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## Iran counter-measure against visa ban still in place

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for European and American Affairs Majid Takht-Ravanchi said on Tuesday that Iran's counter-measure against the U.S. visa ban is still in place.

"Our earlier counter-measure against Trump's previous order is still in place," AFP quoted Majid Takht-Ravanchi as saying at a conference entitled "What to do about Trump's America".

"There is no need for a new decision," he added.

In January, Trump suspended all refugee admissions to the U.S. for four months and banned the entry of Syrian refugees indefinitely pending a security review meant to ensure terrorists cannot slip through vetting. Trump also issued a 90-day ban on all entry to the U.S. from seven Muslim-majority countries, including Iran.

In February, Trump's ban was halted by a federal court, allowing an Iranian archery team into the U.S. Iran reciprocated by allowing entry to an American wrestling team for a competition.

The White House revised and re-issued the ban on Monday -- this time excluding Iraq but still targeting Iranians -- following legal challenges.

# Expert Assembly urges massive voter turnout



See page 2

## Iran, Slovakia join hands to boost economic ties

By Ebrahim Fallahi

**TEHRAN** — Attended by senior officials and company representatives, an Iran-Slovakia business forum was held at Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) on Tuesday.

Heading a high-ranking trade delegation, Slovakian Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Information Peter Pellegrini attended the event alongside the chairman of TCCIMA Masoud Khansari and the head of Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran (OIE-TAI) Mohammad Khazaie.

Slovakia's Economy Minister Peter Žiga and Finance Minister Peter Kažimír as well as representatives of Slovakian and Iranian private companies were also present in the event.

During the meeting both sides emphasized the need for expansion of economic cooperation and expressed willingness for boosting bilateral trade ties.

■ **'Banking relations cornerstone of trade ties'**

Starting the meeting, the head of TCCIMA mentioned Iran-Slovakia long history of trade cooperation and noted, "Since Slovakia is a Eurozone member there is great potential for economic cooperation in various areas." →4



**PERSPECTIVE**  
Seyed Mohammad Hashemi  
political analyst

## Germany's September poll overshadowed by Trump, populism

CNN's Fareed Zakaria on his GPS program said in February that "a senior European leader who attended the Munich Security Conference last week (17-19 Feb.) observed that despite some reassuring words from senior American officials, many of us are convinced that the White House is trying to elect Le Pen in France and defeat Merkel in Germany. And there is heavy talk Stephen Bannon about weakening the European Union and destroying the established order."

Moreover, with the growing popularity of right-wing parties across Europe, including France and the Netherlands, in Germany the populist and Eurosceptic political party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), has seen a surge in public support following the European migration crisis and Britons' vote to leave the EU. The party is expected to win seats in the national parliament this year. However, many German politicians as well as the public have expressed alarm over this trend for the future of the country.

Under such circumstances, Germans are going to the polls on September 24 to elect 598 members of parliament (Bundestag) and allow the parliament choose the country's future chancellor. The result of a latest poll by German public broadcaster ZDF shows a whopping 78 percent of Germans are "very concerned" about Donald Trump's policies. In addition, Merkel's refugee policy, fighting terrorism and spread of extremism are top among the public concerns and challenges before the government.

■ **Germany's political mood is changing**

The race is mainly between two major parties of center-left Social Democrats (SPD), Angela Merkel's conservative Christian Democratic Union and her sister party Christian Social Union (CSU) in Bavaria. →13

## OECD sees lots to worry about in the global economic outlook

The global economy may not be strong enough to withstand risks from increased trade barriers, overblown stock markets or potential currency volatility, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

While forecasting a pickup in growth this year and next, it said the pace is still too slow and warned there's much that could derail it. The OECD expects global expansion to reach 3.3 percent this year, up from 3 percent in 2016, and pick up again in 2018. But the pace will remain short of its average in the two decades before the financial crisis because of weak investment and productivity gains.

"We have acceleration but I'm concerned about this really soft foundation to the recovery," OECD Chief Economist Catherine Mann said in an interview. "We still have this slow, sluggish productivity growth and persistent inequality. Put those together and it's hard to

see the robust consumption and investment profile you need to really get things going."

Though not named in the report, some of the concerns are related to the policies of U.S. President Donald Trump's administration, including his threats to impose tariffs on nations he deems to have an unfair advantage. The OECD also said there's a "disconnect" between equity valuations and the outlook for the real economy, with the market performance partly linked to anticipation of a Trump stimulus package.

"We think the dynamic response to increased protectionism could be really quick, so we have a pretty significant downward bias on what it could mean for growth," Mann said. "What we mean by that is the way businesses will respond by raising prices and cutting trade flows."

QuickTake: Free Trade and Its Foes

The OECD highlighted potential exchange rate volatility from the shift in the interest-rate

cycle. The U.S. Federal Reserve is forecast to increase interest rates next week in what may be the start of a series of hikes this year. In contrast, the European Central Bank is pressing on with its planned stimulus program through 2017.

"Although risks may not materialize immediately, they remain a real possibility and a set of large shocks, possibly interacting with each other, would disrupt the recovery," the OECD said.

Turkey is among the countries most exposed to a strengthening dollar because it has external debt amounting to more than 50 percent of gross domestic product, about half of which is denominated in dollars, while generating little revenue in that currency from exports. Mexico also has significant dollar liabilities of about a fifth of GDP, yet its dollar-generating exports offer it some protection, the OECD said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Turkey, Russia, U.S. military chiefs meet in Turkish city, over Iraq

The Turkish army says its chief of the general staff has met with his Russian and American counterparts in Turkey, discussing the situation in Iraq and Syria among other things.

The meeting among Gens. Hulusi Akar, Valery Gerasimov, and Joseph Dunford took place in the southwestern city of Antalya on Tuesday, the army said.

"Common issues relating to regional security, in particular Syria and Iraq, are being discussed at the meeting," it said in a statement.

Turkey and Russia were two of the three countries — the other being Iran — that suc-

cessfully facilitated a ceasefire deal between the warring sides in Syria. The three guarantor states have also been mediating talks between the Syrian government and opposition toward politically resolving the six-year conflict in Syria.

Turkey is wary of the presence of Kurdish fighters close to its borders in both Syria and Iraq. It associates the fighters with anti-Ankara Kurdish militants and has deployed troops to both of countries without their approval to rein in their movements.

The Kurdish fighters have seized consid-

erable territory from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group in Syria and have majorly contributed to counterterrorism operations in Iraq.

Last month, Akar submitted two proposals to Dunford for an alleged potential operation to "liberate" the northern Syrian city of Raqqah from ISIL.

According to Turkish newspaper Hurriyet, the plans envision Turkish and U.S. forces approaching Raqqah either via the nearby city of al-Bab or the border town of Tal Abyad.

(Source: Press TV)



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## Tehran Times wins best prize at 'Oil & Media Festival'

Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh confers the best prize at Mahnaz Abdi, the economics editor of the Tehran Times, at the fifth Oil & Media Festival which was held in Tehran on Monday.

Abdi was named the top winner in the news section of the festival for writing a report titled "Big leap anticipated for Iran's petrochemical industry" which was published in the newspaper on December 14, 2015.

## For Iran Caspian Sea means peace, friendship: Navy commander

Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari stressed the need for ensuring constant stability in the Caspian Sea, which he said Iran considers as a sea of peace and friendship.

"In view of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Caspian Sea is a sea of peace and friendship and we should move in a way so that continuous stability and full security in different aspects (continue to) exist (there)," he told reporters in the northeastern city of Gorgan on Tuesday, Tasnim reported.

Rear Admiral Sayyari added that there should be full security so that the littoral states can use the sea's resources.

Highlighting the presence of the Iranian Navy in the Caspian Sea, he assured the Iranian nation and neighboring countries that his forces have established full security in 20-percent of the sea.

"All of the neighbors know this," the commander said, adding, "We should (take preventive measures) so that no incident related to piracy, drug trafficking, human trafficking, or environmental issues and pollution in the sea would take place."

Back in September 2014, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani had called on the Caspian Sea littoral states to make joint efforts for the well-being of the lake.

"The Caspian Sea should be the center of development and welfare, the symbol of peace and security and symbol of cooperation among our nations," Rouhani said in a speech to the 4th summit of the Caspian Sea littoral states, held in Russia's Astrakhan.

The president insisted that only the five countries around the Caspian Sea should be entitled to maritime activities, rejecting the presence of armed forces from other foreign countries in the sea.

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MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



**IRGC commanders not allowed to interfere in presidential election**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) commanders are not allowed to interfere in the upcoming presidential election, the IRGC chief said on Tuesday, Mehr reported.

Mohammad Ali Jafari stated that all commanders should refrain from joining any of the political factions or groups, interfering in the election, or vilifying any of the candidates.

Regulatory bodies in the IRGC are tasked with making sure no one would interfere with the election, he said, adding they should detect any violation, and strictly disciplining the violators.



**Presidential candidates' enrollment starts April 9**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Interior Ministry announced on Tuesday that the date to register to contest the presidential election will start on April 9.

Ali Asqar Ahmadi, the election headquarters chief, also said the enrollment to run in the council election will start on March 19 and last for seven days.

The presidential and council elections will be held simultaneously on May 19.



**Riyadh accepts some of Iran's Hajj demands**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization has said there have been relative progress in the ongoing negotiations between Tehran and Riyadh about the dispatch of Iranian nationals to Saudi Arabia for Hajj this summer.

Some of the demands of the Islamic Republic were accepted by the other side, the Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization said in an announcement released on Tuesday.

The statement further said that the talks will continue to make sure the "rational expectations" of Iranian Hajj pilgrims are met.



**Iran won't leave U.S. human rights claims unanswered: Judiciary chief**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Judiciary chief has refuted U.S. allegations that Iran is violating human rights, saying Tehran will not leave such claims "unanswered."

Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani said U.S. reports about human rights situation in Iran are based on false reports provided by members of the anti-Iran terrorist Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO), Press TV reported on Tuesday.

He dismissed as routine the U.S. Department of State's move to level such allegations against Iran.



**Iranian navy sends fleet of warships to Russia**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Navy on Tuesday dispatched a flotilla of warships to Russia's Makhachkala, the capital of the Republic of Dagestan.

The Iranian fleet, which includes the home-made Damavand destroyer and Darafsh missile-launching warship, left Iran's territorial waters in the Caspian Sea with a message of peace and friendship to the Caspian Sea littoral states, Fars reported.

The Iranian Navy's Northern Fleet had earlier sent two flotillas of warships to Russia and one to Azerbaijan.



**Iran launches electronic visa system**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iran on Tuesday made operational an electronic visa system that works with visitors from more than 180 countries.

"The whole thing could be done in 2 or 3 minutes without having to go to consulates. It is a very important in tourism and trade," Deputy Foreign Minister Hassan Qashqavi said, ISNA reported.

He added Iran does not issue electronic visas for nationals of ten countries with which the Islamic Republic does not offer visa on arrival mutually.

# Expert Assembly urges massive voter turnout

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Massive turnout in elections and voting for the fittest are the top two priorities in the upcoming polls in Iran, Assembly of Experts chairman Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati underscored in comments on Tuesday.

"In the next year's elections (which fall on the second Iranian month) emphasis should be laid on full participation of the people and election of the most qualified," the nonagenarian cleric was quoted as saying at a meeting of the Assembly of Experts, an oversight body responsible for supervising and electing Supreme Leader.

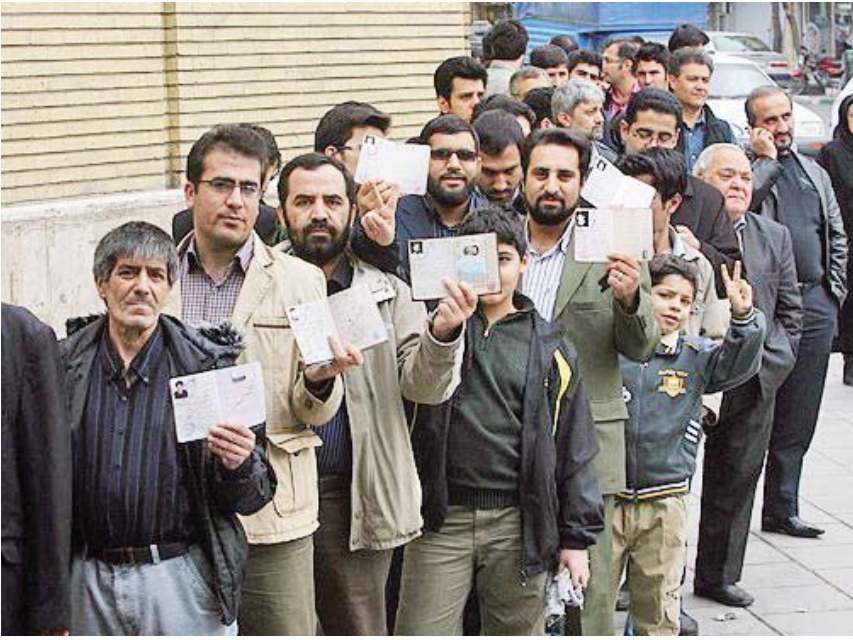
Iran will hold presidential as well as city and council elections on May 19, 2017, one month earlier than usual to avoid a coincidence with the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan which starts late in May.

"The people should feel responsible and cast vote in the elections," the Jannati added.

Late February, President Hassan Rouhani said massive turnout in the next elections is consequential for the fate and grandeur of Iran in the international arena, inviting the Iranian nation to stage a "competitive and impressive" show.

Insecure regional situation also adds more sensitivity to this year's voting, which is held in a region fraught with violence and feud.

Syria has been at war with numerous terrorist organizations for six years now,



**Insecure regional situation adds more sensitivity to this year's voting, which is held in a region fraught with violence and feud.**

Iraq has been fighting ISIS since 2014, Saudi Arabia continues to pound Yemen, and Turkey has been insecure to levels unseen

in decades. Rouhani, who won in a landslide majority of 18.5 million in 2013 in a field of six

## Iraqi official hails Iran's role in fighting terrorism

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iraqi prime minister's military advisor has hailed Iran's positive role in fighting terrorism in Iraq.

"Iran's arms and ammunion have been very effective for us in fighting Daesh (ISIS)," IRNA quoted Khaled Hamoud as saying on the sidelines of the international exhibition of military and defense industry in Baghdad.

Hamoud underlined the need for Iran and Iraq to continue cooperation in the fight against terrorists.

The two sides have been fighting terrorism to establish security in the region, he noted.

The military advisor also lauded Iran's cooperation in the military exhibition, saying Islamic Republic's experience has made the exhibition much better than the previous ones.

Hamoud further said the advanced arms that have been showcased in the exhibition are effective in war on terrorism and securing borders.

"Iraq improves its security and defensive system with the help of neighboring countries, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran," he said, adding that this is the only way that terrorism can be defeated and security established in Iraq and the larger region.

Commander of the Iraqi Air Force Hamid al-Maliki, who also took part in the exhibition, said Iran is still No. 1 supporter of Iraq in its fight against terrorism and praised Islamic Republic's active role in fighting Daesh.

## Rouhani raps U.S. for anti-Iran election report

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has denounced as untrue a recent U.S. report accusing Iran of falling short of international standards for free elections, ISNA reported.

"Elections in Iran are free, healthy, competitive and democratic," Rouhani told reporters on Tuesday, while speaking on the sidelines of a meeting of Assembly of Experts in Tehran.

Rejecting the U.S. Department of State's 2016 human rights report on Iran, Rouhani said, "I think those who criticize Iranian elections should take a look at their own recent election and other problems they are facing."

He further said the recent U.S. presidential election faced protests by both major parties. "Even the current American president casted doubt on the legitimacy of the election before he was elected."

Back in October, Donald Trump said he would accept the result of the election only if he wins, and casted



serious doubt on the legitimacy of the electoral process.

Therefore, Rouhani said, the Americans should pay more attention to their own election process and reform it.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president boasted huge turnout in Iranian elections, saying "this shows that Iranian people trust the elections."

## Trump, Netanyahu discuss Iran in phone call

**POLITICS** **U.S.** President Donald Trump called Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday to discuss the Iranian nuclear deal and Iran's recent missile test, as well as the latest anti-Semitic threats and vandalism in the U.S.

The conversation came following a report that Iran had test-fired a pair of ballistic missiles over the weekend. According to a U.S. official, an American naval vessel was "harassed" by fast Iranian speedboats in the Strait of Hormuz on Monday.

Recently, at an event commemorating 25th anniversary of Buenos Aires Israeli embassy bombing, Netanyahu claimed that "more than 80% of security threats against Israel emanate from Iran".

During the phone call, Netanyahu also thanked

Trump for the warm welcome he gave him during his visit to the White House last month. He expressed his gratitude to the U.S. president for his "forceful statement against anti-Semitism" that he made during a speech last week to a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress.

Netanyahu has been a strong opponent of the Iran nuclear deal. He fought hard to kill the deal during the Obama administration. Now faced with the deal, which has been endorsed by the UN Security Council, Netanyahu is trying to prompt the Trump administration to put sanctions against Iran unrelated to Tehran's nuclear program.

Trump's phone call interrupted a police inquiry into Netanyahu, who was being questioned by the police for a fourth time over suspicions of corruption at that very moment.

## Zarif says banking ties with Indonesia growing

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Tuesday that Iran-Indonesia cooperation is growing in various areas, especially in banking sphere.

"Cooperation between the two countries in various spheres, especially economic and banking areas and oil industry, is on the rise," he said during a meeting with Indonesian President Joko Widodo in Jakarta.

For his part, Widodo called for expansion of relations.

Zarif was in Jakarta to attend the Indian Ocean Rim Association summit which was held on 5-7 March.

IORA is an international organization consisting of coastal states bordering the Indian Ocean.

The Association comprises 21 member states and 7 dialogue partners, the Indian Ocean Tourism Organization and the Indian Ocean Research Group has observer status.

Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, India,



Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mauritius, Somalia, Mozambique, Oman, Seychelles, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Yemen are the member states to the association. China, Egypt, France, Germany, Japan, United Kingdom and the U.S. are the dialogue partners.

Zarif also met with Foreign Minister of Thailand Don Pramudwinai and discussed bilateral ties.

satory damages and \$5 billion in punitive damages.

That judgment stagnated for years because there was no obvious way to collect it. But then it came to light that the Clearstream system in Luxembourg, which facilitates international exchanges of securities, was holding \$1.6 billion in Central Bank of Iran's assets that had been blocked under sanctions.

Last year, lawyers for the September 11 victims persuaded a judge in Luxembourg to place a new freeze on those assets while they sued over whether they could execute the default judgment against those funds.

Both Clearstream and the Central Bank of Iran are now trying to get that freeze lifted.



# U.S. starts deploying anti-missile system in South Korea after North's latest test

## China, Russia slam U.S. missile system deployment

The United States started to deploy the first elements of its advanced anti-missile defense system in South Korea on Tuesday after North Korea's test of four ballistic missiles, U.S. Pacific Command said, despite angry opposition from China.

The announcement came as North Korean state media said Leader Kim Jong Un had personally supervised Monday's missile launches by an army unit that is positioned to strike U.S. bases in Japan, stepping up threats against Washington as U.S. troops conduct joint military exercises with South Korea.

"Continued provocative actions by North Korea, to include yesterday's launch of multiple missiles, only confirm the prudence of our alliance decision last year to deploy THAAD to South Korea," U.S. Pacific Commander Admiral Harry Harris said in a statement, referring to the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system.

The move by the U.S. military is likely to deepen the brewing conflict between South Korea and China, which says the THAAD deployment destroys the regional security balance.

The four ballistic missiles fired by North Korea landed in the sea off Japan's northwest, angering Seoul and Tokyo, days after Pyongyang promised retaliation over the military drills that it sees as preparation for war.

U.S. President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe discussed the launches by the nuclear-armed North during a phone call on Tuesday.

"Japan and the U.S. confirmed that the latest North Korean missile launches were clearly against UN resolutions and a clear provocation against the regional and international community," Abe told reporters. "(North Korea's) threat has entered a new phase."

Trump also spoke to South Korea's acting President Hwang Kyo-ahn to discuss the North's missile launches, Hwang's office said.

Reclusive North Korea, which has carried out a series of nuclear and missile tests in defiance of United Nations resolutions, issued a typically robust statement on state news agency KCNA after the missile launches.

