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South Pars deal finalized before summer: Total CEO



South Pars gas field's phase 22 platform in the Persian Gulf

No alternative for JCPOA: former senator

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Bennett Johnston, a former Democratic senator and current chairman of the American Iranian council, is of the opinion that there is not "alternative" for the nuclear deal - officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - either for the U.S. and Iran.

"Indeed, there is no satisfactory alternative to it either for the United States or for Iran," Johnston tells the Tehran Times.

Following is the text of the interview:

■ What is your assessment of Trump's foreign policy?

A: Critics of President Trump say that he has no foreign policy (or domestic policy for that matter), that it

is all made up off-handily from day to day. The best face for his foreign policy is that it resides in the hands of Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and CIA Director Mike Pompeo (the "Big Four").

■ In his campaign speeches Trump said he would annul the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the Iran nuclear agreement). However, later he talked about a revision of the deal. Basically, what is his alternative for the JCPOA?

A: The Big Four seem to be committed to the JCPOA and, indeed, there is no satisfactory alternative to it either for the United States or for Iran. However they, **→13**

Rouhani calls for efforts to counter Islamophobia in Ramadan

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani of Iran said on Saturday that Islamic countries should counter "Islamophobia" and "anti-Islamic" thoughts in the fasting month of Ramadan.

In separate messages to heads of state of Islamic countries on the start of the holy month of Ramadan, Rouhani said religious figures and leaders

of Islamic countries have the responsibility to promote the Islamic sublime goals in this holy month.

"Create a world without violence and extremism through portraying Islam's moderate image and pinning hope on merciful God," he said.

Rouhani expressed hope that Muslims would make efforts in line with establishing peace and security and reducing crises in the world of Islam. **→2**

Iran not source of jihadist terror, senior analyst says

POLITICS Fareed Zakaria, a political analyst, has said that it is wildly inaccurate to describe Iran as the source of jihadist terror.

"Almost every terrorist attack in the West has had some connection to Saudi Arabia. Virtually none has been linked to Iran," he wrote in an article published by Washington Post on Thursday.

He wrote, "According to an analysis of the

Global Terrorism Database by Leif Wenar of King's College London, more than 94 percent of deaths caused by Islamic terrorism since 2001 were perpetrated by the Islamic State, al-Qaeda and other Sunni jihadists. Iran is fighting those groups, not fueling them."

He also said that U.S. President Donald Trump has adopted the Saudi line on terrorism, which deflects any blame from the kingdom and redirects it toward Iran.

"The Saudis showered Trump's inexperienced negotiators with attention, arms deals and donations to a World Bank fund that Ivanka Trump is championing," he said.

Trump was visited Saudi Arabia on May 20-21 during which he claimed that Iran is a key sponsor of militant groups. On May 20, he signed a huge arms deal with the Saudis with a value of 110 billion dollars.

Egypt launches strikes in Libya after Minya attack

Egyptian air force planes on Friday carried out six strikes directed at camps near Derna in Libya, where armed men responsible for a deadly attack on Christians are believed to have trained, according to military sources.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group on Saturday claimed responsibility for the attack, saying in an online statement that it had been carried out by one of its affiliates.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi announced on Friday that he had directed strikes against what he called "terrorist camps", declaring in a televised address that states that sponsored terrorism would be punished.

"Egypt will never hesitate to strike terror camps anywhere ... if it plans attacking Egypt whether inside or outside the country," Sisi said.

The Egyptian government said at least 29 Coptic Christians were killed and dozens more wounded by armed men who attacked them while they were travelling to a monastery in Egypt's Minya province.

ISIL put the number at 32.

The Christians were headed to the Saint Samuel Monastery, located outside Minya city, about 220km south of the capital Cairo, when the masked attackers, who came in three pickup trucks, opened fire of them before fleeing the scene.

Egyptian security and medical officials told the Associated Press news agency that many of the dead were children.

Al Jazeera's Mahmoud Abdelwahed, reporting from the Libyan capital Tripoli, said residents of Derna "are very angry" about the air strikes.

"Sources on the ground say the six locations targeted by Egyptian warplanes are civilian areas and populated districts inside the city," he said. "They say that only civilian properties like houses, farms and vehicles have been damaged."

In the last two years, Egyptian air force

has carried out several strikes on Derna, notably in February 2015 and March 2016, which killed women and children.

Egypt's Christian minority, which makes up about 10 percent of the country's population, has repeatedly been targeted by armed groups.

In April, at least 45 people were killed and more than 100 wounded in two separate suicide bomb attacks on churches in the cities of Tanta and Alexandria during Palm Sunday ceremonies.

The attacks were claimed by the ISIL terrorist group.

Following the Palm Sunday bombings, Sisi declared a nationwide three-month state of emergency.

A bombing at Cairo's largest Coptic cathedral killed at least 25 people and wounded 49 in December 2016, including many women and children.

(Source: agencies)

ARTICLE
By Yuram Abdullah Weiler
Analyst and journalist

Theater of the absurd: Trump's speech before the Riyadh Summit

"Iran—fresh from real elections—attacked by @POTUS in that bastion of democracy & moderation. Foreign Policy or simply milking KSA of \$480B?" —Iran's Foreign Minister Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif

Expecting tolerance and moderation from Riyadh falls in the same category as expecting peace and disarmament from the Pentagon. Nevertheless, the Riyadh Forum, under the auspices of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC), "will explore the nature of terrorism and the future of extremism." And judging by the \$110 billion weapons deal struck between the U.S. and the Saudis, the future of extremism looks bright, or dim depending on one's perspective.

For a taste of the theater of the absurd, we need only look at Trump's speech (in *italics* below) before the assemblage of 50+ leaders in Riyadh, many of whom could best be characterized as tin pot dictators enjoying U.S. and Saudi backing. Iran, of course, was not invited to the so-called Arab Islamic American Summit, whose goal was "to address ways of building more robust and effective security partnerships to counter and prevent the growing threat of terrorism and violent extremism around the globe through promoting tolerance and moderation."

As keynote speaker, Trump, with the gushing approval of the Saudi potentates, seized the opportunity to vilify the Islamic Republic and spread Iranophobia before a captive audience:

But no discussion of stamping out this threat would be complete without mentioning the government that gives terrorists all three—safe harbor, financial backing, and the social standing needed for recruitment. It is a regime that is responsible for so much instability in the region. I am speaking of course of Iran. **→13**

ARTICLE
Haniyeh Sadat Jafariyeh
Tehran Times Journalist

Re-elected Rouhani's economic challenges, priorities

After his landslide victory in Iran's presidential election held on May 19, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani swept to his second term.

Winning about 57 percent of the votes, his position is now stronger, while expectations of his administration are much higher. People seriously want the president to keep his promises, in particular, those about improving the national economy's status quo and the living standards. In better words, common people expect to feel the improvement of economy in their daily life not only in figures and graphs provided by officials and state-run organizations, but in reality, as well.

During the presidential campaigns, Rouhani was seriously censured by his rivals mainly about the augmented rate of unemployment during his first tenure and the low standards of life among low-income earners.

■ Top priority: job creation

Therefore, creating jobs to curb the unemployment rate which is now above 12 percent, reducing Gini coefficient- a statistical measure of income and wealth distribution in a society-, and improving the living standards stand among Rouhani's top priorities, in the beginning of his four-year road.

On May 22, in his first televised news conference after re-election, Rouhani pointed out that creating 950,000 jobs per annum has been planned over the next five years and the target can be reached in case of attracting 7,700 trillion rials (about \$200 billion) of investments, of which \$65 billion should be secured by foreign investors. The path to reach the set target is not smooth, though.

The administration should lay the groundwork for the Iranian private sector to create jobs, since what the country currently needs is not growing the size of the government. Privatization, on the way to make the government smaller and swifter, is a must. **→4**



Intl. off-road competition held in Qazvin

The second edition of the international off-road competition was held in Qazvin, located in 150 km northwest of Tehran, Capital of Iran.

The two-day competition was held in Mollasadra track in Qazvin on Thursday and Friday with participation of the teams, namely Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia as well as 12 Iranian teams.

Off-roading is the activity of driving or riding a vehicle on unsurfaced roads or tracks, made of materials such as sand, gravel, riverbeds, mud, snow, rocks, and other natural terrain.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Guardian Council to confirm presidential poll results May 30

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Guardian Council, **d e s k** which is constitutionally charged with overseeing elections in Iran, will provide final confirmation of the results of the May 19 presidential election on Tuesday, its spokesman said on Saturday.

"We are making efforts to announce the Guardian Council's opinion about the presidential election on Tuesday," Abbasali Kadkhodaei was quoted as saying.

Although incumbent President Hassan Rouhani won a landslide victory in the elections, his arch rival Ebrahim Raisi has written to the overseeing body, calling for a probe into what he called "irregularities" on election date.



Baghdad not getting involved in Trump's anti-Iran policies: Iraqi FM

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Commenting on U.S. **d e s k** President Donald Trump's anti-Iran propaganda campaign in the Middle East, Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari said Baghdad will not get involved in the anti-Tehran policies adopted by the new U.S. administration.

In an interview with the Spanish newspaper ABC published on Saturday, al-Jaafari stressed that Iraq will not follow any country's policies against another.

Al-Jaafari said many commonalities including geography, history, social affairs and common interests have linked Iraq and Iran.



Majlis to elect new presiding board on Wednesday

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Majlis is set to hold a **d e s k** session on Wednesday to elect a new presiding board, according to the incumbent presiding board's spokesman.

Speaking to ICANA on Saturday, Behrooz Nemati said this will come as a postponement of a previous arrangement for Sunday.

The internal law says a new round of election for the presiding board should be held exactly one year after a previous one, he said, adding that makes Wednesday the day to hold the polling.



'Hope faction adamant in keeping two members at Majlis presiding board'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The leader of the reform **d e s k** parliamentary group Hope has said the faction has a red line for the upcoming Majlis presiding board election.

The red line is to keep Masoud Pezeshkian and Ali Motahari as members of the board, Mohammad Reza Aref told ILNA on Saturday.

However, he also said that Hope's policy is to help various groups engage in a national dialogue.

He said the Hope faction has formed a committee tasked with negotiating the polling with rivals.



Government believes in cyberspace: spokesman

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The cabinet spokesman **d e s k** has said the government strongly believes in cyberspace as a freedom-friendly tool.

"During the elections, we faced shortcomings on the side of some media. So we naturally had to use cyberspace to make up," Mohammad Baqer Nobakht told IRNA on Saturday.

He also underlined that at the same time as the government tried to help free flow of information, the peacefulness in which the elections were held was exemplary.



Russia to produce helicopters in Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Helicopters of Russia **d e s k** Holding and the Iran Helicopter Support and Renewal Company (PANHA) have signed a memorandum of understanding setting the stage for the production of light helicopters in Iran.

The document was signed on Friday on the sidelines of the international exhibition 2017 HeliRussia, Russian Production website reported.

It is assumed that the production of Russian helicopters in Iran will fully meet the needs of Iran for helicopters of a light class.

Foreign Ministry to streamline structure for economic goals

By Ali Kushki

TEHRAN — Encouraged by gains from an international nuclear accord with six world powers, Iran's Foreign Ministry will revamp its current structure to ensure it can engage more actively in economic activities with the international community.

The move appears to be a more serious bid by Tehran to facilitate an economic rebound at the wake of the nuclear deal which removed sanctions against Tehran in exchange for limits on its nuclear program.

"Two economic desks in the Foreign Ministry and one in each overseas embassy will be set up," Tasnim news agency quoted Aboulfazl Hassanbeigi, deputy chairman of the parliamentary national security and foreign policy committee, as saying on Sunday.

"In line with this, expert staff will be hired, as well."

The lawmaker gave no details on when the measures would take place.

Structural changes in ministries can be initiated in the form of a bill either by the government or parliament.

Iran had already tasked its embassies abroad with an economic role, even before the nuclear deal in 2015.

"From the second half of 2014 up to now, 90 percent of our embassies' activities in target countries have an economic focus," Deputy Foreign Minister



In order to demonstrate a more serious economic engagement with the world after the nuclear deal, Tehran plans to revamp its foreign ministry structure so that embassies turn into economic hubs.

Morteza Sarmadi was quoted as saying in an economic seminar in April.

"Through soothing security concerns, the Foreign Ministry has the responsibility to lay the groundwork for international business people to invest in Iran," the top diplomat stated.

"Economic diplomacy", as it's called inside Iran, has been a running theme of speeches and meetings by Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

"We are interested in expanding our relations with the EU... and we are open to economic relations even with the U.S.,"

Rouhani calls for efforts to counter Islamophobia in Ramadan

I → Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani also sent congratulation messages to his counterparts in Muslim countries.

"Parliamentary consultations are important steps to help realize peace in the world of Islam based on long lasting security, stability and prosperity of Islamic coun-

tries," he noted.

The senior parliamentarian also said Islamic countries should adopt an "integrated strategy" to fight extremism and terrorism, suggesting that the Iranian parliament welcomes any "constructive interaction and dialogue" in this respect.

First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri also congratulated his counterparts in the Islamic countries on the start of Ramadan in separate messages.

He expressed hope that violence and terrorism would be eradicated by strengthening brotherly relations among Muslims.

Shamkhani says terrorists promoting Washington policy



POLITICS Iran's Supreme **d e s k** National Security Council Secretary Ali Shamkhani said on Thursday that "terrorists" sent by Riyadh to Syria and Iraq play into U.S. hands and are instruments that serve to promote Washington's policy.

"Iran has been fighting against terrorism for already 40 years... The U.S. citizens got to know what terrorism is after September 11, 2001. However, Trump made his first visit to the country which generates terrorists like a factory... Terrorists in Syria and Iraq are instruments that serve to promote Washington's policy," Sputnik quoted him as saying in an interview with Russia's Kommersant newspaper.

Shamkhani noted that public dissatisfaction with the hereditary transmission of power and Wahhabi

ideology, among other issues, encouraged radicalization of young people in Saudi Arabia.

Elsewhere, he said that Iran will not agree on the participation of U.S. forces in guarding de-escalation zones in Syria.

Syrian authorities do not want to see the "Americans supporting terrorism and destabilizing Syria", he added.

The security official said Iran is ready to consider a deployment of military troops for guarding the perimeter of the de-escalation zones.

Iran, Turkey and Russia signed on May 4 a document on creating de-escalation zones in Syria.

The document was signed at the end of the fourth round of the Syria peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Rouhani, Putin discuss nuclear deal, regional issues



POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Irani-**d e s k** an President Hassan Rouhani and his Russia counterpart Vladimir Putin held a phone conversation on Saturday discussing regional co-operation and the implementation of the international nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Rouhani said, "Iran is determined more than ever to expand cooperation with Russia and we will witness much more close cooperation between the two countries."

Expansion of economic ties between the two countries during recent years indicates that Iran and Russia are determined to expand relations, Rouhani noted.

Rouhani also said that Iran is committed to its obligations in the nuclear deal as long as the other side abides by the agreement.

Elsewhere, he attached great importance to Tehran-Moscow cooperation in fighting terrorism.

For his part, Putin said Iran and Russia are helping Syria in its war against militants upon the Syrian government's request and this is within the framework of international law.

The two countries will continue making efforts to boost peace and stability in the Middle East region, Putin added.

He also said that Russia highly values expansion of ties with Iran.

Elsewhere, the Russian president said that nuclear cooperation between the two countries is essential.

Russia has strengthened its cooperation with Iran in nuclear industry since the conclusion of the JCPOA. Russia plans to build two more nuclear facility at the site of the Bushehr nuclear power plant.

British PM urges Tehran, Moscow to help achieve peace in Syria

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — British Prime Minister **d e s k** Theresa May has said that the leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) states want Russia and Iran to exert influence over the Damascus leadership to reach a peace in Syria.

"We agreed that it would be impossible to defeat terrorism without a political settlement that brings a stable transition away from President Assad," Sputnik quoted May as saying at a press conference held in the follow-up to the G7 meeting.

"We welcomed the progress towards de-escalation but [made] it clear that the regime's backers Russia and Iran must use their influence to deliver a ceasefire and move to a genuine political process," she added.

Earlier this month, Russia, Iran and Turkey signed



a memorandum on the establishment of four safe zones in Syria. The agreement was signed at the end of the fourth round of the Syrian peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan.

The three countries brokered Astana talks on Syria and the first three rounds of the talks were held on January 23-24, February 15-16 and March 14-15.

Syria has been the scene of foreign-backed insurgency for six years, with government forces fighting numerous extremist groups such as Daesh.

On Friday, Al Arabiya quoted Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov as saying that experts from the three countries will draw the boundaries of the de-escalation zones in Syria.

According to Bogdanov, barriers would be built to prevent armed infiltration and the task forces would then be responsible for ensuring security on the ground.

He added that there would also be demarcations of borders to stop the escalation.

Trump son-in-law had undisclosed contacts with Russian envoy

The United States President Donald Trump's son-in-law and close adviser, Jared Kushner, had at least three previously undisclosed contacts with the Russian ambassador to the United States during and after the 2016 presidential campaign, seven current and former U.S. officials told Reuters.

Those contacts included two phone calls between April and November last year, two of the sources said. By early this year, Kushner had become a focus of the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) investigation into whether there was any collusion between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin, said two other sources - one current and one former law enforcement official.

Kushner initially had come to the attention of FBI investigators last year as they began scrutinizing former national security adviser Michael Flynn's connections with Russian officials, the two sources said.

While the FBI is investigating Kushner's contacts with Russia, he is not currently a target of that investigation, the current law enforcement official said.

The new information about the two calls as well as other details uncovered by Reuters shed light on when and why Kushner first attracted FBI attention and show that his contacts with Russian envoy Sergei Kislyak were more extensive than the White House has acknowledged.

NBC News reported on Thursday that Kushner was under scrutiny by the FBI, in the first sign that the investigation, which began last July, has reached the president's inner circle.

The FBI declined to comment, while the Russian embassy said it was policy not to comment on individual diplomatic contacts. The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

Kushner's attorney, Jamie Gorelick, said Kushner did not remember any calls with Kislyak between April and November.

In March, the White House said that Kushner and Flynn had met Kislyak at Trump Tower in December to establish "a line of communication." Kislyak also attended a Trump campaign speech in Washington in April 2016 that Kushner attended. The White House did not acknowledge any other contacts between



Kushner and Russian officials.

■ Back channel

Before the election, Kislyak's undisclosed discussions with Kushner and Flynn focused on fighting terrorism and improving U.S.-Russian economic relations, six of the sources said. Former President Barack Obama imposed sanctions on Russia after it seized Crimea and started supporting separatists in eastern Ukraine in 2014.

After the Nov. 8 election, Kushner and Flynn also discussed with Kislyak the idea of creating a back channel between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin that could have bypassed diplomats and intelligence agencies, two of the sources said. Reuters was unable to determine how those discussions were conducted or exactly when they took place.

Reuters was first to report last week that a proposal for a back channel was discussed between Flynn and Kislyak as Trump prepared to take office. The Wash-

ington Post was first to report on Friday that Kushner participated in that conversation.

Separately, there were at least 18 undisclosed calls and emails between Trump associates and Kremlin-linked people in the seven months before the Nov. 8 presidential election, including six calls with Kislyak, sources told Reuters earlier this month. Two people familiar with those 18 contacts said Flynn and Kushner were among the Trump associates who spoke to the ambassador by telephone. Reuters previously reported only Flynn's involvement in those discussions.

Six of the sources said there were multiple contacts between Kushner and Kislyak but declined to give details beyond the two phone calls between April and November and the post-election conversation about setting up a back channel. It is also not clear whether Kushner engaged with Kislyak on his own or with other Trump aides.

■ How Kushner came under scrutiny

FBI scrutiny of Kushner began when intelligence reports of Flynn's contacts with Russians included mentions of U.S. citizens, whose names were redacted because of U.S. privacy laws. This prompted investigators to ask U.S. intelligence agencies to reveal the names of the Americans, the current U.S. law enforcement official said.

Kushner's was one of the names that was revealed, the official said, prompting a closer look at the president's son-in-law's dealings with Kislyak and other Russians.

FBI investigators are examining whether Russians suggested to Kushner or other Trump aides that relaxing economic sanctions would allow Russian banks to offer financing to people with ties to Trump, said the current U.S. law enforcement official. (Source: Reuters)

'52 dead' in militia clashes in Libya capital

Forces loyal to Libya's unity government said on Saturday that 52 of its fighters were killed as they repelled rival militias in fierce clashes in the capital Tripoli.

Apart from sporadic gunfire in southern Tripoli, calm returned to the city on Saturday, the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Among the 52 killed in Friday's clashes which centered on the southern district of Abu Slim, said Hashem Bichr, a security official of the Government of National Accord (GNA), were 17 members of pro-GNA forces who had been "executed".

