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Finnish Outotec Oyj sees ties with Iran solidifying

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By M.A. Saki and Ali Kushki

TEHRAN — The executive vice president of the Finnish Outotec sees the prospect of relationships with Iranian companies in the field of mineral industry.

The Finnish company has been present in the Iranian market as of the 1970s and today, ties with Iranian companies is strengthening, Adel Hattab told the Tehran Times.

Outotec Oyj is a Finland-based company active within the mineral industry, providing process solutions, technologies, and services for the mining and metallurgical industries.

"We have been here working in Iran since 1976. We are working within the steel and copper value chain. We look forward to working the within zinc, aluminum, gold and many other commodities," he said.

On how the company's ties with Iranian partners have been influenced by the nuclear deal reached between Iran and world powers in July 2015, he said the ties have remained unfazed all through the sanctions era.

"Well, we have as I just said had long relationships since the 1970s, and have strengthened those relationships over the years. We see business strengthening for the both sides."

He appeared optimistic toward the prospect of relations, expressing hope his company wins more investment opportunities in the resource-rich Iran.

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Tehran threatens to retaliate if U.S. bills finalized

TT POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — Iran threatened on Monday that if Congressional sanctions moves, which contravene the nuclear deal, are finalized Tehran will "definitely" take countermeasures.

"If these bills are finalized we have options on the table that we will definitely implement them," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi told a regular news briefing. →2

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Iran female team takes World Taekwondo Junior Championships title

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Suicide bomber kills dozens at Shia mosque in Kabul

A suicide bomber killed at least 27 people and wounded dozens on Monday in an explosion at a crowded Shi'ite mosque in the Afghan capital Kabul, officials said, the third major attack on minority Shi'ites in the city since July.

The attacker entered the Baqir-ul-Olum mosque shortly after midday as worshippers had gathered for a ceremony, the interior ministry said in a statement.

Fraidoon Obaidi, chief of the Kabul police Criminal Investigation Department, said at least 27 people were killed and 35 wounded but that total may rise significantly.

One survivor told Afghanistan's Ariana Television that around 40 dead and 80 wounded had been taken from the building before rescue services arrived at the scene. "I saw people screaming and covered in blood," he said.

Another witness, Sayed Ali, said he had helped carry 30-35 bodies from the mosque and believed another 100 people may be wounded.

Bloody sectarian rivalry between Sunni and Shia Muslims has been relatively rare in Afghanistan, a majority Sunni country, but the attack underlines the deadly new dimension that growing ethnic tension could bring to its decades-long conflict. →3

Three ambassadors submit credentials to Zarif

TT POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — In separate meetings on Monday, the new ambassadors of Germany, Ecuador, and Morocco submitted their credentials to Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Foreign Ministry press office said.

Zarif receives credentials from Germany's new ambassador Michael Sternberg (R)

Michael Sternberg, Alejandro Ortega Almeida, and Hassan Hami will be respectively the new ambassadors of Germany, Ecuador, and Morocco to Tehran.

Political relations between Iran and Morocco were severed in 2009 following a series of disputes on regional issues, but the two countries have been taking necessary steps in recent months to normalize ties.

Back in October, Hassan Hami was officially named by King Mohammed VI as the North African country's ambassador to Tehran, as the two countries move towards expansion of political relations.

Iran and Germany's relationship has also had its ups and downs.

However, the two countries signed a range of business deals in October, under which Tehran and Berlin are expected to develop closer economic relations.

Since Hassan Rouhani started his four-year tenure as Iran's president, the country has moved towards the normalization of relations with various countries.

In September, he met with his Ecuadorian counterpart President Rafael Correa on the sidelines of the 17th NAM summit.

The two senior officials underlined the need for enhanced bilateral ties in all spheres, Press TV reported.

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Iran's 7-month exports to South Africa double yr/yr

TT ECONOMY desk

TEHRAN – According to Iran's Customs Administration, the country's exports to South Africa during the first seven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-October 21) doubled compared to the same period last year, ISNA reported on Monday.

Iran has sent 65,000 tons of goods to South Africa valued at 710 billion rials (about $22 million) in the mentioned time span, which shows a near twofold growth in terms of value compared to the last year's 364.5 billion rials (about $11.36 million).

Iran's 7-months imports from South Africa fell to half of last year's 715.5 billion rials (about $22.3 million) to stand at 323 billion rials (about $10.07 million).

Urea, bitumen and cement are at the top of most exported items list to the African country, and Iran has imported mostly steel products and iron ore, stones, chrome ore and seeds.

The data released by the Customs Administration shows that Iran's trade turnover with South Africa stands at 1.03 trillion rials (about $32.125 million) year to date, registering a 320 billion rial (about $10 million) positive balance.

It also shows that the country's trade turnover with South Africa stood at 1.07 trillion rials (about $33.37 million) during the same period last year with a 350 billion rials (about $11 million) negative balance.

Obama seeks to fortify Iran nuclear deal: WSJ

New steps weighed include licenses for more American businesses and lifting additional U.S. sanctions

The Obama administration is considering new measures in its final months in office to strengthen the landmark nuclear agreement with Iran, senior U.S. officials said.

Action under consideration to buttress the pact includes steps to provide licenses for more American businesses to enter the Iranian market and the lifting of additional U.S. sanctions, the Wall Street Journal reported on Sunday.

The effort to shore up the agreement was under way before the election and is not aimed at boxing in Mr. Trump, who opposes the deal, the officials said. Officials also acknowledged the proposals are unlikely to make the nuclear agreement more difficult to undo.

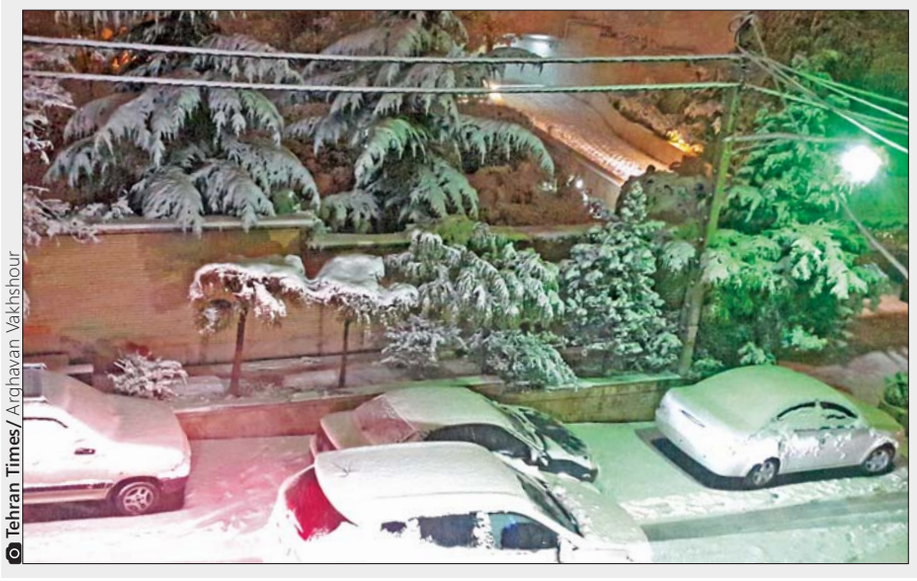
Mr. Trump's first two picks for his national security team—retired Army Gen. Mike Flynnas national security adviser and Rep. Mike Pompeo (R., Kan.) as Central Intelligence Agency director—are hard-liners on Iran who have voiced opposition to the nuclear deal.

Trump transition team officials didn't respond to questions about their plans for the agreement or the current administration's efforts to shore it up.

During the presidential campaign, Mr. Trump talked at times of ratcheting up sanctions on Iran, but also said U.S. companies shouldn't be at a disadvantage in entering the Iranian market. "All of these countries are going to do business with Iran," Mr. Trump said at a campaign event in September 2015. "They're going to make lots of money and lots of other things with Iran...And we're going to get nothing."

Within the Obama administration, officials say they recognize that there is little they can do from a policy perspective if the incoming administration is determined to scuttle the accord. But they plan to make a forceful case to the president-elect's team of the grim consequences they believe the U.S. would face if it ended up being blamed for the agreement's failure.

Under the deal, reached in July 2015, Tehran agreed to scale back its nuclear capabilities in return for the lifting of most international sanctions. →13



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Drama as Tehran turns white after choking pollution

Tehran turned white after an overnight snow on Sunday in a dramatic end to a yellow blanket of noxious smog which settled in for a one-week unwelcomed stay.

BP forms task force to study Iran plans

Global energy giant British Petroleum (BP) has reportedly started a serious push to look into the prospects for making post-sanctions investments in Iran's oil industry.

Reuters said in a report that BP has formed a special task force to study Iran's oil industry investment potentials in what could be a fresh sign of the growing interest of major corporations in Iran's promising oil and gas prospects.

BP's task force for Iran will coordinate the oil major's operations in the country as well as any discussions with the country's national oil company - NIOC.

To cushion against the risks of the remaining US anti-Iran sanctions that ban any American involvement in the country's economy, BP has decided to exclude its American CEO Bob Dudley from its Iran task force and instead appoint chief financial officer Brian Gilvary – a British national – to lead the mission.

The move highlights the lengths to which multinationals will go to exploit lucrative new business in Iran, Reuters added.

BP is an old name in Iran and was the first company to produce oil in Iran more than a century ago when it was called the Anglo-Persian Oil Company.

The company had no recent major involvement in Iran's oil industry before and after the imposition of US-led sanctions against the country in 2012.

The formation of a special task force for Iran follows recent indications that rivals like France's Total and Norway's DNO are already cementing their foothold in the Iranian market through development deals.

Total was the first major western company to sign a deal with Iran earlier this month for the development of a major gas project – Phase 11 of the country's South Pars field.

Norway's DNO has also agreed to study the development of the Changuleh oil field in western Iran – what is expected to lead to a development deal next year.

(Source: Press TV)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

End of Daesh imminent: Iran's army chief

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** The commander of Iran's Army has said Daesh will be wiped out in the near future.

Daesh and other Takfiri terrorist groups will die out in the near future, Major General Ataollah Salehi said on Monday, according to Tasnim news agency.

Highlighting Iran's foresight in realizing threats, the general said the country's top military officials had anticipated four years ago that enemies had plans to pose a threat to Iran from the western borders.

Rouhani urges Judiciary to safeguard freedom of speech

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** The Iranian president in a letter said he expects the Judiciary to safeguard freedom of speech within the framework of the Constitution.

Writing to Majlis Deputy Speaker Ali Motahari in response to his plea over his canceled speech in Mashhad, Hassan Rouhani said a Judiciary report on how the case was handled is necessary to "hearten people", ISNA reported.

Rouhani also extended orders to the ministries of interior and justice to cooperate in dealing with the case.

MP: We have no problem to import expertise from U.S.

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** A member of the Majlis on Monday said he does not believe the Islamic Republic would have any problem with importing technology and expertise from the United States.

"I do not think that the Supreme Leader's ban on imports from America would include modern science and technology," Ramezanali Sobhanifar told ISNA.

Resistance economy pivots on importing foreign knowhow and then localizing it, underlined Sobhanifar who is a member of Industries and Mines Committee.

Slovenian president arrives in Tehran

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** The president of Slovenia arrived in Tehran on Monday afternoon and was welcomed by Energy Minister Hamid Chitchian.

Borut Pahor is heading a high ranking politico-economic delegation to Iran, the Islamic Republic News Agency reported on Monday.

The Slovenian president is to confer with Iranian officials on ways to develop political and economic cooperation between the two countries.

The Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in August announced that the country's embassy in Tehran would be reopened by the end of November.

Ulema call on government to use Basij capabilities

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** A number of prominent ulema have called on the government to tap the capabilities of the Basij in tackling the country's problems.

The issue was raised during Basij chief Mohammad Reza Naqdi's meetings with grand ayatollahs - namely Nasser Makarem Shirazi, Jafar Sobhani, Hossein Nouri Hamedani, Mohammad Ali Alavi Gorgani, and Mohammad Yazdi - Javan newspaper reported on Monday.

During the meetings, Naqdi briefed the ayatollahs on the social and economic activities of Basij, including the creation of 230,000 jobs.

800 thousand truckload of goods smuggled into Iran every year

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Granting the value of smuggled goods in Iran at $20 billion every year, it can be said that 800 thousand trucks are needed to carry the goods into the country, head of the House of Industry, Mine, and Trade of Iran said on Sunday.

Abdolvahab Sahlabadi called on all related organizations to encourage domestic supply for domestic demands as a way to tackle smuggling, Arman newspaper reported.

Iran's maritime build-up accelerates

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Iran will create three naval bases and two naval zones on the costs of Makran, along the coast of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, what its Navy chief characterized as a sea comeback.

"We are building two naval zones and three naval bases on Makran coasts, and this is in line with our policy of making a return to the sea," Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari told a press conference in Tehran on Monday.

Over the past years the Iranian Navy has increasingly played a crucial strategic role in the country's national security fabric due to Tehran's dependence on the Persian Gulf for trade and security.

Now, its naval forces operate in the Gulf of Oman, the Caspian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

The decision to enter international waters comes after Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei hailed the navy as a "strategic force" which can take on regional and trans-regional missions in 2007.

Iran's Navy chief Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari

"We are building two naval zones and three naval bases on Makran coasts, and this is in line with our policy of making a return to the sea."

Now, Iranian frigates patrol in an area of 2,100,000 m2, according to Sayyari, dispatching more than 44 flotilla of warships to high waters.

The missions have contributed particularly to a safe passage of upwards of 3,844 trade ships and tankers threatened by pirates, he added.

The Iranian navy has reached the operational capability through upgrading its existing fleet as well as introducing homegrown vessels and equipment.

"We need no foreign help for our equipment, and are a power in the fields of torpedoes and missiles now," the navy chief said.

Sayyari also announced the Iranian navy will be equipped with homegrown surface-to-surface missiles, sea-based drones, and Low Probability of Intercept radars.

Most probably, some of the items will be unveiled on November 27 earmarked in the Iranian calendar as the national Navy Day.

Tehran threatens to retaliate if U.S. bills finalized

1→ A majority in the U.S. House passed a bill on Wednesday aiming at blocking Boeing's intended sale of 80 commercial airplanes to Iran Air.

President Barack Obama has said he will veto the measure, if the Senate also approves the bill.

Qassemi also said Tehran is monitoring developments in the U.S. "precisely" and "patiently".

Donald-elect Donald Trump, who made inflammatory remarks against the nuclear deal between Iran and great powers during his presidential campaigns, will take the helm at the White House on January 20.

Qassemi said Iran has taken necessary preparations and will make proper decisions in proportionate to the new situation when Trump starts his work.

"It is too soon to judge what has happened... I think there exists 'rationalism' in the U.S. society to the extent that the international interests will not be jeopardized," he noted.

"Any way, Iran is prepared and has the appropriate option for any situation and will take necessary actions if the U.S. seeks to violate nuclear deal," he added.

In a speech in March to a conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in Washington Trump claimed that his "number one priority is to dismantle the disastrous deal with Iran". However, he later backed down from his rhetoric saying it was difficult to violate a deal which has been approved by the UN Security Council.

The July 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), went into effect on January 16.

Qassemi said, "The JCPOA is a multilateral agreement and not a bilateral one and has been approved by the UN Security Council and I do not think that it would be simple for one side to violate the deal or seek to review it."

"Any way, Iran is prepared and has the appropriate option for any situation and will take necessary actions if the U.S. seeks to violate nuclear deal."

EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said on November 9 that the JCPOA is a "multilateral agreement" and that she is tasked to guarantee its full implementation.

EU foreign ministers also issued a statement on November 14 reiterating the 28-nation bloc's "resolute" commitment to the implementation of the nuclear agreement.

'Iran optimistic about Iran-EU ties'

Qassemi said that the European Union has adopted "positive" approach towards Iran and the country is "optimistic" about expanding ties with the EU in various areas.

He also said that Iran and France plan to form first economic committee in January.

Iran dismisses autonomy plan for rebel-held areas of Aleppo

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem rejected on Sunday Staffan de Mistura's proposed plan according to which the Syrian government grant autonomy and recognize the local administration in rebel-held areas of Aleppo.

Qassemi also said, "No such plans could be carried out in Syria's political system."

The Iranian Foreign Ministry official also said de Mistura's truce plan for Syria is "provisional" and "inadequate".

"There are many actors in Syria. Disintegration of Syria have many serious opponents and cannot take place simply,"

'Saudi Arabia following path of dictators'

The Iranian Foreign Ministry official said Saudi Arabia faces many domestic and foreign problems and the kingdom is following the path of many regional dictators.

Qassemi said, "Saudi Arabia has taken a wrong path which is not rational enough. The country has taken the path that has been followed by some dictators in the region whose destiny is obvious for the people and public opinion."

He also expressed hope that the Organization of Islamic Cooperation would restore its main nature and help draw the Islamic countries closer.

Excess heavy water shipped to Oman: AEOI spokesman

TT POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Behrooz Kamalvandi, spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), said on Sunday that Tehran had shipped some of its surplus heavy water to Oman.

"In view of the progress of talks with several foreign firms and countries to purchase heavy water, some quantities of Iran's surplus production has been transferred to Oman," ISNA quoted Kamalvandi as saying.

The shipment comes days after a report by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that claimed Iran's heavy water stockpiles had slightly surpassed the 130 metric tonnes threshold set out in the nuclear deal.

Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council – the United States, France, Britain, Russia and China, plus Germany signed a nuclear accord, known as JCPOA, in July 2015.

The nuclear agreement went into effect in January 2016.

Under the JCPOA, Iran pledged to put limitations on its nuclear program in exchange for the removal of nuclear-related sanctions imposed against Tehran.

Iran is not allowed to have additional heavy water reactors or accumulation of heavy water inside the country for 15 years and all excess heavy water must be made available for export to the international market, the deal stipulates.

More heavy water would be sold to overseas buyers through Oman, according to the spokesman.

Iran had already sold some 32 tonnes of heavy water for a price of $8.6 million to the U.S. in July.

On Friday, Kamalvandi said Iran has remained committed to its obligations under the JCPOA on its heavy water stockpiles.

"According to the JCPOA, we were required to offer on the international market any excess over 130 tonnes of heavy water and we have so far sold 70 tonnes," Press TV quoted Kamalvandi as saying.

