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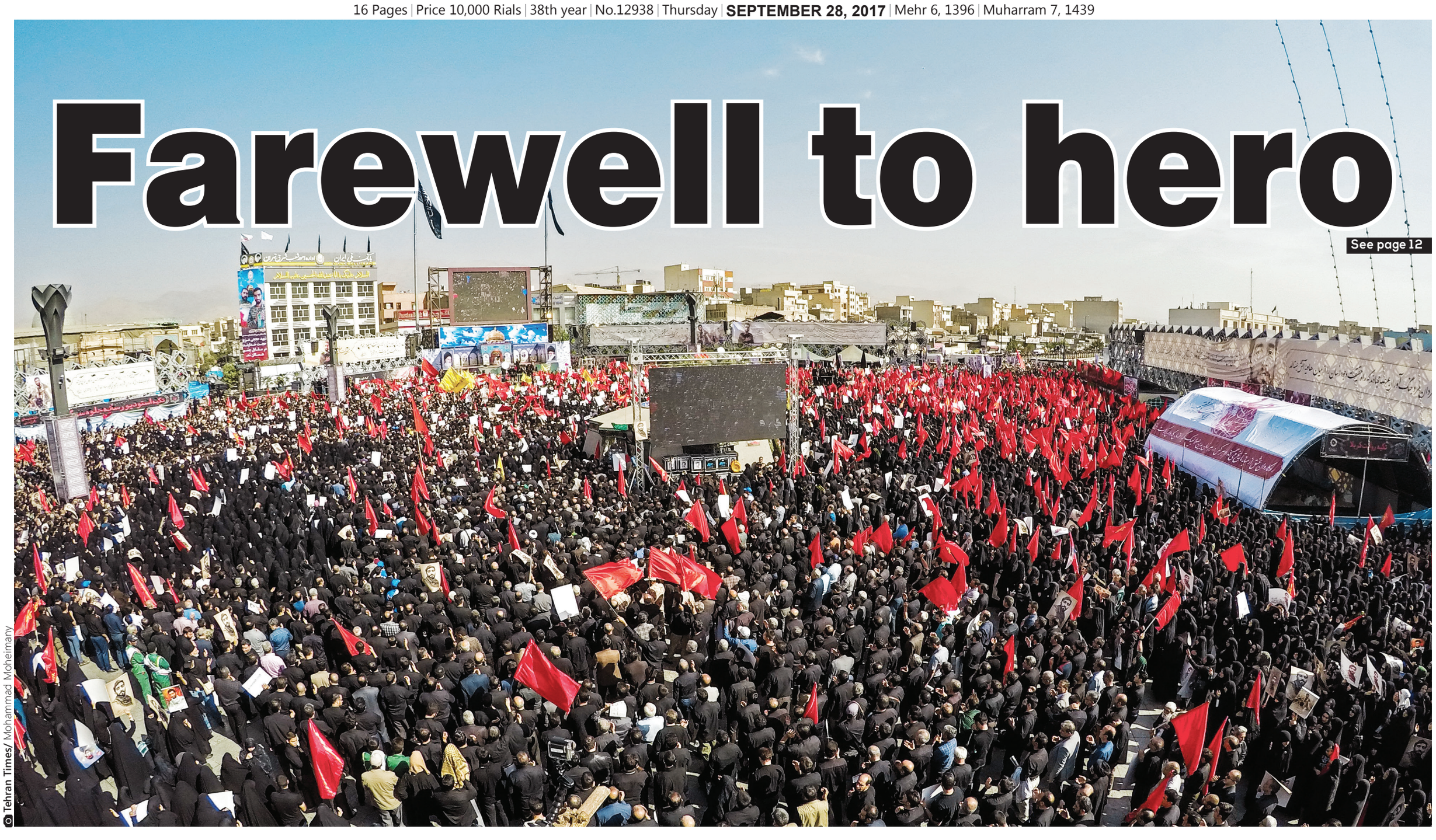
TEHRAN TIMES

The Tehran Times offers condolences on the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussein (AS) and his loyal companions

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Farewell to hero

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ARTICLE

By Ebrahim Fallahi

Tehran Times journalist

Iraq's Kurdistan referendum: What to expect for oil markets

Against the opposition of Iraq's central government and despite the warning signals from much of the international community, thousands of Iraqi Kurds headed to polls on September 25 for a referendum on independence.

An action which many believe could raise serious issues for Iraq's economy in the upcoming months and also result in some short and/or long term changes in the oil market.

■ What is at stake for Iraqi government?

With the Kurds claiming independence, Iraq's government which is currently wrestling to rebuild its energy industry after decades of conflict and war could be facing further instability in the region.

Since 2014 when the Iraqi forces retreated from Kirkuk in war with Daesh, Kurds have been controlling the northern regions in Iraq, and they have been also in conflict with the central government over the city of Kirkuk which is the home for some of Iraq's oldest producing oil fields.

Northern Iraq is believed to hold about 45 billion barrels of crude reserves, more than OPEC member Nigeria.

According to Bloomberg, the region pumped about 544,600 barrels of oil a day in 2016 and is expected to boost output to 602,000 barrels this year making it a significant contributor to the country's economic growth.

Although the Kurds get a 30-percent share from their controlled regions' oil revenues, recent drops in oil prices have imposed economic pressures on KRG and they haven't been able to pay their dues to the oil companies operating the fields in the region. This situation added to the territory conflict over Kirkuk has led the KRG to claim for a higher and "more just" share of the country's oil revenues. →4

Leader pays tribute to national icon

POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, on Wednesday morning paid tribute to Mohsen Hojaji, who was decapitated by Daesh in Syria last month.

Citizens also participated in a huge funeral procession in honor of Hojaji. The procession began in Tehran's Imam Hussein Square on Wednesday morning.

Hojaji was a member of the Iranian military advisory team, which assists the Syria army in its counter-terrorism operations against terrorists. He was taken hostage by Daesh terrorists near the Iraqi border on August 7 and beheaded two days later.

Ayatollah Khamenei attended the Imam Hussein Mosque at the square, where Hojaji's body had been brought to, performing prayers for the martyr prior to the funeral ceremony. →2

Iranian parliament condemns Iraqi Kurdistan referendum

POLITICS desk **TEHRAN —** Iranian MPs issued a strongly worded statement on Wednesday condemning the independence referendum in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

The statement was signed by 210 parliamentarians.

"Any action that seeks disintegration is harmful to the Iraqi people and the entire region and we condemn this action of the Iraqi Kurdistan region," the statement read.

"During the past years, Iraq was targeted by various plots hatched by the U.S. and the Zionist regime of Israel, however, the Iraqi people's resistance and solidarity foiled all the hegemonic system's plots and the Iraqis approved the constitution and formed the central government and restored peace to Iraq."

The statement called the independence referendum "illegal" and harmful to Iraq's "national solidarity" and "territorial integrity".

The statement urged the Kurdistan region to cooperate with the Iraqi central government and stop the Zionists' "adventurism" in the Middle East region.

Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government held independence referendum on Monday. KRG President Masoud Barzani turned a cold shoulder to international calls against the referendum.

Iran closed on Sunday its airspace to the Kurdistan region upon a request by the Iraqi government.

■ Iran's top security official: Iraqi Kurdistan region to go under more boycotts

The secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council underlined more negotiations between Tehran, Baghdad and Ankara after the recent independence referendum in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, noting that more sanctions will be imposed on Kurds in Iraq.

"Mr. Ali Shamkhani believed that trilateral negotiations among Iran, Iraq and Turkey will continue concurrent with talks with the Kurdistan region's groups and parties, and boycott pressures will be exerted too," Jabbar Khouchakinejad, a legislator, quoted Shamkhani as saying in a private session at the parliament on Wednesday.

According to the MP, Shamkhani stressed that different measures will be adopted to make the Kurds withdraw from their stances and the Iraqi government can even resort to military force because this separatist move has happened in Iraq and the referendum is against the Iraqi constitution, he added.

"The Security Council secretary also emphasized that Iran will support the Iraqi government's measures," Kouchakinejad said.

Elimination of nuclear weapons is 'moral responsibility', Iran says

Abbas Araqchi, Iranian deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, said on Tuesday that total elimination of nuclear weapons is a "legal, political and moral responsibility".

"We need to take this responsibility responsibly and continue our collective efforts resolutely," Araqchi told a UN General Assembly meeting intended to promote the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons.

Araqchi also said, "On its part, Iran will continue to remain a strong supporter of nuclear disarmament."

Following is full text of Araqchi's speech published by IRNA:

I would like to begin by thanking you for convening this meeting and your statement. I also associate myself with the NAM statement delivered by the honorable foreign minister of Venezuela.

Promotion of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons, which was proposed by H.E. President Rouhani of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement in 2013, is indeed the promotion of the main purpose of the United Nations i.e. "To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace. This is also in line with the realization of the objective of the very first resolution of this Assembly that called for the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

Over the past seven decades, the existence of nuclear weapons has been the most serious challenge to the international peace and security. Despite the cessation of nuclear arms race for some years in the past, recently we hear alarming announcement by a nuclear-weapon State that it intends to continuously strengthen and expand its nuclear arsenal to ensure its place at the top of the pack. Such a statement is a clear indication of, and an explicit invitation to, the start of a new nuclear arms race. →2

UNESCO experts in Iran weighing historical Sasanian cities

HERITAGE desk **TEHRAN —** Experts form the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) accompanied by archaeologists from Germany and Italy visited parts of the historical Sasanian ancient cities and ruins on Wednesday as part of the process for inscribing the ensemble on UNESCO World Heritage List, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Following nearly a decade of expectation, Iran is further moving towards possible inscription of 'The Ensemble of Historical Sasanian Cities' and 'Arasbaran Protected Area' that comprises several Sasanian-era (224–651) sites, namely Bishapour, Firouzabad and Sarvestan in the southern province of Fars. →10



ARTICLE

By Setareh Behroozi

Tehran Times journalist

Muharram: The reunion of society

Once again the Iranian nation is overwhelmed by the month of Muharram. Black banners and draperies are seen all over the country. People in dark dresses attend mourning congregations.

Traditionally, Iranians hold mourning rituals during the first ten days of Muharram - the first month of the Islamic calendar - to commemorate the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hussein (AS) and his companions in the battle of Karbala in in 680.

Muharram, as a time of intense grief and mourning, is also an opportunity for people to practice cooperation.

It is a good reason for people to gather for a common purpose and to cooperate with each other to hold rituals in a proper way.

People commemorate Imam Hussain (AS) in chorus attending mosques and other religious places like hussainiyas.

Sorrowful and poetic recitations and eulogies are chanted in memory of the 10th of Muharram, Ashura, the day Imam Hussein (AS) and his companions were martyred. There are also chest-beating ceremonies.

During Muharram, some people provide free meals, called nazri, which is distributed mainly among the poor. Taking part in the process of cooking and distributing nazri amongst neighbors and relatives is considered as a good deed.

Although some benevolent persons prefer to order nazri to be cooked by restaurants or catering companies, but it is still a great opportunity for relatives and neighbors to come together in a place for distributing it.

Almost nobody mourns during Muharram individually. The month is an occasion for all to show reunion of the society, cherish religious values, and remind each other of the importance of social unity.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Official: KRG referendum favors Israel by spreading insecurity

POLITICS desk **TEHRAN** — The secretary of Iran's Expediency Council, pointing to the independence referendum in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, said on Wednesday "this is in the interest of Israel and those who want to expand insecurity in the region."

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a local ceremony, Mohsen Rezaei said Kurdistan needs "security, development and progress" and any kind of conflict halts achieve these aims.

"We must preserve the territorial integrity of countries and prevent the change of geographical boundaries," the former IRGC chief stressed.



Russia: Iran missile tests don't breach international accords

POLITICS desk **TEHRAN** — A senior Russian official says Iran's ballistic missile tests do not violate United Nations Security Council resolutions or international agreements, contrary to the West's media hype about the Islamic Republic's missile program.

"There is no ban that might prevent Iran from testing missiles," Mikhail Ulyanov, head of the Russian Foreign Ministry's Non-Proliferation and Weapons Control Department, said on Tuesday, Press TV reported.

He added that a "compromise" was made over Iran's missile activities under the JCPOA in 2015.



Iran, Ukraine discuss expansion of parliamentary ties

POLITICS desk **TEHRAN** — Iran's Ambassador to Ukraine Mohammad Beheshti Monfared in a meeting with chairman of Ukraine's parliamentary committee on foreign affairs Anna Gopko on Wednesday discussed ways to expand parliamentary relations.

In the meeting, the two sides discussed different fields of cooperation between the two states, especially between parliaments of Iran and Ukraine, ILNA reported.

Gopko welcomed expansion of mutual parliamentary cooperation and called the upcoming visit of Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani and head of Majlis Foreign Policy and National Security Committee Aladdin Boroujerdi to Ukraine "very important".



Kazakh fleet visits Iran's port in Caspian Sea

POLITICS desk **TEHRAN** — Kazakhstan's naval fleet has anchored in the port city of Anzali in northern Iran, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

The fleet berthed on the Caspian Sea shores in Gilan Province.

