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Zarif says Iran pursues compliance issues through agreed-upon means

IT POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's desk Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said his country will stick to the letters of an international nuclear pact after President Hassan Rouhani commissioned him to take legal measures against the U.S. infringement of the deal.

A special mechanism has been envisioned to consider compliance issues raised by any signatories to the deal, Iranian media outlets quoted Zarif as saying at a session with the parliamentarians sitting on the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee.

Iran and six world powers reached a compromise in 2015 on Iran's nuclear program, an unresolved dossier since 2003.

Under the deal, known formally as the JCPOA, Iran was guaranteed sanctions relief in exchange for pursuing a limited nuclear program.

Comments by Zarif come after he received a directive from President Hassan Rouhani to start a concrete reaction through proper procedures to the U.S. renewal of the Iran Sanctions Act, a ten-year extension sanctions against Iran. →2

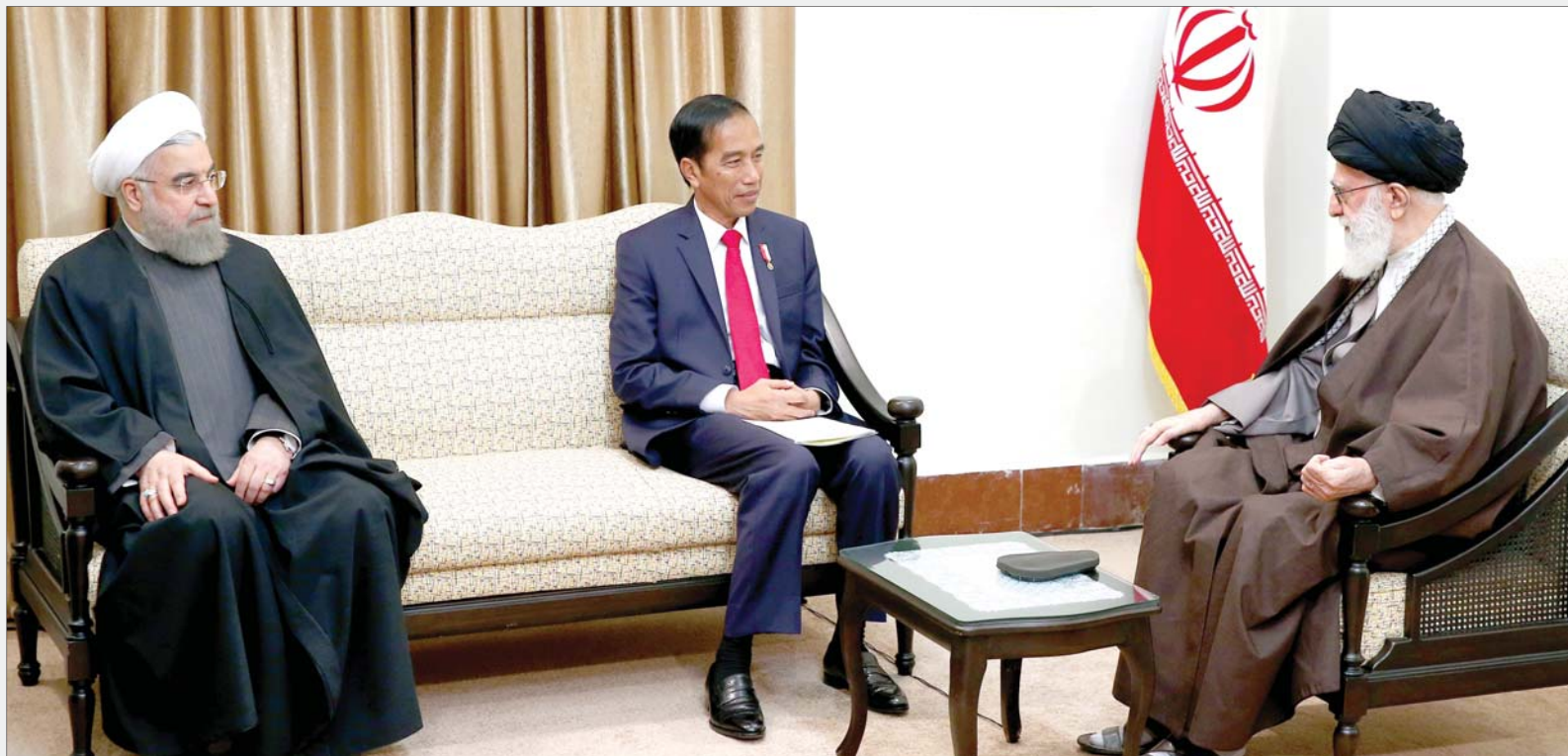
Leader: Israel will cease to exist in 25 years if struggle persists

IT POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday that the Zionist regime would cease to exist in the next 25 years if the Palestinians persist in

the their "collective" struggle and close their ranks.

The Leader made the remarks in a meeting with Ramadan Abdullah Shalah, head of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement.

"As we said before, the Zionist regime will cease to exist if there is a collective and united fight by the Palestinian and the Muslims against the Zionists," Ayatollah Khamenei said. →2



Ayatollah Khamenei: Indonesia is the pride of Islamic world

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Iranian, Indonesian private sectors to cement ties

IT ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian desk and Indonesian chambers of commerce penned 10 memoranda of understandings (MOUs) on cooperation in banking, insurance, stock market, and industry sectors.

The chairman of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Gholam-Hossein Shafeie, and the chairman of Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Rosan Roeslani, signed the MOUs in Tehran on Wednesday, IRIB news reported.

Tehran and Jakarta plan to reach a two-billion-dollar annual trade and it is necessary to overcome banking and customs barriers to hit the target, Shafeie said on the sidelines of the signing ceremony.

He pointed out that the two countries will establish their joint chamber of commerce in the near future.

Roeslani, for his part, said "Iranians are participating in mining, industry, and agricultural projects in Indonesia. However, it is possible for them to cooperate with Indonesians on transport, tourism and infrastructure projects, as well".

Iran exported \$81.5 million worth of non-oil goods to Indonesia in the previous Iranian calendar year (March 2015-March 2016), while imported \$109.4 million of non-oil goods from the country, according to Iran Customs Administration.



Netanyahu's visit to Baku doomed to fail

Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Baku is doomed to fail. The trip can only temporarily provide news stories for Israeli media outlets so that they can carry out a plan to end the regime's isolation. The regime is so hated across the world that it cannot end its isolation and earn respect by one or two trips to Muslim countries.

A brief review of the possible goals and outcomes of the trip would lead us to consider the followings:

1. The main goal that the Zionist regime's prime minister pursues by visiting Azerbaijan is to end the regime's isolation and create schism among Muslim countries. This regime -- which has become isolated across the world due to its occupation of Palestine and its continuous atrocities against the people of this territory, as well as its war crimes and massacres -- attempts to end its isolation by visiting predominantly Muslim countries and covering up its crimes. In fact, Netanyahu needs these kinds of trips and that's why he congratulated Azerbaijan's National Day in an unusual move and said that he would visit Baku this year. He actually imposed this trip to the government of Azerbaijan. The Zionist media outlets have been publishing the news of this trip for two months and are in fact carrying out plans to end the isolation. Netanyahu's next goal is to hurt ties between Iran and Azerbaijan. Fortunately, Tehran-Baku relations have developed in recent years in an unprecedented manner and are like a thorn in the eyes of Israel. So Netanyahu is attempting to disrupt the positive trend of relations between Tehran and Baku by this trip.

2. We, along with the Islamic community, did not expect Azerbaijan to agree to this trip because Azerbaijan is a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and based on the organization's resolutions, →13

Authorities in India's Rayagada extract money in the name of the poor: Narges Ashtari

By Parnaz Talebi & Marjan Golpira

Philanthropist Narges Kalbasi Ashtari, whose story has made headlines internationally and nationally these days, tells the Mehr news agency how the authorities in the Rayagada District benefit from the poverty that the local NGOs portray to the outside world.

The Rayagada District is in the South of Odisha state which in turn is in Eastern India.

"The authorities in Rayagada District benefit from the poverty. They extract money through foreign funds in the name of the poor with the help of these organizations. Everyone is well connected and work together to profit from this," Narges explains.

At age of 21 Narges sets out on a journey to India to open an orphanage. However, today she is faced with an uncertain future including a year in jail and \$4,300 in fines.

The following is her full interview with Mehr published on Sunday.

■ **Narges, some people may wonder why you decided to go to India to open an**

orphanage. Why didn't you set up one in Iran, your motherland?

A. That's a very good question and it is one I get asked about a lot. To be honest, I did a lot of research prior to choosing a country to start my work in. I read a lot about the orphan, abandoned and disabled children of Iran and found many organizations and government run programs that help care for such children.

Generally speaking, Iranian people are much kinder to children in need compared to some states in India where I read horror stories on mistreatment and abuse of these children. The way children are treated in the developing world cannot be compared to Africa and some states of India. The state of Odisha has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world that was just one of many reasons I wanted to go there first. I will, of course, work for the children of my homeland too, and I will love and take care of any child who is in need. We should love all children

equally, no matter where they are born. A child in need is a human indeed, we should focus on ending poverty globally, and that is what I want to be part of.

■ **You had mentioned ASSIST, a local NGO in India, took one of your children's homes from you back in 2013. Why?**

A. Actually I have built two children's homes in Rayagada district where they have taken one away from me and are currently trying to take the second one as we speak. At that time I was not a local in that area and I needed a piece of land to be donated to my foundation. This NGO, ASSIST, donated two pieces of land to Prishan Foundation but once the homes were complete, their behavior towards me changed, and I later found out that the land documents that their group of lawyers had given me were actually forged. The land was still in their name. Once I found out that they were fake, I approached the local police and filed a complaint. →13

Europe wants Trump will stick with Nuclear Deal

Senior European diplomats, fresh from conversations with President-elect Donald Trump's transition team, are hopeful that the next U.S. administration won't tear up the Iranian nuclear deal.

However, they are worried that Mr. Trump could pressure Iran in other ways that will unravel the agreement, The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday.

Among the top concerns of European governments is the July 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six powers, which included the U.S., China, Russia,

France, Germany and Britain.

EU governments have repeatedly said the deal has worked so far. After Mr. Trump's election, they moved quickly to emphasize they intend to rapidly implement their side of the agreement.

The bloc is hoping to benefit from trade deals with Iran made possible by the agreement.

There is a "growing sense that it would be a mistake to blow up the deal," said one senior European diplomat.

The diplomat said he was told by Trump transition officials

that President Barack Obama had pressed Mr. Trump hard on the dangers of walking away from the Iran deal in at least two conversations. Mr. Trump "now understands that it would be irresponsible to disregard it."

Iran and the six major powers finalized the text of the JCPOA in July 2015 which took effect in January 2016.

In a speech in March to a conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in Washington Trump said 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.

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, South Africa sign MoU to boost defense, military ties

Iran and South Africa have signed a memorandum of understanding to boost defense and military cooperation and promote regional and international peace and stability.

The agreement was signed by Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Hossein Dehqan and South African Minister of Defense and Military Veterans Nosiviwe Nolutshando Mapisa-Nqakula in Pretoria on Tuesday.

Speaking to reporters after the signing of the MoU, the ministers said the two countries had agreed to make efforts to promote regional and international peace, stability and security and engage in a firm and all-out campaign against terrorism.

According to the agreement, the two countries would also bolster cooperation in the fields of marine security and organized crimes.

Heading a high-ranking defense-military delegation, Dehqan arrived in Pretoria on Tuesday at the official invitation of his South African counterpart. He is the first Iranian defense minister to visit South Africa after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Certain regional states' support for terrorism regrettable: Dehqan

Meanwhile, in his meeting with the South African minister of defense and military veterans, Dehqan expressed regret that some regional countries were supporting terrorism,

saying the patronage has intensified war and crisis in the region.

The Iranian defense minister said all countries across the world must cooperate to root out terrorism.

"Had it not been for the resistance of countries such as Iran, Russia, Iraq and Syria, terrorists would have spilled over into other parts of the world after establishing and reinforcing their presence in this region," Dehqan added.

He urged friendly countries to reinforce their unity in words and deeds and boost their cooperation in order to counter crises and bring security and prosperity to their nations.

(Source: Press TV)

Rouhani: Iran-Indonesia ties will benefit Islamic world

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — President **d e s k** Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that that strong relationship between Iran and Indonesia ties is beneficial to both countries and the larger Islamic world.

In a joint press conference with Indonesian President Joko Widodo in Tehran, Rouhani said Iran attaches great importance to relations with Indonesia as an important Islamic state in East Asia.

Now the two countries are seeking to expand ties in various spheres of economy, politics, science and technology, Rouhani explained.

Rouhani said the two countries have taken good steps to expand relations since the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, the official name for the July 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and great powers - the United States, Britain, France, China, Russia plus Germany – which took effect in January 2016.



President Rouhani welcomes his Indonesian counterpart Joko Widodo in Saadabad Palace on Wednesday. In a meeting of the senior officials of the two countries Rouhani said Iran is firm to strengthen ties with Indonesia.

■ Strategic ties in energy sector

The president also said that the two countries have established “strategic” relationship in energy sector.

Rouhani went on to say that Tehran and Jakarta enjoy close relationship in the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

He added Iran and Indonesia will seek closer cooperation to help settle crises in Yemen and Syria and put an end to the misery of Muslims in Myanmar.

For his part, Widodo said crises in countries such as Syria, Myanmar and Yemen can be settled peacefully.

He also said that his trip to Iran will open a new chapter in relations.

Iran and Indonesia also signed four memorandums of understanding at the presence of Rouhani and Widodo.

The MOUs are in the areas of electricity and renewable energies, investment, judiciary, and repatriation of criminals.

Leader: Israel will cease to exist in 25 years if struggle persists

Ayatollah Khamenei rejects claims regional conflicts are rooted in religious differences

➔ Praising the Palestinians’ resistance, the Leader said the only way “to liberate the holy city of al-Quds passes through struggle and resistance, and other solutions are futile.”

He expressed hopes about the future of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement and praised its role in uniting Palestinian groups and its resistance against Israel.

Ayatollah Khamenei said the supporters of the Zionist regime create crises all the time, so that the Palestinian issue would sink into oblivion.

The Leader also described the United States as “a big arrogant power” and “Great Satan,” noting Washington is the main culprit behind the current problems in the region.

The Leader criticized what he called “Little Satans” of the region, saying, “Their goal is to undermine the Palestinian issue so that the [Muslim] nations would forget about it.”

Ayatollah Khamenei further said that the conflicts



“The Sunni people of Aleppo, Mosul and other cities are being massacred by the Takfiri criminals,” the Leader laments.

Velayati threatens more retaliation over nuclear deal breach

Ali Akbar Velayati, the top advisor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, said on Wednesday Iran will grow more assertive if Washington as one signatory to an international nuclear pact presses ahead with dishonoring the deal.

The U.S. Senate’s unanimous vote to reintroduce ten-year sanctions, the Iran Sanctions Act, has stoked tensions between the two countries, seen by many a blow to the nuclear agreement reached between Iran and six world powers, including the U.S.

According to the deal, the financial and economic sanctions against Iran must be terminated. In return Iran must put limits on its nuclear activities.

“The Americans’ measure (ISA) will certainly violate BARJAM (the Persian acronym for the nuclear deal),” Velayati stressed. “We will certainly take necessary measures, too.”

On Tuesday, Rouhani in a directive to Iran’s unclear chief Ali Akbar Salehi ordered scientists to start develop-

ing systems for nuclear-powered marine vessels.

People familiar with the issue say to develop the technology, Iran may need uranium being enriched at levels beyond a 3.67 percent purity allowed by the nuclear deal.

Rouhani also ordered Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to work on legal aspects of the ISA.

The decision marked the first concrete reaction to the renewal of sanctions by Washington

“Directives to Zarif and Salehi by the president is Iran’s first step to respond to the violation of BARJAM by the Americans, but it won’t definitely be the last.”

Zarif says Iran pursues compliance issues through agreed-upon means

➔ Tehran says the measure contravenes the terms of the nuclear deal.

Two major mechanisms are foreseen by the JCPOA to consider a compliance issue raised by any of signatories to the deal.

Under the first scenario, a Joint Commission consisting of the E3/EU+3 and Iran will monitor and address issues arising from the implementation of the deal.

The Joint Commission would have 15 days to resolve the issue, unless the time

period was extended by consensus. After Joint Commission consideration, any participant could refer the issue to Ministers of Foreign Affairs, if it believed the compliance issue had not been resolved.

Ministers would have 15 days to resolve the issue, unless the time period was extended by consensus. After Joint Commission consideration, in parallel with (or in lieu of) review at the Ministerial level, either the complaining participant or the participant whose performance is

in question could request that the issue be considered by an Advisory Board, which would consist of three members (one each appointed by the participants in the dispute and a third independent member).

The Advisory Board should provide a non-binding opinion on the compliance issue within 15 days. If, after this 30-day process the issue is not resolved, the Joint Commission would consider the opinion of the Advisory Board for no more than 5

days in order to resolve the issue.

If the issue still has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the complaining participant, and if the complaining participant deems the issue to constitute significant non-performance, then that participant could treat the unresolved issue as grounds to cease performing its commitments under the JCPOA in whole or in part and/or notify the UN Security Council that it believes the issue constitutes significant non-performance.

White House: Iran’s nuclear-powered vessel announcement doesn’t violate nuclear deal

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — White House spokesman Josh Earnest said on Tuesday that Iran’s order over starting developing systems for nuclear-powered boats in marine transportation does not violate the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the official name for the international nuclear agreement between Iran and great powers.