Back in October, AEOI chief Ali Akbar Salehi said that European firms had shown willingness to purchase Tehran's heavy water.

Expressing satisfaction with the demands, Salehi said Iran has become "a major international supplier of the substance," Press TV reported.

"In view of the progress of talks with several foreign firms and countries to purchase heavy water, some quantities of Iran's surplus production has been transferred to Oman."

Finnish Outotec Oyj sees ties with Iran solidifying

1→ "Future looks bright. In that sense, Iran is a very rich country from a resource point of view. We see Iran's metal and mining market grow and therefore, there will be many investment opportunities and we hope of course to participate in those investments."

While Outotec's activities in Iran are focused on providing services and technology, it is open to discuss issues related to the transfer of technology to Iranian partners.

"Typically, we transfer no technology. But obviously we are open to discuss on a case-by-case basis."

Hooman Khajehnasiri, the exclusive agent of the Finnish Outotec in Iran for fifteen years, said Outotec was the most active Finnish company in Iran during the sanctions times, never leaving the Iranian market.

"We didn't leave our market and customers during the hard sanctions time and kept out contacts with our Iranian partners," Khajehnasiri told the Tehran Times.

This unfailing commitment has brought Outotec the highest status among the Iranian firms active in the mineral sector.

"Now our position in the market is really high, and we are very welcome and accepted by different customers in this field."

The long-standing position has given the company impetus to seek strategic ties inside the country, he added.

"We are now trying to develop our strategic relationships with our customers, being more available for technological help," Khajehnasiri concluded.

It is worthwhile to note that with a global network of the sales and service centers, research facilities, and over 4,800 experts, Outotec generated annual sales of approximately € 1.2 billion in 2015.

Syria FM dismisses UN proposal for east Aleppo autonomy

Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem has strongly dismissed a United Nations proposal concerning the establishment of an autonomous region run by foreign-backed Takfiri militants in the eastern part of the strategically northwestern city of Aleppo.

"This was completely rejected... This is a violation of our sovereignty," he said in a televised news conference following a meeting with UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, in Damascus.

Muallem then made it clear that the incumbent Syrian government has no intention to decrease attacks on terrorist positions in the eastern flank of Aleppo, located some 355 kilometers north of the capital Damascus, and that the Damascus administration does not accept leaving civilians there to be taken hostage by militants.

"We agreed on the need that terrorists should get out of east Aleppo to end the suffering of the civilians in the city," the top Syrian diplomat said.

Syrian government forces will eventually emerge victorious, liberate Aleppo and restore calm to all areas of the city, he stressed.

Muallem further pointed out that that government will spare militants that lay down their weapons and turn themselves in to authorities across the country, noting that the government welcomes those who have fled the country as refugees.

The Syrian foreign minister also expressed his country's firm support for the large-scale operation by Iraqi army soldiers and allied fighters from Popular Mobilization Units to recapture the city of Mosul from ISIL (Daesh).

He, however, argued that the international community is not offering such support to a military offensive on Aleppo because of Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, formerly known as the al-Nusra Front, and the fact that the United States has multiple scenarios and plans in a bid to salvage the terror network.

Muallem also called on the U.S. President-elect Donald Trump to put an end to Washington's support for militant groups inside Syria, and restrain countries in the Middle East region that sponsor them militarily and financially.

"What we want from the new [U.S.] administration is not just to stop support (for armed groups)... but to curb those regional powers that are supporting those groups... we have to wait," he said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Muallem described Moscow-Ankara ties as economic, noting that Damascus views Moscow as a friend and ally whereas it considers Ankara as an aggressor that has invaded the Syrian soil and undermined the central government's sovereignty.

He termed as positive the latest international developments concerning the Syrian conflict, praising the strong alliance between Russia, Syria, the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. De Mistura estimates that over 400,000 people have been killed in the conflict.

(Source: SANA)

WHO rejects allegations about Iraq pilgrims

The World Health Organization has rejected as false a report on the increased number of unintended pregnancies in Iraq's holy city of Karbala during Arba'een mourning rituals, which mark 40 days after the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (PBUH), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The UN health body, in a statement, condemned the allegation recently published on Arabic-language Aswat Hurrah (Free Voices) website as completely erroneous and unethical.

The WHO further condemned the use of its name in the report as totally contradictory to the organization's underlying principles, emphasizing that it is investigating the source of the undocumented report and considers punitive measures against those behind its publication.

Earlier this week, Aswat Hurrah alleged that the influx of pilgrims visiting Karbala, which lies about 80 kilometers south of the capital Baghdad, had led to a sharp increase in the number of unintended pregnancies among Iraqi women.

Arba'een, which in Arabic means forty and falls on November 21 this year, has attracted millions of Shia Muslims from Iran.

The pilgrims show their commitment to the Shia imam by walking tens of kilometers.

Meanwhile, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has demanded an apology from Saudi-owned Asharq al-Awsat international newspaper over republishing the false report, stressing that Iraq reserves the right to take legal action against the London-based Arabic daily.

Abadi stated that the report published by Asharq al-Awsat in its Sunday issue constitutes an affront to the Iraqi nation, whose soldiers are making sacrifices in defense of their land, honor and dignity.

The Iraqi prime minister further pointed out that the newspaper and those who run it must apologize to the Iraqi people over the fabricated report, which has been denied by the World Health Organization, and stay away from publishing misleading and inflammatory news stories.

Additionally, prominent Iraqi Shia cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, has threatened to close down the office of Asharq al-Awsat in Baghdad in case the newspaper does not issue a formal apology.

Later on Sunday, Asharq al-Awsat discharged its correspondent in Iraq as part of attempts to allay the anger of the Iraqi people and officials.

(Source: Press TV)

Trump readies cabinet announcement soon

Mattis favored for Pentagon chief

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump prepared Monday to announce a new slate of cabinet picks some time soon, following a busy weekend of meetings with hopefuls at his golf club retreat outside New York.

Donald Trump on Sunday assessed several more contenders for top U.S. posts including Chris Christie and Rudy Giuliani, as blunt-spoken retired Marine Corps General James Mattis emerged as a leading candidate for defense secretary.

Trump held meetings at his golf resort in Bedminster, New Jersey, with candidates for senior administration jobs after he takes office on Jan. 20. On Saturday, he conferred with Mattis and Mitt Romney, formerly a fierce Trump critic now under consideration for secretary of state.

Summing up two days of talks as he said goodbye to retired U.S. Marines Corps General John Kelly on Sunday evening, Trump said he had made decisions on a couple of appointments.

"We really had some great meetings, and you'll be hearing about them soon."

Trump transition spokesman Sean Spicer said no decisions would be announced on Sunday night.

Trump discussed the treasury secretary job with Jon Gray, a board member of the Blackstone Group, two sources familiar with their meeting said.

A Trump transition team statement said their discussion included the U.S. economy, global capital markets and the world financial situation, as well as tax reform and long-term debt.

The last person Trump escorted out of the clubhouse was Giuliani, the former New York mayor. Trump said earlier that Giuliani was a candidate for secretary of state "and other things."

The Trump team statement said Trump and Giuliani discussed "administration priorities" as well as "restoring America's prominence in the world, ongoing national security issues and threats at various hotspots on a global basis."

Christie, the Republican governor of New Jersey, advised Trump during the presidential campaign but was dismissed as the head of his transition team. Asked by reporters before the meeting whether there was a place for Christie in his administration, Trump sidestepped the question but called him "a very talented man, great guy."

Trump met with billionaire investor Wilbur Ross, who he said was under consideration for commerce secretary. Asked whether he wanted the job, Ross told reporters: "Well, time will tell."

Trump also received Jonathan Gray, the global head of real estate at the Blackstone Group, who is being considered for Treasury secretary, according to a person briefed on the matter.

The president-elect has already tapped three senior leaders of his national security and law enforcement teams, choosing U.S. Senator Jeff Sessions for attorney general, U.S. Representative Mike Pompeo as CIA director, and retired Lieutenant General Michael Flynn as national security adviser.

Obama to defend 'core values'

The selections so far suggest that Trump, true to his campaign promises, intends to steer national security and foreign policy in a sharply different direction from that of Democratic President Barack Obama, whose record Trump harshly criticized during his campaign.

Obama campaigned extensively for Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton before the Nov. 8 election and warned during the campaign that Trump lacked the temperament and qualifications to be president.

In Peru, as he wrapped up his last foreign trip, one that was overshadowed by Trump's surprise election, Obama encouraged Democrats on Sunday to work with the new administration but said he would weigh in as a citizen if the Trump administration challenged values he holds dear.

In another sign of Trump's novel approach to politics, the New York businessman who has never held public office said he planned to live in the White House but that his wife, Melania, and their 10-year-old son, Barron, would not move in immediately. He said they would move from New York to the White House "very soon, right after he finishes school."

'True General's General!'

While Trump received lawmakers, politicians and business leaders behind closed doors over the weekend, he gave some hints about his thinking and possible Cabinet choices on Twitter.

On Sunday, he tweeted that "General James 'Mad Dog' Mattis, who is being considered for Secretary of Defense, was very impressive yesterday. A true General's General!"

From 2010 to 2013, Mattis headed the U.S. military's Central Command, which oversees operations stretching from the Horn of Africa through the Middle East and into Central Asia including Afghanistan and Pakistan. During that time, he was at odds with the Obama administration on the need to prepare for potential threats from Iran and about resources for Afghanistan.

Mattis, 66, served as an American commander in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and was known to be popular among the troops.

Speaking on "Fox News Sunday," Vice President-elect Mike Pence, who now heads Trump's transition team," said Mattis had "a legendary military career."

Incoming White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus said it was a "very real possibility" Mattis would get the job, telling the ABC program "This Week:" "I know that President-elect Trump loves leaders like General Mattis."

Pence said that Trump and Romney had a good meeting and "a warm and a substantive exchange."

"I can say that Governor Romney is under active and serious consideration to serve as secretary of state of the United States," Pence said on the CBS program "Face the Nation."

Romney, the unsuccessful 2012 Republican presidential nominee, was a leader of the Republican establishment movement that tried to block Trump from becoming the nominee this year. In March, Romney called Trump "a phony," "a fraud" and "a con man."

A source close to Romney from his time as Massachusetts governor expressed concern he might be "frozen out" by officials whose thinking appears to be closer to Trump's, such as Flynn, Mattis, White House counselor Steve Bannon, and members of Trump's family.

"How much influence and latitude he will have will be up to Trump, and they don't appear to be on the same page about much," the source said.

Former Texas Governor Rick Perry, who made unsuccessful bids for the Republican presidential nomination in 2012 and 2016, will meet with Trump on Monday and is being considered for Cabinet posts including defense, energy and veterans affairs, Trump's transition team said.

(Source: Reuters)

Suicide bomber kills dozens at Shia mosque in Kabul

1→ Already there had been two major recent attacks on Shia targets in Kabul, both claimed by ISIL terrorist group.

Last month, at least 14 people were killed when a gunman in police uniform opened fire on worshippers gathered at a Shia shrine for the Ashura festival. In July, more than 80 people were killed in an attack on a demonstration by the mainly Shia Hazara minority.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility for Monday's attack but the Taliban, seeking to reimpose law after they were toppled from power in 2001, denied any involvement.

"We have never attacked mosques as it's not our agenda," said the movement's main spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid.

Any resurgence of sectarian or ethnic violence could threaten the fragile stability of the government headed by President Ashraf Ghani, who described the "vicious attack" as an attempt "to sow seeds of discord".

Government Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah said Afghanistan should not fall victim to "enemy plots that divide us by titles".

"This attack targeted innocent civilians - including children - in a holy place. It is a war crime & an act against Islam & humanity," he said in a message on his Twitter account.

Thousands of civilians have been killed in Afghanistan in the 15 years since the Taliban regime was brought down in the U.S.-led campaign of 2001. In July, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan reported that 1,601 civilians had been killed in the first half of the year alone, a record since it began collating figures in 2009. *(Source: Reuters)*

Putin says Russia will respond to NATO expansion

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Russia would take countermeasures in response to NATO expansion, RIA news agency quoted him as saying on Monday.

"Why are we reacting to NATO expansion so emotionally? We are concerned by NATO's decision making," Putin was quoted as saying in an interview.

Meanwhile, Moscow says it will deploy its S-400 air missile defense system along with Iskander ballistic missile in the country's westernmost region of Kaliningrad, near the border with the Baltic countries of Lithuania and Poland and NATO member states.

"Russia sees the deployment of its missiles near the western border as a response to Washington setting up a U.S. missile shield in Europe," Russia's RIA news agency quoted Viktor Ozerov, the head of the defense committee in the Russian upper house of parliament, as saying on Monday.

The S-400 missile system is Russia's most modern air defense system. It can track some 300 targets and shoot down around three dozen simultaneously over a range of several hundred kilometers. Kaliningrad is sandwiched between Lithuania from the north and east and Poland from the south. The Baltic Sea is on the region's west.

Russia has deployed the systems to the region more than once. Poland and Lithuania have expressed concern about the move.

Russia and NATO have been at odds over an array of issues, including the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

The US-led military alliance has been deploying troops and equipment close to Russia's borders since it suspended all ties with Moscow in April 2014, after the Crimean peninsula integrated into the Russian Federation following a referendum a month before. The United States and its European allies accuse Moscow of having a hand in the conflict in eastern Ukraine and have imposed a number of sanctions against Russian and pro-Russia figures. Moscow, however, rejects the allegation. *(Source: TASS)*

Amnesty says torture, rights abuses persist in Bahrain despite reforms

Torture and other forms of ill-treatment persist in Bahrain despite reforms introduced by the Persian Gulf Arab kingdom to address alleged human rights abuses after a 2011 uprising, Amnesty International said on Monday.

An Amnesty report assessing the work of oversight bodies set up to deal with grievances or guard against further abuses said it had found "serious shortcomings" in the work of two British-supported institutions whose work is cited by Bahraini and UK authorities as evidence of progress in upholding human rights.

The Bahraini oversight agencies are the Ombudsman of the Ministry of Interior and the Special Investigations Unit (SIU) within the Public Prosecution Office, which were established in 2012. Both receive training and capacity building from Britain, a staunch ally of Bahrain.

"There is no denying that the Bahraini government has taken a step in the right direction by setting up institutions to investigate human rights violations and hold those suspected to be responsible accountable," Lynn Maalouf, Deputy Director for Research at Amnesty International's Beirut Regional Office, said in a statement. *(Source: Reuters)*

Iranian banks moving toward international standards

Iranian banks are trying to fall in line with international standards of transparency so they can better attract business and integrate with the global industry.

The central bank has instructed the subsidiary banks to set up compliance departments and risk management programs, and to implement globally accepted accounting practices so the economy can take better advantage of the easing of international sanctions under the 2015 nuclear deal.

The central bank "felt the need to address and resolve the issues our banks have," Vice Governor Peyman Ghorbani said in an interview on the sidelines of the Frankfurt European Banking Congress. "Good steps have been taken."

Businesses say that the Iranian banks' current situation has created additional hurdles for foreign banks considering working with Iran after the nuclear accord. Major European banks are still wary of resuming business ties with the Islamic Republic for fear of running into remaining U.S. sanctions that apply to non-nuclear activities. Iranian officials say the hesitation is holding up plans to help the economy, despite their country's compliance with the accord.

Internal housekeeping

Large foreign lenders are mostly hesitating over "the internal housekeeping of Iranian banks," said Reza Soltanzadeh, board member of the Tehran-based Middle East Bank.

Policy makers have taken "very good measures" regarding capital adequacy ratios and banks are working hard to comply, he said.

A number of smaller lenders are being audited to "restore trust to the system," said Soltanzadeh. "But this will take time for the larger banks."

Iran has both an official exchange rate to the dollar and another rate used in unregulated markets. The implementation of the nuclear accord in January has energized plans to unify the exchange rates, but "long-term and sustainable unification" also needs good corresponding relationships with larger banks, Ghorbani said.

"We are taking steps and are not in a rush," he said. "We want to make sure that the preconditions are there."

While Iran sees the involvement of large European banks as essential to reviving the economy, it has also expanded its corresponding relationships to 240 banks, including small and medium-size lenders, Ghorbani said.

As the central bank nudges lenders closer to international standards, the Iranian legislature is taking steps to strengthen the regulator's independence and supervisory powers.

The measures -- the Central Bank Act and the Banking Act -- are to be submitted "soon" to parliament, Ghorbani said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Indian refineries owe over $2b oil dues to Iran: petroleum min.

Indian refiners owe $2.55 billion in oil dues to Iran, 90 percent of which are payable by private sector Essar Oil Ltd, Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Monday.

Four Indian refiners had outstandings of $6.11 billion in May, 2016 when formal banking channels were opened with Iran after nearly four years. They came down to $2.55 billion as on 15 November after public sector refiners paid most of their dues to Iran, the minister said.

Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) had an outstanding of $2.557 billion towards Iran as of May 20, of which it paid $2.355 billion and now owes Iran only $202 million, he said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha.

Essar Oil, which the Ruia brothers have sold to Russian national oil company Rosneft in a $12.9-billion deal, had the biggest outstanding of $2.917 billion on May 20. Of this, it paid only $600 million and still owes $2.317 billion.

"Following the lifting of sanctions on Iran on January 16, 2016 and re-establishment of banking channels from 20 May, 2016, Indian refineries have paid $3.563 billion out of $6.118 billion to Iran on account of payment due to National Iranian Oil Co (NIOC) for supply of crude oil," he said.

State-owned Indian Oil Corp (IOC) has paid $538 million out of $550 million due to Iran while HPCL Mittal Energy Ltd, which operates a refinery at Bhatinda in Punjab, has cleared $52 million out of $76 million dues.

Rosneft last month signed agreement to buy a 49 percent stake in Essar Oil's 20 million tons a year Vadinar refinery in Gujarat, adjacent port and petrol pumps, while Trafigura and United Capital Partners (UCP) split another 49 percent equity.

The deal has an enterprise value of close to $12.9 billion – $10.9 billion being for a 20 million tons a year refinery in Gujarat and over 2,700 petrol pumps and another $2 billion for Vadinar port in Gujarat. The deal factors in Essar Oil's debt of about $4.5 billion and about $2 billion debt with the port company.

Also, the dues to Iran were to continue to be on Essar Oil books and the new owner will take responsibility of it.

