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Leader: Britain hatching insidious plot against region

POLITICS TEHRAN — In comments on Sunday, Seyyed Ali Khamenei called England the "real threat" to the region, warning of plots being hatched by British circles.

"England, the washed-up, old colonizer, has made a comeback to the Persian Gulf once again, and intends to pursue its interests using the countries of the region," the Leader told a gathering in Tehran.

"British circles are planning and making decisions for regional countries and Iran."

Yet, they are thwarted in their attempts to meddle in Iran as "the public opinion" is against them, he noted.

Ayatollah Khamenei rejected the idea of "enemy-making," citing efforts by England to train and arm locals in the region and Iran so as to "unleash them against the Islamic establishment and nation."

They are "blood, irreconcilable enemy of the Iranian nation."

"America, England, international plutocracies, and Zionists are main enemies of an independent, progressive Iran."

In the face of such animosity toward Islamic establishment and the Iranian nation, "the most important duty is to 'know the enemy and its goals and stand up to it'."

However, the Leader stressed, the way to stand up to the enemy passes through "enhancing the country's might and retrofitting (the country) through reinforcing components of national authority."

The Leader further enlisted "faith and religious knowledge," "scientific clout," "resistance economy," and "preserving national honor" as four components of the "national might."

Dismissing a reductionist view toward religion that limits religion to mosques and individuals, the Leader said, "The enemy fears a religion that has government, economy, power, politics, army, and financial and executive system."

On the importance of "scientific clout," Ayatollah Khamenei appeared very emphatic, saying "the scientific movement must not be stopped, nor must its pace be slowed down." →2

Truck-ramming attack kills 4 Israeli soldiers, injures 18 in East al-Quds

At least four Israeli soldiers have been killed and more than a dozen others injured when a truck rammed into Israel's military forces in the occupied East Jerusalem al-Quds.

Israeli police spokeswoman, Luba Simari, said the incident took place in the Armon HaNetziv (also known as East Talpiot) promenade in southern part of East al-Quds (Jerusalem) on Sunday afternoon as a large truck veered off road and plowed through a group of Israeli soldiers who had just gotten off a bus, Arabic-language Palestine al-Yawm news agency reported.

She added that four Israeli soldiers lost their lives and 18 others sustained injuries in the attack. Three of the wounded troopers are said to be in critical condition.

Israeli media outlets later reported that the driver of the truck had been shot dead, without providing any details about the identity of the driver.

Palestinian sources, however, identified the man as Fadi Qanbar — a former prisoner and resident of the Old City of al-Quds.

Inspector General of Israel Police Rooney al-Sheikh has described the situation as "very serious," calling for large reinforcements to be dispatched to the area of the attack.

Meanwhile, in a related development, the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine termed the incident as a natural response from Palestinians to the ongoing Israeli aggression and its violent treatment of Palestinian people.

Later reports indicated that Israeli forces had stormed Jabal al-Mokaber region in occupied East al-Quds, breaking into the house of the Palestinian allegedly behind the truck ramming attack.

(Source: Press TV)

Iran in talks with Japan to optimize oil refining process

Iran is finalizing negotiations with two major Japanese companies to improve the efficiency of Tehran's aging refinery, an official announced.

In an interview with Tasnim, Abbas Kazemi, managing director of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC), said Iran has been in talks with Japanese and South Korean companies to optimize oil refining process in two old refineries in Tehran and Bandar Abbas.

One of the major plans is to optimize output in the refineries and reduce the production of fuel oil, a low-cost by-product of petroleum distillation process that is cheaper than crude, but produced in large amounts in the country's aging refineries, he explained.

According to Kazemi, South Koreans and Japanese have shown enthusiasm for investment in Iran to renovate the Iranian refineries following implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), a nuclear agreement between Iran and the Group 5+1 (Russia, China, the US, Britain, France and Germany).

The final round of negotiations with JGC Corporation and JCCP (Japan Cooperation Center, Petroleum) has begun to renovate Tehran's refinery, he noted.

(Source: Press TV)

Farewell to Rafsanjani



© Tehran Times/ Majid Asgaripour

By Ali Kushki

TEHRAN — Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Expediency Council and former president of Iran, passed away at the age of 82 on Sunday afternoon in a hospital in Tehran.

He died of severe heart condition, according to people close to the Rafsanjani family.

A funeral ceremony has been arranged for Tuesday.

"The soul of the great man of the revolution and politics, the paragon of patience and resistance, ascended to the heavens," said President Hassan Rouhani in a tweet.

Rafsanjani, a true follower of Ayatollah Khomeini, founder of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, led a life of political dynamism and eclecticism for over six decades.

Born in 1934 in a village in eastern province of Kerman, Rafsanjani grew up in a wealthy family.

He started his political career in the

"The soul of the great man of the revolution and politics, the paragon of patience and resistance, ascended to the heavens," President Hassan Rouhani tweeted.

1960s, acquainting himself with the views of the to-be founder of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini.

Soon he proved leadership qualities, winning the trust of Ayatollah Khomeini. He was arrested time and again by security forces of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last monarch of Iran, for his key role in anti-monarchy campaigns.

With the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Rafsanjani became the first parliament speaker of the post-revolution Iran.

In 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini tapped Rafsanjani as commander of the war after Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein waged a war against the fledgling revolution.

He served the revolution in his capacity as parliament speaker (1980-1988), president (1989-1997), and chairman of the Expediency Council (1998-to his death). He was also the head of the Assembly of Experts from 2007 until 2011 and interim Friday prayer preacher of Tehran from 1981 to 2009.

"Men of history will be remembered for ever. Ill-wishers should bear in mind that Hashemi is alive because the movement is alive," said Ayatollah Khomeini of Rafsanjani after he survived an assassination attempt on May 25, 1979.

The unwavering ayatollah established the Servants of the Construction Party in 1995. He was also one of the co-founders of the Islamic Republic Party and the Combatant Clergy Soci-

ety.

Leading a hectic political life did not prevent Rafsanjani from acting as a pragmatic politician.

The post-war "reconstruction" era of Rafsanjani (1989-97) saw economic development, private sector growth, and rising prosperity for the middle and upper classes.

He also established the Islamic Azad University, now the largest mortar-and-brick university in the world, accounting for half university seats in Iran.

The seasoned Rafsanjani was also a man of letter, writing a number of books, including the "Story of Palestine" and the multi-volume Tafsir Rahnama, a contemporary 20-volume exegesis of Quran.

"Men of history will be remembered for ever. Ill-wishers should bear in mind that Hashemi is alive because the movement is alive," said late Ayatollah Khomeini of Rafsanjani after he survived an assassination attempt on May 25, 1979.

Tehran lauds performance of anti-terror bloc in Syria

POLITICS TEHRAN — Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said on Sunday that "international determination" and "comprehensive efforts" are required to alleviate the sufferings of the Syrian people.

During a meeting in Damascus on Sunday with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Shamkhani also highlighted the need to involve the international community in efforts to reconstruct the Syrian infrastructure.

He also said, "Close cooperation among Tehran, Damascus and Moscow along with the resistance front brought many valuable victories and let the united anti-terrorism front take the political initiative (in Syria)."

Under a plan introduced by Iran, Russia and Turkey in Moscow on December 20 a ceasefire was declared in Syria on December 30. Under the initiative, known as the Moscow declaration, the warring sides — the government and opposition groups — are scheduled to sit for peace talks in Astana, Kazakhstan, in late January.

The talks does not include terrorists including Al-Nusra Front and Daesh.

Shamkhani warned about some instances of ceasefire violations which are primarily intended to derail efforts to resolve the protracted Syrian war politically. →2

Turkish PM Yildirim visits Iraq to mend relations

Turkey's Prime Minister has arrived in Erbil on the second leg of a trip to Iraq aimed at bolstering Ankara's role in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group.

Binali Yildirim's meeting on Sunday with the head of Iraq's Kurdish region Massoud Barzani follows a meeting on Saturday with his Iraqi counterpart in Baghdad aimed at overcoming differences between the two countries over Iraq's role in the battle to take Mosul from ISIL.

Yildirim is hoping his meeting with Barzani will enhance ties between Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) over three main issues: the fight against the ISIL, trade, and Turkey's fight against Kurdish separatists lead by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê).

The KRG and Ankara will likely want to continue building on the estimated \$8bn worth of trade between the two.

But Turkey's fight against the PKK and other Kurdish groups, who Ankara blamed for numerous bombings across Turkey that have killed hundreds of civilians, will serve as a point of contention between the two leaders.

Yildirim also met on Saturday with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, with the relationship between the two governments under pressure.

At the heart of the fallout between the two was the presence of Turkish troops in Baashiq, a town near Mosul that has served as one of the frontlines in the battle against ISIL.

Baghdad has called for their withdrawal, but Turkey has maintained that their troops would only leave once ISIL was defeated.

Ankara says that their estimated 500 troops in Baashiq were invited by local forces to help train Iraqi militias and Peshmerga forces in the fight against ISIL, though they never got permission from Baghdad.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Leader: Britain hatching insidious plot against region

➔ He also brought to the fore the vitality of a "resistance economy" for the country's national might, saying the enemy uses sanctions as a tool to put a distance between the people and the establishment.

"The antidote to the enemy's planning is 'resistance economy' as we have stated times and again."

Characterizing the last component of national might, the Leader underscored "preserving national honor," and said the country's honor has to be preserved in international negotiations and diplomatic exchanges.

Aside from external threats, the Leader drew attention to "the internal enemy" as a blow to the country's national might, citing "amotivation, frustration, lethargy, apathy, indolence, wrong policies, misconduct, various disagreements, and narrow-mindedness" as manifestations.

Relevant to this, the Leader launched a strong defense of the country's Judiciary, saying "all should appreciate an independent, brave, and adamant Judiciary."

In making the comments the Leader was taking a dig at recent spats between judicial and executive bodies that he rejected as "trivial."

These disagreements play into the enemy's hands. "I have kept and will be supporting governments, the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and the Judiciary, but should be seen what the enemy is seeking and prevent it from achieving its goals."



The antidote to the enemy's planning is 'resistance economy' as we have stated times and again.

Tehran lauds performance of anti-terror bloc in Syria

'International determination required to alleviate the sufferings of Syrians'

➔ He reiterated the long-sought policy by Iran to bring the Syrian warring sides to the negotiating table in order to end bloodshed in the country.

Elsewhere, he said Syrians can settle the crisis between themselves and asked "the UN and the influential countries" to help advance talks between Syrians.

Shamkhani also said, "The countries which do not have the courage to admit the mistakes they made in Syria and insist on continuing their wrong behavior will definitely face problems and irreparable damages."

For his part, Assad praised Iran's effective role in helping Syria counter terrorism, saying Syria will continue fighting Al-Nusra Front and Daesh till the terrorist groups are eradicated.

Pointing to the destructive role of some Persian Gulf Arab littoral states



Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani (L) meets Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on Sunday in Damascus.

and some neighbors in Syria, he said their supports for the terrorist groups will prevent restoration of regional peace and stability.

Terrorism has no border and these countries will also be influenced by the horrors of violence, the Syrian leader predicted.

■ 'Historic event'

In a separate meeting with Ali Mamlouk, a special security adviser to Syrian president, Shamkhani called liberation of Aleppo a "historic event".

The nationwide ceasefire between the government and rebels went into force after Aleppo was liberated from the occupation of terrorists.

Iran's security official said the truce should not provide an opportunity for the terrorists to regroup themselves.

Mamlouk said that the Syrian government and people are determined to continue fighting terrorism by the time the phenomenon is eradicated.

He added the Syrian independence and territorial integrity is the "red line" in any political dialogue.

He also praised Iran's supports for the Syrian government and people.

Saudi support for terrorists creating chaos, Iran says

'West has endorsed connection between S. Arabia and Takfiris'

➔ Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Saturday that Saudi Arabia is creating chaos in the Middle East by supporting Takfiri and terrorist groups.

Qassemi's remarks came as Prince Salman claimed in an interview with Foreign Affairs magazine on Thursday that Iran creates instability, encourages terrorism and violates the sovereignty of other nations in the region.

"Saudi Arabia, who has created chaos in the region by providing the regional Takfiri terrorist groups with organized support, is among the actors whose behavior should be revised to establish peace in the world," Qassemi said.



He said that Takfiri terrorism is rooted in the Wahhabi ideology.

"Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, has committed crimes against the people in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, and on the other hand has betrayed Muslims especially the Palestinian cause in line with the interests of the Zionist regime of Israel," he stated.

He also said that the Western intelligence organizations have confirmed "meaningful and organized connection" between Saudi Arabia's bodies and Takfiri extremists.

Qassemi urged the Saudi officials to revise their behavior and think about the consequences of their "destructive policies and actions".

Iranian official welcomes Turkey's decision to withdraw troops from northern Iraq

A senior Iranian official has welcomed Turkey's decision to pull out its forces from Iraq and respect the Arab country's territorial integrity as a positive move.

"This [issue] that the Turkish government has decided to observe good neighborliness with Iraq and respect Iraq's territorial integrity is a positive step," Ali Akbar Velayati, senior adviser to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei on international affairs, said on Saturday.

"We welcome any kind of friendship among regional countries ... we do not welcome any tension between Turkey and Iraq," he added.

After a meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim in Baghdad on Saturday, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said his administration has reached an agreement with Turkey over Baghdad's demand for the withdrawal of Turkish military

forces from a camp in the north of the Arab country.

"The prime minister and the delegation accompanying him confirmed that this issue will be solved in a satisfactory manner soon," Abadi said.

Iraq's state TV, which aired Abadi's announcement, did not provide further details about the agreement over Turkey's military presence in the Iraqi town of Bashiqa.

Turkey deployed about 500 troops to the facility last year, saying it was wary of potential attacks by the Daesh Takfiri terrorists that are currently based in the Iraqi city of

Mosul, near Bashiqa.

Iraq has repeatedly called on Turkey to withdraw its forces or risk a potential confrontation with the Iraqi military, which is currently battling Daesh in Mosul. Baghdad has also refused Ankara's call for involvement in the operation to liberate Mosul.

The Iranian official further stressed the importance of strengthening cooperation among countries in the Middle East region.

"The regional nations' prosperity hinges on regional cooperation and prevention of any

tension among neighbors," Velayati pointed out.

He said regional countries should not interfere in the domestic affairs of each others, voicing Iran's opposition to any meddling in the internal affairs of states.

The Leader's aide said neither Turkey nor Syria would benefit from the existing tension between the two countries.

He emphasized that stability in Turkey-Syria relations depends on the recognition of equal rights, mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

Turkey's controversial deployment of troops to northern Iraq comes as Ankara continues with its military activities in neighboring Syria.

The Turkish operation, which began in August 2016, has faced similar criticism from the Syrian government. Turkey says it will continue the push which it says is meant to uproot Daesh and Kurdish militants.

(Source: Press TV)



Iran says resolved to help Syria ceasefire persist

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman has stressed that the Islamic Republic will spare no efforts to help the ongoing nationwide ceasefire in the war-stricken Syria persist.

Speaking to the Arabic-language Al-Alam TV on Sunday, Bahram Qassemi underlined that Tehran's stance on the prolonged Syrian crisis has always been clear and unchanging.

"The Syrian issue will have no military solution and ultimately a political solution should be reached," he said, adding that the war cannot continue forever.



Bahonar appointed head of Expediency Council assessment committee

POLITICS TEHRAN — Mohammad Reza Bahonar has been appointed as the head of the Incorporation and Assessment Committee of the Expediency Council.

He was appointed via a decree issued on Sunday by the council's Secretary Mohsen Rezaee, IRNA reported.

Bahonar has been appointed to the post for one year. His predecessor was Seyyed Abdollah Sajjadi Jaghargh.

In a similar decree, Rezaee extended for one year the term of service of Masoud Ghanizadeh as the council's Preparation, Housing, and Urban Development Committee chairman.



French FM to attend economic meeting in Tehran

POLITICS TEHRAN — French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault will pay an official visit to Iran later this month to attend a joint economic meeting in Tehran, Press TV reported on Sunday.

Iran and France will reportedly hold the economic session after some 17 years.

The commercial ties between Iran and France have been rising considerably since the nuclear deal went into force in January 2016.



'We will even back S. Arabia if it fights Israel'

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Iranian president's special aide for ethnic and religious minorities has said the Islamic Republic will support any country that fights Israel.

"We are defending a government which has stood up against Israel. If Jordan or Saudi Arabia made the same resistance, we would support them," Ali Younesi told ISNA on Sunday.

Israel, the U.S., and Saudi Arabia are trying to misrepresent Iran's support for resistance as a sectarian policy, which they know is not true, he said.



Iran, P5+1 to start expert talks in Vienna on Monday

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran and the P5+1 group will hold an expert-level meeting in Vienna, Austria, on Monday.

The meeting will come as a preparation for a Tuesday meeting at the deputy foreign ministerial meeting, which will address Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's recent letter to EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini over U.S. extension of the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA) for another 10 years.

Iran's deputy foreign ministers Abbas Araqchi and Majid Takht-Ravanchi headed to Vienna on Sunday to attend the meetings.



Iran, Afghanistan should form media ties: ambassador

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's ambassador to Afghanistan has proposed that the two countries initiate a media cooperation, Mehr reported.

Speaking to an Iranian media team in Kabul on Sunday, Mohammad Reza Bahrani expressed regret that "there is no systematic cooperation between Iranian and Afghan media outlets".

"Afghanistan is the second Persian-speaking country and there is good audience for Persian-language news in the country," he underlined.

Media on both sides should understand the other country's internal developments well so as to prevent misunderstandings, he stated.

We welcome any kind of friendship among regional countries ... we do not welcome any tension between Turkey and Iraq.

Netanyahu caught on tape negotiating mutual benefits with businessman

Suspicion in the main corruption affair involving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are backed by a tape documenting alleged contacts between Netanyahu and a businessman over mutual benefits, Haaretz has learned.

At the heart of the affair, dubbed Case 2000, lies an attempt to make an unambiguous deal between money and government – not suitcases brimming with cash in return for a gas monopoly, or bank transfers to a secret account in return for franchises in natural resources or infrastructure, but the businessman's support that would help Netanyahu remain in office in exchange for huge financial benefits.

Even if this pact was only partly realized or was still in its infancy, the mere existence – and documentation – of such incredible negotiations demands an immediate criminal investigation. When the affair is fully revealed, the details will shed light on how decisions are made at the top.

It may be said that the affair is based on solid evidence that will be difficult to dispute, like that provided by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's bureau chief Shula Zaken about Olmert: a series of tapes in which the prime minister's own voice is heard. People who spoke with Netanyahu over the weekend after his second police interrogation over corruption allegations said he was surprised by the evidence against him. "He didn't expect it," said a person who knows Netanyahu well.

The details of the affair are sensational also because for many years Netanyahu has been perceived, and rightly so, as a stranger to the local swamp of crony capitalism, adeptly navigated by his two predecessors, Ehud Olmert and Ariel Sharon. A few years back, the man who admired the American trust-breaking President, Theodor Roosevelt, was not the cup of tea of the major players in Israel's economy. Netanyahu has been



described in the past as a cautious man whose sins, while they might infuriate the public, were minor. When the details of the "Case 2000" affair are revealed, these perceptions could crack.

This explosive material landed on the desk of Attorney General Avichai Mendelblit back in the spring. After sitting on it for long months and withholding the information from the public with no justification, the attorney general hastened to plug the narrative beneficial to Netanyahu: The affair is serious from a public perspective and is borderline in criminal terms.

It's time to put an end to this spin and to two others making headlines these last few days: That Netanyahu is calm and certain that it'll all end in hot air; and that Mendelblit is a steadfast attorney general, who conducted a comprehensive, thorough and quick investigation. These two descriptions, aggressively peddled to the public by lackeys of these two intelligent individuals, are trickery and deception.

It appears that the minor of the two

affairs involving Netanyahu, the gifts case, is being received by the public with a shrug. The explanation may be the high threshold set over the last decade, when Israel watched in wonder as a president accused of rape barricaded himself in his residence, tycoons funneled millions into the prime minister's son's bank account, envelopes bursting with dollars finding their way into another prime minister's hands, a finance minister who topped off his bank account with labor unions' funds and a defense minister who stashed away hundreds of thousands of dollars and bought himself a luxury pad with money from tycoons.

