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"Salesman", "Muhammad" to compete in Busan filmfest

TT ART desk **TEHRAN** — Majid Majidi's epic "Muhammad (S), the Messenger of God" and Asghar Farhadi's drama "The Salesman" are in a lineup of Iranian films that will compete in the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) from October 6 to 15.

"Qashang and Faranag" by Vahid Musaian, "Malaria" by Parviz Shahbazi, "The Reward" by Kamal Tabrizi, "The Dream of Water" by Farhad Mehranfar and "Violinist" by Mohammad-Ali Talebi are other Iranian films, which are scheduled to be screened in "A Window on Asian Cinema", a section dedicated for Asian films, the organizers have announced.

56 Asian productions will be competing in this section.

In addition, "Parting", an Iran-Afghanistan coproduction by Navid Mahmudi, is an entry in the New Currents category, competing with 10 other movies.

Moreover, cinematographer Mahmud Kalari is among the jury members presided over by Souleymane Cisse, the most influential living African director from Mali.

Organizers have also arranged a retrospective of works by Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami.

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Leader urges international investigation into Hajj tragedy

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, in a meeting on Wednesday with the families of martyrs of (the 2015) Mina and Grand Mosque mishaps, said the dawdling and incompetence of the Al Saud in this incident proved once more the ineptitude of this accursed wicked tree in administering and managing the Two Holy Mosques' affairs.

See page 2

khamenei.ir

Iran's 5-month steel exports up 51% yr/yr

TT ECONOMY desk **TEHRAN** — Iran's exports of steel ingots and steel products experienced a 51 percent hike in the first five months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-August 21) compared to the same period of time in the past year, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

According to the report, steel ingots and steel products exports in the said period reached 2.31 million tons, registering a 51 percent rise from 1.52 million tons during the same time in the preceding year.

As the World Steel Association (WSA) reported, Iran produced 1.351 million tons of crude steel in July 2016, with 6.2 percent rise from 1.273 million tons in the same month in the previous year.

According to the WSA's latest report, the country stood at the 14th place among top world's steel producers in July, falling from its rank of 13th in the two preceding months.

The country's steel production stood at 16.110 million tons in 2015, indicating 1.4 percent fall from 2014.

As a major steel producer in the region, Iran boosted its steel mills across the country in recent years, as central Isfahan and southwestern Khuzestan provinces remain the major steel producers.

According to WSA, Iran was the biggest producer of crude steel in the Middle East in 2013. The country's rank was 14th in the world in 2014.

Saipa, Kia Motors to finalize talks next week

TT ECONOMY desk **TEHRAN** — Iran's Saipa Group CEO and Executive Member of the Board Mehdi Jamali said on Tuesday that negotiations with Nissan and Kia Motors are underway and those with the South Korean car manufacturer will be concluded by the next week.

According to IRNA, Jamali, addressing a ceremony, told reporters that Saipa has expansion of cooperation with prominent foreign carmakers, including Citroen and Renault, on its agenda.

"Saipa is set to increase its production capacity up to 1.5 million cars per year by 2024," he added, "50 percent of which will be manufactured domestically and the rest via making joint ventures with foreigners."

Iranian filmmaker completes doc on Mina disaster

TT ART desk **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Forud Avazpur has made a documentary on the Mina disaster, a tragedy in which over 400 Iranian pilgrims lost their lives in Mina area, near Mecca in September 2015.

The film titled "Shortness of Breath" is about 25 couples that left Iran for the Hajj ritual in 2015, but the women returned home alone after losing their spouses in the Mina disaster.

Avazpur has submitted "Shortness of Breath" to the 10th Cinema Verite, Iran's major international festival for documentary films, which will be held in Tehran from December 4 to 11.

At least 460 Iranians were among thousands of pilgrims who died on September 24, 2015 in a stampede that broke out in Mina during the Hajj ritual.

The crush was the deadliest disaster in the history of Hajj pilgrimage.

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TEHRAN TIMES

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18th Khwarizmi Youth Festival begins

TT SOCIETY desk **TEHRAN** — The 18th Khwarizmi Youth Festival opened on Wednesday with 500 participants from across the country at Shahid Rajaee Teacher Training University in Tehran, IRIB reported.

Some 383 innovations and inventions in various fields of science and technology will be showcased during this event.

Students will vie with each other in four main categories of basic sciences, technologies, arts and architecture, and agriculture, the event's presiding juror Hamidreza Azemati said.

In addition to financial aids and university admissions given to award winners, 32 prize winning ideas will be commercialized, he added.

The Khwarizmi International Award (KIA)

which was named in memory of Abu Ja'far Mohammad Ibn Mousa Khwarizmi, the great Iranian mathematician and astronomer (770-840 C.E), is given annually by the Iranian Research Organization for Science and Technology (IROST) to individuals who have made outstanding achievements in research, innovation and invention, in fields related to science and technology.

The first session of the Khwarizmi award ceremony which was held in 1987, was only for Iranian nationals, but from the fifth session it became an international award. From the 10th KIA Session, International Organizations such as WIPO, UNESCO, IFIA, COMSTECH, COMSATS, TWAS, ISESCO and WAITRO sponsored the KIA.

On the other hand Khwarizmi Youth Award is a national version of Khwarizmi International Award which only Iranians who are less than 30 years old can participate. This award started in 1999.

Letter to President Rouhani:

Please save the Asiatic Cheetahs from extinction

Iranian Cheetah Society (ICS) has launched a campaign to save the remaining Asiatic cheetahs in Iran's nature. The following is this NGO's letter to President of the Islamic Republic of Iran;

In the name of God

From: the People of Iran

To: Dr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and President of Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution

Your Excellency, as you know, the Asiatic cheetah is in great danger of extinction. The cheetahs have lost most of their population and also their distribution range in the continents of Africa and Asia. Iran has been the last refuge of the Asiatic cheetah in Asia for years.

The last remnants of the Asiatic cheetahs, which might be about 40 individuals most optimistically, are grappling with different problems. Getting killed in car accidents on the roads and also by herds' dogs, extensive destruction of habitat by building mines and roads, poaching, illegal hunting of their prey, destruction and insecurity of pastures due to irregular and unauthorized grazing of livestock, and insecurity of cheetahs' migration paths are some of the Asiatic cheetahs' problems in their natural habitats. In such circumstances, the conservation of cheetahs is beyond the control of an organization or an institution, therefore, cross-sectoral contribution and public help are needed to provide all the technical, social, economic and legal infrastructures.

Unfortunately, recent scientific surveys conducted over the past two years show a sharp decline in the number of female cheetahs; as of now, only two females have been spotted across Iran. In this situation, conservation efforts needs to be expended immediately; otherwise, the Asiatic cheetah is going to go extinct at the end of the present decade of the Iranian calendar. The proposed conservation efforts are listed as following:

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The Republic of Korea supports protection and humanitarian assistance to Afghan refugee girls in Iran

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of the Republic of Korea has reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Afghan refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran through the signing of a new Letter of Understanding with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Iran on Monday 5 September 2016.

MOFA of the Republic of Korea will provide a voluntary financial contribution of 6 million US dollars (USD 6,000,000) to the UNHCR project "Protection and Humanitarian Assistance to Afghan refugee Girls in Iran". In collaboration with the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants Affairs (BAFIA) of the Ministry of Interior of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, this generous contribution will support UNHCR's humanitarian activities for refugee girls in Iran by improving their health status and self-reliance, and through ensuring their optimal access to education and sustainable livelihoods.

The objectives of this project will be achieved through a variety of activities including:

- Supporting the Universal Public Health Insurance Scheme
- Providing assistance to maintain health facilities
- Constructing or renovating schools
- Supporting the provision of literacy courses
- Procuring and distributing hygiene kits
- Procuring and distributing sanitary kits
- Providing business training to establish home-based enterprises
- Providing formal vocational training

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PERSPECTIVE

By: Lachin Rezaian

journalist

Al Saud's black history to exclude Iranians from divine duty of Hajj

Almost one year has now passed since the horrifying events in Mina which left thousands of pilgrims dead including many Iranians.

The Hajj is among the five pillars of Islam, and any Muslim who can afford it must perform it at least once in a lifetime. During the month of the Hajj, Mecca must cope with as many as three million pilgrims.

One of the world's largest annual gatherings of people, Hajj, for years was marred by numerous deadly stampedes, fires, protests and riots due to failures of crowd control.

Despite many years of experience in managing massive crowds, there are still signs that the Saudi government has been negligent in its duty to protect the people within its borders. Saudi Arabia has failed to utilize lessons from previous disasters to reduce or eliminate future consequences. A failure which has cost many faithful believers, particularly in Iran, the right and opportunity to fulfill their religious duty.

Iranian pilgrims' absence is truly felt in the Hajj this year; this is the second time that Iranians are deprived of traveling to Mecca to take part in the annual Muslim Hajj pilgrimage after Riyadh failed to address the Islamic Republic's concerns regarding the safety and dignity of the Iranian nationals participating in the Hajj pilgrimage.

What made 2015 Hajj turn into a tragic event for Iran was a host of incidents happening during Hajj ceremony and affected both Lesser and Greater Hajj pilgrimage by Iranian pilgrims.

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(See the news story "FAO launches four-year holistic program to save Urmia Lake" on page 12)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

Border guards kill 10 terrorists in western Iran

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Ten terrorists of the outlawed Democrat Party were killed in armed clashes with the Iranian border guards in the western province of Kurdistan.

The terrorists who were trying to sneak into the country through the western Iranian borders in Baneh and Khalfi in the Sardasht region, sought to foment insecurity in Iran's Kurdistan province, Fars reported.

Iran sends its largest ever flotilla to free waters

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** The Iranian Navy on Wednesday dispatched its largest ever flotilla of warships, consisting of four warships, to the high seas to safeguard maritime routes used by Iranian vessels in international waters.

The 43rd fleet of warships consists of the logistic warships Lavan, Falakhan, and Khanjar, equipped with missile-launchers, as well as the troop-carrier Konarak and the home-made SH helicopter, Mehr reported.

'Parliamentary ties with France can stimulate cooperation'

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** The special aide to Majlis speaker for international affairs met with French Parliamentarian Gerard Babet in Tehran on Tuesday night."Iran-France parliamentary relations can cause dynamism and vibrancy in the two countries' relations," Hossein Amir Abdollahian said in the meeting, IRNA reported.

The aide criticized dividing terrorists into good and bad and said, "Terrorism has targeted everyone and there is no good terrorism and this word is a security joke." Babet, for his part, appreciated Iran's logical stance in fighting terrorism and its attempts to bring about political settlements to regional crises.

Iran to sue nuclear hackers at international courts

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** The Islamic Republic is going to take the case of cyber-attacks on its nuclear facilities to relevant domestic and international courts, Deputy Prosecutor General Abdolsamad Khorramabadi announced on Wednesday.

Khorramabadi said the move relies on Article 290 of the Iranian Penal Code, according to which the prosecutor general's office has asked the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran to cooperate with the Foreign Ministry to pursue the case, Asriran reported.

Arab media: Iranian, Syrian commanders mull major offensive against militants

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Arab media outlets have claimed that Iran's IRGC Qods Force chief Major General Qassem Soleimani is in southern Aleppo in order to discuss an upcoming large-scale offensive against militants with Syrian Army commanders.

Al-Masdar said in a report on Wednesday that Soleimani has had a number of meetings with high-ranking Syrian army officials and commanders on Tuesday, including Major Duraid Abu Ammar of the Syrian Army's "Tiger Forces".

Notimex director visits Atomic Energy Organization

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Alejandro Ramos Esquivel, the director-general of the official Mexican news agency (Notimex), visited the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) on Wednesday.In his visit to the Tehran research reactor facilities, Alejandro Ramos Esquivel was introduced to Iran's peaceful nuclear program and its progresses.

In an earlier meeting with spokesman of the Supreme National Security Council Keyvan Khosravi, Alejandro Ramos Esquivel described his visit to Iran as very positive and applauded the country's efforts in breaking Western governments' monopoly on news broadcasting.

French parliament speaker warns of JCPOA breach

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** President of French National Assembly Claude Bartolone has cautioned against "serious problems" to arise from lack of commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), commonly known as the nuclear deal.The JCPOA is a substantial agreement which its improper implementation will create serious problems in the world, Bartolone said at a meeting with an Iranian parliamentarian in Tehran on Wednesday, Tasnim reported.

Riyadh makes rude remarks against Iran for Hajj inquiry

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** A top Saudi cleric is revving up the kingdom's rhetoric against Iran, saying in comments published on Tuesday that Tehran's leaders are "not Muslims," in response to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's Hajj message released on Monday.

The remarks by Grand Mufti Abdulaziz Al Sheikh came a day after Ayatollah Khamenei said, "The heartless and murderous Saudis locked up the injured with the dead (after the Mina stampede) in containers- instead of providing medical treatment and helping them or at least quenching their thirst. They murdered them."

Over 460 Iranians were among the hundreds of pilgrims who died in a stampede on September 24, 2015, that occurred in Mina, near Mecca, during the annual Hajj pilgrimage. The incident marked the worst tragedy that has happened during Hajj.

The Islamic Republic announced on May 29 that it won't dispatch pilgrims this year to Mecca due to Riyadh's failure to address Tehran's concerns regarding the safety of the pilgrims.

Instead of answering calls from Tehran to provide technical explanations about the tragedy and redeem the bloods of the victims, the Saudi cleric said Iranians are descendants of "Majuws"— a term that refers to Zoroastrians and those who worship fire.

Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion predating Christianity and Islam and was the dominant religion in Persia before the Arab conquest.

"We must understand they are not Muslims, for they are the descendants of Majuws, and their enmity toward Muslims, especially the Sunnis, is very old," the Saudi cleric said.

Ayatollah says Riyadh venting political rage

Top Iranian cleric Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi on Wednesday said Saudi Arabia's rejection of Iranian pilgrims this year is "politically motivated".

The ayatollah said Riyadh's negative approach to Iranian pilgrims is partly aggravated by the fact that the Saudis were disappointed with the course of political developments in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria.

Iran will never overlook Mina tragedy: Rouhani

President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that Iran will never give up on restoring the rights of the victims of the Mina tragedy, IRNA reported.

Addressing a cabinet meeting, Rouhani stressed that the Islamic Republic will not disregard the crush that claimed the lives of thousands of pilgrims.

The president said his administration will pursue the country's rights regarding the fatal crush of Hajj pilgrims in Saudi Arabia through legal and political channels.

He also urged the Muslim world in general and regional countries in particular to put in a great deal of effort to resolve the problems caused by the Saudi regime regarding Hajj pilgrimage.

The president further said the Hajj period should be regarded as a chance to restore unity among Muslim countries, whereas it is used to hurt the dignity of Muslims.

Islam of Iranians different from what Wahhabi cleric preaches: Zarif

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said that Islam of Iranians is different from what the top Wahhabi cleric is preaching.

"Indeed; no resemblance between Islam of Iranians and most Muslims and bigoted extremism that Wahhabi top cleric & Saudi terror masters preach," Zarif tweeted on Tuesday.

Zarif's remarks came as Abdul Aziz Al Sheikh, the top Wahhabi cleric, said that Iranians are "not Muslims".

The Saudi Mufti comments were made after Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei issued an important statement on Monday suggesting that the Islamic world must fundamentally reconsider the management of hajj due to "Saudi rulers' oppressive behavior towards God's guests".

At least 769 people were killed in a stampede at the holiest Muslim pilgrimage site on September 24 last year. Among the dead were 464 Iranians.

Saudis refuse to accept responsibility for Mina tragedy, Iran says

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Tuesday that the Saudi rulers refuse to accept responsibility for the last year's Mina tragedy, insisting that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef should be liable to the bereaved people of the incident.

In the stampede in Mina on September 24, 2015, 464 Iranian pilgrims lost their lives. The incident happened as families were preparing to receive their dear ones after a month.

"The Saudi crown prince who highlights the necessity of maintaining security during Hajj should remember his government's inability to establish security in the last year's Hajj and be liable to the bereaved nations of the painful Mina incident," ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi stated.

The Saudis keep accusing Iran of politicizing Hajj pilgrimage to avoid accepting responsibility for the incident, he lamented.

Tehran against all sorts of separatism: Velayati

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Iran is against all sorts of separatism since they blow the furnace of war and harm global peace, Ali Akbar Velayati, senior foreign policy advisor to the Supreme Leader, said on Wednesday.

Speaking during a meeting with President of the French National Assembly Claude Bartolone in Tehran, he said Iran and France can help end the conflicts in the Middle East region through cooperation.

"We are on the belief that France should have its own independent policies in the region and we are ready to help in this respect based on maintaining the other countries' territorial integrity."

Velayati also praised the growing ties between Iran and France.

For his part, Bartolone said the nuclear agreement between Iran and the 5+1 group (the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia plus Germany) helped Tehran to improve its relations with the outside world.

Iran and the six major powers reached a nuclear agreement in July 2015 which took effect in January 2016.

'Unanimous standard required to fight terrorism'

During a joint press conference with the French official, Velayati said that a "unanimous standard is required to fight terrorism".

He said that the two countries share common views on countering terrorism.

Velayati also expressed hope that the relations between the two countries would be expanded in various areas.

Elsewhere, Velayati said that Iran's Foreign Ministry will pursue the issue of the Mina incident.

In a stampede at the holiest Muslim pilgrimage site on September 24 last year 464 Iranians were killed.

Spokesman: Salehi to visit Belgium next week

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) will visit Brussels early next week, AEOI spokesman Behrooz Kamalvandi said on Wednesday.

Ali Akbar Salehi will hold talks with officials from the European Union's Directorate-General for Energy, discuss Iran's nuclear cooperation with the EU within the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the spokesman explained.

Kamalvandi added that Salehi may visit another country as well, but did not provide any further details.Referring to follow-ups to the JCPOA, he said the upcoming joint committee meeting on the JCPOA implementation will be held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.

He also commented on a contract with Russia to build two nuclear power plants in southern Iran, saying the bricklaying of the power plants will be held on Saturday in Bushehr with Iranian and Russian representatives in attendance.

Leader urges international investigation into Hajj tragedy

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Ayatollah Khamenei noted: "If they are telling the truth and are innocent in this incident, they must let an Islamic-international fact-finding committee investigate the realities of the issue on the ground and shed light [on them]."

Ayatollah Khamenei said the meeting with the families of the martyrs of Mina and Grand Mosque tragedies was reminiscent of last year's painful events, adding: "The Mina incident and the [ensuing] deaths of worshipping Iranian Hajj pilgrims with thirsty lips and under searing sun were deeply grievous and unforgettable. Of course this incident has a variety of aspects and incorporates enlightening points from political, social, moral and religious standpoints, which must not be driven into oblivion."

"Last year, it was very difficult and shocking for families to digest the news of the death of their beloved ones and the repatriation of their bodies, but in exchange for this tragedy, paying attention to the fact that those beloved ones, like martyrs, are under the auspices of divine forgiveness, compassion and blessing could give cause for comfort and serenity," said the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Khamenei then referred to the martyrdom of some 7,000 pilgrims of the House of God at the Mina incident, strongly criticizing the silence of countries and governments vis-à-vis this awful and tragic mishap.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution described the silence of governments and even scholars, political activists, intellectuals and elites in the Muslim world on the martyrdom of 7,000 innocent pilgrims as the "great calamity for the Islamic Ummah", adding: "Lack of sensitivity vis-à-vis such issues as the heartrending and sorrowful Mina incident is what makes the real tragedy for the Muslim world."

Ayatollah Khamenei said the Saudi rulers' refusal to offer a simple verbal apology was indicative of their ultimate impudence and shamelessness, adding: "Even if there was no premeditation [in the Mina deadly crush] so much lack of foresight and incompetence in a governing and political system would amount to an offense."

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution continued his address by posing an important question: "When a regime fails even to manage the guests of God, while earning revenues too, how could it guarantee that under similar circumstances incidents like the Mina [crush] would not happen (again)?"

Ayatollah Khamenei said: "The Iranian nation is standing courageously against Al Saud's ignorance and misguidance and expresses its Quranic and rightful positions clearly and honorably and other nations and countries must also hold the Saudis accountable courageously."

"The incompetence of the Saudis and the insecurity imposed by them against the Hajj pilgrims to the House of God indeed demonstrated that this government is not qualified to manage the Two Holy Mosques and this reality must be spread in the Muslim world and be understood," said the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

Ayatollah Khamenei said another aspect in the Mina incident was the deadly silence of the self-declared advocates of human rights.

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution referred to the political propaganda campaign launched by the so-called human rights bodies regarding the execution of judicial sentences in some countries, saying: "Dead silence vis-à-vis a government's dawdling in fulfilling its tasks and the deaths of 7,000 oppressed and innocent human beings laid bare the fake identity of the self-declared advocates of human rights and those who pin hopes on international bodies and organizations must learn a lesson from this bitter reality."

Ayatollah Khamenei said formation of a fact-finding committee was an obligation and a must for Muslim countries and human rights advocates, adding: "Although one year has passed since that poignant incident, an examination of ocular, recorded written documents would largely shed light on the realities behind the event."

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution called on Iranian officials to seriously follow up on the formation of a fact-finding committee, adding: "If Al Saud is assured of its own alleged innocence in the Mina incident, it should not gag mouths with money and let a fact-finding committee closely pursue the issue."

In another part of his speech, Ayatollah Khamenei labeled supporters of the Saudi regime as complicit to the crimes of this regime in the Mina tragedy, saying: "Backed by the US, the shameless Saudi regime is impudently standing against Muslims and spilling blood in Yemen, Syria and Iraq. Therefore, the US and other supporters of Riyadh are complicit in the Saudis' wrongdoing and crimes."

Ayatollah Khamenei referred to attempts by foreign-backed propaganda organs to describe the Mina crime as an example of "Shia-Sunni" or "Arab and non-Arab" dispute and conflict, adding: "The propagandists supporting the Saudi rulers are repeating this sheer lie while most of the 7,000 Mina martyrs, including a large number of Iranian martyrs, were Sunnis."