To a separate question, Pradhan said India imported 12.1 million tons of crude oil from Iran during April-September.

This compares to 12.7 million tons imported in whole of 2015-16 and 11 million tons in each of the two previous fiscal year.

Imports from Iran are second to only Saudi Arabia (20.4 million tons) and Iraq (19.6 MT).

In 2015-16, Iran was behind Saudi Arabia (40.4 MT), Iraq (36.8 MT), Nigeria (23.4 MT) and the UEA (15.7 MT), he said.

(Source: JANTA KA Reporter)

Iran sells crude oil at $41.93 per barrel in a week

TT ECONOMY desk

TEHRAN — Iran sold its light crude oil at $41.93 per barrel in the week ended on November 11, with $1.1 drop from its previous week, Shana news agency reported.

Iran' light oil price stood at $39.83 on average since the start of this calendar year (March 20, 2016).

The country also sold its heavy crude oil at $40.76 per barrel in the mentioned week, with $1.06 fall from its preceding week.

Iran' heavy oil price stood at $37.81 on average since the start of current calendar year.

Meanwhile, with a $1.52 drop from its preceding week, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)'s basket price reached $42.06 per barrel in the week ended on November 11.

After major oil producers' meeting in Algiers on September 28, which ended in a preliminary accord on capping OPEC members' oil production level, crude oil prices have experienced an increase.

As predicted, in case of a final deal to freeze oil output, international oil prices would surpass $50 and will swing up to $60.

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh after his meeting with OPEC's secretary-general, Mohammed Barkindo, in Tehran on November 19 said he's optimistic that the group's members will agree to proposed production cuts at a meeting in Vienna later this month.

Zanganeh said crude prices could jump to $55 a barrel if an agreement is reached and non-OPEC producers cooperate.

Malaysian tradesmen keen on invigorating ties with Iran: MICCI president

TT ECONOMY desk

TEHRAN — President of the Malaysian International Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MICCI) Wira Jalilah Baba expressed tendency of his country's businessmen for fortifying economic ties with Iran in post-sanction era, IRNA reported on Monday.

Making the remarks during a meeting held to investigate Iran-Malaysia trade opportunities in Kuala Lumpur, Jalila Baba, who is also an honorary member of Iran-ASEAN Business Council, stressed that MICCI will back expansion of relations with the Islamic Republic.

The meeting, which was attended by owners of industrial and trade firms, was hosted by MICCI and Malaysia External Trade Development Corporation (MATRADE) in collaboration with Iran-ASEAN Business Council.

Mohammad-Hafez Hokmi, secretary of the first exhibition of Iran's trade and investment opportunities in Malaysia, also presented a report on economic conditions of Iran in the post-sanction era and invited Malaysian investors to make sustainable presence in Iran for investment and technology transfer purposes.

Iran-Malaysia trade value stood at $532 million in 2015 and both sides intend to increase the figure to $1 billion in the short run.

Iranian, Brazilian export guarantee bodies sign MOU to facilitate trade

TT ECONOMY desk

TEHRAN — The Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) and the Brazilian Guarantees and Fund Managements Agency (known as ABGF) signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday to facilitate trade between the two countries, IRNA reported.

According to the report, the MOU which was signed by EGFI's Information & Planning Director Mehrdad Parsamanesh and ABGF's Chief Executive Officer Marcelo Pinheiro Franco in Tehran, covers a variety of areas including joint insurance coverage in third countries, coreinsurance and exchanging the credit information of the two sides' businessmen and etc.

In the signing ceremony the two sides expressed hope that signing this MOU will be a step toward facilitating the activities of the two countries businessmen and traders.

Last week, the visiting Iranian Finance Minister Ali Tayyebnia and Brazilian Minister of Industry and Commerce Marcos Pereira and Minister of Mines and Energy Fernando Coelho Filho discussed reinvigorating mutual economic and trade relations in Brasilia.

Introducing available investment opportunities in Iran, Tayyebnia discussed improvement of bilateral banking and brokerage relations with the Brazilian energy minister.

Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI)'s Information & Planning Director Mehrdad Parsamanesh (R) and Brazilian Guarantees and Fund Managements Agency (known as ABGF)'s Chief Executive Officer Marcelo Pinheiro Franco (L)

Negotiations with Airbus, Boeing to continue this week: Iranian official

TT ECONOMY desk

TEHRAN — Iranian Deputy Transport Minister Asghar Fakhrieh Kashan announced on Monday that the Islamic Republic will continue its talks with Airbus and Boeing during the current week, ILNA reported.

Referring to the recently published news [that the Republican-controlled House voted 243-174 to pass the legislation to prohibit the Treasury Department from issuing the licenses U.S. banks would need to complete the transactions that Iran has received no official statements], Fakhrieh Kashan said that Iran has received no official statement from the two giant plane-makers about the issue yet.

He added that Iran will receive five of its ordered planes including one Airbus A321 by the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2017), while no talks have been held to identify possible ways for Iran to make the payments for the airplanes.

Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council -- the United States, Britain, Russia, China, France as well as Germany --started implementation of the deal, dubbed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), on January 16.

Under the JCPOA, all sanctions imposed on Iran by the European Union, the UN Security Council and the U.S. have to be lifted as Iran limits some aspects of its peaceful nuclear program.

The White House announced last week on Monday that President Barack Obama will veto the bill seeking to block the export of passenger aircraft to Iran, saying it would undermine an international nuclear deal implemented early this year.

The White House said American allies would view the legislation as a violation of the nuclear agreement.

It seems the election of Donald Trump as the next president of the U.S. has allowed Republicans to take a more aggressive stance against Iran.

Trump said during his election campaign that he would "dismantle", "tear up" or try to renegotiate the terms of the nuclear deal if elected president.

Iranian officials have warned the U.S. against walking away from the nuclear agreement, stressing that any U.S. president is bound to honor the deal as it has been endorsed by a United Nations Security Council resolution, which makes it effectively an international law.

Asian LNG and coal prices jump to rarely seen highs

Increased imports by South Korea and China have pushed prices for liquefied natural gas and coal to highs not seen in months -- even years.

East Asian spot prices for LNG have climbed above $7 per million British thermal units, a level last reached in December 2015. The commodity has soared by more than 70% from the low reached this April.

An earthquake in September forced South Korea to suspend operations at four nuclear reactors. To compensate for the energy gap, the country is procuring more LNG, research firm S&P Global Platts reports.

Japan imports most of its LNG through long-term contracts that track crude oil prices. Crude has climbed above $40 a barrel from lows that approached $20 at the beginning of the year. Compared to long-dated contracts, LNG spot contracts

are viewed as more affordable, and the demand has driven up spot prices.

China is also importing more LNG since the energy source is seen as comparatively cheaper than liquefied petroleum gas and other fossil fuels, said Simon Flowers at Wood Mackenzie, an energy consultancy.

Spot prices for coal are also going up. Export prices for Australian coal, which serves as a gauge for the Asian market, is currently topping $100 per ton -- more than double a valley last January. Chinese authorities have been cutting excess output capacity in the domestic coal industry by restricting the number of days mines can operate. Chinese power companies have imported more coal to replenish supplies.

The higher spot prices for coal are also mers. Heftier electricity bills may be coming next year.

(Source: Nikkei)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Deutsche Bank confirms chairman Achleitner nomination

Deutsche Bank's supervisory board unanimously nominated chairman Paul Achleitner for a second term, a spokesman of Germany's biggest lender confirmed on Monday.

"It is true that Deutsche Bank's supervisory board has unanimously nominated Paul Achleitner for reelection at the annual general meeting in May 2017," the spokesman said.

The spokesman added that an internal investigation had also cleared Achleitner of wrongdoing in connection with the bank's alleged manipulation of interbank rates including Libor, which cost it a record $2.5 billion in fines from U.S. and British authorities.

Pioneer's €3.5b price tag too much for Aberdeen

Aberdeen Asset Management's chief executive said Italian bank UniCredit had priced its Pioneer fund unit too high at €3.5 billion ($3.7 billion), prompting the British firm to drop a takeover bid, Bloomberg reported on Monday.

Martin Gilbert said the firm was through to the second round, but "couldn't quite afford" the price tag, Bloomberg reported.

Gilbert told Reuters last week that Aberdeen had bid for Pioneer, but had decided not to proceed.

EU has no concerns yet about UK's Nissan deal, awaits details

The European Union's competition chief said on Monday she did not see any concerns over a British assurance to Japanese carmaker Nissan related to Brexit, but that she was still waiting for details to have more clarity about the case.

Nissan agreed last month to new UK investments after Prime Minister Theresa May assured it the government would provide support to counter any loss of competitiveness caused by Britain leaving the EU.

The European Commission subsequently asked for more details.

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Trump can't keep his immigration promises

Come Jan. 20, President-elect Donald J. Trump will start carrying out his agenda. How does he expect to turn promises into policy? Do his plans make sense? If not, what should he do? Finally, given the political realities of Washington, what's most likely to happen? This is part of a series of editorials that try to answer these questions.

What he says he'll do: In an interview after his election last week, Trump said that he favors deporting 2 to 3 million undocumented immigrants, whom he described as "criminal." Then, "after the border is secured and after everything gets normalized," he would determine what to do about the remaining 8 to 9 million undocumented immigrants in the country. Meanwhile, anyone who has entered the country illegally is "subject to deportation," according to his campaign website, which also vows to rescind President Barack Obama's executive actions temporarily shielding from expulsion more than 700,000 undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children.

As recently as July, a Gallup poll found two-thirds of Americans opposed to deporting all immigrants living in the U.S. without authorization.

Does that make sense? Prioritizing the deportation of criminals -- there are far fewer of them than Trump claims -- is the current federal policy, and if Trump intends to continue that course, it's a sensible approach. If, however, he will be guided by the policies on his website, the U.S. has neither the enforcement nor judicial infrastructure necessary. Not to mention popular support: As recently as July, a Gallup poll found two-thirds of Americans opposed to deporting all immigrants living in the U.S. without authorization.

What he ought to do: Trump should focus enforcement resources on removing genuine criminals while also clarifying his intentions toward all other undocumented immigrants. Vague, seemingly contradictory threats needlessly strike fear in families and freeze economic potential. People deciding whether to invest in a home or business should know what awaits them.

The most likely outcome: Trump will rescind Obama's executive actions and pursue a more aggressive course on deportations. "Dreamers," those brought to the U.S. as children, will also be subject to removal. Immigration courts, already clogged, will be overwhelmed as civic and religious organizations assist immigrants contesting deportation. Many states and localities will refuse to cooperate with federal immigration authorities. The issue will continue to fester, without resolution, throughout Trump's term.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Germany's future role in the Middle East

By Thembisa Fakude

There are two crucial elections coming up in Europe; Germany and France will be electing their chancellor and president respectively in 2017. In France's case, there are a number of potential presidential candidates, including the incumbent president Francois Hollande of the Socialist Party. Nicolas Sarkozy and Alain Juppe are the two front-runners for the Republican Party presidential nomination, and one of them is favoured to win the presidency in 2017.

Meanwhile, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the far-right National Front, is also running for the top job. The polls have not placed her in front at the moment, but after the spectacular shock of the Brexit referendum results in the United Kingdom and the outcome of the 2016 United States presidential elections, polls have proven to be less reliable.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel has indicated that she will stand for a fourth term as the leader of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 2017. Her party CDU will have to garner enough representation in the Bundestag for her to be elected. Germany under the chancellorship of Angela Merkel is crucial in the new global political order particularly in light of the rise of right-wing politics in Europe and the election of Donald Trump in the U.S..

Europe under the leadership of Germany is important to counter the balance of this new global power.

Germany's positive image

Germany's positive image as one of the world's greatest exporters of philanthropy, efficiency and professionalism has made it a reference point for other countries. It has become synonymous with perfection because of its high quality products and services the country continues to supply to the world. Its economic and political successes have given it a default leadership role in the world.

However, the rise of right-wing politics is threatening the political stability in the world, particularly in Europe. The number of racially motivated attacks against immigrants is gaining momentum and the backlash to this new phenomenon might lead to a violent reaction as victims seek to defend themselves, which in turn may lead to a widespread state of civil conflict. The tensions felt in the streets of the capitals of Europe suggests a continent that is like a ticking time bomb. Europeans are even turning against income generating tourists who are somehow lumped together with the "undesirable other". Germany's institutional memory and moral high ground under Merkel's leadership is essential in pushing back this scourge and in averting further escalations.

Germany will also have an increased political role in the Middle East. It has demonstrated leadership by assuming political responsibility and engagement on three fronts in the region.

Three fronts in the region.

First, recently it welcomed thousands of refugees from Syria, and this has contributed tremendously to the profile of Germany in the Middle East. Germany has become one of the main stakeholders in the Syrian refugee crisis and its politics, and consequently it will be part and parcel of future political settlements in Syria. The refugee challenge is the most divisive issue in Europe and the greatest threat to European cohesion. The "open door" refugee policy adopted by Germany will entrench the people's relationship with Syria, increasing cross cultural exchanges and interactions. This new reality will most likely culminate in growth in economic cooperation between Germany and the Middle East.

Second, the large numbers of Turkish immigrants in Germany who are growing impatient with the policies of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have unwittingly entangled Germany in the politics of yet another country in the region – Turkey. The political contestations and polarizations in Turkey have spilt over into Germany. Turkey and Germany are therefore likely to continue butting heads as Turkey intensifies its efforts to fight what it calls "Gulenist terrorists" many of whom reside and are citizens of Germany. Furthermore, the strong Kurdish representation in Germany has made the country an interesting political mobilization ground.

Third, Germany will also be key in saving the P5+1 nuclear deal with Iran. Donald Trump has indicated that he will repeal the deal when he comes to power in January 2017. Germany, as a key member of the EU and as a sponsor of the deal, is most likely to exert pressure to save the deal.

The Middle East will face difficulties moving forward. The war in Syria and the election of Trump will most likely add to the refugee crisis. At some stage Germany as the largest host of refugees in Europe will have to contribute to the solution at the source. Europe under the leadership of Germany is important to counter the balance of this new global power.

In conclusion, the decline in global politics is pinning all hopes on Germany, particularly on Chancellor Merkel. Her leadership during the global economic meltdown and on the refugee crisis in Europe has rendered her indispensable. Added to this is the imminent departure from the global political scene of President Barack Obama. Although many have argued that UK Prime Minister Theresa May brings hope to global politics and might supplement Merkel's exceptionalism, her political mandate, which is the execution of Brexit, disqualifies her and adds to the global political pessimism.

(Source: middleeastmonitor.com)

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Achievements of Zarif's Lebanon, East Europe tour

By Maryam Azish

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always considers a balanced approach to all countries and geographical regions and in addition to fostering ties with neighboring and Muslim countries, which has always been among the priorities of the country's foreign policy, the reinforcement of all-out ties with East European countries, has always been on the agenda of Tehran.

Following the implementation of the nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), foreign countries are very keen to re-establish ties with the Islamic Republic.

The recent visits of the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to Lebanon and three East European countries, which are considered to enter the European Union for Iran, are considered as the top of the country foreign policy developments last week.

The present high-profile trip by Zarif is going to well serve as evidence to the decisive role Iran has in promoting ties with East European countries.

Iranian officials have always attached great importance to expansion of all-out cooperation with Lebanon.

Zarif's historical visit to Lebanon

As the first high ranking foreign political figure to visit Beirut after the election of Michel Aoun as the new president following a long political stand-off in the country, Zarif started his four-leg tour on Nov 7, heading to Lebanon prior visiting Romania, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Iranian officials have always attached great importance to expansion of all-out cooperation with Lebanon and also believe that the Islamic Republic of Iran could reach African markets through Lebanon as that country affects all economic activities in Africa.

While in Lebanon, Zarif held several meetings with a number of senior Lebanese officials including the president, the prime minister, the parliament speaker as well as the Hezbollah Leader Hassan Nasrallah during his two-day stay there. During the meetings, he discussed regional issues as well as bilateral relations with the Lebanese politicians.

The Iranian foreign minister also attended a gathering on Iran-Lebanon economic opportunities as he was leading a top 30-member economic delegation to the country.

Outlining the outcomes of his conversations with Lebanese officials, he said he was optimistic about the prospect of ties with Lebanon because he saw relations with Beirut as beneficial to both nations as well as the whole region.

He also said Iran is keen on cooperation with the Lebanese incumbent government and the next government due to be formed by Prime Minister Saad Hariri, adding the Zionist regime and extremism posed threats to Iran and Lebanon.

Zarif also conferred with Lebanese Prime Minister Tammam Salam on settlement of the humanitarian crisis in Syria and the regional disputes, underlying the necessity to expand cooperation between the two countries in new era after election of President Aoun.

Expansion of Tehran-Bucharest cooperation

From Lebanon, the foreign minister flew to Bucharest, Romania, where he signed two documents on mutual cooperation with his counterpart.

Zarif also explored ways of promoting all-out bilateral relations during meetings with a number of top Romanian officials including President Klaus Iohannis, Speaker Florin Iordache and Prime Minister Dacian Julien Ciolos.

In a joint press conference with his Romanian counterpart, Zarif said US has to stay faithful to its commitments towards the JCPOA advising the US president to understand the real meaning of today's world and try to go in harmony with international developments.

Zarif said it is customary with Iran not to interfere in other countries' internal affairs.

When in Romania, Zarif commented on the election of Donald Trump as the new American President, saying the results took many by surprise because they were to face the realities of the world and realized that contrary to their assumptions political apparatus were no longer able to determine the future.

According to Romania's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIR), the level of commercial exchanges between Romania and Iran were standing at 166.6 million euros on October 2015.

Call for expansion of Iran-Slovakia relations

Arriving in Slovakia from Romania, he held meetings with ranking officials and attended the Iran-Slovakia economic and trade meeting.

Talking to Slovakian President Andrej Kiska, the two sides reviewed ways for expansion of mutual cooperation, the political and economic ties in particular.

Slovakia is a country that could boost its share in Europe's economy after its detachment from Czech Republic on the basis of the growth and development of small and medium-sized companies to big and multinational companies.

According to Romania's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIR), the level of commercial exchanges between Romania and Iran were standing at 166.6 million euros on October 2015.