Today, it appears that only a gas monopoly in return for suitcases of cash, or a TV franchise for a bloated bank account in the Virgin Islands under a straw man's name will wake the public out of its stupor. This is what Israeli society has come to.

Suspicion in the gifts affair come as no surprise. For years stories abounded of Netanyahu's tendency to abuse his status to receive funding from wealthy

individuals in Israel and abroad for his luxurious lifestyle. This included first-class flights, hotel suites, expensive Cuban cigars, champagne and suits. Despite many reports since the early 1990s, about his parsimoniousness, his bizarre funding of personal expenses from the public purse, his fondness for enjoying the good life but not paying for it, Netanyahu continued in a behavior, which mainly showed dubious judgment.

In this affair, wealthy businessmen, above all movie producer Arnon Milchan, were allegedly asked to buy hundreds of thousands of shekels worth of luxury items for Netanyahu and his wife Sara. A report by Channel 10's Raviv Drucker that Netanyahu had asked the United States Secretary of State John Kerry to assist Milchan with his visa problems, proves once more that there ain't no such thing as a free lunch, and that the friendship between Netanyahu and Milchan was not just a warm, authentic relationship that happened to develop between the huge money and a top politician.

(Source: Haaretz)

Assad 'optimistic' on new peace talks: French MP

Syria's President Bashar Assad told visiting French lawmakers that he was "optimistic" about new peace talks planned for later this month, a member of the delegation told AFP.

Lawmaker Thierry Mariani said the Syrian president also declared himself willing to negotiate with nearly 100 rebel groups fighting against the Syrian government, excluding extremist organizations.



Assad received the three French lawmakers in the capital Damascus on Sunday, a day after the delegation visited second city Aleppo, recently recaptured by the government. Assad told the delegation he was "counting a lot" on the new peace talks expected to be convened later this month in the Kazakh capital Astana.

They are being organized by regime ally Russia and rebel backer Turkey, who jointly brokered a fragile nationwide ceasefire currently in effect in Syria.

Syria ally Iran is also helping to organize the talks, which Turkey suggested could be convened around the last week of January.

Mariani said Assad told the delegation he was "ready to talk" with some 91 rebel groups, not including the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group or former al-Qaeda affiliate Fateh al-Sham Front (Front for the Conquest of the Levant).

Assad said he was "optimistic" and "ready for reconciliation with them on the condition that they lay down their arms," Mariani said.

Mariani added that Assad criticized Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, accusing him of jailing "more political prisoners than all the Arab countries put together."

And he said the Syrian leader dismissed accusations of war crimes by his forces by saying that no wars were clean.

"There were probably mistakes on the part of the government" that Assad said he would "condemn" and "regret," Mariani said.

More than 310,000 people have been killed in Syria since the foreign backed conflict began in March 2011.

The foreign instigated violence has displaced more than half the country's population and caused massive destruction.

(Source: AFP)

U.S. to send 300 Marines to Afghanistan's Helmand province

About 300 United States Marines will be sent to Afghanistan's Helmand province to assist Afghan security forces battling Taliban insurgents in intelligence and logistics matters, the unit's commander said over the weekend.

The deployment to Helmand will be the Marines' first to the southern province since they left in 2014 as the U.S. declared an end to its combat mission. Since then, Afghan security forces, still backed by Washington in the form of air strikes and hundreds of advisors, have struggled to contain the Taliban advance in Helmand.

Brigadier General Roger Turner told reporters on a conference call that the deployment would be part of a regular rotation to replace a U.S. Army unit already training and advising Afghan troops in the province. And although the 300 Marines would mostly be experienced and senior officers who will work on intelligence, logistics, and administration, Turner said they were braced for a dangerous mission.

"We're viewing this as a high-risk mission...We're not in any way viewing this as a noncombat mission, or something to take lightly."

Tens of thousands of Marines fought fierce battles



against the Taliban in Helmand over five years. Nearly 1,000 coalition troops have been killed there since the U.S.-led military intervention in 2001, more than in any other province.

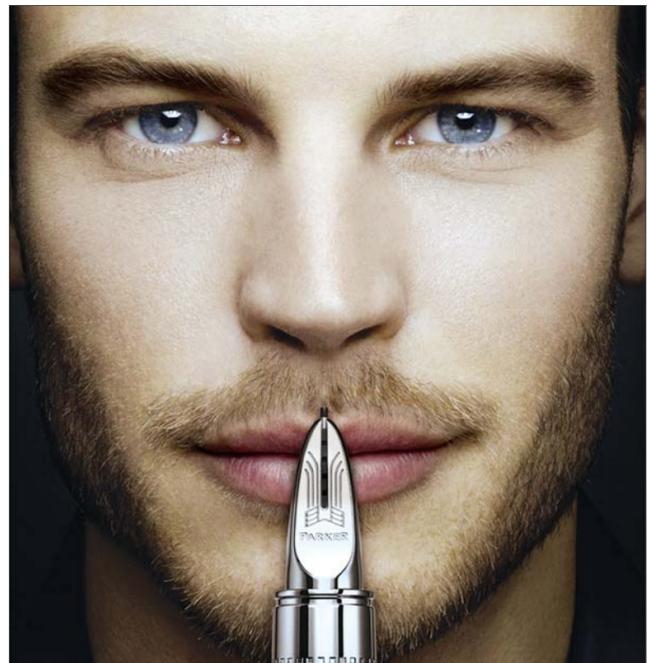
In the last two years the Taliban have captured areas that were the site of some of the deadliest battles for the Marines, including Sangin, Marjah and Nowzad, and for much of 2016 they

have threatened to take the provincial capital Lashkar Gah. In a statement posted online, Taliban officials ridiculed the Marines' deployment as one of the "final failed efforts" by outgoing U.S. President Barack Obama to stem the violence in Afghanistan.

In recent months the U.S. military has also announced rotations of roughly 3,000 Army soldiers to Afghanistan, where about 8,400 American troops conduct both advising missions, as well as "counter terrorism" operations against terrorist groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) and the al-Qaeda.

A small number of Marines are already in Afghanistan, including around 60 who help to secure the huge air base at Bagram.

(Source: Reuters)



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IKAC Co., in accordance with the Act of "Establishment of Civil Development Projects of the Road and Transportation Sector through Participation of Banks and other Financial and Monetary Resources of the Country" of the Islamic Republic of Iran and under the law and regulations concerning the "Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Act (FIPPA)", invites interested investors for an "Investors Conference" on January 30, 2017 at Novotel hotel, Imam Khomeini Airport City, Tehran, Iran where further information about the project will be presented.

More information about the Investors Conference will be announced early in January 2017 on the following website:

www.3t-naco.com.

Conference coordinator contacts:

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Imam Khomeini Airport City (IKAC)

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India to suffer damage due to U.S.-China trade war: Assocham

India may suffer collateral damage to its economy if it finds itself in the crossfire in the escalating trade war triggered by U.S. President-elect Donald Trump with Mexico and China, industry chamber Assocham said on Sunday.

Assocham citing its report on the regime change in the U.S. said India will suffer damage, particularly in sectors such as information technology and select goods exports to the U.S. market.

"Though China and Mexico are in direct firing line of Trump, India needs to watch out and must build bridges with the upcoming American administration and assuage the concerns about the American jobs," Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India said here.

It said Trump's election campaign threats to American companies against job outsourcing to China and Mexico are now quite likely to be realized.

"The Trump threat to protect the U.S. interest in an inward looking manner is for real now. The manner in which Ford has announced scrapping of its \$1.68 billion plan to set up a manufacturing plant in Mexico shows that Trump means business when it comes to carrying out the threat of heavy border tax on the U.S. firms which, as he calls it, ship the jobs abroad," the report said.

India should not sit and watch the trade war among the big economies from the sidelines, Assocham said.

"We must take pro-active steps to ensure that we remain on the right side of the upcoming U.S. administration, or else the impact could be on the Indian services exports to the American firms," the statement said.

"In the coming months, after inauguration of Trump to the White House, China would double up dumping of its goods to countries like India as it gets entangled with the U.S. over trade barriers," it said.

"The Indian government, along with trade bodies like apex business chambers, influential think tanks, opinion leaders and a large diaspora, must work for an effective lobbying to explain to the U.S. policy makers as to how free trade, more so in services, would help both the U.S. and India," it added.

Assocham Secretary General D. S. Rawat said: "If the U.S. gives jobs to Indians in back-end operations, India gives a huge market to the giants like Google, Microsoft and Intel who are all now looking at the digital expansion in the Indian economy." (Source: Economic Times)

UK regulators concerned over bank 'ringfence' compliance

UK regulators are concerned that banks may fail to meet a 2019 deadline for separating retail money from riskier investment banking activity, under rules aimed at preventing a re-run of the financial crisis.

The Prudential Regulation Authority, part of the Bank of England, has written to banks' senior management to gain assurance that their plans to comply with so-called ringfencing rules can be achieved by the deadline, according to two people familiar with the process.

One adviser working with banks said that the watchdog is considering ordering an independent inquiry, called a "skilled persons' review", into at least one lender over its "competence and ability" to execute its plans on time.

Under ringfencing rules, which have become the UK's main regulatory response to the financial crisis, banks with more than £25bn of deposits must move off their consumer-facing business from riskier investment banking.

But the task is set to cost the banks billions of pounds and is weighing heavily on resources at a time when they are coming under pressure from other regulations, record-low interest rates and uncertainty following the UK's vote to leave the EU.

It is the biggest structural reform ever imposed on UK banks and it is already forecast to cost the industry billions of pounds to hit the deadline of January 2019. The Treasury has in the past estimated that it will cost the banks up to £3bn to set up, with annual running costs of up to £4bn.

Stephen Hall at advisory firm KPMG said: "Ringfencing is a large piece of work that needs to be undertaken at a time when banks are considering the impact of Brexit, more prudent regulation and conduct issues — and the economy isn't going anywhere fast. They [the PRA] want to make sure this happens by a certain date, because it's an immovable deadline."

A key part of the task is managing the risks involved in separating the various computer systems involved. Royal Bank of Scotland's failed attempt to separate its Williams & Glyn division as an independent bank, in part because of technology problems, illustrates one of the obstacles facing the banks as they prepare to split up their businesses.

Banks have aired concerns over the timing of ringfencing and are seeking clarity on the potential fallout from Brexit for their plans. However, the Treasury and PRA last year rejected any delay in the deadline.

If the UK leaves the European Economic Area, banks fear that it may prompt a change in the law to prevent EEA clients from being included inside the ringfence, forcing their new structures to be reassembled in some cases.

Banks are still fine-tuning their ringfencing structure, even though they have submitted blueprints to the regulators. It emerged in November that Banco Santander had abandoned plans to split its UK operations in two to comply with ringfencing, providing flexibility to shift operations out of the UK if needed because of Brexit. (Source: Financial Times)



Iran to receive first ordered Airbus on Thursday

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran is expected to receive the first Airbus A321 jetliner - to be delivered this Thursday, IRIB news quoted Managing Director of Iran's flag carrier Iran Air Farhad Parvaresh.

The incoming aircraft is to be used for domestic flights, Parvaresh added.

As Reuters reported, Airbus said on Sunday Iran's state airline Iran Air had accepted its first new jet, marking a key step in opening up trade under a nuclear sanctions deal be-

tween Iran and major powers.

The Airbus A321 jetliner has been painted in Iran Air livery.

"The technical acceptance has been done with formal delivery still to be done," an Airbus spokesman said.

A spokesman for Iran's civil aviation authority said the aircraft had been placed on the country's aircraft register, indicating Iran Air had taken ownership of the aircraft, the first of around 200 Western aircraft ordered



Since sanctions were lifted. During a visit by President Hassan Rouhani to Paris in January 2016, Iran provisionally ordered 118 Airbus jets worth \$27 billion.

Crude steel exports from Iran's major producers up 55% in 9 months

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's eight major steel producers exported 4.12 million tons of crude steel in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20-December 20, 2016), with 55 percent rise from the same period of time in the previous year, IRNA reported on Sunday.

The eight producers' crude steel exports also witnessed 117 percent rise in the ninth calendar month of Azar (November 20-December 20, 2016), from the same month of the past year, to stand at 479,854 tons.

Iran's annual crude steel production and exports are planned to hit 15 mil-

lion tons and 6 million tons, respectively, by the end of current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2017).

The country's annual crude steel output is planned to reach 55 million tons according to its outlook plan for 2025.

As a major steel producer in the region, Iran boosted its steel mills across the country in recent years, as central Isfahan and southwestern Khuzestan provinces remain the major steel producers.

According to World Steel Association (WSA), Iran was the biggest producer of crude steel in the Middle East in 2013. The country's rank was 14th in the world in 2014.

Iranian ports' loading, unloading capacity at 106m tons

ECONOMY TEHRAN — More than 105.9 million tons of oil and non-oil goods were loaded and unloaded in the Iranian ports during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (ending December 20, 2016), IRNA reported on Sunday.

According to a report published by the Ports and Marine Organization of Iran (PMO), in the said period, more than 70.5 million tons of non-oil goods and above 35.3 million tons of oil products were loaded and unloaded in Iran's



The figure stood at 93.5 million tons in the first eight months of the present Iranian year (ending November 20).

May pledges Brexit details in weeks, denies 'Muddled' thinking

U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May said she will unveil details of her plan to negotiate Britain's departure from the European Union in the coming weeks after pressure has mounted for her to show the government isn't "muddled" in its planning.

May said no plan for Brexit was drawn up by her predecessor David Cameron and she needed to assess the situation and work out the correct way to act once Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty is invoked by the end of March, starting two years of divorce talks.

"There hadn't been any plans made for Brexit so it was important for us to take some time to look at the issues, look at the complexity of the issues," May said Sunday in an interview with Sky News. "Our thinking on this isn't muddled," she said, "I will be setting out some more details in coming weeks as we look ahead to triggering Article 50."

May defended herself from an allegation by Ivan Rogers, Britain's envoy to the EU who quit last week, that her government lacked a plan for leaving the bloc. She said a deal will have to include control over Britain's borders,

which other EU leaders have said will be a bar for giving the U.K. access to Europe's single market in goods and services.

Asked about the tradeoff between single-market membership and free movement of people, which will be at the heart of the negotiations, she said it will be about "getting the right relationship, not about keeping bits of membership."

"We will be outside the European Union but we will get the best possible deal for the U.K.," she said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Suggesting Trump's economic plans can spark growth closer to 3% is 'wishful thinking'

Republican economists were upbeat Saturday that President-elect Donald Trump's economic policies could get the economy growing closer to a sustainable 3 percent annual rate, but the suggestion was greeted with skepticism by a senior member President Obama's economic team.

At the moment, the Congressional Budget Office estimates the economy's sustainable growth rate is 1.8 percent, down from a historical rate above 3 percent.

During a bipartisan panel discussion at the American Economic Association meeting, Glenn Hubbard, dean of the Columbia University Business School, said Trump's plans could get GDP growth "up to 2.75 percent or so."

While the details of Trump's policies remain unknown, the combination of broad-based tax reform, regulatory reform, infrastructure and military spending could boost the economy, Hubbard said.

However, Jason Furman, Obama's chief economist, shot back that Republicans were ignoring the "massive" depressing impact on growth from an aging workforce.

"This is going to matter a lot. If you forecast something like 2 percent-2.2 percent [growth], it is going to take your budget in one direction, if you forecast 2.75 percent or higher, it is going to take your budget in a different direction, he said.

Furman said of growth rates of 2.75 percent or higher would be further away from the forecast of mainstream economists "than any budget... in the last 24 years."

"Part of how you get higher is wishful thinking," Furman said. Details of any tax cut will matter, he said.

However, Hubbard and John Taylor, a Stanford University professor, argued that new policies could make a difference.

Sluggish growth "is due to policy," Taylor said. "What you need is a whole set of

policies" to address the problem, he added.

"Where we are now in this economy... is that some structural reforms have the potential for not only a long-term benefit which as economists we emphasize but also short-run," Taylor said.

Taylor said poor U.S. economic policies "had a huge influence" on productivity growth, which has been weakening since 2005.

"There is an opportunity for reversal," he said.

But Furman noted that productivity is declining all around the world, which suggests that Obamacare and other U.S. regulations might not be the cause of the decline.

Former Obama chief economist Alan Krueger told the panel that the administration might have accepted a lower growth rate in order to foster a "no-drama" economy so that the financial sector could heal



The exhibit will be held at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds from January 16 to 19. The event is aimed at introducing manufacturing capabilities of the exhibitors, finding new export markets, getting acquainted with the newest technology and equipment of the world, boosting production and creating jobs.

NEWS IN BRIEF



South Africa's economy needs radical transformation

South Africa's ruling party pledged to ensure the country's black majority secures a bigger stake in the economy and do more to create jobs, as it seeks to claw back support lost in the wake of a succession of scandals implicating its leader, President Jacob Zuma.

The African National Congress, which has led the country since white-minority rule ended in 1994, marked the 105th anniversary of its founding at a rally on Sunday at the Orlando stadium in Soweto, near Johannesburg, where it outlined its policy priorities for the year. The party packed out the 40,000-seat venue.



Bank of Ireland to use brokers again to sell mortgages

Bank of Ireland plans to return to selling mortgages through independent brokers in the second quarter of this year. The lender had to avoid third-party distribution of its home loans as a condition of the taxpayer bailout during the banking crisis.

The move comes as mortgage lending is forecast to reach €7bn this year, boosted by the government's help-to-buy scheme for first-time buyers and looser restrictions on lending from the Central Bank of Ireland.

Bank of Ireland played down its proposal, saying its business model was "focused on building our own customer base." It has told brokers, however, that it plans to be back in the intermediary channel by the second quarter of 2017.



Fed's Kashkari says he's optimistic about bank plan under Trump

Neel Kashkari, the president of the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank who wants to force U.S. banks to hold more capital in order head off a future financial crisis, on Saturday said he was optimistic about his plan's chances under incoming president Donald Trump.

"I'm optimistic that if Congress now says we are going to take a fresh look at bank regulation, we are going to take a fresh look at Dodd Frank, there may be a real opportunity to weigh in and say, let's be much more aggressive on capital requirements," Kashkari told the American Economic Association.

Iranian oil price hikes \$1.15 per barrel in a week

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The price of Iran's light crude oil in the week ending December 30 witnessed a \$1.15 increase per barrel to register a new record in this commodity's price in recent months, IRNA reported on Saturday.

The price of Iran's light oil stood at \$53.31 in the mentioned week to push the average price for the Iranian light crude up to \$41 in 2016.

According to the report, Iran's heavy oil price in the same week experienced a \$1.18 growth per barrel to stand at \$52.84.

Iran sold its heavy crude at \$39.19 on average in 2016.

According to a report by Bloomberg, Oil last year capped its biggest annual gain since 2009 as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and 11 nations from outside the group agreed on a plan to reduce production.

While suppliers including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and Oman have started to curtail output, the prices are expected to continue this upward trend in the upcoming weeks.



Oil suppliers start curtail on OPEC accord

Kuwait officials say the OPEC-member country has reduced oil production this month to around 2.707 million barrels per day, in line with the targeted amount under the OPEC output cut agreement reached on 30 November.

So far, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq and Venezuela are honoring the commitment to cut output, while Iran uses the time to shore up lost market share, and Libya and Nigeria struggle to ramp up production to avoid destabilization.

Kuwait agreed in November to cut output by 131,000 barrels per day, starting on 1 January. This figure is down from its October baseline production of 2.838 million barrels per day, and down from December's 2.9 million bpd in production, news agencies cited industry sources as saying.

On 21 and 22 January, a committee responsible for monitoring whether the agreed upon cuts are being made will meet in Vienna to hash out a way to monitor compliance with the deal.

Meanwhile, Kuwait is benefitting from a slight recovery in oil prices since the November OPEC deal. For the second quarter in a row, Kuwait's trade surplus has widened on oil price recovery, though its US\$4.58-billion surplus is still far below the levels it had seen prior to the oil price crash of mid-2014.

"We expect the surplus to continue to improve as oil earnings continue to edge higher against a backdrop of recovering oil prices. The average oil price continued

to trend upwards in 4Q16, and is set to continue to do so in the months ahead, especially following the announced production cuts by Opec and non-Opec producers," reads a National Bank of Kuwait report.

