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Zarif: Strategic roadmap with Afghanistan in the pipeline

By Ali Kushi

KABUL — Having met with senior Afghan officials in Kabul on Sunday, Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said the two sides have agreed on working toward a "strategic" roadmap which addresses issues of mutual concern.

"Iran and Afghanistan agreed to assign five committees to work out a strategic document on political-security, economic, educational and cultural, water and environment and refugee issues," Zarif told reporters.

The visit capped months of bilateral negotiations between Tehran and Kabul, the top diplomat stressed, noting that not until a general framework was achieved, draft plans had been proposed and upgraded.

One fertile ground for closer collaboration between the two countries is cultural and educational affairs, given a large number of Afghan nationals living in Iran, whom Zarif called them "guests".

"As two nations with religious and language affinities, Iran and Afghanistan can expand cooperation in the areas," Zarif highlighted, saying: "Upwards of 410,000 students and 17,000 Afghan university students are studying in Iran."

Zarif sat down with his counterpart Salahuddin Rabani, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, and former Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Leader: Huge turnout to secure Iran



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Annual exports of fisheries, fish products hit \$900m

ECONOMY TEHRAN — More than \$900 million of fisheries and fish products was exported from Iran during the past Iranian calendar year (which ended on March 20), according to Hassan Salehi, the head of Iran's Fisheries Organization.

As he further explained during the said period Iran exported above \$412 million of fisheries and over \$500 million of fish products.

At the present time, Iran produces 1.07 million tons of fisheries per annum, Salehi added.

The country plans to increase the value of its fishery exports up to \$450-\$500 million by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018), Mehr news agency quotes Salehi as saying in early May.

After the implementation of nuclear deal with world powers in January 2016, Iranian government has focused on development of domestic fishery industry to attract foreign investments and increase the country's share of the international market, Salehi had stated in early February.

In this due, related negotiations have been done with some foreign countries such as France, Romania, Finland, Italy, China, Vietnam, Russia, and Thailand, he added.

Iran buys gear to shield gas output from any new U.S. sanctions

Iran is buying equipment to avert a possible disruption in output at its share of the world's biggest natural gas field, in the event the U.S. decides to impose additional sanctions on its economy, the head of state-run operator Pars Oil & Gas Co. said.

The company is buying "essential equipment" it would need to avert a halt in operations at the offshore South Pars deposit, in case the U.S. imposes new curbs on Iran, Managing Director Mohammad Meshkinfam said in an interview in Tehran. Under new sanctions, the company's purchase of a simple valve for the field would become "a most challenging task," he said.

"They will not be able to stop our work altogether, but they will greatly slow down the progress here at South Pars," Meshkinfam said Sunday.

South Pars, together with the neighboring North Dome in Qatar, is the world's largest gas deposit, and Iran is seeking to attract foreign investors to help develop it.

Iran signed a preliminary \$4.8 billion deal with Total SA and China National Petroleum Corp. in November for the 11th phase of South Pars. It was the country's first joint venture with international partners since sanctions were eased in January 2016. Total will approve the project if sanctions aren't modified, Chief Executive Officer Patrick Pouyanne told reporters in February.

The 24 development phases at South Pars have a combined production capacity of 570 million cubic meters a day of gas, and they currently produce about 500 million, Meshkinfam said.

His company is seeking \$30 billion from the Oil Ministry to halt a decline in gas pressure at the field, he told a news conference later on Sunday. That would be on top of the \$90 billion that the government has allocated to develop South Pars, of which POGC has spent \$70 billion.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Low turnout in elections can be politically corrosive: philosopher

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Charles Taliaferro, a professor of philosophy at St. Olaf College, says low turnout in elections "can be politically corrosive".

In an interview with the Tehran Times, the philosopher also says, "High turnouts is often the result of a confident energy that people and their preferences does or can make a difference."

Following is the text of the interview:

■ Does elections in a country mean there's democracy?

A: Unfortunately, the electoral process can be corrupted on so many levels, that there can be elections and yet the people are not given adequate alternatives or information. States or organizations within a nation can also intimidate voters, suppressing the will of the people. Fortunately, the United Nations established a Focal Point for Electoral Assistance in 1991 which has assisted over a 100 countries that are

working toward fair and just elections

■ Do people's participation in elections really affect their personal and social life?

A: That is a great question. In the communities I work in and with in the USA, namely the college and university communities, I believe that participation in the last presidential election was something that did indeed involve students and professors personally and socially. A lot was at stake in terms of social justice, immigration policies, →2

Iran, S. Korea bolster co-op in wetland conservation

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Ramsar Mayor or Nosratollah Kouzehgar and Suncheon Mayor Cho Choong-hoon inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to enhance cooperation in sustainable development and conservation of wetlands, the Department of Environment official website reported on Saturday.

Ramsar Regional Centre for Central and West Asia with the goal of enhancing the implementation of the Ramsar Convention in the region through training, research, advocacy and public awareness programs was established in the Iranian city of Ramsar, the northern province of Mazandaran, in 2002.

The center is planning on cultivating closer relation with other regional centers of Ramsar Convention lately with the purpose of economic growth by improving nature tourism

and preserving biodiversity by means of protecting and sustainable exploitation of the wetlands.

Accordingly a delegation comprising Ramsar Mayor Kouzehgar, Ramsar chief of department of environment Mohammad Reza Niasati, and Ramsar Regional Centre for Central and West Asia executive director Sadeq Sadeqzadegan travelled to South Korea to visit the Ramsar Regional Center for East Asia in Suncheon and strengthen ties with the center on April 25.

Sharing and exchanging knowledge and successful experiences to improve tourism and sightseeing, enhancing bilateral cooperation to safeguard the biodiversity, promoting economic growth through sustainable eco-tourism, and cooperating on Communication, Education and Public Awareness

(CEPA) programs by arranging joint student camps and sightseeing, eco-tourism festivals, fairs, etc. to support Ramsar convention are of the goals of the newly signed agreement between the two mayors.

The Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. It is named after the city of Ramsar in Iran, where the Convention was signed in 1971.

The Convention's mission is "the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world".



Tehran Times/ Fatemeh Abedi

The art of basketry in central Iran

A rural women from the central province of Isfahan weaves baskets using fine wooden splints, locally called Morvar, on May 6, 2017.

Basket weaving has been a tradition since around 400 years ago in certain villages of the province. Women in one of the villages are professionally busy with basket weaving using Morvar.

Bahrain: Sheikh Isa Qassim trial in absentia postponed to 21 May

The fourth high criminal court on Sunday postponed the trial of Sheikh Isa Qassim, the most senior Shia cleric in the country, to 21 May.

Sheikh Qassim, who was stripped of citizenship and rendered stateless on 20 June 2016, is being treated as an illegal resident in his home country, and has been tried in absentia.

Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, Director of Advocacy, Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy: "Over the past year Bahrain has silenced all political opposition, all human rights defenders, and now they are coming after the most senior religious figure in the country".

Meanwhile, crowds of people on Sunday heeded a call by Bahrain's Shia clergy to take to the streets across the nation in solidarity with Sheikh Isa Qassim.

Sheikh Qassim is the spiritual leader of Bahrain's dissolved opposition bloc, the al-Wafaq National Islamic Society. He had his citizenship taken away in June last year over accusations of using his position to serve foreign interests and promote "sectarianism" and "violence." He has denied the allegations.

Similar charges face Sheikh Hussein Mahrous and Mirza al-Dirazi, his office's head and staffer, respectively.

Security forces have been placed on alert across Bahrain on the eve of Qassim's court session. The trio were to be tried on May 7. But a regime court on Sunday decided to postpone the trial until May 21, reports said.

Hundreds of troops from Saudi Arabia have reportedly crossed into the island using King Fahd Causeway ahead of the trial.

Saudi and Emirati troops were sent over to Bahrain after the revolution to assist Manama's suppressive measures.

The anti-regime Coalition Youth of 14 Feb Revolution released a statement, warning of drastic measures. The movement said it considered any potential "tyrannous" court ruling against Qassim to be void.

Persecution of Qassim, it said, is in line with systematic targeting of the island's Shia majority and rooted in political and tribal vendetta. **13 →**

ELECTION COUNTDOWN



Raisi to speak at University of Tehran

POLITICS TEHRAN — Presidential candidate **d e s k** Ebrahim Raisi will speak at the University of Tehran on Tuesday, the university's Student Basij chief Amin Aqarlu said on Sunday, Fars reported.

Another news about Raisi came from Khorasan Razavi province on Sunday, when the Mashhad Hezbollah Ansar group voiced its support for him.

On Wednesday Raisi will travel to the central province of Chaharmahal-Bakhtiari as part of his presidential campaign, Tabnak news website reported.



Iranian expatriates a great opportunity: Jahangiri

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranians living abroad **d e s k** present precious opportunities for the country, presidential candidate Es'haq Jahangiri told reporters on Sunday.

"In terms of knowledge, they have occupied lofty ranks in the world. Also in terms of money, they are very powerful and can help most sectors in the country," he said.

He added that during his tenure as first vice president in the current government, a plan was made to contact Iranian scientists abroad and use their talent in scientific circles.



Qalibaf proposes candidates reveal their assets in live program

POLITICS TEHRAN — Presidential candidate **d e s k** Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf has proposed that he and his rivals reveal their assets in a live debate show on Friday.

It is the people's right to know where their officials live, what they have, and what activities they undertake, he said on Sunday.

"I had prepared a list of my assets to show... I believe one aspect of fighting corruption is transparency."



Resistance cornerstone of Iran's foreign policy: Hashemi Taba

POLITICS TEHRAN — Resistance is the basic **d e s k** and fundamental part of Iran's foreign policy, presidential candidate Mostafa Hashemi Taba told IRIB on Sunday in an interview with a focus on defense policies.

Defense policies are set by the Supreme Defense Council, he said.

"Iran's top priority is to safeguard the land... Therefore I still insist that my motto will be to defend Iran," the presidential candidate reiterated.



'Mirsalim's rationality unmatched among candidates'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Presidential candidate **d e s k** Mostafa Mirsalim's rationality and wisdom is unmatched among the five other candidates, his campaign chief in Khorasan Razavi said on Sunday.

"Mr. Mirsalim talks according to law and the realities of the country. If he does not make the top goal scorer in the election, he is sure to win the title for the most ethical man," Javad Arian Manesh said, Mehr reported.

He added polls show after the second live debate on Friday Mirsalim's approval ratings have increased greatly.



63,500 polling booths to be staged on election day

POLITICS TEHRAN — About 63,500 polling **d e s k** booths will be staged for the election day of May 19, when presidential, council, and midterm parliamentary elections will be held, according to the secretary of Iran's elections headquarters.

Speaking to IRNA on Sunday, Ali Pourali Motlaq said there will be two ballot boxes for the presidential election at each polling booth.

He added the council and midterm parliamentary elections will be held fully electronically at 9,752 polling stations.

Those guilty in mine incident should stand trial: Rouhani

POLITICS TEHRAN — President **d e s k** Hassan Rouhani said on Sunday that those who are found guilty in a coal mine incident should face trial.

An explosion on Wednesday at the Azad-Shahr coal mine in northeastern Golestan province left 35 people dead.

Visiting the site of the coal mine, the president called for investigation into the incident in order to prevent repetition of such disasters in the future.

The blast, which also left 73 other workers injured, occurred as a result of methane gas accumulation at the coal mine 14 kilometers away from the city of Azad-Shahr.

It occurred when workers changed the battery of the locomotive, creating a spark.

"There were some technical difficulties with the batteries in the depth of 700 meters and changing the batteries was carried out



inside the tunnel rather than outside of it and that triggered the explosion," Labor and Social Welfare Minister Ali Rabiei said on Thursday.

Rouhani also met with the survivors of the tragic incident and the bereaved families.

"[As government] we are responsible for

their lives and it is our duty," the president said. "Rest assured that we will pursue this issue and also your demands."

Coal miners, angry over the tragic incident, besieged a car carrying the president. The miners, some covered in coal soot from searching for fallen comrades still missing, began kicking and banging on the armored SUV carrying Rouhani.

Officials say they've recovered 22 bodies and the search is continuing for the remaining victims.

Rabiei also traveled to Azad-Shahr, where he said many of the country's 20-, 30-, and 50-year-old mines, especially coal mines, were in need of renovation.

He further said that those trapped might still be alive as they could have been working in a part of the mine where there were no methane gas at the time of the blast.

Leader: Huge turnout to secure Iran

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic **d e s k** Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has called for a massive turnout in the upcoming presidential election, saying the presence of the people would strengthen the country against its enemies.

Ayatollah Khamenei said on Sunday that any dereliction on the part of voters in the elections would harm the country.

"The only barrier against the animosity of the enemy is the presence of the people at the scene because the grandeur of an 80-million population country with a powerful and intelligent manpower and millions of youths will instill fear in the heart of the enemy," he told a group of teachers and students in Tehran.

The Leader further said that all people should

participate in the elections in order to preserve their country's grandeur, sovereignty and security.

Iranians will go to the polling booths on May 19 to elect their next president, with more than 50 million people eligible to vote.

"Elections in the Islamic Republic drive from Islam. It is not such that 'republic' be attached to 'Islam'. If there had been no elections, no trace would have remained of the Islamic Republic of Iran today."

Emphasizing that voters are free to vote for any candidate they choose, Ayatollah Khamenei said the main and important issue is that the people turn up at the polls to show that they are ready to defend Islam and the establishment. Elsewhere in his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei criticized the government for signing a

UNESCO document, dubbed as the Education 2030 agenda charting out development goals for world nations, saying the Islamic Republic will not submit to it.

"This is the Islamic Republic of Iran where the criteria is Islam and the Qur'an. This is not a place where a faulty, destructive and corrupt Western lifestyle could have an influence. It makes no sense to accept such a document in the Islamic Republic," he explained, according to Press TV.

He emphasized that such organizations are under the influence of world powers and aim taking advantage of Iran's educational information.

"What occasion makes a so-called international body decide for world nations with diverse history, culture and civilization, under the influence of world powers?"

Foreign Ministry says not involved in election rivalry

POLITICS TEHRAN — The **d e s k** Foreign Ministry announced on Saturday that it is not involved in the presidential election campaigns against or in favor of any particular candidate.

"Under the current circumstances, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs merely announces the foreign policy achievements of the Islamic establishment without involvement in factional and partisan issues," ministry spokesman Bahram

Qassemi said, according to Press TV.

He said none of the Foreign Ministry staff is a member of any political party or faction. Allegations against the ministry ahead of the May 19 election may have intensified due to the fact that the Foreign

Ministry is "actively announcing the country's stance," he noted.

The spokesman said what is announced by the ministry is "completely in line with safeguarding the country's security, national interests and foreign policy achievements."

Low turnout in elections can be politically corrosive: philosopher

I → the environment including climate change policies, federal support of science and the arts, nationalism, healthcare, economic practices. On my campus, St. Olaf College, there was tangible social and personal tension between students behind Trump and Clinton, that made national news. Still, while the turnout was high, estimated at over 58% of eligible voters, about 90 million people did not vote.

■ Does high turnout in the elections show the political maturity of the society?

A: I am tempted to reply that maturity might hinge on who or what one votes for, but I propose instead that societies in which there are large turnouts are indeed sites in which persons are oriented toward and are acting upon the ideal of self-rule, and that ideal of civic republicanism beats the alternatives of royalism or totalitarianism.

Large numbers of voters does not necessarily mean that the population is free of terror or the fear of terror, but it does suggest that the state has secured a sufficiently non-violent, pacific state in which persons feel safe voting.

■ In what way can high turnout help political development?

A: I suggest that low turnouts can be politically corrosive. Whether it is the result of apathy or cynicism or some other factor, it is some sign that the population is alienated from its leaders or at least not committed to the responsibility of caring for themselves. Conversely, high turnouts is often the result of a confident energy that people and their preferences does or can make a difference.

To sustain that energy, I believe it is vital for those who win elections to show respect for those who lose. It can be exhausting to be defeated at the ballot box.

In a democratic republic, victors are expected to pursue their campaign promises that voters trusted, but democracies cannot function if those who lose elections are utterly alienated from having a voice in governance.



Vacancy Announcement

The Mission of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in IRAN is seeking to fill the following vacant position in Tehran:

Legal Advisor (Fulltime)

Main responsibilities

- Advises the mission on IHL and national & or international legal matters
- Initiates and formulates strategies to address identified issues
- Supervises and guides research and analysis of specific legal matters and broader sectors of national legal system
- In charge of project/program implementation and reporting
- Disseminates at an expert level
- Develops & maintains network of interlocutors in all relevant sectors and/or high levels
- Conducts financial rules and budget elaboration and monitors its implementation
- Assumes all responsibility for important or complex files, projects, programs
- Manages staff

Minimum required knowledge & experience:

- Master or Doctorate or specialisation in IHL or related area of International Law
- 5 - 8 years work experience in a similar function
- Confirmed teaching/dissemination experience
- Fluent in spoken and written English and national language
- Confirmed political, social and cultural knowledge
- Confirmed communication & negotiation skills
- Excellent computer skills
- Excellent analytical and reporting skills
- Knowledge of French language is an asset
- Knowledge of humanitarian affairs, and working experience with an international organization is an asset

It should be noted that the position might require travelling (on mission) outside and inside the country.

All interested applicants should submit a letter of interest and a résumé in English to the following email address:

teh_hr_services@icrc.org

ALL submissions MUST be received by the closing date of 17 May 2017

Please be informed that only shortlisted candidates will be notified for further process.

More than 200 cholera cases reported in Yemen's Sana'a

More than 200 cholera cases have been reported in Yemen's capital Sana'a as contaminated water and poor sanitation have led to a sharp rise in the transmission of the deadly disease.

Cholera is one of several risks to civilians, but a rapid advance of the disease would add a new dimension to an unfolding humanitarian disaster.

"In the last few days, we've received more than 200 patients with cholera," a nurse at the Jumhuri hospital in Sana'a told Al Jazeera.

"Two patients died because they were in bad condition and they came here too late."

Khabar agency, a local news website, reported 10 deaths across the country on Saturday, citing information provided by the Ministry of Public Health.

Abdul Hakim Kahlani, the official spokesman for the ministry, told the website that there were three confirmed deaths in Sana'a, three in Ibb province and four in Hodeidah province.

The streets of Sana'a and its suburbs have been littered with piles of rubbish, and families living in close proximity have been some of the hardest hit.

Street cleaners have repeatedly called on the government to increase wages and a strike over pay has lasted seven months.

"We drink from a well that distributes water to the whole district," a resident told Al Jazeera.

"We never got sick in the past, but lately we've had a crisis with garbage in the city and it's caused severe diar-



rehea and vomiting. It's horrible."

Yemen has been battling a cholera outbreak since mid-October 2016.

Out of 23,506 suspected cases, there have been 108 associated deaths.

Cholera is a disease that is transmitted through contaminated drinking water.

Most sufferers exhibit mild symptoms that can be treated with oral rehydration solution, but the disease can kill within hours in severe cases if

not treated with intravenous fluids and antibiotics.

The war in Yemen has killed more than 10,000 people, left 7.4 million children in need of medical help, nearly 2.2 million malnourished, and around 462,000 at risk of severe acute malnutrition, according to the UN children's agency, UNICEF.

Since March 2015, Yemen has been heavily bombarded by Saudi warplanes as part of a brutal campaign against the impoverished country in

an attempt to reinstall Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, Yemen's president who has resigned and is a staunch ally of Riyadh, and crush the popular Houthi Ansarullah movement.

Latest tallies show that the imposed war has so far killed over 12,000 Yemenis and wounded thousands more. The Saudi aggression has also taken a heavy toll on the country's facilities and infrastructure, destroying many hospitals, schools, and factories.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Macron, Le Pen face off in watershed French election

French voters went to the polls Sunday to pick a new president, choosing between centrist Emmanuel Macron and far-right leader Marine Le Pen in a crucial election for the country and Europe.

Polling day follows an unprecedented campaign marked by scandal, repeated surprises and a last-minute hacking attack targeting Macron, a 39-year-old former investment banker who has never held elected office.

The run-off vote pits the pro-Europe, pro-business Macron against anti-immigration, anti-EU Le Pen, two radically different visions that underline a split in Western democracies.

Le Pen, 48, has portrayed the ballot as a contest between the "globalists" represented by her rival -- those in favor of open trade, immigration and shared sovereignty -- versus the "nationalists" who defend strong borders and national identities.

She is hoping to spring a shock result that would resonate as widely as Britain's Brexit decision to withdraw from the European Union or the unexpected victory of U.S. President Donald Trump.

"The world is watching," said 32-year-old marketing worker Marie Piot as she voted in a working-class part of northwest Paris.

"After Brexit and Trump, it's as if we are the last bastion of the Enlight-



enment," she said.

Meanwhile, Turnout in France's presidential election stood at 28.23 percent at midday on Sunday, the interior ministry said, down from 30.66 percent at the same point in the 2012 presidential ballot.

