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Fajr offers chance to see latest films from Asian cinema: Javier Angulo **16**

Foreign tourist arrivals fetch Iran \$32b in four years

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — Foreign tourists have spent some \$32 billion in Iran over the past four years, said an official with the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization.

A total of 19.9 million travelers visited the country during the mentioned period (March 2013 – March 2017), IRIB quoted CHTHO Deputy Director Morteza Rahmani-Movahhed as saying on April 23.

Transportation, accommodation, and even purchasing souvenirs are amongst parameters taken into account for calculating the sum, Rahmani-Movahhed added.

"Under a worldwide accepted definition, a tourist is referred to whoever stays over 24 hours in a foreign country without having a job or a business," he said, Khabaronline reported.

"According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, a [typical] traveler to West Asia spends between \$1,520 and \$1,750, so that we used an average \$1,650 to calculate the income," the official explained.

The government has put in a great deal of effort to revive tourism and hospitality businesses since the incumbent President Hassan Rouhani assumed office in August 2013. **→10**

U.S. reviving global fascism through commercialized security



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Annual minerals, mining exports exceed \$7b

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran's minerals and mining industries exports exceeded \$7 billion in the previous Iranian calendar year 1395 (March 2016-March 2017), according to the latest data released by the Customs Administration.

The exports rose by 38 percent and 17 percent in terms of weight and value, respectively, IRNA reported. More than 57.6 million tons of commodities including steel, copper, aluminum, cement, lead, zinc, coal, coke, chromium, molybdenum, titanium, mica, nickel, and antimony were exported during the past year.

Minerals and mining exports accounted for 16 percent of the country's total foreign trade in terms of value and 44 percent of the country's total trade in terms of weight.

Meanwhile, the country imported over 5.8 million tons of mining and mineral products worth \$3.7 billion to register 26 percent and 17 percent fall in weight and value, respectively, compared to the preceding year. Iran possesses 7 percent of the world's total mineral reserves worth about \$700 billion.

The country is one of the top 10 mineral-rich countries where 68 types of minerals have been identified so far, including the world's largest deposits of copper, zinc and iron ore, which are tempting international investors after the lifting of Western sanctions in January 2016.

Gold slips to two-week low on improved risk appetite; equities rally

Gold fell to a two-week low on Wednesday as investors opted for riskier assets such as equities on renewed optimism over the U.S. economy and as political uncertainty in France receded, softening demand for safe-haven assets.

Spot gold was mostly unchanged at \$1,263.53 at 0741 GMT. Earlier in the session, prices hit a low of 1,260.90, their lowest since April 11.

U.S. gold futures were down 0.2 percent at \$1,264.90 an ounce.

Asian stocks extended gains for a fifth straight day on Wednesday after Wall Street hit new peaks.

"Over the past two sessions, the momentum for gold to move ahead has actually faded away. We can see that risk appetite has increased after the easing situation in North Korea and French election results," said Mark To, head of research at Hong Kong's Wing Fung Financial Group.

"We have to move back to the original gravity of trading range of \$1,200-\$1,250."

U.S. President Donald Trump is proposing to slash the corporate income tax rate and offer multinational businesses a steep tax break on overseas profits brought into the United States, officials said late on Tuesday.

"For gold investors this may not be good news as the overall situation for the Trump administration is to ensure that there is sufficient capital inflows to asset markets including equities or dollar to finance fiscal deficit," said To.

"They have to balance it by keeping the original momentum by rising rates and use fiscal policies to attract more and more people to the U.S. stock markets, which will be negative for gold."

The threat of a U.S. government shutdown this weekend appeared to recede on Tuesday after President Donald Trump backed away from a demand that Congress include funding for his planned border wall with Mexico in a spending bill. **→4**

Swedish film expert lauds organization of Fajr festival

By Samaneh Aboutalebi

TEHRAN — Swedish film expert Astrid Hallenstvedt has praised the organization of the 35th Fajr International Film Festival.

"It's so well-organized," Hallenstvedt, who is attending the festival for the first time, told the Tehran Times at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex on Tuesday.

She compared the festival with other international events and said, "Fajr festival is more systematic; the public screening, the market and other sideline programs are well planned."

Hallenstvedt, who is also a member of the board of the Stockholm International Film



Swedish film expert Astrid Hallenstvedt in an undated photo

Festival, is scheduled to provide the organizers with advice on the films screened at Fajr.

"I liked some of the films screened at the

festival," Hallenstvedt said while she declined to name which ones.

She said that she has been a frequent user of the festival's video library, which allows users to access movies screened at the previous editions of the festival and other films, which were not selected for the event.

Hallenstvedt has also been impressed by the tours of Tehran being arranged by the Fajr organizers. "It's a great opportunity for us to see your city and become familiar with Iranian culture," she stated.

The Fajr film festival will end on Friday.

Erdogan and Trump are showmen: SISU professor

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — A professor of Shanghai International Studies University (SISU) says Turkish President Erdogan and his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump share many things in common, calling both leaders "showmen".

"Erdogan and Trump are showmen who rely on exaggerated nationalist rhetoric to deflect attention from their embarrassingly low popularity," Robert R. Bianchi tells the Tehran Times.

Following is the text of the interview:

■ Erdogan's Turkey won an extremely narrow victory in the constitutional referendum. What does this poor showing suggest?

A: The margin of victory is too narrow to

justify the sweeping transfer of authority in question. Erdogan has split the country in two and if he tries to use these expanded powers he will create even more enemies.

Erdogan's political base has shrunk to a core of provinces in Central Anatolia and the Black Sea. His governments will face open revolts in all of the big cities and in the eastern Kurdish regions. Those pressures will strain police and military forces beyond their limits, setting the stage for new defections and attempted coups.

■ Now don't you think that Erdogan would become more aggressive in his dealings with the issues surrounding the volatile situation in Middle East?

A: Domestic turmoil will make it difficult

for Turkish diplomats to sustain any effort to influence events abroad. Turkey will have to focus on its borders with Syria and Iraq where rival factions and their foreign patrons will seek to exploit Ankara's distractions in order to improve their bargaining positions.

■ Can the results of the referendum affect Tehran-Ankara ties?

A: The referendum does not change the need for Iran and Turkey to compromise on many small differences in order to safeguard more important long-term interests. Tehran and Ankara both want to preserve the unity of Iraq and Syria even though they prefer different power distributions within. Iran and Turkey also want to mediate great power influence in the Middle East **→13**

A cry for help: Millions facing famine in Yemen

The UN has warned that 17 million Yemenis will be in famine unless the world sends urgent humanitarian help.

Antonio Guterres, the UN chief, issued a call to action at the aid conference held in Geneva where donor countries pledged almost \$1.1bn.

But UN says the amount is half of what is needed to combat what it is calling "the world's largest hunger crisis".

More than two million children are acutely malnourished in Yemen. Aid workers say almost half a million of them are suffering from severe acute malnutrition which is a life-threatening condition.

Guterres said that on average, one child under the age of five dies of preventable causes every 10 minutes.

"This means 50 children in Yemen will die during today's conference - and all those deaths could have been prevented," he said.

"Our financial situation is bad," said Fatema Ali Yahya, mother of a malnourished child.

"Only sometimes we get enough money to buy food. If any of my seven children fall ill, I can't take them to the hospital because we do not have money for medication."

Yemen was already one of the poorest countries in the region, and the ongoing Saudi attacks has made matters worse.

"As a result for the war, my husband isn't working any more," said Um Saleh, resident of Yemen's Hodeida.

"He can't go to sea for fishing. All men are jobless. We are suffering from a shortage of food."

■ Elderly suffer too

Malnutrition is affecting all vulnerable parts of the Yemeni society, including the disabled and the elderly.

"It's been a year and a half since we're facing difficulties to get enough food for ourselves and our families. We are getting a little bit of food just to survive and sometimes we just stay hungry," said Taha al-Nahari, a malnourished Hodeidah resident.

People are also dying of preventable diseases because health services, which used to provide diagnosis and treatment, have collapsed in most parts.

(Source: Al Jazeera)



Mo'aven al-Molk, a distinctive Shia shrine

A ceramic tilework bearing historical themes embellishes an exterior wall of the Takieh Mo'aven al-Molk, a distinctive Shia shrine, in western Iranian city of Kermanshah, April 25, 2017.

Completed in early 20th century, the Takieh which is also a tourism destination bears abundant tiles and stucco depicting a wide range of images, from Quranic scenes to pre-Islamic motifs including Shahnameh kings, edifices and local notables in 19th-century costumes.

ELECTION COUNTDOWN



Raisi's loyalists to hold first gathering Saturday

POLITICS TEHRAN — Loyalists to presidential candidate Ebrahim Raisi will hold their first gathering on Saturday in Tehran.

To be held in the afternoon, the gathering will include a speech by Raisi himself, Fars reported on Wednesday.

The gathering will be held at Seven Tir Martyrs Hall in Fayyazbakhsh St. and will start at 17:00.

This week Raisi visited South Khorasan, Sistan-Baluchestan, and Yazd provinces.



High turnout is Iran's real deterrent: MP

POLITICS TEHRAN — High turnout in elections is Iran's greatest deterrent against enemies, a lawmaker has said.

Over the past 38 years, Iran has had the highest electoral turnout in presidential elections compared to many other countries, Elias Hazrati, who is also the editor-in-chief of Etemad newspaper, told ISNA on Wednesday.

"I would like, therefore, to invite all nationalists interested in this land and its peace and security, to demonstrate a powerful image to the world by appearing at polling stations."



Mirsalim: I will look inside for economy

POLITICS TEHRAN — Presidential contender Mostafa Mirsalim has said he will look inside the country rather than outside to advance the economy.

Speaking on national TV on Wednesday, Mirsalim said he hoped by using the capacities of younger generations, he would be able to lead the economy out of "the recession which we now suffer".

He explained that his resistance economy model will use foreign expertise and domestic manpower.



Raisi no less powerful than Rouhani: Javad Larijani

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ebrahim Raisi is no less powerful in executive affairs than Hassan Rouhani, said Mohammad Javad Larijani, deputy Judiciary chief Judiciary for international affairs and dean of the Basic Sciences Research Center.

Raisi can be effective in fighting corruption, Larijani said, adding that Rouhani also lacked direct executive experience prior to presidency.

Larijani also criticized Rouhani for his foreign policy, saying, "To hammer things out with the sheriff would only entail eliminating and humiliating us."



Criticizing Rouhani will backfire: principlist politician

POLITICS TEHRAN — The secretary general of the Front of Followers of the Line of Imam and Leadership believes electoral rivals should not unfairly criticize Hassan Rouhani because it will "backfire".

It will become like the 2009 election when one side all the time argued that the government had been a failure, Mohammad Reza Bahonar told a conference on Wednesday, Nasim reported.

Rouhani is currently under harsh scrutiny by critics who have launched an investigation campaign to find if his doctoral thesis is not genuine.



ISNA poll: 58% of Iranians will vote

POLITICS TEHRAN — A recent poll conducted by Iran Students Polling Agency, a subsidiary of the Iran Students News Agency, has found out that 58 percent of Iranians will vote in the presidential and council elections of May 19.

The poll was carried out on Sunday and Monday, that is some four weeks ahead of the election date.

Officials have said how many people show up in elections is more important than who will win.

U.S. reviving global fascism through commercialized security

By Ali Kushki

TEHRAN — Addressing the Moscow security conference on Wednesday, Iran's Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan said Washington is pursuing a new version of "global fascism" in the post-Cold War era to hold its grip on the international order through "commercialization of security."

"The U.S. is trying to manifest a new form of global fascism through its new doctrine of commercialization of security," Dehghan told the delegates.

Organized by the Russian Defense Ministry, the sixth two-day Moscow Conference on International Security kicked off on Wednesday with a focus on "the prospects and trends of European security, Russia-NATO interaction, cybersecurity, U.S. ballistic missile defense (BMD) posture in Europe and Asia-Pacific, situation in Syria and Afghanistan."

Through its fascist agenda, Washington seeks to "stabilize its future role" in the international order, Iran's defense chief noted.

Dehghan chided the U.S. for its unjustified actions in different geographies after the Cold War, saying: "The most prominent characteristics of the international security order after the end of the Cold War are disorder, uncertainty and fluidity."

These, the defense minister emphasized, have jeopardized global security and spurred conflicts and instability.

"Such policies have resulted in the creation of imaginary, fictitious threats, and division of working with regional and trans-regional allies to induce fear of the other, particularly Russia, China, and Iran."

The incumbent U.S. administration has been at loggerheads with Beijing over the South China Sea, which the Chinese regularly castigate the Americans for "meddling" in the area.



The U.S. also does not agree with Iran and Russia over regional conflicts in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, where they back opposing sides.

Tehran and Moscow see the U.S. approach to the Syrian crisis and other international issues as emanating from Washington's efforts to impose "a unilateral order" on the world.

Dehghan saw the only way to end the current crises in the world "transition to a new order which is premised upon

a multipolar system" which rejects hegemony, either regional or international.

For that new order to form, it is necessary that all countries participate to pave the way for "constructive plans", the minister suggested.

As main features of the new order, the defense minister referred to a globally concerted fight against terrorism, radicalism, and aggression, respect for the national sovereignty of countries and adopting a non-

"Iran will continue to cooperate with powerful Russia against terrorist movements until the end. The Islamic Republic is of the belief that the front formed in Syria by Russia, Iran and the Arab country's legitimate government and its resistant people will eventually conquer the terrorists."

JCPOA Joint Commission insists on full implementation of nuclear deal

POLITICAL TEHRAN — All participants at a meeting of the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna on Tuesday promised continued adherence to the nuclear deal and stressed the need to ensure its full and effective implementation, European External Action Service said in a statement on Tuesday.

The Joint Commission, which was held on April 25 in Vienna, was attended by the 5+1 group (China, France, Germany, Russia, Britain and the U.S.) as well as Iran at the level of political directors/deputy foreign ministers.

This was the 5th meeting of the Joint Commission since JCPOA Implementation Day. Under the terms of the JCPOA, the Joint Commission is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the nuclear deal.

The meeting was chaired, on behalf of EU High Representative Mogherini, by EEAS Secretary General Helga Schmid.

It provided the opportunity to address the



implementation of the JCPOA with regard to nuclear and sanctions-related commitments.

During the meeting, participants discussed the importance of implementation of Annex III of the JCPOA on civil nuclear cooperation, and welcomed in this context the recent EU-Iran high-level seminar on

international nuclear cooperation.

They also welcomed the important progress made on the Arak modernization project, where Chinese and Iranian companies signed the first consultancy services contract on Sunday, April 23, in Vienna.

Prior to the meeting, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said that the Islamic Republic has lived up to its commitments under the JCPOA.

"As the entire world knows and constant reports by the agency have confirmed, Iran has always been committed to its obligations and carefully implemented the nuclear deal," he said on Monday, after a meeting with IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano in Vienna.

Araqchi, who on the part of Iran is tasked to monitor the implementation of the 2015 nuclear agreement between Tehran and six world powers, also said that the other side, however, has not fully complied with its obligations.

Trump injected tougher anti-Iran words into nuclear deal letter

POLITICAL TEHRAN — U.S. President Donald Trump personally intervened to inject tougher anti-Iran language into a recent State Department letter to Congress that confirmed Iran has been honoring its commitments under the nuclear deal, an American official familiar with the matter has said.

The letter to Congress, which was sent by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on April 18, certified that Iran is complying

with its commitments under the nuclear agreement, or the JCPOA.

Under the deal between Iran and six world powers, Tehran accepted some restrictions on its nuclear activities in return for relief from certain economic sanctions.

In irrelevant remarks, the letter described Iran as "the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism." It also said the administration will review whether to re-impose the U.S. sanctions linked

to the nuclear program despite Iran's compliance.

Trump himself is reportedly responsible for the tough language of the letter. He also told Tillerson to issue an anti-Iran public message, in which the secretary of state compared Iran to North Korea. "An unchecked Iran has the potential to travel the same path as North Korea and take the world along with it," he said on April 19, a day after the letter was issued.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad

Javad Zarif took to Twitter to respond to Tillerson's accusations. He urged the U.S. to change course and fulfill its own commitments under the nuclear agreement.

"We'll see if U.S. is prepared to live up to the letter of the JCPOA, let alone spirit," he tweeted. "So far, it has defied both."

On Wednesday, when asked whether the U.S. president will be committed to the deal, Zarif said, "Don't pay much attention to his words."

Iran appoints new Syrian ambassador after hiatus

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iran has appointed a new ambassador to Syria after a seven-month hiatus, ending speculation over the sensitive post.

Javad Torkabadi will lead Iran's diplomatic post in Syrian, replacing Mohammadreza Sheibani whose mandate ended after nearly five years in the job.

Torkabadi formerly had served as Iran's ambassador to Sudan, Bahrain and Nigeria, as well as the country's chargé d'affaires in Kuwait. Torkabadi made his debut meeting on Tuesday night with Syria's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Walid al-Moaleem.

Strong criticism was launched against the Foreign Ministry inside the country for the longer-than-usual appointment given the nature of bilateral relations between the two countries.

Iran has been backing the Syrian government since 2011 when the unrest broke out and then developed into a full-scale war.

In addition to providing advisory assistance to the Syrian army, Iran has



been a strong voice in the international arena for Damascus, calling for a multi-pronged effort to fight terrorist groups in the Syria.

Also, Tehran has been, along with Russia and Turkey, involved in the Astana negotiations, an initiative aiming to bring the Syrian government and representatives of opposition groups to the negotiation table.

Thus far, three rounds of the negotiations have been held.

U.S. moves THAAD anti-missile to South Korean site, sparking protests

The U.S. military started moving parts of an anti-missile defense system to a deployment site in South Korea on Wednesday, triggering protests from villagers and criticism from China, amid tension over North Korea's weapons development.

The earlier-than-expected steps to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system was also denounced by the frontrunner in South Korea's presidential election on May 9.

South Korea's defense ministry said elements of THAAD were moved to the deployment site, on what had been a golf course, about 250 km (155 miles) south of the capital, Seoul.

"South Korea and the United States have been working to secure an early operational capability of the THAAD system in response to North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile threat," the ministry said in a statement.

The battery was expected to be operational by the end of the year, it said.

The United States and South Korea agreed last year to deploy the THAAD to counter the threat of missile launches by North Korea. They say it is solely aimed at defending against North Korea.

But China says the system's advanced radar can penetrate deep into its territory and undermine its security, while it will do little to deter the North, and is adamant in its opposition.

"China strongly urges the United States and South Korea to stop actions that worsen regional tensions and harm China's strategic security interests and cancel the deployment of the THAAD system and withdraw the equipment," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a briefing.

"China will resolutely take necessary steps to defend its interests," Geng said, without elaborating.

China is North Korea's sole major ally and is seen as crucial to U.S.-led efforts to rein in its neighbor.

The United States began moving the first elements of the system to South Korea in March after the North tested four ballistic missiles.

South Korea has accused China of discriminating against some South Korean companies operating in China because of the deployment.

The liberal politician expected to win South Korea's election, Moon Jae-in, has called for a delay in the deployment, saying the new administration should make a decision after gathering public opinion and more talks with Washington.

A spokesman for Moon said moving the parts to the site "ignored public opinion and due process" and demanded it be suspended.

Television footage showed military trailers carrying equipment, including what appeared to be launch canisters, to the battery site.

Protesters shouted and hurled water bottles at the vehicles over lines of police holding them back.

The Pentagon said the system was critical to defend South Korea and its allies against North Korean missiles and deployment would be completed "as soon as feasible".



■ 'WE WILL FIGHT'

More than 10 protesters were injured, some of them with fractures, in clashes with police, Kim Jong-kyung, a leader of villagers opposing the deployment, told Reuters. Kim said about 200 protesters rallied overnight and they would keep up their opposition.

"There's still time for THAAD to be actually up and running so we will fight until equipment is withdrawn from the site and ask South Korea's new government to reconsider," Kim told Reuters by telephone.

A police official in the nearby town of Seongju said police had withdrawn from the area and were not aware of any injuries.

The United States and North Korea have been stepping up warnings to each other in recent weeks over North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and missiles in defiance of U.N. resolutions.

North Korea's nuclear and missile threat is perhaps the most serious security challenge confronting U.S. President Donald Trump. He has vowed to prevent North Korea from being able to hit the United States with a nuclear missile.

North Korea says it needs the weapons to defend itself and has vowed to strike the United States and its Asian allies at the first sign of any attack on it.

The United States is sending the USS Carl Vinson carrier strike group to waters off the Korean peninsula, where it will join the USS Michigan, a nuclear submarine that docked in South Korea on Tuesday. South Korea's navy has said it will hold drills with the U.S. strike group.