Speaking to his Slovakian counterpart Miroslav Lajcak, Zarif stressed that the large economic entourage accompanying him demonstrate the will of both the public and private sectors in Iran to develop ties with Slovakia.

Lajcak also said that bilateral relations between Iran and Slovakia have been good from the very beginning, adding since his visit to Iran in 2015 everything tends to be promising and improving.

He also voiced his readiness to enhance Slovakian embassy's operations in Iran, especially the mission's economic operations, and said that there are plenty of opportunities for economic cooperation between the two nations.

Promoting investments and banking cooperation were among other fields for bilateral cooperation between Tehran and Bratislava, Lajcak said.

Slovakia's economic growth rate this country lies within European standards and Bratislava as Slovakia's capital is the sixth rich island of the Europe.

Iran keen on fostering ties with Czech Republic

Heading to Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic, as the last leg of his East European tour, Zarif conferred with political officials on regional crises especially situation in Syria, fighting terrorism and ties with the European Union and discussed expanding trade and economic relations between the two countries in such areas as energy, banking and tourism.

In a joint conference with his Czech counterpart, he stressed the need for all parties to abide by their commitments to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The Iranian foreign minister described the deal as an important international deal which came as the end of successful diplomatic process.

He also signed documents with the Czech officials on bolstering political exchanges.

It goes without saying that more engagement between Iran and East European countries is going to guarantee peace and stability in the European continent, as well.

Without doubt, Zarif's East European tour would be considered as a turning-point in development of Iran's political and economic relations with Europe.

At a time when world's doors are open to Tehran after the landmark nuclear deal, a suitable opportunity has been provided for consolidation of relations between Iran and the East European states.

Indisputably, the consolidation of relations between Iran and East Europe would mark a new chapter in Iran's further prosperity.

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Changing the game for young people in health and development

ARTICLE

By Michel Sidibé

This summer, hundreds of millions of people around the world followed the twists and turns of two major football tournaments: the 2016 Copa América Centenario in the United States of America and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) European Championship 2016, hosted by France. It is a testament to the enduring power of the beautiful game that matches played at such venues as the Rose Bowl Stadium in Pasadena, California, and the Stade Vélodrome in Marseille were followed by fans from far beyond the Americas and Europe; people from all corners of the globe cheered on their favourite teams and players. Football crosses borders and continents like no other sport, and as such can be deployed as a significant force for change.

In September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which identified sport as an "important enabler" of development and recognized its growing contribution to the promotion of peace. We know that in local communities around the world, often all that is needed to bring a group of young people together is a ball and a patch of grass or urban concrete. Wherever I travel, I come across girls and boys teaming up, marking out goal posts and playing football.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has long realized that football can play an important role in raising awareness of HIV, especially among young people vulnerable to infection. In 2010, the Protect the Goal campaign was launched to raise awareness about the virus ahead of that year's World Cup in South Africa. It continued during the African Cup of Nations tournament in 2013, where HIV prevention messages were disseminated on giant screens at all stadiums hosting matches. The captains of each of the 16 teams participating in the competition read out a statement calling on players, fans and young people to support the campaign. During the World Cup in Brazil in 2014, 2 million condoms were distributed in cities where games were played, while free, rapid HIV tests were offered at local fan sites. UNAIDS International Goodwill Ambassadors, Michael Ballack and David Luiz, have used their influence to help UNAIDS disseminate key messages about HIV testing and prevention to millions of people.

Grassroot Soccer is another powerful initiative that recognizes the potential of football to inspire hearts and minds. Developed by a group of former professional players, in collaboration with the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education and public health experts, Grassroot Soccer combines three effective principles of education:

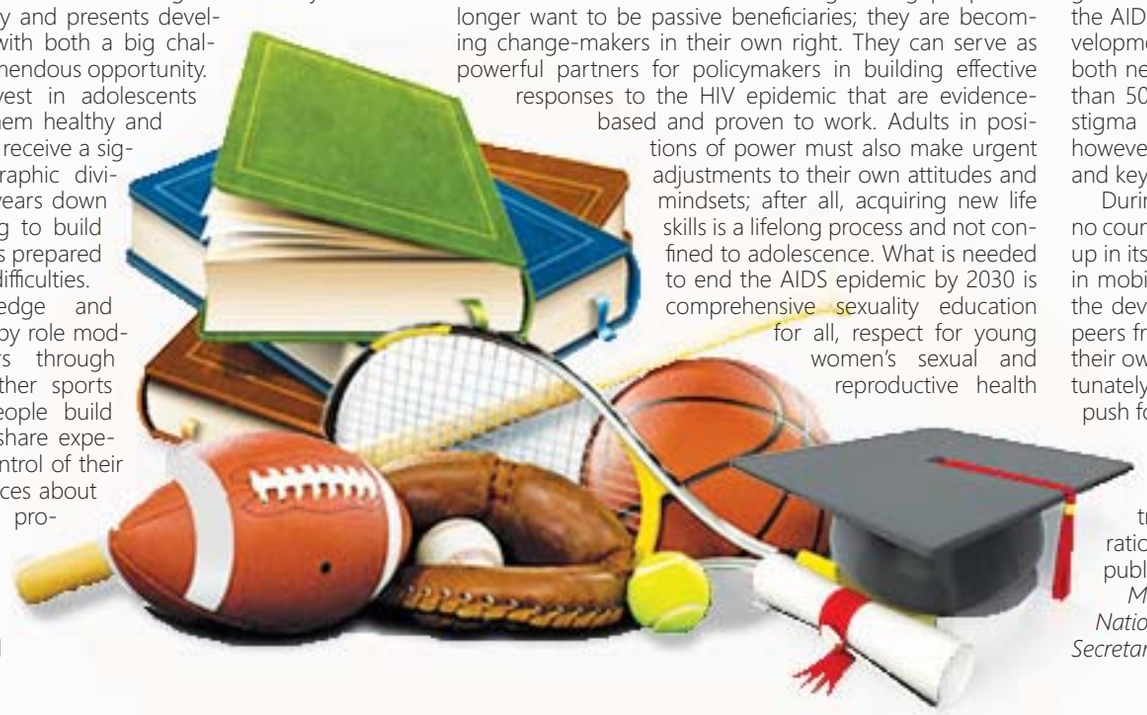
■ Young people learn best from those they respect. Adolescents listen to and emulate their heroes. Grassroot Soccer engages professional players and other role models as HIV educators.

■ Learning is not a spectator sport. Adolescents retain knowledge best when they are active participants in the process, teaching others what they have learned themselves.

■ It takes a village. Role models can change what young people think, but lifelong learning requires lifelong community support.

This fantastic programme has now reached more than 1.3 million adolescent girls and boys with comprehensive HIV prevention and life-skills education. The skills that empower young people to navigate the particular challenges of adolescence are essential. This generation of youth is the largest in history and presents developing nations with both a big challenge and a tremendous opportunity. If countries invest in adolescents now to keep them healthy and strong, they will receive a significant demographic dividend 10 to 15 years down the line, helping to build resilient societies prepared to meet future difficulties.

The knowledge and skills conveyed by role models and peers through football and other sports help young people build self-assurance, share experiences, take control of their lives, make choices about their sexuality, protect themselves from HIV and other infectious diseases, avoid unwanted pregnancy and stride into adulthood with confidence.



Adolescents should have the world at their feet, and be strong, healthy and full of life and expectations for the future. Unfortunately, too often this is just not the case. In fact, the world is currently failing adolescents, particularly adolescent girls. They are being left behind in the HIV response.

In 2015, there were an estimated 250,000 new HIV infections worldwide among adolescents between 15 and 19 years of age, with girls accounting for 65 per cent of new infections among this age group. AIDS-related illnesses are the leading cause of death among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa and the second leading cause of death among young people globally. Gender-based violence, gender inequity, harmful gender norms, stigma and discrimination often prevent women and girls from knowing their HIV status and accessing HIV prevention and treatment services. This is a moral injustice that simply cannot be allowed to continue.

Football and other sports are helping to equip our youth with the knowledge to protect themselves and make informed choices about their health, but we need to go further. The world urgently needs to readjust its thinking on adolescent health and well-being. Young people no longer want to be passive beneficiaries; they are becoming change-makers in their own right. They can serve as powerful partners for policymakers in building effective responses to the HIV epidemic that are evidence-based and proven to work. Adults in positions of power must also make urgent adjustments to their own attitudes and mindsets; after all, acquiring new life skills is a lifelong process and not confined to adolescence. What is needed to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 is comprehensive sexuality education for all, respect for young women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and recognition that everyone everywhere has the right to health. Young people must be involved in the design and delivery of programmes and services that address their needs.

There has been significant progress in reducing the impact of HIV over the past 15 years. There were more than 17 million people on antiretroviral treatment at the end of 2015. AIDS-related deaths are down from a peak of 2 million in 2005 to 1.1 million in 2015. Four countries—Armenia, Belarus, Cuba and Thailand—have received certificates of validation from the World Health Organization for eliminating new HIV infections among children. There has been a 60 per cent decline in new HIV infections among children since 2009 in the 21 countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have been most affected by the epidemic. The number of new HIV infections in 2015, however, remains stubbornly high at 2.1 million, scarcely reduced from 2010 levels, with young women and key populations remaining especially vulnerable.

The new Political Declaration on Ending AIDS, adopted by Member States at the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Ending AIDS held in New York in June 2016, provides countries with an actionable and progressive mandate to put the world on the fast-track to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. To accomplish this, the world must reduce both new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths to fewer than 500,000 globally by 2020 and eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination. We won't reach these goals, however, without reducing infections among young people and key populations.

During the High-Level Meeting, leaders recognized that no country has ended AIDS and no country can afford to let up in its response to HIV. Sport is playing an important part in mobilizing young people to take on leadership roles in the development agenda, to protect themselves and their peers from HIV and other infectious diseases, and to make their own contribution to ending the AIDS epidemic. Unfortunately, that in itself won't be enough. The world needs to push forward with approaches that cut across health, education and justice to remove all obstacles to health programmes and services for adolescents.

To use another sporting analogy: it's time to fast-track the HIV response to meet the Political Declaration's 2020 targets and end the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030.

Michel Sidibé is Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations.

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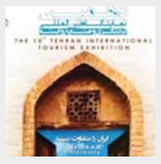


Tehran tourism fair to bring Iran under spotlight

TT TOURISM desk **TEHRAN** — The Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization (CHTHO) as the organizer of the 10th Tehran International Tourism Exhibit has announced that the fair will bring the country under the spotlight in terms of its rich history and culture.

The organization is also set to keep up with the highest regional standards for setting up the exhibit and its upcoming editions, ILNA reported on Sunday quoting Ali-Bager Namatizargaran who is in charge of the CHTHO marketing and advertising tourism.

"See Iran Differently" has been selected as the motto of the exhibition, which will be held at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground from February 6 to 9, 2017.

NOTABLES

Ibn Rushd: Muslim philosopher

Ibn Rushd, better known as Averroes in West, and in full Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Rushd was an influential Islamic religious philosopher who integrated Islamic traditions with ancient Greek thought.

He was born 1126 into a distinguished family of jurists in Córdoba, Spain. Thoroughly versed in the traditional Muslim sciences (especially exegesis of the Qurʾān—Islamic scripture—and Ḥadīth, or Traditions, and fiqh, or Law), trained in medicine, and accomplished in philosophy.

Statue of Ibn Rushd in Córdoba, Spain

Ibn Rushd passed away 1198 in Marrakech, a region ruled by Almohad empire [now in Morocco].

At the request of the Almohad caliph Abu Yaʿqub Yusuf, he produced a series of summaries and commentaries on most of Aristotle's works (1169–95) and on Plato's Republic, which exerted considerable influence in both the Islamic world and Europe for centuries.

He wrote the Decisive Treatise on the Agreement Between Religious Law and Philosophy (Faṣl al-Maḳāl), Examination of the Methods of Proof Concerning the Doctrines of Religion (Kashf al-Manāhij), and The Incoherence of the Incoherence (Tahāfut al-Tahāfut), all in defense of the philosophical study of religion against the theologians (1179–80).

(Source: Encyclopedia Britannica)

Greek current account surplus rises in September, tourism revenue up

Greece's current account surplus rose in September compared to the same month a year earlier, the Bank of Greece said on Monday.

The data showed the surplus reaching 1.008 billion euros ($1.07 billion) from 904.1 million euros in September 2015. Tourism revenues rose marginally to 2.23 billion euros from 2.18 billion in the same month a year earlier.

In 2015 as a whole, Greece posted a current account deficit of 7.5 million euros, helped by higher tourism revenues - its biggest foreign currency earner. *(Source: Reuters)*

Weaker naira can help tourism, bail Nigeria out of recession

Early this year, the naira started dropping in value to a dangerous low. Since virtually all the airlines began to review their fares upward, occasioned by low naira exchange rate to international currencies, one really had no choice than to either stay at home or risk traveling and getting stranded in a foreign land.

The situation worsened to a point when the exchange rate stood at N600 to £1, but there seems to be a moment of reprieve now. And this is coming from the planned exit of Britain from the European Union.

The falling pound sterling was the reason tourists poured like bees into London this year's summer time. They hopped from one shopping mall to another. The British media had risen to the occasion. Like other businesses, they too exploited the slump in the pound to publish products that tourists couldn't resist.

Coming back to Nigeria, the story flips to the opposite side with Nigerians reacting to the gripping recession in the country by groaning, lamenting and blaming government for all their woes. But should they keep wallowing in dejection when others across the globe are seeing recession as a door to prosperity? Britain is one country hit by recession and has been taking every step to earn prosperity instead. Rather than weeping and sulking, Britons are taking everything in their stride, turning their adversity into opportunity.

The lesson here is that Nigeria has a lot to learn from Britain's private sector, the academia, tourism industry, the media and entertainment sectors, among others, which took up the challenge to lead their way out of recession...

(Source: The Guardian)

Gonbad-e Jabaliye: Long-standing, enigmatic octagonal structure

TT TOURISM desk **TEHRAN** — The historical Gonbad-e Jabaliye, or Jabaliye Dome, is one of the architectural landmarks in southeastern Iran.

Standing on the outskirts of Kerman, the octagonal building capped with a double-layered brick dome is made of stone, mortar, and gypsum.

Although its exact date of construction is unknown, some experts believe its origins date back to the second century CE.

Narratives say it may be used as an observatory or the tomb of a dignitary.

The structure is of high importance because it interweaves early Islamic features and elements with the architectural styles practiced during the Sassanid era (224 to 651).

It currently houses a museum of old gravestones.

Here is a select of comments that visitors to Gonbad-e Jabaliye have posted to TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

"Ancient tomb, well preserved"

A polygonal domed building on the outskirts of town, now a museum of gravestones (some of them worth a picture). Elegant proportions. (Stefano M. from Malaysia)

"Nice well maintained monument"

Visited this monument on my visit to Kerman , I wish they had some board or inscription giving a brief history about the place. (Harshdawer form India, visited February 2016)

A view of historical Gonbad-e Jabaliye in southeastern Iranian city of Kerman

"Lovely park and setting"

We stopped at Stone Museum on our way to Kaluts and I'm glad we did. The inside of the museum is full of old grave stones and I would say one can skip it. But if you are in the area I suggest that you stop by and enjoy the lovely art work in the part and take a few snaps of beautiful octagonal limestone building. If you have children they will enjoy the park as well. Megan K. from San Francisco, California; visited December 2015.

Taarof: A Persian art of etiquette

By Julihana Valle

In every social interaction, from buying groceries to negotiating a nuclear deal, this highly valued behavior dictates how people should treat each other.

"Befarmaeed," said Fatimeh with an imperative hand gesture that commanded me to eat more.

As I joined my impeccable Iranian hostess, her mother, two daughters and son for dinner, served on the floor over a perfectly imperfect Persian carpet, I felt ready to put my basic taarof skills into practice for the first time.

I desperately wanted some more of the mouth-watering sabzi polo mahi (a herbed rice dish served with fish) but, before saying yes, I knew I had to convincingly say a few noes.

I had never heard of taarof until I travelled in Iran. This Persian word with Arabic roots defines the country's complex art of etiquette, in which the true meaning of what is said is not in the words, but somewhere beyond them. It's a subtle dance of communication, where participants step back and forth over and over, never taking over the stage.

In the world of taarof, politeness holds the place of honor. In its name, people refuse when they want to accept, say what is not meant, express what is not felt, invite when it is not intended, replace bad news with false hope. By doing so, they try to say what they "wished it were" – without ever admitting that it isn't.

Once I paid a Tehran taxi driver 250,000 rials for the ride, a fare we had previously agreed on after a hard-fought negotiation. Oddly, the money was refused.

"Ghabel nadare," he said smiling, indicating that he wouldn't accept it.

Scratching my head, I insisted. Again he protested. Giving up, I thanked him in Farsi and left the vehicle with a grin on my face. "All is well," I thought, incredulously.

"He was taarofing," my friend Reza later explained. "Of course he expected you to pay. And you should have insisted more. The driver was showing his respect for you. There is an unwritten rule of two or three rounds of offering and refusing in taarof. Once this ritual is performed, you can say what you want without being [considered] rude. Politeness first, but in the end you always pay."

I thought hard about that later, wondering if the driver was still smiling.

TEHRAN TIMES/Hadi Hirbodvash

Taarof is a subtle dance of communication, where participants step back and forth over and over, never taking over the stage.

Although decorous manners are practiced throughout the world, taarof differs by being far more elaborate and pervasive.

In every social interaction, from buying groceries to negotiating a nuclear deal, this highly valued behavior dictates how people should treat each other.

While the concept is generally positive, showing mutual deference, it can be manipulative when used improperly, when someone tries to benefit from the generosity of another. Such behavior is seen as negative in Iranian society, as it masks arrogance rather than expresses humility.

"One key concept in taarof is a function that I have described as 'getting the lower hand'," said William O Beeman, professor of anthropology at the University of Minnesota and a Middle East specialist. "Individuals will seek to raise the other person's status, and lower their own".

Useful phrases:

Taarof nakonid: Please don't taarof

Taarof nemikonam: I'm not taarofing

Paradoxically, he explained, in a hierarchical society such as Iran, where favors and services can be interpreted according to the stratum of the provider, this behavior "produces social stability, because when both persons are doing this, they achieve equality".

