

**Iran's 2-month container shipping jumps 61%** **4**

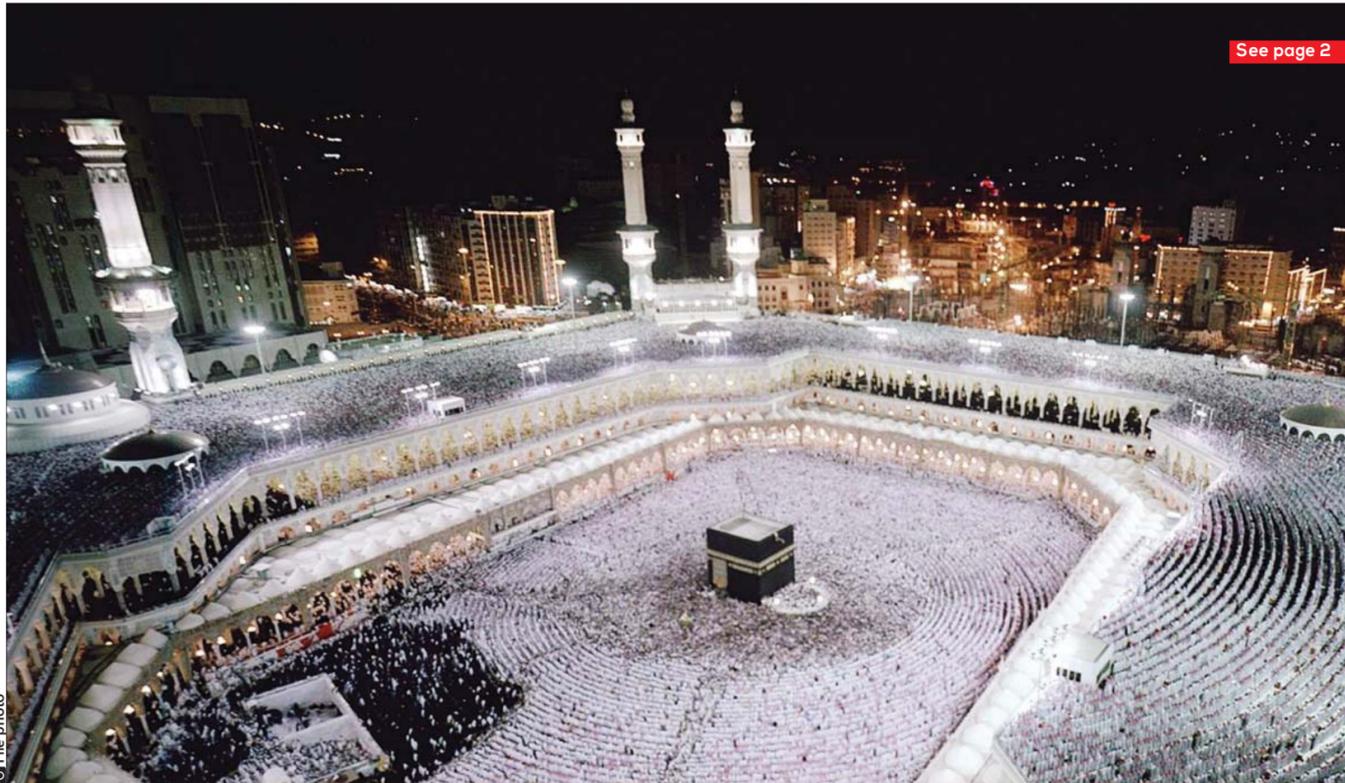
**Iranian airlines expand intl. flights to spur tourism growth** **10**

**Volleyball U21 World Championship: Iran beat Ukraine** **15**

**Felicitations on Eid-al-Fitr**



## Iran condemns terror attempt on Grand Mosque



See page 2

## Salman's promotion is end of harmony within al-Saud tribe: expert

By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — Hossein Askari, an expert on Saudi Arabia who teaches international business at George Washington University, says the promotion of Prince Mohammed bin Salman by his father King Salman to the rank of crown prince marks the end of "harmony within the al-Saud tribe". Prince Mohammed replaced his cousin Mohammed bin Nayef, who formerly had been ahead of him in succession to the throne. The shakeup happened on Wednesday. "I believe that this is the beginning

and the end of any semblance of harmony within the Al-Saud tribe," Askari tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

Following is the text of the interview:

**■ What are the reasons behind the Saudi King's decision to depose the sitting crown prince and replace him with his son Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdul-Aziz?**

A: Prince Mohammad has a special place in Salman's heart and mind. Simply said, he is his favorite son and the apple of his eye. **→2**

## Isfahan festival to honor directors Marzieh Borumand, Rasul Sadr-Ameli

**A R T TEHRAN** — Veteran directors Marzieh Borumand and Rasul Sadr-Ameli will be honored with lifetime achievement awards at the 30th International Film Festival for Children and Youth, secretary of the event Alireza Rezadad said.

He made the remarks in a press conference held at the Film Museum of Iran on Saturday.

Borumand is most famous for her hits "Grandmother's Home" and "School of Mice", two popular puppet series from the 1980s.

"I'm Taraneh, 15", "Waiting for a Miracle" and "The Girl in Sneakers" are among works by Sadr-Ameli.

Rezadad also said that a commemoration ceremony in honor of Abbas Kiarostami and film producer Ali Moallem has also been arranged at the festival.

"There are no plans to divide the festival into two separate festivals, however the films for children and young adults will be judged separately," he added.

A number of workshops have also been arranged on the sidelines of the festival, Rezadad said.

"Shadmehr Rastin and Mohsen Damadi will be holding screenwriting workshops, while Shahram Mokri is due to hold a filmmaking workshop for children," he added. **→16**

## EU promises tough line on trade with U.S.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has warned U.S. President Donald Trump that Europe would react in kind if the United States did not play fair in trade.

The 28 EU leaders on Friday signed up to a document saying they and the European Commission should look into ways to increase reciprocity in government procurement and investment.

"Reciprocity is the right way. If we have for example access to public contracts in the United States, then we can say 'yes' to access to public contracts in Europe," Merkel said, but if full access was denied then Europe would "need an answer".

The leaders called on the Commission to analyze foreign investments in strategic sectors, adding they would return to the issue at a future meeting.

The written conclusions to the European Union summit that ended on Friday made no mention of the bloc's two largest trading partners, the United States or China, but both were in the background of its "free and fair" trade push.

The 28-nation union tried for three years to forge a trade alliance with the United States, but now sees itself as an open markets counterweight to a country whose President Donald Trump is looking at restricting steel and aluminum imports.

Beijing is also in the sights of the "protection agenda" of new French President Emmanuel Macron, described as an embrace of free trade, but with limits on foreign takeovers in areas such as energy, banking and technology, where China seeks Europe's know-how.

An EU-China summit earlier this month, designed to show the two as allies in climate change after the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris accord, was overshadowed by disagreements over trade and over-production of steel.

"Fair competition is better than the law of the jungle," Macron told a news conference alongside German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

France, Germany and Italy have backed the idea of allowing the EU to block Chinese investments, partly because European companies are denied similar access in China.

(Source: Reuters)

## UN leader softens his predecessor's criticism of Iran missile tests

The United Nations secretary general appears to have softened his predecessor's criticism of Iran last year over its missile tests, a issue in Iran's relationships with other powers, including Israel and the United States.

The milder language is contained in a report by the secretary general, Antonio Guterres, to the United Nations Security Council that has not yet been released. A softening of the criticism would be significant partly because the United States has called Iran's missile tests unacceptable.

The Trump administration imposed sanctions on Iran in February and May in response to what it described as "bad behavior" with respect to the tests.

Mr. Guterres's relatively mild language in a passage of the report concerning those

tests could complicate any American-led effort to further penalize Iran for them at the United Nations. A copy of the report, dated June 14, was seen by The New York Times on Wednesday.

The tests are not prohibited under the landmark 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and six major powers, which eased economic sanctions on Iran in exchange for its verifiable promises of peaceful nuclear work.

Security Council Resolution 2231, which put the agreement into effect, called on Iran not to test ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads.

When Iran conducted missile tests in March 2016, critics led by the United States and Israel were infuriated, calling the country's behavior a violation of the Security

Council resolution and a sign that it would not honor provisions of the nuclear accord. Iran rejected the accusation.

In a report to the Security Council last July on compliance with Resolution 2231, Ban Ki-moon, then the secretary general, said he was concerned that the missile tests might not be consistent with the "constructive spirit" demonstrated by the nuclear accord. He called on Iran to "refrain from conducting such launches, given that they have the potential to increase tensions in the region."

Mr. Guterres's report, his first on Iran's compliance with the resolution, also called on the country to refrain from missile tests. But it did not echo Mr. Ban's broader concerns about them. **→13**

## FM advisor: CIA behind Saudi crown prince replacement

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Senior Advisor to the Iranian foreign minister Hossein Sheikholeslam stressed that the US spy agency, CIA, was involved in the replacement of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef with Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

"After the arms deal was gifted to US President Donald Trump in Riyadh, the plot to dethrone bin Nayef entered the operational phase," Sheikholeslam said on Saturday.

"The US and Trump himself agreed to bin Salman's position as crown prince and the permission for the start of the move was given after Washington plundered the Saudi people's

money for weapons," he said, adding that the developments all show that the CIA was behind the new changes in Saudi Arabia.

In relevant remarks on Wednesday, Sheikholeslam said that bin Salman's efforts to please Washington resulted in his reaching the position of crown prince in Saudi Arabia.

"The change of the Saudi crown prince in Saudi Arabia is a result of bin Salman's deal with the US administration and (President Donald) Trump; bin Salman has made a deal with the US over the Saudi people's wealth," Sheikholeslam said.

He said that the crimes and massacres in

the region are all rooted in bin Salman's thirst for power and bin Salman took the last step before being a king by his father's replacing him with bin Nayef.

Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud replaced Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz Al Saud with his own son, Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud, the deputy crown prince and defense minister.

According to a royal decree, Mohammed bin Salman, 31, was also named deputy prime minister, and shall maintain his post as defense minister, the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported on Wednesday.



Tasnimy Erfan Kouchari

## Filband, a village atop the clouds!

Colorful houses are seen in a steep slope of Filband, a mountainous village adjacent to Babol in northern Iran, Mazandaran province, on June 23, 2017. With an altitude of 2300 meters above the sea level, the country-side village even stands above the encircling blanket clouds. It remains abandoned roughly seven months a year due to its icy cold weather. Visitors to the hard-to-access land are generally astounded with abundant lush greenish sceneries and more notably its hospitable people

## Arab states don't seek 'regime change' in Qatar: UAE

A top United Arab Emirates official said Saturday the Arab countries isolating Qatar do not seek to force out the country's leadership over allegations it supports extremist ideology but are willing to cut ties altogether if it does not agree to their demands.

Emirati Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash told reporters in Dubai that his country and its allies do not want "regime change" in Qatar, but a "behavioral change."

He described the six-member, Persian Gulf Cooperation Council that includes his country and Qatar as being in a state of crisis as a result of the standoff, and he referred to Qatar as a "Trojan horse" within the once close-knit group of Arab monarchies that would be isolated for the long term if it does not capitulate.

"The alternative is not escalation. The alternative is parting of ways," he said. "It's very difficult for us to maintain a collective grouping with one of the partners... actively promoting what is an extremist and terrorist agenda."

The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Bahrain presented a 13-point list of demands to Qatar on Thursday and gave it 10 days to take action. They have signaled that if Qatar refuses to comply by the deadline, they will continue to restrict its access to land, sea and air routes indefinitely amid mounting economic pressure on the Persian Gulf nation.

Qatar says it is reviewing the ultimatum, which includes demands to shut Al-Jazeera and cut ties with Islamist groups including Daesh (ISIL). But it has also said it won't negotiate while under siege.

The countries have previously suggested the demands were their bottom line, though Gargash on Saturday appeared to allow for the possibility for some negotiation facilitated by Kuwait, a PGCC member mediating the crisis.

"It is understood that any mediator - that's his job. The job is to take your... position and to look at the position of the other party and to try and reach something that is doable," Gargash said. **→13**

**MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS**



**Senate sanctions violate nuclear deal, general says**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Major General Mohammad Baqeri, head of the Iranian armed forces, said on Saturday that the U.S. Senate's sanctions against Iran violate "spirit" and "text" of the nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Such acts prove the U.S. enmity towards Iran, he said. On 15 June, the U.S. Senate voted nearly unanimously on Thursday for legislation to impose new sanctions on Iran over its ballistic missile activity, its alleged human rights violation and claims of support for terrorist organizations.



**Judiciary decries vilification of President Rouhani on Quds Day**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Tehran Prosecutor General Abbas Jafari Dowlatabadi on Saturday said he will launch a probe into insults against President Rouhani on Friday as he was participating in a rally to mark Quds Day.

On Friday, a number of demonstrators surrounded Rouhani, hurling at him epithets such as "American cleric" and "compromiser", a veiled reference to Rouhani's bid to get closer to the West.

In a letter on Friday the interior minister had called on the Judiciary to bring the perpetrators to the book.



**Eighteen more Iranian fishermen in Saudi prisons: report**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — In addition to three Iranian fishermen captured last week by the Saudi coastguard, more 18 inmates are in the country, a report by Iranian daily Shargh said on Saturday.

Titled "Eighteen Iranian fishermen in Saudi prisons," the report featured interviews with family members of the fishermen, some of whom have been waiting for a clue on the fate of their beloved for two years now.

Iran's Foreign Ministry has not commented on the news.

On Wednesday, Iran's Interior Minister demanded Saudi Arabia release the three fishermen arrested last week by Saudi security forces.



**Army watching enemies round the clock: commander**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Iranian Army is watching the moves of the enemy round the clock and will foil all their plots, Brigadier General Kiomars Heidari, commander of the Army's Ground Forces, said on Saturday.

"Soldiers of the army are vigilantly and sharply guarding the sacred soil of the Islamic Republic of Iran round the clock and will observe and foil all moves and threats of the enemy," Heidari told a gathering of army personnel in Tehran.

Iran shares long borders with insecure countries including Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan.



**Council elections in Tehran eventually confirmed**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — An overseeing body charged with ensuring the integrity of council elections in the capital Tehran finally confirmed the result of the May 19 elections in remaining constituencies on Saturday.

The deadline for the final confirmation was June 21. Integrity of the elections in the remaining 9 cities in Tehran province had already been confirmed. There were reports on vote rigging and vote buying in some districts.

Tehran province has 10 cities and six voting constituencies. Hundreds of hopefuls enrolled to vie for 21 seats in the council election in the metropolis of Tehran.



**West should not compromise with source of terror: Kamal Kharrazi**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Kamal Kharrazi, head of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, said on Saturday that the Western countries should not compromise with Takfiri terrorism which has roots in Wahhabism.

There should be no compromise with supporters of Takfiri terrorists for economic gains, he told a panel discussion at the World Peace Forum in Beijing.

The Western members of the Takfiri terrorist groups will finally return to their home country and carry out terrorist actions, the former foreign minister predicted.

He also said that Iran is determined in fighting terrorism and is ready to cooperate with countries in this respect.

# Envoy: FATF decision on Iran guarantees banking ties

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Financial Action Task Force's decision to suspend counter-measures against Iran "guarantees" stronger financial and banking ties with the country, Tehran's Ambassador to London said on Friday.

"In making the decision, European countries and giant economic countries of the world guaranteed the possibility of expanding banking and financial relations with Iran," Hamid Baeedinejad said in a Telegram message.

Established in 1989, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is the global standard setting body for anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT).

Baeedinejad underscored that facilitation of financial transactions with Iran is "one of the major goals of the nuclear deal."

As a result of the international nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, many international sanctions against Iran were lifted in exchange for it scaling down its nuclear program.

The United States, however, still has sanctions in place that prohibit trade with Iran in dollars and Iranian access to New York's financial system.

Global banks, therefore, have shown reluctance to do business with Iran for fear of running afoul of remaining U.S. curbs against Iranian organizations.

Getting off the FATF blacklist has removed a major hurdle Iran faces in dealing with outside banks and other financial institutions.

Tehran has complained that it is not getting economic benefits it was promised under the nuclear accord.

In June 2016, the FATF welcomed Iran's high-level political commitment to address its strategic AML/CFT deficiencies, and its decision to seek technical assistance in the implementation of the Action Plan.

On Friday, FATF announced its decision to keep Iran out of its blacklist for the second time in a row.

"In light of Iran's demonstration of its political commitment and the relevant steps it has taken in line with its Action Plan, the FATF has decided to continue the suspension of counter-measures. The FATF will



**Iran's ambassador to London says the recent decision by the Financial Action Task Force to suspend counter-measures against Iran paves the way for smoother banking ties with Iran, a step which is in line with the letter and content of the international 2015 nuclear deal.**

keep monitoring progress in the implementation of the Action Plan and consider next steps," read part of the announcement.

"The FATF, therefore, calls on its members and urges all jurisdictions to continue to advise their financial institutions to apply enhanced due diligence to business relationships and transactions with natural and legal persons from Iran, consistent with FATF Recommendation 19. The FATF urges Iran to fully address its AML/CFT deficiencies, in particular those related to terrorist financing," it further highlighted.

Prior to the body's Friday announcement in

Valencia, Spain, Iranian media outlets expressed concern that FATF might not extend Iran's suspension due to powerful lobbying groups in the U.S. who had asked President Trump to intervene.

"Under duress from European countries, the U.S. eventually acknowledged the draft backed by all important countries of the world," Baeedinejad said in a reference to the lobbying.

"In accepting the FATF's decision, the U.S. was forced to confirm Iran's effective international measures to counter money laundering and financing of terrorism," he explained.

## Swedish diplomat highlights importance of Iran's regional role

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Swedish ambassador to Tehran has said that Iran plays an important role in the Middle East region, ISNA reported on Saturday.

"Undoubtedly, Iran plays an important role in the region. Sweden hopes that Iran would cooperate with its neighbors and the international community to help settle crises and clashes in the region peacefully," Helena Sangeland said, according to a translation of her remarks.

Commenting on Iran-Sweden ties, she said that the two countries have had strong relations for over 100 years.

She added that the relations expanded more during first term of Hassan Rouhani's presidency.

The two countries' officials have had "constructive dialogue" in various areas including politics and economy, she explained.

Sangeland also said that Iran was the biggest economic partner of Sweden in the Middle East before



the sanctions. She highlighted the importance of expanding ties in spheres of science, education and research.

Elsewhere, she said that nuclear deal was a turning point in Iran's foreign policy.

Implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the official name for the nuclear deal, by all signatories is "vital", she added.

Iran and the 5+1 group - the U.S., Britain, France, China and Russia plus Germany - finalized the text of the JCPOA in July 2015.

The nuclear agreement took effect in January 2016.

Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven visited Iran on 11-12 February. During his visit, the two countries initialed accords on cooperation in science and technology, higher education and research, roads, telecommunications, and technology.

In a meeting with Lofven on February 11, the Supreme Leader said Sweden has a good reputation among Iranians and is seen by Tehran as a reliable economic partner.

## Iran condemns terror attempt on Mecca's Grand Mosque

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iran condemned on Saturday a foiled suicide attack on the Grand Mosque in the holy city of Mecca, calling on all regional nations to "make relentless efforts in fight against" terrorism.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns terrorism, no matter where, in what form, and for what motive it happens," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said in a statement.

On Friday, Saudi security forces foiled a suicide attack on the Grand Mosque in Mecca, cornering the would-be attacker in an apartment, where he blew himself up.

Reportedly, three cells had planned the attack on worshippers and security forces at the mosque as the Muslim holy month of Ramadan nears its climax.

"The recent failed attempt by a number of criminal terrorists to attack the Masjid al-Haram [Grand Mosque of Mecca] once again revealed the fact that the unbridled and growing terrorism ... knows no faith, religion, geography, race, and nationality, and can target the holiest Muslim sites to achieve its inauspicious goals," Qassemi noted.

"Therefore, the Islamic Republic of

Iran once again warns all governments, particularly [those of] the regional states, about this despicable scourge, and calls on all regional nations to remain vigilant and make relentless efforts in fight against this symbol and manifestation of grudge, hatred, violence, and crime," he went on to say.

The attack comes just days after Saudi Arabia's King Salman appointed his son, Mohammed bin Salman, as heir.

The 31-year old Salman is strongly antagonistic to archrival, Shiite Iran, seeking closer ties with the U.S. and Israel to contain what he calls Iran's "extremist ideology," what Tehran categorically rejects.

Tehran and Riyadh have no relations since January 2016 as Saudi Arabia

summoned its diplomats from Tehran after the storming of its diplomatic posts in Tehran and Mashhad by angry mobs who demonstrated against the execution of prominent Shiite cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.

Informal communication channels have also come under strain as the two back opposing sides in Syria, and sympathize with diametrically opposed fronts in the Middle East.

Ignoring Iran's overtures for a less strained relations, Salman pledged to take war "inside Iran", making a dent in hopes for détente.

The aim of Iran is "to reach the focal point of Muslims (Mecca) and we will not wait until the fight is inside Saudi Arabia and we will work so that the battle is on

their side, inside Iran, not in Saudi Arabia," Salman said in interview in May.

Tehran implicitly accused Saudi Arabia of having had hands in the June 7 terrorist attacks in Tehran, for which Islamic State took credit.

Hours before the twin assault which left 18 people dead, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir had said Iran should be punished for what he called its interference in the region.

Riyadh did not officially condemn the Tehran attacks.

In a recent development, Saudi Arabia and its allies have issued a threatening 13-point ultimatum to Qatar as the price for lifting a two-week trade and diplomatic embargo of the country, including a drastic scaling back of cooperation with Iran.

On June 5, Saudi Arabia along with the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt cut ties with Qatar and introduced sanctions on the country for its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.

Iran is shipping now more than 1,000 tons of fruits and vegetables to Qatar every day, aiming to reduce economic pressure from the Saudi-led alliance against the tiny fellow Arab state.

**The Islamic Republic of Iran once again warns all governments, particularly [those of] the regional states, about this despicable scourge, and calls on all regional nations to remain vigilant and make relentless efforts in fight against this symbol and manifestation of grudge, hatred, violence, and crime.**

## Mohammed bin Salman's promotion is end of harmony within al-Saud tribe: expert

**1** → But I believe King Salman is approaching senility and is not in full command of what he is doing. He may love Prince Mohammad so but he should not let this love dictate national policies. I also believe that Prince Mohammad is using his father who no longer appreciates the ramifications of this decision.

