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Fifth Urban Sculpture Biennial wraps up

TEHRAN — The Fifth Urban Sculpture Biennial was brought to an end on Sunday honoring three artists.

Mona Aqababai received first prize while Mohammadreza Salabifard and Ramin Jamshidi finished second and third.

The honoring ceremony took place at the Khial Gallery of the Saba Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran where eighty-one works were displayed during the biennial, Persian media reported on Monday.

Speaking at the ceremony, Tehran Municipality's Beautification Organization Director Isa Alizadeh said that the organization has made great efforts in the past few years to find a good position in the visual art arena.

He hoped that the sculptures present at the biennial would find their ways into different districts across the capital.

In his brief remarks, Tehran Municipality Statue Office director Mojtaba Musavi said that each participating sculptor was asked to propose the best location for their sculptures, in case their work is selected to be situated across the city.

He hoped the top selected sculptures would be located in different locations across the city in the near future.

Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Ali Moradkhani also attending the ceremony expressed thanks to the organizers of the event, saying that the Beautification Organization has taken a different approach towards artistic events, helping turn the capital into a large gallery.

Iran tells banks to sell dollars at free rates

The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) says it has authorized banks to deal in foreign exchange trading at a free-market rate — a move which is expected to help control the rising rates of the dollar, according to Press TV.

A statement on CBI's website called on merchants and traders to refer to the authorized banks and purchase their required dollars, adding that this would channel foreign exchange operations by individuals and entities to banks and decrease their risks.

The statement added that the banks could also purchase the foreign currencies of exporters of non-oil products "at a rate set by agreement between the bank and the customer".

This, it emphasized, would be carried out through diplomatic missions that are based in Iran as well as the representation offices of foreign investors and also the branches of foreign banks.

The banks could accordingly sell the foreign currencies thus purchased themselves or through other banks and even certified exchange shops, CBI's statement added.

Iran operates two exchange rates, a free market rate, which was at around Rials 40,140 to the dollar on Saturday and an official rate used for some state transactions, set by the central bank at around Rials 32,300, Reuters reported.

In recent months, the CBI has raised the official rate gradually to shrink the gap between the two. It has said it wants to unify the exchange rate, to make the economy more efficient and create a level field for private firms competing with state institutions with access to cheaper foreign exchange, Reuters added.

The CBI further emphasized in its statement that it would provide the required dollars for the banks to enable them to meet customers' needs.

However, the media in Tehran are already voicing doubts if this policy would ever work.

The Persian-language newspaper *Ta'adul* quoted an unnamed trader in Tehran currency market as saying that the CBI through the new policy was trying to bring the chain of supply and demand of foreign currencies under its own control.

'Security of region is security of Iran'



Five events that shook world economy in 2016

By Rajesh Dutt

An increasingly interconnecting world makes countries vulnerable to events in others. Seven years after the American subprime crisis shook the whole world, global economic shocks keep coming. 2016 witnessed several events that ended up impacting economies all over the world, for good and bad.

Chinese crash

On January 4 and 7, China's stock market saw a sharp selloff of about 7 percent that quickly sent stocks tumbling globally. From January 4 to 15, China's stock market fell nearly 18 percent.

The yuan fell to its lowest level since March 2011 which made Chinese exports more competitive in overseas market and in turn made overseas investments more expensive.

The Chinese stock market rout sent shock

waves across the world, hitting the European and U.S. stocks. The wild swings in global financial markets due to China's market crash proved beyond doubt that China now plays a bigger role in the functioning of the global economy.

OPEC cut

For the first time since December 2008—the height of the financial crisis—the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) cut its production in November.

The cut, soon followed by non-OPEC countries such as Russia, helped push oil prices sharply higher. Crude oil jumped more than 5 percent in New York after OPEC agreed to limit production to 33 million barrels a day.

Though it will brighten the prospects for the energy industry and boost the economies of oil-rich countries, for consumers, however,

it will mean higher prices. The slump pushed several oil producing countries such as Brazil and Venezuela into severe recession. Even Saudi Arabia cut back on spending.

Brexit

Britain voted to leave the EU in a referendum in June. Now Britain will have to redefine itself after 23 years of EU membership.

A sharp rise in the value of the U.S. dollar against the euro will adversely affect the U.S. manufacturing sector. This in turn will put additional downward pressure on weak U.S. growth momentum.

Britain's exit from EU will push capital away from the eurozone and direct it towards safe markets, including the U.S. Treasuries, resulting in strengthening of U.S. dollar—and to Japan. This will further lower market interest rates and raise relative currency values. ➔4

Russian envoy hopes for U.S. positive role in Syria under Trump

Russia's ambassador to Iran highlighted the two countries' close cooperation in the fight against terror groups in Syria and expressed the hope that the U.S. will also play a positive role in resolving the Syrian crisis under the presidency of Donald Trump.

Speaking to the Tasnim News Agency, Levan Jagarian rejected as baseless claims that Russia in its talks with the U.S. and Turkey

on Syria reaches agreements with them and then imposes the deals on Iran.

"Those who make such remarks are not aware of details," he said, adding, "We cannot make public details of the talks but we are transparent with the Iranian side."

"We (Iran and Russia) are working very closely together and exchange ideas and infor-

mation with each other," the Russian diplomat noted.

He further pointed to the U.S. president-elect's stances on Syria and said he hopes that the Arab country's crisis will be resolved under Trump's presidency.

The envoy went on to say that he is optimistic about Washington-Moscow relations once Trump enters the White House.

Back in November, Jagarian

said that Trump made promising comments during his election campaign about resolving the problems in ties with Russia caused by the Obama administration.

"We welcome his views. Russia expects a lot from Trump. We hope that Trump would remain committed to the pledges made in his election campaign," the Russian ambassador said at the time.

Christian parent commemorates martyred son

Robert Lazar was an Iranian-Christian martyred during the Iraqi invasion of Iran (1980-1988). Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei paid a visit on December 27, 2015, to the home of the martyr. During the meeting, the Leader said "the Christian minority, both the Armenians and the Assyrians, have emerged victorious out of the Revolution and the war as loyal, wise, insightful and courageous Iranians."

The photo shows the parent of Robert Lazar celebrating the New Year with a picture of their martyred son.



Non-oil exports up over 9% yr/yr

TEHRAN — Iran's non-oil exports during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20) reached \$31.593 billion registering a 9.05 percent rise compared to the same period last year, IRNA reported.

Based on the latest data released by the country's customs administration, some \$28.970 billion worth of non-oil goods were exported from Iran during the last year's first nine months.

The figure for imports also witnessed a 4.38 percent growth in the mentioned time span to stand at \$31.538 billion.

As for the volume, in the mentioned period the Islamic Republic has exported 91.262 million tons of non-oil commodities and imported 24.867 million tons of non-oil goods into the country.

According to the released data, Iran's 9-month trade balance was positive with the value of exports exceeding that of imports by \$55 million.

Gas condensate was the top commodity in the country's non-oil export list with an export value of \$5.124 billion, accounting for 16.22 percent of the total 9-month non-oil exports value.

Liquefied natural gas (LNG) with a value of \$1.952 billion and a 6.18 percent share came in second followed by low-density oils with 3.89 percent share worth \$1.230 billion, associated petroleum gas (APG) and hydrocarbon gas liquids valued at \$1.67 billion and a share of 3.28 percent and finally liquefied propane with \$868 million worth and a 2.75 percent share.

UN: Israeli settlements have no legal validity, Netanyahu places hopes in Trump

The Israeli government's furious reaction to the United Nations Security Council's adoption of a resolution opposing illegal settlements in occupied territory underscores its fundamental and bitter dispute with the international community about the future of the West Bank and east al-Quds (Jerusalem).

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insists that there is nothing wrong with his controversial policy of building settlements in occupied areas that the Palestinians, with overwhelming world support, claim for their state. But Friday's UN rebuke was a stark reminder that the rest of the world considers it a crime. The embattled leader is now placing his hopes in the incoming administration of the United States President-elect Donald Trump, which is shaping up as the first major player to embrace Israel's nationalist right and its West Bank settlements.

In a series of statements, Netanyahu has criticized President Obama's Administration for letting Resolution 2334 pass on Friday by abstaining, using unprecedented language that has turned a policy disagreement into a personal vendetta.

"From the information that we have, we have no doubt that the Obama Administration initiated it, stood behind it, coordinated on the wording and demanded that it be passed," Netanyahu told his Cabinet on Sunday.

In turning his anger toward Israel's closest and most important ally, Netanyahu has underplayed the embarrassment that all 14 other nations on the Security Council voted in favor of the measure. Those votes came from countries that Netanyahu loves to boast of cultivating relations with, including Russia and China and nations across the developing world.

With Friday's resolution, however, the world sent a strong message that it rejects these arguments. The resolution said the settlements have "no legal validity" and constitute a "flagrant violation" of international law. It also urged all states to distinguish between Israel and "the territories occupied since 1967."

(Source: agencies)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Iran’s nuclear propellers to comply with JCPOA: spokesman

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — The spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran has said if Iran develops nuclear watercraft propeller systems, they will comply with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Speaking to Alalam on Sunday, Behrooz Kamalvandi underlined however, that compliance with the JCPOA will not stop Iran from studying uranium enrichment beyond 3.5 percent as allowed under the deal.

Those programs can be had, the theoretical side can be completed, and the practical phase carried out when restrictions are lifted, he said.



‘Iran superior over other Persian Gulf littoral states’

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — Iran’s deputy navy commander for coordination says the Persian Gulf Arab littoral states are in no way capable of fighting in a war against Iran.

“This is no slogan, but is a reality since Iran has made great achievements in producing (military) equipment,” Admiral Peiman Jafari Tehrani said in the Central city of Qom on Sunday night, Fars reported.

He pointed out that Iran has so far sent 44th flotilla of warships to the international waters.



Assyrians enjoy high level of security in Iran: bishop

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — The bishop of the eastern Assyrian diocese of Iran says Assyrian minority across the country enjoy a high level of security.

Speaking to IRNA on Monday, Mar Narsai Benyamin pointed to Daesh atrocities in Iran’s neighborhood and said, “Any person or party that ruins people’s lives or culture is condemnable.”

“Many Assyrians, as well as Muslims who lived in Iraq or Syria were forced to leave their land under the scourge of Daesh,” he expressed regret.



Iran working to resume Hajj

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — The Supreme Leader’s representative in Hajj affairs has said Tehran is trying to resume the Hajj pilgrimage, on halt since Iran-Saudi Arabia relations grew murky after a mass crush in Mecca in 2015.

Ali Qazi Askar made the remarks during as he introduced the new head of the Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization on Monday, ISNA reported.

“We hope they accept our conditions. We still fare as a country which used to hold the most beautiful and successful Hajj,” he said.



National Trust Party chairman resigns as party chair

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — Mehdi Karroubi on Monday resigned from his post as the chairman of Iran’s National Trust Party.

Announcing his resignation while still under house arrest, the 2009 election opposition leader wanted his fellow party members to take Rasoul Montajabnia as the new chairperson, IRNA reported.

The new leader of the reformist party has acted as Karroubi’s deputy so far. he said he was resigning for the good of the party.

Iran is anticipating a new presidential election in May 2017.



Kazakhstan ready to host Russia-Turkey-Iran talks on Syria

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — Kazakhstan will create the necessary conditions to organize negotiations on Syria between Russia, Turkey and Iran, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said on Monday during his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in St. Petersburg.

Nazarbayev said he shared the proposal with his Turkish and Iranian counterparts, Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Hassan Rouhani, on the phone a day earlier, Sputnik reported.

“They all agree, we will create all the conditions for them to work and meet,” he said.

‘Security of region is security of Iran’

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehqan said on Monday Iran regards security of the Middle East region as its own security.

“We regard the security of the region as our own security, and insecurity and crisis in the region influence other’s security,” he said during a ceremony held in Ministry of Communication and Information Technology.

He also said imperialism has always sought to form a united front and undermine security and stability in the Mideast region to achieve its objectives.

“Today, the U.S. and Israel don’t care what happens in the region. The enemy adjusts its plans to the situation,” he said.

Dehqan called the emergence of the Takfiri movement in Iraq and Syria

a creation of the U.S. and the Israeli regime.

“The Takfiri-terrorist movement which has been created by the U.S., the Zionists, reactionary Arabs and even some countries like Turkey does not limit its actions to Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq. It is a comprehensive issue which threatens the whole international security,” he stated.

The Iranian official said that fighting the Takfiri movement is a “humane, sublime goal,” noting that Iran is at the forefront of fighting terrorism and extremism.

“This a fact that an international front has been formed against the Islamic world and unfortunately, it is accompanied by the reactionary governments in the world of Islam.”

He expressed regret over the fact

that the countries that promised to support the issue of Palestine are moving in line with Israel’s benefits.

He added that imperialism and the Zionists make any effort to maintain the current situation.

“Islamic countries have human capacities that can be used against the Zionists, but they are being used against the Islamic countries,” he said.



“Today, the U.S. and Israel don’t care what happens in the region. The enemy adjusts its plans to the situation.”

E-voting viable if Guardian Council approves so

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — Alireza Barati, deputy Interior minister for e-governance and IT, has said the interior ministry is ready to hold electronic voting in the forthcoming presidential election if the Guardian Council gives the go-head.

“Electronic voting offers advantages such as speed, accuracy and precision and we are ready to use it in the upcoming presidential election provided that the Guardian Council approves it,” ISNA quoted Barati as saying on Monday.

There is an economic dimension to electronic voting as it remove the need to print ballots and count votes, the official added.



“Of the 25 stages of every election, 23 are carried out using machines and electronic devices, and

the only ballot casting and voting are carried out manually.”

Barati added that machines were used in 14 polling stations in the previous parliamentary election.

“The result of that election was announced immediately after the polls were closed,” he said.

Back in July, the Rouhani administration wrote to the Guardian Council proposing electronic voting be used in the next year’s elections.

Iran plans to hold its upcoming presidential election in May 2017, when President Hassan Rouhani seeks a second term.

Iran’s support for resistance axis constitutionally honored

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the head of the Iranian parliamentary committee for national security and foreign policy, says Iran’s support for the resistance axis is enshrined in the country’s Constitution.

“Defending the oppressed of the world, particularly the Muslims, has been enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Boroujerdi said in an appearance with visiting member of Yemen’s Supreme Revolutionary Committee.

Article 152 of Iran’s Constitution envisions a foreign policy that is hostile to arrogant powers, embracing of all oppressed nations, and supportive of the world’s Muslims.

Iran backs resistance movements in the region, particularly those in Syria, Palestine, and Yemen in their cause against Zionism, Takfirism, and Wahhabism.

In Yemen, Tehran has thrown its weight behind the Yemeni resistance that has stood up to Saudi Arabia.

Riyadh invaded the small, poor

Arab country in March 2015 to restore power to Hadi, who is living in exile in Saudi Arabia. Yemeni people are against Hadi.

“Iran will press ahead with its humanitarian aid to the oppressed Yemeni people, and the Iranian Majlis will support it, as well,” Boroujerdi concluded.



“Defending the oppressed of the world, particularly the Muslims, has been enshrined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.”

Abducted Iranian national freed in Afghanistan

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — An Iranian national abducted last Tuesday in the western Afghan province of Herat has been released and handed over to Iran’s Consulate in the province, an official with the Iranian consulate told Pajhwok Afghan News on Monday.

Javad Mohammadi had been kidnapped by unknown gunmen after having been stopped on the Herat-Islam-Qala Highway, via which Iranian trucks enter Afghanistan.

The Iranian citizen is a tank truck driver, the official, Mahdi Shahrokhi said, adding Javad is the third Iranian national abducted in Afghanistan over the past month.

Another Iranian driver, whose fate is still unknown,

was kidnapped a few days earlier on the same Highway, according to Afghan media outlets.

Iran’s Foreign Ministry has not reacted to the news so far.

Abdul Rauf Ahmadi, Herat police spokesman, confirmed the incident, saying police intervened to free the Iranian driver.

Five have been arrested and one, who is believed to be the main suspect, is at large, Ahmadi added.

The Iranian Consulate in Herat thanked Afghan security forces for the intervention.

Tehran has repeatedly voiced concern about its citizens, particularly drivers, being abducted by unknown armed groups on the Herat-Islam-Qala Highway.

Military exercise starts in southern provinces

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — Iran’s military launched on Monday a national-wide military drill in southern parts of the country in an effort to achieve a higher level of coordination among various components of its integrated air defense network.

Divisions from Iran’s regular army as well as units from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and Basij (public mobilization) are attending the Modafean Aseman Velayat 7 (The Defenders of Velayat Skies 7).

Staged in an area of 496,000 km2, the war game covers southern provinces of Bushehr, Khuzestan and Hormozgan, parts of the Sea of Oman and the Per-

sian Gulf as well as the three islands of the Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa.

The first day of the three-day drill was held in two stages on the first day.

During the first stage, the Iranian Armed Forces used on mock battlefield various defensive apparatuses, including, radar, missile, artillery, communication and electronic surveillance systems.

The second stage, which started in the afternoon, highlighted Iran’s power in surveillance capabilities during reconnaissance missions and aerial footage from designated targets.

Involving around 17,000 military personnel, the drills aim at simulating intense and large-scale electronic warfare, as well.

The Army Air Force’s aircrafts, includ-

Divisions from Iran’s regular army as well as units from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and Basij (public mobilization) are attending the Modafean Aseman Velayat 7 (The Defenders of Velayat Skies 7).

Advisor urges Islamic countries to support UN settlement vote

IT d e s k **POLITICS TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, special aide to the Majlis speaker on international affairs, said on Monday the Islamic countries should support the recently approved UN resolution on Israel’s settlement activities.