Earlier on Friday, S&P Platts Global said it expected the oil output agreement would help draw down the global inventory build by the third quarter of this year, assuming all parties to the deal comply with their commitments. (Source: oilprice.com)

PICTURE OF THE DAY Petrophoto/Nazila Haghghati



Iran's modern North Oil Terminal located in the northern city of Neka has been established aiming to receive, store, process and transport crude oils of Caspian Sea marginal states under SWAP (exchange) plan. The project is planned to be completed in three phases, it will have the capacity of receiving and transferring 50000, 120000 and 370000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil, in the first, second and third phases respectively.

Russia's Gazprom delivers record volume of gas to Europe via Nord Stream

Russian energy giant Gazprom said it had reached the record 165.2 million cubic meters of daily gas supply to Europe via Nord Stream pipeline.

Last week, Gazprom said it had delivered a record volume of 160 million cubic meters of natural gas via the Nord Stream pipeline on New Year's Day, which showed the pipeline's high demand on the European market and "the importance and relevance of constructing Nord Stream 2."

"In the light of increased demand for gas in Europe, we had been recording the new record volume of gas supply via Nord Stream pipeline, 165.2 million cubic meters per a day, for three consecutive days — January 4-6," the company said in statement.

Russia is engaged in constructing the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that aims to deliver 55 billion cubic meters of Russian natural gas a year to the European Union across the Baltic Sea to Germany, bypassing Ukraine. The pipeline is planned for 2018. Gazprom has a shareholder agreement to extend the existing Nord Stream with partner European energy firms. (Source: Sputnik)

Venezuela issues \$5 billion sovereign bonds in new debt



For crisis-hit Venezuela, the new year appears to look a lot like the old, with civil strife, food and medicine shortages, and a brutal recession battering the oil-rich economy.

However, there's one development that adds a new wrinkle to Venezuela's rapidly deteriorating situation. In a surprise move this week, the cash-strapped country issued sovereign bonds for the first time in five years, to the tune of \$5 billion.

The deal dovetailed with a separate decision by the government to pledge a nearly 50 percent stake in Citgo, its U.S. refinery subsidiary, as collateral for a loan from Rosneft, Russia's state-controlled energy company. The Citgo collateral deal is already being chal-

lenged in court by U.S. multinationals, The Wall Street Journal reported this week.

To some, it may seem like another last-ditch effort to keep lights on in Caracas, but market watchers say the arrangement is one to watch for several reasons.

Russia's contentious relationship with the U.S., combined with Venezuela's own long-standing antipathy toward the world's largest economy, could mean trouble if Venezuela fails to make good on its debts. Citgo — owned by Venezuela state oil company Petroleos de Venezuela SA (PDVSA) — is also a major U.S. oil refiner, and in theory could find its assets seized by Russia. (Source: CNBC)

Thousands of Mexicans protest gasoline price hikes



Mexicans angry over a spike in gasoline prices took to the streets of Mexico City on Saturday after days of protests spurred looting in hundreds of stores, resulting in over a thousand arrests in Latin America's second-largest economy.

Mexico's government hiked gasoline costs by 14 to 20 percent earlier this month, fueling outrage among Mexicans already facing rising inflation and adding to a long list of headaches besetting President Enrique Pena Nieto.

The hike is part of a gradual, year-long price liberalization the Pena Nieto administration has promised to implement this year. But the government's many efforts to justify the hike have fallen on deaf ears. (Source: Reuters)

"No to the gasoline price hike, Pena out," protesters yelled as they marched from Mexico City's center to the Presidential residence.

While there were no reports of violence in Mexico City on Saturday, the backlash has been far from peaceful.

Mexican authorities on Friday reported over 1,500 arrests since the protests began when price hikes kicked in on Jan 1. Mexican retail association ANTAD said on Friday that 423 stores were sacked, nearly half in the central state of Mexico, near the capital.

Local media reported marches on Saturday in the Mexican states of Sonora, Chiapas, Guerrero, Jalisco, Tabasco and Puebla as well. (Source: Reuters)

Khoshrou appointed NIOC's new director of international affairs

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The managing director of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), Ali Kardor, appointed Saeed Khoshrou as the company's new director for international affairs, Shana reported.

Khoshrou has been active in various sectors of the country's oil industry for more than 20 years; he has been in charge for various positions in NIOC including the deputy director of international marketing, the head of petroleum products and gas condensate sector at the office of international affairs in China, head of domestic sales department for gas condensate and etc.

Mohsen Qamsari was previously in charge of directing the international affairs department at NIOC who was recently retired.

Iran seeks investors for 25 petrochemical projects

Iran is seeking investment to build 25 petrochemical projects, an official at the state-run National Petrochemical Company (NPC) was quoted on Saturday as saying.

The NPC is proposing joint or individual investor participation in building the projects, Farnaz Alavi, NPC's director for planning and development, was quoted as saying by the oil ministry's news website SHANA.

Providing feedstock for five more projects were also being studied, Alavi said, without giving further details.

In July, Alavi told Shana that \$32 billion in foreign investment was needed to build 28 petrochemical projects. The projects include factories to produce ammonia and urea, as well as gas-to-olefins (GTO) and gas-to-propylene (GTP) plants.

In July 2015, Iran agreed to curtail its nuclear program in exchange for relief from economic sanctions.

On Monday, Iran said 29 companies from more than a dozen countries could bid for upstream oil and gas projects using the new, less restrictive Iran Petroleum Contract (IPC) model. (Source: Reuters)

UN agency funds solar energy for Libyan hospitals

In a move to help hospitals in Libyan capital Tripoli cope with the incessant power cuts which have been averaging 13 hours a day, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is funding the installation of solar power panels.

So far, in what is believed to be the first time solar power has been harnessed for hospitals in the country, panels have been installed at the Abu Sleem hospital. They are being used to ensure a steady supply of electricity to its intensive care unit.

However, there are planned to install panels at Tripoli Medical Centre as well as the Ali Omar Askar Neurosurgery Hospital south of Tripoli International Airport and the Cordoba Centre for Services and Renal Hemodialysis.

Both the latter have had difficulty functioning because of the security situation.

It is expected that the use of free solar energy will permit the continuous running of dialyzers, medicine refrigeration units, surgery rooms and ICUs at all four hospitals.

"When all are up and running, the panels will help boost the health sector in the country because about 50,000 Libyans will be able to go to hospitals where there are no electricity problems and can enjoy proper health care," said Noura Hamladji, UNDP Libya country director.

The funding is coming from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF).

CERF was a major contributor last year to the UN-led Libya Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) which has an overall spending target of \$165 million. This is to go on a variety of projects including those for refugees and migrants as well as communities directly affected by the country's low-level civil war.

In its report published in November, the HRP plans to spend \$151 million in 2017 helping some 940,000 people, providing urgent healthcare needs and essential medicines as well as ensuring access to basic goods and services such as food, drinking water, sanitation services, education and adequate housing. (Source: libyaherald.com)

Renewables provide majority of new U.S. generating capacity

Renewable energy accounted for the majority (50.5 percent) of new U.S. electrical generation put into service during the first 11 months of 2016, according to the latest issue of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) monthly Energy Infrastructure Update (with data through Nov. 30, 2016).

Combined, newly installed capacity from renewable sources (i.e., biomass, geothermal, hydropower, solar, wind) totaled 9,655 MW, surpassing that from natural gas (8,109 MW), nuclear power (1,270 MW), coal (45 MW), and oil (33 MW) combined.

In the month of November alone, solar and wind combined to provide 946 MW — 158 times more than that from natural gas (just 6 MW).

Year-to-date, new solar generating capacity totals 5,717 MW, while new wind generating capacity totals 3,533 MW. There are also 314 MW of new hydropower capacity and 91 MW of new biomass capacity but no new geothermal steam capacity thus far in 2016.

The rapid growth of renewables — particularly solar and wind — has resulted in their seizing an ever-growing share of the nation's total generating capacity. Five years ago, renewable sources cumulatively accounted for slightly over 14 percent of total available installed generating capacity; now they provide almost 19 percent (18.69 percent): hydropower, 8.53 percent; wind, 6.58 percent; solar, 1.84 percent; biomass, 1.41 percent; and geothermal, 0.33 percent. (Source: Renewableenergyworld.com)

Obama's last chance to make up for his failure in Africa

By Vava Tampa

In 2009, seven months after entering the Oval Office, President Obama pledged a new Africa policy. "Africa," he declared in the Ghanaian Parliament, "doesn't need strongmen. It needs strong institutions."

Pro-democracy activists like me took this seriously -- and for good reason. Africa's strongmen have caused the deaths of millions.

The bloodiest killing field has been Africa's Great Lakes region, where political strongmen have responded to instability in the 20th and 21st centuries by committing crimes against humanity and, in some cases, genocide.



In my beloved Congo -- Sub-Saharan Africa's largest country -- over 5.4 million people were killed between 1998 and 2008 in wars and proxy wars, the International Rescue Committee says. These wars continue to claim an estimated 45,000 lives a month, according to the UN's Ross Mountain.

In neighboring Rwanda, 800,000 people were slaughtered in the space of three months during the Tutsi genocide in 1994.

And in Burundi, which was the scene of on-and-off wars and mini-genocide between 1962 and 2005, over a million have been killed. Thousands more have been killed recently in a repressive campaign to suppress political opponents, which is undoing many of the gains made since the Arusha Accords in 2005 and raising the prospect of another all-out war.

■ Obama's new Africa doctrine

These are the nightmares that many of us believe inspired Obama's new Africa doctrine. And when Donald Trump takes over at the end of this month, I hope he makes "supporting strong institutions instead of strongmen" his priority in Africa.

Fast-forward to 2017, with barely a few weeks left until end of his mandate, and President Obama has -- by most accounts -- bagged no tangible African success. In fact, his much-discussed and oversold Africa policy is in jeopardy. It wasn't supposed to go this way, of course. What went wrong?

In short, he didn't stand up to strongmen. Washington totally failed to twist the arm of Burundi's President Pierre Nkurunziza enough to stop him from clinging to power beyond his constitutional term limit. It then failed to put in place conditions that would make it very difficult for other strongmen in the region to follow suit.

The implication and long-term consequences of this failure are only now becoming clear. West of the Congo River, Sassou Nguesso has, through actions that may be legal on paper but morally wrong and politically dangerous, followed suit and changed Congo-Brazzaville's constitution to cling to power.

Paul Kagame in Rwanda has, through similar maneuvers, managed to change his country's constitution so that he can cling to power even before his term, which expires at the end of 2017, comes to an end.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, dozens were killed in protests when President Joseph Kabila attempted to do the same thing.

The list may very well go on. What happens next is anybody's guess. But all is not yet lost. Africa's Great Lakes, the region that seems pitifully prone to strongmen and mass killing -- and where Washington has squandered opportunities to support strong institutions, as Obama promised in Ghana -- is the very place that Obama can still guarantee his legacy in Africa. But only if action is taken before he leaves office.

The crisis in Africa's Great Lakes region -- anyone who has studied the region will tell you -- is like a three-legged stool: knock off one leg and the stool will fall. In other words, victory in Congo could bring an end to the reign of strongmen in the region and beyond.

■ Life-changing" sanctions

And to help secure victory at this crucial juncture we need Washington to impose "life-changing" sanctions on the things and people Kabila values most: his family, their fortune and their ability to move freely in Africa and across the globe.

Some might argue that -- in the wake of the recently-signed power-sharing deal brokered by Congo's Catholic Church that would end his rule -- imposing sanctions would make Kabila combative. Mixing shrewd diplomacy with threat of sanctions, some have argued, is better. That argument is flawed.

Indeed, what Kabila's actions over the past two years tell us is this: he has no intention to step down and he will continue to crush anyone who questions his legitimacy.

Imposing "life-changing" sanctions, at least for the recent killing of pro-democracy protesters, will not only send a powerful message to Kabila that further targeting of protesters will come at a price, but will also give Rassemblement -- the opposition's main umbrella group, which signed the power-sharing deal with Kabila's camp -- leverage to push for a peaceful creation of a transitional government, as well as preparation for a free and fair presidential election at the end of this year as conditions for sanctions are being eased.

This can only be secured by Obama. Failure to do so could have pernicious consequences -- both for Congo's pro-democracy movement, and, of course, for Obama's own Africa legacy.

(Source: CNN)

A lack of humility is killing U.S. foreign policy

By William Ruger

Whether first uttered by baseball player Yogi Berra, Danish physicist Niels Bohr, or someone else, it is true that "it is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future." Even so, scholars, pundits and policymakers are still eager to jump into the prediction game. This is not surprising, given the very human desire to know what the future will hold. People are curious, they want to be able to plan and they struggle to avoid the predicted "future" by bending or breaking the expected arc of history. But prediction is also foolhardy when it comes with some illusion of control or lacks a large dollop of humility.

Therefore, rather than aiming to predict a specific event or problem that will pose the greatest challenge to the next president, I submit that the biggest potential problem is our general lack of humility about our knowledge and our ability to foresee and control events around us. This will be especially dangerous in the realm of foreign policy, given that the Washington foreign-policy elite has been hobbled by such hubris since the end of the Cold War. Recall Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's breathtaking claim on the Today show in March 1998: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us."

■ See further

This view wasn't anomalous. It has been a fundamental operating assumption of the bipartisan foreign-policy establishment that has supported a grand strategy of liberal hegemony for decades. Albright's perspective--shared widely by the Washington elite--has been tested repeatedly during the last fifteen years, and each experiment has yielded one failure after another. Thinking we could "see further" led the United States into the streets of Mogadishu. It also emboldened Washington to take out leaders in Iraq and Libya in order to make a better world, and it encouraged the conceit that "government in a box"



Recall Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's breathtaking claim on the Today show in March 1998: "If we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us."

could be brought to places like Helmand, Afghanistan. But these well-intentioned efforts all ended up, as retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal described that last folly, as bleeding ulcers.

There has been too much certainty in Washington that aggressive engagement abroad can make America safer or expand its power and values. The U.S. military can effectively hit targets and depose dictators, but has a hard time answering the fundamental question of "What comes next?" Moreover, there has been too little consideration of unintended consequences, the constraints of the world (such as human nature, nationalism and the difficulties of projecting power far from home), and the full costs (human and financial) of American actions.

Unfortunately, the problem runs deep and will be difficult to correct. If America is ever going to stop making mistake after mistake rooted in hubris about what U.S. foreign policy can actually deliver, the country needs a new mental model. It needs to adopt a more realistic mind-set about the limits of power and knowledge, and a new grand strategy consistent with that framework.

A good first step in the development of this new approach would be to turn to a different set of thinkers than those who have dominated policymaking over the last fifteen to twenty-five years. President-elect Trump needs to recall what he said in his first major foreign-policy speech (at the Center for the National Interest); namely, that he would "look for talented

experts with new approaches and practical ideas, rather than surrounding myself with those who have perfect resumes but very little to brag about except responsibility for a long history of failed policies and continued losses at war."

■ Fatal conceit

The country needs people in key government and think-tank positions who appreciate the knowledge problem and the "fatal conceit." In other words, America needs more voices who have internalized the wisdom in University of Texas professor Eugene Gholz's question about policymakers: "How can they understand the rise of ISIL if they don't understand the rise of Donald Trump?"

Fortunately, the American people are yearning for a fundamental change in how they engage with the world. This is evinced in part by President-elect Trump's challenge to Republican establishment thinking on foreign policy in the primaries and more than living to tell about it. Recall that Trump went right into the heart of military-friendly South Carolina and declared: "Obviously, the war in Iraq was a big, fat mistake. . . . George Bush made a mistake. We can make mistakes. But that one was a beauty. We should have never been in Iraq. We have destabilized the Middle East."

But perhaps more telling about the specific state of public opinion on foreign policy, a recent Charles Koch Institute/Center for the National Interest poll suggested a wary public desire for greater prudence abroad. It found that only 14 percent of registered voters in the United States believe the country's foreign policy has made them safer since 2001. A majority, meanwhile, believes that both the United States and the rest of the world are less safe today as a result of the nation's foreign-policy choices in that period. Only 25 percent of American voters believed that the next president should expand the use of the military abroad, while 51 percent feel that the next administration should use the military less than it has since 9/11.

In short, the potential problem is a lack of American humility. A shift towards realism holds the answer.

(Source: The National Interest)

Two clergymen who helped free humanity

2017 marks the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's revolutionary act -- and the 50th of Martin Luther King Jr's expanded mission.

This year will see the 500th anniversary of a great step in freeing human thinking.

Whether rebellious Roman Catholic monk Martin Luther actually nailed 95 "theses," or questions, to the door of a church in Wittenberg, now part of Germany, in October of 1517 is lost to history. But the effects of Luther's open questioning of his church were monumental.

It produced a reformation in Christian thought, championing the idea that the Scriptures should be available to be read and studied not just by clergy but by anyone -- and not only in the scholarly languages of Latin or Greek but in the local tongue.

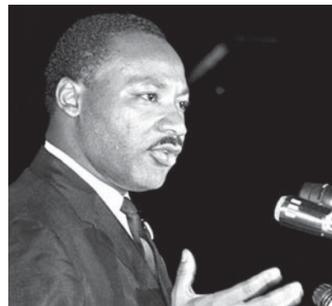
Even more broadly, using the revolutionary technology of his day, the printing press, Luther helped bring about the idea that people should be free to think for themselves, to challenge orthodoxies, whether political, social, artistic, or religious. In the context of 2017, Luther can be seen as an "angry citizen" demanding reforms.

This month the United States also honors Martin Luther King Jr, so named because his father, a Baptist minister in Atlanta, had become a fan of the German reformer while on a visit to Europe.

Fifty years ago, in 1967, King was also on a mission that would expand human freedom. Though the U.S. Civil Rights Act had been passed in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965, he knew they had only laid the groundwork for a full expression of human rights. In 1967 he was to expand his vision of civil rights to include those of all races trapped in poverty. The need was for better jobs at better wages, adequate housing, and an opportunity to get a decent education.

In his book "Where Do We Go From Here?" published that year, he argued that progress for blacks would stall "unless the whole of American society takes a new turn toward greater economic justice."

At the same time King also cautioned African-Americans that their growing



interest in "black power" must not lead their movement away from its biblical roots in nonviolence, or from its emphasis on racial harmony and working for change through the ballot box not through brute force.

Luther was excommunicated from the Catholic Church for his radical views. But last fall Pope Francis made clear how much attitudes have changed, praising the Protestant reformer for helping to put a greater focus on the Scriptures and for exposing abuses and corruption within the church at that time.

In the U.S., the state of Minnesota -- home to some 2,000 Lutheran churches -- has become the epicenter of this year's remembrances of Luther.

"I don't think the average person [today] knows how big of a deal Luther was," Nancy Monke, pastor at a Lutheran Church in Underwood, Minn., told the Minneapolis Star Tribune. "The whole idea of individual freedom, that you can protest the church or any authority, really took off from him."

Fifty years ago, an American clergyman was making his own impression on human thought.

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that," King was telling the world. "Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

He would "stick to love," King said, because hate "is too great a burden to bear."

As we look back from 2017 both Luther and the African-American who took his name still speak powerfully to the world.

(Source: The CSM)

How Iraq and Turkey could beat the ISIL but still lose

A string of bombings in Baghdad and a gunman's bloody rampage in an Istanbul nightclub over New Year's weekend underlined the continuing capacity of the Islamic State (ISIL) to strike beyond the borders of its shrinking territory. In the past two years, the terrorist movement has lost some 50,000 fighters, according to U.S. estimates, as well as more than half of the ground it once controlled in Syria and Iraq. But with offensives to capture its two biggest remaining cities, Mosul and Raqqa, stalled or moving slowly, the ISIL retains the potential to inflict grievous harm on the countries around it, as well as to target Western cities.

In particular, there is reason to worry that Iraq and Turkey, the targets of the weekend attacks, are in danger of effectively losing their war with the terrorists. Both dispatched their armies to capture ISIL's territories last year and recorded significant gains. But both are at risk of political, economic and social breakdown as a result of terrorist counterattacks and of their own counterproductive measures.

Iraqi counterterrorism units advancing through Mosul, and the U.S. advisers and air power backing them, deserve credit for tactics aimed at protecting civilians: The humanitarian cost of the 2½-month-old battle has been small compared with the assault on Aleppo by Syrian, Russian forces. But the Iraqi troops have taken heavy casualties and, having aimed for victory by the end of 2016, the government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi says it may take months more.