**■ The replacement was made through a constitutional change. What might be the reaction of the supporters of Mohammed bin Naif?**

A: "No, no, there is no constitutional change. It was by Royal Decree. King Salman decided so. Moreover, I am almost certain that he did not consult, or get, the

concurrence of the 150-200 senior princes."

**■ Shall we think of the reshuffle as a soft coup d'état, which has the support of the U.S. and the UAE?**

A: I think it has the full support of Trump and Jared Kushner as Prince Mohammad has been dealing with them and telling them about business possibilities. Mohammad bin Naif has been removed from much of this and he is nowhere near as flamboyant as Mohammad bin Salman. He had no chance. He was sidelined from the start. But Salman moved cautiously. He made his son the Deputy Crown Prince with an eye to making him Crown Prince down the line.

**■ What might be the influence of such a major reshuffle in Saudi foreign policy especially towards the region?**

A: More important than Saudi foreign policy, I believe that this is the beginning and the end of any semblance of harmony within the Al-Saud tribe. While Al-Saud princes may have remained silent for the last two and a half years, this silence will be transformed to action before, but undoubtedly upon, King Salman's death. It was one thing to have Prince Mohammad elevated to such power two years ago as Deputy Crown Prince because a new king could have stripped him of all powers. →13

# Landslide buries mountain village in southwest China, fears for 141 people

Fears grew for 141 people missing in China after a landslide buried their mountain village in southwestern Sichuan province on Saturday, with reports that only three survivors had been pulled out of the mud and rock hours after the calamity struck.

The landslide swept over 46 homes as dawn broke at around 6 a.m. in Xinmo village in Maoxian county, a remote mountainous area of north Sichuan close to the region of Tibet, according to the official Xinhua state news agency.

President Xi Jinping urged on the rescue effort, but state broadcaster CCTV reported that by midday the only people rescued were a couple and their two-month-old baby.

Xinhua said the estimated number of missing was provided by local authorities.

The landslide blocked a two-kilometer (1.24 miles) stretch of a nearby river and 1.6 kilometers of road, according to Xinhua.

State television reports showed villagers and rescuers scrambling over mounds of mud and rocks that had slid down the mountainside. Xinhua said there were 400 people involved in the rescue effort and 6 ambulances were at the scene, and more were on their way.

The television images showed water thick with mud flowing over the site, submerging a car pushed from the road, while police and residents pulled on ropes to try to dislodge large boulders.

Police have closed roads in the county to all traffic except emergency services, the news agency said.

There is an extensive network of dams in the region, including two hydropower plants in Diexi town near the buried village.



A researcher from the Chengdu Chinese Academy of Social Science, a state-backed think tank, told China Radio International that heavy rainfall probably caused the slide. The researcher, whose name wasn't given, also warned of the risk that a dam could collapse, endangering communities further downstream.

The area is prone to earthquakes, including one in 1933 that resulted in parts of Diexi town becoming submerged by a nearby lake, and an 8.0 magnitude tremor in central Sichuan's Wenchuan county in 2008 that killed nearly 70,000 people.

(Source: Reuters)

## Iraqi forces free hundreds of civilians in Mosul Old City Iraqi federal police chief hails Hashd al-Shaabi's role in terror fight

Iraqi forces opened exit routes for hundreds of civilians to flee the Old City of Mosul on Saturday as they battled to retake the ancient quarter from ISIL militants mounting a last stand in what was the de facto capital of their "caliphate".

Urban warfare units were channeling their onslaught along two perpendicular streets that converge in the heart of the Old City, aiming to isolate the insurgents in four pockets.

The United Nations voiced alarm on Saturday at the rising death toll among civilians in the heavily populated Old City, saying as many as 12 were killed and hundreds injured on Friday.

Meanwhile, Iraq's federal police chief has praised the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), commonly known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, for contributing significantly to the fight against the ISIL (Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group.

"The Popular Mobilization Units are vital part of Iraq's official defense system, which has been backed by the Iraq parliament," Lieutenant General Raed Shaker Jawdat told Press TV on Friday.

He also stressed that the Iraqis were "very proud" of the PMU as they "have led the most impressive epic and heroic battles."

Since the beginning of the counter-terrorism operation in Iraq, the PMU have provided significant and essential support for rebuilding security apparatuses in the Arab country, he said, noting that Iraq is now secure thanks to Hashd al-Sha'abi.

The commander further hailed recent operations along the Iraq-Syria border as a great achievement and a strategic move to prevent terrorist organizations from boosting their presence in the country.

"Fighting is very intense in the Old



City and civilians are at extreme, almost unimaginable risk. There are reports that thousands, maybe even tens of thousands, of people are being held as human shields (by Islamic State)," Lise Grande, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator in Iraq, said in a statement. "Hundreds of civilians, including children, are being shot."

Iraqi authorities are hoping to declare victory in the northern Iraqi city in the Muslim Eid holiday, which marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, during the next few days.

Hashd al-Sha'abi was formed after the rise of Daesh in Iraq in 2014. In the early days of Daesh's terror campaign, the volunteer fighters played a major role in reinforcing the Iraqi army, which had suffered heavy setbacks in the face of lightning advances of the Takfiri militants.

Currently, they are actively cooper-

ating with the Iraqi military and allied groups in a large-scale operation to fully liberate the northern city of Mosul, the de facto capital of the Daesh terrorist group in the Middle Eastern state.

On November 26, 2016, the Iraqi parliament recognized Hashd al-Sha'abi as an official force with similar rights as those of the regular army.

**'Terrorists using civilians as human shields'**

Elsewhere in his remarks, Iraq's federal police chief voiced concerns over terrorists' use of civilians as human shields.

The militants force women and children to cover them in the streets as they know that Iraqi security forces will not target civilians, he said.

Jawdat also stressed that when the terrorists lose a region they used human shields to secure their way out of

the area.

**'Deadly suicide bombings hit shopping district in Mosul'**

In another development, suicide bombers have killed at least three people while attacking a shopping district of east Mosul that was retaken from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) group a few months ago, according to Iraqi medical and security officials.

The attack struck the area's Muthanna neighborhood late on Friday as residents shopped in advance of the Eid al-Fitr holiday marking the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

"The first suicide bomber blew himself up as he was being stopped by a policeman, who died on the spot," a senior police officer told AFP news agency.

A second bomber managed to enter a shopping arcade and blew himself up among civilians, killing at least two and wounding nine, according to the same officer and a medic at Al-Khansaa hospital.

A third suicide bomber was killed by police before he could detonate his vest, the sources said.

The attack was not the first but among the bloodiest since Iraqi forces retook the eastern side of Mosul in January as part of a massive offensive to wrest back the country's second city from ISIL.

Residents in areas retaken from ISIL, also known as ISIS, have cautioned that sleeper cells remain a threat and that cursory screening has allowed many ISIL supporters to return to civilian life without facing justice.

There had been growing calls in east Mosul before Friday night's attack for the families of ISIL members to be, among other measures, banished for 10 years.

(Source: agencies)

## Regional crises serve Israeli interests: Nasrallah

Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah says the crises in Middle East and North Africa serve the interests of the Israeli regime.

Nasrallah made the remarks in a speech on the occasion of the International Quds Day, which falls on the last Friday of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan.

He noted that the commemoration of the International Quds Day is spreading across the world, saying more countries are observing the event since it was announced by the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini.

Nasrallah said the main goal of the latest developments and wars in the region was to make regional countries accept Tel Aviv's conditions. He added that the Israeli regime was taking advantage of the status quo in the region to marginalize the issue of Palestine.

**'Takfiri terrorists were born to topple Syrian government'**

Also in his remarks, he said the Takfiri terrorist groups of ISIL (Daesh) and al-Nusra Front were formed by the United States and other countries to topple Syria's government, which he described as an obstacle to any com-



promise that aimed to bring down the issue of Palestine.

He added that Daesh was sent to Iraq after the Baghdad government expressed unwavering support for resistance groups.

He said the Saudi war on Yemen was launched because Yemenis stood by the Palestinian people. Nasrallah added that the regime in Riyadh launched the war as there were movements in Yemen against Israel.

The Hezbollah secretary general praised Iran's role as the main supporter of Palestine and resistance groups. He said Saudi Arabia was trying to isolate Iran in the

region and take the war into Iran's territory. He, however, said Riyadh was too weak and scared to launch such a war against Iran.

Nasrallah said Iran's power and influence on regional issues were increasing.

He said Iran's presence in Syria would be bolder, referring to its recent missile attack against Daesh targets in eastern Syria that killed many terrorists and destroyed their positions.

Nasrallah said Syria was steadfast in the axis of resistance.

**'Israel in no position to launch a new war'**

Nasrallah also stated that Israel was participating in the war on Yemen, adding that its air force had conducted airstrikes on the impoverished country.

He said the Israeli regime sought to achieve its goal by launching proxy wars in the region.

The Hezbollah chief said Israel avoids a war on Lebanon or the Gaza Strip as it knows it will be expensive.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Nasrallah said the regimes that conspire against the resistance axis must know that they will fail to achieve anything.

(Source: al Alam)

## Saudi-led demands not 'reasonable or actionable': Qatar

Qatar has dismissed a list of demands submitted by four Arab countries as neither reasonable or actionable.

The list was received by Qatar's ministry of foreign affairs on June 22, according to a report by the state-run Qatar News Agency.

"This list of demands confirms what Qatar has said from the beginning - the illegal blockade has nothing to do with combating terrorism, it is about limiting Qatar's sovereignty, and outsourcing our foreign policy," Sheikh Saif bin Ahmed Al Thani, director of the Qatari government's communications office, said in a statement on Friday.

"The U.S. secretary of state recently called upon the blocking nations to produce a list of grievances that was 'reasonable and actionable'. The British foreign secretary asked that the demands be 'measured and realistic.' This list does not satisfy that criteria."

Qatar also said it is reviewing the demands and is preparing an official response after confirming the receipt of a document containing demands from several Arab countries that cut ties with it and imposed a blockade against it earlier this month amid a major diplomatic crisis.

"The state of Qatar is currently studying this paper, the demands contained therein and the foundations on which they were based, in order to prepare an appropriate response to it and hand it over to the state of Kuwait," QNA said, citing a statement by the ministry of foreign affairs.

Meshal bin Hamad Al Thani, Qatar's ambassador to the U.S., also criticized the list of demands.

**List of demands**

Kuwait has been acting as a mediator to defuse the crisis that erupted on June 5 when Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Egypt announced they were severing relations with Qatar, accusing it of supporting "terrorism".

The four countries have not provided any evidence, and Qatar has repeatedly denied the allegations as baseless.

Earlier on Friday, reports emerged that the Saudi-led bloc had given Qatar a 10 days to comply with 13 demands, which included shutting down the Al Jazeera Media Network, closing a Turkish military base and scaling down ties with Iran.

In the document, the countries also demanded that Qatar sever all alleged ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and with other groups, including Hezbollah, al-Qaeda and ISIL (also known as ISIS).

The document also states that Qatar must consent to monthly compliance audits in the first year after agreeing to the demands, followed by quarterly audits in the second year, and annual audits in the following 10 years.

The list also includes a demand that Qatar pay reparations and compensation for loss of life and other financial losses allegedly caused by Qatar's policies in recent years.

The document did not specify what the countries will do if Qatar refuses to comply.

Amir Handjani, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, told Al Jazeera that the demands are a "non-starter".

"This is a very aggressive position that the Saudi-coalition is taking. I think it's an opening gambit in a long, protracted negotiation," he said.

"The Saudis are signaling to the Qataris that they are willing to dig in. And I think the Qataris are not going to cave. So I expect tensions to rise."

Handjani said that the demands amounted to a request that Qatar gives up its sovereignty.

"I am sure as temperatures rise, other countries such as the United States, the UK, the French - who have long-standing ties with the GCC countries ... will step in and try and play a mediating role," he said.

The White House said on Friday that the rift between the countries is a "family issue" and the four Arab states "should work it out".

Press Secretary Sean Spicer said the U.S. won't intervene unless it is "asked to join ... and facilitate" discussions between the countries involved.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Extremist blows himself up as Saudi police foil Mecca plot

A suicide bomber blew himself up near the Grand Mosque in Mecca as police disrupted a plot to target the holiest site in Islam just as the fasting month of Ramadan ends, Saudi security forces said Saturday.

The Interior Ministry said it launched a raid around Jiddah, as well as two areas in Mecca itself, including the Ajyad Al-Masafi neighborhood, located near the Grand Mosque.

There, police said they engaged in a shootout at a three-story house with a suicide bomber, who blew himself up and caused the building to collapse. He was killed, while the blast wounded six foreigners and five members of security forces, according to the Interior Ministry's statement. Five others were arrested, including a woman, it said.

Saudi state television aired footage after the raid Friday near the Grand Mosque, showing police and rescue personnel running through the neighborhood's narrow streets. The blast demolished the building, its walls crushing a parked car. Nearby structures appeared to be peppered with shrapnel and bullet holes.

The Interior Ministry said the thwarted "terrorist plan" would have violated "all sanctities by targeting the security of the Grand Mosque, the holiest place on Earth."

(Source: AP)

## Iran, France to establish joint transport consultancy task force

**ECONOMY TEHRAN** — Iran and France agreed **d e s k** on Friday to form a joint consultancy task force on transportation to accelerate cooperation in this sector, IRNA reported.

According to the report, Iran's Transport Minister Abbas Akhoundi who arrived in Paris on Friday to visit his aviation exhibition, met with his French counterpart Elisabeth Borne.

In the meeting, the two ministers discussed avenues to further broaden cooperation and ease implementation of the already signed contracts.

They also explored other areas of collaboration including expansion of railroads, investment in Iran's infrastructure projects, airports, subway and monorail.

## Crude steel exports up 8% in 2 months

**ECONOMY TEHRAN** — Iran exported 1.3 million tons **d e s k** of crude steel during the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-May 21), with eight percent rise from the figure of the same period of time in the past year, according to an industry official.

The country produced 3.5 million tons of crude steel during the mentioned time span, showing 18 percent increase compared to the first two months of the past year, Deputy Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Jafar Sarqini told IRNA on Saturday.

Iran exported 5.8 million tons of crude steel in the past Iranian calendar year 1395 (ended on March 20), the official announced and said the figure is planned to hit 8 million tons in the current year and at least 15 million tons by the end of the country's Outlook Plan for calendar year 1404 (March 2026).

According to a January report published by the World Steel Association (WSA), Iran produced 17.89 million tons of crude steel in 2016, registering an 11 percent growth compared to the figure in 2015.

The country's crude steel output stood at 18.466 million tons in the past Iranian calendar year 1395, showing 11 percent rise from 16.656 million tons in 1394.

## Even with Whole Foods, Amazon would need many more warehouses to reshape grocery delivery

If Amazon.com Inc. hopes to revolutionize grocery delivery, then its bid to buy Whole Foods Market Inc. for \$13.7 billion will be just the start of a long and costly process.

The e-commerce giant would need to add a large network of specialized grocery distribution warehouses, former AmazonFresh employees and logistics experts said. This is something Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and other competitors have already done. Whole Foods, with a relatively small distribution footprint of its own, does little to change the picture for Amazon, they said.

Amazon has a little more than 3 million square feet of U.S. warehousing dedicated to its existing Amazon-Fresh and Prime Pantry grocery programs - a tenth of the warehouse space Wal-Mart has for specialized food distribution, according to logistics consulting firm MWPVL International Inc.



"AmazonFresh really was for lack of a better word an after-thought," said Brittain Ladd, who until March was a senior manager for the grocery delivery program, which launched in 2007.

One key to Amazon's success in general retail sales has been its speed in delivering products to consumers, facilitated by warehouses located strategically throughout the United States. As of 2016, the company had about 100 million square feet of space in its fulfillment and data centers, some of it outfitted with state-of-the-art robotics to boost efficiency.

Facilities for distributing fresh food are far more complicated than ordinary warehouses. A single facility can need a half dozen or more temperature settings to house products from Popsicles to berries. Some require certification from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and extra care must be taken to keep shelves clean and prevent pests from contaminating food.

Whole Foods has over 1 million square feet of warehouse space for distribution to its markets, and a chunk of its inventory goes straight from suppliers to stores, MWPVL said.

"It's a peanut. It's nothing," MWPVL President Marc Wulfrat said of Whole Foods' distribution. "If Amazon wants to become a dominant grocery company in a short period of time, then there would be an investment required, and it would be big."

Amazon, which did not return requests for comment, has not detailed its plans for Whole Foods.

(Source: Reuters)

# Iran's container shipping up 61% in 2 months yr/yr

**ECONOMY TEHRAN** — Container shipping op-  
**d e s k** erated by Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) during the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-May 21, 2017) rose by 61 percent compared to the last year's same period.

As Tasnim news agency quoted the managing director of Container Transport Company, a subsidiary of IRISL, on Saturday, despite the fact that last year most of the world's shipping lines experienced some loss, IRISL's container Transport Company could manage to pass the year profitably.

Hamzeh Keshavarz also mentioned establishing direct shipping lines between Iran's Chabahar port and India's Kandla and Mundra ports saying "For the time being 3000 containers have been reserved for loading, and a significant number have also been unloaded."

According to the official, the container shipping market has been witnessing some drastic changes lately so that most of the world's top companies have formed alliances to avoid big losses.

He said 2M (Maersk and MSC), Ocean (China Cosco Shipping, Evergreen Line, CMA CGM, and OOCL), and The Alliance (comprising Japanese firms including NYK Line, "K" Line and Yang Ming Line) are some of the alliances formed recently by big container companies around the world.



## South Pars phases 17, 18 to export 1st butane consignment

**ENERGY TEHRAN** — The first **d e s k** consignment of butane produced in phases 17 and 18 of Iran's South Pars gas field (in the Persian Gulf) will be ready for being loaded and exported in the current Iranian calendar month, Tir (June 22-July 22), according to the operator of the phases.

Mohammad-Reza Chalipa also said that 2,600 tons of butane and propane is currently produced per day in phases

17 and 18, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Phases 17 and 18 of developing Iran's South Pars gas field were officially inaugurated by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on April 16.

The phases are projected to produce 56.6 million cubic meters of natural gas, 75 tons of gas condensate, and 400 tons of sulfur per day, as well as one million tons of ethane and 1.05 million tons of LPG (propane and butane) per

annum.

According to Chalipa, 21 billion cubic meters of methane, 627,000 tons of ethane, and 11,900 tons of sulfur have been so far produced in phases 17 and 18.

He said 2,300 tons of ethane has been averaged produced per day in these phases and sent to the petrochemical complexes during the first quarter of the current calendar year

(March 21-June 22).

South Pars, which Iran shared with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.

The field is divided into 24 standard phases of development in the first stage. Most of the phases are fully operational at the moment.

## India Essar's Iranian oil imports rise near 5%: trade

**ENERGY TEHRAN** — Essar Oil, the top **d e s k** Indian buyer of Iranian crude, imported 4.9 percent more Iranian oil during January-May 2017 compared to a year ago, according to the private refiner's crude and condensate imports data released by Reuters.

According to the data, the company purchased 156,800 barrels per day (bpd) of Iranian crude on average in the mentioned five months compared to the last year's 149,500 bpd for the same time span.

Essar Oil's oil imports from Iran in May also rose 19.1 percent compared with April to about 186,600



barrels per day (bpd), according to tanker arrival data obtained from trade sources and ship-tracking services on the Thomson Reuters terminal.

The company shipped in 156,600 bpd in April. But the figure for May fell 0.4 percent compared with a year earlier in which Essar imported 187,300 bpd of Iranian oil.

Essar Oil is engaged in the exploration and production of oil and natural gas, refining of crude oil, and marketing of petroleum products. It is a part of the Essar Group based in Mumbai.

Iran used to be India's second-biggest supplier before sanctions.

## Britain's financial power is already seeping away

By Alessandro Speciale, Gavin Finch and Steven Arons

Britain's financial power began ebbing away just days into the Brexit negotiations as the European Central Bank sought authority over a key market and banks from Morgan Stanley to Nomura Holdings Inc. fleshed out plans to move operations from London to Frankfurt.

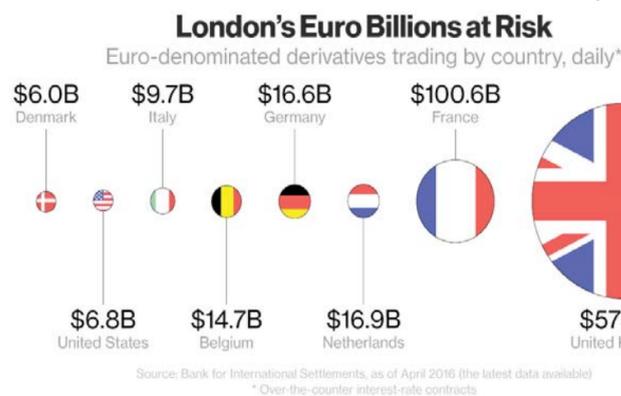
The shifts underscore the threat posed to the U.K.'s financial industry by the decision to quit the European Union, made in a referendum a year ago. They will intensify pressure on Prime Minister Theresa May to safeguard the City of London in any trade deal she strikes with her EU counterparts, who may resist if they see an economic advantage for themselves.

Among the matters at stake in those talks, which began in Brussels on Monday, is whether London can maintain its status as a global hub for finance after Brexit or be forced to watch as business flows to the continent or New York. Such an exodus would jeopardize an industry responsible for nearly a tenth of the economy and some 1.1 million jobs.

"There will be a lot of political pressure to get as much of the finance industry moved to the EU as possible," said Tom Kirchmaier, a fellow in the financial-markets group at the London School of Economics. "The big question will be what the final role of the City will be in Europe."

The latest shot across Britain's bow came early Friday when President Mario Draghi's ECB said it will try to revise the statute governing its powers to gain "clear legal competence" over the clearing of euro-denominated financial instruments.

The Frankfurt-based institution said the change would secure "a significantly enhanced role" for the



ECB and euro-area central banks in supervising clearinghouses, particularly systemically important ones located outside of the EU. The move would also help to clarify how oversight would be shared between the ECB and other bodies, such as the Paris-based European Securities and Markets Authority. The proposed amendment was sent to the European Parliament and to EU governments for approval.

