

TEHRAN TIMES

Top judge: Any move to undermine missile program is a 'betrayal' **2**

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International politics of Middle East is bewilderingly complex: Bruce Hall

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Rodney Bruce Hall, a professor of international relations at the University of Macau, says, "The contemporary international politics of the Middle East is bewilderingly complex."

In an interview with the Tehran Times, Hall says, "This complexity is exacerbated by the fact that this schema is state-centric and presumes states to be unitary, and not politically divided regarding societal preferences towards domestic and international outcomes."

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ Has the political logic dominating the Middle East in recent years been Hobbesian, Lockean, or Kantian?

A: My interviewer poses this question in the terminology of my colleague at Ohio State University, Alexander Wendt. Wendt has argued that "anarchy is what states make of it," that the settlement of security disputes among states has grown up as a practice oriented around a convention. Why is there fisticuffs in professional ice hockey in the West? Because it's allowed. Why do states settle disputes with armed conflict? Because they generated a convention over the centuries to do so. However, the presumption of "anarchy" in the international system (or in a regional system such as the Middle East) presumes a Hobbesian logic on interstate interaction whereby all states reflect negatively on measures by other states to enhance their security.

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Iran's annual petchem exports rises to 19m tons

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's petchem exports rose to 19 million tons during the past Iranian calendar year of 1394 (which ended on March 19), a 2.5-million-ton increase compared to its preceding year, according to an official with Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC).

"Yesteryear, 46 million tons of petrochemicals were produced by the use of 80 percent of the capacity of domestic plants," Alimohammad Bossaqzadeh, the NPC's control manager told the Shana news agency on Monday. **→4**

Assad: Iran helping to find a solution to Syria crisis

By staff and agency

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has said that a solution to the Syrian crisis should be found by the country's people, however "friends can come to you from abroad to help, as it has happened today: from Russia and Iran."

"Another thing is, if this or any other crisis should happen in any country, the first thing any statesman should know is that the people are the country's defenders. And when choosing a plan of action to resolve the crisis it is necessary that it meets the customs and traditions of the nation, its history and its essential aspirations. The solution cannot come from overseas. Friends can come to you from abroad to help, as it has happened today: from Russia and Iran. However, if there is no internal will and good relations between the people and the state, it is impossible to find a solution," Assad told Sputnik in an exclusive interview published on Sunday.

Syria has been torn by a civil war since 2011. As a result of the war, 13.5 million Syrians have been left in need of humanitarian assistance, according to UN figures. Over 6.5 million are internally displaced, while 4.8 million have fled the country among hostilities. **→2**

Tabriz feels winter in spring

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© Mehr/Azin Haghghi

French orchestra to perform in Tehran

ART TEHRAN — The Alliance Orchestra under the baton of Iranian-born French maestro Pejman Memarzadeh will perform at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on April 20.

Pieces by Bach, Gioacchino Rossini, Pablo de Sarasate, Tchaikovsky, Brahms and Beethoven will be performed at the concert.

The orchestra is also scheduled to give performances in the Iranian cities of Isfahan, Kerman and Shiraz.

Also a cellist, Memarzadeh founded the Alliance Orchestra in 1995 in order to strengthen relations between the East and West.

Pejman Memarzadeh

Russia says Iran confirms participation in Doha meeting, not to freeze oil output so far

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said on Monday that Iran has confirmed its participation in a Doha meeting on April 17, however, it planned to join the oil output freeze agreement only after its output rises to 4 million barrels per day.

On March 29, Bloomberg had quoted a person familiar with Iran's policy as saying that the country will attend talks with fellow OPEC members and Russia in Qatar without joining their proposal to freeze crude oil production.

Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh will attend the discussions in Doha, said the person, who asked not to be identified as the talks are private. Iran will maintain its policy of regaining market share lost during years of sanctions so won't accept limits on its output, the person said. Most OPEC members, including Saudi Arabia, have said they will go to the meeting.

Zanganeh says Iran will continue increasing its oil production and exports until it reaches the market position it enjoyed before the imposition of sanctions.

Iran's oil exports have surpassed 2 million barrels per day following the lifting of sanctions under its nuclear deal with world powers, Zanganeh said on Sunday. Iran has doubled exports since its nuclear accord took effect on January 16.

Iran, an OPEC member, has the world's fourth-largest oil reserves but its exports were long hampered by sanctions over its nuclear program. It has moved ahead with an increase in exports despite global concerns over a supply glut that has pushed oil prices below \$40 a barrel, from more than \$100 a barrel in mid-2014. (Source: agencies)

Saudi Arabia acts to slow Iran's oil exports

Saudi Arabia has taken steps to slow Iran's efforts at increasing oil exports, banning vessels that transport Iranian crude from entering their waters, according to traders and shipbrokers.

Iran already faces insurance, financing and legal obstacles despite the lifting of sanctions linked to its oil industry in January. Under a nuclear deal with world

powers, Iran was allowed to resume crude exports to Europe and other destinations.

Since the lifting of sanctions, Iran has managed to sell only small volumes of crude to Europe, including barrels to Spain's Cepsa, Total of France and Russia's Litasco.

By mid-April, only about eight tank-

ers will have sailed from Iran's Kharg Island for Europe, said shipbrokers, with only 12m barrels booked to sail.

Iranian vessels carrying the country's crude are restricted from entering ports in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, according to a circular sent by a shipping insurance company to its members in February.

(Source: Financial Times)

Ban calls for a world free of mines, unexploded ammunition

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for a world free of the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war.

The full text of his message reads:

Mine action is critical for an effective humanitarian response in conflict and post-conflict situations. This is a central message of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action.

Yet in far too many places around the world, new or re-emerging conflicts are creating yet another legacy of explosive hazards, such as landmines, cluster munitions and improvised explosive devices. I am particularly concerned about the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

The United Nations is working to alleviate the suffering of affected communities in high-risk environments. In South Sudan, for example, more than half a million people have received risk education over the last 12 months; 14 million square meters of contaminated land have been cleared; 3,000 km of road was made safe; and 30,000 mines and explosive remnants of war were destroyed. This has enabled the delivery of food and water and the safe movement of those fleeing fighting.

Even in the extremely challenging context of Syria, mine action actors are achieving some important life-saving results. Last year, more than 2 million Syrians received risk education in schools and communities, and more than 5,400 people received physical rehabilitation services. Since August 2015, 14 tons of unexploded ordnance have been destroyed. But millions of Syrian people continue to face this deadly threat every day. There is an urgent need for increased support as well as full, sustained and unhindered access for all mine action activities.

ISIL executes 15 of its own members for spying

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group has killed 15 of its own members in the largest execution the terrorist group has carried out against its elements in Syria, a report says.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said on Sunday that the terrorists were executed near Syria's northern city of Raqqah over spying charges



in connection with the killing of senior ISIL commander Abu Hija al-Tunisi in a Wednesday airstrike.

Following the air raid, ISIL arrested 35 of its members in Raqqah, according to the observatory. In a separate development, a senior leader of the al-Qaeda-linked al-Nusra Front was killed in an airstrike in Syria's northwestern province of Idlib, the Britain-based monitoring group said.

A founding member and spokesman for the al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), Abu Firas al-Suri was killed during a Syrian or Russian raid on a village located in the province's northwestern region, said the observatory.

It added that Suri's son and 20 other foreign militants were also killed in the

Mine action is an investment in humanity. It helps nurture peaceful societies, where those in need can receive aid, and refugees and internally displaced persons can safely return home, and children can go to school. It provides the safe space to undertake development and reconstruction activities, and lay the foundations of sustainable peace.

The first-ever World Humanitarian Summit will convene in Istanbul next month. My report in advance of the Summit highlights the unacceptable impact of mines and explosive remnants of war on civilians. It also stresses the need for States to become parties to, and implement and comply with, relevant international humanitarian instruments.

I am pleased that, in December 2015, the General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution underlining the need for mine action to remain at the top of the international agenda, especially in humanitarian crises. On this International Day, let us work together to advance the goal of a world free of the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war. (Source: UN org)

Former Yemeni president sacks premier over 'failures'

Former Yemeni president sacks premier over 'failures'

There is significant progress in Yemen negotiations: Saudi Arabia's deputy crown Prince

Yemen's fugitive former President Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi has dismissed his Prime Minister Khaled Bahah due to the "failures" of his self-proclaimed government.

In a Sunday statement, Hadi said the decision to fire Bahah was made "due to the failures that have accompanied the performance of the government during the past period in the fields of economy, services, and security."

Bahah's government has "failed to ease the suffering of our people, resolve their problems and provide their needs," Hadi added.

This is while some Yemeni sources say a behind-the-scenes power struggle has been the real reason behind Bahah's dismissal.

The head of Yemen's deposed government, which still proclaims itself the rightful authority and is based in the southern city of Aden, has appointed Ahmed Obeid bin Dagher as the new prime minister, and General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar as the new vice-president.

Bahah, who held both posts before his removal from office, has now been named an adviser to Hadi.

A source close to the former government said the shake-up could undermine UN-brokered peace talks between Yemen's warring parties, scheduled to start in Kuwait on April 18.

"Bahah was in favor of a political settlement and the appointment of Ali Mohsen is a victory for the hard-line wing," the official, requesting anonymity, told Reuters.

In early 2015, Hadi resigned from his post as the president of Yemen and later fled to Aden and then to Saudi Arabia. However, he rescinded his resignation one month after submitting it.

He fled to Saudi Arabia along with most of his officials and declared Aden as their new capital. However, they spend most of their time in the Saudi capital, Riyadh. **→9**

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MEDIA MONITOR



Parliamentarians defend Iran's missile capability

TEHRAN – Iranian parliamentarians issued a statement on Monday expressing their support for the country's missile program, condemning any measure that would undermine national security, Press TV reported on Monday.

"Undoubtedly, the military strategy of the Islamic Republic is [based on] the policy of deterrence," the 154 MPs said in their statement.

The Iranian lawmakers described as "a joke of the history" that "the U.S. on the one hand constantly threatens Iran with military aggression and on the other hand asks Iran to withdraw the policy of expanding its defense and missile [capability]."



The Islamic Republic system accepted JCPOA with its good and bad aspects: Motahari

TEHRAN – The Islamic Republic system in general has accepted the JCPOA with its good and bad points, MP Ali Motahari has said.

"We should not represent the good sides to belong to a part of the system and the bad sides to relate to Dr. Rouhani and Mohammad Javad Zarif," he told IRNA on Monday.

The late Imam Khomeini prevented division by accepting Resolution 598 and now the same behavior should be followed, he said in reference to a ceasefire that ended the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.



Iran has deployed special army forces in Syria

TEHRAN – Iranian Army's elite forces, named the 65 Nohed Airborne Brigade, has deployed a group of its commandos in Syria to provide advisory support for President Bashar al-Assad's Army in fight against terrorist groups, an Iranian commander said.

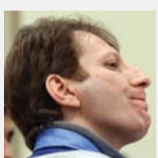
Brigadier General Ali Arasteh said in addition to the brigade other units of the Army have also deployed forces in Syria, Tasnim reported on Monday.



Missile power is Iran's redline: military

TEHRAN – Defensive capabilities, including missile power, are Iran's redlines, the deputy chief of Armed Forces said on Monday.

Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri also said the U.S. non-adherence to its obligations is a "reality" that should not be forgotten, Nasim reported on Monday.



Iranian court delivers death sentence to tycoon Babak Zanjani

TEHRAN – The Revolution Court has delivered billionaire Babak Zanjani's death sentence.

The verdict has been issued by the branch 15 of the court.

Zanjani's lawyer Rasoul Koohpaye Zadeh confirmed to ILNA on Monday that his client had received the death sentence.

"The delivery process has in fact begun today as the verdict comes in 318 pages and we should start taking notes, which takes time. When we are taking notes, the verdict is considered as delivered, since which day we will have 20 days to plea," the lawyer stated.



Iran says projectiles land near border village from Karabakh

TEHRAN – Deputy Governor-General for Political and Security Affairs in Iran's East Azarbaijan province has said three projectiles landed on the vicinity of a village located in the province's Khoda Afarin County on Saturday in Azerbaijan-Armenia crossfire.

The projectiles, Shabestari Khiabani said on Monday, damaged a power pole, resulting in power outage in the area, ISNA reported.

He also said the incident did not lead to human loss, calling on Azerbaijan and Armenia to exercise restraint.



Syrian parliament speaker hails Tehran's support for Damascus

TEHRAN – Syrian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Jihad al-Laham has praised Iran's supporting role in fighting terrorism in Syria and in the ongoing negotiations to resolve the five-year-old crisis in the country.

In a meeting with a senior Iranian parliamentary delegation in Damascus on Sunday, he said that supports provided by Iran would also lead to the progress of Syrian-Syrian dialogue, ICANA reported.

PRESS TV

IRNA

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ILNA

ISNA

ICANA

Top judge: Any move to undermine missile program is a 'betrayal'

POLITICAL TEHRAN – Iran's Judiciary Chief Sadeq Amoli Larijani said on Monday that any effort to undermine the country's missile capability will constitute an example of "betrayal".

"Undermining and questioning missile, security and military achievements under the pretext of freedom of expression are betrayal of the country and ideals of the Islamic Republic of Iran," the top judge said during a meeting with senior Judiciary officials.

He urged the country's attorneys to counter against any acts and moves in this respect.

The remarks by the Judiciary chief followed a statement by the Supreme Leader on Wednesday who said, "If the Islamic system pursues technology and negotiations without defense power, then this will be a retreat in the face of threats from other insignificant countries."

Iran has repeatedly said that its missile program is just for defensive purposes.

Larijani also said questioning the country's defense capabilities and the system's ideals and principles is not "fair".

He expressed hope that the Iranian people and officials would take step on the "path of unity and solidarity" given the guidelines set by the Leader.

Abbas Araqchi, deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs who played a key role in negotiating a nuclear deal with great powers in July 2015, also told a TV program late on Saturday that Iran's missile program is a "national and defense" issue which the Islamic Republic will not negotiate or compromise on it.

In comments posted on his tweeter last month Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also said if Iran had missiles former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein may not have invaded the nascent Islamic Republic in 1980.

Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan also said recently that Iran's missiles were designed to carry only conventional warheads. "And



Iran will never seek (to build) unconventional weapons," Dehghan asserted.

Elsewhere, in his remarks Larijani said Iran will not compromise on its national interests and will not accept foreign interference at any cost.

The Islamic Republic of Iran will resist "illegitimate demands" of the hegemony, he added. "The Islamic Republic of Iran's, being an

example for the Islamic countries, has posed a serious danger against the Western hegemonic governments and they resort to any method and instrument to undermine the system," Larijani said.

He said that the hegemonic governments are well aware of the fact that the Islamic system will not compromise on its values.

Assad: Iran helping to find a solution to Syria crisis

In his interview Assad also said that the West can't be trusted is the most important lesson Syria has learned during five years of civil war.

"The most important lesson we have learned, but I suppose we knew it all along, is that the West is not honest. Western countries are dishonest," Assad stressed.

The U.S., EU and their allies "are pursuing a policy far removed from the principles of international law and the United Nations" and because of that "it is impossible to rely upon the West to solve any issue," he said.

He added, "We live in a world where there is no inter-

national law or morality in politics at present. Anything can happen anywhere on our planet."

He stressed that during the war Syria "endured inhuman suffering" which he wouldn't wish on any other state.

The country faced "terrorist aggression, which was accompanied by atrocities in their essence and form, unprecedented in recent decades, and maybe even in the past centuries," he lamented.

Russia's RIA news agency on Monday quoted Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov as saying that demands for Assad to step down restrict perspectives for political settlement in the country.

Moscow proposes to put off discussions about Assad's fate, Ryabkov said, adding the issue should be decided later by the sides involved in the Syrian conflict.

Iran and Russia have been helping the Assad government while the West and its regional allies like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey have been supporting the militants.

The power vacuum in Syria opened the door for entry of terrorist groups like Al-Nusra Front, Al-Qaeda and later Daesh into the country.

Some regional Arab states like Qatar and Saudi Arabia have been openly helping al-Nusra Front.

Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkey to hold trilateral meeting

POLITICAL TEHRAN – Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkey are scheduled to hold their fourth trilateral meeting on Tuesday in the northern Iranian city of Ramsar.

The first trilateral meeting of the countries was held in 2011 in the Iranian northwestern city of Urmia and the second and third ones were held in 2012 in Nakhchivan and in 2014 in the Turkish city of Van respectively.

According to ISNA, Iranian Amba-



sador to Baku Mohsen Pakaeen has also announced that the first trilateral meeting between Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia will be held in Baku on Thursday.

Rafsanjani: Strengthening missile power is 'essential'

POLITICAL TEHRAN – Ayatollah Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Council, said in a meeting on Monday that strengthening the country's military power, especially missile technology, is "essential".

Rafsanjani said he has always highlighted the importance of "upgrading" missile program as a "defense and deterrent power".

Elsewhere, he highlighted the sta-



tus of Velayat Faqih (rule of Supreme Jurisprudence) and said Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei should be supported.

Italy PM to visit Iran next week

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi will travel to Iran next week for a two-day trip that will make him the first major international figure to visit since the lifting of sanctions against Tehran.

Renzi's office said in a statement Monday that the centre-left leader would visit the Islamic Republic on April 12-13, without giving further details of his itinerary.

Italy has led the way amongst European countries in re-establishing economic ties to Iran following the lifting of international sanctions on the country.

An accord to lift the sanctions was agreed last year and came into force in January. Renzi's trip follows Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's visit



to Italy and France at the end of January, a trip which resulted in a string of major trade and investment deals being signed between Tehran and the two European countries.

Contracts worth an estimated 17 billion euros (\$18 billion) were signed in Rome and Rouhani said he hoped that would represent only a start, as he pitched Iran as a safe base for investors looking to get into a regional market of 300 million consumers.

Iran has said it wants European help to modernize and expand its rail, road and air networks as well as seeking investment to boost its manufacturing base, notably in the automobile sector.

Italy was Iran's largest European trade partner before the impact of sanctions caused exchanges between the two countries to collapse.

(Source: AFP)

JCPOA has created opportunity for progress: Rouhani

POLITICAL TEHRAN – Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Monday that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, commonly called the nuclear deal, has created an atmosphere to tap all the capacities in line with the efforts to develop the country.

A "wise and fast" move towards development and progress is required, Rouhani said during a meeting with the information and communications technology minister and the other high-ranking officials of the ministry.

He said that the atmosphere of hope that has been created after the JCPOA should not be spoiled.

Rouhani also highlighted the importance of maintaining unity in the



country.

He also said that Iran is an "influential and capable" country in the global energy market.

Iran and the 5+1 group - the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia plus Germany - reached the JCPOA in Vienna on July 14, 2015. The JCPOA went into effect in January 2016.

Azeri and Iranian defense chiefs discuss Karabakh conflict

POLITICAL TEHRAN – In a telephone conversation on Monday Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehghan and his Azeri counterpart Zakir Hasanov discussed the latest developments in the Karabakh region which became a scene of clashes between Armenian and Azeri military forces on Saturday.

Dehghan stressed importance of resolving the conflict through dialogue. He also urged Baku and Yerevan to exercise self-restraint.

The Iranian minister stressed that Tehran will spare no efforts to help ease the tension.

Also on Sunday Dehghan held separate phone calls with his counterparts in Azerbaijan and Armenia urging



them to make a halt to the conflict and settle the crisis peacefully.

On April 3, Azerbaijan declared a unilateral ceasefire with Armenia in the disputed enclave however the Azeri Defense Ministry said that three of its troopers were killed as the Armenians fired mortar shells at Azeri positions and attacked them using grenade launchers on Monday.

Iran-Syria cooperation foils U.S.-Israeli plots: Syria PM

The Syrian prime minister has highlighted the importance of cooperation between Iran and Syria in further strengthening the resistance front against U.S.-Israeli plots in the Middle East.

"Iran-Syria all-out cooperation has strengthened the front of resistance and perseverance against Zionist-American schemes for the region," Wael al-Halqi said in a meeting with an Iranian parliamentary delegation in the Syrian capital, Damascus, on Sunday, according to Syria's official news agency, SANA.

Al-Halqi pointed to the historical and strategic ties between the Islamic Republic and Syria, saying that Tehran-Damascus bilateral ties have played a significant role in strengthening the Syrian nation and the resistance front against unjust economic sanctions by the West.

He further expressed gratitude to the Iranian nation for its support of the Syrian people.

Amir Khojasteh, the head of the Iranian parliamentary delegation, reiterated that the Islamic Republic will continue to stand by the Syrian nation and government in their battle against terrorist groups.

Khojasteh, who is the chairman of the Iranian Parliament's Councils and Internal Affairs Committee, said he was confident the Syrian people will emerge victorious in the fight against the enemies and reconstruct their country without any foreign meddling.

Earlier in the day, Khojasteh met with Syria's Parliament Speaker Jihad al-Lahham, expressing hope that "victory" would be close for Syria over the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group.

"The world's infidels, global arrogance, Zionists, and some governments in the region have backed Daesh and the Takfiris; they helped them grow and then sent them to Syria in the hope of bringing about the collapse of Syria and the Syrian government in a matter of two to three months. But for five years now the people of Syria and the government of Syria have resisted and God willing victory is now close," he said.

The Iranian parliamentarian further criticized the countries that actually created Daesh and caused the death of many Syrians, adding that the terrorists are now returning home and causing instability there.

Khojasteh further congratulated Damascus on its liberation of the ancient city of Palmyra. (Source: Press TV)

Al-Nusra Front spokesman killed by air strike in Syria

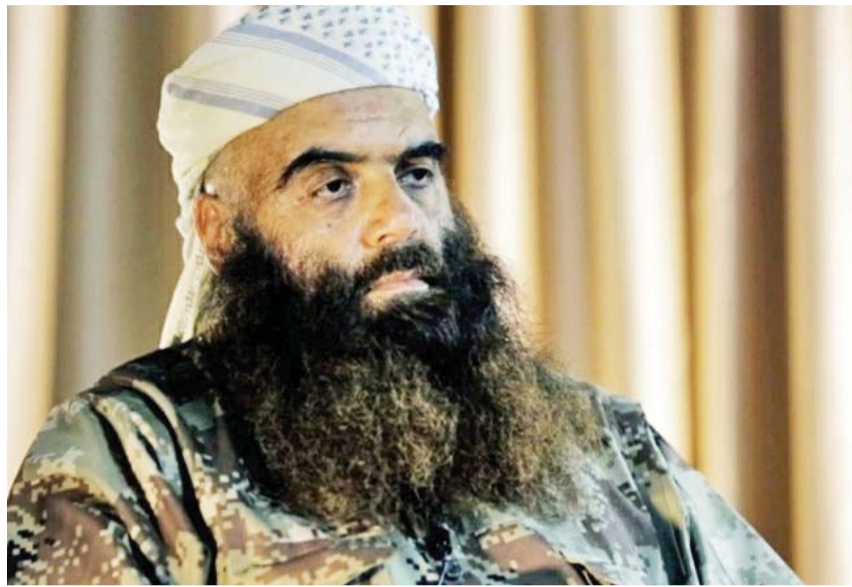
The spokesman for al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), his son and 20 other fighters have been reported killed in air strikes in the north-east of the country.

Abu Firas al-Suri was meeting with other leading fighters in an al-Nusra stronghold, Kafar Jales, when the raids happened on Sunday, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Sources in the north of the country told Al Jazeera they believed the raids were carried out by the United States-led coalition operating over Syria and Iraq. Other sources told the Reuters news agency the attacks appeared to have the hallmarks of U.S. drone strikes.

A U.S. security official said Washington was aware of reports on the killing but had no further information to offer on Sunday. Coalition forces have previously targeted al-Nusra Front leaders in Syria.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights had earlier said the strikes may have been launched by Syrian govern-



ment or Russian fighter jets.

Al-Suri, whose real name was Radwan Nammous, fought against Soviet forces in Afghanistan when he met al-Qaeda

Leader Osama bin Laden and his mentor Abdullah Azzam before returning to Syria after the uprising began in 2011.

A temporary ceasefire between gov-

ernment forces and rebels has largely held since February 27, but al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group were not involved in that deal.

The cessation has, in fact, analysts say, allowed Russia and the U.S.-led coalition that has been bombing ISIL to concentrate their battle against the fighters.

On Wednesday, a drone strike near ISIL's de facto capital, Raqqa, killed Tunisian commander Abu al-Hajja, according to the Observatory, the latest in a series of blows to the group in recent weeks.

Fifteen ISIL commanders accused of revealing his position have since been executed, the Observatory said, and the fate of another 20 men accused of collaborating with the US-led coalition is unknown.

On Sunday, the Syrian army seized the city of al-Qaryatayn, one of the last ISIL strongholds in central Syria, according to state television.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Deportation of refugees from Greece to Turkey begins

Under tight security, police on the Greek island of Lesbos have put people on boats bound for Turkey, the first to be deported under a European Union (EU) plan to stem the flow of refugees to Europe.

Witnesses reported seeing two boats set sail after police boarded people who had arrived on buses.

"All of the migrants returned are from Pakistan, except for two migrants from Syria who returned voluntarily," Giorgos Kyritsis, a spokesman for a government refugee crisis committee, told state TV.

Kyritsis said 136 people were deported from Lesbos and 66 from the nearby island of Chios, where riot police clashed with local residents hours earlier during a protest against the expulsions.

The deal to send people back across the Aegean Sea has been fiercely criticized by rights groups on ethical grounds.

The AFP news agency on Monday said two Turkish ferries on Lesbos, and another one on Chios, were to pick up the refugees and that they would be escorted by police from the EU border agency Frontex.

Turkish Interior Minister Ekan Ala has said his country is ready to receive 500 refugees on Monday and Greek authorities have provided 400 names, although these numbers could change.

The European Union signed the deal with Turkey in March as it wrestled



with the continent's worst refugee crisis since World War II, with more than one million people arriving last year.

Under the agreement, designed to halt new arrivals along the most popular route through Turkey, all "irregular migrants" arriving since March 20 face being sent back. Each case is meant to be examined individually.

About 4,000 refugees have been detained on Greek islands since the agreement came into effect.

For every Syrian refugee returned, another Syrian refugee will be resettled from Turkey to the EU, with the numbers capped at 72,000.

"This is the first day of a very difficult time for refugee rights," Giorgos Kosmopoulos, head of Amnesty International in Greece, told the Associated Press news agency from Lesbos.

"Despite the serious legal gaps and lack of adequate protection in Turkey, the EU is forging ahead with a dangerous deal. Turkey is not a safe third country for refugees. The EU and Greek authorities know this and have no excuse."

(Source: Al Jazeera)

U.S.-Philippine war games begin as China warns 'outsiders'

United States and Philippine troops began major exercises on Monday as China's state media warned "outsiders" against interfering in tense South China Sea territorial disputes.

The official Xinhua news agency gave the warning as Manila and Washington launched the 11-day Balikatan (Shoulder-to-Shoulder) exercises with a low-key opening ceremony in Manila.

U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter is to fly to the Philippines next week to observe live-firing of artillery and visit U.S. Navy ships taking part.

Some 5,000 U.S. troops are taking part along with nearly 4,000 Philippine soldiers and 80 from Australia.

"The...exercises caps Manila's recent attempts to involve outsiders in (a) regional row," China's official news agency Xinhua said in a commentary.

It cited Japan, which sent a submarine on a visit to the Philippines last weekend, and Australia.

"However, a provocation so fear-mongering and untimely as such is likely to boomerang on the initiators," Xinhua added.

"A big country with vital interests in Asia, the United States should first clarify the targets of its Pivot to Asia strategy, which so far has featured no more than unscrupulous inconsistency between fear-mongering deeds and peace-loving words."

China lays claim to almost all of the South China Sea, despite partial counter-claims by Brunei, Malaysia,



Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines.

In recent years it has built major structures including radar systems and airstrips over reclaimed reefs and outcrops, sparking international concern it could impose military controls over the entire area.

It has sent U.S. bombers and warships on patrol close to the Chinese construction activity in recent months, infuriating Beijing.

Lieutenant-General John Toolan, commander of U.S. Marine Corps forces in the Pacific, told reporters in Manila the exercises would help the allies improve maritime security and maintain regional stability.

The exercises come ahead of a decision this year by a United Nations-backed tribunal on a legal challenge by Manila to China's territorial claims.

The Philippines is also preparing to host U.S. troops at five bases under a defense pact born out of U.S. President Barack Obama's plan to reassert American influence in the Pacific.

(Source: AFP)

About 250 Palestinian minors held in Israeli jails: rights group

A Palestinian human rights body says at least 241 Palestinian children under the age of 18 are currently held in Israeli prisons and detention facilities.

The Commission of Detainees' and Ex-Detainees' Affairs announced in a report released on Sunday that 94 Palestinian minors, sentenced on various charges, are incarcerated at the Israeli-run Ofer Prison near the occupied West Bank city of Beitunia, while the rest are being kept in other jails, Arabic-language Palestine al-Yawm news agency reported.

The report added that 22 Palestinian inmates are under the age of 16 years and two are in critical condition after being shot and arrested.

The Palestinian human rights body further noted that six minors are being held by the Israeli authorities under administrative detention.

Some Palestinian prisoners have been held in administrative detention for up to eight, ten and eleven years without any charges brought against them.

The Commission of Detainees' and Ex-Detainees' Affairs also pointed out that in March Israeli authorities issued fines against minor prisoners in Ofer Prison amounting to 85,000 Israeli shekels (US 22,474 dollars).

There are reportedly more than 6,500 Palestinians held at Israeli jails. Hundreds of the inmates have been apparently incarcerated under the practice of administrative detention, which is a policy under which Palestinian inmates are kept in Israeli detention facilities without trial or charge.

The Palestinian inmates regularly hold hunger strikes in protest at both the administrative detention policy and harsh prison conditions.

Israeli forces destroy homes of slain Palestinians

Elsewhere, Israeli forces have razed the homes of four Palestinians, three of whom had been killed in February over an alleged attack against Israeli troops.

According to the Palestinian Information Center, the Israeli forces destroyed the homes of Ahmed Najeh Abu

Al-Rab, Mohammed Ahmed Kmail and Ahmed Rajeh Zakarneh, who were all in their twenties and were earlier killed, in the city of Qabatiya in the Jenin Governorate in the occupied West Bank at dawn on Monday.

The home of a fourth Palestinian, Bilal Abu Zeid, who has been arrested for alleged involvement in the attack by the other three, was also demolished on Monday.

The three young men had been shot dead by Israeli forces in Bab Al-Amud Gate in the occupied East al-Quds (Jerusalem) Old City over an alleged stabbing and shooting attack on Israeli forces on February 3.

Autopsy confirms Palestinian killed by shot to head

Meantime, an autopsy on a Palestinian youth determines that he was killed by a final shot to his head, a doctor says, confirming his execution-style killing by an Israeli soldier in the West Bank.

"After a full autopsy, the fatal wound was in the head," Palestinian doctor Rayan al-Ali said on Sunday.

"There were several gunshot wounds. All those wounds were in the muscles, the lower limbs, and there was a wound in his right lung, but it was not fatal and did not lead to his death," he added.

The Israeli soldier shot Abdul Fatah al-Sharif in the head on March 24 while he was lying wounded by Israeli fire on the ground after an alleged stabbing attack in the West Bank city of al-Khalil (Hebron).

A Palestinian activist recorded the scene on camera and released it through a human rights group. The footage spread online and the soldier was arrested.

Israel's Supreme Court allowed al-Sharif's family to choose a doctor to carry out the autopsy.

On Thursday, military prosecutors had reduced the anticipated murder charge from murder to manslaughter. Under Israeli law, manslaughter signifies an intentional killing but one that was not premeditated.

The soldier and his lawyers claimed at the court



hearings that he was defending himself against the Palestinian, even as he could be seen in the video lying wounded and motionless on the ground.

The soldier said he thought the Palestinian was wearing an explosive belt. However, other soldiers who were present at the time of the deadly shooting told the court that the shooter had said before the incident that the Palestinian "was alive and deserved to die."