"Al Saud and murderous terrorists nurtured and groomed by them are killing people in Yemen and Syria and Iraq. Therefore, despite mischievous propaganda by Western governments, the Saudis are not supporting Arabs and the Mina incident has nothing to do with the media-fabricated conflict between Arabs and non-Arabs," added the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.

"The fact of the matter is that the detested Saudis constitute a group in the Muslim world, some of whom knowingly and some unknowingly, are practicing enmity with Muslims, and the Muslim world must stand against them and disavow the masters of Saudis, i.e. the US and wicked Britain," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

Concluding his remarks, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution called on different Iranian organs including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Hajj Mission, the Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization and the Foundation of Martyrs and War Veterans to fulfill and seriously pursue their assignments vis-à-vis the massive tragic incident of Mina.

(Source: leader.ir)

Turkey says ready to help any U.S. initiative to capture Raqqa

Turkey would be ready to join any initiative proposed by the United States to capture an Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group stronghold in Syria, Turkihsh President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in remarks published on Wednesday, as Turkish-backed forces took more Syrian land from the terrorists.

The United States President Barack Obama floated the idea of joint action with Turkey to capture Raqqa during talks between the two leaders at a G20 summit in China, Erdogan said, according to Wednesday's edition of Turkey's Hurriyet daily. Turkey launched an offensive in northern Syria on Aug. 24 claiming to clear ISIL from its border and to prevent territorial gains by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/Yekîneyên Parastina Gel), which Ankara believes has links to Kurdish insurgents fighting on its soil.

"Obama wants to do some things together concerning Raqqa in particular," Erdogan told reporters on his plane that arrived early on Tuesday, referring to ISIL's de facto capital. He was speaking after meetings in China with Obama, Russian President Vladimir Putin and other world leaders.

"We stated that would not be a problem from our perspective. We said, 'Let our soldiers come together, whatever is necessary will be done'," the Turkish president said, adding that a specific Turkish

role would depend on further talks.

U.S. officials have welcomed Turkish efforts to dislodge ISIL from Syrian strongholds but voiced concern when Turkish troops engaged fighters aligned to the YPG, a force Washington sees as a valuable ally in battling the extremists.

Turkish-backed forces clashed with YPG fighters in the initial stages of the two-week old Turkish incursion into Syria, but have since shifted their focus onto territory held by ISIL and captured a string of villages.

Turkey's military said late on Tuesday that three Turkish soldiers were killed when two tanks were hit by rockets fired by the ISIL terrorists. Four others were wounded, it said.

The military also said the Free Syrian Army (FSA), a loose-knit rebel force backed by Turkey, had taken six more villages, also located in ISIL-held areas.

Turkey and its rebel allies now control a 90-km stretch of land on the Syrian side of the border and are pushing south.

Ankara wants international support to take control of a rectangle of territory stretching about 40 km into Syria, creating a buffer between two Kurdish-held cantons to the east and west and against the ISIL to the south.

Turkey says such a "safe zone" would help stem the flood of Syrian refugees. But the idea has yet to gain traction from the United States and Russia, both engaged in Syria, because of the military demands of policing such a zone.

Turkey, meanwhile, has been sending more military hardware south. The army sent 15 more tanks to the Islahiye district near the border, bringing the total number of tanks and armored vehicles in that area to 90, Dogan news agency reported.

"We do not have the chance to take a backward step. If we take a backward step terror groups like Daesh (ISIL), PKK, PYD and YPG will settle there," Erdogan said, according to Hurriyet.

Daesh is another term for ISIL, while the PYD (Democratic Union Party/Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat)? is the political wing of Kurdish YPG militia, which Ankara says is an extension of Turkey's outlawed PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê), a Kurdish militant group that is fighting for autonomy in Turkey's southeast.

(Source: Reuters)

Yemeni forces seize villages in southwestern Saudi Arabia

Yemeni forces have reportedly seized two villages in Saudi Arabia's southwestern border province of Jizan amid Riyadh's relentless military aggression against Yemen.

On Wednesday, Yemeni forces gained control over the al-Qarn and Dafinah villages in al-Khobe district, located 967 kilometers (601 miles) southwest of Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh, following fierce exchanges of gunfire with Saudi troops there, al-Masirah reported.

Tens of Saudi soldiers lost their lives during the bloody clashes, and scores of others sustained gunshot wounds.

A military source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Saudi fighter jets carried out a raft of airstrikes against the positions of the Yemeni forces in the villages as part of attempts to retake them.

Yemeni forces have stepped up their retaliatory strikes against the House of Saud regime in response to the intensification of the military campaign by Riyadh.

On Tuesday, Yemeni snipers fatally shot a Saudi soldier in the vicinity of a dam located about 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) southwest of Najran.

Fighters from Popular Committees, who are fighting alongside the Yemeni army against the Saudi invaders, also engaged Saudi forces in an area of the al-Khobe district, killing five soldiers.

Separately, Yemeni army units fired several Katyusha rockets at al-Shorfa al-Fawaz, al-Sadis and al-Homar military camps in Najran. However, there were no reports about possible casualties and the extent of damage caused.

The regular Yemeni army forces and the Popular Committees also fired a missile at an electrical substation in the Dhahran district of Saudi Arabia's southwestern region of Asir on Tuesday.

The projectile caused a raging fire in the substation, and gutted six military vehicles parked there.

According to Yemeni local media, more than 65 Saudi soldiers lost their lives as a result of joint attacks by Yemeni army units and Popular Committees last month.

Moreover, Yemeni army soldiers attacked militiamen loyal to Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi — who has resigned as Yemen's president — in the Khabb wa ash Sha'af district of Yemen's northern province of al-Jawf, leaving eight people dead.

The House of Saud regime has been incessantly pounding Yemen since March 2015, with the United Nations putting the death toll from the military aggression at about 10,000. The offensive was launched to restore Hadi to power.

On Wednesday, Saudi fighter jets struck the Razih district in Yemen's northwestern province of Sa'ada, leaving a child dead and six others injured.

Saudi military aircraft also carried out three airstrikes against the Baqim district, and bombarded a school in the Sahar district of the same Yemeni province. No possible casualties and damage were reported.

Four civilians sustained injuries when Saudi warplanes pounded the Fisheries Building in the southern Yemeni port city of Mokha, situated 346 kilometers (214 miles) south of the capital, Sana'a.

(Source: Press TV)

UNICEF: 50 million children uprooted by crises

War and poverty have forced 50 million children around the world from their homes, according to UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund).

Up to 28 million of the children have been uprooted by violent conflict, with nearly as many abandoning their homes in search of a better life, says a report released by the United Nations agency.

The report, entitled Uprooted: The Growing Crisis for Refugee and Migrant Children, also says that the number of child refugees has more than doubled in the past 10 years from four million to 8.2 million.

UNICEF describes the children as some of the most vulnerable people on earth and gives warning that if governments do not act, the numbers are likely to grow.

Whether it is from war, violence, poverty or climate change, the youngsters have been uprooted by crises they are not responsible for, or have little influence over, says UNICEF.

The report, published on Tuesday, says that children make up about a third of the world's population as of 2015 and accounted for nearly half of all refugees.

Speaking in Geneva, Ted Chaiban, UNICEF director of programs, said: "What's important is that these children on the move are children. And they should be treated as children."

"They deserve to be protected. They need access to services, such as education."

According to the report, there were 10 million child refugees and one million child asylum seekers whose status had not yet been determined.

The remaining 17 million children displaced by conflict remained within their home countries' borders.

The report said 45 percent of the

children refugees came from just two countries, Syria and Afghanistan.

Increasingly, these children are travelling alone, with 100,000 unaccompanied minors applying for asylum in 78 countries in 2015, three times the number in 2014, the report found.

Because these children often lack documents, they are especially vulnerable.

The report estimates another 20 million children are migrants, driven from their homes by poverty and gang violence among other things.

Refugee and migrant children face a host of risks including drowning during sea crossings, malnourishment, dehydration, kidnapping, rape and murder.

When they arrive in other countries they often face discrimination and xenophobia, the report stated.

"The world hears the stories of child refugees one child at a time and the world is able to bring support to that child, but when we talk about millions it provokes incredible outrage and underscores the need to address the growing problem," said Emily Garin, the UNICEF report's author.

The report calls on the international community to provide protection, education and health services to these children and asks governments to address the root causes contributing to the large-scale movements of refugees and migrants.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Report: ISIL had bigger plans for Paris attacks

The coordinated bombings and shootings that left 130 dead in the French capital Paris last November were part of what the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group had intended to be a much larger terrorist attack, CNN reported.

According to newly obtained documents on the Paris investigation, the ISIL leaders in Syria had reportedly planned for the November strikes to hit other locations throughout France as well as the Netherlands and remain in contact with operatives throughout Europe today.

"ISIL is increasing its international attack planning," said CNN terrorism analyst Paul Cruickshank. "It's increasingly sophisticated in the way it does this. It's set up an intricate, logistical support system for these terrorists ... to launch these terrorist attacks."

Among the revelations gleaned from the 90,000 pages of investigative documents obtained by CNN are insight into the terrorist organization's use of encrypted communication tools, such as WhatsApp, Viber, and Telegram; and strategies for sneaking across borders, such as hiding in train bathrooms. The documents also reveal the lengths ISIL handlers go to keep their operations a secret, requiring the use of pseudonyms and providing operatives with only enough money and information needed to complete one phase of the mission at a time.

In addition to new details about the capture and interrogations of Adel Haddadi and Muhammad Usman — the two men investigators believe planned to travel to Paris as part of the team of ISIL operatives that carried out the November attacks — the documents also identify a previously unnamed third suspected terrorist as Abid Tabaouni.

According to CNN, Tabaouni managed to evade authorities for months after the Paris attack until he was ultimately arrested in July.

CNN also reported that counterterrorism officials continue to discover the existence of more ISIL operatives throughout Europe, including the United Kingdom, suggesting an increased effort to coordinate future attacks on the continent.

(Source: CNN)

Presidential poll: Trump pulls ahead of Clinton

Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton start the race to November 8 on essentially even ground, with Trump edging Clinton by a scant two points among likely voters, and the contest sparking sharp divisions along demographic lines in a new CNN/ORC Poll.

Trump tops Clinton 45% to 43% in the new survey, with Libertarian Gary Johnson standing at 7% among likely voters in this poll and the Green Party's Jill Stein at just 2%.

The topsy-turvy campaign for the presidency has seen both Clinton and Trump holding a significant lead at some point in the last two months, though Clinton has topped Trump more often than not. Most recently, Clinton's convention propelled her to an 8-point lead among registered voters in an early-August CNN/ORC Poll.

Clinton's lead has largely evaporated despite a challenging month for Trump, which saw an overhaul of his campaign staff, announcements of support for Clinton from several high-profile Republicans and criticism of his campaign strategy. But most voters say they still expect to see Clinton prevail in November, and 59% think she will be the one to get to 270 electoral votes vs. 34% who think Trump has the better shot at winning.

Neither major third party candidate appears to be making the gains necessary to reach the 15% threshold set by the Commission on Presidential Debates, with just three weeks to go before the first debate on September 26.

The new poll finds the two major party candidates provoke large gaps by gender, age, race, education and partisanship. Among those likely to turn out in the fall, both candidates have secured about the same share of their own partisans (92% of Democrats back Clinton, 90% of Republicans are behind Trump) but independents give Trump an edge, 49% say they'd vote for him while just 29% of independent voters back Clinton. Another 16% back Johnson, 6% Stein.

Women break for Clinton (53% to 38%) while men shift Trump's way (54% to 32%). Among women, those who are unmarried make up the core of her support, 73% of unmarried women back Clinton compared with just 36% of married women. Among men, no such marriage gap emerges, as both unmarried and married men favor Trump.

Younger voters are in Clinton's corner (54% to 29% among those under age 45) while the older ones are more apt to back Trump (54% to 39% among those age 45 or older). Whites mostly support Trump (55% to 34%), while nonwhites favor Clinton by a nearly 4-to-1 margin (71% to 18%). Most college grads back Clinton while those without degrees mostly support Trump, and that divide deepens among white voters. Whites who do not hold college degrees support Trump by an almost 3-to-1 margin (68% to 24%) while whites who do have college degrees split 49% for Clinton to 36% for Trump and 11% for Johnson.

Support for Johnson seems to be concentrated among groups where Clinton could stand to benefit from consolidating voters. Although direct comparison between the poll's two-way, head-to-head matchup and its four-way matchup doesn't suggest that Johnson is pulling disproportionately from either candidate, his supporters come mostly among groups where a strong third-party bid could harm Clinton's standing: Younger voters (particularly younger men), whites with college degrees, and independents, notably.

The poll follows several national polls in August suggesting that the margin between the two candidates had tightened following the conventions. A CNN Poll of Polls analysis released Friday showed that Clinton's lead had been cut in half when compared with the height of her convention bounce.

Speaking to reporters aboard her campaign plane Tuesday, Clinton shrugged off a question about the CNN/ORC survey.

"I really pay no attention to polls. When they are good for me -- and there have been a lot of them that have been good for me recently -- I don't pay attention," Clinton said. "When they are not so good, I don't pay attention. We are on a course that we are sticking with."

While enthusiasm for the campaign has continued to inch up, it remains well off the mark compared with this point in other recent presidential election years. In the new poll, 46% say they are extremely or very enthusiastic, compared with 57% at this point in 2012, 60% in early September of 2008 and 64% in September 2004.

Further, nearly half of voters say they are less enthusiastic about voting in this election than they have been in previous years, while just 42% say they're more excited about this year's contest. Although this question hasn't been asked in every presidential election year, in CNN/ORC and CNN/USA Today/Gallup results dating back to 2000, this poll marks the first time that a significantly larger share of voters say they are less enthusiastic about this year's election. The lack of enthusiasm spikes among Clinton supporters. A majority of Clinton's supporters say they're less excited about voting this year than usual (55%) while most of Trump's backers say they're more excited this time around (56%).

(Source: CNN)

NEWS

World stocks hit one-year highs as Fed hike prospects fade

World stocks hit their highest in more than a year and the dollar fell sharply against the yen on Wednesday as expectations of a rise in Federal Reserve interest rates receded after weak U.S. economic data.

Emerging market shares led the charge, touching their strongest levels since July 2015 as investors sought yield with interest rates likely to stay low for a prolonged period.

But European shares dipped in early trade. The Stoxx 600 index fell 0.2 percent led lower by banks .SX7P, for whom rock-bottom interest rates promise tough times. The index nonetheless remained close to eight-month highs.

The top gainers in Europe were energy shares, up 0.7 percent .SXEP, as oil prices rose, even though many market participants remained doubtful producers would reach a deal to freeze output.

Euro zone government bond yields fell as some investors bet the weak U.S. data, which followed weaker-than-expected jobs numbers on Friday, would pressure the European Central Bank to ease monetary policy further. Then ECB meets on Thursday.

"With a September rate hike looking less likely to happen, the ECB might be more pressured to come up with a decision this week on further measures," said Benjamin Schroeder, senior rates strategist at ING.

In Asia, MSCI's main Asia-Pacific stock index, excluding Japan .MIAPJ0000PUS was up 0.2 percent, having earlier touched its highest since July last year. This helped lift MSCI's all-country world index .MIWD00000PUS to its highest since August 2015.

"When people think there's no immediate rate hike from the Fed, then Asia and emerging markets are the place to go to, as investors seek yields," said Toru Nishihama, senior economist at Dai-ichi Life Research.

Japan's Nikkei index .N225, however, retreated 0.4 percent as a strong yen hurt exporters.

Dollar, Oil

The dollar was last down 0.5 percent at 101.50 yen JPY=, having fallen as low as 101.18, its weakest since Aug. 16.

The dollar fell 1 percent against several major currencies on Tuesday after Institute for Supply Management data showing activity in the U.S. service sector slowed to a 6 1/2-year low in August and diminished already slim prospects for a Fed rate hike this month.

The dollar index .DXY, which measures the greenback against a basket of major currencies was flat. The euro was down 0.1 percent at $1.1245 while sterling GBP=, which topped $1.34 for the first time in seven weeks on Tuesday after the ISM data, pulled back 0.2 percent to $1.3412.

"Clearly, this is a challenging environment for the dollar," said Petr Krpata, currency strategist at ING.

The Swedish crown EURSEK= rose around 0.2 percent to 9.52 per euro after the Swedish central bank kept interest rates unchanged, as expected.

Oil prices, which have been on a rollercoaster in recent days as expectations of whether a deal to curb a global glut can be reached have waxed and waned, edged up.

Brent crude LCOc1, the international benchmark, gained 35 cents to $47.61 a barrel. It rose as high as $49.40 on Monday, having fallen to $45.32 on Sept. 1.

The reduced expectations of a Fed hike also lifted other commodities. Copper CMCU3 hit a two-week high at $4,683 a ton, while gold XAU= hit a 2 1/2-week peak above $1,352 an ounce before pulling back. *(Source: Reuters)*

Without Israeli occupation, Palestinian economy would double: UN report

In a report, the UN development body (UNCTAD) described the ways Israeli occupation of Gaza and West Bank has been preventing the Palestinian economy from recovery and getting twice as big as it is now.

The document detailing the "staggering economic cost" of Israeli occupation was released on Tuesday by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

"The Palestinian economy would be at least twice as large without Israeli occupation," the findings reveal.

Among the key reasons for the high unemployment and staggering poverty the agency cites "confiscation of Palestinian land, water and other natural resources." It adds that "restrictions on the movement of people and goods; destruction of assets and the productive base;" also played a major role here.

According to the latest estimations by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics nearly 27 percent of people of the autonomy are currently without job. Meanwhile UNCTAD has revealed that over 66 percent of the Palestinians were food-insecure last year.

"The continuous process of de-agriculturalization and de-industrialization" has contributed to a severe degradation of Palestinian economy, according to the UN report. The paper states that in Gaza "producers are denied access to half of the cultivable area and 85 per cent of fishery resources."

The West Bank area is facing a similar problem, according to the UN. In the so-called area C, which constitutes over 60 percent of West Bank "more than 66 per cent of its grazing land, is not accessible to Palestinian producers".

The figures published in the report say that the Israeli occupation of the Area C "costs the Palestinian economy the equivalent of 35 per cent of GDP ($4.4 billion in 2015)."

The Israeli military campaign in 2014 whose proclaimed goal, was to prevent rocket attacks on its territories from the Palestinian areas delivered another blow to the financial recovery of the Palestinians. *(Source: RT)*

Italtel set to build network infrastructure in Iran

Following the lifting of economic sanctions in January, Italian telecommunications giant Italtel hopes to build ultra-fast Internet infrastructure in Iran.

Speaking at the Iran Connect 2016 conference at Tehran's Espinas Palace Hotel, CEO Stefano Pileri highlighted industries that could benefit, including health, transport and education.

Pileri said: "Italtel is looking to contribute to the development of Iran through technology and innovative solutions. Transforming existing networks and installing ultra-fast wideband infrastructures needs to be a top priority to ensure that people living in Iran truly benefit from Internet technology and vital services can be developed."

He added: "Such a platform, which would be based on virtualization techniques, is key to deploying Iran's infrastructures as it will allow a cost-effective and smooth evolution of the networks to enable both traditional and next-generation telecommunication services, without the need for huge investment,. This should be done in partnership with local companies so that capabilities in the region are utilized and a long lasting relationship with the Iran market is established."

Italtel was a part of Italy's official two day mission to Tehran in April, which saw Italy's Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and representatives of around 60 Italian companies meet with Iranian counterparts.

Over the course of the visit the delegation negotiated seven agreements, including a multibillion dollar "framework of cooperation" that will enable Italy's state railway, Ferrovie dello Stato, to build two high-speed lines in Iran. A memorandum of understanding was signed between power company Enel and the National Iranian Gas Export Company on natural gas and related infrastructure, and a MoU between oil contractor Saipem and the Razavi Oil & Gas Development Company on the Toos Gas Field project.

The meeting came just months after Iranian President Hassan Rouhani chose Italy as his first European country to visit, where other multibillion dollar deals were forged.

A nuclear deal

The flurry of agreements between Italy and Iran comes after sanctions against the Islamic nation by the US, the European Union, China and Russia were lifted on January 16.

"The end of sanctions is a historic step not only for Iran but for the whole region," Renzi said during his visit.

The sanctions were lifted after international nuclear watchdog, the IAEA, confirmed the country had complied with a July 2015 deal on limiting its nuclear activities.

(Source: datacenterdynamics.com)

Top India priorities: GST, banks, infrastructure

The government will press ahead with tax reforms, repairing the banking system and getting stalled infrastructure projects moving to drive growth, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley said on Wednesday, but it is not yet ready to sell off its state banks.

Asked what his top economic policy priorities were, Jaitley told a conference he was determined to stick to a "very stiff" schedule that foresees passing critical enabling legislation for a new goods and services tax (GST) this autumn.

Jaitley said the new GST, once implemented, would have a "transformational" impact by creating a common market in India for the first time, while also acting as a transfer mechanism that would aid poorer federal states.

The goal of the federal and state governments would be for the tax to be revenue-neutral and, and as the tax becomes established, for its rate to come down over time, Jaitley said.

A revenue-neutral tax changes a country's tax structure but is not intended to increase the overall amount of tax levied.

Jaitley did not say what rate he preferred but the government's economic adviser has pegged a revenue-neutral rate at about 18 percent.

Jaitley said it was vital to revive the banking sector, but ruled out selling controlling stakes in public-sector banks that control 70 percent of assets in the financial system and hold the lion's share of India's $120 billion in bad loans.

"I don't think that public or political opinion has converged to the point where we can think of privatisation in the banking sector," Jaitley told The Economist India Summit in New Delhi.

The government is consolidating some of the public sector banks to strengthen them, but does not plan to reduce the state's share below a threshold of 52 percent, Jaitley said.

India currently owns stakes of between 60 percent and 86 percent in nearly two dozen state-run banks.

