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South Pars Gas Field

World officials continue congratulating Rouhani

By Negar Asadi

TEHRAN — Messages of congratulation from various countries' officials are continually pouring in on re-election of Hassan Rouhani as president.

Rouhani, who contested the presidential post for a second term, won a landslide victory in the Friday polls, garnering 23,549,616 votes out of a total of 41,22,131.

French, Japanese, Spanish, Croatian, Afghan, Belarussian and Iraqi leaders as well as the German, British and Canadian foreign ministers are among senior officials sending congratulations to Rouhani on his reelection as president.

French President Emmanuel Macron issued a statement congratulating Rouhani.

"The re-election of President Rouhani strengthens the hope that his government will abide accurately by the historic agreement of July 14, 2015, which allowed to regulate through the diplomatic means the disagreements on the nuclear issue and to engage in the new stage of the relations between Iran and the international community. France, in turn, will continue to exercise vigilance over the strict implementation of [the agreement's] elements," the statement distributed by Macron's press office read. **→2**

Tillerson doesn't rule out talk with Zarif 'at the right time'

POLITICS

TEHRAN — Just two days after more than 23 million Iranians handed a second term to incumbent moderate President Hassan Rouhani, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said he'll talk with his Iranian counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif "at the right time".

"I've never shut off the phone to anyone that wants to talk or have a productive conversation," Tillerson said in Riyadh of Zarif. "At this point, I have no plans to call my counterpart in Iran, although in all likelihood, we will talk at the right time."

Tillerson was making the comments in Saudi Arabia at a joint press confer-

ence with Saudi Foreign Minister Adel Bin Ahmed al-Jubeir.

During his presidential campaigns, Rouhani pledged to remove U.S. non-nuclear sanctions on Iran, interpreted as a signal to the Trump administration.

Tillerson, however, launched "baseless" accusations against Iran, saying he wants reelected Rouhani to stop backing "destabilizing forces" in the Middle East.

This is while Zarif advised U.S. President Donald Trump to discuss how to avoid another September 11 attack with the Saudi hosts of his first official visit abroad. **→2**

Zarif urges Trump to discuss avoiding another 9/11 with Saudis

Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, advised U.S. President Donald Trump to discuss how to avoid another September 11 attack with the Saudi hosts of his first official visit abroad, Zarif wrote in an editorial published on Sunday.

Critics of Saudi Arabia say its strict view of Islam fuels extremism, called takfir, and some even accuse the kingdom of responsibility for the September 11 attacks.

Saudi Arabia denies providing any support for the 19 hijackers - most of whom were Saudi citizens - who killed nearly 3,000 people in 2001.

"(Trump) must enter into dialogue with them about ways to prevent terrorists and takfiris from continuing to fuel the fire in the region and repeating the likes of the Septem-

ber 11 incident by their sponsors in Western countries," Zarif wrote for the website of the London-based Al Araby Al-Jadeed news network.

At a campaign event last February, Trump himself suggested to supporters that the kingdom may be behind the attacks.

"You will find out who really knocked down the World Trade Center because they have papers out there that are very secret. You may find it's the Saudis, okay, but you will find out."

But since his election, Trump has put an end to his sharp commentary in public and on his twitter account about the key U.S. ally and the world's top oil exporter.

Separately, a senior Iranian military official rejected a call by U.S. Secretary of State Rex

Tillerson for newly re-elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to end Tehran's ballistic missile program and what he called its "network of terrorism".

Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri, deputy chief of staff of Iran's armed forces, said Tillerson's remarks "reflected ignorance about Iran," the state news agency IRNA reported.

"Iran's defense policies and aims follow a set trend that cannot be affected by any element," Jazayeri said.

Speaking at a news conference in Riyadh on Saturday, Tillerson also said: "I'm not going to comment on my expectation. But we hope that if Rouhani wanted to change Iran's relationship with the rest of the world those are the things that he could do."

(Source: Reuters)

Warmongering cannot end wars: Ebrahim Raisi

POLITICS

TEHRAN — Ebrahim Raisi, a presidential candidate who came second in elections, has said that wars raging across the globe cannot be ended through a policy of warmongering, but instead through cooperation and respect towards the democratic choices of the people.

"In Syria, and in other places, under no circumstances we are of the opinion that war and warmongering is a means to resolve the problems. Rather we said categorically that

issues have to be solved by respecting and accepting people's opinions in Syria or elsewhere," Raisi told RT in an exclusive interview published on Saturday.

"We think the democratic solution is a good solution. Be it in Syria, in Yemen, in Lebanon, in many parts of the world," he said.

According to Raisi, Iran desires "peace to prevail across the world" as its doctrine is built to "prevent wars."

Iran's military buildup, including military drills and missile tests, only serves this pur-

pose, Raisi said. "Military capability should not be used to threaten others, for warmongering."

The road to peace is paved by establishing "dignified and honorable" relationship with countries worldwide and specifically close cooperation with Iran's neighbors, Raisi believes. "Cultural exchange, economic co-operation and society interaction" should play here a key role, he noted, adding that those who pursue tensions worldwide "should stop."



ARTICLE

By H.E. PANG Sen

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of China to Iran

The Silk Road: Glorious Past and Even Brighter Future

Over 2,000 years ago, an official delegation sent by the Chinese Emperor arrived in this piece of land after an arduous long journey. The road he travelled was the original ancient Silk Road and ever since then, the two civilizations of China and Persia had been interlinked with each other. Later on, Persian artists and craftsmen together with Iranian products reached China by horses and camels through this road and merchant ships loaded with Chinese goods started to dock at the Port of Hormuz of Iran. This was a historic picture of mutual learning and friendly exchanges, and numerous touching stories of bilateral interactions had been passed on from generations to generations.

Nowadays, great changes are taking place along the ancient Silk Road. Chinese President H.E. Mr. Xi Jinping in 2013 put forward the initiative of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (the B&R Initiative), calling upon countries along the B&R to build a community of shared interests and common destiny together, thus injecting new vitality to the B&R.

Since the launching of the Initiative over three years ago, tangible progress has been made. Many countries, including Iran, have voiced support to this Initiative. By focusing on policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bond, the participating countries have deepened their cooperation in all these aspects and a series of early harvest have been achieved. The financing mechanism is functioning, the infrastructure connectivity is taking shape, the industrial capacity cooperation is accelerating, the construction of economic corridors is moving forward, the volume of trade and investment is growing rapidly, and people-to-people exchanges are further deepening. **→2**



Payam Parsaei

Iranian volleyball players take selfie ahead of Poland match

Iranian volleyball players took on-pitch selfie ahead of their friendly match against Poland Saturday night.

Iran lost to powerhouse Poland in straight sets (25-19, 25-19, 25-23) in front of 11,000 cheering fans in Katowice.

Igor Kolakovic's team had already defeated Montenegro twice and earned a victory over Slovenia and lost to them once in the past two weeks.

The Iranian team are preparing for the FIVB World League 2017.

Full liberation of Mosul in next few days: Iraqi president

Iraqi President Fuad Masum has voiced hopes that west Mosul will be freed over the next few days as the country's Special Forces announce the end of their mission in the city.

"Iraq has achieved a decisive victory over terrorism, but we hope in the next few days to achieve a complete liberation of Mosul," Masum made the remarks while addressing the World Economic Forum's regional gathering held in Jordan on Saturday.

He further called on global investors to help rebuild the city, which was overrun by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in 2014.

On Friday, Masum noted that the scope of destruction in the city was "horrendous."

He added "Iraq is stronger in its unity" and that it "will be an important country after getting rid" of the Takfiri terrorists.

Meanwhile, Iraq's Special Forces have declared that their initial mission in Mosul has been completed after they liberated several regions in the city.

Special Forces spokesman Sabah al-Numan said that his troops are ready "to support any other forces if we are ordered to by the prime minister."

Earlier, the Commander of the Iraqi Federal Police Forces Lieutenant General Raed Shaker Jawdat announced that his forces had fully recaptured the 17th July and Eqtesadien neighborhoods of Mosul, and set up barricades and barriers in the liberated areas.

He added that 66 ISIL terrorists had been killed while 13 explosive-laden cars and nine motorcycle bombs had been destroyed during the operations.

Iraqi army soldiers and volunteer fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units (Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi) have made sweeping gains against the Takfiri elements since launching the Mosul operation.

The Iraqi forces took control of eastern Mosul in January after 100 days of fighting, and launched the battle in the west on February 19.

(Source: Press TV)

ELECTION COUNTDOWN



High turnout proves
Iranians' fondness
for establishment:
Velayati

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The head of the Strategic Research Center of Iran's Expediency Council has praised the people's massive participation in the May 19 presidential and council elections, saying more than 70-percent participation proved that Iranians are still interested in their Islamic Revolution.

Speaking to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) on Saturday night, Ali Akbar Velayati said the main factor behind the Islamic Republic's power is the massive presence of the people in various scenes, ranging from the "Sacred Defense" during the 1980-1988 Iraqi war on Iran to different political areas.



Government urges
people not to cheer
Rouhani victory on
streets

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Interior Ministry's election headquarters on Saturday issued a statement calling on people not to create heavy traffic congestion in streets to cheer Hassan Rouhani's victory in the May 19 presidential election.

In case the campaign headquarters of the president-elect wish to hold any ceremony downtown, they should ask for permission, the statement read, ISNA reported.

People started pouring into the streets across Iran celebrating Rouhani's victory on Saturday afternoon. Streets were not cleared until well after midnight in some big cities like Tehran.



Raisi demands
probe into electoral
'crimes'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Failed presidential candidate Ebrahim Raisi wrote a letter to Guardian Council chief Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati on Sunday asking him to start an investigation into what he said were "electoral crimes" in the Friday presidential election.

Raisi indexed his letter with three pages where he detailed the claimed abnormalities. "For the promise I have made to people, I cannot keep silent in the face of the injustice that people have suffered. Therefore, I would like to ask legal action regarding the cases mentioned," he stated.



Rouhani to hold
press conference on
Monday

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Incumbent President Hassan Rouhani is going to hold a press conference three days after he emerged as the sweeping victor in the Friday presidential election.

Parviz Esmaili, the communications director at the presidential office, said the press conference will start at 17:00 pm on Monday, ILNA reported on Sunday.

Esmaili added during the press conference the president will clarify the major policies he will adopt in his second administration.



The sole path to peace
lies in U.S. pullout
from the region:
Iranian general

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The only way to peace in the Middle East is dependent on a pullout of Americans from the region, an Iranian military official said on Sunday in response to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson who called for a shift in Tehran's conduct during President Rouhani's second term.

Massoud Jazayeri, the armed forces deputy chief of staff, said the remarks show that the United States is ignorant of Iran's policies.

Jazayeri said Rex Tillerson's expectations from Iran signify his ignorance of the Islamic Republic's policies, Tasnim reported.



Bird seller rises
to city council in
western Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A bird seller has been elected as the favorite candidate into the city council in Khorramabad, capital of the western province of Lorestan.

Valiollah Rostaminejad garnered 40,086 votes to stand atop in a field of nine members of the city council in the Friday election, enjoying a strong lead of 27,821 votes with the second candidate, IRIB reported.

Rostaminejad had no electoral campaign except for standing on the pavement hanging a banner from his neck which invited people to vote for him.

World officials continue congratulating Rouhani



French, Japanese, Italian, Spanish, Croatian, Afghan, and Iraqi leaders are among senior officials sending congratulations to Rouhani on his reelection as president.

and Japanese Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy felicitated Rouhani and said that the two countries continue cooperation in helping establish regional security and stability.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida also felicitated Rouhani over his re-election.

Abe expressed readiness for cooperation with Iran in line with expanding bilateral ties.

Chrystia Freeland, the Canadian foreign minister, issued a statement congratulating Rouhani and said, "Following the re-election of Hassan Rouhani as president of Iran, Canada welcomes President Rouhani's commitment to continue implementing Iran's nuclear obligations under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and to improve the lives of ordinary Iranians."

"Canada will continue to advance its values and interests when engaging with Iran, including respect for human rights and a peaceful resolution to conflicts affecting the region," the statement read.

Fuad Masum, the Iraqi president, also congratulated Rouhani for being elected for a second term in office.

Italian President Sergio Mattarella

of Iraq Ammar al-Hakim also sent Rouhani a congratulation message.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani congratulated Rouhani on re-election.

Afghanistan is determined to expand relations with Iran.

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson also congratulated Rouhani.

Tehran condemns prison sentence against Bahraini cleric

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has condemned the Bahraini government for sentencing a prominent cleric to one year in prison, expressing concern over the crackdown of civil rights activists.

Sheikh Isa Qassim, the spiritual leader of the country's Shiite majority, was sentenced by a Bahraini court to a one-year suspended prison sentence on Sunday.

The court also seized assets belonging to Sheikh Qassim as part of an ongoing crackdown on dissent in the kingdom.

In a statement issued on Sunday, Qassemi called on the Bahraini authorities to end their fight against freedom of expression and try to engage in a dialogue with the Bahraini people.

"Bahraini people have followed his example of peaceful behavior and are protesting against restriction put on their religious leader," he said.

Bahraini authorities stripped Qassim of his citizenship last June over accusations that he used his position to serve foreign interests and promote "sectarianism" and

"violence." He has denied the allegations.

The top cleric's followers had urged protesters to gather in mosques across the country ahead of the court ruling, but the protests were peaceful.

Since 2011, the Arab country has been grappling with widespread protests against the ruling al-Khalifa's abuse of power and violation of Bahraini people's rights.

The regime has suppressed the protests with the help of forces from neighboring Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Pro-reform candidates capture all council seats in Tehran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — All 21 candidates supported by the pro-reformers under the "List of Hope" have won all seats in Tehran's city council, according to early election results.

With the majority of the votes counted, the results show that all candidates belonging to the List of Hope have won by a wide margin against their principlist rivals. The List of Hope was also successful in the parliamentary elections in 2016, especially in Tehran where the moderate principlists and reformists secured all of the seats.

Mohsen Hashemi Rafsanjani, the son of the former President Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, has received the highest number of votes in Friday's election. He was pro-reform councilors' choice for Tehran's mayor in 2013, but lost to principlists' candidate Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf.

Ghalibaf has been the mayor of Tehran – a reformist majority city – for almost 12 years. However, as the results indicate, his career is nearing its end.

He also ran for the May 19 presidential post but withdrew his bid in favor of Ebrahim Raisi who was defeated in a landslide by incumbent President Hassan Rouhani.

According to the results of the city council elections in Tehran, Mahdi Chamran, the incumbent chairman of Tehran's city council, has taken the 22nd place and failed to win a seat in the council for four more years.

The 5th city council elections were held across the country on Friday, simultaneously with the presidential election. The presidential votes were counted earlier and the results were announced on Saturday.

Tehran's governor Issa Farhadi announced on Sunday that more than 3,600,000 of Tehrani people participated in the council election, setting a new record in the capital.

The Silk Road: Glorious past and even brighter future

I → These achievements have laid solid basis for the further progress of the Initiative.

For centuries, Iran has been one of the most important traffic hubs and trading centers along the B&R. Located at the conjunction of the B&R, Iran enjoys an outstanding geo-strategic position. Since the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between P5+1 and Iran in 2016, the internal and external environment of Iran has improved a lot, which provides better condition for the cooperation between China and Iran.

As a Chinese saying goes, real friends feel close even when they are far apart. For a long time, China and Iran have maintained friendly relationship.

In January 2016, Chinese President Mr. Xi Jinping paid a historic visit to Iran and leaders of the two countries reached a series of important consensus on strengthening bilateral ties. Chinese Vice Premier Madam LIU Yandong and Defense Minister General CHANG Wanquan visited Iran subsequently, and Iranian Economy Minister Mr. Ali Tayebnia and the Foreign Minister Mr. Mohammad Javad Zarif visited China, aiming to implementing the outcomes of President Xi's visit and deepening bilateral cooperation in all areas.

For eight consecutive years, China remained as the biggest trading partner of Iran. Chinese and Iranians companies are now cooperating in many fields such as energy, transportation, machinery, metallurgy, hydro-power,

electricity, telecommunication, construction materials, and automobile. The construction of the Tehran-Qom-Isfahan high-speed railway is underway, the Tehran-Mashhad railway modernization project is about to commence, the new line of Tehran metro goes smoothly, and the Yiwu-Tehran direct cargo train has made its initial voyage.

Two important oil projects, namely the North Azadegan Project of the CNPC and the Yadavaran Project of the SINOPEC, had been completed late last year and their opening ceremony was launched at the presence of H.E. President Hassan Rouhani. Moreover, the CNPC and the NIOC had signed a new head agreement for the development of South Pars gas field. Nowadays, more and more Chinese companies are opening business in Iran and the Chinese-funded R&D parks and automobile industry zones are in operation. Chinese trademarks, such as HUAWEI and CHERY are now enjoying great popularity in Iran. The exchanges between various circles of Chinese and Iranian society are also on the rise.

"There is a road communing different hearts", says an ancient Iranian proverb. The people-to-people exchange between China and Iran is gathering pace. In late April this year, Madam LIU Yandong, Chinese Vice Premier, paid a successful visit to Iran and exchanged views on technological, educational and cultural cooperation with her Iranian counterpart H.E. Sorena Sattari, Vice President of Iran.

Tillerson doesn't rule out talk with Zarif 'at the right time'

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fuel the fire in the region and repeating the likes of the September 11 incident by their sponsors in Western countries," Zarif

wrote for the website of the London-based Al Araby Al-Jadeed news network.

Saudi Arabia denies providing any

support for the 19 hijackers - most of whom were Saudi citizens - who killed nearly 3,000 people in 2001.

Dem senator: Trump's arms deal with Saudis a 'terrible idea'

The United States Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) on Saturday slammed the \$110 billion defense deal President Donald Trump signed with the House of Saud regime, saying the U.S. is relying on a country with "the worst human rights record in the region" to bring peace and security to the Middle East.

"It appears the Trump administration is counting on the country with the worst human rights record in the region to enforce peace and security in the Middle East," Murphy wrote in a Huffington Post op-ed criticizing the deal. "The arms sale is a terrible idea."

Murphy, a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the Kingdom has repeatedly used U.S.-provided weapons against civilians in the region, citing attacks on Yemen.

"Obama withheld precision-guided munitions because the Saudis were using U.S.-provided munitions to repeatedly target civilian and humanitarian sites in their bombing campaign inside Yemen, despite regular protests from the United States," Murphy wrote.

"By selling the Saudis these precision-guided weapons more - not fewer - civilians will be killed because it is Saudi Arabia's strategy to starve Yemenis to death to increase their own leverage at the negotiating table. They couldn't do this without the weapons we are selling them," he continued.

Murphy said more Yemenis have since been radicalized and blame the U.S. for Saudi Arabia's attacks. He also argued that the weapons would not be used against intended targets like the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIL/Daesh) and al Qaeda.



"The Saudis' obsession with Iran, and the proxy wars (like Yemen) that flow from this obsession, mean that they have little bandwidth to go after extremist groups," he wrote, claiming that even if Trump does try to put pressure on the Saudis, they will likely not concede because "they are already getting everything they could ever want militarily from the United States."

The arms package aims to increase Saudi Arabia's defense capabilities by their bolstering equipment and services while also allowing the U.S. to scale back its military commitment in the region.

Murphy said the weapons deal would escalate a proxy war in the region, which could propel Iran to ramp up its nuclear program, adding that this is not "our fight." He argued the \$110 billion in funds could instead be applied to a strategy that aims to achieve global security, like providing primary education in Africa.

The Democratic senator added that the defense deal "was negotiated by Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law, who has zero experience in foreign relations generally, or Saudi arms sales specifically." He concluded that while the kingdom

is an American ally and they jointly work with the U.S. to combat extremist groups, "they are a deeply imperfect friend" to trust with these highly calibrated weapons.

Trump praised the massive defense deal Saturday, saying it will fuel job growth. "Tremendous investments in the United States. Hundreds of billions of dollars of investments into the United States and jobs, jobs, jobs," Trump said referring to the defense deal, according to a White House pool report.

(Source: The Hill)

North Korea launches another missile: South Korea

North Korea has fired an unidentified projectile, South Korea's military said, a week after its latest missile launch.

South Korea's Office of Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that the projectile took off on Sunday afternoon from a location near Pukchang.

The missile flew about 500 kilometers and was believed to have landed in waters off its east coast, South Korea's military said.

The Office of Joint Chiefs of Staff said South Korea and the United States were conducting close-up analysis of the launch.

"South Korea and the United States are closely analyzing the launch for further information," South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

"Our military is closely monitoring the North Korean military for any further provocation and maintaining readiness to respond."

Last week Pyongyang launched an intermediate-range missile named the Hwasong-12 its longest-range missile yet, according to analysts.

It was its 10th launch this year, after dozens in 2016, as it accelerates efforts to develop an intercontinental ballistic



tic missile (ICBM) capable of delivering a nuclear warhead to the continental United States - something U.S. President Donald Trump has vowed "won't happen".

Pyongyang has long had missiles that can reach targets across the South and Japan.

Such tests present a difficult challenge to new South Korean President Moon Jae-in, a liberal who took office on May 10 and has expressed a desire to reach out to North Korea.

North Korea's latest launch came hours after Moon named his new foreign minister nominee and top advisers for security and foreign policy.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Bahraini court gives top Shia cleric suspended jail term

A court in Bahrain has sentenced distinguished Shia cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim to one year in prison, suspended for three years, and ordered him to pay a fine.

The court issued the ruling on Sunday against Qassim, the spiritual leader of Bahrain's dissolved opposition bloc the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society, Bahrain's al-Wasat newspaper reported.

Qassim had his citizenship revoked last June over accusations that he used his position to serve foreign interests and promote sectarianism and violence. The cleric has denied the allegations.

The report said the Bahraini court had also ordered Qassim to pay a fine of 100,000 Bahraini dinars (over \$265,000).

The court further ruled to confiscate Qassim's properties worth 3 million Bahraini dinars (almost \$8 million) and two of his homes.

Additionally, Hussain al-Qassab and Mirza al-Dirazi, the cleric office's staffers, were sentenced to one-year imprisonment.

Thousands of Bahrainis took to the streets on Sunday to denounce the ruling against the Shia cleric.

(Source: Press TV)



In a statement, the al-Wefaq National Islamic Society accused the Bahraini regime of having dragged the country into a new crisis, eliminating all possible political opportunities and depriving most citizens of their right to security, stability and justice.

