

Regional crises won't affect Tehran-Muscat ties: Oman **2**



2nd Iran-Russia Energy Committee meeting due in coming days **4**



'Tourism brings both money and more positive intl. image for Iran' **10**



Kiarostami died of massive brain hemorrhage caused by overdose of heparin: Iran **16**

Iran prepared to deploy troops in Syria



Left to right, Russian lead negotiator on Syria Alexander Lavrentyev, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Hossein Jaber Ansari, Kazakh Foreign Minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov and UN Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura attend the fourth round of Syria peace talks in Astana on May, 2017.

Eurasian Economic Union close to free-trade deal with Iran

The Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union aims to finalize a free-trade deal with Iran by the end of the year, in an attempt by Russia and its fellow members to deepen ties with Tehran.

Russia and Iran cooperate on a number of geopolitical issues, most notably in the war in Syria. The two countries have sought to deepen their relationship since the EU and U.S. imposed sanctions on Moscow in 2014.

Reaching a deal on free trade would represent a notable victory for the nascent EEU — a single market of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia set up in 2015 — and mark a significant strengthening of relations between Iran and the former Soviet republics.

"We believe we can come up with something substantial by the end of the year," said Timur Suleimenov, Kazakhstan's minister of economy.

The EEU's prime ministers resolved in March to make talks with Tehran a priority, scenting an opportunity to expand beyond the bloc's combined market of 183m people.

"We would like to have a framework signed then," said Suleimenov, who became minister in December after previously working as the minister in charge of economy and financial policy at the EEU Commission in Moscow.

At the same time, Suleimenov warned that any souring of U.S.-China trade relations under Trump would be harmful for Central Asia.

Trump's campaign for the White House was marked by strong anti-free trade rhetoric and heavy criticism of China, which he threatened with import tariffs and a move to label it a currency manipulator. However, his recent meetings with President Xi Jinping and a trade deal this month to give U.S. companies more access to the Chinese market, while scorned by experts, have raised hopes that he will be less aggressive towards Beijing in office.

China's One Belt One Road policy to aggressively expand trade relations with Central Asian countries is seen in the region's capitals as a crucial driver of their economic growth. **→4**

Leader, senior officials donate \$170,000 to free prisoners

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, President Hassan Rouhani, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, and Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Larijani made a total of 6.83 billion rials (nearly \$170,000) in contributions to help free prisoners who had committed involuntary crimes.

The leader and the president donated 3.13 billion rials (\$78,250) and 2.7 billion rials (\$67,500) respectively, while the parliament

speaker and the judiciary chief each made 500 million rials (\$12,500), IRIB reported on Monday.

Every year concurrent with the holy month of Ramadan Iranians make generous donations to help free prisoners. According to Blood Money Organization's director Asadollah Jolaei, this year the 30th charity fund raising ceremony will be held today in Tehran.

Some 290 fundraising events are planned to be held nationwide, he added.

Last year, some 178 charity fundraising events to free prisoners took place nationwide and contributions totaled some 400 billion rials (nearly \$10 million), Jolaei explained.

He also pointed out that the leader, the president, the parliament speaker, and the judiciary chief donated 3 billion rials (\$75,000), 2.5 billion rials (\$62,500), 500 million rials (\$12,500), and 500 million rials (\$12,500) to the event respectively.

Iran to receive €10m in humanitarian funding from EU

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The European Commission has offered €10 million in humanitarian funding to help Iran complement efforts to provide for the basic needs of Afghan refugees and their families, with emphasis on education of children, protection, food, water, health and sanitation.

According to a press release issued on the European Commission website on Monday, EU has announced humanitarian assistance of over €44 million to help people in need in South-West and Central Asia, who continue to face the consequences of years of conflicts and displacement, as well as recurrent natural disasters.

The funding will support Afghan refugees and their families in Iran and Pakistan, help victims of conflict in Afghanistan and improve

disaster risk management in Central Asia.

"The EU's assistance announced today will help hundreds of thousands of people affected by conflicts and natural disasters in South-West and Central Asia. I was recently in the region and saw first-hand the humanitarian needs. Children always suffer the most in long-lasting crises which is why a significant part of this funding will also focus on education in emergencies. Investing in children's future is crucial for the stabilization of the entire region," said Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos Stylianides. The Commissioner made the announcement as he met today with Mr. Neil Buhne, UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Pakistan.

€25.5 million will help internally dis-

placed people in Afghanistan who have had to flee conflict or been injured, as well as the most vulnerable Afghan refugees returning to their country. The assistance will focus on areas such as protection, food, emergency shelter, health, water, hygiene and sanitation.

Organizations in Pakistan will also benefit from funding of about €7 million, which will notably help Pakistanis who have been displaced by internal conflict and also help provide essential services for Afghan refugees.

In Central Asia, over €2 million will be provided for disaster risk reduction so communities are better prepared to respond to natural hazards. The Commission has funded a number of such programs in the region since 1996.



Tasnim/Omid Rajabipour

Borage harvest season in northern Iran

Borage, also known as a starflower, is a medicinal herb and now it is in season. Local farmers in Gilan province that lies along the Caspian Sea in northern Iran are busy harvesting it.

An annual herb in the flowering plant family, borage is used in herbal tea called damnoosh in Iran for its healing benefits in hyperactive gastrointestinal, as well as respiratory, cardiovascular, and urinary disorders.

Intl. Holy Quran Exhibition kicks off in Tehran

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Reza Salehi-Amiri opened the 25th International Holy Quran Exhibition at Tehran's Imam Khomeini Mosalla on Monday.

Copies of the Holy Quran published by various Iranian and international publishers are on display in the exhibit that will be running until June 16.

The exhibit, which is held during the holy month of Ramadan every year, coincides with the death anniversary of Imam Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran this year, and the organizers have arranged sections to highlight Imam Khomeini and the Quran.

A special division has also been dedicated to top translations and interpretations of the Holy Quran by Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Abdolkarim Musavi Ardebili and Mohammad Vaez-Zadeh Khorasani.

According to the Deputy Culture Minister Mohammadreza Heshmati, a number of figures active in promoting the Quran will be honored during the exhibit in a ceremony that will be attended by President Hassan Rouhani.

The screening of a documentary on Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993), a Japanese philosopher who had many publications on Islam and other religions, is among the highlights of the exhibition. **→16**

Boost in nominal petchem output capacity planned

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The National Petrochemical Company (NPC) plans to increase its nominal production capacity by three percent to reach 86 percent by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018).

Ali-Mohammad Bossaqzadeh, the production control director of NPC, said the goal will be achieved through implementing new petrochemical projects in the country, Shana news reported on Monday.

Seven new petrochemical projects are planned to be implemented in the coun-

try by the end of the current calendar year, Bossaqzadeh had previously announced.

Also, NPC Managing Director Marziyeh Shahdaie has said that with all unfinished projects coming online the country's petrochemical industry will witness a significant boost and annual production capacity is going to reach 72 million tons in this year.

The official put the country's annual petrochemical production at 50 million tons in the past calendar year and said that 21 million tons of petrochemical products worth \$9.4 billion were exported in the previous year. **→4**



ARTICLE
Harun Yahya
political analyst

The Road to peace in Syria

Truly the only way to end the civil war in Syria is cooperation between regional countries including Turkey, Russia and Iran. The involvement of other foreign powers would not be able to offer a permanent solution. Therefore, it is great to see that new developments reflect this sentiment and a regional cooperation is being built. The meeting that took place on December 20, 2016 in Moscow between the foreign ministers of Russia, Turkey and Iran, which resulted in a joint declaration, marked the beginning of such cooperation.

The declaration dealt with crucial issues such as the preservation of the unity, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, the importance of a diplomatic solution rather than a military one and increasing the ceasefires across the region to allow the transfer of humanitarian aid to areas where they are urgently needed. Indeed, only days after this declaration, on December 30, 2016, a general ceasefire went into effect.

After more than six years of war, the cooperation between the three key regional players for the first time created a prospect for peace in Syria. It was also a clear reminder that the problems in the region can be resolved only through cooperation. In fact, the Geneva meetings that were previously led by the U.S. and Western coalitions failed to offer a solution or contribute to the peace process in the country.

The Moscow agreement also paved the way for the Astana talks, which represented a whole new era for the road to peace in Syria. During the Astana meetings, which were held on January 23-24, February 15-16 and March 14-15, it was decided that Russia, Iran and Turkey would be guarantors of ceasefire and that the three countries act as observers to ensure the continuation of the ceasefire. The UN, the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition also accepted the decision. **→13**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Two right-wing factions agree on list for Majlis presiding board

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Two right-wing factions d e s k - Velaee and Independents - have agreed on introducing a shared list as candidates for the Majlis presiding board.

Speaking to ISNA news agency on Monday, the spokesman of the Velaee faction said the list is to be headed by Ali Larijani, the current parliament speaker.

Hossein Naqavi Hosseini added the two factions have agreed that Velaee has six members in the list and the Independents five.



Rouhani congratulates Azeri counterpart on national day

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — In a message to Ilham d e s k Aliyev on Monday, President Hassan Rouhani congratulated the Azeri leader, government and nation on Republic Day, which marks the founding of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918.

The Iranian president said the great potential for bilateral ties as well as cultural, religious and historical bonds that the two nations have in common have created a “unique arena” for the enhancement of cooperation between the two neighbors in line with their mutual interests, president.ir reported.



‘Council election results not annulled in any constituency’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The spokesman for the d e s k central committee tasked to oversee council elections said on Monday that so far no council election results have been canceled in any constituency.

However, Farhad Tajari said, discussions are underway for annulling the results of council election in Sari - a city in northern Mazandaran province – and this is not final yet.

Speaking to IRIB, he added so far 300 pleas have been made to the committee about the elections. “About 200 of the pleas call for recounting the ballots, which we are currently considering.”



Majlis speaker congratulates Lebanon on liberation anniversary

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali d e s k Larijani has congratulated Lebanon on its Liberation Day anniversary.

In a letter to his counterpart Nabih Berri on Monday, Larijani said the victory was owing to Berri’s efforts alongside those of other prominent figures to free parts of Lebanon from Israeli grip in 2000, ILNA reported.

On May 25, 2000, the Israeli army withdrew from territory in Southern Lebanon, marking the end of the South Lebanon conflict (1985–2000).



Iranians launch campaign to prevent Turkey to dry up wetland

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Some 5,000 Iranians have d e s k signed a petition that has been sent to UN chief Antonio Guterres, calling on Turkey to stop building dams which dry up the Tigris river in Iraq and consequently Hoor al-Azim wetland in southwestern Iran.

The petition reads that Turkey “has constructed a tremendous number of dams in the Southern Anatolian region and the headwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers,” Fars reported on Monday.



Iran sympathizes with Sri Lanka over deadly natural disaster

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Foreign Ministry d e s k spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Monday expressed condolences to the people and government of Sri Lanka over deadly floods and landslides, Tasnim reported.

Landslides and floods in Sri Lanka have killed at least 169 people and the island nation faces the risk of more mudslides as torrential rains continue.

112 people are still reported missing and 95 injured after the worst rains in the Indian Ocean island since 2003.

Iran prepared to deploy troops in Syria



Iran says is prepared to dispatch troops to Syria to monitor compliance with the de-escalation zone initiative which was agreed upon on May 4 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

The agreement, which is to last initially for six months, calls for a pause in fighting, including government airstrikes, and for unhindered aid deliveries in and around the four main zones still held by rebels unaffiliated with the Islamic State.

The pact, however, does not apply to militants associated with the Islamic State or a Qaeda-linked group commonly known as the Nusra Front, which were designated as terrorist and hence, left out of the Astana talks.

The de-escalation zones, envisioned as places where displaced Syrian civilians could voluntarily return and settle, include the northern province of Idlib, the central province of Homs, the East Ghouta

region outside Damascus, and southern Syria along the Jordanian border.

Neither the Syrian government nor the rebels signed the document although the Syrian government voiced its support for it. Rebel groups objected, arguing it left too many loopholes for the Syrian military to continue what they called indiscriminate bombings of civilian areas.

While the de-escalation zone initiative was implicitly welcome by Washington, which said it supported any effort “genuinely” aimed at creating “a credible, peaceful resolution,” it is unclear how the guarantors will monitor compliance.

Aleksandr Lavrentyev, the Russian negotiator at the talks, told Russian news

Iranian lawmakers uncertain about parliamentary leadership

By Mohammad Homaeefar

TEHRAN — Amid uncertainty over the fate of two prominent lawmakers, some members of the pro-reform Hope parliamentary bloc have pledged to do everything they can in order to keep Masoud Pezeshkian and Ali Mottahari in the presiding board of the parliament.

“Some factions are in disagreements on the two deputies but we, as members of the Hope faction, have announced that keeping Pezeshkian and Mottahari [in parliament’s leadership] is our red line,” Parvaneh Salahshouri, a reformist lawmaker, said on Monday.

As competition between different parliamentary factions intensifies, On Sunday the parliament announced that the session for its leadership elections will be held next Wednesday.

Iranian lawmakers elect their speaker and deputy speakers during the first session of parliament for a one-year term. The session is usually held in May, however, this year it was postponed to June 7.

For nine years, members of the parliament have been voting for Ali Larijani to be the speaker of Parliament. Following the 2016 parliamentary elections, which were a major shake-up in the parliament, the lawmakers elected Masoud Pezeshkian and Ali Mottahari as first and second deputy speakers respectively.

During last year’s election, the reformists and moderates formed a coalition under the “List of Hope” and managed to win 41.03% of the seats, more than that of the principlists and independents – if counted separately.

In recent days, however, some parliamentarians have expressed concern about the future of Mottahari in parliament’s leadership. According to unverified



reports, some members of the Hope bloc have formed a coalition with the principlists to remove him from the presiding board.

On Saturday, Mohammad Reza Aref, the leader of the Hope faction, said the bloc wants Mottahari and Pezeshkian to stay in the leadership, and is doing

“Some factions are in disagreements on the two deputies but we, as members of the Hope faction, have announced that keeping Pezeshkian and Mottahari [in parliament’s leadership] is our red line,” Parvaneh Salahshouri, a reformist lawmaker, said on Monday.

Regional crises won’t affect Tehran-Muscat ties: Oman

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Omani d e s k Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah has said that Tehran-Muscat ties are based on “honesty”, “friendship” and will not be affected by crises in the Middle East region.

Oman has “strongest” relations with Iran on the basis of “cooperation” and “friendship”, the foreign minister said in an interview with BBC Arabic.

He added that Oman has good relations with Tehran regardless of differences between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The Omani foreign minister also noted that conflicts between Iran and Saudi Arabia are not permanent and different views are quite natural in regional developments.

Alawi said it is the policy of Oman to distance from regional conflicts although the country is ready to help solve regional problems.

Iran and Oman have been enjoying close ties over the years. During the nuclear negotiations, Oman played an intermediary role, seeking to facilitate the talks between Iran and the U.S. as the main negotiating partners.

According to Times of Oman, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani praised Muscat’s “constructive role” in the nuclear talks.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said on April 2, 2015, that Oman “not only hosted a number of important meetings, but also played a critical role in getting these talks off the ground in the first place”.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani visited Oman and Kuwait in February following an initiative by the Kuwaiti emir to normalize ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia and some other Arab countries on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf.

‘U.S. Senate Democrats expected to tie Russia to sanctions on Iran’

POLITICS A well-placed d e s k Senate Democratic aide has emailed a tip which says the Democratic senators are expected to tie Russia to new sanctions on Iran.

“Expect many Senate Dems to push for the Senate to not do Iran sanctions without Russian sanctions,” Axios news website quoted the aide as saying.

The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee approved on Thursday the most sweeping sanctions against Iran since a nuclear deal was reached in 2015.

The measure is claimed to be punishing Iran over its ballistic missile program, alleged support for terrorism and human rights violations.

The New York Times reported that the Trump administration has

outlets that Russia could send observers and “work more closely” with countries that back the rebels, including the United States and Saudi Arabia.

In an apparent opposition to the remarks, the Syrian government ruled out the “de-escalation zones” being monitored by other actors, including the United Nations.

“We do not accept a role for the United Nations or international forces to monitor the agreement,” Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moallem was quoted as saying at a news conference in Damascus on May 8.

In addition to the compliance issue, the American intervention in the agreed-upon zones is open to question.

A week ago, American troops attacked Syrian forces, targeting three vehicles that were trying to set up a fighting position on the outskirts of a newly established de-escalation zone close to the Jordanian and Iraqi borders, according to military sources.

Russia, Iran and Turkey have to finalize maps of the de-escalation zones by June 4, though the deadline can be extended.

The fifth round of the Astana talks, set for mid-July, should be different from previous ones as Iraqi forces are close to defeating ISIS militants in Mosul and the surrounding province of Nineveh, which marks the end of the “caliphate” in the country.

There were unconfirmed news that Iraqi Popular Mobilization forces managed to dislodge ISIS fighters from a number of villages west of Mosul, making further progress toward the border with Syria.

Iraq’s government is aiming to control the border area with Syria in coordination with the Syrian army.

Linking up the two sides would give President Beshar al-Assad a significant advantage in fighting terrorists in his country.

whatever it can to reach that end.

He also said negotiations are underway between different factions of the parliament in order to reach an agreement on the presiding board.

Aref has been among the top decision-makers of the reformist faction since 2013 presidential election, when he withdrew his candidacy in favor of Hassan Rouhani, paving the way for his presidency. After winning a seat in parliament in 2016, he challenged Larijani for the position of speaker but Larijani was re-elected.

Mahmoud Sadeqi, another reformist parliamentarian from Tehran, has accused “certain ministers” of interfering in the parliament’s affairs.

“If some ministers intervene one more time in the presiding board elections, I won’t remain silent,” Sadeqi tweeted.

Communications and Information Technology Minister Mahmoud Vaezi responded to what he called “rumors” about the Rouhani administration’s interference in the Parliament, ruling out any interference by the administration.

“Such rumors aim at straining the good relations between the government and the Majlis,” Vaezi posted on his Instagram account.

Sadegh Zibakalam, a renowned political analyst and professor at Tehran University, has also spoken out against any decision to unseat Mottahari, noting that if true he’s disappointed at some members of the Hope faction for trying to unseat the two deputies.

Mottahari stands head and shoulders above all 120 members of the Hope faction, Zibakalam said, reaffirming his support for the outspoken lawmaker.

A reform-minded principlist MP, Mottahari is a strong proponent of civil rights and critic of both principlists and reformists.

“This is a time to tread carefully,” Kerry advised the committee.

“We need to consider the implications of confrontation without conversation,” he tweeted.

Kerry said it may endanger the July 2015 nuclear deal Iran and great powers including the U.S.

Iran has said such moves by the U.S. run against the spirit of the nuclear deal.

Putin in France, hopes to mend strained ties with West

On a trip likely to shape Russia-France ties for years to come, Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in France on Monday for talks with newly-elected French President Emmanuel Macron - the candidate he did not back in presidential vote.

The trip offers the Russian leader a chance to turn the page and try to establish a productive relationship with Macron as the Kremlin struggles to mend its bitter rift with the West.

Macron is the first Western leader to speak to Putin after the Group of Seven summit over the weekend, where relations with Russia were a key topic.

The Kremlin has hailed the visit as a chance for Putin and Macron to get to know each other and better understand their views on a range of disputed issues, including the Ukrainian crisis, the war in Syria and Russia's ties with the European Union.

During his G-7 news conference on Saturday, Macron promised to have a "demanding dialogue" with Russia, especially on Syria. He called it a failure that European nations were not involved in the talks over Syria's future but were being hit by its effects, including the huge number of Syrian refugees trying to get to Europe.

"We must talk to Russia to change the framework for getting out of the military crisis in Syria and to build a much more collective and integrated inclusive political solution," Macron declared.

Macron's invitation for Putin was a surprise after his tough stance on Russia during the French presidential campaign. That contrasted sharply with his rivals, including far-right candidate Marine Le Pen and conservative Francois Fillon, who both backed ending Western sanctions against Moscow over the Ukrainian crisis.

Macron's aides also claimed that Russian groups launched hacking attacks on his presidential campaign but Moscow has strongly denied all allegations of election meddling.

Putin, however, made his preferences in the French presidential election clear by hosting Le Pen at the Kremlin in March. Putin also has frequently met with Fillon, the French prime minister from 2007-2012, and praised him as an experienced statesman.

Analysts say the visit to Paris offers Putin an opportunity to improve ties with France that had steadily deteriorated in the closing months of Socialist Francois Hollande's presidency.

"As a person who pays utmost attention



to personal contacts, Putin believes that only a one-on-one meeting could give answers to many questions about Macron as a person and as president of France, as well as his future foreign policy course and his stance on Russia," Tatyana Stanovaya of the Center for Political Technologies, an independent Moscow-based think-tank, wrote.

In October, Putin abruptly shelved a trip to Paris after Hollande alleged that Russia could face war crime charges for its actions in Syria. Hollande also refused to take part in the opening of the newly built Russian Orthodox Spiritual and Cultural Center in Paris and was only interested in talking with Russia about Syria.

As part of his trip Monday, Putin is to visit the center near the Seine River that includes the Holy Trinity Cathedral. The site was sold to Russia under former President Nicolas Sarkozy amid criticism from rights groups.

Prior to that, Putin and Macron are to talk at Versailles and then tour an exhibition there marking the 300th anniversary of Russian Czar Peter the Great's trip to Paris that was prepared by St. Petersburg's Hermitage Museum.

With Peter the Great widely seen as a

ruler who modernized Russia and sought to open it up to the West, the exhibition offers a symbolic backdrop for both to talk about the importance of Russia-France ties.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov, said Russia was dissatisfied with the current level of political contacts.

"The meeting is very important for both Russia and France," he told reporters.

Ushakov said he expects an "interesting discussion" on ways to implement a 2015 Minsk deal for eastern Ukraine, which was brokered by Germany and France. The U.S. and the EU have made the prospect of lifting economic and financial sanctions against Moscow contingent on fulfilling the peace agreement.

The deal has helped reduce the scale of fighting between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, but clashes have continued and political elements of the agreement have stalled. Ukraine and Russia have blamed one another for the fighting that has left some 10,000 people dead.

