift of Zinedine Zidane's side, having played one game more and with just five matches of the season left to play.

"It's special because of the moment of the season and also because it's a game against our great rival, who are top of the table," Luis Enrique told a news conference ahead of his last Clasico as Barca boss before he departs in the summer. "The aim is to stay loyal to our style -- it would be ridiculous not to. Any result but a win would do us no good whatsoever."

However, after winning consecutive La Liga titles in his first two seasons in charge at the Camp Nou, Luis Enrique would not go as far as to say the chances of



winning a third would definitely end with a loss.

"It's a Clasico which could decide the league, but it could also open it up again," he said. "It's like a final for us and we have to go out and look for the win. After the result, we'll see what it means. Until it's mathematically over, no team gives up -- we certainly don't -- but with the end of the season so close, it

could be decisive."

Barca are hoping boost their chances of a victory by freeing Neymar up to play in Sunday's Clasico.

The Brazil international is currently serving a three-game ban but the Catalan club believe if Spain's Court of Arbitration for Sport (TAD) do not respond to their appeal before kickoff, they would be allowed to include him in their team against Madrid.

"I'm preparing for the game with and without Neymar -- the club are right to do what they're doing with the appeal," Luis Enrique said.

Asked three more times about the Neymar situation, he was unable to give any updates and would not say if he was optimistic or if the club would definitely risk playing the forward if they do not receive an answer from TAD.

Other than Neymar, Barca are without injured duo Aleix Vidal and Rafinha, while Jeremy Mathieu missed training on Saturday and is a major doubt, although Arda Turan could return.

(Source: ESPN)

Jambozorg Named Iran's Flag Bearer for Islamic Solidarity Games

Mahlagha Jambozorg has received the honor of carrying Iran's flag during the 4th edition of Islamic Solidarity Games in Baku, the Azerbaijan Republic.

The Iranian shooter, who competed in the Women's 10 meter air rifle event at the 2012 Summer Olympics and the 2016 Summer Olympics, has been chosen by Executive Directors of National Olympic Committee of the Islamic Republic of Iran (NOC) on Saturday.

"She is a good example for the Iranian women who

will compete in the competition wearing hijabs," NOC's General Secretary Shahrokh Shahnazi said.

The Islamic Solidarity Games is an exciting multi-sport event uniting the Islamic world, which is scheduled to take place in Baku from May 8 to 22.

Athletes from Islamic countries around the world will represent their nations during the 10-days competitions.

(Source: Tasnim)



For how long can the Messi-CR7 global supershow go on?

Towards the end of his life Mozart wrote a piece of music called Ein musikalischer Spaß, or "a musical joke", intended as a satire on bad composers. As you might expect it contained a hilarious discord in the horns section, some off-key sonata and -- LOL -- a polytonal finale.

No doubt back in the 1780s this was all very weeping-laughing-emoji-face. Listening to it now, A Musical Joke just sounds predictably ace, brilliant, fun, yeah, really good. It turns up on the kind of CDs you buy at petrol stations called The Cream Of Mellow Classics Vol IV. It was the theme tune to the Horse of The Year Show. Even people who know what they're talking about, whose store of Mozart knowledge isn't drawn from that film where he was a shrieking little American sex maniac, call it a progressive, post-modern, experimental piece of music. It turns out even when he's trying to be bad, Mozart is somehow still a bit more interesting than everyone else.

It was tempting this week to apply the same kind of reasoning to Lionel Messi, who came up with something new and slightly startling in the draw with Juventus that ended Barcelona's Champions League campaign. Weirdly, Messi had a bad game. Not just a quiet game: an actual bad one, like the bad games other, non genius-level footballers have.

Messi still had seven shots at goal. He still did some wonderful things. But that usual hyper-awareness, the beautifully cruel clarity in every pass and every shift of feet was absent. He seemed to walk around a bit more than normal. He put a difficult volley with his weaker foot over the bar in a way that made it actually look like a difficult volley with his weaker foot.

It was all a little disturbing, like seeing your favourite cat on drugs at the vet, legs wobbling, eyes drooping, the old gliding elegance weirdly askew. But then, it turns out even bad Messi is oddly unignorable, fascinatingly semi-good, a bit like Mozart's grippingly dissonant parpings. Even when he's bad, or not great or just average, it feels as though this ought to mean something.

Predictably enough, there was a temptation afterwards to suggest that something significant had passed at the Camp Nou. Football likes this kind of narrative arc. Full stops are drawn. Things end. But what exactly?