Tensions have heightened in the occupied territories since August 2015, when Israel imposed restrictions on the entry of Palestinian worshippers into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East al-Quds.

Some 208 Palestinians, including children and women, have lost their lives at the hands of Israeli forces since the beginning of last October. Around 29 Israelis have also been killed during this period.

(Source: Press TV)

NEWS

Ammar Hakim levels criticism at Iraqi cabinet reshuffle

Head of supreme council of Iraq, Seyyed Ammar Hakim leveled criticism at the Iraq cabinet reshuffle and the new lineup, stressing the recent changes made by Haider al-Abadi are not right, reported Taqrib News Agency (TNA).

Making his remark in a press conference mounted in Baghdad, Seyyed Ammar Hakim pointed out, "parliament members and some political parties are not that much pleased with the new changes proposing a lot of objections on it."

The political face placed stress on the recent reforms in cabinet, adding, "We accept no corruption and incompetent ministers; inasmuch as in the here and now, Iraq is facing great challenges and what we do need is competent and honest ministers so as to tackle the setbacks."

Head of supreme council of Iraq went on to highlight, "it is incumbent upon the parliament members to play an active role in sorting out the problems and meeting people's need."

Ammar al-Hakim, on Saturday, reservations on the new cabinet reshuffle, pointing out that "the method of announcing a change of ministerial cabin were not successful and we have notes on," pointing out that we "we are working hard to save the government through reform steps calculated."

Hakim stressed "the need to provide efficiency personalities candidate to fill government positions," adding "there is a great political mobility to check and make sure the candidates names of ministers, they are correct and efficient is it included all the components of Iraq."

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi of Iraq has presented a list with the names of candidates for ministries as he works up a new cabinet lineup.

"He presented a list with the names of candidates for ministries and their CVs who were chosen by a special committee of experts on the basis of professionalism, competence, integrity and leadership," said a statement on the website of the Iraqi premier on Thursday.

Abadi named Nizar Salem al-Numan as a candidate for oil minister as part of the cabinet reshuffle aimed at combating corruption, state television said.

The premier also named prominent politician Ali Allawi for the post of finance minister and tagged Sharif Ali bin al-Hussein for foreign minister, the report added.

Iraqis have been protesting against corruption over the past months calling for reforms. The administration of Abadi has failed to deliver on its reform promises.

The number of ministers that would be affected by the reshuffle is not clear yet.

The Iraqi parliament must vote on any change of the cabinet lineup.

The parliament, however, postponed its session for that matter until April 2. It had been expected to reconvene later on Thursday. Lawmakers appear divided on the reshuffle, as a number of parliamentarians have called for changes to all ministries and others only urge a partial change.

On March 29, senior Iraqi cleric Muqtada al-Sadr met with Abadi ahead of a deadline set for the premier to enact political reforms.

The parliament voted on March 28 to give Abadi a three-day deadline by which to present his new government or face a vote of no-confidence.

Sadr began a promised sit-in inside Baghdad's Green Zone on March 27, vowing to continue the protest action until the government fulfills its pledges for reform.

He joined his followers at the gates of the area, which is home to many government offices as well as the parliament and foreign embassies.

Meanwhile, Iraq's former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who is currently the secretary general of the Islamic Dawa Party, has reportedly expressed his conditional support for the reshuffle if the changes do not affect less than nine ministries. Otherwise, he has stated, the party will not take part in the parliament vote for the reshuffle.

(Source: agencies)

Erdogan says no room for dialog in Kurdish conflict remains

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said Monday the time for peace talks with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is over and vowed to stamp out the three-decade insurgency.

Militants must either surrender or they will be "neutralized," Erdogan said in a speech in Ankara that was broadcast live by state TV channel TRT.

The PKK abandoned its two-year ceasefire in July, reviving a conflict that has claimed more than 40,000 lives since 1984.

Since July, almost 400 soldiers and police and several thousand militants have been killed, according to government figures. Opposition political parties say between 500 and 1,000 civilians have also died in the fighting, centered in towns and cities in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast.

(Source: Reuters)

NEWS

Iran's master plan to ramp up energy exports

Iran, which possesses the second-largest natural gas reserves in the world, has recently announced its intention to dramatically increase its energy production. It is also positioning itself to increase its energy exports, a long-stated goal of its post-sanctions economic program.



In January 2016 it was announced by Iran's President Hassan Rouhani that the South Pars natural gas field, Iran's portion of the enormous Persian Gulf field it shares with Qatar, will be fully developed and in operation by March 2018. The 24-phase project has just surpassed stage 15 and 16, which together will add 50 million cubic meters per day (mcm/d) of gas and 80,000 barrels per day of condensate. Last year production from South Pars in total increased by 15 percent to 130 billion cubic meters (bcm). Production from the field could add as much as \$4.5 billion in revenue for the Iranian government, which has indicated that getting South Pars fully on-line is a top priority.

The Iranian portion of the South Pars field is roughly 3,700 square and represents the largest accessible source for new gas production. Much of this gas is intended for export in liquid form: Iran has made no secret of its hope to rival Qatar as a major LNG exporter. In late 2015 it announced plans to build five LNG export plans in the next three years. But, LNG is currently a questionable investment. The market remains soft, energy prices are low while new supply comes on line.

Plans set down to construct a pipeline from Iran to Oman in 2014 have been ongoing, with a lasting agreement reached last December.

In late March, Oman's minister of oil and gas announced talks were in still in progress to hammer out remaining details. The 400km pipeline will stretch from Hormozgan province in Iran to Sohar in Oman and carry gas both for Omani domestic consumption and export. Iran is bound by its 2014 agreement to supply Oman with natural gas, a 25-year deal valued at \$60 billion. The pipeline once completed will carry 1 billion cubic feet per day, a deal which Iran's oil minister Bijan Zanganeh has valued at \$1.5-\$2 billion. Oman has agreed to liquefy 1.5 million tons of Iranian gas for export. The pipeline is to be constructed by Korea Gas Corporation (KOGAS). Reports indicate that KOGAS may sign a memo of understanding with Iran and Oman before June 2016 for a project valued at \$1.5 billion.

The scheme would allow Iran to increase its natural gas production and enter into the LNG market before completing its own LNG trains. It also serves Tehran's long-term goal of expanding its influence in the Persian Gulf. Ties between the two countries will likely grow stronger, with one Iranian official predicting bilateral trade to reach \$4 billion in five years.

Meanwhile, the long-contemplated pipeline from Iran's southern oil fields to Pakistan is moving closer to becoming reality. Originally planned in the 1990s and occasionally referred to as "the peace pipeline," this project has gone through multiple rounds of negotiation, with both sides hesitant to commit to the costs of building the nearly-2000 km. long pipeline.

Since 2010, Pakistan has been under significant pressure from both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia not to carry out the project. The pipeline agreement was ratified by Pakistan in 2013, and there has been considerable speculation on whether the project will act as Pakistan's energy lifeline. Pakistan suffers from regular energy black-outs and is in desperate need of greater energy imports.

When sanctions on Iran fell in January 2016, progress on the project was set to continue. In late March, Rouhani visited Pakistan and declared that Iran had finished its portion of the massive pipeline, calling on Pakistan to complete its share. Pakistan and Iran have signed an agreement to increase bilateral trade to \$5 billion by 2021. While Pakistan desires Iranian energy, it hopes to export textiles and agricultural products. Work on the Pakistani side of the pipeline was held up over concerns regarding sanctions against Iran, but since early March work in Pakistan has begun again in earnest. India, which dropped out of the pipeline plan in 2009 over cost and security concerns, is also in talks with Iran.

Like the pipeline agreement with Oman, the completion of the long-awaited peace pipeline to Pakistan could mark an increase in Iran's regional profile and indicate that it is delivering on its promises of increasing its energy production and reclaiming its former status as a major energy exporter. (Source: oilprice.com)

JUMP

Iran's annual petchem exports rises to 19m tons

That was while in calendar year 1393 (March 2014-March 2015) the output stood at 43.5 million tons utilizing 76 percent of the available nominal capacity.

As Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh announced in February, Tehran plans to augment the worth of its petrochemical production by about 30 percent to \$22 billion by the next two years.

In June 2015, Mohammad-Hassan Peyvandi, the deputy managing director of NPC, said Iran planned to raise its petrochemical production to over 180 million tons in a course of ten years.

Iran's light crude oil price highest in 3 months

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Average price of Iran's desk light crude oil surpassed \$30 in the week ended on March 25, for the first time in the past three months.

The price hit \$36.35 per barrel in the mentioned week, showing a \$1.03 growth compared to its preceding week, the IRNA news agency reported on Monday.

The average price of Iran's light crude oil stood at \$30.08 since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 20).

The country also sold heavy crude oil at \$34.18 per barrel on average in the mentioned week, showing \$1.9 growth compared to its previous week.

Iran's average crude oil price stood at \$27.47 since the beginning of new Iranian calendar year.

Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)'s basket price stood at \$35.81 per barrel on average in the week ended on March 25, with \$0.63 rise from its preceding week.

Iran, once OPEC's second-largest producer after Saudi Arabia, is seeking to clear space for its gradual return to the market now that the sanctions are being lifted against the country.

Iran will continue increasing its oil production and exports until it reaches the market position it enjoyed before the imposition of sanctions, the Mehr news agency reported on Monday quoting Iranian Oil Minis-



ter Bijan Zanganeh as saying. With holding 157 billion barrels of recoverable crude oil reserves, Iran possesses the world's fourth largest crude oil reserves.

NUMOV 2016 confab on Iran to kick off today in Berlin

ECONOMY TEHRAN — 2016 conference of the German Near and Middle East Association titled Nah-Und MittelOst-Verein (NUMOV), with a specific focus on Iran, will start operation in Berlin today.

The conference will provide an excellent opportunity for German business-

men and private sector to meet the visiting Iranian officials and their counterparts in a bid to exchange first-hand information about mutual cooperation in the future, according to the IRNA news agency.

NUMOV in particular enjoys a highly favorable reputation due to its very positive activities as the only organization in

Germany during the last 20 years to demonstrate commitment to Iran.

Gerhard Schroder, the Former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Honorary Chairman of NUMOV, has recently visited Iran.

As Germans regard, the label "Made in Germany" enjoys a top reputation in Iran

and is currently witnessing high demand in all sectors.

Various gateways to new business opportunities have been opened for Iran as of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) inked between Tehran and the world P5+1 in June 2015 and the country aims to seize the upcoming chances.

'Germany's VW close to Iran auto deal'

Iran said on Sunday that Germany's auto giant Volkswagen is expected to seal a deal with an Iranian partner in the near future to invest in the country's car industry.

Iran's Ambassador to Berlin Ali Majedi said Volkswagen has been looking into the Iranian car industry for the past year and are closer than ever to a final investment decision.

Majedi said the company's management have been specifically studying the capabilities of several local carmakers and are now trying to choose between only two companies.

He did not name the companies but some reports say they could be Kerman Motor and Mammut Group.

Volkswagen announced last September that it is grooming its Skoda brand for the Iranian market.

"Iran is a very interesting market with great opportunities," VW brand R&D chief Heinz-Jakob Neusser said at the time.

VW will conclude an assessment of the country's auto market by the end of the year, Reuters quoted him as saying. Neusser said it is still too early to say

which product VW could use to go in with "but of course we see the potential".

Reuters further quoted a company source as saying that VW was considering a move into Iran with the mass-market Skoda and Seat brands.

Volkswagen's last venture in Iran involved its production of the Gol compact with Iran's Kerman Khodro before withdrawing under US pressures.

Other German automakers including Mercedes have already started talks to form partnerships with Iran Khodro - the leading Iranian car giant.

The media in Tehran reported in mid-March that a commercial deal between Iran Khodro and Mercedes is imminent.

In January, the German carmaker said it had signed letters of intent with local partners Iran Khodro Diesel and Mammut Group to arrange a "comprehensive re-entry" into the country.

The areas of cooperation include a joint venture for local production of Mercedes-Benz trucks and powertrain components plus the establishment of a sales company for Mercedes-Benz trucks and components, it said then.

(Source: Press TV)

Pak-Iran pact to prepare FTA ground: PIAF chairman

Chairman of Pakistan Industrial and Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Irfan Iqbal Sheikh said the pact between Pakistan and Iran would remove non-tariff barriers in bilateral trade and prepare the ground for a free trade agreement (FTA).

Talking to the media here on Sunday, he said it was remarkable that both the countries agreed to work on issuing long-term multiple entry visas to businessmen and increasing direct air flights to boost the prospects of trade.

Trade in agriculture and mineral sectors offered tremendous scope and Pakistan and Iran were ideally placed and capable enough to complement each other. The prospects of export of services are far greater in transportation, financial, communication, insurance and IT fields, he mentioned.

The PIAF chairman said: "We can get cheaper oil from Iran and by exporting rice to Iran we can get millions in foreign exchange. By formulating a better strategy, we can get our share back in the Iranian market as India has overcome nowadays. The trade can

extended to up to \$7 billion." He termed the signing of five-year Strategic Trade Cooperation Plan (2016-2021) as the beginning of a new era, which provides a great opportunity to the two nations to enhance economic cooperation to new heights.

Irfan Iqbal Sheikh urged the commerce ministry to explore various avenues to enhance the bilateral trade to \$5 billion in five years in accordance with the vision of the top political leadership of the two countries during the recent visit of the Iranian president. He termed it a good omen that Iran would hold a trade and investment exhibition in Pakistan in September this year adding that private sector of two countries should take the lead in strengthening the bilateral relations in all sectors.

The PIAF Vice Chairman, Tanveer Sufi, also welcomed the recent trade ties with Iran and hoped that with re-continuation of the banking system the import export would start and LCs would open from both sides, which would be beneficial for Pakistan as exports needed some support for going in upward direction. (Source: thenews.com.pk)

India's March Iran oil imports top 500,000 bpd: data

India's Iran oil imports topped 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) in March, highest in at least five years, as private refiner Reliance Industries resumed purchases after a multi-year lay-off, preliminary tanker data obtained by Reuters shows.

Indian refiners together imported 506,100 bpd oil from Iran last month, a jump of about 135 percent from February, the data showed. In March of last year, the refiners halted imports from Iran to keep

shipments within the parameters of the temporary nuclear deal then in force.

The higher imports by India signals Tehran's success in beginning to regain market share after the lifting of Western sanctions targeting its nuclear program.

Iran has said it will continue increasing its oil production and exports until it reaches the market position it held before the imposition of sanctions.

In the fiscal year ended on March 31,

Indian refiners shipped in 14.4 percent more oil from Iran at about 251,100 bpd, the data showed. The increase was the largest annual growth since the 2007/08 fiscal year, according to Reuters data.

Essar Oil was the biggest importer of Iranian oil in March with about 207,400 bpd oil, followed by about 130,000 bpd by Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd and about 90,600 bpd by Reliance, its first shipments in about six years.

Reliance had halted Iranian oil imports in 2010 because it was worried that the threat of U.S. sanctions on companies doing business with the Islamic republic would complicate its efforts to boost market share for its fuels in the United States.

Last month Reliance imported Forzan grade and South Pars condensate from Iran, the data showed.

(Source: Reuters)

NEWS IN BRIEF



General Motors recalling over 1.4 million vehicles due to a fire hazard

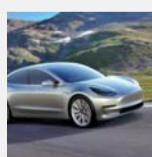
General Motors will recall more than 1.41 million vehicles — all more than a decade old — to fix a defect that has caused about 1,200 engine fires and previously bedeviled the automaker.

The issue affects several nameplates with model years ranging from 1997 to 2004, including 1 million cars that were fixed for the same issue in two recalls in 2007 and 2009.

GM previously urged people to park those vehicles outside until they could get free repairs.

Today, the company said customers have reported at least 19 "minor injuries" in incidents since the most recent recall was completed.

The new recall includes 1.28 million sedans and coupes in the U.S.



Tesla says Model 3 orders top \$10 billion in first 36 hours

Tesla Motors Inc said orders for its new Model 3 electric sedan topped 253,000 in the first 36 hours - a fast start for the company's first mass-market vehicle, which may not begin to reach customers for another 18 months or more.

