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**'Militarily weak Britain can't affect power equation in region'**

**INTERVIEW**  
By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — A professor of the State University of Minnesota says Britain is so economically and militarily weak that its renewed military presence in the Persian Gulf cannot change power equation in the region.

"The British are really quite weak economically and militarily... (that) are not likely to be a major force in the Middle East for the near future," William O. Beeman tells the Tehran Times.

Following is the text of the interview:

**■ What are the reasons for a renewed British military presence in the Persian Gulf?**

A: The British announced the development of a new naval base in Bahrain at Mina Salman. The port was offered to the British in 2012 by the Al-Khalifa government, and the British took them up on this. The ostensible reason is to have a British presence in the Persian Gulf to protect transport of oil through the Straits of Hormuz. It is also a savings for the British for their naval operations in the Indian Ocean region. **→13**

## Rouhani links 'grave sleeping' to corruption



See page 2

**Asia's November imports of Iranian oil more than double from year ago**

Imports of crude oil by Iran's four major buyers in Asia in November more than doubled for a second straight month from a year ago, with purchases by India and South Korea more than four times higher.

Iran's top four Asian buyers - China, India, South Korea and Japan - imported 1.94 million barrels per day (bpd) last month, up 117 percent on a year earlier, government and ship-tracking data showed.

That was just short of the 2016 peak of 1.99 million bpd hit in the previous month, which was the highest since at least 2010, according to data by International Energy Agency.

The volumes were in line with the OPEC member's crude oil and condensate export plans.

Iran was exempted from last month's OPEC deal to reduce output by 1.2 million bpd starting Jan. 1, a victory for Tehran which has argued it needs to regain the market share it lost under Western sanctions targeting its nuclear program.

Industry sources have said Iran has been offering discounts to buyers in return for increasing their purchases. **→13**

**ARTICLE**  
By Seyyed Mohammad Esfahani  
Political expert

### Trump's nuclear dark age?

"Let it be an arms race!" This is the message of the new American president to the world. This was while the international community was dreaming about a world without nuclear arms.

Donald Trump's harsh reaction to Vladimir Putin, puts the dream under the shadow of doubt and ambiguity. The two presidents are both calling for strengthening nuclear arsenals.

At an annual end-of-year meeting with defense chiefs, Putin said Russia's military can overpower any potential foe, but it should build up its nuclear capability. "We need to strengthen the military potential of strategic nuclear forces, especially with missile complexes that can reliably penetrate any existing and prospective missile defense systems," the Russian leader said.

Trump, meanwhile, tweeted U.S. must "greatly strengthen and expand its nuclear capability." Then in a phone conversation with MSNBC, he warned nuclear adversaries that the United States "will outmatch them at every pass and outlast them all."

The president-elect fantasized that the nation must do so until the rest of the world - as he put it - "comes to its senses" regarding nuclear weapons.

**■ A return to Cold War?**

The recent remarks by the two world leaders raise the very predictable question. Are Russia and the U.S. entering a new Cold War? At least it could be a sign that the bilateral treaties between the U.S. and Russia are under serious and increasing stress. These include the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), the 1992 Open Skies Treaty, the landmark 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, and the 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. In the recent years the two countries have accused each other of constantly violating the obligations. **→13**

### Germany, China opens up credit line for two plans of IMIDRO

Deputy Industry Minister Mehdi Karbasian said on Wednesday that Germany and China opened up credit line for two joint venture investment in graphite electrode in Ardakan city and aluminum plant in Jajarm city, northern Khorasan province, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Karbasian, also the head of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO), said that following implementation of JCPOA, the international reputable companies have welcomed to develop partnership with Iranian partners to carry out joint venture investment projects in Iran's mine sector.

He said that for Jajarm aluminum project

a contract was signed with Chinese company providing 46 million euro for two years credit with interest rate of zero.

A German company has supplied equipment with 40 million euro credit to implement graphite electrode projects and it is for three years period.

**A German company has supplied equipment with 40 million euro credit to implement graphite electrode projects and it is for three years period.**

Karbasian said that since 10 to 12 years ago a technological gap was created in the sector of Iran's mine, when international companies disconnected their ties with Iran, and now are gradually coming back to Iran.

He stressed that in Mehdiabad Zink Mine, Yazd province, and Zarshouran Gold Mine in West Azarbaijan province, foreign advisors are being allowed and in the field of environment, the Norwegian advisor is hired.

Karbasian said that value of projects underway between Iran and China over the past three years, was more than 20 billion euro from which 4 billion was in the sector of mine and mine industries.

### Air defense drill highlights Iran's capability to counter all threats: commander

Lieutenant Commander of the Iranian Army Brigadier General Ahmad Reza Pourdastan hailed a war game staged this week by the Air Defense, saying the drill conveyed the message that Iran is powerful enough to foil any threat.

Speaking at the end of the large-scale maneuver on Wednesday, the senior commander said the message of the war game for the Iranian nation and for enemies is that the

Armed Forces are fully prepared to counter threats.

He reminded "the enemies and those who nurture wishful thinking" against the country of the power of the Iranian Armed Forces, saying the Air Defense forces easily hit and destroyed small flying objects during the drill and, therefore, are well capable of targeting invading aircraft as well.

"Today, our Armed Forces are able to respond to any type of

threat in the air, land and sea," Pourdastan added.

He noted, however, that Iran's message for the region is one of peace and friendship and that "we can provide security for the region and there is no need for aliens and trans-regional countries."

The drill, codenamed Defenders of Velayat Skies 7, had started on Monday covering an area of 496,000 square kilometers in Iran's southern areas, main-

ly the provinces of Hormozgan, Bushehr and Khuzestan.

More than 17,000 armed forces took part in the drill, which came to an end on Wednesday with a military parade.

The main purpose of the exercise was improving coordination between various air defense units of the armed forces, serving either in the Army or the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

(Source: Tasnim)



**Forg Castle, a majestic spot in eastern Iran**

Forg Castle, east of Birjand, South Khorasan province, has withstood the test of time. The citadel dates back to the Afsharid period (1736-1796).

### Ankara: Turkey and Russia have ceasefire plan for Syria

Turkey and Russia have prepared an agreement for a ceasefire in Syria, Turkey's foreign minister said, adding Ankara would not budge on its opposition to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad staying in power.

The comments by Mevlut Cavusoglu on Wednesday appeared to signal a tentative advance in talks aimed at reaching a truce, but the insistence that Assad must go will do little to smooth negotiations with Russia, his biggest backer.

Russia, Iran and Turkey said last week they were ready to help broker a peace deal after holding talks in Moscow where they adopted a declaration setting out the principles any agreement should adhere to.

"There are two texts ready on a solution in Syria. One is about a political resolution and the other is about a ceasefire. They can be implemented any time," Cavusoglu told reporters on the sidelines of an awards ceremony at the presidential palace in Ankara.

He said Syria's opposition would never back Assad.

"The whole world knows it is not possible for there to be a political transition with Assad, and we also all know that it is impossible for these people to unite around Assad."

Last week, Russia's foreign minister said Russia, Iran and Turkey had agreed that the priority in Syria was to fight terrorism and not to remove Assad's government.

Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency said earlier on Wednesday Moscow and Ankara had agreed on a proposal toward a general ceasefire. The Kremlin said it could not comment on the report.

A Syrian rebel official said meetings between Ankara and rebel forces were expected to continue this week, but could not confirm whether a final ceasefire agreement had been reached.

**■ Sticking point**

The official told Reuters a major sticking point in negotiations between rebel groups and Turkey was that Russia wanted to exclude the Damascus countryside from the ceasefire, but the rebels refused to do so. **→13**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



**500 student associations renew allegiance to Leader**

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — 500 student organizations on Wednesday wrote a letter to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to renew their loyalty to him and to the revolution, Mehr reported.

As four decades have passed since the Islamic Revolution, the youth have realized that resolving the country's current problems necessitates a campaign against anti-revolution thoughts and return to the pure basics of the revolution, reads the letter.

The letter came in anticipation of the Ninth Dey (December 29) mass rallies in Tehran in 2009 which put an end to about six months of unrests that ensued the presidential election in the same year.



**World politics filled with lies, hypocrisy: grand ayatollah**

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — A prominent religious scholar has criticized the dominant political system in the world, saying it is filled with lies and hypocrisy.

"We are increasingly losing our faith in the global political environment," Grand Ayatollah Naser Makarem Shirazi said on Wednesday.

He said that the double standards followed by the West have created an unreliable atmosphere.

"A clear example of such policy was exhibited by the West following the liberation of Aleppo when they came under defeat," he said.



**Statesmen hail Dec. 29 rally**

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — On December 29, 2009, the Iranian nation "branded its sword at falsity and injustice" to the revolution, Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Wednesday.

The nation on this day once again put the revolution on its right path and illuminated the country's future, he said, IRIB reported.

Elsewhere, Expediency Council's Strategic Research Center Director Ali Akbar Velayati said the nation on this day heroically defeated the sedition.



**Elections headquarters to start work in Tehran**

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — Presidential election headquarters is to start its activities in Tehran next week, Tehran Province's Deputy Governor for Social and Political Affairs Shahabeddin Chavoshi told IRNA on Wednesday.

Chavoshi said the headquarters will focus on preparing necessary grounds for massive turnout in the next presidential elections in the country.

The headquarters is using well-qualified experts who are eligible for this capacity to encourage a higher voter turnout, the official said.



**Zarif vows to help resolve Narges case**

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said he will make efforts to help relieve Narges Kalbasi from her predicaments.

"I assure you that our objective is her freedom from her current problems and a fair treatment," Mohammad Javad Zarif wrote on Wednesday in reply to a letter by some celebrities, professors, and lawyers, Mehr reported.

In his trip to India a few weeks ago, Zarif met with Narges to discuss her case.

Narges, a philanthropist, has been sentenced to a year in prison for unintentional murder.



**Iranian embassy condemns terror attack in Berlin**

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — The Iranian embassy in Germany has strongly condemned the December 19 terrorist attack in Berlin which resulted in the death and injury of a number of civilians.

The embassy also sympathized with the bereaved families of the victims, Fars news agency reported.

The Iranian embassy also underlined the need for maintaining solidarity among all nations and governments for a relentless fight on terrorism.

# Rouhani links 'grave sleeping' to corruption

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday linked social ills in the Iranian society to corruption, reacting to a letter on Tuesday by Oscar-winner director Asghar Farhadi who had said he felt "filled with shame" once he learnt about the homeless spending their nights in dug graves in a city near Tehran.

"Who can accept that dozens of his countrymen who have suffered social ills take refuge to graves at night because of homelessness?" Rouhani said on Wednesday at a session in Tehran.

A report by the Shahrvand daily on Tuesday stirred a row among the Iranians. Allegedly, 50 homeless people had been seen sleeping in dug graves in Nasirabad, a district near Shahriar, eastern Tehran.

Subsequent formal reports said the grave-sleepers were homeless addicts who avoided attending special shelters considered for them by municipalities.

"For 25 years now, I've been an addict and street dweller," the report quoted one of the so-called grave-dwellers as saying.

Whatsoever the reason, this is unacceptable, Rouhani stated, urging all parties and political currents to join hands to



**President Rouhani says it is unacceptable that a dozens of Iranian citizens take refuge to graves because they have no homes of their own.**

address corruption as the cause root of social ills.

"This is bearable neither for the government nor for the people," he lamented.

He added, "To solve such issues we need to unify and stop partisanship... The government and nation both have responsibility to fight corruption.

"Short of an anti-corruption campaign, social solidarity isn't achieved and social capital is damaged."

In his campaign speeches in 2013, Rouhani pledged an economic recovery, lower unemployment, and flourishing business.

He also vowed a tougher stance on corruption.

The grave-sleeping report came nearly two weeks after Rouhani declared a Citizens' Rights Charter.

The charter, which has 120 articles, emphasizes the right to a "decent life," including the rights to freedom of speech, access to information, health services, a clean environment, clean water, food, etc.

Also, it comes against a backdrop of revelations that senior government employees were being paid astronomical salaries, a signal of growing income gap in the contemporary Iranian society.

## Iran tests new surface-to-air missile

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — Iran's military tested a new surface-to-air missile on Wednesday as part of a three-day maneuver in southern provinces of the country.

The drill, codenamed the Modafean Aseman Velayat 7 (The Defenders of Velayat Skies 7), started on Monday covering an area of 496,000 square kilometers in Iran's southern areas, mainly the provinces of Hormozgan, Bushehr and Khuzestan.

Sayyad 3 (Hunter 3) was launched from the home-grown Talash (Endeavor) missile defense system.

The missile has a range of 150 km and is used to target high-altitude flying objects, according to Farajipour, the drill's spokesman.

Also, the unveiled missile will replace S200 missiles launched from the Talash defense system previously.

The defense system has also been equipped with a



made-in-Iran fire control radar, dubbed "Ofoq."

Learning from the Iraqi invasion of the country in the 1980s, Iran has developed its homegrown military technology to upgrade its defense capabilities.

It unveiled in August 2016 the first vertical-launching air defense system, Bavar-373 (Belief 373), similar to the Russian S-300 and capable of hitting targets at a high altitude.

The system included missile-launcher vehicles, a command post, and supplements for missile guidance systems, including an engagement radar.

In addition to indigenous systems, Tehran received the first batch of the S-300 air defense system, making the country's air space most costly for flying objects to penetrate into.

The country has installed armed eyes and missile sites in upwards of 3700 points across its mainland.

## UN backs Russia-Iran-Turkey initiative for Syria talks

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — The United Nations special envoy for Syria has expressed support for an initiative brokered by Russia, Iran and Turkey to launch dialogue between the Syrian government and armed opposition groups, IRNA reported.

Staffan de Mistura's support for the Syria talks came after his telephone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Wednesday, the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

In a meeting in Moscow on December 20 the foreign ministers of Russia, Iran, and Turkey agreed to guarantee

Syria peace talks and backed expanding a ceasefire in the war-torn country.

"Iran, Russia and Turkey are ready to assist in preparing the agreement in the making between the Syrian government and the opposition and to become its guarantor," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said, citing a joint statement. "The ministers agree with the importance of widening the ceasefire, of free access for humanitarian aid and movement of civilians on Syrian territory."

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said on

Monday he was ready to host multilateral talks on the Syrian conflict. "Kazakhstan is ready to host all sides for talks in Astana," Nazarbayev said during a visit to St. Petersburg where he met Russian President Vladimir Putin.

De Mistura said the UN is ready to help draw up an agreement between the Syrian warring sides in Astana.

Lavrov also urged UN officials to stop airing false news about the developments in Syria.

It is also necessary that some Security Council members to stop baseless reports about the situation on the ground and instead ship humanitarian aid to the country.

## U.S. not serious in fighting ISIL: Iran defense minister

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehqan has said that the U.S. is not serious in fighting ISIL as it has fostered terrorists itself and now wants them to remain in the Middle East.

"The Western coalition is of a formal nature, they have no real intention to fight neither in Syria nor in Iraq. We don't see any readiness on their part to play a truly useful and meaningful role in fighting IS, because it's them who have raised terrorists and they are interested in keeping them there," RT quoted him as saying in an interview published on Tuesday.

"Maybe the coalition forces would like to see terrorists weakened, but certainly not destroyed, because those terrorists are their tool for destabilizing this region

and some other parts of the world," he said.

He also said that Tehran has never coordinated its operations with the U.S. and "will never collaborate with them".

Dehqan said that terrorists in Syria receive support from the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Qatar. He also accused Turkey of supporting terrorists on the ground.

"If Iran, Russia and Syria were to reach an agreement with Turkey to end Turkish support for those terrorist groups, particularly IS and Jabhat al-Nusra, and start fighting them, then I think we would see the situation in Syria improve," he added.

Elsewhere, the Iranian minister stressed that any ceasefire in Syria demands guarantees and all parties should agree to fulfill the conditions for a truce.

"We shouldn't let Islamic State or Al-Nusra groups take part in the ceasefire. All other groups should start a political process and negotiations with the Syrian government," he said.

He added that after the truce comes into force, it is important to separate terrorists and opposition groups ready to negotiate with the Syrian government.

**"If Iran, Russia and Syria were to reach an agreement with Turkey to end Turkish support for those terrorist groups, particularly IS and Jabhat al-Nusra, and start fighting them, then I think we would see the situation in Syria improve."**



## Iran-Turkey border is symbol of peace: Turkish party chief

**POLITICS TEHRAN** — Temel Karamollaoglu, leader of the Turkish Felicity Party, said on Tuesday that Iran and Turkey have enjoyed friendly relations for centuries and the border between the two countries has turned into a "symbol of peace and friendship".

Temel Karamollaoglu made the remarks during a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Ankara Ebrahim Taherianfard.

The party leader also said Iran and Turkey play important roles in establishing peace and stability in the region.

"Iran-Turkey relations are so significant that can guarantee peace, security



and stability in the region and the world. Friendship between Iran and Turkey is not something new and has 500 years of background," Karamollaoglu explained.

He added some countries seek to undermine the relations between the two neighbors and that is why the two countries should insist on areas of common

interest and avoid raising differences.

He also called for expanding political, economic and cultural ties.

For his part, Taherianfard said the relations between Iran and Turkey have gone through many ups and downs in the course of history, however, the two countries have stood beside each other in trying times.

The ambassador said it is natural to have different interpretations on one issue, yet "constructive dialogue" and "trust" can help bridge differences.

The diplomat said media, parties and non-governmental organizations can help establish "constructive relationship", "build trust" and achieve "consensus".

# Hariri's Cabinet wins overwhelming confidence vote in Parliament

Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri's Cabinet overwhelmingly won a Parliament vote of confidence on Wednesday, one day after lawmakers began debating its policy statement.

Hariri, who formed his 30-member Cabinet earlier this month, said that when President Michel Aoun won the election, there had been doubts. However, the Cabinet was elected and the policy statement was drafted in record time.

"There's positivity and cooperation in the country after political factions reached the conviction that we could not move forward without agreement and consensus."

Hariri said that the political breakthrough was a local decision, not a regional agreement.

"We all took risks to favor people's interests. Our duty now lies in conducting the policy statement."

The Parliament voted 87 to 4 in support of the fledgling government, while only one member abstained.

Wednesday's session kicked off at 11 a.m. to hear Hariri's response to the lawmakers' remarks.

Only 92 lawmakers out of 126 attended the session. The Lebanese Parliament is formed of 128 seats, but with the resignation of Tripoli MP Robert Fadel and the election of Michel Aoun as the country's president on Oct. 31, the number reduced to 126.

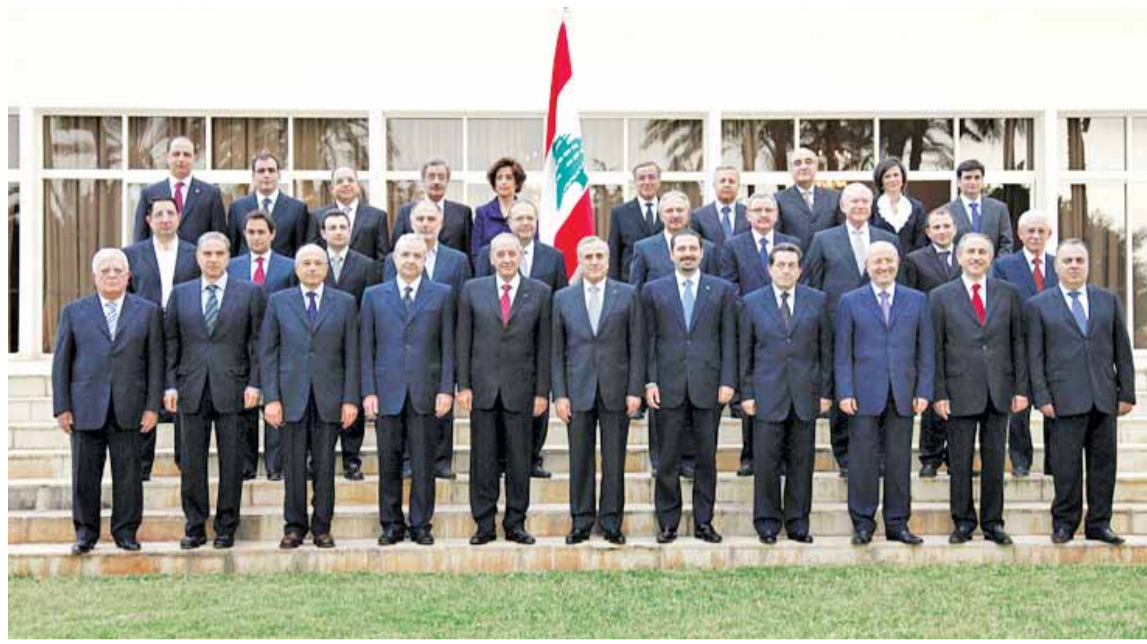
The three Kataeb Party lawmakers, which their chief vowed earlier this month would become part of the opposition, withheld their confidence from the Cabinet, in addition to Akkar MP Khaled al-Daher.