There was no immediate confirmation from medical or other independent sources of the death toll, updated from Friday's health ministry figures of 28 dead and more than 100 wounded that did not give a breakdown of the casualties.

The United Nations special envoy Martin Kobler con-

demned the fighting in which heavy artillery and tanks were used, urging restraint from all sides.

Forces of the UN-backed GNA announced on their Facebook page they had defeated rival militias and taken control of a prison holding key leaders of the ousted regime of Muammar Gaddafi including his last premier, Baghdadi al-Mahmudi, and former intelligence chief Abdullah Senuusi.

Al-Hadhba jail had been under the control of the Fajr Libya militia coalition, which had seized Tripoli in 2014 and set up a government headed by Khalifa Ghweil.

The Libyan capital has been gripped by a power struggle ever since a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization)-backed uprising toppled longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011.

The latest fighting started around a complex of luxury villas that until March served as headquarters of militias

loyal to Ghweil, who was ousted when the GNA took office last year but refuses to recognize the new administration.

Loyalist forces seized the villas in four days of intense fighting in March that saw them expand their control over the capital.

Tripoli had been relatively calm since, but dozens of armed groups still operate and several parts of Tripoli remain beyond its control.

Relying on militia support and pitted against a rival administration in eastern Libya, the GNA has struggled to assert its authority.

In a statement on Friday, the GNA blamed Ghweil and Salah Badi, another leader of Fajr Libya, for Friday's violence.

"This is their gift to the people for the month of Ramadan," it said in a statement. (Source: AFP)

British police arrest two more in hunt for suicide bomber's network

British police said they had arrested two men on Saturday as they stepped up their efforts to capture a suspected network behind the suicide bomber who killed 22 people in Manchester earlier this week.

Officers used a controlled explosion to gain entry to the address in the north of the city where the latest arrests were made. Detectives are now questioning 11 men over the attack by Salman Abedi at a pop concert in Manchester on Monday.

Some hours later, police cordoned off a large area in the Moss Side area of south Manchester and houses were evacuated with a bomb disposal unit sent to the scene.

A man working in a local shop, who declined to be named, told Reuters he saw three men being taken away from the address.

"As part of an ongoing search at a property in Moss Side an evacuation is currently being carried in the area," police said in a statement.

While Britain's most senior counter-terrorism officer said police were confident that they had made "immense" progress and had apprehended a "large part of the network", extra armed officers will be on duty across the country with security stepped up at some 1,300 events over the long holiday weekend.

Britain remains on its highest threat level of critical, meaning an attack is ex-



pected imminently, with the army backing up police and hospitals across the country have told staff to be ready for another incident.

The Times newspaper reported on Saturday that intelligence officers had identified 23,000 extremists living in Britain.

Earlier this week a source with knowledge of the matter told Reuters the security services were managing 500 active

operations involving some 3,000 people who were thought to pose a threat.

However, Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley, Britain's police chief for counter-terrorism, advised people to be vigilant but to "go out as you planned and enjoy yourselves".

There are a number of high-profile events over the weekend including soccer cup finals in London and Glasgow, and the Great Manchester Run.

While police and politicians have praised communities in Manchester for their reaction to the bombing, Greater Manchester Police Chief Constable said there had been a rise in reported hate crimes, from an average of 28 to 56 incidents on Wednesday.

"We can't directly link these to the events of Monday night and are continuing to monitor the situation," he said.

Political campaigning for the June 8 national election which was suspended after the Manchester attack resumed on Friday with the bombing becoming a central feature.

The opposition Labor Party, emboldened by a rise in opinion polls, argued that Britain's foreign policy had increased the risk of attacks and criticized Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May for cutting spending on policing.

May said Labor leader Jeremy Corbyn was saying Britain was to blame for the bombing.

"I want to make one thing very clear to Jeremy Corbyn and to you, and it is that there can never, ever be an excuse for terrorism," she said at a summit of Group of Seven leaders in Sicily.

A poll on Thursday put May's Conservatives five points ahead of Labor suggesting a far tighter race than previously anticipated.

(Source: Reuters)

Iraq begins operation to liberate last ISIL-held Mosul region

Iraqi forces have launched an offensive to retake the last enclave controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in the northern city of Mosul as the Takfiri terrorist group is getting final blows in the country.

The Iraqi military announced the beginning of the operation in a statement released on Saturday one day after the air force dropped leaflets urging residents in Mosul's Old City center to flee through safe corridors.

The targeted Mosul enclave covers mainly the Old City center and three adjacent districts alongside the western bank of the Tigris River.

On Friday, Stephen O'Brien, United Nations under-secretary-general for humanitarian affairs, estimated that as many as 200,000 Iraqis may flee Mosul in the coming days.

Reports say almost 760,000 people have already escaped the embattled Iraqi city over the past months.

Civilians trapped in Mosul suffer from a dire lack of food, water and fuel while they have limited access to hospitals.

Mosul fell to ISIL in 2014, when the terror outfit began its campaign of death and destruction in Iraq.

Since October 2016, the Iraqi army soldiers and allied volunteer fighters have been leading a major operation to recapture Mosul.

Iraqi forces took control of eastern Mosul in January and launched the battle in the west in February.

The operation has taken longer than planned as Takfiri elements are dug in among civilians and are fighting back with car bombs, booby traps, mortar fire and snipers.

The full liberation of Mosul would likely spell the end for the Iraqi half of ISIL's so-called caliphate.

(Source: Press TV)

Former U.S. national security adviser Brzezinski dies at 89

Zbigniew Brzezinski, the hawkish strategic theorist and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, has died at the age of 89.



Brzezinski's death, at a hospital in Northern Virginia, was announced on Friday night by his daughter, Mika, on social media. He was born in Warsaw, Poland, on March 28, 1928.

"My father passed away peacefully tonight," NBC journalist Mika Brzezinski said on Instagram.

"He was known to his friends as Zbig, to his grandchildren as Chief and to his wife as the enduring love of her life," she wrote.

"I just knew him as the most inspiring, loving and devoted father any girl could ever have," she added.

Brzezinski, like Henry A. Kissinger, was a foreign-born intellectual with extensive influence in global affairs, even long after they left the White House. (Source: USA Today)

Russia airstrikes kill 120 ISIL terrorists fleeing Raqqa: source

Russian airstrikes have killed as many as 120 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists who were trying to flee the Takfiri outfit's last stronghold of Raqqa in northern Syria for the ancient city of Palmyra (Tadmor) in the central part of the Arab country, a Russian Defense Ministry source says.

On Saturday, Russia's Sputnik news agency cited a source with the country's Defense Ministry as saying that the development had taken place two days earlier.

"As a result of these strikes, 32 pick-up trucks were destroyed and some 120 terrorists were killed," the source said.

ISIL seized Raqqa in 2014, the same year when it started its campaign of terror in Syria. It then proceeded to capture large swathes of Syrian territory.

Russia has been lending aerial support to the Syrian counterterrorism operations since last September. The combined push is also being reinforced by Lebanese resistance fighters and Iranian military advisors.

The terrorists' turf has now dwindled to just Raqqa.

The Russian source said the Russian military had received reports that the terrorists had entered a deal with the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which has been fighting the Damascus government since 2011. In line with the agreement, the SDF would allow the ISIL terrorists leave the city, in spite of the concerted international endeavor aimed at limiting their presence to the city.

"Upon receiving this information, the command of the Russian contingent in Syria has taken measures to prevent the exodus of Daesh (ISIL) terrorists in the southern direction," the source said. "Any attempts by Daesh militants to move toward Palmyra and to build up their forces there will be squashed."

(Source: Press TV)

NEWS IN BRIEF



Tehran, Yerevan confer on boosting agro ties

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — In a meeting between Iranian Agriculture Minister Mahmoud Hojjati and Armenian Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan in Yerevan, the two sides discussed expansion of increasing partnership in trading agricultural products, Tasnim news agency reported on Saturday.

Referring to the signed agricultural MOU between the two countries, the Armenian prime minister suggested that a joint workforce should be formed on the way to improve mutual trade.

He also suggested that Iran can take advantage of Armenia's membership in Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) to export its products to Europe.

Re-elected Rouhani's economic challenges, priorities

1 → By empowering the private sector, encouraging it for investing in production projects, and improving business environment, the administration can give a boost to job creation.

In addition to setting safety cushions for the private sector, the Rouhani administration should focus on attracting foreign investment.

Meanwhile, domestic and foreign investments should be utilized in manufacturing units, which will lead in creating jobs, decreasing the inflation rate, and improving the living standards.

It is worth noting that the administration can also guide the ever-increasing liquidity volume into production procedures, which will help create jobs, too. Based on the latest statistics, the liquidity volume stood at 11.96 quadrillion rials (about \$317.7 billion) during the 12-month period ended on January 19, 2017, showing 26 percent rise compared to the same period of time in the previous year.

Iranian people said a big no to promises made by Rouhani's rivals about increasing the amount of cash subsidies by re-electing him as the president. As a matter of fact, Iranians announced that they are fans of creating jobs which means making investments and that increased cash subsidies will not uproot poverty especially when paying subsidies puts budget constraints on the government. Rouhani's administration can now distribute cash hand-outs among low-income earners of the society and redirect the financial resources to production units.

Among other must-to-dos, it can be referred to curbing the liquidity rise and guiding it into production procedures, fighting administrative and economic corruption, modifying the taxation system and improving its infrastructure via establishing a comprehensive database, clearing debts to the banking sector on the way to increase banking financial resources and accordingly their ability to provide loans to domestic producers.

■ Govt. loyal to promises

"I will definitely do my best to make my promises," President Rouhani underscored in the same televised news conference.

As a matter of fact, the Rouhani administration commenced economic amendments immediately after winning the elections. On May 20, First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri assigned the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs with implementing 14 prioritized programs by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018). Most of these projects were ratified and initiated during the first tenure of Rouhani, but needed to be completed. Implementing the value added tax law, developing a comprehensive taxation plan, enhancing the country's competitiveness rank, empowering the domestic insurance industry, and creating an intelligent system to fight money laundering are some of the projects.

Airbus Helicopters starts construction of assembly line in China

Airbus Helicopters (AIR.PA), the world's largest supplier of commercial helicopters, has started building an assembly line in China in what Europe's largest aerospace group said was a key step in its plans to tap into the Chinese market.

The company's final assembly line will be located in Qingdao, eastern China, with construction expected to be completed by 2018.



An Airbus framework agreement signed in 2016 called for 100 H135 helicopters to be assembled over the next 10 years, and the first aircraft roll-out from Qingdao is planned for mid-2019.

China is opening up its low-level airspace to civilian aircraft, which could see increasing numbers of helicopters being ordered, with the H135 already used in China for medical services and police surveillance.

Guillaume Faury, chief executive of Airbus Helicopters, said in a statement that the start of construction demonstrated the company's "commitment to further enhancing our industrial co-operation with China's rapidly growing aviation industry".

Airbus Helicopters is a division of planemaker and aerospace group Airbus, whose main rival is Boeing. (Source: Reuters)

South Pars deal finalized before summer: Total CEO

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — French oil major Total plans to conclude the Iran South Pars gas deal before summer, its chief executive Patrick Pouyanne told journalists on the sidelines of the company's annual general meeting.

Pouyanne said the signing of U.S. sanctions waivers, among other hurdles, cleared the path for the deal to be signed, Reuters reported.

Total said earlier in February that a final decision on the deal hinged on the new U.S. administration renewing the waivers.

The French giant signed a deal with National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) for the phase 11 of developing South Pars gas field (Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf), becoming the first western energy company to sign a major deal with Tehran since the lifting of international sanctions in January 2016.

The phase 11 project will progress in two stages, the first costing an estimated \$2 billion, Total said. The produced gas will be fed into Iran's gas network.

The French company has already played a key role in Iran's energy industry, including the development of phases 2 and 3 of South Pars in the 2000s, before pulling out of the country after international sanctions were imposed in 2010.



Iran plans for 25% increase in non-oil exports

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammadreza Nematzadeh announced that the country plans to increase its annual non-oil exports by 25 percent by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018), IRNA reported on Saturday.

While putting emphasis on the significance of training in the field of exports, the minister said that besides submitting sta-

tistics on their output, the production units should also pay special attention to submitting their exports statistics.

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

Iran's value of exports during the Iranian calendar year of 1395 (ended on March 20) was reported to be \$43.93 billion while the figure for imports stood at \$43.684; the val-

ue of exports was \$246 million higher than that of imports.

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

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



Venezuela is staying on top of its debts, even with its people going hungry

Venezuela has been ravaged by severe food shortages, tremendous protests and a sky-high inflation rate, but it's avoided one problem: the country refuses to default on its debt.

The country's ability to keep making payments on its debt may be "in doubt," but its willingness is "strong," said Diego Moya-Ocampos, a senior analyst at IHS Markit. "The government is cutting imports of food and basic goods at the expense of social unrest to pay its debt."

The country's 20-year government bond pays 20.23 percent to lenders, according to Investing.com.

■ Why keep paying?

There are several reasons Venezuela hasn't defaulted. First, it would hurt a government that is already in trouble.

"A default would be a blow to the regime," said Jason Marczak, Latin American Economic Growth Initiative director, Atlantic Council. "A default could lead to Venezuela being closed out of international

markets."

President Nicolas Maduro's regime has been shaken by nationwide protests and dissent among a handful of high-profile officials. Video of the Venezuelan National Guard running over protesters with armored vehicles went viral earlier this month. Attorney General Luisa Ortega condemned the state's violence against protesters.

"Words can barely articulate the situation in Venezuela," Marczak said. "This is a country that has become deeply divided, deeply polarized."

■ The one industry that matters

Defaulting on its debts also would present more problems for Venezuela's biggest industry.

The country's economy is almost completely at the mercy of the oil industry — its economic and social tailspin notwithstanding, Venezuela holds the largest proven oil reserves on earth. As of last year, they stood at the equivalent of 300 billion bar-

rels — approximately 33 billion more than Saudi Arabia — according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

But its oil production has cratered to its lowest levels in about 20 years since a crash in prices that started in late 2014.

Oil minister Nelson Martinez said Thursday that Venezuela is seeking alternatives to pay key lenders, namely China and Russia.

"We are looking forward to solving the issue of the debt," Martinez said at a meeting OPEC, of which Venezuela is a member. "We are looking at all options, some financial support through bonds, and so on."

Venezuela has struck oil-for-loans deals with China and Russia, and those countries together have lent Venezuela at least \$50 billion in exchange for promised oil and fuel deliveries.

But Petroleos de Venezuela, the state-run oil company better known as PDVSA, could default on its debt either this fall — when it's scheduled to pay more than \$3

billion in debt — or "in the coming years," said Reggie Thompson, Latin America analyst at Stratfor.

"It's risky for PDVSA because, even though they made a similar payment earlier this year, their cash flow problems keep worsening by the day," Thompson said. "They also have other headwinds, like mechanical failures."

Thompson added that Venezuela's unwillingness to default also stems from a desire to preserve its own assets.

"They'd have to deal with lengthy lawsuits against bondholders that could end with [the government] having some assets seized."

Lastly, Venezuela won't default on its debt because "many high-ranking government officials and their associates are bondholders," said Moya-Ocampos of IHS, who noted it's "not too common" for high-ranking officials to own their country's debt.

(Source: cnbc)

UK economy slows more than expected as inflation hits spending

The UK economy slowed even more sharply than first thought in the opening months of this year as rising prices in the wake of the Brexit vote took their toll on consumer spending.

The Office for National Statistics said GDP grew just 0.2% in the first quarter of 2017, a marked change of pace from the 0.7% growth in the final three months of 2016. Statisticians had previously estimated the economy grew 0.3% in the first quarter.

There was no growth at all in the first quarter in GDP per head, which adjusts for the size of the population and is generally seen as a better guide to prosperity than mere GDP.

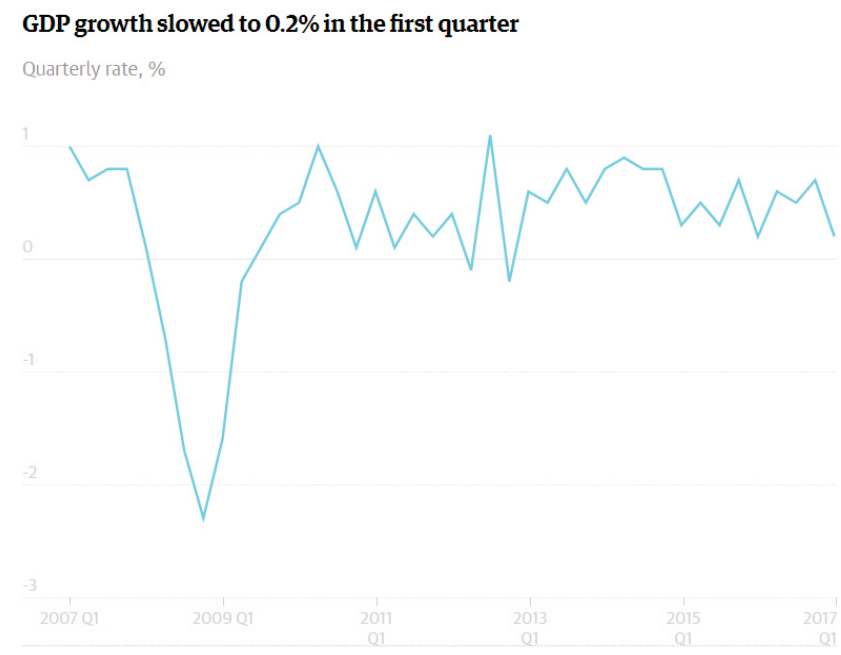
The figures provide the latest evidence that the early resilience to the EU referendum result last June is now wearing off as higher inflation puts consumers under pressure. Prices have been picking up pace since the Brexit vote because it sent the pound sharply lower and has raised the cost of imports to the UK. That higher inflation has hit household budgets and dented the key driver of UK growth, consumer spending.

The ONS highlighted that pattern in its updated estimate of GDP growth on Thursday.

"UK GDP growth slowed to 0.2% in quarter one of 2017 as consumer-facing industries such as retail and accommodation fell and household spending slowed. This was partly due to rising prices," it said in the data release.

"Construction and manufacturing also showed little growth, while business services and finance continued to grow strongly."

Alan Clarke, an economist at Scotiabank in London, noted that first-quarter growth



was below what the Bank of England and most City economists had been expecting.

"The outcome was in line with our forecast, but below the consensus expectation for 0.3% quarter-on-quarter and the BoE — in the fullness of time — expects the growth rate to be 0.4%," he said.

"So this is disappointing and like driving down the motorway at 20mph instead of 70mph."

The Bank said earlier this month that it expected GDP growth would edge up marginally to 1.9% for 2017 as a whole from growth of 1.8% in 2016. But it warned that living standards would fall this year because inflation would be higher than pay growth.

Kallum Pickering, economist at the bank Berenberg was among those commentators predicting growth would pick up again after the first-quarter lull.

"Should we be concerned? No, the dip is probably temporary," he said.

"With both soft and hard data improving in the second quarter, the quarterly growth rate is likely to rebound to 0.4%."

Ian Stewart, chief economist at the consultancy Deloitte was also optimistic the economy could continue expanding despite the pressure on household incomes.

"High inflation is hitting consumers, but a weak pound and a recovering global economy are helping businesses. UK

growth is likely to tilt away from the consumer towards exports, manufacturing and investment this year. This should keep the UK economy growing at a similar rate to last year," he said.

Ruth Gregory at Capital Economics said that given the discrepancy between the weak first quarter GDP data and upbeat surveys, there was "a good chance that the figure is revised back up in time". She also noted quarterly 0.6% rise in business investment, "suggesting that Brexit uncertainty has not significantly weighed on firms' spending plans".

Gregory added: "We have not altered our view that the economy will remain fundamentally resilient in the coming quarters."

Separate figures on housebuilding provided some reassurance on the outlook. The Department for Communities and Local Government said 43,170 new houses were started in England between January and March, up 3% on the previous quarter and up 21% on a year earlier. The number of completed houses rose to 39,520, about 9% higher than the previous quarter and 21% higher than a year ago.

Andy Frankish at The Mortgage Advice Bureau said: "The latest figures do indicate a marginal increase and we can see the signs of recovery starting in 2013, demonstrating the impact of the introduction of help to buy, which could suggest an element of cautious optimism that the industry has perhaps 'turned the corner' following the trough of 2009."

"But if we are to reach the 200,000-plus new-build homes needed each year in England, there is still more momentum required."

(Source: The Guardian)

OPEC needs to do more to restrain shale oil: Goldman Sachs

Goldman Sachs analysts have warned that OPEC's job is not over with the announcement of an extension to its November agreement. Now the group needs to convince markets that even with the cut, U.S. shale output growth can maintain the global glut, with a view to curbing capital inflows into shale production.

