

**Iran-Austria business forum held in Tehran** **4**

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## Guerra Edizioni exec calls Tehran book fair big chance for Italian publishers

By Manijeh Rezapoor

**TEHRAN** — Sara Maria Chellini, managing director of Guerra Edizioni, a Perugia-based publisher of materials for learning Italian as a foreign language, has called the Tehran International Book Fair a big chance for Italian publishers.

Chellini and representatives of many Italian publishing companies are attending the fair as their country is the special guest of the event.

In an interview with the Tehran Times at Italy's stand, Chellini expressed hope that her company would be admitted to the fair next year, so that they would be able to make a more direct relationship with Iranian publishers.

She also said that she is eager to visit Iran later in person to learn more about Iranian publishing houses.

She said that their publishing firm provides books for many educational centers, including primary schools, secondary schools and universities. **->16**

# Iran starts exports from South Pars oil layer



See page 4

## Tehran, Kabul on fast track to strategic ties

By Ali Kushki

**KABUL** — Relations between Iran and Afghanistan are expected to undergo major positive shifts as the two are close to drafting a comprehensive roadmap which catapults bilateral ties to previously unseen levels.

The document, once drafted and implemented, will soothe concerns about a wide spectrum of issues, including environmental challenges which have escalated over the past decade.

Forging a consensus on five components of what Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif called "a strategic framework" was the running theme of his talks on Sunday with five senior Afghan officials held over just five hours and a half.

"We had very important discussions during the visit," Zarif told reporters on his way back to Tehran. He said the visit capped months of negotiations to hammer out a "certain framework for strengthening strategic ties between the two countries."

"We have a non-paper agreement on the principles and between three to six months we hope we can reach an agreement," Zarif said in English in answer to a question by the Tehran Times. **->2**

## Rouhani congratulates French president-elect

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his country's Foreign Ministry on Monday congratulated Emmanuel Macron on his landslide victory in the French presidential election.

Rouhani expressed hope that the ties between Iran and France would deepen during Macron presidency.

The Iranian ambassador to Paris was also among foreign diplomats who participated in a ceremony to congratulate the French president-elect.

Through positive mutual interaction and cooperation, Rouhani said, Tehran-Paris relations would certainly develop in all fields of common interest including politics, economics and culture.

The Iranian president said Tehran is ready to "constantly exchange views [with French officials] on bilateral, regional and international issues", the president said, hoping that obstacles in the way of enhanced relations would be removed under the new French leader, Press TV reported.

The French Interior Ministry announced on Monday that Macron had been officially elected president by winning 66.1 percent of valid votes in the run-off. His rival, Marine Le Pen, garnered only 33.9 percent of the votes.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi also expressed hope the two countries would further strengthen relations based on the grounds prepared during the recent years.

## Iran attaches value to ties with European countries: Velayati

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Ali Akbar Velayati, the senior foreign policy advisor to the Leader, said on Sunday that Iran attaches great value to ties with the European countries especially the ones who adopt more independent policies.

During a meeting with Wegger Christian Strommen, the political director of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in Tehran, Velayati called relations between Iran and Norway "historical" and "valuable".

More determination is required to expand economic relations, he added.

The senior politician called for working out a roadmap in line with expanding cooperation.

He highlighted the importance of expanding relations with Norway as an industrial country.

Commenting on the crises in the Middle East region, Velayati said that the regional

conflicts should be settled "politically".

"Iran has done valuable cooperation with the regional countries and the countries which seek peace to [help] establish security and stability," added Velayati who is also director of the center for strategic research studies at the Expediency Council.

On the situation in Iraq, he said that Iran has supported the Iraqi government and

**Velayati says Iran has done valuable cooperation with the regional countries and the countries which seek peace to [help] establish security and stability.**

people upon their request.

He added Iran will definitely counter any attempt to disintegrate the regional countries.

For his part, Strommen said it is essential to help settle the regional crises.

The Norwegian official also said that Oslo and Tehran have entered a "serious phase" in economic talks since the Iran nuclear deal went into force in January 2016.

Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia plus Germany) Germany and the European Union finalized the text of the nuclear deal, official called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in July 2015.

Based on the agreement Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear work in return for termination of economic and financial sanctions.

## S. Africa's MTN to invest \$295m in Iranian Net broadband network

**JOHANNESBURG (Reuters)** — South Africa's MTN Group has agreed to invest more than \$295 million in Iranian Net, a fixed line broadband network in which it is to buy an initial 49 percent stake.

The outline deal announced on Monday extends MTN's interests in the Iranian telecoms market that has opened up to foreigners following the lifting of international sanctions, which has also allowed MTN to

repatriate \$1 billion in accumulated dividends from its 49 percent stake in wireless network operator Irancell.

The latest agreement, which is still at a non-binding stage, is the second for MTN in Iran this year after Africa's biggest wireless networks group invested in Iran Internet Group, which runs a car hailing app called Snapp.ir.

MTN said it will pay 540 million rand (\$40 million) to buy a 49 percent stake in Iranian

Net and will invest an additional 3.4 billion rand in both equity and loans to help the Iranian company develop a fiber network over the next five years.

"This investment, should it be completed, represents an opportunity to capitalize on the continued strong growth expected in the Iranian broadband market, with an initial focus on eight of the main cities," MTN said in a statement.

## Yemen cholera outbreak kills 25 people in a week: WHO

A cholera outbreak in Yemen killed 25 people this week, the World Health Organization said, as two years of war continues to wreak havoc on the impoverished country's health and sanitation system.

The deaths from the diarrheal disease which is carried in food and water tainted by human feces are among 1,360 cases that the United Nations agency reported since April 27.

Some severe cases can kill within hours unless treated with intravenous fluids and antibiotics.

"(This) is extremely alarming. We are facing a reactivation of the cholera epidemic," Neveio Zagaria, the WHO's representative in Yemen, told Reuters.

"The cause is that there is two years of war in Yemen. There is a huge impact on the infrastructure, the electricity power is on and off, the water pumping stations are not functioning regularly and this has an impact on the quality of water."

A previous outbreak subsided last winter, Zagaria said, and the country has experienced a total of around 27,000 cases including 130 deaths during the conflict.

The United Nations said a child aged under five dies of preventable causes every 10 minutes in Yemen.

A dispute over control of the central bank has also left most public sector salaries in Sanaa and other Ansarul-lah (Houthi) movement-run northern lands unpaid since October.

Street cleaners have gone on strike for their wages, leaving mountains of garbage cluttering main boulevards.

Meanwhile, hospitals are strained by low supplies and cash-strapped staff who in some cases can barely afford transportation to work.

Women and young children, crumpled in pain from the diarrhea, sat on mattress laid in the hallway of a crowded Sanaa hospital.

"I've been lying here since 7:30 in the morning and watching death and suffering. No one came to give me any treatment, not even a needle," lamented patient Ali al-Hamzy. **->13**



## Picking tea leaves in north of Iran

Farmers are picking tea leaves in Lahijan, a city in the northern province of Gilan, May 8, 2017. Tea is cultivated on around 6,800 hectares of land in Lahijan and farmers harvest some 20,000 tons of green tea leaves per annum.

IRNA/Mojtaba Mohammadi

TEHRAN TIMES  
Iran's Leading International Daily

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**ELECTION COUNTDOWN**



**Raisi: Golden signatures should be eliminated**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Presidential candidate **d e s k** Ebrahim Raisi said on Monday that "golden signatures" should be eliminated.

"This is completely controllable and it only entails decisiveness by government," he said, Tasnim reported.

Elsewhere the candidate dismissed Hassan Rouhani's criticism that Imam Reza Holy Shrine custodianship does not pay taxes. "The custodianship was given a tax exemption 30 years ago by Imam Khomeini," he pointed out.

He also provided a report of his assets in response to a proposal to do so by his rival Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf.

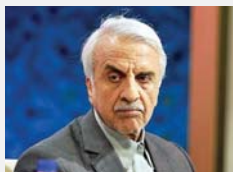


**Mirsalim: Only Leader defended people's votes in 2009**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Presidential candidate **d e s k** Mostafa Mirsalim said on Monday that after the debated 2009 presidential election, only one man defended people's votes, that person being Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

On the house arrest of the protest leaders, he said the house arrest is in their favor and "it would be detrimental to them if they are put to trial."

"The claim that that year election was rigged was wrong and I had warned Hashemi (Rafsanjani)," he added, according to IRIB.



**Hashemi Taba: I will back Rouhani in case of failure**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Presidential candidate **d e s k** Mostafa Hashemi Taba has said he wishes the Rouhani administration to continue for another four years if he himself fails to be elected as president, the YJC reported on Monday.

He also said that he will not announce his assets and financial properties, a negative response to his rival Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf who had invited the candidates to tell about their possessions in a live TV program on Friday.



**Reformists to finalize council list Tuesday**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Reformists will finalize **d e s k** their list for the upcoming council election on Tuesday, the head of Tehran reformist election headquarters announced on Monday.

Morteza Haji said the list which includes 21 members is the best of 600 hopefuls who had submitted their names to the headquarters earlier, ISNA reported.

Ten areas of expertise, such as environment, law, management, architecture, and urban development, were taken into account and the members were assigned to their specific field each, he explained.



**Jahangiri: We stay committed to 950,000 jobs**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Es'haq Jahangiri, first vice **d e s k** president and a presidential contender, said on Monday that the incumbent administration stays committed to creating 950,000 jobs per year as stipulated in the 6th Development Plan.

The government uses all its energy to create jobs, IRNA quoted him as saying.

He underlined that creating the target numbers of jobs requires an annual investment 7.7 quadrillion rials (around \$200 billion).

However he said promises by certain candidates to create five million jobs in four years in "unrealistic".



**Qalibaf: Government marginalize people**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The sitting government **d e s k** sidelined people in resolving problems, presidential candidate Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said on Monday.

Speaking on Jame Jam TV, Qalibaf said the government is not active enough, adding, "Society does not like the temperament of the incumbent government."

"One of people's concerns today is the economic problem which has caused serious challenges in the social sphere," the Tehran mayor reiterated.

# Tehran, Kabul on fast track to strategic ties

**I →** The framework will narrow down on five domains. Each of the issues will be addressed and discussed by a committee.

The security committee will focus on terrorism, drug smuggling, and radicalism, according to Zarif. Also, political issues will be looked into by the body, he said.

An economic committee will seek more trade. Stronger economic ties between the two sides can be of critical importance particularly for Afghanistan.

While Iranian companies can offer engineering and technical services to Afghan partners, the "landlocked Afghanistan", Zarif stated, can use Iran's access to high waters as a transit channel.

A third body is tasked with an environmental mission. For years now, the shrinking Hamoun Lake has been a source of concern for Iran.

Located near the country's eastern border with Afghanistan, the area once held Iran's third-largest lake and a thriving ecosystem of interconnected wetlands.

However, low precipitation, prolonged drought periods, and dams on the Afghan side have resulted in population displacement and unemployment in the border area in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province.

Events such as the 1973 coup in Afghanistan, Iran's 1979 revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the subsequent civil war, and Taliban's rule have all had disastrous impacts on the fate of the Hamoun wetlands, which straddle the Iran-Afghanistan border and are fed by the Helmand or Hirmand (as it is known in Farsi) river.



Mohammad Javad Zarif and Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah (R) in an appearance in Kabul on May 7, 2017.

In addition to Hamoun, Iran's water rights in Hirmand River and Harirud (The Heray Rud River) are to be discussed by the environmental committee, Zarif noted.

A fourth taskforce will explore ways to boost cultural and educational exchanges between Iran and Afghanistan.

"As two nations with religious and language affinities, Iran and Afghanistan can expand cooperation in the areas," Zarif highlighted, saying, "Upwards of 410,000 students and 17,000 Afghan university students are studying in Iran."

The two can have stronger ties in producing education materials and cultural heritage, Zarif exemplified.

In March, the United Nations hailed Iran's generous hosting of millions of violence-stricken asylum seekers and refugees, particularly those from neighboring Afghanistan.

Iran "has been exemplary in hosting refugees and keeping borders open," said Sivanka Dhanapala, head of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees office in Tehran.

Iran has been giving refuge to about a million registered Afghan migrants and another two million unregistered ones for almost four decades, according to the estimates.

More than 350,000 Afghan refugee children are now in school in Iran while some 48,000 undocumented Afghan

children were allowed last year to enroll for the first time in Iranian public schools, according to the UN data, issued months before Zarif's comments.

The UN official further hailed a 2015 decree by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, which called on education administrators to allow all Afghan children, documented or not, to attend Iranian schools.

The directive prompted Iranian officials to build 15,000 new classrooms across the country to accommodate refugee children in the country, which, according to UN estimates, has the world's fourth largest refugee population.

Given the background, the fifth committee will look into ways to address the refugee issue in a most appropriate way.

"To achieve this, the two countries need to join forces", Zarif highlighted, hinting at possible measures to deal with it.

"Issuing ID cards for Afghan refugees in Iran, replacing Afghans' passports with new ones, and organizing refugees so that we can prevent waves of illegal Afghan refugees from entering Iran".

The committees will be created in weeks from now, which pave the way for a "package" to deal with opportunities and challenges both, the top diplomat explained.

**"We have a non-paper agreement on the principles and between three to six months we hope we can reach an agreement", Zarif said in answer to a question by the Tehran Times.**

## Kuwait after maintaining dialogue between Iran, Arab states

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Kuwaiti deputy Foreign **d e s k** Minister Khaled al-Jarallah said his country is looking for paths through which the dialogue between the (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council and the Islamic Republic continues.

Al-Jarallah said Kuwait is seeking closer relations with Russia and dialogue with Iran, ISNA reported on Monday.

He noted that Kuwait and the GCC member states are not seeking to establish a political and military coalition with Washington, and that they are striving to strengthen their ties with Moscow as well.

Kuwait has taken the initiative to repair relations between Iran and other Persian Gulf countries, notably Saudi Arabia, whose relations with Iran have nosedived in recent years.

Tension between Riyadh and Tehran peaked late in

2015 over a hajj tragedy in Mina during which more than 464 Iranian nationals among thousands of others were killed in a stampede.

Also, Riyadh summoned its diplomats from Tehran in January 2016, after angry protesters attacked its diplomatic posts in Tehran and Mashhad in response to the execution of a prominent pro-democracy cleric by Saudi authorities.

While improvement of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia is expected to make inroads into the crises in the Middle East, the efforts to make peace between the two have failed so far.

In a recent interview, Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman said there was no space for dialogue with Tehran due to what he claimed Iran's ambitions "to control the Islamic world".

Further escalating tensions with Iran, the prince said the Saudis would not sit and wait for war but would

"work so that it becomes a battle for them in Iran and not in Saudi Arabia."

The inflammatory remarks did not go unnoticed by Iranian officials. In an interview aired on Sunday, Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan warned Saudi Arabia against "doing something stupid".

Speaking to Al-Manar TV, Dehqan said if the Saudis do anything stupid, the Iranian army will hit back and destroy all of the kingdom — apart from Mecca and Medina.

Referring to a possible Saudi attack or invasion of Iran, the defense minister said he doesn't "understand how they would attempt to do something like that ... they must imagine they have a powerful air force to do so."

Iran's Foreign Ministry has also responded to the Saudi prince's remarks, saying the kingdom follows "confrontational and destructive policies" in the region and towards Tehran.

## Iran warns about Saudi prince's 'battle' remarks

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — In remarks **d e s k** aired late on Sunday the Iranian defense minister lashed back at belligerent remarks by the Saudi crown prince, saying Iran will raze up the Saudi kingdom if it does anything "ignorant".

"If the Saudis do anything ignorant, we will leave no area untouched except Mecca and Medina," Hossein Dehqan said after aggressive comments.

In a televised interview aired last Tuesday Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman, who is also defense minister,

openly threatened Iran, saying, "We won't wait for the battle to be in Saudi Arabia. Instead, we'll work so that the battle is for them in Iran."

Speaking to the Arabic-language al-Manar television, the Iranian defense chief said, "They (Saudis) think they can do something because they have an air force."

Dehqan said such belligerent remarks by the Saudis are intended to "please" the Israeli regime.

On Thursday, Iran's Ambassador

to the UN Gholamali Khoshroo sent a protest letter to the UN Security Council and to Secretary General António Guterres stating the comments by the Saudi prince are "unveiled threat" against Iran and violation of the UN Charter.

"While categorically rejecting the baseless allegations against my country, I wish to underline that his statement reflects an unveiled threat against the Islamic Republic of Iran, in violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, as well as a clear admission of the long-known

complicity of the Saudi regime in acts of terror and violence inside Iran, the latest of which resulted in the murder of 9 Iranian border guards, by the Saudi-financed armed bands.

Elsewhere in his letter to the UN, the ambassador said, "This blatant threat and admission is being made by a regime with a long record of supporting aggression and using terrorist and extremist groups for its short-sighted and dangerous ambitions in the region and beyond."

## Two homegrown satellites ready for launch: minister

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iran's Communications **d e s k** and Information Technology Minister Mahmoud Vaezi has announced that two new homegrown satellites, dubbed Nahid 1 and Payam-e Amir Kabir, are ready to be launched into space.

"Now, we have two satellites ready to be launched, one being Amir Kabir sensing satellite and the other being Nahid telecommunication satellite," Vaezi said in an interview with ISNA.

Expressing the hope that the two satellites would be launched into orbit within the next few months, Vaezi said over 97% of the job has been done.

The two home-made satellites, as well as a space tug, were unveiled for the first time in February.

The three space crafts were unveiled during a ceremony in Tehran attended by President Hassan Rouhani on the occasion of Space Technology Day.

In recent years, Iran has made great technological

advances in manufacturing satellites. In February 2009, the country launched into the orbit its first homegrown data-processing satellite, dubbed Omid (Hope).

In January 2013, Iran sent a monkey to an altitude of about 120km (75 miles) in a Pishgam (Pioneer) rocket for a sub-orbital flight before returning intact to Earth.

Iran also sent another monkey into space at the end of 2013, as part of a program aimed at manned space flight.



# Macron triumphs but focus turns to challenges ahead

## Almost 150 arrested after post-election trouble in Paris

Emmanuel Macron won a resounding victory in the French presidential election but the focus shifted immediately on Monday to whether he can govern the country without the support of a traditional party.

At 39, the pro-European Union former investment banker will become France's youngest-ever president when he is inaugurated next weekend after crushing far-right leader Marine Le Pen in a run-off vote on Sunday.

The European Union breathed a sigh of relief at the election of a supportive French leader and the euro briefly hit a six-month high, but Macron faces a formidable challenge to enact his program while trying to unite a fractured and demoralized country, AFP reported.

"I know the anger, the anxiety and the doubts that a large number of you have expressed," Macron told thousands of cheering and flag-waving supporters at a victory party in the courtyard of the Louvre museum in Paris.

"I will fight with all my strength against the divisions that are undermining us," he said.

Final results showed he had won 66.1 percent of the votes to 33.9 percent for Le Pen.

**Macron under pressure even before his inauguration**

But many commentators said the fact that a third of the electorate either abstained or cast blank or spoiled votes on Sunday showed Macron would start his mandate under intense scrutiny.

The left-wing paper Liberation said he was "under pressure", even before his inauguration which is set to take place next Sunday.

"The high abstention rate, despite the threat of the far-right, is a sign already of dissatisfaction with the new president," it said in an editorial.

Macron, a former economy minister, has proposed an ambitious domestic reform agenda.

He wants to ease rigid labor laws he believes fuel high unemployment, cut state spending, improve education in deprived areas and increase welfare protection to the self-employed.

But he is inexperienced -- the presidential election was the first time he had stood for office -- he has no political party and he faces a huge task to fashion a working parliamentary majority after legislative elections next month.

His centrist En Marche (On the Move) movement, barely a year old, has said it will field candidates in every constituency in the two-round election in June.

There is skepticism however about Macron's ability to win a majority with En Marche candidates, meaning he might have to form a coalition.

"In order for us to act, we will need a majority in the National Assembly," En Marche secretary general Richard Ferrand told TF1 television.

One of Macron's immediate tasks will be to name his prime minister who will govern between now and the parliamentary



elections on June 11 and 18, and perhaps beyond.

Macron said before Sunday's vote he had made his choice but would not reveal the name. He has previously said he would like to appoint a woman.

On Monday, he appeared alongside the man he will succeed as president, President Francois Hollande, at the commemoration of Victory in Europe day on May 8, 1945.

Hollande, who launched Macron's political career by appointing him as an adviser before appointing him to the cabinet, greeted him warmly before they laid a wreath together under the Arc de Triomphe.

Macron also inherits a country still in a state of emergency following a string of extremist-inspired attacks since 2015 that have killed more than 230 people and plagued Hollande's presidency.

**Leave behind extremes**

In an early plea for unity, Macron reached out to Le Pen's supporters after a vicious election campaign that exposed deep economic and social divisions, as well as tensions provoked by identity and immigration.

"I will do everything I can over the next five years to ensure that people no longer have any reason to vote for extremes," he said.

Le Pen responded to defeat by vowing she would lead her anti-immigration National Front (FN) strongly into the legislative elections. A key aide said the party would change its name as part of a revamp.

According to polls released on Monday, En Marche will win between 24 and 26 percent of votes in those elections, with the conservative Republicans party on 22 percent and the National Front on 21-22 percent.

This could give the National Front a significant increase on

the two seats the party currently holds.

The far-left France Insoumise (France Unbowed) party of Jean-Luc Melenchon would score 13-15 percent and the Socialist Party 8-9 percent if the two-round parliamentary elections were held now, the surveys suggested.

Unknown three years ago, Macron is now poised to become one of Europe's most powerful leaders.

Western leaders largely hailed the result after the shock of Britain's vote to leave the EU and the election of Donald Trump in the United States.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman said it was a "victory for a strong and united Europe" and the two had a "very warm" telephone call after his victory was announced, Macron's team said.

Brussels was visibly relieved too at avoiding a Le Pen victory which could have threatened the very existence of the bloc after Britain's vote to leave.

In a victory party on Sunday evening, Macron walked on to the stage to the strains of "Ode to Joy", the anthem of the EU.

His 64-year-old wife Brigitte joined him on stage with her children and grandchildren, a sign that they will be a highly visible couple when he is in office.

Trump, who had hinted at support for Le Pen during the campaign, tweeted congratulations to Macron on a "big win" and said he looked forward to working with him.

**150 arrested in Paris**

Meanwhile, a hundred and forty-one people were arrested in Paris after trouble flared overnight following Emmanuel Macron's victory in France's presidential election, police said on Monday.