Ushakov said that the two leaders will also have a "frank" discussion on Syria, where Russia has backed Syrian President

Bashar Assad and France has pushed strongly for his removal. He added that last week's suicide attack on Manchester Arena emphasized the need to pool efforts in the fight against terrorism.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Sunday urged European Union nations to stick together in the face of emerging policy divisions with the U.S., Britain's decision to leave the bloc and other challenges. Merkel also stressed the importance of being good neighbors "wherever that is possible, including with Russia, but also with others."

Human rights activists protested Monday in Paris over the situation of gays in the Russian republic of Chechnya, holding a banner "Stop homophobia in Chechnya" near the Eiffel Tower.

"It's important that Mr. Putin is ready to hear, we hope, strong words coming from Mr. Macron, to say 'stop' to that homophobia, which has lasted for too long," Cecile Coudriou of Amnesty International said.

Human Rights Watch said last week that high-level officials in Russia's Chechnya humiliated inmates during visits to detention facilities where gay people were being held and tortured. (Source: Reuters)

Warplanes carry out new strikes on Libya's Derna

Warplanes have launched three air strikes on the Libyan city of Derna, a witness said, days after Egypt attacked camps there, saying it was targeting fighters responsible for killing Egyptian Christians.

There was no immediate confirmation of Monday's strikes from officials in Libya or neighboring Egypt, nor any claim of responsibility for the raid on the city at the eastern end of Libya's Mediterranean coast.

The witness said one attack hit the western entrance to Derna and the other two hit Dahr al-Hamar in the south.

Egyptian jets attacked Derna on Friday, just hours after masked men boarded vehicles en route to a monastery in the southern Egyptian province of Minya and

opened fire at close range, killing 29 and wounding 24.

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) terrorist group claimed responsibility for that attack in Egypt, the latest targeting Christian minority there - two church bombings also claimed by ISIL killed more than 45 last month.

Egypt, which attacked Derna again on Saturday, has carried out a number of air strikes on its neighbor since Libya descended into factional fighting in the years following the 2011 civil war that ousted Muammar Gaddafi.

Several armed groups, including ISIL, have gained ground in the chaos.

Egypt has been backing eastern com-

mander Khalifa Haftar, whose Libyan National Army has been fighting armed groups in Benghazi and Derna for more than two years.

Speaking to Al Jazeera from Boston, Tarek Masoud of Harvard University said Egypt cannot solve its security problem by striking Libya.

"Are the people who perpetrated the latest attack in Egypt based in Libya?" he said.

"I don't know. But the fact that this happened so deep within Egypt suggests to me that the bases of operations of these kinds of attacks are not over the border in Libya, but are actually within Egypt.

"That of course means this is a much

bigger problem, one that may not be solved by striking some terrorist bases in faraway Libya."

Libyan National Army spokesman Colonel Ahmad Messmari told reporters in Benghazi late on Sunday that Haftar's forces were coordinating with Egypt's military in air strikes and the weekend raids targeted ammunition stores and operations camps.

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi said on Friday the air raids targeted fighters responsible for plotting the attack, and that Egypt would not hesitate to carry out additional strikes inside and outside the country.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Merkel says EU cannot 'fully' rely on the U.S. or UK

German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged European Union nations to stick together in the face of emerging policy divisions with the U.S., Britain's decision to leave the bloc, and other challenges.

Speaking at a campaign event held in a Bavarian beer tent, Merkel suggested that the two-day G7 summit in Italy that ended on Saturday had served as something of a wakeup call.

G7 leaders were unable to reach unanimous agreement on climate change after U.S. President Donald Trump said he needed more time to decide whether to back a key climate accord.

"The times in which we can fully count on others are somewhat over, as I have experienced in the past few days," Merkel told the crowd of some 2,500 that gathered to hear her and Bavarian governor Horst Seehofer.

"And so all I can say is that we Europeans must really take our destiny into our own hands," she said, according to the DPA news agency.

Merkel emphasized the need for continued friendly relations with the U.S. and Britain and stressed the importance of being good neighbors "wherever that is pos-



sible, including with Russia, but also with others."

"But we need to know we must fight for our own future, as Europeans, for our destiny," she said.

■ **The day after a divided summit**

Despite the Trump administration's talk of an "America first" policy and ongoing criticism of Germany for its massive trade surplus, the G7 leaders in Sicily did vow to fight protectionism, reiterating "a commitment to keep our markets open."

They also agreed to step up pressure on North Korea, to forge closer cooperation on security, and on the possibility of imposing more sanctions on Russia over role in the conflict in Ukraine.

However, while six of the seven G7 nations agreed to stick with their commitment to implement the 2015 Paris Agreement that aims to cut emissions and slow global warming, Trump said he needed more time to decide if the U.S. would abandon the accord.

His administration has argued that U.S. emissions standards are tougher than those set by China, India and others, and therefore have put American businesses at a disadvantage.

Backing out of the climate accord had been a central plank of Trump's campaign. Trump once proclaimed global warming a Chinese hoax.

Trump is "wide open" on whether to continue U.S. support for the Paris climate accord, Defense Secretary James Mattis said in an interview aired on Sunday.

"I'm quite certain the president is wide open on this issue as he takes in the pros and cons of that accord," Mattis told CBS.

The comments from Mattis come after Trump tweeted on Saturday he would take a decision "next week" on whether to stick to or renege on the Paris accord.

After the G7 summit, Merkel called the climate talks "very difficult, if not to say, very unsatisfactory".

Merkel also complained after the meeting that there was resistance during the summit to drafting language that would have called for more measures to help refugees.

(Source: agencies)

North Korea fires Scud missile into Japanese waters, Tokyo threatens action

North Korea has test-fired a missile into Japanese waters, the latest in a series of launches that have ratcheted up tensions over its nuclear weapons programme.

It was North Korea's third ballistic missile test in as many weeks and the 12th this year - carried out in fresh defiance of UN sanctions warnings and U.S. threats of possible military action.

U.S. military monitors said the short-range missile flew for six minutes, while Japan said it fell into the country's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) - waters extending 370km from its coast.

The launch comes despite tough talk from U.S. President Donald Trump, who promised last week at the G7 summit that the "big problem" of North Korea "will be solved".

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe swiftly condemned the test and vowed concerted action along with its U.S. ally.

"We will never tolerate North Korea's continued provocations that ignore repeated warnings by the international community," Abe told reporters.

"As agreed during the G7 summit, the North Korean problem is the international community's top priority. In order to deter North Korea, we will take concrete action with the United States."

Monday's test, a short-range Scud, marks the second time this year that a North Korean missile fell provocatively close to its neighbour Japan.

It flew about 450 kilometres before landing in the Sea of Japan (East Sea) between the Korean peninsula and Japan, the U.S. Pacific Command said.

■ Conflict 'catastrophic'

North Korea has been stepping up efforts towards its ultimate goal - developing an intercontinental ballistic missile that can deliver a nuclear warhead to the continental U.S.

North Korea has test-fired a missile almost every week for the past three weeks.

Michael Penn, president of the Tokyo-based Shingetsu news agency, said the latest test was part of a North Korean effort to strengthen its military against any possible threats from the U.S.

"The missile technology tests themselves do seem to be the priority of the North Korean regime, to get their technology as strong as possible, as quickly as possible, because they feel this is their best way forward - to show their own ability to defend themselves against a Trump administration they cannot predict," Penn told Al Jazeera.

James Mattis, the U.S. secretary of defence, in an interview that aired on Sunday before the launch, said the U.S. favoured diplomacy over war with North Korea, which he said would be "catastrophic".

"The North Korean regime has hundreds of artillery cannons and rocket launchers within range of one of the most densely populated cities on Earth, which is the capital of South Korea," he told CBS News.

"This regime is a threat to the region, to Japan, to South Korea. And in the event of war, they would bring danger to China and to Russia as well.

"But the bottom line is, it would be a catastrophic war if this turns into a combat, if we're not able to resolve this situation through diplomatic means."

Mattis declined to say what kind of action from Pyongyang would constitute a "red line" for Washington, saying the administration needs "political manoeuvre room".

■ 'Direct challenge'

South Korea's new president, Moon Jae-In, ordered a meeting of the national security council to assess the launch, which came a day after North Korea said its leader Kim Jong-un had overseen a test of a new anti-aircraft weapons system.

South Korea condemned the test as a "grave threat" and a challenge to the new leader who advocates dialogue with North Korea in a break from his conservative predecessors.

"That the North repeated such provocations after the inauguration of our new leadership... is a direct challenge to our demand for peace and denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula," the foreign ministry said.

The missile launches, and Pyongyang's threat to stage its sixth nuclear test, have prompted calls for tougher UN sanctions and a warning from Trump that military intervention was an option under consideration.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Russian oligarch offers to 'help' US meddling probes

Russian billionaire Oleg Deripaska Monday said he was ready to cooperate with U.S. congressional probes into election meddling by Moscow without immunity, insisting he has evidence against claims of Kremlin interference.

The New York Times cited congressional sources Friday saying that aluminum magnate Deripaska had requested immunity to cooperate with committees investigating alleged Russian involvement in the U.S. elections.

But Deripaska slammed any claims he had proof on Russian meddling and was willing to provide it in return for a free legal pass as "absolutely untrue".

"The only thing true in the article is the fact that I want to 'help' the democratically elected committee of the U.S. congress, acting in the name of the American people, to find the truth," Deripaska said in a statement through his holding Basic Element.

Deripaska insisted he has "evidence" against claims Russia interfered and said halting "the spread of slander and other attacks" against him was a condition for his cooperation.

Lawmakers are reportedly keen to talk to Deripaska about his links to President Donald Trump's former campaign manager Paul Manafort, as the FBI probes possible collusion between Trump's camp and Moscow.

Manafort and Kremlin-connected Deripaska did business together in the mid-2000s, The New York Times reported, but their relationship broke down into legal wrangling.

Russia has consistently denied claims it had launched a hacking and influence campaign to swing last year's U.S. election in Trump's favor.

Trump has said that any claims of collusion between his campaign and the Kremlin is "fake news." (Source: AFP)

NEWS IN BRIEF



Iranian trade delegation to be dispatched to China, Japan in mid-Aug.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Industry, Mining and Trade desk Department of Khorassan Razavi province in eastern Iran, is planning to dispatch a trade delegation to China and Japan on August 14 for expansion of economic relations, Trade Promotion Organization of Iran announced.

The delegation will be comprised of businessmen and entrepreneurs in various areas including auto industry, electronics, petrochemicals, medicine, textile, medical equipment and etc.

China, Iran's number one trade partner, is the world's second biggest economy followed by Japan in third place.

Boost in nominal petchem output capacity planned

1→ NPC plans to export 23 million tons of petrochemical products, worth \$11 billion, during the current calendar year.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of the 13th edition of Iran Petrochemical Forum (IPF), which was held in Tehran on April 22 and 23, Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said that the future of Iran's petrochemical industry is promising after the implementation of the nuclear deal (officially called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action which lifted sanction against Iran in January 2016).

Given that Iran ranks the first and fourth in the world in terms of gas and oil reserves, respectively, no country enjoys feedstock as much as Iran to develop its petrochemical industry, the minister highlighted.

Eurasian Economic Union close to free-trade deal with Iran

1→ "I am personally afraid of [Trump's] dealings with China," Suleimenov said.

"The U.S. is an important strategic political partner for Kazakhstan, its political importance is much, much bigger than its economic role. But China is both. It is a political partner and economic partner," he added.

"And if something bad happens to the U.S.-China relationship, it is going to affect us. Whether it is a trade war, and there is dumping by Chinese companies to Kazakhstan, to the EEU, whether it is a depreciation of the yuan," the 39-year-old US-educated minister said, "there are lots of other consequences that will affect us."

China is Kazakhstan's biggest investor and its top export destination. Beijing sells about \$6bn of goods to the country every year. China has also surpassed traditional regional heavyweight Russia as the most important trading partner for some of Kazakhstan's neighbors.

(Source: Financial Times)

India tech giant warns Trump's 'radical shift' to hurt industry

The vice chairman at one of India's largest technology services companies warned that U.S. President Donald Trump's visa policies will damage the industry as his company reported weak earnings and his stock fell the most in almost two years.



Tech Mahindra Ltd. said net income was 5.9 billion rupees (\$91 million) in the fourth quarter, compared with the average analyst estimate of 7.8 billion, according to estimates compiled by Bloomberg. Shares fell as much as 17 percent and traded 12 percent lower at 1:18 p.m. local time, the largest intraday decline since May 2015.

The U.S. is tightening the criteria for visa programs that Tech Mahindra and other outsourcing companies use to bring skilled foreign workers into the country. Trump and other politicians have criticized the programs for hurting American workers and allowing companies to use cheaper employees from abroad.

"Trump's America First agenda and focus on curbing the immigration, especially around H-1B visa policies, will hurt the IT sector," Vice Chairman Vineet Nayar said on a conference call. "The norms propose a radical shift in policies related to visa quotas and allotment, thereby, leading to a tougher application procedure and higher cost of Indian IT companies looking to bring talent to the United States."

Several analysts cut their ratings and price targets for Tech Mahindra after it reported results, including those at JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Morgan Stanley. Vibhor Singhal of Phillip Securities Pte reduced shares to a sell rating and slashed the price target to 380 rupees. Tech services companies, including Cognizant Technology Solutions, have been cutting positions in India. Some workers have blamed Trump for prompting the job losses and exacerbating problems in the industry.

Workers have begun debating whether to form the first industrywide IT union. Trade unions are common in India in manufacturing and transportation, but they never had much success in information technology because pay and benefits had historically been good.

"These are unsettling times in both in - on politics and economics of both Europe and U.S.," said Nayar. "However, the demand for technological services continues unabated. We do believe that as always, given our resilience, we will be able to see through - see our way through this current fog."

(Source: Bloomberg)

2nd Iran-Russia Energy Committee meeting due in coming days

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — An Iranian delegation is due to leave Tehran for Moscow in coming days (up to Friday, June 2) to attend the second round of Iran-Russia Joint Energy Committee meeting to be hosted by Russia, Shana reported on Monday.

The first Iran-Russia Joint Energy Committee meeting was held in December 2016 in Tehran.

Representatives of giant Russian oil and gas companies like Gazprom, Rosneft, Zarubezhneft and Lukoil attended the event which was co-chaired by Iranian Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs and Trading Amir-Hossein Zamaninia and Russian Deputy Minister of Energy Molodtsov Kiril.

Following up on the Tehran meeting's reached agreements and discussing the

contribution of Russian oil companies in Iran's oil and gas projects are the main subjects of the upcoming event.

Last week a Russian delegation headed by Deputy Energy Minister Yury Sentyurin visited Tehran and held talks with Zamaninia and a number of Iranian oil officials.

Four Russian companies namely Gazprom, Lukoil, Zarubezhneft and Tatneft have signed memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with Iran to study eight oilfields in the country.

Russian companies have the greatest share of MOUs signed with Iran to study oilfields.

During the first joint committee meeting Zamaninia asserted that oil and gas investment capacity between Iran and Russia could reach \$10 billion.



Russian delegation headed by Deputy Energy Minister Yury Sentyurin held talks with Iranian Deputy Oil Minister Amir-Hossein Zamaninia in Tehran last week.

Asia stocks drift down from 2-year highs, pound nurses losses

Asian stocks handed back earlier modest gains and drifted lower on Monday, running short of incentives to push past two-year highs with many key markets closed for holidays.

The pound, meanwhile, nursed losses after a poll showed a shrinking lead for Prime Minister Theresa May's party in Britain's upcoming elections. MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan .MIAPJ0000PUS was down 0.2 percent. Taking cues after the S&P 500 .SPX and Nasdaq .IXIC scraped to record closing highs, it had earlier risen towards a two-year peak marked on Thursday.

Japan's Nikkei .N225 edged up 0.1 percent while weaker commodities pushed down Australian shares 0.5 percent. The closure of Chinese, British and U.S. markets on Monday deprived investors of potential catalysts and kept overall trading subdued.

Brushing aside a North Korean missile launch, South Korea's KOSPI .KS11 initially touched an intraday record high before

pulling back 0.1 percent. It was on track to snap a six-day winning streak.

Pyeongyang fired what appeared to be a short-range ballistic missile early on Monday.

The dollar index against a basket of major currencies was steady at 97.465 .DXY after rising on Friday thanks to upbeat U.S. gross domestic product data.

The index fell to a 6-1/2-month low below 97.00 a week ago on U.S. political concerns centered on President Donald Trump, but have since crept back.

The dollar and U.S. stocks would face downward risks if trouble for the Trump administration becomes a long-term concern, said Masafumi Yamamoto, chief forex strategist at Mizuho Securities.

"That said, the possibility of the president actually being impeached remains very low, and any negative pressure on U.S. stocks has been limited so far."

The greenback was steady at 111.290 yen JPY=, with the safe-haven Japanese currency showing little reaction to North

Korea's missile launch.

"While the North Korean situation remains tense, the market has gotten used to missile launches, with broader volatility also declining," said Shusuke Yamada, senior strategist at Bank of America Merrill Lynch in Tokyo.

"The U.S. markets will also be shut today, and that is curbing incentive and restricting overall movements as well."

The pound was a shade higher at \$1.2828 GBP=D4 after dropping more than 1 percent on Friday to as low as \$1.2775.

Sterling suffered its steepest fall since January on Friday after an opinion poll showed the governing Conservatives' lead over the Labour opposition down to just 5 percentage points with less than two weeks before a general election.

The euro declined 0.1 percent to \$1.1165 EUR=. The common currency had soared to a 6-1/2-month high of \$1.1268 last week on factors including relief at the French presidential election outcome, but

it has failed to make further headway.

South Africa's rand was turbulent after reports President Jacob Zuma defeated a no-confidence motion against him.

The rand went to a two-month high of 12.65 per dollar ZAR=D3 before pulling back to 12.85.

Crude oil prices slipped, their modest recovery from disappointment over last week's OPEC meeting sputtering out on the back of a relentless rise in U.S. drilling. [O/R]

Oil suffered a big drop last week after an OPEC-led decision to extend production curbs did not go as far as many investors had hoped.

U.S. crude CLC1 was down 0.2 percent at \$49.63 a barrel, having slumped to as low as \$48.18 on Friday. Brent fell 0.3 percent to \$49.63 a barrel LCOc1.

Spot gold XAU= hovered close to a near four-week high of \$1,269.50 an ounce hit on Friday, led higher by investors who feared political risks.

(Source: Reuters)

World luxury goods sales growth seen up 2-4 percent in 2017

Global sales of personal luxury goods will grow by a stronger-than-expected 2-4 percent at constant exchange rates in 2017, as higher spending in Europe and China outpace weakness in the United States and southeast Asia, a report showed on Monday.

In 2017, total revenue in the sector that includes watches, jewelry, clothes, shoes and leather goods will rise to 254 billion-259 billion euros (221.16 billion-225.51 billion pounds) from 249 billion euros in 2016, the study by consultancy group Bain & Co and Italian luxury industry association Altgamma showed.

The luxury goods sector has suffered in the past couple of years from fewer tourists coming to Europe after a wave of militant attacks on the continent, less business in Hong Kong and slowing demand in China.

In October, Bain had forecast 2017 growth of 1-2 percent for the luxury sector, but the industry managed to



grow 4 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2017.

"After a difficult 2016, the first quarter of 2017 brought some relief to the luxury industry. The continuous repatriation of Chinese consumption as well as a positive outlook in Europe both for locals and tourists will help drive overall market growth during the remainder of the year," said Clau-

Far from 'strong and stable', May's economic plan is weak and unstable

By Larry Elliott

Ad Theresa May come back from her Easter walking holiday and decided against holding a general election, few would have blamed her. Going to the country on 8 June was always a gamble, as has become evident the longer the campaign has gone on.

Consider the reasons for caution. It is mid-term when governments tend to be unpopular. The public is sick of politics after the 2014 Scottish referendum, the 2015 general election and last year's EU referendum. May had a workable majority and had vowed to go the distance.

What's more, there were solid economic reasons to let things be. The recovery from the deep slump of 2008-09 has been the weakest in living memory. There has been no productivity growth and wages are lower than 10 years ago. The 1970s was thought of as the most dismal decade for the economy since the second world war but the 2010s now hold this unwanted accolade. In terms of what's happened to living standards, it isn't even close.

Confronted with the strong evidence that economic policy since 2010 has been a failure, May's response has been to offer more of the same. Deep welfare spending cuts are designed to balance the books, and would help do so if the Bank of England was in a position to respond with cheaper borrowing.

But that can't happen because interest rates are at 0.25% and can't go lower. As a result, welfare cuts suck spending power out of the economy. That leads to slower growth, which explains why it will now take until the middle of the next decade under Conservative plans to run a budget surplus.

Presumably, sticking to a deficit-reduction plan that isn't working fits with May's "strong

and stable" mantra. But, in truth, the wrong mix of monetary and fiscal policy has left the economy weak and unstable. Weak because investment and productivity have been so poor. Unstable because growth has been so heavily reliant on debt-driven consumer spending.

The "strong and stable" May has performed two U-turns in the past three months: on the budget plans to increase national insurance contributions for the self-employed and on the manifesto's proposed dementia tax. A third U-turn – relaxing fiscal policy (cutting taxes or raising spending) so that monetary policy (interest rates) can be tightened would make a lot of sense and is long overdue.

As the Institute for Fiscal Studies pointed out last week, government resistance to changing its macro-economic approach will inevitably lead to increased financial pressure on the NHS. Although health has been exempt from the deep cuts that have affected most other Whitehall departments since 2010, the settlements have been nugatory by historical standards. Real spending has risen on average by 4% a year since the mid-1950s. In the 18 years of Conservative rule between 1979 and 1997, it increased by 3% a year. On current plans it will increase by 1.4% a year between 2010 and 2022. (Labour's plans are, incidentally, not a lot more generous. They would involve annual increases of 2% a year.)

When the consultancy firm Oxford Economics put the economic plans of the three main parties through its model it concluded that the continuation of austerity under the Conservatives would lead to stable although unspectacular growth averaging 1.9% a year over the course of the next parliament.

By contrast, the consultancy noted that

"the more expansionary policies proposed by Labour and the Liberal Democrats would offer better outcomes in terms of GDP growth and allow monetary policy to be normalised sooner, without putting the public finances under strain." More specifically, the economy would be 1.9% bigger under the Lib Dem plans and 1% bigger under Labour's plans than under the Conservative plans.