One thing that sets Iran apart from other Middle Eastern countries is its Persian identity, preserved in traditions, language and many rich art forms, including literature. Rumi, Ferdowsi, Hafez and Omar Khayyam are poets whose verses have been – and still are – savored in both the East and West.

Iranians are proud of their heritage; "Nowruz [Persian New Year] is our most important holiday – we still speak Persian [Farsi]. We are Persians in blood and soul, and this cannot be changed," Reza said.

"Taarof represents the kind essence of Iranian people. In our culture, it can be impolite to express ourselves in very a direct and objective way," explained Iranian artist Fereshteh Najafi.

"For Iranians, kind words are always important. Maybe it is because our Persian spirit carries a lot of poetry in it. Our most important thinkers are poets, most of them very ancient, and a language full of kindness and praise is still today present in our readings."

Another Persian legacy is their hospitality. A guest in Iran is like a cherished precious jewel. People will likely put themselves out for you by sharing what they don't have enough of and spending on what they cannot afford – and that's taarof in its purest form.

A usual invitation for a cup of tea can be extended to stay the night. Asking for directions may result in a new friend who, instead of simply pointing, will take you there. As Iranians are genuinely courteous, the line that separates sincere invitations from polite gestures can be very thin.

"You can ask people not to taarof," said Fatimeh, who, when we had only just met, tried to offer me her own bed, saying she would sleep on the floor. "It sometimes works, sometimes doesn't – as the request itself may be a form of taarof."

The truth is that taarof is not meant to appear to be taarof. The less obvious it is, the more successful. When in doubt, the secret is to always consider the other, and put his or her needs first. It is a feeling that, in the end, simply figures itself out.

(Source: BBC)

IN FOCUS

Gold cup tells of rich Persian craftsmanship in Iron Age

TT HERITAGE desk **TEHRAN — This exquisite Iranian artwork which dates back to the early 1st millennium BC boldly reveals the skills accomplished Persian goldsmiths possessed during the Iron Age II.**

The artwork being kept at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, has been excavated at Marlik, an archaeological site situated southwest of the Caspian Sea in northern Iran.

Based on technical details provided by the museum, there are four gazelles on the body of the cup, which have been framed horizontally by guilloche bands, walk in procession to the left. Their bodies are rendered in the repoussé technique and are detailed with finely chased lines to indicate hair and musculature.

Researchers in a last-resort to save the orange-bellied parrot

The orange-bellied parrot has long been threatened with extinction in the wild, but it's only recently researchers realized just how much trouble the species is in.

Each year, researchers keep track of how many of the birds return to their breeding spot, Melaleuca, located in the remote southwest of Tasmania in Australia. The birds make the long trip to the area after spending their winter on the warmer coasts of Victoria and South Australia.

But in 2016, only three females and eleven males managed to survive the migration, leaving only three breeding pairs left.

That's why researchers from the Difficult Birds Research Group at the Australian National University have jumped into action, launching an emergency crowdfunding campaign to help save the bird.

Sudden emergency

"It's always a bit of a lottery ... there's really never any way to predict who's going to survive, and that why there's this sudden emergency," one the group's conservation biologists, Dejan Stojanovic, told Mashable.

"We've just realized there's only three pairs left and if we don't intervene now, it's totally possible none will return next year."

While there is a large captive breeding program aimed at increasing the orange-bellied parrot's wild population, such measures have been unsuccessful in stemming the species' decline.

The orange-bellied parrots breed within a short window of a few weeks. They get in while the weather is nice in Melaleuca, then leave shortly after.

It means Stojanovic and his team have to work quickly. The birds started guarding spots for breeding last week, and the first eggs are expected to be laid this week. It's also why the team has turned to crowdfunding, as typical funding processes are too slow.

While there is a large captive breeding program aimed at increasing the orange-bellied parrot's wild population, such measures have been unsuccessful in stemming the species' decline.

Time really is tight

"All the traditional forms of funding that could get used to deal with a situation like this just take too long. The timing is really tight," he explained.

"Tomorrow we're going down to Melaleuca to do the first check. See who's nesting, how many eggs they've got, what do we have to work with for this emergency situation.

"That's why crowdfunding is important, because we're basically paying for our trip tomorrow on credit — and there is no money to do what we're doing. So if we can crowdfund it by next week, then we should have the money to pull in the resources for a rescue effort."

Stojanovic explained the crowdfunded money will go to intervention in the wild birds' breeding process, bringing in people with a "niche skill set" to do work that's never been done before.

"Basically you have to be a biologist that knows how to climb trees, knows how to feed baby parrots, knows how to identify if a baby parrot is going to struggle, can do things like swap eggs around, and support the breeding females to raise as many as possible," he said.

(Source: Mashable)

Physicists uncover strange numbers in particle collisions

At the Large Hadron Collider in Geneva, physicists shoot protons around a 17-mile track and smash them together at nearly the speed of light. It's one of the most finely tuned scientific experiments in the world, but when trying to make sense of the quantum debris, physicists begin with a strikingly simple tool called a Feynman diagram that's not that different from how a child would depict the situation.

Original story reprinted with permission from Quanta Magazine, an editorially independent division of the Simons Foundation whose mission is to enhance public understanding of science by covering research developments and trends in mathematics and the physical and life sciences.

Feynman diagrams were devised by Richard Feynman in the 1940s. They feature lines representing elementary particles that converge at a vertex (which represents a collision) and then diverge from there to represent the pieces that emerge from the crash. Those lines either shoot off alone or converge again. The chain of collisions can be as long as a physicist dares to consider.

To that schematic physicists then add numbers, for the mass, momentum and direction of the particles involved. Then they begin a laborious accounting procedure — integrate these, add that, square this. The final result is a single number, called a Feynman probability, which quantifies the chance that the particle collision will play out as sketched.

Complicated math

"In some sense Feynman invented this diagram to encode complicated math as a bookkeeping device," said Sergei Gukov, a theoretical physicist and mathematician at the California Institute of Technology.

Feynman diagrams have served physics well over the years, but they have limitations. One is strictly procedural.

Physicists are pursuing increasingly high-energy particle collisions that require greater precision of measurement — and as the precision goes up, so does the intricacy of the Feynman diagrams that need to be calculated to generate a prediction.

The second limitation is of a more fundamental nature. Feynman diagrams are based on the assumption that the more potential collisions and sub-collisions physicists account for, the more accurate their numerical predictions will be. This process of calculation, known as perturbative expansion, works very well for particle collisions of electrons, where the weak and electromagnetic forces dominate. It works less well for high-energy collisions, like collisions between protons, where the strong nuclear force prevails. In these cases, accounting for a wider range of collisions.

"We know for a fact that at some point it begins to diverge" from real-world physics, said Francis Brown, a mathematician at the University of Oxford. "What's not known is how to estimate at what point one should stop calculating diagrams."

Yet there is reason for optimism. Over the last decade physicists and mathematicians have been exploring a surprising correspondence that has the potential to breathe new life into the venerable Feynman diagram and generate far-reaching insights in both fields.

(Source: wired.com)

How climate change has put the North Pole in a serious crisis

With everything that's happened in the United States over the last couple of weeks, there's no shame in admitting if you're feeling a little preoccupied. Indeed, plenty of people have been walking around as if they're still in a dream they can't quite wake up from, with President-elect Donald Trump now already making cabinet appointments for his incoming administration.

But there's another story happening right now, and one that's of no less existential importance? The North Pole appears to be stricken by climate change, and is now far warmer than it's supposed to be as the winter season approaches.

How much warmer, you ask? A lot. As Chris Mooney and Jason Samenow detailed for the Washington Post, the temperature at the North Pole right now is about 36 degrees Fahrenheit above where it should be based on previous years, resulting in slowed sea ice-freezing over the polar seas.

Needless to say, amid the intensifying urgency to address climate change for so many coastal and island locales across the world, and considering the United States just elected someone who once tweeted that global warming is a hoax perpetrated by the Chinese, these are pretty frightening times.

North Pole's temperature

It's no more reassuring when you see the North Pole's temperature visualized in chart form. To the contrary, the abnormality and potential calamity of this moment are that much more apparent.

It's important to note, as the Washington Post report does, that ice is still building up in the seas around the North Pole, but it's happening at far slower pace that it normally would. It's also true that this could be some kind of momentary fluctuation that could remedy itself, at least quickly enough that it wouldn't necessarily be an omen of something truly dire and unforeseeable happening.

But that's all cold comfort considering that something bad definitely is happening, it's just a matter of how quickly.

The overwhelmingly scientific consensus on human-caused climate change is overwhelming for a reason both because the science behind it holds up, and because of the indicators all around us that it's taking place.

That's why the current state of political affairs is so harrowing, as well assuming Trump's climate change denial can be taken seriously, his election could mean that the U.S. will pull out of the Paris climate agreement, a move which would have disastrous international and environmental implications. When you get right down to it, there have seldom been so many things to worry about all at once.

(Source: bustle.com)

AYANDEH Bank Comes 1st in 12th Intl. Public Relations Symposium

AYANDEH Bank won top rank as leading Public Relations Unit in 12th Intl. Public Relations Symposium in the field of implementation of a plan to "Honor Clientele".

This prestigious ceremony was held at the National Library Conferences Hall on Nov. 15-16 in the presence of a great number of experts, managers, and directors of Public Relations Department of organizations and experts in the field of communications and public relations inside and outside the country.

Given the above issue, special statue of the Festival was awarded by the jury members to the Public Relations Department of the bank on implementation of a plan to Honor Clientele.

BIM Membership in Iranian Committee of ICC Extended

Membership of Bank of Industry and Mine (BIM) in the Iranian Committee of International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) was renewed once again, Public Relations Dept. of Bank of Industry and Mine announced.

Given the above issue, membership of the bank was extended for another three-year period, the report added.

As the sole and exclusive representative of private sector in world, International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), established in 1919, is tasked with accelerating and facilitating international trade and business exchanges.

It should be noted that its national committees has been developed in more than 90 countries in world.

For his part, Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Eng. Ne'matzadeh appreciated activity and performance of Chief Executive and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the bank Ali-Ashraf Afkhami and his colleagues for on-time allocation of financial resources to industrial and production projects including Hijab Textile Development Company of Shahr-e Kord, etc.

Wastewater research may help protect aquatic life

New wastewater system design guidelines developed at UBC can help municipal governments better protect aquatic life and save millions of dollars a year.

Nima Moallemi

In a recent study, engineers at UBC's Okanagan campus developed guidelines that can tailor the design of specialized filters, called fluidized bed reactors, to local conditions and help prevent phosphorous deposits from forming in wastewater systems.

The guidelines also help ensure the fluidized bed reactors avoid the release of phosphorus into the environment.

As phosphorus promotes oxygen-depleting algae blooms, its release can suffocate aquatic life.

"If left unchecked, phosphorus can cause significant environmental damage and millions of dollars in additional maintenance costs for large wastewater plant operators, such as municipalities," says the study's principal investigator Joshua Brinkerhoff, assistant professor of engineering. "These are consequences we obviously want to avoid and the design guidelines developed in this research can help us to do that."

Using computer simulations, Brinkerhoff and Ph.D. candidate Nima Moallemi were able to test different types of water flow scenarios in a virtual environment and estimate the operating conditions of the fluidized bed reactors that achieve the best mixing of liquid and solid material to remove phosphorus.

The guidelines allow designers to account for differing wastewater rates and quality found in different geographic regions, as the chemical makeup and amount of wastewater varies with geography and city size.

(Source: EurekAlert)

Why nature is our best guide for understanding AI

In living organisms, evolution is a multi-generational process where mutations in genes are dropped and added. Well-adapted organisms survive and those less fortunate go extinct. This is Natural Selection. Resilience is great, but if you don't grow gills in time for the flood, then tough luck.

Engineering, on the other hand, is a deliberate process with reliable steps designed to reach a stated objective. With the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI), we are beginning to see the convergence of evolution and engineering as machine learning algorithms begin to evolve.

For the sake of our comparison (natural evolution to machine evolution), let's consider data and how it is normalized as the "environment" and the training process as "Natural Selection." The training process can be supervised or unsupervised learning, reinforcement learning, clustering, decision trees or different methods of "deep learning."

Much like natural evolution, different organisms solve for the same problem differently depending on their environment, but ultimately reach the same outcome. Sharks and dolphins wound up with similar mechanisms to survive despite starting from completely different beginnings.

In technology, we see similar patterns. The K-means clustering algorithm, a technique often used for image segmentation, for example, ingests essentially unlabeled inputs (usually images) and coherently grouped clusters are produced until a desired grouping is reached. If you gave 10 people the same data set and asked them to solve the same problem using different algorithms, it's possible that they could each take a different approach and get the same outcome. As machine learning techniques find their way into commercial applications, businesses are faced with the challenge of developing strategies to implement this technology safely and efficiently.

(Source: techcrunch.com)

New beaked whale species identified

When a trio of small dead black whales washed ashore in Hokkaido on the Japanese coast in 2013, Japanese researchers didn't know quite what to make of them. With their porpoise-like snouts, they looked similar to Baird's beaked whales, a species found in the Pacific. But these whales were smaller and darker.

The scientists suspected they might be a new species and sequenced their DNA. But with just three samples, they couldn't say for sure. Now, through a combination of good luck and sleuthing for more specimens, a team of biologists led by Phillip Morin at the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Southwest Fisheries Science Centre are convinced that the mystery whales are, indeed, members of a new species.

The only skeleton of the new species in the United States hangs on display at Unalaska High School in Alaska's Aleutian Islands. The whale was found dead nearby in 2004 and tissue samples preserved in a NOAA Fisheries tissue collection later revealed that it is the new species.

The center houses a large collection of tissue from marine species, and when Morin learned about the mystery whale specimens in Japan, he had a hunch that some of the center's samples may have been misidentified and were actually the same species the Japanese team had found.

To find out, the team sequenced the DNA of about 50 samples in the collection, and found two that matched the DNA from the Japanese specimens.

Then, as luck would have it, in 2014 fresh evidence washed ashore on an Alaskan island in the Bering Sea: a whale carcass similar to a Baird's beaked whale, but smaller. Genetic tests showed it, too, matched the DNA of the suspected new species.

(Source: Cosmos Magazine)

"My mother was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her."

George Washington

Muslim girl's hijab ripped off at a school in USA

Yet another incident of racial hatred surfaced this week when a classmate of a female Muslim student in an American school, ripped off her hijab and pulled down her hair in front of other students.

According to details, the unpleasant incident took place in Northdale Middle School in Coon Rapids, Minnesota, prompting the area's school district to launch an investigation into the incident.

The family of the victim girl told the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) that a female classmate of the Muslim student came up behind her and ripped off her hijab, before throwing it on the ground. She then pulled the Muslim girl's hair down in front of other students in the school.

CAIR's Minnesota expressed concern, in a statement, over the alleged delayed response by the school district to the incident.

"School officials must take immediate actions to ensure that all students, regardless of their faith or ethnicity, are provided a safe learning environment," CAIR-MN executive director Jaylani Hussein said in a statement.

Numerous cases of racial crime and hatred against women covering their heads with hijab have emerged after Donald Trump's recent victory in the U.S. presidential elections 2016.

On Thursday in east London, a British-Pakistani pizza shop owner was subjected to an acid attack by white supremacists.

(Source: The News International)

Unfaltering woman

TT WOMEN desk **TEHRAN** — Marzieh Hadidchi, also known as Marzieh Dabbagh or Tahereh Dabbagh, was the first woman who commanded a division of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

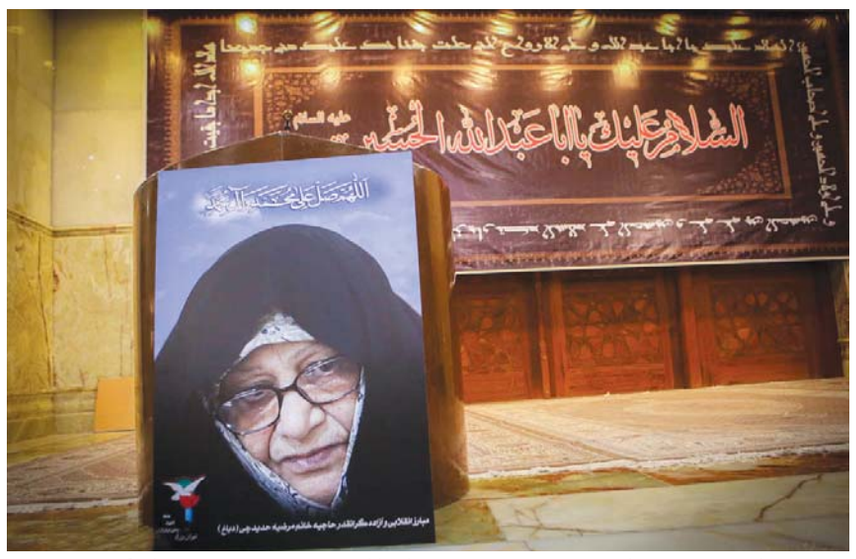
She was arrested in 1972 by SAVAK, the domestic security and intelligence service of Iran, during Shah's regime, and severely tortured.

She spent years in training military tactics in the Palestinian camps in Syria and Lebanon.

Hadidchi was appointed as the IRGC commander in the western province of Hamedan following the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

She later served as the head of the women's prison in Tehran, and as a lawmaker.

Hadidchi was a member of the delegation appointed by Imam Khomeini to convey his message to the last General Secretary of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, in 1989.



During Imam Khomeini's exile in Paris before the Islamic revolution, Hadidchi was his personal bodyguard.

She was elected to parliament (Majlis) for three terms.

Hadidchi chaired the Association of the Women of the Islamic Republic from 1987 until 2012.

She died on Thursday, November 17, at the age of 77.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei issued a message calling her a "combatant, revolutionary and indefatigable woman."

In his message of condolence, the Leader said "imprisonment and harsh tortures" failed to cause a crack in her strong will in the campaign the Shah regime.

President Hassan Rouhani also said Hadidchi left a "glowing" legacy of herself through her "unrivaled" and "epic" struggles against the Phalavi regime and the services that she did after the victory of the Islamic revolution.

First female Somali American lawmaker, a lonely voice in Trump's U.S.

An election that won Donald Trump the White House and gave Republicans control of Congress was an unlikely moment for the United States to also get its first Somali American legislator in the form of headscarf-wearing Ilhan Omar.