(Source: agencies)

## New Hamas chief backs hunger-striking prisoners

New Hamas leader Ismail Haniya pledged support for hunger-striking Palestinian prisoners on Monday in his first comments since being elected as head of the movement that runs the Gaza Strip.

Haniya, who was chosen by the party as its new leader on Saturday, said the Islamist movement stood with the hundreds of prisoners on hunger strike in Israeli jails.

"This visit is a message to our heroic prisoners that your cause was and will remain a top priority," he said during a visit to a protest in support of the strikers in Gaza.

"Your freedom is a national duty and your dignity is our dignity," the 54-year-old added.

Hamas has run Gaza since 2007 but is considered a terrorist organization by Israel, the United States and the European Union.

Hundreds of Palestinians in Israeli jails have been refusing food since April 17.

Israeli authorities put the current figure at 860 hunger strikers, while Palestinian officials say 1,500 have been participating.

They have issued a list of demands including better medical services, family

visits and more dignified detention conditions.

The strike is being led by Marwan Barghouti, a member of Fatah -- a rival political faction to Hamas.

On Sunday, Israeli authorities distributed video footage purporting to show Barghouti secretly eating in his cell.

Barghouti's wife and other Palestinian officials dismissed the video as fake and an attempt to break the hunger strikers.

Some 850,000 Palestinians have been incarcerated since Israel's occupation of their territories 50 years ago, Palestinian leaders say.

Haniya, seen as a pragmatist within Hamas, was elected by its Shura Council Saturday.

Unlike his predecessor Khaled Mehsaal he is expected to be based in Gaza, the Palestinian enclave Hamas has run since 2007 after expelling Fatah following a near civil war.

Haniya takes charge of Hamas as it seeks to ease its international isolation while not marginalizing hardliners within the movement.

Last week it unveiled a new policy document easing its stance on Israel after having long called for its destruction.

(Source: AFP)

## U.S. confirms death of ISIL leader in Afghanistan

The head of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in Afghanistan was killed in an operation led by Afghan special forces in the eastern province of Nangarhar last month, U.S. military officials confirmed.

Abdul Hasib - appointed last year after his predecessor Hafiz Saeed Khan died in a United States drone attack - is believed to have ordered a series of high-profile attacks, including one in March on the main military hospital in Kabul by a group of fighters disguised as doctors.

U.S. military officials in Afghanistan have previously said Hasib's death would "significantly degrade" the group's operations and "help reach our goal of destroying them in 2017".

Last month, a Pentagon spokesman said Hasib had probably been killed during a raid by U.S. and Afghan Special Forces in Nangarhar, during which two U.S. Army Rangers were killed. But there was no confirmation.

The compound was located near the tunnel complex where the U.S. military dropped its largest non-nuclear device on April 13, killing 94 fighters, including four commanders.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Afghanistan's government confirmed Hasib's death on April 27.

"He had ordered the attack on 400-bed hospital in Kabul that resulted in the death and injuries of a number of our countrymen, women. The Afghan government is committed to continuing its operations against ISIL (Daesh) and other terrorist groups until they are annihilated," it said in a statement, using another name for ISIL.

The local affiliate of ISIL - sometimes known as ISIL Khorasan (ISIL-K), after an old name for the region that includes Afghanistan - has been active since 2015, fighting the Taliban as well as Afghan and U.S. forces.

It is believed to maintain links with the main ISIL terrorist group in Iraq and Syria, but has considerable operational independence.

American and Afghan Special Forces, backed by drone attacks and other air support, have waged a series of operations against ISIL-K this year, killing dozens of fighters, mainly in Nangarhar, on the border with Pakistan.

The Pentagon estimates about 1,000 ISIL-K fighters remain in Afghanistan.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

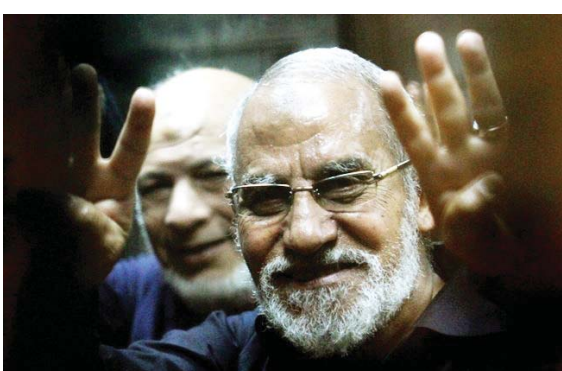
## Egypt issues new life sentence against Brotherhood guide

An Egyptian court sentenced the Muslim Brotherhood's supreme guide Mohamed Badie to life in prison for "planning violent attacks" in a retrial on Monday, judicial officials and a lawyer said.

Badie was part of a group of 37 people accused of conspiring to stir unrest during protests that followed the July 2013 military-led ouster of Egypt's former Islamist president Mohamed Morsi, who hailed from the Brotherhood.

The court condemned Badie to a life term along with Mahmood Ghazlan, a Brotherhood spokesman, and Hosam Abubakar, a member of its guidance bureau, the officials and defense lawyer Abdel Moneim Abdel Maksoud said.

United States-Egyptian citizen Mohamed Soltan, his father Salah Soltan and Ahmed Aref, another spokesman for the group, were among 13 defendants sentenced to



serve five years behind bars.

Egyptian authorities deported Mohamed Soltan to the United States in May 2015, while his father remains in cus-

tody.

The court on Monday acquitted 21 others, including Gehad Haddad, an international spokesman for the Brotherhood.

The retrial came after Egypt's court of cassation scrapped a 2015 ruling under which Badie and 13 others were condemned to death, and 34 defendants given life terms.

"We will appeal for everyone who was convicted," Abdel Maksoud told AFP. The court of cassation would have to issue a final ruling in such an appeal.

Badie is being prosecuted in more than 35 trials, according to his lawyers. He received three death sentences in other cases but those rulings have also been scrapped.

The court of cassation has cancelled scores of death sentences against Morsi supporters including against the deposed president himself.

(Source: Reuters)

## Syria will abide by "de-escalation" plan: FM

### U.S. reviews Syria safe zones

Syria's foreign minister said on Monday that his government would abide by the terms of a Russian plan for "de-escalation" zones so long as rebels also observed it.

Walid al-Moualeem told a televised news conference that rebels involved in the process must help clear areas they control of terrorist factions, including the former al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), and that the deal's guarantors must help them do this.

The deal for de-escalation zones was brokered by Russia, with backing from Turkey and Iran, during ceasefire talks in the Kazakh capital Astana last week and came into effect at midnight on Friday, but some fighting has continued in those areas.

"It is the duty of the groups which signed the ceasefire agreement to expel Nusra from these zones until the areas really become de-escalated. It is for the guarantors to help these factions," he said, referring specifically to rebel-held Idlib province as a place where jihadist groups were present.

Moualeem said a separate peace talks process under the United Nations auspices in Geneva was not progressing. Local "reconciliation" deals that the government is pursuing with rebels were an alternative to that, he said.

Such deals have been criticized by the opposition as being imposed on civilians using siege tactics. The United Nations has said the evacuation of some people as part of those agreements is a form of forced displacement.



Moualeem said there would be no role for either the United Nations or other "international forces" in the de-escalation zones, but said, without giving further details, that Russia had said military police would play an observer role.

**Rebels begin to evacuate Damascus suburb**

Elsewhere, Hundreds of Syrian rebels began leaving the besieged Damascus district of Barzeh on Monday as part of an evacuation deal with the government, state media and a war monitor reported.

State television said fighters and their relatives had started departing Barzeh for rebel-held Idlib province in northwest Syria.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), a British-based war monitoring group, said buses had arrived in Barzeh at dawn and hundreds of fighters and family members had started to board them. More people would leave over the next five days, state TV and the Observatory said.

**U.S. reviews Syria safe zones**

Meanwhile, United States Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said on Monday the United States would closely examine proposed de-escalation zones aimed at easing Syria's civil war but warned "the devil's in the details" and that much needed to be worked out.

Mattis, in some of the most extensive remarks by the Trump administration so far, was cautious when asked about the deal's chances as he traveled to Copenhagen for talks with U.S. allies.

"All wars eventually come to an end and we've been looking for a long time how to bring this one to an end. So we'll look at the proposal and see if it can work," he told reporters.

He added that basic details were still unclear, including who specifically would ensure the zones were "safe" and exactly which groups would be kept out of them.

Pressed as to whether he thought the de-escalation zones could help end the conflict, Mattis said: "The devil's always in the details, right? So we've got to look at the details."

The agreement said four de-escalation zones would be established in Syria for a period of six months, which could be extended if the three signatory countries agreed.

Weaponry and air strikes were not to be used in those zones by combatants, the text published by the Russian foreign ministry on Saturday said.

The agreement also includes creating conditions for humanitarian access, medical assistance and the return of displaced civilians to their homes.

The initiative is the most serious effort to reduce violence and shore up a ceasefire first declared in December since western states accused Damascus of a chemical attack in early April on rebel-held Idlib province.

Mattis noted that U.S. Marine General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke about the zones with his Russian counterpart on Saturday.

"This subject was brought up, but there's a lot of details to be worked out," Mattis said.

**Russia tables draft UN resolution on safe zones**

In another development, Russia said on Monday it had tabled a draft resolution at the United Nations Security Council to back up a deal on establishing safe zones in Syria.

"We confirm that a draft resolution has been introduced," Russian news agencies cited the country's UN mission spokesman Fyodor Strzhizhovsky as saying in New York, without giving details.

A source at the UN told Russia's Interfax news agency that "a vote on the draft will take place possibly this week".

Moscow said on Monday that the situation inside the safe zones was "stable".

(Source: agencies)



NEWS IN BRIEF



**Spanish banks ready to guarantee Iran's petchem deals**

**ECONOMY TEHRAN** — Spanish ambassador to Tehran said that his country's banks are ready to guarantee Iran's petrochemical deals, IRNA reported on Monday.

Eduardo López Busquets made the remarks in a meeting with Marziyeh Shahdaie, the managing director of National Iranian Petrochemical Company (NIPC), on the sidelines of Iran Oil Show 2017 in Tehran.

According to Busquets, Iran soon will be able to start trade with the European companies through Spanish banks.



**Philippines signs MOU in Iran to study 2 oilfields**

**ENERGY TEHRAN** — National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and Philippine's PNOEC Exploration Corporation (PNOEC) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on Monday based on which PNOEC was awarded the study of two Iranian oil fields.

According to the MOU, which was signed in Tehran by Gholamreza Manouchehri, the deputy managing director of NIOC, and PNOEC's board member Pedro A. Aquino, the Philippine company is to conduct preliminary studies on Pazanan field and phase 3 of Darkhovin field in southwest Iran.

PNOEC is the upstream oil, gas and coal subsidiary of the state-owned Philippine National Oil Company.



**Iran-Austria business forum held in Tehran**

**ECONOMY TEHRAN** — Iran-Austria Business Forum was held in Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (TCCIMA) on Monday, IRIB news reported.

The forum was attended by the 25-member Austrian business delegation led by the president of Vienna Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as well as of TCCIMA Chairman Masoud Khansari and Iranian entrepreneurs.

The visiting Australians negotiated development of partnership with their Iranian counterparts in various fields including environment, information technology, pharmaceutical industry, oil, gas, and renovation.

According to Khansari, the bilateral trade between the two countries presently stands at €377 million and will reach €500 million in near future.



**1st ATR airplane will join Iranian air fleet in a week**

**ECONOMY TEHRAN** — Iran's national flag-carrier airline Iran Air signed a contract for purchasing 20 turboprop passenger planes from the French-Italian aircraft manufacturer ATR on April 15 and the first of the kind will be delivered to the country in a week, Mehr news agency reported on Monday quoting Iran Air Managing Director Farhad Parvaresh.

As Parvaresh announced previously, according to the contract, four of the accorded 70-seat ATRs were supposed to be delivered to Iran within a month from the date of the signing agreement and five ones of them were to be received by 2017 year-end. The rest will arrive by the end of 2018.

ATR has reportedly vowed to assist Iran with training pilots and providing technical services, too.

**Banks planning to move 9,000 jobs from Britain because of Brexit**

The largest global banks in London plan to move about 9,000 jobs to the continent in the next two years, public statements and information from sources shows, as the exodus of finance jobs starts to take shape.

Last week Standard Chartered and JPMorgan were the latest global banks to outline plans for their European operations after Brexit. They are among a growing number of lenders pushing ahead with plans to move operations from London.

Goldman Sachs chief executive Lloyd Blankfein said in an interview on Friday that London's growth as a financial centre could "stall" as a result of the upheaval caused by Brexit.

Thirteen major banks including Goldman Sachs, UBS, and Citigroup have given an indication of how they would bulk up their operations in Europe to secure market access to the European Union's single market when Britain leaves the bloc.

Talks with financial authorities in Europe have been underway for several months, but banks are increasingly firming up plans to move staff and operations.

"It's full speed ahead. We are in full motion with our contingency planning," said the head of investment banking at one global bank in London. "There's no waiting."

Although the moves would represent about 2 percent of London's finance jobs, Britain's tax revenues could be hit if it loses rich taxpayers working in financial services.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies - a think tank focused on budget issues - said in a report on Thursday the rest of the population will have to pay more if top earners move.

The exact number of jobs to leave will depend on the deal the British government strikes with the EU. Some politicians say bankers have exaggerated the threat to the economy from Brexit.

(Source: Reuters)

**Iran starts exports from South Pars oil layer**

**ENERGY TEHRAN** — Iran exported the first cargo of crude oil to the tune of 700,000 barrels from the South Pars oil layer last week.

Hamid Bovard, the managing director of Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC), made the remarks in a press conference on the sidelines of Iran Oil Show 2017 in Tehran.

The official said that 25,000 barrels of crude is extracted from the South Pars oil

layer, located in the Persian Gulf, on a daily basis, IRNA reported on Monday.

"We are negotiating for the development project of the layer's second phase," Bovard added.

The director explained that oil recovery from this field was started on March 20, 2017 and a floating refinery is based at the field.

He further noted that the company has a short-term plan for increasing the coun-



try's crude output from the Persian Gulf fields however a 20,000-barrel rise by the end of Iranian calendar month of Khordad (June 21, 2017) is easily reachable.

South Pars, a supergiant gas field Iran shares with Qatar in Persian Gulf waters, is

estimated to contain over 14 billion barrels of oil in its oil layer. The field is also estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

**Iran's trade balance on positive trajectory**

**ECONOMY TEHRAN** — Trade balance has been reported positive for the first month of the new Iranian calendar year 1396, Farvardin, (March 22- April 23, 2017), ISNA reported on Monday.

According to the released report, value of non-oil exports during the said time was \$2.723 billion while the figure for imports stood at \$2.348 billion; the trade balance was registered positive with \$375 million in favor of non-oil exports.

Based on the latest data released by Iran's Customs Administration in late March, the country's trade balance was reported positive for the second consecutive year.

The country's value of exports during the Iranian calendar year of 1395 (ended on March 20) was reported to be \$43.93 billion while the figure for imports stood at \$43.684; the value of exports was \$246 million higher than that of imports.

Gas condensate, liquefied natural gas (LNG) followed by low-density oils, associated petroleum gas (APG) and hydrocarbon gas liquids and finally liquefied propane were among top exported commodities from Iran.

The country's trade balance for the Iranian calendar year of 1394 (March 2015-March 2016) was also \$924 million positive.

High demand from abroad boosted German industrial orders in March, data showed on Monday, a second-in-a-row rise analysts saw as a sign the sector is overcoming past volatility and will contribute to growth in coming months.

Contracts for "Made in Germany" goods were up by 1 percent on the month, the Economy Ministry said, the first time since November 2015 that new orders increased for two months in a row.

"Combined with buoyant confidence indicators today's new orders

data suggest that industrial production could finally gather some momentum," ING Diba economist Carsten Brzeski said in a note to clients.

"There is increasing evidence that contrary to previous cycles industrial production could be the lagging factor of the current positive economic expansion," he added.

The March figure was on a par with the Reuters consensus forecast and followed an upwardly revised rise of 3.5 percent in February. In January orders fell by 6.8 percent.

**German industry orders rise for second month in a row**

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**Rolls-Royce, Turkey's Kale Group to set up aircraft engine JV**

Turkey's Kale Group will set up a joint venture company with UK-based engineering firm Rolls-Royce to develop aircraft engines, including for Turkey's planned TF-X fighter jet, the company said on Monday.

Kale will hold 51 percent stake in the joint venture, while Rolls-Royce will have the rest, the statement said.

Kale said it aimed to develop both civilian and military aircraft engines, including for the TF-X, being developed by Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), one of several major defence projects which Ankara has launched.

In January, Britain and Turkey signed a defence deal worth more than 100 million pounds to develop Turkish fighter jets during a visit to Ankara by Prime Minister Theresa May.

The deal involves BAE Systems and TAI working together on the TF-X, which will be the first Turkish-made fighter jet and will replace the F-16 fighter jet starting from the 2020s.

Kale Group is a provider of structural components, assemblies and kits to the aerospace industry, according to its web site.

(Source: Reuters)

**Chinese bank payment networks surge as Western lenders cut ties**

Chinese banks have dramatically expanded their overseas payment and trade networks since the global financial crisis, exploiting a growing vacuum created by Western lenders which are retreating from higher-risk jurisdictions, new data shows.

The number of so-called "correspondent" or bank-to-bank relationships operated by Chinese banks surged more than 3,300 percent - from 65 in 2009 to 2,246 in 2016 - according to data published by U.S.-based payment and compliance technology company Accuity on Monday.

This contrasts with a 25 percent drop in

the number of correspondent banking relationships globally during the same period, largely caused by U.S. and European banks cutting ties with smaller bank clients in regions such as Asia and Africa.

Correspondent banking describes bank-to-bank relationships that allow individuals and companies to move money around the world, facilitating global trade.

Although Chinese correspondent banking relationships have grown from a low base and still account for a small proportion of such relationships globally, the huge jump underscores how Chinese lenders - such as

ICBC and Bank of China - are fast-globalising to support Chinese companies as they push overseas.

"These contrasting trends suggest that Chinese banks recognise the opportunity to facilitate China's international trade, possibly at the expense of EU and USA global banks who are concerned with the higher risks and costs associated with providing these correspondent banking services," said Henry Balani, Global Head of Strategic Affairs at Accuity.

Accuity compiled the data, which is extracted from standard settlement instruc-

tions, from an average of 29,000 banks in 238 countries or territories across the world.

Global banks are under intense regulatory pressure to guard against money laundering and terrorist financing by closely screening the source of funds they handle.

U.S. watchdogs have dished out more than \$16 billion (£12 billion) in fines for anti-money laundering (AML) compliance failings since the end of 2009, while banks globally spent an estimated \$12 billion on AML compliance programmes last year, according to data compiled by Hong Kong consultancy Quinlan & Associates. (Source: Reuters)

**Macronomy: What are Emmanuel Macron's economic plans?**

With Emmanuel Macron's French election win, the prospect of France leaving the European Union - as proposed by his run-off opponent Marine Le Pen - has been all but eliminated.

But many analysts are already saying that if Mr Macron fails to deliver on economic promises over the next five years, then the challenge from the National Front could be even stiffer come the 2022 election.

As a former economy minister to outgoing president Francois Hollande, his economic credentials formed a big part of his campaign.

So what are some of his key economic policies?

**■ Reforming the Eurozone**  
The election result briefly sent the euro to a six-month high against the dollar, as markets reacted to the victory by the pro-EU candidate. Ms Le Pen had campaigned for France to leave the euro and proposed a referendum in which French voters would have an opportunity to vote to leave the EU.

Mr Macron wants France to stay in the Eurozone, but reform it. In his manifesto, he wanted a common Eurozone budget and a Eurozone finance minister too.

He also will ask Berlin to invest and spend more to help Germany's domestic economy, which it is hoped will help French exporters and manufacturers in other European countries.

But all of this can only happen with Germany's backing. There'll be no decisions until after Germany's elections later this year, so for now he can only focus on domestic policy.

**■ Help business**  
While Francois Hollande initially tried to please the socialist elements of his party by being tough on companies, Mr Macron as economy minister oversaw a change in direction over the past three years, heralding a more pro-business approach. That included about 40bn euros (\$44bn;

£39.9bn) in tax breaks to try to invigorate the economy, a benefit Mr Macron plans to make permanent.

He also says corporation tax will gradually reduce from 33% to 25%.

And a new wealth tax, aimed at the rich, will not apply to financial investments.

**■ Tackle unemployment**  
The unemployment rate in France is 10.1%. About three million people who want to work and are looking for a job don't have one.

While not the worst figures in Europe, it is above average for the region and far worse than, for example, the Netherlands, where it is just above 5%, and Germany, where it is below 4%. The figure for the UK is below 5%.

Youth unemployment is particularly bad, with about one in four under-25s out of work.

Mr Macron has said he hopes to get unemployment down by thinning some of the labour laws, with an aim of making it less onerous on employers to take on new staff.

The International Monetary Fund estimates that it will be hard to get French unemployment down much below 8.5% without major reform.

But one thing in the President-elect's favor is that the strongest union in the private sector is now the moderate CFDT, which now has more clout than the more militant CGT.

Mr Macron has no plans to scrap France's controversial 35-hour working week - a rule which doesn't ban long hours, but is a threshold which triggers overtime payment. Instead he has said he'll allow firms to negotiate deals with their staff on hours and pay.

And perhaps another sign of hope. The economy has been creating jobs at the fastest pace in more than a decade.

(Source: BBC)

**Second Announcement**

**Quality Assessment Announcement for**  
Design, Construction and Delivery of six 63 T Harbor mobile crane units  
for Noshahr, Anzali and Amirabad ports  
(Tender No: 96/HE/1070)  
Ports and Maritime Organization

This is hereby to announce that Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) of I.R.Iran intends to hold an international two-phase public tender by qualitative assessment method for design, manufacturing, purchase, shipment and delivery of six 63T mobile harbor crane units for Noshahr, Anzali and Amirabad ports.

**\*Therefore, in order to qualitative assessment of the manufacturers of the cranes, all local and foreigner manufacturer companies are invited to proceed with receiving of the relevant qualitative assessment documents and forms through [IETS.MPORG.IR](http://IETS.MPORG.IR) website and maximum till **Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2017**.**

**\*Place and deadline for submitting of documents and completed forms:** Central Secretariat of the PMO located at the ground floor of PMO building and to the last working hour on **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> June, 2017**.