“The announcement from the Iranians today does not run counter to the international agreement,” Reuters quoted Earnest as saying in a news briefing.

On Tuesday, President Hassan Rouhani wrote letters to Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) chief Ali Akbar Salehi asking them to take legal and technical steps in response to the extension of the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) by the U.S. Congress which constitutes a violation of the nuclear deal.

In the letter to Salehi, Rouhani instructed the AEOI to



begin planning to develop “nuclear propulsion for use in the field of maritime transportation” as well as the production of fuel for that purpose.

Rouhani said the work on the nuclear powered vessels should be performed within the framework of Iran’s “peaceful nuclear program” and its international obligations.



Iran, Czech Republic sign nuclear cooperation document

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) signed a document with the Czech Republic for nuclear cooperation on Tuesday.

The document was signed during a visit by Behrooz Kamalvandi, the AEOI vice director, to Prague. Kamalvandi also visited UJV, a nuclear research institute in the Czech Republic, and SKODA Company.

He said that the inked document sets the framework for nuclear cooperation.

Certain countries, including the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, have shown interest in cooperation with Iran in the nuclear industry following the historic nuclear deal between Iran and great powers. The nuclear deal concluded in July 2015, took effect in January.



Iran thanks Oman for helping stabilize region

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy **d e s k** Foreign Minister Hossein Jaber Ansari on Tuesday praised the “constructive role” played by Qaboos bin Said Al Said, the Sultan of Oman, in helping stabilize the Middle East region.

During a meeting with Omani Foreign Minister Yusuf bin Alawi in Muscat, Jaber Ansari also described Tehran-Muscat relations as “remarkable”.

Calling Oman a “good neighboring country”, he said relations between the two countries can be a “successful role model” of regional relations.

The officials also discussed the latest developments during the meeting.



Rouhani accepts Putin’s invitation to visit Moscow

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Telecommunications Minister Mahmoud Vaezi said on Tuesday that President Hassan Rouhani has accepted invitation of his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to visit Moscow.

Iranian and Russian foreign ministers are to agree on the date for the trip, Fars news agency quoted Vaezi reporting him.

The Russian president visited Iran in November 2015 during which he invited Rouhani to take a trip to Russia.



Iran to release names of ambassadors to Syria, Oman soon

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Wednesday that the Iranian ambassadors to Oman and Syria have been appointed.

He said that the names of the new ambassadors will be announced in the future when the executive and diplomatic procedures are done.

Mohammad Reza Sheibani, the former ambassador of Iran to Syria, returned home in October after a five-year service in Damascus.

Sheibani bears with him the title of “The Defendant of the Shrine”.



‘Iran-Russia-Syria-Hezbollah coalition liberate Aleppo’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Yahya Rahim Safavi, **d e s k** a senior advisor to the Supreme Leader on military affairs, said on Wednesday that a coalition of Iran, Russia, Syria, and Hezbollah liberated the Syrian city of Aleppo from terrorists.

During a ceremony held in Kharazmi University, he said Mosul will also be liberated soon.

The Syrian government has established control over eastern Aleppo, Vitaly Churkin, Russia’s ambassador to the UN, told the UN Security Council on Tuesday. Safavi, the former IRGC chief, also said the U.S. has become well aware that Iran is the “first power” in the region.



Shamkhani congratulates liberation of Aleppo

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani on Tuesday congratulated the Syrian government, people and army over the liberation of Aleppo.

However, he said, “Military victories cannot be an alternate to a political solution based on dialogue among the government and the armed Syrian groups to reach a national reconciliation.”

Iran is insistent on the need to adopt political approaches to settle the Syrian conflict, he added.

A ceasefire between government troops and the rebels was declared in Aleppo on Tuesday.

Militants surrender as civilians leave Aleppo

Hundreds of foreign-backed militants have laid down arms in Aleppo in the past 24 hours during which almost 6,000 civilians left terrorist-held districts of the Syrian city, the Russian Defense Ministry says.

The ministry also said Wednesday that over the same period 366 terrorists had laid down their arms and moved out of militant-controlled parts of the city.

The evacuations follow a ceasefire deal, brokered by Russia and Turkey, under which the militants were to start leaving from Aleppo along with civilians in the early hours of Wednesday.

Russia, however, said the terrorists resumed fighting at dawn, but that Syrian government forces repelled their attacks, the Interfax news agency reported.

Syrian state television said militant rocket fire on government-held parts of Aleppo killed seven people and wounded others after fighting resumed and the evacuation deal was suspended.

Six people were killed and others wounded in the Bustan al-Qasr neighborhood, with a seventh person killed and more wounded in other government-held parts of the city, the television said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said the Syrian army was continuing its operation to quash last pockets of resistance in the districts of Aleppo where foreign-backed were still in control.

"The attack by the terrorists was ward-off. The Syrian army continued its operation to liberate the eastern districts of Aleppo controlled by the rebels," the ministry said in a statement.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Wednesday that Russia expects terrorist resistance in Aleppo to end in the next two to three days.

"I expect that the rebels will stop their resistance in the next two to three days," he said. "I hope that the situation in eastern



Aleppo will be resolved in two to three days."

The evacuation was the culmination of two weeks of rapid advances by the Syrian army and its allies that drove terrorists back into an ever-smaller pocket of the city.

By taking full control of Aleppo, President Bashar al-Assad has proved the power of the Syrian army. Militant groups have been supported by the United States, Turkey and Persian Gulf monarchies.

The government and its allies have focused the bulk of their firepower on fighting ministers in western Syria rather than Daesh, which this week managed to take back the ancient city of Palmyra.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday the unwillingness of the US to work with Moscow in Syria helped

the fall of Palmyra.

The U.S. and its allies look to have sought to take the shine off Syria's game-changing victories in Aleppo.

Russian officials say the U.S. had stopped attacking ISIL (Daesh) in Raqqa, allowing the Takfiri group to mobilize for the sudden Palmyra attack while thousands of the terrorists had traveled from the Iraqi city of Mosul to participate in the offensive.

Elsewhere in Syria, as many as 1,500 militants laid down arms in a southern suburb of the Syrian capital Damascus under an amnesty law issued by President Assad, the official SANA news agency said.

The gunmen surrendered their weapons in the village of Kanaker in the Rif

Dimashq Province and checked at rehabilitation centers.

■ 'Militants dumping secret documents'

With the fight in Aleppo drawing to a close, sources on the ground said the militants had set fire to their operation bases to get rid of secret documents revealing their links to Western and regional sponsors, the Fars News Agency reported.

Terrorists with the U.S.-backed Nour al-Din al-Zenki militant group had torched schools and residential buildings in the southeastern neighborhoods of Aleppo before leaving the city, the sources told the news agency.

According to the report, the burnt documents included information on terror groups' ties with Turkey and Saudi Arabia, among other foreign parties.

■ 'Aleppo returned to nation'

Syria's UN envoy Bashar al-Ja'afari strongly denied reports of "summary killings" by the army in the areas formerly-held by the terrorists.

He made the comments after an Associated Press reported cited sources linked to militants in Aleppo as saying that government forces had carried out "summary killings" and "mass executions" in neighborhoods recaptured on Monday.

The agency, however, added "none of the residents witnessed the alleged killings, and the reports came amid deepening chaos" in the remaining militant-held areas.

Ja'afari further said 'Aleppo has been liberated from terrorists and those who toyed with terrorism,' adding, 'Aleppo has returned to the nation.'

The Syrian military also denied the claims, saying such allegations were "a desperate attempt" to gain international sympathy.

(Source: agencies)

Brazil Senate approves controversial austerity measures

Brazilians have been on the streets protesting after the Senate approved a 20-year freeze on government spending that a United Nations official described as a "historic mistake".

The upper house voted 53 to 16 on Tuesday to lock in the spending ceiling.

Centre-right President Michel Temer says tough measures are needed to get Brazil's finances back under control, but his austerity policies have drawn sharp criticism and prompted violent protests.

Opponents say the austerity measures, which will affect spending on health, education and social programs, are an attack on the poor in a country where wealth distribution is already among the worst in the world.

Police were out in force in the capital, Brasilia, to protect government buildings from demonstrators during the upper house vote.

However, hundreds of people, many with their faces covered, clashed with police later on Tuesday. Security forces fired tear gas to try to disperse the crowd.

A bus was burned during the demonstration, which drew about 2,000 people, police said. The police operation in the capital ended with 100

arrests, officials said.

In Sao Paulo, left-wing protesters attacked the headquarters of FIESP (Federação das Indústrias do Estado de São Paulo), the country's main industrial association, before being driven back.

The vote means that the spending cap is now mandated by the constitution, serving as the central plank in Temer's effort to "transform" the broken economy, which is in deep recession.

Philip Alston, the UN poverty and human rights rapporteur, attacked the 20-year spending cap as "putting an entire generation at risk of social protection standards well below those currently in place".

"This is a radical measure, lacking in all nuance and compassion," he said last week. "It will hit the poorest and most vulnerable Brazilians the hardest."

Brazilians, battered by nearly 12 percent unemployment and stubbornly high inflation, are increasingly angry over corruption scandals and largely hostile to the austerity measures.

A poll published on Tuesday showed that 60 percent of Brazilians oppose the spending ceiling. Only 24 percent were in favor, according to the Datafolha poll.

(Source: agencies)

Gambia troops take over electoral commission offices

Gambia's security forces have entered the building of the Independent Electoral Commission, instructed its chairman to leave and barred other employees from entering, according to the commission chairman.

Tuesday's developments came as West African heads of state began arriving in the country to try to convince long-term President Yahya Jammeh to relinquish power after losing an election this month.

"The military came to my office and said I am not to touch anything and told me to leave," Alieu Momar Njie, the electoral commission's chairman, said.

"I am worried for my safety."

The Independent Electoral Commission had announced the news of Jammeh's defeat at the hands of Adama Barrow.

The delegation is headed by Liberian leader Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a Nobel Peace laureate and the current chairwoman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The delegation also includes Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari, Sierra Leone Leader Ernest Bai Koroma and outgoing Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama.

The African Union said in a statement late on Monday that it also planned to send a high-level delegation, led by Chad's long-ruling President Idriss Deby, to facilitate a "peaceful and speedy" transfer of power.

The streets of the Gambian capital Banjul were calm on Tuesday, with a high security presence, witnesses said.

Armed guards surrounded a hotel where the delegation was due to meet Barrow, Gambia's president-elect, later on Tuesday.

Barrow has said that he will annul Jammeh's declaration of Gambia as an Islamic republic.

Jammeh initially conceded defeat after official results showed that Gambians voted in Barrow on December 1.

However, last week Jammeh said that he no longer accepted his election loss and called for another vote, saying there were irregularities.

Jammeh's ruling party said late on Saturday that his statement was simply a prelude to the party challenging the results in a petition to the Supreme Court.

By law, election results can be contested up to 10 days after the vote.

(Source: agencies)

China warns Trump ignoring one-China policy could hurt peace

Any change in the United States policy favoring formal recognition of Taiwan will "seriously" damage peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and undermine relations between Beijing and Washington, a Chinese government spokesman said on Wednesday.

The comments from the Cabinet's Taiwan Affairs Office follow President-elect Donald Trump's remarks over the weekend that he didn't feel "bound by a one-China policy" unless the U.S. could gain benefits from China in trade and other areas.



Under the one-China policy, the U.S. recognizes Beijing as China's government and maintains only unofficial relations with Taiwan, a former Japanese colony which broke from the Chinese mainland amid civil in 1949.

Spokesman An Fengshan said breaching the one-China principle "will seriously affect peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait."

"The one-China policy is an important political foundation for relations between China and the U.S.," An told reporters. "If such a foundation is disturbed or undermined, there can be no talk of a healthy and stable development of U.S.-China relations."

Trump broke diplomatic precedent by talking on the phone with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen on Dec. 2, during which the island's leader congratulated Trump on his election victory. Then, this past weekend, Trump said he might use America's recognition of Beijing as leverage for gaining advantages in trade and other areas.

That is placing him perilously close to touching on China's bottom line that brooks no formal recognition of Taiwan or challenge to its claim to sovereignty over the island. China's response has thus far been fairly muted, mainly blaming Tsai for placing the call.

The last major crisis over Taiwan came in 1995, when China staged threatening war games and missile tests near the island in response to then-president Lee Teng-hui's visit to the U.S., which was seen by Beijing as a bid to solidify the island's de-facto independent status. The move was largely seen as backfiring, with Lee winning the island's first direct presidential election in 1996.

Washington responded by putting two aircraft carrier battle groups on alert, one of which crossed the Taiwan Strait, although China's vast strides in military power in the years since would likely complicate such a move in the current era.

The U.S. and China are the world's two largest economies with bilateral trade in goods and services reaching nearly \$660 billion last year.

Although the U.S. does not challenge China's claim to sovereignty over Taiwan, Washington remains Taiwan's main source of weapons, with \$14 billion in approved arms sales since 2009, and is bound by law to consider threats to the island's security a matter of "grave concern."

(Source: AP)

Nearly dozen decapitated corpses found near Yemen's Aden

The headless bodies of at least eleven people have been recovered from a nature reserve near the southern Yemeni coastal city of Aden, which is controlled by loyalists to the former government.

An unnamed source told the local Arabic-language al-Ghad news agency that the corpses were found at al-Hiswa reserve in Enma city, which lies nearly 14.5 kilometers northwest of Aden, on Tuesday evening.

The report added that the condition of the bodies suggested they had been dumped there more than a month ago.

No individual or militant group has claimed responsibility for the act of terror yet, and the motive remains unknown.

Aden, Yemen's second largest city, has witnessed a surge in terror activities by al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh)-linked elements over the past year.

For more than a year, Aden has been controlled by loyalists to the administration of former Yemeni president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, a close Saudi ally, but they have so far failed to restore order to the city.

The al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Yemen has taken advantage of the chaos fueled by a deadly Saudi military campaign to tighten its grip on parts of southeast Yemen.

The ISIL terrorist group has also gained ground in and around the main southern city of Aden after the army and their Ansarullah (Houthi) movement allies were evicted by the House of Saud regime-led offensive, which has been launched in support of the former Hadi government.

Riyadh's attacks have killed at least 11,400 people in the kingdom's impoverished neighbor since March 2015, according to the latest tally by a Yemeni monitoring group.

(Source: Press TV)

ISIL produced military grade weapons in Iraq: report

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group has produced weapons on a scale and sophistication that matches national armies, standardizing production across its self-styled caliphate, according to an arms monitoring group.

Britain-based Conflict Armament Research (CAR) said the ISIL had a "robust supply chain" of raw materials from Turkey, and the technical precision of its work meant it could not be described as "improvised" weapons production.

"Although production facilities employ a range of non-standard materials and chemical explosive precursors, the degree of organization, quality control, and inventory management indicates a complex, centrally controlled industrial production system," it said in a report on Wednesday, after visits last month to six facilities once operated by ISIL in eastern Mosul.

"It's consistent and organized," a technical adviser to the CAR team that visited Mosul told Al Jazeera. "It's kind of unprecedented as far as the scope of what they are creating goes, and the ability to store it and move it, and produce this variety in different sizes."

----- 'Major acquisition network'

Iraq's military launched a sweeping operation on October 17 to retake the northern city, the armed group's last major stronghold in the country, more than two years after government forces dropped their weapons and fled in the face of a lightning-fast



ISIL advance.

Elite troops have retaken a quarter of the city in a grueling United States-backed campaign, but their advance has been slow. Soldiers are constrained by street-by-street fighting and a built-up urban environment.

CAR, which identifies and tracks weapons and ammunition in conflicts, said the facilities it visited were part of a system that produced weapons according to precise guidelines issued by a central authority.

Production included a monitoring system with regular, detailed reports on production rates and quality that helped to ensure standardization, usually to the tenth of a millimeter, across the group's once sprawling territory

in Iraq and neighboring Syria.

CAR investigators estimated that ISIL, had produced tens of thousands of rockets and mortar rounds in the months leading to the Mosul offensive.

Standardization required consistency in the supply of source materials, the report said, achieved through a major acquisition network in neighboring Turkey and a supply chain extending from that country, through Syria, to Mosul.

In addition to the technical advantages of standardization, CAR said ISIL sought to mirror the functions of a national military in an effort to "legitimize the group's capacity and coherence" in the eyes of its fighters.

The monitor also said documents it had seen in Mosul suggested ISIL had provided its fighters with sophisticated instructions on making and planting improvised explosive devices as well as the operation of complex weapons systems such as anti-tank guided missiles.

Dan Popudik, a technical adviser to the CAR team in Iraq, told Al Jazeera they had found a large quantity of mortar rounds and rockets that had been manufactured in ISIL factories.

"At first glance from a few meters away, a lot of this stuff looks like it came out of a factory in another country that we know of, but in reality, it's homemade," he said.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Iran’s crude oil exports to fall 8% in Dec.: source

Iran’s crude oil exports in December are set to fall 8 percent from November to a five-month low, a source with knowledge of its preliminary tanker schedule said, as lower shipments to China and others in Asia offset bumper exports to Europe.

Iran was exempted from last month’s OPEC deal to reduce output by 1.2 million barrels per day (bpd) starting from January, and had been expected to boost its output slightly.

But Iran’s December crude exports excluding condensate are set to fall to 1.88 million bpd, from 2.04 million bpd in November, the source familiar with its export situation said.

Exemption from the deal agreed by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was a victory for Tehran, which has argued it needs to regain the market share it lost under Western sanctions targeting its nuclear program.

Compared with a year ago, Iran’s December crude exports are still set to jump 81 percent as shipments to Europe resumed only in February this year, according to the source.