It also called on the international community to help guarantee stability and contribute to a comprehensive democratic political process meant to bring Bahrain out of crisis and reflect the popular will.

Numerous demonstrations have been held to condemn the persecution of the top Bahraini figure over the past months.

(Source: Press TV)

At least 20 Afghan police killed in Taliban ambushes: officials

At least 20 policemen were killed in Taliban ambushes in southern Afghanistan, officials said, as security forces sought to dislodge fighters in multiple districts.

Fighting is ongoing in Zabul province, where the police were attacked in Shah Joi district, provincial governor Bismullah Afghanmal said on Sunday. He said the Taliban had ambushed police in the areas of Chino and Ghulam Rabat.

"The report we have right now indicates that 20 policemen are martyred and 10 others are wounded. The number may increase," Afghanmal told the Reuters news agency.

Dozens of Taliban, who have been waging a 16-year-long battle against the Western-backed government in Kabul, were also reported killed and wounded, Afghanmal said.

Reinforcements sent to the area where the police had been ambushed were also attacked, said Gul Islam Seyal, a spokesman for the Zabul governor.

Fighting was also ongoing in Zabul's Dai Chopan district, but the extent of casualties was unknown, Afghanmal said.

In neighboring Ghazni province, Taliban fighters launched a three-pronged attack on parts of the provincial capital on Friday, driving a Humvee packed with explosives into the entrance of a district



governor's compound during the assault.

Separately on Sunday, Taliban claimed responsibility for a deadly attack on Saturday on a bank in Paktia province, which left at least six people dead, including three attackers.

Taliban fighters launched their annual "spring offensive" in late April, heralding a surge in fighting as the United States tries to craft a new Afghan strategy and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) considers sending more troops to break the stalemate against the resurgent fighters.

■ **Two killed as gunmen storm foreign guest house in Kabul**

Elsewhere, a German female aid

worker and an Afghan guard have been killed while a Finnish woman was abducted after gunmen stormed an international guest house in central Kabul, Afghan Interior Ministry says.

Interior Ministry spokesman Najib Danish said on Twitter on Sunday that the attack took place on the guest house run by a Swedish charity called Operation Mercy late Saturday.

"A Finnish lady was kidnapped from police district (three) last night at 11.30. A German lady and an Afghan guard were killed," Danish said.

A Finnish Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Karoliina Romanoff confirmed

that a Finnish citizen has been kidnapped in Kabul. "We can confirm that we know about this but we are not giving details at the moment. The only thing we can say is it is not known who the kidnappers are."

Scott Breslin, Operation Mercy's director, said in a brief statement that he was holding a crisis meeting over the incident.

"We know that she's missing, we will send out a press release later," the statement read.

Operation Mercy is known to work in areas such as reducing infant mortality and women's empowerment across Afghanistan.

The latest attack underscores growing insecurity in Afghanistan, which is in the grip of a militancy waged by the Taliban and other groups.

The kidnapping of foreigners has been on the rise as Kabul is plagued by organized criminal gangs who stage abductions for ransom. They often target foreigners and wealthy locals, and sometimes hand them over to militant groups.

Aid workers in particular have increasingly been casualties of a surge in violence in recent years.

(Source: agencies)

Trump tells Middle East: Step up in fight over extremism

The United States President Donald Trump called on Arab leaders to do their share to fight "extremism" on Sunday in a speech that put the burden on the region to combat militant groups while urging unity among religions.

Trump, who generated controversy with his push to ban many Muslims from entering the United States, described the fight against terrorism as a battle between good and evil rather than a clash of civilizations.

"This is a battle between barbaric criminals who seek to obliterate human life, and decent people of all religions who seek to protect it," Trump said in the speech, according to excerpts of the speech released by the White House.

"That means honestly confronting the crisis of extremism and the terror groups it inspires. And it means standing together against the murder of innocent Muslims, the oppression of women, the persecution of Jews, and the slaughter of Christians."

Trump's "America first" philosophy helped him win the 2016 election and has rattled allies who depend on U.S. support for their defense. Trump, who is struggling to contain a brewing political scandal at home, made clear in his address that Washington would partner with the Middle East but expected more action in return.

"Terrorism has spread across the world. But the path to peace begins right here, on this ancient soil, in this sacred land," he said in Saudi Arabia, the first stop on a nine-day tour that includes Israel, Italy and Belgium.

Trump also applauds PGCC (Persian Gulf Cooperation Council) decision to designate Lebanese resistance movement of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization.

The speech is part of an effort to redefine his relationship with the Muslim world after Trump frequently attacked Muslims on the campaign trail last year and tried to ban many from entering the United States.

The approach was also designed to contrast with former President Barack Obama, whom Trump has criticized for his handling of the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist outfit.

(Source: Reuters)

Yemenis recount horrors of cholera epidemic

Swarming Al-Sabeen Hospital in the capital Sana'a, Yemeni medics and civilians have cited horrifying accounts of how a cholera epidemic is wreaking havoc in the war-torn country.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday that Yemen could have as many as 300,000 cases of cholera within six months and an "extremely high" number of deaths. The outbreak has claimed the lives of 242 people over the previous three weeks.

Doctor Nabil al-Najar, the hospital's deputy head, told the Middle East Eye (MEE) news portal on Sunday that the facility received at least 200 new cases every day, in addition to patients who have been injured in airstrikes.

Elsewhere, on Sunday, Yemen's al-Masirah television network reported that Saudi regime strikes against the west-central Sana'a Province's Bani Hushaysh District had killed four civilians.

Yemeni Army snipers, who have been retaliating against the warfare, also killed a Saudi regime troop targeting the kingdom's border region of Asir, it said.

■ **1000s protest U.S. participation in Saudi regime war against Yemen**

Meantime, thousands of people have gathered on the streets of Sana'a to protest the United States participation in the House of Saud regime's relentless war against Yemen.

The Saturday mass protests coincided with a trip by U.S. President Donald Trump to Riyadh, in which he finalized an arms deal with the Saudi regime worth almost \$110 billion.

(Source: Press TV)

Syria rebels leave last Homs neighborhood

The last Syrian rebels and their families are being taken out from the last opposition-held neighborhood of the central city of Homs, according to the provincial governor.

Talal Barazi told AFP news agency on Saturday that 3,000 people, including 700 rebels, were due to leave Waer district by the end of the day or dawn on Sunday.

The Russian-supervised operation began two months ago and has been carried out over several weeks.

Under the deal, opposition fighters are granted safe passage by the government out of Homs to rebel-held areas elsewhere in Syria.

"In all more than 15,000 people - 12,000 civilians and 3,000 rebels - will have left Waer" when the operation is over, Barazi said.

Dozens of people were carrying belongings including rugs, mattresses and bird cages as they prepared to board buses, AFP reported.

Soldiers and vehicles from Syrian regime ally Russia were seen on the outskirts of Waer.

Under the deal, between 600 and 100 Russian soldiers will deploy in Waer to provide security for residents who still live there or for those who were displaced by fighting and wish to return home.

The evacuation of Waer will bring Syria's government closer to cementing its control over more parts of the war-ravaged country.

Earlier this month, rebels also began evacuating the last districts under their control in the capital Damascus, following their defeat in second city Aleppo in December.

(Source: AFP)

Iran, Hungary call for expansion of relations in poultry

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy Agriculture Minister Hassan Rokni has called for expansion of cooperation between Iran and Hungary's poultry industries, IRNA reported on Sunday.



The official, who is visiting the European country heading a 50-member delegation comprised of representatives of the mentioned industry, met with his Hungarian counterpart Lajos Bognár.

Bognár, for his part, said there is currently bilateral cooperation in training and Hungary is ready to expand it to other areas as well.

The delegation also visited some production units and held talks to discuss future cooperation.

UK threatens to quit Brexit talks if it faces massive bill

The U.K. will quit talks on leaving the European Union unless the bloc drops its demands for a divorce payment as high as 100 billion euros (\$112 billion), Brexit Secretary David Davis said.

Britain's negotiations would otherwise be plunged into "chaos," and even a 1 billion-pound settlement would be "a lot of money," Davis said in an interview published in the Sunday Times.

The size of Britain's exit bill, and which types of negotiations can begin before it has been agreed, has been a source of debate for weeks.

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has said the U.K. will have to pay about 50 billion pounds, while Luxembourg's Prime Minister Xavier Bettel has signaled a figure between 40 billion euros and 60 billion euros. The Financial Times estimated the cost could balloon to 100 billion euros, while a study by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales put the cost at as low as 5 billion pounds (\$6.5 billion).

Prime Minister Theresa May's government has said it will meet its commitments to the EU, but has questioned how Brussels officials reached their preliminary estimates.

"We don't need to just look like we can walk away, we need to be able to walk away," Davis said. "Under the circumstances, if that was necessary, we would be in a position to do it."

Davis also said the negotiations, which are expected to begin on June 19, will be "fairly turbulent" and that he would reject any blueprint for discussions that requires the issues of the divorce bill, EU citizens' rights and Northern Ireland's border to be solved before talks can begin on future trade.

"The first crisis or argument is going to be over sequencing," he said.

May also weighed in on the Brexit bill, saying in an interview with the Sunday Telegraph that "money paid in the past" by the U.K. into joint EU projects and the European Investment Bank ought to be taken account in the final sum.

"There is much debate about what the U.K.'s obligations might be or indeed what our rights might be," she said. "We make it clear that we would look at those both rights and obligations."

(Source: Bloomberg)

Australia leads fight to save Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact

Australia is leading the charge to save the controversial Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade deal thrown into doubt by Donald Trump's decision to pull America out of the pact.

As fears rumbled of a new global era of protectionism, Asia Pacific trade ministers gathered in Vietnam on Sunday with Australia, Japan and New Zealand at the forefront of efforts to save the deal.

The 12-nation TPP covered 40% of the global economy before Trump abruptly abandoned it in January as part of a campaign pledge to save American jobs he said had been sucked up overseas.

But some remaining members of the pact – the so-called TPP 11 – are desperate to keep the deal alive, believing the pact will lock-in free trade as well as boost labour rights and environmental protections.

After the Sunday morning meeting, the Australian minister for trade, tourism and investment, Steve Ciobo, said: "It's important to leave the door open to the United States. It may not suit US interests at this point in time to be part of the TPP, but circumstances might change in the future."

New Zealand's trade minister, Todd McClay, told reporters that the TPP 11 "are committed to finding a way forward to deliver" the pact.

Trade representatives in Hanoi have said they are ready to tweak the deal to leave room for a US return, pinning hopes on a U-turn in American policy.

Spearheaded by former US president Barack Obama, the far-reaching TPP – which notably excludes China – would have rewritten the rules of 21st century trade and was seen as a way to counter Beijing's regional economic dominance.

Reviving the TPP, even without the heft of the world's biggest economy, would still provide ballast against China, analyst Alex Capri told AFP.

"The Chinese would not be particularly pleased to see the TPP go ahead even without the United States," said Capri, a senior fellow and professor at the National University of Singapore.

(Source: The Guardian)

NITC, Indian refiners ready to expand cooperation

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC) Managing Director Sirous Kianersi said that in his meeting with Indian Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Dharmendra Pradhan he has announced NITC's readiness for the continuous and safe shipment of Indian refineries' products.

"While emphasizing the significance and history of Iran-India relations, Pradhan, for his part, voiced the preparedness of his country's refineries and oil companies to broaden cooperation with NITC", Shana reported quoting Kianersi as saying.

Soon after the implementation of Iran's nuclear deal known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in January 2016, the official announced his company's determination for a strong return to the European markets and also adding new countries to the list of its customers while it was preparing its fleet to achieve this goal.

In early January, he announced that NITC has leased out 30 oil tankers to foreign companies since JCPOA.

"Our priority is the shipment of Iranian oil to the export markets and additional tankers will be leased out", the official added.



NITC, which operates the largest tanker fleet in the Middle East and has the world's largest fleet of super tankers, transports Iranian crude and also acts as an

independent entity in contracts with foreign concerns for crude oil transportation based on prevailing international freight rates.

Persian Gulf nations tend to buy Iranian gas

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — The National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC)'s Managing Director Hamidreza Araqi told IRNA on Sunday that Persian Gulf nations are willing to buy Iranian gas.

According to the official, there has not been a direct negotiation recently but Iran has received signals showing their willingness for holding talks in this regard.

"I believe that now after the [presidential] election it would be easier to pursue such negotiations," Araqi said.

Despite having rich oil resources, most of the Persian Gulf nations lack enough gas supplies. Iran and Qatar are the only two countries with access to gigantic gas reserves.

Although Iraq has significant gas resources too, but the country doesn't seem to be able to reach these resources by 2018 or even



2020.

Earlier this month, Araqi said that Iran is also in talks with European countries to export gas to Europe.

As ISNA reported, the official noted that sending Iranian gas to Europe is possible both through pipeline and in the form of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

"Various European companies expressed willingness in this regard but reaching a final deal generally takes near five years," he said.

No negotiations with Russia, China over purchasing airplanes

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy Transport Minister Asghar Fakhrieh Kashan announced on Sunday that Iran has held no talks with Russia and China over buying aircrafts from them, IRNA reported.

He, in addition, said that Iran has forgone plans to buy Mitsubishi Regional

Jet (MRJ), a twin-engine regional jet aircraft seating 70–90 passengers, from the Japanese company.

He explained that Iran has ditched the plan because the Japanese airplane manufacturer cannot set a deadline for delivering the ordered planes and because MRJ planes have not been fully

tested by the manufacturer.

The unit of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries began market surveys into Iran in September 2015, four months before the U.S. lifted sanctions. The Japanese company had been touching base with flag carrier Iran Air and Iran Aseman Airlines, as well as the country's aviation



Nayerreh Sadat Pirouzbakht, the president of the Institute of Standards & Industrial Research of Iran (ISIRI), was the head of Iranian delegation at the Rome meeting. ISIRI is the Codex Contact Point for Iran and as such the official channel of communication with Codex.

The Codex Alimentarius (Latin for "Food Code") is a collection of internationally recognized standards, codes of practice, guidelines, and other recommendations relating to foods, food production, and food safety.

There are six Codex regions each represented by a joint FAO/WHO Regional Coordinating Committee (RCC). They meet every two years. Each committee is responsible for defining the problems and needs of the region concerning food standards and food control. By working collectively at the regional level countries are able to highlight regulatory issues and problems arising from food control in order to strengthen food control infrastructures.

Saudi tech fund becomes world's biggest with \$93b of capital

The world's largest private equity fund, backed by Japan's Softbank Group and Saudi Arabia's main sovereign wealth fund, said it had raised over \$93 billion to invest in technology sectors such as artificial intelligence and robotics.

"The next stage of the Information Revolution is under way, and building the businesses that will make this possible will require unprecedented large-scale, long-term investment," the Softbank Vision Fund said in a statement.

Japanese billionaire Masayoshi Son, chairman of Softbank, a telecommunications and tech investment group, revealed plans for the fund last October and since then it

has obtained commitments from some of the world's most deep-pocketed investors.

In addition to Softbank and Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), the new fund's investors include Abu Dhabi's Mubadala Investment, which has committed \$15 billion, Apple Inc, Qualcomm, Taiwan's Foxconn Technology and Japan's Sharp Corp.

The new fund made its announcement during the visit of President Donald Trump to Riyadh and the signing of tens of billions of dollars worth of business deals between U.S. and Saudi companies. Son was also in Riyadh on Saturday.

After meeting with Trump last December, Son pledged \$50 billion of investment in the

United States that would create 50,000 jobs, a promise Trump claimed was a direct result of his election win.

The fund may also serve the interests of Saudi Arabia by helping Riyadh obtain access to foreign technology. The Saudi economy has been severely damaged by low oil prices, and policymakers are trying to diversify into new industries.

The PIF signaled an interest in the tech sector last year by investing \$3.5 billion in U.S. ride-hailing firm Uber. Saturday's statement did not say how much the PIF had committed to the fund, but previously it has said it would invest up to \$45 billion over five years. Softbank is investing \$28 billion.

The new fund said it would seek to buy minority and majority interests in both private and public companies, from emerging businesses to established, multi-billion-dollar firms. It expects to obtain preferred access to long-term investment opportunities worth \$100 million or more.

Other sectors in which the fund may invest include mobile computing, communications infrastructure, computational biology, consumer internet businesses and financial technology.

The fund aims for \$100 billion of committed capital and expects to complete its money-raising in six months, it added.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S., Saudi firms sign tens of billions of dollars of deals as Trump visits

U.S. and Saudi Arabian companies signed business deals worth tens of billions of dollars on Saturday during a visit by U.S. President Donald Trump, as Riyadh seeks help to develop its economy beyond oil.

National oil firm Saudi Aramco said it signed \$50 billion of agreements with U.S. firms. Energy minister Khalid al-Falih said deals involving all companies totaled over \$200 billion, many of them designed to produce things in Saudi Arabia that had previously been imported.

Business leaders on both sides were keen to demonstrate their talks had been a success, so there was an element of showmanship in the huge numbers. Some deals had been announced previously; others were memorandums of understanding that would require further negotiations to materialize. Nevertheless, the deals illustrated Saudi Arabia's hunger for foreign capital and technology as it tries to reduce its dependence on oil exports. Low oil prices in the past couple of years have slowed the economy to a crawl and saddled the government with a big budget deficit.

"We want foreign companies to look at Saudi Arabia as a platform for exports to other markets," Falih told a conference attended by dozens of U.S. executives.

In March, Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and his delegation signed similar agreements worth tens of billions of dollars there, including deals worth as much as \$65 billion in China.

FUNDSEven as it sought U.S. investment on Saturday, Ri-



Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (L, in brown) and U.S. President Donald Trump (C) arrive for their bilateral meeting at the Royal Court in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia May 20, 2017. REUTERS/Jonathan Ernst

yadh made two announcements on plans to deploy its own financial reserves for projects that would cement economic ties with the United States.

The Public Investment Fund, Riyadh's main sovereign wealth fund, and U.S. private equity firm Blackstone said they were studying a proposal to create a \$40 billion vehicle to invest in infrastructure projects, mainly in the United States.

The vehicle would obtain \$20 billion from the PIF and with

additional debt financing, might invest in over \$100 billion of infrastructure projects – a political boon to Trump, who has said he wants to rebuild crumbling U.S. infrastructure.

Meanwhile the world's largest private equity fund, backed by the PIF, Japan's Softbank Group and other investors including U.S. firms Apple Inc and Qualcomm, said on Saturday it had raised over \$93 billion to invest in technology sectors such as artificial intelligence and robotics.

Much of the Softbank Vision Fund's money is likely to be invested in the United States, helping Riyadh obtain access to technology that it could use to diversify its economy.

Top Saudi economic policy makers, including the finance minister and head of the kingdom's main sovereign wealth fund, described investment opportunities in Saudi Arabia to the conference on Saturday.

Saudi officials said they aimed to prepare new, streamlined rules covering direct investment by foreign firms within 12 months.

Among the deals signed on Saturday, GE said it reached \$15 billion of agreements involving almost \$7 billion of goods and services from GE itself. They ranged from the power and healthcare sectors to the oil and gas industry and mining.

Jacobs Engineering will form a joint venture with Aramco to manage business projects in the kingdom, and McDermott International will transfer some of its ship fabrication facilities from Dubai to a new shipbuilding complex which Aramco will build within Saudi Arabia.

(Source: Reuters)

OPEC keeps focus on shale threat as officials meet in Vienna

OPEC officials gathering in Vienna on Friday to prepare for next week's ministerial meeting kept their focus on rising U.S. shale oil production, which has been diluting the price impact of their production cuts.

National representatives from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and officials from several non-members heard a presentation on the outlook for the U.S. industry from Roger Diwan, a Washington-based analyst at IHS Markit Ltd., according to delegates familiar with the matter. Mark Papa, a partner at private equity firm Riverstone Holdings LLC and former boss of shale pioneer EOG Resources Inc., also spoke to the group, delegates said.

Officials at the meeting were relieved that the two outside consultants had estimates for growth in average U.S. crude output of 450,000 to 500,000 barrels a day this year, lower than the 562,000 barrel-a-day forecast from OPEC's own analysts, said two delegates.

The emphasis on U.S. production underscores the dilemma for OPEC and its allies as they consider whether to extend their cuts beyond June. The producers, who together account for about half the world's oil supply, have seen the initial price boost from their historic agreement fade as shale com-



panies deployed more rigs and raised the country's output to the highest since 2015. That recovery could accelerate if they decide on May 25 to prolong the curbs.

IHS's Diwan presented an estimate that U.S. output this year will be about 500,000 barrels a day higher on average than in 2016, the delegates said, asking not to be identified because the meeting was private. That still means that production at the end of 2017 will be 700,000 to 1 million barrels a day higher than at the start, the delegates

said.

That compares with a supply reduction of 1.2 million barrels a day from October levels implemented by OPEC, plus a cut of less than 400,000 barrels a day from non-members.

Papa, who helped create the shale industry more than a decade ago, estimated that average U.S. output would be 450,000 barrels a day higher this year, the delegates said.

■ Three choices

OPEC is widely expected to prolong its supply curbs, and all producers are

backing a nine-month extension, Saudi Arabia Oil Minister Khalid Al-Falih said Saturday.

"We think we have everybody on board," Al-Falih said in an interview with Bloomberg television in Riyadh. "Everybody I've talked to indicated that nine months was a wise decision."

OPEC's Economic Commission Board, a panel of representatives from member countries that meets to discuss the market before every ministerial meeting, considered the implications of various scenarios including extended production cuts, deeper supply reductions and the expiry of the curbs in June, the delegates said. Officials in Vienna didn't recommend a specific course of action, the delegates said.

Out of these three choices, an extension is most likely, analysts from Bank of America Merrill Lynch said in a note to clients.

"If OPEC cuts production even more, it will likely lose additional market share to U.S. shale and prices may not move up much more," the bank said. "Conversely, if OPEC hikes output, oil prices could collapse to \$35 a barrel, setting the cartel on an even more difficult fiscal path. In our view, most OPEC members cannot afford either scenario at this point."

(Source: Bloomberg)

Political shake-up in S. Korea may boost demand for LNG

A political shake-up in South Korea may give liquefied natural gas sellers hope for a demand boost from the world's second-largest market for the fuel.