Sunday's figure was slightly down on the midday participation rate of 28.54 recorded during the first round of the election on April 23.

Overall turnout for French presidential elections is generally high, at around 80 percent.

Sunday's election pitting centrist Emmanuel Macron against Marine Le Pen of the far right falls in the middle of a three-day weekend in France.

It is the first in the six decades of the Fifth Republic in which neither the traditional left nor right has a candidate.

A recent voter survey found that seven in 10 voters are unhappy with the choice be

(Source: AFP)

Italian coastguard: 3,000 rescued in Mediterranean Sea

About 3,000 people have been saved in the Mediterranean Sea in a single day while trying to make the journey from northern Africa to Europe, according to the Italian coastguard.

They were picked up in more than 20 separate rescue operations on Saturday, involving the Italian coastguard and navy, the EU's EUNAVFOR mission in the Mediterranean, European Union border agency Frontex, NGOs, and merchant ships.

The coastguard gave no details of the nationalities of those rescued.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), so far this year 43,490 refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe by sea as of April 26.

More than 1,000 have died or are missing.

Earlier this month, Angelino Alfano, Italian foreign minister, said his country will host an international conference on migration.

"The stabilization of Libya has a tremendous value for us [Italy]: it means national security, the end of human trafficking, and a reduction of the migration flow," Alfano was cited as saying in the Italian Ansa news agency.

Refugees and migrants who pass through conflict-ridden Libya endure harsh conditions.

The refugees and migrants - many from Nigeria, Senegal and



The Gambia - are captured as they head north towards Libya's Mediterranean coast, where some hope to try and catch boats for Italy.

Along the way, they are prey to an array of armed groups and people-smuggling networks that often try to extort money in exchange for allowing them to continue.

Last month, the IOM said many refugees and migrants have been held for ransom, kidnapped, made to perform forced labour and, in some cases, sold in markets as slaves.

Some of those who cannot pay their captors are reportedly killed or left to starve to death, the IOM said. When migrants die or are released, others are purchased to replace them.

Libya is the main gateway for people attempting to reach Europe by sea, with more than 150,000 people making the crossing in each of the past three years.

(Source: agencies)

Turkey deploying troops to Syria's militant-held Idlib

The Turkish army is set to deploy forces to Syria's militant-controlled northwestern Idlib province and establish military bases there, a report says.

The Beirut-based al-Mayadeen TV channel cited sources as saying on Saturday that the Turkish military had sent a telegram to militant groups operating in Idlib and informed them of the deployment.

Turkish forces, it said, would not attack the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham terrorist group, formerly known as al-Nusra Front, but would engage in a "diplomatic" process and push them to evacuate Idlib and hand over their positions to the Turkish army.

A Turkish envoy had personally conveyed the message during a meeting with militant ringleaders in Idlib, the report said.

"The Turkish forces will temporarily deploy inside the border villages with armored vehicles and infantry forces as a first step," the telegram read.

It further urged the militants not to consider the Turkish troops as forces of occupation as it issued "security warning" against any resistance.

The report quoted a breakaway Syrian officer with the militants as confirming the Turkish army's preparation to enter Idlib and establish military bases there.

However, the governor's office in the southern



Turkish province of Hatay denied the report.

"Such statements that were claimed by some Arabic websites and social media accounts saying that the Turkish army will enter the Idlib region are not reflecting the truth," it said in a statement.

The alleged deployment plans come shortly after Turkey, Iran and Russia agreed in Astana, Kazakhstan to create four de-escalation zones in main battlefields in Syria.

One of the safe zones includes Idlib Province and adjoining districts of Hama, Aleppo and Latakia prov-

inces. The remaining three zones cover the northern parts of Homs Province, the Eastern Ghouta region near the capital, Damascus, and the area along the Jordanian border in southern Syria.

The agreement envisages a halt in fighting within the zones and the creation of conditions for humanitarian access, medical assistance, the restoration of damaged infrastructure and the return of displaced civilians to their homes.

Under the deal, the three guarantor states are committed to taking all the necessary measures to continue fighting the Daesh and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham terror outfits both within and beyond the safe zones.

In August 2016, Turkey began a unilateral military intervention in northern Syria, code-named Operation Euphrates Shield, sending tanks and warplanes across the border. Ankara claimed that its military campaign was aimed at pushing Daesh from Turkey's border with Syria and stopping the advance of Kurdish forces, who were themselves fighting Daesh.

Turkey ended its military campaign in northern Syria in March 2017, but did not rule out the possibility of yet another act of military intervention inside Syria, which has been gripped by deadly foreign-sponsored militancy since 2011.

(Source: SANA)

Afghan Taliban captures key district in Kunduz

The Taliban has captured a district in Afghanistan's northern Kunduz province, the second area to fall to the group a week after they launched their so-called spring offensive.

Mahfoozullah Akbari, a spokesman for Kunduz police, said Taliban fighters attacked the district of Qala-e Zal "from several directions" on Friday, and took full control of the district by mid-morning on Saturday.

Akbari said security forces had put up tough resistance but were forced to retreat because reinforcements failed to arrive in time.

In a statement posted on their website, the Taliban said they had killed a number of soldiers, policemen and pro-government militia members and confiscated a huge cache of arms and ammunition.



Afghanistan has seen intensified Taliban attacks across the country, leaving Afghan forces - already beset by killings, desertions, and vacuums in leadership and morale - stretched on multiple fronts.

They have faced high casualties, up 35 percent in 2016 with 6,800 soldiers and police killed, according to a U.S. watchdog.

Last month the Taliban delivered a painful blow to the government, with its fighters dressed in Afghan army uniforms killing at least 135 young recruits at a base near northern Mazar-i-Sharif city.

More than 16 years after they were driven from power, almost half of the country is either contested or under the control of the Taliban.

According to U.S. military estimates released by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the Afghan government can only claim to control or influence 57 percent of the country's 407 districts.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

North Korea detains another U.S. citizen

North Korea announced Sunday it had detained a U.S. citizen for "hostile acts" -- its second arrest in a fortnight of an American as tensions rise between Pyongyang and Washington.

Kim Hak Song was detained on Saturday, the state news agency KCNA reported. "A relevant institution is now conducting detailed investigation into his crimes," it added.

It said Kim had worked for the Pyongyang University of Science and Technology (PUST), as had the US citizen detained last month.

The two-paragraph report gave no further details of the arrest of Kim Hak Song.

Last Wednesday the North confirmed the arrest on April 22 of Kim Sang-Duk, or Tony Kim, for trying to "overturn" the regime.

The arrest of Kim Hak Song means four U.S. citizens are currently being held in the North.

Pyongyang is engaged in a tense standoff with the administration of new U.S. President Donald Trump over its missile and nuclear weapons programs.

The Pyongyang University of Science and Technology -- founded by evangelical Christians from overseas and opened in 2010 -- is known to have a number of American faculty members. Pupils are generally children from the North's elite.

(Source: AFP)

50,000 evacuated in Germany over unexploded WWII bombs

German police on Sunday evacuated some 50,000 people from the northern city of Hanover in one of the largest post-war operations to defuse World War II era bombs.

Residents in a densely populated part of the city were ordered to leave their homes for the operation, planned since mid-April, to extract five recently discovered unexploded bombs.



Seven retirement and nursing homes were affected and some rail traffic through the city was disrupted for the operation, which was expected to last all day.

Local authorities arranged sports, cultural and leisure activities, including museum visits and film screenings, to occupy residents affected by the evacuation.

More than 70 years after the end of the war, unexploded bombs are regularly found buried on German land, legacies of the intense bombing campaigns by the Allied forces against Nazi Germany.

The biggest such evacuation took place last Christmas, when an unexploded British bomb forced 54,000 people out of their homes in the southern city of Augsburg.

(Source: AFP)

NEWS IN BRIEF



S. Korean trade delegation due in Tehran on May 23

ECONOMY TEHRAN — A South Korean trade delegation headed by the head of Busan Chamber of Commerce and Industry is due to visit Tehran on May 23, Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) announced.

The delegation will be comprised of representatives from renowned Korean companies active in various areas including maritime industries, shipbuilding, oil and gas, offshore industrial projects, and petrochemicals etc.



Tehran-Brussels flight to be launched in near future

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Managing Director of Iran's Qeshm Air said that a Tehran-Brussels airline is planned to be launched in near future, IRNA reported on Sunday.

Mahmoud Shekarabi made the remarks after a meeting with Belgian ambassador in Tehran.

According to him, Iran and Belgium have great potential for tourism and trade relations and the European country is also eager to expand ties with Iran.



63 foreign companies registered in Chabahar post-sanctions

ECONOMY TEHRAN — After the implementation of 2016 nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), 63 foreign companies have been registered for investment in Chabahar Free Trade Zone (CFTZ) in southeastern Iran.

According to CFTZ Organization Managing Director Abdolrahim Kordi, more than 240 companies have been registered during the zone's two decades of activity.

Chabahar free trade-industrial zone was established in 1992 along with the two other free trade zones in Qeshm and Kish islands in southern Iran.

Japan, China agree to enhance financial cooperation

Japanese and Chinese finance ministers agreed on Saturday to enhance cooperation through bilateral dialogue on their economies and policy steps.

The two ministers also agreed to hold the next bilateral economic dialogue in 2018 in China, a joint statement issued after their meeting showed. (Source: Reuters)

Globalization reigns at meeting of Asia's economic leaders

Protectionist rhetoric may be in vogue among some Western politicians, but many of the top economic leaders in Asia are saying they aren't worried. These officials suggest trade will become more open and free, and globalization is the solution to many of the world's problems.

From the pulpit at this week's Asian Development Bank meeting in Japan, central bankers and finance ministers from across the region fought back against the idea that international commerce should face more restrictions. Some even rejected the notion that such moves were feasible, despite the occasional setback like the U.S. pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) — a trade deal that would have established rules and opened markets between 12 nations accounting for roughly 40 percent of global GDP.

"I believe that an individual trade pact may not succeed because one country has pulled out, as in the case of TPP, Arun Jaitley, India's minister of finance, defense and corporate affairs, said at a CNBC-hosted debate during the ADB meeting. "But trade is going to move forward."

"Trade is going to find ways and means — either by way of multilateral arrangements, plurilateral arrangements, or bilateral arrangements — of moving forward," he added. "I don't think there is any force in the world today that can prevent trade."

Jaitley's comments were echoed by others at the debate, including ADB President Takehiko Nakao, who said he did not believe recent protectionist remarks "by several policymakers in the world" would immediately impact Asia and its continued opening up.

"As long as we keep reform momentum, which we are doing, we should be okay," he said, reflecting on the likely demise of the TPP in the absence of U.S. membership.

For his part, Nakao took an unequivocal stance on trade. "We are very clear: Free trade is important and protectionist trade practices are not good, and we should make every effort to keep the trade and investment regime open," he said during the debate.

Even Japan and China — which have shared a rocky relationship — agreed to strengthen their financial engagement at a meeting between the countries' finance ministers on the sidelines of the ADB meeting. Earlier this week, finance officials from Japan, China and South Korea issued a statement rejecting protectionism.

And even when there are issues with global trade, they should be resolved by global, multilateral institutions — not one country's administration declaring what is right and wrong — according to Pakistani Finance Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar. "I think it is the responsibility of the World Trade Organization. We have global bodies, (so) it will be ensured that there should be no protectionism," he said of President Donald Trump's attempts to crack down on allegedly unfair trading partners. (Source: cnbc)

2 platforms of South Pars phase 14 to be installed by Mar. 2018

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Two platforms of phase 14 of developing Iran's South Pars gas field (in the Persian Gulf) will be installed on their offshore spots by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018), Mohammad Meshkinfam, the managing director of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), said on Sunday.

Meshkinfam made the remarks on the second day of the 22nd Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show 2017), which is

running at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds, Shana reported.

Phase 14 is expected to produce 56.5 million cubic meters of sour gas and 75,000 billion barrels of gas condensate per day, one million tons of liquefied gas and one million tons of ethane per year, and 400 tons a day of sulfur.

POGC is in charge of implementing development phases of South Pars gas field.

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.

Brexit helps make UK's 1,000 richest people even richer

There are now more UK-based billionaires than at any time in history despite fears over Brexit, according to the Sunday Times Rich List.

This year's list found the wealthiest 1,000 individuals and families have a record total wealth of £658bn, up 14 per cent on last year's figure of £575bn.

Sri and Gopi Hinduja are the richest people in the UK with a fortune of £16.2bn, and the brothers are among a record 134 billionaires on the list, 14 more than were recorded in the 2016 edition.

Plain old millionaires increasingly struggle to count themselves among the mega-rich, with a fortune of £110 million now required to make it into the top 1,000.

Back in 1997 it took a personal wealth of just £15 million to make the grade.

Having first topped the list in 2014, the Hinduja brothers, Srichand, 81, and Gopichand, 77, have a vast array of business investments under the Hinduja Group.

With investments spanning the oil

and gas, automotive, IT, energy, media, banking, property and healthcare sectors, their latest project is the conversion of The Old War Office in London into a sumptuous five-star hotel and 88 luxury apartments for the world's super-rich.

Robert Watts, compiler of the list, said: "While many of us worried about the outcome of the EU referendum, many of Britain's richest people just kept calm and carried on making billions."

"We expected to see a chilling effect in the run-up to the EU referendum, but that simply did not materialise."

"A buoyant stock market usually drives the wealth of Rich Listers higher, and since last June equities have soared."

"We're seeing more and more diversity in the composition of the Rich List."

"More women, more people from ethnic backgrounds, and more from surprising walks of life, with egg farmers and pet food makers lining up with hedge fund managers and private equity barons."

(Source: Independent)

South Koreans want new leader to create jobs minus corruption

Creating jobs, ending corruption and boosting stubbornly low birthrates should be high on a to-do list for South Korea's next president after a campaign mostly dominated by security and foreign policy issues.

There's concern that the economy will likely take a backseat to North Korea when South Koreans pick their next leader on Tuesday. Voters have been rattled by a row over who should foot the bill for a U.S. anti-missile system deployed in the country to defend against North Korean aggression, after President Donald Trump suggested that South Korea should pay more for U.S. security commitment.

Public demand for change in South Korea's economic system remains high as growth and wealth continue to be concentrated in the hands of top few family-run business giants known as chaebol. Anger over allegations of collusion between big businesses and the government helped trigger massive monthslong protests that

led to the ouster of President Park Geun-hye in March and the arrest of the de-facto leader at Samsung, South Korea's largest business group.

Leading presidential contenders have tried to tap into the discontent over economic injustice, high youth unemployment and increased inequality between those with full-time jobs at chaebol and those who are underemployed or looking for work.

But the lack of concrete reform plans means that none of their economic agenda gained much attention during the campaign.

"Candidates fell short of expectations from the public and could not thoroughly cover the reform agenda to change the economic system," said Park Sang-in, a professor at Seoul National University's Graduate School of Public Administration. "Their talks on jobs and innovation were so superficial that they could not win public

support."

On jobs, the two main contenders hold different views on what the government should do.

Moon Jae-in, the front-runner from the main opposition Democratic Party, believes that a bigger government would be better for creating jobs and says South Korea needs more public workers. His main rival Ahn Cheol-soo also puts jobs high on his policy agenda but says the government should not be heavy-handed in intervening in the private sector and instead focus on making the markets fair and friendlier for innovation.

Ahn's campaign has argued that Moon's approach is no different from the previous governments that have relied on chaebol for economic growth, showering them with special treatment that resulted in cozy ties that in many cases led to corruption.

The two leading candidates also differ in what would be the best way to help small

companies and encourage the country's young talents who are drawn to high wages and job security at Samsung, Hyundai and other big businesses, to take more risks and work at small firms.

The new South Korean president, who will take office May 10, will face a narrowing window of opportunity to restore the vitality in Asia's fourth-largest economy.

Both Moon and Ahn recognize that the next administration should change all: the hereditary succession at the big businesses that distort market rules; the gaps between the full-time, stable jobs and contract jobs; the corporate culture and long working hours hostile to raising children.

Whoever wins, South Korea will likely see attempts to limit the power of chaebol's founding families, whose influence is compared to emperors even though they hold a small stake in publicly listed companies founded by their fathers or grandfathers.

(Source: Bloomberg)

India property developers face tough building rules

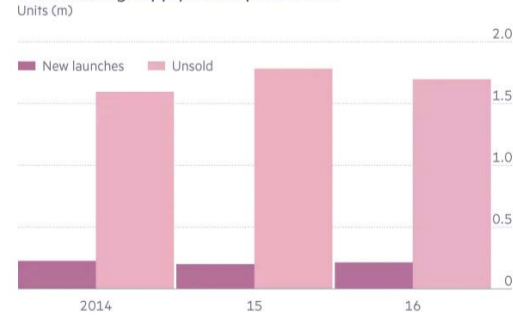
Hundreds of Indian property developers could be forced to shut up shop as a result of tough rules introduced this month to protect homebuyers after repeated failures to deliver promised apartments.

The regulations are an attempt by the Indian government to rein in irresponsible developers that have flourished under a lax regime, using cash from pre-selling apartments to cover overheads and buy land, rather than construct homes. Venkaiah Naidu, India's minister of housing and urban poverty alleviation, says the regulations will "remove the taint" on the sector. The rules will demand that developers secure full approvals before selling homes, pay interest to buyers for delays, and put 70 per cent of pre-collected money into escrow accounts, so it can be used only for construction and land costs. Developers who infringe these rules can be jailed for up to three years. Analysts say the rules could spell the demise of many of the sector's 11,000 businesses, as the construction industry grapples with an inefficient bureaucracy, an oversupply of luxury homes, and the high cost of land that comes with onerous requirements for developers.

"People will exit the industry," says Anshuman Magazine, chairman for India and south Asia at CBRE, the real estate group. "There is a possibility of a supply crunch...??.?if the market doesn't pick up and you put the regulations on top of it and the funding situation doesn't improve." With money sequestered into escrow accounts under the new rules, and no penalty for state bodies that delay or withhold approvals, developers say too much of the burden has shifted on to their shoulders.

"If I buy a parcel of land and I have to wait six months for approvals, I have to carry land and construction costs," says

India housing supply outstrips demand



Source: JLL India

Anita Arjundas, chief executive of Mahindra Lifespace Developers. "There are also the costs of consultants and approval consultants, approval costs, and then you have sales and marketing costs." Small developers without the financial muscle to fund their own operations will struggle most, says Pankaj Kapoor, managing director at Liasis Foras, a research house. But even India's largest developers say the new rules pose a significant challenge. DLF, India's largest listed real estate developer, is one. The cash-strapped company, whose net debt rose to Rs24,397 (\$3.8bn) in the third quarter — up 14 per cent from the same quarter last year — says it will retreat from residential real estate because of the regulations. "We are not looking at entering any new [residential] market," says Saurabh Chawla, the group's executive director.

In some states property developers need up to 50 approvals for a project, a process that can take months, or

even years, to complete. Even after a property has been built, it needs final clearances that companies say are frequently delayed by months without explanation. Now, instead of building residential property, Mr Chawla says that for the next two years DLF will build office blocks and other commercial real estate, while it raises money to comply with the new rules. The decision marks a change of tactics for the company, which "primarily focuses on the development and sale of residential real estate," according to its annual report.

Unitech, one of India's largest property groups, is likely to be hit. Last month the brothers who run the group, Sanjay and Ajay Chandra, were arrested on charges of fraud amid claims they cheated buyers of flats in one of their residential projects near the capital New Delhi. The company has delayed or stopped construction at 13,337 of 17,053 pre-sold properties, blaming a "squeeze in working capital," according to a statement filed in the Delhi High Court. Ramesh Nair, chief executive of property consultancy JLL in India, believes the rules will drive consolidation among developers, which proliferated under a lax regulatory regime. "The impact of this is huge," he says. "The number of developers will come down dramatically to deal with these strong consumer protections." But Vivek Tyagi, who is still waiting for construction to begin on an apartment he bought in 2012 with an advance payment of Rs480,000, says the new regulations might prove just another box-ticking exercise from a government keen to show it is on the side of ordinary people. "In India it's not the law that's the problem," he says. "It's the implementation of the law."

(Source: Financial Times)

OPEC runs out of options as bid to boost oil price fizzles

OPEC's plan to boost oil prices by cutting production has fizzled, yet it has little choice but to stick with it.

Crude has surrendered all of its gains since the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries first agreed production cuts in November. While the group has implemented the curbs, a rebound in U.S. shale output and stubbornly-high stockpiles show the world's three-year crude glut isn't shifting. Even signals from Saudi Arabia and Russia that they'll prolong the supply reductions haven't staunched the rout.

Yet OPEC has limited room for maneuver when it meets on May 25 in Vienna to discuss the deal, and is almost certain to persevere because the alternatives look even worse. If it were to deepen the cutbacks, even more shale supplies might come along to fill the gap, according to UBS Group AG. Abandoning the policy and restoring output would inflict the economic pain of crude below \$40, Citigroup Inc. predicts.