Getting stalled infrastructure projects moving would help to drive growth and provide development benefits for the 1.3 billion people living in India, the economy of which continues to perform below potential, he said.

The latest gross domestic figures showed that growth in Asia's third-largest economy slowed to 7.1 percent in the three months to June, from 7.9 percent previously.

"We are still far below our best," Jaitley said in a podium interview, adding that as India looks to key state elections next year and a general election in 2019, economic reforms should bring growth benefits to voters, but the government must also "blend" them with social programs.

(Source: The Economic Times)

Four fresh worries about China's shadow banking system

The tangled web of Chinese banks and the investment products they sell is growing more muddled as analysts attempt to gauge the impact of new rules unveiled by the country's authorities.

The proposed new rules would require some banks to provision for losses against wealth management products (WMPs), which funnel money from retail investors into securities ranging from stocks to corporate bonds and real estate, in an effort to insulate the lenders from future losses.

The 26.3 trillion yuan ($3.9 trillion) worth of WMPs outstanding have emerged as key cog in China's so-called shadow banking system as investors often expect to be reimbursed for on any losses on the WMPs banks manage — an expectation that could weigh on the lenders if the products begin to sour.

But with analysts scrambling to digest the impact of the draft rules on banks, fresh concerns are emerging including: the degree to which banks have been using WMPs to repackage and invest in other such products, their use as a way for to gain exposure to riskier corporate securities, banks' tendency to borrow money to boost returns on WMPs, and the potential for the new WMP rules to impact other assets.

WMP-squareds, anyone?

Banks may be using WMPs to repackage and invest in other WMPs in an attempt to avoid rules introduced in 2013 that similarly sought to shore up the financial system by limiting the amount of money lenders can invest in 'non-standard' securities to 35 percent of total assets. Such a move would have parallels with some of the more complex collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) that exacerbated subprime losses at U.S. banks in the run-up to the 2008 financial crisis.

The proportion of WMPs bought by other banks jumped from 0.49 trillion at the end of 2014 to 4 trillion at the end of the first half of 2016, though the exact proportion of any such 'WMP-squareds' is unknown.

Boom go the corporate bonds

While the 2013 rule was similarly aimed at shoring up China's financial system, it may not do much in the face of a debt boom that has seen the country's companies sell trillions of yuan worth of corporate bonds as these securities count as 'standard' assets.

"Regulators introduced the restriction on 'non-standard assets' in March 2013 and have not changed it. However, trends in corporate bond issuance, especially in the second half of 2015, may have circumvented its effectiveness in terms of restricting flow of investor funds to low-quality companies," said Phan.

Lots of leverage

Such borrowed money, or leverage, may be needed as banks seek to offset declining profitability.

"With a typical WMP offering returns around that level [3.8 percent], and the bank requiring a spread on top of that to cover costs and show a profit, that's not enough," Orlik and Chen wrote in a note. "In order to keep returns elevated, the shadow banks managing WMP investments appear to be turning to the interbank market as a source of leverage."

The application of leverage may be borne out by statistics in the Chinese interbank market, where lending rose to 59.8 trillion yuan in August this year, up from 13.7 trillion yuan in November 2013, when the data began, the analysts said. Orlik and Chen note that the biggest players in this market are small banks and 'other' financial institutions — or the firms originating and managing the WMP funds.

A bad cycle

Ironically, banks may need to buy riskier securities or use more leverage as they fight slumping profits and a shrinking pool of WMP fees induced by the draft rules. Even if they resist that temptation, reduced demand for their WMPs may end up clipping appetite for other assets such as bonds and stocks, causing a downward spiral in asset prices.

"The proposed new regulations on the bank-managed WMP market, which may come out within months if not weeks, may further dampen bank-managed WMP sales going forward, in our view," Bank of America Merrill Lynch strategists led by David Cui wrote last week. "As the biggest funding source for the shadow banking sector, we believe that any significant slow-down in its sales may have important implications on asset prices across the board, especially bonds' and stocks', and possibly properties.'"

"Given the potential shocks to financial system should bank-managed WMP sales slow down sharply, we consider it a key risk that needs to be monitored closely," they concluded. *(Source: Bloomberg)*

NEWS IN BRIEF

Investors pay Henkel to finance its acquisition

The German consumer goods firm along with France's Sanofi became the first companies to issue euro-denominated bonds at a negative yield on Tuesday. The two firms are set to pay a yield of minus 0.05% on new issues of short-dated bonds.

But Henkel issuance is particularly interesting given that the bond issue will go to finance its acquisition of Sun Products, BayerB pointed out in a research note, and what it might portend for the European M&A market.

The European Central Bank began buying corporate bonds in June as part of a massive quantitative easing program designed to lower borrowing costs and encourage investors to take more risk.

Volkswagen in talks to make electric cars in China

Volkswagen AG is exploring a joint venture to make electric cars in China with a state-run company, part of its aggressive push into electric-vehicle production as the auto maker works to resolve its emissions cheating scandal.

The German car maker has signed a memorandum of cooperation with China Anhui Jianghuai Automobile Co. for a potential partnership, the companies said in separate statements. Jianghuai said the companies will share equal ownership of the joint venture, and are aiming for a formal agreement within five months.

"As we aim to be at the forefront of e-mobility, Volkswagen Group is looking forward to explore all options to set up a close and mutually beneficial partnership with JAC," said Matthias Müller, chairman of Volkswagen Group.

Nissan recalls new minivan over idling stop problem

Nissan Motor Company said on Wednesday it was recalling a domestic minivan model and stopped shipments of the recently launched vehicle to fix a problem with its idling stop function.

The Japanese automaker said it was recalling 9,481 Serena minivans, which went on sale on August 24, due to the risk of short circuiting during use of the idling stop function. Shipments of the minivan were halted last Friday, it added.

Nissan said that one incident of a short circuiting had been reported at one of the automaker's dealerships, which resulted in a small fire under the minivan's hood.

Silk Road still points at cultural, economic globalization

By Fatemeh Aliasghar

A number of ambassadors, cultural officials, and investors from Iran and other countries across the globe pose for a photo opportunity on the first day of the 11th Silk Road Mayors Forum in the Iranian city of Qazvin on September 3, 2016.

The Iranian city of Qazvin hosted the 11th Silk Road Mayors Forum on September 3 and 4, during which several ambassadors, cultural officials, and investors from across the globe convened to discuss a range of topics to fertile the ground for reviving the ancient trade route.

Ambassadors from the Netherlands, Spain, Pakistan, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, India, Brunei, Guinea-Bissau, Indonesia, Senegal, Tunisia, Benin, and Bangladesh participated in the forum.

Director and Representative of the UNESCO Tehran Cluster Office Esther Kuisch Laroche as well as officials from Iran, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, Chile, and the Ivory Coast were other attendees to the event organized by Iran's Revitalization and Utilization Fund for Historical Places (RUFHP).

Conservation of structures that are of historical importance such as caravansaries, bathhouses, and historic houses, as well as cultural and economic interactions between the nations were amidst contexts several speakers used to explore every avenues toward a source of sustainable income that would emerge from cultural tourism.

The RUFHP Director Mohammadreza Puyandeh talked on the issue, redefining the importance of historical sights dotted on the Silk Road, as he expressed readiness of the RUFHP to conduct joint projects in that regard with eligible foreign institutes and investors.

On a side-section program devised for the event, the participants visited several natural beauties and historical places scattered around the city.

During a brief interview with the Tehran Times, Indian Ambassador Saurabh Kumar expressed his outlook on the journey to Qazvin, outlining its considerable achievements.

He said there is a close affinity between India and Iran as the two nations have themes of cultural backgrounds, architecture, and language in common.

Kumar added the city of Qazvin, which he had never seen before, came to him as surprise due to its abundance in amazing natural and historic sights.

Travelers find Iran complex, colorful and deeply traditional like its carpets

Isfahan is a major destination on the "tourist trail" in Iran, particularly Naqhsh-e Jahan Square, where you'll find typical Persian architecture such as that of the above Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque.

Visitors heading to Iran will find the country as complex, colorful and deeply traditional like the Persian carpets for which it is renowned. History lovers are spoiled for choice when it comes to incredibly preserved archaeological sites (including the ancient city of Persepolis), while the photogenic beauty of classic Persian architecture – usually covered with those famous blue tiles – will please anyone with an eye for design.

Plus, outdoor enthusiasts have a surfeit of mountains to climb and ski, desert landscapes to explore and scenic valleys to trek. All this, combined with ultra-welcoming locals, a refined and delicious cuisine (succulent grilled kebabs, flavorful stews) and an ancient culture steeped in poetry, music and art, mean that Iran is a destination as rewarding as it is revelatory.

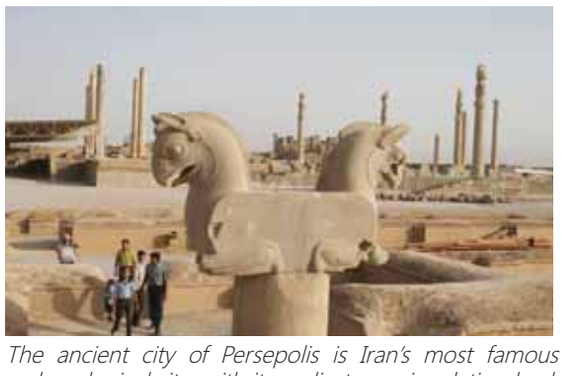
British nationals need a visa to travel to Iran. The process can be notoriously long and frustrating, so you should apply well in advance of your planned travel dates. There are also reports of difficulties securing visas through private visa agencies. The Iranian embassy in London has commenced a visa service.

FCO advice warns against all travel to certain parts of Iran. The FCO also claims the risks to tourists in Iran are higher for those travelling independently than for those travelling as part of an organized tour.

Ancient markets

Those keen to see a more exotic Iran than that offered by Tehran's traffic-clogged roads should head for the atmospheric bazaars of some of the country's most historically significant cities. Tabriz, a former capital, has the most famous. Its sprawling, labyrinthine bazaar – a UNESCO World Heritage Site dating back 1,000 years – is replete with ornate, dimly lit timchehs (halls) that immerse you in an almost mystical, back-in-time feel.

South of Tehran, Isfahan's Bazar-e Bozorg is just as old, and has welcoming teahouses in spades. Its location between Naqsh-e Jahan Square and the Masjed-e Jameh, two of the city's major attractions, is also supremely convenient.



The ancient city of Persepolis is Iran's most famous archaeological site, with its earliest remains dating back to around 515 BC (AFP/Getty Images)

Tehran's bazaar is more modern (it's a mere two centuries old) but is just as maze-like and full of temptations.

Pilgrimage sites

Home to the largest concentration of Shia Muslims in the world, Iran has many important religious shrines and pilgrimage sites. Crowded with pious worshippers – usually in family groups – these are wonderful places to observe the importance of religion in day-to-day Iranian life. They can also demystify this culture for many Westerners, being places where worshippers are just as likely to be exuberant and joyful as they are quietly contemplative.

The most significant and beautiful of these is the massive Haram-e Razavi - the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (AS) - in the north-eastern city of Mashhad, where gold-covered domes and tapering minarets seem to float above the compound's profusion of courtyards, mosques and museums. Shia pilgrims from across the globe come here to visit the shrine of the only Shia Imam to be buried in Iran.

In the south of the country, the Aramgah-e Shah-e Cheragh (Mausoleum of the King of the Light) in Shiraz is nearly as holy. Its bulbous turquoise-tiled dome, gold-topped minarets and mirrored interior are wonderful examples of late Qajar period architecture.

World heritage trail

There are 21 Iranian sites and landscapes on UNESCO World Heritage List, and many first-time visitors to the country end up devising their itineraries around visits to the big-hitters.

Don't miss Persepolis, the majestic former capital of the Achaemenid Empire (200,000 rials, plus extra charge for museum). It's an extraordinary showcase of grandiose Achaemenid construction, including staircases featuring exquisite carved reliefs, majestic gateways topped with statues, and the remains of palaces that once housed magnificent columned halls.

The Jameh mosque in Isfahan is one of Iran's most famous sights and shows the evolution of mosque architecture over 12 centuries (Shutterstock / Marcin Szymczak)

The desert fortress of Bam, recently rebuilt after a devastating earthquake in 2003, was once a thriving trading post on the legendary Silk Route. This mud-brick citadel has massive ramparts, ornately decorated towers and monumental gateways aplenty.

Another must-do is the postcard-perfect Naqsh-e Jahan (Imam) Square and the Masjed-e Jameh (Jameh Mosque) in Isfahan. The latter, the largest mosque in Iran, comprises a series of elaborate iwans (open prayer halls) clad in exquisite blue and gold tiles.

Finally, formal Persian gardens, such as the Bagh-e Fin in Kashan – an oasis featuring a series of turquoise-colored pools and fountains, richly decorated pavilions and a profusion of orange trees – also deserve a place on your list.

Outdoor adventures

More than half of Iran is covered by mountains, so skiing and mountaineering are popular pastimes. Head to Mount Damavand and Mount Sabalan in the Alborz Mountains to climb in summer, and to Dizin in the Alborz Mountains or Sepidan or Chegard in the Zagros Mountains to ski in winter.

Yazd is a great base from which to mount an off-road adventure into the Iranian desert

In good weather, trekking through the Alamut area in the Alborz Mountains is hugely enjoyable. Desert trekking should only be done with an experienced guide – when in desert areas, it's best to explore on a 4x4 expedition or camel trek leaving from Yazd.

Getting there

Imam Khomeini International Airport just outside Tehran is Iran's major international air hub. There are also international airports in Isfahan, Shiraz and Mashhad. The country's busiest domestic airport is Mehrabad International Airport in Tehran.

Domestic bus services between cities and major towns are cheap, comfortable and frequent. The local train network is excellent but trains are less frequent and more expensive than buses – see iranrail.net for details.

(Source: Independent)

IN THE NEWS

Eco camps to promote tourism on Qeshm Island

TT TOURISM desk **TEHRAN** — In line with the national schemes for reviving sustainable tourism industry, Iran has started creating eight eco camps along the coastline of its southern Qeshm Island located in the Persian Gulf.

An undated photo displaying a number of visitors to the Stars Valley on Qeshm Island

The Qeshm Free Zone Organization (QFZO) in close collaboration with the private sector is implementing the project in a bid to broaden accommodation on the island, the IRIB reported on Tuesday.

Farzin Haqdel, the deputy director of the QFZO, anticipated that the camps would be warmly welcomed by travelers to the island, the nature lovers in particular.

The campsites, each with a capacity of about 70 people, are expected to be completed by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2017), he added.

Residents of provinces such as Kerman, Yazd, and Sistan-Baluchestan consist a majority of the ever-growing travelers to the island, Haqdel explained.

Iran's Cultural Heritage Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, as the main supporter of the program, seeks to create 10 more eco camps in several other tourist spots across the country, he noted.

AIR TRAVEL

Why Airbus should keep making the A380

The Airbus A380 earned a lot of buzz when it was first used for commercial service in 2007. The double decker's sheer size (it can fit 525 passengers in three classes) and glitzy premium class cabins made it the heir apparent to the dated Boeing 747.

Now, however, the trend is for airlines to purchase smaller, more efficient long-haul planes like the A350 and Boeing 787. Does this mean that the A380's days are numbered?

The demand for international air travel is expected to rise significantly in the coming years, and airlines with the A380s in their stables will have an advantage on the busiest routes. Even low-cost carriers could be interested in an all-economy-class A380. This version seats more than 800 people.

More room to create more classes

This leads us to another trend that is working in the A380's favor: airlines are trying to maximize revenue by segmenting their planes into multiple classes.

So while orders for four-engine planes are currently sluggish, there could eventually be enough demand for Airbus to continue producing the A380 in the future.

(Source: travelpulse.com)

Second Announcement

MINISTRY OF ENERGY

GUILAN REGIONAL ELECTRIC COMPANYGILREC

Invitation for Prequalification, International Tender No 9512003

Guilan Regional Electric Company (GILREC), intends to prequalify bidders for engineering, procurement and finance of a package of projects comprising Transmission and Sub Transmission Substations, Dispatching Center and Transmission Lines and Underground Cables at 63 and 230 kV voltage levels, during 18 calendar months and through a limited two stage tender.

Interested applicants can receive prequalification documents, with due consideration of the following points:

1- The proposed finance shall be approved by Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

2- The law of maximum use of Iranian Technical Engineering, Manufacturing, and Industrial and Executive Capability, shall be observed.

The eligible applicants may obtain documents on the submission of a written application during working office hours from Sept. 10th, 2016 to Oct. 10th, 2016 in the following addresses:

1- Guilan Regional Electric Company, office of the finance deputy managing director, Imam Khomeini Ave. Ghods Crossroad, Rasht, I.R.Iran

2- Ghods Niroo Engineering Company, No. 82, Motahari Ave., Tehran, I.R.Iran

Meanwhile, the above information is available at: Internet web sites of Guilan Regional Electric Company: www.gilrec.co.ir or Tavanir Company: www.tavanir.org.ir and National database portal of Iran tender's information at: http://iets.mporg.ir.

Applications for prequalification received in soft copy shall be filled in, printed and signed and sealed and be submitted in sealed envelopes to the above address item 1, against a written receipt, up to saturday Dec. 10th, 2016 2:00 P.M (14:00) and be clearly marked as: "Engineering, procurement and finance (EPF) of Transmission and Sub Transmission Substations, Dispatching Center and Transmission Lines and Underground Cables at 63 and 230 kV voltage levels".

Note that: applications received after that date will be considered disqualified.

Guilan Regional Electric Company will scrutinize the received documents in accordance with rules and regulations and will conduct prequalification of the applicants through procedures and qualified firms will be invited to receive tender documents.

It shall be taken for granted that providing and presenting above mentioned documents will grant no rights to the applicants to be invited to tender. The cost of this tender notice shall be borne by successful bidder.

Guilan Regional Electric Company

FEATURE

There's still time for Obama to carve out a Middle East legacy

By Jackson Diehl

Barack Obama took office in 2009 with two big personal priorities in foreign policy: the limitation of nuclear weapons and the cause of Palestinian statehood. This summer the president has been weighing a flurry of possible last-minute actions to cement his legacy on nukes, including a UN resolution that would ban testing. That raises an obvious question: Will Obama also launch an 11th-hour Mideast gambit?

The possibility has been debated in and outside the White House ever since Secretary of State John F. Kerry's quixotic effort to broker an Israeli-Palestinian deal collapsed in 2014. All along, the assumption has been that Obama might wait to act until after the presidential election, so as to avoid creating problems for Hillary Clinton. There's plenty of precedent: Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush all bid for a Middle East legacy during their final months.

Not surprisingly, the prospect of an Obama initiative — which could take the form of a speech, or at its most ambitious, a UN resolution — is producing "high anxiety in the Netanyahu world," as one former administration official puts it. That would be Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu, the Israeli leader who has haunted and taunted Obama since he took office — and absorbed in return more White House animus and abuse than any other U.S. ally. In the end, Obama's final decisions on the Middle East may be driven by another drama: the Barack and Bibi endgame.

For now, the old rivals are cooperating on a deal that could burnish both their legacies. Israeli and U.S. sources say negotiations are essentially complete on a new 10-year bilateral defense pact that would boost annual U.S. military aid to Israel from $3 billion to close to $4 billion. Israel would get more money for missile defense, while agreeing to gradually redirect to American firms the quarter of U.S. funding it now diverts to domestic contractors.

For both leaders, the deal has a positive political twist. Obama would be able to point to it as proof that he was not, in the end, an anti-Israel president, in spite of his battles with Netanyahu over West Bank settlements and the Iranian nuclear deal.

Netanyahu, who has good reason to worry about eroding support for Israel among U.S. liberals, would be able to describe the bounteous guaranteed funding as a Democratic initiative.

Millennials are taking advantage of new opportunities to share political and social views.

Netanyahu dubbed a pariah

That's not the only reason Netanyahu has to gloat: For now, he looks like the winner on points in his eight-year bout with this president. Yes, Obama squashed Netanyahu's fervent campaign against the Iran accord. But Netanyahu has not only successfully resisted Obama's pressure to allow a Palestinian state on terms he opposed, he has also continued Israeli settlement building, ignoring harsh criticism from the State Department and the White House. With years left in his own term in office, he can expect the next president, whether Clinton or Donald Trump, to drop Obama's policy of treating him as a pariah.

Netanyahu has not only successfully resisted Obama's pressure to allow a Palestinian state on terms he opposed, he has also continued Israeli settlement building, ignoring harsh criticism from the State Department and the White House.

Obama, however, still has his potential hole card: an Obama plan for Palestinian statehood. Though he lacks the means to make it happen, the outgoing president could publicly lay out U.S. terms for a settlement, much as Bill Clinton did before leaving office. If he sought ratification by the UN Security Council, Obama could set them in diplomatic stone. A conflict that for half a century has been defined by UN Resolution 242 would henceforth be governed by Obama's.

Palestinian state

The terms were largely hashed out by Kerry during his doomed diplomatic offensive. A Palestinian state would be based on Israel's 1967 borders, with land swaps that would attach the largest West Bank settlements to Israel. Jerusalem would be the capital of both states.

The return of Palestinian refugees to Israel would depend on a bilateral agreement. And Israel would be recognized as the homeland of the Jewish people.

That formula would be quickly rejected by both sides — just as it was when Obama tried to sell it to Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in 2014. Arab states might even block its passage by the Security Council, with help from Russia or France. No matter: Obama would be betting that pressure would slowly mount on Israel to accept the terms, perhaps accompanied by an acceleration of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. Ten or 20 years from now, Obama could find himself heralded as the grandfather of Middle East peace.

Mavens of Middle East diplomacy point out that an Obama plan could do far more harm than good in the short term. To begin with, it could hamstring any attempt by the new president to rescue the failing U.S. position in the larger Middle East; if that's Hillary Clinton, Obama may be pressed to consult her. We'll learn after Nov. 8 whether such considerations matter more to the 44th president than creating a legacy on a pet issue — and trumping Netanyahu.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Obama needs to speak out on Philippine killings

By Phelim Kine

U.S. President Barack Obama has aborted his planned bilateral meeting at the East Asia Summit with Philippine President Roderigo Duterte this week in Vientiane, Laos.