Higher growth under Labour and the Lib Dems would be the result of abolishing the 1% cap on public sector pay, an increase in public sector employment and plans to boost spending on public infrastructure by 50%. The claim by the Conservatives that higher borrowing would lead to much higher deficits and an explosion in the national debt is dismissed by Oxford Economics as the pre-Keynesian nonsense it is.

"Our scenarios demonstrate that higher levels of capital and current spending could be accommodated without putting the public finances under undue strain. Therefore, in our view it is very difficult to argue that the macroeconomic benefits offered by the more austere Conservative plans are anywhere near large enough to offset the opportunity of stronger growth offered by the plans of the Liberal Democrats or Labour."

To sum up, May called an election when there was no need for one, when the public didn't want one, when living standards were falling, when the economy is dysfunctional, when the strategy of the past seven years has demonstrably failed, and when there is a viable alternative.

Despite all that, there were reasons for May to take the bold approach. One was the experience of Gordon Brown, who would almost certainly have won an election in the autumn of 2007, when the financial crisis was in its infancy. A second was that many vot-

ers remain doubtful about the idea of higher borrowing even when it pays for itself. A third was that no matter how tough life is and no matter how tough it might get, the May calculus was that the public would assume it would be even tougher under Labour. She saw the opportunity of a presidential election in which she would be a handbag-wielding, Brussels-vanquishing Margaret Thatcher figure up against Jeremy Corbyn's Michael Foot.

The idea was to keep the focus on the need to have a "strong" prime minister to deliver Brexit and – as far as possible – divert attention from the government's less than impressive economic record. When the economy did move centre stage, the plan was to brand Labour as the party of reckless borrowing and ideologically-driven nationalisation.

In the first couple of weeks of the campaign, the May strategy was a storming success. The Conservatives were streets ahead in the opinion polls. There was talk of a landslide that would see the Tories beat Labour in Wales.

But as the weeks have gone by, Labour has done better. Corbyn is better on the stump than May. The prime minister's rapid U-turn has raised doubts about whether she will be Mrs T redux in the Brexit negotiations. Finally, austerity fatigue and a leftward shift in public opinion on issues such as inequality and nationalisation, meant Labour won the battle of the manifestos.

There are still 10 days until the election, a long time in politics. The polls suggest May will still win and she could still get her landslide. But if the majority is 50 rather than the 150 seen as possible earlier in the campaign, it will be a pyrrhic victory.

(Source: The Guardian)

OPEC wins hedge funds back with jump in oil bets before deal

Following four weeks of growing pessimism, bets on rising West Texas Intermediate prices jumped the most this year just as Saudi Arabia and Russia were mustering support for the deal they struck in Vienna last week, U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission data show.

What happens to U.S. stockpiles will be key to sustaining the enthusiasm, and the Saudis know that. In addition to prolonging a historical deal with allies, the kingdom plans to reduce exports to the world's biggest consumer.

"With OPEC now consciously trying to reduce flows into North America, it's suggesting a faster than expected inventory unwind," Bart Melek, a commodity strategist at Toronto Dominion Bank, said by phone. "There may be a bigger upside as we go into summer driving season."

U.S. inventories, one of the most watched indicators of the global supply glut, have remained above the five-year average that OPEC has sought to break as production from shale plays keeps rising. But they have fallen for seven straight weeks, and the decline is like-



ly to continue as Americans take to the roads, boosting demand for fuel.

Markets were initially unimpressed by the May 25 deal between the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and other top exporters to extend reduced output levels through March, without deeper cuts or any signals as to what happens later in 2018. Futures slumped

4.8 percent in New York before rebounding 2.1 percent Friday. WTI on Monday lost 0.3 percent to \$49.65 a barrel as of 12:06 p.m. in Singapore.

"Ahead of the OPEC meeting there was a lot of optimism they would get a deal done, and potentially even a bigger cut," said Phil Flynn, senior market analyst at Chicago-based Price Futures Group.

Hedge funds's WTI net-long position -- the difference between bets on a price rise and wagers on a drop -- rose 20 percent in the week ended May 23, reaching 193,143 futures and options, according to the CFTC. The number had plunged 50 percent in the previous four weeks.

As for fuels, pessimism over gasoline prices eased for a second week, with the net-short position on the New York-traded benchmark shrinking 79 percent, following a 38 percent contraction a week earlier, the CFTC data showed. Diesel bets moved to a net-long position of 10,846 contracts, from 4,053 net shorts.

When the Energy Information Administration reports on June 1 if U.S. stockpiles shrank for another week, oil investors will have a chance to reassess if their frustration following the OPEC meeting was exaggerated.

"I still think this was a knee-jerk sell-off," Melek said of the plunge in oil futures after the meeting. "In fact, things are better fundamentally than they were. Guess what? For the next three quarters we are going to get pretty robust deficits."

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil slips as more U.S. drilling outweighs OPEC-led cuts

Oil prices slipped on Monday as further increases in U.S. drilling activity undercut an OPEC-led push to tighten supply.

Trading was subdued due to public holidays in China, the United States and Britain, but concerns lingered over whether OPEC action would be enough to stem the tide of oversupply.

Brent crude futures were trading down 19 cents at \$51.96 per barrel at 0857 GMT. The contract ended the previous week down nearly 3 percent.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were also down 19 cents at \$49.61 per barrel.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and some non-OPEC producers pledged last week to extend production cuts of around 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) until March 2018.

An initial agreement, in place since January, would have expired in June this year.

Commerzbank analyst Carsten Fritsch called Monday's price moves little more than "intraday noise" but said hints of deeper cuts or a longer extension from OPEC left the market deflated after the final decision.

"They increased expectations to such an extent that nine months was a disappointment," Fritsch said.

High compliance with the cuts so far was unlikely to last, he said, adding to worries about whether the pledge would dent physical oil stockpiles that remain near record levels.

"The pain for OPEC will increase to such a point that 100 percent compliance is unrealistic," Fritsch said.

Despite ongoing cuts, oil prices have not risen much beyond \$50 per barrel.

OPEC's success in drawing down inventories may hinge on output in the United States, which is not participating in the cuts. U.S. production has soared 10 percent since mid-2016 to more than 9.3 million bpd, close to top

producer levels Russia and Saudi Arabia.

U.S. drillers have added rigs for 19 straight weeks, bringing the total 722, the highest number since April 2015 and the longest run of additions on record, according to energy services firm Baker Hughes Inc.

Almost all of the recent U.S. output increases have been onshore, from so-called shale oil fields.

Even if the rig count did not rise further, Goldman Sachs said it estimated U.S. output would increase by 785,000 bpd between the fourth quarter of 2016 and the fourth quarter of 2017 across the Permian, Eagle Ford, Bakken and Niobrara shale plays.

Analysts say that reducing bloated global stocks will be key to reining in oversupply.

"It's going to be all about inventories and whether they fall as much as OPEC thinks," said Greg McKenna, chief market strategist at futures brokerage AxiTrader.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia starts largest renewable energy auction in bid for jobs

Russia is pressing ahead with its biggest-ever auction for renewable energy, seeking to award contracts to purchase 1.9 gigawatts of clean electricity as well as attracting foreign investment to support jobs at home.

The government tender starting Monday has attracted the interest of Fortum Oyj, Finland's largest energy company, which is prequalified to participate in the auction. Enel SpA of Italy may also participate.

"Russia has had a long history of leadership in the energy sector and now has the opportunity to extend that leadership into renewable energy," said Adnan Amin, director-general of the International Renewable Energy Agency. Developing the country's renewable resources, he said, "can significantly contribute to the country's economic objectives such as economic growth and employment."

The Russian government enacted strict local-content rules in 2012 and 2014 in a bid to stimulate job creation. Clean energy plants aren't allowed to be installed unless a certain percent of the equipment is made locally, and that portion rises every year. Since no company makes wind turbines in Russia, this has hampered the industry. In 2017, the portion is fixed at 40 percent.

The auction is from May 29 to June 9, in two stages, according to Cuming. Participants will begin to submit their bids on Monday, with the decision from the government expected for a later date.

(Source: Bloomberg)

ONGC posts surprise profit drop on royalties, weak gas price

Oil & Natural Gas Corp's quarterly profits missed estimates for a gain as lower gas revenues and a jump in royalty payments outweighed the boost from higher crude prices.

Net income at India's biggest oil and gas producer fell 6.1 percent to 43.4 billion rupees (\$673.6 million) in the three months ended March, the company said in a statement Friday. That's below all but two of the 23 analyst estimates compiled by Bloomberg, which averaged 50.7 billion rupees. Sales grew 34 percent to 217.14 billion rupees.

ONGC, which is key to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's plan to cut India's oil import dependence by 10 percent over the next five years, is seeking to raise output through exploration and acquisitions while preparing for the government's plan to consolidate state oil companies.

Expenses last quarter rose almost 48 percent to 207 billion rupees, including royalty payments of 24.4 billion rupees to the states of Assam and Gujarat. The jump in costs and drop in profit were partly attributable to the royalty issue, according to Dhaval Joshi, an analyst at Emkay Global Financial.

(Source: Bloomberg)



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How and why ISIL-linked rebels took over part of a Philippine city

Rebels linked to the terrorists have hunkered down in Marawi, with close to 100 dead following six days of clashes.

Rebels linked to Islamic State (ISIL) have taken control of several neighborhoods in the southern Philippine city of Marawi, with army artillery and aerial attacks unable to completely dislodge them after six days.

At least 61 militants and 17 security forces have been killed, according to the armed forces. Nineteen civilians have died. Tens of thousands of people have fled the city of 200,000.



How did the fighting start?

Acting on intelligence, security forces tried to capture Isnlon Hapilon, an extremist leader endorsed by ISIL as their point-man for south-east Asia, where terrorists have attempted to establish a presence outside the Middle East.

Hapilon is on the FBI's most wanted list, with a \$5m reward.

Following the botched raid on Tuesday, militants protecting Hapilon went on a rampage, seizing a hospital, school and cathedral. They overran a jail and released scores of inmates.

President Rodrigo Duterte has declared martial law across Mindanao, a poverty-stricken province of 22 million that has a deep history of armed insurrection.

Who are the gunmen?

The militants are from a little-know group called the Maute, named after two brothers, Omar and Abdullah Maute.

Hapilon previously led another radical faction, the al-Qaida-linked Abu Sayyaf, known for bombings and beheadings of hostages as well as links to the group that carried out the 2002 Bali bombings in Indonesia.

The Philippines military says Hapilon has now joined the Maute, which previously ran as a criminal organization but has grown increasingly ideological in its objectives, according to analysts.

The Maute was blamed for last year's bombing in the president's home city, Davao, which killed 14 people. And ISIL's Amaq news agency last week claimed responsibility for the Marawi assault.

Why now?

Sidney Jones, the Jakarta-based director of the Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, says the fighting represents a coalition of various radical extremist factions in Mindanao that have a history of armed violence over land, resources and control.

Now, she says, they have formed a coalition against a common enemy.

"Duterte and his government have failed to appreciate that a major change has taken place in Mindanao, and these men aren't motivated just by clan politics or money. The leaders may have been 'bandits' in the past, but now, they're ideologues," she said.

"They have been convinced by ISIL that the answer to Mindanao's problems is Islamic law," she added.

In an October report, Jones predicted the current tumult. Facing losses in Syria and Iraq, ISIL have increasingly looked to the Philippines to establish a province or "wilayat" in the region, the report said.

Support for ISIL in Mindanao "has facilitated cooperation across clan and ethnic lines, widened the extremist recruitment pool to include computer-savvy university students and opened new international communication and possibly funding channels," it said.

Many Muslims in the Philippines live in Mindanao, a semi-autonomous province, and Marawi is the most populated city in the self-governing region.

What is the government's plan?

Duterte cut short a visit to Russia when the clashes erupted and has backed a strong military response. "If there's an open defiance, you will die," he said on Wednesday. "And if it means many people dying, so be it."

Duterte, the former mayor from Davao, another city in Mindanao, has seen his year-long presidency characterized by bloodshed, with a "war on drugs" that has left thousands of alleged drug addicts and suspected dealers dead. He has been condemned internationally for supporting vigilantism.

The president has publicly encouraged civilians to kill addicts and said he will not prosecute police for extrajudicial executions.

He has been equally outspoken during the Marawi clashes, reassuring soldiers that he will protect them if they commit abuses during the conflict, including rape.

"If you go down, I go down. But for this martial law and the consequences of martial law and the ramifications of martial law, I and I alone would be responsible, just do your job I will take care of the rest," Duterte said on Friday, according to a president's office transcript.

"I'll imprison you myself," he said, referring to any soldiers who commit violations, then he joked: "If you had raped three, I will admit it, that's on me."

On Sunday, Duterte appealed to other rebel groups in Mindanao, including two separatist factions and Maoist-led rebels, to join the fight against the Maute, promising them pay and perks, including housing.

There was no immediate reaction from the three groups.

(Source: The Guardian)

For the U.S.-European alliance, everything has changed

By Anne Applebaum

For more than four months, the White House has confirmed no European ambassadors, filled no high-level diplomatic jobs and given no indication that it ever will. Occasional envoys, the vice president and defense secretary among them, have floated across the Atlantic, carrying messages of general reassurance. They have reconfirmed America's commitment to NATO, spoken of old ties and old alliances, hinted and winked that nothing has changed.

Europeans listened and pretended to believe them. Sure, one of them told me after hearing the vice president speak in February in Munich, "all of that's true until the guy's next tweet." But in the space of two short days last week, President Trump himself ended those months of uncertainty without a tweet. Now we know: The envoys were unreliable. And everything really has changed.

What actually happened in Belgium and Italy? Having declared in Saudi Arabia that he would not "lecture" Arab leaders about human rights, Trump arrived in Brussels and began to lecture America's closest allies, accusing them of owing "massive amounts of money" to NATO and U.S. taxpayers. This made no sense: NATO is not a club like Mar-a-lago with annual dues. But it was a clear sign, at last, of what many had suspected all along: Trump prefers the company of dictators who flatter him to democrats who treat him as an equal.

A few hours later, at a meeting on trade, Trump complained that Germany is "bad" because of the "millions of cars they are selling to the U.S." and appeared to want to rewrite America's trade deal with Germany. This made no sense either: As a part of the European Union, Germany does not negotiate its own trade deals. Also, German companies make "millions of cars" inside the United States, about the same number as they sell. But the comments made it clear: The days when the United States led the world in trade are over too.

At no point did the president seem to understand his role of alliance leader.



The American-German relationship, the core of the transatlantic alliance for more than 70 years, has just hit a new low.

Pressed to commit to a climate-change treaty, he tweeted, "I'll be making my final decision on the Paris Accord next week!" — almost as if this were a television series that relied on cliffhangers to keep people watching. Proving that he still sees the world through the eyes of a property developer, he complained to the Belgian prime minister about European regulations that had slowed down the construction of one of his golf courses. Before the NATO summit photograph, Trump shoved aside the Montenegrin prime minister to put himself in front, because that's what boorish celebrities do.

At no point did the president even appear to understand the issues at stake either. During his NATO speech, he failed

to mention Article 5, the clause that commits NATO members to defending one another if attacked. Later he declared that his trip would pave the way for "peace through strength," though it was clear he had no idea what that phrase, used by Ronald Reagan in the 1980s, actually means: "We're gonna have a lot of strength, and we're gonna have a lot of peace," he explained.

After the visit ended, presidential aides rushed in to explain what the president meant to say. H.R. McMaster, the national security adviser, immediately declared that Trump had supported Article 5. But this time no one pretended to believe him.

As a result of this trip, American influence, always exercised in Europe

through mutually beneficial trade and military alliances, is at its rockiest in recent memory. The American-German relationship, the core of the transatlantic alliance for more than 70 years, has just hit a new low: On Sunday, the German chancellor told a sympathetic crowd that Germany could no longer depend on America, given what she had "experienced in the last few days." The Russian government, which has long sought to expel the United States from the continent, is overjoyed: On Russian television, Trump was said to have turned NATO into a "house of cards."

A "great success for America"? If that was "success," then I'd hate to see failure.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Will Trump help save Yemen?

Add cholera to the famine threat and other crises that are devastating Yemen. More than 360 people have died of the disease in recent weeks, and thousands more are at risk.

All that is unfolding against a civil war that has killed 10,000 people in two years and come to a grim stalemate in which President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his Saudi backers continue to fight the Houthis.

Trump could have used his trip to Saudi Arabia this week to spotlight the humanitarian catastrophe in Yemen and push for a political solution to the conflict. Instead, he basked in the adulation of King Salman and his court, uncritically embraced the country's foreign and domestic policies, and then sold the Saudis \$110 billion in arms.

The package includes precision-guided munitions, which Barack Obama withheld last year in an effort to pressure Saudi Arabia to halt attacks that have killed thousands of civilians and struck hospitals, schools, markets and mosques. He also worried about possible Saudi war crimes in which America could be implicated.

Trump made perfunctory references to Yemen on his trip, but mostly to praise the Saudi war effort. He could be using the leverage he has with his new Saudi friends to push for a resolution to the fighting. After all, Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies depend heavily on Washington for aircraft, munitions, training and in-flight refueling. The United States also helps Saudi Arabia guard its borders.

Trump's failure to apply pressure, combined with the giant arms sale, is raising fears that he may give the Saudis a green light to escalate the fighting, as well as find other



Trump's failure to apply pressure, combined with the giant arms sale, is raising fears that he may give the Saudis a green light to escalate the fighting, as well as find other ways to beef up America's own support for Riyadh.

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Since 2015, the Saudi-led coalition has been bombing the Houthis to try to push them out of Yemen's capital, Sana. The war has put seven million

people in danger of starvation, crushed the economy and decimated the health system.

The problems are exacerbated by a virtual blockade of the Houthi-held port of Hudaydah, a lifeline for food and medicine entering Yemen. The country's public and private reserves are so depleted that employees have not been paid and many have stopped working.

"This is a clear-cut decline into massive famine that is man-made and avoidable," said Jan Egeland, the Norwegian Refugee Council head who recently visited Yemen. One encouraging development is that Saudi Arabia has not so far made good on threats to bomb and seize Hudaydah, apparently heeding warnings by the United States and others.

After two years, it should be obvious there is no military solution to this war. But the Saudis seem determined to press on. "Time is in our favor," Mohammed bin Salman, the king's powerful son who is second in line for the throne, said this month. Separate from the civil war, the chaos is allowing Al Qaeda's affiliate in Yemen to become stronger, the population more radicalized and drawing American forces further into that fight.

While all the warring parties bear some blame for Yemen's misery, the Saudis should understand that escalation will only bring more civilian deaths. A comprehensive peace deal may be out of reach, but the United States, Britain and the United Nations could focus on interim measures that would put Hudaydah under the administration of neutral parties and impose the quickest possible cease-fire.

(Source: The NYT)

A small ray of hope in Palestine



message of non-violent resistance against the inhumane and degrading treatment that Palestinian prisoners and detainees have been suffering in Israeli jails throughout the years, including torture and medical negligence. The

Israeli prison system was described at the height of the strike by Barghouti in a widely shared opinion piece in The New York Times as being part and parcel of Tel Aviv's "inhumane system of colonial and military occupation".

Ending on the eve of the 50th anniversary of Israel's seizure of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in the 1967 war, the strike is a reminder that the occupation of Palestine has never stopped. It has only intensified as Tel Aviv entrenched its control over Palestinian life.

After 50 years of domination, it is time for a solution to be reached. But no one believes that a solution is imminent. The Israeli cabinet's recent approval of a package of confidence-building measures aimed at improving the Palestinian economy and easing settlement construction may improve the situation. But this is little more than a Band-Aid. There is one ray of hope, though. Palestinian support for the hunger strike demonstrates that Palestinian can still organize and resist Israel's efforts to destroy them.

(Source: The National)

Deadly rhetoric: Saudi Arabia opens war of words with Iran

By Sharmine Narwani

For years the Saudis have waged proxy battles against Iran, with little success. Now, despite this history of losses, Riyadh appears to be mobilizing for an ill-conceived confrontation with the Islamic Republic.

“We know we are a main target of Iran,” speculated Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MbS) in an interview early this month.

Then came the threat. “We are not waiting until there becomes a battle in Saudi Arabia, so we will work so that it becomes a battle for them in Iran and not in Saudi Arabia.”

These are fighting words indeed. The Iranians certainly thought so, Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan responding with unusual ferocity: “We warn them (Saudis) against doing anything ignorant, but if they do something ignorant, we will leave nowhere untouched apart from Mecca and Medina.”

In other words, if the Saudis launch direct aggression against Iran, this will be Riyadh’s last war anywhere, ever.

It’s an important line to draw. The Saudis, after all, have been in meltdown since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran saw popular protests de-throning a King (gasp).

And so, for the past 38 years, we have witnessed an increasingly aggressive Saudi Arabia in the region, chasing down Iranian/Shia enemies where there were none. Just look at Yemen, where the two-year Saudi bombing blitz has killed over 10,000 civilians, or Bahrain, where Saudi troops and tanks snuffed out dissent in the Shia-majority state, or Syria, where Saudis send weapons, cash and support to ISIS, Al-Qaeda and other head-chopping extremists. This Saudi hysteria has now touched every corner of the world, and by the \$100+ billion Riyadh has invested in radical schools, mosques, and propaganda to indoctrinate an entire generation of Muslims in Wahhabi-style intolerance.

But while the Saudis are hell-bent on thwarting Iranian influence – real or imagined – Riyadh has never dared to take on the Islamic Republic directly.

As former U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates famously noted in a 2010 WikiLeaks cable, the Saudis always want to “fight the Iranians to the last American.” To which he then added, “it is time for them to get in the game.”

Now perhaps, under the direction of a 31-year old princeling, the Saudis are planning to do just that.

■ Saudi Arabia vs. Iran

Some perspective first on these two Persian Gulf “rivals,” in which I borrow heavily from an earlier interview of mine:

Both Iran and Saudi Arabia are rich in energy resources and have used this rentier wealth to advance their national goals, albeit with vastly differing results. Iran’s economy is focused on diversification away from the energy sector, developing self-sufficiency and becoming a net exporter. Saudi Arabia is import-focused. Iran spends \$15 billion per annum on its military – compared to Saudi’s \$80 billion – yet has one of the most competent military forces in the region and builds its own hardware. The Iranian political system is Constitution-based, diverse, and representative, with loudly competing political blocs that come with their own media and constituencies. The Saudi monarchy is based entirely on the rule of one family, with no meaningful elections or contesting political bodies, and little freedom of expression in the media. Regarding power projection, Iran favors the soft power tools of diplomacy, trade, and alliance-building based on common worldviews/objectives, whereas the Saudis have expanded their influence far and wide by spreading Wahhabi doctrine through schools, mosques, media and other institutions globally – and by blatantly buying the loyalty of allies.