"OPEC needs to create a credible threat that the oil market may return into surplus to finally slow the capital inflows into shale. This could be achieved by both expressing the goal of growing future production, and gradually ramping up production to grow market share but keep stocks stable and backwardation in place."

It's difficult to say how the latter part of this advice can be accomplished, especially with global inventories still above the five-year average, which OPEC has set as a goal. What's more, Asian refiners are saying, according to Bloomberg, that OPEC members are already seeing their regional market share diminish as a result of the initial cuts. The decline will most likely continue, and any sign of a ramp-up in production in any non-exempt OPEC member will sound an alarm, further pressuring prices.

Crude oil prices fell by around 5 percent after OPEC announced the cut on Thursday at its Vienna meeting, as traders and investors were disappointed as hopes were dashed that OPEC would cut production more deeply, instead of just for longer.

Also, Libya and Nigeria remained exempted from the cut, with both countries having made public their plans to further boost their oil output into seven-figure territory before the end of the year. Non-OPEC producers besides



the U.S., such as Canada and Brazil, are also expanding their output.

In this context, OPEC's task, as suggested by Goldman, to push prices up, keep stockpiles within reasonable limits, and maintain market share looks very much like OPEC try-

ing to both have their cake and eat it, too. Perhaps Texas Railroad Commissioner Ryan Sitton was correct when he said on Thursday that "The days of OPEC using oil supplies and prices as a political weapon are gone." (Source: oilprice.com)

In Aramco IPO pitch, Canada plays up its natural resources expertise

By Alastair Sharp

The Toronto Stock Exchange's efforts to win a slice of the massive Saudi Aramco public listing plays up the country's deep experience in natural resources as part of a broader offer to help the kingdom with its shift away from oil dependence.

In pitch documents obtained by Reuters, the TSX talks up "a customized regulatory environment for resource issuers", its leading position in oil and gas equity capital raising, and strong trading interest from outside the country.

The Canadian pitch is also broader than just for a slice of the Aramco IPO. On several trips to the kingdom, the most recent in late March, TMX executives have been joined by senior executives from some of the country's biggest banks, brokerages and other financial players as Canada Inc seeks a role in delivering the kingdom's broader Vision 2030 plan.

One source directly involved in the Canadian pitch told Reuters they are focused on convincing the Saudis that Canada excels in 10 of the 12 areas they have targeted for development under that plan, including in mining and infrastructure. The source declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter.

"We feel that we have put TMX and Canada's best foot forward and we continue to promote our strengths in pursuit

of business opportunities in the region and around the world," TMX said in a statement.

But its best chance of winning a part of the biggest IPO ever, expected to raise about \$100 billion as early as next year, may lie in its geography and geopolitics, securities lawyers say.

While the exchange, owned by the TMX Group Ltd, is widely considered an underdog in a race that has also excited larger exchanges in London, New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Singapore its case could be bolstered by a recent change in U.S. law that allows those affected by the September 11, 2001 attacks to sue the Saudi government, they said.

"We are inoffensive from a political perspective," said Sarah Gingrich, a Calgary-based partner at Fasken Martineau, who has previously worked in Dubai with Saudi clients for international law firm Freshfields.

That law, the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, came into effect in September, after the U.S. Congress overrode a veto by former President Barack Obama.

A group of insurers has since renewed a \$6-billion lawsuit against the kingdom, seeking to hold it responsible for business and property damage as a result of the attacks, in which Saudi has long denied involvement.

In a March 17 interview with the Wall

Street Journal, the Saudi energy minister, Khalid al-Falih, said the so-called "terror law" is one consideration in the country's decision on whether to list in the United States.

Falih, who is Aramco's chairman, declined to comment on the IPO process when reached by Reuters.

It was not clear if the issue was discussed during U.S. President Donald Trump's recent visit.

A spokeswoman for the NYSE, which sources have said planned to visit Saudi soon after Trump's visit, declined to comment on their efforts to win Aramco's business.

Nasdaq, which is a technology partner to Saudi Arabia's exchange, is also pitching for the listing, while the London Stock Exchange is working on a completely new type of listing structure to woo Aramco, Reuters has reported.

■ Small market, big energy focus

Canada-listed oil and gas companies raised 22 percent of global energy financing over the past five years, the TMX pitch documents show, second behind the NYSE's 44 percent.

The documents put Canada in third place behind Chinese and Hong Kong exchanges, and the United States for total capital raised in 2016, noting that TSX-listed companies raised 28 percent more than fourth-placed LSE.

They say more than 40 percent of TSX trading originates outside the country and that bid-ask spreads, a key measure of liquidity, are among the lowest in the world.

Still, while Canada boasts significant expertise in oil and gas financing and strong interest from both institutional and retail investors, it is dwarfed by the much larger U.S. market.

The oil and gas companies listed on its main TSX exchange and the junior TSXV have a total market capitalization of C\$325 billion (\$239 billion), TMX says.

By comparison, the New York Stock Exchange says its oil and gas companies - which include super majors ExxonMobil Corp, Chevron and secondary listings for Royal Dutch Shell and Total - are worth \$3.3 trillion.

Neither the source in the TMX delegation nor the external lawyers said listing and regulatory requirements would prove much of an obstacle to a Canadian listing, especially if it were to be a third or fourth option.

But Canada would only find a way in to the action "if their (Aramco's) bankers think they will get sufficient enough market interest here that it will help promote the stock price and give them some liquidity and trading," said Darrell Peterson, a partner with Bennett Jones in Calgary.

(Source: Reuters)

Canada publishes rules to reduce oil, gas sector methane emissions, air pollution

Canada has introduced new rules aimed at reducing methane emissions and cut air pollution from its significant oil and gas industry, a move hailed with mixed reaction from the industry itself.

Minister of Environment and Climate Change Catherine McKenna introduced the new regulation on Thursday, saying Canada is moving to "catch up" on the action already taken by states such as California, Colorado, and North Dakota. These regulations are part of the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change to reduce methane emissions by 40% to 45% by 2025.

Canada's oil and gas sector is the country's largest emitter of climate-warming methane gas and a source of air pollutants known as volatile organic compounds, some of which are toxic to human health and are contributors to smog.

Methane is the main part of natural gas that is used to heat homes and power factories. The proposed regulations will help Canada's oil and gas industry to conserve valuable natural gas that is now wasted and certain facilities, such as refineries, to reduce their volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas responsible for about 25% of the human-caused global warming we feel today, and it packs 84 times the warming power of carbon dioxide over a 20-year period.

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) on Friday stated that while it welcomes the proposed commitment to reduce further methane and VOC emissions in the oil and natural gas sector, it disagrees with the federal government's assessment Canada needs to "catch up" with environmental policies in the U.S.

The CAPP asserted that Canada is a leader in reducing methane emissions in the energy industry and that the oil and natural gas sector strives to improve its performance as technology and innovation evolve by continuously working with regulators, government and stakeholders.

(Source: miningweekly.com)

U.S. adds oil, gas rigs as OPEC extends deal

The number of active oil and gas rigs in the United States rose for the nineteenth straight week, Baker Hughes reported on Friday by 7, signaling that the U.S. shale patch is, for OPEC, an unstoppable force.

The number of oil rigs in operation increased by 2, and gas rigs increased by 5. Combined, the total oil and gas rig count in the U.S. now stands at 908 rigs, or 504 above the count a year ago. This is on top of drilled but uncompleted wells in the U.S., which are also on the rise, swelling from 5,534 in March 2017 to 5,721 in April 2017, according to the EIA.

Oil prices took a hit this week on OPEC's announcement that they would extend the cut through March 2018—a commitment that under normal circumstances would have had a positive effect on oil prices, but the news came woefully short of lofty market expectations that would have had OPEC cut production deeper, not just longer.

At 12:25pm EST on Friday, WTI was trading up 1% for the day at \$49.39. While up for the day, it was merely recovering losses from post-OPEC announcement. Last week pre-rig count, WTI was trading at \$50.44.

Brent Crude was trading up 0.7% at that time at \$51.82, down from last week's pre-rig count price of \$53.66.

This year has shown that OPEC's influence isn't what it used to be, with U.S. shale breathing down its neck at every turn.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Renewables grew at record pace in 2016

Global markets have steadily been adding renewables such as wind and solar to their energy mix for several years now, but according to a handful of new reports, 2016 might have been the tipping point.

Not only did the world add a record level of renewable energy capacity last year, but it did so at a significantly lower cost compared to 2015.

In the U.S., wind and solar both had a knockout year, the latter of which ranked number one in terms of new capacity growth, ahead of fossil fuels.

Investors who might have overlooked this growing industry probably can't afford to do so any longer. After several years of hype and false starts, renewable energy is finally starting to hit its stride.

According to the Financial Times, it's normally taken between 50 and 60 years for the world to transition from one dominant fuel source to another—think the shift from wood to coal in the 1800s. The transition



we're seeing now is different in that it's happening at a much more accelerated rate than in the past. Many experts speculate whether the 21st century will be the last one to see widespread use of coal, gas and other nonrenewables.

It's important to recognize where sentiment is headed. As costs fall and battery technology improves, more and more governments and corporations will demand that renewables make up a larger share of their energy mix. (Source: valuewalk.com)

Mexico gives green light to Russia's Rosneft, Lukoil to bid on oil contracts

MEXICO CITY (Sputnik) — Subsidiaries of Russia's Rosneft and Lukoil energy majors have been allowed to bid on contracts to develop shallow-water oil fields in the Gulf of Mexico, the nation's hydrocarbons authority said.

Sputnik obtained a statement by Mexico's National Hydrocarbons Commission (CNH) that said LLC RN-Shelf South and LUKOIL International Upstream Holding had been cleared for the first tender in the second round of bidding.

"In the second phase, companies will offer their prices that will be announced [on June 19]," a source in the know told Sputnik.

Mexico is tendering 15 oil exploration blocks in the oil-rich areas of Tampico-Misantla, Veracruz and Cuenca del Sureste that have probable reserves of almost 1.6 billion barrels. Twenty-six companies will bid on the contracts, 20 of them individually and the rest as consortia, including Chevron, ENI, Pemex, Repsol, Shell, and Total.

IN THE NAME OF GOD



K S C

INVITATION TO INTERNATIONAL TENDER

No. : 369832

KHOUZESTAN STEEL COMPANY INTENDS TO PURCHASE 2,000 MT CALCINED PETROLEUM COKE

INTERESTED BIDDERS MAY OBTAIN SET OF DOCUMENTS, CONTAINING THE RELEVANT TERMS AND CONDITIONS BY SUBMISSION OF A WRITTEN APPLICATION AND PAYMENT OF A NON-REFUNDABLE FEE OF EUR 50 ("FIFTY EURO") TO THE ACCOUNT NO. 0100013543943 OR RIALS 2,000,000, ("TWO MILLION RIALS") TO THE ACCOUNT NO. 0100014511008 AT "EXPORT DEVELOPMENT BANK OF IRAN, GENERAL BRANCH" AND PRESENT THE PAYMENT RECEIPT TO THE FOLLOWING ADDRESS:

RAW MATERIAL & ENERGY PURCHASING DEPARTMENT
ROOM NO. 201 OF HEAD OFFICE
KHOUZESTAN STEEL COMPANY (KSC)
KM 10, AHVAZ – BANDAR IMAM KHOMEINI ROAD
P.O. BOX: 1378 POST CODE: 61397 – 31398 AHVAZ – IRAN

NOTE 1: ALL BIDS MUST BE DELIVERED TO THE AFORESAID ADDRESS ON OR BEFORE THE CLOSING DATE 14th JUNE 2017. THE OPENING DATE OF ENVELOPES WILL BE AT 11 AM ON THE 14th JUNE 2017 IN THE BUYER'S CONFERENCE ROOM, LOCATED AT THE HEAD OFFICE OF KSC AHVAZ – IRAN AND THE BIDDERS OR THEIR AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVES CAN ATTEND THE MEETING OF THE TENDER.

NOTE 2: THE OFFERED PRICE SHOULD BE VALID UP TO 30 DAYS AFTER THE OPENING DATE FOR OUR FIRM PURCHASE ORDER SENDING AND UP TO 60 DAYS AFTER THE OPENING DATE FOR ISSUING L/C.

NOTE 3: DELIVERY TIME MUST BE "AUGUST 2017".

Note 4: FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT WITH FOLLOWING DETAILS:

Tel No. : +98 61 32908114 Fax No. : +98 61 32908115

EMAIL : FNOORI@KSC.IR/H.MOHAMMADNEJAD@KSC.IR OR VISIT: <http://WWW.KSC.IR>

Zbigniew Brzezinski, U.S. national security adviser, 1928-2017

If the template for the job of White House national security adviser had been written in the 1970s, two men, Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, would have served as the models. Both were born in central Europe, had distinguished academic credentials, impeccable political connections and wrote extensively about the state of the world. And both were able to practice what they preached in print as the right hand men of the occupant of the Oval office. Brzezinski, who has died at the age of 89, was far from his predecessor's doppelganger, but his record in office can stand fair comparison.



■ **An influential player**
On his watch, under President Jimmy Carter, the U.S. normalized relations with China, severing ties with Taiwan in the process, signed the Salt Two arms treaty with the Soviet Union, brought Egypt and Israel together in the Camp David accords and concluded the Panama Canal treaty, ceding control to Panama. In each decision he was an influential player. On the downside, the U.S. was caught flatfooted by the Khomeini revolution in Iran, allowing the deposed Shah refuge in the U.S., which eventually led to the Iran hostage crisis, a factor in Mr Carter's election defeat in 1980. Brzezinski was also instrumental in arming the Afghan mujahideen after the Soviet invasion of 1979, a policy that came back to haunt the U.S. two decades later (to prove his point, flamboyantly, he was photographed in the Khyber Pass pointing a rifle across the border). From their White House vantage point, both men had notoriously poor relations with the state department, respectively headed by William Rogers and Cyrus Vance, whom they viewed as staid and unimaginative.

Vance eventually resigned in protest over the abortive hostage rescue mission in 1980, an operation Brzezinski actively supported. But both Kissinger and Brzezinski were known for their world views and doctrines, seeing the globe as a global chess board around which the U.S. and USSR moved pieces. No national security adviser since them has had the temerity to venture so far, preferring roles as the facilitators of policies rather than as their intellectual authors. Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzezinski, born in Warsaw on March 28, 1928, was much influenced by his upbringing. His family was Polish nobility and his father, Tadeusz, a diplomat posted to Berlin, Moscow and finally Canada. From the first two of those postings the son had indelible first-hand experiences of the rise of Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin's notorious purges. Canada provided him refuge from the invasion of Poland in 1939 and the world war that first engulfed Europe. He was brought up in Montreal, educated at McGill University and subsequently moved through the finest American universities, including Harvard and Columbia, before his final association as a professor at Johns Hopkins. He became an American citizen in 1958.

Just as Kissinger had hitched his star to Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York before gravitating to Richard Nixon, Brzezinski's first important political connection was the Lyndon Johnson campaign in 1964. He then advised Hubert Humphrey four years later, but he struck pay dirt with the initially improbable presidential bid of Carter, then a relatively obscure former southern governor from Georgia. The candidate's intelligence and ambitions, allied to his inexperience in foreign policy, were the sort of clay which Brzezinski thought he could mold into a coherent global view. That, predictably, brought him into conflict with Vance, a diplomat of much distinction but one more inclined to find accommodations with Moscow than provoke it. The two worked well together on the Salt Two Treaty but too often the national security adviser's impulsiveness rubbed the secretary of state up the wrong way. So did his habit of maintaining separate relations with the likes of Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador in Washington, independent of the state department.

In another departure, hardly surprising given his own background and his president's natural inclinations, Brzezinski placed human rights far higher up the policy agenda than had previously been the case. That constituted a significant departure from standard U.S. policy, which tended to tolerate, as in General Pinochet's Chile, human rights abuses in return for fealty to the U.S. After leaving office, he became, not unlike Kissinger, a prolific commentator and author on foreign policy, but without ever quite achieving his predecessor's level of access. He broke with the Democratic Party and endorsed President George H W Bush in 1988 and was critical of Bill Clinton's long reluctance to intervene in the Balkans in the 1990s. But he was a fierce critic of the younger President Bush's war in Iraq and fulsome in his praise of Barack Obama, even though he was never admitted into his policy circle.

An engaging conversationalist and avid tennis player, he is survived by his wife, the sculptor Emilie Benes, two sons and a daughter, Mika, the TV news host, who announced his death on Friday.

(Source: FT)

Trump brings his solo act to Europe

The president has seemed less at ease among his fellow world leaders in group settings than he is in one-on-one encounters

By Tara Palmeri & David Herszenhorn

Days before President Donald Trump embarked on his first foreign trip, national security adviser H.R. McMaster said the administration's message to allies would be: "America first" does not mean "America alone."

But over the course of the nine-day trip, which wraps up Saturday with a stop at a U.S. naval base in Italy, Trump has seemed happiest when the focus is on him — like the red carpet rollout for his arrival in Riyadh, followed by a sword-dancing display in his honor.

In Europe, where he's attended group meetings with other world leaders — first in Brussels at the European Union and NATO and now at the G-7 summit in Sicily — Trump has appeared less at ease.

While he avoided any major gaffes or serious diplomatic breaches, Trump's lack of rapport with European leaders raises serious questions about his ability to effectively team up with critical U.S. allies.

"Like when there's a new strange kid in the class nobody likes," said a senior EU official who was briefed on the closed NATO meetings in Brussels. "You behave civilly when teachers [media] watch but don't spend time with him in private because he's so different."

■ **Trump's discomfort**
Trump's discomfort has been particularly obvious in comparison to European leaders, who move easily in a pack. At NATO or at the European Council, they routinely attend dinners with 30 leaders around the table. They have posed for countless "family photographs." Attending joint news conferences and sharing the spotlight are old habits.

By contrast, Trump at one point was caught on camera apparently pushing past the prime minister of Montenegro during the NATO gathering to be at the front for the group photograph.

Trump has been at his best in one-on-one sessions, like his bilateral meeting on the sidelines of the G-7 with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who spent a weekend at Trump's Mara-Lago resort in Florida and spoke glowingly in Sicily about his "close partnership and collaboration, and friendship" with the new president.

Another senior EU official said Trump did fine in a smaller meeting with the bloc's top leaders, Council President Donald Tusk and Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. "He was very pleasant, he was very easygoing," this official said.



Trump's lack of rapport with European leaders raises serious questions about his ability to effectively team up with critical U.S. allies.

"He was welcoming everybody, greeting everybody. 'Thank you all guys, you did a great job.' Very sort of American."

Trump's chief economic adviser, Gary Cohn, said Friday that Trump had made a concerted effort to engage with his fellow leaders at the G-7.

"He offered the opportunity to open up the conversation, he yielded to all of the leaders in the room, wanting to hear their opinions on trade," Cohn told reporters. "He literally let all of the leaders go around the room at least once, some of them spoke multiple times before he talked about his views on trade."

But even some of the individual meetings had their awkward moments, like when Trump, standing with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, volunteered that he hadn't specified Israel as the source of secret intelligence he was reported to have shared with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during a recent Oval Office visit.

In his meeting with newly elected

French President Emmanuel Macron, Trump effusively praised him for his victory over far-right contender Marine Le Pen. The American president went so far as to say that he'd been rooting for Macron, according to French reports — though Trump said days before the first round of the French election that he thought Le Pen was the "strongest" candidate on border issues and terrorism.

■ **Leg of the trip**
The Middle East leg of the trip may have been easier for Trump because many of the nuts and bolts were nailed down in advance. Before he stepped off the plane, Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, had sealed a \$110 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia that was formally announced on the trip.

On the Europe leg, allies wanted answers from Trump on questions like whether the U.S. would stay committed to the Paris accord on climate change. They also were unable to come up with a deliverable, say on increasing NATO's

counterterrorism efforts, that Trump could celebrate as clearly as the Saudi arms deal.

While Trump dodged a commitment on the Paris agreement before the G-7 and complained about Germany's advantage on trade, he charged into the NATO conference with a clear message: pay up. He accused the Europeans of being "unfair" to U.S. taxpayers, opting to make a pitch to his base in the U.S. over building new friendships with allies.

Efforts by some of the Europeans to smooth over the divide seemed to fall flat, such as when European Council President Tusk, tried to joke that the U.S. was lucky not to have two presidents like the EU.

Instead of laughing, Trump replied: "I know." On his way out, Tusk, a former prime minister of Poland who is still working to perfect his English, tried some idiomatic English on Trump, saying, "See you on the road in Taormina." He might just as well have said "Do widzenia."

(Source: Politico)

Manchester attack will affect UK's general election

The timing of the attack follows a well-known pattern among modern terrorist groups

By Shelina Zahra Janmohamed

On Tuesday morning, the front pages of Britain's newspapers carried one striking image: the aftermath of an attack in Manchester.

