

TEHRAN TIMES

Congratulations on birth anniversary of Imam Ali (PBUH) and Father Day in Iran

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"Breath" tells of children's hopes, dreams shattered in war

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Seyyed Mostafa Mousavi Sabet

TEHRAN — Iranian director/writer Narges Abyar's latest movie "Breath" shows how hopes and dreams of many Iranian children were shattered by the flames of the war that Iraq lit in 1980.

The story of the film begins in the late 1970s in Valadabad, a poor suburb of Karaj, where Bahar, Nader, Kamal and Maryam, live with numerous colorful dreams of their childhood along with their father and granny, but their mother has died a few years before.

Their father, who suffers from asthma, works for a shoemaking company. In her dreams, Bahar, who narrates the story of the film, wishes to treat him when she becomes a doctor.

Iraq attacks Iran in September 1980, and the father decides to join the Iranian volunteers on the warfront. Thus, granny and the children have to leave their home to live with their relatives in Yazd.

Bahar tells of her dreams, all of which are suddenly buried with her under rubble when their home is hit by Iraqi rockets.

"I wanted to show the story in an atmosphere, which was very close to the real life," Abyar told the Tehran Times.

"I wanted to illustrate how many dreams and childhood innocence are destroyed because of wars and certain aggressors," she added.

See page 12



Employing 'U-Turn' secures JCPOA implementation

Three months after the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - the nuclear agreement signed between Iran and P5+1 in mid-January, President Hassan Rouhani's administration could eventually persuade its dubious critics that Iran is reconnected to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT).

However, the gate to international trade is not opened to Iranians yet due to some reasons, the fact that has beclouded the business perspective of Iranian tradesmen for some major reasons.

First of all, Iranian businessmen cannot make SWIFT transactions by themselves yet. As the Central Bank of Iran's director general for international affairs Hossein Yaqoubi says, "The applicant businessmen should register their orders in bank branches that offer foreign exchange services and ask for opening credit lines." According to him, the story of making brokerage relations and opening credit lines is totally different from that of getting relinked to SWIFT and the issues should not be got mistaken for one another.

Pakistani flotilla leaves Bandar Abbas

The Pakistani flotilla headed home on April 19 by leaving Bandar Abbas, a port city located in southern Iran, the Pakistan embassy said in a press release a copy which was received by the Tehran Times.

In keeping with the highest naval traditions the Iranian Navy ships accompanied Pakistani ships to a distance and relayed messages of good wishes for the Pakistani Navy and the people of Pakistan.

The Pakistani Navy ships also reciprocated the age old tradition, what has become to be known as PASSEX or Passage Exercise in the modern days. A group of IRIN cadets were afforded an opportunity learn the art of operating sail ship in the harbor and at sea. A day earlier a reception was hosted by the visiting Pakistani ships on April 18 in Bandar Abbas. The chief guest at the feast was Commander of IRIN 1st Naval District Commodore Hussain Azad. The reception beside other local dignitaries was also attended by the ambassador of Pakistan in Iran.

Defense attaches from China, Germany, Azerbaijan, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Kuwait, and Turkey along with the defense and naval attaches of Pakistan also attended the auspicious event.

Welcoming the guests, the PN contingent Commander hoped such visits would further strengthen brotherly ties between Pakistan and Iran.

In his remarks the ambassador of Pakistan stated that the goodwill visit by Pakistani ships would supplement his efforts to enhance bilateral cooperation. He added that the two governments aimed at strengthening relations and that it provided the impetus to further cement the ties between the two countries and people.

The purpose of the visit of PN ships was to enhance the goodwill and bring the two countries closer. Commander 1st Naval Zone also said the closeness of the two nations and their common religion provides a great platform to work together.

Iran's crude output to reach pre-sanctions level by June

Iran's crude oil production will reach pre-sanctions levels within two months, a deputy oil minister was quoted as saying on Tuesday, reaffirming Tehran's commitment to boosting production.

State news agency IRNA quoted Rokneddin Javadi as saying that the pre-sanctions level would be attained by the end of the Iranian month of Khordad, which falls on June 20. Iran's oil production

was slightly below 4 million barrels a day before sanctions were imposed on the oil industry in 2011 and 2012. Last week Javadi said output had already surpassed 3.5 million barrels a day. (Source: Reuters)

Fajr festival showcasing bright lineup of world cinema

By Afshin Majlesi

TEHRAN — A vibrant lineup of movies, documentaries and shorts by directors from around the globe will be screened during the 34th Fajr International Film Festival, which opens today at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex.

Fifteen movies, including "1944" directed by Elmo Nuganen from Estonia, "El Clásico" by Halkawt Mustafa from Iraq, "Norfolk" by Martin Radich from the UK and "Guarani" by Luis Zorraquin from Argentina, will compete in the official section -- Cinema Salvation.

Also among the highlights is Romanian filmmaker Corneliu Porumboiu's "The Treasure", the winner of the Prix Un Certain Talent prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2015.

The adventure drama starring Toma Cuzin and Adrian Purcarescu tells the story of two young men who are in search of a lost treasure.

A jury composed of Oscar-nominated director Majid Majidi and several other cineastes will judge the movies.

Director Nasser Taqvai from Iran, Chinese filmmaker and producer Tian Zhuangzhuang, Spanish director José Luis Guerin, producers Ivo Felt from Estonia and Zeynep Ozbatur Atakan from Turkey, and Canadian writer Emmanuel Prevost are other members of the jury.

→12

U.S. unipolar system has ended in failure, Iran says



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See page 2

NATO and Russia want to repair damage to relations: expert

INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Gautam Adhikari, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress in Washington DC, tells the Tehran Times that both NATO and the Kremlin seek to repair the relations which have been damaged since Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014.

"NATO and Russia both, it seems, want to repair at least some of the damage to mutual relations," says Adhikari, who also served as a senior consultant to the World Bank. Following is the full text of the interview:

■ When and for what reasons did NATO decide to expand a political dialogue with Russia in the format of the NATO-Russia Council?

A: The NATO-Russia Council was established in 2002, during the NATO Summit in Rome, to facilitate exchanges on security issues as well as continue dialogue, cooperation as well as joint action on a range of other areas, including joint military exercises. With the end of the Cold War, western pow-



ers had assumed, a bit prematurely in my opinion, that Russia would advance on the democratic path and develop its economy away from the earlier militaristic and centralized planning pattern to a market oriented success. For a while, it seemed that might be possible despite the complexity of the problem of liberalizing a society and economy of that magnitude after seven decades of communist rule. But Putin's rise to supreme power quickly brought a series of disappointments to the West's vision for Russia. Nevertheless, dialogue continued, even positive cooperation for a while -- on fighting terrorism, Afghanistan and other areas -- but Russia's

invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea brought that cooperation to a virtual halt for a while.

■ In a statement issued in Brussels on April 8, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced that "following consultations with Russia, we have agreed to hold a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council at the ambassadorial level." Why does NATO seek to resume dialogue with Moscow?

A: NATO and Russia both, it seems, want to repair at least some of the damage to mutual relations. The Russian foreign minister has said his country does not want "a senseless confrontation" with the West and called for all-European security cooperation. It's possible that the recent instances of terrorism in Europe have led to a concern for overall security coordination and a need for expanded cooperation on counter-terrorism among all powers. Also, some European economies depend to a significant extent on Russian supply of oil and would like to continue trade with Russia.

→9

Aiming at Iran, Saudi Arabia mixes oil policy with politics

By Javier Blas and Wael Mahdi

After taking over defense and economic planning, Saudi Arabia's Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has now stamped his authority over oil policy.

In so doing, the 30-year-old son of King Salman upended the Saudis' decades-long approach of separating commercial from political considerations. Over the weekend, Saudi officials quashed an agreement among major oil producers in Doha to freeze output due to Iran's refusal to participate, a sign the regional rivalry is infecting the market.

"Everything at Doha was about politics," said Yasser Elguindi, an oil analyst at Medley Global Advisors, a consultant that advises large hedge funds.

The change means that everyone exposed to energy prices, from oil majors such as Exxon Mobil Corp. to traders like Vitol Group BV, will have to heed the opaque politics of the Middle East -- and the House of Saud. With Saudi Arabia and Iran weathering one of their

worst diplomatic crises since the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, and both countries taking opposite sides in civil wars in Syria and Yemen, the oil market should brace for a wild ride.

"The fact that Saudi Arabia seems to have blocked the deal is an indicator of how much its oil policy is being driven by the ongoing geopolitical conflict with Iran," said Jason Bordoff, director of the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University in New York and a former White House oil official.

■ The pragmatist

Ali Al-Naimi, the Saudi oil minister, has been the pragmatist who separated oil policy from foreign policy for the past two decades, insisting that pricing considerations such as supply, demand and inventories were the main drivers of his decisions. The technocratic strategy was built on the experience of the 1973 oil embargo, which largely backfired as it led to weaker demand.

While the House of Saud has always kept control of oil policy, ministers drawn

from outside the royal family -- spanning from Sheikh Yamani in the 1980s to Al-Naimi for the last two decades -- enjoyed significant room for maneuver.

Al-Naimi -- and his number two, Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman, an older half-brother of the deputy crown prince -- cooperated with Iran in the past to cut production to boost prices. Oil policy was an unusual oasis of stability in the convulsive politics of the Middle East.

That approach drove talks among Russia, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Qatar to agree to freeze oil production in recent weeks. As late as Saturday, officials from the four countries prepared a draft that they expected to be rubber stamped hours later by oil ministers in Doha. The deal would have marked the first collaboration between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and Russia in 15 years, opening the door to the end of a glut that has driven oil prices from \$100 a barrel to as low as \$26.

→9

PERSPECTIVE

By M.A. Saki

Deputy chief editor

Threats can't whitewash Saudi support for terrorism

The New York Times said in a report on April 15 that Saudi Arabia has warned the U.S. Congress that it will sell off hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of American assets held by the kingdom if it passes a bill that would allow the Saudi government to be held responsible in American courts for any role in the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

If Riyadh claims that 9/11 Commission found "no evidence that the Saudi government as an institution or senior Saudi officials individually funded" hijackers there was no reasons to make such a threat.

In February, Zacarias Moussaoui, the so-called "20th hijacker" who pleaded guilty to participating in an al Qaeda conspiracy in connection to the 9/11 attacks, alleged members of the Saudi royal family supported al Qaeda.

It is not a coincidence that 15 of 19 hijackers were Saudi nationals. There is absolutely something wrong with the kingdom either ideologically, religiously, politically, or culturally that raises such extremely dangerous personalities.

Saudi royals know that top officials in the U.S. are well aware that Saudi Arabia was directly or indirectly involved in the September 11 attacks. Officials in Riyadh also know that it has been due to political and economic considerations that the Bush and Obama administrations have held the public in dark about the Saudi role about the tragedy.

Former Sen. Bob Graham, the co-chair of the 9/11 congressional inquiry, told CNN, "The Saudis have known what they did in 9/11, and they knew that we knew what they did, at least at the highest levels of the U.S. government."

→9

MEDIA MONITOR



Holding cabinet meeting in occupied Golan Heights is against international law, Iran

TEHRAN — Iran has categorically condemned the move by the Zionist regime which has held cabinet meeting in the occupied Golan Heights.

"Golan Heights are occupied lands which belong to Syria and will be taken back by Syria sooner or later," said Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Hossein Jaber Ansari, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

He said it is a blatant breach of international law, calling for serious response by the international community against such provocative acts of the Zionist regime.



Kerry, Zarif to meet amid Iranian sanctions complaints

TEHRAN — Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif planned to meet U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in New York on Tuesday amid Iranian complaints that it's not getting the sanctions relief it deserves under last year's landmark nuclear deal, the State Department said on Monday.

The two were to meet before Kerry flies to Saudi Arabia to join President Barack Obama at a summit with Persian Gulf Arab leaders, department spokesman John Kirby was quoted by AP as saying. Meanwhile, Kirby said the department had sent letters to U.S. state and local officials advising them of changes to federal sanctions policy.

"We're obviously aware of these concerns that they have expressed about the status of sanctions relief," Kirby said. "And the secretary is very mindful that that topic will come up tomorrow, that that is very much on Foreign Minister Zarif's mind."



Majlis passes national budget of \$323 billion

TEHRAN — The Majlis passed national budget bill of \$323 billion on Tuesday.

The bill was passed by 152 approvals, 24 objections, and five abstentions from 195 MPs present in the parliamentary session, the IRIB reported.

The budget relates to the current Iranian fiscal year that started on March 20. The dollar was rated at 30,293 rials (Iran's national currency) at the time the bill was passed. The budget is set based on revenues from 2.25 mbpd crude oil export, meanwhile every barrel of oil will be sold at 40 dollars.



Iranian FM visit Azerbaijan late April

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif will visit Azerbaijan in late April, the Iranian Embassy in Baku told Trend on Tuesday.

He is to take part in the 7th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

The forum will be held on April 25-27 in Baku. During the visit, Zarif is also expected to hold bilateral meetings with the Azeri officials.

About 30 sessions will be held during the forum.



IRGC Ground Force Aviation commander inaugurated

TEHRAN — The commander of the IRGC Ground Force Aviation was inaugurated into office on Tuesday, Nasim reported.

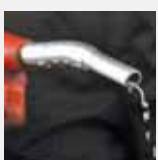
Mohammad Rahmani had been appointed as the first commander of the newly formed unit by IRGC commander Mohammad Ali Jafari last week.



I will pursue murder of 'little guest': Judiciary

TEHRAN — The Judiciary deputy chief for social affairs has said he will pursue the case of the murder of a six-year-old Afghan girl in Iran.

Preventive measures should be put top on agenda at the provincial branches of the Judiciary to reduce the possibility of such bitter happenings as what happened to this "little guest", Mohammad Baqer Olfat was quoted by ILNA as saying on Tuesday.



Majlis okays two rates for gasoline

TEHRAN — The Majlis on Tuesday obliged the government for the current calendar year, which started on March 20, to render two prices for gasoline sold at stations across the country, ICANA reported.

Accordingly, gasoline bought through individual smart cards up to a certain amount per month will be charged at last year's rate (10,000 rials or about 30 cents), while gasoline bought beyond that quota or via public smart cards available at stations will be priced according to the production cost.

Rouhani calls JCPOA a 'political and legal honor'

POLITICAL TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is a "political and legal honor for the Iranian people."

"Those who ask what the JCPOA has done should know that JCPOA has recorded a political and legal honor for the Iranian people," the president told a large gathering of well-wishers in Semnan, the capital of Semnan Province.

He added, "Only three months have passed" since the implementation of the JCPOA "but some think that 30 months have passed."

"The Iranian people decided to remove pressure of sanctions and resolve regional and international problems one after the other," he remarked.

He said when he took presidential office in the summer of 2009 "Iranophobia" has reached its climax.

"We started our work when sanctions have reached its zenith. Inflation, recession, unemployment and turbulence in the market" has irritated the mind of the people, the president added.



Then Iranians took a "historic decision" and decided to defeat Iranophobia, he remarked.

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

He added the Iranian people succeeded to remove all the UN sanctions resolutions issued against the country.

The UN Security Council endorsed the nuclear deal between Iran and great powers by approving Resolution 2231. It rescinded all sanctions resolution against Iran.

"Who could imagine that six Security Council resolutions and 12 (IAEA) Board of Governors resolutions against Iran be canceled and put into dustbin of history?" the president asked.

Rouhani called the JCPOA a product of the people's efforts and the guidelines set by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

He also urged the media outlets to criticize the government but avoid "immoral" propaganda.

Elsewhere, The JCPOA has been approved by the Leader, the Parliament and the Supreme National Security Council and it is the time to use opportunities created after the implementation of the deal and a consequent lifting of the sanctions, he said, adding rivalries should also come to an end.

U.S. unipolar system has ended in failure, Iran says

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Tuesday that the U.S. unipolar system in managing the world has failed, noting and its failure is obvious given the current crises and wars.

Larijani who addressing a summit of Eurasian parliamentary speakers in Moscow, also said, "Terrorism is Washington's instrument that uses against other countries."

The U.S. policies are based on "adventurism" and no country can rely on Washington, he said.

He also called on the countries in the region to form an alliance in order to use capacities for expanding cooperation. Larijani also slammed applying sanctions at the inter-

national system, saying sanctions are the U.S. tool and its application against Iran was a "big mistake".

Commenting on terrorism, he said that the phenomenon is not limited to one country and the entire world should cooperate in countering it.

