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Rouhani: S.Arabia needs ballot box not arms

TEHRAN — Iran's newly re-elected President Hassan Rouhani on Monday criticized Saudi Arabia after it signed a huge arms deal with the U.S., saying "ballot boxes" are more vital than arms for the Arab country.

The kingdom "has never seen a ballot box", Rouhani told a press conference following a landslide vote in the country's presidential election on May 19, in which nearly 42 million people participated.

"Buying arms or building weapons won't make a country powerful. Military power is only a part of strength and we are fully aware of that. But the foundation of power is national strength and this is only achieved through elections," Rouhani asserted. ➔**2**



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Rouhani win seen speeding Iran oil-deals push amid Trump threat

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is in a stronger position after his re-election to push through plans for wooing foreign investors the country needs to boost oil production, according to analysts at Cornerstone Global Associates and SVB Energy.

Iran's effort to attract about \$100 billion to develop more than 50 oil and natural gas fields bogged down ahead of the May 19 presidential election. Political arguments stalled approval of the contract terms the government would offer, and U.S. financial sanctions -- and the potential threat of additional curbs -- continue to dissuade many would-be international investors.

Rouhani defeated rivals in a landslide, winning about 57 percent of the vote. As his victory was announced on Saturday, U.S. President Donald Trump was in Saudi Arabia, Iran's regional rival, bolstering a coalition of states opposed to the Islamic republic. Trump has said the nuclear accord that world powers reached with Iran is one of the worst deals he's seen and is reviewing policy toward the country.

"The election does give Rouhani a mandate to push things through," Ghanem Nuseibeh, founder of London-based management consultant Cornerstone Global Associates, said in an interview in Dubai on Sunday. "Rouhani will do one of two things: either wait and see what Trump does, or he'll say, 'Let's move ahead.' I'd advise him to go ahead."

Shipments double

Years of international sanctions throttled investment in Iran, once OPEC's second-largest producer, and stunted its economy. A tightening of restrictions in 2012 cut into its crude exports. The country more than doubled oil sales after restrictions were eased in January 2016.

Exports have risen to about 2.5 million barrels a day since then, Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, the oil minister, said on May 6 at a Tehran conference. Zanganeh has been instrumental in the government's drive for foreign investment, helping to craft Iran's new oil-investor contracts and pitching projects to international companies. Rouhani hasn't said yet if he'll retain the same cabinet for his second term. ➔**4**

Iran unveils new military projects

POLITICS **TEHRAN —** During an event held in Tehran on Monday, Iran unveiled three strategic military projects developed by its local experts.

Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan unveiled the new projects, including the country's first domestic geoportal, a system for calibration of satellite altimetry, and the first phase of a local network of permanent border posts, Tasnim news agency reported.

Dehqan said the satellite altimetry calibration system is able to measure water depth in

the oceans, seas and gulfs with high accuracy.

The homegrown geoportal provides on-line and updated services for finding geographic information and positioning data for various purposes, he noted.

According to the minister, the local positioning network can be used for a range of fields, including military navigation and positioning, border control, dynamics of the earth, crisis management, earthquake prediction, meteorology, atmospheric water vapor estimation, transportation and traffic control, and agriculture.

He also said that one of the top priorities of the ministry is to boost the armed forces' intelligence capabilities and update the country's positioning data in the military sphere.

In recent years, Iran has made great achievements in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous military equipment, attaining self-sufficiency in the arms sphere.

However, the Islamic Republic maintains that its military power is to defend itself, and that Iran poses no threat to the regional countries.

World officials seek closer ties with Iran as Rouhani reelected president

POLITICS **TEHRAN —** Senior world officials are continuing to send messages of congratulation to Hassan Rouhani on his re-election as president, calling for closer ties with Tehran.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Lebanese President Michel Aoun, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, South African President Jacob Zuma, Iraqi Vice President Nouri al-Maliki, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika and Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili were among those who sent congratulations messages. The German president said that the two countries should take steps in line with expanding relations.

Steinmeier expressed hope that Iran would play "constructive" and "responsible" role in

helping settle conflicts in the Middle East.

Hariri said Rouhani was reelected president at a "sensitive" time, when conflicts are inflicting tolls on Islamic countries.

He called on Iran to play "constructive" role on the path of freedom, justice and peace.

Maliki called for expansion of relations to

Shinzo Abe says Rouhani's re-election indicates "confidence on the path of international interaction" that he adopted during his first term in office.

fight terrorists and restore stability and security to the region.

Margvelashvili said that re-election of Rouhani will help settle regional conflicts.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sent a message on Sunday saying Rouhani's re-election indicates "confidence on the path of international interaction" that he adopted during his first term in office. Abe expressed hope that Iran would play "constructive" role in line with helping establish peace in the region.

South Korean Foreign Ministry also sent a message on Monday felicitating Rouhani.

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.

West Karoun oilfields, IP gas pipeline projects prioritized

ECONOMY **TEHRAN —** Iran's First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri has tasked the Oil Ministry with implementing 11 prioritized projects in the oil and gas sector by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018).

Increasing the output of West Karoun oilfields by 100,000 barrels per day (bpd) to reach 350,000 bpd, and completing the gas pipeline project with Pakistan are the top priorities, Shana reported on Monday. Moreover, acquiring up-to-date knowledge for upstream projects, including improved oil recovery (IOR) and enhanced oil recovery (EOR), expanding the national gas network in rural areas and adding 900,000 new households to the network, and allocating 3.5 trillion rials (about \$93.8 million) for implementing public utility projects

in underprivileged regions which enjoy large oil and gas reserves are among the projects.

West Karoun region includes five oilfields Iran shares with Iraq at the western part of Iran's southwestern region of Karoun.

Based on the latest studies, the in-situ deposit of West Karoun oilfields is estimated to be 67 billion barrels containing both light and crude oils.

The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project was launched in 2010, aiming to construct 1,800 kilometers of pipeline from Iran to Pakistan.

Iran plans to deliver 21.5 million cubic meters per day of gas to Pakistan through the project.

While Iran has completed its part of the gas pipeline, Pakistan has fallen behind the target to take delivery of gas, initially scheduled for 2014.

Fear of internal turmoil prompting Al-Sauds to buy huge arms: U.S. professor

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — A George Washington University professor says Saudi Arabia is buying huge consignments of arms from the U.S. with the intention to use them against its own people because the rulers in Riyadh are mostly concerned about turmoil at home.

"What the A-Sauds fear most is internal turmoil in the Kingdom. The arms they seek will be used against their own people," Hossein Askari tells

the Tehran Times.

On Saturday, the U.S. sealed a multibillion arms deal with Saudi Arabia. The agreement, which is worth \$350 billion over 10 years and \$110 billion that will take effect immediately, was hailed by the White House as "a significant expansion of... [the] security relationship" between the two countries.

Following is the text of the interview Askari who served as special advisor to Saudi finance minister: ➔**2**

Lebanese FM: We were unaware of Riyadh announcement

Lebanon Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil has expressed his surprise over the concluding statement at Sunday's Arab Islamic American Summit in Saudi Arabia, which he argued was announced after a Lebanese delegation departed the Kingdom.

Bassil said on Twitter late on Sunday: "We were not aware of the announcement in Riyadh, rather we thought that no statement would be issued after the summit and were surprised by its issuance and content while we were on the plane back."

Details about the concluding statement have not been released.

The foreign minister, along with Prime Minister Saad Hariri, Interior Minister Nouhad Machnouk and Information Minister Melhem Riachi visited Saudi Arabia over the weekend to attend the Arab Islamic American Summit in Riyadh.

Bassil praised the Lebanese people and their coexistence. "We adhere to the [president's] oath, and to keeping Lebanon away from external problems," the Foreign Minister said in a separate tweet.

The United States President Donald Trump urged Arab and Islamic leaders on Sunday to unite and do their share to defeat extremists.

During a meeting of more than 50 Arab and Muslim leaders he sought to chart a new course for America's role in the region, one aimed squarely on rooting out terrorism, with less focus on promoting human rights and democratic reforms.

Former Minister and Marada Movement chief Sleiman Frangieh responded on Twitter by saying that Bassil is "a witness that has not seen anything."

"Saudi Arabia's position towards Hezbollah and Iran is known, so there is nothing new that was said at the summit in Riyadh," Economy Minister Raed Khoury was quoted as saying by the National News Agency while talking to Voice of Lebanon radio.

"Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil explained the situation and focused on Aoun's oath and Prime Minister Saad Hariri has the same direction and represents Lebanon," Khoury added.

(Source: Daily Star)



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Iran Zurkhaneh win title at Baku 2017

Iran's Zurkhaneh claimed six gold medals and one silver at the 4th Islamic Solidarity Games in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Hosts Azerbaijan finished in second place, bagging one gold, three silver and three bronze medals.

Iraq came third with three silver medals and one bronze.

Zurkhaneh consist of two words: "zur" meaning power or strength and, "khaneh" meaning house, which translates to, house of power or strength.

ELECTION COUNTDOWN



Bahonar: Expediency Council fate to be determined soon

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The head of the Followers **d e s k** of the Line of Imam and Leadership said on Monday that he expects the Expediency Council's fate to be determined in the current Iranian month (May 22-June 21), ILNA reported.

Mohammad Reza Bahonar also commented on the presidential and council elections, calling on political groups avoid implying that the government is dysfunctional.

Addressing a press conference, he said he believed the record of former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad acted against the interests of principlists.



Guardian Council thanks people for high turnout

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Guardian Council on **d e s k** Monday issued a statement thanking the nation for a high turnout in the Friday presidential and council elections.

"Election in the Islamic Republic of Iran means, in the true sense of the word, the participation of people in deciding their fate," it said, IRIB reported.

"The high turnout was a new blow to the enemies of this land," the oversight council said. "It made heavier the responsibility of officials in earnestly serving this devoted nation."



'People have realized their votes count'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A vocal principlist **d e s k** lawmaker published a comment about the presidential election on his Instagram late on Sunday where he said the people have come to the point that their votes matter.

"People have realized that their votes count," Ali Motehari said of the high turnout. He praised people's choice of moderation against heavy barrage of media criticism to misrepresent the incumbent government.

He also called on "radical, anti-government media" to correct their ways. "Power is not everything. There also exist things called national interest and Islam."

Motehari then invited principlists to "become real principlists".



'City-selling changed the mind of Tehraners'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A member of the Councils **d e s k** and Internal Affairs Committee of the Majlis has said "corruption, bribery, and selling the city had changed the minds of Tehran's people" as they were going to elect a new city council on May 19.

Speaking to the Iran Labor News Agency on Monday, Qassem Mirzaei said in the Friday election, "People did not turn their back on principlists, but voiced protest at some tastes and modes of thought."



West failed to depict Iran election as a 'sham': commander

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A senior commander **d e s k** of the IRGC has said that Western countries have tried and failed to depict the Iranian elections as a "sham".

"Today, the world is aware that democracy is a reality in Iran," General Yadollah Javani said on Monday, according to Tasnim news agency.

Javani described the latest election in the country as a manifest of Iran's security, adding that in the Islamic Republic's democracy people are free to "choose their fate within the framework of Islamic norms".



'People said no to increasing subsidies'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — In the Friday election, **d e s k** Iranian people said a big no to promises to increase cash subsidy, a senior advisor to President Hassan Rouhani said on Monday.

"The decision they made showed the nation's level of understanding," Akbar Torkan said, ISNA reported.

"People understand that creating jobs means investment and development, which is in stark contrast to distribution of money," Torkan stressed.

"The more we organize and turn into investment the deposits of people, the more able we will be to create jobs," he said.

Don't sell 'dangerous arms' to terror supporters, Iran tells Trump

© Tehran Times/Maryam Kanyab



POLITICS **TEHRAN** — In an **d e s k** open reference to Saudi Arabia which is famous as the hotbed of terrorism, the Iranian Foreign Ministry on Monday advised the new Trump administration against selling "dangerous weapons to main supporters of terrorism".

The comments by the ministry came upon as Donald Trump took a trip to Saudi Arabia on Saturday and signed a huge arms deal with the Saudis.

"Unfortunately, some regional countries rely on major powers instead of relying on their human resources and capacities of regional cooperation," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said.

The Foreign Ministry official said the Saudi-led war on Yemen has destroyed

Qassemi urged the regional countries to help establish security and peace, respect people's right to determine their destiny and spend their money on development rather than funneling them into U.S. coffers.

the Yemeni infrastructure and the "Takfiri terrorist movements" who are backed by Riyadh have also wreaked havoc on Syria.

During his trip, Trump claimed that Iran is a key sponsor of militant group, an allegation vehemently rejected by Qassemi.

Trump's "unfounded claims" are in line with spreading Iranophobia to motivate the regional countries buy more U.S. arms, the spokesman noted.

The ministry spokesman also called on

the U.S. to stop "warmongering" policies in the region.

Qassemi also said terrorist are gaining more strength due to the U.S. "hostile and aggressive policies" and "miscalculations by despotic rulers" who support terrorists.

He also urged the regional countries to help establish security and peace, respect people's right to determine their destiny and spend their money on development rather than funneling them into U.S. coffers.

Elsewhere, Qassemi said that the

Rouhani:S. Arabia needs ballot boxes not arms

I → "I hope that the day will come that Saudi Arabia will adopt this path," he said. "They should have polling stations in place for the people and let the rulers not be on a hereditary basis. They should be picked by the people."

Rouhani's comments come after U.S. President Donald Trump sealed a multibillion arms deal with Saudi officials during his maiden trip abroad as U.S. president.

The agreement, which is worth \$350 billion over 10 years and \$110 billion that will take effect immediately, was hailed by the White House as "a significant expansion of...[the] security relationship" between the two countries.



Saudi Arabia and Iran haven't had diplomatic relations since early 2016. That's when Saudi Arabia executed a prominent Shiite cleric and protesters in Iran attacked two of the kingdom's diplomatic posts.

Saudi Arabia immediately cut diplomatic ties and other Arab countries lying on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf have taken a harder line on Iran since.

In similar comments, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said that Iran derives stability from the people and not the coalitions.

"We derive stability not from 'coalitions', but from our people, who - unlike many - do vote. Iranians must be respected & are ready to engage," he tweeted on Friday.

Fear of internal turmoil prompting Al-Sauds to buy huge arms: U.S. professor

The Trump-Kushner partnership knows the big bonanza that awaits them when they leave office and probably hopes for some rewards even while they are in office.



A: Saudi Arabia has pushed such an idea for a number of years. It is all with the goal of isolating Iran and casting Iran and Syria out of the Muslim orbit. Saudi Arabia is paranoid about Iran and will even pay Muslim countries to join.

The U.S. will agree to advise such an organization and coordinate their efforts, in large part to sell more arms. But it will be unlike NATO in a very important way. In NATO, member countries have agreed to come to any member's rescue if it is attacked. The U.S. will never agree to do this for an Arab NATO.

■ Feeling of common threat has to be the main cause for creating an Arab NATO, but Saudi Arabia and Qatar differ on Muslim Brotherhood. So, would such a treaty be a successful?

A: You are absolutely correct that all Arab countries don't agree on every issue, but there are pressures that could be persuasive for countries to join, especially if the organization has no teeth with an ironclad mutual defense agreement.

■ What were the reasons for the Riyadh summit with presence of Trump and some leaders from Islamic states?

A: This trip was orchestrated by Jared Kushner (Trump's Middle East czar) and Mohammed bin Salman (Deputy Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia). The stated purpose is to create an "Arab NATO" (Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates as founding members) with the U.S. playing a

supporting role to fight terrorism and to contain and isolate Iran. But the purpose is to sell more arms to the Arabs, to promote U.S. exports to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council countries and for Trump to look tough on the world stage by putting America first and getting Saudi Arabia and the GCC to pay the U.S. for their defense.

There are a number of reasons why the Al-Sauds are resurrecting the shelved idea of an Arab (or Muslim) NATO. What the A-Sauds fear most is internal turmoil in the Kingdom. The arms they seek will be used against their own people (it doesn't hurt that massive arms purchases also translate into massive commissions for the Al-Sauds). In turn, U.S. arms mean U.S. advisors and if needed U.S. soldiers to fight for the Al-Sauds at home or abroad. As the Al-Sauds feel more secure with more U.S. arms and especially with more U.S. advisors and Arab military from Jordan and Egypt, they will be emboldened to crack down on domestic dissent in the name of "fighting terrorism" and to confront Iran.

The Al-Sauds fear the rulers of Iran because of their belief that the Iranians are intent on their overthrow. But instead of diplomacy and confidence building initiatives, they prefer to hide under the U.S. protective skirt and do all they can to promote a conflict with Iran with the U.S. at their side, something they believe they can bank on.

Another important aspect of this summit are for Trump and his family to get close to the Al-Sauds for personal financial reasons. Leaders of Europe, Canada, New Zealand and Australia do not shower ex-U.S. presidents, members of their cabinet and ex-senior lawmakers with donations and large consulting/advising contracts, but that is the way of life for the Al-Sauds. The Trump-Kushner partnership knows the big bonanza that awaits them when they leave office and probably hopes for some rewards even while they are in office. And being "astute" businessmen, the Trump-Kushner team could take this foreign influence peddling thing to another level.

"As the Al-Sauds feel more secure with more U.S. arms and especially with more U.S. advisors and Arab military from Jordan and Egypt, they will be emboldened to crack down on domestic dissent in the name of "fighting terrorism".

Trump in Israel, says he has new reasons to hope for peace

The United States President Donald Trump arrived in Israel on Monday on the second leg of his first overseas trip since entering office and said he had new reasons to hope for peace and stability in the Middle East after his visit to Saudi Arabia.

In a stopover lasting 28 hours, Trump is to meet separately with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Later on Monday, he will pray at Judaism's Western Wall and visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in al-Quds (Jerusalem), and on Tuesday he will travel to Beit Lahm (Bethlehem).

Netanyahu and his wife Sara, as well as President Reuven Rivlin and members of the Israeli cabinet, were at Tel Aviv's Ben-Gurion airport to greet Trump and first lady Melania in a red carpet ceremony after what is believed to have been the first direct flight from Riyadh to Israel.

"During my travels in recent days, I have found new reasons for hope," Trump said in a brief speech on arrival.

"We have before us a rare opportunity to bring security and stability and peace to this region and its people, defeating terrorism and creating a future of harmony, prosperity and peace, but we can only get there working together. There is no other way," he said.

Trump's tour comes in the shadow of difficulties at home, where he is struggling to contain a scandal after firing James Comey as FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) director nearly two weeks ago. The trip ends on Saturday after visits to the Vatican, Brussels and Sicily.

■ Ultimate deal

Meantime, Netanyahu said Israel shared Trump's commitment to peace -- but he also repeated his right-wing government's political and security demands of the Palestinians, including recognition of Israel as a Jewish state.

"May your first trip to our region prove to be a historic milestone on the path towards reconciliation and peace," Netanyahu said.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told reporters en route to Tel Aviv that any three-way meeting between Trump, Netanyahu and Abbas was for "a later date".

Trump has vowed to do whatever is necessary to broker peace between Israel and the Palestinians -- something he has called "the ultimate deal" -- but has given little indication of how he could revive negotiations that collapsed in 2014.

When he met Abbas this month in



Washington, he stopped shortly of explicitly recommitting his administration to a two-state solution to the decades-old conflict, a long-standing foundation of U.S. policy. He has since spoken in support of Palestinian "self-determination".

Trump has also opted against an immediate move of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv to al-Quds (Jerusalem), a longtime demand of Israel.

A senior administration official told Reuters last week that Trump remained committed to his campaign pledge to ultimately relocate the embassy, but would not announce such a move during this trip.

"We're having very good discussions with all parties and, as long as we see that happening, then we don't intend to do anything that we think could upset those discussions."

■ Arab welcome

Netanyahu has come under pressure from right-wing members of his own coalition who say he is not pushing hard enough to get Trump to carry out his promise.

Over the weekend, Trump received a warm welcome from Arab leaders, who focused on his desire to restrain Iran's influence in the region, a commitment they found wanting in the Republican president's Democratic predecessor, Barack Obama.

On Sunday, Israel authorized some economic concessions to the Palestinians that it said would improve civilian life in areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority and were intended to respond to Trump's request for "confidence-building steps".

The United States welcomed the move but the Palestinians said they had heard such promises before.

Trump used his visit to Riyadh to bolster U.S. ties with Arab and Islamic nations, announce \$110 billion in U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia, and send Iran a tough message.

In a speech on Sunday to dozens of Arab and Islamic leaders, he toned down the harsh anti-Muslim rhetoric he had employed during his presidential campaign in favor of trying to build cooperation against militants.

"A better future is only possible if your nations drive out the terrorists and drive out the extremists. Drive them out," Trump said.

Trump will have visited significant centers of Islam, Judaism and Christianity by the end of his trip, a point that his aides say bolsters his argument that the fight against extremist militancy is a battle

between "good and evil".