Iran exports to Asia this month are set to fall 17 percent from November to 1.11 million bpd, the lowest since February, as major importers all cut their purchases except for India.

Exports to Europe look set to rise 10 percent from November to this year’s high of 767,000 bpd, topping levels seen prior to the imposition of toughened sanctions in 2012.

Before the sanctions were enforced, Iran was exporting about 2.2 million bpd of crude each month, with Europe taking about 600,000 bpd, according to the International Energy Agency.

Loadings headed for China in December will tumble 28 percent from November to 400,000 bpd, the lowest since October 2015.

Japan is lifting 134,000 bpd of crude, down 1.6 percent from November, while South Korea is loading 60,000 bpd, half its November volumes.

India - the only major Asian buyer to show growth - will load 517,000 bpd in December, up 12 percent from November and making it Iran’s top buyer for the month.

In Europe, Italy and Turkey are both lifting around 190,000 bpd, while Greece and Spain are taking around 97,000 bpd.

Austria is loading about one million barrels this month, following its first purchase in years in August.

In addition, another 161,000 bpd is heading to unspecified destinations in Europe.

(Source: Reuters)

IMF data show china’s GDP outpaces U.S. in 2016

The figures come from a recent International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimate, and serve to shift the canon that the U.S. is the world’s primary economic superpower. Economists forecast that the U.S. GDP will measure some \$18.5 trillion, while China is expected to net \$21.2 trillion in GDP, per IMF data. The international community has increasingly recognized Beijing’s economic clout, evidenced by China’s currency, the renminbi, becoming one of the IMF’s coveted global reserve currencies, alongside the dollar, euro, yen and pound. Sandeep Mazumder, a macroeconomist at Wake Forest University, told Sputnik News that for the U.S. to increase economic output, “one obvious thing that many macroeconomists are in favor of (including me), is greater spending on public capital (bridges, roads, airports, etc.) in order to give more scope for private capital purchases.” Such policies would “hopefully” generate higher levels of private investment, “which could boost long-term economic growth,” Mazumder said in an email.

China’s financial success has fed directly into President-elect Donald Trump’s campaign narrative, in which he said he’d label China a currency manipulator upon assuming the U.S. presidency. Trump effectively deployed legacy American cultural tropes on Beijing as a way to motivate voters, including that China has stolen U.S. jobs. The incoming President has vowed to ‘make America rich again’, but negotiating deals with China will likely be a key part of the Trump administration’s agenda.

(Source: Sputnik)

HSBC shutting four bank branches a week

HSBC has revealed that it is shutting more than four branches a week and that at least 57 more will be axed in the first few weeks of 2017. High-street banks have closed more than 1,000 branches in the UK during the past two years, according to consumer body Which?.

It has called on banks to consult with communities before implementing closures to ensure that the needs of their customers are being met. The organization said its research had found that 1,046 bank branches were shut, or due to shut, between January 2015 and January 2017. It added that HSBC had axed the most branches over this period: a total of 321, representing a quarter of its network. HSBC told the Guardian it had closed 222 in 2016 alone, taking its current tally to 755.

(Source: The Guardian)

UK employment declines for first time in more than a year

UK employment fell for the first time in more than a year in the three months through October as the labor market showed some signs of weakness.

The number of people in work fell by 6,000 to 31.76 million people, the Office for National Statistics said on Wednesday. While the decline was small, and the jobless rate was unchanged at 4.8 percent, the statistics office said the labor market “appears to have flattened off in recent months.”

“This is the first genuine disappointment we have seen in the hard data since the Brexit vote,” said Alan Clarke, an economist at Scotiabank in London. “This has been a gradual deterioration” and “is bad news for spending growth next year.”

Single-month data showed that the unemployment rate rose to 4.9 percent in October from 4.6 percent in September. Unemployment fell over the three-month period, by 16,000 to 1.62 million, as the drop in the number of people in work was more than offset by those leaving the labor force. There was a 22,000 decline in the economically active population during the period.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Ethiopia will provide support for Iranian investors: President Mulatu

President Mulatu Teshome said Ethiopia would provide all the necessary support for Iranian businesspersons investing in the country.

The president conferred with the departing Iranian Ambassador to Ethiopia Ali Bahreini at the National Palace on Tuesday.

Mulatu stated that Ethiopia wants to work with Iran and share its experience in the fields of science and technology, which he said would help in the economic transformation underway.

The two sides also exchanged views on ways of further cementing bilateral relations between the countries and improving trade and economic cooperation.

The departing Iranian Ambassador Ali Bahreini appreciated the development of Ethiopia in various fields.

Bahreini said “the change in Ethiopia is visible for everybody. We congratulate the government and people of Ethiopia for the good progress they have had”.

“I think Ethiopia is one of the exemplary countries with regard to development issues; so we understand totally what the Ethiopian people and government are doing,” he added.

According to him, Iran and Ethiopia “have been able to build cooperation in lots of fields, in science and technology in particular in which meaningful and useful cooperation



has been established”.

The ambassador said he will continue to work and make all efforts to further strengthen the bilateral relations be-

tween the two countries.

Ethiopia and Iran started diplomatic relations in 1950.

(Source: ena.gov.et)

Russia, Iran working on launching currency pair trading: Russian central bank

Moscow and Tehran are preparing for trade in national currencies at the Moscow Exchange, Deputy Director of International Cooperation and Public Communications Department of the Russian Central Bank Andrey Melnikov said Tuesday.

“There are issues requiring further consideration. There is no doubt [that] it is positive that [Russian and Iranian] central banks are reviewing them. This and the present project on currency pair trading of the [Russian] ruble and [Iranian] rial will significantly increase the [volumes of] using the national currencies for mutual settlement in case there is demand for these currencies,” Melnikov told RIA No-

vosti.

Melnikov added that the project was subject to discussion between the Russian and Iranian exchanges to date.

In January, head of the Iran-Russia Chamber of Commerce Asadollah Asgaroladi told Sputnik that the Iranian Central Bank working committee was discussing transitioning to trade in national currencies with Russia.

In December 2015, Russian Industry and Trade Minister Denis Manturov said Russia and Iran were likely to start transactions in national currencies, adding that the trade turnover between the two countries was estimated at around \$5 billion in five years.

(Source: Sputnik)

S. Korea’s Ssangyong Motor increases exports to Iran

South Korean automaker Ssangyong Motor Co. said Wednesday it has shipped a total of 6,823 vehicles to Iran in the first 11 months of the year, with the figure expected to top 8,000 units this year.

The automaker, the local unit of Indian carmaker Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd., said the figure during the January-November period marks a seven-fold increase from a year earlier.

The sharp increase has been driven by its new trendy SUV, the Tivoli. In the first 11 months, Ssangyong Motor has sold a total of 6,823 Tivoli in Iran, the largest export destination.

The Tivoli was showcased at a trade



show in October last year.

International sanctions on the Middle East country were lifted in January this year.

(Source: Yonhap News)

Iran, Russia explore setting up Islamic bank

Russia and Iran are exploring the establishment of an Islamic bank as the two countries expand their economic cooperation, the TASS news agency cited Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak as saying.

The entire banking system in Iran must abide by Islamic principles such as a ban

on interest and gambling, which foreign firms would need to follow if they are to grab business ranging from long-term financing to insurance.

“The creation of a Russian-Iranian Islamic bank was discussed. Our banks are exploring the mechanism, the related decision has not been made yet,” Novak

said at a bilateral meeting held in Tehran.

No timeframe or potential size was given for the proposed bank, which would be the first such institution operating in the two countries.

State-linked Russian lenders Vnesheconombank, Sberbank and Tatfondbank have been developing Islamic fi-

nancial products of their own over the past year.

Iran is keen to diversify funding options for its companies. At present, most financing in Iran is sourced from domestic lenders with only a small portion sourced from foreign sources and the debt capital markets.

(Source: Sputnik)

PICTURE OF THE DAY SHANA/Hasan Hosseini



Iran, Belarus discuss trading oil, manufacturing equipment

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said on Tuesday Iran is considering cooperation with Belarus in oil industry equipment manufacturing and also oil trade, IRNA reported.

The minister made the remarks after a meeting with Belarusian Industry Minister Vitaly M. Vovk (L) in Tehran.

In the meeting Zanganeh voiced the country’s willingness for cooperation with the European country saying, “We are interested in cooperation in ways that guarantee the long-term interests of both sides;”

Vovk for his part expressed his country’s eagerness to cooperate with Iran in various areas including oil industry noting that “Belarus is ready to cooperate with Iran in a variety of areas especially oil refining and petrochemicals.”

During his visit Vovk has also held talks with his Iranian counterpart Mohammadreza Nematzadeh and also Iranian Vice President Es’haq Jahangiri.

The Belarusian minister also had a meeting with Ahmad Doust-Hosseini, chairman of the National Development Fund of Iran (NDFI), in which he called for NDFI’s support to Iranian contractors contributing to Belarus’s development projects.



Geely’s Volvo Cars says has no immediate plans for IPO

Geely-owned Volvo Car Group said on Wednesday it had no immediate plans for an initial public offering following a media report the carmaker was considering a listing next year.

Swedish business daily Dagens Industri reported, citing unnamed sources, that Volvo Cars, owned by China’s Zhejiang Geely Holding Group Co., could decide this year on whether to go public in 2017.

“We have no immediate plans for an IPO. This is a question for our owner,” a Volvo Cars spokesman said in an emailed statement to Reuters.



Asahi Glass to buy 59 percent stake in Vinythai from Solvay

Japan’s biggest glass maker, Asahi Glass, said on Wednesday it will buy a controlling 59 percent stake in Thai plastics company Vinythai from Belgium chemical firm Solvay SA.

The Japanese maker of auto glass and display panel components will pay 33.5 billion yen (\$291 million) for the stake, with the purchase to be completed by the end of June next year, it said in a statement released through the Tokyo Stock Exchange.



European shares retreat from 11-month highs, Actelion slumps

European shares pulled back from 11-month high on Wednesday, with Switzerland’s Actelion slumping after U.S. healthcare company Johnson & Johnson ended discussions regarding a potential deal with Europe’s largest biotech firm.

The pan-European STOXX 600 index was down 0.4 percent in early trading with healthcare and consumer staples sectors the biggest drags on the benchmark.

Italian banks fell 1.5 percent giving up some of the strong gains seen in the previous session.

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Even when the battle is over, the Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon can never return to Aleppo

By Isabel Hunter

There's nothing of their city left to go home to – but even if there was, those who fled the conflict still have reason to fear for their lives in Syria.

The fight for Aleppo is all but over, and already voices are crying out for refugees to go home to their "liberated" city. But for the Syrians who have escaped the country – the 2.7 million in Turkey, more than one million each to Lebanon and Europe and beyond – the turmoil and human tragedy will continue.



For to be associated with the revolution in any way, as aid worker, teacher, doctor, activist, or journalist, means you can never go home. Refugees fleeing ISIL rule can no more go back to government areas than vice versa, and so goes the muddy complexity of this horrific civil war.

What would refugees be going back to? Much of eastern Aleppo (and Homs) has been reduced to acres and acres of rubble lying in piles and piles of dust.

Reports of children stuck alive under rubble, and of 82 men and women shot in their houses, are yet more war crimes to add to a long list with a UN spokesman calling it a "complete meltdown of humanity".

"My name is on a list," has become a frequent refrain of Syrian refugees in Turkey, and given as the main reason they cannot go back – most often a government blacklist, but of course there are also ISIL and al-Qaida linked-Jabhat al-Nusra (now rebranded Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) lists too.

→13

Can Tillerson succeed as secretary of state?

President-elect Donald Trump has nominated Rex Tillerson for Secretary of State.

By Aaron David Miller

Having worked for half a dozen of his predecessors, here are several takeaways on the significance of his appointment.

■ A sharp break with the past

In the post-World War Two period, we've never had a Secretary of State whose entire career has been spent in the private sector without any prior government or public service.

The closest to this would be George Shultz, who worked for Bechtel between 1974 and 1982 before coming to Foggy Bottom. Prior to that, he had served as Secretary of Labor and Treasury and head of OMB.

Unlike his predecessors -- among them generals, a national security adviser, a secretary of the Treasury, a White House Chief of staff, a Senator -- Tillerson's lack of public service doesn't mean he can't do the job; indeed Exxon operates internationally on five continents and 50 countries.

While Tillerson is no Metternich or Kissinger, he knows his way around the world, many of its leaders, and certainly the political and economic oil world in Asia, the Middle East -- and of course, Russia.

■ In Trump's comfort zone

The process of picking this Secretary of State was clearly the noisiest, most public and political in recent memory. When I asked George HW Bush why he picked James Baker as his Secretary of State, the former President said it was a no-brainer -- a "gimme" in golfing terms.

Not here. The number of candidates with such diverse backgrounds reflects a clear lack of direction on what kind of Secretary of State the President-elect wanted: Romney; Giuliani; Petraeus; Corker. Tillerson entered the field rather late in the game.

Still, it's hardly a stretch to see that Tillerson must have impressed Trump as someone much like himself -- a stunningly successful corporate executive



Appearances are important to Trump, who quipped that Mitt Romney looked like a Secretary of State. Tillerson may not have walked straight out central casting, but he clearly has a large and forceful presence that got Trump's attention.

with mythic business success on a global scale, or to use the President-elect's words a world-class player.

Appearances are important to Trump, who quipped that Mitt Romney looked like a Secretary of State. Tillerson may not have walked straight out central casting, but he clearly has a large and forceful presence that got Trump's attention. Reported endorsements by Bob Gates, Condoleezza Rice and fellow Texan James Baker certainly helped.

■ The Russian connection

It's impossible now to assess how Tillerson's relationship with Putin -- particularly against the ongoing controversy over CIA's analysis of Russian interference in U.S. elections -- will affect his confirmation prospects.

Senate Republicans and Democrats, especially on the Senate Foreign

Relations Committee, are understandably pretty spun up against Putin. But unless Tillerson stumbles during the hearings and comes across as someone who's naive and soft on Putin.

Unless additional information breaks on Putin's involvement in U.S. elections or something truly damaging on Tillerson, it's hard to believe the Senate will deny the President his choice of Secretary of State. And whether Trump ends up cooperating or confronting Putin -- and both are distinctly possible -- it might be useful to have someone like Tillerson who has a sense of both Putin the man and Russia too.

■ Can Tillerson succeed?

Much depends on what kind of Secretary of State Donald Trump wants. My guess is that Trump will focus on domestic affairs and preside rather than

try to micromanage foreign policy. Trump will set broad parameters -- no nation building; taking allies to task if they don't reciprocate sufficiently; trying to engage Putin. Tillerson and the President's other national security appointments will have to work within them or try to influence the President and try to change them. And right now it's impossible to know who among Trump's advisers -- including his family -- will carry the most weight on foreign policy matters.

Whether Tillerson has the skills and intuitive instinct to be a successful negotiator is an open question. Clearly he has very successfully closed oil leases, contracts and various negotiations in the energy sector all over the world. But dealing with international crises isn't quite the same thing as negotiating leasing arrangements or extraction rights in country A or B, or in the case of President Trump, real estate deals.

National identity, deep existential fears, historical trauma, and religion often interact in conflicts between nations and efforts to accommodate them in ways that just aren't present in business transactions.

Based on my experience in working for a number of Secretaries of State, two things are stunningly obvious.

First, success abroad for a Secretary of State and a President too depends on whether the world cooperates and offers up crises that can be defused and agreements that are possible to negotiate.

Second, no secretary of state can succeed unless he or she remains close to the president and the president watches his back in Washington and abroad; there are no successful lone rangers at Foggy Bottom.

James Baker summed it up nicely. He was the White House's man at the State Department; not the State Department's man at the White House. And something tells me that Rex Tillerson has already got this figured out.

(Source: CNN)

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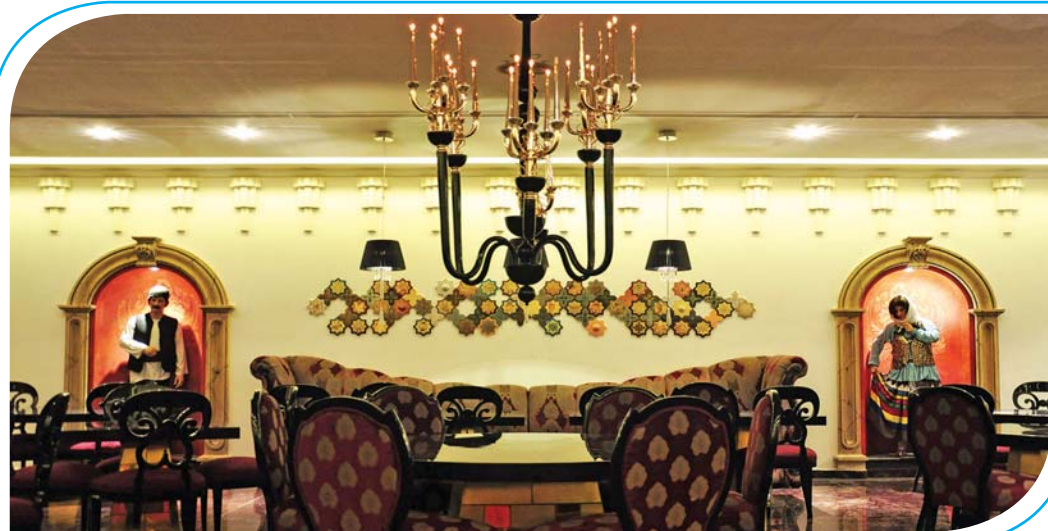
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TAJ MAHAL ANNOUNCES ITS SECOND RESTAURANT MAHI – MAHI

By Seyed Hossein Mousavian

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's relations with the major European states has been fragile and subject to the whims of sanctions regimes. The Iran nuclear deal was a watershed; removing sanctions and opening the door to broader economic co-operation and more sustainable, comprehensive ties. With Donald Trump in the White House, however, the issue is whether a durable, far-reaching Iran-EU relationship can emerge.