The city is one of the UK's largest and most diverse. The image was of a young woman, injured in the bombing, surrounded by the emergency services, with a backdrop of neon night-time colors. She was a survivor. But at least 22 others were killed, and more than 50 injured. At least 12 of those dead were children under the age of 16, including one eight year old.

The country spent the day in shock. Parents recounted their own memories as children of the excitement of attending a concert. This one was by Ariana Grande, a popular star among young girls. For many in the audience the day would have started out as one of the most exciting of their lives. Its ending was something out of a horror movie.

The attack fell in the middle of the current election campaign cycle in the UK, as the country gears up for a general election on June 8.

■ **Sensitive political time**

The motive is not yet clear, but the effect of this horror at such a sensitive political time follows a well-known pattern among modern terrorist groups: terrorize, mobilize and polarize. By creating a visceral fear the aim is to inject hatred into spaces of pluralism and diversity.

We saw it in the stream of atrocities in France during their election cycle. It gave Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far right party the Front National, a platform for her hatred. In today's world, it was the immigrants and Muslims who were demonized for an attack that was timed to create hate. In the same breath she denied the Holocaust. Even with history she created hate.

In the UK, there were plenty who were ready to feast on the bodies of children killed in the Manchester attack.

Katie Hopkins, a controversial news columnist who has previously likened refugees fleeing war zones to "cockroaches" said what was needed was a "final solution". This is a stomach churning phrase used by the Nazis to refer to the Holocaust and the objective to annihilate the Jewish populations of Germany.

Another journalist for a leading newspaper, The Daily Telegraph, Allison Pearson said that what was needed



The attack fell in the middle of the current election campaign cycle in the UK, as the country gears up for a general election on June 8.

was the internment of thousands of terror suspects.

This did not work during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, and again echoes the horrors of genocide.

And Piers Morgan, a disgraced newspaper editor turned TV presenter, explained that attacks wouldn't happen if Muslims stepped up and dealt with extremists. He was trotting out the old race tropes, as though all Muslims know each other, as though there is collective guilt, as though Muslims are separate and other.

The ugly genie of hatred had been let out of the bottle and granted the hatemongers the fodder to fuel their hatred.

Last year, in mid-June, British MP Jo Cox was murdered in the street. The murderer was called a terrorist by the judge. He shouted white supremacist slogans and had been brought to a frenzy by the imminent public vote on Britain leaving the EU.

The campaign rhetoric had focused heavily on

immigration, with references to a "swarm" made by then Prime Minister David Cameron, and a poster showing Syrian refugees and the caption explaining Britain was at "breaking point".

The timing of such events and their intersection with the cycle of elections and democracy entrenches a view that draconian measures, security, surveillance and increased state powers are the answer to public demand. It is proposed that a strong state is required and its citizens in these moments of flux are facilitated into giving away their rights.

They do it of course because they believe it will only affect others and not themselves. They do it, because when the timing of terror coincides with periods of change, then fear turns into hatred. They do it because they have learnt nothing from history, and that this is how horrors start.

(Source: The National)

Two conferences spotlight Muslim world's struggle to counter militancy

By James M. Dorsey

Two conferences this week spotlight the Muslim world's struggle to come to grips with extremism and militancy. The conferences, the Arab-Islamic-American summit in Riyadh and a gathering in East Java of youth leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the world's largest Muslim movement, laid bare the difficulty of reforming cultures in the battle against extremism, called into question the commitment of Muslim states to combat radicalism and political violence, and put on display US President Donald J. Trump's prioritization of commerce at the expense of principle.

Saudi Arabia used US President Donald J. Trump's visit to the kingdom to drive its anti-Shia and anti-Iran agenda. Mr. Trump and Muslim leaders turned a blind eye to Saudi Arabia's role barely two weeks before Mr. Trump's arrival in blocking his administration's proposal to impose United Nations sanctions on the Saudi branch of the Islamic State (ISIL).

Many world leaders, including many of Muslim nations, condemn Iranian policies, but view the Islamic State as the world's foremost terrorist threat. Supporters of ISIL celebrated Monday's attack on an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester in which at least 22 people were killed and 59 others wounded. Claiming responsibility for the attack, ISIL described the concert as a Crusader gathering.

Saudi Arabia blocked the sanctions to ensure that the world's focus would remain on Iran, which it sees as the world's leading state sponsor of political violence. Sanctioning of the Persian Gulf branch of the Islamic State moreover risked drawing attention to the fact that the kingdom sees militant Islamists as useful tools in its proxy wars with Iran in Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

In Yemen, Saudi Arabia's intervention has given ISIL rival Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) a new lease on life. Prior to the war, AQAP had been driven to near irrelevance by the rise of ISIL and security crackdowns.

In a report in February, the International Crisis Group (ICG) concluded that AQAP was "stronger than it has ever been... In prosecuting the war, the Saudi-led coalition has relegated confronting AQAP and ISIL to a second-tier priority... Saudi-led coalition statements that fighting the group is a top priority and announcements of military victories against AQAP in the south are belied by events," the ICG said.

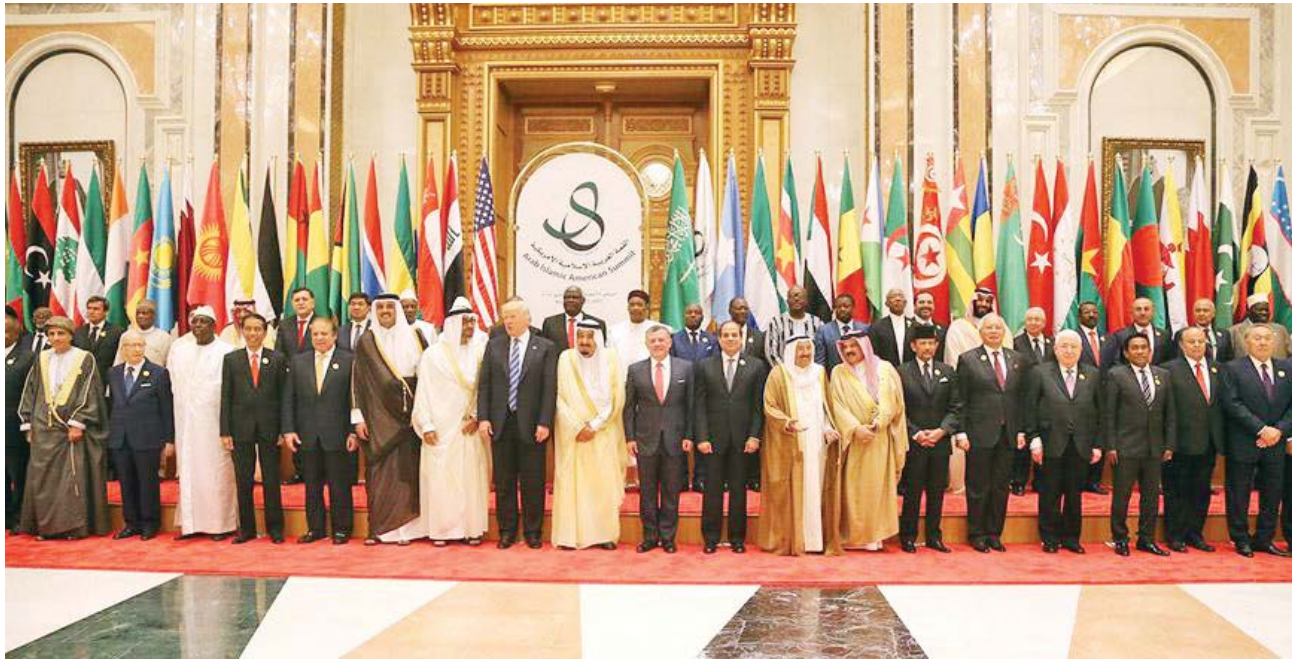
In a statement issued by the Riyadh summit attended by representatives of 55 countries, the leaders vowed "to combat terrorism in all its forms, address its intellectual roots, dry up its sources of funding and to take all necessary measures to prevent and combat terrorist crimes."

It "welcomed the establishment of a global center for countering extremist thought to take base in Riyadh, and praised the center's strategic objectives of combating intellectual, media and digital extremism and promoting coexistence and tolerance among peoples."

The statement made no reference to Saudi-inspired ultra-conservatism that propagates a supremacist worldview, encourages prejudice against Muslim and non-Muslim minorities and that according to many policymakers and analysts, enables an environment that potentially breeds militancy.

In a nod to Saudi Arabia's four-decade long proxy war with Iran that increasingly appears to enjoy Mr. Trump's endorsement, the statement paid lip service to confronting "sectarian agendas," but linked it to countering "interference in other countries affairs," a reference to Iranian support for groups like Lebanon's Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, Iraqi Shia Hashd al-Shaabi fighting ISIL alongside the Iraqi military, and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The statement avoided calling on Sunni Muslim ultra-conservative political and religious leaders to refrain from contributing to sectarian strife. Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on the eve of the summit ruled out dialogue with Iran on the grounds of its religious beliefs.



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Prince Mohammed, turning its power struggle into an existentialist sectarian battle, charged that Iran was planning for the return of the Imam Mahdi (the redeemer) by seeking to control the Muslim world. Shias believe that Imam Mahdi was a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed who went into hiding more than 1,000 years ago. They trust that he will return to establish global Islamic rule before the end of the world.

The NU conference held in the Bahr Ulum Islamic Boarding School Foundation in Jombang in East Java, the movement's birthplace, could not have been more different from the summit. The two-day gathering brought together top NU leaders and young activists who appeared to be driven by a sense of apocalypses if they failed to counter extremism in Indonesia.

The activists' commitment contrast-

ferrying HuT supporters to a rally. A majority of people on the busses were villagers. They were told by military officers, who paid them to board the busses, that they were travelling to a religious gathering. "Hizb-ut-Tahrir has successfully targeted the military," a NU leader said.

In a draft statement scheduled for publication on Wednesday, the NU conference warned that Muslims need to bridge the gap between teachings of Islamic orthodoxy and the contemporary Muslim reality. In a reference to Saudi-inspired ultra-conservatism, the draft asserted that "social and political instability, civil war and terrorism all arise from the attempt, by ultra-conservative Muslims, to implement certain elements of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) within a context that is no longer compatible with...classical norms."

In Yemen, Saudi Arabia's intervention has given ISIL rival Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) a new lease on life.

ed starkly with that of political leaders in Riyadh who appeared motivated by political opportunism, power-driven conflict, and a passion for a photo-op that positions them as being in the forefront of the struggle against the scourge of political violence. (For transparency, this writer was invited to address the conference.)

Attending the NU conference were members of Barisan Ansor Multipurpose Nahdlatul Ulama (Banser), an autonomous security unit within the movement, that confronts militants. In recent incidents, Banser intercepted convoys of busses of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT), a pan-Islamic group that advocates a global caliphate.

Banser commander H. Alfa Isnaeni recalled one intercept of a convoy

The statement charged that "various actors—including but not limited to Iran, Saudi Arabia, ISIS (another acronym for the Islamic State), Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Qatar, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban and Pakistan—cynically manipulate religious sentiment in their struggle to maintain or acquire political, economic and military power, and to destroy their enemies. They do so by drawing upon key elements of classical Islamic law (fiqh), to which they ascribe divine authority, in order to mobilize support for their worldly goals."

In a frontal attack on Saudi Arabia, the statement, issued by a group that was founded almost a century ago in opposition to Wahhabism, Saudi Arabia's strand of Sunni Muslim ultra-conservatism, argued that "it is false and

counterproductive to claim that the actions of Al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and other such groups have nothing to do with Islam, or merely represent a perversion of Islamic teachings. They are, in fact, outgrowths of Wahhabism and other fundamentalist streams of Sunni Islam..." the statement said.

"For more than fifty years, Saudi Arabia has systematically propagated a supremacist, ultraconservative interpretation of Islam among Sunni Muslim populations worldwide... The Wahhabi view of Islam—which is embraced not only by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, but also by al-Qaeda and ISIS—is intricately wedded to those elements of classical Islamic law that foster sectarian hatred and violence. Wahhabism is characterized by extreme animosity towards Shias. It is also characterized by antipathy—at times violent—towards Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Sunni Muslims who do not share the Wahhabis' rigid and authoritarian view of Islam... Saudi opposition to Iran, ISIS and al-Qaeda does not and should not absolve it from responsibility for promoting the very ideology that underlies and animates Sunni extremism and terror," the statement went on to say.

There is little doubt about the statement's sincerity and its bold willingness to focus Muslim discourse on the need to clean up Islam's own house. The conference's proceedings nonetheless laid bare the fact that NU still has its own demons to fight.

Conference participants took no notice and failed to counter a popular Islamic scholar who asserted in remarks pockmarked by sexist jokes that "digitalization, globalization and hedonism is the immoral path that Jews and Christians want us to follow." To be fair, the moderator of the scholar's panel, a human rights activist, took him to task on his gender remarks but not on his references to Jews and Christians.

Similarly, remarks by a NU leader that appeared to differentiate between, on the one hand, the use of religion by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the world's only other Wahhabi state, albeit one that practices a more liberal interpretation of the sect's teachings, and Iran on the other, went unchallenged.

The NU official couched his assault on the Persian Gulf Arabs in terms of nation states that exploit Islam opportunistically and warned that they need to be confronted because they "want to destroy us." Discussing Iran however, he referred to Shiism without qualification and cautioned that "if we don't fight back they will behead us."

To confront extremism, Muslim political leaders and religious groups will not only have to stand up to political manipulation of their faith, but also to prejudices, conspiracy theories based on ingrained bias, and implicit as well as explicit supremacism that have long been common currency across the Muslim world. It is a jihad that is a lot more difficult than paying lip service and playing politics, but is a prerequisite for effective countering of extremism and political violence.

Manchester attack as MI6 blowback?

By Evan Jones

According to Scotland Yard, the attack on the crowd leaving the Ariana Grande concert at Manchester Arena, 22 May, has been perpetrated by Salman Abedi. A bankcard has been conveniently found in the pocket of the mutilated corpse of the terrorist.

This attack is generally interpreted as proof that the United Kingdom is not implicated in international terrorism and that, on the contrary, it is a victim of it.

Salman Abedi was born in the UK of a family of Libyan immigrants. He has travelled to Libya several times in the last couple of months, with or without his father.

His father Ramadan Abedi, with whom Salman lived, is a former officer in [Gaddafi's] Libyan Intelligence Services. He specialised in the surveillance of the Islamist movement, but two decades later has failed to notice that his son has joined Daesh (IS).

In 1992, Ramadan Abedi was sent back to Libya by Britain's MI6 and was involved in a British-devised plot to assassinate Muammar Gaddafi. The operation having been readily exposed, he was exfiltrated by MI6 and transferred back to the UK where he obtained political asylum. He moved in 1999 to Whalley Range (south of Manchester) where there was already resident a small Libyan Islamist community.

In 1994, Ramadan Abedi returned again to Libya under MI6's direction. In late 1995 he is involved in the creation of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), a local branch of Al-Qaeda, in conjunction with Abdelhakim Belhadj. The LIFG was then employed by MI6 again to assassinate Gaddafi, for a payoff of £100,000. This operation, which also failed, provoked heated exchanges within British Intelligence, leading to the resignation of one David Shayler.



Other former members of the LIFG have also lived at Whalley Range, including Abedi's friend Abd al-Baset-Azzouz. In 2009, this last joined Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and became a close associate of its chief Ayman al-Zawahiri. In 2011, al-Baset-Azzouz is active on the ground with the NATO operation against Libya. On 11 September 2012, he directs the operation against the US Ambassador in Libya, Christopher Stevens, assassinated at Benghazi. He is arrested in Turkey and extradited to the US in December 2014, his trial still pending.

Nobody pays attention to the fact that Ramadan Abedi has linked LIFG members to the formation of Al-Qaeda in Iraq and, in 2011, he takes part in MI6's 'Arab Spring' operations, and in LIFG's role on the ground in support of NATO. In any event, Abedi returned to Libya after the fall of Gaddafi and moves his family there, leaving his older children in the family home at Whalley Range.

According to the former Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, Abdelhakim Belhadj was involved in the assassinations in Madrid of 11 March 2004. Later, he is secretly arrested in Malaysia by the CIA and transferred to Libya where he is tortured not by Libyan or American functionaries but by MI6 agents. He is finally freed after the accord between Saif al-Islam Gaddafi [Gaddafi's son] and the jihadists.

During the Libyan war, Belhadj, who had been living in Qatar, returned to Libya, courtesy of the Qatari Emir, and commanded the operations on the ground in league with NATO. On 28 July 2011, he organised the assassination of General Abdul Fatah Younis who claimed to have

joined the 'rebels', but who Belhadj accused of overseeing the struggle against the LIFG during the 1990s.

In September 2011, Belhadj was named military governor of Tripoli by NATO. In 2012, seconded by the Irish-Libyan Mahdi al-Hatari, he created the Free Syrian Army, then returns again to Libya. On 2 May 2014, he is received officially at the Quai d'Orsay [the French Foreign Ministry].

In December 2013, following the discovery in the archives of Gaddafi's Libyan regime of a letter from the former chief of MI6, Belhadj launches proceedings in London against the UK for having kidnapped and tortured him nine years earlier. British Intelligence then illegally places his lawyers under phone-tapping, although it is ultimately constrained to destroy the intelligence obtained.

According to Egypt's Prosecutor General, Hisham Barakat, in May 2015, Belhadj becomes Daesh' most senior figure in North Africa, this claim taken up by Interpol. Belhadj installs three training camps for Daesh in Libya at Derna (in the former property of Abd al-Baset-Azzouz), at Syrte and at Sebrata. In October 2016, he launches in London new legal proceedings regarding his kidnapping and torture, this time nominally against the former director of MI6, Sir Mark Allen.

Daesh has claimed responsibility for the Manchester attack, but without describing Salman Abedi as a 'martyr'. After the assassination, Ramadan Abedi has declared his opposition to jihad in a telephone conversation with journalists. He has also claimed that his son had intended to spend the month of Ramadan [beginning 26 May] with him in Libya and that he is convinced of his innocence.



For more than fifty years, Saudi Arabia has systematically propagated a supremacist, ultraconservative interpretation of Islam among Sunni Muslim populations worldwide... The Wahhabi view of Islam is intricately wedded to those elements of classical Islamic law that foster sectarian hatred and violence.

Britain needs strong leadership, not socialist isolationism

The Tory wobble is finally upon us. In most elections there is a moment when the leading party takes a tumble in the ratings, and the country awoke to a YouGov poll showing the Tory advantage cut to just five points. Should the Conservatives panic? No. On the contrary, they must exploit this news to the fullest – to focus the minds of the voters on the question that really matters. Do they want Theresa May or Jeremy Corbyn to run the country?

The Tories have got to hammer home the flaws in the man and his manifesto.

Mrs. May has said all along that this is the only choice, and she is right. Ukip has collapsed; the Lib Dems have failed to revive. The country is broadly settled on Brexit and perceives Mrs. May as the person best qualified to deliver it. For a while, the Tories floated high on a new national consensus.

What began as a leadership election, however, soon changed. Labour launched a manifesto that was poorly costed and archaic, yet populist. The Conservative manifesto, by contrast, was defined by a worthy but ill-conceived pledge to reform social care. Suddenly, the election became about pocketbook issues – and the Tories lost their advantage not only by offering a controversial policy but by performing a strenuously denied but blindingly obvious U-turn on it.

Tories against Left

This newspaper has long advised the Tories against moving to the Left, and it is now obvious that they are paying the price of conceding so many of Labour's arguments on the economy. If the election is to be a competition between Labour and the Conservative Party over who offers the most welfare goodies, Labour will win. However, the appeal of its giveaway manifesto may lessen in the wake of the dreadful Manchester attack. Voters will be looking once more for serious national leadership – and Mrs. May still stands head and shoulders over her opposition on that score.

Mr. Corbyn decided to play party politics with the Manchester tragedy. He delivered a speech in which he described British foreign policy as one of the chief causes of terrorism. This claim was both inaccurate and cheap. It also demands a review of Mr. Corbyn's record. It is one thing to suggest that Western foreign policy has consequences. It is another to conclude – as the Labour leader almost always has throughout his career – that the guilty West must sit on its hands.

In an interview, Mr. Corbyn repeatedly failed to clarify if he would keep Trident or not, and when pressed on his links to hard line Irish nationalists merely repeated his uncon-

vincing mantra about seeking peace. During the Troubles, Mr. Corbyn picked a side and lobbied for it. He has also refused to commit to the use of drone strikes against terror suspects, once called NATO a "major problem", labelled the killing of Osama bin Laden a "tragedy" and said that it would be nice if every politician in the world could abolish their army.

