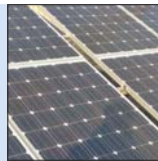




Iran's annual crude steel output jumps 11% **4**



Rooftop solar panels in Yazd to generate 5MW of electricity **12**



Iran win Asian Weightlifting Championships title **15**



Tehran Intl. Book Fair to kick off Wednesday **16**

Post-JCPOA trade with EU up 79%

Envoy says Iran backs Iraq until ultimate victory

POLITICS TEHRAN — The newly appointed Iranian ambassador to Iraq **d e s k** has said Tehran will continue to back the Iraqi government in the fight against terrorism until "ultimate victory" is achieved.

"Iran will continue its support for the Iraqi government, army, and al-Hashd al-Shaabi until ultimate victory is achieved," Iraj Masjedi said on Saturday, Tasnim news agency reported.

Iran was the first country rushing to assist Iraq as ISIS militants ravaged through vast swaths of the Iraqi territory in June 2014, catching the central government off guard.

On future ties with the neighboring Arab country, Ambassador Masjedi emerged very positive, predicting a bright future for ties between Tehran and Baghdad in political, economic, cultural, social, and security areas.

"Iran and Iraq need each other and I see the prospect of the relations very positive," the envoy stressed.

Iran supports the participation of the so-called al-Hashd al-Shaabi forces, the Popular Mobilization Forces, who have proven influential in fighting terrorists.

The forces have brought important extra firepower to the battle in Mosul, where a battle has been underway for the past six months to retake the city from ISIS.



See page 4

European Climate Action and Energy Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete addresses Iran-EU Business Forum on Sustainable Energy in Tehran, April 29, 2017.

Zarif brands U.S. seizure of Iran assets 'banditry'

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif denounced the U.S. government's moves to seize or freeze Iran's assets abroad as a plain case of international banditry, Tasnim news agency reported on Saturday.

Addressing a conference on Iran-Europe trade and banking ties, held in Tehran on Saturday, Zarif said Washington's decision to seize \$2 billion of the Central Bank of Iran's assets held in New York's Citibank or its push to put a freeze on \$1.6 billion in assets belonging to Iran are "undoubtedly an international banditry."

In April 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Congress and then President Barack Obama's actions to hold Iran financially responsible for the 1983 bombing that killed 241 Marines at their barracks in the Lebanese capital of Beirut. The ruling allowed the families of the Marines and victims of other attacks that courts have linked to Iran to seize some \$2 billion in assets held in New York's Citibank, belonging to the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), which had been blocked under U.S. sanctions.

Here are the currency-market winners — and losers — from Trump's first 100 days

The first 100 days of the Trump administration has been a particularly exciting time for financial markets, primarily because many of Wall Street's assumptions about how markets would react to the Republican's purportedly pro-growth policies were way off base.

Remember when Wall Street analysts believed Treasury yields would break above 3% in short order? They're now closer to 2%.

But possibly the most exciting action occurred in the currency market, where traders who had the temerity to bet against the consensus reaped the biggest returns.

From the Mexican peso, to the Japanese yen, to the U.S. dollar — here's a breakdown of the market's biggest winners and losers.

The winners

The Mexican peso: After falling to an all-time low at roughly 22 pesos to the dollar about two days before Trump's inauguration, Latin America's most heavily traded currency has completed an astounding turnaround. The currency has risen 15% from its lows of the year, making it the best performer among the world's 20 most heavily traded currencies. One dollar USD-MXN, -1.1208% bought 18.86 pesos in recent trade.

While the Mexico's central bank has jacked up interest rates to try to defend the currency, politics remains perhaps the most important factor influencing its valuation. Trump's legislative agenda has stalled in Congress as his administration has struggled to unite the fractious House Republican caucus behind its legislative agenda.

To be sure, the peso has been very volatile this week as Trump said he was drafting an executive order to pull the U.S. out of the North American Free Trade Agreement, but eventually changed his mind after the leaders of Canada and Mexico urged him to reconsider.

The Japanese yen: With tensions flaring between the U.S. and several of its geopolitical adversaries, including North Korea and Russia, **→4**

Interests, not democracy, shape U.S. policy: professor

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Prof. William O. Beeman, head of the anthropology department at the State University of Minnesota, says the United States is mostly concerned about its "strategic interests" and human rights and democracy never concern Washington.

"The United States measures its relationships with other nations solely in terms of American strategic interests. The United States makes a show of talking about human rights and democracy, but these concerns never really govern American policy," Beeman tells the Tehran Times when asked about its policy toward the constitutional referendum in Turkey which put too much power in the hands of President Erdogan.

"Turkey is a member of NATO and that is the principal tie between the U.S. and Turkey. If Turkey fulfills its NATO responsibilities, including opposition to Russia and support of the campaign against ISIS/ISIL/IS/DAESH,

that is what will govern the relations with the United States," Beeman notes.

Beeman also says through the constitutional referendum Erdogan has split the nation.

"The referendum lost in Turkey's large urban areas by some margins. The urban areas are the places where there has been, and will be the most significant opposition to the Erdogan government. But this also shows the rural urban split that has been a major source of tension in Turkey for more than 100 years. Urban residents are largely secular, and rural residents are more religious... and the rural voters would support him (Erdogan) despite some of his controversial policies."

The referendum will give the president to press ahead with his policies at home.

"Without parliamentary opposition, he will be much freer to exert executive power without challenge from inside the government, but I anticipate that there will be more public protests of his actions.

"There will be fewer restrictions on Erdogan's executive actions. Certainly there will be crackdowns on Erdogan's rivals for power."

The professor also predicts that the Erdogan government will clamp down on the Kurds with a freer hand.

"Turkey's principal problem remains the Kurds in Turkey's southeast region. I expect more severe crackdowns on the Kurds. Erdogan has also been "soft" in opposition to ISIS/ISIL/IS/DAESH partly because he sees them as controlling the Kurds."

The Minnesota professor says the referendum will not affect the quality of relationship between Tehran and Ankara.

"Actually, I think the Iran-Turkey relationship will not change, and may in fact improve."

He says Turkey and Iran are natural allies in terms of trade and tourism.

"Turkey is essential to Iran in terms of serving as a gateway to the wider world of finance and travel, and as a trade partner."

Turkey: 11 Syrian Kurds killed in border clash

Turkish army has claimed killing 11 "terrorists" during cross-border clashes with Syrian Kurdish fighters.

Rockets fired on Friday from an area controlled by the Kurdish Peoples' Protection Units (YPG/Yekîneyên Parastina Gel?) in Syria targeted a Turkish army command post in the Ceylanpinar district of Turkey's southern San-

liurfa province.

The Turkish army fired back and killed 11 "terrorists", it said. There were no reports of casualties on the Turkish side.

This was the third day in a row that clashes have been reported across the tense border after the Turkish military jets carried out airstrikes targeting the YPG fighters in the area

earlier this week.

Erdogan defends Turkey's strike on Kurdish rebels

Friday's clashes came as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned the YPG that Turkey would fire back against any assault and thwart the creation of any Kurdish state in northern Syria. **→13**



IRNA/ Ata Ranibar

Chokheh competition held in Ghoochan

Chokheh wrestling competition was held in Ghoochan, located northeast of Iran.

For more than 200 years wrestlers have come to Khorasan Province for a wrestling tournament called Chokheh.

This tournament is unique because it is held in the open air.

The local wrestling is very popular among the people of north Khorasan.

Belgian municipality boycotts companies promoting Israeli occupation

A Belgian municipality has adopted a motion that prohibits all forms of political, economic and cultural dealings with Israeli institutions and companies promoting the regime's occupation of Palestinian territories.

The municipal council of Sint-Jans-Molenbeek approved the bill, which "gives a strong signal to politicians in Belgium to stop dealing with Israeli institutions that violate international law and contribute to settlement," the Middle East Monitor reported.

The motion, reportedly adopted by a large majority earlier this week, is intended to "safeguard human rights and the application of international law in the field of public procurement."

Sint-Jans-Molenbeek is the first municipality in Brussels to take such an initiative.

The Palestinian mission to the European Union, Belgium and Luxembourg welcomed the move in a statement.

The mission also hailed the motion as a "courageous step that reflects the municipality's solidarity and friendship with the Palestinian people."

The motion was initially recommended in 2015.

This comes as international calls are mounting for the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement aiming to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law.

The BDS movement was initiated in 2005 by over 170 Palestinian organizations that were pushing for "various forms of boycott against Israel until it meets its obligations under international law."

Thousands of volunteers worldwide have joined the BDS to help promote the Palestinian cause, including scores of Palestinian and international trade unions, NGOs, academic and business societies, as well as cultural figures.

It has also gained support in countries such as Australia, Britain, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Iceland, Romania, South Africa and the United States.

(Source: agencies)

ELECTION COUNTDOWN



Qom seminary scholars endorse Raisi

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Assembly of d e s k Representatives of Qom Seminary Scholars on Saturday announced that they endorse Ebrahim Raisi as their candidate in the May 19 presidential election.

Their announcement said that the assembly recognized Raisi as possessing the necessary qualities to become the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the assembly's website reported.

According to the statement, the assembly consisted of members of the political committee, heads of provincial assemblies, and the dignitaries of the Qom Seminary.



Popular group formed in support of Raisi

POLITICS TEHRAN — A popular group has d e s k been formed to support Ebrahim Raisi in his bid for the presidential post, Fars reported.

The group announced its formation in a statement on Saturday. It came into existence due to "extensive favor toward Raisi from all strata and ethnicities from across the Islamic country," the statement read.

It added, "It is natural that the current circumstances are not befitting the Iranian nation, with much divergence from the primary slogans and goals of the revolution."



Rouhani says will keep security atmosphere away from universities

POLITICS TEHRAN — "We will not let security d e s k atmosphere once again rule our universities," incumbent president Hassan Rouhani, who is seeking reelection, said during a trip to Kerman on Saturday.

"Today neither slogans nor digits and statistics will be able to attract any ear among Iranians. We should continue our path, which is the path to freedom," he said, ILNA reported.

Rouhani also referred to the late Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, whose hometown he was visiting, saying Iran today misses him.



Mirsalim calls for permit to show documents in debates

POLITICS TEHRAN — Presidential candidate d e s k Mostafa Mirsalim has called for permit for candidates to show documents during the live debates.

Mirsalim made his demand in a letter he wrote to the other five candidates in view of the free flow of information. "I was in favor of live debates... and also believe we should not fear freedom tempered by law. We should not prevent free circulation of information on premises of security," he wrote.

"If the interior minister cannot trust candidates to observe national interests, how could people trust them?"



Rouhani is reformists' candidate: Mousavi Lari

POLITICS TEHRAN — Abdolvahed Mousavi Lari, d e s k deputy head of the supreme reformist policy making council, on Saturday said that Hassan Rouhani is the reformists' favored presidential candidate.

Reformists will not have two candidates, but it was decided that somebody run alongside Rouhani and Rouhani did not react negatively to the proposal, he told a press conference, IRIB reported.

The movement that supported Rouhani and brought Jahangiri is sure to take care of who stays and who leaves the race at the end, added Mousavi Lari, a former interior minister.



Raisi, Qalibaf are both the fittest: Rezaee

POLITICS TEHRAN — Mohsen Rezaee, d e s k secretary of the Expediency Council, has said presidential candidates Ebrahim Raisi and Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf are both the fittest to become Iran's next president.

"In unity the fittest is not one person. Messers Raisi and Qalibaf are the fittest both. Any one of them who becomes president will be backed by all revolution's forces," Rezaee wrote in a tweet on Saturday.

Qalibaf is currently the mayor of Tehran. Raisi is the custodian of the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (AS). Both are backed by a coalition of principlists.

Iran says discussing 5-year nuclear cooperation with EU

By Ali Kushki

TEHRAN — Iran and the European Union are discussing a five-year plan for cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy which will be funded by the bloc, Ali Akbar Salehi, Iran's nuclear chief, said on Saturday.

"We are discussing the five-year plan that needs €20 million," Salehi said in an appearance in Tehran with visiting European Climate Action and Energy Commissioner Miguel Arias Canete.

"The Europeans are to provide the funding," Salehi added.

Moreover, the two sides are working on details of a roadmap which, once finalized, will allow for Iran's collaboration with the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) for research and development purposes.

"Details of the cooperation were discussed today," the nuclear chief noted, what Canete confirmed, as well.

Euratom aims to pursue nuclear research and training activities with an emphasis on continually improving nuclear safety, security and radiation protection, notably to contribute to the long-term decarbonisation of the energy



Ali Akbar Salehi (L) shakes hands with European Climate Action and Energy Commissioner Miguel Arias Canete in Tehran, April 29, 2017.

system in a safe, efficient and secure way. Another cooperation area, Salehi added, for nuclear interaction between Tehran and the EU is the establishment of a nuclear safety center in Iran, which can be of service to the whole region.

Closer ties between Tehran and the European Union come in the wake of the international 2015 nuclear deal with six

world powers, Britain, China, Germany, France, Russia and the United States, under which Tehran agreed to curb its nuclear program in reward for relief from economic sanctions.

Under the nuclear accord, otherwise known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the six world powers cooperate with Iran appropriately in the

field of peaceful uses of nuclear energy and engage in mutually determined civil nuclear cooperation projects.

Last November, Salehi and ITER Director General Bernard Bigot signed a non-closure agreement, which will allow Iran to join the multi-national nuclear fusion project as an associate member.

Iran is already studying the development of nuclear fusion and has smaller laboratory tokamak machines.

However, ITER would give it access to new technologies and help bring it into the international civil nuclear energy fold.

In one of the nuclear deal's annexes the powers, which are all ITER members, said Tehran should be encouraged to cooperate with the project. "The nuclear deal opened the door," Bigot said.

Unlike fission reactors, which produce energy by splitting the nuclei of atoms, ITER would generate power by combining them. It remains unclear whether the technology will work and become commercially viable.

Nuclear energy cooperation also was a key theme of a joint statement by the EU foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in April 2016.

Iran presidential debate receives mixed feedback

POLITICS TEHRAN — The first of three planned d e s k debates ahead of the May 19 elections in Iran received mixed feedback, with most commentators describing either Tehran Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf or Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri as the winners of the 3-hour-long debate.

This came as President Hassan Rouhani and his presumed main rival, Ebrahim Raisi, the custodian of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS) in Mashhad, failed to live up to expectations.

The other two candidates, Mostafa Mirsalim and Mostafa Hashemitaba also didn't receive much attention. As the debate was nearing its end, President Rouhani and Qalibaf got into a heated argument over Rouhani's 2013 presidential campaign promises.

Qalibaf criticized Rouhani for failing to fulfil a campaign pledge to create four million jobs, a promise Rouhani denied making, and hit back at the mayor for

issuing false statements.

The Tehran mayor further accused the Rouhani administration of dishonesty, mismanagement and supporting the rich at the expense of the poor.

In the aftermath of the debate, several reformist lawmakers responded to Qalibaf's criticism of the Rouhani administration, comparing him to the former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

"The level of awareness among people is so high that those who intend to damage another person's reputation for their own sake will fail miserably," Saeed Bastani, representative of Torbat Heidarieh said.

Mohammad Hashemi, who served as vice president for executive affairs during the presidency of his older brother, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, also said that the debates should not undermine the Islamic Republic.

He praised Rouhani and Raisi for their cautious and tactful approach in the debate. Hashemi then criticized

Qalibaf for adopting an aggressive approach which he said was very similar to that of Ahmadinejad.

On the other side of the dispute, Elias Naderan, a former principlist MP, described Rouhani as the "biggest loser of the debate".

Qalibaf also criticized the state TV for not broadcasting a video which he had prepared to prove his claim.

"I wanted a video to be played but they didn't allow it," he said.

Mir-Salim, a conservative candidate, wrote an open letter to the other candidates after the debate, in which he indirectly criticized Rouhani for describing what Qalibaf had said as a lie.

"One should promise things he's capable of delivering," Mir-Salim said.

He also said that in the era of communication, with the social media and heightened public awareness, it is very difficult to simply accuse someone of lying.

Tehran, Moscow discuss nuclear cooperation



POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian d e s k officials have held meetings to discuss expansion of nuclear cooperation between the two countries, ISNA reported on Saturday.

Behrooz Kamalvandi, deputy chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), arrived in Moscow on Tuesday for talks with the head of Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation Alexey Likhachov and Rosatom Deputy Director-General for International Relations Nikolai Spassky.

The two sides agreed that delegations from Iran and Russia would follow up on various key issues for nuclear cooperation.

They also discussed the implementation of a number of projects and removal of obstacles in order to boost

nuclear cooperation.

Back in January, the AEOI and Rosatom signed an agreement for cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The agreement came after the signing of a memorandum of understanding on November 11, 2014.

The agreement was in line with the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and six world powers, which resulted in removal of nuclear-related sanctions against Iran in exchange for limits on the country's nuclear program.

Under the deal, Iran agreed to convert the Fordo facility into a nuclear, physics and technology center to benefit from international collaboration especially in the form of scientific joint partnerships in agreed areas of research.

Iran: Israeli attack on Syria violates international law



POLITICS TEHRAN —Iranian d e s k Foreign Ministry on Friday strongly condemned the Zionist regime's attacks on Syrian territory, describing it as a violation of international law.

The Zionist regime of Israel's repeated aggressions against Syria are violation of national sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and are contrary to the international regulations and in line with strengthening terrorists," ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said.

He added, "There is no doubt that these attacks are in line with weakening the legal Syrian government and are clear violation of the sovereignty and territorial

integrity of an independent country which is a member to the United Nations."

He urged international bodies, especially the UN, not to keep silence over such aggressions that undermine the international stability and security.

Qassemi said it extremely important to prevent repetition of such attacks.

Israel carried out several attacks on a military base near the Damascus airport on Thursday.

Syrian state TV quoted a military source saying rockets fired from Israeli territory targeted a military area in the southwestern part of the airport which caused explosions, Aljazeera reported.

Zarif calls Iran safest country for investment

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister d e s k Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Saturday that Iran is the "safest" and "most transparent" country for economic cooperation.

"European partners of Iran should know that Iran is the safest and most transparent country for economic cooperation, because it relies on people for making economic and scientific advances, and the people have guaranteed their peace and security in spite of all the sanctions, war(s) and terrorism," he said during a speech at the 4th Iran-Europe economic and banking ties.

He pointed to long history of relationship between Iran and European countries and said ties, especially in banking area and oil and gas industry, should be normalized as soon as possible.

Zarif also attached great importance to using the post-nuclear opportunities to boost the national economy.



Since the nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), went into force in Jan. 2016, Iran has been seeking to attract foreign investment to prop up its economy.

According to the deal, brokered between Iran and great powers and the European Union, financial and economic sanctions must be lifted and Iran must also put limits on its nuclear activities.

"Steps on the path of resistance economy can be taken through implementing the JCPOA. The diplomatic apparatus is ready to cooperate with private and state-run sectors to help the country's progress and development," the foreign minister explained.

He also criticized the former government's policies which led to "banditry" of the central bank's assets by the United States.

"If the then managers understood better the concept of 'torn papers', Iran's properties would not be target of the U.S. banditry," the chief diplomat noted.

In December 2006 former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad rejected a UN sanctions resolution against Iran as "a piece of torn paper".

Hans Blix: U.S. presented "no evidence" for Khan Shaykhun suspected gas attack

Infighting between rival terrorist groups leaves dozens dead in Syria: observatory

At least 40 foreign-sponsored militants have been killed during a fresh wave of infighting that broke out between rival Takfiri terrorist groups on the outskirts of the Syrian capital Damascus, says a Britain-based monitoring group.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said that the militants were slain after clashes erupted between the so-called Jaish al-Islam (Brigade of Islam) terrorist group and the two allied groups of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly known as al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), and Faylaq al-Rahman, in Eastern Ghouta region on Friday morning.

"There were at least 15 dead among the ranks of Jaish al-Islam and 23 among its adversaries" as well as two civilians, the monitoring group further said, adding that at least 70 other militants sustained injuries in the clashes.

Citing a statement released by the Saudi regime-backed Jaish al-Islam Takfiri group, the monitoring group said the clashes, which are still underway, took place after the terrorist group's rivals captured a reinforcement convoy headed for the strategic al-Qaboun suburb of Damascus to confront government troops.

The Faylaq al-Rahman militant group, however, in a statement denied the allegation, saying Jaish al-Islam had been "preparing for weeks" to launch an offensive against its militants in Eastern Ghouta region. It added that one of its commanders had been killed in Friday's clashes.

Reports say that clashes between the two Takfiri factions also erupted in the towns of Madira, Beit Sawa, Arbin, Kafr Batna, Hazza and Zamalka.

Clashes between rival militant groups in war-torn Syria are quite common. In February, the two previously allied terrorist groups of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and Jund al-Aqsa (Soldiers of al-Aqsa), which are said to be ISIL affiliates, engaged in a



deadly infighting that killed nearly 70 militants from both sides in the northwestern province of Idlib.

In January, dozens of militants were killed after Fateh al-Sham terrorists engaged in a 10-day-long fighting with other militant factions in the same province.

In May last year, another infighting between Jaish al-Islam and Faylaq al-Rahman militants killed over 500 terrorists from both sides and claimed the lives of 10 civilians, including four children.

Jaish al-Islam is the dominant Takfiri group in Eastern Ghouta. One of the group's leaders, Mohammad Alloush, has been among the senior negotiators of the so-called opposition group at peace talks in Switzerland and Kazakhstan.

For nearly six years, Syria has been fighting foreign-sponsored militancy. United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura estimated in August last year that more than 400,000 people had been killed in the war until then. The UN stopped its official casualty count in the war-torn country, citing its inability to

verify the figures it received from various sources.