North Korea's foreign ministry denounced a scheduled U.N. Security Council meeting on Friday, chaired by U.S.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, saying the United States was "not morally entitled" to force members states to impose sanctions on it.

"It is a wild dream for the U.S. to think of depriving the DPRK of its nuclear deterrent through military threat and sanctions. It is just like sweeping the sea with a broom," the North's KCNA cited a foreign ministry spokesman as saying.

DPRK stands for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the North's official name.

China's envoy on North Korea, Wu Dawei, met his Japanese counterpart, Kenji Kanasugi, for talks in Tokyo and they agreed that they would "respond firmly" to any further North Korean provocation, Japan's foreign ministry said.

"We are against anything that might lead to war or chaos," Wu said.

KCNA said earlier leader Kim Jong Un had supervised the country's "largest-ever" live-fire drill to mark Tuesday's 85th founding anniversary of its military, with more than 300 large-caliber, self-propelled artillery pieces on its east coast.

"The brave artillerymen mercilessly and satisfactorily hit the targets and the gunshots were very correct, he said, adding that they showed well the volley of gunfire of our a-match-for-a-hundred artillery force giving merciless punishment to the hostile forces," KCNA cited Kim as saying.

There had been fears North Korea would mark the anniversary with its sixth nuclear test or a long-range missile launch.

(Source: Reuters)

China launches first domestically made aircraft carrier

China has launched its first domestically made aircraft carrier, in a demonstration of the growing technical sophistication of its defense industries.

The 50,000-tonne carrier was towed from its dockyard on Wednesday morning after a ceremony in the northern port city of Dalian.

Development of the new carrier began in 2013 and construction commenced in late 2015. It is expected to be formally commissioned some time before 2020, after sea trials and the arrival of its full air complement.

Reports of the launch said a bottle of champagne was broken across the ship's bow and other craft in the port sounded their horns in celebration.

Like the 60,000-tonne Liaoning aircraft carrier, which was purchased from Ukraine, the new carrier is based on the Soviet Kuznetsov class design, with a ski jump-style deck for taking off and a conventional oil-fuelled steam turbine power plant.

The design limits the weight of payloads its planes can carry, its speed and the amount of time it can spend at sea compared with U.S. nuclear-powered carriers.

The main hull of the new carrier has been completed and its power supply put into place. Next up are mooring tests and the debugging of its electronic systems, the defense ministry said.

China is believed to be planning to build at least two - and possibly as many as four - additional carriers, with one of them, the Type 002, reported to be already under construction at a shipyard outside Shanghai.



They are expected to be closer in size to the U.S. Navy's nuclear-powered 100,000-tonne Nimitz class ships, with flat flight decks and catapults to allow planes to launch with more bombs and fuel aboard.

China has offered little information about the roles it expects its carriers to play, although its planning appears to be evolving as it gains more experience.

The Liaoning was initially touted mainly as an experimental and training platform, but in December was declared to be combat-ready and has taken part in live-firing exercises in the South China Sea, where tensions have risen over China's construction of man-made islands complete with airstrips and military structures.

(Source: BBC)

Trump order on sanctuary city funding blocked in court

A U.S. judge has blocked President Donald Trump's executive order that sought to withhold federal funds from so-called sanctuary cities, dealing another legal blow to the administration's efforts to toughen immigration enforcement.

U.S. District Judge William Orrick in San Francisco issued the preliminary injunction in two lawsuits on Tuesday - one brought by the city of San Francisco, the other by Santa Clara County - saying the president has no authority to attach new conditions to federal spending.

The injunction will stay in place while the lawsuits work their way through court.

White House chief of staff Reince Priebus said the ruling was the 9th Circuit "going bananas", referring to the judicial district where the ruling was issued.

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals previously ruled against President Donald Trump's ban on travelers from several Muslim countries.

"We're taking action to appeal this," Pri-

bus told reporters of the sanctuary city decision.

Judge Orrick said Trump cannot set new conditions for the federal grants at stake. And even if he could, the conditions would have to be clearly related to the funds at issue and not coercive, the judge said.

"Federal funding that bears no meaningful relationship to immigration enforcement cannot be threatened merely because a jurisdiction chooses an immigration enforcement strategy of which the president disapproves," the judge said.

Trump's January executive order on immigration ordered the Department of Homeland Security and justice department to block cities who do not cooperate with federal immigration enforcement from receiving federal funds.

Hundreds of cities, counties and states have been categorised as sanctuary jurisdictions in unofficial tallies, including the entire states of California, Connecticut, New Mexico and Colorado.

Supporters of the sanctuary policy argue that enlisting police cooperation in rounding up immigrants for removal undermines communities' trust in local police, particularly among Latinos.

The Trump administration contends that local authorities endanger public safety when they decline to hand over for deportation undocumented immigrants arrested for crimes.

San Francisco City Attorney Dennis Herrera praised the ruling on Tuesday and said the president was "forced to back down".

"This is why we have courts - to halt the overreach of a president and an attorney general who either don't understand the Constitution or chose to ignore it," Herrera said in a statement.

Santa Clara County Counsel James Williams said the ruling will allow cities and counties across the country to prepare budgets without the "unconstitutional threat of federal defunding hanging over our heads".

Santa Clara County sued in February, saying Trump's order was unconstitutional. San Francisco filed a similar lawsuit.

The U.S. Department of Justice threatened last week to cut some funding to California, as well as eight cities and counties across the United States.

The department singled out Chicago and New York as two cities "crumbling under the weight of illegal immigration and violent crime," even though New York City is experiencing its lowest crime levels in decades and experts say Chicago's recent spike in violent crime has little to do with illegal immigration.

Santa Clara County receives about \$1.7bn in federal and federally dependent funds annually, about 35 percent of its total revenues.

The county argued it was owed millions of dollars in federal funding every day and that its budgetary planning process had been thrown into disarray by the order.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Iraqi forces retake Hatra city from ISIL Baghdad censures Turkey air raid in northern Iraq

The Iraqi forces have liberated the ancient city of Hatra in Nineveh province from the control of the Daesh terrorist group.

According to al-Sumaria news website, Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), also known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, said in a statement on Wednesday that its fighters took control of the city, which lies to the south of Mosul, after fierce clashes with the ISIL (Daesh) terrorists.

The development comes a day after the Iraqi forces launched an operation to liberate the city and its surrounding areas.

■ Baghdad censures Turkey air raid

Meanwhile, the Iraqi government has condemned a deadly air raid by Turkish warplanes in northern Iraq, which killed at least six peshmerga Kurdish fighters.

Government spokesman Saad al-Hadithi, in a statement on Tuesday, slammed Ankara for violating Iraq's sovereignty.

"The Iraqi government condemns and rejects the strikes carried out by Turkish aircraft on Iraqi territory," the statement read.



Regional authorities in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region have already denounced Turkey's air-strike in Sinjar Mountains area late on Monday, which left five peshmerga soldiers and one police officer dead.

The Turkish army earlier said it had conducted a strike against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) militants in an alleged bid to prevent the Kurdish forces from sending weapons to Turkey.

Turkey frequently launches airstrikes in the mountainous regions of northern Iraq without coordination

with Baghdad. Ankara has also deployed troops into Iraq, sparking a bitter rift with Baghdad.

The troops are based in a town near the city of Mosul, which is currently the focus of a massive operation to recapture it from Takfiri Daesh terrorists.

Baghdad has repeatedly called on Ankara to withdraw its forces from the region, describing Turkey's military presence in Iraq as a violation of its sovereignty.

Daesh terrorist shot dead 15 Iraqi civilians in Mosul In a separate development, Hossameddin al-Abbar, a member of Iraq's Nineveh provincial council, on Tuesday said Daesh terrorists, wearing police uniforms, had shot dead at least 15 civilians who had welcomed them in central Mosul.

"Daesh members, some of them wearing federal police uniforms, entered the Al-Maidan and Corniche areas of the Old City," the official said. "They were driving black vehicles and posing as liberators from the Iraqi forces."

"When some families welcomed them, they arrested several of them. They executed at least 15 other people," Abbar added.

(Source: agencies)

Sarkozy camp eyes power-sharing role under France's Macron

France's center-right party, seeking to rebound after the defeat of its presidential candidate, said on Wednesday it could share power with Emmanuel Macron if he is elected, as pollsters predict, on May 7.

Macron, a 39-year-old centrist, is tipped to comfortably win a runoff vote against far-right leader Marine Le Pen, but the political movement he created a year ago faces a huge challenge in the follow-up legislative election in June.

With Macron and his "En Marche!" movement at risk of being in a minority in parliament, the center-right party, The Republicans, hopes to secure enough National Assembly seats to demand a government role despite the defeat of its presidential contender Francois Fillon, eliminated in a first-round vote on April 23.

Francois Baroin, who served as a finance minister for former president Nicolas Sarkozy, on Wednesday publicly stated he was ready to work as prime minister in a "cohabitation" arrangement with Macron.

Baroin, 51 and a rising star within The Republicans, said in an interview on CNews television; "I will be available to ... head the government according to the will of the French people."

Any power-sharing deal between Macron and a right-wing prime minister, like that suggested by Baroin, would likely impose big constraints on him in pursuing economic policies that seek to a balance state protection and pro-business reforms.

Before his exit, Fillon derided Macron's stated aim of being neither left- nor right-wing, pointing to the ex-banker's time as economy minister in the Socialist government of outgoing President Francois Hollande.

This judgment of Macron is still strongly felt among many of the Sarkozy-faction on the right-wing of The Republicans though others, loosely represented by more moderate ex-prime minister Alain Juppe, have suggested they may choose to join in a majority of support for Macron.

Baroin told CNews he would vote for Macron on May 7 without hesitation but that he would not join in helping his campaign. He said he would throw his energy into campaigning for The Republicans in the June parliamentary election.

The last time France had a cohabitation arrangement between the Elysee and the government was from 1997 and 2002 when right-wing president Jacques Chirac had to work with a Socialist government under Prime Minister Lionel Jospin.

The arrangement curbed Chirac's day-to-day control over the direction of the economy, reducing him largely to looking after foreign policy and defense.

(Source: Reuters)

Japan, Russia to sign over 20 economic deals during Abe's visit

Japan will sign over 20 agreements on the economic co-operation projects in the sphere of urban environment and health services during the upcoming visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to Russia on Thursday.

The projects, which are aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation, will become an addition to 80 previously signed bilateral agreements, a source from the Japanese government said, according to the Kyodo news agency.

During the upcoming meeting, Abe and Russian President Vladimir Putin are set to consider the implementation of the agreements reached in 2016, the Kremlin said on Tuesday. The sides also plan to discuss the prospects of Russian-Japanese economic, political and humanitarian cooperation.

During Putin's visit to Japan on December 15-16, the countries signed 12 intergovernmental agreements as well as 68 documents on economic projects between the Russian and Japanese companies, particularly in the spheres of energy, investments, pharmacy and agriculture.

(Source: Sputnik)

UK and U.S. building new 'special relationship' for manufacturing sectors

Anew "special relationship" is being formed between Britain and America as the two nations' manufacturing industries partner up to boost transatlantic trade.

Britain's EEF, which represents 20,000 manufacturing and engineering businesses, and its US counterpart the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), have agreed a deal aimed at promoting and raising awareness of trade opportunities in companies in their sectors.

The partnership is seen as especially important as the UK seeks new trade deals in the wake of the Brexit vote and battles to be "at the front of the queue" with the US.

America is the biggest foreign market for the UK manufacturing sector, buying £47.4bn of goods last year, representing 15.7pc of the total.

There is also a trade surplus, with the US the third largest source of imports of goods for the UK at £36.7bn a year, representing 8.4pc of the total and behind Germany and China.

Under the scheme - which will last for an initial three years - EEF and NAM will share market intelligence, data and policy work. They will also set up trade missions and visits aimed at securing work, along with commercial exchanges.

Other plans include setting up meetings with influential policy-makers in each others' countries, with local knowledge helping bypass bureaucracy and make it easier to land contracts.

(Source: The Telegraph)

Singapore ranked world's top maritime capital, but another city is quickly on the ascent

Singapore has emerged as the world's top maritime capital in a report launched Wednesday, by Norwegian consulting firm Menon Economics.

The annually report, "Leading Maritime Capitals of the World," described the Southeast Asian city state as a resilient hub, home to the fourth largest fleet in the world (when compared to other cities).

The ranking comes as no surprise to Esben Poulsson, president of the Singapore Shipping Association. Speaking with CNBC Wednesday at the Sea Asia conference, he remarked that "Whenever you're number one, there's only one place to go, and that's not where you want to go."

Poulsson said he feels that Singapore's continued dominance is due in part to its continued innovation and its strong maritime services environment, which includes legal insurance and shipbroking.

The second and third places went to Hamburg and Oslo, while Shanghai came in fourth.

The Menon Economics report cited expert consensus that Singapore would remain the "most important city" come 2022, but it noted that Shanghai would become the second most important maritime hub.

"The fact that Singapore and Shanghai are expected to become the most important centers for the industry tells something about the changing center of gravity in both the world economy and the maritime industry," the report said.

Rankings were compared in five slices: the city's strengths as a shipping center, offerings for maritime finance and law, maritime technology, ports and logistics, and its overall attractiveness and competitiveness.

Shanghai moved up the ranks in tandem with China's continued development. Despite GDP growth and Chinese oil demand cooling, the port is still abuzz with activity. In fact, it is largely paralyzed by traffic, due to overcapacity and weather conditions.

(Source: CNBC)

Gold slips to two-week low on improved risk appetite; equities rally

Political concerns in France ebbed after business-friendly centrist Emmanuel Macron won the first round of the French vote on Sunday and opinion polls indicated less support for the eurosceptic Marine Le Pen.

Holdings of SPDR Gold Trust, the world's largest gold-backed exchange-traded fund, fell 0.69 percent to 854.25 tonnes on Tuesday after 6 tonnes of inflows.[GOL/ETF]

Spot gold is expected to fall to \$1,249 per ounce, as it has broken a support at \$1,265, according to Reuters technical analyst Wang Tao.

(Source: Reuters)

Iran, Kyrgyzstan discuss development of railway ties

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian desk Transport Minister

Abbas Akhoundi conferred on expansion of Iran-Kyrgyzstan railway ties in a meeting with the parliamentary delegation of Kyrgyzstan, led by Speaker Chynybai Tursunbekov, Mehr news agency reported on Wednesday.

Expressing content about development of transportation ties with Kyrgyzstan, Akhoundi said that boosting roads, railroads, and airlines between the two countries would definitely ease commute of tradesmen and tourists and would enhance mutual trade as well.

The Iranian minister also voiced his country's readiness for taking part in the multilateral meeting with China, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Kyrgyzstan, which will focus on implementation of railway projects that connect Iran and China via Central Asia.

Tursunbekov, for his turn, an-



Iranian Transport Minister Abbas Akhoundi (R) and Kyrgyz Speaker Chynybai Tursunbekov met on Tuesday.

Number of industrial units up 8% yr/yr

ECONOMY TEHRAN — More desk than 38,392 persons were employed in over 2,411 newly established industrial units of the country's industrial parks in the last Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

As IRNA reported, according to Deputy Minister of Industries, Mining and Trade Ali Yazdani, the number of industrial units which went online during the mentioned period rose by 8 percent compared to the preceding year's 2,227 units.



"The figure for employment also rose by 20 percent compared to the last year's 32,021 people," the official added.

Inflation rate stands at 7.6% in rural areas

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The desk Statistical Center of Iran announced that the inflation rate in the rural areas for the 12-month period ended in Farvardin, the first month of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-April 20), hit 7.6 percent, Tasnim news agency reported on Wednesday.

The center also put the point-to-point inflation rate in the rural areas at 11.6 percent in Farvardin.

Inflation rate in the urban areas for the 12-month period ended in Farvar-



din stood at 6.9 percent; the center previously announced and put the point-to-point inflation rate in the urban areas at 9.4 percent in the mentioned month.

Work at Chabahar Port in Iran progressing fast: Indian min.

The work on the strategic Chabahar Port in Iran for which India will invest \$500 million is progressing fast and the country has already formed a global port company there, according to Indian Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari.

Gadkari had visited Tehran in May 2015 and both the nations had inked a pact to develop Chabahar Port.

In August, the minister said Iran had given "very good offers" to India to develop the integrated Chabahar Port, which has a special economic zone (SEZ).

Chabahar port, located in Sistan-Baluchestan province on the energy-rich Persian Gulf nation's southern coast, lies outside the Persian Gulf and is easily accessed from India's western coast, bypassing



Pakistan.

As per the MoU signed between India and Iran in May last year, India is to equip and operate two berths in Chabahar Port Phase-I with capital investment of \$85.21 million and annual revenue expenditure of \$22.95 million on a ten year lease.

Ownership of equipment will be transferred to Iranian side on completion of 10-year period or for an extended period, based on mutual agreement.

Besides the bilateral pact to develop the port, for which India will invest \$500 million, a trilateral agreement on Transport and Transit Corridor has also been signed by India, Afghanistan and Iran.

(Source: ndtv.com)

Trump's latest trade tactic: Blame Canada

After repeated campaign promises to "get tough on trade," President Donald Trump just moved to slap a roughly 20 percent tariff on softwood lumber entering the United States from Canada, reviving a long-smoldering trade dispute between the U.S. and its second-largest trading partner.

The move follows complaints from U.S. dairy farmers about a recent decision by Canada to change the way tariffs apply to some milk products. The action has had the effect of cutting prices Canadian buyers pay for dairy imports from the U.S.

Trump has called the move "a disgrace" that's hurting U.S. producers in dairy states like Wisconsin. "It has been a bad week for U.S.-Canada trade relations," said Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross in a statement. "This is not our idea of a

properly functioning free trade agreement."

Canadian officials rejected the White House's assertions that its lumber industry is unfairly subsidized and urged the Trump administration to negotiate a settlement.

"You need our lumber to build your homes," Canada's minister of foreign affairs, Chrystia Freeland, told CNBC on Tuesday, noting that lumber prices have been rising. "If the market was being flooded by cheap Canadian lumber, you wouldn't see that happening right now."

The U.S. runs a trade deficit in lumber with Canada, importing more wood than it sends across the northern border. U.S. producers complain that their Canadian competitors enjoy an unfair advantage by harvesting timber more cheaply on federally

owned land, while American timber is largely grown on private land.

The trade dispute between lumber producers in Canada and the U.S. dates back to the Reagan administration, when a tariff on wooden shakes and shingles sparked a retaliation from Ottawa in the form of higher duties on a variety of U.S. products, including books, computers, semiconductors and even Christmas trees.

That trade skirmish helped promote the idea of a broader North American Free Trade Agreement, which was signed by President George H.W. Bush in 1992 and took effect in 1994. Trump has branded NAFTA "a disaster" for American workers, vowing to renegotiate the three-way trade treaty between the U.S., Canada and Mexico.

The dispute over dairy products

stems from a new pricing agreement with Canadian farmers that slashed the price of the milk ingredients used to make cheese and yogurt. U.S. dairy farmers say the new accord has cost Wisconsin and New York companies millions of dollars.

Wisconsin is the largest dairy producer in the U.S. and runs the biggest trade surplus in dairy products with Canada.

While this week's trade skirmish covers a relatively small piece of overall U.S. trade, a wider dispute could create headwinds for the economy and raise prices for American consumers.

The impact would be felt unevenly from one part of the country to another, with states along the northern border most heavily affected.

(Source: CNBC)

Mining giants race to fill board leadership gaps



Three of the world's biggest miners are hunting for new leaders for their boards at a time when the industry faces questions from investors about its conventional diversified business operations and strategies for growth.

BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and Anglo American, whose chairmen have all announced their intention to step down, are also generating healthy cash flows, putting them under pressure to give more money back to shareholders.

The task to find the right candidates is particularly urgent for BHP Billiton and Anglo American due to the growing influence of major investors at both companies who have raised doubts over their future direction.

U.S. activist investor Elliott - which holds a stake of about 4 percent in BHP's London-listed shares - has taken advantage of the planned departure of incum-

bent Jac Nasser to launch a campaign to shake up the world's biggest miner.

Elliott's proposals include getting rid of BHP's dual company structure, spinning off its oil and gas assets and returning more cash to investors.

BHP has so far dismissed them and many other investors have also been skeptical, but say the attack highlights the need for a strong new chair to back up the CEO and unite a disparate shareholder base.

Anglo American's new board leader will also have to deal with a new share register. Shortly after incumbent chairman John Parker announced in February that he would step down, Indian miner Vedanta's chairman Anil Agarwal used an exchangeable bond to acquire a sizeable chunk of Anglo American shares and buy influence.

(Source: Reuters)

Can an OPEC extension push oil to \$60?