EU referendum

The Tories should not be shy about pointing all of this out. They should also return to the issue upon which this election was first fought: Brexit. The Conservative position is to enter negotiations tough-minded, united and willing to walk away from a bad offer. The Labour position is the worst of all worlds. Straddled between Leavers and Remainers, the party does promise to honor the EU referendum result but insists that it would never walk away from the table without a deal – a concession to the Europeans that would leave the UK negotiating team impotent. And whereas the Tories promise a review of imported European legislation and new free trade deals, Labour would keep some of the worst aspects of EU law on the books and tie the country to a high tax, high spending, bureaucratic agenda that would kill growth and jobs.

This is all presuming that a Corbyn cabinet would be

able to get anything done at all. If the issue is leadership then the Tories only have to note how many shadow ministers have resigned from Mr. Corbyn's front bench, that his MPs tried to bring him down in a leadership challenge, that agreement over the party's present defense policy is hard to find or that one Labour MP even said that he could not bring himself to make the case for putting Mr. Corbyn in Number 10.

Indeed, it is possible that this bump in the polls is the worst thing that could happen to Mr. Corbyn, because it makes Tory voters more likely to come out to oppose him. Labour's strong polling in 1992 is often credited with John Major's re-election that year. But the very fact that someone so uniquely unqualified to be prime minister could attract more than a third of the vote indicates that Mr. Corbyn cannot be left alone to damn himself. The Tories have got to hammer home the flaws in the man and his manifesto.

The Manchester attack showed how high the stakes are in this election. The prosperity and future of this country are on the line. What Mr. Corbyn offers is a retreat into socialist isolation, which will translate into insecurity and poverty.

(Source: The Telegraph)

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How to achieve a positive attitude

Learning to think positively may extend your life

By Jen Christensen

Mounting evidence from medical studies has indicated that people who think positively have a lower risk of dying of all causes compared with others their own age who have a gloomier view of life. Over the last decade, researchers have identified practices that can help you achieve and sustain a positive attitude toward your future. Many of them are explained in the Harvard Special Health Report Positive Psychology. Here are a few suggestions:

- Savor pleasure. Feeling pleasure helps sustain a positive attitude. Focus your attention on something pleasing as it occurs, consciously enjoying the experience as it unfolds. Most people are primed to experience pleasure in special moments, such as a wedding day or a vacation. Everyday pleasures, on the other hand, can slip by without much notice unless they disappear or seem threatened. Slow down and focus. You will enjoy things more, whether a meal or a visit with a friend.

- Practice gratitude. Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what you receive, whether tangible or intangible. Try keeping a gratitude journal, in which you regularly write down things for which you are grateful. Doing so will help you go through your days with greater appreciation, taking fewer blessings for granted. As you write, be specific and try to relive the sensations you felt as you remember what each thing means to you.

- Cultivate mindfulness. Mindfulness is generally acquired by training the mind to focus its attention on the present moment in a systematic way, accepting whatever arises. While savoring involves appreciating pleasurable sensations, mindfulness involves opening fully to both pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Being mindful helps you become fully engaged in activities and creates a greater capacity to deal with adverse events. By focusing on the here and now, many people who practice mindfulness find that they are less likely to get caught up in worries about the future or regrets over the past, are less preoccupied with concerns about success and self-esteem, and are better able to form deep connections with others.

- Retain a sense of purpose. It's normal to experience a sense of loss and even grief if a relationship fractures, your children leave home, or you lose a job or retire. It's important at trying times to keep your life as normal as possible and to focus on what you can control. Follow a regular sleep schedule, get enough exercise, eat healthy meals,



If you miss having children in your life, consider coaching or tutoring. If you've lost a parent or spouse, supporting others who are grieving can be helpful.

and stay in touch with friends and family. View an important life change, no matter how painful, as a new challenge or opportunity. If you're between jobs or retired, look for volunteer opportunities that would benefit from your professional skills. If you miss having children in your life, consider coaching or tutoring. If you've lost a parent or spouse, supporting others who are grieving can be helpful. Appreciating your ability to weather the storm will help you maintain a positive attitude.

- Emphasize the positive. Winnowing out and focusing on the positive aspects of a situation are key factors in acquiring resilience—the ability to bounce

back from bad times—that will help you weather the losses that may occur in the years ahead.

Finally, on survey after survey, older people report that they have become more satisfied with their lives as they have aged, despite the losses that accumulate with passing years. This is most likely because they tend to minimize the negative, accept their limitations and use their experience to compensate for them, and set reasonable goals for the future. The earlier in life you adopt these practices—all of which help to sustain a positive attitude—the greater the potential impact on the quality, and possibly length, of your life.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

Hand osteoarthritis (degenerative arthritis of the hand)

Here's information about osteoarthritis of the hand, from what causes it to how it can be treated and how the pain can be managed.

What is arthritis?

Arthritis is a general term for inflammation in the joints. Arthritis can occur in numerous forms. The most common is osteoarthritis, a condition in which the cartilage, the protective cushioning between the joints, wears out. When this happens, the bones rub directly against other bones. This causes structural changes that can be seen on X-rays. Bone deposits or bone spurs known as osteophytes may develop on the edges of the joints. The soft tissues that stabilize joints may also show signs of wear.



Arthritis is often painful, but not always. Over time, arthritis can result in joint deformity and can limit the motion and function of joints.

What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis, also known as degenerative arthritis, may affect one or more joints anywhere in the body. The joints most often affected are the hands and the weight-bearing joints of the lower extremities (knees, hips, feet).

In osteoarthritis, there is a steady worsening and decline of joint cartilage. It affects only particular joints and not the rest of the body. The onset of osteoarthritis is usually related to aging, but other factors can be involved:

- Joint instability and misalignment affect both the distribution of forces across the joint and may lead to degeneration.
- Risk factors for osteoarthritis include heavy usage and traumatic injuries that result in joint irregularities.
- Some people may inherit genes that may predispose them to develop osteoarthritis earlier in life or in uncommon joints.

Who gets osteoarthritis?

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 27 million American adults have osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis is more common in older people. But younger people may get the disease through injury or genetic bone or metabolic defects. Because most osteoarthritis results from wear and tear, the chance of developing the disease increases as people age.

Before age 45, more men than women get the disease. After age 45, more women than men are affected. Other risk factors include being overweight and having a job that causes particular stress to joints.

(Source: webmd.com)



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U.S. cuts April visas for Iranian nationals by half yr/yr

TOURISM TEHRAN — The number of U.S. non-immigrant visas issued to Iranian nationals has dropped by 52 percent in April compared to the same month last year, Newsweek reported on Friday.

The decrease comes after President Donald Trump introduced temporary travel bans in January in order to restrict people from seven Muslim-majority countries including Iran from entering the U.S.



People protest against President Donald Trump's travel ban in New York City, U.S., February 1, 2017. (Reuters/Brendan McDermid)

A review of the new data by Politico shows that in April 2017 there was a nearly 20 percent decline in the number of non-immigrant visas issued to people from 50 Muslim-majority countries, when compared with the monthly average in 2016.

"There were 85,790 visas issued per month to people from those countries last year, but that number was only around 69,000 in April."

Following many ups and downs, lastly a U.S. appeals court refused to reinstate the travel ban on Thursday, calling it discriminatory and setting the stage for a showdown in the Supreme Court.

Experts say the economic cost of the travel ban could reach several billion dollars, asserting the ban could cost as much as \$18 billion in tourism revenue to the U.S. The figures includes some \$10.8 billion that would have been spent in the U.S. by tourists.

Melania factor boosts tourism in Slovenia

The number of tourists in Slovenia rose by 8 percent year-on-year in March, boosted by the fact that new U.S. First Lady Melania Trump was born in the country.

Overnight stays in Slovenia by tourists from the United States jumped 30.6 percent while the number of domestic tourists rose by 22.5 percent, the statistics office said on Thursday.

Analysts said domestic tourist figures reflected improved economic conditions in Slovenia, a country which narrowly avoided an international bailout for its banks in 2013 but expects economic growth of 3.6 percent this year versus 2.5 percent in 2016.

The unemployment rate fell to 10.2 percent in March, down from 12 percent in the same month last year.

The statistics office also said business sentiment in May reached 9.5 points, lower than in April but 5.7 points higher than a year ago, mainly due to improved confidence among consumers and in the service sector. (Source: Reuters)

ROUND THE GLOBE

Four lifts on Canal du Centre and their environs

The four hydraulic boat-lifts on the short stretch of the historic Canal du Centre in Belgium are industrial monuments of the highest quality. Together with the Canal itself and its associated structures, they constitute a remarkably well preserved and complete example of a highly technical industrial landscape at the end of the 19th century.

The construction of the Canal du Centre to ensure the liaison between the Meuse and the Escaut basins was part of the opening-up program of Hainaut, a rich industrial region, notably coal, but with very few natural navigable waterways for coal export. Digging work began in 1884 and the opening to navigation took place in 1917.



The four lifts on the Canal du Centre, Belgium

At the very beginning of the project, the architects were confronted with a two-fold problem: the large distance in height over a short distance and the small quantity of water available. The most adapted technique to overcome these constraints was that of boat lifts, developed by English engineers using only hydraulic power.

Over a distance of 7 km, a series of 4 boat lifts, unique worldwide, were built, each one covering a change in level of 15 to 16 meters. The stretch is bordered by a series of art works including two fixed bridges and two lift or swing bridges. The property also comprises the ancient lock No.1 of Thieu, today disaffected, as well as three buildings housing the necessary hydraulic machinery for the good functioning of the lifts. (Source: UNESCO)

UNESCO World Heritage Committee to put Yazd to vote in July

HERITAGE TEHRAN — The ancient city of Yazd, central Iran, will be assessed as a candidate for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list during the 41st session of the World Heritage Committee, which will be held on July 2-12 in Krakow, Poland.

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization compiled a comprehensive file for possible inscription of the ancient adobe city in 2016, which was deemed incomplete by UNESCO assessors who reminded some shortcomings to be redressed in order to enhance its chances.

CHTHO Deputy Director Mohammad-Hassan Talebian says the organization has addressed all the issues outlined by UNESCO.

UNESCO specialists required some modification which are currently carried out and we hope the historical city would be placed on the World Heritage list this year with no objection, ISNA quoted Talebian as saying on May 25.

In August 2016, Mariana Correia at the head of a UNESCO technical evaluation mission paid a visit to Yazd as part of the decision-making process for inscribing the ancient city.

Yazd is wedged between the northern Dasht-e Kavir and southern Dasht-e Lut on a flat plain ringed by mountains.

According to the UNESCO website, the historical structure of Yazd is a collection of public-religious architecture in a very large scope comprising of different Islamic architectural elements of different periods in a harmonious combination with climatic conditions.



The skyline of Yazd, a historical city in central Iran that embraces rich cultural heritage and traditional architecture.

With its winding lanes, forest of badgirs (wind catchers), mud-brick houses, atmospheric alleyways and centuries of history, Yazd is a delightful place to stay, referring as a 'don't miss' destination by almost all travel associates in the region. The city has an interesting mix of people as well, some 10 percent of whom follow the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism.

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On tentative list

Up to now, Iran has listed over 50 historical and natural sites on the UNESCO tentative list of world heritage sites, which are up for inscription within

Azerbaijan offers facilities for Iranian tour operators

TOURISM TEHRAN — The Republic of Azerbaijan has offered facilities for Iranian tour operators in a bid to widen travel businesses in the northern neighbor.

Bunyad Huseynov, Azerbaijan's ambassador to Tehran, encouraged some 350 Iranian tour operators to schedule tours of rural areas and take advantage of international festivals, sports events, and tax-free policies adopted in Azerbaijan.

The ties between the two neighboring countries have considerably improved over the past couple of years, Azernews quoted Huseynov, addressing a Tehran tourism conference on Thursday.

He also briefed attendees on ASAN Visa system, a newly-implemented visa simplification program that enables easy travels for Iranians and citizens from other countries.

By the means of the ASAN Visa, Iranian citizens have been able to obtain Azerbaijan visas within three days.

Some 46,000 Iranian holidaymakers visited Azerbaijan during Noruz, the Iranian New Year celebrations, said Adalat Veliyev, the deputy culture and tourism minister of Azerbaijan, back in April.



Walled City of Baku with the Shirvanshah's Palace and Maiden Tower in the foreground. The UNESCO-registered site is amongst key tourist attractions in Azerbaijan.

UNESCO experts to assess Iran's natural, historical sites

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A delegation of the UNESCO World Heritage specialists is scheduled to travel to Iran in summer in order to assess Arasbaran Protected Area in the northeast and the Ensemble of Historical Sassanid Cities in the south of the country.

The UNESCO assessors will travel to the country in the Iranian months of Mordad and Shahrivar (starting July 23 and August 23 respectively), ISNA quoted Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization Deputy Director Mohammad-Hassan Talebian as saying on May 23.

The ensemble comprises several Sassanid-era (224-651) sites, namely Bishapur, Firouzabad and Sarvestan in Fars Province. According to a dossier in the ensemble, it embodies the political,



The ruins of Sassanid-era Bishapur Royal Palace in Fars province

historical, cultural and artistic developments of the Sasanian Empire, which was recognized as one of the leading world powers alongside its neighboring arch-rival the Roman-Byzantine Empire.

Arasbaran Protected Area in the northwestern West Azarbaijan Province embraces one of the oldest brick domes in the world, a relatively exact circular urban terrain and some vestiges of other historical monuments. It is a candidate for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list for 2018.

Measuring 78,560 hectares, Arasbaran is of high importance due to its rich flora and fauna in particular presence of rare species. There can be found some endemic plant species including long-leaved trees such as Juniperus foetidissima and endangered species such as Taxus baccata.

How to best use your hotel concierge

By Shivani Voramay

A hotel's concierge staff can help you fulfill a range of requests to make your trip that much better, but its services are often underused and sometimes misused, said Kenneth Abisror, the head concierge at Mandarin Oriental New York in New York City.

Concierges are a valuable resource, he said, and there are several ways for guests to get the most out of what concierges can offer.

Here, Mr. Abisror offers his top tips on how to do that.

Ask them for almost anything

Unsurprisingly, concierges can make restaurant reservations, secure theater tickets and book tours. But they can also help with tasks you may not expect, such as finding a real estate agent in the city you're visiting or even in another city, tracking down your lost luggage, making a doctor's appointment and chartering a jet. "Basically, there's nothing we can't do unless it's unethical or illegal," Mr. Abisror said.

Reach out before you arrive

Contacting your hotel's concierge in advance of your stay has several advantages, Mr. Abisror said. For starters, when



it comes to requests that are difficult to fulfill, such as a reservation at a popular restaurant, asking the concierge for help a few weeks beforehand will increase the chances that you will get what you want.

Also, establishing a relationship with one or two members of the concierge staff ahead of time will serve you through-

out your stay. A concierge can make sure your room is ready if you're arriving early and fulfill any personal preferences, such as having a chilled bottle of your favorite champagne waiting for you.

Don't ask unless you're sure

Making a request that you're not fully committed to not only shows bad man-

ners but can also damage the concierge's reputation if you back out at the last minute, Mr. Abisror said.

The following is a situation he has encountered on several occasions throughout his career: A guest asks for same-day dinner reservations for four at a highly renowned restaurant, so the concierge leverages the professional relationship he has with the maitre d' to secure the reservation. Then the guest informs the concierge that he or she has decided to stick to a reservation at another restaurant. "Now, I have to cancel the table that I pushed hard to get you and risk burning a valued source," Mr. Abisror said.

There is no absolute 'best'

Guests commonly ask their concierge for "the best," but in reality, Mr. Abisror said that there may be several that earn the distinction. For instance, the best show might be the one that's sold out, the one with the most accolades or the one that features a star performer.

"The most important criteria in determining the best is what is best for your taste," he said, "and if you're asking the concierge for help, convey your wishes and trust they're giving you the optimal options."

(Source: The New York Times)

Climate change is making it harder to sleep

Climate change is coming for you in the night.

That's the conclusion of scientists who study how heat disturbs sleep — and how projected warming is expected to make bad sleep even worse.

Led by Nick Obradovich of Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science & International Affairs, a team of researchers are the first to document the relationship between rising temperatures and poor sleep. They sorted through how 765,000 Americans responded to Centers for Disease Control surveys from 2002 to 2011. Comparing the answers about sleep with respondents' local temperatures, they not only found a link between temperature and sleep, but discovered that it was three times stronger in summer.

Their new study links that most individual of experiences — falling asleep — with a truly planetary phenomenon — global warming. It joins an expanding body of research suggesting that rising temperatures will gradually change even the most mundane aspects of everyday life.

■ Physiology of temperature

The physiology of temperature and sleep has been understood for some time. As the body drifts toward unconsciousness, blood vessels in the skin dilate, which lets heat escape and brings down the core body temperature. Previous



ous research has shown that above-normal ambient air temperature “can prevent core body heat shedding, and that poor sleep is associated with elevated core body temperature,” the authors write.

As the world warms, nighttime air tem-

peratures increase at a faster rate than daytime mercury. This seemingly counterintuitive fact has been documented for years by scientists studying the global climate, making it a useful puzzle piece to keep in mind as America (unlike most of the world)

struggles to accept climate change as a reality that's caused by humans.

Having established a relationship between sleep and temperature, the researchers then used global warming projections to see how Americans' sleep problems may worsen in the second half of the century.

Most surprising to Obradovich was that the researchers were able to see a strong effect of heat on sleep at all.

■ Heat waves

The U.S. is a wealthy country, and many people can rely on air-conditioning during heat waves. “Even with this short-term adaptation capacity, we still observed effects in the U.S.,” he said.

When it comes to suffering through hotter temperatures, though, none are worse off than the elderly and the poor.

“Sleep is so fundamental to all aspects of our lives that having the climate disrupt it many more days per month is a real and important cost.”

Solomon Hsiang, who studies the effects of climate change on human behavior and economics at the University of California, Berkeley, credits the new study as the first to methodically analyze temperature, climate, and sleep. The results, he said, “point toward systematic and important effects.”

(Source: The Bloomberg)

“Sleep is so fundamental to all aspects of our lives that having the climate disrupt it many more days per month is a real and important cost.”

New approach predicts threats to rainforests

With rain forests at risk the world over, a new collaboration is equipping conservationists with the tools to predict and plan for future forest loss.

A new study by scientists from the Universities of Oxford, Montana and the U.S. Forest Service highlights novel approaches to tackling deforestation. The team focused their research on Borneo, an island that has lost a staggering 30 percent of its forest since the 1970s and is among the most biodiverse and threatened on the planet.

The loss of Bornean forests threatens species such as the orangutan, Sumatran rhino, and the Sunda clouded leopard; as well as emitting significant amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

Although focused on Borneo, the study findings, published in Landscape Ecology, will be useful to all forest conservationists, and could help tropical forests around the world.

The study took an innovative approach to conducting their data analysis, using existing maps of the area and the machine learning algorithm ‘Random Forests’, the team built a multi-scale model of deforestation on the island over time (from 2000- 2010).

■ Deforestation risk

After calculating the historic links between landscape variables and deforestation, the team used this information to predict the future deforestation risk facing Borneo's remaining forests.

The goal of this study was to provide national authorities with a tool that would support them to recognize potential deforestation threats in the future.

The deforestation risk factors varied from nation to nation, within the island. In Brunei, deforestation was associated with a highly patchy landscape with multiple land uses within a 10km radius and a large amount of forest edge. By contrast, in the Malaysian provinces of Borneo, deforestation was associated with a high proportion of lowland mosaic landscape types within 20km and high proportions of existing plantations within 30km. This led to a diffuse pattern of risk across Malaysian forests. Finally, in the Indonesian provinces of Borneo, deforestation was associated with areas of low elevation and a highly patchy landscape, leading to strong frontiers of deforestation risk.

Ewan Macdonald, joint first author and a researcher in Oxford's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (Wild-CRU) said: ‘Our results provide the best insight to date of where the highest risks lie to Borneo's remaining forests. I hope this will help governments and conservation planners to develop effective strategies to combat these risks and to conserve these beautiful forests for future generations.

‘If we understand where risks lurk, we can plan ac-



tion to counteract them. And these risks are real and imminent for many species, such as the beautiful and enigmatic Sunda clouded leopard, which are threatened by Borneo's forest loss. I hope our understanding of the patterns of deforestation risk will provide a vital tool in developing effective conservation strategies.’

The research findings strongly suggest that this novel approach offer a powerful method for analyzing land use change.

(Source: EurekAlert)

In “massive fail,” dying star mysteriously reborn as black hole

A massive, dying star that astronomers thought would explode has instead quietly collapsed into a black hole. The event, which NASA calls a “massive fail,” could be a more common pattern for giant stars than astronomers previously suspected.

The star, referred to as N6946-BH1, lived in a galaxy 22 million light years away. Referred to as the “Fireworks Galaxy” for the frequent supernovae — explosions of stars — known to happen there, the star cluster has held NASA's attention for several years.