Most likely Trump will not "tear up" the nuclear deal. It is of course possible that Congress will pass new sanctions under terrorism or human rights pretexts and that Trump may sign some of these into law. The reality is, however, that Trump is the most business-oriented U.S. president in modern history and is likely to favor securing contracts for American firms in Iran. Nonetheless, the circumstances of Trump's election require a new road map for Iran and the EU that would safekeep Obama's engagement policy, ensure an EU-Iran relationship that is sustainable, and prevent escalation in U.S.-Iran relations.

Many in Washington wish to sabotage increased global trade with Iran and many insist on maintaining

EU-Iran relations in Trump era

With the JCPOA, world powers received all necessary guarantees to verifiably certify that Iran would not develop nuclear weapons.

the deal. Presently, U.S. companies that obtain licenses from the Treasury Department can work with Iran in the aerospace, medicinal, food, and environmental sectors. Europeans can spur them through their contacts with U.S. companies, to consider greater economic cooperation with Iran.

The new situation in the Middle East requires EU and Iran to cooperate on the traditional disputes, ie, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and human rights. On the issue of terrorism, it is now clear that the real terrorist threat facing the world comes from Wahhabi-Salafist groups like ISIS, Al Qaeda, Jabhat Al Nusra, and Boko Haram. The support for these groups has in large part come from U.S. allies in the Persian Gulf. Iran, for its part, is on the frontlines of combatting these organizations. The time has come for the EU

and Iran to cooperate in the fight against terrorism through an institutionalized joint committee. Such cooperation would take an excuse away from American hardliners, improve global security, and lower differences on terrorism between Iran and the West.

The proliferation of WMDs is another historic source of tension between Iran and the West. With the JCPOA, world powers received all necessary guarantees to verifiably certify that Iran would not develop nuclear weapons. The JCPOA has created a template that Iran and the EU can work to regionalize to ensure a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and through the same model, all WMDs.

The divergence between the EU and Iran on human rights will continue. There is no doubt, however, that Iran's human rights record is leagues ahead of American and European allies in the Middle East. Nonetheless, constructive dialogue on human rights that bridges Islamic and Christian philosophies will help reduce tensions.

With the resolution of the Iranian nuclear crisis, the focus of the global powers has turned to new crises raging in the region, which threaten global peace and security. This has created new rifts between Iran and the West. The aggressions of Saddam Hussein against Iran and Kuwait, of America against Afghanistan and Iraq, of Saudi Arabia against Yemen, and of NATO and several Arab countries against Libya, are a main cause of the instability gripping the Middle East today and the spread of terrorism. Unfortunately, European states have played a role in all these transgressions. Tens of millions have been either displaced, made immigrants, killed, or injured as a result of these conflicts. It is a situation that threatens the security of Europe and Iran and necessitates their cooperation.



Iran and the EU can form a "Committee on Managing Middle Eastern Crises" that is based on five foundational principles: majority

will; power-sharing; free elections; minority rights; reconstruction of war-ridden areas. Such a framework will allow Europe and Iran to

deeper their ties and allow the EU to facilitate continued U.S. engagement with Iran during the Trump presidency.

Iran needs hundreds of billions in economic projects and investments in the next five years. Iran is now the center of a U.S.-EU economic rivalry, but this can be ended if Europe and Iran successfully finalize the numerous economic and investment agreements they have reached since the JCPOA.

Trump's cabinet is poised to be the most anti-Iran, pro-regime change since the Iranian revolution. It is vital for the EU to take actions that emphasize to the Trump administration the importance of not repeating past mistakes. The school of thought that Obama initiated that it is possible to work with Iran can be outshined by Trump. In his first post-election rally in Cincinnati, Trump again indicated that his personal thinking was in the right direction, stating: "We will pursue a new foreign policy that finally learns from the mistakes of the past. We will stop looking to topple regimes and overthrow governments." The EU can help him bolster such a policy.



Trump is the most business-oriented U.S. president in modern history and is likely to favor securing contracts for American firms in Iran.



Trump's cabinet is poised to be the most anti-Iran, pro-regime change since the Iranian revolution.

Obama, Erdogan move ISIL terrorists from Iraq to Syria, to weaken Assad

By Eric Zuesse

12 August 2012 U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency warning that the Obama Administration's strategy might drive ISIS from Mosul in Iraq to Der Zor in Syria, is now being actually carried out as a plan instead of a warning — a plan to weaken and ultimately oust Syria's non-sectarian President Bashar al-Assad and replace him with a Sunni Sharia-law regime (one led by jihadists). The DIA warning had called this scenario an "unraveling," but Obama and the U.S. Congress are now actually choosing it, so as to set the incoming President Trump up with an opportunity to replace Assad's government by one that the Saudis and their U.S.-made weapons will control.

The DIA warning in 2012 had said: "C. IF THE SITUATION UNRAVELS THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A DECLARED OR UNDECLARED SALAFIST [fundamentalist Sunni] PRINCIPALITY IN EASTERN SYRIA (HASAKA AND DER ZOR), AND THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT THE SUPPORTING POWERS [U.S., Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey] TO THE OPPOSITION WANT, IN ORDER TO ISOLATE THE

[pro-Russian and pro-Iranian] SYRIAN REGIME."

Whoever wrote this assessment recognized that though the option would mean an "unraveling" of Syria, it's what the U.S. and its allies were actually seeking.

On September 17th, U.S. and UK jets bombed the compound of Syrian government troops who were fighting to oust jihadists from Deir Ezzor (or "Der Zor"), and killed 62 Syrian soldiers, with a hundred more injured, in that U.S.-led bombing attack. Der Zor was being softened-up for the coming U.S.-and-allied takeover.

The brilliant anonymous military blogger "Moon of Alabama" then became the first reporter to notice the possible connection that the DIA's warning might end up having to what is now the joint U.S.-Turkish-Iraqi operation against ISIS in Mosul; he headlined on 20 September 2016, "Deir Ezzor Attack Enables The 'Salafist Principality' As Foreseen In The 2012 DIA Analysis", and he wrote:

"Two recent attacks against the Syrian Arab Army in east-Syria point to a U.S. plan to eliminate all Syrian government presence east of Palmyra. This would enable the U.S. and its allies to create a 'Sunni entity' in east-Syria and west-Iraq which would be a permanent



thorn in side of Syria and its allies [Russia and Iran]. A 2012 analysis by the Defense Intelligence Agency said" — and he then quoted the above DIA excerpt.

Then on October 12th, he bannered "The 'Salafist Principality' — ISIS Paid Off To Leave Mosul And To Take Deir Ezzor?", and reported that the Obama Administration had just negotiated with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, and with Saudi Prince Salman (who is the decision-maker in Saudi military matters), to provide safe passage into the large Syrian city of Deir Es Zor, for the ISIS jihadists who were occupying the large city of Mosul in Iraq.

He cited also a tweet on the morning of October 12th, from the celebrated Syrian historian and journalist Nizar Nayouf, reporting: "Breaking news: Sources in #London say: #US&#Saudi_Arabia concluded an agreement to let #ISIS leave #Mosul secretly & safely to #Syria."

Furthermore, on October 15th, the Turkish government posted online a map showing the "'Sensitive' Operation Plan for Mosul" including six steps, one of which was "An escape corridor into Syria will be left for Daesh [ISIS] so they can vacate Mosul." Though the U.S. government wasn't public about this part of the plan — moving the jihadists "into Syria" instead of

killing the jihadists (as Obama always claimed to be his intention) — the Turkish government was.

Slightly beyond Der Zor is Palmyra — another Syrian city that the U.S.-Saudi alliance want to grab.

On December 11th, Russian Television headlined "4,000 ISIS fighters regroup, make new attempt to capture Palmyra", and reported that:

"Over 4,000 Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS/ISIL) terrorists, reinforced by tanks, have started an offensive to retake the key Syrian city of Palmyra after regrouping themselves. ... The terrorists have received considerable reinforcement, including heavy military hardware from the regions of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. ... The terrorists are receiving support from jihadists coming from Iraq. ... In October, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that terrorists 'could flee from Mosul and go to Syria.'"

That's precisely what is now happening.

So: the Obama Administration seems to be making considerable progress to set up the next U.S. President, Trump, with an "unraveling" situation in Syria, so as to enable Trump to continue Obama's war against Russia and all its allies (such as Syria).

Whether President Trump will continue Obama's policy isn't yet clear.



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Sinus headache or sign-us up for a migraine consultation

By Paul G. Mathew

As a headache specialist, the topic of sinus headache is a frequent point of discussion. Many patients deny that they have migraines, believing sinus problems are the cause of their headaches. Some of the more tech-savvy patients believe that they have both migraines and sinus headaches after consulting with "Dr. Google." The reality of the situation is that 86% or more of patients who suspect that they have sinus headaches in fact have migraines.

Why the confusion between sinus headaches and migraines?

It begins with the many symptoms that both migraines and sinus headaches share, which include pressure in the face, an association with barometric/seasonal weather changes, and autonomic nervous system dysfunction. The autonomic nervous system controls many of the involuntary functions in your body including heart rate, blood pressure, and sweating. In the case of migraines, autonomic dysfunction can cause eye redness, eyelid swelling/drooping, tearing, sinus congestion, and even a runny nose.

Response to treatment can also further drive patients to believe that they have sinus headaches rather than migraines. For example, a patient may have a headache involving a pressure sensation in the face, and calls their primary care physician thinking a sinus infection is causing the symptoms. The primary care physician then prescribes antibiotics and steroids to treat this assumed sinus infection. The patient feels better after taking these medications, and believes that the infection is cured. The reality of the situation is that steroids can be effective for the treatment of sinus issues and migraines. Even without steroids, antibiotics can be perceived as an effective treatment for two reasons. First, the patient truly believes he or she has an infection, so the antibiotic has a powerful placebo effect. The other reason is that with time, the migraine would have gone away anyway. Unfortunately, this cycle of antibiotics



if you suffer from frequent sinus headaches, there is a good chance that you are actually experiencing migraines.

with or without steroids for the treatment of a migraine masquerading as a sinus infection can go on periodically over years and even decades. Taking steroids can cause many problems including weight gain, hair loss, and bone weakness. Inappropriate use of antibiotics can contribute to the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Conversely, if a sinus headache responds to a migraine-specific treatment like sumatriptan, migraine is more likely the diagnosis than sinus headache.

Here's why you want to know whether you have migraines and not sinus headaches

An incorrect diagnosis of sinus headaches can also serve to skew a patient's family history. Migraine is a genetic disorder that is passed down through family members. Patients often deny that any of their family members have migraines, but when asked about sinus headaches, they will often respond, "Actually, my mother had sinus headaches." When questioned about the mother's sinus headache behavior, the same patients frequently respond, "She would lay down, and insist that the room be dark and quiet. She would also ask for a bucket to be placed by the head of the bed even though she

rarely ever threw up." Such responses tend to lead the physician and patient to the conclusion that migraines actually do run in the family, as sinus headaches are not typically accompanied by light sensitivity, sound sensitivity, and nausea. The same patients will also return for a follow-up appointment noting, "It turns out that my sister, cousin, and aunt all have migraines, which they thought were due to sinus problems." In a jocular way, I at times reply, "Discovering family members that suffer from migraines can be both unfortunate and comforting, but such discovery is not as devastating as routinely encountering a family member who regularly causes headaches, which I refer to as 'mother-in-law syndrome.'"

Three telltale signs it's a sinus headache and not a migraine

While I was lecturing on distinguishing sinus headache from migraine with some Harvard medical students, they came up with the phrase Mathew's Sinus Triad to encompass three features that are more suggestive of sinus headache than migraine. These are:

1. Thick, infectious looking mucous. A little clear drainage can be seen with a number of conditions, and is not necessarily indicative of a sinus infection.
2. Fever. It would be very unusual for migraine to present with fever, but fever is a primary symptom of a sinus infection.
3. Imaging. If an imaging study or evaluation with an endoscope looking up the nose shows a sinus problem, then the headaches are likely related to that — unless the headaches continue after the sinus problem is successfully treated.

In conclusion, if you suffer from frequent sinus headaches, there is a good chance that you are actually experiencing migraines. Making the correct diagnosis and formulating an appropriate treatment plan can reduce the frequency and intensity of headaches, as well as avoid unnecessary testing, visits to specialists, and taking medicines that are not actually treating the problem.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

Eat right

Eating right is important to staying at a healthy weight and keeping an energy balance, the balance between the calories in what you eat and drink, and calories you burn when moving.

The same amount of ENERGY IN (calories consumed) and ENERGY OUT (calories burned) over time = weight stays the same

More IN than OUT over time = weight gain

More OUT than IN over time = weight loss

The best way to make sure you have energy balance is to make better choices before you or your family sit down to eat. Make sure to:

Choose foods that are lower in fat and have fewer calories

Shop "smart" at the grocery store. Learn to read the Nutrition Facts Label on packaged foods. Choose healthy foods more often.

Use the go, slow, and whoa foods

and learn which foods are better for you.

Go foods are good for you; eat them just about anytime

Slow foods should be eaten in smaller amounts

Whoa foods should only be eaten rarely, or on special occasions

Show your family the go, slow, and whoa chart. Help them understand how to make good choices.

Review dietary guidelines



Look at some healthy eating plans. The USDA Food Patterns and the DASH Eating Plan can help you figure out how much of each food group (for example, fruits, vegetables, grains, meats) you should eat each day.

Cook smart

Read about some easy ways to cook foods that can help you make recipes healthier by lowering the calories. They'll be better for you and

will still taste great.

Eat smaller portions

In many cases, the amount of food that appears on your plate when eating out has nearly doubled over the past 20 years. And that has affected the way we look at and serve food at home, too. Learn more about what we call "portion distortion" and about the difference between a portion and a serving.

Make better choices when you eat out

Eat smaller portions and try to find items on the menu that are lower in fat and added sugar. And don't forget you can always ask for healthier options if you don't see them on the menu.

Know your calories

Remember that whether calories come from a soda, sweet potato, or steak, they're still calories. And calories do count for adults and children. Read more about calories from fat and sugar.

(Source: nhlbi.nih.gov)

When is it too cold to exercise outside?

By Laura Schwecherl

Almost everyone can work out safely in cold weather. In fact, scientists have suggested no temperature is too low to exercise outdoors as long as you suit up to minimize cold-weather risks. And though it's obvious that high-intensity workouts—like boot camp training or running—are better choices for staying warm than, say, yoga, your body will work to maintain a core temp of 98.6 degrees no matter what you're doing.

"I still remember working out in 9 degrees," says Anthony Burdi, co-founder of The Rise, a year-round outdoor workout group based in New York. "Afterward we said, 'I can't believe what we just did!' But it's not as bad as you think."

Exercising outdoors when the temperature drops below freezing does come with annoyances. But that runny nose is a good sign. The inside of the nose moistens to humidify the air we inhale, and the excess fluids creep out our nostrils. As for that icy air hitting your lungs? It's basically impossible for freezing air to damage your lungs. Try wearing a scarf and keep layers on your chest to feel warmer as you inhale.

There are a few groups of people who should be cautious before trekking outdoors for a mid-winter run. If you have asthma, the cold, dry air can trigger lung tightness and asthma attacks while exercising. And if you've been diagnosed with poor blood circulation or heart problems, it's best to check with your doc first before hitting the frozen pavement.

Your action plan

1. When the windchill is in the negatives, skip the outdoors.

"Extreme wind chill can make it unsafe—even if you dress warmly," says Lipi Roy, M.D., an internist at Massachusetts General Hospital and instructor at Harvard Medical School. As a general rule, if it's warmer than five degrees (F), your chances of frostbite are low, Roy says. But when the windchill brings temps down to below -15 degrees, exposed skin can get frostbitten in less than 30 minutes. Translation: The treadmill is calling your name.

2. Know the warning signs

The first sign of frostbite is numbness, followed by a tingling or burning sensation. If you suspect frostbite, head back inside and warm the area gradually by running it under lukewarm water or wrapping it in a warm blanket, Roy says.

While you can treat superficial frostbite at home, hypothermia is a true medical emergency. If anyone you're working out with has slurred speech, intense shivering, or a loss of coordination, get to a hospital stat.

3. Wear synthetic fabrics, fleece, and wool

"The first layer should be synthetic—something that will wick moisture away from your skin," Roy says. The second layer should be fleece or wool to help insulate, and the third should be a breathable, waterproof layer to help repel wind. Avoid cotton: It loses its insulating power when we become sweaty.

"The one thing I'm always really adamant about is having something dry to change into," says Chris Lopez, another member of The Rise. "When the workout is over, you don't want to be stuck in wet, sweaty clothes when it's 30 degrees outside."

4. Cover your head, fingers, and toes

Blood flow stays concentrated in our core, making our limbs more susceptible to the cold. In addition to wearing gloves, consider roomier shoes to accommodate thermal or wool socks. A large percentage of body heat is also lost through the head, so wearing a hat is a must. For extra protection, wear a face mask or scarf. And don't forget sunscreen on your exposed face—especially if you're skiing. "UV rays are just as strong in the winter," Roy says.