In the past few years, we have clearly observed how Iran and Saudi Arabia’s nation-building approaches have affected the success of their geopolitical strategies. Both states have experienced existential fears and threats, and their respective alliances have now confronted each other on a few battlefields. Iran has approached



The Saudis, unlike Iran, have forged their external alliances with hegemony or dominance as the primary objective – irrespective of the divergent interests and values of allies.

the matter of its strategic depth carefully and built alliances with partners that genuinely share the common values of independence, self-determination, and resistance against imperialism. The Saudis, on the other hand, have forged their external alliances with hegemony or dominance as the primary objective – irrespective of the divergent interests and values of allies. There is little contest – one side is a nation- and region-building, while the other flails about with unreliable alliances, propped up by petrodollars and all the strategic brilliance of a sledgehammer.

How can this relationship be classed as a rivalry, when the two don’t even operate on the same playing field? Would Tehran even notice Riyadh outside of OPEC meetings if it weren’t so belligerent at every turn, on every border?

But MbS’s promise to bring “the battle” to Iran must be taken seriously because it will not be launched alone. The Saudi prince’s chest thumping comes courtesy of an upgrade in relations with Washington. U.S. President Donald Trump is enthusiastically pushing billions of dollars in weapons sales to the Saudis, and has chosen Riyadh as the destination for his first official foreign visit, championing the establishment of an “Arab NATO” that partners with Israel to confront Iran.

Don’t expect a conventional military confrontation as the opening gambit, however. The U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia are experienced in subversion and sabotage activities against the Islamic Republic, and this is where they are likely to focus their initial efforts.

Last week, Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei warned of foreign interference in the lead-up to Friday’s presidential poll: “the security of the country should be fully protected during the elections. Anyone who violates this should know he will certainly be punished.”

Calling for public vigilance, Khamenei outlined short, medium and long-term “enemy” goals in Iran: “to distort the country’s security and trigger chaos and sedition... targeting issues like that of the economy and living conditions of the people...(and) an effort to

change the system.”

So how will the Saudis play a role? Riyadh’s hand in this “battle” will likely be seen on and inside Iran’s borders, in the same form we have witnessed in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and other theaters flooded with Saudi-backed militants.

■ Stirring up minority populations

Demographically, Iran is around 60 percent ethnically Persian, followed by a mix of Azeris, Kurds, Lurs, Turkmens, Arabs, and others. Some 99 percent of Iranians are Muslim, more than 90 percent of these Shia, the rest Sunni, and the remaining one percent a mix of Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and others.

The main pockets of Kurds are in the northwest on the Iraqi/Turkish borders and in the north-east bordering Turkmenistan – Iranian Kurds are both Sunni and Shia. The second largest ethnicity, Azeris, who are mainly Shia, are also in the northwest on Iran’s border with Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Iranian Arabs who are concentrated in the south near the Iraqi border and the Persian Gulf – as well as around the Strait of Hormuz – are also mostly Shia. Iranian Sunni populations consist mainly of Kurds, Turkmens, and Balochis, and this is the demographic where signs of foreign interference are most notable today.

In recent years, thousands of Iranian security forces have been killed on the border of Iran’s Sistan and Baluchistan province with Pakistan – most recently in April when ten Iranian border guards died in a cross-border terrorist raid.

Reportedly, the operation was conducted by Jaish al-Adl (Army of Justice), a sectarian terrorist group the Iranians say is being directed by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia. The U.S. has traceable ties to some of these groups, notably Jundallah which received Bush-era funds from Washington before being listed as a terrorist organization. That “terrorist” designation, Iran knows, means little. The Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) was listed by the State Department for decades, but then de-listed in 2012 and is today being actively courted by U.S. officials.

Jaish al-Adl is an offshoot of Si-

pah-e-Sahaba, an anti-Shia extremist group banned in Pakistan, but which appears to continue to enjoy both Saudi and Pakistani support. Sipah leaders are ferried around the border areas with Pakistani guards, and fill their ranks with young graduates of Saudi-funded Deobandi madrassahs rife inside the Pakistani border.

U.S. hands are all over the minority map in Iran too. Media, think tanks and politicians highlight and encourage aspirations of Iranian minorities at every opportunity, and will undoubtedly take a more active role in stirring divisions as tensions escalate.

Cue the Kurds. Both U.S. and Saudi fingerprints are all over this project of inciting a Kurdish rebellion inside Iran. Last June and July, for the first time in 20 years, Kurds in Iran’s northwest clashed with Revolutionary Guards, killing several on both sides.

The Kurdish group involved was the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI), a longtime Iranian-designated terrorist organization that announced in 2015 it would take up arms against the state. Not surprisingly, that declaration came shortly after PDKI leader Mustafa Hijri visited congressional leaders in Washington.

■ A vigilant Iran

American dirty tricks are certainly not new in Iran. Former Kennedy-era State Department official Richard J. Barnet wrote in 1968: “The (U.S.) intervention in Iran in 1953 to unseat Premier Mohammed Mossadeq was America’s first successful attempt in the postwar period to subvert a nationalist government.”

According to Barnet, “Five U.S. agents and seven Iranian intelligence operatives” led by CIA operative Kermit Roosevelt “plotted the coup from a Tehran basement.” They were responsible for “recruiting street mobs to oppose the Mossadeq supporters... With the help of substantial sums, which Roosevelt used for hired demonstrators to whip up the growing anti-Mossadeq mobs, and the support of the Iranian army, heavily dependent on U.S. equipment, the insurgents were able to turn the tide against the intractable premier and to drive him from office.”

Iran is intimately familiar with these foreign machinations and has been vigilantly countering them in the decades since the Islamic Revolution.

This is not the compliant Shah’s Iran – this Iran, today, is an independent, sovereign nation-state that came through an 8-year foreign-imposed war with Iraq and built with its own hands a formidable military deterrent.

As we have seen with Iran’s activities in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, the country’s ‘strategic depth’ is a red line – its national borders even more so. After warning the Iraqi government in 2014 that it would take decisive action if ISIS came within 40 kilometers of its border, the Iranian air force – for the first time since the Iran-Iraq war – used F-4 Phantom fighter jets to conduct airstrikes in Diyala province on its western border.

Iran’s armed forces chief Mohammad Hossein Bagheri has also now threatened military action on Pakistani territory unless Islamabad takes control of its borders, saying: “Unfortunately, the Pakistani border area has turned into a refuge and training ground for terrorists hired by Saudi Arabia, with the approval of the United States.”

In a letter this month to the UN Security Council, Iran’s UN Ambassador Gholamali Khoshroo addressed the Saudi threats: “We have no desire, nor any interest, in an escalation of tension in our neighborhood...We continue to stand ready for dialogue and accommodation to promote regional stability, combat destabilizing extremist violence and reject sectarian hatred...We hope Saudi Arabia will be persuaded to heed the call of reason.”

The Saudi princeling Mohammad bin Salman made a novice’s mistake by threatening to bring war to Iran – he put the world on notice. Any Iranian reaction now bears the full legitimacy of international law for a measured retaliation. The Saudi borders are long, its populations restive, and its soldiers have not seen this kind of war. We may yet live to see a Saudi royal eat his words.

Donald Trump’s meaner America

By Robert Reich

Last Wednesday, on the eve of his election to the House of Representatives, Montana Republican Greg Gianforte beat up Ben Jacobs, a reporter for the “Guardian” newspaper.

What prompted the violence? Jacobs had asked Gianforte for his reaction to the Congressional Budget Office’s report showing that the House Republican substitute for the Affordable Care Act would result in 23 million Americans losing their health insurance.

Then, in the words of a Fox News team who witnessed the brutal attack: “Gianforte grabbed Jacobs by the neck with both hands and slammed him into the ground behind him. ... Gianforte then began punching the reporter. As Gianforte moved on top of Jacobs, he began yelling something to the effect of, ‘I’m sick and tired of this!’ Jacobs scrambled to his knees and said something about his glasses being broken.... To be clear, at no point did any of us who witnessed this assault see Jacobs show any form of physical aggression toward Gianforte, who left the area after giving statements to local sheriff’s deputies.”

After the attack, Jacobs was evaluated in an ambulance at the scene and taken to Bozeman Health Deaconess Hospital. Several hours later he left the hospital wearing a sling around his arm. Gianforte was charged with misdemeanor assault.

Donald Trump’s reaction? In Sicily for the G-7 summit, he praised Greg Gianforte’s election as a “great win in Montana.”

For years, conservatives warned that liberals were “defining deviancy down” by tolerating bad social behavior.



Donald Trump is actively defining deviancy down in American politics. He’s also making America meaner.

Last year, Trump said of a protester at one of his campaign rallies: “I’d like to punch him in the face.” He added “in the old days, protesters would be carried out on stretchers.”

In a different era, when decency was the norm, the members of the U.S. House of Representatives would not seat a thug like Gianforte in the chamber. In the age of Trump, it’s okay to beat up a reporter.

Charlie Sykes, a conservative former talk-show host in Wisconsin, says “every time something like Montana happens, Republicans adjust their standards and put an emphasis on team loyalty. They normalize and accept previously unacceptable behavior.”

Gianforte’s attack on Jacobs was shameful enough. Almost as shameful was Gianforte’s press release about what occurred, written immediately afterward by his campaign spokesman, Shane Scanlon:

“After asking Jacobs to lower the recorder, Jacobs declined. Greg then attempted to grab the phone that was pushed in his face. Jacobs grabbed Greg’s wrist and spun away from Greg, pushing them both to the ground. It’s unfortunate that this aggressive behavior from a liberal journalist created this scene at our campaign volunteer BBQ.”

This was all a blatant lie, as confirmed by the Fox News crew that watched the whole thing. But under Trump, blatant lying is the new normal. And a “liberal journalist” is the enemy.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania’s Annenberg School for Communication, says that Donald Trump “has contributed to a climate of discourse consistent with assaulting a reporter for asking an inconvenient question.”

It used to be that candidates and elected officials had a duty to answer reporters’ questions. We assumed that answering questions from the press was part of the job. We thought democracy depended on it.

But we’re now in the era of Donald Trump, who calls the press the “enemy of the American people.”

It was never the case in the United States that candidates or elected officials beat up reporters who posed questions they didn’t like. That kind of thing occurred in dictatorships.

But “Trump has declared open season on journalists, and politicians and members of his Cabinet have joined the hunt,” says Lucy Dalglish, the dean of Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland.

More generally and menacingly, Trump has licensed the dark side of the American psyche. His hatefulness and vindictiveness have normalized a new meanness in America.

Since Trump came on the scene, hate crimes have soared. America has become even more polarized. Average Americans say and do things to people they disagree with that in a different time would have been unthinkable.

“I’d submit that the president has unearthed some demons,” says Rep. Mark Sanford, a Republican Representative from South Carolina. “I’ve talked to a number of people about it back home. They say, ‘Well, look, if the president can say whatever, why can’t I say whatever?’ He’s given them license.”

The new meanness is also finding its way to Washington, where Trump wants to slash Medicaid, Social Security disability, and food stamps so the rich can get big tax cuts; repeal the Affordable Care Act and shove 23 million Americans off health insurance; and lock up poor young people for selling a few ounces of drugs while letting fat cats get rich trading on inside information.

A president contributes to setting the norms of our society. Trump is setting them at a new low.



The U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia are experienced in subversion and sabotage activities against the Islamic Republic, and this is where they are likely to focus their initial efforts.

The Libya fallout shows how Theresa May has failed on terror

By Paul Mason

Salman Abedi was British by birth, Libyan by background, a radicalist by identity, loyal to a "caliphate" based in Raqqa, Syria. These facts should be the starting point of our response to the atrocity he perpetrated: the threat is global, yet our state is national, and our communities local. Our state and our communities were not strong enough to stop

him. The time to discuss why is not after the election, but now.

The "blowback theory", which blames terrorism directly on western expeditionary warfare, is both facile and irrelevant in this case. By bombing Libya we did not enrage or radicalize young people such as Abedi: we simply gave them space to operate in. And then, whatever the intelligence services were doing, the politicians took their eye

off the ball.

David Cameron was right to take military action to stop Gaddafi massacring his own people during the Libyan uprising of 2011: the action was sanctioned by the UN, proportionate, had no chance of escalating into an occupation. And Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy had a stabilization plan. The problem is they had no plan for what to do if their plan went wrong. Nor, it appears, did Cameron's ministers

concern themselves about how a failed state in Libya might affect the growth of global terrorism, and the domestic terror threat in the UK.

In January 2016, in evidence to the foreign affairs committee, Liam Fox, defense secretary in 2011, was asked if the government had made an assessment of the threat of extremism among anti-Gaddafi rebels. Fox replied: "I do not recall reading anything of that nature." ➔13

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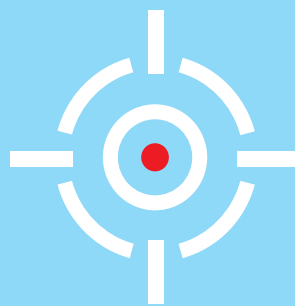
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7 natural remedies for bad breath

By Jen Christensen

There are few things more unpleasant and uncomfortable in social situations than talking to someone with bad breath.

For many people, grabbing a mint or a piece of gum is their go-to solution, as it quickly masks the problem. But this approach often fails to address the root causes of bad breath, which for many people includes dietary deficiency. The reality is that bad breath can be caused by some health conditions, foods and even habits.

■ Examine your hygiene habits

Regularly brushing your teeth and tongue, especially after meals, as well as flossing daily, swishing with hydrogen peroxide and baking soda, and getting periodic teeth cleanings are, of course, the first places to start when addressing bad breath issues. But if the problem persists beyond all this, you may have some kind of nutritional deficiency or underlying health condition that requires other interventions as well.

Here are 7 natural ways to help cure the problem of bad breath at the systemic level through diet:

■ 1. Drink more water

Many people drink far too little water throughout the day to ward off the bacteria in the mouth that are most responsible for causing bad breath. Tiny microbes in the mouth actually feed on loose food particles throughout the day, releasing odor-causing byproducts that end up stinking up breath. And all-natural saliva, it turns out, is your body's built-in remedy for eliminating these bacteria.

It is possible for chronic dry mouth conditions to play a part in the development of bad breath. Dry mouth is caused by the decomposition of dead cells in your mouth and on your tongue. This decomposition results in an unpleasant odor.

But in order for your body to produce enough bacteria-fighting saliva, you must be drinking plenty of clean, fluoride-free water throughout the day. Since saliva is full of oxygen, bacteria have a much harder time surviving because they require low-oxygen environments in order to thrive. Saliva also contains natural enzymes that help stimulate the production of antibodies that neutralize bacteria, which end up getting eliminated when you swish with water, mouthwash, or other oral hygiene products.

■ 2. Supplement with zinc

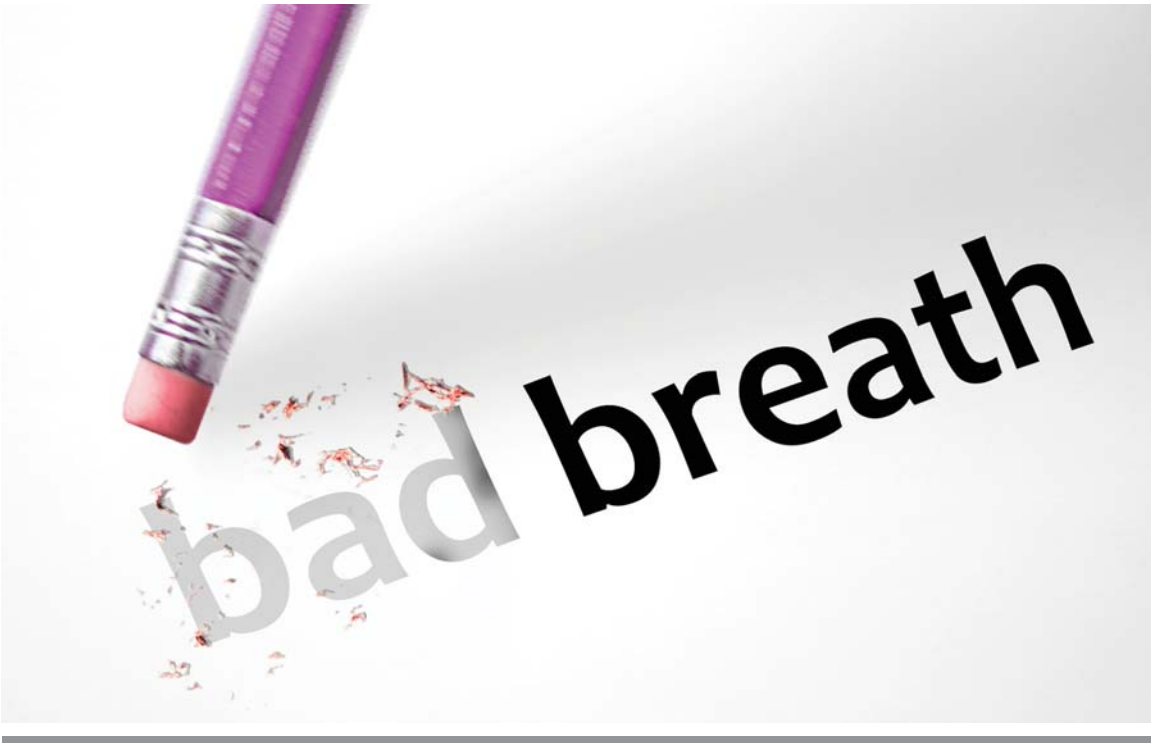
Another common cause of halitosis is a deficiency in the mineral zinc, which helps maintain a clean, bacteria-free mouth. Some mouthwash products actually contain zinc as an active ingredient because the mineral is a known antimicrobial, and aids in the neutralization and elimination of harmful germs. But supplementing with oral zinc and eating more zinc-rich foods like pumpkin and gourd seeds, cacao, and organ meats, for instance, might be an even better approach, as it can help address the problem systemically.

"Zinc deficiency is associated with poor healing, immunity and inflammation," writes Heather Caruso in her book, *Your Drug-Free Guide to Digestive Health*. "Halitosis from oral disease can benefit from zinc supplementation."

■ 3. Use herbs daily

Since bad breath can also stem from a buildup of heavy metals, yeast overgrowth, and other toxins inside the body, it is important to regularly flush your system via dietary interventions.

And one way you can do this is by taking stinging nettle or drinking stinging nettle tea. A powerful herb



Since saliva is full of oxygen, bacteria have a much harder time surviving because they require low-oxygen environments in order to thrive.

that has been shown to purify the blood and eliminate toxins from the body, stinging nettle helps stimulate the lymphatic system, increase the excretion of uric acid through the kidneys, and boost adrenal function, all of which target halitosis at its root.

"Bad breath is often indicative of toxemia or defective elimination via liver," explains Bartram's Encyclopedia of Herbal Medicine: The Definitive Guide. This helpful manual goes on to suggest not only nettle, but also alfalfa sprouts, parsley, peppermint, dill, fennel, sage, licorice, dandelion goldenseal, echinacea, wild yam, myrrh, lemon, and chlorophyll tablets as viable treatment options for bad breath.

■ 4. Take probiotics

Along these same lines, poor gut health is another common cause of bad breath. If your digestive tract is overloaded with built-up toxins, for instance, or if routine antibiotic use and poor dietary habits have left your digestive system in shambles, bad breath could merely be a side effect of another underlying problem.

Equally, if you suffer from certain bowel, constipation or a sluggish digestive system, you are a prime candidate for developing bad breath. The reason for this is that these conditions create an excess of gas in your body, and much of that gas exits through your mouth. Supplementing with probiotic flora or eating more probiotic-rich foods like yogurt, fermented sauerkraut and kombucha tea just might be the remedy. Taking a tablespoon of apple cider vinegar mixed with water prior to eating meals may help your digestive processes run more smoothly.

A study published in the journal *Current Opinion in Gastroenterology* back in 2011 found that probiotic supplements actually help replace odor-causing oral microbes with beneficial varieties, effectively nipping

bad breath in the bud. Other studies have identified specific probiotic strains such as *Lactobacillus salivarius* that directly target harmful bacterial strains in the mouth, and reduce or eliminate the volatile sulfur compounds (VSCs) responsible for causing bad breath.

■ 5. Include more raw foods in your diet

Eat more carrots, celery, and apples. Crunchy fruits and vegetables, preferably organic, that are rich in fiber are also beneficial in the fight against bad breath.

Eating more carrots, celery, and apples, for instance, can help scrape out the plaque buildups that are responsible for causing more mild or infrequent forms of bad breath, as well as add an extra dose of immune-boosting nutrients to your diet. These foods also help trigger an increased production of bacteria-fighting saliva inside the mouth.

■ 6. Salt water gargle

You might also find a salt water gargle to be useful as this combination helps eliminate bacteria from your throat and tonsils. Himalayan Crystal salt is recommended.

■ 7. Consider a cleanse

If you have really bad breath, it's very likely that your body has reached toxic levels. You might want to consider a colon cleanse and then move on to doing a liver cleanse.

Note: If you choose to use a mouthwash or mouth spray as a temporary solution to the problem, it is particularly important that you choose one that has no alcohol at all.

Alcohol actually contributes to the development of bad breath and studies have shown that mouthwashes containing more than 25% alcohol are linked to an increased risk of developing oral cancer.

(Source: foodmatters.com)

Get smart about treadmills

Treadmills are among the most effective types of exercise equipment — if you know how to use them.

Cardio exercise is essential for all-around health, but many older men have trouble hitting the recommended 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week. And some people may have limitations that prevent them from doing traditional cardio workouts like walking, running, or swimming.

But there may be another option: the standard gym treadmill.

"While treadmills may seem boring, they can offer a good alternative for exercise, depending on how you use them," says Dr. Adam Tenforde, with the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Harvard-affiliated Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital. "There is so much more to treadmills than just push the button and start walking."

■ Multiple benefits

The machines can target the key muscle groups that older adults need to strengthen to improve balance and endurance, such as quadriceps, calves, glutes, and hamstrings. "They also can be helpful for people recovering from an injury or surgery, since you can control the speed and intensity, and they are equipped with handrails for added support when needed," says Dr. Tenforde.

