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Report of dicing Syria into zones of influence nonsensical, Iran says

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran rejected on Monday a report by Reuters that Syria will be partitioned into "informal zones of regional power influence," branding it as "nonsensical."

"The report is nonsensical," Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi told a press conference.

On Dec. 28, Reuters claimed Iran, Russia, and Turkey had reached an initial deal on dividing Syria into informal zones of regional power influence and Bashar al-Assad would remain president for at least a few years.

Such a deal, the report added, would allow regional autonomy within a federal structure controlled by Assad's Alawite sect.

"Iran has defended Syria's territorial integrity and its national sovereignty and will continue to do so in the future," the spokesman highlighted.

"We won't allow Syria to turn into a place for countries to exert their influence upon it," he added.

Russia and Iran, in stark contrast to a vehemently hostile approach taken by Turkey, have been backing President Bashar al-Assad ever since 2011 when unrest broke out in Syria.

A recent meeting in Moscow has brought the three countries closer to a compromise on the Syrian deadlock. The talks also laid the groundwork for serious talks between the Syrian government and opposing groups.

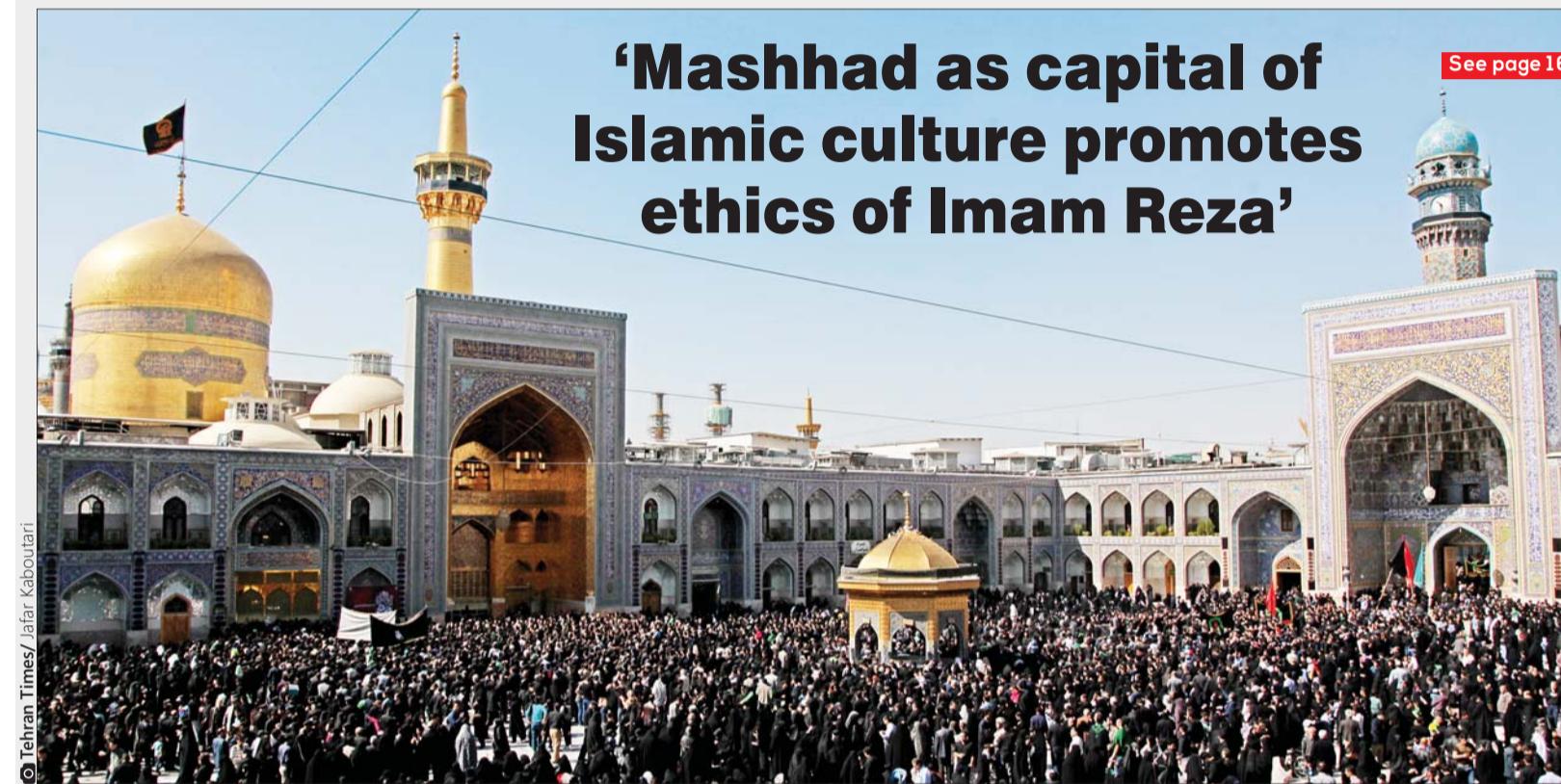
Leader: I back revolutionary, faithful youths

TT POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Monday that

he likes revolutionary and faithful youths and backs them.

"I like revolutionary and faithful youths and sup-

port them," the Leader said during a meeting with a group of highly talented youths from the Sharif University of Technology. →2



29 international firms certified to bid for IPC

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's oil ministry has pre-qualified 29 international companies to bid for its oil and gas projects based on the new model of contracts, known as Iran Petroleum Contracts (IPC).

Anglo-Dutch Shell, France's Total, Italy's Eni, Malaysia's Petronas, Russia's Gazprom and Lukoil, Austria's OMV, Germany's Wintershall, as well as companies from Spain, Poland, China, Japan, India and some other countries are included in the list, SHANA reported on Monday.

In November 2015, Iran introduced IPC aiming to replace buy-back agreements, offering more flexible terms on oil price fluctuations and investment risks to make the sector more financially attractive.

The new contracts, which include those in the upstream exploration and development sectors, are expected to attract more than \$40 billion in foreign investment.

Amir Hossein Zamaninia, the Iranian deputy oil minister for international affairs and trade, said in August 2016 that the country will ink new oil contracts worth billions of dollars with renowned foreign companies by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2017).

Maliki: Mosul disintegration unacceptable

INTERNATIONAL Tehran — Iraq's former prime minister said on Monday that a division of Mosul is unacceptable, noting there are worries about future of the city.

Nouri al-Maliki, who is the secretary-general of the Islamic Dawa Party, said in Tehran that Iraqis oppose disintegration of Mosul.

Before visiting Tehran, Maliki emphasized that Iraqi security forces along with fighters from Popular Mobilization Units and Kurdish Peshmerga are resolute to put an end to ISIL's presence in Mosul and eventually eliminate the terrorists from the Iraqi soil.

Iraqi army soldiers, supported by pro-government Popular Mobilization Units (commonly known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi) and Kurdish Peshmerga, launched a joint operation on October 17 to retake Mosul from Daesh terrorists.

The Iraqi forces' advance has, however, been slowed down due to the presence of hundreds of thousands of civilians, many of whom are prevented from leaving Mosul by Daesh.

Iraqi Staff Lieutenant General Abdulwahab al-Saadi, a top commander in Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), told AFP on Sunday that more than 60 percent of eastern Mosul has been retaken from Daesh Takfiris.

Brigadier General Shalan Ali Saleh, another police officer, said, "Thank God, our troops are advancing according to the plan set by the Joint Operations Command. We are moving slowly to adhere to the instructions of the army chief of staff, who asked that we protect civilians. Most of these areas contain civilians, so we are avoiding the use of rockets and mortars to avoid civilian death."

Meanwhile, the commander of Nineveh Liberation Operation, General Abdul Amir Rashid Yarallah, said Iraqi Special Operations Forces regained full control of Southern al-Karama, Younes al-Sabawi and Yafa neighborhoods in eastern Mosul.

PERSPECTIVE

By Masoud Zamani

International law expert

On Trump, UN and the Logic of Unilateralism

As to the UN, things will be different after Jan 20th, reckoned the president-elect Trump in the wake of the Security Council Resolution condemning Israeli settlements, and thereby sketching his UN related policies.

But exactly how different things will and can be as to the UN after Jan 20th? Yes, neither Trump nor the republican establishment as a whole exactly represents the champion of multilateralism inherent in the work of U.N. Nonetheless, the Trump administration may turn out to be more serious of a threat to U.N. than any of its republican predecessors.

Trump's reaffirmations of the American exceptionalism themes, his unwavering support for Israel, his disagreement with the Paris Agreement, his distaste for humanitarian relief expenditures and his probable disapproval of the new Secretary-General's leftist background may well come to give the UN a very rough time during his presidency.

Undoubtedly, a large part of the UN financial needs is met only by virtue of the U.S. contributions, and certainly, with the increasing financial difficulties of UN, nobody in the world's major organization welcomes more trouble.

Yet, what looks like Trump's fashion of exceptionalism has the potential to harm the U.S. long-term interests in ways more than one.

Unilateralism comes with costs in the international community. One can still remember the reputational blows suffered by the Bush administration over the Iraq war, and other examples of the U.S. disregard for international law in that period. →2

Maternal mortality rate in Iran far below UN SDG target

By Naghmeh Mizanian

TEHRAN — The maternal mortality rate in Iran is far below the target set by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), a founding member of the Family Health Association of Iran (FHA-Iran) told a press conference on December 27.

Low maternal mortality rate is one of the indicators of development in each country, Safieh Shahriari-Afshar, said.

She said the average global maternal

mortality rate is targeted to be less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030.

In 2015, world leaders gathered at the UN to adopt 17 Sustainable Development Goals to achieve several extraordinary things by 2030: end poverty, promote prosperity and well-being for all, and protect the planet.

Currently, Iran is honored to have less than 19 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, Shahriari-Afshar stated.

The world is to achieve the SDG target

of mortality rate of 25 or fewer deaths per 100,000 live births by 2030, however Iran currently stands at the position of 9.5 newborn deaths per 100,000 live births, she explained.

The same statistics in Iran is currently 13.6 per 100,000 live births for children under the age of one year and 15.8 deaths per 100,000 live births for children under the age of five, she added.

Shahriari-Afshar also said Iran is one of the developed countries in providing primary health care services. →12

Trump election could lead to more challenges for EU: Foreign Ministry official

TT POLITICS TEHRAN —

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has said that the election of Donald Trump as the next president of the United States has added another challenge to the European Union's various existing challenges.

In an article published on the website of Jamaran news agency on Sunday, Qassemi described Trump's political positions as "unusual" as well as "destructive", and warned of the troubling consequences of his policies for the EU.

Qassemi noted that commitment to the nuclear agreement – that was reached between Iran

and six world powers – is among the most important concerns of the European Union, saying, "The Europeans would push the new American administration, in particular Donald Trump, to remain committed to the deal."

He added, "Given that one of the determining factors of [good] relations between Europe and America is their stance on post-BARJAM (an acronym for the nuclear agreement) Iran and especially the implementation of

The Europeans would push the new American administration, in particular Donald Trump, to remain committed to the deal.

BARJAM, the way they interact [with each other] would impact relations between Iran and the European Union."

The senior diplomat speculated that during Trump's tenure, the EU would come to the conclusion that it needs to become self-reliant in political and security issues.

This would lead to more divergence between Europe and America and in turn Washington's influence on Iran-Europe relations would be reduced in

comparison to the previous decade, he opined.

"However, this does not mean relations between Iran and the European Union would be improved automatically, but it means that the impact of a nuisance has been reduced," he said, emphasizing that making the most of such opportunity depends on Iran's "art of diplomacy".

Qassemi further said that Iran is ready to make use of such a rift, and described it as a "golden opportunity" that the Trump era could possibly bring about for Iran to develop deeper relations with Europe to reduce the "destructive" effects of Trump's policies.

Anachronistic hand-woven shoes still popular in Iran

The photo shows an old man in Senjan, central Iran, making hand-woven shoes dubbed Giveh.

Giveh is made up of two parts: sole and upper. The sole is usually rubber or leather and the upper is woven thread.

A pair of Giveh is a best choice particularly for hot temperatures.

The hand-woven shoes have customers in some European countries, including Austria, according to Hadis Pazoki, an official with Iran's presidential office for rural development.



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

Iran launches small-caliber ammunition production line

TT POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's defense minister inaugurated a production line for small-caliber ammunition.

During the launching ceremony, Hossein Dehqan said the factory will double the capacity of small-caliber ammunition production, paving the way for exports, Tasnim reported.

The products meet international standards, the minister added, praising local experts for helping the country attain self-sufficiency in making such ammunition.

He said the country is capable of manufacturing state-of-the-art military hardware, describing efforts to develop the country's defense sector as "strategic assets".

Foreign Ministry to launch economic information bank

TT POLITICS TEHRAN — The Ministry of Foreign Affairs plans to launch economic information bank by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2017).

Morteza Sarmadi, the deputy foreign minister, told IRNA on Monday that the bank is intended to develop economic cooperation with different countries and establish real time contacts with foreign firms.

"The economic information of all countries will be available for business people in this bank," he explained.

'Qalibaf would run for president only if all principlists agree on him'

TT POLITICS TEHRAN — A former vice president for parliamentary affairs has said Tehran Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf will run for presidential post only if all principlist groups concur on him.

Speaking to Arman newspaper in an interview published on Monday, Mohammad Reza Mirtajedini said Qalibaf would make the "risk" only in that case.

Mirtajedini said in the 2013 presidential election the principlists had many candidates and that is why they did not succeed.

Amir-Abdollahian hails UN endorsement of Syria ceasefire

TT POLITICS TEHRAN — A senior advisor to the Iranian Majlis speaker late on Sunday praised the UN Security Council for adopting a resolution supporting a ceasefire in Syria, Fars reported.

However, he said "Although the Americans did not veto the resolution, they still have double-standard policy toward terrorism."

An international resolve is needed to fight terrorism, added Iran's former point man for the Middle East affairs.

He said that the roles of Russia and Turkey in trying to resolve the Syrian crisis are very significant.

Bahonar: We endorse Popular Front candidate

TT POLITICS TEHRAN — Mohammad Reza Bahonar, the secretary general of the Front of the Followers of the Line of Imam and Leadership, has said his group will endorse the candidate that will be introduced by the newly established Popular Front of Revolution Forces, Fars reported.

Speaking in a press conference on Monday, Bahonar said having a multiplicity of candidates is good only in the early stages of presidential campaigns, but underscored that principlist groups have to come to terms on one candidate if they wish to win the election.

241 MPs praise air defense drills

TT POLITICS TEHRAN — 241 members of the Majlis on Monday signed a letter in which they thanked the military for the recent series of air defense exercises named Asemeneh Velayat 7.

Addressed to the Khatam ol-Anbiya Air Defense Base which staged the drills last week, the letter said the country takes pride in its "sons" which defend the territory round the clock, ILNA reported.

The MPs stressed that the drills showcased the competence of the armed forces in various areas of air defense.

Leader: I back revolutionary, faithful youths

1→ The Leader also said he attaches great importance to "religious and revolutionary commitment" along with "scientific efforts".

"Scientific progress will not make a country and people happy by itself. Scientific movement will lay the grounds for regulating things in the country and make it a role model in the region, the Islamic world and the (entire) world if it is accompanied by spiritual and revolutionary sublime causes," he stated.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader said the fragility of the Western civilization lies in "lack of spirituality and divine causes".

The Leader added "diligence and resistance on the path of religion and revolution" will help develop the country.

"Great jobs such as the victory of the Islamic Revolution, eight years of sacred defense and also resistance against pressures against the Islamic system were because of the men who were firm and resilient and did not deviate from the path of religion and revolution," the Leader of the Islamic Revolution remarked.

The Leader also pointed to the importance of what he described as "Jihadist presence" in various arenas, saying, "Jihadist action means not getting tired of resisting difficulties and obstacles."

Elsewhere, he said that students' movements should be in line with serving the revolutionary ideals.



Leader says the lack of spirituality and divine values is behind the rifts, shortcomings and frailties of the Western civilization despite its great materialistic advances.

Rouhani seems optimistic about economic prospects

TT POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani said late on Sunday that he is optimistic about the prospects of the country's economy.

"I am very optimistic about the future of the country's economic situation," Rouhani told a televised interview.

He also reassured the people that the foreign currencies' rates will not keep going up.

"The dollar has gained against all currencies in the past few months and it is natural if it also gains in Iran. But the rate of exchange of foreign currencies will certainly not remain at current levels," Reuters quoted Rouhani as saying.

"The stability of (currency) markets is important for the government. The economy has to be predictable so that exporters and importers can act with trust," he said.

Elsewhere, Rouhani attached great importance to the Citizen Rights Charter, noting the people should be aware of their rights.

He added that all the bodies should cooperate to implement the Citizen Rights Charter.

The president declared the rights charter on December 19. The charter, which comprises 120 articles, insists on the right to a "decent life" such as right to clean water, health services, freedom of speech, clean environment, holding rallies, access to information, etc.

Rouhani says JCPOA will benefit all

■ JCPOA benefits all sides'

Rouhani also defended the nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, saying it is a "win-win" game which is "beneficial"



to all sides.

He added, "I have no doubt that the JCPOA was a great job by the Iranian nation. This is a national achievement."

However, the president said he sees "no problem if one expresses his view" about the JCPOA "and criticize" it.

"This is something natural in a democratic society. All are free to talk in our society," he told the live TV program.

He went on to say that the people did an "epic" in 2013 presidential election by making the international atmosphere appropriate for nuclear negotiations.

In his campaigns prior to the June 2013 election, Rouhani vowed to resolve the nuclear dispute with the West, saying "The wheels of centrifuges and the wheels of people's life should both turn."

Iran and the 5+1 group - the United States, Britain, France, China and Russia plus Germany - finalized the

text of the JCPOA in Vienna in July 2015. The deal went into effect in January 2016.

Rouhani also said that international deal defeated the Iranophobia project, adding the world has admitted Iran's "constructive" role.

■ Mideast crises can be settled through diplomacy and resistance'

Rouhani also said Iran supports the countries' territorial integrity and is against changing geographical borders.

The president was indirectly referring to efforts by certain regional and extra-regional powers to divide up Syria.

He also said that Iran helps countries fight terrorism upon their request.

Again the president was indirectly suggesting that Iran is giving military advice to Syria and Iraq in their wars against terrorists upon formal requests by these two countries.

Iran has spared no effort in fighting terrorism, he said, adding conflicts in the Middle East region can be settled through "diplomacy" and "resistance".

He described "diplomacy" and "resistance" as two sides of the same coin.

He also said that Iran, Russia and Turkey have taken good steps in fighting terrorism and expressed hope that planned dialogue between Syria and opposition groups would bear fruit.

Elsewhere, Rouhani said that Iran plays an important role in fighting terrorism and regional diplomacy.

Diplomacy is the "final solution" to the regional crises, he said.

Mogherini renews support for nuclear deal in New Year

TT POLITICS TEHRAN — EU Foreign Policy chief Federica Mogherini has said the nuclear deal, from among eleven other goals, is what she aims to preserve in 2017.

"It is diplomacy that creates new opportunities for our economies, for our citizens, for our region's security. We bring with us in the New Year our determination to preserve this method. And to preserve an historic deal, serving everyone's security," Mogherini said in a post published on her website.

"During the negotiations with Iran, we were often told: you'll never make it," she said. "After we signed the nuclear deal last year, the sceptics said: it's never going to work."

The EU foreign policy chief went on to say that the nuclear deal has worked

against all those predictions. Mogherini also said the 5+1 group and Iran gathered in January 2016 and certified for the first time that all sides had implemented the agreement of July 2015. "Since then, we have kept meeting regularly – the European Union, which

continues to guarantee the agreement, with Iran, the United States, Russia, China, Britain, Germany, France and in constant cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency – to verify the respect of everyone's commitments," she said.

On July 14, 2015, the aforementioned countries signed a nuclear deal, officially termed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Under the deal, Iran was granted relief from sanctions in exchange for it limiting its nuclear program.

We bring with us in the New Year our determination to preserve this method. And to preserve an historic deal, serving everyone's security.

Oman ties not hurt by Muscat joining Saudi-led coalition, Tehran says

TT POLITICS TEHRAN — Tehran downplayed on Monday Muscat's willingness to join the Saudi-led alliance, saying Iran's relations with the Sultanate won't be hurt by the move.

"Our relations with Oman won't be influenced by the country joining the (Saudi-led) coalition," Foreign Ministry spokesman told a press conference in Tehran.

"We have a good understanding of the Omani Sultanate."

The sultanate indicated preparation to take part in

the 40-country alliance in a letter to Saudi Deputy Crown Prince and Defence Minister Mohammed bin Salman.

Iran has shown reluctance to recognize the alliance as an anti-terrorism muscle and rapped Saudi Arabia for an instrumental use of the coalition.

Formally announced in Dec. 2015, the alliance has so far failed to prove effective in fighting terrorism and been mainly used by the Saudis to conduct airstrikes against the Yemeni people.

Oman has traditionally been close to Iran, playing

as a conciliator in regional and international tensions in which Iran has been engaged.

Some sources have viewed the move a shift in Muscat's regional policies and a negative signal to Tehran.

"Oman has always in the past taken positions and policies that are contrary to the (Persian) Gulf positions regarding the region. This now shows the return of Oman to the (Persian) Gulf consensus against Iran and its political positions," Reuters quoted an unspecified source as saying.

On Trump, UN and the logic of unilateralism

1→ In fact, it seems that the possible gestures and moves of the Trump administration against such international law organizations as UN and WTO and such international agreements as TPP, NAFTA and even the Iran nuclear deal cannot but put the U.S. in a very peculiar position —one which effectively transforms the biggest world empire into the planet Trump. Could the president-elect Trump really be unwise or more diplomatically put, unadvised enough to corner the state he represents with his own hands? We are yet to see.

