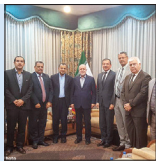




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# Nuclear snap-back can offset U.S. violation

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — d e s k

The Iranian government can show a stronger reaction to violation of nuclear deal if violated by the other parties, a senior official with the Expediency Council said late on Tuesday.

"Iran can activate its yellow cake production plant based on the article 36 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action reached between the Islamic Republic and Group 5+1 (the U.S., Russia, China, France and the UK plus Germany)," Secretary of the Expediency Council Mohsen Rezaee said.

Rezaee made the remarks as he was elaborating the Expediency Council's view towards a Majlis bill on countering the U.S. adventurist measures in the region.

His remarks came after Ali Akbar Salehi, the director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said that Iran can resume uranium enrichment to the purity of 20 percent in five days in the Fordow plant if necessary.

Iran and the G5+1 reached a deal in Vienna in 2015 which stresses curbing Iran peaceful nuclear activities in exchange for removal of sanctions.

Washington has been a major cause of problems in the way of the implementation of the deal over past two years. →2



## 'New Trump strategy for Afghanistan to prove abortive'

**By Javad Mohammadi**

Leader of the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan Party Mohammad Mukhtar Mufleh said increasing America's military presence in Afghanistan, under Trump's new strategy, will yield no fruitful result.

In an exclusive interview with the Tehran Times, Mohammad Mukhtar Mufleh, Leader of the Islamic Movement of Afghanistan Party and advisor to the Afghan Chief Executive, touched upon the new strategy announced by Trump government towards Afghanistan and presented the stance taken by the Afghan government on the US measure.

"Increasing the number of foreign militants cannot resolve issues faced

by Afghanistan as well as that allowing dominance of non-Muslims over Muslims is against the law of Islam," he clarified.

He said similar to Russian's fruitless presence in Afghanistan, giving any opportunity to American forces would mark another wrong measure.

Mufleh recalled that presence of US forces, although effective in some other parts of the world, can exert no positive effect in Afghanistan given that the two sides lack religious commonalities.

He underlined that military presence of Americans had no compliance with the goals and interests pursued by the Afghan nation since US forces mainly sought domination. →13

## Iran-Europe trade up 94% on year in H1

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — d e s k

Trade exchange between Iran and Europe increased 94 percent in the first half of 2017 from the same time in 2016, based on the latest figures released by the European Union's statistics agency Eurostat.

Iran-Europe trade stood at €9.9 billion in the first six months of this year, while the figure was €5.1 billion in the time span from January to June 2016, the same report confirmed.

The upward trend of Europe's imports of Iranian crude oil, following

the implementation of Iran's nuclear deal with G5+1, has played an important role in pushing the figure up, the report added.

Europeans imported €5 billion of goods from Iran in the first half of 2017, showing 224 percent growth from €1.54 billion in the same period in 2016.

Their exports to the Islamic country in the first six months of 2017, registering 37 percent rise, hit €4.9 billion, while the figure stood at €3.56 billion in the same time in the preceding year.

## Fresh Saudi airstrikes kill dozens in Yemen's Sana'a

Dozens of people have lost their lives in fresh air raids conducted by the House of Saud regime warplanes against residential areas in Yemen's western Sana'a Province.

Arabic-language al-Masirah television network reported on Wednesday that the bodies of at least 30 people were recovered from the rubble of an inn in Sana'a province's Arhab district, which was hit by Saudi air raids.

Hussein al-Tawil, head of the Sana'a branch of Yemen's Red Crescent, confirmed the death toll as rescuers continued to pull bodies from the rubble.

Hakim Al Masmari, a journalist with the Yemen Post, told Al Jazeera from Sana'a that air raids hit several areas of the city.

"It is probably the biggest massacre Yemen has witnessed by the Saudi-led coalition," Al Masmari told Al Jazeera by phone.

The death toll is expected to rise as an estimated 70 people were in the inn prior to the aerial assaults.

Meanwhile, the Saudi regime air raids, which targeted security centers in the south of Sana'a City, killed two Yemenis and injured over 10 others, according to the report.

Separately on Wednesday, Yemeni army soldiers and allied popular forces launched rocket and artillery attacks on positions held by Saudi regime mercenaries in several areas across Yemen.

The attacks killed three Saudi regime mercenaries in Yemen's southern Ta'izz and Bayda provinces.

■ **Saudi warplanes kill 3 Hadi loyalists in friendly fire incident**

Elsewhere, Saudi regime warplanes have mistakenly killed three troops loyal to Yemen's Saudi regime-backed former president and injured eight more.

## Erdogan conveys Turkey's unease over U.S. support for Kurdish militants

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday told U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis that Turkey felt unease over U.S. support for Kurdish militant group YPG, presidential sources said.

In a statement following meetings between Mattis and Turkish officials, the sources said the two sides emphasized the importance of maintaining the territorial integrity of Syria and Iraq, as Kurdish northern Iraq gears up for an independence referendum in September.

Both Turkey and the United States have voiced concerns over the referendum, with the former's Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, saying earlier on Wednesday he would ask Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani to cancel it.

Cavusoglu told reporters in Baghdad that Turkey's expectation from Irbil, the capital of the autonomous northern Iraqi Kurdish region, is "very plain and clear - and that is the annulment of this referendum decision."

Masoud Barzani, the Kurdish region's president, announced the vote on whether to secede from Iraq would be held on September 25.

Cavusoglu says Turkey has been saying all along that "the referendum decision is wrong" and that he would tell the Iraqi Kurdish leaders so "once more" when he visits Irbil later on Wednesday.

(Source: Reuters)



**EDITORIAL**

**By Mohammad Ghaderi**  
Tehran Times editor-in-chief

## Negative balance; Afghanistan's rescue

Afghanistan has been suffering from a positive balance policy for many reasons.

A positive balance in the concepts of international relations and foreign policy is a policy that less powerful states, a policy that less powerful states give ways and credit to more powerful countries in return for a privilege, while reassuring equal distribution of credits between the powerful countries to keep them both pleased.

The policy had precedent in the history of Iran before the Islamic Revolution, when the Qajar and Pahlavi dynasty continued to give credits to the then two powerful states, Russia and England, simultaneously.

History, of course, tells us that the adoption of such a policy has not only had any effect on controlling the insatiable appetite of colonial powers, but also failed to secure and safeguard the national interests.

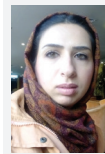
This has happened to our Afghan brothers for many years, while the adoption of such policy over the years has not had the slightest impact on the improvement of the situation in the country.

An overview of the current situation in different parts of Afghanistan suggests that damages caused by years of conflict and combat with foreigners and their mercenaries on the territory of the country largely deprived the nation of its will and ability to recover quickly.

That's precisely why countries like the United States are allowed to intervene in various countries like Afghanistan.

In any case, the new generation looks more than ever before to revive its intrinsic capabilities and is determined to rebuild a livable and independent Afghanistan, an issue that I was deeply touched by as I travelled to Afghanistan a few months back and saw Kabul up-close and personal.

Accordingly, what can be more than anything else to meet this need of the eastern neighbor of Iran is to look inside and adopt a negative policy in their foreign policy, a policy that can be the strongest response to the interference of foreigners, especially the United States to take their hands off Afghanistan.



**ARTICLE**

**By Setareh Behroozi**  
Tehran Times Journalist

## Tehran councilors set sights on cleaner sky

As evidence displays, the capital's air pollution and traffic congestion are amongst the main concerns of the newly-elected Tehran City Council.

During the first session of the fifth Tehran City Council on Wednesday, the chairman Mohsen Hashemi highlighted the need for following-up on different urban management plans with the aim of reducing traffic congestion and decreasing air pollution in the capital as one of the main programs of the council.

Hashemi proposed the expansion of public transportation as the solution for environmental problems Tehran citizens are grappling with.

He also pointed to reducing general expenses and government involvement in urban management and improving cultural and social services as the aims of the new council.

He is of the opinion that air pollution, massive traffic jam, noise pollution, urban environment damages, the sprawling city, run-down areas, labor children, etc. are all making Tehran ill-suited to inhabit.

Hashemi, 56, is the eldest son of the late Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani - the fourth president of Iran.

The pro-reform Hope list succeeded to win all the 21 council seats in Tehran on May 19 election, replacing principlist who took the helm of the fourth council.

■ **Najafi in, Qalibaf out**

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf who served in the post of Tehran Mayor for 12 years, left his office on Tuesday for the new mayor.

Mohammad Ali Najafi, the sole candidate for the post of Tehran mayor, was formally elected at the first session of Tehran City Council on Wednesday.

All Tehran city councilors voted for Najafi, a reformist figure who held office at the Education Ministry from 1988 to 1997.

However, the mayor will be officially inaugurated after getting approval from the Ministry of Interior which is due to take place in coming days.

All in all, Tehran citizens hope for a brighter future and a more vibrant city with the new council setting sights on a cleaner sky.



© IRNA / Mojtaba Mohammadlo

## Iran Handmade Carpet Exhibition opens

The 26th Iran Handmade Carpet Exhibition opened its doors to the public at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Wednesday.

A total of 730 carpet producers are participating in the exhibit which will run till August 29. The showcase will also include nomadic rugs and carpets.

Iran exported \$89 million of hand-woven carpets during the first four months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21- July 22, 2017), showing a year-on-year increase of 3.7 percent in terms of value.



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Security issues behind Iraq's reluctance to lift visa restrictions: minister

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian interior minister **de s k** has said that due to security reasons the Iraqi government is reluctant to lift visa requirements for Iranian pilgrims.

"Iraqi officials say the security conditions are not good enough for hosting a massive crowd (of pilgrims) without a visa," Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli said on Wednesday.

He also said that if Iraqi authorities manage to resolve the issues, it's possible that visa restrictions be lifted for Iranians during Arbaeen, an event marking the 40th day after the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussein (AS).



Iraq not to be used to attack Iran: al-Abadi

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iraqi Prime Minister **de s k** Haider al-Abadi says Iraq would not allow any offensive to take place against neighboring Iran through its borders, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

Al-Abadi stressed that Iraq is not a passage through which foreign countries can invade its neighbors, saying in the event a war breaks out between Iran and the U.S., Iraq will not be used to invade the Islamic republic.

"Iraq has its own interests and we expect other countries to respect Iraq's independence," he added.



Rouhani's attendance at UNGA under consideration: Vaezi

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani's chief of staff, Mahmoud Vaezi, said Wednesday that whether the president would attend this year's United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York is under consideration.

The UNGA is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations (UN), the only one in which all member nations have equal representation.

The General Assembly meets under its president or secretary-general in annual sessions, the main part of which lasts from September to December and resumed part from January until all issues are addressed.



New government to have at least one woman ambassador: Zarif

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said that the new administration will have at least one woman as ambassador.

In an interview with ISNA on Wednesday, Zarif said during his first four-year term in office, a woman deputy foreign minister as well as a woman ambassador were appointed in the ministry for the first time since the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

"Now we are hopeful about having one or two women ambassadors," he said, expressing unwillingness to promise an exact number.



Iran reduced challenges facing Syrian people: Syrian PM

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran played an important **de s k** role in reducing challenges facing Syrian people and stood by Syria in fighting terrorism, the Syrian prime minister said on Wednesday.

Imad Khamis made the remarks in an interview with al-Mayadeen TV channel.

He appreciated Iran for the help it provided to the Syrian people, saying Iran and Syria have long-standing ties.

There is now tendency among Syrian companies to engage with the countries of the East, especially Iran, Russia and China, he added.



City, village councils across Iran commence term

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Ali Asghar Ahmadi, political deputy to the interior minister, said 38,000 village councils and 1,245 city councils officially began their four-year term on Wednesday.

With the start of this term, Ahmadi said, more than 150,000 people were added as main members to city and village councils across the country.

City and village councils are local councils which are elected by public vote in all cities and villages throughout Iran. Council members in each city or village are elected by direct public vote to a 4-year term.

# Saudi Arabia has been harmed by its policies: Zarif

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said that Saudi Arabia's policies in the Middle East region are "destructive" and "harmful" to the country itself.

"Iran has always sought good relations with its neighbors, but we believe that Saudi Arabia's policies in the region have been destructive which have harmed the country," he told ISNA in an interview published on Wednesday.

He said, "A safe and powerful region serves the interests of all the regional countries. Iran's policy in interacting with the regional countries and Saudi Arabia has been within this framework and has not changed."

More "coordination" and "integrity" are required in decision making at the regional arena, he said.

Elsewhere, Zarif said that Saudi Arabia should review some of its policies.

"Such revision will be followed by Iran's positive response," he added.

It is essential for Saudi Arabia to

change its views on regional issues, the Iranian foreign minister said.

"We have always been ready to hold talks with Saudi Arabia. We have always made all efforts to reach a political strategy to settle regional crises. However, unfortunately, Saudi Arabia has not taken actions in this line and sought to gain benefits from creating tension in the region," Zarif said.

He expressed hope that the Saudi officials would make decisions based on wisdom which will help them come to the understanding that Iran seeks stability and peace.

Iran and Saudi Arabia have been at odds since the conflict arose in Syria in 2011. The relations suffered more setbacks as 464 Iranian pilgrims were crushed to death in a stampede in Mecca in September 2015.

The relations started deteriorating as a number of Iranians attacked the Saudi diplomatic missions in Tehran and Mashhad in protest to the execution of the pro-democracy cleric



Nimir al-Nimir in January 2016. Though senior Iranian officials condemned the move, Saudi completely cut ties with Tehran.

## Haley in Vienna to push inspection of Iran military sites

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley met with International Atomic Energy Agency officials in Vienna on Wednesday for what she described as a fact-finding mission, which is part of President Donald Trump's review of the deal Iran made with world powers to curb its nuclear program in return for the lifting of most sanctions.

Haley asked on Tuesday if the UN atomic watchdog plans to inspect Iranian military sites to verify Tehran's compliance with a 2015 nuclear deal.

According to Reuters, she said she was traveling to Vienna to ask questions, not to push the IAEA to do anything.

Reports by the IAEA have shown Iran to be in compliance with its landmark agreement with six major powers.

In the meantime, the Washington Post said Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, complained to IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano that Haley's visit was intended to sow doubt about the nuclear agreement.

"Even before the visit takes place, the way it is



planned and publicized and the signal that it sends have notable detrimental consequences for the successful implementation of the JCPOA," Zarif wrote in a letter to Amano, the Post reported.

In April, Trump ordered a review of whether a suspension of sanctions on Iran related to the nuclear deal - negotiated under President Barack Obama - was in

the U.S. national security interest.

Ali Akbar Salehi, the director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said on Tuesday that Iran can resume uranium enrichment to the purity of 20 percent in five days in the Fordow plant if necessary.

Based on the nuclear agreement, Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear program in exchange for the lifting of economic and financial sanctions. The deal was signed between Iran, the European Union, Germany and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council including the U.S. It went into effect in January 16, 2016.

On August 15, Rouhani said that Iran will quit nuclear agreement "in hours" and return to the previous stage if sanctions are re-imposed on the country.

Rouhani's comments were referring to sanctions imposed by the U.S. Treasury Department on six Iran-based satellite companies on July 28 after Iran launched the Simorgh (Phoenix) satellite carrier rocket into space a day earlier.

Last month, the two houses of the U.S. Congress ratified non-nuclear sanctions against Iran. The sanctions were mainly targeted at Iran's missile capability.

## Lebanon, Iran view Israel, terrorism as threats to regional stability

Lebanon's prime minister has held talks with an Iranian deputy foreign minister on the threats posed by the Israeli regime and terrorism to the troubled Middle East region.

The meeting between Saad Hariri and Hossein Jaber Ansari, which took place in Beirut on Tuesday, focused on Tehran-Beirut ties as well as the latest developments in Lebanon and the broader Middle East region.

During the meeting, Hariri referred to Israel and terrorism as the two primary threats facing Lebanon and the entire region.

Hariri described dialogue and cooperation among different Lebanese political parties as the reason behind the Beirut government's recent achievements, stressing that the country was determined to continue that approach.

Jaber Ansari, for his part, said the two threats highlighted by the Lebanese premier provide a common ground for boosting Tehran-Beirut ties and regional cooperation.

He further voiced the Islamic Re-



public's readiness to bolster relations with Lebanon in all fields and termed the Arab country as a good example of national consensus and domestic coexistence.

In a press conference following the meeting, the Iranian official said he had held talks with Hariri on the need to resolve the Syria crisis through dialogue

and to continue the counter-terrorism fight there.

Jaber Ansari expressed Iran's resolve to bolster cooperation with Lebanon, especially in the political and the economic areas.

Asked about Lebanon's recent counterterrorism operation near the Syrian frontier, he said that the Lebanese mili-

tary, backed by the Hezbollah resistance movement and the nation's support, have managed to score major victories against the terrorists.

He expressed hope that the joint cooperation will continue until terrorists are eradicated from the border region.

The Iranian official further congratulated the Lebanese nation, government, army and the resistance on the battlefield victories.

The Lebanese military launched its anti-terror operation on Saturday. Hezbollah also started a simultaneous offensive against the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group from the Syrian side of the frontier.

Last month, Hezbollah concluded a joint counter-terrorism campaign with the Syrian army at Lebanon's highlands of Aarsal.

Jaber Ansari, who arrived in Lebanon on Monday for a three-day visit, has already held talks with President Michel Aoun, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

(Source: Press TV)

## Iran to 'bake' yellowcake for Trump?

While President Donald Trump is expected to recertify whether Iran is in compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal in September, Tehran has warned that it is capable of resuming high-level uranium enrichment within five days.

The remarks come as the growing tensions between the White House and Tehran have been red hot in recent weeks amid speculations in Iran that the US may tear up the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, aka nuclear deal, concluded be-

tween the Islamic Republic and world powers, including the US, in 2015.

"If we have determination, at most in five days we can start 20 percent enrichment in Fordo [nuclear plant]," the chief of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Ali Akbar Salehi, told Iranian state media on Tuesday.

Mehrdad Seyed Asgari, a Norway-based Iranian commentator, suggests that President Trump seems unlikely to kill the nuclear accord as the domestic ten-

sions in the US appear to weaken him.

"A group of observers believe that Trump does not tend to create new tensions, therefore he would probably recertify Iran's commitment to the deal in September," Seyed Asgari told Trend.

Chief strategist Steve Bannon is Trump's latest top aide leaving his post at the White House, which is taken by many as an indication of possible changes in the US foreign policy.

The US Congress requires the adminis-

tration certify every 90 days whether Iran is in compliance with the nuclear deal. Trump's administration has already declared Iran in compliance, as required by law, twice during his tenure.

However, Trump's remarks, forecasting that the US would declare Iran non-compliant when the next review is due in September, have cast shadow over the future of the landmark nuclear deal between Iran and the world powers.

(Source: Trend)

## Nuclear snap-back can offset U.S. violation

**1 ->** U.S. President Donald Trump has recently signed, according to Foreign Policy, a team of his close aides to assess Washington's withdrawal from the nuclear deal.

The U.S. has tried to circumvent the JCPOA by imposing new sanctions against Iran under the pretext of its regional policies.

"Our first priority is to protect the JCPOA, but not at any cost. If the other side stands by the JCPOA, we will stand by it. If they seek to sabotage it [the deal],

we hope that would not happen, we will do something that will surprise them," Salehi, a nuclear physicist, told the IRIB, the national TV.

To counterbalance the United States' post-JCPOA sanctions that violated the deal, the Iranian Majlis on July 18 approved the single urgency of a bill on countering the U.S. adventurist measures in the region.

The bill was proposed by the Iranian MPs to reciprocate the U.S. Senate's bill titled Countering Iran's Destabilizing Activities Act of 2017.





# Pakistan says U.S. must not make it a 'scapegoat' for Afghan failures

Pakistan rejected on Wednesday the United States criticism of its efforts to fight terrorism, saying it should not be used as a scapegoat for the failure of the U.S. military to win the war in Afghanistan.

The U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled his policy for Afghanistan on Monday, committing to an open-ended conflict there and singling out Pakistan for harboring Afghan Taliban insurgents and other militants.

U.S. officials later warned that aid to Pakistan might be cut and Washington might downgrade nuclear-armed Pakistan's status as a major non-NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) ally to pressure it to do more to help bring about an end to America's longest-running war.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif added his voice to a chorus of indignation in Pakistan over the U.S. criticism, reiterating Pakistan's denial that it harbors militants.

"They should not make Pakistan a scapegoat for their failures in Afghanistan," Asif said in an interview to Geo TV late on Tuesday.

"Our commitment to war against terrorism is unmatched and unshaken."

Pakistan has for years been battling militants who are seeking to overthrow the state with bomb attacks and assassinations.

But critics say the Pakistani military nurtures other extremist factions, including the Afghan Taliban, which are seen as useful to Pakistan's core confrontation with old rival India.

Asif said Pakistan had suffered great losses from militancy - the government estimates 70,000 people have been killed



since Pakistan joined the U.S. "war on terrorism" after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States.

But he said Pakistan's efforts to fight terrorism were being taken for granted and dismissed the notion the United States could "win war against terror by threatening us or cornering us".

"Our contributions, sacrifices and our role as a coalition country have been disregarded and disrespected," Asif said.

The relationship between Pakistan and the United States has endured pe-

riods of extreme strain during the past decade, especially after al-Qaeda militant leader Osama bin Laden was found and killed by the U.S. special forces in Pakistan in 2011.

The U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who is due to meet Asif in coming days, on Tuesday outlined a range of options to change Pakistan's approach but conceded there were concerns about putting too much pressure on Pakistan.

Asif said Pakistan was also angered by Trump's appeal to India to do more in Af-

ghanistan.

"Attempting to isolate Pakistan will not yield anything but a dangerous sharpening of strategic fault lines," said Sherry Rehman, a senior opposition politician and former Pakistani ambassador to the United States.

Former cricket star turned opposition politician Imran Khan said Pakistan should finally learn a valuable lesson: "Never to fight others wars for the lure of dollars," he said on Twitter.

(Source: Reuters)

## Iraqi forces make gains against ISIL in Tal Afar push

Iraqi forces on Tuesday said they were making gains in their ongoing push to dislodge fighters from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group from the northern city of Tal Afar, as the United States Pentagon chief made a surprise visit to Iraq in a show of support.

The joint Iraqi forces took control of al-Jazirah area, on the eastern side of Tal Afar, as troops and members of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU/Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi) started heading towards the city center, a security source told the DPA news agency.

ISIL terrorists, estimated to number up to 1,000, reportedly responded with artillery fire, as government forces massed outside the city. The city has been under ISIL control since 2014.