Clearinghouses stand between the two sides of a derivative wager and hold collateral, known as margin, from both in case a member defaults. The dryness of their task belies their financial power. London's clearinghouses alone hold about \$174 billion of cash and bonds as collateral, compared with Frankfurt's \$62 billion and Paris's \$25 billion.

About 75 percent of trading in euro-denominated interest-rate swaps now takes place in the U.K., according to Bank for International Settlements data from April 2016. Who should regulate them was a matter of dispute even before Brexit. The ECB lost a court case in 2015, after trying to bring clearing inside the euro area.

With Brexit looming, European policy makers are sounding increasingly assertive on the issue. Bank of France Governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau, an ECB Governing Council member, on Thursday pressed the case for forcing major euro clearinghouses to base their operations in the EU, while colleague Benoite Coeure on Tuesday hailed an EU Commission proposal on the matter.

The squabble over location has spurred warnings from the industry of skyrocketing costs. Chief among the doom-mongers is Xavier Rolet, the chief executive officer of London Stock Exchange Group Plc, the majority owner of the world's largest clearinghouse, LCH.

He has warned stripping London of euro clearing will cost 232,000 British jobs and force investors and banks to pay an extra \$100 billion over five years to trade off-exchange interest-rate derivatives. An LSE spokeswoman said she couldn't immediately comment on the ECB's statement.

Just this week, Bank of England Governor Mark Carney and Chancellor of the Exchequer Philip Hammond united to warn against allowing Brexit

to damage the U.K.'s financial industry, arguing that doing so could hurt Europe too. Hammond said the "fragmentation" of services would increase prices of financial products, while Carney called for a new system of co-operation between Britain and the EU over derivatives clearinghouses.

Such overtures were likely directed at May, who after a disastrous election is being pressed to soften her approach to Brexit by focusing more on safeguarding jobs and trade rather than cracking down on immigration, as she previously planned. May was told Friday by officials in Europe that her plan to safeguard the residency rights of EU citizens in the U.K. didn't go far enough.

Banks aren't waiting to discover the outcome of the Brexit talks, fretting that the ultimate pact will cost them their ability to easily service customers in the EU from bases in London. The U.K. capital could lose 10,000 banking jobs as a result of Brexit, think tank Bruegel estimated earlier this year.

Frankfurt is so far beating out other cities in luring business from London. Morgan Stanley is close to picking Germany's financial capital as the EU hub for its broker-dealer business, while Nomura will also move staff there following Brexit, people familiar with the companies' planning told Bloomberg News this week. Daiwa Securities Group Inc. also said on Thursday it will establish a subsidiary there.

Frankfurt offers proximity to regulators at the ECB as well as easy access to the bloc's most populous country and its biggest economy.

"The move of the banks to Europe is a natural consequence of the tendency to move the regulation to the ECB," said Kirchmaier.

(Source: Bloomberg)

# Big Oil turns to big data to save big money on drilling

In today's U.S. shale fields, tiny sensors attached to production gear harvest data on everything from pumping pressure to the heat and rotational speed of drill bits boring into the rocky earth.

The sensors are leading Big Oil's mining of so-called big data, with some firms envisioning billions of dollars in savings over time by avoiding outages, managing supplies and identifying safety hazards.

The industry has long used sophisticated technologies to find oil and gas. But only recently have oil firms pooled data from across the company for wider operating efficiencies - one of many cost-cutting efforts spurred by the two-year downturn in crude oil prices.

ConocoPhillips says that sensors scattered across its well fields helped it halve the time it once took to drill new wells in Eagle Ford shale basin of South Texas.

By comparing data from hundreds of sensors, its program automatically adjusts the weight placed on a drill bit and its speed, accelerating the extraction of oil, said Matt Fox, ConocoPhillips' executive vice president for strategy, exploration and technology.

It is just one application, but if applied to the more than 3,000 wells ConocoPhillips hopes to drill in the Texas basin, those small sensors could lead to "billions and billions of dollars" in savings, Fox said in an interview.

"We started using data analytics in our Eagle Ford business," he said. "And everywhere we look there are applications for this."

The cost and complexity of such systems vary widely. Oil giants such as ConocoPhillips buy a mix of off-the-shelf and custom programs, along with data repositories. The Houston-based producer's employees use Tibco Software Inc's Spotfire data visualization package to analyze information from well sites.

Tibco declined to discuss its pricing.

Services firms including Schlumberger NV and General Electric Co oil and gas unit sell sensor-equipped gear, data repositories and software to improve producers' decision-making.

Back when oil traded at more than \$100 a barrel - before the price crash in 2014 - data analysis was an "afterthought" for most oil firms, said Binu Mathew, who oversees digital products at GE Oil & Gas.

Now - with prices at about \$43 a barrel after recovering from a low of about \$26 in early 2016 - "the effi-



ciency aspect is far, far more important," Mathew said.

A survey by Ernst & Young last year examined 75 large oil and gas companies and found that 68 percent of them had invested more than \$100 million each in data analytics during the past two years. Nearly three quarters of those firms planned to allocate between 6 and 10 percent of their capital budgets to digital technology, the survey found.

Effectively mining large data sets could lead to supplanting workers with artificial intelligence and machine learning systems, according to firms selling and buying data-driven technology.

Simple sensors already increase safety and savings by eliminating the need to send workers to rigs or production facilities to gather data. Automating drilling decisions can produce more consistent results by cutting out human errors, said Duane Cuku, vice president of sales for rig technology at Precision Drilling Corp.

"The driller is now able to focus his attention on the well - and the performance and safety of his crews - as opposed to the manual manipulation of controls," Cuku said.

Occidental Petroleum Corp also uses an analytical tool to find the best design for hydraulic fracturing wells. A new version of the software analyzes data on

well completions and geology to recommend whether injecting steam or water would produce more oil.

Abhishek Gaurav, a petroleum engineer for closely-held Texas Standard Oil, said he uses big-data analytics to help his company choose which properties to explore.

Using Spotfire, the same program utilized by Conoco, Standard applies a combination of data science and petroleum engineering to rank asking prices for land based on a variety of completion, production and geological variables - such as the amount of sand that likely would be required to complete a well in a given formation.

The technique, Gaurav said, has reduced the time needed for evaluating land parcels from weeks to hours - and resulted in better decisions.

"We found value in properties when many other teams did not," he said.

Surveys and maps that companies use to acquire acreage for drilling, for instance, are often not digitized. Older company data on wells may be unstructured or spread among suppliers using different storage formats, making integration and analysis a challenge.

General Electric and its oil-and-gas unit are moving aggressively into the business of digitizing industrial equipment for other firms, and have invested in large data processing centers for energy clients.

GE sees huge potential for market growth: A company study estimated that only 3 percent to 5 percent of oil and gas equipment is connected digitally, and less than one percent of the data collected gets used for decision-making, the study found.

Getting the industry more fully connected will take time.

"There is a huge amount of data prep, data sanitization and data extraction needed for big data to be totally disruptive," said Kate Richard, chief executive at private equity investor Warwick Energy.

She projects a major payoff from the technology is still five or ten years away.

Oklahoma City-based Warwick - which manages interests in thousands of wells across Oklahoma and Texas - is preparing for that payoff by hiring people from tech hubs in California, Richard said.

"They all have computer programming and data science backgrounds," she said.

(Source: Reuters)

## Gazprom smells opportunity as UK's biggest gas store shuts

Gazprom PJSC is in talks to ramp up natural gas sales in the UK as coal plants are shuttered and the nation's biggest storage site is closed for good.

The world's biggest gas producer sees an opportunity to sell more of the fuel after Centrica Plc announced it would close its Rough storage facility in the North Sea and the nation plans to stop using coal-fired plants by the middle of next decade. Medvedev expects Britain to increase imported volumes by 8 billion to 12 billion cubic meters a year by 2025.

After opening an office in 1999 outside London, Gazprom has gradually expanded in the UK market through acquisitions. Earlier this year it became one of the largest retail gas suppliers to British industrial and commercial buyers after one of its units completed an acquisition of Wingas UK. The additional supply deals with UK buyers will be brokered through the British trading unit, according to Medvedev.

Gazprom Energy, the industrial supply arm, is headquartered in Manchester and has about 300 employees. It complements the London-based trading unit active in markets from oil to gas, power and carbon.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Greece Okays Exxon-Total bid to explore for offshore oil

Greece has approved an application by a consortium of Exxon-Mobil, France's Total SA, and domestic oil refiner Hellenic Petroleum, to drill for oil and gas off the island of Crete, Reuters reported quoting the Greek energy ministry as saying.

Greece has also approved another application, by local company Energean Oil, to start drilling for oil offshore western Greece.

The country's oil and gas resources management body will launch a tender for exploration licenses in the blocks by the end of June, with the goal to award licenses by the end of this year.

Last month, the energy ministry held talks with Exxon and Total to discuss the potential of offshore gas exploration. Back then, a government official told Reuters that a consortium of ExxonMobil, Total, and Hellenic Petroleum was expected to file an application to explore south of the island of Crete.

Greece, which has been struggling with a severe debt crisis in the past few years and has received billions of euros of EU- and IMF-backed bailout support, is trying to resume efforts to search for hydrocarbons both onshore and offshore and possibly lessen its dependence on energy imports in the future.

(Source: oilprice.com)



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## Trump has to own the new Afghan war plan

Letting the generals alone decide on troop strength is an abdication of presidential responsibility.

It's tempting to say that any time President Donald Trump delegates a decision to people who actually know something about the subject, it's a good thing. Nonetheless, his decision to hand over all authority for increasing troop levels in Afghanistan to the Pentagon is a mistake.

That's because "commander in chief" isn't just a job title, it's an obligation -- and Trump is abdicating it. Besides, from a strictly political standpoint, the president can delegate authority but not responsibility. America's policy in Afghanistan is now his, whether he likes or not.

Secretary of Defense James Mattis told Congress he will "set the U.S. military commitment, consistent with the commander in chief's strategic direction." Yet neither the White House nor the Defense Department has given the public details as to what that direction might be. Mattis is expected to present a plan to Trump next month.

Mattis and National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster are said to be pushing for up to 5,000 new troops to join the 8,400 Americans and 4,000 NATO-member forces already in Afghanistan. The military is also considering more aggressive rules of engagement, such as allowing Americans to join Afghan forces on the battlefield and to call in offensive air strikes, as they have done successfully in Iraq and Syria.

This would be a welcome change from the policy of former President Barack Obama, who placed arbitrary caps on U.S. troop strength and set an equally arbitrary date for full withdrawal. Now Taliban forces control or are fighting in about 40 percent of the country and suicide bombings are on the rise, as are so-called insider attacks by Afghan soldiers against U.S. troops. The U.S., Mattis told Congress last week, is "not winning" the war.

A few thousand more U.S. troops, it should be noted, will not turn the tide. Many of them will simply be replacing military contractors. If, however, the idea is to keep the government of President Ashraf Ghani from toppling while a broader political solution -- involving the Taliban, Pakistan and China -- can be hammered out, the mini-surge may be worth it.

That should not be solely a military decision. It should involve other U.S. agencies such as the State Department, under the leadership of the president himself. Congress, too, needs to be part of the process, even though -- or especially since -- it has failed its duty to put the war on firm legal footing by passing an authorization on the use of force to replace the outdated one from 2001.

The Pentagon's input and view is crucial, and ideally it would offer several plans from which an inexperienced president could choose. The ultimate responsibility for risking American lives, however, rests with the president -- regardless of whether he acknowledges it.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## What happens after the ISIL is defeated in Iraq and Syria?

The United States is committed to defeating the Islamic State (ISIL) in Iraq and Syria, but as that goal nears realization, another strategic question looms: What security order will replace it, and which of the outside powers enmeshed in the region will stand behind that order? The Trump administration doesn't appear to have a strategy for that, but others clearly do -- which helps to explain the incidents over the weekend in which the United States downed a Syrian government warplane, while Iran fired intermediate-range missiles from its territory at Islamic State targets in eastern Syria.

Though the two incidents were nominally unrelated, they have a common cause: the drive by Iran and Russia, along with their Syrian and Iraqi Shiite clients, to dominate the space that will be left when the ISIL is driven from its capital of Raqqa in eastern Syria, which is under assault from U.S.-backed Kurdish and Syrian Arab forces. At stake are both Syria's oil-producing area to the south of Raqqa and a land corridor between Baghdad and Damascus. Russia, for its part, hopes to drive the United States out of the region.

U.S. commanders have twice bombed convoys that entered an exclusion zone around a border town where American advisers are based and they have destroyed a drone. The Syrian fighter bomber shot down Sunday violated another exclusion zone around the forces surrounding Raqqa.

Syria and Iran may calculate that the Trump administration can be induced to abandon the area rather than risk being dragged into a war in the Syrian desert unrelated to the ISIL. Russia's loud protests about the downing of the fighter -- and its threats to challenge U.S. planes over Syria -- show that Moscow is more than ready to support this gambit.

The United States doesn't have a strategic reason to control southern and eastern Syria, but it does have a vital interest in preventing Iran from establishing a dominion from Tehran to the Mediterranean with Russia's support. That would pose an existential threat to Israel, which is already struggling to prevent Iranian infiltration of Syrian territory adjacent to the Golan Heights, and would undermine U.S. allies in Jordan and Iraq.

Countering Iran and Russia requires tactical defense by U.S.-backed forces, like that recently ordered by commanders on the ground. But it will also require a broader strategy to create a security order in the region acceptable to the United States and its allies. To achieve that, the administration may need to raise the military or economic pressures on Iran, Russia and the Syrian government while pressing for negotiations on a new Syrian political order. Not only should the United States reject Moscow's bluffing about Syrian airspace, but also the Trump administration should make clear to Vladimir Putin's regime that if it continues to ally itself with Iran in the region, it will forfeit any chance of resetting relations with Washington.

(Source: Washington Post)

# Will America wage war with a nuclear-armed North Korea?

Robert E Kelly

It is increasingly clear that North Korea is driving toward a nuclear-tipped intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) which could strike the U.S. homeland. A central question for war and peace in East Asia, then, is how the Americans will respond if or when North Korea achieves this capability.

### America's tough historical reactions

History suggests a tough American response. Major strategic changes tend to provoke an American effort. In 1962, the Soviet placement of nuclear missiles in Cuba provoked the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the U.S. response brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. Rather than reading the Cuban missiles as Soviet equality with the U.S. ability to strike the Soviet homeland (as the Kremlin read the move), the Kennedy administration read the emplacement as a major challenge that must be rolled back, even at the risk of going to war.

It is easy to imagine a similar American response to a North Korean nuclear ICBM. The North is practically a comic-book villain in American popular opinion and culture. In the last few years, North Korea invaded the United States (twice), captured the White House and produced a take-over-world Bond villain. In the war-scare of this spring, 53 percent of Americans supported striking North Korea to stop its nuclear program, even though North Korea does not even have the ability to strike the United States now. It is easy to see that already-majoritarian number rising as a North Korean ICBM comes into view.

Two other examples leap to mind: In 1941, the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor ignited a massive American military effort that ended with nuclear attack on Japan. Similarly, the 9/11 surprise attack led to enormous, still continuing American military exertion in the Middle East. A North Korean nuclear capability to strike the U.S. homeland might well be read as giving it just such a surprise attack capability given how dismally Americans view North Korea (86 percent unfavorability). A North Korea capable of nuking the U.S. homeland would almost certainly be read by hawks in Congress, neoconservatives and much of the public as a major threat, possibly justifying preventive attack.

### Learning to live with a North Korean nuclear weapon

I have previously argued that North Korea probably does not want to attack



## America is facing a countdown that ends with a verified North Korean ability to strike the continental United States with a nuclear weapon.

the United States. Its officials have repeatedly told the world that it seeks nuclear weapons to prevent American-led regime change on the model of Iraq or Libya. Indeed, the United States is a pretty obvious threat to the North Korean leadership. The United States has sought to isolate North Korea for decades, threatened it with a major war in 1994, placed it on an "axis of evil" in 2001, led the sanctions charge in the ensuing years, and so on. It is not, therefore, surprising that North Korea has sought nuclear weapons like other various rogue nations, such as Hussein's Iraq, Iran, Syria, Qaddafi's Libya and apartheid South Africa.

In each case, an isolated, beleaguered regime considered the world's ultimate weapons in pursuit of ultimate security: no country will attack you, no matter how awful you are, if you can credibly threaten nuclear retaliation. That logic is practically unassailable, however loathsome we might find the states pursuing these weapons. The difference between North Korea and these other horrible is that Pyongyang has actually gotten to a nuke. No other has; only nine states -- the United States, Russia, China, France,

Britain, Israel, Pakistan, India and North Korea -- have hurdled this high bar.

So nuclear weapons are a wise choice for North Korea's elite, no matter what we think of the regime. It seeks them for the same reason all nations do -- regime security. We can insist, as we do, that we will never recognize North Korea as a nuclear-weapons state. But it is, whether we like it or not. We also probably cannot stop the North Korean march to a nuclear ICBM, barring a huge, risky air campaign that might not even work and would be practically indistinguishable from a war.

### The U.S.-North Korea countdown

So we are facing a countdown, a ticking clock of sorts, that ends with a verified North Korean ability to strike the continental United States with a nuclear weapon, possibly a hydrogen bomb, atop an ICBM. No really knows when the North Koreans will get there. They lie so much that I am loathe to believe their claims that this is imminent. Other, more credible numbers thrown around suggest 5-10 years. But whenever it might be, it is almost certainly coming. Constant nuclear and missile testing, plus the regime's own words, suggest that it is aiming for a

nuclear ICBM with the explicit purpose of threatening the U.S. homeland.

So what to do? Hopefully we can delay the program. Cyber action might slow it down. Missile defense helps too. And China might finally take this seriously and realize that clamping down on North Korea is wiser than risking a panicked American overreaction when North Korea breaches this barrier. But given China's almost willful obtuseness on North Korea, this is unlikely.

The choice then will be to either adapt or fight (air strikes). The United States did adapt (post-Cuba) to a Soviet ability to nuke the U.S. homeland and, more generally, it has lived with Soviet/Russian and Chinese nuclear deterrence for decades. And South Korea and Japan have adapted to the Northern threat already (although not enough). But the United States seems to be more prone to anxiety -- if not hysteria -- regarding North Korea. President Trump insisted in early January that he will not permit the North to obtain such a weapon -- and the only way to achieve that goal is through a major conflict. This choice is coming soon.

(Source: The National Interest)

## Qatar crisis is a mess the Middle East could do without

By Chris Doyle

The Middle East is not short on crisis. Syria remains engulfed by wars and the worst humanitarian disaster since World War II.

Iraq faces conflict with ISIS over Mosul, with thousands displaced and a referendum looming over the Kurdish regions.

In Yemen, 18.8 million are in need of aid, triggered by both conflict and a naval and aerial blockade, with nearly 100,000 suffering from cholera.

Two million Palestinians in Gaza have less than four hours a day of electricity, and another war with Israel is looking an increasing possibility.

Libya has three governments, thousands of people displaced and a chronic human rights record.

In each and every one of these crises, extremists such as ISIS and al Qaeda prosper.

So the spat in the Persian Gulf, where Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have launched a full frontal diplomatic, economic and public relations assault on Qatar, makes resolving any of these crises infinitely harder.

### Any credible evidence

A litany of allegations against Qatar have flooded the media, the vast majority of which, as yet, are not backed up by any credible evidence. These have been followed by a set of demands that are virtually impossible for Qatar to meet.

Some of the allegations demonstrate rank hypocrisy. Saudi accusations against Qatar risk shining a light on to the Saudis' own historic funding of extremist groups and intolerant ideologies.

No side in this spat has an angelic record. Plenty of valid criticism can be made of Qatar. Many regional actors aside from Qatar -- including Saudi Arabia and Turkey as well as the United States and some European states -- have backed groups in Syria that have proved not to be moderate.

One demand is that Qatar shut down Al Jazeera, the state-funded news network. Al Jazeera Arabic's coverage is not impartial, but set against some of the other news channels in the region, is it any worse?

Moreover, Al Jazeera arguably did more to shake up the media landscape of the region and open up debate on taboo issues than any other media outlet. Freedom of



## The latest U.S. State Department comments reveal a massive frustration that the Saudis and the UAE have not provided any evidence to support their claims nor engage in meaningful steps to calm the situation.

expression must not be a victim of the crisis.

For the outside world, many of whom have friendly relations with all parties, choosing sides is not an ideal option. De-escalation is the preferred route. The latest U.S. State Department comments reveal a massive frustration that the Saudis and the UAE have not provided any evidence to support their claims nor engage in meaningful steps to calm the situation.

### Unrealistic demands

This means that the only way out of this hole is for the Saudis and UAE dramatically scaling down their unrealistic demands of Qatar.

They know full well they have delivered an instrument of surrender to Doha, which has zero chance of being agreed to -- not in 10 days or 1,000. Even to long-term observers such as me, it's not entirely clear why they would do this, considering the risk involved.

The only explanation I can think of is that by putting demands forward that are so absurdly over the top, the Saudis and the UAE must be confident they can force Qatar into a public, abject surrender, pushing it back into its box and forcing it to accept Saudi

dominance in the region.

Qatar is not going to cut ties with Iran when it shares the world's single largest gas field with it.

Moreover, Qatar can argue that many regional states have relations with Iran. For many years, the UAE was Iran's largest trading partner.

The biggest risk here is that all sides dig in their heels, unwilling to shift for fear of losing face: a central feature of Persian Gulf politics.

The longer it continues, the greater the chance the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council is finished. Across the waters, Iran will exploit this to the full -- it is already supplying Qatar with vital food imports.

Russia also will seize on this to maximize its influence in the region at the expense of the United States.

And most infuriatingly, ISIL and al Qaeda, far from losing support, will enjoy highlighting the self-indulgent recklessness of this Persian Gulf infighting as the region fails to put out its fires. But unless these extraordinary demands are dropped, the chances are these flames will burn for a long time yet.

(Source: CNN)

# All signs from Trump point to a coming conflict with Iran

By John Feffer

The Saudi war in Yemen is really directed at...Iran. Donald Trump's first overseas visit to Saudi Arabia and Israel was specifically targeted at...Iran. The Saudi-led isolation of Qatar is actually about...Iran.

The escalation of U.S. military actions against the Syria government is... well, do I really need to spell this out any further?