"In the hearts of artillerymen ... there was burning desire to mercilessly retaliate against the warmongers going ahead with their joint war exercises," KCNA said.

It said Kim ordered the Korean People's Army's Strategic Force "to keep highly alert as required by the grim situation in which an actual war may break out any time, and get fully ready to promptly move, take positions and strike so that it can open fire to annihilate the enemies".

The missiles North Korea fired on Monday were unlikely to have been intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), South Korea said, which can reach the United States. They flew on average 1,000 km (620 miles) and reached an altitude of 260 km (160 miles).

Some landed as close as 300 km (190 miles) from Japan's northwest coast, Japan's defense minister said earlier.

South Korean military and intelligence officials said on Tuesday the four North Korean missiles appeared to be an upgraded version of the Scud type - Extended-Range Scud.

North Korea is mired in a separate diplomatic row with



Malaysia over the killing of Kim's estranged half-brother at Kuala Lumpur airport last month.

The two countries have expelled each other's ambassador from their capitals and on Tuesday announced tit-for-tat bans on departures of each other's nationals, sharply escalating tensions between the two countries that, until the killing of Kim Jong Nam, had maintained rare close ties.

### ■ Diplomatic standoff

The United States and Japan have requested a United Nations Security Council meeting on the latest North Korean missile launches, which will likely be scheduled for Wednesday, diplomats said.

The planned installation of the U.S. anti-missile defense system has led to a diplomatic standoff between China and South Korea.

Chinese authorities have closed nearly two dozen retail stores of South Korea's Lotte Group, which approved a land swap with the country's military last week to allow it to install the system.

On Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang repeated China's resolute opposition to THAAD, saying the country would take the steps necessary to protect its security interests.

"The consequences of this are on the shoulders of the United States and South Korea. We again strongly urge the relevant sides to stop the deployment process and not keep going down the wrong path," he added.

China's state-run Global Times warned the possibility of war on the Korean peninsula was growing because of the U.S.-South Korean military drills and the North

Korean missile launches.

China objects to the THAAD deployment, saying its territory is the target of the system's far-reaching radar. South Korea and the United States have said the missile system is aimed only at curbing North Korean provocations.

The Yonhap news agency said the THAAD deployment could be completed in one or two months.

### ■ China, Russia slam U.S.

Meantime, China and Russia have slammed the deployment of a U.S. missile system to South Korea, with Beijing vowing to defend its security interests.

"We are firmly opposed to the deployment of THAAD (missile system) in the Republic of Korea (ROK) by the U.S. and the ROK," China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang announced during a regular press briefing in Beijing on Tuesday.

"China will resolutely take necessary measures to defend our own security interests. All consequences entailed from this will be borne by the U.S. and the ROK," he added, without elaborating on the sorts of measures it would consider.

Geng further called on "relevant parties to stop the deployment and not to travel down that wrong path."

The Russian Foreign Ministry also said on Tuesday the THAAD deployment is bringing the situation on the already-volatile Korean Peninsula into a stalemate, Interfax reported.

The THAAD system is meant to intercept and destroy short- and medium-range ballistic missiles during their final phase of flight. (Source: agencies)

## Malaysia 'foiled attack' ahead of Saudi king visit

Malaysia says it had foiled a planned attack on "Arab loyalties" ahead of a visit by Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to the Southeast Asian country late last month.

The Saudi King arrived in Malaysia on February 26 on the first leg of his month-long Asian tour accompanied by a 600-strong entourage. He is currently in Indonesia.

On Tuesday, Malaysia's police chief said four Yemenis had been plotting an attack on "Arab royalties."

"Apart from their role involving in producing false travel documents, they are also involved in distributing drugs... and they are also planning to attack the Arab royalties during the visit in Kuala Lumpur, so we got them in the nick of time," Inspector General of Police Khalid Abu Bakar.

Kuala Lumpur said on Sunday that one Malaysian and six foreigners, one Indonesian, four Yemenis and one East Asian, had been arrested between



February 21 and 26 for suspected links to militant groups.

Police noted that two of the seven militants, a Malaysian and an Indonesian, were planning to conduct a large-scale attack using a "vehicle-borne im-

proved explosive device."

Over the last few years, Malaysia has arrested hundreds of people suspected of having connections with militant groups.

The country has been on high alert

since Jakarta, the capital of its neighbor Indonesia, was rocked by multiple ISIL (Daesh)-linked attacks in January 2016.

In June last year, eight people were injured in a grenade attack claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group on a bar on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.

Salman's trip was the first by a Saudi king to Malaysia in more than a decade.

King Salman left for Jakarta on March 1 on the second leg of his luxurious month-long Asia tour, which will also see him going to China, Japan and the Maldives.

The House of Saud regime King Salman has taken the world by surprise with his extravagant visit to Indonesia along with an entourage of 1,500 people amid reports that he plans to spend millions staying in resorts and hotels on Bali Island.

(Source: Press TV)

## Germany cancels another Turkish referendum rally

German authorities have canceled another Turkish rally in support of increasing the powers of Turkey's president in Hamburg, where Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu was supposed to deliver a speech.

Citing fire safety regulations, local authorities in Hamburg provisionally annulled the event, during which Cavusoglu would address some 250 supporters, the website of German broadcaster Deutsche Welle reported.

"Considerable shortcomings in fire protection" issues had led to the decision, Hamburg police said on Monday.

The cancellation came after police earlier rejected reports that they were

set to abolish the rally. They also left the door open for the Turkish minister to hold the demo at another location.

The Turkish foreign minister was reportedly attempting to secure another location.

Last week, Berlin blocked three Turkish ministers' scheduled appearances aimed at gathering support for a "yes" vote in Turkey's April referendum on constitutional reforms, which have been long sought by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

If adopted, a presidential system of government would replace the parliamentary one in Turkey, giving executive powers to the president and abolishing

the position of prime minister.

The cancellation of pro-Erdogan rallies in Germany has triggered diplomatic tensions between Ankara and Berlin.

Erdogan, on Sunday, accused Germany of "fascist actions" reminiscent of Nazi practices. Turkey also said it would go ahead with campaign events in Germany regardless of the ban.

Chancellor Angela Merkel on Monday slammed Erdogan's remarks, saying his claims were "out of place."

Cavusoglu has also accused Germany of working to sabotage the rallies.

"The hotels, the conference halls are being put under pressure; police are being sent to the owners of these plac-

es: it's systematic pressure, a maneuver aimed at erecting systematic barriers," he said on Monday.

"The state and the state-run institutions are all implicated. That's unacceptable. As for us, we will take the necessary measures. We have no fear of anyone," the minister added.

Other German authorities have cited capacity problems in hosting the events, which they said were likely to attract large crowds.

Politicians in other European countries have also urged bans on any pro-Erdogan campaigning ahead of the Turkish referendum.

(Source: DPA)

## Iraqi forces recapture Mosul government buildings, museum

Iraqi Special Forces have reportedly reclaimed the government's headquarters in the northern city of Mosul, the last urban area controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in Iraq.

The building was retaken in the city's Dawasah District on Tuesday by a rapid reaction unit serving the country's Interior Ministry, Lieutenant Colonel Abdel Amir al-Mohammadawi, a spokesman for the forces, told Reuters. "They killed tens from Daesh," he said.

Iraqi Federal Police stormed Dawasah, which also hosts other government buildings, on Sunday. The forces released a report on Tuesday, saying that 135 Takfiris had been killed and 24 of their bomb-laden vehicles destroyed during the operation over the past two days.

Mosul fell to ISIL terrorists in June 2014, when they had just begun a large-scale offensive in Iraqi territory. The terrorist blitz back then sent Iraqi military forces fleeing from some of their bases on the path of the terrorists, leaving military vehicles and hardware — mainly American-made — in place, which the terrorists later comfortably picked up.

But government forces have since then reorganized and managed to take back much of the territory from ISIL terrorists.

The Tuesday recapture of the seat of the government in Mosul, the capital of the northwestern Nineveh Province, has placed Iraqi troops in a yet better position to seize back Mosul's Old City. Most recently, the forces took control of the city's al-Hurriya Bridge, which leads to ISIL concentration points from the south.

Also on Tuesday, Iraqi servicemen restored government control over the Mosul Museum, the country's second-largest after the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad. The terrorists had previously used to notoriously film themselves pulverizing the museum's artifacts.

Powered up by allied popular fighters, the Iraqi army launched the battle to liberate Mosul in mid-October 2016, and managed to claw back its eastern half some 100 days later in January.



Late last month, Iraqi forces began engaging the terrorists in the western side of Mosul.

ISIL terrorists have placed themselves among the civilians in Mosul, making it harder for the security forces to advance. The terrorists have also been preventing residents from leaving the city.

On Sunday, ISIL engaged Iraqi troops in the heaviest clashes since the onset of the operation to cleanse western Mosul.

Major General Haider al-Matari of the Federal Police Commandos Division told The Associated Press that the terrorists had sent at least six explosives-laden cars toward the troops, which were all destroyed before reaching them.

Iraq's al-Sumariah network, meanwhile, has said that ISIL's purported appointee leader in Mosul has ordered the terrorists to withdraw from the city to Raqqa, which ISIL has proclaimed as its so-called headquarters in neighboring Syria.

(Source: Press TV)

## Pakistan temporarily reopens border with Afghanistan

Pakistan has temporarily reopened its two main border crossings with Afghanistan to allow visitors with valid visas on both sides to return home, the foreign office announced.

Pakistan sealed the Torkham and Chaman crossings on February 16, after a string of suicide attacks killed more than 130 people across the country, blaming the violence on Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and other armed groups.

"In order to provide an opportunity to those nationals of Afghanistan who had come to Pakistan on valid visas and wish to return to their country, the government of Pakistan has decided to open the border crossings at Torkham and Chaman on March 7 and 8," the foreign office said in a statement.

The temporary opening was for people who had travelled for medical, work and business purposes but were left stranded, according to Afghan ambassador to Pakistan, Omar Zakhilwal.

Fayyaz Khan, a Pakistani official at Torkham, said large numbers of Afghans were returning home, along with smaller groups of Pakistanis, but that overland trade between the two countries was yet to resume.

Afghanistan has long blamed Pakistan for providing sanctuary to Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network leaders on its soil, while Pakistan accuses its northwestern neighbor of allowing Pakistani Taliban elements to operate in Nangarhar and other provinces.

Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, a Pakistani Taliban breakaway faction, had claimed responsibility for the recent attacks, including Monday's targeting of three Pakistani posts in the Mohmand tribal area on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border that left at least 15 people dead.

In February, the two countries exchanged lists of fighters they believed to be residing in each other's countries.

On Monday, Pakistan Minister of Defense Khwaja Asif claimed the border was being used "as a thoroughfare" by Pakistani Taliban fighters.

"Our murderers are sitting on their border and you are pleading us not to close down the borders," he said at a session of the National Assembly.

Torkham and Chaman crossings are major arteries for the \$1.5bn in trade and commerce between the two neighbors. The Torkham crossing is used by about 15,000 Afghans every day.

Other crossings, which are generally less used, will remain closed. (Source: agencies)



# Iran, Slovakia join hands to boost economic ties



## Renault sales to Iran rise 348% in January yr/yr

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — According to a report released by the French multinational automobile manufacturer, Renault, the company could sell 13,449 cars during the first month of 2017 in Iran, showing a 348-percent increase compared to the same month last year.

In January 2016, Renault sold more than 3,000 cars in the Iranian market.

However, compared to the last month of 2016, the French company's sales in Iran witnessed a nine-percent fall. In December 2016, Renault's sales stood at 14,738 cars in Iran.



## Iran to receive ATR planes later than accorded

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Regarding the ongoing talks with officials of the world's leading turboprop manufacturer ATR, the first ATR planes will be delivered to Iran after Norouz holidays (March 21 to April 2), a bit later than what was accorded, Deputy Transport Minister Asghar Fakhrieh Kashan told IRNA on Tuesday.

As previously announced, ATR was to deliver some of Iran's 20 ordered passenger planes by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20, 2017) simultaneous with deliverance of the country's ordered two Airbus A330 jets.

According to Fakhrieh Kashan the Airbus jetliners will arrive on time but the ATR deliverance will be postponed for a few weeks.

## Denmark steps up co-operation with Iran

The Danish government has announced plans to expand its official co-operation with Iran through sustainable urban development and patents regarding products.

To this end, the Foreign Ministry intends to deploy growth advisers to the nation where co-operative measures are already in full swing.

In the wake of international sanctions against Iran being repealed recently, Danish exports, political dialogue and university co-operation have been on the rise.

In collaboration with the Business Ministry, the Danish Patent and Trademark Office, and the Iranian authorities, the growth adviser will focus on patents and trademarks.

(Source: cphpost.dk)

## Eurasia intergovernmental council signs EAEU-Iran free trade preparation deal

Members of the Eurasian Economic Union's (EAEU) prime ministerial council signed a directive on Tuesday ordering preparations for a temporary agreement on forming an EAEU-Iran free trade zone.

The Eurasian Intergovernmental Council members additionally signed a directive on the state of mutual trade among EAEU members in 2015-2016. Another directive orders to identify areas of the economy with integration potential and steps to implement it.

Among other new orders issued in Kyrgyzstan, the council attendees signed instructions to lay the groundwork for the implementation of the integration community's digital agenda by 2025.

(Source: Sputnik)

## Bank of England's Hogg says failed to declare conflict of interest

New Bank of England Deputy Governor Charlotte Hogg said she had failed to declare correctly to the central bank a potential conflict of interest due to her brother's employment at Barclays (BARC.L), a major bank which is overseen by the BoE.

Hogg has worked at the central bank since July 2013 as its chief operating officer, but did not declare her brother's role in Barclays' strategy office until she submitted documentation to a parliamentary committee reviewing her appointment this year as deputy governor for banking.

"I should have formally declared my brother's role when I first joined the Bank. I did not do so and I take full responsibility for this oversight," Hogg said in a letter to the committee released on Tuesday.

Hogg said the chairman of the BoE's Court of Directors - the central bank's internal supervisory body - had concluded that no conflict of interest arose during her service as chief operating officer.

But she said she would ask the BoE's Monetary Policy Committee, Financial Policy Committee and Prudential Regulation Committee, on which she now sits to review if further steps were needed to manage the potential conflict of interest.

(Source: Reuters)

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"Among others, infrastructure, auto industry, communication, transportation, agriculture, and water management could be named as areas for joint investment," he stated.

"Establishing Iran-Slovakia Joint Chamber of Commerce and enhancing financial, banking and insurance relations between the two countries could pave the way for development of bilateral ties," he added.

"Iran has provisioned a \$50-billion annual foreign investment attraction in its development plans and Slovakia could be a good partner in fulfilling a part of this goal," the official noted.

According to Khansari, establishing good banking relations and removing barriers in this area are the first steps toward good economic and trade relations and Iran expects the Slovakian side to take the necessary measures in this regard.

### ■ 'Joint Economic Committee meeting to be held by yearend'

Further in the event, the Slovakian deputy prime minister mentioned the establishment of Iran-Slovakia Joint Economic Committee and announced that the first round of the committee's meetings will be held by the yearend in Tehran.

He invited Iranian companies and private sector to seek new business, invest-



(Left to right) OIETAI Head Mohammad Khazaie, TCCIMA Chairman Masoud Khansari, Slovakian Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Information Peter Pellegrini, and Finance Minister Peter Kazimiras

ment and trade opportunities in Slovakia in order to fully exploit the potentials of bilateral trade.

### ■ 'Slovakia to help promote Iran's credit risk'

In another part of the meeting, Khazaie expressed appreciation for Slovakia's cooperation with Iran regarding the promotion of the country's credit risk from 7 in 2015 to 6 in 2016.

"We thank our Slovakian partners for helping the country promote its credit risk and hopefully with the support and help of Slovakia there will be yet another promotion from 6 to 5 in 2017," he said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Khazaie mentioned Iran-Slovakia trade turnover and noted, "Although the growth rate of trade between the two countries is promising (between 2014 and 2016 the

## VW's Seat considers selling cars in Iran: CEO

**GENEVA (Reuters)** — Volkswagen's Spanish subsidiary Seat is considering selling its cars in Iran to broaden its reach beyond the crowded European market, its chief executive said on Tuesday.

Seat has been invited by the Spanish government to explore opportunities in Iran but entering the market would require major investment and only work in conjunction with Seat's German parent VW, Chief Executive Luca de Meo told Reuters.

"It's not a market where we can go alone," de Meo said at the Geneva auto show. "We have to see what our sisters and brothers are doing. We are analyzing the situation but nothing concrete is on the table."

French carmakers once dominated the Iranian

market and both PSA and Renault are ramping up investment and production there after an international deal to lift sanctions related to Tehran's nuclear program.

Western and Japanese carmakers that had previously avoided Iran are also eyeing its potential and Iran's deputy industry minister told a conference in Tehran last month that VW may soon finalize a production deal with an Iranian company.

VW has said its main car brand was always looking for new market opportunities around the world and was monitoring developments in Iran closely while conducting talks there on different levels.

Internationalization will be a key topic for Seat in



the coming years as the brand, which is traditionally strong in Mediterranean markets, is counting on new models to boost profits, de Meo said.

## German factory orders slump most since 2009 on investment

German factory orders plunged at the steepest pace in eight years as demand for investment goods weakened.

Orders, adjusted for seasonal swings and inflation, fell 7.4 percent from December, when they increased 5.2 percent, data from the Economy Ministry in Berlin showed on Tuesday. That's the biggest drop since January 2009. The typically volatile reading compares with a median estimate for a 2.5 percent decline in a Bloomberg survey. Orders were down 0.8 percent from a year earlier.

The report breaks a string of data that had pointed to a buildup in momentum and serves as a reminder that Europe's largest economy isn't fully insulated against risks. Last month, the Bundesbank predicted growth would pickup at the start of 2017, supported by domestic demand and a stronger global outlook.

"The data are the result of an unfortunate combination: Bulk orders propelled demand at the end of last year, and now the turbo fired in the other direction," said Andreas Scheuerle, an

economist at Dekabank in Frankfurt. "In the context of sentiment indicators, there's no reason for concern. I'm still convinced we'll see a good quarter."

The euro was little changed and traded at \$1.0596 at 8:41 a.m. Frankfurt time.

Domestic factory orders fell 10.5 percent in January from the previous month, led by a 16.8 percent slump in demand for investment goods, according to the report. Export orders were down 4.9 percent. The ministry said demand for big-ticket items was markedly

below average.

"The weak start to the year should be manageable," the ministry said. "Business confidence in manufacturing is significantly brighter than the long-term average, so that a revival in manufacturing can still be expected."

Ifo's business climate index improved in February amid strong activity in manufacturing and services, and unemployment continued to decline. The ministry will publish industrial-production data for January on Wednesday.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## U.S. trade deficit jumps to five-year high on imports

The U.S. trade deficit jumped to a near five-year high in January as cell phones and rising oil prices helped to push up the import bill, suggesting trade would again weigh on economic growth in the first quarter.

The Commerce Department said on Tuesday the trade gap increased 9.6 percent to \$48.5 billion, the highest level since March 2012. The deficit was in line with economists forecasts. December's trade shortfall was unrevised at \$44.3 billion.

When adjusted for inflation, the trade deficit rose to \$65.3 billion from \$62.0 billion in December. Both the inflation-adjusted exports and imports were the highest on record in January.

The wider trade gap added to weak data such as housing starts, consumer and construction spending in suggesting the economy struggled to regain momentum early in the first quarter after growth slowed to a 1.9 percent annualized rate in the final three months of 2016.

The economy grew at a 3.5 percent

pace in the third quarter.

Trade cut 1.7 percentage points from gross domestic product in the fourth quarter. The Atlanta Federal Reserve is forecasting GDP rising at a 1.8 percent rate in the first quarter.

The dollar was trading marginally higher, while prices for U.S. government bonds were little changed. U.S. stock index futures were slightly lower.

The Trump administration is eyeing trade as it seeks 4 percent annual GDP growth. President Donald Trump has

vowed sweeping changes to U.S. trade policy, starting with pulling out of the 12-nation Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact.

Trump also wants to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was signed in 1994 by the United States, Canada and Mexico. Economists, however, warn that the America-first or protectionist policies being pursued by the administration are a threat to the country's economic health.

(Source: Reuters)

## There's a problem with the post-Trump boom in economic data

By Bob Bryan

In the months following the election of President Donald Trump, economic data have been on an upswing.