Al Jazeera's Osama bin Javaid, reporting from Erbil in northern Iraq, quoted military sources as saying that forces are moving in from the western and northeastern front of the city, adding that they have taken control of an oil refinery "and breached the city's walls".

Army, police and units of the PMU also took "full control" of Tal Afar's al-Kifah and al-Nur districts, PMU spokesman Ahmed al-Assadi was quoted by the AFP news agency as saying.

Assadi said Iraqi forces had encircled the city despite "intense" fighting, adding that the offensive would likely last for weeks.

In his weekly press conference, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi described Tuesday's progress as "excellent", calling it an "indication of the enemy's collapse".

Tal Afar, located some 70km west of the recently recaptured city of Mosul, is a key ISIL hub between Iraq's second largest city and the Syrian border.

In July, Iraqi troops routed ISIL in Mosul, allowing it to advance into Tal Afar on Sunday. ISIL still controls other



areas in the south and west of Mosul.

The latest offensive has forced thousands of people to flee to the country's Kurdish region, according to the United Nations.

Since Friday, more than 3,000 people had arrived at two emergency sites, many with just the clothes on their back, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

"These internally displaced persons (IDPs) carried a minimal amount of clothes; some only had what they wore, some were partially clothed," IOM said in a statement, adding that thousands more are expected to flee in the coming days.

Most of the residents had to walk for hours in arduous conditions before reaching safe areas, the statement said. Many "arrive exhausted and in poor health, often with critical levels of malnutrition among children, some unable to move."

UNHCR, the UN's refugee agency also said it had received some 9,000 people at the Hamman al-Ail transit center in the past week, and it was preparing to accom-

modate nearly 30,000 more.

As the fighting continues, the U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis, who made an unannounced visit to Iraq, declared that "ISIS (ISIL) is on the run", following his meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in Baghdad.

"Today, the security for the Iraqi people has been greatly improved," Mattis said. "Cities have been liberated. People are free from ISIS ... the economy is recovering."

But Mattis declined to make any predictions on the battle.

"ISIS's days are certainly numbered, but it's not over yet, and it's not going to be over anytime soon," he said.

Mattis then left for Erbil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdish semi-autonomous region, where he is scheduled to hold a meeting with President Massoud Barzani.

A key sticking point in the meeting is Iraqi Kurdistan's plan for an independence referendum on September 25, strongly opposed by the U.S. and Baghdad.

Barzani, who has so far resisted international pressure to delay the referendum, said the vote would not be postponed "for the Kurds' own good" despite reports that the U.S. administration is critical of the vote, according to Kurdish news website Rudaw.

"Waiting for Baghdad to approve the referendum is dangerous," said Barzani. "The Kurds have agreed to start a new page with Baghdad, but the Baghdad government's mentality has not changed," he added.

The Iraqi constitution "gives us the right to self-determination."

Brett McGurk, the White House envoy to the anti-ISIL coalition, told the Associated Press news agency that a referendum at this time "would be potentially catastrophic to the counter-ISIS campaign".

(Source: agencies)

## Thousands of Rohingya flee Myanmar for Bangladesh

Thousands of Rohingya have crossed into Bangladesh since Myanmar announced a military build-up in Rakhine state earlier this month, community leaders said Wednesday.

Rakhine in northern Myanmar has been gripped by violence since October, when militants attacked police posts.

That sparked a bloody military crackdown that the United Nations believes may amount to ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya, a mainly Muslim minority living in Buddhist Myanmar.

On August 12 authorities in Myanmar said hundreds of troops had moved into Rakhine as it ramps up counterinsurgency efforts there.

Rohingya leaders in Bangladesh told AFP that at least 3,500 had arrived since then, piling pressure onto already overcrowded refugee camps in the Cox's Bazaar area near the Naf river that divides the two countries.

That is despite stepped-up patrols by Bangladeshi border and coast guards, who said this week they had pushed back a boat carrying 31 Rohingya, including children.



Buddhist-majority Myanmar has long faced criticism for its treatment of the more than one million Rohingya who live in Rakhine, who are seen as interlopers from Bangladesh, denied citizenship and

access to basic rights.

Dhaka estimates that nearly 400,000 Rohingya refugees are living in squalid refugee camps and makeshift settlements in Cox's Bazar.

They included more than 70,000 who arrived in the months that followed the crisis in October, many bringing stories of systematic rape, murder and arson at the hands of Myanmar soldiers.

But Rohingya are also increasingly unwelcome in Muslim-majority Bangladesh, where police often blame them for crimes such as drug trafficking.

Dhaka has floated the idea of relocating tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees to a remote, flood-prone island off its coast, despite opposition from rights groups.

On Wednesday the UN refugee agency said it was "deeply concerned" by the reports of a boat carrying Rohingya being turned back.

"UNHCR is deeply concerned by this incident, which as the coast guard reported, involved women and children who said they were fleeing violence," a UNHCR spokesman told AFP.

"In the current security context, the majority, if not all, of these people crossing from Myanmar into Bangladesh are believed to be fleeing insecurity," he said.

(Source: AFP)

## Taliban suicide bomber kills civilians in Helmand

A Taliban suicide bomber killed at least seven people and wounded 42 others in southern Afghanistan on Wednesday, an official said, in an attack targeting police.

"A suicide bomber detonated an explosive-filled car in a parking lot near the main police headquarters in Lashkar Gah," Omar Zhwak, a spokesman for the governor of Helmand province, told reporters.

In addition to four soldiers, a girl and two women were among those killed, Zhwak said, expressing fears that the death toll could rise further.

Children were studying at a nearby mosque when the explosion took place, Zhwak said, adding they were injured in the violence.

Authorities said that a group of police officers who had lined up to collect their pay had been targeted, according to Al Jazeera's Jennifer Glasse, reporting from Kabul.

"As there have been so many threats on Afghan banks that pay out government and security forces, there is actually a bank branch inside the police station," she said. "Police officers were lined up when the attack happened."

The Taliban effectively controls or contests 10 of 14 districts in Helmand.



### ■ Intensified fighting

Intensified fighting last year forced thousands of people to flee to Lashkar Gah from neighboring districts.

Early in July, an American soldier was killed and two others were wounded in an attack in Helmand province while conducting operations against the Taliban.

Since it launched an annual spring offensive in late April, the Taliban has been mounting lethal assaults on the Afghan army and police outposts in Helmand.

The attack comes a day after the United States President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. would continue fighting in Afghanistan to avoid the "predictable and unacceptable" results of a rapid withdrawal from the country.

In response, the Taliban said that Afghanistan would become a "graveyard" for American soldiers.

Trump did not provide the number of additional troops that would be sent to the conflict, America's longest war, though U.S. officials said before the speech they expected him to go along with a Pentagon recommendation for nearly 4,000 new troops.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Turkey again warns against holding Iraqi Kurdish referendum

Turkey's foreign minister has reiterated his country's demand that the Iraqi Kurds cancel a scheduled referendum for independence.

Mevlut Cavusoglu told reporters in Baghdad that Turkey's expectation from Irbil, the capital of the autonomous northern Iraqi Kurdish region, is "very plain and clear - and that is the annulment of this referendum decision."

Masoud Barzani, the Kurdish region's president, announced the vote on whether to secede from Iraq would be held on September 25.

Cavusoglu says Turkey has been saying all along that "the referendum decision is wrong" and that he would tell the Iraqi Kurdish leaders so "once more" when he visits Irbil later on Wednesday.

Turkey - which has a large Kurdish population and is battling Kurdish rebels - is strongly opposed to an independent Kurdistan state.

(Source: AP)

## Britain urged to recognize sovereign Palestinian state

Palestinian officials have called on Britain to recognize an independent Palestinian state and press the Israeli regime to end its colonial activities in the occupied lands.

In a meeting with British minister of state for the Middle East and North Africa, Alistair Burt, in the West Bank city of Ramallah, Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki said British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson should recognize Palestine in a statement akin to the Balfour Declaration that led to the creation of Israel.

The document issued in November 1917 by the then British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour said British government "views with favor the establishment in Palestine of" Israel.

It set the stage for the Nakba Day (the Day of Catastrophe), when hundreds of thousands of Palestinian fled or were expelled from their homes by Israel during the 1948 war.

"Balfour became famous for his promise ... to establish" Israel on the land of Palestine, Maliki said, adding, "I call for the current British foreign secretary to be famous for giving the Palestinians a promise called the Johnson declaration" that recognizes a Palestinian state."

Separately on Tuesday, Saeb Erekat, the Palestinian chief negotiator and secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), sat down with Burt in the West Bank city of Ariha (Jericho).

Erekat urged Britain to recognize the Palestinian state within the 1967 borders and to reconsider plans to celebrate the 100th anniversary for the Balfour Declaration.

"Britain ... and the rest of the world have to obligate the Israeli government to accept the principle of [the so-called] two states based on the June 4, 1967 borders, that is an independent state of Palestine with East Jerusalem [al-Quds] as its capital ... and a halt to all Israeli colonial activities," Erekat told his British guest.

Israel occupied the West Bank, including East al-Quds (Jerusalem), during the Six-Day War in 1967. It later annexed East al-Quds in a move not recognized by the international community.

(Source: Press TV)



NEWS IN BRIEF



China's oil imports from Iran up 0.45% in July yr/yr

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — China imported 568,720 barrels per day (bpd) of Iranian oil in July 2017, an increase of 0.45% from July 2016, Reuters reported on Wednesday.

Russia held its spot as China's top crude oil supplier for a fifth month in a row in July, with shipments up 54 percent over a year earlier, the report added.



Iran's oil production capacity stands at 3.95m bpd

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Based on the latest statistics, Iran's oil production capacity stands at 3.95 million barrels per day (bpd) of which currently 2.2 million bpd is being exported to the world markets, Iranian Deputy Oil Minister Ali Kardor was quoted as saying by ISNA.

According to the official, Iran's oil production is in compliance with the ceiling approved for the country in OPEC, non-OPEC deal in January 2016.



Intl. glass exhibition running in Tehran

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iran's 1st international exhibition of glass and related industries (Iran GlassTec) kicked off on Wednesday at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds.

Several Iranian and foreign exhibitors from different countries including France, Italy, Germany and China are participating in this four-day event, IIRB news reported.

The latest innovations and products in glass industry including machinery, equipment, mining and processing of raw materials, glass in the building industry, facade glass, doors and windows and office furniture are being showcased in the exhibition.

Russia's Sberbank makes record 185.6bl rouble Q2 profit

Sberbank, Russia's largest bank, said on Wednesday it made a net profit of 185.6 billion roubles (\$3.14 billion) in the second quarter, posting a record quarterly result and beating analysts' forecasts.

Analysts polled by Reuters had forecast Sberbank would make 167.4 billion roubles in net profit in April-June.

Sberbank said its net interest income increased to 357.6 billion roubles in the second quarter from 339.3 billion roubles a year ago, while return-on-capital was at 24.8 percent versus 22.8 percent a year ago.

Alexander Morozov, deputy chief executive of the bank, said in a statement that results were supported by growth in lending, stable margins and an increase in commission income. The bank's loan book grew by 4.7 percent from the first quarter. *(Source: Reuters)*

Trump's comments dent U.S. stock futures

U.S. stock index futures were lower on Wednesday as investors appeared to be in a risk-off mode a day after President Donald Trump said he will shutdown the U.S. government if necessary to build a wall along the border with Mexico. *(Source: Reuters)*

India to set up ministers' panel to oversee state bank consolidation

India's federal cabinet has approved a mechanism to oversee consolidation in the state-run banking sector, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said on Wednesday.

Jaitley said a ministerial panel will be set up to supervise merger proposals from banks' boards, adding that the objective of the planned consolidation was to create strong banks. *(Source: Reuters)*

Russia, Turkey negotiate contracts worth \$820m

**MOSCOW (Sputnik)** — Russian and Turkish businesses have made preliminary agreements on contracts that together are worth approximately \$820 million within the framework of the 86th Izmir International Fair, Russian Deputy Industry and Trade Minister Georgy Kalamonov told Sputnik Tuesday.

"There has been a tight schedule of meetings during the whole period of the exhibition. According to the Russian Export Center alone, at least 196 meetings were held, which resulted in negotiations of contracts worth nearly \$820 million," Kalamonov stated.

The deputy minister added that over course of the fair, Russia presented several new helicopters models, emergency equipment for miners, the newest machine tool equipment as well as an updated series of GAZ vehicles.

Iranian companies ready to join Iraq's energy projects

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said Iranian companies are ready for contribution to Iraq's oil and gas projects, Shana reported.

The minister made the remarks in a meeting with an Iraqi delegation who visited Iran on Tuesday to pass on their oil minister Jabar al-Luaibi's congratulations to Zanganeh regarding his retention as Iran's oil



minister.

During this meeting Zanganeh noted that Iranian oil ministry is ready for expansion of mutual cooperation with Iraq in oil and gas industries.

The official also expressed his ministry's support for continuous gas exports to Iraq.

Iran in June started exporting 7 million cubic meters (mcm) of gas to Iraq on a daily basis and the two

sides have it on the agenda to increase the figure to 35 mcm/d.

In the meeting, Iraqi oil minister's representative expressed his country's satisfaction with the progress in joint fields development projects' follow up meetings and said, "We hope the two countries' cooperation in joint fields expand to other areas of the oil industry as well."

China's robot revolution may affect the global economy

China is installing more robots than any other nation, and that may affect every other nation.

Shipments jumped 27 percent to about 90,000 units last year, a single-country record and almost a third of the global total, and will nearly double to 160,000 in 2019, the International Federation of Robotics estimates.

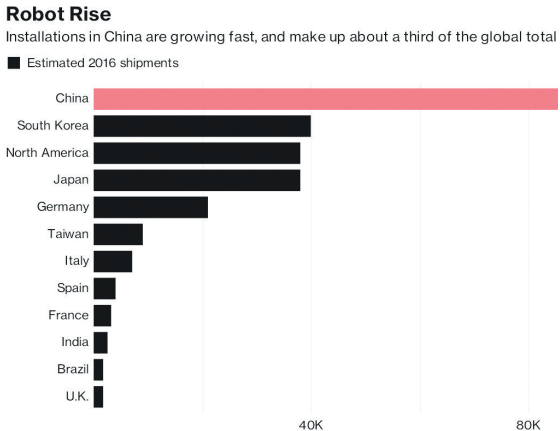
The blazing pace hasn't dented Chinese wages — yet — but it might influence the global economy, according to a report this week by Bloomberg Intelligence.

Automation may drive productivity gains and export competitiveness, but the rising use of robots also threatens to exacerbate domestic income inequality, undermining consumption. And that could spill out beyond the country's borders, economists said.

"By turbocharging supply and depressing demand, automation risks exacerbating China's reliance on export-driven growth — threatening hopes for a more balanced domestic and global economy," BI economists Tom Orlik and Fielding Chen wrote.

Pay gains are intact. Domestic manufacturing workers with a high-school education saw wages rise 53 percent from 2010 to 2014, according to China Household Finance Survey data cited by BI.

"Increasing use of robots should be bad news for medium-skilled workers, especially those in sectors where routine work means scope for automation,"



Source: Int'l Federation of Robotics, National robot associations, Bloomberg Intelligence **Bloom** Orlik and Chen said. "Yet wage growth in China remains rapid, and if anything medium-skilled workers conducting routine work are doing better than average."

Robots are at the core of the government's sweeping Made in China 2025 plan to upgrade factories to be highly automated and technologically-advanced. Replacing assembly-line workers will also help it to offset a shrinking working-age population.

Big UK firms face 2018 slowdown amid Brexit uncertainty

The long-term effects of the Brexit vote on the economy will become clear next year when profit growth at some of the UK's largest companies is expected to drop considerably, according to a new study.

An analysis of forecasts for 2018 gives a grim view on the future for some of the UK's biggest companies, with expectations that there will be a marked slowdown.

The survey of projections compiled by UBS for the Financial Times (£) shows the uncertainty of a post-Brexit

future has resulted in some companies putting plans on hold or shifting operations to other parts of the EU.

It comes as WPP, the world's largest advertising group, slashed growth forecasts for the second time amid cuts in ad budgets.

Analysts expect profit growth at Britain's largest companies to rise by 7.2% in 2018, according to the FT analysis, compared with an anticipated 19% this year. Meanwhile, gains by companies listed in London as a result of currency fluctuation have been

eclipsed by longer term worries.

"The currency is a kneejerk reaction that mathematically comes through," Nick Nelson, head of European equity strategy at UBS, told the FT. "Years two, three and beyond there's more uncertainty."

Among the illustrations of the slowdown are Burberry's planned trenchcoat factory in Leeds being put on hold and a 75% drop in investment in the car industry in the first half of this year. Nissan said it would continue production in the UK after re-



ceiving a promise of no tariffs or extra bureaucratic burdens on the sector.

*(Source: The Guardian)*

Euro-area factories feed best growth spell for economy in years

**Manufacturing Boost**  
Factory activity in the euro area unexpectedly climbed in August



Source: IHS Markit **Bloomberg**

Surging demand for 'Made in the Euro Area' goods is feeding an economy that is creating jobs and finally also seeing price growth accelerate.

A Purchasing Managers' Index for manufacturing rose to 57.4 in August from 56.6 in July, according to IHS Markit. That's the highest reading in two months and compares with a median estimate for a slowdown in activity. Momentum in services unexpectedly cooled to a seven-month low.

The 19-nation euro economy gathered pace in the second quarter as more countries joined the recovery. Steadily declining unemployment and business confidence at a decade high are feeding confidence that inflation -- still well below the European Central Bank's goal -- will eventually pick up on a sustained basis.

Manufacturers recorded an "impressive" performance, with export

orders surging at the fastest pace in more than six years, IHS Markit said, adding that demand in services grew at the slowest rate since January. Input costs and output prices in both sectors increased at faster rates in August.

"This is another positive set of numbers for the euro area, which continues to enjoy its best growth spell for a number of years," said Andrew Harker, associate director at IHS Markit. A stronger intake of factory orders "bodes well for the labor market as firms will likely look to hire extra staff to deal with outstanding work."

ECB policy makers are set to start a discussion about the future path of monetary stimulus in September, when new economic projections will be published. Asset purchases are currently scheduled to expire in December.

*(Source: Bloomberg)*



# Two October surprises could boost oil prices above \$50

Oil prices will remain stuck in a range near \$50 a barrel unless one of two global hotspots delivers an October surprise to the market, jolting the cost of crude higher, according to Helima Croft, global head of commodity strategy at RBC Capital Markets.

The first potential shock Croft and her team at RBC are monitoring is a debt default by Venezuelan oil giant Petroleos de Venezuela SA. Oil production from the state-owned PDVSA has steadily slipped as the country grapples with a financial crisis after the collapse in crude prices in 2014 and years of economic mismanagement.

"They have \$3.5 billion in national oil company debt coming due in October-November. If they default, that could be significant for Venezuela's production outlook," Croft told CNBC's "Squawk on the Street" on Tuesday.

Lower crude production from Venezuela would tend to support the oil market, which has been oversupplied for years.

The second surprise would come if the United States abandons an international deal that lifted sanctions on Iran. President Donald Trump could refuse to certify that Iran is complying with an accord regarding the country's nuclear program. That could lead to the renewal of sanctions, which could impact Iran's oil production.

John Kilduff, founding partner at energy hedge fund Again Capital, said these geopolitical concerns may be somewhat overstated. He noted that the five other nations that negotiated the Iran nuclear deal would probably break with the U.S. and refuse to snap sanctions back on Iran.



He also noted that Venezuela is indebted to Russia and China. Russian oil giant Rosneft has amassed a large stake in PDVSA's U.S.-based refiner Citgo by bankrolling Venezuela. China has long lent Venezuela money in exchange for oil.

However, Rosneft has recently suggested it is done

lending to PDVSA, which has less than \$10 billion left in reserves, according to Croft.

"The math simply does not work on PDVSA staying solvent" without help from Russia and China, she said.

"So we think this default is a clear and present danger."

(Source: CNBC)

## Exxon duped public over climate concerns

Exxon Mobil Corp. spent the last 40 years undermining public concern over climate change, even as its own scientists determined man-made global warming was real and a serious threat, according to Harvard University researchers writing in a peer-reviewed journal.

"ExxonMobil contributed to advancing climate science -- by way of its scientists' academic publications -- but promoted doubt about it in advertorials," the Harvard researchers wrote in the journal Environmental Research Letters. "Given this discrepancy, we conclude that ExxonMobil misled the public."

The findings could add fuel to lawsuits brought against the world's largest oil explorer by market value. New York's attorney general is probing whether Exxon lied to investors and the public for almost four decades about the impact of climate change on profits. Exxon is one of the world's largest sources of fuels responsible for climate change, producing 10 million gallons of gasoline and other fuels every hour of every day.

The researchers said Exxon has disagreed with their conclusion and said its statements on public policy and climate science "have always reflected the global understanding of the issue," according to an opinion piece written by two of the authors and published Wednesday in the New York Times.

A spokesman for Houston-based Exxon didn't respond outside of business hours to an email or phone call seeking comment.

The study's authors, Geoffrey Supran and Naomi Oreskes, both scholars of scientific history at Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts, reviewed 187 climate change communications issued by Exxon between



1977 and 2014. Their article, "Assessing ExxonMobil's climate change communications," was published Wednesday.

While 83 percent of Exxon's peer-reviewed scientific papers and 80 percent of its internal documents acknowledge climate change is real and human-caused, 81 percent of its advertorials expressed doubt over the issue, according to the research. Internal documents accepted the risk of stranded assets caused by climate change, while the advertorials did not.

The researchers point to the example of Exxon scientist Brian Flannery, who in 1985 helped the U.S. Department of Energy write a report acknowledging a scientific consensus on future warming trends caused by carbon dioxide emitted from fossil fuels. Despite that conclusion, company advertorials in 1997 and 2000 downplayed the human effect on climate change and instead promoted "natural variability" in the atmosphere, according to the research.

"ExxonMobil's scientists and executives were, for the most part, aware and accepting of the evolving climate science from the 1970s onwards, but they painted a different picture in advertorials," wrote Supran and Oreskes.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## First tanker with U.S.-produced LNG for Lithuania leaves behind 'political' wake

The delivery of liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the United States to Lithuania is mainly motivated by political reasons, Vladimir Feygin, president of the Energy and Financial Institute, told Radio Sputnik.

"Of course, there is a combination of political reasons and Washington's interests in this case. The U.S. wants to show that its plan [to supply LNG to eastern European countries] is already working," Feygin pointed out.

Lithuania has received its first shipment of American-produced LNG, as the result of an agreement between Lithuania's state-owned trader Lietuvas Duju Tiekimas and Cheniere Marketing International. The LNG tanker from Sabine Pass in the U.S. moored in the port of Klaipeda on Monday.