True that the upcoming U.S. executive seems a little more willing to befriend

Russia, however, it cannot certainly afford to unfriend the rest of the world. By all accounts, the U.S. needs the UN more than any other state in the international community. If the future Trump administration takes a step back in relation to its UN aide programs, the Chinese government will most probably take two steps forward to

fill the inevitable gap. If Trump ignores the interests of other members of the Security Council, the Syrian crisis will remain in deadlock indefinitely, and the outflow of war refugees will be increased. If Trump takes a hostile approach to the UN General Assembly, it will risk its own legitimacy and international prestige. In the same

vein, ignoring other organs of the UN and its specialized agencies will result into political, economic and legal consequences in no way favorable to the U.S. interests. What is more, withdrawing from the international treaties, agreements and pacts to which the U.S. is a party can only call into question the reliability of the U.S. commitments in the eyes of its friends and foes alike. These possibilities, if actualized, suggest that the beginning of the planet Trump could put an end to the American dream. Once again, could the president-elect Trump be impulsive enough to actualize all the mistakes he has promised to make? We are yet to see.

ISIL battle in Iraq prevent attacks at home: Hollande

Western support for military action against ISIL (Daesh/ISIS) extremists is key to preventing attacks at home, French President Francois Hollande said Monday in Iraq, where yet another bombing killed dozens.

A suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden car on a square in Baghdad's Sadr City neighborhood, killing at least 32 people in the latest attack on the Iraqi capital claimed by ISIL terrorist group.

France, one of the most active members of the U.S.-led coalition fighting the extremist group, is particularly concerned over the return of a large contingent of French extremists from Syria and Iraq.

"Taking action against terrorism here in Iraq is also preventing acts of terrorism on our own soil," Hollande said at a base where French soldiers have been training elite Iraqi forces.

Hollande, the only major Western head of state to have visited Baghdad since the coalition was set up in 2014, stressed that supporting Iraq was one of the surest ways of securing Europe.

Of European countries targeted by terror attacks claimed or inspired by ISIS, France has been the worst hit, but attacks have also been carried out in Belgium and Germany.

Besides the defeated extremist fighters who are expected to return to Europe in the coming months, radicalized children who grew up in the "caliphate" ISIL proclaimed in 2014 are also seen as ticking bombs.

"We will have to deal with the issue of the return of foreign fighters... who committed crimes, who brought their families with them, including in some cases very young children," Hollande said.

Since it joined the United States in the coalition in September 2014, France says its warplanes have conducted 5,700 sorties, around 1,000 strikes and destroyed more than 1,700 targets.

ISIL claims Istanbul attack, gunman remains at large

Istanbul police detain 8 suspects over nightclub attack

ISIL terrorist group claimed responsibility on Monday for a New Year's Day mass shooting in a packed Istanbul nightclub that killed 39 people, an attack carried out by a lone gunman who remains at large.

It described the Reina nightclub, where many foreigners as well as Turks were killed, as a gathering point for Christians celebrating their "apostate holiday". The attack, it said, was revenge for Turkish military involvement in Syria.

"The apostate Turkish government should know that the blood of Muslims shed with airplanes and artillery fire will, with God's permission, ignite a fire in their own land," the ISIL declaration said.

There was no immediate comment from Turkish officials.

The terrorist group has been blamed for at least half a dozen attacks on civilian targets in Turkey over the past 18 months but, other than targeted assassinations, this is the first time it has directly claimed any of them. It made the statement on one of its Telegram channels, a method used after attacks elsewhere.

NATO member Turkey is part of the U.S.-led coalition against ISIL and launched an incursion into neighboring Syria in August to drive the radical militants from its borders, sending in tanks and special forces backed by fighter jets.

Nationals of Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Lebanon, Libya, Israel, India, a Turkish-Belgian dual citizen and a Franco-Tunisian woman were among those killed at the exclusive nightclub on the shores of the Bosphorus waterway. Twenty-five of the dead were foreigners, according to the state-run Anadolu news agency.

Police distributed a hazy black-and-white photo of the alleged gunman taken from security footage. State broadcaster TRT Haber said eight people had been detained in Istanbul.

The authorities believe the attacker may be from a Central Asian nation and suspect he had links to Islamic State, the Hurriyet newspaper said. It said he may be from the same cell responsible for a gun-and-bomb attack on Istanbul's main airport in June, in which 45 people were killed and hundreds wounded.

The attack at Reina, popular with Turkish celebrities and wealthy visitors, shook Turkey as it tries to recover from a failed July coup and a series of deadly bombings in Istanbul and elsewhere, some blamed on Islamic State, others claimed by Kurdish militants.

Around 600 people were thought to be inside when the gunman shot dead a policeman and civilian at the door, forcing his way in then opening fire with an automatic assault rifle. Witnesses said he shouted "Allahu Akbar" (God is Greatest).

Some at the club jumped into the Bosphorus after the attacker began shooting at random just over an hour into the new year. Witnesses described diving un-



"If Daesh is eradicated in Iraq but remains in Syria, we know full well that acts will be carried out here in the Middle East but also on our own soil in France, in Europe," said Hollande.

France has 14 Rafale fighter jets that are stationed in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates and taking part in coalition operations.

It also has 500 soldiers training and advising elite Iraqi forces and CAESAR artillery vehicles stationed south of Mosul to provide support for ongoing operations to retake the city.

Australia, Britain and Italy are also part of the 60-member coalition supporting Iraq's efforts against ISIS.

Deadly Baghdad bomb -

Hollande said the recapture of Mosul, Iraq's second city and the extremists' last major bastion in the country, was a matter of weeks but warned efforts should then focus on Raqa in Syria.

"If Daesh is eradicated in Iraq but remains in Syria, we know full well that acts will be carried out here in the Middle East but also on our own soil in France, in Eu-

rope," said Hollande.

He met Iraqi President Fuad Masum, a Kurd, and Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, from the largest Shia political bloc, and called for reconciliation and unity after ISIS is defeated.

Hollande began his trip with a visit to a base near Baghdad where French forces are training Iraq's elite Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), the force that has spearheaded most major anti-ISIS operations in Iraq since 2014.

It was CTS that first breached the city limits of Mosul late last year in an effort to retake what is now ISIS' last major stronghold in Iraq.

But the going has been tough for Iraqi forces, partly because hundreds of thousands of civilians have remained in the city, slowing their advance.

Abadi had promised his forces would rid the country of ISIS by the

end of 2016 but he said last week that three more months would be needed to achieve that goal.

Some observers argue the timeline is ambitious, given the continued presence of ISIS fighters in other parts of the country, such as in Hawijah or in the province of Anbar near the Syrian border.

While its "caliphate" appears doomed, ISIS still has the ability to sow chaos by perpetrating suicide attacks on civilian targets.

A suicide car bomb blast killed at least 32 people and wounded more than 60 Monday in Baghdad's Shiite majority neighborhood of Sadr City.

Police officials said bomber struck on a square where daily laborers were waiting for jobs, causing one of the highest casualty tolls in the capital in months.

ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack via its propaganda agency Amaq, saying the "martyrdom operation" had killed about 40 people.

It also claimed another bombing Saturday that left at least 27 dead in a busy area of central Baghdad. (Source: AP)



He pulled his Kalashnikov rifle from a suitcase at the side of the road, opened fire on those at the door, then threw two hand grenades after entering, Haberturk said, without citing its sources. It said six empty magazines were found at the scene and that he was estimated to have fired at least 180 bullets.

der tables as he walked around spraying bullets.

Kalashnikov in suitcase

The attacker was believed to have taken a taxi from the southern Zeytinburnu district of Istanbul and, because of the busy traffic, got out and walked the last four minutes to the entrance of the nightclub, newspaper Haberturk said.

He pulled his Kalashnikov rifle from a suitcase at the side of the road, opened fire on those at the door, then threw two hand grenades after entering, Haberturk said, without citing its sources. It said six empty magazines were found at the scene and that he was estimated to have fired at least 180 bullets.

Security services had been on alert across Europe for new year celebrations following an attack on a

Christmas market in Berlin that killed 12 people. Only days ago, an online message from a pro-ISIL group called for attacks by "lone wolves" on "celebrations, gatherings and clubs".

In a statement hours after the shooting, President Tayyip Erdogan said such attacks aimed to create chaos and destabilize the country.

Four months into its operation in Syria, the Turkish army and the rebels it backs are besieging the ISIL-held town of al-Bab. Erdogan has said he wants them to continue to Raqqqa, the jihadists' Syrian stronghold.

Turkey has also been cracking down on ISIL networks at home. In counter-terrorism operations between Dec 26-Jan 2, Turkish police detained 147 people over links to the group and formally arrested 25 of them, the interior ministry said.

The New Year's Day attack came five months after a failed military coup, in which more than 240 people were killed, many of them in Istanbul, as rogue soldiers commanded tanks and fighter jets in a bid to seize power.

More than 100,000 people, including soldiers and police officers, have been sacked or suspended in a subsequent crackdown ordered by Erdogan, raising concern both about civic rights and the effectiveness of Turkey's security apparatus.

The government says the purges will make the military, police and other institutions more disciplined and effective.

Police detain 8 suspects

Meanwhile, Istanbul anti-terror police on Monday detained eight people suspected of links to the New Year gun attack on a nightclub, a report said.

The Dogan news agency said police were pressing on with operations after making the first arrests over the attack. The suspected gunman is still believed to be on the run.

Turkey has seen repeated attacks in recent weeks. On Dec. 10, two bombs claimed by Kurdish militants exploded outside a soccer stadium in Istanbul, killing 44 people. A security guard who survived that attack was killed at Reina.

A car bomb killed at least 13 soldiers and wounded 56 when it ripped through a bus carrying off-duty military personnel in the central city of Kayseri a week later, an attack Erdogan also blamed on Kurdish militants.

ISIL's Amaq website said the group was behind a car bomb attack that killed 11 people and wounded 100 in the city of Diyarbakir in November, but Turkish authorities denied this and said Kurdish militants carried out the attack.

The Russian ambassador to Turkey was shot dead as he gave a speech in Ankara on Dec. 19 by an off-duty police officer who shouted "Don't forget Aleppo" and "Allahu Akbar". (Source: agencies)

Fresh clashes erupt in Syria's Rif Dimashq

Syrian army soldiers have reportedly clashed with members of the Fateh al-Sham terrorist group, formerly known as al-Nusra Front, in Rif Dimashq Province as the pro-government forces advance against militants in the region.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the fighting broke out in the town of Ain al-Fijah, situated in the provincial district of Wadi Barada, on Monday.

A number of Fateh al-Sham militants were killed and injured in the clashes, the report added, noting the Syrian troops managed to wrest control of several areas around Ain al-Fijah Spring.

Meanwhile, media reports said that since Saturday some 1,300 civilians have fled militant-controlled villages in Wadi Barada for government-held areas.

The displaced Syrians were transferred to the nearby towns of Qudsaya and Dimas.



Terrorists killed in Syria

Syrian government forces have killed dozens of ISIL (Daesh) terrorists during operations carried out in Syria's Homs and Dayr al-Zawr provinces.

According to military sources on Sunday, a large number of terrorists were killed as army units targeted Daesh positions and supply routes throughout the western province of Homs.

The sources noted that a number of armored troop carriers and armed cars plus a bulldozer used by the terrorists were destroyed during the raids.

Several Daeshis were also killed during operations against terrorist-held locations in the eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr.

Russia: Militants violating ceasefire

A nationwide ceasefire deal between militants and the Syrian government, backed by Russia and Turkey, came into force on Friday. Daesh and the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham are not part of the truce.

Russia says anti-government militants have violated the ceasefire numerous times since it came into effect.

The Russian Center for Reconciliation in Syria recorded 21 instances of militant mortar attacks against government positions.

Fateh al-Sham ringleaders slain in Syria

Separately on Sunday, two Fateh al-Sham ringleaders were killed in airstrikes on the area between the towns of Bab al-Hawa and Sarmada in Syria's northwestern Idlib Province.

The UK-based observatory quoted informed sources as saying that the air raids left Abu Omar al-Turkistani and another unnamed terrorist element dead.

The developments come as a nationwide halt to fighting has been holding in Syria since Friday.

The ceasefire, which does not apply to ISIL (Daesh) and Fateh al-Sham terrorist groups, came eight days after the Syrian military announced full control over Aleppo and called it a "crushing blow" to terrorists.

(Source: SANA)

'War taking heavy toll on Yemeni children'

The UN children's agency UNICEF says Saudi Arabia's devastating war in Yemen is hindering efforts to save children from acute malnutrition and deaths caused by preventable diseases.

A UNICEF spokesman in Yemen said Monday that the agency has struggled to provide treatment for over 200,000 children in the war-hit impoverished country, who are afflicted with Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) as a Saudi-led blockade imposed on the country and the shortage of finance are making it increasingly impossible for the agency to carry out its mission.

"This lifesaving work remains hindered by the shortage of funding and limited access to areas caught in the fighting," Rajat Madhok said, adding that the UN agency has been also supplementing vitamin to millions of Yemeni children who have been grappling with malnutrition.

Estimates show that a total of 2.2 million children are suffering from malnutrition across Yemen, which is at war with militants loyal to the former Saudi-backed president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, and has been under Saudi Arabia's relentless airstrikes since March 2015.

UNICEF has only managed to reach to half of the children afflicted with acute malnutrition. Many others are still in life-threatening conditions and exposed to deadly diseases. The UN says at least 1,000 children die every week from preventable diseases across Yemen.

"I have already lost a cousin to malnutrition today; I can't lose my little brother," says Mohammed Ali, a 19-year-old living with his family in northern Yemen, who is struggling to save his five-year-old brother Mohannad suffering from severe malnutrition.

Mohammad says his brother's condition, which began with diarrhea, has been worsening for the past two years, but the family could not afford treatment.

"I can see that my brother's condition is worsening day after day ... There's nothing I can do," he says.

In a report published in December 2016, UNICEF had warned that kids in Yemen are suffering from the highest ever recorded rates of malnutrition amid scarcity of food supplies due to Saudi Arabia's military campaign against its southern neighbor.

"Malnutrition in Yemen is at an all-time high and increasing," said the UNICEF envoy to Yemen, Meritxell Relano, adding, "The state of health of children in the Middle East's poorest country has never been as catastrophic as it is today."

(Source: Press TV)

Tehran to host IRAN BuildEX expo in Feb.

TEHRAN ECONOMY — The 4th International Exhibition of Building Industry, Façade, Structure & Innovative Technologies (IRAN BuildEX) will be held at the Tehran International Permanent Fairground from February 24 to 27.



Some 250 Iranian and 70 foreign companies from 15 countries are to showcase their latest products and achievements in the construction industry, ILNA reported on Monday.

The exhibition seeks to provide a platform for Iranian and international companies to learn and share about the latest developments of building industry in Iran and the global markets.

Deutsche Bank chairman rules out European merger

Deutsche Bank Chairman Paul Achleitner has ruled out a European merger or a state bailout after the lender's mortgage settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice, Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung reported.

The bank, Germany's biggest, last week announced a \$7.2 billion (\$5.8 billion pound) settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice over its sale and pooling of mortgage securities in the run-up to the 2008 financial crisis.

"The management board in principle looks at everything that could help the business," Achleitner said in an interview with the weekly newspaper published on Sunday.

"At the moment, however, enthusiasm for a pan-European merger is muted as we have other priorities," he said, when asked why Deutsche does not merge with Italy's UniCredit or another lender.

Deutsche, which is trying to simplify its operations to make it more efficient, will keep its investment banking operations and ensure they comply with political and regulatory rules, Achleitner said.

Supervisors including Germany's Bundesbank and the European Central Bank have called for more consolidation in the banking sector, saying there are still too many banks despite a steady fall in the number of branches since the 2008 financial crisis.

Higher capital requirements would put European banks at a competitive disadvantage to their U.S. rivals, Achleitner said, referring to efforts by the Basel committee of supervisors to tighten bank capital rules to avoid a repeat financial crisis.

"The global rules, established with the Basel accord, must not one-sidedly reflect the views of the Americans," Achleitner said.

The former finance chief of Allianz (ALVG.DE) said European banks needed to defend their interests more vigorously against rivals in the United States where lenders are helped by state-sponsored bodies such as Fannie Mae, allowing them to shed part of the risk of mortgages.

"It's obvious that national interests are increasingly being defined and represented in a more robust fashion," Achleitner said. "It's about time that we Europeans stand up for our interests too."

Separately, Achleitner said government aid for players in the financial industry would not become an issue in Germany.

"No one in Germany needs to worry about rescuing banks," said Achleitner, who confirmed he will stand for re-election as chairman at the bank's annual general meeting in May.

By contrast, the Italian government has earmarked 20 billion euros (\$21 billion) to bolster its ailing lenders.

The Bank of Italy said on Thursday that total costs for the state bailout of Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena would come to about 6.6 billion euros.

(Source: Reuters)

Italy might leave euro, says leading German economist - probably it should too

By Tim Worstall

One of the leading German economists has suggested that Italy might leave the euro. The point being made by Clemens Fuest, of the Institute for Economic Research, is that the constraints of the euro have meant that Italian living standards have not risen since 2000. So why would they want to stay in such a system if it doesn't achieve the basic task of any economy, rising living standards? He's right, of course he is, although I would obviously go further, extremist that I am. The euro should never have been started, the Southern European countries should not have been allowed in when it was and the sooner all leave the system the better.

"Ifo chief Clemens Fuest said that he believes Italians will reject the Euro currency and return to the Lira. He told Germany's daily newspaper Tagespiegel: "The standard of living in Italy is at the same level as in 2000. If that does not change, the Italians will at some stage say: 'We don't want this euro zone any more'."

It's important to understand the underlying point here. Methods of economic organisation exist so as to make the people better off. Sure, we can add in secondary considerations, things like moves to ever closer European unity for example, but those are political matters. An economic structure, an economic policy, must be judged first and foremost upon its economic effects. And those, for southern Europe, have been dire as far as the euro is concerned:

"The head of Germany's Ifo economic institute believes Italians will eventually want to quit the euro currency area if their standard of living does not improve, he told German daily Tagespiegel."

And why shouldn't the populace demand economic arrangements which make them richer rather than those which feed the egos of the federalists?

"He also said that if Germany's parliament were to approve a European rescue program for Italy, it would impose on German taxpayers risks 'the size of which it does not know and cannot control.' He said German lawmakers should not agree to do this."

(Source: Forbes)

Oil, gas revenues to help develop railways

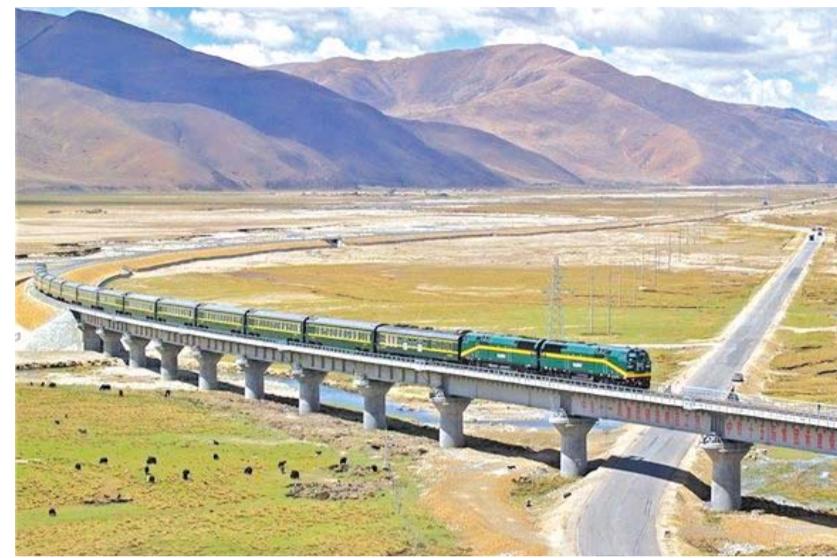
ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's parliament has passed a bill, allowing the administration to allocate one percent of oil and gas revenues annually for railways development projects across the country.

The sum is estimated to be about \$1 billion and will be disbursed over the sixth five-year national development plan, ending in 2021, ISNA quoted Saeed Rasouli, the deputy director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways (IRIR), as saying on Monday.

Moreover, a 10-percent share of the country's diesel sales income, which is estimated to be around \$7.5 billion, will be earmarked for the railways sector, he added.

According to IRNA, the budget will be used in implementing rail transport projects and launching high-speed trains with the main focus on underdeveloped regions.

Transportation through railway rose 100

**Rouhani pledges to reverse slide of Iran's currency**

President Hassan Rouhani sought to reassure Iranians on Sunday that the government would work to protect market stability after the country's currency fell to a record low last week.

"I am optimistic about the country's economic situation and ... I want to reassure our people that foreign currencies will not keep going up," Rouhani said in a live interview with state television.

Iran's rial hit a record low against the U.S. dollar last Monday in a sign of concern about the country's ability to attract foreign money after U.S. President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan. 20.

If the rial's weakness continues, it could

become a political issue ahead of Iran's presidential election in May by threatening some of Rouhani's economic achievements. Rouhani, who took office in 2013, is expected to seek re-election but has not announced it officially.

Economists have said Trump's election in November was a major factor in the rial's weakness. He has said he will scrap the deal between Iran and world powers that imposed curbs on Tehran's nuclear projects and lifted sanctions on the Iranian economy last January.

"The dollar has gained against all currencies in the past few months and it is natural if it also gains in Iran. But the rate

of exchange of foreign currencies will certainly not remain at current levels," Rouhani said, without giving details of how the government plans to defend the rial.