Abadi's government, meanwhile, is not delivering on his frequent promises to promote political reconciliation among Iraq's sectarian factions. On the contrary, the parliament in Baghdad recently took measures that further alienated the Shia-led government from Sunni and Kurdish leaders. The danger is that even after the recapture of Mosul, the country's sectarian



warfare will continue and perhaps even intensify as the factions compete for control over liberated territories.

Turkey appears at risk of its own meltdown in spite of -- and because of -- the authoritarianism of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Erdogan, who avoided action against the ISIL for several years, dispatched troops to Syria in 2016, but he appears more intent on preventing the consolidation of a Kurdish-controlled region there than on helping to capture Raqqa. His brutal crackdown on Kurds and other political opponents inside Turkey has polarized the country, driving a wedge between groups that should be united against the terrorists. Some liberal Turks pointed out that the assault early Sunday Jan.1 on Istanbul's Reina nightclub, a secular and cosmopolitan refuge, came after government religious officials criticized New Year's Eve celebrations.

It remains likely that 2017 will see the elimination of the ISIL's self-declared caliphate as a territorial entity. But what may be more important to the security of the Middle East as well as the West is whether Turkey and Iraq are further destabilized. That will depend in part on whether the ISIL can continue to mount devastating terrorist attacks like those of last weekend. The decisive factor, however, will be whether Erdogan and Abadi are able to embrace more constructive domestic policies.

(Source: The Washington Post)

By Parnaz Talebi

Most Americans oppose US' withdrawal from JCPOA: Survey

Donald Trump's election as the president has raised the speculations on US withdrawal of nuclear deal, yet a new survey has proved the opposite.

A new survey from the University of Maryland's Program for Public Consultation (PPC) finds that nearly two thirds of Americans oppose withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal and seeking to negotiate a better deal, as has been proposed by the president-elect.

"Though President-elect Trump campaigned on ripping up the deal and seeking to negotiate a better one, the majority of Americans would rather continue with the deal as long as Iran continues to comply with its terms," said PPC Director Steven Kull.

Respondents, a sample society of 2980, were first presented the main terms of the deal that was negotiated between the UN Security Council plus Germany (5+1) and Iran over its nuclear enrichment program and asked to evaluate arguments for and against withdrawing and seeking to renegotiate.

The provided background noted that the main focus of the deal was on limiting Iran's capacity for enriching uranium, which could be used for nuclear weapons. The respondents were also provided with some details that Iran had agreed to stay committed to, including:

- Recommit to never build a nuclear weapon.
- Limit its uranium enrichment to the low level that is useful for nuclear energy, but well below the level needed for nuclear weapons. After 15 years Iran will be able to enrich to a somewhat higher level, such as for medical purposes, but not to develop a military capability.
- Reduce by 98 percent its stockpile of low-enriched uranium—and keep it that small for 15 years.
- Reduce its number of centrifuges (the devices that enrich uranium) by two-thirds—keeping only its older and slower centrifuge models—for 10 years. The other centrifuges will go into storage monitored by the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency.
- Allow intrusive inspections of all nuclear facilities to ensure that



the terms of the agreement are being met.

- Allow inspection of any site, including military bases, where inspectors have evidence of suspicious activity, although Iran can appeal to a commission of the signing countries.
- In exchange, the UN and the EU agreed to lift their nuclear-related sanctions on Iran. The US agreed to suspend its nuclear-related sanctions, but its other sanctions remain. If Iran is found to be in violation of the agreement, the nuclear-related sanctions will automatically come back into force.

The information also underlined that Iran has remained committed

to all requirements of the deal till now.

Two arguments were then offered to the respondents, one in favor of US withdrawing the deal and one in favor of continuing and renegotiating it, and both were found convincing by majorities. However, the argument for US withdrawal was more convincing for Republicans (GOP 72.9% - Dem. 34.2%) and the argument for renegotiation sounded more convincing for Democrats (Dem. 78.7% - GOP 46.8%).

When asked about the possibility of other UN members in withdrawing or continuing the deal if US withdraws it, with a general optimism, 57.8% found it totally likely while

While an overwhelming 86 percent of Democrats and 58 percent of independents favored continuing with the deal, only 40 percent of Republicans concurred. Fifty eight percent of Republicans favored withdrawing and seeking to renegotiate.

Though President-elect Trump campaigned on ripping up the deal and seeking to negotiate a better one, the majority of Americans would rather continue with the deal as long as Iran continues to comply with its terms.

40.2% said that would be totally unlikely. Both majority of Republicans and Democrats found it totally likely (GOP 63.2% - Dem. 51.9%). In other words ix in ten expressed optimism that other UN members could be persuaded to join in the effort to renegotiate.

The respondents were also asked how likely it would be that Iran agree to renegotiate the deal and make more concessions if US decides to withdraw. The perspective was negative in this regard and a total of 68.8% found it completely unlikely and only 29.4% thought that Iran would be ready to negotiate the deal. Here again there was a consensus between Republicans and Democrats where 64.4% of Republicans and 74.6% of Democrats said there would be no possibility of

Iran's renegotiation. Yet the Republicans have been more optimistic on the issue with 34.3% (Dem. 24%).

Lastly, when asked on two final options that US should:

1. Withdraw from the current deal and seek to negotiate a new deal
 2. Continue with the deal as long as Iran complies with the terms
- Republicans agreed with withdrawal with a total of 58.1% while Democrats opposed the option with 13.2% agreement. The other option, continuing the deal, was mostly welcomed by Democrats with 85.6% (GOP 40.4% - Independents. 58.6%).
- To put it simple, 69 percent said it was unlikely that Iran would agree to renegotiate the deal and make more concessions. This was a bipar-

tisan perspective that included 64 percent of Republicans as well as 75 percent of Democrats

When asked for their final recommendation, 64 percent recommended continuing with the deal as long as Iran continues to comply with the terms, while 34 percent opted for withdrawing and seeking to negotiate a better deal.

While an overwhelming 86 percent of Democrats and 58 percent of independents favored continuing with the deal, only 40 percent of Republicans concurred. Fifty eight percent of Republicans favored withdrawing and seeking to renegotiate.

Interestingly, support for negotiating was high among Republicans, though even among those who favored renegotiation, 57 percent said it was unlikely that the negotiations would succeed.

The survey was fielded December 22-28, 2016 with a sample of 2,980 respondents drawn from Nielsen-Scarborough's probability-based national panel (which was recruited by mail and telephone using a random sample of households). The margin of error is +/- 1.8 percent.



The Trump bubble

By Mike Whitney

Donald Trump has a plan for dealing with the stock market bubble. Make it bigger.

Before the election candidate Trump blasted Federal Reserve chairman Janet Yellen for keeping interest rates too low for too long to keep the economy humming along while Obama was still in office. The president elect accused Yellen of being politically motivated suggesting that the Fed's policies had put the country at risk of another stock market Crash like 2008.

"If rates go up, you're going to see something that's not pretty," Trump told Fox News in an interview in September. "It's all a big bubble."

Yellen of course denied Trump's claims saying, "We do not discuss politics at our meetings, and we do not take politics into account in our decisions."

As we shall see later in this article, Yellen was lying about the political role the Fed plays in setting policy, in fact, last week's FOMC statement clearly establishes the Fed as basically a political institution that implements an agenda that serves a very small group of powerful constituents, the 1 percent. If serving the interests of one group over all of the others is not politics, than what is it?

The problem we have with Trump is not his critique of the market or the Fed. The problem is his remedy which can be sussed out by reviewing his economic plan. Trump wants to slash personal and corporate taxes in order to put more money into the economy to increase business investment, boost hiring, and rev up growth. Regrettably, his tax plan achieves none of these.

First of all, slashing taxes for the wealthy does not boost growth. We know that. It doesn't work. Period. Check out this blurb from an article on CNBC:

"A study from the Congressional Research Service — the non-partisan research office for Congress — shows that "there is little evidence over the past 65 years that tax cuts for the highest earners are associated with savings, investment or productivity growth."

In fact, the study found that higher tax rates for the wealthy are statistically associated with higher levels of growth...



In fact, the study found that higher tax rates for the wealthy are statistically associated with higher levels of growth...

The CRS study looked at tax rates and economic growth since 1945. The top tax rate in 1945 was above 90 percent, and fell to 70 percent in the 1960s and to a low of 28 percent in 1986.

The top current rate is 35 percent. The tax rate for capital gains was 25 percent in the 1940s and 1950s, then went up to 35 percent in the 1970s, before coming down to 15 percent today — the lowest rate in more than 65 years.

Lowering these rates for the wealthy, the study found, isn't aligned with significant improvement in any of the areas it examined...

There is one part of the economy, however, that is changed by tax cuts for the rich: inequality...

The share of total income going to the top 0.1 percent hovered around 4 percent during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, then rose to 12 percent by the mid-2000s. During this period, the average tax rate paid by the 0.1 percent fell from more than 40 percent to below 25 percent." (Study: Tax Cuts for the Rich Don't Spur Growth,

CNBC)

Trump's tax plan will increase inequality by making the rich richer. He wants to reduce the top tax rate from 39.6% to 33% which means that people "making \$3.7 million or more in a year, would receive \$1 million in annual tax savings." (USA Today) The plan is bad for the economy, bad for the deficits and bad for working people who will see more aggressive attacks on Social Security to make up for the losses in revenue.

Second, the huge tax break Trump intends to award to the tax dodging corporations that stash their money overseas will not be used to fire up growth or invest in future business ventures, but to issue more dividends to shareholders or increase stock buybacks that pump up stock prices. There's a great article at the Intercept website that sums it up perfectly. Here's a short excerpt:

Why would companies expand their operations, hire more workers, and generate more product when consumer demand is still in the crapper seven years after the Great Recession?

"The official line from U.S.-based multinational corporations is that if they get a huge tax break, they'll bring home the trillions of dollars in profits they've stashed overseas and use it to hire tons of Americans.

But now that Donald Trump's election means it might really happen, corporate executives are telling Wall Street analysts what they'll actually use that money for: enriching their shareholders and buying other companies.

The Intercept's examination of dozens of earnings calls and investor conference talks since Trump won the presidential election finds that many executives are telling analysts at large banks that they are eager to take the money to increase dividends and stock buybacks as well as snap up competitors. They demonstrate considerably less if any enthusiasm for going on a domestic hiring spree...

"The wealthy are going to create tremendous jobs. They're going to expand their companies," Trump asserted during the first presidential debate. "They're going to bring \$2.5 trillion back from overseas, ... to be put to use on the inner cities and lots of other things, and it would be beautiful." During the third debate he promised that "We're going to start hiring people, we're going to bring the \$2.5 trillion that's offshore back into the country. We are going to start the engine rolling again." (Corporations Prepare to Gorge on Tax Cuts Trump Claims Will Create Jobs, Jon Schwartz, The Intercept)

Trump knows his so called "tax holiday" scam is a bunch of baloney. Why would companies expand their operations, hire more workers, and generate more product when consumer demand is still in the crapper seven years after the Great Recession?

They're not going to do that. They're going to do exactly what their shareholders

There is one part of the economy, however, that is changed by tax cuts for the rich: inequality...

ers expect them to do, pursue those areas of investment that promise the best possible return. In this case that means stock buybacks, the financial engineering swindle that's going to add another \$2 trillion to equities valuations and send Trump's "bubble" to the moon.

The people who believe that Trump is going to defend the "little guy" against the special interests, corporate lobbyists and elitist oligarchy who run this country are going to be pretty disappointed. Behind his widely-ballyhooed public relations campaign aimed at convincing his backers that he's determined to keep the jobs in the US, Trump is working all the levers to ensure the big money keeps flowing in the same direction it has been for the last 30 years. Upwards.

As for Yellen, last week's FOMC statement made it crystal clear that if Trump makes any attempt to veer from the predatory, neoliberal course she's charted, he will be quickly slapped down with higher interest rates. Check out her comments from the post-statement press conference:

"We're operating under a cloud of uncertainty at the moment ... Some participants noted that if the labor market appeared to be tightening significantly more than expected, it might become necessary to adjust the Committee's communications about the expected path of the federal funds rate, consistent with the possibility that a less gradual pace of increases would become appropriate."

In other words, if wages finally manage to break-free from their seven years of flatlining stagnation due to an unforeseen surge in growth, the Fed will immediately extinguish that improvement by raising rates and reducing the level of economic activity. Yellen's statement simply confirms the Fed's anti-worker bias.

Which is why we say the Fed is basically a political institution. (Eurasia Review)

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The year of conquering negative thinking

By Lesley Aldermanjan

Here's a New Year's challenge for the mind: Make this the year that you quiet all those negative thoughts swirling around your brain.

All humans have a tendency to be a bit more like Eeyore than Tigger, to ruminate more on bad experiences than positive ones. It's an evolutionary adaptation that helps us avoid danger and react quickly in a crisis.

But constant negativity can also get in the way of happiness, add to our stress and worry level and ultimately damage our health. And some people are more prone to negative thinking than others. Thinking styles can be genetic or the result of childhood experiences, said Judith Beck, a psychologist and the president of the Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy in Bala Cynwyd, Pa. Children may develop negative thinking habits if they have been teased or bullied, or experienced blatant trauma or abuse. Women, overall, are also more likely to ruminate than men, according to a 2013 study.

"We were built to overlearn from negative experiences, but under learn from positive ones," said Rick Hanson, a psychologist and senior fellow at the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley.

But with practice you can learn to disrupt and tame negative cycles.

The first step to stopping negative thoughts is a surprising one. Don't try to stop them. If you are obsessing about a lost promotion or the results of the presidential election, whatever you do, don't tell yourself, "I have to stop thinking about this."

"Worry and obsession get worse when you try to control your thoughts," Dr. Beck said.

Instead, notice that you are in a negative cycle and own it. Tell yourself, "I'm obsessing about my bad review." Or "I'm obsessing about the election."

By acknowledging your negative cycle and accepting it, you are on your way to taming your negative thoughts. Acceptance is the basic premise of mindfulness meditation, a practice that helps reduce stress and reactivity. You don't necessar-



When your negative thoughts are making you feel agitated and overwhelmed, take a deep breath, and then another. Practicing controlled breathing can help lower the stress response and calm anxious thoughts.

ily have to close your eyes and meditate every day to reap the benefits of mindfulness. You can remind yourself to notice your thoughts in a nonjudgmental manner, without trying to change or alter them right away.

Accepting negative thoughts can also help lessen their weight. Getting mad at yourself for worrying or telling yourself to stop worrying only adds fuel to the negativity fire.

After you've accepted a negative thought, force yourself to challenge it.

Let's go back to the setback at work. Perhaps not getting the promotion made you worry about your overall competence and you were berating yourself about your skills. Ask yourself, "Why would one setback mean that I am incompetent?" Or you might ask, "What have I done in the past that shows I am actually a very competent worker?"

If you're having trouble challenging your negative thoughts, try this approach. Imagine that your friend is

the one who received the bad news. What advice would you give him or her? Now think of how that advice might apply to you.

A study conducted at Ohio State University found that this method — known as Socratic questioning — was a simple way to reduce depressive symptoms in adults. In the study, 55 adults were enrolled in a 16-week course of cognitive therapy sessions. Researchers studied videotapes of the sessions and found that the more frequently therapists used Socratic questioning, the more the patients' depressive symptoms lessened. The study's authors theorized that Socratic questioning helped patients examine the validity of their negative thoughts and gain a broader, more realistic perspective on them.

There will be times when your bleak thoughts are actually valid, but your projections about what's next are not. Consider this scenario: Your partner has left you for someone else. "My partner doesn't love me anymore," might be ac-

curate, said Dr. Beck, but "No one else will ever love me," is probably not.

Now move from a place of inaction to action to counteract the negative thought. If you are worried about feeling unloved, check in with friends and family members. If you are feeling insecure at work, make a list of your accomplishments. Perhaps ask your best friend to write you a letter telling you all the ways in which you are a good, kind person. Reread the letter daily.

Dr. Hanson, author of "Hardwiring Happiness: The New Brain Science of Contentment, Calm, and Confidence," said it may be helpful to ask yourself if you are accomplishing anything by dwelling on your negative thoughts. If you're ruminating on your financial problems during a run around the track in hopes of finding a solution, then that is useful. But fretting for lap after lap about the president-elect or a foreign crisis is not going to accomplish anything.

When your negative thoughts are making you feel agitated and overwhelmed, take a deep breath, and then another. Practicing controlled breathing can help lower the stress response and calm anxious thoughts.

Finally, if your thoughts are making you feel seriously distressed and interfering with your ability to work and relax, consider seeing a mental health professional. Therapists who specialize in cognitive therapy, which teaches practical ways to cope with persistent and unwanted thoughts, may be particularly helpful. If the underlying source of your thoughts is clinical depression or intense anxiety, you might want to talk with a professional about the root cause of your negative thinking patterns and discuss medications that can be helpful.

While you are sorting out what approach works best for you, give yourself a break and have compassion for your overwrought thoughts.

"The more you dwell on the negative, the more accustomed your brain becomes to dwelling on the negative," said Dr. Hanson, who suggests asking yourself, "Are my thoughts helping to build me up, or tear me down?"

(Source: The New York Times)

A long-lasting flu shot may emerge — but not this year

The most vexing thing about the annual flu vaccination is that it's annual.

You have to get it every year, and many people don't do so. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently reported that only 2 out of 5 Americans have received the shot so far this flu season.

Wouldn't it be easier if a flu shot were a once-in-a-lifetime event, or even once or twice in a decade? Public health officials see that as a potential game-changer.



"If we had an effective universal vaccine, it would take a huge dent out of health care costs [and] disruption of work, school attendance, and social activities," says William Schaffner, a professor of medicine at Vanderbilt University and medical director of the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases. "It could change the entire way we prevent influenza."

The idea no longer seems so elusive, says Barney Graham, deputy director of the vaccine research center at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Modern molecular technology enables scientists "to design things at atomic resolution," which "really wasn't possible until the last few years," says Graham, who is trying to develop what scientists call a universal, or long-lasting, vaccine.

Several groups of scientists, including Graham's, have reported progress toward a vaccine that could protect against flu permanently with a single injection or with a shot given every five to 10 years.

Either approach would be a big advance over current practice, which requires health officials to predict major flu viruses nine months in advance so manufacturers can adjust the vaccine each year. With a universal vaccine, "we wouldn't have to worry about that," Schaffner says. "Each year, we could go after people who hadn't been vaccinated before. It could be a yearlong, daily vaccination activity, not just focused in the fall."

The hope is that such a broad-spectrum vaccine also could protect against rare but potentially deadly pandemics. "It would be the single most important thing we can do in public health today," says Michael Osterholm, a professor of public health and the director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota.

While flu can strike anyone, it is most dangerous for the very young, the elderly, and the chronically ill. Globally, seasonal flu epidemics produce 3 million to 5 million cases of serious disease every year, resulting in 250,000 to 500,000 deaths, according to the World Health Organization.

Symptoms include fever, dry cough, headache, muscle and joint pain, severe malaise, sore throat, and runny nose.

The two major types of seasonal influenza viruses that can infect humans are A and B. Type A viruses, which are constantly changing, are the ones usually responsible for yearly epidemics. Scientists classify type A viruses into subtypes based on the combinations of the two molecules that cover the surface of the virus, hemagglutinin and neuraminidase.

Vaccines work by stimulating the production of antibodies against pieces of the virus. A universal vaccine would need to provoke antibodies that bind to "conserved" regions of the virus — that is, areas that stay the same and are common to most flu viruses. Currently, seasonal vaccines are designed to respond to the hemagglutinin head, which changes every year.

Researchers are using different strategies that target the common areas.

Two groups working separately, for example, are focusing on hemagglutinin's stem, or stalk, which, unlike the head, doesn't change. To do so, each team had to first figure out how to stabilize the stalk after lopping off the head. (The head is removed because it draws key immune system cells — those needed to make antibodies — away from the stem.) Each using a different approach, the teams have found a way to anchor the stem once the head is eliminated.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Antioxidant found in breast milk prevents liver disease, study finds

By Ana Sandoiu

A new study suggests that an antioxidant commonly found in breast milk could help to protect against nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.