Senior Council of Europe leader stripped of powers after Assad visit

Elsewhere, a senior leader of the European human rights body has been stripped of his powers after a visit to Syria and meeting with the Arab country's President Bashar al-Assad.

Senior members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) on Friday passed a vote of no confidence in Pedro Agramunt accused of tarnishing the 47-nation international organization after a March meeting with the Syrian president.

The 65-year-old Spanish leader was also banned from traveling, attending meetings or speaking on behalf of the Strasbourg-based assembly.

"Standards and principles of the parliamentary assembly are more important than any individual member, and the integrity of our assembly must be upheld," said Sir Roger Gale, the British senior vice-president of PACE.

Last month, Agramunt along with a Russian delegation made a visit to the Syrian capital of Damascus, during which

he met and was photographed with Assad.

The Russian-sponsored visit had taken place days before a chemical incident in Syria's Idlib Province, which the Western countries blamed on the Syrian government.

Agramunt recently apologized for his trip to Damascus and signed a written declaration to the PACE office, saying that, "This visit was a mistake. And I have recognized that since I have seen full consequences of it"

He insisted he had traveled not representing the Council of Europe but as a Spanish senator "looking for peace."

Over 80 people died in the April 4 purported gas attack on Khan Shaykhun.

Using the incident as a pretext, the United States warships fired 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles from two warships in the Mediterranean Sea at the Shayrat airfield in Syria's central province of Homs on April 7.

The U.S. claimed that the suspected Khan Shaykhun attack had been launched from the military site. The attack was launched without any investigation into the reported gas attack.

Earlier this month, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said in an interview with the Russian Sputnik news agency that the chemical incident was "a false-flag play just to justify the attack on the Shayrat base."

He also accused the West of preventing any impartial investigation into the suspected chemical attack.

Meanwhile, Hans Blix, a former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency who was also a prominent weapons inspector at the United Nations, said Washington had presented "no evidence" for the suspected gas attack and that the Trump administration had made the decision to launch the strikes unilaterally without making a legal case.

(Source: Press TV)

N. Korea test-fires ballistic missile in defiance of world pressure

North Korea test-fired a ballistic missile on Saturday shortly after the United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned that failure to curb Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic missile programs could lead to "catastrophic consequences."

The U.S. and South Korean officials said the test, from an area north of the North Korean capital, appeared to have failed, in what would be the North's fourth straight unsuccessful missile test since March.

The test came as the USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier group arrived in waters near the Korean peninsula, where it began exercises with the South Korean navy on Saturday, just minutes after the failed launch, a South Korean navy official said.

Tillerson, in a United Nations Security Council meeting on North Korea on Friday, repeated the Trump administration's position that all options were on the table if Pyongyang persisted with its nuclear and missile development.

"The threat of a nuclear attack on Seoul, or Tokyo, is real, and it's only a matter of time before North Korea develops the capability to strike the U.S. mainland," Tillerson said.

"Failing to act now on the most pressing security issue in the world may bring catastrophic consequences."

U.S. President Donald Trump said the launch was an affront to China, the North's sole main ally.

"North Korea disrespected the wishes of China & its highly respected President when it launched, though unsuccessfully, a missile today. Bad!" Trump said in a post on Twitter after the launch.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told the UN meeting it was not only up to China to solve the North Korean problem.

"The key to solving the nuclear issue on the peninsula does not lie in the hands of the Chinese side," Wang said.

In a commentary on Saturday, China's official Xinhua news agency said both North Korea and the United States needed to tread cautiously.

Trump, in an interview with Reuters on Thursday, praised Chinese Leader Xi Jinping for "trying very hard" on North Korea but warned a "major, major conflict" was possible.

The North has been conducting missile and nuclear weapons related activities at an unprecedented rate and is believed to have made progress in developing intermediate-range and submarine-launched missiles.

Tension on the Korean peninsula has been high for weeks over fears the North may conduct a long-range missile test, or its sixth nuclear test, around the time of the April 15 anniversary of its state founder's birth.

Japan protests

Elsewhere, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe condemned the test as a grave threat to the international order.

"I urged Russia to play a constructive role in dealing with North Korea," Abe told reporters in London. "Japan is watching how China will act in regard to North Korea."

U.S. officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the North Koreans had probably tested a medium-range missile known as a KN-17 and it appeared to have broken up within minutes of taking off.

The South Korean military said the missile reached an altitude of 71 km (44 miles) before disintegrating. It said the launch was a clear violation of UN resolutions and warned the North not to act rashly.

With North Korea acting in defiance of the pressure, the United States could conduct new naval drills and deploy more ships and aircraft in the region, a U.S. official told Reuters.

The dispatch of Carl Vinson to the waters off the Korean peninsula is a "reckless action of the war maniacs aimed at an extremely dangerous nuclear war," the Rodong Sinmun, the official newspaper of North Korea's ruling Workers' Party, said in a commentary on Saturday.

Inter-continental ballistic rockets will fly into the United States "if the U.S. shows any slight sign of provocation," the newspaper said.

North Korea rattled world powers in February when it successfully launched a new intermediate-range ballistic missile that it said could carry a nuclear weapon. It also successfully tested ballistic missiles on March 6.

It is not clear what has caused the series of failed missile tests since then.

The Trump administration could respond to the test by speeding up its plans for new U.S. sanctions, including possible measures against specific North Korean and Chinese entities, said the U.S. official, who declined to be identified.

The UN Security Council is likely to start discussing a statement to condemn the missile launch, said diplomats.

But condemnations and sanctions resolutions since 2006, when North Korea conducted its first nuclear test, have done little to impede its push for ballistic missiles and nuclear arms.

The South Korean politician expected to win a May 9 presidential election, Moon Jae-in, called the test an "exercise in futility."

"We urge again the Kim Jong Un regime to immediately stop reckless provocative acts and choose the path to cooperate with the international community," Park Kwang-on, a spokesman for Moon, said in a statement, referring to the North Korean leader.

Moon has advocated a more moderate policy on the North and been critical of the deployment of an advanced U.S. missile defense system in the South intended to counter North Korea's missile threat, which China also strongly objects to.

(Source: Reuters)

Tehran Metro Lines Public Announcement for Suppliers Qualification Assessment (Second Call)



Iran Municipalities and Rural Organization by referring to the Tenders' law approved by Iranian Parliament dated 17/11/1383, and in accordance with note "3" of Article 12 of Executive Regulation No. H-33560T/84136 dated 16/07/1385 and based on Economic Council resolution No. 708653 dated 10/06/1395 intends to procure "designing, homologation, producing, testing, shipping, commissioning, delivering, training, guarantee/warranty services and special tools of 630 metro cars for Tehran metro lines" considering Iranian law for maximum utilization of local technical, engineering and production capabilities by inviting eligible domestic and foreign metro car manufacturers consortium, who can arrange finance to participate in an international Tender. For this purpose, hereby all domestic and foreign companies which have relevant experiences and references are invited to obtain Suppliers' Qualification Assessment Documents.

Tender Subject:

"designing, homologation, producing, testing, shipping, commissioning, delivering, training, guarantee/warranty services and special tools of 630 metro cars for Tehran metro lines" considering Iranian law for maximum utilization of local technical, engineering and production capabilities by inviting eligible domestic and foreign metro car manufacturers consortium, who can arrange finance to participate in an international Tender.

Name and Address of Tender Holder:

Iran Municipalities and Rural Organization(IMRO)
Address: No. 1184, Alley Mir, North Kargar Avenue, Tehran, Iran.
Tel: +98 21 63901085
www.imo.org.ir

Name and Address of Management Contract (MC):

Iran Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO):
Address: No. 10 -Karaneh Ave. -Vali e Asr Ave. Tehran I.R. of Iran
Tel:+98-021-22037475
Fax:+98-021-22037476
www. Idro.org E-mail: itmi@idro.org

Quantity and Delivery Place:

630 metro cars (90 trains)
Six hundred and thirty (630) metro cars, ninety (90) trains, to be delivered, tested, commissioned, and supported by guarantee/warranty services in Tehran Metro Lines.

Suppliers' Qualification Assessment Documents Deadline and Pick up Address:

Within 5 working days form second call of suppliers' qualification assessment published date.
Pick up Address: Electronic file of Suppliers' Qualification Assessment Documents is available at the site: <http://iets.mporg.ir> (national tender site) and at the introduced sites of Management Contract and Tender Holder as addressed above.
Submitting Address: the office of tender holder (Iran Municipalities and Rural Organization) as addressed above.

Iran Municipalities and Rural Organization

Pope Francis arrives in Egypt on historic visit

Pope Francis said violence cannot be committed in the name of God, in a speech at a Muslim-Christian conference in Egypt.

The 80-year-old touched down at Cairo airport on Friday before he was ushered in a car to meet Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

Francis is in Egypt on a 27-hour visit to push for dialogue with Muslims and support the country's embattled Christian minority that has suffered a series of attacks.

"Peace alone ... is holy and no act of violence can be perpetrated in the name of God, for it would profane his name," the Catholic pontiff said.

He also warned against rising populism.

"Demagogic forms of populism are on the rise. These certainly do not help to consolidate peace and stability," he told the conference, organized by al-Azhar, the world's foremost Sunni Islamic center of learning.

"It is essential that we spare no effort in eliminating situations of poverty and exploitation, where extremism more easily takes root, and in blocking the flow of money and weapons destined to those who provoke violence."

Acts that do not promote peace are "a gift to the proponents of radicalism and violence," the pope said.

Amid high security, the pontiff is meeting with Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the Imam of the government-run Al-Azhar mosque and an Islamic philosophy professor, before meeting with Sisi and Pope Tawadros II, the head of Egypt's Coptic Church.

Egypt has been under a state of emergency since two bombings in Coptic churches earlier this month that killed 45 people.

All of the country's churches have been placed under additional protection because of the risk of another assault timed to coincide with Francis being in the country.

Armored cars have been stationed in front of the presidential palace and security men have been posted every hundred yards along a 20km stretch between the airport and central Cairo.

Egypt's Copts, who make up about 10 percent of the country's population of 92 million, are the Middle East's largest Christian minority and one of the oldest.

Egypt has seen a wave of attacks against Christians since 2013, when the military led by Sisi overthrew President Mohamed Morsi, the country's first democratically elected president.

(Source: agencies)

Tehran, Yerevan ink MOU on customs co-op

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) and Customs Service of Republic of Armenia signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on customs cooperation, IRNA reported on Saturday.

The MOU was signed by the Head of IRICA, Masoud Karbasian, and the Chairman of Armenian Customs Services, Vardan Harutyunyan, in Tehran.

Under the terms of the inked MOU, Iran and Armenia's customs organizations will exchange customs statistical data on the bilateral trade every three months and also annually.

Iran exported some \$179.103 million worth of goods to Armenia during the last Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20) while the imports stood at \$20.892 million in the same period.

Iran offers India to run phase 1 of Chabahar Port

India's presence in the strategically located Iranian port of Chabahar — Delhi's primary gateway to landlocked Afghanistan — is all set to get a big boost.

Tehran has recently proposed to Delhi to manage phase one of the port built by Iran even as the two sides are still negotiating terms and conditions of Delhi's role in expanding phase two of the port where the Modi government wants to invest \$235 million.

ET has learnt that Tehran has offered Delhi management rights for two years for phase one of the port and such rights could be renewed by another decade.

But port management proposal is not just only development regarding Chabahar Port, there will be hectic activities with a trilateral meeting being planned between Iran, India, and Afghanistan on operation of Chabahar Port in May.

Last year, the three sides had signed an agreement for operation of Chabahar Port. Besides, a summit to attract investments for the Special Economic Zone in the port complex will be held mid-May in Iran.

Delhi, Kabul and Tehran could also hold trilateral consultations on the future of Afghanistan soon with Indian foreign secretary S Jaishankar planning to visit Tehran in the future close on the heels on series of consultations organized by Moscow on dealing with the Afghan situation and use of Mother of All Bombs by the USA against the ISIS.

The visit of the US NSA to India also provided India an opportunity to understand Washington's plan for the landlocked country.

Incidentally these meetings in Iran are expected to occur ahead of the presidential polls where the incumbent Rouhani is seeking reelection.

India's allotment of \$235 million for phase two of Chabahar is divided into two parts — \$150 million Line of Credit (LoC) from the EXIM Bank for development of port complex and \$85 million — allotted later following contract between the two sides for supply of equipment to develop two berths in the port complex.

A Special Purpose Vehicle has been created by the Indian shipping ministry for development of phase two of the port.

On the Iranian side, Ports and Management Organization is the nodal authority for implementing the project.

India has been given the rights to operate two berths and few terminals in this phase two of the port.

(Source: Economic Times)

Here are the currency-market winners — and losers — from Trump's first 100 days

1 → It should come as no surprise that one of the world's most popular haven currencies has appreciated by nearly 5% USD/JPY, +0.25% since the start of the year to trade at ¥111.43 to the dollar on Friday.

Improving fundamentals have also helped its performance. Unemployment in the world's third-largest economy is at its lowest level in more than two decades. Inflation and economic growth have begun to stir, after years of stagnation. And the Bank of Japan's decision back in September to change its approach to monetary easing has caused some to speculate about whether the country's experiment with negative interest rates and asset purchases might be coming to an end.

Bitcoin: The price of a single bitcoin more than doubled in 2016. This year, it's already up 30%, notching yet another in a series of record highs on Friday at \$1,343, according to the CoinDesk Price Index.

At the same time, the world's most popular digital currency weathered the Securities and Exchange Commission's rejection of two proposed bitcoin exchange-traded funds with nary a blip.

■ The losers

The dollar: Dollar bulls have had a rough time in 2017. Just like they did in 2015, and, oh yea — most of 2016, too.

The Federal Reserve's trade-weighted dollar index climbed by more than 4% between Trump's upset victory on Nov. 8, and the end of the year. The ICE U.S. Dollar index, which gauges the currency's strength against a basket of six rivals, climbed 4.3%.

But since then, both indexes have erased nearly all of their post-election gains as the Trump administration has struggled to implement its agenda.

Investors bid up the dollar on the expectation that Trump's promised fiscal stimulus would allow the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates more speedily. But market strategists like Doug Borthwick, managing director at Chapdelaine FX, a subsidiary of Tullett Prebon, believe the market was too quick to price this in.

For its part, the Federal Reserve has penciled in three interest-rate hikes for 2017. It has already raised borrowing costs once, in March. But even if it makes good with the other two, the market has had years of lead time to anticipate interest rates returning to pre-crisis levels.

The Fed's rate-setting committee will meet next week, but most believe it will hold off on raising rates again until its June meeting.

(Source: Marketwatch.com)

Post-JCPOA trade with EU up 79%

ECONOMY TEHRAN — European Climate Action and Energy Commissioner Miguel Arias Canete said since the implementation of the nuclear deal, known as JCPOA, Iran-Europe trade turnover rose by 79 percent.

Canete made the remarks during the first-ever Iran-EU Business Forum on Sustainable Energy held in Tehran on Saturday, IRNA reported.

According to the official, after the implementation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which lifted the sanctions against Iran in January 2016, the country's exports to

Europe has also risen by 300 percent. "The nuclear deal has paved the way for the resumption of Iran-Europe cooperation," he noted.

The commissioner further noted that EU is ready to provide Iran with their knowledge and experiences in renewable energies sector to help the country reach its goal of a 30 percent renewable power supply by 2030.

"EU is even ready to facilitate the presence of European companies in Iran to help attract necessary investments in this area," Canete added.

The Iran-EU forum was also attended by high-ranking Iranian offi-



European Climate Action and Energy Commissioner Miguel Arias Canete (R) talks with Iranian Energy Minister Hamid Chitichian during Iran-EU Business Forum on Sustainable Energy in Tehran on Saturday.

cially Energy Minister Hamid Chitichian and Deputy Finance Minister Mohammad Khazaei.

Feasibility of sustainable development of energy in Iran, expansion of

Iran-EU trade ties in energy sector, and the country's potentials in developing renewable energies were among subjects that were explored in the forum.

Iran's annual crude steel output jumps 11%

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran produced 18.466 million tons of crude steel in the past Iranian calendar year 1395 (ended on March 20), showing 11 percent rise from its preceding year, IRIB reported on Saturday.

The country's crude steel output stood at 16.656 million tons in 1394.

Of the mentioned figure, 14.419 million tons have been produced by the state-run companies and the rest 4.047 million tons by the private sector.

Also, some 18.151 million tons of steel products have been produced in Iran in the past calendar year, indicating four percent growth from the figure of its preceding year.

Of the steel products output figure,

some 11.331 million tons have been produced by the state-run companies and 6.82 million tons by the private units.

According to a January report published by the World Steel Association, Iran produced 17.89 million tons of crude steel in 2016, registering an 11 percent growth compared to the figure in 2015.

Iran's crude steel output in 2015 stood at 16.14 million tons, the report said.

Maintaining its 2015 record the country ranked 14th among global crude steel producers in 2016.

Also, Europe's steel import from Iran has increased by nearly eight times between 2013 and 2016, placing the country at the third spot next to China and India.

Eurasian Economic Union, Iran may reach free trade zone agreement by fall

GENEVA (TASS) — Talks on the temporary free trade zone agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Iran are scheduled for completion by the next EAEU summit this fall, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Vasily Nebenzya told TASS on Friday.

"There have been no political obstacles because Iran and we want to establish such a zone," the diplomat said. "This is merely an issue of negotiating conditions for this zone: what goods items we will open for access and what ones will be held; the same is from Iran's part," Nebenzya said.

Negotiations of the temporary free trade zone agreement between the EAEU and Iran were planned to be

completed by the latest summit of the Eurasian Economic Union held on April 14, the diplomat said. "However, we decided it will be advisable to continue discussing this topic and proceed with talks," he said. "I hesitate to mention the timeframe but I think we will gear up for the next EAEU summit in fall," Nebenzya added.

Normal negotiating process is currently underway, the diplomat said. "When the countries are negotiating a free trade zone between them, they are naturally in the course of defending their economic interests and attempting to gain advantages in certain areas through bargaining," Nebenzya added.

Iran, Europe exploring further banking ties in Tehran forum

ECONOMY TEHRAN — European bankers attending the fourth edition of Iran-Europe banking and business forum in Tehran's IRIB International Conference Center are investigating avenues of expanding banking partnership with Iran, Tasnim news agency reported on Saturday.

Addressing the opening ceremony of the two-day event, Head of Banking Forum in Frankfurt Nader Maleki said Iran seems a proper bed to Europeans for making their investments and holding such forums will shed light on the future of trade ties between Europe and the Islamic country.



Iran's Ambassador to Germany Ali Majedi also addressed the forum announcing that Iranian banks, namely Saman Bank and Middle East Bank, are conducting related negotiations to launch their branches in some European countries.

As Ali Divandari, the head of Iran's Monetary and Banking Research Institute (MBRI), informed few days ago, representatives of more than 35 European banks, companies and financial firms are attending this event which is mainly focused on "development of banking and financial processes" and "investment opportunities in Iran".

British consumers' confidence slumps as inflation grows

Rising inflation is taking its toll on British households, knocking consumer confidence to its lowest level since the aftermath of last summer's Brexit vote.

Pollsters YouGov said worries about job security and living costs pushed its monthly measure of consumer mood down a further 1.5 points to 108 in April, the weakest reading since last July.

The score above 100 still shows that more people are confident than not, bringing some solace for Theresa May's government as it banks on a solid victory in the snap election on 8 June.

But the consumer confidence measure is well below the levels seen before June's vote to leave the EU. The poll also underscored the squeeze on living standards as inflation starts to rise faster than pay. It found Britons were at their gloomiest in more than three years about their own financial outlook.

"Many analysts have said for a while that inflation would bite and these figures show that it has started to — and is likely to get worse over the coming year," said Stephen Harmston, head of YouGov re-

ports.

The downbeat tone of the poll chimes with signs the economy has lost momentum in recent months as the post-referendum resilience in consumer spending wanes. Official figures on Friday morning are expected to show UK economic growth slowed markedly in the first quarter of this year.

Much of the pressure on households stems from higher inflation, which has picked up to its highest level in more than three years on the back of higher oil prices and because of the pound's weakness since the Brexit vote. A weaker currency makes imports to the UK such as food and fuel more expensive.

Wage growth has fallen behind inflation, leaving people worse off in real terms and denting consumer spending, a key driver of the UK economy.

YouGov bases its consumer confidence survey on 6,000 interviews a month, asking about household finances, property prices, job security and business activity, over the past 30 days and looking ahead to the next 12 months. Six of its

eight measures fell in April.

There was a small increase in homeowners' expectations for property prices over the coming year and people were more upbeat about the level of business activity in their workplace over the past month.

However, confidence about job security over the last month dropped to the lowest level since April 2013.

Nina Skero at the Centre for Economics and Business Research, which co-compiles the consumer confidence report, said the gloom around personal finances did not bode well for the UK economy.

"Consumer confidence has been on the cusp of a decline for a while and it has now tipped over and fallen," said Skero, head of macroeconomics at the consultancy.

"Particularly worrying is the fall in both the forward and backward-looking household finances as it is clear that people are starting to feel the pinch and expect things to get worse. If they start to really rein in spending, the knock-on

effect on the economy could be notable."

A separate measure of consumer confidence from the market research firm GfK also slipped in April, dropping one point to -7, the lowest since December. That report suggested people were more gloomy about their own finances and the UK economy, but more confident that now was a good time to make big purchases such as furniture.

GfK spokesman Joe Staton said that while there was a dip compared with March, confidence was still "surprisingly stable" and had not suffered the sharp drop some commentators had suggested could follow the triggering of article 50.

"Consumers continue to remain positive about the state of their personal finances and even report that now is a good time to buy," Staton said. "But is this too good to be true? Is this simply the calm before the storm? Is pre-Brexit economic turbulence yet to really batter households? That threat cannot be ruled out."