"The stability of (currency) markets is important for the government. The economy has to be predictable so that exporters and importers can act with trust," he said.

Before Rouhani's remarks, the rial strengthened to about 39,000 to the dollar on the free market on Sunday, after sliding to an all-time low of 41,500 last Monday.

The rial's gains came after central bank Governor Valiollah Seif told state television on Saturday that he saw 36,000 rials per

percent in Iran over the past Iranian calendar year 1394 (ended on March 19, 2016) from its previous year and also in 1393 from its preceding year, according to the former head of IRIR, Mohsen Pour Seyed Aqaei.

The national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1396, which starts on March 21, 2017, is based on an oil price of \$50 per barrel, with a focus on unemployment, water resources, railways and the environment.

It estimates crude oil exports at about 2.42 million barrels per day. Oil income has a share of 1.1 quadrillion rials (about \$29 billion) in the budget, a 48 percent rise year on year.

Meanwhile, the budget has allocated 600 trillion rials (about \$15.7 billion) to development projects, compared to 570 trillion rials (about \$15 billion) in the current year's budget.

dollar as a "realistic" rate.

Seif was quoted as telling lawmakers that the central bank was injecting \$5.8 billion in the market to defend the rial.

The currency traded at 35,570 in mid-September. Before December, the record low was about 40,000, hit in late 2012, traders said.

Rouhani's administration stabilized the currency after years of volatility, which helped bring inflation down to single-digit rates from above 40 percent.

Besides the free market exchange rate, Iran uses an official rate, now at 32,375, for some state transactions.

(Source: Reuters)

Demonetization cash crunch pushed Indian factory activity into contraction in Dec.

Indian factory activity plunged into contraction last month as a cash crunch following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's currency crackdown severely hurt output and demand, a survey found on Monday.

The Nikkei/Markit Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index fell to 49.6 in December from November's 52.3, its first reading below the 50 mark that separates growth from contraction since December 2015.

It was also the biggest month-on-month decline since November 2008, just after the collapse of Lehman Brothers triggered a financial crisis and brought on a global recession.

"Having held its ground in November following the unexpected withdrawal of 500 and 1,000 bank notes from circulation, India's manufacturing industry slid into contraction at the end of 2016," said Pollyanna De Lima, economist at survey compiler IHS Markit.

"Shortages of money in the economy steered output and new orders in the wrong direction, thereby interrupting a continuous sequence of growth that had been seen throughout 2016."

The output sub-index at 49.0 was its lowest this year, though the rate of contraction was only slight.

The new orders sub-index which meas-

ures both foreign and domestic demand was also knocked to its weakest in 2016.

Contractions in momentum were reported across all major sub-indexes in the survey, such as purchasing activity and employment, highlighting the blow to the economy after the government's demonetization drive.

Modi's decision to scrap high-value banknotes as part of a crackdown on tax dodgers and counterfeiters removed 86 percent of the currency in circulation virtually overnight, denting consumption in a country where the vast majority of people still rely on cash for day-to-day activities.

Economists have begun slashing GDP forecasts and some of the more pessimistic views are that growth will halve from the 7.3 percent year-over-year rate clocked in July-September, especially as consumer spending accounts for over half of India's output.

The survey also showed output prices rose at a subdued pace last month, while input prices climbed sharply, suggesting manufacturers had little power to pass on rising costs.

With consumer inflation at a two-year low in November, that could fuel hopes of an interest rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India at its next policy review.

(Source: CNBC)

Singapore economy likely grew more than 1% in 2016

Singapore's economy probably grew more than 1 percent in 2016 but the government is keeping a close watch on the labor market as it has shown signs of weakening, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said on Saturday.

Singapore's trade-reliant economy has faced headwinds over the past two years from sluggish global growth, a slowdown in China and falls in global oil prices, which have all weighed on the city-state's marine and offshore engineering industry.

"We expect growth this year to be one plus percent, still positive though less than we had hoped for," Lee said in a pre-recorded New Year message to the nation.

The government had previously forecast that the city-state's economy would grow by 1.0 to 1.5 percent in 2016, which puts the economy on track for its weakest performance since 2009, when gross domestic product (GDP) contracted 0.6 percent.

"While the labor market has eased, unemployment re-

mains low and we are still creating new jobs. I know many employers and workers are concerned, but rest assured the government is watching this closely," Lee said.

The government's Committee on the Future Economy will unveil its recommendations on longer term strategies for growth "in a few weeks' time," he added.

Layoffs in Singapore in the first half of 2016 reached 9,510, the highest since 2009. The unemployment rate was 2.1 percent in the third quarter.

(Source: Bloomberg)

**Samsung warns of slowing growth in key markets**

Samsung Electronics Co. sees growth slowing in key markets and uncertainties increasing around trade protectionism and currency fluctuations.

In his annual New Year's speech Monday, Samsung Vice Chairman and Co-Chief Executive Officer Kwon Oh-hyun urged employees to learn from costly failures as the consumer electronics giant seeks to recover from 2016's bruising debacle surrounding the Note 7 smartphone.

"We should not compromise with even the tiniest problems in product quality," Kwon said at the company's headquarters in Suwon, South Korea. "Let's recover our pride by improving manufacturing processes and safety inspections."

**Big business groups call on UK to take industry's Brexit input**

The heads of five of Britain's biggest trade bodies urged the U.K. to draw on industry's experience as the government negotiates the extent to which the nation is left out of Europe's single market.

Input from companies is "critical" to the success of Brexit negotiations and the government's new industrial strategy, the heads of the Confederation of British Industry, British Chambers of Commerce, Institute of Directors, the manufacturers' group EEF and Federation of Small Businesses wrote in a letter to the Sunday Telegraph.

**Hyundai, Kia target sales rebound after first fall in 18 years**

Hyundai Motor and affiliate Kia Motors on Monday forecast global sales to rebound in 2017 by a stronger-than-expected five percent, after posting their first annual sales fall in nearly two decades last year.

Sales could get a lift this year with emerging markets such as Russia stabilizing, and with Hyundai and Kia Motors gearing up to boost supply to the United States and China, analysts said.

But margins could come under pressure as the South Korean duo - which together rank fifth in global sales - plan to add capacity in China and Mexico.

Turkmenistan halts gas exports to Iran over payment row, Tehran says

Turkmenistan stopped gas exports to Iran on Sunday in a long-running dispute over arrears, Iran's state gas company said.

"Turkmengaz suddenly and ... in an illogical manner, contradictory to the agreement, halted gas deliveries to Iran this morning, demanding quick payment of the disputed amount," the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said in a statement carried by the oil ministry news website Shana.

Turkmengaz had no immediate comment.

NIGC called on consumers to cut gas usage, but said production increases and limiting industrial use could help avoid shortages during the cold winter months.

"Output increases... and cutting consumption in power plants, industry and homes in the winter can compensate for the imports," the NIGC statement said.

Tehran said in December that Turkmenistan had threatened to stop gas exports because of arrears, which amounted to about \$1.8 billion and dated back more than a decade. Iran wanted to refer the issue to arbitration.

But on Friday, Iranian oil minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh was quoted by Mehr news agency as saying that Turkmenistan had reached a temporary agreement with Tehran to continue gas exports.

Iran has major natural gas fields in the south but has imported gas from Turkmenistan since 1997 for distribution in its northern provinces, especially during the winter.

In November, France's Total said it had signed a deal with Iran to further develop its part of the world's largest gas field, becoming the first western energy company to sign a major deal with Tehran since the lifting of international sanctions imposed over Iran's nuclear program.

(Source: Reuters)



Russian oil output in December stays at record highs

Russian oil production in December stood unchanged at 11.21 million barrels per day (bpd), flat month on month and at its highest in almost 30 years, energy ministry data showed on Monday.

Russia is preparing to cut output by 300,000 bpd during the first half of 2017 as a part of a global pact with OPEC aimed at rebalancing the market.

Oil prices ended at \$56.82 last year, more doubling from lows hit early last year.

In tones, production rose to 47.402 million in December from 45.884 million in November.

In 2016 in total, output reached 547.499 tones, or

10.96 million bpd, up from 10.72 million in 2015.

According to preliminary data, which excludes some producing units at some firms, output month on month was slightly down at Rosneft, including Bashneft, and at Gazprom Neft.

Lukoil, Tatneft and production-sharing agreements showed an increase.

The Russian energy ministry has said that its planned output reduction would be gradual as production cannot be cut abruptly due to weather and technological conditions.

"Russian producers have significantly increased drilling

over 2016 in efforts to stem field decline," Toril Bosoni from the International Energy Agency told Reuters.

"While little information on the duration of production cuts has been made public, provisionally we assume that output will rise gradually again during the second half of 2017."

For 2017 as a whole, the Russian energy ministry forecasts oil production at 548-551 million tones, or 11.01-11.07 million bpd.

Natural gas production in Russia in December rose to 66.38 billion cubic meters (bcm), or 2.14 bcm a day, from 62.59 bcm in November.

(Source: Reuters)

PICTURE OF THE DAY IRIB/Morteza Fakhrinejad



Phases 22-24 of the South Pars gas field will add two billion cubic feet to the field's total gas extraction capacity once its four platforms come on stream. Iran is extracting over 15 billion cubic feet of gas per day from the field (which the country shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf) and the figure is anticipated to reach 17.6 bcf by March 2017.

World oil and gas industry faces an 'abundance' of rigs in 2017

The global oil and gas industry is facing a glut of new-build assets with no contracts in place for their use, the boss of an Aberdeen-based energy service firm has warned.

Allan Durham, managing director of Norwegian-owned Presserv Limited, said an "abundance" of rigs and vessels were currently being built speculatively by investors.

He added: "There are at least 61 floaters on order, including drill ships and semi-submersibles."

"Of these, 85 percent are being built speculatively, mainly in south-east Asia. It is unlikely that the speculative builds will find contracts until at least 2019 – assuming a market upturn."

Durham said the delivery of 112 new-build jack-ups would be rolled out globally from the

second quarter of 2017.

With 32 older jack-ups heading for retirement this year, this leaves 80 new-builds entering an already-saturated market, he said.

Presserv, which specializes in preservation and corrosion protection within oil & gas and shipping markets worldwide, urged offshore contractors and operators to "think strategically" about their new assets.

Durham added: "The longer an asset lies unused, the more work and greater the cost involved in reactivating it when the market regains buoyancy."

The global industry has massively reined in offshore exploration spending since 2013, and this trend is expected to continue in 2017.

Despite this, new assets continue to

be built even while existing rigs and vessels are mothballed. It is estimated that upwards of 90 jack-up rigs are currently lying idle.

Durham said: "As some oil companies buy their way out of contracts in an effort to cut future expenditure, they must consider how they will protect their assets."

"By adopting a robust preservation program from fabrication through to commissioning, it is possible to reduce downtime and, in turn, loss of income."

"Only then can contractors and operators be confident that they have fully protected their assets and the interests of their investors."

Oil and Gas UK upstream policy director Mike Tholen said: "The oversupply of rigs and vessels shows the scale of the downturn that the industry has had to address over the last two years."

"Globally, the oil and gas sector has become much more competitive and opportunities around the North Sea may be able to attract some of these resources and put them to productive use over time."

Stavanger-headquartered Presserv has a branch office in Oslo and subsidiaries in Aberdeen and Vitoria, Brazil.

(Source: Energy Voice)

Oil India hits 15-month high

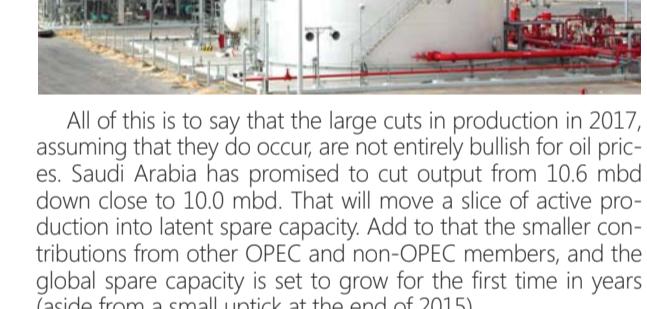
Oil India has moved higher to its 15-month high of 461 rupees (Rs), up 2.3 percent on the BSE in intra-day trade in an otherwise weak market.

The stock of oil exploration & production firm was trading at its highest level since October 8, 2015. At 11:05 am; the S&P BSE Sensex was down 0.56 percent or 150 points at 26,477.

Oil India has fixed January 13, 2017 as the record date for the purpose of ascertaining the eligibility of shareholders for issuance of bonus shares in the ratio of 1:3 (i.e. 1 bonus equity shares of Rs10 each for every three existing fully paid up equity share of Rs10 each). The stock will turn ex-bonus on January 12, 2017.

In past two-months, Oil India has outperformed the market by gaining 11 percent as compared to 3.8 percent decline in the benchmark index. A sharp recovery in crude oil prices also lead rally in the stock.

(Source: Business Standard)



All of this is to say that the large cuts in production in 2017, assuming that they do occur, are not entirely bullish for oil prices. Saudi Arabia has promised to cut output from 10.6 mbd down close to 10.0 mbd. That will move a slice of active production into latent spare capacity. Add to that the smaller contributions from other OPEC and non-OPEC members, and the global spare capacity is set to grow for the first time in years (aside from a small uptick at the end of 2015).

More spare capacity will provide a bit of buffer to any potential outage in 2017, smoothing out the sharp edge of a hypothetical price spike. "If you've got OPEC full adherence for the first six months, the market should be relatively insulated from political risk because that cushion is available," Alan Gelder, a vice president of Wood Mackenzie Ltd., told Bloomberg in an interview. Only a major outage in Saudi Arabia would be an unfixable problem for the oil market, he says. "Anything else should be able to be accommodated."

That suggests that oil price volatility could be lower in 2017. Volatility is already at its lowest level in a year, which underscores the same argument: volatility plunged following the OPEC deal, as a greater level of certainty spread over the market (see chart: OVX is an index that tracks oil price volatility). And the resulting spare capacity that will result from the OPEC deal could lead to a sustained period of lower volatility. The "managed" market of OPEC has always been more stable than the "free" market in which OPEC jockeyed for market share.

The one other factor to keep an eye on is the near-record level of oil inventories, which will act as a second form of spare capacity – supply that can be called upon in a moment's notice. That is another reason to believe that volatility will be less of a problem in 2017 than it was in 2016. The flip side of that is that the OPEC cuts will tighten the supply/demand balance, and will likely force drawdowns in inventories over the course of 2017. Once inventories come down to long-run averages, then there will be a smaller buffer for the global oil market. But, again, OPEC should have a little bit more capacity to work with to resolve any unexpected problem. After more than two years of volatility, we could be in for a smoother ride in 2017.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Blast hits Azeri gas pipeline

An explosion has occurred at a gas pipeline near Azerbaijan's capital Baku early on Monday, the country's Emergencies Ministry said, the second such incident in a week.

An explosion hit the Baku-Alyat pipeline at around 0700 local time (0300 GMT), causing a fire that the ministry said had been contained.

It gave no reason for the accident and there were no reports of casualties.

Last week, the same section of the pipeline was hit by explosion that led to a fire.

(Source: Reuters)



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Life is about Choices. Choose Wisely.

Glasnost 1988: Historic moment for Iran and Russia

By Eric Walberg

On January 1, 1988, just a year and a half before he passed away on June 3, 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini made a historic move, reaching out to the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, in a gesture of anti-imperialist solidarity, despite the long hiatus in relations with communist Russia. This was at a time of war against Iraq and continued subversion of Iran by the U.S. and Israel. He sent President Gorbachev his only written message to a foreign leader.

Ayatollah Khomeini made other prescient gestures in his short and difficult decade as the leader of the Islamic revolution in Iran; in the first place, the transfer of the Israeli embassy to Palestinian representatives, the canceling of recognition of Israel, and the inauguration of al-Quds Day as an annual international holiday on the last Friday of Ramadan. He met with Fidel Castro and other third-world leaders, encouraging solidarity against the imperialist foe.

The unprecedented visit of the Iranian delegation to Moscow was a sincere offer of support to the faltering Soviet leader, who had rejected the atheism of the Soviet past. It contrasts with the treatment of Gorbachev's new friend, Reagan, who was at the same time conspiring to subvert the Soviet Union, even as Gorbachev was sincerely reaching out to the hawkish Reagan, offering a generous plan of world nuclear disarmament.

The Ayatollah's warning not to trust the West was being brought home to Gorbachev graphically as the last Soviet troops were retreating into Uzbekistan in 1988. Despite the unilateral withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, the U.S. was continuing to arm the insurgents, killing those doomed soldiers as they crossed the Afghanistan-Uzbekistan Friendship Bridge, built in 1982. Imperialism takes no prisoners.

Iran played no part in the U.S.-backed "terrorism" in Afghanistan in the 1980s that brought the collapse of the Soviet Union. Iranian leaders knew that nothing good would come from working in alliance with America.

■ Illusory heaven

The Ayatollah knew this well, and was alarmed at the naïveté of Gorbachev. The

Ayatollah warned in his letter that the Western world was an "illusory heaven" that appeared seductive. But the truth lies elsewhere. "If you hope, at this juncture, to cut the economic Gordian knots of socialism and communism by appealing to the center of western capitalism, you will, far from remedying any ill of your society, commit a mistake which those to come will have to erase. For, if Marxism has come to a deadlock in its social and economic policies, capitalism has also bogged down, in this as well as in other respects though in a different form."

Gorbachev was offended and objected. "This invitation is an interference in the internal issue of a country. Because every country is free for selecting its school of thought." He took the Ayatollah's sincere advice as interference, rather than friendly concern. "Imam Khomeini invited us to Islam; do we have to invite him to our school of thought?"

History has proved the fears that the Ayatollah expressed justified. Gorbachev was standing on the edge of the abyss. Sadly, he scoffed at the ability of the Ayatollah to see the danger and to want to help him. But it was too late by then. Gorbachev had lost control, thinking he was handing power to the people, not recognizing that such a wish was another illusion. The disaster of the collapse of the Soviet Union will reverberate for generations to come, as the Ayatollah predicted.

Gorbachev was operating on a different wavelength when he received the letter from the Ayatollah, trying to cozy up to Israel and the U.S., again, naively thinking goodwill gestures would be reciprocated. He opened the doors to the emigration of Soviet Jews in 1988 and prepared to renew full diplomatic relations with Israel.

At the same time Gorbachev promised Arafat during a state visit that year that the Soviet Union would recognize an independent Palestinian state if proclaimed, naively hoping that Israel would show gratitude for his generosity by negotiating a genuine peace with the Palestinians. Arafat declared independence in November 1988 and got Soviet recognition the next year, but it was not much consolation. Israel was busy setting up consular offices in Moscow and elsewhere, issuing eventually a million visas to Soviet Jews



Javad Amoli meets Gorbachev on 7 Jan. 1989 to officially deliver Ayatollah Khomeini's letter to him in Moscow.

Russia and Iran are already playing key roles in establishing this new reality, building on the first step taken by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1988.

to come to Israel.

Hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews got instant Israeli citizenship and emigrated, many of them settling illegally in the Occupied Territories, nominally part of a Soviet-recognized Palestinian state. By the end of 1991 when full diplomatic relations with Israel were restored, over 325,000 Soviet Jews had emigrated. Gorbachev's hope to bring a quick peace to the Middle East were dashed as he was ousted from power, leaving the PLO abandoned and Israel stronger than ever.

Just as the Zionists had hoodwinked Stalin into recognizing Israel, they once again hoodwinked a Soviet leader into re-recognizing it. Instead of increasing Soviet/Russian influence by this dual recognition, all influence was lost. The Palestinians were hurt by the Soviet betrayal, while the Israelis welcomed a million new Jewish immigrants.

■ Gorbachev's trust

Gorbachev's trust was betrayed by both the U.S. and Israel; the Soviet Union collapsed as Soviet Jews fled to the illusory Western

heaven. The world logically expected a new era free of the threat of war, a peace dividend that would improve the lot of people everywhere, ensuring that the material imperative behind war was eliminated. But the triumph of empire has never led to an end to empire, and strengthening empire has never led to improving the lot of the periphery.

This was clear in the centuries of imperialism, where the periphery was impoverished at the expense of the center. There was no reason to believe a new Great Game of empire could be any different, even Bush I's postmodern variant, with the U.S. firmly in control. Indeed, the impoverishment of all who are not part of the center/periphery elite has only accelerated.

Today, the U.S. continues to work with the Saudis to destabilize the Iran-Iraq "Shia arc" replaying the endgame against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, this time with clandestine operations being carried out by the U.S., Saudis and Israelis--all jealous of Iran's increasing influence in the Middle East.

Putin picks up Gorbachev's torch.

U.S. support for terrorists continues to haunt the region, notably in Syria, even as U.S. power ebbs. Following the uprisings in the Arab world in early 2011, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev suggested that the revolts in the Arab world were sparked by outside forces scheming to undermine Russia. "I won't call any names but a whole range of countries, even those we have friendly relations with, have nevertheless been involved in terrorism in the [Russian] Caucasus."

In the ideological vacuum created by the collapse of communism, two Russian ideologies have arisen--Atlantism and Eurasianism, both with roots in the nineteenth century, the latter, a geopolitical reaction to the decadence of the West, articulated persuasively by Nikolai Trubetskoi and Lev Gumilev in the mid-1920s and today by Alexander Dugin.

Russia and Iran are already playing key roles in establishing this new reality, building on the first step taken by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1988. The world's problems will only be solved based on a new geopolitical reality with Russia and Iran at its heart, the kernel of truth in the Ayatollah's historic gesture in 1988.