It should be emphasized that the relevant receipt issued against submitting of the said documents and forms shall be kept for further steps.

**\* Meanwhile, the Question & Answer session of this tender will be held at **10 A.M on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2017** in the PMO amphitheater hall located in the first floor of the PMO building and therefore, attendance of the informed technical and commercial representatives of all manufacturer companies of the aforementioned equipment which are willing to participate in qualitative assessment of tender is obligatory (together with a written introduction letter).**

**\* The tender winner shall pay for newspaper advertisement costs.**  
**Address of the announcing organization:** Ports and Maritime Organization, No.1, Dr. Shahidi St., Haghani Highway, Vanak Sq., Tehran, Iran. Postal code:  
**Fax: (+98) 21-88651194 and (+98)21-88651191**  
**Tel: (+98) 21-84932351 and (+98)21-84932357**



# Brimming U.S. oil storage tanks to feel OPEC cuts last

The energy industry scrutinizes U.S. oil stockpile data every week for evidence that OPEC supply cuts are ending a global crude glut, but growing domestic output means the world's largest oil consumer may be the last place to feel the cuts.

Stubbornly high U.S. inventory levels have shaken market confidence that a deal by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Russia and other top producers to cut 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) from supply will end the two-year glut.

This week, benchmark Brent crude prices slipped below \$50 a barrel. Brent has given up all the gains made since the supply cuts were agreed late last year.

U.S. inventories are a trusted barometer for the health of global oil markets because of the transparency of the data and their location in the country that consumes around a fifth of the world's oil.

But U.S. crude inventories have only grown since the supply cuts took effect. The initial spike in oil prices after the deal reinforced already resurgent production from the U.S. shale industry.

The rush back into the fields boosted U.S. shale output to an estimated 5.2 million bpd in May from 4.5 million at the end of 2016. The increase of 700,000 bpd in U.S. supply has replaced much of the output cuts delivered under the OPEC-led agreement.

Offshore production in the Gulf of Mexico has also hit a record, bringing total U.S. output to 9.3 million barrels a day, its highest since August 2015. That has helped keep U.S. stockpiles full.

"As long as U.S. producers are able to pump oil at a profit then the rebalancing in the U.S. is going to take time," said Mark Watkins, regional investment manager at U.S. Bank.

"It's going to be an extended period of time still. I would look to at least the end of the year."

In addition, producer countries that pumped a lot of their own oil into storage at home have recently been exporting from those tanks to consumer countries



such as the United States.

OPEC members typically do not disclose their stock levels. So even though the export of stored oil is part of the effort to draw down global inventories, it also has pushed previously invisible inventories into global storage data.

Those OPEC shipments may now be easing. Thomson Reuters shipping data shows crude exports from the group dropped from March to April by about 50 million barrels to 741.2 million barrels.

#### U.S. stockpiles rise

U.S. crude inventories hit records earlier this year, and remain up 10 percent since the OPEC-led supply cuts took effect on Jan. 1.

U.S. crude stocks stand at 527.8 million barrels, nearly 30 percent higher than the average of the past five years, according to government data.

Exports from the United States have been steadily rising and have also regularly reached records this year. If markets tighten elsewhere, U.S. exports will

increase and this should drain domestic inventories more quickly.

"What you're going to have to see is global supply across the world drop and U.S. crude ship out before you start to see a meaningful drop in U.S. inventories," said Watkins.

"And that's something that's started a little bit, but it's pretty marginal."

Despite the high domestic output, there are some signs that efforts to reduce the global glut may be having an impact in the United States.

A recent four-week run of U.S. inventory draws has been larger than the 2011-2016 average for this time of year, said Credit Suisse in a note on Friday.

#### Impact elsewhere

More tangible impacts on inventories can be seen elsewhere, some analysts said; inventories simply need more time to return to average levels.

There have been some signs of draw-downs in global inventories, particularly in floating storage, when oil is stored in

a tanker anchored offshore. According to Clipperdata this type of storage has been falling near the refining hub of Singapore.

Singapore «acts as such a parking lot for tankers and should we see Singapore floating storage be drawn down materially that would indicate that the market is tightening," said Matt Smith, director of commodity research at Clipperdata.

Clipperdata estimates that 50 million barrels are floating off Singapore, down sharply from February's peak of 64 million barrels, which was the highest point in at least a year.

"The lack of visible stock declines ... undermined oil market confidence and dragged markets lower," said oil consultants PIRA Energy in a note this week.

"Market jitters are unwarranted; oil on the water is declining, OPEC output is declining and stocks are declining. Onshore stock declines are inevitable, but the exact timing is tricky."

(Source: Reuters)

## Malaysia's Petronas says will support extension of oil output cuts

Malaysian state-owned oil firm Petronas Nasional Berhad will support any extension of oil output cuts by OPEC and non-OPEC producers, its chief executive said on Monday.

Petronas, as the company is known, announced last year that it would cut its oil output by up to 20,000 barrels per day (bpd) as part of Malaysia's commitment to reduce supply following an agreement between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and non-OPEC producers.

"If there is extension of the arrangement, of course we are committed to continue with the same production cut," Petronas Chief Executive Officer Wan Zulkiflee Wan Ariffin told reporters at the Asia Oil & Gas Conference in Kuala Lumpur.

Earlier on Monday, Saudi Arabia's energy minister Khalid Al-Falih said he expected the OPEC-led deal to cut output during the first half of the year to be extended to all of 2017.

Brent crude is at less than half the



levels of mid-2014 due to ample supply in the market. It was trading at around \$49 per barrel on Monday, up 1 percent following comments by the Saudi energy minister.

Petronas, which contributes nearly one-third of Malaysia's oil and gas-related revenue, had warned earlier this year that oil prices will remain uncertain and that it maintained a "conservative" outlook for 2017.

Petronas, like other oil majors, has taken a hit from lower oil prices, though lower operating expenses, job cuts and project rollbacks helped Petronas post a higher 2016 profit.

(Source: Reuters)

## Gazprom starts construction of offshore section of Turkish stream gas pipeline

Russian energy giant Gazprom has started construction of the offshore section of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline along the bottom of the Black Sea, a statement released by the company said on Sunday.

The construction started four days after the meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan, where the two leaders discussed the implementation of the Turkish Stream project, among other issues.

"Today we started the practical part of realization of the Turkish Stream project - the offshore construction of the gas pipeline. The project is being implemented strictly according to the plan, and by the end of 2019 our Turkish and European consumers will have a new reliable route for the import of the Russian gas," the statement said, citing the company's CEO, Alexei Miller.

The Turkish Stream project was



announced in late 2014 by Russian President Vladimir Putin during his visit to Turkey. In November 2015, the project was suspended after a Russian Su-24 aircraft was downed by a Turkish F-16 fighter in Syria. A thaw in relations between Moscow and Ankara began last June following Turkey's apology to Russia.

Moscow and Ankara signed an intergovernmental agreement in October 2016 envisioning the construction of two underwater legs of the Turkish Stream gas pipeline in the Black Sea. The annual capacity of each leg is estimated to reach 15.75 billion cubic meters of natural gas.

(Source: Sputnik)

## Saudi oil minister says output cuts may extend beyond second half of 2017

Saudi Arabia's oil minister said he's confident that an agreement by producers to curb crude output and shrink a market glut will be extended into the second half of the year and possibly beyond.

While U.S. shale output growth and the shutdown of refineries for maintenance have slowed the impact of cuts by OPEC and its partners, producers are determined to reach their goal of reducing bloated stockpiles, Khalid Al-Falih said at the Asia Oil and Gas Conference in Kuala Lumpur on Monday. He said he's confident the global oil market will soon rebalance and return to a "healthy state."

Surging U.S. production has raised concern the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and partners are failing to reduce an oversupply and prop up prices. Oil has surrendered all its gains since their deal late last year to cut output and with OPEC meeting in Vienna later this month, several nations have said they'd support an extension of the 6-month agreement that began in January. This is the first time the Saudi minister has suggested it could be extended beyond 2017.

"Based on the consultations I have had with participating members I am rather confident the agreement will be extended into the second half of the year and possibly beyond," Al-Falih said. "The producer coalition is determined to do whatever it takes to achieve our target of bringing stock levels back to the five-year average."

West Texas Intermediate crude rose 1.2 percent to



\$46.76 a barrel by 12:20 p.m. Singapore time on the New York Mercantile Exchange. Brent, the benchmark for more than half the world's oil, was up 1.3 percent to \$49.73 a barrel on the London-based ICE Futures Europe exchange. Both are still more than 50 percent below their peaks in 2014, when the U.S. shale boom exacerbated a market glut and triggered the biggest price crash in a generation.

Al-Falih said last month that OPEC and its partners have failed, after three months of limiting output, to achieve their target of reducing oil inventories below the five-year historical average. Group member United Arab Emirates said earlier in May that the producer group should extend the collective production cuts into the second half of the year when an expected upturn in demand

will help to re-balance the crude market.

#### Vienna meeting

Russia, which is not member of OPEC but is part of the deal, also thinks it will be necessary to extend the reduction deal, according to Energy Minister Alexander Novak. The producers agreed last year to curb output by as much as 1.8 million barrels a day starting January. OPEC will meet in Vienna on May 25 to decide whether to prolong the deal beyond June.

While the producers curbed supply, production in the U.S., which is not part of the agreement, has risen to the highest level since August 2015 as drillers pump more from shale fields. But American crude inventories are showing some signs of shrinking, falling for the past four weeks from record levels at the end of March.

Despite lingering headwinds, the oil market is improving from early last year when markets were at a low, Al-Falih said. Stockpiles at sea have declined and U.S. inventories will continue their downward trend, he said. Global demand, meanwhile, will probably be stable from the "healthy rate" seen last year, driven by China and India, the Saudi minister said, adding that Asia was the most important market.

There's about 20 million barrels a day of combined demand growth and natural oil-field output declines that need to be offset, Al-Falih said. "No matter how fast U.S. shale grows, it won't make a dent in that number," he said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## China's crude oil imports ease from record, fuel exports fall

China's crude oil imports eased in April from March's record high as refiners processed less oil during a heavy maintenance season, while exports of refined fuel fell by a quarter from a month earlier due to quota reductions.

China shipped in 34.39 million tons of crude oil last month, or about 8.37 million barrels per day (bpd), down nearly 9 percent from March, according to data from China's General Administration of Customs on Monday.

April's level was still up 5.5 percent from a year ago, while imports for the first four months of the year rose 12.5 percent to 139.12 million tons, or 8.46 million bpd.

"April looks more like a return to normal import level. Imports will likely trend down further in the coming few months as refinery maintenance season unfolds and teapots run out of import quotas," said Harry Liu, analyst of consultancy IHS Markit.

Arrivals in March hit 9.17 million bpd as China's intake topped the United States for the first time in 2017.

April's slower imports came as major refineries kicked off their annual maintenance periods, although lower crude oil prices still supported robust demand from some processors.

Oil prices have tumbled to five-month lows, with benchmark Brent crude down nearly 15 percent from a mid-April high, hit by the breakneck pace of U.S. oil output that have undermined OPEC efforts to rein in production.

Many of China's independent refineries, nicknamed "teapots", have nearly run out of import permits issued at the start of the year, another reason for slowing imports, said IHS's Liu.

He expected purchases to pick up from July after Beijing grants the second batch of quotas, although China has started to limit how much crude oil can be imported by private refiners.

The state planner said last month it will stop accepting from May 5 new applications from private oil refiners seeking approval to use imported crude oil.

April imports of oil products fell 7.8 percent to 2.49 million tons while exports of oil products fell 25.1 percent to 3.50 million tons.

The fall in exports was partly because of a sharp reduction in quotas, after the second batch of permits issued to the country's dominant state oil firms for 2017 was down 73 percent from the first round.

(Source: Reuters)

## Oil purchases by top Indian refiner show where market glut bites

While Indian Oil Corp. used to buy more than 80 percent of its crude via long-term contracts, it's cut that share down by 10-12 percent over the past three years, said Chairman B. Ashok. That's because a flood of "light" low-sulfur crude exacerbated by the U.S. shale boom has given the state-run company more opportunities to make spot purchases over scheduled imports of heavier, higher-sulfur Middle East oil, he said.

The output-cut deal between OPEC and its allies to ease a glut has done little to shrink the flow of crude with lesser sulfur content that's easier to process into lucrative fuels such as gasoline. Most of the supply produced in U.S. shale fields, Nigeria and Libya -- all of which are exempt from the production curb agreement -- are of such "sweet" variety. Middle East nations that are shouldering most of the reductions pump mostly "sour" grades that contain more sulfur.

"Middle East nations are the closest in terms of logistics and they're giving us high-sulfur crude that we can process," Ashok said in an interview in Kuala Lumpur, where he is attending the Asia Oil and Gas conference. "But opportunities exist beyond that geography whether it could be Africa, Latin America, North America and so on."

The benchmark for Middle East supplies, Dubai crude, has strengthened relative to other markers as the region's producers including Saudi Arabia cut output while supplies from the U.S. and other areas increase. U.S. West Texas Intermediate flipped to a discount over Dubai in December. The premium of Brent crude, the marker for more than half the world's oil, over Dubai shrank last month to the weakest since 2010.

Some of Indian Oil's refineries like its latest facility in Paradip on the nation's east coast can process heavier crude, but others that are older aren't sophisticated enough to do so and have to be fed lighter varieties. The company is blending the different types of supplies it purchases to streamline the feedstock going into its plants, according to Ashok.

#### Crude blending

"We have blending facilities in the west coast of India as well as east coast," he said. "We have been optimizing by blending. We have been able to source different crudes and blend it along with the others and use the cocktails."

The company expects overall Indian oil-product demand growth of 4-5 percent will probably be sustained over the medium term, with the pace seen at about 3-3.5 percent over the next 20 years, he said. Consumption of everything from gasoline to diesel and jet fuel to liquefied petroleum gas is expanding, according to Ashok.

Increased use of trucks, cars and motorbikes spurred by rapid economic expansion has made the world's second-most populous nation a bright spot for global oil demand, drawing interest from state-run Saudi Arabian Oil Co. to Russia's Rosneft PJSC.

#### Expanding plants

"We're expanding our refineries depending on demand growth," Ashok said. "A lot of capacities should come in by 2021 and the smaller ones could come in even earlier." The Paradip facility is currently operating at about 90 percent capacity and that'll rise close to full capacity in the fiscal year ending March 2018, he said.

To improve its crude purchasing process, the company is set to start a trading office in the regional hub of Singapore this month, Ashok said. It will initially have two traders.

"We're looking at what gives us the best value. Most of the spot crude is low sulfur, while high-sulfur crude is from long-term contracts," Ashok said. "We have been consciously increasing spot purchases over the last 2-3 years. There are more opportunities. It has also given us more flexibility to blend, depending on options."

(Source: Bloomberg)



## Trump goes to Riyadh

By Bruce Riedel

U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to make Saudi Arabia his first foreign stop on his first trip abroad reflects the importance his administration has given to courting the Saudis. There are useful lessons to be learned from previous presidents' trips to the kingdom about how to successfully court the royal family.

The first American president to seek Saudi support was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He began by inviting two of King Ibn Saud's sons, Princes Faisal and Khalid (both future kings), to the White House in 1943 where the fundamentals of the American-Saudi relationship were agreed upon. On Valentine's Day 1945, FDR met with the king face to face on a U.S. Navy cruiser, the USS Quincy, in the Suez Canal just after the Yalta summit. That moment is the cornerstone of the relationship.



FDR was careful to avoid any offense. He sent his daughter to Cairo for a day of shopping. A chain smoker, the president did not smoke in front of the king; instead he grabbed a quick puff in the ship's elevator on the way to lunch alone. In his discussion, FDR did well when he stuck to the big picture of strategic cooperation. When he pushed for the king to back a Jewish state in Palestine, Ibn Saud was firmly negative. The Jews should have a state carved out of Germany since they were responsible for the Holocaust. Hitting a stone wall, FDR dropped the subject.

When he learned that FDR was to meet Ibn Saud, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill insisted on his own meeting in Cairo. Churchill smoked and drank alcohol throughout the lunch. The meeting was a disaster. The British moment in the Middle East was over.

### ■ A big diplomatic deal

The first American president to visit the kingdom was Richard Nixon in the last days of the Watergate scandal. He was desperate for a big diplomatic deal to save him from impeachment. King Faisal, who has just lifted the 1973 oil embargo that had sent America into a recession, instead lectured Nixon on the evils of Zionism and the need to return East Jerusalem to Arab and Muslim rule. Nixon left empty-handed.

President George H.W. Bush fared much better traveling on Thanksgiving 1990 to discuss the upcoming Operation Desert Storm to liberate Kuwait with King Fahd. Bush assured Fahd that once Iraq was defeated he would turn to organizing a multinational conference to address the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the Palestinian issue. The Madrid conference followed in 1992. Bush senior is still highly regarded by the royal family.

Ironically, Barack Obama probably courted the Saudis more than any president since Roosevelt. He certainly sold them more arms than any other president. The kingdom was his first stop in the Middle East in 2009. The visit went poorly. Obama asked for a commitment from King Abdullah to open direct contact with Israel to help facilitate a renewal of the peace process. Abdullah outright refused. Obama thought his staff had worked a deal with the Saudis to take prisoners from the Guantanamo Navy base; the king said he knew nothing about such a deal. By trying to transact business rather than focus on building a personal relationship first, Obama got off to a bad start. It only got worse over time. The new king, Salman, stiffed Obama when he was first invited to America.

The Saudis are planning three events for this month's Trump visit. First is a session with the king and his court, then a meeting with the leaders of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council and finally a meeting with other Muslim leaders and representatives. It is a demonstration of the Saudis' convening power and broad influence. The custodian of the two holy mosques, as they style themselves, has huge soft power in the Islamic world.

Iran is Salman's top issue. This month, Saudi Defense Minister and Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman gave an interview condemning Iran in extremely harsh sectarian terms. The prince, the king's favorite son, characterized the Iranian Islamic Republic as being driven by messianic prophecies and determined to dominate the entire Islamic community. He claimed that Iran sought to take control of Mecca from the kingdom. There was no room for dialogue with Tehran, according to his statement. Indeed, the prince promised that the kingdom will fight its war against Iran inside Iran, not in Saudi Arabia. He was vague about what that means, but it suggests he supports regime change in Tehran. It was one of the most virulent public attacks on Iran ever by the House of Saud.

The royal family is eager for American support against Iran in Yemen, Syria and Iraq. The Saudi leaders face a more skeptical domestic audience. The new Trump administration is widely seen by the public in the Arab world as an enemy of Islam. A poll of Saudis in November showed overwhelming support for Hillary Clinton and only 6% for Trump. There will be no demonstrations against the president in a police state, but the palace will not want to be seen as failing to defend Muslim rights, especially when it comes to Jerusalem.

There will be agreement on fighting terror, including al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIL). Behind the scenes, the Saudis will want some administration action to prevent legal action against the kingdom via the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA). Numerous lawsuits have been filed alleging Saudi responsibility for 9/11. The Saudis will note that the CIA just awarded Crown Prince and Interior Minister Mohammed bin Nayef the George Tenet medal for fighting terrorism. How can a medal winner be a sponsor of terror?

(Source: Al Monitor)

# The center holds firm in France

Independent centrist Emmanuel Macron beat out far-right Marine Le Pen with 65 percent of the vote.

by Yasmeen Serhan

French voters handed Emmanuel Macron, the independent candidate, a decisive victory in the presidential runoff Sunday over Marine Le Pen, the far-right candidate, buoying Europe's political establishment that had watched with despair as populist movements threatened to derail the European experiment.

Macron, 39, who had all but been endorsed by Europe's leaders after his first-round victory on April 23, earned 65.5 percent of the vote, according to early exit polls; Le Pen won 34.5 percent — slightly lower than polls had predicted. The polls projected Macron would win approximately 64 percent of the vote. Voter turnout was 74 percent by the time polls closed at 8 p.m. local time, markedly lower than the 80 percent that turned out in 2012. Approximately 4 million blank votes were cast.

Not only is Macron the youngest president in French history (he's a year younger than Louis-Napoléon, Napoléon Bonaparte's nephew, who was 40 when he was elected in 1848), he is also the first president in modern French history who does not belong to a major political party. Despite briefly serving as economy minister under outgoing Socialist President François Hollande, Macron quit the government in August 2016 to launch his own independent party, En Marche!, which he said aimed to "reconcile the two Frances that have been growing apart for too long."

"A new page of our long history is turned," Macron said in his first statement after the results were announced.

Macron's victory brings an end to a presidential contest labeled a rebuke of the political establishment. Both Macron and Le Pen cast themselves early on as outsiders who are far removed from the established parties that have ruled France for decades. It's an anti-system characterization the two attempted to use against one another — Le Pen derided Macron during the final presidential debate as a Hollande 2.0, whereas Macron cast Le Pen as "the heiress of a name, of a political party, of a system that has prospered for years and years on the back of French people's anger," in apparent reference to her National Front (FN) party, which has maintained a fringe presence in French politics for most of its 45-year history. But Le Pen was able to capitalize on French disaffection with the existing political system, an erosion of the parties that once championed the working classes, and the notion that something fundamental — foreign — ails France.

Addressing her supporters in Paris, Le Pen said the country had "chosen conti-



Macron's victory brings an end to a presidential contest labeled a rebuke of the political establishment.

nunity" and wished Macron "success in the face of the immense challenges facing France." She added that her party must renew itself "to form a new political force."

Hollande, the outgoing president, congratulated Macron on his victory, which he said "confirms that a very large majority of our fellow citizens wanted to gather around the values of the Republic and mark their attachment to the European Union as a gateway for France to the world."

### ■ Parliamentary elections

Macron's victory is merely the first step of his efforts to govern France: He must now turn his focus to the next month's parliamentary elections, during which voters will return to the polls to elect members of the National Assembly, the country's lower but more powerful house of parliament. The election is particularly important because it will likely determine who becomes Macron's prime minister, an individual who almost always comes from the party that controls the chamber.

Although Macron's young party doesn't hold any parliamentary seats — making the chances of him commanding a legislative majority or having a premier from his party less likely — it won't be that way for long. The centrist candidate has vowed to field candidates for all 577 of the chamber's seats, pledging not to make "backroom deals" with other par-

ties and instead putting forward a diverse pool of candidates, half of whom he said would be new to politics.