About eight years ago, N6946-BH1 started to weaken. A few years later, the telescopes aimed in its direction could no longer find it. Astronomers kept searching, probing that sliver of the universe

with the Large Binocular Telescope and the Hubble and Spitzer space telescopes. But the star, which once shined with the strength of 25 of our suns, was gone.

■ Telescope photos

These visible-light and near-infrared Hubble Space Telescope photos show the giant star N6946-BH1 before and after it vanished out of sight by imploding to form a black hole. The left image shows the star in 2007 and right image is the same spot in 2015.

The disappearance came as a surprise because most stars perform one final dazzling act before fizzling out. The “typical view is that a star can form a black hole only after it goes supernova,” said Christopher Kochanek, who teaches astronomy at The Ohio State University, in

a statement.

But that supernova never happened with N6946-BH1. And every alternative explanation for the star's disappearance — maybe it was hiding behind a dust cloud; maybe it was just temporarily dim — was disproven. That left just one option: the star had collapsed into itself and become a black hole.

Such massive fails may be more common than previously believed. Krzysztof Stanek, co-author of the study, recently published in Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, says the process makes sense.

■ A giant black hole

An explosive death might not leave behind the quantity of mass required for forming a giant black hole, Stanek

explained. “I suspect it's much easier to make a very massive black hole if there is no supernova,” he said in a statement.

During the seven years astronomers have been surveying the Fireworks Galaxy and others for supernovae, they've seen fewer such explosions than expected based on statistical calculations.

But this death marks the first time they've observed a star skipping the supernova state. Researchers now think up to 30 percent of huge stars die without a supernova.

Now, where this massive star once glowed, astronomers see only a small amount of infrared light, which researchers believe is from debris falling into a black hole.

(Source: Newsweek)

Somehow, this fish fathered a near clone of itself

A female and male get together. One thing leads to another, and they have sex. His sperm fuses with her egg, half of his DNA combining with half of her DNA to form an embryo.

As humans, this is how we tend to think of reproduction.

But there are many other bizarre ways reproduction can take place. For instance, scientists have discovered a fish carrying genes only from its father in the nucleus of its cells. Found in a type of fish called *Squalius alburnoides*, which normally inhabits rivers in Portugal or Spain, this is the first documented instance in vertebrates of a father producing a near clone of itself through sexual reproduction — a rare phenomenon called androgenesis — the researchers reported in the journal Royal Society Open Science on Wednesday.

The possibility of androgenesis is just one of many mysteries about *Squalius alburnoides*. It's not a species in the usual sense, but rather something called a hybrid complex, a group of organisms with multiple parental combinations that can mate with one another.

The group is thought to have arisen from hybridization between females of one species, *Squalius pyrenaicus*, and males of another species, now extinct, that belonged to a group of fish called *Anaecypris*. To sustain its population, *Squalius alburnoides* mates with several

other closely related species belonging to the *Squalius* lineage.

■ Producing sperm cells

Squalius alburnoides males circumvent this problem by producing sperm cells that do not divide, and therefore contain more than one chromosome set. This is important because most animals, *Squalius alburnoides* included, need at least two chromosome sets to survive.

Mostly, animals have sex cells containing only one chromosome set, which means the egg and sperm are both required for reproduction. But in *Squalius alburnoides*, sperm with multiple chromosome sets can provide all the nuclear genetic material needed for a viable offspring — paving the way for androgenesis.

The details in *Squalius alburnoides* are still unknown, but in general androgenesis is thought to occur in a couple of ways, said Miguel Morgado-Santos, a graduate student at the University of Lisbon and an author of the study: Sperm could fertilize an egg that contains no chromosomes, or it could destroy the genetic content from the nucleus of the egg after fertilization.

Mr. Morgado-Santos's group found this instance of androgenesis by accident, while studying the mating patterns of *Squalius alburnoides*.



The researchers put male and female *Squalius alburnoides* with males and females of another *Squalius* species in an artificial pond, let the fish reproduce and then genetically analyzed 100 randomly selected offspring. One of these offspring had only paternal chromosomes.

“We weren't expecting to find that,” Mr. Morgado-Santos said, adding that at first he and his collaborators thought they had made a mistake.

(Source: The NYT)

NASA sun observatory sees partial solar eclipse in space

NASA's powerful Solar Dynamics Observatory (SDO) may seem to have a boring job: staring at the sun as a space weather sentinel. But every now and then, the observatory gets a lunar surprise to break up the routine.

That's what happened on May 25, when the moon passed between SDO and the sun in a brief — but awesome — partial solar eclipse in space. The lunar crossing, or transit, lasted nearly an hour, with the moon covering about 89 percent of the sun at the eclipse's peak.

On May 26, NASA released an animation of the partial solar eclipse as seen in SDO images. The eclipse began Thursday at 02:24 P.M. EDT (1824 GMT) and ended at 03:17 P.M. EDT (1917 GMT).

“While the moon's edge appears smooth in these images, it's actually quite uneven,” NASA officials wrote in an image description. “The surface of the moon is rugged, sprinkled with craters, valleys and mountains. Peer closely at the image, and you may notice the subtle, bumpy outline of these topographical features.”

SDO's partial solar eclipse view is a teaser of sorts for a grand event coming later this summer. The moon will completely block the sun in a total solar eclipse on August 21 that will be visible from a narrow, 70-mile-wide (113 kilometers) strip of land across 19 states in the United States, stretching from northwest to southeast from Oregon to South Carolina. Observers elsewhere in North America, South America, Africa, Europe and Asia will see a partial solar eclipse, NASA officials said, adding that SDO will also see a partial eclipse.

NASA's SDO spacecraft is one of a fleet of sun-watching observatories monitoring the sun's solar activity.

(Source: space.com)

Walk on inside of pavement to avoid deadly pollution, warn scientists

Pedestrians have been warned to walk on inside of the pavement after it emerged that even legal levels of pollution can damage the heart.

Even the tiniest specks of particulates from diesel cars increase the risk of heart attack, heart failure, and death, scientists at Queen Mary University of London concluded.

Particulate matter under 2.5 micrometers in diameter (PM2.5) has been linked to inflammation, the constriction of blood vessels and high blood pressure and cities must not exceed 25 micrograms per m3 or face fines.

But the researchers found that even low levels of pollution damage heart health, and advised people to take precautions to avoid congested roads.

“Walk on the part of the pavement furthest from cars to reduce the amount of pollution you breathe in,” said Clinical Fellow Dr. Nay Aung, a cardiologist at the university's William Harvey Research Institute.

“Avoid times and places where there is a high level of pollution.

“If you want to cycle into work and there is heavy traffic around that time then try to find a quieter route.

“Those with cardiorespiratory diseases should limit the time spent outdoors during highly polluted periods such as rush hours.”

People who lived in the more polluted areas had the largest, and worst performing hearts, the study showed, even when accounting for other factors such as high cholesterol, obesity and smoking.

(Source: The Telegraph)

Tech makes dirty water drinkable — with a little help from carbon dioxide

Virtually everyone reading this article takes clean drinking water for granted. But that is not the case throughout the world, where hundreds of millions of people lack access to the necessary kind of water treatment tools that can make it safe to drink.

In a new research project, investigators from Princeton University, Unilever, and the University of Hawaii describe a new method of making water drinkable — by counterintuitively mixing it with carbon dioxide, which is normally considered a pollutant.

“We have used a CO2 gas as a means to remove suspended particles,” Sangwoo Shin, an assistant professor of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, told Digital Trends. “When CO2 is in contact with water, it dissociates into ions, which subsequently generates a small electricity. Yet, this electricity is big enough to push the suspended particles. We use this principle to achieve efficient, continuous, scalable water filtration that does not involve any porous filters.”

The idea of taking a cup of water from a contaminated pond or river and then blasting it through with pressurized carbon dioxide to get a fresh cup of drinking water sounds impossible, but that is exactly what Shin says the group's research can achieve.

“Imagine a small CO2 tank that goes with a paintball gun or soda stream,” he said, describing the source of the pressurized CO2. He notes that the technology could also be used for military purposes, in which soldiers are not guaranteed a clean source of drinking water.

(Source: Digital Trends)



Health tips for Ramadan



ARTICLE

By Seyed Mahdi Mirghazanfari, MD, PhD

Part 1

Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is a month of blessing marked by prayer, fasting, and charity. It is the most sacred month of the year for Muslims. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) has said, "When the month of Ramadan starts, the gates of heaven are opened and the gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained."

The holy month of Ramadan started on Saturday in Iran, and the world's 1.6 billion Muslims will be observing it by fasting everyday from dawn to sunset.

As Ramadan is falling on hot summer and spring days for some years now long fasting hours may cause difficulties.

However, the Iranian-Islamic traditional medicine has provided us with some useful tips which both help to rid the body from waste material built up in body for several months by giving it a complete break from food and move towards a healthier life.



■ Breaking fast with date and lukewarm water

Due to the effects of fasting on emptying of the digestive tract particularly during long summer days the Iftar meal- when people end their fast at sunset- should not be heavy and filled with foods and drinks. It is better to break the fast with some lukewarm boiled water and dates and then have a light meal 20 to 30 minutes later.

This way the date and the lukewarm water would enter the digestive system and by producing saliva, stomach acid, and digestive juice in the gastrointestinal tract it would prepare us for a proper meal.

■ Timing to start eating

Those who might not be able to wait for 20 to 30 minutes due to great sense of hunger can reduce the time to 10 minutes and those with strong digestive system can start eating right away, though generally many have poor digestive systems and need to wait a little longer.

■ No Zulbia and Bamiyeh

It is strongly recommended to avoid consuming Zulbia and Bamiyeh (traditional deep fried sweets) in any case.

LEARN ENGLISH

Dinnerware

A: Honey can you **set the table**?

B: Um, sure. What are we having for dinner? Do I need to put out **anything in particular**?

A: Well, make sure to put out the pepper and salt shakers. I don't know if your brother is coming tonight so set an extra **place mat just in case**.

B: Ok, should I use the **fancy silverware**?

A: Yeah go ahead, forks, spoons and knives. I **roasted** some meat so be sure to put out some steak knives as well.

B: I'll also set some cups and **saucers** for some coffee after dinner.

A: Honey? Have you seen our soup bowls?

B: They are in the cupboard where you keep the **gravy boat** and **serving dishes**. Just be careful because the glasses are also there.

A: Oops!

■ Key vocabulary

to set the table: prepare the table so as to sit down and eat **anything in particular:** anything specific

place mat: a board or piece of cloth that you put on a table for each person who is eating there, so that the table is protected from the plates, knives etc.

just in case: as a way of being safe from something that might happen or might be true

fancy: expensive and fashionable

silverware: eating utensils: fork, spoon, knife

to roast: to bake uncovered, esp. in an oven

saucer: a small round plate that curves up at the edges that you put a cup on

gravy boat: a long jug that you pour gravy from

serving dish: a dish used for serving food

■ Supplementary Vocabulary

fork: a fork used specially for eating salads

fine china: a term used for expensive dinnerware

spoon: spoon used specially for eating soup

dinner party: inviting friends over for dinner

tea kettle: a pot used for boiling the water for tea

(Source: irlanguage.com)

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

Iran introduces achievements in health sector to 70th World Health Assembly

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Iran has **d e s k** introduced its latest and inventive achievements in the health sector to the seventieth World Health Assembly 2017, which is being held in Geneva on May 22-31.

According to deputy health minister Ali Akbar Sayyari, Iran seized the opportunity to introduce its accomplishments including the healthcare reform plan focusing on sustainable development in health sector on the sidelines of the 70th World Health Assembly.

Iran's healthcare reform plan kicked off on May 4, 2014 with the main goals of decreasing the out-of-pocket expenses for the patients, promoting natural birth, and supporting underprivileged patients suffering from rare or incurable diseases.

"We were advised to document our achievements so that both Iranians and foreigners could have access to them," Sayyari highlighted.

Giving healthcare services to everyone comprising dwellers both in cities and villages of Iran and Iran's schemes to beat non-communicable diseases were lauded



during the event, Sayyari added.

However, he noted, it was suggested that the government allot larger budget to the health sector and to spend it on all sectors equally by putting greater emphasis on prevention over treatment.

"As trained and skill manpower

are pretty crucial to a country's development we were recommended to come up with plans to decrease work-related deaths and injuries in association with other ministries and responsible organizations," he said.

One of Iran's weak points in health

sector is road traffic deaths particularly among the youth which needs to be tackled in a collaborative effort between all sectors, the official explained.

The seventieth World Health Assembly is still ongoing and Iranian Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi, heading a delegation, delivered speech, visited his counterparts and signed agreements with some of them.

The 70th meeting of the World Health Assembly (WHA), the chief decision-making body of the World Health Organization (WHO), opened at the UN's Geneva headquarters. The assembly will unfold over a nine-day period and will convene over 3,500 delegates from the WHO's 194 member states, according to a news release by the agency.

Deliberations will seek to craft policies conducive to advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development universally adopted by UN members in 2015, with a focus on strategies to improve health systems globally; counter falsified medical products; protect the health of migrants and refugees, and ensure access to medicines and vaccines.

Iran ranks fifth in nanotechnology articles

Rank	Country	Quantity
1	China	16,800
2	USA	6,930
3	India	3,644
4	South Korea	2,559
5	Iran	2,529
6	Germany	2,452

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Iran **d e s k** currently ranks fifth in producing articles related to nanotechnology, according to StatNano, a website that monitors nanotechnology developments in the world.

Iran has submitted 2,529 articles to the Information Sciences Institute (ISI) in the field of nanotechnology since

the beginning of 2017, the website announced.

China, the U.S., India, and South Korea are placed first to fourth in the list respectively.

Germany, Japan, France, UK, Spain, and Italy come next to Iran.

In 2016, Iran ranked sixth in the nanotechnology articles list.

\$10,000 bill for getting car stuck in newly poured concrete



LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A driver could be facing a \$10,000 bill after he plowed into newly poured concrete in Lincoln, Nebraska, and became stuck.

The accident occurred Wednesday on a portion of a road repair project in the state capital. A police incident report says it wasn't obvious that the concrete wasn't dry and that Yasiah drove into

it through a 24-foot (7-meter) gap between traffic control cones.

City engineer Thomas Shafer says the driver is responsible for the repairs. He says the contractor estimated it will cost more than \$10,000 to pay for removing the car, scraping out the ruined slurry, repouring more and finishing it.

Iran's MS Society adopts white stork as its symbol



Masoumeh Ebtekar (L)

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Iran's **d e s k** Multiple Sclerosis Society adopted white stork as its symbol over a ceremony held in Tehran on Friday on the occasion of the World MS Day, May 31.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and chief of the Department

of Environment Masoumeh Ebtekar attended the ceremony.

As described by Ebtekar in her twitter account Iran's MS Society used the white stork as a symbol to convey a feeling of freedom and exhilaration to those suffering the disease.



Mohammad Javad Zarif (L)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Altering school calendar, an escape route from air pollution

The persistent air pollution in metropolises of Iran has lately urged officials to discuss the possibility of altering school calendar.

It's been some years that the choking smog which normally engulfs metropolises and the capital during cold seasons force the officials to shut down schools which is pretty harmful as they usually interfere with final exams or in general the educational curriculum.

جابجایی تعطیلات تابستانه؛ راه فرار از هوای آلوده

با استمرار آلودگی هوا در کلانشهرهای ایران مسئولین به نازگی به منظور رفع این بحران طرح اصلاح تقویم آموزشی کشور را پیشنهاد کرد.

چند سالی است آلودگی هوا در کلانشهرها و پایتخت در روزهای سرد زمستان و پاییز منجر به تعطیلی مدارس میشود که نه تنها ممکن است با امتحانات پایان ترم دانش آموزان تداخل داشته باشد بلکه می تواند خلل جدی در سیستم آموزشی ایجاد کند.

ENGLISH PROVERB

A drowning man will clutch at a straw

■ **Explanation:** someone who is desperate will try to use anything for help, even if it is really no help at all

■ **For example:** Facing the possibility that his marriage might be over, John began visiting psychics to help him decide what to do. A drowning man will clutch at a straw.

PHRASAL VERB

Chuck something away

■ **Meaning:** to throw something away because you do not want it any more

■ **For example:** I chucked all my old clothes away when we moved to the new house.

ENGLISH IDIOM

Before the ink is dry

■ **Explanation:** if people reach an agreement, and then change their minds immediately afterwards, the change occurs 'before the ink is dry'

■ **For example:** You can never tell when he's serious. He's capable of changing his mind before the ink is dry!

Top rebel commander Sabzar Ahmad Bhat killed in Kashmir

Security forces in Indian-administered Kashmir on Saturday killed a top rebel commander in a gun battle, sparking massive protests and clashes in the region.

Sabzar Ahmad Bhat, head of the Hizbul Mujahideen group, was killed overnight by government troops in Tral area, some 40km south of Kashmir's capital, Srinagar, police said.

Hizbul Mujahideen is the largest indigenous rebel group fighting against Indian-rule in the Himalayan territory since an armed rebellion broke-out in 1989.

Bhat was the successor to Burhan Wani, whose death in July last year sparked months of anti-India protests in which scores of people died.

One of Bhat's fighters was also killed in the gun battle, which erupted late on Friday after government forces cordoned off a village following an intelligence tip-off.

"Yes, both of them were gunned down," police chief Shesh Pal Vaid told the AFP news agency.



Police said the fighting was ongoing with at least one fighter holed up in a house.

As the violence raged, hundreds of

angry residents chanting anti-India slogans marched in an attempt to help the trapped rebel escape.

Clashes between rock-throwing pro-

testers and government forces erupted in different places in the area, with police and paramilitary soldiers firing shotgun pellets and tear gas to stop the protests.

As the news of Bhat's killing spread in the region, thousands of people, including students, took to the streets shouting slogans such as "Go India, go back" and "We want freedom."

Many civilians were reported wounded in the clashes.

In a separate incident, the Indian army on Saturday said they had killed six fighters who had infiltrated across the border from Pakistan in the Himalayan region.

Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the end of British rule in 1947. Both claim the disputed territory in its entirety.

Most people in India's portion favor independence or a merger with Pakistan.

Several armed rebel groups are fighting against Indian rule, with tens of thousands of people, most of them civilians, killed in the nearly three decades-old conflict.

(Source: agencies)

Philippine military bombard Marawi city in battle on ISIL terrorists

Philippine military forces have again bombarded the southern city of Marawi, where they have engaged in a battle with suspected Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh)-affiliated terrorists for five days.

"We have identified where they are consolidating so we are doing surgical air strikes to destroy the local terrorist group," said Philippine military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Jo-ar Herrera on Saturday, AFP reported.

The development came as truckloads of soldiers were also seen driving into Marawi. The city is one of the largest Muslim-populated cities in the country with a population of nearly 200,000 residents, most of whom have been evacuated due to the ongoing fighting.

This is while the military has vowed no let-up in its battle against the militants, which coincides with the beginning of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

Military spokesman Herrera said the security operations to rid Marawi of the gunmen would continue despite the start of Ramadan.

"It is painful for the Maranao (the name for local Muslims) that it is Ramadan but our action now is to protect Marawi," Herrera added. "These are the impacts of the local terrorist group's actions."

The violence erupted on Tuesday when dozens of gunmen went on a rampage throughout Marawi in response to an operation by security forces to arrest Isnilon Hapilon, a veteran Filipino militant regarded as the local leader of the ISIL-affiliated militants.

The militants reportedly planted black ISIL flags, took a priest and up to 14 other people hostage at a Catholic church and set fire to buildings.

So far, 13 soldiers, two policemen and 31 militants have

been killed during the fighting, according to authorities.

Two civilians were also confirmed killed inside a hospital that the militants had occupied on Tuesday. The military has also said that it is looking into reports that nine people were murdered at a checkpoint the militants had set up.

President Rodrigo Duterte on Tuesday declared martial law on Mindanao, the country's second-largest island, to stop the spread of Takfiri militancy.

Duterte has further pledged to remove the threat of ISIL-linked militants, whom he accuses of belonging to the local Maute terrorist group and being backed by criminals in the area.

Duterte, however, stated on Friday that he was prepared to talk with the group's leaders.

(Source: Press TV)

Tillerson declines to host Ramadan event at State Department

The United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has declined a request to host an event to mark Islam's holy month of Ramadan, two U.S. officials said, apparently breaking with a bipartisan tradition in place with few exceptions for nearly 20 years.

Since 1999, Republican and Democratic secretaries of state have nearly always hosted either an iftar dinner to break the day's fast during Ramadan or a reception marking the Eid al-Fitr holiday at the end of the month, at the State Department.

Tillerson turned down a request from the State Department's Office of Religion and Global Affairs to host an Eid al-Fitr reception as part of Ramadan celebrations, said two U.S. officials who declined to be identified because they were not

authorized to speak publicly.

According to an April 6 memo seen by Reuters, the office - which typically initiates such events - recommended that Tillerson hold an Eid al-Fitr reception.