Obama canceled the meeting after Duterte referred to him as a "son of a bitch" during a pre-summit media briefing in Manila. Duterte's scandalously undiplomatic invective was part of his profanity-laced reaction to reports that Obama would confront him about the appalling human toll of his so-called "war on drugs" that has killed more than 2,400 Filipinos in the past 10 weeks.

Duterte had good reason to want to avoid such an encounter. That's because Obama's likely message -- stop the killings -- can and should be backed by meaningful U.S. government leverage in terms of its financial aid to the Philippines military and police.

Duterte may have effectively scuttled what would have been an awkward and highly-charged meeting with Obama in Laos. But Obama needs to make clear, and soon, that the U.S. government can and will suspend budgetary funding to the Philippine security forces if Duterte chooses to continue to encourage and incite killings by police and unknown gunmen of alleged drug dealers and drug users.

Drug pushers and users

The most recent Philippine National Police data shows that from July 1 to September 4, 2016, police have killed an estimated 1,011 suspected "drug pushers and users." This is more than 10 times higher than the 68 such police killings recorded between January 1 and June 15 of this year. Police have attributed the killings to suspects who "resisted arrest and shot at police officers."

It's been impossible to assess police claims that the killings were all lawful, since Duterte has rejected calls to investigate these deaths. The president has instead declared the killings as proof of the "success" of his anti-drug campaign. He has urged police to "seize the momentum."

Director-General Ronald dela Rosa, slammed calls for an investigation as "legal harassment," saying it "dampens the morale" of police officers. The same day, Duterte's top judicial official, Solicitor-General Jose Calida, defended the legality of the killings and opined that the number of deaths was "not enough."

The U.S. government shouldn't be surprised by Duterte's enthusiasm for the daily double-digit death toll of his anti-drugs campaign. During his 22-year tenure as the mayor of Davao City in southern Mindanao, Duterte was a vocal cheerleader for a vicious death squad that killed hundreds of "undesirables," including kids as young as 14-years old.

Crime solution

Duterte then made large-scale extrajudicial violence as a crime solution the cornerstone of his electoral campaign. On the campaign trail he promised to "solve drugs, criminality, and corruption in three to six months" — by whatever means necessary. On the eve of his May 9, 2016 election victory, he told a crowd of more than 300,000 that "If I make it to the presidential palace I will do just what I did as mayor. You drug pushers, holdup men, and do-nothings, you better get out because I'll kill you."

The U.S. government shouldn't be surprised by Duterte's enthusiasm for the daily double-digit death toll of his anti-drugs campaign.

Drug deaths in the Philippines: Is President Duterte's war on drugs out of control?

And police aren't the only ones targeting criminal suspects with deadly force. Police statistics attribute another 1,067 killings of alleged drug dealers and users in the past two months to unknown gunmen. These murders suggest Duterte's aggressive rhetoric advocating violent solutions to criminality has found a receptive, and well-armed audience.

Victims include five-year-old Danica May, a kindergarten student who died from a gunshot wound to the head after an unidentified gunman opened fire on her grandfather, an alleged drug user.

In July Duterte exhorted Filipinos who knew of any drug addicts to "go ahead and kill them yourself as getting their parents to do it would be too painful." This prompted the United Nations Special Rapporteur on summary executions, Agnes Callamard, to accuse Duterte last month of effectively granting the police and others "a license to kill."

Duterte has turned a deaf ear to such criticism. He has instead sought to intimidate domestic critics of that campaign and dismissed international critics such as Callamard as "stupid." Duterte has even attempted to justify the mounting death toll of his "war on drugs" by questioning the humanity of drug users: "I'd like to be frank with you, are they (drug users) humans? What is your definition of a human being?" he asked military personnel on August 28.

Obama needs to make clear to Duterte that he will pay an international price for trashing the rule of law and that his unlawful "crime control" campaign puts at risk the $50 million in military aid currently allocated to the Philippines for 2017.

Obama should also make clear that the U.S. government is prepared to hold up the millions of dollars that it allocates each year for "training and mentoring for the Philippines National Police" unless the Duterte government launches a credible, impartial investigation into the sharp rise in killings.

By doing so, Obama can send an unambiguous message to Duterte that despite the cancellation of their bilateral meeting, Duterte can't avoid a painful reckoning with his abusive "war on drugs."

(Source: CNN)

Nicolas Sarkozy is back, but France has changed

By Sylvie Kauffmann

One of the most popular items on the social networks as Nicolas Sarkozy opened his new presidential bid last month was a video of an interview he gave to the French news channel BFM-TV on March 8, 2012. Still president then, Mr. Sarkozy was seeking a second five-year term, with François Hollande running against him. Asked whether he would quit politics if he lost, he firmly answered, "Yes." The journalist was taken aback. "Will you quit politics?" he asked again, incredulous. "You can ask me a third time," the president shot back. "I'm telling you: yes."

Four years later, "Sarko" is back. Just like his interviewer that day, nobody in France quite believed that this man, who admitted as early as 2003 that he thought all the time about running for president, could live without the adrenaline of a life in politics. In 2012, it took him a few months to recover from defeat, but soon enough he was maneuvering to take back his right-wing party, renaming it Les Républicains and putting his people in charge. In a book published last January, "La France pour la vie" ("France Forever"), a seemingly humbled Mr. Sarkozy acknowledged a few mistakes and tried to portray himself as a new man. This was the first stage of his campaign.

A second book, published last week, "Tout pour la France" ("All for France"), provided a springboard for formally starting his candidacy for the presidential election next April. Written in July in the privacy of the Riviera mansion owned by his wife, Carla Bruni, so hurriedly that spelling mistakes were overlooked, the book argues that Nicolas Sarkozy had to come back, for one simple reason: France needs him, just as France needed Charles de Gaulle in 1958.

In a way, this is reassuring: He has not changed. The image of a humbled, apologetic politician was short-lived — all the more so since it did him no favors in the opinion polls. Better go back to the original. The Sarko we knew is back, with a vengeance.

Majority of voters

It is not so easy to run again when you have been ejected from office by a clear majority of voters (he lost to Mr. Hollande by more than three percentage points). Neither is it easy to run again when every poll since you've been back in the political arena shows an intense dislike among a large group of voters and a high rate of negative opinions. But one thing Nicolas Sarkozy, 61, does not lack is political ambition. However unpopular, he will do whatever it takes to come back.

The fight will be harder this time, despite President Hollande's dismal standing in opinion polls. Mr. Sarkozy's problem is that he first needs to win a primary in November. He is no longer the champion of the right, but rather the challenger: His former foreign minister, Alain Juppé, 71, leads in the primary race. And a former prime minister, François Fillon, who is also running, is crucifying his ex-boss for comparing himself to de Gaulle. ("Can you imagine de Gaulle under investigation?" he lashed out recently, in a reference to long-running charges against Mr. Sarkozy of illegal campaign financing.)

So why should France need Mr. Sarkozy in 2017 if it did not want him in 2012? Because, as he explains in his new book, this is not the same country. The situation created by the recent wave of terrorist attacks requires a strong, experienced man at the helm, this argument goes. "I felt I had the strength to lead this battle at such a tormented moment in our history," he wrote. Some saw in the title "All for France" a reference to a book written by Jacques Chirac for his 1995 campaign, "La France pour tous" ("France for All"). By reversing the proposition, Mr. Sarkozy hopes that his new patriotic spirit will erase the worst memories he left — of his obsessive ego, his arrogance, his bragging and his bellicosity.

So why should France need Mr. Sarkozy in 2017 if it did not want him in 2012? Because, as he explains in his new book, this is not the same country.

Next year's election

Will he succeed? Convinced that next year's election will be fought on the right, rather than at the center, the former president is making a huge wager. The No. 1 issue of this campaign, he thinks, will not be the economy, which he did not have the courage to reform when he was in office, but France, war and Islam: It's the identity, stupid.

This is a risky bet. Where Mr. Juppé aims to unify and pacify, Mr. Sarkozy is unabashedly divisive.

Immigration, he says, took a wrong turn in 1976 when President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing allowed families to join economic immigrants in France. Since then, he argues, things have been out of control. He advocates stopping economic immigration for five years, reasoning that integrating immigrants is an old-fashioned concept that has failed. He paints France as a country "forced" by the "ideologues of multiculturalism and the sociologists of inequality" to give up the mission of assimilating newcomers.

"Assimilate means not only acquiring French citizenship but also France's values, culture and way of life," he has written. "We are not Anglo-Saxons who allow communities to live side by side, ignoring each other."

Just as Donald J. Trump wants to "make America great again," Nicolas Sarkozy wants to "make France proud again." Schoolbooks, he says, should "make our country loved, not make it feel guilty." He advocates a "French Islam, not Islam in France." And oh, yes, of course he wants to ban the burkini.

The whole question is whether, even in such tense times, the French are ready for another dose of Sarko.

Patriotism is indeed on the rise, but not in a divisive way.

Immigration and Islam are certainly worth a debate, and will most likely dominate the campaign in the coming months, but the country needs firefighters, not arsonists. Incendiary politics is Marine Le Pen's territory; Mr. Sarkozy's plan, obviously, is to siphon off as many votes as he can from her National Front. But he has been down that road before, and it has not served him well. Indeed, the mood has changed France since the current wave of terrorist attacks began in January 2015. But the turn has not been toward confrontation, and Nicolas Sarkozy may well have misjudged it.

(Source: The NYT)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY TEHRAN TIMES 7

Iran president says 'vital' to restore pre-sanctions oil output

Iran's president said he supports efforts by OPEC to stabilize oil prices, while reiterating that the country must restore production lost during years of sanctions.

"Iran had suffered greatly under sanctions," Hassan Rouhani said, according to a statement on OPEC's website citing the Iranian president. Therefore it is "vital for the country to make up its lost oil production," he said at a meeting in Tehran Tuesday with OPEC Secretary-General Mohammed Barkindo.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries has a responsibility to restore market stability and Iran will support efforts to bring about fair prices, Rouhani said at the meeting, which was also attended by Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh.

Rouhani's comments come as Russia and Saudi Arabia- the world's biggest crude producers- said on Monday they would cooperate to stabilize oil markets, while stopping short of specific measures to achieve that. Speculation has mounted in the past month that OPEC nations and Russia may reach an agreement to freeze production when they hold informal talks in Algiers at the end of the month.

A previous attempt to freeze output failed in April after Saudi Arabia insisted Iran joined the coordinated effort. The Persian nation rejected that proposal on the grounds it hadn't recovered its lost market share after sanctions over its nuclear program were lifted in January.

"Iran will support any measure toward market stabilization and oil price recovery that is based on a fair and just share for member countries," Rouhani said after the meeting in Tehran, according to the state-run IRNA news agency.

Iran has increased its crude output by more than a quarter this year, reaching 3.62 million barrels a day last month, according to a Bloomberg News survey.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Iran to raise shipments of cleaner diesel from 2017: sources

Iran is aiming to increase export volumes of cleaner diesel from next year as its refineries are upgraded, even as it cuts its reliance on imports, industry sources familiar with the matter said on Tuesday.

Iran has expanded its presence in the global oil market after international sanctions were lifted in January, Strongly marketing and increasing diesel shipments.

Diesel exports from National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) containing 500 parts-per-million (ppm) of sulfur will likely make up about half of its overall diesel shipments from early next year, compared with about less than 10 percent currently, one of the sources said.

It currently ships out about 500,000 tons of gasoil with 1 percent sulfur, or 10,000 ppm, which is mainly exported to the Middle East, with small volumes sent to Singapore, Africa and the Mediterranean, the source said, declining to be named as he was not authorized to speak with the media.

"(NIOC) is aiming to increase its low sulfur (diesel) exports and reduce the high sulfur to about 50-50 as refineries are upgrading," he added.

The company ceased imports of gasoil from April 2015 and was balanced with its supply and demand until January when it stepped up exports of the fuel, he said.

The volumes are sold through spot and term contracts, he added, declining to reveal details of term buyers.

The 1 percent sulfur fuel is mainly used for blending or as a feedstock in secondary refining units. But, the cleaner 500 ppm sulfur diesel is used in the transport and industrial sectors in many Asian countries including Vietnam and Bangladesh.

Iran's increase of cleaner diesel is expected to weigh on Asian gasoil margins, which are already hovering near six-year lows, traders said.

Still, as winter approaches, Iran's gasoil exports are likely to decline over the next few months as the fuel is used in the domestic market for power generation, the source added.

Getting letters of credit is still a problem at times, though it is becoming less difficult and does not pose a major issue, said the source. While large global banks are still holding back because of legal risks, Iran has begun working with smaller foreign institutions.

NIOC said earlier on Tuesday it will reduce its gasoline imports and condensate exports once the first phase of its Persian Gulf refinery starts up by end-March 2017.

(Source: Reuters)

Zorlu Enerji of Turkey considers power plants in Iran

Turkish electricity producer Zorlu Enerji may build gas-fired power plants in Iran as Turkey's eastern neighbor seeks to attract investors after decades of economic sanctions.

The company is in talks with Iranian authorities for the project and a concrete plan may be announced this year, said Omer Yungul, chief executive officer of Zorlu Holding, which owns the Istanbul-based company formally known as Zorlu Enerji Elektrik Uretim AS.

Zorlu Enerji, which produces electricity from wind, hydro, gas-fired and geothermal power plants totaling 966 megawatts in Turkey, Pakistan and Israel, plans to invest "a sizable amount" in Iran, Yungul said in an interview in Istanbul. The total capacity of the power plants may be similar to plans by Unit International, owned by Turkish investor Unal Aysal, to build power plants costing $4.2 billion in Iran, he said.

Zorlu Enerji shares rose as much as 2.5 percent to 1.65 liras in Istanbul before ending the day at 1.64 liras.

(Source: Bloomberg)

PICTURE OF THE DAY **SHANA**/*Hamed Noori*

Shahid Rajaei semi-submersible drilling rig is one of the most equipped rigs in Iran's South Pars gas field located in the Persian Gulf.

Cuba to seek oil imports from Russia, Iran

Cuba is looking to Russia and Iran to make up for dwindling oil supplies from close ally Venezuela.

The island is keen to replenish oil supplies as it works to revive foreign tourism following the recent resumption of commercial flights from the U.S.

An official of Cuba's state-run oil company Cupet tells Argus that the Cuban government is preparing to start negotiations with Russia for the supply of crude and refined oil products "to counter possible disruptions in imports from current sources."

Cuba also plans to discuss oil supply with Iran, the official said.

Iran and Cuba discussed cooperation in several areas including oil supply during a visit to Havana last month by foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, an official Cuban government statement said at the time.

"There are no discussions yet about oil imports from Iran," the Cupet official said.

Cuba has been trying to restart deep-water oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico that ran aground in 2012 after foreign companies, including Spain's Repsol, India's ONGC, Norway's Statoil, Malaysia's Petronas, Russia's Gazpromneft and PdV, struck dry holes.

In Venezuela, PdV's crude production is declining because of a lack of investment, services and functional equipment. *(Source: Argus Media)*

Oil edges up; gains limited amid skepticism over freeze deal

Oil prices erased early losses to trade higher on Wednesday partly due to a weaker dollar, but gains were limited as market participants remained skeptical producers would reach an agreement to freeze output to rein in a global supply glut.

London Brent crude for November delivery was up 23 cents at $47.49 a barrel by 0643 GMT, after settling down 37 cents on Tuesday.

NYMEX crude for October delivery was up 22 cents at $45.05.

Trade sources said oil was supported from the dollar's decline following downbeat U.S. economic data, making greenback-denominated crude less expensive for holders of other currencies.

Oil prices hit a one-week high on Monday after Russia and Saudi Arabia agreed to cooperate on stabilizing the oil market, but they have since fallen due to mounting uncertainty over a deal.

Traders said U.S. crude was supported by Genscape data showing a draw of some 700,000 barrels last week at the Cushing, Oklahoma, delivery hub for U.S. crude futures.

U.S. commercial crude inventories likely dropped by 100,000 barrels last week, a preliminary Reuters poll showed on Tuesday.

Gasoline stocks likely fell by 500,000 barrels, while distillate stocks are forecast to have increased by one million barrels, the poll showed.

(Source: Reuters)

NEWS

Oil-market rescue no nearer amid Saudi-Russia 'lip service'

An international agreement to cap crude-oil output in a way that would restrict actual supply and support prices looks no nearer after the two largest producers pledged to cooperate.

Most members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries that can raise production have indicated they will aim to do so, while others are already close to short-term limits.

Monday's joint statement by the oil ministers of Saudi Arabia and Russia, billed as a "significant" announcement, was "without any substance for market balances," Amrita Sen, chief oil analyst at consulting firm Energy Aspects Ltd., said in Singapore.

Although both nations committed to discuss measures to help the oil market, including a potential output freeze, Saudi Arabia said there's no current need to limit production. Russia's Energy Ministry also expressed doubt last week that a cap is needed. Further reducing hopes of a meaningful accord, the two failed to agree on whether Iran has fully restored pre-sanctions output, key to determining whether it should take part in any freeze.

Impossible cooperation

"There is not even a little chance for a real cooperation between Russia and Saudi Arabia," Eugen Weinberg, head of commodities research at Commerzbank AG in Frankfurt, said by e-mail. "It's clearly just a lip service, since the real cooperation between these competitors is just impossible."

OPEC members are due to meet other producers for informal talks in Algeria later this month. One major issue undermining the impact of a potential freeze deal is that both Saudi Arabia and Russia are already pumping a lot of oil. The Saudis produced a record 10.69 million barrels a day in August, according to a Bloomberg survey of analysts, oil companies and ship-tracking data. Russian oil production jumped in recent days, exceeding 11 million barrels a day for the first time since at least 1991, according to daily data from the Russian Energy Ministry's CDU-TEK unit.

"A freeze doesn't resolve anything if Saudi Arabia and Russia are both freezing when their production is at a record high," Saad Rahim, chief economist at oil-trading house Trafigura Group Pte, said in Singapore.

While Russia appears willing to join an international agreement to steady the market, it's reluctant to lead the process of negotiating a freeze. Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich has said all OPEC members must reach consensus on a cap before Russia will participate. Even if a deal is on the table, Iran, Nigeria, Libya and even Iraq could reasonably seek exemptions.

Venezuela has said it's satisfied with the preliminary accord between Saudi Arabia and Russia to at least cooperate.

"We're anticipating that there'll be an excellent climate of dialogue and negotiation among all the producer countries to achieve a historic accord," Venezuela Oil Minister Eulogio Del Pino said from the presidential palace in comments broadcast on state television.

Saudi Arabia will go along with an oil-output freeze if other producing countries agree, Reuters reported, citing Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir speaking in London on Tuesday.

Iran showed Monday that it's ready to pump more crude, with state-run National Iranian Oil Co. saying the country can raise production to 4 million barrels a day in two to three months from the current daily level of about 3.8 million. Iran's President reiterated on Tuesday that while he supports OPEC's efforts to stabilize prices, his country must restore production lost during years of sanctions.

Nigeria may also demand the right to restore production after militant attacks curbed output, while Libya will want to boost volumes that shrank to a fraction of pre-conflict levels. In Iraq, Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi has said he'd support a freeze deal, though new Oil Minister Jabbar Al-Luaibi previously called on oil companies to increase production to boost national revenue.

Most of the rest of OPEC's members already are pumping as much as they can.

Saudi Arabia and Russia were keen to publicize their rapprochement on Monday, saying their joint statement showed a growing trust and understanding that collaboration is vital to oil's recovery. Yet analysts remain skeptical a meaningful deal can be reached in Algiers.

"Talk is cheap, but they could pay a dear price for crying wolf too often," Commerzbank's Weinberg said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Armenia's gas import from Iran up 1.2% in H1

Although exports of natural gas to Armenia in the first half of 2016 decreased by 23.2 percent compared to the same period in 2015, imports from Iran increased by 1.2 percent to 186.5 million cubic meters, according to the Customs Service of Armenia.

Based on the Customs Service, the total value of imported gas decreased by 36 percent to $162.6 million and imports of natural gas from Russia declined by 27.3 percent from 1.125 billion cubic meters in the first half of 2015 to 818.3 million cubic meters.

Imports of Iranian gas in 2015 amounted 383.1 million cubic meters worth $72.4 million, up from 365.9 million cubic meters imported in 2014.

According to the Armenian customs data, in 2015 Armenia imported a total of 2.6 billion cubic meters of natural gas worth $ 514.3 million, up from about 2.5 billion cubic meters imported in 2014.

Russia accounted for 82% of Armenian natural gas imports (about 2.2 billion cubic meters a year) worth $426.3 million.

Armenia not only imported, but also exported natural gas- 24.7 million cubic meters- to the neighboring Georgia earning $6.1 million. *(Source: arka.am)*

Pars Diplomatic Real Estate

Apartment

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Good access to highway, ***Suitable for Residency,*** $9000
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Apt. in Jordan
180 sq.m, 3 bdrs, fully furn, marble floor, nice view, $2300
Mr.Arvin: 09128103207

Apt. in Elahieh
Brand new, 300 sq.m, 4 bdrs, unfurn, large balcony, $4800
Mr.Arvin: 09128103207

Apt. in Jordan
Near to Jam-E-Jam
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Easy ways to increase your daily water intake

1. Add a splash of citrus

If you just can't drink glass after glass of plain water all day, try infusing your water with some citrusy flavor. Just slice up some lemon, lime, or orange, or even all three! Then add to a pitcher or bottle and let it infuse your water with fruity flavor. Keeping a pitcher of this in your fridge at all times will double your water intake in no time.

Other great infusers? Strawberries, mango, cucumbers, and mint. You can also find flavored waters on supermarket shelves, but read the labels carefully and watch out for added sugar.

2. Carry a reusable water bottle

Toting around a refillable water bottle is a surefire way to increase your water intake. Pick up a cute one at the grocery store or mall and be sure to wash it often. Prefer to drink out of a straw? Look for bottles with built-in straws. Like the fruit-infusion idea in tip number 1? There are reusable water bottles with a special section for fruit slices.