It's an ambitious goal that polls suggest Macron may be able to pull off. A Wednesday poll by OpinionWay-SLPV Analytics puts Macron's En Marche on track to win between 249 and 286 seats in the National Assembly, making it the largest party but just short of a majority. Centrist and conservative parties are expected to win between 200 and 210 seats, while the Socialists are projected to have the greatest loss, slumping from 280 seats to between 28 and 43 seats. Conversely, the far-right FN is anticipated to win between 15 and 25 seats, a marked increase from the two seats it now has.

Though Le Pen's electoral defeat follows similar far-right populist losses in Austria and Netherlands, the ideological surge is far from dead. Indeed, while Le Pen may have lost the presidency, she also boasted her greatest political performance to date. Not only did she nearly double her 18-percent finish in the 2012 presidential election, but she also managed to take her father's historically fringe party and, for perhaps the first time in its decades-long history, push it into the political mainstream. Should the FN win as many seats in the legislative election's as polls suggest it might, Le Pen could enjoy another five years of being in the op-

position before trying for the presidency again in 2022.

### ■ The populist wave

Such a result demonstrates neither the rise nor fall of the populist wave, but rather, the disintegration of the political establishment as we know it. As my colleague Uri Friedman noted shortly before the first round of the French contest:

A disaffected and discouraged citizenry isn't just a boon for populists, who condemn the "establishment" and ease worries about the future with nostalgic appeals to past greatness. It also has consequences for left-right politics. If you lack confidence in the government in general, you're unlikely to distinguish much between left, right, and center. If you doubt that your future is bright, you're unlikely to be satisfied with the same old ping-ponging policies of the center-right and center-left.

As Macron assesses the task of governing and Le Pen revels in her unprecedented performance, France will confront a future with its two traditionally main parties — the Republicans and the Socialists — being eclipsed, many of the issues that have made this election a contentious one — immigration, terrorism, employment — still relevant, and a legislative election that's likely to be as rancorous as this one.

(Source: The Atlantic)

## WWII Weapons that wait: clear them now

The evacuation of 50,000 people from Hannover this weekend, following the discovery of five unexploded second world war bombs, reminds us that conflicts can have a deadly impact long after the fighting ends. But while the German city's residents have been inconvenienced briefly, millions of people around the world have been displaced for the foreseeable future, and in many cases permanently, by unexploded ordnance and "weapons that wait". They are the lucky ones; thousands are killed annually.

The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) notes that it is now rare for states to plant anti-personnel mines, thanks to the 20-year-old Ottawa treaty. More than 160 states have pledged to stop developing and producing mines and to destroy their stockpiles; non-signatories — including China, Russia and the U.S., which has spent \$2bn on demining but defends mines designed to self-destruct — should join them. Almost 30 countries have been declared mine-free, including heavily contaminated Mozambique. But civilians are paying for the legacy of previous wars and the surge in IEDs: they make up more than 80% of all IED-related casualties. Many are children, reflecting their innocence, curiosity and sometimes their work herding livestock, but also deliberate targeting. The ICBL says casualties in 2015 reached a 10-year high. Meanwhile, international support for clearance fell below \$400m for the first time in a decade.

Now the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), working in Iraq to clear areas previously held by Islamic State (ISIL), warns of a level of contamination it has not seen for two decades, with minefields 24km long and mass-produced devices "powerful enough to rip apart a vehicle, but sensitive enough to be triggered by a child". In one village, 10 died and 5 were injured after just 44 families returned; teams cleared more than 1,500 IEDs, ranged around the school and through houses. Other NGOs describe families returning to live in homes in eastern Mosul, knowing there are IEDs in some rooms: they have nowhere else to go.

IEDs, primarily used by non-state actors, will not be legislated out of existence, and restricting the flow of materials is inherently more challenging, given



Unexploded munitions, landmines and improvised devices kill thousands of civilians annually. They must be removed for communities to recover.

their improvised nature. But experts say that access to some resources can be reduced. And where they have been planted, they must be cleared.

The effects of war are felt in the devastation of services; the destruction of economies; the fragmentation of families and communities; long-term injuries and illnesses; and, of course, the absence of loved ones. But you cannot restore water supplies or reopen schools or plant crops if you cannot cross the land safely. You cannot recover psychologically while living in constant fear of setting foot in the wrong place. The converse of that depressing truth is that

investing in munitions destruction and clearance pays dividends. It is the first step to solving many more problems.

It took MAG's workers three months to clear that Iraqi village, but 520 of its 540 households have now returned home. Last month, the UK committed to trebling its support for clearance, to £100m over three years. But the Halo Trust estimates that 60 million people live with the threat of unexploded mines. Twenty years after Ottawa, it is time for other international donors to step up to the mark.

(Source: The Guardian)



# America's financial war strategy

By Alasdair Macleod

Part Two

Where Qiao's analysis gets less easy to criticise is in subsequent American actions. He claims that Saddam Hussein was overthrown because he instituted a policy of selling oil for euros, not dollars. That was true, and there is little doubt that the threat to dollar hegemony was discouraged. He claims the break-up of Yugoslavia was to undermine the status of the new euro. The euro lost 30% of its value from that time and was damaged as a settlement option for global trade. As Qiao goes on to say, "after the first cruise missiles exploded in Kabul, the Dow Jones index jumped up 600 points in one day".

Qiao then turns his attention to the contemporary cycle (in 2015) of dollar management, claiming it was now aimed at China. In his words,

It was as precise as the tide; the U.S. dollar was strong for six years. Then, in 2002, it started getting weak. Following the same pattern, it stayed weak for ten years. In 2012, the Americans started to prepare to make it strong. They used the same approach: create a regional crisis for other people.

Therefore, we saw that several events happened in relation to China: the Cheonan sinking event, the dispute over the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands in Chinese), and the dispute over Scarborough Shoal (the Huangyan Island in Chinese). All these happened during this period. The conflict between China and the Philippines over Huangyan Island and the conflict between China and Japan over the Diaoyu Islands, might not appear to have much to do with the U.S. dollar index, but was it really that case? Why did it happen exactly in the tenth year of the U.S. dollar being weak?

Unfortunately, the U.S. played with too much fire [in its own mortgage market] earlier and got itself into a financial crisis in 2008. This delayed the timing of the U.S. dollar's hike a bit.

If we acknowledge that there is a U.S. dollar index cycle and the Americans use this cycle to harvest from other countries, then we can conclude that it was time for the Americans to harvest China. Why? Because China had obtained the largest amount of investment from the world. The size of China's economy was no longer the size of a single county; it was even bigger than the whole of Latin America and about the same size as East Asia's economy.

At the time Qiao presented his paper to the CCP's Central Committee, the Shanghai stock market was collapsing, and ever since then, there have been bouts of capital flight, which the Chinese authorities have had difficulty containing. The main-stream media in the US has been consistently negative. From Qiao's perspective, everything points to a pump-and-dump aimed at China. However, China has protected herself from America's financial attacks through its national ownership of the banks and by capital controls. Consequently, only foreigners can sell yuan to buy dollars, or withdraw dollars from their own operations to invest in Treasuries. Therefore, the damage was always going to be limited.

China also bends with the wind. While America increases her Naval domination of the Pacific region, instead of fighting it she merely increases her influence towards the West. This is the basis of the One Belt One Road project, which is already running goods trains as far as Madrid and London.

China prefers her trade partners to take yuan in payment, and will lend them yuan if called upon. In time, yuan payments will have convertibility into gold using the Shanghai Gold Futures Market when it gains greater depth, making it superior to the dollar as a settlement currency, though Qiao is silent on this point. More on this below. Embedded in Qiao's analysis is an understanding that the Chinese empire will not only become far larger than the US in terms of trade, but by understanding the weaknesses of American financial imperialism, it will be more enduring.

## ■ Solving the US debt limit

These future events are implicit in Qiao's thesis. Let us assume for a moment that his thesis is valid, then Trump's threats to escalate a regional war over North Korea and/or Syria/Iran takes on a wholly different light. While it is a stretch of the imagination to believe that the US's Deep State planned to "harvest" Latin America, followed by South-East Asia in the late nineties, we are entitled to assume that the US government's own strategic advisors would have learned



**Unknown to the public, America has already failed in its financial war against China, and needs new victims, which is why the attention has switched to the Korean peninsula as well as the Middle East.**

that manipulating the dollar's exchange rate in this way is a powerful financial weapon, benefiting America's domestic finances and keeping its enemies under control. By threatening North Korea, dollar investment is likely to flow out of trade and investment in South Korea and Japan, back to US Treasuries.

Thinking ahead, this could solve two pressing problems: the first is to persuade Congress to sanction an increase in the deficit limit, it always being easier to persuade Congress to finance a government at war, and the second is to attract the necessary dollar-denominated capital to buy Treasury debt, without having to increase interest rates. The US Government is bound to be aware that higher interest rates must be capped to minimize the risk of triggering a full-blown debt crisis.

As was the case with the Asian crisis, it seems China will avoid being undermined by these negative capital flows. Unknown to the public, America has already failed in its financial war against China, and needs new victims, which is why the attention has switched to the Korean peninsula as well as the Middle East. Trump now realizes the only way his presidency can prosper is to encourage capital flight into America from abroad, and have the debt limit raised to accommodate it. This, surely, is behind his Damascene conversion.

Japan and South Korea will most probably have studied Qiao's paper, becoming wise to America's true motives, and are therefore more likely to distance themselves from trading in dollars thereafter. Their private sectors will be slow to understand these financial dynamics, so will remain victims. But for governments and large corporations, the American gaff has been blown. This is likely to lead us into a new world, where the dollar's decline as a reserve and trade currency accelerates, as America runs out of its pump-and-dump victims. And when that happens, the dollar is almost certain to rapidly lose its purchasing power, leading to a global currency reset and a far higher dollar price for gold.

## ■ Gold's glaring omission

A clue that Qiao's report was censored is the absence of any mention of China's gold accumulation strategy. While Qiao was quick to notice the importance of the link between gold and the dollar in the Bretton Woods years, there is no mention of why China has been amassing gold, ever since the original regulations were promulgated in 1983, appointing the Peoples Bank for this function. There is no mention of why gold was promoted to ordinary citizens after the Shanghai Gold Exchange opened in 2002, no mention of why China has invested in gold mining to the point where

it is now the largest producer in the world by far, and no mention of why the government retains a monopoly on refining, even buying doré from other countries to refine and accumulate. There is no mention that leads us to understand why Chinese state refined gold bars are hardly ever seen outside China.

China places a great emphasis on hoarding gold, both for itself and its citizens. The public has acquired an estimated 12,000-14,000 tonnes since 2002, and this writer has speculated that the Government has hoarded in various accounts as much as a further 20,000 tonnes since 1983. For the government, this represents an average annual accumulation of less than 600 tonnes a year, mostly at contemporary prices far lower than the current dollar level.

But China has gone even further, seeking to control the global market by making the Shanghai Gold Exchange the largest physical exchange by far. She has now introduced yuan gold futures contracts, which will be followed by yuan oil futures contracts in time. This ensures that foreign traders in commodities and wholesale goods can sell forward the yuan they receive in return for gold, increasing the attractiveness of trade finance and settled in yuan compared with dollars. And when the yuan oil contract is introduced, oil importers will use the yuan contracts to sell oil for gold.

In one simple action, China is ready to change the pricing of oil to gold instead of dollars. All she needs to do is pull the trigger, presumably when she has sold down her own dollar reserves to stockpile industrial commodities. And when oil is effectively settled in gold through the futures markets, we can expect other commodities to follow.

This should come as no surprise to the American state, close to being declared check-mate by China on the geopolitical chess board. The dollar price of gold is likely to rise sharply, reflecting the loss of purchasing power for the dollar, and it will end the American dollar's exorbitant privilege, enjoyed since the end of the gold standard in 1971. It is potentially the coup-de grace for both the paper dollar and American imperialism.

## ■ Conclusion

China is thinking ahead, and has its own unique understanding of how America manages its financial empire for the benefit of its domestic economy, at the expense of everyone else. China has protected herself, and attempts by America to undermine China's economy have already failed. Attention is now focused elsewhere. The latest war-mongering against North Korea, Syria and possibly Iran has much to do with persuading Congress to raise the debt ceiling, and to encourage capital flight back into a new wave of US Treasuries without interest rates being raised. This neatly explains Trump's change of heart over foreign adventures.

The current attempt to pump-and-dump the economies of Japan and South Korea by escalating tension over North Korea, as well as countries with dollar balances in the Middle East by escalating Syria, Northern Iraq and Iran, will likely be the last such attempt. China's publication of Qiao's analysis has alerted government strategists everywhere to the use of this tactic, reducing its efficacy. America is running out of fools to fleece.

The end game for the dollar and America's harvesting of foreign countries is therefore in sight, and it will likely end with a final dollar crisis. China could bring this about at a time of its own choosing, simply by introducing the planned oil futures yuan contract alongside the gold futures yuan contract. When liquid enough, oil producers will be able to sell oil for gold, effectively restoring the pre-1971 price relationships. This explains the dynamics being played out at the highest levels, and America has the most to lose. But because China still owns large quantities of US Treasuries and dollar reserves, for the moment she might prefer more time before executing the coup de grace.

But execute it, she will. Her fundamental objective is to remove America's ability to profit from having everything priced in dollars. Logically, that means getting oil and other key commodities referenced in gold, as they were before the Nixon shock in 1971, with fiat currencies merely being the settlement media. America must be careful not to bring forth the date of her own demise by attacking North Korea, Syria, or Iran.

## French presidential election 2017: Nothing succeeds like success

Macron "Selected"; billionaires and bankers rejoice

By Diana Johnstone

There is great rejoicing tonight in places accustomed to rejoicing. The best champagne must be flowing in places that have plenty of it, chez Bernard Arnault, for example, first fortune in France (eleventh in the world), owner among so much else of the newspapers *Parisien*, *Aujourd'hui France* and *Echos*, all fervent supporters of Emmanuel Macron. The glasses should be clinking also wherever the peripatetic billionaire Patrick Drahi finds himself, born in Morocco, double French-Israeli nationality, resident of Switzerland, owner of a vast media and telecom empire, including the epitome of post-May '68 turncoatism, the tabloid *Libération*, which ran a headline calling on voters to cast their ballots for Macron a day after the public campaign was legally over.

The list is long of billionaires, bankers and establishment figures who have a right to rejoice at the extraordinary success of a candidate who got elected President of the French Republic on the claim to be "an outsider", whereas nobody in history has ever been so unanimously supported by all the insiders you can name.

There should also be satisfaction in the embassies of all the countries whose governments openly interfered in the French election – the U.S. of course, but also Germany, Belgium, Italy and Canada, among others, who earnestly exhorted the French to make the right choice: Macron, of course. All these champions of Western democracy can all join in gloat-



ing over the nonexistent but failed interference of Russia – for which there is no evidence, but part of the fun of a NATOland election these days is to accuse the Russians of meddling.

As for the French, abstention was nearly record-breaking, as much of the left could not vote for the self-proclaimed enemy of labor law but dared not vote for the opposition

**Surveys indicate that as much as 40% of Macron voters chose him solely to "block" the alleged danger of voting for Marine Le Pen. Others on the left voted for Macron vowing publicly that they will "fight him" once he is elected.**

candidate, Marine Le Pen, because one just cannot vote for someone who was labeled "extreme right" or even "fascist" by an incredible campaign of denigration, even though she displayed no visible symptom of fascism and her program was favorable to lower income people and to world peace. Words count in France, where the terror of being accused of sharing World War II guilt is overwhelming.

Surveys indicate that as much as 40% of Macron voters chose him solely to "block" the alleged danger of voting for Marine Le Pen.

Others on the left voted for Macron vowing publicly that they will "fight him" once he is elected. Fat chance.

There may be street demonstrations in coming months, but that will have little impact on Macron's promise to tear up French labor law by decree and free labor and management to fight it out between themselves, at a time when management is powerful thanks to delocalizations and labor is disorganized and enfeebled by the various effects of globalization.



As Jean Bricmont put it, outgoing French President François Hollande deserves a Nobel Prize for political manipulation.

At a time when he and his government were so unpopular that everyone was looking forward to the election as a chance to get rid of them, Hollande, with zealous assistance from the major media, leading banks and oligarchs of various stripes, succeeded in promoting his little-known economic advisor into the candidate of "change", neither left nor right, a totally fresh, new political star – supported by all the old politicians that the public wanted to get rid of.

This is quite an amazing demonstration of the power of "communications" in contemporary society, a triumph for the advertising industry, mainstream media and the billionaires who own all of that.

France was perceived as a potential weak link in the globalization project of eliminating national sovereignty in favor of the worldwide reign of capital. Thanks to an extraordinary effort, this danger has been averted. At least for now.



**The current attempt to pump-and-dump the economies of Japan and South Korea by escalating tension over North Korea, as well as countries with dollar balances in the Middle East by escalating Syria, Northern Iraq and Iran, will likely be the last such attempt.**



# Macron and the revival of Europe

By Roger Cohen

It's not just that Emmanuel Macron won and will become, at the age of 39, France's youngest president. It's not merely that he defeated, in Marine Le Pen, the forces of xenophobic nationalism exploited by President Donald Trump.

It's that he won with a bold stand for the much-maligned European Union, and so reaffirmed the European idea and Europe's place in a world that needs its strength and values.

This, after Britain's dismal decision last year to leave the European Union, and in the face of Trump's woeful anti-European ignorance, was critical. Macron underlined his message by coming out to address his supporters in Paris accompanied by the European anthem, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy," rather than the Marseillaise — a powerful gesture of openness.

A Le Pen-led lurch into a Europe of nationalism and racism has been averted. President Vladimir Putin of Russian backed Le Pen for a reason: He wants to break down European unity and sever the European bond with the United States. Instead, the center held and, with it, civilization.

## A federalizing Europe

A federalizing Europe is the foundation of European post-war stability and prosperity. It offers the best chance

for young Europeans to fulfill their promise.

It is Europeans' "common destiny," as Macron put it in his acceptance speech, standing before the French and European Union flags. To think otherwise is to forget history.

No wonder Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, through her spokesman, immediately proclaimed a victory "for a strong and united Europe."

Le Pen, and all she stands for, lost. That is the takeaway from the French election. In the U.S., Hillary Clinton, and all she was willing ... that will require reform. Europe, complacent, has lost traction. Macron recognized this. He declared, "I want to re-weave the bond between citizens and Europe." More transparency, more accountability and more creativity are required. No miracle ever marketed itself more miserably than the European Union.

Macron, who came from nowhere in the space of a year at the head of a new political movement, did not make facile promises or make up stories. He stood by refugees; he stood by Europe's shared currency, the euro; and he was prepared to tell the French that they cannot turn their back on modernity and prosper.

Through rational argument he increased a lead over Le Pen that polls put at 20 percent after the first round two weeks ago to 30 percent, winning with 65 percent of the

vote to Le Pen's 35 percent.

This, in the age of Trump's fake news, fake claims, and overall fakeness, was an important demonstration that reason and coherence still matter in politics.

Now the hard part begins. For the first time in France, the far right took more than a third of the vote, a reflection of the anger in the country at lost jobs, failed immigrant integration and economic stagnation.

Macron, who said he was aware of the "anger, the anxiety, the doubts" needs to address this social unease head-on by reviving a sense of possibility in France. Without change, Le Pen will continue to gain support.

## Fashioning change in Europe?

Change is notoriously hard to fashion in France. It is a country fiercely attached to the "acquis," or acquired rights, enshrined in its comprehensive welfare state. Many have tried.

Many have failed. It is especially hard without strong parliamentary backing, and Macron will need that. Parliamentary elections will be held next month. His En Marche! (Onward!) movement must organize fast to build on his victory. It has extraordinary momentum.

The traditional political landscape of the Fifth Republic — the alternation of center-left Socialists and center-right

Republicans — has been blown apart.

Perhaps this very feat, without parallel in recent European political history, and Macron's status as a centrist independent give him unique latitude to persuade the French, at last, that they can — like the Germans and the Dutch and the Swedes and the Danes — preserve the essence of their welfare state while forging a more flexible labor market that gives hope to the young. With 25 percent of its youth unemployed, France undoes itself.

Macron's is a victory for many things. He has demonstrated that France is not a country where racism and anti-European jingoism can win an election. He has reasserted the European idea and raised the possibility that France and Germany will conjure a revival of European idealism. He has rebuked the little Englanders who voted to take Britain out the Union (and made a tough negotiation on that exit inevitable).

Above all, through his intelligence and civility, his culture and his openness, Macron has erected a much-needed barrier to the crassness and incivility, the ignorance and the closed-mindedness that seeps from Trump's Oval Office and threatens to corrupt the conduct of world affairs.

Vive la France! Vive l'Europe! Now more than ever.

(Source: The NYT)

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# Effective exercises for osteoporosis

Staying active can strengthen bones and preserve mobility.

If your doctor has recently diagnosed you with osteoporosis, or if you've already had a fracture, you might be avoiding exercise for fear of breaking another bone. Yet staying active is exactly what you should be doing right now.

"If you've already had one fracture, the risk of an additional fracture is very high, so you have to do everything possible to lessen the likelihood that will happen. You need to try to increase bone density and prevent falls, and that's where exercise is so important," stresses Dr. David Slovik, associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and endocrinologist at Massachusetts General Hospital.

Exercise reduces your risk not only of falling, but also of fracturing a bone if you do fall. A recent analysis published in BMJ found that programs of balance, strength, and resistance training reduced the odds of falls resulting in fractures by more than 60%.

## ■ Bone-strengthening program

An exercise program for osteoporosis should include four components:

- Weight-bearing exercises force your body to work against gravity, which helps to strengthen bones. Examples include walking, climbing stairs, playing tennis, and dancing. Higher-impact activities strengthen bone more than lower-impact exercises, but only do what your fitness level allows.

- Muscle-strengthening exercises use weights or your body's own resistance to work against gravity. Examples include lifting free weights, using a weight machine, working with resistance bands, and lifting your own body weight. Do these types of exercises at least twice a week.

- Balance exercises improve your ability to hold yourself upright and help prevent falls. Examples include tai chi and



**Exercise reduces your risk not only of falling, but also of fracturing a bone if you do fall. Programs of balance, strength, and resistance training reduce the odds of falls resulting in fractures by more than 60%.**

yoga. Perform balance exercises at least twice a week.

- Flexibility exercises keep your muscles limber and joints mobile. They include yoga and stretching. Try to stretch for at least five to 10 minutes after every workout. Hold each stretch for 10 to 30 seconds.