"The risk of a higher cut is that it could trigger too strong an increase in prices and support U.S. shale," said Giovanni Staunovo, an analyst at UBS in Zurich. "If they change strategy, Saudi Arabia would lose face. You can't say you want lower inventories, and after a few months give up."

■ No ammunition

The selloff came even after a statement from Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak that his country was "inclined toward" an extension of production cuts into the second half. He was echoing his Saudi counterpart Khalid al-Falih, who said on April 26 that there's a preliminary consensus to prolong the agreement with backing from other OPEC nations such as Kuwait and Iraq.

With OPEC already showing near-per-



fect compliance in delivering its pledged 1.2 million barrel-a-day production cut and an extension looking likely, the group has little ammunition left in its battle to raise prices.

"The OPEC deal was doomed to failure from the very beginning," said Eugen Weinberg, head of commodities research at Commerzbank AG. "If they deepen the cut, the effect will be short-lived. OPEC will find itself in the same position again in six-months time, but non-OPEC would get more market share by then."

■ Bearish data

While the International Energy Agency still predicts a rapid reduction in the supply glut in the second half of this year if OPEC maintains its cuts, data available right now show few signs of success.

Global fuel stockpiles may have actually increased during the first quarter, the IEA estimates. In the U.S. -- the world's biggest consumer -- crude inventories are dropping, but remain near record levels. Meanwhile, American production has roared back, growing by 523,000 barrels a day this year to the highest level in almost two years

as investment returns, according to the Energy Information Administration.

There's a sense of "dejection" in the market that the cuts aren't working, but OPEC can still succeed if it stays the course, according to Energy Aspects Ltd.

"We still think the market does rebalance by the end of this year as long as OPEC continues its production cuts," Amrita Sen, chief oil analyst at the London-based consultant, said in a Bloomberg television interview. "I don't think they have many options."

(Source: Bloomberg)

UK university helps Indian government plan waste-to-energy plant

Researchers from Sheffield Hallam University in the U.K. are working with the Indian government to build a new power plant which will process a third of New Delhi's waste.

Hallam Energy, a research and consultancy group within the university's Materials and Engineering Research Institute (MERI), have consulted on a proposed new waste to energy plant in New Delhi, according to the university.

A feasibility study for the new plant outlines suitable sites and the technology that would be required to develop and process the waste.

The university said that the work is part of the Indian government's Clean India Mission, a national £9 billion (\$11.6 billion) campaign by the government to clean the streets, roads and infrastructure of the country.

Abhishek Asthana, director of Hallam Energy, and co-leader of the project with Sanjay Mukherjee, said



in a statement: "New Delhi is in crisis without serious intervention and a new waste-to-energy plant. At current rates, New Delhi will be producing more than 14,000 metric tons of waste per day by 2024 and would require a landfill site equal to 7 percent of the city's total land, which is completely unfeasible."

Asthana added that the project is due to be completed in 2020 or 2021.

The new plant will process a third of the city's waste (4,000 tons per day) and produce 32 MW of power, according to the university.

(Source: renewableenergyworld.com)

Aramco splits IPO advisory roles, appoints Brunswick

Saudi Aramco has appointed advisory firm Brunswick to join FTI Consulting in running media and investor relations for what is set to be the world's largest initial public offering (IPO), sources said.

The decision to split the role underscores the mammoth task facing Saudi Arabia's national oil giant which hopes to list in 2018 in several countries around 5 percent of the company in a share sale which could raise \$100 billion.

Brunswick was recently appointed to run the external and media communications for the IPO while U.S.-based FTI will focus on managing investor relations, according to two sources with knowledge of the matter.

A spokeswoman for Brunswick declined to comment, FTI did not respond to a request for comment. Aramco declined to comment.

FTI's appointment was reported by Reuters in March.

Aramco will list its shares on the Kingdom's stock exchange as well as



one or more foreign stock exchanges, Deputy Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said earlier this week.

London, New York and Hong Kong have been named as possible exchanges for the listing.

Aramco is courting governments, including China and large institutional investors to buy into the IPO although the full details of the listing, including its size and value, are still unknown.

The \$100 billion IPO price tag is based on Aramco being valued at \$2 trillion, although some analysts believe the ultimate valuation could be much lower.

(Source: Reuters)

AMENDMENT NO.2



Following the Invitation For Qualification (IFQ) No. 9512003 for "Procurement and finance of a package of projects comprising transmission and sub-transmission substations, Subtransmission dispatching Center and transmission lines and underground cables at 230 and 63 kV voltage levels" published in Tehran Times News paper dated April 17, 2017, and website of Guilan Regional Electric Company: www.gilrec.co.ir and Tavanir Company: www.tavanir.org.ir and National Database Portal Of Iran Tender's Information: <http://iets.mporg.ir>, this is to inform you that Subject of the tender has been changed to: "Procurement of Equipments, Engineering and Financing of 9 units of Subtransmission GIS type 63/20 kV Substations through Foreign Financing Method (EPF)".

Moreover, the date for submission IFQ documents is extended for two months and would be on **Tuesday July 11th, 2017 2:00 P.M (14:00)**.

All other conditions and terms of prequalification documents are kept intact.

This Amendment is an Integral part of Prequalification Documents and shall be duly signed and stamped and delivered along with other documents.

Guilan Regional Electric Company

Technician makes shocking call: Expect crude to hit \$90

Crude is on track to double its price per barrel, according to one technician whose bold call had CNBC's "Futures Now" traders scratching their heads this week.

Crude saw its worst day in 2 months last week. The commodity also dipped below \$46 a barrel for the first time since November 30 of last year, and is down more than 15 percent.

Bill Strazzullo, chief market strategist at Bell Curve Trading — who correctly called for crude's plunge to the \$30 range back in 2013 — said oil could be on the verge of a massive rally that would send the commodity to levels not seen in three years.

"I think over the next [few years] it's not out of the question that you push \$80- to \$90" per barrel on oil, Strazzullo said in a recent interview with CNBC's "Futures Now." That's a nearly 100 percent rally from where the commodity is currently trading.

According to Strazzullo, the "dramatic shift in supply and demand dynamics" that sent crude plunging from its high of more than \$100 per barrel in 2013 to its low of \$26 in February 2016 has created a new normal for the commodity.

"The whole pricing structure has shifted lower. But when you look at the new structure, the bottom is still around \$30 a barrel. We think fair value is up around \$60, and probably the upper end of the range is \$80 to \$90," he added.

(Source: CNBC)

Iraq's oil exports average 3.252 million bpd in April

Iraq's daily oil exports averaged 3.252 million barrels per day (bpd) in April, down slightly from 3.259 million bpd the previous month, oil ministry spokesman said.

Iraq shipped 3.230 million bpd from its southern Basra terminals and 22,000 barrels a day were exported from the northern Kirkuk oilfields, Asim Jihad said.

Iraq generated \$4.6 billion and sold its oil for \$47.275 a barrel, the spokesman said.

The volumes announced cover all exports made by state-run oil marketer SOMO from the southern ports on the Persian Gulf and from the Turkish terminal of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean, it said.

Earlier this month, Iraq's oil ministry said it had started loading a tanker with 2 million barrels of crude oil bound for Egypt, marking the first shipment under a bilateral agreement.

Under a one-year agreement reached last month between Iraq and Egypt, Iraq will sell 12 million barrels of oil to Egypt, the ministry said.

(Source: Reuters)

Petronas says second floating LNG facility to be operational in 2020

Malaysian state-owned oil firm Petrolia Nasional Bhd said on Sunday its second floating liquefied natural gas (LNG) facility will be operational in 2020.

Petronas loaded its first cargo from the Petronas Floating LNG (PFLNG) 1 in east Malaysia last month, becoming the first company to produce LNG from a floating production unit.

The second one that is under construction, PFLNG 2, will enable liquefaction, production and offloading of natural gas in the Rotan field, 240 kilometers off the east Malaysian state of Sabah upon completion. It is set to have a processing capacity of 1.5 million tons per annum (mtpa).

Adnan Zainal Abidin, Petronas' acting vice president LNG assets, development and production, said development of the second facility was on track and that the company has received interest from other industry players for using both the facilities.

"We are in discussions with a number of third parties who are interested to have our floaters at their locations," Adnan told reporters ahead of the Asia Oil and Gas Conference in Kuala Lumpur. "It could be the use of existing or new floaters."

Adnan said the costs of the second facility will be lower than the first floater, though he declined to disclose the cost of the development.

PFLNG 1 will reach its designed capacity of 1.2 mtpa by June, and will be stationed at Kanowit in East Malaysia for five years, said chief executive of PFLNG Feisal Azhar.

Other producers currently developing floating LNG production facilities include Royal Dutch Shell, who is building the Prelude FLNG project in Australia which will be the world's biggest maritime vessel at a cost of over \$12 billion.

Japan's Inpex is building a similarly big FLNG unit as part of the \$37 billion Ichthys export project, also for use in Australia.

But both of these expensive projects have been plagued by delays and a global supply glut as new LNG projects come online in Australia and the United States. The huge development costs have led some to question whether FLNG units on this scale will be ordered again in future.

Petronas' Adnan said Asia will still be a huge customer for LNG.

He said new markets like India are huge for LNG demand, while Thailand was also buying more LNG, adding that the first cargo from PFLNG 1 went to India.

(Source: Reuters)

Sri Lanka to lease out oil tanks to India

The Prime Minister of Sri Lanka Ranil Wickremesinghe has said that his country will only lease out oil tanks to India under the proposed deal to jointly operate a strategic oil facility in the eastern port district of Trincomalee.

While addressing a gathering in Welimada, the Sri Lankan PM tried to address concerns regarding the selling of state assets to India, Japan, China and U.S. and said, "We are going to cater to the oil demand in India by leasing out the tanks", mentioned a national news portal.

He further said with a view to developing Trincomalee, the joint working group of the two countries would work out on investment plans. He also mentioned the possibility of Japan joining in the process.

Last month workers of state-run petroleum company of Sri Lanka held a strike to protest the proposed deal with India to jointly run the oil facility but soon ended it after an assurance from the Sri Lankan PM, mentioned a national news portal.

(Source: indianline.com)

Global orders for wind turbines continue to increase

Wind turbines totaling nearly 15,000 megawatts (MW) in capacity were ordered for wind projects worldwide in the second half of 2016, according to a new report from Navigant Research.

The orders came from projects in 24 countries and 11 vendors. Vestas extended its lead from other wind manufacturers with more than 6,445 MW of capacity delivered, which was almost 3,000 MW more than the first half of the year.

"Wind farm developers are becoming more willing to explore regions of less than ideal wind resources and wind turbine manufacturers are using larger rotors and higher hub heights to maximize capacity factors in these regions," said Adam Wilson, research analyst with Navigant Research. "Vestas is a good example of this—the company's average turbine rating for orders received in the second half of 2016 decreased from 2.96 MW to 2.8 MW while average rotor diameter actually increased slightly to 114.5 meters from 112.7 meters."

Gamesa came in second with just over 2,000 of orders. Asia Pacific lead among the regions with 1,800 MW of new capacity thanks to strong showings in India and Australia. North America and Europe were second and third, respectively.

(Source: power-eng.com)

Ethiopia is facing a killer drought

By Paul Schemm

The announcement by the United Nations in March that 20 million people in four countries were teetering on the edge of famine stunned the world and rammed home the breadth of the humanitarian crisis faced by so many in 2017.

Yet even as donors struggle to meet the severe needs in the war-torn nations of Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen, another crisis, more environmental in nature, is taking place nearby — nearly unnoticed.

On Thursday, the Ethiopian government increased its count of the number of people requiring emergency food aid from 5.6 million to 7.7 million, a move that aid agencies say was long overdue. The figure is expected to rise further as southeast Ethiopia confronts another fierce drought.

But with food crises erupting across the continent and the government's budget strained by last year's drought, the money isn't there to fight it. There could eventually be as many people in



Ethiopia needing emergency food assistance as in Somalia and South Sudan combined.

With donors focused on Somalia across the border, little international aid has found its way to the Ethiopian areas hit by that drought. "I think it's partly because there are other priorities, and they are not signaling loudly enough to donor offices," Mason said.

According to a document detailing Ethiopian's humanitarian needs that was drawn up in January by the government and aid agencies, Ethiopia needs nearly \$1 billion to confront the crisis, more than half of which it still lacks. That figure also does not take into account the revised estimates in the numbers of people requiring aid.

During last year's drought, Ethiopia came up with more than \$400 million of its own money to fight off famine, but this year, it has been able to commit only \$47 million, probably because of an exhausted budget.

Severity of the crisis

There have also been accusations that the government is playing down the severity of the crisis to keep the country from looking bad internationally. During the earlier drought, it was months before the government admitted there was a problem, in part because Ethiopia had gained a reputation as Africa's rising star and didn't want to go back to being associated with drought and famine.

The contrast is clear in the bustling capital, Addis Ababa, where rainy skies and a hive of construction projects make it feel thousands of miles away from any drought. While Pizza Hut restaurants are set to soon open in the capital, thousands of children in the arid southeast suffer from acute malnutrition, and cholera is ripping through the relief camps.

The United Nations World Food Program (WFP), which is working in Ethiopia's drought-hit Somali region, has started cutting its food rations to 80 percent. It is short \$121 million for its Ethiopia operation this year, and the money is expected to run out over the summer.

If no new money arrives, the rations could be cut to 420 calories for the whole day — the equivalent of a burger. The government's food contribution will probably suffer a similar fate.

"It's stretching the humanitarian community," WFP regional spokeswoman Challiss McDonough said, referring to the string of crises in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere on the continent. "I don't think of it as donor fatigue. Quite frankly, the donors have been extremely generous, continuing to be so — but they are overwhelmed."

There is also the fact that the Horn of Africa has been incredibly unlucky these past few years in terms of weather. Though famine was averted, many parts of the Ethiopian highlands are still recovering from the 2015-2016 drought, which was attributed to the El Niño ocean-warming phenomenon in the Pacific.

The UN World Meteorological Organization said Friday that there is a 50 percent to 60 percent chance that the Pacific will see another strong warming trend this year, which means Ethiopia's highlands will be slammed again at a time when world resources are scarcer than ever.

"The droughts are coming more frequently and more often and they are worse — and that's climate change. That's very, very clear," McDonough said. "You talk to any farmer how are the rains now compared to 20-30 years ago, they see a difference in their lifetimes, particularly the older ones."

Even while they have one of the smallest carbon footprints on the globe, herders' fragile existence in the arid climate of the Horn of Africa is probably the most threatened by climate change.

Adding to aid organizations' concerns is a proposal by the Trump administration to slash U.S. contributions to international aid institutions, including the WFP. The U.S. government is the largest donor to the program. The proposed cuts, part of the president's 2018 budget blueprint, are likely to face stiff opposition in Congress.

(Source: *The Washington Post*)

Even as donors struggle to meet the severe needs in the war-torn nations of Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen, another crisis, more environmental in nature, is taking place nearby — nearly unnoticed.

Millions could die if America and North Korea go to war

By Kyle Mizokami

North Korea, though a relatively poor, impoverished state, has amassed an impressive arsenal of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Pyongyang has both nuclear and chemical weapons, and thanks to its industrious missile program can deliver them against both South Korea and Japan. A nuclear attack would likely trigger in-kind retaliation by the United States, with the resulting exchange creating unimaginable devastation across East Asia.

By far the most dangerous WMD in a second Korean War would be nuclear weapons. North Korea has conducted five nuclear tests, and experts estimate the country has a stockpile of fewer than ten bombs. Its opponent, the United States of America, has 1,411 nuclear weapons deployed and ready for use. South Korea believes that the North has the technology to put a nuclear warhead on a Rodong (also known as Nodong) missile. The North has 150 to two hundred Rodong missiles, each with an estimated range of up to 621 miles.

Thanks to an overwhelming edge in conventional weapons, it is unlikely the United States would be the first to use nuclear weapons. Although we don't know if North Korea plans to use nukes in a war, we do know it is practicing to use them early in a conflict. Seoul is one obvious target, with the goal of decapitating the South Korean civilian government. North Korea's latest nuclear-weapons test was in the twenty-kiloton range, and such a device detonated over the Han River would kill an estimated fifty-nine thousand people and injure another 136,000 more. With a little warning, Seoul's extensive network of bomb shelters would reduce those numbers by a considerable degree.

Another target might be the port city of Busan, which would take in seaborne reinforcements from the United States. Sasebo Naval Base in Japan, headquarters of the U.S. Seventh Fleet's amphibious forces, is also within Rodong range. A nuclear strike on the base would kill thousands of Americans and cripple the ability of the U.S. Navy, in the short term, to conduct an Inchon-style sea assault on North Korea's coastline. An attack will also kill twenty-one thousand Japanese citizens and injure nearly thirty-eight thousand others.

North Korea might also use chemical weapons to negate key U.S. and South Korean advantages. It is thought to have chemical weapons from the principal five categories: riot, choking, blood, blister and nerve agents. In 2012, South Korea's Ministry of National Defense estimated the North had a stockpile of between



In 2012, South Korea's Ministry of National Defense estimated the North had a stockpile of between 2,500 and five thousand metric tons of chemical weapons.

2,500 and five thousand metric tons of chemical weapons. It further estimates the country has the ability to generate another 4,500 tons annually in peacetime, and twelve thousand tons in wartime.

The effectiveness of chemical munitions varies widely, depending on factors such as environmental conditions and method of dispersal, and it is difficult to predict how many casualties they might cause. They are, as a result, more of a harassing weapon than a destructive one. Chemical weapons could be used against U.S. and South Korean army and air force bases, naval ports, and air-defense facilities — no doubt including the new THAAD missile deployment. While an initial attack might kill or incapacitate relatively few, it would also deny facilities to UN forces until decontaminated. Against air bases such as Osan, a chemical attack would negate America's local airpower advantage. Another possible target are the many South Korean reservist call-up locations scattered across the country, which would frustrate Seoul's attempt to conduct a full-scale military mobilization.

A chemical attack

A chemical attack against civilians is another possible scenario. North Korea has no compunction about putting civilians in the line of fire, as the 2010 bombardment of Yeonpyeong island demonstrated. The use of chemical

weapons against civilians would not only cause thousands of casualties, but it could also cause panic and disorder that would hinder the UN war effort and increase pressure on the South Korean government to end the war.

The threat of a North Korean WMD attack is just one part of the equation; the other is the U.S. response. While the United States probably won't retaliate to a chemical attack with chemical weapons, nuclear weapons are another matter entirely. Using nukes might not be necessary, but the United States may choose to use them anyway to reinforce the concept of nuclear deterrence. The use of nukes also increases the likelihood that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, likely the only person in North Korea authorized to use nukes, would be killed.

The weapon most likely used against Pyongyang is a B61-12 gravity bomb delivered by B-2 bomber. A B61-12 nuclear bomb has a "dial-a-kill" capability of three hundred tons, 1.5 kilotons, fifteen kilotons, or fifty kilotons. A fifty-kiloton device detonated over the North Korean capital would kill an estimated 264,000 people and injure 783,000 more. These numbers constitute 4 percent of the overall North Korean population. A hundred-kiloton warhead delivered by a submarine-launched ballistic missile will kill and injure more

than 1.3 million. Another option is to attack North Korean leadership facilities in and around the city with lower-yield devices, to keep civilian casualties down.

The United States could also conduct smaller, lower-yield nuclear strikes against North Korea's known ballistic-missile bases in order to make sure any surviving nuclear forces could not execute second-strike contingency plans, such as an order to launch all remaining nuclear weapons once it was confirmed that Pyongyang had been struck. North Korea's mobile missiles must rely on a road network amounting to just five hundred miles of paved roads, most of which are concentrated around cities. That would bring follow-up nuclear strikes closer to populated areas.

A war between North Korea and the United States will almost certainly open a Pandora's box of destruction. While the use of nuclear weapons against South Korea could very well cripple the country, retaliatory strikes could kill and injure upwards of a million people in North Korea, destroying the government and provoking societal collapse. One thing is for sure: if such a war does start, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un will be among those killed. Not coincidentally, he is the person best positioned to prevent such a war from happening.

(Source: *The National Interest*)

The CIA and its long history of killing worldwide leaders

By Ewen MacAskill

Some of the most notorious of the CIA's operations to kill world leaders were those targeting the late Cuban president, Fidel Castro. Attempts ranged from snipers to imaginative plots worthy of spy movie fantasies, such as the famous exploding cigars and a poison-lined scuba-diving suit.

But although the CIA attempts proved fruitless in the case of Castro, the U.S. intelligence agency has since 1945 succeeded in deposing or killing a string of leaders elsewhere around the world — either directly or, more often, using sympathetic local military, locally hired criminals or pliant dissidents.

According to North Korea's Ministry of State Security, the CIA has not abandoned its old ways. In a statement on Friday, it accused that the CIA and South Korea's intelligence service of being behind an alleged recent assassination attempt on its leader Kim Jong-un.