(Source: The Guardian)

Pistachios now pose the latest flashpoint between Iran and the United States

As the two countries struggle to redefine their relationship over weighty matters such as nuclear policy, California pistachio producers have another mission.

They're lobbying hard to keep a stiff tariff on Iran's raw in-shell pistachios. Iranians hope to remove a 241 percent duty that's jacked up their potential U.S. prices since the mid-1980s. Federal officials will have to sort it all out, and soon.

"How can you reassure us that you won't take advantage of the market opening?" Commissioner Meredith Broadbent of the U.S. International Trade Commission asked an Iranian trader at a hearing Thursday.

The businessman, Hossein Denis Ketabi, countered that the Iranian pistachio industry would make only a modest impact in the United States.

"Competition is healthy. It's a good thing," said Ketabi, president of the board of Commercial Arman Pegah Co., adding that "it's not 1985."



California pistachio industry leaders who flocked to the International Trade Commission's elongated, first-floor hearing room Thursday countered with warnings

about Iran's growing worldwide pistachio clout.

"There is no doubt that if lower-priced product were to enter the market, even if it were inferior in quality and from another country, grower returns would plummet and the economic viability of this industry could be in jeopardy," said Richard Matoian, executive director of the American Pistachio Growers.

Everyone agrees that the pistachio industry rooted in California's San Joaquin Valley has blossomed since the 1980s, when Iranian imports were flooding the U.S. market. In 1985, barely 47,000 U.S. acres were planted in pistachios. By 2015, with Iranian imports having been all but shut out, California alone had 232,655 pistachio-bearing acres, according to the trade commission.

During the 2014-15 crop year, U.S. pistachio production surpassed 512 million pounds.

(Source: sacbee.com)

Global crude oil discoveries plunge to record low, and it's gonna get worse

By Tom DiChristopher

Conventional crude discoveries plummeted to a record low last year, one of the world's top energy policy advisers said.

And it likely won't get any better any time soon as energy companies gave the green light to the lowest number of new drilling projects in more than 70 years, according to the Paris-based International Energy Agency.

The IEA has warned that insufficient investment could lead to a tightening of global oil supplies. While that might seem like a welcome change in today's oversupplied market, prices could spike sharply higher in the coming years if drillers do not tee up enough new production to satisfy global demand.

Investment levels remain depressed, and exploration spending is poised to fall for a third straight year in 2017, IEA said in a new report.

Energy companies have canceled or delayed \$1 trillion in planned projects by one count, as oil prices remain mired in a slump going back to the summer of 2014. The price collapse was sparked by a boom in U.S. production and compounded by OPEC's refusal to cut output during the first two years of the downturn.

But now IEA says the pendulum could swing the other way, largely due to a drop in conventional oil projects, or those that don't require certain advanced drilling methods.

IEA's analysis finds:

Oil discoveries totaled 2.4 billion barrels in 2016, versus the average of 9 billion barrels in the last 15 years.

Energy companies sanctioned 4.7 billion barrels of conventional oil resources for development, down 30 percent from 2015.

Firms reached a final investment decision on the lowest number of projects since the 1940s.

Offshore drilling projects account for a big part of the pullback. Last year, just 13 percent of conventional oil projects that got the go-ahead were offshore. That compares to an average of 40 percent of projects between 2000 and 2015.

Those figures do not bode well for President Donald Trump's goal of increasing offshore drilling in the U.S. Out-



er Continental Shelf. He is expected to sign an executive order on Friday aimed at rolling back offshore drilling limits imposed by President Barack Obama.

While conventional oil activity is in freefall, U.S. shale drilling is on an upswing, thanks to American companies halving the cost of production, IEA notes. U.S. crude production has recovered to more than 9.2 million barrels a day, the highest level since late 2015.

Producers in the U.S. shale patch rely on an expensive method called hydraulic fracture in which they inject water, minerals and chemicals at high pressure into wellbores to break up shale rock and release oil and gas. More efficient "fracking" will help these producers grow output by

2.3 million barrels a day by 2022, IEA projects.

But shale cannot make up the shortfall in conventional oil development: Conventional sources account for 69 million barrels a day of the current global output of 85 million barrels a day.

"Every new piece of evidence points to a two-speed oil market, with new activity at a historic low on the conventional side contrasted by remarkable growth in US shale production," Dr. Fatih Birol, IEA's executive director, said in a statement. "The key question for the future of the oil market is for how long can a surge in U.S. shale supplies make up for the slow pace of growth elsewhere in the oil sector." (Source: CNBC)

Russia hits 100% compliance with OPEC cut

Russia has effectively reached its 300,000-bpd production cut target under its agreement with OPEC, Energy Minister Alexander Novak said. "Yesterday it was about 298,000 barrels. We can say that we have reached 300,000 barrels," he told media on Friday.

The milestone comes none too soon, as Russia had promised to achieve this level by end April. Russia had undertaken the cut off its October daily average, which exceeded 11 million bpd in a bid to help OPEC's efforts to rebalance the market and improve prices. Together, OPEC –

bar Nigeria and Libya – and 11 non-OPEC producers agreed last November to take 1.8 million barrels from daily global supply.

However, these efforts have proved challenging, with global supplies actually rising during the first quarter of the year, despite hopes for the opposite and surprisingly high compliance. As Oil & Gas 360 noted in March, prior to the agreement, many countries increased production to record levels. This lessens the effect of any production cut, as the cuts are being made relative to the highest production levels in years.

As a result, despite Saudi Arabia cutting significantly more than it was supposed to and Iraq working its way up to its own target, OPEC is now discussing an extension of the agreement into the second half of the year.

Russia is taking part in the discussions, Novak said last week, adding that a decision will be made after a meeting with OPEC on May 24, a day before the cartel's annual meeting that should see an official announcement on the extension.

Meanwhile, shale output in the U.S. is rising and this is pressuring prices, fuelling

pessimism that if the rate of output growth there continues, the OPEC extension would not have the desired effect.

At the same time, however, the International Energy Agency warned that unless investments in oil pick up soon, a deficit will emerge after 2020. Middle Eastern producers need higher oil prices for new investments, but shale producers are doing pretty well at \$50 a barrel, with breakeven prices across the shale plays averaging \$35 a barrel, according to data from Rystad Energy.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Dubai gets its 1st solar-powered gas station

It's a bit of a paradox — a solar-powered gas station. But, if anything, it's another sign of how the world is slowly but surely turning away from fossil fuels toward clean, renewable energy. Dubai is part of the United Arab Emirates, the fourth-largest oil producer in the world. Yet the UAE is also positioning itself for the transition away from fossil fuels that its leaders see coming. Among other things, the UAE sits on the edge of the Persian Gulf. Much of its land area will be threatened by rising sea levels if the melting of the world's ice shelves continues unabated.

In recognition of the country's commitment to sustainable energy, the International Renewable Energy Agency has chosen Abu Dhabi, the UAE's other major city, as the home for its global headquarters. Solar farms are springing up everywhere to take advantage of the abundant sunshine that falls on that part of the world every day.

ENOC, which stands for Emirates

National Oil Company, has now opened the first solar-powered gas station in the country. Solar panels on the roof have a rating of 120 kW, which is 30 percent more than the station needs for its operational needs. The excess is fed back into the local electrical grid.

The new ENOC station has other "green" features. It uses a system to collect the vapors released from its fuel tanks and solar lighting. It also recycles its wastewater. Clean water is in short supply on the Arabian peninsula. All ENOC stations will soon have charging equipment for electric cars. Seven do at the present time.

Dubai's Roads and Transport Authority has agreed to lease 200 Tesla electric cars for use as taxis in Dubai, which will increase the need for more EV charging infrastructure in the area. The new ENOC is not the world's largest solar-powered gasoline station. That distinction belongs to a BP station located in central Ohio. (Source: Gas2.org)

EIA marks biggest jump in U.S. natural gas production in three years

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) announced the biggest jump in the natural gas output rate for the lower 48 states in three years in the agency's monthly production report.

Production stood at 80.2 billion cubic feet per day (bcfd) in February, up 1.8 bcfd from January.

Gross gas production figures for February stood at their highest since August 2016, but February 2016 still holds the record for most production at 82.6 bcfd.

Texas, Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma — the three most prolific gas-producing states — all saw new gas production, the latest numbers show.

Texas gas figures jumped by the first time in 10 months, marking the biggest increase since March 2011. Pennsylvania saw the fourth month of production spikes in a row and Oklahoma witnessed the largest output increase since March 2015.

While natural gas production de-

clined in 2016, the agency said in its April Short Term Energy Outlook report that it expects this trend to be reversed in 2017, with natural gas production increasing by 0.8 billion cubic feet per day. The forecast for 2018 predicts an additional increase of 4 bcfd.

Higher prices in natural gas, expected to rise from the March level of \$2.88 to an average of \$3.10 in 2017, with a further increase to \$3.45 in 2018, will likely contribute to a decline in the share of electricity supplied by natural gas in the coming years, as gas loses its competitive edge. Surprisingly, the EIA predicts that natural gas' share will fall from 34 percent to 32 percent by 2018, while that of coal will increase from 30 percent to 31 percent. Non-hydropower renewable energy (solar and wind) will see a modest increase from 9 percent to 10 percent, the STEO added.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Oil settles slightly higher but posts weekly decline

Oil prices closed up on Friday on growing hope that OPEC might agree to extend production cuts long enough to reduce a global crude glut, but crude prices still posted a weekly decline.

U.S. light crude rose 36 cents to settle at \$49.33 a barrel, off the day's high of \$49.76. Benchmark Brent crude futures settled up 29 cents to \$51.73 a barrel. Both benchmarks ended with weekly and monthly declines.

The more active Brent futures contract for delivery in July closed at \$52.05 Friday, up 23 cents.

If the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) agrees to extend the cuts, then bloated global inventories could drain by the end of the year, a Reuters poll of economists and analysts showed.

OPEC next meets in May to discuss oil supply policy and its secretary-general, Mohammad Barkindo, said this week the group wants to see global inventories reduced further.

That has made energy investors more hopeful the producer group will extend supply cuts into the second



half of the year. OPEC's deal to curb supply, which non-OPEC members such as Russia have joined, is due to expire at the end of June.

The talk of extending the cuts has come even before some producers have reduced output to the agreed-up-

on levels.

U.S. oil prices rose after OPEC made the deal in November. But they remain below where producers would like them, which would encourage OPEC to extend the deal, said Rob Haworth, senior investment strategist at U.S. Bank Wealth Management.

Still, weekly U.S. government data showed crude output, mostly from the shale oil industry, rising. Crude output for February rose 193,000 barrels per day to 9.03 million bpd, the highest since August 2015.

U.S. oil prices have lost ground in eight of the last 11 sessions.

Hedge funds showed pessimism on U.S. crude oil for the first time in four weeks in the week to April 25, the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) said Friday.

The speculator group cut its combined futures and options position in New York and London by 70,136 contracts to 284,942 during the period, CFTC data showed. (Source: Reuters)

Russia's power plant plans in Crimea hit sanction snag

Russia's plans to build two electricity plants in Crimea to provide power to the annexed peninsula are being derailed by the sanctions that the EU and the U.S. have imposed on Moscow over that very same annexation, Reuters reported, quoting sources familiar with the plans.

The \$1.3-billion project is to have two new high-tech plants in Crimea to ensure electricity supply to the residents who have been suffering power outages since the annexation. The plants have been partially built, but have been designed to operate with gas turbines made by a unit of Germany's engineering group Siemens, according to Reuters' sources.

However, Siemens — whose officials have always said that there were no plans to provide such turbines — risks violating the EU sanctions against Russia, which state that "goods and technology for the transport, telecommunications and energy sectors or the exploration of oil, gas and mineral resources may not be exported to Crimean companies or for use in Crimea."

Earlier this month, Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak told Russia's Parliament that "work is continuing despite problems related to the delivery of equipment from a Western company."

"We are working on buying other equipment," the minister said, without giving the name of the Western company in question.

Now the Russian project is facing delays because it has to either alter designs to accommodate other types of Russia-manufactured turbines, or try buying turbines from Iran, or use turbines from Western companies that are already in Russia, according to Reuters' sources.

However, Russia has lost the capability to manufacture such turbines over the past two decades. If Moscow opts for Iran-sourced turbines, those would be either acquired from a big international company or built in Iran under license from one—this could make any big international firm reluctant to agree, because of potential violation of the sanctions. As for the third option of using West-made turbines, it would also require the manufacturer to send engineers to Russia, which would also breach the sanctions.

The company that is building the power stations, Technopromexport, is itself on the U.S. list of sanctions on Russian individuals and entities.

According to a Technopromexport spokesman who sent an emailed statement to Reuters, the timetable for the Crimea power plants would likely be pushed further, but it was not due to the turbines delivery. (Source: oilprice.com)

Canada oil bets on tech, scale in face of foreign majors' exodus

As global oil majors pull out of Canada's oil sands, domestic companies are buying up assets and betting technology and economies of scale will enable them to turn a profit despite low crude prices.

Global energy majors have sold off more than \$22.5 billion worth of Canadian oil sands assets so far this year, concerned about depressed oil prices, high production costs and carbon emissions and limited pipeline access to market.

Three of Canada's biggest oil and gas companies reported first-quarter earnings and held annual general meetings this week, in which they talked up opportunities in the region despite global firms pulling back.

"We are transforming our company at a pivotal time in the industry and at the beginning of a technological renaissance," Cenovus Energy Inc Chief Executive Officer Brian Ferguson told investors on Wednesday.

Cenovus last month announced a C\$17.7 billion (\$12.98 billion) deal to buy ConocoPhillips assets, doubling the size of the Canadian company. The market balked at the ambitious acquisition and Cenovus stock lost a fifth of its value, but Ferguson insists the logic behind the deal is sound.

He predicts 2016 to 2020 will be period in which rapid technology development in areas including drilling, solvent-assisted bitumen extraction and automation will result in massive cost savings.

Suncor Energy Inc CEO Steve Williams said the sector consolidation was very positive for the industry and Canada.

Suncor, Canada's largest energy company, bought a majority-share in the Syncrude mining and upgrading project last year. (Source: Reuters)

Big Oil heads for back-to-back profit triumphs as fortunes turn

Fresh off Big Oil's best quarter in years, Exxon Mobil Corp. and Chevron Corp. may be poised for a repeat.

One-third of the way into the second quarter, crude prices — the prime driver of explorers' profits — are 25 percent higher than a year ago. If global supplies continue to contract and demand inches up through the end of June, the two dominant U.S. drillers will book a second straight quarterly victory in late July or early August.

Already, analysts are forecasting profit blowouts even larger than those registered when Exxon and Chevron disclosed first-quarter results on Friday. Exxon is seen lifting per-share earnings by 132 percent while Chevron is expected to post its biggest second-quarter profit in three years.

Exxon, the world's biggest oil producer by market value, earned 95 cents a share during the first quarter, outperforming all but one of the 19 analysts' estimates in a Bloomberg survey. Chevron, the second-largest U.S. driller, swung to a profit in a big way, scoring its largest quarterly gain since 2014 and a per-share result that was 64 percent higher than the average estimate.

Brent crude, the benchmark for most of the world's oil, has averaged \$53.82 a barrel since the current quarter began on April 1, compared with \$43.10 a year earlier, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. (Source: Bloomberg)

The danger of Trump's mood-based diplomacy

Donald Trump doesn't practice traditional diplomacy. As in domestic policy, but with a thicker fog of ignorance, Trump treats each issue of foreign policy or engagement as a separate event, and reacts to it according to his mood.

This behavior is unlikely to change. If it does not and Trump's presidency continues, the world, including the important part of it he governs, will become more dangerous. The considerable good that Americans do abroad will shrink. And the rule-based systems which the United States seeks to police will decay and be replaced with more regional and national confrontations and more failed states.

■ Trump's shifting moods

Trump's shifting moods have produced several notable flip-flops. Most prominent has been that on Russia, in part because he praised President Vladimir Putin again and again from mid-2013 to February this year. That stopped after the chemical weapons attack in Syria in early April, at which point Trump promised retaliation and switched from admiration to distrust of Russia, Syria's main ally.

It was a double switch – on Russia, but also on intervention. Trump ordered a missile strike on the base from which the Syrian planes staged their attack. He had vowed not to intervene in foreign quarrels, and had appeared indifferent about Assad remaining in power.

After criticizing China for manipulating its currency and destroying U.S. industry with cheap imports for much of his campaign, Trump changed his tone after an apparently friendly weekend with Chinese President Xi Jinping at Trump's Florida resort. He had grumbled before meeting Xi that relations between the two countries had to be radically adjusted. After the meeting, and after receiving some encouragement for his view that China would put pressure on a North Korea threatening nuclear war, Trump shifted once more, asking rhetorically why he would be rude to China on currency manipulation when it was assisting him on North Korea.

For some in the foreign policy establishment, hostility toward Russia and cautious overtures to China was a return to the natural order of things, underpinned by the president's discovery that NATO was not obsolete after all. There's something in that view: Russia was never going to remain a favored nation of America for long, and as early as his January meeting with British Prime Minister Theresa May, Trump had appeared to agree when she told journalists that he was "100 percent" behind NATO. But to say he's become a "normal" foreign policy president is a stretch.

■ Mainstream U.S. diplomacy

The basis of mainstream U.S. diplomacy has historically been a warm attitude toward traditional close allies, cool-to-aggressive toward opponents, and sometimes critical of authoritarian states with which business can or must be done. These postures are full of moral gulches and vast hypocrisies – many were exposed in Wikipedia's publication of U.S. State Department cables – but everyone knows how the game is played. Trump isn't like that. He makes no secret of his dislike of some close allies and appears to admire, rather than tolerate, authoritarian leaders.

In their first White House meeting, Trump pressed German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the United States' most important European ally, to meet NATO's military spending target, and in an awkward quip repeated his claim that he had been wiretapped by the Obama administration. He abruptly terminated his call with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull after Turnbull asked Trump to honor the Obama era commitment to take over 1000 migrants from an Australian detention camp. Trump received Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau more politely, but a few weeks later blamed Canada for trade violations. He held Theresa May's hand as they walked through the White House Colonnade, but soon after criticized her secret services for spying on him, with no proof on which to base such a colossal charge.

By contrast, the president appeared to relish the first round success of French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, whose political lineage is racist, anti-Semitic, contemptuous of Muslims and intent on isolating France from both the European Union and the global economy.

He congratulated Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the narrow and possibly manipulated victory in a referendum on increasing his power – which will likely lead to the newly empowered Erdogan arresting and detaining more government officials, military officers, journalists and academics.

Trump's attitude to his southern neighbor, Mexico, has alienated the country's political class. President Enrique Peña Nieto cancelled a visit to Washington as Trump repeated his campaign promise to build a wall between the two countries and deport millions of Mexicans deemed to be illegal immigrants.

This is not mainstream diplomacy. It is, to adapt the president's customary designation of the press, lame stream diplomacy: lamed by lack of strategy, experience and often, common politeness, his preferences proceeding from a worldview which prizes displays of strength and is contemptuous of liberal allies.

Will this change? Of course – and in every which way. Flip-flops, switches and change make up the one unchanging theme of Trump's diplomacy.

(Source: Reuters)



Australia wants to avoid a Korean war at all costs

A conflict could involve North's neighbors – South Korea, China and Japan – which along with the U.S. are Australia's top four trade partners

By Antoun Issa

Australia may indeed be "blindly and zealously toeing the U.S. line" with regards to North Korea – at least openly – but in truth, Canberra wants to avoid conflict with Pyongyang. There is much at stake for Australia should war resume on the Korean peninsula, after more than 63 years of tense calm. While Julie Bishop stands shoulder-to-shoulder with Mike Pence for the cameras, there is no doubt that, privately, Australian diplomats are offering their U.S. counterparts advice geared towards resolving the North Korea dilemma peacefully.

There is good reason to believe that the current rise in tensions is not simply the latest political ploy by Pyongyang, and that the Trump administration is indeed prioritizing the situation. The U.S. president, Donald Trump, reportedly told UN security council diplomats on Monday to "solve the problem" of North Korea's nuclear weapons, while the entire U.S. Senate was warned during an unusual briefing by the White House on Wednesday that Pyongyang posed "an urgent national security threat".

The diplomatic rhetoric has been matched by bellicose military posturing from both sides – the latest of which was North Korea's large-scale artillery exercise on Tuesday, as the ballistic-missile submarine USS Michigan docked in South Korea. Pence reiterated on his visit to Canberra that "all options are on the table" and it seems the Trump administration is determined to flex its muscles to achieve compliance from North Korea on nuclear proliferation.

■ The escalating tensions

The escalating tensions in North and South Korea have created nothing short of a headache for the Australian government, which considers the matter a high priority. Bishop was said to have dedicated a lot of time on her February trip to Washington discussing North Korea. And why wouldn't she? Australia has much to lose should war erupt in a strategically vital region for trade and security. Canberra's core interest is to maintain stability in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in areas that will affect its trade, such as the Korean peninsula.

North Korea's immediate neighbors – China, South Korea and Japan – are three of Australia's top four trading partners, the other being the U.S. A war, which would probably involve all four powers, would have a direct and immediate im-



Australian diplomats are offering their U.S. counterparts advice geared towards resolving the North Korea dilemma peacefully.

act on Australia's economy. Canberra is rightly worried about the destabilizing effects a Korean war would bring.

That message is undoubtedly being relayed to the Trump administration, which, despite its tough talk, has no ideas on how to resolve the dilemma. Aware of the high costs of military force, U.S. officials, including Pence, concede that diplomacy remains the main course of action.

The options on the table are few. Kim Jong-un appears aware of his advantageous position. North Korean nuclear and missile deterrence has worked thus far in staving off U.S. military action, and China, despite its obvious frustrations with Kim, remains, at least for now, committed to the survival of the regime in Pyongyang for its own security interests.