Al-Jamaa al-Islamiya MP Imad Hout abstained from voting. The premier explained on Tuesday that the Cabinet's slogan would be "restoring confidence."

Lawmakers' policy statement deliberation was originally set to happen in three consecutive sessions in the morning and evening, but parliamentary blocs sought to cut them short.

A total of 22 lawmakers, representing various parliamentary blocs, commented on Tuesday on the policy statement in the morning and evening sessions.

Hariri began his response to the lawmakers' remarks by saluting the Lebanese Army and security forces over "their sacrifices," promising that the Cabinet will follow up on the case of abducted soldiers abducted by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Terrorist group from the town of Aarsal.



**"There's positivity and cooperation in the country after political factions reached the conviction that we could not move forward without agreement and consensus."**

The town was briefly overrun by extremists in August 2014, when ISIL and al-Nusra terrorists captured a number of Lebanese soldiers and policemen, in the worst spillover of the Syrian war to date.

It is believed that nine soldiers are still being held captive by the ISIL.

Hariri said that the controversial spread of arms was left for the national defense strategy. He also emphasized the importance of the country's new vote law.

"There's a role that should be played by the Cabinet and another by the Parliament... All political factions are seeking to endorse a new electoral law," Hariri said.

Different parties have proposed prospective electoral laws based on majority and proportional systems.

A third choice would be to adopt a hybrid law blend-

ing both systems.

Turning to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, Hariri said that the Cabinet was firmly committed to supporting its work. The Tribunal was established in 2009 to investigate the 2005 killing of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

He also said the Cabinet was determined to prevent the country's telecoms data from being breached, partnership between private and public sectors, and exploration of the country's natural offshore oil and gas resources.

Regarding corruption at state institutions, Hariri said that his government had set a precedent in establishing a ministerial portfolio to tackle the matter.

(Source: *The Daily Star*)

## Israel delays settler permits ahead of Kerry speech

Israel delayed a vote on Wednesday on permits for settler homes at Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's request, ahead of a speech by the United States Secretary of State John Kerry, an official said.

The discussion was pulled from the agenda in a move following last week's United Nations Security Council resolution demanding a halt to Israeli settlement building and with Kerry set for a major speech on the conflict later in the day.

Hanan Rubin, a Jerusalem (al-Quds) city councilor and a member of the planning committee that was to discuss the permits, told AFP its members had been informed of Netanyahu's request by the committee chairman.

"We were told by the chairman... that it was pulled at the request of the prime minister so we can avoid a conflict with the U.S. government just before Kerry's speech tonight," Rubin said.

Netanyahu's spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Rubin said the committee had been planning to vote on permits for 492 units in the Ramat Shlomo and Ramot settlement neighborhoods of mainly Palestinian east of al-Quds (Jerusalem).

He said the plans would be brought forward at a later date, though it was unclear when.

The Ir Amim NGO (non-governmental organization), which monitors settlement activity, had earlier said the committee was to discuss permits for 618 housing units in east al-Quds.

Friday's UN Security Council resolution demanded a halt to Israeli settlement building in Palestinian territory. It passed 14-0, with the United States abstaining.

By declining to use its veto, the United States enabled

**Officials are concerned Kerry's speech and the conference could lead to further action against Israel that would then be taken to the Security Council for approval before Trump takes over as U.S. president.**

the adoption of the first UN resolution since 1979 to condemn Israel over its settlement policy.

Netanyahu has reacted furiously, accusing U.S. President Barack Obama's administration of being behind the resolution and vowing not to abide by it.

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20, has signaled far more favorable policy toward Israel and called for the United States to veto the resolution.

Israel's right-wing has welcomed Trump's election, with key members of Netanyahu's coalition calling for an end to the idea of a Palestinian state, the basis of years of negotiations.

■ **Concern over Kerry's speech**

Kerry's upcoming speech has led to further concern in Israel, with officials fearing he could lay out parameters for restarting long-stalled peace efforts that they oppose.

Beyond that, plans by France to hold an international Middle East peace conference on Jan. 15 is another point of worry for Israel.

Officials are concerned Kerry's speech and the conference could lead to further action against Israel that would then be taken to the Security Council for approval

before Trump takes over as U.S. president.

Israel has already taken diplomatic steps in response to what it calls the "shameful" UN resolution.

On Tuesday, the foreign ministry said it was "temporarily reducing" visits and work with embassies of nations that voted for it.

On Christmas Day, it summoned ambassadors of countries that voted for the resolution while Netanyahu also met U.S. ambassador Daniel Shapiro.

Security Council members such as Russia, China and Britain are key to Israeli diplomacy or trade and some analysts suggested the measures being taken were more symbolic than substantive.

Washington is Israel's most important ally and provides it with more than \$3 billion per year in military aid.

It has traditionally acted as Israel's diplomatic protector, often shielding it from resolutions it opposes.

But Obama's administration has become increasingly frustrated with settlement building in east al-Quds and the West Bank, which Israel occupied in 1967.

Israel later annexed east al-Quds in a move never recognized by the international community.

Settlements are built on land the Palestinians view as part of their future state and seen as illegal under international law.

The United States and others say continued settlement building is steadily eating away at the possibility of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Some 430,000 Israeli settlers live in the West Bank and 200,000 Israelis live in east al-Quds, which Palestinians see as the capital of their future state.

(Source: *AFP*)

## Record number refugees opt to leave in 2016

Nearly 55,000 migrants who were not eligible for or were likely to be denied asylum left Germany voluntarily in 2016, up by 20,000 from the number who left of their own volition in 2015, according to government officials.

Germany has toughened its stance on immigration in recent months, prompted by concerns about security and integration after admitting more than 1.1 million migrants from the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere since early 2015.

"That's a considerable increase from last year," Harald Neymanns, interior ministry spokesman, announced on Wednesday, adding that the 2016 figure had climbed to 54,123 through December 27.

"The increase is welcome. It's always preferable when people leave the country voluntarily instead of being deported."

A finance ministry spokesman said the government would boost funding slightly to 150 million euros in 2017 to support efforts to encourage people to leave Germany.

Last week a failed asylum seeker who had sworn allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group killed 12 people when he drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin, prompting criticism of Chancellor Angela Merkel's immigration policy.

Most of those leaving in 2016 returned to their homes in Albania, Serbia, Iraq, Kosovo and Afghanistan, Sued-



deutsche Zeitung newspaper said earlier.

Those leaving are eligible for one-off support of up to 3,000 euros that is supposed to help support finding

employment at home.

Separately, German security officials told Reuters news agency the number of those deported after their asylum requests were rejected rose to almost 23,800 from January to November - up from almost 20,900 in all of 2015.

There has also been a rise in the number of refugees turned away at the borders.

A report by the Neue Osnabruecker Zeitung daily said police had turned back 19,720 refugees through the first 11 months of 2016 - up from 8,913 in all of 2015.

Most were from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq and Nigeria. They had been registered in other EU countries.

As public support for her pro-refugee policies wanes ahead of September's federal election, Merkel has said it is vital to focus resources on those fleeing war, and to keep public support up by deporting foreigners to countries where there is no persecution.

Attacks and security alerts involving refugees and migrants have boosted the popularity of the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, whose rise above 10 percent in opinion polls could complicate Merkel's re-election hopes.

On Tuesday, seven refugees from Syria and Iraq aged 15 to 21 were detained in Berlin on charges of attempted murder for trying to set fire to a homeless man in an underground station.

(Source: *agencies*)

## Erdogan accuses U.S.-led coalition of supporting ISIL U.S. denies Erdogan accusations

Turkey and Russia have separately accused the United States of backing what they call "terrorist groups" in Syria, on the same day they agreed to push for talks in Kazakhstan next month over the conflict.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that he had evidence that the United States-led coalition forces give support to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) and Kurdish groups, namely the People's Protection Units (YPG/Yekineyên Parastina Gel) and the Democratic Union Party (PYD/Partiya Yekîtiya Demokratî).

"They were accusing us of supporting Daesh (ISIL)," he told a press conference in Ankara, using the Arabic abbreviation for ISIL.

"Now they give support to terrorist groups including Daesh, YPG, PYD. It is very clear. We have confirmed evidence, with pictures, photos and videos," he said, without elaborating further about the evidence in question.

■ **Ludicrous comments**

The U.S. state department dismissed Erdogan's claims as "ludicrous". Spokesman Mark Toner said there was no basis for such an accusation.

Also, the United States embassy in Ankara on Wednesday denied Washington had ever supported the ISIL terrorists in the Syrian conflict after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan claimed the terrorists had enjoyed U.S. backing.

"The United States government is not supporting Daesh," the embassy said in a terse statement, using another acronym for ISIL.

The United States "did not create or support Daesh in the past. Assertions the United States government is supporting ISIL are not true," it added.

The statement did not mention Erdogan by name but said there was "considerable misinformation circulating in Turkish media" about U.S. operations against ISIL in Syria.

"For those interested in the truths, here are the truths," the embassy said.

However, the embassy said: "The United States government has not provided weapons or explosives to the YPG or the PKK - period."

Erdogan said that the U.S.-led coalition forces fighting against ISIL in Syria had also failed to provide assistance for the Turkish operation to capture the extremist-held town of Al-Bab.

Responding to this allegation, the embassy said the United States continues to work closely with Turkey to "determine how we can increase our efforts to defeat (ISIL) ... and eliminate this scourge that threatens both our peoples."

It said the discussions included how best to help Turkish forces and their Syrian opposition allies fighting the extremists around Al-Bab.

The U.S. backing of the YPG and criticism of the human rights climate in Turkey has angered Ankara in the final months of the administration of President Barack Obama.

Turkish officials have expressed hope for a "new page" under President-elect Donald Trump including the extradition of Erdogan's arch enemy Fethullah Gulen who he blames for the July 15 failed coup. (Source: *agencies*)

## Shinzo Abe visits Pearl Harbor with Barack Obama

The leaders of Japan and the United States have met at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, 75 years after the surprise Japanese air attack that led to the U.S. entering World War II.

The meeting on Tuesday between Shinzo Abe and Barack Obama at the historic site is a further step in the reconciliation process between the two wartime enemies.

The Japanese prime minister and U.S. president have both sought to guide their citizens to embrace reconciliation and remembrance.

Although Abe's visit is not the first by a Japanese leader to Pearl Harbor, it is the first to include ceremonies and speeches together with the U.S. president.

For Obama, it is possibly the last time he has met a foreign leader as president, White House aides said.

"This visit, and the president's visit to Hiroshima earlier this year, would not have been possible eight years ago," said Daniel Kritenbrink, Obama's top Asia adviser in the White House.

The meeting between the two leaders comes as Abe prepares to lead Japan into an uncertain era, with Republican Donald Trump set to occupy the White House in January.

The president-elect has declared his opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement that Obama was pushing for and that Abe made the heart of his economic strategy.

And, at least on the campaign trail, Trump has even called into question the U.S. security guarantees that shielded Japan through the Cold War and later the rise of China.

In eight years, Obama, America's Hawaiian-born first "Pacific president", never made the headway he wanted in his vaunted "rebalance to Asia" diplomatic strategy. In May, he visited Hiroshima to pay his respects.

The Japanese attack of January 7, 1941, on an unsuspecting U.S. fleet moored at Pearl Harbor turned the Pacific into a major theatre of war.

The raid had been prepared in secret by Japan for months, but was over within two hours.

Japanese warplanes came out of nowhere to sink much of the U.S. fleet and leave 2,400 sailors and soldiers dead.

A reluctant America was drawn into the war already raging in Europe and its colonies, a war that ended after U.S. atom bombs razed the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In May, Obama surveyed the preserved ruins in Hiroshima and revived his Nobel Peace Prize-winning call for a world without nuclear weapons.

(Source: *agencies*)

## European stocks inch higher in light trade as miners gain

European stock markets struggled for direction in light post-holiday trade on Wednesday, with miners pushing higher, while Italian banks led decliners on ongoing concerns about the future of Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena.

The Stoxx Europe 600 index SXXP, +0.05% rose 0.1% to 360.77, after rising 0.1% on Tuesday, which was the first trading day after Christmas.

BHP Billiton PLC BLT, +4.10% BHP, +0.65% BHP, +3.29% posted the biggest gain on Wednesday, tracking gains from the Australian session where the mining sector led the benchmark S&P ASX 200 XJO, +1.01% to the highest close since August 2015.

Other miners were also on the rise in Europe, with shares of Fresnillo PLC FRES, +4.32% rising 3.8% and Anglo American PLC AAL, +3.24% climbed 3.4%.

The gains helped lift the commodity-heavy FTSE 100 index UKX, +0.30% 0.3% to 7,087.81. It was the first trading day in London after the Christmas and Boxing Day holidays.

Italian bank woes: Banks in Italy, however, capped gains for the pan-European index. Shares of Banca Popolare di Milano Scarl PMI, -4.55% lost 2.7%, Banco Popolare SC BP, -4.33% dropped 2.6% and Unione di Banche Italiane SpA UBI, -2.88% gave up 1.2%. Shares of Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena SpA BMPS, -7.48% were still halted for trade.

Late on Monday night, BMPS said the European Central Bank said the bank's capital shortfall is far higher than the €5 billion expected when the government last week organized a rescue for the lender. The hole on Monte dei Paschi's balance sheet is now €8.8 billion, according to the ECB, partly because of large outflows of deposits in recent months.

Italy's FTSE MIB index I945, -0.55% dropped 0.3% to 19,324.48. Germany's DAX 30 index DAX, -0.04% was flat around 11,473.06, while France's CAC 40 index PX1, -0.09% was slightly lower at 4,846.83.

Other movers: Shares of Airbus Group SE AIR, -0.43% dropped 0.6% after the plane maker late Tuesday said it's cutting production of its flagship A380 superjumbo next year.

Rolls-Royce Holdings PLC RR, -0.40%, which makes engines for the A380, lost 0.5%. (Source: MarketWatch)

## Cuba says economy shrank this year in tandem with Venezuela crisis

Cuba's economy shrank 0.9 percent this year in tandem with the crisis in key trading partner Venezuela, President Raul Castro told the National Assembly on Tuesday in a closed-door speech, predicting a slightly brighter outlook for 2017.

The figure suggests sharp economic contraction in the second half after the cash-strapped government slashed imports, investment and fuel in response to lower exports and a drop in cheap oil deliveries from Venezuela. It had reported 1 percent growth for the first half.

"Restrictions in cash and in the provision of fuel worsened in the second half," Castro said, according to excerpts published by official media outlet Cubadebate.

"Financial tensions and challenges that might intensify again in certain circumstances will persist, but we hope that gross domestic product (GDP) will grow moderately, by around 2 percent (in 2017)."

Cuba's centrally planned economy has struggled for decades with the U.S. economic embargo and mismanagement at home.

Market-state reforms and, more recently, a detente with the United States that has boosted remittances and the tourism sector, helped the economy grow on average at close to 3 percent each year between 2011 and 2015.

Still, the long slump in global fuel prices is hurting many of Cuba's top trading partners such as Angola, Venezuela and Brazil, and revenue from the sale of professional services to those countries has dropped.

Key ally Venezuela has slashed its provision of cheap oil and the drop in global commodities prices is punishing Cuban exports of nickel, refined oil products and sugar. (Source: Reuters)

## Vietnam suffers first slowdown in economic growth for 4 years

Vietnam's economy expanded an estimated 6.21 percent this year, slightly behind 2015 and marking the first slowdown in four years, but a fourth-quarter surge to 6.68 percent was the best for a year, keeping it among Asia's fastest-growing economies.

Drops in agriculture and mining dragged full year growth below last year's 6.68 percent and the government's target of 6.3-6.5 percent, the General Statistics Office (GSO) said on Wednesday.

"2016 GDP has not reached target or had any major breakthroughs but in general the economy has had good growth except for the agriculture and mining sectors," GSO head Nguyen Bich Lam told reporters.

In 2015, Vietnam's economy had expanded at its fastest pace since 2007 having maintained growth momentum since 2012. The slower annual growth this year -- the first deceleration since 2012 -- left Vietnam ranked behind India, China and the Philippines.

The Statistics Office put the drop in pace down to adverse weather, a marine environmental disaster and an unfavourable global economy.

"The 6.21 growth this year is actually not too bad given the outside factors like weather and the international markets," said Tran Minh Hoang, chief economist at Vietcombank Securities.

"Next year growth may improve slightly to 6.3-6.5 percent as the oil market stabilises and public spending increases," Hoang added. (Source: Reuters)

# Iranian ICCIMA, Azeri ASK ink MOU

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) and Azerbaijan Confederation of Entrepreneurs, known as ASK, signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in Baku.

The MOU was inked on the first day of Iran-Azerbaijan Business Forum in the Azeri capital, by the ASK president Mammad Musayev and the ICCIMA board member Hossein Pirmoazen, the portal of ICCIMA reported on Wednesday.

During the signing ceremony, attended also by Iranian and Azeri governmental and private sector managers, the two sides explored avenues for further trade ties besides calling for the implementation of the previously penned contracts.

Iran-Azerbaijan Business Forum will wrap up on Thursday having entrepreneurs from a wide range of sectors, including agriculture, food and light industries, pharmaceuticals, transportation, logistics, tourism, ICT, construction, production of building materials and auto spare parts participated, Trend news agency reported.

Iran's ICT Minister Mahmoud Vaezi and Azerbaijan's Minister of Economic Development Shahin Mostafayef also took part in the event.

Vaezi arrived in Baku on Tuesday for a three-day visit to attend the 11th meeting of the Azerbaijani-Iranian intergovernmental commission on economic, trade and humanitarian issues.



ICCIMA board member Hossein Pirmoazen and ASK president Mammad Musayev are signing the MOU. Iranian ICT Minister Mahmoud Vaezi and Azeri Minister of Economic Development Shahin Mostafayef are standing behind.

In his meeting with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, the two sides underscored the importance of all-encompassing relations, particularly in the economic sector.

"Economic relations between the two countries have made great progress as compared to the previous year," Vaezi was quoted as saying.

## Swedish PM to lead trade delegation to Iran

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, leading a trade delegation, is due to visit Tehran in February 2017, Sweden's ambassador in Iran, Helena Sangeland, said on Tuesday.

In a meeting in Tehran with the chairman of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), Gholam-Hossein Shafeie, the Swedish envoy expressed her country's willingness to expand mutual cooperation with Iran, saying, "Sweden puts great importance on ties between the two countries."

Referring to opportunities created after the lifting of sanctions on Iran, the Swedish official noted that the two countries exchanged several delegations and held official meetings over the past year, the ICCIMA website reported.



The resumption of Sweden's economic center activities in Tehran has created an opportunity for small

and medium sized enterprises to make investment and launch joint ventures in Iran," she said.

Both officials also stressed the need for removing banking barriers to help boost the trade between the two countries.

Earlier this month, Presidential Chief of Staff Mohammad Nahavandian met members of the International Council of Swedish Industry (NIR) to exchange views on promoting economic ties.

In the meeting, Nahavandian described Iran's economy as an opportunity for the members of the Swedish council, ISNA reported.

The Iranian official called on Swedish companies to get more engaged with Iran's private sector, stressing that the country's private sector is increasingly involved in the economy.

## Iran hopeful of a good business decision from Trump: Iranian vice trade min.

Oil-rich Iran with a population of 80 million means good business, and being a "good businessman" U.S. president-elect Donald Trump won't likely risk worsening the hard-won normalized ties with Iran, said a senior industry and trade minister of Iran as investors have turned jittery about the landmark nuclear deal between Iran and the U.S.-led global powers that lifted international sanctions once Trump takes office next month.