■ Trump flight from Saudi to Israel thought to be first ever

Trump's plane believed to be the first to fly directly from Saudi Arabia to the Israel.

Trump left Riyadh for Tel Aviv ahead of talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in hopes of seeking ways to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace.

A spokesperson for the Civil Aviation Authority of Israel told AFP he was not aware of any flight taking that course before.

Israel has no diplomatic relations with the House of Saud regime despite informal ties on certain levels, particularly around shared concerns over Iran.

Any links are diplomatically delicate, with Arab states strong supporters of the Palestinian cause. Egypt and Jordan are the only two Arab states to have signed peace deals with Israel.

Israeli citizens, however, can travel to Saudi Arabia and thousands of Muslims attend the annual hajj pilgrimage there, flying with stopovers in neighboring countries.

A plane carrying reporters accompanying Trump had to stop in Cyprus rather than fly directly.

(Source: Reuters)

Palestinians stage industrial action ahead of Trump visit

Palestinians have begun a general strike in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to observe a "Day of Rage" in support of hunger-striking prisoners in Israeli jails ahead of the United States President Donald Trump's visit to the occupies territories.

The Palestinian Ma'an news agency said public places will be shut down on Monday, except schools and medical centers.

The industrial action had initially been called by a Palestinian national committee set up to support a mass hunger strike in Israeli prisons that is now on its 36th day.

Palestinian factions also released a statement, calling for "unity and assimilation with our brave prisoners," as they threw their weight behind Monday's general strike.



They slammed Washington's support for the Israeli occupation and called on the Palestinian public to join the action in a bid to reject a possible resumption of talks with Israel under the U.S. sponsorship.

Informed sources say the health conditions of the Palestinian inmates refusing food has deteriorated, with some of them being taken to hospital.

Meanwhile, Israeli authorities continue to prevent access to the hunger strikers and keep them isolated from other prisoners.

Since April 17, more than 1,600 Palestinian prisoners have gone on hunger strike to demand appropriate medical care and treatment in Israeli jails as well as the right to pursue higher education.

They are also calling for an end to Israeli denial of family visits, solitary confinement and the so-called administrative detention, which is a form of imprisonment without trial or charge.

International organizations have called for pressure on the Tel Aviv regime to heed the inmates' demands.

■ Nablus clashes

Separately on Monday, Ma'an reported clashes between Palestinian youths and Israelis in the West Bank city of Nablus.

Local sources said the scuffles broke out after hundreds of Israeli settlers, backed by regime forces, raided Nablus to hold a religious event at the site of Joseph's Tomb.

Israeli troops fired tear gas as well as rubber and metal bullets at the Palestinians and made a number of arrests.

(Source: Press TV)

Bombing kills 14 terrorists in NW Syria: SOHR

A so-called monitoring group says more than a dozen members of the foreign-sponsored Ahrar al-Sham Takfiri militant group have been killed when a bomb attack targeted their headquarter in Syria's embattled northwestern province of Idlib.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) reported that two simultaneous blasts hit the base in Tal al-Loqan area, which lies about 11 kilometers east of Saraqib city, on Sunday, killing at least 14 terrorists and wounding dozens of others.



The Britain-based Observatory said a local militant commander was among the slain Takfiris, noting that two dismembered bodies were at the site. They are believed to belong to the two people who blew themselves up in the headquarters.

Ahrar al-Sham, however, said in a statement that a single attacker had driven a motorbike up to the building, detonating explosives attached to himself and a bomb on the bike at the same time.

Even though there was no immediate claim of responsibility, the Salafist terrorist group blamed the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists for the attack.

Idlib is a militant stronghold, but some terrorist groups aligned with Ahrar al-Sham have engaged in bloody clashes with allied groups of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly known as al-Nusra Front, there this year.

In February, the two previously allied terrorist groups of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham and Jund al-Aqsa, which is said to be affiliated with ISIL, engaged in a deadly infighting that killed nearly 70 militants from both sides in Idlib Province.

Dozens of militants had been killed a month earlier after Fateh al-Sham terrorists engaged in a 10-day-long fighting with other militant factions in the same Syrian province.

■ Clashes in Daraa despite it being 'safe zone'

Meanwhile, intense clashes broke out in Syria's Daraa on Monday between government forces and insurgents with both sides shelling parts of the southern city that has been declared a safe zone under a recent Russia-sponsored deal, opposition activists and state media said.

Daraa, the site where Syria's crisis began in March 2011 with anti-government protests, is one of four "de-escalation zones" announced earlier this month in during cease-fire talks in Astana, Kazakhstan.

(Source: agencies)

Deadly attack hits Iraqi military center in Diyala Hashd al-Sha'abi retakes 7 villages west of Mosul

At least four Iraqi soldiers have been killed in a bomb attack on a military training center in the eastern Diyala Province.

Two Iraqi officers, who asked not to be named, said six assailants struck the base north of Baghdad, on Monday morning.

Five of them detonated their explosive vests once inside the training center.

The attack also left four others, including two officers, injured. The situation is now under control.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

There has been a hike in terror attacks as ISIL terrorists are under intense pressure in the city of Mosul, their last stronghold in the country.

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

■ Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters take back 7 villages west of Mosul

Meanwhile, Iraqi fighters from Popular Mobilization Units have liberated seven villages on the western outskirts of Mosul as pro-government forces and army soldiers cooperate to expel Takfiri ISIL terrorists out of their last urban stronghold in the country.



try.

The media bureau of the volunteer forces, commonly known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, announced in a statement on Sunday that the fighters had established full control over al-Mesabas, al-Niliya, Sadet Zawbaa and Thara al-Owaisat villages south of Qairawan region, Arabic-language Shafaaq news agency reported.

Popular Mobilization Units later won back the village of Northern Ayn Fathi west of Mosul following bitter clashes with ISIL

terrorists. The fighters also shot down an ISIL drone as it was flying over the village of Hatamiya north of Qairawan.

The Popular Mobilization Units also managed to liberate Tal Qasab village north of Qairawan, killing 10 ISIL terrorists and destroying two vehicles rigged with explosives.

Additionally, Popular Mobilization Units reclaimed control over Ayn Ghazal village north of Qairawan, and began an operation to clear the area of hidden bombs.

The Iraqi forces took control of eastern

lims.

Since 2011, the kingdom has been the scene of peaceful anti-regime protests against the systematic abuse of the Shia population and discrimination against them.

The Bahraini regime has responded to the protests with excessive and lethal force, which has drawn international criticism.

Bahrain's perennial rulers are allies of the West, including the United States which has

its Fifth naval fleet based in the tiny Persian Gulf country.

On Sunday, hundreds of protesters marched in the capital Manama after the verdict was issued against Sheikh Qassem.

Qassem's residence in his native village of Diraz is under siege by regime forces in the face of a sit-in held outside the building ever since the regime revoked his citizenship.

(Source: Press TV)

Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah has lambasted a suspended jail term given by a Bahraini regime court to the country's Shia majority leader Sheikh Isa Qassem.

The court convicted the spiritual leader of illegal collection of funds and money laundering and sentenced him to one year in jail suspended for three years. It also ordered him to pay \$265,266 in fines.

"This sentence is a new crime added to a series of crimes against humanity perpetrated by the [Bahraini] regime," a Hezbollah statement said.

The charges emanate from the collection of an Islamic donation called Khums, which in Shia Islam is collected and spent by a senior cleric in the interests of the needy.

Qassem also faces expulsion from the kingdom after authorities revoked his citizenship last year. His defense lawyers refused to attend the hearings, which they saw as an attack on the country's Shia Muslims.

NEWS IN BRIEF



TCCIMA to host S. Korean trade delegation today

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) will host a South Korean trade delegation in its building today, the official website of TCCIMA announced.

The delegates led by the chairman of Busan Chamber of Commerce and Industry are active in the fields of maritime, ship building, marine structures, oil, gas, and petrochemicals as well as offshore projects.



TPO's head, Iraqi officials negotiate progress of Iranian projects in Iraq

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) Mojtaba Khosrotaj in his trip to Baghdad negotiated the progress of Iranian engineering projects underway in Iraq by the Iraqi officials, Tasnim news agency reported on Monday.

The official met Iraqi minister of youth and sport as well as the deputy ministers of industry and trade during his stay in the neighboring country.



Iran, Australia enhance co-op in water, renewable energy sectors

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Hamidreza Tashayoie, the chairman of Iranian center for the water and electricity export development and industrial logistics, said that Iran and Australia have expanded their cooperation in water and renewable energy projects.

Tashayoie made the remarks in a meeting with Australian deputy ambassador in Tehran, IRIB news cited the official website of Energy Ministry (known as PAVEN).

According to the official the two sides cooperate in areas like water resources management, constructing wind and solar farms, desalination, implementation of smart systems in water and wastewater management, and water resources management.



Asia's biggest agro-food expo to kick off in Tehran today

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The 24th International Exhibition of Food, Food Technology and Agriculture of Iran (Agrofood 2017) will kicks off today at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds, IRIB news reported. As Asia's biggest agriculture and food event, the four-day exhibition will host over 1500 domestic and foreign companies from 37 different countries.

Exhibitors from Spain, Austria, the United Arab Emirates, Britain, Ukraine, Italy, Ireland, South Africa, Germany, Brazil, Belgium, Bulgaria, Portugal, Thailand, Turkey, Chechnya, China, Denmark, Russia, Romania, Japan, Singapore, Syria, Switzerland, France, Finland, Canada, South Korea, Georgia, Lebanon, Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, Moldova, Norway, the Netherlands, India and Greece will be showcasing their latest products and achievements in food and agriculture sectors.

Rouhani win seen speeding Iran oil-deals push amid Trump threat

1 → Iran was waiting until after the election to hold its first international auction of oil-development rights, Iranian Students News Agency reported on May 16, citing Ali Kardor, managing director of state-run National Iranian Oil Co. Iran announced some terms of the new investor contract at a November 2015 conference in Tehran, and it targeted signing the first deals in March or April of 2016.

"The fact that Rouhani won as a reformist who delivered the nuclear deal and promised to bring in foreign investment would suggest that there is support for things like the oil contracts," Patrick Murphy, a Dubai-based partner at law firm Clyde & Co., said by phone Sunday.

Political foes

Rouhani's political foes have less interest in blocking the new contract now that he's won a new term, said Sara Vakhshouri, president of Washington, D.C.-based consultant SVB Energy. Even so, international investors "are still worried about remaining U.S. sanctions and possible future sanctions that could target Iran's missile program," she said by email.

The biggest oil companies have committed so far to little more than agreements to study energy projects or form development plans. Total SA, which agreed to draw up plans to produce offshore natural gas and pump crude onshore, hasn't signed any final deals for projects in Iran.

The Trump administration agreed last week to roll over sanctions waivers on Iran's oil industry and crude sales. At the same time, the U.S. imposed new sanctions on Iran's ballistic missile program and said it was continuing to review Iran's adherence to the 2015 nuclear accord.

"Everything becomes irrelevant" if Trump tears up or tries to modify the historic agreement, as that would scare off investors, Nuseibeh said.

On the other hand, Rouhani will boost interest among European governments and companies for keeping Iran open for business if he can offer oil-development contracts now, the consultant said. That would "make it even more complicated for Trump to try to renegotiate the nuclear deal," Nuseibeh said. (Source: Bloomberg)

Monthly crude steel output up 15% yr/yr

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran produced 1.734 million tons of crude steel in the first month of current Iranian calendar year, Farvardin (March 21-April 20), a 15 percent rise from 1.507 million tons in the same month last year, IRIB reported on Monday.

The country's production of steel products also shows 17 percent growth compared to the first month of past year.

Iran's exports of crude steel and steel products stood at 439,000 tons and 102,000 tons in this year's Farvardin, indicating 28 percent rise and 41 percent fall, respectively, from the same month of the previous year.

Crude steel output stood at 18.466 million tons in the past calendar year 1395, showing 11 percent rise from 16.656 million tons in 1394.

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

The country exported 5.5 million tons of crude steel in the past year, with 27 percent increase from the figure of its preceding year.

Iranian Steel Manufacturers Association's Secretary Rasoul Khalifeh-Soltan believes that while the country's



steel industry's growth has been 5.7 percent on average in the recent years, the figure can reach 10 percent this

year, given the promising condition the sector enjoys at present.

Iran-EU trade up 165% in Q1

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — The European Union's trade with Iran amounted to €5.3 billion in the first quarter of 2017, a 165 percent rise from €2 billion in the first quarter of 2016, based on the latest figures released by the European Union's statistics agency Eurostat.

The EU's exports to Iran stood at €2.53 billion during January-March this year, indi-

cating 57-percent growth from €1.604 billion in the same time span last year.

Iran's exports to the EU amounted to €2.77 billion in the said time, with seven-fold rise from €396 million in the same period in the preceding year.

After the lifting of sanctions against the country in January 2016, Iran's been trying to regain its traditional European clients.

Iran has potential to increase oil production by 3m bpd

Iran has the potential to increase oil production by 3 million barrels per day, an Iranian oil official said on Monday, adding that the figure is based on estimates from international oil companies.

"Based on plans and proposals received from international companies, Iran has the potential to

increase oil production by 3 million barrels (per day)," deputy head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Gholamreza Manouchehri was quoted as saying by state news agency IRNA.

He did not specify when the increase could happen.

(Source: Reuters)

No trade talks before Brexit bill settled, EU warns London

European Union governments agreed a common Brexit negotiating plan on Monday and renewed their insistence that they would not open talks on a post-Brexit trade deal until London agrees to settle what it owes the Union.

Ministers from the 27 other EU states met in Brussels to sign off on a common strategy and mandate the EU executive, in the form of chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier, to launch talks on their behalf after Britain's

June 8 election. The strategy and mandate were adopted unanimously, officials said.

Several ministers stressed their priorities are to provide legal clarity for EU citizens in Britain before they find themselves living outside the EU in March 2019 and to agree how to calculate what London owes Brussels before departure.

The Union's leaders agreed last month on a phased structure of talks, under which the free trade agreement which British Prime

Minister Theresa May wants with the EU would only be discussed after a first phase of talks makes "significant progress" on issues such as citizens' rights and the budget.

"It's clear that in this matter, on the finance issue, if we get stuck then we will not get on to Phase Two, what should come afterwards between the European Union and Great Britain," Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn said on arrival.

His Dutch counterpart Bert Koenders

told reporters: "It's very British to know that if you're part of a club and then you leave you have to settle your accounts."

May and her Conservative government have said they will meet their obligations but challenge the idea that Britain might have to pay tens of billions of euros to the EU to cover its share of existing financial commitments. Britain wants to launch talks on a future trading relationship as soon as possible.

(Source: Reuters)

Disagreements surface over China-backed trade deal

Disagreements between Asian countries over a China-backed free trade deal surfaced at talks on Monday, raising questions over a target for concluding negotiations by the end of the year.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) would create a free trade area of more than 3.5 billion people, bringing together China, India, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand as well as Southeast Asian nations.

The RCEP talks, which began in 2012, have been given new impetus by the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement.

But officials involved in the talks say the target to complete the discussion stage by year-end may be hard to meet given disagreements over several issues. India in particular is reluctant to give up on tariffs, they say.

"They are concerned that major tariff elimination will cut revenue and their competitive position, especially against China," said one official who did not want to be identified as the talks were private.

Another official also said India's position posed the biggest challenge in Monday's ministerial talks.

The main focus of RCEP is reducing tariffs although not as many would be cut to



Trade ministers pose for a photo during the 3rd Inter-sessional Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Ministerial Meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam May 22, 2017. (Reuters/Kham)

zero as under the TPP agreement.

Coverage of services and the digital economy are more modest than for the other agreement and it would have no protection for labor rights or the environment. Moreover, while it might have provisions for greater freedom of movement, this is one of the potential sticking points in discussions.

"We are making progress but there's still a long way to go," New Zealand Trade Minister Todd McClay told Reuters. "There

is a renewed desire to find a way to a high quality outcome. But it's going to take a lot of hard work to get it done by the end of the year."

Monday's meeting in Hanoi followed heated discussions there at the weekend at the first gathering of trade ministers from Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) countries since U.S. President Donald Trump's switch to an "America First" agenda.

APEC countries failed to come out with their usual joint statement after the United

Pacific Alliance looks to Asia as NAFTA, TPP face uncertainty

Pacific Alliance countries are in talks to expand the trade bloc outside Latin America and into high-growth Asia as the future of established deals, such as NAFTA and the evolving Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), hang in the balance, officials from Mexico and Chile told CNBC at the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Talks aimed at widening the six-year old "Alianza del Pacifico" (Pacific Alliance), the world's eighth-largest economic block and exporter, are at an exploratory stage, but have taken on an more urgency since U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from the TPP, leaving the remaining members scrambling to rescue the deal or forge new partnerships.

Mexico's economy minister said though member states were committed to resuscitating the TPP with or without the U.S., they didn't want to squander years of effort building trade relations with Asia.

"It is in the best interest of Mexico to be linked to the Asian economies," said Mexican Economy Minister Idefonso Guajardo. "We are now creating a new membership...in order to not waste the negotiating capital we have invested in TPP."

Deborah Elms, executive director of the Asian Trade Centre, said though Pacific Alliance members are trying to widen



the appeal of the bloc, it was "big on rhetoric, short on deliverables."

Attempts to engage a larger membership may be motivated by obstacles preventing cross-border trade within their own region, Elms said.

"For countries like Chile, they live in a difficult neighborhood," she explained. Mercosur, the far older South American economic and political bloc, "has been stuck and protectionist forever. This has left Chile unable to craft a sensible trade strategy in the region. They have instead struck out on their own and signed agreements with anyone else who is willing and started down the Pacific Alliance path to help them cope with their problem."

Chile's head of international trade, Paulina Nazal Aranda, said the Pacific Alliance may name new countries that may join the bloc at its summit next month in Cali, Colombia.

"It's well known that New Zealand and Australia are in the top list for us to initiate this kind of process," Nazal said. Both countries are "perfect candidates," she said, as "they have high quality standards" and negotiations can be completed "in the short term."

Though concrete benefits may be hard to discern immediately, Australia's Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment, Steven Ciobo, told CNBC that his country had held "good discussions" with the Pacific Alliance over the past 12 months.

This was part of a broader plan to pursue "bilaterals, plurilaterals and multilaterals," Ciobo said. "All I can say to you is watch this space."

New Zealand is also looking eastward toward South America.

"I've formally written to the Pacific Alliance members requesting that New Zealand become an associate member," New Zealand Trade Minister Todd McClay said in an interview with CNBC on Sunday. "We see South America, along with Mercosur, with Europe, with Asia, our relations with the U.S. as very important to New Zealand trade policy."

(Source: cnbc)

OPEC nears decision time: rollover or deepen cuts?

By John Kemp

OPEC ministers head to Vienna next week where they are expected to ratify an extension of the current production cuts that has been agreed informally among the key participants.

Saudi Arabia and Russia announced earlier this week that they have agreed on the need to extend OPEC and non-OPEC output cuts for a further nine months until March 2018.

Riyadh and Moscow pledged the bulk of cuts under the current agreement between OPEC and non-OPEC exporters so their agreement on the need for an extension has made an extension very likely when OPEC meets formally next week.

Other OPEC ministers have already signaled support. Crucially both Iraq and Iran have stated they are in favor, which removes any remaining obstacles.

In theory, OPEC could try to surprise the market by announcing deeper cuts or an even longer extension beyond March 2018, though most analysts and traders have discounted the possibility.

Saudi Arabia and Russia left the door open by promising "to do whatever it takes to achieve the desired goal of stabilizing the market and reducing commercial oil inventories to their 5-year average".

Past experience suggests a decision to deepen the cuts would cause a sharp increase in prices in the days following the announcement but an extension would have little impact or cause prices to fall slightly.

■ OPEC decisions

Researchers have studied the impact on oil prices of all OPEC decisions between 1983 and 2008 ("The behavior of crude oil spot and futures prices around OPEC and SPR announcements", Demirer and Kutun,



2010).

They found that OPEC decisions to cut production caused prices to rise significantly over the following month, but decisions to rollover an existing agreement caused prices to fall slightly.

"The degree of return persistence following OPEC production cut announcements creates substantial excess returns to investors who take long positions on the day following the end of OPEC conferences," according to Demirer and Kutun.

The authors estimated excess returns on a long position to be around 7.5 percent for the front-month futures contract and 4.5 percent for the 12th-month contract over the course of the following month.

In the build up to most OPEC meetings, crude traders' default assumption seems to have been that OPEC would struggle to reach an agreement on cutting production and would normally take the easier course

of extending existing allocations.

Decisions to cut production therefore tended to surprise the market and push prices higher, but a rollover was mostly anticipated and had little impact on prices.