(Source: opednews.com)



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ANALYSIS

By Nauman Sadiq

Since the times of the Soviet-Afghan jihad, during the eighties, it has been the fail-safe game plan of the master strategists at NATO to raise money from the oil-rich emirates of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE and Kuwait; then buy billions of dollars' worth of weapons from the arms' markets of the Eastern Europe; and then provide those weapons and guerilla warfare training to the disaffected population of the victim country by using the intelligence agencies of the latter's regional adversaries. Whether it's Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, Libya or Syria, the same playbook has been executed to the letter.

More to the point, raising funds for proxy wars from the Persian Gulf Arab States allows the Western executives the freedom to evade congressional scrutiny; the benefit of buying weapons from the unregulated arms' markets of the Eastern Europe is that such weapons cannot be traced back to the Western capitals; and using jihadist proxies to achieve strategic objectives has the advantage of taking the plea of plausible deniability if the strategy backfires, which it often does. Remember that al-Qaeda and Taliban were the by-products of the Soviet-Afghan jihad, and the Islamic State and its global network of terrorists is the blowback of the proxy war in Syria.

Notwithstanding, the Western interest in the Syrian civil war has mainly been to ensure Israel's regional security. The Shi'a resistance axis in the Middle East, which is comprised of Iran, the Syrian regime and their Lebanon-based proxy Hezbollah, posed an existential threat to Israel; a fact which the Israel's defense community realized for the first time during the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war during the course of which Hezbollah fired hundreds of rockets into northern Israel.

Those were only unguided rockets but it was a wakeup call for Israel's military strategists that what will happen if Iran passed the guided missile technology to Hezbollah whose area of operations lies very close to the northern borders of Israel?

Therefore, when the protests broke out against the Assad regime in Syria, in early 2011 in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings, under pressure from the Zionist lobbies, the Western powers took advantage of the opportunity and militarized those protests with the help of their regional allies: Turkey, Jordan and the Persian Gulf Arab States. All of the aforementioned states belong to the Sunni denomination, which have been vying for influence in the Middle East against the Shi'a Iranian axis.

Moreover, since the beginning of

NATO's playbook of proxy wars in Middle East



the Syrian civil war in August 2011 to June 2014, when the Islamic State overran Mosul in Iraq, an informal pact existed between the Western powers, their regional allies and the Sunni Arab jihadists of the Middle East against the Shi'a resistance axis. In accordance with the pact, the Sunni militants were trained and armed in the training camps located in the border regions of Turkey and Jordan.

This arrangement of an informal pact between the Western powers and the Sunni Arab jihadists of the Middle East against the Shi'a Iranian axis worked well up to August 2014, when Obama Administration made a volte-face on its previous regime change policy in Syria and started conducting air strikes against one group of Sunni militants battling against the Syrian regime, i.e. the Islamic State, after the latter transgressed its mandate in Syria and overran Mosul and Anbar in Iraq and threatened the capital of another steadfast American ally: Masoud Barzani's Erbil in the oil-rich Iraqi Kurdistan.

After the reversal of policy in Syria by the Western powers and the subsequent Russian military intervention on the side of the Syrian regime, the momentum of Sunni Arab jihadists' expansion in Syria has stalled and they now feel that their Western patrons have committed a treachery against the Sunni jihadists' cause; that's why, they are infuriated and once again up in arms to exact revenge for this betrayal.

If we look at the chain of events, the timing of the Paris and Brussels attacks has been critical: the Islamic State overran Mosul in June 2014, the Obama Administration began conducting air strikes against the Islamic State's targets in Iraq and Syria in August 2014, and after a lull of almost a decade since the Madrid and

London bombings in 2004 and 2005, respectively, the first such incident of terrorism took place on the Western soil at the offices of the Charlie Hebdo in January 2015, and then the Islamic State carried out the November 2015 Paris attacks and the March 2016 Brussels bombings.

Notwithstanding, it is an irrefutable fact that the United States sponsors the militants, but only for a limited period of time in order to achieve certain policy objectives. For instance:



the United States nurtured the Afghan jihadists during the Cold War against the erstwhile Soviet Union from 1979 to 1988, but after the signing of the Geneva Accords and the consequent withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan, the United States withdrew its support from the Afghan jihadists.

Similarly, the United States lent its support to the militants during the

Libyan and Syrian civil wars, but after achieving the policy objectives of toppling the Qaddafi regime in Libya and weakening the anti-Israel Assad regime in Syria, the United States relinquished its blanket support from the militants and eventually declared a war against a faction of Syrian militants, the Islamic State, when the latter transgressed its mandate in Syria and dared to occupy Mosul and Anbar in Iraq in early 2014.

The United States' regional allies in the Middle East, however, are not as subtle and experienced in the Machiavellian geopolitics. Under the misconception that the alliances in international politics are permanent, the Middle Eastern autocrats keep pursuing the same untenable policy indefinitely, which was laid down by the hawks in Washington for a brief period of time in order to achieve certain strategic objectives.

For instance: the security establishment of Pakistan kept pursuing the policy of training and arming the Afghan and Kashmiri jihadists throughout the '80 and '90s and right up to September 2001, even after the United States withdrew its support from the jihadists' cause in Afghanistan in 1988 after the signing



and videos of the Islamic State's brutality surfaced on the internet.

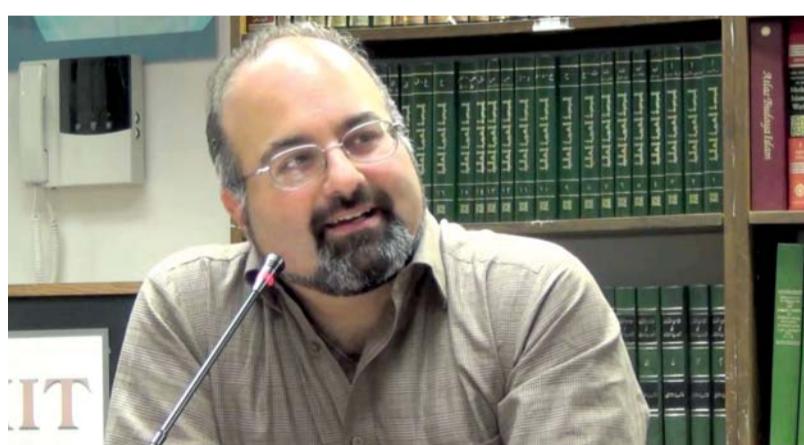
Keeping up appearances in order to maintain the façade of justice and morality is indispensable in international politics and the Western powers strictly abide by this code of conduct. Their medieval client states in the Middle East, however, are not as experienced and they often keep pursuing the same unsustainable policies of training and arming the militants against their regional rivals,

Administration has also lent its support to the Shi'a-led government in Iraq, but the Shi'a Arabs of Iraq are not the trustworthy allies of the United States because they are under the influence of Iran.

Therefore, the Obama Administration was left with no other choice but to make the Kurds the centerpiece of its policy in Syria and Iraq after a group of Sunni Arab jihadists transgressed its mandate in Syria and overran Mosul and Anbar in Iraq from where the United States had withdrawn its troops only in December 2011. The so-called Syrian Democratic Forces are nothing more than Kurdish militias with a tinkering of mercenary Arab tribesmen in order to make them appear more representative and inclusive in outlook.

As far as the regional parties to the Syrian civil war are concerned, however, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Persian Gulf Arab States might not have serious reservations against the close cooperation between the United States and the Kurds in Syria and Iraq, because the Persian Gulf Arab States tend to look at the regional conflicts from the lens of the Iranian Shi'a threat. Turkey, on the other hand, has been wary of the separatist Kurdish tendencies in its southeast more than the Iranian Shi'a threat.

The sudden thaw in Turkey's relations with Russia and latent hostility towards the West is partly due to the fact that Erdogan holds the US-based preacher, Fethullah Gulen, responsible for the July coup plot and suspects that the latter has received tacit support from certain quarters in the United States' intelligence community; but more importantly, Turkey also feels betrayed by the duplicitous Western policy in Syria and Iraq, and that's why it is now seeking close cooperation with Russia in the region.



INTERVIEW
By Mohammad Mazhari

With the advent of extremist fundamentalists with a claim on Islam and who however commit the most abominable acts of atrocity in the name of the same religion, western circles seeking the flimsiest of pretexts to discredit the very religion of Islam through depicting a violent and irrational image of it, came to the fore to exploit the opportunities thus created. The sectarian strife within Islam fueled even further by countries supporters of terrorism provides a grim image of the religions the Messenger brought as a religion of peace 14 centuries ago to unify the Ummah and to bestow mercy upon the downtrodden and the oppressed of the world. His recommendation for Muslims was to deal others even enemies out of mercy.

Mr. Omid Safi sat with our correspondent earlier this week to address the roots of the extremism and contributing factor to their utterly lurid

nature of atrocity which hit for the most part the world of Islam; Mr. Safi believes that destructive contribution of the western powers and their Arab allies seek merely their parochial interests through an ideology equally monolithic in interpretation of the scriptures, which countenances sectarian rift and allow such atrocities with no qualms.

Professor Omid Safi is a Professor of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Duke University. He is also the Director of the Duke Islamic Studies Center.

You have formerly pointed out that tensions in Islamic world are not ideological or theological but are due to geopolitical competitions between powers. Can you explain your idea?

In the Muslim majority countries, there is a competition that connects to geo-political interests. We see a coalition of Iran/Russia/Syria on one hand, and a Turkey/Saudi/United States on the other hand, though Turkey is also now moving closer to Russia. In other words, it is not enough to see this as

Islam religion of mercy, Prophet mercy to whole universe

a mere "Sunni/Shi'a" conflict, but often predicated by these geopolitical elements. I wrote an article about this last year.

Can we suppose that the advent of extremist groups such as ISIS in our modern era supports Max Weber's idea on development of Islam by Muslim warriors who sake this-worldly religion? Or we must take into consideration sectarian divisions in Islam and suppose these groups just as an exception?

No, I think these kinds of groups are more complicated. They are actually nihilistic groups, unlike classical Islamist groups that wanted to establish Islamic states, they offer merely death and destruction with no clear path of building a state. I don't see them as "this-worldly", and certainly not "other-worldly", but rather what happens when religion is emptied of all mercy, tenderness, and intellect.

Do you agree that terrorist groups are result of poverty and marginalization of religious people in modern societies? Is that a kind of a reaction to capitalization and marketization of everything?

Not at all. It has been long established that there is no direct correlation between poverty and religious extremism. I tend to look to more historical and political factors: so on one hand, groups like ISIS have a clear

link to the Wahhabi influenced interpretation of Islam espoused by Saudi Arabia. They are also jihadist in their orientation, armed and fueled by hyper-militarized societies. But there is also a blame that has to be assigned to Western regimes. When the United States illegally invaded Iraq and destroyed the cursed regime of Saddam Hussein, they did so without a plan for nation-building, or even rudimentary understanding of the very complex country they were occupying. So they fired thousands of officers and soldiers from the Ba'thist regime, who then had no plan for employment.

Absolutely. Nationalism poses a serious challenge, especially when it is wed to both geopolitical interests, sectarianism, and the "divide and con-

quer" policies of the West. I hope that unity will come not as uniformity: the diversity of Muslim interpretations and practices is in and by itself not a negative. But we have so much to offer one another, as long as we refuse the siren call of politicians from inside and outside of the Muslim-majority world who insist on dividing us.

In your point of view, how can Muslims get united? And is it possible or practical despite of theological differences between Muslims?

Absolutely. Nationalism poses a serious challenge, especially when it is wed to both geopolitical interests, sectarianism, and the "divide and con-



quer" policies of the West. I hope that unity will come not as uniformity: the diversity of Muslim interpretations and practices is in and by itself not a negative. But we have so much to offer one another, as long as we refuse the siren call of politicians from inside and outside of the Muslim-majority world who insist on dividing us.

In a word, what is legacy of Prophet Muhammad for Muslims and the whole world?

Mercy. Above all, Rahmat. In an age when people are killing one another over who is a part of the "community of Muhammad" (Ummat-e Muhammadi) and who loves the family and companions of the Prophet (Al-e Muhammadi), who quickly we have forgotten that the Prophet is above else a Mercy not just to this world, but to all the universes that exist and could exist. This is the meaning of "wa ma arsalnaaka illa rahmatun lil 'alamin". He is truly the "Nabi-ye Rahmat", the very embodiment of God's qualities of mercy and compassion and all. We should start with that, and always ask whether any word, any thought, any action confirms to the meaning of mercy, love, tenderness, justice, and compassion as embodied by the Prophet or not. May we become worthy of bearing the fragrance of the Prophetic qualities, insha'allah.

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A breathing technique to help you relax

The practice of yoga incorporates many separate breathing techniques (above and beyond the coordinated breathing you do during yoga routines) that can help relax you and release tension. And many of these techniques can be done anytime, anywhere—not just during yoga class.

If you'd like to reap the benefits of these breathing techniques, start with the abdominal breathing technique described below. Once you've mastered abdominal breathing, you can then try others based on the unique benefits that each technique offers.

Abdominal breathing

As we go about our daily lives, most of us take quick, shallow "chest breaths" that can leave us feeling tense and drained. Abdominal breathing, also called "belly breathing," is a basic yoga breath that combats the effects of chest breathing. The technique emphasizes breathing deeply to create abdominal movement. It's essential for those beginning a yoga practice, but everyone can benefit from learning it, yogi or not.

Abdominal breathing is best learned while lying on your back, with one or both of your hands on your abdomen. To take an abdominal breath, inhale slowly and deeply, drawing air into the lowest part of your lungs so your hand rises. Your belly should expand and rise as you inhale, then contract and lower as you exhale. One way to think of this is to imagine your lungs as two glasses of water—with each breath, you

should fill them from the bottom up, but empty them from the top down.

Once you're comfortable doing abdominal breathing in a reclining position, you can try it while sitting or standing. You can use this technique as you practice a yoga posture or while meditating. It is also useful at any time of the day when you need to calm down.

Increased well-being: Another reason to try yoga

The ability of yoga to help dial back both physical and mental problems is reason enough to try it. But there's more. Even at this early stage of research, a regular yoga practice appears to

health. For example, yoga can help improve your sleep, which in turn gives you more energy and focus during your day. When you feel better physically and mentally, you have the energy to adopt better habits, including a healthier diet and more physical activity. These changes in turn can lead to better weight control, which helps with a host of physical problems. More exercise—not to mention fewer aches and pains—can improve your sleep, and so the cycle continues.

Better sleep

How do you feel when you wake up in the morning—refreshed and ready to

Yoga facilitates sleep by reducing stress, anxiety, and arousal—all known causes of poor sleep.

correlate with increased wellbeing, including better sleep, better body awareness, weight loss, and greater happiness. By improving mindfulness, it simultaneously helps to boost compassion, gratitude, and "flow" states, all of which contribute to greater happiness. Early evidence suggests that yoga may even slow aging on the cellular level, perhaps through its stress-busting effects.

What makes these findings so exciting is that they suggest that a regular yoga practice can improve multiple areas of your life at once, creating positive feedback loops that can further promote

go, or groggy and grumpy? As many as one in four Americans sleeps less than six hours a night. Insufficient sleep can make you too tired to work efficiently, to exercise, or to eat healthfully.

Over time, sleep deprivation increases the risks for a number of chronic health problems, including heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. But emerging research shows that yoga may help you fall asleep faster, sleep longer, and sleep more soundly—without the negative side effects of medication.

Yoga facilitates sleep by reducing stress, anxiety, and arousal—all known

causes of poor sleep. One small study looked at a Kundalini meditation and breathing practice. Twenty people who had trouble sleeping did the 30-minute practice every night before going to bed. After eight weeks, researchers found that the participants were sleeping 36 minutes longer on average and waking up less during the night. Over all, the quality of their sleep improved by 11%.

Sleep problems tend to increase as you get older, but a study done on adults ages 60 and up offers some good news. When scientists surveyed 35 seniors who had been doing a daily yoga practice for at least two years, they found that those who did yoga fell asleep 10 minutes faster, got an extra hour of sleep, and felt more rested when they woke up in the morning, compared with seniors who did not do yoga.

Yoga even helps with full-fledged insomnia. While following common advice on how to get a good night's sleep can reduce sleep problems, people in one study fell asleep 37% faster after eight weeks of yoga compared with 28% for those who received only the advice.

Research shows that there is a "dose-response" effect—meaning that the more you practice yoga, the fewer sleep disturbances you are likely to experience and the more restorative your sleep will be. Even if you don't have problems falling asleep, yoga can improve the quality of your slumber.

(Source: health.harvard.edu)

Why do I eat when I'm not hungry?

By Malia Frey

It's a problem that almost all of us share—we eat when we don't need to. And the extra calories add up quickly, sometimes adding pounds of weight over the course of a year. So what's the best way to curb unnecessary snacking? The first step is to discover the cause.

Common reasons for unnecessary eating

These are some of the most common reasons that you might eat when you're not hungry. Use the solutions to help curb your habit.

• Boredom. We often head to the refrigerator when

The desire to taste something is a variation of boredom eating.

The best solution for that is to grab a piece of sugar-free gum or brush your teeth. Minty flavors help kill cravings.

we need something to do. At work, you might head to the break room to see if treats are available when you are trying to avoid work. Instead, go chat with a coworker, do an easy mini-workout, or keep a book of puzzles handy and challenge your brain for 5 minutes.

• Need for Taste. The desire to taste something is a variation of boredom eating. The best solution? Grab a piece of sugar-free gum or brush your teeth. Minty



flavors help kill cravings. You can also grab a glass of homemade flavored water (yum!).

• Nervous Energy. Sometimes we're in social situations and we eat because it's the most comfortable thing to do or because we're nervous. Solution? Stand away from the food. Then you won't be tempted to dip into the chip bowl or grab for cheese treats instead of meeting new people.

• Emotional Comfort. Food fills an emotional void for many people. If this is the reason that you eat when you're not hungry, you have a few options to curb the habit. First, try replacing the snack habit with a healthy habit. Many experts recommend physical activity like going for a walk or a quick yoga break because those activities can help curb negative thinking. If that doesn't work, don't hesitate to

work with a behavioral therapist to address emotional barriers to weight loss. Many therapists are specifically trained to help clients with eating issues.

• Habit. Your mindless eating habit may have started as boredom, but once you start visiting the refrigerator every day at 3pm, your body starts to expect food at 3pm. Solution? The next time that you wander to the refrigerator or to the snack tray, ask yourself why. If the answer doesn't include the word "hunger," go for a walk or call a friend instead. You'll end up replacing the old habit with a healthy new one.

Remember that moderate nibbling is good for you as

The next time that you wander to the refrigerator or to the snack tray, ask yourself why. If the answer doesn't include the word "hunger," go for a walk or call a friend instead.

long as you don't consume too many calories from snacks. But eating when you're not hungry or when you don't need to can derail your diet or cause weight gain. Of course, you should never wait until you are starving before you eat, either. Try to eat moderate portions at regular intervals throughout the day to stay satisfied all day long and avoid mindless eating, binge eating or eating foods that aren't good for your diet.

(Source: [verywell.com](http://www.verywell.com))

The ultimate guide to gym etiquette

By Jordan Shakeshaft

From yoga and Pilates to circuits and supersets, there's no right or wrong way to get in shape. Whatever it takes to break a sweat, right? But let's not leave that sweat on the mats (or that hair in the sink). From the locker room to the cardio zone, when it comes to gym etiquette, there are a few rules that everyone should follow—fitness karma points guaranteed.

The weight room

- Respect the headphones. Singles feel free to mingle, but people who have their headphones in are basically putting up a big "do not disturb" sign. So, save the chit chat for later.

Wax on, wax off

Sure, we may have hit the gym to avoid doing housework, but wiping down machines is a chore with serious payoffs. (No one wants a side of germs and infectious skin diseases with their workout.)

Lift a finger

More chores, we know. But returning free weights, medicine balls, and other equipment to their proper places is more than courteous—it might burn a few extra calories too!

Mind the mirror

Leave the lip gloss application, ab adoration, and smizing for the boudoir. Gym mirrors are there for form and safety, so avoid crossing in front of Mr. Military Press mid-set.

Get in the zone

The right one, that is. From bicep curls to power cleans, there's a proper place for everything at the gym—and trust us, you don't want to learn the hard way.

Share!

Sometimes there just aren't enough toys for everyone. Let a stranger "work in." And rather than standing idly by, maximize your time and efforts with a few killer supersets.

Easy does it

While every gym has its own policy, most prefer it to be earthquake-free. Avoid dropping heavy weights like hot cakes—and leave excessive grunting off the menu while you're at it.

The cardio zone

Give some breathing room

It's no secret that cardio can get a little sticky-icky sometimes. So when there's a choice of seven free treadmills, is it really necessary to cozy up right next to Ultra-Marathon Man? Scout out a more secluded treadmill instead.

Get mobile without the mobile phone

Chatting on a treadmill is a recipe for road kill. There are exceptions, including firing up fitness apps like Runkeeper or Fitbit to stay on track. But otherwise, it's safer (and less annoying) to keep your eyes off your phone and on the road (er, treadmill).

Play it straight

Interval training aside, keep the treadmill stunts to a minimum (unless of course you're these guys).

No spitting, snot rocketing, or other barnyard behavior

This should go without saying, but spend enough time in a gym and you're bound to see it once. Do not pass go; proceed directly to the hand sanitizer (stank face optional).

No marking your territory

Saving seats was so not fair in middle school—and not much has changed since then. So don't expect that towel, water bottle, or fanny pack (workout fashion 911!) to mean "dibs" on the elliptical.

The studio

Arrive early

Fashionably late doesn't apply when it comes to group classes. Plan to arrive at least five minutes early to find a spot and settle in without disruption.