Donald Trump has identified several number-one enemies to target. Throughout the campaign, he emphasized the importance of throwing the full weight of the Pentagon against the Islamic State. More recently, his secretary of defense, Jim Mattis, identified North Korea as "the most urgent and dangerous threat to peace and security."

Other threats that have appeared at one time or another in the administration's rotation include China, Cuba, the mainstream media, former FBI director James Comey, and Shakespeare (for writing Julius Caesar and then somehow, from the grave, persuading the Public Theater to run a scandalous version of it).

Through it all, however, Iran has loomed as the primary bogeyman of the Trump crowd. Fear of Iranian influence has prompted the administration to all but cancel the 2015 nuclear deal, intensify a number of proxy wars, consider pushing for regime change in Tehran, and even intervene in the mother of all battles between the Shia and Sunni variants of Islam.

You're worried about Trump and the nuclear football? The prospect of blowback from an all-out U.S. assault on the Islamic State keeps you up at night? A preemptive strike against North Korea, which Mattis acknowledges would be disastrous, has you rethinking that upcoming trip to Seoul?

Sure, those are all dystopian possibilities. But if I had to choose a more likely catastrophe, it would be a direct confrontation between the United States and Iran. After all, everything seems to be pointing in that direction.

## ■ The fate of the deal

The nuclear deal that Iran signed with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany and the European Union is hanging by a thread. Trump made no bones about his distaste for this Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). He promised to tear it up.

He hasn't done so. It's not just that he's gotten pushback from the usual suspects in Washington (diplomats, foreign policy mavens, talking heads, journalists). Even members of his inner circle seem to see value in the agreement. Mattis, who is otherwise hawkish on Iran, has stood by the JCPOA and diplomacy more generally. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has, albeit reluctantly, acknowledged that Iran has lived up to its side of the agreement. Then there are all the American jobs on the line from the Iranian purchase of Boeing jets.

Even though Trump hasn't torn up the agreement, he has certainly attempted to give it a good crumple. He has directed the Treasury Department to apply additional sanctions on Iran's missile program. He's considering the option of declaring the Revolutionary Guards a terrorist organization. Congress, meanwhile, is pursuing its own complementary set of sanctions against Iran (though, because

it's bundled with sanctions against Russia, the legislation may not meet Trump's approval).

None of this violates the terms of the JCPOA. But it challenges the spirit of the accord.

Adding insult to injury, Trump damned Iran with faint condolences after the recent terrorist attacks in Tehran. "We grieve and pray for the innocent victims of the terrorist attacks in Iran, and for the Iranian people, who are going through such challenging times," Trump wrote. "We underscore that states that sponsor terrorism risk falling victim to the evil they promote."

Talk about bad taste. After September 11, Iranians gathered for candlelight vigils to mourn the mostly American victims of the attacks. The Iranian government didn't say anything about chickens coming home to roost after U.S. military interventions in the Middle East, for that would have been inappropriate (though accurate).

But Iran might yet have to make a statement that echoes Trump's tone-deaf remark: States that tear up international agreements risk falling victim to the evil they promote.

## ■ Proxy wars

The conflict is escalating in Syria, where Iran backs Bashar al-Assad and the United States supports a shifting set of anti-government groups.

Both countries could decide to team up against the Islamic State. And indeed, Iran launched a missile attack against ISIS in Syria this last weekend in retaliation for the terrorist attacks in Tehran. As after September 11, when Tehran and Washington briefly worked together, cooperation against Sunni extremists would seem a no-brainer.



But the would-be caliphate, having lost most of Mosul and now teetering on the verge of conceding its capital in Raqqa, is shrinking at a rapid clip. Which may well explain why the United States has been wading deeper into the Syrian conflict. For the first time since the war in Syria began, U.S. forces shot down a Syrian government plane this last weekend. It's only the latest in a series of attacks on Assad's forces, according to The Atlantic.

Three times in the last month, the U.S. military has come into direct conflict with the combined forces of the Assad regime, Iran-supported Shiite militias, Hezbollah, and possibly even Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. The clashes have reportedly resulted in the deaths of a small number of pro-regime forces, and are much more strategically important than the much-ballyhooed U.S. air strike on the al-Shayrat airfield back in April in



## Behind all of Trump's boneheaded policies in the Middle East is an unmistakable urge for confrontation with Iran.

response to the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons.

Several administration figures, notably Ezra Cohen-Watnick and Derek Harvey in the National Security Council, are eager to confront Assad and his Iranian backers more aggressively. Mattis, however, has reportedly opposed several of their risky propositions. Regardless of the Pentagon chief's somewhat more risk-averse behavior, both Iran and the United States are maneuvering to control as much territory as possible in the vacuum created by the collapse of ISIS.

Even The Washington Post, which generally supports the JCPOA, is enthusiastic about the U.S. intervening more forcefully

to work toward support of those elements inside of Iran that would lead to a peaceful transition of that government.

It was the first public indication of regime-change sentiment from the administration.

But it's not the only sign. Cohen-Watnick, the liaison on the NSC to the intelligence community, has reportedly confessed to other administration officials of his desire to oust the Iranian regime through espionage. And the fellow that's now leading the Iran operation at CIA is Michael D'Andrea, otherwise known as the "dark prince," a long-time operative who is fully capable of pursuing the harder line that Cohen-Watnick wants to see.

But wait, didn't Iranians just overwhelmingly back the reformist Hassan Rouhani in elections last month? This popular government has engaged in domestic reforms and external engagement of the "Great Satan." In other words, Iranians have changed their own regime — peacefully — since the days of the more confrontational Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Of course, Washington has overturned the wishes of Iranian voters in the past, helping to overthrow Mohammed Mosaddegh in 1953.

Whenever oil interests (Tillerson) intersect with chickenhawk ambitions (Bannon), talk of regime change is sure to follow.

## ■ Clash of civilizations

When Donald Trump said a few nice things about Islam on his first foreign trip to Saudi Arabia, liberals back home breathed a sigh of relief. At least the new president wouldn't follow senior advisor Steve Bannon's more extreme narrative of a new crusade against the infidels.

"This is not a battle between different faiths, different sects, or different civilizations," Trump said. "This is a battle between barbaric criminals who seek to obliterate human life, and decent people of all religions who seek to protect it. This is a battle between good and evil."

But even as he rejected the larger religious frame, Trump has embraced a different kind of war: a clash within a civilization. The battle lines between Sunni and Shia have hardened throughout the Middle East, and Trump is wading into this mess firmly on the side of the Sunni. And not just any Sunnis, but the most extreme Wahhabi version of Sunni Islam as represented by the ruling sheikhs of Saudi Arabia.

Let's be clear: Trump is not making a doctrinal statement by siding with extremist Sunnis. He knows nothing about Islam and is not interested in learning. This is about power — who will control the Middle East.

In the past, however, the United States in its infinite naiveté thought that it could control outcomes on the ground in the region. Today, that naiveté has developed into a kind of aggressive ignorance as the Trump administration simply follows the Saudi lead, with Israel pushing from behind. In this way, the United States will be propelled toward war with Iran.

But wait, actually, Donald Trump himself anticipated this outcome.

Back in 2013, Trump said, "We will end up going to war with Iran because we have people who don't know what the hell they are doing. Every single thing that this administration and our president does is a failure."

Who knew that Donald Trump could be so prescient? The president has proven himself high-performing in at least this one regard: self-fulfilling prophecies.

(Source: FPiF)



**Even though Trump hasn't torn up the agreement, he has certainly attempted to give it a good crumple. He has directed the Treasury Department to apply additional sanctions on Iran's missile program. He's considering the option of declaring the Revolutionary Guards a terrorist organization.**

## The Persian Gulf crisis: Grappling for a face saving solution

By James M. Dorsey

A two-week old conflict in the Persian Gulf goes to the core of key issues in international relations that hamper the fight against political violence and govern diplomatic relations: the absence of an agreed definition of terrorism that allows autocrats to abuse efforts to counter extremism by repressing non-violent critics and the ability of small states to chart their own course and punch above their weight.

Proponents of maintaining the term terrorism as a multi-interpretatable catchall phrase argue that one man's terrorist is another's liberation fighter. While that is no doubt true, it applies to persons and groups that see violence as a legitimate tool but misses the mark when applied to non-violent critics, particularly proponents of a pluralistic, democratic environment and/or forms of Islamic governance that challenge monarchical autocracy.

Authoritarian leaders like the Persian Gulf ruling families, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Egyptian-general-turned-president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi have a vested interest in either imposing their definition of terrorism on the international community or preventing it from adopting a definition. The absence of a definition has allowed them to brutally suppress basic human rights, including freedoms of expression and the media, and to put tens of thousands of non-violent critics behind bars.

Bahrain this week, in a bid to pressure the United States to adopt the Saudi-UAE definition of terrorism that includes any group, violent or not, that challenges government or potentially questions their autocratic rule, expelled Qatari military personnel working at a US military base on the island state. The expulsion was the first indication that the Persian Gulf crisis could affect the US defensive umbrella for the region as well as operations to defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

In a twist of irony, Bahrain's minority Sunni Muslim ruling Al Khalifa family relies on support of the Muslim Brotherhood, a main target of the Saudi-UAE-led boycott of Qatar, to counter opposition from the Persian Gulf state's Shiite majority. Yet, it has been exempted from the ire of Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Bahrain joined the Saudi-UAE-led boycott of Qatar and accused Doha of seeking to overthrow its government.

There is little doubt that Qatar maintains ties to jihadist militants as does Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, there is also little doubt that the Saudi-UAE effort to force Qatar to adopt their sweeping definition of terrorism would undermine US-backed efforts to maintain a back channel to militants.

In one such instance, the US State Department in a letter to US Republican Congressman Peter J. Roskam during the 2014 Gaza war noted that Qatar was important in efforts to get Hamas, the Islamist group that traces its roots to the Muslim Brotherhood and controls Gaza, to accept a ceasefire with Israel. The department further pointed out that Qatar was also funding the internationally recognized Palestine Authority headed by President Mahmoud Abbas.

"We need countries that have leverage over the leaders of Hamas to help put a ceasefire in place. Qatar may be able to play that role as it has done in the past," Assistant Secretary for Legal Affairs Julia Frifield said in the letter. At the same time, Ms. Frifield admitted that the US was pushing Qatar to be more compliant in its crackdown on funding of political violence, which she described as "inconsistent."

Hamas has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, but not the United Nations. The EU has kept Hamas on its terrorism list despite a controversial EU court ruling that it should be removed.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE appear, two weeks into the boycott of Qatar, to be struggling to present Qatar with their demands or what Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir termed "grievances." While there was no explanation why demands had not yet been tabled, it seemed likely that the two Persian Gulf countries were trying to establish which demands stood a chance to garner international support. They have said they would put forward their demands within days.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE have signalled through their media and various statements by officials that they want Qatar to break its ties to Islamists, including the Brotherhood and Hamas, as well as shutter Qatar-sponsored media, first and foremost among which the Al Jazeera television network.

Speaking in an interview, UAE Foreign Minister Anwar Gargash lumped the Brotherhood, Hamas and Al Qaeda together as terrorist organizations and demanded that Qatar be put under some kind of international supervision.

"If we get clear strategic signals that Qatar is going to change and it will stop funding violent Islamist militants that is the basis for a discussion, but we would need a monitoring system. We do not trust them. There is zero trust, but we need a monitoring system and we need our western friends to play a role in this," Mr. Gargash told The Guardian. In separate comments to journalists in Paris, Mr. Gargash suggested that the Saudi-UAE-led effort to isolate Qatar "may last for years."

Many in the international community, including the United States, which could emerge as the major mediator in the Persian Gulf crisis, are unlikely to support curbing of the press. Saudi Arabia and the UAE more over differ over the degree to which the Muslim Brotherhood poses a problem.

If that were not enough to complicate the formulation of a list of demands, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson suggested that seeking to ban the Brotherhood was all but impossible. Speaking to the House Committee on Foreign Relations, Mr. Tillerson cautioned that designating the Brotherhood, with an estimated membership of 5 million, as a terrorist organization would "complicate matters" with America's relations with foreign governments.

"There are elements of the Muslim Brotherhood that have become parts of governments. Those elements... have done so by renouncing violence and terrorism," Mr. Tillerson said. He said groups affiliated with the Brotherhood that commit violence had already been added to the US terrorism list.

By breaking off diplomatic relations with Qatar and imposing an economic boycott on the Persian Gulf state without a clear definition of demands that stood a chance to win international support, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have put themselves in a position in which they are effectively grappling for a face-saving exit strategy.

In the process, they have highlighted the danger of not clearly defining what constitutes terrorism and who is a terrorist not only for the rule of law and defense of human rights but also for the credibility of autocrats who abuse the void in their bid to arbitrarily impose their will.

The United States, France, Iran, Pakistan, Morocco, Turkey and Kuwait have urged both sides to quickly resolve their differences in negotiations. The calls put Saudi Arabia and the UAE further on the spot as long as they do not table a clear set of demands that resonate with the international community.

# The secret of Macron's success

By John Lloyd

France's new president has amazed Europe with the speed and élan of his rise, from a former minister to head of the republic in less than a year, from political neophyte to creator and leader of a winning party. He has amazed that world, too, with his charm, his debate incisiveness and ideological creativity, plucking ideas and policies now from the left, now from the right.

It's ruthlessness that has got him there. This week, he caused four ministers to leave his cabinet, three of whom were members of the closely allied MoDem party and one who had played a large part in building Macron's own République en Marche. No talk of being innocent till proven guilty. All are being investigated for (relatively mild) corruption and it's only a preliminary inquiry, but the accusation was enough to bolster the impression of Macron's ruthlessness, the French media on Wednesday were full of anonymous quotes to the effect that he exercised tight control over ministers: an "outsized ego" who stops them governing, said the unnamed party sources.

Macron will need to be both ruthless and controlling. He

now embarks on a twofold mission to succeed where his predecessors have failed, in a France seen as declining in its economy, its status and its optimism.

That mission is, first, to revivify France, and second, to re-establish it as an equal partner with Germany in revivifying the European Union.

## ■ Voter turnout

He's beginning with France. Though his clean sweep of presidency and parliament has been impressive, he will be uneasily aware of a record low voter turnout in the June parliamentary elections and that holding the center means both left and right are against him.

He has already made clear that he wants to begin negotiations with the labor unions on injecting more flexibility into workplaces - easier firing, more hiring. In doing so faces what one commentator has termed the "mother of all battles" with organizations that have stymied change for decades. It will be a clash of different experiences and reflexes. Macron is young and educated at elite institutions, the unions are creatures of an industrial age in which job security and increasing wages were the start and finish of bargaining.

The European Union is a larger challenge, in part because he can control it less. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the undisputed but lonely leader of the EU, was visibly relieved by his election. She gushed immediately after his May win that Macron "carries the hopes of millions of French people and also of very many people in Germany and in the whole of Europe."

## ■ Merkel faces tough election

However, Merkel faces a tough election on September 24 and must calibrate her response to him to avoid alienating her voters. "German support cannot replace French policy making," she said drily after her enthusiastic welcome to Macron. I don't see why - as a priority - we should change our policy.

The chancellor was saying that she would not consider the loosening of the fiscal rules on which Germany insists and of her government's attitude that France and other "Club Med" countries must stop piling on debt that digs them deeper into an economic hole.

Then there's Italy, which has succeeded Greece as the center of Europe's concern. The third largest economy in the eurozone, Italy's forecast growth rate of one percent this year lags behind the modest growth in the rest of the

EU and does little for the country's dangerously indebted economy and banking sector.

Opposition to the EU is growing in Italy, where an election is likely early next year, perhaps late this one. Although the populist euroskeptic Five Star Movement did badly in recent mayoral elections, it still tops the national polls.

The never-to-be-discounted Silvio Berlusconi is also pledging to relaunch his Forza Italia party, while his allies on the right - the League and the Brothers of Italy - all reject public disaffection with the EU and could together beat the governing Democratic Party.

An ailing, politically turbulent Italy poses a bigger danger to EU reform because, unlike Greece, the Italian economy is too big to save from default.

Macron must conquer these problems - along with the agonies of Brexit negotiations and the continued hostility of the central European members Poland, Hungary and Slovakia to much EU policy, especially on immigration - if he is to join Merkel as chief engineer in the Union's engine room. He has the wind behind him. But the opposing headwinds will be as strong.

(Source: Reuters)

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# Potassium and its profound impact on your health

Why low potassium could be dangerous, and how to treat it safely

By Veeraiash Chauhan

From the time it was first isolated from the ashes of plants (potash) thousands of years ago, our understanding of the chemical element potassium has increased. Today, it would not be an overstatement to say that life, as we know it, would not be possible without potassium. We are referring not just to the functioning of the human body here. Potassium, in fact, is necessary for normal function of virtually all living organisms.

## ■ Potassium's central role in our physiology

The bulk of our body's potassium is found inside cells, and not outside in the fluid that bathes those cells (called extracellular fluid). This big differential in concentrations is maintained by an enzyme that is fundamental in maintaining the integrity of all animal cells, and it is called the sodium-potassium ATPase pump. This is located on the membrane that envelops a cell.

This enzyme pumps sodium out, and potassium in to the cell, in a 3 to 2 ratio. This ratio between the potassium concentration inside a cell and outside of a cell is the driving force in generating its electricity, called the action potential, without which muscle and nerve cells cannot execute their functions. The next time you drink your favorite electrolyte beverage with potassium, do take a moment to realize the profound ways it controls your physiology.

## ■ The kidney's role in regulating potassium levels

Like with most electrolytes, the kidney has the major responsibility of maintaining the normal blood level of potassium.

Therefore, both low and high potassium levels are possible in disorders of the kidney. There are other mechanisms which impact potassium level in our blood as well (like the oral intake of potassium as part of food, acidity of our blood, etc.), but on a minute-to-minute basis however, the kidney is the main regulator.

If potassium concentration of the blood gets too high, the kidneys start to excrete the excess out into the urine. Should the level fall too low for comfort, the kidneys can reduce excretion to a bare minimum. Inability of the kidneys to respond in this normal manner even in the face of low blood levels of potassium is called renal potassium wasting.

## ■ Abnormally low potassium levels in the blood: hypokalemia

Renal potassium wasting is just one reason for abnormally low levels of potassium in the blood. From a conceptual standpoint, an easy way to understand reasons for low blood



**If potassium concentration of the blood gets too high, the kidneys start to excrete the excess out into the urine.**

potassium is to divide those causes into two categories: situations of either low supply of potassium in to the blood, or situations of increased loss. However, here is a more complete list:

- Decreased oral intake of potassium containing foods
- Increase loss of potassium from the gut—these could include entities like diarrhea where potassium is lost in stools, or vomiting, where significant vomiting can lead to increased loss of potassium in the urine (due to mechanisms beyond the scope of this article).
- Increase loss of potassium in the urine—this phenomenon can be seen due to elevated level of mineralocorticoids (hormones produced by adrenal gland that act on the kidney to regulate potassium secretion), and due to external reasons (like use of diuretics, also known as “water pills”, eg. furosemide or hydrochlorothiazide. Other causes include rarer entities like Bartter syndrome, Gitelman syndrome, drugs like amphotericin B, etc.
- Increased entry of potassium into cells, so that the level will not be measured on routine blood testing (which tests potassium level in the serum, which is the liquid plasma that bathes our cells, minus certain proteins). In these situations, the total amount of potassium in the body is essentially the same and there is no net deficit. However, since its location

changes, it cannot be measured. This can result from elevated levels of insulin, high alkalinity in blood, etc.

• Increase loss of potassium from excessive sweating. This is especially seen in patients with cystic fibrosis.

## ■ How does low potassium impact your health?

Alterations in our muscle and nerve cells' electricity, or the action potential, is the main reason behind the symptoms and signs that you could experience due to low potassium levels.

Here is a short list of what problems you might experience:

- Muscle weakness, lack of energy, cramps, etc: This includes not just our peripheral muscles, but in extreme circumstances could affect muscles involved in the breathing process (respiration). Therefore, severe cases of hypokalemia could lead to respiratory failure and death.
- Abnormalities of the heart's rhythm: This again could be life threatening in severe situations.
- Increase in blood pressure
- Elevation in the blood sugar level because of low potassium causing reduction in insulin secretion
- Over a long term, persistently low potassium levels can cause changes in the kidneys' structure and function.

## ■ Safe treatment of low potassium levels is critical

Cautious supplementation and reple-

tion of potassium can treat hypokalemia and bring the levels up to normal. However, the underlying cause of hypokalemia needs to be identified as well so that the disease, and not just its sign/symptom is being treated. In patients who have significant wasting of potassium from the kidney, certain kind of medications, referred to as potassium sparing diuretics might be of immense help.

Extreme caution should be exercised with intravenous supplementation of potassium since infusions can be painful if done the wrong way, or too fast. The bigger danger however in these situations is too much or too rapid potassium supplementation, which will lead to dangerously high potassium levels in the blood.

As you might have gathered by now, our body functions normally within a certain range of blood potassium. Anything higher or lower than that could become life threatening in severe cases. Needless to say, treating severe hypokalemia is not a DIY project and should be done under the supervision of a physician, even if you plan to do it at home. If the cause of low blood potassium is not obvious, or if treatment requires an inordinate amount of potassium repletion, highly consider getting a consultation with a specialist physician who treats these issues, that is, a nephrologist.

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

## 7 questions to ask when you're given a prescription for an opioid

By Susie Moore

A discussion with your doctor may minimize your chance of becoming dependent on or addicted to these powerful painkillers.

Opioid misuse is now one of most important health problems in the United States, rivaling smoking as a cause of death. Although news reports tend to focus on an opioid crisis among the young, the opioid epidemic is increasingly affecting older people as well. In fact, the rates of hospitalization for opioid overdoses among Medicare recipients quintupled from 1993 through 2012. Although older people are still less likely than younger ones to become addicted or succumb to opioid overdoses, they are more likely to suffer side effects from extended opioid use, including memory and cognition problems and falls.

“Opioid use and pain management is something we deal with constantly,” says Dr. Michael L. Barnett, assistant professor of health policy at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. According to a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, nearly one-third of Medicare beneficiaries received at least one prescription for opioids in 2015, and those who did get an average of five such prescriptions or refills. Dr. Barnett and a team of his colleagues decided to investigate how Medicare recipients get opioid prescriptions in the first place.

The researchers examined the records of nearly 380,000 Medicare patients who visited emergency departments (EDs) from 2008 to 2011. None of the patients, who had a variety of conditions and injuries that caused them pain, were taking opioids at the time.