“It’s the right time for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League to grab the opportunity and conduct its Islamic-humane mission in supporting the oppressed Palestinian people,” he posted in his Telegram channel.

gram channel.

“The illegitimate regime of Israel” should be stopped from transgressing, he said, adding that supporting the Palestinian cause will lead to unity in the Islamic world.

The UN Security Council issued a resolution on Friday and condemned Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories such as East Jerusalem al-Quds.

The resolution was passed by a vote of 14 to 0 and de-

clares that Israeli settlements have “no legal validity” and constitute a “flagrant violation under international law.”

The resolution demands “Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called the resolution a “shameful” vote.

According to reports, Netanyahu summoned representatives of the UNSC states that backed the resolution.

Chinese carrier enters South China Sea amid renewed tension

A group of Chinese warships led by the country's sole aircraft carrier entered the top half of the South China Sea on Monday after passing south of Taiwan, the self-ruled island's Defense Ministry said of what China has termed a routine exercise.

The move comes amid renewed tension over Taiwan, which Beijing claims as its own, ineligible for state-to-state relations, following U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's telephone call with the island's president that upset Beijing.

The Soviet-built Liaoning aircraft carrier has taken part in previous exercises, including some in the South China Sea, but China is years away from perfecting carrier operations similar to those the United States has practiced for decades.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said the carrier, accompanied by five vessels, passed southeast of the Pratas Islands, which are controlled by Taiwan, heading southwest.

The carrier group earlier passed 90 nautical miles south of Taiwan's southernmost point via the Bashi Channel, between Taiwan and the Philippines.

"Staying vigilant and flexible has always been the normal method of maintaining airspace security," said ministry spokesman Chen Chung-chi, declining to say whether Taiwan fighter jets were scrambled or if submarines had been deployed.

Chen said the ministry was continuing to "monitor and grasp the situation".

Senior Taiwan opposition Nationalist lawmaker Johnny Chiang said the Liaoning exercise was China's signal to the United States that it has broken through the "first island chain", an area that includes Japan's Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said people should not read too much into what



“Our Liaoning should enjoy in accordance with the law freedom of navigation and overflight as set by international law, and we hope all sides can respect this right of China’s,” she told a daily news briefing.

the carrier was up to, as its movements were within the law.

"Our Liaoning should enjoy in accordance with the law freedom of navigation and overflight as set by international law, and we hope all sides can respect this right of China's," she told a daily news briefing.

Influential state-run Chinese tabloid the Global Times said the exercise showed how the carrier was improving its combat capabilities and that it should now sail even further afield.

"The Chinese fleet will cruise to the Eastern Pacific sooner or later. When China's aircraft carrier fleet appears in offshore areas of the U.S. one day, it will trigger intense thinking about maritime

rules," the newspaper said in an editorial.

China has been angered recently by U.S. naval patrols near islands that China claims in the South China Sea. This month, a Chinese navy ship seized a U.S. underwater drone in the South China Sea. China later returned it.

Japan said late on Sunday it had spotted six Chinese naval vessels including the Liaoning traveling through the passage between Miyako and Okinawa and into the Pacific.

Japan's top government spokesman said on Monday the voyage showed China's expanding military capability and Japan was closely monitoring it.

China's air force conducted long-

range drills this month above the East and South China Seas that rattled Japan and Taiwan. China said those exercises were also routine.

Last December, the defense ministry confirmed China was building a second aircraft carrier but its launch date is unclear. The aircraft carrier program is a state secret.

Beijing could build multiple aircraft carriers over the next 15 years, the Pentagon said in a report last year.

China claims most of the South China Sea through which about \$5 trillion in shipborne trade passes every year. Neighbors Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have claims.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. envoy to Israel summoned over UN settlement vote

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has summoned the U.S. ambassador to Israel over a resolution condemning settlements on Palestinian territories.

The summon on Sunday came hours after envoys of all other UN Security Council members were asked to appear before the foreign ministry following the UN vote.

Dan Shapiro, who was excluded from earlier summons targeting 14 UNSC member states, was called to discuss the U.S. decision to abstain, which enabled the adoption of the resolution. Ahead of the vote, Netanyahu had called on the U.S. to block the text.

On Friday the Council passed the first resolution since 1979 condemning Israel over its settlement policy.

The resolution demands "Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem".

It says settlements have "no legal validity" and are "dangerously imperiling the viability of the two-state solution".

■ Netanyahu calls for 'action plan'

Netanyahu has asked the foreign ministry to prepare an "action plan" to present to the security cabinet within a month over how to handle Israel's relations with UN institutions.

"We will do all it takes so Israel emerges unscathed from this shameful decision," Netanyahu said.

By way of rebuke of the vote, Israel's Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman also announced on Sunday that Israel was cutting civilian coordination with Pal-

estinians.

Saeb Erekat, secretary general of the executive committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, said Israel now had to choose between closing itself off or opening itself up to negotiations.

"I call upon you this morning to seize the opportunity, to wake up, to stop the violence, to stop settlements and to resume negotiations," he told Israel Radio on Sunday.

Netanyahu claims that U.S. President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry were behind the resolution.

"We have no doubt that the Obama administration initiated it, stood behind it, coordinated the drafts and demanded to pass it," Netanyahu said at the beginning of a weekly cabinet meeting.

"This is of course in total contradiction to the traditional American policy of not trying to impose conditions of a final resolution. And, of course, the explicit commitment of President Obama himself in 2011 to avoid such measures," he said.

The Israeli leader said that he had told Kerry "friends

“We have no doubt that the Obama administration initiated it, stood behind it, coordinated the drafts and demanded to pass it,” Netanyahu said at the beginning of a weekly cabinet meeting.

don't take friends to the Security Council".

In addition to the pledges made on Sunday, Netanyahu cancelled his upcoming meeting with British Prime Minister Theresa May.

Planned visits to Israel by Senegal's foreign minister and Ukraine's prime minister were cancelled in light of those countries' support for the UN vote.

While the resolution contains no sanctions, Israeli officials are concerned it could widen the possibility of prosecution at the International Criminal Court.

They are also worried it could encourage some countries to impose sanctions against Israeli settlers and goods produced in the settlements.

Army radio reported that Lieberman has ordered Israeli security to halt cooperation on civilian matters with the Palestinians, while retaining security coordination. Israeli officials refused to comment on the report.

The measures taken on Sunday add to Netanyahu's order to review engagements at the United Nations, including funding for UN agencies and the presence of its representatives in Israel.

Right-wing Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan said on Saturday night that Israel should "announce a full annexation of settlement blocs" in response to the resolution.

Education Minister Naftali Bennett of the far-right Jewish Home told army radio that his party would "soon propose a bill to annex Maale Adumim", a settlement city east of Jerusalem.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Kremlin: Terrorism not likely cause of Tu-154 crash

Parts of crashed Russian plane found in Black Sea

Russian investigators do not regard "a terrorist act" as one of the main theories behind the crash of a military plane in the Black Sea, the Kremlin said.

All 84 passengers and eight crew members on board the plane operated by the Russian military are believed to have died when it crashed two minutes after taking off in good weather from the southern Russian city of Sochi on Sunday morning.

"[Investigators] are considering all versions of events," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on a conference call on Monday.

"It is still too early to say. But the version that it was a terrorist act is nowhere near the top of the list."

Vigils were held in Russia on Monday after Russian President Vladimir Putin declared a day of mourning.

Following the crash, Russia launched a search operation that involved more than 45 ships and 3,500 people, including 135 divers flown in from across Russia, sweeping a vast crash site at sea and along the shore, according to the defence ministry.

Five helicopters and drones were be-



ing used to help spot bodies and debris.

Two deep-water submersibles arrived on Monday in Sochi to aid the operation, which went on all through the night thanks to powerful searchlights.

The Black Sea search area, which covers over 10 square kilometers, is plagued by underwater currents that can carry debris and body fragments into the open sea.

The search party has not yet found the plane's black boxes, Emergency Situations Minister Vladimir Puchkov told Russian news agencies.

The plane, belonging to the defense

ministry, was taking Russia's famed choir, the Alexandrov Ensemble, to a New Year's concert at Hemeimeem air base in Syria's coastal province of Latakia.

One singer, who did not get on the plane due to the recent birth of his child, said he was devastated at the loss of so many talented colleagues.

"I have lost my friends and colleagues, all killed, all five soloists. I feel in complete disarray," Ananyev told the AP news agency.

"It is such a shame. I have known these people for 30 years. I know their wives and children. I feel terrible for the children

and for all that I have lost."

Mourners lit candles and brought flowers to Channel One and NTV, whose TV journalists were going to Syria to cover the concert, and to a charity founded by Dr Yelizaveta Glinka, who was on the plane bringing medicines to Syria.

■ Parts of planes found

Meanwhile, Russian divers Monday found parts of the military plane that crashed in the Black Sea with 92 people onboard, a local official said.

"The (plane) debris are at the depth of 27 meters one mile from the shore," (89 feet) said Rimma Chernova, a spokeswoman for the Sochi-based search and rescue operations run by the Russian emergency ministry.

Russian news agencies had earlier quoted an unnamed official as saying that the fuselage of the plane had been found, a statement local authorities did not confirm when contacted by AFP.

Chernova added that divers were planning to use a remotely-operated diving machine to determine the precise coordinates and size of the plane parts in order to understand what to do next.

(Source: agencies)

Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev says ready to host Syria peace talks in Astana

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said on Monday he was ready to host multilateral talks on the conflict in Syria in the Kazakh capital of Astana.



"Kazakhstan is ready to host all sides for talks in Astana," Nazarbayev said during a visit to St. Petersburg where he has been meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Putin said on Friday that Russia, Iran, Turkey and Syrian President Bashar Assad had all agreed the Kazakh capital should be the venue for new Syrian peace negotiations.

Putin also said last week the next step for Syria would be a nationwide ceasefire.

(Source: Reuters)

Over 2,000 Saudi extremists fighting abroad

More than 2,000 Saudis are fighting abroad with extremist groups, with over 70 percent of them in Syria, the kingdom's interior ministry was reported as saying Monday.

"The number of Saudis proven to be in conflict areas is 2,093," interior ministry spokesman General Mansour al-Turki told daily newspaper Al-Hayat.

He said that 1,540 of them were in Syria, where militants have flocked since ISIL terrorist group seized control of vast areas in mid-2014. Another 147 were in Yemen, which is the base of Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, considered by Washington as the most dangerous affiliate of the global terror network.

Another 31 were believed to be in Afghanistan or Pakistan, Turki said.

Only five were believed to be in neighboring Iraq, where ISIS also seized significant territory in 2014.

Turki said 73 Saudis had also been detained abroad "on charges related to acts of terrorism."

(Source: AFP)

Balkan countries illegally push back migrants: UNHCR

Illegal deportations of migrants seeking to reach western Europe along the so-called Balkans route have been on the rise, the UN refugee agency warned Monday.

Some 1,000 people from the Middle East, Asia and Africa "were expelled in November alone along the Balkans route ... more than before," the UNHCR spokeswoman in Serbia, Mirjana Milenkovska, told AFP.



Hundreds of thousands of migrants took the Balkans route through Macedonia and Serbia, Croatia and Hungary as they tried to reach western Europe from Greece before it was largely shut down in March.

Non-governmental human rights organizations and activists also warned that an increasing number of legally-registered migrants were being "illegally deported" from Serbia to Bulgaria and Macedonia.

On Dec. 17 "a seven-member Syrian family, including a two-year old child, 16-year old girl and two women almost froze after being left in a forest in -11 Celsius degrees (12.2 Fahrenheit) to walk towards Bulgaria some one kilometer (half a mile) away," an activist said.

"The family was registered in Belgrade and on its way to a refugee center, when they were taken off the bus by a police or army unit that tore their documents," said Gordan Paunovic of the Info Park group that provides help to refugees.

They were eventually rescued by a regular police officer from a nearby town who was alerted by activists, Paunovic said.

The Belgrade Center for Human Rights (BCHR) that represents the family said that the bus driver confirmed the information. Serbian Defense Minister Zoran Djordjevic denied army involvement in the incident.

Some 7,000 migrants are currently in Serbia. Most are lodged in 13 official reception centers, while some 1,000 are sleeping rough in downtown Belgrade, Milenkovska said.

Some 109 people were reportedly deported in November to Macedonia from Serbia's border migrant transit center at Presevo.

"They all came back to Belgrade and told us the same story: they were awakened at 4 a.m., put in a police van and than driven to a field in the middle of a forest on the border with Macedonia," Paunovic said.

Members of Macedonian Youth Lawyers Association (MYLA), who provide legal help to migrants in Macedonia, also "have recorded cases of persons who have been pushed back to Macedonia, although they had asylum papers from Serbia."

(Source: AFP)

JUMP

Five events that shook world economy in 2016



The higher U.S. dollar will trigger pressure on China to float the yuan lower, as it is caught in the divergence between its two largest export markets—the EU and the U.S.

■ Trump win

U.S. president elect Donald Trump has complained against longstanding trade agreements which he might scrap. The first could be the North American Free Trade Agreement. The devaluation of yuan against U.S. dollar by China has also earned his wrath and he has vowed to punish Beijing for it. He has also promised to tax country's firms that move jobs overseas.

He is also planning a new fund that has the potential to boost jobs but could trigger the inflation to shoot up.

■ Sanction free Iran

The nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers removed the sanctions put on the Islamic Republic of Iran. Removal of these sanctions had wide ramifications for global economy. Iran can now increase its revenue from oil exports by \$10 billion by next year.

The European Union has ended restrictions on Iranian trade, shipping and insurance. The United States too will no longer apply its sanctions on Iran's economy, especially on the banking sector.

Iran's central bank says lifting banking sanctions would allow \$30 billion of foreign reserves currently frozen in accounts around the world to be brought back. For India, it means crude oil supplies from Tehran will increase but there will also an adverse impact on India's farm commodities as Iran now has a wider market to shop.

(Source: Economic Times)

Iran offers to provide buses for Pakistan public transport system

Iran has offered to provide modern buses to improve public transport in Pakistan, especially in Sindh province.

According to Radio Tehran report, Iranian Consul General Mehdi Sobhani made the offer in a meeting with Sindh Minister for Transport and Mass Transit Nasir Hussain Shah.

The minister lauded the CG for offering assistance in various transport-related projects and offering to provide 200 modern buses to improve public transport in the city.

He said provision of a modern transport system to the people was a priority of the government and efforts were underway on various projects in this regard.

The Iranian diplomat also invited the minister to bring along officials of the transport department to Iran on an exposure visit to witness the modern urban transport system operating in Tehran.

(Source: THE NEWS)

The UK slips below France in economic rankings

The UK has slipped below France this year in the World Economic League Table (Welt), which tracks the size of economies around the world and forecasts how this might change in the next 15 years.

This fall was due to the large fall in the sterling exchange rate following the vote to leave the European Union, but Welt has predicted that it will catch up with France by 2021.

Douglas McWilliams, president of the Cebr, which carried out the research, said the table tracked "the pace of globalization as the former leading economies from the West get overtaken by fast growing emerging economies."

By 2024, India will become the third largest economy, overtaking the UK and France in 2018, Germany in 2021, and Japan in 2024. South Korea, Indonesia and the Philippines were all forecast to grow much larger by 2030, with Korea overtaking the UK and France to become the seventh largest economy by 2030.

China is also predicted to overtake the United States in 2029 as the biggest economy in the world, despite a slowdown and big infrastructure plan spearheaded by president-elect Donald Trump. It forecast that this plan would only have an impact on the economy by 2018 or 2019.

Chris Blythe, chief executive of The Chartered Institute of Building, said: "New trading agreements with the Asian powerhouse economies of China and India and with the US along with nations such as Australia could help unlock growth opportunity for Britain's infrastructure and construction sector"

For the first time, the league table has covered every country in the world except Syria.

(Source: The Telegraph)

Nikkei weighed by autos, bucking mostly higher Asia finish

Asian shares ended broadly higher on Monday despite thin trading volumes because of the Christmas holidays, with some major markets in the region still closed.

Japan's Nikkei Stock Average fluctuated NIK, -0.16% , closing down 0.2% after it briefly turned up 0.01% to 19432.48 in afternoon trading. Meanwhile, the Shanghai Composite Index SHCOMP, +0.40% reversed morning trading losses and closed higher 0.4%. Elsewhere, Korea's Kospi SEU, +0.09% ended higher 0.09% and Taiwan's stock exchange was 0.4% higher:was up 0.01% and Taiwan's stock exchange was 0.2% higher.

Markets in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore were closed.

In Japan, auto stocks declined because of a stronger yen due to profit-taking pressure. A strong yen threatens to reduce profits exporters earn abroad. Toyota 7203, -1.40% TM, +0.20% ended lower 1.4% at ¥6,991,while Mazda 7261, -1.86% fell 1.9% to ¥1,974.5 and Honda 7267, -2.10% declined 2.1% to ¥3,495. The Topix transportation subindex was down 1.5%. The yen USDJPY, -0.16% was at 117.04 compared with 117.49 late Friday in New York.

(Source: MarketWatch)

Mineral exports rise 34%, hit \$4.4 billion

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran exported \$4.4 billion of minerals and mineral products during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-November 20), an official with Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) said on Monday.

The figure showed a 34 percent rise compared to the same period last year, IRNA quoted Amir Sabbagh, the IMIDRO planning and strategic supervision director as saying on Monday.

Mehdi Karbasian, the head of IMIDRO, announced in July that 34 mining and mineral industries projects, costing \$7.2 billion, would become operational in the country by the end of the current Iranian calendar year.

Back in May, Karbasian said that Iran had offered \$40 billion in mining projects to foreign investors.