Here's another tip: Did you know it's extremely common to mistake thirst for hunger? The next time you feel hungry, try drinking some water before reaching for food to see if that's what your body is really craving.

3. Go for sparkling water

Because bubbles make everything more fun try alternating flat water with the carbonated kind. Experts say carbonated water is just as good for you as flat. Fizzy water is especially good if you're trying to cut back on soda. There are even options available with a hint of flavor. Just remember to check those labels for added sugar or sweeteners.

4. Spice up your food

Think about it: A little heat at mealtime is guaranteed to send you straight for some refreshing water to cool down your mouth. Try seasoning your food with a little cayenne pepper or hot sauce. There are some fantastic spicy salt-free seasoning mixes out there too. Bonus? Guzzling water in between bites will help you feel full faster, so you'll be less likely to overdo it on portions.

5. Change up the temperature

Start your day with a cup of hot water with a squeeze of lemon. Some people prefer ice-cold water, especially after a workout, while others find that sipping room temperature water is easier than sipping it cold. Try switching it up until you find the temperature that works best for you. It could be that you like different temperatures at different times of days.

6. Get your workout on

When you're working up a sweat you'll need to replenish those fluids. Even a fast-paced walk on your lunch break can have you reaching for the cold stuff. Set a goal of at least 8 ounces of water for every 30 minutes of physical activity. Make sure you're always prepared with a big bottle of water, especially if you're exercising in the heat.

(Source: verywell.com)

First face transplant patient, Isabelle Dinoire, dies at 49

The recipient of the world's first face transplant, Isabelle Dinoire, has died, according to French doctors.

A statement released by Amiens Hospital, which performed the ground-breaking procedure in November 2005, said Dinoire died on April 22, 2016 "following a long illness."

She was 49 years old.

The delay in announcing her death was explained in the hospital statement.

Dinoire suffered a rejection of the transplants last winter and lost part of the use of her lips, Le Figaro, a prominent French newspaper reported Tuesday. The heavy anti-rejection treatments she had to take contributed to the occurrence of two cancers, according Le Figaro.

Surgeons performed the operation when Dinoire was 38 years old, after her face was mauled by her dog.

The medical marvel created a wave of controversy at the time, with some questioning the ethics of transplanting a face before attempting reconstructive surgery.

French surgeons Dr. Jean-Michel Dubernard and Dr. Bernard Devauchelle decided to carry out the operation to stitch on a nose, chin and mouth from a brain-dead donor, and opted out of the more traditional reconstructive surgery route.

Dinoire was given the lower part of a face taken from a woman who had committed suicide.

A year after having the procedure, Dinoire declared: "It may be someone else's face, but when I look in the mirror, I see me."

The surgery paved the way for other transplants involving varying combinations of facial parts performed in six other countries, including the United States.

(Source: CNN)

HAVE YOUR HERB

Cilantro

One of the popular Mediterranean herb, cilantro comes from coriander plant that produces both a spice and an herb. The leaf is known as cilantro and when the plant goes to seed, we harvest the coriander seed.

Ancient Greece used cilantro essential oil as a component of perfume. During medieval times, the Romans used cilantro to mask the smell of rotten meat.

Cutting with a dull knife or over-chopping will bruise the herb, and much of the flavor will be misplaced onto the cutting board surface. So take caution when need to chop the herb. Always use the entire leaf and stem, as many of its nutrients are located in the stem.

Here is a list of the healing power of cilantro:

- Help reduce anxiety
- Good source of vitamins A, C, K and traces of the B vitamins
- Help with eye disorders, red eye, macular degeneration
- Help our urinary tract to stave off infections
- Help with Alzheimer's disease
- Excellent blood builder and it helps to prevent anemia
- Rich in flavonoids
- Prevent kidney stones
- In long term, they remove mercury, lead, aluminum from our tissues
- Detoxify the body
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- May help improve sleep quality
- May have a new natural fungal cleansing formulation opportunity
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Al Saud's black history to exclude Iranians from divine duty of Hajj

1 →

The first incident happened on April 5, 2015, when Saudi officers sexually harassed the two Iranian teenage boys at the King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah as a result of which Iran stopped sending pilgrims for the Lesser Hajj until the fate of that case is determined at court, a case which Saudi officials did not take it seriously and defined the minimum sentence for them, which even was not carried out later. Saudi Arabia did not punish the officers, nor did it offer apologies to the Islamic Republic, while, in a letter to the Islamic Republic of Iran's consulate in Jeddah, the Saudi foreign ministry had announced that the two officers would receive maximum penalty; a claim which has so far proved to be a sheer lie.

Meanwhile, years ago in 1987, more than 400 pilgrims, most of them Iranian Shia pilgrims, were killed when security forces of Saudi Arabia crushed and opened fire on the pilgrims, during an anti-US and anti-Israel protest in Mecca. After the Saudi scandal, Imam Khomeini boycotted the Hajj for three years, from 1988 to 1990, inclusive. In 1991, Iran and Saudi Arabia renewed diplomatic relations after coming to an agreement to allow Iranian pilgrims to perform the Hajj again.

For more than a decade, Iranian pilgrims participated in the rituals without any major problems (minors including quality of services provided to them). However, it doesn't mean that there has been no more incidents; as in different years, many people have fallen casualty in dozens and hundreds to misconduct of organizers in stampedes, fire incidents, construction failures, etc. Iran had by then learned how to organize its own pilgrims in the best possible manner to avoid such incidents.

During 2015 Greater Hajj, two deadly incidents killed thousands of people, among them hundreds of Iranians, and received the title of deadliest disaster in the history of hajj pilgrimage, once again indicating the Saudis' inability to guarantee the safety of pilgrims.

On September 11, 2015, a crane fell in the grand mosque, ten days before official beginning of Hajj rituals and left 118 people dead and 394 injured. 11 Iranian pilgrims lost their lives and more than 30 others suffered injuries.

On September 24, 2015, at least 460 Iranians were among thousands of pilgrims who died in a stampede which broke out in Mina, near Mecca, during the Hajj pilgrimage. The incident happened in Mina at the intersection of two streets leading up to Jamaraat Bridge.

Head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization Saeed Ohadi expressed regret over the event saying that there were three tragedies in the Mina incident; the first catastrophe happened when Saudi government deliberately blocked ways of the pilgrims and led them to the direction which made the way highly tumultuous and eventually due to negligence of the Saudi government, the tragedy happened.

He also slammed Saudi government for failing to provide appropriate emergency facilities, saying 'it would have been possible to save many of the victims,' if they had simply given water to people caught in the stampede or had not kept all the injured and the dead altogether in locked-up containers.

A year after the Mina tragedy, Saudi officials still refuse to take responsibility of their misconduct of (if not conspiracy in) Hajj management.

Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei declared three days of national mourning in Iran strongly criticizing Al Saud for lacking ability and management in controlling the pilgrimage, saying the running of the Hajj must be handed over to Islamic states.

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani also said that the tragic incident showed lack of foresight on the part of Saudi rulers which led to the killing of thousands of men and women from across the Muslim world, including Iran.

Following the deadly incidents in 2015, Saudi Arabia once again came under fire for their inability to ensure the safety of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims who converge on Mecca every year.

Following the diplomatic tensions between Riyadh and Tehran which ended up in cutting the diplomatic ties between the two countries, Iranians lost the opportunity to participate in Hajj. Iranian officials came into negotiations with Saudi officials to pave the way for visa issuance and set the ground for Hajj travelers from Iran, but Saudi government showed no flexibility and curbed the path of negotiations.

After months of efforts, Iranian Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization announced on May 29, it won't dispatch pilgrims this year to Mecca. The Saudis ignored the absolute right of the Iranians to perform Hajj.

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Ali Jannati also announced on May 29, that due to obstructionist measures taken by Saudi Arabia, it would not be possible for Iranian pilgrims to attend the Greater Hajj ceremony during the current year.

The announcement came after two rounds of negotiations between representatives of Iran and Saudi Arabia aimed at providing necessary conditions for presence of Iranian pilgrims in this year's Hajj. Both rounds of talks, however, ended up in failure due to impediments created by the Saudi side.

One year has now passed since the ominous incidents in Saudi Arabia, however, they have refused to offer the smallest amount of cooperation in this regard and provision of compensation for the victims. They even refused to return bodies of many victims to their countries and many were buried without their relatives' consent and even some without any identification. This also could have happened to Iranian victims if it was not for strong and serious position-taking of Ayatollah Khamenei; "Saudi officials fail to do their duties and act against their responsibilities and show slyness in some cases; if Iran wants to react, Saudi Arabia's conditions will not be good. We have so far shown self-restrain in several cases. In case of reaction, our response will be firm and severe," had asserted the Leader.

Families of the victims of the Mina tragedy have taken legal action with Iranian courts of Justice against the Saudi government to seek compensation in line with Universal Jurisdiction, the other substantive law governing relationships of member states of the United Nations.

Saudi Arabia is accused of blocking the path leading to Allah, and raising obstacles against Iranian pilgrims. As the Islamic Revolution Leader has repeatedly underlined, all Muslim pilgrims across the world must fundamentally reconsider the management of the two holy places and the issue of hajj due to constant and frequent mismanagement and oppressive behavior of Saudi rulers towards God's guests.

"Negligence in this regard will confront the Islamic Ummah with more serious problems in the future," Ayatollah Khamenei had emphasized.

Clinton versus Trump: How it might matter for the Middle East

By Richard Falk

When it comes to foreign policy, it seems at first glance to be a no brainer. Hilary Clinton is experienced, knowledgeable, intelligent, an internationalist, known and respected around the world. In contrast, Donald Trump repeatedly shoots himself in the foot and others elsewhere, seems clueless on the complexities of the world, makes such reckless hyper-nationalist boasts about how he will crush enemies and make allies squirm. Such posturing makes people everywhere fearful, hostile and even wondering whether the American citizenry as a whole is collectively experiencing a psychotic episode by taking seriously such an outlandish candidate.

Between Militarism and Isolationism

Yet a closer look makes the choice between these two candidates less obvious, and more interesting, although not more encouraging, especially if the focus is what the election might mean for the Middle East. One of the few consistent positions taken by Trump is to voice his deep skepticism about regime-changing interventions in the region, especially Iraq and Libya, and the accompanying expensive delusions of former presidents, as well as Clinton, about policies aimed at producing democracies. As expected, Trump has some awkward inconsistencies in his earlier pronouncements on these issues if you bother to check out what he had to say a few years ago. Still, his present opposition to military interventions in the Middle East has been consistently expressed throughout the presidential campaign. His essential position is summarized by his own words:

What follows, then, is the likelihood that Trump will oppose intervention in the Middle East unless there is a clear connection present with a terrorist threat directed at the United States posed by ISIS, and maybe al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).

Clinton has a consistently hawkish record in foreign policy, which she tried her best to put out of sight during the primary competition with Bernie Sanders, whose progressive views were surprisingly similar to Trump on this central question of military intervention in the Middle East. During her time as Secretary of State (2009-2012), including shaping policy toward Russia, China, Afghanistan, and in the Middle East, Clinton over and over again pushed President Obama hard to adopt more militarist and confrontational positions, most visibly in the region with respect to American military involvement in Libya and Syria. When visiting Libya shortly after Qaddafi was brutally executed in 2011 by rebels when captured in a Libyan town, Clinton chillingly observed, "We came, we saw, he died." It was a revealing comment, a kind of cold-hearted gallows geopolitical quip.

Stability First, or America First?

It is also relevant that Clinton's regional grand strategy was premised on keeping friendly dictators in power even in the face of overwhelmingly popular uprisings, disclosed rather starkly in her lobbying efforts to stand by Mubarak in his hour of troubles with the Egyptian people back in 2011. Although she now downplays her support for the 2003 aggressive war in Iraq launched against the regime of Saddam Hussein, she clearly supported at its outset the most disastrous American foreign policy decision since the United States committed itself in the mid-1960s so heavily to the losing side in the Vietnam War. Not only did the attack on Iraq bring many deaths, much devastation, massive displacement, and lasting chaos to Iraq and its people, but the long American-led occupation spread disorder beyond Iraqi borders, and was an important contributing cause to the origins and rise of ISIS.

Yet, despite these Clinton policy misjudgments in the Middle East, isn't the world still better off with the steady hand of Clinton than the wildly impulsive Trump. Her morbid quip struck hard at what this distinction could mean: "A man you can bait with a tweet is not a man we can trust with nuclear weapons." Such anxiety is intensified as soon as we realize that there are no political checks limiting the capacity of an American president to use nuclear weapons. This makes us aware of how people everywhere despite their huge stake in prudent American leadership, play no role in determining the outcome of a presidential election in the United States. It may be time to consider a plan to enfranchise the whole world to have a vote of some kind in American national elections if the ideal of global democracy and the rule of law are ever to achieve political traction.

Trump has made a number of assertions about nuclear weapons that not only challenge decades of Western conventional wisdom, but also strike fear in the hearts of people wherever they are, including the Middle East. In his preoccupation with conserving American financial resources Trump has suggested that it might not be a bad thing for Japan and South Korea to develop their own nuclear weapons, and then take over responsibility for their own security. Supposedly he asked a friend, "Why can't we use nukes?" True, such assertions are not necessarily indicative of what Trump would do as president in the Middle East but neither should they be ignored. Trump seems neo-isolationist in overall outlook, which means fewer international commitments and a desperate search for ways to cut overseas expenditures. It is possible that his unwillingness to give unquestioned support to the nonproliferation regime that has frozen the nuclear status quo for decades might generate a renewed push for phased, total nuclear disarmament, the only decent and reliable long-term solution.

There are other worries. Trump opposes the Iran nuclear deal, probably the most constructive diplomatic initiative taken during the eight years of the Obama presidency. Trump thinks it was a terrible deal since it "gave back to Iran $150 billion and gave us nothing." Scrapping the agreement, or even failing to live up to its commitments, endangers an unraveling of the whole normalizing relationship of Iran within the Middle East, and could tempt Israel to launch some kind of preemptive attack on Iran's nuclear facilities or even give rise to an extremely dangerous nuclear arms race in the region. It should be noted, in passing, that both Trump and Clinton have tied themselves so firmly to the mast of pro-Israeli alignment as to be blind to the desirability of promoting a Middle East Nuclear Free Zone, a proposal that enjoys the support of every Middle Eastern government except Israel, and would probably do more to stabilize the region than any other single initiative.

Regressive Ideology

Thinking that Clinton is more reliable than Trump may be more a matter of style than substance. Supposedly she did not oppose giving Israel a green light to attack Iran during her period as Secretary of State. Also worrisome is her long undisguised admiration for the warped wisdom of Henry Kissinger, and even Robert Kagen, considered the most militarist member of the neoconservative inner circle, and despite being closely identified in the past with Republicans, has endorsed Clinton, and reportedly acts as the most prominent adviser in her foreign policy braintrust. It is hardly a surprise that 50 self-proclaimed Republican national security specialists publicly endorsed Clinton over Trump, but it is a marker of how unusual this contest for the American presidency has become. As has been often observed, Clinton is of the foreign policy/national security establishment that has brought to where we are now, while Trump is seen as a potential spoiler who might pursue policies that would cause structural disintegration and with it, the collapse of the neoliberal economic order, that is, 'the Washington consensus.'

After fifteen years of wars in the Middle East, after trillions of dollars spent and thousands of lives lost, the situation is worse than it has ever been before.

Trump, too, boasts of his meetings with Kissinger, as some kind of certification of his worthiness that overcomes his amateurish qualifications for high political office. Yet his opinions adopt lines of thought that are probably an anathema to this aged master of real politik. Clinton, of course, has reflected more and longer on such matters, and in an effort to please all sides opts for what she is calling 'smart power,' a customized blend of 'hard' and 'soft' power that is supposed to be responsive to the complexities of shaping foreign policy in the early 21stcentury. The Clinton formula, not unlike that of other recent mainstream candidates in the U.S., is designed to please as much as possible the warlords of the Pentagon, the wizards of Wall Street, and the champions of Israel, or at least not distress any of these three nodes of American geopolitical primacy.

With these profiles as a background, can we predict the foreign policy of a Clinton or Trump presidency in the Middle East? It is possible to make more reliable guesses about Clinton because she has made some of her positions already clear: an escalation of support for anti-Assad Syrian forces (except ISIS), a hardening of diplomatic bargaining with Iran in carrying out the nuclear agreement, a further upgrading of the 'special relationship' with Israel, and no change of course with respect to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the other Western-leaning autocracies in the region. In addition, a possible recommitment of American military forces in Iraq, and especially robust military action against political extremism throughout the region,

Trump can be expected to indulge his neo-isolationist inclinations, likely moving policy in an opposite direction, withdrawing American combat forces and downgrading military bases in the region, in effect, a pivot away from the Middle East. The exception would seem to be his extravagant pledge to crush ISIS, whatever that might mean in practice, especially as it already seems almost crushed. The related idea of imposing an absolute ban on Muslim immigration to the US, if enacted, is likely to have disastrous blowback effects, fanning the flames of Muslim civilizational discontent.

If voting for an American president was only about the Middle East, I would rate the candidates as a tossup, but it isn't. When the American domestic scene is taken into account, as well the rest of the world, Clinton holds the clear edge unless one feels so disgusted her candidacy as to write in Bernie Sanders on the ballot or cast a vote of conscience for Jill Stein, the Green Party candidate. I remain uncertain as to which of these choices to make.

My liberal friends become angry when even such a possibility is mentioned. They still blame the Ralph Nader candidacy in the 2000 election for depriving Al Gore from a victory in Florida, and thus a national victory over George W. Bush. I remain puzzled by and opposed to such a logic. Why allow third party candidates to seek public office if the pundits view it as irresponsible, or worse, to vote for them if the best candidate? Or maybe, it is okay to vote for them if your state is not 'a swing state,' but that again means that it is more important to vote for the lesser of evils to avoid the greater of evils rather than to vote for the best candidate. I take a more nuanced position. It depends on how evil is the greater of evils compared to the lesser evil, and whether this seems to matter. At present, if I were in a swing state I would vote for Clinton, although reluctantly (domestic issues and nuclear weapons policy), but since I live in California I will probably vote for Jill Stein. Somehow I wish Bernie Sanders had wrestled with this dilemma rather than uncritically adopting the liberal consensus, which given Clinton's slide to the right since the Democratic Party convention should keep him awake some nights.

A teenager could decide where to land NASA's next Mars mission

NASA is already planning where could they land their next rover mission to Mars, and young Alex Longo may have a say on it. The teenager is a NASA fan, and after the agency asked scientists their opinion on where to land the rover in 2014, Longo decided his suggestion was worth sharing, and for his surprise, NASA thought the same.

One of the leading ideas on the matter, the 2020 mission landing site on Mars is Alex Longo proposal to land the rover at Gusev Crater. The crater received NASA's rover Spirit back in 2004, and it found evidence that suggested there might have once been life on the red planet.

Longo is from Raleigh, North Carolina, and was 14 years old when the agency asked him to be a part of the first meeting to discuss the 2020 rover's landing site. NPR reports the boy could not believe it at first.

After sending a detailed paper with his proposal, NASA sent Longo an email with the invitation and the teenager said he just got up and left the room. He thought it was a dream, but after a while, he came back and the email was still on his computer screen.

The meeting was held in a hotel near NASA headquarters in Washington, D.C. and Longo got to the meeting with his parents, who drove him there. He was the last speaker of the conference and got a round of applause for his idea. Longo's proposal is to give Gusev Crater a second chance due to what rover Spirit found at the place.

One of the leading ideas on the matter, the 2020 mission landing site on Mars is Alex Longo proposal to land the rover at Gusev Crater.

Longo confessed he was scared at the time of the meeting. There were 125 Ph.D.s and grad students in the room. He knew he was by far the least experienced or knowledgeable person there. And he had to give them a presentation.

Alex proposal is supported

Other scientists currently support Alex proposal, and his idea is one of the eight semi-finalists. Next year the recommendations will be reduced to four.

Space enthusiastic Alex Longo said he had been a fan of space exploration as long he can remember and confessed his first experience with the field was in 2005. Longo was just five years old, and he said his mom and dad had him watch a space shuttle launch.

The launch inspired Longo, and he later decided he was going to go into space himself, and he would be the first person to walk on Mars.

Alex started following NASA missions through the agency's website and in 2014, he saw the announcement that would bring him to be part of 2020 mission to Mars. NASA was requesting abstracts from scientists to suggest landing sites and Longo, who had written to the agency in the past, started developing his proposal. *(Source: NPR)*

Future drought will offset benefits of higher CO2 on soybean yields: study

An eight-year study of soybeans grown outdoors in a carbon dioxide-rich atmosphere like that expected by 2050 has yielded a new and worrisome finding: Higher atmospheric CO2 concentrations will boost plant growth under ideal growing conditions, but drought - expected to worsen as the climate warms and rainfall patterns change - will outweigh those benefits and cause yield losses much sooner than anticipated.

The new discovery, reported in the journal Nature Plants, contradicts a widely accepted hypothesis about how climate change will affect food production, said University of Illinois plant biology professor Andrew Leakey, who led the new research.

"If you read the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports and if you read the scientific literature on the subject for the last 30 years, the concluding statement is nearly always that elevated carbon dioxide will ameliorate drought stress in crops," Leakey said.

Numerous laboratory and field studies have supported this assessment: In many scenarios, elevated carbon dioxide acts as a fertilizer, boosting plant growth. Plants exposed to high CO2 also reduce the size of the pores in their leaves, lessening the exchange of gases with the atmosphere. This helps plants use less water from the soil.

Such findings strongly suggested that elevated CO2 would help plants better withstand drought, Leakey said.

"This was consistent with what we saw with our own experiments the first four years, the relatively wet years," Leakey said. "But when the growing seasons were hot and dry, that pattern broke down."