The team found that whether people left the ED with an opioid prescription depended to some extent on the doctors who treated them. Among people who saw doctors who prescribed opioids the most frequently, 24% received an opioid prescription, compared with



**Although older people are still less likely than younger ones to become addicted or succumb to opioid overdoses, they are more likely to suffer side effects from extended opioid use, including memory and cognition problems and falls.**

7% of those who were treated by doctors who were least likely to prescribe opioids. Moreover, people who got these prescriptions were likely to continue taking the drug for at least six months.

This study also found that people often received opioid prescriptions without asking for them — and in many cases, without knowing that the medications were opioids.

“Don't be afraid to ask your doctors about the prescription you've been given or let them know if you have reservations about taking a particular drug. Most physicians are willing to involve patients in shared decision making,” Dr. Barnett says. You'll want to ask the following:

### ■ 1. Is this medication an opioid?

Drug names are difficult to remember and easily confused, so you'll want to determine whether a painkiller is an opioid.

### ■ 2. Is this safe to take with my other medications?

Opioids aren't advisable if you're taking a benzodiazepine — a class of drug used to treat anxiety, depression, and insomnia.

### ■ 3. Are there any non-opioid pain relievers I could take instead?

Some nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like celecoxib (Celebrex) and diclofenac (Voltaren), which are more potent than nonprescription NSAIDs, are available by prescription. Although these medications may have more troublesome side effects than over-the-counter NSAIDs, they won't lead to dependence or addiction.

### ■ 4. Is this the lowest dose possible?

You don't want to take a higher dose than you need for pain relief. It's better to start with a small dose and ask your doctor to increase it if necessary.

### ■ 5. May I have fewer pills?

Take the lowest dose possible for the briefest time possible. If you still have unmanageable pain once you've finished your prescription, you can discuss further options, including continued opioid use, with your doctor.

### ■ 6. How should I taper off the medication?

You may need to gradually reduce the amount you take to avoid withdrawal symptoms like muscle pain and nausea.

### ■ 7. Should I have some naloxone (Narcan) on hand?

This drug, which rapidly reverses the effects of an opioid overdose, is available by prescription as a nasal spray.

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

## Is your smartphone giving you carpal tunnel?

By Alan Mozes

People who spend lots of time on their smartphones may be scrolling, tapping and swiping their way to carpal tunnel syndrome, a painful wrist and hand disorder.

A small study found a link between extended use of smartphones and other hand-held electronic devices and a greater likelihood for experiencing the telltale wrist and hand pain of the syndrome.

But the researchers did not prove that heavy smartphone use caused carpal tunnel syndrome, and one hand surgeon said very few people in the real world use their smartphones as much as the heavy users in the study did.



Study author Peter White said the findings suggest “caution may be warranted when using hand-held electronic devices, in order to minimize the chance of developing carpal tunnel syndrome.”

White is an assistant professor in the department of health technology and informatics at Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

The carpal tunnel is a narrow and hard pathway of bone and ligament found at the base of the hand, according to the U.S. National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. It contains tendons, which enable finger-bending, as well as the so-called “median nerve,” which runs from the forearm to the palm and provides feeling to some fingers.

Carpal tunnel syndrome can gradually develop following repeated pressure to the point where the median nerve passes into the hand and meets the wrist.

A common cause, said White, are work conditions that call for “repetitive, forceful or awkward hand movements, for example, when typing.” And the result is often pain (sometimes extending up the arm), numbness, finger tingling and weakened grip strength.

To explore whether smartphone use might up the carpal tunnel syndrome risk, White and his associates followed up on their prior investigation involving 500 Hong Kong University students.

Those students fell into two camps: intensive users of hand-held electronic devices (meaning five or more hours of use per day) and non-intensive users (less than five hours per day). Hand-held devices included mobile phones, tablet computers and game consoles.

More than half (54 percent) of the intensive group reported musculoskeletal pain and/or discomfort, compared with 12 percent among the less intensive group.

The new study looked at 48 students from the first study. Half were intensive users who spent (on average) more than nine hours a day using their devices. Those in the other group spent just under three hours a day on their devices.

The participants answered questionnaires on electronic device habits and any pain or discomfort in their neck, shoulder, back, elbow or wrist/hand region.

Ultrasounds and physical exams on the wrist region were also done.

Muscle pain was found to be more common among intensive users.

The researchers also found that intensive electronics users had “significantly” more discomfort, and more severe discomfort, in their wrist and hand.

The more time a person spent using a hand-held electronic device, the more intense and long-lasting their wrist and hand pain was.

To explain why, the researchers pointed to device design, which requires the repeated use of fingers to click, swipe, scroll, tap and press. The result is an enlargement and flattening of the median nerve, alongside bulging of a key ligament.

To minimize risk, White advises keeping the wrist as straight as possible when using devices.

He added, “One should try to minimize repetitive movements of one's fingers and thumb when using hand-held electronic devices, especially for single-hand use. It is also important to take regular rest periods, so as to avoid continuous intensive use, so as to allow recovery time and to prevent prolonged stress.”

But hand surgeon Dr. Dori Cage questioned how much of a risk smartphone use really poses.

“The strong correlation of carpal tunnel syndrome with smartphone use is surprising, as I have not seen that in my practice,” said Cage, an American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons spokesperson.

Cage, who's with San Diego Hand Specialists, also suggested that “it is unlikely that the general population would have [the] degree of phone use” seen among the intensive users in the study.

“This is likely an issue affecting only a small percentage of cellphone users,” she said.

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

## Archaeologists dig up ancient Islamic city in town believed to have been 'home to giants'

A dig in eastern Ethiopia has discovered an ancient Islamic city, the first evidence that the country had been well connected to the Persian Gulf, Egypt and India for trade.

Archaeologists traveled to the town of Harlaa and unearthed a 12th century mosque, evidence of Islamic burials and headstones, glass vessel fragments, carnelian (which was often used in ancient Islamic societies for jewellery) as well as pottery from Madagascar, the Maldives, Yemen and China.



People pass across city square in Harar, Ethiopia

The structure of the Islamic house of worship was found to be similar to those in Southern Tanzania and Somaliland. Bronze and silver coins from 13th century Egypt were also found on the site.

Farmers had stumbled across pottery and coins from the ancient civilization for many years, but it was not until researchers from the University of Exeter arrived that the city was revealed.

Professor Timothy Insoll, who led the research said: "This discovery revolutionizes our understanding of trade in an archaeologically neglected part of Ethiopia. What we have found shows this area was the center of trade in that region." (Source: Independent)

## Tourism is booming in U.S. but no hotel jobs

**Washington (Business Report)** — Tourism is thriving in the nation's capital, with the District of Columbia's visitors bureau declaring a record year for U.S. foot traffic in 2016. But at Washington's hotels, hiring has been more or less flat for two decades.

The region's hotel industry employs only about 5 400 more people today than it did in 1990, a tiny increase for a region the size of the Washington area. When calculated as a percent of the metropolitan area's total employment base, the industry's employment footprint here is actually getting smaller. "We have a very vibrant, financially successful industry, but it's just not throwing off a lot of employment," said John Boardman, executive chairman of local hotel union Unite Here Local 25.

According to data maintained by the Bureau of Labour Statistics and analyzed by economists at the Stephen S. Fuller Institute at George Mason University, the hotel industry's share of the local job market has been steadily trending downward for 17 years.

# Iranian airlines expand intl. flights to spur tourism growth

**TOURISM TEHRAN** — Iran's Mahan Air and Zagros Airlines have recently launched new direct flights to Spain and Russia respectively in a bid to accelerate the pace of tourism growth in the country.

### Tehran-Barcelona direct flights launched

Mahan Air started flying nonstop from Tehran to Barcelona early on Thursday.

"The nonstop flights from Tehran to Barcelona and vice versa will lessen travel time from 12-15 hours to only 6 hours," Hossein Hosseini, the airline's marketing manager, was quoted as saying by IRNA.

Mahan currently operates weekly flights on Sundays and Thursdays between the two cities using the Airbus A340.

Back in February, Iran tourism chief Zahra Ahmadipour and Spain's Ambassador Eduardo López Busquets discussed deepening tourism cooperation by simplifying visa issuance regime and establishing direct flights.

Mahan, which started operations in 1992 as the first private carrier in Iran, has now grown to own the largest fleet among all Iranian carriers.

### Isfahan connected to Moscow, St. Petersburg

Zagros Airlines has launched its weekly flights to the Russian cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

The privately-owned airline on Friday launched its maiden flight to Moscow from Isfahan's Shahid Beheshti International Airport.

The inbound and outbound flights are scheduled for every Friday as the airline changes its Russia destination on a weekly basis. "It flies to Moscow on one week and switches to St. Petersburg the



An undated photo depicts a Mahan Air passenger jet taking off from Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport over the city skyline.

next," IRNA reported.

The domestic carrier has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to buy 20 Airbus A320neo jets and eight A330neo aircraft, Reuters reported on Thursday.

### More airliners on way to Iran

Iran has ordered more than 200 planes since international sanctions against the country were lifted last year in return for curbs on the country's nuclear program.

clear program.

Flag carrier IranAir has ordered 100 planes from Airbus, 80 from Boeing and 20 ATR turboprops but implementing the deals has been hampered by uncertainty over financing, Reuters reported.

Boeing has also signed a deal for 30 737 MAX jets with Iran's Aseman Airlines, which is managed as a private company and owned by Iran's civil service pension foundation.

Refurbishing Iran's aviation industry is essential for tourism boom in the country that aims to lure 20 million foreign travelers annually by 2025.

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.

## UK tourism industry resilient after militant attacks, bookings data shows

Britain's tourism industry is proving resilient despite recent militant attacks and is set for higher bookings this year, outperforming the European average, travel data analysis company ForwardKeys said on Thursday.

ForwardKeys, which analyses booking reservations, said that forward bookings for international arrivals were up 12 percent compared to the previous year as of June 17.

The figures were more positive than for the rest of Europe, which averages bookings 7.8 percent higher than this time last year.

British police are on high alert after a man drove a

car into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge, killing four, and then stabbed a policeman to death in the grounds of parliament in March.

That attack was followed by a suicide bombing at a pop concert in Manchester which killed 22, and a deadly attack on London Bridge this month. ForwardKeys' data was from before an attack on worshippers near a north London mosque on Monday.

ForwardKeys said that there was no wave of cancellations of bookings to Britain following the London Bridge attack.

While an extremely strong start to the year has

slowed following each attack, the firm said other factors, such as a blockade on Qatar, could be having an effect, and that Britain's position was still healthy.

"One needs to bear in mind that even though we have seen something of a slowdown in bookings for the UK in recent weeks, the forward booking situation for July and August remains extremely healthy," Olivier Jager, CEO, ForwardKeys, said in a statement.

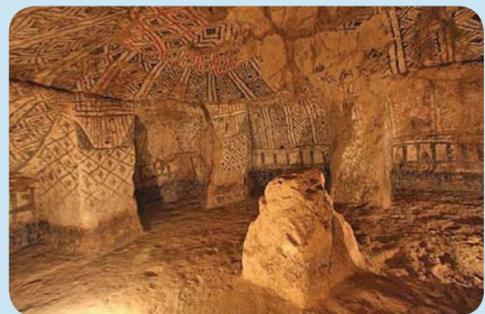
"There has been a sustained positive trend in bookings for the UK throughout the year so ForwardKeys remains bullish on the UK's tourism performance in summer 2017." (Source: Reuters)

## ROUND THE GLOBE

### National Archeological Park of Tierradentro

The National Archaeological Park of Tierradentro is located in the south-western of Colombia in Andean's central cordillera, in the municipality of Inza, department of Cauca.

Four areas, dispersed over a few square kilometers, make up the archaeological park: Alto de San Andres, Alto de Segovia, Alto del Duende, El Tablon and as a site of importance but outside the park boundary the Alto del Aguacate.



The park contains all known monumental shaft and chamber tombs of Tierradentro culture, the largest and most elaborate tombs of their kind.

The area holds the largest concentration of pre-Columbian monumental shaft tombs with side chambers—known as hypogea—which were carved in the volcanic tuff below hilltops and mountain ridges.

The structures, some measuring up to 12 m wide and 7 m deep, were made from 600 to 900 CE, and served as collective secondary burial for elite groups.

The present state of archaeological and anthropological knowledge suggests that the builders of the hypogea (underground tombs) lived in the mountain slopes and valleys in the area. In the valleys they established small settlements whereas on the hillsides settlement was dispersed, close to the fields.

Underground tombs with side chambers have been found over the whole of America, from Mexico to north-western Argentina, but their largest concentration is in Colombia.

(Source: UNESCO)

## Subterranean settlement holds secrets of life in west-central Iran

**HERITAGE** A combination photo shows interlinked tunnels, rooms and corridors of Samen subterranean settlement that after more than a decade of excavations still keeps clues to ancient life in west-central Iran. Some human remains are also seen in the pictures released by entekhab.ir on April 10, 2017.

The subterranean complex appears to have been first used for religious purposes, then as a cemetery and finally as a shelter during emergencies. It lies beneath a modern city of the same name in Malayer county, Hamadan province.

The underground complex, located 400 km west of Tehran, is believed to be built sometime between the fall of the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BC) and early Parthian era (247 BC-224 CE).

Excavations at the site began in 2005 and is still going on. So far tens of well-preserved skeletons have been retrieved from its interconnected chambers.



## How to be mindful on vacation

By David Gelles

"Going on vacation can lead to relaxation, adventure and even awe, whether you're seeing a famous landmark or enjoying a local delicacy. But it can also be stressful, replete with botched travel plans and dashed expectations. Whatever is happening, take time to savor the experience. Being mindful on vacation can help us fully appreciate each moment, from exhilarating new adventures to relaxing quiet afternoons." — Dina Kaplan, founder of The Path, a meditation community.

Try going on vacation without a checklist. Can you avoid ticking off tourist sites and instead enjoy the relaxed sensations of living in the moment, wherever you are? Think of a vacation as a feeling within, rather than a chance to bring



your hurried lifestyle to another place.

Experiment with a new rhythm. Make a plan to have no plans. Avoid scheduling anything for an afternoon and see how that makes you feel. Does it bring up anxiety? Do you feel like you're missing something? Can you pause, focus on your breath and be comfortable with a bit of uncertainty and unplanned exploring?

Be open to meeting new people.

Don't be afraid to make eye contact, share a smile and strike up a new conversation.

If you stumble upon a park, a restaurant or a cultural attraction that looks interesting, be willing to try out new experiences, even if they're not in a guidebook.

Sit at a cafe or park or garden where a local would spend time. Notice how people dress, speak or gesture differently than at home and whether the smells from nearby restaurants and bakeries are different, too.

When a ferry or flight or driver is delayed, try to let go of anxiety. What if this is part of the journey and will lead to something unexpected and better? We can't always control what is happening, but we can control how we choose to respond to every situation throughout

the day.

When things don't go as planned, put your phone and computer away, come back to your breath and notice how you're feeling. Do you feel tightness in your chest or jaw?

If so, come back to your breath again and try to let it go. Keep your phone away and try picking up a book you've always wanted to read. This is the perfect time.

During the best times of your vacation, try not to get too attached to how you're feeling, taking care to avoid getting caught up in craving more moments like this.

Notice the sensations you are feeling even as you acknowledge that they, and this experience, are impermanent. Enjoy them even while knowing it will eventually be time to head home.

(Source: The New York Times)

# Atomic imperfections move quantum communication network closer to reality

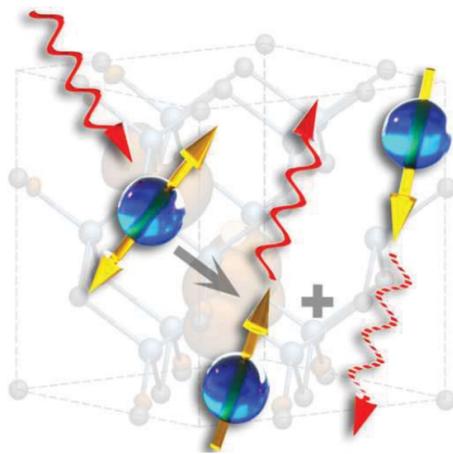
An international team led by the University of Chicago's Institute for Molecular Engineering has discovered how to manipulate a weird quantum interface between light and matter in silicon carbide along wavelengths used in telecommunications.

The work advances the possibility of applying quantum mechanical principles to existing optical fiber networks for secure communications and geographically distributed quantum computation. Prof. David Awschalom and his 13 co-authors announced their discovery in the June 23 issue of *Physical Review X*.

"Silicon carbide is currently used to build a wide variety of classical electronic devices today," said Awschalom, the Liew Family Professor in Molecular Engineering at UChicago and a senior scientist at Argonne National Laboratory. "All of the processing protocols are in place to fabricate small quantum devices out of this material. These results offer a pathway for bringing quantum physics into the technological world."

## Theoretical models

The findings are partly based on theoretical models of the materials performed by Awschalom's co-authors at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest. Another research group in Sweden's Linköping University grew much of the silicon carbide material that Awschalom's team tested in experiments at UChicago. And another team at the National



Institutes for Quantum and Radiological Science and Technology in Japan helped the UChicago researchers make quantum defects in the materials by irradiating them with electron beams.

Quantum mechanics govern the behavior of matter at the atomic and subatomic levels in exotic and counterintuitive ways as

compared to the everyday world of classical physics. The new discovery hinges on a quantum interface within atomic-scale defects in silicon carbide that generates the fragile property of entanglement, one of the strangest phenomena predicted by quantum mechanics.

Entanglement means that two parti-

**Quantum mechanics govern the behavior of matter at the atomic and subatomic levels in exotic and counterintuitive ways as compared to the everyday world of classical physics.**

cles can be so inextricably connected that the state of one particle can instantly influence the state of the other, no matter how far apart they are.

"This non-intuitive nature of quantum mechanics might be exploited to ensure that communications between two parties are not intercepted or altered," Awschalom said.

## Controlling quantum states

The findings enhance the once-unexpected opportunity to create and control quantum states in materials that already have technological applications, Awschalom noted. Pursuing the scientific and technological potential of such advances will become the focus of the newly announced Chicago Quantum Exchange, which Awschalom will direct.

An especially intriguing aspect of the new paper was that silicon carbide semiconductor defects have a natural affinity for moving information between light and spin a (magnetic property of electrons).

A "key unknown has always been whether we could find a way to convert their quantum states to light," said David Christle, a postdoctoral scholar at the University of Chicago and lead author of the work. "We knew a light-matter interface should exist, but we might have been unlucky and found it to be intrinsically unsuitable for generating entanglement."

(Source: EurekAlert)

## Holding hands to comfort loved ones does help reduce pain, U.S. study shows

Holding the hand of a loved one to comfort them really does help reduce pain, a U.S. study has shown.

Dr. Pavel Goldstein, a postdoctoral pain researcher in the Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Lab at the University of Colorado Boulder was inspired to conduct the research after witnessing the birth of his daughter four years ago.

He said: "My wife was in pain, and all I could think was, 'What can I do to help her?' I reached for her hand and it seemed to help."

"I wanted to test it out in the lab: Can one really decrease pain with touch, and if so, how?"

His team found that when an empathetic partner holds the hand of a woman in pain, their heart and respiratory rates sync and her pain dissipates.

Dr. Goldstein said: The "more empathetic the partner, the stronger the analgesic effect and the higher the synchronization between the two when they are touching."

## Interpersonal synchronization

Researchers examined 22 couples as part of the study into "interpersonal synchronization" where individuals begin to physiologically mirror the people they are with. The phenomenon is seen every day when people

sync their footsteps with the person they're walking with or adjust their posture to mirror a friend's during conversation.

Dr. Goldstein's study is the first to explore interpersonal synchronization in the context of pain and touch. He hope it can inform the discussion as health care providers seek opioid-free pain relief options.

The 22 heterosexual couples, between the age of 23 and 32, were put them through a series of tests aimed at mimicking a delivery-room scenario.

The couples either sat together, not touching; sat together holding hands; or sat in separate rooms and repeated all three scenarios as the woman was subjected to a mild heat pain on her forearm for two minutes.

The study found when the couples were allowed to hold hands they synced and the pain decreased.

Dr. Goldstein said: "It appears that pain totally interrupts this interpersonal synchronization between couples. Touch brings it back."

His previous research found the more empathy the man showed for the woman the more her pain subsided during touch and the more physiologically synchronized they were, the less pain she felt.



He said: "It could be that touch is a tool for communicating empathy, resulting in an analgesic, or pain-killing, effect."

Researcher has also shown leaders and followers have a good rapport, their brainwaves fall into a similar pattern and when romantic couples are simply in each other's presence, their cardiorespiratory and brainwave patterns sync up.

(Source: The Telegraph)

## Solving the scorching mystery of the sun's erupting plasma jets

Spiky bursts of plasma called spicules swirl around the surface of the sun. Millions erupt every moment, spurting solar material some 6,000 miles high at speeds of about 60 miles per second.

"These things are very violent," said Bart De Pontieu, a research scientist with Lockheed Martin Solar and Astrophysics Lab in Palo Alto, Calif. The "gas in spicules is about 10,000 degrees and they travel the length of California in just a minute or so."

Scientists have studied spicules for decades, but were not sure how the plasma jets formed. Now, Dr. De Pontieu and his colleagues think they have solved the searing mystery. They published their

findings Thursday in the journal *Science*.

## High-powered land

Using data gathered by high-powered land and space telescopes, they created a computer simulation that reconstructed the conditions between the sun's surface and its atmosphere, where spicules form.

Powerful magnetic fields are created in the interior of the sun. There, the high density keeps them tangled and tamed. But near the surface, the magnetic fields can use neutral particles, atoms that do not carry an electric charge, to diffuse into the sun's atmosphere. The fields enter a reddish layer called the chromosphere where their violent nature is unleashed.

"It's a sling shot effect," said Mats Carlsson, a professor of astrophysics at the University of Oslo in Norway, and co-author of the paper.

The density in the chromosphere is significantly lower than in the sun's interior, so the magnetic fields are no longer suppressed and are able to straighten out. As they unwind and release their tension, they fling hot plasma at incredible speeds, creating the spicules. The spicules surge thousands of miles high, passing through the chromosphere and into the sun's corona before collapsing.