Dr. Slovik recommends mixing up your routine. Incorporate a variety of exercises to work different parts of your body and prevent boredom.

## ■ Start safely

When you're just starting out, it can help to work with a professional so you don't injure yourself. "I will sometimes

refer patients to a physical therapist to initiate the exercises and explain how to do them safely," Dr. Slovik says. A professional trainer can also help you design an appropriate workout.

Always start slowly, with light weights and few repetitions, and build up from there. Don't worry if you can do only two or three biceps curls or leg lifts at first. Add one more repetition per week, until you can eventually do a full set of eight to 12 reps.

Be gentle and mindful of your condition. If you've already broken bones in the spine, avoid activities in which you bend forward, reach down, twist, or lift

heavy weights. Ask your doctor if you need to be aware of any other physical limitations based on your bone strength and general health.

## ■ Osteoporosis care program

Remember that exercise is an important part of osteoporosis care, but it is just one component of that care. "Exercise should not be done in isolation. When I see patients, I talk about the nondrug approaches to treating osteoporosis, and those include calcium, vitamin D, exercise, and fall prevention," Dr. Slovik says. "And then the second part is the pharmacologic approach, which includes medicines like bisphosphonates." Ask your doctor how all of these elements should work together as part of a comprehensive bone-preserving strategy.

## ■ Osteoporosis exercises

These exercises strengthen the muscles needed to keep you upright and improve balance. Aim for eight to 12 repetitions of each exercise.

**Hip extension:** While holding onto the back of a chair for balance, slowly raise your right leg straight out behind you. Lift it as high as you can without bending your knee. Lower the leg. Repeat with the left leg.

**Bridge:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Put your hands next to your hips with the palms down on the floor. Keeping your back straight, lift your buttocks as high as you can off the mat. Pause. Lower back down slowly.

**Chair stand:** Position the chair against a wall. Sit in the chair with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Cross your arms and put your hands on your shoulders. Keeping your back and shoulders straight, stand up slowly, using your legs rather than your hands. Slowly sit back down.

(Source: [health.harvard.edu](http://health.harvard.edu))

## Top 10 signs of schizophrenia

By John M. Grohol

Schizophrenia is a serious mental illness characterized by a broad range of unusual behaviors that cause profound disruption in the lives of the patients suffering from the condition — and often in the lives of the people around them, too. Schizophrenia strikes without regard to gender, race, social class or culture. It is most often first diagnosed in a person's 20s: early-to mid-20s for men, later 20s for women.

Not everyone who has schizophrenia experiences every symptom. Some people experience a few symptoms, some many. The severity of symptoms varies with individuals and also varies over time.

### ■ The top 10 signs of schizophrenia are:

- Delusions (believing things that are not true)
- Hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that are not there)
- Disorganized thinking (can't keep thoughts ordered)
- Disorganized speech (e.g., frequent derailment of the conversation, loose associations, or talking incoherently)
- Agitation
- Grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior (e.g., child-like "silliness," resisting simple instructions, odd or rigid posture, repeated movements that serve no purpose)
- Lack of drive or initiative
- Social withdrawal
- Apathy
- Emotional unresponsiveness or lack of emotional expression

One of the most important kinds of impairment caused by schizophrenia involves the person's thought processes. The individual can lose much of the ability to rationally evaluate their surroundings and interactions with others. There can be hallucinations and delusions, which reflect distortions in the perception and interpretation of reality and the world around them.

The resulting behaviors may seem bizarre to the casual observer, even though they may be consistent with the person suffering from schizophrenia's internal perceptions and beliefs.

It is rarely helpful to challenge a person who has schizophrenia's beliefs or hallucinations directly, since they may make a kind of sense to the person. Instead, a person should be seen professionally for treatment of this condition. Modern treatment for schizophrenia includes both medications and psychotherapy.

### ■ Additional symptoms that occur in people with schizophrenia

Individuals with schizophrenia may also have:

- Inappropriate displays of emotion (e.g., laughing for no reason)
- Depression, anxiety or anger
- Daytime sleeping, or disturbed sleep
- Lack of interest in eating or food
- Anxiety or a phobia
- Problems with memory
- Lack of insight or awareness of the schizophrenia symptoms

(Source: [psychcentral.com](http://psychcentral.com))

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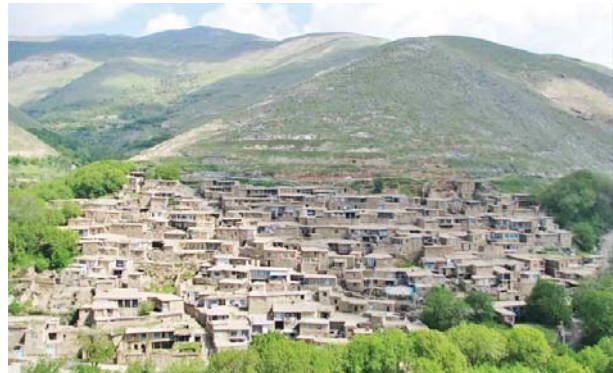
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## Ecotourism growth suggests solution for village-city migration

**TOURISM** TEHRAN — The expansion of ecotourism contributes to regional development while lessens irregular migration from rural areas to major cities, a top tourism official has said.

Attention to ecotourism will prevent migration from villages to cities and put rural areas on the path of development yet helps them safeguard their cultural identity, Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization Deputy Director Bahman Namvar-Motlaq said on Sunday.



A view of Malham Darreh, a touristic village in the northwestern Hamadan province

He made the remarks during the inauguration ceremony of a newly-constructed eco-lodge in Malham Darreh, a touristic village in the northwestern Hamadan province, ISNA reported.

Tourist draws, generating jobs, and the growth of domestic industries are amongst other fruits of eco-tourism boom, Namvar-Motlaq said.

The official pointed out that at the moment there are some 500 eco lodges in the country, adding the number is on the rise.

Earlier in April, CHTO Director Zahra Ahmadipour said "A total of 274 eco camps have been constructed throughout the country since the beginning of 2016," as she assumed such projects provide sustainable sources of income for locals.

Due to a very diverse natural setting, Iran offers a lively and interesting environment to the natural loving travelers. It embraces temperate forests in the north with relatively high humidity and rainfall, deserts and salt lakes in the central parts, towering mountain ranges and peaks, as well as glaciers and coastal areas.

## Ferdowsi mausoleum to offer free entry on May 15

**TOURISM** TEHRAN — Entry will be free to the mausoleum of Ferdowsi, the illustrious Persian poet, in Tus, Khorasan Razavi province, on May 15.

On the occasion of the National Ferdowsi Day, vast variety of programs have been arranged throughout the province to commemorate Ferdowsi, IRNA quoted Mohammad Reza Kargar, an official with the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization as saying on Saturday.



A view of Ferdowsi mausoleum in Tus, northeastern Iran, with a massive statue of the Persian poet in the foreground

"Entry to Ferdowsi mausoleum will be free of charge for everyone on May 15," he said.

To commemorate the day, various meetings, workshops, exhibits, and live performances such as Naqqali, which is a style of storytelling dedicated to Shahnameh epic stories, will be held nationwide.

Many Iranians regard Ferdowsi as the greatest of their poets. Down through the centuries they have continued to read and to listen to recitations from his masterpiece, the Shahnameh.

Though written some a millennia ago, the poem collection is somehow intelligible to the average modern Iranians, to them it is the history of their country's glorious past, preserved for all time in sonorous and majestic verses.

## Iran reports rise in number of tourists

Iran says the number of tourists that visited the country last year increased by above 30 percent from a year earlier — what could be an indication that one of the world's top travel destinations is already finding its lost flavor after the removal of sanctions.

A top trade official in Tehran told domestic media that Iran hosted over 6 million tourists over the last Persian calendar year that ended on 21 March 2017.

Ahmad Asqari Qajari, the director of the Tourism Department of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIM), said the figure showed an increase of above 2 million compared to a year earlier.

Asqari Qajari told Iran's state news agency IRNA that Iran earned around \$8 billion from tourism last year, stressing that the figure could increase even higher once the infrastructure for hosting a higher number of tourists were prepared.

With over 20 special sites that have been registered on the World Heritage List of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Iran has been frequently named as a must-visit travel destination.

The country aspires to host 20 million tourists annually by 2025, with expectations of expanding the tourist sector to \$30 billion. (Source: Press TV)

# Oljaytu mausoleum reveals 14th-century Persian architecture

**TOURISM** TEHRAN — A UNESCO World Heritage site, the 14th-century Mausoleum of Oljaytu is highly recognized as an architectural masterpiece particularly due to its innovative double-shelled dome and elaborate interior decoration.

The very imposing dome stands about 50 meters tall from its base. Covered with turquoise-blue faience tiles, the stunning structure dominates the skyline of Soltaniyeh, an ancient city in Zanjan province, north-western Iran.

The interior has long been under renovation, chockfull of scaffolding poles. However, its decoration is such impressive that scholars including A.U. Pope described it as 'anticipating the Taj Mahal'. It is the earliest existing example of the double-shelled dome in Iran.

A great-grandson of Hulegu, founder of the Il-Khanid dynasty, Oljaytu was a Mongol ruler who, after dabbling in various religions, adopted the Shia name Mohammed Khodabandeh.

The city of Soltaniyeh was briefly the capital of Persia's Il-khanid dynasty (a branch of the Mongol dynasty) during the 14th century.

According to the UNESCO, the Mausoleum of Oljaytu is an essential link and key monument in the development of Islamic architecture in central and western Asia. Here, the Ilkhanids further developed ideas that had been advanced during the classical Seljuk phase (11th to early 13th centuries), during which the arts of Iran gained distinction in the Islamic world, thereby setting the stage for the Timurid period (late 14th to 15th centuries), one of the most brilliant periods in Islamic art.

The very large dome is the earliest extant example of its type, and became an important reference for the later development of the Islamic dome. Similarly, the extremely rich interior of the mausoleum, which includes glazed tiles, brickwork, marquetry or designs in inlaid materials, stucco, and frescoes, illustrates an important movement towards more elaborate materials and themes.

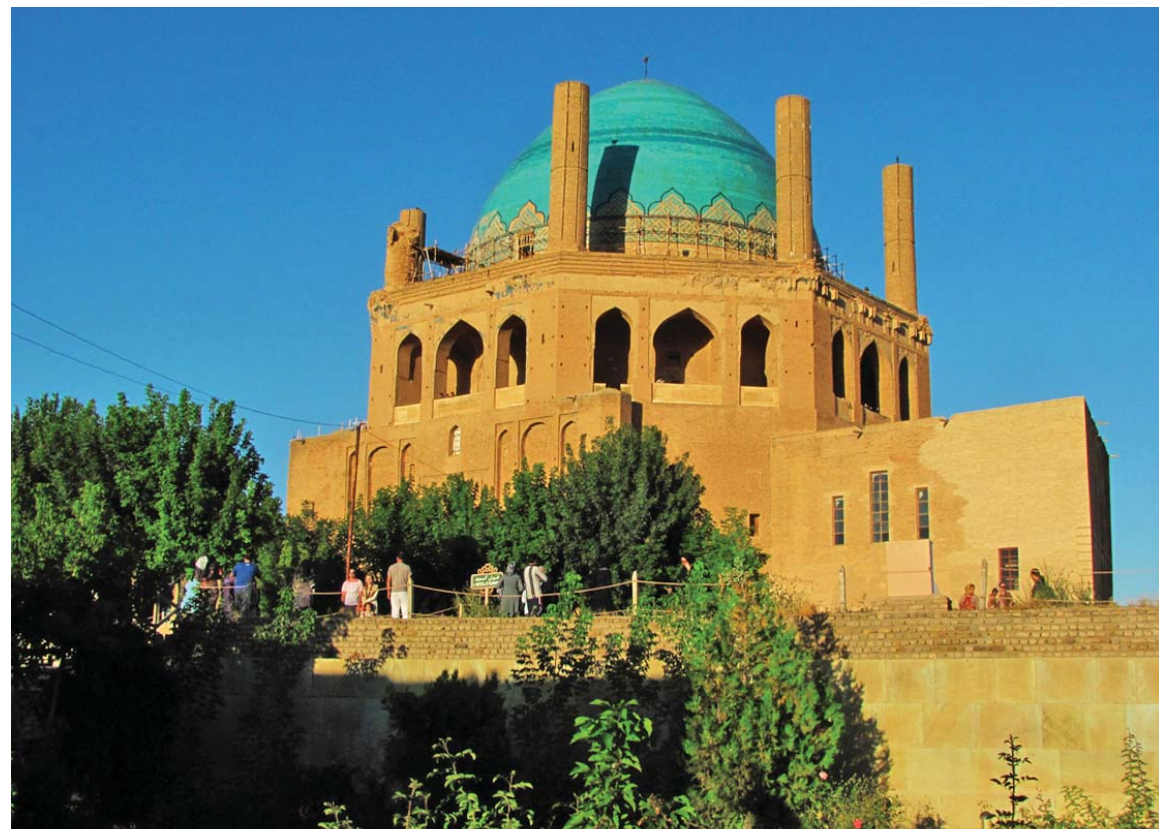
### Under tourists' eyes

Here is a select of comments that visitors to the mausoleum have posted to TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

#### Amazing architecture despite the scaffolding

The dome of Soltaniyeh displays amazing brick work architecture and blue mosaics.

It has been undergoing major restoration since the 1970s which is still ongoing, so expect scaffolding. Despite this, the



People visit the 14th-century Mausoleum of Oljaytu, a UNESCO site located in Soltaniyeh, Zanjan province

visit is memorable. (FrenchTraveler from Paris; visited Oct. 2016)

#### Unfortunately inside not nice

From outside the brick dome is impressive but inside it is still under renovation. The interior is full of scaffolds and there is nothing to see inside because of this.

All in all it's not worth going there in an extra trip. But it can be a nice stop on the way with the view from outside. (StefanBaW235 from Biberach (Riss), Germany; visited April 2017)

#### Great outside, dull inside

While this UNESCO listed dome shape mausoleum looks really impressive from outside, thanks to its shining blue color dome, its interior is really disappointing.

We saw a full view of construction structure that not only overshadow all delicate works of art but also the remaining ancient crafted works are all badly damaged and seems lack proper maintenance. (Suwatss from Bangkok; visited April 2017)

#### Plain is striking

Here's another fantastic site that has been in a state of renovation for quite a long time, according to the site's guide. The scaffolding covers almost everywhere inside, but looking up to the inside of the dome is worthwhile.

Outside is beautiful, the unadorned pressed Adobe mud/brick compliments the bright blue turquoise dome. (Miriamh D. from Boulder, Colorado; visited May 2016)

## Tourists flock to Iran's 'image of the world'

Key sites Isfahan have witnessed a significant rise in visitor numbers since the nuclear deal

By Megan O'Toole

**ISFAHAN** — Sunlight spills across the turquoise and sapphire dome of the Shah Mosque in Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Square, and in its shadow, dozens of tourists hold cameras aloft to capture the memory.

The square's name translates to "image of the world", and countless feet have crossed these grounds to marvel at the World Heritage site first-hand.

"Gardens, palaces, mansions, mosques, schools, bazaars, magnificent bridges and most of all, the splendid square of Naqsh-e Jahan, all are the memories that stick in the mind of any travelers who visit Isfahan," the American linguist A.V. Williams Jackson wrote more than a century ago, after his own trip to the central Iranian city. "The memory remains so vivid and stable that it even won't get blurred after months and years."

Today, Isfahan remains one of Iran's biggest tourist draws: An inquiry to the reservations desk at its landmark Abbasi Hotel, recently lauded by CNN as "the Middle East's most beautiful hotel", revealed that it was fully booked for the next three months.

Other hotels throughout the city are routinely filled to capacity as tourists have flocked to Isfahan in increasing numbers since the implementation of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal, according to municipal officials.

"In the past two years, I can say the number of incoming tourists has been three times more than we had before the deal. More important are the investment figures. Investment has been exceptional, several times more, since the nuclear deal," Mohammad Izadkhasti, the city's tourism deputy and an adviser to Isfahan's mayor, told Al Jazeera from inside his bright, airy office, citing significant investments in the accommodation and recreation sectors.

"The current hotel infrastructure and accommodation capacity of the city is very low," he added. "There are currently 15,000 rooms, but statistics show we need at least 150,000."

The rise in tourism numbers in Isfahan mirrors a countrywide trend: Since the 2013 election of President Hassan Rouhani and the ensuing nuclear agreement, tourism numbers have surged, increasing to 5.2 million in 2015 from 3.8 million in 2012. Revenue for tourism in 2015 exceeded \$8bn in Iran, which is home to 21 World Heritage sites, including the majestic ruins of Persepolis, the Persian Garden properties and the historic bazaar complex in Tabriz.

Pejman Abdolmohammadi, a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics Middle East Centre with expertise in Iran,



Visitors sip tea in the courtyard of the landmark Abbasi Hotel [Wojtek Arciszewski/Al Jazeera]

noted that the "trust of tourists, particularly from Western countries, [has] started to increase". But that could change depending on the outcome of Iran's upcoming presidential election, as well as on the future of the nuclear deal, which US President Donald Trump has threatened to scrap.

"Economically speaking, Iran at the moment needs foreign investment. Working on creating more security and stability in the political field would be the best strategy," Abdolmohammadi told Al Jazeera. "Iran has many tourist sites ... [including from] the pre-Islamic era and Islamic architecture that have immense potential for tourism, which is still not discovered."

Should Washington tinker with the nuclear deal, tourism could suffer in the short term — but within the next decade or two, Iran is nonetheless on track to continue rebounding as a strong actor in the industry, he said.

"Iran as a player is coming back to the scene," Abdolmohammadi said. "The first, very small signal has been the [recent increase in tourism and investment], even though that is just the very beginning of this comeback. Economically speaking ... the alliances that Iran may create with India, Japan and other players could create a new Asiatic actor going beyond the Middle East."

Many within Iran's tourism industry echo this optimism. According to tour operator Mohammad Dorri, a 36-year-old mechanical engineer who has worked as a tour guide for

the past five years, the recent easing of visa restrictions for many foreign tourists — along with the lifting of international sanctions — has resulted in a massive boom for his agency's business.

"Over the past two years, there have been around 10 times more incoming tourists than in previous years," Dorri told Al Jazeera, noting that his agency handled an influx of around 500 tourists last year.

"The classic destinations we get the most requests for are Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Kerman, Yazd; the more experienced tourists also ask to see Tabriz and the Caspian Sea region. Isfahan is always one of the most popular requests."

But Dorri and others have stressed the need to better advertise Iran's tourism offerings and to bolster the country's lagging tourism infrastructure — particularly as the government has announced an ambitious plan to attract more than 20 million tourists by 2025.

"When tourists from Western countries want to book a hotel here [in Isfahan], either it's not available, or he or she can stay just one or two nights, when they might have wanted to stay a week here because there's a lot to see," Izadkhasti said. "It goes without saying that the city loses a lot of money."

To help deal with the continuing influx, the city has taken a number of steps, including bringing taxation for building hotels in Isfahan to zero and making plans to convert a

number of historic houses into accommodation facilities, he said.

Al Jazeera recently spoke with a number of tourists exploring Isfahan, and despite ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region and increasingly harsh rhetoric towards Iran from the United States, none expressed any concerns about visiting the country.

From a rooftop plateau in the grand Ali Qapu Palace, German tourist Nils Schmidt-Soltau, 38, gazed out across the manicured lawns of Naqsh-e Jahan Square. He said that he could not have imagined a trip to Iran without a stop in Isfahan, noting he was struck by "the culture, the monuments and the friendliness of the people".

Outside the Imam Mosque, Swiss tourist Betty Dumas, 64, said that she and her friends visited Tehran and Shiraz before coming to Isfahan: "[We came] to discover the country, and it's quite easy now to get a visa."

Still, Reza Galily, who works in a local shop chiseling exquisitely detailed designs into copper plates, pointed out that tourism in the area had not reached its full potential. Surrounded by turquoise and silver colored plates, he acknowledged that despite the recent rise in numbers, "the types of tourists who spend a lot cannot come and spend a lot here" due to the exclusion of foreign debit and credit cards from the market.

Meanwhile, outside Isfahan's popular Shahrzad Restaurant, clusters of people wait for upwards of half an hour to enjoy steaming plates of kebabs under the soft light of stained-glass windows and mirrored ceiling inlays.

Elsewhere, tourists stop to examine the centuries-old paintings inside Vank Cathedral, or to sip sugary tea in the lilac-scented garden of the Abbasi Hotel. Among the most popular evening gathering spots in the city is the historic Allahverdi Khan Bridge, where locals and tourists alike converge to sing songs, fly kites and spread out picnic blankets under the night sky.

"The most important thing about the city that has attracted many tourists over the years is its cultural identity, which has continued over thousands of years. There has never been a cultural gap," Izadkhasti said. "When tourists come to the city, they can take a tour through the heart of history from different periods. In many cities there is an old part of town and a new part of the city, the old part of the city is open for tourists, and they come and see and enjoy it."

"But Isfahan is like a museum," he added. "Every corner of the city is integral ... It has developed its own cultural identity. This is what's most interesting for tourists."

(Source: Al Jazeera)

**Despite ongoing geopolitical tensions in the region and increasingly harsh rhetoric towards Iran from the United States, travelers did not express any concerns about visiting the country.**



# Scientists create high-conductivity transparent nano-scale film material

A team of researchers announced, in a study published Friday in the journal *Nature Communications* that it had succeeded in creating a nano-scale material that could be used to build cheap and efficient transparent conductors.

The researchers argued that the new material, made of a compound called barium stannate, could lead to the creation of smaller, faster, and more powerful electronics, and more efficient solar cells.

"Even though this material has the highest conductivity within the same materials class, there is much room for improvement in addition to the outstanding potential for discovering new physics if we decrease the defects," lead researcher Bharat Jalan, a professor of chemical engineering and materials science at the University of Minnesota, said in a statement.

The researchers used a novel synthesis method to create the material. They first grew a thin film of barium stannate in which the elemental tin source had been replaced with a chemical precursor of tin. Doing so allowed them to exploit the unique properties of the chemical precursor, and greatly enhanced the chemical reactivity and conductivity of the material.

## Optically transparent

The thin film thus created not only had a much higher conductivity than any other material in its class, it also had a wide "bandgap" — which means light could



easily pass through the material, making it optically transparent.

So far, most materials with a wide bandgap have been found to have either low conductivity or poor transparency.