Tesla Chief Executive Elon Musk tweeted on Friday that the Model 3, which is slated to go into production in late 2017, will sell at an average price of \$42,000, including the price of options and additional features, which would give the initial flurry of orders an estimated retail value of \$10.6 billion.

That intense interest, fanned in part by a steady stream of tweets by Musk, could help boost Tesla's stock price, which closed Friday at \$237.59, up 3.4 percent.



Daimler heir apparent sets path forward for Mercedes

At Mercedes-Benz's stand at the New York auto show, there were murmurs: Ola Kaellenius, the poised, youthful-looking Swede who runs Mercedes' global sales, has the inside track to succeed Daimler CEO Dieter Zetsche.

Similarly, the German business newspaper Handelsblatt said the 46-year-old Kaellenius is "likely to figure prominently" in Daimler's future leadership, especially after strong sales in 2015.

In February, Daimler extended Zetsche's contract until Dec. 31, 2019. So Kaellenius has more seasoning ahead of him. On Jan. 1, he will become the board member responsible for group research and Mercedes-Benz Cars development.

Noruz travelers up 67% year on year: official

TOURISM TEHRAN – The number of Iranians who stayed in lodgings across Iran during Noruz holidays (March 20-April 1) rose 67 percent in comparison to the same period last year, Iran's tourism chief Morteza Rahmani-Movahhed announced in a press conference on Monday.

Number of travelers to South Khorasan, Kermanshah and Kohkilyeh-Boyer Ahmad provinces increased this year, he added.

The number of flights to the United Arab Emirates decreased 18 percent and the decrease was 10 percent for Turkey. The number of internal flights, though, increased 9 percent, he said.

"Over 100 million people visited tour-

ist spots during Noruz holidays, which increased 67 percent in comparison to the same period last year," he said.

The head of Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization, Davoud Keshavarzian, also made a short speech about Noruz travels.

He said that over eight million Iranians used public transportation during Noruz and 60 percent of them used buses.

"Over 820,000 travelers passed the borders of Iraq, Turkey, and Azerbaijan and 33 percent of them were foreigners who entered Iran," he said.

Three million Iranians traveled by airplane, an increase of 12 percent in comparison to the last year, he added.

About 1.6 million passengers travelled by train during the holidays, he mentioned.



Bloggers to introduce attractions of Qeshm Island

TOURISM TEHRAN – The Persian Gulf island of Qeshm will host the first bloggers' travel writing festival from April 25 to 29. The event is co-organized by Iran Federation of Tourist Guide Associations and Qeshm Free Zone Organization.

Bloggers who write travel diaries and travel-

ogues can apply for the festival until April 8 and the jury will select 35 bloggers to attend the event. The winners will be announced during the closing ceremony on April 29, which marks Iran's Persian Gulf National Day.

Qeshm is the biggest Iranian island in the Persian Gulf near the Strait of Hormuz.

Tomb of Four Kings in Lahijan: Tracing a historical capital

There are two gates. I entered the yard from the right gate where old men were sitting on the stairs and staring at my camera. Though I assume they were staring at my camera from when I was photographing Lahijan's grand mosque on the side of the square. Upon entering the Chahar Padshahan (Four Kings), I found myself walking on the stone tiles in between them the green grass had grown. Chahar Padshahan consists of two buildings.

There is a newer structure with blue ceramic artworks similar to that of typical mosques in Iran. But the shorter building on the left looks much less new and much more Gilani style of architecture: Wooden structure, white plaster walls, clay roof tiles and ancient cafe house style of paintings here and there.

Weather in Gilan province is very humid throughout the year. Also in the past, it was very difficult to bring any construction materials to Gilan due to being locked in the Alborz mountain range forcing the people to use the local materials. Stones were too heavy and rare and the stone structures could not resist the extreme humidity.

On the other hand, wood was cheap and plentiful and the clay tiles could cover the roof, not only protecting the building against the shower-like rainfalls but they were even lighter than stone and could be easily replaced if damaged.

Chahar Padshahan however, has a slightly different structure. The old building is rectangular shape, contains several rooms, each has doorways to the ter-



Chahar Padshahan Mosque (Photo: Madi Jahangir)

race and another door inside, to connect the rooms to one another. Four Lahijan's great men are buried there, two of whom were the rulers of Biehpish. (1) They were from Kiyaei dynasty, rulers of a lost kingdom which had Lahijan as the historical capital.

Gilan is historically part of Iran however for the same reason of being locked by Alborz mountain range, the local rulers of the region were not much under influence and control of the Iran's central government.

In the ancient time until the Safavi domination of Gilan and long before the Iran's provincial divisions into the current state, Gilan was divided by the Sefidrud River into eastern and western re-

gions. The river's eastern side was called Biehpish (Gilaki: This side of river) and the western side Biehpas (Gilaki: Other side of the river).

For a period of time, Sadat-e Kiyaei ruled the Biehpish area and established a government in Lahijan as their capital. Kiyaei rulers were followers of Zaidi branch of Shi'ite Islam whom later reverted to Ithna Ashariyeh Shi'ism, the current dominant Islamic sect in Iran.

They are called Sadat for being descendants of prophet Muhammad (AS) who fled Abbasid oppression against Prophet's household. Under their rule, they gave asylum, supported and cherished Shah Ismaeil Safavi, the founder of Safavi dynasty when he was a child and

played a very important role in establishment of Safavi empire, one of the strongest kingdoms that reunited Iran (Persia) after centuries of division.

It is surprising that how the events have been connected to each other from past to present and perhaps to future. Nowadays, Chahar Padshahan (often called Meydan too) is one of the main seven districts in Lahijan's old city and is often crowded in the month of Moharram, only when the special ceremonies are being held for the martyrdom of Imam Hossain (AS) Other than that, there are few visitors who pay respect to the tombs or come to hold daily prayers in the mosque.

Upon me exiting Chahar Padshahan, the sun was almost down. I took so many photos inside the shrine until the key holder of the place told me that I am not allowed to do more shooting. I recited Fatiha for the kings and watched over the calligraphic texts and paintings once more. Most of the paintings are related to Qajar era but the building itself was built upon order of Shah Abbas Safavi. The most amazing parts are the tombs themselves, showing off a type of art that Gilanis are master of: the amazing wooden artworks with so much detailing.

The tomb of the Four Kings is a regular shrine similar to many other shrines in the country. But maybe not, for being a reminder of a great period of Iran's history, in which my hometown, the current small, peaceful and quite city of Lahijan, has once played an important role.

(Source: Dream of Iran)

European colonization caused substantial loss of pre-Columbian lineages

by the University of Adelaide's Australian Centre for Ancient DNA (ACAD), researchers have reconstructed a genetic history of Indigenous American populations by looking directly into the DNA of 92 pre-Columbian mummies and skeletons, between 500 and 8600 years old.

Published in Science Advances (open access), the study reveals a striking absence of the pre-Columbian genetic lineages in modern Indigenous Americans; showing extinction of these lineages with the arrival of the Spaniards.

"Surprisingly, none of the genetic lineages we found in almost 100 ancient humans were present, or showed evidence of descendants, in today's Indigenous populations," says joint lead author Dr Bastien Llamas, Senior Research Associate with ACAD. "This separation appears to have been established as early as 9000 years ago and was completely unexpected, so we examined many demographic scenarios to try and explain the pattern."

(Source: Past Horizons)

A CLOSER LOOK

Facts about the Great Wall of China

Snaking its way through the Chinese countryside, it is one of the most impressive pieces of architecture and engineering in history – a project that was ongoing for 2,000 years.

The first walls were constructed during the seventh century BC to protect individual kingdoms in China from warring neighbours. When Qin Shi Huang conquered and united China – becoming the first Emperor in 221 BC – he ordered that the sections of wall be joined into one great defence.

Here are 5 facts about the Great Wall of China...

■ Myths and legends

There are several misconceptions about the bulwarks. It is not a single wall, but a series of fortifications, some of which run parallel to each other, and there is no truth to the legend that the Great Wall can be seen from space.

■ The really great wall

If you added up all the branches built throughout the Great Wall's history, then its total length would be 13,171 miles. That is longer than the distance between London and the capital of New Zealand, Auckland.

■ Solid foundations

It is impossible to know how many millions of construction workers were used over the millennia to build the walls. Those who died – which could number in the hundreds of thousands – were buried in the foundations of the Great Wall.

■ Light the beacons

During the Ming dynasty, watchtowers were developed to warn of a Mongol invasion. Detachments of soldiers were stationed in each tower and, if they saw someone approaching, they would send up a column of smoke to raise the alarm. At night, huge bonfires were lit.

■ A legendary place

Dozens of legends surround the Great Wall. One of the most enduring is the myth of Meng Jiangnu, the wife of one of the builders who died. According to the story, when she learned of his death, she cried so hard that it caused a section of the wall to collapse.

(Source: History Extra)

When was the first strike?

With so many monumental construction projects being carried out, it may not be all that surprising that the first strike was in Ancient Egypt.

The first documented strike in history is thought to be that held by the craftsmen working on the royal necropolis at Deir el-Medina, in the mid-12th century BC.

Although slaves were carrying out much of the work on Ancient Egyptian structures, many paid builders and craftsmen were brought in to make up the workforce.

Under the rule of Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses III, the workers grew resentful against their insufficient and late rations, so threw down their tools and stopped working. They organised what may have been the first-ever sit-down protest in history, which they carried out in the mortuary.

The event is recorded in a single papyrus, which details the workers complaining that: "The prospect of hunger and thirst has driven us to this."

After negotiations with the local officials, the strikers were eventually granted provisions and agreed to return to work. In fact, their wages actually went up. A lucky escape as it could be assumed that a pharaoh wouldn't put up with rebellious subjects in a reasonable manner.

(Source: History Extra)

PICTURE OF THE DAY

📷 Mehr/Navid Mohammadi



An Iranian family poses for a photo in front of Taq-e Bostan pond in Kermanshah, western Iran

ON THIS DAY

1792	George Washington casts 1st presidential veto
1879	Chile declares war on Bolivia and Peru, starting the War of the Pacific.
1887	Anne Sullivan teaches "water" to Helen Keller
1889	Start of Sherlock Holmes' "Adventure of Copper Beeches" (BG)
1894	Start of Sherlock Holmes' "Adventure of Empty House" (BG)
1895	Start of Sherlock Holmes' "Adventure of 3 Students" (BG)
1939	Membership in Hitler Youth becomes obligatory
1943	Allies bomb Mortsel
1944	World War II: 270 inhabitants of the Greek town of Kleisoura are executed by the Germans.
1955	Winston Churchill resigns as British PM, Anthony Eden succeeds him
1974	Then tallest building, World Trade Center opens in NYC (110 stories)

Nagorno-Karabakh: Rehearsal for an upcoming war?

By Can Kasapoglu

Recent clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh region - an occupied Azerbaijani territory according to four United Nations Security Council resolutions - have claimed the lives of more than 30 from both sides. At the time of writing, Azerbaijan declared a unilateral ceasefire.

In military terms, it would be fair to say that Baku and Yerevan would not go into an all-out war.

However, a warlike rehearsal through skirmishes and the trajectory of the recent clashes hinted at what the next war between Azerbaijan and Armenia would look like.

In such a case, the Azerbaijanis would rely on rapid combined-arms offensives to achieve decisive results swiftly, while the Armenian defense planners would attempt to hold on to their topographically advantageous defensive lines and launch small-scale counter-offensives to regain lost positions immediately.

Russia would pretend to be a peace-mediator, while supporting the Armenian defense through the back door.

Finally, Turkish public opinion would strongly side with Azerbaijan, and Ankara would play a supportive yet cautious role.

Unusual tensions

Apparently, the recent round of skirmishes presents a different case from the "usual" tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Although casualty reports of the two parties' officials differ, they overlap on the military equipment that was used. Both sides reported helicopters, main battle tanks, and other armored vehicles with artillery support being involved in the engagements.

From a military standpoint, the clashes are tantamount to what modern doctrines call "combined-arms operations". The course of action is based on a sophisticated use of different military assets through a simultaneous and synchronized operational way in order to achieve what "each arm"

could not accomplish separately.

Therefore, "arms" on the battlefield compensate for each other's vulnerabilities, while providing unique advantages to advance.

In a simplified tactical scenario, tanks provide maneuvering and protection advantage to infantry, while the infantry protects tanks from anti-tank systems. Simultaneously, artillery pins down enemy formations while attack helicopters hunt down enemy tanks to pave the ground for an armored offensive.

Notably, combined arms operations cannot be compared with sniper fire-exchange over contact lines. They are conducted to achieve decisive and destructive results swiftly. Clearly, at strategic level, this type of operation aims to change control of terrain.

A key detail about the strategic balance in Nagorno-Karabakh came into the picture when the Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan announced casualties, without specifying whether the fallen troops belonged to the local militia of Karabakh or the Armenian



Armenian artillery position in Martakert, Nagorno-Karabakh.

military.

This was a small but critical detail, as for some time Azerbaijani military analysts have been focusing on distinguishing the Armenian casualties resulting from the border clashes. In this regard, Azerbaijanis argued that the majority of the Armenian losses were from Armenia rather than the local armed elements.

Therefore, Baku anticipates a significant decrease in available manpower

of the de facto Armenian administration in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Moreover, the Armenian army - mainly relying on conscription and having severe shortages to finance its armament - has been facing significant modernization problems in recent years.

Coupled with the manpower problems of the Armenian side, the overall military balance has been shifting in favor of Baku in recent years. The only

exception in this regard would be the decreasing oil prices that would affect Azerbaijani military modernization.

On the other side of the border, the Azerbaijani National Security Concept, which was approved by President Ilham Aliyev in 2007, openly states that a settlement with Armenia could be achieved only under a complete withdrawal of Armenian forces from the occupied territories and full restoration of Azerbaijan's sovereignty.

In tandem, the current military doctrine of Azerbaijan, which was adopted in 2010, underlines the right to exert military force to regain Nagorno-Karabakh.

Thus, Baku's actions are stemming from the very fact that the Nagorno-Karabakh and occupied territories issue remains well beyond realpolitik-driven parameters.

Strategic culture

Rather, it constitutes a vital component of the Azerbaijani strategic culture as the top security agenda and matter of pride for the nation. In other words, the military option is really on the table for Baku. →9

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Panama Papers: Mossack Fonseca leak reveals elite's tax havens

A huge leak of confidential documents has revealed how the rich and powerful use tax havens to hide their wealth.

Eleven million documents were leaked from one of the world's most secretive companies, Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca.

They show how Mossack Fonseca has helped clients launder money, dodge sanctions and evade tax.

The company says it has operated beyond reproach for 40 years and has never been charged with criminal wrongdoing.

The documents show links to 72 current or former heads of state in the data, including the Icelandic Prime Minister, Sigmundur Gunnlaugsson, who had an undeclared interest linked to his wife's wealth and is now facing calls for his resignation.

The files also reveal a suspected billion-dollar money laundering ring involving close associates of President Putin.

Gerard Ryle, director of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), said the documents covered the day-to-day business at Mossack Fonseca over the past 40 years.

"I think the leak will prove to be probably the biggest blow the offshore world has ever taken because of the extent of the documents," he said.

The documents also shed light on how Mossack Fonseca offered financial services designed to help business clients hide their wealth.

One wealthy client, American millionaire and life coach Marianna Olszewski, was offered fake ownership records to hide money from the authorities. This is in direct breach of international regulations designed to stop money laundering and tax evasion.

An email from a Mossack executive to Ms Olszewski in January 2009 explains how she could deceive the bank: "We may use a natural person who will act as the ben-



eficial owner... and therefore his name will be disclosed to the bank. Since this is a very sensitive matter, fees are quite high." Ms Olszewski did not respond to the BBC's questions.

In a statement, Mossack Fonseca said: "Your allegations that we provide structures supposedly designed to hide the identity of the real owners, are completely unsupported and false."

"We do not provide beneficiary services to deceive banks. It is difficult, not to say impossible, not to provide banks with the identity of final beneficiaries and the origin of funds."