To make this discovery, Leakey and his colleagues relied on an unusual technology that enables them to simulate future climate conditions in actual farm fields. The Soybean Free Air Concentration Enrichment facility uses high-tech sensors to determine wind speed and direction, and a computer to regulate the release of gases to expose the crop plants to a given set of climate conditions.

Under hot conditions

Under hot and dry conditions at elevated CO2, the plants in the SoyFACE experiments used more, not less, water than those grown under current atmospheric conditions, the researchers found.

"What we think is happening is that early in the growing season, when the plant has enough water, it's able to photosynthesize more as a result of the higher CO2 levels. It's got more sugars to play with, it grows more, it creates all this extra leaf area," Leakey said. "But when it gets dry, the plant has overextended itself, so later in the season it's now using more water."

Two other plant responses also contribute to the problem, the researchers found.

"At elevated CO2, there are changes in certain hormones the plant uses to signal between the roots and shoots," Leakey said. The "plant becomes more sensitive to that signal at elevated CO2, and that causes photosynthesis to decline more in response to drought than it would do at ambient CO2 levels." *(Source: EurekAlert)*

ZAR Macaron Co. Exports Grain-Based Sweeteners for 1st Time

After years of dependence of Iranian industry on importing grain-based sweeteners, ZAR Grains Factory managed to export its fructose-based consignments for the first time in the country.

Chairman of the Board of Directors of ZAR Macaron Company Morteza Soltani announced the above statement and said: "At the initiative taken by the talented laborers of the company and relying upon the assistance of the Almighty God, the company managed to take giant stride in line with exporting its fructose-based products to abroad."

Given the above issue, the company managed to prevent from capital flight after years of importing similar products into the country, he maintained.

It should be noted that fructose syrup is of sugar-based derivatives of the grains factory, he said, adding: "considering the dire need of country to sweeteners and imbalanced situation in price of sugar for confectionery and chocolate production units, this product can be considered as suitable alternative to sugar."

Benefited from world's most modern and state-of-the-art technology, grains unit of the company started its activity as high-tech industry, he highlighted.

Elsewhere in his remarks, senior official of the company pointed to the necessity of strengthening intermediate industries in order to produce products with Value Added (VA), and said: "Not only single-product economy cannot boost economic growth in the country, but also weakening small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can exclude these industries from production cycle."

In the end, Chief Executive of ZAR Macaron Company called on responsible officials to roll up their sleeves vehemently in order to back production sector logically.

Bank Shahr Public Relations and Communications Center Awarded with Badge of Honor

The sole excellent management award and Plaque of Honor in national level was granted by Public Relations Specialists' Association to the Head of Bank Shahr Public Relations and Communications Center Dr. Farshad Fakhimi.

As held in Intl. Seminars Centers of Olympic Hotel, the first national seminar entitled "Studying Problems and Challenges Facing Public Relations Departments in Iran", the prestigious public relations management award was granted to the Public Relations Department manager of the bank for his excellent performance in this respect.

The Plaque of Honor is read as follows: "Promoting status of Public Relations in the country is possible under the auspices of the salient move taken by innovators and talented managers in the field of 8th art and is manifestation of sublime endeavor of the elites of the country for all-out progress of Islamic Iran."

Tehran to Host 59th GBM of Asian Productivity in Coming Year

Tehran will host organizing 59th Governing Board Meeting (GBM) of productivity on April 9-11, 2017.

Head of National Iranian Productivity Organization (NIPO) Dr. Roya Tabatabaei Yazdi announced the above statement and said: "The Asian Productivity Organization is the highest profile meeting which is held once a year in one of member countries with the aim of studying relevant issues on productivity." At the initiative taken by the Plan and Budget Organization, this prestigious meeting will be held for three days in Tehran in coming year, she maintained.

Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Fiji, Cambodia, South Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Mongolia and Nepal will take part in this important productivity event, the senior official of the organization opined.

Asian Productivity Organization (APO) is a regional and intergovernmental organization which was founded in 1961, so that Islamic Republic of Iran took membership at the organization in 1965. It should be noted that Iran hosted Governing Body Meeting of Asian Productivity Organization (APO) in 2008.

SINA Bank to Open a Branch Office in Germany

SINA Bank will set up a branch in Germany in near future.

According to the Public Relations Department of the bank, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was inked between visiting German trade and economic delegation to Tehran, headed by the Minister of Trade, Media, Economy and Technology of Bavarian State and chief executive of SINA Bank.

As licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic republic of Iran (CBI), the bank decided to set up a branch office in Germany, the report added.

It should be noted that the MOU was signed and sealed in the presence of Head of Iran's Mostazafan and Janbazan (M&J) Foundation Eng. Saeedikia.

Given the above issue, MOU was inked under the auspices of an agreement made between M&J Foundation and German trade and economic delegation.

With the coordination made in this regard, the two sides will boost mutual cooperation in various fields including finance, construction, building, agricultural and animal husbandry industries, renewable energies, textile and tourism industries, etc. as joint venture.

NEWS

Record-holding U.S. astronaut and two Russians return to Earth

An American astronaut who set the U.S. record for cumulative time in orbit safely returned to Earth early Wednesday along with two Russian cosmonauts after a six-month mission aboard the International Space Station.

NASA's Jeff Williams, 58, logged 534 days in space over four missions. The ISS commander landed at 07:13 local time (0113 GMT) on the steppes of central Kazakhstan aboard a Russian-made Soyuz capsule along with Alexey Ovchinin and Oleg Skripochka.

"Touchdown! Welcome home @Astro_Jeff, officially back on Earth after 172-day mission & total 534 days on 4 missions," NASA tweeted.

A NASA live video feed showed Williams on the ground smiling and waving while talking on a satellite phone before being carried away for medical tests.

The three men undocked from the ISS nearly three and a half hours earlier after spending their mission largely conducting scientific experiments.

Williams performed five space walks, including one along with NASA astronaut Kate Rubins to install a docking adapter for future commercial Boeing and SpaceX crew capsules to visit the space station.

"Williams was instrumental in preparing the station for the future arrival of U.S. commercial crew spacecraft," NASA said in a statement.

He also helped set up an experimental temporary inflatable module designed by Bigelow Aerospace to test expandable habitats astronauts might use on the Moon or Mars in the coming decades.

The retired Army colonel beat the previous U.S. record set by astronaut Scott Kelly during his year in orbit.

Kelly has 520 days in space over his career.

Williams, a grandfather, is also the oldest American to spend live on the space station. *(Source: phys.org)*

Scientists discover 'sixth' taste

The desire to delve into a whopping great bowl of pasta or devour a huge bag of crisps comes to many of us - and now scientists believe they have discovered a "sixth taste" which could be fuelling our carb cravings.

Until now, it was believed that humans could only detect five different primary tastes: sweet, salty, sour, bitter and, added to the list seven years ago, umami. But now researchers claim we're capable of tasting a "starchy" flavor too.

Juyun Lim, Associate Professor of Food Science and Technology at Oregon State University, conducted the research, which suggests that our palate can detect carbohydrates founds in foods such as pasta, potatoes and bread.

"Every culture has a major source of complex carbohydrate. The idea that we can't taste what we're eating doesn't make sense," she told New Scientist.

To test the sixth-taste theory, Dr. Lim and her team dissolved different levels of carbohydrates in liquid solutions and gave them to 22 participants who were asked to rate how each tasted. *(Source: The Telegraph)*

Glamorous new fish species discovered in world's largest ocean reserve

A new species of butterflyfish has been discovered in the deep reefs of Papahnaumokukea Marine National Monument, an area in the remote northwest of the Hawaiian Islands which President Obama recently expanded, making it the world's largest protected ocean reserve.

The fish was identified by scientists from the Bishop museum in Honolulu and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

"Butterflyfish are the glamour fish of the coral reefs," said Richard Pyle, Bishop Museum scientist and lead author on a paper reporting on the discovery of the fish.

"They are colorful, beautiful, and have been very well-studied worldwide. Finding a new species of butterflyfish is a rare event."

The fish was discovered in deep coral reefs, known as mesophotic coral ecosystems, or "the coral-reef twilight zone".

They occupy depths of around 50-150 meters in one of the least-explored marine ecosystems: it is too shallow for most submersible-based exploration and too deep for most divers to reach.

"Discoveries such as this underscore how poorly explored and how little we know about our deep coral reefs," said Randall Kosaki, NOAA scientist and co-author of the study. "Virtually every deep dive we do takes place on a reef that no human being has ever seen."

(Source: ibtimes.com)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Marriage counselling centers to increase in Iran

TT SOCIETY desk **TEHRAN** — Ten marriage counselling centers will be set up in each province of Iran by March 20, 2017, an official with the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs said on Tuesday.

Nasser Sobhi-Qaramaleki made the remarks over a press conference with Youth Affairs and Sports Minister Mahmoud Goudarzi in attendance, IRIB reported.

"16 provinces of Iran are currently deprived of any marriage counselling services," Sobhi-Qaramaleki explained, adding, "earlier we had made arrangements to designate two centers to each province but considering the current trend 10 counselling centers will be licensed to operate in all provinces by the end of the year."

Some 60 marriage counselling centers are also awaiting legal processes and will soon obtain their license, he noted, "1,809 centers have applied for license and we are following up on 257 of the applications in the private sector."

'Kindness bag' campaign to help out underprivileged students

TT SOCIETY desk **TEHRAN** — 'Kindness bag', a campaign coordinated by a charity foundation, is designed to help underprivileged students all over the country, Fars news agency reported on Wednesday.

Kindness bags contain some 15 stationery items and hygiene products such as toothbrush and toothpaste, and will be handed out by the beginning of the school year on September 22, Ala Charity Foundation consultant Ali Mazaheri explained.

Each bag and the items it contains worth some 500,000 rials (nearly $15) which will do for a whole year, Mazaheri noted.

So far 10,000 bags have been ready for being dispensed among the students nationwide, he said.

LEARN ENGLISH

Working as an Intern

Jonas: How's your new job?
Crystal: It's not a job exactly. It's an **internship**.
Jonas: Oh, so you're working as somebody's **lackey** and getting paid a **pittance**.
Crystal: No, not exactly. I'm doing a lot of **scut work** and I'm not getting paid a lot, but I'm getting very valuable **on- the-job experience**.
Jonas: Sure you are. You're learning how to **fetch** coffee and **run errands**. **Yippee**! You don't have to tell me anymore. I know all about it. It's **slave labor**.
Crystal: No, it's not! I'm **shadowing** one of the managers' part of the day and I **sit in on** important meetings all the time. My **mentor** shows me how things are done in the business world and gives me great career advice.
Jonas: Well, then you're lucky. Most interns who work for our company learn **diddly squat** and spend their time doing **menial** work. Some of them are even **unpaid**. What a **racket**!
Crystal: In that case, I'm glad I don't work for your company!
(Source: eslpod.com)

Words & phrases

internship: a job that lasts for a short time, that someone, especially a student, does in order to gain experience
lackey: someone who always does what a particular person tells them to do - used to show disapproval
pittance: a very small amount of money, especially wages, that is less than someone needs or deserves
scut work: routine and often menial labor
on-the-job experience: of, relating to, or being something (as training or experience) learned, gained, or done while working at a job
fetch: to go and get something or someone and bring them back
run errands: an errand is a short trip to fulfill some small business; when you're running errands, you're making a bunch of these all at once
yippee: used when you are very pleased or excited about something; hurray
slave labor: work for which you are paid an unfairly small amount of money
shadow: to follow someone closely in order to watch what they are doing
sit in on: to be present at a meeting but not take an active part in it
mentor: an experienced person who advises and helps a less experienced person
diddly squat: anything
menial: menial work is boring, needs no skill, and is not important
unpaid: done without receiving payment
racket: an illegal or dishonest scheme for obtaining money

Be kind to me!

Please save the Asiatic Cheetahs from extinction

→1

A. Preventing the establishment and implementation of any development plan such as roads and mines in cheetahs' habitats

B. Increasing the number of ranger and also improving their equipment in cheetahs' habitats

C. Purchasing ranches inside the cheetahs' habitats

D. Protecting the cheetahs' migration paths across the existing protected areas, especially in North Khorasan and Semnan Provinces

E. Securing the black spots of the roads to avoid any car accidents with cheetahs and other wildlife, especially Abbas Abad axis on Semnan-Mashhad road

F. Involving local communities in ecotourism and habitat conservation

G. Registering the 9th Shahrivar (August 30th) as "Iranian Cheetah National Day" in the official calendar of Iran to raise public awareness, sensitivity, and community participation to protect the cheetahs

22 years ago on this day, a mother cheetah with her three cubs went to drink water. Unfortunately, they were attacked by local people. The mother ran away, but two cubs were killed and only one survived. This cub was named Marita and lived in captivity for the rest of his life. 13 years later, Iranian Cheetah Society proposed that this day should be considered "Iranian Cheetah National Day," and it has been celebrated as such since then.

Thus, the undersigned do hereby declare to you, as the highest state authority, the demand for the implementation of the above measures.

The Asiatic cheetah is one of the most well-known and popular symbols of Iran at the present. We hope that with your support and also the cooperation of all related organizations, the fastest runner on the planet can be preserved.

Yours sincerely,
People of Iran

Copy to; Dr. Masoumeh Ebtekar, Vice President and Cheif of Iran's Department of the Environment to be informed.

Copy to; Mr. Ali Jannati, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance and President of General Culture Council of Iran to be informed.

Copy to; Mr. Mohammad Reza Mokhber Dezfouli, Secretary of Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution of Iran to be informed.

Copy to; Mr. Seyed Hossein Shahmoradi, Secretary of General Culture Council of Iran to be informed.

FAO launches four-year holistic program to save Urmia Lake

The remaining part of the news story headlined "FAO launches four-year holistic program to save Urmia Lake", which started from page 1 in our Wednesday issue, had to appear on page 2. However it was unfortunately forgotten to be put on the mentioned page. Due to this mistake the entire news story is republished. The mistake is regretted.

FAO signed an agreement on Tuesday (6 September 2016), with the Urmia Lake Restoration Commission (ULRC) in Tehran at Sharif University of Technology to lend substantive technical assistance for the execution of an integrated programme that aims ultimately to secure sustainable water resources management in the Urmia Lake basin.

At the ceremony, Mr. Serge Nakouzi, the FAO Representative to the Islamic Republic of Iran and to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), and Dr. Issa Kalantari, Adviser to the Iranian President on Water, Agriculture and Environment and Secretary of Urmia Lake Restoration Commission (ULRC) signed the agreement and the project documents in the presence of His Excellency Hiroyasu Kobayashi, Ambassador of Japan to Iran.

"The project will accelerate halting and inverting the lake's drying-up process by targeting reduction of water consumption within the Urmia Lake basin" the FAO Representative said.

Mr. Nakouzi underscored that through the implementation of the Programme, the concerned stakeholders will be empowered with tools and methodologies to monitor water consumption, agricultural water productivity and drought, while enhancing their capacity to disseminate Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) in agricultural water management.

The joint FAO – ULRC Programme that entitled "the Integrated Programme for Sustainable Water Resources Management in the Lake Urmia Basin" also comprises a socio-economic component that seeks to promote sustainable alternative income-generating solutions.

The Programme which funded by the Government of Japan with 436 million Japanese Yen (approx. 3.8 million USD), will be implemented by the Government of Iran with the support of the FAO technical and operational team, fully integrated within the existing governance of the Urmia Lake Restoration Programme (ULRP) and in close cooperation with different partners, selected on the basis of multidisciplinary requirements.

The area and volume of Urmia Lake is the resulting net balance of the amount of inflowing and outflowing water. For hundreds and perhaps thousands of years, the Urmia Lake was in balance with its water supply from the watershed, but recent increases in agricultural, industrial and municipal water withdrawals have disturbed the balance and the Urmia Lake is drying up. Consequently, the most urgent need is to restore the water inflow to the Urmia Lake.

Following an official communication from the ULRC to the FAO Representation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, expressing concerns for the extreme water depletion/degradation of the Urmia Lake and requesting Organization's assistance in finding possible solutions to the problem, a multidisciplinary mission was organized in February 2015 to respond to this request.

A rapid assessment on the status and prospects of the Urmia Lake was conducted by a team of FAO experts within the framework of the FAO Regional Initiative on Water Scarcity, as Islamic Republic of Iran became one of the recent focus countries of the Regional Initiative.

The findings of such a rapid assessment reaffirmed that the restoration of Urmia Lake is firmly anchored to the whole-basin water balance (inflow-outflow), particularly through addressing the dual core challenges of firstly, reducing water consumption of development activities upstream the lake; and secondly, managing drought, climate variability, and related risks for reduced precipitations.

Inter-basin water transfer would represent an additional variable of the water-balance equation, provided proper impact assessment is carefully considered. Water quality deserves due attention as well.

The ultimate beneficiaries of the project will be the Urmia Lake basin communities, who will benefit from information and decision support systems to target interventions reducing water consumption while restoring the Urmia Lake and its wetlands.

Throughout implementation of the project, special emphasis will be given to the inclusion of valuable alternative income-generation scenarios and employment options, cropping system revisions, and value chain improvement for farmers, rural population, and other socio-economic entities, to achieve the pre-determined target of water consumption reduction.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Tehran hosting workshops to promote waste sorting, upcycling

Workshops encouraging waste sorting and making works of art out of waste are being held in Tehran, Tehran's deputy mayor for women's affairs said.

The workshops which will last until September 21 are designed to train housewives and high school girls in various neighborhoods of Tehran on the practice of waste management, Narges Ma'danipour noted, IRIB reported.

She explained that 22 workshops on waste sorting are being held for at least 2,200 housewives which will be followed by 177 workshops teaching how to craft artistic works out of waste for at least 3,000 participators.

برگزاری کارگاه های آموزشی تفکیک زباله و خلق آثار هنری از مواد دورریز در تهران

مدیرکل امور بانوان شهرداری تهران از برگزاری کارگاه های آموزشی تفکیک زباله و خلق آثار هنری از مواد دورریز در تهران خبر داد.

به گزارش خبرگزاری صدا و سیما ؛ نرگس معدنی پور خاطر نشان کرد: کارگاه ها ی آموزش مدیریت پسماند تا پایان شهریور ماه ادامه خواهد داشت و برای ۲ گروه بانوان خانه دار و گروه دختران دبیرستانی در محلات مختلف برگزار می شود.

وی توضیح داد: ۲۲ کارگاه برای حداقل ۲۲۰۰ نفر با موضوع تفکیک پسماند خانگی برگزار می شود و در ادامه ۱۷۷ کارگاه با موضوع خلق آثار هنری از مواد دورریز برای حداقل ۳۰۰۰ نفر برگزار خواهد شد.

ENGLISH PROVERB

Money doesn't grow on trees

Explanation: you should not waste money because it is not plentiful or obtained easily
For example: ‹Dad, can I have a new bike?' ‹We can't afford one. Money doesn't grow on trees, you know.'

PHRASAL VERB

Be/come along

Meaning: to arrive
For example: Another bus should be along in a minute.

ENGLISH IDIOM

Ambulance chaser

Explanation: a lawyer who finds work by persuading people injured in accidents to claim money from the person who caused the accident is called an ‹ambulance chaser'.
For example: Peterson and Scott are well-known ambulance chasers; that's how they make their money!

Syrian villages liberated from militants

Syrian military source: Army doesn't use chlorine gas

The Syrian army has regained control of several militant-held villages in Syria's western-central province of Hama.

According to military sources, Syrian tanks pushed the foreign-backed militants out of the villages located around the town of Maardas and the Bteish area in the province's northern country side.

During the operations, over 70 Jaish al-Fateh (JaF/Army of Conquest) terrorists were killed and large numbers of their armored vehicles and cannons were destroyed.

Syrian troops also thwarted several terrorist attacks on the towns of Maan and Kafraa, killing some 30 more militants and destroying a number of their tanks and vehicles.

Earlier, Syrian air force jets destroyed several militant command posts and armored vehicles and killed scores of terrorists during multiple raids on Hama's countryside.

Over the last few weeks, Syrian forces have been making vast gains in and around the province, located 213 kilometers (132 miles) north of Damascus, which is partially controlled by groups backed by Jaish al-Fateh and the so-called Free Syrian Army militants.

UN urges Syria sides to cease hostilities

Meantime, a United Nations investigative panel has called on all parties involved in the deadly conflict in Syria to revitalize a faltering nationwide ceasefire in the violence-wracked state.

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria, which is tasked with investigating human rights violations in Syria, made the request in its 12th report published.

The cessation of hostilities brokered by the United States and Russia went into effect in Syria on February 27. However, fighting still rages on in some parts of Syria, particularly around the city of Aleppo. The truce does not apply to the terrorist groups of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Front for the Conquest of the Levant), al-Qaeda's Syrian branch formerly known as al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra).

The February truce offered a "glimmer of hope" to civilians in Syria, but just a month later, fighting and indiscriminate attacks on residential areas increased, the commission said.

"The cessation of hostilities agreement brought a welcome respite for civilians that lasted all too briefly," the commission added, emphasizing that "the sense of hope engendered earlier this year must be revitalized."

The UN panel further called for more support for UN Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura, who is trying to restart UN-brokered negotiations aimed at resolving the crisis in the Middle Eastern country.

It further urged an end to the numerous sieges in Syria, which have trapped approximately 600,000 people in dire conditions.

Chlorine gas

Elsewhere, a Syrian military source denied on Wednesday accusations that the army had launched a chlorine gas attack on a rebel-held neighborhood of Aleppo.

The Syrian Civil Defense, a rescue workers' organization which operates in rebel-held areas, said government helicopters dropped bombs containing chlorine Tuesday on the Sukari neighborhood in Aleppo's eastern sector.

"We have not and will not use at any point this type of weapon," the Syrian military source said. The accusation was an attempt by rebels to divert public attention away from their defeats, the source added.

The Syrian army, backed by allied forces, on Sunday encircled the rebel-held part of Aleppo.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. urges Bahrain to free Nabeel Rajab

The United States has called on the Bahraini regime to release prominent rights activist, Nabeel Rajab, citing "concerns" over silencing dissidents in the Persian Gulf tiny state.