Survey measures of expectations such as consumer confidence, purchasing manager surveys, and regional Federal Reserve surveys have all seen booms. Citi's US economic surprise index — a measure of economic data' performance against expectations — has been pushed to multi-year highs.

There's only one problem: This boost may not be as good as it appears.

Much of the recent uptick in economic data has been due to "soft data," or data from surveys and sentiment readings, as opposed to "hard data," or actual measures of economic activity.

According to Gluskin Sheff's David Rosenberg, the stronger survey data doesn't show the full picture. Not only is "hard data" weak, but many of the underlying measures of actual activity in the surveys have failed to meet expectations, while survey questions about sentiment are pushing the "soft data" higher.

For one thing, housing surveys have softened up in the past few months.



"The NAHB housing index peaked in December at 69 and proceeded to drop to 67 in January and 65 in February," said Rosenberg. "There has been a notable decline in both buyer traffic and sales expectations. The AIA Architectural Index slid from 55.6 in December to a four-month low of 49.5 as of January."

While manufacturing surveys have been soaring post-election, the enthusiasm hasn't translated into higher expectations for investment or hiring.

"It is also interesting to see how that ripping Philly Fed manufacturing index for February showed only a modest uptick in capital spending plans — to 22.1 from 21.9 and really no higher than it was right before the election," said Rosenberg. "Go figure. Hiring intentions also collapsed to 28.5 from 38.6, and yet I didn't see this factoid mentioned on bubblevision."

Small business enthusiasm has crept up since the election, which Trump's own team has noted. Rosenberg said there is a problem there too.

"The NFIB index also edged up to a cycle high and yet again, capex plans dipped to 27 from 29 and also stands where it was just prior to the November election," said the note. "Ditto for hiring plans."

The issue here, based on Rosenberg's analysis, is that not only is "hard data" not following the surveys, but the surveys themselves aren't indicating an actual increase in economic activity. Instead, the jump has come from businesses and consumers saying that they believe the general economy will get better.

In order for that to happen, businesses actually have to spend more on capital more or hire more, and so far the surveys don't indicate that firms intend to make those investments.

(Source: The Business Insider)



# SP phases 17, 18 on verge of complete inauguration

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Phases 17 and 18 of developing Iran's South Pars gas field (in the Persian Gulf) are on the verge of complete inauguration, according to Hassan Boyeri, the operator of these phases.

Boyeri, who is the managing director of Industrial Projects Management of Iran Company (IPMI), said that some 15.5 billion cubic meters of gas has been injected from these phases to the national network since their first train of gas sweetening was put into operation during the tenth month of Iranian calendar year of 1393 (December 22, 2014-January 20, 2015), Shana reported.

He put the investment for development of phases 17 and 18 of South Pars at \$8.1 billion and announced that the four platforms of these phases have the total production capacity of 56 million cubic meters of gas per day.

The huge offshore field, shared with Qatar, covers an area of 9,700 square kilometers, 3,700 square kilometers of which, called South Pars, are in Iran's territorial waters in the Persian Gulf. The remaining 6,000 square kilometers, called North Dome, are situated in Qatar's territorial waters.

The field is estimated to contain a significant amount of natural gas, accounting for about eight percent of the world's reserves, and approximately 18 billion barrels of condensate.



## Mitsui takes LR1 to ship Iran naphtha to Japan: industry sources

In a significant deal, a Long Range I tanker has been chartered for delivering a parcel of 55,000 mt of Iranian naphtha to Japan next month, several brokers, owners and charterers said Monday.

A 2009-built, Bahamas-flagged tanker, the 75,000 dwt Gulf Cobalt has been placed on subjects by Mitsui and loading is scheduled in the next two weeks at one of the Iranian ports, shipping industry sources tracking the developments told S&P Global Platts.

Mitsui officials could not be immediately reached for comment but shipping sources tracking the deal said that there is also an option to take the cargo to other parts of North Asia.

The deal is important because if the option to discharge the cargo at one of the Japanese ports is exercised, it will be one of the first LR1 tankers to deliver Iranian naphtha into the country after the sanctions were

eased on the Persian Gulf nation last year.

While a few cargoes of Iranian naphtha have been delivered into Japan since October last year, they were mostly on Medium Range tankers, which typically carry cargoes of less than 40,000 mt each, sources said.

LR1s can deliver up to 55,000 mt of cargoes each at Japanese ports.

Sources said the Gulf Cobalt was placed on subjects by Mitsui at Worldscale 120, which was at a slight premium to the freight rates on the Persian Gulf-to-Japan routes. Platts Monday assessed this benchmark LR1 route at w117.5.

"Freight rates for Iran loadings do command a premium but it can vary [widely] depending on the number of suitable ships available at a given point of time," said a Singapore-based executive with a clean oil tankers company.

As the main US financial sanctions against

Iran are still in place, shipping companies with direct links to the US financial and stock markets avoid calling at Iranian ports.

Other companies such as those based in Europe, which do load or discharge cargoes at these ports, charge a premium.

As Iran's Persian Gulf Star or PGS refinery ramps up operations at its first 120,000 b/d train, the country's naphtha exports to North Asian countries such as Japan are expected to increase.

Earlier, Showa Denko purchased two MR-size cargoes of Iranian naphtha, one each from Marubeni and Mitsubishi, for use in its plant in Oita, Japan, for delivery in December and February respectively, according to sources with direct knowledge of the matter.

However, sometimes such imports do not get recorded as naphtha in official government data due to technical specifications.

"They may get recorded as either naph-

tha or condensate," said a Tokyo-based chartering executive with a global commodities trading company.

For around a year now, Iran has already been exporting crude and clean condensate. With these latest naphtha sales, its trading portfolio is growing.

The sales also indicate that getting international insurance cover for the cargoes is no longer as great an issue as it was in the past.

The Middle East and Red Sea region is the largest supplier of naphtha to North Asia, although significant volumes also come in from Europe and smaller quantities from India and the US.

Iranian naphtha will provide stiff competition to sales from other refineries in the Middle East and Red Sea. But the grade and quality will also be crucial if Iran wants to step up the sales, sources said.

(Source: Platts)

## Iran's oil output to hit 4.15m bpd in 2022, IEA forecasts

International Energy Agency (IEA) has predicted that Iran will expand its oil production capacity by 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) to reach 4.15 million bpd in 2022.

IEA also said the forecast hinges on whether the accord to lift international sanctions remains in place. Having been released last year from trade restrictions, the country has introduced a new contract model to attract foreign investors.

OPEC will increase its production capacity by about twice as much as previously thought, led by expansion in Iran and Iraq, according to IEA.

The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries will raise output capacity by 1.95 million barrels a day from 2016 to 2022, with a third of the gains concentrated in Iraq, the IEA said. Last year the Paris-based agency predicted growth of 800,000 barrels a day from 2015 to 2021.

While OPEC is leading an effort by global producers to clear a glut this year by reducing output, the organization is getting ready to meet rising demand in coming years. Iraq is rehabilitating its oil industry after years of conflict, while neighboring Iran is seeking foreign investors after the lifting of nuclear-related sanctions.

"The group is building capacity even as it reduces in 2017, in anticipation of higher demand," said the IEA, which advises most of the world's biggest economies on energy policy. "Capacity growth is concentrated in the low-cost Middle East, with Iraq leading the gains."

Iraq will retain its position as OPEC's second-biggest producer, adding 700,000 barrels a day to reach 5.4 million a day in 2022, according to the IEA, which last year saw the nation hitting 4.6 million by 2021. Most of the increase will come from oil fields in the south of the country, such as the Majnoon project operated by Royal Dutch Shell Plc.

With supplies from outside OPEC also projected to rebound sharply next year, it's unclear whether there'll be enough demand to immediately absorb extra crude from OPEC.

Demand for the group's output will be at 33 million barrels a day in 2018, roughly in line with the amount it pumped before cutting production. Even if Saudi Arabia, OPEC's biggest member, continues its policy of holding back some output for emergency use, the IEA's data point to considerable excess capacity next year.

Whether or not the group chooses to prolong the current agreement on output limits, "it is difficult to imagine a return to the unbridled production that sent prices crashing to their lowest in more than a decade," the agency said.

(Source: Bloomberg)



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## What EU's Mogherini, Tillerson agreed on

By Uri Savir

The European Union finds itself at a crossroads, as important changes are taking place both inside and outside of Europe. And the outcome of this crossroads will undoubtedly affect many regions in the world, including the Middle East.

With the exit of the United Kingdom from the EU, a U.S. president openly critical of the EU and the possibility of an anti-EU president at the French Elysee Palace, EU leaders will be forced to reassess their policies. EU's foreign and security policies stand first in this reassessment line, as Brussels must redefine its relationship with the new U.S. administration. With the United States aspiring to a weaker EU and not exactly lamenting the Brexit, EU leadership is in the process of developing policies of greater independence.

### ■ The agenda for future

Federica Mogherini, the EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, had her first meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Feb. 9. A senior official close to Mogherini told Al-Monitor that the meeting



focused on mapping out the agenda for future discussions between the United States and the EU. The aim of the EU is to create a balance between compromises with U.S. President Donald Trump's administration and a more independent foreign policy, as defined by German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The issues on the U.S.-EU agenda include the situation in Ukraine, the Iran deal, the fight against the Islamic State (ISIL) and other fundamentalist terror, the situation in Syria and an Israeli-Palestinian two-state solution.

Mogherini has said publicly that she is dismayed by the unorganized decision-making process of the White House, but she will keep an ongoing rapport with the U.S. secretary of state.

On the Israeli-Palestinian issue, it is clear that a two-state solution and the curbing of Israeli settlement policies is of greater urgency to the EU than it is to the United States. The senior EU official said that on this issue specifically, the EU will express an independent foreign policy, steered by the common interests and views of its member states. With the last Middle East Quartet report on obstacles to the two-state solution in July 2016 and the anti-settlement United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334, freezing settlement expansion is a high priority for the EU. According to the official, Brussels will attempt to convince the United States to go ahead with a diplomatic move on a two-state solution while accepting Trump's preference for a regional approach.

### ■ Madrid conference

In this vein, the EU is revisiting the last joint European-American approach to a policy platform for Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution created by former U.S. President George H.W. Bush: the Madrid conference of 1991, which promoted parallel bilateral and multilateral negotiation tracks. In a current configuration, a Madrid II conference could again take the role of a plenary launching of bilateral and multilateral negotiations.

The EU official describes the parameters of a possible Madrid II conference: The invitation to such a conference would be based on existing agreements between the parties and relevant Security Council resolutions, with the inviting part being the Quartet (EU, UN, United States and Russia). The date and location would be agreed upon with the United States and Russia. The representation level would be of foreign ministers, except for Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which should be represented by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Mahmoud Abbas, respectively.

The conference will launch direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, to be held both in the region and in the United States. The sides will negotiate all permanent status issues: borders, security, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements and end of conflict. During the negotiations, both sides must refrain from any unilateral acts (including settlement expansion for Israel, turning to UN agencies for Palestinians) that could predetermine permanent status. The time frame of these negotiations will be one year; another plenary session to report the progress would convene in 2018.

On the multilateral track, the basis will be the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, with a gradual beginning of normalization between Israel and the Arab states. The multilateral talks would take place in Brussels and refer to the following topics: economic cooperation, environment, regional security and anti-terror, and water. The representation level of these talks would mostly be of experts and will progress in parallel to the bilateral track, with the aim of consolidating agreement points. These, in turn, would be reported and discussed at the 2018 plenary session.

The senior EU official emphasized that, given the danger of a total diplomatic stalemate, which would lead to a possible outbreak of violence, it is essential to agree with the U.S. administration on a peace negotiation platform, while securing a leading role for the United States.

A senior Israeli Foreign Ministry official who spoke to Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity rejected any such initiative that would create an international framework for negotiations. Israel, according to him, will agree only to bilateral and unconditional negotiations with the Palestinians.

Despite Israel's rejection, Netanyahu's government could be in for a surprise. The EU's talks with the United States and with Russia could bear fruits, and such a framework may come about as a result of these talks about the region.

(Source: Al Monitor)

# Don't be fooled, Trump's new Muslim ban is still illegal

By Farhana Khera & Johnathan Smith

President Trump's executive order barring immigrants from seven Muslim-majority countries experienced nearly universal defeat in the federal courts. On Monday, he issued a revised version of that order, but it still suffers from a fundamental, and fatal, flaw: It constitutes unlawful religious discrimination.

On the surface, this revised order looks different from the first version. It explicitly exempts Iraq from the travel ban, thus reducing the number of affected countries to six, as well as lawful permanent residents (that is, green card holders) and people who have visas. It no longer categorically bars Syrian refugees or includes a religious test to determine which refugees may enter the country. And in a marked departure from the earlier order, it goes into effect in 10 days, so that the chaos that unfolded in airports around the world when the January order became effective presumably won't happen again.

These changes are, no doubt, intended to address the due process concerns that led the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit to affirm a lower-court ruling that put a hold on part of the original order. But while these changes are important, they do not fix the core problem with the executive order: The administration is waging an all-out assault on Islam and Muslims.

That's because anti-Muslim bias and bigotry that characterized the original travel ban remain in this revised version. The order is still limited to only Muslim-majority countries: namely, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen. Residents of those countries — and only those countries — will be severely restricted in their ability to travel into the United States for 90 days. Left off are the predominately Christian countries that the State Department lists as "Terrorist Safe Havens" like Colombia, the Philippines and Venezuela.

### ■ The revised order

The revised order also continues to traffic in bigoted and largely false perceptions: By requiring the government to compile occurrences of "honor killings" by immigrants, it gives official recognition to an inflammatory and misleading trope of Islam that is perpetuated by anti-Muslim hate groups.

President Trump has not been subtle in his intentions. We need look no further than his own words to figure them out. On the campaign trail, he constantly conflated the vast majority of peaceful Muslims with the small handful of violent Muslims.



**This dark and wholly unsubstantiated worldview about Islam and the American Muslim community is shared by several of the president's senior aides and advisers.**

After the Paris attacks in November 2015, Trump said that "we're going to have no choice" but to close some mosques in the United States, where "some really bad things are happening." The next month, after the attack in San Bernardino, Calif, he called for a "complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" and released a factually dubious statement that "large segments of the Muslim population" have "great hatred towards Americans" and favor Shariah law. Astonishingly, that statement is still posted on Trump's website.

In December, when a reporter asked whether he had reconsidered his stance on Islam, Trump replied: "You know my plans. All along, I've been proven to be right." This dark and wholly unsubstantiated worldview about Islam and the American Muslim community is shared by several of the president's senior aides and advisers.

Let's be clear: This revised order is a Muslim ban. All the countries he has excluded are more than 90 percent Muslim. Three of them — Iran, Somalia and Yemen — are more than 99 percent Muslim. Even though Trump tailored his order to survive

legal challenges, as his former adviser Rudolph Giuliani conceded on national television, his objective is clearly to exclude Muslims.

The Trump administration argues that the ban protects the country. Moreover, the Department of Homeland Security concluded last month that "country of citizenship is unlikely to be a reliable indicator of potential terrorist activity." Former national security officials from Democratic and Republican administrations have made clear that the January order does not make our country safer. Instead, the bigotry that Trump spews at news conferences and on Twitter have been a boon for terrorists' recruitment efforts.

### ■ The twisted worldview

The twisted worldview does not match reality. Muslims have been part of America for centuries, since the first slave ships arrived in the 17th century. Today, Muslims represent 1 percent of the United States population: They are our teachers, doctors, neighbors and co-workers.

American Muslims will suffer a particular harm from this executive order: Those

who have ties to the banned countries won't be able to see their family members and close friends. American Muslims will also be deprived of the instruction from the leading Islamic scholars who are from those countries.

Thousands of Muslim men and women serve in the armed forces; many have given their lives defending our nation and our ideals. They contribute to the diversity that has always been our nation's pride and strength. President George W. Bush paid tribute to this in the weeks after the Sept. 11 attacks when he said, "There are thousands of Muslims who proudly call themselves Americans, and they know what I know — that the Muslim faith is based upon peace and love and compassion."

President Trump and his top advisers would be wise to listen to President Bush. The Muslim ban and President Trump's relentless attacks on Islam are not just an assault on thousands of patriotic, innocent Americans — they violate our Constitution and our most fundamental American values and beliefs.

(Source: The NYT)

## Refugee crisis prevents honest dealings with Turkey

By Markus Feldenkirchen

The fear that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan might cancel the refugee deal and allow masses of migrants to make their way to Germany has shackled Angela Merkel's policies toward the autocratic leader. It's time to come up with a European solution that decreases our dependence on Turkey.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan wants to hold a major speech in Germany soon. He hopes to use it as a chance to promote proposed changes to the Turkish constitution that would be the decisive step in transforming his country from an autocratic, despotic state to a dictatorship. It's the height of chutzpah: The Turkish president wants to take advantage of our freedom of assembly and expression to promote the elimination of precisely those civil liberties in Turkey. Must we accept this?

There are very strong voices out there who would like to ban the appearances by Erdogan and the cabinet ministers who he controls. A number of cities have already formally canceled planned events, citing security concerns. Those decisions prompted Erdogan over the weekend to compare the bans to methods used by the Nazis, a comparison that is as outrageous as it is dumb, further escalating tensions between politicians in Germany and Turkey.

But those who seek to prevent speeches because they don't like the content are simply falling prey to the same reflexes as the despot himself. In mid-February, the Turkish judiciary under Erdogan's control detained Deniz Yücel, the Turkey correspondent for the German daily Die Welt and a dual German-Turkish citizen, because the regime doesn't like what he writes in his articles. More than 150 Turkish journalists had already been silenced earlier by Erdogan's repressive apparatus.

German politicians should also seek to avoid empty vengeance. The travel bans or economic sanctions that some are calling for would be acts of defiance that might satisfy a need for revenge, but they wouldn't help anyone. As difficult as it might be, ongoing dialog with Erdogan and his regime remains vital, not least so as to help regime victims like Yücel. But this dialog must be



**Given that a new wave of refugees could destroy Merkel's chances of re-election this fall, the chancellor has been conspicuously submissive in her approach to Erdogan.**

conducted with confidence, with independence and in harmony with our own convictions.

### ■ Driven by fear

Unfortunately, Chancellor Angela Merkel and her government are anything but confident when it comes to dealing with Erdogan. Instead they are sadly inhibited. That is primarily because Merkel's Turkey policies are mostly driven by fear. She is paralyzed by concerns that Erdogan could put an end to the refugee deal -- a threat he has repeatedly issued. The deal's goal isn't all that complex: Erdogan, whose country is home to just under 3 million refugees, has agreed to prevent a further wave of migration to Germany and is being paid a handsome sum of money for his services as doorman. Not just with billions of European euros for the care of refugees in Turkey. But also with ignoble silence about his trampling of democracy and human rights.

### ■ A new wave of refugees

Given that a new wave of refugees could destroy Merkel's chances of re-election this fall, the chancellor has been conspicuously submissive in her approach to Erdogan. When German comedian Jan Böhmmermann last year recited a viciously critical poem about Erdogan on air, Merkel quickly denounced it for being "intentionally abusive." Anticipatory subservience rarely comes across as dignified. The fact that Erdogan's army destroys Kurdish villages and is putting not only journalists, but also countless civil servants in jail, by contrast, is seldom if ever commented on by the German government. Instead Merkel paid her compliments to the president on two occasions ahead of important votes in Turkey and, consciously or not, became an accomplice by doing so.

Merkel's government has also acted strangely in the case of journalist Yücel. It was not a coincidence that the Turkish ambassador in Berlin was requested to attend a meeting to discuss the issue in Berlin. When governments want to send a clear message of disapproval, they issue a summons to ambassadors, as the Turkish government did to the German ambassador on Thursday when the city of Gaggenau canceled a propaganda event with the Turkish justice minister. But even that goes too far for this German government, despite one of its citizens being deprived of his freedom for merely doing his job -- that of helping to protect freedom.

To exude confidence and once again act in accordance with German values, Merkel must overcome her fear for once and for all. That doesn't mean ending the refugee deal herself. But she should cease allowing her actions to be determined by the fear of Erdogan doing so. It's time to develop alternatives -- by promoting a European refugee policy that does not outsource the protection of EU borders to Turkey but instead sees the EU taking on that responsibility. Key countries involved in the refugee crisis, including Italy and Greece, finally need to be provided with support in the form of money, experts and infrastructure that they need in order to register migrants at the EU's external border, review their cases and make a decision as to whether they should be deported or not. It's high time for Europe to free itself from Erdogan's shackles.