It now seems quite likely that OPEC will agree to an extension of November's production cut agreement at their May meeting. The question facing analysts and market watchers is how much a cut extension will impact the market going forward, and whether it will deliver the boost in prices that OPEC is hoping for.

In November, the agreement was a boon to the price, sending WTI north of \$50, only for prices to fall a few months later. The impact of the deal, which was publicized for months beforehand and enjoyed blanket coverage from all major market media outlets, was significant but temporary. Inventory reports in February caused the price to crash back down, and apart from a brief swing upwards after U.S. missile strikes in Syria, an event which had analysts crowding over the return of the risk premium, prices have slumbered near \$50, far below where OPEC needs them to be.

Undoubtedly, OPEC is hoping an extension of cuts will have a more lasting effect, delivering true stability to markets and lifting prices up to \$60. The level several OPEC members have indicated they want prices to rest over the long-term, in order to balance their budgets. But a string of bearish signs have pushed the price below \$50, and barring another bout of "geopolitical risk," it seems only significant changes in fundamentals will deliver the boost OPEC needs.

The impact of the first round of cuts was blunted in part due to the ramp-up in production during the fourth quarter of 2016. Huge inventories were reported in the U.S. early in 2017, though there were declines in OECD inventories according to the IEA, evidence that the OPEC and non-OPEC cuts totaling 1.8 million bpd were having some effect, despite low compliance from non-OPEC states.

American inventories were expected to fall, boosting price in the short-term. Instead, unexpectedly high gasoline inventories pushed the price to its lowest point in weeks in mid-April, despite simultaneous drops in the crude supply. The decline of about 1 million barrels was less than analysts predicted.

American inventories are falling, which bode well for a price recovery if OPEC does decide to extend cuts. Yet the effect may not be immediate enough for OPEC to declare victory in June, as rising production in the fourth quarter of 2016 in OPEC and outside of OPEC in early 2017 basically obviated the cumulative effect



of the cuts.

Nevertheless, plenty of analysts see bullish conditions ahead and a tighter market. Goldman Sachs and Citigroup, among others, feel that prices will recover near \$60. Goldman feels that recent declines are due to short-range factors, as fundamentals slowly shift towards tighter supply. The IEA, which has been warning of a much tighter supply situation in the years ahead as investment fails to keep up with demand, feels that inventory declines are likely in the summer despite demand falling for a second straight year. If inventories post big enough declines, the continued absence of 1.5 million bpd taken off the market early in the year could finally have the desired effect.

Goldman's feeling that recent drops in price are from short-term, speculative factors should give investors and analysts cause for optimism. The steep drop last week came on the back of a higher-than-expected rig count report and doubts over Russia's possible com-

pliance with further OPEC cuts. These could be interpreted as the emotional response of the markets, rather than a sure sign of shifting fundamentals. Five rigs were added in the most recent report, the lowest increase since February, and a possible sign that the boom in U.S. shale could be slackening.

Like the week-long boost after the U.S. missile strike in Syria, the sudden dip in prices last week could be offset once inventory draws deepen. If OPEC succeeds in lengthening, or even deepening cuts, and pulls Russia on board, there's a chance that the IEA and Goldman's prediction of a stabilizing market and a closer balance between supply and demand by the late-summer 2017 could come true.

But there's plenty of skepticism out there. Inventory draws will have to be deep, and compliance among OPEC and non-OPEC members strong, for the anticipated increase in U.S. production to be successfully offset. *(Source: oilprice.com)*

Biggest U.S. companies setting more renewable-energy targets

Almost half of the biggest U.S. companies have established clean-energy targets for themselves, according to a report from sustainable investors and environmental groups including the World Wildlife Fund.

It's not just the biggest U.S. companies -- 44 percent of the smallest 100 members of the Fortune 500 have also set goals, up from 25 percent in 2014, and 48 percent of the entire list.

Many are finding that renewable energy isn't just cleaner, it's also often cheaper. About 190 Fortune 500 companies collectively reported about \$3.7

billion in annual savings, according to Power Forward 3.0, a report by WWF, Ceres, Calvert Research & Management and CDP.

"We're not talking about anecdotal information anymore," Marty Spitzer, a WWF senior director of climate and renewable energy in Washington, said in an interview. "We're talking about large, large savings."

Potential savings and sustainability goals prompted corporations to buy almost 3.7 gigawatts of power generated by clean-energy projects in 2015, and another 2.5 gigawatts last year,

almost all from wind and solar, according to Bloomberg New Energy Finance.

Technology companies are among the biggest buyers of clean energy. Alphabet Inc.'s Google expects to be powered entirely by clean energy this year. In January, Apple Inc. agreed to buy the output from a proposed 200-megawatt solar farm in Nevada to help power a data center in Reno, Nevada. And Salesforce.com Inc., the San Francisco-based business software company, this month said it has reached net-zero greenhouse-gas emissions. *(Source: Bloomberg)*

But it's no longer just tech companies. About 63 percent of Fortune 100 companies have clean-energy targets, according to the report. Such targets include commitments to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions and increase energy efficiency and renewable energy.

The 190 Fortune 500 companies reported emission reductions equivalent to mothballing 45 coal-fired power plants for a year, according to the report. It also found that 23 of Fortune 500 companies have 100 percent renewable-energy targets.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil price slips on bulging U.S. crude stocks, ample global supplies

Oil prices weakened further on Wednesday as data showed a rise in U.S. crude inventories and record supplies in the rest of the world cast doubt over OPEC's ability to cut output and tighten the market.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) was trading down 4 cents at \$49.52 per barrel at 0845 GMT, after gaining 0.7 percent in the previous session. The WTI price has fallen for seven of the past eight sessions.

North Sea Brent crude, the international benchmark for oil prices, eased 3 cents to \$52.07 per barrel. Brent is around 8.5 percent below its April peak.

Market players pointed to the American Petroleum Institute's (API) U.S. inventory data, issued late on Tuesday, as weighing on prices. Not only did the report show crude oil stocks rose 897,000 barrels in the week to April 21, defying expectations of a 1.7 million barrel draw, but it also showed a large build in gasoline stocks, unusual for this time of the year.

"Should these figures be mirrored by



the EIA, widespread concerns over stubbornly high OECD oil stocks will have been justified in what would be a setback to the global oil rebalancing process," analysts at PVM said.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) will issue its inventory data

at 1430 GMT on Wednesday.

Both Brent and WTI prices pared losses and came close to flat after Saudi Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said his country was interested in further talks between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and non-OPEC

producers to stabilize oil prices.

OPEC and a group of other producing countries, including Russia but excluding the United States, have pledged to cut output by 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) during the first half of the year in order to rein in years of oversupply and prop up prices.

Yet prices have largely slumped this year as U.S. inventories remained brimming and global fuel supplies set new records, despite the pledges to cut output.

The average value of the Brent crude forward curve has fallen by over \$5 per barrel since the start of the year, when an OPEC-led supply cut started.

The slump in Brent is a result of record crude oil volumes in circulation on ships around the world, despite the cuts.

Thomson Reuters Eikon shipping data showed 50 million bpd have been booked for shipment on tankers this month, up 10 percent since last December, contributing to rising stocks not just in the United States but in key markets like Japan. *(Source: Reuters)*

BHP Billiton puts U.S. shale gas assets on the block again

BHP Billiton has put its Fayetteville shale gas assets in the United States back on the block, the world's largest miner said on Wednesday, as it seeks to focus on more lucrative opportunities in oil.

BHP first tried to sell the Fayetteville assets more than two years ago, having made the shale gas investment in 2011 before writing it down by \$2.8 billion a year later after gas prices dropped.

But it shelved the idea of a sale in February 2015, saying at the time it

planned to "maximize value" of the assets. BHP valued the business at \$919 million at the end of 2016, according to its annual accounts.

In a corporate operations review published on Wednesday, BHP said the gas-rich Fayetteville field in Arkansas was under review and that it was now "considering all options, including divestment".

Macquarie Bank analysts in a note said divestment of Fayetteville was the

most likely course of action.

Analysts have linked the revived sale to activist investor Elliott Management's call earlier this month for BHP to spin off its petroleum division, much as BHP did with the aluminum and other non-core operations when it created South 32 in 2015. BHP has rejected the call by Elliott, which claims to hold a 4.1 percent interest in BHP's U.K.-listed shares.

BHP on Wednesday denied any link between Elliott's move and prospects for

Fayetteville including divestment, and said the move was instead part of an ongoing review.

Within the petroleum business, BHP has long made it clear it intends to focus on liquid products in the United States, a more lucrative business than dry gas.

In February, it agreed to spend \$2.2 billion to fund its share of investment for the second phase of the Mad Dog oil-field in the Gulf of Mexico. *(Source: Reuters)*

Trafigura buys more naphtha; snaps up Reliance cargo

European trader Trafigura has bought 55,000 tons of naphtha from India's Reliance Industries for end-May loading from Sikka, adding to its unusually high purchases of the fuel from the Singapore cash market, traders said on Wednesday.

Trafigura paid a slightly above \$16 a ton premium to Middle East quotes on a free-on-board (FOB) basis for the cargo, making this one of the highest premiums for Reliance Industries since the sales of its March cargoes.

From April 7-26, Trafigura has bought more than 970,000 tons of naphtha for June to July delivery, making up more than 80 percent of all volumes transacted this month.

Japan's Itochu, which this week paid high premiums for India's Bharat Petroleum Corp cargoes, has sold more than 450,000 tons to Trafigura while oil major BP sold around 300,000 tons to the European trader.

The reasons behind the strong buying were unclear and Trafigura declined to comment in the previous session about the unusual purchases when contacted.

Traders not related to the company said Trafigura may be short of supplies due to heavy demand from Latin America although this could not be independently confirmed. *(Source: Reuters)*

U.S. govt. approves company to export 2.21bln cubic feet of natural gas daily

Golden Pass, a U.S. company that operates a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in the state of Texas, has been granted a license to export 2.21 billion cubic feet per day, the U.S. Department of Energy announced in a press release on Tuesday.

The deal allows exports to any country that is not subject to U.S. sanctions, including nations that do not have trade agreements with the United States.

"This announcement is another example of President [Donald] Trump's leadership in making the United States an energy dominant force," U.S. Energy Secretary Rick Perry stated in the release.

The deal with Golden Pass is the latest in a series of licenses authorizing LNG exports of 18.2 billion cubic feet daily from other terminals now under construction in the states of Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Georgia and Maryland.

When completed, the new terminals will position the United States to be the world's dominant LNG exporter, the release concluded. *(Source: Reuters)*

Oil supermajors dig way out of doldrums as cash poised to surge

Big Oil's struggle against crude's collapse is starting to ease, giving some companies enough cash to pay shareholders without piling on more debt.

The world's five biggest non-state oil producers, known as the supermajors, probably increased cash from operations by a combined 67 percent last quarter from a year earlier, according to HSBC Bank Plc analysts Gordon Gray and Kim Fustier. That may allow some to cover dividends and capital spending without borrowing for the first time since 2012, they said.

In the past three years, Exxon Mobil Corp., Royal Dutch Shell Plc, Chevron Corp., Total SA and BP Plc have canceled billions of dollars of projects, dumped thousands of jobs and amassed towering debts to weather crude's decline. While prices are still half their 2014 level, a partial recovery, coupled with spending cuts, contributed to "sweet-spot" conditions in the first quarter that probably drove up earnings, according to Morgan Stanley.

The "macro environment was favorable for the majors during the first quarter," said Martijn Rats, an analyst at Morgan Stanley in London, citing higher prices and resilient refining margins. "In addition, cost reductions are still coming through," helping bring a "significant improvement in net income," he said.

The five companies combined are expected to more than double first-quarter net income, according to analyst estimates compiled by Bloomberg. Chevron will return to profit while Shell's earnings will rise to a seven-quarter high, the estimates show. Exxon, Total and BP may post their biggest profits since September 2015.

The big five oil producers also operate refineries and petrochemical plants, giving them a safety net during crude's downturn when earnings from oil and gas production sank. Refining margins rose during the worst of the slump as the cost of the raw material -- crude oil -- fell while demand for fuels stayed strong. Margins have since narrowed but remain buoyant.

Yet doubts remain. Oil's recovery has stalled this year as a revival in U.S. shale production threatens an attempt by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies to eliminate a global oversupply. Although benchmark Brent crude rose more than 50 percent last year, prices are down about 9 percent in 2017.

Amid concern that OPEC and its partners will fail to reduce stockpiles significantly, energy companies have performed worst in the MSCI World Index this year, tumbling from pole position in 2016.

The majors won't come roaring back until oil prices rally further, according to Alastair Syme, an analyst at Citigroup Inc.

Dividend yields at Shell and BP, which fell through 2016 as crude started to recover, have risen this year, typically a signal that investors fear a cut in payouts.

BP declined to comment when contacted by email. Shell referred Bloomberg to Chief Executive Officer Ben van Beurden's comments earlier this year, when he said free cash flow "more than covered our cash dividend" in the fourth quarter.

France's Total will kick off the supermajors' first-quarter earnings season on April 27, with Exxon and Chevron following the next day. BP will report on May 2 and Shell on May 4.

"You'd hope by now the cost and spending cuts start showing up in the accounts," said Iain Armstrong, an analyst at Brewin Dolphin Ltd., which owns BP and Shell shares. "Benefits of oil prices will be a major factor and how much of that the companies have been able to capture with lower costs." *(Source: Bloomberg)*

Win or lose, Marine Le Pen is a nightmare for the EU

By Pieter Cleppe

France has spoken, for now. The country voted Sunday in the first round of its presidential elections, after weeks of campaigning that have been dogged by scandals, gaffes and surprises.

Though the first round treated voters to 11 candidates to pick from, in the year following Britain's decision to leave the European Union and American voters sending Donald Trump to the White House, one candidate has dominated media coverage: the populist, nationalist, far-right Marine Le Pen.

As had been expected for some time, Le Pen has made the final round, where she will face the centrist Emmanuel Macron. Macron's centrism and pro-European leanings will now inevitably frame the run-off as an effective referendum on France's future relationship with the EU. As a founding EU member, this will likely be giving political leaders in Brussels reason to worry.



Le Pen's National Front Party has a long history of euro skepticism and promotes a number of policies that are anathema to the high-minded principles behind the European project.

In recent years, Le Pen has attempted to soften both her image and the position of her party on the matter of France's future in the EU.

At one time, the National Front was in favor of abandoning the euro, plain and simple. More recently, she has said she would organize a referendum on France's common currency membership.

Now, she has specified that she would try to renegotiate France's EU membership over six months. If that attempt fails, she'll hold a referendum.

Could she hold a referendum, and what could happen if she does?

Even if she does win the presidency, Le Pen would be wise to keep the champagne on ice for a while. She is unlikely to get a majority in the French parliamentary elections, due to be held June 11, and would therefore face a hostile -- probably center-right -- government standing in the way of executing her plans -- and holding a referendum.

Still, she would be able to call a nonbinding referendum without the approval of the government.

If the French people were to vote to keep the euro -- which is likely if you believe French opinion polls -- she would stand down, given then that "70% of my project cannot be put in place."

If a majority in France voted to leave the EU and the eurozone, it's constitutionally illegal for France to leave, as its constitution states "the Republic is part of the European Union." So a French EU exit would require a burdensome constitutional change.

■ Frexit and the economy

Of course, all of these legal considerations regarding EU membership will be of minor importance should France actually decide to leave the eurozone. The economic chaos it would likely cause would be the top priority for everyone in France and across the continent.

The French Central Bank has estimated that refinancing French public debt outside of the eurozone would cost more than 30 billion euros (\$32 billion) in additional annual interest.

According to Le Pen, exit from the euro would not result in economic "catastrophe." She has stressed she wants France to leave the eurozone in the best possible circumstances, saying she does not want to "break the dishes," and suggesting it should happen through consultation with other European countries she considers to be "suffering" from euro membership, predicting that Italy, Spain and Greece would join France.

Even a moderate President Le Pen is trouble for EU.

If France votes to stay in the eurozone but Le Pen doesn't stand down, some of her other proposals are hard to square with anything for which the EU stands. Look at her protectionist proposals, such as imposing an import tax of 3%.

Everything really would be on the table if Le Pen is elected, given the political damage it would do to the EU and the eurozone: projects that are completely reliant on political goodwill.

With regard to Schengen, things may get serious right from the start. She has just made clear that, if elected, she would immediately suspend France's membership of the border-free zone.

The European Commission has already stretched the possibility of suspending Schengen, but proper border checks -- with all the traffic jams they would cause, as witnessed when they were implemented between Croatia and Slovenia some weeks ago -- are bound to create a lot of economic damage right away.

Brussels may have avoided what German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schauble called the nightmare scenario of the final round being between Marine Le Pen and left-wing Eurosceptic Jean Luc Mélenchon.

But even if Le Pen is ultimately thwarted, the success of her campaign and the flames it has fanned will ensure that any celebrations are short-lived.

(Source: CNN)

Why a napkin is not the answer to the Libyan crisis

By Mustafa Fetouri

According to a recent report in a British newspaper, the Trump administration is considering a plan to partition Libya to bring about peace and a new political settlement.

The Guardian reported that Sebastian Gorka, a White House policy official, has suggested the idea of dividing Libya into the three regions it had comprised before it broke from Italy's colonial chains in 1947 and became fully independent four years later. Those three regions would be Cyrenaica in the east, Tripolitania in the west and Fezzan in the south.

■ Discussing the issue

The report suggested that Gorka drew a projected map of Libya on a napkin while discussing the issue with a European diplomat in the days before Donald Trump was inaugurated as the American president. The diplomat is said to have described the proposed partitioning of the country as "the worst solution for Libya".

Libya has been in chaos for almost six years, without a functioning central government and increasingly dominated by armed militias and criminal gangs. It has become a haven for terror groups. The Government of National Accord, supported by the United Nations, has brokered a peace deal, but has not been able to push it forward, let alone govern the country, since it was set up in December 2015.

Trump is expected to play a more active role in bringing about a political solution in Libya, so that a national government could fight terrorism and contain illegal immigration, which are the two most important objectives of the United States and its European Union allies.

So why is carving up Libya such a bad idea?

First, tribes and clans are the cornerstone of Libyan society, making them too complicated to mess with. Intertribal relations are very strong and the social connections among clans and families are stronger still, making it almost impossible for the general population to accept the idea of dividing them up into separate countries.

Second, oil is the main source of income. The oil-producing region is exactly in the middle of the country, between east and west. Dividing up such a vital natural resource would be a complicated and difficult process during peaceful times, let alone during turbulent periods.



Trump is expected to play a more active role in bringing about a political solution in Libya, so that a national government could fight terrorism and contain illegal immigration, which are the two most important objectives of the United States and its European Union allies.

The third reason why division is not a good political option is that the idea of a divided Libya has been rejected in the past and has no traction now.

Most political parties in eastern Libya do not support it, while the majority of political parties in the west and south do not even like to discuss it. Indeed, there is only a small number of people calling for more independence for the three regions, but such a minority cannot win a serious political debate, let alone a national contest.

■ Political approach

The Trump administration is expected to formulate a political approach towards Libya that preferences more Russian involvement. By contrast, the Obama administration strongly supported the GNA. This was also the position of its major European allies, including France

and Germany.

Many EU countries fear that the Trump team is likely to withdraw such support from the GNA and start rapprochement with Russia to renegotiate the UN-brokered deal.

Russia has been engaged with the Syrian crisis and has, historically, given little thought to Libya. However, that appears to be changing.

Last January, field marshal Khalifa Haftar, commander of the Libyan armed forces backed by the Tobruk-based government, was received on board the Admiral Kuznetsov, the Russian flagship, while it was sailing back from its Syrian mission.

Last November, Haftar visited Moscow and met Sergei Lavrov, foreign minister, to seek his help in lifting the arms embargo imposed on Libya by the UN in March

2011 when trouble first erupted against the Qaddafi regime.

Unless developments in the Syrian war upset the political status quo between Washington and Moscow, it is likely that both will find more common ground in Libya. The Russians will not accept any talk of dividing the country since it will neither bring peace or stability. Both Russia and the U.S. worry about Libya becoming a bigger base for international terror groups. Both should understand that Libya will be easy prey for ISIL if the country is divided. Even if Gorka continues to press forward his idea of redrawing the Libyan map, it is unlikely that he will find allies among the EU, let alone among the Libyan political factions, who mostly quarrel about anything except the need for their country to remain in one piece.

(Source: The National)

Let the world condemn Duterte

A Filipino lawyer formally asked the International Criminal Court on Monday to charge President Rodrigo Duterte and 11 officials with mass murder and crimes against humanity over the extrajudicial killings of thousands of people in the Philippines over the past three decades. The I.C.C. should promptly open a preliminary investigation into the killings.