"Iran wants good relations with the U.S... (and having so) will be ultimately a win-win for both countries," said Mansour Moazami, Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade & Industrial Development

and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) Chairman of Board in an interview with the Mael Business Newspaper.

Iran's currency and capital markets have suffered from exodus of foreign money amid uncertainty in Washington's policy under Trump and his hawkish foreign affairs and security team. Trump throughout his campaign outright disapproved of the pact calling it "stupid" and "worst deal ever negotiated." Renegotiations may be inevitable after Trump takes office, putting many of foreign investments and deals that poured into the country upon lifting of the sanctions at risk.

Moazami is visiting Korea to discuss

business deals with Korean shipbuilders. IDRO, an executive body of the Iranian Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, oversees industrial policies and state entities including automakers Iran Khodro, or IKCO, and SAIPA, and shippers Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) and National Iranian Tanker Co.

He visited Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering Co's Gojeje shipyard on Monday, and said cooperation with the Korean firm would greatly help "expansion of the marine industry" in Iran, especially construction projects of state-owned shipyard Iran Shipbuilding & Offshore Industries Complex Co. (ISOICO). Iran plans to invest up to \$30

billion in its marine and shipbuilding sectors, he added. He also expected Iran's methanol production - currently 5 million tons annually - would more than quadruple to 20 million tons by 2020, which would lead to higher demand in tanker ships, providing "good opportunities" for many shipbuilders including Korean ones.

Regarding the auto industry, he said he was "not satisfied" with Korean car-makers that only focus on exporting their cars. He hoped that Korean automakers invest in the Iranian auto industry, such as building car production facilities, for enhanced cooperation. (Source: Pulse)

## Majority of British managers think Brexit uncertainty will affect UK economy

A majority of managers in the UK believe Brexit-related uncertainty will hold back economic growth next year and almost half think leaving the UK will be a drag in the long term, according to a survey.

The 2017 outlook from the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) paints a relatively downbeat picture of the UK economy, but managers appear optimistic about their own organizations' ability to thrive despite worries surrounding Britain's exit from the European Union and the global climate as Donald Trump takes over the US presidency.

In a survey of 1,118 managers, the CMI found 65% were pessimistic about the UK's economic outlook for the next 12-18 months. Their caution over 2017 followed what appeared to be a tough year for many organizations, when only 39% said they had grown, the lowest proportion since 2012 when the shockwaves from the Eurozone debt crisis hit the UK economy. A further 39% said business levels had stayed roughly the same in 2016 and 22% said their business had declined.

Asked about the impact of Brexit on economic growth in the next three to five years, 49% thought it would be negative. But a sizeable 37% believed leaving the EU would have a positive impact on the UK economy and 14% said it would have no impact.

The findings follow signs that businesses are becoming more nervous about hiring and investing as Brexit negotiations approach. Companies and individuals have also become more concerned about costs because the pound's sharp fall since the referendum has made imports such as fuel and food ingredients to the UK more expensive.

But the CMI poll, conducted in November and published on Wednesday, also showed a majority of managers, 57%, were confident about their organizations' own prospects in the year ahead. Just 25% said they felt pessimistic. Managers in the private sector were more optimistic than those in the public and charity sectors.

The CMI's chief executive, Ann Francke, said the results showed that despite uncertain times ahead there were still

opportunities for "forward-thinking" UK businesses.

"Although it's clear that there are significant challenges posed by the UK's decision to Brexit, as a country we need to move forward and harness pragmatic positivity," she said.

Francke also called for employers to address the growing sense of frustration with the status quo and widespread inequality expressed by voters in the UK and elsewhere this year.

"In this climate of heightened political uncertainty and economic turbulence, the time is now to position Britain as a global leader in responsible capitalism, targeting essential issues like workplace ethics, inclusivity and executive pay to restore trust and transparency and improve productivity," she said.

Managers said tackling the UK's poor productivity performance was a priority in 2017 and that they wanted to improve economic efficiency by investing in technology, improving management skills and cutting bureaucracy. (Source: The Guardian)

**Persian Gulf may have firm tone in line with global markets**



Persian Gulf stock markets may have a slightly firm tone on Wednesday in line with global bourses, with some investors in Saudi Arabia tempted to push up shares after the index hit a new high for the year on Tuesday.

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan is up 0.5 percent, while oil prices rose overnight, with Brent crude now around \$56 a barrel.

On Tuesday, banking stocks boosted the Saudi index 1.3 percent to 7,257 points in its highest trading volume for two weeks, above technical resistance at this year's previous peak of 7,235 points hit in early December.

**Thai shippers' council raises 2017 export forecast**



A group of Thai shippers said on Wednesday it expected exports to be flat this year and grow 1-2 percent next year, slightly better than it had expected, thanks to higher global oil and commodity prices.

In November the group predicted exports would be flat to 0.8 percent weaker for this year rise of 0-1 percent in 2017.

Exports, which account for about two-thirds of Thai output, have contracted each in the past three years, a major drag on an economy still struggling to regain traction since the army took power in May 2014.

The Bank of Thailand last week predicted exports would fall 0.6 percent this year and be flat in 2017.

**Indian ambassador offers to launch exhibition of goods in Azerbaijan**



Representatives of Gem&Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) in India have met with Indian Ambassador to Azerbaijan Shri Sanjay Rana.

Report informs referring to Indian media, trade relations between India and Azerbaijan and reduction in import duty of gems and jewellery products to Azerbaijan were some of the key topics in the meeting.

The meeting expressed a proposal to invite jewelers from Azerbaijan to the exhibition IJS Signature 2017 in India, February 2017.

The ambassador noted that he would hold talks with jewelers of Azerbaijan and discuss development of trade relations.

## Brazil offers Iran refinery, petchem plant deal

Talks between Brazil, Iran and India could result in the construction of an oil refinery and petrochemical plant in one of the South American nation's states, according to politicians, a diplomat and other people close to the talks.

The state of Maranhao, on Brazil's northern Atlantic coast, is offering a 5,000-acre site for the project, according to a senior official in the state's government, who requested not to be named because he doesn't want to jeopardize the talks. The area already has a deep water port for tankers and its location would provide relatively easy access to the Pacific and Asia via the Panama Canal.

Despite extensive oil reserves, Brazil lacks refining capacity. The project would help Brazil address its dependence on refined fuel imports and could provide a boost to the local economy, Jose Reinaldo Tavares, a federal lawmaker, said in an interview. The project would require investment of at least \$2.5 billion, according to the legislator, who re-



cently traveled to Tehran and New Delhi as part of an official delegation from Maranhão.

Iranian oil officials have visited the proposed site twice already, a local Maranhao official said. Mohammad Ali Ghanezadeh, Iran's ambassador to Brazil, said in an interview that his government is "very much interested" and "ready to put money and energy" into the project.

He added that the main obstacle to the deal are U.S. banking sanctions. Engineers India Ltd, a New Delhi-based design and engineering company, is participating in the discussions but its involvement will depend on financing conditions, according to people in India and Brazil familiar with the talks. EIL did not respond to calls and e-mails.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## China could derail OPEC's effort to balance oil markets this year, says analyst

OPEC's effort to balance an over-supplied oil market could have the unintended consequence of crimping crude demand from China, said Matt Smith, head of commodities research at shipment-tracking firm ClipperData.

Falling demand from China, the world's second largest oil consumer, would hurt OPEC's current strategy. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, along with non-members, is cutting production in a bid to reduce huge stockpiles of oil that have built up during more than two years of weak oil prices.

But cutting production has boosted prices, and that could result in less strategic buying from China, according to Smith.

"Emerging market demand, and

specifically from China, has been really strong in 2016," he told CNBC's "Squawk Box" on Tuesday.

"However, they've been on these sort of bouts of bargain hunting and opportunistic purchases to essentially fill their stockpiles, their strategic reserves. And so, as prices rise, and as they've risen recently, we're likely to see less of that bargain hunting next year," he said.

Oil prices are up about 20 percent since OPEC — followed by other producers — reached a deal to reduce output. They rose on Tuesday as traders awaited the Jan. 1 start of OPEC's program to cut oil output.

The "Goldilocks scenario" for traders betting the deal will work is a high degree of compliance among OPEC members, Smith said. Members have

a history of cheating their quotas.

If Chinese oil demand falls in the face of rising prices, it would make it harder to reduce crude inventories.

China's huge appetite for oil gives it tremendous power to dictate prices at a time when producers are trying to offset low prices by attracting more business. The Asian powerhouse has used its influence to play producers against one another in a race to the bottom this year, analysts told CNBC last month.

The effect can be seen in flows of oil to China from OPEC's three largest producers, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. The shipments have varied considerably from month to month as China seeks discounts from a wide range of oil exporters.

(Source: CNBC)

## Oil prices edge down ahead of OPEC, non-OPEC production cuts

Oil prices edged down on Wednesday in quiet early Asian trading as the market waits to see how OPEC and non-OPEC members carry through on planned supply cuts in the New Year.

International Brent crude futures were trading down 13 cents, or 0.2 percent, at \$55.96 a barrel at 0312 GMT after closing the previous session up 93 cents.

U.S. benchmark West Texas Intermediate crude oil prices were down seven cents at \$53.83 per barrel after settling up 88 cents at \$53.90 a barrel in the previous session.

Trading is expected to remain thin this week ahead of the New Year holiday.

The market is taking a wait-and-see approach on the official start of the landmark deal reached by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and several non-OPEC members to reduce their output. The deal is set to kick in from Jan. 1.

OPEC and non-OPEC producers are expected to lower production by almost 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd), with Saudi Arabia, OPEC's largest producer, agreeing to bear the lion's share of the cuts.

"There are mixed expectations of the cuts, trading is thin so the first two weeks of January would be critical to watch," said Michael McCarthy, chief market strategist at

Sydney's CMC Markets.

"If there's any misstep or any indication of disagreement to (the deal), we would see crude prices dropping," he said.

In a sign that the world's oil major producers may abide by their agreement, OPEC member Venezuela said it will cut 95,000 bpd of oil production in the New Year.

Russian oil producer Gazprom Neft said it planned to boost oil output by 4.5 percent to 5 percent next year, less than it had intended before Russia, one of the non-OPEC member countries, joined a deal to reduce a global supply overhang.

(Source: Reuters)



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11. 6,000lit PROTHIOCONAZOLE + TEBUCONAZOLE FS40%/W/V
12. 10,000 lit TRITICONAZOLE FS20%/W/V

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3. EURO 6,750 PARAQUAT SL20% W/V EQUIVALENT OF RIALS 228,130,000.
4. EURO 28,400 FOR CLODINAFOP PROPARGYLE EC8% W/V EQUIVALENT OF RIALS 959,835,000.
5. EURO 6,215 FOR MESOSULFURON METHYL + IODOSULFURON METHYL + DIFLUFENICAN + MEFENPYER+ DIETYLE OD6% EQUIVALENT OF RIALS 210,050,000
6. EURO 6,215 FOR MESOSULFURON METHYL + IODOSULFURON METHYL + MEFENPYER + DIETYLE OD1.2%/W/V EQUIVALENT OF RIALS 210,050,000
7. EURO 180,000 FOR SULFU SULFURON METHYL + MET SULFURON METHYL WG80% ( CONSIST OF 1250 cc SURFACTANT FOR EACH 40 gr BAG) EQUIVALENT OF RIALS 6,083,460,000
8. EURO 4,480 FOR DIFENOCONAZOLE FS3%/W/V EQUIVALENT OF RIALS 151,411,000
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## Europe takes a braver stance on gun control

The European Union, to its credit, has agreed on a series of proposals for tighter gun controls as a timely response to the growing threat of terrorism and mass shootings. The proposals, which are headed toward a final vote by members next year, would extend bans on semiautomatic assault weapons to more models, institute medical checks for gun buyers, tighten sales on the internet and track the resale of guns to foil black-market dealers.

Europe's move against high-powered weapons adapted from the battlefield stands in contrast to the evasiveness of Washington political leaders on the obvious need for stronger federal gun controls. In obeisance to America's gun lobby, Congress has sidestepped votes on gun safety despite strong public desire driven by repeated mass shootings. Republican leaders have even shied away from proposals to deny gun sales to people on the government's terrorist watch lists.

Officials of the European Commission, the union's executive body, spent the past year negotiating with member nations for tougher proposals that, while not perfect, face the gun threat candidly without veering off on tangents, like arguing that the gun mayhem could more easily be stopped by addressing immigration or mental illness.

"We have fought hard for an ambitious deal that reduces the risk of shootings in schools, summer camps or terrorist attacks with legally held firearms," Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the commission, declared last week in hailing the proposals as a milestone for Europe. Terrorism is not the only risk linked to firearms, the commission emphasized. Over the last decade, 10,000 homicides were committed with firearms in Europe. This is just a small fraction of the more than 300,000 gun deaths in that time in the United States, where citizens own guns at far higher rates.

The final compromise did not ban all of the most dangerous semiautomatic weapons, like the AK-47, as some nations wanted, nor limit ammunition magazines to 10 cartridges for all of them. But it would require member nations to share more information to prevent gun sales in other jurisdictions after a buyer is rejected by one country. The rules also aim to control the problem of guns that are pronounced deactivated as collector items but then refitted for sale as weapons. (Source: The NYT)



Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission.

# 25 years on, collapse of Soviet Union still brings cheers—and tears

By Priit Vesilind

The USSR was officially dissolved on December 26, 1991. A veteran National Geographic writer reflects on events that must never be forgotten.

"We are living under the carcass of a dead cow, and it stinks," said Algimantas Cekuolis, a Lithuanian politician. "There are two electrodes attached to this carcass, and every once in a while it twitches. And that cow's name is Bolshevism." Cekuolis smiled as if he had just emptied stale beer into the sink.

It was 1990, only a few months before the carcass twitched its last—when one of history's largest and most powerful empires died with a whimper. I was on assignment in the Baltic States for National Geographic when Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of glasnost (free speech) first popped the bottle and released a thousand genies. Speech, indignation, and opinions billowed out like steam.

The Soviet Union, technically based on the ideals of mutual aid and human camaraderie, had not flowered as planned in Russian soil. Those who ruled the Soviet Union distrusted and feared their citizens; the citizens, in turn, distrusted and feared their government.

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was forged by a band of left-wing radicals, the Bolsheviks, who led an armed attack on the Russian government in February 1917, storming the Tsar's winter palace in Petrograd, now known as St. Petersburg. It was first formalized in 1922, with Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan as members. In 1940 it forcibly annexed the independent Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

### ■ A narrow escape

I was born in Estonia during the Nazi occupation of the Baltics. In the summer of 1944 my family and I fled from the approaching Red Army along with



The Fall of the Berlin Wall

thousands of other Baltic people. Many of us were crammed into German hospital ships and troop carriers heading west. Soviet dive-bombers sank one ship, the Moero, killing more than 1,500 people. When the Allied invasion of Europe reached Germany in 1945, we were waiting, hiding in the hayloft of a kind German farmer along with 20 Hungarians.

In the Estonia we left behind, the returning Soviets brutalized the population with a roundup of artists, teachers, intellectuals, and suspiciously successful farmers, eventually consigning more than 10,000 people to Siberian labor camps. In Ukraine, Soviet policies led to the starvation of millions. For the following 50 years the citizens of the Soviet Republics found themselves press-ganged to serve the interests of an experimental state led by Moscow. At the end of World War II the Soviets solidified another buffer zone of defense, seizing control of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, Romania, and Bulgaria—the final pieces

of the "Soviet Bloc."

The Soviet agency assigned to aid foreign journalists, Novosti, was a fountain of misinformation. Reason held no currency against dogma; black was often offered as white. And, throughout its more than 70-year effort to retool human behavior, the keepers of the USSR could never satisfactorily answer this fundamental question: If communism is a superior economic philosophy, why are so many people struggling to escape from communist nations, and none struggling to get in?

Most people in the Soviet Bloc, although deeply patriotic, found socialist life dispiriting and eventually pointless. To ensure loyalty, the government inundated its people with alternate versions of history, the "fake news" of their day. But the contradictions between actual policy and the Soviet constitution, which promised abundant freedoms, were seldom hidden from view. Lies were blatant. Hypocrisy was part of the bureaucratic skill set. Neighbor reported on neighbor. In the

Baltic States, border police raked the sand along the seashores each night so they could follow the trail of footprints left by would-be defectors.

### ■ Fall of the Wall

The most potent symbol of the Soviets' distrust of their citizens was the Berlin Wall, built in 1961 by Soviet-controlled East Germany (officially known as the German Democratic Republic, or GDR). The purpose of the wall was clear: to keep the people of the GDR in, and Western influence out. The Soviets called it the "anti-Fascist protective barrier." In the following decades nearly a hundred East Germans, attempting to breach the Wall and escape to the West, were gunned down by their own border police.

At its apex in the 1970s, the USSR comprised nearly 300 million people and 100 distinct ethnic groups, stretching across 11 time zones on the largest landmass on Earth. It developed nuclear weapons, sent cosmonauts into space, and generated power, pride, and fear. As Soviet life softened in the 1970s and '80s, and advances in communications technology made it more difficult for the state to hide its flaws, Premier Mikhail Gorbachev attempted to stave off social revolution by granting glasnost (free speech) and perestroika (restructuring).

National Geographic Senior Writer Mike Edwards, assigned to cover Moscow in the late 1980s, found the change dramatic. "Even five years ago you couldn't have a casual, candid conversation with an ordinary person," Edwards told a Geographic archivist. "It just would not happen. He would be terrified to be seen talking to a foreigner. Now you get to Moscow and people can't stop talking to you. They want to tell you how bad life is. The frustration that builds up in people, and the anger that builds up standing in line for hours—200 people standing in line to buy ten eggs. And so you find people screaming at each other. Sometimes fist fights." →13

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**INTERVIEW**  
By Hamid Reza Gholamzadeh

# Trump administration under impact of multiple visions

Dr. Amer Al Sabaileh, Secretary General of Mediterranean Gulf Forum (MGF) and Director of Middle East Media Polices Institute (MEMPSI) believes that Trump administration would be a novelty in US foreign policy should he stick to his election campaign remarks on ISIL and the whole crisis in the Middle East. He downplayed the possibility that Trump would actively engage in a full-blown war with Iran, but the US regional allies would still be hostile to Iran's policies in the region.

**With Donald Trump as the US president, what do you think will happen to the US war on terror?**

Well, what we know so far is Donald Trump the candidate. He tackled the issue of war on terror in a very blunt and direct way. Therefore, if Donald Trump managed to apply what he said in several occasions on his approach on eliminating terrorism and ISIS, especially his criticisms of Obama's administration about Mosul battle, then we should expect a noticeable change in the American approach with seriousness in encountering those terrorist groups.

**Do you think Trump's anti-ISIS rhetoric could lead the US in a path for more significant role in dealing with the terrorism in the region, specifically in Syria? In addition, Trump and Putin are said to have closer relations. Could this help bring an end to the current Middle East crises?**

Still, we can't take for granted what Donald Trump has already said. The US President is usually surrounded by the visions of the institutions, which means various opinions, tactics and strategies. However, Trump's vision seems clear, he believes that the priority in Syria is for fighting terrorism; this logically means that he is taken the Russian position. If he sticks to this declared vision, then definitely here will be a positive impact on battle against terrorism in Syria and the region.

**Some experts believe that the new US administration, concerned about putting the US interests in the region at risk, would not favor a confrontation with Iran due to probable rise of tensions between the**



**The US President is usually surrounded by the visions of the institutions, which means various opinions, tactics and strategies.**

**two countries, but some US allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel would probably take actions against Iran. What is your take on this?**

It is hard to think that Trump's administration will go for clash with Iran. Trump might not adopt friendly attitude toward Iran, but he seems to be far. Especially, that relations with Saudi Arabia might be crucial to his previous statements and the Justice against Sponsors of Terrorism Act (JASTA). What might be really obvious is the influence of Netanyahu's visions on the American administration.