Lopez also suggests an unconventional idea: Wear latex gloves under your regular gloves. That way, if you're doing burpees or push-ups on any potentially wet or icy surface, your hands won't end up wet, even if your gloves do. Same goes for your feet. "Put a small plastic bag on each foot, then your socks, then your shoes," Lopez says. Admittedly it can look a little goofy.

5. Avoid the rain and wind

The body has a hard time managing its temperature when soaked; water draws heat away from the body 25 times faster than air because of its higher density and heat capacity. And freezing windchill can be dangerous (like we mentioned earlier). Not only can it quickly make the outdoors feel much colder than the thermometer reads, wind pushes air and moisture through our clothes and removes the layer of warm air that surrounds our body.

(Source: greatist.com)

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HERITAGE

Tehran exhibit to showcase lavish European, Indo-European rugs

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** — An exhibition of European and Indo-European handwoven rugs and carpets will open doors to the public at the Carpet Museum of Iran on December 18.

“Of the selected carpets, seven pieces are French-made, one is from the UK and three are of Indo-European origins,” Mehr news agency quoted Shokufeh Mesbahi, the secretary of the exhibit, as saying on Tuesday.



File photo shows a Louis XVI-style French Aubusson carpet made in circa 1920.

Sponsored by the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage in close collaboration with the Tourism National Iranian Council of Museums, the exhibit will be running until January 6, 2017.

The Carpet Museum of Iran is situated on North Kargar St. beside Laleh Park in central Tehran. It showcases variety of Persian carpets from all over the country, majority of which date from the 16th century onward.

Experts say modern weavers have inherited rich traditions from ancient nomads of Central and West Asia, who developed woolen carpets as a shield against sever weather conditions.

The oldest-known hand-knotted Oriental rug was excavated from the Altai Mountains of Central Asia near Pazryk in 1948.

Dating from the 4th century BC, the rug was found in a semi-frozen Scythian burial mound. It is currently on display at the Hermitage Museum in Leningrad, Russia.

China targets \$290 billion investment in tourism by 2020

China aims to invest 2 trillion yuan (\$290 billion) in tourism by 2020 by attracting more private investment into the industry, China's state planner said on Wednesday.

Saying as tourism infrastructure and public services were "in dire need to be improved", the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) said it would plan a batch of key tourism projects and "proactively guide" social capital - a term China uses for private investment - to invest in the industry.

The figures were in a joint release from the NDRC and the China National Tourism Administration, in response to guidelines from the state cabinet to reform the tourism industry.

China aims for the total sum of tourism services purchased in the country to reach 7 trillion yuan (\$1 trillion) by 2020, with tourism contributing more than 10 percent of annual economic growth, the statement said.

The tourism industry is expected to employ 50 million people by 2020, which will account for more than 10 percent of total employment, it said. (\$1 = 6.9046 Chinese yuan renminbi) *(Source: Reuters)*

ROUND THE GLOBE

Borobudur Temple in Indonesia

The Borobudur Temple is one of the greatest Buddhist monuments in the world, and was built in the 8th and 9th centuries CE during the reign of the Syailendra Dynasty.

Inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage list, the monument is located in the Kedu Valley, in the southern part of Central Java, at the center of the island of Java, Indonesia.



A view of the Buddhist Borobudur Temple in Indonesia

The main temple is a stupa built in three tiers around a hill which was a natural center: a pyramidal base with five concentric square terraces, the trunk of a cone with three circular platforms and, at the top, a monumental stupa.

The walls and balustrades are decorated with fine low reliefs, covering a total surface area of 2,520 m2. Around the circular platforms are 72 openwork stupas, each containing a statue of the Buddha.

The Temple should also be seen as an outstanding dynastic monument of the Syailendra Dynasty that ruled Java for around five centuries until the 10th century.

The temple was used as a Buddhist temple from its construction until sometime between the 10th and 15th centuries when it was abandoned. Since its re-discovery in the 19th century and restoration in the 20th century, it has been brought back into a Buddhist archaeological site.

(Source: UNESCO)

High-profile Tehran conference to convene leading intl. hoteliers, investors

TOURISM d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iran Hotel & Tourism Investment Conference, as a melting pot for tens of national and international officials, investors, owners, operators, and decision-makers, will be held at Tehran's Parsian Evin Hotel on 7-8 February 2017.

The London-based Bench Events, a hospitality investment conference organizer which partners with the British Hospitality Association, sponsors the conference under the auspices of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization.

CHTHO Director Zahra Ahmadipour, Deputy Economy Minister Mohammad Khazaei, Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Masoud Soltanifar, and Tourism Financial Group CEO Mehdi Jahangiri are amongst the Iranian speakers to the event, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

The international lecturers include Michael Johnston form the Regional Hotel Chain LLC; Christopher Hewett from TRI Hospitality Consulting; Christophe Landa-is from AccorHotels; Eric Callender from Ecosign Mountain Resort Planners Ltd; Christopher Hewett from TRI Hospitality Consulting, as well as Anita Mendiratta and Alla Peressolova both from the UN-WTO.

According to the Bench Events, only 13 out of the 96 hotels in Tehran are classified as four or five-star, although it is widely acknowledged that these would not meet internationally recognized standards for such classification.

Iran has launched extensive plans to bolster its tourism sector.

Under the 2025 Tourism Vision plan, Iran is expecting to increase the number of tourism arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million by 2025.

The 4.8 million tourists brought around \$6.5 billion in revenue to the country de-



An undated photo depicts tourists visit the magnificent ruins of Persepolis in southern Iran. Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list, Persepolis was once the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (550 –330 BC).

spite sanctions and limitations imposed by the EU, the UN and the U.S.

With the easing of sanctions following the landmark nuclear deal in 2015, it is expected that by 2025 the country will receive \$30 billion from tourism income.

In 2015, the CEO of French multinational hotel group AccorHotels, Sebastien Bazin, said “The Iranian market is a top priority for AccorHotels, as are Africa and India”.

“They have a lot of things in common:



Iran Hotel & Tourism Investment Conference
7-8 February 2017
Parsian Evin Hotel, Tehran, Iran

A poster for the Iran Hotel & Tourism Investment Conference.

civilization, architecture, demography, booming medium-sized enterprises, lack of supply, lack of infrastructure and lack of low-cost airlines”.

Iran’s tourism potential is enormous but more investment is needed

Iran is in the midst of a tourism boom, thanks to the efforts of the current moderate government under President Hassan Rouhani to rebuild ties with the West. There are big challenges ahead, but the decision by many countries to lift sanctions following the nuclear deal, has opened up investor potential like nowhere else.

Iran offers a diversity; blending Persian and Arab cultures, the list of attractions is long: from the great city of Isfahan, to the mountains of Damavand, the religious tourism site of Mashhad, and the island of Kish.

While the U.S. still has sanctions in place, hotel groups headquartered outside the USA have already started to move in. The French Accor group became the first in 2016. Others are following including the UAE's Rotana and Spain's Melia. It's expected that by 2018 Iran will have six different international brands.

In response, the country is trying to move fast to develop its infrastructure including increasing airport capacity at Tehran, Isfahan, Tabriz, Mashhad and Shiraz. Iranian airlines has purchased more aircraft as international airlines start to focus on the market, including British Airways, which recently launched daily flights to Tehran.



A view of the 19th-century Amir Chakhmaq mosque in Yazd

But there are weaknesses such as airport capacity is still limited and more investment is needed. The hotel market is massively under supplied often with poorly trained staff. And Internet infrastructure - especially on-line payment systems - is underdeveloped as a result of banking sanctions. Online sales are lagging, but picking up fast. The slow but gradual improvement in Iran's do-

mestic currency is also helping.

Turkey's ambassador to Tehran Riza Hakan Tekin reported that Turkey is fully prepared to share its expertise in tourism industry with Iran. “Turkey can also cooperate with Iran in order to share its experience in implementing tourism infrastructure projects, including building hotels,” added Tekin.

The ambassador referred to Yazd, Shiraz, and Isfahan as being among the top destinations for Turkish tourists. Yazd is one of the oldest cities in the world and that Turkish people and officials are well familiar with this ancient Iranian city, he added. Tourists from all over the world visit cities of Kerman, Yazd, Isfahan, and Shiraz where rich collections of historical sites and natural beauties of the country stand within or nearby.

Enough to compete against many regional destinations, notably Egypt, Dubai, Oman and Turkey, the latter of which has recently faced an increase in terrorism, Iran is considered to be a safe destination.

For investors things are not quite as easy. A reliable local partner - to navigate bureaucracy, business rivalry, and even corruption - is crucial. Without one, the task is impossible. *(Source: FTN News)*

World Bank lends Albania \$71 million for tourism infrastructure

The World Bank said on Tuesday it had given Albania a \$71 million loan to upgrade infrastructure in four southern towns to help attract foreign tourism but also urged local authorities to avoid unsustainable over-construction.

Ellen Goldstein, the World Bank's director for the Western Balkans, said infrastructure in the UNESCO heritage towns of Gjirokaster and Berat, the port of Sarande facing Greece's Corfu island, and the

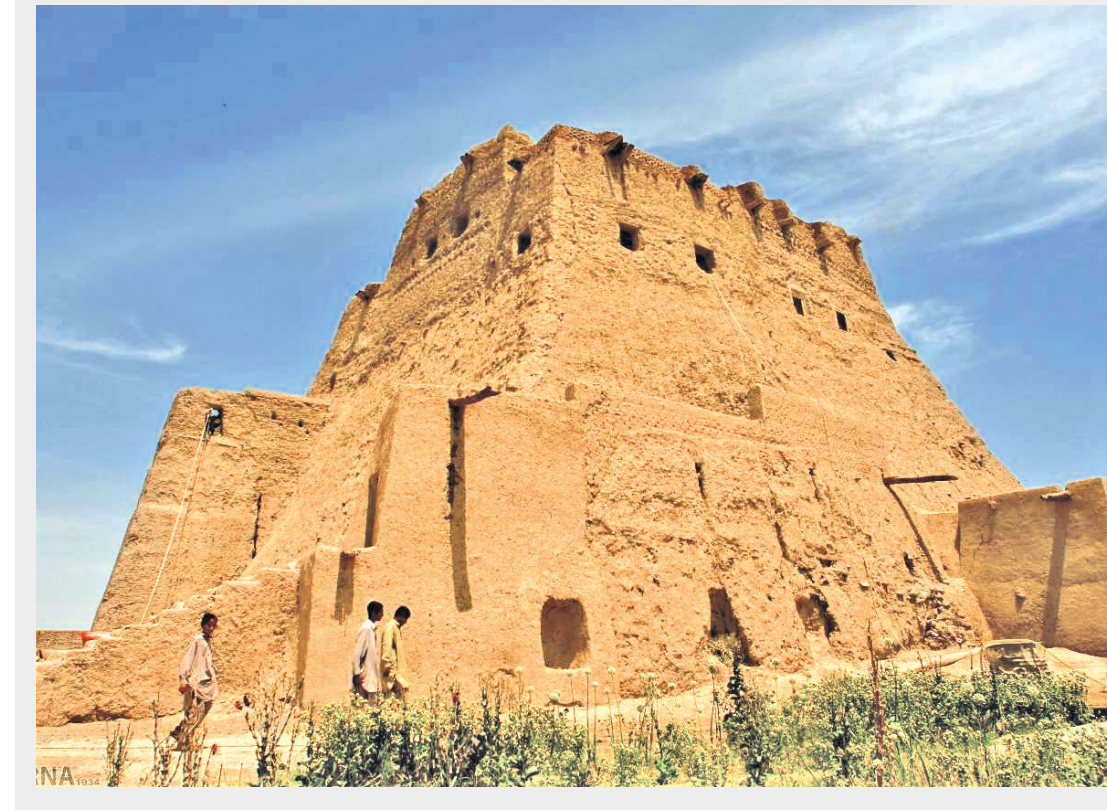
southeastern town of Permet would be upgraded.

“It aims to create tourism products, site management plans for the four cities and their surrounding cultural and natural heritage sites, and estab-

lishment of partnerships for tourism destination management,” Goldstein said at the signing ceremony in Tirana, capital of the impoverished Balkan country.

(Source: Reuters)

IN FOCUS IRNA/Ahmad Ali-Dergi



Historical Seb Castle stands tall in southeastern Iran

HERITAGE d e s k One of the tourist attractions in the south-eastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan.

Located in a village of the same name, the castle was extensively used during the Qajar era (1789–1925) as a borderline surveillance base. However, narratives say that its heyday dates back to the time of the Safavids (1501–1736).

Seb Castle is constructed of clay and mortar blend with loads of sticky plant seeds. In some parts wooden slabs cut from palm trees have been used to strengthen the overall layout, enabling it to withstand the natural disasters in particular mellow seismic vibrations.

The collective Sistan-Baluchestan Province -- Sistan in the north and Baluchestan in the south -- accounts for one of the driest regions of Iran with a slight increase in rainfall from east to west, and an obvious rise in humidity in the coastal regions.

In ancient times, the region was a crosswords of the Indus Valley and the Babylonian civilizations.

The picture shows three local youngsters hanging around the castle on April 28, 2016.

Nokian Tyres launch ground-breaking tire safety tech

Nokian Tyres together with tire and service chain Vianor launched SnapScan, a ground-breaking new tire monitoring service that measures tread depth quickly and efficiently using 3D scanning technology. The drive-over scanners are designed to be installed along drivers' everyday routes such as parking lots and service centers and do not require separate equipment to be installed on the vehicle.

"Too many people are unaware of the condition of their tires, and the threshold for replacing tires seems to be high. We want to use this new technology to raise drivers' awareness of the condition of their tires by making it as easy to access as possible," said Ville Nikkola, head of Vianor's Retail Business Area.

SnapScan is an entirely new tread depth measuring and safety tool for tires. The automated drive-over scanner reads the tires while a camera identifies the vehicle based on its registration number. When the scan is complete, the driver can opt to receive a personal tire report by text message or email free of charge, regardless of which manufacturer's tires are fitted to the car.

■ The technical solution

The technical solution was developed in collaboration with Finnish technology partners Futurice and Affecto. The entire service is enabled by unique 3D scanning technology patented by British Sigmavision.



Studies show that about 25 percent of tire related accidents occur because the tread depth is below the minimum level1. Driving with tires in good working condition allows drivers and other road-users to react safely and more quickly. Snap-

Skan takes the hassle out of tire maintenance, as the information is automatically sent to the vehicle owner electronically. This ensures drivers know when they should service or replace their tires before it's too late.

Studies show that about 25 percent of tire related accidents occur because the tread depth is below the minimum level1. Driving with tires in good working condition allows drivers and other road-users to react safely and more quickly.

Nokian Tyres aims to lead the charge in moving the tire industry forward by creating innovative, consumer-friendly services that take the stress out of tire care. The vision of SnapScan is to promote road safety with millions of people around the world in a quick hassle-free way.

■ Harnessing technology

"There is a big change ahead for our industry in the near future. Until now, the tire sector has lagged clearly behind other industries in terms of digitalization. It is high time to harness technology to serve motorists with regard to their tires. The sector needs a bold forerunner," said Nokian Tyres' President and CEO, Ari Lehtoranta. "It's our job to make our roads and environment safer.

Our company's roots stretch back to 1898, and we have been at the forefront since then, providing a range of products and services related to road-users' safety.

We launched the world's first winter tire and now we are launching the first service to report to motorists on tire safety directly by email or text message."

The first SnapScan scanning point will be taken into use along the access road to the Q-Park Iso Erottaja underground car park in Helsinki, Finland.

(Source: Consumer Electronics Net)

Grand Canyon-like craters on Mars could have been carved thanks to climate change

Like Earth, Mars has some deep canyons. Those on the Red Planet were carved out of its surface around 3.8 billion years ago. Scientists have debated about how they actually got there, and new research could hold the answer.

A new study from Penn State University published in the journal Earth and Planetary Science Letters suggests that Mars may have gone through its own version of (non-human-driven) climate change, with dramatic climate cycles triggered by a buildup of greenhouse gases.

These cycles may have caused extended warm periods on the planet, sometimes lasting up to 10 million years at a time. This would mean that enough water would have been produced for rivers to flow and wear away the ground, somewhat like the Colorado River did when it created the Grand Canyon.

Previous research has suggested that some of these warm periods may have been the result of an asteroid impact. If this was the case, however, the warm periods would have had much shorter durations, the researchers wrote in their paper. Plus, it's doubtful that enough water would have been produced to create craters of the size

they've observed, they added.

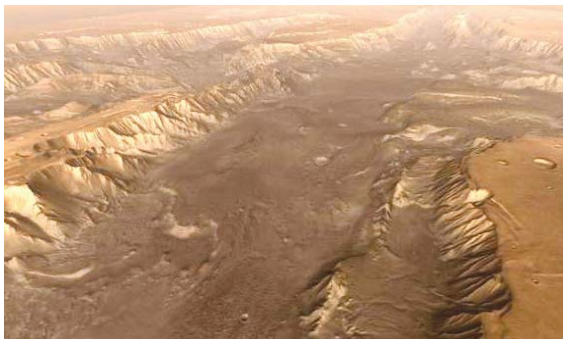
"In terms of water, we need millions of meters of rainfall, and (previous studies) can get hundreds of meters," Professor Jim Kasting, a geosciences professor at Penn State and coauthor of the study, said in a statement.

Rain usually removes some of these gases when it falls, but because Mars was cold in its early years, there was less rain, so this the process didn't keep up.

■ Habitable zone

"Mars is in this precarious position where it's at the outer edge of the habitable zone," said Natasha Batalha, a graduate student in astronomy and astrophysics at Penn State. "Because you are colder, you don't get the same deposition of carbon back into the planet's surface. Instead, you get this atmospheric buildup and your planet slowly starts to rise in temperature."