Treadmills offer a safe environment, too, free from unpredictable footing and adverse weather conditions. Another advantage is they can be programmed for individualized workouts. "You can easily vary the speed and incline to focus on specific goals," says Dr. Tenforde.

Most treadmills monitor intensity with hand sensors that measure your heart rate, but that's not the most accurate approach. A better way to gauge your effort is to use what's called the rate of perceived exertion, which involves ranking your sense of how hard you're working on a 1-to-10 scale, with 1 being low and 10 being high. For instance, a rate of 5 to 7 is consistent with a moderate-intensity level where you work hard, but can maintain a conversation and do not overexert yourself (see "Rate of perceived exertion").

■ Workout routines

Here are three treadmill routines you can add to your exercise program that address different needs: speed, endurance, and muscle building. Whichever one you choose, do it for 10 minutes at first, and then gradually build up to 20 to 30 minutes as you progress.

Take the time for a five- to 10-minute warm-up, in

which you walk at a slow pace, and do the same at the end to cool down. This helps reduce your risk of injury and improves post-workout recovery. You also may need to begin with a lower level of intensity at first — around 4 or 5 on the exertion scale — and gradually increase it over time.

"Also, don't assume that you must exercise at a certain speed if it does not meet the goals of that day," says Dr. Tenforde. "For example, if you had a poor night's sleep, you might need to exercise at a slower speed and intensity to achieve the same effort as usual." (As always, talk to your doctor first about commencing any exercise program.)

■ Routine 1: Incline (endurance and muscle building).

An incline setting generates more muscle activity than walking on a flat surface since you work against gravity. A small 2014 study in the journal *Gait & Posture* found that incline treadmill walking could benefit people with knee osteoarthritis and knee replacements.

- The workout: Begin walking at a zero-grade incline on an exertion of 3 or 4 for up to two minutes, then increase to level 1 incline for another minute or two. Repeat the routine until you reach an incline level where you work at 5 to 7 exertion and try to maintain it for a minute or longer. Then reverse the routine until you reach the zero-grade incline again. It is fine to stay at an incline longer, or to exercise at a lower exertion rate, until you are more comfortable.

■ Routine 2: High-intensity interval training (HIIT) (speed, endurance, and muscle building).

HIIT involves alternating between set periods of high-intensity work and rest. The high intensity is at an exertion rate of around 5 to 7, while you rest at a rate of 2 or 3. "HIIT is based on your individual exertion, so adjust the treadmill to match this desired effort," says Dr. Tenforde.

"The point with HIIT is to mix up the intensity to make yourself work harder for shorter periods. It can be fun and breaks up the monotony of exercise." HIIT is also ideal for people who have trouble finding time to exercise. A study published online April 26, 2016, by PLOS One found that HIIT produces health benefits similar to longer, traditional endurance training.

- The workout: Begin with a moderately high

intensity-to-rest ratio of 1:3, in which you exercise for one minute and rest for three minutes. As you improve, you can vary the ratio to 1:2 or 1:1 or even work for longer high-intensity periods with shorter rest breaks.

■ Routine 3: Speed variations (speed and endurance).

One advantage to treadmills is that you can control speed. Many treadmills have several types of pre-programmed workouts that vary the speed and even incline, often with labels, such as "fat burning," "tempo," or "hill climbing." "These can help increase your cardiovascular health by varying the effort and can be another way to add variety," says Dr. Tenforde.

- The workout: Choose one of the pre-programmed workouts and adjust the speed and resistance as needed to ensure you stay within an exertion range of 5 to 7.

■ Treadmill basics

- Consult with your doctor before beginning any fitness program.
- Since treadmill technology can vary depending on the brand, consult with a professional trainer to review all the machine's functions and safety features.
- Begin and end each workout with a five- to 10-minute warm-up and cool-down.
- Try to stay within a range of 5 to 7 on a 10-point scale of perceived exertion.
- Mix it up — variety in effort and routines can make workouts fun.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)



Disease and conditions: Urinary incontinence

Urinary incontinence — the loss of bladder control — is a common and often embarrassing problem. The severity ranges from occasionally leaking urine when you cough or sneeze to having an urge to urinate that's so sudden and strong you don't get to a toilet in time.

If urinary incontinence affects your daily activities, don't hesitate to see your doctor. For most people, simple lifestyle changes or medical treatment can ease discomfort or stop urinary incontinence.

■ Symptoms

Some people experience occasional, minor leaks of urine. Others wet their clothes frequently.

■ Types of urinary incontinence include:

- Stress incontinence. Urine leaks when you exert pressure on your bladder by coughing, sneezing, laughing, exercising or lifting something heavy.
- Urge incontinence. You have a sudden, intense urge to urinate followed by an involuntary loss of urine. You may need to urinate often, including throughout the night. Urge incontinence may be caused by a minor condition, such as infection, or a more severe condition such as neurologic disorder or diabetes.

You may need to urinate often, including throughout the night. Urge incontinence may be caused by a minor condition, such as infection, or a more severe condition such as neurologic disorder or diabetes.

• Overflow incontinence. You experience frequent or constant dribbling of urine due to a bladder that doesn't empty completely.

• Functional incontinence. A physical or mental impairment keeps you from making it to the toilet in time. For example, if you have severe arthritis, you may not be able to unbutton your pants quickly enough.

• Mixed incontinence. You experience more than one type of urinary incontinence.

■ When to see a doctor

You may feel uncomfortable discussing incontinence with your doctor. But if incontinence is frequent or is affecting your quality of life, it's important to seek medical advice because urinary incontinence may:

- Indicate a more serious underlying condition
- Cause you to restrict your activities and limit your social interactions
- Increase the risk of falls in older adults as they rush to the toilet

■ Causes

Urinary incontinence isn't a disease, it's a symptom. It can be caused by everyday habits, underlying medical conditions or physical problems. A thorough evaluation by your doctor can help determine what's behind your incontinence.

■ Temporary urinary incontinence

Certain drinks, foods and medications can act as diuretics — stimulating your bladder and increasing your volume of urine. They include:

- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Decaffeinated tea and coffee
- Carbonated drinks
- Artificial sweeteners
- Corn syrup
- Foods that are high in spice, sugar or acid, especially citrus fruits
- Heart and blood pressure medications, sedatives, and muscle relaxants
- Large doses of vitamins B or C

Urinary incontinence also may be caused by an easily treatable medical condition, such as:

- Urinary tract infection. Infections can irritate your bladder, causing you to have strong urges to urinate, and sometimes incontinence. Other signs and symptoms of urinary tract infection include a burning sensation when you urinate and foul-smelling urine.
- Constipation. The rectum is located near the bladder and shares many of the same nerves. Hard, compacted stool in your rectum causes these nerves to be overactive and increase urinary frequency.

■ Persistent urinary incontinence

Urinary incontinence can also be a persistent condition caused by underlying physical problems or changes, including:

- Pregnancy. Hormonal changes and the increased weight of the uterus can lead to stress incontinence.
- Childbirth. Vaginal delivery can weaken muscles needed for bladder control and also damage bladder nerves and supportive tissue, leading to a dropped (prolapsed) pelvic floor. With prolapse, the bladder, uterus, rectum or small intestine can get pushed down from the usual position and protrude into the vagina. Such protrusions can be associated with incontinence.
- Changes with age. Aging of the bladder muscle can decrease the bladder's capacity to store urine.
- Menopause. After menopause women produce less estrogen, a hormone that helps keep the lining of the bladder and urethra healthy. Deterioration of these tissues can aggravate incontinence.
- Hysterectomy. In women, the bladder and uterus are supported by many of the same muscles and ligaments. Any surgery that involves a woman's reproductive system, including removal of the uterus, may damage the supporting pelvic floor muscles, which can lead to incontinence.
- Enlarged prostate. Especially in older men, incontinence often stems from enlargement of the prostate gland, a condition known as benign prostatic hyperplasia.
- Prostate cancer. In men, stress incontinence or urge incontinence can be associated with untreated prostate cancer. But more often, incontinence is a side effect of treatments for prostate cancer.
- Obstruction. A tumor anywhere along your urinary tract can block the normal flow of urine, leading to overflow incontinence. Urinary stones — hard, stone-like masses that form in the bladder — sometimes cause urine leakage.
- Neurological disorders. Multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, stroke, a brain tumor or a spinal injury can interfere with nerve signals involved in bladder control, causing urinary incontinence.

(Source: mayoclinic.org)



Tehran exhibit features Parthian-era helmet amid other rarely-seen relics

HERITAGE TEHRAN — A Parthian-era armory helmet along with a patchwork of other rarely-seen historical relics of the same period (247 BC–224 CE) are on show at the National Museum of Iran in downtown Tehran, ISNA reported.

Arsacid dynasty that founded and ruled the Parthian empire controlled almost all the trade routes between Asia and the Greco-Roman world.



A Parthian-era helmet being kept at the National Museum of Iran in Tehran

Parthian wealth obtained through lucrative trade networks resulted in substantial patronage of the arts, in particular relief sculpture, statuary (large and small scale), architectural sculpture, metalwork, jewelry, and ceramics; coins with images of Parthian rulers form another important category of objects, according to the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The showcase will be running through June 17 and it is part of a larger event that features prehistoric tools, pottery vessels, metal objects, textile remains, and some rare books and coins dating back to the Paleolithic era to the end of Qajar period (1789–1925).

UK tech visas quadruple after applications soar

Technology industry demands for special measures to let companies hire foreign workers after Brexit have been boosted by a surge in demand for technology visas.

Tech City UK, the government organization that processes applications for the dedicated “Tier 1 Exceptional Talent” visa, said successful applications had more than quadrupled in the last 12 months, with 260 endorsed in the last fiscal year.

It follows fears in the British tech community that access to skilled computer coders would be hit by restrictions to freedom of movement when the UK leaves the EU.

David Cameron introduced the tech visa scheme in 2014 in a bid to make London the technology capital of Europe and rival Silicon Valley as a destination for start-ups, and amid fears of a shortage of skilled coders in the UK.

The “Tech Nation” visa scheme allows Tech City UK to endorse applications from non-EU workers, and lets successful applicants stay in the country for five years, after which they can apply to settle.

(Source: The Telegraph)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Jesuit Missions of the Guaranis

Jesuit Missions of the Guaranis, a serial transnational property, consists of the ruins of Sao Miguel Arcanjo in Brazil, and those of San Ignacio Mini, Santa Ana, Nuestra Senora de Loreto, and Santa Maria la Mayor in Argentina.

These are the impressive remains of Jesuit Mission settlements established in the 17th and 18th centuries on lands originally occupied by Guaraní indigenous communities.

In Brazil, the ruins of the Sao Miguel Arcanjo church constitute the most intact and complete structure among this period's designated heritage properties. In Argentina, the four Jesuit-Guarani Missions, located in the southern Misiones province, provide an exceptional example of systematic and organized territorial occupation.



The Jesuit reduction of Sao Miguel das Missoes in Brazil

The properties' surviving ruins depict the experience of the Society of Jesus in South America, where there emerged a singular system of spatial, economic, social, and cultural relations in 30 settlements – referred to as reducciones – that included ranches, mate plantations, and networks of trails and waterways extending across the Uruguay River and its tributaries.

This particular model of the reducciones also included smaller structures and constructions designed to support the basic functions of the settlements. Together, these elements, each closely integrated within productive lands, and each manifesting the distinct potential and complementary traits of the various settlements and the other Jesuit provinces in the region, inform this underlying interpretation, reflected by the serial heritage property in a singular and specific fashion.

(Source: UNESCO)

Iran to extend “rest facilities” to cope with tourist influx

TOURISM TEHRAN — Iran's booming tourism industry is putting a strain on public infrastructure across the country, particularly on public toilets, and this is a concern that is to be addressed through building new rest facilities nationwide.

The surge in foreign visitors has been so dramatic that many four- and five-star hotels may be overbooked in high seasons. Iran has seen three years in a row with double-digit growth in international arrivals and scheduled global air capacity as well.

The Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport and Urban Development aims to construct resting facilities which are comprised of toilets, prayer rooms, as well as fragments for supplying goods and charging mobile phones, and are equipped with solar panels, Tasnim quoted CHTHO Director Zahra Ahmadipour as saying on Sunday.

The scheme, as a pilot project, will be initially implemented in West Azarbaijan province as its capital Tabriz will be privileged as the Tourism Capital of Islamic Countries in 2018, she explained. A total of 19.9 million travelers visited the country during the past four Iranian calendar years (March 2013 – March 2017), bringing in some \$32 billion of tourism revenues, according to the CHTHO.

Iran becoming hot destination

Following a landmark nuclear deal France and world powers clinched in



A file photo depicts a Western sightseer looking at a travel book on Iran.

2015, Iran is repeatedly named as a hot travel destination by a circle of international media outlets in terms of its rich history, picturesque sceneries, traditions, cuisine and hospitable people.

Issuing visas on arrival at the airport for nationals of some 190 countries as well as issuing electronic visas are

among the initiatives being considered by Iranian officials.

The government has also announced plans to create sufficient accommodation and transportation for the growing number of tourists. There is a plan to increase the number of higher-end hotels from 130 to more

than 1,000 in 10 years.

At the moment Europeans travelers from countries including France, Italy and Germany, who account for the majority of western tourists, can now get visas on arrival in Tehran, and at the main sites they mingle with sightseers from China, Japan and elsewhere.

More 4&5 star hotels to jumpstart Iranian hospitality industry

TOURISM TEHRAN — A total of 20 four- and five-star hotels will be inaugurated across Iran by the end of the current calendar year (March 20, 2018), a tourism official has said.

An initiative for building hotels to jumpstart the tourism industry is the most important measure taken by the department for investment in the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization, Mehr quoted Saeed Shirkavand, who presides over the department, on May 25.

Spurring foreign investment to improve the country's hospitality industry has been a main strategy of the department. However, the investors have mainly been involved in hotel management rather

than hotel construction so far, he said.

Last October, Deputy Economy Minister Mohammad Khazaei unveiled an incentive plan based on which Iran grants years of tax exemption to both domestic and foreign businesses and individuals who invest in hospitality industry of the country.

“The tax exemption [strategy] has been envisaged for a period of 13 years for investments in underprivileged areas, and five years for other parts of the country,” ISNA quoted Khazaei as saying.

Under a national outlook plan, the country is projected to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.



The 5-star Espinas Palace Hotel is lit at sunset in northwest Tehran

Dublin to get 3,500 new hotel rooms

More than 3,500 new hotel rooms will become available in Dublin before 2020, a report by a leading estate agent has indicated.

Savills said that the supply of hotel accommodation would rise by 15 per cent based on a study of projects that are planned or under construction.

The majority of the new rooms will be located in the central areas of Dublin 1 and Dublin 2, followed by Dublin 8 and the area around Dublin airport.



The estate agent said that it expected 1,500 new hotel bedrooms next year followed by about 2,000 more in 2019.

(Source: The Times)

‘Tourism brings both money and more positive intl. image for Iran’

Standing in the blue-tiled shadows of one of Iran's greatest mosques, armed with a dish of sesame caramel snacks, Mohammed Reza Zamani is a cleric on a mission to repair the country's image in the west, one tourist at a time.

Tourism brings both money and a more positive international image for Iran, says Zamani, 36, a theology student, who is keen to ensure that visitors who might once have been alarmed by his clerical turban and robes feel welcome in his city.

“I think the moment they set foot in Iran [foreigners] find it totally different from what they expect, and their minds are changed by the people when visitors talk to us,” he said, as he took a short break between explaining marriage and circumcision traditions to a group of Italians and discussing millenarian religious beliefs with a man from the Netherlands.

“Free Friendly Talks” a billboard announces in English, at the entrance to a historic religious seminary-turned-museum, in the central city of Isfahan, a former imperial capital so beautiful that even today Iranians describe the city as “half the world.”

Iran's reformist president, Hassan Rouhani, staked his government and reputation on opening Iran to the world, sealing a nuclear deal that ended sanctions and courting foreign investment in its wake.

Rouhani was re-elected for a second



Mohammed Reza Zamani (standing, center right) with an Italian group in Isfahan. (Photo: Emma Graham-Harrison for the Observer)

term in a landslide victory recently, a sweeping endorsement of his policy from the Iranian people. And for many Iranians the growing flood of foreigners armed with guidebooks and selfie sticks is one of the most visible signs of change and re-engagement.

Europeans from countries including France, Italy and Germany, who account for the majority of Western tourists, can now get visas on arrival in Tehran, and at the main sites they mingle with sightseers from China, Japan and elsewhere.

“When the sanctions were lifted, I decided to come as soon as possible,”

Museums close earlier than usual during Ramadan

HERITAGE TEHRAN — Museums affiliated with the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization close an hour earlier than usual to mark the holy month of Ramadan, ISNA reported on Saturday.

All museums across the country that are run by the CHTHO will be open to the public from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. throughout the fasting month, Mohammadreza Kargar,

an official with the organization said.

May 27 was announced the beginning of Ramadan in Iran by sighting a waxing crescent moon which signifies the beginning of each Islamic month.

During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, sex, smoking, and indulging in anything that is in excess or ill-natured from dawn to sunset.

increasing recognition in the west, with dishes such as fesenjan, a rich, tart and sweet chicken stew thick with walnuts and pomegranate molasses.

There are also bazaars packed with carpets and handicrafts for shoppers, a thriving contemporary arts scene and spectacular natural beauty ranging from beaches to stark deserts and snow-capped mountains.

Together these factors have fueled a dramatic rise in Western tourists to Iran. Isfahan, the jewel in Iran's heritage crown and more a destination for tourists than pilgrims, counted just over 5,000 visitors a month in 2013, when Rouhani came to power. By spring 2017 that number had risen to 85,000 in a single month, the newspaper Isfahan Today reported.

The surge in visitors has been so dramatic that some nights in high season every single hotel room in the city is taken, according to the receptionist at the newly built Zenderood Hotel.

Dubai-based Rotana Hotels is the latest firm to unveil plans for a new hotel in Isfahan, following the likes of the French chain Accor.

Spanish heritage hotel company Paradores is also looking at opportunities in the country, whose famous hotels include a former caravanserai that housed traders bringing lucrative goods to market in the 16th century.

(Source: The Guardian)

New species of frog from the Neotropics carries its heart on its skin

In the Neotropics, there is a whole group of so-called glassfrogs that amaze with their transparent skin covering their bellies and showing their organs underneath.

A recently discovered new species from Amazonian Ecuador, however, goes a step further to fully expose its heart thanks to the transparent skin stretching all over its chest as well as tummy.

The new amphibian is described by a team of scientists led by Dr. Juan M. Guayasamin, Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador, in the open access journal ZooKeys.

It can also be distinguished by the relatively large dark green spots at the back of its head and the foremost part of the body. Additionally, the species has a characteristic long call.

■ **Slow-flowing streams**

The new frog is named Hyalinobatrachium yaku, where the species name (yaku) translates to ‘water’ in the local language Kichwa. Water and, more specifically, slow-flowing streams are crucial for the reproduction of all known glassfrogs.

The reproductive behavior is also quite unusual in this species. Males are often reported to call from the underside of leaves and look after the egg clutches.

Having identified individuals of the new species at three localities, the researchers note some behavioral differences between the populations. Two of



them, spotted in the riverine vegetation of an intact forest in Kallana, have been calling from the underside of leaves a few meters above slow-flowing, relatively narrow and shallow streams. Another frog of the species has been observed in

an area covered by secondary forests in the Ecuadorian village of Ahuano.

Similarly, the amphibian was found on the underside of a leaf one meter above a slow-flowing, narrow and shallow stream.

■ **The studied frogs**

The new amphibian is described by a team of scientists led by Dr. Juan M. Guayasamin, Universidad San Francisco de Quito, Ecuador, in the open access journal ZooKeys.

However, at the third locality - a disturbed secondary forest in San José de Payamino - the studied frogs have been perching on leaves of small shrubs, ferns, and grasses some 30 to 150 cm above the ground. Surprisingly, each of them has been at a distance greater than 30 meters from the nearest stream.

The researchers note that, given the geographic distance of approximately 110 km between the localities where the new species has been found, it is likely that the new species has a broader distribution, including areas in neighboring Peru.

The uncertainty about its distributional range comes from a number of reasons. Firstly, the species’ tiny size of about 2 cm makes it tough to spot from underneath the leaves. Then, even if specimens of the species have been previously collected, they would be almost impossible to identify from museum collection, as many of the characteristic traits, such as the dark green marks, are getting lost after preservation. This is why the conservation status of the species has been listed as Data Deficient, according to the IUCN Red List criteria.

Nevertheless, the scientists identify the major threats to the species, including oil extraction in the region and the related water pollution, road development, habitat degradation and isolation.

(Source: EurekAlert)

Here’s how big a massive black hole can actually get

As the size of a black hole defined by the Schwarzschild radius relates to its mass, it's only by acquiring more mass that a supermassive black hole will grow larger, as a greater mass means space time is curved over a larger area. Note however that the Schwarzschild radius doesn't denote an actual surface, but the area beyond which space time is curved to such a degree that the escape velocity exceeds the speed of light.

In other words, there is so much mass in such a small volume that the gravitational force curves space time to such extent that not even light can escape. As no light reflects, this is why a black hole is black.

Although it's thought that supermassive black holes can grow indefinitely, there is a theoretical maximum that it will be able to grow by means of the conventional accretion disc method, where gas in close proximity to the supermassive black hole becomes gravitationally attracted, passes the photon sphere and accretes into a disc as the material spirals into the black hole.

At that point — or usually way before that point has been reached — the gas in close proximity is exhausted, and the supermassive black hole stops acquiring more mass — except perhaps by tidally disrupting the occasional star that comes too close. Tidal disruption events are when a star comes too close to the black hole and is pulled apart by the black hole's tidal forces.

(Source: IBT)

Doped diamond may lead to everyday quantum computers

Quantum computers are still halfway mythical, but they are moving closer to reality step by tiny step.

One of the most widely favored structures for building viable quantum computers is a diamond surface dotted with irregularities only a couple of atoms wide.

The problem researchers face, however, is making sure those irregularities — essentially atom-scale holes and accompanying bits of atom-wide foreign material — are drilled into the diamond substrate in exactly the right spot.