Iran to host 7th APMCHUD

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran will host the 7th biennial Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development (APMCHUD), Iranian Deputy Transport Minister Mohammad-Saied Izadi announced on Monday.

Underscoring the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 6th APMCHUD, Izadi noted that from 2006, India, Iran, South Korea, and Indonesia

have chaired the conference and Iran is to host the next round of the conference.

In the context of growing urbanization in different forms, ministers and senior officials of 68 countries from the Asia Pacific Region deliberated on challenges of urban planning and management during the 6th APMCHUD in New Delhi for three days from December 14.

How JPMorgan could not save Italy's problem bank

On the morning of July 29, former Italian Industry Minister Corrado Passera was traveling in a high-speed train toward the medieval city of Siena, racing to meet the directors of the world's oldest bank to present them with a rescue plan.

Monte dei Paschi di Siena, Italy's third-largest lender, was destined to be wound down within months unless it could raise billions of euros and pull itself out of a swamp of bad loans that threatened to swallow up its five centuries of banking.

Passera's recapitalization plan was supported by Swiss investment bank UBS - Monte dei Paschi's long-time adviser - but the former minister was running out of time.

The Tuscan lender had already changed

advisory horses - turning away from UBS and Citi, and instead engaging JPMorgan to engineer a survival strategy, according to bankers close to the matter. Its board was meeting that day at its HQ in a 13th-century fortress to decide whether to formally commit to the Wall Street player's plan, they said.

Veteran banker Passera felt he would at least have a chance to make his case. He didn't. As the train reached Florence, about 70 km from Siena, his phone rang. Monte dei Paschi's chairman told him the board would not hear him, according to a source familiar with the events.

The bank had instead pinned its fate on JPMorgan's plan to clear out 28 billion

Carpet exports from Iran to U.S. stands at \$50m in 8 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — About \$150 million worth of Iranian carpets were exported to the United States during the eight months to November 20, IRNA quoted Hamid Kargar, the head of Iran's National Carpet Center, on Monday.

Due to the imposed sanctions, Iran's export of carpets to the U.S. was zero in the same period in 2015,' he underlined. The U.S. imposed a ban on carpet im-



ports from the Islamic Republic, among other products, in September 2010, but has recently reopened its market after the removal of nuclear sanctions against Iran in January 2016.

PICTURE OF THE DAY IRIB NEWS/Zeinab Hamzehluoie



HOFEX 2017 hosting 100 Iranian, foreign participants in Tehran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The 6th edition of Iran's International Exhibition of Office Furniture (HOFEX 2017 office section) has been inaugurated on Sunday at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds, with participation of 100 Iranian and foreign companies, IRIB new reported.

Aiming to lay the groundwork for joint investments, the four-day exhibition is showcasing the latest products and services of 90 domestic companies and 10 foreign exhibitors.

All kinds of office furniture including amphitheater furniture, desks, library furniture, accessories, office decoration and etc. will be put to show in the exhibition.

China, Taiwan and Italy are among the countries that will have the most participants in this year's event.

Some trade delegations from Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Iraq, Qatar, Oman, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, and Russia are expected to visit the exposition.



Dollar dips vs. yen after U.S. yields pull away from highs

The dollar dipped against the yen on Monday, edging lower down after U.S. Treasury yields dipped on mixed economic data. Trading was subdued with many key markets shut on Monday for the Christmas holidays.

The greenback was down 0.2 percent at 117.300 yen JPY=. The euro was steady at \$1.0457 EUR=.

Currencies took stock of the U.S. debt market, which saw the benchmark 10-year note yield US10YT=RR end lower on Friday.

The yield pulled back from 27-month peaks scaled mid-month following Friday's release of U.S. economic indicators that included strong housing and consumer confidence data but also numbers that pointed to slower household income.



China's property curbs set to stay in place in 2017

A slew of property curbs introduced this year in China's biggest cities are likely to be kept throughout 2017, while Beijing looks to develop a long-term mechanism to stem speculation, a government think tank was reported as saying on Monday.

Soaring house prices this year have prompted more than 20 Chinese cities to tighten lending requirements on house purchases. Regulators have told banks to strengthen risk management around property loans.

House price growth would gradually slow in 2017, with "certain time periods" likely seeing actual price declines, the academy said, without giving further details, according to state-owned Economics Information Daily.



Indian shares fall to 7-month low on worries over capital gains tax

The NSE Nifty fell about 1 percent on Monday to a seven-month low, erasing its gain for the year, as investors fretted that the government may impose long-term capital gains tax.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Saturday that people in financial markets must make a "fair contribution" to nation building, comments that were seen as setting up the prospect of higher taxes for investors.

However, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley clarified on Sunday that the government did not plan to impose long-term capital gains tax, though that was not enough to prevent selling on Monday.

Russia sees oil products output down 2.5 percent in 2017

Russia's output of oil products is expected to fall by about 2.5 percent in 2017 due to further work on a massive refinery modernization program aimed at boosting fuel quality, a deputy energy minister said.

According to Reuters, in 2011, the government and oil producers agreed on the \$50 billion initiative to update Russia's refineries, most of which were built in the 1940s and 1970s.

Russia's gasoline supplies almost ran dry in 2011 due to a lack of modern refining capacity, angering many voters in the run-up to Vladimir Putin's election to a third presidential term.

Deputy Energy Minister Kirill Molodtsov told a briefing in comments cleared for publication on Monday that the country would produce 277 million tons of oil products in 2016, falling to an estimated 270 million tons of higher quality fuels in 2017.

"This is mainly related to the rise in refinery yield," he said, adding that he did not expect fuel shortages next year despite extensive plans for refinery maintenance.

He said gasoline production was estimated at 39.8 million tons in 2017, with diesel output seen at more than 70 million tons.

Production of fuel oil could decline by more than two million tons due to an increase in export duty from Jan. 1 2017.

oil export expected to reach over 279 tons in 2017

The oil export from Russia is expected to reach more than 2016's estimated total of 253.5 million tons (roughly 279.4 million tons) in 2017, which is an almost 5-percent increase since 2015, Russian Deputy



Energy Minister Kirill Molodtsov was quoted by Sputnik as saying on Monday.

"Supposedly 253.5 [million tons of oil are expected to be exported from Russia] this year, which is 4.8 percent more than in 2015. In 2017, we will have a little more than this," Molodtsov said.

The deputy minister added that the export levels depended on the implementation of the oil output deal

initiated by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). In November, OPEC agreed to cut oil production by 1.2 million barrels per day to 32.5 million barrels per day for the whole cartel from next year. On December 10, a number of non-OPEC countries agreed to cut oil output by 558,000 barrels per day, with Russia cutting the output by 300,000 barrels per day from January 2017. (Source: agencies)

Brazilian Petrobras workers strike for higher pay

Workers at Brazil's national oil company, Petrobras, began a strike December 23 that has paralyzed operations at its refineries and offshore platforms.

The strike comes after workers rejected a salary increase they say is insufficient. According to Smart Stock News, Petrobras has historically given raises that have at least covered the rate of inflation — but the proposed six percent increase

would fall nearly 1 percent short of that, as of November's reckoning. Petrobras, which has debts of more than \$125 billion, has been trying to cut costs and sell off assets, including announcing a \$2.2 billion asset sale to french oil company Total. The Federation of Petroleum Workers (FUP) union, the largest trade union in Brazil's oil sector, also says Petrobras is in breach of the Collective Work Agree-

ment for 2016-2017. Unions have also voiced concerns about changes in their employee contract that could let Petrobras lower the number of hours worked, Smart Stock News reports. In a statement, Petrobras said it had been notified by unions of the strike ahead of time. The oil company has decided to go to court with a request for conciliation to continue negotiating with the unions. According to

TeleSur, Petrobras has about 85,000 workers and accounts for about 13 percent of Brazil's gross domestic product — but the company has been embroiled for more than a year in a far-reaching corruption probe of price fixing and kickbacks on a massive scale, which has brought down executives and politicians at the highest levels of government. (Source: Sputnik)

PICTURE OF THE DAY SHANA/Mojtaba Mohammadgholi



Located in southern province of Fars, Parsian Gas Refinery Company is Iran's third largest gas refinery with a nominal capacity of 82 million cubic meters per day. The refinery produces some of the world's finest gas condensate which is mostly being sent to South Korea and Japan.

World's first solar panel road opens in Normandy village

France has opened what it claims to be the world's first solar panel road, in a Normandy village.

A 1km (0.6-mile) route in the small village of Tourouvre-au-Perche covered with 2,800 square meters of electricity-generating panels, was inaugurated on Thursday by the ecology minister, Ségolène Royal.

It cost €5m (£4.2m) to construct and will be used by about 2,000 motorists a day

during a two-year test period to establish if it can generate enough energy to power-street lighting in the village of 3,400 residents.

In 2014, a solar-powered cycle path opened in Krommenie in the Netherlands and, despite teething problems, has generated 3,000kWh of energy — enough to power an average family home for a year. The cost of building the cycle path, how-

ever, could have paid for 520,000kWh.

Before the solar-powered road — called Wattway — was opened on the RD5 road, the panels were tested at four car parks across France. The constructor was Colas, part of giant telecoms group Bouygues, and financed by the state.

Normandy is not known for its surfeit of sunshine: Caen, the region's political capital, enjoys just 44 days of strong sunshine a year compared with 170 in Marseilles.

Royal has said she would like to see solar panels installed on one in every 1,000km of French highway — France has a total of 1m km of roads — but panels laid on flat surfaces have been found to be less efficient than those installed on sloping areas such as roofs.

Critics say it is not a cost-effective use of public money. Marc Jedliczka, vice-president of Network for Energetic Transition (CLER) told Le Monde: "It's without doubt a technical advance, but in order to develop renewables there are other priorities than a gadget of which we are more certain that

Oil-rich Mauritania still not finding its feet

Mauritania is still struggling to assert itself as an oil country despite the deposit of about 950 million barrels discovered in the Atlantic Ocean at the beginning of 2006.

Ten years after it is far from the target of 30,000 barrels per day of production.

Production even rebounded to stabilize at an average of 6,000 barrels per day.

Nevertheless, the authorities remain optimistic.

"The investment climate in the oil sector in Mauritania it is very good, we have a lot of companions who invest, who spend in exploration oil, drilling, it means that the business climate in the oil industry is very good," said Ahmed Salem Ould Tekrou, General Director of Hydrocarbons at the Ministry of Energy and Mines.

Despite making \$ 4.26 million from oil production ordinary citizens say they do not benefit from the explorations.

"Gasoline is a bit expensive compared to other countries. We pay 436 francs a liter , I know that it is a little exaggerated in Mauritania compared to other countries," said Aminata, a citizen.

The fallout from authorities and ordinary citizens is still rife, despite the government's promises. (Source: Africa News)



it's very expensive than the fact it works."

Jean-Louis Bal, president of renewable energy union SER, said: "We have to look at the cost, the production [of electricity] and its lifespan. For now I don't have the answers."

Colas said the panels have been covered with a resin containing fine sheets of silicon, making them tough enough to withstand all traffic, including HGVs. The company says it hopes to reduce the costs of producing the solar panels and has about 100 other projects for solar-paneled roads — half in France and half abroad. (Source: The Guardian)

Pakistan in bid to ease power purchase from Iran

Islamabad is seeking ways to facilitate the purchase of electricity and gas from Iran, a senior Pakistan government official said.

Commerce Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan said that during his upcoming visit to Tehran, Iran he would hold talks on cooperation in the energy sector, particularly in the purchase of electricity for Gwadar port, reported Iran Daily, citing IRNA.

Pakistan is willing to import electricity from Iran for all areas along the Iran-Pakistan border, he said.

He added that in the next few weeks, impediments to banking cooperation between the two countries could be removed. (Source: Trade Arabia)

China end-Nov crude oil stocks drop 1.6%, diesel hits record low

China's end-November crude oil stocks fell 1.55 percent from the previous month to 29.89 million tons as domestic output shrank and winter demand grew, data from the official Xinhua news agency showed, while diesel inventories slid to a record low.

That left crude oil stocks at their lowest level since July, according to the data, released in a Xinhua report on Monday. China's refinery throughput hit a daily record in November as plant maintenance wound down and independents ramped up productions.

Crude oil production fell nine percent from a year earlier. Diesel stocks led the fall in refined fuel products with a 3.9 percent decline to 5.95 million tons. Gasoline stocks inched up 0.87 percent to 7.95 million tons. Xinhua said in its report that diesel supply had become tight as refineries across China tempered production while they upgraded facilities to produce higher-quality fuels in order to meet stricter emissions limits on gasoline and diesel that China is introducing from Jan. 1. The agency did not provide the outright inventory volumes. The Chinese government rarely discloses levels of either commercial or strategic oil stocks, making it difficult to gauge real demand in the world's second-largest oil consumer. (Source: Reuters)

GE delivers first ever wind turbine in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Aramco took delivery of the kingdom's first ever wind turbine from General Electric on Sunday as part of a push to expand its renewable energy footprint.

The state-owned oil giant said took delivery of a 2.75-120 wind turbine that will provide power to Saudi Aramco's Bulk Plant located in Turaif, in northwest Saudi Arabia.

The wind turbine will generate 2.75 megawatts of power at its peak, supplying enough energy to power around 250 Saudi households.

Saudi Aramco said the turbine will allow it to reduce the amount of diesel its burns for power generation by 18,600 barrels of oil equivalent per year. The turbine will be officially commissioned in January 2017.

The construction of foundations for the turbine are underway.

First electricity from the turbine is expected to be supplied to the Saudi Aramco Bulk Plant once commissioning of the turbine is complete.

The turbine's blades will reach a height of about 475 feet (145 meters), or almost half the height of Riyadh's Kingdom Tower.

The diameter of the wind turbine rotor blades will dwarf the span of the world's largest passenger jet, Saudi Aramco said.

The rotor's diameter measures 393 feet, making it 50 percent wider than the wing span of an Airbus 380.

The rotor blade's tips can travel at up to one-third the speed of sound, Saudi Aramco added.

The wind turbine and its control system have been specifically designed by GE to minimize the potential noise emitted from the rotor blades.

Saudi Aramco said it hopes that wind energy will become a key source of power under the kingdom's National Renewables Program that was launched in 2010.

The program is expected to deliver a combined 9,500 megawatts generated from wind and solar energy by 2023.

"Saudi Aramco is actively promoting the reduction of energy intensity across the Kingdom by advocating responsible policies, awareness, and energy innovation," Saudi Aramco's Executive Head for Power Systems Abdulkarim Al Ghamdi said. (Source: petroglobalnews.com)

New South Wales government launches energy storage challenge

The government of New South Wales, Australia has issued a call for energy storage proposals to help wind and solar generators deliver energy to the grid constantly.

The call for proposals is part of the government's Advanced Energy Challenge.

Minister for Industry, Resources and Energy Anthony Roberts said that the initiative will stimulate new energy-related ideas and turn them into effective technologies and business models.

According to a statement from the NSW government, the best proposals in the challenge will receive government support, such as access to government, industry and research collaborators, leveraging of government assets, access to government data and concierge referral to existing funding opportunities.

The government will co-design and implement the successful proposal with the proponents.

Expressions of interest for the first round of the challenge are due on Feb. 3, 2017. (Source: renewableenergyworld.com)

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Syrian-Americans: Model immigrants?

A study of earlier immigrants from Syria finds them 'doing very well' and should ease concerns about recent refugees.

A U.S. pledge to accept 10,000 refugees from war-torn Syria was achieved last summer. In all, the country has admitted more than 15,000 Syrian refugees since January 2014.

That's a tiny fraction of the 4.8 million Syrian refugees who have fled a brutal civil war to find asylum around the world. Yet, in a U.S. election year, even this modest commitment managed to stoke controversy and raise continuing questions over whether these refugees would become a burden, or even a danger, to American society.

An indicator of how these new arrivals may do in the United States is found in data on the 90,000 Syrian immigrants who have been in America over a much longer period of time. It shows them to be nothing short of a model group of new Americans.

"Immigrants from Syria who live in the United States are in fact doing very well. They are learning English, getting good jobs, owning homes, and starting businesses at impressive rates," say the authors of an analysis of these earlier Syrian immigrants conducted by the Fiscal Policy Institute and the Center for American Progress. "These findings are reassuring and should provide the basis for more informed and thoughtful consideration of how to think about current and future Syrian immigrants and refugees," the analysis concludes.

Syrian immigrants in the U.S. earn a good living, with a median annual wage of \$52,000. This compares very favorably with the \$36,000 median wage for all immigrants in the workforce and the average \$45,000 annual median wage for workers born in the U.S., the analysis says.

Syrian immigrants are often entrepreneurs and have a high rate of business ownership. Some 3 percent of people born in the U.S. own their own businesses; more than 11 percent of Syrian immigrants do.

Syrian-Americans tend to be well-educated, too. More than a quarter (27 percent) of Syrian-born men in the U.S. hold advanced college degrees (master's degree or higher).

After living in the U.S. for at least 20 years, the data show, more than 90 percent of Syrian immigrants have become U.S. citizens, a rate about 20 percent higher than that of U.S. immigrants in general.

→13

How will Trump and Duterte get along?

Duterte's personal envoy to Washington owns the Trump Tower in Manila

By Richard Javad Heydarian

In the past few months, the Philippine-U.S. alliance has suffered an unprecedented setback. Diplomatic exchanges have been rife with tensions, while military cooperation has been downgraded, although it is unclear whether it has been formally downgraded.

This deterioration in relations is mainly due to bilateral disagreements over human rights issues and policy responses to Chinese maritime assertiveness in the South China Sea.