At least that's what the research suggests. Now, the scientists will have to find out whether enough carbon dioxide and hydrogen could have been produced on Mars. To answer that question, they will most likely look



for evidence of carbonate rocks deposited deep down in Mars' surface that would get produced from acidic rain produced by high amounts of atmospheric carbon dioxide.

"If the next Mars mission was able to dig down deeper, you might be able to uncover these different carbonates," Kasting said. "That would be a sort of smoking gun for the carbon dioxide."

(Source: Business Insider)

Antacid aerosol particles could cool the planet and repair ozone damage

Researchers from the Harvard John A. Paulson School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS) have identified an aerosol for solar geoengineering that may be able to cool the planet while simultaneously repairing ozone damage.

This would be a powerful mitigation against any global warming that would need to be combined with a mitigation for ocean acidification. Also, the world

would still need to work towards decarbonizing (getting rid of fossil fuel usage) energy production and transportation

"In solar geoengineering research, introducing sulfuric acid into the atmosphere has been the only idea that had any serious traction until now," said David Keith, the Gordon McKay Professor of Applied Physics at SEAS and professor of public policy at the Harvard Kennedy



School, the first author of the paper. "This research is a turning point and an important step in analyzing and reducing cer-

tain risks of solar geoengineering."

■ Solar geoengineering

This research fundamentally rethinks what kinds of particles should be used for solar geoengineering, said Frank Keutsch, the Stonington Professor of Engineering and Atmospheric Science at SEAS and professor of chemistry and chemical biology, a co-author of the paper.

(Source: nextbigfuture.com)

IMIDRO in Direct Talks with Four Japanese Giants

Iranian Mines & Mining Industries and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) is in direct talks with four large Japanese companies in the financial and economic field, Public Relations Department of the Organization reported.

Managing Director of IMIDRO Mehdi Karbasian pointed to the recent trip of Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif and his accompanying delegation to East Asia and reiterated: "In this trip, negotiations have been made with four large Japanese firms including "Mitsubishi", "Sumitomo", "Kubisi" and "Nippon" companies."

Elsewhere in his remarks, he said: "A historic contract, worth €10 billion, was inked between Iran and Japan in Feb. 2016 in the presence of Iranian and Japanese ministers of economy."

Turning to the negotiations with senior Chinese officials, he said: "New investment opportunities were raised for broadening and enhancing bilateral relationships."

He also pointed to the domestic issues and exports in the country and added: "With the logical measures taken in this regard, export of non-oil commodities exceeded non-oil imports volume, the

issue of which indicates considerable decline in imposts volume."

In the end, Managing Director of IMIDRO Mehdi Karbasian said: "In contemporary world of today, there is a tight competition for export of products. For example, Chinese government has levied incentives to exporters in mineral industries such as steel and other products in the past one and a half years. In some cases, China has accepted to pay at least 50% of transport cost to the destination country, the issue of which has caused considerable increase of competition of Chinese products."

ZAR Industrial and Research Group Chief Named Advisor to Industry Minister

In a decree, Chairman of the Board of Directors of ZAR Industrial and Research Group Morteza Soltani was appointed as advisor to the minister of industry for the promotion of export of non-oil commodities, Public Relations Department of the Group reported.

In this introduction ceremony, the Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Eng. Mohammad-Reza Ne'matzadeh

said: "Promotion of exports of non-oil products is considered as the most important factor for the economic development as well as promotion of status of the country in internal level."

He praised unflinching efforts of the chairman of Board of Directors of the Zar Industrial and Research Group and said: "As an exemplary exporter, industrious chief executive

of the Group has won honor for the Group and country every year and for this purpose, I appoint you as advisor to the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade."

It should be noted that this decree was issued and notified by the Minister of Industry to Morteza Soltani Chairman of the Board of Directors of Zar Macaron Company, Golam-Ali Soleymani Chair-

man of the Board of Directors of Kalleh Dair Products Company, Younes Jaleh Chairman of the Board of Directors of Shirin Asal Company, Mohammad-Reza Ansari chairman of the Board of Directors of Keyson Company and also Abdol-Reza Ya'ghoubzadeh Chairman of the Board of Directors of Pooyandegan-e Rah-e Sa'adat Company separately.

CVE-2016-7165 Privilege Escalation Flaw Affects Many Siemens Solutions

Siemens has released security updates and temporary fixes to address a privilege escalation vulnerability which affects several industrial products.

The flaw could be exploited by attackers to escalate their privileges if the flawed products are not installed under the default path.

Users with local access to the Windows system running on the same device as affected Siemens applications can escalate their privileges under certain conditions.

The products affected by this vulnerability are widely adopted by many organizations, the impact of its exploitation depends on each specific implementation.

The flaw affects several products, including Siemens SCADA systems, distributed control systems (DCS). It also affects engineering tools and simulators such as SIMATIC, SINEMA, TeleControl, SOFTNET, SIMIT, Security Configuration Tool (SCT) and Primary Setup Tool (PST) products.

Spending hours on phones is just as bad as TV for children's health, say Harvard academics

Hours spent on a smartphone are just as bad for children's health as being glued to the television, a Harvard study suggests.

Those who spend more than five hours a day on gadgets see their chance of obesity rise by 43 per cent, the study shows.

Such children were also twice as likely to consume sugary drinks, get too little exercise and suffer sleep deprivation. The study tracked 25,000 youngsters aged 14 to 18.

Lead researcher Dr. Erica Kenney said: "Using smartphones, tablets, computers, and videogames is associated with several obesity risk factors.

"This study would suggest that limiting children's and adolescents' engagement with other screen devices may be as important for health as limiting television time."

The study is published in the Journal of Pediatrics. Research suggests that today's teenagers spend far more time on handheld devices than watching television.

Ofcom figures show those aged between five and 15 spend 15 hours a week online compared with around 13 and a half hours watching a TV set.

Latest figures show record levels of obesity, with one in three obese or overweight by the end of primary school.

Tam Fry, from the National Obesity Forum, said smartphones should be "off limits" before breakfast and after dinner.

"Tablets are nothing but personal TV's and rules governing screentime should be as stringent as for TV," he said.

"Daytime use should be reasonable but sparing. And from bedtime to breakfast they should be off limits," he said, urging parents to put up with more "tears and tantrums" for the good of their child's health.

(Source: The Telegraph)

Scientists discover an exoplanet with clouds of jewels

For the first time ever, scientists have observed weather patterns on a gas giant outside of our Solar System, a team of British researchers announced Monday.

Researchers at the University of Warwick observed cloud formation and weather patterns on the massive exoplanet HAT-P-7b from 1,040 light-years away, thanks to data from NASA's planet-hunting Kepler space telescope. And what they found startled them.

Scientists knew from previous studies that HAT-P-7b, which is 40 percent larger than Jupiter and 500 times more massive than the Earth, moves in a tight orbit around its star, completing a full revolution in just 2.2 days. Because of that proximity, the exoplanet is tidally locked, with one side of the permanently facing the star, much like Earth's moon is tidally locked to Earth.

The researchers had assumed that extreme temperatures and constant daylight on the side constantly baking in the light of its star, which is twice the size of our sun, would prevent cloud formation, explained David Armstrong, lead author of the study, in a press release.

"We expect clouds to form on the cold night side of the planet, but they would evaporate quickly on the hot dayside," said Dr. Armstrong.

Instead, they determined that clouds existed on both sides of the planet, suggesting complex wind and weather patterns. What's more, the researchers speculate that the clouds forming on HAT-P-7b might be made of the same material that comprises rubies and sapphires, according to the paper, published Monday in the journal Nature Astronomy. The unusual atmospheric phenomenon is a historic first in the field of exoplanetary studies.

As they looked through the data gathered by Kepler between between 2009 and 2013, they discovered that the brightest spot on the exoplanet's surface kept shifting positions, indicating that clouds were moving across its atmosphere.

(Source: The CSM)

Right after an asteroid killed the dinosaurs, life returned to the scene of the crime

Some 66 million years ago, a giant space rock smashed into the Gulf of Mexico and brought the age of the dinosaurs — along with 75 percent of all organisms on Earth — to an abrupt and fiery end. Tsunamis roiled the oceans, superhot shrapnel from the impact rained down from the skies, dust swirled into the atmosphere and blocked the sun, and minerals from the asteroid turned the surrounding water toxic.

Scientists drilling into the site where the asteroid struck found evidence of microscopic organisms in the layers of rock that were deposited in the days, months and years after the impact. Within the geological blink of an eye of one of the worst mass extinctions in Earth's history, two hardy "disaster species," called Braarudosphaera and Thoracosphaera, had returned to the scene of the crime.

"It's a sign of life in the surface ocean right after the mass extinction," said Timothy Bralower, a paleoceanographer at Pennsylvania State University. "It certainly wasn't sterile."

The finding, presented Monday at the American Geophysical Union fall meeting, is the latest result from the Chicxulub drilling program — an effort to drill more than 2,000 feet into Chicxulub crater, which was left behind when the asteroid hit.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Iran’s first membrane bioreactor comes on stream

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The first membrane bioreactor **d e s k** in Iran was inaugurated at University of Tehran on Wednesday, IRNA news agency reported.

Membrane bioreactor for wastewater treatment are used to treat biologically active wastewater feeds from municipal or industrial sources. They offer several operational and economic advantages compared to conventional wastewater treatment plants.



Mohammad-Reza Mehrnia, a member of the university's chemistry engineering faculty and the project manager, explained that it took a year to complete the project and now the plant operates at capacity of 5 cubic meters of water per day. This is the first time that a membrane bioreactor wastewater treatment plants is built in Iran and it can pave the way for the future growth in this field, Mehrnia said, adding, the plant is aiming at recycling the wastewater by removing 99 percent of the common pollutants.

"Considering the practical experience we gained from building this plant we are now prepared to commercialize the project," he added.

Speaking on the financial aspects of the project Mehrnia highlighted MBR plants may cost 10 to 20 percent more expensive than the technologies being utilized now.

"Using such plants would result in better water management and less environmental damages," he suggested.

Compactness and small layout size of the plant, simple management of the plant as a result of high degree of automation, complete bacteria removal, lower operation costs than classical biological plant, possibility of reuse of treated wastewater for irrigation purposes or as process water, no odors emission or noise, fast construction because of relatively small size of the plant, reduced quantity of chemicals needed for phosphorus reduction, and last but not least being considered as green technology and leaving smaller footprint are of the few advantages of such plants.

LEARN ENGLISH

Learning Fire Safety

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

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

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

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

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

(Source: eslpod.com)

- **Words & phrases**
 - fire safety:** set of practices intended to reduce the destruction caused by fire
 - turn down:** to refuse an offer, request, or invitation
 - rash:** a large number of unpleasant events, changes etc. within a short time
 - comply:** to do what you have to do or are asked to do
 - fire code:** set of rules prescribing minimum requirements to prevent fire and explosion hazards arising from storage, handling, or use of dangerous materials, or from other specific hazardous conditions
 - smoke alarm:** a piece of electronic equipment which warns you when there is smoke or fire in a building; smoke detector
 - fire escape:** metal stairs or a metal ladder on the outside of a tall building, that people can use to escape if there is a fire
 - fire extinguisher:** a metal container with water or chemicals in it, used for stopping small fires
 - flammable:** something that is flammable burns easily
 - overload:** to put too much electricity through an electrical system or piece of equipment
 - electrical outlet:** receptacle providing a place in a wiring system where current can be taken to run electrical devices
 - fire drill:** an occasion when people pretend that a building is burning and practice leaving it, so that they learn what to do if there is a real fire
 - stop, drop, and roll:** a simple fire safety technique taught to children, emergency services personnel and industrial workers as a component of health and safety training



Be kind to me!

Health minister laments unfair criticism of healthcare reform plan

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — **d e s k** Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi has voiced regret and disappointment about unfair criticism of the national healthcare reform plan.

In a recent report, the minister has given an account of his latest trip to the underprivileged areas of the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan, highlighting the positive and successful outcomes of implementing the healthcare reform plan in these districts.

"I believe those who are heavily biased towards healthcare reform plan don't even know anything

about where these poor villages are or how much hardship the citizens must have endured before conducting the healthcare reform plan," he explained.

Qazizadeh-Hashemi described that over his four-day trip he had met people who were satisfied with the program for the past three years of its implementation due to better healthcare services access, less out-of-pocket money and more job opportunities created in heath sector.

"However, we still have to try harder to get desirable results," he noted.

According to the chancellor of Iranshahr University of Medical

Sciences, Iraj Zareban, currently there are 294 projects pertaining to health sector underway in the area and there are doctors in all healthcare centers, the minister pointed, additionally the number of the doctors has almost jumped by 5 folds increasing to 117. Moreover, 61 specialists are offering healthcare services to the citizens.

Iran's healthcare reform plan is a scheme aiming at decreasing the out-of-pocket expenses for the patients, promoting natural birth, supporting underprivileged patients suffering from rare or incurable diseases, etc. which is being administered in Iran currently.



U.S. Energy Dept. balks at Trump request for names on climate change

The U.S. Energy Department said on Tuesday it will not comply with a request from President-elect Donald Trump's Energy Department transition team for the names of people who have worked on climate change and the professional society memberships of lab workers.

The response from the Energy Department could signal a rocky transition for the president-elect's energy team and potential friction between the new leadership and the staffers who remain in place.

The memo sent to the Energy Department on Tuesday and reviewed by Reuters last week contains 74 questions including a request for a list of all department employees and contractors who attended the annual global climate talks hosted by the United Nations within the last five years.

Energy Department spokesman Eben Burnham-Snyder said Tuesday the department will not comply.



"Our career workforce, including our contractors and employees at our labs, comprise the backbone of (the Energy Department) and the important work our department does to benefit the American people,"


Burnham-Snyder said.

"We are going to respect the professional and scientific integrity and independence of our employees at our labs and across our department," he added. "We will be forthcoming with all publicly available information with the transition team. We will not be providing any individual names to the transition team."

He added that the request "left many in our workforce unsettled."

Reuters reported late Monday that former Texas Governor Rick Perry is expected to be named by Trump to run the Energy Department. The agency employs more than 90,000 people working on nuclear weapons maintenance and research labs, nuclear energy, advanced renewable energy, batteries and climate science.

(Source: Reuters)

IN FOCUS  **IRNA/** Reza Qaderi



A group of people put on a public performance on Tuesday in Shiraz, Fars province, to motivate a change in attitude and road use behavior.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

‘Clean caves day’ added to Iran’s environmental calendar

Iran has registered September 23 as the clean caves day on its national environmental calendar.

"With the purpose of raising public awareness about the value of caves and creating a culture of protecting these ecosystems we have decided to mark September 23 as the national clean caves day," said Asghar Mobaraki, an official with the Department of Environment.

"Caves are not only great historical heritage to us but are natural habitat to species endemic to these ecosystems and some wild animals' lives such as bats, bears and leopards depend on them," he added.

ENGLISH PROVERB

Snug as a bug in a rug

- **Explanation:** wrapped up tight, warm, and comfortable (often used when addressing a child)
- **For example:** The bedroom in Aunt Jane's house was cold, but after she wrapped me up in four or five quilts and put a stocking cap on my head, I was snug as a bug in a rug and ready to go to sleep.

PHRASAL VERB

Brush up (on) something

- **Meaning:** to practice and improve your skills or your knowledge of something that you learned in the past
- **For example:** I must brush up on my French before I go to Paris.

ENGLISH IDIOM

In the balance

- **Explanation:** if something is in the balance, the situation is uncertain and it is not clear what is going to happen
- **For example:** The future of the company is in the balance while the takeover bid is being examined.

Ayatollah Khamenei: Indonesia is the pride of Islamic world

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader d e s k of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told President Joko Widodo on Wednesday that Iran has a “brotherly” view toward Indonesia.

The Leader also said, “The Islamic Republic of Iran views the progress and dignity of Indonesia, as a Muslim and populous country, as the pride of the Islamic Ummah.”

The Leader also said the two countries of Iran and Indonesia have great potential for commercial, economic, political and cultural ties.

“We believe that Islamic nations, contrary to the wishes of enemies,

should buttress each other and avoid differences,” Ayatollah Khamenei noted.

The Leader went on to say that the level of economic and trade ties between Iran and Indonesia is not commensurate to the great and different capacities of the two nations, suggesting that the value of trade ties should reach “20 billion dollars” in a certain period of time.

The Leader also said the conflicts in the Middle East region have been fueled by outside forces that have “evil goals.”

The Leader suggests that the value of trade ties between Iran and Indonesia should reach “20 billion dollars” in a certain period of time.

Ayatollah Khamenei also lauded the Indonesian government for its stance on the Palestinian issue.

Many of these crises that the region is facing were created with the aim of forcing the Palestinian issue into oblivion, he said, adding that the Palestinian cause must not be neglected.

“Today, Indonesia and the Islamic Republic share similar stances on various international issues,” the Leader remarked.

Pointing to the recent earthquake in

Indonesia, Ayatollah Khamenei asked for Allah’s mercy and forgiveness for the souls of the deceased and expressed sympathy with their families.

Widodo, for his part, said that the main purpose of his visit to Iran is to expand economic relations, especially in the field of energy.

“We had constructive meetings with Iran’s government and we agreed to develop cooperation in the field of gas and refinery,” Widodo stated.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Widodo emphasized that Indonesia is committed to the Palestinian cause, saying, “We are serious and active in supporting the rights of Palestinian people.”