Larijani also called on the countries in the Eurasian region to draw up a strategy to counter terrorism.

The summit of Eurasian parliamentary speakers was attended by Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, China, Mongolia, Pakistan, South Korea, Russia, Thailand, Philippines and the Czech Republic.



Iran staunching flow of narcotics into U.S., Europe

Tehran to host first anti-drug summit of 30 countries across the Balkan route

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iranian Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli said on Tuesday that Iran staunches unbridled flow of narcotics into the U.S. and Europe thanks to increasing drugs seizures and stricter anti-drugs measures.

"Hundreds of tons of narcotic types have been seized by our country (Iran), much more than that over the same period last year."

Rahmani Fazli, who also acts as the secretary general of Iran's Drugs Control Headquarters, highlighted the statement during an appearance with the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Yury Fedotov.

The meeting happened in New York on the first day of the 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (April 19-21).

Rahmani Fazli also said European countries have been uncooperative with Iran in the anti-drugs battle, which could help ease the burden logistically and financially.

A more cooperative Europe could lend Iran a hand with the hardware demanded by anti-drugs missions, the official noted, calling for more serious policy on the European side.

"Any effective measure to cut down narcotics trafficking via the Balkan route is contingent upon their serious, practical cooperation in sectors such as delivery control, money laundering, financial resource tracking, drugs discovery, confiscation of international traffickers' properties and identifying drug dealers as well as sharing information on traffickers."

The Balkan and northern routes are the main heroin trafficking corridors linking Afghanistan to the huge markets of the Russian Federation and Western Europe.

The Balkan route traverses Iran (often through Pakistan), Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria across South-East Europe to the Western European market.

The minister called for UNDOC engagement with all countries to explore more effective ways for ex-addicts not to bounce back to their bad habits.

Finally, as a practical step, Rahmani Fazli proposed that Afghan farmers be encouraged to cultivate other seeds but poppy on their farms.

For his part, Fedotov praised Iran's commitment to drug seizure and contribution to 40 percent of all such confiscations around the world, naming Iran the strategic partner of UNDOC and the



global community in the drug fight.

Also, Fedotov expressed his gratitude to Iran for taking the helm of the tripartite anti-drugs coalition with Afghanistan and Pakistan, saying UNDOC will be unfailing in throwing its weight behind its members, particularly the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Elsewhere, in his remarks, the anti-drug figure called on Iran to share its experience with regional countries as the country has come a long way in battling narcotics trafficking.

Appreciating Iran's recent measures to keep an eye on money laundering

from illicit drugs trade, Fedotov showed readiness to back the plan, agreeing with Iran's proposal to host the first anti-drug summit of 30 countries across the Balkan route.

Over the past 10 years, Iran has been fighting the battle against smuggling unaided, spending hundreds of millions of dollars and deploying tens of thousands of troops, many of whom martyred in this way.

While there have been great breakthroughs, uprooting drug trafficking goes well beyond the potential of one single country.

Gov. says cannot cut cash subsidies to 24 million citizens

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Government spokesman Mohammad Baqer Nobakht has thrown into question the feasibility of cutting cash subsidies to 24 million people, saying it is "unfair" to delist Tehran residents with monthly incomes as high as almost \$900.

The parliamentary legislation could be a blow to Rouhani's popularity, people familiar with the matter say, because if the government avoids enforcing the ratification, it will be subject to legal questioning.

Already a cause of worry for the incumbent government, Nobakht complained of the legal conundrum which is a drag on the government.

"This move is unfair and will create problems for most of the people," Nobakht was quoted as saying.



However, with sagging oil prices cutting Iran's national income, analysts have warned that Tehran will have to

cut back the system of giving monthly cash payments as much as it is possible or risk running huge deficits.

According to new criteria outlined by the Majlis, the Rouhani administration will have to abandon monthly cash payments of around \$12 to every Iranian for many people with monthly incomes beyond a \$900, ISNA reported.

Originally, it was envisaged the surplus from the subsidy reform plan, which went into effect in 2010, would go into other sectors such as healthcare, public transportation, job generation, etc.

Now, the plan has been a bone of contention, forming new divisions among decision makers of the country.

UN Security Council unable to settle Palestine crisis: Iran

POLITICAL TEHRAN — The Iranian deputy permanent representative to the UN has said the Security Council is unable to resolve the decades-old Palestinian crisis.

During his speech at the UN on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Gholam-Hossein Dehghani said the Zionist regime is continuing its "colonial" policies without fear of any punishment.

He stressed NAM's solidarity with the

Palestinian people.

He cited attacks on civilians, continuation of the Gaza Strip blockade, destruction of Palestinians' houses and more settlements as instances of the crimes committed by the Israeli regime.

He also noted NAM condemns Israel's aggression against Lebanon's territorial integrity.

Prior to the outbreak of war in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, Israel was almost hes-



itant about mounting attacks on Palestinians, mindful of Muslim outcries and sympathy.

Now, the embattled Middle East has given a rare moment of relief from the Islamic world, emboldening the regime to be at liberty with surge of air and ground assaults against the defenseless people of Palestine.

It is Iran that has always been unflinchingly vociferous of the regime's savagery and brutality.

Meanwhile the international community has almost turned a blind eye to the atrocities of the regime.

ISNA

AP

IRIB

TREND

NASIM

ILNA

ICANS

Syria: 'Assad's future is not up for negotiation'

The Syrian government's chief negotiator has said his side is pushing for an expanded administration led by President Bashar al-Assad, and that Assad's own future was not up for negotiation.

The Western-backed Syrian opposition said on Monday that it was taking what it called a pause from United Nations-sponsored talks in Geneva aimed at ending the five-year-old conflict.

The opposition wants some form of transitional governing body with full executive powers - but without Assad.

But Bashar Jaafari told Lebanese TV news channel al-Maydeen on Tuesday that a bigger government was needed to preserve the country's existing institutions.

"In Geneva, we have one mandate only: to arrive at an expanded national government. This is our mandate this is the goal we strive to achieve," Jaafari said on Tuesday.

On Monday, Jaafari accused the House of Saud regime, Turkey and Qatar - all opposition backers - of trying to derail the talks after the rebels suspended their participation.

"There has been a decision ... in Saudi Arabia, in Turkey and in Qatar to derail inter-Syrian decision-making," he said.

"They do not want there to be a di-



alogue between Syrians - they want to make the Geneva negotiations fail."

Jaafari said the opposition and the countries that support it were "annoyed because of the progress being made by the Syrian army on the ground".

A strained ceasefire

The UN struggled on Monday to keep the troubled talks on track, as the opposition suspended "formal participation", accusing the government of repeated violations of a fragile ceasefire that has been in place since February.

The main opposition bloc in Geneva, the so-called High Negotiations Committee (HNC), accused the government of sending a message that it did not want a political solution, but a military solution that the opposition said would destroy the country.

HNC coordinator, Riad Hijab, said during a press conference in Geneva that there is no solution in Syria as long as Assad is in power.

"There is no solution in Syria if Bashar al-Assad is present. We came to Geneva

for a political transition in Syria, but the government does not want a political solution because it knows such a solution is the end of the regime."

The ceasefire has been strained to breaking point, particularly around the divided city of Aleppo, with each side blaming the other for an escalation that has underlined the huge challenge facing peace talks that are currently being held in Geneva.

The ceasefire, which was supposed to buttress the talks, had reduced violence despite alleged violations on both sides.

The truce has held in most of Syria, except in the north, where it has practically collapsed. Al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), excluded from the agreement, is deeply rooted in the parts of northern Syria controlled by opposition forces, complicating the oversight of the truce.

But United Nations peace envoy Staffan de Mistura insisted the ongoing round of indirect discussions, which began on April 13, would continue through the week as planned.

According to the UN, more than 250,000 people have been killed and millions have fled the country since Syria's conflict erupted in 2011.

(Source: agencies)

Israeli settlement activities hamper peace process: UN

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has slammed Israel's illegal settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian lands and said Tel Aviv's land grab policies are an obstacle to peace.

"I once again reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and undermine efforts to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," Ban told the Security Council in a regular briefing on Monday.

The UN chief further expressed concerns over demolitions of Palestinian homes by Israel as well as ongoing violence in the occupied West Bank and said peace seems "more distant" than ever under the current circumstances.

"The creation of new facts on the ground through demolitions and settlement building raises questions about whether Israel's ultimate goal is in fact to drive Palestinians out of certain parts of the West Bank, thereby undermining any prospect of transition to a viable Palestinian state," Ban said.

Ban also slammed the ongoing punitive demolitions of homes belonging to families of Palestinians, who allegedly attack Israelis, as an internationally-banned form of collective punishment.

Since last October, about 210 Palestinians have been killed in what is regarded as the third Palestinian Intifada (uprising) that erupted over Israeli plans to change the status quo of the al-Aqsa Mosque, a highly revered Muslim site.



Israel's expansionist policy was among the major sticking points that led to a freeze in negotiations with Palestinians in 2014. Currently, efforts are underway to revive the stalled process.

Ban further called on both Israelis and Palestinians to engage in constructive dialogue and said the Middle East Quartet - the United States, the UN, the European Union and Russia - is preparing a report on the current situation as well as the threats to the so-called peace process.

He underlined the significance of unity among the Palestinian factions, urging all sides to commit to reconciliation.

"The path out of the current political deadlock requires commitment, compromise, mutual respect and leadership on both sides. It also requires the acceptance - demonstrated by deeds as well as words," Ban said.

Over half a million Israelis live in more than 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank including East al-Quds.

(Source: agencies)

Sweden minister resigns under pressure over anti-Israel remarks

Sweden's Minister of Housing Mehmet Kaplan has resigned under mounting pressure over remarks he reportedly made seven years ago comparing the Israeli regime to the former Nazi regime in Germany.

Sweden's Prime Minister Stefan Lofven said on Monday that Kaplan had submitted his resignation and that he had accepted it.

He said the minister's decision to step down had been deemed correct.

"Mehmet Kaplan's overall assessment of the situation is that he will not be able to act as a minister and I share that assessment," Lofven said.

The premier described Kaplan as "a man with humanist and democratic values."

The 44-year-old Turkish born-minister has come under increasing pressure since last week, when a Swedish daily published the comments he had made seven years ago about Israel.

The Svenska Dagbladet daily quoted Kaplan as saying in March 2009 that, "Israelis treat Palestinians in a way that is very like that in which Jews were treated during Germany in the 1930s."

Kaplan, however, was not a minister when he made the remarks.

Kaplan confirmed that he was stepping down because of increasing criticism by the public and media, which he said had made it impossible for him to do his job. He made vague comments on the media reports about him.

"Let me be clear; this is not a confirmation of reports about me that I consider wrongful. I know who I am and



what I have done," Kaplan said. He also acknowledged that "on several occasions [he] severely criticized" the Israeli regime's treatment of the Palestinians.

Israel's ambassador to Sweden, Isaac Bachman, roundly denounced the remarks and described them as "deeply anti-Semitic."

Sweden's Foreign Minister, Margot Wallström, also described Kaplan's remarks as "terrible."

Relations between Sweden and Israel hit the lowest ebb when the government in Stockholm recognized the State of Palestine in 2014. It was the first member of the European Union (EU) in Western Europe that made the recognition.

Palestinians want to establish an independent state on the territories of the West Bank, including East al-Quds (Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip.

Earlier this month, Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah called on all EU members to recognize the state of Palestine and establish full diplomatic relations with it.

(Source: Press TV)

NEWS

Netanyahu moving Israel in 'wrong direction,' Biden says

United States Vice President Joe Biden has criticized Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over his regime's illegal settlement activities in the Palestinian occupied territories, saying Netanyahu is moving Israel in "wrong direction."

In a speech to the Israel advocacy group J Street on Monday, Biden called the settlements an obstacle to a two-state solution, and denounced Israeli moves under Netanyahu as "counterproductive" to the Tel Aviv regime's security.

"Settlement policies are hurting support for Israel and moving us further away from a two-state solution," Biden said.

"I firmly believe that the action Israel's government has taken over the past several years - the steady and systematic expansion of settlements, the legalization of outposts, land seizures - they're moving us, and more important, they're moving Israel, in the wrong direction," Biden said.

"They're moving us toward a one-state reality, and that reality is dangerous," he continued.

The presence and continued expansion of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestine has created a major obstacle for the efforts to establish peace in the Middle East.

More than half a million Israelis live in over 120 illegal settlement colonies built since Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and East al-Quds.

The United Nations and most countries regard the Israeli settlements as illegal because the territories were captured by Israel in a war in 1967 and are hence subject to the Geneva Conventions, which forbids construction on occupied lands.

(Source: AP)

Suicide car bomber attacks heart of Afghanistan's Kabul

At least 28 people were killed and more than 300 wounded when a suicide bomber blew up a bus full of explosives near a government security building in the heart of Kabul.

After the initial blast, which was described as huge by witnesses, armed men and more suicide bombers stormed the heavily-guarded compound, police said.

Al Jazeera's Qais Azimy, reporting from Kabul, said Tuesday's attack, which was quickly claimed by the Taliban, was likely the biggest such incident to hit the capital since 2001.

With the attack happening during morning rush-hour in a crowded area, the number of deaths was likely to rise, according to police.

"Our sources are telling us that at the time of explosion there was a graduation ceremony going on for new recruits when the suicide bomber detonated himself," Azimy said.

The security agency attacked is responsible for protecting government ministers and VIPs.

A police spokesman, Basir Mujahid, told Al Jazeera that the gunfight was ongoing, as Afghan Special Forces rushed to the scene.

"The Taliban are still fighting with the security forces," Mujahid said.

In a statement, the Presidential Palace condemned the attack "in the strongest possible terms".

"The explosion has caused a lot of damage to the government," Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, told Al Jazeera.

The United States embassy said it was not affected by the blast. The NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) military coalition also said it was unaffected.

The Taliban last week announced the start of their "spring offensive" even as the government in Kabul tried to talk them back to the negotiating table in a bid to end the country's drawn-out conflict.

In a statement, the group warned it would "employ large-scale attacks on enemy positions across the country", dubbing the offensive Operation Omari after the movement's late founder Mullah Omar.

Since then, fighting has raged around the symbolically-important northern city of Kunduz, which fell briefly to the Taliban last September.

(Source: agencies)

Trump mistakenly refers to 9/11 as 7-11

Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump on Monday mistakenly referred to the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as "7-11."

"I was down there and I watched our police and our firemen, down on 7-11, down at the World Trade Center, right after it came down, and I saw the greatest people I've ever seen in action," he said during a rally on Monday.

"I saw the bravest people I've ever seen, including the construction workers, including every person down there," he continued.

"That's what New York values are about."

Trump was campaigning in Buffalo, ahead of the Empire State's primary on Tuesday.

7-Eleven is an international chain of convenience stores that operates franchises and licenses some 58,300 stores in 17 countries. 7-Eleven Inc. is headquartered in the American city of Dallas, Texas.

(Source: The Hill)

Obama to veto 9/11 bill against Saudi Arabia: White House

The White House has indicated that United States President Barack Obama would veto legislation allowing Americans to hold the Saudi ruling family accountable in U.S. courts for any role in the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

"Given the long list of concerns I have expressed ... it's difficult to imagine a scenario in which the president would sign the bill as it's currently drafted," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said on Monday.

The bill, proposed by Democratic senator Chuck Schumer and Republican John Cornyn, if passed, would take away immunity from foreign governments in cases "arising from a terrorist attack that kills an American on American soil."

Earnest said the legislation could put Americans at legal risk overseas if other nations were to pass reciprocal laws that remove foreign immunity in their courts.

"It could put the United States and our taxpayers and our service members and our diplomats at significant risk if other countries were to adopt a similar law," he said. "The whole notion of sovereign immunity is at stake."

The House of Saud regime has threatened to sell off some \$750 billion of American assets held by the kingdom if Congress passes the bill, according to The New York Times.

Earnest warned the Saudi government against taking such a step.

"A country with a modern and large economy like Saudi Arabia would not benefit from a destabilized

global financial market and neither would the United States," he said.

If the Republican-dominated Congress passed the bill, American courts could order freezing the assets held by Saudi Arabia in the United States.

President Obama is expected to land in Riyadh on Wednesday. It's not clear whether the issue will be discussed during the visit.

Earnest also said he is not sure if Obama will raise the issue during a meeting with Saudi Arabian King Salman.