The lawyer, Jude Josue Sabio, filed the complaint in his own name, but he also represents two men who have publicly said they were paid members of the death squad that Duterte set up in Davao City when he was the mayor to hunt down drug dealers. After he was elected president last year, Duterte took the killing campaign nationwide, effectively declaring an open season for police and vigilantes on drug dealers and users. In all, Sabio said in the 77-page filing, more than 9,400 people have been killed, most of them poor young men, but also bystanders, children and political opponents.

Sabio is not the first to accuse Duterte of mass killings — so have Human Rights Watch, in 2009; Amnesty International, this January; and some brave Filipino politicians. The I.C.C. chief prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda,



declared last October that the court was "closely following" developments in the Philippines.

There are reasons why the I.C.C. might be reluctant to go after Duterte. He is enormously popular with many Filipinos, for whom narcotics are a major scourge.

The court, moreover, was created to prosecute

cases of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes among member countries only when their national courts are unwilling or unable to do so. Those conditions might be met if the Philippines House of Representatives, dominated by Duterte's allies, quashes, as expected, an impeachment motion filed by an opposition lawyer. But there is already more than enough evidence for a preliminary investigation, which would send an unmistakable signal to Duterte that he may eventually have to answer for his crimes, and would encourage governments to take measures against him, such as imposing tariffs on Philippine goods.

And if the findings of Sabio, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and politicians, or the confessions of the former death squad members, are not enough evidence, there are Duterte's savage words. "Hitler massacred three million Jews. Now, there is three million drug addicts. I'd be happy to slaughter them," he told reporters in one of his most outrageous statements (and misstating the figure for the Holocaust, which is six million).

(Source: The NYT)

A child in Yemen dies every 10 minutes

The head of the United Nations stood in front of a room full of global leaders Tuesday and made a plaintive plea: "On average, a child under the age of 5 dies of preventable causes in Yemen every 10 minutes," António Guterres said.

"This means 50 children in Yemen will die during today's conference, and all of those deaths could have been prevented."

Whether his last claim is true is certainly up for debate, but what Guterres is asking for would most certainly help: \$2.1 billion in funding to combat deepening hunger and disease across Yemen.

After two years of civil war, Yemen, the Arab world's poorest country, is facing collapse. Its currency, agriculture, infrastructure, health care and even the most basic social cohesion have been

destroyed by the war, and about 7 million people are on the brink of starvation, while two-thirds of the population relies on humanitarian aid to survive.

"We are witnessing the starving and the crippling of an entire generation," Guterres said. "We must act now to save lives."

A half-million children are so severely malnourished that they are likely to die if they do not receive urgent care, said the UN children's agency and the World Food Program.

The fundraising conference in Geneva has already raised \$1.1 billion, raising hopes that by the end of this year the UN's goal could be reached. A broader call for \$4.4 billion to address food crises in Yemen, South Sudan, Somalia and Nigeria is still unfulfilled.

In an irony, Saudi Arabia has made

the biggest public funding pledge, promising \$150 million for Yemen. Much of the physical destruction in the country has been wrought by a Saudi-led air campaign — backed by the United States and others — that human rights activists say has indiscriminately targeted civilians. Kuwait, Germany and the United States have pledged lesser sums.

The war in Yemen has pitted the Saudi-backed government against a northern Yemeni group known as the Houthis. The Houthis control the capital, Sanaa, as well as much of Yemen's western coast, including the pivotal port of Hodeida. Yemen imports 90 percent of its food, and 70 percent of that comes through Hodeida.

Reports have swirled recently about an impending assault on the city, Yemen's fourth-largest, by Saudi forces. About

100,000 internally displaced people live there. The Saudis claim that the port serves as an entry point for weapons supplies to Houthis, but aid agencies have voiced skepticism at the claim, given the blockade and the fact that the United Nations inspects each arriving ship.

The trigger for famine in Yemen could be an assault on Hodeida. If even the severely restricted flow of food is disrupted and fighting limits access to aid agencies, those living day-to-day will be without any other option.

"We are concerned about facilities in Yemen because at this stage we can't afford to even lose one bridge or one road network, let alone lose a major facility like the Hodeida port," Muhanad Hadi, regional director for the World Food Program, told Reuters.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Trump's Syria strike paves way for another ME war

By Mina Ahmadi

It has been announced that US' recent missile attack on Syria was a reaction to an alleged use of chemical weapon by this Arab country against its own people in Khan Sheikhoun region in Idlib in northern Syria, something that Damascus robustly denies.

Undoubtedly, Khan Sheikhoun has given a new pretext to the US to repeat its threats and make them operational as Washington attacked Syria by its missiles a day after the incident.

The experts believe that US President Donald Trump has ordered airstrikes on Syria in order to attract the public opinion and compensate the defeat of the terrorists in Iraq and Syria.

These days, Washington has followed controversial policies in the region leading to fanning the flames of tensions and having no major consequences but destruction and chaos.

"Tonight, I ordered a targeted military strike on the air base in Syria from where the chemical attack was launched," the US president said.

"It is in this vital national security interest of the United States to prevent and deter the spread and use of deadly chemical weapons," Trump said.

Former head of the Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council Seyyed Hossein Mousavian believes that Trump's Syria strike puts America at the precipice of another Middle East war and the consequences could unleash something worse than what followed the invasion of Iraq.

In an article published in Huffingtonpost, Mousavian has warned against dangerous consequences that US missile strike on Syria could have after the dust settles and the instability that it might bring with it in the months ahead.

"A week after the Trump administration made the decision to launch a cruise missile strike against Syria's Shayrat air base, it is no surprise that the attack dangerously increased tensions in the Syrian civil war and emboldened forces that aim to maintain a state of chaos in the country," Mousavian wrote.

"But what remains to be seen is what happens after the dust settles and the real impacts of the attack come to a head, especially in the country and surrounding region. So far, all signs point to more instability and less diplomacy in the months and years ahead, with the potential for an all-out Middle East war seeming increasingly likely".

■ G7 Gathering in Italy

In an aim to oust al- Assad rather than questing a diplomatic solution and end supporting terrorist groups as well as leaving the future of Syria to its people without meddling in election, foreign ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) major industrialized nations convened in Italy aimed at put pressure on Russia to



The experts believe that US President Donald Trump has ordered airstrikes on Syria in order to attract the public opinion and compensate the defeat of the terrorists in Iraq and Syria.

break its ties with al-Assad after the suspected chemical attack in Idlib province.

Britain and Canada said sanctions could be tightened on Moscow if it continued to back Assad as the civil war, now in its sixth year, drags on.

"I think we have to show a united position and that in these negotiations we should do all we can to get Russia out of Assad's corner, at least to the point that they are ready to participate in finding a political solution," German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said.

■ Fact-Finding Committee

The Islamic Republic of Iran has adopted a clear stance regarding the chemical attack in Syria, says the Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qasemi, underlying that:

"Iran strongly condemned the chemical attack in Syria and was the first to ask for formation of an international fact-finding committee to look into the issue."

He said that with great determination Iran put forward the issue of creating a fact-finding committee on Syria and Tehran agreed on the issue with its neighbors as well as Damascus.

What happened in Syria was suspicious, the Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

Head of Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission Alaeddin Boroujerdi said that the US polices in Syria are doomed to failure and the impacts of the US and Saudi Arabia defeats in Syria and Yemen are quite evident.

■ Unacceptable Move:

In a telephone call with his Kazakh counterpart, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif described US' unilateral move against Syria as unacceptable, underlining the need for impartial international probe into chemical attack in that

country.

Meanwhile, in another telephone conversation with the Venezuelan foreign minister, Zarif referred to recent developments in Syria, calling on the Non-Aligned Movement to be more active in Damascus developments. Venezuela is the present rotating president of the NAM.

During another phone calls with his Brazilian and Bolivian counterparts respectively, Zarif condemned chemical attack in Syria as well as US' unilateral move against the country urging for an international impartial investigation into it.

■ UN's Khan Sheikhoun Resolution



The US has adopted a new hegemonic approach of using never-ending threats against other countries and unleashing the military forces to unlawfully attack nations around the world.

On April 13, Russia vetoed a resolution by US, UK and France to the UN Security Council to examine the use of chemical weapons in Khan Sheikhoun in Syria.

Russia, as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, vetoed the US-backed resolution while Moscow last week presented a draft resolution to the Council calling for inspection of the incident in Khan Sheikhoun.

Through their draft resolution, the Western countries did call on the Syrian government to give all information about its military operations on April 4 when the chemical attack occurred in Khan Sheikhoun; such a call brought Russia's disagreement.

The Western media and officials unfoundedly try to condemn Syria for the alleged use of chemical weapons in Khan Sheikhoun, while the Russian and Syrian officials stress that blast of terrorists' ammunition depot in that region has caused the incident.

Now after about six years of war in Syria, what have been seen from the US governments and their double standard politics as well as the US authorities' biased and paradoxical statements?

What is seen from such policies is nothing but bloodshed and carnage of innocent people? In fact, the US is trying to cast its ominous shadow all over the world to run countries and plunder their resources.

The US has adopted a new hegemonic approach of using never-ending threats against other countries and unleashing the military forces to unlawfully attack nations around the world.

It is expected from Washington and officials to respect toward nations and their interests instead of creating warmongering policies toward them.

Tell us why we're at war, President Trump

By Peter Van Buren

People speak of Afghanistan as "our generation's" Vietnam, a quagmire, a war that goes on simply because it has been going on.

The Afghan war is dragging into being our generation's, and soon the next generation's Vietnam as well, over a decade and a half old. There are troops deploying now that were two years old when the conflict started. There are fathers and sons deploying together. Bin Laden's been dead for years.

With a slight break, the current war in Iraq has been ongoing for some 14 years. If you want to think of it in a longer view, Trump is now the fifth consecutive president to make war on that country. Saddam's been dead for years.

And though of more recent vintage, the war in Syria appears both open-ended in duration and ramping up in U.S. involvement. If Assad died tomorrow, the war would likely only intensify, as the multiple parties in the fight vie to take over after him.

The reason we're fighting all of these places and more can't



still be "terrorism," can it? That has sort of been the reason for the past 16 years so you'd think we would have settled that. Regime change? A lot of that has also happened, without much end game, and nobody seems to know if that does or ever did apply in Syria to begin with. America can't be under threat after all these years, right? I mean, world's most powerful military and all that.

So maybe it's time for the current president to tell us why we're still fighting in all of these wars. Because previous presidents' track records on explaining to the ever-bloodthirsty American public why we are fighting is poor. Perhaps history has a lesson for us?

So maybe it's time for the current president to tell us why we're still fighting in all of these wars. Because previous presidents' track records on explaining to the ever-bloodthirsty American public why we are fighting is poor. Perhaps history has a lesson for us?

When I was a kid, successive presidents told us we had to fight in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, because if we didn't fight them over there, we'd have to fight them on the beaches of California. We believed. It was a lie.

I was a teenager during the Cold War, several presidents told us we needed to create massive stockpiles of nuclear weapons, garrison the world, maybe invade Cuba, fight covert wars and use the CIA to overthrow democratically elected governments and replace them with dictators, or the Russians would destroy us. We believed. It was a lie.

When I was in college our president told us that we needed to fight in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua or the Sandinistas would come to the United States. He told us Managua was closer to Washington DC than LA was. He told us we needed to fight in Lebanon, Grenada and Libya to protect ourselves. We believed. It was a lie.

When I was a little older our president told us how evil Saddam Hussein was, how his soldiers bayoneted babies in Kuwait. He told us Saddam was a threat to America. He told us we needed to invade Panama to oust a dictator to protect America. We believed. It was a lie.

Another president told us we had to fight terrorists in Somalia, as well as bomb Iraq, to protect ourselves. We believed. It was a lie.

The one after him told us that because a bunch of Saudis from a group loosely tied to Afghanistan attacked us on 9/11, we needed to occupy that country and destroy the Taliban, who had not attacked us. The Taliban are still there 15 years later, ISIS now too, and so is the American military. We believed. It was a lie.

After that the same President told us Saddam Hussein threatened every one of our children with weapons of mass destruction, that the smoking gun would be a mushroom cloud, that Saddam was in league with al Qaeda. We believed. It was a lie.

In 2011 the president and his secretary of state told us we needed regime change in Libya, to protect us from an evil dictator. We believed. It was a lie.

In August 2014 the same president told us we needed to intervene again in Iraq, on a humanitarian mission to save the Yazidis. No boots on the ground, a simple, limited act only the United States could conduct, and then we'd leave. We believed. It was a lie.

That same president later told us Americans will need to fight and die in Syria. He says this is necessary to protect us, because if we do not defeat Islamic State over there, they will come here, to what we now call without shame or irony The Homeland. We believed. It was a lie.

So with a new guy in the White House, maybe it's time to renew the question. Perhaps the media can take a day off from what borders on sexual pleasure gushing over the latest super bomb and ask the president a few simple questions: why are we fighting, what is the goal, when will we get there? Someone should have asked a long time ago, but since no one did, this is as good a time as any.

Federal judge: Public has no right to know about Dakota pipeline spill risks



Energy Transfer Partners, the pipeline's developer, has argued that keeping information regarding spill risks from the public is essential, as it could be "useful to vandals and terrorists." However, the move is looking more like a way to hide any potential negative impact on the environment.

While the fight to prevent the controversial construction of the Dakota Access pipeline has largely faded from the minds of most Americans, the pipeline's parent company – Energy Transfer Partners – is still hard at work seeking to further undermine civilian and environmental protections to ensure the "smooth" operation of their \$3.8-billion-investment in the project.

In spite of long-standing concerns that the pipeline could threaten the safety of drinking water for 17 million people, a federal judge has now given Energy Transfer Partners legal permission to hide information

about which areas of the pipeline are at risk for spills.

Last Friday, U.S. District Judge James Boasberg ruled that information regarding these risks should be shielded from public view, but added that Energy Transfer Partners must make public certain details related to spill response measures, as well as the names of waterways that could be affected.

Energy Transfer Partners previously ar-

gued in court that keeping such information private was essential, as it could be "useful to vandals and terrorists" or others "with malicious intent to damage the pipeline." The Standing Rock Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux indigenous American tribes, whose primary water sources are directly threatened by the pipeline, have argued that the disclosure of such information is essential, as it would strengthen their call for a more extensive environmental review of the project.

Boasberg rejected the tribes' arguments, stating "the asserted interest in limiting intentionally inflicted harm outweighs the tribes' generalized interests in public disclosure and scrutiny," despite that fact that pipeline safety experts have repeatedly found the environmental review of the Dakota Access pipeline to have been "seriously deficient."

This latest court case mirrors the back-and-forth that took place between Energy Transfer Partners and indigenous tribes last year, resulting in an intense public protest where indigenous people were supported by environmental and social justice groups. Encampments were formed in areas where the pipeline was set to cross under the Mis-

souri River, with the intention of preventing the pipeline's full completion and forcing the company to reroute the pipeline around the primary water source for the Sioux and millions of others who rely on the river for drinking water.

These camps united the tribes, military veterans and foreign activists, but were met with opposition by private security officers hired by Energy Transfer Partners, as well as state police. By the time this latest court hearing was under way, 750 anti-pipeline protesters had been arrested.

The Obama administration had attempted to calm the situation by issuing "voluntary" injunctions on the pipeline's construction, but since these injunctions were not legally binding, construction continued anyway, allowing the full blame for the advancement of the project to be placed on Trump, a strong advocate for the fossil fuel industry. Trump had between \$500,000 and \$1 million invested in Energy Transfer Partners in 2015, which many took as a conflict of interest, considering the controversial nature of the issue. Trump did, however, divest his stake in the company before becoming president.

Despite the words of politicians and assurances from Energy Transfer Partners, oil spills in North Dakota are commonplace, with the Center for Biological Diversity estimating that the state has averaged around four major pipeline spills annually since 1996. This latest ruling is set to create even more risks for those who stand to lose the most in the event of more spills.

(Source: MintPress)

In spite of long-standing concerns that the pipeline could threaten the safety of drinking water for 17 million people, a federal judge has now given Energy Transfer Partners legal permission to hide information about which areas of the pipeline are at risk for spills.

Obama's return to public life: charming but flat

By Matthew Cooper

Barack Obama's return to the stage on Monday was a reminder of some of the good qualities he brought to public life — his keen intelligence, broad smile and laid-back charisma — that are not associated with his successor. He was charming while speaking at the University of Chicago about how to get young people more involved in public life. "What's been going on while I've been gone?" he joked when coming on stage. Joshing easily with students about their volunteer and electoral work, he shared stories of his own days as a community organizer. The entire event, with its multihued panel of young activists (including one Republican), felt like a throwback to, well, the days before January 20.

But if the event was inspiring and Obama gracious — avoiding using the word Trump — it was also a sign that the 44th president's post-presidency is still very much a work in progress. He'll be engaging in a variety of activities, including making a lot of money. Obama's event Monday was free, but he'll soon start delivering speeches for a reported \$250,000 and more, represented by the Harry Walker Agency. He's also writing a book and raising money — to build a library and presidential center at the University of Chicago, and an institute at Columbia University, his alma mater. This is what modern presidents do. Gerald Ford inaugurated the big buck-raking of sitting on corporate boards, while Jimmy Carter was known for peripatetic do-goodism and volunteer work, George W. Bush the quiet work of issues close to him — like aiding veterans and reducing HIV in Africa — and Bill Clinton the high-flying foundation that leveraged his fame to take on everything from childhood obesity to earthquake relief. Obama is part of this continuum.

But his plan to ease the way for young people to enter politics and volunteerism is a different emphasis, and in some ways curious. He's pushing on an open door: There's nothing blocking students from activism, something that is evident at campuses across the country.



■ When politics is exciting

Youth voting rates are low, but they do spike at times when politics is exciting — as it was in 2008, when Obama first ran for president and young people propelled his victory over Hillary Clinton in the Democratic primaries and then over John McCain, the Republican nominee, in the general election. If you try to imagine Lyndon Johnson using his short post-presidency period — he died four years after leaving office in 1969 — to encourage students to care about the world, it would be tragicomic. The Texan was hated on campuses, pilloried for the Vietnam War. "Hey, Hey, LBJ, How many kids did you kill today?" was a common refrain during his term.

Young people were on fire; they didn't need a president

to encourage them. The idea that a middle-aged former president is now necessary to get those darn kids to put down their cat videos and get involved is a noble sentiment, but it also misses the point. Young people get involved when they feel that politics matters to them, not when they're encouraged to do it.

To be fair, creating paths to public service, whether it's Americorps, the volunteer program founded by Bill Clinton and continued under Bush and Obama, or the Peace Corps, created by president John F. Kennedy, is a noble thing. JFK had no post-presidency, of course, and so the guardians of his legacy helped create the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University — a fulcrum of American political life.

Institutions that give people a path to pursue civic causes whether as a career or as volunteers make sense. Pleading with them to participate seem less inspiring.

■ Carefully selected group

The carefully selected group of young people who joined Obama on stage were inspiring — the Hispanic vet who is now a university researcher, the Indian-American seeking office, the young woman from a Chicago low-income neighborhood who now has her doctorate, and so on. But ultimately the familiar rap on American public life — we don't talk to each other enough, young people don't vote enough, the decline of "mediating institutions" like the PTA and the union hall and so on — seemed familiar and not easily ameliorated through exhortation.

It was in his opening comments that Obama mentioned an issue that really may make a difference: political gerrymandering. Redrawing political boundaries to advantage one side is as old as the Republic, but the combination of technological innovations in demography and cartography and an abandonment of unspoken norms now makes it possible for Republicans to dominate state legislatures and Congress in ways that might have been inconceivable 30 years ago.

The Supreme Court will hear arguments this spring about political gerrymandering and what should be the limits. The court may decline to issue an important ruling, preferring instead to leave the political process well enough alone, but Obama, along with his former attorney general, Eric Holder, have made it clear that they are going to stay active in the issue. That's commendable; it's an important topic. But it's also more partisan than Obama's above-the-fray tone would suggest.

At 55 and with a rigorous diet and exercise routine, Obama is likely to be an ex-president for 30 or even 40 years, so there's no sense in judging him following one performance three months after leaving office. But this first step, while charming and welcome, wasn't particularly inspiring.

(Source: Newsweek)

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Don't take fatigue lying down

By Matthew Solan

Have you ever had one of those days where you are so weary, you can't seem to do anything except binge-watch Netflix?

Sure, everyone gets tired sometimes, and often bounces back after a quick rest or a good night's sleep. However, if bouts of fatigue occur more often and last longer, you shouldn't ignore them.