It came as the first peace and friendship flotilla from Kazakhstan to Iran.

Kazakh Captain Niyaz Bekov met Iran's Northern Fleet Commander Rear Admiral Ahmad Reza Baqeri upon arriving in Anzali Port.



Tehran fully backs besieged residents of Fua'a, Kafraya in Syria

POLITICS desk **TEHRAN** — Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, a senior advisor to the Majlis speaker, has underlined that Tehran will do its best to provide the needed support for the Syrian residents of the Shiite towns of Fua'a and Kafraya who have long been under the terrorists' siege.

Speaking in a meeting with Hussein Ragheb al-Hussein, a member of the Syrian parliament and deputy chief of the Syrian National Dialogue Forum on Tuesday, Amir-Abdollahian said Tehran has always supported people and government of Syria in the fight against terrorism.



Official calls for closer Iran-Bulgaria cultural ties

POLITICS desk **TEHRAN** — The chairwoman of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Documents and National Library Organization has called for expanding cultural cooperation between Iran and Bulgaria, IRNA reported.

"Cultural cooperation will lead to exchange of opinions among scientists and researchers," Ashraf Boroujerdi said in a meeting with cultural and foreign policy advisors of Bulgarian president on Wednesday.

"Collaboration can present the true image of both countries' cultures to their people," she added.

Leader pays tribute to national icon



1 → The Leader also met with Hojaji's family, expressing gratitude for their steadfastness in their cause.

Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani addressed the commemoration ceremony as the event's keynote speaker.

Also attending the procession were military top brass from the Army and the IRGC.

On Tuesday, Hojaji's body lied in state at the Imam Reza Shrine in the holy city of Mashhad, where throngs of mourners paid homage to him.

Hojaji is set be buried in his hometown of Najafabad in Isfahan Province, following another funeral procession on Thursday.

Ayatollah Khamenei had earlier called Hojaji "a proof put before the world's eye".

Soon after Hojaji's martyrdom, General Qassem Soleimani said Iranian forces would not rest until they have taken out every last terrorist from the face of the Muslim world.

The general, who commands the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, vowed on September 21 that the terror outfit would be uprooted in two months.

Top U.S. general: Exiting Iran nuclear pact would make future deals tough

The top U.S. military officer said on Tuesday Iran was complying with the pact curbing its nuclear program and warned that any American decision to walk away from it would make other nations less likely to enter into agreements with the United States.

President Donald Trump is considering whether to withdraw from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers including the United States, calling the accord an "embarrassment."

Marine Corps General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Iran was complying with its obligations under the nuclear deal.

The committee's top Democrat, Senator Jack Reed, asked Dunford whether walking away from the Iran nuclear pact would affect the U.S. ability to negotiate with North Korea or devise a non-military solution toward Pyongyang.

"It makes sense to me that our holding up agreements that we have signed, unless there is a material breach, would have an impact on others' willingness to sign



agreements," Reuters quoted Dunford as saying during his reappointment hearing.

Trump this year also announced he would withdraw the United States from the international Paris climate agreement and the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement.

U.S. officials, including senior military leaders, have said that the first option to deal with the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile program is through diplomacy.

The ambassadors to the United States from Britain, France, Germany and the European Union all strongly backed the nuclear agreement with Iran on Monday as long as Tehran continues to comply with the pact.

If Trump does not recertify by Oct. 16 that Iran is in compliance with the agreement, Congress would have 60 days to decide whether to reimpose sanctions on Tehran suspended under the accord.

That would let Congress, controlled by Trump's fellow Republicans, effectively decide whether to kill the deal. Although congressional leaders have declined to say whether they would seek to reimpose sanctions, Republican lawmakers were united in their opposition to the deal reached by Democratic former President Barack Obama.

Analysts says a collapse of the deal could worsen Middle East tensions.

Amano: Iran's nuclear program different from North Korea

POLITICS desk Yukiya Amano, chief of the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency, said on Tuesday that Iran's nuclear program is different from situation in North Korea, noting "in the JCPOA's case, diplomacy worked".

In an interview with Reuters, he said that Iran is implementing its nuclear commitments under the deal.

He said complementary access - often consisting of short-notice inspections carried out under the IAEA Additional Protocol, which Iran is implementing under the accord - is going smoothly.

"Complementary access in Iran is being undertaken without problem and the number of accesses is quite high," he said.

During his speech at the UN General Assembly last Tuesday, U.S. President Donald Trump hinted that he may not recertify the agreement when it comes up for review by a mid-October deadline, in which case the U.S. Congress would have 60 days to decide whether to reimpose sanctions waived under the accord.

The nuclear deal was reached in July 2015 and went into effect in January 2016.

Except the U.S. under Donald Trump, all other signatories to the nuclear deal – France, Germany, Britain, Russia and China and the European Union - have been insisting on the full implementation of the multilateral agreement endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.



Guards chief: Daesh to be wiped out in 2 months

POLITICS desk **TEHRAN** — On Wednesday the commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps said Daesh would be wiped out in two months.

The IRGC has been providing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's army with military advisory missions over the past years when the Arab country was invaded by Daesh and other terrorist groups.

Jafari's remarks were the exact words spoken a few days earlier by Qassemi Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Quds Force which has led advisory missions against Daesh, including in Iraq.

Iran officially voiced its intention to fight Daesh with new force in July when members of the terrorist group attacked the Majlis building and Imam Khomeini's mausoleum, killing 17.

A few days later, the IRGC launched missiles onto Daesh positions in Syria, inflicting heavy damages on the terrorists in retaliation for the terrorist attack.

In the latest military development, IRGC drones destroyed several Daesh bases on the Syrian border with Iraq.

According to an IRINN TV report on Sunday, during the IRGC operations carried out in Syria's eastern Dayr al-Zawr province, many terrorists were killed in the attacks, which also destroyed large amounts of terrorists' equipment and weapons.

Elimination of nuclear weapons is 'moral responsibility', Iran says

Araqchi says U.S. starting nuclear arms race

1 → Yet, the ongoing plans and activities of almost all nuclear-weapon possessors for the modernization of their nuclear weapon arsenals and the development, by a certain nuclear-weapon State, of mini-nukes, which, by reducing the threshold for their use, increases the possibility of their use, are other alarming trend indicating the start of a new nuclear arms modernization race.

These trends would further deteriorate the international peace and security and definitely deepen the already existing frustration of non-nuclear-weapon States. While nuclear-weapon States are primarily responsible for the elimination of their nuclear arsenals, the non-nuclear-weapon States shall not remain indifferent towards the 47-year non-compliance of nuclear-weapon States with their explicit nuclear disarmament obligations.

Promotion of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons is a valuable means in this regard, through which the States demonstrate their political will to pursue the realization of the noble objective of a nuclear-weapon-free world.

Similarly, non-nuclear-weapon States need to contribute to the work of the United Nations high-level international conference on nuclear disarmament in 2018 and the Review Conference of the States Parties to the NPT in 2020 towards taking concrete actions to rectify this situation.

In this context, I would like to refer to the United Nations Conference to Negotiate a Legally Binding Instrument to Prohibit Nuclear Weapons, Leading Towards their Total Elimination, and the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which was indeed a collective protest to the violation of obligations and unequivocal commitments of the nuclear-weapon States on nuclear disarmament.

"Recently we hear (an) alarming announcement by a nuclear-weapon state (the United States under Trump) that it intends to continuously strengthen and expand its nuclear arsenal to ensure its place 'at the top of the pack.'"

As an active participant in that conference, Iran voted in favor of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and will continue to support its overall objective. Contrary to some arguments that this treaty will undermine the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, Iran is of the view that it will reinforce the nuclear disarmament regime. Indeed, what have undermined so far and continue to undermine the realization of the objectives of the NPT is nearly 50-year non-compliance of the nuclear-weapon States with their nuclear disarmament obligations under its article VI.

Iran stresses that Article VI obligations are quite clear and its implementation is neither optional nor conditional to such concepts as "strategic stability" or "international security environment". The Treaty contains two explicit obligations: the obligation to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons and the obligation to disarm nuclear weapons entirely. They are inherently linked and designed to serve one objective i.e. no one should have nuclear weapons. We warn that non-implementation of article VI will continue to challenge the very foundation of the NPT, tarnish its credibility and undermining its effectiveness.

While we need to work towards reversing the current trends, we should also make every effort to ensure the universalization of the NPT. It is of outmost importance in our region that the nuclear weapons of the only non-party to the NPT, namely Israel, continue to threaten the region and beyond.

"The international community has a shared responsibility to support the implementation of the JCPOA which has been endorsed by the UNSCR 2231."

As a longstanding member of NPT, the Islamic Republic of Iran has spared no effort for its protection and sturdy implementation. This persistent contribution to the Non-proliferation regime did not cease even when a fabricated crisis inflicted huge trouble on my country and stringent political and economic pressure were exerted against Iranian nation. In order to overcome such an unnecessary crisis, the Islamic Republic of Iran chose to enter into negotiations with E3/EU+3 in good faith which resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The JCPOA, as a successful model of dialogue and a historical achievement of diplomacy, has delivered on its purposes for the past two years. This has occurred mainly due to genuine commitment of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the JCPOA, as verified and reported by 8 consecutive IAEA reports. The international community has a shared responsibility to support the implementation of the JCPOA which has been endorsed by the UNSCR 2231. The JCPOA has positively contributed to preservation of NPT and its full implementation by all its participants will prove to be a lasting credit for diplomacy.

To conclude, I would to emphasize that working towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons is a legal, political and moral responsibility. We need to take this responsibility responsibly and continue our collective efforts resolutely. On its part, Iran will continue to remain a strong supporter of nuclear disarmament.

U.S.-led warplanes drop white phosphorus bombs in northeast Syria: report



The United States-led coalition purportedly fighting the the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group has reportedly dropped internationally-banned white phosphorus bombs in Syria's troubled eastern province of Dayr al-Zawr, leaving a number of civilians dead and injured.

Local sources told Syria's official news agency SANA that the airstrikes targeted the outskirts of al-Suwar town on Wednesday, killing three civilians and injuring five others.

The sources added that the aerial assaults also badly damaged residential buildings in the area.

The development came only a day after at least nine civilians lost their lives in the United States-led airstrikes against the town of Markadah, located nearly 100 kilometers south of the northeastern city of Hasakah.

Informed sources said two women and a six-member Iraqi family, who had escaped fighting in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, were among the victims of the attacks.

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported on Saturday that more than 2,800 civilians had been killed in US-led airstrikes across Syria over the past three years.

The Britain-based monitoring group reported that 427 people, including 137 minors and 113 women, were killed in the aerial attacks between May 23 and June 23 this year. The U.S.-led air raids also resulted in the injury of hundreds of civilians, some of whom suffered permanent disabilities and had to have their limbs amputated.

The aerial raids caused massive destruction of residential buildings and civilian infrastructure as well.

The U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against what are said to be ISIL targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a United Nations mandate. The military alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians. It has also been largely incapable of achieving its declared goal of destroying ISIL.

The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates, in two separate letters sent to UN Secretary General António Guterres and rotating President of the UN Security Council Amr Abdellatif Aboulatta on August 24, stated that the U.S.-led coalition was perpetrating war crimes and crimes against humanity through aerial bombardment of residential neighborhoods.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry also stressed that the military alliance was using internationally-banned white phosphorus munitions in flagrant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

(Source: Press TV)

Mattis met with rockets in Kabul ahead of Afghan talks



The Taliban has targeted the United States defense secretary James Mattis with a rocket attack on Kabul airport after he arrived in Afghanistan on an unannounced visit, officials said.

Mattis landed in the Afghan capital on Wednesday, alongside NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Chief Jens Stoltenberg, and was met with several rockets landing in and around the airport, local police reported.

There were no reports of casualties or damage after the attack, which was claimed by the Taliban.

The trip marks Mattis' first visit to the country since the U.S. President Donald Trump's pledge last month to win America's longest war. His schedule will include a meeting with Afghan president Ashraf Ghani to discuss NATO's U.S.-led "train and assist" mission, designed to strengthen Afghanistan's security forces.

"Discussions will focus on the NATO-Afghanistan partnership, including the ongoing NATO-led Resolute Support Mission in support of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces," a statement on Resolute Support's Facebook page said on Wednesday.

Afghanistan has struggled to combat offensives by Taliban fighters in the country since the withdrawal of U.S.-led NATO troops at the end of 2014.

U.S. generals have labelled the war in Afghanistan, which will enter its sixteenth year in October, a stalemate despite the estimated $1tn America has invested in fighting and reconstruction in the country. The U.S. is pressing NATO partners to increase their own troop levels in Afghanistan following U.S. president Donald Trump's announcement in August that he was giving the Pentagon authority to ramp up deployment of forces in the country.

Under Trump's plan, more than 3,000 troops will be added to the 11,000 U.S. forces already on the ground in Afghanistan.

NATO allies have around 5,000 troops currently deployed around the country.