"We call on the government of Bahrain to release him immediately," U.S. State Department spokesman Mark Toner said on Tuesday, adding that, "We have concerns about the state of human rights in general in Bahrain and we're engaging with the government... on all these issues."

The move was prompted just two days after the New York Times published a letter by Rajab, noting that the 52-year-old activist was facing new charges for organizing pro-democracy demonstrations and publishing Twitter posts deemed "insulting" to the Bahraini authorities.

The prosecutor of Bahrain's northern region, Mohammed Salah, said Rajab had been questioned over a complaint from the cybercrime unit accusing him of "publishing a column in a foreign newspaper in which he deliberately broadcast news, statements and false rumors that undermine the kingdom's prestige and stature."

In the column, Rajab addressed readers in the first person, saying he was writing from a "Bahraini jail cell where I have been detained, largely in isolation, since the beginning of summer."

He said Bahrain has some 4,000 political prisoners and the highest prison population per capita in the Middle East.

"This is a country that has subjected its people to imprisonment, torture and even death for daring to desire democracy," Rajab wrote.

According to the United States-based rights body Human Rights Watch, he already faces up to 12 years in prison over tweets critical of the war on Yemen by the House of Saud regime, a staunch ally of Manama.

Manama itself has been harshly cracking down on anti-regime protests since February 14, 2011.

Troops from the House of Saud regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) — themselves repressive Arab regimes — were deployed to the country in March that year to assist the regime in its crackdown on peaceful and pro-democracy rallies.

Scores of people have been killed and hundreds of others injured or arrested since then.

(Source: Press TV)

Thousands rally against Netanyahu's visit to The Hague

Thousands of people have staged a demonstration in The Hague in protest at an official visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the Netherlands, saying he should be brought to justice for his crimes.

On Tuesday, the protesters carried Netanyahu's mugshots and signs that read "Bring Bibi Netanyahu to International Criminal Court" as the Israeli leader arrived in the Netherlands and met with senior Dutch officials.

Chants such as "Free free Palestine, boycott boycott Israel" could also be heard during the demonstration.

"I'm standing here because Netanyahu is visiting the Netherlands. I'm standing in The Hague and we think that rather than him being received by the parliament, he should be put on trial in the Peace Palace of the UN tribunal," a protester said in English.

Some of the protesters also criticized local authorities for attempting to cancel the anti-Netanyahu gathering.

"This demonstration is not only against Netanyahu, but it's also for our right to demonstrate, at the places where we want, where it's happening, because the Zionists, they always get the permission to stand in front of the parliament," another demonstrator commented.

The rally was originally planned to be staged outside the Dutch parliament building in The Hague downtown, but authorities later did not allow the protesters to proceed.

The demonstration came a day after former Dutch Prime Minister Dries Van Agt reacted angrily to Netanyahu's two-day visit to the Netherland, calling on government officials to "send him right away to the International Criminal Court."

Speaking in an interview with the NPO1 public broadcaster on Monday, Van Agt described the 66-year-old Chairman of Israel's right-wing Likud political party as a "war criminal," arguing that the Tel Aviv regime has been committing a crime under the ICC's Rome Statute.

"The occupation and expansion... building of settlements, of occupied territory, this is according to the Rome Statute, which is... the setup... the statute on which the international criminal court is based, in so many words, a war crime," he said.

"So why should we receive someone who continues with such things, we could have sent him right away to the International Criminal Court, that would have been better," the 85-year-old politician and activist, known for his vocal support of the Palestinian cause, the ex-PM pointed out.

The Rome Statute, which went into effect in July 2002, outlines the four grave international crimes, namely crimes of aggression, war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. The statute forms one of the foundations of The Hague-based International Criminal Court.

Israel signed the treaty in December 2000, but "unsigned" it two years later by means of the United States lobby.

One of the primary reasons behind the decision was a clause in the document, which allowed the prosecution of the Israeli regime over war crimes for "transfer of parts of the civilian population of an occupying power into occupied territory." *(Source: Press TV)*

Turkey's actions could complicate situation in Syria: Russia

Russia has voiced deep concerns over the advances made by Turkish troops in Syrian territory, warning that such actions could make the conflict gripping the Arab country more complicated.

The Russian Foreign Ministry issued the warning in a statement released on Wednesday.

The ministry expressed worries about the incursion of Turkish soldiers and pro-Ankara Syria militants deeper into Syrian soil, saying, "This calls into question the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic."

Such advances, which are being made without coordination with the Damascus authorities and without the approval of the United Nations Security Council, "could further complicate the military and political situation in Syria, which is dire as it is," the statement read.

It further called on the Ankara government to "refrain" from any steps that could destabilize Syria.

The Turkish military backed by planes from the United States-led coalition launched an offensive in Syria on August 24. Damascus denounced the intervention as a breach of its sovereignty.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said the operation, dubbed "Euphrates Shield," was aimed at "terror groups" such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), a U.S.-backed Kurdish group based in Syria.

Hours after the beginning of the offensive, Turkish-backed militants seized the Syrian town of Jarablus. They are also expected to continue the action in order to establish a safe zone in the 98-kilometer (61-mile) area stretching from Jarablus to the city of A'zaz.

Since March 2011, Syria has been gripped by militancy it blames on some Western states and their regional allies.

Russia and Turkey have been supporting the opposite sides to the crisis in Syria.

United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura estimates that over 400,000 people have been killed in the Syrian conflict. The UN has stopped its official casualty count in Syria, citing its inability to verify the figures it receives from various sources.

(Source: Press TV)

Abe tells ASEAN that Japan is 'seriously concerned' by South China Sea tension

Japan is "seriously concerned" about Beijing's increasingly muscular claims in the South China Sea, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe told Asian leaders.

Beijing insists it has sovereign rights to almost all of the strategically vital waters, where the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have claims.

It also has a simmering territorial row with Japan over the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea.

"I am seriously concerned with the continuing attempts to change unilaterally the status quo in the East and South China Sea," Abe said on Wednesday at a regional summit in Laos hosted by the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

"I hope that both parties to the dispute in the South China Sea will abide by the ruling by the China-Philippines tribunal court, which legally binds the parties to the dispute, and it will lead to a peaceful settlement of the dispute," he said, according to a briefing by official Yasuhisa Kawamura.

The gathering in Laos is the first ASEAN meeting since an international court ruled in July that China's claims to the sea had no legal basis, and that its artificial island building program in the waters was illegal.

It was a sweeping victory for the Philippines, which filed the case in 2013.

China has ignored the ruling, announcing penalties for "illegal" fishing in the sea and continuing its reclamation activities.

(Source: AFP)

NEWS

Japan pledges $440 million to bolster Asia's anti-terrorism steps

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe pledged $440 million (328.92 million pounds) on Wednesday to help Asian countries strengthen counter-terrorism measures, a government spokesman said, as the region sees a surge in large-scale attacks.

Police blamed a bombing last week in Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's home town that killed 14 people on rebels linked to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group, while 22 people were killed in a July attack on a cafe in the Bangladeshi capital.

"As our first ever support for anti-terrorism and anti-extremism steps in Asia, we will carry out an aid program worth 45 billion yen for the next three years," Japanese Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Koichi Hagiuda quoted Abe telling a meeting of leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping.

It was not clear which Asian countries will receive the aid, but the plan includes measures such as the introduction of cutting-edge biometrics identification systems and advanced equipment to detect explosives.

(Source: Reuters)

UN to hold first high-level summit on refugees, migrants

The UN General Assembly will host a high-level summit to address large movements of refugees and migrants, with the aim of bringing countries together behind a more humane and coordinated approach at UN Headquarters in New York on 19 September 2016.

This is the first time the General Assembly has called for a summit at the Heads of State and Government level on large movements of refugees and migrants and it is a historic opportunity to come up with a blueprint for a better international response. It is a watershed moment to strengthen governance of international migration and a unique opportunity for creating a more responsible, predictable system for responding to large movements of refugees and migrants.

In January 2016, the Secretary-General appointed a Special Adviser, Karen AbuZayd, to work with United Nations entities and undertake consultations with Member States and other relevant stakeholders in the lead up to the Summit. This will include overseeing the Secretary-General's report on large movements of refugees and migrants, submitted to the General Assembly in May 2016.

The Summit will be attended by heads of state and government, Ministers, and leaders from the UN System, civil society, private sector, international organizations, academia, and beyond in alignment with the General Assembly resolution establishing the summit's modalities.

But there will be many more people who will be following the Summit through the Internet, social media, and a myriad of related events taking place around the world. The Summit will also be webcast live on webtv.un.org.

Also on the margins of the General Assembly, on 20 September 2016, the United States President Obama is hosting the Leaders' Summit on Refugees, alongside co-hosts Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, Jordan, Mexico and Sweden, which will appeal to governments to pledge significant new commitments on refugees. While the Leaders' Summit will focus on refugees, not migrants, the General Assembly High-Level Summit will address large movements of both. The two events will complement one another. *(Source: UNIC)*

The Republic of Korea supports protection and humanitarian assistance to Afghan refugee girls in Iran

1→ This generous contribution will be used to fund activities during the project period 1 January 2016 to 31 December 2017, and will be implemented nationwide by UNHCR Iran, in coordination with BAFIA, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Literacy Movement Organization, the Technical and Vocational Training Organization (TVTO) and national NGO partners.

The Ambassador of the Republic of Korea in Iran, Kim Seung-Ho, and UNHCR Representative, Sivanka Dhanapala, marked the occasion by signing a Letter of Understanding on Monday at UNHCR's country office in Tehran. Also joining the signature ceremony was Ms. Jinyoung Park from the Humanitarian Assistance Division of MOFA. Ms. Park just arrived in Iran as part of a mission to visit refugee assistance projects including health posts, community-based initiatives, TVTO classes, a refugee settlement, and schools in Shiraz and Tehran.

For nearly four decades, the Islamic Republic of Iran has hosted and supported one of the largest urban refugee situations in the world. An estimated 951,000 registered Afghan refugees, 28,000 Iraqi refugees and some 1.5 - 2 million undocumented Afghans are currently living in Iran, many of whom are second or third generation refugees that have never been to Afghanistan. UNHCR has maintained an uninterrupted presence in the country for 32 years, and works in close coordination with BAFIA to provide protection and assistance to Afghan and Iraqi refugees throughout the Islamic Republic of Iran. *(Source: UNHCR)*

TENNIS

Djokovic into semis after another opponent retires

Novak Djokovic's strange U.S. Open took another bizarre turn as he advanced to the semi-finals on Tuesday when Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga retired at the start of the third set, trailing 6-3 6-2.

Tsonga took a medical timeout during the changeover at 5-2 of the second set and had the area below his left knee taped.

World number one Djokovic held serve to love to close out the set and the Frenchman walked off, giving the Serbian passage into the last four for a 10th consecutive time.

It has been an unusual tournament for Djokovic who has played only two full matches. He was gifted a walkover in the second round and a retirement after six games in the third before Tsonga.

"I'm in the semi-finals, so that's what matters for me the most," Djokovic told reporters after 83 minutes in Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"I know Jo for a long time, we grew up playing in the junior circuit as well. He's a fighter, he's somebody who loves the big stage. This is something I'm sure he didn't wish for."

The first five games progressed on serve to offer promise of a big-hitting battle.

But Tsonga wobbled in the sixth game, committing three double faults to lose serve, the first of three successive breaks that left the Serb with a 5-3 lead.

From that point, Djokovic dominated.

Tsonga said when he felt pain in his knee, he knew it was over. "It's something I had already in the past," he said.

"When I have my knee, of course, it's already tough to play against one of the best tennis players.

"But when I don't have my knee, I have no chance to come back from two sets to love."

Australian and French Open champion Djokovic came to New York with question marks, having lost in the third round at Wimbledon and the first at the Rio Olympics while battling a nagging left wrist injury.

He was unfazed by his sparse time on court.

"In this stage of the season, considering some physical issues I have had ... this was the scenario that I needed and I wished for," he said.

"I got a lot of days off and recovered my body. Right now I'm feeling very close to the peak."

Djokovic will play for a place in the title decider against another Frenchman in 10th seed Gael Monfils, who beat compatriot Lucas Pouille in straight sets.

Monfils has yet to beat Djokovic in 12 career meetings.

(Source: Reuters)

Williams headlines fascinating quarter-finals

Ana Konjuh was not a year old when Serena Williams played her first U.S. Open match but both will be in the Arthur Ashe Stadium spotlight on Wednesday, with four gripping quarter-finals to take center stage at the year's final grand slam.

Even on a card packed with quality and intriguing story-lines, world number one Williams remains the undisputed Flushing Meadows headliner and will take on Romanian fifth seed Simona Halep.

It has been another dominant run to the last eight for 34-year-old Williams, who has not dropped serve or spent more than 68 minutes on court in any of her matches.

After moving to the top of the all-time grand slam match wins list on Monday with her 308th victory sealed against Yaroslava Schvedova, Williams has two further records in her crosshairs.

A seventh U.S. Open title would give the American her 23rd grand slam singles crown and move her past Steffi Graf for the most in the professional era.

At the other end of the spectrum is power-hitting 18-year-old Konjuh, who until this U.S. Open had never ventured beyond the third round of a grand slam.

The 92nd ranked teen booked her quarter-final with an upset of fourth seed Agnieszka Radwanska and will meet 10th seeded Czech Karolina Pliskova as she continues her bid to become just the second woman to win both the U.S. Open junior girls and women's titles.

On the men's side, the gold, silver and bronze medalists from the Rio Olympics will battle for more glory at Flushing Meadows.

Second seed Andy Murray, who has enjoyed a dream summer with a second Wimbledon title and a second Olympic gold, would like nothing more than to end the fortnight with a second U.S. Open trophy.

Standing in the Scot's way is Japanese sixth seed and Olympic bronze winner Kei Nisihikori who has quietly gone about his business while looking for a second appearance in the final in three years.

Argentine Juan Martin del Potro, the 2009 winner, has provided the feel-good story of the tournament.

The Olympic silver medalist, whose career has been interrupted by a series of wrist surgeries and needed a wild card to enter, will have the crowd in his corner when he takes on third seed and twice grand slam champion Stan Wawrinka.

(Source: Reuters)

Arshavin: Cherchesov is the ideal choice

When Andrei Arshavin signed a contract for Kazakhstan's FC Kairat in March this year, many thought he was going there to see out the end of his playing days, especially since he turned 35 in May. As it turned out, that couldn't be further from the truth; the former Zenit St. Petersburg, Arsenal and Russia star still has that magic touch.

Due to a variety of problems at his previous club, FC Kuban Krasnodar, Arshavin essentially spent six months away from the pitch. In switching to Kairat, he has got exactly what he needed – playing time. The Kazakhstan championship runs from spring to autumn, so in just shy of five months Arshavin has played 25 games, 21 in the league and four in the UEFA Europa League qualification rounds, scoring eight goals.

The Russian star succinctly summed up the reasoning behind his move to Kazakhstan in an interview with FIFA.com: «They made an offer and I accepted.»

Geographically Kazakhstan is right on the edge of European football and does garner much attention from an international fanbase, although recently both the Kazakhstan national team and local clubs are proving a tough task for opponents to deal with, especially on home soil. Just ask Poland's players, who dropped points in Astana in their opening game of the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia™ qualification campaign. We asked Arshavin to compare the set-up in Kazakhstan with those he came across in Russia and England.

«Of course, it's hard to compare with England and that doesn't just apply to Kazakhstan but other countries as well," he answered. «Only Germany can probably compete with them. In principle, you can draw similarities with Russia however. The infrastructure in Russia is a little better, plus they're building new stadiums ahead of the World Cup. In general, the stadiums here are pretty much the same, left over from the post-Soviet era. Sometimes the pitches are better, sometimes they're not. The set-up is decent at Kairat actually.»

«As for the national team,» Andrei continued, «I've been telling the local players that Kazakhstan haven't got the hardest qualifying group for the 2018 World Cup (ed's note - Romania, Denmark, Poland, Montenegro and Armenia).

There's no one who you'd pick out as clear favourites and Kazakhstan can compete with anyone at home. If things go their way on home soil, they can target a decent result. Who knows, maybe we'll see Kazakhstan at Russia 2018? At club-level, Astana and Kairat are roughly at the standard of the play-off round for the UEFA Champions League and Europa League.»

Helped by Arshavin, Kairat made it as far as the second qualifying round for the Europa League this season. Easing past Albanian outfit KF Teuta Durres, the Almaty-based side then lost out in a close-run encounter to Maccabi Tel-Aviv, who have featured in the group stages of the Champions League before. It took Arshavin hardly any time at all to adapt to his new surroundings before he was orchestrating his team's play and contributing massively to the team's surge up the table after a shaky start, narrowing the gap to league leaders and main rivals FC Astana.

Arshavin's feats have been taking place on the fringes of European football, so only his most loyal fans, of which there are many, have taken note. That he was not in the Russia squad for UEFA EURO 2016 came as no surprise: the last time Andrei played for the national team was four years ago.

Nevertheless, one goal at the end of July changed everything. Once again Arshavin was the topic of conversation in Russia, England and everywhere they showed his phenomenal strike against FC Taraz in Matchday 22 of the Kazakhstan Premier League. Even taking into account the standard of the competition, this goal will easily go down as one of the best of the summer from anywhere in the world.ha

Arshavin, anticipating a crossfield pass in front of the penalty box from another former Zenit player, Anatoliy Tymoshchuk, used his back leg to deftly steer the ball beyond his marker in a single elegant motion. Leaving the defender for dead, he then cut back onto his right foot to eke out a yard of space. With more opposition players about to crowd him out, the little magician deftly chipped the ball over the defenders and goalkeeper into the net.

«It all happened naturally,» he explained. «First I beat one defender and then another. Next I saw a big crowd of players in front of me and there was no other way I could hit the target easily.»

The ideal choice

His employers will not mind keeping Arshavin in Almaty for another season after such a display (he agreed a deal on a rolling-contract basis). Back home, the voices calling for his return to the national team, which lacks creative players, are getting louder after Russia's poor showing at the EURO. Nevertheless, Andrei is careful when talking about the future.

«There aren't any plans just yet, time will tell. It's hard to say about the national team, I haven't played for my country for a long time after all. If the call-up comes, then we'll talk about it. If I'm being honest, at my age I need to think about every moment I spend on the football pitch, so it's hard to make any big plans for the future.»

Recently the Russian national team, which Arshavin inspired to the EURO 2008 semi-finals, has changed head coach. Stanislav Cherchesov has been tasked with guiding the team at two hugely important tournaments on home soil, the FIFA Confederations Cup 2017 and the 2018 World Cup. Andrei, for one, welcomes the decision by the Russian Football Union: «I think he's the ideal choice given the current situation.»

Indeed, in less than a year's time, Arshavin's native city of Saint Petersburg will become the main destination of the Confederations Cup, hosting the opening match, final and two other games.

«It will be a huge event for Saint Petersburg,» he concluded with confidence.

Who knows, perhaps a swansong performance in front of his home fans could be yet to come from one of Russia's best-ever footballers.

(Source: FIFA)

La Liga games could be called off due to late-summer heat wave - Tebas

Spanish Football League (LFP) president Javier Tebas has not ruled out La Liga matches being postponed this weekend because of extreme hot weather.

A late summer heatwave has hit the Iberian Peninsula, with temperatures surpassing 40 degrees Celsius (104 Farenheit) in many areas on some days.

Mid-afternoon games, which include Celta Vigo vs. Atletico Madrid and Osasuna visiting Real Madrid on Saturday, are most at risk.

"If the temperature [at the weekend] reaches 40 degrees we could postpone some La Liga games," Tebas told Cadena Cope.

"You cannot play a game of football with temperatures of 36, 37 or 38 degrees.

"We have discussed the heat issue, not just because of this weekend but because of the previous rounds.

"Real Madrid played their last game against Celta [on Aug. 27] with a temperature of 32 degrees."

The third round of La Liga games kicks off when Real Sociedad host Espanyol in San Sebastian on Friday evening.

But Tebas said: "The problem has been that, in the evenings, the temperature hasn't dropped much."We have spoken to the referees' committee to make sure the players can drink water to cope with the conditions."

(Source: ESPN)

Nicklas Bendtner signs for Nottingham Forest in time for Arsenal reunion

Nottingham Forest have completed the signing of former Arsenal striker Nicklas Bendtner on a two-year contract, the club's owner has announced.

Bendtner, 28, has been a free agent since leaving German side Wolfsburg last season, enabling Forest to sign him outside of the transfer window, which closed last week.

The striker, who began his professional career at Arsenal, could be set for a swift reunion with the Gunners as Forest have been drawn at home to Arsene Wenger's team in the EFL Cup later this month.

Forest owner Fawaz Al-Hasawi announced the signing via his Twitter account.

Bendtner becomes the 12th new arrival at the City Ground following the appointment of Philippe Montanier as head coach over the summer and he could go straight into the squad for the trip to Aston Villa on Sunday.

The Denmark international began his career at Arsenal and had loan spells at Birmingham, Sunderland and Juventus before switching to Wolfsburg in 2014.

He scored 24 league goals in 108 appearances for the Gunners and has netted 29 times in 72 outings for his country.

(Source: Soccernet)

Manchester City's Pep Guardiola to thrive in Premier League - Iniesta

Pep Guardiola will adapt to life in the Premier League to bring success to Manchester City, according to Barcelona midfielder Andres Iniesta.

Former Barca coach Guardiola has made a perfect start to life at the Etihad, winning his first five games in charge and sitting on top of the Premier League.

He faces his biggest test of the season so far on Saturday when City take on Manchester United at Old Trafford without suspended striker Sergio Aguero.

Iniesta worked under Guardiola during his first four seasons at the Camp Nou and says the coach will quickly get used to life in England.

The Spain international also believes Guardiola has helped his cause by recruiting well over the summer -- both on and off the pitch.

"Pep knows how to adapt and I'm sure he'll do so in England," Iniesta said in his book "The Artist," as reported by The Guardian. "He's also got staff like Mikel Arteta who'll help that process, who know the league.