**How do you evaluate the future of military developments in Syria and Iraq?**

Well, in Iraq and Syria, ISIS is the main protagonist and became the enemy of the whole world and the threat to the global security. This vision is a result of various developments, from the spread of terrorism in the world, to the refugee crisis, drugs, organized crimes, weapon smuggling, etc. Therefore, putting an end to this crisis is becoming a priority, this

simply how things in Iraq and Syria can be seen. So putting an end to the security crisis is becoming the objective of many countries

**How do you see the role of the political-military axis including Iran, Iraq, Syria, Russia and Lebanon in the future developments of the region, especially during Trump's presidency?**

This axis is already there, in Syria it was obvious that this axis was behind saving Syria from collapsing yet, let us also think that on political level there is wide gaps among these countries. For Russia, the relation with Israel for example is something normal, even the military and security coordination, while for the rest it is still a taboo. So what if Russia believed that the regional settlement is necessary to put an end to the ongoing crisis? Then this axis might crack. However, from a security perspective, this axis might also go along with Trump's vision to encounter terrorism.



**It is hard to think that Trump's administration will go for clash with Iran. Trump might not adopt friendly attitude toward Iran, but he seems to be far.**

## Turkey, Russia agree on general Syria ceasefire plan

**MOSCOW** — Turkey and Russia have agreed on the outlines of a nationwide ceasefire plan in Syria for Damascus to consider, Turkish media reported Wednesday.



Russia-Turkey framework agreement on Syria proposes end of hostilities in the country starting at midnight local time on December 29. Moreover the two countries agreed that the deal should be submitted for consideration by Damascus, Turkish news agency reports.

The general ceasefire proposal is planned to be presented to the Syrian government for consideration, according to Turkey's Anadolu news service. On December 20, the Russian, Iranian and Turkish foreign ministers met in Moscow. They emphasized the importance of expanding the ceasefire regime in Syria and announced their willingness to broker a future agreement between Damascus and the opposition.

Three days prior, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed the possibility of holding talks between the Syrian government and opposition in the Kazakh capital of Astana.

The Moscow-Ankara proposal is said to take effect at midnight local time on Thursday, December 29 (22:00 GMT Wednesday), the Anadolu news service said citing anonymous sources.

The truce agreement is subject to approval by the Syrian government and does not extend to terrorist organizations operating in the country.

Should the pact hold, according to Anadolu, the Syrian government and opposition will launch peace talks in the Kazakh capital of Astana brokered by Russia and Turkey. The bilateral proposal aims to advance the political process outlined in the UN resolution on Syria.

Source Sputnik



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# 5 sure-fire tricks for learning something new

By Kendra Cherry

Have you ever wanted to learn something new but assumed that it required too much effort, that you were too old, or that it was just too difficult? Many people would like to learn to speak a new language or play a musical instrument but incorrectly assume that the time for learning such things was when they were much younger.

Learning new things can be a tough sometimes, but it is also good to keep challenging your mind as you grow older. Fortunately, there are a lot of tips and tricks out there that can make the process easier and more effective. Whether you are trying to learn quantum physics, a new language, or how to perform CPR, researchers have uncovered a number of different tips, tricks, and strategies that can help you move from beginner to expert much more effectively and easily.

## Here are just a few great ideas

### 1. Practice the right way

They say that practice makes perfect, but recent findings reveal that it's really the right kind of practice that leads to expertise. While factors like innate talent, IQ, and motivation also play a role in how well people learn and later perform a skill, experts agree that practice does have an essential role in the learning process.

**While factors like innate talent, IQ, and motivation also play a role in how well people learn and later perform a skill, experts agree that practice does have an essential role in the learning process.**

So what kind of practice is best? While psychologists are still figuring out exactly which practice approaches lead the most success in various situations, studies show that exploration during the early learning stages is critical.

So if you are learning a new language, starting with the sounds, grammar, alphabet and other basic elements might help you become more fluent later on.

When you are playing a new video game, taking the time to explore the game-play environment and learn the rules can help you excel and score higher.

### 2. Take a nap

What's the first thing you should do after you learn something new? According to some researchers, the answer is to take a nap. Experts have long believed that one of the primary functions of sleep was to con-



solidate information we have learned during the day, and recent studies have supported this idea that sleeping after learning can improve learning.

One study found that sleep actually results in physical changes in the brain. Following a learning task, sleep deprived mice experienced less dendritic growth while well-rested mice had more. So the next time you nod off after a mid-afternoon learning session, don't feel bad. Not only is the nap probably good for you, it might just help cement the information you learned into your memory.

### 3. Study at the right time

Our bodies have their own internal "clocks" known as circadian rhythms that control the sleep-wake cycle and energy levels throughout the day. While the peak times for physical strength are around 11AM and 7PM, the peak periods for mental alertness are around 9AM and 9PM. So, would it stand to reason that you should

study when your mind is at its sharpest?

In one experiment, researchers had participants memorize words pairs at either 9AM or 9PM and then tested them at a 30 minute, 12 hour, or 24 hour interval. The results revealed that while time of day had no impact on initial memory, the memory on the 12 hour retest was much better among those who had a full-night sleep than those who had a period of wakefulness.

On the 24

hour retest, the researchers found that those who had slept shortly after studying and then had a full day of wakefulness did better than those who had been awake all day after studying and then had a night's sleep before retest.

So what does this suggest? The results indicate that studying shortly before sleep is the ideal time to enhance memory. The researchers suggest that sleep helps stabilize declarative memory, minimizing the negative impact that wakefulness has on memory.

### 4. Quiz yourself

There has been a lot of talk about the importance of testing in recent years within political and educational circles, but researchers have found that testing can be about a lot more than just assessing what you already know. In fact,

testing might actually be one of the best ways to help you learn.

Studies have shown that people who study and are then tested on the material have better long-term recall of the information than those who study and are never tested. Even those given extra study time still had worse recall of the materials than those who had been tested.

So the next time you are trying to memorize some information or study a challenging subject, spend a little time quizzing yourself, taking online tests on the subject, or completing chapters tests that are included in your textbook.

### 5. Learn over time

When you are trying to pick up a new skill such as learning to play the guitar to speak Spanish, you might be tempted to engage in binge-learning sessions. Instead of trying to learn everything all at once, experts suggest that spreading your practice and study sessions out over a period of time, known as distributed practice, is the best approach.

One review of common learning strategies found that distributed practice was one of the most effective strategies for learning a new skill. So instead of cramming for a big exam the night before, you are much better off spacing out a few study sessions in the weeks and days leading up to the exam.

The great thing about this approach is

**Instead of trying to learn everything all at once, experts suggest that spreading your practice and study sessions out over a period of time, known as distributed practice, is the best approach.**

that it often helps people stick to their goals to learn something new. Instead of sitting down for an hour or two every night to try to memorize Spanish vocabulary and conjugation rules, try spending 15 to 20 minutes every day on a brief study session. Not only are you more likely to actually find time for these quick sessions, you will learn more and stick with it over time.

(Source: [verywell.com](#))

## Could lack of sleep trigger a food "addiction"?

By Stuart Quan

We have all heard it. Perhaps some of us have even said it. Phrases like "No willpower" and "Can't push away from the table" are frequently used to disparage an overweight or obese person's perceived lack of "motivation" to control his or her eating habits. But, is this really the primary reason why weight gain occurs?

It is a simple nutritional principle that if calories consumed exceed calories expended, weight gain will result. Therefore, most weight reduction programs focus on cutting calories. Many people view failure to adhere to these regimens as a lack of motivation, dedication, or mental toughness. However, there is now increasing evidence that the "lack of willpower" may be explained by chemical and hormonal changes resulting from sleep deficiency.

There are more and more data that support a link between obesity and insufficient sleep. The growth of this

country's obesity epidemic over the past 40 years correlates with a progressive decline in the amount of sleep reported by the average adult. In large population-based studies, obesity has been found to be related to reduced amounts of sleep. But if this association is true, how might sleep deficiency be related to weight gain?

A recent experimental study published in the journal *Sleep* provides some clues. Sleep restriction to 4.5 hours per night was compared with normal sleep duration for 4 nights each in a group of young, healthy adults. When measured at the end of 4 days, the ratio of 2 hormones responsible for hunger levels, ghrelin (which increases appetite) and leptin (which reduces appetite) was altered to favor greater appetite. Other studies have observed the same thing. However, this study measured something the others hadn't: snack consumption, particularly items with greater fat and protein content, was higher after sleep restriction — and, strikingly, the participants' levels of endocannabi-

noids increased corresponding to the time of greater snack consumption. Endocannabinoids are chemicals that kindle appetite (like ghrelin), but more importantly, also stimulate reward centers in the brain. Thus, this finding suggests that sleep restriction may make the act of eating more satisfying. Could it be that insufficient sleep contributes to weight gain by stimulating the brain to make eating more pleasurable? If so, the "lack of willpower" may not be due to personal weakness, but rather a result of an addictive chemical imbalance resulting from sleep loss. No doubt that this exciting finding requires further investigation. However, it already provides additional evidence that sufficient sleep is important for optimal health, and in particular, for combating obesity. It also suggests that greater efforts need to be made on the part of public health officials, individual clinicians, and the general public to get the 7 hours or more of nightly sleep recommended by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine.

(Source: [health.harvard.edu](#))

## Which is more important: sleep or exercise?

By Katie Golde

It's the crack of dawn, and the alarm goes off. Time to get in that run (or yoga class or weight session) before the day begins. Only problem? You're really freaking tired. Which poses the question: On super sleepy mornings, is it better to crawl out of bed and get to the gym, or head back to dreamland?

### The case for hitting snooze

"If you want all-around rock star health, then sleeping and working out are both important," says Rob Sulaver, sports nutritionist and trainer at Bandana Training. Unfortunately, most Americans aren't getting enough of either one. According to the National Institutes of Health, adults should get seven to eight hours of shut-eye each night.

And for good reason: Sleep plays a major role in your overall physical and emotional health, helping your brain function, reducing your risk of chronic disease, promoting mental well-being, and boosting your immune system. Studies also show that sleep loss is associated with increased hunger and appetite, linking a lack of zzzs with an increased risk of obesity.

Not surprisingly, feeling fatigued and sleep deprived can also affect one's exercise performance, says Jason Edmonds, a biologist and Greatist expert. (If you've ever worked out while exhausted, you know how much more laborious and less productive it seems.) In fact, one study found that improving sleep habits (as in, clocking seven solid hours) might actually benefit your exercise regimen. So staying between the sheets in the early a.m. hours sounds like a good plan to be your healthiest self, right? Not so fast.

### The perks of early workouts

First, there are commonsense benefits to early exercise sessions: You're more likely to hit the treadmill, park, or classroom before other options come up (Shopping Wednesday, anyone?), and you won't have to trudge to the gym after a long day at the office. Plus, exercising increases the production of endorphins, those feel-good chemicals that help relieve stress. Another study found that in warmer climates, men who exercised in the mornings had higher levels of endurance and exercise capacity than those who exercised in the evening heat.

Finally, early-bird workouts can lead to more restful sleep, research shows. In one study, people who worked out at 7 a.m. slept longer and had deeper sleep cycles than those who exercised at 1 p.m. or 7 p.m.

To determine whether or not you're sacrificing sleep in favor of sweating it out, consider how long you're sleeping and the period of time you're asleep, says Natalie Dautovich, Ph.D., a National Sleep Foundation environmental fellow. "If you find you feel fatigued during the day, that it's difficult to concentrate or hard to wake up, then you may need to reconsider your sleep schedule."

One way to figure out if you're an early bird (or a night owl) is to see how your body acts without time constraints. "If you're on vacation and you're able to go to bed and get up when you want, see what time your body naturally awakens," Dautovich suggests. "This can be an indicator of your natural preference for the best period of time for your body to be asleep."

### Your action plan

The decision whether to get up (or not) is based on personal preference and depends on several factors, including how much sleep you're already getting and your ability to tweak your schedule to get in a workout at some other point in the day. Sulaver suggests asking yourself these three questions to gauge whether or not you should suck it up or stay under the covers:

- Am I actually going to shut off my alarm and sleep in?
- Can I work out any other time during the day?
- Can I make up the workout later in the week, possibly by doing a two-a-day?

If you answer "no" to all of the above, get up and work out, Sulaver says. If you can move around your schedule and you feel like you could sleep forever, readjust your workout for another time of day.

### The takeaway

"If you're constantly deciding between working out or getting enough sleep, you're doing it wrong," Sulaver says. Making sure you fit in time for both good rest and exercise is equally important. Try getting up 30 minutes earlier a couple times a week to work out (and going to sleep earlier too) to slowly ease into the habit. When you're up and at 'em, start simply with a perfect morning workout, quiet home workout, or any of our easy-to-practice bodyweight routines to kick-start your new routine.

(Source: [greatist.com](#))

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## Arvand Free Zone to host culinary festival

**TOURISM** TEHRAN — Arvand Free Zone in south-west Iran will host an indigenous culinary festival from January 9 to 11, 2017.

The event comes as part of nationwide campaigns for promoting gastronomy tourism.

Titled "Iranian Cuisine, Tourism Culture", the festival will turn the spotlight on local appetizers, desserts, herbal drinks, and main courses dominated by seafood dishes.

The function of the festival is also to host cooking competitions, workshops, scientific meetings on food, handicraft shows, and art exhibits.

Organized by Khuzestan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department in collaboration with Arvand Free Zone Organization, the event will also embrace dishes native to Kish and Qeshm islands, Abadan, Khorramshahr, Ahvaz, and Dezful amongst other neighboring cities in Bushehr and Hormozgan provinces.

The Iranian cuisine, usually embellished with fragrant herbs, varies from region to region, however it principally accentuates freshness, deliciousness, and colorfulness.

Earlier in December, the deputy director of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization Morteza Rahmani-Movahhed said "Iran can increase its share of the global gastronomy tourism, which makes an annual turnover of about \$300 billion."

Arvand Free Zone is situated at the confluence of the two major rivers of Karun and Arvand and it shares border with Iraq and Kuwait as well.

## China to boost investment in tourism

China said it will boost investment in tourism, with plans to develop rustbelt regions and upgrade public toilets high on its to-do list as it looks to lift the sector's contribution to economic growth.

Announcing a new plan for the sector, China said it aims to invest 2 trillion yuan (\$290 billion) in tourism between 2016 and 2020 which would translate to annual growth of more than 14 percent in direct investment in the industry.

Old industrial and resource-dependent cities, particularly in the north of the country, will be encouraged to develop tourism and the government has promised to set up "demonstration tourist bases" in those areas. Several depleted coal cities have already made efforts to turn defunct mines into parks.

The plan also promised a "toilet revolution", prompted by wide-spread complaints about toilet hygiene levels at China's tourist spots and said the country would aim to build or renovate as many as 100,000 public toilets over the period.

(Source: Reuters)

## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Archaeological site of Olympia

The UNESCO World Heritage site of Olympia, in a valley in the Peloponnese, Greece, has been inhabited since prehistoric times.

In the 10th century BC, Olympia became a center for the worship of Zeus. The Altis — the sanctuary to the gods — has one of the highest concentrations of masterpieces from the ancient Greek world.



The ruins of Olympia, Greece

In addition to temples, there are the remains of all the sports structures erected for the Olympic Games, which were held in Olympia every four years beginning in 776 BC.

For the Altis, the sacred grove and the center of the sanctuary, some of the most remarkable works of art and technique have been created, constituting a milestone in the history of art.

Great artists, such as Pheidias, have put their personal stamp of inspiration and creativity, offering unique artistic creations to the world.

In this universal place, the Olympic Idea was born, making Olympia a unique universal symbol of peace and competition at the service of virtue.

Here, too, prominence was given to the ideals of physical and mental harmony, of noble contest, of how to compete well, of the Sacred Truce; values, which remain unchanged in perpetuity.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Iranian youth join wave of ecotourism

**TEHRAN (Al-monitor)** — Off-road driving as well as tours of the desert, mountains and forests have become popular pastimes for youths in Iran. The phenomenon particularly applies to those from more affluent backgrounds, who often embark on journeys to the desert in their upscale vehicles.

To become better acquainted with desert tourism and off-road driving in Iran, Al-Monitor spoke to Mohammad Ali Majdabadi, a veteran in the trade.

Iranian youths, particularly those from affluent backgrounds, join the growing trend of ecotourism, roaming the country's vast desert, mountains and forests.

Driving his Mitsubishi, Prado or another one of his collection of vehicles, Majdabadi has been leading tours of Iran's deserts for about a decade. Commenting on how ecotourism began to take form in Iran, he told Al-Monitor, "This topic [ecotourism] goes back to 40 years ago when rich people began exploring the more difficult routes with their fancy American vehicles, like Cherokees, Range Rovers and Blazers, for hunting, desert trekking and fishing.

The new trend, however, is about 10 years old with the past five years seeing the establishment of regular tours. Initially, these tour groups were for those who wanted an adventurous trip in nature, but have since become a source of business."

An online search for "desert tourism" in Persian will turn up dozens of tour companies and websites that offer different options at various prices. However, these tour groups do not seem to be very specialized.

"The majority of tours found on the internet go only to the nearest and most accessible spots in the desert where one can easily visit without a tour group, or even with a regular car," Majdabadi said.

"However, there are about 10 tried tour companies that are famous when it comes to desert tours and can even embark on the challenging and specialized routes."

But how much do these tours cost? A quick search on the web will net a variety of options. A two-day tour to the Maranjab Desert, one of the most popular destinations in central Iran, will cost about \$57 and doesn't require a purpose-built vehicle.

The more specialized tours, however,



A four-wheel drive safari crosses the sand dunes in Maranjab Desert around 60km north-east of Kashan, central Iran on December 6, 2015.

have different price tags. "The cost depends on the type of trip and the services being offered. But on average, one should consider \$35-\$50 for a desert tour," Majdabadi said.

And exactly what attractions do these tours offer the public? Mesr Desert, located in Dasht-e Kavir, or the central desert of Iran, is known as one of the most noteworthy tourist sites in the country. Situated on the road between the cities of Damghan, Nain and Esfahan, the desert is easily accessible — which is perhaps why many go there. Some of the activities that tour groups offer here include trekking in the desert, walking on sand dunes, watching the magnificent sunset over the salty marshes of the desert and exploring the palm groves.

Amir, an adventurer who has been visiting Iran's deserts with different tour groups for about six years, told

Al-Monitor, "Usually, these tours don't do anything special. Sand sliding, driving over the sand dunes with one's car, and desert safari are the main attractions of these trips. The rest of the time we watch the desert at night and enjoy the raw, unique nature that has remained untouched and has been less damaged by humans."

Desert tourism is not the only type of adventures offered by these tour groups. During the summer, when the desert becomes intolerable, nature enthusiasts opt for tours of the mountainous regions in Iran's north and west.

Al-Monitor asked Majdabadi about the usual types of people that join these tour groups. He responded, "Of course, it's natural that they are more from the richer class, because if you want to enjoy being in nature you need to have a car that can drive uphill during difficult situa-

tions. Of course, there are also people who come with ordinary and cheaper jeeps. Usually, though, those who come on these trips have cars like the Toyota Land Cruiser, FG Cruise, Prado and Hilux — or Mitsubishi SUVs."

On average, given the steep import tariffs, these vehicles cost about \$50,000-\$70,000 in Iran. This is while the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Welfare puts the average monthly salary of a common laborer at \$230. Yet, the luxury pastime of ecotourism is not restricted to youths and older people, with some families joining tour groups too.

As Majdabadi noted, people from different backgrounds can be seen in these groups, and although there is a wide wealth gap between some of them, nature — and their shared love for it — is a common factor leading to friendships that may not have emerged otherwise.

## Russia easing visa requirements for Japanese

The Russian Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday it will loosen visa requirements for Japanese visitors as of Jan. 1.

The ministry said a multiple-entry visa will be introduced for tourists and those visiting relatives and friends that are good for a maximum period of six months and one year, respectively.

Another multi-entry visa will be made available for businesspeople and those entering Russia for cultural and sports exchanges, the validity of which is up to five years, it said.

The ministry said the action is in response to the announcement by the For-



eign Ministry in Tokyo earlier this month that Japan will relax visa requirements for Russian nationals as of Jan. 1.

(Source: The Japan Times)

## Banyuwangi welcomes more tourists in 2016

Banyuwangi in East Java reportedly saw an increase in tourist arrivals throughout 2016.

Banyuwangi Cultural and Tourism Agency acting head M.Y. Bramuda said the regency welcomed more than 3 million domestic visitors and 72,000 foreign tourists in 2016, far above the initial target of 2.5 million and 50,000, respectively.