"We were quite surprised at how well this unconventional approach worked the

very first time we used the tin chemical precursor," study's first author Abhinav Prakash, a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, said in the statement. "It was a big risk, but it was quite a big breakthrough for us."

The technique also allowed re-

searchers to exercise "unprecedented" control over thickness and composition of the material created. Moreover, since the process that created the new material is both reproducible and scalable, the researchers said it could eventually replace the indium-based transparent conductors that are currently used.

The discovery of the new material comes at a time when reserves of indium tin oxide — the material most commonly used in transparent conducting materials — are running low. Given that most modern technologies, including smartphones, tablets and household appliances, now come with incorporated touch screens, a replacement is urgently needed.

Since both barium and tin are significantly cheaper than indium and are much more abundant, they could help scientists move toward the ultimate goal — creation of a material with high conductivity and optical transparency at a low cost.

The "high conductivity and wide bandgap make this an ideal material for making optically transparent conducting films which could be used in a wide variety of electronic devices, including high power electronics, electronic displays, touchscreens and even solar cells in which light needs to pass through the device," Jalan said.

(Source: IBT)

**The discovery of the new material comes at a time when reserves of indium tin oxide — the material most commonly used in transparent conducting materials — are running low.**

## Restoring wildflower meadows could bring new era of super-organic food

Grazing farm animals in wildflower meadows could reverse the disastrous decline of Britain's plants and wildlife and usher in a new era of super-organic food, the charity Plantlife has said.

Conservationists at the charity, of which the Prince of Wales is a patron, are calling for every farm in Britain to plant at least one wildflower meadow on which cattle and sheep can live.

Animals which graze on species-rich natural meadows of flowers, herbs and wild grasses consume far more minerals, proteins, and amino-acids, making them healthier and their meat more nutritious.

In the past, Welsh farms often kept a wildflower-rich field called a "Cae Ysbyty" or "hospital field" where sick or recuperating animals were grazed so they could benefit from the mixture of herbs to aid their recovery.

Cow grazing on Farthing Downs, an area of open space owned by the City forming part of green belt land to the south of London.

## Biodiverse pasture

Studies have shown that the meat of animals grazed on biodiverse pasture contains high levels of Vitamin E, and quantities of omega-3 fatty acids previously only found in oily fish.

Dr. Trevor Dines, Botanical Specialist at Plantlife, said:



"Essentially you are what you eat. Animals that are able to graze on rich, diverse sources of plants will be healthier and their meat will be better. And livestock make meadows, they help them to thrive and improve diversity."

"We would like to see a wildflower meadow on every farm and we would like to see more food branded as 'wildflower meadow grazed' as a sign of quality, one step up from organic."

The UK has lost more than 97 percent of its wildflower

meadows since the 1930s, an area equivalent to one-and-a-half times the size of Wales.

The decline is threatening once-common British flowers such as ragged-robin and harebell, which are closed to being listed as "threatened with extinction".

The Prince of Wales is calling for more Coronation Meadows to be planted to mark the 60th anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne.

The project, which began in 2014, has so far seen 90 new meadows established across the country, including the recently completed Queen's Meadow in Green Park, London.

Ahead of National Meadows Day on July 1, homeowners are also being urged to leave a section of their garden unmowed to allow wildflowers to reestablish.

Marian Spain, Plantlife chief executive, said: "Meadows, once a feature of every parish, are now an increasingly fragile part of our national heritage, but all is not lost."

"Coronation Meadows is the largest initiative of its kind in the UK and it's thrilling to see the ambitious challenge sown by the Prince of Wales being brought to life."

(Source: The Telegraph)

## SpaceX plans to begin testing their high-speed satellite broadband later this year

More than two years ago, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk announced the NewSpace Company's intention to build an internet constellation, consisting of several thousand satellites in low-Earth orbit (LEO), providing 1 gigabit-per-second (1 Gbps) broadband to customers across the globe. They plan to begin on-orbit tests later in 2017 and begin full launch operations in 2019 through 2024.

"We plan to design, develop, produce, launch, and operate a constellation of 4,000 satellites," Cooper explained to the committee. "These will provide high-speed, low-latency, and affordable broadband to the underserved, and unserved, populations throughout the United States and abroad."

The company hopes to bring broadband service to the 34 million Americans, 23 million of which are in rural areas, who are currently unserved by traditional broadband operators. SpaceX feels it is in a unique position to leverage its ability to vertically integrate the entire process, from design through launch and operations to low running costs while still providing the high speeds customers expect.

## Broadband service

However, in order for the company to

be treated like other broadband service providers, SpaceX contends a change in rules and regulations will be necessary so that satellite services aren't treated unfairly when compared to their terrestrial counterparts.

Bringing satellite service to customers involves far more than simply launching a multitude of satellites and providing Internet access. Indeed, the greatest hurdle to large-scale endeavors like satellite internet service is often the red tape imposed by governmental regulatory agencies.

With SpaceX planning to greatly increase their launch cadence, going from one launch per month to potentially one every few days, the company posits a change in the licensing process from the FAA and FCC will be imperative if such a schedule is to be maintained. The processes those agencies follow, who are responsible for granting launch and radio frequency licenses, are a significant impediment to a heightened cadence, and Cooper said that SpaceX is eager to work with the government to streamline the workflow.

Moreover, the very definition of broadband service itself may need to be re-worked so as to not exclude sat-



ellite Internet service from consideration from government investment projects. Historically, satellite data services have not been classified as broadband due to their high latency and comparatively low data rates.

While technology advancements have increased the speed of computer processors from single-digit megahertz to today's state-of-the-art silicon that can clock-in at thousands of times faster, one thing has not changed: the

speed of light.

The speed at which information can flow through fiber optic cable, copper, or even the vacuum of space cannot travel faster than the speed of light.

For instance, if the broadband satellite is in geostationary orbit 22,236 miles (35,786 kilometers) above the equator, communications would take at least a quarter of a second to make the round trip.

(Source: Spaceflight Insider)

## BMI's Mobile Bank Users Exceed 3m: Report

The number of users of Mobile Bank of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) surpassed three million.

With over three million users, the bank has covered more than eight million transactions in Iranian month of Bahman in the past Iranian calendar year (from Jan. 20 to Feb. 21, 2017), Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

The bank has launched Mobile Bank in order to gain

satisfaction of customers on the electronic banking (e-banking) services and also pave suitable ways for facilitation of relevant affairs, the report added.

Of the salient services of Mobile Bank service of Bank Melli Iran, it should be referred to: announcing the bill, account balances, inter- and intra-bank payment of installments, money transfer from one account to another account, money transfer from one account

to the other debit cards of the bank coupled with payment of services bill, etc.

Offering services based on banking cards, money transfer from the bank's debit card to the other debit cards, connected to SHETAB services, purchasing charge for all SIM cards of mobile phones, etc. are of the other salient services of the bank in this respect.

## Claim that fish prefer plastic over real food retracted: study

The esteemed journal *Science* last week retracted a research paper on the impact of so-called microplastics on fish. The research received widespread media attention in June of last year. "Fish eat plastic like teens eat fast food, researchers say," proclaimed one of many similar headlines—but an investigation following its publication concluded that its authors, led by Dr. Oona Lonnstedt, were guilty of "scientific dishonesty."

Critics quickly spotted signs that the research was, in the words of one whistleblower, "a complete fantasy." Among other tells, scientists working at the same research station as Lonnstedt claimed she hadn't been there long enough to do the experiments she described, and didn't have the necessary equipment.

As questions mounted, the paper's authors claimed that a laptop containing the sole copy of their raw research data had been stolen just 10 days after the paper was published.

It has long been known that both pollutants and plastic waste find their way into the ocean food chain, and wind up contaminating human food supplies. But Lonnstedt's *Science* paper went even further, claiming to demonstrate that young fish raised in environments high in plastic actually preferred plastic particles over natural food. Speaking to the BBC after the study's release, Lonnstedt said that for young fish, plastic could be compared to "unhealthy fast food for teenagers."

Scientific controversies have contributed to a growing skepticism of science and its institutions. Both 2009's "Climategate" email leaks and accusations of fraud surrounding a key 2015 study on global warming provided fuel for climate change skeptics, though further investigation showed little actual misconduct in either case.

(Source: Fortune)

## In disposable mucus houses, these zooplankton filter the oceans

Swimming hundreds of feet beneath the ocean's surface in many parts of the world are prolific architects called giant larvaceans. These zooplankton are not particularly giant themselves (they resemble tadpoles and are about the size of a pinkie finger), but every day, they construct one or more spacious "houses" that can exceed three feet in length.

The houses are transparent mucus structures that encase the creatures inside. Giant larvaceans beat their tails to pump seawater through these structures, which filter tiny bits of dead or drifting organic matter for the animals to eat. When their filters get clogged, the larvaceans abandon ship and construct a new house. Laden with debris from the water column, old houses rapidly sink to the seafloor.



In a study published in *Science Advances* on Wednesday, scientists near California's Monterey Bay have found that, through this process, giant larvaceans can filter all of the bay's water from about 300 to 1,000 feet deep in less than two weeks, making them the fastest known zooplankton filter feeders.

In doing so, the creatures help transfer carbon that has been removed from the atmosphere by photosynthesizing organisms to the deep sea, where it can be buried and stored long term. And given their abundance in other parts of the world, these organisms likely play a crucial role in the global carbon cycle.

When it comes to the flow of carbon in the ocean, "we don't know nearly as much as we should," said Kakani Katija, a principal engineer at the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute and the study's lead author. "If we really want to understand how the system works, we have to look at all the players involved. Giant larvaceans are one important group we need to learn more about."

(Source: The NYT)

## Curiosity rover eyes gorgeous black sand dunes on Mars

NASA's Mars rover Curiosity has snapped some additional stunning vistas of the black sand dunes that have captured its attention for parts of the past 18 months.

The newly released photos show a section of the Bagnold Dunes, a big black-sand field that lies on the northwestern flank of Mars' 3.4-mile-high (5.5 kilometers) Mount Sharp.

From early February through early April of this year, Curiosity studied four different sites near a linear dune within Bagnold. The car-size rover is now driving uphill and away from this area, carrying a sand sample with it as it goes, NASA officials said.

Curiosity arrived at a different part of Bagnold in late 2015. The six-wheeled robot soon began examining some crescent-shaped dunes, kicking off the first-ever close-up investigation of active sand dunes on a world other than Earth.

Curiosity's recent work at the linear-dune site — which lies about 1 mile (1.6 km) south and uphill of the crescent-dune spot — should help researchers better understand how Mars' winds sculpt dunes into different shapes and patterns, mission team members said.

"At these linear dunes, the wind regime is more complicated than at the crescent dunes we studied earlier," Mathieu Lapotre, of the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, said in a statement.

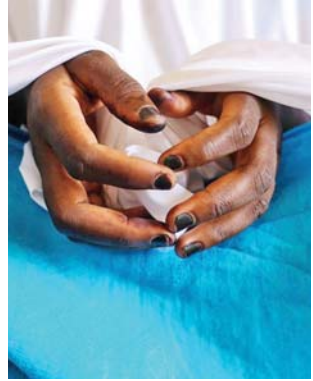
(Source: space.com)



## UNICEF welcomes release of 80 Chibok schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on Sunday welcomed Saturday's release of more than 80 of the Chibok schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram insurgents over three years ago.

It is heartening to know that the girls will be returning to their families who have been waiting for this day



More than two years of being held hostage by Boko Haram, in northeast Nigeria, one of the Chibok girls recounts the horrific conditions they experienced.

"It is heartening to know that the girls will be returning to their families who have been waiting for this day. They will face a long and difficult process to rebuild their lives after the indescribable horror and trauma they have suffered at the hands of Boko Haram," said UNICEF Nigeria Acting Representative Pernille Ironside in a statement.

She said UNICEF is on standby to support the Nigerian authorities to provide the comprehensive psychosocial support, help reunite the girls with their families and make sure they can continue their education in a safe environment.

"UNICEF calls on Boko Haram to end all grave violations against children, especially the abduction of children and the sexual abuse and forced marriage of girls," she said.

(Source: UN News Center)

## RECIPE OF THE WEEK

### Spinach and carrot quiche

"A dense spinach quiche that's good for breakfast, lunch, or dinner!"

#### Ingredients:

1 tablespoon vegetable oil



- 1 onion, diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 (10 ounce) packages chopped spinach, thawed
- 1/2 cup shredded carrots
- 2 cups shredded gouda cheese
- 6 eggs
- 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper
- 2 (9 inch) pie crusts

#### Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C).

Heat the oil in a skillet over medium heat, and cook the onion until tender. Mix in the garlic, spinach, and carrots, and cook until the spinach liquid has evaporated. Remove skillet from heat, and mix in cheese and eggs. Season with red pepper, nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Pour 1/2 the mixture into each pie shell.

Bake 30 minutes in the preheated oven, until a toothpick inserted in the center of a quiche comes out clean.

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Interview Skills

Mr. Parsons: Come in.

Rebecca Carlyle: Mr. Parsons?

Mr. Parsons: Ah, you must be Rebecca. Please do come in.

Rebecca Carlyle: Thank you for **making some time** to see me Mr. Parsons. **It's a pleasure** to meet you finally.

Mr. Parsons: The pleasure's all mine Rebecca. Have a seat please. Now would you like any **refreshments**? Tea or coffee?

Rebecca Carlyle: A coffee would be lovely thank you. Black, no sugar.

Mr. Parsons: No problem. Sally can we have two coffees please? One, no milk or sugar?

Sally: Certainly Mr. Parsons.

Mr. Parsons: So Rebecca, I understand you had a first **interview** with Miss Childs last week.

Rebecca Carlyle: Yes that's correct. She **filled me in** on the details of the job on the telephone.

Mr. Parsons: Great. Well, I'm glad to say she **recommended** you for a second **interview**, and here we are. Perhaps we can start by discussing your **background** and **resume** details a little?

Rebecca Carlyle: Yes, of course.

#### Key vocabulary

**make some time:** manage to find time

**it's a pleasure to:** it's happy to

**refreshment:** drinks

**interview:** a meeting at which people talk to each other

**fill me in:** give me more information

**recommend:** suggest

**background:** the experiences, knowledge, education of a person

**resume:** a short document describing your education, work history

#### Supplementary vocabulary

**introduction:** formally introducing yourself to someone

**business attire:** formal business clothes (usually a suit and tie)

**interviewer:** the person giving the interview

**interviewee:** the person being interviewed

**human resource department:** the department in charge of hiring new employees

(Source: irlanguage.com)

# National exhibition on hijab and dignity underway

**W O M E N** TEHRAN — The 11th national exhibition on hijab and dignity is being held at Tehran's Shahr-e Aftab Fairground.

The event, which opened on May 3 and runs through May 13, follows the aim of making people acquainted with Iranian-Islamic products, Fars quoted Hamid Qobadi, the secretary of the working group on fashion and cloths as saying.

The exhibition is being held simultaneous with the 30th International Book Fair -Iran's most important cultural and social event - in order to provide facilities for people to have easier access to the exhibition, Qobadi noted.

Meetings are being held on the sidelines of the exhibition to introduce the achievements of the Iranian-Islamic clothing industry, he said, adding that special books on hijab and dignity are being exhibited.

A reference book on fashion and cloths has been highly welcomed by the visitors, he noted.



## Roses in hand, Venezuelan women protesters face security forces

Dressed in white and chanting "Liberty!", tens of thousands of women opposed to Venezuela's socialist President Nicolas Maduro marched on Saturday, proffering roses to security forces who blocked their way.

The women's marches, which took place in most major cities around the South American oil producer, were the latest in five weeks of sustained protests against Maduro whom opponents decry as a dictator who has ruined the economy.

In Caracas, marchers sang the national anthem and shouted "We want elections!" They were halted at various points by lines of policewomen and National Guard troops with armored cars.

The opposition, which has majority support in Venezuela after years of being in the shadow of the ruling Socialist Party, is demanding that delayed state elections be held and the 2018 presidential vote be brought forward.

They also want the government to free scores of jailed activists, allow humanitarian aid from abroad to offset a brutal economic crisis, and respect the independence of the legislature where the opposition won a majority in 2015.

Highlighting vandalism and violence by young masked protesters, Maduro says opponents are seeking a coup with U.S. support and harbor "terrorists" and "murderers" in their ranks.

In response to the crisis, the 54-year-old successor to Hugo Chavez is setting up a super body known as a "constituent assembly" with powers to rewrite the constitution, shake up public powers, and potentially replace the legislature.

"This march is against opposition terrorism, they are destroying everything," said cook Fredesvilda Paulino,



A demonstrator holds a camera as she attends a women's march to protest against President Nicolas Maduro's government in Caracas, Venezuela May 6, 2017.

54, at a pro-government rally also in Caracas on Saturday where red-shirted women waved pro-Maduro flags and banners.

The women's marches were organized as part of an opposition attempt to vary tactics and keep momentum against Maduro.

Women have often been feeling the brunt of Venezuela's economic crisis due to widespread food and medicine shortages, huge lines at shops, soaring prices, and increasing hunger in the nation of 30 million people.

#### Thirty-seven deaths

Since the anti-Maduro protests began in early April, at least 37 people have died, with victims including supporters of both sides, bystanders and members of the security forces.

Opposition leaders say the constituent assembly is

a biased mechanism designed to keep an unpopular leader in power.

They say the government is to blame for violence by young protesters as authorities are refusing a free vote to resolve the crisis and are needlessly blocking and repressing marches.

"Just let us vote, and this will all end," said teacher Anlerisky Rosales, 22, in the opposition women's march in Caracas. "There is too much suffering in Venezuela. If we have to, we will give our lives in the street until Maduro goes."

Various female protesters marched topless with black face masks in mourning for the fatalities.

At one point, a female government official emerged from the security lines to receive a petition and talk with the demonstration leaders.

With Maduro's approval ratings at around 24 percent - less than half the level at the time of his narrow election victory in 2013 - and Venezuela suffering a fourth year of harrowing recession, the opposition's challenge is to keep up street pressure and draw in support from poor former "Chavista" sectors.

Officials are hoping they become exhausted and disillusioned, while highlighting the violence of young opposition hotheads to try to discredit the whole opposition.

Many Venezuelans are closely watching the armed forces, who have the potential to tip the balance if they disobey government instructions or give Maduro a nudge behind the scenes.

Top armed forces officials have been pledging loyalty in public, though opposition leader Henrique Capriles said on Friday that 85 military officials had been arrested for dissent.

(Source: Reuters)

## Doubts over Saudi order that 'eases' control over women



Saudi Arabia has some of the world's tightest restrictions on women

Saudi women no longer need a man's consent to carry out certain activities, local media reported on Friday, but activists said the royal order does not go far enough.

Saudi Arabia has some of the world's tightest restrictions on women, and is the only country where they are not allowed to drive.

Under the guardianship system a male family member, normally the father, husband or brother, must grant permission for a woman's study, travel and other activities.

But the Arab News said a royal decree issued by King Salman ordered that women are no longer required to obtain a guardian's consent for official services "unless there is a legal basis for this request" under Islamic law.

Government agencies were advised of this directive, the report said.

Other Saudi media including the Sabq online newspaper, which is close to authorities, have carried similar reports.

Sahar Hassan Nasief, a women's rights activist in the Red Sea city of Jeddah, welcomed royal attention to the issue but said it remained unclear what will change under the decree.

"We still need more. We still need to get rid of the guardianship completely,"

she told AFP.

Nassima al-Sadah, an activist in the city of Qatif, said she does not think the government is about to end guardianship.

"Maybe they will just reduce it," she said. Last year thousands of people signed a petition calling for an end to guardianship.

United Nations special rapporteur Philip Alston, on a visit to Saudi Arabia in January, said the guardianship system needs reform.

Activists say that even female prisoners have to be received by the guardian upon their release, meaning some have to languish in jail or a shelter beyond their sentences if the man does not want to accept them.

Although the government no longer requires guardian permission for women to work, Human Rights Watch said in an earlier report that many employers still demand guardian consent in order to hire a woman.

Some hospitals also require a guardian's approval before carrying out medical procedures, it said.

Activists say that if they have open-minded male family members, getting their consent is not a problem.

(Source: AFP)

## Only female candidate in S. Korea presidential race



Ms Sim Sang Jeung at a campaign rally in Seoul on Saturday. She is a former labour activist who is the leftwing Justice Party's candidate and is up against 12 men in the presidential race.

When Park Geun Hye was elected South Korea's first female president five years ago, she secured the largest vote share of the country's democratic era. But after her term ended in impeachment and disgrace, only one of the 13 candidates to succeed her is a woman.

Analysts say the near all-male panel - epitomized by rows of campaign posters dominated by middle-aged men in dark suits - demonstrates the enduringly patriarchal nature of Korean society.

The only exception is Ms Sim Sang Jeung, a former labor activist who is the leftwing Justice Party's candidate.

Park - the daughter of the late strongman Park Chung Hee - was ousted from power in March over a massive corruption and influence-peddling scandal centered on a secret confidante that prompted millions to take to the streets calling for her ouster.

She has been detained and is awaiting trial on charges including abuse of power and bribery. The public outrage unleashed a storm of sexist remarks online, such as: "Don't even dream about having a female president for the next 100 years."

Ms Sim condemns what she calls

a sexual double standard, saying no one took issue with the gender of two previous presidents who were imprisoned in the 1990s for their part in crushing the Gwangju Uprising against the military-backed dictatorship.

Ms Sim, who is married with a son, has no chance of victory at the ballot box, with South Korea's leading pollsters both putting her in fourth place in the final surveys of the campaign, on 7.3 percent according to Realmeter and 8 percent for Gallup Korea, far behind Democratic Party front runner Moon Jae In.

But the 58-year-old who once worked as a seamstress score well in debates and was the most vocal critic of Mr Hong Joon Pyo, the candidate of Park's conservative Liberty Korea Party, who is known as "Korea's Trump" for his outspoken rhetoric and sexist remarks and has been polling third. Mr Hong, 62, drew fire for saying "washing dishes is women's work" in an interview, and for bragging in his memoir about helping a college friend with an attempted date rape by drugging a woman.

Ms Sim targeted him repeatedly during a television debate until she forced out an apology.

(Source: The Strait Times)



# Israel PM tosses Hamas new policy document into waste basket

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has symbolically thrown into a bin a new policy paper issued by Hamas last week in which the Palestinian resistance movement accepts a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders.