Omar, a 34-year-old refugee from Somalia's bullet-ridden capital, Mogadishu, won a seat in Minnesota's House of Representatives on November 8, as a self-styled progressive who would stick up for fellow Muslims and work for fairer pay and better schools in Minneapolis.

To her supporters, she is a charismatic ambassador for Somalis and Muslims and a silver lining in an election that elevated the Republican candidate, Trump, who campaigned against the threat of terrorism from Muslim refugees, like Omar.

Crowds chanted her name as Omar made her victory speech Tuesday night, wearing pearls and elegant white robes. Critics ask, however, whether beneath the sparkly smile and all-purpose liberal slogans, she is a political lightweight who dodges scrutiny.

"If we've learned anything these past few days, it's that America is at a point of divide with two very opposing concepts of nationalism," Omar's spokesman Akhilesh Menawat told Al Jazeera.

Ilhan Omar, first Somali American elected to the Minnesota Legislature on November 8

"We've found that our solution - uniting people and thriving in our diversity, not fearing diversity - works. We've done Minneapolis; now it's time to go to the state and keep moving forward. There's a lot more work to do."

Omar was born in Mogadishu, but her family fled after dictator Siad Barre was toppled in 1991 and Somalia collapsed into cycles of clan-on-clan violence, famine and religious fanaticism, which continue to blight the Horn of Africa nation.

After four years in a Kenyan refugee camp, Omar's family was excited to secure refugee resettlement to the U.S. state of Virginia. They soon joined fellow Somalis in Minneapolis, Minnesota, a northern Rust Belt state on the Great Lakes bordering Canada.

Twelve-year-old Omar knew little English and grew frustrated that teachers continuously overlooked her in class. She once showed pluck when a maths teacher ignored her raised hand when asking pupils to solve a number puzzle.

"In defiance, she just walked up to the board and answered the problem and sat back down - to prove that she was worth something," said Menawat.

Aged 14, she got her first dose of U.S.-style politics when interpreting for her grandfather at caucuses of the Minnesota Democratic Farmer Labor Party (DFL), a Democratic affiliate. It stuck and soon, she was a student organizer at Edison High School.

She earned degrees in business, political science and international studies. She helped female African immigrants. As a city council policy wonk, she favoured rehabilitating rather than jailing offenders, and helped restaurants stay open late for fast-breaking Ramadan suppers.

(Source: aljazeera.com)

In Presence of 1st Vice President:

GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Co.'s Pelletizing Plant No. 2 Goes on Stream in Kerman Province

Several important industrial and economic projects were inaugurated in Kerman Province in the presence of First Vice President Eng. Es'haq Jahangiri. **GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company's Pelletizing Plant No. 2,** with the production capacity of five million tons of pellets, was one of the important projects which was put into operation in Kerman Province.

Moreover, GOLGOHAR Sports and Cultural Complex became operational in Sirjan, Kerman Province in the presence of First Vice President.

In his two-day trip to southeastern Kerman Province, Eng. Jahangiri also paid a visit to exemplary "resistance economy" city in Qaleh Ganj city. In addition, a number of water supply projects were put into operation in Kerman Province in the presence of First Vice President Eng. Jahangiri.

In the inaugural ceremony of GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company's Pelletizing Plant No. 2, Eng. Jahangiri, who was accompanied by the Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade, said: "Today, a giant industrial and economic project is put into operation in this province which can materialize most of its economic objectives."

As large as 100,000 square meters, GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company's Pelletizing Plant No. 2 has been constructed with huge amount of fund in this province, costing 4,400 billion rials and €103 million.

Inauguration of this giant industrial and production unit in Kerman Province has generated 500 direct and 2,000 indirect employment opportunities for job-seeking people, the report added.

Inauguration of GOLGOHAR Sports and Cultural Complex in Sirjan

GOLGOHAR Sports and Cultural Complex was also put into operation in Sirgan in the presence of First Vice President Eng. Jahangiri and Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports **Soltanifar**. This complex is equipped with different parts including soccer pitch, track-and-field piste, swimming pool, gym, wrestling hall, weightlifting and bodybuilding halls, tennis court, etc.

As large as 29,000 square meters, GOLGOHAR Sports and Cultural Complex is constructed with credit, costing over 450 billion rials, the report added.

First Vice President Eng. Jahangiri was the first speaker in the inaugural ceremonies of these two projects in Kerman Province who said: "Development trend of the country has been put in the right track and effective steps have been taken in the country in line with accelerating construction operation of development projects."

He called on all responsible and executive officials of the country to join their hands together for removing problems available in the country.

Currently, the country is in dire need of formulating effective planning in line with removing unemployment, improving livelihood of all walks of life and developing underprivileged and disadvantaged regions of the country, he maintained.

Salient achievements have been taken by the private sector in inauguration of most industrial and production projects in the country, he said, adding: "Most people believe that country can be developed with public funding, rather, private funding is needed as prerequisite for propelling the country towards prosperity."

Both public and private sector cooperation is needed in order to meet most economic objectives of the country, he said, adding: "Cooperation of these two sectors is considered as driving force for materialization of most economic objectives in the country."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the vice president pointed to the formulation of an accurate planning in order to compete in international arena and said: "Development of mines and mineral industry is one of the most important priorities for industrial development of Iran. Iran is home to rich mine and mineral resources, oil, gas reserves and also competent manpower for the development of this industry in international level."

Iran's economy can be administered without relying upon the oil revenues, he said, adding: "Iran's exports balance of trade without considering oil revenues turned "positive" in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year in 1395 (March 20 – Sept. 21), the issue of which is a great achievements in this country, showing that giant steps have been taken in this regard."

Focusing on social issue is one of the main missions of large industrial and production units in the country, he said, adding: "People living in desert and disadvantaged areas in the country expect the large industrial and production units to meet their demands, so that inauguration of these two projects in this province can help solving problems facing the deprived people of this region to a great extent."

He also pointed to the water shortage problem in some regions of this province and said: "Giant steps have been taken by the government in this regard. Fortunately, large companies in the country such as GOLGOHAR Company of Sirjan have taken giant steps in the field of treatment of wastewater and also construction of wastewater treatment plant."

Earlier, *Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Eng. Mohammad-Reza Ne'matzadeh* pointed to the inauguration of several projects in the field of mines and mineral in the past month and revealed the completion of steel chain in the country and prevention of dumping in these industries.

Giant steps have been taken in the 11th government dubbed "Hope and Prudence" in the field of producing steel, pellet, direct reduction iron (DRI), sponge iron and ingots (bullions), he said, adding: "With the effective planning taken in this regard, copper, lead and zinc mines have been flourished to a great extent."

In the end, the industry minister expressed his special thanks to those officials who established necessary cooperation and collaboration with the government in materializing most economic objectives.

Chief Executive of **GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company** was the next speaker who pointed to the self-sufficiency of industries in the country to pellet (conglomerate) product and said: "Moreover focusing on concepts of resistance economy, localization and exports, this industrial and production unit paid due attention to the social issues to a great extent."

The senior official of the company also expressed his thanks to those managers who took giant steps in line with materializing most objective of his company.

At the end of ceremony, First Vice President Eng. Jahangiri paid tribute to the dignified position of martyrs of this city and commemorated names and memories of martyrs of Islamic Revolution and Sacred Defense.

By: A.Saeidi

Ex-PM Fillon is favorite to win French conservative presidential ticket

Former prime minister Francois Fillon is favorite to become the French center-right's presidential candidate after a voting upset that puts him in pole position for a showdown with far right leader Marine Le Pen in next year's election.

Fillon, who has said he will cut public sector jobs and rein in government spending, won 44 percent of votes in Sunday's first-round of voting for the center-right's nomination. He faces a second-round vote against another former prime minister, Alain Juppe, who trailed him by 15 percentage points.

Former President Nicolas Sarkozy came third and, after being eliminated, endorsed Fillon for the second-round vote next Sunday.

The outcome adds to uncertainty about the result of next year's presidential election, likely to be decided in a runoff in May. It could increase a still remote possibility that the anti-immigration, Eurosceptic National Front leader Le Pen can win it, although there is no clear evidence Fillon would fare worse against her than Juppe.

The surprisingly big lead hands Fillon, 62, a strong advantage in next Sunday's runoff. An admirer of late British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, he is probably the closest thing France has to an economic liberal and social conservative.

Although Fillon's triumph on Sunday was a surprise, opinion pollsters had said he made a late surge in campaigning, and several stalwarts from the conservative Les Republicans party threw their weight behind him after his first-round success.

"I will vote for Francois Fillon because it is he who will best defend the values of the right," said party president Laurent Wauquiez, a close Sarkozy ally.

A snap poll by Opinionway after Sunday's results showed Fillon winning the head-to-head contest against Juppe with 56 percent of support.

With the French left in turmoil under deeply unpopular Socialist President Francois Hollande, the opinion polls indicate that whoever becomes the center-right challenger is likely to face Le Pen in May's presidential election runoff.

The polls have suggested Le Pen has only a remote chance of winning that runoff but the more centrist Juppe, 71, had been seen as the best placed candidate to defeat her in a two-horse race.

Targets for National Front

A BVA poll in September showed Fillon, who drives racing cars for a hobby, would beat Le Pen by a margin of 61 percent of votes to 39 percent if they contest a presidential election runoff.

But that consensus predates Donald Trump's U.S. election win, which exposed the same popular anger against political elites as in Western European countries such as France, Italy and Austria that Le Pen has tapped into.

It also raised questions over the accuracy of opinion polls, which were under scrutiny again on Monday in France.

With his socially conservative and pro-business policies, Fillon lacks the broad appeal of the more centrist Juppe, and so may increase Le Pen's chances of taking power.

Fillon stood down as social affairs minister after big street protests in 2003 when he championed reforms extending the age at which people are entitled to retirement pension payments.

"To some extent, we believe Fillon's lead introduces additional uncertainty when it comes to the presidential election," said Raphael Brun-Aguerre of JP Morgan in a research note.

But Juppe, who served as prime minister form May 1995 until June 1997 under President Jacques Chirac, would also be vulnerable to National Front barbs.

"Either of the candidates would probably be targeted by far-right National Front leader Marine Le Pen being for part of the old political guard, and Juppe, on this front appears relatively more vulnerable," said Morgan Stanley in a research note.

Juppe was not giving up.

"I believe more than ever that the people of France need to come together to turn the page of a disastrous five-year term that has demeaned our country and to block from power the National Front which would lead us into the worst of adventures," he told supporters on Sunday night.

Opportunity for Left?

Fillon and Juppe have clashed most forcefully over Fillon's proposals to slash the cost of government, notably by axing 500,000 public sector jobs over five years.

Fillon's proposals for market-oriented reforms - including scrapping the 35-hour working week and raising the retirement age - go beyond what his challenger advocates for a country where the state remains a powerful force in the economy, even for the center-right.

"My fellow Frenchmen have told me, everywhere, they want to break away from a bureaucratic system which saps their energy," Fillon told his campaign faithful on Sunday night.

Born in a western region of France where the secular nation's catholic roots remain strong, Fillon has said France faces a problem "linked to Islam". Juppe has sought a more conciliatory tone with France's large Muslim minority.

Any registered voter can take part in the conservative primaries, and polls showed many of those that did on Sunday were from the left and extreme right.

"The only chance for Juppe is a strong turnout in the second round, including from left-leaning voters. He will try to present himself as the man of the center. His message will be: we need reforms, but nothing that is horribly painful," said Claire Demesmay, an expert on Franco-German ties at the German Council on Foreign Relations.

The ruling Socialists and their allies will hold their own primaries in January. Hollande, whose popularity ratings are abysmal, has yet to announce whether he will stand again.

Some on the left hope that if Fillon wins the conservative ticket, its candidates could find new impetus as a space opens up for them in the center.

Another beneficiary could be Emmanuel Macron. The former investment banker who quit his job as Hollande's economy minister in the summer launched his independent run for the presidency last week.

Macron, who says he is neither of the left or right, ranks as one of France's most popular politicians, though polls indicate his chances of reaching the election's second round are slim.

(Source: AFP)

ISIL Egypt affiliate allegedly plotted president's assassination

As many as 292 suspects will be tried in an Egyptian military court over charges that include assassination attempts on President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, 2014 bombings in North and South Sinai and plans to kill the crown prince of Saudi Arabia. The suspects are alleged members of Sinai State, the local affiliate of the ISIL terrorist group, also known as ISIS.

Suspected militants twice plotted to assassinate Sisi, according to reports. The alleged terrorists first attempted to assassinate the Egyptian president in 2014 when he was on a pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia, according to state-run Middle East News Agency. The second attempt was plotted by a seven-member terrorist unit that planned to target Sisi's convoy when it travelled to Cairo, the report added without mentioning the year. The unit reportedly comprised of six former police officers and a dentist.

Authorities did not say how they foiled the assassination plans, but said 66 suspects confessed during a year-long investigation.

According to the authorities, the former police officers involved were part of a "bearded police officers" group that came up in 2012. Its members grew their beards as per their interpretation of Islamic teachings, but Egypt's interior ministry called it a violation of police and military codes, and reportedly sent the officers to its reserve forces.

The suspects also planned to assassinate Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Nayef in the Persian Gulf kingdom, as well as five Egyptian judges, Agence France-Presse reported citing a prosecution official.

All suspects supported extremist ideology and perceived state officials and members of the army, police and the judiciary are "infidels."

(Source: IB Times)

Obama seeks to fortify Iran nuclear deal: WSJ

1→ "Our bet is when they look at this and analyze what the implications would be for tearing up the deal, they won't do it," a senior administration official said. "But as for what they'll actually do? Who knows?"

Another senior U.S. official argued "it's very hard to tear up the deal" because U.S. allies and partners, including Russia and China, are committed to it. But, the official said, the "most important thing we can do is show that it's working."

Administration officials said they haven't yet begun conversations on the Iran deal with the officials Mr. Trump has deployed across the government to facilitate his transition into office. They also are unsure whether those Trump officials are the ones they need to persuade.

The picture they plan to articulate for Mr. Trump's team is stark: If the agreement falls apart, and the U.S. is blamed for its collapse, Iran would resume its nuclear program more aggressively. In that case, the U.S. risks alienating Europe, as well as China and Russia, and limiting its ability to use sanctions again to contain Iran. Military action against Tehran's nuclear facilities, these officials argue, could be the only alternative.

Administration officials do not believe Mr. Trump would overtly pull out of the deal. Their concern is more that it would fall apart due to attempts by the incoming administration to renegotiate pieces of it, expanding sanctions against Iran unrelated to its nuclear program, or neglect.

Aaron David Miller, a Middle East expert at the Wilson Center, a think tank in Washington, said the Iran deal is "uniquely vulnerable" and requires constant attention because it is not a treaty and has faced significant opposition in the U.S. and Iran.

"Over time, without that kind of willful and purposeful effort, it's hard to maintain," Mr. Miller said. "It needs to be constantly attended to, defended and rationalized. Does this new administration have that kind of will? That's an open question."

Mr. Trump's nominee to head the CIA, Mr. Pompeo, was among the most aggressive U.S. lawmakers in trying to overturn the nuclear agreement. He has said the terms of the deal don't do enough to stop Iran from developing "nuclear weapons" and that the U.S. is essentially subsidizing Tehran's military operations in Syria and Iraq by unfreezing billions of dollars of its oil revenues. He has proposed legislation for new sanctions on Iran and measures to limit the White House's ability to implement the deal.

"I look forward to rolling back this disastrous deal with the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism," Mr. Pompeo wrote in a tweet last week, shortly before his nomination for the CIA post.

Gen. Flynn, Mr. Trump's pick for national security adviser, has described Iran in writings and interviews as the world's primary source of international terrorism. And he's accused the Obama administration of suppressing intelligence linking the Iranian government to al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. The White House has denied this charge.

Iranian officials have publicly accused the Obama administration of not doing enough to promote investment in Iran as part of the nuclear deal.

In response, Secretary of State John Kerry has met with European bankers to encourage them to go back into the Iranian market. The Treasury also issued new investment guidelines for Iran that were seen as easing Iran's ability to gain access to U.S. dollars.

"Our bet is when they look at this and analyze what the implications would be for tearing up the deal, they won't do it," a senior administration official said.

"The deal is under a lot of stress moving forward," said Elizabeth Rosenberg, a former Treasury Department official who worked on the Iran deal who is now at the Center for a New American Security, a left-leaning think tank. "The greatest danger comes from the United States."

She said perhaps Mr. Obama's strongest check against the deal's opponents is Congress, where many lawmakers are wary of overturning it outright.

Yet many lawmakers also want to ramp up sanctions on Iran over its ballistic missile program. The White House has threatened to veto one of the bills in Congress. It is unclear that Mr. Trump would do the same and has voiced conflicting statements on the utility of new sanctions.

"We're all reading the tea leaves here," the senior administration official said, adding that the perception among Administration officials of Mr. Trump is "he's not a warmonger."

Even if the incoming administration doesn't technically or legally undo the deal, there is the risk that Iran will view new sanctions, or even tougher rhetoric, as a reason to back out on its own.

The Obama administration has praised Tehran for abiding by the nuclear agreement. And Mr. Kerry has maintained a belief that Iran could emerge as a partner for the U.S. in stabilizing the Mideast.

The first time, the Obama administration stepped in to purchase the excess heavy water from Iran. The IAEA said Iran was now seeking another international buyer to help it remain in compliance.

Mr. Pompeo and other Republican leaders have stressed that the U.S. under a President Trump will no longer aid Iran, but will, instead, vigorously enforce the terms of the deal.

Obama 'not optimistic' about Syria's future

U.S. President Barack Obama is "not optimistic" about Syria's future and said the chaos could persist for "quite some time" as the United Nations warned that time was running out to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe in the city of Aleppo, which has been pounded by air strikes for nearly a week.

Obama, who will be succeeded on January 20 by Donald Trump, said that he told Russian President Vladimir Putin on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Peru that he was deeply concerned about the bloodshed in Syria and that a ceasefire was needed.

He warned that Syria's second city was likely to fall.

"I am not optimistic about the short-term prospects in Syria," he said at a summit of Pacific leaders in Lima.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Israel plays with fire with ban on Muslim calls to prayer: Hamas leader

The political bureau chief of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas has warned the Israeli regime about the recent ban on the use of speakers for Muslim calls to prayer, stating that such legislation is tantamount to "playing with fire."