The attempt, according to the ministry, involved "the use of biochemical substances including radioactive substance and nano poisonous substance" and the advantage of this was it "does not require access to the target (as) their lethal results will appear after six or 12 months".

The person directly responsible was allegedly a North Korean working for the foreign intelligence agencies.

A CIA spokesman refused to comment on the allegations.

But although such a claim cannot be dismissed as totally outlandish — given the long list of U.S. involvement in coups and assassinations worldwide — the agency was forced to cut back on such killings after a U.S. Senate investigation in the 1970s exposed the scale of its operations.

An executive order

Following the investigation, then president Gerald Ford signed in 1976 an executive order stating: "No employee of the United States government shall engage in, or conspire in, political assassination."



U.S. intelligence agency has since 1945 succeeded in deposing or killing a string of leaders, but was forced to cut back after a Senate investigation in the 1970s.

The executive order was partly out of embarrassment at the role of the CIA being publicly exposed — but also an acceptance by the federal government that U.S.-inspired coups and assassinations often turned out to be counterproductive.

In spite of this, the U.S. never totally abandoned the strategy, simply changing the terminology from assassination to targeted killings, from aerial bombing of

presidents to drone attacks on alleged terrorist leaders. Aerial bomb attempts on leaders included Libya's Muammar Gaddafi in 1986, Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic in 1999 and Iraqi president Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Earlier well-documented episodes include Congo's first Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba of Congo, judged by the U.S. to be too close to Russia. In 1960, the CIA sent a scientist to kill him with a lethal virus, though this became unnecessary when he was removed from office in 1960 by other means. Other leaders targeted for assassination in the 1960s included the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, president Sukarno of Indonesia and president Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam.

In 1973, the CIA helped organize the overthrow of Chile's president, Salvador Allende, deemed to be too left wing; he died on the day of the coup.

The alleged North Korean plot sounds crude. But intelligence agencies still resort to crude methods. The alleged North Korean plot recalls the assassination of the Russian dissident Alexander Litvinenko in 2006. A British inquest concluded he had been killed by the Russian intelligence agency using polonium hidden in a teapot.

The U.S. has developed much more sophisticated methods than polonium in a tea pot, especially in the fields of electronic and cyber warfare. A leaked document obtained by WikiLeaks and released earlier this year showed the CIA in October 2014 looking at hacking into car control systems. That ability could potentially allow an agent to stage a car crash.

Recent failed North Korean missile attempts have been blamed on direct or indirect planting of viruses in their computer systems.

It is a long way from the crude, albeit imaginative and eventually doomed, methods employed against Castro. The U.S. admitted to eight assassination attempts on Castro, though the Cuban put the figure much higher, with one estimate in the hundreds. Castro said: "If surviving assassinations were an Olympic event, I would win the gold medal."

(Source: *The Guardian*)

America's financial war strategy

By Alasdair Macleod

America's renewed desire to escalate military tensions is a front for America's continual financial war, this time directed at North Korea, Syria and possibly Iran. This is likely to be the opinion of China's strategic advisors. We analyse the geopolitics and economics behind America's war strategy from China's perspective, concluding that it is entering its final phase. China's exit plan appears to be to tie the pricing of energy and then other major commodities to gold, returning to the pre-1971 status quo, when the dollar was just a settlement link between commodity prices and gold. Except this time, the dollar itself will be side-lined, so far as China is concerned, which will use the yuan instead for its empire, which will be far larger than that of the U.S. in time, measured by GDP.

The day President Trump assumed office, it appeared that at last there would be détente with Russia, leading to America's withdrawal from unwinnable conflicts and towards a new peaceful agreement between these long-term enemies. However, within the traditional presidential bedding-down period of one hundred days, Trump has gone from his electoral platform of disengagement from foreign ventures to overt aggression in multiple locations.

Something major has changed his thinking. Trump has committed no less than five acts of foreign aggression in that short time, with a sixth pending. The first was a joint operation with Emirati commandos in Yemen, which backfired, leading to the death of a Navy SEAL. The second was the recent attack on a Syrian airfield, in response to an alleged poison gas attack. The third is the escalation of military threats against North Korea. The fourth is the bombing of a cave network in Eastern Afghanistan. And the fifth is the deployment of more troops to Northern Iraq and Eastern Syria to step up the fight against ISIS. The rhetoric is also being ramped up against America's long-term bogeyman, Iran.

The three theatres of war that offer the best prospects for further escalation are Syria, Korea, and Iran. They are in two regions where significant quantities of dollars are owned and invested, offering the potential for capital flight, which should be kept in mind, when reading this article.

Trump is also seeking congressional approval for an increase in defence spending totalling \$54bn, a massive increase which, to put it in perspective, compares with Russia's total defence budget of \$66bn.

The default assumption is that American military power and weapons technology guarantees battlefield objectives will be achieved. This hasn't usually been the case since the first Iraq invasion in 1990. Since then, any initial success has been more than outweighed by subsequent failures and unintended consequences. It is because of American-led operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria that Europe is flooded with refugees, bringing undercover terrorists with them. There can be little doubt that a dispassionate analyst would recommend America abandons military action, so there must be other reasons behind America's war-mongering.

China, itself a long-time strategic target for American aggression, is sure to be worried about the escalation of threats to North Korea, and with good reason. In terms of trade, South Korea is now an important trading partner, and for that reason, China will not want to see the situation on the Korean peninsula deteriorate. She will also not want America securing territory which abuts her border. Russia has a small border



America's renewed desire to escalate military tensions is a front for America's continual financial war, this time directed at North Korea, Syria and possibly Iran.

with North Korea as well and is likely to share that view. However, Russia's trade is not so much with South Korea, but she is a major arms supplier to the North.

The only leader with good access to North Korea's president, Kim Jong-un, is Russia's President Putin. When Trump was first elected, negotiations with North Korea were a realistic option, and there was even talk of Trump meeting Kim Jong-un to negotiate. The route to negotiations was always through Putin, and if that is not actually closed, it is made much more difficult, because of America's action launching missiles against Russia's interests in Syria.

While the renewal of hostilities in Korea threatens to resume (they never officially ended in 1953), China and Russia are sure to avoid escalating the situation. President Xi will have made his own assessment of President Trump to this end, which was probably the most important reason for the meeting at Mar-a-Lago, from Xi's point of view. The rather casual way in which Xi is reported to have been told about the missile strike against Syria over chocolate cake looks like a businessman's power-play to impress an opponent. It was not an action of statesmanship. Xi is likely to have thought it amateurish, even a sign of weakness, and might have given Putin a debrief of the meeting including this view.

The relationship between Russia and China is strong, and they are likely to coordinate their strategic responses to American aggression in both Korea and Syria. The question is, if America continues to escalate its bellicose actions against North Korea, Syria, and possibly Iran, what will their response be? For clues, we should look at this from China's point of view. The People's Liberation Army's most influential strategist, Major-General Qiao Liang laid out his overall strategic philosophy at a book-study forum of the Communist Party's Central Committee in Autumn 2015. His view can be taken to be that of the Chinese leadership.

China's working assumptions
Qiao's economic analysis and conclusions are both interesting and important, but it should be read for what is not said, as much as what is said. His paper will have been examined and cleared by China's leadership, before being made publicly available. To that extent, there is likely to be an element of disinformation involved as well. It will also have been intended to

be studied by foreign governments, alerting them to America's true motives.

With these cautions in mind, we can proceed. Qiao's principal thesis is that America uses the dollar to manage external trade and finance for its domestic benefit. Many of us are familiar with the proposition that by exporting dollars and dollar-denominated bank credit, America creates wealth for both the U.S. government and the major American banks, and that the dollar's reserve status is accordingly vital to the U.S. economy. But Qiao takes this much further, claiming that since the dollar's peg to the gold price was abandoned, America has initiated a cycle of economic boom and bust among foreign users of the dollar for its own benefit. As Qiao puts it:

The U.S. avoided high inflation by letting the dollar circulate globally. It also needs to restrain the printing of dollars to avoid a dollar devaluation. Then what should it do when it runs out of dollars?

The Americans came up with a solution: issuing debt to bring the dollar back to the U.S. The Americans started to play a game of printing money with one hand and borrowing money with the other hand. Printing money can make money. Borrowing money can also make money. This financial economy (using money to make money) is much easier than the real (industry-based) economy. Why will it bother with manufacturing industries that have only low value-adding capabilities? Since August 15, 1971, the U.S. has gradually stopped its real economy and moved into a virtual economy. It has become an "empty" economy state. Today's U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has reached U.S.\$18 trillion, but only \$5 trillion is from the real economy.

By issuing debt, the U.S. brings a large amount of dollars from overseas back to the U.S.'s three big markets: the commodity market, the Treasury Bills market, and the stock market. The U.S. repeats this cycle to make money: printing money, exporting money overseas, and bringing money back. The U.S. has thus become a financial empire. In other words, America's wealth is sustained by a pump-and-dump operation facilitated by the dollar's reserve status, replacing genuine industrial production. It is worth clarifying one point: foreign owned dollars never leave the U.S., only their function. It is more correct to state that the U.S. Government causes dollars to be diverted from foreign trade and investment in manufacturing, to be invested in Treasuries. It can do this by increasing the risks of other uses compared with owning U.S. Treasuries, which are deemed to be "risk free".

The first cycle identified by Qiao

was the expansion of dollars aimed at creating a boom in Latin America in the mid-seventies. Bank credit expanded on the back of a weak dollar. America then raised interest rates to strengthen the dollar when inflation threatened, leading to dollars being switched from riskier uses into safe-haven Treasuries. A widespread financial crisis in Latin America ensued. This allowed American investors subsequently to buy productive assets at rock-bottom prices (the Brady bonds). Meanwhile, the U.S. stock market rose strongly from 1981 onwards, as interest rates subsequently declined.

The second cycle was aimed at South-East Asia, which expanded on the back of a dollar that weakened from 1986 onwards. From 1995, the dollar began to strengthen, culminating in a bear-raid on the Thai baht, which spread to Malaysia, Indonesia and other countries in the region. The Asian Tiger phenomenon was created and destroyed, not by the countries themselves, but by the flood and ebb of dollar ownership and investment. Qiao notes that China escaped being caught up in this U.S.-inspired operation. Again, dollars flowed back into U.S. assets, this time fueling the tech boom, which had another two years to run.

Qiao goes so far to state that the most important event in the twentieth century was not the two world wars, but America's abandonment of the gold standard in 1971. This is some statement. While he explains the events that led up to this event convincingly, the flaw in Qiao's analysis is to assume that America deliberately added the pump-and-dump money-making strategy to the benefits of exporting dollar ownership when freed from the discipline of gold. U.S. strategists in the Deep State almost certainly lacked the degree of control necessary over events.

The real reason U.S. interest rates rose in 1980-81 was to stop runaway domestic inflation, which was getting out of control. The collapse of Latin America was unintended. The Asian crisis was mostly the result of bad investment and outright theft of capital, not the premeditated actions of the American government. Qiao claims that the way dollars were deliberately diverted from foreign investment is by America issuing Treasury debt. While the benefits to America of this pump-and-dump cycle might be obvious expressed in Qiao's description, the expansion of the quantity of Treasuries being issued is primarily tied to credit cycles, not the result of some devious dealings by the Deep State. But we can at least agree that the consequences of America's mismanagement of her own financial affairs match Qiao's observations.

(Source: wealth.goldmoney.com)

END OF PART ONE

Safe zones in Syria: Astana's key to political settlement?

By Sophie Mangal

According to the director of the Kazakh MFA Department for Asia and Africa Aidarbek Tumatov, the Astana process of signing a new memorandum on tensions de-escalation zones will allow to stop bloodshed in Syria and initiate a new political dialogue.

The main points

According to the document at our disposal, 4 zones of the escalation of tensions are to be created in Idlib governorate, to the north of Homs, Eastern Ghouta and in the south part of Syria. The exact coordinates of the zones will be determined by guarantor states May 22. The working group will be created within five days.

It is expected that the usage of arms will be prohibited inside the zones and the humanitarian organizations will be provided with all the necessary assistance. The measures on restoring urban infrastructure, water supply and other life support systems will be also taken.



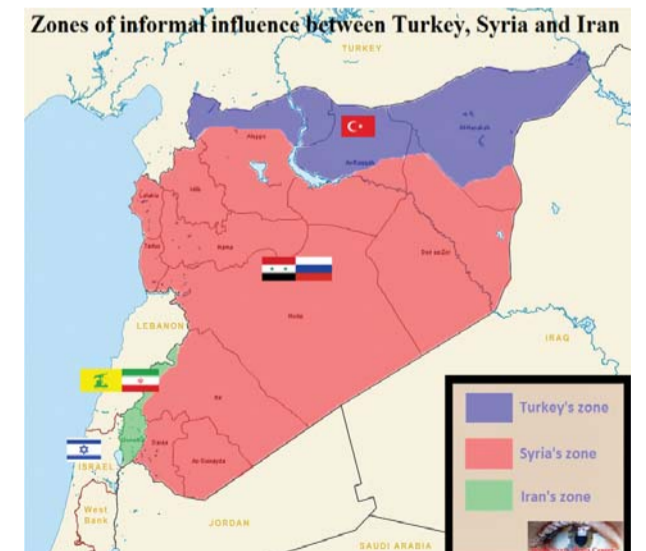
Along the de-escalation zones borders it is planned to create lines of demarcation to prevent ceasefire violations. There also should be checkpoints for civilians, delivery of goods and humanitarian aid.

It was also said that Iran, Russia and Turkey act as a guarantor of peace and security in the region and at the same time support the territorial integrity and independence of Syria.

Opposition's view
Inside Syria Media Center tried to find out opposition's point of view on this issue.

The head of the Syrian opposition's Moscow Group Qadri Jamil said that all sides support the idea of creation such zones and their presence can actually stop bloodshed and create favorable conditions for political settlement in Syria.

Mahmoud al-Hamza, a member of the Syria National Council also stated that he welcomes any steps aimed at reducing violence as the Syrians are tired of war and yearn for peace. He stressed that such an initiative should be implemented.



Along with this, some analysts express their concern regarding that it's not clear which foreign troops may be placed in Syria to provide security for the four-zone perimeter in the country. Some observers call upon strengthening the security for civilians not only inside the safe zones.

Analogies

Not so long ago the U.S. put up an initiative to create "no-fly zones" and "safe zones" in Syria while Turkey offered to set up refugee zones along the Syrian-Turkish border. However, there were concerns that Washington and Ankara may support the Syrian opposition under the pretext of a humanitarian operation. According to CNN, Donald Trump is ready to discuss and even adopt the initiative.

Conclusion

To sum up, such zones is a decisive step towards the settlement of the conflict. It's important that their creation goes side by side with the political dialogue. Meanwhile, a lot will depend on how scrupulously the parties will comply with the memorandum.

Within the traditional presidential bedding-down period of one hundred days, Trump has gone from his electoral platform of disengagement from foreign ventures to overt aggression in multiple locations.

Hillary Clinton's absolution

By Frank Bruni

One of the best and one of the worst bits of news last week were the same: Hillary Clinton is deep into the writing of another book.

It's due to appear much sooner than I'd realized — in September, to be precise — and it's billed as a reflection on her 2016 campaign and her stunning, grueling defeat by Donald Trump. In an interview that Clinton gave to Christiane Amanpour on Tuesday, she mentioned the memoir repeatedly and excitedly, casting it as "my confession and my request for absolution."

If it follows the example of her last literary outing, it'll put the priest to sleep. "Hard Choices," technically about her time as secretary of state, was actually a change-of-address form. She wasn't asking to be understood. She was asking to have her mail forwarded to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Could this time be different? There are reasons to hope so and to root for that. With the White House finally

off the table (isn't it?) and nothing left to lose, Clinton can do something that she failed to in "Hard Choices," in its predecessor, "Living History," and in decades of public life defined as much by guardedness as by ambition. She can lose her caution, ditch her calculation and go out in a blaze of candor. Imagine the catharsis, not just for her but for all of us.

Obviously, I'm talking about more than her book. I'm talking about this whole next phase — Hillary: The Coda — and her last chance to fix our understanding of who she really is. The truth is that we still don't know, because while she has been constantly in our faces, she has also been a million miles away, one of the best known and least known people on the planet.

And one of the most repressed, by both external forces and herself. Surely she's weary of that. Many of the rest of us are.

■ She promised plenty

With Amanpour there were glimmers of something raw-

er. Did Clinton believe that James Comey cost her the election? Hell, yes. Did misogyny come into play? You bet. She promised plenty more on that in the memoir.

Putting aside the merits of those complaints and whether they diverted too much blame from Clinton herself, they at least weren't woven from the threads of some campaign whiz's data, filtered through a committee of jittery advisers and read from some pasteurized script. There was some spark in them — some hurt and anger and humanity. More, please.

Trump's victory held only a fraction of the lessons that it was said to, but it did reveal a hunger among many Americans for a kind of political discourse that wasn't so tightly circumscribed and numbingly polite. There's still space and need for a prominent Democrat to feed people some of that. Wouldn't it be a kick if that Democrat were Clinton, so long associated with the opposite kind of talk? I'm not making a prediction. I'm indulging a wish.

She lost on Nov. 8 but in many ways faces the same

post-presidency questions that someone fresh out of the Oval Office does, because she has a prominence that rivals former presidents' and a soapbox nearly as tall as theirs. Her words travel far. Her actions have weight.

■ Etiquette and precedent

Etiquette and precedent suggest that someone in her vanquished position show some restraint and respect, but you may have noticed that etiquette and precedent have lost much of their currency in the Age of Trump. I'm not suggesting that she or Barack Obama descend to Trump's level, but they do have greater leeway to pipe up than they would with another president. Greater cause, too. She should indeed pipe up, and not only in an occasional barbed tweet.

She has reportedly been putting together a political action committee to raise money for groups that oppose Trump's agenda — it could be announced as soon as this coming week — and will do her part to help Democratic congressional candidates in 2018. Terrific. →13

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8 everyday activities that totally count as exercise

By Kristine Lockwood

Burn, baby, burn—calories that is. Every-one burns fuel doing everyday activities. Scientists even have a name for it: non-exercise activity thermogenesis. It's the energy you use walking up stairs or lifting grocery bags, and with a little imagination, it's easy to turn mundane activities into calorie-burning opportunities.

The best part? Research suggests these activities can help with weight management and actually count toward recommended exercise guidelines. (The CDC recommends two-and-a-half hours of aerobic activity and two days of strength training per week.)

Your action plan

For decades, researchers assumed you needed to break a sweat—or at least raise your heart rate for a prolonged period—for an activity to count toward exercise guidelines. But new research is causing scientists to rethink those beliefs. One study, for example, found that short bouts of higher-intensity exercise were associated with a decreased risk of being overweight or obese. ("Short bouts" refers to fewer than 10 minutes of physical activity.)

These findings should encourage us to take advantage of all the opportunities to get active, from the kitchen to the laundry room. Here are eight activities that sneak exercise into your routine while also crossing things off your to-do list.

1. Shopping

Whether you're buying groceries or a new pair of shoes, shopping means walking, and walking burns calories (we're talking upwards of 200 calories per hour). You can get an even better workout by parking far from the store's entrance and avoiding elevators and escalators. Bonus: Try two stairs at a time to really get things moving.

2. Cleaning

Vacuuming, sweeping, or Swiffering is good for 150 calories per hour. So turn on some tunes and blast away those dust bunnies (and a few extra cal). Next time you do laundry, pick up the basket and twist your torso from side to side for a few reps—you've just snuck in a quick oblique workout.



3. Cooking

Working in the kitchen—everything from chopping veggies to washing pots and pans—burns around 75 calories in 30 minutes. Ditch the electric mixer and stir batters by hand to give your arm muscles some extra loving.

4. Sitting

Before you roll your eyes, we aren't trying to say you're going to get healthy sitting down all day long. But there are things you can do while parked in a chair to get in a bit of exercise. Try lifting your shoulders to your ears. Next, tighten your core, squeeze your butt, and let the mus-

cle toning begin.

5. Washing your car

Washing your car can burn 135 calories in 30 minutes. Add in a few sets of calf raises to reach the roof of the car and a few sets of squats to wash the tires—you'll get in a quick leg workout while making your car shine.

6. Commuting

Get off the bus or train one stop early to go the extra mile—literally. Extra credit: Walk along the curb to improve balance and work your core (safety first, though).

7. Shoveling snow

Don't let bad weather stop you from

working out—aerobic exercise is just a shovel away! Shoveling snow for 30 minutes can burn over 180 calories. Ready for more? Put on your headphones with some upbeat music and pick up the pace.

8. Ordering

You probably think the only thing getting a workout at the restaurant is your stomach. But here's one thing you can do while waiting for waiter to take your order: Stand on one foot. Not only will it work your core with some basic balancing, it's also a handy way to measure tipsiness too!

The takeaway

While traditional aerobic activity and strength training are key to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, everyday activities can be a great way to get moving.

(Source: greatist.com)

Working in the kitchen—everything from chopping veggies to washing pots and pans—burns around 75 calories in 30 minutes.