President Moon Jae-in, elected this month after the impeachment of his predecessor, is seeking to rein in the use of coal-fired power and scrap plans for new nuclear stations, while pushing for greater reliance on natural gas and renewable energy. It's a break from the pro-coal and nuclear policies of the previous administration.

The policy shift could reverse its declining demand for LNG. Under the new policies, the country may need to import about 8 million tons more annually by 2025 than previously estimated, according to energy consultant Wood Mackenzie Ltd. That's good news for global LNG producers, who have seen spot prices crash by 75 percent in the past three years as demand growth has failed to keep pace with a spate of export projects coming on-



line.

"The new president's decision to move away from coal and nuclear is definitely beneficial for LNG imports," said Zhi Xin Chong, an LNG analyst at Wood Mackenzie in Singapore. "There could be a much earlier recovery of gas demand in the power sector"

Moon campaigned on policies that included increasing the utilization rate for all gas-fired power plants and to lower taxes on LNG. This week, he ordered some coal plants, all at least 30 years old, to shut for the month of June.

(Source: Gulf Times)

Nigerian oil labor union suspends Exxon Mobil strike in Rivers state

A Nigerian labor union that had called for the shutdown of all Exxon Mobil Corp facilities in the Niger Delta has suspended its strike at its Rivers state branch in the oil production hub, two union representatives said on Saturday.

Reuters had been unable to verify independently whether members of the Petroleum and Natural Gas Senior Staff Association of Nigeria (PENGASSAN) had shut the company's facilities in the region on Friday, and oil industry sources said there was no impact on production.

"The strike has been suspended," said Chika Onuegbu, who represents PENGASSAN in Rivers state.

Onuegbu and a senior PENGASSAN official, who also said the strike in Rivers state had been suspended but did not want to be identified, said the move followed a ruling by an industrial arbitration panel.

PENGASSAN'S chairman in the Port Harcourt zone, Azubike M Azubike, later said the industrial action had not been suspended elsewhere in the country.



"The strike is still on nationwide, especially in Exxon Mobil facilities across Nigeria. We are still talking with Exxon Mobil management," he said.

Nigerian labor unions have held a number of strikes in the last few months over the dismissal of oil industry workers.

The latest industrial action was in protest at the sacking of 150 workers in December, of which 82 were PENGASSAN members.

Strikes by Exxon workers in Nigeria at the end of last year did affect output, delaying loadings by weeks.

(Source: Bloomberg)

OPEC needs shock and awe to drain the glut

By Julian Lee

Enough of this drip-feed of trying to slowly whittle away oil inventories. If OPEC wants to bring down excess stockpiles, it needs to find its courage when it meets on Thursday, dust off its old playbook and make a big cut as it did in the past. "We're going to do what it takes to bring the industry back to a healthy situation," Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister, Khali Al-Falih, said in a Bloomberg Television interview in Washington back in March. Nice words, but it's going to take a lot more than words to get oil inventories, or prices, back to where OPEC wants to see them.

■ What it took

In 1998- yes, I've been doing this long enough to remember all that time ago- OPEC slashed output by more than 4.5 million barrels a day to try to rebalance the market after the Asian financial crisis. Three years later it had to do even more

as recession hit demand again, and it cut its collective output target by 5 million barrels a day. In 2008 it was forced to make another huge sacrifice, with members deciding to chop daily supply by around 4.7 million barrels. The OPEC cuts agreed last November begin to look rather puny in comparison -- the effective reduction in April was around 1 million barrels a day, against a plan of more than 1.7 million. In that last big deal Saudi Arabia agreed to cut its own production by almost twice as much as the 486,000 barrels a day it pledged this time, taking it down to little more than 8 million barrels a day. The consensus view, which the group has done nothing to dispel, is that members will agree to extend the initial six-month cut to last at least 15 months and possibly longer, if inventories don't start falling faster than its own analysts expect.

■ Undermining the cuts

But the latest cuts have been under-

mined both from within and from without and simply prolonging them may not soak up the excess even by next March. The short, sharp intervention envisaged in November has turned into a long, slow grind. If OPEC wants to drain inventories and boost prices, even if only to around \$60 a barrel, it needs to cut deeper, not just longer. Some of the non-OPEC participants have been slow to implement the full reductions they promised -- Russia only met its target at the end of April -- while rising U.S. production is taking an increasingly big bite out of the cuts that have been made. A new worry is that output is now rising in both Libya and Nigeria, the two OPEC countries exempt from the deal. They could add around 450,000 barrels of new supply, if recent gains can be consolidated, and will almost certainly get another free pass this time around.

Even the reported cuts in output have not immediately translated into reductions

in exports. Figures provided by Saudi Arabia to the Joint Organizations Data Initiative show how the cut in the country's exports of crude and products has lagged well behind the headline drop in output. Imports into the U.S. from Persian Gulf OPEC countries also highlight the problem, with inflows at levels not seen since before the shale boom began.

■ Cuts? What cuts?

And though there have been hints, there are few prospects that more countries will join the deal beyond Equatorial Guinea, which is due to become OPEC's newest member this week. Looking back at the group's previous big market interventions, they have all been done as a series of cuts, with additional reductions of between 1 million and 1.5 million barrels a day agreed about every six months. OPEC needs to spring a surprise when it gathers on Thursday.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Massive spill kept secret: Australia oil regulator hid key leak data for months

Australia's governmental oil watchdog group knew for months about a previously uncontrolled underwater oil leak but kept the information hidden from the public until now.

The National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA), a government agency tasked with monitoring industry compliance as well as tracking well integrity, health and safety, and environmental management of Australia's petrochemical industry, did not report a 2016 two-month uncontrolled underwater oil pipeline leak, only releasing the data now in its annual report.

Following a routine inspection in 2016, NOPSEMA technicians identified an underwater oil pipeline that was continuously leaking oil at the rate of some 50 gallons a day, according to a report by The Guardian.

According to the report, some 3,000 gallons of unprocessed crude oil spewed into the surrounding marine eco-



system over the course of two months before the leak was finally patched.

A spokesperson for NOPSEMA claimed that the leak occurred after a pipeline seal failed. The spokesperson would not reveal the name of the company that owns and operates

the pipeline, or the precise location of the spill, asserting only that it happened on the North West Shelf, about 155 square miles of open ocean of varying depth off the coast of Western Australia, which boasts extensive oil and gas deposits.

NOPSEMA and local government officials came in for heavy criticism from Greenpeace Australia Pacific for suppressing the information. The environmental organization observed that no punishments or fines have been levied against the unnamed operator of the pipeline.

According to the new NOPSEMA annual report, under-sea petrochemical leaks increased some 28 percent in 2016, while inspections concurrently dropped 27 percent.

"NOPSEMA's performance report should be a wake-up call to the government and to anyone who has the bad luck of sharing the marine environment with the oil industry," Greenpeace asserted.

(Source: Sputnik)

Saudi says all 'on board' to extend oil cuts for nine months: Bloomberg

Saudi Arabia's energy minister said on Saturday all oil producers were in agreement to extend crude output cuts by nine months, Bloomberg Television reported.

"We think we have everybody on board," Khalid al-Falih said in an interview with the channel in Riyadh. "Everybody I've talked to indicated that nine months was a wise decision."

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is curbing its output by about 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) from Jan. 1 for six months, the first reduction in eight years. Russia and other non-OPEC producers agreed to cut half as much.

The deal has lifted oil prices, but inventories in industrial nations are rising and higher returns have encouraged U.S. companies to pump more. A growing number of OPEC officials believe it may take longer than six months to reduce stocks.

OPEC next meets to decide output policy on May 25 in Vienna.

There will also be a gathering in May of OPEC and non-OPEC producers, OPEC Secretary-General Mohammad Barkindo said in February.

(Source: Reuters)

Shareholders assess climate risks to oil majors

On May 12, shareholders of Occidental Petroleum - the \$46 billion company oil and gas company - passed a resolution calling on the company to assess its vulnerability to climate change, a milestone in the shareholder activist movement to pressure companies to adapt to a carbon-constrained world.

Crucially, the resolution passed with the support of BlackRock, the largest asset manager in the world. BlackRock said that it was concerned with the amount of detail that Occidental has thus far disclosed regarding its exposure to potential climate action in the future. As a result, BlackRock, which owns 8 percent of Occidental's shares, helped pass the first successful climate resolution at a major oil and gas company.

"Today's historic vote puts the oil and gas industry on notice - the climate is changing and so are investor expectations of how companies should respond," Laura Campos, a director at the Nathan Cummings Foundation, one of the resolution's proponents, said in a statement.

The impetus for such resolutions is straightforward. Shareholders are growing increasingly concerned that a concerted push, driven by both policy and market forces, to transition the global economy from fossil fuels to cleaner sources of energy could leave oil companies out in the cold.

And there is no guarantee that such a transition would be orderly. As seen over the past few years in the utility sector, it only takes a modest loss of market share to upend the economics of the industry. Utilities have suffered steep financial losses resulting from the small slice of business taken by wind and solar.

It is reasonable to assume that the oil industry could suffer a similar fate. After all, the ramp up of U.S. shale production, which added only 4 million barrels of new oil supply in a few years (roughly 4 to 5 percent of global supply) caused a once-in-a-generation meltdown in prices. If electric vehicles take a similar-sized or larger bite out of oil demand, it could wreak havoc on the finances of oil companies. Moreover, other climate policies could have a more direct impact: carbon taxes, limits on extraction, etc.

But the industry has been reluctant to disclose their exposure to a carbon-constrained world. Thus, shareholders hope to force them to own up to these vulnerabilities.

Up until now, such votes have failed to pass muster at shareholder meetings. Exxon beat back such a campaign a year ago. But the support from BlackRock in the Occidental vote suggests that even dispassionate investors from a massive private equity firm are concerned about the exposure of their investments to the coming energy transition.

The Occidental vote calls on the company to produce a report laying out its climate risks by 2018. This "climate stress test" will evaluate how the company could perform and adapt to a world in which governments attempt to keep warming capped at 2 degrees Celsius - a scenario that is looking increasingly difficult to achieve and would require much more aggressive climate policies.

"We remain concerned about the lack of discernable improvements to the company's reporting practices" on climate change, BlackRock said in a statement.

Moreover, the financial risks related to climate change lurk on multiple fronts. ExxonMobil is in the midst of fighting an investigation from the New York Attorney General into whether or not it has misled shareholders on its exposure to climate change. The accusation is based on the notion that Exxon has assured its shareholders that it will be able to produce all of the oil and gas on its books, whereas the AG argues such an outcome is not possible under likely forthcoming climate regulation.

Another recent example can be found in Alberta, where Kinder Morgan just suffered a setback over its plan to sell shares to finance the expansion of the Trans Mountain pipeline, which would carry crude oil to Canada's Pacific Coast. Greenpeace sent a request to the Alberta Securities Commission to halt the sale of shares, arguing that "Kinder Morgan's business plan only works if the world fails to act on climate change," as Keith Stewart, Senior Energy Strategist for Greenpeace Canada, said in a statement. "They may think that's a good bet, but they should be honest with potential investors about the risks being taken with their money." Greenpeace argued that Kinder Morgan is using outdated and increasingly unlikely oil demand forecasts that assume steady demand growth over time. Alberta's Securities Commission agreed to consider Greenpeace's challenge.

Shareholder activism is only going to grow over time as clean energy becomes cheaper and governments move to implement policies to reduce emissions and comply with agreements such as the Paris Climate Accord. ExxonMobil faces a shareholder vote later this month related to climate change and the threat of a low-carbon transition.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Trump’s dangerous credibility gap

By Doyle McManus

When Donald Trump was merely a real estate mogul, he exaggerated flamboyantly and reporters considered it charming: He promoted Trump Tower as a 68-story building, even though it has only 58 floors. When Trump was a presidential candidate, he lied enthusiastically, but that didn't prevent him from winning: He insisted falsely that he opposed the Iraq war from the start, to cite only one of many instances.

Now Trump is president, and his old habits haven't changed. He's still spinning bald-faced untruths whenever it suits his purpose.

The difference now is that the stakes are higher, and the lies more consequential. Earlier presidents husbanded their credibility as a precious commodity; not Trump. His modern predecessors from Lyndon B. Johnson to Barack Obama needed years to open a “credibility gap”; Trump produced his in record time. That's not merely a problem of ethics or integrity; it's a practical problem too.

Trump doesn't seem to know it, but he's hurting his ability to govern.

As one of Napoleon's aides said under not-quite-similar circumstances, this is worse than a crime; it's a blunder.

In the next battle over the Russia investigation, Trump won't get the presumption of truthfulness, because he's thrown it away.

■ The tall tales

The tall tales began on Inauguration Day, when the president celebrated record crowds that weren't. He said president Obama wiretapped his campaign; his intelligence agencies say that's not true. He said his approval of the Keystone XL project requires that the pipeline be built with American steel; it doesn't. And so on.

The most current example, of course, is the ever-changing story of why Trump decided to fire James Comey as director of the FBI.

Initially the White House said Comey was fired because the deputy attorney general reviewed his performance and ruled that he had mismanaged the investigation of Hillary Clinton's e-mails.

Then it emerged that the deputy, Rod Rosenstein, didn't volunteer; he was ordered to write a memo. And that Comey was fired not because of the Clinton investigation, but because he had lost the president's confidence months ago.

Next Trump, in an interview, admitted that he had wanted to fire Comey all along; Rosenstein's recommendation was merely window-dressing. And he said he had Russia in mind too.

“When I decided to just do it, I said to myself ... (this) thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story,” the president told NBC News.

But before he changed his story, Trump sent underlings out to spin on his behalf, including Vice President Mike Pence. Pence spent an evening earnestly telling reporters that Comey was fired solely on the basis of Rosenstein's recommendation — only to have Trump pull the rug out from under him. (That was Pence's second unfortunate experience fronting for the administration; in January he defended national security adviser Michael T. Flynn against charges of secret dealings with Russia — but the charges turned out to be true.)

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Speaker Paul Ryan dutifully echoed the White House talking points too. They put their reputations on the line on Trump's behalf.

■ Lots of things happening

By way of explanation, Trump tweeted that “with lots of things happening,” his surrogates can't be expected to provide accurate information. That would seem to make his press officers, who also spread the false account, a waste of taxpayer money.

The consequences go beyond bruised feelings.

A prominent Republican lawyer and former Trump campaign aide, A.B. Culvahouse Jr., said the episode “both prolongs the FBI/DOJ investigation and undermines the credibility of the Trump campaign's denials of no conspiracy with Putin.”

A few other Republicans are now carefully keeping their distance from White House talking points. Sen. Richard Burr, the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee who is leading an investigation into Russian interference, said pointedly that he does not agree with Trump's assertion that Comey lost the confidence of the FBI.

The episode also raises the bar for Trump's nominee to be the next FBI director. Republicans as well as Democrats will ask for assurance that the next chief won't be a White House stooge.

More immediately, if Rosenstein, Comey or Comey's successor accuse Trump of trying to impede the investigation, who will believe the president? In the next battle over the Russia investigation, Trump won't get the presumption of truthfulness, because he's thrown it away. He will look for allies, but he may find fewer who are willing to stand up for him.

It's not surprising that Trump didn't change his ways when he arrived at the White House. Playing fast and loose with the truth had always worked for him before — and, to many who knew him, that seemed an integral part of his personality.

But it may not be working any more. Trump has diminished his own influence as president, and may not even know it.

(Source: LAT)

Graf Zeppelin: Nazi Germany’s forgotten aircraft carrier

By Robert Farley

From the first days of his ascension to power, Adolf Hitler planned to rebuild the Kriegsmarine into a world-class navy. Most of the world's other major fleets included aircraft carriers, and so German naval authorities soon determined that the Reich would also require carriers.

Germany laid down its first carrier in December 1936, and launched the Graf Zeppelin two years later. It would never enter service, however: disputes between the Kriegsmarine and the Luftwaffe would delay the development of an air group, skepticism about the value of carriers would slow the project and, finally, the demands of the war prioritized other projects.

Had Graf Zeppelin entered service, however, it might have posed a formidable problem for the Royal Navy.

Acting either alone or in support of Kriegsmarine battleships, Graf Zeppelin could have threatened Britain's commercial lifeline, and at the very least made the antisubmarine campaign considerably more complicated.

The Royal Navy began converting ships into aircraft carriers before the end of World War I. By the early 1920s, Japan and the United States had joined the pack.

The Washington Naval Treaty accelerated the pace of carrier construction, leading to the conversion of several large battle cruiser hulls into fleet carriers.

France joined the party shortly thereafter, and even the Soviets and the Italians made abortive moves towards carrier construction.

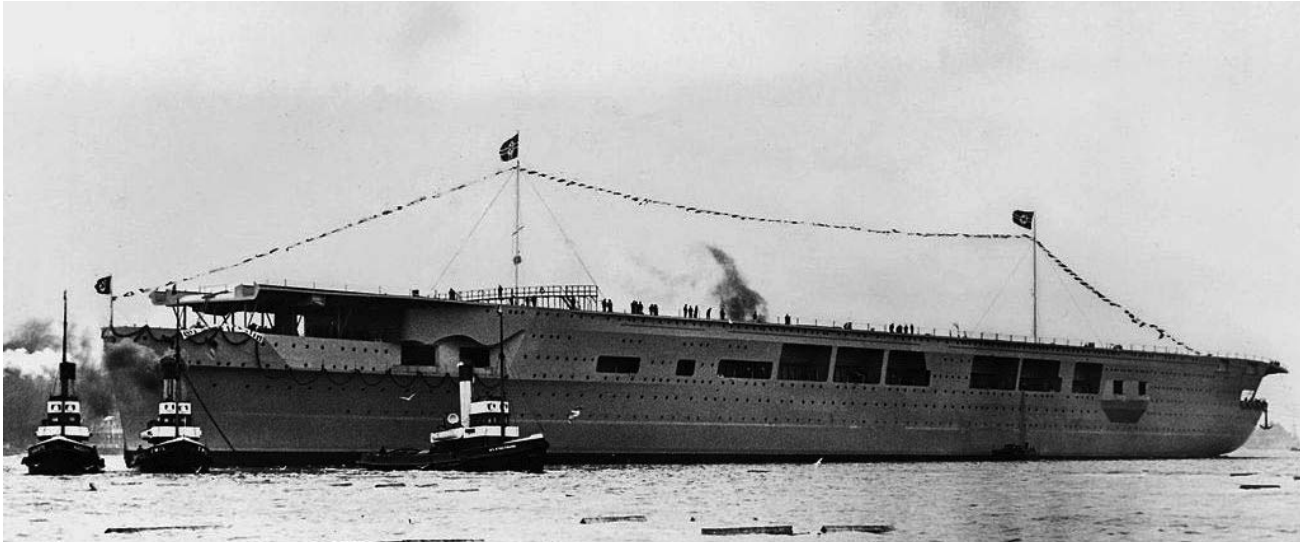
The Treaty of Versailles sharply limited both German aviation and German naval construction, making aircraft carriers out of the question. When Hitler renounced those restrictions, however, carriers were back on the menu. The Anglo-German Naval Agreement allotted roughly forty thousand tons to German carrier construction, and initially the Reich determined to construct two nineteen-thousand-ton ships (roughly the size of American, Japanese and British fleet carriers).

■ Foreign aircraft carriers

Although access to foreign aircraft carriers was limited, the Germans did manage to acquire some engineering materials from Japan during the design process.

Expectations for the size of Graf Zeppelin and its sister increased across the process, as it became clear that the Anglo-German Naval Agreement did not pose a particularly important obstacle to what the Germans wanted.

By the time of its launching, Graf



At the onset of war the Germans decided, probably correctly, that the Graf Zeppelins represented too much of an investment, given other priorities.

Zeppelin was expected to displace thirty-five thousand tons, very large for an aircraft of the era, similar in size to the Essex-class carriers.

Graf Zeppelin had a design speed of thirty-five knots, which would have made it the fastest carrier ever built (although it's not at all clear that the final ship could have made that speed). It would also have carried a substantial anti-aircraft armament for the period, which it would have needed given the lack of escorts in any plausible mission profile. Unlike American or Japanese carriers of the period, it would have had an armored flight deck.

Despite its size, the Germans did not expect Graf Zeppelin to carry a very large air group. Work on pilot training and aircraft development started in 1938.

The responsibility for this development lay with the Luftwaffe, an interservice collaboration arrangement that has repeatedly proved unworkable in practice. In any case, the initial projected air group included twenty Fi 167 biplane torpedo bombers, ten Bf 109 fighters and thirteen Stuka dive bombers.

As the project matured, the Germans dispensed with the Fi 167, and began working on plans to convert the Ju-87 into a torpedo bomber, as well as a carrier specialized fighter. Still, this collection would have been substantially inferior to the air groups normally deployed on American or Japanese carriers.

■ Long-range plans

Long-range plans for Graf Zeppelin would have involved service with the regular body of the Kriegsmarine, supporting and protecting German battleships in operations against the Royal

Navy and other foes. In the real war, however, Graf Zeppelin's role would have been very different.

Just as the cruisers and battleships of the Kriegsmarine found themselves committed to commerce raiding, Graf Zeppelin would have had to earn its keep in the hunt for merchant shipping in the Atlantic.

As an individual raider, Graf Zeppelin would have had some advantages over battleships such as Bismarck and Scharnhorst. Aerial recon would have made it much easier for the Graf Zeppelin to find targets, or to find targets for its partners. Strikes launched by bomber and torpedo aircraft could have wreaked havoc at long range, against not only British merchant shipping, but also against escorts and would-be interception squadrons.

And Graf Zeppelin's fighter contingent could have dealt with Swordfish biplanes of the sort that crippled Bismarck. It could also have operated in tandem with a battleship or heavy cruiser, increasing the scouting range and lethality of the raider formation, while also providing protection against British aircraft.

The biggest problems would have come not from the ship's fuel, but rather from the expenditure of limited aviation stores. Sustaining carrier operations is hugely costly in terms of fuel, munitions and spare parts.

The British, Americans and Japanese all dealt with this problem in different ways, and to different effect, but none of them employed carriers in long-range raiding ops detached from sources of supply.

Germany did maintain a certain rump network of resupply ships in the Atlantic,

but this would have struggled to keep Graf Zeppelin in operation for any extended period of time.