The data also contains secret offshore companies linked to the families and associates of Egypt's former president Hosni

Mubarak, Libya's former leader Muammar Gaddafi and Syria's President Bashar al-Assad.

Russian connection

It also reveals a suspected billion-dollar money laundering ring that was run by a Russian bank and involved close associates of President Putin.

The operation was run by Bank Rossiya, which is subject to US and EU sanctions following Russia's annexation of Crimea.

The documents reveal for the first time how the bank operates.

Money has been channelled through offshore companies, two of which were officially owned by one of the Russian president's closest friends.

Concert cellist Sergei Roldugin has

known Vladimir Putin since they were teenagers and is godfather to the president's daughter Maria.

On paper, Mr Roldugin has personally made hundreds of millions of dollars in profits from suspicious deals.

But documents from Mr Roldugin's companies state that: "The company is a corporate screen established principally to protect the identity and confidentiality of the ultimate beneficial owner of the company."

Iceland connection

Mossack Fonseca data also shows how Icelandic Prime Minister Sigmundur Gunnlaugsson had an undeclared interest in his country's failed banks.

Mr Gunnlaugsson has been accused of hiding millions of dollars of investments in his country's banks behind a secretive offshore company.

Leaked documents show that Sigmundur Gunnlaugsson and his wife bought offshore company Wintris in 2007.

He did not declare an interest in the company when entering parliament in 2009. He sold his 50% of Wintris to his wife for \$1 (70p), eight months later.

Mr Gunnlaugsson is now facing calls for his resignation. He says he has not broken any rules, and his wife did not benefit financially from his decisions.

The offshore company was used to invest millions of dollars of inherited money, according to a document signed by Mr Gunnlaugsson's wife Anna Sigurlaug Pálsdóttir in 2015.

Mossack Fonseca says offshore companies are available worldwide and are used for a variety of legitimate purposes.

"If we detect suspicious activity or misconduct, we are quick to report it to the authorities," it said. "Similarly, when authorities approach us with evidence of possible misconduct, we always cooperate fully with them." (Source: BBC)

COMMENT

Oil could soon see \$50, here's why: RBC analyst

Oil hit its lowest level in nearly a month last week, but one of Wall Street's top commodities analysts says a recovery is on the way in 2016.

On CNBC's "Futures Now", global head of commodities strategy at RBC Capital Markets Helima Croft predicted that oil will rebound following a scheduled meeting between OPEC and non-OPEC members on April 17th in the Qatari capital.

"We spent an entire year with [Saudi Arabia and Russia] saying everything was fine," explained Croft.

"Their decision to come out and even mention a freeze was a catalyst for the rally" that recently pulled crude to within view of \$40, Croft said. "As we look towards the April 17 meeting, I don't think Saudi Arabia would even show up in Doha if there wasn't going to be an agreement."

Speculation over a potential accord between cartel members has whipsawed global energy markets. According to a statement from Qatari energy minister Mohammed Bin Saleh Al-Sada, approximately 15 producers representing 73 percent of global oil output will meet to discuss the possibility of a production freeze. For now, Iran remains the OPEC wild card, because Tehran is seeking an increase of exports following the lifting of sanctions earlier this year.

However, oil analysts say the market remains oversupplied, keeping a cap on crude prices. Croft told CNBC that could easily change if the world's largest oil producer takes action in the near term.

"If Saudi Arabia freezes at their January levels, and that holds through the summer, that's an effective cut of several hundred thousands of barrels a day," noted Croft.

In terms of gauging the market, Croft sees a "quiet period" taking effect, wherein U.S. oil, or West Texas Intermediate, will likely slip to \$35 ahead of the meeting.

"In the next couple of weeks, we think [oil prices] will drift a little bit lower," she said. "We've had so much short-covering and I don't think there's very much left of that [since] we remain over-supplied and the fundamentals remain soft," said Croft.

In the long-term, Croft noted that getting oil back to \$50 per barrel will take time, but is doable assuming major producers continue to struggle with their supplies.

"We still expect a recovery to \$50" by the fourth quarter, the analyst said. "One thing we are watching is mounting supply disruptions coming out of places like Nigeria and Northern Iraq. If those continue to mount [that could] bring the re-balance into Q3. So we are watching those supply outages. If that eats into our overhang, [we may] get a recovery in Q3 to the 50's as opposed to Q4."

From there, Croft added that the move from \$50 to \$60 per barrel will be harder, because of the need to work off the inventory, which is typically a slower process. (Source: CNBC)



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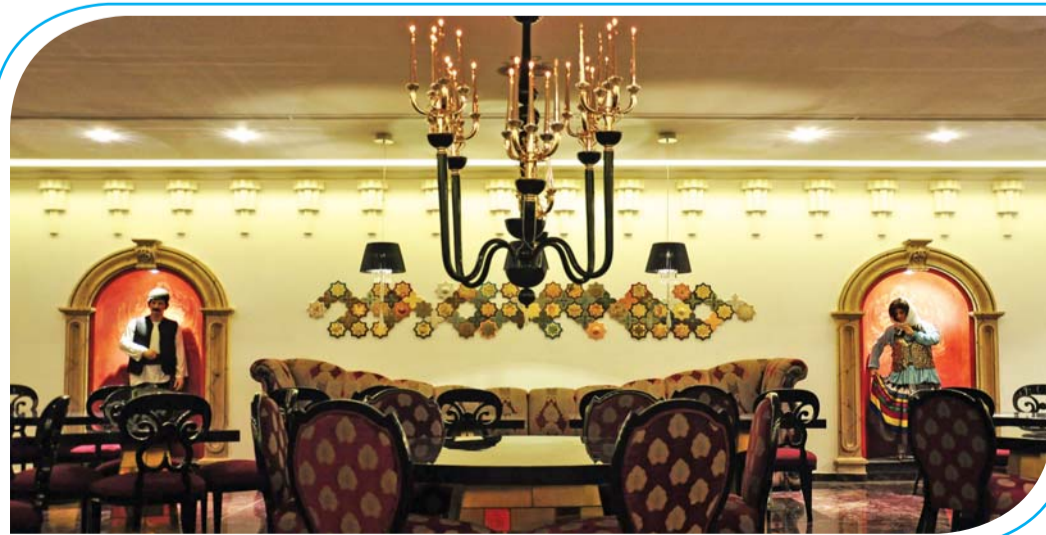


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NEWS IN BRIEF

Electric fork simulates salty flavors with electric currents

Who needs salt when you have electricity? That's the proposition of the "electric flavoring fork" created by a researcher in Japan to make meals more palatable for people who need to stick to low-salt or no-salt diets.

The prototype fork, developed by Hiromi Nakamura of Re-kimoto Lab at the University of Tokyo, comprises a handle that houses a rechargeable battery and electric circuit, according to Nikkei Technology. When a user places the head of the fork on their tongue, they can press a button on the handle to deliver one of three levels of electric current, which replicates varying degrees of saltiness.

Spices like pepper and garlic help the fork to deliver saltiness rather than sour and metallic tastes, according to Nikkei Technology.

"When I increased current level by using a rotary switch on the back of the fork, a metallic taste started to become stronger than the salty taste," wrote the online publication's reporter, who was eating salt-free tonkatsu (pork cutlet). "On the other hand, it is reportedly difficult to emphasize a sweet taste or juicy flavor."

The prototype fork, which is not waterproof, was created for less than \$18, not accounting for the cost of the fork. The device's rechargeable battery lasts six hours per charge.

This isn't the first time Nakamura has shown how electricity can simulate saltiness and sweetness: In 2012, she showed off the application of electricity to affect tastes at the Computer Human Interaction Conference in Austin, Texas, and brought an earlier version of the "electric flavoring fork" there. The latest iteration is less unwieldy than a prototype shown earlier this year and is the result of six years of development.

(Source: Digital Trends)

Ancient floodstones sought to help predict climate change

When it comes to predicting climate change, most scientists use state-of-the-art supercomputers to model future trends.

But researchers at the University of Sheffield are hoping to gather information that is a little closer to home.

Scientists are hunting for ancient floodstones which record the high level of water going back hundreds of years.

Thousands of homes and buildings across Britain have plaques marking unusual periods of high tide and flooding.

Now Sheffield University has launched a project to record their locations and information to help make more accurate predictions of which areas are at risk of flooding.

Most flooding records only go back 150 years, but floodstones often record water from much earlier. Even Roman examples have been found.

Sheffield University has launched the UK Coastal Floodstones Project and is asking the public to record the locations.

A new initiative led by Ph.D. student Greg Rushby from the University's Department of Geography, is inviting members of the public to record the locations of floodstones across the country to assist scientists in making more accurate predictions of which urban and rural areas are at risk of flooding.

Ph.D. student Greg Rushby, who is leading the project, said: "Floodstones are often found on the side of buildings or long-lasting structures such as bridges and walls."

(Source: The Telegraph)

A baby's BMI may predict early obesity

Pediatricians usually start monitoring kids for obesity risk at a 2-year-old's well-child visit, but a new study shows severe obesity is predictable as early as six months old. The authors recommend children start being screened for the condition as babies.

Cincinnati Children's Hospital Center researchers found that measuring body mass index (BMI) - which doctors can calculate using a child's height and weight and then plotting the numbers on a graph - in babies as young as 6 months, could pinpoint the children most likely to go on to develop obesity.

The study, presented at the national Endocrine Society meeting in Boston, is the first to show that weight gain during the baby years differs in those who eventually go on to develop obesity, the authors said.

To learn more about early predictors of obesity, they analyzed electronic records of children under the age of 6, including 783 lean children and 480 severely obese children.

The youngsters were from varying economic backgrounds. The authors reported that the body mass index ratings in children who become severely obese by age 6 began to differ from children who remain normal weight as early as 4 months of age.

"We found in this study that growth patterns differ at 6 months of age in kids who become severely obese," said the study's lead author Dr. Allison Smego, a fellow in the division of Endocrinology at Cincinnati Children's.

(Source: CBS)

Global tiger population may double by 2022, say scientists

The global population of tigers is currently less than 3,500, which is indeed a worrisome figure. More than 90 per cent of the territory which was once covered by the big cats is not under the forest cover anymore. It was feared 10 years ago that tigers may go extinct one day. However, fortunately, in India and Nepal, the population of tigers has increased if we talk about the past decade. And now, in a good news, the number of tigers could rise to double in the forest cover that is remained, a paper published in the international journal Science Advances has claimed.

In 2010, a meeting of 13 tiger range countries was held in Russia, in which a target was set to double the number of tigers by 2022. Representatives of these 13 countries will meet again in New Delhi this month and a review of progress on the target will take place.

The authors of the scientific study mapped the forests across 76 landscapes that have maximum tigers with the help of satellite technology between 2001 and 2014. It was found that the forests had not



According to the study, tigers also "proliferate rapidly where prey and sheltered habitat are abundant, as demonstrated by tiger recovery in Panna National Park, India."

shrunk at the pace which was thought. The factors that lead to shrink in tiger territory involve agricultural expansion and infrastructure development.

■ Tigers proliferate rapidly

According to the study, tigers also "proliferate rapidly where prey and sheltered habitat are abundant, as demonstrated by tiger recovery in Panna National Park, India." The tiger being a solitary animal required forested habitats that are larger than 30 sq km large for survival.

Achieving the goal would need "maintaining the existing habitat, including ecological connectivity among source populations."

The researchers used tools such as Google Earth Engine and Global Forest Watch to analyze habitat loss to the tiger. Sumatra was the most affected. As per their estimation, \$750 billion need to be invested in infrastructure over the next decade. "Large roads are mortality magnets for tigers."

Authors also noted the successful efforts of conservation managed by community in Nepal and India, the two countries that have registered a rise in tiger population.

(Source: News Nation)

NASA astronauts train on Orion spacecraft for trip to Mars

Astronauts began training on the Orion spacecraft to prepare for an eventual trip bringing spacefarers to Mars. The test crew donned full spacesuits in order to fully test the vehicle and their own ability to interact with control systems while wearing their full gear.

The Orion spacecraft is designed to be NASA's next space delivery system, capable of lifting human payloads to orbit, and well beyond the Earth. This vehicle is the cornerstone of the American space agency's quest to send people to the Red Planet.

"Engineers at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston are evaluating how crews inside a mockup of the Orion spacecraft interact with the rotational hand controller and cursor control device while inside their Modified Advanced Crew Escape Spacesuits. The controllers are used to operate Orion's displays and control system, which the crew will use to maneuver and interact with the spacecraft during missions to deep space



destinations," NASA officials wrote on their website.

■ Four astronauts

The Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle (Orion MPCV) is designed to carry a crew of four astronauts to destinations

beyond low-Earth orbit (LEO). The United States has not possessed a means of bringing people into space since the retirement of the space shuttle program in 2011. The last vehicle capable of bringing human occupants beyond LEO was the Saturn V, which was retired in 1973.

Mission planners at NASA are confident they will be able to safely land a human crew on the Red Planet in about 20 years. The vehicle has undergone a single test flight so far, in 2014, when an empty capsule completed two orbits of the Earth to test critical safety equipment.

"NASA's Orion spacecraft is built to take humans farther than they've ever gone before. Orion will serve as the exploration vehicle that will carry the crew to space, provide emergency abort capability, sustain the crew during the space travel and provide safe re-entry from deep space return velocities," NASA officials report in an overview of the upcoming spacecraft.

(Source: Tech Times)

Waistline could predict heart disease better than weight

When it comes to heart health, new research adds to the argument that a pear-shaped body, which is heavy in the hips, may be better than an apple-shaped body, which carries more weight around the belly.

A study of diabetes patients found that increasing waist size appears to be a stronger predictor of serious heart disease than body weight or body mass index (BMI, the weight-to-height ratio).

"We have known that abdominal obesity is more linked to coronary atherosclerosis [plaque buildup in the arteries] than other forms of obesity," said Dr. Brent Muhlestein, a study author and co-director of research at the Intermountain Medical Center Heart Institute in Salt Lake City.

"We found that left ventricle heart function got worse with progressive waist circumference. The relation between left ventricle function and waist circumference remained highly significant, even after adjusting for body weight," Muhlestein said.

The left ventricle is the heart's primary pumping chamber, and abnormal ventricular function is a common cause of heart disease, including congestive heart failure, the study authors noted.

■ Waist circumference

For this investigation, scientists measured waist circumference, total body weight and BMI in 200 men and women with type 1 or type 2 diabetes. Diabetes can raise heart risks, but patients did not start the study with any symptoms of heart disease.



The researchers evaluated the heart function of study participants by using echocardiography — a type of ultrasound. They noted that left ventricular function got progressively worse as waist sizes got bigger, with heart decline eventually leveling off at 45 inches of waistline.

The study authors noted that the link between waist circumference and reduced heart function was independent of total body weight and BMI.

Dr. Sarah Samaan, a cardiologist and physician partner at the Heart Hospital at Baylor in Plano, Texas, said these results support previous research indicating that fat in the abdominal area is much more risky than fat elsewhere in the body.

"Abdominal fat produces a wide range of inflammatory substances, and is more highly correlated with heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes than other types of fat," said Samaan, who was not involved with the study.

(Source: MicroCap Magazine)

Screening mammography is not a perfect test for breast cancer: study

Younger white women are most likely to get immediate breast reconstruction when they have a mastectomy for breast cancer, while rates are lower for those over age 45 and those who are not white, according to a new study.

"We know that breast reconstruction is thankfully gaining momentum, though historically the numbers were very low," said lead author Dr. Paris Butler of the University of Pennsylvania Health System in Philadelphia.

Past research hinted that some breast cancer patients aren't being referred to plastic surgeons if the primary physician didn't think they were healthy enough, he said. But race is not an independent predictor of surgical complications, so women of every race should be referred to plastic surgeons equally, he said.

"We eliminated the misconception that these operations were less safe in women of color," Butler told Reuters Health.

■ Undergoing mastectomy

"No woman, unless critically ill, should undergo mastectomy without consultation with a plastic surgeon," Butler said.

Researchers used national surgery datasets to study more than 48,000 women who had mastectomy only, or mastectomy with immediate breast reconstruction between 2005 and 2011. Overall, immediate reconstruction rates rose from 26 percent of women in 2005 to 40 percent in 2011.