Trump chooses congressman, former SEAL Zinke as interior secretary

Meantime, Trump has chosen first-term Republican U.S. Representative Ryan Zinke of Montana, a former Navy SEAL commander, as his interior secretary, a senior transition official said on Tuesday.

Zinke, 55, will be nominated to head the Interior Department, which employs more than 70,000 people across the United States and overseas more than 20 percent of federal land, including national parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite.

Zinke’s choice was something of a surprise since some Republican officials wanted him to challenge Democratic U.S. Senator Jon Tester of Montana in the 2018 elections.

Zinke emerged after Trump had toyed with the idea of nominating U.S. Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington state for the position.

He is a proponent of keeping public lands under federal ownership, putting him at odds with some

in his Republican Party who are more favorable to privatization or placing them under the control of states.

It remains unclear where Zinke would stand on opening up more federal lands to increased drilling and mining, something Trump promised he would do as president.

Trump’s official energy platform calls for opening “onshore and offshore leasing on federal lands, eliminate moratorium on coal leasing, and open shale energy deposits.”

A Trump aide told Reuters last week that McMorris Rodgers had been picked for the post. She had met Trump at his golf resort in Bedminster, New Jersey, shortly after the president-elect began his Cabinet search.

On Tuesday, a source close to the congresswoman said she had never been offered the job.

Zinke had been an early Trump supporter, backing

the New York businessman for president in May. His nomination must now be confirmed by the Republican-controlled Senate.

“Congressman Zinke is a strong advocate for American energy independence, and he supports an all-encompassing energy policy that includes renewables, fossil fuels and alternative energy,” Trump spokesman Jason Miller said before a meeting on Monday between Zinke and Trump at Trump Tower in New York.

Zinke, a member of the House of Representatives subcommittee on natural resources, has voted for legislation that would weaken environmental safeguards on public land.

But, unlike other candidates who were on the short list for the interior secretary job, Zinke opposes the transfer of public lands to the states, a position that echoes Trump’s.

Authorities in India’s Rayagada extract money in the name of the poor: Narges Ashtari

I→ The key member of ASSIST, a husband and wife, were sent to jail for 3 months because of that but still to this day they occupy my first home and the police are not investigating this matter. In their minds, ASSIST thought that once I built the homes, they could somehow get rid of me and then sell them to make money... both of these properties are very expensive and both of them together come to a total of around 80 to 88 thousand dollars. So as you can imagine in a place so poor as Rayagada district, this amount of money is huge and these people would go to any length for money, even if it means killing someone. They harassed me, they harassed the children, they threatened me, and now, they have instigated this current case against me. They don’t want me to talk about any of this and it is not just them, there are many other regional NGOs that are scamming people on a daily basis. The entire district and the NGOs here just wanted to silence me, and now that I have been sentenced, they seem to be getting what they wanted. It is absolutely an injustice to me.

■ Could you please walk us through the day when you had arranged an excursion for your blind children and orphan boys two years ago? Fill us in on the details please.

A. On November 3, 2014, I took my visually impaired children and my orphan boys to a picnic in Rayagada, a tourist destination where a lot of people go every day for picnics. During this picnic two of my staff members, husband and wife, had also brought with them their own two children and it was during this picnic that they alleged that their older son disappeared. Obviously we all tried to search for him, yet we couldn’t find him. So the parents went to the police station and I returned home with my own children. At the police station, they gave a statement to the police officer that their son was missing and they requested the police to search for him. And that was it.

It was only 33 days after, on December 6, 2014, that they were approached by ASSIST and were told to try to get money from me and that if I didn’t pay, they would help them file a case against me. They approached me many times with these threats, but I never paid a single penny to anyone.

So they went to the police station and changed their story. They said that I had murdered their son. They were alleging that I had taken their son to a river, thrown him in and watched him drown. Later on, they changed their story again and accused me of manslaughter, because they said I had chosen an unsafe picnic area, blaming me for the death of their son. Their story has constantly changed! Manslaughter due to negligence makes absolutely no sense, because firstly, the boy was not part of my foundation, secondly there’s been no body found and finally, the parents were present at this picnic! They should have been taking care of him, not anyone else. I told the police from the very beginning that they were trying to extort money from me but instead of helping me, they were asking me for bribes too! So from the beginning it’s been absolutely ridiculous and corrupt.

Accusing me of manslaughter due to negligence makes absolutely no sense, because firstly, the boy was not part of my foundation, secondly there’s been no body found and finally, the parents were present at this picnic!



In the case of the missing child, from the very beginning the motive was money and still to this day, it remains the same.

■ Do you believe police did enough investigation to find the missing boy whose disappearance has raised many doubts to this day as his body has yet to be found?

A. Absolutely not. When the child was pronounced missing I had called the police to come and investigate. Two officers showed up an hour and a half later and they did not do a search at all. From that day onwards there has been no proper investigation whatsoever. I have not even been questioned; nobody has ever asked me what happened. From the very beginning the motive was money and still to this day, it remains the same.

■ Just like you, your Indian assistant, Raju Gupta, also was charged of negligence on his part too for the incident, yet he walked away from any charges. Why?

A. It’s very clear! That’s just another clear indication that this was just simply a revenge attack on me, an attempt to extort money from me. My colleague Raju Gupta doesn’t have thousands of Rupees to pay in bribes, in their eyes, I do.

■ You said you have not received a fair trial at the local court of Rayagada. Why do you think the judiciary system in that village has failed you?

A. They have absolutely failed me. It is a tiny town and everybody is somehow connected there. Everybody profits and benefits from poverty in Rayagada; so if you start to talk about the corruption, and if you start to expose the people who are meant to be helping the poor, they all suddenly turn on you, because you will affect their income so to speak. Every single person working in this district profits from this; it is like a business for them. I was not able to speak properly in my court hearing and I was told to answer very short answers or yes/no. Even the judge in my court case cried when the mother of the child was talking! That’s how unprofessional and completely biased the trial was. I didn’t get a fair trial and I don’t expect to get a fair appeal in the next court either because it is in the same town with same people.

■ Describe the attitude of the residents of Rayagada towards you these days.

A. I don’t blame the residents of Rayagada. They have kept their distance from me and again I don’t blame them for that. Obviously, when there is local government, when the police chief and the mayor and these powerful people turn against you, then I don’t expect the local people, the poor people, to go against the authority. I don’t blame them for being silent because obviously they’re scared. If I am a foreigner and I am also scared of these people I can only imagine what the innocent,

uneducated local people are feeling. Everyone is afraid to help me and the person who provided me with bail has been threatened and scared as well. It is impossible for anyone in this district to reach out and support me without also being framed and silenced.

■ Do you fear for your life?

A. I Absolutely do. Many times people have tried to harm me. Many times they followed me on the highway trying to crash into my car. In one instance, in the middle of the night, there were police officers outside my home trying to frighten me. There are so many of these incidents and I have even reported this to police officers in different districts but they haven’t intervened or tried to help me. There was an order from the Supreme Court of India which allowed me to get an exit permit and leave India and also to get police protection, but they still do not provide me with this! They are trying to do anything to harm me.

■ What is your message for the judiciary system of Rayagada or the people of that village?

A. My message to the judiciary system is very different from the message I have for the people of Rayagada. I do not blame the people of Rayagada. The system in that area is flawed; those governing that area are corrupt. The people are not at fault. They cannot turn against the people governing this area.

My message to the judiciary system is that they have failed me and most likely many other people who weren’t able to defend themselves. If they are able to do this to me then just imagine what they can do to people here who don’t have a voice to speak up against it. I have a connection to the outside world but many people here don’t; I feel really sorry for them. The state of Odisha needs to wake up and realize that nobody should be above the law and the law should be equal for everybody, this is not what is happening in one of their districts, Rayagada district.

■ Many people across the world have raised concern over your health and safety and they want to know what they can do for your freedom.

A. Obviously, my physical and emotional wellbeing is not good at all. I think anybody in my shoes would feel the same. It’s definitely a scary situation. Even now that I am 100% protected in the Iranian consulate, I’m still scared because I don’t know what will happen in my appeal. I face a jail term for one year in the same town where I exposed their corruption!

My future and safety is all in the hands of the government of India. I don’t know why they are so quiet, why they are not intervening in this case. I demand a fair investigation. I’m not demanding an acquittal or anything else. I’m simply demanding a fair trial. I want them to open up my case and realize that I’ve been framed. I ask the people of Iran to please try to get in contact with Mrs. Sushma Swaraj who is the minister of external affairs [of India] and our Mr. Zarif to ask them to fight for me because I cannot fight alone anymore. I am afraid and need help. I want justice.

There was an order from the Supreme Court of India which allowed me to get an exit permit and leave India and also to get police protection, but they still do not provide me with this! They are trying to do anything to harm me.

Assad: West is telling Russia we went too far in defeating terrorists

I→ Just recently, six western nations asked Russia and Iran again to put pressure on you, asking for a ceasefire in Aleppo. At the time when your army was progressing, they were asking for a ceasefire. Assad: It’s always important in politics to read between the lines, not to be literal. It doesn’t matter what they ask. The translation of their statement is for Russia [to] “please, stop the advancement of the Syrian Army against the terrorists.” That is the meaning of their statement, forget about the rest: “You went too far in defeating the terrorists, that shouldn’t happen. You should tell the Syrians to stop this. We have to keep the terrorists and to save them.”



(Source: RT)

Netanyahu’s visit to Baku doomed to fail

I→ resolutions, member states have been prohibited from having ties with Israel and taking measures that could lead to the end of Israel’s isolation. Muslim people of Azerbaijan, who hate the occupying regime, will be naturally unhappy because of this action of their government and will criticize the country’s authorities for it. It is shocking to see a country that has suffered from occupation, to host an occupying and criminal regime. Azerbaijan is aware of the consequences of occupation, and for years has suffered from the occupation of its territories which led to displacement of its citizens. How can this country overlook the occupation of the Palestinian territory and the displacement of Muslim people, and stand alongside the occupiers of Quds?

3. Israel’s loud speakers have announced that ties between Baku and Tel Aviv would lead to a strategic relationship. But the reality is that no Muslim country can have a strategic relationship with Israel, because this regime is the biggest threat to the security of the Islamic world. It has occupied the first Qibla of Muslims, and commits new crimes against Muslims on a daily basis. So, ties between Baku and Tel Aviv would never lead to a strategic relationship. In addition, having a strategic relationship means acknowledging the legitimacy of the occupation, and Azerbaijan, which considers itself as an opponent of the occupation of the Islamic territories, cannot be a strategic partner to Israel.

4. Last but not least, Netanyahu’s trip is doomed to fail and it only provides news stories for Israeli media for a short time with the whim of ending isolation. This regime is so hated across the world as well as among Muslims that it cannot end its isolation and earn respect by one or two trips to Muslim countries. Disrupting Tehran-Baku relations in this trip would also fail because ties between the two countries are solid and the officials of Iran and Azerbaijan are clever enough to prevent Israel from hurting their relations. Azerbaijan’s government has become aware of the Zionists’ dishonesty in recent years and it should not allow Tel Aviv to exploit its relations with Baku.

Even when the battle is over, the Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon can never return to Aleppo

6→ Nouriman, from Douma on the outskirts of Damascus, said she saw her house bombed in front of her eyes. She managed to salvage her cooking pots from the wreckage of her kitchen. The 46-year-old then risked her life to go back to rescue her nephews, who had been orphaned. Her son-in-law had been a photographer, and her brothers also active in the revolution.

“I could only flash my face at them,” she told me from her sitting room in Reyhanli, on the Syrian-Turkish border, describing how she travelled with the rebels in convoys and then by bus through Syrian government checkpoints, terrified she would be recognized and arrested.

Others fled with their children after defecting from the army. Mustafa Hilaq left Damascus with his children for rebel held areas and now looks forward to taking his son to school and playing badminton with him in Turkey. Radwan, 24, fled after his friend was arrested for helping internally displaced people under government controlled Aleppo – he knew he was next. He has settled and opened a computer repair shop on the Turkish border – the calm where he sees a therapist to deal with his severe anxiety.

■ The long term consequences

The long term consequences of integrating 2.7 million refugees in Turkey are dire, and expensive – the seemingly enormous €3bn (£2.5bn) promised by the EU pales in comparison to the near €20bn Turkey plans to spend annually in the coming three years on providing vital assistance.

But integrating a seriously traumatized population goes far beyond basic care. The vast majority have some sort of post-traumatic stress disorder; others have lost legs or eyes, need physiotherapy or complex healthcare to treat cancer, epilepsy or diabetes.

NGOs active in the area, such as the International Medical Corps – who are supported by the European Union Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (Echo) – are vital to help provide for these long-term and endemic needs.

Refugees in Turkey have long known that, should Assad prevail, they cannot go home.

Winning Aleppo may be lauded as a victory for Assad. But make no mistake, this bloody war is far from over.

(Source: Independent)

Jose Mourinho vs. Pep Guardiola: United and City have identical records

By Arindam Rej and Jonathan Smith

Both Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola and Manchester United's Jose Mourinho have taken charge of 25 games so far this season: with exactly the same results.

The managers have identical records (W14 D6 L5) though there has been a bit of a difference in the way the pair have been treated in the media. After Guardiola won his first 10, the press pack have taken more time to criticise the former Barcelona man, whereas Mourinho's temper tantrums at Old Trafford have drawn more fire -- especially as his form since winning the 2014-15 title with Chelsea continues to crumble.



Here's a quick look at how the pair have come to their respective records from our correspondents Arindam Rej (United) and Jonathan Smith (City).

AR: Jose Mourinho swept into Manchester United like a breath of fresh air and began by rattling off four wins in a row, starting with success in the Community Shield, in a faultless August.

The bubble was burst emphatically, though, with three defeats in succession. Manchester City delivered the first blow, highlighting that Mourinho's men might not be the force many were hoping them to be.

In the wake of that, the United manager kept chopping and changing his players and results were inconsistent. Stories started emerging about dressing room unrest -- and one of his summer signings Henrikh Mkhitaryan was first ruled out for being unfit, then accused of not having adapted well enough to the Premier League. Another summer signing, world-record recruit Paul Pogba, made a slow start.

There were signs of recovery when United battled to a 0-0 draw at Liverpool, despite the accusations of negativity, and a 4-1 win over Fenerbahce in the Europa League -- leading Mourinho to start hitting back at "Einsteins" who had been questioning them.

Mourinho, though, was about to receive the biggest humiliation of his time in charge: thrashed 4-0 at his former club Chelsea. At that stage, United had won eight, drawn two and lost four.

The strain on Mourinho was visible in games that followed at Old Trafford and he was sent off in two out of three of them, resulting in touchline bans. His frustration came as United developed a habit of being dominant but drawing games they perhaps should have won.

With Guardiola's City wobbling, Mourinho managed to draw level in his overall track record -- albeit with the help of playing in the Europa League -- by guiding United to successive wins against Zorya Luhansk and Tottenham Hotspur.

JS: Pep Guardiola's record this season can be broken into two distinct parts -- the first of sheer perfection, the second a mix of missed opportunities, individual errors and the occasional unexpected mess.

It seems a long time ago that Guardiola hit the ground running with an unblemished run of 10 victories from his first 10 games. Everything that the Manchester City boss tried, worked. Aleksandar Kolarov switched from left-back to centre half and was a revelation, Raheem Sterling moved to right wing and rediscovered his brilliant form that had persuaded City to pay £49m for him 12 months previously and every other player in the side improved significantly on their performances under previous manager Manuel Pellegrini.

On that run, they overcame a notoriously difficult trip to Stoke City and played a breathtaking 40 minutes at Old Trafford on their way to beating United in the Manchester derby and seemed odds-on to win the title at a canter.

The perfect run surprisingly ended at Celtic in the Champions League when Brendan Rodgers' side matched City's high energy and tempo and stunned them with a thrilling 3-3 draw.

It was a theme that Tottenham picked up on four days later to give City their first defeat and they have had problems ever since. New signing John Stones and Kolarov suddenly looked vulnerable; City continued to leak goals and they badly miss Vincent Kompany, who hasn't managed to play a full game all season.

Goalkeeper Claudio Bravo was brought in for his ball-playing skills, which he excelled at, but his shot-stopping was poor and City have conceded 27 goals from their 25 fixtures. With just five clean sheets all season, they've needed to score at least twice and his strikers haven't been firing. Aguero has 16 goals but it should be more: four games missed through suspension (with three more to come) and three penalty misses have contributed to that.

(Source: ESPN)

Brussels excited at EURO 2020 role

Brussels has unveiled its UEFA EURO 2020 host city logo -- and is relishing its pioneering status as one of 13 cities that will stage a historic tournament in four years' time.

Belgium's love for football and Brussels's proud status as a major centre at the hub of Europe came to the fore when the city launched its UEFA EURO 2020 host city logo on Wednesday.

The impressive Brussels City Hall welcomed guests from UEFA, the Royal Belgian Football Association (RBSFA/KBVB) and the Brussels authorities to celebrate another major step on the road to a unique final tournament that will be hosted by 13 European cities in four years' time.

Brussels is the tenth city so far to unveil its UEFA EURO 2020 host city logo. Each of the 13 logos features a single iconic bridge from the city in question -- underlining the tournament's aim of building bridges between nations and fans.

The Brussels logo showcases the Pont Sobieski, an Art Nouveau bridge near the world-famous Atomium building constructed for the Universal Exhibition in 1958.

Belgium's capital will stage three group matches and a round of 16 encounter in 2020, at a new stadium to be constructed near the current Roi Baudouin stadium -- the setting for several games at UEFA EURO 2000, successfully co-hosted by Belgium and the Netherlands.