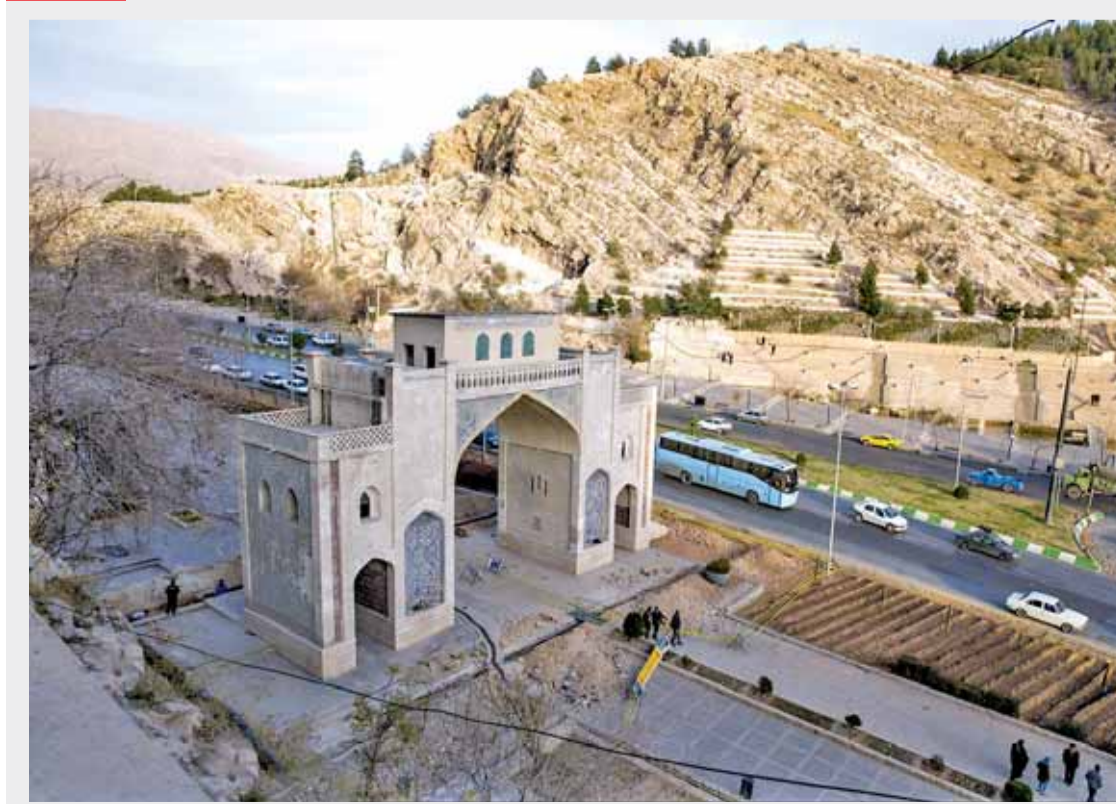
"The aforementioned number of tourist arrivals is for the most visited areas only. The number of visitors to newly opened destinations, such as



the pine tree tour in Songgon and mangrove forest tour, has not been included," Bramuda said.

(Source: The Jakarta Post)

## IN FOCUS



## Quran Gate undergoing restoration

**HERITAGE** TEHRAN — The semi-historical Quran Gate standing at the north-eastern entrance of the city of Shiraz is undergoing some minor restorations on its façade as well as relatively major ones that are aimed to bolster the foundation.

Called Darvazeh Quran in Farsi, the monument was initially built in the 18th century during the Zand dynastic era. For times it sustained lots of damages while receiving renewals, during one of which a hand-written copy of the Holy Quran was embedded at a small room on its top.

Traditionally, the majority of travelers opt to pass underneath the gate as they believe to receive the blessing from the holy book before undertaking any journey.

However, the gate succumbed to several multiple quakes during the Qajar era (1785 to 1925). The structure, as what is seen currently, dates from the mid-2000s.

At the moment, the gate adjacent to the popular Khajou Kermani park and mausoleum attracts hundreds of travelers and locals to its peaceful atmosphere.

The 5-star newly-constructed Shiraz Hotel is located within a close distance to the gate as well.

# Arthritis could get worse as humans continue to evolve: Oxford

Hip and shoulder pain could get worse in the future because our bodies are suffering a 'hangover' from evolution, Oxford University has claimed.

Researchers studied 300 bones and fossils from species spanning 400 million years, including reptiles, primates and Neanderthals to see how joints had altered over time.

They found, that as man began to stand on two legs, bones began to change so that they could carry the extra weight of an upright posture.

However it also left humans susceptible to conditions such as arthritis and back pain, and the trend is likely to continue.

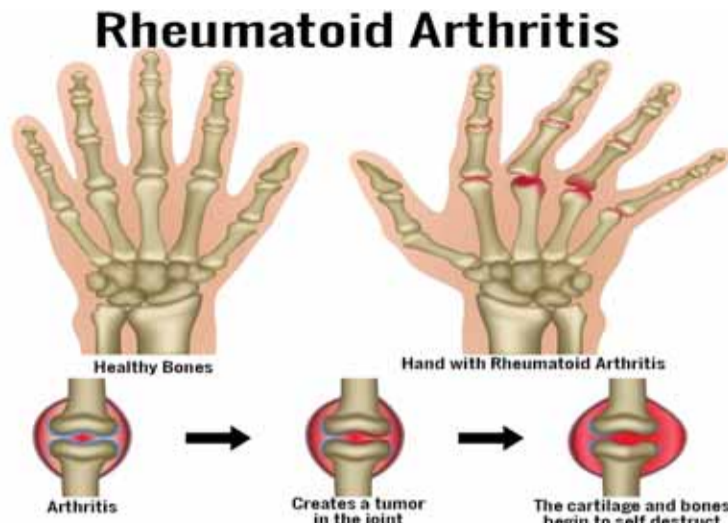
Dr Paul Monk, who led the research at the Nuffield Department of Orthopaedics, Rheumatology and Musculoskeletal Sciences, said: "We see certain things very commonly in hospital clinics - pain in the shoulder with reaching overhead, pain in the front of the knee, arthritis of the hip, and in younger people we see some joints

that have a tendency to pop out."

"We wondered how on earth we have ended up with this bizarre arrangement of bones and joints that allows people to have these problems. And it struck

us that the way to answer that is to look backwards through evolution."

The team created a library of 3D models which they could compare to see how they had changed over millions of years.



They found that as human ancestors started to move on to two legs, the neck of the thigh bone grew broader to help support the extra weight. But a thicker thigh bone makes arthritis more likely. And it is likely to get worse over time, they predict.

Dr Monk added: "What is interesting is if we try and move these trends forward, the shape that is coming has an even broader neck and we are trending to more and more arthritis."

A similar pattern could be seen at the shoulder where a natural gap which allows the tendons and blood vessels to pass through, is becoming narrower over time. As the space narrows it becomes more difficult for people to move their arms up over their heads.

The researchers have produced interactive models of how human joints alter over time so that specialists making prosthetics or dealing with orthopedic complaints know how bones are changing.

(Source: The Telegraph)

## Expert explains potential of machine learning, satellites to track wildfires

Wildfires are a serious problem across the Western United States, and each case has threatened homes, businesses, and even the natural landscape. But what if something can detect wildfires beforehand?

It can be remembered that despite the natural beauty of the region that inspires so many people to visit and live there, wildfires tend to be a very real and dangerous threat.

Steven Brumby, currently taking his post doctorate at Los Alamos National Laboratory, started growing interested in developing machine learning tools to map wildfires around the world after a wildfire almost destroyed his home in 2000.

However, it appears current developments in new satellite technology, cloud computing, and machine learning are slowly making this possible.

According to Medium, it's first important to understand that over the last 30 years, larger and more intense fires have damaged millions of acres of land.

The U.S. Forest Service has estimated that 90 percent of these fires were even caused by humans. While the US has resources to fight most wildfires, some remote locations may not even be detected for days.

Climate studies show that wild land fires are a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions as well, with 50 percent of human industrial emissions being from them.

However, it appears mapping wildfires around the

globe is a possibility. The technology of fire detection has slowly evolved from located watch towers in the 1990s, to manned spotter aircraft in the 1950s and satellites from 1970s to the present.

The latter is a key to consistent global scale fire detection, however, current sensors only detect fires that have reached a substantial size. Meaning this isn't too useful than ground and aircraft systems for early detection.

Satellites from the U.S. and EU have thermal sensors that can detect the heat of wildfires from orbit, allowing daily mapping of these wildfires globally, except if they are masked by clouds.

The "scars" by wildfires are also visible from space and provide a way to "map" the slow recovery of ecosystems and determine what was lost in the fire.

This means that mapping is not only important. It is also important to map tree health and risks to nearby residential and infrastructure zones as well.

Now, Brumby has helped develop a generic algorithm-based machine learning approach to "teach" computers to map wild land fire burn scars. They originally used satellite imagery from NASA, which was a hard thing to do at the time as someone from a data center has to cut at least a 400MB Landsat file to a CDROM and mail it physically.

Now, at Descartes Labs, they have a platform to analyze all the world's public and commercial satellite



imagery using the cloud and machine learning. Google and Amazon is currently hosting NASA/USGS, NOAA and ESA satellite imagery archives, meaning they can now process more data than before.

This enables their scientists to analyze virtually all the available imagery across different satellites. For instance, they were able to process more than a hundred times the data used in their weeks-long work on the Cerro Grande fire and finished analysis in just an hour.

Meaning, there is a new era coming in the field of global monitoring, historical analysis, real-time altering and forecasting the future.

(Source: Nature World News)

## Scientists to begin sending messages to aliens, despite warnings that it could trigger Earth's destruction

Any aliens that we speak to will probably think of us like we think of bacteria, Stephen Hawking has warned.

A major program to try and speak to aliens has been launched - despite warnings that it could lead to the destruction of humanity.

Meti stands for Messaging Extraterrestrial Intelligence and is a new project that will look to send out signals into space so that extra-terrestrials can pick them up. It will start doing that from 2018 - allowing humanity to get in touch with aliens, rather than waiting for them to talk to us.

But scientists have long warned that sending out such messages could be dangerous, and that alerting aliens to our existence might lead to our complete destruction. That has included Stephen Hawking, who has warned that sending out signals could put us in danger.

Earlier this year he said that we should be "wary" of responding to any messages from aliens. Doing so would probably be like when the Native Americans first met Christopher Columbus, he said in September, and in that case things "didn't



turn out so well" for the people being visited.

And Professor Hawking has suggested that any civilization we did make contact with is likely to see us as no more developed than bacteria. As a consequence it might not actively look to kill us - but wipe us out just because it doesn't care about us.

There are no regulations governing whether or not messages can be sent out into space, or what those messages should say. That means that METI and other groups can send out their signals despite any objections.

But those behind METI say that it will instead be used as a way to "learn and

share information", if it is successful.

The team will now look to work out how best to do that, and put together a message that could be understood by other living things in the distant universe that we might be able to make contact with. The initial message is likely to use basic mathematical and scientific concepts.

The group hopes to raise \$1 million to start that work. Some of that money will go towards building or borrowing a powerful transmitter that can send a message out into the universe.

Scientists have tried in the past to send out messages into space. Those have included NASA's pioneer 10 and 11 spacecraft that carried messages written onto plaques and a record, as well as radio messages that have been sent out into the universe.

It isn't clear that any of those have ever been received. Some have suggested that we might have received similar messages ourselves, but most scientists believe that we have so far failed to hear or talk to any alien life.

(Source: Independent)

## BP Chief Expounds on Significance of Investment of Banks in Booming Economy

Investment of banks in boosting and flourishing economy of country is of paramount importance.

Chief Executive of Bank Pasargad (BP) Dr. Majid Ghassemi announced the above statement and said: "Banks play a significant role in promoting economic situation of the country."

Speaking in International Management Conference, held on Dec. 27 at the venue of Tehran's Mild Tower, he said: "We are in dire need of a disciplined developmental pattern in the field of rules governing money and capital markets, so that economic situation can be improved."

While placing special emphasis on provisions of Paragraph "9" of general policies of resistance economy entitled "Correcting and Strengthening Financial System to Meet Demands of Economy", he said: "According to many economists, banks are responsible for meeting financial demands of economic sector of the

country as much as 85%."

With due observance to the said issue, it can be concluded that banks play a decisive role in promoting economy of the country significantly, he maintained.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed to the necessity of revising laws at the Capital Market in Iran and said: "Moreover, most objectives of rules at the Capital Market are materialized by banks."

With regard to the necessity of presence of Iranian banks in investment of companies, giant economic plans and projects, he said: "Economy of country is in dire need of an integrated and comprehensive program of financial sector including monetary sector, capital market sector, budget and insurance sector."

He is of the opinion that small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) should be supported financially in order to materialize most of their objectives.



In the end, Chief Executive of Bank Pasargad (BP) Dr. Majid Ghassemi said: "If giant development projects are not supported by banks, these projects will doom to failure. However, banks play constructive and decisive role in this respect."

## 10,000 metric tons of plastic pollute great lakes annually

Tracking the amount of plastic that enters the Great Lakes has led researchers from the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) to conclude that almost 10,000 metric tons of plastic from the United States and Canada pollute these bodies of water.

Publishing his findings in the Marine Pollution Bulletin as the lead author, Matthew Hoffman from RIT's School of Mathematical Sciences used computer simulations to follow the volume of plastic debris moving across state and international boundaries. "Most of the particles from Chicago and Milwaukee end up accumulating on the eastern shores of Lake Michigan, while the particles from Detroit and Cleveland end up along the southern coast of the eastern basin of Lake Erie," Hoffman shared. "Particles released from Toronto appear to accumulate on the southern coast of Lake Ontario, including around Rochester and Sodus Bay."

The study made use of mathematical modeling to extend the scope of the problem over time and spatial scales, going beyond the measures utilized by prior observational studies that concentrated on plastic pollution in the open water, tributaries and along the shorelines.

Hoffman and his coauthor, assistant professor of public policy Eric Hittinger from RIT, were able to trace that 5,000 metric tons or half of the plastic pollution entering the Great Lakes went into Lake Michigan. Lake Erie would receive 2,500 metric tons of plastic while Lake Ontario ended up with 1,400 metric tons of plastic. Lake Huron got 600 metric tons of plastic and Lake Superior got 32 metric tons each year.

Hoffman noted that the plastic in the Great Lakes are carried by persistent winds and lake currents to the shore and could turn up in another country or state. This new inventory method is able to give full mass estimates on the entire connected lake system and is finally able to map plastic debris moving between lakes and across interstate and international borders. "This study is the first picture of the true scale of plastic pollution in the Great Lakes."

(Source: Tech Times)

## Researchers create Wolverine-inspired self-healing, stretchable and highly conductive material

Imagine a material that, when cut, can repair itself - à la Wolverine from "X-Men" - and is transparent, extremely stretchable, as well as highly conductive. Scientists believe that such a material, if developed, can be used - among other things - to create "self-healing" robots and to increase the life of lithium-ion batteries.

A team of researchers described, in a study published Friday in the journal Advanced Materials, the creation of such an ionic conductor - one that is transparent, stretchable and self-healing.

The rubber-like material can stretch to a staggering 50 times its original length, and can "heal" in a span of just 24 hours after being cut at room temperature. Moreover, just five minutes after healing, it can be stretched to two times its original length.

"Inspired by wound healing in nature, self-healing materials repair damage caused by wear and extend the lifetime, and lower the cost, of materials and devices," the University of California, Riverside, whose researchers were involved in the study, said in a statement.

(Source: IBT)

## New ultrasound technique is first to image inside live cells

Researchers at The University of Nottingham have developed a break-through technique that uses sound rather than light to see inside live cells, with potential application in stem-cell transplants and cancer diagnosis.

The new nanoscale ultrasound technique uses shorter-than-optical wavelengths of sound and could even rival the optical super-resolution techniques which won the 2014 Nobel Prize for Chemistry.

This new kind of sub-optical phonon (sound) imaging provides invaluable information about the structure, mechanical properties and behavior of individual living cells at a scale not achieved before.

Researchers from the Optics and Photonics group in the Faculty of Engineering, University of Nottingham, are behind the discovery, which is published in the paper 'High resolution 3D imaging of living cells with sub-optical wavelength phonons' in the journal, Scientific Reports.

"People are most familiar with ultrasound as a way of looking inside the body - in the simplest terms we've engineered it to the point where it can look inside an individual cell. Nottingham is currently the only place in the world with this capability," said Professor Matt Clark, who contributed to the study.

In conventional optical microscopy, which uses light (photons), the size of the smallest object you can see (or the resolution) is limited by the wavelength.

For biological specimens, the wavelength cannot go smaller than that of blue light because the energy carried on photons of light in the ultraviolet (and shorter wavelengths) is so high it can destroy the bonds that hold biological molecules together damaging the cells.

Optical super-resolution imaging also has distinct limitations in biological studies. This is because the fluorescent dyes it uses are often toxic and it requires huge amounts of light and time to observe and reconstruct an image which is damaging to cells.

Unlike light, sound does not have a high-energy payload. This has enabled the Nottingham researchers to use smaller wavelengths and see smaller things and get to higher resolutions without damaging the cell biology.

"A great thing is that, like ultrasound on the body, ultrasound in the cells causes no damage and requires no toxic chemicals to work. Because of this we can see inside cells that one day might be put back into the body, for instance as stem-cell transplants," adds Professor Clark.

(Source: Sciencedaily.com)

## Einstein's theory of relativity explains how Santa can fit in chimneys, deliver gifts without a trace

Researchers at the University of Exeter have revealed a scientific explanation on how the infamous Santa Claus move from chimney to chimney without being spotted or heard by expecting children.

Their findings showed that the Albert Einstein's theory of relativity could easily explain how Santa Claus could deliver gifts to more than 700 million children in one night without being seen or heard.

"Visiting around 700 million children in 31 hours would mean he would have to travel at 10 million kilometers an hour if he is to deliver presents to every child," said Dr. Katy Sheen, a physicist in the Geography department at the University of Exeter, in a press release. "How does Santa manage to reach these phenomenal speeds?"

According to Dr. Sheen's calculations, Rudolph and the gang need carry Santa around at about 10 million kilometers per hour in order to deliver the presents to more than 700 million children in 31 hours, considering world time zones. Santa is often featured as an old man with a huge white beard and large stature. However, due to the high speed of his travel, Santa could actually shrink, or get thinner, making it possible for Santa to fit into chimneys.

Theory of relativity could also explain why the children expecting Santa Claus at night rarely catch a glimpse of the fat man. The researchers noted that the ability of Santa to be undetectable is due to the so-called Doppler Effect. Traveling at more than 200,000 times faster than the world's fastest man, Usain Bolt, the Doppler Effect would change Santa's color, turning him from red to green until he finally disappears at greater speed. The high traveling speed of Santa would also silence his approach and departure.

Dr. Sheen explained that the high speed of Santa's sleigh could squash the light waves that are being released. On the other hand, the sound created by Santa speeding through the skies would be too high for human hearing range, making it appear like completely silent. However, Santa's ride could create a sonic boom as they break the speed of sound.

The scientific explanation for the stealth delivery of Santa Claus is made to present science and physics interesting to children. Dr. Sheen has no plans to publish her calculations to a peer-review journal. She clarified that her calculations were only made to make physics interesting.

(Source: Nature World News)



## 'Green week' international exhibition opens in Kish Island

**SOCIETY** TEHRAN — The second international exhibition on promoting the culture of environmental protection kicked off in the Persian Gulf island of Kish on Tuesday.

The 5-day event, dubbed 'green week', brings together representatives of some 80 domestic and foreign companies active in environmental spheres, IRNA news agency reported.

Stretching over a land area of 3,000 square meters the exhibition features Iranian companies along with German and Italian ones involved in recycling, waste management, and building incinerators, the event's executive director has said.

"The exhibition aims to encourage green culture as a contributory factor behind a healthy lifestyle," Mehrshad Khodabakhshi suggested.

Introducing equipment, abilities, and programs in agriculture sector, livestock breeding, and natural resources management, promoting organic productions

in agriculture sector, encouraging green tourism, introducing green petrochemical, oil, gas, transport, and mining industries and urbanization along with formulating sound and effective strategies to prevent environmental damages are of the main focuses of the green week exhibition.

Moreover introducing non-indigenous herbs to the country in order to develop herbal medicine industry and highlighting the role of chain markets in protecting the environment and minimizing environmental harms are of the other purposes of the exhibition.