According to the expert, Lithuania wants to show that it has implemented diversification of energy supplies.

"This shipment is not large and cannot satisfy Lithuania's need for natural gas. However, it is kind of demonstrative gesture," he said.

Feygin also underscored that the LNG currently being exported from the U.S. is much more expensive than Russian natural gas.

"There is no doubt that the political factor is prevalent in this case. I can't see any other logic in these supplies," he said.

The deal was signed in June as part of Lithuania's efforts to reduce dependence on Russian gas supplies and consolidate ties with Washington. The agreement envisages LNG deliveries of 140,000 cubic meters.

According to Lithuanian Energy



Minister Zygimantas Vaiciunas, the American gas will boost competitiveness in the regional energy market.

Lithuania expects more LNG supplies from Cheniere in 2017. The country also purchases LNG from Norway, Nigeria and Trinidad and Tobago. The government estimated Lithuania will import half of its 2017 domestic gas consumption in the form of LNG.

On June 8, the US delivered its first LNG shipment to Poland, as part of a plan to cut Warsaw's reliance on Russian imports.

According to energy industry analysts, the U.S. is expected to become a net exporter of natural gas by next year, largely thanks to the country's LNG exports.

Washington has long been arguing for the geopolitical importance of LNG exports to Europe, saying it would help European allies decrease dependence on Russian energy imports. However, the cost of shipping natural gas from the U.S. to Europe remains high and requires sizable infrastructure investments.

(Source: Sputnik)

## Oil prices fall on concerns of oversupply as Libyan output recovers

**SINGAPORE (Reuters)** — Oil prices fell on Wednesday, weighed down by concerns of oversupply as Libyan output improves and as U.S. gasoline inventories rose despite the peak summer driving season.

Brent crude futures, the international benchmark for oil prices, were at \$51.64 per barrel at 0721 GMT, down 23 cents, or 0.4 percent, from their last close.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$47.59 a barrel, down 24 cents, or 0.5 percent.

Libya's Sharara oil field, the country's largest, was gradually restarting on Tuesday after a shutdown, although instability in the country means that output there could be volatile, traders said.

Sharara recently reached output of 280,000 barrels per day (bpd), but closed earlier this week due to a pipeline blockade. Its production is key to Libya's oil output, which surged above 1 million bpd in late June, about four times its level last summer.

Libya's rising output is a headache for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which together with non-OPEC producers including



Russia has pledged to hold back around 1.8 million bpd of supplies between January this year and March 2018 to tighten supplies.

However, OPEC has so far fallen short of its pledge, in part due to Libya's strong output. The OPEC-member has been ex-

empt from cuts.

"Sentiment towards oil remains bearish amid oversupply fears and the possible threat of OPEC's supply cut deal falling apart," said Lukman Otunuga, analyst at futures brokerage FXTM.

The next meeting of a ministerial com-

mittee of OPEC and non-OPEC states to discuss their production pact has been proposed for Sept. 22.

In the United States, crude inventories fell by 3.6 million barrels in the week to Aug. 18 to 465.6 million, industry group the American Petroleum Institute said Tuesday. However, gasoline stocks rose by 1.4 million barrels, compared with analyst expectations in a Reuters poll for a 643,000-barrel decline.

Jeffrey Halley, senior market analyst at futures brokerage OANDA said that the rising U.S. gasoline inventories were "not a good sign during the U.S. summer driving season" during which fuel demand tends to be high.

Official inventory data by the U.S. Energy Information Administration is due to be released late on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Bernstein Research warned that low prices and ample supplies were resulting in low oil industry investment levels.

"We see (oil and gas)... order intake activity at almost the same low level as in 2016 ... For now, we remind investors that contract levels appear to still be insufficient to drive recovery in earnings," it said.

## China's July gasoline exports third-highest since 2000

China's July gasoline exports rose 5.9 percent on a year earlier to 1.02 million tons, the third highest monthly amount since at least 2000, Chinese customs data showed on Wednesday.

China's diesel exports in July fell 8.8 percent on a year ago to 1.4 million tons, the data showed.

Kerosene exports fell 3.1 percent to 1.06 million tons.

(Source: Reuters)

## Shale drillers head north as the Permian fills up

Just as the Permian Basin is showing some wear and tear, there is growing interest in a separate shale play to the Permian's north.

The Anadarko shale region, located mostly in Oklahoma, has seen a sharp increase in investment and drilling activity in recent years. The expanding presence of shale players in the Anadarko has resulted in the EIA including the region in its monthly Drilling Productivity Report alongside more well-known places such as the Permian, Eagle Ford and the Bakken.

The Anadarko produces more than 450,000 barrels of oil per day, but the region is increasingly becoming known for its surging natural gas production, which is set to top 6 billion cubic feet per day (bcf/d) in September, according to the EIA.

The EIA noted in its DPR that the Anadarko is second only to the Permian Basin in the number of active rigs – the Anadarko had 129 as of July, while the Permian had 373. The Anadarko region is "well-established," the EIA says, but improved drilling and completion technology has led to a resurgence in interest for the region. The shale layers in the Anadarko tend to be rather deep, but also thicker than in the Bakken, for example.

The region is comprised largely of the STACK (Sooner Trend Anadarko Canadian and Kingfisher) and the SCOOP (South Central Oklahoma Oil Province) plays, two areas that have seen a surge of investment from shale E&Ps in the past few years.

Rising interest in the Anadarko comes as the market for oil in the Permian is starting to look a little frothy, with high land prices, a shortage of oilfield services, and some production hiccups.

Another important takeaway from the inclusion of the Anadarko in the EIA's monthly roundup is that natural gas production continues to rise in places that are home to interest from oil producers. Shale producers tend to extract natural gas as a byproduct when targeting oil, and almost half of the U.S.' natural gas production is now coming from oil plays, according to Bloomberg.

"This is again telling us why we are in a perpetual bear market in natty gas," Stephen Schork, president of Schork Group Inc., a consulting group in Villanova, Pennsylvania, told Bloomberg in an interview. "We are finding more and more gas. It's giving the bears more ammo." Gas production is rising quickly, and not just in the Anadarko. Output in September is expected to jump across all major shale basins, including the Marcellus, Bakken, Eagle Ford, Haynesville, Permian and Niobrara. That will keep a lid on natural gas prices.

In addition, the Anadarko offers shale companies another option for oil and gas exploration if they find the Permian a little too crowded. The Wall Street Journal recently profiled Jim Hackett, the former CEO of Anadarko Petroleum, who has set up a new company that will target the STACK play. The SCOOP and STACK have the best well economics out of any other shale basin after the Permian, according to RBN Energy.

Hackett's company, Silver Run Acquisition Corp. II, is taking over two other STACK-based companies, and the combined outfit will be called Alta Mesa Resources Inc., with a market cap of \$3.8 billion. The efforts of Hackett mark a major investment – and a large bet – on the STACK play. "There are one or two careers worth of opportunities just in the Stack," Hackett told the WSJ in mid-August. Intriguingly, Hackett says the STACK is attractive because "the Permian Basin has been picked over pretty well."

Alta Mesa will ramp up drilling in the STACK over the next year and a half while also investing in pipelines, storage facilities and gas processing plants, according to the WSJ. Hackett says the company's wells will have a breakeven price of around \$25 per barrel.

(Source: oilprices.com)

## Australia looks to lock in renewable energy target

Australia's second most populous state has proposed passing laws to lock in a renewable power target of 40 percent by 2025, looking to spur investment in solar and wind farms even as the national government wrangles over energy policy beyond 2020.

Victoria state Premier Daniel Andrews will introduce legislation to the state parliament this week to cement renewable energy targets, including 25 percent by 2020.

The eastern state, with a population of 6.24 million, suffered a sharp jump in wholesale electricity prices earlier this year after one of its largest coal-fired power plants closed.

The 1,600 megawatt Hazelwood plant had provided a quarter of Victoria's power supply, and its closure has raised demand for gas-fired power at a time when east coast gas supply has been strained, fueling rises in gas and power prices.

The federal government, controlled by the Liberal Party, has no renewable energy target beyond 2020 and has said it wants to take a more technology-neutral approach to ensure stable and affordable power supply.

States led by the opposing Labor party have long pushed their own green power targets due to a decade of energy and climate policy uncertainty at the federal level.

Victoria, a Labor-controlled state, will hold renewable energy auctions in which companies will bid to supply the market, the first of which is for 650 megawatts, which the government said it hopes will bring up to A\$1.3 billion (\$1 billion) worth of investment into the sector.

However, big energy users and major power producers cautioned against a state-by-state approach to setting renewable energy targets, following the Victorian government's announcement.

(Source: Reuters)



## Steve Bannon’s departure: A presidency in eclipse

The most combative White House aide has gone. Less a victory for moderation than a win for Wall Street, the generals and low tax Republicans.

In some civilizations, eclipses of the sun have always been seen as powerful portents. Awe-struck humans have even been known to respond with a human sacrifice, designed to appease deities who could make the land dark. If Donald Trump’s sacking of his chief strategist Steve Bannon was a sacrifice of this kind, it did not protect America from Monday’s spectacular sea-to-sea darkling. But it was certainly an attempt to save the administration from a total eclipse of its own.

Some see the ousting of Bannon last week simply as a victory for traditionalist and moderate Republicans. In this reading, the disciplined new White House chief of staff, General John Kelly, has triumphed over the disruptive rightwing populism of Bannon. There is some validity to that. The president’s broadcast on Monday, which was expected to announce fresh troop deployments in Afghanistan, will be scrutinized for evidence of it. While he was in the White House, Bannon fought the generals’ wishes for more troops, backing the use of private contractors rather than U.S. forces. Trump’s words may show the extent to which Bannonism of some kind has survived the departure of the man himself.

But there is more to this than moderation. Bannon saw himself as a nationalist warrior, speaking for the president’s blue-collar, white-skinned electoral base against the Beltway establishment. Although he boasts that he will be even more powerful outside the White House, this is bluster. His departure weakens the administration’s nationalist radicalism on issues like trade, immigration, and the economic stimulus that candidate Trump promised. Relations with China, which preoccupied Bannon so much that he rang a liberal journalist last week to announce that “to me the economic war with China is everything”, may ease. But the opposition he voiced to military action against North Korea or Syria may also give way to a more interventionist approach from the generals – including national security adviser HR McMaster and defense secretary James Mattis – who have forced him out.

An equally important example on the domestic front is tax reform. Gen Kelly was reported this week to see tax as the way to rebuild the administration’s ties with congressional Republicans and to repair relations with business after Trump disbanded three presidential business councils last week. But the congressional leaders do not want the spending on jobs and infrastructure that Trump campaigned for. They only want tax and budget cuts, plus tax breaks for business to go alongside the scrapping of rules on the environment and consumer protection.

The immediate reason Trump is in trouble is because of his terrible response to the Charlottesville protests. But his deeper crisis is that he actually shares many of the congressional party’s priorities. The voters who rallied to his (and Bannon’s) nationalist appeal a year ago are getting it. Support for Trump in states that he won in 2016, like Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, is down to between 34% and 36%. That reflects not just Charlottesville but the fact that in practice this president is less concerned with jobs and workers and more concerned with corporate interests – not least his own. Trump isn’t an outsider but an insider. And increasing numbers of Americans can see this, even in the dark.

(Source: The Guardian)

## The U.S. navy’s deadly collision course

The circumstances of the crash of the USS John S. McCain near Singapore, which killed at least one U.S. sailor and has left nine missing, remain unclear pending a Navy investigation. The bigger picture, however, is already in focus: Four major accidents this year involving ships of the Seventh Fleet highlight a systemic problem that imperils American dominance on the high seas.

At any given time, about 100 of the Navy’s roughly 275 ships are deployed. Yet the fleet is half the size it was 30 years ago, meaning the ships are docked for shorter periods before redeploying. The uncertainty caused by so-called budget sequestration has hindered the Pentagon’s long-term planning. All this has made shortcuts inevitable, such as neglecting standard upkeep and putting off some training until after deployment.

Such pressure on craft and crew alike takes a toll, and baseline skills such as ship-handling can atrophy. This larger context helps to explain the events of Monday, in which the McCain collided with a petroleum tanker, but there are other factors.

Another of the Seventh Fleet’s destroyers -- the USS Fitzgerald -- collided with a container ship near Japan in June, killing seven sailors. Both ships had reportedly turned off their identification systems to maintain a military level of stealth, which is typical for a combat ship that wants to see but not be seen. Particularly in the case of the McCain, which was making its way across the most crowded commercial waterway in the world, more visibility can make for greater safety.

It has also been reported that the commercial ships in both collisions were operating on autopilot. Especially in the Strait of Malacca, this is an unfortunate break with maritime tradition and common sense. Yet commercial ships, with smaller crews and the need to economize, often cut such corners. The shipping companies need to acknowledge and address this danger -- and if they don’t, their insurers should. (It’s worth noting that the damage to the McCain is on its left-hand, or port, side, strongly suggesting it had right-of-way over the tanker.)

With the McCain and Fitzgerald now out of service indefinitely, the Seventh Fleet finds itself without two of its seven Arleigh Burke-class destroyers. These are the ships equipped with the Aegis anti-missile systems that would be the front-line defense against a missile attack by North Korea in the region.

The Navy has rightly decided to put a temporary pause on operations by the Seventh Fleet, with a focus on “trends in personnel, materiel, maintenance and equipment.” Given the pervasiveness of the issues, this shutdown should be extended to its surface ships worldwide. Undoubtedly, some senior officers will find their careers ended. Yet the larger issue will remain: how best to train sailors, and deploy ships, to continue to protect vital U.S. interests in an increasingly threatening environment.

(Source: Bloomberg)

# Turkey fumes as Sinjar Yazidis declare ‘democratic autonomy’

by Amberin Zaman

As Massoud Barzani, the president of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, continues to resist mounting international calls to scrap a referendum on Kurdish independence planned for September, a rival Kurdish faction has added its voice, declaring what it calls “democratic autonomy” in the predominantly Yazidi region of Sinjar. The Sinjar Democratic Autonomous Administrative Council made the announcement on Sunday, saying it wants “free and democratic life for all Yazidis.”

Sinjar is among the so-called disputed territories that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the central government in Baghdad both claim as their own. The KRG says the referendum will be conducted in all the disputed territories, including Sinjar.

Bordering Syria, Sinjar remains the scene of a turf war between the Barzani-led Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), backed by Turkey, and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is fighting for Kurdish autonomy inside Turkey and is also vying for influence in Iraq, Iran and Syria. The PKK-backed administration council says it will not allow the referendum to be conducted in areas under its control, including Khanasor, a strategic crossing point for PKK militants heading to Syria.

Bilal Wahab, a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, told Al Monitor, “If they decide to, the PKK can block positioning referendum ballot boxes in Sinjar in towns and neighborhoods, they control.” This, he said, would leave the Yazidis caught in the middle of the political rivalry between the PKK and the KDP.

Tensions between the KDP and the PKK flared in September 2014, when Islamic State (ISIS) terrorists unleashed an orgy of mass murder and rape, killing thousands of Yazidis. Many blame KDP peshmerga for failing to defend the Yazidis and for fleeing the scene without even leaving weapons for the beleaguered minority to defend itself. That is when the PKK intervened, shepherding thousands of Yazidis to the safety of the Sinjar Mountains.

The PKK has since overseen the establishment of a Yazidi militia, the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), as well as an all-female force along with local governing bodies. Sinjar town remains under the



**Turkey has several thousand troops in Iraqi Kurdistan and has repeatedly threatened to take military action against the PKK in Sinjar.**

control of pro-KDP Yazidis, but the rest of the region has largely been divided up between pro-KDP and pro-PKK groups, and in some instances they cohabit.

### ■ Diplomatic body

Sunday’s assembly presented a list of planned institutions meant to convey the distinct and independent character of the autonomous zone. These include a “diplomatic body” to “manage relations with Iraq, Kurdistan and other states” and a “neutral court” to prosecute “those who caused or helped [ISIS] in the Yazidi regions.” There was no immediate reaction from the KRG, but Barzani repeated today that there is no question of postponing the referendum.

All of this is infuriating Turkey, which views the PKK’s presence in Sinjar as a further threat to its own security. Turkey has several thousand troops in Iraqi Kurdistan and has repeatedly threatened to take military action against the PKK in Sinjar.

In a bid to pre-empt further Turkish

actions, the KDP and its Syrian Kurdish proxies sought in March to dislodge the PKK from Khanasor, but failed. In April, Turkish fighter jets targeted PKK and YBS militants in the area, but ended up killing six KDP peshmerga instead.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan asserted today that his government is considering joint military action with Iran against the PKK. “[The] PKK terror organization has a foot in Iran,” Erdogan said, speaking to reporters ahead of an official visit to Jordan. “They always cause harm to Iran and us. ... We believe if the two countries cooperate, we can reach a conclusion in a much shorter period of time.”

Those comments follow last week’s groundbreaking three-day visit to Ankara by Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, Iran’s military chief of staff. According to the pro-government daily Turkiye, Bagheri offered to launch a joint operation against the PKK’s Qandil bases bordering

Iran and to help drive PKK fighters out of Sinjar as well.

In a further twist, a growing number of Yazidis have defected from KDP- and PKK-backed outfits to join the Baghdad-supported, predominantly Shiite Popular Mobilization Units, which have driven ISIS from southern Sinjar, effectively curtailing the KDP and PKK’s influence there. This dynamic makes it less likely that the PKK-backed administrative council is acting under Baghdad’s influence or that it is part of an effort to prevent the Sept. 25 independence referendum from taking place.

“I don’t believe the council was coordinating with Baghdad,” said Arzu Yilmaz, an Iraqi Kurdistan-based academic who has done extensive research on Sinjar. She told Al-Monitor, “More likely, it is part of a broader strategy [for the PKK] to position themselves ahead of any declaration of independence proper by the KRG.”

(Source: Al Monitor)

## Terrorists threaten the walkability of Europe’s cities

Planners face the challenge of preserving traditions of civic sociability

By Andrew Hill

Barriers are going up around Europe. Hours after a terrorist in a van mowed down pedestrians on Barcelona’s Las Ramblas last week, Madrid installed massive plant-pots at Puerta del Sol in the Spanish capital. Entrances to the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, leading to Milan’s cathedral, are blocked by ugly new jerseys, as Italians call them — the modular concrete lane separators first used in the U.S. state.

Nice, victim of the worst vehicle attack to date, has only recently unveiled a white truck-resistant pillar-and-cable fence, cordoning off the Promenade des Anglais, where 86 people died on Bastille Day last year. London, hit by two attacks this year, has reinforced pedestrian walkways on bridges with concrete blocks. To the acute pain of further loss of innocent lives — tourists, shoppers, revelers — add the sinister, hard-to-define threat to something quintessentially European: the paseo, the passeggiata, the promenade.

“Walkability” has become a central tenet of urban planning. One study suggests that people living in walkable places engage in 100 minutes more physical activity a week than those who don’t. “Walking meetings”, as favored by the late Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg, are now modish ways to stimulate creativity in Silicon Valley and beyond.

But we Europeans do not need to be told by professors and entrepreneurs that walking is good for us. We have been strolling sociably towards greater wellbeing for centuries. Arriving in Barcelona in 1826, the American naval officer Alexander Slidell Mackenzie took rooms overlooking “the Rambla”. The street, built over an old riverbed and at that time only recently urbanized, was “constantly frequented by every variety of people, and in the afternoon was thronged to overflowing”, he wrote in his travelogue A Year in Spain.

### ■ The threat of imminent attack

Well-dressed men and women mingled with peasants, artisans, French officers and their girlfriends, students, curates and monks. It goes without saying that the threat of imminent attack puts this tradition of ambulatory, open-air cosmopolitanism in jeopardy. The essence of the stroll — which, in Paris, gave birth to the ideal of the flâneur, the leisurely observer of city life — is that it should be relaxed.

When I lived in Milan, which is certainly not Italy’s most laid back city, a passeggiata in one’s Sunday best, past the Galleria and the Duomo, was a weekly restatement of one’s part in civilized society. The menace of



**To the acute pain of further loss of innocent lives — tourists, shoppers, revelers — add the sinister, hard-to-define threat to something quintessentially European: the paseo, the passeggiata, the promenade.**

terrorism will have already persuaded some nervous boulevardiers to divert to less populous places, take the car, or cower on the sofa at home. For those who do venture out, having to keep an eye out for murderers in vans wrecks the whole idea of a civilized city walk as an exercise in stress-free people watching. It doesn’t do to romanticize the notion too much. These days, Las Ramblas is as much an overcrowded tourist attraction as a civic amenity. It has “evolved from being the favorite street of Barcelonans to a street many avoid”, Eduard Cabré, an urban planning consultant, told website Citylab shortly after the attacks. And of course, local authorities need to protect citizens from likely threats. Hence the new bollards on many of our boulevards. At the same time, though, “we really don’t want to abolish pedestrians or we will end up with ghost cities”, as Marialena Nikolopoulou of Kent School of Architecture

told me. She and others have tested clever alternatives to fortifying public spaces, such as using mirrors or floor markings to make pedestrians act playfully, so that suspicious behavior stands out. It is worth a try, if only to safeguard the public demonstration of civic sociability and friendly exchange so admired by generations of visitors. “Who can say enough in praise of the paseo?” Mackenzie wrote in the 1820s. “It furnishes an amusement at once delightful and innocent, and from which not even the poorest are excluded, a school where the public manners are softened and refined by social intercourse and mutual observation; where families meet families, and friends meet friends, as upon a neutral ground.” It is a measure of how hard terrorists have hit Europe that we now have to armor that innocent, neutral ground like a potential battlefield.

(Source: FT)



# NATO-CIA-Pentagon: Junction of the real druglords and warlords

By Sibel Edmonds

The Casualties of CIA-NATO Afghan Operations Include Heroin-Related Deaths

Are you aware of the heroin epidemic that has been on fire all across America- since 2001? Thanks to the government-corporate media outlets you probably are not.

Between 2002 and 2013, heroin-related overdose deaths in the US quadrupled, with more than 10,000 people dying of heroin overdoses in America in 2014 alone. Afghanistan has been the number one source globally of both opium and heroin:

Heroin from Afghanistan has killed more people than the 55,000 Americans killed in the Vietnam War. An American now gets killed every 32 minutes by Afghan heroin. With US heroin deaths tripling every four years, an American will get killed by heroin every 16 minutes by 2020.