Antioxidants are commonly found in fruits and vegetables, and they are thought to prevent cell damage. Vitamins C and E, selenium, and carotenoids are all examples of antioxidants.

Studies have shown that a diet rich in fruits and vegetables can help to prevent chronic diseases. However, it is not certain whether the antioxidants themselves protect against these diseases, or whether other substances in fruits and vegetables do.

New research links one antioxidant in particular — commonly found in breast milk and foods such as kiwi, soy, and celery — to the risk of developing nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD).

NAFLD is becoming increasingly widespread. In the United States, the disorder is the most common cause of liver disease, accounting for 75 percent of all chronic liver diseases.

NAFLD affects 20-30 percent of U.S. adults and 60

percent of obese adults, and the disease has been linked to the obesity "epidemic" and the metabolic disorders that accompany it.

Studying the effect of PQQ in obese mice

Researchers from the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus set out to examine whether an increased dose of pyrroloquinoline quinone (PQQ) administered prenatally in obese mice could halt the progression of NAFLD.

The findings were published in the Journal of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology.

Led by Karen Jonscher, Ph.D. — associate professor of anesthesiology and a physicist at CU Anschutz — the team fed a high-fat, high-sugar Western diet to pregnant mice in order to induce obesity. Another group of pregnant mice was fed a healthful diet. Additionally, a subgroup from each of the two groups received PQQ in their drinking water.

The mice's offspring were also fed the two diets for 20 weeks, as well as having received PQQ through their mothers' breast milk.

As expected, the mice fed a Western diet gained more weight than those fed a healthful one. Supplemen-

tal PQQ, whether administered pre- or postnatally, had no impact on the weight gain.

However, PQQ treatment reduced both liver and body fat in obese offspring. PQQ reduced liver fat in mice even before they were born.

The researchers found decreased indicators of oxidative stress and proinflammatory genes in obese mice that had been given PQQ. This suggests that the antioxidant also reduced liver inflammation.

Interestingly, these positive effects persevered in the offspring after the PQQ was withdrawn as part of the weaning process. "When given to obese mouse mothers during pregnancy and lactation, we found it protected their offspring from developing symptoms of liver fat and damage that leads to NAFLD in early adulthood," says Karen Jonscher.

PQQ is naturally found in soil, interstellar dust, and human breast milk. The antioxidant is critical for development in mammals, and it can also be found in a variety of plant foods, such as soy, parsley, celery, kiwi, and papaya.

Jonscher also emphasizes the benefits of early PQQ diet supplementation for the prevention of liver disease.

(Source: Reuters)

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10 hot titles of IT world

By Alireza Khorasani

Here are high rated IT titles in the world that reviewed by savvy tech users:

- 1** Nokia 6 smartphone Unveiled in china as first official android phone from HMD Global.
The 5.5-inch Nokia 6 with Qualcomm Snapdragon 430 processor, 4GB of RAM, 64GB of on-board storage alongside microSD support, a 16-megapixel rear-camera, 8-megapixel front-camera, and 3,000mAh battery will sell through JD.COM for \$245.
- 2** New Year's eve saw people sending a total of whopping 63 billion WhatsApp messages, according to Facebook, which owns the mobile messaging service. Of the total, nearly 14 billion messages were sent in India alone.
While images constituted around 8 billion messages, nearly 2.5 billion WhatsApp messages were videos, a WhatsApp spokesperson revealed.
- 3** 76% of Apple's mobile devices are now running iOS 10.
That's a rise of 13% compared to the last time these figures were released, which happened in November. In October, the adoption rate stood at 60%. Coming to other versions, iOS 9's share now stands at 18%, while earlier iOS versions claim just a 6% share.
- 4** Microsoft is planning on including Cortana in a cloud-based connected car platform that will allow car manufacturers to offer custom driving experiences.
Microsoft's 'Connected Car' strategy now has a new name: Microsoft Connected Vehicle. But the goal is the same: Linking cars to Microsoft cloud services.
- 5** On April 25th, most third party apps using Google Hangouts will be shutting down. Even with its Allo messaging app launched, Google has said that it has no plans on shuttering Google Hangouts. Still, it has started pre-installing Allo on new Android handsets instead of Hangouts.
- 6** Volkswagen and Ford will be integrating their vehicles with the Amazon Alexa voice assistant.
Volkswagen announced it's integrating Alexa into future automobiles with the goal of providing driving-oriented functionality.
- 7** Intel has nearly completed a 5G modem with 5Gbps download speeds. It's capable of achieving 5Gbps download speeds, which is really fast – for example, it would take a 50GB movie around 80 seconds to download.
- 8** Apple slashes Tim Cook pay for the first time this year as company misses sales targets.
Apple declared annual sales of \$215.6 billion for the fiscal 2016 (Apple's fiscal years end on the last Saturday of September), 3.7% below the company's target of \$223.6 billion, according to a regulatory filing. The operating profit of the iPhone maker stood at \$60 billion, also below the \$60.3 billion target, slipping 0.5%.
- 9** Google acquires Swedish company Limes Audio in a bid to improve audio quality for conference calls.
Limes Audio's flagship product is called TrueVoice – a full-duplex audio conferencing software that employs advanced speech enhancement techniques, such as microphone mixing, acoustic echo cancellation, and various forms of noise reduction.
- 10** Russia wants to scrub LinkedIn's presence from the country completely. According to The New York Times, people in the country can no longer download the social network's mobile application from the App Store or Google Play.

IT IRAN

6 million images linked to Persian words by local search engine: Alireza Yari

By Shataw Naseri

In an interview with Mehr, the Secretary of the Administrative Council for Local Search Engines Alireza Yari announced that two concept and image networks, respectively known as FarsiNet and TasvirNet, have been launched so that conceptual and visual communication via Iran's local search engine might be better carried out.
He said, "the concept network, or FarsiNet, was launched to establish the connection of words on a computer-based network and, also, to render the local search engine better comprehend Persian language. Hence, the communication between words and sentences might be unambiguous."
Yari noted, "with the launch of these two networks, image processing and deep comprehension by the engine will be established." Stating that in the entire successful search engines across the world, a high number of images and words are linked, he maintained, "a wide range of algorithms cause these search engines to comprehend deeply, an ability that, ultimately, could serve the users based on the sentence or the word they search for."
Alireza Yari said, "the TasvirNet project is under way at Iran's Telecommunication Research Center and, in the first phase, we have succeeded in linking 6 million images to Persian words."
The number is set to increase to 14 million images in the second phase and in the third phase, millions of images will be added to this collection, according to the Secretary of the Administrative Council for Local Search Engines.
"Currently, the local search engine links images to Persian words based on English image processing," Yari said, adding, "in the third phase, the native images will be added to the search engine in regard to our culture, religion as well as our local, historical and tourism aspects."

Digital Trends Top Tech of CES 2017 Award Winners

The new year had barely arrived when the Digital Trends team rolled into Las Vegas, but we wasted no time prowling the Las Vegas Convention Center for the gadgets that will come to define tech in 2017 and here you are to see our best selections of new and innovative devices for you.

Best of Show
Samsung Chromebook Plus



Designed with cooperation from Google, the Chromebook Plus is the first Chrome OS device built with Android apps in mind. The 2,400 x 1,600 panel has a digitizer for built-in stylus support, and flips a full 360 degrees for dedicated tablet use. It's one of the sturdiest Chromebooks we've laid hands on, in a field full of systems that cheap out with plastic components and low-resolution panels.

Automotive
Nvidia PilotNet



Many automakers are gunning for high-level autonomous vehicles by 2020, which is just a short three years away. To do that, it's going to take more than just networking a bunch of cameras and sensors to monitor conditions — a car will have to learn what to do when those conditions change. Nvidia's PilotNet gives cars the brainpower to do just that.
Running on Nvidia's Drive PX 2, the company's autonomous driving hardware, PilotNet employs "deep learning," which is basically a computer's way of dealing with the abstract. It acts like a neural network, learning habits demonstrated to it and applying them to safe driving.

Computing
Dell XPS 13 2-in-1



Dell's XPS 13, introduced at CES two years ago, was a revelation. It proved not only that Windows laptops can be awesome. The XPS 13's thin-bezel design and carbon fiber-infused chassis was like nothing we'd seen before. Now, Dell has brought the same quality and creativity to the 2-in-1 form factor with its appropriately named XPS 13 2-in-1. While it admittedly adheres closely to the XPS 13's formula, that's not much of a problem, because no one has really caught up to it. And as you might expect, the XPS 13 2-in-1 shaves weight and thickness. It's 0.56 inches thick at most, though feels thinner due to its tapered design, and tips the scales at 2.7 pounds.

Cool Tech
Monoprice Delta Mini



This year at CES, Monoprice unveiled a 3D printer that costs \$150.
But price alone isn't why we're giving the Monoprice Delta Mini our best of CES award. Despite being outrageously affordable, it's also extremely sturdy, ca-

pable, and user friendly. Just like its predecessor, the MP Select Mini, the Delta Mini is equipped with a range of high-end features that are usually only found in printers that cost much, much more than \$150.

Cool Tech
Ability3D 888



Ever since 3D printing broke into the consumer space, proponents of the technology have foretold of a utopian future in which 3D printers are a household staple akin to dishwashers and microwaves — where we can print products on-demand instead of buying them at a store.
Company founder and former NASA engineer Ben Willard has created an innovative new 3D printer (called the 888) which is capable of printing high quality metal parts in the comfort of your own home. But that's not what's impressive about it. Metal printers have been around for years at this point — but unfortunately, even the cheapest ones cost as much as a Lamborghini. What's incredible about the 888 is that when it hits Kickstarter later this year, it'll retail for less than \$3,000.

Cool Tech
Square Off



Chess may have made its way to computers and smartphones in the roughly 1,500 years since its invention, but the physical board itself hasn't changed much.
Invention's Square Off is changing that with artificial intelligence, magnets, and Wi-Fi. Square Off is a large, hand-crafted rosewood chess set that uses magnets underneath the surface to move pieces — almost as though you're playing Wizard's Chess from Harry Potter. Self-moving chess boards aren't exactly new (see Phantom Force), but what makes Square Off unique is that it comes with a companion app. With the app, anyone in the world can play a game with you and you'll see their moves come to life on your board.

Gaming
HTC Vive Tracker



The HTC Vive, our favorite product of 2016, is about to get a whole lot more interesting. The HTC Vive tracker is a small black disc that can be attached any supported device and make it visible to the Vive's room-scale sensors — you can now bring props into VR.

Headphones
Beyerdynamics' Xelento Remote



Enter Beyerdynamics' stunning Xelento Remote, an updated version of the Astell & Kern AK T18E. To fashion its latest audiophile gem, Beyerdynamics shrunk down the the company's storied Tesla dynamic moving coil driver. The result beats out the new upstarts with the best sound from a headphone we've heard at the show. Even on the noisy showroom floor, it's evident that Beyerdynamic has something special in the Xelento Remote.

Home Appliance
GE FirstBuild Paragon Mat



Ovens let you select a temperature, but that exact control isn't found on cooktops. Though the Bluetooth-connected mat currently only works with GE's Induction Cooktop, the future implications are pretty intriguing. When you make pancakes, the batter cools the pan down a bit, but your burner doesn't adjust for that. The Mat does. Using a sensor, it constantly monitors the temperature of the pan resting on top it, and then it cranks up or lowers the Cooktop in response.

Home Audio
GoldenEar Triton Reference



GoldenEar's statement speakers, the Triton One, stand tall as one of the few speakers (or products in general) to garner a perfect score from our review section, offering a mix of incredible precision up top, a warm and smooth midrange, and what we simply referred to as "Best. Bass. Ever." This year at CES, GoldenEar has done it again with its uncompromising new flagship towers, the Triton Reference.

Home Video
Sony Bravia A1E 4K UHD OLED TV



Picking a winner for our Best Tech of CES in the home video category is always difficult — there are usually three or more extremely qualified candidates — but this year, the race was tighter than ever. With Samsung's new QLED technology and LG's stunning W7 Series Wallpaper OLED in the mix, a determination took hours of consideration. In the end, though, Sony's jaw-dropping Bravia A1E OLED TV walks away with our award.

Mobile
Honor 6X



Budget phones don't have to be ugly and boring anymore. The \$250 Honor 6X

is a new breed of budget phone with a strong dual-camera setup that performs many of the same tricks as Apple's iPhone 7 Plus for a third of the price.

Outdoor
Goal Zero Yeti Lithium 3000



Goal Zero introduced a massive upgrade to its line of Yeti portable power stations at CES 2017. Where the previous models used lead-acid batteries, the new Yeti Lithium line uses Panasonic-made lithium-ion batteries — the same battery technology inside Tesla electric cars.

Photography
Panasonic Lumix GH5



The GH5 brings 4K movie capture at 60 frames per second (180fps if you shoot in Full HD), and there's no time limit (most 4K-capable cameras muster 30fps at 30 minutes). And priced at \$1,999 (body only, available in March), it brings professional-level filmmaking to consumers, enthusiasts, YouTubers, and even pros working on a budget.

Smart Home
Sleep Number 360 Smart Bed



Sleep Number's 360 Smart Bed can actually act on the data it collects. Sleep Number introduced a smart bed at last year's CES, but the 360 Smart Bed is more like a responsive bed. It has the same tech but instead of merely offering suggestions for better sleep, it works to help you stay in Sleepy Town.

Sport & Fitness
Garmin Fenix 5S



Digital Trends has been tracking Garmin's line of athletic- and outdoors-centric Fenix smartwatches since the introduction of the first model in 2013. Not a single model failed to take home either an Editor's Choice or Recommended award, so it's little surprise the Garmin's excellence continues in the new Fenix 5, 5S, and 5X.
While the Fenix 5's 47mm face addresses one of our main complaints with the Fenix 3's bulkiness, it's the 5S's 42mm measure that has us most excited about the new model.

(Source: digitaltrends)

Large-scale tornado outbreaks increasing in frequency, study finds

The frequency of large-scale tornado outbreaks is increasing in the United States, particularly when it comes to the most extreme events, according to research recently published in *Science*.

The study by researchers including Joel E. Cohen, a visiting scholar at the University of Chicago, finds the increase in tornado outbreaks does not appear to be the result of a warming climate as earlier models suggested. Instead, their findings tie the growth in frequency to trends in the vertical wind shear found in certain supercells -- a change not so far associated with a warmer climate.

"What's pushing this rise in extreme outbreaks, during which the vast majority of tornado-related fatalities occur, is far from obvious in the present state of climate science," said Cohen, the Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor at Rockefeller University and Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences at Columbia University.

Tornado outbreaks

Tornado outbreaks are large-scale weather events that last one to three days, featuring several thunderstorms and six or more tornadoes in close succession. In the study, published in the Dec. 16 issue of *Science*, the researchers used new statistical tools, including extreme value analysis -- a branch of statistics dealing with deviations -- to analyze observation-based meteorological estimates associated with tornado outbreaks together with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration datasets.



The researchers estimated that the number of tornadoes in the most extreme outbreak in a five-year interval doubled over the last half-century. "Viewing the data on thousands of tornadoes that have been reliably re-

"Our study raises new questions about what climate change will do to severe thunderstorms and what is responsible for recent trends," says co-author Michael K. Tippett, an associate professor at Columbia University's Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science.

corded in the United States over the past half-century as a population has permitted us to ask new questions and discover new, important changes in outbreaks of these tornadoes," Cohen said.

To understand the increased frequency in tornado outbreaks, the researchers looked at two factors: convective available potential energy, or CAPE, and storm relative helicity, which is a measure of vertical wind shear.

Earlier studies

Earlier studies had projected a warming climate would increase CAPE, creating conditions favorable to a rise in severe thunderstorms -- and potentially tornado outbreaks. But Cohen and his colleagues found the increases in outbreaks were driven instead by storm relative helicity, which has not been projected to increase under a warming climate.

"Our study raises new questions about what climate change will do to severe thunderstorms and what is responsible for recent trends," said co-author Michael K. Tippett, an associate professor at Columbia University's Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science.

The "fact that we didn't see the presently understood meteorological signature of global warming in changing outbreak statistics for tornadoes leaves two possibilities: Either the recent increases are not due to a warming climate, or a warming climate has implications for tornado activity that we don't understand."

(Source: *EurekAlert*)

IBM predicts 5 life-changing innovations for the next 5 years

New diagnostics for brain disorders based on speech pattern analysis, imaging devices that will let us see the whole electromagnetic spectrum and entire medical labs each built onto a single computer chip are just a few of the advances we can expect to see in the next five years, according to IBM.

Big Blue released its "IBM 5 in 5," an annual list of innovations that the company predicted will have major impacts on the way we live over the next five years.

"With advances in artificial intelligence and nanotechnology, we aim to invent a new generation of scientific instruments that will make the complex invisible systems in our world today visible over the next five years," said Dario Gil, vice president of science and solutions at IBM Research, in a statement.

One of the developments identified in the list is the use of deep learning machine intelligence to help clinicians predict and monitor brain and mental health disorders such as psychosis, schizophrenia, mania and depression. The company said its scientists are currently using transcripts and audio recordings of psychiatric interviews to find speech patterns that can indicate such disorders.

Human mind

In addition to giving health professionals unprecedented access to the human mind, artificial intelligence

will also play a role in providing a larger window into the world around us.

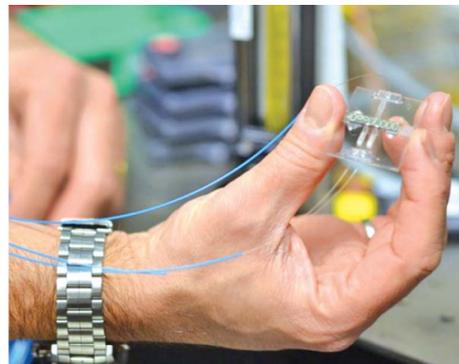
Over the next five years, new devices using hyperimaging technology and artificial intelligence will help us see broadly beyond the domain of visible light by combining multiple bands of the electromagnetic spectrum to reveal valuable insights or potential dangers that would otherwise be unknown or hidden from view, the company said. And such technology will be broadly and cheaply available.

"For example, using millimeter wave imaging, a camera and other sensors, hyperimaging technology could help a car see through fog or rain, detect hazardous and hard-to-see road conditions such as black ice, or tell us if there is some object up ahead and its distance and size," the company said.

New data

As new technologies make a broad range of new data available, machine learning will also help organize and analyze this new information. IBM said that within five years, we will be able to use machine learning algorithms and software to organize information about the physical world to make sense of the vast and complex data gathered by billions of devices.

"By aggregating, organizing and analyzing data on climate, soil conditions, water levels and their relation-



ship to irrigation practices, for example, a new generation of farmers will have insights that help them determine the right crop choices, where to plant them and how to produce optimal yields while conserving precious water supplies," according to IBM.

Apart from artificial intelligence, nanotechnology will also be a major source of innovation, particularly in the health industry.

(Source: *sci-tech today.com*)

Over 20 Int'l Lecturers in Iran's Automotive Industry Int'l Conference

Twenty three international lecturers have announced their readiness to attend in Iran's Automotive Industry International Conference which is going to be held on 12-13 February 2017 in Milad Tower.

According to a report released by the conference's secretariat, the presence of producers and other industrialists in automotive and auto parts industry from France, Germany, Canada, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Turkey, India, Japan and etc. has been finalized. In the meantime, 23 international lecturers have announced their readiness to attend and provide expert panels in Iran's 4th Automotive Industry International Conference.

These requests will be studied and selected by the

conference's scientific committee based on the main themes and topics of the conference which are governance and regulations in sales and after-sales service, sales and after-sales service value chain, economics of sales and after-sales service in the automotive industry, the importance of the service (sales and after-sales) in branding and brand promotion, successful sales and after-sales solutions and best service practices, factors related to sales and after-sales service affecting customer satisfaction and loyalty. At the same time, 85 papers from Iranian universities and activists in the automotive and auto parts industries have been received by the secretariat of the conference which will be stud-

ied and decided on. The 4th Iran Automotive Industry International Conference is going to be held on February with a focus on sales and after-sales service, taking advantage of international experiences and knowledge to achieve international standards and developing a strategic plan under the supervision of Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade.

IKCO as the biggest carmaker in Iran and the region will take part in this international event, accompanied by its main partners, Peugeot, Renault, Mercedes-Benz and Suzuki. On the sidelines of this conference also, a car show will be held with Iranian and International carmakers presenting their latest products.