The Taliban have promised to turn Afghanistan into a "graveyard" for foreign forces and have frequently carried out deadly attacks in areas of the country they control.

As of February, about 60 percent of Afghanistan's 407 districts were reported to be under government control, according to the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, a U.S. watchdog agency.

Mattis arrived in Kabul following a visit to New Delhi, during which he met his Indian counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman who said India would not send troops to Afghanistan as part of Trump's plan.

(Source: agencies)

Uganda flooding kills at least 13

Rainstorms in western Uganda caused flooding that swamped houses, killing at least 13 people including two babies, police said on Wednesday.

Rubanda district police commander Ramathan Tai said officers in the rural town of Nfasha recovered seven bodies during a heavy rainstorm on Tuesday night and found six more the following day. "There are reports of some people missing, but we are yet to establish the number as some homes were washed away during the rainstorm," Tai said.

"The bodies so far recovered include two babies, three women and eight men whom we suspect were in houses when the storm hit," he said.Rubanda and neighboring districts in western Uganda have been hit with heavy rainstorms over the last week.

Local media reported the death of two infants after floodwaters inundated a hospital in nearby Rukungiri district last week.

(Source: AFP)

EU plans to take 50,000 refugees from Africa, Middle East



The European Union unveiled plans on Wednesday (Sept 27) to take at least 50,000 refugees directly from Africa, the Middle East and Turkey to discourage migrant boats from making the risky Mediterranean crossing.

The proposal involves admitting refugees to European Union countries over the next two years under the bloc's resettlement program, which was introduced during the migration crisis that hit the continent in 2015.

"We need to open real alternatives to taking perilous irregular journeys," European Union Migration Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos told a news conference in Brussels.

The European Commission said in a statement that it was "recommending a new EU resettlement scheme to bring at least 50,000 of the most vulnerable persons in need of international protection to Europe over the next two years".

The EU has already resettled 23,000 people from refugee camps in countries outside the EU under the scheme, particularly Turkey and Jordan, which were overwhelmed with people fleeing the war in Syria.

Resettlement would continue from those areas but there would be "increased focus" on North Africa and the Horn of Africa - particularly Libya, Egypt, Niger, Sudan, Chad and Ethiopia, the commission said.

"This will contribute to further stabilizing migration flows along the Central Mediterranean route," which mainly involves people making the dangerous crossing from Libya to Italy, it said.

The resettlement program is different from the EU's controversial refugee quotas, which involved moving asylum-seekers who had already reached Italy and Greece to other EU countries, under compulsory quotas.

The latter scheme, which ended on Wednesday, saw just 29,000 people out of a planned 160,000 shared out around EU states to ease the pressure on the overstretched Greek and Italian authorities.

Brussels separately released plans on Wednesday to allow countries in the passport-free Schengen area to reintroduce border controls for security reasons for up to three years.

Countries in the 26-country Schengen travel area can currently reintroduce frontier checks for six months for security reasons, and two years if that is combined with a threat to borders such as Europe's migration crisis.

"Under today's proposals, member states will also be able to exceptionally prolong controls if the same threat persists," the European Commission, the executive arm of the EU, said in a statement.

Avramopoulos however said this should be a "last resort", and that keeping the Schengen area open for travel should be a priority.

Several countries including France and Germany have called for the extension after a series of terror attacks. France reinstated the checks after the November 2015 Paris attacks.

Border checks introduced by Germany, Denmark, Austria, Sweden and Norway in May 2016 to deal with a huge influx of migrants into Europe from Syria and North Africa are set to expire in November.

The reintroduction of so many checks raised concerns about the collapse of the Schengen zone, seen by many in Europe as a symbol of unity and freedom.

(Source: AFP)

North Korea could show 'super response' to Trump threats



A North Korean official says Pyongyang will "show a super response" to recent threats made by the United States President Donald Trump.

In an exclusive interview with Press TV on Wednesday, Paek Hyon Chol, the vice general director of the North Korean Foreign Ministry's Asian affairs, said his country was determined to react to Trump's threats against North Korea's sovereignty.

Trump threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea if necessary during his first speech at the United Nations General Assembly on September 19. North Korea has said that his remarks constituted a declaration of war against Pyongyang.

Paek told the Press TV correspondent that Pyongyang's response to what he called the US declaration of war would amount to his country's contribution to regional peace.

The official said Washington was in no position to talk about negotiations, while it is conducting "nuclear exercises near the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) borders."

The U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis recently said the United States sought to solve the Korea crisis "diplomatically."

"We continue to maintain the diplomatically-led efforts in the United Nations," Mattis told reporters during a visit to India on Tuesday.

Washington is opposed to North Korea's advancing missile and military nuclear programs. Pyongyang says it needs those programs as a deterrent against hostility by Washington and its regional allies, including South Korea and Japan.

The foreign ministry official said the DPRK's nuclear activities were non-negotiable with the U.S., describing the country's hydrogen bomb tests as its right to defense and survival.

(Source: Press TV)

Corbyn ready to take over task of negotiating Brexit



British Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn will voice his party's readiness to govern and to take over the job of negotiating Brexit.

According to Corbyn's office, he plans to say the party is "on the threshold of power" in a speech he is slated to give to the party's annual conference on Wednesday.

Despite reducing Prime Minister Theresa May's Conservatives to a minority administration in June's snap election, the party remains divided over Europe.

Some of the members seek to keep Britain inside the bloc's single market, while Corbyn is cool to the notion.

He will accuse government ministers of "bungling" Brexit negotiations and call on May's government to "pull yourself together or make way" for others to be able to negotiate Britain's exit from of the bloc.

One of the Labour leader's closest shadow cabinet allies, Angela Rayner, told Sky News that Corbyn has proved he is "prime minister material" and that he would be able to "run Britain and run the economy better than Theresa May."

Meanwhile, President of the European Council Donald Tusk said Tuesday that "no sufficient progress" has been made to move to the next phase of Brexit talks in Brussels.

The European Union and British officials are holding a fourth round of Brexit negotiations this week in Brussels which has seen little progress so far.

The negotiations started on Monday in Brussels, where the EU's chief negotiator Michel Barnier insisted that he would not discuss May's call for a two-year transition deal until there was progress on the other issues.

The European Council will decide in October whether sufficient progress has been made to begin trade talks, as Britain wants.

(Source: Press TV)

NEWS IN BRIEF



Stock market index rises 4.2% in a month

ECONOMY desk **TEHRAN** — Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE)'s main index (TEDPIX) gained 3.459 points or 4.2 percent to 85,832 in the sixth Iranian calendar month Shahrivar (August 23-Septemebr 22), Tasnim news agency reported on Wednesday.

As reported, 16.979 billion securities worth 45.874 trillion rials (about $1.174 billion) were traded through 1.170 million deals in the stock market.

Japan's big banks plan digital currency launch

Japanese banks plan to introduce a digital currency ready for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics as they respond to the threat from China's Alibaba, which recently launched its mobile-phone payments service in the country.

A consortium of banks, led by Mizuho Financial Group and Japan Post Bank, has won support from the country's central bank and financial regulator to launch the J Coin, an electronic currency to pay for goods and transfer money using smartphones.

The J Coin would be convertible into yen on a one-to-one basis, operating via a smartphone app and using QR codes to be scanned in stores. In return for providing the service for free, the banks would benefit by collecting more data on consumer spending patterns.

(Source: cnbc)

UK retail sales hit two-year high in Sept.

Retail sales hit a two-year high in September according to the latest survey from the CBI, signalling resilience from UK shoppers in the face of higher inflation and making a rate hike by the Bank of England in November more likely.

The CBI's Distributive Trades survey showed that its retail sales balance jumped to +42 in the month, up from -10 in August.

It was the highest reading since September 2015 and beat the expectations of City of London analysts.

The CBI survey is a somewhat erratic indicator but it follows robust figures for August from the Office for National Statistics, which showed 1 per cent growth last month.

The Bank of England has signalled that a rate rise is likely "in the coming months" if the economy develops as they expected in August, and the signs of strength from the vital retail sector will likely keep them on track to raise the cost of borrowing in November for the first time since 2007.

Inflation rose to 2.9 per cent in August, well ahead of recent average wage rises, meaning real wages are still falling.

(Source: The Independent)

Yellen lifts dollar as global markets await Trump tax plan

Growing expectations that the U.S. Federal Reserve will raise interest rates for the third time this year lifted the dollar on Wednesday, and European share prices rose as President Donald Trump's administration prepared to outline a new tax plan.

The dollar rose half a percent to a one-month high against a basket of currencies and yields on interest rate-sensitive two-year U.S. Treasury yields touched their highest since 2008 after Fed Chair Janet Yellen said on Tuesday it would be "imprudent" to keep rates on hold until U.S. inflation hit 2 percent.

Ten-year yields climbed seven basis points to an eight-week high of 2.30 percent, also pushed higher by the prospect of tax cuts that could increase federal borrowing, analysts said.

Wall Street looked set to open modestly higher, index futures showed.

Markets are pricing in a more than 80 percent chance the Fed will raise borrowing costs in December, according to the CME Group's FedWatch tool, up from 72 percent a week ago. Several other senior Fed officials are scheduled to speak on Wednesday.

"Yellen's comments gave more certainty about another rate hike by the end of the year," said DZ Bank rates strategist Daniel Lenz.

"Further details of Trump's tax plans and whether this proceeds smoothly will be of interest -- it should be a boost to the economy and mean a generally higher bond yield environment."

On the eve of its unveiling, Trump said lawmakers should expect a "very, very powerful document" that would cut taxes "tremendously" for the middle class.

If passed, the plan would be Trump's first significant legislative win since taking office in January.

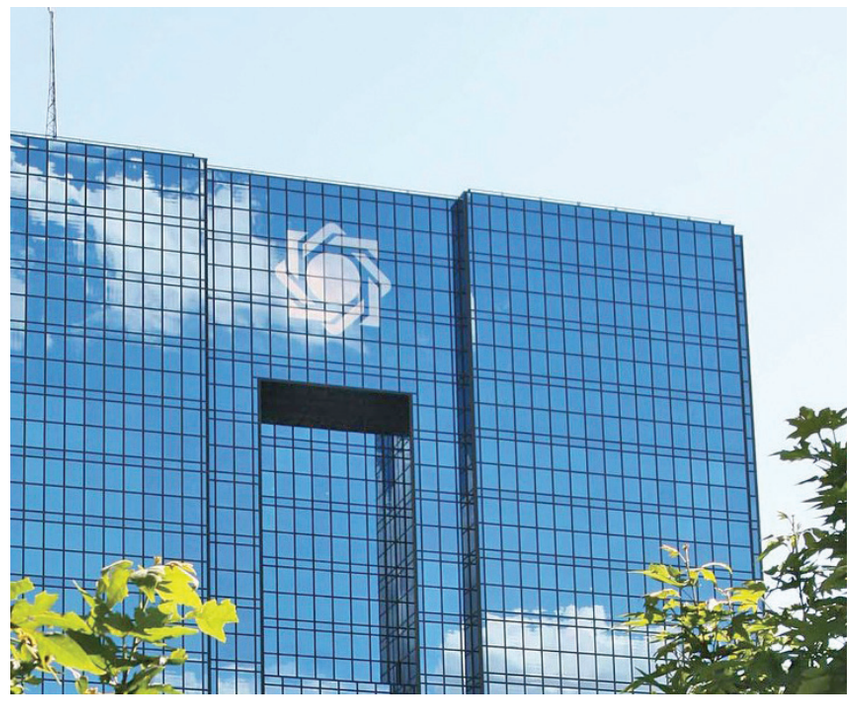
"The idea that Trump could be reaching across the aisle, talking about tax cuts to middle and low income households, if it comes to pass, we are talking a pretty material fiscal boost to the U.S. economy. This sort of easy fiscal policy is why the markets are reacting the way they have," said Mark Dowding, co-head of investment grade at BlueBay Asset Management.

Anticipation of the long-awaited plan helped lift shares in Asia, while a weaker euro pushed European equities higher. A weaker currency is a boon to exporters.

An index of European banks rose 1.5 percent as the pan-European STOXX 600 share index rose 0.3 percent to a 10-week high.

Cyclical sectors that had surged on the prospect of "Trumpflation" resulting from the president's pro-growth campaign pledges were the day's top gainers, with miners up 0.9 percent. *(Source: Reuters)*

Inflation rate stands at 9.9% in Iran: CBI



ECONOMY desk **THRAN** — The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) announced that the inflation rate for the 12-month period ended on the last day of the sixth Iranian calendar month of Shahrivar (September 22) compared to the same period in the previous year hit 9.9 percent, Tasnim news agency reported on Wednesday.

It is while the Statistical Center of Iran had previously put the inflation rate for the 12-month period at eight percent.

The center has put the country's inflation rate at 9.8 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1395 (ended on March 20), showing 4.5 percent drop from its preceding year.

It is while the CBI has put the country's inflation rate at nine percent during the past calendar year.

Iran, accordingly, could manage to experience a single-digit inflation rate after 26 years in 1395.

Curbing inflation was one of the major promises by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani during his presidential campaign. Under the previous administration, inflation skyrocketed to cross 44%.