At the onset of war the Germans decided, probably correctly, that the Graf Zeppelins represented too much of an investment, given other priorities. The second ship of the class was broken up before launching, and work on Graf Zeppelin continued spasmodically across the war. Eventually, Allied naval dominance made the construction of further surface vessels pointless. Graf Zeppelin was scuttled in 1945, raised by the Soviets, and sunk as a target in 1947.

In the end, the need to develop operational experience with carriers may have posed the most difficult obstacle. In the wake of World War I, Japan, the UK and the United States spent almost two decades working through the problems and implications of carrier warfare. This included the development of aircraft, deck procedures, pilot training programs, resupply priorities, and aircraft management systems.

The Germans would have had very little time to work on any of these, and could not have drawn on the expertise of any partners, apart from the distant Japanese. Simply getting Graf Zeppelin's air group into shape would have taken more time than the Reich had to lose.

Still, Graf Zeppelin could have thrown a wrench into Allied naval warfighting plans; in the Arctic, for example, it could have caused major problems for Murmansk convoys. It is fortunate that the Nazis never had the opportunity to put it to use.

(Source: nationalinterest.org)

Netanyahu under pressure as media corruption and graft probes gather pace

By Yakir Gillis

In the absence of any substantial political rivals, escalating corruption probes into the conduct of Benjamin Netanyahu present the most significant threat to his eight-year tenure as Israel's prime minister and highlight the controversial connections between the country's politicians, media and businessmen.

Israel's political elite has frequently been the focus of corruption allegations in recent years.

Former prime ministers such as the late Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert were the subject of probes, the latter receiving a six-year jail sentence in 2014 after being found guilty of bribery.

While Netanyahu has faced a series of graft investigations in the course of his career, he has never been charged and has consistently dismissed the claims against him as baseless.

■ Netanyahu's s serious challenges

However, the latest police inquiries into his affairs, launched by Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit in December 2016, have been gathering pace in the past few months and pose a serious challenge to his leadership.

Over the years Netanyahu has emerged as a formidable political force, beating off rivals time and again, but some are speculating that at least one of the current investigations could force him out of office.

The first, named "Case 1000", relates to gifts allegedly given by prominent businessmen to Netanyahu and his family. The second, "Case 2000", while apparently less legally robust, has nonetheless been significantly more damaging to Netanyahu's reputation.

A third investigation has so far only indirectly linked the premier to a controversy surrounding Israel's acquisition of submarines from German manufacturer ThyssenKrupp. Netanyahu denies any wrongdoing in all three cases.

Case 2000 — which has exposed controversial links between politics, media and business — was prompted by a recording obtained by the police in a search of the home of a former senior Netanyahu staffer in



an unrelated case.

According to reported leaks from the investigation, published in January, the recordings are of a meeting in late 2014 between Netanyahu and Noni Moses, the chairman of Israeli newspaper and media group Yediot Ahronot, which is generally critical of Netanyahu.

The two are reportedly recorded negotiating a deal by which Yediot would change its negative editorial line toward the prime minister. In exchange, according to the reports, the latter suggested measures to curb the circulation of Yediot's rival Israel HaYom (Israel Today). Spokespeople for the prime minister have claimed that the leaks from the investigation are inaccurate and misleading.

The relationship between Netanyahu and Israel Today has long been contentious. The newspaper, launched in 2007, is owned by Las Vegas magnate and major Republican donor Sheldon Adelson, who is known to be a staunch supporter of Netanyahu. The title, distributed free of charge, has become the most widely read newspaper in Israel. Its growing stake in the media market has severely damaged Yediot's bottom line, provoking a bitter war of words between the two publishing companies.

The conflict has forced many in Israeli political and business circles to take sides, supporting either the

"Noni" or "Sheldon" camps.

■ Political spectrum

In terms of its politics, Israel Today became known for its distinct pro-Netanyahu editorial line and negative coverage of his rivals on the left and right of the political spectrum.

The newspaper was instrumental in drumming up votes for Netanyahu in the run-up to his 2009 election victory and has helped to consolidate his support base ever since.

Opposition politicians and opposition-leaning media have also claimed that the title's main aim was not to make money but to support Netanyahu's political causes, thereby circumventing strict Israeli political and campaign financing laws. These assertions were bolstered when left-leaning newspaper Haaretz revealed in January that Israel Today had made losses of approximately \$190 million over the last decade.

Netanyahu, Israel Today, and Adelson have repeatedly denied these allegations. However, leaked reports from the police investigation suggest that the recordings may uncover a direct link between Netanyahu and the newspaper. For example, in discussions with Moses, Netanyahu is alleged to have offered to ask Adelson to reduce Israel Today's circulation, according to reports of the leaked tapes. Like the other claims, this one too has been dismissed by all those concerned.

Reliable media reports based on police sources have indicated that investigators are leaning toward recommending that prosecutors press charges against Netanyahu in Case 1000, potentially forcing him to step down. The reports also suggest that investigators are less confident as to whether the evidence against Netanyahu in Case 2000 constitutes a criminal offense.

Nonetheless, the Israel Today case will likely be a watershed. For while it may not be the issue on which Israeli prosecutors choose to press charges against a serving prime minister, it will probably prompt increasing scrutiny of the network of relationships between politicians, businessmen and the media.

(Source: Newsweek)

New World Order triumvirate: US, China, Japan

By Eric Walberg

Watching the most recent Hollywood blockbuster, *The Martian*, I was struck by the political subtext. The great pioneer of outer space was the Soviet Union, and in those days, Hollywood followed the spirit of detente and cooperation in space with such uplifting films as *Space Odyssey 2010* and the tv series *Star Trek*. Now the hostile Cold War has returned, and Hollywood mirrors this in what is otherwise a rather ordinary adventure film. The startling plot device is to point to China as the new partner in space, leaving the Russians pointedly out of the equation. Just imagining a Hollywood nod to Russia--the pioneer of outer space exploration and good will--is impossible given the crisis in international relations today.

Hollywood is a barometer for changing political weather conditions. Of course, the Muslim terrorist is the usual trope. This new embrace of China will make *The Martian* a hit in Beijing. At a time when world trade relations are in deep trouble, and we are on high alert to the possibility of a hot war breaking out, we can see this sea change in US foreign relations, where China is now the implied US friend in the world and Russia the enemy. This is a moment for India to ponder where she stands.

In the past, the Soviet Union was India's reliable partner, and suffered US hostility for her peaceful, nonaligned policy. When the Soviet Union collapsed, India adjusted, maintaining good relations with Russia and at the same time striving for good relations with the world hegemon. But the world hegemon has its own interests, and so far, India is not a priority. Because of the mess the US created in Afghanistan, Pakistan takes precedence over India diplomatically, and now China is catching up, with its formidable economic might and lack of a world hegemonic agenda making it attractive.

Its regional ambitions are of some concern, including for India, which makes the surprisingly high profile of Japan under Trump cause for some serious thought. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has already visited the US--and Trump--three times. After meeting with Trump at his residence at Trump Tower, Abe stated: "Alliances cannot function without trust. I am now confident that president-elect Trump is a trustworthy leader."

In December 2016, Prime Minister Abe joined President Barack Obama in a ceremony at Pearl Harbor, where he characterized the US-Japan alliance as an "alliance of hope". On Abe's third visit, in February 2017, he stated that "the cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific is the strong Japan-US alliance," and that he and President Trump "will work together to further strengthen our alliance." During Abe's February 2017 visit to the White House, he extended a formal invitation to President Trump and Vice President Pence to visit Japan.

■ 'Threats' to Japan

Why this flurry of interest in Japan? During Abe's third visit, North Korea test-fired a ballistic missile, which western media pointed out landed in waters near Japan, leading western analysts to whip up fear that North Korea might drop a bomb on Japan. About three weeks later, North Korea fired four ballistic missiles, three of which landed in Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone. It could be pointed out that North Korea has every right to test its weapons, that it doesn't really have much choice about where to test them, nor is it party to Japan's 'exclusive economic zone' on the high seas. More important, it has never threatened to launch war with Japan or anyone else.



Trump was elected based on his promise to strengthen the US economy. China and the United States are Japan's top export markets, each over \$100 billion in recent years.



In 2016, during the election campaign, Trump told a town hall meeting that it was time to reconsider the policy of not allowing Japan to arm itself with nuclear weapons.

This is the scarecrow threat to Japan, which is convenient for US warmongering. The other supposed challenges in the region involves China's long standing claims on Senkaku Islands (known in Chinese as Diaoyu) in the East China Sea, and Russia's possession of certain Kuril Islands, which it was awarded at the end of WWII and which Japan insists are hers.

Both North Korea and Russia have legitimate claims for respect from their neighbors. Both are seen as hostile aggressors in the western media, though neither has any expansionist plans. Both North Korea and Russia are treated as enemies for purely US geopolitical reasons, China also is in need of containment. That makes Japan the best option for any alliance to keep US rivals in line. At the same time, the US smile directed at China suggests that there is room for accommodation of China, faced as the US is with more stubborn rivals like Russia and North Korea, as the least bad of the lot, and given its power, thus better as an ally than a foe.

This complicated America pas de trois is fascinating to watch, but for India, is unsettling. So far, there is little interest in the US in making India a stronger player in the world or even the region. It is not strategically important for the 'great game' players. But that is really much better for India in the long run. Being a close ally of the US is fraught with problems. As pointed out in "India-US Bilateral Trade Treaty: The Time is Now" (The Diplomatist April 2017), the US is a thorny partner at best.

Though US politicians grumble about China as a geopolitical threat, the first stop of US presidents is Beijing. Before his day in New Delhi in 2010, Obama made a 4-day visit to China in 2009, calling Beijing the key to "peace, stability and development in south Asia". Chinese president Xi Jinping visited the US in April 2017, and Trump accepted his invitation to pay a state visit to China later this year. So far India is not included in this budding friendship. The reality of world geopolitics means that China is more important to the US than India, as a potential ally against Russia, and as a creditor.

■ Japan next nuclear power?

The US effectively still occupies Japan, with 50,000 US troops, free access for its navy, and Japan's payment of \$2 billion a year for the privilege of this 'security' arrangement. India can be grateful that it has never been so intimately tied to the US. Better safe, than sorry. The trick is to avoid offending the beast, and quietly pursue good relations with all countries, including Iran, Russia, and even North Korea. Friends are less likely to cause problems than enemies.

Commander of US Pacific Command Harry Harris listed Japan first among five US allies in the Asia Pacific, and added that Japan's 2015 defense legislation, which authorized limited collective self-defense, would "significantly increase Japan's ability to contribute to peace and security." The US-Japan alliance forms the foundation for the "rebalance to Asia" strategy first announced during the Obama administration.

While there are currently no known plans in Japan to produce nuclear weapons, it has been argued Japan has the technology, raw materials, and the capital to produce nuclear weapons within one year if necessary, and many analysts consider it a de facto nuclear state. In 2011, former Minister of Defense Shigeru Ishiba explicitly backed the idea of Japan maintaining the capability of nuclear latency: "I don't think Japan needs to possess nuclear weapons, but it's important to maintain our commercial reactors because it would allow us to produce a nuclear warhead in a short amount of time ... It's a tacit nuclear deterrent."

In 2016, during the election campaign, Trump told a town hall meeting chaired by CNN's Anderson Cooper, that it was time to reconsider the policy of not allowing Japan to arm itself with nuclear weapons. He told Mike Wallace in June 2016 Japan would in fact be "better off if they defend themselves from North Korea, including with nukes."

Trump was elected based on his promise to strengthen the US economy. China and the United States are Japan's top export markets, each over \$100 billion in recent years. So it makes sense to make friends with both, even though they both are difficult for Japan to swallow. International politics make strange bedfellows. This new unlikely triumvirate ruling the world is a chilling spectacle, not only for India.

Trump's other major electoral promise was to pursue a more isolationist, peaceful foreign policy. On both counts so far, the results have been disappointing, even alarming.

This is a crucial moment for India. It must play a mature role to counter US warmongering, based on its tradition of promoting world peace. While India does not object to the US pursuing friendly cooperation with its neighbours China and Pakistan, it must not be at the expense of India. Neither is flirting with the creation of another nuclear armed state in anyone's interests. Both India and Pakistan ruffled US feathers with their nuclear arms, but the idea of letting Japan join the 'club', presumably to threaten North Korea and to keep China 'in check', is irresponsible.

The fact that India is left out of all this is not something to bemoan. Just as Russia is slighted even in Hollywood, India too is left out in the cold. Bilateral trade treaties, yes, but, given the craven nature of the current 'great game', it is much better in terms of genuine security to be self-reliant, and friendly to all nations, than to be making military alliances where there is no need. It was this penchant for cynical alliances that precipitated WWI. Alliances demand an enemy, and then demand action against that perceived enemy. India is better off sticking with the UN, with the only peaceful alliance going.

Trump approves new Pentagon strategy to "annihilate" ISIS

By Niles Niemuth

Defense Secretary James Mattis announced at a press briefing on Friday that President Donald Trump had approved a new Pentagon plan that would escalate the war for US domination of the Middle East and North Africa.

Mattis told reporters that the plan would aim to militarily encircle strongholds of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to "annihilate" the Islamist militia, which still controls significant portions of Syria and Iraq.

The immediate target is the ISIS capital of Raqqa in northern Syria, where a major offensive is being prepared by the US in coordination with the various Kurdish and Arab Syrian militias it has built up during the five-year conflict. The civil war has been stoked by the US and its regional allies with the aim of unseating Syrian President Bashar al Assad.

Mattis also reported that Trump had delegated the ability to authorize military operations to him and to commanders on the ground to speed up operations.

"We've accelerated the campaign," Mattis said, indicating that commanders were already taking advantage of their new-found authority.

The Obama administration used the emergence of ISIS in Iraq and Syria in 2014 to justify redeploying thousands of US troops to Iraq and deploying hundreds of troops to Syria, while opening a campaign of airstrikes across both countries.

Saudi Arabia has been using US weapons and support to wage an unrelenting air war and naval blockade against Yemen, creating a humanitarian crisis.

The bloody campaigns by US and Iraqi forces to retake cities seized by ISIS, including Fallujah and Mosul, have resulted in the complete destruction of entire neighborhoods and have displaced hundreds of thousands of people. US airstrikes have killed thousands of civilians, with a significant uptick in casualties since Trump took office in January.

ISIS developed out of the invasion and occupation of

Iraq in 2003, in which the US stoked sectarian divisions between Shiites and Sunnis to assert its control, and the war for regime change in Syria beginning in 2011, in which the CIA and Pentagon supported Sunni Islamist militias, elements of which formed ISIS.

According to the Pentagon, ISIS now maintains branches and affiliates in multiple countries, all of which will require US military intervention across a broad swath of territory from Central Asia to West Africa.

The decision by Trump heralds a dramatic escalation of conflicts that have killed more than a million people and displaced tens of millions from their homes over the last 16 years under the guise of the so-called "war on terror." In the eyes of military planners, the turn by the United States to use military force to offset its relative economic decline and assert its dominance over the entire globe is just in its beginning stages.

Military operations waged against ISIS and other Islamist militias are underway in Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Afghanistan. In Afghanistan, the US recently dropped the largest non-nuclear bomb ever used in combat on a network of caves allegedly being used by the ISIS Khorasan affiliate.

The ever-expanding use of military force is not limited to the United States. At Friday's press conference, Mattis singled out the deployment of 4,000 French troops to the Lake Chad region of West Africa. France has been fighting Islamist insurgents there since 2014, including Boko Haram militants who have pledged their allegiance to ISIS.

The announcement of the Pentagon's wide-ranging war strategy came just one day after American war planes launched airstrikes on Shiite militias loyal to the Assad government near Syria's borders with Jordan and Iraq. It was the first attack by the Trump administration on forces aligned with Assad since the April 6 cruise missile strike on al-Shayrat airbase.

The pro-Assad paramilitary group that came under attack had allegedly come within 18 miles of a military base where American and British Special Forces are training Sunni militants.

Mattis noted the airstrike at the press conference on Friday, blaming the attack on the intervention of Iran in Syria.

"It [the strike] was necessitated by offensive movement with offensive capability of what we believe was Iranian-directed forces inside an established and agreed upon deconfliction zone," he claimed.

Both Russia and Iran have intervened militarily to prop up their ally Assad. While the US military intervention in Syria, illegal under international law, is couched as an effort to defeat ISIS and eliminate the threat of terrorism, it is ultimately aimed at the ouster of Assad. This has created the conditions for a direct clash between the US and Russian and Iranian-backed forces that could quickly spiral out of control, precipitating a much larger conflict.

The announcement of the Pentagon's new strategy came as Trump left Washington for his first foreign trip in office. The first stop will be Saudi Arabia, where the president is expected to announce a record \$110 billion arms deal with the Saudi monarchy. The deal reportedly includes precision guided bombs that had been withheld by the Obama administration while it funneled billions of dollars of other weaponry.

The brutal Saudi onslaught against Yemen, the poorest country in the Arab world, aims to re-impose a Saudi- and US-backed puppet government. The war, which began in 2015, has killed thousands of civilians and pushed millions to the brink of famine. The latest weapons deal will further escalate the carnage.

Saudi Arabia has been using US weapons and support to wage an unrelenting air war and naval blockade against Yemen, creating a humanitarian crisis. Hundreds of thousands are now threatened by a deadly outbreak of cholera.

The US support for Saudi Arabia, which is one of the main funders of Sunni Islamist militias along with the other Gulf monarchies, belies the narrative that the US is waging a war to defeat these groups. These outfits serve as convenient props for American imperialism, used as proxy forces against those that stand in the way of American dominance and trotted out as an excuse for the deployment of the US military to every corner of the globe.

Four-year-olds don't act like Trump

By Alison Gopnik

The analogy is pervasive among his critics: Donald Trump is like a child. Making him the president was like making a 4-year-old the leader of the free world.

But the analogy is profoundly wrong, and it's unfair to children. The scientific developmental research of the past 30 years shows that Mr. Trump is utterly unlike a 4-year-old.

Four-year-olds care deeply about the truth. They constantly try to seek out information and to figure out how the world works. Of course, 4-year-olds, as well as adults, occasionally lie. But Mr. Trump doesn't just lie; he seems not even to care whether his statements are true.

Four-year-olds are insatiably curious. One study found that the average preschooler asks hundreds of questions per day. Just watch a toddler "getting into everything" — endangering his own safety to investigate interesting new objects like knives and toasters. Mr. Trump refuses to read and is bored by anything that doesn't involve him personally.

Four-year-olds can pay attention. They do have difficulty changing the focus of their attention in response to arbitrary commands.

But recent studies show that even babies systematically direct their focus to the events and objects that will teach them the most. They pay special attention to events that contradict what they already believe. Mr. Trump refuses to pay attention to anything that clashes with his preconceptions.

■ Difference between fantasy and reality

Four-year-olds understand the difference between fantasy and reality. They certainly enjoy pretend play, imagining that the world is full of villains and that they are all-powerful heroes.

But studies show that they know they are pretending and understand that their imaginary companions are just that: imaginary. Mr. Trump seems to have no sense of the boundary between his self-aggrandizing fantasies and reality.

Four-year-olds have a "theory of mind," an understanding of their own minds and those of others. In my lab we have found that 4-year-olds recognize that their own past beliefs might have been wrong. Mr. Trump contradicts him-

self without hesitation and doesn't seem to recognize any conflict between his past and present beliefs.

Four-year-olds, contrary to popular belief, are not egocentric or self-centered. They understand and care about how other people feel and think, and recognize that other people can feel and think differently from them.

In my lab, which studies the cognitive development of children, we have found that even 1½-year-olds can understand that someone else might want something different from what they want. They understand that someone else might like broccoli, even though they themselves prefer crackers, and they will help that person get what he wants.

In fact, children as young as 1½ demonstrate both empathy and altruism: They will rush to comfort someone who is hurt, and they will spontaneously go out of their way to help someone. In one study, if 1-year-olds saw a stranger drop a pen and strain to reach for it, they would crawl over obstacles to find the pen and give it to him.

■ Neither empathy nor altruism

Mr. Trump seems to have no sense of the boundary between his self-aggrandizing fantasies and reality.

Mr. Trump displays neither empathy nor altruism, and his egocentrism is staggering.

Four-year-olds have a strong moral sense. Children as young as 2½ say that hurting another child is always wrong, even if an authority figure were to say otherwise. Babies will avoid a puppet that has been mean to another puppet. Mr. Trump admires authoritarian leaders who have no compunctions about harming their own people.

Four-year-olds are sensitive to social norms and think that they and other people should obey them. In one recent study, seeing a puppet play a game involving particular rules led children to follow the rules themselves and to expect other people to do so. Even 2- and 3-year-olds protested when they saw someone break the rules. Mr. Trump has time and again shown his contempt for norms of behavior in every community he has belonged to.

Now, all this is not to say that a 4-year-old would make a good chief executive. Being president is certainly a grown-up job. Still, most adults, even most presidents, and certainly the best presidents, manage to retain some of their childlike traits — curiosity, openness to experience, intuitive sensitivity to others.

(Source: The NYT)

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What is wheezing and what are the causes?

Causes and tests for respiratory wheezing

Wheezing is a common but frightening symptom that often prompts people to see their doctor. What is wheezing, what are some possible causes, and what can you expect when you see your doctor?

What is wheezing?

Wheezing is defined as a high-pitched whistling sound that occurs with breathing. Wheezing can occur both with breathing in (inspiratory wheezing) and with breathing out (expiratory wheezing), though it is more common with breathing out.

What causes wheezing?

The sound of wheezing is created by a narrowing of the airways. This can be due to swelling or blockage anywhere from the throat down to the smallest airways. Some possible causes include:

- Asthma - The most common cause of wheezing is asthma.
- Anaphylaxis - This is a severe allergic reaction (often due to a bee sting or eating nuts or shellfish) that causes swelling in the throat and is a medical emergency.
- Bronchitis - Bronchitis can be both acute (lasting only a few days), or chronic (lasting weeks to months to years).
- Bronchiolitis - This is an infection that involves the smallest airways (bronchioles) and is most common in children.
- Inhaling (aspirating) a foreign body - Choking can sometimes cause wheezing if the object that is inhaled does not completely obstruct the airways. Often people recall choking, such as on a piece of steak or in the case of children, on other objects. But sometimes, especially when an object does not completely obstruct the airways (such as a piece of carrot), people may not remember a choking episode.