But the surprising election of Donald J. Trump, a populist and businessman, could reset bilateral ties toward a more positive direction—though it risks further undermining the rule of law in the Philippines.

Under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines has witnessed a significant reconfiguration in both its domestic political landscape and its foreign policy outlook.

■ The tough-talking leader

Domestically, the tough-talking leader, true to his campaign promise, has launched a scorched-earth campaign against the proliferation of illegal drugs. While a majority of the population has remained supportive of the president, the Duterte administration has nonetheless grappled with heavy criticism from the international community and some Philippine opposition lawmakers and rights groups, because of the violent nature of the drug war.

The outgoing U.S. President Barack Obama has been firm in his criticism of Duterte's drug war and its impact on the rule of law. The Obama administration has called upon the Duterte government to uphold "the rule of law and a commitment to upholding basic, universal human rights," warning that a violent crackdown on drug users and sellers is "not going to solve the problem."

The European Parliament, the United Nations and Australia have also expressed similar concerns, as have many international and Philippine rights organizations.

In response, Duterte has lashed out at leaders of Western nations, accusing them of preventing him from fulfilling his law-and-order campaign promise.

Meanwhile, he has maintained broadly cordial relations with key U.S. allies such as Japan and South Korea, which have mostly refrained from directly criticizing the Duterte administration.

As Duterte inches closer to the end of his first six months in office, he is under increasing domestic and international pressure to show success in suppressing the drug menace in the country as well as to shift to a more rehabilitation-centered and public health-focused approach.



There is growing expectation that Trump won't be tough on the Philippines vis-à-vis human rights and democracy issues.

Duterte's foreign policy has been equally earthshaking. He has threatened to end Manila's military alliance with Washington, opted for a bilateral (rather than multilateral) strategy in the South China Sea.

In the past month, the Duterte administration has warned that he might end some existing joint military exercises with U.S. forces and restrict their access to Philippine bases, although he did not take formal moves to follow through on these threats.

■ Trump's election

Since Trump's election, however, Duterte has been singing a somewhat different tune. Just months earlier, Duterte dismissed Trump as a "bigot" and buffoon.

Upon Trump's election victory, however, which seemingly took even Duterte by surprise, the tough-talking Philippine leader immediately switched to a more cordial tone, offering congratulations and best wishes to Trump, declaring: "I don't want to fight [with Washington anymore] because Trump is there."

Duterte, previously dubbed as the "Trump of the East," proved more than eager to also emphasize his temperamental similarity with the newly elected American leader.

There are legitimate reasons for Manila to be more optimistic about the direction of relations with the United States. First of all, there is growing expectation that Trump won't be tough on the Philippines vis-à-vis human rights and democracy issues.

In fact, Duterte controversially claimed, after his

phone call with Trump, that the incoming U.S. leader supports his war on drugs, though the Trump transition team is yet to confirm that anyone actually said this.

Duterte also has welcomed Trump's seemingly tough approach to China, even though Duterte himself has pursued accommodation with Beijing. It is possible that Duterte could embrace a tougher U.S. policy toward China since this might mean Washington will more directly take on China rather than pushing regional allies like the Philippines to do so.

For Duterte, the best outcome is for the Philippines to maintain good relationship with both superpowers, and let Washington shoulder the costs of constraining Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea.

Moreover, Duterte also allegedly hopes to leverage business linkages with Trump to bolster U.S.-Philippine relations. Duterte's personal envoy to Washington owns the Trump Tower in Manila.

If the Philippines and China fail to arrive at a mutually satisfactory agreement in the disputed waters, then Duterte has even more reasons to repair frayed ties with Washington.

It goes without saying that it is perhaps too early, if not foolhardy, to speculate about the likely rapport of two of the most mercurial leaders in recent history, Duterte and Trump. For now, however, the government in Manila seems more eager to build ties with Obama's successor than it was with the Obama administration.

(Source: Newsweek)

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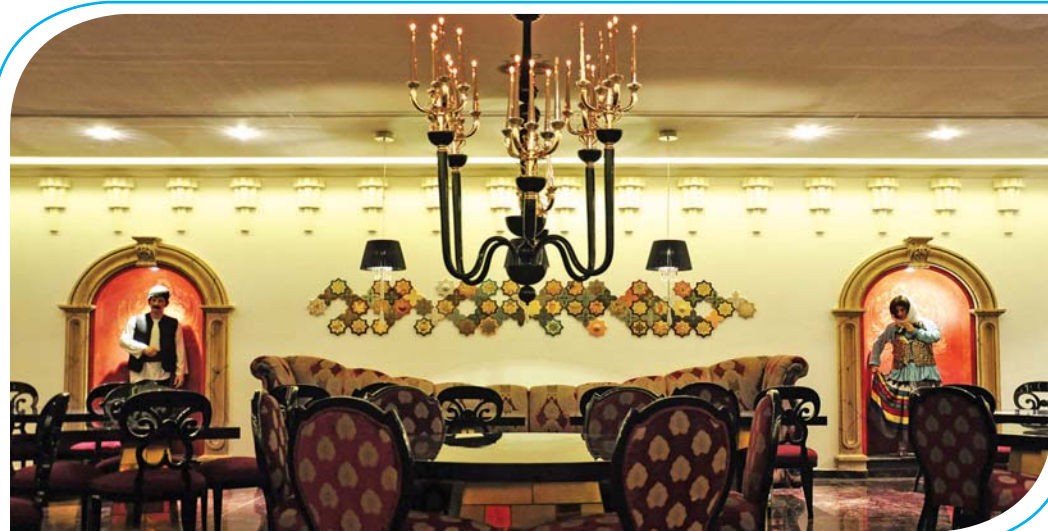
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By Mina Ahmadi

In a rare and earth-shattering step, the UN Security Council on December 23 voted in favor of a resolution hopefully bringing an end to settlement activity by Zionist regime on occupied Palestinian territory with the United States particularly abstaining.

Adopted by 14 votes in favor and one abstention, the resolution was put forward at the 15-member council for a vote by New Zealand, Malaysia, Venezuela and Senegal, a day after Egypt withdrew it under pressure from Israel and US president-elect Donald Trump.

The UNSC approved the resolution after the US refused to veto it, reversing its longstanding policy of shielding Israel from condemnatory resolutions at the world body.

The significant move by the Security Council came regardless of an endeavor led by Zionist regime and supported by Trump to hinder the passage.

■ "Big loss"

US President-elect Donald Trump reacted after the vote and said UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution censuring Israel for its illegal settlement construction in occupied Palestinian territories was a "big loss" for the regime.

Trump also promised change at the world body after he takes office next month. "As to the UN, things will be different after Jan. 20th," he tweeted.

"The big loss for Israel in the United Nations will make it much harder to negotiate peace. Too bad, but we will get it done anyway!" Trump twitted.

Last year, Trump said that he wanted to be "very neutral" on Israel-Palestinian issues, however, he adopted a more pro-Israel approach as the presidential campaign progressed.

He made disparaging remarks about Palestinians, claiming they have been "taken over" by militants.

Following the vote, Republican lawmakers and politicians criticized President Barack Obama over his refusal to veto the resolution.

The passage of the "resolution on Israeli settlements marks another

UNSC passes anti-Israel resolution



Last year, Trump said he wanted to be "very neutral" on Israel-Palestinian issues, however, he adopted a more pro-Israel approach as the presidential campaign progressed.

shameful chapter in the bizarre anti-Israel history of the United Nations," said Arizona Senator John McCain in a statement.

■ "No legal validity"

The first resolution the Security Council has adopted on Israel and the Palestinians in nearly eight years indicated that Tel Aviv regime's settlements in the Palestinian territory, occupied since 1967, have "no legal validity".

The resolution demanded a halt to "all Israeli settlement activities", saying this "is essential for salvaging the two-state solution".

According to Aljazeera, some 430,000 Israeli settlers currently are residing in the West Bank and a further 200,000 Israelis live in occupied East Beit-ul Moqaddas, which the Palestinians see as the capital of their future state.

Earlier this month, Israeli lawmakers approved a hugely-controversial bill legalizing some 4,000 settler units

built on private Palestinian land in the occupied West Bank, in the first of three readings needed to turn it into law, Press TV wrote.

The US, UN and European Union have strongly criticized the bill.

Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Ministry condemned a new bill proposed by Israeli lawmakers that would legalize some 4,000 settler homes in the occupied West Bank, saying the measure is against "international law".

Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said the bill "runs contrary to international law and regulations especially the international human rights and international humanitarian law, and those who take such actions violate the international rights and should be prosecuted."

The move violates the Palestinians' right to determine their destiny, the Foreign Ministry official added.

UN high commissioner for human rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein strongly criticized the settlement bill.

"Israel as the occupying power, must respect the private property of Palestinians, regardless of whether or not compensation is provided," Guardian quoted him as saying in a statement.

He also said, "All Israeli settlements – whether outposts built without formal approval but often with the support of the Israeli authorities and which are currently illegal under Israeli law, or settlements approved by Israel – are clearly and unequivocally illegal under international law and constitute one of the main obstacles to peace."

Over half a million Israelis live in over 230 illegal settlements built since the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Beit-ul Moqaddas.

■ 'Big blow' to Israel

Reacting to the passage of the resolution,

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon hailed the passage of the resolution as "a significant step, demonstrating the council's much needed leadership and

the international community's collective efforts to reconfirm that the vision of two states is still achievable".

Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's office said the vote was "a big blow" to Israeli policy and a show of "strong support for the two-state solution".

Palestinian resistance movement Hamas on Saturday welcomed the landmark vote, saying it marked an "important evolution".

"Hamas appreciates the position of the countries that voted in the Security Council for the right of the Palestinian people (to live) on their land," said Hamas spokesman, Fawzy Barhoum.

"We salute this important evolution in international positions," he said, while calling for more such actions to bring about "the end of the occupation".

The United Nations maintains that settlements are illegal, but UN officials have reported a surge in construction over the past months.

■ Purely symbolic gesture



Author and commentator John Stepling believes that the anti-Israeli settlement resolution is absolutely "toothless" and a "purely symbolic gesture" and Israel does not care at all about what the UN says.

John Stepling an author and commentator believes the anti-Israeli settlement resolution is absolutely "toothless" and a "purely symbolic gesture", adding that Israel does not care at all about what the United Nations says.

"So yes, it is a tiny, infinitesimal, symbolic victory but it has no relevance, there is no sanction mechanisms attached to it, there is no penalty, and Israel will ignore it as they usually ignore things they do not like," Stepling said.

Press TV quoted Stepling as saying that Tel Aviv has no intention of ever stopping its land grabbing and wants all Palestinians gone, which is likely to occur with the election of Donald Trump and the nomination of David Friedman as US ambassador to Israel.

He went on to say the fear right now is that Trump may turn out to be the most pro-Israeli president in history, and that with the appointment of David Friedman, Israel will have "carte blanche".

Stepling further opined that the anti-Israeli settlement resolution will only allow the recognition of the world condemnation of Israel.

He also argued the reason why the US did not veto this resolution has to be seen in the light of President Barack Obama's lame duck period and the defeat of the US proxy war in Syria.

According to the commentator, it is time to stop euphemistically describing an "incremental genocide" against Palestinians, asserting that there is no justification for any of these Israeli settlements that are growing more rapidly than ever.

For sure, the resolution's immediate impact appears to be largely symbolic, but Zionist regime worries it could unfasten the door to an increase in international steps, including economic measures. Much of the international community considers the settlements illegal or illegitimate and an obstacle to peace.

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Is it bad to eat the same foods every day?

By Alexandra Duron

Routines: Some people swear by them, while others love to mix it up. But what if we're talking about your weekday turkey wrap lunch, or that bowl of cereal you have nearly every morning? Does it matter if your diet is, well, boring? We found out whether variety really is the spice of—a longer and healthier—life.

The need-to-know

First of all, people tend to stick to the same stuff—at least on a weekly basis, says Rania Batayneh, M.P.H., author of *The One One One Diet*. "Those foods are the ones they know and like and have recipes for," she says. And there's more than just comfort in having a routine meal plan.

If you're filling up on fruits and veggies,

Boredom can bring on overeating or a quest for diet-derailing treats and noshing on the same stuff exposes you to the same pesticides.

rest assured that you're flooding your body with nutrients and antioxidants, and bolstering your immune system in the process, say Lyssie Lakatos, R.D. and Tammy Lakatos Shames, R.D., co-owners of The Nutrition Twins. Since this go-to strategy means you're never wondering what to eat, you're less likely to deplete your Dorito supply (if you even have one) while pondering your next meal, Batayneh says.

"It also triggers more healthy habits," Lakatos says. "It takes time to mentally prepare to eat healthily, so when one thing's out of the way, you can focus on other habits." Think: squeezing in a workout or carving out time to meditate.

Plus, a structured eat-and-repeat routine may help keep your waistline



in check. Consider this: A recent study found that a more diverse diet is associated with a greater waist circumference. The study authors speculate that perhaps having more variety in the diet might lead to eating more healthy and unhealthy foods—which goes to show that you still have to keep tabs on your calorie count.

Things get murkier if your per diem plan routinely incorporates less-than-stellar choices (looking at you, fries and wings). Batayneh says that occasionally indulging in unhealthy meals may help you sustain an otherwise healthy diet and keep you motivated. Of course, there's a bit of an asterisk to that statement too: One or two cheat meals might be OK, but it greatly depends on what your cheat meal looks like and what your personal health goals are. But it may not work so well if you're the kind of person who falls off the wagon after the first bite of a bacon double cheeseburger or if you give in to nutritionally empty temptations daily.

Still, there are drawbacks to maintaining a Xeroxed menu. First up: By eating the same thing day in and day out, you're limiting your diet to certain nutrients and depriving yourself of others—even if you have

a healthy, well-balanced meal plan, Shames says. For example, if your diet lacks probiotics (hi, yogurt!) or prebiotics (the carbs that probiotics eat that come from whole grains and honey), you could throw off the bacteria in your gut, which could affect mood and immunity, she says.

Plus, noshing on the same stuff exposes you to the same pesticides (yep, even if you go organic), and it's possible to develop food sensitivities if you OD on any one food, Lakatos says.

"Another drawback is monotony," Batayneh says. "It can be very easy to get bored of what you're eating after three nights of the same dinner!" (Word.) And boredom can bring on overeating or a quest for diet-derailing treats.

Plus, recent research suggests that eating a greater variety of healthy foods may boost health in a big way—it's associated with a lower likelihood of developing metabolic syndrome (risk factors that up your odds for heart and health problems). And another (albeit older) study on women says that greater variety of healthy food lowers the risk of death.

The takeaway

Eating the same healthy foods every sin-

gle day isn't going to hurt you. So yes, you're still healthy if your Friday menu is a carbon copy of Monday's. Batayneh suggests eating a mix of different-colored fruits and veggies, though she also gives the green light to eat the same ones that you love every day.

But even an already-healthy diet can welcome new all-star ingredients into the fold, and the variety is probably good for you. Try making small tweaks—like adding an extra veggie to your dish, switching up the go-to greens in your salad, or seasoning food with lime instead of lemon—to amp up your nutrient intake, Shames says. And to keep boredom at bay, Batayneh suggests having a few different meals—they don't have to be complicated—on deck.

Whatever you do, make sure you stick to the healthy stuff, since one too many

It takes time to mentally prepare to eat healthily, so when one thing's out of the way, you can focus on other habits. Think about squeezing in a workout or carving out time to meditate.

French fries or other less-than-awesome options means you're just exposing yourself to artery-clogging foods on a regular basis, Lakatos says. You can indulge on occasion, but learn to recognize when an indulgence turns into the new normal. If you start running low on energy, feeling guilty, packing on pounds, or generally feeling less healthy, it might be time to cut back on the junk. "There's no perfect number of cheat meals for everyone—it really depends on how you can fit the foods you love into an overall healthy lifestyle," Batayneh says.

(Source: *greatist.com*)

Routine screening tests for men

Men are less likely than women to get routine physical exams and screenings. A survey by the American Academy of Family Physicians found that 55% of men surveyed had not seen their doctor for a physical exam in the previous year, even though 40% of them had at least one chronic condition. Nearly one-fifth of men ages 55 and over said they had never undergone screening for colon cancer, and almost 30% said they "wait as long as possible" to seek medical attention when they are feeling sick or in pain.

Screening means testing for diseases and conditions that may not yet be causing symptoms. If you already have a disease or condition, more frequent testing may be required. Here are some important tests to discuss with your doctor.

Screening tests for men ages 50 and older

Abdominal aortic aneurysm

Guidelines recommend a one-time screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm by ultrasonography in men ages 65 to 75 years who have ever smoked.

Blood pressure testing

Testing at least every two years if you have normal blood pressure (120/80 or below); at least once per year if it is elevated or if you are at increased risk for heart disease and stroke (such as from smoking or diabetes).

Cholesterol test

Get this checked every five years; if you have risk factors for heart disease, discuss with your doctor whether you should be tested more frequently.



A survey by the American Academy of Family Physicians found that 55% of men surveyed had not seen their doctor for a physical exam in the previous year, even though 40% of them had at least one chronic condition.

Colorectal screening

Men ages 50 to 75 should be tested by one of these three methods: (1) fecal occult blood test annually; (2) flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years; (3) colonoscopy

every 10 years. After age 75, discuss the need for continued screening with your doctor.

Diabetes screening

If you are age 40 to 70, and overweight or obese, you should be tested. If you have risk factors for type 2 diabetes or heart disease, or if your blood pressure is higher than 135/80, or if you use medication to control your blood pressure, talk to your doctor about whether you should be tested, and how often.