Clearly Messi isn't finished. He is still brilliantly effective, scorer of 45 goals already this season. He may be 30 in June, but Messi's passing is so good, his brain so sharp, it feels like even a dip or a lull is likely to be followed by other, deeper gears, some late blooming reinvention as Argentina's deep-lying midfield creator at the Qatar World Cup when they are managed by a mad, frazzled, wild-eyed Pep Guardiola.

Barcelona also aren't finished, despite what Claudio Ranieri seemed to say afterwards on BT Sport. Juventus were just too good for them. This is a really good, powerful team, with two fine creative central midfielders and a wonderful defence, good enough to show the flaws in a pigeon-chested Barça propped up by its ageing stars, weakened by poor recruitment and the drying-up of that connection with the youth team.

But then Barcelona stopped being really interesting when Xavi began to fade away, a midfielder so good he made all the other stuff make sense: the idea of systems-football, of Catalan-collectivism, of Barcelona as not just better, but better, morally superior, the mes que un club claptrap. Here they come again: mincing little doe-eyed hobbits, Dickensian urchins in the church of velcro-touch wall-pass. All of it crowded over with nauseating pity by people on the internet for whom these are essentially moving blobs on a TV screen, a soap opera of good and bad, iPod-football for a distant, glazed generation who like to, you know, feel really good about their consumer choices.

Buying Neymar and Luis Suárez may have propped up the soulful super-ewoks schtick a little longer, even if this was at bottom a pretty crass galactico move. But beyond this Barcelona are simply too powerful, too well marketed and too rich to be in trouble for too long. They will re-gear and reinvest and build another team. Perhaps the excellent, Barça-DNA Thiago Alcântara might return to reinforce a little of that old gold.

They will be back. But it won't be entirely the same, because something is finally coming close to being finished. The last nine years of elite level football have been genuinely unusual, mainly for the twin domination at the top of the Messi-Ronaldo supremacy. Unplanned, fanned by a wider celebrity obsession but based in their own extraordinary talent, it has been an age of rare and extreme individualism.

This summer it is exactly 10 years since Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo first popped up at two and three in the Ballon d'Or voting, and then block-booked it out for the next nine years. There is another clásico this weekend, another head-to-head Messi-CR7 global super-show. But it is now possible to wonder how many more of these we're going to get, to conclude that the claustrophobic personality football of the last decade might just be easing a little.

It has already become routine to produce weekly lists of the next big things who might just replace Ronaldo and Messi as the best in the world. In reality, they won't be replaced. Not properly. They're just too good, their achievements too extreme and sustained. Sport is not meant to work like this. Football has not worked like this before. The four Ballon d'Or winners before Messi-Ronaldo were Kaka, Ronaldinho, Andrei Shevchenko and Pavel Nedved. All fine attacking footballers, they scored 16, 16, 17 and six league goals in their winning seasons.

Since when Messi has 287 league goals in 267 matches, Ronaldo 279 in 260. They're basically freaks, virtuosos, prancing little silk-waistcoated geniuses, in their own way a kind of footballing joke. The world wasn't meant to be heading this way. When Messi emerged in earnest Fabio Cannavaro's Italy were world champions, Greece had just won the Euros. Team play, systems, collective defence looked like the future.

There is nothing wrong with that, as Juventus showed at the Camp Nou with a fine, seasoned, fluent defensive performance. But as of this week there is now a chance of a shift, the likelihood that victory in Europe for Juve or Atlético Madrid -- a Gianluigi Buffon Ballon d'Or -- might just see the beginning of the end of the age of individualism and a pair of conjoined all-time greats whose brilliance will only really become plain when they're gone.

(Source: Guardian)

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Iranian reciter wins award at Tunisian Quran competition

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian reciter Seyyed d e s k Mohammad Kermani won second prize at the 15th Tunisia's International Quran Memorization, Recitation and Psalmody Competition, which was held from April 17 to 21.



First prize was presented to Mohamed Ahmed Fathallah, second prize went to Ahmed Salim from Egypt while third prize went to Hassan Touk from Turkey. In the memorization category, Rashid Ben Abderrahame Ben Hamza Allani from Tunisia won first prize, while Ibrahim Bendake from Morocco and Younes Mustafa Beshir El Klaib from Libya received second and third prizes respectively.

Participants from 21 countries, including Tunisia, Jordan, Bahrain, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, Sudan, Senegal, Morocco, Libya and Yemen, competed in the contest.

"The Apprenticeship of Victor Frankenstein" translated into Persian

CULTURE TEHRAN — Mohammadreza Maleki d e s k has recently completed the translation of "The Apprenticeship of Victor Frankenstein", Canadian children's writer Kenneth Oppel's two-volume book series.