All of this has brought U.S.-Australian coordination on North Korea ever closer. Consultations are robust, and Australian input is being sought in providing ideas on how best to deal with North Korea. While Australia shares America's concern regarding Pyongyang's nuclear missile capabilities – particularly given Australia

now is a marked target for North Korea's missiles – and welcomes increased pressure to deter North Korean aggression, there is a strong preference in Canberra to avoid armed conflict.

■ Military action

Should Trump take the road to military action, Australia wants to be in on the decision-making process. According to sources in Washington, the Five Eyes alliance – America's closest allies, which include the Anglo powers of Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand – were given only a three-hour notice of Trump's decision to strike Syria. Last-minute calls on major military operations are not standard protocol for the Five Eyes and while, Syria is not a big national security concern for Australia, North Korea certainly is, and Canberra expects to be at the table early on.

But one clear takeaway from this month's strike on Syria was that this administration will play tough on adversaries and enforce red lines – the red line here is a North Korean capability, presumed to be in development, to hit the U.S. mainland with a nuclear warhead.

The possibility of armed conflict in the Korea peninsula – although remote – cannot be ruled out while Trump is in office. Such a possibility now has to be part of the Australian government's calculus as it forms its policy towards North Korea in particular, and the Asia-Pacific in general.

Canberra had adapted to an Obama administration that preferred multilateral diplomacy and offshore balancing in its handling of Pyongyang. Although North Korea continued to expand its nuclear program, Obama's hands-off approach resulted in a predictable stability on the peninsula around which Canberra could shape its policy. That predictability is now out the window.

The Trump administration has swiftly replaced Obama's policy of containing North Korea with coercion. Trump will go to lengths to prevent the North Koreans from obtaining a long-range nuclear missile in striking distance of the U.S. How far he will go remains to be seen, which explains why Australia wants to get into his ear sooner rather than later.

(Source: The Guardian)

Will terror-stricken Nice turn to Marine Le Pen for president?

By Oscar Lopez

Marine Le Pen chose a pointed location for the first rally since the first round of France's presidential election: Nice, where a Tunisian-born man killed 86 people last year by driving a truck into beachfront crowds celebrating Bastille Day.

Calling Nice a "martyr city of terrorism," Le Pen told thousands who packed into the Palais Nikaia stadium that she would "be the president who wages war on terrorists." She pilloried her opponent, centrist Emmanuel Macron, for his support of the European Union's open-borders policy. "How can we think we are protected if terrorists can move around freely, if weapons can circulate freely?" she asked. "I am the president who will protect you!"

Le Pen, who is trailing Macron by a 20-point margin in most polls, is hoping that fears of terrorism will convince conservative voters to back her in the May 7 runoff. And Nice, with its memories of last year's attack and history of voting for center-right candidates, seems like fertile ground.

Le Pen received 25 percent of the vote in Nice in Sunday's first-round vote, beating Macron by five points and coming in just behind the leader, François Fillon of the center-right Republicans.

"In every recent election, voters have favored the Republicans," said Marie-Ange Grégory, a political scientist at Nice University. "By having her rally in Nice, she'll be hoping to convince those on the hard-right who voted for Fillon to turn to the National Front in the second round." A recent survey found that 24 percent of Fillon voters would choose Le Pen in round two, making them her largest potential source of new votes.

■ Memory of terrorism

In a city where the memory of terrorism is still fresh, Le Pen's message found its mark. "I just cried and cried," said Odile Tixier, 67, recalling the night of the attack. "Because Nice is my city. I'm Niçoise, my parents are Niçois, my grandparents were Niçois. It was very traumatizing."

For 32-year-old Vincent, the attack had hit close to home, quite literally. "The truck stopped 50 meters from my apartment," he says, asking The Post not to print his last name for privacy reasons. "I keep thinking, it could've been me. It's shocking."



Le Pen, who is trailing Macron by a 20-point margin in most polls, is hoping that fears of terrorism will convince conservative voters to back her in the May 7 runoff.

Vincent voted in the first round for François Asselineau, a minor candidate who campaigned on a platform to exit the European Union. With Asselineau out of contention – he received less than one percent of the vote – Vincent decided to vote for Marine Le Pen, and had come to a party rally for the first time. "I've always liked the National Front," he said. "The attack just reinforced my conviction for the party."

Arnaud, 50, also voted for Asselineau in the first round because he found Le Pen "a bit too xenophobic, a bit extreme." But in the second round, Le Pen's tough stance on security would outweigh his concerns about her more extreme position on immigration. "I'm sick of watching people die," said Arnaud, who also declined to give his last name because of privacy concerns. He was particularly incensed by last week's attack in Paris, in which a police officer was shot and killed on the Champs-Élysée: "We shouldn't have to put up with that."

It's still not clear how much Le Pen's message will re-

sonate here. "I know a lot of people who were extremely shocked by the attacks," said Grégory, the political scientist. "But I don't think they would vote for Le Pen." A poll taken just before the election found that voters in Nice were more concerned about unemployment than security. And in the end, Le Pen's first-round score was only two percentage points higher than in the 2012 election, about the same increase as her surge in support nationally.

But some Nice residents have been convinced. Among them is 75-year-old Marc, who declined to give his last name. He is a hardcore Fillon supporter who says he could never vote for Macron. "There has to be a counterbalance against the left," he said. "We've been too slack, and now we're paying for it. It's going to be a tough fight against terrorism." And he has high hopes for the National Front. "Brexit was great, Trump was great," he said. "Le Pen could be great too."

(Source: The Washington Post)

Trump, China risk sparking dangerous Middle East arms race

By James M. Dorsey

Forced to acknowledge that Iran is complying with the nuclear agreement it concluded two years ago with the world's major powers, U.S. President Donald J. Trump appears to be groping for ways to provoke Iran to back out of the deal. If successful, Mr. Trump could spark a nuclear arms race in the Middle East at a time that a Chinese agreement to build a drone manufacturing plant in Saudi Arabia could initiate a similar drone race that threatens to take hostilities in the region to a whole new, more dangerous level.

Mr. Trump's strategy stems from the realization that the United States would render itself impotent if he were to unilaterally terminate the agreement with Iran. America's European allies as well as Russia and China would condemn termination, uphold their end of the agreement, and refuse to adhere by punitive measures the United States might adopt. With other words, termination would significantly reduce the United States' ability to influence Iran.

As a result, Mr. Trump, who has described the nuclear agreement as "one of the worst deals I've ever seen" and vowed to "dismantle" it, has since coming to office taken steps to lower incentives for Iran to continue to adhere to the accord. The outcome of May 12 elections in Iran could play into Mr. Trump's hands if a hardliner rather than incumbent President Hassan Rouhani were to emerge victorious.

At the same time, sticking to his

that the Islamic republic is the world's foremost source of political violence. JCPOA is the acronym for the nuclear agreement or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Re-imposing U.S. sanctions against Iran that were lifted alongside punitive United Nations measures would stop short of a unilateral termination of the agreement, but leave Iran no choice but to respond. It could retaliate with relatively meaningless sanctions of its own, but that would unlikely satisfy hard line critics as well as a sense that the agreement has so far failed to produce economic benefits for the average Iranian. On the plus side, cooler heads would likely counsel that U.S. punitive action would allow Iran to play the international community against the United States.

U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis, on a visit to Riyadh last week, echoed the kingdom's view of Iran, saying that "everywhere you look if there is trouble in the region, you find Iran." Mr. Mattis went on to say that "it is in our interest to see a strong Saudi Arabia."

Since coming to office, Mr. Trump has stepped up military support for Saudi Arabia's troubled intervention in Yemen with increased strikes against ji-



urged the Trump administration not to scrap the deal. Both countries remain critical of the agreement, but believe that it has bought them a decade of an Islamic republic deprived of a nuclear weapons capability. That approach has been reinforced by the rise of Mr. Trump and his tougher policy towards Iran.

Mr. Trump's high stakes poker game that will likely embolden Saudi Arabia in

erty and the development of a domestic industrial supply chain for HTGRs built in Saudi Arabia.

The agreement contributes to Saudi Arabia's effort to develop nuclear energy and potentially a nuclear weapons capability. Saudi officials have repeatedly insisted that the kingdom is developing nuclear capabilities for peaceful purposes such as medicine, electricity generation, and desalination of sea water. They said Saudi Arabia is committed to putting its future facilities under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

A recent report by the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security (ISIS) concluded however that the nuclear agreement with Iran had "not eliminated the kingdom's desire for nuclear weapons capabilities and even nuclear weapons... There is little reason to doubt that Saudi Arabia will more actively seek nuclear weapons capabilities, motivated by its concerns about the ending of the JCPOA's major nuclear limitations starting after year 10 of the deal or sooner if the deal fails," the report said.

China, unlike the United States, has to balance relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, with which it has had a far longer military relationship. To do so, China has moved cautiously to restore nuclear cooperation with Iran in the wake of the lifting of the UN sanctions. Iran's government-controlled Iranian Students' News Agency (ISNA) reported this weekend that China had agreed to redesign Iran's Arak nuclear reactor under U.S. supervision.

China and the United States are pursuing different objectives in the Middle East and its dominant Saudi-Iranian dispute. In doing so, the two world powers risk however further destabilizing the region rather than contributing to ending debilitating disputes, reducing volatility, and putting an end to large scale bloodshed. As a result, despite their different goals, both powers' approaches threaten to reinforce one another in putting the Middle East at greater risk.

Re-imposing U.S. sanctions against Iran that were lifted alongside punitive United Nations measures would stop short of a unilateral termination of the agreement, but leave Iran no choice but to respond.



desire to remain unpredictable, Mr. Trump has not ruled out terminating the agreement. Asked point blank by the Associated Press whether he would stick to the deal, Mr. Trump replied: "It's possible that we won't."

The president, besides charging that Iran has violated the spirit rather than the letter of the agreement and ordering a 90 day review that in the words of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson will "evaluate whether suspension of sanctions related to Iran pursuant to the JCPOA is vital to the national security interests of the United States," has also aligned the United States squarely alongside Saudi Arabia, which charges

hadist targets, a loosening of the U.S. rules of engagement, and a lifting of restrictions on U.S. arms sales to the kingdom because of the high civilian casualty rates in the conflict.

"We will have to overcome Iran's efforts to destabilize yet another country and create another militia in their image of Lebanese Hezbollah, but the bottom line is we are on the right path for it," Mr. Mattis told the Saudis. Iran has backed Houthi rebels in Yemen whom Saudi Arabia accuses of being Iranian stooges.

Ironically, the staunchest opponents of the nuclear agreement, Saudi Arabia and Israel, have since its conclusion

what is for the kingdom's ruling Al Saud family an existential battle with Iran coupled with Chinese nuclear energy and military deals with Saudi Arabia and Iran nonetheless threatens to spark a regional arms race with potentially dangerous consequences.

With the United States refusing to share its most advanced drone technology, China has agreed to open its first overseas defense production facility in Saudi Arabia. State-owned China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) will manufacture its CH-4 Caihong, or Rainbow drone as well as associated equipment in Saudi Arabia. The CH-4 is comparable to the U.S. armed MQ-9 Reaper drone.

The deal could spark an arms race in the Middle East with Iran and other states seeking to match the kingdom's newly acquired capability to launch strikes from the comfort of a computerized, Saudi-based command-and-control center without putting Saudi military personnel at risk.

Similarly, China signed an agreement on nuclear cooperation with Saudi Arabia during last month's visit by Saudi King Salman. The agreement is for a feasibility study for the construction of high-temperature gas-cooled (HTGR) nuclear power plants in the kingdom as well as cooperation in intellectual prop-

Diplomacy with North Korea: A real benchmark for President Trump's 100 days

By Christine Ahn,

The Trump administration recently announced an emergency meeting with 100 senators at the White House, where many speculated that Trump would disclose new intelligence to justify U.S. military action against North Korea, or else more sanctions.

Neither would constitute a success in the Trump administration's first 100 days. What would be calling for diplomacy to avert nuclear war.

Any military action by the United States, however limited, would provoke a conflict that could instantly kill millions on the Korean peninsula — and threaten a regional nuclear war that could draw in Japan, China, and Russia. Every president before Trump considered a pre-emptive strike against North Korea, but they were quickly sobered by the reality that a military option would trigger a counter-reaction from Pyongyang. The Obama, Bush, and Clinton administrations all felt they couldn't justify military action that would kill millions of South Koreans and endanger the 28,500 U.S. soldiers and 230,000 U.S. citizens residing there.

The most serious brush was in 1994, when President Clinton considered a pre-emptive strike on North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear reactor. The Pentagon concluded — well before Pyongyang possessed nuclear weapons — that even limited action would claim a million lives in the first 24 hours, if North Korea retaliated with conventional strikes on Seoul. President Obama, too, considered surgical strikes, but as The New York Times journalist David Sanger reported, "the risks of missing were tremendous, including renewed war on the Korean peninsula."

Stratfor, a global intelligence firm, also raises questions about the suggestion that it's possible to destroy North Korea's nuclear infrastructure in a single strike. "We simply do not have a comprehensive or precise picture of the North Korean nuclear program, especially when it



comes to the number of weapons and delivery vehicles," it says. "We do not know for sure where they are located or how well they are protected." Pyongyang was sure to communicate this during its military parade on the 105th birthday of its founder Kim Il Sung, when it showcased its nuclear-capable and mobile Transporter Erector Launchers (TELS). Not a sitting duck, TELS would allow North Korea to fire missiles from anywhere, from a forest or mountain, against Japan and South Korea.

"There is no South Korean leader who thinks the first strike by the U.S. is okay," said Suh Choo-suk, a senior research fellow at the Korea Institute for Defense Analyses. "The Security of South Korea is as important as that of the U.S.," reminded Moon Jae-in, the leading South Kore-

If Trump wants to make an early mark with North Korea, it should be with the only thing that's ever worked: diplomacy.

an presidential candidate. "No pre-emptive strike should be carried out without the consent of South Korea" — especially "in the absence of a South Korean president." The second leading candidate Ahn Chul-soo cautioned, "We need to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue in a peaceful manner."

Importantly, North Korea has threatened to retaliate only in response to a U.S. pre-emptive military strike. In its 7th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un affirmed that his country would not use nuclear weapons unless its sovereignty was violated.

Last week, DPRK Vice Foreign Minister Han Song-ryol explained that his government's pursuit of nuclear weapons and long-range missiles was "to protect our government and system from threat and provocation from the United States." Former Secretary of Defense William Perry, who helped negotiate a freeze of North Korea's nuclear program during the Clinton administration, agrees: "I believe that the danger of a North Korean ICBM program is not that they would launch an unprovoked attack on the United States — they are not suicidal."

President Trump must avoid at all costs a direct military confrontation with North Korea, which has a long history of engaging in brinkmanship. The United States has been successful in defusing past crises by working in partnership with U.S. allies in the region. Today, China calls for restraint, and South Korea is urging a diplomatic solution. That diplomatic solution must include a formal resolution of the Korean War, which was only temporarily halted by a ceasefire when North Korean and American military commanders signed the Armistice Agreement in 1953.

President Trump could demonstrate his art of deal making by advancing the only solution that's ever worked: diplomacy and engagement.

Economy talks

By Zahra Emamzadeh

When it comes to elections in Iran, like many other countries, any candidate who can reassure Iranians about economic boost and creating jobs is the one who will gain a high favorability. Statistics show that the majority of Iranians are concerned about the economy.

A phone survey is conducted by "IranPoll" on 2017 presidential election, between April 11 and 14, among a representative sample of 1,005 Iranians (with the margin of error of +/- 3.09%). Participants were asked to answer to ten different questions about 6 potential candidates.

The report is basically based on the data provided by Pre-Election National Opinion Poll (April 2017) by "Iran poll". It is noteworthy that two candidates who were included in the survey but were later disqualified by the Guardian Council are not included in this report. Another two candidates that considered eligible by the Guardian Council and were not studied in "Iran poll" are not studied, therefore; Hashemi Taba and Mirsalim.

As a result, the report is concerned with the following four candidates: Rouhani, Ghalibaf, Raisi and Jahangiri.

The participants were asked 10 different questions about their ideas, opinions and views on these four candidates. The questions can be categorized in four main groups:

Their satisfaction with their economic well-being and if they see any changes between now and four years ago.

- Their satisfaction with the economic situation of the country and their comparison between now and four years ago.

- They have been questioned about President Rouhani and his success or failure in economic matters and their opinion about Mr. Rouhani's chance to take the office for the second term.



- Questions on whether the nuclear deal has or has not improved the economic situation of ordinary people.

Respondents' general views about the four candidates are also shown in the poll. Moreover, respondents were asked about their preferred candidate who can better accomplish peoples' goals.

When the participants respond about their level of income: 37% said they were "getting by" with their level of income, then 28% of the participant declare that they are "hardly getting by", 26% of the population said "it is very difficult to get by" and only 9% of respondents were satisfied by their income. When participants were asked how their welfare has changed in comparison to 4 years ago, only 11% announced an improvement.

With regard to the current economic situation of the country, 64% of the respondents were pessimistic: they considered economy as "somewhat bad" or "very bad". 34% of the participants were optimistic about country's economic situation. 52% believed that the situation is getting worse, and 31% show their hope in having better economic situation in future.

55% hold the belief that Mr. Rouhani was not successful in solving economic problems while

42% of the people believe that Mr. Rouhani was successful in this regard.

When people were asked about the relation between nuclear deal and economic improvement, there was less optimism with 72% majority stating that ordinary people's economic status has not been improved as a result of the nuclear deal.

About President Rouhani, 56% of the participants thought that he will lose the next election and 34% suggest that he won't lose the election.

When people were asked about the most important issues that the next president should take care of, unemployment in general and youth unemployment with 55% were the most important area of concern. 19% of the people are worried about financial problems and almost one-third of population were worried about other problems;

The last part of the poll which is about the candidates themselves: it should be noted that before this poll is conducted before the outset of presidential campaign and televised debates. For instance, in last presidential election, the election of Mr. Rouhani did not seem very probable before the televised debates but after debates his popularity rose in the polls and eventually he became the president elect.

When people were asked about the favorableness of the candidates, Mr. Ghalibaf took the first position, Mr. Rouhani in the second position and then Mr. Raisi and Mr. Jahangiri, respectively. Rouhani has almost 65% favorability, with nearly 35% view him as unfavorable. Mr. Raisi is the least candidate regarded as unfavorable with a slight difference followed by Mr. Ghalibaf.

When people were asked which candidate can better accomplish goals, Mr. Rouhani was the best in terms of percentage and Mr. Ghalibaf and the other candidate were far apart, and Mr. Raisi was the last person in this position.

The goals are listed below,
1) Improving Iran's foreign relations
2) Increase civil liberties
3) Remove international sanctions
4) Fight corruption
5) Improve the living condition of the poor
6) Ameliorate Iran's environmental problems
7) Reduce unemployment rate
50% of the respondents believed that Rouhani can do better in the first three priorities.

When it comes to fighting corruption, Mr. Rouhani and Mr. Ghalibaf are the best candidates in the eyes of people, but in this case there is major change about Mr. Raisi, with 20% of the people thinking that he will be successful in this regard, while his maximum chance in other doesn't exceed more than 15%.

In the last three priorities, again Mr. Rouhani and Mr. Ghalibaf are the best candidates. Ghalibaf, though gained a better position in the 5th.

As I mentioned before these poll and judgment all belong to pre-presidential campaign and debate, in which usually sudden changes and sometimes unpredicted ones comes up.

The double life of a right-wing terror suspect

By Jörg Diehl and Matthias Gebauer

In photos, Franco A. looks rather unremarkable. In one image, the dark-haired first lieutenant in gray uniform even has a slightly mischievous look on his face. Next to him in the picture, which was taken in the French town of Illkirch, stands a class of schoolchildren. The Bundeswehr soldier is stationed there with a German-French brigade.

For investigators, the young man with parted hair and glasses represents both a puzzling and extremely dangerous case. On Wednesday morning, Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) arrested him in the Bavarian town of Hammelburg. Concurrently, his quarters in France, his car and the apartment of his suspected accomplice in Offenbach were searched. The suspected accomplice, Mathias F., was also detained.

Prosecutors in Frankfurt have been investigating Franco A. since February 17 on suspicions he was planning a significant act of violence. It is thought that A., who was taking part in a hand-to-hand combat training course, may have been planning an attack in Germany.

Staunch right-wing extremist

The scenario laid out by investigators is alarming: Despite his rather ordinary appearance, Franco A. is suspected of being a staunch right-wing extremist, full of hate for foreigners and prone to violence. Furthermore, at the end of 2015, he established a secret identity as a Syrian refugee. One of the theories investigators are pursuing is that Franco A. had hoped to implicate refugees in the act of violence he was planning.

The story began at the end of January. A technician performing maintenance work at Vienna International Airport found a loaded 7.65 caliber pistol in a restroom duct and informed police. After examining the weapon, the officers decided to outfit the duct with an alarm so as to identify the person who came to retrieve the weapon from its hiding place.

The plan bore fruit on February 3 when Franco A. opened the duct and he was taken into temporary custody. Franco A. told police that he had found the weapon in a bush at the location of the January 20 officers' ball in Vienna. At the airport, he says, he suddenly realized that he wouldn't be able to take the pistol through security, which is why he hid it in the restroom.

Investigations undertaken following the discovery of the weapon revealed the soldier's strange double life, but they also cast light on the chaos that reigned at the height of the refugee crisis. The Austrians passed along Franco A.'s finger prints to the BKA, and before long the Germans found a match. But the match, oddly, was with a Syrian asylum-seeker.