Stagger

Sun salutations should be PG, so make sure the arms and legs can extend fully—without feeling up your neighbor. Like on public transportation, there's no excuse for an improper touch.

Go with the flow

Class energy matters, so go ahead and chant those Intention affirmations—just not in meditation class. There's a time and a place for ohm-ing, panting, and screaming out reps.

Be kind

Now this applies to all areas of the gym: Smile, be courteous, and even try saying "hi." (Using words instead of grunts or whistles is almost always preferable). The gym may not be the happiest place on earth (that's Disney World, right?), but it can't hurt to try.

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Tehran museum to exhibit newly recovered relics from Italy

HERITAGE TEHRAN — An exhibition of historical **d e s k** relics recently recovered from Italy will open to the public this morning at the National Museum of Iran in downtown Tehran.

Part of a larger group smuggled into Italy in 2008, the artifacts were initially delivered to the Iranian Embassy in Rome following years of hard-fought legal battle with the Italian art authorities.

An Iranian legal team managed to win back the stolen artifacts following a restitution order by an appellate court in the northern Italian city of Milan.

The police forces in Monza seized the looted relics together with several other collections in June 2008 after an Italian antiquities dealer of Pakistani origins shipped them from Bangkok to Italy, the National Museum of Iran Director Jebreil Nokandeh said in November 2016.

In a similar move, a number of other Iranian artifacts smuggled to the European country over the past decade, found their way back home in July 2015.

In May 2016, Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization publicized a call for assistance, asking Iranians abroad to inform the organization in case of tracing smuggled artifacts and antiquities of Iranian heritage.

The showcase titled "The Collection of Historic Objects Returned from Italy" will be held under the auspices of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft Organization.

An array of early-Islamic era earthenware and jewelries is centerpiece of the exhibit that will be running through February 11.

Intl. symposium on seismic rehabilitation of heritage structures opens in Tehran

HERITAGE TEHRAN — The International Symposium on Seismic Rehabilitation of Heritage Structures commenced on Monday at the University of Tehran, discussing ways for maximizing protection of potentially vulnerable structures.

Goodarz Ahmadi from Clarkson University, the U.S.; Gouran Arun from Yildiz Technic University, Turkey; Toshikazu Hanzato from Mie University, Japan; and Mehrdad Hejazi from Isfahan University, Iran; are amongst invitees to the two-day event.

The symposium revolves around properly employing seismic retrofits modifications that enables existing structures to be more resistant to ground motion and soil failure caused by earthquakes.

Iranian Research Institute for Cultural Heritage & Tourism, Shahid Beheshti University, the Research Center for Conservation of Buildings and Fabrics sponsor the event.

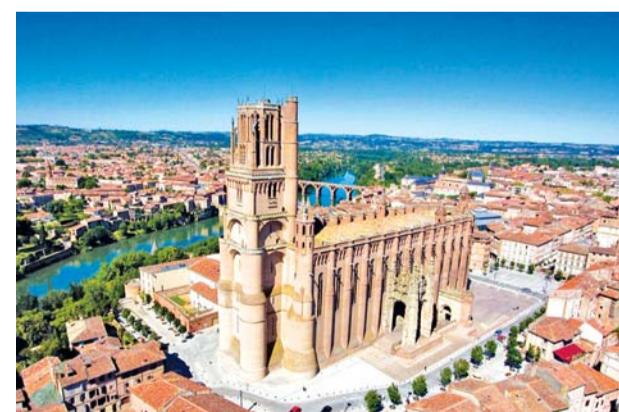
Iran is one of the most seismically active countries in the world.

ROUND THE GLOBE

Episcopal city of Albi

On the banks of the Tarn River in southwest France, the old city of Albi reflects the culmination of a medieval architectural and urban ensemble.

The episcopal city of Albi presents a complete built ensemble representative of a type of urban development in Europe from the Middle Ages to the present day. Its monumental and urban elements are complementary and well preserved, in subtle harmony of tones and appearance thanks to the use of local fired brick.



A view of the episcopal city of Albi in southwest France with Sainte-Cécile Cathedral in the foreground.

It is testimony to a program which was simultaneously both defensive and spiritual, and which was implemented by the Roman Catholic bishops following the suppression of the Albigensian or Cathar heresy in the 13th century.

Sainte-Cécile Cathedral is the most remarkable monumental symbol, in a Gothic architectural style unique to southern France, to which systematic internal painted decoration, a choir, and late Gothic statuary were added in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Finally, the outstanding value of the city is expressed by a medieval urban landscape that is both well preserved and extremely authentic.

(Source: UNESCO)

Under visitors' eyes: Hafezieh Meeting point of nature and culture

TOURISM TEHRAN — Each day **d e s k** hundreds of Iranians along with foreign backpackers come to visit Hafezieh, a major tourist spot where illustrious Persian poet Hafez is laid to rest.

The spot located in southern city of Shiraz delicately intertwines the beauty of a well-manicured Persian garden with a spiritual atmosphere that stems from his poetry.

Hafez poetry soaked in deep sense of humanity echoes ranges of historical events, biographical descriptions and details of life in his hometown, Shiraz.

Set in a charming orchard, his tomb is surmounted by an octagonal dome supported by eight stone columns. The internal side of the tomb bears elaborate tilework.

The current marble tombstone that is engraved with a long verse from the poet was placed monarch Karim Khan in the 18th century.

Hafez is most famous for his Divan and among the many partial English translations of this work are those by Gertrude Bell and H. Wilberforce Clarke.

Encyclopedia Britannica comments that the extraordinary popularity of Hafez poetry in all Persian-speaking lands stems from his simple and often colloquial though musical language, free from artificial virtuosity, and his unaffected use of homely images and proverbial expressions.

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

Nice atmosphere

It was very nice. There are some areas where you can seat and ponder and listen to Iranian classical music. I liked it. (Agholzer from Germany, visited October 2016)

Take snaps and poems

Lovely peaceful grounds and buildings, with cypress trees and the tomb itself... They gave us souvenir books and delicacies but with language being limit-



A file photo shows Hafezieh, a key tourist destination in Shiraz where illustrious Persian poet Hafez is laid to rest.



A number of foreign tourists visit tomb of Hafez in an undated photo.

Iran amongst top 17 tourist spots in 2017

Have you considered Iran for your next holiday?

When you think of the most beautiful places in the world, your mind wanders off to famous attractions like the Eiffel tower in France or the Niagara falls in Canada.

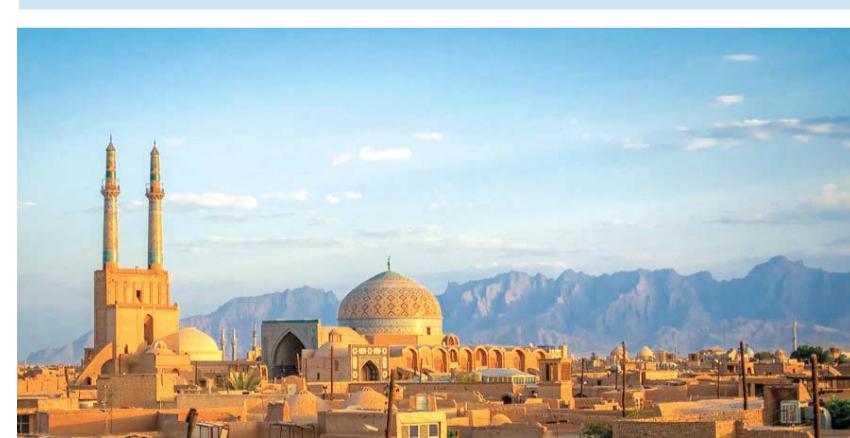
You imagine yourself in the lush green landscapes of Scotland or the snow-clad mountains of the Himalayas. From the magnificent nightlife in Thailand to the spectacular waterfalls and rich wildlife in New Zealand, there is something that allures you to visit these countries.

However, if you look past the cliched destinations of the world, you will be amazed at the undiscovered beauty you can stumble upon in nations that don't really fall on the typical tourist map. One such nation is the ancient historic country of Iran.

Dating back to the Persian Empire, Iran is full of stunning mosques, breathtaking palaces and museums, intriguing ruins, and marvelous shrines and mausoleums.

Not just that, even in terms of landscapes and activities, Iran gives most other countries in the world a run for their money. From the beaches by the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea to the snow-clad slopes of Alborz, Iran is a delight.

Tourism has declined since the Iran-Iraq war and most visitors now visit the country for pilgrimage purposes. However, nothing has affected the immaculate aesthetics of this gem that remains unexplored for most travelers.



An undated photo shows Yazd skyline in detail. The city located in central Iran boasts a very rich cultural heritage and traditional architecture.

An added bonus is its natural beauty that will take your breath away.

New Zealand

If you love the thrill of adventure sports, New Zealand is your best bet where you can experience everything from bungee jumping to sky diving.

In fact, New Zealand became the top searched destination by Indians according to Skyscanner in 2016.

Croatia

The popularity of Game of Thrones, has put Croatia on the map and is attracting tourists from all over the world including Indians as well who are avid watchers of the series.

Croatia not only offers a tour for the fan of the series, it also has other wonders that draw tourists to it.

Seychelles

While 2016 saw honeymooners and celebrity couples flock to Maldives in large numbers, in 2017, we expect Seychelles to draw such crowds.

The untouched beauty of white sand beaches, coral reefs, tropical climate, luxury resorts and the expanse of the Indian Ocean make it worth your visit.

London

If the Queen's City is on your travel bucket list, 2017 is a good year to visit it as the flight rates are cheaper and so are the sightseeing attractions thanks to the fall of the Great British Pound.

London has several attractions to offer, the popular ones being Madame

ed did not stay long. But sitting and reading some of his wonderful poems would not be inappropriate. Weather was perfect too - mid November. (Johmar from the UK, visited November 2016)

Lovely garden and buildings

To foreigners it doesn't carry the meanings it has for Iranians. In this beautiful place you witness the love and reverence people have for the great poet. (Stefano M. from Malaysia, visited April 2016)

Culture experience

Excellent place filled with culture and fantastic architecture. I definitely recommend to have some traditional tea in the front coffee shop. (Monika V. from the UK, visited October 2016)

Tussauds, the Buckingham Palace, Tower Bridge and Big Ben.

Iceland

The Nordic island nation may make for an expensive trip but it promises an experience like no other.

Its landscape consists of volcanoes, glaciers, hot springs and protected national parks and the icing on the cake is certainly the phenomenon of Northern Lights.

Nepal

Nepal's economy is highly dependent on its tourism but with natural disasters like the earthquake hitting the nation and destroying parts of it, tourism too decreased.

However, Indians can show their solidarity and make use of the fact that it is so close to its border. Nepal has some amazing natural wonders including the highest peak in the world Mount Everest.

Portugal

If you like Goa, there's really no way on earth you can miss Portugal. The former colonial master of India's favorite beach state has an awful lot to offer. Soak in history in Lisbon or lounge along the beaches of Algarve or explore the lush Serra da Arrabida.

Jordan

Float on the Dead Sea or snorkel in the vibrant reefs of Red Sea. Or simply catch a glimpse of what life was like centuries ago in the ancient city of Petra.

There is a lot to do in Jordan. And with a round trip from India starting at as little as Rs 29,000 Jordan has never been so within your reach as it is today.

Iran

Soak in the grandeur of the former Persian Empire as you wind your way through the mosque-dotted lanes of Tehran.

Indeed, Iran is filled with mosques, museums and palaces that are bound to take your breath away. But know that there is a lot more to Iran than the Islamic architecture. Take your pick from the beaches by the Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea or the snow-clad slopes of Alborz; there is a lot to see in Iran that you can dream of.

Canada

Apart from its very dishy prime minister, Canada also happens to have some pretty darned beautiful national parks. And to celebrate 150 years of its independence, Canada is throwing open these parks to tourists...

Finland

For more than 800 years, Sweden and Russia fought over Finland till in 1917, the country won its independence. 2017 marks 100 years of Finland's independence so you can expect a lot of cook-offs, concerts and what nots! (Source: india.com)

NASA releases 'ice home' concept for living on Mars

NASA has unveiled its concept for houses on Mars and according to the space agency's researchers, the best building material for these structures is rather unexpected -- ice.

Because astronauts who visit Mars are likely to stay for weeks, rather than days, they will need a structure both to call home for that period and to protect them from the harsh environment of the Red Planet.

During a day of brainstorming, experts at NASA's Langley Research Centre in the US state of Virginia, along with a group of designers and architects, put forward a concept they described as a "Mars ice home".

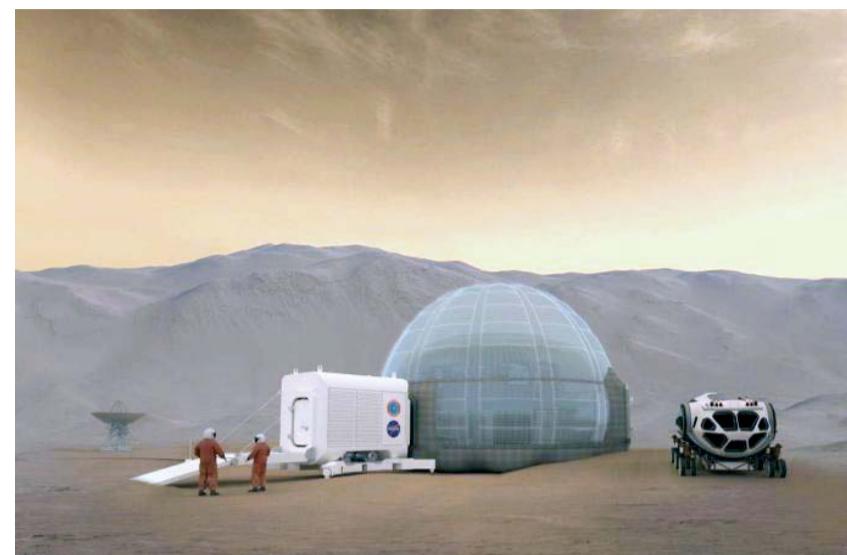
"After a day dedicated to identifying needs, goals and constraints we rapidly assessed many crazy, out of the box ideas and finally converged on the current ice home design, which provides a sound engineering solution," senior systems engineer Kevin Vipavetz said.

■ Why life on Mars?

Life on Earth has its challenges, but what about life on Mars? Can humans ever survive on our neighboring red planet, fourth from the sun?

NASA described the dome as a "large inflatable torus, a shape similar to an inner tube that is surrounded by a shell of water ice".

The "Mars ice home design has several advantages that make it an appealing



concept," the team said.

"It is lightweight and can be transported and deployed with simple robotics, then filled with water before the crew arrives."

Shelter on Mars also needs to protect astronauts from galactic cosmic rays and space radiation -- and although the most effective means of doing so would be to build an underground habitat, this would require heavy robotic equipment.

most effective means of doing so would be to build an underground habitat, this would require heavy robotic equipment.

Researcher Sheila Ann Thibeault said it was a challenge to find a material that could provide this protection.

■ Martian environment

The "materials that make up the Ice Home will have to withstand many years of use in the harsh Martian environment, including ultraviolet radiation, charged-particle radiation, possibly some atomic oxygen, perchlorates, as well as dust storms," she said.

But the thick ice of the ice home would provide a balance, reducing exposure -- and allowing light to pass through.

"All of the materials we've selected are translucent, so some outside daylight can pass through and make it feel like you're in a home and not a cave," ice home principal investigator Kevin Kempton said.

This feeling of "home," Dr. Kempton said, was also an important consideration.

"After months of travel in space, when you first arrive at Mars and your new home is ready for you to move in, it will be a great day," he said.

The team said -- based on the amount of water that could be reasonably extracted from Mars -- their design would allow the ice home to be completely filled and covered in ice within about 400 days.

(Source: abc.net.au)

Languages still an obstacle of global science, identify by research

Language barrier makes problem to understanding scientific research. A new study suggests that over a third of new scientific reports are published in languages other than English. This can create a problem in the understanding of scientific knowledge.

According to the study, English is now considered the common language or 'lingua franca' of global science. Despite the global exposure of the journal, the major scientific journal is published in English.

The Cambridge researchers call on scientific journals to publish basic summaries of a study's key findings in multiple languages. The Universities and funding bodies are encouraged to translations as part of their 'outreach' evaluation of criteria.

According to the research report, "Language barriers continue to impede the global compilation and application of scientific knowledge". They have also pointed out an imbalance in knowledge transfer in countries where English is not the mother tongue.

■ Natural areas

The research report first published on 29 December

in the journal PLOS Biology. The survey was conducted in charge of Spain's protected natural areas. Over half, the respondent has raised the language obstacle as a barrier of their scientific knowledge.

The researchers have also surveyed the web platform Google Scholar for the better performance of the research one of the largest public repositories of scientific documents in a total of 16 languages for studies relating to biodiversity conservation published during a single year, 2014.

Random sampling from the research showed that, on average, only around half of non-English documents also included titles or abstracts in English. This means out of 75,000 documents around 13,000 documents on conservation science published in 2014 are unsearchable using English Keywords, reported by PLOS Biology.

According to the lead author of the study Amano, we need to systematic development of databases at the global scale; speakers of a wide range of languages



should be included in the discussion.

The researchers suggest efforts translate should be evaluated in a similar way. Particularly if the science wants to cover issues at a global scale or regions the efforts to translate the language is very important.

(Source: Latin Post)

Fish seek cooler waters, leaving some fishermen's nets empty

There was a time when whiting were plentiful in the waters of Rhode Island Sound, and Christopher Brown pulled the fish into his long stern trawler by the bucketful.

"We used to come right here and catch two, three, four thousand pounds a day, sometimes 10," he said, sitting at the wheel of the Proud Mary — a 44-footer named, he said, after his wife, not the Creedence Clearwater Revival song — as it cruised out to sea.

But like many other fish on the Atlantic Coast, whiting have moved north, seeking cooler waters as ocean temperatures have risen, and they are now filling the nets of fishermen farther up the coast.

Studies have found that two-thirds of marine species in the Northeast United States have shifted or extended their

range as a result of ocean warming, migrating northward or outward into deeper and cooler water.

■ Changing temperatures

Lobster, once a staple in southern New England, have decamped to Maine. Black sea bass, scup, yellowtail flounder, mackerel, herring and monkfish, to name just a few species, have all moved to accommodate changing temperatures.

Yet fishing regulations, which among other things set legal catch limits for fishermen and are often based on where fish have been most abundant in the past, have failed to keep up with these geographical changes.

The center of the black sea bass population, for example, is now in New Jersey, hundreds of miles north of where it was in the 1990s, providing the basis for regu-

lators to distribute shares of the catch to the Atlantic states.

Under those rules, North Carolina still has rights to the largest share. The result is a convoluted workaround many fishermen view as nonsensical. Because black sea bass are now harder to find in their state waters, North Carolina fishermen must steam north 10 hours, to where the fish are abundant, to even approach the state's allocation. Mr. Brown and other New England fishermen, however, whose states have much smaller shares, can legally land only a small fraction of the black sea bass they catch and must throw the rest overboard. And New England states like Maine, where fishermen are beginning to catch black sea bass regularly, have only a tiny allocation and no

established fishery.

"Our management system assumes that the ocean has white lines drawn on it, but fish don't see those lines," said Malin L. Pinsky, an assistant professor in the department of ecology, evolution and natural resources at Rutgers University, who studies how marine species adapt to climate change. "And our management system is not as nimble as the fish."

The mismatch between the location of fish and the rules for catching them has pitted recreational fishermen against commercial ones and state against state. It has heightened tensions among fishermen, government regulators and the scientists who advise them and raised questions for fishery managers that have no easy answers.

(Source: NYT)

Scientists engineer gene pathway to grow brain organoids with surface folding

One of the most significant ways in which the human brain is unique is the size and structure of the cerebral cortex. But what drives the growth of the human cortex, likely the foundation for our unique intellectual abilities?

In research published in the journal Cell Stem Cell -- in a study entitled, Induction of expansion and folding in human cerebral organoids -- researchers at Whitehead Institute provide insight into a specific gene pathway that

appears to regulate the growth, structure, and organization of the human cortex. They also demonstrate that 3D human cerebral organoids -- miniature, lab-grown versions of specific brain structures -- can be effective in modeling the molecular, cellular, and anatomical processes of human brain development. And they suggest a new path for identifying the cells affected by Zika virus.

■ Increased proliferation

"We found that increased proliferation of neural progenitor cells (NPCs) induces expansion of cortical tissue and cortical folding in human cerebral organoids," says Yun Li, a lead author of study and post-doctoral researcher at Whitehead Institute.

"Further, we determined that deleting the PTEN gene allows increased growth factor signaling in the cell, unleashing its growth potential, and stimulating proliferation."

(Source: EurekAlert)

New Version of BIM's Quality Management Sys. Certificate Extended

Quality Management System Certificate of the Bank of Industry and Mine (BIM) was renewed from 2008 ISO 9001 certificate to 2015 version, Public Relations Dept. of the bank announced.

Risk management, knowledge-based management (ISO 9001) and identification of business environment of organization and its beneficiaries have been emphasized in the new standard version, so that quality

management system can be deployed at industrial and production units.

Relying upon technical knowhow and knowledge of its manpower, the Bank has embarked on deploying ISO 9001 quality management certificate (2015 version) in line with gaining customers' satisfaction and stakeholders, the report added.

With more than 120 years of fruitful experience in

the field of S.G.S. international standards, Switzerland has undertaken the auditing procedure of quality management system at BIM.

It should be noted that Bank of Industry and Mine (BIM) is the first Iranian bank which has managed to obtain and extend validity of quality management system certificate in all its branches across the country since 2005.