"Older adults may chalk up fatigue to aging, but there is no reason you should battle ongoing tiredness," says Dr. Suzanne Salamon, a geriatric physician with Harvard-affiliated Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

Here are signs that you should take your tiredness seriously:

- Inability to do activities you enjoy
- Waking up exhausted, even after a good night's sleep
- Not feeling motivated to begin the day
- Sudden bouts of exhaustion that go away and then return

This type of fatigue can affect your health in many ways. You may have less energy to exercise. You may have trouble concentrating, staying alert, and remembering things. You may anger easily and become more socially isolated.

It's worth checking in with your doctor

Fatigue also could signal a medical condition, according to Dr. Salamon, and you should consult your doctor to see if you have any of the following issues.

- Anemia. This occurs when your blood has too few red blood cells or those cells have too little hemoglobin, a protein that transports oxygen through the bloodstream. The result is a drop in energy levels.
- Heart disease. Heart disease can cause the heart to pump blood less efficiently and lead to fluid in the lungs. This can cause shortness of breath and reduce the oxygen supply to the heart and lungs, making you tired.
- Sleep problems. Sleep apnea is characterized by pauses in your breathing, often lasting several seconds, or shallow breathing while you sleep. It is common among older adults and those who are overweight. Another sleep-related issue is an overactive bladder, which forces repeated nighttime bathroom trips. Either of these can disturb your sleep enough to leave you feeling tired during the day.
- Medication. Certain medications can make you feel tired, such as blood pressure drugs, statins, antidepressants, antihistamines, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, and cold medications. "People react to medications differently and they often end up taking more as they get older," says Dr. Salamon. Check with your



Heart disease can cause the heart to pump blood less efficiently and lead to fluid in the lungs. This can cause shortness of breath and reduce the oxygen supply to the heart and lungs, making you tired.

doctor, especially if you have added a new medication or recently increased your dosage. "Sometimes it helps to take certain medicines, which may cause fatigue, at night rather than in the daytime," she says.

- Low-grade depression or anxiety. Mental health issues often drain energy levels. "You may suffer from depression or anxiety and not even know it," says Dr. Salamon.

• Myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS). This is a complex disorder that causes unexplained extreme fatigue, which can worsen after physical or mental activity and does not improve with rest. Its cause is unknown, but may be linked to one or more underlying issue.

Some simple ways to boost energy levels

For regular, everyday fatigue, try these tips:

- Drink a cup of coffee or tea. A little caffeine can jump-start your day, she says. "You don't need more than that, but it can offer a mental and physical lift, especially if you have trouble with morning fatigue."
- Go for a 30-minute walk. "If you can't get outside, walk around your house in bouts of 10 to 15 minutes, two to three times a day," says Dr. Salamon.
- Take a nap. A midday nap can help overcome tiredness later in the day. Keep naps to about 20 to 30 minutes, as studies have suggested that napping for 40 minutes or longer can have the opposite effect and leave you feeling groggy rather than refreshed. "Also, don't nap too late in the day or in the early evening, when it could interfere with your normal sleep schedule," says Dr. Salamon.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

Child's death increases risk for brothers or sisters dying

The grim legacy of a child's death may include a heightened risk for death among the child's siblings, the authors of a new study warn.

The increased risk was greatest among same-sex siblings or those closest in age to the deceased child, and it persisted throughout the 37-year follow-up period of the study, Yongfu Yu, Ph.D., and coauthors write in JAMA Pediatrics, published online April 24.

They urge healthcare professionals to "be aware of children's vulnerability after experiencing sibling death, especially for same-sex sibling pairs and sibling pairs with close age."

The authors of an accompanying editorial similarly draw attention to the issue, noting that the devastating impact of a sibling's death is not surprising "when one considers that the sibling relationship is often the longest-lasting interpersonal relationship that a person will have."

This study is an "important addition to the literature on sibling bereavement, providing a first look at the mortality risk among bereaved children in the general population," say the editorialists. Doctors and other healthcare professionals must "consider the needs of the entire family system and extend care when appropriate to those left to grieve the death," they stress.

The final analysis included 5,005,029 children from both countries. All children were initially placed in the unexposed group. A child would be switched to the "exposed to a sibling death" group when he or she had a sibling of any age who died between the ages of 6 months and 18 years. If multiple siblings died, exposure started from the time of the first sibling's death. All other children remained in the unexposed group, and each child was followed until death, emigration, or the end of the study period.

The main study outcomes were all-cause mortality, mortality by type of death (disease or external causes, such as accidents), and cause-specific mortality. Potential confounders included preterm birth; singleton birth; parity; Apgar score at 5 minutes; calendar period; the child's age and sex; and maternal age, socioeconomic status, smoking status, and country of birth.

Of the study participants, 55,818 (1.1%; 51.5% male) had at least one sibling who died within the study period. The exposed children had a median age of 7 years at the time of the death. Over the course of the study, 534 of children exposed to a sibling death died (0.96%), compared with 25,591 deaths among the unexposed children (0.52%).

Compared with unexposed children, the mortality rate ratio (MRR) from all causes in the exposed group was 1.71, or a 71% increase in the risk for death during the 37-year study period. This relationship remained whether the sibling had died of disease (MRR, 1.72) or an external cause (MRR, 1.65).

In an analysis of cause-specific mortality, bereaved individuals had a particularly high risk for death from the same cause as their sibling — whether that was disease or external causes (MRR, 1.91).

(Source: Medscape)



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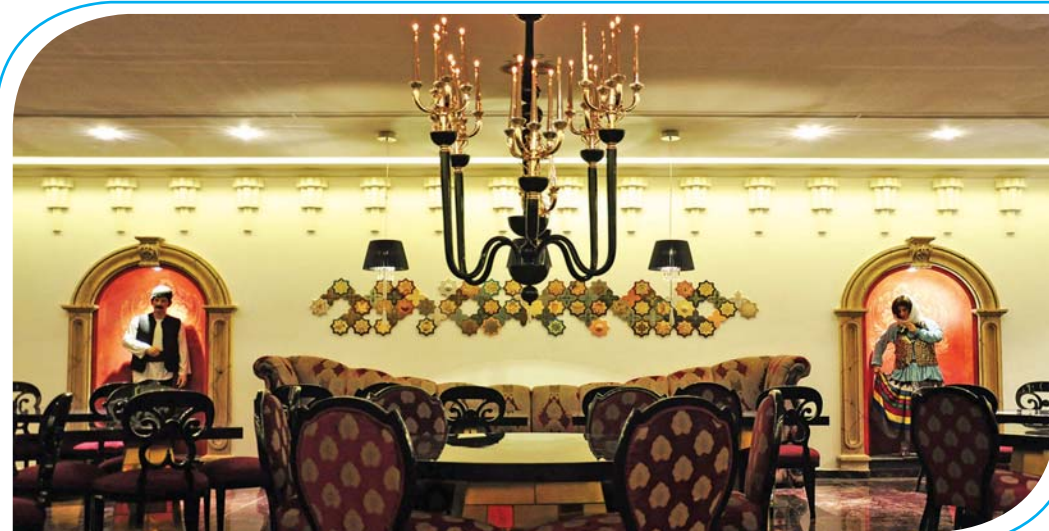


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NEWS IN BRIEF



New evidence puts man in southern Iran 35,000 years ago

HERITAGE DESK **TEHRAN** — Radiocarbon tests and archaeological findings of unearthed objects in Rostaq, a rural district in the southern province of Fars, indicate humans inhabited the region at least 35,000 years ago, Tasnim reported on Tuesday.

Iranian archeologist Hassan Moradi who led the project says the excavations revealed tens of settlements and objects that date from the Middle Paleolithic to the Islamic era.

Vestiges of burial places, qanats (aqueducts), plants, windmills, pools, houses, bathhouses, a cemetery, a cistern, a caravansary, and a mosque amongst others have been found during the excavation seasons.



Tehran museum to host workshop on Islamic decoration

HERITAGE DESK **TEHRAN** — Malek National Library and Museum Institution in downtown Tehran will hold a workshop on gereh-Sazi (literary: making knot) from April 29 to May 1.

Skilled artisan Saeid Shakuri is set to train know-how of the craft that creates intricate geometric designs using wood stripes or other substances to adorn buildings in the Islamic architecture.

Gereh-Sazi, also called girih-chini, refers to two related techniques of woodworking: either a lattice frame, which could be left plain or filled with wooden insets, colored glass, or other materials and was used for balustrades and window screens; or a mosaic panel, composed of hexagons, stars, and other geometric shapes and used to decorate the mosques, palaces, and private houses.



Handwoven crafts expo underway in Tehran

HERITAGE DESK **TEHRAN** — A vibrant exhibition of handwoven floor-covering handicrafts opened its doors to the public at the five-star Parsian Esteghlal Hotel in northern Tehran on Monday.

Nationwide craftspeople promote their carpets, rugs, gabbehs, kilims, djadjims, and tableau rugs amongst other associated products at 20 stalls installed in an area of 500 square meters, IRIB reported.

Arranged under the auspices of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, the exhibit comes to an end on April 28.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic areas of Istanbul

With its strategic location on the Bosphorus peninsula between the Balkans and Anatolia, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, Istanbul has been associated with major political, religious and artistic events for more than 2,000 years.

Its masterpieces include the ancient Hippodrome of Constantine, the 6th-century Hagia Sophia and the 16th-century Suleymaniye Mosque, all now under threat from population pressure, industrial pollution and uncontrolled urbanization.



A view of the 16th-century Suleymaniye Mosque located on the Third Hill of Istanbul, Turkey

The distinctive and characteristic skyline of Istanbul was built up over many centuries and encompasses the Hagia Sophia whose vast dome reflects the architectural and decorative expertise of the 6th century, the 15th century Fatih complex and Topkapi Palace - that was continually extended until the 19th century, the Suleymaniye Mosque complex and Sehzade Mosque complex, works of the chief architect Sinan, reflecting the climax of Ottoman architecture in the 16th century, the 17th century Blue Mosque and the slender minarets of the New Mosque near the port completed in 1664.

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list as the historic areas of Istanbul, the property embraces the Archaeological Park, at the tip of the Historic peninsula; the Suleymaniye quarter with Suleymaniye Mosque complex, bazaars and vernacular settlement around it; the Zeyrek area of settlement around the Zeyrek Mosque (the former church of the Pantocrator), and the area along both sides of the Theodosian land walls including remains of the former Blachernae Palace.

(Source: UNESCO)

Foreign tourist arrivals fetch Iran \$32b in four years

I → Back in January, CHTHO Director Zahra Ahmadipour emphasized on breathing fresh air into the sector in order to grasp boom in foreign arrivals and achieve sustainable growth.

Iran regards tourism a fountain of wealth, seeking to make the best use of positive atmosphere created in the wake of the JCPOA, a landmark nuclear deal signed between Iran and six world powers in January 2016.

Iran has preserved its topmost global ranking in the “price competitiveness” category of the 2017 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, which shows how costly it is to travel or invest in a country. The biennial report was released by the World Economic Forum earlier on April 5.

Iranian artisans attending Florence handicrafts exhibit

HERITAGE DESK **TEHRAN** — A delegation of 18 Iranian artisans is participating in the 81st International Handicrafts Trade Fair -- Mostra Internazionale dell'Artigianato, which was inaugurated in Florence, Italy, on April 22.

Native to various provinces across Iran, the attendees are experienced in crafting kilims, traditional jewelry, potteries, ceramics, marquetry, wood-carving, printing, embroidery, sea handicrafts, amongst others, an official with the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization said on Monday.

Touring & Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran in close collaboration with the CHTHO runs the



CSEN ti porta alla Mostra dell'Artigianato ed. 2017 con un tuo stand nel Padiglione “Bellezza e Benessere”



A poster for the 81st International Handicrafts Trade Fair in Florence, Italy

New archaeological finds helping Egypt’s image, tourism sector: minister

A series of major discoveries of ancient relics in Egypt is boosting the country's image and reviving the interest of foreign travelers, its tourism minister said on Tuesday.

The largest Arab country's tourism industry, a crucial source of hard currency, was wrecked by years of political turmoil after the 2011 popular uprising, and an increase in deadly Islamist violence continues to deter visitors.

But Tourism Minister Yehia Rashed told Reuters the picture was brightening thanks to a number of significant archaeological finds in Egypt including the unearthing this month of the tomb of a nobleman from more than 3,000

years ago.

“It has improved [our] image, improved the curiosity, you know the culture business is helping out the overview of Egypt,” Rashed said in an interview in Dubai.

“We’re hoping to announce many discoveries as we go on.”

The latest Islamic State militant attack - bombings at two Christian Coptic churches in Egypt - killed 45 people earlier this month but Rashed said, “What [has] happened in Egypt is no different to what happened in London downtown, what happened in Paris downtown, these things happen.

“I think it’s proven [that] Egypt is se-

cure. It is safe and tourism is back.”

Britain and Russia have yet to lift a suspension of flights from their countries to the Red Sea resort of Sharm al-Sheikh that was imposed after Islamic State brought down a Russian airliner in 2015, killing all 215 people aboard.

Egypt could attract as many as 10 million visitors this year, Rashed said, a figure in line with a target of between 10 million and 12 million he gave a year ago for 2017.

“We’re going to reach as maximum as we can,” he said.

Rashed said Egypt reached “almost 15 million room nights” in the first quarter, though he declined to say how

country's pavilion that is covering over 100 square meters, Pouya Mahmoudian, the director of the CHTHO exports department added.

The trade fair is also a prestigious venue dedicated to digital craftsmen, designers and illustrators to showcase their home decorations, graphic and interior designs.

Florence Daily News says the fair is where culture, arts, handicraft traditions and new creativities meet and shape up to become exclusive. “Unique pieces, modelled by experienced hands, dedicated to people who want to stand out. Classical, modern, ethnic, contemporary, feasible – any kind of style here finds its ideal dimension.”

The event runs through May 1.

Thailand under strain from tourist surge

Annual visits set to hit 60m by 2030 against 16m just 6 years ago



A Chinese tourist poses for pictures with a royal guard at the Grand Palace in Bangkok

transport department to push ahead with infrastructure plans. “The congestion will be more and more. This is why it’s the most opportune moment to talk of upgrading, investment and expansion of existing facilities.”

Thailand's tourism ambitions will be underscored this week as it hosts the global summit of the World Travel & Tourism Council, where David Cameron, former UK prime minister, is due to

give a keynote address. The country is also scheduled to host high-profile international events in fields from motorcycle racing to gastronomy as part of an effort to grow as a venue for speciality holidays.

Tourism is a rare source of growth for an economy hobbled by a decade of on-off political crises that included a military coup three years ago.

Government figures suggest the

sector accounts directly and indirectly for about 17.7 percent of gross domestic product, while some international estimates put the number as high as 20 percent, Mr Pongpanu said. He acknowledged the potential pitfalls of overdependence on the industry.

Holidaymakers from mainland China accounted for almost half the rise in visitor arrivals from 15.9m in 2010 to 32.6m last year, driven in part by Lost in Thailand, a 2012 road trip film that won cult status in the Middle Kingdom.

Chinese tourist numbers have continued to rise despite a jump last year in visa-on-arrival fees and a crackdown on so-called “zero dollar tours” — cut-price packages in which agents shepherd visitors on a compulsory itinerary of favored hotels and shops.

Thailand's increasing reliance on international visitors was underscored this month during a dispute over a crackdown by the Bangkok administration on the city's famous street food. Mr Pongpanu said his ministry was in discussion about the plans with the capital's authorities, which have already suggested vendors in some tourist areas will be spared.

(Source: Financial Times)

Exhibition to showcase Indonesian cultural heritage for UNESCO list opened

JAKARTA (The Jakarta Post) — Indonesia is striving for the inclusion of the phinisi shipbuilding culture from South Sulawesi, pantun poetry and the pencak silat martial art on the UNESCO world cultural heritage list, an official has said.

In a bid to push for the inclusion of the three heritage items in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) list, the Education and Cultural Ministry opened a cultural exhibition in the ministry's complex in Senayan, Central Jakarta, on Tuesday. The exhibition

will be open until April 28.

“God willing, the ‘phinisi’ will be deliberated in UNESCO's meeting from Dec. 4 to Dec. 6 in Seoul this year,” said Nadjamuddin on Tuesday, while adding that he hoped for pantun to be included in the ICH on 2018 and pencak silat on 2019.

He said the ministry already submitted the dossiers of supporting documents for the three cultural heritage items to UNESCO.



Baby whales ‘whisper’ to mothers to avoid predators: study

Newborn humpback whales and their mothers whisper to each other to escape potential predators, scientists reported Wednesday, revealing the existence of a previously unknown survival technique.

“They don’t want any unwanted listeners,” researcher Simone Videsen, lead author of a study published in Functional Ecology, told AFP.

“Potential predators such as killer whales could listen to their conversations and use that as a cue to locate the calf and predate on it.”

Whales are known for their loud calls, congregating fellow members of the pod. Male humpback whales also emit reverberating sounds to attract females during the mating season.

But this is the first time scientists have observed a unique, intimate form of communication between humpback mothers and calves.

Breeding ground

Researchers from Denmark and Australia tracked each of eight calves and two mothers for 24 hours in Exmouth Gulf, Western Australia, a breeding ground for Antarctic humpback whales seeking warmer waters to mate and give birth.

Using tags attached to the animals, the team of scientists recorded their faint squeaks and grunts.

“These signals between mother and calf are more quiet than those of normal



adult humpback whales,” Videsen said, noting they were 40 dB lower than the singing of males in the area.

While a male’s cry can resound over an area covering several kilometers, the pairs in the study could only hear each others’ calls within a distance of less than

100 meters (330 feet), she added.

The low sounds were detected when the pairs were swimming, suggesting the discreet tone helps the mammals stay together in the murky breeding waters, infested with killer whales preying on stray calves.

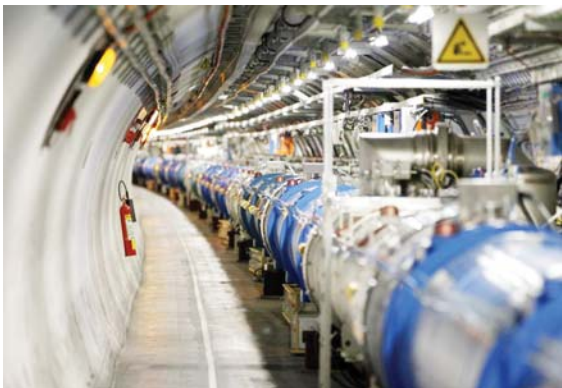
The scientific investigation also shed light on the growing problem of ocean noise pollution that can severely disrupt marine life.

Strange quarks shed light on ‘primordial soup’ just after the Big Bang

By observing collisions at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), scientists at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) — one of the world’s largest scientific research organizations — are learning more about the “primordial soup” that existed just after the Big Bang. In experiments, scientists have now shown proton collisions can produce a large number of strange particles — the first time this has been observed in collisions with anything other than heavy nuclei.

A few billionths of a second after the Big Bang — currently the most widely accepted theory of how the universe was formed — elementary particles, including protons and neutrons, did not exist. Instead, their building blocks — quarks and gluons — were in a sort of hot, primordial soup where they could roam freely. This soup is known as a quark-gluon plasma.

Studying quark-gluon plasma lets scientists investigate the properties of strong interaction — one of the four known fundamental forces of nature, the others being weak interaction, gravity and electromagnetism. But to create this plasma, scientists need extremely high temperatures and energy densities. These conditions, which can be created in the Large Hadron Collider, allow the quarks and gluons to become free. But only in certain collisions are “strange quarks” produced — the



collision of heavy nuclei.

Strange hadrons are well-known particles and include the likes of Xi, Omega and Kaon. When quark-gluon plasma is produced, there is an enhanced production of strange particles. Scientists in the ALICE collaboration at CERN — which detects and studies quark-gluon plasma — have now shown that this phenomenon, whereby a large number of strange particles containing quarks is produced, can result from the collision of protons — which are far lighter.

Producing strange quarks

Producing strange quarks with protons is easier than using heavy nuclei — meaning scientists can more readily carry out tests on the plasma that existed at the start of the universe. “We are very excited about this discovery,” Federico Antinori, spokesperson for ALICE, said in a statement. “We are again learning a lot about this primordial state of matter. Being able to isolate the quark-gluon-plasma-like phenomena in a smaller and simpler system, such as the collision between two protons, opens up an entirely new dimension for the study of the properties of the fundamental state that our universe emerged from.”

As well as providing a new avenue for research, scientists also found the production rate of strange particles increased at a faster rate than other particles generated in the same collision.

Researchers also say the findings challenge current theoretical models that do not predict an increase in strange particle production from proton collisions: “This may point towards a common underlying physics mechanism which gradually compensates the strangeness suppression in fragmentation,” the team wrote.