## Computer simulation

To create a computer simulation that accurately reflected what was happening

on the sun, Dr. Carlsson said they needed to incorporate the effects of neutral particles. In earlier simulations they did not differentiate neutral particles from charged particles in the sun. Those models made it seem as if the edge between the sun's atmosphere and surface was fully electrically charged.

"We had an absence of spicules," said Dr. Carlsson. "In our previous model we had one instead of the millions you have in the sun."

But when they plugged distinct neutral particles into their simulation, they produced a model that had the same features seen on the sun.

(Source: The NYT)

## BP Implements over 70% of Plan to Construct Pipeline for Exporting Gas to Iraq

Bank Pasargad implemented more than 70 percent of plan to construct pipeline for exporting gas to neighboring Iraq, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Given the above issue, more than 70 percent of gas pipeline construction plan, as long as 595 km, for exporting gas to Iraq and also construction of gas boosting-pressure stations were implemented at the sponsorship of Bank Pasargad.

For his part, Director of Public Relations Department of Gostaresh Energy Pasargad Company Mehran Erfani said: "Plan to construct pipeline for exporting gas to neighboring Iraq was developed by NAFTANIR Company in BOT (Build-Operate and Transfer) basis."

It should be noted that the said company is a subsidiary of Gostaresh Energy Pasargad Holding Company, affiliated to Pasargad Financial Group.

This giant project is under construction, costing \$1,670 million, in cooperation with Bank Pasargad and National Development Fund of Iran (NDFI).

Turning to the generation of employment in this project, he added: "Following the macro policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and in line with supporting Iranian companies and suppliers, more than 70 firms, composed of consulting engineers, manufacturers of equipment,

suppliers and executive contractors, are busy active in this project.

In the end, Director of Public Relations Department of Gostaresh Energy Pasargad Company Mehran Erfani pointed to the physical progress of this project and said: "Currently, construction operation of this giant project is underway with 71% physical progress. According to the scheduled program, this project will be put into operation by Sept. 2017."

## Banks' Capital Doubled in 11th Government "Unprecedented": President

Capital of banks in the country doubled in the 11th government dubbed "Hope and Prudence".

President Hassan Rouhani announced the above statement on Thursday night at Iftar (fast breaking ceremony) banquet held in the presence of economic activists on the occasion of National Guild Day.

For the first time, capital of public and state-owned banks turned twofold in the 11th government, he said, adding: "Reforming banking system of the country will be followed up strictly in the 12th government, so that we should try to create economic boom in the country."

In the end, the president pointed out that banking system in the country will be boomed significantly in



the 12th government.

Director of Public Relations Dept. of Bank Melli Iran

(BMI) was the next speaker who said: "With the coordination made in this regard, the bank paid more than 8,000 billion rials worth of facilities in order to meet demands of families for supplying appliances and products."

Moreover, the bank also has paid 262 billion rials worth of facilities to applicants in the same period to purchase consumables in installments focusing on domestic products.

In the end, he said that more than 43,000 facilities have been paid by Bank Melli Iran to applicants in the first two months of current year in 1396 (from March 21 to May 21), accounting for 10.6 percent of total facilities of the bank.

## Wildfires may be more toxic than scientists thought

It was a hot Monday in August 2013, just before dawn. A team of scientists stood on the tarmac in Houston. They had the keys to an unusual aircraft: a NASA-owned DC-8 jumbo jet with a laboratory inside it.

They made for a large and diverse group: chemists and geoscientists, meteorologists and climatologists, engineers and pilots. Their primary mission took them over patches of woods across the U.S. Southwest, where they measured the kind of chemicals off-gassed by trees.



But on that particular morning they took the plane slightly north, toward the Sierra Nevadas, where an enormous wildfire—known as the Rim Fire—was chewing through ancient pine forest. And after a couple of hours of flying, once they got to the fire, they drove the plane straight into its enormous plume of smoke — and then they did it again, and again.

This was not the first time they had flown the plane through a smoke cloud. NASA's DC-8 had made two earlier trips to different wildfires in Oregon and Washington that summer. It measured towers of soot and ash close to the ground and more than 10 miles in the air, from the bottom of the troposphere to the lower reaches of the stratosphere.

The "thing that you're always surprised by when you fly through the fire is that everything that you can measure, you see enhanced," said Greg Huey, an atmospheric chemist at Georgia Tech and one of the leaders of the mission. "You just get big signals for everything in one of these fires."

And they got one big signal in particular. The initial results of the three flights were published this month in the *Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres*. The research could dramatically revise scientists' understanding of how much pollution is caused by wildfires.

(Source: theatlantic.com)

## Scientists rescue samples of melting Bolivian glacier for posterity

A team of international scientists are transporting samples of ice from a melting glacier in Bolivia to Antarctica, for study and preservation before the glacier disappears.

The international "Ice Memory" expedition of 15 scientists took samples from the glacier on Illimani Mountain in the Andes and will store them in Antarctica at the French-Italian base of Concordia.

The scientists were helped by local guides and porters, who live near the base of Illimani. Clearly visible from Bolivia's capital La Paz, Illimani's "eternal snows" are frequently referenced in the music, mythology and literature of the Aymara people.

But scientists say global warming is rapidly melting the glaciers of the Andes, removing an important source of fresh water for many communities and threatening others with deadly avalanches. Illimani itself has warmed by 0.7 degree Centigrade in the last 18 years, said Ice Memory glaciologist Patrick Ginot.

The team dug over 130 meters (430ft) into the glacier to remove 75 ice samples, which they say yield some 18,000 years of climatic history.

"As glaciologists, we want to keep this kind of glacier sample because for us it is an encyclopedia of the climate and environment," Ginot told Reuters on Tuesday.

The French-led Ice Memory organization says its goal is to create a global ice archive sanctuary in Antarctica. It has also run a similar expedition on Mont Blanc in the Alps and plans further trips to Russia and Nepal.

(Source: Reuters)

## Evolutionary biologists have been misinterpreting a key point in Darwin's theory for years

Richard Prum, Coe Professor at Yale University and author of "The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex," reveals details of Darwin's theory on gender. This particular hypothesis was not well accepted, even years after Darwin's first publication. Today, this gender theory is being analyzed in a different way. Following is a transcript of the video.

Today, most evolutionary biologists think that sexual selection by mate choice is really a kind of natural selection. So, when they see the peacock's tail or a beautiful ornament in nature, they imagine that it evolves because it provides objective information about the quality of the mate that choosers need to know.

However, Darwin himself proposed an alternative theory. And it's one that I'm very interested in trying to bring back into the sciences.

Darwin proposed that mate choice is really about the aesthetic quality of the experience of the chooser. It's about what the animals themselves think of as beautiful. When Darwin wrote the "Origin of Species" he had several problems at the end.

He had no theory of genetics. No elaborated theory of the origin of humans. And his real additional problem was the origin of beauty.

(Source: Business Insider)

## Norway warns Brazil that funds to safeguard rainforests at risk

Norway has warned Brazil that funds to help protect the Amazon rainforest under a billion-dollar program are in jeopardy because more forests are being destroyed, a Norwegian government letter showed on Wednesday.

Brazil's President Michel Temer met Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg in Oslo on Friday to discuss cooperation including Norway's program to help Brazil's efforts to restrict logging and the clearance of forests by farmers.



Wealthy from producing oil and gas, Norway is the biggest foreign donor to protect tropical forests from Brazil to Indonesia, partly because they are big natural stores of greenhouse gases and help to slow climate change.

The Amazon is suffering a "worrying upward trend" in deforestation since 2015 after "impressive achievements" over the previous decade, Norway's Environment Minister Vidar Helgesen wrote to his Brazilian counterpart Jose Sarney Filho this month.

Norway's annual contributions to an Amazon Fund, to which it has paid \$1.1 billion since 2008 based on Brazil's progress in slowing deforestation, were now set to fall, he wrote in the letter seen by Reuters.

"Even a fairly modest further increase (in deforestation) would take this number to zero," he added.

Filho wrote back on June 19 saying that data "indicate that we may have stopped the rising curve of deforestation recorded from August 2014 through July 2016. We hope that the new data will soon reveal a downward trend."

He said that Brazil has an "unwavering commitment to sustainability, to curbing deforestation and to the full implementation of its targets to reduce emissions under the Paris Agreement" to combat global warming.

Brazil's deforestation climbed to 8,000 square kilometers (3,088 square miles) in 2016 - about the size of Greece's Mediterranean island of Crete - from 6,200 in 2015. Losses were far below 19,000 sq km in 2005, Brazilian satellite data show.

Under current benchmarks, a rise in annual Amazon deforestation rates to 8,500 square km or above will mean no annual payments from Norway, Norwegian officials say.

Norway promised at the 2015 Paris summit to extend its partnership with Brazil until 2020, assuming success in slowing deforestation. It also has projects in forest nations including Brazil, Indonesia, Guyana and Tanzania.

(Source: Reuters)

## LEARN ENGLISH Interview Skills 10 - Concluding The Interview

Mr Parsons: Well Rebecca, is there anything else you need to know for now?

Rebecca: I don't think so Mr. Parsons. I think you have covered all the main points for me.

Mr Parsons: Okay well listen, here is my business card with my mobile number. If any other questions **spring to mind** don't **hesitate** to contact me. Of course you can also call Miss Childs too.

Rebecca: Great. Ermm, when can I **expect** to hear from you?

Mr Parsons: Well, we are finishing the **shortlist** interviews tomorrow, so we will certainly have a decision made by early next week. Miss Childs will call you to discuss more on Monday or Tuesday. **How does that sound?**

Rebecca: That sounds perfect. Thank you very much for taking the time to speak to me Mr. Parsons.

Mr Parsons: The pleasure's all mine Rebecca.

Rebecca: I hope to hear from you very soon.

Mr Parsons: Absolutely. Thanks for coming Rebecca. Goodbye.

### Key vocabulary

**spring to mind:** be remembered; comes to mind

**hesitate:** to stop before you do something

**expect:** think something will probably happen

**shortlist:** list of people or items most likely to be chosen

**how does that sound:** does that seem good to you?

### Supplementary vocabulary

**you can reach me by:** you can get in contact with me by (method of communication)

**round:** one interview in a series of interviews that a candidate has to go through

**group interview:** an interview involving more than one candidate in which the candidates have to work together

**status:** acceptance or rejection (of an application)

**contract:** an agreement between two or more parties, especially one that is written and enforceable by law

(Source: irlanguage.com)

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

# Six metropolises, 289 cities facing water stress

**ENVIRONMENT** TEHRAN — Six metropolitan areas of Isfahan, Bushehr, Bandar Abbas, Shiraz, Kerman, and Mashhad and 289 other cities in Iran are currently troubled with water stress, deputy energy minister said on Friday.

"The amount of water consumption is roughly equal to the amount of water stored in these cities," IRNA news agency quoted Rahim Meydani as saying.

Mentioning water storage level in dams, Meydani explained that for the time being the water storage level in dams are quite satisfying nationwide.

However, in such conditions the consumers should efficiently manage their water consumption, especially during peak hours, Meydani added.

From 4.30 p.m. to 9 p.m. on weekdays and from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 4.30 p.m. to 9 p.m. on weekends are peak periods



of water consumption, he highlighted. He went on to say that "Water consumption is pretty high during the aforesaid hours."

As forecasted by Iran Meteorological Organization the temperature is expected to rise 0.5 to 1.5 centigrade in the [Iranian Calendar] months of Tir, Mordad and Shahrivar falling on (June 22 to September 22) which would certainly result in high water consumption, he said, adding, "to maximize efficiency try to avoid consuming much water in peak periods and putting off affairs needing water until off-peak periods."

With the beginning of the summer and concurrent with national water saving week in Iran (June 22-28) the consumers are presented with water management and efficiency techniques for 10 percent reduction in drinking water consumption.

## Donors bring 12 children back to life over Ramadan

**SOCIETY** TEHRAN — Over the holy fasting month of Ramadan (May 27-June 25), brain dead organ donors restored 12 children lives by donating their hearts at Tehran's Shahid Rajaei Cardiovascular Medical and Research Center.

Doctor Seyed Mohammad Mahdavi, pediatric heart transplant surgeon at Shahid Rajaei Cardiovascular Medical and Research Center, lauded the donors' families who made a great humanitarian act in the holy month of Ramadan and helped save 12 children lives who were all in critical condition and might not survive, ISNA news agency reported on Friday.

Thankfully there are not any children in critical

condition at the hospital for now, Mahdavi added.

"The efforts initiated and undertaken by the health ministry and the society of organ donation over the past months to raise awareness about organ donation among the public have paid off and we can actually see the tangible increase in organ donation," he highlighted.

According to a report released by the Iranian Society of Organ Donation there are 26,000 patients waiting on the lists to receive a transplant out of which some 10,000 die every day. Nonetheless, should half of those who are diagnosed with brain death donate their organs, no one would have to wait for a transplant.

Shahid Rajaei Cardiovascular Medical and Research Center is one of the largest heart hospitals in Asia. Designed in an area of 110,000 square meter, the hospital providing cardiovascular care became fully operational in 1972.

Shahid Rajaei Cardiovascular Medical and Research Center renders services in as many different fields as adult cardiology, pediatric cardiology, cardiac surgery, catheterization, angiography, pacemaker, cardiac electrophysiology, ablation, rehabilitation, cardiac imaging (echocardiography, fetal heart echocardiography, CT scan, MRI, and radioisotope), laboratory, Holter monitoring, and outpatient care.

## 29.5 million people globally suffer from drug use disorders: UNODC

In 2015 about a quarter of a billion people used drugs. Of these, around 29.5 million people - or 0.6 per cent of the global adult population - were engaged in problematic use and suffered from drug use disorders, including dependence. Opioids were the most harmful drug type and accounted for 70 per cent of the negative health impact associated with drug use disorders worldwide, according to the latest World Drug Report, released on June 22 by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Disorders related to the use of amphetamines also account for a considerable share of the global burden of disease. And while the market for new psychoactive substances (NPS) is still relatively small, users are unaware of the content and dosage of psychoactive substances in some NPS. This potentially exposes users to additional serious health risks.

The Report finds that hepatitis C is causing the greatest harm among the estimated 12 million people who inject drugs worldwide. Out of this number, one in eight (1.6 million) is living with HIV and more than half (6.1 million) are living with hepatitis C, while around 1.3 million are suffering from both hepatitis C and HIV. Overall, three times more people who use drugs die from hepatitis C (222,000) than from HIV (60,000). However, the Report stresses that despite recent advances in the treatment of hepatitis C, access remains poor, as treatment remains very expensive in most countries.

This year marks 20 years of the World Drug Report, which comes at a time when the international community has decided to move forward with joint action. UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov highlighted that the outcome document of the 2016 landmark UN General Assembly special session on the world drug problem contains more than 100 concrete recommendations to reduce demand and supply, however he acknowledges that more needs to be done.

"There is much work to be done to confront the many harms inflicted by drugs to health, development, peace and security, in all regions of the world," said Mr. Fedotov.

### Changing business models for drug trafficking and organized crime

In 2014, transnational organized crime groups across the globe were estimated to have generated between one fifth and one third of their revenues from drug sales. Mobile communications offers new opportunities to traffickers, while the darknet allows users to anonymously buy drugs with a crypto-currency, such as bitcoin. While drug trafficking over the darknet remains small, there has been an increase in drug transactions, of some 50 per cent annually between September 2013 and January 2016 according to one study. Typical buyers are recreational users of cannabis, "ecstasy", cocaine, hallucinogens and NPS.

### Global Drug Market Trends

The spectrum of substances available

on the drug market has widened considerably, the Report says. The opioid market in particular is becoming more diversified, with a combination of internationally controlled substances like heroin, and prescription medicines that are either diverted from the legal market or produced as counterfeit medicines. NPS continued to evolve such that by 2015, the number of reported substances had nearly doubled to 483 compared with 260 NPS in 2012.

Opium production is up and the cocaine market is thriving. In 2016, global opium production increased by one third compared with the previous year and this was primarily due to higher opium poppy yields in

Afghanistan. The Report also points to the expansion of the cocaine market, such that from 2013-2015, coca bush cultivation increased by 30 per cent mainly as a result of increased cultivation in Colombia. Following a period of decline, there are signs that cocaine use is increasing in the two largest markets, North America and Europe.

### Drugs and terrorism

Although not all terrorist groups depend on drug profits, some do. Without the proceeds of drug production and trafficking, which make up almost half of the Taliban's annual income, the reach and impact of the Taliban would probably not be what it is today. Up to 85 per cent of opium cultivation in Afghanistan occurs in territory under some influence of the Taliban.

### International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking

By resolution 42/112 of 7 December 1987, the General Assembly decided to observe 26 June as the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking as an expression of its determination to strengthen action and cooperation to achieve the goal of an international society free of drug abuse.

Supported each year by individuals, communities and various organizations all over the world, this global observance aims to raise awareness of the major problem that illicit drugs represent to society.

### Listen First

Building on the success of last year, the theme for 2017 is: "Listen First - Listening to children and youth is the first step to help them grow healthy and safe." It is an initiative to increase support for prevention of drug use that is based on science and is thus an effective investment in the well-being of children and youth, their families and their communities.

The UN General Assembly held a Special Session (UNGASS) on drugs in April 2016. This Special Session marked an important milestone in achieving the goals set in the policy document of 2009 "Political Declaration and Plan of Action on International Cooperation towards an Integrated and Balanced Strategy to Counter the World Drug Problem", which defined action to be taken by Member States as well as goals to be achieved by 2019.

(Source: UNIC & un.org)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

## Firefighters save oil-soaked flamingo in southern Iran

A flamingo which had got stranded in oil recycling facilities of Bandar Abbas Refinery, southern province of Hormozgan, was rescued by firefighters, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Once the workers saw the animal and made sure that it was still alive they soon called firefighters who helped save the bird by taking appropriate measures to help the flamingo recover.

Every year by the beginning of the cold season, migratory birds wing their ways towards warm regions to find better food supplies and escape the cold weather. Many flamingos are spotted in Shour, Shirin and Minab River International Wetland, Hormozgan province. Marshes and swamps are the most important habitats of these flamingos in Hormozgan.

## آتش نشانان فلامینگوی گرفتار در مواد نفتی را نجات دادند

به گزارش روز شنبه ایرنا یک قطعه فلامینگو که درحوضچه بازیافت مواد نفتی پالایشگاه نفت بندرعباس گرفتار شده بود با تلاش نیروهای آتش نشانی و امدادی این پالایشگاه نجات یافت.

پس از مشاهده این پرنده مهاجر در حوضچه مواد نفتی و اطمینان از زنده بودن آن، کارگران به سرعت نیروهای آتش نشانی را مطلع کرده، بلافاصله نسبت به خروج این فلامینگو اقدام و سپس کارهای لازم برای بهبود حال این پرنده انجام شد.

هر سال با شروع فصل پاییز و افزایش سرمای هوا، دسته پرنده مهاجر برای پست سر گذاشتن سرمای هوا و پیدا کردن غذای مناسب به مناطق گرم مهاجرت می کنند. بیشترین جمعیت فلامینگوها دربخشی از تالاب بین المللی شور- شیرین میناب دیده شده است. مردابهای ساحلی کم عمق و باتلاقهای هرمزگان مهمترین زیستگاه فلامینگوها است.

### ENGLISH PROVERB

## A house divided against itself cannot stand

**Explanation:** if a group's members are in perpetual disagreement, the group will eventually cease to exist

**For example:** The candidate urged the members of his political party to unite because he understood that a house divided against itself cannot stand.

### PHRASAL VERB

## Creep up on somebody/ something

**Meaning:** to surprise someone by walking up behind them silently

**For example:** Don't yell - let's creep up on them and scare them.

### ENGLISH IDIOM

## Behind bars

**Explanation:** someone who is behind bars is in prison

**For example:** If you hang around with that gang, you'll find yourself behind bars in no time!

# Syrian forces advance on Daesh-held Dayr al-Zawr province

Syrian army forces, supported by allied fighters, have reportedly managed to advance on the ISIL (Daesh)-held eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr for the first time since 2014 days after an Iranian missile strike against terrorist positions there.

Backed by pro-government forces, "the Syrian army entered Dayr al-Zawr Province from the southeast, near the Iraqi border," the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said on Friday.

SOHR Head Rami Abdel Rahman noted that the Syrian forces had advanced eight kilometers into the province and were just 12 kilometers from the key T2 oil pump.

The Syrian forces now control part of Dayr al-Zawr city and a nearby military airport, but Daesh is in control of most of the provincial capital.

Earlier this month, the Syrian troops reached the eastern border with Iraq and they were reported to be in control of an 85-kilometer stretch of the frontier by Friday.

The fresh gains came less than a week after the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) pounded Daesh headquarters in Dayr al-Zawr with six medium-range ballistic missiles fired from western Iran.



The missile attack killed more than 170 Takfiri terrorists and inflicted heavy damage on their equipment and systems, the IRGC said in a statement. The strike was conducted in retaliation for the June 7 terror attacks in the Iranian capital, Tehran.

Over the past few weeks, tensions have escalated in Syria between the government forces, the US and Russia.

In two occasions in June and May, US warplanes attacked Syrian military forces near the town of At-Tanf, claiming they posed a threat to US forces, an allegation rejected by Damascus.

Last week, a US Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet shot down a Syrian SU-22, which was conducting an operation against Daesh militants on the outskirts of the city of Raqqah.

The shutdown led Moscow to announce a halt to a hotline with the US meant to minimize incidents in Syrian airspace and vow to track US-led coalition aircraft in central Syria as "targets."

## ■ Syrian forces advance in Homs, Damascus

Separately on Friday, drone footage showed smoke rising above the al-Waer district on the outskirts of Homs city, where fighting is underway between Syrian troops and terrorists. The pro-government forces recaptured Ard al-Washash, al-Waer Dam and Al-Waer Canyon region.

The Syrian fighters further retook almost the entire Ayn Tarma Valley in east Damascus and several sites in the southern part of the city such as al-Jisr neighborhood.

## ■ Bombing rips through Aleppo

In another development on Friday, a bomb blast hit the al-Furqan neighborhood of the city Aleppo, killing four people and wounding 30 others.

Aleppo police chief said the bomb was planted beside a trash bin, but media reports said the explosion was caused by a mortar fire.

(Source: SANA)

## China, U.S. agree on aim of 'complete, irreversible' Korean denuclearization



China and the United States agreed that efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula should be "complete, verifiable and irreversible", Chinese state media said on Saturday, reporting the results of high level talks in Washington this week.