At the end of 2015, Franco A. had adopted the alias David Benjamin and, in Bavaria, claimed to be a refugee. Although he speaks no Arabic and only broken French, he was registered -- as the Christian son of a fruit trader from Damascus. He said he had been born in 1988.

The files make clear the lengths Franco A. went to in developing his identity as a Syrian refugee. Shortly after he was registered, he applied for asylum and was granted just over 400 euros per month in benefits. He was even assigned a room at a group hostel. At the same time, he reported punctually for his military service -- and nobody noticed that anything was awry.

The BKA, though, received an additional interesting clue from Vienna: Investigators say that Austrian officials found files in Franco A.'s possession that clearly point to his right-

wing extremist proclivities. That detail was enough to get prosecutors in Frankfurt involved. On Feb. 17, they opened an official investigation on suspicions that he was preparing a violent attack.

Under intense surveillance

Nobody believed his story about accidentally finding the weapon and, in the weeks that followed, the soldier was put under intense surveillance. Telephone surveillance revealed that Franco A. was a staunch xenophobe: Investigators say that he exchanged virulently bigoted texts with other right-wing extremists on WhatsApp and heatedly ridiculed foreigners.

These exchanges led investigators to suspected accomplice Mathias F., who is likely an old friend of Franco A.'s from Offenbach. The two communicated often. A soldier in the army reserve in Vienna, who investigators had thought of as a witness until that point, was also part of the chat group. The homes of several chat group members were searched on Wednesday. Investigators ultimately reached the conclusion that the young man may have been doing more than just venting their hatred of foreigners. They could have been planning an attack. ➔13

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Is active surveillance safe for men with family history of prostate cancer?

Having a family history of prostate cancer doesn't make it more risky for men with a new diagnosis of the disease to initially hold off on active treatment in favor of monitoring with periodic lab tests, a research review suggests.

It's becoming more common for doctors to skip aggressive treatments like surgery or radiation for men with low-risk prostate tumors in favor of doing periodic tests to see if tumors grow, a practice known as active surveillance. But research to date has offered a mixed verdict on whether this approach is safe for certain men with a higher risk, including black patients and people with a family history of prostate tumors.

For the current study, researchers analyzed data from six previously published studies and found that active surveillance wasn't linked with an increased risk of prostate cancer progressing for men with a family history. One study did, however, find that family history increased the risk of cancer progression in black men.

Family history

The "current findings can help doctors reassure patients that having a family history of prostate cancer should not automatically exclude them from being considered for active surveillance, although more research needs to be done for African American men," said senior study author Dr. James Dupree, a urology researcher at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Most men with prostate cancer are diagnosed with low-risk tumors that haven't spread to other parts of the body. Often, doctors and patients struggle to choose the best course of action because it's hard to tell which tumors will grow fast enough to be life-threatening and which ones might never get big enough to cause problems.

"Just because a cancer is found, it does not automatically mean it needs to get treated right away," Dupree said by email. "In some cases, cancer should be treated, but in other cases it may not need immediate treatment and can be managed with active surveillance."

For example, Dupree and colleagues reviewed one study of 200 patients that didn't detect a meaningful difference in high-risk tumors based on whether or not men had a family history. In men who did have a family history, this study also didn't find a difference in risk based on the number of relatives with prostate cancer.

Two other studies in the review looked at biomarkers for prostate tumors, including results from prostate specific antigen (PSA) tests that are commonly used to look for these malignancies. Neither study found family



It's becoming more common for doctors to skip aggressive treatments like surgery or radiation for men with low-risk prostate tumors in favor of doing periodic tests to see if tumors grow, a practice known as active surveillance.

history to be a meaningful predictor of aggressive prostate cancer.

Aggressive tumors

In another study, family history wasn't a good predictor of aggressive tumors for most men, but it did signal an increased risk for black men.

One limitation of the research review is that it included only six studies, the authors note in BJU International.

Still, the findings should reassure men with a family history of prostate cancer that active surveillance may be a reasonable option in some cases, said Dr. Behfar Eghdaie, a urologic surgeon at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York

who wasn't involved in the study.

"Screening for prostate cancer saves lives," Eghdaie said by email. "However, the decisions after prostate cancer is detected may lead to overtreatment."

To strike the right balance, doctors can screen men at a young age with a PSA blood test to help determine a patient's future risk, then recommend an appropriate treatment after a man is diagnosed with prostate cancer, Eghdaie added.

"Incorporating active surveillance to treat men with low risk prostate cancer reduces the harms of overtreatment associated with both surgery and radiation therapy," Eghdaie said.

(Source: Reuters)

Is sushi healthy?

By Lisa Drayer

Whether you eat sushi from a Japanese restaurant or from a local supermarket, there's no arguing that it's become a mainstream meal -- and that's good news.

Sushi can be a very healthy addition to your diet, especially when it's filled with vegetables, omega-3-rich seafood such as salmon and tuna, and small amounts of heart-healthy avocado.

The healthfulness of sushi can rapidly decline, though, depending on how your roll is prepared. Sushi saboteurs include tempura batter and condiments such as mayo and cream cheese, which significantly boost unhealthy fat and calories.

For example, a shrimp tempura roll drizzled with spicy mayo can contain more than 500 calories and more than 20 grams of fat -- that's double the calories and three times the fat of a crab-containing California roll.

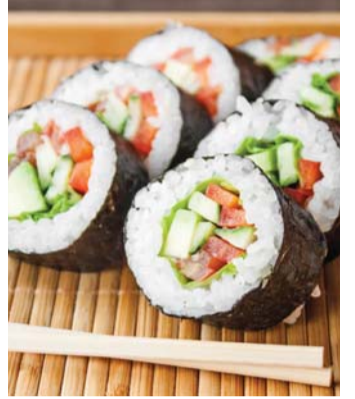
Sodium-rich soy sauce can also be a concern; just one small tablespoon contributes about 900 milligrams of sodium, or about 40% of the daily recommended sodium limit. By comparison, 10 salted pretzel twists have 744 milligrams of sodium. If you are watching your sodium, ask for a low-sodium version or eliminate it altogether.

Another tip to keep in mind: Though white sushi rice may be pleasantly sticky, it's typically made with sugar and salt along with vinegar and is a source of refined carbohydrates. Ask for brown rice instead. Although it still may contain sugar to boost sweetness, it's rich in whole grains and offers a fiber boost.

And if you are pregnant or if you have an impaired immune system, don't risk the chance of illness from raw seafood.

Bottom line? When eating sushi, keep it seafood-rich and simple.

(Source: CNN)



Though white sushi rice may be pleasantly sticky, it's typically made with sugar and salt along with vinegar and is a source of refined carbohydrates. Ask for brown rice instead.

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Azerbaijan seeks to bolster tourism ties with Iran

TOURISM TEHRAN — The deputy culture and tourism minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan has held talks with provincial authorities of East Azarbaijan in northwest Iran, laying out a roadmap for widening cooperation thanks to countless mutual commonalities, CHTN reported on Saturday.



Azerbaijan's Deputy Culture and Tourism Minister Adalat Veliyev (L) talks to East Azarbaijan Province Governor General Esmaeil Jabbarzadeh in Tabriz on April 26, 2017.

During his April 26-27 visit to Tabriz, the capital city of East Azarbaijan, Adalat Veliyev met with Governor General Esmaeil Jabbarzadeh, Tabriz Mayor Sadeq Najafi, and Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department Director Morteza Abdar.

"In the wake of countless cultural, lingual and religious commonalities that link the Republic of Azerbaijan to Tabriz, the way is paved for planning and implementing cultural events with assistance of the two regions' peoples," CHTN quoted Veliyev as saying.

He said some 46,000 Iranian holidaymakers visited Azerbaijan during Noruz, the Iranian New Year celebrations, Trend reported on Wednesday.

In December 2015, tourism ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation member states selected Tabriz as the capital of Islamic tourism for 2018. The historical city was also named a World Craft City by World Crafts Council - Asia Pacific Region (WCC-APR) in 2015.

Irish tourism boom falters as British stay away after Brexit

Double-digit growth in Irish tourism ground to a halt in the first quarter, official data showed on Thursday, as a weak pound kept British visitors at home.

The number of visitors grew just 0.6 percent in the quarter from the same period last year, the central statistics office reported. That was down from growth of almost 17 percent in 2016 and 14 percent in 2015 during the same quarter, when a weak euro helped tourism reach record highs.

The number of visitors from Britain fell 6.5 percent in the three months to March, the first drop in the quarter since 2010.

"This provides an indication of the challenge the Irish tourism industry is facing following Great Britain's decision to leave the European Union," Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport Shane Ross said in a statement.

(Source: Reuters)



ROUND THE GLOBE Aachen Cathedral

Aachen Cathedral, traditionally known in English as the Cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle, is a Roman Catholic church in Aachen, western Germany.

Construction of this palatine chapel, with its octagonal basilica and cupola, began c. 790-800 under the Emperor Charlemagne. Originally inspired by the churches of the Eastern part of the Holy Roman Empire, it was splendidly enlarged in the Middle Ages.

Charlemagne made the Frankish royal estate of Aachen, which had been serving a spa ever since the first century, his favorite abode. The main buildings of the Imperial Palace area were the Coronation Hall and the Palace Chapel - now Aachen Cathedral.



The Palatine Chapel is based on an octagonal ground plan, which is surrounded by an aisle and by tribunes above, and roofed with a dome. Facing the altar, the Emperor sat on the gallery; the Carolingian stone throne was the coronation seat of the kings of the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation from the Middle Ages until 1531.

The chapel itself is easily recognizable from later additions by its distinctive structure. An atrium on the western side and a portico led to the imperial apartments. The Gothic choir and a series of chapels that were added throughout the Middle Ages created the composite array of features that characterized the cathedral.

The interior of the chapel is embellished by antique columns that Charlemagne probably ordered to be brought from Rome and Ravenna. (Source: UNESCO)

Iranology conference to look chronologically at ancient land

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A comparative chronology table of Iran and the world will be unveiled during an academic conference which will be held at the Milad Tower in Tehran on May 1.

Titled "Comparative Chronology Table of Iran and the World from the Paleolithic Era to the End of the Iron Age", the initiative has been developed by a cluster of Iranian experts to give a fresh look into the role and place of Iran in the progress of human societies.

The foundation's director Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Khamenei along with several other scholars and archaeology professors will deliver lectures on the national project that encapsulates occurrences from the Paleolithic era to the late Iron Age.

One of the advantages of developing a reliable chronology is enhancing a more meticulous familiarity with the history, culture, politics, economy, sciences, and art of each society in comparison to other societies. Undoubtedly, such a chronology provides plenty of data in

different fields to interested parties.

Presently, several chronologies which have been mainly developed by Western researchers are available. However, no noteworthy activity has been carried out in this regard in Iran, the foundation says.

Parts of an introduction to the chronology reads as follows:

"Given the historical negligence of eastern countries and Europeans' innate megalomania, which began since the Renaissance and, particularly since the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent scientific advancements, the latter set out to write the history of the world from their own point of view. In doing so, either advertently or inadvertently, they failed to provide accurate accounts and interpretations of important aspects of human progress.

Hence, many of the world chronologies, when introducing Iran, rarely move beyond the Achaemenid era [c. 550-330 BC] and interpreted many of the later significant human achievements in a pre-historical con-

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A poster for the Conference of Comparative Chronology of Iran and the World

text while focusing on the centrality of Mesopotamia. Clearly, several political thoughts and positions have promoted such an approach."

Sharp rise in foreign tourist visits to Kerman province

TOURISM TEHRAN — The number of foreign tourists traveling to the southeastern province of Kerman has raised five times over the past four years, a provincial tourism official said on Saturday.

The sector witnessed a sharp rise in the Iranian calendar year 1393 (March 2014-March 2015) when the number of foreign tourist arrivals jumped by about 100 percent in comparison to its preceding year, IRNA quoted Mahmoud Vafai, director general of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department as saying.

Vafai estimated an average annual growth of 30 percent for the past three years, adding that roughly 12,000 foreigners visited the province in 1392, while the figure rose to around 16,000 in 1393 and to 21,000 in 1394.

He forecasted that some 45,000 foreign travelers will visit Kerman



An undated photo depicts travelers walking across the scenic Shahdad Desert in Kerman province.

in the current Iranian calendar year (March 2017-March 2018), adding that foreign tourist arrivals has fetched the

province some \$25 million over the past four years.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Vafai said

that travelers to the province are dominantly from France, Germany, Spain, Italy, the U.S., and Southeast Asian countries.

Elier this month, Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization Deputy Director Morteza Rahmani-Movahhed announced a total of 19.9 million travelers visited the country during the four-year period.

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

Kerman is world-famous for its long history and strong cultural heritage. It is bounded by the provinces of Fars on the west, Yazd on the north, South Khorasan on the northeast, Sistan-Baluchestan on the east, and Hormozgan on the south. It includes the southern part of the central Iranian desert, the Dasht-e Lut.

Nepal tourism soars to higher levels than before the devastating earthquake

Nepal is finally getting back on its feet after a deadly earthquake devastated the region in 2015.

Two years ago, the scenic mountainous landscape of Nepal was destroyed by a severe earthquake.

It killed 9,000 people and damaged more than 800 monuments with its powerful force.

The tragedy significantly impacted Nepal's tourism industry, with many visitors suddenly too fearful to go.

Tourism, which accounts for four per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), wasn't the only industry to suffer.

The effects of the earthquake drove the net loss of Nepal's econ-

omy to a staggering seven trillion dollars.

But the nation has soared back with traveler numbers seen before the 7.8-magnitude quake, and then some.

Pre-earthquake in 2014, 800,000 tourists visited Nepal.

Fast-forward to 2017 and there are more holiday bookings than the same time three years ago.

Michael Edwards, Intrepid Travel's regional director for the UK and Europe, told Travel Weekly: "Nepal is outstripping growth because of the awareness raised.

"We have put extra resources into promoting the country, but the re-

sponse from customers has been amazing."

Intrepid bookings for Nepal have skyrocketed by 70 percent worldwide compared to last year.

The ecotourism travel provider has seen numbers exceed those seen in 2014.

Managing director Brian Young said: "Nepal's return has been phenomenal and we'd like to thank agents for their support.

"So confident are we in Nepal's growth, we have launched a new Local Living Nepal trip for 2017."

Nepal is home to eight of the 14 highest peaks across the globe, including the famous Mount Everest.



Nepal was rocked by the deadly 7.8-magnitude quake two years ago

It has traditionally lured adventurers for its diverse offering of extreme and awe-inspiring travel activities.

(Source: express.co.uk)

Parthian-era citadel to be turned into museum

TOURISM TEHRAN — Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization is set to turn Narin citadel into a site museum, after a restoration project is fully implemented, CHTN reported on April 27.

Known as Narin Qa'leh, the mud-brick fortress dates back to the Parthian era (247 BC-224 CE). It stands in the city of Nain, Isfahan province. Nain is one of the oldest continuously settlements in central Iran, located on the junction of the desert road to Tabas and Mashhad.

The city has been an important crossroad on converging trade routes for thousands of years. It is well regarded for its handicrafts as well.



NASA's TRAPPIST-1 planets could be seeding each other with alien life

Scientists have now discovered that if life does exist it could be passed between the planets via space debris, raising the possibility that the Transiting Planets and Planetesimals Small Telescope (TRAPPIST) is a Solar System with several planets inhabited by similar lifeforms.

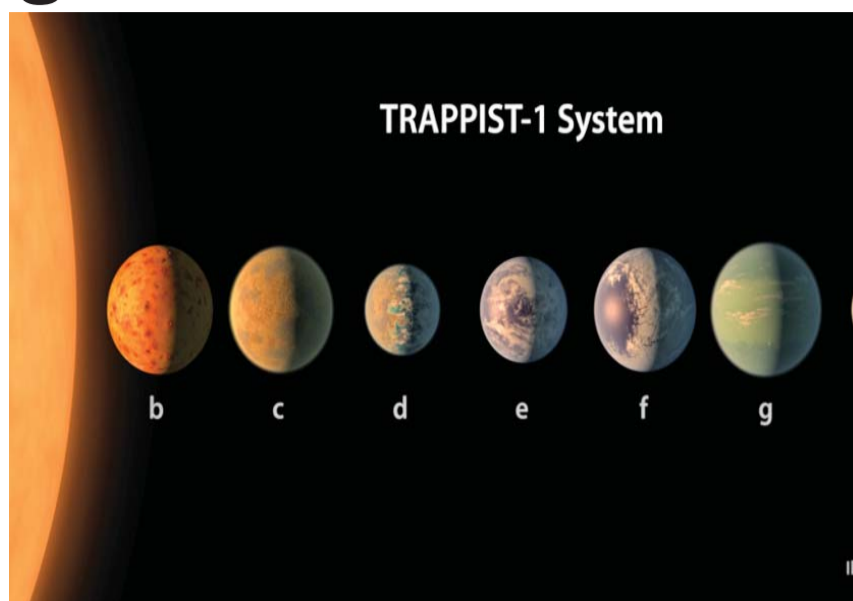
In a study published in *Astrophysical Journal Letters*, Sebastiaan Krijt and colleagues from the University of Chicago have looked at the possibility of material transfer between the TRAPPIST-1 planets, for example if one of them was hit by a comet or asteroid.

That impact would cause large chunks of rock and other material to be ejected into space as pieces of debris and, after floating around for a while, gravitational forces of a nearby planet could eventually take hold and bring it crashing down to the surface.

Single-celled organisms

If the ejected material was large enough and the proceeding journey short enough, any bacteria or single-celled organisms attached to it could survive long enough to reach a new planet.

"Frequent material exchange between adjacent planets in the tightly packed TRAPPIST-1 system appears likely," Krijt said in a statement. "If any of those materials contained life, it's possible they could inoculate another planet with life."



Unlike our Solar System, all of the planets in TRAPPIST-1 are close to one another, meaning that material would not have to travel far.

Calculations show that around 10 per-

cent of the material ejected would reach another potentially habitable planet within 100 years.

"Transport between planets f and g stands out as being particularly fast and

Unlike our Solar System, all of the planets in TRAPPIST-1 are close to one another, meaning that material would not have to travel far.

effective, with some material being transferred within 10 years of being released," the team wrote.

Fred Ciesla, co-author of the paper, said in a statement: "Given that tightly packed planetary systems are being detected more frequently, this research will make us rethink what we expect to find in terms of habitable planets and the transfer of life—not only in the TRAPPIST-1 system, but elsewhere."

Systems of planets

"We should be thinking in terms of systems of planets as a whole, and how they interact, rather than in terms of individual planets."

In an email interview with *Newsweek*, Krijt says if organic material was passed between planets, similar lifeforms could emerge: "If life only arose on one planet and subsequently spread to others, then that would indeed be the case."

In such a scenario, there are some interesting parallels with ecological models that describe systems of islands on the Earth. One complication here however, is that while we have shown that material transfer can be fast, we cannot (yet) make any statements about the frequency of material exchange, as this is controlled by the unknown properties of the population of impactors present in the system."

(Source: *Newsweek*)

Soaring deer numbers are behind growing problem of Lyme disease, warn experts

Britain's soaring deer population is fuelling the growing problem of Lyme disease, scientists have warned.

At the turn of the century there were only around 250 reported cases of Lyme disease in the UK each year, but now the NHS says the figure is closer to 3,000 and some charities claim the actual number could be as high as 45,000.

The disease is transmitted through ticks which feed on deer, and then can be picked up by dogs and their owners when they walk through woodland.

The British deer population now stands at around 1.5 million, the highest level it has been for 1,000 years, with numbers doubling since 1999. Urban foxes and domestic cats are also often targeted by ticks and can spread disease.

Professor Richard Wall, of the University of Bristol, said: "The primary problem is deer, and anywhere that you have lots of deer, you get lots of ticks. The females feed on the deer and then produce lots of eggs."

"Dog owners should be careful if they walk their pets in areas where deer are present and make sure they are treated with anti-tick treatments and avoid long grass."

Deer populations

Deer populations have been steadily increasing since



the 1963 Deer Act stopped the animals from being treated as vermin, and now hunters require a license. They also have no natural predators, such as lynx or wolves.

Lyme disease can be a serious health problem for both humans and dogs, leading to heart failure, meningitis, memory problems, paralysis, and even death.

The problem is made worse by owners taking their pets abroad, because Lyme disease is more common in ticks on the continent. Around two per cent of ticks

now carry the pathogen which causes Lyme disease compared to 0.5 percent in 2015. Ticks can also infect dogs with the potentially fatal disease Canine Babesiosis which can also cause jaundice and anemia.

Vets are calling on the government to introduce regulations which force pet owners to use anti-tick treatments when travelling abroad. Studies show that around three quarters of dogs returning from the continent are carrying ticks.

"Whether you walk your dogs in urban parkland, woodland, heathland or open fields, ticks present a risk to our pets' health and ourselves."

The call came at the start of Tick Awareness Month, which aims to highlight the problem, and encourage pet owners to be more vigilant.

Latest results from The Big Tick Project, the largest ever veterinary study of ticks, found that just under one three dogs is carrying a tick at any one time.

Supported by more than 1200 veterinary practices across the country in conjunction with MSD Animal Health, the Big Tick Project received more than 6000 ticks from a total of 12,096 dogs examined and checked for ticks by each participating veterinary practice.

(Source: *The Telegraph*)

Time travel is 'possible' -- mathematically anyway

Pull out your list of regrets, mistakes and runs of just plain bad luck, because it turns out you can go back. A University of British Columbia professor has run the numbers on the feasibility of time travel, and he says they check out.

"People think of time travel as something fictional," math and physics instructor Ben Tippett said in a news release Thursday. "And we tend to think it's not possible because we don't actually do it. But, mathematically, it is possible."

It's a finding that's sure to inject new energy and vigor into late-night, half-sober arguments about the morality of traveling back in time to assassinate Adolf

Hitler before his rise to power.