Iraq's Kurdistan referendum: What to expect for oil markets

1 → That means if the referendum proceeds further, Iraq is going to lose a great deal of its oil revenues to the KRG.

Referendum and the oil market

The consequences of the KRG recent movements won't be limited to Iraq and it could also affect the neighboring countries and also the oil market to some extent.

Even though the Kurds make up only about one-fifth of Iraq's 38-million population, more than 30 million Kurds are also living in Iran, Syria and Turkey's border cities with the country and this could raise serious issues for them especially Iran and Turkey.

Turkey fears the independence vote could result in insurgence among its own Kurd population and also a probable military response from Baghdad could trigger a refugee crisis toward Turkey and Iran's borders.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan threatened on Monday to cut off the pipeline that exports oil from northern Iraq through Turkey's port of Ceyhan.

Erdogan's thread was immediately mirrored on the oil markets as a 2-year high jump in oil prices.

"Oil prices took a breather on Tuesday after Brent crude earlier rose to a 26-month high, supported by Turkey's threat to cut crude flows from Iraq's Kurdistan region to the outside world," Reuters reported on Tuesday.

Iran also called the vote "illegal and illegitimate" and closed its borders with the Kurdish region at the request of Iraq.

Considering the situation, it appears that intensification of the conflict between the central government and KRG will disrupt a great deal of Iraq's oil exports in the future and that consequently could change the region's geopolitical and economic equations.

However, Iranian oil expert and market analyst Mahmoud Khaghani believes that there are certain economic and energy ties established between the conflicting parties in the region that should be considered before jumping to conclusions.

"Regional and political conflicts can quickly boost oil prices, as they did Monday, but there are so many aspects to be considered.... such conflicts are not long lasting and the prices can just as quickly go back down," he told the Tehran Times in a telephone interview on Wednesday.

Khaghani further explained that being in a land lock, Kurds cannot ignore neither their neighbors nor the central government since they will eventually need their neighbors to send their oil off to the world markets.

"Turkey has also established rather strong economic and energy ties with Kurds and shutting them completely won't be in line with their interests as well", he noted.

"We should expect an agreement between Iraq's central government with Kurds and even between KRG and Turkey soon, something that in my opinion is inevitable," he added.

The analyst believes that the oil market's primary reactions to the referendum should be considered merely emotional and eventually in near future the prices will settle down again.

"The trend is not upward in my opinion, what market is experiencing is a short term shock and the prices will come down again soon," he concluded

Considering all aspects, it appears that KRG will be able to use the referendum only as a pressure lever against the central government to get more share of the country's oil revenues.

Although the Kurd's ballot may have had no immediate impact on oil supply so far, but it will at least mirror some short term effects on the oil market and also on both sides' economies in near future. Something that we should wait to see.

WEF warns of 'vast numbers of jobs' being disrupted by automation and robots

Global economies remain at risk from further shock and are "ill-prepared" for the next wave of "automation and robotization," according to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) latest global competitiveness report.

The Switzerland-based organization's 2017 Global Competitiveness Index, published Wednesday, assesses various factors driving countries' productivity and prosperity – including its institutions, infrastructure, education, innovation and labor market efficiency, among others, and showed a sharp divide between major global economies.

"Ten years on from the global financial crisis, the prospects for a sustained economic recovery remain at risk due to a widespread failure on the part of leaders and policy-makers to put in place reforms necessary to underpin competitiveness and bring about much-needed increases in productivity," WEF stated of its findings.

In 2017, the report found that Switzerland retained top spot as the most competitive economy, closely followed by the U.S. and Singapore. Also in the top 10 were the Netherlands in fourth place, followed by Germany, Hong Kong, Sweden, the U.K. (which had fallen from sixth to eighth place), Japan and Finland.

With the usual suspects populating the rankings again this year, Margareta Drzeniek-Hanouz, head of Economic Progress at the World Economic Forum, told CNBC on Wednesday that there had not been much effort at structural reforms



that would improve competitiveness.

"Global growth has been mainly fueled by monetary policy and low interest rates over the last few years so we do not see much progress on productivity, so that is reflected in the ranking. At the same time, we should be seeing more (productivity) in order to keep growth going forward," she told CNBC Wednesday.

Major BRICS economies lagged far behind, however, with China standing at number 27 in the forum's ninth year of competitiveness rankings, Russia at 38, India at 40, South Africa at 61 and Brazil at 80.

There was also much divergence between the high-ranking northern European economies and southern European ones, including Spain (34), Italy (43) and Greece (87).

The organization said that that its 2017 report highlighted three key areas of concern, including the robustness of the financial system, a lack of flexibility in labor markets and an imbalance between investments in technology and efforts to promote their adoption in the wider economy.

The 'age of talentism'

Heralding what the organization has called the Fourth Industrial Revolution – which is characterized by a range of new technologies that are fusing the physical, digital and biological worlds, WEF urged governments to adopt more flexible labor markets as an era of automation and robotization approached.

"Another key finding is that competitiveness is enhanced, not weakened, by combining degrees of flexibility within the labor force with adequate protection of workers' rights. With vast numbers of jobs set to be disrupted as a result of automation and robotization, creating conditions that can withstand economic shock and support workers through transition periods will be vital," it said.

WEF's Global Competitive Index Top 10 2017-2018:

1. Switzerland
2. United States
3. Singapore
4. Netherlands
5. Germany
6. Hong Kong
7. Sweden
8. United Kingdom
9. Japan
10. Finland

Commenting on the latest WEF report, Klaus Schwab, the organization's founder and executive chairman, said that "global competitiveness will be more and more defined by the innovative capacity of a country."

"Talents will become increasingly more important than capital and therefore the world is moving from the age of capitalism into the age of talentism. Countries preparing for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and simultaneously strengthening their political, economic and social systems will be the winners in the competitive race of the future," Schwab said.

(Source: cnbc)

Bombardier bonds tumble as U.S. slaps import duties on C-series

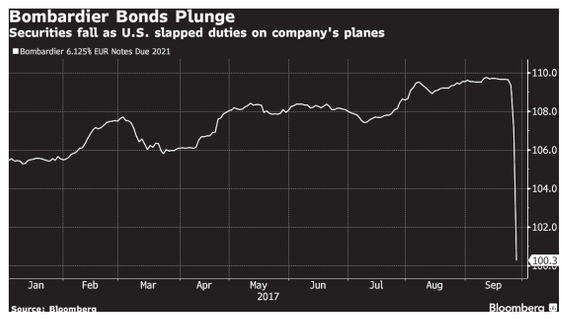
Bombardier Inc.'s euro-denominated bonds maturing in 2021 have declined the most in more than two years after the U.S. imposed import duties of 220 percent on the company's C-series plane, threatening to upend deliveries of more than $5 billion to Delta Air Lines Inc. next year.

The Canadian aircraft and train manufacturer's senior unsecured notes are currently down by more than seven price points at 99.963, according to Bloomberg prices at 10am London time. The notes had already fallen 2.2 points on Tuesday -- the same day that competitors Siemens AG and Alstrom SA agreed to join their rail businesses.

The penalties create a new hurdle for Bombardier's Chief Executive Officer Alain Bellemare, who is trying to turn the company around after the C-Series came in more than two years late and $2 billion over budget.

U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May earlier said, "I am bitterly disappointed by the initial Bombardier ruling. The government will continue to work with the company to protect vital jobs for Northern Ireland." Bombardier is the largest manufacturing company in Northern Ireland; its rail division employs ~3,500 in the U.K., according to the company's website.

(Source: Bloomberg)



India's economy may be in the doldrums, but it's getting more competitive

India's economic growth hit a three-year low during the April-June period, enveloping Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a barrage of criticism for poor execution of major reforms such as the recent national sales tax and demonetization.

But a new World Economic Forum study indicates his government has made progress in strengthening overall business sentiment.

The South Asian giant ranked 40th out of 137 countries on the organization's 2017 global competitiveness ranking — one spot lower than last year's edition, but still its highest-ever score in WEF's current methodology.

National competitiveness is defined as a set of institutions, policies and factors that determine a country's level of productivity.

Improvement across most pillars of competitiveness, particularly infrastructure and higher education, reflects recent public investments in these areas, WEF said. Strides in labor market efficiency, especially the nation's ability to attract and retain talent, also helped India's 2017 ranking, the Swiss foundation added.

"The quality of institutions has increased further, especially in terms of efficiency of public spending."

Modi's government has pledged to spend a record $60 billion on infrastructure this financial year, but concerns are rampant that lower tax collections and weak economic growth could force New Delhi to cut expenditures. *(Source: cnbc)*

Brent oil eases but remains in sight of 2015 highs

Brent oil eased on Wednesday following a report of a possible increase in Nigerian exports, but an unexpected drop in U.S. crude inventories helped keep the price within sight of this week's 26-month highs.

Turkey's repeated threat to cut oil exports from the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq pushed the price close to $60 a barrel on Monday for the first time since June 2015.

Brent November crude futures were down 14 cents at $58.30 a barrel at 0832 GMT, while U.S. crude for November delivery edged up 11 cents to $51.99.

Traders and analysts said a report from pricing agency Platts that a force majeure on exports of Bonny Light crude, scheduled to be 161,000 barrels per day (bpd) this month, could be lifted "very soon" was behind the loss in Brent.

However, Brent is set for a 22 percent gain in the third quarter of this year, its largest rise in the period between July and September since 2004, thanks in part to coordinated output cuts.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and 11 rival producers, including Russia, have committed to output cuts of 1.8 million bpd between January 2017 and March 2018 to help global supply align with demand.

Brent futures are commanding their highest premium over U.S. crude in more than two years, partly because of the quick production response by U.S. shale producers to any uptick in price.

"There's pretty strong upward momentum at the moment," said Ric Spooner, chief market analyst at CMC Markets in Sydney, referring to a better-than-expected near-term outlook for the supply balance.



U.S. crude stocks fell by 761,000 barrels last week as refineries boosted production, while gasoline inventories increased, data from the American Petroleum Institute showed on Tuesday, in contrast with market expectations.

U.S. crude inventories were forecast to rise for a fourth straight week, a Reuters poll had shown.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration will release official inventory data at 10:30 a.m. EDT.

Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday repeated a threat to cut off the pipeline that carries 500,000-600,000 bpd of crude from northern Iraq to the Turkish port of Ceyhan in retaliation for an independence referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"All the ingredients are now there for a flare-up in regional tensions with Iran also weighing in on the matter," PVM Oil Associates analyst Tamas Varga said.

(Source: Reuters)

China looks to create national natural gas pipeline firm

China is dusting off a plan to create a natural gas pipeline company and is working with state oil giants on the project, Reuters reported citing three senior sources familiar with the matter.

The pipeline would give producers more access to infrastructure and would help to raise natural gas use in the country.

China's state economic planner, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), is discussing the deal with China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC), Sinopec Group, and China National Offshore Oil Co regarding which assets the future company will comprise, who the main shareholders will be, and how governance will be settled, according to Reuters sources.

The plan to create a natural gas pipeline company was first discussed some five years ago. Now it is part of China's ongoing efforts to make its state-run energy firms more efficient.

CNPC holds almost 80 percent of China's main natural gas pipelines. Sinopec has the second-biggest share, while China National Offshore Oil Company operates many of China's receiving terminals for LNG.

Although the creation of a natural gas pipeline company will surely make gas producers' access to infrastructure better and easier, the setting-up of such a venture will take time and make for a complex transaction, because it would involve billions of dollars worth of assets, Lin Boqiang, a senior energy researcher with Xiamen University, told Reuters.



CNPC and Sinopec have sold over the past year part of their natural gas infrastructure assets. CNPC restructured the pipeline business, while several months after that Sinopec said that it was selling 50 percent in its Sichuan to East China Gas Pipeline Co to investors for the equivalent of US$3.4 billion (22.8 billion yuan), to raise funds to expand its natural gas business.

China is expected to account for 40 percent of the global annual growth in natural gas demand over the next five years, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). Imports of the bridge fuel in China are running at record rates as Beijing pushes on with its cleaner energy agenda that should see the country satisfy 10 percent of its energy needs with gas in 2020, from 5.9 percent in 2015.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Kuwait greenlights game-changing gas fields project after years of delay

Kuwait is green-lighting the development of non-associated gas fields after seven years of delays, according to a new report by S&P Global Platts, in a move that would more than double the Jurassic field's non-associated gas production which has been static since 2010.

The northern areas of the Persian Gulf will supply the gas-hungry Kuwaiti energy market with new supplies once tenders to build the new fields are fulfilled, the report said.

Companies bidding on the engineering, construction, and procurement pieces of the tender have until Friday to submit their bids, sources close to the matter said.

Kuwait had previously launched an effort to build production in its Jurassic fields back in 2010, but production has stagnated at 180 million cubic feet per day since then. But now, the government plans to grow gas output to 510 million cubic feet per day, along with 200,000 bpd of light oil by the end of 2017.

The Jurassic fields will gain three early production fields that will produce 100 million cubic feet of gas per day and 40,000 bpd of light oil each. The first of the trio will begin production by the end of this month, the second by October and the last by December, state oil minister Issam Almarzooq said during the summer.