"Both sides reaffirm that they will strive for the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," a consensus document released by the official Xinhua news agency said.

U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had said on Thursday that the United States pressed China to ramp up economic and political pressure on North Korea, during his meeting with top Chinese diplomats and defense chiefs.

China's top diplomat Yang Jiechi and General Fang Fenghui met Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis during the talks. Yang later met with U.S. President Donald Trump in the White House, where they also discussed North Korea, Xinhua reported.

The consensus document also highlighted the need to fully and strictly hold to UN Security Council resolutions and push for dialogue and negotiation, which has long been China's position on the issue.

Military-to-military exchanges should also be upgraded and mechanisms of notification established in order to cut the risks of "judgment errors"

between the Chinese and U.S. militaries, the statement also said.

Chinese state media described the talks, the first of their kind with the Trump administration, as an upgrade in dialogue mechanisms between China and the United States, following on from President Xi Jinping's meeting with Trump in Florida in April.

Xi and Trump are next expected to meet again in Hamburg during the G20 Summit next month.

A day last week's talks, President Donald Trump said China's efforts to use its leverage with North Korea had failed, raising fresh doubts about his administration's strategy for countering the threat from North Korea.

The death of American university student Otto Warmbier earlier this week, after his release from 17 months of imprisonment in Pyongyang, further complicated Trump's approach to North Korea. China, North Korea's main trading partner, has been accused of not fully enforcing existing UN sanctions on its neighbor, and has resisted some tougher measures.

Washington has considered further "secondary sanctions" against Chinese banks and other firms doing business with North Korea, which China opposes.

(Source: Reuters)

## UN rejects Israel claims of Hezbollah operating under cover of NGO



The United Nations has dismissed Israeli accusations that Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement is setting up observation posts on the border under the guise of an environmental NGO.

Earlier this week, the Israeli military published photographs and footage showing what it claimed to be Hezbollah observation posts established on behalf of "Green Without Borders" near the frontier with the occupied territories.

Israel's Ambassador to the UN Danny Danon sent a letter of protest to the UN Security Council, denouncing the alleged "dangerous provocation" and accusing Hezbollah of carrying out undercover reconnaissance activities.

The council should "demand that the government of Lebanon dismantle these observation posts immediately, and prevent any future activity of Hezbollah and its affiliates in southern Lebanon, particularly near the Blue Line," he said, referring to the UN-drawn boundary between Lebanon and the occupied lands.

On Friday, however, UN spokeswoman Eri Kaneko rejected Tel Aviv's allegation against Hezbollah and said that members of Green Without Borders had only planted trees in the area

over the past years.

She stressed that the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) "has not observed any unauthorized armed persons at the locations or found any basis to report a violation of [Security Council] Resolution 1701," passed at the end of the 33-day Israeli war on Lebanon in the summer of 2006.

UNIFIL remains in contact with the Lebanese armed forces on monitoring the border to ensure there are no violations "and to avoid any misunderstandings or tensions that could endanger the cessation of hostilities."

The 33-day war, which killed more than 1,200 Lebanese, ended on August 14, 2006, after a UN-brokered ceasefire went into effect.

Since then, UNIFIL has also been charged with monitoring the cessation of hostilities.

Israel's claims come while it frequently violates Resolution 1701 by invading Lebanon's airspace.

The Lebanese army and Hezbollah have on numerous occasions reported border breaches by Israeli troops attempting to install espionage devices and tracking equipment in Lebanese territory.

(Source: Press TV)

## Mohammed bin Salman's promotion is end of harmony within al-Saud tribe: expert

2 → But now that he has been elevated to Crown Prince, the issue has taken on more urgency for the other 10,000 or so princes. This is made all the more dire as the young Crown Prince could break up the GCC, entangle Saudi Arabia in an armed conflict with Iran and lose U.S. backing when Trump gets cold feet or is out of office. In that eventuality, the Al-Sauds could be driven out of power and lose their position and their direct access to the national treasury, the thing that matters most to all princes given their over-the-top lifestyle.

As to foreign policy, Mohammad bin Salman will be much more muscular than his predecessors. He will confront the Qataris more forcefully to tone down Al-Jazeera, end support for the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas and distance themselves from Iran. Mohammad bin Salman is a young man who 'feels his oats'

and who thinks he has never-ending 'wind in his sails'. He wants to re-establish absolute Saudi supremacy in the GCC and in the Arab World. He believes that he has U.S. and Israeli backing to confront Iran in Yemen and elsewhere and will get U.S. airpower support in case of a direct-armed conflict with Iran. I think that he is drunk on power.

**"Trump hates Obama so much that he wants to undo anything and everything that Obama has done. So why not destroy Obama's steps to improve U.S.-Iranian relations!"**

## Arab states don't seek 'regime change' in Qatar: UAE

1 → Qatar has long denied that it supports extremist groups and funds terrorism. But it acknowledges that it allows members of some groups such as Hamas to live in Qatar, arguing that fostering dialogue is key to resolving global conflicts. The Al-Jazeera network it hosts has provided exposure for groups ranging from Daesh to al-Qaeda, and is seen by its critics as a mouthpiece for extremist ideology.

The demands from Qatar's neighbors

amount to a call for a sweeping overhaul of Qatar's foreign policy and natural gas-funded influence peddling in the region. Complying would bring Qatar's policies in line with the regional vision of Saudi Arabia, the Middle East's biggest economy and gatekeeper of Qatar's only land border.

"This list of demands confirms what Qatar has said from the beginning - the illegal blockade has nothing to do with combatting terrorism, it is about limiting

Qatar's sovereignty, and outsourcing our foreign policy," Sheikh Saif Al-Thani, a Qatari ruling family member who heads the country's government communications office, said in a statement earlier Saturday.

The United Arab Emirates has said the list was intended to be confidential, and it has accused Qatar of leaking it to the press in a sign of bad faith.

Qatar's neighbors are also demanding that it curb diplomatic ties with Iran,

limiting trade and commerce, stop funding other news outlets, including Arab21, Al-Araby Al-Jadeed and Middle East Eye, hand over "terrorist figures" and wanted individuals from the four countries, stop all means of funding for groups or people designated by foreign countries as terrorists, pay an unspecified sum in reparations and stop all contacts with the political opposition in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain.

(Source: AP)

## 'American democracy is under attack': Sanders urges vigilance against Trump's 'authoritarianism'

Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said the United States has been slipping toward authoritarianism under President Trump and that citizens have an "enormous obligation" to protect American freedom.

The runner-up for the Democratic presidential nomination last year delivered his scathing critique of the administration in a speech discussing the threat of authoritarianism in both the U.S. and other countries.

"Under President Trump, our country is moving in an authoritarian direction and the very nature of American democracy is under attack," Sanders said at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Before outlining why he thinks Trump is leading the U.S. toward authoritarianism, Sanders criticized the new health care bill unveiled by Senate Republicans Thursday morning. The draft bill they plan to bring to a vote as early as next week is the latest move in Republicans' seven-year effort to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act and remove the taxes it imposes on high-income individuals.

"I am unalterably opposed to the Trump-Republican health care plans. The plan has passed in the House, as you know, and was just released a few minutes ago in the Senate. I'm going to do everything that I can to defeat the Trump-Ryan health care proposal, but that should not be a shock to anybody," Sanders said.

Sanders, who supports universal health care, acknowledged that his Republican counterparts have significant policy disagreements on these serious issues, but said there is one fundamental issue upon which there should be no debate.

"And that is, no matter what our political view — whether we are progressives, conservatives or moderates — we must do everything that we can to preserve American democracy and oppose the current drift toward authoritarianism that I believe President Trump represents."

In Sanders' assessment, no other president in U.S. history has told as many "outrageous and blatant lies" as Donald Trump has — to delegitimize the country's electoral system.

He said there's no evidence to back Trump's assertion that 3 million to 5 million people voted illegally in the last election, but that making this claim sent a message to Republican governors to accelerate efforts to suppress the votes of minorities, poor people, senior citizens and young people.

According to Sanders, Trump's rhetoric also preemptively casts doubt on the results of any future election he might lose — delegitimizing any president who succeeds him. He also reminded listeners that Trump was the principal spokesman for the so-called birther movement based on the "vicious and racist lie" that former President Barack Obama was not born in the U.S. and therefore not eligible to be president.

Sanders took issue with Trump's mischaracterization of London Mayor Sadiq Khan's response to a recent terrorist attack to promote his controversial travel ban and his routine vilification of journalists as "scum," "horrible" and "lying, disgusting people."

"When Trump claims that all of mainstream media is 'fake news,' not to be believed, what does that say to the average American?" Sanders said.

Back in January, when Trump's lie about his inauguration crowd size was a major story, Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, said, "Better to get your news directly from the president. In fact, it might be the only way to get the unvarnished truth."

Sanders said that this mindset that only the president can be trusted for the truth suggests something very dark for the future of democracy, and that the Founding Fathers protected the press in the Bill of Rights because a "well-informed citizenry is necessary for democracy to function correctly."

He said Trump's outbursts at judges are not simply "temper tantrums" but a blatant disregard for the separation of powers enshrined in the Constitution — attempts to delegitimize a coequal branch of government so it cannot constrain his power.

"On the campaign trail he attacked a federal judge's impartiality because of his ethnic background. And as president he attacked the federal judge who blocked his immigration executive order, referring to him as a 'so-called judge.' What is even more alarming was Donald Trump's insistence that the judiciary itself did not have the power to even review his immigration orders," he said.

(Source: Yahoo News)

## UN leader softens his predecessor's criticism of Iran missile tests

1 → A spokesman for Mr. Guterres, Stéphane Dujarric, did not immediately respond to a query about the difference.

Iran has long said the missiles are its defensive bulwark in an increasingly hostile region. Since it has already promised not to make nuclear weapons, its leaders have said, the missiles by definition cannot carry them. Iran has also said that Resolution 2231's language does not ban missile tests.

Some disarmament experts suggested that Mr. Guterres' report decreased the possibility of United Nations penalties against Iran over its missile development.

Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, a Washington-based group, said the difference between Mr. Ban's and Mr. Guterres' reports was subtle.

Mr. Guterres "may have adjusted the language in the report out of recognition that further sanctions of Iranian entities tied to missile development or production will not likely succeed in reducing, or even slowing, Iran's ballistic missile program," Mr. Kimball said.

Sanctions intended as punishment for missile tests, he said, could even strengthen hard-liners in Iran "who want to accelerate the program in response to U.S. pressure."

## Spain's Alvaro Arbeloa retires after career with Liverpool, Real, West Ham

Former Liverpool, Real Madrid and West Ham defender Alvaro Arbeloa has revealed he is retiring from football.

Arbeloa, 34, made three Premier League appearances for the Hammers last season before being released and in an interview with Marca he revealed he was hanging up his boots.



"It's time to say goodbye," he said. "Physically I was okay to keep playing."

The former Spain full-back spent three years with Liverpool before returning to the club for whom he made his senior debut, Real Madrid, in 2009.

He won one La Liga title and the Champions League twice, making over 200 appearances before signing for West Ham last August.

Asked what he believes the future has in store for him now he has called time on his playing career, he suggested he would be open to a return to the Bernabeu.

"Madrid is the club of my life, I will never call to ask for a job, but I am always available to offer myself," he said.

(Source: ESPN)

## Federer reaches 11th Halle final after beating Khachanov

Top seed Roger Federer will challenge for a ninth Halle Open title after reaching the Wimbledon warm-up event final with a 6-4 7-6(5) victory over rising Russian talent Karen Khachanov on Saturday.

The 18-times grand slam champion, who captured the Australian Open, Indian Wells and Miami titles this year, skipped the entire claycourt season to improve his chances of winning a record eighth title at the All England Club.

Despite a shock exit from Stuttgart on his comeback last week, Federer has improved in Halle and has not lost a set. He will now play the winner of the other semi-final between Frenchman Richard Gasquet and local favorite Alexander Zverev.

The pair traded breaks in the first two games but Federer made amends by grabbing a second one to restore his advantage and clinch the first set on his second set point.

The Swiss lured Khachanov to the net on several occasions, including at 4-4 in the second set and the Russian dumped a forehand volley into the net to give Federer two break points.

But instead of serving out the set, the top seed was broken again and the Russian even held two set points at 6-5 before the world number five recovered and forced a tiebreak.

He converted his first match point to reach an 11th Halle final.

(Source: Reuters)

## Grigor Dimitrov says Dan Evans' positive test for cocaine is 'sad for tennis'

Grigor Dimitrov declared Dan Evans' positive test for cocaine as "sad for tennis" after the Bulgarian reached the semi-finals at Queen's.

Dimitrov had just beaten Medvedev 6-3 3-6 6-3 in the last eight at the Aegon Championships when he was asked to reflect on the announcement made by Evans at a hotel less than one mile away.

Evans admitted he had failed a drugs test in April and the International Tennis Federation have handed the British No 3 a provisional suspension.

"I just heard this, I had no clue. Any news like this, it's sad for tennis," Dimitrov said.

"It is what it is, and there are circumstances to everything. As I said, it's sad to see. Whatever it is after that, I think it's to be determined."

Evans will now miss Wimbledon and could face a ban of up to four years, but that will be of little concern to Dimitrov, who is fast becoming a contender for the title at the All England Club.

Dimitrov, 26, is gaining momentum and will face Spain's Feliciano Lopez at Queen's for a place in Sunday's final.

"Feli is an extremely good grass court player. He knows his way around the court pretty well. Very experienced, as well," Dimitrov said.

"I'm in the semi-final of Queen's. I'm pretty positive, excited to get out there and perform again.

"It's been a while since I have felt that good on the court, so I'm just going to try to use that momentum, and whoever I play I'm going to focus entirely on my side of the court."

(Source: Sky Sports)

## American Leeper breaks Pistorius record in 400 meters

American Blake Leeper broke South African Oscar Pistorius's T43 paralympic world record in the 400 meters when he ran 45.25 seconds at the U.S. athletics championships on Friday, officials said.

"It is hard to believe. To run 45.25 to break the world record, I am excited for the future," said the 27-year-old Tennessee native who lives in Southern California.

Leeper finished a non-advancing seventh in the semi-final race despite competing as a double amputee.

Pistorius set his record of 45.39 seconds at Daegu, South Korea in August, 2011.

Paralympic gold medalist Pistorius is serving a six-year jail term after being found guilty of murdering his girlfriend in 2013.

(Source: Reuters)

# Lionel Messi is turning 30 but he isn't remotely close to the end...

Lionel Messi is turning 30 - but he isn't remotely close to the end, as Barcelona are already making plans to win big with him for years to come.

It was after Luis Enrique's last ever game as manager of Barcelona that he was asked how long he thought Lionel Messi could last.

"There's plenty more to come," he said. "He is an extra-terrestrial. The No 1 without any doubt. He looks after himself to the maximum and he is not a player who relies on his physique."

On Saturday as he blows out thirty candles on his birthday cake and thinks about the thirty trophies he's won to date, he certainly won't be thinking about the end of his career.

Thirty is the new 25 for most players who look after themselves - and Messi is showing no signs of slowing down.

Last season he wasn't the only one proving age matters less than it did before the days of sports science, intelligent nutrition, perfect pitches and fewer 'reducer' tackles.

Cristiano Ronaldo finished strongly for Real Madrid, belying his 32 years - with Dani Alves producing a spectacular second half of the season despite celebrating his 34th birthday in May.

Messi is not the kind of player who relies on the electric pace that is usually the first weapon in a player's armory to disappear with the passing of time.

He gets away from people because of quick feet, stays on the ball because of a low center of gravity and upper body strength - with those attributes set to last



for a long while to come.

There may be a change in position with Barcelona using a 3-4-3 more regularly next season and Messi finding himself starting games at the top of a midfield diamond.

The club have re-signed Gerard Deulofeu and Borussia Dortmund's Ousmane Dembele is on their wish-list. The idea is Deulofeu, and in the long term Dembele, will join Luis Suarez and Neymar

in attack, with Messi drifting dangerously behind them.

Wherever Messi starts he'll do his own thing when the game starts. A coach hasn't been born yet who would dare try to limit the Argentine's freedom with any real credibility.

Another reason to believe there will be more trophies to come is the fact he'll stay at the Nou Camp - where the football suits him in familiar surroundings.

El Mundo Deportivo's 'Get me to Manchester City' story this week raised eyebrows but there seems little desire to leave for anywhere other than Argentina and to Newell's Old Boys at the end career - which is a long way off yet.

All of which is good news for football and bad news for La Liga defenders.

Messi marries his long-term partner Antonella Rocuzzo next Friday, 20 years after they first met.

This week the Spanish public prosecutor backed his plea for his 21-month prison suspended sentence to be wiped completely in return for him paying an extra fine.

Things are good. He has two sons, Thiago, four, and Mateo one and the family are happy living in Gava the beach town just south of Barcelona.

All that's missing is a new contract that Barca directors hope Messi will sign by the end of July.

They have no intention of letting him leave. They know, just like Enrique, that he will be their most important player for a good few years yet.

(Source: Daily Mail)

## Hiddink urges FIFA to pick best referees for World Cup



FIFA should pick the best referees for the World Cup and not limit its list to one per nation, according to coaching great Guus Hiddink.

Hiddink, a two-time World Cup semi-finalist, told The Associated Press three or four referees should be chosen from the same country if they were best at a job getting more complex as video review is tested.

"It's not a World Cup for referees, it's a World Cup for football teams," the Dutch coach said in St. Petersburg where he is analyzing Confederations Cup games for American broadcaster Fox Sports.

"We want to have the best teams so we want to have the best referees as well. Not necessarily European. Without looking to their nationality, which are the best referees?"

At the 2014 World Cup, FIFA had 25 referees from 25 different countries working in Brazil.

"I don't think it's a law that you have to have from every country or from every continent a referee," said Hiddink, who led the Netherlands in 1998 and co-host South Korea in 2002 to within a game of

the World Cup final.

While Hiddink's South Korea benefited from controversial referee decisions, his Australia team in 2006 lost to a stoppage-time penalty against eventual winner Italy in the Round of 16.

Hiddink likes the video review which FIFA hopes will get fast-track approval for the 2018 World Cup, though with one concern. Trials are scheduled next season in only some national competitions worldwide.

"Referees who are coming from, with all respect, less developed countries regarding this system, let them learn as soon as possible," he said.

Hiddink's favorite from the first two rounds of group games was Chile and Germany playing to a 1-1 draw in Kazan.

It was a "beautiful example" of trying to outplay an opponent from the first whistle.

Hiddink, whose last coaching job was with Chelsea in 2016 after Jose Mourinho was fired, enjoys the fast pace of Champions League games."

(Source: AP)

## 'Nadal will enter Wimbledon mentally and physically fresh,' says coach



World No. 2 Rafael Nadal has skipped all the grass-court tournaments in the lead-up to the 2017 Wimbledon, causing analysts to question his chances at the third Grand Slam of the year. However, coach Carlos Moya feels the Spaniard will be "mentally and physically fresh" entering The Championships which begin July 3.

After storming to a record 10th French Open championship without dropping a set, Nadal took time off and visited Ibiza for a holiday before returning home to Mallorca. A few days ago, Nadal posted an Instagram picture of him cruising around on a Gocycle G3, an electric bicycle. Nadal has also been training against local Spanish players on the grass courts in Mallorca, giving coach Moya enough reasons to be optimistic.

On his decision to skip the Queen's Club Championships, an ATP World Tour 500 series tournament, Moya told El Espanol that the 31-year-old Nadal "is listening to his body" and practising on the grass-courts in Spain instead of exerting himself ahead of Wimbledon 2017. "One of the important factors that led us

to skip Queen's is that there are grass-courts here (in Mallorca).

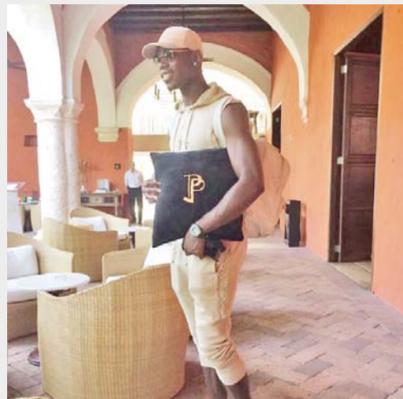
"I would have suggested him to do the same thing anyway, but training on Mallorca courts makes everything easier. The clay-court season was tiring, especially mentally. Rafa is listening to his body, even though he wants to play. He has realised that health is the first thing, and he will go to Wimbledon being mentally and physically fresh," said Moya, who won the 1998 French Open during his career.

In recent years, Nadal has had a horrific run at the All-England Tennis Club. After beating Tomas Berdych for his second Wimbledon crown in 2010, Nadal lost to Novak Djokovic in the 2011 final before suffering second, first, fourth and second round exits through 2012 to 2015. Last year, Nadal was forced to pull out of The Championships due to a persistent wrist injury. The Spaniard is playing his best tennis since 2014 and enters the 2017 Wimbledon as a legitimate threat to the likes of Andy Murray, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic.

(Source: IB Times)



arsenal #Icon. #Legend. #King. #Thierry.



paulpogba Just so you can say Pogpillow #holidays #colombia



uefachampionsleague 30 Happy birthday to @fcbarcelona + #UCL icon Leo#Messi

# Saeid Marouf: I love volleyball and I live with volleyball

"I love volleyball and I live with volleyball." These are the words of Iran's charismatic captain Mir Saeid Marouflakrani, better known by the shorter version of his name - Saeid Marouf.

"When you play against the best teams in the world, first, you must think about what you are going to learn from them," the 31-year-old Iranian setter pondered. "The World League is a new experience for us because we are new in the world of volleyball. We have played in the World League just for the last four years. We are not Italy or Brazil - they have played in the World League for 28 years. We are new in the world of volleyball and we must learn a lot of things from Poland, from Brazil, from Italy, from Russia, from USA..."

"You know, I love volleyball and I live with volleyball. I came from a volleyball family. I want to enjoy my job. Without volleyball, I couldn't do anything in my normal life. A day when we don't have practice is not a normal day for me. The court is always very special for me." Only someone with this kind of attitude towards his profession can reach the heights that Saeid Marouf has reached.