Pneumonia

- COPD - Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) such as emphysema may cause wheezing.
- Bronchiectasis - A widening of the airways often due to childhood infections or cystic fibrosis is sometimes difficult to diagnose, and may at first be attributed to another cause of wheezing.
- Epiglottitis - A medical emergency marked by symptoms such as fever, drooling, and sitting in an upright position in an attempt to breathe, epiglottitis is caused by an infection of the epiglottis – a small piece of cartilage attached to the end of the tongue.
- Viral infections such as respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) – Many viral infections can cause wheezing, especially in children.
- Lung cancer - The first symptom of lung cancer may be wheezing, making it important to identify the cause of wheezing even if the cause appears obvious.

Heart failure

- Pulmonary embolism - Blood clots in the legs may break off and travel to the lungs (pulmonary emboli).
- Acid reflux - It may not seem obvious, but acid reflux is a fairly common cause of wheezing.
- Hypersensitivity pneumonitis – Chronic inflammation of the lungs caused by such things as moldy hay and bird droppings may have wheezing as the first symptom.
- Medications – Especially aspirin.
- Vocal Cord Dysfunction – Caused by one or both of the vocal cords closing unintentionally during



Wheezing can occur both with breathing in (inspiratory wheezing) and with breathing out (expiratory wheezing), though it is more common with breathing out.

breathing, this is also known as “vocal cord asthma.”

When to see your doctor

If you have been wheezing, it is important to see your doctor -- even if you feel you know the cause or have experienced wheezing in the past. In medical school, we were taught repeatedly to remember “all that wheezes is not asthma.” Even if you have been diagnosed with asthma, make sure to contact your doctor with any change in your symptoms.

Call your doctor (or 911) immediately if you are experiencing chest pains, lightheadedness, are finding it hard to catch your breath, or note a bluish tint to your lips and skin. Swelling of your face, neck, and lips could be a sign of a life-threatening allergic reaction.

Questions your doctor may ask about wheezing

The first thing your doctor will do (after making sure you are comfortable and stable) is take a thorough medical history and perform a physical exam. Some of the questions she may ask you include:

- When did your symptoms begin?
- Have you ever had symptoms like this before?
- Is your wheezing worse at night or during the day?
- Have you been stung by a bee, or have you eaten foods that may cause serious allergic reactions such as shellfish or nuts?
- Do you have any other symptoms such as a cough, shortness of breath, chest pain, hives, swelling of your face or neck, or coughing up blood?
- Do you have a personal or family history of

asthma, eczema, lung diseases, or lung cancer?

- Do you, or have you ever, smoked?
- Have you choked while eating?

Evaluation of wheezing

Tests to evaluate your wheezing and determine a cause will vary depending upon your history. Some of them may include:

- Oximetry - To check the oxygen level in your blood.
- A chest x-ray
- Spirometry
- Blood tests – Such as a white blood cell count to look for signs of infection.
- Pulmonary function tests
- A CT scan of your chest
- Bronchoscopy - If your doctor is concerned that you may have aspirated (breathed in) a foreign object, or that you may have a tumor in or near your airways, she may order a bronchoscopy to take a closer look down in your airways.
- Laryngoscopy - To look at your larynx and vocal cords.

- Allergy testing - If she feels that you have allergies that are causing your airways to spasm.

Treatments for wheezing

Depending on how serious your symptoms are, your doctor will first do what is necessary to make you comfortable and control your symptoms. Since there are many possible causes of wheezing, further treatment will depend on the cause of your wheezing.

(Source: [verywell.com](#))

This is how much praise kids really need

To help children thrive emotionally and socially, aim to praise them for their good behavior five times a day, a new study suggests. The research, presented at the British Psychological Society's annual conference, found that parents who did exactly that saw a boost in their kids' wellbeing and a drop in hyperactivity and inattention.

For the study, which has not yet been published in a peer-reviewed journal, researchers from De Montfort University in England asked 38 parents of 2- to 4-year-olds to complete questionnaires about their children's behavior and wellbeing. Some of the parents were also given information about how and when to praise their children for good behavior and were asked to keep track of how many times they did so each day.

After four weeks, the parents who said they praised their kids five times a day saw an improvement in their children's wellbeing, compared to those who weren't keeping track. Children in the praise group also had better behavior and reduced levels of hyperactivity and inattention, according to the parents' responses.

Sue Westwood, senior lecturer at De Montfort University, said that praising a child is a “simple, cost effective intervention” that when used on a regular basis can have a significant impact. “Improved behavior and wellbeing can result simply from ensuring that a child's positive actions are rewarded with praise and parents are seen to be observing their good behavior,” she said in a press release.



The study is based on De Montfort's Five Praises campaign, designed to encourage parents and caregivers to give frequent positive and loving attention to children, especially very young kids. On the campaign's website, parents can download a weekly chart—similar to the ones used in the new study—to

track their five daily instances of positive reinforcement.

“Sometimes it's easier to criticize than it is to compliment,” the researchers wrote in materials distributed to parents in the study. “Bad behavior is more obvious than good behavior—you're much more likely to notice when

Bad behavior is more obvious than good behavior—you're much more likely to notice when your child is yelling than you are to notice when your child is quietly reading a book.

your child is yelling than you are to notice when your child is quietly reading a book.”

But research has showed that regular appreciation and praise fosters feelings of closeness and love in babies and toddlers, the study authors say, and also encourages them to keep up their good behavior.

Researcher Carole Sutton, co-founder of the Five Praises campaign, says that parents should take the opportunity to “catch” their children being good, and to acknowledge their everyday efforts and achievements: toddlers brushing their teeth, learning to ride a tricycle or caring for pets or siblings, for example. At the same time, she says, parents should also set firm boundaries so that children don't grow to expect unwavering approval.

Five praises a day may not be a magic number; Sutton chose it as a good goal because it echoed the popular advice to eat five servings of fruit and vegetables a day. “You might use fewer or more,” she says, “but the important point is that the children should hear positive messages frequently and over weeks and months, not just for a day or two.”

Sutton also says that not just parents, but grandparents, teachers and anyone who interacts with children of any age should make an effort to praise behaviors they want to encourage in their kids. If they do, she says, “they will almost certainly see a move to more positive patterns of behavior in families, classrooms, in shops—everywhere.”

(Source: [time.com](#))

7 things everyone needs to get rid of to be instantly happier

By [Susie Moore](#)

It's May. 2017. Holy moly. Spring is officially in full swing, which got me thinking, Does anyone actually spring clean anymore? Let's take a look at what that actually means: “To clean all of a place, especially your house, very well, including parts you do not often clean.” Sounds very healthy to me.

And what better time of year then to have a formal cleanse in other areas too? Because your mental well-being (and not just your kitchen pantry) depends on it. Here are some things to consider kicking out this season:

1. Comparison

Who can you finally stop comparing yourself to? Dan Sullivan, founder of Strategic Coach, says you have to “get out of the gap” when it comes to measuring your life by other people's success—the gap being where you are and where they appear to be. The best way to do this is to consider how far you have come in the last 12 months, to the day.

On this day last year, what didn't you know, have, or had become yet? Let your progress astound you. Basically, focus on your own thing.

2. Exhaustion

Why does everyone seem to be tired all of the time? Go to bed earlier! Take a bath. Read. Unwind. Listen to nature sounds at night on Spotify versus scouring Snapchat. Plan your outfit and bag the night before work so you have a few extra minutes in bed. There is nothing magical or mystical about getting sufficient rest. Commit to a curfew during the week and to being more organized.

3. Excuses

Everything you've ever wanted is on the other side of the excuse that you can't have it. What have you been telling yourself that you can't have: a promotion at work, a leaner body, a successful blog, a fulfilling relationship, more money?



Ask yourself, “What if my belief about this were not true?” Look for examples of other people who might already be, do, or have some of the things that you want. And flex your curiosity muscle (not your comparison trigger). What does this reveal to you? Does it mean what you want is possible? And therefore, could also be possible for you, if you allow it?

4. Guilt

Guilt is a killer. It's also proof that you're living in the past. Guilt is an unhealthy, unconstructive, and totally unnecessary emotion. You're probably giving it way too much mental space when you don't have to. Here are 6 things you can stop feeling guilty about, pronto.

5. Regret

Remember this: You've always done the very best you could with what you knew at the time and with the resources that you had. That's all we ever do, every single one of us. Can you give yourself a little break?

6. A grudge

Guilt is a killer and is also proof that you're living in the past. Guilt is an unhealthy, unconstructive, and totally unnecessary emotion.

I've secretly been holding a grudge against two different people for years now. One is a former passive-aggressive, sexist boss who treated his team really poorly and screwed me out of a commission that I earned. Another is a family member who is really insincere (not to mention cheap) and who acts like a hero. *shudder*

Thinking about either of them can rile me up. So I

don't. Because forgiveness (still!) does not flow easily. I just cut them out of my mind altogether. It works well enough for me. There is no toxicity because there is, well, simply nothing. Next item!

7. Clutter

I love a good Marie Kondo-style cleanup. Just last week, when I couldn't find an outfit for a Facebook live (because I could not see everything I own in my closet), I went on a rampage and donated two big shopping bags of stuff (including dresses with tags still attached because I never wore them, but clung to the hope that I would out of a sad sense of regret ... remind me to read No. 5). It felt so cleansing.

I also have around 313 mini bottles of lotions and potions thanks to a Birchbox membership, an ipsy subscription, and the freebies I get sent as an influencer. I threw out the ones I have tried but don't like, gave away the ones I won't use, and am using the rest in order. Use, discard. Use, discard. The orderliness makes me feel like a goddess.

What can you consciously declutter: a bookshelf, bathroom drawer, inbox, an entire scroll or two of your phone of unused apps?

Unhealthy habits remain and fester as long as we don't shine a light on them. So if you decide to clean your home from top to bottom this spring, don't forget to clear out the junk in your head too.

(Source: [greatist.com](#))

10 hot titles of IT world

By Alireza Khorasani

Here are high rated IT titles in the world that reviewed by savvy tech users:

1 Russian security firm ElcomSoft has discovered that Apple has been keeping deleted notes in the cloud for far longer. Its security researchers were able to retrieve notes that should've vanished weeks and months ago. In some cases, they were even able to recover notes from way back in 2015.

2 Apple has refused to compensate an Australian woman who woke up on a flight to the sound of her Beats headphones exploding in her face. According to Australian site Adelaide Now, Apple says they have investigated the incident and determined that third-party batteries were to blame.

3 Uber is charging some riders more for high demand routes. Uber has been charging some passengers differently based on the routes that they're taking, according to a pair of reports in Bloomberg and Business Insider. The goal of the pricing scheme is to help entice drivers in those areas to help reduce wait times for passengers. Traditionally, Uber has charged riders based on the mileage, time on the road, and surrounding demand.

4 Amazon could be planning to bring its checkout-free grocery stores to Europe. Amazon could be looking to expand its cashier-free grocery stores to the UK and Europe in the future. The company recently filed several trademark applications related to its Go stores with the UK's Intellectual Property Office and its European Union equivalent.

5 The White House plans to huddle with top executives from Apple, Facebook, Google and other tech giants next month to brainstorm ways that the U.S. government can put more of its "citizen services" online and tackle thorny policy issues like high-skilled immigration. Both items are part of a lengthy agenda that awaits the inaugural gathering of the American Technology Council, an effort by President Donald Trump to modernize the inner-workings of Washington that's being spearheaded by his son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner.

6 In 2016 you voted that the best screen size is between 5" and 5.3", in 2017 the most preferred screen diagonal is still centered on 5.2". 41% of the vote settled on that option, though this year the larger option - 5.5" - came close with 28%. Things are starting to sway towards bigger screen, though this poll gives us a feeling that it will be a while before the 5-and-a-bit inch phones lose the top spot. The '5.7" (wide aspect ratio)' option scored a respectable 16% of the vote - way above both regular 5.7" and 6" phones

7 Samsung Galaxy S8 announced for China. The flagship will officially go on sale in the country starting May 25. There's currently no information on what price tag it will carry.

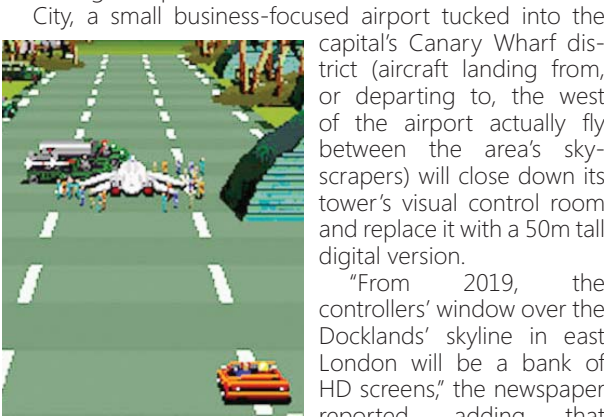
8 Huawei MediaPad T3 7.0 now available for purchase in US. One of the devices from Huawei's MediaPad T3 lineup is now available in the US. The device in question is the MediaPad T3 7.0 and it's sold at Walmart. The retailer is offering the tablet for \$89.

9 Google has announced that Drive's Quick Access feature will soon be available on the service's Web client. The feature in question is currently only available on Android and iOS. Quick Access, for those who aren't aware, uses machine learning to intelligently predict the files you may need.

10 New Telegram update brings video messages, ability for bots to accept payments. The app now lets users send video messages as well (voice messages are already supported, in case you aren't in the know).

London City airport swaps control tower for digital cameras

London's City airport is replacing its air traffic control tower with zoomable cameras worked from a base in Hampshire, according to reports.



City, a small business-focused airport tucked into the capital's Canary Wharf district (aircraft landing from, or departing to, the west of the airport actually fly between the area's sky-scrapers) will close down its tower's visual control room and replace it with a 50m tall digital version.

"From 2019, the controllers' window over the Docklands' skyline in east London will be a bank of HD screens," the newspaper reported, adding that the full 360 degree view from the City VCR has been compressed to a 225-degree arc, allowing NATS controllers to view the entire runway and apron area from a normal seated position without needing to turn around.

(Source: Guardian)

World's thinnest hologram promises 3D images on our mobile phones

By Katyanna Quach

A group of scientists has developed the "world's thinnest hologram" – a thousand times thinner than a human hair, they claim.

Holograms are three-dimensional images created by the interactions of laser lights, and appear to have more depth than images formed from lenses.

The dream is that one day, flat images from screens will be upgraded to realistic 3D projections like the virtual screens seen in sci-fi. Shrinking holograms is a necessary step to applying the technology to smaller devices such as mobile phones.

Min Gu, lead author of the study and professor at the research innovation and entrepreneurship department of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Australia, said: "Integrating holography into everyday electronics would make screen size irrelevant – a pop-up 3D hologram can display a wealth of data that doesn't neatly fit on a phone or watch."

But "conventional computer-generated holograms are too big for electronic devices."

A paper published in Nature Communications by a team of physicists from RMIT, Australia, and the Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT), China, describes how a thin film of antimony



telluride (Sb2Te3) can reduce the size of holograms.

It's described as a nano-hologram and measures 60 nanometres. The researchers found that the grainy, repetitive surface structure of antimony and tellurium atoms led to unequal refractive indices and acted as optical resonant cavities.

An optical resonant cavity allows the light

from laser beams to bounce around and reflect many times to create waves that are in different phases. The shifted positions of the light are more likely to create the illusion of depth seen in holographic imaging.

The next stage is to create a rigid film that can be laid onto an LCD screen to project a 3D holographic display, said Zengji Yue and Gaolei Xue, co-authors

of the paper and researchers at BIT. It'll involve shrinking the hologram down even further – at least 10 times smaller.

"From medical diagnostics to education, data storage, defense and cyber security, 3D holography has the potential to transform a range of industries and this research brings that revolution one critical step closer," Gu said. ®

(Source: theregister)

You don't have to register personal drones with the FAA anymore



In March, the FAA noted that over 100,000 hobby drone owners had registered their machines since the year began, bringing the total in the US over 770,000. Owners have filed their non-commercial UAVs with the agency ever since the DoT passed a law in December 2015 that made registration mandatory. But a Washington, D.C. court has struck down that legislation, freeing just-for-fun drone owners from notifying the government of their purchases -- for good and ill.

Model aircraft enthusiast John Taylor brought his case against the FAA back in January 2016, shortly after the regulations came in place. The DC court of appeals ruled (PDF) in his favor, effectively classifying non-commercial drones as model aircraft and subject to the FAA's 2012 Modernization and Re-

form Act, which prohibited the agency from making new laws restricting flying hobbyist craft.

But the drone industry isn't celebrating this turn: Turns out, keeping track of owners and making sure they're trained to fly was useful for everyone.

"The FAA's innovative approach to drone registration was very reasonable, and registration provides for accountability and education to drone pilots," DJI's head of policy Brendan Schulman told Recode in an email. "I expect the legal issue that impedes this program will be addressed by cooperative work between the industry and policymakers."

The FAA could appeal, but Congress might step in to explicitly lay out the FAA's authority in regulating non-commercial drones.

(Source: Recode)

American special forces open a drone hacker lab



Battlefield drones are evolving quickly, and there's only so much militaries can do to keep up -- they're not used to competing with consumer tech that can improve in a matter of months. To that end, US Special Operations Command (aka SOCOM) is taking the unusual step of opening a drone hacker lab in Tampa, Florida.

The organization's James Geurts hopes this tinkerer mindset will help special forces "get out in front" of future threats that could easily prove overwhelming, such as drone swarms.

There are also more direct problems to solve, such as balancing weapon payloads and portability. You may need a drone bigger than something like the tiny, kamikaze-oriented AeroVironment Switchblade (above) to take down a target, but you can't always field more conventional runway-bound drones to

do the job.

The lab could also help with countermeasures. SOCOM has already been working with Johns Hopkins' Applied Physics Lab to turn improvised explosive detectors into drone jammers, and it won't be surprising if the hacker lab takes this development one step further.

Not that the Command can afford to wait for breakthroughs. ISIS has already ramped up its ability to fly drones (up to 70 drones in one day over Mosul alone), and SOCOM felt enough heat that it recently placed an urgent order for 350 Switchblade drones to bolster its arsenal. While the lab should ultimately help in the long run, there will likely be plenty of stopgap solutions in the near term.

(Source: businessinsider)

Facebook rolling out food ordering feature in America



Facebook is reportedly working on a food ordering option. It would work straight through the web and mobile versions of Facebook, making it possible to grab pizza without leaving the social network.

The new option can be found in the Facebook website sidebar, or under the app's main menu. It's probably limited to America, though, as deliveries are carried out via Delivery.com and Slice. Tapping the option will display a list of local restaurants that you can order from. The whole process can be complete through Facebook, including entering your address, specifying payment, tipping, and paying.

(Source: Facebook)

HTC is celebrating 20 years of innovation



HTC has made a new video that shows Taiwanese company was founded on May 15, 1997.

HTC created the first publicly available Android smartphone, the G1 (a.k.a. Dream), and for a long while it was among the top sellers in the space.

The company has seen its fair share of troubles (having to do with low sales levels) recently, so perhaps the new U series of devices unveiled this year - the U11, U Ultra, and U Play - will help it overcome those issues. We'll have to wait and see.

(Source: droid-life)

Fuchsia is not replacing Android, at least not for now



Nearly two weeks ago, we told you about a new open source operating system that Google has been quietly working on. Called Fuchsia, the OS now has a proper user interface for smartphones and tablets. Unlike Android, which uses a kernel based on Linux, Fuchsia employs a kernel called Magenta.

According to Dave Burke, Google's VP of engineering for Android, Fuchsia is an early stage project that will "pivot and morph" The executive adds that it is independent of Android and called it an "early stage experimental project."

(Source: androidpolice)

‘Alien megastructure’ star is at it again with the strange dimming

The perplexing cosmic object known as “Boyajian’s star” is once again exhibiting a mysterious pattern of dimming and brightening that scientists have tried to explain with hypotheses ranging from swarms of comets to alien megastructures.

On May 19, an urgent call went out to scientists around the world to turn as many telescopes as possible toward the star, to try and crack the mystery of its behavior.

“At about 04:00 A.M. this morning I got a phone call ... that Fairborn (Observatory) in Arizona had confirmed that the star was 3 percent dimmer than it normally is,” Jason Wright, an associate professor of astronomy at Pennsylvania State University, who is managing a study of Boyajian’s star, said during a live webcast.

“That is enough that we are absolutely confident that this is no statistical fluke. We’ve now got it confirmed at multiple observatories, I think.”

Star KIC 8462852, or Boyajian’s star (also nicknamed “Tabby’s star,” for astronomer Tabetha Boyajian, who led the team that first detected the star’s fluctuations), has demonstrated an irregular cycle of growing dimmer and then returning to its previous brightness.

Star’s brightness

These changes were first spotted in September 2015 using NASA’s Kepler



Space Telescope, which was built to observe these kinds of dips in a star’s brightness, because they can be caused by a planet moving in front of the star as seen from Earth.

But the brightness changes exhibited by Boyajian don’t show the kind of regularity that is typical of a planet’s orbit around its star, and scientists can’t see how the changes could be explained by a

Scientists have hypothesized that the changes could be due to a swarm of comets passing in front of the star, that they’re the result of strong magnetic activity, or that it’s some massive structure built by aliens.

The vanishing animals that future generations will never see

Some of the world’s most exotic animals could be extinct within months, conservationists have warned, with future generations growing up in a world without many of the species that are alive today.

The WWF claims that some animals, such as the vaquita porpoise, could be wiped out in the next few months, while others have only decades left at best.

Some would now be extinct had zoos not provided a ‘Noahs Ark’ from which to reestablish populations.

Habitat loss, poaching, hunting and disease are pushing many species to the brink to such an extent that the world has now entered a sixth mass extinction.

More than 23,000 species are on the IUCN Red List threatened with extinction, including 41 percent of the world’s amphibians, 25 percent of mammals and 13 percent of birds.

Numbers of vaquita - dubbed the panda of the sea - have dropped by 90 percent since 2011 because the porpoise are getting tangled in illegal fishing nets.

There are only 30 now left in the wild, and all live in Mexico’s Gulf of California. Conservationists have warned they could be extinct by the autumn if the Mexican government does not do more to protect the area.

The “last hope for the species is the Mexican govern-

ment immediately putting in place and properly enforcing a permanent ban on gillnets.”