Hamas announced its new political roadmap, which accepts the establishment of an independent Palestinian state along the 1967 borders in the Qatari capital of Doha on May 1. The new document, however, underscores Hamas's right to armed resistance against the Tel Aviv regime.

Following its announcement, the Tel Aviv regime referred to it as a smoke screen aimed at fooling the world.

Netanyahu, sitting behind his desk, crumpled what he said the "hateful document" into a ball and tossed it in a waste paper bin that he pulled up at the end of a 97-second video clip published on social media on Sunday.

During the video, he claimed that media outlets had been taken in by "fake news", accusing Hamas of lying to the world.

"The new Hamas document says that Israel has no right to exist, it says every inch of our land belongs to the Palestinians, it says there is no acceptable solution other than to remove Israel," Netanyahu said, claiming the new policy was aimed at destroying Israel.

The Palestinian resistance movement described Netanyahu's action as a "racial behavior".

Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said on his Twitter the move is the act of weak people and proves the document's strength and impact.

Hamas is a leading force in the fight against Israel. The Tel Aviv regime has waged three wars against the Palestinian territory since 2007, killing thousands of people.

The last war began in early July 2014 and ended on August 26 the same year. It killed nearly 2,200 Palestinians and wounded over 11,100 others.

Ismail Haniyeh was chosen on Saturday as the leader of the movement, replacing Khaled Meshaal.



## ■ Israeli embassy in Egypt closed for past 5 months

Elsewhere, Israel's embassy in the Egyptian capital Cairo has been closed for the past five months over alleged security issues in a move described by Egypt as "strange and inexplicable".

The Hebrew newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth reported that the security situation in Egypt prompted the closure of the embassy, with Israel's ambassador to Cairo, David Govrin, and his diplomatic staff working from Jerusalem al-Quds.

According to the report, the additional pay they receive for working abroad has been retroactively canceled for the months they've worked in Israel.

"This is an embassy that has been evacuated from the country in question," the ministry of foreign affairs said in a notice, citing the reason behind the cut.

A senior Egyptian Foreign Ministry official said, "Israel's conduct regarding the closed embassy is strange and inexplicable to me."

"Israel set several conditions to returning the ambassador and diplomat-

ic staff, and Cairo's security chiefs took these conditions very seriously and were committed to meeting them. But even following these talks, the ambassador has yet to return, and there is no date for the embassy to be reopened," the official said.

The Egyptian official further said the Israeli mission was supposed to return to Cairo several weeks ago, but it appeared that following attacks on Coptic churches, Israel went back on that decision.

"We have no new information about the Israeli mission returning to Cairo," the official said.

Egypt and Jordan are the only two Arab governments that have official diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv and host Israeli missions. The rest of the Arab governments have no diplomatic relations with the Israeli regime, and seek to portray themselves as Tel Aviv's traditional adversaries and upholders of the Palestinian cause.

Even so, reports have indicated that some of the governments, including the House of Saud regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have had secret relations with Tel Aviv, covertly

appeasing the regime.

## ■ Netanyahu's cabinet seeks to downgrade status of Arabic

Meantime, Israeli ministers have approved a controversial bill that will downgrade Arabic as an official language and define the country as the "national home of the Jewish people".

The Haaretz newspaper reported on Sunday that if the bill were to become law, Arabic would no longer be an official language and would instead be defined as having special status.

In the bill, Hebrew is defined as the "national language", which would become part of the country's so-called basic law, which is similar to a constitution, it said.

The legislation still has to go through further drafting by the justice ministry and pass several votes in parliament.

Critics have described the proposed legislation, which also declares that the "right to self-determination" in Israel is "unique to the Jewish people", as impinging on the rights of its Arab minority, who make up some 20 percent of the 8.7 million population.

Defining Israel as the "national home of the Jewish people" has also raised concerns among rights activists and others worried over discrimination and attempts to further mix religion and state.

Ayman Odeh, a parliament member who heads the mainly Arab Joint List alliance, said approving the bill would mean trampling on minority rights, adding it would "legally transform us into second-class citizens".

The bill was sponsored by Avi Dichter, a member of the Likud party of Benjamin Netanyahu, who said it was necessary to "set in law our national identity while remaining a democratic state".

Palestinian citizens of Israel allege widespread discrimination by Netanyahu's government.

(Source: agencies)

## Ex-Obama administration officials to testify in Trump-Russia probe

Two officials in former President Barack Obama's administration will testify in a Senate investigation into allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 United States election and possible collusion between President Donald Trump's campaign and Moscow.

James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence under Obama, and Sally Yates, who was Deputy Attorney General, will testify to the Senate Judiciary subcommittee on crime and terrorism, the first such public testimony by former officials from the Democratic administration in one of congressional probes on Russia.

Congressional committees began investigating after U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Russian President Vladimir Putin had ordered hacking of Democratic political groups to discredit the election and sway the voting toward Republican Trump, who won an upset victory in November.

Moscow has denied any such meddling. Trump also has dismissed the allegations, suggesting instead that Obama might have wiretapped his Trump Tower in New York or that China may have been behind the cyber-attacks. No evidence has been found to support either allegation.

The public hearing will be the first featuring testimony by Obama administration officials who have left government. Trump fired Yates from the Department of Justice in January, and Clapper retired on Jan. 20, when Trump was inaugurated.

Senator Lindsey Graham, the subcommittee's chairman who called the hearing is a Russia hawk and sometime critic of Trump who has been one of the leading



Republican voices calling for a thorough investigation of Russia and the election.

Yates is expected to tell the senators that on Jan. 26, when she was acting Attorney General, she had warned White House Counsel Don McGahn that then-National Security Adviser Michael Flynn had not told the truth about conversations he had with Sergei Kislyak, Moscow's Ambassador to Washington, about U.S. economic sanctions on Russia.

Flynn resigned after less than a month in office. The congressional hearings have been shadowed by allegations, mostly from Democrats, that lawmakers are too partisan to investigate effectively.

In the lead-up to hearing, Susan Rice, who was Obama's

national security adviser, declined an invitation to testify because it had come only from the Republican Graham and not Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, the subcommittee's ranking Democrat.

Her refusal was first reported by CNN. Rice's name was linked to the Russia investigation when Trump suggested she might have broken the law by asking intelligence analysts to reveal the name of a Trump associate mentioned in an intelligence report.

She denied doing anything inappropriate, and there is no evidence to substantiate Trump's allegation.

Trump tweeted on Thursday that it was "Not good!" that Rice had not agreed to testify.

The probe being led by Graham and Whitehouse is one of three main congressional investigations of Russia and the 2016 U.S. election. The FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and U.S. intelligence agencies are conducting separate investigations.

Clapper, Yates and another official who served under Obama, former CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) Director John Brennan, had been scheduled to testify to the House of Representatives intelligence committee in March, but that hearing was canceled by the panel's chairman, Republican Devin Nunes.

Nunes, a Trump ally, has since recused himself from the Russia investigation amid concerns that he was too close to the White House to lead a credible probe.

Yates, Clapper and Brennan are now due to appear at a public hearing of the House committee that has not been scheduled.

(Source: Reuters)

## Merkel's CDU wins elections in Schleswig-Holstein

Chancellor Angela Merkel's party has won elections in Germany's northern-most state, dealing a second consecutive blow to her Centre-left rivals.

Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) won 32.0 percent of the vote in the strongly Protestant state of Schleswig-Holstein, according to preliminary results released early on Monday.

The Social Democrats (SPD) - which was governing the state in a coalition with the Greens and SSW, a regional party that represents the Danish and Frisian minorities - won just 27.2 percent of the vote.

Schleswig-Holstein's CDU candidate Daniel Guenther, speaking after projected results were first announced, said that voters had made a clear decision against the incumbent state government, which he referred to as "the coalition of stagnation".

Voter participation on Sunday was at 64.2 percent, up four percentage points from the state's last elections in 2012.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party picked up 5.9 percent of the vote, meaning it will enter the state's legislature for the first time as it has passed the five percent threshold.

Once it does, the anti-immigrant party will sit in 12 of Germany's 16 state parliaments.

Joerg Meuthen, AfD's leader, welcomed the result and said the party would do even better in state polls in North Rhine Westphalia next week and in the national election in September.

Originally founded as an anti-euro party in 2013, the AfD is expected to enter the national parliament for the first time after September's election, but is treated as a pariah by established

political parties, which refuse to work with it.

The result is disappointing for the SPD, whose popular new leader Martin Schulz - the former head of the EU parliament - was expected to rally the party in the run-up to the September 24 general elections.

■ **Hellishly angry**  
Schulz said he was "hellishly angry" about losing to the CDU.

"This is really something that gets under the skin and makes us unhappy," he said.

"We had all expected a better result." The so-called Schulz effect failed its first electoral test in March in the small industrial state of Saarland in the southwest, and failed to grant the SPD in Schleswig-Holstein enough votes to continue its current coalition.

(Source: DPA)

## UN: 2m children displaced by South Sudan conflict

The civil war in South Sudan has forced more than two million children to flee their homes, according to two United Nations agencies.

Children make up 62 percent of the more than 1.8 million South Sudanese refugees who have arrived mainly in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan, says the UN children's fund, UNICEF, and the refugee agency, UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

More than a million children have, meanwhile, been internally displaced.

"No refugee crisis today worries me more than South Sudan," said Valentin Tapsoba, Africa director for UNHCR.

"That refugee children are becoming the defining face of this emergency is incredibly troubling."

South Sudan has been riven by a civil conflict since a split between President Salva Kiir and his former deputy, Riek Machar, escalated in December 2013.

Tens of thousands have been killed and 3.5 million displaced.

About 100,000 people are facing a famine and a million are on the brink of famine.

The UN announcements came on the same day that a monitoring group warned a third South Sudanese county is at risk of famine.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network said starvation is likely to occur in Koch county.

Famine already has been declared in the counties of Leer and Mayendit, with a million people said to be at risk.

The new report says famine is likely to spread during the lean season for farmers from July to September. It says that without humanitarian aid, famine could be declared in even more areas.

The African nation's civil war, now in its fourth year, has blocked aid to some regions.

The combination of fighting and famine in the world's youngest country has created one of the world's largest humanitarian crises.

Last month, the United States condemned Kiir for the state's "man-made" famine and ongoing conflict, urging him to fulfil a month-old pledge of a unilateral truce by ordering his troops back to their barracks.

"We must see a sign that progress is possible," Nikki Haley, U.S. ambassador to the UN, told a Security Council briefing on South Sudan on Tuesday.

"We must see that ceasefire implemented."

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## 11 migrants dead, 200 missing in Mediterranean sinkings

Eleven migrants have died and nearly 200 are missing after two boats sank off the coast of Libya, UN agencies said Monday citing survivors, in the latest such tragedy.

The first involved an inflatable craft which left Libya early Friday with 132 people on board, only to start deflating a few hours later, before overturning.

Some 50 survivors were picked up by a Danish container ship, the Alexander Maersk, which was alerted to divert by Italian coastguards and dropped them off on Sunday in Pozzallo, southern Sicily.

Representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) were able to meet them on Monday to hear their accounts.

Survivors told them that women and children were among those missing.

At the same time, the bodies of 10 women and one child were found Monday on a beach in Zawiya, 50 kilometers (31 miles) west of Tripoli, according to an official for the Libyan Red Crescent.

Then on Sunday seven migrants -- a woman and six men -- were rescued by Libyan fishermen and coastguards off the coast of the Libyan capital.

An IOM spokesman who met them said they had set out on a boat with at least 120 people on board, including about 30 women and nine children.

In all more than 6,000 migrants were rescued Friday and Saturday in international waters off the coast of Libya and brought to Italy, while several hundred were rescued in Libyan waters and taken back to Libya.

The number of people leaving Libya in the hope of starting a new life in Europe is up nearly 50 percent this year compared with the opening months of 2016.

With most departures coming in the warm summer months, the trend points to around 250,000 people arriving over the course of 2017. Some 500,000 migrants were registered in Italy in the three years spanning 2014-16.

(Source: AFP)

## Yemen cholera outbreak kills 25 people in a week: WHO

➔ The House of Saud regime war in Yemen has killed more than 10,000 people, left 7.4 million children in need of medical help, nearly 2.2 million malnourished, and around 462,000 at risk of severe acute malnutrition, according to the UN children's agency, UNICEF.

Since March 2015, Yemen has been heavily bombarded by Saudi regime warplanes as part of a brutal campaign against the impoverished country in an attempt to reinstall Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Yemen's president who has resigned and is a staunch ally of Riyadh, and crush the popular Ansarullah movement.

Latest tallies show that the imposed war has so far killed over 12,000 Yemenis and wounded thousands more. The Saudi aggression has also taken a heavy toll on the country's facilities and infrastructure, destroying many hospitals, schools, and factories.

(Source: agencies)



## Kante claims award double as Chelsea star named Footballer of the Year

Chelsea midfielder N'Golo Kante has followed up his PFA Player of the Year award with the Footballer of the Year award, decided by journalists.

The France international topped the poll of the 340-strong membership ahead of Blues team-mate Eden Hazard, with Tottenham midfielder Dele Alli in third place.



Between them, Blues duo Kante and Hazard, who was the 2015 Footballer of the Year, collected more than 65 per cent of the journalists' votes, which were spread over a record number of 17 different players.

Kante was instrumental in Leicester's shock Premier League triumph last season and following his £32million summer switch to west London, the midfielder looks set to collect a second successive championship medal with Chelsea now needing just two more victories to secure the title.

The 26-year-old will receive the prestigious FWA accolade, which has been awarded since 1948, at a gala dinner in London on May 18 when the association marks its 70th anniversary.

Kante said: "It is a fantastic honour to win this award. With so many great players in this Chelsea squad and in the Premier League, for the Football Writers' Association to name me their Footballer of the Year is a very proud moment in my career."

The FWA said a record 17 players received nominations, with Kante and Hazard together sweeping up 65% of the votes cast.

(Source: Eurosport)

## Arsenal want Monaco boss Wenger leaves this summer

Arsenal will reportedly make a move for Monaco boss Leonardo Jardim if Arsene Wenger leaves the club this summer.

The Frenchman is still yet to pen a new contract at the Emirates, despite his current deal expiring in two months.

Recent reports have stressed Wenger is still likely to agree a two-year extension with Arsenal, which would extend his stay until June 2019.

However, according to Telefoot, in case the 67-year-old does leave, the Gunners have put Jardim at the top of their shortlist.

The Portuguese manager has worked wonders at Monaco this season, guiding them to the Champions League semi-finals and the top of Ligue 1.

Arsenal chiefs have reportedly been impressed with the 42-year-old and believe he is the man to replace Wenger if he leaves.

(Source: Talksport)

## Novak Djokovic drops hint over new super coach

Novak Djokovic has hinted at bringing in a big name as coach after he took the surprising decision to part with his entire backroom team.

The world No 2 ended his long-term partnership with coach Marian Vajda and other members of his team after last month's Monte Carlo Masters.

Sir Andy Murray has climbed to the top of the rankings under Ivan Lendl, while Rafael Nadal hired former world No 1 Carlos Moya for this season.

And Serbian star Djokovic has suggested he may too turn to a former player as he bids to rediscover the winning spark after an underwhelming start to 2017.

"It's going to be someone that has been through similar experiences like I have, the 29-year-old said.

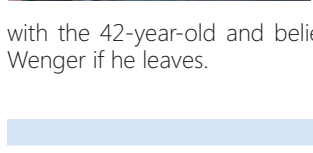
"Not too many people in the past in tennis have managed to get to that stage and play at that level, so I'll see.

"I'm thinking slowly and thoroughly about it. I don't want to take things with a rush.

"I also know that I'll not stay by myself without a tennis coach for too long. I'm sure difficult paths lead to beautiful destinations, so I'm sticking with that."

Djokovic, who will defend his French Open title in little over two weeks, will compete next at the Madrid Masters.

(Source: Metro)



# Qatar Airways signs World Cup sponsorship deal with FIFA

Qatar Airways said it has signed a deal with global soccer body FIFA to be one of the official sponsors and the official airline of the next two World Cups, in Russia and Qatar.

The state-owned carrier did not disclose the value of the deal, which it said would cover the Confederations Cup 2017, the 2018 World Cup in Russia, the Club World Cup and the Women's World Cup in 2019 and the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

The airline joins Coca-Cola, Gazprom, Chinese conglomerate Wanda Group, Adidas, Visa and Hyundai as official partners of FIFA, the highest of the three tiers of FIFA sponsorship.

Rival Middle East carrier Emirates was a FIFA sponsor until 2014 when it said it would not renew its contract following months of calls for sponsors to respond robustly to allegations of bribery to secure the 2022 World Cup for Qatar.

Dubai-based Emirates said in 2015 it could be interested in renewing a deal to sponsor the World Cup in the future. FIFA said in a statement that the deal "represents one of the biggest sporting sponsorships in the world and the largest in the history of Qatar Airways."

Qatar Airways is a major sponsor of Spanish football team Barcelona, and sponsors other sporting teams and events.

Swiss-based FIFA, whose reputation has been tarnished by the worst corruption scandal in its history, still has a large number of vacant slots for its second tier World Cup sponsors and third tier regional supporters.

Several dozen soccer officials, including several occupying senior FIFA positions, were indicted in the United States in 2015 on corruption-related charges, while disgraced former FIFA president Sepp Blatter, who was not among them, was banned in 2015 for six years by FIFA's own ethics committee for ethics violations at the height of the scandal.

FIFA needs sponsorship to help reach its target of a \$100



million surplus for the four-yearly cycle ending at the 2018 World Cup.

It is also under pressure to increase its revenue after president Gianni Infantino, elected last year, promised to increase payouts to its 211 member federations to develop the sport.

FIFA made a loss of \$391 million in 2016, which it blamed partly on increased legal costs following the scandal, and has forecast a \$489 million loss in 2017 but then expects to turn a \$1.07 billion profit in 2018 when the World Cup is held in Russia.

(Source: Reuters)

## Monaco eye history-making comeback against Juventus

Juventus host AS Monaco in the second leg of their UEFA Champions League semi-final tonight, with one foot already in the final after a 2-0 win in France last week.

A Gonzalo Higuain brace gave the Bianconeri a comfortable cushion after the first leg, and the Serie A giants should finish the job at Juventus Stadium in Turin.

Monaco's only hope is their own ability to get goals in bunches, although even a team as free-scoring as this one will struggle to break down Juve's savvy defence.

Before a preview and a look at the team

news, here are the schedule and viewing details:

The onus is on Monaco to get goals early in Turin. Fortunately, it's something the Ligue 1 leaders can do.

Monaco won 3-0 in Nancy on Saturday to stay top of Ligue 1. Scoring three is something manager Leonardo Jardim's side has made a habit of this season, per the Champions League official Twitter account:

One of the key members of Monaco's prolific forward line has been 18-year-old striker Kylian Mbappe. The precocious tal-

ent has netted 24 goals in all competitions this season, including five in the Champions League, per WhoScored.com.

Mbappe's star is on the rise, but Higuain is already an established goal-getter. He followed his brace in Monaco by scoring the equaliser for Juventus in Saturday's 1-1 draw against Torino.

Higuain will again count on supply from Juve's pillars of creativity—classy forward Paulo Dybala and mercurial midfielder schemer Miralem Pjanic.

The latter could boss this game if Monaco

are missing a key cog from their midfield. Physical holding player Tiemoue Bakayoko is listed as doubtful, per the tournament's official website.

Not having Bakayoko's power and defensive instincts would be a big miss for a Monaco side that cannot afford to conceded another goal.

Ultimately, though, the task looks too tough for Monaco to turn around a two-goal deficit against a side as well-drilled as Juve. Expect the Serie A leaders to reach their second Champions League final in three seasons.

(Source: Bleacherreport)

## Buffon's final wish



Ready to make his 150th UEFA club competition appearance in the semi-final decider, Gianluigi Buffon recalled past near misses, and said what it would mean to finally win the UEFA Champions League.

On Monaco: They play positive, energetic football and they're a sparkling, physical side with quality players and a lot of experience. We know that if we want to get another shot at winning the Champions League, we have to overcome an obstacle that'll be at least as tricky as Barcelona in footballing terms.

On feeling his age at 39: I was thinking the other day that I've managed to span almost three generations. When I started playing, you still had guys born in the end of

the '50s and the '60s—and I'll finish with guys born in the 2000s. It's a huge span of time! It's nice knowing that I'm playing with the future Messis, Cristiano Ronaldos and Neymars.

On what it would mean to finally lift the trophy: It would mean a lot for me. It would be the greatest joy of my career, together with the [2006] World Cup, because it would almost be a reward—the end of a very difficult road paved by bravery, stubbornness and hard work.

I have always wanted to win it and I have always been convinced that I can do it together with my team, the fans, my colleagues. That would be great—we can talk about it later if it happens!

(Source: UEFA)

## Juventus player stops interview after hearing 'racist' insult



Juventus' Morocco defender Medhi Benatia cut short a post-match television interview after claiming to hear a racist insult in his earpiece.

The France-born player, 30, was speaking to Italian broadcaster Rai after Saturday's 1-1 draw with Torino.

"What stupid person is speaking?" said Benatia before ending the interview.

The incident comes a week after another Serie A player, Pescara's Sulley Muntari, walked off the pitch after claiming he was being racially abused.

Benatia, who is on loan at Juventus from Bayern Munich, has not commented publicly on what happened during the television interview.

The broadcaster has since apologised and promised to find out who made the "unacceptable" comments.

"Rai is sincerely saddened by the deplorable episode of racism involving the Juventus player during the broadcast of Champagne Football," it said on Sunday, adding that the insult had not been heard by the viewers.

Benatia has made 17 league and cup appearances for Juventus, who are closing in on a sixth successive Serie A title and are in the Champions League semi-finals.

Juventus released a statement, saying: "Following the regrettable insult Medhi Benatia heard through his earpiece during Calcio Champagne, Juventus Football Club wishes to express its concern over the incident."

"While acknowledging the Rai statement expressing solidarity, everyone - and the player first and foremost - deserves an explanation about what occurred."

(Source: BBC)

## Schumacher eyeing F1 one step at a time

Mick Schumacher insists he is in no rush to become the next teenager in F1.

As teens, Max Verstappen and Lance Stroll both powered straight out of European F3 onto the formula one grid.

But Schumacher, son of the F1 legend Michael Schumacher, says he is in no such rush.

"I've just come into Formula 3 — my second weekend is just over, the 18-year-old German told the ARD broadcaster.

"For me it's about taking one step at a time. I cannot say anything concrete yet."