Hepatitis C virus testing

Men at increased risk for this infection should be tested regularly (discuss how often with your doctor). Risk is increased if you have had blood (or blood product) transfusions or received a transplanted organ before June 1992, are a health care worker who may have been stuck by a needle, or have ever used injected drugs, even just once many years ago.

Lung cancer

Annual screening for lung cancer with a low-dose CT scan in adults ages 55 to 80 years who have a 30 pack-year smoking history (smoked one pack/day for 30 years, two packs/day for 15 years, etc.) and who currently smoke or have quit within the past 15 years.

Prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test

When and whether men should have regular PSA tests for prostate cancer is controversial. These tests are not recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. Discuss with your doctor.

(Source: *health.harvard.edu*)

5 (relatively) easy New Year's resolutions for healthier, happier kids (and families)

By Claire McCarthy

It's that time of year again, the time when we make resolutions. We set goals, make plans and imagine ways that we can do better in the year to come.

We usually have good ideas — the problem tends to be in making those ideas actually happen. We get busy, the resolutions are too ambitious, we really don't want to give up sweets for whatever reason, resolutions often fade away by February.



It's too bad, because while there may be some families out there with perfect lifestyle habits, I'm guessing they are few and far between. We all have room for improvement. The key may be setting goals that are achievable — and practical.

Here are five suggestions that most families can manage — and that can make all the difference when it comes to setting everyone on a healthier path:

Family meals have all sorts of benefits, from decreasing the risk of obesity to improving vocabulary to keeping teens out of trouble. Plus, they are a nice way to check in with each other.

1. Eat one more family meal a week.

Family meals have all sorts of benefits, from decreasing the risk of obesity to improving vocabulary to keeping teens out of trouble. Plus, they are a nice way to check in with each other. Work, homework, and activity schedules can make it hard to get everybody in the same place at the same time, but it's worth the effort. Keep the food

simple: something like pasta and salad (or some heated up frozen vegetables) is fine. The point is to be together.

2. Have everyone eat one more serving of fruits or vegetables a day. The recommendation is five servings a day, and my experience as a pediatrician is that very few people actually do that. Try packing an apple for a snack, slicing a banana in the morning cereal, and always serve a vegetable with dinner (and insist on at least three bites from picky children.) Be creative and work with your children. One serving isn't that much. You can do it.

3. Find one more way a week to be active. The recommendation is that all children be active for an hour a day — and again, my experience as a pediatrician is that not many children are meeting it. Being active could be staying after school to play at the park for a half hour, going to family swim at the YMCA on Sundays, taking a walk, or dancing while you make supper. You can do it once a week together, or break it up into little bits every day, or vary it by person. Again, be creative. Taking the stairs instead of the elevator could work, too, or walking to school in the morning.

4. Create a device-free zone or time. Dinnertime is a great example, and bedrooms after bedtime is another. This can be hard, not just for the kids who give pushback, but also for parents who are just as addicted to devices. But our devices, as fun and necessary as they may be, are increasingly inserting themselves between us, and getting in the way of sleep.

5. Make sure everyone has time to goof off. I mean it. Both parents and children are way too scheduled, and that's not good for us. Not only does it lead to stress, it can actually get in the way of learning and creativity. So be sure that every single member of the family has some unscheduled time to just, well, play. If you can play together, even better.

Don't be too ambitious. Set goals you can manage, talk as a family, and figure it out together. Even small steps can be steps in the right direction.

(Source: *health.harvard.edu*)

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Surge in tourists puts some strain on Thailand's infrastructure

Thailand's success in attracting huge numbers of tourists has put some infrastructure for handling the influx under pressure, an economist with the World Bank said on Monday.

"Bottlenecks are building up in destinations like Chiang Mai, Bangkok and Phuket, while infrastructure still hasn't expanded," Kiatipong Ariyaprichya said.

The economist also said that new destinations inside Thailand "must be introduced and monitored closely to support sustainable tourism".

The industry has remained resilient despite a 2014 coup and a wave of deadly bombings in August this year that killed four Thai tourists and injured dozens, including foreigners.

Last year, Thailand attracted a record 29.9 million visitors. The tourism ministry expects 32.4 million visitors this year while the tourism council says there could be 34.4 million in 2017.

But tourism growth is putting airports and other aspects of infrastructure under strain. Infrastructure is a problem not just for tourism - a rare bright spot for the economy - but for growth in general.

In the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index 2016-2017, Thailand's infrastructure ranking was 49th compared with 38th in 2006-2007.

For airport congestion, help is planned. In June, Airports of Thailand Pcl (AOT), the country's main airport operator, said it intends to spend \$5.5 billion over the next 15 years to expand six main airports. *(Source: Reuters)*

Database eyed to boost services for tourists in Japan

The Japanese government plans to step up efforts in fiscal 2017 to create a database of information on foreign visitors to the country, including their spending trends and other demographics, according to sources.

The move is a part of an effort to create new tourism-related services by analyzing the data collected. The government aims to put the database into practical use nationwide in 2020 when Tokyo hosts the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

This fiscal year, the government is conducting a pilot test on a system that allows foreign tourists to verify their identities and make purchases using their fingerprints. The experiment is under way in three locations: the Tokyo metropolitan area, the Kansai area and Fukuoka.

Next fiscal year, the government plans to increase the number of areas subject to the trial by about 10 and establish a list of 18 items on which participating areas will collect information, according to the sources.

However, sufficient information might not be collected, as foreign visitors could get concerned about providing travel routes and other specific personal data.

(Source: The Jakarta Post)

ROUND THE GLOBE

City of Potosi

Potosi in Bolivia is the example par excellence of a major silver mine of the modern era, reputed to be the world's largest industrial complex in the 16th century. The historical city has been inscribed on UNESCO World Heritage list.

A small pre-Hispanic-period hamlet perched at an altitude of 4,000 m in the icy solitude of the Bolivian Andes, Potosi became an "Imperial City" following the visit of Francisco de Toledo in 1572.



A view of Potosi, a UNESCO World Heritage site in Bolivia

It and its region prospered enormously following the discovery of the New World's biggest silver lodes in the Cerro de Potosi south of the city. The major colonial-era supplier of silver for Spain, Potosi was directly and tangibly associated with the massive import of precious metals to Seville, which precipitated a flood of Spanish currency and resulted in globally significant economic changes in the 16th century.

The whole industrial production chain from the mines to the Royal Mint has been conserved, and the underlying social context is equally well illustrated, with quarters for the Spanish colonists and for the forced laborers separated from each other by an artificial river.

Potosi also exerted a lasting influence on the development of architecture and monumental arts in the central region of the Andes by spreading the forms of a baroque style that incorporated native Indian influences.

By the 17th century there were 160,000 colonists living in Potosi along with 13,500 Indians who were forced to work in the mines under the system of mita (mandatory labor).

The city and region retain evocative evidence of this activity, which slowed significantly after 1800 but still continues. This includes mines, notably the Royal mine complex, the biggest and best-conserved of the some 5,000 operations that riddled the high plateau and its valleys, dams that controlled the water that activated the ore-grinding mills, aqueducts, milling centers and kilns.

This inventive architecture, which reflects the rich social and religious life of the time, had a lasting influence on the development of architecture and monumental arts in the central region of the Andes.

(Source: UNESCO)

Tchogha Zambil, a fascinating tourist destination in southwest Iran



A view of Tchogha Zambil. The UNESCO World Heritage site is one of the finest surviving examples of the Elamite architecture in the globe.

T**OURISM** **TEHRAN** — The magnificent ruins of Tchogha Zambil is amongst the top-most tourist attractions in southwest Iran as it is considered by many the finest surviving example of the Elamite architecture in the globe.

The prehistoric mud brick complex bears testimony to the unique expression of the culture, beliefs, rituals and traditions of one of the oldest indigenous communities of Iran.

Inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1979, the ziggurat overlooks the ancient city of Susa (near modern Shush) in Khuzestan Province.

It was originally measured 105.2 meters in each side and protected by five huge concentric walls, three of which are presently remained.

Reaching a total height of some 25m, the ziggurat was used to be surmounted by a temple and estimated to hit 52m during its heyday.

Its construction started in c. 1250 BC upon the order of the Elamite king Untash-Napirisha (1275-1240 BC) as the religious center of Elam dedicated to the Elamite divinities Inshushinak and Napirisha.

UNESCO says that Tchogha Zambil is the largest ziggurat outside of Mesopotamia and the best preserved of this type of stepped pyramidal monument.

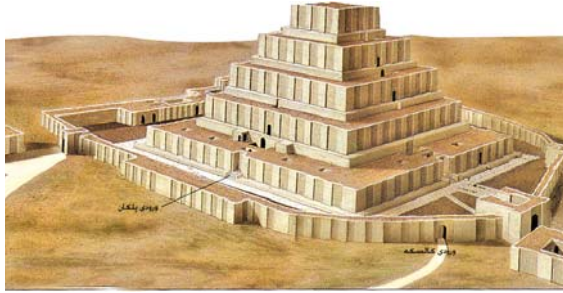
The Elamite structure was given a facing of baked bricks, a number of which have cuneiform characters giving the names of deities in the Elamite and Akkadian

languages.

It was never been completed as thousands of unused bricks left at the premises testify.

Tchogha Zambil was excavated in six seasons between 1951 and 1961 by Roman Ghirshman, a Russian-born French archeologist who specialized in ancient Iran.

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



An artistic imagination of Tchogha Zambil

The ziggurat never been completed as thousands of unused bricks left at the premises testify.

Highlight of our trip through western Iran

Build in the 13th century BC, sacked around 640 BC, remained lost for more than 2500 years, accidentally re-discovered in 1935, leaving a magnificent brick ziggurat to visit this days. The huge building and the semi-desert isolation are impressive. (Wim Antwerp from Belgium, visited September 2016)

Must see

It's a wonderful place to visit, don't miss it if you're around. We went there in the evening, we were the only visitors and the sunset was magnificent. When it gets dark, lights are turned on and the ziggurat is visible from far. (Egoissimo from Romania; visited August 2016)

Well worth a visit

Definitely worth visiting this mud brick structure. An on-site guide took us around his explanations being translated for us by our driver/guide. As there were only the two of us plus our driver/guide he took us into a small internal area not normally accessible. Hardly anyone there which was great for us but a pity as this is a site worth the time. (Phebert from United Kingdom, visited May 2016)

Imposing ziggurat

One of the best examples of Elamite architecture, a world heritage site. Bricks seem freshly baked, the whole structure is well maintained. The area can be HOT, avoid going there from noon to 2pm, there is little if none shade. (Maxscuba from Italy, visited April 2016)

Top 10 archaeological discoveries of 2016

2016 has revealed an amazing array of archaeological discoveries, pushing the boundaries of scientific research and our understanding of the past. The following list represents 10 of the most exciting announcements across the year.

1 – Bronze Age stilt houses unearthed in East Anglian Fens

Archaeologists have revealed exceptionally well-preserved Bronze Age dwellings during a series of excavations throughout the year at Must Farm quarry in the East Anglian fens that is providing an extraordinary insight into domestic life 3,000 years ago.

2 – Swedish Archaeologists discover unknown ancient city in Greece

Archaeologists from the University of Gothenburg have begun exploring a previously unknown ancient city at a village called Vlochos, five hours north of Athens.

The archaeological remains are scattered on and around the Strongilovouni hill on the great Thessalian plains and can be dated to several historical periods.

3 – Spectacular cargo of ancient shipwreck found in Caesarea

Archaeologists diving in the ancient harbor in the Caesarea National Park recovered beautiful artifacts and coins from a 1,600-year-old shipwreck.

This is the largest assemblage of marine artifacts to be recovered in the past thirty years.

4 – Significant Bronze Age city discovered in northern Iraq

Archaeologists from the University of Tubingen per-



These bronze artifacts discovered from a cargo of ancient shipwreck in Caesarea, May 2016.

form excavation work just 45 kilometers from ISIL territory – the settlement may have been an outpost of the Akkadian Empire.

The archaeologists also discovered settlement layers dating from the Akkadian Empire period (2340-2200 BC).

5 – Archaeologists uncover massive 2500 year old Iron Age mound

Archaeologists have discovered that a 40-foot mound in Yorkshire, thought to be a Norman castle motte, is actually a unique Iron Age monument, built 2,500 years ago.

6 – Archaeologists in Norway discover church and altar of Viking king Olav Haraldsson

Archaeologists in Norway claim to have discovered a

church where the Viking King, Olaf Haraldsson was first enshrined as a saint.

The discovery gives credibility to Norse saga accounts surrounding important events of that era.

7 – Structures in French cave sheds new light on the Neanderthals

Deep inside Bruniquel Cave, in the Tarn et Garonne region of southwestern France, a set of man-made structures 336 meters from the entrance was recently dated as being approximately 176,500 years old.

This discovery indicates that humans began occupying caves much earlier than previously thought.

8 – Pharaonic boat burial uncovered in Abydos, Egypt

Penn Museum archaeologists excavating at the desert site of Abydos, Egypt have discovered the remains of a subterranean pharaonic boat burial dating to the reign of Senwosret III (c. 1850 BC).

9 – The Roman shoe hoard of Vindolanda

In 2016, the Vindolanda archaeologists excavated the ditch and discovered an incredible time capsule of life and conflict, and amongst the debris were dog and cat skeletons, pottery, leather and 421 Roman shoes.

10 – Mummified remains identified as Egyptian Queen Nefertari

A team of international archaeologists believe a pair of mummified legs on display in an Italian museum may belong to Egyptian Queen Nefertari – the favorite wife of the pharaoh Ramses II. *(Source: Heritage Daily)*

IN FOCUS Mizan/Behrouz Khosravi



Sorkhrud wetland hosts thousands of migratory birds

T**OURISM** **TEHRAN** — Flocks of migratory geese are shown at Sorkhrud wetland in the northern Iranian province of Mazandaran on December 25, 2016.

The south Caspian Sea refuge will remain dominated by its northerly guests until about mid-May 2017 when the migration season comes to an end.

Every Year, the rich landscape drags hundreds of birdwatchers, backpackers, and bird buffs as well.

The mid-winter population of the migratory birds is estimated to exceed over a million in the whole sandy shorelines of the south Caspian Sea that adds up to 700km.

Furthermore, the Caspian Sea provinces of Gilan, Golestan, and Mazandaran, embracing variety of freshwater lakes, wetlands, and lagoons, are large wintering destinations for pelicans, flamingos, ducks, swans, and coots and some other species.

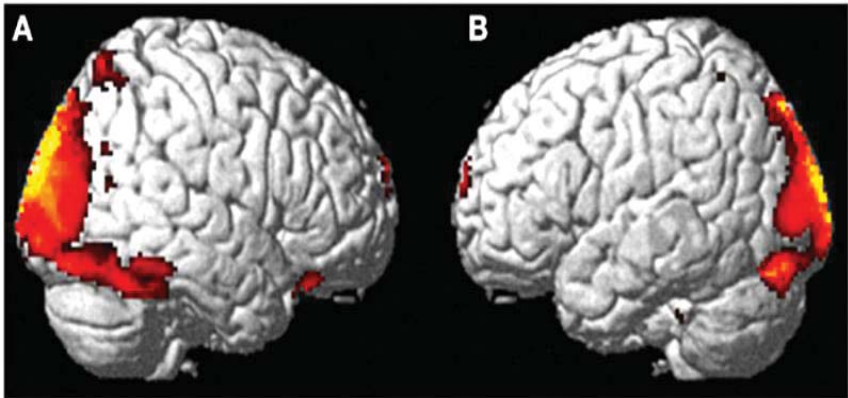
Scientists say your “mind” isn’t confined to your brain, or even your body

You might wonder, at some point today, what’s going on in another person’s mind. You may compliment someone’s great mind, or say they are out of their mind. You may even try to expand or free your own mind.

But what is a mind? Defining the concept is a surprisingly slippery task. The mind is the seat of consciousness, the essence of your being. Without a mind, you cannot be considered meaningfully alive. So what exactly, and where precisely, is it?

Traditionally, scientists have tried to define the mind as the product of brain activity. The brain is the physical substance, and the mind is the conscious product of those firing neurons, according to the classic argument. But growing evidence shows that the mind goes far beyond the physical workings of your brain.

■ Brain plays important role
No doubt, the brain plays an incredibly important role. But our mind cannot be confined to what’s inside our skull, or even our body, according to a definition first put forward by Dan Siegel, a professor of psychiatry at UCLA School of Medicine and the author of a recently published book, *Mind: A Journey to the Heart of Being Human*.



He first came up with the definition more than two decades ago, at a meeting of 40 scientists across disciplines, including neuroscientists, physicists, sociologists, sociologists, and anthropologists. The aim was to come to an understanding of the mind that would appeal to common ground and satisfy those wrestling with the question across these fields.

Our mind is not simply our perception of experiences, but those experiences themselves, psychiatry professor Dan Siegel argues.

both embodied and relational, that regulates energy and information flow within and among us.” It’s not catchy. But it is interesting, and with meaningful implications.

■ Physical shelves
The most immediately shocking element of this definition is that our mind extends beyond our physical selves. In other words, our mind is not simply our perception of experiences, but those experiences themselves. Siegel argues that it’s impossible to completely disentangle our subjective view of the world from our interactions.
“I realized if someone asked me to define the shoreline but insisted, is it the water or the sand, I would have to say the shore is both sand and sea,” says Siegel. “You can’t limit our understanding of the coastline to insist it’s one or the other. I started thinking, maybe the mind is like the coastline — some inner and inter process. Mental life for an anthropologist or sociologist is profoundly social. Your thoughts, feelings, memories, attention, what you experience in this subjective world is part of mind.”