Speaking in an exclusive interview with Turkey's official news agency, Anadolu, Khaled Meshaal said the controversial and so-called muezzin bill "has drawn a strong reaction from the Palestinian people and Muslims worldwide."

Meshaal added that Israel has opted to reverse the proposed bill for the fear that it would serve as an excuse to stop Jewish rituals in the occupied Jerusalem al-Quds, stressing that the Palestinian nation's outrage signaled that muffling Muslim calls to prayer is their red line.

The Hamas leader noted that there will be no stability in the Middle East region, unless Palestinian rights are recognized and Israel withdraws from Palestinian lands.

During a cabinet meeting last Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would support the bill, claiming that calls to prayer make excessive noise.

Palestinian leaders argue that the bill is not about noise, but is rather intended only to silence mosques.

"This bill is the ugly product of Islamophobia that has come to dominate Israel," Thabet Abu Ras of the Abraham Fund commented.

Haneen Zoabi, a Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset (parliament), also said, "The issue is not about noise in their ears but about the noise in their minds. What disturbs them so much is the noise of the Palestinians' presence in their own homeland."

Meshaal also called on US President-elect Donald Trump to change US foreign policy and strive to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

"We realize that regional and international developments affect the Palestinian cause and all regional issues, but what makes history is the struggle of the peoples," he said.

The Hamas leader further described an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands and sacred sites as the key to regional stability.

On November 10, Meshaal urged Trump to withdraw the longstanding American support for Israel, stating that the Tel Aviv regime is a "burden" for Washington.

(Source: Press TV)

Russian MoD finds evidence of chemical weapons use by terrorists in Aleppo

Russian experts have found evidence that terrorists have been using chemical weapons in their regular attacks in Aleppo, Russia's Defense Ministry said, adding that the UN's watchdog hasn't sent any specialists to the besieged city despite requests.

The evidence was found in Aleppo's Area 1070 by officers from the Russian Radiological, Chemical and Biological Defense troops' scientific center, Russian Defense Ministry spokesperson Major General Igor Konashenkov said on Monday in a statement.

"In Area '1070' in the southwestern suburbs of Aleppo, experts from the Russian Defense Ministry conducted rapid identification of nine selected samples (fragments of mines, the soil from the craters, places where shells landed), which confirmed [that the terrorists] had used chlorine and white phosphorus munitions to fill their ammunition," he said.

According to Konashenkov, Russian experts took bioassays from four Syrians who were injured in a chemical attack for detailed testing.

Konashenkov stated that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is dedicated to monitoring the use of chemical weapons, hasn't yet sent any experts to the area, despite repeated calls from Moscow to do so.

However, this does not prevent some OPCW members from remotely placing blame, and failing to recognize the facts of the use of chemical weapons in Aleppo against the civilian population," he said.

(Source: RT)

F1's South East Asia future in doubt as Ecclestone says Singapore wants to drop race - report

Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone has cast doubt over the future of the sport in Southeast Asia by telling a German magazine that Singapore no longer wants to host a grand prix after its current deal expires next year.

With neighbouring Malaysia also considering pulling out of the championship after 2018 because of declining ticket sales and TV viewership, the region could be left without a race for the first time since 1998.

The Singapore race costs some S$150 million ($105.04 million) to put on every year, 60 percent of which is funded by the government. It was first staged in 2008 and the city-state renewed its contract for another five years in 2012.

Ecclestone's blunt comments in Auto Motor und Sport, however, suggested negotiations over a further extension have not gone well.

"Look at what we have done for Singapore," Ecclestone said. "Yes, the grand prix has cost Singapore a lot of money, but we've also given them a lot of money.

"Singapore was suddenly more than just an airport to fly to or from somewhere. Now they believe they have reached their goal and they do not want a grand prix anymore."

The event is organised in the city-state by Singapore GP, a private company owned by Ong Beng Seng, one of Singapore's richest men. A spokeswoman for the company said in an e-mail on Monday: "We don't comment on ongoing commercial negotiations." Ecclestone, 86, is famous for outspoken media interviews during negotiations. The Briton attended this year's Singapore race amid negotiations on F1's takeover by U.S. cable TV mogul John Malone's Liberty Media.

Formula One announced a record-equalling 21-race provisional calendar for 2017 in September.

The Singapore race is one of the glamour rounds of the championship, taking place at night on a street circuit with spectators entertained by internationally renowned music acts such as Beyonce and Justin Bieber. Crowds, which topped 100,000 on all three days in the first year, have declined, however, with this year's race averaging 73,000 spectators for each day, down from 87,000 in 2015.

STRUCTURAL SHIFT

A decline in ticket sales in Malaysia is also behind the decision by the government and race organisers there to look at bringing an end to their annual round of the championship, which has been held at Sepang since 1999.

The loss of the Singapore round, however, might encourage Malaysia to retain their round and hope to attract some of the 150,000 international visitors who went to the city-state in each of the first four years of the race.

Singapore's tourist sector is seeing a structural shift away from heavy spenders and towards the emerging middle classes of China, India and Indonesia, analysts say.

Tourist arrivals have been on the rise. In the first eight months of this year, before the F1 race, the number of visitors was up 10.3 percent from the same period of 2015, at 11.3 million.

Singapore's tourism receipts in the first half of the year grew 12 percent to S$11.6 billion ($8.13 billion), driven mainly by shopping, accommodation and food and beverage, which offset a fall in sightseeing, entertainment and gaming.

Trinh Nguyen, a senior economist for emerging-market Asia at French investment bank Natixis SA in Hong Kong, said the recent drop in F1 attendance may be a sign that the novelty of the event is wearing off, and may also be a reflection of weak regional growth. "It (F1) also comes with costs. Thus, with tourism receipts (from F1) waning... the cost benefit calculus is tipping in the other direction," Nguyen said. *(Source: Reuters)*

Tokyo swimming pool won't have same problems as Rio, says FINA head

The new aquatics center being built for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics will experience none of the problems faced by organizers of this year's Rio de Janeiro Games, the International swimming federation (FINA) president said on Monday.

The swimming pool in Rio was plagued by construction delays, and made headlines around the world after the water turned a shade of green during the Games. Many athletes also complained that the pool had a foul smell.

"I visited the place where they are beginning to build the new swimming pool and... it will have all the requirements for an excellent championship because the last condition in Rio was different," FINA President Julio Cesar Maglione told the Kyodo news agency.

"We are sure that it will be fine here."

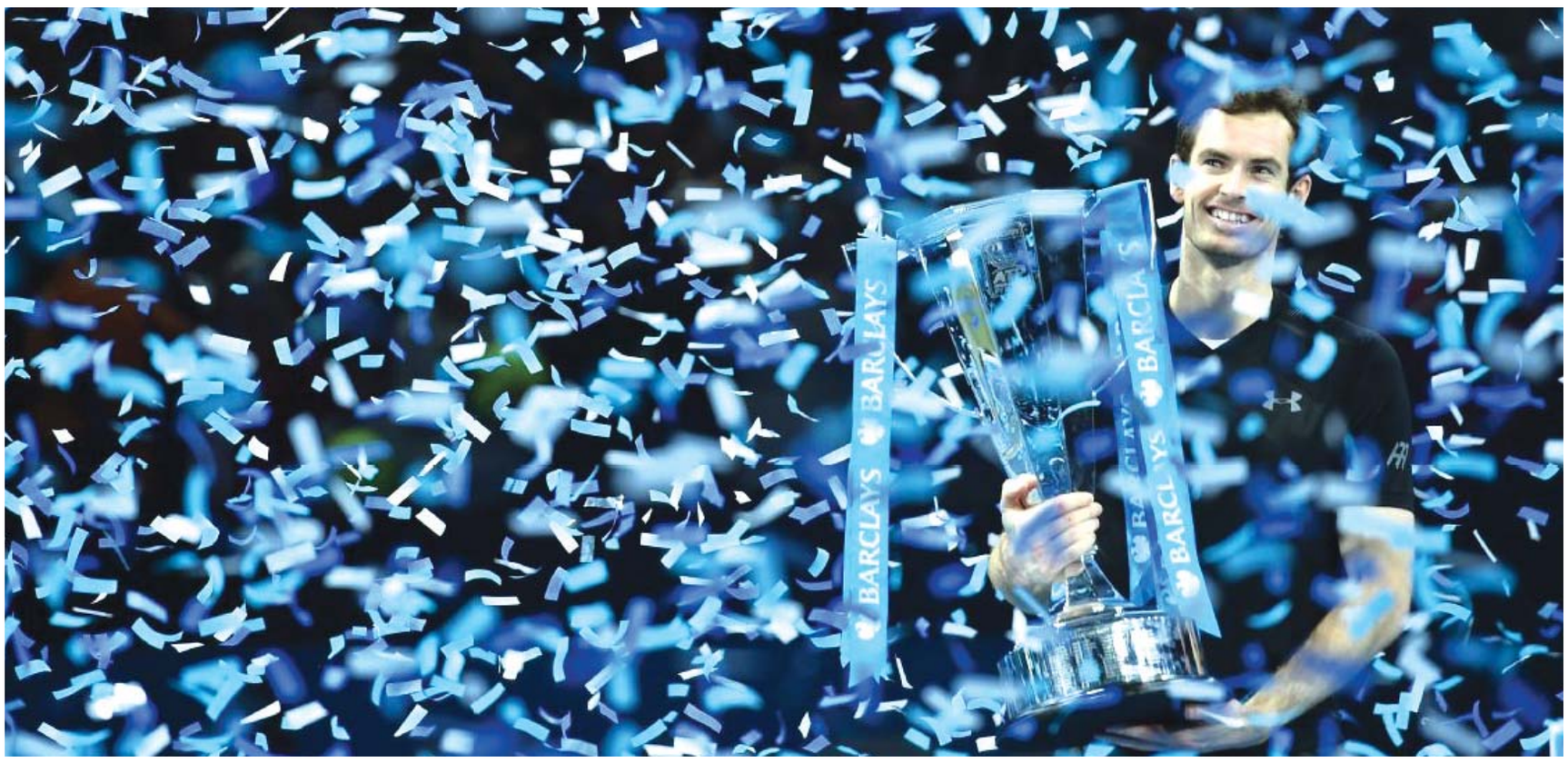
Olympic organizers in Tokyo are building the pool near the existing Tatsumi International Swimming Center and are mulling over whether the venue should seat 15,000 or 20,000 spectators.

Cornel Marculescu, FINA's executive director, met Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike in October and pitched for the construction of a new venue instead of the renovation of Tatsumi.

"I received specific advice on the new aquatics center from the executive director when he was here in October," Mori said.

"We are a big swimming nation, but we don't have the fantastic facility we should have. We need to co-operate so we can leave behind the fantastic facility we need." *(Source: Reuters)*

Can No.1 ranking inspire Andy Murray to complete career Grand Slam?



Andy Murray has already switched his focus after securing the year-end world number one ranking: win more Grand Slams. Can he complete his trophy cabinet?

Andy Murray capped his climb to the peak of men's tennis in fitting fashion – dethroning previous incumbent Novak Djokovic at the ATP World Tour Finals in London.

It was the question that hovered over the 29-year-old during his surge to the top: could he really upstage his arch-nemesis when it mattered?

He could. Despite having far less recovery time – twice setting a tournament record for the longest match in duels with Kei Nishikori and Milos Raonic – he outclassed the 12-time Grand Slam winner in straight sets.

It was arguably his most important victory. Clinching the No.1 ranking on a short-term basis is one thing, but finishing the year at the summit leaves one thing indisputable: he was the best player in 2016.

Murray switches focus to slams

Olympics: check.

Davis Cup: check.

World No.1: check.

But Murray, for all his diverse success, still has a mediocre haul of Grand Slams. When he edged a five-set thriller with Djokovic at the US Open in 2012, it was expected to pave the way for many more. Instead, just two Wimbledon titles have followed, while his Major record in finals reads quite abysmally: played 11, lost eight.

He has consistently found the final barrier too great an obstacle. And, finally, that seems set to change.

Roger Federer is a fading force; Rafa Nadal is without a Major in over two years; Djokovic's troubles could quite conceivably extend; the young contingent is yet to step up. All the ingredients are in place for Murray to spearhead men's tennis through 2017.

"Now that I've got there [world No.1], I obviously would be motivated to try and stay in that position," Murray said, via BBC Sport.

"But the majors get me working hard ... When I go away in December to train, I'm training with the Australian Open in mind.

"Because of the best-of-five-set matches, they're the ones you have to really put in the extra work for and the extra training for. That's what motivates me."

Murray needs the Australian Open and French Open titles to complete his tennis cabinet. Once a farfetched ambition, it's suddenly a plausible outcome.

But will he do it?

Omens promising for australia

Five finals in Melbourne; one defeat to Roger Federer, four to Novak Djokovic. His triumph in London, albeit roared on a vivacious partisan support, proved he is the greatest on the hard-courts. He won in Rio, should have won in Flushing Meadows and has dominated the Tour ahead of Sunday's success.

The ATP Finals have often produced the winner in Australia, so the signs are encouraging for Murray. Factor in that Djokovic will only have six weeks to transform his form in the off-season – not long considering he's struggled since Wimbledon – and everything points to the Scot's southern hemisphere drought ending in 2017.

But the french open will be trickier

Toni Nadal has already claimed his steed is the leading candidate to triumph at Roland Garros in 2017. "I am convinced we will see the best Rafa Nadal next season," coach Toni told Mallorca Esports. "I think at Roland Garros will be among the top candidates with Djokovic, but I'm confident we can achieve a 10th title."

That shouldn't concern Murray. In his corner, the returning Ivan Lendl brings three French Open titles (and he sacrificed more in search of an elusive Wimbledon title). Murray ran Djokovic close in Paris last time around and his game finally seems suited to clay after years of torment on the red dust.

It's a supremely exciting time for British tennis and Murray. At 29, he knows his best tennis can't stretch for much longer. A young talent will inevitably emerge and take the men's game by storm. But in the first chunk of 2017, he has a great opportunity to tick off at least one – and perhaps both – of the final gaps in his tennis puzzle.

(Source: Eurosport)

Arsene Wenger spotted Mohamed Elneny while scouting Fabian Schar

Mohamed Elneny says he only ended up at Arsenal because the club was scouting one of his teammates at Basel.

Elneny, 24, joined the Gunners in January to provide more depth in central midfield but said Arsene Wenger was originally interested in Basel centre-back Fabian Schar.

"I was very happy when I joined Arsenal but I asked one of my friends how the negotiations started and if they had scouted me before," the Mirror quotes Elneny as telling DMC Sports.

"He told me that Arsenal officials were scouting Fabian Schar in the first place, and that's when they noticed me."

Schar ended up joining Bundesliga club Hoffenheim instead but a move to Arsenal had been close for the Switzerland international, according to Elneny.

"All of us at Basel knew that Schar was linked with Arsenal and at every season's end, we congratulated him as the move

was close to completion, according to Schar himself. But afterwards, things changed quickly.

"My agent told me that Arsenal officials came many times to watch Schar but they were impressed every time by my performances and development and they went on to sign me instead."

Elneny has made 13 appearances for Arsenal this season and started Saturday's 1-1 draw with Manchester United at Old Trafford. *(Source: ESPN)*

Mourinho chose Mata, Martial and Rashford ahead of Rooney due to pace

Jose Mourinho explained that a lack of pace was the key reason why captain Wayne Rooney did not start in Manchester United's 1-1 draw with Arsenal at Old Trafford on Saturday.

With Zlatan Ibrahimovic suspended for the match, Mourinho turned to Anthony Martial and Marcus Rashford instead of utilising Rooney's big-game experience.

Juan Mata gave the Red Devils the lead before French striker Olivier Giroud came off the bench to score a late equaliser for the visitors.

Rooney did come on as a substitute in the 63rd minute for Martial but failed to help United to victory.

"I thought we were going to have the ball," Mourinho said. "Arsenal are a team who let their opponents play.

"I thought we would have space and the ball would arrive quite easily to the attacking players.

"I believed ones like Mata, Martial and Rashford were faster than Wayne, better attacking opponents one to one in the last line. I thought it was the best option."

United's next league assignment will be against West Ham United at Old Trafford on Nov. 28.

(Source: Soccernet)

Ranieri confident of Leicester revival

Leicester City stand on the verge of the Champions League knockout stages despite struggling in the Premier League this season.

Claudio Ranieri is convinced Leicester City's fortunes will change as they stand on the brink of qualification for the Champions League knockout stages.

The Foxes defied the odds to win the Premier League last season, but they have failed to replicate that fairytale so far this term and a 2-1 loss to Watford at the weekend left them just two points above the relegation zone in 14th.

However, manager Ranieri is optimistic that Leicester, who are on a run of four matches without a win in all competitions, will soon turn the corner.

"I am not happy but I am confident," he told a media conference ahead of Tuesday's contest against Club Brugge. "I'm happy with the spirit and cohesion of the group but not with the results.

"We have a good group and we work so well

during the week. Sooner or later our fortunes will change.

"Life is easier when you enjoy it. Now it's not easy, but we must be strong and come through it. Our focus is to try and win [on Tuesday] and to go back to the Premier League and improve our position.

"I don't think there is a big difference [compared to last season], only the results are different."

The Champions League has provided much-needed respite and victory over Brugge will secure Leicester's progression from Group G - something Ranieri believes would be another major success for his squad.

He added: "I respect Brugge. They're good and I can't believe they have zero points. They play well, create chances and have good players.

"We don't feel the pressure, we just know that we must perform well if we are to win against Club Brugge.

"We have the opportunity to go to the knockout stages of the Champions League. It's another fantastic achievement for the club."

(Source: FourFourTwo)

Alireza Faghani: I knew I would become a referee

TT SPORTS desk

From an early age, football was far more than just a game for Alireza Faghani. For the 38-year-old, the passion for football and refereeing runs deep in his family roots.

"I come from a family of referees. Both my brother and brother-in-law are referees. My father and father-in-law were also professional referees in the Iranian league back home. They had a big influence on me. I spent hours watching and studying them.

"From 16 years of age, I always knew refereeing was my calling," Faghani told the-AFC.com in an exclusive after receiving the AFC Referees Special Award 2016 alongside his Islamic Republic of Iran compatriots Reza Sokhandan and Mohammad Reza Mansouri in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on Sunday.