Almarzooq said last Friday that global crude and refined product stockpiles have "massively drained" as a result of OPEC's oil production reduction agreement.

"We are on the right track and there is now more light at the end of the tunnel," Almarzooq said at the start of the meeting on Friday. "This is not the time to take our foot off the accelerator."

The Jurassic fields plan would contradict Kuwait's stern opposition to new oil production, which would reduce the impact of OPEC's market rebalancing efforts. It is unclear if Kuwait would activate the oil production in light of the ongoing oil price crisis.

(Source: oilprice.com)

It's a dangerous moment for OPEC

By Julian Lee

Oil prices are recovering. U.S. storm damage and strengthening economies may have finally dislodged sentiment away from resignation to a future of low oil prices.

That's the story, but it isn't the whole picture. And while OPEC and other countries that have cut production will undoubtedly take comfort from Brent near $60 a barrel, they should be wary of taking too much of the credit and certainly can't relax their output restraint. They are not yet out of the woods.

On Monday, Brent crude came within a dollar of the $60-mark that seems to be OPEC's unofficial target (at least for now), although U.S. benchmark WTI is lagging ever further behind.

Nine months of output cuts by the group and its friends have certainly contributed to the higher prices. But to pin the 16 percent rally in Brent crude since August 30 on these actions alone would be a mistake, and raise the risk that ministers make the wrong decisions in the months ahead.

Oil traders and executives meeting in Singapore this week are more focused on the state of the global economy and the resulting strength of oil demand than they are on output cuts.

One thing that sets this year's strong economic performance apart is that it is touching economies everywhere. Yes, the economic boom may be particularly strong in emerging Asian economies, but it extends further, including to the developed economies of the U.S. and Europe. And that boom is being felt particularly in demand for so-called middle distillates -- diesel, heating oil and jet fuel -- and for petrochemical products.

Weekly data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration bear this out, with distillate demand up 9 percent so far this year compared with the same period in 2016, and inventories dipping below their 5-year average in last week's preliminary data. U.S. jet fuel inventories fell below their five-year average in July and gasoline is headed in the same direction.

Add to this the suggestion that, as I wrote on Sunday, U.S. oil production growth has been over-estimated, and it is easy to see why sentiment is shifting away from "lower for longer" towards rebalancing.

But we need to be careful, because there are short-term factors whose influence we neglect at our peril.

Disruptions to U.S. refineries caused by Hurricane Harvey have been a big factor in driving the correction in the country's product inventories. Crude oil input to refineries fell around 3 million barrels a day, or 17 percent, below normal in the three weeks to Sept. 15, curtailing production of distillates and gasoline. But the storm had a much smaller and shorter impact on crude oil production, which fell by 750,000 barrels a day the week the storm made landfall but recovered most of that over the two following weeks.

For an overall rebalancing of the market, it is the volume of crude coming out of the ground, rather than products coming out of refineries, that is most important. And the U.S. refinery hiccup should prove temporary.

The Kurdish referendum on independence from Iraq may have no immediate impact on oil supply, but it is a timely reminder that potentially disruptive political events in the Middle East can never be ignored. Threats to political stability in the region can quickly boost oil prices, as they did Monday, while the easing of those threats can just as quickly unwind the rally.

The vote will almost certainly deliver a mandate for independence, but the impact on oil supply will depend on the reactions of the region's neighbors. Turkey has already threatened to shut the taps on the only route to market for nearly 600,000 barrels a day of crude exported through the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Were it to follow through on this threat, it would be equivalent to boosting OPEC's output cut by half and would certainly hasten market rebalancing.

Can the crude rally last?

If economic growth remains strong then oil demand may continue to outstrip supply, slowly eating into the surplus inventory. The focus on over-supply will switch to worries about impending shortage. Indeed, Citigroup Inc. and Trafigura Group are already there. And the global demand picture looks promising: the International Energy Agency sees it growing by 1.6 million barrels a day in 2017, up from a June forecast for growth of less than 1.3 million barrels a day.

But, as I wrote here, that boost to demand growth comes entirely from a downward revision to last year's oil use, not an increase in how much the IEA thinks the world will consume this year. With no corresponding downward revision to last year's oil supply, that can only mean that there is even more excess inventory than previously thought.

And, higher crude prices have yet to feed through fully to gas station forecourts -- but they will, raising the cost of driving, which is already above last year's level. That alone will cut into demand growth, never mind the drag that rising oil prices, and their inflationary impact, may have on economic prospects.

Then there is shale. U.S. oil prices are still well short of $60 a barrel, but they are already high enough to start encouraging some producers to begin locking in prices for next year and boosting investment.

When OPEC and their friends meet at the end of November, their decision on the future of their output agreement may be no easier to make. At that time, the deal will still have four months to run, so don't be surprised if they simply decide to kick the can down the road and leave a formal decision on where to go next for another meeting early in 2018. If the recent past has shown us anything, it is that the market outlook can change dramatically in four months.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Shell CEO says oil prices will be around $60 by the end of the decade

It's "not unreasonable" to expect oil prices at $60 a barrel by the end of the decade, Royal Dutch Shell CEO Ben van Beurden told CNBC's "Managing Asia."

To be sure, that's not a large rise from current levels.

Brent crude rose 0.38 percent to trade at $58.66 a barrel in Wednesday Asia trade, after hitting a 26-month high on Tuesday, while U.S. crude was higher by 0.5 percent at $52.14 at 12:00 p.m.

Van Beurden said forecasting oil prices in the short term was "very difficult," but he still expected gains.

"I do think oil prices are going to go up over time as a result of the tightening of the market," he said. "It's not unreasonable to expect that if you want to make financial projections going out in the future, you want to make projections around $60 oil by the end of the decade."

He noted that growth in oil demand has been fairly consistent, increasing approximately 1.6 million to 1.7 million barrels a day, with the exception of outlier years affected by events such as the financial crisis.

Supply in the oil markets, however, was a considerably more complicated picture, he explained.

"It's a mix of OPEC, it's shales, it's large complex projects and they each have their own dynamic in terms of response time to prices ... And on top of it, there's a lot of sentiment that is feeding the markets," van Beurden said.

But the slim gains in oil prices didn't appear likely to have an out-sized impact on the company's performance.

Royal Dutch Shell expects to have a "significant, higher amount" of free cash flow with oil at $60 a barrel than when it was at $90 years ago, van Beurden said.

"Nobody can predict how it's going to play out," he said, adding that those in the commodity business needed to be prepared for downturns.

"Therefore, our mindset needs to be building resilience. And you do it with a 'lower forever' mindset," he said.

By ensuring that projects had the lowest possible break-even price, the company would be able to survive even if oil prices came down further, van Beurden said.

"If you have a strategy that is predicated on really trying to understand what the future of the oil price is going to be, and then betting on it, I think you're basically betting the company. So you should never have that as a philosophy," he explained.

Oil prices spiked early this week after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned about cutting off a pipeline carrying oil from the semiautonomous Kurdish region in Iraq to Turkey. The threat came after Kurds voted in an independence referendum which was opposed by several countries, including the U.S. and Turkey, Reuters reported. *(Source: CNBC)*

A breakthrough in solar power with Britain's first subsidy-free farm

As a steep decrease in the cost of renewable energy has made it more economical, Britain has set up its first solar power farm without government subsidy in Eastern England. The farm opened in Clayhill, Bedfordshire, on Tuesday.

The need to make investment in alternate sources of energy arises as the aging coal and nuclear power plants are to be replaced before they get closed in the 2020s. Also, Britain aims to decrease subsidies on renewable power generation.

The cost of solar panels and batteries has fallen dramatically over the past few years, and this first subsidy-free development at Clayhill is a significant moment for clean energy in the UK.



This 10 megawatt (MW) solar power farm can provide power to nearly 2,500 homes with the energy it generates. The farm will also have a 6 MW battery storage facility. It has been designed by a power company, Anesco, which specializes in developing solar and battery storage sites.

The government has made efforts to put a stop to the spiraling subsidy costs of renewable energy. It has started to scrap any new subsidies for onshore wind and solar projects in the past few years.

According to Reuters, Steve Shine, chairman of the Clayhill project's developer, Anesco, said,

The project proves that the government's decision to withdraw subsidies doesn't have to signal the end of solar as a commercially viable technology.

The farm has been built near a town called Flitwick which already has a solar project. As per the analysts, it is important to build new projects near existing ones to help reduce the costs.

According to the Financial Times, a consultant for Cornwall Energy, Peter Atherton, said,

That makes a big difference because obviously a lot of the common infrastructure you need is already in place.

The decrease in the costs have resulted in the solar power capacity in Britain to increase to nearly 12 gigawatts (GW) from the 2 GW five years back. In fact, the capacity hit a record this year in May with the ability to provide power to nearly 25 percent of the country.

Britain aims to meet 15 percent of the country's energy needs with the help of renewable sources by the year 2020, increasing it from 8 percent in 2015. *(Source: agencies)*

Are America and North Korea destined for war?

By Daniel L. Davis & Harry J. Kazianis

Last Friday National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster emphatically told reporters that despite what many have said to the contrary, "there is a military option" for North Korea. Tuesday afternoon at the United Nations, President Trump went even further, saying that if he felt certain conditions warranted it, then he would have no choice "but to totally destroy North Korea." The president and his national security advisor, however, are wrong. Engaging in a "preventive war" with Pyongyang, as McMaster phrased it last month, would turn a tense situation into a catastrophic failure for America. There is no cost-effective military option and claiming there is only puts America's security at risk.

One doesn't have to be a military expert to see why a so-called preventive military strike would not only fail to resolve the threat to U.S. personnel and U.S. allies, but worsen it. Two anecdotes and a brief assessment of North Korean capability exposes the futility of "preventive" war.

I fought alongside McMaster in February 1991 at Desert Storm's Battle of 73 Easting. Prior to our ground assault, the U.S. Air Force and other coalition planes saturated the Iraqi forces occupying Kuwait for an average of once every ten hours for forty-two days. Enemy tanks were the primary target. Iraqi armor had literally nowhere to hide in the open desert; their steel hulls were painfully clear from the skies and defenseless to air attacks.

Yet as we discovered when we closed with the enemy, more than 80 percent of the enemy's tanks and other armored vehicles had survived the air attacks. An enemy that can't hide or defend itself can still survive sustained bombardment under near-perfect attack conditions, even in open desert.

In September 2011, I was at a U.S. Forward Operating Base in the Kunar Province of eastern Afghanistan when the base came under attack by members of the Taliban. They were positioned on the side of a mountain with a commanding view on our base located below. U.S. soldiers returned fire with heavy machineguns and 105 millimeter artillery shells for about thirty minutes, yet they were unable to silence the attackers.

Finally, a U.S. fighter jet made a bombing run on the enemy location on the mountain and destroyed the dismounted troops in a massive explosion. The rugged mountains of Afghanistan provided Taliban fighters — with no additional protection — the ability to withstand U.S. heavy weapons and artillery shells. Only when a fighter jet entered the scene were they destroyed.

The implications are clear: if missiles and unimpeded air power are insufficient to destroy enemy armor out in the open after forty-two days, and if men clothed in mere robes can survive on the surface of a mountain against heavy weapons, then the tens of thousands of North Korean artillery pieces, their mobile missile launchers, and hidden nuclear-missile silos would be able to withstand even the most withering and sustained attack.

(Source: The National Interest)

Shinzo Abe's momentous gamble

If, as seems likely, Shinzo Abe wins the snap election he's just called for next month, he could become Japan's longest-serving postwar prime minister. A better legacy would be as the man who reshaped the world's third-biggest economy.

Anything less wouldn't be worth the risk. Abe's approval ratings have rebounded lately and the opposition is in disarray, but most Japanese oppose Abe's decision to call elections more than a year early. Four in 10 say they're undecided about who to vote for, and many could shift loyalties to a new party formed by popular Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike. If the ruling Liberal Democratic Party loses seats, even a victorious Abe could face internal rumblings about his leadership. With nuclear tensions rising on the Korean Peninsula, the last thing the region needs is a Japan consumed by political dysfunction.

Abe came into office pledging first and foremost to transform the economy. He's made some progress -- bringing more women into the Japanese workforce, improving corporate governance, negotiating (and now, keeping alive) the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement and welcoming more migrant workers into Japan's famously closed society. The economy has expanded for six quarters; at 2.8 percent, unemployment is the lowest among G-7 nations.

Yet the task is unfinished: Wages and consumption remain stagnant, and most new jobs are part-time positions that don't pay as well or offer the same benefits as full-time work. Growth is expected to slow in 2019 as the infrastructure boost for the 2020 Olympics wanes, while the Bank of Japan will soon face pressure to wind down its massive quantitative easing program.

Expectations that Abe might push through more dramatic structural reforms -- the so-called third arrow of his economic revival agenda -- have waned. His main focus now seems to be restoring Japan's status as a "normal" country, in part by strengthening the military and revising the country's pacifist constitution. Certainly, that's an appropriate -- and, given North Korea's provocations, necessary -- debate for Japan to have. Abe is justified in seeking to bolster the country's missile defenses. His strengthening of strategic ties with the U.S. and India should pay long-term dividends.