Here's how putting a clothespin behind your ear can relieve tension throughout your body

As much as I hate to admit that it's happening, time is taking its toll on me and every so often I feel the occasional aches and pains that let me know I'm not a teenager anymore. I try to take it in stride, and I'm not really one of those people who likes to run to the doctor whenever it happens. I view medicating as a last resort, so I like to stay informed on ways to feel better naturally such as pain relief stretches and yoga.

Unfortunately, you can't always stretch out in public, which is where reflexology and acupressure come into play. This method has you place clothespins on certain spots of your earlobe to offer a tension release. It relies on the ears having complex nerve endings that form a virtual map of your entire body. Please note, however, that this method shouldn't replace actual medical advice, but it's definitely worth trying.

There are six pressure points on your ears, each connected to a certain part of your body. Applying pressure, with a clothespin or even your fingers, can help relieve aches and pains in those areas.

1. The uppermost part of your ear is connect-



ed to the back and shoulders. Apply pressure for about a minute.

2. The next spot down is connected to the internal organs. Obviously, severe pains should be examined by a medical professional immediately, but this can help with minor aches.

3. The upper-middle part of the ear is associ-



ated with the joints. Again, chronic problems must be examined by a doctor, but this is great for the occasional discomfort.

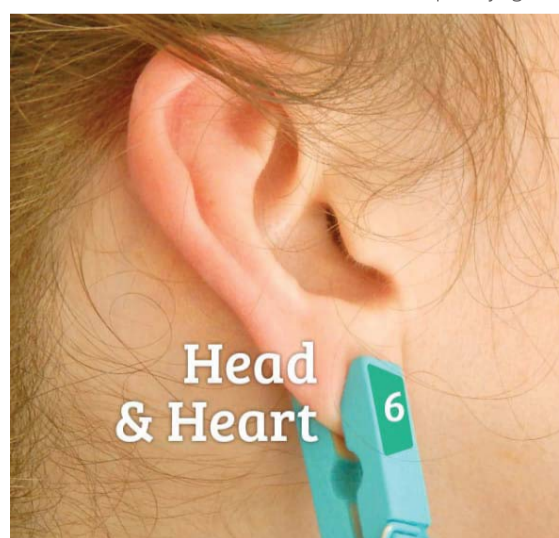
4. If you've got some sinus issues, pressure to the lower-middle part of the ear can help.



5. Just above your earlobe is the area associated with digestion. Stimulate this spot to relieve minor stomach aches and digestive discomfort.



6. The lowest part of the ear, the lobe, is connected to the head and heart. It's a pretty good



way to eliminate pressure headaches as well as promote heart health.

(Source: wimp.com)

There are six pressure points on your ears, each connected to a certain part of your body. Applying pressure, with a clothespin or even your fingers, can help relieve aches and pains in those areas.

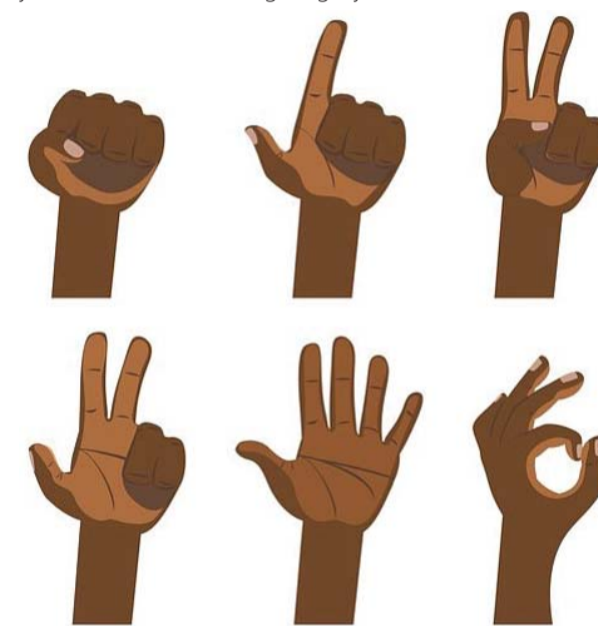
7 hand exercises to prevent arthritis & carpal tunnel

If you work on a computer all day, do a lot of texting or work with your hands, you probably complain about wrist and hand pain on a weekly (if not daily) basis.

It's not just office workers who suffer from sore, swollen, and strained wrists and hands. Workers in a wide variety of occupations, from farmers to painters to cashiers and even mechanics have also reported pain.

Hands, in particular, can become affected by arthritis. Our hands are made up of many joints, including our fingers, thumbs, knuckles, and wrists. Arthritis in the hands can lead to pain, swelling, and stiffness, making it quite difficult to use the hands properly.

Carpal tunnel syndrome can cause numbness, stiffness, and pain in the fingers and hand. There is no known way to prevent carpal tunnel, but some exercises can lower your chances of needing surgery.



Here are seven basic moves you can do any time of day.

Wrist Stretch: This exercise is intended to stretch tight forearm flexor muscles that are restricting the median nerve. To perform this exercise, extend one arm in front of the body, fingers together and palm facing down. Then use the opposite hand to gently apply pressure and bend the fingers and wrist downward (Hold for 10 seconds).

You should feel this stretch in your upper wrist and forearm muscles. Repeat 5 times on both wrists.

Make a fist: This is as simple as it sounds – just make a fist. It may not seem difficult, but when your hand is inflamed, stiff, and in pain, even making a fist can seem like a challenge. For this exercise, practice making and releasing a fist. Try to make your fist tighter and tighter each time.

Finger bends: With your hand wide open, take turns bending each finger one at a time. Hold the finger bent for a few seconds before releasing.

Thumb bend: Similar to finger bend, but this motion only requires the bending of your thumb. Once bent, hold for a few seconds, release, and repeat.

Make an "O": Start with your hand open, but bring your fingers and thumb together as if you're creating the letter O. In this position, your fingers and thumb should have a slight bend to them. Hold this position, release, and repeat.

Table bend: Place your hand on its side, pinky side down, on top of a table – your thumb should be facing the sky. Position your fingers as if you are giving a 'thumbs up' – fingers curled into palm, thumb up in the air. With thumb still pointing up, release your fingers so your hand looks like an L. Repeat.

Finger lift: With your palm face down on a table top, take turns lifting one finger at a time away from the table. Hold it up for a few seconds, then place it back down.

(Source: stylemagazine.com)

Why bacteria are more threatening than ever

The stories are harrowing: people with simple cuts who get exposed to bacteria can end up with life-threatening, and sometimes even life-ending, infections. Antibiotics were supposed to prevent these infections and deaths. But in the U.S., about two million people become infected with bacteria that can't be treated by antibiotics, and at least 23,000 people die from those infections every year.

The bacteria behind these infections, once common. Have mutated to become resistant to the dozens of antibiotics developed to wage war against them. That's a problem of our own making. Public health experts say that the superbugs are the result of years of overusing and misusing antibiotics, either by dispensing them in too-high doses or using them against minor infections or inappropriate conditions like the flu, which doesn't respond to antibiotics. Antibiotics are also overused in farming—not just to keep infections at bay, but also as a way to encourage animals like chickens, pigs and cattle to grow larger and produce more meat. With so many antibiotics circulating in people and in animals, bacteria mutate to find ever more clever ways of becoming resistant to the drugs.

The only way to get ahead of antibiotic-resistant superbugs is to outsmart them. In recent years, doctors have been cutting back on prescribing the drugs, and some hospitals require registries for antibiotics so they can keep track of how much are being used. Educational programs have sprung up designed to teach people about when antibiotics are appropriate, and when they aren't. In order to fend off superbugs, we have to be as persistent as they are.

(Source: time.com)

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** French candidate hacked just before presidential election. According to Reuters, the 9GB of data were posted to Pastebin earlier, by a user named EMLEAKS.
- 2** Illegal Galaxy S8 subsidies drop price as low as \$177 in South Korea. In the cutthroat South Korean smartphone market, a bidding war for new customers has emerged around the Samsung Galaxy S8, with retailers offering illegal subsidies that drop the new flagship's price to the equivalent of just \$177.
- 3** Japan's SoftBank takes driving seat in Indian online shake-up. According to sources with direct knowledge of the matter, the solar-to-tech conglomerate is seeking to secure a piece of India's industry leaders in everything from payment systems to online shopping and groceries, in a series of deals that would shake up the \$65 billion sector.
- 4** FBI warns of surge in wire-transfer fraud via spoofed emails. Attempts at cyber wire fraud globally, via emails purporting to be from trusted business associates, surged in the last seven months of 2016, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation said in a warning to businesses.
- 5** YouTube and Warner extend their streaming music deal. Warner isn't entirely happy with YouTube's response to piracy, though.
- 6** Android Pay could use your face to authenticate loyalty programs. 9to5google has torn the latest version of the app apart and found lines of code that hint at a feature called "Visual ID," which authenticates your loyalty points by using facial recognition.
- 7** Samsung Galaxy C10 to be the first Samsung phone with a dual camera setup. According to a source out of China, the first Samsung handset to carry a dual camera setup will be the Samsung Galaxy C10. The model number of the device is SM-C9150. And powering this handset will be the new Snapdragon 660 SoC, which is supposed to be unveiled by Qualcomm on May 9th.
- 8** Microsoft HoloLens becomes an AR assistant for spinal surgery. A new mixed reality platform could improve accuracy and expedite procedures.
- 9** New York City plans to track every homeless person in its borders. A new tool will pool data from all over the city and open it up to civic and nonprofit workers.
- 10** Germany confronts Russia over election hacking. The head of German domestic intelligence warns Russia against interference. Speaking with reporters at a conference in Potsdam, Hans-Georg Maassen, president of the BfV agency (Germany's domestic intelligence group) renewed claims that Russian hackers were behind the attack on his country's parliament.

Apple now king of wearables, main competitors decline

The wearable market is growing slowly but its dynamics are changing. According to Strategy Analytics, Apple ousted Fitbit from the top position with 3.5 million wearables shipped during the first quarter of this year.



That's a jump of 59% compared to the same period last year. Apple raced ahead of the market, which grew only 21% annually for a total of 22 million units shipped. Fitbit went from first (with 4.5 million in Q1 2016) to third (with just 2.9 million in Q1 2017), a massive slump. Xiaomi also declined - from 3.8 million to 3.5 million - but it still kept enough market share (15%) to go up to second place. The market also diversified, makers outside the Top 3 went up from 7.7 million units to 12.2 million. Growth mostly came from North America, Europe and Asia. The Apple Watch 2 in particular was a hot seller in the US, UK and several other countries, helped out by strong marketing.

(Source: strategyanalytics)

Snapdragon 845 could be Qualcomm's next high end chipset, made using 7nm process

Last month, we told you that Samsung and TSMC were chomping at the bit, each hoping to be designated a manufacturer of the next flagship Qualcomm chipset expected to be called the Snapdragon 845. Using the 7nm process, this SoC should be found inside next year's high-end handsets with the Samsung Galaxy S9 getting first crack at employing it. Rumors have the chip rolling off the line early next year, which suggests that Samsung will return to its regular time frame next year and introduce its next flagship at MWC 2018. The annual conference will take place in 2018 starting on February 26th and running to March 1st. Other chipsets to be produced with the 7nm process next year will be coming from Huawei's Kirin, MediaTek, and Nvidia. Current high-end chips, like the Snapdragon 835, are produced using the 10nm process. Dropping down to 7nm



will increase performance by 25% to 35%. It also means a reduction in chip size, which could lead to a slight reduction in handset size for those models that use the Snapdragon 845. Next week, Qualcomm is expected to unveil a new mid-to-high-end chip called the Snapdragon 660. This SoC is expected to be found inside the new Samsung Galaxy C series, the Xiaomi Redmi Pro 2, Xiaomi Mi Max 2, Oppo R11, Vivo X9s Plus and the Nokia 7 and Nokia 8. It features four Cortex-A73 cores running at a clock speed of 2.3GHz, and four Cortex-A53 cores running at a clock speed of 1.9GHz. The graphics chip on board will be the Adreno 512 GPU, and the X10 LTE modem is included. Rapid recharging is offered with Quick Charge 4.0, and there is support for LPDDR4X 1866 MHz RAM and UFS 2.1 flash memory.

(Source: AndroidHeadlines)

IDC: Apple leads as tablet shipments shrink 8.5% in Q1 2017



Q1 2017 saw an 8.5% decline in worldwide tablet shipments, according to analysts from IDC. 36.2 million units were shipped globally, compared with 39.6 million a year ago. Apple stays on top for the period with 8.9 million shipped tablets, ahead of Samsung with 6 million. The Cupertino company saw a sharper decline than its Korean rival, though Huawei is third ahead of Amazon and Lenovo. IDC expects detachable tablets, while slate tablets should continue to lose ground.

(Source: IDC)

Report says Moto Z2 Play will be slimmer, pack in smaller battery compared to Z play



Report says the Z2 Play would be 6mm thick, which is a millimeter less compared to the Z Play. Not only this, at 145g, it will also be 20g lighter than its predecessor. However, the handset will pack in a comparatively smaller battery: 3,000mAh (Z Play featured a 3,510mAh battery). Other key specs that have been rumored include Snapdragon 626 SoC with octa-core 2.2GHz CPU, 4GB RAM, and 64GB storage.

(Source: gsmarena)

The rumored Amazon Echo touchscreen speaker may look like an old TV set



Even "@evleaks" Blass has just posted higher-res images of the Amazon touchscreen speaker on his Twitter account. It still looks like an old TV set, but it will apparently be sold in black and white colors. Rumors have been flying around the internet recently that claim Amazon is planning to release a new member of its Echo connected speaker family that would also include a touchscreen.

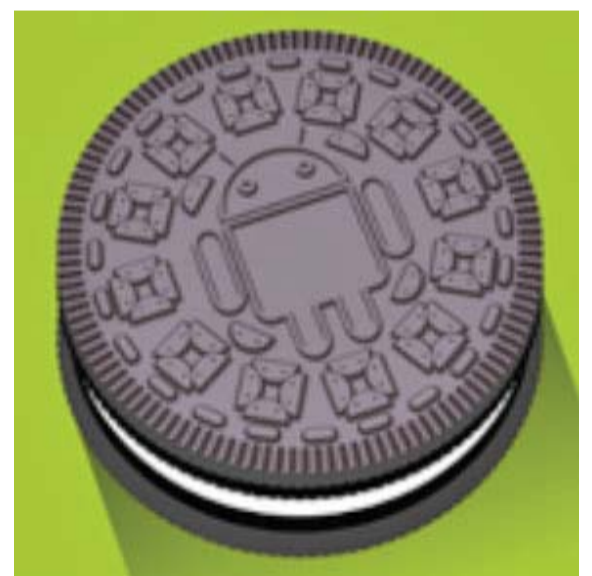
(Source: androidauthority)

Crack open those Oreos; Android Nougat beta program closes

We are getting closer to the introduction of Android O. Google has shut down the Android Nougat beta program that allowed subscribers to get early access to new versions of Android Nougat. Android O, which the consensus expects to be named Android Oreo, will probably be unveiled between May 17th and May 19th during Google I/O. Anyone still using the Android Nougat beta program should have automatically received the last publicly released version of the OS. As far as developers are concerned, the Android O Developer Preview started officially on March 21st; it will end some time in this year's third quarter when phone manufacturers are expected to receive the final version of the operating system. Developers who are members of the preview

program are currently in "Preview 1," which means that they have access to the alpha version of Oreo (assuming that is what the build will be called). Developer Preview 1 is intended for developers, not consumers, and can only be flashed to a supported device. The first beta version of Android O will be available during Google I/O. When the time comes, those interested in joining the Android O beta program will be able to sign up to receive these versions of Android O via an OTA update. Just keep in mind that since these will be beta releases, there are bound to be some issues that need to get ironed out. Supported devices will include: Nexus 5X, Nexus 6P, Nexus Player, Pixel, Pixel XL and Pixel C.

(Source: AndroidDevelopers)



Apple files patent to eject water from iPhone using sound



Technology major Apple has filed a patent that details a way to prevent water from damaging an iPhone's earpiece or speaker by ejecting it using sound. The patent explains how the speaker can generate a "tone or acoustic signal" to detect the liquid and then blast it out. The Apple Watch Series 2 also has a similar feature.

(Source: mashable)

Rumors persist about Apple placing touch ID on back of iPhone 8



Apple's rumored "iPhone 8" with an OLED display and wireless charging will continue to have Touch ID, but there is a "high chance" it will be on the back of the smartphone, says Hong Kong-based equity research firm CLSA. CLSA created a diagram showing Touch ID placed slightly below the Apple logo on the back of the iPhone.

(Source: macrumors)

Opera Max 3.0 released with all new design, data savings for Facebook



Opera Max, the powerful data savings and data management tool for Android devices, has just received a major update that brings a lot of visual changes, as well as under the hood improvements. The most obvious addition to the Android app is the new design, which was optimized to make Opera Max easier to use. The developers have added a step-by-step tutorial that triggers when you open the app for the first time.

(Source: opera)

Why two volcanoes in Hawaii are so close, but so different

Mauna Loa, the biggest volcano on Earth — and one of the most active — covers half the Island of Hawaii. Just 35 miles to the northeast, Mauna Kea, known to native Hawaiians as Mauna a Wakea, rises nearly 14,000 feet above sea level. To them it represents a spiritual connection between our planet and the heavens above.

These volcanoes, which have beguiled millions of tourists visiting the Hawaiian islands, have also plagued scientists with a long-running mystery: If they are so close together, how did they develop in two parallel tracks along the Hawaiian-Emperor chain formed over the same hot spot in the Pacific Ocean — and why are their chemical compositions so different?

"We knew this was related to something much deeper, but we couldn't see what," said Tim Jones, an earth science Ph.D. student at Australian National University and the lead author of a paper published in *Nature* on Wednesday that may hold the answer.

Planet's mantle

Mr. Jones and his colleagues developed a model that simulates what's happening in our planet's mantle, beneath the crust that we live on, offering a window to the center of the Earth — or close to it. Their study may one day allow a reconstruction of the history of the movement of Earth's plates — and the processes linked to these movements over billions of years, like mass extinction



events, diamond and oil deposits, and changes in climate.

If you were to drill nearly 4,000 miles into the Earth, you'd reach its core, a ball of solid iron surrounded by liquid that scientists estimate is hotter than the sun. Before making it there, you'd hit the mantle — an 1,800-mile-thick layer of solid rock that can flow like a liquid, just substantial-

ly slower. This mantle is the reason plates move across the surface. It's why we have continents, earthquakes and volcanoes.

The closest anyone ever got to the mantle was a seven-mile-deep hole drilled into the crust on a peninsula in western Russia. But now we can better understand what's happening below by looking at Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa,

said Mr. Jones.

The prevailing hypothesis has been that volcanoes like these two in Hawaii are chemical fingerprints of the Earth's composition at the deep mantle, just at the border of its core.

Seismic evidence

Scientists have seismic evidence that the deep part of the mantle is a graveyard where long ago slabs of earth were subducted, or thrust underneath one another, creating separate regions with different chemical compositions that eventually made their way to the surface in a hot mantle plume, or upwelling, as the core heated the rock into magma.

But that didn't explain the separate tracks along which the volcanoes formed. By examining data from the two volcanoes, Mr. Jones and his team suggested an alternative: The chemical signature, along with this double-track volcanism as it's called, occurred three million years ago when the plates above the hot spot shifted direction, moving north.

This shimmy rearranged zones of magma that are heated under different pressures in the shallower part of the mantle — when they cool, the volcanic rock that results reflects this difference. Previously stacked on top of one another, the movement of the plates exposed now geographically separates magma zones that fed the volcanoes individually.

(Source: *The NYT*)

The prevailing hypothesis has been that volcanoes like these two in Hawaii are chemical fingerprints of the Earth's composition at the deep mantle, just at the border of its core.

Gravitational waves could help us detect the universe's hidden dimensions

Gravitational waves might be used to uncover hidden dimensions in the universe. By looking at these ripples in space time, researchers at the Max Planck Institute for Gravitational Physics in Germany say we could work out what impact hidden dimensions would have on them, and use this information to find these effects.

The discovery of gravitational waves was announced in February 2016. Scientists used the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory (LIGO) detectors to find fluctuations in space time created by a pair of colliding black holes. Scientists can now use this information to see the universe in a whole new way — potentially even one day tracing waves that came from the Big Bang.

At present, our models of the universe are incomplete. They cannot explain many of the things we observe in the universe, so many physicists believe we are missing something — and that something could be the presence of extra dimensions.

If scientists were to find evidence of extra dimensions, they could start answering some of the most fundamental unknowns of the universe, like what dark matter is and why the universe is expanding at an accelerating rate.

Gravitational waves

Gravitational waves are ripples in space time caused by extremely energetic events. These events, like merg-



ing black holes, would release so much energy they would disrupt the way space time moves, creating 'waves' that would propagate out from the source — similar to the way a pebble thrown into a pond creates ripples moving outwards.