'Declassify 9/11 report on Saudi role'

Meantime, a number of U.S. lawmakers have called on the White House to declassify documents that shed light on the House of Saud regime's possible complicity in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The former congressmen say the 28-page classified document proves two Saudi nationals who were behind the 9/11 attacks received support and assistance from Riyadh while in the United States.

The 28-page report is part of a larger Congressional report on 9/11 released in 2002 and called the Joint Inquiry into Intelligence Community Activities, which was conducted by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Reports say the Obama administration and intelligence officials are now weighing whether to declassify the remaining 28 pages.

Former U.S. senator and governor of Florida, Bob Graham, said last week that the U.S. should declassify



the redacted pages, which could implicate Saudi Arabia in the attacks and prove that there existed "some support from within the United States."

Graham said on Sunday that Saudi officials are opposing the legislation because they are worried the kingdom's ties to al-Qaeda terrorists would be revealed during a possible trial.

In addition, he said Saudi Arabia's threat to pull hundreds of billions of dollars from the U.S. economy "says something about Saudi Arabia's involvement in 9/11."

The September, 11, 2001 attacks, also known as the 9/11 attacks, were a series of strikes in the U.S. which killed nearly 3,000 people and caused about \$10 billion worth of property and infrastructure damage.

U.S. officials assert that the attacks were carried out by 19 al-Qaeda terrorists - 15 of them were Saudi citizens -- but many independent researchers have raised questions about the official account.

(Source: agencies)

JUMP

Employing 'U-Turn' secures JCPOA implementation

Besides, this can also be explained via Iranians' unfamiliarity with new SWIFT rules, because it has been around four years since the European sanctions were levied against Iran's financial transactions and left Iranian tradesmen in exile. So, they should start new brokerage relations and regain their reputation in international business environment.

Moreover, dollar-based SWIFT transactions are still inaccessible due to the U.S.-led sanctions imposed on Iran in early 1980s for issues other than the country's nuclear program and the fiscal exchanges are presently done via other currencies.

Abbas Araçchi, who is the head of Iran Foreign Ministry's committee for following up on the implementation of the JCPOA, says "the legacy of primary sanctions still impacts our economy and impedes us from doing trade in dollar, the factor that significantly decreases Iran's leverage in economic terms."

On April 14, U.S. House Speaker Paul Ryan said he opposed any effort to give Iran access to the U.S. dollar, citing concerns about what Tehran would do with any financial access gained in the wake of the Iran nuclear deal, Reuters reported. "This is one of the reasons I adamantly oppose any steps this administration may take to give Iran access to the dollar," he said at a press conference.

Furthermore, as of the removal of sanctions against Iran, several foreign banks are craving for the renewal of their relations with Iran to benefit from the country's bonanza in the near future. However, they are startled to cooperate with Iran for the reason of the billion-dollar fines that U.S. regulators had frequently imposed on them for circumventing anti-Iranian sanctions in past years. For example, France bank BNP Paribas agreed to pay \$8.9 billion in July 2014 for violating U.S. sanctions against Sudan, Cuba and Iran. As a result, while brokerage relations are the prerequisites to opening LCs and making SWIFT transactions, such interbank ties are strictly confined due to obstructive measures of the U.S. which make the process of sanctions removal as well as Iran's reconnecting to global financial system sluggish.

As Reuters reported on April 3, "there is growing political pressure on European banks to support corporate clients seeking to do business in Iran." For example, in February, British Prime Minister David Cameron wrote to Barclays and required the bank to explain its refusal to handle a payment on behalf of Moly slip Atlantic, a British lubricant maker arranging sales in Iran. "The policy of Barclays Bank is in direct opposition to the policy of the EU and UN, as well as in opposition to the policy of the UK government," Cameron wrote in a letter first reported by the Times. Barclays Chief Executive Jes Staley, wrote in his reply to the prime minister: "As we offer banking services through our U.S. operations we are required to continue to restrict business activity with Iran."

Another example for the U.S. dominance on international financial and trade relations with Iran after the implementation of JCPOA was reported by the Japan Times when it wrote on March 16, "Japanese firms are still taking a wait-and-see approach because U.S. restrictions remain against financing businesses in Iran." "Even though Washington lifted sanctions on non-U.S. banks, experts say banks will still face challenges in financing big projects unless the U.S. lifts sanctions entirely."

While Obama administration officials have repeatedly said they aren't blocking access to Iran's overseas deposits, what the U.S. authorities are doing towards Iranian business and trade seems an implicit breach and a distraction from the direct text of the accorded nuclear deal which permits:

- > Transfers of funds between EU persons and entities, including financial institutions, and Iranian persons and entities, including financial institutions;
- > Banking activities, including the establishment of new correspondent banking relationships and the opening of new branches and subsidiaries of Iranian banks in the territories of EU member states;
- > Supply of specialized financial messaging services, including SWIFT, for persons and entities including the Central Bank of Iran and Iranian financial institutions;
- > Financial support for trade with Iran (export credit, guarantees or insurance);
- > Commitments for grants, financial assistance and concessional loans to the Government of Iran; and,
- > Transactions in public or public-guaranteed bonds.

U.S. officials, including Treasury Secretary Jack Lew — with whom Central Bank of Iran Governor Valiollah Seif met on April 14 — have ruled out reinstating the U-turn (transactions that must be cleared through a U.S. financial institution even though the money does not stay in the U.S. bank) for Iran even though the procedure was allowed from 1995, when the United States ended direct banking relations with Iran and imposed a wide trade embargo, until 2008.

Seif, addressing the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington on April 15, called for "effective implementation of the agreement in such a way that Iran's economic and business activities will be facilitated." This includes the U-turn, as well.

Seif clarified that the JCPOA was predicated on the lifting of all nuclear-related sanctions and that in Iran's opinion, the U-turn waiver was included, Al-Monitor wrote.

In practice, no specific step has been taken by U.S. officials to ease Iran's financial transactions yet and the Asian country's economic transactions are under the high impact of political issues. In case the circumstances remain unchanged, JCPOA may be jeopardized.

Banking barriers to be removed soon between Iran, Russia: TCCIMA chairman

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The Chairman of Tehran desk Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (TCCIMA) said that legal barriers to banking relations between Iran and Russia would be lifted soon, the Tasnim news agency reported on Tuesday.

As reported, Masoud Khansari made the remarks on the sidelines of the economic conference on improvement of trade cooperation between Iran and Russia in Tehran on Tuesday, where a Russian delegation comprised of Russian tradesmen, headed by the Minister of Investment and Development of the Sverdlovsk region of the Russian Federation Alexei Orlov, participated in.

According to the TCCIMA head, Tehran-Moscow trade volume stood at \$1.2 billion seven years ago but the figure has fallen recently.

"The recent sharp drop of the Russian Ruble against the dollar has negatively affected mutual trade between the two sides and Iranian traders are not interested in exporting their products to that destination accordingly," he said, "Measures are being taken to improve the situation and to increase bilateral trade volume with Russia via removing banking obstacles as well as easing the process of opening credit lines."

In past November, Iran and Russia held their 12th joint economic committee meeting in Moscow, discussing ways to give a boost to the bilateral trade.

Iranian Communications and Information Technology Minister Mahmoud Vaezi and Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak co-chaired the meeting, in which the two sides drafted a roadmap for increasing the volume of transactions, the IRNA news agency reported.

Officials from private sectors of the two countries ex-



Minister of Investment and Development of the Sverdlovsk region of the Russian Federation Alexei Orlov (2nd R) and Chairman of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (TCCIMA) Masoud Khansari (2nd L) in the economic conference on improvement of trade cooperation between Iran and Russia, which was held in Tehran on Tuesday

plored opportunities for cooperation in the fields of energy, oil, electricity, commerce, and science.

Vaezi also held a meeting with Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Igor Shuvalov at the time.

On the sidelines of the meeting, Shuvalov referred to

the lifting of sanctions against Iran as a positive measure which will notably improve economic relations between the two countries.

Russia will definitely pay attention to establishing long-term trade ties with Iran, he added.

Iran supports UN's 2030 agenda for sustainable development: Khazae

Mohammad Khazae, Vice-Minister for Economic Affairs and Finance of Iran, said that his Government attached great importance to the realization of the UN's 2030 agenda for sustainable development based on national priorities, the United Nation's official website reported.

Khazae made the remarks at the inaugural forum of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on Financing for Development Follow-Up which is being held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from April 19 to 20.

Given Iran's support for 2030 Agenda, relevant policies and actions had been taken at the national level, Khazae said, adding that the Government had strengthened the mobilization of domestic resources, further improved the tax collection system and provided more efficient public services.

Among other things, Khazae said, the Government had improved the tax policy, which would improve efficiency and effectiveness of the system. In addition, the Government had recently issued its long-term environmental policy, which

focused on coordinated and systematic management of resources and development of green economy. Reducing poverty and inequality, and ensuring risk reductions were among national priorities, as well.

The forum was a cornerstone in the process of implementation and follow-up both of the Addis Agenda and the 2030 Agenda. While the former would support the means of implementation of the latter, the Addis Agenda would nevertheless outline the 2030 Agenda and continue supporting sustainable de-

velopment programs well beyond 2030. Obstacles to sustainable development, particularly in Africa, included inadequate resources exacerbated by illicit financial flows and unmet ODA commitments, unfair trade rules, debts and debt sustainability, systemic issues in the international financial institutions, too little transfer of technology and lack of capacity.

In forum's general debate, representatives of the European Union, Guatemala, Panama, Netherlands and Iran participated.

(Source: un.org)

Iran-India deal on Farzad-B gas field to be concluded this year

ECONOMY TEHRAN — "In case undergoing desk technical negotiations with Indians bear fruit, the agreement on development of Farzad-B gas field will be signed by the end of 2016," said National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Managing Director Roknaddin Javadi.

The official said that a group of Indian companies are currently assessing different projects in Farzad-B and will present their findings to NIOC for final decisions, the Shana news agency reported on Tuesday.

Endorsing oil contracts is usually a time-consuming process, Javadi noted.

According to the NIOC's managing director, Iran has recently made a deal with a German company, Winter-



shall Holding GMBH, and the company will commence its studies on four oil fields in west of Iran within a month.

About a month ago, Iran and India agreed to sign a contract to develop Farzad-B gas field in the Persian Gulf by October.

Companies involved in the deal were given deadlines to complete negotiations.

Farzad-B, with estimated reserves of 12.8 trillion cubic feet of gas, was opened in 2008 by a consortium of three Indian companies: ONGC Videsh, Oil India and Indian Oil.

The field has been left undeveloped due to international anti-Iran sanctions that have gradually begun to be lifted this year.

Iran's economy bustling, IMF says

WASHINGTON (UPI) — The Iranian economy is outperforming the region as a whole mainly because of higher oil production and the lifting of sanctions, the IMF said.

In transcripts published Sunday, Masood Ahmed, the director of Middle East and Central Asia programs at the International Monetary Fund, said the Iranian economy is expected to grow by about 4 percent this year. That expansion should help lift the net growth for oil exporting nations by about 2 to 3 percent, he said from Washington.

"This is mainly due to the increased

growth in Iran, because of the effect of lifting sanctions and the higher oil production that comes from it," he said in his remarks. "In Iran this year, we are expecting an extra 600,000 barrels or so per year of oil production."

Sanctions pressures eased in early 2016 following a nuclear deal signed in July between Iran, the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, plus Germany. Full trade in Iranian crude oil remains restricted because some financial maneuvers are still blocked by U.S. sanctions.

A tanker of crude oil, the first to

leave Iran since mid-2012, left for the European market last month.

Though sanctions relief means more Iranian oil on the market, the Iranian government has tried to make its economy less dependent on oil for revenue. Ali Larijani, the speaker of the Iranian parliament, said the economy exports around \$50 billion worth of non-petroleum products, "which is not sufficient."

Iran is outperforming its peer economies. The IMF said members of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, a group that includes members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries

like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, should see economic growth slow from 3.75 percent last year.

"Economic growth in the PGCC countries this year is expected to be below 2 percent in part as these countries are tightening their public spending in response to the oil price drop," Ahmed said.

Iranian representatives were not on hand for a weekend meeting in Doha to consider oil production levels. Saudi Arabia said no deal to keep output steady was possible without Iran's participation.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Iran boosts crude oil exports in April

Iran has boosted its crude oil exports so far in April to around 1.75 million barrels per day, according to an industry source and shipping data, as OPEC's No. 3 producer works to recover market share following the lifting of sanctions.

That volume, if sustained for the rest of April, would be up from average March exports of about 1.60 million bpd. Iran says it is exporting more than the figures suggest.

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's petrochemical giant seeks billions of dollars investment

Iran's Persian Gulf Holding Company (PGHC) is seeking financial contributions to its petrochemical projects in the current Iranian calendar year which began on March 20.

PGHC, Iran's major petrochemical firm, has devised a 5-year master plan based on which it seeks a certain goal every year, its CEO Adel Salimnejad told Shana news agency.

"For this year, we are planning to carry out a number of multi-billion-dollar projects across Iran and we need contributions to financing the projects," Salimnejad was quoted as saying.

"In the first step, we will renovate the holding's plants as much as possible and then will move on to carry out new projects to supply the domestic and international markets," he said.



Founder of China's Tencent to give \$2 billion in shares to charity

The founder of China's Tencent Holdings Ltd, Pony Ma, said he plans to donate 100 million company shares, worth more than \$2 billion, to the firm's charity foundation in one of China's biggest philanthropic pledges ever.

Ma, whose fortune is estimated to be about \$18.8 billion, said the donation would go towards supporting medical, educational and environmental causes in China.

China has overtaken the United States as the country with the most billionaires, according to an October survey of the super-rich, but philanthropy has been slow to take off with wealthy people preferring to keep a low profile.

Reasons you should book a trip to Bulgaria

Ask a novice traveler to describe the Balkan Peninsula, and you'll likely encounter blank stares, quizzical looks and the ever-echoing "Waaait... where?"

But just because this land of lush mountains, sparkling seas and fluffy AF bread knots isn't popular does NOT mean it should be tossed from your bucket list. Bulgaria, in particular, is the perfect place to start your Balkan adventure.

■ The coastline is prime!

Speaking of beaches, Sunny Beach is the summer getaway you'll want to re-live forever. Dance all night at a bar in the sand, and lay on a lounge chair as the sun comes up, drink still in hand.

■ And the greatest "meatballs" of your life

Some call them burgers, and some say they look more like meatballs. We simply refer to kufteh as the best darn meat patties of all time.

■ Two words: Fried bread

You know how funnel cake gets all warm and slightly gooey in the center? Well mekitsa is fried bread that tastes just like that... only the warm, gooey center is the whole darn piece of bread. Yum!

■ Nature is both abundant and marvelous

Try hiking a mountain of never-ending waterfalls, or plunging into a cave known as "The Eyes of God." Streaked with lush Balkan Mountains, Bulgaria is the perfect place to have a natural adventure that's off the beaten path.

■ And most of the best sights are free

Whether it's a daring cliff-side hike, a cafe-filled Arts district or the interior of an elegant medieval church, you'll see a LOT of culture for almost no coin at all.

■ ...with some of the friendliest folks you'll ever meet

Passing travelers tend to agree: Bulgarians are incredibly friendly and eager to make sure you experience the best of their culture, of which they're hugely proud. Expect grandmothers, shopkeepers, college students and waiters to greet you with a smile and a heaping second helping of the nearest food item.

■ You'll certainly conquer your fear of heights...



Try looking over the edge of Kopitoto, scaling the seven hills of Plovdiv or riding a chairlift to a high-altitude trek around The Seven Rila Lakes. These views are enough to cure anyone from a fear of heights, or at least give a compelling reason to try and conquer them.

■ ...because even churches come with dazzling views

Bulgaria is dotted with dozens of picturesque monasteries. Make the trip to one with an especially panoramic view, and prepare to be amazed.

■ And life is all cheese, ALL the time

After a week in Bulgaria, feta will be your new middle name. Pair it with tomatoes, meat or fluffy white pastry for the typical Bulgarian meal of your dreams.

■ Meals often come cheap

Expect to eat a luxurious dinner — plates of goodies, drinks, the works — for about \$10 USD. Of course prices vary from place to place. But on the whole,

you'll be rollin' in the dough (both literal and figurative) at every meal.

■ Locals are chill

As in much of Europe (or anywhere that's not the U.S., really), Bulgarian locals have mastered the art of sitting back, relaxing and simply savoring each other's company. Instead of robot-like humans plugged into their laptops, a typical coffee shop scene includes large groups of friends laughing and hanging out. THIS, people, is what life's all about.