Lis Key at International Animal Rescue said pangolins - the world’s most trafficked animal - were also in danger of dying out within a generation. Orangutan s and slow lorises are also critically endangered because of poaching and habitat loss.

The “pangolin could become extinct before most people even know what it looks like,” she said. “I’m not sure whether it could be gone within the decade but certainly within decades.

Then “figures used when talking about pangolin trafficking usually refer not to individuals but to the number of truckloads. Tragic.

In terms of orangutans

“In terms of orangutans and slow lorises which are our area of work, both are Critically Endangered so one step away from extinction, owing to the continuing rapid rate of habitat loss and the effects of illegal hunting.

Elsewhere, there are fewer than 100 Javan Rhino left in the wild because of poaching and Save the Rhino has estimated that they could become extinct within the next decade or sooner.

In March a rhino was poached from a French zoo, the



first time such an incident has ever been recorded, and demonstrating the demand for rhino horn. Three rhino are killed a day on average in South Africa alone.

There are also only around three dozen scimitar-horned oryx in the wild after they were hunted to extinction by trophy hunters who prize their twisted horns.

(Source: The Telegraph)

Nutritional properties of mushrooms are better when grilled or microwaved

Culinary treatments (boiling, microwaving, grilling, and deep frying) influence on proximate composition and antioxidant capacity of most cultivated mushrooms worldwide. A study by Spanish researchers has shown that microwaving and grilling are the best processes to maintain the nutritional profile of mushrooms.

Mushrooms are considered valuable health foods, since they have a significant amount of dietary fiber and are poor in calories and fat. Moreover, they have a good protein content (20-30% of dry matter) which includes most of the essential amino acids; also provide a nutritionally significant content of vitamins (B1, B2, B12, C, D and E) and trace minerals such as zinc or selenium. Mushrooms are also an important source of biologically active compounds with potential medicinal value such as betaglucons.

The most mushrooms are commonly cooked before being consumed. Scientists from Mushroom Technological Research Center of La Rioja (CTICH) aimed

to evaluate the influence of different cooking methods (boiling, microwaving, grilling and frying) on proximate composition, betaglucons content and antioxidant activity of four cultivated mushrooms species.

The study was conducted on the most widely consumed mushrooms worldwide: Agaricus bisporus (white button mushroom), Lentinula edodes (shiitake), Pleurotus ostreatus (oyster mushroom) and Pleurotus eryngii (king oyster mushroom). They were harvested from the cultivation rooms at CTICH facilities. After the cooking process, raw and cooked mushrooms were then freeze-dried, and the proximate composition and the antioxidant activity were analyzed.

The results of this study, published in the International Journal of Food Sciences and Nutrition, revealed that frying induced more severe losses in protein, ash, and carbohydrates content but increased the fat and energy. Boiling improved the total glucans content by enhancing the



betaglucons fraction.

A significant decrease was detected in the antioxidant activity especially after boiling and frying, while grilled and microwaved mushrooms reached higher values of antioxidant activity.

Antioxidants compounds

“Frying and boiling treatments produced more severe losses in proteins and antioxidants compounds, probably due to the leaching of soluble substances in the water or in the oil, which may significantly influence the nutritional value of

the final product” says Irene Roncero, one of the authors of the paper.

“When mushrooms were cooked by microwave or grill, the content of polyphenol and antioxidant activity increased significantly, and there are no significant losses in nutritional value of the cooked mushrooms” says Roncero.

The researcher clarifies that adding a little oil portion while grilling mushrooms is not a problem. “This minimal amount will not cause nutrient losses by leaching; in fact, the antioxidant capacity can be even improved. Moreover, if olive oil is used, the fatty acid profile of the final preparation is enhanced with barely increase in the calorie content.”

Roncero underlines that the cooking technique clearly influences the nutritional value and the antioxidant activity of mushrooms so that the “adequate selection of the culinary method is a key factor to preserve the nutritional profile of this highly consumed food.”

(Source: EurekAlert)

Scientists sneak a peek at how ladybugs fold their wings

With the help of high-speed cameras, CT scanners and some nail-art supplies, scientists in Japan have managed to catch a glimpse of the elaborate way that ladybugs fold their wings to tuck them away.

The research could have implications for everything from aeronautics to umbrellas.

The study, published this week in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, explored how ladybugs can have wings strong enough to fly with, but quickly collapsible so they can be tucked out of the way.

The wings, after all, are much larger than the black-spotted wing cases they fold down to fit inside — as is immediately obvious easy to see if you just watch a video of the wings unfolding.

But the researchers at the University of Tokyo explain that no one knew how the ladybugs put the wings away, since they actually shut the wing cases first — then pull the wings inside. The interesting action is tucked out of sight.

So they replaced those distinctive red and black cases with transparent ones — built out of a kind of UV-cured resin that’s often used in nail art, according to a press release from the university. The artificial wing case, called an elytron, allowed the researchers to watch how the wing folded.

“I wasn’t sure if the ladybug could fold its wings with an artificial elytron made of nail-art resin,” says Kazuya Saito, a professor at the University of Tokyo and the lead author on the study. “So I was surprised when I found out it could.”

The scientists used high-speed cameras to record the process, and CT scans of folded and unfolded wings to help figure out the precise pattern of folds.

(Source: npr.org)



Artificial spider silk is not only super strong, it’s sustainable too

Researchers at Stockholm’s KTH Royal Institute of Technology are keen to help — courtesy of their invention of the strongest artificial silk fibers yet created. Made using a combination of spider silk proteins and nanocellulose from wood, the new process is also impressively low-cost and scalable in a way not seen before.

“We have developed a high-performance hybrid material where we are able to combine the stiffness of cellulose with the toughness and functionality of recombinant silk,” researcher Daniel Söderberg told Digital Trends. “Furthermore, we show that by fabricating filaments using a microfluidic process we are able to get never-seen-before properties.”

A description of the work is published in the journal ACS Nano, in a paper titled “Ultrastrong and Bioactive Nanostructured Bio-Based Composites.”

The partially wood-based artificial spider web won’t just be used for ridding New York of evildoers, however. (In fact, for some reason the researchers haven’t singled this out as a possible use, at all.) Instead, they are interested in the possible medicinal properties of spider webs — which reportedly date back as far as ancient Rome, when webs were used to dress soldiers’ battle wounds.

The “unique combination of strength, flexibility, and bioactivity in a biocompatible material is very attractive for both implants and tissue engineering applications where load-bearing constructs are needed, such as hip prosthesis, bone, ligaments, and tendons,” co-author My Hedhammar told us.

(Source: Digital Trends)

Air traffic controllers are masters of handling stress — here’s how they do it

Robert Sapolsky, Stanford University professor and author of “Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst,” has studied how humans handle stress. Air traffic controllers face an incredible amount in their daily jobs, but the successful ones find a way to turn it off.

What’s interesting though is to look at occupations that are immensely immensely stressful. Where what you see are two different profiles of outcome. And the poster child for that for years has been people studying is air traffic controllers.

There’s the folks who burnout after a year on the job.

And then there are the people who are perfectly fine and are working there happily for 30 years.

When you first start a job like that, like before one of your sessions, two hours before your blood pressure is elevated, you’re already in anticipatory stress. You finish your shift and two afterward you’re still hypertensive.

And you come back to the ones that are going to last for 30 years, and they park the car in the parking lot and they’re still running like this. They sit down in the chair, they turn on the stress response and two seconds after the end of their shift, they’re thinking about dinner. They turn on the stress response like crazy when they need it and they turn it off the rest of the time. Bioengineering term: They’re maximizing their signal-to-noise ratio. That’s the profile of the successful one there.

The people who burn out after a year, they still have that huge anticipatory rise, the huge recovery period, that’s the marker of someone who is coping with an enormously stressful period and stressful job.

(Source: Business Insider)

Each Plane Imported into Country Able to Generate 1,000 Jobs Directly and Indirectly

Each plane which is imported into the country can generate new employment opportunity for 1,000 job-seeking people directly and indirectly.

Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development Asghar Fakhriyeh Kashan announced the above statement and expressed his special thanks to the Bank of Industry and Mine (BIM) for its cooperation and collaboration for the entrance of four newly-purchased

ATR72-600 planes into the country.

Speaking in the ceremony of landing four ATR72-600 planes into the country, he said: “Purchasing new planes is a solid evidence for the materialization of objectives of resistance economy.”

He reiterated: “These planes have been purchased with the aim of booming small and less developed airports appropriately.”

It should be noted that Bank of Industry and Mine (BIM) was introduced as operating agent in a way that National Development Fund of Iran (NDFI) undertook to finance the aforementioned planes, he observed.

Earlier, Bank of Industry and Mine (BIM) had embarked on repairing and modernizing 25 plane engines in line with equipping aviation fleet of the country, he ended.

Four Other New ATR72-600 Planes Insured by IIC

Four other new ATR72-600 planes, which were purchased by Iran’s National Flag Carrier (Iran Air), were insured by Iran Insurance Company (IIC), the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

The newly-purchased ATR72-600

planes were put under the insurance services of plane body, third-party liability and passengers.

For his part, Ship, Plane and Cargo Insurance Affairs Manager of the company Majid Rahmati said: “The newly-purchased four ATR72-600 planes are

of the world’s safest turboprop planes which were delivered to Iran’s National Flag Carrier (Iran Air) yesterday.”

Under the contract inked between Iran Air and Iran Insurance Company (P.J.S), these equipped planed left France’s Toulouse for Tehran international airport

and then were fully put under the insurance coverage of Iran Insurance Company, he maintained.

Earlier, one Airbus A321 plane and two Airbus A330 planes had been insured by the insurance company, he ended.

Leopard trapped in snare released back to wild

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — A leopard which had been **d e s k** trapped in a snare and injured on May 12 in the Paband National Park, the northern Mazandaran province, was released back to wild last week, Iran Environment and Wildlife Watch website reported.



The five-year-old male leopard which was trapped and wounded was soon spotted by the rangers, put under anesthesia and transferred to Semeskandeh Wildlife Refuge in Sari for further treatment. After receiving proper care and being well-fed it was released back to its habitat as fit as a fiddle last Tuesday. To make sure of the leopard's state it is being observed by a satellite tracking device.

On the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity

Diversity in species, ecosystems and landscapes attracts tourism and promotes economic growth. In turn, a well-managed tourist sector can help reduce threats to key wildlife populations, and can maintain or increase biodiversity, through tourism revenue.

The celebration of the International Day for Biological Diversity under the theme “Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism” is an opportunity to raise awareness of the important contribution of sustainable tourism both to economic growth and to the conservation of biodiversity.

This theme has been chosen to coincide with the observance of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development and can contribute to ongoing initiatives such as the Sustainable Tourism Program.

■ Why an International Day for Biological Diversity?

While there is a growing recognition that biological diversity is a global asset of tremendous value to present and future generations, the number of species is being significantly reduced by certain human activities.

The Convention on Biological Diversity is the international legal instrument for “the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources” that has been ratified by 196 nations.

Given the importance of public education and awareness for the implementation of the Convention, the General Assembly proclaimed May22, the date of the adoption of its text, as the International Day for Biological Diversity by its resolution 55/201 of 20 December 2000.

■ Biodiversity and the Sustainable Development Goals

The objectives of halting biodiversity loss and promoting the sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems are included in Sustainable Development Goal number 15.

(Source: [un.org](#))

LEARN ENGLISH

Interview Skills 5

Mr. Parsons: Okay, now I'd like to find out more about your last job. I see you spent almost four years at the London Weekly, is that right?

Rebecca: Yes, that's right. To be honest, the first year was quite **tough** for me. I was really just treated more like an **intern**. I didn't have many responsibilities and I found it quite **frustrating**.

Mr. Parsons: So, what changed?

Rebecca: Well **slowly but surely I proved myself**, and the new editor liked me so he promoted me to features writer.

Mr. Parsons: Wow, a real **step up**!

Rebecca: Yes I was responsible for restaurant and food **reviews** mostly. I spent years in that position, but to be honest it wasn't an area of journalism I wanted to stay in **long-term**.

Mr. Parsons: I see, so why did you decide to leave finally?

Rebecca: I just felt that the paper couldn't offer me any new opportunities. I really needed a more **challenging** role to be honest.

■ Key vocabulary

tough: difficult to do or deal with

intern: someone, especially a student, who works for a short time in a particular job in order to gain experience

frustrating: to cause feelings of discouragement or bafflement

slowly but surely: happening gradually but inevitably or without fail

to prove oneself: to show to have the character or ability expected

step up: something that is better than you had before

review: an article in a newspaper or magazine that gives an opinion about a new book, play, film, food etc.

long-term: covering a relatively long period of time

challenging: a test of one's abilities or resources in a demanding but stimulating undertaking

■ Supplementary vocabulary

unsatisfied: a feeling of fulfillment

promote: to go up in rank or status (at your job)

trial period: to prove your worth (at your job)

food critic: a person who critiques food at restaurants

disinterested: to not have an interest in something

(Source: [irlanguage.com](#))

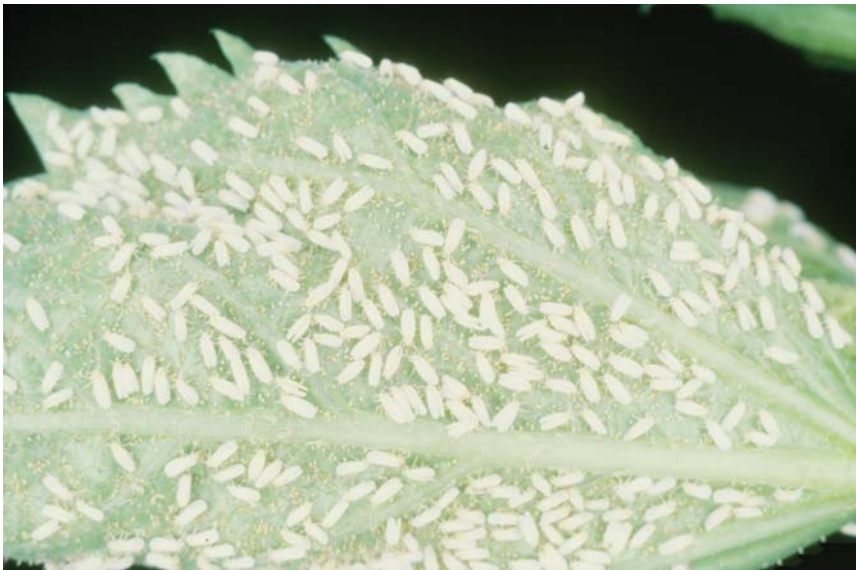
Silverleaf whiteflies, unwelcome guests to the capital

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — It is boiling **d e s k** hot, you are desperate to get to the bus or subway station trying to evade the scorching sunlight while you should be maddeningly careful not to swallow or inhale the whiteflies flying in almost every direction around you.

Unfortunately with the warm weather setting in the capital, silverleaf whiteflies - these little annoying pests -which are spotted almost everywhere from tree leaves, windshields, and women's scarves, to your lock of hair, have become the unwanted guests of the Tehraners for some years now.

Despite the measures taken by Tehran's Municipality and the City Council, swarm of whiteflies keep attacking Tehran every year over summer making it irritating to walk along the street while you keep sneezing or get a runny nose as one or some of them make their ways through your nose or mouth.

"The whiteflies find the environment pretty appealing now as their natural enemies which used to be highly effective as biological controls disappeared due to the use of pesticides in the city years ago," the chief of Tehran's Department of Environment said, ISNA news agency



reported.

The absence of their natural enemies that could keep the population under control, warm weather, and the availability of suitable host-plants in Tehran has soared these pests' population, Mohammad-Hossein Bazgir explained.

According to the Health Ministry and

the Universities of Medical Sciences, the whiteflies do not cause any serious problems to human health, however they could cause some level of discomfort as they might trigger allergic reactions, Bazgir added.

"Tehran's Municipality is responsible for controlling such pests' population and

Canine distemper virus wildlife mortal enemy

By Farnaz Heidari

Diseases are parts of life, but in a well-balanced ecosystem virulent epidemics are rare. Disease can even be beneficial to a population, weeding out old or weak animals. Problems occur when a population of animals is exposed to a new disease to which it has not had a chance to build up natural immunity.

■ Old and classic story

Introduced diseases can rip through unprotected populations with devastating speed. The classic example is that of the myxomatosis virus. In the 1950s a British farmer decided to use the virus (which originally came from South America) to control the rabbits on his farm. No one could have dreamed it would be so effective. The disease spread so fast that it killed 99 percent of all British rabbits within a year. But farmers barely had the chance to heave a sigh of relief before conservationists realized something was horribly wrong. Over the 2,000 years since rabbits were introduced to Britain, they had helped create and maintain some of the island's most treasured habitats. They had also become a vital component of the food chain, supporting predators such as foxes and various birds of prey. When rabbit numbers crashed, so did national populations of red kites, buzzards, and many other predators. Fortunately for them, rabbit populations have now recovered, and a large proportion have at least some degree of resistance to the myxomatosis.

■ Effects of disease on endangered species

The increased transmission of diseases as a result of human activities and interaction with humans is a major threat to many endangered species and ecosystems. In Iran there is absolutely no data about unknown diseases such as canine distemper in large felines. We know disease-causing organisms such as bacteria, viruses, fungi, and protists can have major impacts on vulnerable



species and even the structure of an entire ecosystem. For example Pusa caspica is a relict species, now confined to the Caspian Sea, where its ancestors lived.

The Caspian seal was hunted commercially up until the mid-1990s, sometimes with 100s of thousands of animals hunted each year. That was the main reason for the decline of more than 1 million animals at the start of the 20th Century to around 100 thousand today. Today there is still occasional commercial hunting, and at least several thousand seals are caught in (mostly illegal) fishing nets each year. Caspian Seal is also vulnerable to canine distemper virus.

Canine Distemper and related viruses causes disease outbreaks in many seal species and other carnivores, so Caspian seals are not particularly unusual in this respect. What was a little unusual was that this happened as large outbreaks, and so was very visible, rather than as a continual slow process with a lower incidence.

Generally outbreaks like this happen when there is a large population with limited prior exposure, and the disease crosses over from a reservoir species. In the case of Caspian seals there are still lots of questions to be answered

about the CDV outbreaks, but it may be that the disease jumped into the seals via feral dogs, jackals or wolves.

■ What is CDV?

A species that is both common and fairly resistant to a disease can act as a reservoir for the disease, which can then infect populations of susceptible species. For example, during the early 1990s in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park, about 25% of the lions were killed by canine distemper, apparently contracted from the 30,000 domestic dogs living near the park. In January 2015, A study conducted by an international team of researchers has led to evidence that suggests lions in Africa originally got distemper from domesticated dogs, but now it appears there are other unknown carriers.

Distemper, caused by the canine distemper virus (CDV) is a viral disease and has been known to infect dogs, coyotes, foxes, pandas, and a wide variety of other animals, including big cats. It is transmitted through the air, and symptoms generally include a high fever, inflammation of the eyes and nose, and coughing, which is how the disease is spread. Scientists are hoping to learn more about how the disease is transmitted as part of an overall effort to prevent the loss of life wild animals that could lead to extinction in populations already threatened by the encroachment of man.

Unfortunately the situation of this disease for big cats in Iran is unknown. Some evidences exists but there is absolutely no confirmed data because all the cadavers of wildlife in Iran do not undergo scientific autopsy.

The effect of this disease on native wildlife can be very serious. For example, domestic dogs in Africa spread canine distemper to wild hunting dogs and lions, causing many to die. Nobody knows how would be the situation for vulnerable cat species in Iran? In cases like these the domestic animals usually suffer only mildly and often receive the benefit of veterinary medicine while their wild counterparts can be devastated.

‘Doomsday’ seed vault meant to survive global disasters breached by climate change

The seed bank designed to preserve the world's crops and plants in the event of global disaster isn't prepared to withstand the greatest global disaster facing our planet: global warming. Melting permafrost on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen, where the Svalbard Global Seed Vault is located, has seeped into the seed bank, raising questions of how the structure will be able to survive in the future as the Earth keeps warming.

The seed vault is built in an abandoned Arctic coal mine, deep inside a mountain. It contains about a million packets of seeds from almost every country in the world, representing “the most diverse collection of food crop seeds.” In 2015, the ongoing civil war in Syria prompted researchers in the Middle East to withdraw some seeds to replace those previously stored in a gene bank in war-torn Aleppo.

■ “Built to stand the test of time”

The structure was built underneath the permafrost so it could be “a fail-safe seed storage facility, built to stand the test of time — and the challenge of natural or man-made disasters,” as the seed bank's website says. But oh, the irony. Unusually warm temperatures in the winter have caused rain, and the permafrost has been melting. “It was not in our plans to think that the permafrost would not be there and that it would experience extreme weather like that,” Hege Njaa Aschim, from the Norwegian government, which owns the vault, told The Guardian.



Fortunately, the water hasn't flooded the vault itself. It only got to the entrance of the tunnel, where it froze. (The seeds are stored at minus 0.4 degrees Fahrenheit.) But the incident has raised questions over the durability of a seed bank that was supposed to operate without people's intervention.

The vault managers are now waterproofing the facility and digging trenches to channel melt and rainwater away, according to The Guardian. They've also installed pumps in case the vault floods again. “We have to find solutions. It is a big responsibility and we take it very seriously. We are doing this for the world,” Asmund Asdal at the Nordic Genetic Resource Centre, which operates the seed vault, told The Guardian. “This is supposed to last for eternity.”

(Source: [The Verge](#))

Over 1,700 new plant species discovered in 2016: report

In 2016 alone, 1,730 new plant species were discovered across the globe, from flowers to food to potential new medicines, according to a new report.

Eleven new species of orchids were discovered last year in Vietnam, while 29 new types of begonia were found in Malaysia, according to the second annual report of State of the World's Plants by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

“A detailed knowledge of plants is fundamental to human life on Earth,” the report said. “Plants underpin all aspects of our everyday life — from the food that we eat, to the clothes that we wear, the materials we use, the air we breathe, the medicines we take and much more.”

Traditionally, most new plant discoveries have been announced in publications read by plant specialists, but Kew decided to make the information more widely available in its first State of the World's Plants reports last year.

“We were overwhelmed by the global interest in this information,” Kew said.

This year's report includes plants used for medicinal purposes, such as new species of the genus Mucuna, which are cultivated to provide a treatment for Parkinson's disease. They contain L-DOPA, a dopamine precursor.