Workshops looking at renewable energies, promoting traditional medicine and organic foods, and building solar cars, boats and heaters are also scheduled as side events.

After an almost 10-year interval the second green week exhibition is arranged in a collaborative effort between various ministries and environmental bodies and Kish Island is playing host to the event from December 27-31.



## Major flooding in UK now likely every year, warns lead climate adviser

Major flooding in the UK is now likely to happen every year but ministers still have no coherent long-term plan to deal with it, the government's leading adviser on the impacts of climate change has warned.

Boxing Day in 2015 saw severe floods sweep Lancashire and Yorkshire, just weeks after Storm Desmond swamped Cumbria and parts of Scotland and Wales.

But Prof John Krebs, who leads the work on adapting to global warming for the government's official advisers, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), told the Guardian: "We are still a long way from where we need to be, in that there is still not a coherent long-term view."

Lord Krebs said it was important for both government and households to learn from the run of floods that have affected many parts of the country in recent years. "Almost every year there has been some more or less major flooding event and that is a key message," he said. "We have to now get it embedded that this is something that will happen somewhere most years."

Increased flooding is the biggest impact of climate change for the UK, but the CCC has also warned that the nation is poorly prepared for deadly annual heat waves, water shortages and difficulties in producing food. However, Krebs, who is stepping down from his CCC role after eight years in January, said: "There is still hope this country will make the progress it needs to make."

Pressure to act now must continue from the CCC in its



watchdog role and from the public, he said: "This is not something in the long-term future, this is something here and now. But it will also be worse for your children and grandchildren than it is for us, unless we do something about it."

"At the extreme end, parts of the world could become uninhabitable and there could be mass migration," Krebs said. "At the more modest end, we are likely to experience more extreme weather events in this country and we need to prepare for that."

Krebs also said ministers would regret cutting flood protection measures for new homes. New laws passed earlier in 2016 aim to drive the building of 1m new homes but Krebs, an independent member of the House of Lords, said he was disappointed ministers had

rejected proposals to cut the risk of the homes flooding and make them cheap to heat.

"The imperative to build more homes was overriding anything that might get in the way and I think the house builders got at the Department for Communities and Local Government to say all of this is going to be costly and difficult," he said.

"It isn't [costly] really, but they just want to get on and build homes according to the bog-standard, simple template and not have to worry about whether the development is sustainable in terms of carbon footprint and flood risk. In 20 years' time, people will look back and say, 'What were they thinking?'"

The CCC has also warned the government that there are no plans to deliver half of the cuts in carbon emissions needed in the 2020s, a caution Krebs likened to a yellow card.

On the third runway at Heathrow, Krebs said the government had not been clear whether the plan meant carbon emissions from planes would remain under the limit recommended by the CCC. "Is it crazy [to build it]? We don't know yet," he said.

Krebs said rejection of human-caused climate change and its great risks – which he calls denial – is a "fringe discourse", with 114 of the world's nations already having ratified the global climate deal signed by 194 countries in Paris a year ago.

(Source: The Guardian)



### GENERAL PROCUREMENT NOTICE

Islamic Republic of Iran

Auction of portion of offtakepotable Water from theBushehr Water Desalination Plant  
Bushehr Water and Wastewater Company intends to sell the portion of off take potable waterfrom the Bushehr water desalination plant amounting to 2000 m3/d, by an auction to a qualified private parties.

A. Scope of the Project;

Provision of all therequired services of the use ofportion of offtake potable water including: design,

Implementation and construction of required structures, supply and operation of the equipment and facilities, etc.

B. More information is presented at the prequalification document.

C. Deadline for purchase auction document: Jan,10,2017

D. Place to purchase auction document:

MehrAbPooyesh Consultant Engineers Company, Post Code: 1596843139, Unit No. 14,

No. 414, Corner of Larestan St. and Motahari Ave. Tehran, I.R.Iran.

Contact No. +9821 8892 9936 –Fax +9821 8892 928

E. Deadline for submission of prequalification document: Feb,08,2017

F. Place to submit the completed prequalification document:

The Secretariat office of the Bushehr Water and Wastewater Company, Rais Ali Delwari

Ave., Bushehr, I.R.Iran.

G. The opening shall take place at:

The CEO office of the Bushehr Water and Wastewater Company, Rais Ali Delwari

Ave., Bushehr, I.R.Iran.

Date: :Feb,11,2017

Time: 10:00AM local time

### آگهی مزایده

فروش بخشی از آب تولید شده در تاسیسات  
نمک زدایی بوشهر



شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان بوشهر در نظر دارد بخشی از آب تولید شده در تاسیسات نمک زدایی شهر بوشهر با ظرفیت آب تحویلی در روز برابر ۲۰۰۰ متر مکعب از طریق برگزاری مزایده به بخش خصوصی واجد شرایط واگذار نماید.

الف) شرح مختصری از پروژه: انجام کلیه خدمات مورد نیاز جهت استفاده از آب مزاد شامل طراحی، اجرا و ساخت موارد مورد نیاز، خرید تجهیزات، بهره برداری از تجهیزات و ...

ب) سایر مشخصات مورد نیاز در اسناد ارزیابی ارائه شده است.

ج) آخرین مهلت خرید اسناد: ۹۵/۱۰/۲۱

د) محل فروش اسناد: تهران - خیابان مطهری نبش لارستان ساختمان ۴۱۴ واحد ۱۴ مهندسین مشاور

مهراث پویش کد پستی ۱۵۹۶۸۴۳۱۳۹ - تلفن ۸۸۹۲۹۹۳۶ - ۸۸۹۲۹۹۳۷

ه) مهلت ارسال اسناد: ۹۵/۱۱/۲۰

و) محل تسلیم اسناد مزایده: بوشهر - خیابان رئیسعلی دلواری - دبیرخانه شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان بوشهر

ز) تاریخ بازگشایی پاکات: ساعت ۱۰ صبح روز شنبه مورخ ۹۵/۱۱/۲۳

ح) محل بازگشایی پاکات: بوشهر - خیابان رئیسعلی دلواری - شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان بوشهر - دفتر مدیرعامل شرکت

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شرکت آب و فاضلاب استان بوشهر

# Netanyahu likely to be investigated for bribery, fraud following 'secret probe' discovery

Israeli police have obtained new documents in a secret probe against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, prompting them to seek a full criminal investigation against the politician on suspicion of bribery and fraud, local media reports.

Since discovering the files, police have requested from Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit that he allow a full investigation against Netanyahu. Authorities are reportedly convinced that they will be able to open one in the coming days, Channel 2 News reported, according to The Times of Israel.

The documents were reportedly obtained as part of a secret inquiry against Netanyahu by special police unit Lahav 433, which was launched in June. The probe was given the green light by Police Chief Roni Alsheich, who demanded secrecy and that no details of the investigation be leaked to the media.

Meanwhile, Mandelblit also reportedly instructed employees in the state prosecutor's office to look into allegations that Netanyahu accepted €1 million (\$1.04 million) from Arnaud Mimran, a French



businessman currently serving eight years in prison for committing carbon tax fraud. During his trial, Mimran claimed he donated the money to Netanyahu during his 2009 election campaign. However, Netanyahu has repeatedly

denied the donation, and a spokesperson for the leader has called the newest action against him "nonsense."

"Since Netanyahu's victory in the last elections and even before, hostile elements have made heroic efforts to

attempt to bring about [Netanyahu's] downfall, with false accusations against him and his family. This [latest attempt] is absolutely false. There was nothing and there will be nothing," the spokesperson said, as quoted by Haaretz.

It is indeed far from the first time that Netanyahu has come under fire for suspected corruption. Last month, Mandelblit opened a probe into an alleged scandal involving the purchase of German submarines, with Netanyahu's personal friend and lawyer suspected of a conflict of interest. The prime minister is expected to be questioned in the probe.

In July 2015, then-Attorney General Yehuda Weinstein announced a criminal investigation into alleged misconduct at Netanyahu's residences.

Netanyahu's wife, Sara, has also found herself in the spotlight for alleged corruption, accused of misusing public funds in May. She was also accused of stealing thousands of dollars worth of state funds from bottles returned to local supermarkets last year.

(Source: RT)

## Palestinian MK placed under house arrest

A Palestinian member of the Israeli parliament has been placed under house arrest for 10 days after he was accused of smuggling mobile phones and SIM cards to Palestinian prisoners.

An Israeli court in Rishon LeZion, a city near Tel Aviv, issued the decision on Tuesday.

Basel Ghattas, of the Joint List, a predominantly Palestinian electoral coalition in the Israeli Knesset, was arrested last week after he surrendered parliamentary immunity for search and arrest, and remained in police custody for six days undergoing interrogation.

Micky Rosenfeld, an Israeli police spokesman, said that the legislator would be placed under house arrest with a "number of specific restrictions".

"He will not be allowed to leave the country until the final decision is made on the investigation," Rosenfeld told Al Jazeera.

"He is also not allowed to visit any prisons for the next 180 days."

When asked what evidence was presented before the court on the accusations, Rosenfeld said there was "concrete evidence" but would not elaborate on the nature of it.

"A second suspect involved in the case was arrested this morning," he said.

Avichai Mandelblit, the Knesset's attorney general, said Ghattas was caught on police surveillance cameras giving envelopes to one of the prisoners at Ketziot prison in the south of the country, but the investigation is still under way.

Ghattas has neither publicly denied nor confirmed the accusations, but in a video posted on his official Facebook page before his arrest on December 22, he said that he "did not carry out any violation linked to so-called state security or the security of citizens".

Ghattas's office and home were raided and searched by Israeli police during the time of his arrest.

Moshe Mizrahi, a Rishon LeZion magistrate's court

judge, set bail at 50,000 shekels (approximately \$13,000).

Yousef Jabareen, who is also a member of the Joint List, said "there is no doubt that these are ongoing efforts by Israel's right-wing parliament to strip away the legitimacy of Palestinian politicians".

Last year Israel banned the northern branch of the Islamic Movement.

Earlier this year, Israeli police carried out mass arrests of political activists and members of the Arab Democratic National Assembly party, or Balad, on accusations of money laundering.

An estimated 1.7 million Palestinians, descendants of Palestinians who remained on their land after the creation of Israel in 1948, hold Israeli citizenship.

According to the Haifa-based Adalah Legal Centre for Arab Minority rights, Palestinian citizens of Israel suffer from more than 50 discriminatory laws limiting their access to state resources and political expression.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## 'Militarily weak Britain can't affect power equation in region'

It may be that the Al-Khalifa government wants a second European/American presence in the Persian Gulf to protect them from "outside influence." They are still paranoid about the Shi'a majority in their country, and are not 100% sure that the United States will continue to support them in the future.

### Why is England returning to the Persian Gulf?

Actually, they never really left. British ships and military operations have been operating in the Gulf since they withdrew in 1971-72? Without a naval base, however, they had to travel back and forth to the UK all the time. The British are concerned about the instability in the region and see their presence as a way to curtail this should the need arise. It is a new application of the old

philosophy of Pax Britannica, though on a much smaller scale. Also, the offer from the al-Khalifa government was an unusual invitation which they felt they should accept.

### What can be the impact of Britain's military presence on the Persian Gulf security?

A: It depends on who you ask. Obviously the Al-Khalifa regime sees it as a stabilizing force, and the British and Americans (who had to have been consulted) agree. From the standpoint of Iran, it is a destabilizing force because it introduces another European-American force into the region.

### Some argue that England is replacing the U.S. in the Persian Gulf. Do you agree with this view?

A: With the election of Donald Trump, it is certainly a

possibility, since the Trump administration has isolationist tendencies. Even the Obama administration wanted to reduce the American presence in the region. However, this is a new development in American politics. The plans for this base are four years old, and the base itself was announced in 2014. I think the British at this point will be supplementing the American forces rather than replacing them.

I want to remark that I know very well Iranian feelings regarding the British, but I would caution you against over-reacting to this one event. It has been in planning for four years, after all, and is no surprise. The British are really quite weak economically and militarily at this point. They are not likely to be a major force in the Middle East for the near future.

(Source: Reuters)

## Trump's nuclear dark age?

As the latest example, in July 2014, the U.S. State Department officially alleged that Russia is violating its INF Treaty obligations "not to possess, produce, or flight-test" a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) with a range of 500 to 5,500 kilometers or "to possess or produce launchers of such missiles."

But Russia denies that it is breaching the INF Treaty. The Russian Foreign Ministry said in December that the allegations are "groundless" and the United States has "not provided any proof" that Russia is "allegedly producing and deploying" banned missiles.

### Not a traditional enemy, nor a traditional friend

Being shocked with Trump's state-

Moscow has instead raised its own concerns about Washington's compliance with the agreement. Russia claims that the U.S. is placing a missile defense launch system in Europe that can also be used to fire cruise missiles, using targets for missile defense tests with similar characteristics to treaty-prohibited intermediate-range missiles, and making armed drones that are equivalent to ground-launched cruise missiles.

ments about Putin during his presidential campaign, the world was shocked again with Mr. Trump's fantasy about arms race. Before this statement, one may think

Trump is interested in Putin's leadership approach, and they have notable similarities. Both presidents are unhappy with the modern global order and the direction it is going. Both dislike domestic and global elites and despise political correctness. And both of them are masters at crossing invisible red lines. But Trump's recent harsh reaction to Putin, make it hard to analyze what is going on

in the United States.

Referring to technical disputes, some experts believe that failure to resolve the festering compliance dispute could threaten the treaty and impede further efforts to reduce U.S. and Russian nuclear arsenals in the years ahead. But it is not only some technical disputes. Trump is neither a common friend nor a common enemy. He is going to establish his own rules. Even if the cost may be a world under the threat of a nuclear arms race. It is not the first one and also not the last one. So welcome to Trump's dark age!

## 25 years on, collapse of Soviet Union still brings cheers—and tears

On November 9, 1989, a colleague at National Geographic headquarters in Washington came charging down the hall with news that West Germans were literally dancing on top of the Berlin Wall by the Brandenburg Gate. Twelve hours later I was in Germany, hustling toward the gap in the Wall at Invaliden Street, where a small bridge spanned the River Spree. Moving toward me in the near darkness were families with small children, mothers pushing strollers, teenagers dressed in pre-washed jeans, businessmen in shabby suits. All streaming through the open gate.

The reality nearly knocked me to my knees, and I sat down and wept. They were East Germans, yes, but in my mind they were also Estonians and Ukrainians, Russians and Armenians. Crowds of jubilant West Germans applauded and shouted welcome, pressing flowers into the hands of their brothers and sisters.

### Free at last

The tide spread quickly. In 1991, during an attempted coup by hardline Communist legislators to keep the Soviet Union together, Russian President Boris Yeltsin climbed onto a military tank in Mos-

cow's Red Square to denounce the coup and yank the Russian Republic out of the Union. Within days, the 12 other constituent republics of the empire, from Estonia in the north to Moldova in the south, followed the Russian defection and declared independence.

A raw period of elation, optimism, chaos, corruption, and unregulated capitalism followed the fall of

**As Soviet life softened in the 1970s and '80s, and advances in communications technology made it more difficult for the state to hide its flaws, Premier Mikhail Gorbachev attempted to stave off social revolution by granting glasnost (free speech) and perestroika (restructuring).**

the empire. Oligarchs and con men erected their own castles, and vendors flush with black-market consumables clogged the streets of Moscow. Dissidents and intellectuals celebrated freedom, but much of the Russian population considered free market capitalism a gift that came without an operator's manual.

Now we mark the 25th year since the end of what U.S. President Ronald Reagan called the "Evil Empire" in 1984. But when former KGB agent Vladimir Putin consolidated power in Russia 20 years later, he lamented the fall of the Soviet Union as "the most catastrophic event of the 20th century."

Some say the winds of change in post-empire Russia have stoked the fire beneath Western nations that long for economic and social stability. Others lament that the world is shifting toward a stingy isolationism, erecting new walls and uplifting potential strongmen to high office. Empires rise and fall, and few retain their luster. But the demise of the Soviet Union, though now lamented in some quarters, ended a bitter, misguided chapter in human endeavor.

(Source: National Geographic)

## Russia's embassy in Damascus comes under terrorist shelling twice over day

The Russian embassy in the Syrian capital Damascus has been shelled twice over a day, Russia's Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday.

"At 13:00 and 13:19 [Moscow time] on December 28, the Russian embassy in Syria was shelled by terrorists. One mine, which, fortunately, did not explode, fell in the courtyard of the compound of the Russian diplomatic mission's administrative buildings," the ministry said in a comment.

"The second mine fell in the close vicinity to its territory. Combat engineers have been involved to defuse unexploded ordnance," the comment said.

The ministry also stated that there is still a real threat to the Russian embassy in Damascus and its personnel from terrorist groups.

"We have to state that there remains a real threat to the embassy in Russia and its employees from the terrorist groups entrenched in Damascus suburbs," the Foreign Ministry said.

"This reaffirms the urgent need for prompt elimination of all such hotbeds of terrorism."

(Source: TASS)

## Ankara: Turkey and Russia have ceasefire plan for Syria

A second rebel official told Reuters there was no agreement yet from the side of the rebel factions.

"The details of the ceasefire deal have yet to be officially presented to the factions, and there is no agreement so far," the second official said.

Russia's foreign minister said on Tuesday the Syrian government was consulting with the opposition ahead of possible peace talks, while a House of Saud regime-backed opposition group said it knew nothing of the negotiations but supported a ceasefire.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia, Iran, Turkey and Assad have agreed that Astana, the Kazakh capital, should be the venue for new Syrian peace talks.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said on Wednesday United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura had spoken by phone with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and supported the efforts to establish a ceasefire and new peace talks.

The Syrian opposition's main political body on Tuesday urged rebel groups to cooperate with "sincere regional efforts" to reach a ceasefire deal but that it had not been invited to any conference, referring to the Kazakhstan meeting.

The Turkish military said on Wednesday it had "neutralized" 44 Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists and wounded 117 as part of its operation in the northern Syrian town of al-Bab.

Rebels supported by Turkish troops have laid siege to al-Bab for weeks under the "Euphrates Shield" operation launched by Turkey nearly four months ago to sweep the Sunni hardliners and Kurdish fighters from its Syrian border.

(Source: Reuters)

## German police detain alleged contact of Berlin truck attacker

German police on Wednesday detained a Tunisian national on suspicion of having ties to Anis Amri, the suspected Berlin truck attacker gunned down by Italian police last week, prosecutors said.

"The deceased suspect Anis Amri had saved the number of this 40-year-old Tunisian national in his phone. The investigations indicate that he could have been involved in the attack," the federal prosecutor's office said in a statement.

The suspect was taken into custody early on Wednesday after federal police officers searched his home and work premises.

"The extent to which the suspicions against the detained person can be confirmed remains subject to further investigation," the statement added.

Twelve people were killed and dozens injured on Dec. 19, when Amri is believed to have hijacked a truck and used it to mow down people at a Berlin Christmas market.

The 24-year-old went on the run and was the focus of a frantic four-day manhunt before being shot dead by police in Milan after opening fire first.

The Berlin rampage was claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group, which released a video last Friday in which Amri is shown pledging allegiance to the ISIL Chief Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

(Source: AFP)

## Asia's November imports of Iranian oil more than double from year ago

Iran's crude oil imports cost Japan an average \$45.46 a barrel for November, which was the third cheapest after Mexico and Oman, customs-cleared trade data by Japan's Ministry of Finance showed on Tuesday.

Japan's trade ministry on Wednesday released official data showing its imports jumped 41.2 percent from a year earlier to 237,653 bpd last month.

India's imports grew more than four-fold from a year earlier to 620,000 bpd, topping China's imports for a third straight month. South Korean imports were nearly five times higher at 472,067 bpd.

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

(Source: Reuters)

## Bradley Wiggins announces retirement from all forms of professional cycling

Bradley Wiggins has announced his retirement from cycling, ending a career that saw him win a British record eight Olympic medals as well as the country's first Tour de France title.

The 36-year-old posted a statement on his Instagram page on Wednesday afternoon, accompanying a picture of his collected race jerseys, medals and trophies. In it, he said: "2016 is the end of the road for this chapter, onwards and upwards, 'feet on the ground, head in the clouds' kids from Kilburn don't win Olympic Golds and Tour de Frances! They do now."