BSI Shines in 12th War Veterans' Sports-Cultural Olympiad

The 12th War Veterans' Sports-Cultural Olympiad in banking network of the country was held in Babolsar in the presence of public and private banks in different sports-cultural fields in a way that Bank Saderat Iran (BSI) managed to win top 19 scores and stood at the second rank in this series of competition, Public

Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

In this round of competition, 260 war veterans and disabled from 11 banks in the nationwide competed with one another in the fields of recitation, memorization and interpretation of Holy Quran, futsal, volleyball, badminton, table tennis, chess, shooting, swimming, dart

throwing, karate, track-and-field.

It should be noted that this round of competition was highly welcomed by a great number of staff and personnel at banking sector of the country, so that Bank Keshavarzi, host of the competition, claimed champion and stood at the first rank.

The 3rd rank went to Bank Melli Iran.

The closing ceremony of this round of competition was held in the presence of Manouchehr Jalali-Asl Advisor to the managing director of the bank in War Veterans' Affairs and a number of senior managers in banking network of coun-

Fridges and washing machines could be vital witnesses in murder plots

High-tech washing machines and fridges will soon be used by detectives gathering evidence from crime scenes, experts have forecast.

The advent of the 'internet of things' in which more devices are connected together in a world of 'smart working' could in future provide important clues for the police.

Detectives are currently being trained to look for gadgets and white goods which could provide a 'digital footprint' of victims or criminals.



Mark Stokes, the head of the digital, cyber and communications forensics unit at the Metropolitan Police told The Times: "Wireless cameras within a device, such as fridge, may record the movement of owners and suspects."

Mr. Stokes said detectives of the future would carry a 'digital forensics toolkit' which would allow them to analyze microchips and download data at the scene, rather than removing devices for testing.

However the police could come up against opposition from companies making the gadgets, who are concerned about the privacy of their customers.

In the U.S., Amazon is currently fighting requests by the US authorities to hand over recordings from one of its Echo home entertainment systems belonging to James Andrew Bates.

Officers in Arkansas are investigating the murder of Victor Collins who was found dead at Mr. Bates' hot tub in 2015. They have already taken evidence from an electric water meter, which appears to show that a huge amount of water was used. Detectives say it could have been to wash blood away from the patio.

The Echo delivers weather forecasts, controls thermostats and light switches, and plays music. But it also has artificial intelligence and improves over time based on the owner's voices so could provide insight into what happened on the night of Collins' death.

(Source: The Telegraph)

Mastery of xylan and cellulose will enable stronger glues for wooden skyscrapers

Molecules 10,000 times narrower than the width of a human hair could hold the key to making possible wooden skyscrapers and more energy-efficient paper production. The two most common large molecules – or 'polymers' – found on Earth are cellulose and xylan, both of which are found in the cell walls of materials such as wood and straw. They play a key role in determining the strength of materials and how easily they can be digested.

Cambridge UK researchers found that cellulose induces xylan to untwist itself and straighten out, allowing it to attach itself to the cellulose molecule. It then acts as a kind of 'glue' that can protect cellulose or bind the molecules together, making very strong structures."

Understanding how cellulose and xylan fit together could have a dramatic effect on industries as diverse as biofuels, paper production and agriculture, according to Paul Dupree.

"One of the biggest barriers to 'digesting' plants – whether that's for use as biofuels or as animal feed, for example – has been breaking down the tough cellular walls," he says. "Take paper production – enormous amounts of energy are required for this process. A better understanding of the relationship between cellulose and xylan could help us vastly reduce the amount of energy required for such processes."

But just as this could improve how easily materials can be broken down, the discovery may also help them create stronger materials, he says. There are already plans to build houses in the UK more sustainably using wood, and Paul Dupree is involved in the Centre for Natural Material Innovation at the University of Cambridge, which is looking at whether buildings as tall as skyscrapers could be built using modified wood.

(Source: nextbigfuture.com)

Start-up IonQ sees opportunity in still-developing area of quantum computers

Quantum computing is a still-aspirational field of computer science that envisions impossibly fast computers built on the laws of particle physics. Mainstream scientists theorize that a quantum computer could perform tasks unattainable to even the most advanced traditional computers, such as seamlessly breaking data encryption or rapidly analyzing the human genome.

"What excites us is not what we already know it's good for, but what we don't yet know it's good for," IonQ chief executive David Moehring said.

The problem is that the capability has not arrived yet. IonQ's founders admit they are a long way from even having a prototype of what they will sell to companies.

"Quantum computers don't exist today, and therefore there is not a big commercial market based on quantum computers," co-founder Jungsang Kim said.

In an email sent weeks before his death, Weller likened IonQ to a "discovery stage" biotechnology company, essentially a drug company in the earliest phases of development. Such investments are considered highly risky and often do not yield returns for more than a decade.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Donald Trump victory sparks global women's rights marches

After a year of seismic shocks comes the protest and fightback. At least that is what activists plan with the first major demonstration of the year – the women's march – planned for 30 cities around the world on 21 January, the day after Donald Trump's inauguration as president of the U.S.

The women's march on Washington has been given permission by state authorities to go ahead. Tens of thousands of women (and men, who are also welcome to join it) have already pledged to take part and plans for a sister rally in London are gaining support from writers, musicians and politicians.

Organizers say the U.S. election proved a "catalyst for a grassroots movement of women to assert the positive values that the politics of fear denies".

In the UK the Women's Equality party has thrown its weight behind the march. "I am a dual national and voted for Hillary Clinton in Wisconsin," said the party co-founder, Catherine Mayer.

"I will march with my father, a U.S. citizen, who during his time as a conscript in the U.S. army came under investigation by Senator Joseph McCarthy for supposed un-American activities. In fact he was and remains a U.S. patriot who will march to promote the values essential to the U.S.: democracy and the human rights of the whole population," she said.

"For me the march is also important because it recognizes how interconnected our world is. What happens in America impacts all of us. The rights of women and of minority populations and vulnerable and low-income people are under threat and we must do everything we can to protect these rights and fight for true equality."

Musician Pixie Geldof, writer Stella Duffy, activist Jack Monroe and U.S. rock musician Thurston Moore are supporting the London march, while in the U.S. organizers claim that many of the musicians who have refused to play at Trump's inauguration will join them.

(Source: *The Guardian*)

RECIPE OF THE WEEK Baked Denver omelet

"My family loves omelets, and this is a quick and easy one. These directions are for a Denver omelet, but experiment with other ingredients to make your favorite."

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons butter
1/2 onion, chopped

1/2 green bell pepper, chopped
1 cup chopped cooked ham
8 eggs
1/4 cup milk
1/2 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
Salt and ground black pepper to taste

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Grease a 10-inch round baking dish.

Melt butter in a large skillet over medium heat; cook and stir onion and bell pepper until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in ham and continue cooking until heated through, 5 minutes more.

Beat eggs and milk in a large bowl. Stir in Cheddar cheese and ham mixture; season with salt and black pepper. Pour mixture into prepared baking dish.

Bake in preheated oven until eggs are browned and puffy, about 25 minutes. Serve warm.

LEARN ENGLISH Road Trip

A: So, are we **all ready to go**?

B: Yup, I think so. The car's **packed**; we have **munchies** and music, and the map's in the car.

A: Did you get the camera?

B: Got it! Did you **fill up the tank**?

A: Yup, it's **all set**.

B: You're sure we're not forgetting anything?

A: I'm sure... we've **got all our bases covered**.

B: Well let's **get going** then! I love **road trips**!

B: Um... do you think we can make a **pit stop**?

A: But we've only been on the road for ten minutes.

B: I know, but I forgot to go to the bathroom before we left.

Key vocabulary

all ready to go: prepared, ready to leave

packed: full, everything is inside

munchies: snacks, food

fill up the tank: put gas in the car

all set: ready

got all the bases covered: have everything ready

get going: start, leave, depart

road trip: long car trip

pit stop: quick stop for food or gas

Supplementary vocabulary

trunk: the luggage area of a car

passenger: person in a car, not the driver

freeway: highway

rental car: a car you rent, a car you pay to borrow

highway toll: fee paid for using the highway

(Source: *irlangage.com*)

Maternal mortality rate in Iran far below UN SDG target

→1 She further said that FHA Iran, as an NGO, is active in different fields related to empowerment of vulnerable women, sex workers, addicts, and homeless women.

The Mikhak center, working under the supervision of FHA Iran, provides reproductive and sexual health care for vulnerable women, said Shahriari-Afshar who is also the chairperson of the regional executive committee of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

With the aim of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, FHA Iran makes efforts to reduce vulnerabilities in cooperation with the ministry of health, the welfare organization, the drug control headquarters, and the women empowerment headquarters, she added.

FHA Iran was established in 1994, contributing to the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights, especially among the youth and vulnerable groups in consistence with cultural values of the society.



Its strategic framework highlights the five A thematic areas of Abortion, HIV and AIDS, Adolescent, Access and Advocacy.

IPPF was established in 1952 in India by eight women from eight countries who fiercely considered themselves brave and angry.

These women were motivated by the health risks that led to increased maternal morbidity and mortality in women and girls as a result of a lack of family planning-leading to non-spacing of children, unwanted and unplanned pregnancies, unsafe abortions, child marriage and teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence and lack of education.

The main purpose of IPPF is to enhance the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, girls, boys and men, through advocacy for progressive policies and laws, increased access to quality services to the marginalized, hard to reach and underserved population groups.

Romanian president rejects nomination of Muslim woman for PM

Romania's president has rejected a proposal by the leftist party that won elections this month to appoint the country's first female and first Muslim prime minister.

Klaus Iohannis gave no reasons for rejecting the nomination of Sevil Shhaideh, put forward by the Social Democrats (PSD), but there was speculation that it may have been due to her Syrian husband's background.

"I have properly analyzed the arguments for and against and I have decided not to accept this proposal," the president said in a televised statement. "I call on the PSD coalition to make another proposal."

The PSD won 45% of the vote on 11 December. Its leader, Liviu Dragnea, withdrew his own bid to become prime minister because he is serving a two-year suspended sentence for fraud in a previous election.

Shhaideh's political experience is limited, having served as development minister for just five months before the previous PSD-led government resigned in late 2015. This and her personal closeness to Dragnea – he was a witness at her wedding – stoked opposition accusations that she would merely be his puppet.

Shhaideh's Muslim faith is not thought to have been a problem for Iohannis. Instead, the focus may have been on her Syrian husband, whom she married in 2011.



Sevil Shhaideh's political experience is limited, having served as development minister for five months. Photograph: Alex Micsik/EPA

According to the non-profit investigative journalism group the Rise Project, he has several times expressed support for the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, and for the Lebanese Shia movement Hezbollah.

He worked in the Syrian agriculture ministry for 20 years before emigrating in 2011, according to media reports and Dragnea. He then served as an adviser to the Romanian agriculture ministry and gained citizenship in 2015.

Cătălin Predoiu, a former justice minister from the center-right National Liberal party, said on Facebook that he could not see how Shhaideh could get the security clearance needed to be prime

minister. Giving her the job would "give her access to defense information classified as secret, including from Nato," he wrote.

Andrei Tărănu, a political analyst, said: "In the absence of any explanations by the president, I suppose that his rejection is linked to questions of national security and because the United States would not have been very keen."

The website HotNews cited unnamed sources as saying the security services had "strongly cautioned" against Shhaideh's nomination because of the closeness to the Assad regime of her husband and his two brothers.

Dragnea was due to make a statement on Tuesday afternoon responding to the rejection. Some in his party called for Iohannis to be suspended.

Tărănu said: "Either the PSD shows its wisdom by making a new proposal [for prime minister] or we move towards fresh elections." He said an attempt by the PSD to remove the president would be problematic because under the constitution Iohannis is entitled to request a second proposal for prime minister.

The PSD's election triumph came barely a year after anger over a deadly nightclub fire that killed 64 people forced it from office. The inferno inside the Colectiv club was blamed on corrupt officials turning a blind eye to a lack of fire precautions. Poor medical care also contributed to the death toll.

(Source: *The Guardian*)

Women allowed to wear hijabs in custody: police in California City say

Police in Long Beach, California, have reversed their policy on barring prisoners from wearing any religious head covering while in custody. The move follows a lawsuit filed by a Muslim woman who claims her hijab had been forcibly removed.

Kirsty Powell was arrested in May 2015 and stripped of her headscarf, despite her protestations that it was part of her religious beliefs. A year later she sued the city alleging her civil rights had been violated.

But last month the Long Beach Police

department altered its policy, according to a department spokeswoman, as reported by the Long Beach Press-Telegram on Sunday.

"If an arrestee is wearing a religious head covering, employees shall make all reasonable efforts to allow this practice, except where safety and security concerns dictate otherwise," Marlene Arrona said in an email.

The order issued by Long Beach Police Chief Robert Luna does not cover whether head coverings can still be

worn during booking photos. It also still allows for them to be taken away if jailers believe that prisoners could use them to harm themselves.

"Quite honestly unless there's a situation ... where this person is distraught, potentially suicidal, I can't imagine taking a headscarf away," Long Beach's jail administrator Tom Behrens said.

Upon the initial disclosure of the lawsuit earlier this year, the police department claimed that safety was at the root of their policy and the removal of Powell's hijab.



Muslim women participate in a self-defense class, Dec. 16, 2016 in New York City.

"The police department has a duty to protect all people who are in their custodial care, and one of the policies that protects inmates is that certain items are not allowed to be retained by a prisoner while in custody" read a statement. "These items include belts, neckties, shoelaces, and head coverings."

However, it also said that it would be consulting with religious groups about its policy.

"The police department takes great pride in our community partnerships," the statement continued. "We will continue to work with local religious leaders to make sure we are mindful of cultural sensitivities while ensuring the safety of all involved."

But Powell said in an initial statement released by the Los Angeles branch of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, that she had been left "exposed."

"I would never want anyone to go through what I felt from this experience, it was horrible," she said.

It is not the first time that a police department has reversed its policy on head coverings in the wake of legal action.

After a similar lawsuit in Dearborn, Michigan, the police department also began allowing the wearing of headscarves in custody and during booking procedures. Under the new guidelines, which were disclosed earlier this year, Muslim women can also request to be searched by female officers without men present and can wear tear-resistant hijabs, to prevent them from using the headscarf to hang themselves.

(Source: *International Business Times*)



Iranian Vice-President for Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, receives a New Year's gift from the Santa Claus during her visit to St. George Church, Tehran.

Angela Merkel, Russia's next target

It's no surprise that Russia met President Obama's expulsion of its diplomats, which he announced Thursday in response to the Kremlin's efforts to manipulate the 2016 election, with a collective shrug. Moscow seems content to let the clock run out, knowing that on Jan. 20 Mr. Obama will be replaced by an admirer in the White House and an old friend in the State Department.

But the changeover is bittersweet; President Vladimir V. Putin has also lost a beloved boogeyman. For the foreseeable future, the United States can hardly serve as Russia's preferred enemy of the state. So guess who qualifies best as a new, well, boogeywoman? Angela Merkel.

The German chancellor is a perfect target. Germany is holding general elections next autumn, and with politicians sympathetic to Moscow on the rise, she may well be running for her fourth term as the sole European leader willing to stand up to a newly assertive Russia.

Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ms. Merkel has been the most consequential voice for punishing Russia. The next year, she welcomed a million refugees into Germany, and pushed the rest of Europe to do the same — thus, in the view of Russian ethno-nationalists, diluting European culture. And she still believes in a united, integrated European Union, a bastion of liberal values and, at least implicitly, a political and economic bulwark against Russia.

It seems that Russia may be planning to do to Ms. Merkel and her allies in 2017 what it did to Hillary Clinton and other Democrats in the United States in 2016. After all, last year the same hackers who broke into the Democratic Party's computers, known online as Fancy Bear or Sofacy Group, attacked the German Parliament's network; they are also ac-



cused of stealing documents from individual members of Parliament. Every revelation about how Russia interfered in the American elections gives Germany a foretaste of what is already looking to be the nastiest, toughest, most exhausting election campaign in modern German history.

That foretaste, though, is also Germany's one advantage. We know something about Russians' technical abilities and methods, and, even more important, we have a developing sense of where they're coming from ideologically — and how that will guide their attacks.

Here, we can draw valuable lessons from the Cold War. What Russia does today is very much the digital version of what we Germans, before 1989, termed "Zersetzung." The term is hard to translate, but it's best described as the political equivalent of what happens when you pour acid on organic material: dissolution and disintegration.

The methods of Zersetzung are to

cast doubt on the basic norms of the Western liberal order and its institutions; to distort and thereby discredit the purposes of the European Union, NATO and the free-market economy; to erode the credibility of the free press and free elections. The means of Zersetzung include character assassination and, through th

e spreading of lies and fake news, the creation of a gray zone of doubt in which facts struggle to survive.

We have seen all of this before, employed by the K.G.B. and the East German Stasi: psychological warfare, rumor-mongering, schemes to bribe politicians and then expose them as criminals. They used it both internally, against dissidents, and externally, against Western enemies. Mr. Putin and his former K.G.B. colleagues should know that, this time, we have a better sense of their dirty tricks, and how they have updated Zersetzung for the internet.

The government has its role to play, but so do journalists and civil-society

groups. We journalists will put pressure on companies like Facebook and Twitter to be vigilant against fake news; we will expose the patterns of Russian agitprop where we see them.

But it is just as important to be clear about the ideology driving these attacks. In September, my newspaper, Die Zeit, joined with the broadcaster ZDF to reveal details of Moscow's highly sophisticated disinformation campaign. We had gained access to roughly 10,000 emails that showed how ideologues close to the Putin administration advised the pro-Russian rebel government in Eastern Ukraine.

Among the emails was a document that set "thematic guidelines" which rebel-allied media outlets had to follow — if necessary by distorting facts and faking news. "Today's Russia is no longer the Russia of the 1990s, but is working unwaveringly to re-establish the strength of the Soviet Union. Today's Russia is on an equal footing with the West," it read. "A global diplomatic war is underway. But the West is also suffering in this war, and it is still unclear who will prevail."

No doubt similar marching orders have been given to the armies of hackers who were sent to attack the Democrats, and who are now plotting attacks on Germany.

It is quite clear who will lose. Mr. Putin and his reckless fakers should be aware that the only thing they will harvest from this mendacity is another lost generation of Russians who could serve their country better by being given the opportunity for honest and constructive intellectual challenges. A government that maligns the outside world to make feel Russia great again is doomed to fail — as it failed before.

(Source: New York Times)

Israeli police to question Netanyahu over alleged gifts

Police are expected to question Israel prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his official residence in Jerusalem on suspicion of receiving gifts from businessmen in breach of his role as a public servant, Israeli media reported.

The move was authorized by Attorney-General Avi-chai Mandelblit, who decided after a preliminary probe that there was sufficient evidence for a criminal investigation, Haaretz newspaper reported.

The police and Justice Ministry would not confirm when the interview would take place or the nature of the investigation, details of which have appeared in the media in recent days. Netanyahu's office has denied any wrongdoing.

"All the supposed affairs will turn out to be fiction," his family spokesman said on Monday. "We are repeating: there will be nothing, because there is nothing."

Photographers were camped outside the heavily guarded residence, hoping to get pictures of investigators arriving. Black screens were erected inside the gates of the property to block the view.

Haaretz and other newspapers said the probe related to gifts worth "hundreds of thousands of shekels" (\$1=3.85 shekels) given to Netanyahu by Israeli and for-

eign businessmen.

Channel 2, a commercial network, said the investigation was one of two cases now open against the prime minister, although it said details of the second remained unclear.

Netanyahu, 67, has been in power on and off since 1996. He is currently in his fourth term as prime minister and will become Israel's longest-serving leader if he stays in office until the end of next year.

He and his wife, Sara, have weathered several scandals over the years, including investigations into the

under fire from peacekeepers, police officer Mohamed Ahmed told Reuters news agency.

"It exploded about 200 meters from the gate. Civilian buildings were damaged," AMISOM said on its Twitter feed.

The powerful blasts damaged the front of the nearby Hotel Peace, though there were no immediate reports of casualties there. The burned-out shell of one of the wrecked vehicles lay outside.

Al-Shabab spokesman Sheikh Abdiasis

misuse of state funds and an audit of the family's spending on everything from laundry to ice cream. They have denied any wrongdoing.

Netanyahu is not the first prime minister to be questioned in a criminal case.

Ehud Olmert, who held office from 2006 to 2009, is currently serving 18 months in prison after being convicted of breach of trust and bribery in 2014.

Former prime minister Ariel Sharon was questioned while in office in 2003 and 2004 over allegations of bribery and corruption involving him and his two sons. In 2006, his son Omri was convicted of corruption and served time in prison.

Netanyahu's police appointment drew a barrage of commentary from the center-left opposition in parliament, with politicians calling for him to go.

Ahead of a cabinet meeting on Sunday, Netanyahu responded, saying: "I suggest the opposition calm down."

Israeli commentators pointed out that while Netanyahu may be questioned, it has happened many times in the past and prime ministers have gone on governing, sometimes for years.

(Source: Reuters)

Massive blast hits near Mogadishu airport

Suicide bombers attacked the main peacekeeping base in Somalia's capital, killing at least three Somali security officers.

Captain Mohamed Hussein told The Associated Press news agency on Monday one blast took place as security forces were searching cars at a checkpoint a few hundred meters from the main base of the African Union peacekeeping force, AMISOM.

Another vehicle then drove through towards the base's main gates but came

under fire from peacekeepers, police officer Mohamed Ahmed told Reuters news agency.

"It exploded about 200 meters from the gate. Civilian buildings were damaged," AMISOM said on its Twitter feed.

The powerful blasts damaged the front of the nearby Hotel Peace, though there were no immediate reports of casualties there. The burned-out shell of one of the wrecked vehicles lay outside.