There were 189,000 heroin users in the US in 2001, before the US-NATO invasion of Afghanistan. By 2016 that number went up to 4,500,000 (2.5 million heroin addicts and 2 million casual users). Heroin deaths shot up from 1,779 in 2001 to 10,574 in 2014 as Afghan opium poppy fields metastasized from 7,600 hectares in 2001 (when the US-NATO War in Afghanistan began) to 224,000 hectares in 2016. (One hectare equals approximately 2.5 acres). Ironically, the so-called US eradication operation in Afghanistan has cost an estimated \$8.5 billion in American taxpayer funds since the US-NATO-Afghan war started in October 2001.

Interestingly, while the mainstream and pseudo-alternative media outlets keep playing up drugs from Mexico, we hardly hear a peep on the massive amount of Afghan-sourced heroin. To put it in perspective: In 2014, according to the DEA drug threat assessment, Mexico produced an estimated 42 metric tons of heroin. Afghanistan produced 6,400 metric tons of opium that same year. The largest share of US heroin is Afghanistan-sourced. It is coming from US-occupied Afghanistan. There is no other mathematical possibility:

Mexico with 10,500 hectares of opium could not possibly supply even 1/20th of the heroin demand in the US. What has the DEA been doing about the vast majority of heroin which is coming in from Afghanistan?

Looking at facts and figures regarding the heroin epidemic, it becomes obvious that the DEA has been a colossal failure and they refuse to answer most questions asked of them. Perhaps, the DEA would answer questions (or plead the 5th) at Congressional Hearings.

First, 'the Mexicans did it' which is to say that the



**Mexico with 10,500 hectares of opium could not possibly supply even 1/20th of the heroin demand in the US. What has the DEA been doing about the vast majority of heroin which is coming in from Afghanistan?**

It was estimated that more than 200,000 people in New York City alone were using heroin. At one point in time, you were able to find used syringes on public playgrounds. As in the case of Afghanistan, the CIA-Pentagon WarLords-DrugLords were at the top of the chain:

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the CIA recruited the Laotian Hmong tribe to fight communist forces in the region. The CIA encouraged the Hmong to grow opium instead of rice to make them dependent on CIA air drops of food. The agency could then force their compliance by threatening to withdraw the food aid. To make the deal even sweeter, they even located a heroin refinery at CIA headquarters in northern Laos and used Air America, a passenger and cargo airline that was covertly owned and operated by the CIA, to export the Laotian opium and heroin. Much of it ended up in Vietnam, causing an epidemic of heroin addiction in US soldiers.

CIA ties to international drug trafficking goes back to the Korean War:

In 1949, two of Chiang Kai-shek's defeated generals,

reports submitted to the US Congress in 1999 by FAS:

1960s- In support of the US war in Vietnam, the CIA renewed old and cultivated new relations with Laotian, Burmese and Thai drug merchants, as well as corrupt military and political leaders in Southeast Asia. Despite the dramatic rise of heroin production, the agency's relations with these figures attracted little attention until the early 1970s.

MAY 1970- A Christian Science Monitor correspondent reported that the CIA 'is cognizant of, if not party to, the extensive movement of opium out of Laos,' quoting one charter pilot who claimed that 'opium shipments get special CIA clearance and monitoring on their flights southward out of the country.' At the time, some 30,000 US service men in Vietnam were addicted to heroin.

1972-The full story of how Cold War politics and US covert operations fueled a heroin boom in the Golden Triangle broke when Yale University doctoral student Alfred McCoy published his ground-breaking study, The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia. The CIA attempted to quash the book.

1973- Thai national Puttapon Khamkhruan was arrested in connection with the seizure of 59 pounds of opium in Chicago. A CIA informant on narcotics trafficking in northern Thailand, he claimed that the agency had full knowledge of his actions. According to the US Justice Department, the CIA quashed the case because it might 'prove embarrassing because of Mr. Khamkhruan's involvement with CIA activities in Thailand, Burma, and elsewhere.'

For those who consider alternative media outlets such as Newsbud conspiracy hubs, here is a report, albeit watered-down, by the New York Times, published in 1993:

During the Vietnam War, operations in Laos were largely a CIA responsibility. The agency's surrogate there was a Laotian general, Vang Pao, who commanded Military Region 2 in northern Laos. He enlisted 30,000 Hmong tribesmen in the service of the CIA.

These tribesmen continued to grow, as they had for generations, the opium poppy. Before long, someone - there were unproven allegations that it was a Mafia family from Florida - had established a heroin refining lab in Region Two. The lab's production was soon being ferried out on the planes of the CIA's front airline, Air America. A pair of BNDD agents tried to seize an Air America.

A pair of BNDD agents tried to seize an Air America DC-3 loaded with heroin packed into boxes of Tide soap powder. At the CIA's behest, they were ordered to release the plane and drop the inquiry.

Author and activist William Blum noted in his book Rogue State,

"The CIA flew the drugs all over Southeast Asia, to sites where the opium was processed into heroin, and to trans-shipment points on the route to Western customers."

Do you remember the Iran Contra scandal and the days when Crack Cocaine was the major drug that destroyed communities and lives across the United States in the early 1980's? Another fact obscured by the mainstream media, so that many still have either not heard about it or consider it another conspiracy story.

The United States supported the Contras in their fight against the Sandanista government in Nicaragua. Officially barred from arming and funding the Contras by Congress, the CIA came up with a scheme to sell arms to Iran and use the funds to illegally arm and supply the Contras. CIA-protected drug smugglers flew down to Nicaragua loaded with arms to supply the Contras and flew back loaded with Columbian cocaine. A decade later, investigative reporter Gary Webb used official government documents to prove that the CIA had sheltered these drug smuggling operatives and followed the trail of this cheap Columbian cocaine to the beginning of the crack epidemic in South-Central LA. Ironically, again, during this same period American Taxpayers were funding DEA operations that were supposedly countering crack-cocaine suppliers and operations.

(Source: Newsbud)

## Trump draws geopolitical battle lines in South Asia

By James M. Dorsey

President Donald J. Trump has drawn battle lines in South Asia that are likely to have a ripple effect across Eurasia: a stepped-up war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, a tougher approach towards Pakistan's selective support of militancy, and closer cooperation with India - moves that are likely to push Pakistan closer to China and Russia.

There is little doubt that Mr. Trump had few good choices 16 years into an Afghanistan war in which the Taliban and other militant groups are holding their ground, if not making advances, buffeted by Pakistani policies that are rooted in the fabric of the country's military and society. Similarly, there is little doubt that Pakistan's convoluted relationship to militancy poses serious challenges to US policy in South Asia as well as a global effort to contain political violence.

Nonetheless, Mr. Trump could find that his newly announced South Asia policy will fail to achieve his goal of an "honorable and enduring outcome worthy of the tremendous sacrifices" made by the United States. The silver lining is that Pakistan may temporarily engineer a stay of execution but ultimately will find itself in a cul de sac from which there is no escape.

Mr. Trump, despite refusing to disclose details of his strategy in Afghanistan, made clear in a speech outlining his South Asia policy, that he hopes that an increased US military presence will force the Taliban to come to the negotiating table. Yet, achieving that would require the kind of military and political engagement in Afghanistan that Mr. Trump seems unwilling to embrace.

US media reported that Mr. Trump envisioned only a modest increase of several thousand troops in a country wracked by corruption whose military is largely incapable of standing its ground on its own. Various military and political analysts suggest that it would take a far greater commitment to militarily turn the tables on the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Moreover, Mr. Trump's exclusive focus on defeating militants militarily or bombing them into submission ignores the broader economic, social and political problems that fuel militancy in Afghanistan and drive Pakistan's support for the Taliban and a selection of other groups. "We are not nation building again. We are killing terrorists," Mr. Trump said.

Announcing a tougher approach towards Pakistan, Mr. Trump insisted that the South Asian nation's partnership with the United States would not survive if it continued to harbor and support groups that target the United States.

Adding fuel to the fire, the president emphasized the US' strategic partnership with India, calling on it to support his administration's policy with increased Indian economic assistance to Afghanistan. In doing so, Mr. Trump challenged a pillar of Pakistani policy towards Afghanistan: limiting Indian influence in the country at whatever price.

Mr. Trump's approach to South Asia puts to the test two assumptions: that Pakistan will want to preserve its partnership with the United States at whatever cost and that it has few alternatives. Mr. Trump could well find that at least in the short term those assumptions are incorrect.

Pakistan's relationship to militancy is engrained in a deeply-rooted zero-sum-game approach towards India within the military as well as an empathy for Sunni Muslim ultra-conservatism that is woven into the fabric of the security forces, parts of the government bureaucracy, and significant segments of society.

Pakistan's use of militant groups to counter India in Afghanistan and Kashmir as well as an anti-dote to nationalist insurgents in the restive province of Balochistan is moreover tacitly endorsed by China's repeated vetoing of the designation of Masood Azhar, an anti-Indian militant, former fighter in the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, and Islamic scholar who graduated from a Deobandi madrassah, Darul Uloom Islamia Binori Town in Karachi, that is the alma mater of numerous Pakistani militants.

Moreover, China, with an investment of more than \$50 billion in Pakistani infrastructure and energy that would turn the country into a key node, if not the crown jewel of its One Belt, One Road initiative, is a logical escape for a government and a military that lacks the political will to confront its own demons. Similarly, Russia, long eager to gain access to warm water ports and expand its influence in Central and South Asia, is certain to see opportunity in further estrangement between Pakistan and the United States.

Closer ties to China and Russia may offer Pakistan a temporary escape from dealing with structural problems. Ultimately, however, Pakistan's relationship to militancy is likely to also complicate its relations with Beijing and Moscow amid escalating violence in Balochistan and no end in sight to the militant insurgency in Afghanistan.

A series of devastating attacks in Balochistan over the last year that have targeted Pakistani cadets, decimated the legal profession in the capital Quetta, and targeted Chinese nationals as well kidnappings and drive-by shootings pose a serious obstacle to China's strategic ambition to extend its maritime power across the Indian Ocean and turn the sleepy Baloch fishing port of Gwadar into a gateway to its troubled north-western province of Xinjiang.

Pakistan has, moreover, in the past year turned a blind eye to Saudi funding of anti-Shiite, anti-Iranian militants in Balochistan, including a Pakistani cleric who remains a member of the Council of Islamic Ideology, a government advisory body tasked with ensuring that legislation does not contradict Islamic law, despite having been designated a global terrorist by the US Treasury.

China has too much invested in for Pakistan's selective support of militancy or the advantages of needing India by protecting Mr. Azhar to ultimately get in the way of achieving its geopolitical goals vested in its One Belt, One Road initiative.

As a result, Pakistan's refusal to confront its demons could in the final analysis leave it out in the cold: its relationship with the United States severely damaged, India strengthened by closer cooperation with the US, and China and Russia demanding that it do what Washington wanted in the first place. Pakistan is likely to have fewer, if any, options and no escape routes once China and Russia come to the conclusion Mr. Trump has already articulated.

173 tons of raw opium from Latin America (from 10,500 hectares in Mexico and 1,500 hectares in Colombia) were converted into 17.3 tons of heroin and all 17.3 tons were imported into the US, where it would not supply even 5% of the US heroin demand.

If all countries on Earth growing opium, except Afghanistan, were to convert their opium to heroin and send it to the US, it wouldn't be enough for even half of the current US heroin demand.

With the obvious parallels and undeniable correlations, any critical mind would begin spewing the following questions: How did Afghan opium spread from 7,600 hectares prior to the US-NATO invasion to 224,000 hectares since the invasion? What is the correlation between US heroin deaths rising from 1,779 in 2000-pre Afghan invasion, to more than 10,000 in 2014 alone?

### ■ Parallels & Flashbacks

Forty years ago the United States was hit by another major heroin epidemic. During the 1970's, during the Vietnam War, heroin making its way to the United States from the Golden Triangle became an epidemic.



**During the Vietnam War, operations in Laos were largely a CIA responsibility. The agency's surrogate there was a Laotian general, Vang Pao, who commanded Military Region 2 in northern Laos. He enlisted 30,000 Hmong tribesmen in the service of the CIA.**



# The threat to internet freedom in Trump's America

By Emily Parker

One of the great things about America is that if you don't like the government, you have the right to speak out against it. Since President Donald Trump took office in January, ordinary citizens have been voicing dissent on the internet and in the streets. Now, an extraordinary request from the Department of Justice (DOJ) could make people increasingly afraid to exercise that right.

The DOJ is trying to compel an internet hosting company, DreamHost, to hand over information about everyone who visited disruptj20.org, a DreamHost customer web site that helped organize Trump inauguration protests. DreamHost is fighting back, arguing that complying with the request would require handing over 1.3 million IP addresses, as well as contact information, content of emails, and photographs of thousands of people. While the Trump inauguration protests were largely peaceful, some protestors were violent and destructive. But the DOJ request

is not limited to rioters. It could also affect people who casually visited a protest web site, perhaps simply to learn more about what was happening.

This DOJ request appears groundbreaking, and not in a good way. Mark Rumold, an attorney for the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), which is working with DreamHost on the case, says that this kind of information seizure usually would be limited to a site dedicated to criminal activity, like child pornography or drug sales. What's unusual about the DreamHost case, Rumold said in an email, is that the targeted website is not dedicated to a criminal enterprise, "but to engaging in the core of what the First Amendment is designed to protect: associating, communicating, learning and engaging with like-minded political protesters and in organizing protests and dissent."

## ■ Constitutionality of a warrant

DreamHost is challenging the DOJ on the constitutionality of its warrant. In a blog post called "We Fight for the Users,"

DreamHost explained that law enforcement regularly approaches the company to ask for information about customers who might be the target of criminal investigations. But the DOJ is going too far. DreamHost is protesting because, it writes, "Internet users have a reasonable expectation that they will not get swept up in criminal investigations simply by exercising their right to political speech against the government."

In making this overly broad request, the DOJ has taken a page from the playbook of authoritarian governments. It may seem far-fetched to compare the United States to China, for example, where political protest sites wouldn't even be allowed to exist. But blocking Web sites is only one way to crack down on dissent.

Authoritarian governments use the threat of surveillance – and possible subsequent legal action – to create an atmosphere of fear and caution. Expressing your viewpoint or organizing for activism online is a good way to get on the official radar. Sometimes,

it's just not worth the trouble. Citizens' self-censorship helps authoritarian governments keep the Web in check.

Self-censorship may not appear to be much of an issue in the United States, where a brief glance at Twitter will expose you to a flood of anti-Trump commentary. Street protests are popping up regularly, with the help of social media. Americans don't seem particularly afraid of expressing themselves, or of mobilizing for action. But that could change. America is very divided and the atmosphere is tense. If protests were to escalate, it's not hard to imagine the Trump administration, putting more pressure on internet companies to reveal information about people associated with demonstrations.

## ■ Political activists

Political activists are not likely to be deterred by such information requests, even if they were overly broad. But ordinary citizens, those that don't consider themselves "dissidents," might balk. The internet is where all kinds of people come together to express grievances

and coordinate action.

How many Americans would think twice about visiting a protest site if they knew that the hosting company might have to hand over information about them? Would people still want to express their views on social media if it meant exposing themselves to a potential investigation? Complaining won't solve anything anyway, they might figure, so it's not worth the risk.

In this particular case, the DOJ may not get what it wants. EFF's Rumold says that the most likely outcome is that DreamHost will have to turn over some information from the site, after the DOJ's warrant is substantially narrowed and protections are put in place to protect innocent users. But even if that happens, the story shouldn't end there. Internet companies should continue to speak out about overly broad government requests, and the media and public must remain vigilant. Americans should not take internet freedom for granted.

(Source: Reuters)

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# Symptoms you shouldn't ignore

By Kara Mayer Robinson

Most aches and pains aren't a sign of something serious, but certain symptoms should be checked out. See a doctor if you feel any of these things:

■ **1. Weakness in your arms and legs**

If you get weak or numb in your arm, leg, or face, it can be a sign of a stroke, especially if it's on one side of your body.

You could also be having a stroke if you can't keep your balance, feel dizzy, or have trouble walking.

Get help quickly if you suddenly can't see well, get a bad headache, feel confused, or have problems speaking or understanding.

"Caught early, it is often reversible," says internist Jacob Teitelbaum, MD.

Don't wait to see a doctor. Call emergency line. If you get a clot-buster drug within 4.5 hours of your first symptom, you can lower your risk of long-term disability from stroke.

■ **2. Chest pain**

When it comes to chest pain, it's better to be safe than sorry.

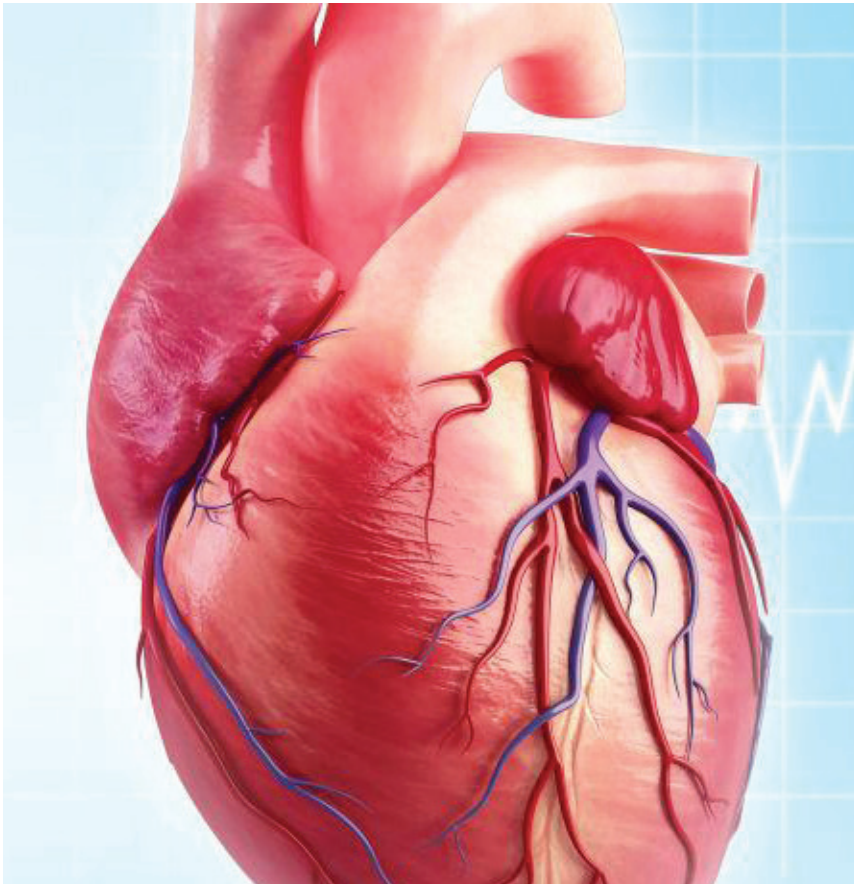
"Any chest pain, especially accompanied by sweating, pressure, shortness of breath, or nausea, should be evaluated by a medical professional right away," says Shilpi Agarwal, MD, with One Medical Group in Washington, DC.

Chest pain or pressure can be a sign of heart disease or a heart attack, particularly if you feel it during exertion or while being active. Or, chest pain may mean problems other than with your heart; for example, you have another serious condition, such as a blood clot moving into your lung, Teitelbaum says.

If your chest feels tight or heavy, and it lasts more than a few minutes or goes away and comes back again, get help. Don't try to tough it out.

■ **3. Tenderness and pain in the back of your lower leg**

This can be a symptom of a blood clot in your leg. It's called deep vein thrombosis, or DVT. It can happen after you've been sitting for a long time, like on a long plane ride, or if you're sick and have been in bed a long time.



**Chest pain may mean problems other than with your heart; for example, you have another serious condition, such as a blood clot moving into your lung.**

If it's a blood clot, you may feel the pain mostly when you stand or walk. You may also notice swelling. The leg is usually red and tender, and it will be larger than the other leg.

It's normal to feel tenderness after exercise. But if you also see redness and feel heat where it's swollen or painful, call your doctor.

Teitelbaum says you can also check for what's called the Homans sign. "If you flex your toes upward and it hurts, that's

also suggestive of a blood clot," he says. "But don't rely on that. If it's hot, red, and swollen on one side, go to the ER."

It's important to catch a blood clot before it can break off and block your blood flow, which can lead to complications.

■ **4. Blood in your urine**

Several things can cause you to see blood when you pee.

If you have blood in your urine and you also feel a lot of pain in your side or

in your back, you may have kidney stones. A kidney stone is a small crystal made of minerals and salts that forms in your kidney and moves through the tube that carries your urine.

Your doctor may take X-rays or do an ultrasound to see the stones. An X-ray uses radiation in low doses to make images of structures inside your body. An ultrasound makes images with sound waves.

Many kidney stones eventually pass through your body when you pee. It can be very painful. Sometimes your doctor may need to remove the kidney stone.

If you see blood in your urine and you also have an increase in feeling that you urgently need to pee, make frequent trips to the bathroom, or feel burning when you urinate, you may have a severe bladder or kidney infection, Teitelbaum says. Don't wait to see your doctor, especially if you have a fever.

If you see blood but don't feel any pain, it may be a sign of kidney or bladder cancer, so visit your doctor.

■ **5. Wheezing**

Breathing problems should be treated right away. If you're wheezing, or hear a whistling sound when you breathe, see your doctor.

"Without urgent evaluation, breathing can quickly become labored, and it can be catastrophic if not evaluated and treated quickly," Agarwal says.

It may be from asthma, a lung disease, a severe allergy, or exposure to chemicals. Your doctor can figure out what's causing it and how to treat it. If you have allergic asthma, an allergist or pulmonologist (lung specialist) will create a plan to manage it and reduce flare-ups.

Wheezing can also be caused by pneumonia or bronchitis. Are you coughing up yellow or green mucus? Do you also have a fever or shortness of breath? If so, you may have bronchitis that's turning into pneumonia. "Time to see your doctor," Teitelbaum says.

(Source: [health.harvard.edu](#))

## Tips for dining out with type 2 diabetes

By Shannan Rouss

Dining out shouldn't be stressful, but when you've been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, visiting a restaurant can feel suddenly fraught with peril. The temptation of the bread basket or the risk of waiting a ridiculously long time for your food might be enough to keep you at home. Fortunately, with a little preparation you can still do dinner at the latest Italian hot spot while sticking to your meal plan. Keep reading for tips to help you navigate — and thoroughly enjoy — your next night out.

■ **1. Stalk the restaurant.**

While reviewing a restaurant's menu online can certainly help you plan ahead, take your reconnaissance to the next level by checking out your destination's Instagram, Facebook and more. "I recommend my clients look at the restaurant's social media accounts beforehand," says Lori Zanini, RD, a certified diabetes educator and creator of the free 7-Day Diabetes Meal Plan. "Pictures on social media will provide a great idea of how large portion sizes are and which dishes look like the best option for them. And it lets them plan in advance for portion control."