Japan's economic future, and his own political legacy, may well depend on next month's elections.

Nevertheless, Abe would do well to remember that nations are only as strong as their economic foundations. His pledge to spend new tax revenues on social programs, including education and child and elder care, may win him votes at the expense of shoring up the country's fiscal position.

If Abe wins next month's election, he needs to use it as a mandate to strengthen and accelerate his program for making Japan's economy more open, innovative and nimble. Japan's future -- and his legacy -- may well depend on it.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Congress warns Kurds against further steps after independence vote

The Iraqi Kurds' independence vote on Sept. 25 has forced Congress to rethink its longtime support of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

The KRG has enjoyed bipartisan U.S. support and a great deal of autonomy ever since the first Persian Gulf War in 1991. Its decision to go ahead with a referendum that threatens to unravel the regional unity against the Islamic State (ISIS), however, has ruffled feathers on Capitol Hill.

"Obviously it was not something we felt like was in our national interest," Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker, R-Tenn., told Al-Monitor. "We felt like it would weaken [Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi] as he runs for re-election in [2018], and we didn't think the timing of it was good."

"We've been very, very clear [with KRG President Massoud Barzani and others] that this is not something we support," Corker added.

Although the results of the nonbinding referendum are not yet available, the "yes" vote is expected to easily prevail amid estimates of a 72% voter turnout. Corker indicated that congressional action — including possibly blocking a pending $296 million arms sale to arm two peshmerga brigades — would be contingent on Erbil's next moves.

"It's too early [to talk about specific repercussions]. We'll see what steps they take after the fact," Corker told reporters on Capitol Hill on Sept. 25. "Hopefully they won't make an abrupt move toward true independence."



Corker indicated that congressional action — including possibly blocking a pending $296 million arms sale to arm two peshmerga brigades — would be contingent on Erbil's next moves.

Heightened tensions

Heightened tensions with Baghdad aren't the only U.S. concern. KRG neighbor and NATO member Turkey has been particularly vehement, with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatening economic and even military repercussions.

Senate Foreign Relations member Chris Coons, D-Del., voiced his concerns over the referendum's impact on regional stability.

"While I respect the right to self-determination of people around the world, I'm very concerned how this may well destabilize the region and pose real challenges to Iraq's future," Coons told Al-Monitor.

The KRG has also drawn condemnation from both the Iraqi central government and the international community for including disputed territories, such as the oil-rich Kirkuk province, in the vote.

"The Kurds did a great job of protecting those [disputed areas] from [ISIS], but the facts on the ground are that they now have control of those [disputed areas]," said Corker. "So we've got a number of issues there that hopefully will be worked out in an appropriate way."

The House started signaling its own displeasure with the referendum over the summer when it passed an annual defense authorization bill in July. The bill contained report language stipulating that continued U.S. military and non-military funding is "contingent upon KRG participation in the government of a unified Iraq."

The Donald Trump administration meanwhile has requested $365 million for peshmerga salaries and equipment for the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1. The administration has also raised concerns about the referendum, however, with White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders denouncing the vote in disputed areas as "particularly provocative and destabilizing."

Pending foreign aid

Meanwhile, the Senate's pending foreign aid spending bill raises its own questions about the future of U.S. aid by axing previous language directing the State Department to provide the KRG with military and security assistance. Committee aides insist the updated language won't have a practical on-the-ground impact for the Kurds, but the bill's report language directs the State Department to provide economic and refugee assistance funds to the KRG even as it conspicuously leaves out language directing funds to go to military assistance.

Despite the negative legislative implications for Kurdish independence, some House members have doubled down on their support for Iraq's Kurdish population and praised the referendum.

"I firmly believe in the Kurdish right to self-determination," Rep. Eliot Engel, D-N.Y., the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a statement. "With so many urgent issues at hand, including [ISIS'] final defeat, the return of displaced people, a recovering economy and political complications in the KRG, I urge Kurdish leaders to use the mandate created by this referendum to address these important issues."

And Rep. Trent Franks, R-Ariz., who sits on the House committee that drafted the defense bill, pointed to Baghdad's past failure to facilitate military aid directly to Kurdish peshmerga forces as they fought ISIS. Franks has previously sponsored legislation to bypass Baghdad and directly arm the peshmerga as well as Iraqi Christian militias fighting alongside the Kurds.

"While the [Barack] Obama administration dithered and fought efforts to arm and support the Kurds, the [Donald] Trump administration has the opportunity to stand with a noble people in their time of need," Franks said in a statement. "A free and independent Kurdistan can represent hope for peace in the Middle East."

(Source: Al Monitor)

Macron's Europe speech

The speech Emmanuel Macron delivered on Tuesday about the future of Europe could easily have been anticipated as an exercise in wishful thinking, or just another attempt to boost EU morale. Speaking only two days after the German election had rattled nerves with a far-right surge, the French president was well aware that his words – and especially the way he would lay out his plans for deeper eurozone integration – would be scrutinized, at a time when Angela Merkel's prospective coalition partners wouldn't all necessarily be keen to endorse them.

For all its potential pitfalls, this was a welcome, forward-looking speech for the continent. The Brexit vote, Donald Trump, migration and the rise of populism have delivered blows to the EU. Even if the club's economic prospects seem to be improving, its fragility remains real. Europe's neighborhood, conflicts in the Middle East, Vladimir Putin's Russia, and Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's Turkey are all sources of concern.

EU's prospects

Macron is not the first to try to instil more confidence in the EU's prospects after the hazardous years the club has just experienced. This month, Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the EU commission, tried to strike an upbeat tone, saying the EU could now "catch the wind in its sails". Days later, struggling with her own Brexit quandary, Theresa May spoke in Florence of a deep partnership between the EU and Britain after its departure, with security cooperation described as central. In this European autumn of speeches, it remains to be seen whether words can be matched by realities.

Eurosceptic will sneer at some of the flowing rhetoric, but Macron can hardly be faulted for trying to set a vision for the continent when so many uncertainties remain. Now is the time, the French president said, for the EU to be rebooted as a project harnessing "genuine sovereignty, unity and democracy". He listed priorities: security cooperation, defense (the creation of a "European rapid response force" by 2020), a common asylum policy, a digital union, education (the creation of "European universities"), and the environment (the introduction of a "European carbon tax"). He called for pan-European lists to be set up for the 2019 European parliament election – implying the emergence of pan-European parties – and wants "democratic conventions" to be organized across the continent next year, giving citizens a more direct say on what Europe should become.



After so many blows to the EU, the French president is seeking to reinvigorate the spirit that once brought the continent together.

Eurozone integration

This was a speech seeking to reinvigorate a European spirit, of the sort the founding fathers created after the devastation of the wars of the 20th century. Europe would increasingly be multi-speed, Macron said, with groups of member states moving forward on some projects unimpeded by the refusal – or lack of readiness – of others to join them. Deeper eurozone integration was mentioned, but cautiously, no doubt keeping in mind that difficult coalition talks lie ahead in Germany. Macron said he was confident that Merkel would demonstrate the same "European commitment", "audacity" and "sense of history".

Macron no doubt wants to hoist his country into Europe's driving seat, alongside Germany. Much is at stake for him, as he undergoes difficult economic reforms in his own country. Some of what he has said may remain a wishlist, but the impetus he's trying to create is laudable. It was telling that Brexit was only briefly mentioned (as "ongoing discussions that do not define the future of Europe"). But an important message was delivered all the same: as Europe transforms, deepens its integration and envisages further enlargements (the Balkans), Britain will, "if it so wishes", one day "again find the place that belongs to it", Macron suggested. Speeches do matter. They can infuse energy, rally support, set goals, and they help understand challenges in a way that makes it easier to confront them. Macron's message needs to be heeded: Europe needs more, not fewer, ambitions.

(Source: The Guardian)

Italy's dodgy deal on migrants

With the blessing of the European Union, Italy is offshoring its Mediterranean migration problem to a former colony, Libya.

The goal is to prevent mostly sub-Saharan African migrants from leaving Libya's shores for Europe. But the tactics could further destabilize Libya and condemn migrants to more misery.

Italy's interior minister, Marco Minniti, isn't shy about why his country has moved to beef up Libya's coast guard, strike deals with tribesmen who control Libya's southern border, persuade clan-based militias to prevent boats from leaving Libya and promise Libyan mayors sources of revenue to replace profits stemming from trafficking.

Fanning migration fears

It's all about keeping populist parties from fanning migration fears ahead of Italy's elections next spring.

"I think fear is the crucial element of the next 10 years in democracy," Minniti said last month. "In Italy and all the world."

The results are astonishing: The flow of migrants crossing the Mediterranean was 85 percent less last month than in the previous August.

While Minniti denies direct payments to militias or traffickers, it's hard to believe that European money committed to limiting migration isn't reaching these groups.

This is a dangerous gambit. It risks funneling new money for arms to rival factions in Libya. And it puts Italy, and Europe, in the role of hiring as gatekeepers the very people who profit from extorting, starving, selling into slavery, torturing and raping migrants.

Citing "horrendous violations and abuses" detailed in a report released last December, United Nations human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein warned that Italy's strategy is "very thin on the protection of the human rights of migrants inside Libya and on the boats."

Migrants face abuse

It is inhumane to warehouse migrants in Libya, where they face abuse. They should be rescued, and asylum applications processed more quickly, with people ruled ineligible sent to their country of origin.

Italy needs to be relieved of sole responsibility, for this is a European problem.

The European Union, the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration are working to improve dire conditions for migrants in Libya.

The sad fact is, though, that Europe is so determined to stop people from getting to Italy that it is abandoning human rights to quell European anti-migration sentiment.

(Source: The NYT)

Will Trump Get What He Wants?

Reducing the Level of U.S.-Russian Relations

By Saeed Sobhani



President Donald Trump still remains confused in resolving the "Moscow riddle". On the one hand, existing evidence shows the willingness of Trump to increase the level of relations with Moscow, and, on the other hand, current facts in the international system have shown that relations between Russia and the United States have reduced since the presence of Trump at the White House. The dismissal of American and Russian diplomats and warnings from both sides reveal an abnormal situation in relations between the two countries. On the other hand, the recent sanctions on Russia by the US Congress and the signature of these sanctions by Donald Trump, has highlighted the contrast between the White House and the Kremlin.

Recent statements by Russian ambassador to the United Nations, Vasily Nibenzia, can largely reflect the prevailing state of relations between Russia and the United States:

"Relations between Russia and the United States are at a very low level, and this is not only a matter of good relations between the two countries, but also affects the international situation: Russian-American relations are an important factor that our partners count on." Our partners in person or in absentia from both countries (Russia and the United States) want to end the current situation and resolve their issues, because this approach is not just in our interest, but the world benefits from it. However the relationship between the Russian and American delegation to the United Nations is pragmatic.In the past, this trend has continued and will continue in the future. In addition, in the present situation, the UN Security Council, luckily or unfortunately, one of the few areas that Russia and the United States are cooperating with. "

The fact is that during the 2016 presidential campaigns, Russia was demanding the victory of Donald Trump and the defeat of Democrats. The disclosure of Hillary Clinton's emails on the one hand and the connections that existed between Russia and Trump election team are issues that can't be easily ignored. However, Trump faces hurdles to revive Washington-Moscow relations. One of these obstacles is the pressure of Democrats and even traditional Republicans on this issue. Many traditional Republicans, such as Arizona State Senator John McCain, have warned Trump about restoring ties with Russia. In other words, the threat-based viewpoint posed by the American authorities, from the Democrats and the Republicans to Moscow, remains strong.

It should not be forgotten that, in the current circumstances, one of the main charges brought against Donald Trump has been the secret connection with the Russian authorities (during the 2016 presidency campaigns). A charge that Trump has repeatedly rejected. However, security officials in the United States continue to investigate this issue. In the same vein, Trump has preferred to continue the previous approach of US presidents in confronting Moscow.

Issues such as the inspection of the RussianConsulate in San Francisco have raised the anger of Russian officials from Washington. Russian officials have announced that if Russia's consulate would be checked by FBI in San Francisco, this would be a violation of the Russian diplomat's immunity law. Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry, said:

"The request for inspecting the consulate and residence of Russian diplomats is a direct threat to the security of Russian citizens."

It should be noted that the US State Department has recently called on Moscow to close its consulates in San Francisco, Washington and New York. Russian Foreign MinisterSergei Lavrov warned Americans in this regard:

"We will react to actions that are totally unlawful and harmful to us. The purpose of these measures is merely to disrupt our relationship with the United States, a new anti-Russian Washington aimed at preventing US President Donald Trump to use Its legal authority is designed. Any normalization of relationships should be based on mutual respect. "

However, Sergei Lavrov and other Russian officials know well that the normalization of relations between the United States and Russia is not possible at least in the near future! Trump knows well that any actions he and his entourage take in improving relations with Russia will strengthen the security and political pressure on his team at the White House.