■ Bulgarians take holidays seriously

Following one of many public holidays, Bulgarians don't hesitate to take an extra day off, too. Visit on Liberation Day or Saint George's Day, and expect to join a party in the streets.

■ There's no such thing as commuting

Bulgaria's chilled-out culture reflects a love for people and pleasures in the immediate proximity. When you visit, locals

will recommend sights that are near to your current city or town, ensuring you'll never have to go out of your way to see something awesome.

■ Old mixes with new, for a scene that's always cool

For example, Sofia's Roman ruins are juxtaposed with modern buildings that would make any architecture junkie swoon. A city tour is never boring when so many styles converge in one place.

■ Almost NOBODY will know where you went

If for no other reason, visit Bulgaria just for the stunned stares, dazzled comments and "You went WHERE?" questions that come after a visit to this amazing nation. You'll be able to educate your fellow Americans on a very important place... one they should visit as well!

Happy travels!

(Source: Huffington Post)

Tourism body claims world's first 'selfie bench' to hide blunder

A pair of benches in Porthcawl with their backs to one of the most scenic views in Wales have been christened Britain's first dedicated 'selfie benches' by tourism officials, after the local council came under heavy criticism for ignoring the coastal vista for a pavement.

Bridgend County officials baffled locals with the recent "daft" placement of the benches that face the promenade and Seabank Hotel, rather than the picturesque Welsh seaside, from where, on a clear day, visitors are said to be able to enjoy uninterrupted views of the coast of

Somerset and Devon across the Bristol Channel.

"It's just daft isn't it," said Porthcawl mayor David Newton-Williams, reported WalesOnline.

"Everybody's having a bit of fun with it, but it's a bit stupid," he said.

In an effort, to save face, the Bridgend Tourism Association has since declared the seats the UK's first "selfie benches".

"We are inviting anyone visiting Porthcawl's esplanade to take their own bench selfie and share it on social media using the hashtag #SelfieBench" said Hugh

Murray, a director at the Bridgend Tourism Association.

The two benches were installed earlier this year following a request from members of Porthcawl Shout in 2009 to replace the original poorly-conditioned seats. The elderly voluntary group had asked that the benches face the road to offer an alternative view for pedestrians, according to a spokesperson for Bridgend County Borough Council.

But Gary Victor, chairman of Porthcawl Shout, said: "This is totally refuted by Porthcawl Shout."

He argued that the group had campaigned for the refurbishment of the two century-old Victorian design benches but "had nothing to do with the siting of the benches".

"They [the council] decided that was where they were going to be put," he added.

The counterintuitive positioning of the seafront benches might have made sense previously, when a hedge was in place behind the benches, blocking the sea views, but the council should have thought "one step ahead" to its removal, Mr Victor said.

"The hedge behind the seats has since been removed, but there currently are no plans to change the direction in which these seats are pointed," a spokesperson for the county said.

"The pair of benches, which face Porthcawl's busy esplanade and not the stunning coastline, have caused some confusion in the press with many quick to point fingers at a council mishap," the Bridgend Tourism Association said in a statement.

"It has since been claimed, however, that whilst one will be turned, the other could be a blessing in disguise, catering for an influx of social media savvy travellers," it said.

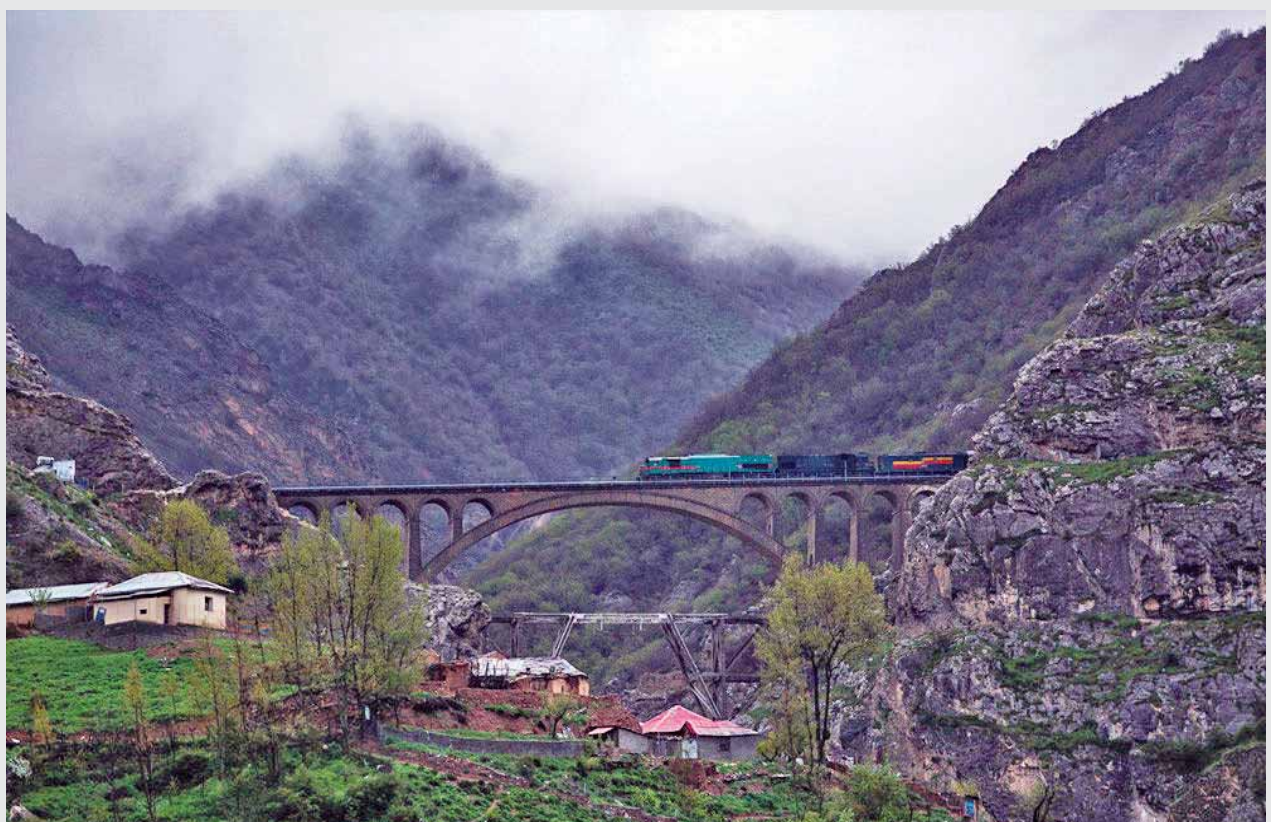
The latest dispute in the seaside town follows another controversial bench scandal back in 2014 when railings were built over a bench at Pink Bay, making it nearly impossible to sit on it.

"The positioning of this safety rail obviously looks unusual, but it was to try and stop people from sitting on the bench, and walking in front of it too, as this is an area of the path that is particularly unstable and likely to collapse, causing further damage," a spokesperson for Bridgend Council said at the time.

Bridgend County, which last year hosted the television series *The Only Way is Essex* for a one-off Wales based special, has seen a surge in interest following the show.

(Source: The Telegraph)

PICTURE OF THE DAY Mehr/Amir Ali Razzaqi



The Veresk arch bridge in Savadkuh County, northern Iran, is 110 meters high and 66 meters long. The bridge was built in 1936 during World War II by leadership of an Austrian engineer named Walter Inger.

A CLOSER LOOK

Awesome road trip hacks for the whole family

Road trip! What childhood memory comes to mind when you hear those words? Chances are your memories are either about great fun, or hours of misery fighting with your sibling in the back seat of the car. For me, it's a little bit of both!



Now that I'm older and have learned a lot about traveling with kids of all ages, I realize as long as you take the time to plan ahead on some things, and are wide open to change on others, a road trip can be a fun part of the whole adventure. Here are some great road trip hacks for the whole family.

■ Make behavior expectations clear before leaving

This often overlooked hack sets the tone for the whole trip. Talk to your family about trip rules and expectations before you leave. Print them out so you can refer back to the rules if necessary. The last thing you want to hear is, "You didn't tell me that!"

The rules should include things like, "Everyone uses the restroom when we stop, even if you don't have to go," and "When we stop, everyone stays together." Also relay expectations about how often you will be stopping, when you will eat, what reward will be given for good behavior, and what is taken away if behavior is not up to par. By going over these simple rules and expectations beforehand, your family will know what to do.

■ Hang a backpack full of activities over the headrest of the front seat

This hack works for all ages and there's nothing to buy since just about everyone owns a backpack. Items inside the pack can be customized based on age.

Hang a backpack over the head rest of the front seat, then roll the flap of the backpack down and secure it with a binder clip. Once secure, fill the bag and mesh compartment inside with age-appropriate activities and snacks. This hack can be super simple or very creative. For little ones, you might want to wrap up a few dollar store toys and put them in the bag as a special surprise.

■ Fill Fido's Kong toy with peanut butter

Dogs get bored just like kids. When traveling with your four-legged kid, fill a Kong toy with a tasty treat such as peanut butter. I know, it sounds gross but it really does work! He will be able to smell the treat even after licking all he can out of the center. This keeps him busier than a normal toy would and it doesn't splinter all over your car like a bone.

Once you reach your destination, just rinse the toy thoroughly inside and out to remove any leftover treat still inside. Most of the Kong toys have a larger opening that makes cleaning easy.

■ Play games that promote working as a team and avoid games with one winner

Face it! Kids are competitive at all ages, and they will fight if given the chance. A game that requires everyone to work as a team will help everyone get along better. You can play a game of scavenger hunt and offer a prize for everyone once all of the items are collected, say, "If you get everything on the list, we will stop and have ice cream!" That would work for me!

It may be best to avoid some of the more traditional games like license plate bingo if you are traveling with competitive kids. Games like these can backfire and cause fights when someone doesn't believe you actually saw that license plate from Ohio.

■ Create a moving scrapbook

Assign everyone a different task. Someone can be in charge of pictures, someone items for the scrapbook, and someone keeps a journal. The idea is that each person works on their part while on the trip so that when you return home from your destination, you have everything for a scrapbook. The collaborative work becomes a meaningful souvenir everyone will appreciate.

■ Stay connected while on the road

An easy solution for staying connected to the internet on larger devices such as a tablet is use your smartphone's hot spot or tethering capabilities. This hack comes in handy for the whole family. Full views usually offer more information than a mobile view so it's easier to find maps and other needed information faster.

Remember, if you don't have unlimited data you will want to either purchase more data before you leave, or monitor the usage closely while on the road to avoid overage charges.

■ Schedule pit stops where everyone can burn off excess energy

Bring action items such as a football or Frisbee so that you can encourage everyone to burn off excess energy during pit stops. If you forget to bring something family members can chase, no worries, foot races or tag will get you the same result.

This is a great family activity so Mom and Dad should be running too. Exercise helps release endorphins and that reduces stress. If you are less stressed, you will be better able to handle the hiccups that may happen along the way.

■ Go old school and bring a real map and a sharpie

There is just something about a traditional map that brings excitement to a trip. You can tell the kids this is how Mom and Dad traveled when we were your age. You will sound ancient but the kids usually think it's cool!

Allow the kids to trace the route as you go. They will appreciate the visual of how far they have gone and how much further they have to travel to reach the destination. It adds a fun element that is missing in today's travel.

■ Go off the beaten path

Another fun activity for all ages is to follow a couple of those really weird billboards you see along the way or Google, "World's Largest (you fill in the blank)." These little side adventures not only take you off the beaten path, but they add unexpected fun and memories to your trip.

(Source: lifehack.org)

Muslims for Bernie Sanders



ARTICLE

By Hamid Dabashi

Analyst

The dramatic debate between Senator Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton in Brooklyn on April 14, in anticipation of the New York primaries today, notwithstanding the national conversations about the U.S. presidential campaign has become positively predictable, if not

punishingly boring - except for the grassroots mobilization it has triggered and that may one day change the shape of politics in this country.

Today, I think of the possibility of "democracy" in the U.S. exactly the way Gandhi is reported to have thought of "Western Civilization": It would be a great idea.

On the Republican front, Ted Cruz and Donald Trump are clean-shaven prehistoric cave dwellers in business suits, while Hillary Clinton on the Democratic front is the dictionary definition of a chameleon - like a corrupt politician

changing color depending on which way the political wind blows but consistently representing mega-donors, big banks, and Super PACs without any moral scruples, while feigning she cares about the poor and the disenfranchised.

■ Closest candidate

In this presidential campaign, Bernie Sanders is the closest candidate to the aspirations of millions of decent Americans dreaming of a better future for their children while refusing to lend their name to an imperial republic that systematically arms the rich tyrants around the



world, supports Israel stealing Palestine and murdering Palestinians one settlement at a

time, and helps to create monstrosities like ISIL.

Today's New York primary, like millions of other New Yorkers, I intend to exercise my very fragile rights as a U.S. citizen and go and vote for Bernie Sanders, doing my share and hoping he will beat Clinton and win the Democratic nomination.

I do so without any illusion that Bernie Sanders can alter the imperial DNA of this country, or that I am particularly enamored by this liberal Zionist beating on the dead horse of a "two-state" delusion.

→9

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'The New Normal': Why U.S.-Saudi Geopolitical 'Honeymoon' Ended

Riyadh should give up its illusions and adopt a more realistic approach toward U.S.-Saudi relations, American scholars Perry Cammack and Richard Sokolsky note, stressing that the partnership between the two states "is experiencing deep structural changes."

The U.S.-Saudi partnership is undergoing deep structural changes, according to Perry Cammack and Richard Sokolsky of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"Shifting U.S. regional and global priorities, fundamental changes in the global energy market, and America's response to the convulsions sweeping the Middle East since 2011 have engendered mutual mistrust and exposed deep fault lines," the U.S. scholars write in their analysis for The National Interest.

Cammack and Sokolsky refer to Barack Obama's concerns, voiced by the U.S. President in his interview with Jeffrey Goldberg of the Atlantic. Obama called the Saudi regime "free riders" who could drag the United States into trouble in the region.

Obama's remark has prompted resentment in Riyadh.

"No, Mr. Obama. We are not 'free riders,'" Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal wrote in his open letter to Obama published in the Arab News.

"You accuse us of fomenting sectarian strife in Syria, Yemen and Iraq," the Saudi Prince noted.

Whether Riyadh likes it or not, it is time for Saudi Arabia and Iran to learn to "share the neighborhood" in the Middle East, the U.S. President believes.

It is becoming clear that King Salman's assertive military doctrine does not add to stability in the region.

Though Washington supported Riyadh's war in Yemen "to reassure the Saudis that the United States was a reliable partner," Saudi Arabia's military actions look "impulsive and ill conceived"



in the eyes of the Obama administration, according to the U.S. scholars.

Saudi Arabia's overreliance upon American protection has played a nasty trick on Riyadh.

At the same time, Washington has become less dependent on the Persian Gulf oil.

Furthermore, the U.S. has emerged as Saudi Arabia's competitor in the oil market. The House of Saud does not conceal its discontent with the White House and is even taking steps to bolster its relations with Moscow and Beijing.

And here is the rub: both Russia and China maintain a friendly relationship with Tehran, Riyadh's longstanding geopolitical rival.

What is the way out for Saudi Arabia? According to the U.S. scholars, Riyadh and Washington should adopt "the new normal approach."

"The new normal will be a more difficult U.S.-Saudi relationship. Both sides will harbor lower expectations of each other and continue to disagree, sometimes sharply, over important regional

security issues, but will seek accommodations when their interests overlap," Cammack and Sokolsky explain.

"They will have a more realistic and sustainable relationship that, shorn of its illusions and misperceptions, could produce fewer disappointments and even allow ad hoc cooperation," the scholars stress.

The two allies still have a lot of shared interests in the region and they really need to begin "a candid, frank and constructive dialogue" over their expectations and simmering controversies.

"Next week's US-GCC summit in Riyadh is the last opportunity for the Obama administration to recalibrate the U.S.-Saudi relationship," the American scholars underscore.

(Source: Sputnik)

Saudi Arabia's overreliance upon American protection has played a nasty trick on Riyadh.

Palestinian President Abbas: 'The world must not forget us'

INTERVIEW

By Nicola Abé

On Tuesday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was scheduled to meet with Angela Merkel in Berlin, where he will ask for support in pushing the peace process forward. In an interview, he says the issue has been on the back burner for far too long.