Prior to an OPEC meeting, traders have usually assumed there is a small but non-zero chance output will be cut, and a larger probability that allocations will be rolled over.

Oil prices have reflected these ex ante estimates of the probability of output cuts versus the probability of a production rollover.

In the event that the meeting agreed on a rollover, the relatively low ex ante probability of output cuts declined to zero ex post, and oil prices adjusted downwards slightly.

But if the meeting decided on a reduction, the ex ante probability, usually seen as low, suddenly rose to 100 percent ex

post, and the surprise factor drove prices higher.

"The market is not sure what the outcome will be: Will OPEC cut production or maintain the status quo?" according to Demirer and Kutun. "If OPEC announces a production cut, the surprise leads to an upward adjustment in prices."

"However, if OPEC maintains the status quo, the market takes this inaction as a failure to agree on a production cut and therefore adjusts prices downward."

■ Rollover or deepen?

The rise in prices following OPEC's announcement of production cuts on Nov. 30. was consistent with this pattern.

Front-month Brent prices jumped by 23 percent from \$46.38 on the day before the meeting to reach a peak about a month later of \$57.10 on Jan. 6.

In the run up to next week's OPEC meeting in Vienna, OPEC members are reportedly exploring a range of possible scenarios.

But among oil traders, the consensus seems to be that the ex ante probability of deeper production cuts is very low while the probability of a rollover is high.

No one expects OPEC would allow the current cuts to expire and flood the market with an extra 1 million barrels per day from the start of July.

If OPEC were to surprise the market by deepening production cuts, prices are likely to rise very sharply as those probabilities are reappraised ex post.

Short-dated futures contracts will likely rise more than long-dated contracts, causing the contango to narrow.

But in the event of a rollover, prices are likely to remain flat, or even come under mild downward pressure, as the residual threat of a cut is removed.

(Source: Reuters)

China says will eventually allow private companies to invest in oil storage

China will eventually allow private companies to invest in the country's oil and gas storage, the government said in a blueprint document for its energy sector that mainly underscored earlier pledges on reforming heavily monopolized oil and gas industries.

Beijing has previously said it would take steps such as pushing to open upstream oil and gas exploration to private companies, help split natural gas sales from gas pipeline operations and lift the output of higher quality oil products.

That comes as China pushes to overhaul state-owned enterprises, including with the introduction of so-called mixed ownership of state firms, as part of the most far-reaching reforms of its sprawling and inefficient state sector in two decades.

"We are expecting specific measures (on energy sector reform) to follow after the State Council releases this overarching guide," said Lin Boqiang, an academic specialized in energy at Xiamen University.

"(But) this is the first time that China said it would encourage private capital in oil and gas storage facilities."

In the document released late on Sunday, the State Council said it would



aim to ramp up government investment in the country's oil storage facilities, while also allowing non-state firms to operate storage. It did not give further details.

China has been building underground caverns capable of holding a substantial chunk of its expanded strategic oil reserves by 2020, as it looks for new storage methods away from expensive and exposed above-ground tanks in crowded coastal regions.

The blueprint document also said the State Council would set up a "management system" to regulate crude import licenses.

The rest of the paper mainly repeated earlier government plans on reforming the energy sector.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. solar power groups await ITC ruling on higher tariffs

U.S. solar power businesses are braced for an imminent decision from the country's International Trade Commission on whether to start a process that could lead to a sharp contraction in the market and thousands of job losses.

The ITC is considering a call from Suniva, a bankrupt Chinese-owned manufacturer of solar cells and panels in the U.S., for higher tariffs on imported products to stop low-priced foreign competition. The commission is expected to make a decision soon on whether to investigate the company's complaint.

The case could be an early test of President Donald Trump's trade policies and stance on renewable energy. If the tariffs sought by Suniva are imposed, they would sharply increase the price of panels, also known as modules, and the silicon cells used to make them, and it would be harder for solar power to compete against other energy sources.

The Solar Energy Industries Association, the lobby group, has warned that the tariffs would threaten thousands of jobs in occupations such as



designing, installing and managing solar power systems, which account for about 85 per cent of the employment in the sector.

Abigail Ross Hopper, president of the SEIA, said: "If demand goes down, which we think is a likely outcome [if the administration accedes to Suniva's request], that will affect employment all across the supply chain, and all across the country."

The US solar industry has grown rapidly in recent years, in large part because of the plunging cost of imported photovoltaic modules from countries including China, Malaysia and South Korea, which have made solar an increasingly competitive form of electricity generation.

(Source: Financial Times)

Switzerland votes in favor of ban on new nuclear plants

Switzerland has voted to follow Germany and start exiting nuclear power as part of a revised energy strategy which will also cut consumption and increase wind and solar power generation.

Some 58.2 percent of voters in a referendum on Sunday backed a ban on new nuclear plants, according to final results. The affluent Alpine state's five existing nuclear plants can, however, continue to operate as long as they are deemed safe.

The vote followed Germany's decision in the wake of Japan's 2011 Fukushima disaster to shut down all 17 of the country's nuclear reactors by 2022. Last week, the commitment of newly-elected French president Emmanuel Macron to nuclear power was called into question by the appointment of nuclear critic Nicolas Hulot as energy minister.

Switzerland relies heavily on hydroelectric power generation, but nuclear power stations account for about a third of electricity generation.

Last November, Swiss voters narrowly rejected a much faster exit from nuclear power under a timetable proposed by the Green party, which would have phased out nuclear power production completely by



2029, with the first plants shutting next year.

But environmental groups welcomed the broad support for the Bern government's energy strategy approved on Sunday.

The ban on new nuclear plants would meet "one the most important demands" of Greens, encourage domestic energy production, and boost investment in Switzerland, said Martin Bäumele, president of

the Green Liberal party.

"It's a more liberal policy than in Germany — but it's still the case that we won't be able to build new nuclear power stations," said Patrick Dümmler, senior fellow at Avenir Suisse, a think-tank.

Bern argued that increased safety standards meant it was no longer cost effective to build nuclear power stations, pointing out that the new £18bn Hinkley Point C

power station in the UK would rely heavily on public subsidies.

Opponents warned, however, that the government's plans were costly and posed risks to energy security.

Switzerland's new strategy also includes targets to further reduce carbon dioxide emissions from vehicles, as well as overall energy and electricity consumption. Power generation from renewable sources such as wind and water will in future be considered in the national interest — making schemes harder to block. Financial help will be boosted for schemes to improve the energy efficiency of buildings.

Other European countries such as Denmark and Italy as well as Germany had taken similar steps to switch energy policies, "but not all of them have tried to get the whole population on board — that is what's special here", said Rolf Wüstenhagen, renewable energy specialist at the University of St Gallen.

When exactly Switzerland finally exits nuclear power would depend on whether energy market prices justified re-investing in existing plants, analysts said, but might not be until the 2030s.

(Source: Financial Times)

Oil rises on expectations of extended, possibly deeper, output cut

Oil rose on Monday, bolstered by confidence that top exporters will this week agree to extend supply curbs, with suggestions that the cuts could even be deepened.

Brent crude was up 50 cents at \$54.11 a barrel at 0836 GMT, with U.S. light crude also up 50 cents at \$50.83.

Both benchmarks have climbed more than 10 percent from lows hit earlier this month.

Prices have risen on expectations that a pledge by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other producers, including Russia, to cut supplies by 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) will be extended by six to nine months, instead of covering only the first half of this year.

"The decision (to extend cuts) seems to be almost a done deal," said Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodities analyst at SEB Markets. "There seems to be a very high harmony in the group."



The option of deepening the cuts was also being discussed ahead of a meeting of OPEC and other producers in Vienna on May 25, sources said.

"Oil soared ... as rumors swirled that OPEC... was considering recommending the double whammy of a production cut extension and deeper cuts ahead of this Thursday's meeting," said Jeffrey Halley, analyst at futures brokerage OANDA in Singapore.

Deeper cuts are required to balance the market, according to some analysts who point to a slight rise in OPEC exports this year.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) said it expects OPEC net oil export revenues to rise in 2017, partly because of "slightly higher" OPEC output.

But deeper cuts might serve to stimulate U.S. shale production, said Schieldrop at SEB Markets.

"If you cut production, it's no free lunch. You get something in the short term, but you get a backflip in the medium term, which is more production in 2018 and 2019," Schieldrop said, referring particularly to U.S. shale oil output.

Goldman Sachs says that the U.S. rig count for new oil production has jumped by 404 since May last year, representing a rise of 128 percent.

U.S. oil production has already climbed by 10 percent, or almost 900,000 bpd, since mid-2016 to 9.3 million bpd.

(Source: Reuters)

Asia oil refinery delays favor producer case for extending output cuts

Delays in the startup of new oil refineries in Asia will provide support for appeals by crude producers, led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, to extend output cuts to next March to support higher prices.

Asia's refining capacity in 2017 was expected to expand by the most in three years, helping to tilt the global oil market back into balance as production cuts led by Russia and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) took effect. But analysts are rethinking the Asia demand impact after delays in Chinese and Vietnamese projects, adding more importance to a potential extension of the producer-led supply cuts.

Because of the delays, energy consultants Wood Mackenzie now expect a net refinery capacity addition in Asia of 360,000 barrels per day (bpd), down from a forecast of 450,000 bpd in December.

"If these projects had come on time, that would have given some head room for OPEC's production to the tune of 300,000 to 400,000 bpd at least," said Suresh Sivanandam, analyst at consultancy Wood Mackenzie.

"So these delays would mean that market rebalancing could be delayed and hence the need for extending the production cuts."

State-owned PetroVietnam said on May 18 that it was delaying commercial operations at its 200,000 bpd Nghi Son refinery to the end of December. The project is a joint venture with Kuwait Petroleum Corp and Japan's Idemitsu Kosan Co. Ltd.

A 200,000 bpd expansion at CNOOC Corp's Huizhou refinery planned for start-up around May or June has been delayed, said a company official who declined to be named.

CNOOC did not reply to an e-mail seeking comment.

The falling Asian demand and the possible extended producer cuts come at the same time that Asia is importing more light crude from the United States. This is increasing the risk of a battle among producers over market share in the region.

Shale oil production in the United States gained by nearly 617,000 bpd from December to June, government data showed.

Saudi Aramco (IPO-ARMO.SE: Quote) has been supplying additional volumes of light crude to Asia despite cutting exports of heavier grades. At the same time, Kuwait Petroleum Corp (KPC) is also looking for new outlets for its crude after closing a domestic refinery in April, traders said.

A potential new outlet is PetroChina's Yunnan refinery which is receiving crude via a pipeline from Myanmar and is expected to start trial runs in June. The state-owned Chinese major had been in talks with Saudi Aramco for long-term crude supplies.

(Source: Financial Times)

How Kosovo poisoned America’s relationship with Russia

By Ted Galen Carpenter

Washington, DC perpetuated and deepened its Balkan blunder a few years after the Bosnia intervention when it intervened in Kosovo. Civil strife in Serbia's restless, predominantly Albanian province, simmered and then flared in the mid-and late-1990s. This time, Washington didn't even make a gesture of deferring to the leading European states, but took the policy lead early on. Ultimately, the United States led a seventy-eight-day air war against Serbia, compelling Belgrade to relinquish control to a largely NATO occupation force operating under a fig-leaf resolution that the UN Security Council approved. Russia reluctantly acquiesced to that peacekeeping resolution, despite Moscow's ties to Belgrade and Russian interests in the Balkans going back well into the nineteenth century.

That step reflected Russia's military, economic and diplomatic weakness following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Despite anger at NATO's policy, there was little Russian leaders felt they could do in response to the West's intrusion into a traditional Russian sphere of influence. Even with Moscow's surprisingly passive response, though, Washington's arrogance nearly produced a tragedy. In the closing days of the fighting, Moscow dispatched a token peacekeeping contingent to Kosovo, without prior authorization from the Western powers. NATO's supreme commander, U.S. Army Gen. Wesley Clark, ordered the British commander on the scene, Gen. Mike Jackson, to seize the airport outside Kosovo's capital, Pristina, and prevent the Russian troop planes from landing—by force, if necessary. Jackson flatly disobeyed Clark's order, stating bluntly that he wasn't going to start World War III for the American general.

The Kosovo intervention set some terrible precedents. A supposedly defensive U.S.-led alliance attacked a country that had not attacked any NATO member, disregarded Moscow's angry protests, and forcibly detached the province of a sovereign country, placing it under international control. That set of worrisome precedents was compounded by the actions that the United States and its allies took in early 2008.

Kosovo wanted to declare its formal independence from Serbia, but it was clear that such a move would face a certain Russian (and probable Chinese) veto in the UN Security Council. Washington and an ad hoc coalition of European Union countries brazenly bypassed the council and approved Pristina's independence declaration.

It was an extremely controversial move. Not even all EU members were on board with the policy, since some of them worried about the wider ramifications. Spain fretted about the encouragement because such a decision might give to its own secessionist movements, especially the Basques and the Catalonians. Greece and Cyprus were deeply concerned that ratifying the forcible severing of Kosovo from Serbia could legitimize Turkey's earlier military seizure of the northern portion of Cyprus and the subsequent establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in that occupied territory.

Russia's leaders protested vehemently and warned that the West's unauthorized action established a dangerous, destabilizing precedent. Washington rebuffed such complaints, arguing that the Kosovo situation was unique. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns made that point explicitly in a February 2008 State Department briefing. Because the situation was unique, he insisted, the West's Kosovo policy set no precedent regarding other ethnic secessionist situations. Both the illogic and the hubris of that position were breathtaking.

The Western powers soon discovered that merely because they said their action in Kosovo established no precedent that did not make it so. Russia demonstrated that point just a few months later. The Republic of Georgia had been dealing with secessionist efforts in two regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, ever since the Soviet Union dissolved at the end of 1991. President Mikheil Saakashvili's national government in Tbilisi exercised little authority over either area, and Russian "peacekeeping" troops were on the ground in South Ossetia.

When Saakashvili's forces launched an offensive to reassert control over South Ossetia in early August 2008 by conducting an artillery barrage against the self-proclaimed rebel capital, the Russians counterattacked and were soon advancing to the outskirts of Tbilisi. Predictably, the United States and its allies blamed Moscow for the conflict, although a subsequent European Union investigation placed most of the blame on Saakashvili. The war lasted only five days, and when it was over, the Kremlin made it clear that the bolstered Russian force would continue to protect the autonomy of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The parallels to NATO's role preventing Serbia from regaining control over Kosovo were not particularly subtle.

■ West-Russia ties deteriorate

George W. Bush's administration condemned both Moscow's initial invasion and the Kremlin's subsequent actions, as did Washington's NATO allies. But just as Russia was not in a position to do much about NATO's conduct in Kosovo, the Western powers (short of initiating a war against Russia) could do little about Moscow's meddling in Georgia. The episode marked another stage in the continuing deterioration of relations between the West and Russia.

The Kosovo precedent came back to haunt the United States again in 2014 when the Kremlin enhanced its military presence on the Crimea Peninsula and used it to "supervise" a referendum in which Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine. That step was a prelude to Russia's annexation of the peninsula. Washington reacted with even greater anger than it had following Moscow's invasion of Georgia, soon imposing an array of economic sanctions against Russia. At a press conference, President Obama fumed that Russia could not be allowed to redraw "the borders of Europe at the barrel of a gun." None of the journalists in the room asked the president what he thought NATO had done in Kosovo.

The Kosovo intervention was an even worse U.S. foreign-policy blunder than the earlier intervention in Bosnia. It empowered an extremely unsavory political movement, the Kosovo Liberation Army, which proceeded to commit an array of human-rights abuses. The mission further transformed NATO from a defensive military alliance into a mechanism for aggressive nation-building crusades.

(Source: nationalinterest.org)

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

By Olivia Beavers

Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.) on Saturday slammed the \$110 billion defense deal President Trump signed with Saudi Arabia, 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 during its civil war.

■ Saudis targeting civilians

“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 (ISIS) and al Qaeda.

The “Saudis’ obsession with Iran, and the proxy wars (like Yemen) that flow from



President Trump was spotted laughing as he held the sword during the traditional sword dance.

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.”

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.

■ Escalating a proxy war

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.

“Yes, this is the Saudi's money, but we shouldn't just assume that the path to global security is through the spread of more and more weapons,” he reasoned, saying terrorist organizations “thrive on economic destitution” that more education could combat.

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: thehill.com)

Germany’s ongoing project to welcome its refugees

More than 1.2 million refugees came to Germany in 2015 and 2016. Initially, the country greeted them with chaos and poor planning, but the situation has improved.

Dishad Jaro would love to get to know some Germans. Sometimes, the 27-year-old Syrian heads to the Hamburg central station and buys himself a pita with hummus, putting himself right in the heart of the city's life. But he nevertheless hasn't found the courage to simply walk up to someone and start talking to them.

In the refugee hostel in eastern Hamburg, into which Jaro moved several weeks ago, he is almost completely surrounded by foreigners. “That doesn't make it easy,” he says. Still, he now has a bit more privacy to study German grammar and vocabulary. Before moving to his current home, the young man had lived together with his wife, baby and mother in a container village, with a capacity for 240 residents, in northern Hamburg.

In that shelter, the family had just 15 square meters (160 square feet) at its disposal, furnished with two bunkbeds, a child's bed, a table and metal lockers. It was warm, clean, dry -- and almost 3,000 kilometers away from the Syrian civil war. The Jaros were grateful. But it was extremely tight. If the baby cried at night, everybody would wake up.

In their new hostel, they have a kitchen and an extra room. It is a significant step forward for the family, but all of them would love to finally feel as though they had arrived in Hamburg, along with all that entails: their own apartment, jobs, friends and acquaintances.

Getting that far isn't easy, and only very few asylum applicants who have arrived in Germany since mid-2015 have managed to establish such a life in their new homeland. Federal, state and local officials have done yeoman's work in the last year and a half to fix many of the worst problems. The school gymnasiums that were initially used as hostels can now be used for sports once again and there are integration classes on offer throughout the country where newcomers can learn German. Last year, the German government spent more than 14 billion euros (\$15.2 million) to house, provide for and integrate the country's refugees.

■ Challenging real integration

But it is becoming increasingly clear just how difficult the path is for everyone involved, and how challenging real integration is. Moving from a gymnasium into a container village is certainly a step in the right direction, but it isn't yet cause for celebration. Attending an integration class is a far cry from speaking German. And many refugees are only just now becoming aware of how difficult it is to find a job without sufficient qualifications or German credentials. Many company executives have also become disillusioned, having realized that it won't be as simple for them to draw the skilled workers they so badly need from the ranks of refugees as some had thought.

Integration is a long-term project, one that will take decades rather than years. Nevertheless, it is worth asking the question: Is Germany on the right path? Because the failures of today could develop into the problems of tomorrow. The following is a snapshot of the situation as it currently stands.

By now, most refugees have been able to move out of emergency hostels and are living in better

accommodations. Even in Berlin, where conditions were particularly bad, things are slowly improving.

Elke Breitenbach, who runs the city-state's integration portfolio, said a month ago that “the miserable state of living conditions” of Berlin refugees in sporting facilities “has finally come to an end.” Some 63 gymnasiums in the city were converted into emergency shelters beginning in September 2015, with more than 10,000 people sleeping on cots at the height of the crisis. At the end of March, though, the last 78 of them were able to finally pack together their belongings and move into group accommodations.

But 13,400 people in the German capital are still waiting to leave the emergency hostels where they are staying. Of that total, 2,100 must make due with what even German officials describe as “precarious” quarters -- meaning they have little privacy, often in large halls divided up by provisional partitions. Most other states, though, have the situation under control. According to the results of a survey conducted by SPIEGEL, only in Hamburg (600) and in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (1,600) are refugees still living in empty big-box stores or other provisional shelters.

■ The refugee crisis

Those arriving in Germany today are met with much better conditions than those who came in 2015. During the refugee crisis, states and municipalities began building numerous lodgings with improved standards. Some of them now stand empty. “We want to ensure that we can immediately react should significantly more people suddenly begin arriving again,” says a representative from the state Interior Ministry in North Rhine-Westphalia. None of those responsible wants to be caught off guard to the degree they were in fall 2015. Should such an influx repeat itself, most regions would find themselves much better prepared to react. The country has amassed significant experience since then.

For years, the apartment market in most German cities has been tight. According to a study conducted on behalf of the Left Party group in the city-state's legislature, there is a lack of 130,000 affordable small apartments for low-income earners in Berlin alone - a study that did not take into consideration refugee families searching for flats. Currently, around 30,000 newcomers are living in communal housing - and they would ultimately like to move into their own apartment. Living next door to German neighbors would be a crucial step in their integration. It isn't known how many refugees across the country are looking for private accommodations.