The first volume of the series entitled "This Dark Endeavor" tells the story of twin brothers Victor and Konrad Frankenstein. Konrad gets sick and Victor finds an ancient formula in the forbidden Dark Library to cure him. Published in 2012, the second volume "Such Wicked Intent" continues the story of Victor who discovers a book in the Dark Library in which he finds the promise of not just communicating with the dead, but entering their realm. Peydayesh Publications in Tehran is scheduled to release the book in the near future.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Azerbaijan's Alton to perform in Tehran

A R T TEHRAN — The Alton band from d e s k Azerbaijan is scheduled to give a concert of Azerbaijani folk music at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on May 6.

Avaye Hannaneh, a Tehran-based cultural institute, is the organizer of the performance.



Fajr film market opens

A R T TEHRAN — The 20th Iranian Film d e s k Market opened on Friday on the sidelines of the 35th Fajr International Film Festival. Representatives of 18 international distributors from around the world are in Iran to take part in the film market, the organizers announced on Saturday. The market will be running until April 27.

Colleagues to share memories of Abbas Kiarostami

A R T TEHRAN — A d e s k number Abbas Kiarostami's colleagues in "Tickets" and "Like Someone in Love" is scheduled to share memories of their collaboration with the world-renowned Iranian filmmaker during a program at the 35th Fajr International Film Festival today.

The program is part of the three-day tribute to the legendary filmmaker who dies last July.

Assistant director Shohreh Golparian who also worked as an interpreter in "Like Someone in Love", and line producer and the director of cinematography in the film will deliver speeches.

Kiarostami made the film in Tokyo in 2012 about a young sex worker who develops an unexpected connection with a widower over a period of two

days. Cinematographer Mahmud Kalari and sound effects engineer Mohammadreza Delpak, who collaborated with Kiarostami in "Tickets", will talk about their memories of Kiarostami.

The Italy-based Iranian actor Babak Karimi, who worked on the project as a producer and film editor, will share his memories of the collaboration in a video, which will be screened at the session.

"Tickets" was jointly directed by Kiarostami, Ken Loach and Ermanno Olmi in 2005. This anthology film is about a journey from Central Europe to Rome, during which the characters connect through casual encounters and set forth a story of love, chance and sacrifice.



A poster for "Tickets" directed by Abbas Kiarostami, Ken Loach and Ermanno Olmi in 2005

Residence of S. Korean ambassador hangs works by painter Masih Mirhosseini

A R T TEHRAN — The d e s k official residence of the South Korean ambassador in Tehran is displaying works by Iranian painter Masih Mirhosseini in an exhibition.

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the showcase, South Korean Ambassador Kim Seung-ho said that he opened his residence to the public in order to promote friendship between Iran and his country, the Persian service of Honaronline reported on Saturday.

He added that he wants to be familiar with Iranian culture by organizing such an event.

Mirhosseini expressed her thanks to the ambassador over organizing the exhibit and said, "This is the first time a diplomat has organized such an event at his home in Iran and this means he wants his cultural relations with artists to



Art aficionados visit an exhibition of paintings Masih Mirhosseini at the official residence of the South Korean ambassador in Tehran on April 19, 2017. (Borna/Matin Qasemi)

deepen." She said that organizing the exhibition was a basis for more cultural interactions and asked the ambassador to help expand collaborations between Iranian and Korean artists in the fields of cinema and visual arts.

Mirhosseini presented Seung-ho and his wife two works from her collection.

After three weeks, French artist succeeds in hatching eggs

PARIS (Reuters) — French artist Abraham Poincheval, who famously spent a week inside a rock and two weeks inside a bear sculpture, has succeeded in hatching chicken eggs after incubating them for some three weeks.

Poincheval embarked on his latest project in late March of imitating a mother hen by incubating some 10 eggs with his own body heat inside a glass vivarium at Paris' Palais de Tokyo contemporary art museum.

At the time, he estimated it would take 21-26 days for the eggs to hatch and the first did so on Tuesday. A spokeswoman for the museum said on Thursday nine had hatched and the chicks were on their way to a farm.

For the endeavor, Poincheval sat on a chair, wrapped in an insulating



French artist Abraham Poincheval is seen in a vivarium on the first day of his performance in an attempt to incubate chicken eggs, which takes from 21 to 26 days, at the Palais de Tokyo Museum in Paris, France, March 29, 2017. (Reuters/Gonzalo Fuentes)

blanket, over a container with the eggs. He could leave his seat for no more than 30 minutes a day for meals.

Earlier this year, the artist spent a week inside a block of stone, while in 2014, he lived in a hollowed-out bear sculpture for two weeks.