■ **2. Pack a snack.**

Sure, making a reservation is always a good idea when you're trying to stick to an eating schedule, but there's no guarantee you'll be seated on time — or that your food will show up promptly. To avoid a blood sugar low if your meal is delayed, Zanini recommends having a snack on hand. Try a quarter-cup of almonds with two tablespoons of unsweetened dried fruit like raisins. And,



**Research suggests that balsamic vinegar may help lower blood pressure and keep cholesterol in check.**

she adds, "If you are taking short-acting insulin, do not take your insulin until your meal has arrived."

■ **3. Read between the lines.**

"Au gratin," "breaded," "bisque," "crunchy" and "crispy"

all could be hints that the dish is going to be higher in carbs," warns Zanini. Alternatively, she says, "Broiled, grilled and even stir-fried or sauteed can be good options, as long as you inquire about the base that was used to do so." If you do opt for something stir-fried or sauteed, ask if the restaurant can prepare it using a plant-based oil (Zanini says olive oil is the best) or even water or broth.

■ **4. Scrutinize the sauce.**

"The carbohydrate content of food can vary widely, especially if there are any sauces or additives," says Catherine Metzgar, Ph.D., RD, of diabetes clinic Virta Health in San Francisco. The reason? Sauces — even ones that may seem innocuous like teriyaki or barbecue — are often loaded with sugar and other hidden carbs like cornstarch or flour, explains Metzgar. So either skip the sauce altogether or ask for it on the side so you can control how much you consume.

■ **5. Opt for oil and vinegar.**

Starting off your meal with a fiber-rich salad is a good idea: Research has shown that it can reduce overall calorie intake at a meal by 11 percent. Just beware of the dressing. "Salad dressings are another one of the biggest culprits of added sugars and hidden carbs," says Metzgar. The same goes for the low-fat or fat-free versions, which often contain just as much (if not more) added sugars to improve the flavor. Your safest bet? Oil and vinegar. Not only will you know exactly what's in your dressing (just two tasty ingredients!), research suggests that balsamic vinegar may help lower blood pressure and keep cholesterol in check.

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

## 'Loneliness epidemic' called a major public health threat

By Robert Preidt

Loneliness may be more hazardous to your health than obesity -- and a growing number of Americans are at risk, researchers report.

About 42.6 million American adults over age 45 are believed to suffer from chronic loneliness, according to AARP.

"Being connected to others socially is widely considered a fundamental human need -- crucial to both well-being and survival. Extreme examples show infants in custodial care who lack human contact fail to thrive and often die, and indeed, social isolation or solitary confinement has been used as a form of punishment," said Julianne Holt-Lunstad. She is a professor of psychology at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah.

"Yet an increasing portion of the U.S. population now experiences

isolation regularly," she added during a presentation Saturday at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association (APA) in Washington, D.C.

Holt-Lunstad presented results of two large analyses. In one, researchers analyzed 148 studies that included a total of more than 300,000 people. Those studies linked greater social connection to a 50 percent lower risk of early death.

The researchers also reviewed 70 studies involving more than 3.4 million people to gauge the impact of social isolation, loneliness and living alone on the risk of premature death. The conclusion: The effect of the three was

equal to or greater than well-known risk factors such as obesity.

More than one in four Americans lives alone, more than half are unmarried, and marriage rates and the number of children per household are declining, according to U.S. Census data.

"These trends suggest that Americans are becoming less socially connected and experiencing more loneliness," Holt-Lunstad said in an APA news release.

She said there is strong evidence that social isolation and loneliness increase the risk of early death more than many other factors.

"With an increasing aging population,

the effect on public health is only anticipated to increase. Indeed, many nations around the world now suggest we are facing a 'loneliness epidemic.' The challenge we face now is what can be done about it," Holt-Lunstad said.

Possible solutions, she said, include getting doctors to screen patients for social isolation, and training schoolchildren in social skills. Older people should prepare for retirement socially as well as financially, she added, noting that many social ties are related to the workplace.

Holt-Lunstad also suggested that community planners include spaces that encourage people to gather together, such as recreation centers and community gardens.

Research presented at medical meetings should be viewed as preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

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

## A bad work environment can be bad for your health

By Daniella Emanuel

Don't hit the snooze button on this one.

Some dread going to work, and some look forward to it, but how important is it to actually enjoy and feel satisfied with your job?

Nearly two-thirds of US workers experience some degree of mismatch between their desired and actual working conditions, according to a recent survey by RAND. To make things worse, a study conducted in the UK found that there were more physical markers of stress in people who went from being unemployed to working in a bad job than in those who remained unemployed.

Together, these studies provide insight into the struggles of the work force and the negative health impacts a poor work environment can have on employees.

■ **How Americans really feel**

The RAND report reflects the responses of more than 3,000 Americans ages 25 to 71 on a variety of questions regarding their jobs.

"The thing that surprised me most was how many people experienced some kind of hostile social interaction in the workplace," said Nicole Maestas, co-author of the study and associate professor of health care policy at Harvard Medical School. The report found that one in five US workers had such experiences, with the interactions including verbal abuse and sexual harassment.

A big factor in this statistic is the level of support that a boss provides in the work environment, Maestas said. A supportive boss can cut the amount of hostile interactions in the workplace in half, she said, and lower it even more than that for young women without a college degree.

"The top of the organization sets the tone about what this culture values and tolerates as far as behavior and codes of conduct, which filters down to all of the supervisory levels," Maestas said. "So at every point, having a boss that will either not be disrespectful or intervene if you're being treated disrespectfully by someone else is really, really important."

The study also found that nearly three-fourths of Americans report intensive or repetitive physical exertion at least a quarter of the time while on the job. And more than half report exposure to potentially dangerous working conditions.

One in four American workers said they don't feel like they have enough time to do their jobs, and about half reported working during their free time in order to meet expectations. Women report having more difficulty arranging time off to take care of personal and family matters than men, as well as earning less money.

A disparity is also seen in the complexity of jobs. Regardless of their level of education, younger and prime-age working women were significantly less likely to report having a job that requires solving complicated tasks and unforeseen issues in comparison with similarly aged men.

Although 75% of workers received training to improve on or learned a skillset in the past year, only 38% reported that their job "offers good prospects for advancement."

This study provides important information for employers, Maestas said. Within work environments, there is an attitude that if an employee is happy, he or she will be more productive. In respectful places of work, there is less turnover, so these numbers could help influence employers to aim for a better code of conduct, she said.

Seth Kaplan, an associate professor of psychology at George Mason University who was not involved in the study, said it generally corroborates what is already known about American work experiences. But the percentage of people who reported a hostile environment was higher than he suspected.

"We focus a lot on very dramatic overt behaviors in the workplace, like workplace shootings, for example. Those are relatively rare," he said. "But it's usually the kind of harsh or mildly aggressive supervisor that's the chronic stressor that's there every day that doesn't get as much attention. And I think we kind of fail to realize how detrimental those types of stressors can be."

On the bright side, four out of five workers reported that their jobs were "meaningful" in at least one way, and 84% reported that they learn new things.

■ **Is a bad job better than no job?**

"Working in a bad job is not good for you. It's not good for your physical health, and it's not good for your mental health. And nearly everybody accepts that," said Tarani Chandola, lead author of the International Journal of Epidemiology study and professor of medical sociology at the University of Manchester.

"But there is some backward 'Oh, at least you have a job. Any job has got to be better than not having a job -- so being unemployed must be the worst thing for your health there can be.' It's an assumption that people make, but not many people actually test this assumption."

He and co-author Nan Zhang, also of the University of Manchester, decided to test it. They surveyed 1,116 people in the UK aged 35 to 75 years and found that those who transitioned from unemployment to a poor-quality job had higher biological indicators of stress than people who remained unemployed.

These biological indicators are an issue because they show that the individual could develop metabolic- or cardiovascular-related diseases, according to the study.

The individuals who transitioned into good-quality jobs had the lowest amounts of stress indicators seen from measurements across the cardiovascular, metabolic and immune systems, the study said.

Chandola said they did not find any mental health improvement in either the people who stayed unemployed or those who went on to poor-quality jobs, which also counters the assumption that a bad job is better than no job.

George Mason University's Kaplan said "it would be nice if they were able at some point to collect data on objective health outcomes." As the study suggests that the biological markers are indicators of eventual illness, a followup report on health outcomes would be advantageous, he said. But overall, he thought the study provided a clever new look at the effects of poor-quality employment.

(Source: [CNN](#))



## CHTHO chief names deputy director for tourism

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — The newly-appointed director of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization Ali-Asghar Mounesan has selected Mohammad Moheb-Khodai as his deputy for tourism affairs.



Mohammad Moheb-Khodai speaks in an undated photo

Moheb-Khodai replaced Mirhadi Qareseyyed-Romiani who served in the post since July, CHTN reported on Tuesday. Mounesan, who doubles as vice president, assumed the position on August 13, replacing Zahra Ahmadipour who held the post since November 2016.

Under its 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, Iran is expecting to soar foreign tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

## U.S. warns citizens about traveling to Cancun

The U.S. State Department warned its citizens about traveling to parts of Mexico including Cancun and Playa del Carmen, as homicides rise at resorts popular with American tourists.

The advisory issued on Tuesday upgraded the warnings for two states, Quintana Roo and Baja California Sur, saying turf wars between crime gangs have led to a surge in violence. The only warning for Quintana Roo in a December statement was about lack of cellular and Internet service in some areas.

The expanded travel advisory hits at the heart of a tourism industry that brings in \$20 billion a year for Mexico. The state of Quintana Roo, where the resorts of Tulum and Cozumel are also located, gets 10 million tourists a year, a third of the national total.

The warnings come as homicides in Mexico are set to rise to their highest since at least the turn of the century. Quintana Roo alone has seen 169 murders this year.

"Shooting incidents, in which innocent bystanders have been injured or killed, have occurred" in both states, the U.S. warned. "While most of these homicides appeared to be targeted criminal organization assassinations, turf battles between criminal groups have resulted in violent crime in areas frequented by U.S. citizens."

While Quintana Roo's advisory is now stricter, it isn't included among the most dangerous spots in Mexico, where U.S. government personnel are told to defer non-essential travel. That restriction is reserved for parts of Chihuahua, Coahuila and Colima states, among others. U.S. travel warnings of differing levels exist for most Mexican states.

Business group Coparmex, which represents more than 200 hotels, restaurants and other companies in Cancun, said the advisory will likely affect bookings this winter, when Americans head to the beaches. Adrian Lopez Sanchez, who heads Coparmex in Cancun, says security is beginning to improve after deteriorating earlier this year and last year.

(Source: Bloomberg)



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Ephesus

Located within what was once the estuary of the River Kaystros in Turkey, Ephesus comprises successive Hellenistic and Roman settlements founded on new locations, which followed the coastline as it retreated westward.

Excavations have revealed grand monuments of the Roman Imperial period including the Library of Celsus and the Great Theatre. Little remains of the famous Temple of Artemis, one of the "Seven Wonders of the World," which drew pilgrims from all around the Mediterranean.

Since the 5th century, the House of the Virgin Mary, a domed cruciform chapel seven kilometers from Ephesus, became a major place of Christian pilgrimage. The Ancient City of Ephesus is an outstanding example of a Roman port city, with sea channel and harbor basin.



The Library of Celsus in Ephesus, Turkey

Founded by the 2nd millennium BCE, the sanctuary of the Ephesian Artemis, originally an Anatolian mother goddess, became one of the largest and most powerful sanctuaries of the ancient world.

When Asia Minor was incorporated into the Roman Empire in 133 BCE, Ephesus was designated as the capital of the new province Asia.

Excavations and conservation over the past 150 years have revealed grand monuments of the Roman Imperial period lining the old processional way through the ancient city including the Library of Celsus and terrace houses.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Healthcare city aims to boost Iran's medical tourism prospects



The picture shows an artist's rendition of the Isfahan Healthcare City in central Iran, whenever the massive project is fully completed.

**TOURISM** **TEHRAN** — The first phase of an enormous healthcare city was officially inaugurated in the city of Isfahan, central Iran, on Monday as the country avidly seeks to surge its global share of the medical tourism market.

Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi accompanied by several provincial officials cut the ribbon on Isfahan Healthcare City which is comprised of orthopedic, obstetrics and gynecology clinics, as well as medical offices.

Once the complex becomes fully operational, it will create around four thousand direct jobs in the province, according to project managers. The whole project is estimated to cost a

total of 19.65 trillion rials (about \$260 million) which will be secured by the private sector, YJC reported on Monday.

Ground was broken for the healthcare center in 2012 and it is projected to become fully operational by the next three years.

The first phase covers 84,000 square meters of superstructure costing 4 trillion rials (about \$108 million) to be built.

Some 2 trillion rials (about \$54 million) has been allocated to the second phase of the complex that will be comprised of a comprehensive radiation hub, a conference hall and vast laboratory center for PET scan, CT scan and MRI amongst others.

A hospital with one thousand beds, measuring 124,000 square meters in

area, has been projected for the third phase under a budget of 12 trillion rials (about \$315 million).

The final phase will be capped by constructing a 12-story four-star hotel measuring 33,000 square meters in area, to which 1.65 trillion rials (about \$44 million) has been allotted.

Isfahan Healthcare City is aimed to become a widely-known international medical complex for offering quality clinical, health, and education services.

Earlier this month, Ali Rabiei, the minister of cooperatives, labor and social welfare said the country has a potential to earn \$7 billion in revenues through attracting one million health tourists on a yearly basis.

Relative wallet-friendly services can

be considered as the main advantage of medical tourism in Iran, the minister said in an address to a Tehran conference to which business representatives from over 30 courtiers attended.

Moreover, the state-run Tourism Holding Company, affiliated with the Social Security Organization, is to unveil a comprehensive plan, which will be implemented with the participation of 22 hospitals and over 200 physicians, specialists, and surgeons.

The Ministry of Health registered some 105,000 inbound patients over the past Iranian calendar year (March 2016-March 2017), a majority of them came from neighboring countries including Iraq, Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Persian Gulf littoral states.

## Northern cities gear up for intl. tribal culture festival

**HERITAGE** **TEHRAN** — The cities of Gorgan and Gonbad-e Kavus in northern Golestan province will successively host the 11th International Festival of Tribes Culture in early September, ISNA reported on Monday.

The first event will be held at Gorgan International Exhibition Center from September 4 to 7 and the second at Gonbad-e Kavus' Olympic Sports Complex from September 9 to 11, said Ebrahim Karimi who presides over Golestan province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department.

Holding exhibits on handicrafts and souvenirs as well as rituals and traditional music performances, and setting up massive ethnic tents called siah chador

(black tent) are among the main programs of the festival, the official added.

Diplomats, cultural officials, as well as regional performers, craftspeople, and artists from Iran and the neighboring countries such as Armenia, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Iraq, and Afghanistan have been invited to participate in the festival.

The province is home to the UNESCO-registered Gonbad-e Qabus, a one-millennium-old brick tower that is of high architectural importance as an exemplar design of the early-Islamic-era architecture. The 53-meter-high tomb-tower is where Qabus Ibn Voshmgir, the 11th-century Ziyarid ruler and literati is laid to rest.



An undated photo depicts Turkmen nomads performing a traditional dance at the foot of Gonbad-e Qabus, a UNESCO-inscribed tower in northern Iran.

## Tunisia's tourism revenues up 19 percent this year as more Europeans return

**TUNIS (Reuters)** — Tunisia's tourism revenues have risen 19 percent so far this year, reflecting a recovery in a vital sector crippled two years ago by attacks on foreign holidaymakers.

Tourism Minister Salma Loumi said 4.58 million foreign tourists visited the North African country between Jan. 1 and Aug. 10. Arrivals from neighboring Algeria were up 60 percent, helped by a promotional campaign by Tunisia, while visits by European tourists rose 16 percent.

"There are good indicators, revenues rose by 19 percent to 1.5 billion Tunisian dinars (\$613 million)", Loumi told reporters on Tuesday.

Tunisian officials expect the number of foreign tourists to rise to 6.5 million this year, up about 30 percent from 2016, due to an improving security situation and interest from new markets including Russia.

That would mark a return to normal, although below a record 6.9 million visitors seen in 2010.

Tourism accounts for about 8 percent of Tunisia's gross domestic product, provides thousands of jobs and is a key source of foreign currency, but it has struggled since two major attacks in 2015.

The first at the Bardo National Museum in Tunis left 21 tourists dead, while 39 mostly British holidaymakers were killed in the second attack on a beach in the resort

city of Sousse.

Last month, however, Britain's foreign office said it was no longer advising against travel to most of the North African country including the capital Tunis and major tourist destinations.

Tour operator Thomas Cook has said it will resume offering holidays in Tunisia following the change.

Tunisia's tourism ministry said it expected the company to start offering flights to Tunisia from February 2018.

The government expects rising tourism to help Tunisia's economy grow 2.5 percent this year, after a 1 percent expansion last year.

## Paris revels in tourism surge, but cautious after Barcelona

**PARIS (Reuters)** — Paris is on track to welcome more tourists this year than ever before after a bumper first half, a senior official said, though some would-be visitors might think again after the Barcelona attack.

The Paris region registered 16.4 million arrivals in the six months to June, its tourist board said on Tuesday.

That was the most in any first half of the year since current records began in 2008, confirming a strong recovery from a lull that followed Islamist attacks in the French capital in November 2015 that killed 130 people.

Frederic Valletoux, president of the Paris region tourist board, said a strong July and August, and good bookings for September meant the region could see 32-34 million tourist arrivals this year compared with 30 million in 2016 and 32 million in 2015.

It was too early to say if Thursday's attacks in the Catalan capital and the coastal resort of Cambrils would weigh on that forecast.

"(This) could be a record year but let's not get carried away," he told a news conference.

"Now will Barcelona have an impact



Tourists and local residents enjoy a long holiday weekend on the lawns of the Champ de Mars near the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, June 4, 2017.

on other destinations like Paris? It's hard to say. It's Europe. The international situation remains turbulent and terrorism a daily threat."

The 10.2 percent year-on-year bounce in first half arrivals was driven by a 14.9

percent rise in foreign tourists, led by Americans and Chinese. Fewer Britons visited as the pound lost value amid uncertainties over Brexit.

Among reasons for the upturn, tourism officials cited government financing

for marketing campaigns abroad and enhanced security measures in Paris.

Tourism generates over 7 percent of France's national income. In the Ile de France region, which includes Paris - one of the world's most visited cities - about half a million people have jobs linked to tourism.

The French revival is not confined to Paris. Visitor numbers nationwide are seen rising to 89 million in 2017 from 83 million last year. France targets 100 million visitors annually by 2020.

Valletoux said it was likely that Barcelona's tourism sector would now take a hit, but the experience of Paris and New York showed the Spanish city would recover.

"One can expect Barcelona to experience some slowdown. It took three years for New York to bounce back after the Sept 11 attacks, for Madrid it was a year (after the 2004 commuter train bombings) and for Paris also a year," Valletoux said.

The Barcelona attack was the latest of a spate across Europe in the past 13 months in which militants have used vehicles as weapons, killing nearly 130 people in France, Germany, Britain, Sweden and Spain.



# NASA powers up spacecraft that could one day carry humans to Mars

NASA just got one step closer to its most ambitious spacecraft ever: One that can carry humans to the moon, Mars and perhaps beyond.

It's called Orion. And Lockheed Martin (LMT), NASA's contractor for the project, said the latest version of the vessel was powered on for the first time Tuesday morning, lighting up the intricate on-board computers that will one day help guide Orion through the vacuum of space.

"This is the brains and heart of the spacecraft," said Lockheed spokesperson Gary Napier. He added that the inaugural power-up appeared to go "very well."

For the next one or two months NASA will add even more computer systems and continue testing its hardware and software, Napier told CNNMoney.

## ■ Important milestone

It's an important milestone for Orion, which NASA has been working on ever since the Space Shuttle program was retired in 2011.

The hope is to one day launch the spacecraft on the Space Launch System (SLS), a truly massive rocket that is also currently under development by NASA and a handful of private-sector contractors.

When it's up and running, SLS could be the most powerful rocket ever built. The current record holder is NASA's Saturn V rocket, which was used in NASA's Apollo missions, including the 1969 moon landing, and has long been retired.

Orion and SLS are seen as NASA's next great step forward.

Orion is tentatively scheduled to fly on SLS for an unmanned test flight around the moon in 2019.

"Although astronauts will not fly in this capsule on this flight, a large majority of the [tech is] the same design that astronauts will rely on during following missions with Orion into the solar system," Lockheed said in a statement.

It's not clear when the first humans will actually climb aboard Orion. NASA originally slated the first manned mission for sometime in 2021, but the timeline has since shifted and NASA has yet to set a new target date.



**It's not clear when the first humans will actually climb aboard Orion. NASA originally slated the first manned mission for sometime in 2021, but the timeline has since shifted and NASA has yet to set a new target date.**

## ■ Space exploration

Several private-sector companies are investing big money in space exploration.

Elon Musk's SpaceX is known for its Mars ambitions, and the firm is expected to announce a major update to its Mars travel plan in the coming weeks. And Jeff Bezos, head of Blue Origin, is underway on his own spacecraft capable of making cargo trips to the moon.

Meanwhile, NASA has poured tens of billions of dollars

into developing SLS and Orion, and it's already pushed back several deadlines.

But cheerleaders for NASA's Orion program say the private sector is far behind NASA in developing something that would have SLS and Orion's capabilities.

And, of course, NASA put the very first humans on the moon -- so the agency knows a thing or two about the perils and complications of spaceflight.

(Source: CNNMONEY)

## 'Electronic skin' takes wearable health monitors to the next level

A new, electronic skin microsystem tracks heart rate, respiration, muscle movement and other health data, and wirelessly transmits it to a smartphone. The electronic skin offers several improvements over existing trackers, including greater flexibility, smaller size, and the ability to stick the self-adhesive patch -- which is a very soft silicone about four centimeters (1.5 inches) in diameter -- just about anywhere on the body.

The microsystem was developed by an international team led by Kyung-In Jang, a professor of robotics engineering at South Korea's Daegu Gyeongbuk Institute of Science and Technology, and John A. Rogers, the director of Northwestern University's Center for Bio-Integrated Electronics. The team described the new device in the journal Nature Communications.

The electronic skin contains about 50 components connected by a network of 250 tiny wire coils embedded in protective silicone. The soft material enables it to conform to body, unlike other hard monitors. It wirelessly transmits data on movement and res-

piration, as well as electrical activity in the heart, muscles, eyes and brain to a smartphone application.