(Source: Newsweek)

Why some penguin populations are shrinking on Antarctica

Antarctic penguin populations have dropped more than 25 percent on average over the past two decades, according to a new report released Tuesday from the nonprofit environmental group Oceanites.

Climate change is leading to a precipitous decline in several penguin populations on the Antarctic Peninsula, according to the group, which completed the first comprehensive survey of the region’s species in 24 years using satellite images.

The Antarctic Peninsula — home to 3.2 million breedings pairs spread across five penguin species: the emperor, adélie, gentoo, macaroni, and chinstrap — is one of the fastest warming areas on the planet.

Despite a recent but brief cooling period of less than two degrees Fahrenheit since the late 1990s, the Antarctic Peninsula’s average temperature has warmed by five degrees Fahrenheit over the last 60 years, according to the Oceanites report. The winter months have seen a steeper increase — with average temperatures that are nine degrees Fahrenheit warmer than those in the late 1960s.

Threat to penguins

As a result, snow is melting faster on the peninsula, and the area has now experiences rainfall — something that was not seen until 25 years ago. Researchers say those two factors pose a deadly threat to penguin breeding grounds.

Three penguin species — the adélie,

chinstrap and gentoo — typically breed on dry ground in the summer. If they cannot find dry ground and instead breed on the wet surface, their eggs and chicks can drown or freeze.

A chinstrap penguin on Half Moon Island in the South Shetlands, off the Antarctic peninsula.

Some species have been hit particularly hard. Both the adélie penguin population on Petermann Island and the chinstrap colony at Baily Head on Deception Island declined by more than 50 percent.

Warming in the Antarctic Peninsula is also causing sea ice to melt rapidly and form more slowly, threatening the penguins’ food source. Penguins feed off krill, and krill feed off the algae that grow un-

der sea ice. Less ice means less algae for krill larvae to feed on.

Researchers argue the lack of krill is mostly responsible for the declining adélie populations, which rely heavily on the small crustaceans and less on fish relative to other penguin species. Gentoo penguin populations, in contrast, are actually increasing because they have switched from eating krill to fish.

“Adaptation is key. Gentoos survived in the winter because they adapted,” said Ron Naveen, the founder of Oceanites and the organization’s lead investigator on the report. The “chinstraps and Adélie penguins are kind of the losers because they haven’t adapted yet.”

(Source: pbs.org)

Official Reveals Implementing “NASIM” Plan of SIC in All BSI Branches

NASIM (Breeze) Plan of SARMAD Insurance Company (SIC) will be implemented in all branches of Bank Saderat Iran (BSI).

Managing Director of SARMAD Insurance Company (SIC) Esmail Delfaraz announced the above statement and said: “Bank Saderat Iran will organize NASIM Plan of the insurance company.”

A Grand Gathering of Bank and Insurance was held in the presence of Managing Director of SARMAD Insurance Company (SIC) Esmail Delfaraz, Executive Advisor to CEO of Bank Saderat Iran and Deputy BSI for Branches and Marketing Affairs Jamshid Jaam-Khaneh and also senior managers and deputies of the

two organizations.

The gathering was held with the aim of developing and promoting mutual cooperation between bank and insurance, so that activity of branches of Bank Saderat Iran was studied in the field of issuing life insurance policy and also implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in “NASIM” Plan, Public Relations Dept. of the company observed.

For his part, Managing Director of SARMAD Insurance Company (SIC) Esmail Delfaraz pointed to the necessity of strengthening cooperation between bank and insurance and expressed his special thanks to the officials who made their utmost efforts for attracting in-

surance portfolio for dear customers of the bank.

He put the number of bank branches which were trained in the field of marketing and selling standard insurances (fire, liability, accidents, incidents, and travel) at 500.

In the end, Managing Director of SARMAD Insurance Company (SIC) Esmail Delfaraz and Executive Advisor to CEO of Bank Saderat Iran and Deputy BSI for Branches and Marketing Affairs Jamshid Jaam-Khaneh emphasized on the necessity of organizing a get-together meeting on mutual cooperation and interaction of the two economic enterprises consecutively.

SINA BANK Issues over 95% of Docs. Electronically

In line with the enforcement of development policies in the field of banking services and promotion of culture of using these services, more than 95 percent (95%) of documents issued in SINA BANK in the past year (ended March 20, 2017) were made electronically, Public

Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Considering the policy of the bank on dissemination of culture of using modern banking services and reducing the number of referrals to the branches of the bank, only 4.71 percent of documents was issued manually by the end of last Iranian

month of Esfand (from Feb. 21 to March 20) while the rest documents were issued in a completely mechanized form.

With due observance to the said issue, modern banking services of the bank were highly welcomed by a great number of customers of the bank, the report maintained.

It should be noted that the bank will take giant strides in the current year 1396 (started March 21, 2017) in line with materializing most of its objectives especially in the year named after “Resistance Economy, Employment and Job Generation”, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank ended.

NASA launches super balloon to collect near space data

A stadium-sized pressure balloon launched by NASA in New Zealand began collecting data in near space on Wednesday, beginning a 100-day planned journey after several launch at-



tempts were thwarted by storms and cyclones.

The balloon, designed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to detect ultra-high energy cosmic particles from beyond the galaxy as they penetrate the Earth’s atmosphere, is expected to circle the planet two or three times.

The “origin of these particles is a great mystery that we’d like to solve. Do they come from massive black holes at the center of galaxies? Tiny, fast-spinning stars? Or somewhere else?” Angela Olinto, a University of Chicago professor and lead investigator on the project, said in a statement.

The balloon’s monitoring was only the start of a long quest which would next involve a space mission currently being designed by NASA, she added.

The balloon, launched on Tuesday in Wanaka, a scenic spot on New Zealand’s South Island, will collect data from 34 km (21.1 miles) above the earth.

New Zealand was also the base for NASA’s scientific balloon program in 2015 and 2016.

(Source: Reuters)

Humans threaten crucial ‘fossil’ groundwater: study

Human activity risks contaminating pristine water locked underground for millennia and long thought impervious to pollution, said a study Tuesday that warned of a looming threat to the crucial resource.

Even at depths of more than 250 meters (820 feet) under the Earth’s surface, so-called “fossil” groundwater -- more than 12,000 years old -- has been found to contain traces of present-day rainwater, they said.

This suggests that deep wells, believed to bring only unsullied, ancient water to the surface, are “vulnerable to contaminants derived from modern-day land uses,” study co-author Scott Jasechko, of the University of Calgary, told AFP.

Groundwater is rain or melted ice which filters through Earth’s rocky layers to gather in aquifers underground -- a process that can take thousands, even millions, of years.

It is the largest store of unfrozen fresh water on the continents.

Groundwater is pumped to the surface by deep wells for drinking and irrigation, and supplies about a third of all human water needs -- including safe drinking water for billions of people.

For the latest study, presented at a European Geosciences Union meeting in Vienna, Jasechko and a team set out to determine how much of Earth’s groundwater was more than 12,000 years old.

They used the carbon signature of “fossil” H2O -- the bulk of groundwater pumped from wells deeper than 250 meters -- to distinguish it from younger groundwater.

New groundwater has more radioactive carbon because it was more recently exposed to Earth’s atmosphere and shallow soil, tainted by nuclear tests since about the 1950s.

Fossil waters, in comparison, were isolated underground long before human activity could blight it.

(Source: AFP)

Scientists have found a brilliant new use for orange peels

When we think of “food waste,” we tend to think of things like throwing out bagged salad we accidentally let expire, tossing leftovers we brought home that we never ate, or disposing of an untouched wedding buffet because the bride left the groom at the altar after discovering he had a secret second family living in Sao Paulo. But food waste also comes in more innocuous forms that we often overlook things like orange peels.

Sure, tossing the peel is a natural part of the orange eating process, but just because peels are natural, that doesn’t prevent them from ending up in landfills. However, a team of researchers believes they’ve found a use for all that excess citrus waste developing a method for using peels to create a water filtration system.

Absorbent material

According to the University of Granada, scientists from the Spanish college, together with Mexican researchers, have figured out a way to turn leftover citrus peels from fruits like oranges and grapefruits into a new absorbent material that’s able to clean wastewater by filtering out heavy metals and organic pollutants. Though these peels might seem innocent enough, the university stresses that the global fruit industry produces 38.2 million tons of these inedible fruit outsides every year. As Modern Farmer points out, peels can be an especially pesky problem for companies who make products like orange juice and orange concentrate that then have to deal with this waste on an industrial scale.

(Source: Food & Wine)

Persian fallow deer delivers twins at Tehran zoo

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — A Persian fallow deer living in captivity at Tehran Zoological Garden, also known as Eram Zoo, gave birth to twins for the first time in Iran, IRIB reported on Wednesday.

According to Iman Memarian, chief vet of Tehran's Pardisan Rehabilitation Center, the population declined over years and the animal is currently nearly extinct in Iran, however the only surviving indigenous populations are in Dez Wildlife Refuge and Karkheh Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Iran and some are being kept in captivity at Eram Zoo.



The species are also threatened with extinction on a global scale and listed in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, Memarian said.

"Habitat loss in one of the greatest factors of the Persian fallow deer extinction and by restoring it especially in provinces of Fars and Khuzestan which used to be their major natural environment we could actually let them go back to wild once again," Memarian added.

Although owing to building roads, developing urban areas, and some other environmental issues restoring the habitats would be pretty grueling and expensive and requires national determination, he suggested.

Farabi ophthalmology seminar opens in Tehran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The 23rd Farabi ophthalmology updates seminar kicked off in Tehran on Wednesday, IRIB reported.

Holding various symposiums and workshops on the latest technologies in ophthalmology, recent advances in eye surgery and treatment regimens and techniques, and also evaluating Iran's accomplishment in the field compared to the other countries are of the purposes of the three-day event.

Ophthalmologist would participate in the seminar nationwide and deliver speeches. The Seminar would be a great opportunities for the specialist to exchange views and impart knowledge on the field.

Concurrent with the Farabi ophthalmology updates seminar, the 8th translational ophthalmology seminar will take place as well.

Translational research applies findings from basic science to enhance human health and well-being. In a medical research context, it aims to "translate" findings in fundamental research into medical practice and meaningful health outcomes.

LEARN ENGLISH

Funeral Arrangements

A: Hi Daniel, how are you **holding up**? I am greatly sorry for your loss.

B: Thank you, I'm doing much better. I've begun organizing everything for the funeral.

A: How's that going?

B: It's a lot harder than I imagined. There are many things that you have to arrange. I booked a time and date with the funeral home, but I still have a lot of things to do.

A: Have you bought a **burial** plot and a casket?

B: No, Wendy is being **cremated**. She always talked about how she didn't want to be buried. I already chose a cremation urn and we plan to spread the ashes in the ocean.

A: I see, that sounds like something she would have really liked. I am sure the memorial service will be **tasteful**. You are doing a great job.

B: Thanks, it hasn't been easy, but luckily we have life insurance and Wendy left behind a detailed will that will sort out any other legal matters.

■ Key vocabulary

hold up: continue to live through hardship

burial: the act of burying, esp. the interment of a dead body

cremate: burn up something and reduce to ash

tasteful: a being in keeping with good taste

■ Supplementary vocabulary

arrange: to make preparations

morgue: a place where dead bodies are stored

funeral home: a place where memorial services are held

to book: to set a speci?c time to do something

to grieve: to be sad

(Source: irlangauge.com)

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

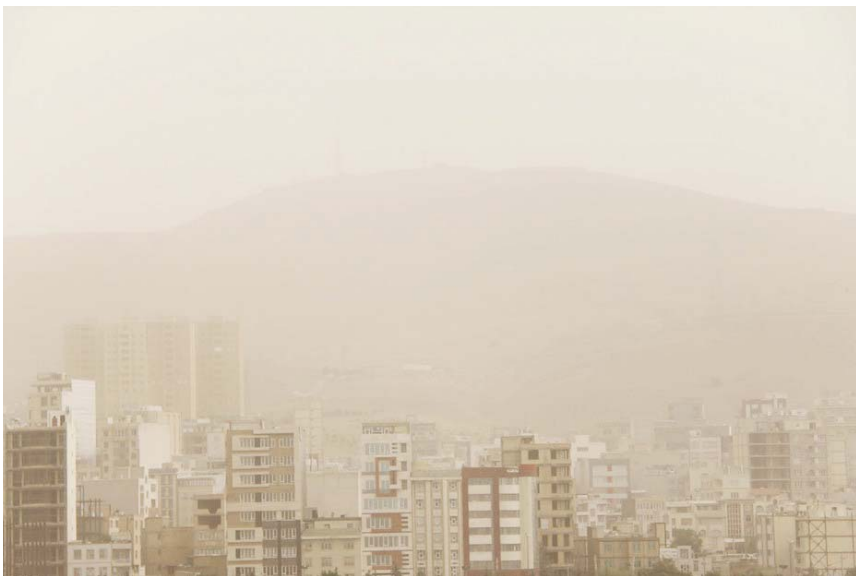
Tehran to host UN summit on dust storms

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The United Nation will hold a summit on sand and dust storms in the fourth Iranian calendar month of Tir (June 22-July 22), environment chief Masoumeh Ebtekar said.

"Numerous resolutions and documents have been proposed and adopted by international bodies for two years now to address sand and dust storms and in line with those measures the UN is organizing the first international summit to tackle and mitigate the dust storms," Khabaronline quoted Ebtekar as saying.

Sand and dust storms mostly originated from hotspots in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia are adversely affecting Iranian cities adjacent to the aforesaid areas and causing great discomfort for the poor dwellers.

Elsewhere in her remarks, Ebtekar highlighted that "We met with Iraqi officials in 2013 to discuss the matter,



however the war and the following insatiability and the safety issues impeded

efforts to resolve the issue." Fortunately, the chief said, it's been

Headteacher accused of using school funds to splash out on New York trip and laptop, court hears



A headmistress used school money to fund a luxurious trip to New York during term-time, a court has heard.

Melanie Rose, who also worked as an Ofsted inspector, stands accused of using school finances to finance an unauthorized trip across the Atlantic in December 2012.

The 45-year-old, of Loughton, Essex, is also said to have purchased an Apple laptop worth more than £2,000 for her husband, used petty cash to cover staff meals and restaurants, and claimed £1,100 for a taxi fare.

At Snaresbrook Crown Court on Monday, the former head was accused of abusing her position by dishonestly claiming the expenses between January 2009 and August 2013.

It is alleged that Mrs. Rose used petty cash claims and the school credit card to cover the costs of her activities, which remained hidden until she left prior to the 2013/14 academic year.

It was only during an audit of the school's accounts following her departure, that the scale of Rose's spending is said to have been

uncovered.

However, under her leadership the school's academic standards appear to have improved, with an Ofsted inspection in November 2012 upgrading its rating from satisfactory to good.

In their report, inspectors singled out Mrs. Rose for praise, describing her as an "outstanding leader" whose management of the school is "highly effective".

On two counts of fraud, she is alleged to have misrepresented the true cost of a taxi fare, thought to be a fraction of that claimed, and for claiming expenses back for hotel accommodation during an unauthorized leave of absence.

The other relates to the purchase of a computer in 2011, which the prosecution claims was for her own personal use.

She denies three counts of fraud.

Judge Nicholas Huskinson set her trial, which is set to last five days, for 4 September.

(Source: Telegraph)

Discovery of plastic-eating worms offers chance to finally get rid of world's growing piles of litter



Millions of tons of plastic bags end up on landfill sites every year, risking the health of the environment and destroying the natural habitat of certain animals.

But amateur beekeeper Federica Bertocchini has made an astounding discovery when removing wax worms from honeycombs, which she hopes could help solve the problems caused by plastic bags.

In the wild, the worms live as parasites in bee colonies by laying their eggs inside hives and, once hatched, grow on the beeswax. The worms on Professor Bertocchini's property had been kept in a plastic shopping bag, which she saw were full of holes.

Professor Bertocchini, from the Institute of Biomedicine and Biotechnology of Cantabria (CSIC), Spain, noticed the strange phenomenon, and in collaboration with Paolo Bombelli and Christopher Howe from the University of Cambridge, they took approximately 100 wax worms and exposed them to supermarket-brand plastic bags.

two months that Baghdad has expressed readiness to counter the predicament and preliminary talks to take first step to combat dust storms began last week.

"The hotspots are recognized and we hope that Iraq would manage to accomplish its task which is to restore the dried wetlands," she added.

Commenting on the clean air bill which has been recently passed by the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) Ebtekar pointed that the bill would play a key role in improving the air quality in metropolises and also promoting the use of new energies.

Some of the regulations of the newly approved bill are already adopted and will be soon imposed; some are drafted and will be discussed and passed by the cabinet too, she noted.

With people on board and promoting the use of public transportation, hybrid cars, and improving fuel quality air quality would increase day by day, she said.

In just 40 minutes, holes began to appear, and after 12 hours the mass of the plastic bags had reduced by 92mg.

Professor Bombelli said: "If a single enzyme is responsible for this chemical process, its reproduction on a large scale using biotechnological methods should be achievable".

"This discovery could be an important tool for helping to get rid of the polyethylene plastic waste accumulated in landfill sites and oceans."

One of the reasons the worms can break down plastic at such a quick rate is likely because they're doing it already – when they're digesting beeswax, a sort of "natural plastic" as Professor Bertocchini calls it, with a chemical structure similar to polyethylene.

The team are planning to use what they have learned from the worms to find a viable way to get rid of plastic waste to save our "oceans, rivers and the entire environment from the unavoidable consequences of plastic accumulation".

(Source: Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ↔ ع

Ethnics set off journey to celebrate Persian Gulf national day

Representatives from different Iranian ethnics started a 600-kilometer journey on Tuesday to mark the Persian Gulf national day, which falls on April 30 this year.

The 12-day event started in the city of Shiraz and will end in the port city of Bandar Abbas, neighboring the Persian Gulf.

Representatives from Sistani, Baluchi, Azari, Kord, Turkmen, Taleshi, and Qashqai ethnics have taken part in the program so far, Fars news agency quoted the event's manager Qolam-Ali Kazemi Qashqai as saying.

It is a non-government annual event which was initiated two years ago. Last year, it covered a 400 km distance from Shiraz to the Persian Gulf port city of Bushehr, he said.

ENGLISH PROVERB

Who makes himself a sheep will be eaten by the wolves

■ **Explanation:** an easily influenced person can be misled

■ **For example:** The price stated is from eight hundred dollars onwards and that means the final price will be much more than advertised. Who makes himself a sheep will be eaten by the wolves.

PHRASAL VERB

Chip away at

■ **Meaning:** Gradually reduce something to make it less powerful, effective, etc.

■ **For example:** Writers such as Voltaire and Diderot were chipping away at the foundations of society

ENGLISH IDIOM

Beat/ knock the (living) daylight

■ **Explanation:** If a person beats the (living) daylight out of another, they hit them very hard and repeatedly

■ **For example:** If I catch you stealing again I'll beat the daylight out of you!

I don't want to be Israel's political 'plaything': German FM

Germany's foreign minister says he does not want to be "a plaything" for Israel's politicking after the regime's prime minister refused to receive him over the senior diplomat's meeting with pro-Palestine advocacy groups.

"I'll say it openly, we cannot become a political football for Israeli domestic politics," Sigmar Gabriel said on Tuesday.

Gabriel had reached the Tel Aviv-occupied Palestinian territories on Monday. He had in advance made it clear that he sought to meet with the Breaking the Silence and B'Tselem groups, which oppose Tel Aviv's occupation of Palestinian territories.

Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu gave the top German diplomat an ultimatum over his planned meetings, saying he would not meet him if Gabriel refused to drop the plans.

Netanyahu said the organizations "slander" Israeli troops "and seek to put our soldiers on trial as war criminals," and that Tel Aviv would routinely shelve meetings with the officials who would hold talks with the rights bodies.

Gabriel, however, proceeded to attend the meetings in spite of the warning. He later addressed the incident, saying, "I regret it greatly. I was surprised by the cancellation of the visit, apparently because we were planning to do something which is quite usual



on such visits, namely to speak also with representatives of the civil society."

"You can't get a proper and comprehensive picture in any country on Earth if you only meet in government offices," added Gabriel.

He also signaled that future visits by German officials could likewise feature similar sessions with rights organizations. "I can't imagine that we would not do such things in the future just to get

government appointments," Gabriel said.

Both Gabriel and Netanyahu, however, asserted that the incident would not harm bilateral ties.

■ B'Tselem undeterred

Following the session with Gabriel, B'Tselem issued a press release and called on the international community to bring the regime in Tel Aviv to justice for its continued occupation of the Palestinian territories.