His rejection of the request suggests there are no plans this year for any high-profile Ramadan function at the State Department. The month of fasting and prayer for Muslims gets under way in many countries on Saturday.

When asked by Reuters to comment on Tillerson declining a request to host an Eid al-Fitr event in July for Ramadan, a State Department spokesperson said: "We are still exploring possible options for observance of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the month of Ramadan. U.S. ambassadors are encouraged to celebrate Ramadan through a variety of

activities, which are held annually at missions around the world."

Muslim activists have accused President Donald Trump's administration of having an unfriendly attitude toward Islam, encapsulated by its attempts to ban citizens of several Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States.

The administration says that while it strongly opposes militants, it has no quarrel with Islam. Aides point to Trump's visit this month to Saudi Arabia, the birthplace of Islam where he addressed the leaders of more than 50 Muslim countries, as evidence of that.

Members of Congress, Muslim civil society and community leaders, diplomats from Muslim countries and senior U.S. officials usually attend the State Department Ramadan event, a symbol of

the U.S. government's diplomatic efforts with Muslim countries and people.

If Tillerson avoids hosting one this year, that could send a message "that it is not as important to this administration to engage with Muslims," said former U.S. diplomat Farah Pandith, who served in the Bush and Obama administrations and helped plan Ramadan events at the White House and State Department.

Tillerson issued a statement on Friday to mark the start of Ramadan, which he called "a month of reverence, generosity, and self-reflection."

"Most importantly, it is a cherished time for family and friends to gather and give charity to those who are less fortunate," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

Sri Lanka floods, landslides: Death toll rises to 100

Floods and landslides in Sri Lanka's southern and western regions have killed at least 100 people and damaged more than 800 homes, officials said on Saturday.

Ninety-one people were also reported missing and 40 others have been hospitalized after unusually heavy rain on Friday triggered a string of mudslides and caused rivers to burst their banks, according to the country's Disaster Management Centre (DMC).

Indian medical teams and emergency relief arrived in the capital, Colombo, on Saturday to help Sri Lanka deal with the worst flooding in 14 years.

In Agalawatte, some 100km south of Colombo, res-

cuers pulled at least 11 bodies out from the mud and earth, while one person was found alive.

Authorities issued fresh evacuation orders for those living downstream of two major rivers, citing a risk of flooding even though the rains had subsided.

Soldiers have fanned out in boats and helicopters to help with rescue operations. Residents said there are more people trapped in interior villages where boats have been unable to reach.

An Indian ship carrying medical supplies docked in Colombo on Saturday, after Sri Lanka issued an international appeal for help. Another ship is due to arrive on Monday.

The flooding is the worst since May 2003 when 250 people were killed and 10,000 homes destroyed after a similarly powerful Southwest monsoon, officials said.

The DMC said the monsoon ended a prolonged drought that had threatened agriculture as well as hydropower generation.

Mudslides have become common during the monsoon season in the tropical Indian Ocean island as land has been heavily deforested to grow export crops such as tea and rubber.

Last May, a massive landslide killed more than 100 people in central Sri Lanka.

(Source: agencies)

Theater of the absurd: Trump's speech before the Riyadh Summit

➔ It should be unnecessary to point out the absurdity of the above statement, coming from the leader of a country that has launched repeated destabilizing incursions into the Middle East--1953 CIA coup in Iran, 1958 in Iraq, 1948 in Syria, 1987 Tanker war, 2003 invasion of Iraq, 1991 Persian Gulf war, 2001 invasion of Afghanistan -- just to name a few.

From Lebanon to Iraq to Yemen, Iran funds, arms, and trains terrorists, militias, and other extremist groups that spread destruction and chaos across the region. For decades, Iran has fueled the fires of sectarian conflict and terror.

From Lebanon to Iraq to Yemen and beyond, the U.S. is involved continuously in destabilizing operations, which include targeted assassinations by unmanned aircraft and regime change by hired terrorists, in order to advance its geopolitical goals. By backing the sanguinary Saudi regime in its unabashed efforts to subjugate its own and other Shi'a minority populations, the U.S. has intentionally

provoked sectarian conflict in the oil-rich Middle East for its own benefit.

It is a government that speaks openly of mass murder, vowing the destruction of Israel, death to America, and ruin for many leaders and nations in this room.

Trump is defaming a nation that has not committed aggression against its neighbors since 1738, long before the United States existed. Furthermore, the U.S. has committed mass murder itself by firebombing numerous cities in Germany and Japan on its sanguinary quest for "unconditional surrender." In one bombing raid on Tokyo in March 1945, 100,000 civilians were brutally slaughtered.

Among Iran's most tragic and destabilizing interventions have been in Syria. Bolstered by Iran, Assad has committed unspeakable crimes, and the United States has taken firm action in response to the use of banned chemical weapons by the Assad Regime—launching 59 tomahawk missiles at the Syrian air base from where that murderous attack originated.

Deploying the THAAD missile defense systems in South Korea against a background of extensive war games and provocative posturing can certainly be called destabilizing interventions by the U.S. And make no mistake about it: the 59 cruise missiles may have exploded in Syria, but the true targets of the murderous missiles were Trump's political critics in Washington.

Responsible nations must work together to end the humanitarian crisis in Syria, eradicate ISIS, and restore stability to the region. The Iranian regime's longest-suffering victims are its own people. Iran has a rich history and culture, but the people of Iran have endured hardship and despair under their leaders' reckless pursuit of conflict and terror.

"Responsible nations" would not invade other sovereign nations or coerce them into accepting an international order dictated by Washington. The Iranian people are indeed long-suffering, but as a result of the sanctions placed

upon the Islamic Republic by the rogue superpower.

Until the Iranian regime is willing to be a partner for peace, all nations of conscience must work together to isolate Iran, deny it funding for terrorism, and pray for the day when the Iranian people have the just and righteous government they deserve.

The Iranian people have voted overwhelmingly for the government that they desire, unlike Americans, the majority of whom did not vote for Trump. That an American president and his myopic advisers would dare to suggest they know what is best for Iranians illustrates the fatal flaw of the imperial mindset.

"First concrete result of POTUS cozying up to despots in Riyadh: Deadly attack on peaceful protesters by emboldened Bahrain regime," Dr. Zarif remarked on his Twitter page. Compared to the war-worshiping hypocrites in Washington, the Iranian people indeed have a just and righteous government.

Deadly car bomb attack rocks Afghanistan's Khost

A suicide car bomber has attacked Afghan police providing security to the United State forces in eastern Afghanistan, killing at least 18 people, government officials said.

The attack, responsibility for which has been claimed by the Taliban, took place around 8:30am (04:00 GMT) on Saturday near a stadium and bus station in Khost City, Mubarez Zadrar, a spokesman for the governor of Khost province, told Al Jazeera.

"Eighteen people were killed and 10 people injured, including two children," Zadrar said. "The target of the attack was Afghan police and U.S. forces, but most of the victims were civilians."

Saturday was a public holiday in Afghanistan as it marked the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

In clear defiance to a call by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan for a ceasefire during the holy month of Ramadan, the Taliban announced on Friday they would intensify their attacks during the month.

Separately, 10 civilians, including women and children, were killed and six others were wounded when a minibus hit a roadside bomb in Afghanistan's western Herat province on Friday.

The incident took place in Adraskan district of Herat on Friday morning, Abdul Ahad Walizada, a spokesman for the Herat provincial police, said on Saturday.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Erdogan told Merkel of anger over asylum for 'putschists'

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed his disapproval to German Chancellor Angela Merkel over her country's reportedly giving asylum to people accused of links to last year's failed coup, he said in an interview published on Saturday.

"We brought to the agenda the putschist soldiers whose asylum applications have been accepted and gave a firm reaction," Erdogan said, referring to his meeting with Merkel on the sidelines of a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) summit in Brussels on Thursday.

"We asked: 'How can you do this?'" Erdogan said, quoted by the Hurriyet newspaper.

Since the coup attempt, dozens of Turkish diplomats and high-ranking officials have sought asylum in Germany as Ankara continues its crackdown on those suspected of links to the United States-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom it accuses of ordering the coup.

German media reported this month that numerous Turkish military personnel and their families holding diplomatic passports had been granted political asylum.

But Erdogan said Merkel told him asylum approval "was not up to her".

Relations between Berlin and Ankara have been strained since last July's attempted putsch, but have deteriorated further over several issues including the referendum campaign to expand Erdogan's powers.

Ties also worsened after Turkey imprisoned Deniz Yucel, a German-Turkish journalist with Die Welt, on terror charges in February.

Erdogan hit back at Germany's "fixation with Deniz", saying he told Merkel: "I reminded them: 'You have many Deniz, I gave you these documents'"

(Source: AFP)

No alternative for JCPOA: former senator

➔ particularly General Mattis, believe that Iran is the chief troublemaker in the region and has spoken of sanctions and other countermeasures against Iran but not a repudiation of the JCPOA. The outlines of such actions remain unclear.

What is your prediction of U.S.-Iran relations during the Trump presidency?

A: The outlook for the United States-Iran relationship under the Trump Presidency depends, first of all, on Iran. The Supreme Leader has been quoted as saying that he does not wish a cozy relationship with the United States. Whether Iran will act in ways that the United States regards as provocative remains to be seen but, if so, General Mattis, et al. would likely respond. Of course, the Iran election will greatly affect the relationship. Armed conflict is not desired or in the interest of the United States or of Iran and, in my view, will be avoided.

Some experts say Trump's remarks are a blow to NATO or that his disdain of NAFTA is in line with the interest of the American people. On the other hand, some say his insistence on economic protectionism are not in harmony with liberalism or neo-liberalism. What do you think?

A: President Trump's remarks about NATO have been repudiated by him, and the Big Four are strongly in support of NATO and will keep the United States securely in support of it. The United States is sharply divided between supporters of Trump (about 40 percent) and those who oppose him. Each group seems to have its own set of facts, news sources and opinions. The danger of Trumpism are a constant source of news, opinions and conversation in the United States and opponents range in intensity from those who see the United States on the brink of fascism to those who are much less concerned. My view is that the Trump honeymoon is over and that the United States view of liberal democracy will survive intact.

Considering the decline of Trump's popularity, some say he won't be elected for a second time. What is your prediction? Is there a possibility of presidential candidacy by Hillary Clinton or Michelle Obama?

A: I would be surprised if Trump wins a second term but it is way too early to predict the candidates, the issues and the mood of the American people in 2020. One of the great things about American Democracy is its faults are self-correct.

Jose Mourinho on Antoine Griezmann, Man Utd and Monaco

Jose Mourinho made a surprise appearance at the Monaco GP as the Manchester United manager takes a break from football following his side's Europa Cup win.

Speaking to Sky Sports F1, Mourinho revealed he was intent on taking a month off from his day job and started his mini-break in style as he arrived in the Monte Carlo paddock just in time for Saturday's all-important qualifying hour.

"I don't care about football for a month. I'm really happy with our season, the trophies, to be back in Champions League but now I have a rest, to disconnect completely and enjoy my family and friends and other sports I like," Mourinho said before being pressed about United's rumoured transfer targets.

"I have no idea if Antoine Griezmann will come to United. Ask Ed Woodward. He knows since March who I want, what I want and how much I want. Now is for him to work."

But when pressed by Sky F1's Natalie Pinkham, the Manchester United boss, aka the Special One, did concede he was far from a specialist on all things Formula 1.

(Source: Sky Sports)

Fellaini: 'I would break my foot for Jose Mourinho'

Manchester United midfielder Marouane Fellaini has suggested that he would be willing to 'break his foot' for Jose Mourinho.

The Belgian international has enjoyed a promising season under the stewardship of Mourinho, despite early questions being asked of his performances and difficult campaigns under previous coaches Louis van Gaal and David Moyes.

"If I have to break my foot for him [Mourinho], I'll do it. That's me. Even when I'm in pain, I play," said Fellaini, according to the Independent.

"Now I am here at Manchester United, I'm in and want to stay here.

"I work every day with great players, with great staff, at a great club and I'm happy to be here and try to give everything for this club."

Fellaini played an integral role in Mourinho's side that eventually went on to secure the Europa League crown against Ajax last week.

(Source: Sports Mole)

A disgrace I will never forget – Wenger savages Arsenal critics

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger has launched a stinging attack on his detractors, describing some of the criticism as "a disgrace" that he "will never forget".

The Gunners have endured a largely difficult season in the Premier League, with their fifth-place finish ensuring that they missed out on Champions League qualification.

They also suffered a humiliating 10-2 aggregate defeat to Bayern Munich in the last 16 of Europe's elite club competition and a 2-0 home defeat to Southampton in the quarter-final of the EFL Cup.

A growing number of fans have called for Wenger not to be given an extension to the contract that expires next month, with 'Wenger Out' banners appearing at matches and events around the world and airplanes carrying banners both for and against the manager's exit having been flown over The Hawthorns during Arsenal's defeat to West Brom in March.

The 67-year-old has been left furious at the manner of his treatment.

"I don't mind criticism because we are in a public job," he told BBC Sport. "I believe there's a difference between being criticised and being treated in a way that human beings don't deserve.

"The lack of respect from some has been a disgrace and I will never accept that. I will never forget it.

"The behaviour of some people during the season is what hurts me most. It's not my person that is hurt but the impeccable image of the club around the world. That kind of behaviour does not reflect what Arsenal is.

(Source: Sun)

Kane beats Kante to PFA Fans' Player of the Season prize

Harry Kane has won the PFA Fans' Premier League Player of the Season prize ahead of Chelsea duo N'Golo Kante and Eden Hazard.

The Tottenham striker, who won the Golden Boot after scoring 29 goals in the top flight, finished top of the public poll with 16,378 votes.

Kante, who won the PFA Players' Player of the Year and the Football Writers' Association prize for 2017, finished second on 13,515 votes.

Hazard came third on 8,412 votes, ahead of Arsenal star Alexis Sanchez (6,727), Spurs midfielder Dele Alli (3,507) and Everton striker Romelu Lukaku (955).

The top six were chosen by a panel comprising past Premier League stars Paul Merson and Peter Beagrie, as well as Mike Riley, general manager of the Professional Game Match Officials, and Football Supporters' Federation chairman Malcolm Clarke.

More than 49,000 votes were then cast in a public ballot to decide the winner.

(Source: Soccerway)

Nadal targets 10th title in French Open generation game

With the world's top five occupied by players over 30 for the first time, Rafael Nadal is poised to tighten the old guard's Grand Slam grip by capturing an unprecedented 10th French Open.

The Spaniard, written off as a contender in Paris after a quarter-final loss to Novak Djokovic in 2015 and an injury-enforced pull-out before the third round last year, arrives at Roland Garros as the overwhelming favourite.

The 30-year-old has already reached the magical 10 titles this year at the clay-court events in Monte Carlo and Barcelona.

For good measure, he also won Madrid for a fifth time, ending a two-year seven-match losing streak against Djokovic in the process.

Nadal boasts a sensational career record at Roland Garros -- 72 wins and just two defeats, to Djokovic in 2015 and an injury-affected shock loss to Robin Soderling in 2009.

That defeat to the Swede opened the door for Roger Federer to win his only French Open title.

However, Federer, at 35, is skipping the French Open to save himself for an assault on an eighth Wimbledon.

Djokovic, the defending champion in Paris, and world number one Andy Murray are struggling for form ahead of the tournament which starts Sunday.

However, Nadal is desperate to keep a lid on expectations. "You have to write what you have to do, but I don't care," said Nadal when asked about his status as favourite.

Nadal has also thrived on hard courts in 2017, reaching his first Slam final in three years when he lost in five sets to Federer in Australia despite being a break to the good in the deciding set.

He was a beaten finalist against Federer in Miami while his title triumph in Madrid gave him a record-equalling 30th Masters title to add to his 14 majors.

Nadal's record on clay against the world's top two is also heavily-weighted in his favour -- 8-2 against Murray (2-0 at Roland Garros) and 10-5 when facing Djokovic (5-1 in Paris).

The Spanish star will open his campaign against combustible Frenchman Benoit Paire, a man he de-



scribed "as not the ideal opponent" first up.

Friday's draw, meanwhile, placed him on a semi-final collision course with Djokovic.

Djokovic will have US legend Andre Agassi as coach for the first time.

Djokovic completed the career Grand Slam at last year's French Open when he also held all four majors.

On clay this year, he has at least been on an upward curve -- quarter-finals in Monte Carlo, semi-finals in Madrid

and a runners-up spot in Rome where he was demolished by Alexander Zverev.

Djokovic's relationship with the 47-year-old Agassi, an eight-time major winner, is limited, for the moment, to just the French Open.

Agassi said that he initially turned down Djokovic's approach, but was persuaded by his wife, Steffi Graf, to change his mind.

(Source: AFP)

Mathieu hits out at French federation boss



Paul-Henri Mathieu has hit out at French federation president Bernard Giudicelli for saying the 35-year-old, who played some memorable matches at Roland Garros, did not deserve a wild card for the French Open.

Mathieu, however, will be in the main draw after winning his three qualification matches and he will take on Belgian David Goffin in the first round.

"Enough with the farewell wildcards. 'Paulo' is not the future, his career is more behind than ahead of him," Giudicelli, who also denied two-time champion Maria Sharapova a wild card after she returned from a doping ban, said earlier this week.

Mathieu, who reached the fourth round twice in Paris and led Andre

Agassi two sets to love in 2002 as he came close to a quarter-finals spot, hit back on Saturday.

"Someone who says that knows nothing about high level," the Frenchman, who reached a career high ranking 12 in 2008, told French sports daily L'Equipe.

"I got injured -- hip and calf -- and could not play for six to eight weeks but that, they don't know. I can't understand the way they acted, it was totally disrespectful."

Nine-time champion Rafa Nadal maintains one of his biggest scare at Roland Garros was in a third-round 5-7 6-4 6-4 6-4 win against Mathieu in 2006 that lasted almost five hours.

(Source: Eurosport)

Manchester City spending spree looks likely to continue



Manchester City are weighing up a deal for Benfica's 23-year-old goalkeeper Ederson.

Despite AC Milan wonderkid Gianluigi Donnarumma remaining their primary target, there is an acceptance that it would take a huge bid to prize the Italian from his boyhood club.

Ederson has impressed for the champions of Portugal and could leave for less than his £38million release clause.

The young Brazilian is developing into one of Europe's top goalkeepers and City are in the market for a dependable presence at the back.

He possesses a high level of technical ability with his feet as well as being a shot stopper and although he isn't City's first

choice, a move could come to the fore next week.

If the club do pursue a deal, there would be some third-party ownership complications to overcome.

Pep Guardiola ousted Joe Hart is favour of a keeper with what he deemed to be a higher level of ability with his feet in Claudio Bravo at the start of the season.

Bravo flattered to deceive and on occasion failed to provide a stabilising presence with some high profile mistakes.

Willy Caballero showed his worth but has been released and it is thought that Guardiola views goalkeeper as a key position to strengthen ahead of next season.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Vettel fastest in final Monaco practice

Ferrari's championship leader Sebastian Vettel was faster than ever in final Monaco Grand Prix practice on Saturday while Formula One title rival Lewis Hamilton remained well off the pace in his Mercedes.

The German lapped the winding harborside street circuit in a best time of one minute 12.395 seconds, with Finnish team mate Kimi Raikkonen 0.345 slower on a sunny morning in the Mediterranean principality.

Hamilton was only fifth, 0.835 slower than Vettel, while team mate Valtteri Bottas was third and 0.435 off the Ferrari's pace.

Vettel had also been top of the timesheets in

Thursday practice, when his car's speed was obvious to all as he lapped the circuit in 1:12.720 -- at the time the quickest ever lap of Monaco.

The Ferrari driver, who leads Hamilton by six points after two wins each, is already looking like the clear favorite for what would be the Italian team's first Monaco triumph since Michael Schumacher in 2001.

Dutch 19-year-old Max Verstappen was fourth for Red Bull with Australian team mate Daniel Ricciardo, on pole last year but suffering brake problems on Saturday, sixth.

Force India's French rookie Esteban Ocon brought the

session to a close with a smash, breaking his suspension on the exit to the swimming pool complex and plowing straight on into the energy-absorbent wall.

There was more gloom for McLaren, whose hopes of scoring their first points of the year receded with a 15-place grid penalty for Britain's Jensen Button after a problem with his Honda power unit.

The 2009 champion, who is standing in for Fernando Alonso while the Spaniard competes in the Indianapolis 500 on Sunday, now looks set to start in last place.

(Source: Reuters)

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sr4oficial Special moments, smiles that make me feel alive. #FamilyDay

Iran out of FIFA U-20 World Cup

Group C came down to the wire as a late deflected goal helped Portugal edge Iran 2-1 at the FIFA U-20 World Cup Korea Republic 2017 and send them to the knockout stages.

Iran opened the scoring just four minutes into the match when Reza Shekari found space at the near post to head in Ali Shojaei's corner kick for his third of the tournament.