"City have signed well and have a very competitive squad. I know Nolito well because he was a teammate here at Barcelona and with Spain. He's had a great start and hopefully can continue. I've admired David Silva for years: I think he's exceptional.

"Players learn day to day, from experience, teammates and managers. I learnt a lot with Pep; he helped me to improve and he'll do the same at City."

Guardiola has already shown a ruthless side by dropping England goalkeeper Joe Hart before allowing him to leave on a season-long loan with Torino.

City have since spent £13.5 million to bring in Claudio Bravo from Barca and the Chile international could make his debut in the Manchester derby.

Iniesta says that Guardiola has always regarded the goalkeeping position as a vital one and wanted his No. 1s to contribute more than simply making saves.

"Yes, he's always been important for us, another player: when the ball comes out from deep, depending on whether your opponents have one or two [forwards], the goalkeeper plays," the 32-year-old added. "He allows you to have numerical superiority."

(Source: ESPN)

Queiroz furious with Uzbekistan referee appointment

TT SPORTS desk

Iran head coach Carlos Queiroz has shown his anger after FIFA referees committee appointed Australian Benjamin Williams for Uzbekistan – Iran match in the third round of AFC World Cup qualifying match for Russia 2018.

Williams who was the referee of 2015 Asian Cup quarter final match between Iran and Iraq made a controversial decision as he sent off Iran defender Mehrdad Pooladi in the 43rd minute.

Queiroz was furious on the sidelines and could be seen being physically restrained from confronting Williams as he headed in at the halftime interval.

"I'm totally surprised, the referee who made that mistake in the Asian Cup against us has been appointed to officiate our game against Uzbekistan in Tashkent. However he was selected to officiate a game in the AFC Champions League in Tehran but he withdrew it," Queiroz told reporters.

"I knew that Iran, Uzbekistan and South Korea are the favourites in Group A. Our next matches against Uzbekistan and South Korea are crucial. We need to have a decent performance in order to keep our chance alive," the Portuguese coach added.

"We had a bad feeling after the game against China in Shenyang. We could have grabbed the three point as we had the chances. However we can talk about this when we see other teams playing in China," he added.

Iran who began the AFC World Cup qualifying campaign with a 2-0 win over Qatar in Tehran last week, held to a goalles draw against China in Shenyang on Tuesday.

The Persians are currently in second place of Group A with four points, behind leaders Uzbekistan who have won their first two games against Syria and Qatar. South Korea stand in fourth with four points.

Iran team finishes 2nd in Asian University Football Championship

Iran's national university football team has ended its campaign at the third edition of Asian University Football Championship in South Korea, and finished as the vice champion of the sports event following a narrow defeat from Japan in the final showdown.

On Wednesday, the Iranian squad lost to the East Asian side 2-3 at the conclusion of the title clash staged at the Main Sports Complex in South Korea's northeastern city of Taebaek, National University Sports Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran website reported.

The Japanese footballers got off to a strong and promising start, and took the lead by scoring the first goal in the 8th minute.

Iranians then came from behind and took the game to the wire to net the equalizer. Mohammad Osuni eventually managed to tie the game after nineteen minutes into the first half.

The Japanese team, however, could regain the lead in the 27th minute, and placed the ball at the back of Iran's net to make it 2-1.

Ali Fatemi nailed Iran's second goal and leveled the score at 2-2 five minutes before the referee blew his whistle and signaled the end of the first period.

In the second half, Japan scored the third and winning goal only one minute before the regulation time was to draw to a close.

The third edition of Asian University Football Championship began in Taebaek on September 1 and concluded on September 7.

Iran's national university football team was put in Group A of the preliminary stage of the sports event, and joined Malaysia and South Korea B squads.

South Korea A, Hong Kong and South Korea C formed Group B in the tournament.

China was pitted against Myanmar and Oman in Group C. Japan A, Chinese Taipei and Japan B were also drawn in Group D.

(Source: PressTV)

Iran's Sarmayeh Bank blanks T. Grand in AVC club championship

Iranian professional volleyball team Sarmayeh Bank has blanked T. Grand of Chinese Taipei to chalk up a praiseworthy victory at the second round of the 2016 Asian Women's Club Volleyball Championship in the Philippines.

On Wednesday, the Iranian volleyball squad overpowered the Taiwanese outfit 3-0 (25–14, 25–16 and 25–12) in their Group F match played at the Alonte Sports Arena in the city of Binan, about 34 kilometers (21 miles) south of the capital, Manila.

"Our players exhibited an all-around stunning performance, and believed that they could defeat the Chinese Taipei team. We went to the court only thinking of victory, which we managed to capture at last," Iranian volleyball player Maedeh Borhani said after the match.

She added, "The fine performance of our players created a situation, which eliminated the opposite team's winning chances and thus they could not trouble our team throughout the encounter."

In other matches of the day, Chinese Ba'yi Shenzhen beat Thailand's Bangkok Glass 3-2 (16-25, 25-20, 25-21, 20-25 and 15-8), NEC Red Rockets of Japan blanked Vietnamese Lien Viet Post Bank 3-0 (25-15, 25-19 and 25-13), and Kazakhstan's Altay Oskemen hammered Foton Pilipinas of the host nation 3-0 (27-25, 25-18 and 25-21).

(Source: PressTV)

Ecclestone says new F1 owners would want him to stay

Formula One's commercial supremo Bernie Ecclestone has been asked to stay on for three years after an imminent takeover of the sport is completed by U.S. cable TV mogul John Malone's Liberty Media.

"They want me to be here for three years," the 85-year-old, who over the decades has built the sport into a business with annual turnover of around $1.9 billion, told Reuters on Wednesday.

Media reports have suggested the first part of a broader deal between outgoing rights holders CVC and Liberty Media could be announced on Wednesday.

However Ecclestone and CVC chairman Donald Mackenzie voiced some scepticism about the time frame at last weekend's Italian Grand Prix.

"Honestly, I don't think anybody knows -- including our friends from Liberty, and Donald," said Ecclestone, who still expected the deal to get over the line.

The Briton said he would not be attending next week's Singapore Grand Prix, the social highlight of the sport's Asian calendar, because of the negotiations.

"Because all this is going through, they (CVC) want me to be there (in London) to help them with all sorts of things. I can't afford to be away for five to six days."

TUESDAY MEETING

A Formula One board meeting is scheduled for next Tuesday, by which time the deal should have been finalised and a new chairman introduced.

Ecclestone expects that to be Chase Carey, executive vice-chairman of Rupert Murdoch's 21st Century Fox and a director of Sky News owner Sky Plc, who would replace Austrian Peter Brabeck-Letmathe.

Brabeck, 71, has been chairman since 2012 but has recently recovered from cancer and is due to step down as chairman of Nestle, the world's largest food and drink company, in 2017.

Ecclestone, famously unwilling to delegate in the past, indicated he would be happy to share the workload.

"He (Carey) can do lots of things that I haven't done with this social media, which he seems to be in touch with. He's been dealing with sponsorship with his TV people. Between us we'll get on with it," he said.

Ecclestone's future had been called into question, with former team owner and television pundit Eddie Jordan saying on Sunday that Monza could even be the Briton's last race.

"That's Eddie Jordan. If he had any money, and wanted a small wager, I'd give him good odds," said Ecclestone.

BIGGEST SHAKE-UP

The takeover, which values Formula One at more than $8 billion according to media reports, would represent the biggest shake-up in the cash-rich sport for decades.

A deal with Liberty would also herald a new era for a European-dominated sport that has long sought to break into the U.S. market and win fresh audiences, with team principals already welcoming the possibility of a bigger push.

Liberty Media has interests in the Atlanta Braves baseball team, satellite radio service Sirius XM, entertainment group Live Nation and minority interests in Time Warner and Viacom.

Malone's Liberty Global is the world's largest international TV and broadband company, operating in more than 30 countries in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean through a series of different brand names.

One bump in the road ahead could be the need for the deal to be approved by the sport's governing International Automobile Federation (FIA) and other global motorsport series, and European anti-trust regulators.

The FIA has a one percent stake in Formula One's parent company Delta Topco, which could be worth around $90 million according to forbes.com, and that has been held up as a possible conflict of interest.

The privately-owned Force India and Sauber teams have also filed a complaint asking EU authorities to investigate the sport's governance and distribution of revenues.

Ecclestone expected the European Commission to take a closer look at the sport as a result.

"It's like the police. You get stopped for a rear light and they want to know if you've got a driving license and insurance. So I don't know what effect that will have," he said.

(Source: Reuters)

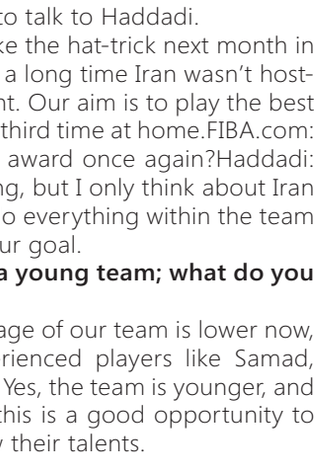
BASKETBALL

Haddadi not thinking about winning MVP

Few players in Asia can boast of having made an impact on the world of basketball as much as Hamed Haddadi has.

The 2.18m native of Ahvaz, Iran has been a fixture of Team Melli's men's national team since 2006, and since then has become one of the most iconic players from the continent. He has transcended boundaries and cultures, finding success not just in his native country, but also in other places like China and the NBA.

There is no doubt that Haddadi has been the most dominant big man in Asia in the post-Yao-Ming era, leading Iran to numerous podium finishes and championships. With Haddadi at the vanguard, Team Melli have reached unprecedented heights, playing in the 2008 Beijing Olympics and in two FIBA Basketball World Cups (2010 & 2014).



This year, however, with Haddadi already turning 31, the big guy will take on an elder statesman role with the Iranian national team. Similarly revered teammates from his golden generation (e.g. Samad Nikkhah Bahrami, Mahdi Kamrani and Hamed Afagh come to mind) have all but given way for a younger set of players to step in, and Haddadi will be expected to be the sage whose years of experience should help temper his upstart teammates' hot-blooded approach to the game.

This doesn't mean, however, that Haddadi will be a mere cheerleader from the sidelines. On the contrary, he shold still figure prominently for Iran, and, without a doubt, he continues to be a potentially unstoppable force who could almost single-handedly carry the team to the nexus of the 2016 FIBA Asia Challenge. Heck, he may even win another MVP trophy along the way.

FIBA.com recently got to talk to Haddadi.

FIBA.com: Will Iran make the hat-trick next month in Tehran?Haddadi: It's been a long time Iran wasn't hosting a main basketball event. Our aim is to play the best we can and to win title for third time at home.FIBA.com: Will you aim for the MVP award once again?Haddadi: Becoming MVP is one thing, but I only think about Iran winning the trophy. I will do everything within the team system so we can reach our goal.

FIBA.com: Iran has a young team; what do you think of them?

Haddadi: The average age of our team is lower now, and we don't have experienced players like Samad, Mahdi and Hamed Afagh. Yes, the team is younger, and for these young players, this is a good opportunity to gain experience and show their talents.

FIBA.com: Which teams are you looking forward to face?

Haddadi: All the teams are good, and every game is a great challenge for us. We look at all teams the same way.

FIBA.com: Besides Iran, which teams are favorites to win the FIBA Asia Challenge?

Haddadi: Any team who comes here wants to win the trophy; no one comes to lose. Iran, China, Korea, Chinese Taipei, Philippines, Kazakhstan and Jordan are the ones favored in my opinion to reach the top 8.

(Source: FIBA)

Brazilian defender Padovani joins Iran's Esteghlal

Brazilian defender Leandro Padovani Celin joined Iranian popular football team, Esteghlal of Tehran.

The 32-year-old player has joined Esteghlal on a one-year contract for an undisclosed fee.

Padovani is reunited with Alireza Mansourian, under whom he played at Naft Tehran.

He has spent the majority of his career in Brazil. In 2012, he transferred to Foolad in the Iranian Professional League (IPL).

The League where he won the title in 2013–14 season. In July 2014 Padovani signed with Naft Tehran.

He signed a contract with Iranian champions Sepahan in the summer of 2015, due to ITC issues he could not play until winter 2016. He made his debut on 2 February 2016 in a 2–2 draw against Persepolis.

(Source: Tasnim)

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Poem of the day

The sugar-loving birds of distant Ind,
Except a Persian sweetmeat that was brought.
Hafez

Prayer Times

Noon:13:02 Evening: 7:41 Dawn: 5:16 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:42 (tomorrow)

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NEWS

Tar virtuoso Farhang Sharif dies at 85

TT ART desk **TEHRAN —** Tar virtuoso Farhang Sharif who performed with some giants of Iranian traditional music such as Gholamhossein Banan, Taj Esfahani and Mohammadreza Shajarian, died of respiratory problem at his home in Tehran on Wednesday. He was at 85.

Tar virtuoso Farhang Sharif performs in an undated photo.

His wife, Masureh Rezai, confirmed the report in interviews with some Persian news agancies and said that Sharif was in critical condition after he had undergone surgery several times in July.

Born in in the northern Iranian city of Amol in 1931, he learned to play tar with maestros Abdolhossein Shahnazi and Morteza Neydavud, two masters of tar who lived during the Qajar and Pahlavi periods.

However, Sharif had his own style in performing the Iranian instrument.

He performed with many Iranian musicians and vocalists in over ten albums and many concerts.

He collaborated with legendary vocalist Shajarian in "Peyvande Mehr", which was released in 1982. He also worked with singer Akbar Golpayegani, now retired, in a collection from which "Grey Hair" became a hit.

"Tanhavash" joins Matsalu Nature lineup

TT ART desk **TEHRAN —** Iranian director Fathollah Amiri's documentary "Tanhavash" was added to the lineup of the Matsalu Nature Film Festival, which will be held in the Estonian cities of Lihula, Haapsalu and Tallinn from September 21 to 25.

The film tries to trace the Iranian cheetah, the sole survivor of the extinct species of Asian Cheetah, which still remains in the country.

"Tanhavash" has won the best film award at the 18th Iran Cinema Celebration for medium-length documentaries.

The festival will also screen "Donkey" by Iranian filmmaker Arash Es'haqi.

Collection of films by Puran Derakhshandeh unveiled in Tehran

TT ART desk **TEHRAN —** A package containing ten acclaimed movies by Iranian director Puran Derakhshandeh was unveiled at the Film Museum of Iran on Tuesday.

A number of artists and officials attended the unveiling ceremony, Persian media reported on Wednesday.

"Hush! Girls Don't Scream", "Eternal Children", "Candle in the Wind", "Lost Time" and "A Love without Frontier" are among the films recently released by the Iranian Visual Media Institute.

Speaking at the ceremony, Cinema Organization of Iran Director Hojatollah Ayyubi said, "We are making our best efforts to present a positive, shining image of Iran to the world with our films."

Addressing Derakhshandeh, he added, "We are happy you are making films and we hope others recognize your efforts. You narrate social problems in your films, and I must say we all respect you, and releasing this package was the least thing we could do."

In his brief remarks, Mostafa Abtahi, the managing director of Iran's Visual Media Institute, also expressed thanks to Derakhshandeh for making films, which reflect social realities.

"This collection contains the best works a creative Iranian woman could have made on social issues. All the films are released with English subtitles for use by foreign audiences," he added.

For her part Derakhshandeh also thanked the organizers and said that the subject of the family is of high importance, while it is also a great social issue, adding, "Families face many problems and we should not censor ourselves.

"I as a cineaste, I want to feel that I myself am in the society. I want to relate in my words and I want my films to be screened especially on television, which functions like a public university," she explained.

She asked the officials to trust the filmmakers so that they can freely reflect their thoughts in their films.

The collection also carries "Passing through the Dust", "Little Bird of Happiness", "Endless Dreams", "Mute Contact" and "Wet Dreams".

"Salesman", "Muhammad (S)" to compete in Busan filmfest

1→

A selection of nine films including "Where Is the Friend's Home?" (1987), "Life Goes On" (1992) and "Under the Olive Trees" (1994) will be shown at the Special Programs in Focus.

The retrospective will be accompanied by a forum on Kiarostami's life and works in which his son, Ahmad, will participate along with other Iranian filmmakers attending the festival this year.

"76 Minutes and 15 Seconds with Abbas Kiarostami", a documentary by Seifollah Samadian collecting 76 minutes' worth of exceptional moments from Kiarostami's life, will also be screened in this section.

A combo picture shows scenes of "The Salesman" (L) and "Muhammad (S), the Messenger of God".

National Orchestra conductor Farhad Fakhreddini quits

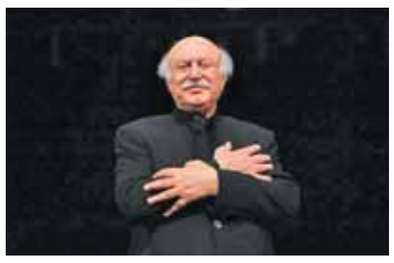
TT ART desk **TEHRAN —** The conductor of Iran's National Orchestra Farhad Fakhreddini resigned from his position on Tuesday over a lack of cooperation from officials.

"Last year, I spent one of the best periods of my career and I had the honor to accompany a group of best musicians during several acclaimed performances," he told the Persian MNA.

"But concerning the orchestra, the officials did not address requirements, and all their efforts led it in a direction that I did not approve of, so I no longer felt it appropriate for me to continue working with the orchestra," noted Fakhreddini who founded the orchestra in 1998.

He also lamented over the lack of pay for the musicians of the orchestra and added, "However, they [officials] spent large amounts of money to invite foreign musicians."

After founding the National Orchestra, Fakhreddini, 80, attracted a huge number of musicians, including legendary vocalist Mohammadreza Shajarian, to collaborate with the orchestra.



Maestro Farhad Fakhreddini in an undated photo

However, earlier in July 2009, he announced his resignation after the Music Office decided under pressure from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to hand over management of the orchestra to the Rudaki Foundation.

Consequently, the orchestra was almost dismantled. However, Fakhreddini established an independent ensemble named the Mehrnavazan Orchestra in 2011 with musicians who had performed in the National Orchestra.

After the victory of Hassan Rouhani in the 2013 presidential election, Fakhreddini was tapped to reestablish the orchestra.

"Retouch" crowned best short at Iran Cinema Celebration

TT CULTURE desk **TEHRAN —** Iranian director Kaveh Mazaheri's "Retouch" has won the award for best short film at the 18th Iran Cinema Celebration.

The winners in the short film section of the celebration were announced on Tuesday during a ceremony at Tehran's Eyvan-e Shams Hall.

Produced by the Iranian Young Cinema Society, "Retouch" is about a young woman whose husband is trapped under a halter during a workout, but she declines to save him and, consequently, he dies.

The award for best director went to Farnush Samadi and Ali Asgari for "Silence". Masud Hatami also received the award for best director in the experimental short section for "Surviving".

The award for best screenwriter was presented to Arman Khansarian for "Teal".

Omid Adibparvar won the best editor award for "Diehard". The award for best sound engineer went to Morteza Mohammadi and Salman Abuzar for their colleaboration in "Three Years, Three Months and Two Days".

A scene from "Retouch"

Hamed Hosseini received the award for best cinematographer for "Whales".

The Iranian House of Cinema organizes the Celebration annually to commemorate Iran's National Day of Cinema, which falls on September 11 this year.

Winners in the categories of short films, animations and documentaries are announced annually before the National Day of Cinema.

The celebration reaches its climax with the announcement of winners in the feature-length films section on that day.

PICTURE OF THE DAY Honaronline/*Sharareh Samei*

A duet performs during the 10th National Festival of Youth Music at Tehran's Rudaki Hall on September 6, 2016. The festival will run until September 14.

IRIB programs nominated for ABU awards

TT ART desk **TEHRAN —** Nine Iranian radio and TV programs have been nominated for awards in various sections of the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) awards, the organizers have announced.

Radio programs "Vibration", "Valmer" and "Iranian Online" are among the nominees.

"Revival through Donation" and "Book Reading Campaign" are also among the radio finalists.

TV programs "Kimia" and "My Decision" have been nominated both in the drama section and the children's section.

"Alarm" and "Bridge" also received nominations in the ABU perspective award section.

Winners will be announced during a ceremony in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, but no exact date has yet been set for the event.

Leslie H. Martinson, Prolific TV Director and "Batman" Helmer, Dies at 101

LOS ANGELES (Hollywood Reporter) — Director Leslie H. Martinson, who worked on more than 100 television series during his prolific career and helmed "Batman: The Movie" in 27 days between the first two seasons of the wildly popular 1960s ABC show, has died. He was 101.

Martinson, who seemingly directed episodes of every TV program from "The Roy Rogers Show" in 1953 to the late 1980s syndicated comedy Small Wonder, died Saturday of natural causes at his home in Los Angeles, his family announced.

Martinson also helmed several features, including the John F. Kennedy naval tale "PT 109" (1963), starring Cliff Robertson, the beach comedy "For Those Who Think Young" (1965) and the light-hearted Raquel Welch adventure "Fathom" (1966).

Moving easily from genre to genre, the Boston native with the wicked New England accent put his stamp on TV Westerns (Maverick, Cheyenne, Sugarfoot), crime stories (Mannix, Ironside, 77 Sunset Strip), action (Mission: Impossible, Six Million Dollar Man, The Bionic Woman), drama (Dallas, Eight Is Enough) and comedy (The Brady Bunch, Love, American Style, Diff'rent Strokes).

Martinson's credits range from some of television's most popular hits, including "Fantasy Island", "CHiPS", "Cannon" and "Barnaby Jones", to such long-forgotten shows as "Dusty's Trail", "The Alaskans" and "The Chicago Teddy Bears".

It's hard to find a series that doesn't bear his name on at least one episode.

"If you want to be a director, you can start studying before you're anywhere near a set," Martinson said during a 2003 interview with the Archive of American of Television. "Every time you watch a television show, you're learning your craft. You don't watch a show for entertainment, you watch to study."