"There must be a price to pay for

continued military control of another people while thumbing one's nose at basic moral values and international law," the statement said.

In similar comments, B'Tselem director Hagai el-Ad also called for an end to the Israeli occupation in an interview with Israel's Channel 2.

"Our message is the same message we delivered at the UN Security Council [in October 2016], the message we say to the Israeli public and won't stop saying — the occupation must end and you can't hide it, not from Israelis and not from the world," he said. "That's the truth and those are the facts and it's not clear what the prime minister is so afraid of."

In October 2016, B'Tselem infuriated Netanyahu and other right-wing politicians in Israel by taking the podium at the UN to speak against the regime's illegal settlement activities in Palestinian lands, vowing to keep up its anti-occupation campaign despite the threats it receives from Tel Aviv.

Israel has been occupying the territories of West Bank and East Jerusalem al-Quds since 1967.

It has been dotting the areas with settlements ever since in what has been regularly denounced as an insidious trend towards annexation of the lands.

(Source: agencies)

Trump commemorates Armenians 'massacred' by Ottomans in WWI

U.S. President Donald Trump has censured the killings of more than one million Armenians at the hands of Ottoman Turks over 100 years ago, however, stopping short of describing them as "genocide."

In a statement issued on the 102nd anniversary of the massacre on Monday, Trump commemorated "one of the worst mass atrocities of the 20th century."

"Beginning in 1915, one and a half million Armenians were deported, massacred, or marched to their deaths in the final years of the Ottoman Empire," he said. "I join the Armenian community in America and around the world in mourning the loss of innocent lives and the suffering endured by so many."

The remarks were made as thousands of Armenian-Americans had gathered to remember the "Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day" at Times Square in New York City and other locations in major cities across the States, waving the tricolor flags of Armenia and paying homage to the victims.

"We must remember atrocities to prevent them from occurring again," Trump noted. "We welcome the efforts of Turks and Armenians to acknowledge and reckon with painful history, which is a critical step toward building a

foundation for a more just and tolerant future."

April 24 marks the date when hundreds of Armenians were arrested in the then-Ottoman capital of Constantinople in 1915 for allegedly collaborating with the enemies of the Turks. A process of mass killings then began.

Commemorations of the event have been held by Armenians since the 1920s.

■ Trump's comments irk Turkey

Trump's language on Monday was similar to that of his predecessor, Barack Obama, and other U.S. administration heads who were concerned with upsetting Turkey as a U.S. ally in the Middle East.

The former U.S. president had promised to recognize the killings as genocide but failed to follow through during his eight-year tenure.

In reaction to the latest remarks by the businessman-turned-politician, the Turkish Foreign Ministry claimed that Trump's comments on the remembrance day were "misinformation" and "false definitions."

"We expect from the new U.S. administration not to discredit the one-sided historical narrative of these circles which are known for their tendency to violence

and hate speech and to adopt an approach which will take into consideration the sufferings of all sides," it said.

Amid sharp Turkish criticism for the remarks, the U.S. State Department noted that Trump, in fact, had made no mention of genocide.

"The [Trump] statement that was put out is consistent with the statements that have been put out for at least several of the past administrations," White House spokesperson Sean Spicer told a briefing in Washington.

"I think if you look back to the language that President Obama, President Bush have used, the language the President used is consistent with all of that," Spicer added.

Huge rallies are annually held in the Armenian capital, Yerevan, with the demonstrators burning the Turkish flag in protest against the role of the Ottoman Turks in the incidents.

The occasion often sparks political tensions between Armenia and Turkey, which vehemently opposes the description of the massacre as "genocide."

Armenia claims that up to 1.5 million of its people were killed at the time, and demands that the incident be recorded in books and documents as "genocide."

(Source: Press TV)

EU Ankara negotiator calls for suspension of Turkey accession talks

The European Union should formally suspend Turkey's long-stalled talks on membership if it adopts constitutional changes backed at a referendum last week, a leading member of the EU parliament responsible for dealings with Ankara said on Wednesday.

Kati Piri said ahead of a plenary debate on the matter that if President Tayyip Erdogan implemented his new charter, giving him even more powers, Turkey would close the door on membership.

Erdogan said on Tuesday that Turkey would not wait forever to join the bloc, just a day after the EU executive's top official for membership talks asked Europe's foreign ministers to consider other types of ties with Turkey when they meet on Friday.

Ties between EU states and their NATO ally Turkey soured in the aftermath of a failed coup last July as the bloc was taken aback by Erdogan's sweeping security crackdown that followed.

Austria has long called for aborting Turkey's EU bid altogether but other EU states have been more cautious, highlighting that the bloc depends on Ankara to keep a lid on the flow of refugees from the Middle East.

Erdogan's accusations around this month's constitutional vote that Germany and the Netherlands act like Nazis have taken the relationship to new lows.

Piri, a Dutch center-left European



lawmaker, said, "As Turkey with such a constitution cannot become a member of the EU, it also doesn't make sense to continue the discussion on integration with the current government."

"The EU should officially suspend the accession talks if the constitutional changes are implemented unchanged," she told reporters, after the legislature last year passed a non-binding resolution calling for such a move.

Piri said any suspension should only come if and when the "authoritarian

constitution" is enacted, which would happen after Turkey holds the next election, now due in late 2019.

She said Erdogan could bring them forward to swiftly assume more powers, though the Turkish leader said that was not on the agenda now.

Piri stressed, however, the process should be suspended rather than ended altogether: "I don't want to take that perspective away from the Turkish population."

"Turkey should remain a candidate

country but we're negotiating with the government. It's become clear over the last two years that this government doesn't want to meet criteria."

She said she expected the EU's foreign ministers this Friday would ask the bloc's executive for a formal assessment of where Turkey stands on fulfilling these. Based on that, EU leaders could make further decisions when they next meet in June.

One tangible effect of suspending the process would be freezing the annual payments of some 600 million euros (\$650 million) of EU pre-accession funds to Turkey.

Like Hahn, Piri said Brussels could instead step up talks on enhancing the customs union which Turkey already has with the EU, a process she said could take the next two to three years.

"Clear political benchmarks" on the rule of law and human rights should be part of the process, she said, hoping it would give Europeans leverage to persuade Turkey to reverse policies which the bloc says are undermining democracy there.

Piri said, however, that while the process could be launched, it cannot be finalised without a deal in separate talks on reunifying Cyprus, an island long split between an EU state backed by Greece, and their rivals supported by Ankara.

(Source: Reuters)

Turkey detains more than 1,000 for 'links to Gulen'

Turkish authorities have detained more than a thousand people suspected of having links to U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gulen.

The overnight crackdown was one of the largest operations in months against the network, which Turkey blames for orchestrating a failed coup in July.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soyulu said 1,009 people were detained so far.

The operation was launched in all of Turkey's 81 provinces and targeted the network's structure in the police force. Soyulu described the arrests as an "important step" towards the government's aim at "bringing down" the Gulen movement.

The operations were carried out as part of a probe led by the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office, state-run Anadolu Agency reported, adding that a nationwide hunt for more suspects continued.

Authorities have arrested more than 47,000 people since the failed coup, Turkey's interior minister said, including some 10,700 police officers and 7,400 military personnel, and sacked or suspended 120,000 others from a wide range of professions including soldiers, police, teachers and public servants, over alleged links with what Turkey's government deems terrorist groups.

The latest arrests come ten days after a tightly contested referendum approved the expansion of presidential powers, according to preliminary results.

The referendum bitterly divided Turkey. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan argues that strengthening the presidency will avert instability associated with coalition governments, at a time when Turkey also faces security threats from armed groups, including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) and the Kurdish PKK.

But his critics fear a drift into authoritarianism, with a leader they see as bent on eroding modern Turkey's democracy and creating one-man rule.

Mass detentions immediately after the attempted coup were supported by many Turks, who agreed with Erdogan when he blamed Gulen for orchestrating the coup, which killed at least 240 people, mostly civilians. But criticism mounted as the arrests widened.

Gulen has denied orchestrating the coup attempt.

(Source: TRT)

Bahrain revokes nationality of dozens of political dissidents

Bahraini courts have revoked the citizenship of dozens of people as part of the ruling Al Khalifah regime's oppressive measures and heavy-handed crackdown on political dissidents and pro-democracy campaigners in the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom.

On Tuesday, the courts sentenced three defendants to life imprisonment, while the rest were slapped with between three and ten years in jail. The activists were all found guilty of "forming a terror cell and illegally possessing explosives," Arabic-language Luaia television network reported.

The development came only two days after Bahrain's Supreme Court of Appeal sentenced three defendants to 15 years and three others to 10 years behind bars.

The seventh defendant was slapped with three years in jail.

They were all charged with "forming a terror cell and possessing explosives in the western village of Dar Kulaib."

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held numerous demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country on February 14, 2011.

They are demanding that the Al Khalifah dynasty relinquish power and a just system representing all Bahrainis be established.

Manama has spared no effort in clamping down on dissent and rights activists. On March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were deployed to Bahrain to assist the Manama government in its crackdown on peaceful protesters.

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of Al Khalifah regime's crackdown on anti-regime activists.

(Source: Press TV)

Erdogan and Trump are showmen: SISU professor

➡️ and Central Asia while disagreeing over whether to favor Western interests or to strengthen ties with Russia and China.

■ **U.S. first reacted negatively to the results of the referendum in Turkey, however later the U.S. congratulated Erdogan on victory? How do you analyze the situation?**

A: Erdogan and Trump are showmen who rely on exaggerated nationalist rhetoric to deflect attention from their embarrassingly low popularity. They can attack or embrace one another depending on shifting calculations, but the underlying irritant in Turkish-American relations will remain as long as Ankara and Washington pursue contradictory approaches to Kurdish demands for autonomy and possible statehood.

"Tehran and Ankara both want to preserve the unity of Iraq and Syria even though they prefer different power distributions within."

UN eyes new Yemen peace talks by end of May

A new round of peace talks between Yemen's warring sides should begin by the end of May, the UN mediator said Wednesday, as alarm grows over the country's humanitarian crisis.

UN special envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed told AFP that negotiations were underway to stave off a feared military attack on the vital Red Sea port of Hodeida, in what he hoped would be a first step towards a ceasefire.

Averting an attack on Hodeida -- the main entry point for desperately needed aid to Yemen -- could

allow "a real cessation of hostilities and to go back to the talks," he said.

"We are at the preliminary stage, but time is also a real constraint for us, because my aim is to finish all of this before Ramadan," he said, adding that he hoped "to enter into a new round of talks before Ramadan."

The Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan is set to begin around May 27 this year.

Even if Ould Cheikh Ahmed manages to get the parties to the table, any success will be hard-won: since Yemen's

conflict escalated two years ago, all UN mediation attempts and seven declared ceasefires have failed.

A Saudi-led coalition attacked Yemen in March 2015 to help the government retake the capital Sana'a and swathes of the country's north and west.

More than 7,700 people have been killed in the past two years of fighting, while the country has plunged into a deep humanitarian crisis and faces the imminent risk of famine.

(Source: AFP)

Serena says accidentally spilled news of her pregnancy

Serena Williams had no intention of sharing her pregnancy with the world last week but spilled the beans when she accidentally uploaded the “20 weeks” photo of herself on Snapchat, the world number one said on Tuesday.

Williams, who was wearing a yellow swimsuit in the ‘selfie’, quickly deleted the post but later confirmed her pregnancy via her publicist after frenzied speculation.

She told the TED conference in Vancouver that the photo was intended only for her personal records.



“I have this thing where I’ve been checking my status and taking pictures every week to see how far along I’m getting,” the 35-year-old said in an on-stage chat with journalist Gayle King.

“I was just saving them (for myself)” said Williams. “I’ve been so good about it, but this was the one time it slipped.”

Williams said she had found out she was pregnant only two days before the Australian Open in January, which she went on to win for her 23rd grand slam title.

“It wasn’t very easy. You hear all these stories about people when they’re pregnant — they get sick, they get really tired, really stressed out,” she said.

“I had to really take all that energy and put it in a paper bag, so to say, and throw it away.

“Pregnant or not, no one knew and I was supposed to win that tournament. Every time I play, I’m expected to win. If I don’t win, it’s actually much bigger news.”

Williams, who is taking maternity leave for the rest of the 2017 season, said there was no change to her plan to return to the tour as a mother next year.

“I definitely plan on coming back. I’m not done yet,” said Williams, who credited her 36-year-old sister Venus, a seven-time grand slam champion, for inspiration.

“If she’s still playing, I know I can play.

“This (motherhood) is just a new part of my life. My baby’s going to be in the stands and hopefully cheering for me.”

(Source: Reuters)

WTA chief Simon defends Sharapova’s wildcard entry

Women’s Tennis Association Chief Executive Steve Simon has defended the wildcard entry awarded to former world number one Maria Sharapova for the Stuttgart Open following her 15-month doping ban.

While some say the five-times grand slam champion, initially banned for two years after testing positive for Meldonium at the 2016 Australian Open, has done her time some fellow players are angry the red carpet is being rolled out.

Sharapova will play Italian Roberta Vinci in the Round of 32 of the Stuttgart Open on Wednesday and Simon believes the ban was more extensive than previous offenders.

“You have to look at how other leagues and tours have handled players who have come back,” Simon told BBC Sport. “They come right back to the team and start playing.

“She is starting at ground zero. It is going to affect her seedings in big tournaments so she’s still going to pay a penalty for a while.

“If you think about it from other leagues, most of them (bans) are half of a season or a full season. She’s had a year and a half”

Former World number one Kim Clijsters also supported the decision to let Sharapova compete in the tournaments.

“I was disappointed and surprised when the news came out but, having been on both sides of the spectrum as a tournament director and as a player, I don’t think she needs to be punished more,” Clijsters said.

(Source: Reuters)

Newcastle and West Ham raided in HMRC probe

Newcastle United and West Ham United’s grounds have been raided in a fraud investigation.

HMRC said it deployed 180 officers across the UK and France, resulting in the arrests of several men working within professional football.

It said investigators had searched a number of premises in the north east and south east of England.

A spokesman added it had also seized business records, financial records, computers and mobile phones.

The arrests were connected to a suspected income tax and National Insurance fraud, he added.

In a statement, HMRC said it had arrested “several men working within the professional football industry for a suspected income tax and national insurance fraud”.

“180 HMRC officers have been deployed across the UK and France today,” the statement added.

“Investigators have searched a number of premises in the north east and south east of England and arrested the men and also seized business records, financial records, computers and mobile phones.

“The French authorities are assisting the UK investigation, have made arrests and several locations have been searched in France.

“This criminal investigation sends a clear message that, whoever you are, if you commit tax fraud you can expect to face the consequences.

“As this is an ongoing investigation, HMRC is unable to provide any further detail at this time.”

(Source: BBC)

F1 to ditch ‘halo’ protection device in favor of screen



Formula One is set to abandon plans for a ‘halo’ head protection system in favor of a transparent screen that could be introduced for 2018.

The governing International Automobile Federation (FIA) announced the development following a meeting of the sport’s core Strategy Group in Paris on Tuesday ahead of this weekend’s Russian Grand Prix.

“A number of more integrated solutions for additional frontal protection have been studied, and the decision has been taken to give priority to the transparent ‘shield’ family of systems,” it said in a statement.

“The FIA aims to carry out track tests of this system during this season in preparation for implementation in 2018.”

The ‘halo’ cockpit protection device, which is fixed at three points including a central pillar in front of the driver that supports a protective loop above his head, was extensively tested last season with a mixed response.

The FIA said in January the net safety benefit had been established but a decision needed to be made about the aesthetics and whether such a system was right for Formula One.

Cockpit protection has become a priority since the deaths of drivers in other series after being hit by wheels and flying debris.

The shield, a see-through screen in front of the driver that does not cover the cockpit, was tested in practice for this year’s Chinese Grand Prix.

Decisions made at the Strategy Group have to be approved by the FIA’s World Motor Sport Council, which is usually a formality.

Tuesday’s meeting also agreed changes to the 2018 regulations that will lead to the disappearance of the current

‘T-wing’ and ‘Shark Fin’ aerodynamic devices that have also been criticized on aesthetics grounds.

Measures will also be taken to ensure that oil will not be used as fuel.

The Strategy Group, which is currently limited to top teams, will also be opened

to non-members.

The governing body said this would demonstrate “the effective commitment of both the FIA and the Commercial Rights Holder to improve transparency in the sport.”

(Source: Reuters)

Ennis-Hill not expecting Chernova apology after doping ban



Britain’s Jessica Ennis-Hill does not expect to receive an apology from Tatyana Chernova after the Russian heptathlete was stripped of her 2011 world title for a doping violation but she is eager to get her hands on the gold medal.

Chernova won heptathlon gold ahead of Ennis-Hill at the 2011 World Championships but was stripped of the medal along with her bronze in the 2012 London Olympics by the Court of Arbitration of Sport (CAS) in November due to blood doping.

Chernova has not issued a public apology after her ban and Ennis-Hill said she was not counting on getting one.

“If she was to apologize it would make it that bit easier but I don’t think it will ever happen,” Ennis-Hill was quoted as saying by the Times.

“People who are doing it don’t believe they are doing anything wrong. They think everyone’s doing it. There are not many cases where people say, ‘I’m really sorry, I shouldn’t have done that.’ It never

happens because they are in denial.”

The 31-year-old, who also won the world title in 2009 and 2015, retired last year and is hoping she will receive her medal at the Olympic Stadium in London, which will host this year’s World Championships.

“It would be really special to get my medal back in that stadium,” Ennis-Hill added. “I don’t have my medals on display at home but it would be pretty disappointing to get a world gold in the post.”

Prior to her 2011 triumph, Chernova participated in the World Championships twice, finishing eighth in 2009.

“It’s obvious when someone is doing something they shouldn’t,” Ennis-Hill said. “You look at their progression and how they improve. It just did not add up.

Chernova was also stripped of her bronze from the 2008 Olympics with Briton Kelly Sotherton set to receive the medal.

(Source: Reuters)

Dale Earnhardt Jr. to retire from NASCAR following 2017



Hendrick Motorsports says NASCAR superstar Dale Earnhardt Jr. will retire at end of the 2017 season.

Earnhardt has raced at NASCAR’s top level for 18 seasons and made more than 600 starts. In a release, Hendrick Motorsports said Earnhardt shared his plans to retire with his number 88 team on Tuesday.

Earnhardt, 42, is a fan favorite, having won the sport’s Most Popular Driver award numerous times. His career highlights include two Daytona 500 victories and 26 wins in the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series, the sport’s top level. He’s also a two-time champion of what is now referred to as the Xfinity Series, the sport’s second-highest division.

In a release, the team said team owner Rick Hendrick and Earnhardt first met about Earnhardt’s potential retirement on March 29th.

The decision to retire comes after

a difficult 2016 season for Earnhardt; a concussion midway through the season forced the popular driver to miss the entire second half of the series’ tour. During that time, 4-time series champion Jeff Gordon and young talent Alex Bowman drove the No. 88 in relief of Earnhardt.

“Having influence over my exit only became meaningful when it started to seem most unlikely,” Earnhardt said. “As you know, I missed a few races last year and during that time I had to face the realization that my driving career may have already ended without me so much as getting a vote on the table. Of course, in life we’re not promised a vote, and that’s especially true in racing.”

Earnhardt’s final race will be Nov. 19 at Homestead-Miami Speedway. Hendrick Motorsports says it will announce its plans for 2018 at a later date.

(Source: cnycentral)

Conte hails Chelsea’s ‘big psychological step’ toward Prem title



league, is totally open.

“But I think we are ready to fight until the end. Then we must be proud for our job, for what we are doing this season. But now it’s normal that we have to try to push until the end to keep this position.”

Costa wrapped up the win with his first Premier League goals since March 6. The Spain international’s performances in recent weeks have attracted widespread criticism, but after Tuesday’s match Conte insisted that he never lost faith in his top scorer.

“It’s normal for the strikers that it is important to score,” Conte said of Costa. “The goal is their life. But, for me, I’ve always said I’ve been pleased with his commitment, his

Antonio Conte claimed that Chelsea had made a “big psychological step” after a 4-2 win over Southampton at Stamford Bridge moved the Blues seven points clear of Tottenham at the top of the Premier League on Tuesday.

Goals from Eden Hazard, Gary Cahill and a second-half double from Diego Costa earned Conte’s men a hard-fought win against a confident and dangerous Saints side, who twice found a way past Thibaut Courtois courtesy of former Chelsea men Oriol Romeu and Ryan Bertrand.

The result, secured just days after beating Tottenham by the same scoreline in a thrilling FA Cup semifinal at Wembley, means Chelsea need a maximum of 12 points from their five remaining Premier League fixtures to win the title, and all eyes will now turn to Spurs’ clash with Crystal Palace on Wednesday.