With war waging in Syria and in Yemen as well as the perpetual threat of violence by the terrorist organization Islamic State (IS), the myriad trouble spots in the Middle East have eclipsed the ongoing conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians for close to two years now. Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian Autonomous Authority, is hoping to place the enduring crisis back on the agenda during his planned visit with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Tuesday.

In an interview with SPIEGEL ONLINE, he calls on the German leader to invoke her good friendship with Israel as part of an effort to push the peace process forward again. Abbas also condemns the recent wave of knife attacks by Palestinians against Israelis, while at the same time lodging serious allegations against the government of Benjamin Netanyahu.

■ Mr. President, the peace process is dead. Many members of Netanyahu's right-wing government openly oppose a two-state solution. Should Germany change its policies in the Middle East?

A: We know history. We will not demand that Germany put more pressure on Israel. But we know that Germany supports a Palestinian state. This is why Chancellor Merkel should use her good friendship with Israel to promote peace.

■ In light of the civil war in Syria and the terror attacks taking place in Europe, many politicians feel there are more urgent foreign policy issues at the moment than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Do you fear you are being forgotten?

A: Of course we notice that the instability of the whole region is having an effect on interest in the Palestinian issue. But the world must not forget us. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be solved first. Many terrorists use the conflict as a cover. They claim that they are supporting our struggle. But this is not true. We condemn their deeds. But if we don't find a solution to the conflict soon, I fear the violence of these terrorists groups will spread and affect us in our territories and in Israel.

■ It is in fact true that Israel has been haunted for months by a wave of Palestinian violence. The perpetrators are mostly very young and act spontaneously. Many are speaking of a "knife intifada."

A: This is not an intifada. We have to understand why these young people are committing such attacks. This generation experiences the violence and humiliation of the occupation on a daily basis. And they experience how more and more settlers are coming to occupy their land. If Israel stops this, no child will take a knife to attack Israelis.

■ The Netanyahu government has accused you of incitement. How do you respond to this?

A: I am against these attacks and I have said this over



and over again.

■ So you do not have influence on the younger generation?

A: If a young person loses hope, then he or she doesn't care if I condemn their deeds.

■ But you meet with relatives of attackers and send condolence letters. Are you not sending the wrong signal by doing this?

A: If a Palestinian dies, we support their family socially. It does not mean that we support what they did.

■ You call attackers who have been killed "martyrs." Doesn't that imply some sort of heroism?

A: We are not encouraging our youth to commit violence. But if someone dies at the hands of Israeli security forces, we call that person a martyr. This is our tradition.

■ You have repeatedly accused the Israeli government of planning to change the status quo on the Temple Mount. This is a very sensitive issue that triggers strong religious emotions. Aren't you heating up the conflict with such statements?

A: This is not about religion. The problem is that Israel is occupying our land and attacking our holy sites. The Al Aqsa Mosque is ours. It is part of our capital city East Jerusalem, which has been occupied since 1967. The Israelis should stay away from Al Aqsa. Instead, they are provoking us on a daily basis with their visits and violating the status quo by praying there.

■ But what we are dealing with here are extremists and not the Israeli government.

A: Among the visitors are members of the Knesset. And the Israeli government has the responsibility: They have to stop the extremists. They have to respect their obligations regarding the status quo.

■ Many chances for peace have been missed over the past 20 years. Can you only see failures on the Israeli side, or did you also make mistakes?

A: I am constantly asking the Americans and Europeans: What are my mistakes? They confirm that I made no mistakes. It is the Israeli side which misses all the chances for peace.

■ Instead of negotiating with the Israeli government, you are now taking unilateral steps as well as addressing the international community directly. Do you think this is a good strategy?

A: We support the French initiative, which calls for a multilateral instead of a bilateral approach. We want an in-

ternational conference and an international support group to be established to reach peace. We will talk with the Europeans, the Americans, partners in Asia and moderate Arab states. We would also like Israel to join, but they are refusing this international approach.

■ What is the Palestinian side offering for such talks?

A: We will reaffirm our recognition of the State of Israel living side by side with the State of Palestine in peace and security. I am asking Netanyahu to sit with me at the table and negotiate. I do not have any preconditions. We only want a temporary building stop in the settlements while these talks are taking place. The Israelis are telling us it is not the right time for a two-state solution. But when is this moment? The right time is now and not tomorrow or any time in the future. We want to coexist with them. But the Israelis don't want that. They want to separate themselves from us and prefer not to see us.

■ Are you prepared to recognize Israel as a Jewish State?

A: We recognized the State of Israel in 1993, and we are prepared to reaffirm our recognition of the State of Israel based on the two-state solution. But they have to reciprocate as well.

■ Israel is very concerned that radical groups could gain more influence in the West Bank. Hamas is popular, especially among younger people, as elections at universities showed.

A: These results were individual cases.

■ According to the polls, you aren't very popular among your people at all. Your government lacks legitimacy. There haven't been any elections in the West Bank for the past 10 years. Do you fear that Hamas could win a possible election?

A: I am willing to have elections at any time, but Hamas refuses it. Currently, we are negotiating the creation of a unity government with Hamas in Qatar. We can conduct elections as soon as we have a unity government.

■ Will you seek another term as president?

A: I do not want to run again.

■ In the West Bank, an increasing number of militant Hamas cells are active -- with some planning terror attacks against Israel. Do you still have control of the situation?

A: Our security forces are working very efficiently to prevent terror. Just a couple of days ago, three young men were tracked down and arrested. They were planning an attack. In this context, our security cooperation with Israel is functioning well. Hamas is trying to sabotage things, but we have the situation under control.

■ You recently stated that the Palestinian Authority is on the brink of collapse.

A: It is a matter of fact. If the Israeli Defense Forces are operating in our cities in Area A, this is bothering us and violating the agreements. This area is supposed to be controlled by the Palestinian Authority alone. If Israel will not end these incursions, then it should take over the responsibility. But then there will not be a Palestinian Authority anymore. If Netanyahu sits in this chair, I will not be needed anymore.

(Source: Spiegel)

COMMENT

Egypt's hollowed-out society

By Gamal Eid

On Wednesday, three judges in Cairo will decide whether to allow prosecutors to pursue their case against me and my co-defendant, the journalist and human rights advocate Hossam Bahgat, in the government's continuing attack on nongovernmental organizations in Egypt. The case against me has centered on my role in founding the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, which aims to educate the Egyptian public about their civil and human rights.

As for Mr. Bahgat, it is widely known that his investigative reporting has rattled the government. But the case against him has focused on the activities of the organization he founded, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.

■ Human rights abuses

We have been targeted because our groups provide critical resources to those facing human rights abuses in Egypt. We have represented victims of torture from across the spectrum: Muslim Brotherhood members, liberals, leftists, victims of arbitrary arrest and even government supporters. We have stood for the ideas that human rights belong to all, no matter their ideology, and that civil rights belong to all citizens, no matter their wealth or power.

This week, the judges will also decide whether to allow prosecutors to impose on me, Mr. Bahgat and our organizations office closings, travel bans, asset freezes and criminal charges. If the court so rules, it will be tantamount to the Egyptian government shutting down not only the organizations named in the case, but all nonstate institutions that are independent of the security agencies and criticize violations of rights.

The accusations against us are that our activities harm Egypt's reputation, that our groups were formed outside the framework of the law regulating nongovernmental organizations and that we received foreign funding to support terrorism. These charges are baseless, and if our trial is legal rather than political, we will prove this.

Murky as this case is, the underlying message is clear: This is how the military-backed regime of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi intends to eliminate the last independent civic organizations in the country.

Authoritarian regimes are, in general, averse to a strong civil society. Egypt is no exception. Yet under president Hosni Mubarak, and despite routine government harassment, we did build a critical, independent civil society. During that era, the police could shut groups down, but it was rare for organizations to be closed for long and almost unheard-of for staff members to be jailed.

Five years after Mubarak's ouster, things couldn't be more different. If Mubarak was confident enough to tolerate independent groups operating outside state control, Sisi lacks such self-assurance.

■ Mediators role

Civil society matters in a country like Egypt because these groups can play an important role as mediators in situations of tension and conflict. In 2011, when millions took to the streets to protest the Mubarak regime, it was groups like ours, along with labor unions, professional associations and charities, that made a crucial difference to the outcome — giving structure to the demonstrations that kept them nonviolent and constructive. Our counterparts in Syria and Libya were not so fortunate, and the protests there quickly dissolved into armed conflict.

After Mubarak was deposed, groups like ours also worked overtime to translate chronic problems and longstanding needs into workable demands that were included in political negotiations. In 2011, for instance, my organization led an initiative involving hundreds of judges, lawyers, police officers, journalists and others to reform the then-feared Ministry of Interior. We held training sessions with police officers and consulted with ministry officials.

Sadly, our project with the Interior Ministry was eventually blocked by factions that did not want reform. Indeed, everything changed with Sisi's accession to power in 2013, which ushered in a new, more repressive era.

First, there was an assault on Muslim Brotherhood charities, then came the trials and closings of independent cultural organizations. The Sisi regime went on to close and prosecute nongovernmental organizations that were promoting health care, education, press freedom, democratic reform and good governance. While some, like mine, were frank critics of official policy, most stayed out of politics, dedicating themselves instead to delivering basic services that the government neglected to provide.

Today, there are very few of us left. We know that without the mediating role of independent civic institutions, ordinary social tension can easily escalate into nationwide conflict. The powerful can manipulate routine differences between communities, ethnic groups and social classes into a politics of brute force. When that happens in a country under authoritarian rule, the entire public sphere is transformed into a zero-sum game between those wielding near-absolute power and those whose basic rights are in jeopardy.

With a crumbling economy, a vicious counterinsurgency in Sinai and widespread public dissatisfaction, the Sisi regime faces difficulties far larger than those confronting Mubarak in the final days of his rule. It is hard to imagine the current government weathering these crises without the bedrock of civic organizations, which is why Sisi's attacks on civil society seem so shortsighted.

If we lose this week's round of our legal fight, my personal life may take a painful turn. But it will be the Egyptian people who bear the brunt of the consequences, since they will soon be left with nothing between them and a crumbling state.

(Source: The NYT)



NEWS IN BRIEF

Iranian physiotherapy conference to kick off in May

SCIENCE TEHRAN — Iranian Physiotherapy Association has announced the opening of the 27th annual conference, held under the motto 'Move for Life', on May 4-6, 2016.



The Olympic Hotel in Tehran, the meeting venue, is where professors, researchers and representatives of 15 world countries will come together for the event.

Ahmad Moazenzadeh, executive secretariat of the conference, said the congregation launched with aid of Iran Medical Council, welfare organization and some medical universities not to mention the help of business firms.

Around 2,000 participants from Australia, U.S., Ireland, England, Canada, Pakistan, India, Lebanon, Tajikistan and some more countries will be attending the conference, Moazenzadeh enumerated.

Mainly, foreign physiotherapists will deliver the lectures, the secretariat noted while various round tables are held for scientific discussions.

SPF 30 sunscreen may cut cancer risk by 80%

If you aren't a regular sunscreen user, you may want to think twice and lather up when you go outside this summer; a new study found that applying sunscreen drastically reduces the risk of skin cancer.

The latest research out of Ohio State University, which was done on mice, showed that when SPF 30 sunscreen was applied prior to UVB exposure, it significantly reduced the risk of melanoma, the deadliest kind of skin cancer.

"We have developed a mouse model that allows us to test the ability of a sunscreen to not only prevent burns but also to prevent melanoma ... we hope that this model will lead to breakthroughs in melanoma prevention," Christin Burd, assistant professor of molecular genetics at Ohio State University, said in a statement.

The study tested multiple different sun protection factor (SPF) 30 sunscreens, and found that they all delayed the onset of melanoma and reduced the incidence of tumors.

The study had some limitations. Besides the fact that it was done on animals, it also looked only at a short but intense dose of UVB rays — UV rays across the spectrum can contribute to cancer risk, and the average person is not exposed to that much UVB in one sitting. The lead researcher says that she is currently seeking funding to conduct more studies to explore additional scenarios.

(Source: Time)

A robot to teach kids coding

A robot named Root has been developed to expose kids of all ages to coding in a way that brings the often daunting world of computer science to life.

Root looks like a smoke detector but is actually a sophisticated robot. A magnetic surface, wheels, and an impressive arsenal of sensors allow it to navigate a classroom whiteboard. But Root isn't actually programmed to do anything. Its tasks and functionality hinge on a child's imagination.

The robot is capable of driving and drawing as well as playing music, but Root needs instructions to operate, a line of code. Zivhan Dubrovsky of Harvard's Wyss Institute recalls testing out Root with kids for the first time.

"If you ask kids can you make a text based java script line follower? They go 'no that's hard, can't do that', but we can put level one in front of them and they can do it in minutes," he said.

Using a tablet wirelessly connected to the robot, level one introduces kids to the principles of programming using an interface of simple commands and pictures. As they become more adept, they jump to levels 2 and 3, at which point writing computer code becomes second nature, according to Dubrovsky.

(Source: Reuters)

Hope for reversing Type 2 diabetes

Many experts believe Type 2 diabetes is an incurable disease that gets worse with time. But new research raises the tantalizing possibility that drastic changes in diet may reverse the disease in some people.

Recently, a small clinical trial in England studied the effects of a strict liquid diet on 30 people who had lived with Type 2 diabetes for up to 23 years. Nearly half of those studied had a remission that lasted six months after the diet was over. While the study was small, the finding offers hope to millions who have been told they must live with the intractable disease.

"This is a radical change in our understanding of Type 2 diabetes," said Dr. Roy Taylor, a professor at Newcastle University in England and the study's senior author. "If we can get across the message that 'yes, this is a reversible disease — that you will have no more diabetes medications, no more sitting in doctors' rooms, no more excess health charges' — that is enormously motivating." (Source: The NYT)

Oil Industry knew of fossil fuel dangers of climate in 1960's: report

Oil Industry officials knew fossil fuels were capable of producing dramatic climate change during the 1960's, according to the Center for International Environmental Law. A new report claims some people in the industry even joked with one another about their ability to melt polar ice caps.

According to the group, fossil fuels executives have been working since the 1940's in an effort to spin the propaganda narrative over the environmental consequences of their industry.

The role of fossil fuels in driving up concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide has been discussed by scientists since the end of the 19th century.

During the first half of the 20th Century, most researchers believed greenhouse gases would largely be absorbed by oceans around the globe.

"In 1957, a landmark paper by Roger Revelle and Hans Suess of the Scripps In-



stitute upturned that conventional wisdom, demonstrating that far more CO2 would remain in the atmosphere than previously

assumed, potentially accelerating the impact of global climate change," The Center for International Environmental Law stated

on its website.

Environmental regulations

Air pollution in the form of smog over Los Angeles in the 1940's led to the establishment of the Smoke and Fumes Committee.

The express goal of this group, made up of representatives of the nation's largest oil companies, was to present environmental regulations as costly and unwarranted.

Stanford Research Institute scientists released a report to the American Petroleum Institute in 1968, highlighting the potential dangers of fossil fuels to the environment.

The team put out a stark warning that rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere would lead to warmer oceans, rising sea levels and thinning ice caps. The Robinson Report placed the blame for rising sea levels on the use of fossil fuels by human civilization.

(Source: Tech Times)

Dinosaurs in decline long before asteroid catastrophe, study reveals

Dinosaurs were in decline long before the asteroid struck that spelled their doom, new research suggests.

Dinosaurs were on the up and up from the late Triassic about 220m years ago, with new species arising faster than others went extinct. But the study reveals their fortunes had begun to change long before the catastrophic six-mile-wide asteroid hit what is now the Gulf of Mexico, 66m years ago.

The research, the authors believe, could resolve a long-standing controversy among paleontologists.

"One of the things that has been long debated about dinosaur evolution is whether they were reigning strong right up until the time of the meteorite impact, or whether there was a slow, gradual decrease in (the emergence of new species) or an increase in extinction before that time," said Chris Venditti, an evolutionary biologist at the University of Reading and an author of the paper.

Writing in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sci-



ences, researchers from the University of Bristol and the University of Reading describe how they carried out a new kind of statistical analysis based on large "family trees" of dinosaurs, allowing

them to explore the rise and fall of species as time marched on. The study looked at the three major groups of dinosaur: the ornithischians (beaked herbivores such as tegosaurus), saurpods (flesh-eating beasts such as Tyrannosaurus rex) and saurpods (long-necked plant-eaters that included diplodocus).