Tippett created a formula based on Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity, which states that huge cosmic objects like stars and black holes distort space and time. The recent detection of gravitational waves created by distant colliding black holes confirmed Einstein's theory.

Space-time continuum

Large stars can actually cause the fabric of the space-time continuum to curve, which Tippett says contributes to the curved orbits of planets as they move through space.

The "time direction of the space-time surface also shows curvature.

There is evidence showing the closer to a black hole we get, time moves slower," he explains. "My model of a time machine uses the curved space-time -- to bend time into a circle for the passengers, not in a straight line. That circle takes us back in time."

Oh, cool. So all we have to do is build this time-bending machine and we're off to 2012 to bet everything we have on the then-laughably long odds of a European Union without the UK, a U.S. president named Trump and the world champion Chicago Cubs.

Of course, not all physicists are ready to climb aboard Tippett's hypothetical

time machine, which he cleverly named the "Traversable Acausal Retrograde Domain in Space-time," or TARDIS, in a nod to the iconic time-traveling booth from "Doctor Who." No less than the world's most famed cosmologist, Stephen Hawking, has said that if time travel is possible, we certainly wouldn't be able to go backward in time.

But Tippett's calculations show that his TARDIS, which is really just a conceptual bubble of space-time, can move backward and forward by moving at speeds that would exceed the speed of light at times.

(Source: *CNET*)

Official Terms Effective Role of BMI in Foreign Trade Sustainable Development

International network of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) has played an effective role in the sustainable development of country's foreign trade.

BMI's Deputy Chief Executive for Intl. and Currency Affairs and Member of Board of Directors of the Bank Gholam-Reza Panahi announced the above statement and said: "Brokerage ties are lifelines for growth and development of foreign trade of country."

The country will be able to attract foreign investment and increase volume of foreign trade under the auspices of establishing brokerage relations comprehensively, he maintained.

He pointed to the key and important role of the bank during sanctions period in the field of attraction of foreign investments within the framework of "financing" projects and also paving suitable ways for offering diversified international services for imports and exports



and said: "Iran's international banking system tolerated many ups and downs during sanctions period, the issue of which cost the country dearly."

After a landmark deal inked between Iran and six world's major powers (the five permanent members of UN Security Council plus Germany), rosy and bright future was opened for the Islamic Republic of Iran in global arena, based on which, Iran managed to resume its banking ties with the outside world vigorously."

BMI has currently focused on enhancing brokerage relations, he said, adding: "Banking ties with other banks can be facilitated if brokerage relations are strengthened."

In the end, BMI's Deputy Chief Executive for Intl. and Currency Affairs and Member of Board of Directors of the Bank Gholam-Reza Panahi pointed to the significant growth in export of non-oil commodities in the country and said: "Brokerage relations should be used optimally in order to back export of non-oil commodities."

TOSS'E TAAVON Bank's CEO Meets Vietnamese Counterpart to Broaden Banking Ties

On the sidelines of 10th Asia-Pacific Co-operative Ministers' Conference, held in Vietnam, Chief Executives of Iran's TOSS'E TAAVON Bank and Vietnamese Cooperatives Bank held talks and conferred with each other to explore avenues for broadening and enhancing bilateral ties, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

In this meeting, Chief Executive of TOSS'E TAAVON Bank Hojjatollah Mahdian placed special emphasis on the launching bilateral joint commission with Vietnamese bank.

While exchanging information between the two banks, the senior official of the Iranian bank expressed his readiness to share experiences in

cooperatives sector especially in the banking and credit areas, he reiterated.

It should be noted that the visiting Iranian delegation paid a visit to Handicrafts and Agricultural Produce Exhibition of cooperative companies and ceramic products at two Ceramic and Silk Cooperative Villages.



Robots, poison used to combat invasive species

A robot zaps and vacuums up venomous lionfish in Bermuda. A helicopter pelts Guam's trees with poison-baited dead mice to fight the voracious brown tree snake. A special boat with giant winglelike nets stuns and catches Asian carp in the U.S. Midwest.



In the fight against alien animals that invade and overrun native species, the weird and wired wins.

"Critters are smart — they survive," said biologist Rob "Goose" Gosnell, head of U.S. Department of Agriculture's wildlife services in Guam, where brown tree snakes have gobbled up nearly all the native birds. "Trying to outsmart them is hard to do."

Now, new technology is being combined with the old methods — weed pulling, trapping and pesticides.

Finding new weapons is crucial because invasive species are costly — \$314 billion per year in damages in just the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, India and Brazil. It's also one of the leading causes of extinction on islands, such as Guam, according to Piero Genovesi, an Italian scientist who chairs the invasive species task force for an international organization.

A new underwater robot is targeting the stunning but dangerous lionfish, which has spread over the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico and up the East Coast as far north as New York's Long Island, with its venomous spines that are dangerous to touch. With no natural predator in the Atlantic, the voracious aquarium fish devour large amounts of other fish including key commercial fish species such as snapper and grouper.

The robot is the creation of Colin Angle, chief executive officer of iRobot, which makes the Roomba vacuum cleaner.

The robot, called Guardian LF1, uses what Angle says is a gentle shock to immobilize the lionfish before they are sucked alive into a tube. In its first public outing this month, the robot caught 15 lionfish during two days of testing in Bermuda.

(Source: *Sfgate*)

This polymer folds itself into origami structures

Origami is an old Japanese art of folding paper into various decorative shapes, and requires a certain amount of nimbleness of the fingers. But a new method developed by researchers uses layers of a thin polymer that fold themselves into origami structures under the effect of light.

The self-folding origami technique was developed by researchers from Georgia Institute of Technology and Peking University in China, who published a paper on the subject Friday in the journal *Science Advances*. And the possible applications of the technique aren't just decorative — it can find uses in a range of fields, including "soft robots, microelectronics, soft actuators, mechanical metamaterials and biomedical devices," according to the researchers.

The paper, titled "Origami by frontal photopolymerization," explains the method. A thin layer of liquid acrylate polymer is placed in a plate or between two glass slides, and then light from an LED projector is shone onto the polymer.

A photo-initiating material mixed into the polymer causes it to harden under the effect of light, while a light-absorbing dye in it controls the amount of light absorbed. The areas that receive less light end up bending more, and the bending process starts when the polymer film is removed from the liquid.

Jerry Qi, a professor in the Woodruff School of Mechanical Engineering at Georgia Tech and a co-author of the paper, said in a statement Friday: "During a specific type of photopolymerization, frontal photopolymerization, the liquid resin is cured continuously from the side under light irradiation toward the inner side. This creates a non-uniform stress field that drives the film to bend along the direction of light path."

(Source: *IBT*)

Control of molecular motion by metal-plated 3-D printed plastic pieces

Many measurement techniques, such as spectroscopy, benefit from the ability to split a single beam of light into two in order to measure changes in one of them. The crucial device that separates the beam is the beam-splitter. These have been mostly limited to light beams, where one uses simply a partially reflective glass.

EPFL scientists have now developed a similar device for splitting beams of molecules, where high-voltage electrodes are used to control the motion of the molecules inside a vacuum. The electrodes are built by an innovative method that combines 3D printing and electroplating for the fabrication of complex metallic structures. The same approach can also be used in a wide range of other experiments. The new method is published in *Physical Review Applied* and overcomes previous fabrication problems thus opening up new avenues.

Sean Gordon and Andreas Osterwalder at EPFL's Institute of Chemical Sciences and Engineering, developed the new fabrication method, and demonstrated it by constructing the complicated combination of electrodes required to guide and split beams of molecules. The production method not only allows complex shapes to be made but, in addition, speeds up production by a factor of 50-100.

(Source: *EurekAlert*)

Tehran to host Iran-EU climate change seminar

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Iran and the European Union will hold a seminar on climate change and global warming here on Sunday.

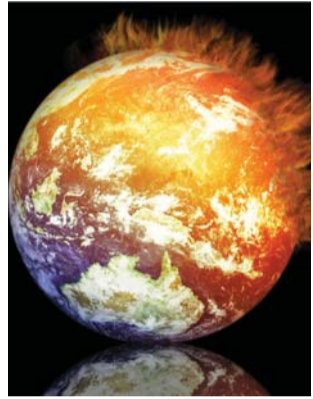
The EU commissioner for climate action and energy Miguel Arias Canete and the chief of Iran's department of environment Masoumeh Ebtekar will attend the seminar, ISNA reported.

"The seminar can open up an opportunity to promote environmental cooperation between Iran and the European Union in the field of climate change," said the director for international affairs of the department of environment Majid Shafipour.

Global warming and climate change are of the enormous challenges regarding protecting natural resources and biosphere reserves that human kinds and most significantly officials and policy makers are facing worldwide, he underlined.

Commenting on the importance of the issue of climate change, Shafipour highlighted that on April 16, 2016 EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif issued a joint statements and urged mutual cooperation in fighting climate change and global warming.

Additionally, Canete and Ebtekar issued a joint statement following the high level meeting on climate change in Brussels confirming their commitment to work closely together to support the implementation of the Paris Agreement on December 14, 2016, he added.



Boy turns in \$2,000 he found, gets Outstanding Citizen Award

ARLINGTON, Mass. (AP) — A 6-year-old Massachusetts boy who turned in \$2,000 in cash he found in a bank bag lost by a restaurant employee has received an Outstanding Citizen Award.

Arlington resident Jasper Dopman was walking with his father, Erik Dopman, on April 18 when he spotted a cloth bag on the ground near a school. The bag contained cash and deposit slips.

Erik Dopman called the Arlington police and turned in the bag. An investigation determined the money belonged to Tenoch Mexican Food Corp. Police located an employee at the company's Medford restaurant who said she had lost the bag earlier.

The money was returned to the family-owned restaurant. Father and son each received an Outstanding Citizen Award from police and gifts from the Mexican food company.

LEARN ENGLISH New Furniture

A: How about this **floor lamp**?
B: Fine just get it! We have been shopping for furniture for five hours! I'm so tired!
A: We still need to find an **armoire** and a **dresser**.
B: Fine! I am going to go home and **drop off** this **nightstand**, coffee table and **love seat** while you look for the rest of the things.
A: Great! Pick me up in about an hour because I think I'll also get a **bean bag** and a dining set.
B: **While you are at it** can you **pick out** a nice **recliner**? I really want one so I can watch TV.
A: Recliner? In my beautifully decorated living room? I don't think so!

Key vocabulary

floor lamp: a tall lamp with a base that stands on the floor
armoire: a large wardrobe or cabinet
dresser: a set of shelves usually used for holding clothes
drop off: to take someone or something to a place by car and leave them there on your way to another place
nightstand: a small table or stand placed at a bedside
love seat: small sofa that seats two people
bean bag: a large cushion filled with polystyrene beads and used as a seat
while you are at it: during the time you are there
pick out: to choose something from a group
recliner: a chair in which you can lean back at different angles

Supplementary vocabulary

Sectional: one large couch with different sections
coffee table: a table that is set in the middle of a living room
bar stools: chairs that are placed at a bar
family room: the room where the family spends time together

(Source: irlanguage.com)

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

Rooftop solar panels in Yazd to generate 5MW of electricity

SOCIETY TEHRAN — An Iranian cooperative has initiated pioneering efforts to set up 1,000 rooftop photovoltaic power stations, each capable of generating 5 kilowatts of electricity, in the central city of Yazd.

A rooftop photovoltaic power station, or rooftop PV system, is a photovoltaic system that has its electricity-generating solar panels mounted on the rooftop of a residential or commercial building or structure.

"As per the arrangement we are planning on mounting some 1,000 solar power plants on rooftops in the city of Yazd," Seyyed Javad Hosseini Azabadi, Pishgaman cooperative CEO said, IRNA news agency reported.

Citizens can have their own rooftop PV system by paying some 150 million rials (nearly \$3,750), Hosseini Azabadi suggested, adding, each plant is capable of generating some 5 kilowatts of electricity.

A land area of 50 to 60 meters would do for installing the plant; citizens who own a plant would acquire stocks valued at 60 million rials (nearly \$1,500) and receive monthly income of 3.25 million rials (nearly \$80).

In the first phase, some 1,000 plants are being installed in the city of Yazd by the end of the year (March 20, 2018) and



so far 400 households have registered, Hosseini Azabadi pointed.

In the next phase, some 10,000 plants each capable of generating 5 kilowatts of electricity will be set up in the provinces of Yazd and Kerman within three years, he added.

"They would also receive annual dividend on their shares," he highlighted.

The province of Yazd gets relatively adequate amounts of sunshine which paves the way for building solar plants; that is a great method to take advantage of natural and renewable resources of the area, he explained.

The CEO went on to say that using solar energy to generate electricity would lead to economic and social efficiency as well.

Given that 600 grams of carbon dioxide is produced per kilowatt-hour when generating electricity with fossil fuels the solar plants can be a great replacement which would cause no damages to the Earth.

The scheme is being implemented since the beginning of the second Iranian calendar month of Ordibehesht (April 21 to May 21), he said.

Indian schoolgirls dragging their broken-down bus inspires others round world



A photograph of Indian schoolgirls dragging a bus uphill in slippery mud after it broke down has gone viral, with Twitter users citing it as an example of true "girl power".

The teenagers from Manipur, in north-east India, were returning from a school trip to Loktak Lake when the bus reportedly got stuck in thick mud.

At least two dozen teenagers in traditional dress can be seen in the picture heaving the large vehicle up a steep incline using a thick rope.

The girls are believed to be students of Waikhomani Girls' College, near the city of Imphal, close to the Myanmar border.

An image of the feat was first shared by Twitter user Lawai

BemBem, a women's rights activist based in Manipur. Their post has been retweeted 3,400 times and liked nearly 4,000 times in two days.

Many people praised the girls, "saluting their courage" in an "adverse situation", and describing them as "empowered women" who prove "nothing is impossible".

A few users were sceptical of the image's authenticity, asking why the girls were not facing the other way to pull the bus uphill, as if in a tug-of-war.

Others asked where the rope had come from. However roads in Manipur are notoriously poor, so it is likely the bus driver had come prepared to get stuck.

(Source: Independent)

Turkey blocks Wikipedia without court order or explanation



Access to Wikipedia, a free online encyclopedia, has been blocked in Turkey, according to an internet censorship-monitoring network.

Turkey Blocks, which calls itself an independent "digital transparency project" said users in Turkey have been unable to access all language editions of Wikipedia since Saturday morning. "The loss of availability is consistent with internet filters used to censor content in the country," the monitor said.

The site has been blocked under a provisional administrative measure without a court order but Turkey Blocks says an order is expected in the coming days. The measure has been implemented by the country's Information and Communication Technologies Authority.

There is no official statement on why the site has been blocked but Turkish media is reporting the cause as "terror-related content."

Daily Hurriyet newspaper said Turkey has been in communication with Wikipedia for the removal of content supporting terror and presenting Turkey as a "supporter of terror."

NTV reported that Turkey demanded Wikipedia to open an office in the country, act in line with international law and abide by court decisions and "not be part of the blackout operation against Turkey."

If these demands are met and the content removed, the site would be reopened, according to Turkish media. (Source: World Trend News)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Healthcare reform plan reduces C-section in Iran: minister

The number of cesarean sections to deliver babies has dropped by 11 percent in Iran since launching the healthcare reform plan in the country in 2014, the health minister has said.

However, the number is still big as some 40 percent of women choose C-section over natural birth on average, ISNA news agency quoted Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi as saying.

"We are determined to cut the number to some 25 percent same as developed European and North American countries," Qazizadeh-Hashemi highlighted.

وزیر بهداشت: کاهش ۱۱ درصدی آمار سزارین در کشور در راستای اجرای طرح تحول نظام سلامت

وزیر بهداشت با اشاره به اجرای طرح تحول سلامت از سال ۹۳ اعلام کرد: از ابتدای اجرای این طرح آمار زایمان سزارین در کشور ۱۱ درصد کاهش یافته است.

به گزارش ایسنا، حسن قاضی زاده هاشمی ادامه داد: با این وجود هنوز آمار سزارین بالا است و به طور متوسط حدود ۴۰ درصد از خانم ها زایمان سزارین را انتخاب می کنند.

قاضی زاده هاشمی خاطرنشان کرد: مصمم هستیم که متناسب با کشورهای پیشرفته دنیا در عرصه پزشکی گام برداریم. در بیشتر کشورهای اروپایی و آمریکای شمالی آمار سزارین حدود ۲۵ درصد است.

ENGLISH PROVERB

It is never too late to learn

■ **Explanation:** you can always learn something new
■ **For example:** Grandma decided to take a course in using computers. "It's never too late to learn," she said.

PHRASAL VERB

Choke something back

■ **Meaning:** to control your anger, sadness etc. so that you do not show it
■ **For example:** He choked back tears as he described what had happened.

ENGLISH IDIOM

At someone's beck and call

■ **Explanation:** if a person is at someone's beck and call, they are always ready to do things for them or obey orders to please them
■ **For example:** Parents should not be at the beck and call of their children.

Hezb-i-Islami's Hekmatyar to Taliban: Lay down arms

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of Afghanistan's Hezb-i-Islami, has called on the Taliban to come to the negotiating table in his first public appearance in 20 years.

At least 200 people welcomed Hekmatyar on Saturday in Afghanistan's eastern Laghman province, where he was conducting meetings with members of his team for the past two days.

"Ask the militants who are they fighting with? The government? The people - the innocent people of Afghanistan?" Hekmatyar said at the public gathering.

"If you lay down your guns and come forward, I will be the first one to call you my brother. To the Taliban, [I say] come forward, let's talk about peace and prosperity, and join us in this peace process in Afghanistan."

Hekmatyar is expected to make a speech in the coming days in Kabul, where many Afghans have mixed feelings about his return.



Large posters of Hekmatyar and his group members were seen lying torn on streets. "Dwelling on the past events will bring

nothing to this country. If we hold on to what he did in the past, we will never move forward," Zakariya Safari, who was present at the gathering said.

"But at the same time, we cannot be sure whether Hekmatyar's return will bring any peace to the country because it is not as easy as it sounds."

"It will require many groups and individuals who have different ideologies and beliefs to come to one solution. It does not seem that easy to me."

Hekmatyar founded Hezb-i-Islami in the mid-1970s. He briefly accepted the position of prime minister in an administration following the collapse of a Soviet-backed government in 1992.

Hekmatyar was designated as a "terrorist" by the United States state department in 2003, but in February, the United Nations Security Council lifted sanctions on him, which paved the way for his return to Afghanistan.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Trump tells NRA he will never 'infringe' on gun rights

The United States President Donald Trump have told gun owners that they have a "true friend in the White House" as he addressed a National Rifle Association (NRA) meeting in Atlanta.

"To the NRA I can proudly say I will never ever let you down," he said on Friday, pledging also never to "infringe" on the right of people to keep and bear arms.

"Freedom is not a gift from government. Freedom is a gift from God," he told the powerful lobbying group.

Trump, speaking on the 99th day of his presidency, said he was proud to be the first sitting president to address a major NRA forum since Ronald Reagan in 1983.

He thanked the organization for backing him in May last year, the earliest it has ever endorsed a presidential nominee.

"You came through for me, and I am going to come through for you," Trump said.

According to the U.S. media reports, the NRA gave \$30.3m to the trump campaign.

Since taking office, Trump has raised the issue of gun ownership rights only obliquely at a few of the campaign-style rallies he has held.

But he has taken steps to roll back some restrictions on gun use and sales put into effect during the Obama administration.

Trump said on Friday that under his administration the "assault" on the second amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which secures the right of the people to own guns, has come to an end.

"No longer will the government be trying to undermine your rights and your freedoms as Americans. Instead we will work with you by your side."

His Democrat predecessor Barack Obama tried to pass minor gun control

legislation following the Sandy Hook School massacre that killed 26 people in 2012.

A few blocks away from the NRA convention, protesters gathered to counter the group's message and to honor victims of gun violence.

Gun control organizations said they would also rally on Saturday in opposition to the "extremist" NRA leadership and its "guns everywhere" agenda.

Representative for Gun Safety said that the gun lobby's agenda contributes to the more than 90 Americans shot and killed and the hundreds more injured every day in the US by gun violence.

Dem senator lists victims of gun violence during Trump's NRA speech

Meantime a Democratic senator criticized President Trump's decision to speak at the NRA Leadership Forum on Friday in Atlanta with a series of tweets naming young victims of gun violence.

Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) accused Trump of trying to "celebrate right of criminals to own guns, to glorify weapons that kill" on Twitter during Trump's afternoon address to the NRA convention.

Murphy went on to tweet photos and names of 11 people killed by gun violence, all of whom were under the age of 30.

Murphy represents Connecticut, site of the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, and he has been a leading Democratic voice against gun violence.

At last year's Democratic National Convention, he called Trump's position on the Second Amendment "sinister," saying he would support "putting guns in elementary schools."

(Source: agencies)

U.S. admiral: Power of Yemeni Ansarullah fighters growing

A United States Navy commander says the military power of the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement in Yemen has increased and Ansarullah fighters are now in possession of weapons they did not have before Saudi Arabia started a war on their country.

The Ansarullah and their allies in the Yemeni army regularly fire long-range ballistic missile at positions inside Saudi Arabia in retaliation for Saudi military strikes on Yemen. The Ansarullah also aimed for U.S. Navy warships in the Red Sea off the coast of Yemen three times in October 2016.

In January, an Ansarullah-operated remote-controlled boat packed with explosives rammed into a Saudi regime frigate in waters near the port city of Hudaydah, killing two sailors and wounding three others.

Referring to those capabilities, Vice Admiral Kevin Donegan, a commander of the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, told Reuters earlier this week, "These weapons didn't exist... before the war. There was no explosive boat that existed in the Yemeni inventory."