Middle East Longest Screen Installed in North Isfahan Wastewater Plant

The design and construction of wastewater treatment plant in Hesseh and Darak regions in Isfahan Province was put atop agenda in 2014 by Engineering and Development Deputy Office of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company.

The ground was broken for the construction operation of this wastewater

treatment plants in the same year. Construction operation of this giant project is underway with 95 % physical progress.

Currently, installation of electromechanical parts and equipment of the station is underway.

Ebrahim Kazemi Executive Manager of the project announced the above statement and said: "Due to the current

situation of sewerage network across the city and also uneven development of urban areas, this project has faced with numerous problems, so that suitable parts and equipment should be installed at wastewater treatment plant in order to bring garbage collected from 17-m depth above the ground."

The screen selected for this giant

project is of the most modern type which is known as stair-shaped mechanical screen, he maintained.

Presently, only a domestic company has managed to manufacture this type of screen, he said, adding: "The current screen has been manufactured by the expert domestic engineers, observing requirements of international standards."

TTB to Expand Its Foreign Exchange Services across Country

Tose'e Ta'avon Bank (TTB) will develop and expand its foreign exchange services.

Hojjatollah Mahdian Caretaker of the bank announced the above statement and said: "The bank will promote its banking services in the field of foreign exchange in line with offering high-quality services to its clients."

Speaking in Foreign Exchange Seminar, he placed special emphasis on the necessity and significance of exchange-intensive field of these activities in the bank-

ing network and stated: "Foreign exchange services include issuance of various types of guarantee letter and Letters of Credit (L/Cs) which are offered at the bank, so that real and legal entities can refer to the foreign exchange branches of the bank."

Turning to the issue that qualitative trainings are of paramount importance, he said: "Qualitative and applied education in the field of foreign exchange cause this sector to promote, so that responsible officials can take giant strides in line with promoting these types of

services with updating relevant information."

Elsewhere in his remark, he pointed to the implementation of plan entitled "Honoring Clientele" and called on concerned officials to make their utmost efforts in line with materializing objectives in this field.

It should be noted that Foreign Exchange Seminar was held across the country with the aim of settling problems facing branches as well as submitting report on foreign exchange performance in the presence of heads of bank branches.

There was never a "pause" in global warming, scientists say

A new independent study shows no pause in global warming, confirming a set of temperature readings adjusted by U.S. government scientists that some who reject mainstream climate science have questioned.

The adjustments, made by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in 2015 to take into account changes in how ocean temperatures have been measured over the decades, riled a House committee and others who claimed the changes were made to show rising temperatures. The House Science Committee subpoenaed the agency's scientists and then complained that NOAA wasn't answering its requests quickly enough.

The new international study looked at satellite data, readings from buoys and other marine floats for ocean temperatures. Each measurement system independently showed the same 20 years of increase in temperatures that NOAA found: about two-tenths of a degree Fahrenheit per decade since 2000, said the study's lead author, Zeke Hausfather of the University of California, Berkeley.

"Our research confirms that NOAA scientists were right," Hausfather said. "They were not in any way cooking the books."

NOAA adjusted past data to take into account old measurements by ships that often recorded temperatures from their engine rooms, where heat from the engines skewed the data. Buoys and satellite data don't have such artificial warming, Hausfather said.

In 1990, about 90 percent of the ocean temperature readings were done by ships, now it is about 85 percent by the more accurate buoys, Hausfather said.

Scientists Andrew Dessler of Texas A&M University and Kevin Trenberth of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, who weren't part of the original study or the more recent one that confirmed its conclusions, called both accurate.

"This paper further allays any qualms that there may have been scientific errors or any non-scientific agendas," Trenberth said in an email.

(Source: *Popular Mechanics*)

Cosmic 'spitballs' released from Milky Way's black hole

Black holes don't just provide gravity, absorb incoming matter and prevent anything from escaping. They also gravitationally pull on and tear matter that passes nearby, including stars. In a surprising find, a new study out of Harvard shows that torn-apart stars aren't merely reduced into gas, but they form dense streams that re-condense into planets in just year-long timescales.

Moving rapidly away from the central black hole, these 'cosmic spitballs' represent a brand new population of rogue planets, and are potentially the most catastrophic objects from space careening through our galaxy.

When a massive object -- a star, gas cloud, planet, asteroid, etc. -- gets too close to a black hole, it will find itself 'spaghettified'. The tidal forces from the black hole will pull any matter closer to its center more strongly than the matter that's more distant, causing it to get stretched and compressed into a long, thin, spaghetti-like strand. Some of this material may then get devoured by the black hole, adding to its mass, while other material gets added to its accretion disk.

Most of the matter, however, will be accelerated by the gravitational and electromagnetic forces around the black hole, flinging it outwards at incredible velocities: up to speeds a few percent the speed of light. This ejected matter has been seen to cause flares, to emit light across the electromagnetic spectrum and to spur the emission of high-energy particles, at least temporarily.

(Source: *forbes.com*)

Our brains adapt to learn more faces as we grow up

Neuroscientists know that facial recognition is unlike any other object perception in our brains. Within milliseconds of birth, we learn to distinguish faces from other images -- likely because other people are vital to our survival. What gives us that ability, and how exactly we refine these skills -- how we learn to tell one specific face from another for example -- over time is a bit of a mystery, though, because there seem to be so many neurological faculties that go into it.

Conventional wisdom is that the brain tissue we're born with gets chiseled down to just what we need as adults. But new research led by neuroscientists at Stanford University suggests that when it comes to facial recognition, it's just the opposite: the fusiform gyrus, a sliver of lower brain matter thought to play a role in discerning faces, appears to become larger and develop more complexly arranged neurons (relative to total brain size) as we go through adolescence into adulthood. These changes likely translate into being better at recognizing faces as we age.

"What's surprising here is that the changes involve a different mechanism, expansion not pruning," Kalanit Grill-Spector, a cognitive neuroscientist at Stanford and lead author of the paper, told *New Scientist*. Their work was published (paywall) on Jan. 6 in the journal *Science*.

For the study, the researchers had 22 children (aged 5 to 22) and 25 adults (aged 22 to 28) sit in an advanced MRI machine that tracked brain tissue density and composition in their brains. (The kids had to have some extra coaching on sitting still, Gizmodo reports.) While in the machine, the participants were asked to look at two sets of images: one of different faces, the other of different places.

(Source: *Quartz*)

Vehicle inspection effective way to mitigate air pollution, Ebtekar says

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Launching **d e s k** of the nationally integrated vehicle inspection system is an effective measure employed to mitigate air pollution particularly in metropolises, chief of the Department of Environment Masoumeh Ebtekar has said.

Nationally integrated vehicle inspection system is a procedure mandated by the government in May 2016 in which a vehicle is inspected at certain intervals to ensure that it conforms to regulations governing safety and emissions.

The vehicle inspection system is a sound strategy for mitigating air pollution and its measurable impacts will be realized gradually in the near future, Mehr news agency quoted Ebtekar as saying on Saturday.

Mentioning the clean air bill which is yet to be adopted by the Majlis (Iranian



Vehicles are undergoing inspection at the Beyhaqi center in Tehran.

parliament) Ebtekar highlighted that the bill is clearly mandating the reduction of five-year interval for vehicle inspection to two years.

She further stated that schemes to fight air pollution have various dimensions and are long-term, adding that implementing all the laws adopted by the government to deal with choking smog such as scrapping clunkers, renovating and providing public transportation can successfully fulfil such schemes.

Temperature inversion has been considered as major problem Tehran and some other metropolises of Iran are struggling with specifically in autumn and winter.

An inversion can lead to pollution, usually resulted from the emission generated by cars particularly high-emission clunkers, being trapped close to the ground, with possible adverse effects on health.

Rangers' protection bill aims to crack down on poachers

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Iran's Department of Environment will put forward rangers' protection bill to the cabinet next week, which aims to make regulations and restrictions more stringent on poachers.

"The bill proposes harsh punishments for poachers who attack rangers and help to expedite the decision-making process for the cases involving rangers," the deputy DOE director for legal affairs said.

Mohammad Mojabi made the remarks during a ceremony devoted to the memory of two late rangers, Mohammad Dehqani and Parviz Hormozi, who were killed in June 2016 during an armed conflict with poachers in Hormozgan province, ISNA news agency reported.

He further pointed out that the multiple deaths of the rangers while trying to safeguard the environment and wildlife this year has urged the officials to take disciplinary and punitive measures to prevent such tragic and unpleasant incidents from happening.

Choked by smog, Beijing creates new environmental police

Officials in Beijing are creating a new environmental police squad in the latest effort to fight China's persistent problems with heavy smog.

According to state media, Beijing's acting mayor said Saturday that the new police force will focus on open-air barbecues, garbage incineration and the burning of wood and other biomass.

Beijing and dozens of cities in China spend many winter days under a thick, gray haze, caused chiefly by thousands of coal-burning factories and a surplus of older, inefficient vehicles.

Government-issued "red alerts" on the worst days come with emergency measures that can include shutting down highways, restricting vehicles, or ordering factories to curtail production. But enforcement remains an issue.

China's environmental ministry acknowledged last week that its inspection teams found companies resuming production despite a government ban.

(Source: Telegraph)

By Farnaz Heidari

Compete by antlers

Caspian Red deer (*Cervus elaphus maral*) or Maral is a famous subspecies of Red Deer. This subspecies is native in Caspian Sea and Caucasus Mountains. Once found throughout the forested areas of the Alborz and much of the Zagros (the last survivors were seen in the Arasbaran area about 50 years ago) and is now found only in the Caspian Region, particularly to the east in the Dodangeh Wildlife Refuge and Golestan National Park.

This subspecies is burlier than European Red Deer and its two brow tines rather than one considered as the most significant identification key.

■ Destruction of habitat

Caspian Red Deer (Maral) is considered as easternmost subspecies of red deer. It is, of course famous for its association with belling roars of the stags reverberates through the forested regions. But the situation is not so good for them.

Their main habitats are scattered or better say fragmented by human activities. Marals have been seriously affected by logging, which is damaging its vital habitats. Their geographical distribution shrank sharply and now they became scarce in many regions as a result of forest clearance. Their habitat also was taken over by farmers, and the animals were also exposed to uncontrolled hunting.



Tehran Zoo/ Azka Soltani

■ Adaptation

Caspian Red Deer is well adapted to cope with life in harsh situations. For example, their small ears and short tails, reducing the surface area through which they might lose body heat. The Red Deer is a social animal and primarily nocturnal. It feeds on a variety of leaves and grasses, and occasionally on mushrooms and berries.

■ Conservation dream

In 2006, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has carried out the surveys in order to assess the feasibility and efficiency of red deer reintroduction in Dilijan National Park and Shikahogh Reserve in Armenia. It is essential to strengthen control over poaching, mining

and overgrazing and to enforce conservation activities. This subspecies is protected in Dilijan National Park, Shikahogh Reserve and Arevik National Park of Armenia. But the generation of Red Deer was completely destroyed in the North West and West of Iran according to reports about 50 years and out of reach of humans.

However, genetic mixing as a result of introductions of deer from different areas is a problem that should be addressed. Disease and parasites also have a detrimental effect on the Red Deer populations. Nutritional diseases, natural toxicological factors, viral, bacterial and protozoal diseases, rickettsial infections, neoplastic disease, ectoparasites, endoparasites are some of the major diseases which threaten them.

Red Deer is also plagued by ticks, which can live on their bodies in huge numbers. The blood loss they can cause can lead to death in weak animals. Leopards, wolves, brown bears and more significantly humans considered as the main threats to them. Pristine forests and undisturbed habitats can guarantee their survival but it seems that there is no way for them to go back to the old ways.

■ Deer fight

Two Caspian Red Deer can compete for females or territory. Their antlers are shed at the end of the winter and the new antlers reach full growth in the late summer, shortly before the rutting season. When Maral's antlers are free of their velvet, legendary fights gets started.

IN FOCUS Tehran Times / Amir Ali Razzaghi



Siberian swans wing their way to paddy fields of northern Iran

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Some 8,000 Siberian swans have migrated southward to Fereydunkenar, northern province of Mazandaran, to escape the cold and declining food supplies.

Mute swans, tundra swans, and whooper swans flies to Iran every year by the beginning of the cold seasons and spend three months in the paddy fields and their number grows year by year. This year twelve rangers have volunteered to safeguard and feed them twenty-four seven.

Swans mainly feed on wheat and corn and such a big flock need about one ton of food every day. Locals, tourists and city councils usually help to provide food for the birds.

The migratory birds also boost tourism and every day the paddy fields play host to tourist who come from neighboring villages, and other cities to see these wild animals.

Swans have also dramatic impact on the agriculture in the area as they eat the vermin and pests harmful to the crops, their feces can be used as organic fertilizer to the land, and by moving across the fields constantly they somehow plow the land which all can reduce expenses for the farmers.



LEARN ENGLISH

I'm in Debt

A: Hello, I'm here to see Mr. Corleone.

B: Right this way, sir.

C: Charlie! What can I do for you?

B: Mr. Corleone, I'm really sorry to **trouble** you, but I need your help.

C: Anything for you, Charlie! Your father was like a brother to me.

B: Well, sir, you see, this **recession** has **hit me pretty hard**; I lost my job and I'm in a lot of **debt**.

C: I see...

B: Yeah, you know, I've got credit card bills, car payments, I've got to pay my **mortgage**; and **on top of all that**, I have to pay my son's college **tuition**.

C: So you're asking for a loan.

B: Well, I just thought maybe you could help me out.

C: What? At a time like this? I'm **broke** too, you know! You're not the only one who has been hit by the recession! I lost half my money in the **stock market crash**! Go on! Get outta here!

■ Key vocabulary

trouble: disturb or bother

recession: a period of time when the economy of a country is bad

hit me pretty hard: had a strong, negative effect on me

debt: the amount of money you owe to a person, bank, company, etc.

mortgage: a legal arrangement by which you borrow money from a bank or similar organization in order to buy a house, and pay back the money over a period of years

on top of all that: besides that, in addition to

tuition: the money you pay for being taught

broke: not have any money

stock market: the business of buying and selling stocks and shares

crash: if a stock market or shares crash, they suddenly lose a lot of value

■ Supplementary vocabulary

borrow: take and use some money, and return the equal amount of money at a later time

pay back: return the money you borrowed

a loan: amount of money borrowed

take out a loan: borrow money

unemployed: having no job

downturn: a time when the economy is worse than usual

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Be kind to me!

Syrian government approves plan to restore services to Aleppo

The Syrian government has adopted a plan of action meant to restore public services and security to the northwestern city of Aleppo, whose eastern side was recently liberated from the Takfiri militants.

The initiative, which is aimed at helping Aleppo residents return to their normal lives, was approved during a special cabinet session chaired by Prime Minister Imad Khamis in Damascus on Saturday.

The plan includes a range of measures such as the opening of Aleppo roads, providing water, electricity and fuel to citizens as well as assessing conditions for repair and reconstruction activities there.

A mobile unit will be tasked with restoring electricity to the war-ridden city and refill cooking gas cylinders as well as two fuel stations.

Under the measure, the Interior Ministry should also work to increase security patrols and repair damaged police stations.

The initiative further stipulates the rehabilitation of two hospitals and five health centers as well as the renovation of Aleppo's International Airport, a train track and Suleiman al-Halabi water-pumping station.



During Saturday's session, the government further passed an emergency plan by the Education Ministry to repair 50 schools in Aleppo's eastern sector over six months. The ministry seeks to renovate 100 schools in the entire city by the start of the next academic year.

Last December, the Syrian army established full control over Aleppo, which had long been divided between government forces in the west and the militants in the east.

The Aleppo liberation came after the last remaining Takfiri elements were evacuated from the city along with civilians under a ceasefire deal between the government and foreign-backed militant groups.

The city's recapture is widely seen as a crushing blow to the militants and their

foreign supporters, who have been actively working to topple the Damascus government since March 2011.

The gain also set the stage for a nationwide halt to fighting in Syria that took effect on December 30, 2016 following an agreement between the warring parties.

French delegation in Aleppo

In another development on Saturday, a French parliamentary and media delegation toured Aleppo.

MP Thierry Mariani, the head of the delegation, said in a statement that what they saw was very different from what was being promoted by Western media.

He further noted that the major concern at this stage was how to help Syria in the reconstruction process, calling for the cooperation of international institutions to that effect.

He further hailed the Russian military campaign, which has played a significant part in the Syrian's army battle against Takfiri terror groups.

The French delegation later held a meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus.

(Source: SANA)

Ivory Coast minister freed after troops mutiny deal

Mutinying soldiers in Ivory Coast's second largest city Bouake released the defense minister after opening fire on the governor's house where he was staying as a two-day troop revolt came to a violent standoff.

Defense minister, Alain-Richard Donwahi was trapped inside by the shooting late on Saturday, unable to head back to the commercial capital, Abidjan. But after several hours Donwahi, other officials, and journalists were allowed to leave the home.

The defense chief went immediately to the airport to fly back to Abidjan.

The incident came minutes after Ivory Coast's President, Alassane Ouattara, went on national television to say a deal with the troops to end the revolt had been reached.

In addition to Donwahi, the deputy commander of the elite Republican Guard and the mayor of Bouake had been trapped inside the residence.

A crowd of angry soldiers massed outside the house, loudly shouting that they wanted their bonuses paid immediately, not next week.

The two-day mutiny by soldiers spread quickly in nine cities across Ivory Coast with troops demanding higher salaries and improved living conditions.

Speaking to his ministers and reporters, Ouattara said the government had agreed to take into account the soldiers' demands concerning bonus payments and

living and working conditions.

"I would like to say that this manner of making demands is not appropriate. It tarnishes the image of our country after all our efforts to revive the economy," Ouattara said.

Ouattara did not give details of the deal offered to the mutineers in his brief televised comments.

Soldiers in Bouake appeared furious after his announcement, with one mutineer saying: "The president must tell us the date we will be paid and the amount we will be given."

Earlier, a member of the uprising said mutinying soldiers would return to their barracks.

"It's over," Sergeant Mamadou Kone told the Reuters news agency. "Some of our soldiers will remain in place to manage the security of shops and banks, but the majority of soldiers will return to barracks beginning tonight."

Unrest linked to the mutiny was witnessed in cities across the country, including the commercial capital of Abidjan, where gunfire rang out at the defense ministry after soldiers entered the city's military headquarters.

Abidjan is a city of nearly five million residents where the president, administration and parliament are based.

Rogue soldiers also erected makeshift barricades around the nearby military headquarters, leaving all roads leading to the camp gridlocked with traffic and

hampering access to several neighboring districts.

The uprising began early on Friday when disgruntled soldiers - mainly former rebel fighters - seized Bouake. The mutiny then spread to numerous other cities and towns.

Ivory Coast, French-speaking West Africa's largest economy, has emerged from a 2002-11 political crisis as one of the continent's rising economic stars.

However, years of conflict and a failure to reform its army, a thrown together from a patchwork of former rebel fighters and government soldiers, have left it with an unruly force hobbled by internal divisions.

Nearly all of the mutineers appeared to be former members of the New Forces rebellion, which had used Bouake as its de facto capital and controlled the northern half of Ivory Coast from 2002 until the country was reunited following a 2011 civil war.

Donwahi arrived in Bouake in the early afternoon accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel Issiaka Ouattara, known as Wattao, a former rebel leader who is now the deputy commander of the Republican Guard.

During a similar uprising in 2014, when hundreds of soldiers barricaded roads in cities across Ivory Coast demanding back pay, the government agreed upon a financial settlement.

(Source: agencies)

Florida airport gunman faces 'possible death penalty'

The United States authorities have charged a U.S. army veteran accused in a deadly shooting rampage at the Fort Lauderdale International Airport, with offences that could carry the death penalty, while continuing to probe whether "terrorism" was a potential motive.

Federal prosecutors charged Esteban Santiago on Saturday with firearms offences and carrying out an act of violence at an airport, U.S. Attorney Wilfredo Ferrer said in a statement.

If convicted, he could face the death penalty or life in prison.

Santiago, 26, was accused of killing five, wounding six and sending thousands scrambling for safety on Friday before authorities shut down the airport in Florida, a major gateway to the Caribbean and Latin America.