(Source: Quartz)

SpaceX makes history: Here’s a look back at the monumental Falcon 9 landing

On December 21, 2015, Elon Musk’s ambitious company SpaceX made history by successfully launching Falcon 9, sending a satellite into orbit, and safely landing upright on a strip of concrete landing pad in Cape Canaveral.

Now on its first anniversary, celebrate SpaceX’s accomplishment by watching a clip from National Geographic’s documentary of the historic event.

The ORBCOMM-2 mission is not new in itself — many satellites have been sent into orbit before — and SpaceX is not the first company to launch and land a rocket upright.

What makes the occasion momentous are conditions that came together to create a unique circumstance. That is, Falcon 9 is the first reusable rocket to actually reach outer space and send a satellite into orbit.

The short video clip released by National Geographic reveals just how tense the situation was during the Falcon 9 launch, and it begins with Musk asking if the sensors could detect anything that could pose a problem for the operation.

As soon as the rocket launches, Musk immediately runs outside the control center to watch the rocket in the night sky. The video then features a montage of clips

showing the rocket from where Musk stood, with Musk nervously watching and waiting, and the scientists and staff of SpaceX practically drowning in the silent tension.

■ Landing sequence
Musk is especially nervous during the landing sequence when the first stage of the rocket seems to take longer than expected to begin its series of “three burns” to return to Earth. Of course, with the Falcon 9 explosion happening just months prior, it is no wonder that everyone is waiting with bated breaths to witness what happens next.
“OK, this is bad,” Musk says in the video.

Of course, Falcon 9 is only fashionably late in showing signs of its grand re-entry but, when it successfully manages the successive burns without exploding, everyone goes wild with excitement and happiness.

Musk runs back to the control center as Falcon 9 ever so gently touches down and accomplishes his dream landing. He is even more amazed as Falcon 9 just stands in its landing spot unmoving and showing no signs that it would topple over.

“Holy smokes, man,” Musk says, an appropriate expression since the Falcon 9 begins emitting a lot of



smoke after its landing.
Just 11 days after the successful launch and landing, Musk announced that Falcon 9 had been thoroughly examined and is ready to go again. Of course, it had its fair shares of successes — delivering payloads to and from the International Space Station — and failures in 2016.

(Source: Tech Times)

Bogoslof volcano erupts again, sends up another ash plume

Bogoslof volcano in the Aleutian Islands was continuing to produce ash and aviation concerns after its third eruption of the week Friday morning.

The Alaska Volcano Observatory said in a Friday update that it had raised the aviation color code for the volcano, about 60 miles west of Unalaska, to red and its status to “warning” at about 11:15 A.M. in response to reports of a “short-lived explosive eruption.”

A “Coast Guard ship in the vicinity reported ash emission as well as ejection of lava and fragmental material,” AVO staff wrote. “According to the Coast Guard, ash emission subsided at about 10:37 (A.M. Alaska time).”

■ Major storm
John Lyons, a geophysicist at the observatory, said a major storm in the area was interfering with volcanologists’ attempts to get signals from monitoring stations on islands near Bogoslof Island, which was radically altered during eruptions this week.

Reports of the eruption Friday, which started at about 9:30 a.m., were being relayed through Coast Guard watchstanders. “They reported activity for about an hour



and seven minutes,” Lyons said. “We don’t have any visual observations yet because it’s cloudy, and the plume didn’t go above the regional cloud deck, which is 30,000 feet.”
Lyons said forecasted winds in the area were expected to take any ash over water to the northeast, with no ash fall expected in any Alaska communities.

■ Forecast area
The National Weather Service issued a forecast area (in black) west of Nunivak Is-

land for volcanic ash clouds from Bogoslof volcano in the Aleutian Islands, following an eruption on Friday morning. (From NWS)
The National Weather Service issued a forecast area (in black) west of Nunivak Island for volcanic ash clouds from Bogoslof volcano in the Aleutian Islands, following an eruption on Friday morning. (From NWS)
The National Weather Service’s aviation desk in Anchorage has been tracking issues related to Bogoslof since Wednes-

day, when dozens of lightning strikes — which Lyons called “the defining characteristic of this eruption so far” — were recorded at or near the volcano.

Anchorage-based NWS meteorologist Michael Kutz said that a trio of low-pressure systems in the Aleutians were expected to form a single system headed north near Nunivak Island by Sunday afternoon. He said the stormy conditions have been a factor in keeping Bogoslof ash from falling on land.

“(There’s) one system that’s creeping up on Dutch Harbor and a second low out near Adak and a third near the end of the chain,” Kutz said. “If things were further to the south, like they had been earlier this week, we’d start seeing (ash) dragging over into the Aleutian chain and then moving toward us.”

The Anchorage office was forecasting volcanic ash clouds over the Bering Sea, in an area north of the Aleutians to the west of Nunivak Island, in an aircraft advisory set to expire around 10 p.m. Friday. (Source: adn.com)

Receiving 3 Licenses from CBI to Launch E-Exchange Devices: Official

Chief Executive of Bank Shahr Dr. Hossein Mohammad Pourzarandi revealed the commissioning of electronic foreign exchange devices in order to offer quality banking services to foreign travelers visiting Iran, Public Relations Department of the bank added.

So far, three official licenses have been received from the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) to commission these electronic devices, he maintained.

The senior official of the Bank pointed to the significance of electronic exchange devices in facilitating quality banking services to foreign travelers and said: “The bank has focused on easing quality services to

foreign travelers especially at airports, international exhibitions and free zones.”
Currently, the electronic exchange machine is able to convert euro and dollar currencies into rials, he said, adding: “This possibility has been defined for other currencies as well.”
In the end, Chief Executive of Bank Shahr Dr. Hossein Mohammad Pourzarandi pointed to the high welcome of foreign travelers from electronic exchange machines and said: “This technology is unique of its kind which is offering round-the-clock services to foreign tourists and travelers.”



PGPHCO Chief Named Top World’s Petrochemical Managers

According to the latest ranking of top petrochemical managers and influential figures in the petrochemical sector in 2016 introduced by International ICIS Institute, Adel Nejadshahim Chief Executive of Persian Gulf Petrochemical Holding Company was introduced as one of the top 40 influential managers in world and stood at 31st rank.

Presently, Persian Gulf Petrochemical Holding Company (PGPHCO) accounts for 42% share of total petrochemical production volume in the country, Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.
Relying upon its successful performance in the past three years, the company was introduced as top two petrochemical units in the Mid-



dle East and also a leader company among top 500 domestic companies.
It should be noted that Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company is one of the rare companies that has thus far managed to attract 640 million euro worth of foreign investment and has taken giant stride in development of this industry in the country.

Cal Academy researchers discover more than 100 new species in ’16

Biologists who explore the Earth and oceans are constantly aware that the life around us is both profligate in variety and vital for the planet’s sustenance.

The California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco has just released a summary of the new life forms its researchers have discovered worldwide and reported in scientific journals this past year. The discoveries are varied indeed:

Forty-three new species of ants, 36 species of beetles, 24 fishes, six plants, five fossil sea urchins and four spiders. In addition, a new species of sand wasp, an eel, a shark, a coral, a skate, a lizard, a bee fly and a fossil sand dollar. These are among the results of the academy’s scientific forays into the remote and nearby parts of the natural world, where unknown life abounds.

To most academy visitors the images of those creatures, and sometimes the living examples themselves, can evoke amazement, curiosity, delight, and even revulsion.

But to scientists they offer new insights into the amazing variety of life on Earth, the remarkable ways that evolution has enabled life to adapt to challenging changes, and the urgent need to protect Earth’s biodiversity for the future.

One new fish species the academy’s scientists have found, for example, is a colorful little perch-like swimmer called a groppo. It was discovered during a major seafaring expedition to a region called the Coral Triangle in the Philippines. Academy curator Luiz Rocha, working with Bishop Museum scientist Brian Greene, spotted the fish flashing pink and yellow in the light of their dive lamps as they swam at 487 feet beneath the surface. It was the deepest fish discovery humans had ever made.

(Source: San Francisco chronicle)

Impact of climate change on microbial biodiversity

The scientists discovered that climate change affects biodiversity most strongly in the most natural environments, as well as the most nutrient enriched environments. This means that these extremes are most susceptible to future changes in temperatures.

We still know fairly little about the specific impacts of climate change and human activity, such as nutrient enrichment of waterways, on broad geographical scales.

Researchers from the Department of Geosciences and Geography at the University of Helsinki, the Finnish Environment Institute, and the Nanjing Institute of Geography and Limnology, Chinese Academy of Sciences have studied hundreds of microcosms in mountainous regions with the aid of natural temperature gradients in the studied areas, while modifying the enrichment level in field tests.

The results indicate that the bacteria in elevated tropical areas are similar to e.g. those in arctic areas. As a result of changes in temperature and aquatic enrichment, significant alterations occur in the microcosms, and as the enrichment increases, biodiversity reduces, says Associate Professor Janne Soininen.

Experiments in mountainous regions indicated that differentiating between the effects of temperature variations and aquatic nutrient enrichment can help us understand the possible effects of climate change in different environments. The typically austere, i.e. nutrient-poor, waters in the north, for example, are extremely susceptible to temperature variations, and as the climate warms up, species that have adapted to the cold will decline.

The only good news is that biodiversity may improve at first, as the climate warms up, as species that thrive in warmer areas increase, until biodiversity again starts to decline when the temperature continues to rise.

(Source: EurekAlert)

New blood tests can detect prions

A new blood test can detect even tiny amounts of infectious proteins called prions, two new studies show.

Incurable prion diseases, such as mad cow disease (BSE) in cattle and variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD) in people, result from a normal brain protein called PrP twisting into a disease-causing “prion” shape that kills nerve cells in the brain. As many as 30,000 people in the United Kingdom may be carriers of prions that cause vCJD, presumably picked up by eating BSE-tainted beef. Health officials worry infected people could unwittingly pass prions to others through blood transfusions. Four such cases have already been recorded. But until now, there has been no way to screen blood for the infectious proteins.

In the test, described December 21 in Science Translational Medicine, magnetic nanobeads coated with plasminogen — a protein that prions grab onto — trap prions. Washing the beads gets rid of the rest of the substances in the blood. Researchers then add normal PrP to the beads. If any prions are stuck to the beads, the infectious proteins will convert PrP to the prion form, which will also stick to the beads. After many rounds, the researchers could amplify the signal enough to detect vCJD prions in all the people in the studies known to have the disease.

No healthy people or people with other degenerative brain diseases (including Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s) in either study had evidence of the infectious proteins in their blood. And only one of 83 people with a sporadic form of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease tested positive. Those results indicate that the test is specific to the vCJD prion form, so a different test is needed to detect the sporadic disease.

In two cases, researchers detected prions in frozen blood samples collected 31 months and 16 months before people developed vCJD symptoms.

(Source: Science News)



"A mother loves her children unconditionally. However they wrong her, she'll carry on loving them."

Alaa Al Aswany

Video of black mother's arrest in Texas sparks anger

A video showing a white police officer in Fort Worth, Texas, violently arresting a black woman along with the woman's daughters has sparked anger amid ongoing police violence against US minorities.

The confrontation erupted on Wednesday after Jacqueline Craig, 46, called police to report that a white neighbor had choked her seven-year-old son for throwing trash in front of his home.

In the video, the officer can be seen wrestling Craig to the ground after a verbal altercation and pointing a stun gun at her back.

Craig's teenage daughter was also taken into custody after she put herself between her mother and the officer. Another daughter also was arrested, police said.

The person recording the arrests can be heard calling the officer a "racist pig." As of Thursday night, the video had garnered 2.1 million views.

Fort Worth police said in a statement that the officer, who was not named, was placed on restrictive duty status and the incident is under investigation.

"The initial appearance of the video may raise serious questions," the police department said. "We ask that our investigators are given the time and opportunity to thoroughly examine the incident and to submit their findings."

A series of videos showing officers using deadly force against unarmed African-Americans in recent years has sparked protests and has raised concerns of racial bias and excessive force by US police.

The Texas chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) defended the women, saying the officer "ignored basic community policing standards and his own responsibility to de-escalate the confrontation."

"When the mother of a seven-year-old boy calls the police to report an assault on her son, the responding officer should expect to find her distraught," Texas ACLU Executive Director Terri Burke said Thursday.

"This incident and countless others like them demonstrate that for people of color, showing anything less than absolute deference to police officers — regardless of the circumstances — can have unjust and often tragic consequences," Burke said.

Burke said incidents like these are a "threat to public safety." "If a black woman in Fort Worth can't call the cops after her son is allegedly choked by a neighbor without getting arrested, why would she ever call the cops again?"

(Source: Press TV)

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Soft Christmas cookies

"Soft cut out sugar cookie that I have used for years. I sprinkle with colored sugar before baking or you could also try icing them when cool."

Ingredients:

3 3/4 cups all-purpose flour



1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup margarine, softened
1 1/2 cups white sugar
2 eggs
2 teaspoons vanilla extract

Directions:

Sift flour, baking powder, and salt together, set aside. In a large bowl, cream together the margarine and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs one at a time, then stir in the vanilla. Gradually blend in the sifted ingredients until fully absorbed. Cover dough, and chill for 2 hours.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Grease cookie sheets. On a clean floured surface, roll out small portions of chilled dough to 1/4 inch thickness. Cut out shapes using cookie cutters.

Bake 6 to 8 minutes in the preheated oven, or until edges are barely brown. Remove from cookie sheets to cool on wire racks.

Alarming rise in female drug users

IT WOMEN TEHRAN — The desk director of the Welfare Organization of Iran has warned that drug addiction is increasing at an alarming rate among women of different age groups in the country.

"Nowadays, we are facing with a growing number of divorce and drug addiction," IRNA quoted Anoushiravan Mohseni-Bandpey as saying on Sunday.

The latest studies indicate that the drug addiction ratio among people of 15-25 years is 6 men to one woman, while the ratio is 16 men to one woman in the age group of 25-40 years, and 17 men to one woman in the age group of

40-55 years, he explained.

Currently, there are about 1.5 million drug addicts in the country, Mohseni-Bandpey said, adding, about 2.6 million women are the breadwinners of their families, of them around of 1.7 million have lost their husbands and 350,000 have taken the responsibility of their families because their husbands have been addicted, imprisoned, or disabled.

Moreover, some 250,000 breadwinner women have got divorced in the first five years of their married life and nearly 150,000 women are living alone and earn their own living, he concluded.



Romania set for first woman and first Muslim as Prime Minister



Sevil Shhaideh is sworn in for the position of minister for regional administration and public administration, in Bucharest, Romania, May 20, 2015. Inquam Photos

Romania is set to appoint a Muslim and a woman as prime minister for the first time in its history with the nomination of Sevil Shhaideh, a little-known member of the Tartar minority.

The center-left Social Democratic Party (PSD) led by Liviu Dragnea took 45 percent of the vote on election day in 11 December, double any other party's share.

It is now forming a new government in coalition with a smaller liberal partner. But Mr Dragnea, who as party chief would normally be appointed to become Prime Minister, was found guilty of electoral fraud and given two years' suspended sentence in April.

Though Mr Dragnea, 54, was not banned from politics and remains hugely popular among his party's base, incumbent President Klaus Iohannis was elected on an anti-corruption platform and has barred any candidate with a criminal record from becoming PM.

So his party chose Ms Shhaideh, who

was a minor minister for just six months in a previous government.

The 52-year-old technocrat briefly oversaw the department of regional development, and has long been an ally of Mr Dragnea.

"Dragnea has nominated a loyal person," Romanian political science professor Sergiu Miscoiu told Reuters. "It will be a government controlled by Dragnea."

And Mr Dragnea made no bones about the nature of the appointment, telling reporters: "the political responsibility stays with me first of all."

Nonetheless, the move is a historic one. Only 0.3 percent of Romanians are Muslims. Ms Shhaideh is not only a member of the tiny Sunni population which has persevered for seven centuries on the coast of the Black Sea, but is married to a Syrian, and she and her husband own properties in the war-torn country.

(Source: The Independent)

UWW agrees to Iran's cover-singlet wrestling proposal



This photo provided by the Islamic Republic of Iran Wrestling Federation (IRIWF) shows the proposed singlet and helmet for cover-singlet wrestling.

The United World Wrestling (UWW) has accepted a proposal by Iran to allow female athletes from Muslim nations to adhere to Islamic dress codes while taking part in international tournaments.

During a recent meeting in the Turkish coastal city of Istanbul, representatives from the Islamic Republic of Iran Wrestling Federation (IRIWF) tabled a proposal on the "cover-singlet wrestling," which officials from the governing body for Olympic (amateur), traditional and associated wrestling styles agreed to adopt.

The UWW indicated that any further suggestions or amendments by the IRIWF, experts from non-governmental organizations affiliated to the federation, and UWW member states are welcome and will be taken into account before a

style is finalized.

Most of the technical principles of cover-singlet wrestling are similar to those of women's wrestling. A singlet covers the athlete's body from head to toe, and an accompanying helmet protects her head and ears.

Cover-singlet wrestling is expected to attract a large number of female wrestlers, as the discipline would allow the athletes to observe their cultural and religious beliefs and do the sport. The current singlet used in women's wrestling has stopped many female wrestlers from participating in international sports events.

The IRIWF hopes that cover-singlet wrestling would prepare the ground for those athletes to represent their respective countries in world events.

(Source: Press TV)

Chibok girl recalls 'miracle' release by Boko Haram to spend Christmas with her family

When Boko Haram fighters decided to release some of the 200 Chibok schoolgirls kidnapped two-and-a-half years ago in northeast Nigeria, Asabe Goni did not think that she would be among the girls allowed to go home.