“I think that we passed a big, big step, a big psychological step after the defeat against [Manchester] United,” Conte said. “Because, against United, we lost three points and then you had to prepare a semifinal against Tottenham, and then another tough game in the league.”

“I think that, in that moment, we had a really important test, a psychological test, and our answer was very good. For this reason I must be pleased. But we must think this race is open. We reached the final in the FA Cup, which is a great incentive for us. But the other competition, the

work for the team. He always worked for the team.

“Sometimes he was unlucky in different circumstances, but I was always confident about him. After the Tottenham game, I said I’m sure he’s keeping his goals for the final weeks of the season. Now he must continue. He’s very important for us. His confidence is very important for us.

“He scored two very important but also beautiful goals, with good combination and technique between him and his teammates.”

Conte grew increasingly irate on the touchline as a succession of Southampton corners caused panic in the Chelsea defence, and at one point in the second half kicked an equipment bag in frustration.

“In this moment I wanted to kick the ball, and I took the bag as a ball,” he explained.

“Sometimes, believe me, I want to play. I want to play, to kick the ball. But I know that if I kick the ball, the referee will probably send me off... only for this.

“In this part of the season, we are totally involved in the game. I think it’s the right way for me, for the players, to be always together during different moments: positive or negative moments. We have to try and exploit every single moment to send always the right message.”

(Source: ESPN)

Iran's group in FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup is not easy

S P O R T S Iran's group in 2017 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in Nassau, Bahamas is manageable, but by no means easy.

Iran have been drawn in Group B along with Mexico, Italy and Nigeria.

As sixteen of the world's best beach soccer teams converge on the Bahamas for the prestigious competition, the-AFC.com takes a look at Asia's three representatives at the global showpiece.

Head coach Mohammad Mirshamsi's side booked their seventh appearance in the global finals by capturing last month's AFC Beach Soccer Championship in Malaysia, comfortably accounting for United Arab Emirates with a 7-2 win in the final.

Iran scored an impressive 50 goals at the Kuala Terengganu event, 12 of them coming from tournament MVP Mohammad Mokhtari, and they are now targeting a FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup semi-final appearance after reaching the last eight in the two previous tournaments.

On both occasions, Iran's competition came to an end in narrow defeats to teams which went on to reach the final. In 2013 they lost 6-5 to eventual champions Russia, while two years ago in Portugal they were eliminated 5-4 by a Tahiti side which fell only to the host nation. It is a measure of IR Iran's progress that they defeated both sides at last November's Beach Soccer Intercontinental Cup.

Iran's group in Nassau is manageable, but by no means easy; Italy are fourth in the world rankings, while Mexico and Nigeria both finished as runners-up in their respective continental championships.

They begin their campaign against a Mexican side that they beat 3-2 at the same stage of the 2015 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup, before meeting the highly-rated Italians two days later.



The Road to Tokyo 2020 seminar to be held in Tehran



S P O R T S Iran's National Paralympic Committee will host 'The Road to Tokyo 2020' seminar on April 29.

Peter Van de Vliet, Medical & Scientific Director of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), will attend the one-day seminar in Tehran.

The session will be held with the aim of raising awareness of Tokyo

2020 Paralympic Games upcoming programs.

Methods of medical management and classification as well as research programs in Paralympics field are the subjects of the meeting.

Furthermore, Sir Philip Craven, International Paralympic Committee (IPC) President, will attend the Iran Track & Field - National Championships for People with Disability.

Nicolae Gioga starts his work as Iran rowing head coach



S P O R T S Nicolae Gioga from Romania has started his work as head coach of Iranian rowing teams, Gholamreza Amini, president of Iran Canoeing, Rowing and Sailing Federation, said.

According to Amini, the Iranian team will participate at the 2017 World Rowing Cup II which has been scheduled for June 7.

The Iranian rowers will also take

part at the 2017 World Rowing Cup III. The competition will be held in Lucerne, Switzerland on June 28.

"Our main objective is to prepare our team for the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta. We are going to win more medals in the upcoming event. Nicolae Gioga is an experienced coach and can help our rowers to get better results," Amini said.

Iran crowned at Kazakhstan Open – WTF G1

Iran came first at the Kazakhstan Open – World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) G1.

The Iranian team won six gold medals, four silvers and one bronze in the three-day competition.

Mahdi Eshaghi in -54kg, Mohammad Sadegh Dehghani in -58kg, Mahdi Yousefi in -63kg, Seyed Ahmad Khosrowfar in -73kg, Alireza Darvishpour in -80kg and Hossein Ghorbanzadeh in +87kg claimed six gold medals for the Iranian team.

Jafar Khalilzadeh in -54kg, Aryan Mohammadi in

-63kg, Mahdi Jalali in -68kg and Ahmad Mohammadi in -87kg won four silver medals and Farshad Ghias took a bronze medal in the -87kg weight category.

Host Kazakhstan finished in second place with one gold medal, four silvers and eight bronzes.

Uzbekistan came third winning two bronze medals.

The Kazakhstan Open – World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) G1 brought 472 taekwondo practitioners in Atyrau, Kazakhstan.

(Source: Tasnim)

FA charges Sunderland boss David Moyes over 'slap' comments

The Football Association has confirmed that Sunderland manager David Moyes has been charged over comments in which he said a female reporter "might get a slap" after a postmatch interview.

In a statement, the FA said Moyes had been charged "in relation to comments made after the game against Burnley on 18 March 2017."

The statement added: "It is alleged

the Sunderland manager's remarks were improper and/or threatening and/or brought the game into disrepute, contrary to FA Rule E3(1).

"He has until 6pm on May 3 2017 to reply to the charge."

Moyes has said he "deeply regrets" the comments, which he made after a 0-0 draw with the Lancashire side.

He apologised for his exchange with

BBC Newcastle and Radio Five Live reporter Vicki Sparks, who had asked if owner Ellis Short's presence at the game had meant Moyes was under more pressure.

Footage published by the Daily Star shows him answering before the interview drew to a close: "No, none at all."

However, thinking he was off camera, he then added: "You were just getting a wee bit naughty at the end there, so just

watch yourself. You still might get a slap, even though you're a woman. Careful the next time you come in."

However, both Moyes and Sparks were laughing during the exchange and the reporter did not make a complaint, although colleagues were reported to have been unimpressed when they heard what had been said.

(Source: ESPN)

Ex-Iran coach Lozano appointed as coach of China volleyball team

Former Iran coach Raul Lozano has been named as the first ever foreign coach of the Chinese men's volleyball team.

The Chinese Volleyball Association (CVA) announced that the new coach and his team will be presented at a press conference on Wednesday.

Lozano, who had coached Iran in 2016 and led the team to fifth place at the 2016 Rio Olympics, replaced

Xie Guochen, who was sacked after the Chinese team failed to book a berth in the Rio Olympics.

After the Rio Olympics, the CVA started a hunt for an experienced foreign coach, Xinhua reported.

Li Quanqiang, the vice president of CVA, said that now is the right time to bring in a new coach with a fresh perspective.

(Source: Shinhua)



Iran's Esteghlal on the verge of qualification

A 1-1 draw between Esteghlal of Islamic Republic of Iran and Emirati side Al Ahli on Tuesday saw both sides move to the brink of qualification from Group A of the AFC Champions League.

Visitors Al Ahli took a 17th minute lead in the clash at a packed Azadi Stadium, with Abdulaziz Sanqour placing the ball into the net after a neat header from striker Ahmed Khalil found him unmarked in the area.

On the half hour mark, though, only a fine low save by Majed Naser in the Ahli net prevented a Yaghoub Karimi free-kick from levelling the tie.

In the 58th minute, Esteghlal's pressure finally told as a quick throw released Khosro Heydari whose lobbed cross was headed home by striker Kaveh Rezaei.

With neither side then able to find a winner, both teams now lie on eight points with one Group A game remaining - three points clear of both Saudi Arabia's Al Taawoun and Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv.

(Source: AFC)



ACL 2017 MD5 - Group B: Al Fateh 1-1 Esteghlal Khuzestan

Salman Bahrani's spectacular injury-time overhead kick secured a point for Esteghlal Khuzestan on Tuesday as the Iranian side drew 1-1 with Saudi Arabia's Al Fateh in Group B of the 2017 AFC Champions League.

Bahrani's late equaliser came thanks to an acrobatic strike after substitute Ali Al Zaqaan had looked set to seal all three points for the Saudi club with his effort just five minutes from time.

The draw means third-placed Al Fateh remain two points behind the 2016 Iranian champions who are in second.

The Saudi side are scheduled to meet Lekhwiya in the final round of matches knowing they will need a win over the Qatari side if they are to stand any chance of reaching the Round of 16, while hoping that Khuzestan fail to take any points from their encounter with an already eliminated Al Jazira from the UAE.

(Source: AFC)



Iranian indoor field hockey team thrashes Qatar in Asian Cup

The Iranian men's national indoor field hockey team has maintained its winning streak at the 7th edition of the Asian Cup, and recorded a resounding victory against the host country Qatar.

On Tuesday evening, the Iranian indoor hockey players trounced the Qatari team 9-3 in a match held at the world's largest indoor multi-purpose dome – Aspire Dome – in the Qatari capital city of Doha.

The Iranian indoor field hockey players had edged past Malaysia's national squad 11-0 in its opening game the previous day.



The Iranian outfit is going to play against the national Omani team on Wednesday.

The 7th edition of Indoor Hockey Asia Cup kicked off in Qatar on April 24, and will run through April 28, 2017.

The men's event comprises of eight teams drawn into two pools. Iran has been drawn in Group A along with Qatar, Malaysia and Oman. Kazakhstan is in Pool B with Uzbekistan, Taiwan and Thailand.

The top two teams from each group will play in the cross-over semi-finals, while the finalists will automatically qualify for the 2018 Hockey Indoor World Cup, which is scheduled to be held between February 7 and 11 next year in the German capital city of Berlin.

The Iranian squad comprises Yaghoub Bahrami, Amir Aruei, Nima Heydari, Behnam Sa'di, Hamid Nouraniyan, Abbas Aruei, Mohsen Bohlouli, Seyed Mohammad Ghorayshi, Navid Taherirad, Alireza Chezani Sharahi, Behdad Biranvand and Behdad Biranvand.

The team is led by Esfandiar Safaei as the head coach. Masoud Bohlouli and Abolfazl Yousefi assist Safaei as coaches.

Iran is the most decorated Asian team, winning six previous editions. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Uzbekistan, China and North Korea are competing in the women's category of the Indoor Hockey Asia Cup. They are meeting each other in a round-robin format, with the top two teams meeting in the final.

(Source: Press TV)

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» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co. Tel: 88911433

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Tehran Intl. Contemporary Music Festival kicks off

A R T TEHRAN — The 2nd Tehran International Contemporary Music Festival opened on Wednesday.

Musicians from five countries are performing during the festival, which runs until May 5, the organizers announced at a press conference at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on Wednesday.



The musicians are coming from Germany, Poland, Sweden, Finland and Italy, the organizers announced.

Concerts will be performed at Rudaki Hall, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, and the University of Tehran.

Several seminars are also scheduled to be organized on the sidelines of the festival.

Established by the Contemporary Music Circle, the festival aims to introduce works by Iranian composers that are being performed in international festivals by world musicians.

NEWS IN BRIEF



CCTV officials visit IRIB

A R T TEHRAN — A delegation of the China Central Television (CCTV) headed by Deputy Director of the China CCTV News Center Yang Hua, has visited the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB).

Yang Hua met IRIB Director of International Affairs Abbas Nasseri-Taheri and the two discussed expansion of bilateral cooperation, IRIB announced in a press release published on Wednesday.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) was also signed between Nasseri-Taheri and Yang Hua to boost media cooperation.

A number of CCTV high-ranking managers visited Tehran in June, 2015.



Sadi Foundation, University of Belgrade sign MOU

A R T TEHRAN — The Sadi Foundation, a Tehran-based organization that promotes the Persian language abroad, and the University of Belgrade have inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in Tehran.

The MOU was signed by Sadi Foundation deputy director Seyyed Mohammadreza Darbandi and the head of the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade, Ljiljana Markovic, the foundation announced in a press release on Wednesday.

Based on the agreement, the university in collaboration with the foundation will establish a department for the Persian language.

Will Smith and Jessica Chastain Join Pedro Almodóvar on Cannes Festival Jury

PARIS (New York Times) — Pedro Almodóvar will preside over a jury that includes Jessica Chastain and Will Smith at this year's Cannes Film Festival, the festival announced on Tuesday.

The other jurors for the festival's 70th edition are the German director Maren Ade, whose "Toni Erdmann" was a hit at the festival last year and was nominated for an Academy Award; the Italian director Paolo Sorrentino; the Chinese actress Fan Bingbing; the French actress and singer Agnès Jaoui; the Korean director Park Chan-wook; and the French composer Gabriel Yared.

Among the directors with films competing for the Palme d'Or this year are Sofia Coppola, Noah Baumbach, Todd Haynes and Hong Sang-soo. The festival will take place May 17-28.

Fajr offers chance to see latest films from Asian cinema: Javier Angulo

A R T TEHRAN — Valladolid International Film Festival director Javier Angulo has said that the Fajr International Film Festival provides a good opportunity for everybody to see a miscellany of latest films from Iran and other Asian nations.

He is currently in Tehran to attend the 35th edition of the festival, which is currently underway at Charsu Cineplex, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Last year, he also attended the festival, selecting three movies and a documentary from Iranian filmmakers, and a film from an Iraqi director to screen at the Valladolid festival.

Angulo said that Iraqi filmmaker Halkawt Mustafa's drama "El clásico" about two unusual Kurdish brothers who risk their lives by riding a motorcycle to Spain to meet their soccer hero, Cristiano Ronaldo and Iranian director Reza Mirkarimi's "Daughter" about the clash between generations were warmly received at the festival.

This year, Rambod Javan's drama "Negar" and Fereidun Jeirani's "Stuffiness", both from Iran, have



This file photo shows Valladolid International Film Festival director Javier Angulo.

drawn his attention.

Angulo criticized the organizers of the Fajr festival for their delay in

screenings. However, he praised the Fajr for organizing the Iran Film Market and the professionally equipped theaters of

the cineplex.

The Fajr festival will come to end by announcing winners on Friday evening.

Gilles Jacob pays tribute to Abbas Kiarostami at Fajr festival

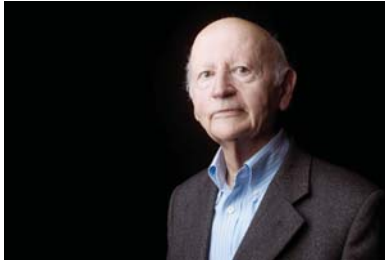
A R T TEHRAN — Former president of the Cannes Film Festival Gilles Jacob has sent a message to a commemoration held for the legendary Iranian filmmaker to Abbas Kiarostami at the 35th Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran.

"Kiarostami was one of the most creative individuals in the world," Jacob said in a video screened at Charsu Cineplex on Tuesday.

"A man equal in caliber to the great director and screenwriter Roberto Rossellini," he added.

He called Kiarostami "one of the masters of world cinema" and added, "Even at my age, I still want to go back to school so he could teach me cinema."

The organizers of the festival



Former president of the Cannes Film Festival Gilles Jacob in a file photo

arranged a three-day commemoration for Kiarostami who died of a severe gastrointestinal disease at 76 last July.

A number of international cineastes, critics and figures, including Spanish filmmaker Victor Eric, attended the commemoration.

The festival will wrap up by awarding winners on Friday.

Four students shortlisted for Fajr's Talent Campus

A R T TEHRAN — Four students have been selected to compete in the final stage of the screenwriting workshops held at the Talent Campus during the 35th Fajr International Film Festival in Tehran.

The workshops were organized on the themes of migration, environment, peace and love, the organizers have announced.

Maria Syed from India was selected from among the students working in the migration category while Mostafa Shams from Iran was picked up in the environment section.

Ali Hosseinzadeh from Iran was chosen in the peace category and Akaki ve Tamar from Georgia was selected in the love category.

The top selected students have a month-long opportunity to submit a



final screenplay to the secretariat of the festival, and the final winner will receive the Talent Campus Award, which will be financial support for making a short film.

The Talent Campus is a venue established to discover young gifted students in various fields of cinema, and 110 film students from 33 countries attended the workshops during the event.

Family ties test the unconventional "Guardians of the Galaxy"

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — After causing havoc in the universe and saving it from destruction, Marvel's "Guardians of the Galaxy" are back in a new adventure that takes the unconventional group of friends on a quest to discover their family ties.

"Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2," which begins its international rollout on Tuesday, sees roguish thief Peter Quill, green-skinned warrior Gamora, the muscle-bound Drax, mischievous Rocket Raccoon and baby tree-alien Groot split up after being pursued by a gold-skinned villain named Ayesha.

The plot centers on Peter's long-awaited reunion with his father, an ancient god called Ego (Kurt Russell), who is the life force of a planet, and his tense relationship with his adopted father figure, the fin-headed Yondu (Michael Rooker).

"The most compelling way to find out something about a person you're interested in is to explore their relationships," Chris Pratt, who plays Peter, told Reuters.

"I can't think of too many movies or stories on the screen that have honored that type of relationship, so



Actor Zoe Saldana poses for a portrait while promoting Marvel Studios' "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2" in West Hollywood, California, U.S., April 20, 2017. (Reuters/Danny Moloshok)

it's really kind of cool if you like a contemporary family story."

"Guardians Vol. 2," once again written and directed by James Gunn, comes after the surprise blockbuster success of 2014's "Guardians of the Galaxy," which ushered in a new cadre of unlikely heroes into Disney-owned Marvel's expanding film franchise.

Loved and lost, Heath Ledger shows carefree side in new documentary

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Nine years after his death at age 28, audiences are seeing a different side of Australian actor Heath Ledger through the lens of his own camera.

Documentary "I Am Heath Ledger" uses thousands of hours of self video shot by Ledger, as well as his art work and music videos, to paint a portrait of the young actor who took Hollywood by storm in roles like "Brokeback Mountain" and "The Dark Knight."

The film also seeks to counteract the lingering perception that Ledger was severely depressed when he accidentally overdosed on painkillers, anxiety and insomnia medication.

"He was super happy and he was loving life. He struggled with some demons, but he wasn't one to go anywhere but forward," Ledger's Hollywood agent Steve Alexander says in the film, which was launched at the Tribeca film festival this week.

Rather than dwell on his January 2008 death in New York, the film uses Ledger's video archives and

interviews with his family and closest friends to "celebrate Heath's life and to tell the story of this multi-faceted artist," director and producer Derik Murray told Reuters Television.

It portrays Ledger as a force of nature who longed for adventure, was generous with his friends, and whose passions ranged from chess to making music videos. His non-stop energy also meant he rarely slept a full night.

While Ledger's friends including Naomi Watts and director Ang Lee were interviewed for the film, Michelle Williams' - Ledger's former fiancee and mother of his daughter Matilda - chose not to take part, said her spokeswoman.

Murray said Williams' support was integral to the film "but she really didn't feel she wanted to be in front of the camera."

Ledger was found dead a few months after the couple split up and shortly after filming his role as the manic Joker in "The Dark Knight," for which he won a posthumous Oscar.

Treasures from Paris's Louvre museum go on display in Hong Kong

HONG KONG (Reuters) — A selection of artwork from Paris' world-renowned Louvre museum goes on display in Hong Kong on Wednesday, offering Chinese patrons a rare opportunity to view some of the institution's cultural treasures on their doorstep.

The "Inventing le Louvre: From Palace to Museum over 800 Years" exhibition at the Hong Kong Heritage Museum features some 130 works, including paintings, sculptures, ceramics and tapestries from various periods spanning centuries.

It features a statue of French writer Jean de La Fontaine and a fragment of a horse head dating from before 500 BC.

The exhibition is being held to mark the 20th anniversary of the establishment of Hong Kong's Special Administrative Region (SAR) government after the territory was handed back to China in 1997 following over 150 years of British rule.

It also underscores the importance of Chinese visitors to the Paris museum,



Tourists stand in front of the Louvre Pyramid designed by Chinese-born U.S. Architect Ieoh Ming Pei in Paris, France, September 13, 2016. (Reuters/Charles Platiau)

according to Pascal Torres, Chief Curator of the Louvre's department of interpretation and cultural programming.

"The most important visitors of (any) foreign country are Chinese," he told Reuters.

"So it was necessary for us to permit to some good part of the Chinese public, who will not travel very easily to France or to Paris, to know a little about the Louvre Museum."

"Inventing the Louvre" runs until July 24.