(Source: Spiegel)



## INTERVIEW

By Fadi Boudaya

For decades, Syria has been unique for its ingenious diplomacy, shrewdness in expressing its regional and international stances, which placed this Middle Eastern country in the limelight.

Since the terrorist war against Syria has a diplomatic aspect of its kind, the presence of the Syrian Foreign Ministry was extraordinary exceptional to reflect the national principles and a diplomatic school worthy to be engraved in history.

The following is an interview of Deputy Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad.

■ **It has become obvious to everyone that the terrorist war currently fought on Syrian soil is the product of a vicious conspiracy and a pre-planned scheme to destroy Syria. In terms of international diplomacy, did anything portend this scheme? And how is it related to the defeat of the Zionist entity in 2006 and the failure to implement the 'new Middle East' proposed by Condoleezza Rice?**

It goes beyond doubt that the war on Syria has been pre-planned; we sensed it through our diplomatic meetings inside and outside Syria. During my time at the United Nations, I still remember the frequently-raised question: "why did the Middle East remain unchanged after the huge changes i.e. the collapse of the former Soviet Union?"

The following are the main reasons behind all international crises:

a) The American domination of the world: after breaking up the Soviet Union, the United States succeeded in sowing enmity between Eastern Europe states and Russia. They even managed to change the socialist character of Ukraine to some degree.

b) The ultimate objectives of these changes were in favor of the Zionist entity, since the former Socialist Camp supported the liberation movements worldwide. By breaking up the Socialist Camp, they removed the main obstacle that hindered their project.

c) For Western colonial countries, it was extremely important to destroy the Arab countries which still embrace the ideology of resistance, similar to that of the former Socialist Camp; namely Syria. At the UN, they repeatedly told as that "change is coming to you"

If they wanted to implement democracy and fight backwardness as they claimed, they would have targeted states that lack democracy such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

■ **With the outbreak of that war on Syria, the Arab League has adopted a negative stance toward the Syrian government by condemning its actions, suspending its membership and even giving away its seat to the opposition. What fueled this attitude? And how independent and unbiased the AL is in terms of its decisions?**

It seems that the so-called "Arab Spring" has misled the way; instead of targeting the oppressive and authoritative Saudi regime, they wanted to destroy Syria because it poses a real threat to the Zionist entity through supporting the Resistance and the Palestinian right of return, maintaining its own independent decisions, and refusing to be part



**The Arab League has been manipulated by the United States, which was the mastermind of all decisions on Syria.**

of the Western alliance. That is why they set up training camps in the neighboring countries in order to destroy Syria.

As for the Arab League, we must first know what the member Arab countries are.

In Tunisia, Muslim Brotherhood seized power after overthrowing the regime; Libya has been invaded by a US-Western-Persian Gulf alliance. In Egypt, they toppled Mubarak and handed over the power to the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohamed Morsi. In sum, they wanted extremist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood to take over power in those countries.

The Arab League has been manipulated by the United States, which was the mastermind of all decisions on Syria. We've seen decisions on Syria written in English even before being translated into Arabic; so the AL has no power whatsoever regarding the decisions it issues.

■ **Would you agree to return to the AL as victory looms?**

In fact, it's up to the Syrian people to decide on this matter. Personally, I think we won't be honored to reactivate our membership in the AL. Many other Arab states think the same way since the AL has turned into a medium to pass over West-made projects that contradict with

the will of Arab people.

■ **The majority of foreign and Arab countries withdrew their ambassadors from Syria during the war. Was it an action of support for the so-called Syrian opposition or a fear from growing security instability? Will Syria accept the return of ambassadors after it proved victorious in the war?**

Diplomatic relations are a 'communication' tool. Most embassies which withdrew their ambassadors said it was due to security considerations. However, up to 40 embassies still operate normally in Syria. The Czech Republic, through its ambassador in Syria, represents the United States and Britain; they regularly visit Syria and tour in some areas.

But this does not mean there is no problem in this respect. The war on Syria is inclusive and involves all forms of extortion and pressure. Our embassies are still operating in many countries, particularly in France, so are our missions to the United Nations, and this clearly shows the 'communication' is maintained.

■ **For years, you've been vainly negotiating a 'political settlement'. What were the obstacles towards achieving this settlement? And exactly what did the other party want in this regard? What is the role – if any – of Russia and Iran in these negotiations? Is Syria now stronger than before because of the military achievements?**

As clearly stated before, we be-

**If they wanted to implement democracy and fight backwardness as they claimed, they would have targeted states that lack democracy such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar.**



**The ultimate objectives of these changes were in favor of the Zionist entity, since the former Socialist Camp supported the liberation movements worldwide.**



**Erdogan must change his policy; stop supporting terrorists if he really wants to fight terrorism.**

lieve in the political solution and have been working on two paths simultaneously:

1) fighting terrorism militarily with support from our Russian and Iranian allies,

2) engaging in a political process through participating in peace talks starting Geneva 2 onwards.

However, the real obstacle has always been the western countries which continuously evaded working out a solution to eradicate terrorism and kept on investing in the Syrian crisis, thus spreading terror and fear.

They wanted to achieve in politics what they have failed to gain on the ground, even though they have sent more than 360,000 terrorists into Syria as per UN reports.

■ **What are the international and regional political variables after the victory of the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and its allies in Aleppo? Why does Russia seek to implement a comprehensive ceasefire agreement?**

The administration of the Russian president Vladimir Putin has brought about new international facts where the military action is no longer restricted to United States. Therefore, Russia and Iran coordinate with the Syrian leadership on a daily basis.

Our victory in Aleppo has turned the tables, which necessitates a consultation process about the next step, so it would be better to work out the other issues peacefully.

Both Syrian and Turkish people can benefit from a secure environment once Turkey is convinced to cease arming and supporting the terrorist groups, and seal the borders.

■ **How does Syria approach the assassination of the Russian ambassador in turkey?**

It is definitely a murder. In principle, I support Russia's public attitude. However, the policy pursued by Erdogan on Syria allowed such a crime. The slain Russian Ambassador was attempting to persuade Turkey to abandon its hostile policy toward Syria. In fact, we had indirect communication with him in turkey in various fields.

Erdogan must change his policy; stop supporting terrorists if he really wants to fight terrorism.

■ **The foreign ministers of Russia, Iran and Turkey held a meeting in Moscow recently. What does Turkey needs to do after six years of conspiring against Syria? Is Damascus in favor of restoring relations with Ankara if it eventually leads to end the war under Russian-Iranian patronage?**

The Turkish role in the region has dramatically waned; Erdogan tries to manipulate the Americans (through Turkey's NATO membership), the Russians, the Qataris one and also Western Europe.

Eventually, Erdogan should close the Turkish borders to prove himself serious in fighting terrorism. However, if he wants to enter Syrian territories, he will be dealt with properly.

■ **How do you read the US abstention from voting for ending the Israeli settlements?**

It is political maneuver; the Obama administration was going to be replaced very soon so it wanted to give a light of hope for the nations in the region; it abstained from voting but did not vetoed it.

I do not trust the attitudes of the United States and we should not applaud this event because it [United States] will never be the enemy of Israel.

■ **What is your message to the conspirators against Syria?**

I want to say to those who funded and supported terrorism in order to topple President Assad: you lost the bet; Assad still on power while you were overthrown. What comes around goes around; terrorism will definitely backfire while Syria and its allies will triumph.

We also hold the United States accountable for the spread of terrorism, deaths and wounded. Its misleading media has been exposed, especially after the election of President Donald Trump. Some media outlets falsely declared Hillary Clinton the new president-elect, but after finding out the truth they tried to regain the public trust.

## No such thing as humanitarian terrorists, analyst says of white helmets

Muslim Press has conducted an interview with Tim Anderson, the author of The Dirty War on Syria, to discuss the White Helmets and the war propaganda against the Syrian government.

The White Helmets "take selfies of themselves 'saving' children, only to fool gullible people. But there is no such thing as a humanitarian terrorist," Tim Anderson says.

Below, the full transcript of the interview has been presented.

■ **You have referred to the White Helmets as a "fake humanitarian group". Would you clarify what you mean by that?**

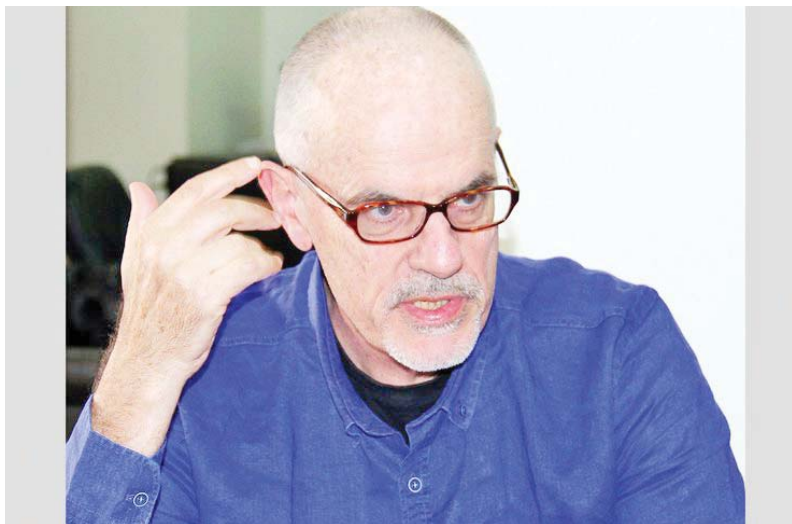
They and their sponsors pretend they have humanitarian motives, but they are the same people who murder civilians for their beliefs, or because they support the Syrian Government. They take selfies of

themselves 'saving' children, only to fool gullible people. But there is no such thing as a humanitarian terrorist.

■ **How do you assess their role in the war propaganda against the Syrian government?**

Along with the lies about the Syrian Government bombing its own hospitals and schools, the role of the US-UK sponsored White Helmets has been quite important. It is not possible for the imperial powers to run a long term war of aggression without fooling their own people that this is done for some higher purpose.

Naked aggression irritates most people and creates a reaction. If there were no fake humanitarian pretext, it would be hard to sustain the blatant violation of international law and human rights, explicit in the



arming of terrorist groups against a sovereign country.

■ **What's your take on The**

**White Helmets documentary that won an Oscar?**

It is a culmination of PR mar-

keting in the context of US culture, which says everything has a price. It is a master stroke of marketing, but it creates its own reaction – now more people will look more critically at this Frankenstein's monster I believe al Qaeda's Oscar is more a triumph of marketing than one of acting or documentary making.

■ **What points does this documentary insinuate?**

The overt message is: keep supporting the lovely moderate head-choppers (and their child welfare branch) against the evil Syrian government.

The underlying message is: imperial cynicism has no real boundaries; vicious terrorism can be sold to the gullible masses as saintly benevolence.

■ **Some might say the Oscars awarded to The White Helmets**

**and The Salesman were purely because of political reasons. What's your take on this?**

Yes I agree. But Hollywood has always had a role in promoting war and the delusion of US 'exceptionalism'. Imperial politics and soul-less culture go hand in hand.

*Tim Anderson has degrees in economics and international politics, and a doctorate on the political economy of economic liberalization in Australia. His current research interests relate to (i) Development strategy and rights in development, (ii) Melanesian land and livelihoods, and (iii) Economic Integration in Latin America. He is a Senior Lecturer in Political Economy at the University of Sydney. He has studied the Syrian conflict since 2011.*

(Source: Muslim Press)



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# Yes, you do need carbohydrates every day

## Here's how many carbs you need

By John Lloyd

According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, about half your daily calories should come from carbohydrates. So that's quite a lot. But, there's more to it than that: how many carbs you need -- some sources of carbohydrates are better for you than others.

First, what are carbs? Carbohydrates are mostly found in plants where they provide energy and structure. Sugars, starches, and fibers fall into this category.

And although animals need and consume carbohydrates, you won't find any carbs in meat, fish or poultry. But you will find carbs in milk and dairy products because they contain lactose, which is also a type of sugar.

### How many carbs do you need?

Your carbohydrate need can be based on your caloric intake. If you know how many calories you need each day, you can figure out how many grams of carbs you need:

- Start by determining your daily calorie need and divide that number in half. That's how many calories should come from carbohydrates.
- Each gram of carbohydrate has four calories. Divide the number you got from the first step by four.
- The final number is equal to the amount of carbohydrates in grams you need each day.

For example, a person who eats approximately 2,000 calories per day should take in about 250 grams of carbohydrates (2,000 divided by 2 = 1,000 and 1,000 divided by 4 = 250).

### Tracking your carbohydrate intake

- Find the carbohydrate grams on the Nutrition Facts labels on packaged foods. You'll find calorie information there too, but be sure to double-check the serving size and number of servings per package.
- Use the USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference to calculate carbohydrate amounts for fresh foods. It's a large database that's regularly updated.
- Keep a food diary to track your information. You can print out your own pages and keep them in a notebook.



book.

- Join Calorie Count to track calories, carbohydrates, and all the other nutrients, plus you'll find suggestions for a healthy diet. They also have a great smartphone app so you can track your calories when you're away from your computer.

### Which carbs are best

Carbohydrates include complex carbohydrates, like starches, and simple sugars such as white sugar, high fructose corn syrup, and honey. As far as plant-based carbs go, choose 100-percent whole grains, and fruits and vegetables for most of your carbohydrates. The standard tip is to 'make half of your grains whole.' That way, as long as you eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables, you'll add a substantial amount of fiber to your diet.

Of course, you don't want to consume carbs only. You need protein and fat, just not as much. Balance your carbohydrate choices with protein sources such as lean meat, poultry, eggs, or fish, and some healthy fat such as olive oil, avocado or nuts, and seeds. Protein combined with high-fiber carbs helps keep you feel full between meals.

### Watch out for sugars

The worst carbohydrates sources may be sugary foods, including things made with sugar, honey, corn syrup or maple syrup. These foods usually have too many calories, but offer little or no nutritional value.

Avoid sugary snacks, pastries, sugar-sweetened soft drinks, candy, and cookies. Watch out for heavily processed foods that often contain added sugars, even those that don't taste sweet. (Source: verywell.com)

## How much weight can you lose by walking 30 minutes a day?

By Maria Parepalo

You can exercise for hours, but if your daily calorie intake from food is more than your body's daily calorie need, you will not lose weight. To lose weight, you need to take in fewer calories than your body burns. By doing this, your body will start burning its stored energy, or fat, to make up the energy difference. Exercising will increase your body's daily energy demand, but to lose weight, you still need to take in fewer calories.

### Evaluate your basal metabolic rate

To evaluate how much weight you can lose by walking, you first need to evaluate how much energy your body requires on a daily basis. Calculate your body's metabolic rate by using the variables of your weight, height, age and sex: For women, calculate  $(4.35 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (4.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (4.7 \times \text{your age}) + 655$  to find your BMR. For men, calculate  $(6.23 \times \text{weight in pounds}) + (12.7 \times \text{height in inches}) - (6.8 \times \text{age in years}) + 66$ . The final number of the equation equals the minimum number of calories your body needs every day to remain at your present weight.



### Evaluate how many calories you can eat

Multiply your basal metabolic rate by an activity factor. If your general activity level is low, for example if you have a desk job and a very sedentary lifestyle, use 1.2. If you are moderately active, for example you walk on your job throughout the day and exercise three to five days a week, use factor 1.55. If you are highly active every day and exercise vigorously, use 1.9. The number you will get is your daily energy need. This is how much you can eat every day without gaining or losing weight.

### How much will walking burn

Next you need to evaluate how many calories a 30-minute walk will burn. The amount of energy you burn depends on the intensity and duration of the exercise and also your body weight. If you walk at a slow pace, for example 2.5 mph, you will obviously burn less energy than if you walk at a moderate pace of 3.5 mph. In addition, the more you weigh the more calories you burn. For example, a 120 pound person will burn around 80 calories walking on level ground at 2.5 mph for 30 minutes. However, walking 3.5 mph, uphill, will burn 180 calories. A 150 pound person doing the same exercises will burn 100 and 200 calories, respectively.

### How much weight can you lose

On a weekly basis, if you eat 3,500 calories less than your energy requirement, you will lose 1 pound per week. If your calorie intake and expenditure are in balance, allowing you to maintain a steady weight, and you begin walking 30 minutes a day without increasing your calorie intake, you can calculate how much weight you can lose. If you weigh 150 pounds and walk uphill for 30 minutes at 3.5 mph every day for one week, you will burn 200 calories. Multiply 200 calories by 7 days, for a total of 1,400 calories. In four weeks you will have burned 5,600 calories. This equals a weight loss of 1.6 pounds in four weeks.

(Source: livestrong.com)

## Bird flu found in Tennessee, near top U.S. chicken states

By Megan Durisin

A deadly form of bird flu has been confirmed in a southern Tennessee chicken flock, marking the first U.S. case at a commercial poultry farm this year.

Highly-pathogenic H7 avian influenza was detected in a chicken breeder flock of 73,500 birds in Lincoln County, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service said in a statement Sunday. The site has been placed under quarantine and the flock will be destroyed to prevent the disease's spread. No birds will enter the food system, the agency said.

tem, the agency said.

Tennessee borders several of the nation's largest chicken-meat producing states, including Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas and North Carolina. The virus is believed to spread partly by migratory wild birds, posing the risk that it may reach other farms.

"Animal health is our top priority," Charles Hatcher, Tennessee's state veterinarian, said in a statement. "With this HPAI detection, we are moving quickly and aggressively to prevent the virus from spreading."

South Korea banned poultry imports from the U.S. after the discovery, the agriculture ministry said Monday. The country has faced surging egg prices and has culled almost 34 million birds amid a domestic outbreak. While poultry producers across Europe and Asia have been grappling with bird flu in recent months, Brazil, the world's largest chicken exporter, has so far remained untouched.

First ever

The HPAI finding is the first ever in Tennessee, according to the state's agriculture department. The highly pathogenic form of the virus can be fatal to domesticated chickens and turkeys. About 30 nearby poultry farms are also under quarantine, while none have reported an increase in

bird deaths, the department said.

The U.S. southeast was largely spared bird flu during the last major U.S. outbreak, which was centered around turkey and egg farms in the Midwest and led to the death of more than 48 million birds through mid-2015 from either infection or culling. HPAI was found once last year at an Indiana turkey farm. Previous outbreaks have led some importing nations to restrict shipments of poultry from affected areas.

The U.S. is expected to produce a record 41.081 billion pounds of chicken this year, the USDA forecasts.

(Source: Bloomberg)

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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** Next Google Pixel phones may not feature 3.5mm headset jacks. New rumor claims that this year’s Pixels will ditch a feature that most users love: the standard 3.5 mm headset jack.

**2** Samsung Internet browser is now listed on Google Play Store, and it supports Nexus phones. It’s the first step taken by the South Korean company in making the browser available to smartphones launched by other brands.

**3** Adobe has just announced a new version of its Light-room Mobile application is now available to all compatible Android and iOS devices. There’s just one new feature called raw HDR capture mode included in the latest update.

**4** Google Play turns 5. One this day five years ago, Google opened its digital store that would become one of the largest places to shop for mobile games, apps, movies, TV shows, music, and books. Since March 2012, Google Play Store has grown to more than 1 billion active users in 190 countries.

**5** Huawei executive: No more than 4GB of RAM is needed on a smartphone. Huawei executive Lao Shi recently noted on his weibo page that 4GB of RAM is enough on a phone for it to scroll smoothly. Mr. Lao also added that many Huawei phones work better with 4GB of RAM than they might with 6GB of the stuff inside.

**6** LG G6 pre-orders hit 40,000 in Korea after four days. LG G6 has rung up 40,000 pre-orders in South Korea during the four days that consumers in the country have been able to reserve the phone. That is a good sign for LG, although the enthusiasm does need to be tempered because the Galaxy S8 and Galaxy S8+ won’t come into the picture until they are unveiled on March 29th.

**7** All new iPhones could have OLED screens by 2019. The report comes from Korean publication The Bell, which details the plans of Interflex, a new Apple supplier, to build a new flexible printed circuit boards (FPCBs) production facility which will cost \$866 million.

**8** Yahoo launches new text-based chatbot that can help you organize the family schedule. This new product is called Captain, and it essentially is a text-based chatbot assistant that can help you streamline the family schedule and tasks.