Dinosaurs flourished

The results showed that while dinosaurs flourished from about 220m years ago, with species arising faster than they went extinct, about 140m years ago their success started to stall. Eventually, about 90m years ago, 24m years before the asteroid hit, the dinosaurs entered a long-term decline, with species going extinct faster than new ones emerged.

That, the authors reveal, could have left the dinosaurs more vulnerable to extinction when the six-mile-wide disaster struck. "Because diversity was lacking, because species were going extinct and not being replaced, it might have made them more susceptible," said Venditti.

(Source: The Guardian)

Loon deaths from malaria tied to climate change

For decades, researcher Mark Pokras and his colleagues have been trying to understand what is killing loons.

Through thousands of blood samples taken over the past 30 years, they found these birds — a relatively common sight on many New England lakes — were suffering from lead and mercury poisoning as well as other pollutants.

But the researchers took some solace in knowing that loons, unlike birds that frequent more tropical climates, weren't being sickened by avian malaria.

Pokras and Ellen Martinsen, a Vermont-based research associate with the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, started finding several different malaria parasites in loon blood samples a few years back. The latest data shows as many as 12 percent testing positive, though not all are expected to be infected with malaria.

Then last summer, the researchers found the first ever case of a loon — on Umbagog Lake located in Maine and New Hampshire — that died of the disease. Biologists and fans of the loons haven't found another case yet, but they are looking for other dead birds.

Crowdfunding campaign

Groups like the Loon Preservation Committee — whose offices are on the loon-populated Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire — have advised their volunteers to step up surveillance on lakes across the state. The Maine-based Biodiversity Research Institute has also started a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds to further investigate the extent of the problem.

"I wouldn't call it alarm bells but it certainly is raising eyebrows and emphasizing the need to look more," said Pokras, an emeritus associate professor at Tufts University who is writing a book on loons. "It may certainly be this bird that died was unlucky or maybe it had some immune deficiency that made it more susceptible to the parasite. I doubt it but we don't know that yet."

Martinsen, who used molecular methods to screen the loon population for malaria parasites, said the concern is that the birds may not have defenses to protect them against an infection — much like humans with Ebola or West Nile "which wreaks havoc on our system."

(Source: BurlingtonFreePress)

New study examines the effect of ecstasy on the brain

Researchers from the University of Liverpool have conducted a study examining the effect ecstasy has on different parts of the brain.

Dr. Carl Roberts and Dr. Andrew Jones, from the University's Institute of Psychology, Health and Society, and Dr. Cathy Montgomery from Liverpool John Moores University conducted an analysis of seven independent studies that used molecular imaging to examine the neuropsychological effect of ecstasy on people that use the drug regularly.

A number of studies have compared ecstasy users to control groups on various measures of neuropsychological function in order to determine whether ecstasy use results in lasting cognitive deficits.

It is common, however, for ecstasy users to use other drugs alongside the substance, and therefore the Liverpool team aimed to discover whether this had any bearing on the impact of the drug.

The nerve pathway that is predominantly affected by ecstasy is called the serotonin pathway. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter that is synthesized, stored, and released by specific neurons in this pathway. It is involved in the regulation of several processes within the brain,

including mood, emotions, aggression, sleep, appetite, anxiety, memory, and perceptions.

Emotional reactions

They found that ecstasy users showed significant reductions in the way serotonin is transported in the brain. This can have a particular impact on regulating appropriate emotional reactions to situations.

The paper, entitled 'Meta-analysis of molecular imaging of serotonin transporters in ecstasy / polydrug users', has been published in the journal of Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews.

Dr. Roberts, said: The "research team conducted the analysis on seven papers that fitted our inclusion criteria which provided us with data from 157 ecstasy users and 148 controls. 11 out of the 14 brain regions included in analysis showed serotonin transporter (SERT) reductions in ecstasy users compared to those who took other drugs."

"We conclude that, in line with animal data, the nerve fibers, or axons, furthest away from where serotonin neurons are produced (in the raphe nuclei) are most susceptible to the effects of MDMA. That is to say that these areas show the greatest changes following MDMA use.

(Source: Medicalxpress.com)

NASA finds cosmic dust speeding through our Solar System

NASA just discovered some special particles floating in our cosmic neighborhood.

The Cassini spacecraft, which has been orbiting Saturn since 2004, has detected alien dust that came from outside our Solar System.

Scientists suspect that this dust is interstellar in origin because it moves fast and in different directions, compared to the dust found on Saturn, according to a recently published report in the journal of Science. And although this alien dust was faint, it had a distinct signature.

Cassini has been studying the gas giant and its moons. During its tenure, the spacecraft used its cosmic dust analyzer to sample millions of ice-rich dust grains.

Most of the dust grains came from Saturn's moon Ence-

ladus. The moon has a global ocean beneath its icy surface and it has active jets that spray water vapor and other particles into space.

Out of the millions of cosmic particles the spacecraft collected, 36 were special. These were alien dust grains. Scientists concluded that the dust came from interstellar space -- the void that exists between stars.

Alien dust

Scientists have come across alien dust in our solar system before, so the discovery is not unprecedented. In the 1990s, international researchers from the ESA/NASA Ulysses mission made an observation of foreign dust, which was traced back to an interstellar cloud.

"From that discovery, we always hoped we would be able

to detect these interstellar interlopers at Saturn with Cassini. We knew that if we looked in the right direction, we should find them," said Nicolas Altobelli, Cassini project scientist at the European Space Agency and lead author of the study.

These microscopic dust particles were traveling at high speed through space when Cassini detected them. They were moving at a rate of 45,000 mph, a speed so fast the dust can essentially avoid being trapped by our sun's gravitational forces.

Unlike previous missions, Cassini was able to analyze the alien dust, which revealed the dust grains were made of minerals, not ice. The composition was primarily rock-forming elements such as magnesium, silicon, iron and calcium.

(Source: The CNN)

Rescuers are in a race against time to find survivors from a powerful 7.8-magnitude earthquake as the death toll from Ecuador's strongest earthquake in decades has risen above 400.

On Monday, teams from Ecuador and neighboring countries fanned out across the country's Pacific coastline to look for the dozens of people still missing.

In the port city of Manta, a group of about 50 rescuers working with sniffer dogs, hydraulic jacks and a drill managed to free eight people trapped for more than 32 hours in the rubble of a shopping center that was flattened by Saturday night's quake.

The first rescue took place before dawn, when a woman was pulled head first from a nearly 2½-foot (70-centimeter) hole cut through concrete and steel. Firefighters applauded as she emerged from the debris, disoriented, caked in dust and complaining of pain but otherwise in good health.

Another uplifting scene played out in nearby Portoviejo, where a cellphone call to a relative from under the debris of a collapsed hotel led searchers to Pablo Cordova, the hotel's administrator. Once he was gingerly removed, he was immobilized and hauled away on a stretcher, his hands waving in the air in a sign of appreciation to cheering onlookers.

"Since Saturday, when this country started shaking, I've slept only two hours and haven't stopped working," said Juan Carranza, one of the firefighters leading the rescue effort in Portoviejo.

Despite such cheering moments, tragedy continued to mount. At the shopping

Rescuers race to find survivors from Ecuador's big quake



center in Manta, authorities were working to free a woman they had found buried alive with a heavy concrete slab pinning her legs when an aftershock forced them to abandon the effort. When they returned the debris pile had moved and the woman was dead, said Angel Moreira, a firefighter coordinating the effort.

The government reported late Monday that the official death count had increased to 413 and said they expected the toll to rise further in the days ahead. Among the dead were an American and two Canadians.

Complicating rescue efforts is the lack of electricity in many areas, meaning noisy power generators must be used, making it harder to hear anyone who

might be trapped beneath rubble.

Christian Rivera, the head of emergency services for the capital, Quito, said that depending on the circumstances a person without serious injuries can survive up to a week in such conditions.

"After that, there's a quick decline ... and the rescuers' work becomes very difficult," he said. Foreign Minister Guillaume Long tweeted that 654 search experts from other nations were on the ground late Monday and that more were expected to arrive on Tuesday — bringing to 13 the nationalities involved in the rescue.

The United States has offered assistance but so far President Rafael Correa, a strong critic of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America, has yet to respond publicly.

The leftist leader on Monday boarded a military helicopter to deliver water, food and other supplies to devastated areas.

He urged Ecuadoreans to remain united in what is likely to be a long rebuilding process that could cost billions of dollars. "The priority is to direct resources where there are signs of life," Correa said.

After a deadly earthquake in Chile in 2010, that South American country was able to get back on its feet quickly thanks to a commodities boom that was energizing its economy. But Ecuador must rebuild amid a deep recession that has forced austerity on the OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries) nation's finances. To assist in the recovery effort, Ecuador plans to draw down on some \$600 million in credit lines from the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and other multilateral lenders.

Manta, a thriving port city, is among the areas hit hardest by the earthquake. Power cables lie in city streets and electricity remains out in many neighborhoods. Among the many buildings flattened by the shaking was a control tower at the airport that was home to U.S. anti-narcotics missions in South America until Correa kicked the Americans out.

As humanitarian aid begun trickling in, long lines formed as people sought to buy bottled water. Many residents are sleeping outdoors in makeshift camps or in the street cuddled next to neighbors.

Spain's Red Cross said as many as 5,000 people might need temporary housing because of destroyed homes and 100,000 need some sort of aid.

(Source: AP)

Threats can't whitewash Saudi support for terrorism

It is obvious to the world that the Saudi kingdom has been financing and fueling the ideology of extremism and terrorism for long years. Its recognition of the Taliban as Afghanistan's government in 1997 to its support to extremists in Iraq and Syria are examples of this.

It is not also a secret that last December Ger-

man Vice Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel publicly accused Saudi Arabia of financing extremism in the West. "We have to make clear to the Saudis that the time of looking away is over," Gabriel told Bild am Sonntag newspaper. He said, "Wahhabi mosques all over the world are financed by Saudi Arabia."

Just by condemning terrorism and extremism does not whitewash the name of the Saudi kingdom which has almost become synonymous with extremism and terrorism. The Saudi regime's honeymoon with the West, which had been unfairly covering up its backing for extremism over these years, is also coming to an end.

NATO and Russia want to repair damage to relations: expert

German Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier also said recently that the world powers will consider Russia's return to the G7. What are the reasons for such a remark?

Once again, the co-dependence of major European economies and Russia is a factor that might be driving moves towards reducing tension. Germany is Europe's biggest economy and is also a sort of de facto leader of the EU. Europe lives next door to Russia and an easing of strained relations is desirable for both. Whether Russia should be welcomed back into a G-8 is, however, not entirely up to EU nations. The U.S. will have a deciding voice in such a move. It's unlikely to happen, however, without significant change in Vladimir Putin's approach to foreign relations, international cooperation and view of Russia's position in and relations with

the global power architecture. Internally, he has actively promoted conservative values. Externally, Putin seems to want to restore Russia's greatness as the superpower it was in the Cold War days. He seems to want to develop alternatives to cooperation with Western powers, which he also sees as upholding values that go counter to his vision for Russia. He actively promotes anti-Western propaganda.

Viewed from the outside, and given the declining state of Russia's economy, static demographics and restlessness within its regions, any harking back to past Russian glory would appear unrealistic. Perhaps deep in his near-inscrutable mind Putin recognizes the problem, or at least soon will, and come round to a more realistic and cooperative relationship with the West.

How does NATO want to tackle certain problems such as cultural roots of terrorism, migrant crisis, etc.? Has NATO been adapted to deal with such threats?

A: I'm not sure NATO would be the correct platform to tackle cultural roots of terrorism or sociopolitical dimensions of the migrant crisis. That doesn't come within its authority or responsibilities. The EU must deal with that. In fact, each nation within the EU might need to develop a distinct locally adjusted approach to dealing with such issues. NATO may one day be called upon to manage any international conflict situation that might emerge from the migrant flow or a significantly heightened level of terrorism in Europe. But, as things stand, European nations will have to tackle their socio-cultural problems.

Aiming at Iran, Saudi Arabia mixes oil policy with politics

It didn't go according to plan. Instead, by Sunday morning, the Saudis insisted on the inclusion of Iran in any deal.

"Some countries from OPEC changed their positions in the morning -- right before the meeting began," Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said after the talks in Doha broke apart.

Venezuela's oil minister, Eulogio del Pino, said that Saudi representatives in the meeting didn't have the authority to negotiate and the summit had strained relationships within OPEC.

"We are going to try and recover the trust," he told reporters during a visit to Moscow.

In fact, the U-turn was telegraphed weeks before the gathering. Prince Mohammed bin Salman, known in diplomatic circles as "MbS" and the emerging force in economic policy within the king-

dom, said in two interviews with Bloomberg News that the participation of Iran was necessary for any deal.

Final word

The oil market took the warning more as a rhetorical warning intended for domestic consumption than a threat to the Doha talks. Since the four countries started the process to freeze output, oil prices rallied more than 35 percent.

"One thing we've learned in the oil markets: regarding the Saudis, we now have to listen to MbS," said Michael Wittner, oil analyst at Societe Generale SA in New York and a former official at the Central Intelligence Agency. "He clearly had the final word on Saudi policy and on their stance in these talks, not Ali Naimi," he added.

Prince Mohammed has accumulated power since his father's ascension to the throne last year. He became defense minister and soon after launched a military campaign in Yemen. He also

chairs the top economic planning body and the council that has authority over the kingdom's giant state-owned oil company.

Market share

Although oil officials and OPEC watchers almost unanimously point towards the politicization of Saudi oil policy, there could be other reasons behind Prince Mohammed's stance on Iran.

One is protecting Saudi Arabia's oil-market share, which could be eroded if it froze production as Iran increased exports following the removal of sanction in January. The other is avoiding a sharp increase in oil prices, which could throw a lifeline to rival suppliers in the U.S. and also slow down the kingdom's agenda of domestic reforms.

"We don't care about oil prices," Prince Mohammed told Bloomberg last week. "\$30 or \$70, they are all the same to us. We have our own programs that don't

need high oil prices."

Bad cop

The unanswered question is: Why did Saudi oil officials negotiate for weeks on a draft accord for Doha, giving the impression that a deal was possible even without Iran?

One suggestion is that Riyadh tried to use the Doha meeting to force Russia, an ally of Iran, to choose between higher oil prices and supporting Tehran. In that thesis, Al-Naimi played the role of good cop, with Prince Mohammed acting as the bad cop. Another theory is that Prince Mohammed made an eleven-hour intervention, forcing his team, led by Al-Naimi, into a U-turn, with the same objective: hurt Iran.

"Ultimately, Saudi oil policy has become extremely politicized," said Amrita Sen, chief oil analyst at Energy Aspects Ltd., a London-based consultant.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Post-sanctions Era: A Golden Opportunity for Refah Bank

ECONOMY TEHRAN — With the EU sanctions against Iran's banking system lifted, Iran's Refah Bank is now re-connected to Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) and consequently the bank's brokerage relations are expanded, Refah Bank's office of public relations reported.

According to this report, in the new atmosphere, the bank's office of international affairs has attempted to establish new brokerage relations, resume its previous relations with broker banks, opening new broker accounts and re-activating its banned broker accounts, as a result the number of Refah Bank's brokers have increased con-

siderably.

According to statistics, Refah Bank's transactions with more than 120 foreign correspondent bank with SWIFT code (RMA) is now active and the bank uses this worldwide network for sending and receiving encrypted SWIFT messages.

Refah Bank is also exchanging various currencies through its active brokerage accounts in countries such as Turkey, Switzerland, Belgium, Spain, Oman, Germany, Japan, Russia, UAE, China, India, Korea, etc. The bank is able to see to the needs of its clients providing different international banking services in accordance with existing regulations and in the shortest possible time.

Fourth IKCO Car to Enter Iran's Market

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The 4th IKCO brand car is going to enter the market by the end of this Iranian year (Mach 20, 2017), IKCO office of public relations reported.

Referring to car production as a goal to supply both domestic and international markets, Keyvan Vaziri, IKCO Deputy CEO Assistant in New Product Development said, "The production target for the car to be produced based on "X409TC" project will be 100,000 sets annually."

"The car is already designed and the body stamping dies are prepared; the mass production for this car which would be the 4th IKCO car will start by February 2017," he asserted.

According to Vaziri, the main export markets for this car will primarily be the

CIS and Persian Gulf countries, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

In the meantime, he claimed that this car meets all the required safety, pollution, fuel consumption and quality standards and also covers Europe's compulsory safety standard.