Women of minority race, over age 45, or with a diabetes diagnosis were less



likely to get immediate reconstruction, even though they were not more likely to have surgical complications within 30 days, the researchers found.

More than half of women under age 45 had immediate reconstruction, compared to 11 percent of those aged 65 and older. About 35 percent of white women had immediate reconstruction, compared to 33 percent of Latina women and 24.6 percent of African American women, according to the results in the American Journal of Surgery.

"It's great that there's been increased use in immediate breast reconstruction, but there are disparities," said Dr. Amy Alderman, former director of the cosmetic surgery program at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and now in private practice in Atlanta, Georgia.

For many older women, breast reconstruction may not be a top priority, said Alderman, who was not part of the new study.

(Source: Daily Star Gazette)

India and China will suffer severe water stress by 2050, says study

Parts of Asia are likely to suffer severe water stress by the middle of this century, according to a new study by scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

The study considered major developing nations — notably India and China — and modeled their water-use trajectories if no action is taken to restrain either growth or anthropogenic climate change.

Under such circumstances, the researchers found that both countries had a roughly one-in-three chance of entering a "water-stressed phase," defined as one in which water usage exceeds surface-water supplies.

"This is not simply a case of saying that climate change is going to affect everything adversely everywhere," says co-author Adam Schlosser, deputy director at MIT's Joint Program on the Science and Policy of Global Change, in a telephone interview with The Christian Science Monitor.

"There is a whole range of plausible outcomes, and when we think about water resources, it has to do with human demands as well as climate change."

■ Four variables

Specifically, the researchers looked at four key variables: population growth, economic expansion, natural climate fluctuations, and carbon emissions from human activity.

They then made predictions about the impact of economic expansion and population growth alone, human-induced climate change alone, and then both together, focusing on how these factors affected water stress.

As defined by the European Environment Agency, "water stress occurs when the demand for water exceeds the available amount during a certain period or when poor quality restricts its use. Water stress causes deterioration

of freshwater resources in terms of quantity and quality."

While natural phenomena such as drought can certainly cause water stress, says Dr. Schlosser, unrestrained economic growth and the ballooning emissions that accompany it have "very direct effects on water demand."

Most people think of fresh water as endlessly available, but when demand consistently outstrips supply, aquifers — nature's underground water-storage tanks — can become completely drained.

"When you look at emerging economies such as India and China, this puts them into a category of water-stress that's unsustainable, one might even argue unacceptable," says the professor. "It's a place you really don't want to be in — withdrawing water at a rate where supply cannot be replenished."

(Source: The CSM)

Medical and security officials in Iraq say at least 23 people were killed and more than two dozen others injured in a series of bomb explosions, a shooting attack and shelling across Iraq.

A security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said five people lost their lives and nine others sustained injuries when bomber detonated his explosive-laden vest near a psychiatric hospital in Sadr City, the mainly Shia district of eastern Baghdad, on Monday, Arabic-language al-Baghdadia satellite television network reported.

Security forces immediately cordoned off the site of the attack, and ambulance workers ferried the wounded to a nearby hospital.

Unidentified armed men also sprayed a Muslim cleric with bullets in the capital's southwestern neighborhood of Hayy al-Aamel, killing him on the spot.

Bombs, bullets, shells claim 23 lives across Iraq



Elsewhere in al-Nasr Wal Salam city, which is also known as al-Hasuah and lies in the Abu Ghraib district of

western Baghdad, mortar shells fired by Takfiri militants claimed two civilian lives and left eight others wounded.

A soldier was also killed and two others injured on Monday, when a roadside bomb went off in Baghdad's southeastern neighborhood of Arab Jabour.

Separately, five members of the Popular Mobilization Units (al-Hashd al-Shaabi) lost their lives and seven others sustained injuries when a car bomb attack struck the town of Tarmiyah, situated about 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of Baghdad.

Coalition planes destroy ISIL-occupied Turkish consulate in Mosul - ministry

In another event, aircraft from a U.S.-led coalition on Monday destroyed the Turkish consulate compound in Mosul in northern Iraq which has been occupied by the ISIL terrorists since June 2014, the Turkish foreign ministry said. (Source: agencies)

International politics of Middle East is bewilderingly complex: Bruce Hall

I In this logic, we are playing a zero sum game and your security can only come at the expense of my insecurity, and vice versa. In a Lockean system the game is a mixed motives game.

I can reflect positively, negatively or indifferently to measures by a given state to enhance their security. It largely depends upon whether I regard you to be a threat, and ally, or an indifferent bystander in the security arena. In a Kantian system states respond positively to measures by other states to enhance their security. They presume these other states to be either allies or indifferent bystanders, thus no threat to their security. I can identify positively with the security of my friends, and wish them to enhance their security stature.

In terms of this analytical schema, the contemporary international politics of the Middle East is bewilderingly complex. This complexity is exacerbated by the fact that this schema is state-centric and presumes states to be unitary, and not politically divided regarding societal preferences towards domestic and international outcomes. This has never been the case and is clearly less so since the Arab Spring re-

those rules and serve its interests. Realists therefore expect that the institutions that the hegemon establishes will decay as the hegemon suffers a decline in power relative to other actors. This analytical framework was largely constructed to explain the construction and maintenance of the Bretton Woods institutions (the IMF, World Bank, GATT now morphed into the WTO and the international monetary system). I would argue that the "America in decline" argument (and an accompanying body of literature) turns up every 25 years or so. In 1987 one of the books near the top of the New York Times bestseller's list for weeks and months was a book by a previously obscure Yale University historian called *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. At the time Germany and Japan were at the peak of their economic power relative to the U.S., whose productivity and competitiveness had suffered during the 1970s and early 1980s. The book argued U.S. "imperial overstretch" had doomed it to decline and Germany and especially Japan would replace the U.S. at the top of the economic power charts. This, of course, failed to happen. The Reagan defense build-up was financed rather cheaply, largely with the savings of the Japanese, and resulted in numerous new technologies with lucrative applications in the consumer and commercial sectors. The Japanese bubble economy burst and the East bloc and the Soviet Union collapsed by 1991. Never had the international system looked more unipolar, nor had U.S. hegemony appeared more dominating.

The current round of this academic fad sees a rising China replacing the U.S. This thinking ignores the fact that the global economy is lately like an engine firing on only one cylinder, with persistent weakness in Europe and Japan and increasing difficulties with a needed economic transition in China. It also ignores un-addressable demographic trends with ageing Chinese and Japanese work forces coupled with inability to replace those work forces, along with a number of other difficulties. It ignores the fact that the United States retains at least 11 operation aircraft carrier task forces complete with full complements of guided missile cruisers, destroyers, mine sweepers, troop transports, etc. with which to project power globally. These capabilities will

I don't think it's possible to characterize the "system" of Middle Eastern international relations as a whole as Hobbesian, Lockean or Kantian, but only specific dyadic and triadic relations between states that are often less than domestically stable.

be unmatched for decades under the most optimistic assumptions regarding the growth of the military capabilities of others. The U.S. also has battle hardened combat veterans who have seen service in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere numbering in the hundreds of thousands including reservists, recallable and deployable in a matter of hours to days.

In short, the rise of China by no means entails the "decline" of the United States except in relative terms, and the figures I cite above leads us to question how meaningful are these relative terms to international power structures. While some underlying weaknesses persist in the U.S. economy, America's economic recovery from its 2008 financial crisis is well devel-

oped, U.S. public sector debt has been paid down to some of the lowest levels in a decade or two, and this would enable the U.S. to finance another major military expansion of the order of the Reagan defense buildup should the need be perceived, due to strong challenges by others of a magnitude that I do not think we should expect. It appears to many analysts that the U.S. largely retains its military AND economic "hegemony" and has the means to maintain it for decades to come. Joseph Nye has made similar arguments in his most recent book.

Yet one might argue that U.S. "regional hegemony" in the Middle East has declined in recent years. I can credit that assertion, while questioning whether it is a problem for U.S. security or U.S. "hegemony" elsewhere. This relative decline in U.S. hegemony in the Middle East has three sources in my view: 1) the destabilizing consequences of the U.S. destruction of Iraqi power, 2) the destabilizing consequences of the Arab Spring revolts, initially welcomed by the U.S., 3) the expansion of the Islamic State into the power vacuum resulting from numbers 1 and 2 above.

While I believe any U.S. President that might have refrained from military engagement in Afghanistan after Mullah Omar declined to assist the U.S. with locating bin Laden and other al Qaeda operatives, I and others strongly opposed the second invasion of Iraq and the Second (Persian) Gulf War at the onset explicitly due to concern about destabilization of the region as a consequence. To be brutally frank, President George Herbert Walker Bush (father of President George W. Bush) had intentionally left Sadaam in power at the end of the First (Persian) Gulf War, as a counterweight to other potential belligerents in the region. The U.S. invaded Iraq, destroyed the country, killed hundreds of thousands of troops, and decapitated the Baathi regime. The U.S. did so in part because President George W. Bush was surrounded by people telling this was the American moment to achieve democratic governments in the region and effect "regime change." It is in retrospect (and I believe it should have been before the fact) clear that it is rather naive to expect a country full of people with major ethnic and religious cleavages, people with no history of democratic

Arab Spring uprisings to be all negative, and the U.S. and its allies continue to believe the Islamic State phenomenon is ultimately containable if not eradicable. I worry that a larger problem is that with oil trading at \$30 a barrel, and the U.S. largely enjoying energy self-sufficiency due to new technologies, the U.S. is simply losing interest in the Middle East. True, the Saudis are trying to ruin American shale oil and fracking producers with over-production, but all that can accomplish is that the U.S. producers go under for a time, the U.S. burns cheap gulf oil in the interim, and when the price rises again, U.S. entrepreneurs who bought out the stakes of the failed producers will start up production again. The Saudis and OPEC have lost their status as the global swing producer in the global oil markets to the United States. This is not repairable. Without a critical national security concern such as energy security to keep U.S. attention focused on the Middle East, U.S. policy to the region will continually suffer a likely progressive benign neglect. Energy poor China has many more reasons to concern herself with Middle Eastern developments than does the U.S. on energy

I worry that a larger problem is that with oil trading at \$30 a barrel, and the U.S. largely enjoying energy self-sufficiency due to new technologies, the U.S. is simply losing interest in the Middle East.

security related, or economic grounds.

French President Hollande has called for a greater role for his country in Syria. Does this mean that the EU is seeking a stronger voice in international structure?

A: The EU clearly has its hands full at present with the consequences of a major humanitarian crisis due to the escalating inhumanity attending the Syrian civil conflict, and the escalating inhumanity attending the expansion of the Islamic State. France, in particular, has suffered loss of 130 innocent lives in the crimes perpetrated in Paris in August of last year by putative agents of the Islamic State. France is also obligated, as a core EU member, to accommodate large numbers of Syrian and other Muslim refugees from the present wave of immigration on humanitarian grounds. With a large extant Muslim population from Algeria and Morocco as a legacy of its colonial days, it has long been unclear how Muslim immigrants who end up agitating for the introduction of sharia in France can be integrated into France's self-consciously aggressive secularism. A new wave of Muslim immigration presents even larger potential difficulties for French national and cultural coherence. As Germany under Merkel is the voice of an essentially Christian European humanitarianism - agitating for admission of the refugees on humanitarian grounds, France, already so badly injured by IS violence, might rather naturally, pose the voice of European security against perceived threats in the region, and act on Europe's behalf.

City Bank honored by UN-Habitat for supporting CPI

ECONOMY TEHRAN — United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has paid tribute to Dr. Pourzarandi, the managing director of City Bank, for the bank's all-out supporting of Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and contributing the implementation of UN-Habitat's City Prosperity Initiative (CPI), the public relations office of the bank reported.

Also, in the event, a note of citation was

given to Masoumeh Ebtekar, the head of the Department of the Environment, for selecting Qazvin as the global pilot city for the trial implementation of the UN-Habitat's City Prosperity Initiative (CPI). Also, Qazvin Mayor Masoud Nosrati was

UN-Habitat's City Prosperity Initiative (CPI) is a global initiative that enables city authorities, as well as local and national stakeholders, to identify opportunities and potential areas of intervention for their cities to become more prosperous.

The destabilization of Syria, and the continuing fratricidal carnage there, has created a vacuum into which the political entrepreneurs and self-gratifying adventurers of the Islamic State are expanding.

olutions in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and the ongoing horrors in the Syrian conflict. It seemed for a time that Islamicist oriented states in the region, including Turkey under Erdogan, were oriented toward Egypt under Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in a quite Kantian fashion. Unfortunately for Mr. Morsi, he confused "ballot-ocracy" with democracy, and failed to understand that winning a single election was not equivalent to a mandate to create an Islamic state in Egypt. The orientation of Islamicist states in the region to Egypt under General Sisi is more Hobbesian, but at the same time more Lockean by "moderate" Arab states like Jordan, Bahrain, the UAE, and perhaps Lebanon and post-Baathi Iraq. Saudi Arabia is now quite busy with its own war with an Islamicized Yemen. Meanwhile, aside from Egypt, re-secularized as a post-Mubarak regime under the harsh rule of General Sisi and his coterie, various parties still contend for power in states that experienced revolutions during the Arab Spring. I don't think it's possible to characterize the "system" of Middle Eastern international relations as a whole as Hobbesian, Lockean or Kantian, but only specific dyadic and triadic relations between states that are often less than domestically stable.

Don't you think that the collapse of hegemonic system is the main reason behind the crises in the Middle East?

A: Hegemonic stability theory largely argues that the hegemon makes the rules for the international system and creates international institutions that enforce

EDBI foreign exchange balance shows 962% growth

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Domestic and foreign exchange currency balance of Export Development Bank of Iran show 140 percent and 962 percent growth, respectively, in the previous Iranian calendar year, according to the public relations office of the bank.

Addressing a gathering attended by branch staff of the bank, Dr. Mohsen Ashrafpour, EDBI head for communication affairs, named resuming encrypt-

ed SWIFT activities with more than 120 brokerage banks, membership in Association of Development Financing Institutions in Asia and the Pacific (ADFIAP), the signing of a contract with the Russian RFC bank with the goal of opening letters of credit (LCs) up to €10 million as important achievements of the bank in the previous Iranian calendar year.

Among brokerage banks with which EDBI resumed ties, the official named ARES, EIH, BCP, KBC, RFC, etc.

NEWS

Tabriz feels winter in spring

On Monday, April 4, snow blanketed the northwestern city of Ardabil. The snowfall, 16 days after the start of the spring, came as a surprise as Iran experienced its warmest winter in the living memory.

Nagorno-Karabakh: Rehearsal for an upcoming war?

6 At this point, the primary drawback of the Aliyev administration is stemming from the risk of igniting a regional conflict in which Russia would support Yerevan.

Russia has a formidable bastion in Armenia equipped with strategic weapon systems. Furthermore, Moscow and Yerevan have recently signed a joint air defense agreement.

From a broader perspective, the Russia factor appears more complicated than "simply" a military alliance with Armenia.

For a long time, Moscow has been exploiting protracted conflicts, be it Nagorno-Karabakh or South Ossetia, to maintain grounds for its military presence in the former Soviet Union territories, while these deployments prolong the protracted conflicts, generating a vicious cycle.

Moreover, although Russia's lucrative arms sales to Azerbaijan and its military alliance with Armenia might seem contradictory, such a course of action even bolsters the aforementioned situation.

During the clashes, Turkish public opinion showed a strong solidarity with Azerbaijan due to the shared national identity. Yet, it seems, Ankara would still avoid a regional war, and opt for capacity-building measures to support its ally.

(Source: Aljazeera)

Former Yemeni president sacks premier over 'failures'

1 The Ansarullah (Houthi) movement took over state matters after the resignation and escape of Hadi, which had thrown the country into a state of uncertainty and threatened a total security breakdown in Yemen, where an al-Qaeda affiliate has presence.

Saudi Arabia has been waging a ferocious war on Ansarullah movement fighters and its allied Yemeni forces since late March 2015 in a bid to return Hadi to power, but it has failed to do so. Nearly 9,400 Yemenis, including 4,000 women and children, have lost their lives in the war.