**9** Android Pay is now live in Belgium, making it the tenth country to adopt Google’s mobile contactless payment system. Belgians can use their NFC-enabled Android phones to make in-store payments at over 85,000 retail locations throughout the country, including places like H&M, Media Markt, McDonalds, Carrefour, and others. Also Samsung will launch its mobile payments service Samsung Pay in Sweden this year, according to fresh reports out of the Scandinavian country.

**10** Nintendo Switch was Nintendo’s best launch ever, in the Americas. The hybrid console’s launch title The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild was the best-selling launch title of any Nintendo console. Next in line for that title is now Super Mario 64 which launched with the Nintendo 64.

## You can control this robot with your thoughts just by watching it work

Researchers have developed a robot that takes its cues from human brain waves, changing its actions almost instantaneously if a person observes it making a mistake.

Using new algorithms that monitor brain activity for specific signals, the technology could pave the way for a future where humans can control robots almost effortlessly by simply observing their actions.

“Imagine being able to instantaneously tell a robot to do a certain action, without needing to type a command, push a button, or even say a word,” says the director of MIT’s Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (CSAIL), Daniela Rus.

**A streamlined approach**  
A “streamlined approach like that would improve our abilities to supervise factory robots, driverless cars, and other technologies we haven’t even invented yet.”

While virtual assistants like Apple’s Siri and Amazon’s Alexa have liberated us from buttons and levers and made hands-free technology control a reality, the truth is that these systems are still fairly limited.

Not only is their voice recognition patchy at times, but the software behind them is designed to respond only to particular words and phrases, which means users need to learn to speak in certain ways to get the systems’ attention.

Existing brain-control interfaces that let people direct robots with their thoughts have transcended some of the issues holding back voice recognition, but users are still obliged to train themselves to think in a very particular way to get machines to do what they want. That kind of training can take a long time to master, and even when you’ve got the hang of it, forcing yourself to adapt your thinking to a number of specific control-based thoughts can be mentally exhausting.

To get around this, the CSAIL researchers designed a system based on what’s called “error-related potentials” (ErrPs) – brain signals that are generated whenever we notice a mistake, and which are easily produced without requiring any serious concentration.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

# Google caught spreading fake news over the weekend

By Katie Collins

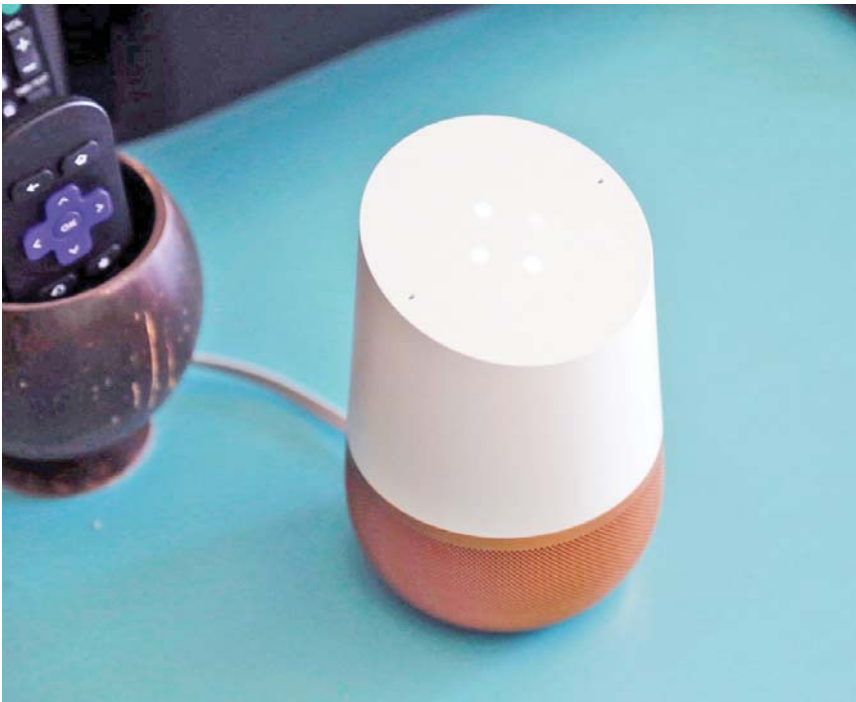
Don’t believe everything you read on the internet. Google acknowledged reports that it inadvertently allowed false information to spread over the weekend. “Unfortunately, there are instances when we feature a site with inappropriate or misleading content,” a Google spokeswoman said in a statement.

On Sunday, chatter about the tech giant spreading inaccurate information and conspiracy theories through a search function called “Featured Snippets” bubbled up on social media, highlighting reports from TheOutline.com and Searchengineland.

You may have seen the Featured Snippets displayed in a box at the top of Google search results or heard them parroted by your Google Home device when you input a query.

Over the weekend, Featured Snippets was giving a rather funky answer to the question: “Is Obama planning a coup?” The Obama is, of course, former President Barack Obama.

“According to details exposed in Western Centre for Journalism’s exclusive video, not only could Obama be in bed with the communist Chinese, but Obama may in fact be planning a communist coup d’état at the end of his term in 2016,” Google would reply.



The spread of false information -- aka fake news -- has been attracting attention recently though it’s a problem as old as the internet itself. Still, it was the 2016 US presidential campaign that transformed “fake news” into a hot-button topic, with claims that fake news reports influenced the outcome of the election. Since the

election, President Donald Trump has used the phrase in attacks on mainstream media.

At the center of the storm last year was Facebook, a network where people can easily share fake news. The company has since promised to crack down on the problem.

But it’s not just Facebook. In this specific instance, Google fixed the problem as soon as it was alerted to the result. But people are actively trying to find other examples. If you do happen across what you believe to be a Featured Snippet containing false information, you can click on the feedback link directly underneath to flag the problem to Google.

Spreading false information is not Google’s intention. The company has been trying to crack down on it. Last month, Google teamed up with Facebook to combat the problem in France and Germany, both of which face upcoming elections.

So what went wrong over the weekend? According to Google, the Featured Snippets search function relies on algorithms to automatically provide a match to a search query, pulling in text from third-party sites. Most of the time this provides people with a helpful summary or answer to their question. But the algorithm doesn’t always discriminate between reputable and disreputable sources.

“When we are alerted to a Featured Snippet that violates our policies, we work quickly to remove them, which we have done in this instance,” Google said. “We apologize for any offense this may have caused.”

(Source: cnet)

## Spam email operator’s faulty backup leaks 1.37bn addresses

One of the largest spam operations in the world has exposed its entire operation to the public, leaking its database of 1.37bn email addresses thanks to a faulty backup.

As well as email addresses, the holy grail of the spam operation, personal information including real names, IP addresses and physical addresses have also been leaked, though on a smaller scale than the email information that makes up the bulk of the dataset.

According to security researchers at MacKeeper, the leaked information stems from an operation called River City Media, an email marketing firm that sends up to a billion messages a day to spam filters across the world.

“The situation presents a tangible threat to online privacy and security as it involves a database of 1.4bn email accounts combined with real names, user IP addresses, and often physical address,” said MacKeeper’s Chris Vickery. “Chances are that you, or at least someone you know, is affected.”

Vickery hasn’t managed to fully verify the leak, but



says he has found addresses he knows are accurate in the database. And the source of the data, a snapshot of a backup made at some point in January 2017, accidentally published to the internet without any password protection, adds more credibility to the leak.

“Well-informed individuals did not choose to sign up for bulk advertisements over a billion times,” Vickery says. “The most likely scenario is a combination of techniques. One is called co-registration. That’s when you click on the ‘Submit’ or ‘I agree’ box next to all the small text on a website. Without knowing it, you have potentially agreed your personal details can be shared with affiliates of the site.”

Anti-spam organisation Spamhaus, working alongside MacKeeper and Vickery, has used the information contained in the leak to add River City Media’s details to its database, blacklisting the firm’s entire infrastructure.

The breach is so large that when Vickery initially reported that he had access to a leaked dataset containing 1.4bn records, India’s national government issued a statement denying that it was the source – the country’s federal ID system is one of the few databases in the world containing more than a billion individuals, and speculation ran rampant until Vickery released the actual information.

(Source: guardian)

## India becomes key battleground in global ecommerce war



Global tech giants are heading for a proxy war in India. Alibaba is leading a \$200 million investment into Paytm’s marketplace, creating a new Indian unicorn. It confirms the intention of the Chinese behemoth to take on Amazon, which is aggressively ramping up, investing \$5 billion into its local operation as other homegrown rivals flail. Only one of the tech big boys will emerge victorious.

The \$255 billion Chinese group and Paytm have already invested together to build a dominant mobile-wallet payment business, now worth around \$5 billion. Their smaller e-commerce unit is now being separated out to meet Indian regulations. After the latest fundraising, Jack Ma’s Alibaba and its own payments affiliate Ant Financial will effectively control the e-commerce company and continue to own a large stake in the payments arm, which must be majority Indian-owned.

Local rivals Flipkart and Snapdeal, backed by New York investment firm Tiger Global and Japan’s SoftBank, respectively, helped to establish the domestic e-commerce industry. But their future roles look uncertain as these global tech giants, with deeper pockets, get stuck into the market.

Privately owned Flipkart is fighting hard to maintain a narrow lead; investors now reckon it is worth as little as one third of its \$15 billion peak in 2015. Meanwhile, the founders of Snapdeal are cutting costs and headcount; an email to employees admits errors in executing its strategy. Talk of a possible merger between Snapdeal and Paytm keeps surfacing in local media. That makes sense, given SoftBank already owns a near 30 percent stake in Alibaba and could lose a fortune fighting head-to-head to build market share.

(Source: Reuters)

## Qualcomm moves VR forward with wireless headset



Virtual reality took a few steps forward last week, advances highlighted by Qualcomm’s demo of a development headset for wireless virtual reality.

The prototype is part of a reference design for a second generation of VR headsets that don’t have to be connected to a PC. Hardware companies can adopt this technology, and Qualcomm has started an accelerator to enable those companies to move faster. At least five headset makers plan to launch VR headsets in 2017 that are based on Qualcomm’s newest chip, the Snapdragon 835. Osterhout Design Group has also said it will create two augmented reality smartglasses models with the 835.

Qualcomm vice president Tim Leland said the device was a reference model, which others could use as their own products or as a foundation for more unique designs. The 835 will have better performance per watt, significantly better graphics, and a 20 percent improvement in motion-to-photon latency, he said. There will also be better interaction with sensors and better single-buffer rendering performance.

“I think the future of VR is mobile,” Leland said. “I don’t think the future of VR is tethered to a PC. The market is starting to speak on that.”

The best thing about this prototype is that it told me the second generation of VR hardware isn’t far off.

In other developments in VR at GDC, LG showed off its first wired headset to compete with the HTC Vive. It is based on the Steam VR technology developed by Valve and can use apps that are available in the Steam VR store.

(Source: venturebeat)

## NHS to use Uber and startup Cera for at-home patient care



Healthcare startup Cera is teaming up with Uber to deliver patient care on the NHS’ behalf. The service, launched in November, matches “hundreds” of carers in the UK with the people who need them most. Today, the company is announcing a partnership with the Barts Health NHS Trust -- which runs Mile End Hospital, Newham University Hospital and others -- so that doctors can effectively prescribe the platform and help their patients receive timely care at home. The hope is that such a service will improve patient care while freeing up hospital beds in London.

Cera has inked similar deals with three clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in north-west London: Harrow, Brent and Hillingdon. To meet the needs of each community, Cera will be relying on Uber and its fleet of app-hailed drivers. They will help not only carers to make their usual house visits, but also patients as they attend hospital appointments. Cera says its services will also help people to get out of the house and remain independent. They can hail an UberAssist, which will help with walkers and scooters, or an UberWAV, which is fully wheelchair accessible.

To be clear, Uber doesn’t have a direct relationship with the NHS. It’s working with Cera, who holds the contract with the UK health service. “We do not have any contracts with Uber to provide non-emergency patient transport,” a spokesperson for the Barts Health NHS Trust emphasised. “When patients need assistance getting to and from our hospitals we provide ambulances and medi-cars, driven by trained experts.”

(Source: engadget)



# Fruit flies halt reproduction during infection

A protective mechanism that allows fruit flies to lay fewer eggs in response to bacterial infection is explained in a study published in the journal eLife.

The findings represent a case of 'behavioral immunity' in response to bacterial infection: in addition to triggering conventional antibacterial weaponry, fruit flies use nerve cell signaling pathways to reduce the impact of infection on their offspring and environment.

It is widely known that all living organisms adapt their behavior in response to infection, but the mechanisms behind this are less understood. Recent studies in fruit flies have started to unravel these behaviors, showing, for example, that flies can avoid contaminated food by sensing an odor emitted by dangerous bacteria. Professor Julien Royet, Group Leader at Aix-Marseille University, France, set out to investigate this further in the fruit fly by studying another protective behaviour: laying less eggs.

Following bacterial infection in fruit flies, Royet and his team saw a strong but temporary reduction in their egg-laying activity. "Having seen this reduction, we set out to find the signal that triggered it," recalls Royet. "We know that peptidoglycan, a component of the bacterial cell wall, activates the NF-kB pathway, which controls the immune response in the fruit fly. We were however surprised



to see that injection of purified peptidoglycan into the flies also affects egg-laying, suggesting that the same bacterial component regulates both immune and behavioral responses to bacteria."

#### ■ Controlling egg-laying

Having demonstrated that peptidoglycan also activates the NF-kB pathway

to control egg-laying, the team set out to understand exactly how egg-laying was altered. They found that flies with infections had three times as many matured eggs in the ovary as uninfected flies.

As egg-laying resumes after 24 hours, the team concluded that infection temporarily blocks the release of the eggs

into the oviduct, and that something was carefully controlling this process, to ensure that normal egg-laying continues once the threat of infection has passed.

"Since egg-laying behavior is controlled by a complicated neuronal network in flies, one possibility was that peptidoglycan is acting directly on this network," explains lead author C. Leopold Kurz, research scientist at Aix-Marseille University. "We tested this hypothesis using various mutants and saw that, unexpectedly, peptidoglycan is indeed sensed by neurons."

#### ■ Subclass of neurons

The next step was to identify the subclass of neurons on which peptidoglycan acts to regulate egg-laying. The team looked at other mutant flies and saw that the neurons that produce octopamine – a key neurotransmitter involved in ovulation -- are the ones that sense peptidoglycan.

"Taken together, our findings show that bacterial infection regulates ovulation by affecting the octopaminergic signaling pathway in neurons, via activation of the NF-kB pathway," says Royet.

A future challenge will be to test whether this NF-kB-dependent response to peptidoglycan following infection also occurs in the neurons of higher organisms and directly influences animal behavior.

(Source: EurekAlert)

**It is widely known that all living organisms adapt their behavior in response to infection, but the mechanisms behind this are less understood.**

## China to develop satellite-delivery rockets that launch from airplanes

China will develop a new generation of rockets that can be launched into space from an aircraft, a senior official said.

Air-launched rockets can rapidly replace dysfunctional satellites or, in cases of disaster relief, quickly send up Earth observation satellites to assist in the effort, Li Tongyu, the head of carrier rocket development at the China Academy of Launch Vehicle Technology, said.

Engineers at the academy, which is the main developer of Chinese carrier rockets, have designed a model capable of sending a payload of about 100 kilograms into low Earth orbit, he said.

They plan to design a larger rocket that could carry 200 kg into orbit.

#### ■ Certain altitude

The "Y-20 strategic transport plane will be the carrier of these rockets. The jet will hold a rocket within its fuselage and release it at a certain altitude. The rocket will be ignited after it leaves the plane," Li was quoted as saying by state-run China Daily.

Large satellites will still have to be put into orbit with conventional rockets, experts said.

Delivery of the Y-20 to the Chinese Air Force began

in July. It is China's first domestically developed heavy-lift transport plane and has a maximum take-off weight of more than 200 metric tons and a maximum payload of about 66 tons, the Daily quoted aviation experts as saying.

Solid-fuel rockets can be launched from planes much faster than land-based liquid-fueled rockets, where preparation can take days, weeks or longer, in part because it takes so much time to pump in the fuel, experts said.

Each mission involving a solid-fuel rocket launched by a Y-20 would take only 12 hours of preparation to place a 200 kg satellite into a sun-synchronous orbit 700 km above Earth, Long Lehao, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said.

#### ■ Advantages of rockets

Other advantages of such rockets are that they are flexible in deployment and do not need ground infrastructure, Pang Zhihao, executive editor-in-chief of Space International magazine said.

They also are less susceptible to bad weather and launch costs are lower than those of ground-launched rockets, he added.

The U.S. undertook the world's first air-launched space



mission in 1990, in which a Pegasus rocket developed by the former Orbital Sciences Corp was launched from a refitted B-52 strategic bomber to send two small satellites into orbit.

Since then, 43 Pegasus missions have been carried out, with the most recent in December.

Several U.S. space companies, including Virgin Galactic and Generation Orbit Launch Services, are developing air-launched rockets, the Daily report said.

(Source: dndindia.com)

## How a new space weather forecaster could help protect astronauts

Solar storms often roil the surface of Earth's star, but their effects are rarely limited to that body alone; rather, they can send deep punches of energy blazing out into space.

Of these, the most powerful is known as a coronal mass ejection (CME), millions of tons – even a billion – of protons and electrons hurtling from the sun. While

Earth's atmosphere and magnetic field offer protection from the most dangerous effects of these and other forms of space weather, astronauts out in space are more vulnerable.

It is for this reason that a newly developed technique promising earlier warning of these solar events could provide such a critical contribution to future space travel.

#### ■ Robotic spacecraft

"Robotic spacecraft are usually radiation-hardened to protect against these kinds of events," said Chris St. Cyr, a space scientist at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, in a press release. "But humans are still susceptible."

Most space-weather research is done using space-based satellites, a big advantage of which is the absence of inter-

ruption by cloud cover. Aside from this limitation, however, ground-based instruments are able to offer a much higher time resolution than their space-bound colleagues – and they have the added benefit of being able to return data almost instantly.

(Source: The CSM)

## “MA” Insurance Co. Wins Top Iran National Financial Management Award

For the fourth consecutive year, “MA” Insurance Company managed stood at first rank in 7th Iran National Financial Management Award among other insurance companies, the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

It should be noted that Iran National Financial Management Award is held every year for commemorating Dr. Gholam-Reza Eslami Bidgoli.

With the evaluation made by the Jury Board, MA

Insurance Company was awarded with a crystal statue.

This prestigious ceremony was held in the presence of Dr. Seyyed Ali Sadr al-Sadat Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. Abbas Akhouni Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Dr. Mohammad-Ali Najafi President's Economic Advisor, Dr. Mohammad Qassemi Deputy Expediency Council for Economic and Research Activities, senior officials and managers of Iranian Economic Organization.

Vahid Vosough Financial Affairs Manager of MA Insurance Company was awarded with Crystal Trophy and a Plaque of Honor at 7th Iran National Financial Management Award due to its excellent and deserving performance in the fields of financial management, financial transparency and also giant steps taken in attraction of income resources according to the financial and accounting standards, the report ended.

## Chadormalu Wins 1st Rank in Capital and Money Market Festival

Chadormalu Mining & Industrial Company, with its excellent performance and activity, stood at 1st rank in Capital and Money Market Festival, Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

With its symbol at Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), dubbed “CHEKAD”, the company was awarded with a Plaque of Honor and statue of the Festival for its salient activities in the current year in 1395 (to end

March 20, 2017).

It should be noted that 5th Specialized National Financial-Engineering Conference and Capital and Money Market Festival was held simultaneously at the venue of Management School of Tehran University in the presence of university lecturers, students, managers and experts active in the Capital and Money Market.

Chadormalu Mining & Industrial Company was appreciated in this prestigious festival at the unflinching and unsparing effort of the company in development and creation of value at the Capital and Money Market coupled with its support from boosting professional business.

It is worth mentioning that the Conference and Festival is held every year by Iran Financial – Engineering Association.



## BSI Wins Valuable Awards in National Strength Meeting in Production and Services

The 15th National Strength Meeting in Production and Services was held a couple of days ago in the presence of Vice President for Executive Affairs Dr. Shariatmadari, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Thanks to its best performance, Bank Saderat Iran managed to win two gold statues and one Plaque of Honor in backing production and services, certificate to fight money laundering, the topmost creative public relations and knowledge-based enterprise.