"This sunroof with a new style and appearance, designed by IKCO engineers enjoys a turbocharged engine and an automatic gearbox," he said and added, "considering safety and performance criteria this car is being tested under the supervision of IKCO NPD in Spain, Germany and South Korea."

Vaziri also emphasized that this new IKCO product, to be produced this year, could compete with some of the Korean and even European cars.

JUMP

Muslims for Bernie Sanders

I intend to vote for Bernie Sanders conscious of a crucial development in the U.S. Muslim community. This year is the first time that I will vote in a presidential election conscious of being a Muslim and that consciousness is a significant event in the make-up of the U.S. Muslim community at a time of intense Islamophobia.

I will not be the first nor the only Muslim voting for Sanders in the U.S. The fact that U.S. Muslims are significantly siding with Senator Sanders has already made major headlines in the U.S.

There is, in fact, an entire Facebook page dedicated to "Muslims for Bernie Sanders 2016". Leading Muslim scholars and intellectuals like Zareena Grewal and Donna Auston have also written eloquently as to "Why Muslim Americans should vote for Bernie Sanders".

Reports indicate that "in less than three weeks, Bernie Sanders being a friend of the Arab and Muslim American communities, has become legendary, and the support from this community of Sanders voters has been growing online since his March 8 victory in Michigan".

The significance of U.S. Muslims rallying behind Sanders as the "only Jewish candidate" should neither be exaggerated nor misinterpreted. This is a crucial development, but we need to know why.

Rise of Muslims

Above all, this vote signifies the rise of Muslims as a self-conscious, engaged, and assertive community with pronounced political views. To be sure, this does not mean all Muslims are for Sanders. There are plenty of rich and powerful Muslims of all sorts, no doubt, rooting for Hillary Clinton or even voting Republican. The very idea of a "Muslim vote" is as flawed and misleading as that of the "Jewish vote", or "Christian vote".

Many Muslims would have sided with and voted for Bernie Sanders even if he were not Jewish. That he is a proud and progressive Jew from a poor immigrant background links him to the deepest layers of Jewish prophetic voices throughout the ages as well as to the Jewish intellectuals and activists vastly involved with the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. as he, in fact, exemplifies - a particularly proud moment for Jewish Americans that Muslims must learn and update.

The formation of this crucial political consciousness signals a historic formation that could and should bring Muslims into the forefront of a national awakening in active alliance with such crucial segments of U.S. society as the budding Jewish liberation theology of a post-Zionist era, the Occupy Wall Street uprising, the Black Lives Matter movement, and even the nascent Democracy Spring rallies.

Sanders is a significant catalyst in this historic moment, bringing significant layers of political consciousness in the U.S. to the forefront of the U.S. presidential election. His supporters are putting up a heroic effort to promote their preferred presidential candidate. These forces, however, must begin to think of the day after a dreadful Clinton nomination, and what would happen to the significant momentum that Sanders' campaign has generated.

In the formation of that momentum, I believe, Muslims have a significant role to play, not just as Muslims, but more importantly as a momentous gathering integral to progressive fronts joining ranks with equally committed segments of society determined to change the landscape of U.S. politics with wide-ranging global consequences.

(Source: Aljazeera)

Obama: Top Intel official reviewing secret 9/11 material

United States President Barack Obama says the top-ranking U.S. intelligence official is reviewing classified material in a Sept. 11 report that families of attack victims and some lawmakers are demanding be made public.

Several members of the House and Senate, including House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi, have joined 9/11 families in pressuring for declassification of 28 pages that are part of government documents compiled on the 9/11 attack amid speculation of a possible role by the House of Saud regime. Nearly 3,000 people were killed in the attack.

In an interview with CBS's Charlie Rose, Obama was asked if he had read the 28 pages. "I have a sense of what's in there," he replied.

Obama also revealed that James Clapper, director of National Intelligence, "has been going through this" to ensure that whatever is made public does not damage U.S. national security interests.

"My understanding is that he's about to complete that process," the president said.

Former U.S. Sen. Robert Graham, who helped write the report that includes the 28 redacted pages, recently told CBS's "60 Minutes" the secret material could reveal possible Saudi backing for the men who hijacked airplanes, flying two into the World Trade Center in New York and another into the Pentagon. A third hijacked plane crashed on Sept. 11, 2001, in western Pennsylvania.

(Source: AP)

Czech to Support Mining Projects in Iran

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Czech Republic mining sector announced their readiness for banking and insurance support of Iran's Mines and mining industries projects, IMIDRO office of Public Relations reported.

A business delegation from the Czech Republic, mainly the representatives of the country's mining sector headed by Czech's Deputy Foreign Minister Martin Tlapa met with Mehdi Karbasian, chairman of the executive board of Iranian Mines & Mining Industries Development & Renovation (IMIDRO) to explore potential avenues of cooperation.

In this meeting, Tlapa announced his country's readiness to cooperate with Iran's mining sector. In this regard he noted that Czech's industry players are ready to strike deals with their Iranian counterparts with the full support of Czech central bank and Export Guarantee and Insurance Corporation.

Karbasian, for his part, underlined the capabilities of Czech firms in power plant and mining machineries construction sectors as a beginning for cooperation between the two countries and noted, "Financing the projects is very important for us, so Czech firms should consider project financing methods in order to broaden the ties".

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



We do not remember days, we remember moments. Cesare Pavese

LEARN ENGLISH

Learning Fire Safety

The apartment manager asked all of the tenants to come to a short meeting to learn about ***fire safety***. I didn't want to go, but the manager said that there would be free food, and who am I to ***turn down*** free pizza?

Apartment manager: Thank you all for coming to this meeting about fire safety. With the ***rash*** of fires in this neighborhood recently, it seemed like a good idea to talk about fire safety with all of you.

I want to make sure we ***comply*** with the ***fire code***, so I've installed new ***smoke alarms*** or replaced the batteries in the older ones in each apartment and in the hallways. The ***fire escapes*** are in good condition and there are ***fire extinguishers*** in each hallway.

Your job is to keep the inside of your apartments safe. Keep ***flammable*** items away from the fireplace and don't ***overload*** your ***electrical outlets***. Any questions? If not, we're ready for a ***fire drill***.

Nobody told me there would be fire drill. I'm guess I'm ready ***to stop, drop, and roll*** – as long as I can take the pizza with me. (Source: eslpod.com)

Words & phrases

fire safety: set of practices intended to reduce the destruction caused by fire

turn down: to refuse an offer, request, or invitation

rash: a large number of unpleasant events, changes etc. within a short time

comply: to do what you have to do or are asked to do

fire code: set of rules prescribing minimum requirements to prevent fire and explosion hazards arising from storage, handling, or use of dangerous materials, or from other specific hazardous conditions

smoke alarm: a piece of electronic equipment which warns you when there is smoke or fire in a building; smoke detector

fire escape: metal stairs or a metal ladder on the outside of a tall building, that people can use to escape if there is a fire

fire extinguisher: a metal container with water or chemicals in it, used for stopping small fires

flammable: something that is flammable burns easily

overload: to put too much electricity through an electrical system or piece of equipment

electrical outlet: receptacle providing a place in a wiring system where current can be taken to run electrical devices

fire drill: an occasion when people pretend that a building is burning and practice leaving it, so that they learn what to do if there is a real fire

stop, drop, and roll: a simple fire safety technique taught to children, emergency services personnel and industrial workers as a component of health and safety training

QUIZ OF THE DAY

142) One word is missing in the sentence below. Find this word. Young boy finally plucked up courage to invite his beautiful classmate to dinner.

(Quiz No. 141 missing word is: was ***a little*** late)

PHRASAL VERB

Set up

Meaning: start a business

For example: She set up her own company 10 years ago.

ENGLISH PROVERB

A closed mouth catches no flies

Explanation: if you learn when to keep silent you will avoid trouble



Be kind to me!

Iran sets out on bidding farewell to plastic waste

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Saying **d e s k** goodbye to plastic bags is one of the primary objectives of the Department of Environment (DoE) for this year, Saeed Motesaddi, the deputy director of DoE, told a press conference here on Monday.

"Soon we will reveal the details on the incentive, deterrent and punitive measures to promote plastic bags elimination in the country," he added.

He went on to say that "60 percent of the plastic bags we use are unnecessary, besides these plastics sometimes, because of the components plastics are made up of, they turn into carcinogenic materials when we put freshly baked bread into them."

Sadly, 50 percent of the plastic bags are used only once worldwide and 40 percent of the marine species are discovered to swallow the plastic debris, he lamented.

Today using plastic bags is banned in Paris and some international chain stores, he said, adding, "We'd better go back to our long-established and time-honored tradition of using cloth bags."

"We have conducted in depth research



into plastic bags usage, especially in Tehran, which confirms the possibility of plastic

bags deletion in the country," he said, stating "in order to implement this plan many

organizations need to participate and we must make some amendments to the law."

Earth Day 2016: Trees for the Earth

Mentioning to the Earth Day 2016 which will be observed on April 22 and its slogan, "Trees for the Earth", Motesaddi regretted the fact that "in our country we plant plastics instead of trees."

Earth Day is an annual event, celebrated on April 22, on which day events worldwide are held to demonstrate support for environmental protection. It was first celebrated in 1970, and is now coordinated globally by the Earth Day Network, and celebrated in more than 193 countries each year.

13 million hectares of forests are being ruined annually and on this very day "we have to do our best to not let the future generation to see these disasters," he added.

"We are using plastics at an alarming rate, however, decreasing plastic waste is possible and the key is participation of the public and both governing and decision making bodies," he said.

What is required is a firm plan for waste management, he highlighted.



Iranian dentist examines people on the street

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Shafi Ja'fari is a young dentist who visited and examined people around Enqelab square, central Tehran, for three hours on Thursday, ISNA news agency reported.

What Ja'fari, a Tehran University graduate, did, was a symbolic act of criticism centered on the widespread ignorance of prevention.

He explained that "Iranian people often overlook the importance of prevention and regular checkup, so I took my unit to the street to encourage the public to take dental problems serious."

"I usually visit 40 to 50 patients per day and I know from

experience that neither the patients nor the doctors take prevention into account," he lamented.

Ignoring dental problems at the early stages would intensify the disease as well as the expenses, Ja'fari warned, adding, periodical checkups can both prevent serious problems and cut the expenses.

"I chose Enqelab square so I could visit people of different classes and I got a great feedback," he added.

He expressed hope that insurance companies and healthcare providers strive to reconcile people with the concept of prevention particularly in the field of dental care.

Cops: Dad's stranger-danger test scares teens into 911 call

WESTLAKE, Ohio (AP) — A suburban Cleveland man had a friend pose as a threatening ex-convict during a test to see whether his teenagers would let a stranger into their home, prompting them to flee and call 911, police said Friday.

A prosecutor will consider potential child-endangering charges against the adults.

Westlake police said the father "refused to acknowledge the emotional upset he

had caused" and described his 14- and 16-year-old sons' actions as an "epic fail." But officers commended them for barricading themselves in a bedroom, jumping out a second-floor window onto a garage roof and then running to a neighbor's home to call for help.

The stranger showed up at their door Thursday afternoon and was let in by the younger teen, breaking the family rule on admitting only known relatives, police

said. Once inside, the man told the boys that their father owed him money, and he threatened them.

"This guy was crazy. This guy wanted to kill us," the elder son told a dispatcher on the 911 call. "He said, 'If I start chopping up bodies in here, then I'm going to be the bad guy. I just got out of jail two weeks ago.'"

The fake convict, a 45-year-old man from Cleveland Heights, was in contact by

phone with the father during the charade, and when the friend thought things had gone too far and wanted to stop, the father insisted it play out, police said.

One son said in the 911 call that he'd spotted his father's car parked in the street but didn't see him in it. The teen said he thought his father was around the house but wasn't certain, so their instinct was to run away.

(Source: gulfnews.com)

IN FOCUS ISNA/ Hamid Amlashi



On the sidelines of the 5th Symposium of World Federation of Neurosurgical Societies which was held on April 17-22 in Tehran, the statue of Professor Majid Samii was unveiled. Samii is a world renowned neurosurgeon who has been celebrated for his accomplishments on countless occasions.

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Austrian company to build two hospitals in Iran

Austrian VAMED Company has signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran Housing Investment Company to build two hospitals in the cities of Tabriz and Shiraz.

Ali Moqaddaszadeh, the director of Iran Housing Investment Company which is affiliated with Social Security Organization, leading a delegation comprising of business owners of the private sector, signed the MOU in Vienna, Mehr reported. Moqaddaszadeh said that VAMED group (with health services being the field of operation of all its enterprises) committed to build two 320-bed public hospitals in Iran worth 200 million euros.

شرکت اتریشی دو بیمارستان در ایران میسازد

با امضای تفاهم‌نامه میان شرکت اتریشی VAMED و شرکت سرمایه گذاری خانه سازی ایران دو بیمارستان در شهرهای شیراز و تبریز احداث می‌شود. به گزارش خبرگزاری مهر، علی مقدس زاده مدیرعامل شرکت سرمایه گذاری خانه سازی ایران به عنوان یکی از شرکتهای وابسته با سازمان تأمین اجتماعی همراه با هیاتی متشکل از فعالان اقتصادی و بخش خصوصی کشور این تفاهم نامه را در وین امضا کرد. مقدس زاده گفت: شرکت VAMED متعهد شده تا دو بیمارستان دولتی ۳۲۰ تختخوابی در ایران به ارزش تقریبی دویست میلیون یورو بسازد.

3D printer used to create new feet for duck

CEDARBURG, Wis. (AP) — A duck who lost its feet to frostbite is waddling again thanks to a Wisconsin middle school teacher and a 3D printer.

Vicki Rabe-Harrison rescued Phillip the duck and, after watching a video of a 3D printer online, turned to South Park Middle School teacher Jason Jischke in Oshkosh for help.

Rabe-Harrison tells WBAY-TV that she planning to put Phillip down when Jischke called to say his class was working on the project. It took them six weeks to get the prosthetic feet just right.

Phillip was a bit wobbly when he first tested his new feet, but he has now joined other birds and animals at a sanctuary north of Milwaukee. Autumn Farm Sanctuary co-founder Alyssa Herbst says Phillip is getting used to his new feet.

Iranian footballer Mehrdad Oladi dies of cardiac arrest



T I S P O R T S
d e s k
Former Persepolis and Esteghlal striker Mehrdad Oladi passed away at the age of 30 due to cardiac arrest in Shohadaye Tajrish hospital in Tehran on Tuesday.

Reports suggest that Oladi had no sign of life when he was rushed to hospital.

Persepolis manager Branko Ivankovic describes the news as unlivable while other Iranian football characters including Ali Karimi, Parviz Mazloumi, Karim Bagheri, Hamid Derakhshan and Amir Ghalenoei paid tributes to late Oladi and his family in their messages.

His funeral will be held on Thursday and he will be buried in his hometown, Qadi Kola village at Qaem Shahr, North of Iran.

Oladi started his career at Persepolis before moving to Dubai outfit Al-Shabab for one season.

He scored the winning goal in 61st match of Tehran derby on 3 November 2006 against Esteghlal, arch rival of Persepolis.

He joined Esteghlal in 2013 with a one and half year contract. Esteghlal released him at the end of his contract and he joined Malavan.



Parviz Mazloumi to stay Esteghlal coach

T I S P O R T S
d e s k
Parviz Mazloumi will continue his work with Esteghlal coach until the end of the season.

It's been rumored that Mazloumi is on the verge of the sack as Esteghlal coach after suffering defeat in Tehran derby.

Esteghlal lost to bitter rival Persepolis 4-2 on Friday in Iranian Professional League.

With four weeks remaining, Esteghlal is third three points

behind Persepolis at top of IPL.

"We still has chance to win the title. I apologize to all Esteghlal fans but I think if we win all our games we have a chance at title," Mazloumi said.

"I believe that the referee's decision went against us. Esteghlal could have won the match," he added.

Esteghlal will host Foolad in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Friday while Persepolis meet struggling Esteghlal Ahvaz in an away match.

Claudio Ranieri: Leicester City boosted by big clubs' failures

Claudio Ranieri believes Leicester City are Premier League leaders because the top clubs have not played to their potential this season.

Leicester's lead has been cut to five points with four games to go after Tottenham sent out a strong statement with a 4-0 win at Stoke on Monday.

The focus will now return to Ranieri's side, who will take on Swansea at home next Sunday without top scorer Jamie Vardy after he was sent off in the 2-2 draw against West Ham and then charged with improper conduct.