Four new relatives of Aloe vera, widely used in the cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries, were identified in southern Africa.

In Gabon, five new species of the leg-



ume tree Paubrasilia, for which the country of Brazil was named, were discovered. The wood of the tree is highly valued for the production of violin bows.

Six new species of Salvia — commonly known and used as the herb sage, but also contains species with horticultural and hallucinogenic uses — were found from China, Iran and Mexico.

Among the most important newly discovered species with potential for new food sources were 11 Brazilian species of Manihot, known variously as cassava, garri, manioc or tapioca which is a staple food for millions of people in the tropics. Nigeria is the largest producer.

It is third in global importance after maize and rice, and offers more food security than cereals because tubers can be left in the ground until needed, Kew said.

(Source: [earth.com](#))

China killed CIA sources, hobbled U.S. spying from 2010 to 2012

China killed or imprisoned 18 to 20 CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) sources from 2010 to 2012, hobbling the United States spying operations in a massive intelligence breach whose origin has not been identified, the New York Times reported.

Investigators remain divided over whether there was a spy within the Central Intelligence Agency who betrayed the sources or whether the Chinese hacked the CIA's covert communications system, the newspaper reported, citing current and former U.S. officials.

The Chinese killed at least a dozen people providing information to the CIA from 2010 through 2012, dismantling a network that was years in the making, the newspaper reported.

One was shot and killed in front of a government building in China, three officials told the Times, saying that was designed as a message to others about working with Washington.

The breach was considered particularly damaging, with the number of assets lost rivaling those in the Soviet Union and Russia who perished after information passed to Moscow by spies Aldrich Ames



and Robert Hanssen, the report said. Ames was active as a spy in the 1980s and Hanssen from 1979 to 2001.

The CIA declined to comment when asked about the Times report.

The Chinese activities began to emerge in 2010, when the American spy

agency had been getting high quality information about the Chinese government from sources deep inside the bureaucracy, including Chinese upset by the Beijing government's corruption, four former officials told the Times.

The information began to dry up by

the end of the year and the sources began disappearing in early 2011, the report said.

As more sources were killed the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and the CIA began a joint investigation of the breach, examining all operations run in Beijing and every employee of the U.S. Embassy there.

The investigation ultimately centered on a former CIA operative who worked in a division overseeing China, the newspaper said, but there was not enough evidence to arrest him.

Some investigators believed the Chinese had hacked the CIA's covert communications system.

Still others thought the breach was a result of careless spy work including traveling the same routes to the same meeting points or meeting sources at restaurants where Chinese had planted listening devices, the newspaper said.

By 2013, U.S. intelligence concluded China's ability to identify its agents had been curtailed, the newspaper said, and the CIA has been trying to rebuild its spy network there.

(Source: Reuters)

Hamas sentences three to death over killing top commander

The military court in the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip has handed death sentences to three Palestinians convicted of the assassination of one of the high-ranking military commanders of Hamas resistance movement earlier this year.

After a four-day trial, two of the accused were sentenced to be hanged and one to be shot, the military court announced.

The Ministry of Interior and National Security in Gaza announced on Sunday that the court found Ashraf Abu Leila, the prime suspect in the assassination of 38-year-old military commander, Mazen Fuqahaa, guilty of premeditated murder, treason and conspiracy with hostile foreign parties, and sentenced him to death by hanging.

The others were identified as Hisham al-Aloul, 44, who was also sentenced to death by hanging, and Abdallah al-Nashar, who will be executed by the firing squad. They were all convicted of collaborating with the Israeli regime.

Aloul was convicted of conspiracy and treason as well as involvement in the killing of the senior Hamas com-

mander.

Nashar was found guilty of treason and conspiracy, and leaking information about Fuqahaa's movements and his hangouts.

Last week, Hamas released what it said was a recording of the confessions of the accused.

Chairman of the Hamas-run military judiciary, Brigadier General Nasser Suleiman, said Sunday's verdicts were final and could not be appealed according to the rules of the Military Field Tribunal.

Speaking at a press conference in Gaza City on May 11, the new chief of Hamas political bureau said Palestinian security forces in the Gaza Strip had detained Fuqahaa's assassin.

Ismail Haniyeh stated that a fair and appropriate punishment would be handed out on the basis of the movement's judicial principles, and in honor of Fuqahaa, all Palestinian martyrs as well as all prisoners in Israeli jails.

The Hamas chief stressed that the Israeli regime was behind the criminal act.

"The Israeli occupation is the entity that gave orders

regarding Fuqahaa's assassination. The killer has confessed to the crime and spelled the assassination out in details," Haniyeh pointed out.

Fuqahaa was shot in the head four times at the entrance to a residence in the Tal al-Hawa neighborhood of Gaza City on March 24.

Izzat al-Rishq, a member of Hamas political bureau, said the assassination was carried out with a gun equipped with a silencer.

The Gaza Strip has been under an Israeli blockade for a decade, while Egypt's crossing with the enclave has also remained largely closed in recent years.

The Islamic Jihad movement said in March that Faqha's assassination marked the beginning of "a new offensive" by Israel against the Palestinians in Gaza, and that the group had the right to respond and defend itself.

Thousands of Palestinians poured into the streets for Faqha's funeral in March.

After Sunday's ruling, human rights groups issued concern.

(Source: agencies)

Abbas to propose large-scale land swap with Israel: official

A Palestinian official says President Mahmoud Abbas will propose exchanging 6.5 percent of the Palestinian territory with Israel, more than triple the amount put forward in a previous land-swap initiative.

The official close to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) told Middle East Eye on Sunday that Abbas would make the proposal during the United States President Donald Trump's forthcoming visit to the West Bank.

"The Palestinian side will be presenting a new vision which is quite detached from that of the majority of the Palestinian people. This vision is based on exchanging a lot of Palestinian lands," the official said.

"Previous discussions about a Palestinian-Israeli settlement revolved around the exchange of only 1.9 percent of the lands, but now we are talking about more than triple that amount," he noted.

During the 2008 Israeli-Palestinian talks, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert floated the controversial idea of land swaps, offering parts of the occupied territories in exchange for keeping

major Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

PLO Secretary General Saeb Erekat said Olmert wanted 6.5 percent of the West Bank in exchange for the occupied territories equivalent to 5.8 percent of the West Bank.

A source at the Palestinian Foreign Ministry said the 2008 negotiations failed as the Palestinians only agreed to exchange a much smaller percentage of its lands.

Israel occupied East al-Quds (Jerusalem) during the 1967 war and later annexed it, declaring the whole city its indivisible capital despite an outcry from the international community. Palestinians want the city as the capital of their future independent state.

Abbas met with Trump in Washington in early May, urging his American counterpart to resume Israeli-Palestinian talks under the 2008 offer made by Olmert.

The last round of the discussions collapsed in April 2014, with Israeli settlements cited among major reasons behind the failure.

Trump, who is now in Saudi Arabia on



the first leg of his Middle East tour, is set to visit Palestine on Tuesday.

Washington has recently suggested that it would no longer insist on the so-called two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It has also pledged to relocate the American embassy from

Tel Aviv to al-Quds, sparking widespread condemnations.

On Saturday, Erekat warned that moving the American embassy would end the "peace" process between the occupying regime of Israel and the Palestinians.

(Source: Press TV)

Poll lead falls, but British PM May to stick with elderly-care cuts

British Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservative Party said on Sunday it would not ditch proposals to reduce support for elderly voters, as opinion polls showing their lead ahead of the June 8 national election falling.

Polls published late on Saturday showed the Conservative lead over the center-left Labor Party has narrowed after both parties set out their policy offerings last week -- the first real sign that an expected victory for May could be less emphatic than many had predicted.

May has faced criticism from political rivals and pressure groups over her planned social care reforms, which include a making elderly homeowners - a core voter group for the Conservatives - pay more towards their old-age care

The criticism, including within the Sunday editions of usually friendly right-leaning newspapers, prompted senior ministers to defend the reform package in a series of television interviews.

"This is necessary ... we have to do something about the huge costs of social care," Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson told ITV's Peston on Sunday show.

The growing cost of caring for the elderly as the population ages is a problem that has bedeviled successive



governments, with the current system widely seen as inadequate.

"I do understand people's reservations and the questions that some people are asking about the detail of all this, but the broad thrust is right," Johnson said.

Asked in a separate interview on the BBC Damian Green, pensions minister and a close May ally was asked

whether the government would reconsider the planned changes. He said: "No".

Lead halved

One poll showed Labor had halved the Conservatives' lead to 9 percentage points; the first single-figure gap since May called the snap election hoping for a resounding victory that would strengthen her mandate to negotiate Britain's exit from the European Union.

Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn, whose manifesto launch set out plans for higher state investment and nationalization of some services, said the Conservatives were betraying Britain's elderly.

"Theresa May and the Conservatives won't stand up for pensioners, their only concern is their billionaire friends," he said.

The Conservatives have framed their election campaign as a personality battle between May and Corbyn by asking voters who they trust more to get a good Brexit deal, banking on May's image as a tough negotiator to sway wavering voters.

Their campaign portrays Corbyn as an out-of-touch left-winger.

(Source: Reuters)

Up to 200,000 Venezuelans march in anti-Maduro protests

Hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets of Venezuela to mark 50 days of protests against the government of President Nicholas Maduro.

In Caracas alone, some 160,000 marched through the city, said Edinson Ferrer, a spokesman for the opposition, citing a preliminary estimate.

Protesters brandished placards that read "We are millions against the dictatorship" and "No more dictatorship".

Many Venezuelans are furious with Maduro's government, blaming it for soaring inflation, shortages of food and medicine, and a crackdown on human rights. They are demanding elections and autonomy for the opposition-led legislature.

Two-time presidential candidate and de facto opposition leader, Henrique Capriles, led the Caracas march.

"Fifty days and they've assassinated 50 people... Despite everything, on day 50, amid more repression, there is more resistance and more fight for Venezuela," he said.

As with many of the previous marches, police firing tear gas broke up the demonstration and protesters responded by throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails. Many young men wore hoods and gas masks and carried makeshift shields of wood and metal.

One man was set on fire during the rally by people who accused him of stealing, the Reuters news agency said.

In the volatile border city of San Cristobal in Tachira state, more than 40,000 people took to the streets. Maduro had sent in 2,600 soldiers there after a week of mayhem that included looting.

"We don't want more deaths. We want salaries that mean something, and medicines. The government invests more in bullets and weapons than in food and education for this country," said Maria Diaz, a 33-year-old lawyer, standing in the torrential rain in front of security forces.

The turnout for Saturday's demonstrations came close to the biggest rally during seven weeks of protests, when several hundred thousand people came out on April 19.

The demonstrations have degenerated into violence that has left 47 dead, hundreds injured, 2,200 detained and some 161 imprisoned by military tribunals.

■ 'Doubling down'

Anti-Maduro protests have swelled since he called for convening a "popular" assembly to rewrite the Venezuelan constitution, with half its members coming from sectors loyal to him.

The opposition says the assembly would allow Maduro to avoid elections. He denies that and has "guaranteed" that presidential elections will be held next year, as required by law.

Maduro insisted Friday that the "popular" assembly would provide a "path to peace, dialogue and consensus," while the opposition, he said, was offering only "violence and death." He accuses protesters of trying to foment a coup beneath pro-democracy rhetoric.

Al Jazeera's John Holman, reporting from Cucuta on the Colombia-Venezuela border, said the government was responding to the growing pressure by "doubling down".

"Opposition leader Henrique Capriles was trying to leave the country the other day to go to New York City to talk to the UN and he says the authorities took away his passport," he said.

"President Maduro has also extended the state of emergency that had been in effect for over a year now. That means he doesn't really have to listen to the opposition-controlled Congress and get his decrees issued as he sees fit."

Maduro has his supporters, too.

On the other side of town, some 2,000 pro-government workers sang and danced as they staged a rival march to show their support for the president's controversial plan to rewrite the constitution.

On Thursday, the US imposed sanctions on the chief judge and seven other members of Venezuela's Supreme Court and President Donald Trump described Venezuela's humanitarian situation as "a disgrace to humanity".

Maduro responded by telling Trump to stop meddling in Venezuela's affairs.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Erdogan prepares to regain leadership of party he founded

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pledged his commitment to leading Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP/Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi) as he prepared to be elected as the first Turk in nearly 70 years to serve simultaneously as head of state and of a political party.

"We were separated, but today we are together again," he told a crowd of applauding supporters outside the sports hall in the capital Ankara, where the party congress was being held amid tight security.

"We will work hard," he added before entering the arena, where thousands of party faithful cheered and waved AKP flags.

Erdogan, who founded the AKP in 2001 and led it to victory in an election a year later, was forced to surrender leadership nearly three years ago when he was elected president, a position traditionally above party politics.

That changed with last month's referendum, in which Turks narrowly backed a constitutional change to create an executive presidential system that would give Erdogan sweeping new powers and allow the head of state to be a party member or leader.

He is the first president to lead a party since Ismet Inonu, who succeeded modern Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and was head of state until 1950. He replaces Binali Yildirim, who is set to remain as prime minister until elections in 2019.

Such sweeping political changes, Erdogan says, are vital to ensure stability in Turkey as it battles Kurdish and extremists and after an attempted coup last year that Ankara attributed to supporters of the United States-based cleric Fethullah Gulen.

(Source: Reuters)

Gatlin claims 100 meters victory at Japan Golden Prix

Veteran American sprinter Justin Gatlin fended off the challenge of a host of Japanese hopes when he won the men's 100 meters at the Golden Grand Prix in Kawasaki on Sunday, crossing the line first in 10.28 seconds.

The Rio Olympic silver medalist started slowly but rallied to dip ahead of Asuka Cambridge, who finished .03 seconds behind the American, while another Japanese, Shuhei Tada, came third in 10.35.

Any hopes of clocking a fast time were scuppered by a 1.2-metre headwind at the Todoroki Stadium, although Gatlin said he was pleased with his performance in testing conditions.

"It was a tough wind, but the competition was even tougher going against some of the future stars of Japan," the 35-year-old was quoted as saying by Kyodo. "They put together a good race, and they're going to be formidable opponents."

"I've been a little bit injured, not being able to train as hard as I want to, but I've been working on my finish and it helped out today."

Canada's Aaron Brown won the men's 200m in a time of 20.62, while Bulgaria's Ivet Lalova-Collio doubled up to claim the women's 100 and 200m.

(Source: Reuters)

Monaco turn down world record £103m bid from Real

AS Monaco have reportedly turned down a world record £103m bid from Real Madrid for rising striker Kylian Mbappe.

Mbappe has been regarded as the most promising frontman in world football this season following a standout run for Monaco, having helped to lead the French side to their first Ligue 1 crown in 17 years and a memorable semi-final finish in the Champions League.

According to The Telegraph, Monaco have rejected a record-breaking bid for the 18-year-old and plan to instead offer the striker a new deal.

Should Mbappe ever be sold for such a fee, the move would outstrip the cost of Paul Pogba's headline-making move to Manchester United last summer, as well as other standout deals that once saw Cristiano Ronaldo and Gareth Bale join Los Blancos.

Mbappe has notched 15 goals for Monaco this term and scored in the club's title-deciding 2-0 victory over Saint-Etienne last week.

(Source: Sports Mole)

Juventus win record sixth consecutive Serie A title

Juventus have been crowned champions of Italy yet again, their win over Crotone ensuring Roma and Napoli cannot catch them.

Juventus have claimed a record sixth Serie A title in a row following their victory over Crotone on Sunday

Massimiliano Allegri's side had the chance to secure the Scudetto last week but their 3-1 loss to Roma gave the capital club hope with two games remaining.

Luciano Spalletti's side won 5-3 in a thrilling game at Chievo on Saturday, while Napoli trounced Fiorentina 4-1 to keep the title race alive. However, goals from Mario Mandzukic, Paulo Dybala and Alex Sandro gave Juve a 3-0 win in Turin that ensures they cannot be caught on the final day.

It is their sixth title in as many seasons since 2011-12, a feat never before achieved in Serie A history.

It is also the second step towards a first treble in the club's history, with Juve having beaten Lazio 2-0 in Wednesday's Coppa Italia final and with a showdown with Real Madrid in the Champions League still to come.

Allegri has now won four Scudetti, having claimed three in a row with Juve and one with AC Milan in 2010-11.

(Source: Four Four Two)

Arsene Wenger's men miss out on the top four

Arsenal missed out on the top four for the first time under Arsene Wenger despite beating Everton 3-1 at the Emirates Stadium.

Liverpool cruised to an easy 3-0 win against Middlesbrough at Anfield, as Hector Bellerin, Alexis Sanchez and Aaron Ramsey's strikes failed to make a difference.

Hector Bellerin opened the scoring for Arsenal in the eighth minute after scoring from six yards out Alexis Sanchez doubled Arsenal's lead after he tapped home a Danny Welbeck cutback

The Gunners started off on the front foot straight away, with Danny Welbeck missing an attempt at the near post in just the second minute.

Six minutes later Bellerin fired Arsenal into an early lead as he slammed in from six yards out after Welbeck failed to connect to a Mesut Ozil pass.

But the mood at North London took a turn for the worse as Laurent Koscielny was shown a straight red card in the 14th minute for a dangerous two-footed tackle on Enner Valencia.

The one-man advantage didn't stop Wenger's men from doubling their lead as Sanchez tapped home in the 27th minute after Welbeck cut the ball back to him for his 29th of the season.

The Spanish right-back celebrates his early strike at the Emirates Stadium against Everton The Chilean star carried on his hot streak in front of goal, banging in his 29th of the campaign

(Source: the Sun)

Ex-F1 driver suffers fractured pelvis and hip during fiery crash

Four-time Champ Car champion and ex-Formula One driver Sebastien Bourdais suffered a fractured pelvis and hip in a frightening crash during qualifying for the Indy 500, in which he lost control of his car and hit the outside wall at over 230mph before flipping over and catching fire.

Bourdais was lucky to escape without life-threatening injuries in the accident, which happened on the third of his four qualifying laps as he negotiated turn two. The Frenchman was extracted from his Dale Coyne Racing cockpit and transported to hospital where his injuries were diagnosed, and he underwent surgery on Saturday night.

However, Bourdais did not lose consciousness during the accident.

An IndyCar statement read: "Verizon IndyCar Series driver Sebastien Bourdais was diagnosed with multiple fractures to his pelvis and a fracture to his right hip following an incident today while attempting to qualify for the 101st Running of the Indianapolis 500 Mile Race.

"According to IndyCar Medical Director Dr Geoffrey Billows, Bourdais will undergo surgery on his pelvis this evening at IU Health Methodist Hospital."

Team owner, Dale Coyne, added: "Sebastien is in good hands here at IU Methodist Hospital with the staff and now we just wait for him to recover."

Bourdais is one of the most successful ever drivers in American racing, having won four Champ Car series titles between 2004 and 2007, before switching to Formula One in 2008 for a two-year stint with Toro Rosso.

Mayweather: Conor McGregor fight will happen

Floyd Mayweather says there is a "90% chance" he will take on Conor McGregor if he returns to the ring as it is "the only fight that makes sense".

Former five-weight world champion Mayweather retired unbeaten in September

2015 after 49 bouts.

Ireland's UFC lightweight champion McGregor, 28, claims he has signed his half of the deal to fight the American.

"I think the fight will happen" said 40-year-old Mayweather. "We have to give

the people what they want to see."

Mayweather, who was speaking after his fighter Gervonta Davis beat Liam Walsh in London, said he would speak to his advisor Al Haymon and establish their next move.

"There's no rush," he added. "The only

fight that makes sense to me is the McGregor fight. I guess I have one more obstacle that I have to get over.

"When we make a move it's going to be huge. When Floyd Mayweather fights it's history.

(Source: BBC)

Manchester United splash out £12.16m per point!

	Squad value	Wages 16-17	Total	£ per point
1 Man United	£522.4m	£280m	£802.4m	£12.16m
2 Man City	£454.4m	£255m	£709.4m	£9.46m
3 Sunderland	£87.5m	£92m	£179.5m	£7.48m
4 Arsenal	£293.1m	£210m	£503.1m	£6.99m
5 Chelsea	£378.2m	£226m	£604.2m	£6.71m
6 Liverpool	£279.6m	£185m	£464.6m	£6.36m
7 West Ham	£117.1m	£112m	£229.1m	£5.45m
8 Southampton	£137.1m	£110m	£247.1m	£5.37m
9 C Palace	£101.2m	£106m	£207.2m	£5.05m
10 Leicester	£102.9m	£110m	£212.9m	£4.95m
11 Stoke	£100m	£82m	£182m	£4.44m
12 Everton	£152.2m	£114m	£266.2m	£4.36m
13 Swansea	£80m	£82m	£162m	£4.26m
14 Middlesbro	£51.7m	£66m	£117.7m	£4.20m
15 Tottenham	£208.6m	£126m	£334.6m	£4.03m
16 Hull	£71.7m	£65m	£136.7m	£4.02m
17 Watford	£84m	£76m	£160m	£4.00m
18 West Brom	£59.2m	£88m	£147.2m	£3.27m
19 Bournemouth	£68m	£66m	£134m	£2.98m
20 Burnley	£46.7m	£50m	£96.7m	£2.42m
TOTAL	£3.3bn	£2.5bn	£5.8bn	£5.74m

Manchester United delivered the worst value for money by far in the Premier League this season, taking into account the number of points they won set against the cost of assembling and paying their squad.

Analysis by The Mail on Sunday shows Jose Mourinho's club have spent £12.16million per point going into the final game.

This is calculated by a squad acquisition cost of £522m and estimated total club wage bill of £280m this season for £802m outlay.

With just 66 points, United are the only club into double figures of millions per point.

The accompanying table shows the value for money of all 20 top flight teams,

using squad costs (fees paid for all players combined) and estimated total club wage bills for the current campaign based on previous bills plus predicted growth.

Burnley, led by manager Sean Dyche, offer the best value with an outlay of £2.42m per point but Tottenham Hotspur are arguably the standout performers.

Second place in the table for Mauricio Pochettino's team came at just over £4m a point, well below the divisional average of £5.74m.