A report by a team from MIT, Harvard University, and Sandia National Laboratories, in the U.S., covers a new method of doing so, creating the “defects” in the diamond crystal structure within 50 nanometers of their optimal locations.

The precise placement of the irregularities — known as “dopant-vacancies” in the business — is a critical outcome if quantum computers are ever to end up on the market.

This is because the combination of a tiny hole and a couple of atoms of non-diamond matter — nitrogen, for instance — can be engineered to act as a qubit, the fundamental element of quantum computing.

At the heart of a qubit is a subatomic particle that can simultaneously occupy a number of contradictory states — on, off, and a “superposition” of both together, for instance. The combination of the hole, the foreign atoms, and the light refracted through the diamond combine to create an elegant qubit.

(Source: CosmoMagazine)

Poorly understood Mars landing conditions led to probe’s demise

Europe’s Schiaparelli spacecraft came very close to a successful landing on Mars last year, but engineers failed to realize how jarring the probe’s parachute descent could be, dooming the touchdown, a report released on Wednesday said.



Schiaparelli flew to Mars with the Trace Gas Orbiter, which is studying gases in the planet’s atmosphere from orbit. The lander crashed during an attempted touchdown on Oct. 19.

Its parachute worked as designed, but atmospheric forces at supersonic speed were not well understood, the report, commissioned by the European Space Agency, said.

The “software behaved the way it was supposed to,” David Parker, ESA head of robotic exploration said in an interview.

“It should have been anticipated that the (spacecraft) rotation could reach the maximum. The software could have been more robust had it been more cleverly designed.”

Miscommunication between contractors Thales Alenia Space and Honeywell contributed to the problem, Parker said, adding that the ESA took full responsibility.

The agency will apply the lessons learned for the follow-on ExoMars rover life-detection mission, scheduled to launch in 2020.

Contributing to Schiaparelli’s botched landing was the lack of a backup avionics system, a decision made to save money and meet a March 2016 launch date, the report said.

However, a powerful spin for a fraction of a second overloaded the spacecraft’s sensors, leading to the false conclusion that it had reached the ground.

As a result, Schiaparelli shed its parachute early, briefly fired its landing thrusters and hit the ground at 336 mph (540 kph). The crash left a visible crater that was later photographed by NASA’s Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter.

(Source: Reuters)

‘Shape-shifting’ pasta could transform food shipping

Researchers at MIT have been playing with their food in the name of science, concocting a shape-shifting dining experience that could significantly reduce food shipping and packaging costs.

The team from MIT’s Tangible Media Group created flat sheets of gelatin and starch that transform into 3D shapes, such as flowers and pasta forms, when submerged in water.

The “culinary performance art” is a practical way to stack the edible sheets into more efficient packaging.

“We did some simple calculations, such as for macaroni pasta, and even if you pack it perfectly, you still will end up with 67 percent of the volume as air,” said Wen Wang, a co-author of the research, set to be published in a paper this month at the Association for Computing Machinery’s 2017 Computer-Human Interaction Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems.

“We thought maybe in the future our shape-changing food could be packed flat and save space.

■ **Fermentation process**

Wang and her co-authors came up with the nov-

el food after researching a bacterium that changes its shape when exposed to moisture. When they realized that the same bacterium is used in the fermentation process of a traditional Japanese food called natto, the researchers decided to test it in the 3-D printing process of edible cellulose onto layers of gelatin containing the bacteria.

Printing the cellulose into different patterns on the gelatin produced different responses when it was introduced to water.

“This way you can have programmability,” said Lining Yao, lead author of the paper and former MIT graduate student. “You ultimately start to control the degree of bending and the total geometry of the structure.”

The researchers then worked with a local chef to design different culinary creations, before building computational models of the material’s transformations and an online interface to allow users to design their own edible shapes.

“We envision that the online software can pro-



vide design instructions, and a startup company can ship the materials to your home,” Yao said. “With this tool, we want to democratize the design of noodles.”

(Source: Newsweek)

Why humans are programmed to self-destruct wherever we go, says Hawking

The human race is in so much trouble that it needs to colonize another planet within 100 years or face extinction. So says the physicist Stephen Hawking in an upcoming BBC documentary, Stephen Hawking: Expedition New Earth. According to Hawking, “with climate change, overdue asteroid strikes, epidemics and population growth, our own planet is increasingly precarious”.

If this makes you nervous, it should. Colonizing another planet will be much easier said than done, and lots of people would likely be left behind to face whichever disaster comes first. So is there an alternative?

You first have to appreciate that this is mainly a population issue. According

to the official count, the number of humans recently passed the 7.5 billion mark. While estimates of the carrying capacity of Earth vary widely, most people would accept we are causing serious damage. And with the population set to hit nearly 10 billion by 2050, that may be as much as 10 times more than the planet’s resources can sustain.

If we could yet reverse this growth, we might be able to avoid Hawking’s solution (at least if we are prepared to ride our luck over the asteroid strike). Standing in our way are two flaws hardwired into human DNA: our genes and our inability to make rational choices. If we can overcome them, I would argue that our days on this planet may not be numbered after all.

■ **The selfish gene**

Our genes problem famously stems from Richard Dawkins’ The Selfish Gene. It contains the idea that all organisms are merely conduits for genes that hop from generation to generation through different bodies. They do this purely in their own interests, not necessarily the interests of the organisms themselves.

Our genes have been able to do this because our ancestors were unable or unwilling to resist the urge to procreate. We have stemmed this to some extent by teaching kids about contraception (notably by appealing to “selfish” arguments about their future happiness, not saving the planet). Nonetheless the population continues to grow.

Also relevant is another idea in The Self-

ish Gene known as kin selection. It suggests that not only is our ultimate drive to spread the genes contained within our bodies, we are also compelled to protect and nurture the genes in our relatives — and by extension the people in our motherland.

Originally discussed by Darwin, this idea implies we are all essentially racist—consciously or subconsciously favoring those who share our genes. It is one of the more controversial areas in The Selfish Gene, since it is difficult if not impossible to separate nature and nurture. All the same, the fact that we have more genes in common with people closer to home means there is at least an evolutionary argument for favoring them.

(Source: NW)

New Zealand test rocket makes it to space but not to orbit

California-based company Rocket Lab said Thursday it had launched a test rocket into space from its New Zealand launch pad, although the rocket didn’t reach orbit as hoped.

The company said its Electron rocket lifted off at 04:20 P.M. Thursday and reached space three minutes later.

“It was a fantastic flight and we are really, really happy with the performance of the vehicle,” said company founder Peter Beck.

Beck, a New Zealander, said the early stages of the mission went to plan, right up to the final separation.

He said his team would be working through terabytes of data over the coming weeks to find out why the rocket didn’t reach orbit. He said a second test rocket has been built but it would take the team at least a couple of months before they were ready to launch it.

Rocket Lab was given official approval last week to

conduct three test launches from the remote Mahia Peninsula on the North Island. The company hopes to begin commercial launches later this year and eventually launch about one rocket every week.

Beck said it will target getting to orbit on the second test and will look to carry a heavier payload.

New Zealand has never had a space program but officials hope regular launches could change perceptions of the South Pacific nation and generate hundreds of millions of dollars each year in revenue.

■ **Disposable rockets**

Rocket Lab plans to keep costs low by using lightweight, disposable rockets with 3D-printed engines. It sees an emerging market in delivering lots of small devices into low Earth orbit. The satellites would be used for everything from monitoring crops to providing internet service.

Politicians are rushing through new space laws and the government has set up a boutique space agency, which employs 10 people.

“So far, it’s only superpowers that have gone into space,” Simon Bridges, New Zealand’s economic development minister, told The Associated Press last week. “For us to do it, and be in the first couple of handfuls of countries in the world, is pretty impressive.”

Rocket Lab’s Electron rocket is unusual in many respects. It carries only a small payload of about 150 kilograms (331 pounds). It’s made from carbon fiber and uses an electric engine. Rocket Lab says each launch will cost just \$5 million, a tiny fraction of a typical rocket launch.

It’s a different plan than some other space companies like Elon Musk’s SpaceX, which uses larger rockets to carry bigger payloads.

(Source: AP)

MEAF Appreciates BSI’s Public Relations Dept.

On the occasion of Communications and Public Relations Week, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance (MEAF) appreciated salient achievements and performance of Public Relations Department of Bank Saderat Iran (BSI), Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

For this purpose, Mohammad Sharafshahi Deputy Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance (MEAF) for Resources and Management Development Affairs awarded a Plaque of Honor to the Public Relations De-

partment Director of the bank Hamid-Reza Rahbar.

The Appreciation Letter is read as follows: “Public Relations Department in any organization is the symbol of empathy, unity and amity in administrative system of the country, so that activity in this strategic field requires establishing constructive interaction with audiences with the nature of love, sacrifice, patience and forbearance.”

It is worth mentioning that Public Relations offices of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance took giant

strides in the field of disseminating information services and advertising during the 11th government dubbed “Hope and Prudence”.

“Hereby, while congratulating the Public Relations and Communications Week, the unflinching, sincerely and honestly activities of respected staff and personnel of the bank is highly commemorated and wish evermore success to you in the year named after Resistance Economy, Production and Job Creation.”

350 athletes sign up for UAE's Ramadan Women's Sports Tournament

The ninth Ramadan Women's Sports Tournament started 27th May and will end 2nd June, the Sharjah Women's Sport Foundation, SWSF, has recently announced.

The weeklong event, which brings together 350 female athletes from 20 sports clubs. The event is ongoing under the patronage of H.H. Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed Al Qasimi, wife of H.H. the Ruler of Sharjah, Chairperson of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs, SCFA, and Chairperson of SWSF.

Local and regional sports clubs as well as private companies are attending in this year's tournament, and compete in the three sports of basketball, volleyball and archery.

"In our commitment to the directives of H.H. Sheikha Jawaher Al Qasimi, the foundation has devised a forward-thinking strategy in creating a conducive environment for the development of Emirati women through year-long sporting events and competitions," said Nada Askar Al Naqbi, Director-General of SWSF, highlighting that doing so allows female athletes to hone their skills and participate actively in the sports scene at home and abroad. (Source: WAM)

Fereni starch pudding

"A delightful pudding that can be eaten hot or cold, during Ramadan, particularly on suhoor or iftar. Adjust both the sugar and the rosewater to taste."

Ingredients:

- 2/3 cup cornstarch
- 2 cups milk
- 6 whole cardamom seeds



- 1/2 cup ground almonds rosewater to taste
- 1/4 cup white sugar, or to taste
- 1/4 cup blanched slivered almonds

Directions:

Dissolve cornstarch in 1 cup of cold milk. Bring remaining 1 cup milk to boil with cardamom and ground almonds. Reduce heat to medium, and whisk in cornstarch mixture. Add sugar and rosewater to taste. Allow the mixture to boil for about 3 more minutes on medium heat, stirring constantly. Remove cardamom seeds from the mixture and pour it into serving dishes. Garnish with slivered almonds and serve warm or cold. Enjoy!

Productive tips for amazing mums this Ramadan!

The beautiful month of Ramadan has steadily come in and many mothers out there (including myself) are finding ways to ensure we get the best of ourselves for this spiritual month. It can often be a real balancing act managing family, work, and other commitments before and during Ramadan. However if we organize ourselves efficiently we can aim to ensure that we complete our tasks successfully in Ramadan so that we are left with more time to really embrace its benefits. Read Islamic literature with your family.

Ramadan is a time for being with family, focusing on prayer, and fulfilling our obligations, such as giving zakat, amongst many other fruitful actions. For many mothers, Ramadan also consists of preparing suhoor and iftar, managing the kids and other household chores, in addition to being the best they can be during this special month.

Implementing effective time management strategies in every aspect of our lives can really help to keep organized and leave more time during the day to focus on our main priority: Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala (glorified and exalted be He). Being a mother of two toddlers and one on the way, I know that life can leave us stretched in all directions, and it can often be a juggling act to manage our time effectively. I find it beneficial to do productive things prior to Ramadan to ensure that we obtain and maintain the correct balance.

1. Plan meals beforehand

Preparing suhoor and iftar may not be a struggle if you organize yourself efficiently. It may be helpful to make a plan of what you are going to cook for the day to ensure that not all your time is spent on the cooking and there is ample time for other important duties such as nafl (voluntary, extra) prayers, Quran recitation, dhikr, and attending taraweeh (night) prayers.

2. Pre-calculate Zakat

Try to calculate your Zakat al Fitr before Eid so you're not left to do it in a rush and make arrangements of when and where you will pay it, and have it ready. This will save you worrying about it at the last minute.

3. Build a 'support network'

Ask older siblings to look after the younger ones.

Getting the family involved in Ramadan activities is an excellent way to ensure you have some extra help at hand and increase the family bond. Going together to taraweeh prayers, attending the mosque events, preparing meals, and reading Islamic literature can all increase your good deeds. It is also important to remember Ramadan is a time for you to focus on yourself and even mothers need



some alone time. This is where asking extended family or older siblings to mind younger siblings can help you get the utmost from the day.

4. Schedule 'Me' time

Although mothers by nature put their children and family before themselves, it is important to schedule some 'me time' where possible.

This is where your support network comes in but also identifying a specific time when you can be away from the demands of the home can help you strengthen spiritually. This could be at night before you sleep, or in the morning before everyone is awake. Either way it is important to ensure you don't 'burn out' and ask your husband/family for support – they can also be informed about this time that you need with your Lord and will respect that if you tell them.

5. Create mini-rotas

One final way to ensure you can spend time both with your children and your husband this Ramadan is to create mini-rotas where everyone in the house can chip in and help.

You can create a rota for tidying and cleaning up

after iftar, encouraging your children to take turns to earn more reward this month! For mothers who have young babies, maybe work out a rota where your husband does the 'night shifts' in tending to the baby if he's not working weekends for example. Ramadan is a time where you too want to take advantage of the last 10 nights, as the verse states:

"Indeed, We sent the Qur'an down during the Night of Decree. And what can make you know what is the Night of Decree? The Night of Decree is better than a thousand months.

The angels and the spirit descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter. Peace it is until the emergence of dawn" [97:1-5].

Ramadan should not be a time where mothers feel over-burdened and stressed out with workloads, I hope the above simple tips will help you use your time productively to make the most of this special month without having to worry about juggling the demands of family life; after all, your good deeds are to earn only the best home in the Hereafter.

(Source: productivemusilm.com)

Two stabbed to death protecting Muslim women in Portland

A stabbing in Portland, Ore. on Friday has left two people dead and one person injured. The three victims were stabbed by a man after they tried to stop him from yelling anti-Muslim and racist remarks at passengers on the MAX train.

The comments made by the suspect, 35-year-old Jeremy Joseph Christian from North Portland, were described as hate speech and were directed at two dark-skinned women, one wearing a hijab, police said. Christian has prior felony convictions—for robbery and

kidnapping—from back in 2002.

Army veteran and father of four, Ricky John Best, 53, died at the scene. The other two victims were taken to the hospital, where 23-year-old Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche died. The other victim, Micah David-Cole Fletcher, 21, is being treated for injuries that are not expected to be life-threatening, police said.

Namkai-Meche had recently graduated from Reed College in Portland. His mother posted on Facebook a picture and message honoring her son:

"He was a hero and will remain a hero on the other side of the veil."

Reed College president, John R. Kroger, described the incident in a statement as horrific and included kind word from Namkai-Meche's professors who described him as intelligent, humble, and caring.

Loren Cannon, the Special Agent in Charge of the FBI in Oregon, said that the FBI will be involved to make sure that justice is served for the victims. Cannon said that it is too early to tell if the stabbing was a federal hate crime, but that the FBI is planning on working with Portland police on the case.

"To those community members affected by this violence - in particular, the families of the Good Samaritans heroes and our neighbors in the Muslim and African-American communities - we stand with you," Cannon said. "We won't allow these acts to go unanswered."

According to the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office, Christian is being charged with two counts of Aggravated Murder, Attempted Murder, two counts of Intimidation to the Second Degree, and Felon in Possession of a Restricted Weapon. Christian will be brought before the Multnomah County Court on Tuesday and may face more charges after the Attorney's Office presents his case to a jury, police said.

This hate incident is one of many that have happened in the United States recently. Since the election of President Donald Trump, hate crime has been on the rise. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, in the first ten days after the election there were 867 hate incidents in the United States and 33 of them were in Oregon.

The high number of hate crimes is not surprising given Oregon's history of racism. According to the Oregon Encyclopedia from the Oregon Historical Society, there was a law passed in 1849 blocking black people from moving or entering into Oregon. In the 1920s, the Klu Klux Klan was prominent in Oregon with 35,000 members.

Oregon officials are upset by the attack on Friday. Governor Kate Brown said in a statement that she is heartbroken and called the victims brave and compassionate.

(Source: Daily Beast)

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PUBLIC CALL FOR PRE- QUALIFICATION OF TENDERERS
TWO PHASES TENDER NO : 4984-33/6-SS/95
SUBJECT: LEASE PURCHASE OF BRAND NEW VERTICAL SIESMIC PROFILE (VSP) PACKAGE INCLUDING PROVISION OF SPARE PARTS, TRAINING AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT
National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) a wholly subsidiary of national Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) intends to grant the provision of the above – mentioned services to a well – know and qualified contractor through the public call for Tenderers pre- qualification & signing the related contract.
A: Brief of the Scope of required Services .
PROVISION OF BRAND NEW VERTICAL SIESMIC PROFILE (VSP) PACKAGE INCLUDING SPARE PARTS, TRAINING AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT ON LEASE PURCHASE BASIS FOR UTILIZATION IN ALL OFFSHORE&ONSHORE OIL & GAS OILFIELDS OF IRAN
B: Quality evaluation criteria of Tenderers
1- The Natural/ Legal entities
2-Financial ability for the above- mentioned services and Bank Tender Guarantee in the amount of Iranian Rials five Billion nine hundred forty three million (5,943,000,000) for Iranian Companies and Euro one hundred seventy two thousand nine hundred twenty three (172,923) for foreign companies
3-Technical and Planning ability.
4-Ability for providing the Equipment and Machinery
5-Necessary experience and knowledge in the respective field.
6-Company good reputation
7-Appropriate standby capacity for work
C: The minimum acceptable quality score is 60.
D: Tenderers may visit this Pre-qualification advertisement by referring to national Information Center of the Iranian Tenders (<http://iets.mporg.ir>) with Call code number 1,481,266
E:Tenderers may obtain the pre-qualification documents and Tender Draft documents by sending their formal application to the NIDC's Contracts Department
FAX: +98-61-34148320-1 or Email: ahkarimi@nidec.ir
F:All competent tenderers may complete and deliver the prequalification documents to NIDC by Handing over them to room 107- Tender committee – First Floor- Operational building – Koyee Mellat- Ahvaz- Iran within 14 days from the date of the second issuance of this advertisement
G: Final Tender documents will be sent to the Emails of the competent and qualified contractors
Approved by NIDC.

National Iranian Drilling Company
Contracts Department

Hashd al-Sha'abi move on key town near Syrian border

Iraq Hashd al-Sha'abi (Popular Mobilization Forces) moved on Monday to capture a key town beyond the city of Mosul from ISIL (Daesh), tightening its grip on series of towns and villages near the Syrian border, officials said.

According to Shia lawmaker Karim al-Nouri, the mainly Shia Popular Mobilization Forces seeks to drive ISIL terrorist group out of the center of strategic Baaj, west of Mosul near the border with Syria. Al-Nouri said the surrounding villages have already been taken from ISIL.

Once Baaj falls, he told The Associated Press, the fight with ISIL will move to the Syrian border. He didn't elaborate.

"Baaj is a strategical town for Daesh as it is the last supply line" linking ISIL with Syria, said Sheikh Sami al-Masoudi, a PMF leader, using the Arabic acronym for ISIL. "Once we reach the border, we will erect a dirt barricade and dig a trench to derail their (ISIL) move," he added.

By afternoon, a brigade from the PMF reached the Syrian border for the first time, taking Um Jrais village, al-Masoudi later said.

Hashim al-Mousawi, a leader with al-Nujaba, which is also part of the PMF, said the troops are ready to move inside



Syrian territories but that this needs Iraqi government approval.

The PMF - known as Hashed al-Shaabi in Arabic - has largely operated since October in the desert to the west of Mosul, trying to cut ISIL supply lines.

On the Syrian side of the border, U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, ISIL

militants and Syrian rebels are fighting for territory. President Bashar Assad's forces and their allies have also been on the offensive, moving toward the Iraqi and Jordanian border but are still far from reaching it.

On May 18, a U.S. airstrike hit pro-Syrian government forces, the attack was the

first such close confrontation between America troops and fighters backing Assad.

Syrian activists said leaflets were dropped Sunday on advancing Syrian soldiers and their allies, warning them to stay away from the border crossing of Tanf. "Any movements toward Tanf will be considered hostile and we will defend our forces," the coalition leaflet read.

In Mosul, Iraqi forces began a new offensive to drive ISIL militants from the remaining pockets of territory that the militants still hold in the Old City, in Mosul's western half. The ISIL hold on Mosul has shrunk to just a handful of neighborhoods in and around the Old City district where narrow streets and a dense civilian population are expected to complicate the fight.

Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul fell to ISIL in the summer of 2014 as the militants swept over much of the country's north and central areas. Weeks later the head of the extremist group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced the formation of a self-styled caliphate in Iraq and Syria from the pulpit of a Mosul mosque.

(Source: agencies)

Manchester sees rise in hate crimes after attack

The number of hate crime incidents reported to police in Manchester has almost doubled since the suicide bomb attack at the Manchester Arena on May 22 that killed 22 people and injured dozens of others.

A total of 56 hates crimes were recorded by the Manchester Police on May 24; a significant rise from the 28 reported two days previously. Police say 28 is a fairly typical number.

"It is important that we continue to stand together here in Greater Manchester," Ian Hopkins, Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police, said.

"Particularly against some of the hateful views that we've seen from a very small minority of the community that have no place here."

Although a direct link couldn't be made to the attack on Monday night - which was carried out by Salman Abedi, a 22-year-old Briton of Libyan descent - the police are continuing to monitor the situation.

Some of the victims are afraid to report such incidents to police, while others are frightened of reprisals from the community.

"I know some [Muslim girls] who have been attacked.

There was one who doesn't wear a headscarf or anything, but a man came up to her and punched her in the head," Tracey Pook, a Muslim receptionist, told Al Jazeera.