## ■ Unlike flat sensors

Unlike flat sensors, the tiny wires coils in this device are three-dimensional, which maximizes flexibility. The coils can stretch and contract like a spring without breaking. The coils and sensor components are also configured in an unusual spider web pattern that ensures "uniform and extreme levels of stretchability and bendability in any direction." It also enables tighter packing of components, minimizing size.

The researchers liken the design to a winding, curling vine, connecting sensors, circuits and radios like individual leaves on the vine.

The key to creating this novel microsystem is stretching the elastic silicone base while the tiny wire arcs, made of gold, chromium and phosphate, are laid flat onto it. The arcs are firmly connected to the base only at one end of each arc. When the base is allowed to contract, the arcs pop up, forming three-dimensional coils.

(Source: EurekAlert)

## The deep seas are alive with light

In 1932, William Beebe wedged his lanky body into a cramped submersible and became the first scientist to descend into the sea's inky darkness. A tiny window let him gaze out. Later, he described an unfamiliar world of dancing lights, pale glows and beguiling shimmer.

"It seemed to explode," he said of one luminous creature. Nothing, he added in his book, "Half Mile Down," had prepared him for the spectacular displays. The colors included pale greens, blues, reds and especially blue-greens, which by nature can travel far in seawater.

Over the decades, biologists learned that the creatures of the deep sea use light much as animals on land use sound -- to lure, intimidate, stun, mislead and find mates.

## ■ The living lights

The living lights emanated from tiny fish with needlelike fangs, and gelatinous brutes with thousands of feeding tentacles. The sheer variety suggested that bioluminescence was fairly common, but no scientist came up with a measurement of the phenomenon.

Now, 85 years after Dr. Beebe's pio-

neering dive, scientists have succeeded in gauging the actual extent of bioluminescence in the deep ocean.

During 240 research dives in the Pacific, they recorded every occurrence and kind of glowing sea creature -- more than 500 types living down as deep as two miles. Then, the researchers merged the results into a comprehensive survey.

The result? Most of the creatures -- a stunning 76 percent -- made their own light, vastly outnumbering the ranks of the unlit, such as dolphins.

## ■ Depths of the ocean

The depths of the ocean are a lot brighter than you might think. New research from the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute shows that nearly three quarters of deep sea creatures emit their own light using bioluminescence.

"People think bioluminescence is some kind of exotic characteristic," said Séverine Martini, a marine biologist and lead author of the study, published this year in Scientific Reports. "Even oceanographers don't realize that it's common."

(Source: The NYT)

## 2nd Phase of Shiraz Subway Opens in Presence of Interior Minister

The second phase of Subway Line No. 1, as long as 10.5 km, was inaugurated in Shiraz in the presence of Interior Minister Rahmani Fazli, the Public Relations Dept. of Shiraz Urban and Suburban Railway Company reported.

Managing Director of Shiraz Urban Railway Organization Asadollah Hajzamani was the first speaker who said: "The second phase of Metro Line 1 is ready for operational with four stations. Under the law, the company will offer

free of charge transport services for two months."

As long as 24.5 km, Shiraz subway is the longest subway line in the country after Tehran Subway, he said, adding: "It is hoped that one or two stations will be put into operation every 1.5 to two months."

He went on to say that Imam Hussein (AS) Station will be put into operation during the current Ten-Day Dawn celebrations, he maintained.

Construction of subway with such specifications will require sufficient time between six to eight years in case of existence of necessary financial resources, he said, adding: "Shiraz Urban Railway Company has been put into operation with approx. five years delay due to the shortage of financial facilities."

In the end, Managing Director of Shiraz Urban Railway Organization Asadollah Hajzamani added: "700 billion toman, \$30 million and 100 billion to-



mans have been provided out of distribution of participation bonds, National Development Fund of Iran (NDFI) and banking loans respectively for the construction of Subway Line No. 1 in Shiraz."

## Official Reveals Enhanced Banking Ties between Iran and Oman

The banking ties between Iran and Oman is on the verge of considerable development.

Mohsen Zarrabi Chairman of Iran and Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce announced the above statement and said: "Fortunately, two banks of "Muscat" and "Sehar" have established good relationship with the Iranian banks,

so that suitable ways have been paved for the issuance of guarantee for technical and engineering companies and also issuance of Letter of Credit (L/C) for importing and exporting goods especially for Iranian merchants and traders.

In a meeting held in the past month between senior managers of Sehar Bank and chief executives of Export

Development Bank of Iran (EDBI), Saman Bank and Middle East Bank, constructive agreements were made in the field of boosting mutual cooperation, he said, adding: "It is hoped that the two countries will cooperate and collaborate with one another in order to materialize most of their objectives."

## Bank Shahr, Pioneer in Construction of Knowledge-Based Projects

Giant steps have been taken by Bank Shahr in the field of completion of construction of knowledge-based projects.

Technology Commercialization and Innovation Deputy President for Scientific Affairs Mahmoud Sheikh Zeynaddin announced the above statement and pointed to the economic woes of country and necessity of paying due attention to the knowledge-based economy and said: "Bank Shahr has always been

pioneer and leader in the field of construction of knowledge-based projects in the country."

In this regard, agreement has been signed and sealed with banks, he said, adding: "Special funds have been set up both in public and private banks in order to offering financial facilities to the target companies."

Bank Shahr is among the active banks in the country which has taken

giant stride in the field of completion of many knowledge-based projects up to the present time, he reiterated.

In the end, he referred to this issue that knowledge-based economy and development based on knowledge and creativity is one of the most important subjects reiterated in the field of resistance economy and said: "Banks play important role in this field, so that both public and private banks have thus far



rolled up their sleeves in order to back knowledge-based projects."

## Toothless, dwarf dolphin, a case study in evolution

Scientists on Wednesday unveiled an extinct species of toothless, whiskered and objectively cute mini-dolphin that plied Earth's oceans some 30 million years ago.

With only a fossilized cranium -- found in a river near Charleston, South Carolina -- to work with, the researchers were able to reconstruct the snub-nosed mammal's evolutionary saga, describe its facial features and figure out what it snacked on.

Just over a meter (three feet) from snout to tail, Inermorostrium xenops was half the size of the common bottlenose dolphin.

Ironically, the pint-size Flipper was an early offshoot from one of the two main groupings of cetaceans called Odontoceti, or "toothed whale" that includes sperm whales and orca.

This group also developed a radar-like capacity to navigate and detect objects by emitting sounds, called echolocation.

The other branch, baleen whales, are filter feeders that strain huge volumes of ocean water to net tiny, shrimp-like krill or plankton -- think humpback or the gargantuan blue.

"Inermorostrium took only four million years to evolve from ancestral whales with precisely occluding teeth" -- matching top and bottom -- "into a toothless, suction feeding specialist," explained Robert Boessenecker, a professor at the College of Charleston and lead author of a study in the British Royal Society journal Proceedings B.

During those four million years -- a brief interlude on the evolutionary clock -- I. xenops lost its pearly whites, saw its snout and mouth shrink and developed super muscular lips.

"This last feature is perhaps the most critical," said Boessenecker, who deduced the dolphin's powerful smackers from a series of deep artery channels clearly designed to nourish extensive soft tissue.

(Source: AFP)

## Cyborg bacteria could turn CO2 into fuel

If we want to fix our climate problem, it's not enough to simply stop burning fossil fuels. At this point, we have to actively take CO2 out of the air. There are a few technologies designed to remove CO2 from the air, but many of them are inefficient or expensive. But new research from Harvard might provide a low-cost, effective way to convert CO2 into something useful: The researchers discovered that adding compounds like cadmium or mercury to bacteria will trigger them to grow tiny semiconductors, converting CO2 into acetic acid.

Many heavy metals like cadmium, mercury, and lead are toxic to both large and small creatures alike, and some bacteria have evolved a defense. When exposed to these heavy metals, the bacteria use them to build semiconductor crystals on their surfaces, effectively neutralizing them. The Harvard researchers realized these crystals could be used as a sort of artificial photosynthesis.

When exposed to water, light, and carbon dioxide, the crystals on these bacteria make acetic acid-vinegar, basically. This reaction is around 80 percent efficient, more than six times as efficient as regular photosynthesis. More importantly, all it takes is bacteria and some cadmium for the reaction to start taking place.

"You grow them in their liquid broth and you just add small aliquots of cadmium solution and you wait a couple of days and out pops these photosynthetic organisms," says researcher Kelsey Sakimoto. "It's all very simple, mix-in-a-pot-chemistry."

(Source: Popular Mechanics)

## Ancient Earth's hot interior created 'graveyard' of continental slabs

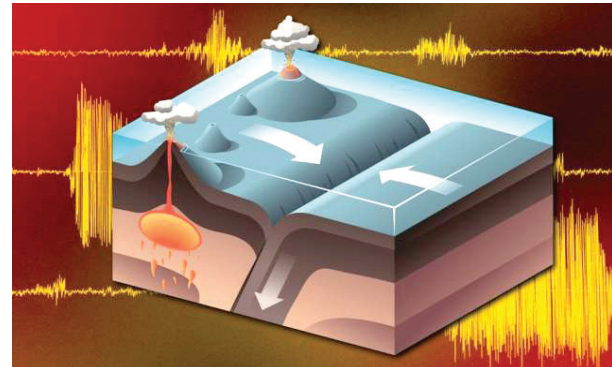


Plate tectonics has shaped the Earth's surface for billions of years: Continents and oceanic crust have pushed and pulled on each other, continually rearranging the planet's façade. As two massive plates collide, one can give way and slide under the other in a process called subduction. The subducted slab then slips down through the Earth's viscous mantle, like a flat stone through a pool of honey.

For the most part, today's subducting slabs can only sink so far, to about 670 kilometers below the surface, before the mantle's makeup turns from a honey-like consistency, to that of paste -- too dense for most slabs to penetrate further. Scientists have suspected that this density filter existed in the mantle for most of Earth's history.

Now, however, geologists at MIT have found that this density boundary was much less pronounced in the ancient Earth's mantle, 3 billion years ago. In a paper published in Earth and Planetary Science Letters, the researchers note that the ancient Earth harbored a mantle that was as much as 200 degrees Celsius hotter than it is today -- temperatures that may have brewed up more uniform, less dense material throughout the entire mantle layer.

The researchers also found that, compared with today's rocky material, the ancient crust was composed of much denser stuff, enriched in iron and magnesium. The combination of a hotter mantle and denser rocks likely caused subducting plates to sink all the way to the bottom of the mantle, 2,800 kilometers below the surface, forming a "graveyard" of slabs atop the Earth's core.

(Source: eurekalert.org)



## Trump’s decision to allow plastic bottle sales in national parks condemned

The Trump administration’s decision to reverse a ban on the sale of plastic water bottles in some of America’s most famous national parks, including the Grand Canyon, shows “the corporate agenda is king and people and the environment are left behind”, campaigners have said.

Trump’s day of doom for national monuments approaches



The comments come after the administration ended a policy that allowed parks to ban the sale of plastic bottled water in an effort to curb pollution.

That policy “was a win-win for everyone except the bottled water industry, which is only interested in its bottom line”, said Lauren DeRusha Florez, a campaign director for Corporate Accountability International, a group that campaigns against corporate abuses.

The change means national parks will no longer be allowed to ban plastic bottled water, after Trump administration officials ended a six-year-old policy put in place to curb pollution.

The National Park Service, responsible for America’s most celebrated wilderness areas, announced the change in a press release that closely echoed lobbyists’ arguments against the ban.

“It should be up to our visitors to decide how best to keep themselves and their families hydrated during a visit to a national park, particularly during hot summer visitation periods”, said the acting National Park Service director, Michael Reynolds. He said parks would continue to encourage people to use free bottle filling stations, “as appropriate”.

The same argument was used by the bottled water industry’s main mouthpiece, the International Bottled Water Association, last year. Members of the lobbying organization include representatives of bottled water giants such as Nestlé, which sells brands including Poland Springs, Perrier and San Pellegrino in North America.

Six years ago, the parks service encouraged America’s 417 federal parks to end bottled water sales where practical, arguing that the system needed to be “an exemplar of sustainability”. Parks that did ban bottled water only did so after installation of water bottle filling stations and a campaign to inform visitors where those filling stations were.

Since 2011, 23 of America’s most famous parks had ended bottled water sales. Those included the Grand Canyon and Zion national park, which together drew 10.2 million visitors in 2016. Last year, 331 million people visited America’s national parks.

Plastic bottles at the Grand Canyon alone comprised 20% of waste, and 30% of the park’s recyclable waste.

Plastic bottles were also a major contributor to trash that ended up along walkways and “below the rim” of the landmark canyon.

Already, the world consumes more than 1m plastic water bottles per minute, or roughly 20,000 per second. Environmentalists fear the impact of the growth in plastic water bottle sales could rival the effect of climate change, as recycling efforts fail to keep up with demand, and plastic ends up littering coastlines in particular.

(Source: The Gaurdian)

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Daily Life - I’m sorry

A: Whoa, whoa, what’s going on? Watch out!

B: Hey, watch where you’re going!

A: Oh, no! I’m so sorry! Are you all right?

B: Oh...I don’t know.

A: I **feel terrible**, I really didn’t **mean** to **knock you over**. My tire, just **exploded**, and I lost control of my bike. Really, it was an **accident**. Please accept my apologies.

B: Just let me try to stand up.

SONG: Why do birds suddenly appear, every time you are near?

A: Are you okay?

B: Oh, wait a second, you seem really familiar, I think I know you from somewhere.

A: Yeah, I think we have met somewhere before. That’s right! We met at Aaron’s **place** last weekend! What a **coincidence**! But anyway, I’m glad to see that you’re not too badly hurt, and I should probably get going. I have a nine o’clock meeting.

B: Ouch! My ankle! I think it’s broken! You can’t just leave me like this! Are you calling an ambulance?

A: Nope, I’m canceling my appointment so that I can stay here with you.

#### ■ Key Vocabulary

**feel terrible**: sorry

**mean**: intend, plan

**knock over**: make something fall over

**explode**: suddenly break apart

**accident**: an event that is not planned or intended

**familiar**: probably known, but not clearly remembered

**place**: house

**coincidence**: situation when two or more things happen at the same time in an unplanned way

#### ■ Supplementary Vocabulary

**regret**: feel sad or sorry about something

**apologetic**: feeling or showing regret, showing an apology

**feel guilty**: feel responsible for doing something bad

**unfamiliar**: not familiar

(Source: irlanguage.com)

# Pivotal concerns about feral and free roaming dogs

By Farnaz Heidari

Our susceptible wildlife is closing in on the extinction by human-wildlife conflicts. The resultant negative of human interferences on wild animals and their habitats is widespread. Now dogs are often the most abundant terrestrial carnivore as Julie Young and her colleagues told the Bio-Science in 2011.

“Dogs can significantly disrupt or modify intact ecosystems well beyond the areas occupied by people. Few studies have directly quantified the environmental or economic effects of free-roaming and feral dogs. Our case study in Mongolia suggests that efforts to conserve threatened and endangered species that do not include management actions aimed to reduce dog-wildlife interactions may be ineffective in areas where feral and free-roaming dogs occur. Man’s best friend may not be wildlife’s best steward!”

#### ■ Serengeti disaster

The increased transmission of disease as a result of human activities and interaction with humans is a major threat to many endangered species and ecosystems. Human activities may increase the incidence of disease carrying vectors. In addition, interaction with humans and their domestic animals exposes wild animals to diseases never previously encountered that can reduce the size and density of wild populations. During the early 1990s, in Tanzania’s Serengeti National Park about 25% of lions were killed by canine distemper, apparently contracted from the 30,000 domestic dogs living near the park as Kissui and Parker mentioned on their article in 2004.

But the disaster became more frequent, and the number of wildlife affected also increased. This greater morbidity was attributable not only to lions but also to silver-backed jackals (*Canis mesomelas*) and bat-eared foxes (*Otocyon megalotis*). By August 1994, 85% of the Serengeti lion population had anti-CDV antibodies, and the epidemic spread north to lions in the Maasai Mara National reserve, Kenya, and uncounted hyaenas, bat-eared foxes, and leopards



were also affected.

Dr. Mafalda Viana from Veterinary and life Science Section of Glasgow University and her colleagues have been focused on dynamics of Canine Distemper Virus in domestic dogs and lions. The results of their study seem to indicate that the wider dog population and other wildlife species drive CDV dynamics. Hence, although widespread dog vaccination reduced the infection in dogs, transmission to lion populations still occurred, warranting further investigation into effective management options of CDV in this species-rich ecosystem. This is the latest data after 3 decades of CDV exposure in dogs and lions of the Serengeti.

#### ■ Lack of information about CDV in Iran

By raising the profile of a particular disease such as Canine Distemper Virus (CDV), it can leverage more attention for biodiversity conservation at large in a particular context. CDV in Iran is unknown because dead bodies of wildlife in our country get buried without detailed necropsy.

Chief vet of Pardisan Rehabilitation Center Dr. Iman Memarian explained that “an infectious disease is capable

of inducing declines in wildlife populations, and occasionally result in their extinction.”

Threatened populations are at greater risk from pathogens that are transmitted through density independent processes, including those contracted during social interaction (frequency dependent transmission), vector-borne diseases, or those that spillover from reservoirs of infection. With small, often fragmented populations, large carnivores are particularly vulnerable to the effects of infectious disease, especially multi-host pathogens like Canine Parvo Virus (CPV) and Canine Distemper Virus (CDV), Memarian pointed.

The chief vet went on to say that the endangered population of Persian leopard (*Panthera pardus saxicolor*) in north-east part of Iran could face an increasing risk of extinction due to infection with canine distemper virus (CDV). Short-lasting CDV infections are unlikely to be maintained in small populations of species with limited connectivity like leopards, where viruses fade out as susceptible hosts are depleted.

“Multi-host pathogens can persist in more abundant host species that can act

## How to survive a bear encounter



knife. Aim for the face and ears.

Hechtel spent nearly his entire 40-year career studying black bears and grizzlies in Alaska. He loves bears. Among his hardest tasks has been distilling complicated animals down to simple safety instructions for humans. Often, people only seem to remember to play dead. During one Alaskan mauling, a

young woman fell to the ground and lay perfectly still even after a black bear began chewing on her leg. “If a bear is eating you,” he says, “don’t play dead.”

A defensive bear is a different story; you need to convince it that you’re not a threat to its food or its young. If one does attack, drop to the ground with your belly down to protect your soft vital organs. Interlock your fingers behind your neck. Don’t fight or scream. If the bear flips you over, roll back onto your stomach. When it senses it has nullified the menace, it will leave. Stay still until the bear is gone.

Occasionally, you hear about some gruesome mauling, but the vast majority of the time, humans stumble into bears, or vice versa, and both parties leave unscathed. “People who have run-ins with bears generally don’t know what they’re doing,” Hechtel says. “And they still come out O.K. most of the time.”

(Source: The New York Times)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ↔ ب

### Flood leaves 2 dead, 2 missing in Iran

Severe flood in Golestan Province in northeastern part of Iran has so far claimed two lives and left 2 missing.

Heavy rain and storm happened on Thursday evening across Aliabad, Kalaleh, Gonbad-e Kavus and Azadshahr countries, Fars reported.

One individual died after falling from the roof of a house due to heavy wind in Gonbad-e Kavus, Iran’s Emergency Medical Services official Hassan Nouri announced.

Two individuals onboard a car in Aliabad are still missing and one found dead, however the car has been found, he noted.

Search and rescue is still going on in the region, he concluded.

## ENGLISH PROVERB

### Union is strength

■ **Explanation**: A group has more force than an individual

■ **For example**: We cannot allow our opponents to divide us. Union is strength.

## PHRASAL VERB

### Work out

■ **meaning**: End nicely

■ **For example**: Things were going wrong for them but fortunately it all worked out in the end.

## ENGLISH IDIOM

### Waiting for a raindrop in the drought

■ **Explanation**: waiting and hoping for something that has little chance of happening.

■ **For example**: For many people, finding a job these days is like waiting for a raindrop in the drought.



# Phoenix police fire tear gas at anti-Trump protesters

The United States Police have fired tear gas and stun grenades at crowds of protesters in Phoenix, Arizona, as they demonstrated against the U.S. President Donald Trump, who held a campaign-style rally nearby for supporters.

A haze enveloped the night sky on Tuesday as protesters and police clashed outside the downtown Phoenix Convention Center, where Trump had just wrapped up his speech.

People fled coughing as an officer in a helicopter above bellowed through a speaker, urging protesters to leave the area.

Police claimed protesters threw rocks and bottles at shielded officers, who were armed with batons.

"They also dispersed some gas in the area," said Jonathan Howard, Phoenix police spokesman.

The officers responded with pepper spray to "disperse the crowd and stop the assaults," he said.

Three people were arrested, Police Chief Jeri Williams said.

However, several people on social media disputed the police account.

"I witnessed no gas being thrown at police prior to police firing upon protesters," reporter Andrew Kimmel said, writing on Twitter.

Local television station 3TV showed footage of police shooting an object at a protester who had kicked back a tear gas canister. The protester fell to the



ground after being hit.

Police did not estimate how many protesters had gathered, but Arizona media said thousands turned out.

Authorities were on high alert for the gathering - the president's first political rally since deadly violence in Charlottesville, Virginia. There, on August 12, a white supremacist mowed down anti-racist protesters who were countering a far-right rally, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring dozens.

## ■ Toxic Trump

Al Jazeera's Gabriel Elizondo, reporting from Phoenix, described tense scenes as skirmishes broke out between protesters and Trump supporters at the end of the president's campaign-style rally.

"There were some scuffles, instances of people yelling back and forth at each other. Then, as the anti-Trump group started to break up, police used tear gas to disperse the crowds and open up the streets," he said.

"Most of that tension has now left the streets. However, there continues to be a heavy riot police presence here."

Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton had unsuccessfully called on the president to not hold the rally so soon after the trouble in Charlottesville.

A few scuffles and shouting matches were also reported earlier in the day as Trump supporters lined up to attend the rally. But those events were generally peaceful.

"Toxic Trump," read one protest sign held up to the president's supporters streaming into the Phoenix Convention Center downtown.

"Lock Him Up!" read another, a reference to earlier campaign chants by Trump and his backers about his Democratic election rival Hillary Clinton.

About six members of an anti-Trump group, Redneck Revolt, arrived with guns. John Brown, who wore military fatigues and carried an AK-47, said he was there to protect anti-Trump protesters.

Arizona allows people to carry weapons openly.

A number of opposition signs showed drawings or photos of Trump with a small, Hitler-style moustache.