But Schumacher said he already feels comfortable in the highly competitive junior series, although he is currently just fifth overall.

"I have no real trouble," he said. "The car is extremely fast — I think almost as fast as DTM. It's extremely fun." Norbert Haug, the former Mercedes F1 chief, hailed Schumacher's progress so far.

"He is very, very controlled, he looks very good and I have a good feeling," he said. "He drives close to the limit but not beyond it."

"We can all expect a great deal from him."

(Source: grandprix.com)





# Iran beach soccer make history to finish third

Iran ended their Bahamas 2017 campaign on a high with a 5-3 win against Italy in the play-off for third place to become Asia's highest ever finishers at the Beach Soccer World Cup.

These two teams met during the group stage at Bahamas 2017 with Italy edging Iran 5-4 in a thrilling match.

Mohammad Ahmadzadeh scored his seventh goal of the tournament when he put away a second-chance opportunity after Moslem Mesigar's shot was parried into his path.

Ahmadzadeh scored his second of the match early in the second period on another second-chance opportunity to take his overall tally to eight.

Mohammad Mokhtari then struck a phenomenal overhead kick to give Iran a three-goal cushion, which was fitting as Iran have attempted the most overhead kicks of anyone in the Bahamas.

Italy got back into the match courtesy of none other than Gabriele Gori. Two goals took him on to 17 - the second a curling effort from a set piece - to move him beyond Dejan Stankovic into second place for biggest hauls at a single competition. Less than a minute later, Mesigar scored his second of the tournament.

Dario Ramacciotti brought the Azzurri back to within one goal with a well-placed, close range header. But it wasn't enough for the Italians as Ahmadzadeh completed his hat-trick with a late penalty to ultimately seal Iran's place in the record books.

(Source: FIFA)



## Iranian duo receive two prestigious awards

**S P O R T S** Mohammad Mesk Ahmadzadeh and Peyman Hosseini received two noticeable awards in the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Bahamas 2017.

Ahmadzadeh won the adidas Golden Ball after eye-catching performance in the competition.

Iran captain also won adidas Bronze Scorer award after netting nine goals in the event.

The adidas Gold Scorer award went to Gabriele Gori from Italy who scored 17 goals.

Furthermore, Iran goalkeeper Peyman Hosseini won adidas Golden Glove award after shining at the competition.

Hosseini helped Iran finish third in the Beach Soccer World Cup.

Brazil, who won the title after beating Tahiti 6-0, won the Fair Play award.



## President Rouhani congratulates Iranian medalists in Beach Soccer World Cup

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani offered his congratulations to the people and sports community over the country's winning of third place in FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup, which made the Islamic Republic Asia's highest ever finisher in the history of the tournament.

In a message issued on Monday, Rouhani praised the Iranian national team for ending FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Bahamas 2017 on a high with a 5-3 win against Italy in the play-off for third place.

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Mohammad Ahmadzadeh scored his seventh goal of the tournament when he put away a second-chance opportunity after Moslem Mesigar's shot was parried into his path.

Ahmadzadeh scored his second of the match early in the second period on another second-chance opportunity to take his tournament tally to eight.

Mohammad Mokhtari then scored a phenomenal overhead kick to give Iran a three-goal cushion, which was fitting as Iran has attempted the most overhead kicks this tournament.

Italy got back into the match courtesy of none

other than Gabriele Gori, who tied Dejan Stankovic in second place on the all-time goals in a single tournament record (16). Gori then made it 17 for the tournament with a curling effort from a set piece. Less than a minute later, Mesigar scored his second of the tournament.

Dario Ramacciotti brought the Azzurri back to within one goal with a well-placed, close range header. But it wasn't enough for the Italians as Ahmadzadeh completed his hat-trick with a late penalty to ultimately make history for Iran.

(Source: Tasnim)

## Iran learn rivals at FIBA Basketball World Cup Qualifiers

**S P O R T S** Iran basketball team have been drawn to Group D of the Asian qualifiers of the 2019 FIBA World Cup.

Iran were drawn with Qatar, as well as Kazakhstan and Iraq in Group D of the Asian qualifiers for the competition in China.

The Asian Region will be merged with Oceania Region that is why Australia and New Zealand will be part of the FIBA World Cup Asian Qualifiers.

The Asian qualifying event will run through February 2019 with six window periods. Competing teams play two games in each window.

2019 FIBA World Cup Asian Qualifiers Groups

ASIAN QUALIFIERS			
GROUP A	GROUP B	GROUP C	GROUP D
1 CHN	1 JPN	1 SYR	1 IRQ
2 NZL	2 TPE	2 LBN	2 QAT
3 KOR	3 AUS	3 IND	3 KAZ
4 HKG	4 PHI	4 JOR	4 IRI

Group A: China, New Zealand, South Korea, Hong Kong  
Group B: Japan, Chinese Taipei, Australia, the Philippines

Group C: Syria, Lebanon, India, Jordan  
Group D: Iran, Qatar, Kazakhstan, Iraq

The top seven teams will advance to the 2019 FIBA World Cup which will be held in China from August 31 to September 15.

The FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019 will see seven teams qualify directly for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, with the remaining four and the host to be determined through four Olympic Qualifying Tournaments in 2020.

## Formula 1 team payments for 2017 revealed

Ferrari will receive the largest share of revenues allocated for Formula 1 teams despite finishing third in the 2016 constructors' championship, Autosport can reveal.

At the start of each season, Formula One Management projects revenues from three streams - hosting fees, media

rights and other income avenues, such as hospitality and trackside sponsorship.

FOM's 2017 turnover is estimated at \$1.83bn, with underlying revenues estimated at \$1.38bn.

It then distributes approximately 68% of projected underlying revenues among the qualifying teams.

That figure of \$940m is 3.5% down on last year's figure due to anticipated increases in marketing costs in line with FOM owner Liberty's plans, and a reduction in the number of grands prix from 21 to 20.

Revenues are distributed across the 10 teams through nine monthly payments

from April, with a final "check" payment - when definitive revenues have been calculated - in March 2018.

The amount each team receives is based on a series of factors, including performance over the course of the season, past success and special agreements.

(Source: autosport)

## Man United's Zlatan Ibrahimovic has doctors marvelling at recovery - agent

Zlatan Ibrahimovic's agent has raised hope the Manchester United striker will get back to his best following knee surgery after revealing doctors have been stunned by the Swede's progress.

Ibrahimovic, 35, underwent an operation on damaged knee ligaments in the United States a fortnight ago and is set to miss the rest of the season and the start of the next campaign.

But Mino Raiola has suggested the forward stands a good chance of resuming his playing career once he has fully recovered.

"His knee is so strong that the doctors said they had never seen anything like it," Raiola told Swedish newspaper Expressen.

"He has a knee that it is almost impossible for a football player with a 20-year career to have. It was quite clean, there was no harm in it.



"Zlatan is so strong that the doctor wants him back after his career to research on him.

"They work in the world's best research institutions for the knees and ligaments.

"They research a lot on the subject and that is why they are better than everyone else. And the doctors want back Zlatan to do research on him.

"So after Zlatan's career, we will go back and open him up again to do research on his ligaments."

Ibrahimovic scored 28 goals in 46 games for United following his move from Paris Saint-Germain before his season was cut short last month. His long-term future is yet to be decided, with his one-year contract at Old Trafford due to expire this summer.

The former Barcelona and AC Milan striker had yet to decide whether to extend his stay at Old Trafford before suffering his injury against Anderlecht.

Sources have told ESPN FC a new one-year deal to stay at the club is still on the table, while Ibrahimovic is a target for Major League Soccer side LA Galaxy.

(Source: Soccermet)

## Esteghlal Khuzestan on the verge of qualifying for ACL last 16 for first time

Tournament debutants Esteghlal Khuzestan require a point against Group B's bottom side Al Jazira on Tuesday to qualify for the last 16 of the 2017 AFC Champions League at the first time of asking.

After winning their opening two games on the continent, the Iranian side have drawn two and lost one ahead of the fixture at Ghadir Stadium. But a two-point lead over third-placed Al Fateh, coupled with a better head-to-head record, means a draw against already eliminated Al Jazira will suffice.



Salman Bahrani's stoppage-time equaliser against Al Fateh in a 1-1 draw two weeks ago has left the hosts' qualification prospects in their own hands and they warmed up for the clash with a 2-1 victory over Saba Qom in the Iranian Pro League on Thursday, although Farshad Salarvand sits out through suspension.

The visitors' form on the continent has been woeful, in stark contrast to a domestic campaign that saw them wrap up the UAE League with several games to spare. Two wins from two domestically since their last Group B game means the Emirati team go into the tie on form, but both Yaqoub Al Hosani and Fares Juma are suspended.

(Source: AFC)

## ACL: Iran's Esteghlal need a point against Al Taawoun to advance

Esteghlal will progress to the 2017 AFC Champions League Round of 16 should they claim a point against Al Taawoun at Al Ahli SC Stadium on Tuesday.

Al Taawoun sit three points adrift of second-placed Esteghlal in Group A, meaning a win would move the Saudi outfit level with their opponents on eight points, although a four-goal winning margin is required in order to gain the superior head-to-head record after Esteghlal ran out 3-0 victors in the corresponding fixture in February.

Kaveh Rezaei's second-half equaliser against Al Ahli of the United Arab Emirates two weeks ago secured a 1-1 draw and took Esteghlal within a point of advancing, before the Tehran-based team won two on the bounce in the Iranian Pro League.

Al Taawoun, who suffered a 2-1 defeat to Al Ahli in the Saudi Professional League on Friday, played out one of the most entertaining matches of the tournament on Matchday Five as Ricardo Machado's injury-time equaliser ensured a 4-4 draw with Lokomotiv. They now must win to have any chance of progression, but will have to do so without the suspended Naif Mousa.

(Source: AFC)

## Iran U-20 football team held by Senegal

Iran U-20 football team was held to a 1-1 draw by Senegal in a friendly match on Sunday.

The match which was held in Tehran's Shahre Qods Stadium, was as part of preparation for the 2017 FIFA U-20 World Cup in South Korea.

Iran U-20 football team will play Senegal on Friday in Karaj's Enghelab Stadium.

Amirhossein Peyrovani's boys have been drawn against two-time world champion Portugal, Zambia and Costa Rica in Group C of the FIFA U-20 World Cup.

Senegal is in Group F along with Ecuador, USA and Saudi Arabia. The 2017 FIFA U-20 World Cup will be played in six venues across Korea Republic from May 20 to June 11.

(Source: Tasnim)

## Iran lose to Russia in Victory Day Women Cup

Iran suffered second defeat in the 8th International Futsal Tournament for Women National Teams on Sunday.

The Iranian team lost to Russia 4-0 at the Aquarium Hotel, Crocus Expo in Krasnogorsk, Russia.

In another match, Spain humiliated the Czech Republic 8-1.

The Iranian women team started the four-day campaign with a 7-0 defeat against Spain.

Iran will play the Czech Republic on Tuesday.

The tournament, which has brought Russia, Iran, Spain and the Czech Republic, is also known as Victory Day Women Cup 2017.

(Source: Tasnim)





INTERNATIONAL DAILY  
www.tehrantimes.com

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Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807  
Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603  
www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co. Tel: 88911433  
Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com  
Printed at: Kayhan - ISSN: 1017-94

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran  
P.O. Box: 14155-4843  
Zip Code: 1599814713



## Guerra Edizioni exec calls Tehran book fair big chance for Italian publishers

In her visit to the fair, Chellini also plans to assess the new grounds for working in Iran.

"In the past, we had a very good relationship and sent materials to teach the Italian language, and now after long period has elapsed, I am here to see what is the status of Italian language studies here, because I did not know that there were Italian university departments and Italian schools here in Tehran," she said.



She said that she knows very little about Iran's publishing industry.

"In fact, I was curious to come here and see the fair. I found out that you have a huge publication industry and I was surprised to see how big this fair is," she said.

"Normally with the exception of the Frankfurt Book Fair, book fairs are not this big, but I found a lot of items especially for children here and I am really very surprised," she noted.

She also expressed her interest in cooperating with Iranian publishers because she thinks that the best way for cooperation is working on joint projects.

"Previously in India, we co-published an Italian language book that was very successful, and I think it could be very interesting to manage publishing something here with Iranian publishers," she said.

"People from the place know exactly what they need, what they can publish and what is better not to publish, and they have a perfect eye on the situation," she added.

Guerra Edizioni also imports books from other countries to be used at Italian educational centers.

"For example, we brought some authentic books from Japan to Italy, and we would also like to do that with other languages like the Persian language," she said.

"I would come back to Iran not for the fair but to see the country," that is the last sentence the kind lady said at the end of her words.

About 30 Italian publishing firms, including Alma Edizioni, Armando Publishing House, Bompiani, Francesco Brioschi Editore and Dami International, are participating in the Tehran International Book Fair, which will run until May 13 at the Shahr-e Aftab Fairground.

## Tehran exhibit to spotlight new styles in contemporary Iranian art

A group exhibition opening at the gallery of Tehran's Mellat Cinema Complex this weekend will feature new styles in the contemporary Iranian art.



Paintings and sculptures by a large number of artists, including Nasim Abolqasem, Mahdieh Pazuki, Keyvan Asgari, Zahra Qiasi, Banafsheh Hemati and Bita Vakili, have been selected for the exhibition titled "Trends and Approaches in Contemporary Iranian Art".

The showcase, which will be held from May 11 to June 9, has been organized under the auspices of the Mandegar Art and Culture Institute and the Beautification Organization of the Tehran Municipality.

## NEWS IN BRIEF



### Italian festival to screen Iranian shorts

A lineup of three Iranian films will go on screen at the ShortS International Film Festival, which will be held in Trieste, Italy from July 1 to 8.

The lineup includes "Out of This" by Keyvan Mohseni, "Red" by Ario Saffarzadegan and "Red Point" by Motahareh Ahmadpur.

# Hungarian association keen to work with Iranian publishers on children's books

**CULTURE TEHRAN** — The president of the Association of Hungarian Publishers' and Booksellers' Association, Andras Sandor Kocsis, has said that they are eager to collaborate with Iranian publishers on children's books.

Iran and Hungary can focus their collaboration on children's publications, he told the Persian service of MNA at the Tehran International Book Fair on Sunday.

He also added that children's books translated from other languages are most welcome.

Kocsis expressed his hope that he could make pacts with Iranian publishers in this field before the fair wraps up.

He described Iranian children's books and their illustrations as amazing and Hungarian publishers care a lot about illustrations in children's books.

According to Kocsis, about 400 publishing companies are working in his country. However, 50 percent of the country's publishing industry is dominated by only 12 publishers, he said.

The 30th edition of the Tehran International Book Fair will come to an end this Friday.



The president of the Association of Hungarian Publishers' and Booksellers' Association, Andras Sandor Kocsis, in an undated photo

## Cartoonist Kambiz Derambakhsh holds second cut-rate exhibit

**ART TEHRAN** — Kambiz Derambakhsh, a cartoonist famous for his quick and simple cartoons, plans to hold his second cut-rate exhibit, which will open on Friday.

A collection of photos, cartoons, comic strips and paintings will be showcased at the exhibition, which will be organized at Tehran's Art Center.

The works will be offered at different prices beginning with 1,000,000 rials (about \$27).

Last year, the cartoonist exhibited his first exhibit with a collection of 500 works at Aryana Gallery.

Derambakhsh has previously said



that he does not like to pile up works on his desk at home and prefers to give art enthusiasts a chance to have one of them in their homes.

The Art Center is located at North Salimi St., Andarzgu Blvd. in the Farmanieh neighborhood.

## Street artist Banksy tackles Brexit in Dover mural

**DOVER (Reuters)** — British street artist Banksy has taken on Brexit with a mural of a workman chipping away one of the 12 gold stars on the flag of the European Union on a wall in Dover, the ferry port that connects England with Calais in France.

Banksy, whose identity is a closely guarded secret, posted pictures of the work, which appeared overnight, on his official Instagram feed on Sunday, the day of the French presidential election.

His representative also confirmed it was by Banksy. Dover and its white cliffs, which are seen by many people arriving in and departing from Britain every year, have loomed large in media coverage of

Brexit. The Sun newspaper, which campaigned for "leave", projected the message "Dover & out" on the cliffs on March 24, the day that British Prime Minister Theresa May triggered the start of Britain's exit from the EU.

In 2015, Banksy created four artworks at the Jungle migrant camp in Calais, including one featuring Apple founder Steve Jobs, in a reference to his background as the son of a Syrian migrant.

In March he created the Walled Off Hotel in Bethlehem, a quirky guesthouse that stands close to Israel's towering security barrier in the occupied West Bank.

## Director Francis Ford Coppola weighs in on preserving net neutrality

**NEW YORK (Reuters)** — Francis Ford Coppola, director of classic films such as "The Godfather" and "Apocalypse Now," has sent a letter to the top U.S. telecommunications regulator to urge support for "net neutrality," which prevents internet companies from blocking, throttling or giving "fast lanes" to particular websites.

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai, named by President Donald Trump in January, has said that he plans to scrap a 2015 internet conduct standard aimed at preventing broadband providers from favoring their content over others.

In the letter released late on Sunday by advocacy group Public Knowledge, the Oscar-winning filmmaker said the internet was designed so it would not be dominated by giant corporations.

"Trusting the leadership of huge corporations with

America's artistic heritage is a crucial mistake, and can already be seen in the 'monotony' of contemporary major studio cinema," Coppola wrote.

"The changes you are making at the FCC will only make the fragile balance between artist and businessman more impossible to maintain. I assure you that none of the films that I or my contemporaries are known and celebrated for could exist today in such a climate," he wrote in the brief letter.

Big web companies like Facebook Inc, Alphabet Inc and others back net neutrality rules, saying they guarantee equal access to the internet.

Internet service providers such as AT&T Inc, Verizon Communications Inc and Comcast Corp oppose net neutrality rules, saying they made it harder to manage internet traffic and discouraged investment in improving access.



Director Francis Ford Coppola places his handprints in cement during a ceremony in the forecourt of the TCL Chinese theatre in Hollywood, U.S., April 29, 2016. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

## Passionate speeches take spotlight at MTV Movie and TV awards

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Spirited speeches were front and center at the MTV Movie and TV awards on Sunday, where the night's top winners at the usually irreverent awards show took to the stage to champion diversity and inclusion.

A rare spell of wet weather in Los Angeles shut down the red carpet before the awards show, but inside, host Adam Devine literally set the stage on fire as he kicked off MTV's first awards celebrating both television and films.

Streaming platform Netflix enjoyed the night's biggest spotlight when its 1980s sci-fi series "Stranger Things" won the inaugural Show of the Year award.

"Thank you to Netflix, where would we be without Netflix? Like literally, when you're having a bad day, what do



2017 MTV Movie and TV Awards - Show - Los Angeles, U.S., 07/05/2017 - The cast of 'Stranger Things' accept the award for 'Show of the Year.' (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

you do when you go home?" "Stranger Things" star Caleb McLaughlin said on stage, as the audience shouted back "Watch Netflix".

Disney's live-action fairytale "Beauty and the Beast" won Best Movie and

director Bill Condon thanked the female audience, saying "women have proven that they are huge and powerful audience and it's going to change the movie business."

MTV did away with gender-specific acting categories this year for its fan-voted awards, where "Beauty and the Beast" star Emma Watson won best actor in a movie and "Stranger Things" newcomer Millie Bobby Brown, 13, won best actor in a show.

"Acting is about the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and that doesn't need to be separated into two different categories," Watson said on stage.

But this year's show saw presenters and winners get passionate about issues on stage.

U.S. Representative Maxine Waters

presented the award for Best Fight Against the System and said each of the nominees "pushes back against the bullies and uses their platform to inspire us all." The award went to "Hidden Figures," the story of three black female NASA mathematicians.

"Logan" stars Hugh Jackman and newcomer Dafne Keen won Best Duo, "Get Out" star Daniel Kaluuya won the Next Generation award, while NBC family drama "This is Us" won Best Tearjerker.

The MTV Generation Award went to the "Fast and Furious" action franchise and star Vin Diesel thanked "a generation that was willing to accept this multicultural franchise where it didn't matter what color your skin was or what country you're from - when you're family, you're family."

## "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2" blasts off with \$145m debut

**NEW YORK (AP)** — "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2" rocketed to an estimated \$145 million debut in North America, kicking off Hollywood's summer movie season with something the movie business has been craving: a sequel more successful than the original.

Director James Gunn's second "Guardians" film opened 54 percent higher than the 2014 runaway hit, according to studio estimates Sunday.

That release, which introduced the intergalactic band of misfits played by Chris Pratt, Zoe Saldana, Dave Bautista, Vin Diesel and Bradley Cooper, debuted with \$94 million in its first weekend.

Once a little-known, oddball property in Marvel's vault, the "Guardians of the Galaxy" have grown into one of the

comic-book factory's biggest brands.

The Walt Disney Co. validated the rise of "Guardians," too, by moving it from August (when the original opened) to the first weekend in May. Marvel has used the same weekend to effectively launch the summer season for the last decade.

The opening for "Guardians Vol. 2," made for about \$200 million, is the second largest of the year, following Disney's "Beauty and the Beast" (\$174.8 million). But it also turns back the tide of underperforming sequels, a developing scourge to Hollywood. Last summer saw a litany of sequels that failed to live up to earlier installments.

"We spent a lot of time looking at sequels and the idea of sequel-itis," said

David Hollis, distribution chief for Disney. "Really, poor quality films have been the thing that has, more than anything, been rejected by consumers over time. The ambition here was to make something that was unbelievably fresh and exciting. As long as we can continue to deliver high-quality storytelling, high-quality world-creation, we'll be in great shape."

"Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2" scored on that front, landing an A CinemaScore from audiences and an 82 percent "fresh" rating from critics on Rotten Tomatoes. In two weeks of international release, the film has also made \$269 million overseas. A third "Guardians" is already planned, as are crossovers with Marvel's Avengers.

But whether "Guardians" can turn

the tide for summer sequels will be a much-followed story line as the season progresses. The bottom line of just about every studio depends on it.

On the horizon are big-budget sequels like "Alien: Covenant," "Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales," "Cars 3," "Transformers: The Last Knight," "Despicable Me 3" and "War for the Planet of the Apes."

"I think this is going to be one of the biggest summers ever. Obviously last summer was a bummer. We had numerous sequels - well over a dozen - that didn't live up to the promise of their immediate predecessor," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst for comScore. "Summer 2017 gets us back on track. There's a lot out there."