Al-Shabab spokesman Sheikh Abdiasis

points with al-Shabab - which wants to topple the Western-backed government - often claiming responsibility.

Despite being ousted from most of its key strongholds across large parts of south and central Somalia, the al-Qaeda-linked group continues to wage deadly attacks across the country.

The attacks have threatened this Horn of Africa nation's attempts to rebuild from two decades of conflict.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Pope tells bishops to have zero tolerance for sexual abuse

Pope Francis has told bishops around the world they must adhere to a policy of zero tolerance for clergy who sexually abuse children and begged forgiveness for "a sin that shames us."

In a letter sent on Dec. 28 but released

by the Vatican only on Monday, Francis said: "I would like us to renew our complete commitment to ensuring that these atrocities will no longer take place in our midst."

Since his election in 2013, Francis has

taken some steps to root out sexual abuse in the Church and to put in place practices to protect children. But victims' groups say he has not done enough, particularly to hold account bishops who tolerated sexual abuse or covered it up.

"[The Church] recognizes the sins of some of her members: the sufferings, the experiences and the pain of minors who were abused sexually by priests. It is a sin that shames us," Francis wrote in the letter.

(Source: Reuters)

On Trump, UN and the logic of unilateralism

Today, every one appears to be interested in things that the president-elect Trump can or cannot do unilaterally; can Trump unilaterally dismantle the nuclear deal?, can Trump unilaterally decide to withdraw from NATO, TPP, WTO and Paris Agreements?, can Trump unilaterally recognize Jerusalem as the capital of the occupied territories?, can Trump unilaterally erect a border wall against Mexico? In the eyes of Trump, underlying an affirmative answer to these questions is the hypothesis that America is so great as to act alone and not suffer the consequences.

However, Trump seems to have forgotten that if the U.S acts alone, it will be alone. Can the president-elect Trump with his best intentions be mad enough to render

America the loneliest country in the world? We are yet to see.

Whether we desire it or not, Trump is, slowly but surely, shaping his own discourse in the world's politics. In his discourse, America is the best, and the whole

True that the upcoming U.S. executive seems a little more willing to befriend Russia, however, it cannot certainly afford to unfriend the rest of the world.

world, just one of the rest. This is unilateralism at its most vulgar. The question for us, the rest of the world, is how to process, face and encounter the logic of unilateralism in a way responsive to our needs. This is where our responsibility lies. Can we, the members of the international community, too review and renovate our own discourse? Does U.N have a strategy to deal with Trump's threats? How are the other parties to the nuclear deal going to react to Trump's walking the talk? Above all, can we possibly be feeble enough to be trumped by a unilateralist Trump? We are yet to see.

Dr. Masoud Zamani holds a PhD degree in international law from the University of Nottingham and is a lecturer of international law.

Trump aide says U.S. sanctions on Russia may be disproportionate

A top aide to President-elect Donald Trump said in an interview that the White House may have disproportionately punished Russia by ordering the expulsion of 35 suspected Russian spies.



Incoming White House press secretary Sean Spicer said on ABC's "This Week" that Trump will be asking questions of U.S. intelligence agencies after President Barack Obama imposed sanctions last week on two Russian intelligence agencies over what he said was their involvement in hacking political groups in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Obama also ordered Russia to vacate two U.S. facilities as part of the tough sanctions on Russia.

"One of the questions that we have is why the magnitude of this? I mean you look at 35 people being expelled, two sites being closed down, the question is, is that response in proportion to the actions taken? Maybe it was; maybe it wasn't but you have to think about that," Spicer said.

Trump is to have briefings with intelligence agencies this week after he returns to New York on Sunday.

On Saturday, Trump expressed continued skepticism over whether Russia was responsible for computer hacks of Democratic Party officials.

"I think it's unfair if we don't know. It could be somebody else. I also know things that other people don't know so we cannot be sure," Trump said.

He said he would disclose some information on the issue on Tuesday or Wednesday, without elaborating. It is unclear if, upon taking office on Jan. 20, he would seek to roll back Obama's actions, which mark a post-Cold War low in U.S.-Russian ties.

Spicer said that after China in 2015 seized records of U.S. government employees "no action publicly was taken. Nothing, nothing was taken when millions of people had their private information, including information on security clearances that was shared. Not one thing happened."

"So there is a question about whether there's a political retaliation here versus a diplomatic response," he added.

Pressure in Congress

U.S. intelligence agencies say Russia was behind hacks into Democratic Party organizations and operatives before the presidential election. Moscow denies this. U.S. intelligence officials say the Russian cyber attacks aimed to help Trump defeat Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Republican John McCain, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has scheduled a hearing for Thursday on foreign cyber threats and has said that Russia must be made to pay the price for attacks "on our very fundamentals of democracy."

The top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee said on the same ABC program that Congress would push for an even harsher reprisal against Russia and warned Trump against undoing Obama's sanctions.

"We think that more has to be done. We don't think that frankly the steps that have been taken are enough of a deterrent," said Representative Adam Schiff, a California Democrat. "And you're going to see bipartisan support in Congress for stronger sanctions against Russia."

Senator Tom Cotton, a Republican from Arkansas, said on "Fox News Sunday" that Obama's sanctions were not enough.

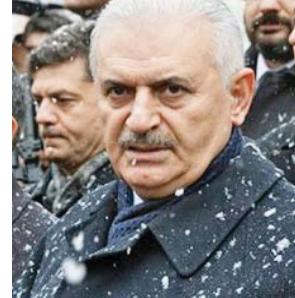
Russian President Vladimir Putin decided not to expel anyone in retaliation, saying he would consider the actions of Trump when deciding on further steps. Trump, who has repeatedly praised Putin, said the Russian leader was "very smart" for holding back.

Russian diplomats who were expelled by Obama left Washington on Sunday, Russian news agencies reported, citing Russia's embassy.

(Source: Reuters)

Turkish PM to visit Iraq this week to discuss fight against terror

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim will be visiting Iraq this week to discuss the fight against terrorism and the future of Iraq, the government's spokesman said Monday.



"The Prime Minister will be traveling to Iraq on Thursday to start a new era with the Iraqi central government," Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus told a news conference.

"A new peace perspective in Iraq is just around the corner," Kurtulmus added. Yildirim's office said in a statement he would be visiting both Baghdad and Erbil.

Relations between Turkey and the Iraq have been tense in the past, particularly over the presence of Turkish troops at the Bashiqi camp north of Mosul.

(Source: Reuters)

Arturo Vidal: 'I think 2017 will be our year'

Bundesliga winner, DFB Cup winner, Copa America Centenario winner, Chilean Footballer of the Year: it has been a memorable 2016 for Arturo Vidal, although FC Bayern München's combative midfielder is aiming to go one better in 2017.

Bundesliga.com caught up with one of world football's finest midfielders to reflect on the year just gone and look ahead to what is to come in 2017...

bundesliga.com: Arturo Vidal, what were your first steps in the game and what was your relationship to football when you were younger?

Arturo Vidal: It was difficult at the start when I was a boy, but thanks to my mother's efforts I managed to make it. On top of that, I was lucky enough to have a pitch right outside my house. Those things helped me to believe it was possible to become a footballer and that I'd be able to help my family. Everything I experienced back then helped me a great deal psychologically. It gave me the desire and the battling spirit to keep going and fight out in the world.



bundesliga.com: What was it like for you when you first arrived in Germany, at Bayer 04 Leverkusen, in 2007?

Vidal: It wasn't easy but I was so determined to succeed and make my childhood ambitions come true that I decided to fight against everything. I was at odds with everything: with the language, for example, with great players who were older than me, with coaches who initially left me out of the team or with whom I had a difference of opinion. There were a lot of things that generally don't get publicised, but it was my mentality, or my desire to succeed, that were stronger than anything else.

bundesliga.com: You have now been at FC Bayern for approximately 18 months. How would you evaluate your time in the Bundesliga with them?

Vidal: To be honest I'm very happy and satisfied with what I've done. That said, I'm still missing a few things that would make me even more satisfied, that would make me totally happy, such as winning the Champions League this season. That's one of my objectives. It's been a dream of mine ever since I started to like football. Another dream is to win the World Cup with my national team.

bundesliga.com: You have been surrounded by top-class players throughout your career. Which players have you most enjoyed watching or playing alongside?

Vidal: I've played with a lot of first-rate players and several of them are the best in the world at the moment. It's difficult to choose one ahead of any other, but in goal, obviously, Manuel Neuer, Gianluigi Buffon and Claudio Bravo. In midfield there's Andrea Pirlo, Xabi Alonso, Charles Aranguiz and Franck Ribery. There are so many good footballers. I could fill three of four teams with players I like, and all of them would be top-class.

bundesliga.com: You have won almost everything you could have in 2016. How would you summarise your year?

Vidal: On a scale of one to ten I'd give it a nine. The only thing missing was the Champions League, where we reached the semi-finals. We played really well in that match but we were knocked out by a strong team [Club Atletico de Madrid]. I hope this coming year will be a ten.

bundesliga.com: Can Bayern win everything?

Vidal: This team has to win everything and that's why we've got the players we've got. I think 2017 will be our year. We've got a very good coaching staff and great players who are hungry to win titles. So we're going to try and win everything.

bundesliga.com: Was Bayern's final game before the winter break, a 3-0 win over RB Leipzig, a statement of intent?

Vidal: Yes, we played really well in that game and personally I felt pretty comfortable. It sent a message to our opponent and also to the rest of the league. But the most important thing is that we went into the break top of the Bundesliga.

bundesliga.com: You still have many more years left as a footballer. Do you think you will finish your career at Bayern?

Vidal: Yes, it's possible. I feel good here and I'm happy so it's difficult to say that I want to finish my career elsewhere. I feel as if I'm at home. My family is doing well and my kids are better than ever. That helps me make decisions that help me and my family. When you're happy with a team, like I am at Bayern, then you want to stay there a long time. On the other hand, you never know what the future might bring. I'd also like to play for Colo Colo [in Chile] at the end of my career.

bundesliga.com: What has football given you?

Vidal: A lot. I'd say almost everything, in fact. It's helped me grow as a person, to mature. Living away from your homeland is difficult in general, but football helps you to forget your problems and about the distance between you and your family and friends. I'm grateful to football because without it I don't know where I'd be today.

bundesliga.com: How do you like living in Munich? Are you able to go out and quietly enjoy a coffee or have a meal in a restaurant?

Vidal: I really like living in Munich. Here in Germany my family - wife and kids - is very united. There's a lot of love and care. And that's essential for me, it helps me feel at ease. But it's obviously normal for me to miss my friends too.

bundesliga.com: What would you like to do once your playing days are over?

Vidal: I'd rest a bit and spend time with my children, my grandchildren - God willing - and my family in general. I'd also like to have time to enjoy my horses and all the things that have cost me a lot of energy over all these years.

(Source: Bundesliga)

Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo: Money is not my priority

Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo has said that he is not motivated by money after the Portugal captain was linked with turning down a lucrative offer to play in China.

Ronaldo's agent Jorge Mendes has said that an unnamed Chinese club were willing to pay Madrid a transfer fee of €300 million and give the 31-year-old an annual wage of more than €100m, but the offer was rejected as it was "impossible" for his client to accept.

Asked about being the world's best-paid footballer in an interview on Egyptian TV channel On TV, the recently crowned 2016 Ballon d'Or winner said: "In my job I try to be the best, and I work for that."

"So this is important for me, to be the No. 1, the most valued player. But this is not my motivation. My motivation is to play football, to be the best, and this is what I try to do. I'm looking to money only as a means to become comfortable and independent after I finish football."

In November, Ronaldo agreed a new deal which ties him to Madrid until 2021 when he will be 36, while he also recently signed a "lifetime" endorsement contract with Nike which reportedly could be worth as much as \$1 billion.

Asked how he could keep his motivation going at this stage in his career, Ronaldo said he was aiming to maintain the form which has brought him two of the last three Ballon d'Or prizes.

"My target is to maintain, I have a few years more to play football," he said. "I sign a great deal with Nike, a great deal with Real Madrid, so I am glad and I am blessed at my age to do two such huge contracts. For me it is unbelievable, I feel very proud for that. And of course it will give me more motivation to continue working hard. My job to maintain my level and to do what I like to do. I am so happy."

Ronaldo was also asked how he finds a balance between his football and his growing business interests, which include his CR7 brands of clothing, footwear, fragrances and blankets.

"My team, the guys who work with me, are the best," he said. "They work hard like me, outside football. Business is something I like and in the future I can see myself in that position. But now I have to focus more on football, as that is my job."

"In my team I have guys who take care of the specific areas for me. I like to know how the business is going, it is important, as when something has your name on it you should know about them - the shoes, the hotels, the blankets, the headphones, the fragrance, many things we have. I trust in my people."

The Chinese Super League has seen a number of high-profile names make the move to the division, with Carlos Tevez and Oscar most recently choosing to play Asia.

Mendes' claim about the record offer from China came as big names including Carlos Tevez and Oscar having moved to the Far East this month, following previous huge deals involving other stars such as Jackson Martinez and Graziano Pelle.

Asked in AS for his views on the potential power of the Chinese Super League, Spain's foremost football economist Jose Maria Gay de Liebana said he had his doubts about sustainability, while adding that this was different to other Asian countries who had attracted aging stars with big money.



(Source: Soccernet)

Antonio Conte doing an extraordinary job at Chelsea - Carlo Ancelotti



Bayern Munich coach Carlo Ancelotti has praised Antonio Conte on doing an "extraordinary" job at his former club Chelsea after the Blues equalled a Premier League record of 13 straight wins in a season.

Ancelotti was the last Italian coach to lead Chelsea to a Premier League title in 2010 and he believes Conte has what it takes to emulate him this season after a 4-2 win over Stoke City took them six points clear at the top of the table.

"What Conte is doing at Chelsea is extraordinary," Ancelotti said in an interview with Gazzetta dello Sport. "Antonio has determination, ideas, personality and experience. He's mature as a coach now and I'm truly happy for him."

"[Zinedine] Zidane has won the World Club Cup after winning the Champions League [with Real Madrid], and there were people who thought he was not a coach. The truth is Conte and Zidane had quality on the field and they've taken that into their new jobs with them."

Ancelotti, who has deemed his first six months as Bayern coach as "exceptional," had equally warm words for other coaches, starting with Napoli's Maurizio Sarri.

"I admire Sarri's work a lot," he said. "They seem to be able to play with their eyes closed -- they are really beautiful to watch at times. Now they face Real Madrid [in the Champions League] and that's going to be an intriguing tie."

"I've never won anything on paper as a player or a coach -- you have got to win on the field and I can tell you now that if Real want to go through, they are going to have to sweat a lot."

Ancelotti won the Serie A title with AC Milan in 2004 and believes current

Rossoneri coach Vincenzo Montella has what it takes to emulate him.

"I'd like to pay my compliments to Montella, who is very, very, very good," he said. "He's built a squad which wasn't at all easy and he's launching the careers of plenty of young players, courageously. That's the path to follow."

On the other side of Milan, Inter Milan coach Stefano Pioli has also caught Ancelotti's eye.

"He's a golden lad, Stefano," Ancelotti said. "He's got clear ideas and an effective game plan. It seems like the results are now starting to emerge. He's going to do well -- I hope he does."

Ancelotti, however, is struggling to see beyond Juventus becoming Serie A champions for a sixth straight time this season, while he feels they are going to be one of the teams to watch in the Champions League.

"[Massimiliano] Allegri's got a great team," he said. "I know all about the experience and mentality of Juventus and they never give you an inch. They are determined and decisive."

"They have time to improve -- they've got a month-and-a-half now to prepare for the last 16 [of the Champions League] and they've got to use this time to correct the mistakes that have emerged from the opening part of the season, but I can say the same for my Bayern -- there's plenty to put right."

"If it were not for the language [in Germany], which I just cannot get my head round, everything would be perfect. The team [Bayern] is playing well and winning, we're top of the league -- what more can one ask for?"

(Source: ESPN)

Southgate targets world number one ranking for England



New England manager Gareth Southgate wants to make the under-achieving nation the world's top football power, however long it takes, he said in a New Year message on Sunday.

England have slumped to 13th in FIFA's rankings and have failed to make any impact at major tournaments for decades but Southgate is relishing the task ahead.

"We're 13th in the world rankings and at the last two tournaments we haven't got through a knockout game," Southgate, who was named as full-time manager in November after a four-match interim period in charge, said.

"There are some obstacles we have to overcome but for me that's a great opportunity and the potential is huge."

"I don't have any fear in what lies ahead because I'm just seeing what's possible. How do we go to being the number one team in the world?"

"We've got to deliver, we've got to work hard, we've got to work intelligently. I'm looking at what's achievable, I'm not thinking about anything else."

Southgate has taken charge after a tumultuous period for England. After a poor 2014 World Cup when they went out at the group stage there came the dismal flop at Euro 2016 when they were knocked out by Iceland in the last 16, leading to the resignation of manager Roy Hodgson.

Hodgson's replacement Sam Allardyce lasted only 67 days before stepping down after being caught up in a newspaper sting in which he was secretly recorded saying it was possible to "get around" Football Association rules on player transfers.

Under his guidance England are unbeaten, if not thoroughly convincing, in four games with wins against Malta and

Scotland and draws with Slovenia and Spain.

He has impressed with his realism and vision for the future though and has not been afraid to speak his mind.

On taking over he spoke of the need for some "humility" in a squad full of millionaire players.

Continuing that theme Southgate, who won 57 England caps, said he was concerned about the spiralling wages of young players.

"The very best players have that drive and that's why they get to the top," he said.

"The concern is for any young player at an academy, who's not quite made it in the first team, but thinks they have because you get big money for having achieved nothing."

"If you don't have that inner drive, there's a danger you'll never actually get to be a top professional or be a first-team player. In years to come they could look back and have huge regrets."

Southgate has already said Wayne Rooney will remain captain, even if the Manchester United forward is no longer a guaranteed starter in the first team. The former Middlesbrough boss wants more leadership throughout the squad though.

"At different moments you've got to have different people take that lead, whether that's being brave enough to take the ball or talking to the others, getting them mentally back on course," he said.

"A lot of that responsibility over the last few years has fallen on Wayne's shoulders; that's got to be shared, that's got to be developed and that's not just on the field but off the field in particular."

England's next game is at home to Lithuania in a World Cup qualifier on March 26.

(Source: Reuters)

Branko Ivanovic attacks Carlos Queiroz over UAE's camp

TT SPORTS Persepolis coach Branko Ivanovic has attacked Iran national football team coach Carlos Queiroz for holding training camp in the UAE in mid-season.

Team Melli flew to Dubai on Monday morning to hold a one-week training camp in Dubai.

Iran was supposed to play a friendly match with Morocco but the match has been cancelled and the African team will play Island or Sweden instead of Team Melli.

"We are going to prepare our team in the mid-season but Queiroz has invited our key players to the training camp while Persepolis should prepare for the AFC Champions League. If we cannot qualify for the ACL next stage, Queiroz will be responsible for that," the Croat told the reports.

"Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia is our rival in the AFC Champions League and has played Real Madrid in a warm-up match but we should play with Iran's first or second division teams. It can make problem for Persepolis in the Asian competitions and Iran league," Branko said.

"We have to support Team Melli to advance to the 2018 World Cup since I've been Iran coach for four years and I understand the situation but the collaboration should not be one-sided. Football in a country is not just about national team. We have women football, futsal, clubs, and grassroots football teams as well," Branko stated.



Sepahan's defender links with Real Ovideo



TT SPORTS Iranian defender Aref Gholami has been linked with a move to Spanish Segunda Division side Real Ovideo.

The 19-year old defender who has been a regular starter for Sepahan in this season's Iran Professional League has caught the eye of Spanish side whose coach is former Real Madrid defender Fernando Hierro.

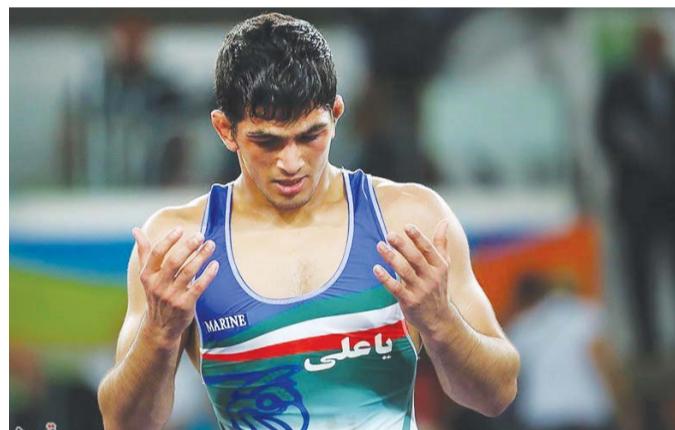
The Spanish side has sent and official

letter to Sepahan in order to invite the young defender.

Ovideo is currently in 12th place in Segunda Division. Gholami has also received and offer from Qatari side Al Sadd. He can reunite with Iranian international defender Morteza Pouraliganji if he joins the Qatar Stars League side.

Gholami has also played seven games for Iran U-20 team.

Iran to participate at Paris Tournament with five wrestlers



TT SPORTS Iran will participate in Paris Wrestling Tournament 2017 with five representatives.

The competition will be held at the Olympic Center in Paris, France from January 29 to 31.

Olympic gold medallist Hassan Yazdani will partake at the tournament. Yazdani claimed a gold medal in

the 74kg in Olympics after defeating Russian Anuar Geduev.

Komeil Ghazemi will also participate in the event. The -125kg freestyle won a silver medal in the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Peyman Biabani, Hossein Shahbazi and Amir Reza Amiri will also represent Iran in the competition.