Vice President for Executive Affairs was the first speaker in this prestigious award-gran ting ceremony who pointed to the significant services of the banks along with their industrious manpower in the field of

offering high-quality services to the noble nation of Islamic Iran and said: “Effective steps have been taken in this regard with the aim of boosting and enhancing services in banking network of the country.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed to the follows up for paying debts of government to public and private companies and said: “It is hoped that problems facing the companies and banks will be resolved in the very near future.”

“Honoring harbingers of dignity and independence in society, presenting successful patterns of entrepreneurship in national level, clarifying executive strategies which boost status of production and services compa-

nies, etc. are considered as the reliable brands in national and international arena, he maintained.

He referred to boosting awareness of consumers from credibility level, efficiency of products and services and also equality of domestically-manufactured products with other foreign products and services and compliance with the world's latest standards as main topics followed up strictly by organizers of this prestigious meeting and said: “Implementation of all topics in this grand meeting will lead to the strengthening status of domestic production companies and getting lion's share at international markets.”

## Polymer sponge designed for cleaning up oil spills in the ocean

Cleaning up oil spills is never a fun job, but a new material just might make it easier. Thanks to Seth Darling and his colleagues at Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois, we have a new tool at our disposal when it comes to our environmentally damaging messes. It's a material capable of not only absorbing up to 90 times its own weight in oil, but also being wrung out much like a sponge and reused time and time again.

It's the recyclability of the new material that makes it so special. While most commercial solutions can clean up a mess, they can't be put back into action once they've been used. Today's so-called sorbents, which absorb oil, are a one-and-done type of solution — once they've been employed in an oil spill, they and the oil they've collected are discarded and normally incinerated. Needless to say, this isn't the most sustainable way of going about things.

But Darling's sponge-like device could be a game-changer. The material, which Darling describes as a “foam,” is made of polyurethane or polyimide plastics and coated with “oil-loving” silane molecules, which means that they soak up oil particularly well. Not so well that the oil can't ultimately be squeezed out of the sponge, of course, but well enough to attract the oil in the first place. Already, the Argonne National Laboratory team has begun testing its technology. “We made a lot of the foam, and then these pieces of foam were placed inside mesh bags – basically laundry bags, with sewn channels to house the foam,” Darling told New Scientist. The researchers then hung these mesh bags from a bridge atop a large pool that has been designed for oil spill simulations.

(Source: Digital Trends)

## One sign that 2017 will be a bad year for Lyme disease

An explosion in the mice population across the northeastern United States is a worrying sign of a potentially similar-sized surge in cases of Lyme disease.

But people get Lyme disease from ticks, not mice, right?

Deer are often blamed for being carriers of Lyme disease, infecting the ticks who feed on them, who then jump on to human hosts. But mice are among the most effective carriers of the condition, infecting 95 percent of the ticks who feed on them, according to NPR.

Two biologists told NPR that they have found in mice a leading indicator of future Lyme outbreaks: the bigger the annual mouse population, the larger the following year's pool of new Lyme cases will be.

Once found primarily in the New England (the disease is named for Lyme, Connecticut), and a slice of Wisconsin, Lyme is now found all over the United States.

Its rise results in part from rising deer populations, but also in the changing landscape of the country. Land development for farming, housing and commerce has chewed through the once vast forests and wild lands of the U.S., leaving smaller patches of forest interspersed with human settlements. Mice thrive in these smaller forests, in large part because the larger animals who prey on them cannot.

(Source: CNBC)

## Underwater mountains solve mystery of where the poles’ coldest water goes

Cliffs and chasms in the ocean floor create the turbulence needed to push cold, dense water up to the surface, a new study finds, solving a problem scientists have been puzzling over for 50 years.

Vast ocean currents are thought to circulate the water from the surface to the seafloor and back up again. In the polar regions, cold water sinks to the abyssal ocean at a rate of about 107 cubic meters per second, or 50 times the transport of the Amazon River. But how does it get back up to the surface to complete the cycle?

The other half of the mechanism, to get cold water to rise from the seabed to the surface, has been harder to explain. The ruggedness of the seafloor, with cliffs, ridges and chasms deep underwater are the answer to the puzzle, according to a paper published in the journal Nature Communications.

#### ■ Drake Passage

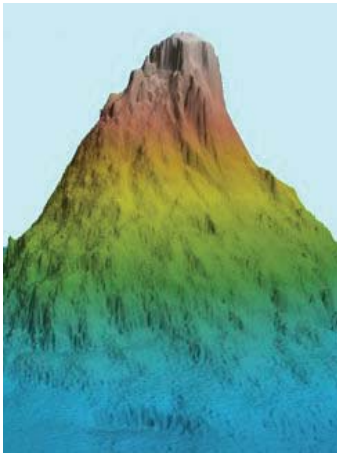
Scientists studied water near Antarctica in the Southern Ocean using a tracer, releasing it about 1,000 miles to the west of a stretch of sea called Drake Passage. The seafloor at Drake Passage is much rougher than the surrounding plains. The tracer measured very little ocean turbulence in its passage until it reached Drake Passage, where it met a series of ridges and underwater mountains.

“All of a sudden, it started to spread in the vertical quite fast,” said study author Raffaele Ferrari, an oceanographer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the U.S., in a statement.

These seafloor features, such as continental boundaries and seamounts, create turbulence and currents that forces the cold water upwards, in a similar way to how skyscrapers can disrupt air to create intense wind tunnels.

“In the abyssal ocean, you have 4,000-meter sea mountains and very deep troughs, up and down, and these topographic features help create turbulence,” Ferrari said. “What seems to be emerging is that water comes back up from the abyss by spending a lot of time in these places where turbulence is really strong.”

(Source: ibtimes.co.uk)





## There exist over 1.2m clunkers nationwide, says MP

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — There are some 1.25 clunkers **d e s k** in Iran, MP Hamidreza Fouladgar said, Mehr news agency reported on Tuesday.

Some 247,000 clunkers are being scrapped annually nationwide, Fouladgar said, adding, some 1.9 million clunkers were scrapped within the last 10 years.

“So long as we postpone scrappage of clunkers they would grow in number and intensify air pollution in metropolises,” the MP noted.

Offering financial incentives such as low-interest loans to scrap clunkers would encourage car owners to replace their old cars with newer models, he highlighted. Many metropolises in Iran are grappling with crippling air pollution which are blamed on number of reasons including clunkers. Municipalities are now doing their best to replace clunkers with low-emission cars to mitigate the air pollution to some extent.

## Surgeons remove 915 coins swallowed by Thai sea turtle

**BANGKOK (AP)** — Tossing coins in a fountain for luck is a popular superstition, but a similar belief brought misery to a sea turtle in Thailand from whom doctors have removed 915 coins.

Veterinarians in Bangkok operated Monday on the 25-year-old female green sea turtle nicknamed “Bank” whose indigestible diet was a result of many tourists seeking good fortune tossing coins into her pool over many years in the eastern town of Sri Racha.

Many Thais believe that throwing coins on turtles will bring longevity.



Typically, a green sea turtle has a lifespan of around 80 years, said Roongroje Thanawongnuwech, dean of Chulalongkorn University’s veterinary faculty. It is listed as an endangered species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

The loose change eventually formed a heavy ball in her stomach weighing 5 kilograms (11 pounds). The weight cracked the turtle’s ventral shell, causing a life-threatening infection.

Five surgeons from Chulalongkorn University’s veterinary faculty patiently removed the coins over four hours while “Bank” was under general anesthesia. The stash was too big to take out through the 10-cm (4-inch) incision they had made, so it had to be removed a few coins at a time. Many of them had corroded or partially dissolved.

“The result is satisfactory. Now it’s up to Bank how much she can recover,” said Pasakorn Briksawan, one of the surgical team. While recovering in Chulalongkorn University’s animal hospital, the turtle will be on a liquid diet for the next two weeks.

Bank was brought in to veterinarians by the navy, which found her ailing in her seaside hometown.

As well as the coins surgeons also found 2 fish hooks, which were also removed today.

Some 15,000 baht (\$428) in donations was raised from the public to pay for her surgery.

# Celebrities, charity society commute teenage death sentence

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — A group of Iranian **d e s k** celebrities in association with a charity society finally managed to commute a teenage boy death sentence, Khabaronline reported.

A 15-year-old boy, who used the pseudonym “Soheil”, had been convicted of murder and was sentenced to death. Soheil who waited in a death row for five years committed a murder over a childish argument with another guy.

Last month just before carrying out the execution the victim’s family agreed to receive some 3.5 billion rials (nearly \$87,500) to make a compromise with Soheil’s family.

The court only gave them some days to pay out the money otherwise Soheil would be executed. Imam Ali charity society committed to pay 2.5 billion rials (nearly \$62,500).

Since then many of the actors and singers joined hand to encourage the public to donate as much money as they can on their Instagram accounts.

And finally last Friday singer Mohsen Chavoshi shared a new song called “vase” on his Instagram page and solicited contributions in exchange for downloading his song to help free Soheil who only had seven days left to either die or live.

“I know you wouldn’t disappoint me...” Chavoshi wrote in his message. The contributions made overnight were so generous that the next morning he announced that the amount needed to free Soheil was collected.

According to an announcement Imam Ali charity society issued on its website Soheil will soon be released from prison.



## Polluted environments kill 1.7 million children a year: WHO



A quarter of all global deaths of children under five are due to unhealthy or polluted environments including dirty water and air, second-hand smoke and a lack of adequate hygiene, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Monday.

Such unsanitary and polluted environments can lead to fatal cases of diarrhea, malaria and pneumonia, the WHO said in a report, and kill 1.7 million children a year.

“A polluted environment is a deadly one — particularly for young children,” WHO Director-General Margaret Chan said in a statement. “Their developing organs and immune systems, and smaller bodies and airways, make them especially vulnerable to dirty air and water.”

In the report -- “Inheriting a sustainable world: Atlas on children’s health and the environment” -- the WHO said harmful

exposure can start in the womb, and then continue if infants and toddlers are exposed to indoor and outdoor air pollution and second-hand smoke.

This increases their childhood risk of pneumonia as well as their lifelong risk of chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma. Air pollution also increases the lifelong risk of heart disease, stroke and cancer, the report said.

The report also noted that in households without access to safe water and sanitation, or that are polluted with smoke from unclean fuels such as coal or dung for cooking and heating,

children are at higher risk of diarrhea and pneumonia.

Children are also exposed to harmful chemicals through food, water, air and products around them, it said.

Maria Neira, a WHO expert on public health, said this was a heavy toll, both in terms of deaths and long-term illness and disease rates. She urged governments to do more to make all places safe for children.

“Investing in the removal of environmental risks to health, such as improving water quality or using cleaner fuels, will result in massive health benefits,” she said.

(Source: Reuters)

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Trick or Treat

A: Trick - or -treat

B: Tom, aren't you a little too old to be **trick-or-treating**?

A: What are you talking about? Where is your Halloween **spirit**? Didn't you ever **dress up** in a **costume** and go around the neighborhood **trick-or-treating** with your friends?

B: Of course I did, but when I was ten! **Trick -or-treating** is for kids, plus, I'm sure people will think you're a **kidnapper** or something, **running around** with kids at night.

A: Whatever, I'm going next door I heard Mrs. Robinson is **giving out** big bags of **M&Ms**!

#### ■ Key vocabulary

**trick-or-treat**: a children's Halloween practice of asking for treat

**spirit**: energy

**dress up**: attire in clothes suited to a particular role

**costume**: a set of clothes worn by an actor or by someone to make them look like something such as an animal, famous person etc.

**kidnapper**: to seize and detain or carry away by unlawful force

**run around**: to go all over the place, to move quickly from one place to another

**give out**: to give for free, to give something

**M&Ms**: colorful button-shaped chocolates produced by Mars, Incorporated

#### ■ Supplementary vocabulary

**goblin**: in folklore and fairy tales, an ugly creature that does evil or mischief to humans

**haunted**: inhabited or visited by ghosts


**mummy**: a corpse preserved by embalming, esp. one embalmed and wrapped by or in the manner of the ancient Egyptians

**potion**: a mixture for drinking, esp. one that is supposed to have medicinal, magical, or poisonous effects.


**jack-o'-lantern**: a pumpkin that is carved to look scary

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Second Announcement



N.I.O.C  
1395.5290



National Iranian  
Drilling Company

Public Calls For Quality Evaluating Of Tender(First Publish/Seconed Publish)

Two-Stage(Semi-compressive)

TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE (Rial)	DESCRIPTION	Tenders Portal Reg. No.	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial					
83,050	2,840,300,000	82,014,333,600	p/f"geolink measuring while drilling(mwd) orienter system negative mud pulse telemetry,4.75"-8" tool o.d. ref: geolink(uk) ltd .	1479255	TenderNo.: FP/05-95/058 Indent No:9545010	1

Brief discription of subject:

National Iranian Drilling Company(NIDC) address pasdaran Blev., Airport Saqare, Ahvaz, Iran hereby intends to purchase its requirements from qualified and interested tenderers through two-stage public tender ( semi-pressed) upon following terms and conditions:

A) Qualitative evaluation of tenderer:

The evaluation is based on article ( J ) implementing regulations of the law of tenders and also carried out base on worksheets qualitative evaluation inquiry in the tender documents. Minimum acceptable point of quality is 60.

B) Preparation of tender documents:

Purchasing of documents:

In order to receive the tender documents, 510,000 Rials should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.

Receiving of documents:

Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum one week after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Hall No.:113, 1thfloor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN

Notice: Only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and recieve tender ducments from foreign procurment department in due date will be known as tenderer from tender committee.

C) Delivery of call quality evaluating:

Tenderers shall submit the completed documents including qualificaion worksheets in form of software in CD and documentary within 14 days from last day of document recived deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1thfloor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN.

D) Tender Guarantee:

Type of guarantee:

A)Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activites licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranain Drilling Company.

Duration of credit guarantee:

This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on. [WWW.NIDC.IR](http://WWW.NIDC.IR)

Foreign Procurement Dept  
National Iranian Drilling Company

### Job Vacancy

A reputable authorized international test center affiliated with ETS (Educational Testing Service) of America is seeking English native speakers interested in teaching preparation courses for international exams, namely TOEFL iBT and GRE General. The accepted applicants will receive a short OJT (on-the-job-training) and will start collaboration with a rational payment.

Phone: 021-88919021 (Ex. 119) Saturday-Thursday (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.)

Email address: [info@amirbahador.com](mailto:info@amirbahador.com)

### Aria Banader Iranian Chabahar Port and Marine Services Company



#### International Public Tender Announcement Tender No. ME/1006/95

Aria Banader Iranian Chabahar  
Marine & Port Services Company

**Tender subject:** Manufacturing, Shipment, Training and delivery of **two 6000 HP ASD TUGBOAT units** for Shahid Beheshti Port of Chabahar.

It is hereby to announce that Aria Banader Iranian Chabahar Port and Marine Services Co. as the equipment supplier of Shahid Beheshti Port(Chabahar) Development Plan First Phase proceeds to hold an international public tender of Manufacturing, Shipment, Training and delivery of the above vessels in a two-stage way after quality assessment.

All domestic and foreign manufacturer companies with the experience in the field of manufacturing the similar vessels are invited to receive the relevant CD containing the quality assessment forms and Tender Documents, presenting a written introduction letter (National ID is mandatory), Valid ID card and the original bank receipt of **2,000,000 Rials** deposited to account No. 0203568843007 of Aria Banader Iranian Chabahar Port and Marine Services Company, by Bank Day **maximum till Wednesday March 15, 2017 at 16:00** refer to the following address.

The deadline for submitting the documents and completed quality assessment forms will be up to **Saturday April 15, 2017 at 16:00.**

#### - Purchasing and delivery of tender documents address:

No. 40 ,Kish St., Jahankoodak Crossroads, Nelson Mandela Blvd., Tehran, IRAN, Postal Code : 1518814111, Phone: +982188190677-9 , FAX: +982188190679 or Email: [m.niapak@abiports.com](mailto:m.niapak@abiports.com).

- **Tender deposit:** unconditional and multiple extendable bank guarantee to the amount of **15,000,000,000 Rials** and its equivalent sum of **350,000 Euro**. (the aforesaid guarantee will be received after participants qualification in tender in quality assessment stage at the same time with price and technical proposal offer)

- To keep the date of documents delivery, any question is allowed only 72 hours before deadline of documents delivery.

- All manufacturers obliged to consider the Law Of Max Local Capabilities.

- The cost of advertising is undertaken by the winner.

- After quality assessment, to provide technical and commercial documents the competent companies will be invited.



# Syrian soldiers, allied fighters recapture 18 villages in Aleppo

Syrian forces have regained control over more than a dozen villages in the country's northern province of Aleppo.

On Monday, Syrian soldiers and allied fighters restored security and stability to 18 villages, including Jarkes, al-Ismailiyah, Abajah, Mazra'a Abajah and Abu Tinah, killing a large number of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists, Syria's official news agency SANA reported.

They also destroyed an explosives-laden car and nine pickup trucks equipped with heavy machine guns.

Elsewhere, in the central province of Homs, Syrian troopers and fighters from popular defense groups targeted ISIL terrorist group positions in al-Katibah al-Mahjourah and al-Baredah districts, besides the eastern outskirts of al-Qarayayn town and the ancient city of Palmyra (Tadmor).

Syrian army units also struck the gatherings and positions of the terrorist group Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (Victory Front for the People of the Levant), formerly known as al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra), in the northern village of al-Lataminah, located 39 kilometers northwest of Hama, killing many terrorists and destroying three vehicles belonging to them.

Moreover, Syrian army soldiers and their allies engaged in fierce clashes with ISIL Takfiris in the Maqabir district of the eastern city of Dayr al-Zawr, located 450 kilometers northeast of the capital, Damascus, killing several terrorists and destroying their fortifications.



## ■ Terrorist mortar fire injures five in Syria's Aleppo

Separately, foreign-backed militants have launched a mortar attack against a residential neighborhood in Syria's northern city of Aleppo, leaving at least five people injured. The mortar shells struck the Ghouta neighborhood of the city.

Several mortar shells also slammed into the Kurdish-populated Daseiniyah Village of Homs Province, though no immediate reports of casualties were available.

## ■ Syrian children suffer staggering levels of trauma, distress

Meanwhile, international aid group

Save the Children says the nearly six-year-old militancy in Syria has caused a mental health crisis among the country's children, and millions of Syrian children are living in a state of "toxic stress" due to prolonged exposure to the horrors of war.

The report by Save the Children and its partner agencies in Syria, entitled In-visible Wound, warned that the "staggering levels" of trauma and distress among children could cause permanent and irreversible damage.

It pointed out that 71 percent of children interviewed experienced frequent bedwetting and involuntary urination,

which are the symptoms of toxic stress and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Moreover, 48 percent of the adult interviewees said they had seen children, who had lost their ability to speak or begun to suffer from speech impediments since the outbreak of Syrian crisis.

Nearly half of those interviewed said children "regularly or always have feelings of grief or extreme sadness." Aggression and substance abuse are also commonplace.

Doctors and mental health specialists maintain that toxic stress can disrupt the development of the brain and other organs and increase the risk of addiction and mental health disorders in adulthood.

"After six years of war, we are at a tipping point, after which the impact on children's formative years and childhood development may be so great that the damage could be permanent and irreversible," Dr. Marcia Brophy, a psychosocial adviser for the Middle East at Save the Children, said.

She added, "The risk of a broken generation, lost to trauma and extreme stress, has never been greater."

Save the Children stressed that some 13.5 million people inside Syria, including 5.8 million children, are in need of aid, and about 4.8 million people are trapped in besieged and hard-to-reach areas.

Syria has been plagued by foreign instigated militancy since March 2011.

(Source: SANA)

## North Korea, Malaysia ban each other's citizens from leaving

North Korea has barred Malaysian citizens from leaving the country, prompting Kuala Lumpur to quickly respond with a similar ban amid rising diplomatic tensions between the two sides over the assassination of the North Korean leader's half-brother in Malaysia.

All Malaysian nationals in North Korea "will be temporarily prohibited from leaving the country until the incident that happened in Malaysia is properly solved," the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) announced in a Tuesday report, citing the Foreign Ministry.