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin expressed his anticipation in a message to the Brussels event. "Your city is in the heart of Europe," he said, "and will also be at the heart of a very special European Championship. We are looking forward to travelling to Belgium, which has passionate fans and a talented team."

"UEFA is very pleased that the tournament can be held in the European capital," added UEFA fifth vice-president Michael van Praag in his address. "And Belgium is not only good at playing football, but is also good at organising."

"At EURO 2000, Belgium proved that it was capable of organising major tournaments," said Belgian FA president Francois De Keersmaecker. "Together with Brussels, we are ready to again take on a leading role. EURO 2020 starts



today. Everyone in Belgium will be able to be part of it."

EURO Brussels 2020 president Alain Courtis recalled Belgium's pioneering role as a co-host in 2000 -- "today we are again pioneers," he said, expressing his excitement at a EURO that will make history.

A group of Brussels schoolchildren dressed in Belgian national team shirts brought the Henri Delaunay Cup -- European national team football's premier silverware -- into Brussels City Hall.

"These children represent the future," said Guy Vanhengel, minister of the Brussels Capital Region. "Sport brings people together, and this EURO will be a heritage for the generations to come."

"We are proud that Brussels -- the beating heart of Europe -- is one of the cities to host a EURO taking place throughout Europe," added the mayor of Brussels, Yvan Mayeur.

(Source: UEFA.com)

Argentine firm reaches \$112.8 million deal with U.S. in FIFA probe

U.S. prosecutors on Tuesday announced an agreement allowing Argentine sports media Torneos y Competencias SA to pay about \$112.8 million to settle charges stemming from a sweeping bribery probe targeting FIFA, soccer's world governing body.

The deferred prosecution agreement with Torneos, whose former chief executive pleaded guilty last year to engaging in schemes to bribe soccer officials, was approved by U.S. District Judge Pamela Chen at a hearing in federal court in Brooklyn.

Under the deal, Torneos agreed to forfeit \$89 million and pay a \$23.76 million penalty. Prosecutors charged it with one count of wire fraud conspiracy, which will be dropped if it abides by the agreement's terms for four years.

Outside of court, Ignacio Galarza, the company's general manager, said he welcomed the agreement, which is the first with a company in the FIFA corruption probe.

"Today is a great day for us as we start to leave this

investigation behind," Galarza told reporters.

In a statement, Brooklyn U.S. Attorney Robert Capers said the company cooperated and is "being given a chance to change the way the business of soccer is done in the future."

As part of the agreement, the company said it would implement internal compliance and accounting controls.

The company is one of 43 people and entities charged as part of a U.S. investigation that upended Zurich-based FIFA and the soccer world. To date, 20 people and two related companies have pleaded guilty in connection with the probe.

Torneos is 40 percent owned by DirecTV, which AT&T Inc acquired in 2015. In August 2015, DirecTV valued its stake at \$147 million, but said its investment could be adversely impacted by the probe.

Prosecutors said Torneos paid bribes and kickbacks to high-ranking soccer officials over 15 years to obtain lucrative media and marketing rights for international

soccer tournaments.

Torneos paid millions of dollars in bribes to acquire the broadcasting rights for the 2018, 2022, 2026, and 2030 World Cup games in several South American countries, according to court documents.

The court documents also say that Torneos paid millions of dollars in annual bribes to support its affiliate, T&T Sports Marketing. An affiliate of Twenty-First Century Fox Inc owns 75 percent of T&T and Torneos owns 25 percent, according to Torneos. [L1N1420MF]

Fox did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Torneos "paid the bribes and kickbacks with the agreement and support of the U.S. broadcasting company affiliates and their representatives," prosecutors said.

The case is U.S. v. Torneos y Competencias SA, U.S. District Court, Eastern District of New York, No. 16-cr-00634.

(Source: Reuters)

Liberty Media to raise \$1.55 billion to fund Formula One deal



Liberty Media Corp (LMCA.O), led by U.S. cable mogul John Malone, said on Wednesday it would raise \$1.55 billion to fund its acquisition of Formula One racing car series.

The company said investors, including Coatue Management LLC, D.E. Shaw and Jana Partners, had committed to the financing through a subscription for Liberty's Series C common stock at \$25 per share.

Liberty Media took control of the cash-generating glamour sport in September

in a deal valued at \$8 billion, ending a long-running saga surrounding the sport's ownership and potential flotation.

At the time, Liberty Media acquired an initial 18.7 percent stake from controlling shareholder CVC Capital Partners.

The money raised from the investment will be used to increase the cash component paid to the consortium of selling Formula 1 shareholders led by CVC Capital Partners, Liberty Media said on Wednesday.

(Source: Reuters)

Murray, Kerber named ITF players of the year



Briton Andy Murray and Germany's Angelique Kerber were named ITF World Champions on Tuesday, capping stellar years for the men's and women's world number ones.

Murray, whose brother Jamie was named doubles World Champion along with Brazil's Bruno Soares, won Wimbledon in July before becoming the first player to win two Olympic singles gold medals when he retained his crown in Rio de Janeiro in August.

He won nine titles in a milestone year that ended with him beating rival Novak

Djokovic to win the ATP Tour Finals and seal the year-end rankings top spot.

"It means a lot to me to be named ITF World Champion. I have had such a memorable year," Murray said in a statement.

Kerber enjoyed an equally impressive season, winning the Australian and U.S. Open titles as well as an Olympic silver medal in Rio.

She becomes the first German to win the award since Steffi Graf claimed the last of her seven in 1996.

(Source: Reuters)

Neumayr: Ronaldo did everything to increase every single ability

Markus Neumayr thinks that, although Lionel Messi may be more naturally gifted, the intense work Cristiano Ronaldo has done to improve every aspect of his game has set him apart from his rivals in The Best FIFA Men's Player 2016 running.

Neumayr and Ronaldo both joined Manchester United as teenagers in 2003. Although the German midfielder didn't go on to make an appearance for the club, he did get to study the Portuguese attacker in training.

"You saw from the beginning that he had so much talent," Neumayr, who now represents FC Luzern in the Swiss Super League, told Goal. "I guess he doesn't have the same talent as Messi on one level, but he works harder than everybody else. This is why he is the world-class player he is."

"When I met him for the first time at United he had



a completely different body. He started to work on it every day.

"Another example is his heading ability. Through hard work he developed into a player who is one of the best headers of a ball in the world. Every single ability was increased permanently because he did everything for it."

Ronaldo helped Real Madrid lift the UEFA Champions League trophy and Portugal conquer the UEFA EURO this year. The 31-year-old is presently in Japan, aiming to win a third FIFA Club World Cup having triumphed with Manchester United in 2008 and Los Merengues two years ago.

Messi and Antoine Griezmann are the remaining contenders to win The Best FIFA Men's Player prize at The Best FIFA Football Awards™ ceremony in Zurich on 9 January 2017.

(Source: FIFA)

Iran and Poland vying to sign Mauro Berruto

T T S P O R T S Iran and Poland volleyball d e s k federations are vying to hire Italian coach Mauro Berruto.

Iran has also negotiated with Italian coach Andrea Anastasi and Bulgarian Radostin Stoychev but it seems they are reluctant to take charge of the team.

Berruto is also among the candidates to take charge of Poland volleyball team as well as his countryman Ferdinando Di Giorgi and Bulgarian Radostin Stoychev.

The Polish federation will announce the new coach on December 20, the country's volleyball federation President Jacek Kasprzyk said.

The contract of their current coach, Stephane Antiga, runs out by the end of December and the federation has decided not to renew it.

Under Antiga, the Polish team has won 68 out of the 100 matches it has played since 2014. But it failed to win a medal at the Rio Olympics.

Berruto was head coach of Italy men's national volleyball team from 2010 to 2015. Under his guidance, Italy achieved the silver medal in the European Championship in 2011. The Italian team won the bronze medal at the 2012 Olympic Games. They later achieved bronze medal at the World League 2013, while in the same year, Berruto led the team to the second consecutive silver medal in the European Championships.

At the World League 2014, Italy advanced to the final round, held in Florence, gaining another bronze medal.

After Italy finished in fifth place in the World League finals in Rio de Janeiro, on July 29, 2015, Berruto resigned as coach of the Italian national team.



Iran's priority is qualifying for 2019 Basketball World Cup: Dirk Bauermann

T T S P O R T S Iran national basketball team head d e s k coach Dirk Bauermann stated that his priority is to qualify for the 2019 FIBA Basketball World Cup.

The FIBA World Cup will be held in China. The top 7 teams (where 2 teams each are coming from the Americas and Europe; And the top team from Africa, Asia and Oceania) in this competition will qualify directly for the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo.

"Our priority is to qualify for the 2019 FIBA Basketball World Cup then we'll fight for a place at the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo. We fought against big teams like Mexico and

Greece in the road to Rio 2016 and I have to say any team would have had a tough job against them. We gained good experience in that competition so we can now use it in World Cup qualifying games," Bauermann said.

"This season's Iran basketball Pro League is on another level as teams are so close to each other. There are a lot of good players who can make it to the national team," Bauermann added.

The 58-year-old German coach, who accepted Iran job in July 2015, has led the Asian giant to FIBA Asia Championship third place and FIBA Asia Challenge gold medal.



Iran's Zahra Nemati on road to recovery



The first woman in Iran's history to win Olympic or Paralympic gold says that she has not fully recovered from the hand injury.

Nemati won the gold medal in the women's individual recurve bow W1/W2 competition in Rio. Now, she is waiting to return to training after recovering from injury.

"I am not fully recovered yet to start my training. I will return to training soon. My long-term goals are to participate in the 2018 Asian Para Games as well as Tokyo Paralympic Games," Nemati said.

"I was under pressure in Rio since expectations were high. In my

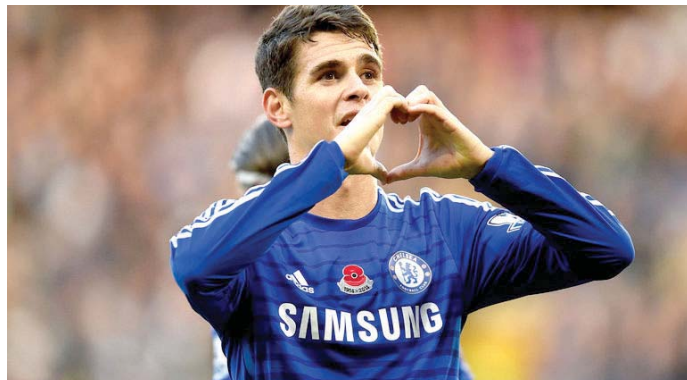
opinion, it's more difficult to repeat the success than earning that for the first time. Also, I had a tough task ahead of me since I was exhausted after participating at the Olympics," Iran's Olympic flag-bearer for Iran added.

Nemati also recalls a very painful moment for the Paralympic family as a whole and Iranian athletes in particular.

"I cannot forget the tragic accident of the Para-cyclist Bahman Golbarnezhad. That was one of the worst events for me as well as for the entire Paralympic community," she added.

(Source: Tasnim)

Chelsea's Oscar: Shanghai SIPG transfer '90 percent' done



Oscar has said that his move to Shanghai SIPG is "90 percent" completed after the Chinese Super League club offered £60 million to sign him from Chelsea in January.

On Tuesday, a source close to Oscar told ESPN FC that the Brazilian was weighing up the move which would see him become Chelsea's most lucrative ever sale, with the Blues having reportedly accepted the bid.

Back in February it was revealed that Oscar had rejected the chance to join Jiangsu Suning in a £57m deal because of his reservations about moving to China, but the 25-year-old has now confirmed that he is close to completing a switch to their domestic rivals.

Speaking to Brazilian network Globo, Oscar said: "It's 90 percent right. It just depends on some bureaucratic details."

The move to Shanghai SIPG would see Oscar massively increase his current £90,000-a-week wages and link up with former Chelsea manager Andre Villas-Boas, as well as fellow Brazilians Hulk and Elkeson.

Oscar has not started a Premier League match for Chelsea since September, and has increasingly become viewed as surplus to requirements since head coach Antonio Conte's successful decision to switch to a 3-4-3 formation.

(Source: Soccermet)

Real's Zidane predicts tough semi-final against America

Mexican team America will be fired up by the thought of marking their centenary year by beating Real Madrid and becoming the first team from the CONCACAF region to reach the Club World Cup final, Real manager Zinedine Zidane has said.

America, the CONCACAF Champions League holders, beat South Korean side Jeonbuk Motors 2-1 to set up a semi-final clash with Real in Yokohama on Thursday and Zidane said the prospect of facing the Spanish giants would motivate the Mexicans.

"I think Club America are very motivated because they want to celebrate their centenary," Zidane was quoted as saying by Kyodo.

"Some clubs only have a once in a lifetime chance to play against Real Madrid and I think it is a very good opportunity for them."

Zidane denied that Real were favourites to win the game, saying his players would have to work hard to reach Sunday's final against Atletico Nacional or Kashima Antlers.

"I never think that we have a better opportunity to win than our opponents. We have to play football and many people expect Real Madrid to win the game very easily but that is not what I think," he added.

"We will be playing against great opponents and I am sure we will have a tough time during that match and that is what I will be telling my players.

The Real manager is unlikely to risk captain Sergio Ramos for Thursday's game, with the defender not having trained for the past two days, and would not be drawn on whether talisman Cristiano Ronaldo would feature.

"I have to think about the starting XI and I will disclose who will be playing tomorrow," Zidane said.

"Of course, he (Ronaldo) is as motivated as always. He is always motivated regardless of who the opponents are or whether it is a friendly or even training."

Ronaldo won his fourth Ballon d'Or award on Monday, and Zidane paid tribute to the Portugal forward's achievement.

"It is very rare that one player wins so many awards," he said. "His fourth Ballon d'Or is a great achievement and not something that can easily be achieved. What he's doing now is very wonderful. Maybe he deserves a fifth Ballon d'Or as well."

(Source: FIFA)

Video assistant referee used for first time at FIFA Club World Cup

History was made in Wednesday's Club World Cup semi-final between Atletico Nacional and Kashima Antlers when a touchline video assistant referee (VAR) employed replay technology in an official FIFA match to award a penalty.

The decision came with half an hour gone and the match still goalless when Kashima's Daigo Nishi went to ground after tangling with Atletico defender Orlando Berrio.

Nishi had been standing in an offside position when a long free kick was played into the area but was deemed not to have been interfering with play.

Referee Viktor Kassai -- who did not see the incident -- ran to the touchline where he took approximately 30 seconds to watch a replay of what happened before pointing to the spot.

Shouma Doi converted to put the hosts 1-0 ahead. The Japanese side went on to win 3-0 to become the first Asian side ever to reach the final of the competition. They will face either Spanish giants Real Madrid or Mexico's Club America -- who play in the other semi-final on Thursday -- in Sunday's final.

"This is the first-ever live trial with Video Assistant Referees at a FIFA competition, so this is something that is new for everyone -- especially to see the referee run to the video replay area at the side of the field," said Massimo Busacca, FIFA's Head of Refereeing.

"In the incident tonight, the communication between the referee and the video assistant referee was clear, the technology worked well, and ultimately the final decision was taken by the referee, which will always be the case since the VARs are only there to support."

Last week, it was confirmed that video replays would be used for the first time by referees during the tournament in Japan.

The video assistance will be used to support referees with "match-changing" decisions for the first time in a FIFA competition but with the human official retaining the final say.

"The clear message we've got from players and coaches throughout the world is that they would like the referee on the day to remain the main decision maker and that's why the option is always there to go and look at the footage directly," said David Elleray, Technical Director of The IFAB.

The Club World Cup is the end of the test process for VARs but live trials could go ahead globally in the future.

"Once the official experiments begin, the competition organisers will send a great deal of information to The IFAB, which will be analysed by KU Leuven university," Elleray added.

"We'll be wanting to look at how often video reviews are used and how often a referee confirms or changes a decision based solely on the information from the Video Assistant Referee or after an on-field review.

"More importantly, we will want to examine how the VAR system impacts on the behaviour of players, the behaviour of referees, the response of fans in the stadium and the response of people watching on television. So there will be a great deal of information that we'll need before The IFAB takes a final decision on the implementation of VARs in 2018, or 2019 at the latest."

(Source: ESPN)

Bijan Moghanloo quits as Iran taekwondo head coach

Bijan Moghanloo stepped down as head coach of Iran taekwondo team, following poor performance in the WTF World Team Championships.

Under guidance of Moghanloo, the Iranian team lost to South Korea and Turkey in the event which was held at the Sarhadchi Sports Olympic Center in Azerbaijan's capital.

It was Iran's weakest performance in 20 years.

The Iranian team, as a powerhouse in the world, showed a pretty poor performance in the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio as well.

Azerbaijani team won the title for the second successive year with its Iranian coach Reza Mehmandoost.

(Source: Tasnim)

Novak Djokovic won't hire coach to replace Boris Becker - report

World number two Novak Djokovic will reportedly elect not to bring anyone in to replace former head coach Boris Becker.

The German and Djokovic parted ways last week after three years together, during which the Serb won six grand-slam titles.

There had been reports suggesting Djokovic's friend and Davis Cup team-mate Nenad Zimonjic would fill the role but The Times reports that no-one

new will be brought in.

Instead Marian Vajda, who is already part of the team, will step up as his head coach according to a spokesperson for the Serbian.

The report also mentions that Pepe Imaz, the 42-year-old spiritual guru, and Djokovic's younger brother Marko will also both be more involved next season.

(Source: Eurosport)



The film sees Erso tracked down by the Rebel Alliance and embarking on a dangerous mission with rebels to new planets to find a way to stop Darth Vader.