During their time in captivity the girls were encouraged to convert to Islam and to marry their kidnappers, with some whipped for not doing so, but Goni said otherwise they were treated well and fed well until supplies recently ran short.

Hungry and ill, the 22-year-old did not even have the energy to stand up in October when the fighters said that any girls who wanted to be released should

line up. She sat and watched as other girls scrambled to get into line.

"I was surprised when they announced that my name was on the list," Goni told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "It was a miracle," she said, while expressing regret that she had to leave behind her cousin who was also abducted.

"I never knew that I would return [home]," Goni said. "I had given up hope of ever going home."

A group of 21 girls was released two months ago after Switzerland and the International Red Cross brokered a deal with Boko Haram. They have been held since in a secret location in the capital Abuja

for debriefing by the Nigerian government.

But the girls have been taken back to the Chibok area in Borno state to spend Christmas with their families, returning home for the first time since being seized from their school in April 2014.

"I was very happy when they said I should go home," Goni said in an interview in her family's home in the northern city of Yola, surrounded by her father, stepmother, five siblings and several neighbors.

The kidnapping of more than 200 schoolgirls from Chibok in April 2014 hit international headlines and prompted global figures, including U.S. first lady Michelle Obama and a list of celebrities, to

support a campaign.

None of the girls were seen again until May this year when one of the students, Amina Ali, was found in a forest with a baby and a man claiming to be her husband.

Her discovery prompted hopes that the girls were alive and Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari pledged to ensure the release of the remaining girls in captivity.

■ 'I was in great pain'

Recalling the abduction, Goni said the girls, which included her younger cousin Margaret with whom she had lived since she was a child, trekked for three days through Sambisa forest, Boko Haram's vast woodland stronghold, before they arrived at a camp.

"I was in great pain," she said. "Many of us didn't stop crying until about three months after we were kidnapped."

While the girls were not forced to convert to Islam, the fighters told them that they would all be sent home if they did so, said Goni. Neither were they forced to marry, she added.

"But the way they talked to us about it, you would be afraid not to," she said, recalling how the girls were sometimes flogged with a whip. "That is why some were convinced to marry."

Goni said the girls were otherwise treated well by the fighters. They were given material to sew clothes and fed three times a day until recently when food became scarce.

The girls told state officials they were not abused or raped, and all tested negative for sexually transmitted diseases, according to a confidential report based on a two-week debriefing prepared for Buhari and seen by the Thomson Reuters Foundation in November.

When Goni was released, she did not have time to say goodbye to Margaret, whom she calls her sister, or the other girls.

"Some of the other girls left behind started crying," she said. "But the Boko Haram men consoled them, telling them that their turn to go home would come one day."

(Source: Aljazeera.com)

IN FOCUS IRNA/ Marziyeh Masoumi



Iranian Christian women light candles in the Eucharist ceremony held in Saint Sarkis Cathedral, Tehran. The Eucharist, also called Holy Communion, and the Lord's Supper is a Christian rite that is considered a sacrament in most churches.

Fresh advance in east Mosul to begin within days: U.S. commander

Iraqi forces will resume their push against ISIL (ISIS) terrorist group inside Mosul in the coming days, a U.S. battlefield commander said, in a new phase of the two-month-old operation that will see American troops deployed closer to the front line in the city.

The battle for Mosul, involving 100,000 Iraqi troops, members of the Kurdish security forces and Shia volunteers, is the biggest ground operation in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion of 2003. The upcoming phase appears likely to give American troops their biggest combat role since they fulfilled President Barack Obama's pledge to withdraw from Iraq in 2011.

Elite Iraqi soldiers have retaken a quarter of Mosul, the militants' last major stronghold in Iraq, but their advance has been slow and punishing. They entered a planned "operational refit" this month, the first significant pause of the campaign.

A heavily armored unit of several thousand federal police was redeployed from the southern outskirts two weeks ago to reinforce the eastern front after army units advised by the Americans suffered heavy losses in an ISIL counterattack.

U.S. advisers, part of an international coalition that has conducted thousands of airstrikes and trained tens of thousands of Iraqi ground troops, will work directly with those forces and an elite Interior Ministry strike force.

"Right now we're staging really for the next phase of the attack as we



start the penetration into the interior of east Mosul," Lieutenant Colonel Stuart James, commander of a combat arms battalion assisting Iraqi security forces on the southeastern front, said in a Reuters interview late on Sunday.

"So right now, positioning forces and positioning men and equipment into the interior of east Mosul ... it's going to happen in the next several days."

That will put U.S. troops inside of Mosul proper and at greater risk, though James said the danger level was still characterized as "moderate." Three U.S. servicemen have been killed in northern Iraq in the past 15 months.

James, speaking from an austere outpost east of Mosul where several

hundred U.S. troops are stationed, said the pace of the upcoming phase on the eastern side would depend on resistance from ISIL.

"If we achieve great success on the first day and we gain momentum, then it may go very quickly. If Daesh fights very hard the first day and we run into a roadblock and we have to go back and go OK that was not the correct point of penetration, it may take longer," he said.

■ Integration

Further integration with the Iraqi troops — to what commanders described as an unprecedented level for conventional U.S. forces — will help synchronize surveillance, air support and force movement, according to James.

"It increases our situational under-

standing. The man on the ground knows what's going on best," he said. "It's just better when they're on the ground talking to each other and saying, 'Hey, have you looked at that area over there? That's decisive terrain. Have you thought about putting forces there?'"

Mosul, the largest city held by ISIL anywhere across its once vast territorial holdings in Iraq and neighboring Syria, has been held by the group since its fighters drove the U.S.-trained army out in June 2014.

Its fall would probably end ISIL's ambition to rule over millions of people in a self-styled caliphate, but the fighters could still mount a traditional insurgency in Iraq, and plot or inspire attacks on the West.

A multi-ethnic city where up to 1.5 million people of a pre-war population of around 2 million are still thought to be living, Mosul is divided roughly in half by the Tigris River. The western section, which Iraqi forces have yet to penetrate, has built-up markets and ancient narrow alleyways which will complicate future advances.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi had said he would win Mosul back by the end of this year, a deadline now certain to be missed. His commanders say their advance was held up by the need to protect civilians, fewer of whom fled than initially expected.

Inclement weather has repeatedly delayed ground advances which rely heavily on aerial surveillance and airstrikes.

(Source: Reuters)

Obama confident he could have won the White House again

President Barack Obama says he could have been reelected for a third term and that the nation still largely embraces his political vision despite last month's election of Donald Trump to succeed him.



The U.S. leader's remarks were made in an interview posted on the podcast "The Axe Files," produced by CNN and the University of Chicago.

Obama, who winds up his second and final term in office in just over three weeks, said he believes the American public still supports his progressive vision, despite having voted for Trump — his political opposite.

"I am confident in this vision because I'm confident that if I had run again and articulated it, I think I could've mobilized a majority of the American people to rally behind it," Obama tells his interviewer, former senior adviser David Axelrod, in the most recent of several exit interviews he has been conducting.

He was philosophical and a little rueful about Democrats' loss of the presidential election, when Hillary Clinton was defeated by Trump in a shock outcome almost no one predicted.

"Losing's never fun," he tells Axelrod, a political strategist who helped craft Obama's winning 2008 presidential campaign and then followed him to the White House.

"I'm proud that I have tried to conduct myself in office to do what I think is right rather than what is popular, I always tell people don't underestimate the public humiliation of losing in politics," Obama said.

"It's unlike what most people experience as adults, this sense of rejection."

But he was also proud of the way the progress made in the two terms of his presidency, thanks to the "spirit of America," especially evident in the younger generation.

"That spirit of America has still been there in all sorts of ways. It manifests itself in communities all across the country," Obama said.

"We see it in this younger generation that is smarter, more tolerant, more innovative, more creative, more entrepreneurial, would not even think about, you know, discriminating somebody against for example because of their sexual orientation," the president said.

"All those things that I describe, you're seeing in our society, particularly among 20-year-olds, 30-year-olds."

Despite the election of Trump — a Republican who appears set to put in place policies that will take the country sharply to the right — during his presidency "the culture actually did shift," Obama told Axelrod.

"The majority does buy into the notion of a one America that is tolerant and diverse and open and full of energy and dynamism," the U.S. president said.

"The problem is, it doesn't always manifest itself in politics." (Source: AFP)

Turkey detains 1,682 for questioning over links to failed coup, militants

Hundreds of people have been detained for questioning by Turkish authorities in the course of last week over suspected links to opposition leader Fethullah Gulen as well as militant groups.

Turkey's Interior Ministry said 1,682 people had been detained for questioning last week, 516 of whom were remanded in custody.

Most of them are suspected of having links with US-based Gulen, who is accused of being behind a failed coup attempt in July. The 75-year-old has condemned the coup and denied any involvement in the violence.

Ankara has been engaged in a crackdown on people it accuses of having connections to the cleric.

The post-coup crackdown has seen some 36,000 people jailed pending trial and more than 100,000 sacked or suspended in the civil service, army, judiciary and other institutions.

People suspected of having links to Daesh were also among those nabbed last week.

Ankara has been engaged in a large-scale campaign against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in its southern border region over the past few months.

The Turkish military has also been pounding the group's positions in northern Iraq as well in breach of the Arab country's sovereignty.

A shaky ceasefire between Ankara and the PKK that had stood since 2013 was declared null and void by the militants following the Turkish strikes against the group.

(Source: Reuters)



Civilian bodies recovered from former militant jails in east Aleppo

Amid clean-up operations in the recently-liberated areas of eastern Aleppo, Syrian forces have discovered the bodies of 21 civilians massacred in prisons previously run by the Takfiri militants.

The official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA) said there were five children and four women among those executed by the terrorists before withdrawal from areas under their control in the northwestern city.

"The bodies of martyrs were found inside prisons belonging to terrorist groups in al-Sukkari and al-Kallaseh neighborhoods... Upon close examination, the civilians were found to have been shot at from a very close range," said Director of Aleppo Forensics, Zaher Hajo.

The military fully liberated Aleppo on December 22 in the final stage of a weeks-long push. The militants had been controlling the city's eastern part since 2012, a year after foreign-backed militancy swept over the country.

As the terrorists were feeling the heat from army advances, they began using civilians as human shields to hamstring Syrian troops in their operations.

According to the report, towards the end of the liberation operation, scores of civilians, who had been abducted by Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra Front), escaped its prisons, reaching an army checkpoint.

The escapees have given gruesome accounts of killings carried out by the Takfiri terror group against civil-

ians.

Meanwhile, SANA said as many as 150 militants had laid down arms in al-Sanamin, a town in the countryside of the southwestern city of Dara'a, in order to fall under an amnesty law issued by President Bashar al-Assad, which pardons those ceasing to partake in the armed conflict.

Dara'a Governor Mohammad Khaled al-Hannous then declared al-Sanamin "the first in the province... to be cleared of the armed presence."

He added that some villages and towns in Dara'a Province, which bears the same name as that of its capital, were likewise about to be freed of militant presence. (Source: SANA)

Saudi jets intensify airstrikes on Yemen, use cluster bombs

Saudi fighter jets have intensified their airstrikes against Yemeni provinces, using more internationally-banned arms in their latest raids.

According to Yemen's al-Masirah television, Saudi Arabia dropped cluster bombs on Harad district in Hajjah Province on Monday.

Cluster bombs, which can contain hundreds of bomblets, pose risks to civilians both during and after attacks. Unexploded bomblets can claim lives long after a conflict is over.

Multiple rights groups, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have on various occasions reported the use of cluster bombs by Riyadh in Yemen.

Saudi fighter jets also launched two airstrikes against residential areas in Amran Province and another two on Dhahir district in the province of Sa'ada on

Monday.

The kingdom's warplanes further pounded a residential building in Asilan district in Shabwah Province.

Three other air raids hit the Madfoun area and Asrat valley in Nihm district, northwest of the Yemeni capital, Sana'a.

There were no immediate reports of possible casualties.

In Nihm, the Yemeni troops killed 15 Saudi-backed mercenaries in an attack on the militants' positions on Monday, a day after tens of the mercenaries, including five commanders, were killed during clashes with Yemen's forces there.

In another retaliatory attack, Yemeni army snipers killed a Saudi soldier in Ta'a military base in Saudi Arabia's southwestern province of Najran on Monday.

The Yemeni forces also fired a volley of Katyusha rockets at Qarn military base in Jizan Province in southwestern Saudi



Arabia.

Saudi army's position in Hamraa hill in the same province was also targeted by Yemeni artillery attacks.

Meanwhile, a fire erupted at a Saudi military base in Jizan's Muthalath al-Rokhba after the Yemeni troops fired artillery shells at the site.

On Sunday, the Yemeni forces launched rocket attacks on al-Meqran

Portugal's ex-president Mario Soares in deep coma

Former president Mario Soares, seen as the father of Portugal's modern day democracy, was in a deep coma and in "critical" condition, the Red Cross hospital in Lisbon said Monday.

"Mr. Soares is in a very critical situation, in a deep coma, and the prognosis remains uncertain," spokesman Jose Barata told journalists.

Soares, 92, has been in the Red Cross hospital's intensive care unit since Dec. 13 after taking ill for an un-

disclosed reason.

After briefly improving, Soares's health took a turn for the worse on Saturday.

"There has been steady worsening of the state of his health," said Barata.

The founder of Portugal's Socialist party, Soares was a towering figure in Portuguese politics for decades, having served as foreign minister, prime minister and as president from 1986 to 1996.

(Source: AFP)



Syrian-Americans: Model immigrants?

Syrian-American community

more favorable in recent years, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center. Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of adults in the U.S. today say they think that in general immigrants have a positive influence because of the hard work and the talents they bring with them. Only about one-fourth of Americans (27 percent) expect immigrants to have a negative influence on the U.S.

That's nearly a complete reversal of attitudes from the 1990s, the Pew center points out, when 63 per-

cent of Americans thought immigrants were a burden on America and only 31 percent said they strengthened the nation.

The U.S. has taken in Syrian refugees to do its part in what is a worldwide humanitarian effort. The motive has not been to necessarily benefit economically. Still this new research into how earlier Syrian immigrants have fared can only strengthen confidence that these new arrivals will become a positive force in American life.

(Source: The CSM)

6 → This thriving Syrian-American community should provide a solid base of support for the new Syrian refugees. The report cites the example of the Syrian-American club of Houston, a nonprofit group of largely professionals that helps new arrivals fill out job applications, drives them to job interviews, and raises funds for academic scholarships.

Despite the recent political campaign rhetoric that has raised fears about immigrants, Americans' opinions toward these newcomers have actually become

Sam Allardyce has had ‘dark moments’ since England axe but now he's ready to save Crystal Palace from drop

Sam Allardyce calls it ‘moving on’. Crystal Palace fans will settle for a successful rescue mission.

Their new manager has had 12 weeks to ponder the consequences of the actions which cost him the England job after just 67 days.

Allardyce described the period following his sacking as ‘one of the darkest moments in my career’ and revealed that even his grandchildren were affected by the fall-out of his quick-fire departure.

Now Big Sam is back, charged with putting out the fire which threatens Palace’s Premier League status, starting at Watford today. Fireman Sam, then.

It seems he’s been here a million times before. Allardyce is well-versed at this very scenario.

In his spells at Bolton, Newcastle, Blackburn, West Ham and Sunderland, Allardyce has never been relegated from the top flight.

So when Palace called time on Alan Pardew’s tenure on Thursday, Allardyce’s appointment seemed inevitable.

Asked whether he was tired of being employed as a survival specialist, Allardyce said: ‘I’ve always felt like that, but that doesn’t matter now.

‘It’s what people want from me and do I like the job description when they offer me a job, and, if I do, I take it.

‘What you think you are or could be is immaterial, it is what you get offered at the time. You are not in control of who asks you to be the manager of their football club. You take control when you decide whether you want to work or not.’

Joking that he ‘must be mad’ to take over during the busiest fixture period and the impending ‘nightmare’ of the January transfer window, Allardyce said one of his priorities would be to stop the team conceding goals.

He added: ‘From 2015 where they were fifth in the league to 2016 it’s become difficult. The team struggled to score goals but were defensively sound, now the team seems to score a goal but are quite weak defensively.

‘I’ve got to try and balance that situation here. We don’t want to take away from the flair and goal ability but make sure when we are scoring a goal it is winning us a game.’

There was only ever one man for this job. One man who would provide Palace with the best possible chance of staying up.

Yes, there were reservations at boardroom level. The football is unlikely to adhere to the club’s long-term vision in terms of stylistics and philosophy.

It won’t be pretty, for sure. But by nature, relegation battles aren’t.

Indeed, speaking after Pardew’s dismissal on Thursday, chairman Steve Parish admitted: ‘We all bought into the decision to play a more expansive style of football. We all believed in it. That hasn’t worked.

‘It’s no-one’s fault. The players have been running their socks off for Alan, the spirit is good. But now we’re going to wind the dial back the other way.’

Similarly, given the controversy surrounding Allardyce’s sacking as England manager after just one game in charge, the potential for embarrassment has not been lost on certain members of the club’s hierarchy.

Allardyce knows there has to be closure on his short stint with England, which ended after he was caught on video apparently advising how to get round the rules of third-party ownership.

He told Sky Sports: ‘The first four weeks was something that was one of the darkest moments in my career,’ he said. ‘I’m talking about me and my wife and my family, we all had to deal with that problem — my children, my grandchildren at school.

‘But eventually time passes by, you overcome those adversities and you move on.

‘Moving on for me is taking this job. I know I’m the same man. I’m probably a better man for the experience.

‘In adversity you have to become stronger and make sure you don’t make those mistakes again so you learn from it.