Three Trump supporters taunted Latino protesters with offensive comments about immigrants and held anti-Muslim and Black Lives Matter signs.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## 22 million Americans support neo-Nazis, new poll indicates

Nine per cent of Americans say holding neo-Nazi or white supremacist views is acceptable, according to a new poll.

The Washington Post ABC poll was carried out in the wake of the deadly racially-charged violence which erupted at a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville earlier this month. If extrapolated to the entire United States population, nine per cent would equate to 22 million people.

According to the survey, 83 per cent of Americans think holding neo-Nazi views is unacceptable.

Thirty-nine per cent said they believe the "alt-right" holds white supremacist or neo-Nazi views whereas 21 per cent believe they do not. On the other hand, thirty-nine per cent of those surveyed said they had no opinion on the matter.

The survey, which found President Donald Trump's overall approval rating of 37 per cent was not substantially different to his 36 per cent mark in July, was conducted from 16-20 August and from speaking to 1,014 adults across the United States.

President Trump's response to the ugly clashes between Neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klan (KKK) members and "alt-right" supporters and anti-fascists at Charlottesville, which culminated in Heather Heyer being killed after a

car ploughed into a crowd of anti-fascist protesters, has led to him being condemned by members of Congress, leading business executives and military leaders.

President Trump pointed blame at "both sides" for the violence, drawing a moral equivalence between white supremacists and anti-fascists.

While the problem of white supremacy has gained increasing attention in the wake of Charlottesville, it has of course been an ongoing and persistent problem in the states. The murder of Heyer, the 32-year-old anti-fascist protester who was killed, is the most recent in a spate of killings which have raised the specter of far-right violence.

In February, an Indian-born engineer was shot dead in a Kansas bar, with witnesses telling reporters the gunman shouted "go back to your country" before opening fire.

In May, Jeremy Joseph Christian spewed anti-Muslim "hate speech" to a young woman wearing a hijab on a train and her friend. After other passengers intervened, he pulled out a knife and slashed their throats, with two people left killed and a third seriously injured.

He was charged with murder, attempted murder, possession of a weapon and intimidation but sought to defend his actions in court. He shouted slogans

such as: "You call it terrorism. I call it patriotism" and could also be heard shouting "Death to the enemies of America".

"Leave this country if you hate our freedom, death to Antifa," he also said, referring to the commonly used shorthand for the anti-fascist movement.

The so-called "alt-right" movement has gained increasing attention since Donald Trump's presidential bid and his time in the White House. While President Trump has sought to distance himself from the movement - which has been accused of racism, anti-semitism and misogyny - its members have rallied behind him and hailed him as their leader.

Steve Bannon, the former executive chair of far-right online publication Breitbart News which he described as "the platform for the alt-right" last year, was fired as President Trump's White House Chief Strategist at the end of last week.

Since becoming the latest top Trump aide to leave their post, Bannon has returned straight to be the head of Breitbart. In the hours after his departure from the Trump administration became public, Breitbart proclaimed the return of their "populist hero" on its homepage.

(Source: The Independent)

## Russia, China slam new unilateral U.S. sanctions

Russia and China have reacted strongly to new United States sanctions targeting Chinese and Russian companies and individuals for allegedly "supporting" North Korea's weapons program by doing business with the country.

The U.S. Treasury Department on Tuesday imposed sanctions on six Chinese-owned firms, and one Russian, one North Korean, and two Singapore-based entities as well as six individuals — four Russians, one Chinese and one North Korean — for facilitating trade ties with Pyongyang.

The targeted firms and figures are accused of working with blacklisted individuals, assisting the development of the North Korean energy sector, helping it place workers abroad, or move money from abroad. Their U.S. assets were frozen and Americans were barred from conducting business with them.

The U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said in a statement that it was "unacceptable" for the designated entities to "enable North Korea to generate income used to develop weapons of mass destruction."

### ■ Russia preparing response

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov reacted to the new U.S. sanctions by expressing disappointment and warning Washington that Moscow was preparing a response.

"The lip service from American representatives about the desire to stabilize bilateral relations [with Russia] is extremely unconvincing," Ryabkov said in a statement.

"In recent years, Washington in theory should have learned that for us, the language of sanctions is unacceptable, and the solutions to real problems are only hindered by such actions. So far, however, there doesn't seem to be an understanding of such obvious truths," he said.

"In the meantime," he added, "we are beginning to work out the inevitable response to this situation."

The Russian official also expressed hope that "our American colleagues will be aware of the futility and detrimental nature of further sliding down the spiral of sanctions."

Russian Senator Andrey Klimov also reacted to the unilateral U.S. sanctions by calling them illegitimate and urging due

counteraction.

Saying that the only sanctions recognized by international law are the ones approved by the United Nations Security Council, he said, "We must react in principle to this insane and confrontational policy. The toolbox is rich; let's hope that we will act consistently, reasonably, professionally and effectively."

### ■ China: bilateral cooperation at stake

China, for its part, said that Washington should "immediately correct its mistake" of imposing unilateral sanctions on Chinese firms and individuals to avoid denting bilateral cooperation.

Beijing "opposes unilateral sanctions out [side] of the UN Security Council framework," said a Chinese government spokesperson. "We strongly urge the U.S. to immediately correct its mistake, so as not to impact bilateral cooperation on relevant issues."

The U.S. is opposed to the North Korean missile and military nuclear programs. Pyongyang says it needs them to deter potential U.S. aggression.

Earlier this month, China and Rus-



sia had voted in favor of a U.S.-drafted sanctions resolution against North Korea in a rare move that signaled willingness to cooperate with Washington.

Among the Chinese names targeted with the new sanctions are three coal companies, including one of the country's largest importers, Dandong Zhicheng. The three firms are collectively responsible for having imported nearly half a billion dollars' worth of North Korean coal between 2013 and 2016, the U.S. Treasury Department claimed.

Moscow-based company Gefest-M was among the Russian entities singled out by the Treasury Department.

(Source: agencies)

## Tillerson: U.S. won't win 'battlefield victory' in Afghanistan

The United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has undermined President Donald Trump's promise to win the Afghan war and defeating the Taliban, saying Washington might not succeed in the war.

"I think the president was clear this entire effort was intended to put pressure on the Taliban, to have the Taliban understand that you will not win a battlefield victory," Tillerson said during a press conference Tuesday afternoon. "We may not win one, but neither will you."

His remarks came one day after Trump said he would prolong the military intervention in the South Asian country, which he once described as a "complete waste."

Tillerson also stepped up pressure on the neighboring Pakistan over its perceived support for the Taliban in

Afghanistan.

He pointed to the fact that the U.S. is a key ally of Pakistan and that Islamabad enjoys a special status as a non-NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) partner which receives billions of dollars in aid.

These, however, "could be on the table for discussion if in fact they are unwilling to change their posture or change their approach to how they are dealing with the numerous terrorist organizations that find safe haven in Pakistan," Tillerson added.

"It is in Pakistan's interest to take those actions."

Trump also said on Monday that Washington can no longer remain silent towards Pakistan's "safe havens for terrorists," threatening Islamabad to cut the "billions and

billions of dollars" of U.S. aid.

The U.S. president announced that he would send more troops to the country's longest war, which he once described as a "complete waste."

The United States -- under Republican George W. Bush's presidency -- and its allies invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror.

Trump who had previously called for withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan argued that his "original instinct was to pull out," but that he was convinced by his national security team to take on the Taliban militants.

(Source: Press TV)

## 'New Trump strategy for Afghanistan to prove abortive'

**1 ->** The official further warned that increased military presence of Americans could trigger off violent reactions on the part of their rivals inside the region. Leader of Islamic Movement of Afghanistan said the issue would also raise anger of countries who hold close political and geographical ties with Afghans.

Mufleh emphasized that the US, by increased military presence, never aimed at eliminating the Taliban movement as evidenced by documents released by the media indicating that Americans have assisted the opposition forces in Afghanistan.

"We have been informed that external forces have provided military support for those opposing the Afghan government," said the politician stressing that instead of uprooting terrorists, Americans seek to exacerbate war and insecurity in northern Afghanistan as a gateway to Central Asia.

Advisor to the Afghan president pointed to the stance taken by Afghan National Unity Government's Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah against the new Trump strategy asserting "US forces seem to be in charge of everything inside Afghanistan as they are freely taking actions there without forming an agreement with the Afghan government."

Mohammad Mukhtar Mufleh urged US President Donald Trump to take side of people and to clearly condemn killing of innocent people as a result of American bombardments.

He criticized certain neighboring countries whose actions have given way to presence of Americans inside Afghanistan saying "had the neighboring states remained beside Afghans with honesty, current problems would have never appeared."

At the end of his remarks, the Afghan politician invited all Islamic states to form a coalition in a bid to bolster regional cooperation.



## Egypt cancels Kushner meeting with minister after denial of aid

Egypt called off a scheduled meeting between its foreign minister and top United States presidential adviser Jared Kushner on Wednesday after the United States decided to withhold millions of dollars in aid.

But President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi would meet the U.S. delegation led by Kushner later in the day as scheduled, Sisi's office said.

Two U.S. sources familiar with the matter told Reuters on Tuesday that Washington had decided to deny Egypt \$95.7 million in aid and to delay a further \$195 million because of its failure to make progress on respecting human rights and democratic norms.

"Egypt sees this measure as reflecting poor judgment of the strategic relationship that ties the two countries over long decades and as adopting a view that lacks an accurate understanding of the importance of supporting Egypt's stability," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

The decision could have "negative implications" on achieving common goals and interests between the two countries, it added.

Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry had been scheduled to meet the U.S. delegation led by Kushner, a son-in-law to the U.S. President Donald Trump and a close adviser, on Wednesday in Cairo to discuss the Middle East.

But the meeting was canceled immediately after the ministry released its statement, a copy of Shoukry's schedule sent out to journalists showed.

A foreign ministry official told Reuters the meeting had been canceled but did not give a reason. A U.S. embassy official in Cairo said Kushner's meeting with Shoukry had never been set in stone because "the schedule was never fixed."

(Source: Reuters)

## Floods kill almost 1,000 in India, Nepal and Bangladesh

Almost 1,000 people have been killed over a period of two weeks in some of the worst flooding to hit South Asia in decades, with residents running out of food and clean water, officials said.

Bangladesh, India and Nepal have put the combined death toll at least 800 since August 10.

The Red Cross said on Tuesday that 24 million people have been affected by the floods, with large areas of land submerged in water.

"The situation is going from bad to worse," said Jagan Chapagain, Red Cross undersecretary-general, as he confirmed the death toll given by regional authorities.

"This is the worst flooding that parts of South Asia have seen in decades."

Flood waters in the three countries have killed hundreds of people who were stranded and cut off from road access. Many villages are now only accessible by boat.

The Red Cross says it needs more than \$3.5m to help people in Nepal.

The charity is planning to launch a separate campaign to raise funds to help people in Bangladesh.

But the organization said India has the resources needed to respond, without foreign help.

Victims in India blame the government's inability to respond adequately.

Almost one-third of Nepal and Bangladesh is flooded, leaving residents vulnerable to waterborne diseases such as diarrhea, malaria, dengue fever and encephalitis.

(Source: Al Jazeera)



## Mayweather claims McGregor is struggling to make weight

Floyd Mayweather has claimed Conor McGregor is struggling to make weight ahead of their highly-anticipated showdown in Las Vegas this weekend, live on Sky Sports Box Office.

The undefeated 40-year-old said McGregor is “extremely heavy” and could risk facing a fine should he fail to make the 154lbs light-middleweight limit at Friday’s weigh-in.

The Irishman, who has previously fought at 145lbs, is accustomed to losing a large percentage of weight on the week of a fight, though Mayweather suggests the UFC star may be facing a tough cut this time around.

“Conor McGregor is extremely heavy right now, I think he’s 164lbs, he still has 10lbs to go,” Mayweather told FightHype.com.

“He’s got to get that weight down, a true champion is disciplined and very responsible but we’ll see.

“If he doesn’t make the weight we’ll still fight but it’s going to be a heavy fine.”

However, McGregor vowed his weight is “phenomenal” as he and Mayweather arrived in Las Vegas on Tuesday for their super fight at the T-Mobile Arena this Saturday night.

The two-weight UFC champion has been training at the UFC Performance Institute in the world’s fight capital for August 26, and is adamant it’s been the best camp of his career.

“He knows nothing,” McGregor told reporters at the grand arrivals. “Let him keep praying. Praying for weight, praying for fatigue, praying for me to take a back-step - all he’s doing is praying to the new god of boxing.

“My weight is absolutely phenomenal. Tell me one time I have ever missed weight or not performed? Let him think what he wants.”

(Source: Sky Sports)

## Barcelona confirm hacking after Di Maria ‘announcement’

Barcelona confirmed their social media accounts had been hacked after the LaLiga giants appeared to announce the signing of Angel Di Maria.

The Argentina and Paris Saint-Germain attacker has been linked to Barca, who are still seeking reinforcements following Neymar’s exit to the Ligue 1 outfit.

A bizarrely timed tweet in the early hours of Wednesday morning, Spanish time, appeared to confirm the 29-year-old’s arrival at Camp Nou.

“Welcome Angel Di Maria to FC Barcelona! #DiMariaFCB,” the tweet read. However, hackers quickly followed up their transfer ‘announcement’, although a series of tweets remained published for more than half an hour before Barca seemingly intervened.

Later, the club tweeted: “Our accounts have been hacked tonight. We’re working to solve the problem as soon as possible. Thanks for your patience.”

Barca are still seemingly looking to be active in the transfer market, with reports on Wednesday claiming the club had submitted yet another bid – this time £101million plus add-ons – for Liverpool star Philippe Coutinho.

(Source: Telegraph)

## Mario Balotelli blasted by Nice boss Lucien Favre

Mario Balotelli was jeered by his own fans – and then blasted by his boss – after his Nice side crashed out of the Champions League.

The French side lost 2-0 to Napoli in the last qualifying round at the Allianz Arena to go out 4-0 on aggregate.

Balotelli, made only four successful passes and was pulled after 77 minutes. New signing Wesley Sneijder was also ineffective in his first game of the season.

But Nice boss Lucien Favre said: “This came too soon for Wesley Sneijder but Mario Balotelli was not in the game.

“When you have one or two who do nothing on the pitch, it is impossible to beat anyone, even in Ligue 1.

“You have to be honest. I should have taken him (Balotelli) off sooner. He didn’t run enough. He didn’t give enough. We played better when we put in his place a youngster [Knepe Ganago] who nobody knows.”

Balotelli was off the pitch arguing with the fourth official when Napoli took the lead after 48 minutes.

“First it was his shoelace, then it was his bracelet,” sighed Favre. The Italian impressed on the Cote d’Azur during his debut season, scoring 17 times in 28 games.

But his second year at the club is already threatening to turn sour.

(Source: Mirror)

## Liverpool ‘to reject Barcelona’s fresh £138m offer for Coutinho’

Liverpool will reportedly turn down Barcelona’s fourth bid for Philippe Coutinho as they plan to stand firm on their stance that the playmaker is not for sale.

So far, the Reds’ resilience has not wavered having rejected three offers, thought to be worth £72m, £80m and £113m from the Catalan giants. Despite Coutinho handing in a transfer request, the Anfield club reportedly informed Barcelona that they do not want any more contact from them after rebuffing a third offer, said to include unrealistic add-ons.

The warning has not stopped the La Liga club, though, as rumours have emerged that they intend to table a fourth offer worth £138m, which would include £101m cash and £37m in bonuses.

According to The Mirror, Liverpool officials believe that the Spanish club do not have the funds to pay a huge fee up front, even though they recently sold Neymar to Paris Saint-Germain for a world record £196m.

The report adds that Coutinho has his heart set on a move to Barcelona, but is beginning to accept that he will not get his wish before the transfer window shuts in eight days’ time.

(Source: Goal)

# Wayne Rooney retires from England duty after rejecting recall from Southgate



them be successful.

“I will always remain a passionate England fan. One of my very few regrets is not to have been part of a successful England tournament side.

“Hopefully the exciting players Gareth is bringing through can take that ambition further and I hope everyone will get behind the team. One day the dream will come true and I look forward to being there as a fan – or in any capacity.”

It is 14 and a half years since the then 17-year-old striker burst on to the scene for England, making his debut in a friendly against Australia at Upton Park in February 2003.

Rooney’s first international goal followed against Macedonia that September and the following summer his outstanding performances led to a place in the Euro 2004 team of the tournament.

The forward was unable to match those

individual displays at a major competition, despite going onto play in three World Cups and two further European Championships.

He has, though, left an indelible mark on the national game. Rooney usurped Sir Bobby Charlton as England’s top scorer with his penalty against Switzerland in September 2015.

Rooney replaced David Beckham as the country’s most capped outfield player the following September in Slovakia having announced his intention to retire after the 2018 World Cup.

That decision looked to be taken out of Rooney’s hands when England manager Southgate dropped his captain in his first matches as permanent manager in March.

But leaving United for Everton has led to an immediate upturn in form and fortunes, making Southgate ready to recall the long-serving forward for the upcoming World Cup qualifiers against Malta and Slovakia.

Yet despite being within touching distance of Peter Shilton’s record 125-cap haul for England, Rooney has decided to walk away.

Captaining his country to a 3-0 World Cup qualifying win over Scotland last November proved his final appearance.

The subject of Rooney’s retirement is sure to dominate the agenda when Southgate announces his squad for the upcoming matches at St George’s Park on Thursday.

(Source: Guardian)

## FIFA investigating Neymar complaint over unpaid Barcelona loyalty bonus



FIFA is investigating a complaint made by Neymar in relation to an unpaid loyalty bonus from his time at Barcelona.

Barca are refusing to pay €26million, which was included in the contract extension he signed with the club last October, to the Brazil star and his father.

The club say that Neymar was in breach of the terms of that contract when he negotiated with Paris Saint-Germain prior to his world-record €222m transfer, meaning the clause in the deal stipulating the bonus is null and void.

Neymar’s father, who also acts as his agent, accused Barca of “blackmail” in their refusal to pay and FIFA is now looking into the matter.

A spokesperson from world football’s governing body told Omnisport: “The matter ... is pending and being investigated. As a result, we are not in a position to comment on it.”

Barca spokesperson Jordi Vives has previously stated: “There were three conditions [to the loyalty bonus]: one, that the player does not negotiate with another club in the

last three months before July 31.

“Two, that he will express publicly his commitment to fulfil his contract.

“Three, the collection was to be made on September 1, to ensure that he did not go to another club.

“Now that we know that none of these three conditions were met, we will not honour that bonus.”

The complaint is a separate case to Barca’s lawsuit against Neymar, which was announced on Tuesday.

The Catalans are suing the 25-year-old for an alleged breach of contract in the wake of his PSG move, demanding he pay back a bonus he was given for signing his new contract last year, as well as €8.5m in damages and an additional 10 per cent in arrears.

In response PSG said they were “surprised” by Barcelona’s statement, adding: “The club repeats that, along with Neymar Jr, it strictly respected all applicable laws and rules and can only regret, once again, the attitude of FC Barcelona.”

(Source: FourFourTwo)

## Sharapova passionate ahead of US Open after ‘tough’ suspension



Former world No 1 Maria Sharapova says her passion for tennis has never been stronger.

The 30-year-old Russian will make her first Grand Slam appearance since serving a 15-month suspension for doping offences as a wildcard at the US Open next week.

She was originally suspended for two years after testing positive for the banned heart and blood-boosting drug Meldonium at the 2016 Australian Open, but the Court of Arbitration for Sport reduced the ban on appeal.

She said she had taken the drug for several years and did not know it had been placed on the banned list at the start of 2016.

Writing on the Players’ Tribune website, Sharapova said: “When it comes to tennis, good or bad - there’s only one thing that I know for certain - I’ve missed it.

“Though these last two years have been tougher, so much tougher than I ever could have anticipated, my passion for the game has never wavered. If any-

thing, it has only grown stronger.”

Sharapova, who is ranked 148th in the world, made her return in April at Stuttgart reaching the semi-finals as a wildcard but such invitations have attracted criticism from some rivals.

“I’m aware of what many of my peers have said about me and how critical of me some of them have been,” she added. “If you’re a human being with a normal beating heart, I don’t think that sort of thing will ever be possible to ignore.”

The US Tennis Association defended its decision to offer Sharapova a wildcard saying: “Her suspension under the terms of the tennis anti-doping programme was completed and therefore was not one of the factors weighed in our wildcard selection process.”

The five-time Grand Slam champion was refused a wildcard at the French Open and missed Wimbledon with a thigh injury. Not only is she looking forward to proving her doubters wrong, but competing on the big stage as well.

(Source: Sky Sports)

## Lewis Hamilton needs to step up in his 200th race

Lewis Hamilton will start the 200th grand prix of his Formula One career in Belgium this weekend but the triple world champion has smaller but more significant numbers on his mind.

Refreshed from an August break in the Caribbean, including a trip to Cuba in his role as UNICEF ambassador, the Mercedes driver is 14 points behind championship leader Sebastian Vettel as he revs up for the second half of the season.

A fifth victory of 2017 for the Briton would put the pressure back on Ferrari’s Vettel and Hamilton can celebrate another milestone by bagging pole position on Saturday at the long and fast Spa-Francorchamps circuit.

That would see Hamilton, who sportingly relinquished third place to team mate Valtteri Bottas in Hungary before the summer shutdown, match the record of 68 poles set by Michael Schumacher with Ferrari in 2006.

Mercedes have won the last two Belgian Grands Prix, with now-retired 2016 world champion Nico Rosberg triumphant from pole last year after Hamilton won in 2015.

Nobody will be taking anything for granted, however, after Ferrari’s one-two win in Budapest at the end of July.

“On paper, people will assume that Spa should suit our car because it is a circuit where aerodynamic efficiency is extremely important,” Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff said.

“But assumptions are dangerous — we have seen too



many times already this season that the form book can be rewritten from one weekend to the next. So we will be making no assumptions.”

Hamilton has won twice before at Spa, as has Vettel, but the track — a classic blast from the past — has not been particularly kind to him.

In 2008, when he won his first title, the Briton was demoted from first to third after the race for cutting a chicane, with then Ferrari rival Felipe Massa savoring victory instead.

Spa can often be a lottery, with its capricious weather,

and rain could be a boon for Red Bull’s Belgian-born Dutch teenager Max Verstappen, who can count on plenty of local support in what amounts to a home race.

“I just love the track and it’ll be nice seeing so many orange (Dutch) fans in the grandstands,” he said.

“Spa is my favorite track of the year. You have to get everything right but when you get a good lap it’s very rewarding.”