Gravitational waves were first predicted by Albert Einstein over 100 years ago, but until now we have not been able to find them. By the time the ripples reach us, they are so tiny that detecting them requires hugely sensitive equipment. This is what LIGO was able to do.

In the latest study, which appears on the preprint server arxiv.org, David Andriot and Gustavo Lucena

Gómez look at how gravitational waves move through the known dimensions — three representing space and another for time. They then investigate what effects extra dimensions might have on the four dimensional waves we see.

"If there are extra dimensions in the universe, then gravitational waves can walk along any dimension, even the extra dimensions," Lucena Gómez told *New Scientist*.

They found extra dimensions could have two effects on gravitational waves — firstly, they would have what they call a "breathing mode." This provides another way for the gravitational waves to move in space.

The second effect is a "massive tower" of extra gravitational waves. These waves could be detected at high frequencies, something our current technologies prevent. To detect changes at the frequencies they propose, LIGO would need to be thousands of times more sensitive.

However, Bobby Acharya, professor of Theoretical Physics at King's College London, UK, who was not involved in the study, is not convinced by the findings. In an interview with *Newsweek*, he says that while he firmly believes in the existence of extra dimensions, models suggest these dimensions would be extremely small: "That means that in order to excite them and create waves in those extra dimensions you require a lot of energy," he says.

(Source: *Newsweek*)

Current climate change measurements mask trade-offs necessary for policy debates

Scientists and policymakers use measurements like global warming potential to compare how varying greenhouse gases, like carbon dioxide and methane, contribute to climate change.

Yet, despite its widespread use, global warming potential fails to provide an accurate look at how greenhouse gases affect the environment in the short and long-term, according to a team of researchers from Princeton University, the Environmental Defense Fund and Harvard University.

The researchers argue in the May 5 issue of *Science* that because global warming potential calculates the warming effects of greenhouse gases over 100 years, they discount the effects of any greenhouse gas that disappears from the atmosphere after a decade or two. This masks the trade-offs between short- and long-term policies at the heart of today's political and ethical debates.

What is needed, the researchers conclude, is a standardized approach that recognizes both commonly utilized timescales — 20 and 100 years — as a ubiquitous pair. This two-valued approach would provide clarity to climate

change policy analyses, which often result in misleading debates about policy trade-offs.

"Different gases have widely different lifetimes in the atmosphere after emission and affect the climate in different ways over widely different timescales," said co-author Michael Oppenheimer, the Albert G. Milbank Professor of Geosciences and International Affairs, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and the Department of Geosciences at Princeton University. The "paired approach creates a more comprehensive picture of the nature of climate change and the effects of various policies to stem its consequences."

Standardized approach

While most reports reference only one of these metrics — most measure the effects over 100 years — a standardized approach including both should become the norm to avoid skewing results. For example, recent studies show anti-shale gas advocacy groups base arguments around the 20-year time horizon, while the pro-shale gas community emphasizes the 100-year timescale, but both metrics are needed to truly understand the



short- and long-term impacts shale gas has on the environment.

The researchers liken the 20- and 100-year timescales to city-highway vehicle fuel efficiency data. Car dealerships boast about miles per gallon for both highway and city, providing buyers with an analysis relevant to different roadways. The dual-number system also enables buyers to calculate an average.

Another example is how blood pressure is measured with two numbers, systolic and diastolic. The first number (systolic) meas-

ures the pressure in your blood vessels as the heart beats. The second number (diastolic) calculates the pressure in your blood vessels when your heart rests between beats. Together, the numbers reveal whether a person has an average blood pressure, like 120 over 80, or is at risk of pre-hypertension or high blood pressure.

While the researchers advocate using both 20- and 100-year time scales (rather than one or the other), they do not advocate for a change in time horizons.

(Source: *phys.org*)

Mass-Production of Peugeot 2008 & Dena+ in the Presence of Iran's President

IKCO officially started the mass-production of Peugeot 2008 and Dena+ in its central site in Tehran in a ceremony attended by the country's President, Hassan Rouhani.

IKCO CEO, Hashem Yekehzare and Iran's Minister of Industries, Mining and Trade Mohammad Reza Nematzadeh were also present at the event.

Dena+ is a new version of the sedan, Dena, improved in IKCO R&D center considering its appearance and equipment.

As the first domestically produced car equipped with

four airbags, Dena+ offers desirable safety standards.

Designed by Iran Khodro engineers, the company equipped its production line with new equipment and machineries in cooperation with international companies.

The facelift also enjoys a rearview camera, multimedia system and a sunroof, while the doors come with a new design.

Peugeot 2008 — the mass-production of which also started — is the first product of the joint venture between the two companies of Peugeot and IKCO named -IKAP.

The new round of cooperation between the two car-makers initiated with the two CEOs signing a contract in the presence of the Iranian and French Presidents.

Direct investment of the French partner, technology transfer and exporting 30% of the JV's products are regarded as the main outcomes of this contract.

Peugeot 2008 features a 1.6L V4 naturally aspirated engine, producing 163 Hp with max torque of 243 Nm @ 4000 rpm. The 2008's 6-speed automatic gearbox transfers the engine power to the front wheels.

Schoolgirl's polystyrene plane flies 150 miles from Wales to Leicester

It could easily have been dismissed as a flight of fancy. But claims that a polystyrene plane travelled 150 miles across Britain after being thrown by a young girl from a Welsh grid may actually be true, according to aerodynamics experts.

The little craft, was bought at a shop on Anglesey by Abbie Lee and launched from the Menai Suspension Bridge in late March by her daughter Tamara, 5.

The family, from North Wales, wrote their name and address on the plane and were anxious to see how far it would travel.

But they were amazed when last week they received a postcard from a Leicestershire woman named 'Kathy' who said she had found the 21 inch model in Bradgate Park, in Charnwood Forest, northwest of Leicester.

Mrs Lee said: "We flew it off Menai Bridge and never thought we'd see it again. I couldn't believe it. We can't really figure it out, following the maps and that, it's just so far."

Professor Robert Kerr, a specialist in aerodynamics at the University of Warwick said fierce westerly winds and a low pressure weather system could have picked up the polystyrene plane and carried it for 150 miles before depositing it in Leicester.

"So in addition to a strong water current between the Irish Sea and the outlet to the River Conwy, there could also be a strong air current."

Prof Kerr said that if the wind was blowing west-south-west (WSW) when the plane was launched it could have amplified a strong breeze coming from the cooler Irish Sea.

Professor Christoph Bruecker, the BAE Systems Sir Richard Olver Chair in Aeronautical Engineering at City, University of London, also agreed that the feat was possible.

(Source: *The Telephone*)

Massive asteroid impact crater in Falklands linked with Great Dying mass extinction

The Falkland Islands may be home to one of the world's largest craters. A new analysis has revealed it has many characteristics of an asteroid impact and may date back to the "Great Dying" extinction event.

About 200 similar large craters have been discovered so far on Earth but there are many other examples of them on other planets including on Venus, Mercury and Mars.

The Falkland Islands structure, which is described in details in the journal *Terra Nova*, has a diameter measuring approximately 250 kilometers (150 miles). If it turns out to be an impact crater, this size would make it one of Earth's largest — comparable to the famous Chicxulub crater discovered in the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico nearly four decades ago.

In this research, the scientists have documented the geophysical features of a large basin situated on the Falkland (Malvinas) Plateau, to the northwest of West Falkland Island.

They have analyzed marine seismic-reflection profiles of the area, and conducted gravity and magnetic surveys. Their investigations suggest that they are confronted with a large basin with traits consistent with those of impact craters caused by collisions with asteroids.

In particular, the researchers note a gravity anomaly, characterized by a decrease in the strength of Earth's gravity over the site. This negative anomaly is surrounded by a ring-shaped positive gravity anomaly. These features are very similar to the one seen at the Chicxulub impact structure.

(Source: *IBT*)

The Large Hadron Collider is back in business

For the past several months, the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) in Switzerland has been undergoing maintenance. Equipment has been tested and upgraded, parts have been replaced, and this weekend, the giant machine will finally be switched back on to begin collecting data again.

The LHC is the largest machine in the world, which means keeping it operational is a herculean task. Millions of components have to work seamlessly with one another, and if something breaks it could accidentally send a beam of particles crashing into a wall at nearly the speed of light.

Given the immense complexity and power of the machine, it's not surprising that engineers spend months testing and retesting every component to make sure everything is working the way it's supposed to. The LHC's actual upgrades and maintenance work have been finished since December, and the past several months have been spent systematically testing every one of the accelerator's pieces.

All of this work should be worth it, however. The most recent round of upgrades is designed to increase the LHC's luminosity, which is essentially a measure of the accelerator's collision density. The higher the luminosity, the more collisions per second per cubic centimeter. Increasing the luminosity means more collisions and more data for the scientists to study.

Once the largest ring of the LHC is tested this weekend, the scientists will start small test runs with only a few particles and slowly ramp up the number of particles until there are enough for collisions. That will begin a series of hopefully successful high-energy runs at the LHC later this year.

(Source: *Popular Mechanics*)

Iranian ranger shares his daily life on Instagram!

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Do you like to know more **d e s k** about daily life and concerns of rangers? Here you are! The Iranian ranger Ahmad Bahri introduces his life and career on his page in Instagram, *ahmad_bahri_mohitban*.

Under the title of "Diary of a Ranger", Bahri, who comes from the city of Qom, registers his life in photos.

In his page, he introduces the wildlife of Qom and shares the scenes he witnesses during his career with others. He also warns about threats to animals and natural habitats in other parts of the world.

Bahri is also the founder of a movement entitled "Nazr-e Tabiat", literally meaning doing something charitable to help save and protect the environment. The movement was initiated in August 2016 and it aims to collect money to improve

wildlife across Iran.

In "Nazr-e Tabiat" people can make their contributions to the environment by either giving away money to construct watering places and buying hays for feeding the animals or by taking care of wounded animals until they recover and can return to the wild once again.

How to help an injured animal

Capturing an injured wild animal can be stressful to the animal and to you. Find out how to protect yourself and the animal during the containment process.

To capture and confine a wild animal in distress:

- Do not handle any wild animal if doing so risks your safety or the safety of others. If you are injured, you cannot help the animal. When in doubt, do not attempt capture, and call a wildlife rehabilitation center for advice.

- Use a towel to cover the animal's head to calm it down and reduce shock.

- Do not handle or pet the wild animal. Rather than being a source of comfort, this just creates more stress and may lead to deeper shock - many wild animals in shock in fact look like they are resting. Keep a safe distance from the animal, and do what you can to protect it from harassment by pets or other people.

- Wear gloves and protective eyewear for long-billed birds.
- Do not offer the animal food or water, and do not leave food or water in the box with the animal. Because the animal has not been medically examined, it is impossible to know the exact extent of its injuries. Feeding the animal or forcing it to drink water at this point could cause death. As with humans, hospitalized animals need to be very gradually rehydrated and fed using special formulas and techniques. Wild animals have specific dietary requirements that are unique to each species - feeding the wrong food can greatly impact the animal's health.

- Prepare a well-ventilated, covered box of appropriate size by lining it with something absorbent, like newspaper or clean cloths (without holes or ragged or fringed edges). If you have no other alternative, wrap the animal in a towel or sweatshirt for immediate transport to a wildlife rehabilitation center, or until a suitable box can be acquired from a nearby home or store.

- Do not attempt to treat the animal's injuries. The best treatment possible is to leave the animal as is until it can be transported to a wildlife rehabilitation facility. Additional handling causes stress, and improper treatment can cause further injury. One exception is if the animal is bleeding excessively. If this is the case, simply apply gentle pressure to the wound to stop the bleeding. Do not apply a tourniquet of any kind.

(Source: *spca.bc.ca*)

LEARN ENGLISH

Gardening

A: I've decided to grow my own garden!

B: What? You don't know the first thing about gardening!

A: **On the contrary**, I have been reading a lot of books about the subject.

B: Oh yeah? Tell me then, **smarty pants**, how will you go about **setting up** your garden?

A: Well, first I need to buy some things, such as fertilizer, seeds and tools.

B: What type of tools?

A: You know, the basics. A **rake**, **shovel**, **spade** and a **hoe**.

B: Right. Well it seems like you have all your **bases covered**. What's next?

A: I'll **till** the soil and then sow the seeds. I'll then add some fertilizer and **voila!** Gardening all done!

B: Well, good luck with your garden, especially considering we are in the dry season and it won't rain for the next three months!

Key Vocabulary

on the contrary: in opposition to what has been stated
smarty pants: a person who tries to show he is so smart
set up: to make ready for use

rake: a hand implement consisting of a row of teeth

shovel: a tool with a long handle used for lifting

spade: a tool with a heavy metal blade used for digging

hoe: a garden tool that has a flat blade on a long hand

base covered: have all the things prepared

till: prepare for growing plants

voila: something used when something is being presented

Supplementary Vocabulary

sprinkler: a device attached to a water hose to spread water

pruner: a tool used to remove small branches from trees

hedges: a kind of shrub plant

garden hose: a long tube connected to a facet to disperse water

gardener: a person who tends to gardens

(Source: *irlanguage.com*)

Human intervention, climate change threaten Zagros mountain range

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — While **d e s k** Zagros Mountains provide a protective barrier against sand and dust storms, human intervention and climate change have posed a major threat to these ecologically valuable natural resources, the central Zagros biodiversity landscape conservation project director said.

The Zagros mountain range passes through a large section of western Iran. Covering 32 million hectares of land area in Iran, it is a vast catchment area, accounting for 50 percent of Iran's surface water. It is, quite simply, Iran's water tower. But decades of construction and often-unplanned development have placed its fragile ecosystems in danger.

Based on the surveys Zagros forest suffer from highest erosion rate worldwide, Shirin Abolqasemi regretted, adding, this why these environmental reserves, with distinguishing characteristics unlike any other ecosystems throughout the country, demand undivided attention.

"Some 15 rivers are fed from the Zagros mountain range, 50 million of Iranian nomads live in Central Zagros area, and some 980 villages are located in the same area," Abolqasemi highlighted.

The 6th five year national plan calls for sustainable development in the area by seeking local communities support, encouraging sustainable farming, and



Zagros Mountain, Lorestan, Iran

protecting the biodiversity, she added.

One effort to repair the damage started over a decade ago. The "Central Zagros Biodiversity Landscape Conservation" project began operations in 2005, originally in Fars province. It was later extended to Isfahan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, and finally, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad provinces.

During its lifetime, the project - implemented by the Department of Environment and the UN Development

Program (UNDP) - piloted a number of successful conservation efforts. It then documented the best practices and expanded upon them.

During its lifetime, the Zagros project was funded to the tune of approximately \$3.9 million from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) implemented through the UNDP Iran office, and an amount from the government of Iran equivalent to \$5.8 million.

The project is reported to have played

an influential role in the scoping of the 6th five-year national development plan. The intention is to use its findings to ensure the future sustainable development of the Central Zagros mountain landscape. The project was expanded in mid-February 2016 in Tehran by signing a memorandum of understanding to keep the initiative alive between the governor-generals of the 4 Zagros provinces named above and the Ministry of the Interior and the Management and Planning Organization.

On the occasion of International Migratory Bird Day

How you can help migratory birds?

Migration is a hazardous journey for birds, but those hazards are often overlooked in the large-scale spectacle of millions of birds that successfully travel between their breeding and wintering grounds each year.

The International Migratory Bird Day will be celebrated on the second Saturday in May (May 13, 2017) in Western Hemisphere.

As birds journey between breeding and non-breeding sites, International Migratory Bird Day 2017 will celebrate the importance of the places and habitats where they stop to rest and refuel. The art created to represent this event features 11 migratory bird species.

The first step in helping birds migrate successfully is to understand the threats they face along the way. Birders who want to help migrating birds can minimize those threats by...

- Creating bird-friendly landscaping and preserving natural habitats for birds to rest and refuel during migration. This includes choosing native plants and providing water to birds as well as offering good food both naturally and through supplemental feeders.

- Feeding birds year-round and choosing healthy, nutritious foods such as suet, black-oil sunflower seeds,



fruit, nuts and nectar to offer. These foods provide high amounts of fat and sugar to help birds have plenty of energy during migration.

- Keeping bird feeders and bird baths clean and fresh to avoid spreading diseases that could infect migrating birds and thus spread to migratory flocks.

- Using several methods to prevent bird window collisions at home, and supporting "lights out" campaigns in local cities where office buildings can be a hazard to migrating birds. In large cities, volunteers are always welcome to patrol collision zones to collect stunned birds so they can be effectively rehabilitated.

- Minimizing or avoiding pesticide use and taking care to dispose of oil, lead and other toxic materials safely and responsibly so there is no environmental contamination that can affect birds. If a spill occurs, participating in cleanup efforts can help protect both local and migratory birds.

- Taking steps to discourage feral cats and always keeping pet cats indoors so they do not threaten birds. Dogs should always be closely supervised and leashed when near popular bird habitats as well.

- Supporting strong enforcement of local hunting laws and measures to prevent poaching or illegal hunting activities.

- Sharing your love of birds with friends and family members to introduce them to this rewarding hobby. This helps raise awareness of birds in every season and encourages more people to enjoy migration and protect migrating birds.

Migration is a natural part of many birds' lives, but it is one fraught with danger. By understanding the threats migrating birds face, it is possible for every birder to take steps to help their feathered friends complete these seasonal journeys safely.

(Source: *thespruce.com*)

Mugger crocodile as a wild beast



Mugger Crocodile, photo by Mina Ezzati

By Farnaz Heidari

The beautiful broad-snouted Crocodile kept at Tehran Zoo is a vulnerable species and also known as Mugger. The snout of this Mugger has expanded, this head-on view allows the crocodile to grasp its prey without getting any attention. Drought and also habitat destruction led to their population decline. Some individuals survive today primarily in captivity. Lack of awareness about their place in the web of life were pushed species such as Muggers to the brink of extinction.

Beasts of prey

Alligators, caimans, crocodiles, and gharials are jointly referred to as crocodilians. The crocodilians are holdovers, survivors of that long-ago time known as the Age of Reptiles, a time when the dinosaurs were the ruling creatures on the Earth, dating from 265 million years ago to roughly 66 million years ago. All four forms of crocodilians - alligators, caimans, crocodiles, and gharials - basically resemble each other. The alligator has a broad, rounded, shovel-like snout while the gharial's snout is long and very narrow. The snouts of caimans and crocodiles are between these two extremes, although a long, tapered snout is most common.

Crocodiles show their upper and lower teeth when mouth shut also it defines



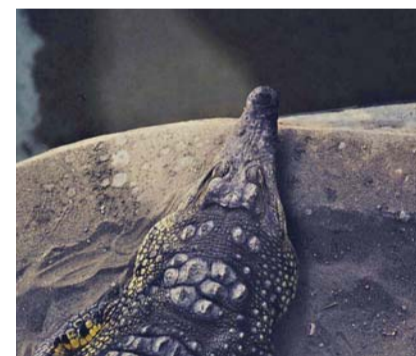
Mugger Crocodile, photo by Mina Ezzati

with "pinch" on upper snout. Alligators only show their upper teeth when mouth is closed and there is no pinch on upper snout. But the caimans have pointy eye ridge and snout pinch together that distinguishes them from crocodiles and gators. Alligators have smooth curve of the snout but crocodiles have more rugged head than gators. Also crocodiles have "V" shape head although alligators have "U" shaped head. All crocodilians have both their nose and their eyes located on the top of the skull so that they can see and breathe while the rest of their body is submerged beneath the water.

Iran native crocodile

Mugger is a Marsh Crocodile who lives in eastern Iran, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and also Sri Lanka. Some assessments pointed to the possibility of Mugger extinction in Bangladesh, there is also records about regional extinction of Muggers in Bhutan, Myanmar. International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) pinpointed this species is known to occur to 420 m above sea level.

Almost half of all of crocodilian species are endangered, even though there is much less hunting today than in the past. Today, the loss of habitat is a greater threat than hunting for most crocodiles especially for Muggers. Drought, extend-



Nile Crocodile, photo by Amin Mirzaei

ing of human activities and loss of habitat are the main threats for Muggers in Sistan and Baluchestan Province. Muggers are not properly protected in their habitats and there are not enough Muggers being reared to make sure this species does not disappear forever. Mugger crocodile has the small range and is vulnerable in Iran. The effects of drought has drastically reduced the habitat of Muggers, so human conflicts raised. Muggers have also moved into artificial canals and rivers where it is more in danger from humans. Some of them strayed into artificial ponds where humans are present. One of the biggest problems for Muggers is the fact that more and more people want to live in the same places that they do.

According to IUCN "Muggers are known from the drainages, small dams, artificial ponds and the natural ponds along the Sarbaz and Kajou Rivers, which join together to form the Bahokalat River in Sistan and Baluchestan Provinces close to the Pakistan border. Recent surveys in the Nahang River area along the Pakistan border suggest that *C. palustris* is more widely distributed than previously considered."