It is clear, however, that they often have poor chances in the competition for affordable housing. Foreigners have a tough time dealing with the bureaucracy they face in official agencies and also find themselves confronted with prejudice. According to a study conducted by the Berlin Institute for Integration and Migration Research (BIM), many landlords are concerned that refugees would have trouble understanding the intricacies of German apartment living - when it comes, for example, to issues such as waste separation and Sunday quiet, both of which are mandated by law.

Thus far, policy support has been insufficient, with social housing projects taking too long to come to

fruition, and private initiatives are also “reaching their limits,” say officials at BIM. The online platform Refugees Welcome, for example, seeks to help newcomers find rooms in shared apartments. It is a nice idea, but it doesn't always work. A large share of the refugees who have arrived in Germany are young men -- and they don't always match the profiles residents of many shared apartments have in mind when looking for roommates.

Between 2015 and 2016, some 15,000 refugee projects launched in Germany, with many of them focused on helping newcomers learn the language - things like volunteer instruction, mentoring or casual meet-ups with refugees. Those interested in learning German have good chances of finding someone to help.

■ Adult education centers

The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), with the help of other institutions like the country's network of adult education centers (Volkshochschulen) and workers' welfare organizations, has created an extensive offering of integration courses across the country. The classes offer a combination of language training and civics for newcomers, with the state covering the costs for those who have been granted official refugee status.

The program includes 600 hours of German language training and 100 hours of instruction on German values, German history and the constitution. Once the course is completed and the test passed, refugees should be able to get along well in day-to-day life and have a fundamental understanding of German values. According to BAMF, some 317,000 migrants began such an integration course last year.

BAMF has significantly increased the number of German-language classes on offer, but refugees must compete with other foreigners, including citizens of other EU member states, to get a spot. Because Afghans don't have good chances of being allowed to stay, and the share of Afghans granted official refugee status slipped below 50 percent for a time, they are not given priority when it comes to integration efforts. In contrast to Syrians, for example, Afghans cannot enroll in an integration course before their asylum applications have been approved -- and BAMF sometimes takes years to process those applications.

That is a problematic state of affairs because Afghans represent the second-largest group of asylum seekers in Germany. Many of them will ultimately remain - and they often need extra support because the illiteracy rate in Afghanistan is almost 70 percent. Gabriele Köhler, head of the Berlin language school Lernwege, knows how difficult it is for refugees who first have to learn to read and write. Her school currently offers two normal German courses and three literacy courses. “It takes around three months before they can write even simple words,” the teacher says.

Of the refugees aged between 15 and 64 who arrived in the country in 2015, 10 percent of them had found jobs by the second half of 2016. That may not sound like much, but most refugees must first learn German or receive additional vocational training before they can begin looking for work.

(Source: Spiegel)

International campaign is criminalizing criticism of Israel as ‘antisemitism’

By Alison Weir

For two decades, some Israeli officials and Israel partisans have worked to embed a new, Israel-focused definition of antisemitism in institutions around the world, from international bodies and national governments to small college campuses in heartland America. This effort is now snowballing rapidly. As a result, advocacy for Palestinian rights is well on the way to being curtailed and even criminalized as “hate.”

As the world has witnessed the oppression and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, many people have risen in protest. In response, the Israeli government and certain of its advocates have conducted a campaign to crack down on this activism, running roughshod over civil liberties (and the English language) in the process.

The mechanism of this crackdown is the redefinition of “antisemitism” to include criticism of Israel, and the insertion of this definition into the bodies of law of various countries.

Where most people would consider “antisemitism” to mean bigotry against Jewish people (and rightly consider it abhorrent), for two decades a campaign has been underway to replace that definition with an Israel-centric definition. That definition can then be used to block speech and activism in support of Palestinian human rights as “hate.” Various groups are applying this definition in law enforcement evaluations of possible crimes.

Proponents of this Israel-centric definition have promoted it step by step in various arenas, from the U.S. State Department and European governments to local governments around the U.S. and universities.

While this effort has taken place over the last two decades, it is snowballing rapidly at this time. The definition is increasingly being used to curtail free speech and academic freedom, as well as political activism.

Furthermore, such politicizing of an important word may reduce its effectiveness when real antisemitism occurs, doing a disservice to victims of true bigotry.

As of this writing, the U.S. Congress has endorsed the distorted definition, the governments of the UK and Austria have officially adopted it (in December and April, respectively), various U.S. State legislatures are considering it, and numerous universities are using it to delineate permissible discourse. Many representatives and heads of other states around the world have embraced the new meaning, even if they have yet to officially implement it.

This article will examine the often interconnected, incremental actions that got us where we are, the current state of affairs, and the public relations and lobbying efforts that are promoting this twisting of the definition of “antisemitism” — often under cover of misleadingly named “anti-racism” movements.

■ Claims of “Antisemitism” Used to Silence Support for Palestinians

For many years, numerous respected organizations have documented Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights, including killing of Palestinian civilians, abuse of Palestinian children, torture of Palestinian prisoners, confiscation of Palestinian land, and other cases of systematic violence and oppression. Detailed reports have been compiled by Defense for Children International, the International Red Cross, Amnesty International, Foreign Service Journal, Physicians for Human Rights, Christian Aid, Human Rights Watch, the National Lawyers Guild, Israel's Public Committee Against Torture, Israel's B'Tselem and others.

Israel long claimed that its 1948 creation was on “a land without a people for a people without a land,” and many people may still believe this founding myth. The fact is, however, that the land was originally inhabited by an indigenous population that was approximately 80 percent Muslim, 15 percent Christian, and a little under 5 percent Jewish. The Jewish State of Israel was created through the ejection of approximately three-quarters of a million people.

Over the decades since Israel's founding in 1948, accusations of an-



For two decades a campaign has been underway to replace the definition of “antisemitism” with an Israel-centric definition that can be used to block speech and activism in support of Palestinian human rights as “hate.”

tisemitism have been leveled against many people who criticized Israeli actions. Indeed, the accusation was used effectively to silence very prominent critics.

However, for most of that time, the meaning of the term itself was not in question. The standard definition was, in Google's terms, “hostility to or prejudice against Jews.” Around the turn of this century, though, certain advocates began promoting official and even legal definitions of antisemitism that included various kinds of criticism of Israel.

■ Conflating Criticism of Israel with Antisemitism

Unsurprisingly, the new definitions appear to have originated from within the Israeli government, or at least with an Israeli government official.

The definitions adhere to a pattern set by a man named Natan Sharansky, who was Israel's Minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora Affairs and chair of the Jewish Agency for Israel. Sharansky founded a Global Forum against Anti-Semitism in 2003, stating: “The State of Israel has decided to take the gloves off and implement a coordinated counteroffensive against anti-Semitism.”

But Sharansky apparently didn't mean a counteroffensive against just

cal dissent at all.

Finally, Sharansky said it's antisemitic to “delegitimize” Israel, or dispute its “right to exist” (a standard Israeli talking point for many years). In fact, insisting Israel has the “right” to exist amounts to saying it had the right to expel Muslim and Christian Palestinians in order to found a religiously exclusive state. (See “What ‘Israel's right to exist’ means to Palestinians,” by John Whitbeck, published in the Christian Science Monitor).

Sharansky's outline provided the pattern for a European agency to create a new definition of antisemitism the next year, 2005 — a definition that would then be adopted by a succession of organizations and governments, including the U.S. State Department.

■ There is a back story to how this all came about.

This European agency itself was founded and run by a man with important connections to Israel. It was called “The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia,” under the Council of the European Union. A Frenchman named Jean Kahn had convinced European heads of state to create it in 1997.

Kahn had been a President of the European Jewish Congress, elected in



anti-Jewish bigotry, but an offensive against criticism of Israel. The following year he wrote a position paper that declared: “Whereas classical anti-Semitism is aimed at the Jewish people or the Jewish religion, ‘new anti-Semitism’ is aimed at the Jewish state.”

Sharansky's paper laid out what he called the “3-D Test of Anti-Semitism.” Sharansky applied the term “antisemitic” to criticism of Israel in three cases. First, he argued that statements that “demonize” Israel are antisemitic — by being, in his mind, unfairly harsh. (Some of those allegedly guilty of “demonizing” Israel are Jimmy Carter, Desmond Tutu, Alice Walker, Human Rights Watch, Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, French President François Mitterrand, and others.)

Second, Sharansky declared that it's antisemitic to apply a “double standard” to Israel — in other words, to criticize Israel for actions that other states may also take. However, if one could never criticize, protest or boycott abuses without calling out every single other similar abuse, no one would ever be able to exercise politi-

a plenary session in Israel, and said the Congress “would demonstrate its solidarity with Israel” and that he hoped European countries would “coordinate their legislation outlawing racism, anti-Semitism or any form of exclusion.”

Kahn was chairman of the Monitoring Centre's management board and called the “personification” of the agency. Within three years, the Centre issued a position paper calling for the definition of anti-Semitic offenses to be “improved.”

A few years later, Israeli professor Dina Porat took up the effort to create a new definition. Working with her were Kenneth Stern and Rabbi Andrew “Andy” Baker of the American Jewish Committee. Stern reports that when the Monitoring Centre's then head, Beate Winkler, had failed to deliver the desired definition, Andy Baker “smartly developed a working relationship with her.” Stern and others then created a draft for the Monitoring Centre to use.

In 2005 the agency issued its “Working Definition of Anti-Semitism,” largely based on that draft. It includ-

ed an array of negative statements about Israel as examples of antisemitic offenses. While standard dictionary definitions of antisemitism didn't even mention Israel, fully half of the newly devised Monitoring Centre definition referred to Israel.

Once the Monitoring Centre had created its expanded definition, certain Israel partisans used it to promote similar definitions elsewhere. And while the Monitoring Centre itself continued to term it only a “working” definition and its replacement organization eventually withdrew the definition, in other countries and agencies the expanded definition became official.

In addition, quite frighteningly, proponents pushed successfully to begin applying the Israel-centric definition to law enforcement.

■ In the United States

The same year Sharansky created his “3-D” antisemitism test — a year after he founded the Global Forum against Anti-Semitism — the U.S. Congress passed a law establishing exceptional government monitoring of antisemitism. The law created a special State Department envoy and office for this monitoring, over objections of the State Department itself.

The law, called the “Global Anti-Semitism Review Act,” included a line that subverted its meaning by enshrining a new definition of antisemitism aligned with Sharansky's: “Anti-Semitism has at times taken the form of vilification of Zionism, the Jewish national movement, and incitement against Israel.”

The bill was introduced in April 2004. That June, a Congressional hearing was conducted about how to combat antisemitism. A major witness was Israeli minister Sharansky. In his testimony Sharansky proposed his “3-D” Israel-connected definition for anti-Semitism.

State Department officials objected to the proposed legislation, saying the new office was unnecessary and would be a “bureaucratic nuisance” that would actually hinder the Department's ongoing work. A State Department press release opposing the new office described the many actions that State was already taking against antisemitism.

Despite this opposition, the Senate bill acquired 24 cosponsors representing both parties, including Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Diane Feinstein, Russ Feingold, Sam Brownback, Saxby Chambliss and Ted Stevens. Similar bills (here and here) were introduced in the House of Representatives, acquiring 35 cosponsors, again including both Republican and Democratic leaders. The legislation passed easily and quickly became law.

The first Special Envoy, Gregg Rickman, endorsed the European Monitoring Centre's Working Definition in 2008. Rickman's report called it a “useful framework” for identifying and understanding antisemitism. After Rickman left the State Department, he went to work for the American Israel Political Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the major Israel advocacy organization that lobbies Congress.

The next Special Envoy, Hannah Rosenthal, took this campaign a major step forward: In 2010 the office officially adopted the European Monitoring Centre's definition.

Rosenthal was extremely proud of having achieved this “breakthrough” definition. She began making use of it quickly, establishing a 90-minute course on the new antisemitism at the Foreign Service Institute, the training school for diplomats.

“We have now a definition we can train people on,” she told the Times of Israel, “and we've been very aggressive in training foreign service officers.”

Rosenthal announced that with the new definition including criticism of Israel, their reporting on antisemitism improved “300 percent,” even though, she said, that didn't mean that antisemitism had actually increased in all the countries monitored.

The gloves were off. Now fully half of the official U.S. State Department definition of antisemitism had gone beyond the normal meaning of the word to focus on Israel.

END OF PART ONE

(Source: israelpalestineneews.org)

U.S. attack on Syrian Forces: Asserting “safe zones”

On May 19, 2017 U.S. warplanes struck a Syrian military convoy within Syrian territory, after claiming the forces came too close to U.S. military positions.

In legal terms, it was both an act of war and criminal. The U.S. military is currently occupying Syrian territory without invitation by the Syrian government and without any form of mandate from the United Nations. In geostrategic terms, the United States is attempting to assert itself and its geopolitical strategy of establishing and subsequently expanding “safe zones” inside Syrian territory in a bid to topple the Syrian government, then divide and destroy the Syrian state. Foreign Policy, a clearinghouse for corporate-financier funded think tank policymakers, in an article titled, “U.S. Bombs Syria Regime for the First Time,” would admit: The strike showed American commanders are willing to use force to maintain de facto safe zones in the country's east, where U.S. forces are training local militias to battle the Islamic State and provide security in liberated regions.

While Foreign Policy's article confirms U.S. intentions of carving out “safe zones” in Syria, it misleads readers regarding the purpose of doing so. While it claims that these “safe zones” are intended to host training for “local militias to battle the Islamic State,” U.S. intentions to create such zones stretches back long before the threat of the Islamic State was introduced into the conflict. U.S. policymakers themselves openly admitted the “safe zones” were meant to both perpetuate the conflict and seek a more long-term process of regime change after initial attempts to stampede the government in Damascus out of power failed in 2011.

A March 2012 Brookings Institution paper titled, “Middle East Memo #21: Saving Syria: Assessing Options for Regime Change” proposes the concept of “safe zones” or “safe-havens” not to fight the yet-to-be invented Islamic State, but specifically to assist U.S.-backed regime change. It claims (emphasis added): An alternative is for diplomatic efforts to focus first on how to end the violence and how to gain humanitarian access, as is being done under Annan's leadership. This may lead to the creation of safe-havens and humanitarian corridors, which would have to be backed by limited military power. This would, of course, fall short of U.S. goals for Syria and could preserve Assad in power. From that starting point, however, it is possible that a broad coalition with the appropriate international mandate could add further coercive action to its efforts.

A 2015 Brookings paper titled, “Deconstructing Syria: Towards a regionalized strategy for a confederal country” would elaborate on the nature of these zones, not as bases for fighting terrorism - but as a means of incrementally dividing and literally “deconstructing” Syria as a unified nation-state (emphasis added): The end-game for these zones would not have to be determined in advance. The interim goal might be a confederal Syria, with several highly autonomous zones and a modest (eventual) national government. The confederation would likely require support from an international peacekeeping force, if this arrangement could ever be formalized by accord. But in the short term, the ambitions would be lower—to make these zones defensible and governable, to help provide relief for populations within them, and to train and equip more recruits so that the zones could be stabilized and then gradually expanded.

It would also elaborate regarding the role the Islamic State specifically plays in all of this - not as an enemy to be defeated - but as a pawn to be used against the Syrian government:

The idea would be to help moderate elements establish reliable safe zones within Syria once they were able. “American, as well as Saudi and Turkish and British and Jordanian and other Arab forces would act in support, not only from the air but eventually on the ground via the presence of special forces as well. The approach would benefit from Syria's open desert terrain which could allow creation of buffer zones that could be monitored for possible signs of enemy attack through a combination of technologies, patrols, and other methods that outside special forces could help Syrian local fighters set up.

Were Assad foolish enough to challenge these zones, even if he somehow forced the withdrawal of the outside special forces, he would be likely to lose his air power in ensuing retaliatory strikes by outside forces, depriving his military of one of its few advantages over ISIL. Thus, he would be unlikely to do this.

Here, not only is the focus on tempting the Syrian government into an attack to justify wider direct conflict between U.S. and Syrian forces, Brookings policymakers openly use the prospect of stripping away tools the Syrian government is using to fight the Islamic State as leverage while the U.S. invades and occupies larger stretches of Syrian territory.

The use of the Islamic State as a pawn against the Syrian government should come as no surprise and is hardly a “conspiracy theory.” The U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) itself in 2012 would publish a memo detailing specifically what a prescribed “Salafist” (Islamic) “principality” (State) would be used for by the U.S. and its allies: If the situation unravels there is the possibility of establishing a declared or undeclared Salafist principality in eastern Syria (Hasaka and Der Zor), and this is exactly what the supporting powers to the opposition want, in order to isolate the Syrian regime, which is considered the strategic depth of the Shia expansion (Iraq and Iran).

The DIA memo then explains exactly who the supporters powers are - as well as who the principality's enemies would be: The West, Gulf countries, and Turkey support the opposition; while Russia, China, and Iran support the regime.

America's strategy in Syria is an admittedly more drawn out process than was used against Afghanistan in 2001, Iraq in 2003, and Libya in 2011. All three nations are now destabilized and virtual breeding grounds for terrorism, conflict, instability, and human catastrophe - cautionary examples of Syria's fate should U.S. foreign policy “succeed” there as well. With the recent strike, the U.S. proves that it will continue its illegal, unwarranted aggression in Syria until it either topples the Syrian government and succeeds in transforming the nation into yet another failed state amid its growing collection of global military interventions, or until the U.S. is stopped by sufficient deterrence by Syria and its allies in Moscow and Tehran.

Watergate? We're not there yet

Now that Robert Mueller III has been appointed special counsel to investigate ties between President Trump's campaign and Russia, Democrats and even a few Republicans are drawing comparisons between the present mess and the Watergate scandal that brought down Richard Nixon.

Senator John McCain of Arizona pegged the president's problems at a "point where it's of Watergate size and scale" after reports surfaced that Mr. Trump had pressed James Comey, then the F.B.I. director, to quash an investigation of Mike Flynn, the Trump loyalist and former national security adviser. David Gergen, who was a White House aide to four presidents in Republican and Democratic administrations, contended that "we're in impeachment territory now." A few other Republicans have broken away from their party's blind defense of the president and called for deeper investigations.

The national interest and the integrity of the democratic process are undeniably at stake in the investigation. And it may turn out that the president and his associates have engaged in an attempt to obstruct justice; really bad stuff could turn up. But Watergate? We're not there yet. That's a word that summons obstruction on a monumental scale, with evidence to prove overt criminal acts — not least the White House con-

spiracy to burglarize the Democratic Party headquarters.

Scores of administration officials were indicted or jailed when president Nixon had to flee from office on the eve of certain impeachment.

■ Trump complains of witch hunt

Mr. Trump has made the parallel easier to draw as he complains of a "witch hunt," tramples ethical standards and shows no sign of the reasonable political behavior the nation sorely needs from him. Like Mr. Nixon, he regularly denounces real and imagined "enemies"; his White House is full of sycophantic assistants pressed to defend fantastic claims and policy distortions, as was Mr. Nixon's. Like the Nixonites, Trump loyalists in the administration are clearly fearful of crossing their boss by attempting helpful criticism as the president plays daily with political fire.

Yet the differences are also worth noting. The public learned then that the Nixon team had plunged into rank criminality, discussing a million-dollar bribe for the burglars after they demanded ransom money for protecting the White House. And the political realities in Congress were of a different order. Back then, the Democrats enjoyed subpoena power through majority control of both houses so

that, unlike now, they could freely investigate the scandal.

Bipartisanship was such in 1973 that the Senate voted 77 to zero to create the select Watergate committee once the F.B.I. established the burglary's connection to the Nixon re-election campaign.

In contrast, current Republicans revel in tooth-and-claw partisanship. Democrats remain a largely powerless minority as Republican leaders pretend they have no grave doubts about Mr. Trump, hoping to survive next year's elections despite his unpopularity.

Most striking of all in the Nixon impeachment was the deus ex machina revealed unexpectedly in the Watergate hearings that gripped the nation on television and radio — Mr. Nixon's supreme folly of crafting his conspiracies before the attentive microphones of a White House taping system to record his utterances for some imagined high place in history. When the Supreme Court ruled that the tapes were fair game for investigators, the nation finally grasped the extent of Mr. Nixon's scheming. Denials from his "silent majority" base became pointless.

President Trump has hinted threateningly at the existence of tapes; so far it sounds like his characteristic bluffing.

(Ironies abound. Mr. Trump's complaints to the F.B.I. about damaging leaks recall that Deep Throat, the ultimate Watergate leaker to The Washington Post, was revealed to be W. Mark Felt, then the associate director of the F.B.I.)

Watergate remains a tall bar. The Clinton and Reagan scandals couldn't come close. In president Bill Clinton's case, an independent counsel capitalized on his writ to wander widely into the president's sex life, elevating a sex-and-mendacity saga into a perjury trial in which the Senate calmly voted to acquit, finding it all insufficient reason to evict a popular president.