The latest row between Pyongyang and Kuala Lumpur – which have maintained strong relations for years – came following the killing of Kim Jong-nam last month by two women using a VX nerve agent at an airport in the Malaysian capital.

Malaysia has already charged the two women – an Indonesian and a Vietnamese – with murder. They face hanging if convicted.

Malaysia has not directly put the blame on North Korea for the assassination, but there is suspicion that Pyongyang had been behind the killing, an accusation strongly rejected by the North.

The Malaysian investigation into Kim's death has also angered Pyongyang, which says the process is aimed at tarnishing its image. The diplomatic row has seen both

sides declaring each other's ambassadors as "persona non grata," ordering them to leave.

Malaysian authorities have sought a number of North Korean citizens for questioning on the case, but they only detained one, whom they released and later deported for lack of evidence.

According to the KCNA report, the North Korean Foreign Ministry further expressed hope that the Malaysian government would resolve the matter in a "fair and timely manner based on goodwill."

It went on to say that Malaysian diplomats and nationals in the North would be allowed to "conduct business and live normally" while the travel ban is in place.

## ■ Malaysia quick to retaliate

Reacting to the ban, Malaysia's Prime Minister Najib Razak issued a statement and slammed Pyongyang's "abhorrent act."

"This abhorrent act, effectively holding our citizens hostage, is in total disregard of all international law and diplomatic norms," the statement said.

Malaysia had already stopped visa-free travel for North Korean nationals following Kim's assassination.

In a tit-for-tat move, Najib said he has also instructed the police "to prevent all North Korean citizens in Malaysia from leaving the country until we are assured of



the safety and security of all Malaysians in North Korea."

The Malaysian ban seems to be focused on Pyongyang's embassy in Kuala Lumpur, where police say two of the North Korean suspects sought for Kim's murder are holed up.

"How much longer do they want to hide in the embassy...it is a matter of time before they come out," police Chief Khalid Abu Bakar said.

(Source: Xinhua)

## Protesters shut much of south Nepal a day after clashes

Markets, schools and factories were closed across Nepal's southern plains on Tuesday in response to the killing of three protesters who tried to disrupt a political rally.

Security forces opened fire at the rally on Monday, killing three protesters and wounding more than a dozen, in the south-eastern town of Rajbiraj, where the Unified Marxist-Leninist (UML) party had organized a get-out-the-vote rally before local elections.

The police put the death toll at four, but later revised it to three.

Santosh Niraula, a local police officer, said much of the public transport remained off the roads in the southern flatlands bordering India.

The Samyukta Loktantrik Madhesi Morcha, an alliance of seven regional parties that organized Monday's protest, called for a two-day general strike in the region.

The group has accused leaders of the UML, the country's main opposition party, of humiliating its supporters and deriding the community during the mass rally.

The protesters say the constitution discriminates against them by limiting their representation in state institutions. They have long called for the redrawing of provincial boundaries to ensure greater representation for their community.

Thousands of police officers were de-

ployed on Monday to maintain security at the UML rally, but clashes still erupted outside the venue where hundreds of protesters waved black flags and blocked roads.

Nepal's coalition government announced last month that polls would be held on May 14 for more than 700 local bodies, the first local elections in 20 years.

(Source: agencies)

## Germany's September poll overshadowed by Trump, populism

➔ In addition, other small parties including Greens, Lefts, Free Democratic Party (FDP) and AfD will also run in the vote. According to the surveys, the SPD with Martin Schulz as its leader and Merkel's challenger are frontrunners in opinion polls. Yet, according to German weekly Spiegel "surveys aren't the same thing as election results as Brexit and U.S. presidential election proved. But the country's political mood is changing and even people in Merkel's orbit say that the trend is clear. It is currently on the side of the SPD"

## ■ Could Schulz unseat Merkel?

Before the summer of 2015, in the absence of a powerful rival, the conservatives were always leading. However, the refugee crisis changed everything. CDU's poor performance in Berlin state poll which Merkel herself described as "a bitter defeat" as well as the worst ever result in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania regional elections in which AfD scored better than leading conservatives was the most clear demonstration of the public discontent with Merkel's migration policies. The chancellor later told a CUD convention that the situation of mid-2015 "cannot, should not and must not be repeated". Her government also introduced strict measures in order to bring the situation under control.

62 year-old Merkel is the total opposite of her main challenger Martin Schulz. Schulz who is one year younger than her and is a former high-school dropout who didn't go to university and fought alcoholism successfully.

Merkel has been Germany's chancellor for 12 years (three terms) and dealt with numerous crises including the Euro debt crisis in 2008. Schulz's detractors however, say he has no experience in German politics other than his years as mayor of a small city and after 23 years in the European Parliament he decided to return to domestic politics.

Unlike Merkel who is ever-cautious in her remarks and lacks enthusiasm, Schulz has made emotional connection with the voters. He speaks his mind forthrightly and appears in lots of TV talk shows and interviews and making the most of the photo opportunities. He has called Trump an "irresponsible man" and a threat to democracy. In his campaign, he even blasted AfD and described them as being "rat catchers".

Schulz has tried to focus on social issues, justice, equality, fair distribution of wealth, better unemployment benefits and taxes for the rich. Nevertheless, liberal German media and his critics claim that such catchy slogans are devoid of real meaning as long as he fails to present concrete plans. On the other hand, they say SPD has been a coalition partner for years, now criticizing CDU policies for example on refugees and economy means criticizing SPD itself. Critics have also questioned Schulz's lavish lifestyle while he was at the head of the European Parliament and earned hefty salaries, which is a far cry from a person who wants to bring justice to the society.

It is very hard to predict the outcome of the Septem-

ber polls but some analysts believe chances of Schulz ousting Merkel in September are slim. Schulz's challenge has been widely interpreted as a step towards undoing voter disenchantment and limiting the number of protest votes going to the rightwing populist party Alternativen für Deutschland.

Michael Walter, a professor of political science of University of Kassel, tells the Tehran Times: "It is true that the Schulz character is the total opposite of Merkel, she is not an energetic person who excites you even when you go to her speeches... on the other hand she has been stable in representing the conservative party and people do not want to have a lot of changes at the moment. And why they want change. Economic data is very good, employment rate is very good, the money is there for the state, and at the moment... I believe Merkel will be in office as chancellor for another term."

By standing again, Merkel could end up matching the 16 years in office of former Chancellor Helmut Kohl. However, one should wait to see if the changes in the country's political mood could in the future lead to emergence of another Marin Le Pen this time in Germany or not?

For now at least populists in Germany do not pose a real threat to the society "because they don't have real politicians like the Netherlands' Geert Wilders, France's Marin Le Pen and Hungary's Viktor Orbán as their leaders" says Michael Walter.

## UN chief: World must act to avert famine in Somalia

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has arrived in Somalia on an emergency visit aimed at drumming up support for an effort to avert a famine that could affect 6.2 million people.

Guterres said the world "must act now" after he arrived in the capital Mogadishu.

Somalia's newly-elected President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed met with the UN chief on Tuesday.

"My first priority is to address this drought crisis and my main priority is to make an appeal to the international community to help us," Mohamed said.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned there are just two months left to avert what would be Somalia's third famine in 25 years. The last one, in 2011, killed nearly 260,000 people.

The situation has become "significantly worse in the last six months," the UN said on Monday.

Last week, the government declared a national disaster as the drought continued to ravage the country.

According to the WHO, more than 363,000 acutely malnourished children and 70,000 severely malnourished children are in need of urgent, life-saving support.

The Horn of Africa nation is one of three countries - along with Yemen and Nigeria - that aid agencies say are on the verge of famine. A famine was declared in South Sudan last month

(Source: agencies)

## Two children killed in U.S. drone attack in Yemen's Bayda: official

A local Yemeni official says a drone strike suspected to have been carried out by the United States has left two Yemeni children dead in the south-central Bayda Province.

The unnamed provincial official said on Tuesday that the incident took place outside the Yakla village of Bayda's Qifah district on Sunday, when the victims, aged 10 and 12, had been tending a herd of goats.

Local residents also confirmed the attack and identified the slain brothers as Ahmed and Mohammed al-Khobze.

The Pentagon is yet to comment on the aerial attack.

Yakla was the scene of a U.S. ground and aerial attack on January 29, the first authorized by the U.S. President Donald Trump.

A \$75 million U.S. aircraft was destroyed while dozens of Yemeni civilians and U.S. Navy SEAL Ryan Owens were killed in the rare commando raid.

The Pentagon claimed that the deadly attack had produced intelligence about the al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) militant group.

However, senior U.S. officials rejected the claim, saying that they were not aware of any actionable intelligence.

Bill Owens, Ryan's father, also denounced the raid and demanded an investigation into it, asking, "Why at this time did there have to be this stupid mission when it wasn't even barely a week into [Trump's] administration?"

Reports say Washington has conducted more than 40 strikes against what are claimed to be al-Qaeda targets in Yemen since March 2, when it stepped up its campaign in Yemen.

The conflict-ridden country has been under regular U.S. drone strikes, with Washington claiming to be targeting al-Qaeda elements while local sources say civilians have been the main victims of the attacks.

Yemen has also been rocked by a military campaign by the House of Saud regime since late March 2015. The U.S. has been providing huge amounts of arms and military training to kingdom's military.

The Saudi regime's aggression, which allegedly seeks to restore Yemen's former government to power, has killed over 12,000 Yemenis according to the latest tallies.

(Source: Press TV)

## Hungary passes bill to detain all asylum seekers

Hungary's parliament has approved the automatic detention of all asylum seekers in container camps at the country's southern borders, despite a fierce backlash from human rights groups.

Under the new legislation, asylum seekers entering Hungary and those already in the country will be detained or moved to the container camps.

Earlier this year, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán said the measure was needed as a response to "terror" attacks in Europe, citing the November 2015 attacks in Paris.

The move reinstates Hungary's practice of detaining asylum applicants, which it suspended in 2013 under pressure from human rights groups.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, immediately criticized the measure.

"This new law violates Hungary's obligations under international and EU laws, and will have a terrible physical and psychological impact on women, children and men who have already greatly suffered," the UNHCR said in a statement.

On Tuesday, Orbán ordered the reinforcement of fences on the country's southern border.

Work began last week on a second border fence and the right-wing government extended a state of emergency that gave authorities additional powers to secure the borders. Hungary had previously built a fence on its borders with Serbia and Croatia in September 2015.

In October last year, the majority of Hungarians voted against a European Union referendum aimed at sharing 160,000 refugees around the 28-member bloc through mandatory quotas.

It has since not accepted any asylum seekers allocated under the scheme.

Hungary granted asylum, or some form of protection, to 425 people out of 29,432 applications in 2016.

(Source: agencies)



## Reus-less Dortmund still brimming with confidence for Benfica

Borussia Dortmund are counting on their attacking form, despite the absence of injured Marco Reus, to reverse a 1-0 first-leg deficit when they host Benfica for their Champions League round of 16 second leg on Wednesday.

The Germans have scored 12 goals in their last three league games alone and look to be hitting top form at the right time.

"We are brimming with confidence, the atmosphere within the team is great," Dortmund coach Thomas Tuchel said after his team crushed Bayer Leverkusen 6-2 in the Bundesliga on Saturday.



"We are focussed, we take it step by step, and that is a great development for the team and a really good phase for us at the moment."

Dortmund also scored a record-breaking 21 goals in the Champions League group phase, but it could not keep up the streak in Lisbon last month, when they squandered a bagful of chances and a penalty to lose 1-0.

Bundesliga leading scorer Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, who missed most of those chances and saw his spot kick saved, has since rediscovered his scoring form, netting twice against Leverkusen.

"We have been creating chances and huge scoring opportunities for weeks now," Tuchel said.

However, he will lack versatile attacking midfielder Reus, who suffered a thigh muscle injury on Saturday and was ruled out for a month.

"Marco has been extremely consistent for the past weeks ... and it is a big blow for us that he is not playing on Wednesday," Tuchel said.

Mario Goetze will also be missing, with the Germany midfielder sidelined since late last month with a metabolic disorder.

Tuchel has enough firepower left and can also count on his in-form youngsters, including teenagers Christian Pulisic and Ousmane Dembele, both of whom were on target on Saturday.

The Portuguese are equally deadly up front and poised to reach the last eight for the third time in six seasons.

Benfica are also in form, having won their last seven matches in all competitions. Striker Kostas Mitroglou, who scored the winner in the first leg, has grabbed 18 goals in his last 17 appearances.

They are top of the league, a point ahead of rivals Porto, and through to the Portuguese Cup final.

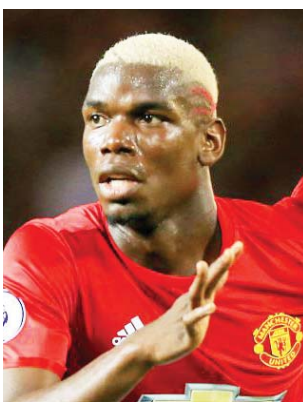
"We are not worried about others," said Benfica coach Rui Vitoria. "Our focus is on us and what we have to do. Every game at this stage is a final for us. The pressure on Benfica is normal and it has to be this way."

(Source: Reuters)

## Frank Lampard: Paul Pogba could be a '£90 million problem' for Man United

Frank Lampard says Paul Pogba has yet to live up to the world-record fee that Manchester United paid for him last summer, and suggested that the midfielder could become a "£90 million problem" at Old Trafford.

United paid about £89.3m to bring Pogba back from Juventus in August, and though he's played consistently for Jose Mourinho, the 23-year-old has come into criticism since a underwhelming display in the EFL Cup final last month.



Pogba has scored just four times in 25 appearances in the Premier League this season, and Lampard said United should be expecting a bigger return on their investment.

"It was a signal of their intentions to spend £90m on player who I wouldn't say is the finished article," the former Chelsea star said on Sky Sports on Monday.

"He's got fantastic attributes. He's strong, he's got great feet, he's bigger than you and he's quicker than you as a midfield player.

"But when you have a £90m price-tag on your shoulders, we analyse more and we want more. I'm still wondering, what's his best position? What kind of player is he? What does he want to be?"

"I feel a little bit like he has fallen in between everything. When you pay £90m you want to see results, and he hasn't quite delivered. He's young and he possibly will do, but as it stands he hasn't been a game-changer."

Lampard conceded that the high transfer fee may have raised expectations a little too high for a player who has never scored more than 10 goals in a season.

"The problem he has is all of our perceptions," Lampard continued. "Who would you pay £90m or £100m for? [Luis] Suarez, [Cristiano] Ronaldo, [Lionel] Messi.

"They bring 40 to 50 goals a season. They win games on their own week in, week out. We don't know that Paul Pogba can do that yet, but he's being judged on it.

"We need to give him time. We need to flip forward to next season and see if he's improving his game. But at some stage he has to be that dominant midfield player because I do believe that's in him.

"The problem for me is that if you spend £90m, you don't want a £90m problem."

(Source: ESPN)

# Barcelona dare to believe mission impossible is possible



Barcelona first struggled to come to terms with their shock 4-0 defeat to Paris St Germain in the Champions League last 16 first leg but have sparkled in their last two games and are daring to believe they can defy history by reaching the quarter-finals.

After scraping 2-1 wins over Leganes and Atletico Madrid in the immediate aftermath of their humbling in Paris, the five-times European Cup winners have doled out a 6-1 thrashing to Sporting Gijon and a 5-0 hammering to Celta Vigo.

Although no side has ever managed to claw back a four-goal deficit in the second leg of a Champions League tie, the form of Neymar and Lionel Messi has convinced some Barcelona fans that

history could be made at Camp Nou on Wednesday.

Neymar and Messi both starred in an awesome attacking display against Celta on Saturday and after Messi struck his second goal, Barca's fifth, supporters began chanting "Yes we can!"

Coach Luis Enrique, who announced last week he will leave the club at the end of the season, said it was not just fans who believed Barca were capable of what to date has proved an impossible job.

"I have unbreakable faith we can win the tie," the coach told reporters.

"We're going to risk everything, we want to create an atmosphere in which the fans will help us even more than they normally do.

"I think we've hit top form before a really difficult game but we're going to have a chance to go through. It looks like a lost cause but if we do things well who knows what could happen? We'll keep trying until the last minute."

The coach is known for his expressions of unabashed confidence to the press but he did admit the drubbing at the Parc des Princes had kept him preoccupied over the last fortnight.

"I've naturally been thinking about it for a long time," he said.

"It wasn't normal they beat us so easily but our objective is to show that we're the best team and can turn it around in 90 minutes."

PSG have won three and drawn once

since the first leg but could only scrape a 1-0 win over struggling Nancy on Saturday, which kept them second in Ligue 1 behind Monaco.

Midfielder Blaise Matuidi said the French champions were wary of the threat Barca could pose, despite their significant advantage going into the match.

"We believe in ourselves but we will also respect this team because we know they're capable of great things," the France international told reporters.

"The first few minutes will be important because they'll put us under pressure looking for an early goal. We must be strong mentally. We will experience some difficult moments, so we must prepare for that."

(Source: Reuters)

## Manchester United's Zlatan Ibrahimovic banned for three matches



Manchester United striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic has accepted a charge of violent conduct and will serve a three-match ban, the English Football Association (FA) has announced.

Ibrahimovic, 35, caught Bournemouth defender Tyrone Mings with his elbow before half-time of United's 1-1 draw at Old Trafford on Saturday.

The former Paris Saint-Germain forward was stamped on by Mings before he elbowed his opponent, and while both players escaped action from referee Kevin Friend they were charged with violent conduct by the FA on Monday.

Ibrahimovic, who has scored 15 Premier League goals this season, will miss Monday's FA Cup trip to Chelsea and the league matches at Middlesbrough

and home to West Bromwich Albion.

A statement from the FA read: "Zlatan Ibrahimovic will serve a three-match suspension with immediate effect after he admitted an FA charge of violent conduct and accepted the standard penalty.

"It follows an incident in or around the 44th minute of the game between Manchester United and AFC Bournemouth on Saturday (4 March 2017).

"The misconduct was not seen by the match officials at the time but caught on video."

Bournemouth will contest Mings' charge and the FA's recommendation that he serves a longer ban, the Press Association has reported.

(Source: Soccerbet)

## Pep Guardiola: I would like to sign more British players for Manchester City



Pep Guardiola has said he would like to bring more English players to Manchester City when the transfer window opens.

The City coach has already started making plans for the summer, with young players top of his wanted list.

Guardiola has said he would like to bring in home-grown players, with Tottenham Hotspur full-back Danny Rose among his reported targets.

He is also reported to be an admirer of Arsenal's Jack Wilshere, currently on loan at Bournemouth.

And the City boss told a news conference ahead of Wednesday's Premier League clash with Stoke City: "I would like to have English players.

"People don't believe me, but I

would. But they are so expensive.

"When I was at Barcelona I liked to work with locals. When I was in Germany I liked locals, because they feel something special.

"But sometimes it is not possible -- the market is the market. That is why the club has worked with the academy through to a long time, thinking about the next years."

City have exciting young talent emerging from their youth ranks and Guardiola hopes to bring those players through to the first team in future.

He has already said he expects four of five youth-team players to join the squad on their summer tour to the United States.

(Source: ESPN)



@gomofarah Long run this morning



@luisnani Waiting for family to have lunch!



@cristiano To hang out with my friend



# To play Iran in World Cup very tough, says U.S. U-20 coach



**S P O R T S** Ex-Iran national football team coach **d e s k** believes that being drawn alongside Iran at the 2017 FIFA U-20 World Cup is quite tough. Iranian-American coach Omid Namazi, who is currently the coach of U.S. U-20 Soccer Team (Tab Ramos's assistant) and the head coach of U.S. U-18 Soccer team, led his side to the 2017 CONCACAF U-20 Championship title on Sunday.

"I'm very happy that we finally won the title as it was quite important for us. We started with a loss against Panama in a match that we were far the better side. We managed to beat the reigning champion Mexico in an intense match which I believe was our best performance during the tournament. In the final, we could have won the game within the 90 minutes but the game went on penalties. Now we need to be prepared for the U-20 World Cup in South Korea which will be held in May," Namazi said.

"I've always said that I'm so proud to be an Iranian. It's an honor for me as an Iranian to coach the U.S. soccer youth teams as I'd like to show how talented the Iranians are," he added.

"As an Iranian I'll never want to play against my own country but in a draw anything is possible. If we draw alongside Iran in the same group I will do my job as U.S. soccer team coach but it would be very tough for me," he added.