He also said that the ballistic missiles fired into Saudi Arabia had several times the range of missiles the Yemenis had before the Saudi war started.

A senior Emirati official echoed Donegan's comments, saying, "We are seeing UAVs, anti-tank and anti-ship missiles, as well as land and sea mines."

The powerful resistance put up by the Ansarullah fighters has bogged down a supposedly militarily-superior House of Saud regime. Observers say Riyadh has not only failed to reach any of its goals from the war on Yemen, it

has also been unable to pull out from the conflict in a face-saving manner.

After more than two years of constant military strikes from the air, sea, and land, and a total embargo on Yemen, the House of Saud regime has been unable to reinstall a former Yemeni president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi — who had been allied to Riyadh as president. It has also faced mounting criticism over the civilian casualties in the conflict. The protracted Saudi regime war has already killed over 12,000 Yemenis, according to recent tallies; hundreds of Saudi troops have also reportedly been killed.

There has been talk of a "political" solution to the war in the more recent past. U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, whose country has been assisting Saudi Arabia in the war on Yemen, called for such a solution on April 19.

"In Yemen, our goal is to push this conflict into UN-brokered negotiations to make sure it is ended as soon as possible," Mattis said back then after meetings with Saudi officials in Riyadh.

More Saudi soldiers killed

Meanwhile, on Saturday, a Yemeni military source said Yemeni snipers had shot dead three Saudi soldiers in a military base in Saudi Arabia's southwestern Jizan region.

Two other Saudi soldiers and eight mercenaries lost their lives when their location was attacked by the Yemeni soldiers and allied popular forces in the Midi district of Yemen's Hajjah Province.

A Yemeni Qaher-2 ballistic missile also hit a Saudi military base in Jizan and left unspecified casualties and material damage.

(Source: Press TV)

Trump: My first 100 days 'just about the most successful' ever

The United States President Donald Trump on Friday touted the accomplishments of his first 100 days in office, calling his administration one of the "most successful" in history.

"My fellow Americans, I truly believe that the first 100 days of my administration has been just about the most successful in our country's history," Trump said during his weekly address. "Our country is going up, and it's going up fast."

Trump's comments echoed those he made earlier on Friday at the White House, saying, "It's a false standard, 100 days, but I have to tell you, I don't think anybody has done what we've been able to do in 100 days."

Trump has seen historically low approval ratings in the early days of his administration and faced several

setbacks on his agenda. Republicans are still looking for a way to repeal ObamaCare after a legislative defeat last month, and courts have halted Trump's executive orders dealing with immigrants and refugees.

In his address, Trump underscored his effort to strengthen the U.S. economy by bringing back jobs from other countries and cutting back on federal regulations.

"Since my inauguration, economic confidence has soared, reaching higher than any time in nine years. Optimism among manufacturers is at a record high, and small-business confidence has seen its largest increase in nearly four decades," he said.

Trump also touted the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, whom he called "a truly great judge" who is "deeply devoted to our Constitution."

"My administration is the first in modern political era to confirm a new Supreme Court justice in the first 100 days. The last time it happened was 136 years ago, in 1881," Trump said.

Trump nominated Gorsuch to fill a seat left vacant by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia in February 2016. Republicans pushed to keep the seat vacant during President Obama's final year office, refusing to hold hearings on his nominee, Merrick Garland.

Trump admitted on Thursday in an interview with Reuters that the presidency was harder than his past work in business. "I loved my previous life," he said. "I had so many things going. This is more work than my previous life. I thought it would be easier"

(Source: The Hill)

Turkey: 11 Syrian Kurds killed in border clash

1 → "Are we going to leave them unanswered? We are doing what is necessary," Erdogan said in Istanbul.

"We will take this kind of measure as long as the threats continue."

Ankara sees YPG as "a terror group" linked to the outlaw Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) inside Turkey. The PKK has waged a battle against Turkish authorities since 1984.

But the United States considers it to be a key ally in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in Syria.

A Turkish military statement said Tuesday's strikes were carried out to prevent the PKK from sending "terrorists, arms, ammunition and explosives to Turkey", adding that the operation was conducted "within the scope of the international law".

The U.S. State Department has said it is "deeply con-

cerned" Tuesday's strikes - that were also carried out in Iraq - were conducted "without proper coordination either with the United States or the broader global coalition" against ISIL.

On Wednesday, Russia's foreign ministry said the attacks carried out by Turkey were unacceptable and called on all sides to show restraint. Ankara said Washington and Moscow had been properly informed in advance.

U.S. deploys troops to Syria-Turkey border
Meantime, the U.S. military says it has deployed a group of troops and military vehicles along the Syria-Turkey border to prevent further clashes between Turks and Syrians.

A convoy of armored vehicles with U.S. flags was spotted on a rural road in the village of Darbasiyah, a few hundred meters from the Turkish border in Syria's northeastern Hasakah province, Kurdish activists said on Friday.

Pentagon spokesman Captain Jeff Davis also confirmed the report.

"We continue to urge all the parties involved to focus on the common enemy which is ISIS (Daesh)," he told reporters later on Friday.

Ilham Ahmad, another senior Kurdish official, told the Associated Press that the U.S. troops began their patrols along the border on Thursday and had already conducted reconnaissance flights in the area.

"The U.S. role has now become more like a buffer force between us and the Turks on all front lines," Mustafa Bali, a Kurdish activist in the area, said.

Sharvan Kobani, a YPG commander, told Reuters on Friday that the U.S. troops would only report to their high-ranking commanders and were yet to begin their monitoring mission.

(Source: agencies)

ASEAN meets amid Korea tension and South China Sea row

Southeast Asian leaders are meeting in the Philippines for a day-long meeting where tensions on the Korean Peninsula and in the South China Sea are expected to be high on the agenda.

The 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was expected on Saturday to urge North Korea to "immediately cease all actions that violate its international obligations and contravene United Nations Security Council resolutions", according to a draft of the chairman's statement to be issued at the end of the meeting.

Tensions have surged in the region in recent weeks in the wake of a series of North Korean missile tests and rhetoric from the United States President Donald Trump's administration on the country's weapons program.

The U.S. has deployed a naval strike group to the Korean Peninsula amid signs the North could be preparing for a sixth nuclear test, and U.S. officials have said all options are on the table.

"The actions of [North Korea] have resulted in an escalation of tensions that can affect peace and stability in the entire region," the ASEAN statement said.

Another topic expected to be discussed at the summit is China's role in the region.

In the chairman's statement, the leaders also called on countries with claims to the South China Sea to avoid actions "such as land reclamation and militarization that may further complicate the situation".

China has nearly completed construction on three man-made islands to the consternation of other Asian claimant governments and the U.S.

The artificial islands have been built with runways, towers, radars and more recently weapons systems.

The U.S. has previously criticized what it called China's militarization of its maritime outposts, and stressed the need for freedom of navigation by conducting periodic air and naval patrols near them.

"We took note of the serious concerns expressed by some leaders over the recent developments and escalation of activities in the area, which may further raise tensions and erode trust and confidence in the region," the chairman's statement said.

Philippine leader criticizes Western meddling at ASEAN summit

Ties between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the West could grow stronger and more productive "if we learn to respect each other's independence and treat each other as sovereign equals," said President Rodrigo Duterte on Saturday during the opening session of the summit in Manila.

Duterte added, "Relations bear fruit when they are based on mutual respect and benefit."

The Philippine president underlined the need for the 10-nation bloc to address security issues such as terrorism and piracy, but avoided reference to the sensitive South China Sea territorial dispute, which pits China against its neighbors.

Duterte said the Philippines and other nations were helpless to stop Chinese artificial island-building in areas they claimed, so there was no point in discussing it at the summit.

Duterte's drug war, which has claimed thousands of lives and led to warnings by rights groups about a possible crime against humanity, has been widely condemned in the West.

But he has enjoyed support from some of his Southeast Asian guests this week, including Brunei Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah and Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

The summit is the first major international conference Duterte has hosted since rising to power nearly 10 months ago.

(Source: agencies)

The double life of a right-wing terror suspect

8 → Still, the BKA asked the Bundeswehr, as the German military is called, to allow Franco A. to continue serving so that they could surreptitiously monitor him. But the officer behaved unobtrusively. He only told a few of his comrades about the pistol found in Vienna and that it was becoming a problem for him.

Only months later did Franco A. again hear from the authorities: On April 19, members of MAD, Germany's military intelligence agency, interviewed him. But A. chose his answers carefully, according to investigators, hiding his right-wing extremist views and repeating his story of how he found the firearm in Vienna.

Investigators still have to find out what exactly Franco A. was planning. Thus far he has remained silent. In their search of Mathias F's home in Offenbach, officials say they found ammunition, hand grenades and a small quantity of explosives. But it is still unclear what role he played. He says that Franco A. gave him the weapon that he had found and that he didn't think anything of it.

Prosecutors have been reticent about providing concrete details and a spokeswoman said on Thursday that investigators have found no clearly developed plans for an attack, though she added that the case includes a number of perplexing elements. Franco A.'s conspiratorial behavior has no doubt fueled suspicions that he has something to hide.

The German military must now provide an explanation for how the first lieutenant's right-wing convictions could have gone undiscovered for so long. And how Franco A. was able to conceal for more than a year that he regularly traveled to Bavaria to maintain his fake refugee identity.

Fears that a Bundeswehr soldier could commit an attack are not new. Thus far, though, the concern had been that an Islamist might infiltrate the military and then use his new skills in an act of terrorist violence. Indeed, this summer MAD will be introducing a new security check for all incoming recruits in the hopes of closing potential security holes.

Whether such a check might have weeded out Franco A. is doubtful.

(Source: Spiegel)

Poch: We've matured in a year

Mauricio Pochettino insists Tottenham are better-placed to deal with stress than they were at this point last season.

Spurs' title challenge stumbled in late April last season, taking only two points from their last 12 available as Leicester won the Premier League title.

This time around, Spurs trail Chelsea by four points with five games remaining, with Arsenal first up in the north London derby on Super Sunday, live on Sky Sports, and the Argentine boss says his side have more maturity to deal with the pressure.



Asked if last season's failure gives them motivation this time, Pochettino told Sky Sports: "In some ways there is a motivation, in others it is an area to improve. First of all we had to find out why it happened, and then find a solution."

"The team is more mature than last season. It was a completely different moment. I feel now the team has more capacity to manage the stress, to fight to win the title, and I think we've improved a lot."

"Whether we win or lose, I think the team are at another level mentally."

Pochettino insists he is not concerned about finishing above Arsenal for the first time in 22 years because his focus is solely on winning the Premier League.

Victory will ensure Tottenham finish above their rivals but Pochettino is single-minded in his pursuit of Chelsea and a first league title since 1961.

"It's important to win because we know what it means to beat Arsenal in the derby, but our aim is to win the title, not to be above Arsenal. I don't care about Arsenal, I care about my players, my club, my fans, but not what happens next to us."

"But you can't ignore what happens in the past, the last 20, 30 years, and we know very well what it means. We will try to give our best, try to win, because if we are able to take the three points, we will be in the race for the title."

"Every game is a challenge, every game is important to focus and try to play. It will be a tough game, with a warm atmosphere, and our fans will be unbelievable again, like always. I'm sure they help us to have more energy."

"I like to have pressure. I'm always excited for the challenge, and I am so, so happy to be in that position."

The feel-good factor is rife at Spurs at present, having won their last eight Premier League games to put London rivals Chelsea under pressure at the top.

But Pochettino insists keeping that positive feeling is no easy feat, and opened up about the complexities of managing morale in the camp.

"In football it is never easy to have a good relationship with every person. Those who play are happy, those on the bench are 50 per cent happy, and 50 per cent disappointed, and the players who are not on the bench are 100 per cent disappointed. That is a relationship so difficult."

"I am always open to talk, my door is always open, but then it is up to the player to come or not. Sometimes there are different players, some more distant, some closer, but you need to respect. Sometimes it is so difficult to be close to the staff, sometimes it is easy."

"We will try, we have a very clear philosophy. Our motivation is always to know the person before the player; they are not machines, not robots, they are people who feel, have problems in life outside of the pitch."

(Source: Skysports)

Arsenal's 'soft centre' holds no fear for opposition - Troy Deeney

Watford striker Troy Deeney says that Arsenal have lost their fear factor, insisting that Arsene Wenger's side struggle to get back into a game once they are behind.

Deeney, 28, was pivotal up front as Watford scored twice in 13 minutes to shock Arsenal 2-1 in January. And the forward believes that Arsenal's side struggle to get back into a game once they are behind.



"The only thing I'd say when you play Arsenal, is there is no fear," Deeney told BBC Radio Five Live. "When you play a tough centre-half, like Eric Bailly at Manchester United, you're up against him and think 'he's going to give me a whack!'"

"There's no-one in that Arsenal team who you really fear. You feel like you could run through them. They are great footballers, much better than me, I can't deny that. I just think there is that soft centre to Arsenal."

Arsenal are five points adrift of the top four (with one game in hand) and have fallen to shock defeats to Crystal Palace and West Brom in recent weeks. And Deeney says that the club are missing the fight of their rivals.

"I always find when Arsenal go behind, I don't feel confident that they're going to come back and win 2-1," he said.

"Whether it be Burnley or Man United. I don't feel, I don't have that confidence in them. Whereas, if Chelsea go a goal behind I think, right, well that might have kick-started them."

(Source: Soccernet)

Jurgen Klopp hits back at Jose Mourinho's 'unfair fight' complaint

Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp says Manchester United have enough depth that Jose Mourinho shouldn't be complaining of an "unfair fight" for the top four because of their fixture congestion.

United, Liverpool, Manchester City and Arsenal are all fighting to finish in the top four alongside title contenders Chelsea and Tottenham, but after United's goalless draw with City on Thursday, Mourinho claimed that his side's busy slate made for an unlevel playing field.

"I think 18 more matches played than Liverpool," Mourinho said of this team's fixtures, though the reality is 13 games more than Liverpool.

"Eighteen more matches is like half of a Premier League almost. Eighteen matches are many miles in the players' legs. So if you can say that, it is an unfair fight."

But while Klopp said he could understand Mourinho's frustration as Liverpool faced similar circumstances a year ago, he also dismissed Mourinho's argument, that United have all the resources needed to compete on multiple fronts.

"I can imagine what he means but they have played a similar season to what we had last year," Klopp told English newspapers. "They also have a different squad, a wider squad, and with all of their injury problems they had so far they are still able to put out teams."

"And you think, [Henrikh] Mkhitaryan isn't playing? [Wayne] Rooney isn't



playing? And him, and him... It is different but of course it is hard.

"They have seven or eight games left -- five in the Premier League, a semifinal and maybe

a final -- and yes that is hard, absolutely, but we had a similar situation last season, not fighting for the Champions League unfortunately, and it's not unfair, it is the situation.

"Nobody asked us last year how we felt about it. It doesn't feel well but I know what he means."

(Source: Soccernet)

David De Gea to Real Madrid: Man United exit has hidden agenda - Guillem Balague

Reports in Spain have claimed the goalkeeper has told Jose Mourinho he wants a switch to the Bernabeu.

But Balague does not see why United would sell De Gea and thinks the Spanish press are doing their best to unsettle the 26-year-old.

"Do Real Madrid want De Gea? You bet they do," he wrote for Sky Sports.

"What surprises me, however, is why a club like Manchester United - that have no need to sell him - would be prepared to let him leave. I'm sensing a hidden agenda."

"There are plenty of rumours that David de Gea is Real Madrid-bound, but I am not convinced that this is the wish of the current United goalkeeper."

"Just why would he want to leave a club that is one of the world's biggest, a club on the up, and where he is un-



questionably the number one to move to Madrid where he will be on less money and the pressure will be higher?"

"Not for the first time in situations like this, the Spanish press have announced that not only does De Gea want to leave but have gone as far as to say that he has even requested a move."

I have been told that he has not said anything of the kind to United. Why do the Spanish press keep insisting he wants to go then?"

De Gea has been in fine form this season for United, making 42 appearances in all competitions, keeping 16 clean sheets.

The Red Devils return to action tomorrow when they welcome Swansea to Old Trafford.

(Source: ESPN)

Vettel keeps Ferrari on top in final Russian practice



Formula One frontrunner Sebastian Vettel kept Ferrari ahead of champions Mercedes in final Russian Grand Prix practice on Saturday.

The German, who is seven points clear of Mercedes's Lewis Hamilton after winning two of the first three races, lapped the Sochi street circuit with a fastest time of one minute 34.001 seconds on the ultrasoft tires.

Finnish team mate Kimi Raikkonen was second on the timesheets, 0.337 slower than the four-times world champion, with compatriot Valtteri Bottas third for Mercedes.

The Ferrari drivers led both sessions on Friday, with Bottas again quicker than triple world champion Hamilton.

Mercedes have led every lap in Sochi since the race made its debut on the calendar after the 2014 Winter Olympics,

with Hamilton winning the first two races and now-retired 2016 champion Nico Rosberg triumphant last year.

The champions have also started the last 18 races on pole position but that remarkable run may end in Saturday's later qualifying unless Mercedes are holding something back.

"I think Mercedes will be fine; it's a circuit that suits them, so they will be strong," Vettel had said after Friday practice.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen was fifth fastest with Brazilian Felipe Massa sixth for Williams.

Britain's Jolyon Palmer did just four laps but failed to set a time after Renault changed his chassis overnight as a precautionary measure, following an exhaust leak.

The team will also replace the car's engine before qualifying.

(Source: Reuters)

Jose Mourinho says Man Utd lacked belief under Louis van Gaal



Jose Mourinho says Manchester United were missing "happiness, trust and belief" under Louis van Gaal and expects the squad to be even more resilient next season.

United face Swansea at Old Trafford on Sunday, with the manager praising the spirit shown by his team after their 0-0 draw against Manchester City on Thursday extended their unbeaten league run to 24 games.

Mourinho, who was a coach under Van Gaal at Barcelona in the late 1990s, said his predecessor pulled together a "committed" squad but feels they were missing certain traits going into the season, where they are now bidding for a top-four finish and success in the Europa League.

"The group was a nice group, honestly," said Mourinho. "Good people,

good boys, committed people. I think Mr Van Gaal left a good group of boys with very good relations between them and I got that in my hands."

"I think they missed happiness, they missed trust, they missed belief. They missed this extra bit that brings resilience, brings you fight. They have it."

"So next July 9, when we meet again for next season, it's a stronger group. So the new players when they arrive will find a group more ready to go for big things."

"But the reality is that we are fighting to win the Europa League and we are fighting to try to finish fourth, so let's go."

Central defenders Phil Jones and Chris Smalling remain out for the Swansea game, with Marcos Rojo having suffered a season-ending knee ligament injury, and Paul Pogba is out with a leg muscle injury.

(Source: Skysports)

WADA reinstates Madrid anti-doping laboratory

Madrid's Anti-Doping Laboratory was reinstated by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) on Friday, more than a year after it was suspended.

The suspension, which followed WADA's declaration last March that the Spanish Anti-Doping Agency (AEPD) was non-compliant, prohibited the lab from carrying out any WADA-related anti-doping activities.

AEPD, which had missed a deadline for required changes to its drug-testing procedures, was removed

from the non-compliant list early last month and an inspection of the Madrid lab followed on March 23-24.

"We would like to thank the laboratory for their continued cooperation throughout this process," WADA Director General Olivier Niggli said in a statement.

"Given the specific circumstances of their suspension, WADA is confident that the laboratory will continue to operate to the high standards required."

The suspensions led to a dramatic drop in testing in the top two Spanish soccer leagues, with no samples at all taken from players in the second division for a year after AEPD's suspension.

WADA said in February the lack of testing was "alarming" with AEPD blaming FIFA and UEFA for not taking over drug testing in football while it was ruled non-compliant.

(Source: Reuters)

Esteghlal move up to IPL second place

SPORTS Esteghlal football team defeated Padideh 2-1 to move up to second place in the Iran Professional League (IPL) on Saturday.

In the match held in Mashhad, Moein Abbasian scored for Padideh in the 34th minute but Omid Noorafkan equalized the match with a long-range shot in the 57th minute.

With nine minutes remaining, Jaber Ansari scored the winner for the visiting team.

In Isfahan, Tractor Sazi lost to Sepahan 2-0 to drop to third place in IPL standing table.

Mehrdad Mohammadi scored in the 41st minute and Farid Behzadi extended the lead in the 89th minute.

IPL champions Persepolis were held to a 3-3 draw by Zob Ahan in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

The Reds came from 3-1 behind to draw 3-3 with Isfahan based club.

Sanat Naft lost to Foolad 1-0 in the home match and Siah Jamegan edged past already relegated Machine Sazi.

Esteghlal Khuzestan and Gostaresh Foolad played out a goalless draw, Paykan defeated Saipa 2-0 and Naft Tehran lost to Saba 2-1.



Iran chosen to host 2018 Asian Snooker Championship

SPORTS Iran has been chosen to host the 34th Asian Men Snooker Championships.

It's the first time the Persian Gulf country was chosen to host the competition.

In the ACBS General Assembly meeting which was held in Doha, Qatar on Friday, Iran won the right to host the competition.

Iran participated in the 33rd Asian Men Snooker Championship with four participants.

The ACBS General Assembly meeting brought together 26 nations, including host Qatar, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, India, China, Singapore, Malaysia, China Taipei, Japan, South Korea, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan,

Philippines, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Sri Lanka.

The ACBS Asian Snooker Championship is the premier non-professional snooker tournament in Asia.

The event series is sanctioned by the Asian Confederation of Billiard Sports and started from 1984.

Mostly, the winner of the tournament qualifies for the next season of the Professional Snooker Tour.



Iran win Asian Weightlifting Championships title

SPORTS Iran won the title of the 2017 Asian Weightlifting Championships in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan on Saturday.

The Iranian team finished in first place with 562 points.