The suspect was scheduled to make an initial court appearance on Monday.

Murder charges could be forthcoming from state prosecutors, but no decision has been made yet, according to the Sun Sentinel newspaper.

Santiago had travelled from Alaska to Fort Lauderdale on Friday.

After retrieving a 9mm semi-automatic handgun and ammunition that he had declared and stowed inside his checked luggage, he allegedly loaded the weapon in a toilet and opened fire in the crowded baggage claim area.

FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) special agent George Piro said law enforcement was continuing to investigate

motives for the attack, including "continuing to look at the terrorism angle."

A former member of the Puerto Rico and Alaska National Guard, Santiago served in Iraq from April 2010 to February 2011. He ended his service in August.

An aunt, Maria Luisa Ruiz, told the NorthJersey.com news site that Santiago became a father to a baby boy in September, and that he was having mental problems.

"Like a month ago, it was like he lost his mind," Ruiz said. "He said he saw things."

On November 7, Santiago walked into the FBI's Anchorage office and complained that his mind was being controlled by national intelligence agencies, which were forcing him to watch videos of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group.

The "erratic behavior" led agents to contact local police, who took him to a medical facility for a mental health evaluation, Piro said.

He was not placed on a no-fly list. Anchorage police Chief Christopher Tolley said Santiago came to the FBI office with a loaded magazine, but left his gun and newborn child in his car.

Santiago's weapon was taken by police for safekeeping at the time, and he was able to reclaim it on December 8.

Santiago's brother, Bryan, criticized the way authorities handled his case.

"They had him hospitalized for four days and they let him go. How are you



going to let someone leave a psychological center after four days, when he said he hears voices that the CIA is telling him to join certain groups?" Bryan Santiago told CNN, in a Spanish-language interview the network translated into English.

"Not everyone has the same reaction when they return from war. Some are better, and some, not so much."

The shooting renewed anxieties about airport security, a concern that has loomed large in the post-9/11 era, and shed new light on ongoing United States

gun-control debates.

The Transportation Security Administration, the agency responsible for security at U.S. airports, allows passengers to travel with unloaded firearms and ammunition as checked baggage.

Senator Chris Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut, rebuked the government for not taking legislative action to tighten gun laws.

"Political cowardice is the accomplice of every mass shooter," he wrote on Twitter.

(Source: AFP)

Another car bombing hits Baghdad's Sadr City

Another car bomb explosion has hit Sadr City of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, leaving at least 20 people dead and some 50 more wounded.

On Sunday, a bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle at the entrance of a vegetable market in the Jamila neighborhood of Sadr City on Sunday, Iraq's al-Sumariyah television network reported.

Interior Minister spokesman Saad Maan said a soldier at the gate opened fire on a "suspect vehicle, but the terrorist blew up his car."

Maan further said the soldier who opened fire on the attacker was among the wounded.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group claimed responsibility for the assault.

Sunday's explosion came nearly a week after a similar ISIL terrorist attack claimed 35 lives and injured 60 others in the Shia-populated suburban district.

Such attacks are seen as desperate parting shots by the Takfiri terrorist group, which has been pushed out of most of its turf in Iraq.

Currently, Iraqi forces are fighting to force the terrorists out of the northern city of Mosul, their last stronghold in Iraq, as well as three towns in western Anbar Province.

(Source: Press TV)

Congressional Black Caucus to be more aggressive under Trump

WASHINGTON (AP) — For almost eight years, the members of the Congressional Black Caucus existed in the shadow of the first black president. They praised President Barack Obama's achievements while at the same time pushing him to do more for their constituents who overwhelmingly supported his history-making campaign and administration.

But with Obama set to leave the White House on Jan. 20, black lawmakers in the House and Senate are recalculating and reassessing their place in Washington. And realizing they're regaining the limelight as the most visible and powerful African-American politicians in the nation's capital.

President-elect Donald Trump will face a larger and more aggressive caucus, which will advocate for positions with "a bit more force," said Rep. Danny Davis, D-Ill., a longtime member. "Without President Obama being in office, there will be more forceful articulation vis a vis administration policy."

To the outgoing caucus chairman, Rep. G.K. Butterfield, D-N.C., "The consequences are too enormous for us to be indecisive."

There are more black lawmakers in Congress than ever: 49 African-American men and women were sworn in Tuesday, including Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., just the second black female senator. Also serving on Capitol Hill are the first Indian-American senator, 38 Hispanic lawmakers, including Democrat Catherine Cortez Masto of Nevada, the first Latina senator, and 15 Asian-Americans.

The caucus never had a perfect relationship with Obama, and several powerful members initially backed Hillary Clinton during Obama's first run for president in 2008.

Trafficker leaves migrants in freezing German motorway car park

A people smuggler left 19 migrants, including five children, at a motorway parking area in freezing temperatures in southern Germany and fled the scene, police said.

Police said the temperature was -20 degrees Celsius (-4 degrees Fahrenheit) when they found the migrants, one of whom had approached two other people at the parking area to raise the alarm after their driver left them.

They were freezing cold when the emergency services reached them near Brannenburg, just across the border from Austria.

The migrants, who were not carrying passports, said they came from Iraq and Syria. They told police they had paid between 500 euros and 800 euros (\$526-842) per person to be taken from an Italian refugee center to Germany.

Police said in a statement a manhunt had so far been fruitless for the driver of the van, carrying British license plates.

Four of the migrant children were taken into the care of a youth welfare office. The other migrants were taken to a reception center for refugees, police said.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's open-door policies have allowed into Germany about 1.1 million refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere since mid-2015.

The migrant flow has slowed sharply, but Merkel's conservative Bavarian allies want an annual refugee cap - a demand she has refused.

(Source: Reuters)

ECOWAS holds off on troop deployment to The Gambia

West African leaders are still pursuing mediation to ensure a peaceful transfer of power in The Gambia where President Yahya Jammeh refused to accept defeat in an election last month.

Liberia's President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, told reporters on Saturday, after a meeting among regional leaders in Ghana's capital, Accra, that regional bloc ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States) did not yet intend to deploy its standby military force in the country.

"We are committed to a peaceful mediation and a peaceful transfer of power in The Gambia. We will continue to pursue that for now," said Sirleaf, who chairs the 15-member body.

Asked if the regional group would deploy a standby force soon, she said "no", adding that ECOWAS was closely monitoring proceedings in The Gambia's Supreme Court, where Jammeh is challenging the poll result.

Nigerian Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama said ECOWAS would hold a meeting on Monday in Abuja to discuss further steps.

(Source: Reuters)

Navy, Trump planning biggest fleet expansion since Cold War

With President-elect Donald Trump demanding more ships, the Navy is proposing the biggest shipbuilding boom since the end of the Cold War to meet threats from a resurgent Russia and saber-rattling China.

The Navy's 355-ship proposal released last month is even larger than what the Republican Trump had promoted on the campaign trail, providing a potential boost to shipyards that have struggled because budget caps that have limited money funding for ships.

At Maine's Bath Iron Works, workers worried about the future want to build more ships but wonder where the billions of dollars will come from.

"Whether Congress and the government can actually fund it, is a whole other ball game," said Rich Nolan, president of the shipyard's largest union.

Boosting shipbuilding to meet the Navy's 355-ship goal could require an additional \$5 billion to \$5.5 billion in annual spending in the Navy's 30-year projection,

according to an estimate by naval analyst Ronald O'Rourke at the Congressional Research Service.

The Navy's revised Force Structure Assessment calls for adding another 47 ships including an aircraft carrier built in Virginia, 16 large surface warships built in Maine and Mississippi, and 18 attack submarines built in Connecticut, Rhode Island and Virginia. It also calls for more amphibious assault ships, expeditionary transfer docks and support ships.

(Source: AFP)

All you need to know about The Best

As the clock ticks down, the excitement is mounting. The world's best football players and coaches will be recognised on Monday 9 January 2017 at the inaugural edition of The Best FIFA Football Awards™. Zurich's TPC studios will host the awards themselves, with the winners of each accolade decided by the global football community.

As all of the stars begin to descend upon Zurich, we want to make sure you get all you need to know about the awards ahead of Monday's ceremony.

- **Which awards will be handed out?**
 - The Best FIFA Men's Player Award (Nominees: Cristiano Ronaldo, Antoine Griezmann and Lionel Messi)
 - The Best FIFA Women's Player Award (Nominees: Melanie Behringer, Carli Lloyd and Marta)
 - The Best FIFA Men's Coach Award (Nominees: Claudio Ranieri, Fernando Santos and Zinedine Zidane)
 - The Best FIFA Women's Coach Award (Nominees: Jill Ellis, Silvia Neid and Pia Sundhage)
 - The FIFA Puskás Award 2016 (Nominees: Marlone, Daniuska Rodriguez and Mohd Faiz Subri)
 - The FIFA Fair Play Award
 - The FIFA Fan Award (Nominees: ADO Den Haag supporters, Borussia Dortmund-Liverpool supporters and Iceland supporters)



- **When and where will the ceremony take place?**

The ceremony itself, at Zurich's TPC Studios (Technology and Production Center, Switzerland AG, 8052 Zurich) will begin at 18.30 CET, but we will have a live blog on FIFA.com from 14.30 CET, to bring you all the build-up from the Green Carpet ahead of the event. You can follow along with the pre-ceremony Green Carpet and the ceremony itself, via streams on FIFA TV on YouTube, as well as the live blog.

- **Who voted for these awards?**

The winners of The Best FIFA Men's and Women's Player, and The Best FIFA Men's and Women's Coach awards, are determined through a combined voting process, in which 50 per cent of the decision is based on the votes of captains (25 per cent) and head coaches (25 per cent) from national teams all around the globe. The remaining 50 per cent is split equally between an online public ballot of football fans (25 per cent) and submissions from a selected group of media representatives (25 per cent) from all around the world. The vote took place between Friday 4 November and Tuesday 22 November 2016.

- **What steps were taken to protect the integrity of the voting results and ensure compliance with the allocation rules?**

The voting procedure for each of the awards has been supervised and monitored by the independent observer PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Switzerland.

- **How does voting for the FIFA Puskás Award and FIFA Fan Award work?**

The FIFA Puskás Award and FIFA Fan Award are voted by you, the fans. Public voting is taking place on FIFA.com with each individual member of the public entitled to make one vote for each category. Haven't voted yet? There's still time! Voting for The FIFA Fan Award will close at 10.00am CET on 9 January, while voting for the FIFA Puskás Award will close during the ceremony.

- **How is the FIFA FIFPro World11 selected?**

The FIFA FIFPro World11 awards are organised by FIFPro. The awards recognise the best players in each position based on their performances during the period from 1 December 2015 to 28 November 2016 inclusive. The winners are selected by over 45,000 professional players from around the world with each vote carrying the same weight.

- **What trophies will be handed out?**

The winners of the inaugural The Best FIFA Men's and Women's Player, and The Best FIFA Men's and Women's Coach awards will be given a newly-designed, platinum-coated trophy. The trophy has a shape which resembles the iconic FIFA World Cup™ Trophy, an homage to tradition with a contemporary, dynamic design. The winners of the other awards will also be handed different, platinum-coated, trophies during the ceremony.

(Source: FIFA)

Everton's Koeman demands transfer action after cup exit

Everton manager Ronald Koeman has urged the club's board to recognise the extent of his rebuilding job by backing him in the transfer market after Saturday's FA Cup exit at home to Leicester City.

Everton let slip a one-goal lead at Goodison Park with Nigerian striker Ahmed Musa's second-half brace enough to condemn the Merseyside club to a 2-1 third round defeat and the likelihood of another season without silverware.

"I know what we need to change and if everyone opens their eyes maybe we will get further on our improvement as a team," Koeman told British media.

"Because that's really what we need and that's all about what happens this month."

Everton have been linked with Manchester United duo Memphis Depay and Morgan Schneiderlin, and Koeman, who will be without injured winger Yannick Bolasie for up to a year, has made it clear to his employers where the team needs to strengthen.

"I have that in mind and the board knows because we spoke together about what we need. That's the job of (director of football) Steve Walsh and it's my job," the Dutchman added when asked about signing new players in the January window.

"I hope everybody realises what the team needs to play and to get results that meet the expectations at this club. I can explain more but I don't like to because that's talks we need to do inside."

Everton, who are seventh in the Premier League after 20 games, host fourth-placed Manchester City on Jan. 15.

(Source: Reuters)

Lizarazu: Zidane does nothing piecemeal

Not for him the life of a coach. "There's not enough physical exertion," says Bixente Lizarazu, who nowadays prefers the adrenalin rush of extreme sports. The former France and Bayern Munich left-back has pursued alternate thrills since hanging up his boots in 2006, while his career path has led him into the media realm. Instead of donning a tracksuit in the dugout, he shares his thoughts on the game as a pundit for French radio station RTL, television channel TF1 and sports daily L'Equipe.

That media work has given Lizarazu a front-row seat to watch Zinedine Zidane enjoy a successful adaptation to the rigours of management – so much so that his old friend is now a candidate for The Best FIFA Men's Coach 2016. With the unveiling of the winner just days away, Lizarazu spoke to FIFA.com about Zizou's remarkable transformation.

- **FIFA.com: A few years ago, did you ever imagine Zinedine Zidane becoming a coach?**

Bixente Lizarazu: If you look at someone like Didier Deschamps, he was already a coach during his playing days due to his way of thinking. Zizou wasn't necessarily the same, but everyone has their own approach. He told himself that this was the best way of getting back into football and he did everything he could to understand the job. That's what makes him exceptional – that determination he puts into something when he's decided to do it. People who don't know him don't realise how determined he is, in addition to his talent. And he's followed this path with a lot of humility, step by step. He got his badges, observed, listened and then decided at some point he was ready. What's incredible is that he won the Champions League in just a few months. Plus he's overseen a long unbeaten run. He's currently beating every record in terms of getting early success.

- **How do you account for his rapid success as a coach?**

Zizou does nothing piecemeal. His career has been built over a long period, with a certain consistency at important moments. He had lots of great moments with France and Real Madrid, and it's his entire career that's been incredible. He's started very well as a coach, but for me that's something else he'll build over a long period. It's very difficult to win the Champions League, even for an experienced coach.

- **How do you explain Zidane becoming a leader of men after being fairly quiet during his playing days?**

I think he's revealed new talents that he didn't necessarily have to use when he was a player, or he just had to perform well on the pitch to get his team-mates to up their game. He didn't need to be very communicative because he communicated so well with his feet. From the outside, I find his way of communicating incredible. He's clear and very much at ease with the media and you can tell he has the support of every player. I can also see how clever he's been with Cristiano Ronaldo, unlike Rafael Benitez, who criticised him when he arrived. That's not the kind of thing you do with your best player who gets you 50 goals a season.

- **Were you surprised that he accepted the coaching role at a club like Real Madrid so early in his career?**

No, because everything that happens to him is extraordinary. He scored two headers in the World Cup Final and an incredible volley in the 2002 Champions League final. Things like this always happen to him, so there's a definite sense of continuity! When you want to coach a club, it's important to know it well, and that's how it is for him at Madrid, where he knows the club officials and who he can or can't rely on. He picked all that up in various different roles, from being Jose Mourinho's assistant to presidential advisor and then coach of the reserves. He also gained confidence from being Carlo Ancelotti's assistant, when his role was to speak with the players. He did a lot of jobs before becoming [head] coach so he knows every inch of the club off by heart. That's all very important if you want to avoid banana skins.

- **What kind of coach do you think he is day to day?**

I can't answer that because I'm not with him day to day. But what I can say is that I was particularly struck by a moment during the Champions League final against Atletico when you could see Zizou and Ronaldo speaking to each other and smiling before the penalty shoot-out. What gives great players their strength is that ability to be calm, relaxed and confident at big moments. Having already lived through high-pressure moments as a player and having that experience

is priceless. That's also what gives him his strength as a coach. Sometimes I see coaches getting over-excited or nervous on the touchline and I think that's counterproductive. There's no need to increase the pressure or add to the nerves during a final. Zidane knows how to find the right words.

- **How do you rate Zidane's chances of beating Fernando Santos and Claudio Ranieri to the honour of being named The Best FIFA Men's Coach 2016?**

The three men have different arguments in their favour. Zizou won the Champions League after five months and that's a huge achievement even if Real have great players, because you still have to manage them. Fernando Santos also deserves a lot of credit because he didn't necessarily have the best team but took them all the way. What Claudio Ranieri achieved with Leicester has a bit less worth for me because it wasn't in Europe, but it

was still fantastic to finish as champions ahead of all the usual heavyweights. It's difficult to compare them, but my heart says Zizou. Not sure if I'm objective, though (laughs)!

- **Is the hardest part still to come for Zidane?**

The hardest part is always still to come because the most difficult thing of all is remaining successful. He knows that and he's proved it throughout his career by continuing to progress and reaching new levels. He didn't stop playing football after winning the World Cup in 1998. When you reach the summit of Everest it's difficult to stay at the top because there are plenty of people who want to steal your place.

(Source: FIFA)



Dimitrov ends trophy drought with Brisbane title



Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov ended a two-and-a-half year trophy drought on Sunday after outlasting Kei Nishikori of Japan in an absorbing final at the Brisbane International.

The 6-2 2-6 6-3 win at the Pat Rafter arena was the 25-year-old's first in four attempts against world number five Nishikori and will boost his confidence ahead of the Australian Open, which starts on Jan. 16 in Melbourne.

Dimitrov, a former world number eight, had seen his ranking plummet to 40 last July, before he improved in the second half of the season to climb back up to 17.

"It's been pretty emotional past year so for me, this trophy means a lot," Dimitrov, whose last ATP title came at Queen's Club in 2014, said during the presentation.

"These 10 days out here for this tournament have been the most fun I've ever had on a tennis court, and off

the court."

After surviving three break points during his first two service games, Dimitrov went on to break Nishikori and then won four consecutive games to close out the set.

Yet the 27-year-old Nishikori, the 2014 U.S. Open runner-up, fought back in the second set, breaking Dimitrov twice to level the match.

The Japanese took a lengthy medical time-out before the deciding set, which seemed to hand the momentum back to Dimitrov.

The Bulgarian, who defeated top seed and defending champion Milos Raonic in the semi-final, got the decisive break in the eighth game to go 5-3 up and then served out the match for his fifth career title.

"This is my sixth year now and first time I was in the final. So I'm very happy this week," Nishikori said.

(Source: Reuters)

Guardiola admits to errors at Man City



Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has taken responsibility for the club's recent inconsistent form and said he is still getting to know his players and how best to use them.

City made a flying start under Guardiola, winning their first 10 games in all competitions, but have won just nine times in 21 matches since, a run which has left them fourth in the Premier League, seven points behind leaders Chelsea.

"At times my ideas were not good, because I'm still getting to know the players, to know what is the best position, the best way to play, to adapt to them," Guardiola told British media.

"Sometimes I have an idea: three at the back or play a player in a certain way, and sometimes it didn't work. And, when that happens, I never complain to the players. Because I see them training, how they suffer."

"You have to look at yourself and see what you have to do to help them

find each other and play to each other more fluently, not all the time with an aggressiveness," he added.

"That is my job. I have to help them and I tell them that. And most of the times we were not good, it was my responsibility."

Guardiola said he will have to adapt to the English game and tweak the tactics, which have served him so well during trophy-laden spells with Barcelona and Bayern Munich.

"I'm not going to change England and I don't want to do that. Of course, it's going to change me. That's why I came here -- to be changed. That is nice," the Spaniard added.

"When I do the same thing all my career, 15 or 20 years as a coach, it's boring. I would still be in Barcelona, my home and with these players I would be there. But every country has his own personality, his own way to play. And that is marvellous."

(Source: Reuters)

IFF fails preparation plan for World Cup, says Carlos Queiroz

S P O R T S Iran national team head desk coach Carlos Queiroz has revealed that due to not providing the promised conditions by the Iran Football Federation he presented a resignation letter and will no longer continue his job.

The Portuguese coach made a statement on his official Facebook page:

Dear friends,
After a five-hour meeting with Iran Federation President, I have presented a resignation letter from my position as National Team Coach.

This decision comes after a meeting concluding that there are no conditions to proceed with the approved Preparation Plan for the World Cup, due to the permanent opposition to the National Federation and the National Team Coach, moved by sports agents not interested in the National Team success.