Preferences

Most crocodilians live in fresh water, but a few venture into estuaries (the mouths of rivers), coastal swamps or the sea. Muggers live in freshwater habitats consist of



Nile crocodile photo by Azka Soltani

rivers, lakes, reservoirs, hill streams, village ponds and manmade tanks. But some species such as Nile crocodile (as you can see also in the pictures) have been found in saltwater habitats. Although they typically live in rivers, Nile crocodiles also inhabit salty estuaries and mangrove swamps. Crocodiles have up to 40 salt glands on the tongue. These special salivary glands allow the crocodile to get rid of excess salt without losing too much water. These glands are necessary because crocodiles have kidneys that need plenty of fresh water to flush out the salt.

Living with people

Many people only ever see a crocodile or an alligator in a story book, on the Television or at the cinema. These crocodilians are often huge, fierce monsters that attack and eat humans. Such images have given crocodilians a bad reputation. Just a few large crocodiles e.g. Nile and saltwater species, can be very dangerous, but most such as Muggers are timid creatures that are no threat to humans. Bahokalat people believe that Muggers bring abundance and bounty so in their habitat you may have a close-up view. Attacks out of the water are unlikely - the element of surprise is lost because most of them cannot move fast on the land. But some meetings are harmful especially for children.

Iraqi forces kill dozen terrorists, destroy 4 bomb-rigged cars west of Mosul

Members of the Iraqi rapid response forces have carried out an operation in the western part of the strategic city of Mosul, killing a dozen ISIL (Daesh) terrorists as government troops and fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units are battling to drive the extremists out of their last urban stronghold in the Arab country.

Lieutenant Colonel Abdel Amir al-Mohammedawi, a spokesman for the forces, announced in a statement on Saturday that the elite units of the Interior Ministry had managed to destroy four vehicles rigged with explosives and kill 12 Daeshis in the process.

Mohammedawi added that government forces continued to make territorial gains in western Mosul, and dozens of families were being evacuated from liberated regions.

Commander of Federal Police Forces Lieutenant General Raed Shaker Jawdat also said that his forces were making a steady advance in Mosul's western neighborhood of al-Haramat. He said that they had killed 15 Daesh terrorists there. Eight vehicles belonging to the terrorists were destroyed as well.

Moreover, Nayef al-Shammari, a member of the Iraqi Parliament's Security and Defense Committee, said on Saturday that Daesh terrorists were retreating from Zanji



and 17 Tamuz neighborhoods in western Mosul to al-Farouq district near Grand al-Nuri Mosque, where purported Daesh ring-leader Ibrahim al-Samarrai aka Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi gave his speech on the formation of the terror group.

Elsewhere in the eastern province of Diyala, Iraqi army soldiers and fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units, commonly known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, have launched

a major offensive against Daesh positions, trying to purge the areas of Hawdh al-Nada, Hamrin, Wadi al-Thalab and Talal Qazlaq from Daesh extremists.

Meanwhile, the Ninth Division of the Iraqi Army announced that government soldiers had detained the self-proclaimed Daesh police chief of Hamam al-Ail town south of Mosul.

There are reports that the high-profile Daesh figure had disguised himself

among civilians fleeing the area.

Iraqi army soldiers and Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters have made sweeping gains against the Takfiri elements since launching the operation to retake Mosul.

The Iraqi forces took control of eastern Mosul in January after 100 days of fighting, and launched the battle in the west on February 19.

Daesh butcher in Speicher carnage arrested

Additionally, Iraqi security forces have arrested a Daesh commander wanted for the June 2014 massacre of hundreds of military recruits in the city of Tikrit, the capital of Salahuddin Province.

The media bureau of Baghdad Operations Command stated that the high-ranking militant commander, whose identity was not immediately available, was nabbed in Sheikh Awad village north of Baghdad.

On June 12, 2014, Daesh terrorists killed around 1,700 Iraqi Air Force cadets in an attack on Camp Speicher, a former US base. There were reportedly around 4,000 unarmed cadets in the camp at the time of the attack.

An investigation committee later revealed that 57 members of the former dictator Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party had aided Daesh terrorists in massacring the Iraqi troopers.

Pakistan, Afghanistan dispute toll after clashes



Pakistan said Sunday its forces killed at least 50 Afghan troops and destroyed five checkpoints in clashes along the disputed border two days earlier, while Afghanistan dismissed the account, saying only two border police and a civilian were killed.

The two armies traded fire Friday around the Chaman border crossing, which has been closed by Pakistan, stranding people on both sides. The clashes, which ended after a few hours when local commanders contacted each other via an emergency hotline, marked a dangerous escalation between the two U.S. allies.

The two uneasy neighbors share a porous 2,200-kilometer (1,375-mile) border and have long traded allegations of allowing their border regions to be used by militant groups.

Pakistani Maj. Gen. Nadeem Ahmad told reporters at the crossing that two Pakistani soldiers were killed in Friday's fighting and another nine were wounded. He said around 100 Afghan forces were wounded.

Najib Danish, deputy spokesman for the Afghan Interior Ministry, said that account was "completely baseless." He said two Afghan border police were killed in Spin Boldak, on the Afghan side of the border, and another 11 were wounded. An Afghan government statement issued

Sunday accused Pakistan of "unprovoked firing" Friday and Saturday.

Danish said a woman was killed and 30 other civilians were wounded in the attacks, which forced several local residents to flee their homes.

Pakistani officials said the fighting began after Afghan security forces fired on Pakistani census workers and the troops escorting them, killing nine civilians and wounding 42, including women and children. They say the Afghan government had been notified and given the coordinates of the border villages, where the census workers were going door to door.

Afghan officials said Pakistani troops fired the first shots.

Afghanistan refuses to recognize the so-called Durand Line, established more than a century ago when the British Empire controlled much of South Asia, as the international border. The line runs through the traditional homeland of the Pashtun ethnic group, which dominates Afghanistan and the border provinces of Pakistan.

Afghanistan refuses to allow Pakistan to set up additional border posts, even though the frontier area is used by the Taliban and other Islamic militant groups. Each country says the other turns a blind eye to militant sanctuaries. (Source: AP)

Deadly attacks hit Indian-administered Kashmir



Fighters have carried out an attack in Indian-administered Kashmir that killed at least three civilians and a policeman, the latest violence to hit the valley, according to authorities.

They said one of the fighters was also killed while attacking policemen clearing the site of a road accident late on Saturday near Kulgam district.

"A police party was at the accident site when they were attacked. In the crossfire, one policeman and three civilians died. One of the attackers also died," a police source told the AFP news agency on Sunday.

SP Pani, senior police officer, confirmed that a police unit came under fire on Saturday night as it reached a road accident site on a key highway connecting the valley with the rest of India.

He said the dead civilians included road construction officials of a private company.

Police believe two of the attackers escaped under the cover of darkness after the officers retaliated in Malpora, a village 65km south of Srinagar, the main city in Indian-administered Kashmir.

In the same Kulgam district, five Indian policemen and two civilians were killed when fighters attacked a bank van, and two soldiers were killed in an attack along the de-facto border with Pakistan.

And on Sunday, thousands of local residents gathered to mourn the dead separatist fighter at a funeral where his

comrades fired shots into the air as a mark of respect.

In another Kashmir-related development, Pakistan's army said Indian troops shot and wounded at least four Pakistani villagers.

A military statement said the troops committed a ceasefire violation when they fired without provocation late on Saturday from near the UN-monitored military control line near the border between the two countries.

The statement said the Indians also targeted civilians in the village of Thruti with mortars and that Pakistani troops returned fire.

Anti-India sentiment runs deep in the predominantly Muslim Kashmir valley, one of the world's most heavily militarized areas.

The clashes have become more frequent since the killing last July of Burhan Wani, the popular commander of a separatist armed group.

Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since the end of British rule in 1947 but both claim the territory in its entirety.

Separatist groups have for decades fought the roughly 500,000 Indian soldiers deployed in region, demanding independence or a merger of the entire territory with Pakistan. (Source: agencies)

82 abducted Chibok girls freed by Boko Haram

At least 82 of the nearly 200 schoolgirls who were still missing after a mass Boko Haram abduction in northeast Nigeria in 2014 have been freed, a government official has told Al Jazeera.

The girls were in the town of Banki, close to the Nigeria-Cameroon border, after their release on Saturday, Al Jazeera's Ahmed Idris, reporting from Nigeria's capital, Abuja, said.

"We are told that 82 of the Chibok girls have been freed by Boko Haram," he said.

"According to sources, this may be a

result of negotiations - but there have also been some military operations of recent around that area, as well as other parts of northeast Nigeria."

Boko Haram seeks to impose a strict law in Nigeria's mainly Muslim north.

The armed group seized 276 pupils from the Government Girls Secondary School in the town of Chibok on the night of April 14, 2014, with 57 of them managing to escape in the immediate aftermath of the abduction.

Some of the schoolgirls have since been released, while others managed to escape.

Before Saturday, more than 80, including 21 whose release was negotiated in October 2016, had been freed.

Negotiations between the Nigerian government and Boko Haram have been ongoing for some time.

Government officials said the talks continued after the release of the 21 girls last year, but in recent months they seemed to have hit a wall amid an escalation in fighting.

Following Saturday's release, Al Jazeera's Idris said there were questions around what the Nigerian government might have given

to Boko Haram in return for the schoolgirls.

"A lot of people in Nigeria don't believe that Boko Haram will simply release those girls after three years in captivity for nothing in return," he said.

"We were told that Boko Haram was trying to negotiate for the release of some of their top commanders in custody of the Nigerian security services. There are also some reports suggesting that they want some ransom to be paid for some of these girls." (Source: Al Jazeera)

Bahrain: Sheikh Isa Qassim trial in absentia postponed to 21 May

Governmental action against the leading cleric is taking place within the framework of implementing U.S., British and Israeli agenda in Bahrain and the region, and comes in the wake of defeats suffered by Saudi Arabia and its allies, the statement said.

Qassim's hometown of Diraz, on the island's northwest, has been under a police blockade since the issuance of the citizenship decree against the cleric.

On Thursday, many Bahraini and international rights bodies, including the European Center for Democracy and Human Rights, Britain's ARTICLE 19, wrote to the

United Nations, the United States, and the European Union, urging them to take action versus the persecution of the cleric and the country's Shias in general. They called the charges "politically-motivated" and demanded that Sheikh Qassim's citizenship be restored.

Bahrain has been witnessing a popular uprising against the ruling Al Khalifah regime since February 2011, with anti-regime protesters taking to the streets on an almost daily basis. The demonstrators are demanding that the Al Khalifah family relinquish power and let a just system representing all Bahrainis be established.

Scores of people have been killed and hundreds of others wounded or detained amid Manama's crackdown on dissent and widespread discrimination against the country's Shia majority.

Bahraini opposition al-Wafa'a Islamic Party on Saturday called on all Bahrainis to stage a unified march towards the blockaded area.

Sheikh Ali Salman, al-Wafaq's jailed secretary general, said targeting Sheikh Qassim amounts to targeting the entire Shia community. (Source: agencies)

Palestinians urge 'week of rage' as Israel plans to force-feed hunger strikers

Leaders of a mass hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners have called for a "week of rage" against Israel amid reports that Tel Aviv plans to bring in foreign doctors to force-feed the inmates refusing to eat.



"Our people should unleash their anger and clash unprovoked with the Israeli occupation at seam zones," the prisoners' leadership said in a statement released on Saturday, referring to the zones around the controversial separation wall, where Palestinians are not permitted to enter.

The statement also called on Palestinians to "blockade Israeli embassies all over the world and continue to organize rallies and sit-ins and to crowd in sit-in tents in Palestinian cities and villages."

"Any attempt to force-feed any hunger-striking prisoner will be treated as an attempt to execute prisoners. We will turn these prisons into battle fields with our bodies, armed with our will and determination," the statement read.

On Thursday, Israel's Channel 2 broadcaster reported that Tel Aviv sought to bring in foreign doctors to force-feed Palestinian hunger strikers because its own medical association has banned the inhumane practice.

The head of the Palestinian Committee of Prisoners' Affairs, Issa Qaraq, warned that the doctors "of any nationality" who performed force-feeding would be legally pursued.

Force-feeding is a crime and jeopardizes the lives of prisoners and violates international laws and ethics, he added.

In a statement emailed to American news magazine Newsweek, Arab Israeli lawmaker Ahmad Tibi at the Israeli parliament condemned the idea of using foreign doctors to force-feed the hunger strikers as "an immoral manipulation aimed at bypassing the Israel Medical Association's" ban.

"The very idea is horrible and disgraceful, and the human demands of the prisoners should be met instead of conducting a dirty struggle against them," he said.

The open-ended mass hunger strike, dubbed the Freedom and Dignity Strike, began on April 17 to denounce harsh conditions in Israeli jails. It is led by a jailed leader of the Fatah movement, Marwan Barghouti.

The strike initially began with 1,500 prisoners, but now, in its 20th day, about 2,000 Palestinians are believed to be refusing food.

Earlier this week, the Arab League urged the United Nations to launch a probe into the violation of Palestinian prisoners' rights in Israeli jails.

Some 6,500 Palestinians are currently being held in Israeli jails, 536 of them arbitrarily, according to figures provided by the Palestinian prisoners' rights group Addameer in January.

Palestinian inmates complain that they have been subjected to assault and torture at Israeli prisons.

They have continuously resorted to hunger strikes in an attempt to voice their anger at the so-called administrative detention, which is a form of imprisonment without trial or charge that allows Israel to incarcerate Palestinians for up to six months. (Source: Press TV)

Hillary Clinton's absolution

But instead of just speaking for dollars, how about speaking her mind, in a lexicon purged of the usual platitudes and clichés? I'm keenly curious for her thoughts on sexism, just not the way she rendered them with Amanpour, swerving quickly to a boilerplate discussion of equal pay.

I want to know about the private moments of insult and fury that were part of her extraordinary journey, and my interest isn't chiefly voyeuristic. That kind of honesty from her would do more to move the discussion about gender roles and double standards forward than the statistics she recites with so little prompting and such ease.

Will some people call her whiny? Of course, and at times they'll be right. But there are complaints no matter what she or anyone at her altitude, with her history, says or does. She made a perfectly valid observation to Amanpour about spotty cellphone coverage in rural areas and was accused of snootiness. The only sane strategy is not to care too much.

Besides, that's the only path to freedom, which she must crave and which would bring out the best in her. Every so often there's a glimpse of a less censored Clinton, as when she pushed back at some Black Lives Matter activists who accused her of victim blaming. Take a fresh look at the video. She's irritated. She's blunt. And she's more likable and compelling than at almost any moment after that encounter in August 2015, toward the start of her campaign.

I remember well my own extended one-on-one interactions with her for a 2001 magazine story and the gleam in her eye when we decided on red wine after a long day. She wasn't fashioning an image: Merlot Hillary. She was just hankering for a drink, and her laughter and looseness as she had it were real.

She let politics beat that laughter and looseness out of her. That was the greatest of her many mistakes, captured somewhat by a remark to Amanpour that attracted much less attention and analysis than other segments of the interview. Referring to one of the differences between her candidacy and Trump's, she said, "I wasn't going to appeal to people's emotions in the same way that my opponent did."

Well, Secretary Clinton, it's never too late, and this next book is as good a place as any to start. Open the wine. Open your soul. Instead of "Hard Choices," give us "Wrong Turns." Instead of "Living History," maybe "Livid With History." You're due for self-recrimination, but you're also entitled to rage, and I suspect that absolution lies on the far side of both. (Source: The NYT)

Arturo Vidal hits out at Lionel Messi's ban being overturned

With Argentina struggling to qualify for the 2018 World Cup, Lionel Messi's ban could not have been overturned at a better time.

The Albiceleste desperately need their main man to help them to next year's tournament in Russia, and he will now be available after FIFA gave into an appeal.



Argentina have quite enough on their hands as they search for a replacement for Edgardo Bauza, who was sacked with his country lying fifth in their qualifying group.

However, Messi's suspension for verbally abusing match official Dewson Silva and refusing to shake his hand after the 1-0 win over Chile was their biggest worry.

The Barcelona superstar was originally punished with a four-game ban and a fine of 10,000 Swiss Francs.

A FIFA statement has since confirmed that the decision has now been quashed, reading:

The return of their all-time leading goalscorer isn't just a huge boost for Argentina, but also great news for the neutral.

Yet, there is unsurprisingly a sense of injustice felt by their rivals.

In fact, it's fair to say that few players would get away with it. Chile's Gary Medel only had a similar ban shortened by one game, so it will be a particularly sore point for the Copa America champions.

Chile and Bayern Munich midfielder Arturo Vidal has alluded to that in an interview with Cooperativa.

«That issue is complicated,» Vidal said.
«If only the rules were the same for everyone.

«Well for Argentina, Messi and football, because it's always nice to see Messi play for his country, he always gives everything.»

It remains to be seen if any action will be taken against the 29-year-old, as suggesting that Messi gets special treatment is a huge claim to make.

Chile are just a point above Argentina, so Messi's return could have huge ramifications for how the qualifying stages pan out.

(Source: Mirror)

Real Madrid sign the best young player in Brazil

As Real Madrid continue to challenge for the double of La Liga and the Champions League this season, they are also making huge waves in the transfer market as well.

On Sunday, Brazilian newspaper Globoesporte report that Real Madrid have agreed a deal to sign the best young player in Brazil for 45 million euros: Vinicius Junior.

Globoesporte are arguably the best source for football news in Brazil and they confirm that the deal is all but done.



Vinicius Junior is currently 16, and Real Madrid have agreed to sign the Flamengo attacker when he turns 18, and he will head to Spain after the World Cup.

Real Madrid beat Barcelona to the signing of Vinicius Junior with the deal set to cost 61 million euros in total, including wages and a payment to his agents.

In comparison, Manchester City paid just over 32 million euros for Gabriel Jesus last summer.

Barcelona had offered 25 million euros for Vinicius Junior, to Flamengo and slightly less money in wages. Real Madrid will pay the youngster 8 million euros per season.

The Catalans even had Neymar ring up Vinicius Junior in a bid to sway him to sign for Barcelona.

According to Globoesporte, everything is agreed between Real Madrid, Flamengo and the player himself, all that needs to be done is to sign contracts.

At 16, Vinicius Junior has been treated like a jewel at Rio giants Flamengo having joined the club in 2010.

Vinicius Junior has been the main standout young player at the club since emerging to prominence in the Under-13 side at Flamengo.

In 2017, Vinicius Junior became champion, best player and top scorer at the South American Under-17 Championship.

Flamengo own 100% of the rights to Vinicius Junior and the 45 million euro transfer fee will be double what Santos received from selling Neymar to Barcelona.

(Source: Goal)

Gurardiola: Why I want Man Utd to win the Europa League

Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola hopes there are five English teams playing in the Champions League next season.

As things are, the top four Premier League sides will qualify for the competition, with City currently sitting in third.

However, with Manchester United still left in the Europa League and outside the top four places, Guardiola prefers them concentrating on that competition thus having five English participants.

"We have four teams fighting for two places," he said, after City's latest league win against Crystal Palace, as reported by Goal.

"Hopefully United can focus on the Europa League and next season we shall see five English teams in Europe which would be amazing."

City boosted their chances with an emphatic 5-0 home victory over struggling Crystal Palace ending a run of back-to-back draws.

However, City's Saturday goal spree means they have now scored 70 goals -- the lowest tally of the top four -- but manager Pep Guardiola believes that total should be far higher.

"Tottenham is the only team I can think of who created more chances than us," Guardiola told the club's website.

"We are the best team in the league when it comes to creating chances -- there is no competition.

"Our problem is finishing these chances -- this is the most difficult thing in football. Against (Manchester) United we created 19 chances -- no goals. The numbers don't lie, though, we have created so many chances but haven't scored enough.

"I remember the game against Everton where we lost 4-0 and they only had four attempts at goal. We created so many yet we lost so this is something we must work on."

Guardiola, though, will finish the campaign trophyless something he's not experienced in his previous eight managerial seasons.

The 46-year-old accumulated 14 trophies coaching boyhood club Barcelona before collecting seven major honours at Bayern Munich.

(Source: Squawka)



Barcelona eye stunning move for Antonio Conte

Antonio Conte has refused to rule out leaving Chelsea after just one season at Stamford Bridge and is on the wanted list of Inter Milan.

The Italian has done a remarkable job this season leading the Blues to within touching distance of a Premier League and FA Cup double.

Conte is due to be under contract for another season and the club were planning to sit down and discuss a new deal later this month.

But he moved to England without his wife and daughter who were widely expected to link up with him in time for the start of next season.

Barca are looking to replace Luis Enrique who announced in February that he would be standing down but they have yet to get someone in place.



Conte has however caught the eye of the Barcelona hierarchy with his transformation of Chelsea's fortunes and they are ready to have a go at luring him to Spain.

Roman Abramovich cannot persuade Conte to stay in London he won't have to look very far for his replacement with his close friend Leonid Slutsky in pole position.