Portugal were then forced to take the initiative in searching for a goal while Iran sat in a compact defensive posture. That was effective until Diogo Goncalves scored a superb equalizer in the 54th minute. Portugal then created the majority of chances until in the 86th minute, they found the goal that kept their campaign alive.

Substitute Xande Silva's cross on the right wing deflected off Iran defender Nima Taheri and snuck into the far side of the net. Iran then created a couple of late chances, but Portugal held on to ensure their progression to the knockout stages.

Portugal will now face host Korea Republic in the Round of 16 on Tuesday 30 May in Cheonan, while Iran are eliminated from the competition and still in search of their first knockout berth in the tournament.

(Source: FIFA)



Iranian judokas win two silver medals at Asian Championships

S P O R T S Iranian judokas Mohammad Rashnnejad and Saeid Mollaei won two silver medals in the Asian Judo Championships 2017 in Hong Kong.

On Friday, Rashnnejad was defeated against Naohisa Takato from Japan in the -60kg weight class and seized a silver medal.

Pak Yong-nam from North Korea and Uzbekistan's Mukhriddin Tilovov jointly won the bronze medal.

Mollaei also took a silver medal in the prestigious

competition after losing to Japanese Sotaro Fujiwara in the final match of the -81kg.

Vladimir Zoloev from Kyrgyzstan and South Korean Lee Moon-jin won the bronze medal.

The 2017 Asian Judo Championships are the 23rd edition of the Asian Judo Championships, and are being held in Hong Kong from May 26 to May 28.

A total of 244 judoka from 29 countries have participated in the competitions.



Button gets 15-place grid penalty for Monaco GP

Jenson Button is set to start Sunday's showcase Monaco Grand Prix from last place after McLaren's engine partners Honda detected a power unit problem that will incur a 15-place grid penalty.

McLaren have not qualified higher than seventh on the 20 car grid in five races this season.

Button, the 2009 world champion and former Monaco winner, is standing in for Fernando Alonso in the Mediterranean principality while the Spaniard competes in the Indianapolis 500 on the same day.

The penalty will only confirm in Alonso's mind that the double world champion, who has been the center of attention at Indianapolis, was right to miss Monaco for a shot at glory across the Atlantic.

McLaren are the only team yet to score a point this season, the former champions beset by a lack of reliability and performance.

Monaco had represented a real chance for the team to change that, however, with the tight and twisty street circuit rewarding driver skills and making engine power less of a factor.

Button, who had not driven a Formula One car for more than six months until he stepped into the cockpit for Thursday practice, was 12th in Satur-



day's final session before qualifying.

Belgian team mate Stoffel Vandoorne, who already had a three place penalty carried over from the previous race in Spain, was 10th.

Button, 37, had said on Thursday that he was enjoying being back behind the wheel.

"I definitely stepped away at the right time and I haven't missed driving a Formula One car. But today I really enjoyed it, more than I have for a couple of years to be fair," he said at the time.

"I'm enjoying it very much, probably more than I thought I would actually."

(Source: Reuters)

Raiola denies Donnarumma threat from AC Milan

AC Milan have not threatened to leave Gianluigi Donnarumma in the stands if he does not sign a new contract in the coming weeks, insists agent Mino Raiola.

Reports in Italy have claimed that the 18-year-old goalkeeper will be omitted from the first team for all of next season if he does not agree to a new deal before June 30.

Donnarumma, who has a year left on his contract, has been linked with a possible €75million move to Manchester United, with manager Jose Mourinho reportedly keen to sign him if David de Gea joins Real Madrid.

The Italy international stated in March that he hopes to stay at San Siro, but a lack of a breakthrough in talks with the club has left his future far from certain.

Raiola, however, has made it clear that Donnarumma's plans are likely to be settled after the international matches early next month.

"Nobody said Gigio doesn't want to renew with Milan," Raiola told Radio DeeJay.

"I don't think Milan's directors said any such thing [about banishing him to the stands]. I think people are just trying to create a war between Milan and me.



"After the internationals, Gigio will go on holiday and then we'll see what happens. We're talking to Milan. We'll see.

"We will evaluate certain things and there will be other matters to assess, too. I'm not taking anyone away on a free transfer."

Donnarumma was not included in the youthful Italy squad for the friendly with San Marino next Wednesday, but it is expected that he will be called up by Giampiero Ventura for the match with Uruguay on June 7 and World Cup qualifier against Liechtenstein four days later.

(Source: Soccerway)

Sanei: Preparation key to Iranian victory

Islamic Republic of Iran head coach Ali Sanei has praised his players for carrying out their instructions to perfection following a 2-0 win over Iraq which saw them lift the inaugural AFC U-20 Futsal Championship title on Friday.

Iran emerged victorious thanks to Sahand Rezapour's fourth-minute strike and an own goal from Iraq's Zaid Ali. To leave the Iranians as proud holders of both the U-20 and senior AFC Futsal Championship titles, and Sanei a very happy man.

"It was a fantastic game," declared a smiling Sanei.

"We could have scored more than two goals, but our players are young and inexperienced, so we didn't want to make any more mistakes.

"We were more concerned in controlling the game and acting on their mistakes.

"For our preparation, we analyzed their play style. And we knew what we wanted to do, and we played



it perfectly.

Undefeated throughout the tournament, the Iranians impressed during the Group Stage and beyond, scoring

40 goals and only two conceding nine. A fine run of form that, according to Sanei, helped fuel belief and optimism within the camp.

"From the Group Stage, we got better with every game," he said.

"It was a step-by-step process, and with every victory, our confidence grew."

Iran and Iraq - via their U-18 teams - are now set to be Asia's two representatives at the 2018 Summer Youth Olympics in Buenos Aires, and with little time to waste, Sanei is eager to begin scouting for players immediately.

"Iran is a big country with many talented and skilful players. We won't just be looking in schools and universities, but I believe we can find players from the streets, neighborhoods and cities from everywhere."

(Source: AFC)

Hazard sacrifices a pay increase so Chelsea can sign their target

Eden Hazard has joked that his new deal could prevent Chelsea from signing Romelu Lukaku this summer.

The Belgian midfielder still has three years remaining on his current deal but the Premier League champions will be wary of interest from Real Madrid in the upcoming transfer window.

Hazard admits he has not yet been offered a new deal by Chelsea but will open talks after the club's FA Cup final against Arsenal.

'At this moment, there's nothing on the table. We're waiting for the end of the season,' the 26-year-old told

'I'm still calm. We will talk. If not, then we'll see.'

Asked if there's still a chance of a move to another big European club this summer, the Belgian replied: 'For the moment, I don't know. I'm happy at the club.'

'When I'm back from the national team, we'll have time to talk and see what's possible.'

Chelsea have reportedly made the signing of Lukaku one of their priorities for the summer, and Hazard has joked that his own contract could get in the way of his Belgium team-mate's potential return to Stamford Bridge.

'If I sign a contract, maybe there won't be enough money left to get Romelu!' he said.

'I'm kidding. Whoever comes in, we'll be ready for the new season.'

(Source: Metro)



Impressive Touhid Lotfi named Most Valuable Player

Islamic Republic of Iran's Touhid Lotfi has been named the AFC U-20 Futsal Championship's Most Valuable Player after guiding his side to the title on Friday.

Iran's talismanic captain rounded off a superb individual campaign with another highly creditable display as Iran beat Iraq 2-0 to secure the inaugural tournament's crown.

The livewire playmaker scored six times in seven matches – including a hat-trick against Thailand in the semi-finals – while also creating numerous assists as Iran netted an impressive 40 goals throughout the competition.

And despite being unable to add to his tally in the final, Lotfi was a shining light yet again as he further underlined just why he is regarded as one of the region's rising stars in the world of futsal.

"No words can express how I felt when I received this award, all I could do was cry and ask God if it was meant to be," the 19-year-old said after receiving his accolade.

"But this award is not just because of my efforts, I have to acknowledge that it's my colleagues who gave me the opportunity to hold this award.

"My performances from the Group Stage onwards have been thanks to my coach Ali Arani. All I needed to do was follow the plan," he added.

(Source: AFC)



AFC President hails Iran's AFC U-20 Futsal Championship success

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) President Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa has congratulated the Islamic Republic of Iran for winning the inaugural AFC U-20 Futsal Championship after they defeated Iraq 2-0 on Friday night in Bangkok, Thailand.

Both countries will represent Asia at the Buenos Aires 2018 Youth Olympic Games Futsal competition in Argentina.

"On behalf of the Asian football family, I would like to congratulate the Islamic Republic of Iran for displaying immense quality and consistency to clinch the first-ever AFC U-20 Futsal Championship. Iraq also deserve praise for their efforts and I am confident that both teams will do our continent proud in Buenos Aires next year.

"Tonight's victory serves as a testament to the exemplary efforts undertaken by Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran and I am confident that this achievement will continue to inspire tomorrow's generation of players and fans."

The AFC U-20 Futsal Championship was introduced to provide AFC Member Associations with more opportunities to compete and succeed at the international level, as espoused in the AFC's Vision and Mission.

Shaikh Salman also commended the Local Organizing Committee for hosting a highly-successful competition both off and on the court. After 11 days of highly charged, quick tempo action at the Bangkok Arena, the impact of the championship was also evident across the continent on multiple social media platforms, with the AFC's Twitter account reaching 824,615 impressions.

In addition, the AFC YouTube channel has registered an impressive 418,439 views, closing in on nearly 2 million minutes of riveting action viewed.

"Futsal in Asia continues to see great progress and rising standards in recent times and the AFC U-20 Futsal Championship exemplifies this growing trend, reinforcing the passion for the great game in the continent.

"I would like to thank Football Association of Thailand and the Local Organizing Committee for their hard work and dedication in delivering a memorable and successful competition."

Friday's final saw the Islamic Republic of Iran emerge victorious thanks to Sahand Rezapour's fourth-minute strike and an own goal from Iraq's Zaid Ali. The victory leaves the Iranians as proud holders of both the U-20 and senior AFC Futsal Championship titles.

(Source: AFC)

Japan come from behind to reach last 16

Italy and Japan played out a 2-2 draw – with a Ritsu Doan brace earning a point for the Asian champions – that saw both progress into the knockout round from FIFA U-20 World Cup Group D in second and third place.

In seemingly a straight-shootout for second spot, Italy arrived with the ace of goal difference up their sleeve. They looked like they would be able to keep it firmly tucked away, though, as they raced into a two-goal lead inside ten minutes.

A stunning volleyed cross from the left Andrea Favilli was expertly turned in by Riccardo Orsolini. Then, a smart free-kick from Francesco Cassata – clipped over the wall – allowed Giuseppe Panico to slam home.

It would have been easy to assume that was that. But that was not accounting for Doan. A chink of light appeared when he got a stud on Keita Endo's in-swinging cross to nutmeg Andrea Zaccagno and halve the deficit before the break.

His second was something special. Charging into the area, the three Italian defenders around knew they could not touch the fleet-footed Gamba Osaka man and, with Zaccagno on-rushing, he nudged the ball into the net.

(Source: FIFA)

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■ Managing Director: Ali Asgari

■ Editor-in-Chief: Hassan Lasjerdi

» Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
editor@tehrantimes.com

» Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000

» Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450

» Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807

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Iranian pop singer Mohammad Alizadeh to tour Australia, Canada

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian pop singer Mohammad Alizadeh to tour Australia and Canada in summer and autumn this year.



A poster for Iranian pop singer Mohammad Alizadeh's tour of Canada in October

His Australian tour will begin at the Sleeman Sports Complex in Brisbane on June 23, Irangam Records, which is the organizer of the tours, announced last week. Performances have been arranged for Perth and Sydney on June 24 and 30 and the final leg of his band's tour will be at the Melbourne Recital Centre on July 1. Stand-up comedian Hassan Reyvandi will also give performances on the tour. The Canadian tour is scheduled to start at the John Bassett Theatre in Toronto on October 6. It will then continue in Vancouver and Montreal on October 8 and 13 and finally will come to an end in Calgary on October 14.

Iranian theater troupe, Italian center to hold workshop in Lecce

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Moj Theater Troupe from Iran in collaboration with Cantieri Teatrali Koreja, an Italian theatrical production center for experimentation and theater for infancy and youth, will hold a workshop in the Italian city of Lecce in October.

Theater students from around the globe have been invited to attend the workshop, which is to be led by Cantieri Teatrali Koreja artistic coordinator Salvatore Tramacere, the director of the Moj Theater Troupe, Arash Abbasi, told the Persian service of ISNA on Saturday. "Interested Iranian applicants are asked to send their CVs to the email address mojtheatre.workshop@gmail.com within the current week," he added.

There will be individuals from different countries at the workshop, which will be followed by a performance by the participants at the end, he concluded.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Joint album by Iranian, Afghan musicians released

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — "To the Other Side of Samarkand", a joint album by Iranian and Afghan musicians, has recently been released by the Naghmeh Haft Eqlim Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran. "To the Other Side of Samarkand" is the debut album of Afghan pop singer Aref Jafari, who is also the composer of the album.



"Three Sisters" to go on stage at Tehran theater

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Hassan Majuni plans to stage Russian playwright Anton Chekhov's "Three Sisters" at Tehran's Paliz Theater on June 6. The 1901 play is about three sisters Olga, Masha and Irina, who grew up in a cultured and educated family in Moscow but now they have to live in a small, boring town. Saeid Changizian, Fariba Jeddikar, Hossein Omid, Mehdi Bajestani and Milad Shajareh are the main members of the cast for the play.

Iran's "Animal" wins award at Cannes Cinéfondation

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian short film "Animal" co-directed by Bahram and Bahman Ark won the second prize of the 20th Cinéfondation Selection at the 70th Cannes Film Festival, the organizers announced on Saturday. The film tells the story of a man who attempts to cross a frontier disguised as a ram. "Paul Is Here" by Valentina Maurel from Belgium won the first prize, while "Two Youths Died" by Tommaso Usberti from France received the third prize.

Works by pioneers of Iranian modern art on display at Tehran exhibit

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** — Tehran's Mojdeh Gallery is displaying works by the pioneers of Iranian modern art in an exhibition titled "New Era Pioneers". Rarely seen works by Sohrab Sepehri, Bahman Mohasses, Hossein Zenderudi, Parviz Kalantari, Jazeh Tabatabai and many other artists are seen in the collection, the gallery announced in a press release on Saturday. "The artworks have been borrowed from several Iranian collectors and offered works are quite different from what many would expect from the artists," gallery owner Mojdeh Tabatabai said in a press release published on Saturday. She added that the exhibit is actually good practice to learn how to run a museum, because the collectors are good supporters of museums. "After museums, collectors are the supporters and preservers of art," she said. Artistic director of the gallery Fereydon Farbud also said that the



An art enthusiast visits the New Era Pioneers exhibition at Tehran's Mojdeh Gallery on May 25, 2017. (Honaronline/Siamak Zomorodi-Motlaq)

project has been initiated by the Iranian National Committee for ICOM (the International Council of Museums) Farbud said that 30 works have been put on display in the exhibit, with each artist presenting two or more works. "Works are offered at good and reasonable prices, giving the chance to art aficionados to acquire a piece of art they like," he added. The works will be exhibited until May 30 at the gallery located at 27 North Allameh Blvd., in the Saadatabad neighborhood.

Denis Johnson, author of "Jesus' Son", dead at 67

NEW YORK (AP) — Denis Johnson, the prize-winning fiction writer, poet and playwright best known for his surreal and transcendent story collection "Jesus' Son," has died at age 67. Johnson died Wednesday, according to his literary agent, Nicole Aragi. Johnson died of liver cancer at his home in The Sea Ranch, outside of Gualala, California. "Denis was one of the great writers of his generation," Jonathan Galassi, president and publisher of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, said in a statement Friday. "He wrote prose with the imaginative concentration and empathy of the poet he was." Johnson's honesty, humor and vulnerability were intensely admired by readers, critics and fellow writers, some of whom mourned him on Twitter. He won the National Book Award in 2007 for his Vietnam War novel "Tree of Smoke" and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for "Tree of Smoke," and, in 2012, for his novella "Train Dreams." His other works include the novel "Laughing

Monsters" and "Angels," the poetry collection "The Veil" and the play "Hellhound On My Trail." The story collection "The Largess of the Sea Maiden," his first since "Jesus' Son," is scheduled to come out January from the Penguin Random House imprint Dial Press. Many remember him for "Jesus' Son," which in hazed but undeniable detail chronicled the lives of various drug addicts adrift in America. The title was taken from the Velvet Underground song "Heroin," the stories were sometimes likened to William Burroughs' "Naked Lunch" and the experiences were drawn in part from Johnson's own struggles with addiction. Much of "Jesus' Son" tells of crime, violence, substance abuse and the worst of luck. But, as related by a recovering addict with an unprintable name (his initials were F.H.), the stories had an underlying sense of connection, possibility and unknown worlds. In the story "Car Crash While Hitchhiking," the narrator looks upon an accident victim, a bloodied man taking his final breaths.

"He wouldn't be taking many more. I knew that, but he didn't, and therefore I looked down into great pity upon a person's life on this earth," Johnson writes. "I don't mean that we all end up dead, that's not the great pity. I mean that he couldn't tell me what he was dreaming, and I couldn't tell him what was real." Reviewing the book for The New York Times, James McManus noted that "Mr. Johnson's is a universe governed by addiction, malevolence, faith and uncertainty." "It is a place where attempts at salvation remain radically provisional, and where a teetering narrative architecture uncannily expresses both Christlike and pathological traits of mind," McManus wrote. The book was adapted into a 1999 film of the same name, starring Billy Crudup and including a cameo by Johnson. In 2006, "Jesus' Son" was cited in a Times poll as among the important works of fiction of the previous 25 years.

Ariana Grande to hold concert in Manchester for bombing victims

NEW YORK (Reuters) — U.S. pop star Ariana Grande said on Friday that she will hold a benefit concert in Manchester for the victims of Monday's suicide bombing at her show in the English city. Grande, 23, said in a message on her Instagram account that a date for the concert had not yet been worked out. Monday's suicide bombing, which killed 22 people and injured more than 100, many of them young people, took place just after Grande had finished performing. She later cancelled several concerts scheduled in London and Europe through June 5. "I'll be returning to the incredibly brave city of Manchester to spend time with my fans and to have a benefit concert in honor of and to raise money for the victims and their families. ... I will have details to share with you as soon as everything is confirmed," Grande wrote. She also tweeted a link to a fundraising site for the victims organized by the Manchester Evening News, which has so far brought in some 1.7 million pounds (\$2.1 million) Grande tweeted after the bombing she was "broken" by the attack by British-born Salman Abedi that was claimed by Islamic State. She returned



A boy carries a candle during a vigil for the victims of an attack on concert goes at Manchester Arena, in Royton, near Manchester, Britain May 26, 2017. (Reuters/Phil Noble)

to her Florida home on Tuesday. In her Instagram posting, she said that her "Dangerous Woman" concert tour was intended to be a "space for my fans, a place for them to escape, to celebrate, to heal, to feel safe and to be themselves." She said the victims would be "on my mind and in my heart everyday ... for the rest of my life." But she added defiantly: "We will not quit or operate in fear. We won't let this divide us. We won't let hate win." Former Oasis frontman Liam Gallagher, a Manchester native, said on Friday he would donate the proceeds of his show next Tuesday in the city to a fund supporting victims and their families.

Security tight for "Wonder Woman" movie premiere in Hollywood

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — The U.S. premiere of superhero movie "Wonder Woman" went ahead with extra security in Los Angeles, including bomb sniffer dogs and a heightened police presence on the red carpet, after the cancellation of the film's London event after this week's British suicide bombing. Media and fans underwent extra bag checks for the open air red carpet at Hollywood's Pantages Theatre on Thursday, where the cast spoke of their regret at the Manchester pop concert bombing that killed 22 people. Britain raised its terror alert to critical and movie studio Warner Bros. said on Wednesday it had decided to cancel its May 31 premiere in London for "Wonder Woman." Actress Gal Gadot, who plays the comic book superheroine, told reporters she was "familiar, unfortunately, with these types of events." "I think it was a good idea not to do the premiere in London... I can tell you we always say we need to celebrate life and life is stronger than anything and now we're trying to celebrate life, right? So it's mixed



Cast member Gal Gadot in "Wonder Woman" feelings but the show must go on, I guess." Director Patty Jenkins said she was not concerned about canceling the film's London premiere. "All of our eyes on the UK right now and we're heartbroken. It's not the time to celebrate anything and I'm only happy that we really did make a movie about love and trying to be better people." "That's the message that needs to be out in the world right now but it's not a time to celebrate anything else," Jenkins said. The film, the first live action feature film built around the 1941 DC comic book character, also stars Chris Pine and Robin Wright. It starts its rollout in movie theaters worldwide on May 30.