For Democrats, too much indulgence of impeachment notions could prove a distraction from the more workaday and politically achievable challenge at hand. Their main job is to rouse the public to use Mr. Trump's unimpressive polling numbers as leverage on Republicans, who already are citing the Mueller investigation as reason to slow down congressional inquiries into the Trump and Russia affair. Beyond that, they and other critics should be working hard to win back a majority next year in at least one house of Congress. This would secure them the subpoena power to shed far better light for the nation on Mr. Trump's and his enablers' sorry deeds.

(Source: The NYT)

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- Sufficient knowledge of computer applications

Valid applications should reach the Economic & Commercial office of the Embassy by close of business 7 June 2017. Applications must be in English and should be addressed to the Economic & Commercial office the Embassy of Spain, Tehran. Late applications will not be considered.

The bases of the announcement are available in the web page of the Economic and Commercial Office of the Spanish Embassy:

<http://www.icex.es/icex/es/navegacion-principal/todos-nuestros-servicios/informacion-de-mercados/paises/navegacion-principal/portada/index.html?idPais=IR>

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Sweet dreams: eating chocolate prevents heart disease

By Howard LeWine

If you're a chocoholic, the news out of England is tantalizing: middle-aged and older adults who eat up to 3.5 ounces of chocolate a day (that's more than two standard Hershey bars) seem to have lower rates of heart disease than those who spurn chocolate.

At least that was the conclusion of a study that followed the health of nearly 21,000 residents of Norfolk, England, for 11 years. Among those in the top tier of chocolate consumption, 12% developed or died of cardiovascular disease during the study, compared to 17.4% of those who didn't eat chocolate. The results were published online in the medical journal *Heart*.

Desire vs. evidence

I'm a chocolate lover. My new favorite is an ice cream called Chocolate Therapy. The name doesn't feel like a stretch, given the results of this study and many before it that have linked eating chocolate to a lower risk of heart disease.

Much as I'd like to believe in that connection, and get to work on my own personal Chocolate Therapy, we don't yet know enough to put eating chocolate on a par with eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

All of the large studies, including the one from Norfolk, are observational studies. That means the researchers asked questions about the participants' eating habits, tracked their health, and made statistical connections. These kinds of studies can generate important insights. But they can't prove cause and effect. It takes a randomized trial to do that.

It's possible that people who like to eat chocolate do something else that offers heart protection, like eat a wide variety of healthful foods. One of the interesting things about this research is that participants in the non-chocolate group had higher average weight, more artery-damaging inflammation, more diabetes, were less physically active and had diets with the least amount of fat compared to chocolate eaters.

Is milk chocolate okay?

Most of the previous studies on the chocolate-heart connection found that only dark chocolate offered any cardiovascular protection. In the Norfolk study, any type of chocolate, including milk chocolate, seemed to have the same beneficial effect.

Scientists aren't sure what it is about chocolate that seems to boost heart health. It may be related to flavonoids, a type of antioxidant produced by plants.



Chocolate seems to boost heart health. It may be related to flavonoids, a type of antioxidant produced by plants. Flavonoids are found in tea, blueberries, apples, pears, cherries, and nuts.

Flavonoids are found in tea, blueberries, apples, pears, cherries, and nuts.

Flavonoids are particularly abundant in cacao beans—the seeds of the cacao tree. Fermenting, drying, and roasting cacao beans yields cocoa powder, which is used to make chocolate.

Flavonoids in cocoa have been shown to help lower blood pressure, improve blood flow to the brain and heart, prevent blood clots, and fight cell damage. They've also been shown to help thinking skills.

No chocolate prescription—yet

I routinely write my patients a prescription for exercise, and sometimes for eating more vegetables and fruits. I won't be writing any prescriptions for chocolate in the foreseeable future.

But I won't be telling them not to eat chocolate—in moderation of course. As the Norfolk study researchers concluded, "There does not appear to be any evidence to say that chocolate should be avoided in those who are concerned about cardiovascular risk."

When it comes to chocolate or cocoa flavonoids, no recommended daily amounts have been set. The European Food Safety Authority suggests that 200 mg of cocoa flavonoids per day is a good target for the general population.

The amount of cocoa used in chocolate varies a lot. To find out how much you're getting you'll have to do some detective work. The amount of flavonoids in chocolate is not always listed.

Your best bet is to stick with dark chocolate. As a general rule, it has more cocoa and therefore more flavonoids than milk chocolate. It also has less unhealthy sugar and saturated fat.

The higher the cocoa content of the bar, the better it is for your health. Look for bars with 70% cocoa or more.

I'm going to stick with an ounce of dark chocolate every so often—with some Chocolate Therapy in between.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

People who feel younger at heart live longer

By Jen Christensen

Go ahead lie about your age. It may be the very thing that helps you live a longer life.

If those fibbers truly believe that they are younger than what it says on their birth certificate, a new study shows they are among a group of people who have a lower death rate.

That's compared with those who felt their age or who even feel older than their years.

The new research letter is published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* online.

The study looked at data from 6,489 people with an average age of 65.8 years who reported that they felt a little less than 10 years younger. What's interesting is most people in the study didn't feel like their actual age. Most said they felt about three years younger. Only a tiny percent, some 4.8%, felt at least a year older than their actual age.

When University College London researchers followed up on these people over the next eight years, the scientists found only a little over 14% of those who felt younger than their years had died. That was compared with the more than 24% of the people who reported feeling older or feeling their age who had died. Some 18% of the people who felt like their chronological age died in that same time period.

Why happiness is healthy

The researchers say they want to better understand what made the difference with this group.

"Possibilities include a broader set of health behaviors than we measured (such as maintaining a healthy weight and adherence to medical advice), and greater resilience, sense of mastery and will to live among those who feel younger than their age," the study concludes. "Self-perceived age has the potential to change, so interventions may be possible. Individuals who feel older than their actual age could be targeted with health messages promoting positive health behaviors and attitudes toward aging."

Dr. Sharon Bergquist, a physician and assistant professor of medicine at Emory University School of Medicine who specializes in healthy aging, isn't surprised by the results.

"Research is showing us that personality can so be tied to your destiny," Bergquist said.

Your happiness type matters

New research into the link between personality and aging finds that there are two main traits that seem to help people live a longer life: conscientiousness and optimism.

People who have both traits may have more of a will to do the right thing to live a healthy lifestyle that can keep them healthy long into old age.

"Aging well can certainly become a self-fulfilling prophecy," she said.

(Source: CNN)



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Tehran exhibit highlights Iranian handicrafts

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — A patchwork of Iranian handicrafts have been put on show at the headquarters of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting in line with a scheme that pursues encouraging the skills at various workplaces. Craftspeople native to Tehran, Isfahan, and Alborz provinces are promoting their works within eight stalls at the exhibit, which is organized under the auspices of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization.



Wooden boxes handcrafted with marquetry ornaments

Holding such events helps the handicrafts market thrive, empowers artisans, and paves the way for them to be acquainted with [the taste of] people from all walks of life, Mehr quoted Pouya Mahmoudian, the director of the CHTHO Exports Department as saying on May 17.

The exhibit runs through May 25. It features inlaid jewelry, traditional glasswork, marquetry works, amongst others.

Hotels add plugs, ports for device-laden guests

Stephen Delaney travels with a laptop, an iPad, two cellphones and a backup power pack to keep all his devices charged.

When he walks into a hotel guestroom, he scours for the power outlets and USB ports.

"I hate when a hotel room does not have conveniently placed plugs," says the Franklin, Tenn., USA TODAY Road Warrior and health care IT consultant. "Unfortunately, there are many hotels that have not yet added plugs on top of desks, nightstands, etc."

Delaney has an ideal number of outlets and USB ports he would like to see in a room.

"Let's say this: plugs on the nightstand, in the bathroom, on the desk — at least four on the desk — and others around the room in easy reach, without having to duck under furniture or behind furniture," he says.

Many older hotel rooms have outlets hidden behind nightstands and desks. But hoteliers are listening to travelers such as Delaney and thinking carefully about the "plug-ability" of new properties when designing them and retrofitting older ones to handle multiple devices.

"Research suggests a single traveler may carry upwards of three devices when they travel," says Kate Ashton, senior vice president of brand operations for Wyndham Hotels and Resorts. (Source: USA Today)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Medina of Tunis

Located in a fertile plain region of north-eastern Tunisia, and a few kilometers from the sea, the Medina of Tunis is one of the first Arabo-Muslim towns of the Maghreb (698 CE).

Capital of several universally influential dynasties, it represents a human settlement that bears witness to the interaction between architecture, urbanism and the effects of socio-cultural and economic changes of earlier cultures.

Under the Almohads and the Hafsids, from the 12th to



A view of Zitouna Mosque in Tunisia

the 16th century, Tunis was considered one of the greatest and wealthiest cities in the Arab world. Numerous testimonies from this and earlier periods exist today. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, new powers endowed the city with numerous palaces and residences, great mosques, zaouias and madrasas.

The inscribed property covers an area of approximately 280 ha and comprises all the features of an Arabo-Muslim city. It is composed of the central medina (8th century) and suburbs to the North and South (13th century).

There are some 700 historic monuments, distributed in 7 areas, among which the most remarkable are the Zitouna Mosque, the Kasbah Mosque, the Youssef Dey Mosque, Bab Jedid Gate, Bab Bhar Gate, the Souq el-Attarine, the Dar el-Bey, Souqs ech-Chaouachia, the Tourbet (family cemetery) el Bey, noble houses such as Dar Hussein, Dar Ben Abdallah, Dar Lasram, the Medrasa Es-Slimanya and El-Mouradia, the El Attarine military barracks and the Zaouia of Sidi Mehrez.

With its souqs, its urban fabric, its residential quarters, monuments and gates, this ensemble constitutes a prototype among the best conserved in the Islamic world.

(Source: UNESCO)

Biological diversity vast potential for tourism thrive: expert



Travelers pose for a photo with a picturesque landscape of Iran's Kurdistan province in the background.

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's considerable wealth of biological diversity and changing landscapes provide local communities with high potentials for creating jobs through attracting more travelers, an expert affiliated with the Department of Environment says.

Villagers can make the best use of their regional potentials to secure their livelihoods and [variant] landscapes provide local communities opportunities for higher rates of employment, Asghar

Mobaraki said in an interview with ISNA on Sunday.

"Tourism revenue from a protected area is far more than hunting, fishing, logging and so on," he said, while attached a great importance to preserving the environment.

He made the comments on the occasion of the International Day for Biological Diversity that is celebrated annually on May 22 with an aim to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues.

This year's 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.

Choosing such theme underlines governments need to focus on different components of biodiversity and its associated economic values, Mobaraki added.

According to the UN, 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.

Experts say 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.

Why traveling to Iran is the journey of your life

The people who travel to Iran have certain interests in ancient history, culture, civilization and architecture. They want to see for themselves how those factors have contributed to the formation of a unique society existing at this part of the world.

■ Ancient Persia's sights

If you're interested in learning more about the formation, rise and decline of the Persian Empire, making a journey to Iran will help you achieve this goal. The center of this ancient global power is at the heart of present Iran.

Fars province offers plenty of valuable remnants of the antiquity where the emperors used to rule their vast territories. Persepolis is just one of such locations, which is one of the most famous Iran tourist attractions.

At the south west of Iran, there's an Elamite temple in form of a ziggurat that predates Persian Empire. The ancient territories where Elam kings were ruling from was at this part of the country and the temple strongly expresses the magnitude of the royal power to build up such a structure.

The efficiency in constructing such structure is implicitly suggesting how advanced the architecture of the time used to be.

■ Pioneers of architecture

Ancient Iranians have initiated their own styles in architecture according to the requirements dictated by the climate, rituals, usage, etc at this part of the world. The people who travel to Iran can see the historical mounds where the earliest inhabitants of Iranian plateau have

built their settlements and temples since 8000 years ago.

Achaemenian and Sassanian palaces introduce grand edifices built for various purposes from accommodation and administration to worshiping and burials. A good number of such sights are in reasonable condition and offer breath-taking visits to the explorers of ancient architecture.

Some of the elements created for such structures were later used by Iranians in creating Islamic architecture in the Muslim world. Without those elements, there wouldn't be any Islamic architecture evolved as it is today.

■ Variety of ethnic groups

When you take one or two weeks traveling in Iran, you will notice the variety of ethnic groups in Iran. Persians, Kurds, Azeris, Arabs, Balochis, Gilakis, Armenians, Assyrians, Turkmens, etc are among these groups. They have their own dialects, languages, etc and follow the traditions that are, at times, thousands of years old.

There are still some nomads living in Iran pursuing the same migrating models of their ancestors. You may happen to see them or ask your travel agent to organize such meetings with them during your tours to Iran. Qashqai, Bakhtiari, Shahsavani, etc tribes are living at different parts of Iran and a visit to Iran may bring about a meeting with them.

■ Birthplace of ancient religions

Iran is the origin of some of the ancient religions influencing various nations, religions, cultures, etc. Zoroastrianism, Mithraism and Manichaeism immersed in



A nomadic girl clad in traditional attire

Iran. The worship of Anahita, the goddess of water was carried out in Iran.

Today the majority of Iranians are Shiite Muslims. This branch of Islam is different from the majority of the Muslim world's Sunnis. The reasons could be sought in the ancient history, culture and religions of Iranians.

■ Conclusion

Traveling to Iran isn't just visiting a country. If you want to learn about the countries around Iran, their vernacular architecture, traditions and celebrations, architecture and arts, and so forth, Iran is the key. What you see here plus the impression you get from the Iranians in the streets will place a strong positive and rich impact in your mind and at your heart that you will not easily forget.

Visit Iran and see it for yourself that it will be "The Journey of Your Life"!

(Source: tripadvisor.com)

Travelers find absolute bargains whilst trekking in Iran

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran is extraordinarily easy on the wallet since travel costs including the ones for food, accommodation and transportation are fairly low.

Foreign travelers are able to find amazing bargains while trekking Iran with some travel sources put daily travel expenses and the ones for 24-day trip at \$25 and about \$600 respectively.

According to a recent biannual report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), Iran has maintained its topmost global rank as a lower-cost destination for a third straight year.

The WEF gave Iran a score of 66.6 in terms of price competitiveness and put it ahead of global tourism players such as Egypt, Malaysia, Russia, Turkey, Greece, Spain, the U.S., France and Italy, Press TV reported on May 21.

The last 10 countries at the bottom



Tourists walk through the Persepolis archeological site in southern Iran. It was a ceremonial capital of Persian Achaemenid Empire (c. 550-330 BC).

Chinese travelers are changing their travel behavior

Chinese people have been traveling in greater numbers. The latest development in Chinese Economy has impacted its dynamic growth and now China is an important source market for Asian as well as European and American countries.

China recently displaced USA in the list of the most international travels by spending more than \$164.8 billion. That number is expected to reach \$422 billion by the year 2020 that is equal to GDP of some developed countries.

Why are Chinese travelers so important? Due to the rise in disposable incomes and

increase in direct flight lines the Chinese have risen as the key player in world tourism economy.

China recently displaced USA in the list of the most international travels by spending more than \$164.8 billion. That number is expected to reach \$422 billion by the year 2020 that is equal to GDP of some developed countries.

That count is even going to increase, ac-

cording to Oxford Economics when more than 61 million Chinese will be able to afford foreign trips by 2023. There are also some interesting facts about Chinese travelers revealed in a survey.

Nine out of ten Chinese now have better means and are hoping to travel more than 5 years ago. According to a report by the UN-WTO, the tourist spending by China has seen double-digit growth each year after 2004.

The way the Chinese travel has changed a lot in recent times. Earlier Chinese used to travel in groups and used to take bus tours as it was the most comfortable way for them to get Visa.

But this scenario has completely changed now, according to a leading Marketing Agency of China now the Chinese travelers are branching out in a surprisingly different way. (Source: Tourism Review)

The scientific breakthrough that enabled physicists to solve the puzzle of infinity

During the mid20th century, physicists were grappling with a perplexing puzzle. It seemed that every time they applied equations to explain fundamental properties we see and experience around us — like the mass of a particle or what happens when two particles interact with each other — they always got the same answer: infinity.

But this wasn't a result at all. It was mathematics' way of telling them that they were doing something wrong. Here, professor of physics and mathematics at Columbia University and co-founder of the World Science Festival, Brian Greene, reveals the story of how physicists ultimately tackled the puzzle of infinity.

You can learn more fascinating science at the 10th annual World Science Festival in NYC taking place from May 30-June 4.

Infinity is a way that nature, kind of, grabs you by the lapel and slaps you in the face and says, "You were doing something that doesn't make any sense."

So, one of the big problems that afflicted quantum mechanics is that when scientists started to do calculations with the structure, they found an answer that would pop out of the mathematics and did not make any sense.

Almost any question that you asked, if you did the calculations, you know, "How does at a mass of a particle change?",



"How do these two particles slam into each other?" And infinite doesn't mean big. So people realized that we had to find a way to deal with these infinities. Kind of get rid of

■ Dealing with infinities

One of the big problems that afflicted quantum mechanics is that when scientists started to do calculations with the structure, they found an answer that would pop out of the mathematics and did not make any sense.

them. During, I guess, it was the '50s and '60s, a group of scientists came up with a way of thinking about it, to get rid of the infinities.

And in essence, what they found is we were taking our equations a little too seriously.

We were pushing our equations to arbitrarily short distances. Arbitrarily high energy, where they, probably, don't actually apply.

So what people realized is that if you cut off the equations, be more modest in how you apply them you can naturally get rid of the infinities and, in a way, still have a predictive theory.

So this is the subject of normalization in quantum field theory and that was a breakthrough that allowed us get things like the Standard Model of particle physics, which predicted the Higgs boson that was discovered in 2012, by the Large Hadron Collider.

This is a structure, a mathematical structure that can make predictions for the properties of particles that agrees with observations to ten decimal places.

So this is, in many ways, the shining wonder of theoretical physics and without normalization, getting rid of the infinities — the structure would not fly.

(Source: Business Insider)

What curing deaf mice's hearing means for humans

More than 5 percent of the world's population suffers from profound hearing loss, and about 60 percent of the deafness in infants is caused by gene mutations.

That's why scientists at the Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School have spent several years refining a technique to repair one of the common genetic disorders that cause deafness, offering hope to millions. The genetic disorder they repaired is Usher Syndrome.

The disorder stems from an abnormality in a gene called *ush1c*, which encodes the proteins in the inner-ear hair cells. These hairs convert sound vibration into electrical signals for the brain. In people with Usher Syndrome, that conversion does not happen, leaving them with devastating deafness, loss of balance and sometimes even blindness.

The researchers wanted to see if tackling the syndrome at its root — the abnormal gene — could reverse the damage. For this, they turned to a pioneering approach called adeno-associated viral vector, which uses a harmless virus to deliver new genes. They replaced DNA from a virus with a healthy *ush1c* gene from a mouse.

That altered virus was multiplied in a petri dish, then injected into the inner ears of deaf mice suffering from Usher Syndrome. After six weeks, the mice had almost

perfect hearing and full recovery of sensory hair growth, brain auditory function, balance and sound sensitivity down to a whisper.

■ In terms of range frequencies

Dr. Margaret Kenna, a specialist in genetic hearing loss at Boston Children's Hospital who wasn't involved in this study, says that while there are devices that can bolster hearing, nothing beats nature. "Cochlear implants are great, but your own hearing is better in terms of range of frequencies, nuance for hearing voices, music and background noise, and figuring out which direction a sound is coming from." Exactly the kind of results achieved with the deaf mice.

After this study, written up in two papers published in Nature Biotechnology last February, the Boston team started preparing for human trials. In March, they exposed human outer-ear hair cells in the lab to the same *ush1c*-carrying virus. After 10 days, the virus penetrated about 83 percent of the targeted cells.

Although cell function was not tested, the team's ability to reach so many cells has brought real hope that this technique might be able to cure not just a human *ush1c* gene defect but other hearing disorders caused by genetic mutations.



Brad Welling, chief of otolaryngology at Massachusetts

Eye and Ear, wasn't part of that team but is cheered by their work. The "day is growing closer to human trials which will correct defects in the outer ear cells and potentially other areas of the inner ear...and we look forward with great anticipation to human application."

(Source: Newsweek)

NASA scientists detect barrier around Earth

NASA's Van Allen probes have revealed human activities are not having physical and chemical impacts on Earth's environment, but also on radio frequencies extending out into space.

After analyzing data captured by the probes, NASA scientists concluded that very low frequency (VLF) radio communications make interactions with particles in space, forming an artificial barrier that can block high-energy particle rays from space.

VLF communications are mainly used

to communicate with submarines across massive distances in the ocean from very powerful ground stations.

Scientists are now studying VLF radio transmissions' ability to impact the near-Earth environment in further detail. They are probing the odds of using VLF transmissions in the upper atmosphere to allay the effects of charged particles on spacecraft that are susceptible to adverse space events like coronal mass ejections (CMEs) from the Sun.