Scholar Gonul Donmez-Colin praises Iran film diversity

I → "Another Time" by Iranian director Nahid Hassanzadeh was selected to be screened at the festival last year. The film won the Special Achievement Award.

Donmez-Colin has much knowledge of Iranian elites in cinema and also looks for young talents in the field.

She is the author of many books, including "The Cinema of North Africa and the Middle East", "Turkish Cinema: Identity, Distance and Belonging" and "Women, Islam and Cinema".

The topic of her next book is female filmmakers in Iran.

"I am comparing the Turkish and Iranian women behind and in front of the camera. There is a problem worldwide. Hollywood women are also complaining that there is not enough space for them. But women are fighting and good things are happening," she

remarked.

"It is not enough to be a woman filmmaker. You have to tell a story differently from men; that is important. Because if women tell the stories that men do, then nothing changes. What is important is to have a different language to talk about women. Otherwise, we would have the same old language. Women do not have personality, they do not stand on their own as a body in the movies," she explained.

She hopes that women filmmakers will change the language of cinema, which she believes is male-dominated.

Concerning her thoughts on the Iranian Film Market underway on the sidelines of the Fajr festival, she said that the market is very good and very well organized.

"Some distributors have sent some links so I can be ready to select the films. I have watched some films



before I came here. I am not buying any films here, we just select and show the films at the Mannheim festival," she concluded.

Havana walls brought to life with murals of wide-eyed children

HAVANA (Reuters) — The gigantic black and white portraits of children started appearing on walls around a suburban neighborhood of Havana two years ago, the work of Cuban artist Maisel Lopez.

The sober, finely painted portraits contrast with Cuba's dilapidated buildings and pot-holed streets, colorful vintage cars and peeling pink, apricot and turquoise paint on eclectic architecture.

With nearly 30 murals completed, Lopez said he is only getting started on his "Colossi" series, a striking endeavor in the Communist-run country where street art is rare.

"I want to keep expanding further afield," said Lopez, 31, who started painting the walls of homes and shops in his home district of Playa and is now completing his first mural in neighboring Marianao.

A chubby girl with wispy blond hair wistfully rests her chin on her hands, while a black boy with angular features peers at passersby with a slight air of defiance.

The murals are unusual in a country where public spaces are tightly controlled and posters and murals mainly have political themes or depict figures like Ernesto "Che" Guevara.



Cuban artist Maisel Lopez poses for a photo in front of his paintings in a state art gallery in Havana, April 18, 2017. Picture taken on April 18. (Reuters/Stringer)

Only one other artist in Havana, Yulier Rodriguez, has an equally recognizable assortment of street art. His figures are alien, the murals colorful. Lopez's subjects are realistic and monochrome.

Lopez said in an interview last week that political art led

him to paint murals. He helped with several celebrating the Bolivarian revolution during a cultural mission in 2009 to Cuba's socialist ally Venezuela.

"A mural is constantly in interaction with the public," said Lopez, whose work is inspired by Cuban independence hero Jose Marti, who said "children are the hope of the world".

"That's why I paint the children big, to mark their importance," he said.

Unlike many street artists, including Rodriguez, Lopez seeks permits to paint on walls. While initially hard to get, he gained trust as he developed the series, he said.

Each colossus is several meters tall and takes Lopez four days to a week to paint. Each depicts a child living in the vicinity. He does not charge to paint them.

Instead, he earns a living teaching art classes and selling canvas portraits that can fetch up to \$1500.

Locals have declared themselves fans and guardians of his work, looking after it as people stop to take photographs.

"It's really striking and gives life to the street," said Vivian Herrera, 47, who runs a bakery next to one of the murals. "It's like the girl is really there, with her big, open eyes."

"American Gods" reflects real world issues in modern mythology saga

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — A storm is brewing in Starz's gritty new series "American Gods", as deities old and new gear up for a battle that reverberates with topical issues in the real world.

Immigration, race, religion and sexuality are all examined in "American Gods" through the saga of Shadow Moon,

a convict who is released to the news of his wife's death. He is hired to be the bodyguard of an old grifter named Mr. Wednesday, the disguise of the Norse god Odin.

"This show has become the most politically relevant show on TV without a doubt," actor Ricky Whittle, who plays

Shadow, told Reuters at the red carpet premiere on Thursday.

"American Gods", which premieres on premium cable network Starz on April 30, is based on British author Neil Gaiman's 2001 novel of the same name, a surreal story of how the old gods of folklore struggle to be revered and remembered

in an age of new gods like technology and media.

"Our goal with this project was really to give the audience our experience reading it, and we wanted to tell the story as vividly as we imagined it when we read Neil's book," said Bryan Fuller, who developed the show for TV.