China became runner-up with 548 points and Uzbekistan came third with

511 points.

Host Turkmenistan finished in fourth place with 490 points.

The Iranian team won one gold medal, two silvers and bronze in the competition.

The Asian Weightlifting Championship is a weightlifting championship or-

ganized by the Asian Weightlifting Federation for competitors from the Asian countries.

It has been held since 1971 for men and 1988 for women. In 2008 the championships provided the official qualification for Asian competitors in the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

Iran win Indoor Hockey Asia Cup



Iran won the seventh edition of the Indoor Hockey Asia Cup on Friday.

Esfandiyar Safaei's men trounced Kazakhstan 10-1 in the final match in Doha, Qatar.

Iran defeated Malaysia (11-0), Qatar (9-3), Oman (10-3) and Uzbekistan (12-2) in the five-day tournament.

Iran has won seven times out of seven editions.

Qatar came third after defeating Uzbekistan 5-3 in the bronze medal match.

Iran and Kazakhstan qualified for the Hockey Indoor World Cup 2018 as the tournament's finalists.

Indoor Hockey Asia Cup is an international men's and women's indoor field hockey tournament governed by the Asian Hockey Federation (ASHF).

It was introduced in 2008 for men's competition and the women's competition was added a year later in 2009.

(Source: Tasnim)

Former Team Melli defender Ebrahim Ashtiani



Former Iran national and Persepolis football team Ebrahim Ashtiani has been hospitalized in a coma following a stroke.

According to reports, Ashtiani's level of consciousness is low. The former Persepolis defender has been hospitalized in Laleh Hospital in Tehran.

Ebrahim Ashtiani began his playing career with Shahin. He joined Persepolis after four years and played eight years for the Iranian popular team.

Ashtiani also was a member of Iran national football team from 1968 to 1974.

Ashtiani won the Asian Cup in Thailand in 1972 as well as the football tournament of the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran.

He made 35 appearances for the Iran national football team and was part of Team Melli competing in the football tournament of the Olympics in Munich 1972.

(Source: Tasnim)

Celtic secure biggest Ibrox win over Rangers

Celtic claimed their biggest ever win over Rangers at Ibrox in the final Old Firm derby of the season.

Scott Sinclair netted an early penalty after Myles Beerman needlessly fouled Patrick Roberts, and Leigh Griffiths struck a spectacular second.

Callum McGregor rolled home to extend the advantage after the interval.

Dedryck Boyata headed in Griffiths' swirling free-kick before Kenny Miller replied for Rangers and Mikael Lustig curled in the visitors' fifth.

Brendan Rodgers' side remain unbeaten domestically this season, having also beaten Rangers in last weekend's Scottish Cup semi-final to set up a final date with Aberdeen and the chance to clinch Celtic's first domestic treble since 2001.

Rangers - third in the league after a second 5-1 loss to Celtic this season - remain nine points behind Aberdeen, who face St Johnstone later.

Whatever Rangers' plan was, it dissipated in double quick time. It took Celtic just a single minute to cut through the home defence, McGregor being put in on goal.

Had McGregor looked outside him and rolled a pass to Griffiths then the striker would have had a tap in. Instead, he took it on himself and was denied by a brilliant last-ditch block by Clint Hill.

It was a mighty let-off for Rangers, but it was just a reprieve on what was a thunderously sobering day for them.

The opening goal came after Beerman made a bad decision when diving in on Roberts while the winger was making his way out of the penalty box.

It was an error that was punished by Sinclair, the winger sending Foderingham the wrong way from the penalty spot.

Celtic did not let up. Their movement had Rangers bewildered and their work-rate ensured that whenever Rangers got the ball they were relieved of it very quickly.

The second came when Emerson Hyndman was robbed of possession by Stuart Armstrong, who played it out to Griffiths. The striker's shot from the left side of the penalty area was a venomous hit that flew over Foderingham's head.

Celtic were enjoying a mountain of possession and all the chances and should have racked up more goals before the break.

Griffiths' curling shot came slapping back off the crossbar. When the loose ball fell to Sinclair he knocked it wide when he really ought to have put it away.

Sinclair had a second great chance soon after. Again, Griffiths was the creator, spinning in a ball

from the left to an unmarked Sinclair at the back post. Sinclair contrived to put it wide.

Rangers' defending was appalling and the half-time introduction of Andy Halliday for Joe Dodoo did nothing to change that.

Celtic were on a different plain. Roberts went close to adding a third a minute into the new half, but McGregor did precisely that six minutes later. Rangers, completely spooked by Celtic's runners, stood off McGregor and he fired through James Tavernier's legs for number three.

The fourth duly arrived from Griffiths' fierce free-kick on the right-hand side. Rangers had enough men in the box but Boyata was free in the six-yard area and easily nodded past Foderingham.

Miller placed home following a one-two with substitute Joe Garner but Celtic would get the day's final goal.

The history-defining fifth came when right-back Lustig skipped away from Danny Wilson and swerved a gorgeous finish past Foderingham.

Five did not flatter Celtic. Six or seven would have been a fairer reflection of their dominance but the result was enough to register their biggest away league win against Rangers since a 4-0 victory in 1897.

(Source: BBC)

Ildefons Lima, Andorra's collector of caps, goals and jerseys

"It was a liberating result for us," Ildefons Lima told FIFA.com - an understandable reaction to his team's defeat of San Marino on 20 February, given that no other FIFA member had endured such a lengthy run without a win. And yet, the Andorran skipper could not help but feel a tinge of empathy for the team on the other side of the pitch.

"You're full of joy, obviously, but it also makes you feel a little sad, because the team you've beaten experiences the same kinds of ups and downs that you do. Hopefully, they'll get to experience some joy soon as well," he said magnanimously. Indeed, the loss to Andorra extended San Marino's own unfortunate run to 75 matches without a win.

Lima acknowledges that seemingly even encounters such as these can end up creating more tension than usual. "When you play teams like San Marino, you're afraid to lose, because you know that they're about the same level, and if you can't beat them, who can you beat? But we do try to approach all of our games in the same way, no matter the opponents. We're acutely aware of our level, and that to achieve anything, we have to give 110 per cent."

The victory, the fourth such result since the nation became a FIFA member in 1996, was a motivating factor for the Andorrans, who went on to bring another unproductive spell to an end by drawing 0-0 with Faroe Islands on 25 March in a 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™ qualifier. The stalemate provided the principality with its first point in a competitive encounter for 11-and-a-half years.

"It was almost like winning the World Cup!" he said. "For us, these games are actually like mini-World Cup tournaments."

With five qualifying matches for Russia 2018 still to play, it remains to be seen if these two positive results will propel Andorra to surpass their best-ever performance in a qualifying competition: five points in the Germany 2006 campaign.

"Back then, we had several professionals in our squad," recalled the robust centre-back. "There's a lot of work to be done if we want to move up to the next level, and the key to achieving that is having players who play abroad. The Andorran league is still an amateur set-up."

Now 37 years of age, Lima has enjoyed a nomadic career, turning out for professional sides in Spain, Mexico, Greece, Italy and Switzerland. "I'm like Willy Fog", he said, laughing. On the books of Andorran outfit Santa Coloma since 2014, he is hopeful that his ageing body will stand up to the rigours of one more qualifying campaign and has set his sights on a more immediate goal in the meantime.

"What really excites me is the thought of becoming Andorra's most capped player," explained the veteran. "But when you represent Andorra, it's tricky. We don't play an awful lot of friendlies and we don't reach the final stages of tournaments."

Although he has two more appearances to go before that aim is achieved, he does already hold one international record: he is his country's top goalscorer, despite being a defender by trade. "A team like ours tends to try to make the most of dead-ball situations, and that's where I come in, as I'm pretty tall. And as our penalty takers had retired, I plucked up the courage and volunteered, and now I'm the designated taker," he said, clearly still amused by the idea.

In fact, during the qualifiers for UEFA EURO 2016, his three goals made him the highest-scoring defender overall for that campaign. "I would love to add to my total before I retire, but that said, 11 is more than enough. It's difficult, though, because sometimes we don't even get over the halfway line!" he joked.

Another exciting challenge that lies ahead for Lima is continuing to expand his jersey collection, which he stores carefully in a custom-made wardrobe. "I'll eventually have 500 or 600, and one of my goals is to get hold of a jersey from every FIFA member team in the world. I already have a hundred or so, including some pretty exotic ones, like Aruba! They have to be match-worn rather than bought from a shop, though."

Before the interview draws to a close, he mentions his latest acquisitions, national team jerseys from Rwanda and Sierra Leone. "I got hold of them by contacting the manufacturer on Facebook. Yes, I know I'm a total geek," he concluded with a grin.

(Source: FIFA)

Iran advance to Asian Footvolley Championships final encounter

The Iranian men's national footvolley A team has defeated Iran's B squad at the semi-final stage of the Praputt Kamlang-ek FC 4th Asian Footvolley Championships in Thailand to book its passage into the final match of the continental sports event.

The final match between Iran A outfit, comprised of Othman Sensebili and Jamil Kor, and Iran's national footvolley B team was held on Tha Lo Beach in Tha Muang district of the central Thai province of Kanchanaburi on Saturday morning.

Iran A pair could chalk up a 2-1 win over their compatriots Vahid Shadan and Vahid Imeri at last.

Iran and Thailand national footvolley A teams will face off in the final on Saturday evening.

The Praputt Kamlang-ek FC 4th Asian Footvolley Championships kicked off in Thailand on April 26, and will wrap up on April 29, 2017.

Footvolley was created by Octavio de Moraes on Rio de Janeiro's Copacabana Beach, Brazil, in 1965. It is a sport that combines aspects of beach volleyball and association football.

Footvolley is essentially beach volleyball, except for the fact that players are not allowed to use their hands, and a football replaces the volleyball.

A number of professional football players, including Romário, Edmundo, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho Gaúcho, Júnior, and Edinho, have taken up footvolley in both promotional events and celebrity matches in recent years.

(Source: Press TV)

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Sydney photo exhibition to explore Iranian historical sites

A R T TEHRAN — An exhibition photos of a number of Iranian historical sites by Australian photographer Rod Sainy will be held at M2 Gallery in the Australian capital of Sydney from May 3 to 16. The exhibit entitled "Architecture of Ancient Persia/Iran" will showcase Sainy's photos of the ruins of Persepolis, Soltanieh Dome, Sheikh Safi Mausoleum, Toghrol Tower, and many other sites that were taken during his visits to Iran in 2014 and 2015. In his collection, Sainy focuses on the sites, which had previously been photographed in the 1920s by the German archaeologist Ernst Herzfeld and in the early 1930s by British traveler Robert Byron.

NEWS IN BRIEF



"Never Fall Down" at Iranian bookstores

A R T TEHRAN — American writer Patricia McCormick's 2012 novel "Never Fall Down" has recently been published in Persian by Aradman Publications in Tehran. Translated by Reza Abedinzadeh, the book tells the true story of an 11-year-old boy Arn Chorn-Pond when the Communist Khmer Rouge swept into power in Cambodia in 1975.

When soldiers arrive in his hometown, Arn is separated from his family and assigned to a labor camp, where he sees the other children dying before his eyes. One day, the soldiers ask if any of the kids can play an instrument. Arn's never played a note in his life, but he volunteers to save his life.



French ambassador visits Tehran museum

A R T TEHRAN — French Ambassador Francois Senemaud has paid a visit to the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA). Cultural Attaché Jamel Oubechou also accompanied Senemaud during the visit, the TMCA reported in a press release on Saturday. They also held a meeting with the director of the Center for Visual Arts, Majid Mollanoruzi, and TMCA Director Ali-Mohammad Zare' to discuss the expansion of relations between French museums and the TMCA. TMCA's cinemathèque is currently hosting a six-day festival of French films, which will end on May 1. French critic and former chief editor of Cahiers du Cinemas Jean-Michel Frodon has attended the screenings.

Sao Paulo mayor declares war on wall writers

SAO PAULO (Reuters) — It took Brazilian artist Iaco one minute to whip out a can of spray paint and write "doria" seven times across a gray wall in Sao Paulo. It took four minutes for a police officer to arrive, gun drawn, handcuff Iaco and haul him to the nearest precinct - a swift response to a high-profile provocation in Mayor João Doria's war on graffiti. This was not just any wall. Weeks before, Doria donned orange overalls and a face mask to help spray gray paint over some 15,000 square meters of street art along that same stretch of Avenida 23 de Maio. The fate of those murals, commissioned by the prior mayor, has sparked a debate over the world-famous graffiti scene in South America's biggest city and its place in the cleaner landscape imagined by Doria's "Pretty City" program. The mayor has since called the move to repaint that busy avenue too hasty and now insists that his fight is not with the city's colorful street art but with a style of aggressive tagging known as "pichação." The angular, runic font has conquered swaths of Sao Paulo's landscape as unseen street artists scale buildings and landmarks with paint rollers and spray cans in hand, drawing the ire of many who embrace other forms of graffiti. "A muralist is an artist and has our respect," Doria said in an interview this month, highlighting his plans to commission new works of street art. "Pichação is aggression ... It is not a social problem. It is mental, criminal."

Tehran Intl. Book Fair to kick off Wednesday

By Manijeh Rezapoor

TEHRAN — The 30th edition of the Tehran International Book Fair will open on Wednesday, with Italy as its special guest.

In a press conference held at the Iran Cultural Fairs Institute on Saturday, Deputy Culture Minister for Cultural Affairs Seyyed Abbas Salehi elaborated on the different programs to be held during the 10-day cultural event. "The Tehran book fair is a national fair. The number of participating publishers both from Tehran and other cities are quite significant. However, the organizers have dedicated each day to one special province highlighting the art, culture, traditions and whatever is related to that province at the fair," he stated.

"Organizing professional venues for the publishers, setting up meetings with the writers, as well holding sessions with professional translators will all help organize a better, more professional fair," he added.

He called the Shahr-e Aftab (Sun City) Fairground, which will be hosting the fair for the second time, a proper venue designed for the fair, providing good facilities for the visitors.

Iran Cultural Fairs Institute Director Amir-Masud Shahramnia next gave more details about the fair and said that 1687 publishers are expected to attend the fair.

Italy is the special guest of the 30th edition of the fair this year attending with a group of 32 Italian cultural figures, he stated.

He added, "We have also dedicated a section to introduce the foreign cities, highlighting the rich and ancient Persian civilization.

"The guest city of this year's edition is Istanbul and we will be hosting a number of Turkish writers, publishers and literary agencies this year."



Deputy Culture Minister for Cultural Affairs Seyyed Abbas Salehi attends a press conference in Tehran on April 29, 2017 to brief the media about the 30th edition of Tehran International Book Fair. (Mehr/Maryam Kamyam)

He also pointed out that the book fair has granted scholarships to 10 literary agencies, publishers, writers and professional translators active in translating works in the Persian language into other international languages.

"Those who have received scholarships this year are coming from Egypt, Armenia, Japan, Italy, Afghanistan

and several others," he asserted.

The 30th edition of the book fair will open with attendance on Wednesday, May 3.

The fair will be running until May 13 at the Shahr-e Aftab (Sun City) Fairground.

Iraqi National Theater to review Iranian films

A R T TEHRAN — The Iraqi National Theater will review Iranian cinema by organizing a festival of Iranian films, which will open on May 2.

A lineup of films produced from 2015 to 2017 are scheduled to go on screen during the event, which will run until May 6, Zainab al-Qassab, the director of Public Relations and Media at the Iraqi National Theater, announced in a press release on Friday.

The lineup includes "Bodyguard" by Ebrahim Hatamikia, "The Star of the East" by Ali Ghaffari, "The Eagle of the Desert" by Merdad Khoshbakhti and



"Aliens" by Ramin Bahrani.

A number of meetings and conferences with the directors of the films will also be arranged on the sidelines of festival.

The festival will be organized under the auspices of Iran's Cultural Office in Baghdad.

Gallery launched in Tehran to improve economics of art

A R T TEHRAN — A gallery was launched in Tehran on Friday by the private sector as its owner said that the gallery aims to boost the economics of art.

"In my view, we will be able to maintain the dignity of artists and to increase their motivations when we can grease the wheels of the economics of art for them," Toktam Farmanfarmai said during the opening ceremony of Farmanfarma Gallery.

She emphasized the need to institutionalize "the culture of purchasing artworks and support of artists among people."

She said the gallery plans to consider a scientific basis for the valuation of the artworks selected for each showcase.

The gallery located in the Karim Khan neighborhood was originally a house converted into a place for art exhibits. The two-story structure contains nine halls equipped for art exhibitions.

Works by prominent Iranian artists, including Aidin Aghdashlu, Jazeh Tabatabai, Hanibal Alkhas, Iraj Zand, Parvaneh Etemadi and Mehdi Sahabi, are currently on display at its debut exhibit, which will run through May 19.

"Retouch" named best short at Tribeca Film Festival

A R T TEHRAN — "Retouch" by Iranian director Kaveh Mazaheri was picked as the Best Narrative Short at the 16th Tribeca Film Festival in New York City, the organizers announced on Thursday.

"For its message of choice, liberty and renewal where the lines of morality and honesty are blurred, leaving the audience's own projection of the events open for discussion and introspection," the jury commented.

"We appreciated the unification of the aesthetic and the ethical," the panel added.

The jurors of the Best Narrative Short and Best Animated Short categories were Udi Aloni, Brennan Brown, Gilbert Gottfried, Amy Heckerling, Sheila Nevins, Mark O'Brien and Jesse Plemons.

The film is about Maryam whose husband has an accident at home and, rather than saving him, she stops helping and watches him die.

Due to President Donald Trump's temporary travel bans, Mazaheri was not able to attend the awards ceremony held at BMCC Tribeca Performing Arts Center. Therefore, he spoke to the audience in a video.

He thanked the jury for selecting his movie as a winner and said, "This is a pity that I am not among you tonight and I cannot talk to you in person."

"The reason that I am not there is because of Mr. Trump's fascinating decisions and as the least consequence, my crew and I couldn't get U.S. visas.

"... I would like to present it honorably to all immigrants around the world who are struggling for a better life."

"Keep the Change", written and directed by Rachel Israel, was selected as the best U.S. narrative while "Son of Sofia", written and directed by Elina Psykou, won the award for best international narrative feature. The film was jointly produced by Greece, Bulgaria and France.



The award for best documentary feature went "Bobbi Jene", a joint production of USA, Denmark and Israel directed by Elvira Lind.

Springsteen recounts struggle to live outside bliss of rock songs

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Bruce Springsteen talked on Friday about his struggle to live in the real world rather than inside the lyrical songs he has composed over his 40-year career.

The "Born to Run" musician, who revealed in a 2016 memoir that he had struggled with depression, called rock songs "three minutes of bliss and life compressed."

He told a Tribeca Film Festival audience during a conversation about his career that he had sometimes seen his music "as a life preserver and as a safe space - you think you can live there."

But Springsteen, 67, said that no artist could live only within his art.

"At the end of the day it's just your job and just your work and life awaits you outside of those things. ... So that took me a long time to learn that lesson - thanks Patti- and it was a tremendous struggle for me," he added, referring to his wife of 25 years, Patti Scialfa.

Springsteen spoke of his early days in music in New Jersey, buying his first guitar at age 15, and being a "stone-cold draft dodger" during the Vietnam War - a period that informed much of his writing, including one of his best



Recording artist Bruce Springsteen performs during a campaign event for U.S. Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S. November 7, 2016. (Reuters/Carlos Barria)

known but most misunderstood songs, "Born in the U.S.A."

Springsteen said he had come to terms with people misinterpreting the 1984 song as patriotic. It was played, without his permission, during Donald Trump's rallies during the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

In rock songs, he said, "People hear the music, the beat, then they hear the chorus, and if they have the time or the inclination, maybe they get into some of the verses.

"That's the way the political rock and roll ball bounces. It's one of those things," Springsteen said.

Roman Polanski's "Based on a True Story" added to Cannes Film Festival lineup

LONDON (The Guardian) — Roman Polanski's new film has been added to the Cannes Film Festival lineup as his legal battles to return to the U.S. continues.

"The Rosemary's Baby" director's new thriller "Based on a True Story" will play out of competition. It stars Eva Green as a mysterious woman who tries to insert herself into the life of a famous author, played by Polanski's off-screen wife Emmanuelle Seigner.

The announcement arrives as the 83-year-old film-maker's lawyer continues to argue for his return to U.S. after he fled in 1977. Polanski pleaded guilty to unlawful sex with a 13-year-old and has spent the last 40 years in Europe. Last month, Polanski was denied the promise of "special treatment" if he came back to the U.S., with jail time still possible.

This week saw Polanski's victim Samantha Geimer write a letter to the Los Angeles DA criticizing their treatment of the case.

"You and those that have come before you have never protected me, you have treated me with contempt, using a crime committed against me to further your own careers," it read. "You refuse to investigate the truth, you seek to hide testimony

and defame those who produce relevant evidence and facts with accusations of criminal activity, facts you ignore to serve yourselves."

Deputy district attorney Michele Hanisee responded with a denial of any wrongdoing on her end. "With respect to your comments about investigations of misconduct, this office has never 'covered up' any misconduct, nor is there, as you suggest, any misconduct continuing today," she wrote. "As a victim you have a right to notice of the substantive proceedings in the case and to be heard about the substantive proceedings in the case."

Polanski's last film "Venus in Fur" also received its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival and won him the Cesar for best director. Last year's festival saw controversy for director Woody Allen as allegations of his sexual abuse resurfaced with estranged son Ronan Farrow writing a piece for the Hollywood Reporter.

Other new additions to the festival lineup include Force Majeure director Ruben Östlund's drama "The Square", starring Elisabeth Moss and Dominic West. Previously announced titles include new films from Sofia Coppola and Michael Haneke.