Yemenis, in return, have been carrying out retaliatory attacks on the Saudi forces deployed in the country as well as targets inside Saudi Arabia.

Early on Monday, Yemeni forces fired a Qaher 1 ballistic missile at the Saudi-held al-Naser military base in Yemen's province of Ma'rib, killing and injuring a yet unknown number of Saudi mercenaries.

Saudi Arabia's Deputy Crown Prince: There is significant progress in Yemen negotiations

In another event, Saudi Arabia's deputy crown prince said the warring parties in Yemen are close to resolving a year-long conflict.

"There is significant progress in negotiations, and we have good contacts with the Houthis, with a delegation currently in Riyadh. We believe that we are closer than ever to a political solution in Yemen. So we are pushing to have this opportunity materialize on the ground, but if things relapse, we are ready."

Saudi Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told in interview with Bloomberg. (Source: agencies)

Nigeria claims arrest of Ansaru Leader Khalid al-Barnawi

The Nigerian army says it has arrested the leader of an al-Qaeda linked militant group, Ansaru, known for kidnapping and murdering Westerners.

Khalid al-Barnawi was captured in Lokoja, capital of the central state of Kogi on Friday, military spokesman Brigadier General Rabe Abubakar said on Sunday.

"He is among those on top of the list of our wanted terrorists," he added.

Al-Barnawi has been one of the three Nigerians listed by the United States in 2012 as "specially designated global terrorists." The U.S. had placed a \$5 million bounty on his head.

A-Barnawi has "ties to Boko Haram" and "close links to al-Qaeda," according to the US State Department.

A Nigerian army officer said his arrest was "a huge success and will have a profound effect on counter-terrorism operations in Nigeria and beyond."

Ansaru is a splinter group of Boko Haram which claimed responsibility for the December 26, 2012 attack on a facility in Abuja, where the army held captured militants. They killed two policemen and freed 40 detainees.

The group also said it was responsible for another attack in 2013 on a convoy of Mali-bound Nigerian troops in Kogi state. The terrorists killed two soldiers and seriously wounded five others.

Boko Haram has so far claimed the lives of over 17,000 people since the start of its insurgency in Nigeria in 2009. The violence has also forced over 2.6 million others to flee their homes since then. (Source: agencies)



Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi Khaled Bahah



FOOD FOR THOUGHT



"We love our mother unknowingly, and only realize how deep-rooted that love is at the ultimate separation." *Guy de Maupassant*

NEWS

Women-only compartments in Germany not reaction to New Year attacks

LONDON (Thomson Reuters Foundation) — A German railway company which has introduced women-only compartments on one line said on Thursday the move was not a reaction to the New Year sex attacks in Cologne and other cities but a response to customer requests made earlier in December.



Mitteldeutsche Regiobahn set aside compartments for women, children and the elderly on trains operating between Leipzig and Chemnitz in eastern Germany last week, with two compartments for the use of women and children only.

"Some women wanted to have a little bit more security," a Mitteldeutsche Regiobahn spokesman told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by phone from Germany.

He said the compartments were in the middle carriage of the train, near the train conductor's compartment.

More than 600 women in several cities across Germany filed complaints ranging from sexual molestation to theft after attacks during the New Year weekend, and police investigations were focused on illegal migrants from North Africa and asylum seekers.

The Mitteldeutsche Regiobahn spokesman said the company had received requests for dedicated compartments before the attacks took place, and such compartments had only been set aside on one line which did not have open carriages where all passengers sit together.

Cities in several countries have brought in "women only" train carriages, buses and taxis in a bid to stem sexual harassment.

The world's largest capital, Tokyo, was one of the first to introduce women-only carriages on trains, in 2000. Mexico City, Jakarta and others followed suit, and some are mulling the idea.

A 2014 Thomson Reuters Foundation survey of 15 of the world's largest capitals plus New York found 70 percent of women questioned felt safer on single-sex transport.

Gender experts expressed concern over its effectiveness, saying it was a short-term fix, not a way of stopping the harassment of women.

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Strawberry pretzel salad

"It is a dessert, but isn't too sweet, nor too salty. It is really pretty when you put it in a clear ovenproof dish."

Ingredients:

- 2 cups crushed pretzels
- 3/4 cup butter, melted
- 3 tablespoons white sugar



- 1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 (8 ounce) container frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 2 (3 ounce) packages strawberry flavored Jell-O
- 2 cups boiling water
- 2 (10 ounce) packages frozen strawberries

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C).

Stir together crushed pretzels, melted butter and 3

tablespoons sugar; mix well and press mixture into the bottom of a 9x13 inch baking dish. Bake 8 to 10 minutes, until set. Set aside to cool.

In a large mixing bowl cream together cream cheese and 1 cup sugar. Fold in whipped topping. Spread mixture onto cooled crust.

Dissolve gelatin in boiling water. Stir in still frozen strawberries and allow to set briefly. When mixture is about the consistency of egg whites, pour and spread over cream cheese layer. Refrigerate until set.

VP puts emphasis on women's role in resistance economy

WOMEN TEHRAN — The vice president in women and family affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, here on Monday put emphasis on utilizing women's capacities in implementing and promoting resistance economy.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in an official decree in February 2014 called on the government to secure the utilization of the country's resources, struggle to promote a knowledge-based economy, take efforts to increase energy consumption efficiency and boost domestic production as the requirements for the materialization of the resistance economy.

The department of women and family affairs has made immediate efforts in solving urgent problems of women in the previous years, Molaverdi said, adding, "several agreements have been signed in this regard."

"We hope that the current year (1395, beginning March 20), to be the year of fulfilling the promised cooperation between the department and other executive organizations," she added.

We also hope for achieving outstanding goals in empowering women and children this year and the coming year, the vice president noted.



Young Muslim women take lead over men in race for degrees

Muslim girls are academically outperforming their male counterparts for the first time, researchers have found.

A "new and remarkable" cultural shift will be revealed this week to the British Sociological Association annual conference, when it hears evidence that more young Muslim women have been gaining degrees at British universities than Muslim men, even though they have been under-represented for decades.

Dr Nabil Khattab of the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies in Qatar, and Professor Tariq Modood of the University of Bristol, found that 25% of Muslim women aged 21-24 now have degrees, compared with 22% of Muslim men of the same age.

After studying the GCSE results of 6,600 candidates in England, the academics also found that average scores in school tests at ages 11 and 14 were higher for Muslim girls than boys.

"Muslim girls seem to be outperforming Muslim boys, especially in relation to their school performance," said Khattab. "This is very interesting, given what we know about the gender gap among Muslims, not only in education but also in the labor market. While older men are more likely to be degree-holders than their female counterparts, younger women are more likely to have degrees."

Khattab explained that the trend for girls to outperform boys had been well observed among non-Muslim students for some time. "On the other hand, it is very new among Muslims," he said. "Nevertheless, that it has happened at all



The academic success of Muslim schoolgirls marks a 'cultural transformation', say researchers. Photograph: Jamie Jones/REX/Shutterstock

is remarkable when one considers that in 1990 and 1991 Pakistani and Bangladeshi men admitted to higher education outnumbered their female peers by more than two to one and more than three to one respectively.

Khattab suggested that one possible reason for the change might be the fact that Muslim women, particularly those planning to become economically active after leaving school, appreciated that they were "likely to face labor market penalties due to widespread stereotypes and racism, perhaps more so than Muslim men".

He explained: "This can reinforce their determination to obtain higher education qualifications not only as good as those of the majority group but even better, in order to resist the anticipated labor market discrimination preventing them from achieving a desired job."

The findings suggest that the younger generation of Muslim women in Britain mark a distinct break with the past. "It is possible that Muslim women who are British-born, unlike their mothers, have undergone a cultural transformation," Khattab said.

The academics also suggested that the reason why Muslims overall were less likely to have degrees and attend an elite university than non-Muslim pupils was due to them falling behind at primary school. However, when the data was adjusted to remove the initial deficit, they found that in secondary schools Muslim pupils performed as well as non-Muslim students, and were catching up with them by the time they took GCSEs. "Once we take the previous school performance into account, Muslim students seem to be performing as well as the majority group, even in attending elite Russell Group universities," they claim.

"At the GCSE level, there was a clear advantage among Muslims. This finding is striking, given the well-established educational disadvantages among some Muslim ethnic groups, most notably Pakistanis and Bangladeshis."

(Source: The Guardian)

Is France xenophobic about its veiled Muslim women?

By Dr Nouredine Miladi

The statement made on Thursday 31 March 2016 by France's Families and Women's Rights Minister, Laurence Rossignol, added fuel to the far right Islamophobic attacks against Muslims. It also provides further ammunition for the large part of French media which are already notorious for their negative portrayal of Muslims. It is a contradiction in terms for a minister who attacks the freedom of dress in democratic country like France to, at the same time, head the ministry whose raison d'être is essentially defending women's rights.

In the type of liberal democracy which the minister believes in, it seems that every form of freedom to choose one's dress, including miniskirts or very tight leggings, which are both sexually explicit should be respected, except the liberty to choose to wear the Mus-

lim woman's dress.

In a statement to Monte Carlo and BFM TV, while commenting on the increasing trend of selling collections to Muslim women by famous brands such as Dolce & Gabbana and H&M, she described Muslim veiled women as 'slaves who prefer slavery'.

Although this is out of a free choice she went further by adding, "There are women who choose to wear the hijab. There were African Americans too who preferred to be enslaved"!! (theguardian.com)

This is by all means a racist spat which by modern standards is intolerable. Will the minister dare to make the same inflammatory comments about Jewish women who abide by the codes of conduct described in Judaic scriptures? How about Christian sisters who abide by the teachings of Jesus in terms of their dress codes?

Do Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant wom-

en "prefer slavery" too? In a similarly arrogant fashion Rossignol claims that these brands of Muslim women's dress are dangerous "...those same brands, with such Islamic collections, give an image of women that is dangerous for the rights and freedom of Muslim women in France." (CNN.Com)

The minister, who has provoked rage and exasperation, claims that the hijab "...promotes the shutting away of women's bodies".

While the minister has been concerned about French women from the Muslim faith who choose freely to follow the Islamic dress codes, it is remarkable that we don't hear a critical stance about the exploitation of women's body in advertising campaigns for instance. The modern advertising industry capitalizes on the woman's body as a marketing tool. Sophisticated ads display almost bare bodies in order to sell a product such as an expensive car, a watch, perfume or

an electronic device to name a few. Adverts which portray women in bikinis are actually selling two products. One is the merchandise, and the second is women's naked bodies as part of a consumer culture.

Or maybe the French Families and Women's Rights minister should have a say on the alleged 'sickening sex abuse' which a few French UN soldiers have been recently accused of in the Central African Republic. The Al-Jazeera.com reported on Friday 1 April 2016 that the 'UN and French peacekeepers (were) accused of grim abuses in the restive African nation, including bestiality with children'. The news also reads that 'A report by a U.S.-based advocacy group said three girls in CAR told UN staff they were tied up and forced to have sex with a dog by a French military commander in 2014' (Aljazeera.com).

(Source: Peninsula On-line)

IN FOCUS Mehr/ Damoon Pournemati



Mother's Day was marked at Kahrizak Charity Foundation in Alborz Province on Wednesday.

Year of conflict puts 3.4 million women of reproductive age at risk: UN

A year of conflict in Yemen has left an estimated 3.4 million women of reproductive age between 15 and 49 years in need of humanitarian assistance, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has reported, expressing growing concern about the situation.

Of them, nearly 500,000 are pregnant and will give birth within the next nine months. The lack of reproductive health services and supplies can result in an estimated 1,000 maternal deaths among 68,000 pregnant women who are at risk of life-threatening complications during childbirth.

"Women and girls lack access to humanitarian aid, including reproductive health services, and are therefore even more at risk of unwanted pregnancies, which, in turn, can put their lives at risk," UNFPA Country Representative Lene K. Christiansen said in a press release, noting that the status of women and girls was already weak in Yemen prior to the conflict as gender-based violence was common at home. (UN News Center)

Iran to start FIVB Volleyball World League with Brazil

S P O R T S Iran will kick off the 2016 FIVB Volleyball World League with a match against Brazil in Rio de Janeiro.

A total of the 12 teams were drawn in 9 pools of 4 teams in Group 1.

In each pool, all teams will compete in round robin format. The results of all 9 pools will combine in 1 ranking table. The host and the top five ranked teams will play in the final round.

The last ranked team after the Intercontinental Round could be relegated if the winners of the Group 2 Final Round can meet the promotion requirements set by the FIVB.

Raul Lozano's men will face Brazil in Group 1 Week One at the Arena Carioca 1 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Iran will face USA and Argentina on June 17 and 19 respectively.

In Week 2, Iran will meet Bulgaria on June 23 in Belgrade, Serbia. The Persians will play Brazil and Serbia on June 24 and 25 respectively.

In July 1, Iran will host Serbia in Tehran's Azadi Stadium in Week 3.

The Asian best team will face Italy on July 2 and Argentina on July 3.

The 2016 FIVB Volleyball World League will be the 27th edition of the annual men's international volleyball tournament played from 16 June to 17 July.

The tournament will feature a new format with 36 teams expected to compete.

The Group 1 final round will be held in Krakow, Poland.



Mahdavikia: Zidane is the best player I've played against

S P O R T S Former Iranian international Mehdi Mahdavikia admitted that current Real Madrid head coach is the best player he has played against in his whole career.

"When I was at Hamburg we faced Juventus twice in 2000-01 UEFA Champions League group stage. I will never forget that match which ended up in a 4-4 draw, I scored once, was awarded a penalty and provided an assist. Zidane was at Juventus then and I would like to say that he is the best player I've played against. He was unpredictable, in my opinion he was a perfect player," Mahdavikia said.

Former Hamburg and Eintracht Frankfurt winger also believes that Bundesliga is one of the best leagues in the world.

"The biggest advantage of German Bundesliga com-



paring to the other top leagues in the world is its discipline and that's the main reason why Die Mannschaft is very successful," Mahdavikia added.

"Unfortunately there is not much attention to the grassroots football in Iran while we have a lot of young talents who are capable of reaching world class level. We have Sardar Azmoun and Alireza Jahanbakhsh who came from Iran youth team and now playing in Europe," he added.

"After 1998 World Cup in France I had a couple of offers from Europe. I almost joined Tottenham but there were minor issues which blocked this move," he added.

Mahdavikia is eager to become the Hamburg SV head coach in the near future.

"I love Hamburg and its fans and it is a dream to become the head coach of this club one day," he added.

Zobahan seeks victory over Bunyodkor in ACL, coach says

S P O R T S Iran's Zobahan coach Yahya Golmohammadi says that they are going to beat Uzbekistan's Bunyodkor in AFC Champions League Group B.

The match will be held in Isfahan's Foolad Shahr Stadium on Tuesday.

"The main goal of each team is first not to concede goals and next to use the opportunities and score," said Zobahan coach Golmohammadi.

"Despite scoring just once, our good defensive performances have helped us become one of the favorites [to go through]. It's

important that we don't concede goals.

"On Tuesday, we will play against a high quality, technical team. We hope that with the backing of our supporters we can put in a good performance and achieve our goal of taking all three points," Golmohammadi added.



My career isn't over yet, insists Wayne Rooney



Wayne Rooney insists he "still has a few years left" at international level despite the form of his striking rivals.

The Manchester United forward and England captain has been out with a knee injury since February and has watched on as Harry Kane and Jamie Vardy have staked their claims for Euro 2016.

Both scored in the 3-2 friendly victory over Germany last weekend while Vardy added another in the Three Lions' 2-1 defeat by Holland on Tuesday.

Tottenham striker Kane is currently top of the Premier League scoring charts with 22 while Leicester forward Vardy is second on 19 and questions have been raised over Rooney's place in Roy Hodgson's starting XI in France this summer.

However the 30-year-old, England's all-time record goalscorer, believes he is still capable of performing at the highest level.

"I've still got a few years left, I feel," said Rooney, speaking to the PFA's 4 The Player magazine. "I'll keep trying to, first and foremost, help the team be successful and if I can score the goals to help achieve that then that'll be great."