■ Earth's landscape

Humans have long been shaping Earth's landscape, but now scientists know we can shape our near-space environment as well. A certain type of communications — very low frequency, or VLF, radio communications — have been found to interact with particles in space, affecting how and where they move. At times, these interactions can create a barrier around Earth against natural high energy particle radiation in space. These results, part of a comprehensive paper on human-in-

duced space weather, were recently published in Space Science Reviews.

A "number of experiments and observations have figured out that, under the right conditions, radio communications signals in the VLF frequency range can in fact affect the properties of the high-energy radiation environment around the Earth," said Phil Erickson, assistant director at the MIT Haystack Observatory, Westford, Massachusetts.

(Source: PerfScience)

Bank Pasargad Named Leader Bank in Winning International Honors

According to the evaluation of prestigious EUROMONEY Institute, Bank Pasargad was introduced as top Iranian lender for the third consecutive year, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Iranian Bank Wins Euromoney's Best Bank Transformation Award

For his part, Deputy Managing Director and Director of Public Relations Dept. of Bank Pasargad Khosrow Rafiei said: "EUROMONEY Periodical is one of the most reliable international magazines in the field of assessing financial markets and performance of banks."

The bank managed to win the title of top Iranian bank in 2017 for the third consecutive year in a tight

international competition, he said, adding: "Euromoney Awards for Excellence 2017" is considered as one of the most valuable awards in banking industry which is awarded to the top banks in the world annually."

In the end, Deputy Managing Director and Director of Public Relations Dept. of Bank Pasargad Khosrow Rafiei pointed to the other international successes of the bank such as expansion of its relations with prestigious foreign banks and said: "The bank has thus far gained salient achievements in other international arenas, the most important of which is the title of winning top Bank of the Year in the country in 2016 and also title of top Islamic bank in the same year."



"Productivity" Accounts for 86% Share in Economic Growth: NIPO Chief

"Productivity" made up 86 percent of share in economic growth of the country in the nine months of the past Iranian calendar year (from March 20 to Dec. 20, 2016).

Head of National Iranian Productivity Organization (NIPO) Roya Tabatabaei Yazdi announced the above statement and put the productivity index of manpower in the last Iranian calendar year 1395 (ended March 20, 2017) at 8.59 percent.

She also put the productivity share of capital in the same period at 10.86 percent.

Iran's economy experienced a sig-

nificant 11.6 percent growth in the nine months of the last Iranian calendar year (from March 20 to Dec. 21, 2016), she said, adding: "According to the statistical estimations, share of productivity from economic growth has been estimated at 86 percent."

The senior official of the Organization put the productivity share of "manpower", "capital" and "production functionaries" in the past Iranian calendar year 1395 (ended March 20, 2017) at 8.59, 10.86 and 9.95 percent respectively.

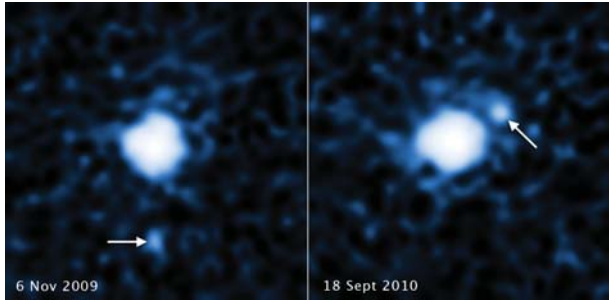
Elsewhere in his remarks, she pointed to the status of Iranian productivity in the Asian Productivity Organization



and stated: "total factor of productivity in Iran from 2010 to 2014 stood at -2.1 percent when the country had been put under severe sanctions."

Third largest dwarf planet found to have moon

Dwarf planet 2007 OR10, the third largest of nine known dwarf planets in the Solar System, is orbited by a small moon, scientists discovered using current and archival images gathered by three separate observatories.



Smaller than only two other dwarf planets, Pluto and Eris, 2007 OR10, approximately 950 miles (1,530 kilometers) in diameter, was discovered a decade ago by a team of researchers using the Samuel Oschin Telescope at the Palomar Observatory in California. It is currently three times further from the Sun than Pluto and has an eccentric orbit.

The moon of 2007 OR10 was first seen in images captured by NASA's Kepler Space Telescope, which searches for planets orbiting stars other than the Sun, known as exoplanets.

■ Rotation periods

Kepler data revealed that 2007 OR10 rotates on its axis once every 45 hours — a rotation rate much slower than that of most Kuiper Belt Objects, which have rotation periods less than 24 hours.

Csaba Kiss of the Konkoly Observatory in Budapest, Hungary, the lead author of a study on the discovery published in The Astrophysical Journal Letters, said that researchers suspected the dwarf planet's slow rotation period was caused by the gravitational pull of an orbiting moon.

They examined archival images of 2007 OR10 taken by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope, but, initially, they did not see the moon because it is so small and faint.

However, in perusing subsequent Hubble images captured by the telescope's Wide Field Camera 3 approximately one year apart, the researchers spotted the moon moving with the dwarf planet against background stars, indicating it is gravitationally bound to 2007 OR10.

"Ironically, because we don't know the orbit, the link between the satellite and the slow rotation rate is unclear," said team member John Stansberry of the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore, Maryland.

(Source: Spaceflight Insider)

This might be the coolest visualization of evolution ever

Researchers have set up what's essentially a giant rectangular petri dish, called the "microbial evolution growth arena plate" (MEGA plate for short).

At each end of the MEGA plate, there are no antibiotics. But every several centimeters, in toward the center, the scientists paint bands of antibiotics of increasing potency.

Each increase of antibiotic concentration is a stressor that the bacteria (they're just regular E. coli) have to cope with.

That is, the bands of increasingly powerful antibiotics (either trimethoprim or ciprofloxacin) are provoking the bacteria to evolve, outsmarting the medicines that are designed to kill them.

It's both beautiful and terrifying to see antibiotics be powerless against almighty evolution. You can see the bacteria (shown in milky white) all stopped at the first band of antibiotic.

■ Mutant bacteria

But then a small group of bacteria, containing a mutation that allows them to survive the chemical assault, break through. Those mutant bacteria become the dominant type in the population.

This process repeats for each more powerful band of antibiotics, until the bacteria achieve total resistance at the center.

The researchers — who published this visualization method in the journal Science in September — hope this technique will help them better understand the complicated patterns underlying antimicrobial resistance, which is a growing concern in hospitals around the world.

We need to think of better solutions to this overuse of antibiotics.

(Source: Vox)

Bacteria could lead to cleaner methane power

Methane as a greenhouse gas isn't all that eco-friendly when used for power, but scientists might have a way to keep the damage to a minimum.

Penn State researchers have crafted microbial fuel cells that can convert methane into electricity right at the well, without leaking loads of gas into the atmosphere by sending it through pipes.

The team created a cocktail of bacteria (including a synthetic microbe you can't normally grow) that produces the necessary materials to grab and transport electrons from the methane.

Not only is this a relatively clean process, the bacteria can run on waste products -- it might clean up the site as it generates power.

This definitely isn't ready for prime time. The current project only produces a thousandth of the electricity that you'd get from a methanol fuel cell.

And of course, cleaning up methane power is really a stopgap solution on the way to wider use of renewable energy. But it's a start -- until it's realistic to ditch methane, anything that curbs its harmful emissions should be helpful.

(Source: Engadget)

New York teacher fired ‘after ripping off eight-year-old girl’s hijab’

A substitute teacher has been fired after allegedly ripping off the hijab of an eight-year-old girl.

Oghenetega Edah, 31, reportedly threatened to take off Safa Alzockary's veil after she misbehaved during class at Bennington School, New York.

She was misbehaving in class and sitting in the teacher’s chair without permission, the New York Post reported.

After tapping her on the arm to get her to move and making the threat, he told her: “I’m taking it off”

He then pulled the veil off, bringing it across her face and damaging her right eye, police sources said.

“This alleged behavior is completely unacceptable,” Michael Aciman, a Department of Education spokesman, said.

“This individual was removed from the school immediately and his employment has been terminated.”

A differing account of the incident by NBC New York reports Safa was sitting in her chair when the teacher pulled off her hijab.

Police are investigating along with the Department of Investigation.

“It was scary,” Safa told the New York Daily News.

Her father, Mohamed Alzockary, said he was shocked by what his daughter said happened.

“I didn’t expect a teacher to do that to a child,” he said.

“She’s OK right now ... but kids, they’re nervous.”

(Source: The Independent)

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Stuffed cabbage rolls

“I don’t know where I got this recipe, but I have been using it for well over 20 years. Works well in a slow cooker.”

Ingredients:



2/3 cup water
1/3 cup uncooked white rice
8 cabbage leaves
1 pound lean ground beef
1/4 cup chopped onion
1 egg, slightly beaten
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 (10.75 ounce) can condensed tomato soup

Directions:

In a medium saucepan, bring water to a boil. Add rice and stir. Reduce heat,

cover and simmer for 20 minutes.

Bring a large, wide saucepan of lightly salted water to a boil. Add cabbage leaves and cook for 2 to 4 minutes or until softened; drain.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine the ground beef, 1 cup cooked rice, onion, egg, salt and pepper, along with 2 tablespoons of tomato soup. Mix thoroughly.

Divide the beef mixture evenly among the cabbage leaves. Roll and secure them with toothpicks or string.

In a large skillet over medium heat, place the cabbage rolls and pour the remaining tomato soup over the top. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer for about 40 minutes, stirring and basting with the liquid often.

LEARN ENGLISH

Canceling an Appointment

A: Hello, Samantha speaking.

B: Hi Samantha. This is Angela calling.

A: Oh, hi Angela, **what’s up?**

B: I’m just calling about our meeting today. I wonder, is it possible to **reschedule** our appointment in the afternoon? I have a bit of an emergency that I need to take care of.

A: Let me see, it shouldn’t be too much of a problem...

B: I’m really sorry, I hope it doesn’t **inconvenience** you too much, it’s just this thing **came up**, and...

A: Angela, you know what, I can’t **make it** to our meeting, either. Why don’t we **postpone** it to tomorrow afternoon at the same time?

B: Sounds great. See you tomorrow.

C: Angela... Angela, look up! See that lady over there who is trying on a red leather jacket? Isn’t that Samantha?

B: What? **No wonder** she told me she couldn’t make it to the meeting, oh, no, I think she saw me...

Key vocabulary

what’s up: what is the matter

reschedule: schedule something for a different time

inconvenience: cause problem or trouble

come up: occur in an unexpected way

make it: come

postpone: decide to do something at a later time

no wonder: not surprisingly

Supplementary vocabulary

scheduling conflict: two or more appointments scheduled at the same time

call off: cancel

double-book: have two appointments or meetings at the same time

push back: move a meeting or appointment to a later time

rain check: a promise or offer to do something in the future that is not possible to do now

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Women win highest ever seats in Tehran council elections

W O M E N TEHRAN — Six women have **d e s k** been elected to Tehran’s 5th city council elections, registering a record high out of the total 21 members.

The number of female councilors has been doubled in the 5th council elections compared with the previous rounds, in which women’s number was not more than three, Khabaronline reported on Sunday.

For the first time in Iran’s history six women joined the city council of Tehran in a situation that the total number of members of the council has decreased from 31 in the 4th council to 21 in the 5th.

Shahrbanoo Amani Anganeh, Bahareh Arvin, Zahra Sadrazam Nouri, Nahid Khodakarami, Zahra Nejadbahram and Elham Fakhari gained the 4th, 5th, 11th, 16th, 17th and 19th rankings in the elections, respectively.

Women made up one tenth of the members of the 4th council, while currently they make up about one third of the members.

A number of 10,416 people, including 1,337 women and 9,079 men, had registered for city and village council elections in Tehran province, IRNA quoted the deputy governor of Tehran province for political and social affairs, Shahabeddin Chavoshi, as saying.

According to stats released by the Interior Ministry, a number of 17,885 women, equaling 6.3 percent of the total candidates, have put their names down for the polls all around the country.

The 5th city and village council elections was held simultaneously with the 12th presidential election on May 19.



Shahrbanoo Amani Anganeh



Bahareh Arvin



Zahra Sadrazam Nouri



Nahid Khodakarami



Zahra Nejadbahram



Elham Fakhari

Women main victims of current crisis in Middle East: UN envoy

Iran’s ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations (UN), Gholamali Khoshroo said that women are among the main victims of current political crises and also cruel sanctions in the Middle East.

Addressing the May 16 Security Council open debate on women and peace and security: sexual violence in conflict, Khoshroo said that the spread of violent extremism, inspired by takfiri ideology, that has no respect for women, threatens in an unprecedented way the lives and rights of women and girls.

The full text of his address follows:

Women are a key resource for promoting peace and stability. Security Council Resolution 1325 on “women, peace and security” is focusing on the specific impact of armed conflict on women, the positive role they can play in conflict prevention and strengthening peace and security in local, regional and international levels.

Mr. President,

Unfortunately, current crisis, especially in the Middle East, has taken abhorrent forms and constitutes unprecedented challenges to the stability in our region. Women are among the main victims, grappling with the scourge of violent extremism and terrorism. The spread of violent extremism, inspired by takfiri ideology, that has no respect for women, threatens in an unprecedented way the lives and rights of women and girls. They have suffered the most and been targeted for systematic sexual exploitation and slavery, rape and other forms of sexual violence by extremists and terrorist groups.

Iran strongly condemns the barbaric acts of the terrorist and violent extremist groups such as Daesh and its



Iran’s ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations (UN), Gholamali Khoshroo

offshoots, Boko Haram, as well as indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including women and children.

In an environment filled with hate, intimidation, xenophobic attitudes, racial profiling and discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity, country of origin, language, women easily fall victim to sexual violence and abuse. Thus their opportunities for academic, economic, political and social progress are gravely curtailed by these intimidating mindsets and situations.

In some regions, particularly the Middle East, destructive factors such as foreign intervention, military invasion as well as foreign occupation have contributed considerably to the collapse of families. As a result, women and children are bearing the brunt of the menaces that not

only destroy their present but expose them to long-lasting miseries. That would remain for generations. Under such circumstances, there will be little room for women’s empowerment and development.

The impact of sanctions on gender-responsive policies and budgeting within respective countries is also another significant aspect. Sanctions as a form of collective punishment flagrantly and indiscriminately violate basic human rights of all citizens particularly women and others in vulnerable situations.

The systematic violations of the legitimate human rights of the Palestinian people, including Palestinian women, under brutal occupation of the Israeli regime and illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip constitute massive deprivation of the Palestinian civilians and women of their rights.

It is also very unfortunate that women and girls are also fallen disproportionately victims to airstrikes in Yemen. As confirmed reports indicate, the unjustified invasion of Yemen by Saudi-led coalition has led to the death of more than 10,000 people and the injury of more than 17,000 civilians, including at least 1,677 women and 2,260 children.

Mr. President,

In closing, let me, Mr. President, stress that my delegation believes that organizing such a debate in this council should not undermine the work of the most relevant bodies for consideration of women related issues in the United Nations system namely CSW, ECOSOC as well as the General Assembly.

(Source: IRNA)

Afghan women break ground with TV station launch

A new TV channel dedicated to women began broadcasting in Afghanistan, the first of its kind in a country whose media industry, like many areas of society, remains dominated by men.

Zan TV (“Women’s TV”) launched on Sunday with a staff of all female presenters and producers, following a high-profile marketing campaign on billboards in Kabul and on social media.

Female newsreaders appear regularly on many Afghan channels, but an entire station for women is a novelty. Its arrival highlights the fact that behind the daily stories of violence, change is taking place in Afghanistan, even if it is often slow and patchy.

“I am so happy that this TV station has been created for women because there are women in our society who are not aware of their rights,” said 20-year-old Khatira Ahmadi, a producer at the station.

“So this station represents women and we work to raise the voice of women so they can defend their rights,” she said.

Women’s rights and education as well as media freedom are often cited by the government and foreign aid organizations as among the biggest achievements in the country since the Taliban was toppled in 2001.

Still, Afghanistan is one of the most difficult places in the world for women in the media, and in a poor and war-ravaged country -- with a crowded TV landscape of around 40 stations -- there is no guarantee of success.

Media entrepreneur Hamid Samar, the founder of Zan TV, said he was banking on potentially large female audiences in big cities like Kabul who are hungry for news and discussion that reflect their own experiences.

“There has been a lot of talk about women’s rights and media rights,” he said. “But we’ve never seen anything special for women and that’s why we’ve done this.”

Zan TV runs on a shoestring using low-cost digital technology and operating out of a basic studio in Kabul, focusing on talk shows along with some programs on health and music.

It relies heavily on a team of mainly young women, many of them students. Youth and enthusiasm make up for what it lacks in experience.

Around 16 male technicians work behind the scenes in areas like graphics, camera operation and editing, as well as teaching female colleagues who have little access to media training.

Some of the female staff like Ahmadi have had to cope with disapproving family members or even brush aside threats in



order to pursue their media careers.

But for Ahmadi, among the few staff members with prior television experience, giving a new generation of women a chance to work in media is a major benefit of the station.

“I came to share my experience with colleagues here and I am really happy working along with the other girls,” she said.

(Source: Reuters)

South Africans protest over violence against women

Hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Pretoria on Saturday, angered by a rise in violence against women and children in South Africa, including killings and sex attacks.

Answering the call by a group calling itself “#Not In My Name” the protesters, most of them men, marched through the streets of the South African capital behind a woman symbolically dressed head to toe in white.

“The time to take collective responsibility for our shameful action is now,” said Kholofelo Masha, of the protest organizers, who described himself as “a loving dad, brother and uncle.”

South African men have remained quiet on the issue for too long, he added: “You hear a lady screaming next door, you decide to sleep when you know there is a problem next door... No man should beat a woman or rape a woman while you’re watching”.



Reports of the rape and murder of women and girls have been front-page news recently in South Africa, which has some of the worst crime rates in the world.

According to official figures, a woman is killed by

someone she knows every eight hours somewhere in the country and one woman in five has been subjected to at least one act of violent aggression in her life.

South African President Jacob Zuma on Thursday visited the home of the parents of a three-year-old girl who was raped and killed.

“We as the citizens of this country must say enough is enough,” Zuma said then. “This is one of the saddest incidents I’ve come across. It’s a crisis in the country, the manner in which women and children are being killed.”

The ruling African National Congress has called the wave of violent acts “senseless and barbaric” while the main opposition Democratic Alliance party has denounced the “failure to make South Africa safe for all,” and has called for a national debate on the problem.

(Source: Aljazeera.com)

Ivanka Trump praises Saudi Arabia on women's rights after country donates \$100 million to her cause

Ivanka Trump has praised the progress of women's rights in Saudi Arabia after the country and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) pledged to donate \$100 million to the first World Bank's global project for women entrepreneurs.

Speaking in Saudi Arabia as her father met with some Arab and Islam leaders, Trump said progress in the nation was "encouraging" but said there was "still a lot of work to be done".

"In every country around the world women and girls continue to face unique systematic, institutional, cultural barriers, which hinder us from fully engaging in and achieving true parity of opportunity within our communities," she said at a roundtable of women leaders in society, businesswomen and elected government officials.

"Each of you know this to be true. And yet the stories of Saudi women, such as yourselves, catalyzing change, inspire me to believe in the possibility of global women's empowerment."

Progress includes women being allowed to vote in local elections, and a decreasing amount of power held by the religious police.

"The need to empower and engage women transcends borders and cultures. Whether in the United States or in Saudi Arabia, women play a critical role in a movement that unites us all," she said.



Journalists were asked to leave the room before issues around women's equality could be brought up, such as women not having the right to drive, go anywhere alone or be included in public life.

U.S. officials did not raise these concerns, as noted by the U.S. state department's past reports on human rights.

Trump was invited to participate by Saudi Princess Reema bint Bandar, a retail executive, divorced mother and social

activist who is one of the main voices for women's rights in a conservative country.

At the same forum, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim said the UAE and Saudi Arabia will donate \$100 million towards the planned \$1 billion global women's entrepreneurship fund, which was encouraged by Trump and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

It is unclear how much each of the two Middle East nations donated. The Wall

Street Journal reported that although the President's daughter proposed the fund, she does not control it or raise money for it.

"Thank you JimYongKim for your leadership & for joining me in a meaningful discussion with women entrepreneurs today," tweeted Trump.

He responded, "Women's economic empowerment is key to growth. Thanks to Saudi Arabia & UAE for their support & Ivanka Trump for championing the issue."

The fund is still being formed and will be formally announced at the G-20 July summit.

"I think this fund [...] is going to make a huge difference," Kim said.

Yousef Al Otaiba, the UAE's ambassador to the U.S., said in a statement that his country's donation shows "our commitment to empowering women in our region and builds on the progress we have made in our country, where women play a role in every segment of society."