In an interview with France Football published this week, Ranieri acknowledged that Leicester are still in with a chance of winning the league only because other teams have underperformed.

"I think that if Leicester are there, it's also because the big clubs have not given 100 percent until now, for one reason or another," the Foxes manager said.



"Our goal was to stay in the Premier League -- that's done. And now we're fighting for the title. We honestly couldn't have contemplated more than that."

Ranieri said he has been working seven days a week during his time at Leicester but that doing something he loved so much did not feel like a chore.

He also played down the significance of potentially winning a league title after a near miss with Roma and further second-place finishes with Chelsea and Monaco.

"I'm very happy with what I've done," the Italian said. "In fact, two people co-exist inside me. One who says, 'You have to win, you have to win!' And the other that says, 'but look at what you've accomplished!'"

"I've been a manager for 30 years now... I've won third and second division titles, cups. I'm missing the title in the first division of a league."

"Will it happen? I don't know. I'm ambitious. I want this title, but inside me there's this thought that says, 'Claudio, what you've accomplished is no mean feat.'"

(Source: ESPN)

Jose Mourinho still wants Man United job despite PSG reports - sources



Jose Mourinho is still targeting the Manchester United job this summer, sources close to both manager and club have told ESPN FC, despite reports on Tuesday that Paris Saint-Germain had made an official approach.

Mourinho would only consider a move to another club if the Old Trafford job was 100 percent off the table, but many connected to the situation believe it is increasingly likely the former Chelsea manager will be appointed at United to replace Louis van Gaal.

There have already been extensive discussions, while sources told ESPN FC that Mourinho has started reaching out to potential members of his backroom staff, although no contract has been signed yet and the situation remains open.

Mourinho's camp reached out to PSG -- and Inter Milan -- in October when the prospect of him getting sacked by Chelsea first arose, but the latest reports -- which the French club have said "no

comment" to -- are wide of the mark.

Indeed, sources close to PSG say the situation has moved on since then, and there is a willingness to give Laurent Blanc, who signed a new two-year contract in January, at least another season to win the Champions League, despite last week's quarterfinal elimination to Manchester City.

There has been another link between PSG and Mourinho, however, as the Portuguese has expressed approval towards the idea of United signing Zlatan Ibrahimovic on a free transfer in the summer.

The Sweden international would be one of five main first-team signings Mourinho would plan for the Old Trafford club, including two defenders, a commanding midfielder -- with Benfica's Renato Sanches hugely admired -- and a fast winger. The 53-year-old is also a huge admirer of Tottenham's Harry Kane.

(Source: ESPN)

London announces 'world record' ticket prices



Usain Bolt's 100m world record of 9.58 seconds time will be reflected in the price of some children's tickets at next year's IAAF World Championships in London, organizers said on Tuesday.

Announcing its "world record" ticket prices and the race schedule for the Olympic Stadium event from August 4-13, London 2017 chiefs said children's tickets for some sessions will be available for nine pounds 58 pence.

Others will cost 12.91, 18.29 and 52.74 pounds -- reflecting world records set at previous world championships by Britons Colin Jackson (110m hurdles), Jonathan Edwards (triple jump) and Sally Gunnell (400m hurdles).

Jamaican Bolt's time, which has never been lowered, was achieved at the 2009 championships in Berlin.

London 2017 managing director Cherry Alexander said ticket prices had been set to ensure "full venues

with passionate crowds" and that more than 250,000 tickets, a third of the total, would cost 35 pounds or less.

"We want prices to be accessible to the athletics family, all sports fans and new spectators; and we wanted the timetable to allow as many people as possible to attend the biggest sporting event since London 2012," she said.

"I really believe we have achieved this and it is going to be an incredible summer of world athletics."

Organizers said more evening and weekend sessions would make it easier for the public to attend.

"Most sessions during the IAAF World Championships include a final and where possible, medal ceremonies have been scheduled together to enhance spectator experience," a statement said.

(Source: Reuters)

FOOTBALL We'll still win the title, says Barca coach

Barcelona coach Luis Enrique remains convinced his faltering team will end their winless run and retain the La Liga title after seeing their treble dreams dashed.

They have surrendered a nine-point lead over second-placed Atletico Madrid after losing their last three games and are now above them only due to a superior head-to-head record.

Barca, whose defence of their European crown was ended by Atletico in the Champions League quarter-finals last week, are also just one point ahead of Real Madrid.

However, Luis Enrique remained positive before the trip to Deportivo La Coruna on Wednesday, after which they will have just four games left in the title race.

"I'm convinced we're going to win the league, if I wasn't I wouldn't be sitting here," he told a news conference on Tuesday.

"I like adversity, that's how I am. I want to turn this around, win tomorrow and put on a show. I want to delight the fans who are behind us and can't explain this situation."

Luis Enrique did not give any reasons for the dramatic loss of form, which has seen his side go from 39 games unbeaten in all competitions to losing four of their last five games.

"We are on a negative run but we don't need to exaggerate. If it's due to psychology, then we have the best psychologist around (at the club)," he added.

"We're clinging on to our players and their attitude and their way of competing. We have had moments like this before, we know how to cope with pressure. But we're playing against teams that can punish us with few chances."

Luis Enrique was also unapologetic for deriding a reporter who had asked him about the team's fitness levels at a news conference after Sunday's 2-1 home defeat by Valencia.

"I have nothing to apologise for. I didn't show anyone a lack of respect," he said.

"Journalists have also shown me a lack of respect. This is my style, I don't care if you don't like it."

Barcelona, who had hoped to repeat the treble they won last season, will be without influential centre back Gerard Pique at Deportivo through suspension. He is set to be replaced by Marc Bartra, who has made just three league starts this season.

(Source: Reuters)

Zidane: Barca and Atletico still in the driving seat

Zinedine Zidane insists Real Madrid are capable of claiming a Liga and Champions League double, but warned the capital club still have it all to do in a thrilling title race.

Liga champions Barcelona were centering towards the defence of their title, but a shock loss of form has seen Luis Enrique's men lose three consecutive league matches to blow the race wide open.

Second-placed Atletico Madrid are now only behind Barca courtesy of an inferior head-to-head record, while Zidane's men - who, like their city rivals, also have a Champions League semi-final to prepare for - are just a point adrift.

After losing the derby 1-0 to Atleti in February, Zidane claimed that it was not possible for Madrid to win the title, but since then they have won seven straight league matches.

Zidane believes Barca and Atleti are still in the driving seat, but challenged his team to win their remaining five matches to give themselves the best possible chance of a first league title since 2012.

"It's being said that we are going to win everything, and I don't like it at all. We haven't won any title at all yet," Zidane said ahead of Wednesday's contest against Villarreal at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"We are capable of winning both titles, but it doesn't mean anything. We will fight until the last minute and I assure you we will work until the end."

"I think that Barcelona and Atletico can win every game. If we win every game, but Barcelona do it too, we won't be the champions."

"I have always said that we must first move ahead of Atletico. They [Barca] are now tied with Atletico."

Zidane had little interest in discussing Barca's slump, which also included a Champions League quarter-final exit to Atleti, choosing instead to focus on Madrid's ambitions.

"I'm not thinking about that. I think more about what we have to do," he said.

"There are always difficult moments in the season, but that does not mean anything because they are still first. We must continue with the belief we can do something."

"I do not know when I changed my perception [on the title race], but when we lost to Atleti that day it became more complicated."

(Source: Goal)





Poem of the day

O brother, the world remains with no one.
Bind the heart to the Creator, it is enough.

Sadi

Prayer Times

Noon:13:03 Evening: 20:01 Dawn: 4:54 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:24 (tomorrow)

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NEWS

Tehran Symphony Orchestra to take "Neynava" to Shanghai festival

T A R T TEHRAN — The Tehran Symphony Orchestra under the baton of maestro Ali Rahbari will perform Hossein Alizadeh's 1983 hit "Neynava" at the closing ceremony of Shanghai Spring International Music Festival.



Conductor Ali Rahbari acknowledges the audience after the Tehran Symphony Orchestra performed Hossein Alizadeh's 1983 hit "Neynava" during the 31st Fajr International Music Festival at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on February 11, 2016.

The orchestra will also be performing Russian composer Igor Stravinsky's "Fire-bird" and French composer Hector Berlioz's "Symphony Fantastique" at the closing concert, Rahbari told the Persian service of ISNA on Tuesday.

The Shanghai Spring International Music Festival will be held from April 28 to May 18, hosting musicians from 10 different countries including the United States, Germany, Britain, Switzerland and South Korea.

The Tehran Symphony Orchestra opened the 31st Fajr International Music Festival with a performance of Alizadeh's "Neynava" in February 2016.

Ali Rahbari had resigned as the conductor and music director of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra over some differences in March; however, he returned to his job after reaching an agreement with Iranian cultural officials in early April.

According to Rahbari, the support offered by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance has given a spiritual boost to the orchestra.

Musicians from seven countries to perform at Tehran festival

T A R T TEHRAN — Musicians from seven countries will be giving performances during the 1st Tehran Contemporary Music Festival (TCMF), which will be held from April 22 to 29.

The musicians are coming from Norway, Georgia, Poland, Switzerland, Romania, Belgium and the Netherlands, the festival's advisor in international affairs, Hossein Sadri, said in a press conference held Tuesday at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

He added that a number of Iranian and foreign scholars will be delivering lectures at the Iranian Artists Forum, calling it a good program for music students and researchers.

Rezo Kiknadze, Rector of Tbilisi State Conservatoire is among the musicians who will be delivering lectures along with some of the Iranian musicians including Nader Mashayekhi and Mohammad Sarir.

Established by the Contemporary Music Circle, the festival aims to introduce works by Iranian composers that are being performed in international festivals by world musicians, Navid Gohari, the artistic director of the festival said.

He explained that the participating musicians from Iran and other countries will be performing works by world composers, that is, Iranian musicians will be performing works by Iranian and foreign composers, and the foreign ensembles will also be performing works from the Iranian and world composers.

Rudaki Hall, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art and the Iranian Artists Forum will be hosting the event, he added.

NEWS IN BRIEF



TMCA to spotlight French New Wave cinema

T A R T TEHRAN — The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA) in collaboration with the French Embassy plans to discuss the French New Wave cinema during a four-day program, which will open on April 23.

TMCA Director Majid Mollanoruzi, French Ambassador M. Bernard Poletti and some Iranian cineastes are scheduled to attend the opening ceremony.

The lineup composed of six movies includes Leos Carax's crime drama "Mauvais Sang" (Bad Blood), which is about Alex, a young Simian card hustler who is coaxed into a heist after his father is murdered.

The movies will go on screen with Persian subtitles, and review sessions will also be organized.

Fajr festival showcasing bright lineup of world cinema

Eastern Vista highlighting films from Asian, Muslim nations

This year's Eastern Vista, a section dedicated to films from Asian and Muslim nations, will screen fifteen movies, including "Solomon" by Zaza Khalvashi from Georgia and "My Sister, the Pig Lady" by Jang Moon-il from South Korea.

The organizers will also screen a variety of films, namely "The Assassin", a martial arts drama by Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-Hsien and "Lamb" by American director Ross Partridge, in some none-competitive sections.

Review of Iranian New Wave cinema

Iran's New Wave cinema will be reviewed by screening a restored version of veteran director Dariush Mehrjui's 1969 highly acclaimed drama "The Cow" today.

The film starring Ezzatollah Entezami won the International Federation of Film Critics (FIPRESCI) Prize of the Venice Film Festival in 1971. It was the first award the Iranian motion picture industry ever received in an international event.

French cinema under spotlight

As one of its side section programs, the festival plans to organize a review of the French motion picture industry, screening six movies by the country's prominent filmmakers.

The biographical drama "Anton Tchekhov 1890" by Rene Feret, the crime thriller film "Rabid Dogs" by Eric Hannezo and the computer animated fantasy film "The Little Prince" by Mark Osborne are among the films.

Workshops by top Iranian cineastes

A number of top Iranian cineastes such as Oscar-winning director Asghar Farhadi and Oscar-nominated filmmaker Majid Majidi are scheduled to hold a



A poster for the 34th Fajr International Film Festival

series of workshops on the sidelines of the festival.

Workshops will also be set up by cinematographer Mahmud Kalari, and directors Fereidun Jeirani, Farzad Motamen, Puran Derakhshandeh, Alireza Davudnejad and Majid Barzegar.

Over 100 students from Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, Azerbaijan and Iran have registered for the six-day workshop program entitled "Dar ul-Funun", the name of the Iranian polytechnic established in 1851.

Iranian films for sale

Over 30 films from latest Iranian productions and

dozens of animated movies are on display by various Iranian distributors at the Iranian Film Market, which is underway on the sidelines of the event.

Among the highlights of the market are "Life+1 Day" directed by Saeid Rustai, "Standing in the Dust" by Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian, "Fury and Furor" by Hooman Seyyedi, "Breath" by Narges Abyar and "Muhammad (S), the Messenger of God" by Majid Majidi.

About 150 international distributors, directors, actors and critics from around the globe have been invited to attend the event, which will run until April 25.

"Breath" tells of children's hopes, dreams shattered in war

T A R T TEHRAN — "Breath" is competing in the 34th Fajr International Film Festival, which opens today at Tehran's Charsu Cineplex. It is also scheduled to be screened today at the Iranian Film Market on the sidelines of the event.

Bahar in the film represents about 3000 children killed during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, which is called the Sacred Defense in Iran.

Abyar, who wrote the screenplay based on her novel of the same title, called the film unique in subject and said that Iranian cinema has been silent on the subject of the children killed in the war so far.

"Many innocent children were killed in the war, but our films have not dealt with the subject," she stated.

Certain people have accused Abyar and producer Mohammad-Hossein Qasemi, who is also her husband, of undermining the Sacred Defense by this film and their previous movie "Track 143", which is about the great maternal sacrifice in the war.

Abyar said that she does not understand the reasons behind their objections and added, "A country, a dictator imposed



Sareh Nur-Musavi acts in a scene from "Breath".

the war on us at that time, and we defended ourselves. Now, we should show the trauma and the upshot of that aggression."

"Our country has always been accused of warmongering, while we ourselves are

a victim of others' warmongering attitudes and my film expresses this fact," she noted.

She said that the objections will never make her cautious about selecting subjects for her next films.

The "Breath" production crew spent months looking for the children starring the film and finally, Sareh Nur-Musavi, who portrays Bahar, and three other children were selected from among about 2000 people who did auditions for the project.

Abyar described working with children as "a difficult and simultaneously sweet experience" and said that she is satisfied with her choice.

"Children have certain abilities, which may help a filmmaker get brilliant acting from them," she said.

To picture Bahar's imagination and dreams, Abyar used 2D animations directed by Hossein Jamshidi-Gohari and Amin Haqshenas.

"We used simple animated pictures to get really close to children's imaginations, their world, and the paintings they draw," Abyar said.

"Breath" won the Golden Simorgh for Best Film with National View at the 34th Fajr Film Festival held in Tehran during February.

The film also brought Shabnam Moqaddami the Crystal Simorgh for best supporting actress.

PICTURE OF THE DAY

Fars/Soheil Sahranavard



Members of director Soroush Taheri's troupe perform a new adaptation of Victor Hugo's "Les Misérables" at the Nazerzadeh Kermani Hall of the Iranshahr Theater Complex in Tehran on April 17, 2016. The play will run until May 4.

"Buried Secret" revealed in Tehran

T A R T TEHRAN — "The Buried Secret", an Iranian-Lebanese joint production featuring the struggle of a mother during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, was reviewed at a meeting in Tehran on Monday.

The meeting was held after a screening of the movie at the former United States embassy in Tehran, the Persian service of ISNA reported on Tuesday.

Iranian director Ali Ghaffari, producer Morteza Shoeibi and a number of film critics attended the meeting.

"The film, with an entire cast of Lebanese, was shot in Lebanon with the aim to be screened in the Arab-speaking countries of Lebanon, Egypt and Syria," Ghaffari said.

Shoeibi also noted that the film has been made based on a true story, aiming to depict the pain of those mothers who suffered over the loss of their sons.

The film is due to have a public screening within the next few months, he added.

Amer Kalakish, also known of Abu Zeinab, was a resistance fighter who died during an operation against an Israeli convoy in 1985. His operation killed 12 troopers in the Israeli occupation forces and wounded 14 others.

Carmen Lebbos, Ammar Chalak and Yussef Haddad are among the main cast members.