"I'm frightened of the anger that will follow. No doubt, we're going to have some protests from far-right groups."

■ Fear amid solidarity

The residents of Manchester have shown plenty of solidarity since the attack. Several crowd funding campaigns have been set up to raise funds for the families of the victims.

A campaign entitled "Muslims United for Manchester" is being led by the British Muslim Heritage Centre that seeks to raise at least \$65,000 for the victims and their families.

"We wish to respond to evil with good, as our faith instructs us, and send a powerful message of compassion through action," the campaign's description reads.

However, there are also fears that the current unity that largely prevails is only a temporary distraction from the city's problems with hate crimes.

"There is something burning underneath and all



those injustices, whether they are here or abroad - they have an effect on the reaction of people," Abdul Aziz, a Manchester-based member of the Muslim Association of Great Britain, told Al Jazeera.

On Saturday, Britain lowered its official terrorism threat level from "critical" to "severe" after police said they had dismantled a large part of Abedi's network.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

New clashes as fate of Bahrain cleric remains unknown

Bahraini regime forces have clashed with demonstrators rallying in solidarity with a prominent Shia cleric and his slain supporters in several areas across the kingdom.

Troops attacked peaceful protesters who took to the streets of Sitra Island and chanted slogans against King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah on Sunday night.

The protesters held the monarch responsible for recent crimes committed by his forces in the northwestern village of Diraz where several protesters were killed during a raid of Sheikh Isa Qassim's home.

On May 23, police raided Diraz, which has been under a military siege for almost a year, and stormed the home of the spiritual leader of Bahrain's Shia majority.

At least five demonstrators were killed and dozens more injured during the crackdown which also saw more than 280 people arrested.

The fresh wave of anti-regime protests broke out on May 21, when a Bahraini court sentenced Sheikh Qassim to one year in jail and ordered him to pay \$265,266 in fines.

Last year, the cleric was also stripped



of his citizenship, which sparked repeated sit-ins outside his residence in Diraz.

Also on Sunday, demonstrators staged a protest in support of Sheikh Qassim in Saar residential area, west of Manama, calling for the punishment of those behind the killing of activists.

Al Khalifah regime forces rushed to attack the peaceful protesters, firing toxic gases to disperse them.

Similar protests were also held in Bilad Al Qadeem town and the villages of Shahrkan, Samaheej, Bani Jamra, Musal-

la, Karranah, Karzakan, Karbabad, Daih and Sanabis late on Sunday.

The developments come as the fate of Sheikh Qassim remains unknown amid reports that the regime wanted to send him to exile either in Turkey or the United Arab Emirates after Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi rejected such a request in a show of support for the Shia leader.

Bahrainis also held a symbolic funeral for the slain activists in the villages of Abu Saiba and Shakhora, calling for those responsible for the crimes to be held accountable.

The five victims were buried on Friday without their families' permission in a move denounced by the victim's relatives as a crime.

"The martyrs' families announce that depriving them from burying their sons in accordance with their wish can be construed as a crime which will be added to the first crime of liquidating them in the field," the families said in a statement.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held numerous demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the kingdom in early February 2011. They are demanding that the Al Khalifah dynasty relinquish power and a just system representing all Bahrainis be established.

The Manama regime has spared no effort to clamp down on dissent and rights activists. On March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were deployed to Bahrain to assist Manama in its crackdown.

Scores of people have been killed and hundreds of others have been injured or arrested as a result of the Al Khalifah regime's crackdown on anti-regime activists.

(Source: Press TV)

The Road to peace in Syria

➔ In the summit held in Tehran on April 19-20, Iran, Turkey and Russia once again came together and agreed on the topics to be discussed during the fourth Astana meeting. They also discussed prisoner exchanges and decided to create four de-escalation zones in Syria.

The agreement signed by the three countries designated the zones as Idlib, parts of Latakia, Aleppo, Hama and Homs and Damascus/Eastern Ghouta as well as some parts of Daraa and Quneitra provinces.

In fact, President Erdogan and President Putin had already announced their agreement on the de-escalation zones in Syria when they met in Sochi before the fourth meeting. In other words, another very important step was taken towards lasting peace in Syria through an agreement between Russia, Iran and Turkey. For the first time, a new era of non-violence started in Syria. The decision on the zones also lent a positive atmosphere to the sixth stage of the Syrian talks held in Geneva.

Interestingly, certain Western media outlets seem to be in a state of panic in the face of these developments. Many analysts believe that the current display of strong collaboration and power by the Turkey-Iran-Russia nex-

us meant a decline in U.S. influence in the region.

The criticism campaign, led by some British media outlets as usual, portrayed the coalition of Iran, Russia and Turkey as an anti-NATO structure. For instance, The Economist announced that this friendship should be of concern to NATO.

TIME on the other hand, conjured up catastrophic scenarios because the de-escalation zones did not cover the entire country—even though this is only natural, since this is only the first step—and claimed that the solution was unacceptable for the opposition. In a pessimistic, provocative and divisive manner, it railed against a historic plan that promised to bring peace to this country, which has been ravaged by war for the past six years.

The panic seen among the British deep state members, the maestro of global imperialism, is clear proof that the two large Muslim countries of the region, together with Russia, are doing the right thing by cooperating to help Syria. Naturally, Iran, Turkey and Russia gaining power and influence in the region is not in the best interests of this deep structure, which has worked

on its plans for the Middle East for centuries through countless plans and plots.

It is a historical fact that throughout history, there have been countless plans and plots to prevent and destroy the friendship between these three countries. Numerous embargos and sanctions were implemented against them. However, the good news is that throughout history, the three countries never fell into those traps. Despite the sundry plots and ruses, Iran, Turkey and Russia have maintained their friendship which always produced good results.

And now Iran, Turkey and Russia joining forces to bring peace to Syria, and acting in complete accord, is going to be further proof that such sinister games cannot and will not succeed. Particularly, it is crucial that two fraternal countries, Iran and Turkey, continue to strengthen their bonds and engage in the highest level of economic and political cooperation. By the grace of God, their cooperation will be the strongest assurance of peace, stability, development and welfare in the region.

Pakistanis protest power cuts, protester killed in clashes

Violence erupted at demonstrations against power cuts in several towns in northwestern Pakistan Monday, leading to clashes with police that killed a protester and wounded several, officials said.

Hundreds of protesters burned and rampaged through government offices and police checkpoints, snatching valuables and police weapons, said Deputy Commissioner Malakand district, Zafar Ali Shah.

They tried to burn a main power station in the town of Dargai, he said. Similar clashes took place in Peshawar, Charsadda and Swat.

In Peshawar, protesters took to the streets for the third day of rallies and roadblocks, said police official Nasir Khan. At least two offices of the power supply department were ransacked, he said. Provincial lawmaker Fazl-e-Rabbi who led the rallies in Peshawar, said the protests would continue until the federal government ends disparity in the power distribution.

"We have complained to the power distributors to end the unscheduled outages, but they're not listening to us," said Shah, the deputy commissioner.

(Source: AP)

The Libya fallout shows how Theresa May has failed on terror

➔ That is not to say it would not have been done, but I don't recall reading such material ... I do not recall reading any reports that set out the background of any activity to specific rebel groups."

■ Astonishing failure

It is an astonishing failure. Because, as the committee report makes clear, from February 2011 rebels detached themselves from the main rebel militia, refused to take orders from it and killed its main commander. By October, the situation was out of control.

Theresa May, as home secretary, sat through 55 National Security Council meetings on Libya between March and November 2011. The national security adviser's "lessons learned" report makes no mention of any Home Office contribution to that body's decisions, nor any mention of the implications for domestic terror.

It is now reported that MI5 was facilitating the travel of non-terrorist British Libyans to fight in Tripoli. The minister responsible for that decision would have been May. Did she ask about the impact of the Libyan fighting on the terror threat here? That would be something the newspapers, if they did their job, would be shouting at her today, instead of hurling insults at Jeremy Corbyn.

In July 2011, as the fighting raged, May did warn that al-Qaida was seizing arms in Libya. However, she concluded, because of the Arab spring, "al-Qaida is failing". Unfortunately it was the Arab spring that failed, and the rise of Islamic State was one of the results.

In January this year May pulled the plug on any future strategy of regime change and foreign intervention, implicitly criticizing Cameron's Libya strategy. Speaking in Philadelphia, she decried the "failed policies of the past".

But it is the job of a government to do more than decry things. It has to deal with the mess created. And to do that, it has to ask a question May never bothered with: are cuts to the police and defense budgets sustainable in the context of the increased terror threat?

May's response, to the rooms full of police federation reps who did raise it, year after year, was to reject the premise of the question. Now, with the terror threat at critical, she has had to deploy troops to guard key installations.

No matter by how much the budgets of GCHQ and MI5 have been boosted, in an attack such as this – and the threat is ongoing – it is the resilience of police, fire and A&E departments that is tested. The troop deployment is a tacit admission that this resilience is under strain.

Reversing police budget cuts now, as Labour has promised, should be mandatory. If anything, the recent spate of attacks – both failed and successful – shows the need for a more strategic rethink.

■ Extra resources

Britain needs the equivalent of the French GIGN, the full-time paramilitary force deployed to deal with the Bataclan attack. Such a force would need a new legal framework and heavy investment in extra resources – not, as now, resources borrowed from frontline police and Special Forces.

But above all Britain needs to be in active collaboration with security services across Europe. Reports suggest the explosives used by Abedi, the bomb design and the networks utilized were those of radicalized north Africans living in European cities.

As they constructed their Brexit strategy, senior civil servants briefed journalists that May was prepared to threaten the EU with withdrawal of security and intelligence cooperation. May stupidly included the threat in her article 50 letter, later claiming it was not a threat at all. How hollow and foolish that all sounds now.

The Manchester massacre should be a wake-up call. This is a government of amateurs; Fox didn't bother to ask about the terror implications when we bombed Libya; May lost 19,000 police in the face of reasoned warnings. Unfortunately the enemy we are fighting are professionals.

Jeremy Corbyn has, ignored by the commentators, repeatedly used prime minister's questions to warn about the impact of police cuts on our security. He has – at every point – done what May and Fox did not: asked the right questions.

Laugh, if you want, at Diane Abbott's failure to answer the question: how much would 10,000 extra police cost? But it was the wrong question. With the ISIS caliphate about to collapse in Raqqa and Mosul, spreading its survivors into the refugee trails of Europe, I don't care how much 10,000 new officers cost. The right question is: how soon can they start?

(Source: The Guardian)

Bartra feared for his career after Dortmund bus attack

Marc Bartra has revealed he feared for his career in the moments following the attack on Borussia Dortmund's team bus ahead of their Champions League clash with Monaco in April.

Former Barcelona defender Bartra was the only player significantly injured in the three explosions that damaged the vehicle and he later underwent surgery on his right wrist.

But the 26-year-old, who returned to action against Werder Bremen on the final day of the Bundesliga season, has now said that he initially thought the incident could force him into an early retirement as he was trapped in his seat.

"When the attack happened, I thought I would never be able to play again," Bartra told Kicker after Dortmund's DFB-Pokal final win against Eintracht Frankfurt. "I could not move in the first five or 10 minutes and I could not hear anything.

"When the doctor told me after the surgery that everything was going well and I was going to be able to play again in a month, that was indescribable and the most beautiful news.

"I feel stronger today than ever before. I was very sad that such a thing could happen - it was a few damn difficult weeks - but now we can all enjoy this victory."

(Source: Soccerway)

Djokovic begins Agassi era with win

Defending champion Novak Djokovic enjoyed a winning French Open start under new coach Andre Agassi on Monday, cruising past Spain's Marcel Granollers 6-3 6-4 6-2 in the first round.

The 12-times grand slam champion parted company with his entire coaching team earlier this month after a string of disappointing results before inviting American great Agassi to work with him during the French Open.

The 30-year-old Serbian, without a tour title since January, found little resistance from Granollers, grabbing two breaks early on in the first set as he chased the 77th-ranked Spaniard around the court.

With Agassi, sporting a black t-shirt and sunglasses, quietly sitting in the stands along with the Serb's entourage, it was a similar story early in the second set with the world number two returning everything Granollers tried to throw at him.

He again went 4-1 up before a wobble saw him fail to convert eight set points at 5-3.

Djokovic kept his cool to earn the second set and pounced on the Spaniard's accumulating mistakes in the third set to seal victory on his first match point.

With Agassi making a fast exit from the stands at the conclusion of the match, Djokovic heaped praise on his new coach.

"It is an incredible honour and good luck to have him with me on the team," Djokovic said. "Every day is special with him. I am learning something every day."

"I changed everyone (coaches). But I will not change my wife. My wife never."

(Source: Eurosport)

Nadal blasts past Benoit Paire to win in three

Rafael Nadal's challenge for a 10th title at Roland Garros got off to a comfortable start as he defeated Benoit Paire 6-1 6-4 6-2 to reach the second round of the French Open.

Nadal, who has returned to form on clay this season in a big way, made light work of the Frenchman in front of his home fans on Suzanne-Lenglen.

The heavy favourite for the title looked in imperious form as he steamed through the first set in under half an hour. Paire, described prior to their encounter on Court Suzanne Lenglen as a dangerous opponent by Nadal, played with more freedom in a closer second set as the Spaniard lost his edge.

Trading baseline rallies, they exchanged breaks to leave the Frenchman leading 4-3. But Nadal then pulled clear and, with Paire periodically clutching his stomach after a medical time out, the Spaniard took nine of the last 10 games to close out the match in just under two hours.

(Source: Eurosport)

Barcelona goalkeeper signs a contract extension until 2022

Marc-Andre ter Stegen has signed a new contract at Barcelona committing himself to the Catalans until 2022.

The club released an official statement on the deal saying: 'FC Barcelona announces that it has entered into an agreement with Marc-Andre ter Stegen for the renewal of his contract until 30 June 2022.

'His buyout clause is set at €180million. The new contract will be signed on Tuesday 30 May at 13:30 at the offices of the club.' The German was named the club's first choice goalkeeper at the start of this season after Claudio Bravo was sold to Manchester City in August.

He was previously the No 1 for Champions League and Copa del Rey matches but following Bravo's move to the Premier League he became the club's starter in La Liga.

Jasper Cillessen, who joined from Ajax at the start of the season, was the club's starter throughout the victorious Copa del Rey campaign.

Cillessen was in goal for Barcelona as they won the Copa del Rey final 3-1 against Alaves on Saturday with ter Stegen left on the bench.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Retiring Roma legend Francesco Totti: 'I'm not ready to say it's over'

Roma legend Francesco Totti admitted he was "afraid" of what comes next as he bid a warm farewell to the only club of his career on Sunday.

Totti, 40, played his final match for Roma, for whom he debuted as a 16-year-old in 1993, coming on as a substitute in the 54th minute of the Giallorossi's 3-2 Champions League-clinching victory over Genoa at the Stadio Olimpico.

The Roma captain led his side to a Serie A title, two Coppa Italia crowns and two Italian Super Cups over his record 786 matches for the club in which he scored 307 goals. However, during a heartfelt send-off by the club and their fans on Sunday, the former Italy international confessed he's not ready to accept his career is over.

"We're here, the moment has arrived. Unfortunately, the moment has arrived that I hoped would never come," Totti told the crowd in his postmatch speech.

"Over the last few days, so much has been said about me, such wonderful things. You were behind me, pushing me on during difficult moments, and that's why I want to say thank you to everyone.

"I cried on my own, like crazy! You can't just forget 25 years like this. I thank everyone, even if this is not easy for me. I spoke to my wife about what these years have been like.

"I thank my mother and father, my brother, family and friends. Thank you to my wife and three children. I wanted to start from this, because I wasn't sure if I'd be able to get to the end of it."

Totti, who joined the club academy as a boy, recounted the past 28 years as a member of Roma. But admitted it was now time to "grow up."

"It is impossible to explain 28 years in a few phrases. I'd love to do it with a song or a poem, but I'm no good at those. I tried to express myself through my feet, because everything seems easier that way.

"Speaking of which, do you know my favourite toy when I was young? The



football! And it still is. But at a certain point, you have to grow up. That's what they told me, that time had made its decision.

"Damn you, time! The same that on that June 17, 2001 we wanted to go so fast. I couldn't wait to hear the referee blow his whistle three times and it still gives me goosebumps now.

"Now time has come and tapped me on the shoulder, telling me I have to grow up. He said, from tomorrow, you will be an adult. Take off your shorts and boots, from now you are a man and can no longer

smell the grass, feel the sun in your face, the adrenaline that consumes you and the satisfaction of celebrating.

"Being born Roman and Romanisti is a privilege. Being captain of this team was an honour. You are and always will be in my life. I might not be able to have fun with my feet any more, but my heart will always be with you.

"Now I walk down those stairs, enter the locker room that welcomed me when I was a child and I leave now that I am a man.

"I am happy and proud to have given

28 years of my love to Roma. I love you!"

Goals from Edin Dzeko, Daniele De Rossi and Diego Perotti confirmed Roma's direct qualification to the Champions League group stage after lowly Genoa threatened to hold them to a draw with efforts from 16-year-old Pietro Pellegri and Darko Lazovic.

Had the northerners managed to divide the points in Rome, Napoli would have snatched second place courtesy of their 4-2 victory at Sampdoria.

(Source: ESPN)

Barcelona unveil new home kit for 2017-18 season featuring new sponsor

Barcelona have revealed their new home kit for the 2017-18 season, with a different look to the traditional red stripes and a new sponsor.

The iconic red and blue look is maintained by the Copa del Rey winners, however there is just one red stripe of traditional thickness vertically down the middle.

This then splits off into thinner stripes across the chest, with one more bar under the arms and none on the sleeves, which are left plain blue.

The shirt is designed by Nike, who call it an 'updated interpretation of the traditional Blaugrana stripes'.

A statement on their website says: 'On the shirt, the vertical red bands are cast against a deep royal blue to form the updated stripe composition.

'Detailing inspired by the club's history and culture can be seen on the collar, which is partially defined by the Catalan flag, the Senyera.'

The kit goes on sale on June 1, and any Barca fans wanting to get the genuine article as soon as it becomes available could be left with light pockets.

Although no official price has yet been announced, the 2016-17 adult shirt - for a season that has already finished - is still retailing at £69.99, reduced from £100.

Barcelona unveiled the new kits via social media on Monday morning, with a stylised image featuring many first team stars, including Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez, Andres Iniesta, Gerard Pique and Neymar.

However for the main promotional



images, Neymar is chosen as the model, ousting multiple Ballon D'Or winner Messi to be front and centre of the campaign - perhaps showing a shift in Barca's mentality towards who is their primary star player.

The shirt is sponsored for the first time by Japanese company Rakuten, who become the club's main sponsor this summer, replacing Qatar Airways.

Rakuten are an online trading company based in the Far East, and have courted controversy in Europe by allowing the trade of ivory and whale meat.

Rakuten announced an end to whale and dolphin meat sales in April 2014 due to international pressure, but they are understood to have not completely stopped the trading with products still available on their sites because the practice is not banned within Japan.

(Source: Daily Mail)

One F1 comeback is enough for Button

Formula One may have seen the last of Jenson Button following the 2009 world champion's Monaco Grand Prix comeback as stand-in for McLaren race regular Fernando Alonso.

The 37-year-old Briton made it abundantly clear at the weekend that while he enjoyed the experience more than expected he had no desire to do any more Formula One races this year.

"It has not whetted the appetite for any more -- definitely not," said Button, who started last and from the pit lane due to penalties and retired from the race after colliding with Pascal Wehrlein's Sauber.

Button, who was deemed at fault by race stewards and given a three-place grid drop for a next race that may never happen, will have breathed a big sigh of relief to see double world champion Alonso emerge unscathed from a crash-strewn Indianapolis 500.

Had the Spaniard been injured in a race he led for 27 laps before his car's Honda engine expired in all-too familiar circumstances with 21 of the 200 laps remaining, Button's services might have been required further.

Asked before the race whether he might return as a stand-in later in the year if required, Button replied: "Who knows, but I don't plan on it.

"I also know that the team don't plan on moving their race drivers around.

"So no, it's definitely not the plan for me to race again this year in



Formula One. In other categories, possibly yes. But not in Formula One, I've got my own things that I'm enjoying away from the sport at the moment."

Former champions McLaren -- the only team yet to score a point this year -- have an option on Button for 2018 but he left no doubt that he had not missed the sport he left at the end of last year.

While he said he had enjoyed practice "more than I have for a couple of years to be fair", he was also clearly unsettled by the width and characteristics of the new cars and the prospect of trying to overtake.

The best moment of his afternoon was perhaps a phone call from Alonso before the start, with the Spaniard wishing him luck and asking him to take car of his car.

(Source: Reuters)

Four killed in stampede at football final in Honduras

It should have been a day of celebration as Motagua were crowned champions in Honduras, but instead it was marred by tragedy.

According to Honduras' national police, four people were killed and several injured in a stampede at the national stadium Sunday prior to the league final between Motagua and Honduras Progreso.

The incident occurred, police say, when a group of fans tried to enter one section of the stadium in a violent manner.

Montagua club president, Pedro Atala, said the incident was caused by false ticket sales and denied his club were responsible for overselling tickets.

"There is a joy that we cannot hide, but we also have mixed feelings," Atala told Honduran TV.

"First and foremost, our deepest condolences to the people who died outside the stadium, due to selling of fake



tickets and an increase in the number of fans that the police didn't expect.

"We want to make clear, that at no point was there overselling of tickets. That is easy to prove.

"We are going to try and find the relatives of the victims

to help them as best we can."

The match eventually went ahead following a minute's silence, with Montagua winning 3-0.

Atala later tweeted that security officials had recommended the match should not be canceled as the stadium was already full.

Police say they had reinforced security before the match by placing 600 law enforcement officers at the stadium, in the country's capital, Tegucigalpa.

"To ensure order and safety of those attending the sporting event and avoiding violent events, in agreement with the authorities of the National League, it was decided to reinforce the control measures for the entry of fans into the stadium," a statement read.

Police will now investigate the clubs to see if they oversold their tickets.

(Source: CNN)

Iran's Mousavi misses FIVB Volleyball World League opening week

S P O R T S Iranian middle blocker Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi has been ruled out of the 2017 FIVB Volleyball World League opening week due to a knee injury.

"Mousavi misses the first week of the competition since he is not fully-prepared. It's a huge blow for us ahead of the FIVB Volleyball World League but Iran has so many experienced players," Iran volleyball manger Amir Khoshkhabar said.