Wiggins, who conquered his sport on the road as well as in the velodrome, won his fifth Olympic gold in Rio this year as part of the team pursuit, adding to a tally that also includes a silver and two bronzes.

He competed in five successive Games from Sydney 2000 and reached a career high in 2012 when he completed an unprecedented double of a Tour de France victory with Team Sky and a home Olympic triumph in the time-trial in London.

His retirement message also read: "I have been lucky enough to live a dream and fulfil my childhood aspiration of making a living and a career out of the sport I fell in love with at the age of 12. I've met my idols and ridden with and alongside the best for 20 years."

"I have worked with the world's best coaches and managers, who I will always be grateful to for their support. What will stick with me forever is the support and love from the public though thick and thin, all as a result of riding a pushbike for a living. 2012 blew my mind and was a gas.

"Cycling has given me everything and I couldn't have done it without the support of my wonderful wife Cath and our amazing kids."

(Source: Guardian)

## Chicharito runs the rule over towering trio

There are just a few days left before the world discovers who has been chosen as the finest men's player on Planet Football for 2016, with the chosen one lifting The Best FIFA Men's Player award on 9 January 2017. The shortlisted trio are three attacking luminaries - Lionel Messi, Cristiano Ronaldo and Antoine Griezmann - all of whom have strong cases for claiming the prize at the ceremony in Zurich.

What are their main strengths? Does one have a particular quality that sets him apart from the others? In order to dig deeper, FIFA.com called upon a man with an inside track, himself a master of the striker's arts and who is more than familiar with the three nominees: Javier Hernandez. In typically open and intelligent fashion, Chicharito gave his verdict on the men of the moment.

"So close to the two giants" "Going on what they've achieved this year, the three of them have been correctly nominated," said the Bayer Leverkusen forward, someone who enjoys following the beautiful game almost as much as playing it.

"Messi is a phenomenon and so is Cristiano. We all know that they're several notches above the rest of us footballers. As far as Griezmann is concerned, I think he deserves a great deal of credit for the very fact that he's getting so close to those two giants [of the game]."

After summing the trio up in very general terms, then came the moment to go into more specific details. First up for analysis is Griezmann, who appeared for Atletico de Madrid in an epic UEFA Champions League quarter-final clash in 2014/15 against Chicharito's then-club Real Madrid, a tie eventually settled by a poacher's goal from the Mexico star.

"He's played really well, he's been vital both to Atletico and the French national team," said Hernandez. "What most impresses me about him is that he can do everything. He's an extremely complete player."

"It's not easy to make your mark the way he has at a club like Atletico, where an emphasis on discipline has priority over attacking," Chicharito continued. "Not only has he achieved that (making his mark), but he's also taken on a very important role in the team. And for France he shouldered the [attacking] responsibility after [Karim] Benzema was ruled out, which was by no means easy either."

### Different but equally great

Ronaldo and Messi, Messi and Ronaldo... Even a fellow pro like Hernandez cannot fail to admire the inspirational qualities of a pair of footballers who have dominated the world football scene. "They're both geniuses," he enthused. "That said, they have different qualities and play in different positions."

"Cristiano is a player who can finish with both feet and with his head, using his great leap and making the most of his physique. Not that Messi can't do that (finish) too, but we know that he tends to play much deeper and get on the ball more during the transition from defence to attack, which he does better than anybody else. Cristiano is more attacking, more of a striker."

Chicharito's view on Ronaldo comes from a season playing together up front for Madrid, so the Mexico striker is well-placed to describe the Portuguese superstar and, above all, help pinpoint what most impressed him during their shared spell with Los Blancos.

"That would be his hunger, his determination," said Hernandez. "A lot of people say that Messi is all talent and Cristiano is all hard work, but the hunger Cristiano has [to succeed] should also be considered as talent."

"[The hunger] he has is almost unmatched. He knows exactly what he wants to achieve, his perseverance is huge and his level of ambition too. I think that he looks in the mirror and says to himself that 'today I want to be better than you'," continued the ex-Manchester United front-man. "That, in my view, is a talent. It's a gift that isn't to do with ball skills but is in the mind, which is equally important."

(Source: FIFA)

# The faces who left us in 2016

This year unfortunately saw the passing of several influential figures in the world of football: former star players like Johan Cruyff, Cesare Maldini, Stephen Keshi, Carlos Alberto, Raul Sanchez and Trifon Ivanov, as well as some other remarkable individuals who contributed to the development of the game, such as ex-FIFA President Joao Havelange and Italian artist Silvio Gazzaniga, who designed and created the FIFA World Cup™ trophy.

In late November, football fans worldwide were saddened to learn that the plane carrying the players and staff of Brazilian club Chapecoense had crashed in Colombia; the tragic accident took the lives of all but three of the players on board. The global outpouring of solidarity that followed culminated in the club being awarded the 2016 Copa Sudamericana.

We look back on some of the greats who left us in 2016 to recall the impact their careers had on the game.

### Trifon Ivanov: Cornerstone of the Bulgarian defence

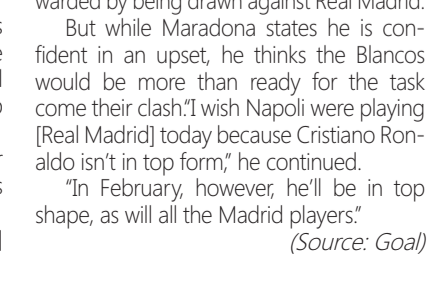
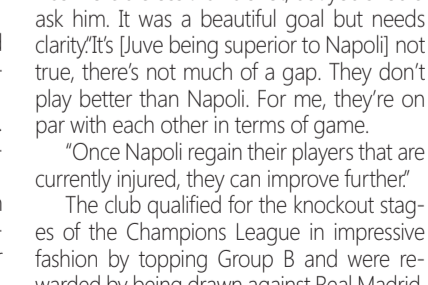
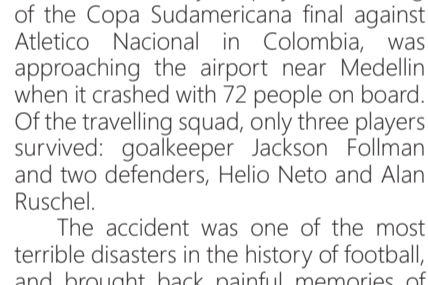
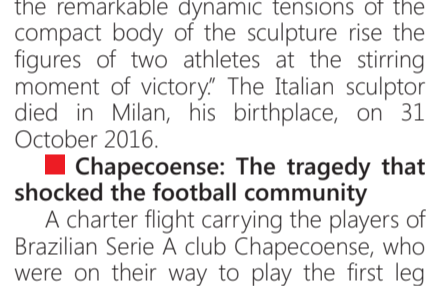
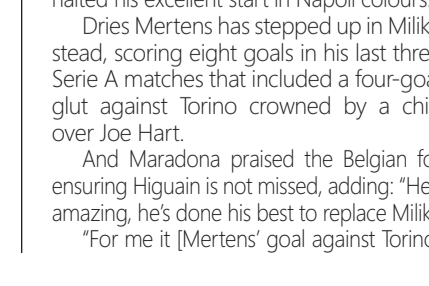
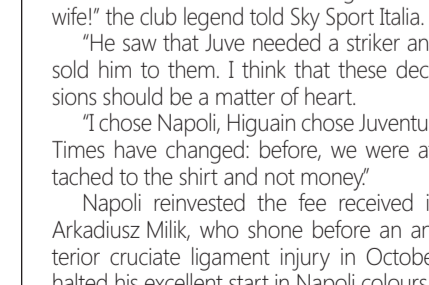
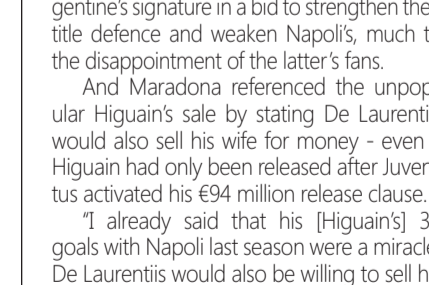
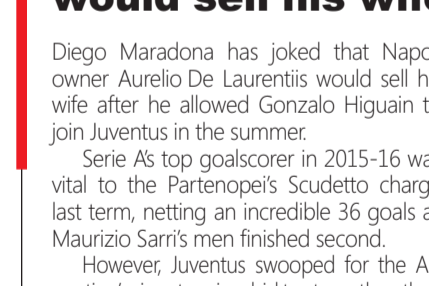
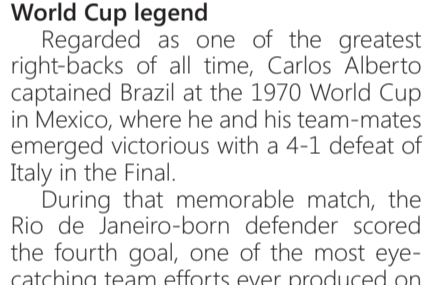
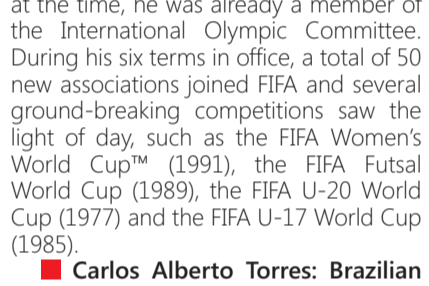
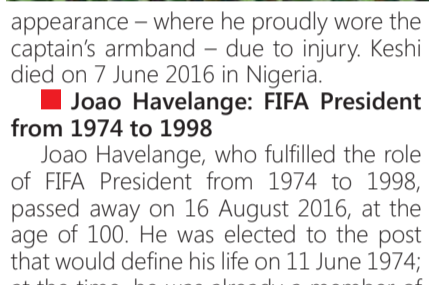
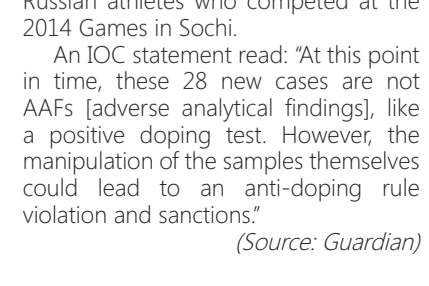
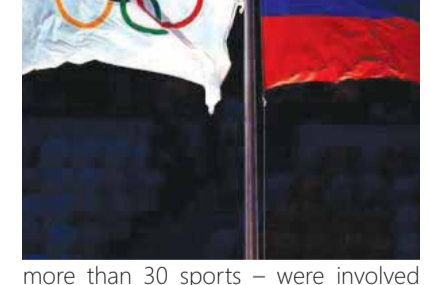
Trifon Ivanov was a key member of the Bulgarian side that raised eyebrows all over the globe by reaching the semi-finals of the 1994 World Cup. The robust centre-back also played at France 1998. In total, he collected 78 caps, 30 of which were earned during FIFA-run competitions, and scored six goals. He turned out for a number of clubs, including CSKA Sofia and Rapid Vienna. Ivanov died on 13 February 2016, in his home town of Samovodene.

### Raul Sanchez: Chile's stalwart defender

Raul Sanchez shone at Chile 1962, where he starred in all six of the host nation's matches and helped them to secure third place. The intelligent defender made a total of 33 appearances for his national team. At club level, he donned the colours of several Chilean outfits, including Santiago Wanderers, with whom he claimed a league title and two national cups. Sanchez passed away in Santiago on 28 February 2016.

### Johan Cruyff: The Dutch master

Although he won no international honours with the Netherlands and only appeared at one World Cup, in 1974, when the Dutch reached the Final, Johan Cruyff is nevertheless often mentioned in the same breath as Pele, Beckenbauer and Maradona. A symbol of the "Total Football" movement, he is regarded as one of the most brilliant players of all time. After hanging up his boots, the Dutchman moved into coaching, racking up trophies with Ajax and Barcelona, while starting the famed La Masia academy at the latter. Cruyff passed away on 24 March 2016 in Barcelona, after a long battle against lung cancer. That day, football lost one of its greatest stars.



### Cesare Maldini: The rock of Milan

Cesare Maldini, father of the legendary Paolo Maldini, coached La Nazionale at France 1998, where his charges were eliminated at the quarter-final stage on penalties by the hosts. As a player, the Trieste native enjoyed great success with AC Milan, amassing four Serie A titles and the 1963 European Cup, before embarking on a brief spell with Torino and then hanging up his boots. The elegant defender was also capped 14 times for Italy. After retiring from coaching, Maldini worked as a television commentator, until his death on 3 April 2016 in Milan, his adopted home.

### Stephen Keshi: National hero on and off the pitch

Very few football observers foresaw Nigeria's victory at the 2013 CAF Africa Cup of Nations, but Stephen Keshi had other ideas, steering his side to the final, where they saw off Burkina Faso 1-0 in Johannesburg. A few months later, he led the Super Eagles to the 2014 World Cup after successfully negotiating a tricky two-legged play-off with Ethiopia; at the tournament proper, they reached the knockout stages. During his tenure, Nigeria also participated in the 2013 FIFA Confederations Cup. But the astute Nigerian was not just a talented coach: during his playing career he also lifted the Cup of Nations and took part in five qualifying matches for USA 1994, which resulted in his country qualifying for a World Cup for the very first time. At the tournament itself, he was restricted to one

appearance - where he proudly wore the captain's armband - due to injury. Keshi died on 7 June 2016 in Nigeria.

### Joao Havelange: FIFA President from 1974 to 1998

Joao Havelange, who fulfilled the role of FIFA President from 1974 to 1998, passed away on 16 August 2016, at the age of 100. He was elected to the post that would define his life on 11 June 1974; at the time, he was already a member of the International Olympic Committee. During his six terms in office, a total of 50 new associations joined FIFA and several ground-breaking competitions saw the light of day, such as the FIFA Women's World Cup™ (1991), the FIFA Futsal World Cup (1989), the FIFA U-20 World Cup (1977) and the FIFA U-17 World Cup (1985).

### Carlos Alberto Torres: Brazilian World Cup legend

Regarded as one of the greatest right-backs of all time, Carlos Alberto captained Brazil at the 1970 World Cup in Mexico, where he and his team-mates emerged victorious with a 4-1 defeat of Italy in the Final.

During that memorable match, the Rio de Janeiro-born defender scored the fourth goal, one of the most eye-catching team efforts ever produced on a football pitch. During his club career, he pulled on the jerseys of Fluminense, Santos, Botafogo, Flamengo, New York Cosmos and California Surf. Carlos Alberto passed away in Rio on 25 October 2016.

### Silvio Gazzaniga: Creator of the iconic World Cup trophy

Silvio Gazzaniga was the artist responsible for the design of the current World Cup trophy, which was first hoisted into the air by host nation West Germany, in 1974. Made of 18-karat gold, it weighs six kilos. "The lines spring out from the base, rising in spirals, stretching out to receive the world," he once said. "From the remarkable dynamic tensions of the compact body of the sculpture rise the figures of two athletes at the stirring moment of victory." The Italian sculptor died in Milan, his birthplace, on 31 October 2016.

### Chapecoense: The tragedy that shocked the football community

A charter flight carrying the players of Brazilian Serie A club Chapecoense, who were on their way to play the first leg of the Copa Sudamericana final against Atletico Nacional in Colombia, was approaching the airport near Medellin when it crashed with 72 people on board. Of the travelling squad, only three players survived: goalkeeper Jackson Follman and two defenders, Helio Neto and Alan Ruschel.

The accident was one of the most terrible disasters in the history of football, and brought back painful memories of the plane crash involving the Zambian national team in 1993. At the request of Atletico Nacional, CONMEBOL decided to award the Copa Sudamericana to Chapecoense.

(Source: FIFA)

## Russian official admits to 'institutional conspiracy' of doping Olympic athletes

A Russian official has admitted for the first time to the existence of a doping campaign that involved hundreds of the country's athletes.

"It was an institutional conspiracy," Anna Antseliovich, the acting director of Russia's national anti-doping agency Rusada, told the New York Times on Tuesday. The government's top officials were not involved, however, Antseliovich said.

Rusada said on Wednesday that Antseliovich's comments had been distorted and taken out of context. The Tass news agency cited a statement as saying that the impression had wrongly been given that its leadership recognised that there had been an "institutional conspiracy".

The Kremlin said that it would check the veracity of the NYT report to make sure that Antseliovich had been accurately quoted. "We are not inclined to consider this information as first hand," said spokesman Dmitry Peskov. "The accuracy of these words first needs to be checked."

The report details how the director of one laboratory tampered with urine samples at the Olympics, and provided performance enhancing drugs to athletes. The operation was assisted by the the Federal Security Service and a deputy sports minister.

Russia has long denied a such an operation existed despite a report commissioned on behalf of the World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) that asserted earlier this month that more than 1,000 Russians athletes across



more than 30 sports - were involved in or benefited from state-sponsored doping between 2011 and 2015.

The report, authored by Canadian law professor Richard McLaren, said that the London 2012 Olympics were "corrupted on an unprecedented scale" due to Russian doping. After the McLaren Report's publication the International Olympic Committee said it had opened disciplinary proceedings against 28 Russian athletes who competed at the 2014 Games in Sochi.

An IOC statement read: "At this point in time, these 28 new cases are not AAFs [adverse analytical findings], like a positive doping test. However, the manipulation of the samples themselves could lead to an anti-doping rule violation and sanctions."

(Source: Guardian)

## Maradona: Napoli chief De Laurentiis would sell his wife!

Diego Maradona has joked that Napoli owner Aurelio De Laurentiis would sell his wife after he allowed Gonzalo Higuain to join Juventus in the summer.

Serie A's top goalscorer in 2015-16 was vital to the Partenopei's Scudetto charge last term, netting an incredible 36 goals as Maurizio Sarri's men finished second.

However, Juventus swooped for the Argentine's signature in a bid to strengthen their title defence and weaken Napoli's, much to the disappointment of the latter's fans.

And Maradona referenced the unpopular Higuain's sale by stating De Laurentiis would also sell his wife for money - even if Higuain had only been released after Juventus activated his €94 million release clause.

"I already said that his [Higuain's] 36 goals with Napoli last season were a miracle. De Laurentiis would also be willing to sell his wife!" the club legend told Sky Sport Italia.

"He saw that Juve needed a striker and sold him to them. I think that these decisions should be a matter of heart."

"I chose Napoli, Higuain chose Juventus. Times have changed: before, we were attached to the shirt and not money."

Napoli reinvested the fee received in Arkadiusz Milik, who shone before an anterior cruciate ligament injury in October halted his excellent start in Napoli colours.

Dries Mertens has stepped up in Milik's stead, scoring eight goals in his last three Serie A matches that included a four-goal glut against Torino crowned by a chip over Joe Hart.

And Maradona praised the Belgian for ensuring Higuain is not missed, adding: "He's amazing, he's done his best to replace Milik."

"For me it [Mertens' goal against Torino]



was more a cross than a shot, but you should ask him. It was a beautiful goal but needs clarity. It's [Juve being superior to Napoli] not true, there's not much of a gap. They don't play better than Napoli. For me, they're on par with each other in terms of game."

"Once Napoli regain their players that are currently injured, they can improve further."

The club qualified for the knockout stages of the Champions League in impressive fashion by topping Group B and were rewarded by being drawn against Real Madrid.

But while Maradona states he is confident in an upset, he thinks the Blancos would be more than ready for the task come their clash. "I wish Napoli were playing [Real Madrid] today because Cristiano Ronaldo isn't in top form," he continued.

"In February, however, he'll be in top shape, as will all the Madrid players."

(Source: Goal)

# Iran, Morocco set to be called off

**S P O R T S** Iran football friendly match desk against Morocco is set to be called off, the Iranian media reported.

The friendly match is scheduled to be held on January 6 at Dubai's Al Ain Stadium.

According to the local reports, the UAE will only let the game to be held behind the closed doors and it's while a lot of Iranian fans in the UAE who are interested in watching Team Melli's game.

However Carlos Queiroz's men may only hold their 7-day training camp in Dubai without playing a friendly.

Iraq, who is in Group B of the Asia's 2018 World Cup qualifying, has reportedly shown interest in playing a friendly match with Iran on March 18.

Iran, who is currently top of Group A in the Asia's 2018 World Cup qualifying with 11 points, will take on Qatar on March 23 before facing China five days later.

A couple of African teams will hold training camps in Dubai in order to prepare for the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations which will take place in Gabon from January 14 to February 5.