‘When you’re sacked as a manager you have to look at what you did wrong, look at yourself and don’t blame other people. Yes, there are contributing factors all over the place but you have to look at yourself and move on.

‘To be honest it was such a blur for me when it happened so I can’t recall that much. Then my family, like they always have been, were there and told me to go away, move on and then this offer came up.

‘I didn’t think anything would come until perhaps New Year but like I’ve said I’m ready for it and I’m looking forward to getting stuck in.

‘Everybody sees I’m good at this from my past track record and hopefully I can deliver again.’

Landing a new left back in January will be a priority for Allardyce, with Leeds’ Charlie Taylor among the potential candidates.

But until then, Allardyce must work with the players he’s got. He’ll be encouraged by his central defensive options in Scott Dann, James Tomkins and Damien Delaney, while right back Joel Ward has been touted for an England call-up.

We all know Allardyce’s penchant for a target-man, and in Christian Benteke he’s got one of the best of that type in England. And with the wing talents of Wilfried Zaha and Andros Townsend at his disposal, expect crosses galore.

In Allardyce Palace have a man who will leave no stone unturned in the quest to beat the drop. He’s already started looking at houses close to the club’s Beckenham training ground as he throws himself back into managerial life.

And, of course, he’ll come fully equipped with his constantly updated dossier of statistics, the numerical analytics now synonymous with Allardyce’s career.

(Source: Dailymail.co.uk)

Juan Mata surprises kids with gifts on Christmas



Manchester United star Juan Mata took some time out on Christmas Day to spread some festive cheer among kids in the city.

The Spanish winger visited two centres, the Wood Street Mission and the Zion Community Centre, to deliver gifts to children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

And it wasn’t all soft toys and boardgames, as the 28-year-old gave away Manchester United scarves and signed autographs as he put smiles on a few faces.

With the visits filmed and posted on United’s official

Facebook account, Mata could be seen chatting to parents and was clearly touched by the reaction of some of the children.

His first visit was to the charity Wood Street mission. “They’re doing a great job,” said the winger.

“It was amazing to meet all the kids and to give them gifts and meet their families. It’s incredible the work they do there.”

He then made his way to Zion, where not everyone was thrilled to see Mata walk through the door, as one cheeky chappy revealed he was Manchester City fan,

much to the amusement of everyone in the room.

United face Sunderland on Boxing Day at 3pm, with fans hoping Mata still has some festive cheer left over to spread at Old Trafford.

Jose Mourinho’s men will be looking to continue there recent fine form having won three Premier League games on the bounce.

They are unbeaten in 10 games in all competitions and go up against a Sunderland side managed by former boss David Moyes.

(Source: Dailymail.co.uk)

Mkhitaryan: Man Utd not giving up on the title



Manchester United have not given up hope of winning the Premier League as Henrikh Mkhitaryan eyes trophies in 2017.

But with 20 matches remaining, Mkhitaryan said his team-mates are still dreaming of silverware.

“My wishes are for the team to have the best year possible - for Manchester United, for the players and for the fans,” Mkhitaryan told The Times of India.

“I hope we have an amazing season and fight for all the titles. Hopefully, in 2017, we can win some trophies. But United are a long way behind the leaders at the moment.

“We haven’t given up yet, we’re not saying we are out of the competition. There are a lot of games remaining, especially at this time of year, so we’re trying to do our best to be in the top four.

“And, of course, in the Europa League we’re going to try and go as far as we can.”

Having struggled to initially convince

manager Jose Mourinho following his big-money arrival from Borussia Dortmund in the off-season, Mkhitaryan is now thriving in Manchester.

Mkhitaryan scored in the Europa League win over Zorya earlier in December, and he netted the only goal in United’s victory against Tottenham three days later before missing back-to-back Premier League games due to injury.

Asked if he was ever worried that he would not force his way back into Mourinho’s calculations, the Armenia captain said: “No, because I was trying to do my best in training to earn a place to play. You have to earn it.

“It doesn’t matter if the club bought me for £40 million, I knew that I am not guaranteed to play. Even when you are selected you many not play every game, depending on the tactical situation and the opponent.”

(Source: Goal)

Red Bull Target West Ham Takeover



Football is big business, huge business, it is a sport awash with money and it seems that takeovers are becoming the norm as various global companies want their share.

This morning the leading tabloid publication the nation produces is running with the suggestion that West Ham United Football Club could be the next big Premier League club to be the subject of a takeover bid.

Our associates over at The Sun, are of the opinion that the energy drinks giant Red Bull, are set to bid £200 million for the club.

The Austrian based company are no strangers to sport, as well as having two F1 teams (Red Bull Racing and Scuderia Toro Rosso), they also own clubs in New York, Brazil, Austria and Germany.

The first football club Red Bull acquired, back in 2005, was the Austrian side SV Salzburg, who now go under the

name Red Bull Salzburg.

Next on the agenda were New York Metro Stars, now known as New York Red Bulls, in 2007 Red Bull purchased the German 5th division side SSV Markranstadt, rebranded them Red Bull Leipzig and have guided the club to the top of the Bundesliga, challenging Bayern Munich for the title this season.

Our reference source suggests that Red Bull have flatly refuted that they are interested in buying Leeds United, Brentford, Charlton Athletic and Swindon and are solely focussed on acquiring West Ham due to its location and iconic stadium.

However, it remains to be seen whether David Sullivan and David Gold can be persuaded to step aside.

If our source is correct we could be about to witness an interesting next few months.

(Source: vitalfootball)

Cleveland Cavaliers: Steve Kerr on Matthew Dellavedova’s Absence

One big difference Golden State Warriors coach Steve Kerr sees from previous match-ups with the Cleveland Cavaliers is the absence of Matthew Dellavedova.

The Cleveland Cavaliers and Golden State Warriors are no strangers to one another. Since the beginning of the 2014-15 campaign, the two teams have played each other a total of 18 times, including two finals series. This time was a bit different since the Cavaliers were with Matthew Dellavedova.

For the first 17 of those games, the Cavaliers were with point guard Matthew Dellavedova. In those match-ups, Cavaliers coaches David Blatt and Tryonn Lue were comfortable with Delly guarding the two-time MVP Stephen Curry, whom he had moderate success against.

In the most recent game, however, the Cavs were without Dellavedova, which is Warriors head coach Steve Kerr could notice.

According to Joe Vardon of cleveland.com, the absence of Dellavedova ‘jumped out’ to Kerr.

Playing against the Warriors always seemed to get the

best out of Delly both offensively and defensively. During the 2015 NBA Finals, Delly, who was forced into the starting point guard role with Kyrie Irving injured, averaged an impressive 7.5 points and 2.7 assists per game while playing exceptional defense on Curry.

In what was one of his best games with the Cavaliers, Delly erupted for 20 points in game three of that series, including a clutch bucket late in the game to secure a win and give the team a 2-1 lead.

During his days in Cleveland, Delly was a scrappy point guard who had the ability knock down an open three-pointer. With career averages of 5.7 points and rebounds per game while playing for the Cavs, Dellavedova was a perfect compliment tolrvng off the bench.

Unfortunately for the Cavaliers, as the 26-year-old gained experience and confidence he ended up falling out of the teams price range, and ended up signing a four-year, \$39 million contract with the Milwaukee Bucks during July of 2016.

Ever since Dellavedova left, the Cavaliers have struggled

to find a permanent backup point guard, making Kerr’s statement valid.

From the fallout of Mo Williams to the distrust in Kay Felder and Jordan McRae, the Cavaliers have not had a backup point guard all season. Instead, Iman Shumpert, who’s main position in shooting guard, has been taking the minutes behind Irving.

To add salt to the wound, the Cavs have been plagued with injuries as of late. Most notably, starting shooting guard J.R. Smith broke his thumb against the Milwaukee Bucks and is expected to miss three-to-four months, leaving the Cavaliers in more need of depth at the point guard position.

Despite being without their former point guard, the Cavaliers were able to grind out a 109-108 win over the Warriors on Christmas Day, improving their record 23-6. With the Cavaliers in first place in the Eastern Conference, Kerr replied, “apparently not” when asked if the loss of Dellavedova has affected the Cavaliers.

(Source: FoxSport)

Zob Ahan moves IPL third place

TTSPORTS Zob Ahan football team has climbed to third place after being held to a 1-1 draw against Padideh in the 15th week of Iran Professional League in Mashhad on Monday.

Former Persepolis Honduran striker Jerry Bengtson put the visiting team ahead in the 56th minute but Morteza Mansouri scored the equalizer in the 70th minute.

Zob Ahan is currently in third place with 25 points from 15 games, five points behind second place Tractor Sazi and seven points behind league leader Persepolis.

Elsewhere in Abadan, Sanat Naft suffered a 0-1 home defeat against Gostaresh Foolad. Reza Khaleghifar scored the winner for the visitors in the 18th minute.

Sanat Naft is currently in 11th place with 16 points while Gostaresh moved to 9th spot with 20 points.

In the last game of IPL 15th week, Saipa will take on Machine Sazi on Thursday in the basement battle.



Yahya Golmohammadi appointed Oxin Alborz coach

TTSPORTS Former Persepolis and Zob Ahan coach Yahya Golmohammadi has been named as new head coach of First Division football team Oxin Alborz.

The 45-year-old coach replaced Firooz Karimi with the aim of helping the team to win promotion to Iran Professional League.

Golmohammadi parted company with Zob Ahan

in September after the poor results with the Isfahan-based team.

He has played most of his professional career for Persepolis. Golmohammadi also made 75 appearances for Team Melli and scored five times.

He started his coaching career with Saba in 2008 and has also worked in Tarbyat Yazd, Nassaji Mazandaran, Naft Tehran and Persepolis.

Khosro Ghamari re-elected as president of Iran Cycling Federation



Khosro Ghamari has been re-elected as president of Iran Cycling Federation (ICF) on Sunday.

In the elections held in Tehran's Olympic Academy, Ghamari managed to capture 35 votes in the election, followed by Hamid Saeidnameh with three votes and Mohammad Abdollahi with one vote.

Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports

Masoud Soltanifar also attended the elections.

"Our main target is to win medals in the 2018 Asian Games. We have to go above and beyond expectations," Ghamari said.

"I will review our performance in the last four years and eradicate the weak points," he added.

(Source: Tasnim)

Ali Karimi to leave Dinamo Zagreb in January: report



Iranian midfielder Ali Karimi will leave Dinamo Zagreb in the January transfer window.

Karimi, who didn't get a chance to play in the Croatian football team, is set to part company with Dinamo Zagreb, Croatian media reported.

On 1 July 2016, Karimi joined Dinamo Zagreb from Iran's Sepahan on a five-year contract for a reported

US\$400,000 transfer fee.

He is the first Iranian to play in Croatian Prva HNL.

The 22-year-old midfielder made his league debut on 13 August 2016, coming on as second half substitute in a 2-1 victory against Inter Zapresic.

Karimi will reportedly join his former club Sepahan.

(Source: Tasnim)

Simeone is 'really loved' at Atletico, says Cerezo

Atletico Madrid president Enrique Cerezo is confident head coach Diego Simeone will remain with the club beyond the end of this season.

On the back of last season's agonising penalty shoot-out loss to rivals Real Madrid in the Champions League final, Simeone negotiated down his most recent contract extension at Atletico from 2020 to end in 2018.

Atleti's patchy form in La Liga this term – they lie sixth and nine points off top at the mid-season break – and Simeone's stated desire to coach Inter at some stage is his career has led to mounting speculation that the Argentine could walk away at the end of the current campaign.

Nevertheless, Cerezo expects the revised contract to be honoured.

"Everyone can think and say what they want, but the only certain thing is that he is in Atletico and Atletico is with Cholo [Simeone]," he told AS.

"You have a contract in force and the contacts are in order. In addition, at Atletico when we want someone, we really love him.



"Atletico are not half-hearted and we really want Cholo. Let the coach and the team work to make a great season."

Atleti will face Las Palmas in the last 16 of the Copa del Rey and are through to face Bayer Leverkusen in the same stage of the Champions League after topping a

group featuring Bayern Munich.

"It has not been a spectacular start, but the recovery line will take us where we want to be," Cerezo said. "In the Champions League our performance has been impressive.

"We have not even reached the middle of the season. There is a lot left and teams have many ups and downs and are going through bad times.

"We have already passed our [bad spell]. You have to recover those lost points."

Star forward Antoine Griezmann is without a La Liga goal since October but Cerezo is backing the France international to turn his form around.

"Nothing has happened to him," he added. "The players have good and bad spells and now they are in bad shape.

"But the goals will come and they will recover their good streak.

"The great players need the goals and to have great matches, and Griezmann will have them."

(Source: Goal)

Higuain: Dybala is a lot like Messi

Juventus striker Gonzalo Higuain has compared team-mate Paulo Dybala to Barcelona star and five-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi.

Dybala has quickly become one of the premium forwards in the game following his arrival from Palermo in 2015, helping Juve to Serie A, Coppa Italia and Supercoppa Italiana success in his maiden season.

The 23-year-old Argentine international has continued to shine

in 2016-17, scoring three goals and amassing two assists to help Juve top the Serie A table by four points.

And his performances have been praised by countryman Higuain, who believes Dybala could follow in the footsteps of Argentina captain Messi.

"Dybala and Messi are a lot like each other. Messi is the best and he shows it every day," Higuain told Premium Sport. "Paulo is still young, he's 23 years old

and depends on what's coming in the future, he has all the characteristics to become one of the best players.

"It has to have a great mental strength. When reaching so fast at high levels it is not easy to stay there for many years.

"There will be many ups and downs and you will always have to keep a balance and not listen to criticism and praise."

(Source: Soccerway)



Costa, Sanchez and Coutinho lead the 2016 Premier League Team of the Year

It has been a remarkable year of upsets with Leicester City winning the Premier League title and Chelsea producing the worst-ever defence as champions in the first half of 2016 -- only for the two clubs to produce wholly different results in the second half of the year.

Manchester United ended their trophy drought in the post-Sir Alex Ferguson era by winning the FA Cup under Louis van Gaal, while Jose Mourinho returned to management at Old Trafford, and Pep Guardiola brought his own super-successful brand of football to the Premier League with Manchester City.



But as 2016 nears its end, which players and manager have been consistent enough from January through to December to claim their place in the Team of the Year?

■ Kasper Schmeichel

The Leicester City goalkeeper kept 15 clean sheets as the club recorded the most unexpected title triumph in English football history with seven shut-outs coming in the final 12 games of the season. Injury has affected his 2016-17 campaign, but Schmeichel has been the stand-out keeper of the year.

■ Hector Bellerin

Arsenal's Spanish right-back has been a model of consistency, and his performances earned him a new six-year contract to fend off interest from Manchester City and Barcelona. Equally adept going forward, Bellerin, 21, is crucial for Arsenal's long-term aspirations.

■ Virgil van Dijk

The Dutch centre-half has earned comparisons to Rio Ferdinand with his increasingly impressive displays for Southampton. Tall, quick and with the ability to carry the ball out of the back four, the former Celtic defender is now emerging as a target for Champions League clubs.

■ Toby Alderweireld

Alderweireld's defensive partnership with Belgium teammate Jan Vertonghen was the cornerstone of Tottenham's bid for the Premier League title last season. The 27-year-old is powerful, strong in the air and comfortable with the ball at his feet. Tottenham miss him hugely when he's ruled out through injury.

■ Danny Rose

With Luke Shaw struggling to rediscover form and fitness at Manchester United following a year-long absence with a broken leg, Spurs defender Rose has emerged as England's best left-back. One of the few Englishmen to enjoy a successful Euro 2016 campaign.

■ N'Golo Kante

The French midfielder is arguably 2016's Player of the Year, with his immense performances in Leicester's title campaign being replicated for Chelsea this season. Kante simply performs the role of two men -- as a destroyer and creator -- and he has been a huge success at Chelsea this season.

■ Michael Carrick

At 35, the Manchester United midfielder is in the twilight of his career, but his class and experience helped guide Louis van Gaal's team to the FA Cup last season, and he has become a crucial figure in Jose Mourinho's team. United simply do not lose when Carrick plays, which says it all.

■ Kevin De Bruyne

Manchester City have endured an up and down 2016, but Kevin De Bruyne has been hugely impressive throughout. The Belgian midfielder's goals and energy have dragged City to results at times, and he is developing into a player of Steven Gerrard's calibre at the Etihad Stadium.

■ Philippe Coutinho

The Brazilian has become the man who makes Liverpool tick and edges out the likes of Eden Hazard, David Silva and Juan Mata because of his year-round contribution. Liverpool have not had a match-winner of Coutinho's ilk since Luis Suarez, but the 24-year-old rapidly is becoming as important to the team as the Uruguayan was.

■ Alexis Sanchez

The former Barcelona winger has become Arsenal's talisman after being handed a central role by Arsene Wenger. When Sanchez plays well, Arsenal win. Their challenge now is to keep the Chilean at the Emirates in 2017, and that will not be easy.

■ Diego Costa

The Chelsea forward has scored 25 goals for his club in 2016, with 13 coming this term to propel Antonio Conte's team to the top of the Premier League. Costa is back to his best, and his form and fitness are key to Chelsea staying ahead of the pack in 2017.

■ Manager: Eddie Howe

Claudio Ranieri completed a miracle with Leicester last season while Antonio Conte has confounded the doubters in his first six months at Chelsea, but over the calendar year, Eddie Howe's achievement in keeping Bournemouth in the Premier League and guiding them to the top 10 so far this season should not be overlooked. It's an incredible achievement.

(Source: ESPN)

"No way could I have done it without Andrew," Michael once said. "I can't think of anybody who would have been so perfect in allowing something which started out as a very naive, joint ambition, to become what was still a huge double act but what was really... mine."