The former CSKA Moscow and Russia boss, 45, has been living in London since January and has been close friends with Chelsea's billionaire owner for more than a decade.

Slutsky who has been learning English has been living in the Chelsea hotel, and has been a regular at Chelsea matches as well as the club's Cobham training ground.

(Source: Express)

Kylian Mbappe gives Man United and Arsenal hope in £85m transfer race



Kylian Mbappe has opened up on his plans amid speculation he could be set for a move away from Monaco in the summer transfer window.

The 18-year-old forward has been a revelation for Monaco this season, scoring 24 goals in all competitions, and his barnstorming form in the Champions League has put a number of top European clubs on red alert.

Reports suggest Arsenal are prepared to spend £85million

on Mbappe this summer and it's understood Manchester United and Real Madrid are also very keen on the youngster.

After Monaco's 3-0 victory over Nancy on Saturday, the Frenchman said: 'As I've said before, we are all aiming for the same objective.

'I want to win the league with my team and I don't want any distractions getting in the way of that.'

(Source: Metro)

Sharapova advances to 2nd round in Madrid Open



Maria Sharapova recovered from a shaky opening to defeat Mirjana Lucic-Baroni of Croatia 4-6, 6-4, 6-0 in the first round of the Madrid Open on Sunday, getting off to a good start in her second tournament since returning from a doping ban.

Sharapova took control of the match after struggling early against the 20th-ranked Lucic-Baroni, cruising to victory in the final set after more than two hours on the

center court in Madrid. Sharapova had 16 winners and only 10 unforced errors in her opening-round victory, her fourth since a controversial return to tennis.

It was Sharapova's fifth match since a 15-month ban for testing positive for meldonium at last year's Australian Open. She played her first tournament after the ban in Stuttgart last month, being eliminated in the semifinals.

(Source: AP)

Ibrahimovic so strong surgeons want to do research on him, says Mino Raiola

Zlatan Ibrahimovic is so strong that doctors want to perform research on the Manchester United star once he retires.

The 35-year-old suffered cruciate knee ligament damage in Manchester United's Europa League quarter-final against Anderlecht, and underwent surgery at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine last week.

The Swede's agent Mino Raiola revealed to Swedish paper, Expressen, that surgeons were so impressed with the condition of Zlatan's knees that they would like to do further research on him once he retires.

"His knee is so strong that the doctors said they had never seen anything like it," Raiola told Expressen.

"He has a knee that it is almost impossible for a football player with a 20-year career to have. It was quite clean, there was no harm in it.

"Zlatan is so strong that the doctor wants him back after his career to research on him. They work on the world's best research institutions for the knees and ligaments.

The former PSG forward took to social media last week to announce that he had undergone successful surgery but his immediate future remains unclear, with the Swede's contract at Old Trafford expiring at the end of the season.

(Source: Eurosport)



Iran out of Beach Soccer World Cup final

SPORTS Iran lost to Tahiti 3-2 in penalty shoot-out on Saturday in the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup Bahamas 2017 semi-final.

Iran will play the loser of Brazil and Italy match in the bronze medal match.

The match got off to a very tentative start with both teams weighing each other's tactics out. Peyman Hosseini saved Li Raimana Li Fung Kuee's penalty in the first minute. Tearii Labaste hit the crossbar with a free-kick from distance, but other than that, not many chances were created.

The goal finally came midway through the second period when Ali Nazem jabbed home a shot from close range after a failed clearance by Heiarii Tavanae.

Tahiti eventually showed their experience and patience when Patrick Tapa scored with four and a half minutes left in the match. Captain Naea Bennett found Tapa with a calm cross out of the air and the midfielder timed his run and put the chance away with confidence to send the match to extra time.

Neither side could find the decisive winner in extra time, so the match went to penalties. It took 12 attempts to decide the winner in the shoot-out, but eventually it was Raimoana Bennett who was the day's hero. His goal sent the Tahitians to their second consecutive final.



Godwin Mensha rules out Persepolis move



SPORTS Nigerian striker Godwin Mensha has ruled out joining Persepolis football team.

According to Persepolis website, former Paykan striker penned a two-year contract with the club but Mensha said he has not joined Persepolis yet.

Persepolis claimed the Iran Professional League title last season.

The 27-year-old player joined Paykan in the summer of 2016 with a one-year contract and scored 15 goals for the Tehran-based team in the Iran Professional League.

Mensha started his career in Spain, playing for several clubs in the third and fourth division before moving to Malta to play for Balzan and Mosta.

Sepahan extends contract with Zlatko Kranjcar



SPORTS Zlatko Kranjcar has signed a two-year contract extension with Sepahan football club on Sunday.

The 60-year-old Croat was appointed as Isfahan based club in late March as a replacement for Abdollah Veisi.

Kranjcar returns for a second stint in charge at the club. He was named as Sepahan coach in 2011 and won

Iran Professional League title in his first season as well as Iran's Hazfi Cup in the following year.

The former Montenegro coach has extended his contract for two seasons for an undisclosed fee.

Sepahan finished in fifth place in the last season.

Sepahan won four matches under Kranjcar and suffered a defeat.

(Source: the-afc)

ACL MD6 - Group C: Al Ahli (KSA) v Zobahan preview

Saudi Arabia's Al Ahli need just a point against Zobahan to advance to the AFC Champions League knockout round on Monday, but defeat at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium would see the Iranian side join Al Ain as the qualifiers from Group C.



Al Ahli could have advanced to the last 16 two weeks ago but suffered a shock 2-0 defeat to Bunyodkor to leave them sweating on their place in the next phase, although the Saudi team will go into the clash with confidence having seen off Monday's opponents 2-1 earlier in the campaign.

Zobahan were in a similar position on Matchday Five as a win would have seen them progress to the next round; however, a 3-0 home reversal to Al Ain now leaves them needing three points to successfully navigate the Group Stage.

Since their respective defeats, Al Ahli have won two in a row in the Saudi Professional League, while Zobahan have drawn one and won one domestically as both sides enter the clash in good form.

(Source: the-afc)

Bonacic linked with Iran's Gostaresh Foolad hot seat

Luka Bonacic is a name to be linked with Iran's Gostaresh Foolad football team's hot seat.

According to local media, the 62-year-old coach will replace Faraz Kamalvand in the Tabriz-based football team.



Former Sepahan Coach Abdollah Veisi also is a candidate to take charge of Gostaresh Foolad but it seems the Croat has more chance to be appointed as new coach.

Bonacic has already worked in Iranian football clubs Foolad, Sepahan, Zob Ahan, Mes Kerman and Esteghlal Ahvaz.

Gostaresh Foolad finished in 8th place in Iran Professional League (IPL), 28 points adrift of champion Persepolis.

(Source: Tasnim)

Asian Men's U23 Volleyball Championship: Iran advance to semi-final

SPORTS Hosts and defending champions Iran beat Kazakhstan in straight sets (25-9, 25-17, 25-14) at the 2nd Asian Men's U23 Volleyball Championship at the 6,000-seater Rezazadeh Indoor Stadium on Sunday.

Juan Cichello's boys defeated Pakistan 3-0 victory and downed Malaysia 3-1 in their second match. They defeated China 3-0 in their third match.

Iran will face Thailand on Monday in the

competition's semi-final.

The competition got underway in Ardabil, Iran from 1 to 9 May 2017.

Only top two teams from this top-flight tournament will join host Egypt, South American champion Brazil, European winner and runner-up Poland and Turkey, Argentina, Cuba and Mexico, African winner Algeria, Italy and Russia in the 12-team World Championship in Cairo, Egypt.

Iran futsal players fall to Spain in Victory Day Women Cup 2017

The national Iranian women's futsal team has gone down to a bitter defeat at the 8th edition of International Futsal Tournament for Women National Teams in Russia, and lost its opening match to the world's vice champion, Spain.

On Saturday evening, Iranian sportswomen sustained a 0-7 loss at the hands of their Spanish counterparts at Crocus Expo in Krasnogorsk city. The Iranian team conceded two goals in the first half, while the rest were scored in the second.

"The Iranian team could rather play at the opposing team's level in the first period. The match against Russia as the world's third best team is of great importance. The



Czech squad is powerful as well," Foruzan Soleimani, head coach of Iran women's national futsal team, said after the match.

The national Iranian women's futsal team is scheduled to face Russia in its second fixture on Sunday.

The 8th edition of International Futsal Tournament for Women National Teams started in Russia on May 6, and will finish on May 9, 2016.

National women's futsal teams from the Czech Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Russia and Spain have attended the three-day tournament, which is also known as Victory Day Women Cup 2017.

(Source: Press TV)

Alexis Sanchez: No talks on future until summer after frustrating season

Alexis Sanchez has told Sky Sports he will discuss his future with Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger at the end of the season, adding that he has been frustrated at times in his side's erratic campaign.

Sanchez, whose contract expires in 2018, has been linked with a move away from the Emirates with Bayern

Munich among the clubs reported to be interested.

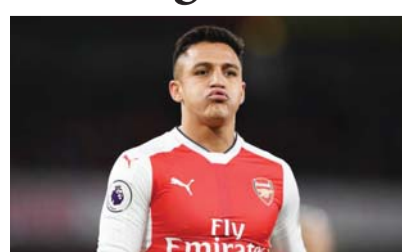
He said he felt Arsenal played "the best brand of football" and that when he arrived in London he had felt he would "win the title with this squad."

But addressing his future, he said: "We've said that the two of us will sit down together to discuss what will

happen and what we're going to do, what's best for the club, what's best for me, what's best for him.

"We'll speak once the season is over because if I speak now, that would take my focus away from what I want, which is qualifying for the Champions League and winning the FA Cup."

(Source: Sky Sports)



INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

Managing Director: Ali Asgari
Editor-in-Chief: Hassan Lasjerdi

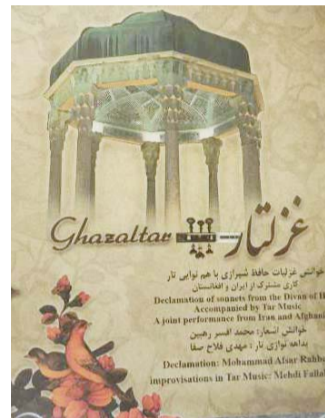
Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98(21) 88808214 editor@tehrantimes.com
Switchboard Operator: Tel: (+98 21) 43051000
Advertisements Dept.: Telefax: (+98 21) 43051450
Public Relations Office: Tel: (+98 21) 88805807
Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603
www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co. Tel: 88911433
Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
Printed at: Kayhan - ISSN: 1017-94

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran
P.O. Box: 14155-4843
Zip Code: 1599814713



Iranian, Afghan musicians release joint album "Ghazaltar"

A R T TEHRAN — "Ghazaltar", an album representing a collaboration between Iranian tar player Mehdi Fallah-Safa and Afghan artist Mohammad-Afsar Rahbeen, has recently been released in Tehran.



The cover of "Ghazaltar"

The album was unveiled during a ceremony at the 30th Tehran International Book Fair on Saturday.

The album features poem recitations by Rahbin, who is also Afghanistan's cultural attaché in Tehran, from the Divan of Hafez and improvisations by Fallah-Safa, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Sunday.

The album, which was released under the auspices of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, aims to promote the musical intangible heritage in Western and Central Asia, Rahbeen said at the ceremony.

He added that their next project will focus on works by Persian poet and mystic Molana Jalal ad-Din Rumi.

Narges Abyar to discuss gender in Iranian cinema in Spain

A R T TEHRAN — Narges Abyar, the director of the acclaimed drama "Track 143", will be discussing gender in Iranian cinema during a two-day seminar opening today at the Completeness University in Madrid.



Entitled "Representaciones De Género En El Cine Iraní", a number of Spanish scholars will also be attending the seminar, Iran's Cultural Office in Madrid has announced on its website.

In addition, the film "Track 143" is scheduled to be screened at the University of Salamanca located in the town of Salamanca, west of Madrid on May 10 followed by a question and answer panel to be attended by Abyar.

"Track 143" is about a great maternal sacrifice during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war as Olafat is waiting for her missing-in-action son to return home.

The program has been organized by the two Spanish universities in collaboration with Iran's Cultural Office in Madrid.

"Alien" director Ridley Scott 'heads for wider universe' in latest installment

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Ridley Scott, the English director of three of the sci-fi horror "Alien" films, says he is heading into a wider universe with the latest in the series: "Alien: Covenant."

The franchise has produced nearly 40 years of sequels and prequels, numerous books, toys and video games. The 2012 prequel "Prometheus" marked Scott's return to the story, 33 years after the original.

"Alien: Covenant", the sixth installment, is set 10 years after Prometheus with a colony ship headed to a remote planet with a sinister inhabitant.

"I think we open up into a much larger universe than we ever did before," Scott told Reuters on Saturday.

"The others did all-action 'shoot-em-up, shoot-em-up, kill, kill, kill', but I thought they should have answered various questions from the first one," he added.

"That would enable us to open up that universe in a much more interesting way other than just monsters chasing people in corridors.

"This one has really gotten into creation," he added.

The film stars Michael Fassbender, Katherine Waterston, Billy Crudup and Danny McBride.

"I was exhausted at the end. It's absolutely grotesque," said Crudup.

Iranian Stage Actors Celebration awards top stars of the year

A R T TEHRAN — The 14th Iranian Stage Actors Celebration was held at Tehran's City Theater Complex on Saturday with honoring stars of the plays performed over the past year.

The celebration is organized annually by the Iranian Theater Forum to honor top actors of the past year.

Top stage actors for last year were Afshin Hashemi for his role in "Three Sisters and Others" by writer/director Hamid Amjad, and Alireza Keymanesh for playing a role in William Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" directed by Mostafa Kushki.

Kazem Sayyhi also received an award for his role in Mary Chase's "Harvey" directed by Melody Aramnia.

Mahshad Mokhberi, Reyhaneh Salamat and Pantea Panahiha were the top three actresses of the year.

Mokhberi received her award for her role in "The Missing Lady" directed by Farhad Sharifi while Panahiha was awarded for her collaboration in "Love Letters from the Middle East" directed by Kiumars Mopradi.

Salamat was presented an award for her roles both in "October 1942, Paris" directed by Masud Musavi and "Three Sisters and Others".

The troupes performed "Cloudy House" by directors Siamak Ehsai and Hamid Purazari, and "Shelter" directed by Amid Miri were selected as best casts of the year.



A thespian performs a skit during the 14th Iranian Stage Actors Celebration at Tehran's City Theater Complex on May 6, 2017. (Mehr/Behnam Tofiqi)

Palme d'Or winner Shahab Hosseini returns to the stage with "Confession"

A R T TEHRAN — Actor/director Shahab Hosseini who won the Cannes Palme d'Or for best actor last year plans to stage a play titled "Confession" in Tehran.

Hosseini, Ali Nasirian and Nima Reisi are the main members of the cast for the play, which will soon premiere at the main hall of Tehran's City Theater Complex, the complex announced in a press release on Sunday.

However, no further details were given in the report.

Hosseini made his stage directorial debut with "Meeting" at Tehran's Niavaran Cultural Center in 2012.

He won the Palme d'Or for



Shahab Hosseini poses during a photocall after accepting the Palme d'Or for best actor for his role in "The Salesman" at the 69th Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France on May 22, 2016. (Photo by Reuters)

best actor for his role in Asghar Farhadi's Oscar-winning drama "The Salesman" at the Cannes Film Festival in 2016.

Photo exhibit on Orientalist Hammer-Purgstall underway at Tehran complex

CULTURE TEHRAN — An exhibition of photos on Austrian Orientalist Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall is currently underway at the Abi Hall of Tehran's Niavaran Cultural Historical Complex.

The weeklong showcase entitled "Bridge" opened on Saturday during a special ceremony attended by Austrian Ambassador Friedrich Stift, some of his colleagues, and the deputy director of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, Mohammad-Hassan Talebian.

Earlier last week, the National Library and Archives of Fars in Shiraz commemorated Hammer-Purgstall in a program titled "Hammer-Purgstall, a Bridge between Hafez and Goethe". Born in 1774, Hammer-Purgstall



A portrait of Austrian Orientalist Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall

is mostly renowned for the first ever complete translation of the Divan of Hafez into a Western language.

Before his death in 1856, he already had a gravestone prepared bearing inscriptions in the ten languages that he had mastered.

UniFrance, Farabi execs meet

A R T TEHRAN — Jean-Christophe Baubiat, the director of Research and Distributor Relations of UniFrance, an organization for promoting French films outside France, met the director of Iran's Farabi Cinema Foundation Alireza Tabesh in Tehran on Saturday.

At the meeting, Tabesh gave information about some joint projects implemented by Iran and France and said that Farabi is eager to expand collaboration with French companies.

He also announced Farabi's plan to set up theaters for children's films in the near future.

Baubiat said that UniFrance promotes the French cinema in the world and supports films that

are produced in different countries in the French language.

He also said that UniFrance is willing to cooperate with Farabi in screening films for the public and at international events, as well as in film distribution and joint projects.

He added that UniFrance can provide additional facilities for the French cineastes to attend the Fajr International Film Festival, adding that the company can also help Iranian directors make their films in France.

Moreover, he said that UniFrance has established a new educational department, which can dispatch directors or cineastes to Iran to hold workshops.



UniFrance executive Jean-Christophe Baubiat (2nd L) and Farabi director Alireza Tabesh (4th L) meet in Tehran on May 6, 2017. (Photo by Farabi)

Auction houses see signs of art market uptick ahead of New York sales

NEW YORK (Reuters) — As auction powerhouses Christie's and Sotheby's gear up for their New York spring sales, hopes are high that a host of major works the likes of which have not hit the block for several seasons will reap strong, even record, prices.

After years of gangbuster results marked by soaring prices, both auction houses staged relatively modest sales last year, owing largely, they say, to hesitancy on the part of consignors in an unsettled global market.

No works carried estimates much beyond \$40 million, in contrast to recent seasons when many pieces broke the \$100 million barrier. Executives resorted to employing such terms as discerning, measured and selective to characterize both the market, and some flabby results.

But collectors' hunger for top-tier



A sign is pictured outside Christie's auction house in Geneva, Switzerland, December 15, 2016. (Reuters/Denis Balibouse)

works also drove heavy spending in the fall, said Brook Hazelton, president of Christie's Americas, citing its Claude Monet record in November.

"Those successes gave a tremendous boost to seller confidence, and since that time we have seen a meaningful increase in supply," Hazelton told Reuters.

Eerie model of Picasso's corpse lies in Spanish birthplace

MALAGA, SPAIN (Reuters) — A life-size model of the corpse of Pablo Picasso lies on a plinth in his home city of Malaga, eyes closed, hands folded.

The artist who transformed his subjects into Cubist abstractions is immortalized in an eerily realistic sculpture dressed in his trademark blue and white striped jersey and black rope-soled shoes.

The work, made of silicon, resin and fiberglass, with human hair and real clothes, was created by Spanish artist Eugenio Merino - best known for

his hyper-realistic models of dictators including Spain's Francisco Franco.

Picasso lies out in a small room in the city's branch of the Alliance Francaise cultural institute, the end point of a tour following the landmarks of his life.

On the surface, it looks like another scheme to draw in tourists.

But, say the organizers, the tour and sculpture are actually a critique of the way the city has used Picasso for commercial ends.

"The project is meant to criticize mass

"We have witnessed strong demand for breakthrough masterpieces," said Simon Shaw, co-head of Impressionist and modern art at rival Sotheby's, citing one of its star offerings, Egon Schiele's, "Danaë," as just one example.

Painted when the artist was just 19, the work which Impressionist and Modern Art Evening Sale head Jeremiah Evarts called "without doubt the most important early work that's ever come to auction" is expected to fetch as much as \$40 million, not including commission, which would set a new Schiele record.

Traditionally the auction houses' largest, the spring sales in New York kick off on May 15 as Christie's features Pablo Picasso's 1939 portrait of muse Dora Maar, "Femme assise, robe bleue," estimated between \$35 million and \$50 million, at its Impressionist and Modern

Art sale. Other highlights of the week-long sales include Cy Twombly's "Leda and the Swan," carrying a \$55 million high estimate, and Francis Bacon's "Three Studies for a Portrait of George Dyer," both at Christie's.

Bacon's 1963 triptych of his lover, once owned by Roald Dahl, is expected to sell for \$50 million to \$70 million.

Works by Andy Warhol -- one of his iconic Campbell's soup cans -- and Roy Lichtenstein are each estimated to fetch \$25 million to \$35 million.

At Sotheby's, Jean-Michel Basquiat's untitled work from 1982, last auctioned in 1984 for a mere \$19,000, is now expected to reap more than \$60 million, making it among the week's highest-estimated works and setting it up to break the artist's \$57.3 million record set just a year ago.



Spanish artist Eugenio Merino poses next to his artwork entitled 'Picasso died here', featuring a hyperrealistic figure of Spanish artist Pablo Picasso's corpse, displayed at the Alliance Francaise (French Alliance) in Malaga, southern Spain May 5, 2017. (Reuters/Jon Nazca)