The IR Iran trio made Asian history during the Rio Olympics 2016 when they were selected to officiate the final of the Men's Football Tournament in August. "Reza and Mohammad have been fantastic and together, we have formed a great partnership. As a centre referee, you need to be aware of every detail on the pitch and they have made my life so much easier," added Faghani.

While the chemistry between the trio produced one of the proudest moments for Asian refereeing this year, the unassuming Faghani was also quick to praise his continent's counterparts for a stellar year. "This special award is dedicated to all referees in Asia. Through the AFC programmes and seminars that we have attended together, we have grown closer and we are all inspired to give our best each time we enter the pitch.

"I must express my gratitude to the AFC instructors and all Asian referees. There is an entire team working continuously behind the scene and none of this would have been possible without them."

Iran female team takes World Taekwondo Junior Championships title

TT SPORTS desk

Iran female team won the title of the 2016 World Taekwondo Junior Championships.

The Iranian team, headed by Fatemeh Safarpour, claimed two gold and two bronze medals in the five-day competition held in Burnaby, Canada.

Zahra Pouresmaeil in the +68kg weight class and Mobina Nejad Katesari in -42kg won two gold medals respectively. Mobina Babalou in -55kg class and Parisa Javadi Kouchaksarei in -63kg seized two bronze medals.

Iran stood on the podium with 55 points, followed by Chinese Taipei who won one gold and three silver medals and bagged 55 points.

Russian Federation came third with 50 points, winning three silver and two bronze medals.

The Best Coach award in the female division was won by Fatemeh Safarpour from Iran; in the male division it was won by Jung-ho Kim of Korea.

Canada's Skylar Park (-59kg) was named female MVP; the male MVP award went to Korea's Chan-Ho Jung (-55kg).

The Best Referee awards were given to Yassin Abdullah ai Naimat from Jordan, Eid Fairouz Mesmari from UAE, Panikos Loizou from Cyprus, Eric Wah from Canada and Guler Gencturkoglu from Turkey. The Good Fighting Spirit Award was won by Brazil, while the Active Participation Award was won by Australia.

Also, Iran male team finished in fourth place with 47 points, winning one gold and one silver.

Republic of Korea won the title bagging 93 points with five gold medals and two bronzes.

Russia Federation finished in second place with 66 points after winning two gold medals, two silvers and two bronzes.

Turkey stood on third place seizing 53 points with one gold, one silver and two bronze medals.

Iranian wrestler Yazdani presents his singlet to Olympic Museum

TT SPORTS desk

Iranian freestyle wrestler Hassan Yazdani Cherati presented his singlet who wore in the 2016 Olympic Games to the Olympic Museum.

The Iranian wrestler defeated Russia's Aniuar Geduev in men's 74kg freestyle wrestling.

Geduev had already defeated Jordan Burroughs, the reigning Olympic champion, in the quarterfinals.

The Olympic Museum Collection mainly includes artefacts from the Olympic Games, items illustrating the links between the IOC and the Olympic family, artworks related to sport or the Olympic Movement, and Olympic stamps and coins.

Most of the Olympic Museum's material, financial and human resources are devoted to this collection.

Iran's Rahim Emami wins Tour of Fuzhou

Iranian rider Rahim Emami won the Tour of Fuzhou on Sunday.

Emami and Arvin Moazami, both from Pishgaman Giant Team, finished in first and second place followed by the Netherland's Peter Schulting of Valkenburg-Parkhotel Continental Team.

Emami, who celebrated his third overall victory at the Tour of Fuzhou after wins in 2013 and 2015, won the overall with a time of 14:50:53.

"This year, it was more difficult than last year," the Iranian told cyclingnews.com. "There were more stages [five instead of three] and more hard stages too."

"But my team was also better than last year. It's a younger team growing nicely. Last year before the final stage, my advantage was only one second but today I was more relaxed with a bigger advantage. Everything has been perfect this year with a superb organization," he added. *(Source: Tasnim)*

Iranian Adolescent's Volleyball Tournament targeting "Volleyball Your Way"

The second edition of Iranian Adolescent's Mini-Volleyball Tournament lasted seven days in Ramsar, where 155 participating teams competed to keep the pulse of new volleyball generation.

This mini-volleyball tournament began on November 8 in both boys and girls' categories. Along with "Volleyball Your Way," one of the main purposes to find out some talents to be in the national team in the next five years later in 2021 when these young generations will be kept in good form.

Over 700 athletes took part in this festival that ended with a remarkable success. The tournament ran for three days in the boy's category, where 82 teams attended. After 146 overall matches, Golastan, Mazandaran, Kashan, and Guilan fared well to emerge as the top four teams.

Seventy-five players were chosen to keep their practice going in their zonal camps running once every three months. The final national boys will be chosen among them.

In the girls' category, seventy-three teams competed within 16 groups and after holding 164 matches, Isfahan Barkhar, Isfahan Khomeini Shahr, and Kerman Shahr-e Babak finished as the top three ranked teams. The MVP in each position were sent to the talents-finding committee for further training.

Dr. Mohammad Reza Davarzani, President of Iran Volleyball Federation along with Majda Cicic, the Serbian head coach of Iran's women team, and members of talents-finding committee from 31 provinces of Iran were all present in the closing ceremony.

President Davarzani emphasized the importance of finding talents from all over Iran. He witnessed the evaluations on site and also praised the contributions of all the official members.

Sevilla trying to show it belongs among the best in Europe

MADRID (AP) — Sevilla wants to show it is ready to reach the next level.

After three straight titles in the Europa League, the Spanish club is hoping to thrive among the best soccer teams on the continent.

And the first step toward that goal may come Tuesday against Juventus, when it can secure a spot in the knockout round of the Champions League for the first time since 2010.

A draw against the Italian champions at Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan Stadium will be enough to get the club back in the decisive stages of Europe's top competition, and a win will guarantee first place in Group H.

Sevilla won five Europa League titles in the last 11 seasons, but it has not succeeded in the Champions League since making it to the round of 16 in the 2009-10 season, when it was eventually eliminated by CSKA Moscow. It also advanced past the group stage in the 2007-08 season, when it later lost to Fenerbahce in the last 16.

Sevilla coach Jorge Sampaoli, hired this season to try to turn the Spanish club into a top contender in Europe, rested some of the team's regular starters in the 3-2 win at Deportivo La Coruna in the Spanish league on Saturday, when the team scored twice in the last five minutes to erase a 2-0 deficit.

"This win, coming back from two goals against a difficult opponent, gives us a huge boost going into Tuesday's game," Sampaoli said.

GROUP E

Harry Kane's return from injury might just be the catalyst that revives Tottenham's Champions League campaign.

The England striker, who was the Premier League's top scorer last season, has scored three goals in his first two matches back after seven weeks out with an ankle injury, and should lead Tottenham's attack for what could be a must-win game at Monaco.

Tottenham has only four points from four games so far, and will be eliminated if they fail to win in southern France and Bayer Leverkusen wins at CSKA Moscow.

Monaco leads the group by two points. If the French team wins, it will be assured of qualifying in first place if Leverkusen doesn't win in Russia.

GROUP F

Leicester gets a second chance to clinch qualification for the knockout stage in its first Champions League campaign. This time, it comes at home.

Cristian Ronaldo, again facing the team in which he started his career, will have another chance to become the first player to score 100 goals in European competitions.

The English champions host Club Brugge at King Power Stadium, needing only a draw to advance. Leicester beat the Belgian team 3-0 in their first meeting in the group and is still unbeaten after four games.

The situation couldn't be more different in the Premier League, with Leicester only two points above the relegation zone after a tough start to its title defense.

"This season I'm watching behind me," Leicester manager Claudio Ranieri said. "The relegation is very close to us."

Leicester is three points ahead of FC Porto, which visits third-place FC Copenhagen in the group's other game.

GROUP G

Still unbeaten this season, defending champion Real Madrid needs a draw at Sporting Lisbon to reach the last 16 of the Champions League for the 20th straight time.

The game marks a return to Lisbon for the first time since winning the 2014 trophy against Atletico Madrid at the Estadio da Luz.

Cristian Ronaldo, again facing the team in which he started his career, will have another chance to become the first player to score 100 goals in European competitions. The Portuguese forward, coming off a hat trick in the Madrid derby in the Spanish league, is two goals short of the milestone.

Borussia Dortmund, boosted by a win over Bayern Munich in the German league, can secure first place when it visits already eliminated Legia Warsow. It will be without goalkeeper Roman Buerki, who broke his hand in the match against Bayern.

Sporting needs to defeat Madrid to stay alive.

GROUP H

A victory at Sevilla will guarantee Juventus a spot in the next round, although it can also advance if Lyon fails to win at Dinamo Zagreb.

The Italian champions may be without forward Gonzalo Higuain, who received a knock on his left thigh in the win over Pescara this weekend. Defender Medhi Benatia is also a doubt because of a knee injury.

Juventus was held by Sevilla to a 0-0 home draw earlier this season, and a loss to the Spanish club in the group stage a year ago left the Italians second in their group.

Sevilla has won seven of its last nine matches, with the only setbacks coming in a draw at Sporting Gijon and a home loss to Barcelona.

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Poem of the day

The modest and the merry shall be seen
To boast their kinship with a single voice.

Hafez

Prayer Times

Noon:11:51 Evening: 17:13 Dawn: 5:20 tomorrow) Sunrise: 6:48 (tomorrow)

NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S. festival to screen "Gita"

TT ART desk **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Masud Madadi's "Gita" will be screened at the 3rd edition of the Culver City Film Festival, which will be held in the U.S. city from December 3 to 9.

The social drama starring Merila Zarei is about a young man who was adopted by a couple in his childhood. His real mother returns home years after living abroad to meet her son's foster parents after his death.

"It's Raining Lightly" at Antakya filmfest

TT ART desk **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Saeid Nejati's short film "It's Raining Lightly", a joint production of the Iranian Youth Cinema Society (IYCS) and Izmir Metropolitan Municipality, will go on screen at the 4th Antakya International Film Festival, which will open in the Turkish city tomorrow, the IYCS announced on Monday.

The story of the short film is set in the 1960s at a village school in which students help their teacher with social issues.

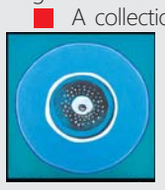
The festival will run until November 29.

WHAT'S IN ART GALLERIES

Painting

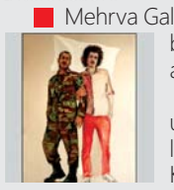
■ An exhibition of paintings by Mostafa Chubtarash is currently underway at Etemad Gallery 1.

The exhibition titled "The Buzz of the Bee Who Slips from Democracy" runs until November 29 at the gallery, which can be found at 4 Bukan St., off Yaser Ave., in the Niavaran neighborhood.



■ A collection of paintings by Rashin Teimuri is on display in an exhibition at Jorjani Gallery.

The exhibit entitled "Look" runs until November 28 at the gallery located at 4 Khayyam Alley off Vali-e Asr Ave near the Parkway Intersection.



■ Mehrva Gallery is currently displaying paintings by Mohammadreza Zavvar-Jalali in an exhibition entitled "Unlike".

The exhibit will be underway until November 27 at the gallery located at 38 South Aban St. off Karimkhan Ave.

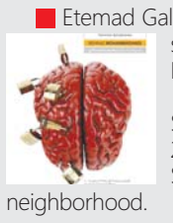
■ Paintings by Morteza Darebaghi are on display in an exhibition at Iranshahr Gallery.

The exhibit runs until December 6 at the gallery that can be found at 69 Sepand St., off Karim Khan Ave.

■ An exhibition of paintings by Shideh Tamy is underway at O Gallery.

The exhibit entitled "Tide" will be running until December 6 at the gallery located at 44 Khosro Alley, off Ostad Nejatollahi St.

Multimedia



■ Etemad Gallery 2 is showcasing sculptures and sets of installation art by Behnaz Mohammadi.

The exhibition named "Feminine Symphonies" runs until November 29 at the gallery located at 4 Bukan St., off Yaser Ave., in the Niavaran neighborhood.

Germany buys California house built by writer Thomas Mann

BERLIN (Reuters) — Germany has purchased the California home that once belonged to Nobel Prize-winning author Thomas Mann for $13.25 million and plans to preserve the historic property, the real estate company that listed the house said on Thursday.

The Pacific Palisades home on the outskirts of Los Angeles was initially listed at just under $18 million, according to the website of Joyce Rey with Coldwell Banker Previews International. The sale closed on Wednesday.

The Sueddeutsche Zeitung newspaper, which first reported the sale, said the German foreign and culture ministries planned to turn the 5-bedroom house into a center for trans-Atlantic dialogue that offered residencies for academics and artists.

Swiss graphic designer Melchior Imboden to display works in Tehran

TT ART desk **TEHRAN —** Swiss graphic designer Melchior Imboden plans to display a collection of his posters in an exhibition, which will open at the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) in Tehran on November 25.

The exhibit is part of a program organized by the Momayyez Foundation to commemorate the 11th anniversary of the passing of prominent Iranian graphic designer Morteza Momayyez, 1935-2005), who is considered the father of modern graphic design in Iran.

A selection of works by students of Imboden will also go on display in one of the galleries, while two galleries have been dedicated to posters by Imboden.

Melchior Imboden is also scheduled to give a lecture at the ceremony. In addition, an exhibition of early sketches by Momayyez will open in another showcase at the IAF.

Born in Stans, Switzerland, Imboden lives and works in Buochs in Central Switzerland. Imboden began his studies as an interior designer. In 1984 he began studying graphic design at the Art School in Lucerne. During his five-year course of study, he worked for design offices in Italy and Switzerland.

Melchior Imboden teaches both graphic design and photography. He has been a university lecturer for photography in Bern and has also taught at various universities in Switzerland. He has been invited to give guest lectures abroad in Beijing, Taipei, Moscow, New York, Paris, Brno, Krakow and Tehran, among others.

Works by Swiss graphic designer Melchior Imboden are on display in an exhibition.

Center offering Iranian cultural products opens in Beijing

TT CULTURE desk **TEHRAN —** A center offering art and cultural products from Iran opened in the Chinese capital of Beijing on Monday.

The center, which has been established by an Iranian businessman named Arastu Purheidar, sells Persian carpets, rugs, hand-woven textiles, handicrafts, historical books, films and halal foods, the Persian service of IRNA reported.

"This center provides the Chinese people in Beijing with an easy access to Iranian cultural products from carpets and other handicrafts to a variety of cultural services," Purheidar said during the opening ceremony of the center.

A number Iranian diplomats and Chinese officials also attended the ceremony.

"The establishment of the center will help to expand cultural relations between Iran and China," Iran's consul general, Mohammad-Ebrahim Allahdad said in a brief speech.

Iran's commercial attaché, Reza Seyyed-Aqazadeh, also said that the center will help Chinese people to raise their knowledge about Iran.

(File photo)

PICTURE OF THE DAY **Honaronline/***Ehsan Neqabat*

Photographer Afshin Aryafar poses after showcasing his latest collection "Hallucination" in an exhibition at Tehran's Golestan Gallery on November 20, 2016. The collection focuses on superstitions about traditional bathhouses in Iran.

Ariana Grande wins top American Music award, Green Day takes aim at Trump

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Canadian rapper Drake won his first ever American Music Awards on Sunday, Ariana Grande was named artist of the year, and punk band Green Day took aim at newly-elected U.S. President Donald Trump.

"No Trump, no KKK, no fascist USA," sang Green Day, performing their controversial anti-gun violence single "Bang Bang" on the live show and re-writing some of the lyrics.

It was the most overt reference to the Nov.8 U.S. presidential elections at the three-hour awards show where the focus was otherwise mostly on music.

Pop singer Selena Gomez, 24, who surprised fans by making her first major public appearance since cutting short her world tour in August to deal with panic attacks and depression, won the best pop/rock female artist award.

In an emotional speech, Gomez thanked her fans for their loyalty and explained why she felt the need to take a break.

"Most of you know a lot of my life whether I like it or not. I had to stop. I had everything, but I was absolutely broken," said Gomez, who is also known for her on and off again romance with Justin Bieber for the past five years.

The American Music Awards are chosen by fans voting online.

Drake, 30, who got a leading 13 nominations, won best rap/hip-hop artist, song and album for his best-selling "Views", which earlier this year became the first album to earn one billion streams on Apple Music.

Boston Marathon bombing film "Patriots Day" personal for Wahlberg

NEW YORK (Reuters) — The makers of the first Hollywood movie about the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing say they felt enormous pressure to get the tone and the story right for all those who were killed and injured in the attack.

"Patriots Day", due in U.S. movie theaters on Dec. 21, made its world premiere in Los Angeles on Thursday night, and Mark Wahlberg, its Boston-born star and producer, said local expectations were high.

"I'm going to be accountable and they're going to hold me to the highest standards and the expectations are beyond," Wahlberg told Reuters on the red carpet.

Three people were killed and 264 were injured when two homemade bombs went off in the crowd near the finish line of the Boston Marathon on April 15, 2013.

Cable television channel HBO is next week airing the documentary "Marathon", which focuses largely on the struggles of the survivors.

The movie version focuses on the hunt for the bombers, who turned out to be brothers, Dzhokhar and Tamerlan Tsarnaev.

"To make movies like 'Patriots Day', there's definitely pressure. But that pressure for me is very inspiring and I want to get it right for the people, the members of law enforcement, the members of government, the citizens who were hurt, the citizens that had loved ones killed," director Peter Berg said.

"Maesthetic Visage" to showcase Ebrahim Haqiqi's new collection

TT ART desk **TEHRAN —** Veteran graphic designer Ebrahim Haqiqi is scheduled to display a collection of his calligraphic paintings on Hafez poetry in an exhibition titled "Maesthetic Visage".

The exhibit will open at Tehran's A Gallery on Friday, Haqiqi announced in a press release on Monday.

"The collection will contain the calligraphic paintings I have created with acrylic and digital printing on canvas," he said.

"I have also tried to make changes on the visual aspect of my works and not actually on the techniques," he added.

This is the sixth solo exhibit of Haqiqi's calligraphic paintings that will run until December 16 at the gallery, which is located at No.7, Arshad Alley, Azodi St., Karimkhan Ave.