Ferrer, Muguruza break Australian hearts in Brisbane

David Ferrer sent local favourite Bernard Tomic packing with an easy 6-3 7-5 win in the opening round of the Brisbane International on Monday.

The eighth-seeded Spaniard capitalised on Tomic's poor serve, breaking the flat-looking Australian three times to clinch the first set at the Pat Rafter Arena.

They traded service holds through the second set until the final game when Tomic's eighth double fault sealed Ferrer's comprehensive win.

"All tennis players have pressure, but at this moment of my career, I need to enjoy these types of matches on Centre Court," Ferrer said.

"I am 34 years old, 35 next month, so I hope I will play a little bit longer," added the Spaniard who faces another Australian, wildcard Jordan Thompson, in the second round.

Nicolas Mahut staged a brilliant comeback against Stephane Robert to win the all-French contest 4-6 6-3 6-4. He will meet the winner of the clash between seventh seed Grigor Dimitrov and Steve Johnson.

In the women's event, fourth seed Garbine Muguruza staved off Samantha Stosur's spirited comeback, prevailing 7-5 6-7(2) 7-5 in a three-hour battle that ended in disappointment for the partisan crowd.

The 2016 French Open champion saved three set

points to surge ahead and broke Stosur twice early in the second set.

Stosur mounted a strong reply, racing into a 4-2 lead in the decider before Muguruza staged a comeback of her own to book her place in the second round against Daria Kasatkina. Sixth seed Elina Svitolina eased into the second round with a 6-3 6-3 victory over Olympic champion Monica Puig.

"My game was quite solid. I didn't do so many unforced errors, which is good, because with couple of changes it can happen," the world number 14 said.

(Source: Reuters)

Federer makes smooth return to action in Hopman Cup

Roger Federer showed no signs of rust in his first competitive match for six months when he outclassed Dan Evans 6-3 6-4 at the Hopman Cup on Monday.

The 17-times grand slam winner underwent knee surgery in February and, after missing the French Open with a back injury, announced in July that he needed extensive rehabilitation and would be sidelined for the rest of the season.

Federer walked out to a standing ovation from more than 13,500 fans at the Perth Arena and breezed to an easy win over Evans, putting Switzerland 1-0 ahead in their match against Britain in the mixed team event.

"The standing ovation coming in, it was very special. I'm here now enjoying and looking forward to the week of course," the 35-year-old said in a courtside interview.

Asked what keeps him going, Federer said; "I guess it depends also on how you get hurt. I got hurt filling up a bath for my children. It's not really the way I wanted to leave this game."

The former world number one, who has slipped to 16th in the rankings, said he enjoyed the time out but had started to miss tennis.



"You can't be more happy to return back on a Centre Court, taping your ankles, tying your shoes and walking out and getting that kind of welcome," he said.

Federer has not won a grand slam title since Wimbledon in 2012.

"It would be nice to win another one, of course I'd even take two-three-four," he said.

"It's tough at the top. A lot of good guys are there right now, a lot of young guys are coming up too. The gap's definitely not very big but I gave it chance. Let's see what happens."

(Source: Reuters)

Zenit's Axel Witsel to reject Juventus for Chinese Super League move

Axel Witsel has confirmed he will reject an offer from Juventus in order to join Chinese Super League club Tianjin Quanjian from Zenit St. Petersburg.

Witsel, 27, almost joined Juve in the summer but the move fell through and a deal was expected to be completed in the January transfer window ahead of him becoming a free agent at the end of the season.

However, Mediaset quote the Belgium international as telling Tuttosport that he has had "an irresistible offer" from China that was too good to turn down.

"It was a very difficult decision because on the one hand there was a huge, top club in Juventus, but on the other hand there was an irresistible offer for the future of my family," he said.

"The Bianconeri management always behaved like real gentlemen and I can only be grateful to them."

"I will be a Juventus fan and I hope that Juve will win the Champions League, and who knows maybe our paths will finally cross in future."

Witsel will link up with Fabio Cannavaro at Tianjin Quanjian, and earn a reported €18 million annual salary over a four-year contract.

RTBF had last week reported Shanghai



SIPG, coached by former Zenit boss Andre Villas-Boas, were also among a trio of Chinese clubs vying for Witsel.

Should the move be confirmed Witsel would be the latest star name added to a growing list who have opted to move to China, where the government hopes to turn the country into a football superpower.

Carlos Tevez and Oscar have recently made the switch in highly lucrative deals, and even players of lesser renown are now casting envious glances at the riches on offer.

(Source: ESPN)

Jurgen Klopp: Borussia Dortmund's Mario Gotze still has world-class talent

Jurgen Klopp says Borussia Dortmund midfielder Mario Gotze is capable of returning to the form that made him one of the game's most promising talents, telling Bild: "The world-class footballer in him still lies dormant."

Gotze, 24, returned to Dortmund in the summer after three largely disappointing years at Bayern Munich but, used in a more defensive role by BVB coach Thomas Tuchel, he has rarely shown his full potential.

Liverpool boss Klopp, who handed Gotze his Bundesliga debut when in charge at Dortmund in November 2009, said the Germany international can overcome this difficult spell and establish himself among the best in the game.

"He picked up injuries often enough at unfavourable times and overall has not rediscovered his rhythm," said Klopp, who was strongly linked with a move for Gotze last year.

"The world-class footballer in him still lies dormant. It's like cycling -- you can't unlearn it."



Dortmund, who ended last season as runners-up, have endured a disappointed first half of the season as a team, with Tuchel's side currently sixth, 12 points behind leaders Bayern.

Klopp, though, said Dortmund are "maybe the most talented team in Europe" and "have the potential in the squad so that everyone will be happy in the end."

Klopp was also asked about Dortmund's local rivals Schalke, where Christian Heidel -- the man who gave him his break as a coach at Mainz -- is now sporting executive.

Heidel remained calm despite five straight defeats at the beginning of the season and vowed to keep coach Markus Weinzierl, who joined from Augsburg last summer, and the club have risen to 11th in the standings.

"A horror start like that can turn into an advantage for Schalke in the end," he said. "To stay calm during such a period is maybe Schalke's biggest achievement in recent years. That was really good."

"Everything will be fine there in the end. They've got a good team, a clear plan, a top coach, a top sporting director and unbelievably passionate fans."

Klopp said he can see similarities between Liverpool and Schalke, who last won a German title in 1958, five years before the start of Bundesliga.

Liverpool have not been crowned champions in the Premier League era, with the last of their 18 titles coming in 1989-90.

He said: "Schalke are a bit like Liverpool. If you haven't won the title in such a long time, it does not mean that you must win it, but the pressure grows, and the desire too."

(Source: Soccernet)

Iran Girls' U-18 volleyball team beaten by American team

Iran girls' U-18 volleyball team was defeated against champion of USA universities in a friendly game on Sunday.

The Iranian team lost to its rival in straight sets (25-15, 25-16, 25-14) in Maribor, Slovenia.

Majda Cicic's girls had already lost to Slovenian teams in their three previous friendlies.

"The American players were older than our players and they have played together for many years. Our players have recently started the professional volleyball and there is a long way ahead of them," Cicic said.

"Our players are eager to learn new things and it will help them to progress. They are doing their best in the training," she added.

Iranian girls' U-18 volleyball team started its 11-day training camp in Slovenia last week.

Iran is preparing for the 11th Asian Girls U-18 Volleyball Championship which will be held in Chongqing, China from March 5 to 13.

(Source: Tasnim)

Iran, Morocco friendly match called off

The friendly match between Iran and Morocco football teams scheduled for January 6 at Dubai's Al Ain Stadium has been called off.

The match was part of Iran preparation for the World Cup qualifiers.

Team Melli left Tehran on Monday to hold a seven-day training camp in Dubai.

According to the reports, the UAE had only allowed the game to be held behind closed doors but many Iranian fans in Dubai were eager in attending the game.

Morocco is getting ready for the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations which will take place in Gabon from January 14 to February 5 where the team has been drawn in the Group C alongside defending champion Ivory Coast, DR Congo and Togo.

Iran will face Qatar and China on March 23 and 28 respectively in Group A of the 2018 FIFA World Cup Qualification tournament for Asia.

Other teams in the group are South Korea, Uzbekistan and Syria.

(Source: Tasnim)



Poem of the day

This well-arranged composition will remain for years,
 When every atom of our dust is dispersed.
 The intention of this design was that it should survive
 Because I perceive no stability in my existence.



Prayer Times

Noon: 12:09 Evening: 17:24 Dawn: 5:45 (tomorrow) Sunrise: 7:15 (tomorrow)

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Fajr festival to spotlight artworks from Spain, Brazil

T A R T TEHRAN — The 9th edition of the Fajr International Festival of Visual Arts will review artworks from Spain and Brazil this year, the organizers have announced.

In a press conference held at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on Monday, the secretary of the Festival Mojtaba Aqai said that an exhibition of artworks from the two countries will open during the festival running from January 22 to February 18.

He also said that artists from 47 countries have applied to attend the festival, adding that about 13,000 artworks have so far been submitted to the secretariat.

"A collection of 125 works have so far been chosen by the selecting board and the competing works will go on display in the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art," he remarked.

The Niavarani Cultural Center will be hosting the international section and works by prominent Iranian visual artists, he stated.

A seminar entitled "Reading Art" has also been arranged on the margins, and the film screening section has been removed from the festival this year, he concluded.

NEWS IN BRIEF



"Kech" named best short at Third Eye Asian filmfest

T A R T TEHRAN — Iranian director Mehrdad Hassani's "Kech" won the award for best short film at the 15th Third Eye Asian Film Festival, which was held in Mumbai, India from December 15 to 22, the Iranian Youth Cinema Society (IYCS) announced on Monday.

"Kech" which means daughter in Kurdish, tells the story of a nurse who sacrifices herself to save a child from a war zone.

Iranian shorts "Unknown" by Azar Faramarzi, "The cat and I" by Babak Habibifar, "You Just Be My Mother" by Roqieh Tavakoli and "Flesym" by Behruz Rustai also went on screen during the festival.



Nova ensemble to perform in Tehran

T A R T TEHRAN — Nova, an Iranian traditional music ensemble led by tar player Puya Damadi, is scheduled to perform a concert tonight at Tehran's Niavarani Cultural Center.

The group plans to perform a repertoire of 20 selections from their latest album, "Return".

The ensemble features Saman Vijeh on oud, Arash Boluri on santur, Erfan Kamfar on daf and Mazda Damadi on tombak. Hossein Shokri is the vocalist for the group.



Tehran Intl. Storytelling Festival set for February

T A R T TEHRAN — The 19th edition of the International Storytelling Festival will be held in Tehran from February 15 to 19.

The festival is organized every year by the Institute for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA).

North American movie box office sets record in 2016

NEW YORK (Reuters) — The North American movie box office raked in \$11.4 billion in 2016, making it the highest-earning year in history, according to box office tracker comScore.

Last year's total eclipsed the previous record of \$11.14 billion in 2015.

The crop of blockbuster movies in 2016 was topped by "Finding Dory", which tallied \$486.3 million in sales in the United States and Canada, comScore said.

The latest Star Wars movie, "Rogue One", finished the year in second place, but it was only released on Dec. 16 in the United States and continues to enjoy strong sales.

Disney had six of North America's top 10 grossing movies in 2016 and all of the top three, including "Captain America: Civil War", which took in \$408 million, according to comScore.

"Forgetful fish, super-heroes, household pets and space travelers led the charge in a year that was marked by an incredibly diverse selection of films from every genre and of every size and scope from all the studios," comScore's senior media analyst, Paul Dergarabedian, said in a news release on Sunday.

'Mashhad as capital of Islamic culture promotes ethics of Imam Reza'

T CULTURE TEHRAN — Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Reza Salehi-Amiri has said that selecting Mashhad as the Capital of Islamic Culture for 2017 has provided a good opportunity for Iran to promote the ethics of Imam Reza (AS) who is buried in the northeastern Iranian city.

He made the remarks during a ceremony held in the Ferdowsi High School of Mashhad on Monday to celebrate selecting the northeastern Iranian city as the Capital of Islamic Culture for 2017.

"Today we hold a celebration to turn the spotlight on the Islamic-Iranian identity and introduce this identity to the world," he said.

The culture minister said that the programs for the Capital of Islamic Culture 2017 have officially begun, adding that President Hassan Rouhani has also expressed congratulations over this auspicious event.

"Mashhad is the city of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS), which has made Iran a sacred land, and surely in the near future it will turn out to be the permanent Capital of Islamic Culture," he remarked.

"Mashhad will once again refurbish its identity and the world will once more witness the glory of the modern civilization of Islam," he asserted.

Salehi-Amiri also added that in the world of today where violence is observed everywhere, the message of peace, friendship and brotherhood is heard from

مشهد ۲۰۱۷
 پایتخت فرهنگ اسلامی
 عاصمة الثقافة الإسلامية
MASHHAD 2017
 Capital of Islamic Culture

the holy city of Mashhad.

The high-ranking officials of Mashhad, including Mashhad Governor General Alireza Rashidian, were present at the ceremony.



The Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) selects the Capital of Islamic Culture every year for the Arab nations and the Asian and African regions.

DEFC to chronicle life of siah-bazi master Sadi Afshar

T A R T TEHRAN — The Documentary and Experimental Film Center (DEFC) is producing a documentary about the life of Sadi Afshar (1934-2013), the master of siah-bazi, a type of Iranian folk dramatic performing art.

Siah-bazi is a type of Iranian folk play featuring a blackfaced harlequin who stirs the audience to laughter with amusing improvisations.

Amir-Hossein Guran is the director of the documentary titled "A Glance over the Life of Sadi Afshar", the DEFC announced in a press release on Monday.

Guran called Afshar "the second Charlie Chaplin of the world" and said, "In this film, Afshar talks about his

experiences and his heartfelt emotions that have never been expressed in any other film or source."

"Scenes of the film have been taken over the last few years of his life," he added.

Guran has conducted interviews with some Afshar's colleagues and friends, including Davud Fat'hali beigi, Mahmud Azizi, Gholam Babutah, Reza Rezamandi, Javad Ensafi and Marjan Qamar.

Afshar gave many performances in Iran and other countries during his lifelong career in this genre of Iranian dramatic art.

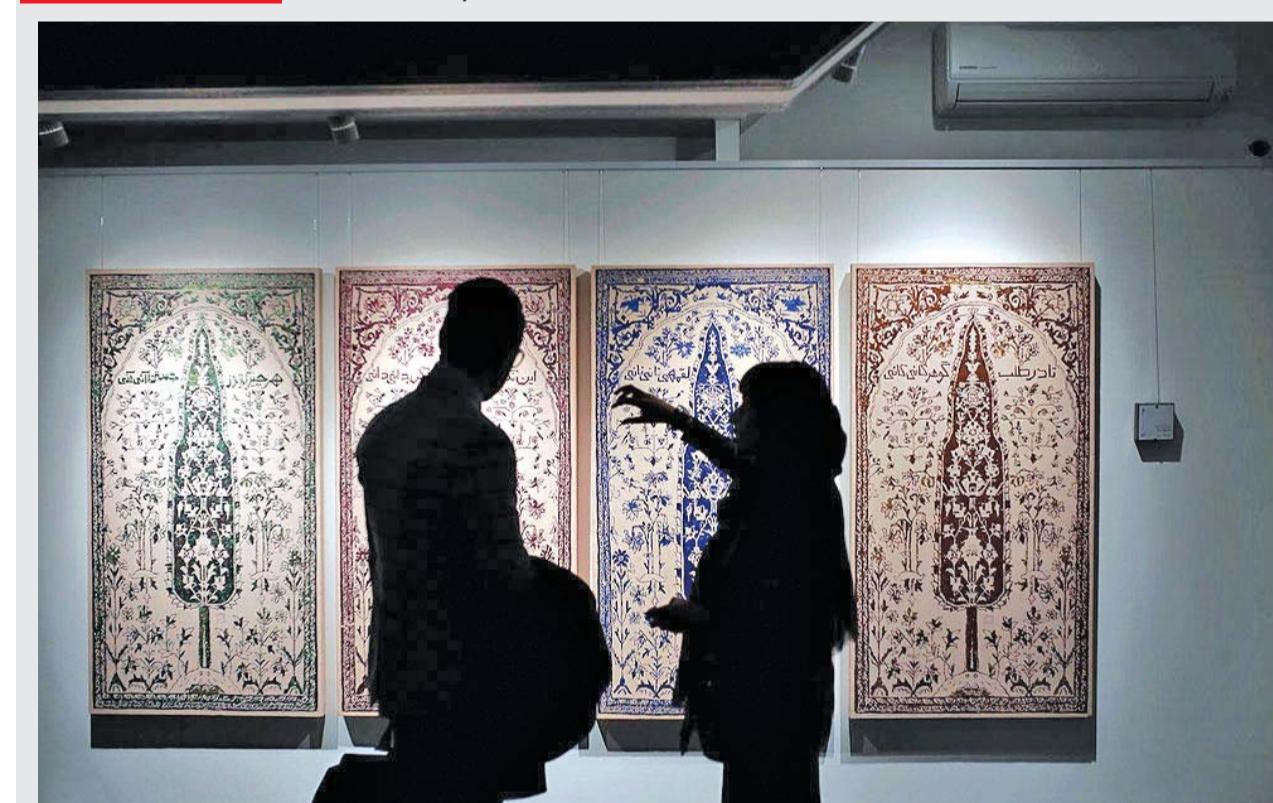
He was so dedicated to his work that once during an interview he had expressed his wish to die on stage.



Sadi Afshar (L) and his colleague perform a siah-bazi in an undated photo.

PICTURE OF THE DAY

© HOnaronline/Sara Sassani



Visitors talk together at an exhibition of paintings by Narenj Kazemi at E1 Gallery in Tehran on January 1, 2017. The exhibit titled "Deep Oath" runs through January 13 at the gallery located at 1 Hamid Dead End, off Lesani Alley, Jebheh St., off Mahdieh St. in the Elahieh neighborhood.

Iranian filmmaker to display photos of Nelson Mandela funeral at UN

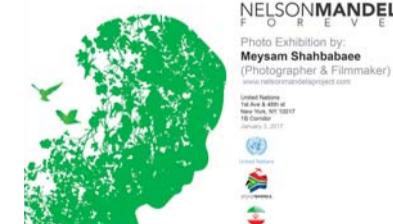
T A R T TEHRAN — An exhibition of photos featuring the funeral services for the South African anti-apartheid hero Nelson Mandela will open today (January 3) 2017 at the UN Headquarters in New York.

Entitled "Nelson Mandela Forever", the 3-day exhibit showcases photos taken by Iranian filmmaker and photographer Meysam Shahbabai, while he was attending the ceremony in the village of Qunu, where Mandela was buried on December 15, 2013, ten days after his death.

The UN General Assembly has declared July 18 "Nelson Mandela International Day" and Shahbabai arranged several exhibits in South Africa, France and the United States in 2016.

He also displayed the photos and the book containing the photos in an exhibition in Tehran on July 18 to mark the birthday anniversary of Mandela.

The ceremony was attended by



the United Nations Information Center Director, Maria Dotsenko.

Shahbabai is making a documentary, which will put the spotlight on the life story of Nelson Mandela.

Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years for defying the racist apartheid government that led South Africa for decades. He emerged from prison in 1990 and became South Africa's first Black President four years later.

Mandela died on December 5, 2013 at the age of 95 after months of struggling with an illness.

"Bad Boys of Brexit" headed for screen, says Farage associate

LONDON (Reuters) — Three film production companies including Netflix are interested in making a warts-and-all screen dramatization of Nigel Farage's insurgent Brexit campaign, according to an associate of Farage.

This would be another extraordinary twist for Farage, who from the fringes of British politics achieved his life's goal when Britons voted to leave the European Union last June, and has since befriended U.S. President-elect Donald Trump.

The project would be based on "The Bad Boys of Brexit", an account of Farage's campaign by Arron Banks, a multi-millionaire British insurance tycoon who bankrolled the campaign, according to Andy Wigmore, a spokesman for Banks.

"We have three interested parties in the rights to the book and we will be meeting representatives from three studios including a Netflix representative on Jan. 19 in Washington DC," Wigmore told Reuters in a text message.

Bruce Willis, Demi Moore donate Idaho theater to troupe

HAILEY, Idaho (AP) — Actors Bruce Willis and Demi Moore have donated the Liberty Theatre in downtown Hailey to a local theater company.

The Idaho Statesman reports that the formalized gift gives the Company of Fools a secure, permanent space where the theatrical company has performed since 1996.

The couple, who are now divorced, bought the historic movie house in 1995 with the idea of transforming it into a live-performance space. The next year, they encouraged friends Rusty Wilson and Denise Simone to relocate their theater company to Idaho to perform on the Liberty's thrust stage.

In 2013, Company of Fools merged with the Sun Valley Center for the Arts, creating the largest arts organization in Idaho.

Moore and Willis are longtime supporters of the Wood River Valley.

Farage, Banks, Wigmore and others in their circle will travel to Washington for Trump's inauguration as president, which will take place on Jan. 20.

"We have invited all of them (the studio representatives) to our pre-inaugural party ... We have also invited many of Trump's team to the event," said Wigmore.

Netflix did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Sunday Telegraph newspaper earlier reported that Hollywood studio Warner Bros. was also interested, but it was unclear from Wigmore's texts to Reuters whether those who have approached Warner Bros. included representatives of Warner Bros.

The subtitle of Banks' book is "Tales of Mischief Mayhem and Guerrilla Warfare in the EU Referendum Campaign". It is described on its publisher's website as "an honest, uncensored and highly entertaining diary of the campaign that changed the course of history".