In 2016 the World Bank invested \$2.5 billion in Michelle and Barack Obama's charity for girls education, called Let Girls Learn, over five years.

Kim said at the time that the empowerment of girls was "central" to the group's development efforts.

(Source: Independent)

North Korea: Missile meets all specifications, ready for mass-production

North Korea said on Monday it had successfully tested an intermediate-range ballistic missile which met all technical requirements and could now be mass-produced, indicating advances in its ambitions to be able to hit the United States.

The North fired the missile into waters off its east coast on Sunday, its second missile test in a week, which South Korea said dashed the hopes of the South's new liberal government under President Moon Jae-in for peace between the neighbors.

North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un supervised the test of the Pukguksong-2, which confirmed reliable late-stage guidance of the warhead and the functioning of a solid-fuel engine, the KCNA state news agency said.

It quoted Kim as saying the Pukguksong-2 met all the required technical specifications so should now be mass-produced and deployed to the Korean People's Army strategic battle unit.

Pyeongyang has defied all calls to rein in its nuclear and missile programs, even from China, its lone major ally, saying the weapons are needed for defense against U.S. aggression.

The United Nations Security Council is due to meet on Tuesday behind closed doors to discuss the latest test, which defies Security Council resolutions and sanctions, at the request of the United States, Japan and South Korea, diplomats said on Sunday.

The test could also alter the dynamics of Moon's plan to review a controversial deployment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) U.S. anti-missile system in the South that is angrily opposed by China, which sees its powerful radar as a threat to its security.

"Saying with pride that the missile's rate of hits is very accurate and Pukguksong-2 is a successful strategic weapon, he approved the deployment of this weapon system for action," KCNA said, quoting Kim.

Earth is beautiful

The launch verified the reliability and accuracy of the

solid-fuel engine's operation and stage separation and the late-stage guidance of the nuclear warhead which was recorded by a device mounted on the warhead, KCNA said.

"Viewing the images of the Earth being sent real-time from the camera mounted on the ballistic missile, Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un said it feels grand to look at the Earth from the rocket we launched and the entire world looks so beautiful," KCNA said.

The use of solid fuel presents advantages for weapons because the fuel is more stable and can be transported easily in the missile's tank allowing for a launch at very short notice.

The Pukguksong-2 flew about 500 km (310 miles), reaching an altitude of 560 km, South Korea's military said.

The South's military said the test provided more "meaningful data" for the North's missile program but whether the North mastered the re-entry technology for the warhead needs additional analysis.

The reclusive state has been working to develop a nuclear-tipped missile capable of striking the U.S. mainland and on Saturday said it had developed the capability, although Western missile experts say the claim is exaggerated.

Some experts believe it will be 2030 or later for the North to develop the technology. But KCNA said last week's missile test put Hawaii and Alaska within range.

North Korea regularly threatens to destroy the United States which it accuses of preparing for invasion. South Korea hosts 28,500 U.S. troops to counter the threat from the North, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War.

Japan 'cannot tolerate launch'

Experts say solid fuel engines and mobile launchers make it more difficult to detect signs of launch preparations.

"For military purposes, solid-fueled missiles have the advantage that they have the fuel loaded in them

and can be launched quickly after they are moved to a launch site," David Wright, co-director of the Global Security Program at the U.S.-based Union of Concerned Scientists, said in a blog post.

"Building large solid missiles is difficult," he said, adding it took decades for major superpowers such as France and China to go from a medium-range missile to an intercontinental ballistic missile.

U.S. President Donald Trump has warned that a "major, major conflict" with North Korea is possible, and in a show of force, sent the Carl Vinson aircraft carrier strike group to Korean waters to conduct drills with South Korea and Japan.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said economic and diplomatic pressure would continue.

"We cannot absolutely tolerate the missile launch on May 21 and repeated provocative remarks and actions by North Korea," Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga said on Monday.

"It is important to lower North Korea's foreign currency earnings and prevent nuclear missile related shipment and technological transfer in order to prevent North Korea's nuclear missile development. We will fully implement our own sanctions against North Korea."

China repeated its call for all parties to exercise restraint to not let tension mount further.

On Monday, the South's Unification Ministry spokesman Lee Duk-haeng said while Seoul will respond firmly to any provocations by the North, "it would not be desirable to have ties between the South and the North severed."

Moon took office on May 10 after winning an election on a platform of a more moderate approach to the North, with which the South is still technically at war since no peace treaty was signed at the end of their 1950-1953 conflict.

(Source: Reuters)

Turkey summons U.S. envoy over Washington street brawl

Turkey summoned the United States ambassador to Ankara to protest the treatment of Turkish security officials in the United States during an official visit last week, Turkey's foreign ministry said in a statement on Monday.

The United States said last week it was voicing its "strongest possible" concern to Turkey over a street brawl that erupted between protesters and Turkish security personnel during President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Washington, D.C.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia agrees to lift remaining Turkey trade sanctions

Russia agreed on Monday to lift remaining trade sanctions against Turkey imposed in the wake of the shooting down by Turkish air forces of a Russian warplane over the Syrian border in 2015.

The state-run Anadolu news agency said a corresponding accord was signed on the sidelines of a summit of Black Sea regional leaders in Istanbul by Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek and his Russian counterpart Arkady Dvorkovich.

It said that the document was an important step towards the normalization of economic relations and increasing trade volumes.

The Russian government in a statement confirmed that the document "on the lifting of bilateral trade restrictions" was signed in the presence of Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim and Russian premier Dmitry Medvedev.

There were no immediate details on the contents of the document but it is expected to again allow the import to Russia of tomatoes, a key Turkish agricultural export.

The November 24, 2015 shooting down of the Russian plane led to an unprecedented crisis in ties and prompted Russia to impose a raft of sanctions against Ankara.

These included an effective ban on Russian package holidays to Turkey, ruining the 2016 tourism season in the country's south. That ban has since been lifted.

After a reconciliation deal in summer last year, relations have seen a rapid improvement with the two sides working together in a bid to end foreign instigated Syria conflict.

(Source: AFP)

Bomb blast at Bangkok hospital injures 24

A bomb explosion at a hospital in downtown Bangkok has "slightly" injured at least 24 people, police in the Thai capital said.

Monday's incident took place as Thailand marked the



three-year anniversary of the May 2014 military coup.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The explosion occurred in a guest room for retired military officials at King Mongkut hospital, and all of the injured received treatment, local TV station TNN24 reported.

"It was a bomb. We found the pieces that were used to make the bomb," Kamthorn Aucharoen, commander of the police's explosive ordnance team, told Reuters news agency. "Right now, authorities are checking out closed circuit cameras."

Investigators found remains of batteries and wires at the scene of the blast, said Srivara Ransibrahmanakul, the deputy national police chief.

Government spokesman Sansern Kaewkamnerd said 24 people had been wounded.

He added that three of the wounded received serious shrapnel injuries to the face and neck, but most of the victims had minor wounds.

Some of the injured were hurt by broken glass, TNN24 said.

Thailand's Army Chief, General Prayuth Chan-ocha, seized control of Yingluck Shinawat's government three years ago, saying the military had to restore order and push through reforms after six months of turmoil.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Flynn to decline U.S. Senate subpoena in Russia probe

Former White House national security adviser Michael Flynn will decline to comply with a subpoena from the Senate Intelligence Committee investigating possible Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election, according to media reports on Monday.

Flynn will invoke his Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination, the Associated Press, Wall Street Journal and Fox News reported, citing sources close to Flynn. The committee had first requested documents from Flynn in an April 28 letter, but the retired lieutenant general had declined to cooperate with the committee's request.

(Source: Reuters)

Brazilian protesters call for President Temer to resign

Brazilians around the country staged demonstrations on Sunday to call for their president to step down after the supreme court opened an investigation into allegations he endorsed the payment of hush money to a jailed former lawmaker.

Unions, political parties and activists called for Brazilians to come out on Sunday to demand President Michel Temer step down, though protests in major cities were smaller than expected.

Hundreds of people huddled under umbrellas and building porticos to avoid the rain in Sao Paulo.

In Rio de Janeiro, 150 people waved union flags on the boardwalk along Copacabana beach. They signed a giant banner with messages, such as, "Out with Temer" and "I want a better Brazil".

Another 100 people marched to the house of Rodrigo Maia, speaker of the lower house of congress, to call for Temer's ouster and immediate elections.

Some were protesting against Temer's proposals to loosen labor laws and change the pension system as much as they were responding to the recent allegations.

"We're here to get Temer out of government because he is a coup-leader, because he is against teachers" and other workers, said Tatiana Camargos, a 41-year-old biology teacher, reported AP

news agency.

Temer seeks suspension of probe

Temer has defied calls to resign, saying a leaked recording purportedly implicating him in corruption was doctored and denying any wrongdoing.

The recording appears to have Temer endorsing the payment of bribes to ex-House Speaker Eduardo Cunha in exchange for his silence. Cunha is serving a sentence after a corruption conviction.

Temer has asked the Supreme Federal Tribunal, Brazil's highest court, to suspend its investigation into him - something that it is unlikely to do.

Prosecutor General Rodrigo Janot, who has accused Temer of corruption and obstruction of justice in the case before the court, has said that a preliminary analysis of the recording showed that the conversation it contained was logical and coherent and its contents were consistent with the testimony of people cooperating with the prosecutor's office.

Some allied political parties have already withdrawn their support for Temer and others are considering it.

Al Jazeera's Lucia Newman, reporting from Sao Paulo, said that ultimately Temer's fate will be decided in the congress and by the courts.

"Wednesday is going to be an important day to look towards as the supreme court will have to decide whether to accept



cept President Temer's request to drop an investigation into alleged corruption," she said.

If the court does not decide to drop the probe, "it could very well be that more parties in his coalition decide to abandon the president," said Newman.

Brazil in crisis

The accusations against Temer have plunged Latin America's largest nation into crisis yet again, sending its currency and stocks plummeting and stalling a series of reforms designed to pull the economy out of a protracted recession.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Arsenal major owner says ‘shares are not, and never have been, for sale’

Arsenal majority owner Stan Kroenke's KSE (Kroenke Sports & Entertainment) UK Inc said on Monday its shares in the Premier League club were not for sale after media reports that the club's second-largest investor had made an offer to buy out Kroenke.



"KSE is a committed, long-term investor in Arsenal and will remain so," KSE UK said in a statement, adding that its shares in the club have never been for sale.

Alisher Usmanov, a Russian billionaire who owns 30 percent of Arsenal, made the \$1.3 billion offer in a letter to American billionaire Kroenke, who controls 67 percent of the club, the Financial Times reported on Friday.

Kroenke's business and sports empire also includes the U.S. Denver Nuggets basketball team and the Rams American Football team.

Arsenal fans have been disappointed by the team's performances this season and manager Arsene Wenger said last week that a decision on his future will be made at a board meeting following the FA Cup final against Chelsea on Saturday.

Arsenal failed to clinch a top-four place in the Premier League, which will have a significant financial impact as they have not qualified for the lucrative European Champions League for the first time in 20 seasons.

(Source: AFP)

Gomes ‘honoured’ to become youngest Man Utd player

Angel Gomes says he is honoured to become the youngest player to represent Manchester United since club legend Duncan Edwards.

The 16-year-old replaced Wayne Rooney in the 88th minute of Sunday's 2-0 home win over Crystal Palace, making his debut for the club.

As well as becoming the first Premier League player to be born in the year 2000, Gomes – a cousin of former United winger Nani – was the youngest to represent the club since Edwards' debut in 1953.

Gomes told MUTV: "Duncan Edwards was a great player and a United legend.

"He started playing when he was young and it is an honour to be the youngest since him."

Gomes had a rollercoaster week, being named the youngest-ever winner of United's Youth Team Player of the Year accolade before being drafted in by Jose Mourinho for the squad to face Palace.

He added: "Obviously, it's a dream come true. I have been here since the age of six working my way up and it's what everyone dreams about.

"I just want to thank the manager for putting me on the bench and playing me, and all the staff back at the club and everyone who has helped me.

"I'm from Manchester, Salford and it's literally down the road. It's just unbelievable.

(Source: Soccerway)

How much Madrid and Barca will earn from La Liga title race

Real Madrid will receive a significant financial boost after ending their five-year wait for the Liga title.

Zinedine Zidane's side secured the club's first league triumph since 2012 with a 2-0 win over Malaga and the result provided a healthy boost to the coffers.

LA LIGA REWARDS BASED ON LEAGUE POSITION	
	€20.825M REAL MADRID
	€18.375M BARCELONA
	€15.925M ATLETICO
	€13.475M SEVILLA
	€11.025M VILLARREAL
	€8.575M REAL SOCIEDAD

After clinching the league, the Blancos are set to pocket a prize of €20.8 million, which represents their share of a €122.5m prize pot that is distributed among Primera Division clubs.

The distribution is based on final league position, with the teams receiving a percentage in proportion to their place in the table.

Though they were pipped to the title, runners-up Barcelona will receive €18.4m, while Atletico Madrid have secured a boost of €15.9m after finishing third.

Fourth-placed Sevilla stand to earn €13.5m and Villarreal, who finished fifth, will bag €11m.

Tony Adams' Granada, however, will pocket a relatively measly €300k after finishing the season at the bottom of the division.

(Source: Goal)

Zidane gets sacrifice from Galacticos to make Real Madrid champions

Zinedine Zidane's transformation of Real Madrid from crisis club to champions has been rooted not in the glamour of relying purely on 'Galactico' talent, but fostering a team spirit and never say die attitude.

Madrid sealed a first La Liga title in five years on Sunday -- and 33rd in total -- with a 2-0 victory at Malaga to bring a halt to Barcelona's domination of domestic matters having won six of the previous eight titles.

Zidane has now won four trophies since taking charge in January last year and could add a fifth by retaining the Champions League against Juventus on June 3.

However, the fact the winning margin was a mere three points shows Madrid needed to fall back on every member of a seemingly endless pool of talent and every one of a series of late fightbacks to hold off the Catalans.

"Watching what they do on the pitch, this squad is spectacular," said Zidane on Saturday.

"Those that have played less have been at the same level as those that have played the most and, in a 60-game season that is very difficult physically, that has been important."

Madrid garnered a massive 17 points from game-changing goals scored in the last 10 minutes of nine different games.

The most important late goal of all might have been one that didn't even earn a victory, but saw a three-point swing in the title race as Sergio Ramos powered home a stoppage time header to earn a point in a 1-1 draw at Barcelona in December.

Barcelona got their revenge when for once Real's belief got the better of them as they chased a winner despite being a man down after Ramos's red card in a thrilling 3-2 El Clasico defeat last month.

Lionel Messi capped a virtuoso display by scoring with



the last kick of the game to keep Barca in the title race.

However, if the Argentine showed that night that Barca may still have the best player, over a nine-month marathon Madrid had the best team and without doubt the best squad.

Most importantly of all, Zidane trusted in that squad.

For league games away at Eibar, Gijon, Deportivo la Coruna, Leganes and Granada in the final months of the season, he left a host of first-team regulars including

Cristiano Ronaldo out of his squad entirely.

The so-called Madrid B-team rewarded the Frenchman by scoring 21 goals and winning all five of those games.

"We have always had the best players, but the key is this time all the players are motivated, have minutes and match rhythm, not just 11," said Ramos.

It's not bad going for man still only 17 months into his first role in senior management

(Source: AFP)

VW's soccer sponsorship in limbo as Wolfsburg face relegation

Volkswagen's (VOWG_p.DE) expensively assembled soccer team VfL Wolfsburg face relegation from Germany's Bundesliga for the first time in 20 years, a move that could lead the carmaker to curb sponsorship as it grapples with its emissions crisis.

Given the sport's huge global popularity, automakers have long viewed soccer clubs as an ideal marketing platform to raise brand awareness and attract new customers.

A town of around 125,000 people, Wolfsburg owes its very existence to

Volkswagen.

Purpose-built on Adolf Hitler's orders in 1938 to make the "peoples' car", about half the town's workers have jobs directly linked to the company.

Volkswagen (VW) has for years splashed out shareholder money in a bid to build a top soccer team even as experts questioned the business case because VfL Wolfsburg have only limited revenue streams and lack an international fan base.

Of the 18 Bundesliga teams, the VW-owned club ranked fifth on market value

in February at 184 million euros (\$205.6 million), compared with 579 million for record 27-times champions Bayern Munich, according to data provider Statista GmbH.

But the 2-1 loss on Saturday to Hamburg SV, a club with only about half Wolfsburg's market value, means they face a two-legged relegation playoff against local rivals Eintracht Braunschweig on May 25 and 29 to determine their fate.

"That's a punch below the belt for players and club officials," Wolfgang Hotze, the club's executive director and a

former VW manager, said on Sunday after Hamburg leapfrogged Wolfsburg in the standings.

A VW spokesman on Monday declined to discuss the implications of Wolfsburg's potential relegation for the carmaker's future sponsoring policy.

After VfL Wolfsburg won the German Cup in 2015 and reached the quarter-finals of the Champions League, Europe's most prestigious club competition, the following season, their fortunes declined rapidly.

(Source: Reuters)

Zverev downplays French Open chances despite Rome victory



German Alexander Zverev says he cannot rest on his laurels after beating Novak Djokovic to win the Italian Open on Sunday and has set his sights on bigger titles in order to retain his place in the world's top 10.

The 20-year-old stunned world number two Djokovic 6-4 6-3 to become the youngest winner of a Masters 1000 tournament since the Serb himself in Miami in 2007.

The win also helped Zverev surge up to number 10 in the world rankings for the first time in his career.

"I could not imagine top 10 by the age of 20," Zverev told reporters. "It's something truly amazing. Getting there is one thing, but staying there is going to be very, very difficult.

"Even though I won this title, I will be

back on the practice courts very soon trying to improve my game."

Despite an impressive claycourt season, Zverev downplayed his chances of winning the French Open, which starts on Sunday, saying nine-time winner Rafa Nadal would start as the man to beat.

Nadal had won all 17 matches on clay this year before losing to Austria's Dominic Thiem in the Rome quarter-finals.

"The strong favorite is still definitely Nadal. Novak is playing great again. Thiem has been showing he's been playing very well," he added.

"I just won here, so I've got to put myself on that list, even though I don't want to say that I'm the favorite myself. But the guys who have been playing the best over the past few weeks are definitely the favorites."

(Source: Reuters)

Enrique: Barca players do not know identity of new coach



Luis Enrique has rejected claims in the Spanish press that Barcelona's players already know the identity of his replacement.

The 47-year-old announced in March he would leave Camp Nou at the end of the 2016-17 campaign, bringing the curtain down on a tenure that has yielded eight trophies.

It will be nine if the Blaugrana can overcome Alaves in the Copa del Rey final on Saturday, Luis Enrique's final game in charge of the club he played 264 times for as a player.

Ernesto Valverde has been touted as Luis Enrique's replacement after his exploits with Athletic Bilbao, while current Barca assistant Juan Carlos Unzué has also been mentioned.

Barca chairman Josep Maria

Bartomeu hinted the new boss will be appointed on May 29, with El Correo claiming Valverde has already agreed a deal and the players have been informed.

However, Luis Enrique rejected that report and suggested Barca fans should not believe everything they read in the media.

"There has been no communication in that sense," he said after Sunday's 4-2 LaLiga win over Eibar.

"And on top of that I don't think you should trust in the media because the majority of them lie more than they speak."

Barca missed out on a third successive league crown at the weekend as Real Madrid pipped them to the title by three points.

(Source: Soccerway)

IPC issues fresh warning to Russia

Russia has been given a final warning to address doping or face a total ban from the 2018 Winter Paralympics in Pyeongchang.

The country was blocked from the 2016 Rio Paralympics by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) after revelations of systematic doping.

The IPC said on Monday there was a "strong chance" the ban would remain if there was no improvement by September.

The Paralympics begin in South Korea on 8 March, 2018. "Russia has to restore confidence in the wider sporting world," IPC president Sir Philip Craven said.

Craven added that the governing board were "pleased and encouraged" by Russia's co-operation, and that the body would do all it could to ensure Russia's suspension ended when the reinstatement criteria was met.

"Russia is a great sporting nation and the Paralympic

Movement would like to see Russia back competing as soon as it can prove it has met the reinstatement criteria in full," he said.

"Our mindset currently is on doing all we can to have the Russian Paralympic Committee (RPC) at Pyeongchang 2018."

What is the latest?

The IPC taskforce had previously unanimously recommended the suspension, imposed in August 2016, stays in place.

A taskforce report expressed its concern at Russia's lack of action ahead of the 2018 Winter Olympics.

Russia was suspended after World Anti-Doping Agency investigator Richard McLaren detailed widespread drug use, and cover-ups allegedly involving government officials.

However, officials have not "specifically addressed" McLaren's findings, either by accepting them or "properly rebutting" them, according to the report from the IPC taskforce, which has been working with the RPC.

Craven said on Monday that a number of key criteria still

needed to be met.