Iran will take on Italy, Brazil and Poland on the first week of the competition, scheduled for June 2-4.

The matches will be held at the Adriatic Arena in Pesaro, Italy.

The 2017 FIVB Volleyball World League will be the 28th edition of the annual men's international volleyball tournament played by 36 teams between June 2 and July 2.

Of the 12 teams in Group 1, 11 also competed in the top tier in 2016 (Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, France, Iran, Italy, Poland, Russia, Serbia and the USA). They are joined by 2016 Group 2 winners Canada. The top five of a combined Preliminary Round ranking will join the Finals hosts from June 28 to July 2.



Tianjin Bohai Bank beat Iran's Sarmayeh Bank at Asian Women's Club Volleyball Championship

China's Tianjin Bohai Bank sailed into a 3-0 (25-11, 25-20, 25-11) win over Iran's Sarmayeh Bank at the quarter-final phase of the SMM 2017 Asian Women's Club Samruk Kazyna Volleyball Championship on Monday.

Tianjin Bohai Bank's captain Chen Liyi and Yu Junwei scored 18 points each on Monday for the team's successful entry into the Final Four to contend the title.

"I feel good about our chances in the semi-finals against Thailand and we know we will play our best as a team," Chen said in a post-match interview at the Boris Alexandrov Sports Palace.

Chen Liyi rushed to get her work done at the wing. Yu Junwei likewise scored off attacks and added service aces. Sarmayeh Bank found difficulty in passing the ball, given the powerful attacks of their opponents. The Iranian side tried to use their substitute players, but the Chinese club stormed into a 25-11 finish in the first set.

By the second set, Yung Junwei supported China's



offence by scoring from the flank. Sarmayeh Bank persisted in keeping a narrow gap, with setter Shabnam Alikhani utilising different hitters. What she needed to find was the most prolific who could help stage a rally.

Mahsa Saberi tried at the left, while Maedeh Borhani attacked mostly from the right side.

Consistent, steady play was what the Iranian side needed as they later succumbed to attack errors. They tried to redeem themselves by saving some set points, but Tianjin Bohai Bank eventually slid into a 25-20 win in the second set.

In the third set, Tianjin Bohai Bank hurried into a 16-7 lead, as they continued to collect points from Chen Liyi, Yu Junwei. Sarmayeh Bank's Farnoosh Sheiki tried to help in offence and defence, but mainly, their errors overtook their demeanour on the court. Bench players were enlisted by coach Mitra Shabanian but their efforts were spoiled by their opponents' innate strength in attack. The Chinese side took the set 25-11.

Tianjin Bohai Bank will face Supreme VC in the semi-final match on Tuesday, May 30, at 16:30 local time.

(Source: Asianvolleyball)

Premier League stars celebrate Ramadan on holiday in Dubai

Premier League stars were out in force in Dubai as Manchester United duo Luke Shaw, Adnan Januzaj and Stoke midfielder Bojan celebrated Ramadan.

The three were photographed dressed in white robes known as 'thawbs' as they posed in the United Arab Emirates' biggest city on Sunday.

The photos were posed by Instagram user Ahmed El-Saraf, who captioned the photo: 'Having Sohoor night with the boys'.

Sohoor is the pre-dawn meal consumed early by those observing Ramadan before they spend the daylight hours fasting.

Shaw and Januzaj's team-mate Paul Pogba was also photographed travelling to Saudi Arabia as he made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The midfielder is a practising Muslim though it is unknown whether he will be fasting in observation of Ramadan after being named in France's squad for their June matches against Paraguay, Sweden and England.

The Premier League stars are all currently on their end-of-season break after mixed fortunes in 2016-17.

United defender Luke Shaw endured another season beset by injury problems and was openly criticised by



manager Jose Mourinho in April after coming off eight minutes in to the 1-1 draw against Swansea.

His teammate Januzaj meanwhile looks set to be sold by United after a poor season on loan at bottom-placed Sunderland.

The Belgian winger's career at Old Trafford has stalled and Mourinho hinted he would be let go- Januzaj has just one year remaining on his current deal.

Bojan was also sent out on loan by his parent club as the Stoke star joined Bundesliga side Mainz in January until the end of the season.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Marco Reus faces 'several months' out after partial ligament injury

Marco Reus has suffered a seemingly endless number of injuries in his young career. Although, with the German Cup he has lifted the first major trophy of his career, Reus appears set to miss out on more playing time.

In the first half of Borussia Dortmund's German Cup final win over Eintracht Frankfurt, Marco Reus partially tore a cruciate ligament in his right knee and is expected to be out for "several months," his club confirmed on Monday. No specific return date was given, but it looks as though BVB fans may not see their star winger back on the pitch until October at the earliest.

Reus was a late arrival for BVB's celebrations through Dortmund's city center because he was in hospital getting examined. This is just the latest in a long line of injuries for the 27-year-old, who missed both the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Euros due to injuries and was not selected in Germany's Confederations Cup this summer in order to give him some much-needed rest.

Reus will now spend yet another



summer recovering from an injury and there are genuine concerns that the winger's body isn't suitable for football as ligament tears, adductor problems and muscle and ankle issues continue to plague the former Gladbach player.

Nevertheless, Reus, who turns 28 at the end of the month, has battled back each time and this season, after a scintillating second half of the campaign, capped it off with the first trophy of his career.

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

Mizael Conrado elected NPC Brazil's President

The Brazilian Paralympic Committee (CPB) elected the fourth President in its history on Friday (31 March) when the former football-5-a-side star and two-time Paralympic champion Mizael Conrado was elected for a four-year term. Conrado replaces Andrew Parsons, who was in charge of the CPB since 2009. Naise Pedrosa and Ivaldo Brandao will be, respectively, the first and second Vice Presidents.

Conrado is the first Paralympic medallist to take over as CPB president. Besides the two gold medals achieved at the Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games, Conrado was chosen as the world's best football-5-a-side player in 1998.

"Being elected as President of CPB is a very emotional moment to me. I acknowledge the challenges to come, but even bigger will be our responsibilities. This responsibility comes with the commitment to giving my best in order to give a chance to those who have not yet had access to the Paralympic Movement. I want to honour the magnitude of this Movement and also honour the other Presidents who paved the way for us. Former President Andrew Parsons left a legacy of harmony in the Paralympic Movement and I am committed to keeping it. Together we will be stronger," said Conrado.



Mizael served as a Vice President during the two terms of Parsons.

Parsons said: "I want to wish best of luck to our new board. They are three extremely capable people. I have worked side by side with Brandao and Mizael. Mizael's perspective as a former athlete, put together with his experience as a Vice President, will make him a great President. I'm sure he will lead our Paralympic

Movement not only to the top of medal tables but will also open doors to people with impairments in all levels."

As a Vice President, Conrado was pivotal in the passing of The Inclusion of People with Disabilities Act, which eliminated accessibility barriers in transport, housing, services, education, sport and the exercise of citizenship in Brazil. The law also stated that 2.7 per cent of the gross revenues of the federal lotteries should be invested in sport, up from the 2 per cent level.

After conducting the discussions for the new law in the Brazilian Senate, former football star and now a Senator Romario supported Mizael for the highest position in the Brazilian Paralympic Movement.

Romario said: "It makes me really proud the fact that Mizael Conrado was elected President of the Brazilian Paralympic Committee. A person with a vision impairment ahead of Brazil's NPC is very emblematic, especially in a country where we do not see former athletes ahead of our sports federations very often. This is going to be key for him, because his practical experience will give him a different perspective. Besides that, Mizael is also a lawyer. So I want to wish him and the Brazilian Paralympic Movement best of luck."

(Source: Paralympic.ir)

Isfahan to host futsal international tournament

The four-a-side futsal tournament will be held in the city of Isfahan, Iran.

Head of the futsal committee in the Islamic Republic of Iran Football Federation (IRIFF), Abbas Torabian, said the tournament will kick off in Isfahan on December 3, 2017.



According to Torabian, Argentina, Russia and Portugal have expressed readiness to take part in the competition.

Argentina won the 2016 FIFA Futsal World Cup after defeating Russia 5-4 in the final match.

Iran also finished in third place, beating Portugal in penalty shootout.

(Source: Tasnim)

Stage set for AFC Futsal Club Championship Vietnam 2017 official draw

Ho Chi Minh: The stage is set for the AFC Futsal Club Championship Vietnam 2017 official draw which will take place on Tuesday in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam.

The 14 participating teams will be divided into two (2) groups of four (4) and two (2) groups of three (3) teams.

The group winners and runners-up from each group - eight (8) teams in total - will qualify for the quarter-finals. The four (4) winners of the quarter-finals will then qualify for the semi-finals, with the winners of those advancing to the final. The two losing teams will face each other in the third and fourth placing match.

The eighth edition of the tournament is set to take place in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam from July 20 to 30 later this year.

As representatives of the host country, Thai Son Nam FC (VIE) have been made the top seed, while the other seedings have been based on the ranking from the AFC Futsal Club Championship Thailand 2016.

POT 1:

1st: Thai Son Nam FC (VIE) - HOST

2nd: Shriker Osaka (JPN)

3rd: Nafit Al Wasat (IRQ)

4th: Blue Wave Chonburi (THA)

POT 2:

5th: Al Dhafra FC (UAE)

6th: Sanaye Giti Pasand (IRN)

7th: Al Rayyan SC (QAT)

8th: FC Almalyk (UZB)

POT 3:

9th: Vic Vipers FC (AUS)

10th: Bank of Beirut FC (LIB)

11th: Shenzhen Nanling Tielang FC (CHN)

POT 4:

Unranked: Vamos FC (IDN)

Unranked: FC Erem (KGZ)

Unranked: Disi Invest (TJK)

(Source: AFC)

Tamas Ajan re-elected as head of world weightlifting federation

The 78-year-old Tamas Ajan has won a fifth term as International Weightlifting Federation president, amid criticism of the sport's record of doping at the Olympics.

The IWF says Ajan beat Antonio Urso, the Italian leader of European weightlifting, 86-61 in a vote of member federations. Seven candidates had entered the contest.

Hungarian official Ajan has led the Budapest-based IWF since 2000. He was previously its CEO-like secretary general for 25 years. Weightlifting's longstanding doping problem was shown with 49 of the 111 positive tests, most involving steroids, in reanalysis of samples from the 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2012 London Olympics.

The International Olympic Committee has so far stripped 29 weightlifting medals from those games.

Ajan was an IOC member for 10 years until 2010, and remains an honorary member.

(Source: AP)

Iran runners-up at IBSA Judo Asian - Oceania Championships

Iran finished in second place at the 2017 IBSA Judo Asian - Oceania Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

The 2017 IBSA Judo Asian and Oceania Championships were held from May 22-29 in two categories of team and individual in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

In the final match, the Iranian team went against the Paralympic champions, South Korea, and were defeated 3-2.

Notable moments of the final games were the outstanding performance of Meysam Banitaba and Mohammadreza Kheirollah Zadeh who managed to defeat their title-holding South Korean opponents.

The 2017 IBSA Judo Asian and Oceania Championships wrapped up on Monday with South Korean team as the champion. Iran won second place while Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan shared the third place.

This tournament was organized by the Paralympic Committee of Uzbekistan under the auspices of International Blind Sports Association.

(Source: MNA)

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Paris Intl. City of Arts to showcase works by Mehdi Fatehi

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — Posters by Iranian illustrator and graphic designer Mehdi Fatehi will be put on display in an exhibition at the International City of Arts (Cité internationale des arts) in Paris today.



A graphic design by Mehdi Fatehi

Entitled “Present Perfect”, this exhibition that will be held at the Corridor of the center is scheduled to run until June 10, the organizers announced.

They also said, “Although he belongs to the generation that witnessed the digital revolution, Mehdi Fatehi chooses to compose his posters with traditional techniques such as silkscreen print and flat colors.”

“In a minimalist approach to design, the artist articulates image and text in a palette reduced to only two to three colors.

“He thus steps away from certain current trends, which favor profuse digital colors to create clean, powerful, and distinctive images.”

Fatehi, 35, is a member of the Iranian Institute for the Promotion of Visual Arts.

He won various awards such as the bronze prize at the 8th International Triennial of Stage Poster in Sofia, Bulgaria in 2016.

He is currently in residence at the Cité Internationale des Arts through the Institut Français program.

Croatian festival VAFI to screen Iranian animations

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — A lineup of nine Iranian animations will go on screen during the 8th International Children and Youth Animation Film Festival -- VAFI in the Croatian city of Varazdin.



“The Switchman” by Mehdi Khorramian, “The Orangish Tree” by Amir-Hushang Moin, “The Empty Page” by Siavash Khodai, “Butterflyness” by Ali Azizi and “Rumor” by Leila Noruzi, all produced by the Documentary and Experimental Film Center, will compete in the festival, which will be held from May 30 to June 4.

The lineup also includes “The Belief” by Amir Vahedi, “Children of Oak” by Sa’adat Rahimzadeh, “Zoom In” by Hamid Khalvati and “Stripy” by Babak and Behnoud Nekui.

The festival is dedicated to animated films made by children or youths under 18 years. However, animated films made for children and youth are also screened.

Intl. Holy Quran Exhibition kicks off in Tehran

1 -> Heshmati previously had said in a press conference held ahead of the exhibit.

Groups of artists from Iran and other countries are expected to attend the exhibition to hold workshops.

In addition, numerous exhibitions have been organized in 200 other Iranian cities concurrent with the Tehran exhibit.

The international section is also due to open on June 7 and will be running for five days.

Iranian writer Fariba Vafi nominated for LiBeratur Prize

C U L T U R E d e s k TEHRAN — Iranian author Fariba Vafi has been nominated for the LiBeratur Prize, a literary honor that is presented by the Litprom Association in Frankfurt.

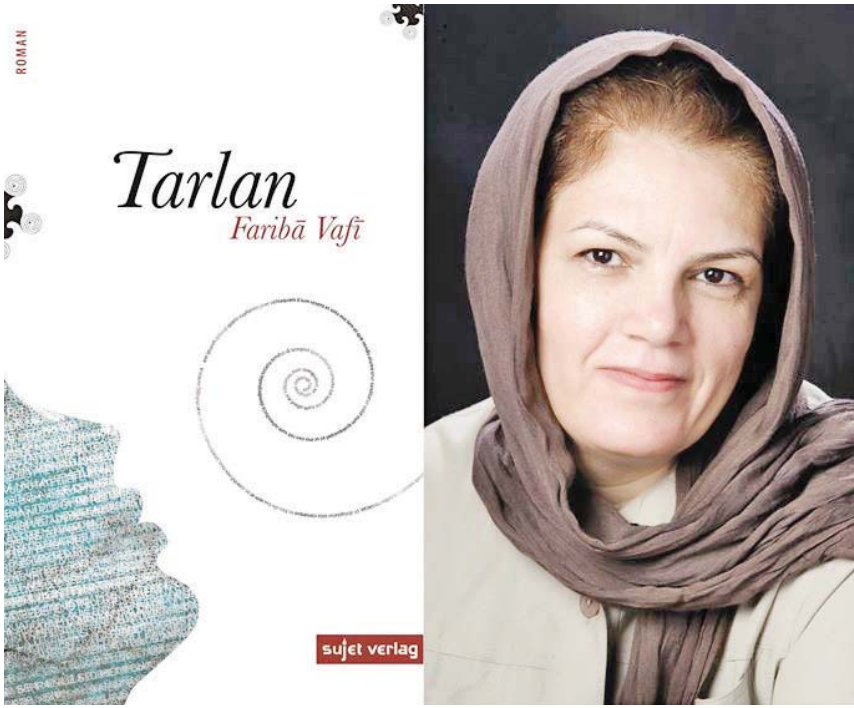
She received the nomination for her second novel “Tarlan”, which has been translated into the German language by Jutta Himmelreich, the organizers announced.

Published by Sujet Publications in Germany in 2015, the book tells the story of a young girl, Tarlan, who dreams of becoming a writer but she chooses to go to the Police Academy.

LiBeratur Prize is awarded annually to inform about literary developments and trends in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The Australia-based Iranian writer Granaz Musavi has also been nominated for the prize for her book “Songs of a Forbidden Woman”. Also among the nominees are writers from Korea, Kenya, Lebanon, India Singapore, Haiti and Swaziland.

The online voting to recognize



This combination photo shows Iranian writer Fariba Vafi and the front cover of her novel “Tarlan”. The winner this year will continue until Wednesday on the official Euros and an invitation to the website of the Litprom Association. Frankfurt Book Fair.

Iran’s “Bodyguard” receives nominations at Madrid festival

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — Iranian director Ebrahim Hatamikia’s political drama “Bodyguard” has received nominations in four categories including best foreign film at the Madrid International Film Festival.

The film produced by Ehsan Mohammad-Hassani also received a nomination for editor Mehdi Hosseivand.

Parviz Parastui and Babak Hamidian have also been nominated for best actor and best supporting actor awards respectively.

“Bodyguard” tells the story of a middle-aged man who mostly protects high-ranking political figures. However, he gets into trouble when a suicide bomber wearing an explosive vest approaches a vice president.

The festival will be held in the Spanish capital from July 8 to 15.



Babak Hamidian (L) and Parviz Parastui act in a scene from “Bodyguard”.

Kiarostami died of massive brain hemorrhage caused by overdose of heparin: Iran

A R T d e s k TEHRAN — The Iran Medical Council (IMC) announced on Monday that Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami died of a massive bleeding in outermost layer of the meninges caused by an overdose of heparin.

Kiarostami who was suffering from a severe gastrointestinal disease died at a Paris hospital last July.

Speaking at a press conference on Monday, IMC director Alireza Zali said that France and the Parisian hospital have declined to offer the necessary cooperation in providing the IMC with a copy of Kiarostami’s medical records.

“Not even one page of the records has been officially given to us,” he lamented.

He said, “The survey has been carried out by a



Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami in an undated photo team of 40 elite Iranian specialists, some of whom studied in France, based on a copy of the medical records we received from an alternative source.”

Box Office: “Pirates of the Caribbean” Hooks No. 1, “Baywatch” Belly Flops

LOS ANGELES(Variety.com) —Disney’s “Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales” is sailing into first place at the domestic box office this weekend, but the story the numbers dictate is not one of swashbuckling heroics.

Johnny Depp’s fifth outing as Jack Sparrow is looking at a three-day total of \$62.2 million from 4,276 locations, and a four-day holiday weekend sum of \$77 million. If not for international appeal, that would be a let down for a movie riding on a \$230 million production budget.

The first place finish also can’t cover up a serious case of franchise fatigue. “Dead Men Tell No Tales” is the lowest opening for a Pirates movie apart from the original, which earned over \$46 million in its first weekend (and was also the only installation approved by critics). Last time out in 2011, “On Stranger Tides” pulled in \$90 million in its opening weekend. That’s still less than 2007’s “At World’s End” (\$114.7 million) and 2006’s “Dead Man’s Chest” (\$135.6 million). But it’s no question why Disney is still churning out sequels -- combined, the movies have made \$1.3 billion domestically and \$3.8 billion worldwide.

“Dead Men Tell No Tales” centers on Sparrow battling deadly ghost sailors, led by the Javier Bardem’s Captain Salazar. Joachim Ronning and Espen Sandberg directed the film, which also sees the return of both Orlando Bloom and Keira Knightley, who were absent from the fourth installment.

Over time the “Pirates” franchise has become more reliant on overseas ticket sales, and that’s certainly the case this time out. The studio should make back its production budget this weekend once worldwide ticket sales are taken into account. Since the franchise still makes money (even if U.S. grosses are dwindling)



Actor Johnny Depp attends the Premiere of Disney’s “Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales” in Los Angeles, California, U.S. on May 18, 2017. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

Swedish art gallery satire “The Square” wins Palme d’Or at Cannes

CANNES, FRANCE (Reuters) — “The Square”, a Swedish movie about the curator of a museum filled with grotesquely pretentious conceptual art, beat stiff competition to win the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival on Sunday.

Critics hailed the movie by writer-director Ruben Ostlund as “high-wire cinema” that veers between comedy and thriller with moments of pure surrealism, though some said it could easily have shed part of its 2 hours and 22 minutes running time.

The film’s highlight is a dinner for the museum’s well-to-do patrons, with a performance artist leaping from table to table impersonating an ape in a bizarre, tense and ultimately violent scene.

Spanish filmmaker Pedro Almodovar, who headed the jury of nine people that included Hollywood stars Will Smith and Jessica Chastain, said the film was about “the dictatorship of being politically correct”.

“Such a serious subject is treated with an incredible imagination. It is very, very, very funny,” he said.

“BPM (Beats Per Minute)”, a French movie about AIDS awareness campaigners in the 1980s, had been favorite for the award but had to settle for second place, taking the Grand Prize of the Jury, something Almodovar seemed to regret.

“This is a very democratic jury and I am the ninth part of this jury,” he said and fought back tears as he talked of the film’s portrayal of “real heroes that saved many lives”.

Sofia Coppola won best director for “The Beguiled”, a remake of the 1971 Clint Eastwood tale of tension between an injured soldier in the American Civil War and the women and girls who take him in.

Although members of the jury said she was the first woman to win that



Director Ruben Ostlund, Palme d’Or award winner for his film “The Square”, reacts during the closing ceremony of the 70th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France on May 28, 2017. (Reuters/Stephane Mahe)

prize, the history books show that Soviet director Yuliya Solntseva won it in 1961.

Nicole Kidman, who starred alongside Colin Farrell in “The Beguiled” and “The Killing of a Sacred Deer” missed out on the best actress trophy but was awarded a special prize, collecting the jury’s 70th Anniversary Award.

Best actress went to Diane Kruger for her performance in German film “In the Fade”, playing a woman trying to put her life back together after her husband and young son are killed in a bomb attack. It was her first role in her native German.

Joaquin Phoenix was named best actor for his portrayal of a psychologically damaged hitman in “You Were Never Really Here” by British director Scottish director Lynne Ramsay, who shared the prize for best screenplay with the writers of “The Killing of a Sacred Deer”, Yorgos Lanthimos and Efthimis Filippou.

Video-streaming company Netflix, which had two acclaimed movies in competition, left empty handed. It’s lack of success should have come as no surprise, given that Almodovar said at the start of the festival that the Palme d’Or should not go a movie that would not be given a theatrical release.