"Over the last two years my form for England has been really good, I've scored a lot of goals."

"It's a young team and obviously as

captain you want to get a strong bond between everyone and I really feel there is that at the moment, everyone gets on really well. There isn't a massive age gap from the oldest to the youngest player - I think us and Holland were the youngest teams going through qualifying - and I think that shows and helps the younger lads relax around everyone.

"You have myself, Joe Hart, Gary Cahill who are a little bit older and are there to help with anything but we're all together all the time and I think the squad is in a very good place right now."

Rooney burst onto the international scene at Euro 2004, scoring four goals before a metatarsal injury put paid to his - and England's - hopes against Portugal in the quarter-finals.

The former Everton striker admits his game, and temperament, has changed since his teenage years.

He said: "I think I'm a different player now to what I was then so I don't compare myself - I'm always just thinking about what comes next and making sure I'm at my best for the summer. I feel I'm a lot more patient now in my play, when I was younger I could be impatient and I'd end up in positions I didn't really need to be in."

(Source: PAsport)

Neymar's €193m release clause could be met by Paris Saint-Germain - agent



Neymar's agent Wagner Ribeiro has said that the Barcelona forward "loves" Paris and believes Paris Saint-Germain are capable of meeting his €193 million release clause.

L'Equipe reported on Monday that PSG have decided to make Neymar, 24, their No. 1 transfer target this summer.

The Brazil captain has two years to run on his current deal at Barca and his father said in February that discussions on an extension would not start until May.

Negotiations have been slowed by an ongoing court investigation into Neymar's switch from Santos to Barca in 2013, but the player said in January that he still had "years" left at the Camp Nou.

Ribeiro also suggested that a move in the short-term is unlikely but revealed that if PSG's interest became more concrete then Neymar would seriously consider the offer.

"What I can confirm to you is that Neymar has a contract with Barca until 2018," Ribeiro told L'Equipe. "He feels good in Barcelona, he's liked over there and he's playing for the best team in the world."

"It's no small feat to impose yourself at such an enormous club. But the prospect of living in a city like Paris and to play for a club like PSG -- that's also a dream for

every player. We'll see in two years, when he will be at the end of his contract."

When pressed on whether this meant that Neymar would not entertain a move before his current deal expires, Ribeiro said: "That means that if PSG show an interest in Neymar, we can discuss it."

"A contract can also be terminated provided that the release clause is paid. It's huge: €193m. But I don't think that might be an insurmountable problem for PSG."

Ribeiro said he had a good relationship with PSG sporting director Olivier Letang and club president Nasser Al-Khelaifi, but that the end of the season was the time to talk with them about a potential transfer.

L'Equipe claims that PSG could offer Neymar a salary of €20m per year to tempt him away from Barca.

The paper suggests that his dream of winning the Ballon d'Or could also be a factor in him changing clubs, in case he is always seen as second best to Lionel Messi at the Camp Nou.

The large contingent of Brazilians already at PSG could help Neymar come to terms with moving to a less glamorous league, with Ribeiro saying that Lucas Moura has already been urging him to come to the French capital.

(Source: ESPN)

TENNIS

Novak Djokovic sets new records in Miami Open victory against Kei Nishikori

Novak Djokovic secured his sixth Miami Open title with a 6-3 6-3 straight sets victory over Kei Nishikori.

Top seed Novak Djokovic continued his domination of men's tennis with a 6-3 6-3 win over Japan's Kei Nishikori in the Miami Open final in Florida on Sunday, before quickly turning his thoughts to the upcoming clay court season.

The French Open is the only grand slam missing from Djokovic's otherwise glittering resume, but he has already been installed by the bookmakers as odds-on favourite for Roland Garros after a magnificent start to 2016. Djokovic dropped serve in the first game against Nishikori but it was pretty much one-way traffic after that as he outclassed the sixth seed in all facets of the game on the hardcourt at Key Biscayne.

The 28-year-old Serb took 85 minutes to join American Andre Agassi as a six-time Miami Open winner. Djokovic said his first Miami win in 2007 paved the way for a career that now includes 63 ATP titles. "It gave me a lot of confidence, a lot of self belief that I can finally win these big tournaments, finally beat the top players," he said in a court-side interview.

"Every year I come back to this tournament I get goose bumps from those days. I was still 19 years old and making my way to the top."

He collected \$1,028,300 on Sunday, becoming the sport's all-time leading money-winner with career earnings approaching \$100 million. It was his fourth consecutive championship, and a record 28th overall, in the Masters 1000, a series of nine tournaments considered the most prestigious other than the four grand slams. "First set was a real battle, but towards the end of the first set I started serving better... which means a lot in matches like this against top players," he said of his latest victory.

It was Djokovic's fourth title of 2016, following victories at the Australian Open, Qatar and Indian Wells. His only blemish on an otherwise perfect record so far this year came in Dubai in February, when he retired during a quarter-final with an eye infection.

Djokovic will fly home on Monday to Monte Carlo, where he will begin his clay court season next week. "I have plenty of energy and lots of motivation for the beginning of the clay court season that ends up, hopefully, with a crown in Paris (in June)," he said. "That's obviously one of the top goals each year, but I'm not the only one that wants to win that big trophy. There are many big events prior to that so I'm hoping I can build my form."

(Source: Reuters)

Antonio Conte confirmed as new Chelsea head coach

Italy manager Antonio Conte has signed a three-year contract to become Chelsea's new head coach.

He will begin his role after the end of this summer's European Championship.

"I am very excited about the prospect of working at Chelsea Football Club. I am proud to be the coach of the national team of my country and only a role as attractive as manager of Chelsea could follow that," Conte said in a statement.

"I am looking forward to meeting everyone at the club and the day-to-day challenge of competing in the Premier League. Chelsea and English football are watched wherever you go, the fans are passionate and my ambition is to have more success to follow the victories I enjoyed in Italy."

"I am happy we have made the announcement now so everything is clear and we can end the speculation. I will continue to focus on my job with the Italian national team and will reserve speaking about Chelsea again until after the Euros."

Italy face Belgium, Ireland and Sweden in this summer's tournament.

Conte had been linked with the Chelsea job since just before Jose Mourinho's departure, and speculation has increased in recent months, leading to today's announcement.

(Source: Eurosport)

Bayern will not play Lewandowski contract games, says Rummenigge

Karl-Heinz Rummenigge is confident Robert Lewandowski's long-term future lies at Bayern Munich and refuses to be drawn on speculation the Poland international could be on the move.

Recent reports suggest the prolific attacker is close to signing a contract renewal, but Cezary Kucharski - one of Lewandowski's representatives - has previously claimed Real Madrid are interested in signing the striker.

Bayern have no interest in playing games, though, and remain confident the 27-year-old will stay put.

"I am not commenting on Lewandowski's potential renewal," club chief executive Rummenigge told Kicker.

"We are not joining his agent [in playing] games."

"Taking a look at his contract length gives us reasons to be relaxed about the future."

Lewandowski's deal with Bayern runs until June 2019.

The striker has been in superb form for the Bundesliga champions this campaign, scoring 36 goals in 40 appearances in all competitions.

(Source: Goal)



Poem of the day

Till clothed in music such as sorrow sings,
My mournful story from thy zither sweeps.

Hafez

Prayer Times

Noon:13:07 Evening: 19:48 Dawn: 5:17 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:44 (tomorrow)

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NEWS IN BRIEF



Cannes to screen "Maman Soori's Case"

T E H R A N — Iranian director Hossein Hejrat's debut film "Maman Soori's Case" will go on screen in the Short Film Corner at the 69th Cannes Film Festival, which will be held in the French city from May 11 to 22.

A production of the Northlands International - UAB Company in Vilnius, Lithuania, the movie tells the story of a middle-aged woman who provides home-cooked food for her customers in Tehran.

The Short Film Corner provides the creators of short films an opportunity to show their projects to a massive audience, pitch future projects, and hopefully make many important connections as well.



Iranian documentarian publishes memories of captivity in Iraq

T E H R A N — Iranian documentarian and photojournalist has recently published "Hey You" that recounts his memories of his four-month imprisonment in Iraq by U.S.-led forces during 2003.

The book released by Suresh Mehr Publications also reveals facts about the U.S. detention camps in the then occupied country.

Abutaleb along with his colleague Soheil Karimi were detained by the U.S.-led forces while making a documentary that was to be named "Marsh Land of the Fairy Tales".



"He" to compete in Swiss filmfest

C U L T U R E **T E H R A N** — Iranian documentarian Sam Kalantari's "He" will go on screen at the 47th Nyon International Documentary Film Festival - Visions du Réel (Visions of Reality) - which will be held in the Swiss city from April 15 to 23.

Produced by the Documentary and Experimental Film Center (DEFC), the film focuses on shop-window mannequins made in a factory in Qaleh Hassan Khan, a town between Tehran and Karaj.

About 200 movies from 49 countries will be screened at the festival.

According to the organizers, the current edition plans to highlight works by the younger generation of filmmakers.



Iranian director to take "Distorted Memories of a Lake" to Croatian festival

C U L T U R E **T E H R A N** — The Iranian short film "Distorted Memories of a Lake" will be screened at the 9th Smaragdni Eco Film Festival, which will be held in Hrvatska Kostanjica, Croatia from June 2 to 10.

Directed by Seyyed Vahid Hosseini-Nami, the film predicts the sad fate of planet Earth in 2027 when it will face its warmest year.

"Distorted Memories of a Lake" was produced by the Iranian Young Cinema Society.

Chris Stapleton scores big at Country Music awards

LAS VEGAS (Reuters) — Chris Stapleton, in his breakthrough year, took home more hardware at the Academy of Country Music Awards on Sunday, winning Male Vocalist of the Year, Album of the Year with "Traveler" and Song of the Year with "Nobody to Blame".

Before success on his own, the bearded, Kentucky-born singer wrote or co-wrote six number one hits for some of country's biggest stars. His 2015 debut studio album "Traveler" also won a Grammy Award earlier this year for Best Country Album.

"Thank you everybody and thank you for being so kind to me," he said after winning best male vocalist.

In other major awards, Jason Aldean won Entertainer of the Year. Miranda Lambert won the Female Vocalist of the Year Award and took the stage to perform "Tush" with Keith Urban and ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons.

The Country Music awards show held in Las Vegas got off to a raucous start with co-host Luke Bryan performing "Huntin', Fishin' And Lovin' Every Day." He was later joined on stage by Blake Shelton, with whom he had co-hosted the awards since 2013.

This year, Shelton was replaced by Dierks Bentley. When Bentley came on stage with Bryan, Shelton joined in and said: "Good luck tonight boys".

Indian festival honors Iranian films

T E H R A N — Two Iranian films won awards at the 8th Nashik International Film Festival (NIFF) in India.

Director Soheila Golestani's debut film "Two" received the NIFF International Appreciation Award, while the Best International Short Film Award went to "Three Colors" by Mojgan Taraneh, organizers have announced on the website.

Golestani wrote the screenplay for "Two" based on U.S. author Bernard Malamud's "The Maid's Shoes".

The film tells the story of Bahman, a man who comes back to Iran years after living in Europe to sell his father's house. A 40-year-old man helps him pack the furniture and equipment. This collaboration changes their destiny but not in a good way.

Mahtab Nasirpur and Parviz Parastui, who is also the producer of the film, are main members of the cast for the movie.

"Three Colors" is about three women in three different social positions.

The festival, which ran from March 17 to 20, promotes independent filmmakers and youth talents worldwide. It is dedicated to Dadasaheb Phalke, who is considered the father of Indian cinema.



Mahtab Nasirpur acts in a scene from "Two".

"Memories for All Seasons" director to make doc on Imam Khomeini's wife

T E H R A N — "Memories for All Seasons" director Mostafa Razzaq-Karimi plans to make a documentary on Khadijeh Saqafi (1913-2009), the wife of the founder of the Islamic Republic Ayatollah Seyyed Ruhollah Khomeini.

"A team of four researchers has been working on the project over the past year and the screenplay has now been completed," Razzaq-Karimi told the Persian service of MNA on Monday.

"The documentary is of high importance, because it centers on a person who lived with Imam Khomeini for over 60 years and we need to focus on every detail of her life," he added.



Imam Khomeini and his wife, Khadijeh Saqafi, in an undated photo

"Her days of life with Imam, their lives in Tehran, Najaf, Qom and Neauphle-le-Château are among the topics to be covered in the documentary," Razzaq-Karimi said.

"By necessity, much research had to be carried out for this documentary and we are now waiting for the Oruj Films as the producer to approve the scenario," he mentioned.

Razzaq-Karimi is the director of "Memories for All Seasons", an acclaimed documentary that narrates the memories of a group of Iranian soldiers wounded by Iraqi chemical weapons during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

PICTURE OF THE DAY Honaronline/Hassan Motahhari



Members of director/writer Alireza Jafarimaram's troupe perform the children's play "Unlovely Wolves" at Tehran's Niavaran Cultural Center on April 3, 2016.

Film depicting China's shadow over Hong Kong wins top Asian award

HONG KONG (Reuters) — A Hong Kong film portraying a dystopian future under Chinese Communist Party rule won one of Asia's top film awards on Sunday at a time when Beijing's attempts to rein in the city's democratic development have stoked growing political tensions.

"Ten Years", a feature-length film comprising five short vignettes depicting a dark vision of the city in 2025 is a surprise hit. It strikes a public chord nearly 16 months after tens of thousands blocked roads across the city as part of an "Occupy Central" civil disobedience movement to demand China's leaders allow full democracy in 2017.

The low-budget, independent film brushed off competition from commercial hits like martial arts flick "Ip Man 3".

"Ten Years exposed the fear of Hong Kong people (towards China)," said Chow Kwun-wai, one of the five directors who worked on it after winning best picture at the Hong Kong Film Awards that recognizes film excellence across Asia.

British actress Judi Dench picks up record eighth Olivier Award

LONDON (Reuters) — Veteran film, television and stage actress Judi Dench picked up her eighth Olivier Award on Sunday, a record tally at Britain's biggest night for theater.

The 81-year-old scooped the Olivier for best actress in a supporting role for "The Winter's Tale".

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am absolutely livid as I had a bet with my grandson, which I've now lost and I'm never going to be allowed to forget it," Dench said in her acceptance speech.

"I know everybody says what a wonderful time they had doing something, I can truly say this time that in 'The Winter's Tale', it was an absolutely memorable time for me."

Asked backstage if she had any plans to slow her workload down,

Dench told Reuters: "Who wants to slow down? No, I want to be employed. It's putting the car in the garage that. You will never get it started."

"Gypsy" picked up four prizes, the most awards for a single production on the night, including best musical revival and best actress in a musical for Imelda Staunton, who opened the glitzy London ceremony in character as Momma Rose.

"Gypsy" also picked up awards for best actress in a supporting role in a musical for Lara Pulver and best lighting design.

"Kinky Boots" picked up three awards, including best new musical, best actor in a musical for Matt Henry and best costume design. Pop singer Cyndi Lauper, who col-

laborated with playwright Harvey Fierstein on bringing the 2005 film first to the Broadway stage before London, also performed on the night.

"Ma Rainey's Black Bottom", inspired by the blues singer, won best revival while "Hangmen", about the abolition of hanging in Britain in the 1960s, won best new play.

Kenneth Cranham beat competition from the likes of Benedict Cumberbatch, Kenneth Branagh and Mark Rylance to be named best actor for "The Father", in which he portrays a man with dementia.

In a category including nominees Nicole Kidman and Gemma Arterton, Denise Gough won best actress for "People, Places And Things", a rehab drama in which she plays an addict.

In her acceptance speech, Gough lamented the lack of diversity among nominees - an issue that overshadowed February's Oscars.

"I love this industry so much and to be given an award is fantastic but we have a responsibility," she said backstage.

Robert Icke picked up the best director award for "Oresteia" while long-running musical "The Phantom Of The Opera" won the audience award - the sole prize voted for by the public.

"Nell Gwynn", which stars Arterton, won best new comedy.

The awards, celebrating their 40th anniversary, wrapped up with past winners performing "What I did For Love" from "A Chorus Line", which won best new musical at the 1976 ceremony.