Belgium could also be good for Ferrari’s Kimi Raikkonen, who arrives with a new contract for 2018 in his pocket.

The fearless Finnish ‘Iceman’ has won four times at Spa but will need to be beyond the reach of Ferrari ‘team orders’ if he is to do it again.

“For sure there are some circuits that fit us better,” Raikkonen, whose last Belgian win in 2009 was also Ferrari’s most recent at Spa, said in Hungary.

“The Mercedes has better horsepower but it depends on so many things.

“If you purely look now, you would say it’s not going to be as easy for us as here (Hungary) but obviously we try to improve and we are going to do our best.”

Sunday’s race, the 50th world championship Grand Prix held at Spa, will also see a Belgian competing — McLaren rookie Stoffel Vandoorne — for the first time since Jerome d’Ambrosio in 2012.

(Source: Reuters)



# Persepolis storm back to draw with Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia

**S P O R T S** A late equalizer by substitute Godwin Mensha saw Islamic Republic of Iran's Persepolis come from two goals down to draw 2-2 with Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli in the first leg of their 2017 AFC Champions League quarter-final on Tuesday.

Al Ahli took the lead after just two minutes at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex when Omar Al Soma slotted home the rebound after Persepolis keeper Alireza Beiranvand parried a shot from Saleh Al Jamaan into the Syrian striker's path.

Shortly before the hour, recent signing Leonardo da Silva made it 2-0 for the Jeddah-based side by finishing off a pass from Al Jamaan with aplomb, before Persepolis pulled one back in the 72nd minute after Shojae Khalilzadeh headed home from close in, the-afc reported.

With just six minutes remaining, Nigerian Mensha fired past Mohammed Al Owais in the Al Ahli goal to cap an excellent comeback for Persepolis and leave the tie firmly in the balance ahead of the second leg in Abu Dhabi in three weeks' time.



## Branko Ivankovic happy with draw against Al Ahli

Iran's Persepolis football team's coach Branko Ivankovic says that he is content with his team's performance against Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia.

"I am happy because we came back from two goals down. Now, we have a chance to book a place in the competition's semis," Branko said in the post-match news conference.

"As I've already said, Al Ahli is a dangerous team and takes advantage of players like Omar Al Soma and Leonardo da Silva," the Croat added.

"I would like to thank my players because they didn't lost their concentration after receiving two goals. I hope we defeat Al Ahli in the second leg," Branko concluded.

## Zlatko Dalic hits out at Iran's Esteghlal link

**S P O R T S** Zlatko Dalic has denied that he has been offered a contract by Iranian football club Esteghlal.

The Iranian media suggest that the 50-year-old is a candidate to replace Alireza Mansourian at the Tehran-based team.

"It's not true. I have not had any contact with Esteg-

hlal. I am having my summer vacation at this moment," the former Al Hilal coach said.

Most recently, Dalic was head coach of Al Ain of the UAE but stepped down in January.

Former South Korea coach Uli Stielike is reportedly a nominee to take charge of the Iranian giant.

Esteghlal currently sit two places above the relega-

tion zone.

Mansourian led the Blues to Iran Professional League runner-up last season but he has won just one match after five weeks in the new IPL season.

The former Iran national team midfielder resigned after Esteghlal suffered a 2-0 home defeat to Padideh but the team's managerial board didn't accept it.

## S. Korea football coach says Iran similar to European teams

South Korea football coach Shin Tae-yong said Wednesday he thinks Iran are similar to European teams as his squad was gearing up for the World Cup qualifier at home later this month.

Shin's side has been training at the National Football Center (NFC) in Paju, north of Seoul, since Monday for South Korea's last two matches in the final Asian qualifying round for the 2018 FIFA World Cup. The Taeguk Warriors, currently second in Group A, the last automatic qualification spot, are scheduled to host already-qualified Iran on Aug. 31, and will take on third-placed Uzbekistan five days later.

For their first opponents Iran, currently the top-ranked Asian team in FIFA rankings at No. 24, Shin said he doesn't think Iran are a typical Middle Eastern team.

"I must say Iran are not the same as other teams in the Middle East," Shin said to reporters at the NFC. "They have their unique power and speed. They're much more like European teams."

South Korea, ranked No. 49 in the world, have not beaten Iran since 2011, suffering 1-0 losses to Iran in their last four meetings. The national team also has an inferior overall head-to-head record with nine wins, seven draws and 13 losses.



"We can't allow an opening goal to Iran," he said. "We must score first, so that we can prevent the opponents from messing with our mind."

Iran are scheduled to land in Seoul on Saturday, which is earlier than the usual arrival time for international matches. Shin said he doesn't care about Iran's early arrival and said he has been analyzing Team Melli since he took the helm of the national team last month.

"I've already finished setting up my defense plan against Iran," he said. "I just have to work with my players (to execute the plan) when our full squad gets assem-

bled next week. And, of course, I could change my plan depending on the players' fitness."

With the arrival of Guangzhou Evergrande defender Kim Young-gwon, there are now 17 players at the NFC. Nine other players, including Europe-based Son Heung-min and Hwang Hee-chan, will join training next week.

The national team didn't have outdoor training on Wednesday, as Shin explained that the players needed some rest after their club duties. The players have been training with GPS metrics to track their movements and monitor their fitness level.

"These players are motivated and even if they're tired, they train hard with intensity because they came to the national team after a coaching change," Shin said. "I thought keeping up our training today could be actually harmful to the players, so I decided to have indoor training with a focus on recovering their energy."

If South Korea qualify for the 2018 World Cup, the Korea Football Association said they will try to schedule friendly matches in Europe in October. Shin said if it happens he wants to meet stronger teams than his side. "I don't want to meet a team that is at the same level with us," he said. "Through friendly matches, we need to know where we are. It should be a learning process."

## Jon Jones failed drugs test

Jon Jones failed a US Anti-Doping Agency test ahead of his light-heavyweight title fight with Daniel Cormier at UFC 214, it has been revealed.

In the early hours of Wednesday morning, the UFC released a statement confirming a story broken on TMZ that Jones, 30, had failed a USADA test for the second time in his career.

"The UFC organization was notified that the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) has informed Jon Jones of a potential Anti-Doping Policy violation stemming from an in-competition sample collected following his weigh-in on July 28, 2017," the UFC confirmed in a short statement.

"USADA, the independent administrator of the UFC Anti-Doping Policy, will handle the results management and appropriate adjudication of this case involving Jones, as it relates to the UFC Anti-Doping Policy and future UFC participation.

"Under the UFC Anti-Doping Policy, there is a full and fair legal process that is afforded to all athletes before any sanctions are imposed.



"The California State Athletic Commission (CSAC) also retains jurisdiction over this matter as the sample collection was performed the day before Jones' bout at UFC 214 in Anaheim, CA, and USADA will work to ensure that the CSAC has the necessary information to determine its proper judgment of Jones' potential anti-doping violation."

(Source: Independent)

## Vandoorne staying at McLaren in 2018

**LONDON (Reuters)** — Belgian driver Stoffel Vandoorne will continue to race for struggling former world champions McLaren next season, the Formula One team announced on Wednesday ahead of his home race at Spa-Francorchamps.

The newcomer has scored just one point so far this season, with McLaren struggling to get strong performances from their Honda engine.

"I'm delighted that the team has now formally announced that I will continue to race for them next year, because I'll be able to approach the second half of my rookie season with total focus on the job in hand," he said in a statement.

McLaren Racing Director Eric Boullier said the plan had always been for Vandoorne to continue as part of a multi-year deal.

"That plan hasn't changed, and I'm very happy therefore to be able to confirm that he'll continue to race for us next season," said the Frenchman.



"Like all rookies, he's had to learn a lot in the first half of his first Formula One season, but we have great confidence in him, and he's getting better and better all the time."

McLaren's other driver, Spain's double world champion Fernando Alonso, has yet to decide his future and wants to be assured of a competitive car before committing to McLaren.

## Iran seize fourth straight win with 3-0 match against Czech Republic

Iran raced to a straight-sets win against Czech Republic (25-22, 25-12, 25-19) to claim top spot in Pool D of the 2017 FIVB Volleyball Boy's U19 World Championship on Tuesday at Isa City Sports Hall. The Asian side conclude the Preliminary Round with a record of four wins in as many matches.

Iran's Porya Yali charted a total of 17 points scored off purely on attacks, while Amir Hossein Toukteh contributed another 11 points.

Iran completely dominated in offence, posting 38 attacks, while Czech Republic managed to connect with 23 spikes. The Asian side gave much difficulty for the opponents to pass the ball successfully. The usual hitters of the Czech side could not seem to find their known tempo. Every Czech player needed to work hard on defence, leaving minimal momentum to run the offence precisely. The European side saved several match points from opponent errors, but Iran's lead proved difficult to surmount.



(Source: FIVB)

## U19 volleyball team need experience: Coach

Iran U19 volleyball coach Mohammad Vakili says that he is 80 percent satisfied with his team's performance.

Iran fueled their momentum going into the next phase of the 2017 FIVB Volleyball Boy's U19 World Championship as they won a straight-sets match against Czech Republic to top Pool D of competition on Tuesday at Isa City Sports Hall.

"I would say I am about 80 per cent satisfied with the performance of the team so far," Vakili told fivb.com.

"I think it has something to do with the age, that they can be prone to too many mistakes."

"We do not have any solution to this except time itself. We need experience," he added.

(Source: FIVB)

## Iran Greco-Roman team runners-up at World Wrestling Championships

Iran's Greco-Roman team finished in second place at the Wrestling World Championships in Paris, France on Tuesday.

The Iranian wrestlers won three bronze medals and came second with 36 points.

Mohammadali Geraei at 71kg, Saeid Abdivali at 75kg and Hossein Nouri at 85kg won three bronze medals in the competition.

Russia won the title with 46 points after claiming two silver and two bronze medals.

Turkey came third with 34 points. It finished day two at the summit of the medals table with two golds and a bronze.

Team Rankings (Top Six)

1. Russia, 46 points (0 gold medal, 2 silver, 2 bronze), 2. Iran, 36 (0-0-3), 3. Turkey, 34 (2-0-1), 4. Georgia, 30 (0-0-2), 5. Germany, 29 (1-1-1), 6. Armenia, 28 (2-0-0)



(Source: unitedworldwrestling)

## Chelsea line up Tuchel to replace Conte

Reports in Germany claim Chelsea have met with Thomas Tuchel about replacing Antonio Conte as their manager.

With relations said to be strained between Conte and Chelsea's board following a summer of unrest regarding a lack of transfers, the Diego Costa situation and more for the reigning Premier League champions, losing to Arsenal in the Community Shield and then their Premier League opening to Burnley was far from an ideal start.

Still, Conte led Chelsea to the PL title last season, his first in England, with a record 30 wins from 38 games. How is he the bookies favorite to be the next PL manager to leave his job?

Tuchel, 43, has been out of work since leaving Borussia Dortmund at the end of last season and Sport Bild is reporting that Chelsea's director Marina Granovskaia has approached Tuchel about replacing Conte, while it is also stated that former Barca boss Luis Enrique is a contender.

Chelsea fans have, understandably, not reacted too kindly to reports that a successor is being lined up for Conte. The Italian coach is adored by the Blues faithful after leading a rapid rebuild of their squad in his famed 3-4-3 formation last season. His passion on the sidelines is now a hallmark of Chelsea matchdays and if he does leave anytime soon due to issues behind-the-scenes, expect a mutiny from the fans.

Yes, managers have come and gone and frequently and success has remained under Roman Abramovich but hooking Conte may even be a step too far for the notoriously expectant owner.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Russia's World Cup stadium in Samara behind schedule

**SAMARA, Russia (Reuters)** — Construction work on the World Cup stadium in the Russian city of Samara is about 30 days behind schedule, the company building the venue said on Wednesday, adding it would make up the lost time.

Work on the new 45,000-seat stadium, one of 12 that will host World Cup matches next summer, has been plagued by delays over the past months.

"We would have liked a faster construction pace," Sergei Ponomaryov, the deputy head of general

contractor PSO Kazan, told reporters. "We have calculated that we are behind by about 30 days."

Ponomaryov said all major construction work at the venue would be finished by the end of the year, the initial deadline for its completion.

But on Wednesday cranes dominated the skyline above the venue and towering metal structures were supporting its roof.

The pitch also not been laid, unlike at some other venues being built for the tournament.

The governor of the Samara region, Nikolai Merkushev, blamed the delay on unfavorable weather, including heavy rain in the Spring.

"In September we will be back on track," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko said last month there was "no doubt" the venue would be ready by the end of the year, TASS news agency reported.

The Samara Arena will host four group stage matches, a match in the round-of-16 and a quarter final.



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## Shiraz to host Tehran Symphony Orchestra

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** – The Tehran Symphony Orchestra is scheduled to give an open-air concert at Afif Abad Garden in Shiraz next week.



“Swan Lake” by Pyotr Tchaikovsky and “Slavonic Dances” by Antonin Dvorak at the concert, which is scheduled to be held on August 31, the orchestra announced on Tuesday.

The concert will also be enriched with “Danzon No. 2” by Arturo Marquez and “Gone with the Wind” by Max Steiner.

The orchestra will also perform “Epic” and “Empty Cry”, both composed by conductor Shahrzad Rohani, and some pieces by other Iranian musicians such as Ruhollah Khaleqi, Ali-Akbar Qorbani and Babak Zarrin.

## Thomas Meehan, Tony-winning story writer of ‘Annie,’ dies

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Three-time Tony Award-winning book writer Thomas Meehan, best known for transforming the Little Orphan Annie cartoon strip into the smash Broadway musical “Annie,” has died at age 88.

Meehan, who had been ill for about five months and had undergone surgery, died at his home in Manhattan late Monday or early Tuesday, longtime friend and “Annie” collaborator Martin Charnin said. Charnin visited his old friend about 10 days ago.

“There’s a hole in my heart,” Charnin said. “It’s a gigantic loss, not only to the industry but also to us. We’ve been together and so close since the 1950s.”

Meehan wrote the books for three shows that ran over 2,000 performances on Broadway: “Annie” with 2,377 performances, “The Producers” with Mel Brooks at 2,502 performances and “Hairspray,” which he wrote with Mark O’Donnell and which reached 2,642 performances.



In this June 8, 2003 file photo, Thomas Meehan, left, and Mark O'Donnell pose with their Tony awards for best book of a Musical for “Hairspray” during the 57th Annual Tony Awards at New York’s Radio City Music Hall. (AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File)

“I wrote stories that were serious, very somber, trying to be in the style of William Faulkner,” Meehan told the Observer newspaper in 1999. “My career has always been that every time I try something really serious, it’s no good, but if I try to be funny, then it works.”

Tributes poured in on social media, including from “Hamilton” creator Lin-Manuel Miranda, who called Meehan “one of the best around,” and from actress Kate Shindle, head of the Actors’ Equity Association, who called his death a “great loss.”

Meehan’s other shows include “Young Frankenstein” with Brooks, “Cry-Baby” with O’Donnell, “Elf” with Bob Martin, “Chaplin” with Christopher Curtis, “Bombay Dreams” with Meera Syal and the musical “Rocky” with Sylvester Stallone.

Meehan began his career as a writer with The New Yorker’s “Talk of the Town” section and later earned an Emmy Award nomination in 1964 as one of the writers of the TV series “That Was the Week That Was.”

Charnin said Meehan was “really very unique.” “He was somebody who you could literally call a wit,” Charnin said. “There are not a lot of wits left in comedy, and Tom was a wit. I have no problem calling him that.”

Meehan made his Broadway debut with “Annie,” alongside Charnin and songwriter Charles Strouse. The 1977 original won the Tony as best musical and ran for 2,300 performances, inspiring tours and revivals that never went out of style.

“Annie” almost died at the Goodspeed Opera House in Connecticut in 1976. But Charnin brought in noted stage and film director Mike Nichols, who signed on as a producer, and helped him revise the show.

With actress Andrea McArdle replacing Kristen Vigard as the red-haired moppet Annie and Dorothy Loudon added as Miss Hannigan, the production went on to open in New York in April 1977 with a bang.

# Iranian theaters get box office boost

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** – Iranian cinema has seen over a 100-percent growth in box office receipts over the past five months compared to a similar period a year earlier.

About 30 movies hit the Iranian theaters over the past five months, grossing over 1,740 billion rials (over \$45.5 million), while the theaters earned 1,560 billion rials (about \$41 million) from the screening of 60 films during 12 months from March 20, 2016 to March 20, 2017, the Persian service of ILNA reported.

Saman Moqaddam’s comedy “Sperm Whale 2: Roya’s Selection” was the top-grossing movie of the past five months with over \$5.2 million, followed by two other comedies “Guidance Patrol 2” by Saeid Soheili at over \$5.1 million and “Good, Bad, Garish” by Peyman Qasemkhani at over \$4.2 million.

The lowest-grossing movie of the past five month was “The White Heart of the Dandelions”, a drama directed by Afshin Mahmudi, with about \$22.

Asghar Farhadi’s Oscar-winning movie “The Salesman” was the top-grossing movie of the last Iranian calendar year with over \$4 million, followed by director Manuchehr Hadi’s comedy “I Am Not Salvador” at \$3.7 million and Qorban Mohammadpur’s melodrama “Salam Mumbai” at over \$3.5 million.

Mostafa Almasi’s low-brow comedy “Good Friends” was the lowest-grossing movie of the last Iranian calendar year with over \$4,000.



Reza Attaran acts in a scene from Saman Moqaddam’s comedy “Sperm Whale 2: Roya’s Selection”, which was the top-grossing movie of the past five months in Iran.

## Naqsh to perform at Uzbek festival of Eastern songs



**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian ensemble Naqsh will perform at the 11th Sharq Taronalari International Music Festival, an Uzbek event dedicated to songs from the Orient.

The band led by tar player Amir Sharifi will perform pieces from the Qajar period (1794-1925) in Samarkand on Friday, the

organizers have announced.

Vocalist Mojtaba Asgari will accompany Naqsh, which also features Mohammad Eshqi on santur, Elmira Mardaneh on kamancheh, Marjan Mehraban on qanun and Soheil Allahdadian on tonbak.

The biennial festival will come to an end on August 30.

## Sydney Persian film festival unveils official lineup

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The 6th Persian International Film Festival, which is held annually in the Australian city of Sydney, has announced its official lineup.

Eight films will compete in the festival, which will open on September 7 with “Window Horses”, an animated movie directed by Japan-born Canadian filmmaker Ann Marie Fleming.

The lineup also includes “Breath” by Narges Abyar, “Being Born” by Mohsen Abdolvahab and “Monte” by Amir Naderi, “Parting” by Navid Mahmudi, “Under the Smokey Roof” by Puran Derkshandeh, “They” by Anahita Ghazvinizadeh and “Bridge of Sleep” by Oktay Baraheni will also be screened in the main competition of the four-day event.

The short competition will screen eight films such as



Sareh Nur-Musavi acts in a scene from “Breath” that will be screened at the 6th Persian International Film Festival in Sydney, Australia.

## George and Amal Clooney give \$1 million to combat U.S. hate groups

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Actor George Clooney and his humanitarian lawyer wife, Amal Clooney, have donated \$1 million to the Southern Poverty Law Center, a U.S. non-profit that monitors extremists and domestic hate groups, in response to protests in Charlottesville, Virginia earlier this month.

An Aug. 12 rally in the town organized by neo-Nazis and other white supremacists led to counter-protests and the death of a woman when a car plowed into the crowd. The street battles triggered a political crisis for President Donald Trump, who praised “very fine people” on both sides of the fight.

“What happened in Charlottesville, and what is happening in communities across our country, demands our collective engagement to stand up to hate,” the Clooneys said in a joint statement.

The donation comes from the Clooney Foundation for Justice, which the couple established in 2016 to promote justice in classrooms and courtrooms around the world.

Southern Poverty Law Center President Richard Cohen thanked the Clooneys for “standing with us at this critical moment in our country’s fight against hate.”

## Comedian Jerry Lewis died of end-stage heart disease: coroner

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Comedian Jerry Lewis died of end-stage heart disease when he passed away at his home at age 91 in Las Vegas on Sunday, Clark County Coroner John Fudenberg said on Monday.

The determination was made by a hospice care doctor and given to the Coroner’s Office, and no further inquiry is required, Fudenberg told Reuters by telephone.

Lewis was receiving in-home hospice care before his death, Fudenberg said.

Lewis parlayed his distinctive style of low-brow com-

edy into a long-running movie and stage career. He also became a fund-raising powerhouse with his annual Labor Day telethon.

He partnered with Dean Martin as a comedy duo in the 1940s and 1950s. At their height, the pair set off the kind of fan hysteria that once surrounded Frank Sinatra and the Beatles.

Lewis’ best known films include 1963’s “The Nutty Professor,” 1960’s “The Bellboy” and 1982 comedy-drama “The King of Comedy,” which was directed by Martin Scorsese.

## Tehran Inter-Orchestra to give concert at Rudaki Hall



**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Tehran Inter-Orchestra, a private ensemble established by musician Vahid Eftekhari-Hosseini, will perform at Tehran’s Rudaki Hall on Thursday.

Nader Mashayekhi, a former conductor of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra, will conduct the concert entitled “Love and No More”.

The concert is the first part of the orchestra’s annual plan to perform German composer Johann Sebastian Bach’s religious pieces, Mashayekhi said in a press release on Tuesday.

Some bricolage pieces by Mashayekhi will also be played by the orchestra, which is composed of 80 musicians and a choir group.

## Morgan Freeman to get Screen Actors lifetime award

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Morgan Freeman, the versatile actor known for playing gods and presidents, will be honored with the 2017 lifetime achievement award by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) at its annual ceremony in January.

Freeman, 80, whose prolific career spans 50 years and more than 100 movies, will join the likes of past recipients Lily Tomlin, Debbie Reynolds and Dick Van Dyke when he gets the honor at a Los Angeles ceremony on Jan. 21. SAG announced the award on Tuesday.

“Some actors spend their entire careers waiting for the perfect role. Morgan showed us that true perfection is what a

performer brings to the part,” SAG-AFTRA president Gabrielle Carteris said in a statement.

“He is innovative, fearless and completely unbound by expectations,” she added.

The award is given annually to the actor who fosters the finest ideals of the acting profession.

Freeman’s calm demeanor and authoritative voice has seen him cast as God, or the voice of God, in movies including “Bruce Almighty,” and he played the role of president in “Invictus” and “Deep Impact.” In 2005 he won an Oscar for playing a former boxer in “Million Dollar Baby.”



A makeshift memorial appears for late comedian, actor and entertainer Jerry Lewis around his star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles, California, U.S. August 20, 2017.(Reuters/Kyle Grillo)