Morocco has been drawn in the Group C of the tournament alongside defending champion Ivory Coast, DR Congo and Togo.



## Igor Prahic linked with a move to Persepolis



**S P O R T S** Naft Tehran defender Igor Prahic has been linked with a move to Persepolis football club.

The 29-year-old defender joined Naft Tehran in July after parting company with Padideh.

Persepolis Croat coach Branko Ivankovic has shown interest in signing a contract with his countryman in the January transfer window.

Branko is set to sign Prahic as a replacement for Mohammad Ansari in defence.

"I know Persepolis wants to

hire me but I am in contract with Naft and two clubs should reach an agreement on the transfer," Prahic said.

Ansari will likely move to Chinese Super League side Guizhou Hengfeng Zhicheng in January.

Persepolis is going to strengthen defensive line for the AFC Champions League, where the team will kick off the campaign with a match against Al Hilal on February 21.

The Iranian popular team leads the domestic league with 32 points after 15 weeks, two points ahead of Tractor Sazi.

## Beijing Guoan bid for ex-Arsenal star Podolski



Beijing Guoan have made a bid for Galatasaray forward Lukas Podolski, the Turkish club has confirmed.

Reports in Turkey suggest the Chinese Super League (CSL) club's offer for the ex-Germany international is worth around £5.5 million and Galatasaray have admitted they are willing to strike a deal if Podolski wishes to leave.

Back in February, Gala sold experienced striker Burak Yilmaz to Beijing for £6.5m, with the 31-year-old reportedly earning another £6.5m in his annual salary.

"We've received a remarkable offer from Beijing Guoan for Lukas Podolski," Galatasaray spokesman Levent Nazifoglu

told Anadolu Agency.

"Now we're thinking about this offer. The possible move is up to the player."

Beijing are one of several CSL clubs flexing their financial muscle in an attempt to boost the profile of the country's top flight, with Shanghai SIPG recently completing the €60m purchase of Chelsea midfielder Oscar.

They turned professional in 1992 and are owned by CITIC Limited, a Hong Kong-based conglomerate that is in turn 58 per cent owned by the Chinese state.

Podolski won 129 caps for Germany during a 12-year international career and has enjoyed spells with Koln, Bayern Munich and Arsenal. (Source: Goal)

## Iranian wrestler slapped with four-year ban for doping violation

Iranian heavyweight Greco-Roman wrestler Bashir Babajanzadeh Darzi has been given a four-year ban after testing positive for consuming anabolic-androgenic steroids during the Greco-Roman World Cup held in the country earlier this year.

Vice president of the Islamic Republic of Iran Wrestling Federation, Hamid Banitamim, said the United World Wrestling took the measure against the 27-year-old sportsman after he was found to have traces of the banned drugs in his latest doping test.

Babajanzadeh Darzi was a member of the national Iranian Greco-Roman wrestling team during the Greco-Roman World Cup, which ran between May 19 and 20 in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz.

The Iranian squad overcame the Russian side 8-0 in the finals to claim the title of the competitions.

Turkey took the third place, while Kazakhstan, Belarus,



Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Germany ranked fourth to eighth respectively.

During the wrestling bouts at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, Babajanzadeh Darzi's dream for a men's 130-kilogram repechage competition was shattered after Turkish wrestler Riza Kayaalp downed Germany's Eduard Popp 8-0 by technical fall in the semifinal round, and the 25-year-old German did not manage to advance to the next level.

The 26-year-old Iranian heavyweight wrestler received a bye in the first round of his contests at the indoor Carioca Arena 2 stadium in Rio's western district of Barra da Tijuca on August 15.

Babajanzadeh Darzi overcame 29-year-old Chinese counterpart Meng Qiang 3-1 in his first encounter. However, he conceded a 1-3 defeat against Popp later on. (Source: PressTV)

## Radostin Stoychev rejects Iran Volleyball Federation's offer



Radostin Stoychev has rejected an offer from Iran Volleyball Federation.

General Secretary of Iran Volleyball Federation Mahmoud Afshardoost had previously said the federation is on the verge of reaching an agreement with the Bulgarian coach.

"We received an email from Stoychev last night. The coach wrote he is not interested in working with Iran national volleyball team," Afshardoost told the Tasnim news

agency. "Stoychev said he cannot guarantee that they will qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. From now on, we will negotiate with the other candidates," he added.

Iran is not going to renew Raul Lozano's contract.

Under guidance of the Argentinean coach, Iran finished in fifth place in the 2016 Olympic Games. (Source: Tasnim)

## Iran's Abdolhosseini named China karate coach



**S P O R T S** Majid Abdolhosseini desk from Iran has been appointed as head coach of China karate team.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) Executive Board agreed to add karate to the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Karate will consist of three kumite events per gender.

Abdolhosseini took charge of China karate until the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games.

Majid Abdolhosseini was a member of Iran national karate team from 1990 to 2006 and represented the country in numerous competitions including world championships, Asian championships, Asian Games and international competition.

In 1997, Abdolhosseini won a gold medal in Italy in world championship.

The 44-year-old coach has also collected two gold medal in 1995 Asian championship in the Philippines and 2005 in Macau.

## From agents to Zurich, this is the A to Z of transfers

The transfer window opens on Jan. 1, kicking off a month of gossip and speculation. Ahead of that, Mark Ogden presents his A to Z of all things transfer-related.

**A = Agent:** No transfer gets done nowadays without an agent to grease the wheels for the player, buying club or selling club.

**B = Bosman:** It is now 21 years since Belgian footballer Jean-Marc Bosman won the right for footballers to move as free agents at the end of their contracts. Whether it was a blessing or a curse continues to be debated, but almost every transfer window features "Bosman" deals.

**C = Collapse:** The transfer window is littered with deals collapsing at the last minute, with David De Gea's proposed move from Manchester United to Real Madrid falling down in the final seconds of the summer 2015 window.

**D = Deadline:** After a month of transfer madness, it all has to end and the deadline for the winter transfer window will fall on Jan. 31, which just happens to be the same night as a full Premier League fixture programme.

**E = Extension:** Just when you thought that the transfer window was closed, all last-minute deals get an extra two hours to be completed, with "deal sheets" provided to ensure paperwork gets rushed through.

**F = Fax machine:** Despite the oft-repeated claims that "paperwork is being faxed through," all deals are now completed with scanned paperwork being emailed to the league, in which the player has been signed.

**G = Gazump:** The practice of outbidding a rival club for a player, despite a deal already having been struck. Chelsea snatched Willian from Tottenham's grasp in August 2013 with a £32 million bid, despite Anzhi Makhachkala already having accepted a £30m offer from Spurs for the Brazilian.

**H = Hitch:** A particular problem on deadline day, when delayed flights, failed medicals or problematic paperwork can force a deal to fall through.

**I = International Transfer Certificate:** Another hurdle for any club to clear when signing a player from another country is securing clearance, which comes in the form of an International Transfer Certificate that is issued by the league he is leaving.

**J = Juventus:** The Italian champions hold the record for banking the world's biggest transfer fee after selling Paul Pogba to Manchester United last August for an initial £89m that, potentially, could rise to £93m.

**K = Kickback:** The banned practice of offering and / or receiving illegal payments to push through a transfer. These are also known as "bungs."

**L = Loan:** Need a player but don't want him, or can't afford him, on a permanent basis? Then sign him on loan, but remember that he cannot play against his parent club while temporarily employed elsewhere.

**M = Medical:** The paperwork might be done and the player may have agreed terms, but will his dodgy knee or back injury enable the deal to get over the line? The medical is the final checkpoint to a deal getting the green light.

**N = Negotiations:** Deals are done by agents and chief executives / directors of football, who thrash out the fine details of contracts; managers and players are rarely involved in these negotiations.

**O = Out of Contract:** Clubs can still add to their squad outside the transfer window, but players must be free agents. One recent example was Victor Anichebe, who signed for Sunderland in September.

**P = Panic Buy:** Every transfer window has one and it is usually an eleventh hour gamble by an under-pressure manager or club, desperate to find the missing piece of the jigsaw. Some work, most fail.

**Q = Quota:** Premier League clubs must have at least eight home-grown players -- players produced by an English or Welsh club academy -- in their 25-man squad, so there is a limit on how many overseas players can be signed.

**R = Robinho:** No deal sums up the madness of transfer deadline day quite like Robinho's £32.5m arrival at Manchester City in September 2008. Earlier in the day the Brazilian forward was destined for Chelsea but, by 11 p.m., he became the embodiment of new owner Sheikh Mansour's ambitions for City.

**S = Scouting Report:** Ideally, a club will sign a player after a series of scouting reports have been filed, highlighting strengths and weaknesses. But when the heat is on and the clock is ticking, sometimes best practices are overlooked.

**T = Torres:** At £50m, Fernando Torres remains the most-expensive January deal of all-time in the Premier League. The Spanish striker moved from Liverpool to Chelsea in 2011.

**U = Under-24:** Compensation fees must be paid to clubs that lose players under the age of 24 as free agents at the end of their contracts. This provides recompense for the cost of the player's development.

**V = Veto:** Some clubs simply do not do business with each other. Famously, Sir Alex Ferguson vetoed Gabriel Heinze's request to leave Manchester United for Liverpool in August 2007. No player has moved directly between the two clubs since Phil Chisnall left United for Liverpool in 1964.

**W = Work Permit:** Players moving to the Premier League, who do not have a European Union passport, must acquire a work permit to play in England. The UK Home Office operates a points-based system to ensure only those of a sufficiently high quality standard are allowed to sign for clubs. Many poor players slip through the net, however.

**X = Xisco:** The Spanish striker is still regarded as one of the worst transfer window signings, with Newcastle being blocked by FIFA from selling the player on just four months after his £5.7m arrival from Deportivo La Coruna in September 2008. His contract terminated in January 2013 after he scored one goal in nine appearances for the club.

**Y = Youth system:** Prioritised by forward-thinking clubs. They develop home-grown players to either save money on transfer fees or generate income from sales of players such as, in the case of Southampton, Luke Shaw, Adam Lallana, Theo Walcott and Gareth Bale.

**Z = Zurich:** The city where all deals are processed via FIFA's Transfer Matching System. (Source: ESPN)



### Poem of the day

His friend's bright face warms not the enemy  
When love is done--  
Where is the extinguished lamp that made night day,  
Where is the sun?

Hafez

### Prayer Times

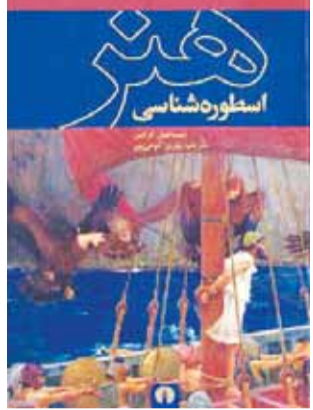
Noon:12:06 Evening: 17:20 Dawn: 5:44 tomorrow Sunrise: 7:14 (tomorrow)

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## "The Mythology of Art" published in Persian

**CULTURE TEHRAN** — A Persian translation of Turkish author Ismail Gezin's book, "The Mythology of Art" ("Sanatin Mitolojisi"), has recently been published in Tehran.



The Elmi Farhangi Publishing Company introduced the book translated into Persian by Behruz Avazpur during a special ceremony in Tehran on Tuesday.

The translator gave a brief explanation about the book, saying that writing is a movement that begins with a myth leading towards art, or the reverse, art that moves towards myth.

"This book is quite the opposite of other complicated texts, it has a very smooth narration with very simple text," he added.

Scholar Hamidreza Shairi also attending the ceremony said that in the world of today, myth has been tied with movement and can move in all directions, adding, "In myth, movements, beliefs and imaginations are hidden."

"Every myth is a verbal picture presented to us. Some of them are even movie products that are made up with moving pictures because of the way they describe certain processes," reads part of the description of the book in Turkish.

"Myths reflects the psychology of antiquity. Art, at least in the beginning, is a psychological need. In this sense, we can argue that art comes from the same source as myths. In other words, written cultural myths are the continuation of the mythological expressions of people before writing," it says.

## Donya Fannizadeh, puppeteer of Iran's most popular puppet Kola-Qermezi, dies at 49

**CULTURE TEHRAN** — Puppeteer Donya Fannizadeh who was mostly known for manipulating Kola-Qermezi, Iran's most popular puppet character that features a playful boy, died on Wednesday at 49 after about ten years battling sarcoma.

The illness severely affected the muscles of her right hand so that she had to use her left hand in the sixth episode of the Kola-Qermezi TV series broadcast in March 2015.

"She passed away at Tehran's Day Hospital today morning," her husband, Abtin Sahami, said in a statement.

Donya was the daughter of actor Parviz Fannizadeh who rejected a proposal from celebrated Iranian director Bahram Beizai for Donya during her childhood to act in one of his works.

Once, in an interview, Donya had said that his father was opposed to her collaboration in cinema as an actress.

"I never understood his reason for the objection, but I respected his view, shifting my focus to puppetry," Donya had said.

She began her career in a puppet show with the TV puppet series "Umbrella with the Song of Rain" in 1985 and then collaborated in other TV puppet series including, "The Curious Little Raven", "The Goat with a Bell Foot", "Hadi and Hoda", "Aunt Spider" and "Salty Mouse".

Donya shot to fame with her collaboration in "Kolah-Qermezi and Pesar-Khaleh", director Iraj Tahmasb's box-office hit in 1992.

She also worked in two episodes of the Kolah-Qermezi series "Kolah-Qermezi and Sarvenaz" in 2001 and "Kolah-Qermezi and Mama's Boy" in 2012.

Her collaboration continued with Tahmasb in the TV series "Kolah-Qermezi" in 2009 and five other episodes.

Once, she had said that she would feel really sad if one day she is told to leave her work with Kolah-Qermezi.

In late September, Donya did a phone interview with anchor Reza Rashidpur on TV program "Hala Khorshid", saying "Kolah-Qermezi is my elder son."



Puppeteer Donya Fannizadeh attends the unveiling ceremony of a collection of stationary bearing images of some characters from the "Kola-Qermezi" series at Azadeh Company in Tehran on October 10, 2013. The images of puppets Kola-Qermezi (R) and Pesar Khaleh are also seen in the background.

She is survived by her husband, Abtin Sahami, and their twin sons, Siavash and Arshia.

In statements published in Persian media, colleagues expressed their deep sadness over Donya's death.

"We never thought we would lose her so soon," Tahmasb and actor Hamid Jebelli, who lent his voice to Kolah-Qermezi in all projects, said in a joint statement.

"But, since the merciful God is the real possessor of man, we wipe our tears and surrender ourselves to this

great grief," they stated.

The statement also read, "She had a profound love of children, whose smiles made her happy. Perhaps not every child will know her, but her influence on children will remain for years."

Kolah-Qermezi producer Hamid Modarresi said, "She made children happy for 22 years and left the stage bitterly."

"Her death is deeply sorrowful," he added.

## NEWS IN BRIEF



### Iranian films on screen at Indian festival

**CULTURE TEHRAN** — Four Iranian films produced by Iran's Farabi Cinema Foundation are on screen at the 6th Kolkata International Children's Film Festival, which is currently underway in the Indian city, Farabi announced on Wednesday.

"Formula 13" by Nasser Rafai, "The Other One's Dad" by Yadollah Samadi, "The Promise" by Mohammad-Ali Talebi and "Ava" by Siamak Kashef-Azar will be screened in the feature film section of the festival.

Nine other Iranian feature and short films produced at Iran's Art Bureau are also on screen at the festival, which will run until December 31.

## TMCA releases "The Sea Suspended"

**ART TEHRAN** — The two-volume pictorial book, "The Sea Suspended", for an exhibition of works by modern Iranian and Arab artists underway at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA), has been published.

The books were introduced during a ceremony held at the museum on Tuesday attended by a large number of artists and officials including Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Ali Moradkhani, TMCA director Majid Mollanoruzi and Karim Sultan, the Curator of the exhibit.

Forty works by Arab artists loaned by the Barjeel Art Foundation in the United Arab Emirates, in addition to forty artworks by Iranian artists selected from

the treasure trove of TMCA, have been put on display in the exhibit until Friday.

Moradkhani regarded the exhibit a positive event and said, "I am happy the artistic activities are carried out by the private sector, which help organize good programs."

He also said that the TMCA enjoys a good status and hoped the obstacles would be removed so that the museum would find a better and higher position.

Mollanoruzi also on his part said that one of the responsibilities of the museum is to showcase world artistic movements.

"This is the first time since the establishment of the museum that it has hosted an exhibition of Arab artists, and

this was a good chance for more dialogue and comparative discussions between Iranian and Arab artists," he said.

"We cannot claim that all the modern Arab art has been displayed in this exhibit, but part of the major modern Arab artistic movement has been showcased," he remarked.

Karim Sultan expressed thanks to the TMCA director and said that the exhibit shows the dialogue about the art of the region and has drawn the attention of the media.

The artists reflect the world like a mirror and this happens even in the most abstract form, he added.

The exhibit, which opened on November 9, will close on December 30.



Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Ali Moradkhani unveils a poster for the book "The Sea Suspended" at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on December 28, 2016. (Honaronline/Saeid Rabiie)

## Carrie Fisher, "Star Wars" Princess Leia, dies at 60

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Carrie Fisher, who rose to fame as Princess Leia in the "Star Wars" films and later endured drug addiction before going on to tell her story as a best-selling author, died on Tuesday aged 60, her family said.

Fisher, a mental health advocate who spoke about her own struggles with bipolar disorder and cocaine addiction, had suffered a heart attack on Friday as she flew into Los Angeles.

The daughter of actor Debbie Reynolds and the late singer Eddie Fisher had been returning from England where she was shooting the third season of the British sitcom "Catastrophe."

"Thank you to everyone who has embraced the gifts and talents of my beloved and amazing daughter," Reynolds said on Facebook. "I am grateful for your thoughts and prayers that are now guiding her to her next stop."

Fisher's friend and former "Star Wars" co-star Mark Hamill, who played Leia's brother Luke Skywalker, said in a tweet: "No words. #Devastated"

Fisher was met by paramedics and rushed to the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center after suffering the heart attack during the flight on Friday.

Fisher reprised the role in two "Star Wars" sequels. She returned last year in Disney's (DIS.N) reboot of the "Star Wars" franchise, "The Force Awakens", appearing as the more matronly General Leia Organa, leader of the Resistance movement fighting the evil First Order.

Filming was completed in July on Fisher's next appearance as Leia in "Star Wars: Episode VIII", which is set to reach theaters in December 2017.

Fisher's Princess Leia makes a surprise appearance at the end of "Rogue One", the latest blockbuster, which opened this month, in the "Star Wars" series.

Shortly after news of her death was made public, her dog Gary, who has his own Twitter account, said goodbye: "Saddest tweets to tweet. Mommy is gone. I love you @carriefisher"

### PICTURE OF THE DAY

IRNA/Bahman Zarei



A group performs a Kurdish dance during the opening ceremony of the Kermanshah Cultural Week on a beach at Qeshm Island on December 27, 2016.

## Iranian photog wins award at Japanese contest

**ART TEHRAN** — Iranian photographer Amir Shokrgozar won one of the three special prizes at the 77th International Photographic Salon of Japan last week.

He received the prize for his single untitled photo, which depicts a boy with his herd in a heavy snow.

Two other special prizes were presented to Serbian photographer Bojan Petrovic for "MP" and Israeli photographer Leonid Goldin.

The contest offered 124 honorable mentions to photographers from over 70 countries including 12 photographers from Iran.

"Where" by Vahid Babai, "Stop War Crimes" by Seyyed Ali Miremadi, "Rain" by Seyyed Mohammad-Sadeq Hosseini, "Mirror" by Parisa Fahami and "In Class" by Mohammad Golchin Kuchi received honorable mentions.

"Bustle" by Mohammad Sobati-Azar, "Hidden Way" by Mehdi Nazari, "No Title" by Mehdi Heidarnejad, "Cold" by Mehdi Aqiqi, "My Husband" by Ghadir Vaqari, "Mourning for Father" by Amir-Hossein Kamali and "The Old Village" by Amin Dehqan also won honorable mentions.

A selection of the submissions to the contest will be showcased in exhibitions in Tokyo, Nagoya, Fukuoka and other major cities in Japan during March 2017.

The contest has been organized by the Asahi Shimbun newspaper and the All Japan Photographic Federation.