It is no surprise that big-spending United, Manchester City, Arsenal and Chelsea are high in the table but Sunderland's massive £7.48m per point to finish bottom is perhaps the most woeful figure of them all.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Turkish NBA star denied entry to Romania after passport canceled

U.S.-based Turkish basketball star Enes Kanter was refused entry into Romania on Saturday because his Turkish passport had been canceled, Romanian border police said.

Kanter, who plays in the NBA for Oklahoma City Thunder, is a long-time supporter of Pennsylvania-based preacher Fethullah Gulen, whose extradition Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan is seeking in relation to a failed coup last July.

Kanter had tweeted earlier that Romanian police had detained him at Bucharest airport.

"I'm being held at Romanian airport by police," Kanter wrote, along with a photo of him with his arms around two police officers and a video describing what he said was his situation.

"We are in Romania and they said they canceled my passport by Turkish embassy," he said in the video, speaking in English. "You know because the reason behind it is just of course my political views."

Neither the National Basketball Association nor the



Oklahoma City Thunder were immediately available for comment on Kanter.

Kanter's agent, Melvut Cilnar, told Oklahoma media that the player was safe.

He said he and Kanter expected to return to the U.S.

Monaco finish season in style

French champions Monaco finished the Ligue 1 season in style with a record 12th consecutive win as they beat Stade Rennais 3-2 away on Saturday.

Monaco, who prevailed with goals by Fabinho, Jemerson and Jorge, finished with

95 points, eight ahead of Paris St Germain after the capital side were held 1-1 by Caen at the Parc des Princes.

Olympique de Marseille secured a Europa League spot by finishing fifth with a 1-0 home win against Bastia that relegated

the Corsican club to Ligue 2.

They were joined on their way down by Nancy despite their 3-1 home victory against St Etienne, and Lorient will need a playoff against Ligue 2 third-placed Troyes to keep their place in the elite after

Saturday's 1-1 draw against Girondins de Bordeaux.

Bordeaux finished sixth and will play in the Europa League provided PSG beat Angers in next Saturday's French Cup final.

(Source: Daily Star)



The 38-year-old has also been a regular at the Le Mans 24 Hours, having first competed in the French race in 1999, and he has a best overall finish of second three times in 2007, 2009 and 2011 with the factory-backed

Peugeot team. More recently, Bourdais has competed around his hometown track of Le Mans with the Ford Chip Ganassi Racing USA team.

(Source: Independent)

FIFA U-20 World Cup: Iran edge past Costa Rica

S P O R T S Mohammad Mehdi Mehdikhani secured an opening win for Iran as his late goal saw off Costa Rica 1-0 in FIFA U-20 World Cup Korea Republic 2017 Group C.

Despite Iran's fairly well-established FIFA World Cup pedigree, having appeared at three in the last 20 years, this was only their third ever outing at U-20 level – and the first of those came in the inaugural tournament. Because of that, you could forgive them for being a tad ring-rusty. In truth though, Costa Rica were not much sharper.

Both struggled to fashion opportunities in a tepid first half. Iran began the brighter of the pair, looking to utilize a distinct height advantage. As time wore on, Costa Rica's stronger possession game saw them begin to dictate the pace of the match, though a sloppy final ball undermined their chance of fashioning any clear openings, FIFA.com reported.

The pattern continued until the latter stages where Iran first came close from an audacious Omid Norafkan corner, clipping the top of the bar, before the deadlock was broken with nine minutes to go. Unmarked at the far post, Mehdikhani chested down and fired low into the bottom left corner to snatch three points from what looked like a certain stalemate.

"We won the match after 40 years but it will not be our last win in the tournament. The first match is the most difficult match but our players did well in both halves and we earned a valuable victory," Iran coach Amirhossein Peyrovani said in the post-match news conference.

"We advanced to the World Cup after 16 years and it's a good feeling. Iran U-18 football team have also qualified for the World Cup and our senior team will most likely advance to the 2018 World Cup. It shows we have so many talented players in our country," he added.



Iran will meet Zambia on Wednesday in the second group match. Peyrovani says they have analyzed the team.

"Zambia played well against Portugal but Portugal missed several chances in this match. The match against Zambia can be the group decider match for both teams," he added.

Also in the group, African champion Zambia made a dream start to their 2017 FIFA U-20 World Cup campaign with a 2-1 victory over two-time global winner Portugal

in the group C clash in Jeju.

The 2017 FIFA U-20 World Cup is the 21st edition of the FIFA U-20 World Cup, the biennial international men's youth football championship contested by the under-20 national teams of the member associations of FIFA, since its inception in 1977 as the FIFA World Youth Championship.

The tournament is hosted by South Korea between 20 May and 11 June 2017.

Iran finish 8th at Women's U-23 Volleyball Championship, Japan win title

S P O R T S Iran lost to Malaysia 3-2 (25-23, 22-25, 25-23, 22-25, 15-13) in the 7th-8th playoff match at the 2017 Asian Women's U-23 Volleyball Championship at The Mall Nakhon Ratchasima's MCC Hall on Sunday.

Low Mei Cing scored a match-high 30 points including 27 kills from 82 attempts while Alicia Yui added 12 points.

Fatemeh Amini and Zahra Shiri scored 19 points apiece for Iran.

"The game was quite even. We lost to them in the first round, so we just wanted to beat them today. I think they served pretty well. In the fourth set, we made too many unforced errors while they got so many points on their serves. In the last set, both teams stood an equal chance of winning the set and match, but they made more errors than us. Then we took this opportunity. We are happy to win this match," Malaysia's head coach Dato Moh Wung Ming said after match.

"We are a young team and we are preparing this team for the SEA Games in our country. I hope they will gain more experience from this tournament," he added.

Formidable Japan produced a fantastic comeback 3-2 (20-25 16-25 25-19 27-25 15-12) victory over



determined Thailand in the hard-fought final showdown to underline their supremacy over the competition at the packed The Mall Nakhon Ratchasima's MCC Hall on Sunday.

Vietnam powered past Taiwan in straight sets 25-20 25-19 25-19 to claim bronze in this top-flight tournament.

The 2017 Asian Women's U-23 Volleyball

Championship is a biennial international volleyball tournament organized by the Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) with Thailand Volleyball Association (TVB).

The tournament, which was held from May 13 to 21, served as the Asian qualification tournament for the 2017 FIVB Volleyball Women's U-23 World Championship in Slovenia from September 10 to 17. The top two teams from the Asian meet made the cut for the World Championship.

Final rankings

1. Japan - qualified for 2017 World Championship
2. Thailand - qualified for 2017 World Championship
3. Vietnam
4. Taiwan
5. Kazakhstan
6. Hong Kong
7. Malaysia
8. Iran
9. Uzbekistan
10. Australia
11. New Zealand
12. Sri Lanka
13. Macao

Paulo Sergio reaches agreement with Iran's Foolad



S P O R T S Paulo Sergio Bento Brito, known as Paulo Sergio, has reached an agreement to take charge of Foolad football team.

Under guidance of Naeim Sadavi, the Iranian team finished in 10th place in Iran Professional League, 29 points adrift of champion Persepolis.

Sergio amassed Primeira Liga

totals of 86 games and 18 goals over the course of seven seasons, but played mainly in the lower divisions of Portugal.

He began his career as manager in 2003 and took charge of several teams, including Portuguese teams Vitoria Guimaraes, Sporting, Pacos Ferreira, Academica, Hearts in Scotland and APOEL in Cyprus.

Iran want to win AFC U-20 Futsal Championship title: coach



S P O R T S Iran coach Ali Sanei says that they want to win the title of the AFC U-20 Futsal Championship.

Iran will look to take their impressive AFC U-20 Futsal Championship Group Stage form into Monday's quarter-final clash with Lebanon when the two sides meet at the Hua Mark Indoor Stadium. "Firstly, I would like to congratulate

Lebanon and all the other quarter-finalists. It has not been an easy competition for anybody, but we move on despite all our challenges. We are prepared.

"We have a responsibility to Iran as we are representatives of the country. We have a strong senior team, but we also want to be champions of this tournament," he added.

Iran seize gold medal at zurkhaneh competition

Iranian team claimed a gold medal in the men's group team skills in the first day of zurkhaneh competitions held as part of the 4th Islamic Solidarity Games in Baku.

Host Azerbaijan won the silver medal, while Afghanistan and Iraq seized the bronze medal.

Teams from nine countries – Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Uganda – took part in the first day of the zurkhaneh competitions, which will last for two days.

Zurkhaneh consist of two words: "zur" meaning power or strength and, "khaneh" meaning house, which translates to, house of power or strength.



Zurkhaneh is accompanied by the rhythms played by Murshud who sits in a place called the Serdem. The

door "Serdem", is narrow and low with a passage leading to the opening. The serdem itself is 1 or 1.5 meters tall and is built from wood.

The shape and form of Zurkhaneh tools are taken from ancient weapons. The participants of zurkhaneh use equipment, such as a club bell, push-up board, shield, bow and chain throughout the performance.

More than 3,000 athletes from 54 countries of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation are competing in 21 sports at the Games.

The Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games started May 8 and will last until May 22 in Azerbaijan's capital.

(Source: Tasnim)

Kaveh Rezaei: Esteghlal fans demand your very best

When Islamic Republic of Iran giants Esteghlal step onto the field into the cauldron of noise that is the cavernous Azadi Stadium to face Emirati side Al Ain in the first leg of their AFC Champions League Round of 16 tie on Monday, striker Kaveh Rezaei knows that nothing less than giving his all will be sufficient for the club's home fans who are comfortably among Asia's most fervent.

The 25-year-old is in his second AFC Champions League campaign after he reached the last 16 with Isfahan club Zobahan, although his four goals in six games this time round is a marked improvement on last year's tally when he netted just the once.

But then the pressure and expectations from the legions of Esteghlal fans, a side that is considered by many to be among the biggest clubs in Asia, is a different experience entirely. "Esteghlal are a great team, one of the true giants in Iran and Asia," says Rezaei, who helped the team finish runners-up in the Iran Pro League this season.

"At the same time there is a lot of pressure on the shoulders of the players. We have to play at our best in every match, it's not a matter of improving game by game, the fans insist that in each match we have to play at our top level.

"It's been quite a challenging experience for me, as I always have to be at the highest standard of my ability every single game."

For role-models and veterans, Esteghlal do boast some of IR Iran's most experienced players with captain and goalkeeper Mehdi Rahmati and vice-captain Khosro Heydari boasting over 135 international caps between them. A factor that, Rezaei believes, gives the Tehran side the edge over former club Zobahan.

"I honestly believe that last year with Zobahan we could have reached the final instead of Al Ain [who the side lost to in the Round of 16]. I think this was a lot to do with a lack of experience in the team," says Rezaei.

"This year it is totally different. This year my team and team-mates have a lot more experience. We have players who have played in World Cups, European leagues and big tournaments, so the atmosphere in the club is totally different.

"We also have the support of around 90,000 fans each game which is a big help to our team. For example, they played an important factor in our play-off win over Al Sadd. And match-by-match we are getting better and better."

The second leg comes just a week later at Al Ain's Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium, and Rezaei and his team-mates will be without the six digit numbers in support. However, there will be no mistaking the demands from the fans back home.

With Iran lacking an AFC Champions League winner since the tournament revamp in 2003, the expectations is there, from both players and fans, for Esteghlal to end that record.

(Source: the-afc)

Khademalsharieh earns silver in Asian individual blitz championship

Iranian chess player Sarasadat Khademalsharieh has featured sparkling performances at the 2017 Asian Individual Championship (Men and Women) in China to scoop a silver medal in the prestigious continental event.

On Sunday, a representative from India landed in the first position of the chart at the end of women's blitz event in the southwestern Chinese city of Chengdu.

Iran's 20-year-old international master and female grandmaster ended her campaign with 7.5 points and finished in second place, the Chess Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran reported.

The 2017 Asian Individual Championship (Men and Women) kicked off on May 11 in China, and will wrap up on May 22.

The sports event has brought together tens of chess players from various Asian countries, including China, India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

(Source: Press TV)

Iranian para athletes take gold, silver medals

Para athletes Saman Pakbaz and Masoud Heydari from Iran claimed gold and silver medals in the men's shot put F12 in the Islamic Solidarity Games on Saturday.

Pakbaz won the gold medal with a throw of 15.69 meters.

Silver medal went to Heydari who threw 15 meters. Uzbekistan's para athlete claimed the bronze medal.

More than 3,000 athletes from 54 countries of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation are competing in 21 sports at the Games.

The Baku 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games started May 8 and will last until May 22 in Azerbaijan's capital.

(Source: Azer News)



Iranian reciter Hamed Alizadeh tops at Malaysian Quran contest

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian reciter Hamed Alizadeh has won the first prize at the 59th International Al-Quran Recital and Memorizing Assembly in Malaysia.

He received his prize during the closing ceremony of the competition at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday night, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Sunday.

Bruneian reciter Awangku Muhammad Adibul Amin bin Pengiran Haji Marjuki emerged as runner-up while Wan Fakhru Razi Wan Mohamad from Malaysia won the third prize.

Normalina Alias from Malaysia won the first prize in the female reciters category and Dayang Siti Noor Dzuhairah Awang Damit from Brunei won the second prize.

The third place in this category was taken by A'tiqah Suhaimi from Singapore.

In the male memorizers' category, Diallo Mouhamed Al Muoudjtaba from Senegal received the first prize and Muhammad Syazani Jemy from Malaysia and Ammar Abdulla A. Sakini from Qatar won the second and third prizes respectively.

Aishatu Musa Gale of Nigeria took the first place in the female memorizers' category and the second and third prizes went to Zainab M.S. Hijawi from Palestine and Ngom Ndeye Diarra from Senegal.

Iranian male reciters are the major competitors at the Malaysian contest every year.



Iranian reciter Hamed Alizadeh (R) receives his prize as top winner from Yang di-Pertuan Agong Sultan Muhammad V during the closing ceremony of the 59th International Al-Quran Recital and Memorizing Assembly at Kuala Lumpur's Putra World Trade Centre on May 20, 2017.

(NSTP/Mohd Yusni Ariffin)

Mohsen Haji-Hassani Kargar took first place at the 57th edition of the competition. He lost his life in the

2015 deadly stampede during the hajj pilgrimage in Mina. Mohammad-Taqi Morovvat, Ahmad

Abolqasemi and Ali Sayyah Gorji are among the Iranian top winners of the contest in previous editions.

“Bazaar in the Islamic City” appears in Persian

CULTURE TEHRAN — “The d e s k Bazaar in the Islamic City: Design, Culture, and History”, a book reviewing the role of the bazaar in the world's Islamic cities, has recently been published in Persian.

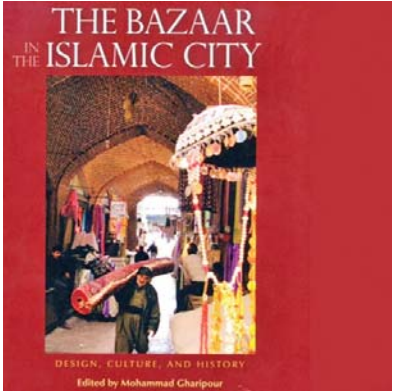
The book will be introduced during a meeting at Tehran's Malek National Library and Museum Institution on Tuesday.

The book has been compiled and edited by academician Mohammad Qaripour and translated into Persian by Kheyzaran Esmaeili.

Published by the American University in Cairo Press in 2012, the Persian version has come out by the Memarnet and Naqsh-e Mana Publications.

“The 320-page book is comprised of twelve informed and informative scholarly articles presenting an interdisciplinary exploration of the history and dynamics of the bazaar through individual case studies drawn from the Islamic communities of Cairo, Damascus, Aleppo, Nablus, Sana'a, Bursa, Istanbul, Kabul, Tehran, and Yazd,” the American University in Cairo Press has announced on its website.

“This pioneering academic work poses pertinent and complex questions about the future of the traditional bazaar. Some, like the bazaars of Damascus and Aleppo will never be the same again, or will take a decade or two to be restored to their former ambience and vitality.



“Indeed, many of the bazaars mentioned in this book may develop in a manner in which they will no longer be recognizable. In this context, ‘The Bazaar in the Islamic City’ is destined to emerge as a key historical reference work,” it says.

A number of programs have also been arranged on the sidelines of the introduction program including a lecture to be delivered by the director of the museum, Mojtaba Hosseini, in honor of the founder of the museum Haj Hossein Aqa Malek (1873-1973).

Documentary “Chahar Suq” directed by Sirus Hesari is also due to be screened at the meeting.

Located in the vicinity of Bagh-e Melli, the Malek Museum is affiliated with the Astan-e Qods Razavi Museum and Library in Mashhad.

No spoilers! “Twin Peaks” premiere urges guests to keep secret

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — As co-creator David Lynch introduced the first screening of his much-anticipated revival of the 1990s TV series “Twin Peaks”, he evoked the image of tahe tall green Douglas fir trees that came to define the mysterious small town setting of his show.

“Douglas firs are beautiful trees and if we're very quiet, we can hear the rustling needles as we move through the forest, getting closer and closer and now we're here,” Lynch told an audience late on Friday, embracing his penchant for being enigmatic.

Ahead of Showtime's “Twin Peaks” debut on Sunday, the cast and creators have closely guarded the details of the new season. Guests and reporters at the Los Angeles premiere were urged to not reveal any of the plot details of the first two episodes screened on Friday night.

Mystery -- and perhaps a special level of bizarreness -- has been part of the fabric of “Twin Peaks” since its inception on ABC in 1990, following FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) as he arrives in a small lumber town to investigate the strange and supernatural circumstances of the murder of teen homecoming-queen Laura Palmer.



Kyle MacLachlan (L) and David Lynch attend the premiere of “Twin Peaks” in Los Angeles, California, U.S. May 19, 2017.

(Reuters/Phil McCarten)

MacLachlan, who reprises his role as Cooper, told Reuters, “I can't say much but we do drink coffee and it is damn good. And we do have cherry pie.”

The pie and brew took on cult status in the original showing.

Co-creator Mark Frost said the new 18-part season “had

Bourgeois art world skewered in Cannes movie “The Square”

CANNES, FRANCE (Reuters) — A sumptuous Stockholm museum filled with grotesquely pretentious conceptual art is at the center of “The Square”, a Palme d'Or nominee at Cannes which switches between surrealism, comedy of manners, thriller and social commentary.

As the museum's handsome and successful but flawed curator searches for his stolen mobile phone, the story goes off into wild directions that even the director admitted he struggled to make gel.

The film's highlight is a dinner for the museum's well-to-do patrons where a performance artist leaps from table to table impersonating an ape -- a bizarre, tense and ultimately violent scene.

Variety's Owen Gleiberman called “The Square” “a piece of high-wire sociological suspense” which outstays its welcome: “the more it goes on the less it hangs together”.

The Guardian's Peter Bradshaw said it “brings some gobsmackingly weird and outrageous spectacle, with moments of

pure showstopping freakiness”. Both critics admired writer-director Ruben Ostlund's ambition, calling the film a piece of “high-wire” cinema.

Ostlund told reporters: “I was a little bit scared of how to deal with all these layers.

“I was super, super happy when I was reaching 75 percent of the editing or something because then I realized: OK, this will work, it will actually fit together and make a solid film.”

The actors said Ostlund was an

extremely demanding director, often shooting the same scene more than 70 times.

Lead actor Claes Bang said he performed one speech 100 times.

“Around take 95 he drags me down to the monitor and he points to the monitor and he says: ‘Now this is gonna stop. I am not going to have any more of that shitty television acting that you're doing. Now you pull yourself together and you do it for real!’”

Iranian films line up for Russia Golden Knight festival

A R T TEHRAN — Six Iranian films and documentaries will compete in the various sections of the 24th edition of the Golden Knight, an international film festival, which will start tomorrow in

Sevastopol, Russia.

“Bridge” by Amirhossein Noruzi, “Protected Oaks” by Mehdi Nurmohammadi, “Lonely Road” by Mohammadreza Hafezi and “Ramadan” by Yasin Khoshamad-Zehi will be screened in the documentary film category.

“Beluga” by Mehdi Jafari and “My Decision” by Ehsan Abdipour will be competing in the official section of the festival, which will run until May 31.

All six films have been produced by Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting.



NEWS IN BRIEF



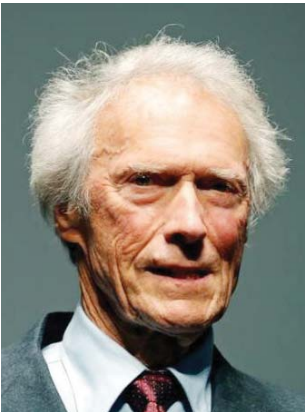
Iran’s “Servant” to compete in San Francisco Black Film Festivals

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian director Farnush Abedi's “The Servant” will go on screen at the San Francisco Black Film Festival, which will be held in the American city from June 15 to 18.

The animated film is about a servant who becomes a master and a bug becomes his servant. After a while, the man understands that he has begun a game that has no rules.

Clint Eastwood does not rule out a return to Westerns

CANNES, FRANCE (Reuters) — Clint Eastwood does not rule out making another Western, he said on Saturday as he presented a 25th anniversary restored copy of “Unforgiven” at the Cannes Film Festival.



70th Cannes Film Festival - Screening of the restored copy of the film “Unforgiven” (Impitoyable) - Cannes, France. 20/05/2017. Director Clint Eastwood arrives.(Reuters/Eric Gaillard)

“When I read the (“Unforgiven”) script 25 years ago, I always thought that this would be a good last Western for me to do,” said the 86-year-old actor-director.

“And it was the last Western, because I have never read one that worked as well as this one since that.

“But who knows, maybe something will come up in the future,” said Eastwood, who made his name in the TV series “Rawhide” and the so-called spaghetti Westerns of the 1960s, now considered classics.

“Unforgiven” won four Oscars including Best Picture and Best Director for Eastwood who also starred.

Bands pay tribute to Chris Cornell at Ohio Music Festival

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Bands and music fans at a weekend rock festival where Soundgarden had been scheduled to headline are paying tribute to frontman Chris Cornell.

Cornell was found dead this week after a concert in Detroit. Soundgarden was supposed to close out the first night of the Rock on the Range festival on Friday in Columbus.

Many of the bands remembered Cornell by performing his songs. Bush sang “Black Hole Sun,” Live performed “I Am the Highway” and Stone Sour did “Outshined.”

Fans say they're still in shock.

A medical examiner says Cornell hanged himself after performing Wednesday.