"At the moment there are a lot of good plans with timelines on paper, but we now need to see plans in action and delivering concrete results," he said.

Has there been any progress?

Taskforce chairman Andy Parkinson, the chief executive of British Rowing, has reported "various positive developments", including Russia trying to set up an effective short-term testing programme.

However, athletics' world governing body, the IAAF, earlier this year voted to extend Russia's suspension from international competition, which saw many track and field athletes miss the Rio Olympic Games.

Parkinson said that until there was an official response specifically addressing the findings made by the McLaren report, the ban should remain in place.

(Source: BBC)

Boys learn fate at FIVB U-19 Volleyball

S P O R T S Iran have been drawn in Pool D of the FIVB Boys Under-19 Volleyball Championship.

The tournament will take place in Bahrain from August 18-27.

The ceremony took place at the Golden Tulip Hotel in Manama on Saturday and the tournament will be held at Isa Sports City in Manama.

International Volleyball Federation official Ramon Suzara conducted the draw in the presence of Bahrain and Arab Volleyball Association president Shaikh Ali bin Mohammed Al Khalifa, Bahrain Volleyball Association vice-president Jihad Khalfan, fivb.org wrote.

Holder Poland will start in Pool B, against France, Brazil, Cuba, Japan and France, while hosts Bahrain were placed in Pool A, with the USA, Puerto Rico, Egypt and Tunisia.

Argentina and Iran, silver and bronze medallists in 2015 have been drawn together in Pool D, along with Mexico, China and the Czech Republic.

Pool C features European heavyweights Italy and Russia, along with Chile, South Korea and Turkey.

Pool A – Bahrain, USA, Puerto Rico, Egypt, Tunisia

Pool B - Poland, Brazil, Cuba, Japan, France

Pool C - Italy, Russia, Chile, South Korea, Turkey

Pool D - Argentina, Iran, Mexico, China, Czech Republic

The matches will be played on two courts at the Isa Sports City with matches starting at 12.30pm (local time, GMT 10.30am) each day.



Volleyball team win title at Baku 2017

S P O R T S The Iranian volleyball team swept past host Azerbaijan in straight sets (25-16, 29-27, 25-18) at the Crystal Hall in Baku to win the title of the 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games on Sunday.

Iran participated in the competition with their U-20 volleyball team.

Captain Rasoul Aghchehli was instrumental for Iran as he hit 22 points and smashed 19 spikes, while Aliasghar Mojarad was a rock in defence as he won four blocks.

Rasoul Ibragimov and Bartlomiej Lipinski scored 11 points apiece for Azerbaijan.

Algeria clinched a shock bronze in the battle for third place with a 3-1 victory against Turkey.



Athletes from 54 Islamic countries around the world are representing their nations over 10 days of competition across 20 different sports which include 23 disciplines (Athletics and Para Athletics, Aquatics – Diving, Aquatics – Swimming, Aquatics – Water Polo, Basketball 3×3, Football, Gymnastics – Artistic, Gymnastics – Rhythmic, Wushu, Table Tennis, Handball, Judo and Blind Judo, Wrestling – Greco, Wrestling – Freestyle, Shooting, Tennis, Volleyball, Boxing, Zurkhaneh, Karate, Taekwondo and Weightlifting) in 16 world-class sporting venues in Baku.

The 4th Islamic Solidarity Games started on May 12 and will finish on May 22 in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan under the motto “Solidarity is our strength.”

Iran advance to AFC U-20 Futsal Championship semi-final



Ali Sanei's Islamic Republic of Iran team sealed a 6-2 victory over Lebanon at the Hua Mark Indoor Stadium on Monday to secure their semi-final place at the AFC U-20 Futsal Championship 2017.

Hussein Albaba gave Lebanon the lead in the fourth minute, prompting an immediate response from Iran through Omid Khani. Further goals from Hamzeh Kadkhoda, captain Toudid Lotfi and a Lebanon own-goal just before the break gave Iran a comfortable 4-1 lead heading into half-time.

Mohammad Taheri eventually added to Iran's tally in the second-half, but Lebanon continued to press hard to try to find a way back into the game and were rewarded when Steve Koukezan received a neat back-heel to slot past the Iran keeper. But the Iranians responded immediately with a headed goal from Lotfi, his second of the game, making it 6-2 with five minutes remaining.

Iran have been scheduled to meet Thailand on Wednesday.

(Source: AFC)

ACL 2017 Round of 16: Persepolis FC v Lekhwiya preview



A close contest is expected when Persepolis take on Lekhwiya in the first leg of the 2017 AFC Champions League Round of 16 at Azadi Stadium on Tuesday as the sides go head to head for the first time since 2015.

Persepolis advanced to the knockout round following a tense Matchday Six in Group D as Mehdi Taremi bagged a hat-trick in a 4-2 victory over Al Wahda to secure the runners-up spot.

There were no such worries for Lekhwiya, though, as the unbeaten

Qatari team strolled through on top of Group B.

The sides last faced off in the group stage in 2015, when Persepolis played out a 3-0 win at home, only for Lekhwiya to gain revenge with the same scoreline in the return fixture.

Influential midfielder Karim Boudiaf returns from suspension for the visitors, but Almoez Ali misses out after he picked up a booking in the 4-1 victory over Al Fateh two weeks ago.

(Source: AFC)

Iran sign off with double gold in Baku



Iran completed the 2017 Islamic Solidarity Games with two gold medals in the table tennis team finals at the Sarhadchi Arena on Monday.

The men's outfit of Alamian brothers Noshad and Nima, as well as Afshin Noroozi, got the better of Turkey 3-1, after the women's trio had claimed a gripping 3-1 victory over hosts Azerbaijan in the first final.

The favourites struck first blood in the men's final in Baku, as Nima Alamian bounced back from dropping the first game to brush aside Ibrahim Gunduz with little trouble.

The singles silver medallist appeared to be caught unawares early on, but reeled off the last three games for the loss of only 13 points in total.

The second match was a far tighter affair, with the first two games between singles champion Noshad Alamian and Ahmet Li going to sudden death but being shared.

Noshad, 25, found life harder against fellow left-hander Li than he had in any other match at the Games, and he fell behind as his Chinese-born opponent edged the third 13-11.

Li, who is ranked 13 places lower than his opponent as the world number 89, completed a 3-1 win to level the tie and gain revenge for his 4-1 defeat to Alamian in the singles last four.

The Turkish pair of Gencay Menge and Gunduz threatened an upset in the doubles, but Noroozi and Nima did enough to scrape through a fifth-game decider.

That left Iran on the brink of victory, only for the pressure to appear to get to Noshad as he produced a poor first game to put himself in trouble against Menge.

The world number 76 rediscovered his excellent form from earlier in the week though and stormed to his second gold medal of the Games, and his country's 39th in all as they finished third in the medals table, with three games on the spin.

Earlier on Monday, Iran had also taken the women's crown by seeing off Azerbaijan.

Singles runner-up Ning Zhing got the hosts off to a perfect start with a straight-games victory over Neda Shahsavari, before singles bronze medallist Wang Miao struggled early on against Mahshid Ashtari to fall behind.

She fought back though in sudden death to take the second game and, roared on by the crowd, moved one ahead.

Ashtari did admirably well to stay in the rubber as she forced a decider, before extending her run of consecutive points to eight to take control.

Wang missed a succession of shots in the fifth to hand it to Ashtari 11-7 as the final went into the doubles all square.

The doubles clash was always likely to prove crucial and the Iranian pair of Shahsavari and Maryam Samet hit back to level after Chen Xingtai and Wang Miao had taken the opener.

Iran powered through the following two games in impressive fashion to move one singles win away from the gold medal.

And their top player Shahsavari thrashed Azeri number three Chen in straight games to secure an impressive victory.

(Source: Baku 2017)

Islamic Solidarity Games: Wushu fighters win six gold medals

Iranian wushu representatives claimed six gold medals at the 4th Islamic Solidarity Games in Baku on Monday.

In the last day of the competition, the Iranian wushu fighters showed their supremacy in the sport.

The Iranian athletes won six gold medals out of seven classes.



Men's 52kg

Gold: Moein Hajizadeh (Iran)

Silver: Sadik Pehlivan (Turkey)

Bronze: Ali Ali Wazea Zaid (Yemen)

Bronze: Zahoor Ahmed (Pakistan)

Men's 56kg

Gold: Mahdi Mohammadi (Iran)

Silver: Elchin Eminov (Azerbaijan)

Bronze: Yusuf Widiyanto (Indonesia)

Bronze: Annageldi Agamyradoc (Turkmenistan)

Men's 60kg

Gold: Erfan Ahangarian (Iran)

Silver: Yassine Hamzaoui (unisis)

Bronze: Ruslan Piraliyev (Azerbaijan)

Bronze: Ali Mohammad Al-Hajj Helal (Yemen)

Men's 65kg

Gold: Foroud Zafari (Iran)

Silver: Bayram Shammadov (Azerbaijan)

Bronze: Ali Ay (Turkey)

Bronze: Obaidullah Obaidullah (Pakistan)

Men's 70kg

Gold: Saeid Fazeli (Iran)

Silver: Vugar Karamov (Azerbaijan)

Bronze: Puja Riyaya (Indonesia)

Bronze: Savas Bekar (Turkey)

Men's 75kg

Gold: Yazdan Mirzaei (Iran)

Silver: Ayman Mohamed (Egypt)

Bronze: Maaz Khan (Pakistan)

Bronze: Parviz Abdullayev (Azerbaijan)

More than 3,000 athletes from 54 countries of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation are competing in 21 sports at the Games.

(Source: Tasnim)

Iran take 10m synchronized platform gold

Iran finished in first place in the 10m synchronized platform of the 4th Islamic Solidarity Games in Baku on Sunday.

The Iranian team consisting of Shahnam Nazarpour and Mojtaba Valipour won the gold medal with 326.04 points.

Azeri pair Artem Danilov and Dmitriy Sorokin took silver with 265.11.

The bronze medal went to Hussein Al-Elayawi and Hussein Al-Maliki of Iraq with 215.64.

More than 3,000 athletes from 54 countries of the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation are competing in 21 sports at the Games.

(Source: Tasnim)

Zurkhaneh claim five gold medals

Iranian athletes won five gold medals in five Zurkhaneh's disciplines at the 4th Islamic Solidarity Games in Baku on Sunday.

Ali Jalijoo took a gold medal in Charkhe Teez discipline. Silver medal went to Iraqi Jaber Abdulameer.

Orkhan Khanlarov from Azerbaijan and Afghanistan's Hassan Sharifi Mushtaq jointly won the bronze medal.

In Charkh Chamani, Ali Jalijoo bagged a gold medal. Orkhan Khanlarov snatched the silver medal and bronze medal went to Mustafa Nooristani from Afghanistan and Tajikistan's Abdulali Nazaali.

In Kabbadeh, Mohsen Golestanizadeh from Iran seized a gold medal. Iraqi Jaber Abdulameer ranked second in the event.

Azerbaijan's Mammadi Salamov and Ismoil Sangov from Tajikistan won the bronze medal.

Iran's Pezhman Sokoonati won the gold medal in Meel Bazi. Khayyam Orujov from Azerbaijan claimed the silver medal and Afghanistan's Ahmad Shakib Atahi and Sardar Ahmad Khan Arbab from Pakistan bagged the bronze medal.

Iran's Mostafa Mofid took Iran's fifth gold medal in Meel Sangin discipline and Iraqi Ridha Algburi took the silver.

Azerbaijan's Khayyam Orujov won the bronze medal. Another bronze was captured by Tajikistan's Navruz Arabov.

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.

(Source: Azer News)

Puran Derakhshandeh shifts to male victims of child abuse in new film

A R T **TEHRAN** — Puran d e s k Derakhshandeh, the director of the acclaimed movie “Hush! Girls Don’t Scream” about the female victims of child abuse has shifted onto the male victims of the heinous crime in her new project titled “Hush! Boys Don’t Cry”.

“After making ‘Hush! Girls Don’t Scream’, I promised to make a film on problems threatening boys,” Derakhshandeh told the Persian service of MNA on Monday and added that she is currently studying the issue to write a screenplay for the film.

“The shooting of the movie will likely begin this summer and I will try to complete it to have its premiere at the Fajr Film Festival in February,” she said.

Derakhshandeh gave no details about the plot of “Hush! Boys Don’t Cry”. Directed in 2014, “Hush! Girls Don’t Scream” was screened at many international events and won several prizes, including the Diamond Award at the International Independent Film Awards in Los Angeles.

The film starring Shahab Hosseini and Tannaz Tabatabai tells the story of a young girl named Shirin who is supposed to get married in a couple of hours, but she unexpectedly



Iranian filmmaker Puran Derakhshandeh in undated photo

murders a man. The cause of the crime is rooted in her nightmarish childhood.

In her previous film “Under the Smoky Roof”, Derakhshandeh, who mostly known for her great attention

on major social problems in Iranian society, warned of the rise of partners who are emotionally unavailable.

Intl. Holy Quran Exhibition to open in Tehran on May 29

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — The d e s k 25th International Holy Quran Exhibition will be held at Tehran’s Imam Khomeini Mosalla from May 29 to June 16.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, Deputy Culture Minister Mohammadreza Heshmati said that similar exhibitions will also be organized in 200 other Iranian cities at the same time.

Screening a documentary on Toshihiko Izutsu (1914–1993), a Japanese philosopher who had many publications on Islam and other religions, is among the highlights of the exhibition, he said.

However, he gave no more details on the documentary.

Copies of the Holy Quran published by various Iranian and international publishers have been selected to be showcased at the exhibition.

The organizers also put collections of Quranic artworks on



This file photo shows a visitor buying copies of Quran at the 23rd International Holy Quran Exhibition at Tehran’s Sacred Defense Garden Museum on July 8, 2015. (Farhangnews/Hadi Hosseini)

display at the exhibit, which is held during the holy month of Ramadan every year.

In addition, groups of artists from Iran and other countries will also attend the exhibition to hold workshops.

Institutions active in Quranic multimedia productions will exhibit their latest works during the event.

Iranian rock star Reza Yazdani touring Canada

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian d e s k rock star Reza Yazdani began a tour of Canada on May 19 with a performance at the Richmond Hill Center for the Performing Arts in Toronto.

He is performing a selection of songs from his latest album “Duel in a Mirror”, the Canada-based company Aria Persys Film Production that is the organizer of the concert tour has announced.

On the second leg of his tour, Yazdani gave a concert at the Church of the Gesu in Montreal on Sunday.

He is also scheduled to perform at the Centennial Theater in Vancouver on May 28.

The tour is being organized in



collaboration with the Vancouver Iranian Film Society.

Drummer Mohammad Khorraminejad, guitarists Arash Zamanian, Milad Adl and Maziar Ahmadpur, and saxophonists Shahruz Bardudeh and Alireza Mehdizadeh are accompanying Yazdani during the tour.

Meet the Meyerowitzs: Hoffman, Stiller and Sandler seek highbrow laughs

CANNES, FRANCE (Reuters) — Ben Stiller once again plays Dustin Hoffman’s son, this time alongside Adam Sandler in an intellectual comedy that Hoffman hopes audiences will find funny rather than just “interesting”.

“The Meyerowitz Stories”, which screened at Cannes on Sunday, is written and directed by Noah Baumbach, whose dialogue-heavy New York movies are often compared to mid-career Woody Allen. This is no “Meet the Fockers”.

About the fractured relations between Hoffman’s four-times married almost-famous sculptor and his offspring, “Meyerowitz” is a long way from the knockabout comedies that Sandler and Stiller are best known for.

“I just think it’s cool to hear ‘Happy Gilmore’ mentioned at Cannes,” Stiller said after the lowbrow 1996 golfing comedy in which he co-starred with Sandler was mentioned at the festival news conference.

Hoffman, who soared to fame in “The Graduate” in 1967, said he resented people telling him they grew up with his movies, and although reluctant to play the ageing Meyerowitz, was delighted to be directed by Baumbach.



70th Cannes Film Festival - Photocall for the film ‘The Meyerowitz Stories’ (New and Selected) in competition - Cannes, France. 21/05/2017. Cast members Adam Sandler (R), Ben Stiller (L) and Dustin Hoffman pose.

“We would work for him for nothing,” he said, to which Emma Thompson, who plays his wife, retorted: “We did work for him for nothing!”

When a journalist prefaced her question by

Golestan Palace Museum to showcase rare carpets, manuscripts, photos

A R T **TEHRAN** — Tehran’s d e s k Golestan Palace Museum will be hosting exhibitions of precious carpets, manuscripts and photos opening today.

“17 hand-woven Persian carpets dating back to the Qajar and Pahlavi eras, selected from the palace collection, will go on display in the exhibit,” director of the palace Masud Nosrati said in a press release published on Sunday.

“The silk and wool carpets have originally been woven in the cities of Arak, Tabriz and Sanandaj but the carpet weavers are not known,” he said, adding that the palace is home to over 350 precious and rare carpets, which are scheduled to be displayed gradually.

The pictorial book “Exhibition of Golestan Palace Carpets” will also be unveiled in two languages, Persian and English, at the opening ceremony.

Nosrati also said that nine rare manuscript books inscribed by

the Safavid and Qajar masters of calligraphy like Mir Emad Hassani (1554-1615) will be put on display. The books are decorated with beautiful paintings by the masters.

In addition, a collection of 30 photos all taken by the Qajar king Nasser al-Din Shah (1821-1900) about 131 years ago will be exhibited, Nosrati said.

“The first selfie taken by Nasser al-Din Shah will also be displayed in the exhibit,” he concluded.

The advent of photographic art occurred in Iran about five years after its invention in 1839 during the last years of Qajar king Mohammad Shah’s reign.

Afterwards, Nasser ad-Din Shah, Mohammad Shah’s successor, showed great interest in photography and sent several groups of talented students from Dar-ul-Fonun, the Iranian polytechnic institute established in 1851, to European academies to learn the art.



commemorate late Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami by screening his 1990 masterwork “Close-Up”.

“Close to Kiarostami”, a joint production of Iran and Germany by Mahmud Behraznia, will also go on screen as part of the commemoration program.

Tehran center to organize screenwriting workshops by Asghar Farhadi

A R T **TEHRAN** — The d e s k Oscar-winning filmmaker Asghar Farhadi will hold a series of screenwriting workshops in June at Bamdad House, an educational center in Tehran.

The workshops, which are scheduled to begin on June 11, will be held in seven sessions under the auspices of filmmaker Parisa Bakhtavar who is Farhadi’s wife.

The students will receive lessons online via Skype.

Farhadi won two Oscar awards for his “A Separation” in 2012 and “The Salesman” in 2017.



Iranian filmmaker Asghar Farhadi

NEWS IN BRIEF



“Survival” to go on screen at Spain’s Rural FilmFest

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Masud d e s k Hatami’s “Survival” will compete in the short film section of the 5th Rural FilmFest, which will be held in Ciudad Real, Spain from August 1 to 5.

Produced by the Iranian Youth Cinema Society, the film is about the concepts of empathy and human dignity.

The film has been awarded in several Iranian and international events including Brno 16 in the Czech Republic and Stockholm Experimental and Animation Film Festival.



German scholars to hold workshops on Iranian folk music

A R T **TEHRAN** — German scholars Lisa d e s k Gaupp and Lutz Dollereder from Leuphana University of Lueneburg will be attending a workshop on Iranian folk music in July.

The two-day workshop has been organized by the Iran Music Association in collaboration with the Center for World Music of the University of Hildesheim in Germany and will be opening on July 3 in Tehran.

Interested applicants are asked to register at the association before June 5.

Drake wins record 13 Billboard Music awards

LAS VEGAS(Reuters) — Rapper Drake grabbed a record 13 wins at the 2017 Billboard Music Awards on Sunday, eclipsing Adele’s previous record of 12 awards in 2012.

“I want to say, hold tight Adele, because when a new thing drops you’ll be back to get the record back,” the Canadian recording artist said in accepting one of his awards at the star-studded event held in Las Vegas.

Drake, who also won top artist, top male artist and top rap album for “Views”, later posed for photographers surrounded by his microphone-shaped trophies.

The three-hour show -- hosted by hip-hop artist Ludacris and former High School Musical star Vanessa Hudgens -- included performances by Miley Cyrus, the Chainsmokers, Nicki Minaj and Imagine Dragons.

Beyonce and Twenty One Pilots each took five awards, although they were absent from the ceremony. The Chainsmokers earned four, including top collaboration and top hot 100 song for “Closer” with Halsey.

Blake Shelton took home the award for top country artist, and top country song went to Florida Georgia Line.

Justin Timberlake’s “Can’t Stop the Feeling” won top selling song and top radio song.

The Icon Award for achievement in music went to Cher, 71, who gave a heartfelt speech after performing two of her biggest hits -- “Believe” and “If I Could Turn Back Time”.