Namazi was served as Carlos Queiroz assistant coach at Team Melli between 2011 to 2014.



## Majda Cicic proud of Iranian girls' volleyball team

**S P O R T S** Majda Cicic says that she is proud of **d e s k** Iranian team in the 11th Asian Girls' U18 Volleyball Championship.

Iran started the competition with a straight-set loss to Olympics champion China and suffered a shock defeat to Hong Kong on the second day of the competition.

"I would like to say that I was very satisfied in the first set against Hong Kong although my team are very inexperienced," Cicic said.

"Next match, I'm sure that they will play better, because they saw what they have to do. I'm proud of my team because they've tried their best. Every match, we will be better and better," she added.

The Asian Girls' U18 Volleyball Championship will continue at the Chongqing No. 8 Secondary School Yubei Campus till March 13.

The best four teams will qualify to the 2017 FIVB Girls' U18 World Championship, which is due to take place in Argentina from August 18 to 27, 2017.

## Iran down China in AFC Beach Soccer Championship



Group A winners' ticket to the 2017 AFC Beach Soccer Championship semi-finals will now be contested between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Bahrain after the Iranians whipped China PR 10-0 in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia on Tuesday.

Both Iran and the Bahrainis recorded their third straight win on Tuesday with their crunch tie being their groups' last game on Wednesday.

Iran expressed their strong intentions as Mohammadali Mokhtari opened the scoring in great fashion after receiving from an Ali Mirshekari bicycle kick in the first minute of the game.

Iran's talismanic scorer Farid Boulakbashi then got in the side's second, his eighth in the competition, before Moslem Mesigari also scored shortly after.

Mokhtari then added another, his number six in the tournament, after beating keeper Jiang Wen Tao and a defender to make it 4-0 before the fifth was added

by Seyed Hosseini as his tap-in rolled easily between the Chinese custodian's hands to end the first period.

A free-kick by Seyed Nazem added Iran's sixth before Mokhtari recorded his third in the tie with a beautiful volley, followed by a strong Mohammad Moradi strike that hit the bar before going into the net.

Amir Akbari then scored Iran's ninth as his strike bounced off keeper Chang Rui Qi's hands to end the second period.

Come the third period, a Boulakbashi free-kick went wide before his strike five minutes from time made Iran's 10th and only goal in the period that capped off the Iranians' fine performance.

The top three finishers at the AFC Beach Soccer Championship will represent Asia at the 2017 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup, which is scheduled to be held in Nassau, Bahamas from April 27 to May 7.

(Source: AFC)

## Queiroz, Renard look to be out of running for Bafana coach



Coach of the Afcon champions Cameroon Hugo Broos looks, for now, to be the only name in contention to replace Shakes Mashaba.

With the South African Football Association (Safa) still hopeful of making an announcement regarding their new coach this week, EWN Sport understands that two outstanding favourites for the job now look to have dropped out of the running.

Herve Renard's representative Youssef Haijoub confirmed that no contact has been made by Safa with him and that he's happy in his current role with Morocco, with his objective of qualifying them for the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Meanwhile, former Bafana Bafana coach Carlos Queiroz, in a text message overnight, told EWN Sport that he "can't see a short-

term decision with regards to this possibility".

"I am not free and without a mutual agreement it is not possible to cancel my contract (with Iran). Maybe in the near future (the opportunity will present itself) if Safa still trusts my services."

Coach of the Africa Cup of Nations champions Cameroon Hugo Broos looks, for now, to be the only name in contention to replace Shakes Mashaba. That's after the initial shortlist also included the likes of Roy Hodgson and Stuart Baxter.

Safa has told EWN Sport that it's unlikely any movement around the announcement of the coach will be made before President Danny Jordaan returns from supporting the SA Under 20 side in Zambia.

(Source: EWN)

## Holder Iran drawn with Korea in Asian Boys' U19 Volleyball Championship

Fourteen teams will strut their stuff in the "SMM" 11th Asian Boys' U19 Yangon Aerodrome Volleyball Championship in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar between March 28 and April 5, vying for the top honour and four tickets to compete in the 2017 FIVB Volleyball Boys' U19 World Championship in Bahrain from August 18 to 27.

Casting lots for the top-notch championship took place recently at the AVC Headquarters which saw all participating teams divided into four pools. Pool A comprises Hong Kong, Malaysia and Australia. Defending and consecutive six-time champions Iran, Korea and Bahrain are in Pool B. Pool C consists of Thailand, Sri Lanka, Uzbekistan and 2014 silver medalists Japan, with Kazakhstan joining China, and Chinese Taipei in Pool D.

The contest will be played in a preliminary round-robin stage in each pool with the top two teams from each pool advancing to the quarter-finals in Pool E and Pool F, while teams finishing third and fourth places will be relegated to the 9th-14th classification round in Pool G and Pool H, asianvolleyball.net reported.

The nine-day competition will be held at Wunna Theikdi Indoor Stadium in Hall B and C. With the seating capacity of 30,000, the stadium was used to stage many sport events earlier including the 2013 South East Asian Games, the Asean Para Games in 2014 and the 2016 Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship.

Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia are likely to withdraw from the championship, claiming no reason for their decision.

At the previous edition three years ago in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Iran successfully defended their title to capture gold for six times in succession following a straight-set win over Japan in the final showdown. China finished third place after powering past Chinese Taipei 3-1 (24-26 25-19, 25-21 25-18).

The top four teams in this tournament will represent Asia to compete in this year's FIVB Volleyball Boys' U19 World Championship in Bahrain. However, if the host country could not make it to the top four, a total of five teams from Asia including hosts Bahrain will then join the fray in the world meet.

## Ott: the Swiss Messi of Beach Soccer

Enter the name 'Noel Ott' into an Internet search engine, and before long you will also see the name of one of the best footballers of all time – Lionel Messi. The reason for this is simple: the in-demand Swiss player is widely regarded as beach soccer's answer to the Argentinian superstar.

"Many people compare me to him," Ott proudly confirmed to FIFA.com, "because I spin past opponents like a whirlwind. Fans began making the comparison when I was playing beach soccer for Barcelona in 2014 and 2015. We're both quite small, score lots of goals and are technically strong. I also wear the No10 shirt for the national team. Having said all that, I don't see myself as being on the same level as him at all. Messi is one of the best, if not the best footballer of all time. To be compared with someone like that is a huge honour"

In exactly 50 days time, this exceptionally talented player will be seeking to lay the foundations for his first international title. Die Nati kick off their FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup 2017 campaign in the Bahamas on 27 April by facing the hosts in Group A before taking on competition debutants Ecuador and African champions Senegal. For Ott, reaching the knockout stages is a must. "My mentality means I always want to win, and if I go to a tournament, I want to finish in top spot. While we're primarily just pleased to be involved, anything is possible from the quarter-finals onwards, as so much depends on your form on the day in beach soccer." With three FIFA Club World Cup titles and a FIFA U-20 World Cup success to his name, Messi already has a head start in this respect.

Ott sampled his first taste of a World Cup as a 21-year-old in Portugal in 2015. He finished the tournament with the adidas Bronze Boot as the third-highest goalscorer despite the fact that Switzerland, fresh from finishing runners-up at the 2014 Euro Beach Soccer Cup, flew home early after losing 7-3 to the hosts in the last eight. The Swiss striker scored in all four of his team's matches. "Although we often travel to major competitions with the national team, anything involving FIFA is always more significant. The World Cup is the best and coolest tournament you can play at," he said.

■ **Choosing the sand**

Ten years ago, Ott's life seemed destined for a different path. He joined the youth ranks at Grasshoppers Zurich at the age of 12 and progressed through each level before failing to make the leap to the U-21 team, something the man from Sattel admits was "a brutal setback". His mother's friend, former beach soccer international Franziska Steinemann, soon persuaded him to switch from turf to sand. "It brought back the joy of football for me," Ott explained. "The appeal of beach soccer lies in its love and passion for the beautiful game. It's a sport, but also a lifestyle."

"In Switzerland it's often said that the only people who play beach soccer are those who didn't make it in on grass," the 23-year-old continued, "but that's simply not the case. I made the choice to move into beach soccer. For me, there's nothing better. I'm able to travel the world for my hobby, and unfortunately that's all it is right now. My dream would be to make a living from the sport somehow. Right now we don't earn any money at all and play the game alongside our normal jobs. I think there are hardly any players around the world who can make a living from beach soccer."

Ott's progress in the sport culminated in his maiden call-up to the national team in 2012. "Noel's a super lad; he's down-to-earth and a team player," said his coach Angelo Schirinzi. "His skills are outstanding. His pace, ball control, coordination and, of course, his perfect overhead kicks are all exceptional."

Ott is determined to show off these skills again on the international stage in a few weeks time, some 7,700km from home. The one thing he will not get to experience in the Bahamas is a showdown with Messi's compatriots, who will be watching the Beach Soccer World Cup from home for the first time in the competition's history after losing to Ecuador on penalties in qualifying.

(Source: FIFA)

## Alireza Rahimi named new president of Iran's handball

Alireza Rahimi has been elected as new president of Iran Handball Federation on Tuesday.

In the elections attended by Deputy of the Sport and Youth Minister, Mohammadreza Davarzani, in Tehran's Olympic Academy, Rahimi managed to capture 34 votes.

Morteza Hassanpour finished in second place with seven votes.

Rahimi will remain in the post until 2021. He was previously president of Persepolis Athletic and Cultural Club, Sepahan FC and Rah Ahan FC.

He also was a board member of the Islamic Republic of Iran Football Federation.

Rahimi took charge of Iran Handball Federation between 1994 and 2010.

(Source: Tasnim)





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New director appointed to Cinema Organization of Iran

A R T  
d e s k

TEHRAN — Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Reza Salehi-Amiri appointed Mohammad-Mehdi Heidarian as the new director of the Cinema Organization of Iran on Tuesday, the ministry announced.

Heidarian, who was a senior advisor to Salehi-Amiri, previously served as the deputy culture minister for cinematic affairs from 2002 to 2005 when Ahmad Masjed-Jamei held office as culture minister.

Heidarian replaced Hojatollah Ayyubi who held the post since 2013.

The appointment was announced a day after Ayyubi was rumored to have resigned. However, he immediately denied his resignation.

NEWS IN BRIEF

"The Sky Is Changing" at Iranian bookstores

CULTURE  
d e s k

TEHRAN — London-based Swiss writer Zoe Jenny's 2010 novel "The Sky Is Changing" has recently been published in Persian by Saleess Publications in Tehran.

Translated by Sahar Tavakkoli, the book is about Claire, her husband and a circle of middle class friends. They believe that they are in full control of their perfect lives and destinies but their dreams can be easily destroyed.

Spielberg, Streep, Hanks may team for Pentagon Papers movie

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hollywood dream team Steven Spielberg, Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep are considering taking on some classified government documents in a feature film about the Pentagon Papers case.

A source close to the project who spoke only on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly said Monday that Spielberg has signed on to direct "The Post," a co-production from Fox and Amblin Entertainment.

Based on a script by Liz Hannah, the film will focus on The Washington Post's 1971 publication of the classified Vietnam War study after a federal judge barred the New York Times from further coverage. The Times had previously published a series of articles from the critical report after military analyst Daniel Ellsberg leaked the top secret documents.

In defiance of the government's efforts to block coverage on grounds of national security concerns, Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham joined forces with the New York Times in a legal battle over their right to publish. The case went to the Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the press.

According to a report by the Hollywood trade publication Deadline, Hanks is in talks to play Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee - which would mark his fifth outing with Spielberg - and Streep is in negotiations for the part of Graham.

Margot Robbie to headline alternate Robin Hood universe tale Marian

LONDON (The Guardian) — Margot Robbie is set to play Maid Marian in a new film that takes a revisionist look at Robin Hood folklore.

According to Deadline, the Suicide Squad and Wolf of Wall Street star will take on the lead in Marian, a script that was reportedly the center of a heated bidding war. It was ultimately picked up by Sony and producers Donald De Line and Amy Pascal.

The story will follow the character after her lover Robin Hood dies as the result of a conspiracy to conquer England. She will then take up his place as leader of the resistance, taking her people into battle.

Indian scholars discover 700-year-old manuscript of Divan of Hafez

CULTURE TEHRAN — A team of Indian scholars d e s k working at the Asiatic Society, a Kolkata-based institute for Oriental studies, has stumbled upon a 700-year-old manuscript of the Divan of Hafez, the Times of India reported on Monday.

The manuscript, which bears the signature and gold insignia of Shah Jahan, the fifth Mughal emperor who reigned from 1628 to 1658, also contains an unpublished ghazal.

The unpublished poem begins with this verse: "Beham Dellah Ke Bazam Didane Ruyat Moyasser Shod" (Thank God, I have the honor of looking at your face again).

Persian poet Hafez lived and wrote much before the time of Shah Jahan, but the insignia means that the manuscript, which also embellished with beautiful illuminations and calligraphy, had landed in the Mughal emperor's library, scholars said.

Many literati and scholars recently traveled to the city to catch a glimpse of the manuscript currently on display at Asiatic Society's museum. However, it will soon be relocated, considering its antique value and fragile condition.

Asiatic Society's researchers discovered the Divan of Hafez while studying the works of the Persian-Urdu poet Mirza Ghalib.

Historian Ramkrishna Chatterjee of the Asiatic Society said, "When our Persian scholars went through it, they were stunned. This was an original handwritten manuscript by Hafez, who preceded Ghalib by nearly 500 years."

"We started hunting for reference material to authenticate the manuscript while we consulted Persian scholars who vouched for the authorship of the ghazal collection, we had to know how this manuscript reached us," he added

Syed Akhtar Hussain, associate professor of Persian at Jawaharlal Nehru University and president of the acclaimed Institute of Indo-Persian Studies, said that the unpublished poem will make scholars of Persian literature rush to take a closer look at the manuscript.

He added that a similar handwritten manuscript is



Tomb of Hafez, Shiraz

kept at Khuda Baksh Library in Patna.

Ahmad KarimiHakkak, an Iranian professor of Persian literature at the University of Maryland, has also made remarks about the manuscript.

"Since this divan bears the signature of Shah Jahan, it naturally adds to the authenticity of the manuscript," he said,

"Hafez wrote about 500 ghazals in his own hand. After his death, some of his students copied his manuscripts for greater dissemination. The earlier copies are also considered to be authentic, but since this one contains

an unpublished ghazal, its authenticity is unquestioned," he added.

The question researchers are asking is why the manuscript bears the signature of Shah Jahan although Hafez lived and wrote long before the Mughal Empire. "Successive Mughal courts, right from the time of Humayun, have collected original manuscripts of Persian poets and Hafez was naturally the most coveted figure. Mughal emperors would even gift manuscripts to other rulers, and libraries were looted during wars. This is how manuscripts traveled," Hakkak explained.

Poet Ahmad Azizi dies at 59

CULTURE  
d e s k

TEHRAN — Poet Ahmad Azizi who mostly known for his new style in composing masnavi, died in the western Iranian city of Kermanshah on Monday nine years after falling into a coma following a stroke. He was 59.

Azizi was hospitalized in the Imam Reza Hospital where his sister Zeinab had been taking care of him all these years.

President Hassan Rouhani, offered condolences to the Azizi's family in a message published by Persian media.

"Azizi, who was one of the pioneers of the ritual poetry, had a great influence on the growth of contemporary poetry with his precious literary works. His

works will remain as an eternal part of the great treasure of culture and literature of Islamic Iran," President wrote in his message.

In a message of condolences, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Reza

Salehi-Amiri called the death of the poet a great loss.

"This great poet, who composed poetry with a revolutionary and religious perspective, was regarded as a popular poet of the Islamic Revolution, and he will surely be missed," part of the message reads.

Deputy Culture Minister for Cultural Affairs Abbas Salehi expressed his condolences in a separate message, and said that his memory would live on forever.

He asked the poets and the guests attending the closing ceremony of the 11th Fajr International Poetry Festival, which ends in Mashhad today, to pay

tribute to the poet.

Azizi was born in 1958 in Sar-e Pol-e Zahab in Kermanshah Province. His family moved to Tehran with the beginning of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war and he began to work with the Javanan magazine, composing poetry.

Azizi's poetry has been mingled with Islamic mysticism, and his new style has had a great influence on the contemporary poetry.

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, who had traveled to the western Iranian city of Kermanshah in October 2011, paid a visit to Azizi in the hospital.

Alec Baldwin says Trump impersonation revived his comedy career

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Actor Alec Baldwin said that his impersonation of U.S. President Donald Trump on NBC's sketch show "Saturday Night Live" has revived his "dead" comedy career after he wrapped up sitcom "30 Rock" in 2012.

Actor Alec Baldwin speaks at a protest against U.S. President-elect Donald Trump outside the Trump International Hotel in New York City, U.S. on January 19, 2017. (Reuters/Stephanie Keith)

Trump on "Saturday Night Live" (SNL) last October, ahead of November's U.S. presidential elections.

Baldwin quipped that his comedy career "did die" but that "I'm being reincarnated. As Trump! Oh God!"

Viewer ratings have soared for "Saturday Night Live" since Baldwin started portraying Trump in a series of skits mocking the billionaire reality TV star-turned-politician as a dim-witted commander-in-chief with a short attention span, an oversized-ego and a Twitter addiction.

Trump criticized the NBC show in December, calling it "totally unwatchable" and a "hit-job."

Robert Osborne, genial face of TCM, dead at 84

NEW YORK (AP) — Robert Osborne, the genial face of Turner Classic Movies and a walking encyclopedia of classic Hollywood, has died. He was 84.

Jennifer Dorian, general manager of TCM, announced Osborne's death Monday. A publicist for the network said he passed away Monday in New York.

"His calming presence, gentlemanly style, encyclopedic knowledge of film history, fervent support for film preservation and highly personal interviewing style all combined to make him a truly world-class host," said Dorian. "Robert's contributions were fundamental in shaping TCM into what it is today and we owe him a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid."

A cause of death was not announced, though Osborne's waning health had forced him to miss the previous two TCM Film Festivals, which he hosted annually in Los Angeles.

Osborne was there from the inception of Ted Turner's commercial-free classic movie network. To open its first broadcast on April 14, 1994, he introduced "Gone With the Wind." In the decades after, he remained Turner Classic's primary - and often sole - host.

For TCM viewers, Osborne was a

constant and comforting presence. He presented nightly films and movies packaged in series like "The Essentials" with bits of history and trivia. He also conducted interviews with stars for the network's guest programmer evenings. His intros - always beginning "Hi, I'm Robert Osborne" - were the warm appetizers to countless feasts of Hollywood classics.

In a 2014 interview with The Associated Press, Osborne - who previously worked as a Hollywood Reporter columnist and as host of the Movie Channel - recalled his long-standing obsession with Hollywood. Even in college, he maintained a black book, nicknamed "Blackie," of his research into films and the details of their making.

"I was ready with all that information when a job was created. I prepared for something that didn't exist," said Osborne.

Born in Colfax, Washington, Osborne studied journalism at the University of Washington and spent two years in the Air Force in Seattle. He then moved to Los Angeles to make it as an actor, and was signed by Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz's Desilu Studios. Ball, who remained a mentor to him up until her death in 1989, encouraged Osborne to pursue writing - "especially after she saw me act," Osborne would recall.

Book on painter Koorosh Shishegaran published in London

CULTURE TEHRAN — A book providing a profound insight into the life and career of Iranian painter Koorosh Shishegaran has been published by Saqi Books in London.

The book entitled "Koorosh Shishegaran: The Art of Altruism" has been edited by Hamid Keshmirshakan, with Hamid Dabashi also contributing to the project.

Articles by art expert Alireza Sami-Azar, professor of Art History at California State University Abbas Daneshvari, and curator and novelist David Galloway have been included in the first part of the book.

The second part showcases various artistic phases of the artist and outlines his progressive approach to art-making and distribution.

Born in Qazvin in 1944, Shishegaran is considered one of the most expressive and emotive artists of the contemporary Iranian art movement.

In a career spanning six decades, he has established himself as an artist of great discipline, social awareness and manual skill, working in a wide array of different media, from graphic design to painting, photography and furniture design.

Drawing inspiration from Iranian visual culture, Shishegaran is best known for his scribble line abstract paintings. These dynamic colorful lines, depicting the contemporary human condition, have enabled the artist to find a style and language expressive of the modern era.