For example, we saw this after the G20 summit in Hamburg. At that meeting, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Donald Trump. Although the presidents of the United States and Russia looked at this visit useful, but after that, we witnessed the deterioration of the situation and diplomatic confrontation between Washington and Moscow. Also, many members of the Republican Party expressed their opposition to the normalization of relations with Moscow. The sanctions imposed by the Senate and the House of Representatives against Russia (with the vast majority of delegates and senators) showed that Trump's maneuver for restoring ties with Moscow was much more limited than was thought!

Finally, it is impossible to talk about reviving Russia-US relations in the near future. This is while some political analysts believe that an increase in the level of Russian-American relations is possible only during Trump presidency, since there were few presidents at the White House who want to be in touch with Moscow. Donald Trump, since his presence at the White House So far, has received advices from Henry Kissinger, the American veteran strategist about restoring relations with Russia, but as mentioned, Trump is facing difficult obstacles in operating these recommendations. Will Democrats and Republicans allow Trump to Increase the relationship between Washington and Moscow in future?

Obviously, the answer to this question is not positive. Even if he wants to, Trump can't do anything about the difficult obstacles that Congress and U.S. security agencies have created in front of him. Russian officials have recently stressed that US-Russian relations have reached its lowest level during Trump presence in the White House. In other words, the Russian authorities' desire to improve bilateral relations has not been met since the presence of Trump at the White House. And it seems that in the best condition, Trump may succeed to keep this process unchanged in coming years. Otherwise, he does not have the power to change this situation fundamentally.

Endless concerns of Nikki Haley

By Hnif Ghaffari



When Donald Trump won in the presidential campaigns of 2016, politicians like Susan Rice, the national security adviser to Obama administration and the former representative of United States at the UN, considered their own time as the head of foreign policy equations of America expired.

At the other side, people like John Bolton (the former United States Ambassador to the United Nations) became hopeful to turn back to the United States foreign policy once again. Even some media reported the possible return of John Bolton to the United Nations as the US Ambassador. But in the end, Trump chose Nikki Haley as his representative at the UN.

Trump's choice of a migrant as the United States Ambassador at the United Nations surprised some analysts of US domestic issues. Nikki Haley is Indian. Nikki Haley is now 45 years old. She was born on January 20, 1972 in Bamberg, South Carolina in a Sikh family

It was then we saw the growth of the political situation of Nikki Haley in the United States. From January 2005 to January 2011, she represented the city of Lexingtonof South Carolina in the House of Representatives. From January 2011 to January 2017, she was elected the 16th governor of the state of South Carolina.

Haley was the first woman to become governor in South Carolina. She was also the second Indian-American governor in the United States after Bobby Jindal. She was the youngest governor of the United States at the time. It should be noted that Nikki Haley was backed by Republican and Tea party members from the beginning of her political career.

She was nominated for the South Carolina Governorate in November 2010, supported by Mitt Romney, Sarah Palin and the Tea party movement, and won the election.

Then in November 2014, she was reelected as the governor of the state of South Carolina. Sarah Palin's support of Nikki Haley represents the extremist policy of the former governor of the state of South Carolina and the current US ambassador to the United Nations Security Council.

The Senate Support from Nikki Haley

The support of the vast majority of the members of the US Senate from the appointment of Nikki Haley as the United States representative to the United Nations is another issue that needs to be considered. In November 2016, Donald Trump announced that he intended to appoint Nikki Haley as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations. This action was endorsed by the United States Senate, and, in the end, 96 US Senators announced their support for Nikki Haley's election.

An overview of the ideas and views of Nikki Haley in a variety of areas can affect the understanding of her political and even individual personality. Haley is one of the opponents of abortion and has consistently supported anti-abortion movements and thoughts. In 2006, she voted in the House of Representatives in South Carolina for punishing the practice of hurting a fetus, in which violence and harm to the fetus are defined as a criminal offense against the mother.

Economically, Nikki Haley doesn't have a fundamentally good attitude towards taxation in the United States! One of Haley's goals is to reduce taxes. During her time at the House of Representatives in South Carolina, she voted against a law that added tax to any cigarette that was produced.

But the peak of Nikki Haley's views is about immigration. Haley, born and raised in an immigrant family, believes that immigration laws should be implemented. She voted in favor of a law that obliges employers to prove the legality of the presence and residence of new workers.

This is while US President Donald Trump has a completely anti-immigrant approach! In other words, it can be explicitly stated that there is a controversy between the positions of Trump and Nikki Haley considering the issue of immigration.

Nikki Haley's Mission to Deal with JCPOA

In the absence of US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who opposes Donald Tramp's approach against the nuclear agreement with Iran, this mission has been handed over to United States Representative Nicky Haley! In other words, Nikki Haley has now become the main general of US foreign policy in confronting JCPOA. NiKKi Haley's recent visit to Vienna and her visit to Yuko Amano, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, made her name to be mentioned in the domestic media of our country.

In other words, the mission of Nikki Haley in recent days has been making the situation ready for the cancellation of JCPOA. The visit of the United States Ambassador to the United Nations with the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna has been confronted by the reaction of our country's authorities. In this meeting, Nikki Haley called for an unlimited inspection of the Agency from the military sites of our country and has essentially put pressure on Amano in this regard. Nikki Haley's trip to Vienna comes at a time when Donald Trump, through the formation of a special committee composed of American jurists and politicians, is seeking to cancel the nuclear deal with Iran. However, the president of the United States knows well that the cancellation of JCPOA is costly for Washington.Trump therefore seeks Iran to pay the cost of withdrawing the nuclear deal by discussing issues such as inspecting Iran's military sites and declaring Iran to not comply with the nuclear deal. As news sources have reported, Trump plans to report in October that Iran has not been committed to the nuclear deal contents. In this regard, Trump calls for promotional and political tensions, therefore the issue of unrestricted inspections of Iran's military sites is of great importance here. However, news sources in the United States have announced that Nikki Haley has not provided any new information and documents to Amano on Iran's failure to comply with JCPOA and merely requested the Agency to inspect the military sites in Iran.

Undoubtedly, Nikki Haley has appeared as the US ambassador to the United Nations at the worst and most difficult time. She is standing in this position at the time of Donald Trump, one of the most unpredictable and controversial US presidents. Some analysts believe the future of John Bolton will be waiting for Nikki Haley. After the time of George W. Bush at the White House, the life of political people of his affiliates, including John Bolton, ended. We can now see that even members of the Trump government do not use John Bolton in important decisions taken in the field of the United States foreign policy.

Finally, Nikki Haley and her performance at the United Nations were more and more monitored by the public opinion of the United States. Regarding the foreign policy crises made by Trump, Nikki Haley has a difficult mission at the UN to theorize these crises and tensions! For example, with the North Korean crisis, Nikki Haley has to make extensive lobbying with the permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council.

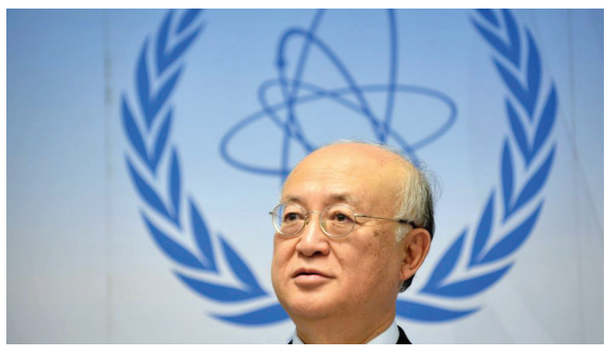
However, Trump's foreign policy approaches are not endorsed by many international players.This also makes it difficult for Nikki Haley to work as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations.

As the success of Trump in the US political sphere is almost impossible, his government members are also in a similar position, and this rule also applies to Nikki Haley.

Amano's behavioral paradox

By Saeed Sobhani

Dr. Ali Akbar Velayati, the adviser to the Supreme Leader in International Affairs, has recently made spectacular remarks about Amano's approach regarding the inspection of Iranian military sites. Amano has recently emphasized that, in accordance with the Additional Protocol, the Agency will have access to all sites and places in Iran (military and civilian)! In a reaction to Amano's claim, Dr. Velayati has stated:



"In the past, the IAEA had no access to military sites at all, and if so, we would not have agreed." The claim Mr. Amano has made up himself. If he was independent and his decision was based on independence, then he would have to visit the nuclear centers of the Zionist regime. Because the presence of a nuclear weapon in the occupied territories is the greatest threat to the Middle East, and Amano is pretending not to know anything about it, and accordingly there is no response. Neither Mr. Amano, his agents and nor any other stranger have the right to visit our military sites since these centers are among the forbidden areas. This security area is closed on all strangers and those who are working for them.

These explicit stances point out that the United States Representative Nicky Haley in the United Nations has pushed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to visit military centers in our country. On the other hand, Amano's passive stance in this regard showed that he still looks at a political approach to current legal issues in the international system. Obviously, the Islamic Republic of Iran will not tolerate this approach by the IAEA.

In recent days, there have been other issues between Iran and the Agency that should be taken into consideration. In its most recent report, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has once again reaffirmed the commitment of the Islamic Republic of Iran to JCPOA. The report was released just after the visit of United States Missionary Nicky Haley to the United Nations to Vienna and her visit to Yukio Amano. Prior to the release of the report, a senior IAEA official (not named) said in a conversation with Reuters:

"There is currently no need to visit Iran's military sites such as Parchin, and the Agency will not do this solely for the purpose of sending a political message. We are not supposed to visit a military site like Parchin for the sake of sending a = political message. "

However, immediately after the release of the Agency's latest report, Yukio Amano, in an interview with the Associated Press, announced that, according to the regulations accepted by Iran, the Agency has access to all places without distinction between military and civilian sites!

How can the recent positions of the IAEA officials be combined? Amano claims that he can access "any place" in Iran at any time and inspect the site! This is despite the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly described its readiness to cooperate with the IAEA officials and members of the 1 + 5. Obviously, the IAEA's inspection of Iran's military sites was contrary to rational, military and security requirements and Iran would never allow the IAEA inspectors to do so.

However, Amano's statements indicate that he was after a way to declare Iran's commitment to JCPOA on the one hand, and seek the American authoritiesapproval on the other hand (especially after Nicky Haley trip to Vienna).This dual approach of the Director General of the IAEA reflects his being under the influence of powerful lobbies and his lack of independence in the face of the United States. Why did not Amano ever (especially over the past two years) have spoken about visiting military sites in Iran and inspecting them?

The fact is that the IAEA has never had an independent approach to inspect countries such as the United States. Not only during the time of Amano's presence in the IAEA, but during the presence of Mohamed ElBaradei, we could see the Agency's dual policy in dealing with legal phenomena. So far, it has been repeatedly stressed that "mistrust towards IAEA" is one of the components that should be considered by the diplomatic and foreign policy system of our country during the post-JCPOA period. Amano played a significant role in the nuclear talks in Vienna in July 2015, especially in solving the P.M.D problem.

However, we can't simply ignore the impact of IAEA's managing authority on lobbying power.

What is certain is that our country's foreign diplomacy and foreign policy should not be silent against Amano's statements about the possibility of inspecting the military sites in Iran. It should be noted that one of the reasons for this is to pave the way for Donald Trump government to break the nuclear deal and get out of JCPOA.

As the US sources have announced, Trump doesn't intend to endorse the Islamic Republic of Iran's commitment to the October Congressional report. The recent visit of Nicky Haley to Vienna and her visit to Amano also took place in the same direction. Obviously, in this equation, Amano must play a role as a "legal personality", and not as a "real and political personality"!This is the rule that the IAEA Director General has not fulfilled so far! However, Amano's dual-paradoxical reports before signing of the nuclear deal is not forgotten yet. On the one hand, Amano is attempting to reduce the severity of his sensitivities to our country by declaring Iran's commitment to the treaties, and on the other hand, with continued emphasis on the issue of inspecting military sites in Iran, the satisfaction of Donald Trump's government in the United States. However, Amano must admit that the time of dual-policy approaches is over.

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5 ways you can tell you're having a good workout

By Keri Lynn Ford



"I thought I was going to die during my workout!" These are words I frequently hear after a client believes she has given it her all in the gym, but has she really? How do you know if you have given 125 percent to your workout?

1) Rate of perceived exertion. I often use the rate of perceived exertion to measure a client's intensity during a workout. The American Council on Exercise defines the rate of perceived exertion (RPE scale) "by use of a 0-to-10 chart to rate the feelings caused by your exertion." For example, sitting in front of the TV gets a rating of 0. The rating of exertion should be independent of pace and depend on feelings caused by exertion. Increasing pace or adding a hill could have you working more toward a 10 on the scale. I tell my clients to work at a higher rate of perceived exertion because most people think they are working out at an 8 when they are only at a 5.

2) Actual heart rate. Another method of measurement is a heart rate monitor. It tells you what your exact HR is at any given moment, and how many calories you have burned during a workout. It can also determine if you are working out within your target heart rate zone. If you know your maximum heart rate, you can ensure you are working at the appropriate intensity.