The 1.89-metre-tall volleyballer is considered one of the best setters in the world. He was named Best Setter of the 2014 World League and a number of other competitions at the world or the continental level during his career so far. Marouf was also declared Most Valuable Player at the 2013 Asian Championship. Furthermore, he was voted Iranian Sportsman of the year for 1394 (2015-2016) of the Iranian calendar. With gold medals from the Asian Championship, the Asian Games and the AVC Cup on the national team level, and from the European Champions League, the Asian Club Champi-



onship, as well as the national Super Leagues of Russia and Iran, on the club level, Mir Saeid Marouflakrani is a living sports icon both to his countrymen and internationally.

At 31, he is a true leader for his teammates and

a shining example for the young generations. And to everyone's relief, he is here to stay... "For sure, while I can play, I will play..." promises Marouf at the end of his interview.

(Source: FIVB)

## Haji Safi reaches agreement with Panionios



**SPORTS** Sepahan midfielder **d e s k** Ehsan Haji Safi has reportedly reached an agreement with Greek football club FC Panionios.

According to reports in the local media, Haji Safi, who played for FSV Frankfurt last year, is going to continue his football in a European league once again.

Haji Safi bade farewell to his teammates on Friday and a source close to Sepahan club said that he

has reached an agreement with Panionios.

Haji Safi is set to team up with fellow countryman Masoud Shojaei at Panionios.

Haji Safi has represented Iran at the 2011 AFC Asian Cup, 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2015 AFC Asian Cup, in addition to Sepahan at the 2007 FIFA Club World Cup.

He has scored six goals in 82 caps for Iran.

## Hamid Estili candidate for Naft Tehran job



**SPORTS** Ex-Iran midfielder **d e s k** Hamid Estili has been nominated to take charge of Naft Tehran.

Estili is mostly remembered for his memorable goal and goal celebration against the U.S. at the 1998 FIFA World Cup.

He has already coached Steel Azin, Persepolis and Rah Ahan football teams.

Former Foolad coach Dragan Skocic also is a candidate to coach the Tehran-

based football team.

Former Persepolis and Iran attacking midfielder Ali Karimi had reportedly reached an initial agreement with Naft Tehran.

Naft Tehran parted company with Ali Daei at the end of the last season. Naft Tehran finished in ninth place under coaching of Daei.

The former Bayern Munich striker also led Naft Tehran to Iran's Hazfi Cup title.

## Volleyball U21 World Championship: Iran beat Ukraine

**SPORTS** Iran earned their **d e s k** second win at the 2017 FIVB Volleyball Men's U21 World Championship on Saturday.

The Persians defeated Ukraine 3-2 (25-19, 25-21, 23-25, 20-25, 15-13) in the competition's Pool C.

Behrouz Ataei's men have been scheduled to face Argentina on Sunday.

"This match was very important for us, if we could win this, we could go to another level - and we did! Ukraine was not playing on their top level yesterday but today they were very strong and

ticked all the boxes of strong volleyball play. My players are tired, Italy's match was a hard match and now I'm very happy with this result," Ataei said in the post-match news conference. The FIVB Volleyball U21 World Championship runs from June 23 to July 2 in two cities Brno

and Ceske Budejovice in Czech Republic.

The World Championship is the nineteenth edition of the international volleyball tournament and the world championship for men's national teams under the age of 21, organized by the sport's world governing body, FIVB.

## Iran's Katayoun Khosrowyar attends AFC Women's Coaching Tutors Course

The first AFC Women's Coaching Tutors Course taking place in Shanghai, China PR, this and next week, highlights the importance of coaching for women's football development.

The 25 participants are leading coaches from 22 AFC Member Associations, with two participants from the continent's biggest countries China PR and India, and a representative of the Oceania Football Confederation, the Papua New Guinea Football Association.

The main objective of the course is to train and promote talented women coaches to become coach educators, leaders and role models for future women's team coaches. All the participating coaches have an 'A' or 'B' coaching certificate, a prerequisite for participation.

The tutors at the 10-day program are the AFC's Assistant Technical Director and Head of Coach Education Wim Koevermans and UEFA pro-licensed coach and former head coach of the Netherlands, Russia, Scotland and South Africa women's national teams Vera Pauw. Both Vera and Wim are also former international players.

The course was initiated by AFC Women's Football Committee Chairwoman Moya Dodd. She was awarded the 2016 International Olympic Committee Women and Sport Award and used the grant she received towards organizing the first-ever AFC Women's Coaching Tutors Course, with the AFC providing the bulk of the funding. UEFA also contributed to the course by providing Vera as an expert, and the Chinese Football Association (CFA) and Shanghai FA hosted the program at the Shanghai Oriental Green Boat Training Centre, which is an elite



athlete training centre, with national youth players on hand for practical sessions.

Moya said: "I am delighted to have the support of the IOC, in partnership with the AFC, to create this new course. Getting a better gender balance in coaching remains a big challenge in football, even though we have some high-profile success stories like Chan Yuen Ting in Hong Kong and Asako Takakura in Japan."

"Training 25 women across Asia and Oceania to become coach tutors will create a new dynamic in coach education, and amplify our progress towards gender equality in technical roles. They will also have a strong network - each other - to help meet future challenges."

Most of the coaches are taking part in a coach educator training program for the first time. They will benefit from educational sessions to update their skills and football knowledge and the practical part of the

program in Shanghai includes attending two women's team matches, one featuring a China youth team and another in the Chinese Women's Super League.

Katayoun Khosrowyar, Head Coach of Islamic Republic of Iran women's under-16 national team, said: "I was very lucky to be nominated for this course after being appointed head coach for the under-16 Iran national team. This course in Shanghai has been a great opportunity to reconnect with old friends and help me prepare for this new chapter in my life."

"This AFC tutors' course is a 'full package', including new coaching techniques, styles and advice on how to be a more effective instructor to guide future coaches in becoming Asian role models. The CFA and Shanghai FA have been 100 percent helpful and hospitable in hosting us and making sure we have everything we need to have a successful course."

Rachel Wadunah, Head Coach of Papua New Guinea women's under-20 national team said: "I am very grateful for this opportunity that has been given to me. The course content is very informative and of high level football compared to where I come from. I am also amazed there are so many 'A' and 'B' license female coaches in Asia!"

"I am the head coach of the under-20 national team and in four weeks' time, we are going to play in the FIFA Under-20 Women's World Cup qualifying competition. I will definitely use the learnings from this course in the campaign."

(Source: AFC)

## Chelsea boss Antonio Conte plots £96m double swoop for Juventus duo

Chelsea boss Antonio Conte is plotting a huge £96m double swoop for Juventus duo Leonardo Bonucci and Alex Sandro this summer.

Conte is looking to raid the elite division of his homeland in search of top talent, with Bonucci and Sandro heading the list.

Reports in Italy claim the Chelsea boss will push hard for the Juventus pairing, while fellow Italian boss Roberto Mancini, of Zenit St Petersburg, is also planning to plunder the league.

The front page of Italian publication Corriere dello Sport carries the message 'Attenti a quei due' - 'watch out for these two,' while bearing the images of both Conte and his compatriot Mancini.

The coverage points to Chelsea's upcoming 'assault' on Juventus, with the current champions hoping to prise away two of their star assets.

Conte had been said to be unhappy with transfer policy at Stamford Bridge this summer, after making his desire to improve upon his title winning squad known.

The Blues have also recently put on hold their talks with Belgian goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, who is believed to be looking to double his £90,000 per week wages.

Meanwhile former Premier League boss Mancini has his eyes set on Roma, who have recently signalled their selling ambition after allowing Egyptian winger Mohamed Salah leave for Liverpool.

Mancini is said to be putting together a €45m (£40m) double bid for Leandro Paredes and Kostas Manolas, with the hope of bringing the pair to Russia.

(Source: Daily Mail)



## Manchester United making progress in pursuit of Alvaro Morata

Manchester United are making progress in their pursuit of Alvaro Morata but have yet to agree a fee with Real Madrid, sources have told ESPN FC.

Manager Jose Mourinho has identified Morata as the striker he wants to replace Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

There is still hope a deal could be secured before United head to the United States for their preseason tour on July 9.

Sources have told ESPN FC that agreeing personal terms should be straightforward because of Morata's willingness to move to Old Trafford.

There had been a fear that uncertainty surrounding the future of Cristiano Ronaldo could force Madrid to stall on any deal for the Spain international.

But reports in Spain suggest Ronaldo will now stay at the Bernabeu while Marca, which has close ties to president Florentino Perez, reported that the Spanish champions are set to push on with a bid for Monaco striker Kylian Mbappe.

French newspaper L'Equipe reported on Friday that Zinedine Zidane, once Mbappe's idol, called the striker to convince him to join Madrid said they were ready to sell one of their "BBC" stars to make room for him.

Mbappe's arrival would further limit opportunities for Morata, who made only 14 La Liga starts last season.

The striker, who returned to Real Madrid last summer after two seasons at Juventus, scored 20 goals in 43 appearances last term.

There has been no offer for him from Chelsea, who are also in the market for a striker with Diego Costa set to depart and have been linked with Everton's Romelu Lukaku.

United also have an interest in Andrea Belotti, although Torino have said a €100 million buyout clause in his contract -- only available to clubs outside Italy -- must be met before the 23-year-old is allowed to leave.

(Source: Soccernet)

## Joachim Low warns of 'intense' Cameroon's threat

Joachim Low has warned Germany that Cameroon are dangerous opponents as they look to secure a place in the Confederations Cup semifinals on Sunday.

Germany need just a point from the encounter in Sochi, but Cameroon can advance if they win by two clear goals.

"Cameroon have nothing left to lose," Low told a news conference on Saturday. "They can only advance if they win."

"Tomorrow will be one of the most challenging and physically intensive games. When you see how fast they play, what pace they have in their players in attack, this mixture is not seen often. They are so persistent and fast."

In a bid to counter that pace, Low said he intended to restore Roma defender Antonio Rudiger to his back four.

"I had already planned this because Cameroon have such crazy quick players," he said. "These are also Rudiger's strengths with his strength and his speed."

That will be one of a number of changes, although Low cautioned against wholesale alterations to his starting lineup with qualification not yet secure.

"I cannot change too much," he said. "I cannot swap seven or eight because the basic structure must remain. But four or five changes are conceivable."

Low has never failed to reach the semifinals of a major tournament since taking charge of Germany.

Cameroon, meanwhile, have never beaten Germany in their three previous meetings.

(Source: Soccernet)

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NEWS IN BRIEF



"The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui" to go on stage on Kish Island

**A R T TEHRAN** — Iranian director Amir d e s k Dejagam plans to stage German playwright Bertolt Brecht's "The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui" at the Persian Gulf Hall of Kish Island on Monday.

The 1941 play is about the rise of Arturo Ui, a fictional 1930s Chicago mobster, and his attempts to control the cauliflower racket by ruthlessly disposing of the opposition.

The play is a satirical allegory of the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany prior to World War II.

Sorush Taheri, Tinu Salehi, Bahar Qasemi, Bahram Ebrahimi and Amir Karbalaizadeh are the main members of the cast for the play that will remain on stage until July 3.

The play previously went on stage at Tehran's Hafez Hall during April and May.



Tahereh Mafi's "Shatter Me" translated into Persian

**C U L T U R E TEHRAN** — Iranian-American author d e s k Tahereh Mafi's "Shatter Me" series has recently been translated into Persian by Shabnam Saadat.

Published in 2014, the series includes five books: "Shatter Me", "Destroy Me", "Unravel Me", "Fracture Me" and "Ignite Me".

The collection, which is an action-packed young adult novel, tells the story of a young girl Juliette. Her touch is fatal and some people are after her to use it as a weapon.

Parian Publications in Tehran is scheduled to release the collection in the near future.



Iranian cities to host photo exhibits of master musicians

**A R T TEHRAN** — Exhibitions of photos and d e s k documents of Iranian master musicians will open in 25 Iranian cities on July 1.

Iranian journalist and music researcher Forugh Bahmanpur has gathered the collection over the years.

The Iran Music Association in Tehran and its branches in 24 cities including Yazd, Hamedan, Bushehr, Qom, Kerman and several others are the organizers of the event.

Two Iranian films to compete in Armenian festival

**A R T TEHRAN** — Two Iranian films will be d e s k competing in the Fresco International Film Festival running in the Armenian capital Yerevan from August 26 to 31.

The short "Senses" by Nahal Dashti and the animation "The Servant" by Farnush Abedi will be competing with 26 more films from other countries, the organizers have announced.

The animated film "Servant" is about a servant who becomes a master and a bug becomes his servant. After a while, the man comes to understand that he has begun a game that has no rules.

Stars come out for European premiere of Edgar Wright's "Baby Driver"

**LONDON (Reuters)** — Big Hollywood names hit the red carpet in London on Wednesday for the European premiere of British director Edgar Wright's new heist movie "Baby Driver".

The movie stars "The Fault in Our Stars" teen heartthrob Ansel Elgort as the titular Baby, a tinnitus-afflicted getaway driver who falls foul of a group of crooks, led by Oscar-winners Kevin Spacey and Jamie Foxx.

The film, which was shot in the U.S. city of Atlanta, features elaborate car chases, choreographed to the music that Baby listens to in order to drown out the ringing in his ears.

Foxx, who won the Academy Award for Best Actor for 2004's "Ray", said he valued Wright's creativity in an industry where film franchises often dominate.

"The stuff that Edgar Wright does was just amazing, and there's not a lot of that right now, so you appreciate the fact that you get a chance to be in something original and something fantastic that really - it creates its own genre in a sense," he said.

Isfahan festival to honor directors Marziah Borumand, Rasul Sadr-Ameli

**I ->** Twelve foreign movies including "My Friend Raffi" by Arend Agthe from Germany, "Little Grey Fergie" by Peder Hamdahl from Norway and "Bo's Most Exciting Holiday Ever" by Diederik Ebbinge from the Netherlands will be competing in the festival.

Among the highlights are also "Fortune Favors the Brave" by Norbert Lechner from Germany, "Belle and Sebastian" by Christian Duguay from France, "Jill and Joy's Winter" by Saara Cantell from Finland and "Come Along" by Igor Sterk from Slovenia.

Seven animated films and eighteen short and mid-length movies from Iran, Japan, France, Austria, Russia, Germany, Canada, India and several others are scheduled to go on screen at the festival.

"The Boy and the Beast" by Mamoru Hosoda and "Chieri and Cherry" by Makoto Nakamura, both from Japan, "Long Way North" by Remi Chaye from France, "Hero Quest" by Maksim Fadeev from Russia and "Release from Heaven" by Ali Nuri-Oskui from Iran are among the animated films.

In addition, nine Iranian short and feature-length films and animations will go on screen at the international section of the festival.

They include "The Skater" by Fereydon Najafi, "The End of the



This combination photo shows directors Marziah Borumand (L) and Rasul Sadr-Ameli in an undated photo.

Dreams" by Mohammad-Ali Talebi, "The Orangish Tree" by Amir-Hushang Moïn and "Dreams in One Day" by Sadeq Javadi.

Also included are "The Win Suddenly Rises" by Edris Samani, "Are You Volleyball?" by Mohammad Bakhshi, "Sweet Dream" by Maryam Abdoli, "Hi"

by Mohammadreza Hajigholami, and "Sheyda's Homework". The festival will be running in Isfahan from June 30 to July 6.

IAF to screen Kiarostami's films

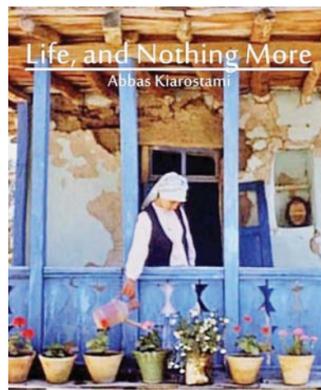
**A R T TEHRAN** — The d e s k cinemathèque of the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) will be screening a selection of films by Abbas Kiarostami opening on July 1.

The films include "Close Up", "Life and Nothing More", "The Taste of Cherry", "Under the Olive Trees" and "Take Me Home", IAF announced in a press release published on Saturday.

This is part of the program held on the sidelines of the exhibit "In Praise of Life", featuring a collection of 43 posters by Kiarostami.

An honoring ceremony has also been arranged on July 3 at the Shahnaz Hall of the forum.

The screening program will be running for three days at the forum located on Musavi St., off Taleqani Ave.



A poster for "Life and Nothing More" by Abbas Kiarostami

Portraits of Iranian eternal figures to go on show in Tehran center

**A R T TEHRAN** — An d e s k exhibition of portraits of Iranian eternal figures, famous for their lifetime endeavors in different areas, will open in the Niavaran Cultural Center on Friday.

"The exhibit named 'Frame of Exaltation' aims to introduce those who have had active participation in the art, culture and academic fields to be honored as eternal figures to the young generation," secretary of the exhibit Mahmud As'adi has said in a press release.

"We also mean to aid the continuation of this worthy tradition of selecting and honoring eternal figures in the country," he added.

A collection of artworks including paintings, calligraphy and calligraphic-paintings also created by the eternal



figures is due to open on the sidelines of the exhibit.

"The artworks belong to Masters Mahmud Farshchian, Yadollah Kaboli, Mohammad Ehsai, Gholamhossein Amirkhani, Ali-Akbar Sadeqi and several others," he remarked.

A number of eternal figures are expected to attend the opening ceremony. The exhibit will be running until July 7.

Actor Johnny Depp apologizes for 'poor taste' Trump assassination joke

**GLASTONBURY, ENGLAND (Reuters)** — Johnny Depp on Friday apologized for joking about assassinating U.S. President Donald Trump, saying his remarks were in "poor taste."

"The Pirates of the Caribbean" star spoke during an appearance at Britain's Glastonbury music festival on Thursday when he pondered how long it had been since an actor had killed a U.S. president.

His remarks drew rebukes from Trump supporters, and the White House described Depp's remarks as "sad."

"President Trump has condemned violence in all forms and it's sad that others like Johnny Depp have not followed his lead," the White House said in a statement.

"I hope that some of Mr. Depp's colleagues will speak out against this type of rhetoric as strongly as they would if his comments were directed to a Democratic elected official."

Depp on Friday said his remarks were not intended maliciously.

"I apologize for the bad joke I attempted last night in poor taste about President Trump," Depp, 54, said in a statement. "It did not come out as intended, and I intended no malice. I was only trying to amuse, not to harm anyone."

Depp was at a screening of his 2004 film "The Libertine" at the Glastonbury festival when discussion turned to the topic of Trump. Depp said he thought the president "needs



Actor Johnny Depp poses on a Cadillac before presenting his film "The Libertine", at Cinemageddon at Worthy Farm in Somerset during the Glastonbury Festival in Britain, June 22, 2017. (Reuters/Dylan Martinez)

help."

"Can we bring Trump here?" Depp asked the audience. "... When was the last time an actor assassinated a president?"

Actor John Wilkes Booth assassinated U.S. President Abraham Lincoln in 1865.

"Now I want to clarify, I'm not an actor," Depp continued. "I lie for a living. However, it's been a while, and maybe it's

time." The U.S. Secret Service said it was aware of Depp's comments but had no other comment.

Some Republicans criticized Depp's comments as part of a grim trend.

"I'm sick of celebrities getting away with such disgusting comments," Ronna Romney McDaniel, the Republican National Committee's chairwoman, wrote on Twitter.

Depp, whose latest "Pirates of the Caribbean" movie was panned by critics in May, has had more than a year of bad press following an acrimonious divorce from actress Amber Heard and a lawsuit against his former business managers that has detailed claims of lavish spending by the actor.

Earlier in June, Delta Air Lines and Bank of America pulled their sponsorship of a New York production of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" because the assassinated Roman ruler was portrayed as a Trump-like businessman.

Last month comedian Kathy Griffin posed in photographs holding up a fake bloody, severed head resembling Trump. She also apologized but was fired from hosting CNN's annual New Year's Eve broadcast.

Last week, a gunman opened fire on Republican lawmakers in who were practicing for a charity baseball game.

Radiohead take aim at 'strong and stable' May at Glastonbury

**GLASTONBURY, ENGLAND (Reuters)** — Britain's Radiohead returned to Glastonbury's Pyramid Stage on Friday, 20 years after a legendary performance at the festival, with a set that mocked Prime Minister Theresa May's election campaign and pulled songs from nearly all of their albums.

The band from Oxfordshire, England, first headlined in 1997, one of the wettest years in the festival's history, when they lifted a sodden crowd with music from their album "OK Computer".

Featuring songs about alienation, capitalism and modern technology, the band's third album sounds oddly prescient in a politically divided and anxious Britain in 2017.

Fans expected "OK Computer" to feature heavily in the set on Friday, the same day a version of the album was re-released, including tracks that did not make the cut 20 years ago, called "OK Computer OKNOTOK 1997 2017".

The band opened with "Daydreaming" from last year's "A Moon Shaped Pool", followed by "Lucky", the first of a host of "OK Computer" tracks that included "Exit Music (For a Film)", "Let Down", "Paranoid Android" and "Karma Police".

Singer Thom Yorke changed the lyric at the end of the

song "Myxomatosis" to "strong and stable", apparently mocking a slogan that May repeated many times in her campaign.

"See you later Theresa; Shut the door on the way out," Yorke said, in one of his few addresses to the crowd.

May has yet to form a stable government in Britain, more than two weeks after an inconclusive national election.

Radiohead's two-hour show went down well with fans,



Radiohead performs on the Pyramid Stage at Worthy Farm in Somerset during the Glastonbury Festival in Britain, June 23, 2017. (Reuters/Dylan Martinez)

but left some newcomers underwhelmed, evidenced by a steady stream of people heading off to other stages.

Tom Martin, a 30-year old from Cork, Ireland, was not disappointed by a band he had long followed. "It was the best gig I've ever seen," he said.

Earlier in the day, English duo Royal Blood drew a huge Pyramid Stage crowd for a masterclass in straight, hard rock as their second album "How Did We Get So Dark?" went straight to the top of the charts.

Lead singer and guitarist Mike Kerr, who formed the band with drummer Ben Thatcher in 2013, said playing the main stage at the world's biggest greenfield festival was "life-changing, terrifying and ridiculous".

The festival started with a minute of silence on Friday morning in memory of recent terror attacks and the devastating Grenfell Tower fire before Hacienda Classical eased revelers into the first day of music.

Peter Hook, the bass player from Manchester bands Joy Division and New Order, led the crowd in reflecting on "our hopes and our prayers for life, love and freedom, the things we are here to celebrate".

Other performers on the main stage at Worthy Farm in south-west England, included 81-year-old Kris Kristofferson and English indie band the xx.