After a year without defeats, after reaching the first position in our World Cup qualifying group, and after confirming Iran's the best Asian team in FIFA Ranking, the Iranian Federation confirms not to have conditions nor the authority to implement the approved Preparation Plan.

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



Former Persepolis defender Seyed Alikhani passes away

S P O R T S Former Persepolis defender Kazem Seyed Alikhani died at the age of 62 on Sunday.

Seyed Alikhani died after long battle with disease. He started his playing career at Machine Sazi in 1977 and joined Persepolis football team after two years.

Seyed Alikhani played for the Iranian most popular

team for 10-year. He also made two caps for Iran national football team, making his debut against the Soviet Union.

Seyed Alikhani has also played for Tehran-based clubs Gostaresh and Poora.

Tehran Times staff also offers heartfelt condolences to Seyed Alikhani's bereaved family.

Iranian indoor field hockey team thrashes host in Croatia Indoor Cup 2017

The Iranian men's national indoor field hockey team has preserved its winning streak in the Croatia Indoor Cup 2017 and registered a resounding victory against a squad of players from the host nation's top-ranked clubs.

On Saturday, the Iranian indoor hockey players trounced the Croatian team 15-3 in a match held in the town of Sveti Ivan Zelina, which lies northeast of Croatia's capital, Zagreb.

The Iranian indoor field hockey had edged past Croatia's national squad 5-2 earlier in the day.

The Iranian outfit defeated the national Belarusian team 8-2 on Friday. The Persians routed Slovenes 20-0 in their opening match on the same day.

The Croatia Indoor Cup 2017 started in Sveti Ivan Zelina on January 6 and will conclude on January 8. The tournament has attracted national indoor field

hockey teams from Belarus, Croatia, and the Islamic Republic of Iran in addition to the squad of players from the host nation's top-ranked clubs.

The Iranian men's national indoor field hockey team considers the Croatian tournament as a preparatory stage for the 7th edition of the Asian Cup to convene in Qatar in May.

The Iranian squad comprises Behdad Biranvand, Mohammad Asnaashari, Amir Aruei, Hamid Nouraniyan, Mohsen Bohlouli, Sasan Hataminejad, Seyed Mohammad Ghorayshi, Alireza Chezani Sharahi, Abbas Aruei, Behnam Sa'di, Vahid Fathi, and Sajjad Mamizadeh.

The team is led by Esfandiar Safaei as the head coach. Masoud Bohlouli and Abolfazl Yousefi assist Safaei as coaches.

(Source: PressTV)



Sajjad Esteki: Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain want me

Iranian international handball player Sajjad Esteki says that he has received offers from big European teams including Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain.

The 26-year-old player, who plays for Dinamo Bucuresti, has been voted the most prodigious player by people at the VELUX EHF Champions League.

"I've received several offers from Hungarian Veszprém Barabás, SG Flensburg-Handewitt of Germany, Paris Saint-Germain of France, Ukraine's Motors and Barcelona of Spain. I thanks God because

I showed a good performance in the EHF Champions League since it was my first experience," Esteki told Tasnim news agency.

"I am the first Asian player who has been voted the most prodigious talent in EHF Champions League and I hope that I can continue my success," he added.

His older brother Allahkaram is also a member of Dinamo Bucuresti team. Turkish and Qatari clubs are interested in hiring the 28-year-old player.

(Source: Tasnim)

Stage set for AFC Beach Soccer Championship 2017 draw

Fourteen nations will learn their AFC Beach Soccer Championship Malaysia 2017 opponents on Monday at the tournament's official draw in Kuala Lumpur.

The competition, which also serves as the qualifiers for the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Bahamas 2017, will see the participating nations divided into two groups of five teams and one group of four teams.

The group winners and the best

second-placed team from the three groups will qualify for the semi-finals, the winners of which will advance to the final.

For the draw, the teams will be ranked according to the results of the 2015 edition which was won by Oman.

The teams (with their rankings in brackets) will be drawn as follows:

Pot 1: Oman (1st), Japan (2nd), Islamic Republic of Iran (3rd)

Pot 2: Lebanon (4th), United Arab

Emirates (5th), Bahrain (6th)

Pot 3: Uzbekistan (7th), China PR (8th), Iraq (9th)

Pot 4: Thailand (10th), Qatar (11th)

Pot 5: Afghanistan (unranked), Malaysia (unranked), Myanmar (unranked)

The top three teams will fly the Asian flag at the 2017 global extravaganza in the Bahamas which is scheduled to begin on April 27.

(Source: AFC)



Iran's Maedeh Borhani joins Bulgarian Shumen W

Bulgarian volleyball club Shumen W completed the signing of Iranian international player Maedeh Borhani.

Borhani, 29, is the first Iranian woman player who joins a European volleyball team.

The opposite spiker joined Shumen W from Iranian volleyball club Bank Sarmayeh.

Also, Zeinab Ali Giveh, Azad University player, is a target for the Bulgarian club.

"We agree with the transfer but we have to find a replacement for our player. We will make the final decision about Giveh on Monday," Azad University coach Maryam Hashemi told the Tasnim news agency.

Shumen W competes at eight-team Bulgaria Superliga Women.

(Source: Tasnim)

FIFA proposes Americas-wide qualifying contest for 2026, says official

FIFA has proposed merging the CONCACAF and South American qualifiers as part of its plans to expand the 2026 World Cup, a leading official from the region said in a newspaper interview.

Venezuelan Football Federation president Laureano Gonzalez said the idea for the merger had come from FIFA president Gianni Infantino.

Gonzalez, who is also a vice-president of CONMEBOL, the governing body for South America, said it would want at least 14 places at the finals for the two regions combined before accepting the proposal.

CONCACAF represents North and Central America as well as the Caribbean.

The FIFA Council is due to vote on Tuesday whether to increase the number of teams at the finals from the current 32 to either 40 or 48 from 2026. FIFA will decide at a later date which regions will be awarded the additional slots.

CONMEBOL currently has four-and-a-half places at the World Cup for its 10 members while CONCACAF, which has 35 FIFA members in its ranks, has three-and-a-half places.

"There is a suggestion from Gianni Infantino to unify the CONMEBOL and CONCACAF qualifiers," Gonzalez told the Venezuelan sports daily Meridiano.

"This would have support if they gave us more places. At the moment, we have seven between the two confederations, plus two half places," he said.

"If this went up to 14, similar to what Europe has for more or less the same number of teams, the idea would catch on the continent."

FIFA could not immediately be reached for comment. Europe currently has 13 places for 55 teams, plus one for 2018 World Cup hosts Russia.

CONCACAF is also a leading contender to host the 2026 World Cup, possibly with a joint bid involving at least two out of the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Gonzalez also said there was "a spirit" in the region in favor of holding a repeat of last year's Copa Centenario in 2020, but with 24 teams instead of 16.

The Copa Centenario, which celebrated the Copa America's 100th anniversary, was a special tournament in addition to the regular Copa America.

The Copa America is played every four years in the year following the World Cup and traditionally features 10 teams from CONMEBOL and two from CONCACAF.

The Centenario, however, took place in the United States and featured six teams from CONCACAF plus the 10 from South America.

CONCACAF also has its own biennial tournament, the Gold Cup, staged in odd-numbered years.

Gonzalez said officials were in favor of another extra tournament in 2020, with a similar makeup to the Centenario but under a different name and with the format increased to 24 teams.

"Obviously it wouldn't be called Centenario," said Gonzalez. "Our Copa America would continue to be played as usual."

Such a tournament may face opposition from European clubs, where many of the region's top players are based.

(Source: Reuters)

Jose Mourinho: Memphis Depay will play if he doesn't leave in January

Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho has claimed that Memphis Depay "will play some games" for the club if he does not leave in the January transfer window.

Depay, 22, wants to move after making only one start for United this season -- in the EFL Cup against Northampton Town, when he was substituted early in the second half -- but Mourinho confirmed on Friday that no acceptable bid has been made for the Dutchman yet.

Sources close to Everton told ESPN FC last month that the Merseyside club had held talks with Depay.

Mourinho told Fox Sports: "I was informed by the club that there is a chance Memphis could leave. From a human point of view, I cannot stop him from leaving when he is not playing under me."

"If he is staying, I would be more than happy because he is a fantastic guy and a very good player. I feel so sorry that I am not giving him opportunities to play. A player of his age needs to be playing matches."

"If he stays with me, for sure, he will play some games because we have so many matches. If he leaves, we wish him all the best for the future because he is a fantastic kid."

Depay has made eight appearances for United this season but five of those have been as a late substitute, coming on during the final 10 minutes of matches.

Explaining the lack of game time for the Netherlands international, who was signed in summer 2015 by former manager Louis van Gaal, Mourinho said: "We have a lot of players in Memphis' position. It is the one position where we are overbooked really."

"We have a lot of players there. So it is not easy for any one of them to play."

(Source: ESPN)





Poem of the day

I was a secret treasure of kindness and generosity,
and I wished this treasure to be known.

Rumi

Prayer Times

Noon:12:11 Evening: 17:29 Dawn: 5:46 tomorrow Sunrise: 7:14 (tomorrow)

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Iranian artists honored at Graphis competition

T A R T TEHRAN — Two Iranian artists have won awards at the Graphis Magazine annual poster and logo design competition in New York, the organizers announced last week.



Mehdi Mahdian received the Silver Award in the poster section of the competition for his work entitled "The Scope of Meaning".

In the logo design section of the competition, another Iranian artist, Turaj Saberivand, won the Silver Award for designing the logo of RighTel, the third largest mobile phone network operator in Iran.

The winning works will be published in the Graphis 2017 book.

"Three Sisters", "The Horses" receive Ostad-Mohammad Medallions

T A R T TEHRAN — "Three Sisters and Others" by writer/director Hamid Amjad and "The Horses" by writer/director Mohammad Rahmanian have won Ostad-Mohammad Medallions during the second edition of the honor that is presented to works promoting Iranian cultural elements.

Amjad wrote the play based on Anton Chekhov's "Three Sisters" and receive the medallion in the adaptation section during a special ceremony at Tehran's City Theater Complex on Saturday night. He staged the play at the complex for two months last summer.

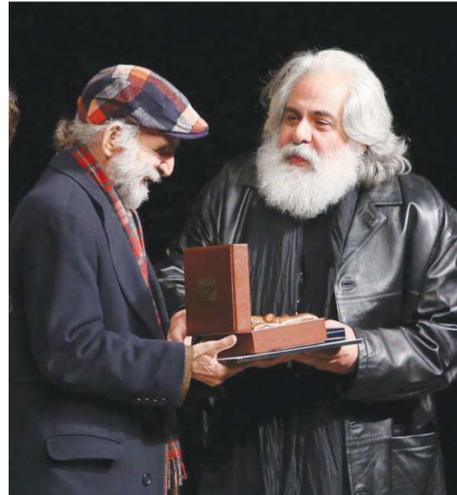
"The Horses" was honored in the original play section. The play tells the story of a groom who lives with his horses near Karbala in 680 when Imam Hussein (AS) and his companions were martyred. The groom knows the language of his horses and quotes stories from them about their riders.

"We should not make any changes in the plays by great writers to stage them," Rahmanian said after accepting his medallion from veteran actor Esmail Khalaj. "We are only allowed to rewrite them for performance."

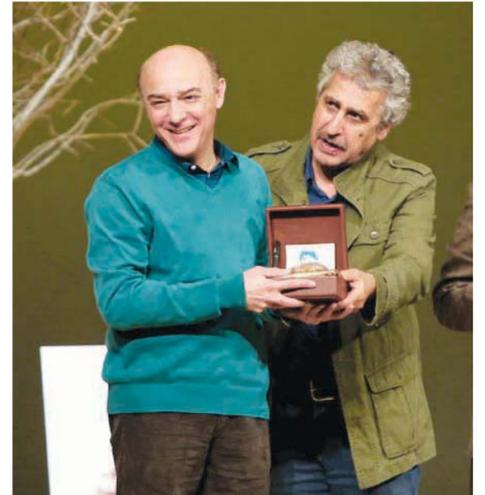
The medallion to honor playwrights was established by the Ostad-Mohammad Foundation, which was set up in 2014 by friends and family of prominent playwright and director Mahmud Ostad-Mohammad a year after his death.

The organizers also honored 65-year-old playwright Farideh Farjam who is considered as Iran's first female modern dramatist.

In a short speech, veteran documentary filmmaker praised librarian Sima Ravai who works at the library



Writer/director Mohammad Rahmanian (R) receives Ostad-Mohammad Medallion from actor Esmail Khalaj for his play "The Horses" at Tehran's City Theater Complex on Jan. 7, 2017.



Writer/director Hamid Amjad (L) accepts Ostad-Mohammad Medallion from director Masud Jafar-Jozani for his play "Three Sisters and Others" at Tehran's City Theater Complex on Jan. 7, 2017.

(Mehr/Masud Saki)

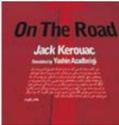
of the City Theater Complex and said, "Seventy to a hundred plays are being performed at the theaters of Tehran every night."

"This should be considered as a movement and an awakening, because theater is the real image of our nations," he added.

The ceremony came to an end with a performance of Ostad-Mohammad's musical "The Theatric Divan" by director Ruzbeh Hosseini's troupe.

The play will run at Sangelaj Theater through Jan. 19. The first edition of the Ostad-Mohammad Medallion was held in December 2015.

NEWS IN BRIEF



"On the Road" appears in Iranian bookstores

T A R T TEHRAN — A Persian version of American writer and poet Jack Kerouac's 1957 novel "On the Road" has recently been published by Kuleh Poshty Publications in Tehran.

Translated by Yashin Azadbeigi, the book tells the story of two carefree and adventurous friends, Sal and Dean, who are traveling across America.



IAF to screen doc on cartoonist Kambiz Derambakhsh

T A R T TEHRAN — "Paper Cinema", a documentary about Kambiz Derambakhsh, a cartoonist famous for his quick and simple cartoons, will be screened at the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) on Wednesday.

The documentary directed by Javad Atashbari chronicles the artistic life of Derambakhsh.

The 74-year-old cartoonist has showcased his works in many exhibitions across the world.

National Society of Film Critics: "Moonlight" best picture

NEW YORK (AP) — The National Society of Film Critics has voted "Moonlight" the best picture of 2016.

Society members who gathered Saturday at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York also gave Barry Jenkins the best director award for the film.

The movie is a coming-of-age tale about a young, black kid growing up in a poor, drug-ridden neighborhood of Miami.

The critics also passed out best acting awards to Casey Affleck for "Manchester by the Sea" and Isabelle Huppert for both "Elle" and "Things to Come."

Best supporting actor and actress are Mahershala Ali in "Moonlight" and Michelle Williams in "Manchester by the Sea."

Beat poet David Meltzer dies at age 79

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — David Meltzer, a Beat poet and musician who appeared in an influential anthology in his early 20s and went on to complete more than 50 books, has died. He was 79.

Meltzer died last Saturday after suffering a stroke. His wife, Julie Rogers, says he died at their home in Oakland.

The New York-native eventually settled in the San Francisco Bay Area, a mecca for Beats in the 1950s and '60s. Meltzer had begun writing as a child and attracted wider attention when he was featured along with such acclaimed contemporaries as Allen Ginsberg and John Ashbery in "The New American Poetry 1945-1960." He would publish prose and poetry steadily over the following decades, with books including "Ragas" and "Luna" and such recent works as "When I Was a Poet" and "Two-Way-Mirror." A retrospective of his verse, "David's Copy: The Selected Poems of David Meltzer," came out in 2005.

Meltzer had many talents. He made radio and TV appearances as a boy and worked extensively in music. Like Ginsberg and other Beats, Meltzer had an affinity for jazz and collaborated with jazz musicians in the 1950s on an album released decades later, "David Meltzer: Poet with Jazz 1958." He was a songwriter and guitarist himself and recorded and performed with his first wife, the singer Tina Meltzer, in the 1960s.

Fourth Intl. Art Festival of Resistance honors winners

T A R T TEHRAN — The Fourth International Art Festival of Resistance honored the top winners during a ceremony held at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute on Saturday January 7.

The ceremony was attended by Executive director of the festival Mohammad Habibi and Iranian Artists Forum Director Majid Rajabi-Memar, Persian media reported on Sunday.

The top works were selected from among the artworks including painting, poster, sculpture, cartoon and caricature by artists from over 70 countries.

In the poster section, the first award went to Hadi Qaderi, and Mahbubeh Pakdel won the first award in the cartoon section.

Arash Forughi received the first award in the caricature section, and the first award in the sculpture section was given to Mohammad-Taqi Sedaqati.

No winner was announced for the painting category, and only several artists were honored in this section.

The book of the fourth edition of the festival containing the images of the participating works was also unveiled at the ceremony.

In addition, a bust of Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr, a prominent Shiite cleric who was executed by Saudi Arabia on January 2, 2016 was also unveiled at the ceremony.

The bust has been made by sculptor Nader Qashqai.



Cartoonist Mahbubeh Pakdel holds her award during the closing ceremony of the Fourth International Art Festival of Resistance at the Saba Art and Cultural Institute in Tehran on January 7, 2017.

(ISNA/Amir Kholusi)

PICTURE OF THE DAY Honaronline/Masud Mirmiri



Members of a troupe led by director Manijeh Majmedi perform "Incident at Vichy", American dramatist Arthur Miller's 1964 play about a group of men detained in Vichy France during World War II, at Tehran Nazerzadeh Kermani Theater on Jan. 7, 2017.

11 docs to compete in Fajr festival

T A R T TEHRAN — The 35th Fajr Film Festival announced a lineup of 11 films for the documentary section on Sunday.

"Zero to Platform" by Sahar Mosayyebi, "Light Blue" by Arash Lahuti, "Avantage" by Mohammad Kart and "The Prime Minister" by Seyyed Mohammadreza Hashemian are among the selected films.

"Fight Feast" by Seyyed Vahid Hosseini, "Vanished" by Farahnaz Sharifi, "Super Marathon" by Saied Keshavarz and "Entail" by Mohammad-Ali Shabani will be shown at the festival as well.

The festival will also screen "The Perpetrator of the Station 20" by Hesam Eslami, "Slowness" by Yasser Khayyer and "Kwayres, the Little Syria" by Saied Sadeqi.

The 35th Fajr Film Festival will be held in Tehran and several other Iranian cities from Jan. 31 to Feb. 10.

Inventory of Prince's estate lists cash, property, gold bars

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — An inventory of Prince's estate submitted to a probate court in Minnesota shows he had acquired tens of millions of dollars' worth of real estate and other personal property before he died last year.

Much of the value of his estate hasn't been established yet, including unreleased recordings and videos from his vault, according to the Star Tribune.

Prince died April 21 of an accidental overdose of the painkiller fentanyl. He did not leave a will. His estate has been valued at between \$100 million and \$300 million, before taxes.

Carver County District Court records

show that an asset inventory by Bremer Trust, the company overseeing the estate, lists a dozen properties in Carver and Hennepin counties with an estimated value of \$25.4 million. It lists about \$110,000 in four bank accounts, as well as unclaimed property, capital credits and cash, and 67 10-ounce gold bars with a total value of nearly \$840,000.

In addition, Prince's companies, Paisley Park Enterprises Inc., NPG Records Inc., NPG Music Publishing and LotusFlow3r had more than \$6 million in cash on hand at the time of his death. NPG Records has an estimated \$6.8 million in arbitration receivable.

"Silence" proves Scorsese's faith in passion project

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Twenty-eight years in the making, Martin Scorsese's "Silence" premiered on Thursday, raising questions of faith over both the subject matter and in Scorsese's dedication to the project.

"Overwhelming that you would be asked to journey with him on this kind of adventure of the soul that he's been willing to take for the last 28 years, and to be given this role... was confusing and humbling," said actor Andrew Garfield.

In "Silence", Garfield plays Sebastiao Rodrigues, a 17th century

Portuguese Jesuit priest who travels to Japan with a fellow missionary in search of their mentor, Father Cristovao Ferreira, portrayed by Liam Neeson, who has renounced his faith under torture.

The priests arrive in Japan at a time when Catholicism is outlawed, and face violence and persecution in their evangelizing mission, which causes a crisis of faith.

The epic historical drama is based on the acclaimed 1966 novel of the same name by late Japanese writer Shusaku Endo and was shot in Taiwan.