Cardio burns carbohydrates first and then fat, so utilize energy from carbohydrates in your body to fuel your strength session, and then move on to cardio where your body will have no choice but to burn fat.

To figure out your maximum heart rate (HRmax):

1. The age-based calculation. Use this formula: 220 (men) or 226 (women) minus age. For example, a 26-year-old woman's maximum heart rate would be 226 - 26 = 200. The age-based calculation provides an average statistical prediction of your HRmax and is better for beginners.

2. Record your highest heart rate. You can do this by working out at maximum effort. HRmax depends on the activity, so Polar suggests you establish HRmax with the sports you do most often. Polar has an online test to determine HRmax for running.

3. Clinical stress testing. Recommended for accuracy and specifically for people over the age of 40, overweight, sedentary or have a family history of heart disease. A cardiologist or exercise physiologist will determine your HRmax with a treadmill.

Once you know your HRmax, you can determine how hard you are truly working, using percentages. Are you working at 60 percent of your HRmax, or maximum possible effort? Determine the heart zone you should be working within for your individual goals using the categories here.

3) Quality over quantity. If you are going to the gym six days a week and working out for more than two hours each time, you are not maximizing your workouts. The intensity of activity should dictate the amount of time you spend.

If you were doing 20 minutes of hill sprints, it would not be sustainable like 40 minutes of slow, steady cardio would be. While variety is key, the goal is to workout harder in a shorter amount of time. Exercises engaging fast-twitch muscle fibers (plyometric drills, sprints and High-Intensity Interval Training (or HIIT)) burn more calories during your workout and maximize calories burned afterward (known as the after-burn effect.) The same holds true for compound strength training movements activating more than one muscle at once.

If you have an hour or more, hit the weights and then do cardio. Cardio burns carbohydrates first and then fat, so utilize energy from carbohydrates in your body to fuel your strength session, and then move on to cardio where your body will have no choice but to burn fat. If you only have 30 minutes, hit the weights instead of cardio. You will burn more fat because strength training increases your metabolism. Cardio expends more calories during the workout, but may not have as much after-burn.

4) Muscle fatigue. Pushing your body to muscular fatigue may result in a "jello" effect, accelerated rate of muscle burn or your muscles "giving out" during a rep. Your muscles reach maximum effort once they can no longer contract, or "working to failure." Doing this during a sprint or weight lifting set is the point of maximum effort. It is possible to also push too hard, which can leave you feeling dizzy, weak, or nauseous. If this happens, sit and sip water.

If that doesn't help, call it a day and get proper nutrition into your body. Another risk of overexertion is injury, especially without a proper warm-up. Movements resulting in a popping, snapping, cracking sound, or a feeling of pulling and engaging muscles that you are not focusing on are signs of a serious injury or muscle strain. Stop immediately and consult your physician.

5) Increased hunger. Increase in hunger immediately after or during your workout, general growing appetite or cravings for carbohydrates are normal with heightened energy expenditure. Your body needs fuel to perform and utilizes carbohydrates for energy throughout the day and during exercise. Eat your carbs and required calories, especially within the first 30 minutes after working out.

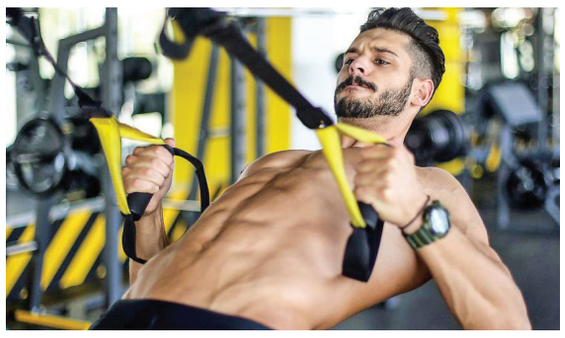
Make the most of your time. A quality, intense workout always exceeds a long, mediocre workout. On the flip side, remember that too much of a good thing is still too much. Happy training!

(Source: huffingtonpost.com)

If you only have 30 minutes, hit the weights instead of cardio. You will burn more fat because strength training increases your metabolism. Cardio expends more calories during the workout, but may not have as much after-burn.

TRX suspension training

By Gina Shaw



Want to push your body like the Navy SEALs do? Try TRX suspension training, which uses gravity and your body weight to make workouts more challenging.

Heavy-duty adjustable straps, similar to the SEALs' parachute webbing, are the basis of TRX. You can either buy straps (which cost about $200) and anchoring gear to use on your own, or take a TRX class at a gym or specialty studio.

Pretty much any exercise you do without TRX -- like a plank or a pushup, a crunch or a chest press -- can be made more challenging with it. You can get a serious workout in a relatively short period of time.

Intensity level: Medium

If you take TRX to the limit, you can push your body really hard. You'll sweat for sure.

But if you're not that fit, you can back off on the intensity and still get a challenging workout. It all depends on how you position your body.

Areas it targets

Core: Yes. No matter what exercise you're doing on the TRX (and there are hundreds), almost every one of them challenges your core.

Arms: Yes. There are many possible arm and upper body exercises to do on TRX.

Legs: Yes. You're almost always working your legs in some way with most TRX exercises.

Glutes: Yes. Your glutes get a lot of work with most suspension exercises, and you can always choose specific butt-targeting moves if you want.

Back: Yes. You're using your entire core, including your back muscles, at all times to maintain stability.

Type

Flexibility: Yes. TRX training is great for flexibility, balance, and coordination.

Aerobic: Yes. Although suspension training is a strength workout, you'll almost certainly find your heart pounding after even a brief session. The workout's creators also offer a "TRX Cardio Circuit" workout.

Strength: Yes. Suspension training pushes your strength in unique ways. Be prepared to use muscles you didn't know you had!

Sport: No.

Low-Impact: Yes. There's little lower-body impact with suspension training.

What else should I know?

TRX is a super-intense workout that can be adapted, but it's not for everyone. You need to have a basic level of fitness and coordination to get the most out of even the simplest TRX workouts and to be safe.

Cost: Buying your own set of straps from the TRX company costs about $200. If you want to do TRX at the gym, there's the cost of the membership plus any class or trainer fees.

Good for beginners: Surprisingly, yes. As challenging as it is, TRX can also be modified for people who are just starting out. You should work with a trainer first to learn proper form and make sure you're up to even the less intense moves.

Outdoors: You can do TRX outdoors as long as you have a stable place to anchor your straps.

At home: Yes, TRX is specifically designed for use in a relatively small indoor space. You just need a stable spot (like a closed door) to anchor your straps.

Equipment required: Yes. You at least need the suspension straps and something to anchor them to.

What Dr. Melinda Ratini says:

TRX is a super-intense workout that can be adapted, but it's not for everyone. You need to have a basic level of fitness and coordination to get the most out of even the simplest TRX workouts and to be safe.

You should have a trainer working with you to be sure your technique is on target to help avoid injuries.

It is a great workout for you if you have limited time and space and are trying to get in or maintain top condition.

If you are out of shape or new to the gym, go for a slower, beginner TRX workout to build strength and muscle. Add a good aerobic activity like walking to get you in top shape before lunging into using TRX as an aerobic workout.

Do not attempt TRX if you have a medical problem, pain, or balance issues unless your doctor says it is OK. Otherwise, you will be setting yourself up for injury.

(Source: webmd.com)

How to leave meat out to defrost

By Peter Mitchell

Improperly defrosted meat can result in food poisoning. The USDA suggests not leaving any meat out in the open for more than two hours, or one hour in climates above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Any meat left too long in temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit may rapidly develop bacteria. As such, leaving meat out uncovered and away from the refrigerator is a dangerous way to defrost your meat. Instead, leave frozen meat in the refrigerator, use the microwave or run it under cold water. Refrigerator thawing is the safest way to thaw meat.

Step 1

Remove the meat from the freezer and leave it inside its packaging.

Step 2

Place the meat in the refrigerator if you're not planning to eat it for at least 12 hours. Place it directly on the wire rack, with a tray positioned beneath to catch the thawing ice.

Step 3

Leave small pieces of meat, such as steaks and chops, in the refrigerator overnight or for 12 hours. Larger items, such as a chuck roast, need a full day or more to thoroughly defrost, according to the USDA.

Step 4

Keep very large pieces of meat, such as roasts and turkeys, in the refrigerator for a full day for each 5 lbs. of weight.

Step 5

Put your meat in a sealed bag and submerge in a sink filled with cold water if you're keen to eat the meat in only a few hours.

Step 6

Change the water every 30 minutes to keep the temperature cool, below 70 degrees Fahrenheit in ideal circumstances. Remove when the meat is soft and flexible. Defrost times depend on the size of the meat.

Step 7

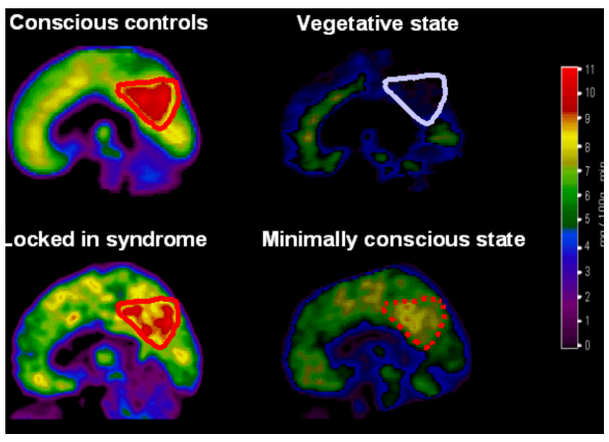
Use a microwave for small pieces of meat that you want to eat very soon. Most microwaves have a "defrost" setting -- which is usually around 30 percent of maximum capacity.

Step 8

Place the meat on a microwave-proof dish. Separate any steaks or meat chunks. Set the microwave to defrost. After 5 minutes, turn the food 180 degrees to ensure even thawing. Keep defrosting until the meat is fully thawed.

(Source: livestrong.com)

Man who woke up after 15 years could help people medicine gave up on



By Joseph Frankel

Few things are more terrifying than the idea of being trapped in one's own body, appearing lifeless to all the world and unable to prove (or in some cases, know), that you are otherwise. Such cases are often considered hopeless, with no interventions available to restore consciousness. And sometimes, individuals are misdiagnosed as permanently vegetative, with no awareness of the outside world, when in fact they can be restored to the conscious living.

New research could help on both these fronts. In a new study published in Current Biology, researchers report that stimulating the nervous system in a particular way rescued a man from a prolonged vegetative state. The achievement provides evidence that the approach could help prevent such patients from being left in that unconscious state unnecessarily. A group of researchers from France found that a 35-year-old man who had been in a vegetative state for 15 years showed significant signs of awareness after vagus-nerve stimulation, a procedure that has been used in treating depression and epilepsy.

A surgically implanted device slowly sent a current to the vagus nerve over the course of six months. After just one month, the man began to show improvements in following signals with his eyes, and in displaying other signs of attention clinicians look for on the Coma Recovery Scale.

A 35-year-old man who had been in a vegetative state for 15 years showed significant signs of awareness after vagus-nerve stimulation, a procedure that has been used in treating depression and epilepsy.

After six months, supported by significant changes in the man's brain activity in the thalamus, researchers determined that their intervention helped propel the man from a vegetative state—showing no signs of communication or attention—to a minimally conscious state, in which people are aware of the world around them, but just barely able to express that fact.

This research builds off a larger body of work in which different techniques have been used to stimulate the thalamus in people who are in vegetative states, Joseph Fins, a professor at Weill Cornell Medicine and an expert in minimally conscious states, tells Newsweek. Other research has shown that transcranial magnetic stimulation and deep-brain stimulation both achieve a similar effect. Stimulating the vagus nerve, which leads to the thalamus, Fins says, is another route to the same result.

"The thalamus is to the brain as Hartsfield airport is to Delta airlines," Fins says. "You can't get there through here if you don't get to the thalamus."

And while this man in France will likely not be up and about anytime soon, he is now in a state where communication with the outside world is possible. And cases like his, Fins says, have serious implications for the way scientists, doctors, and families see people in these states.

Multiple studies have revealed a high rate of misdiagnosis of people in minimally conscious states as vegetative. As Fins has told Newsweek in the past, being classified as vegetative versus minimally conscious can mean the difference between life and death.

That article detailed the case of Maggie Worthen, a young woman who suffered a stroke that left her paralyzed and unable to communicate. Eventually—and after her mother refused to remove her from a ventilator so she could die—doctors at Weill Cornell determined that she was not vegetative, but rather in a minimally conscious state. This correct diagnosis qualified her for training with assistive equipment that let her communicate with the outside world. This research, Fins says, is part of the puzzle of matching brain activity to behavior. For many years, doctors diagnosed people in these states based purely off their behavior. Studies like this point toward a way to look beyond what doctors observe with their own eyes and into the brain itself, potentially sparing the life of a person who may respond to interventions like vagus nerve stimulation.

Although there is reason to be optimistic about the study's potential, Brent Vogt, a research professor at Boston University, cautions that this report focuses on the case of a single person. "We'll need a more substantial number of patients who are [studied] to prove that this is a case that can be used clinically," he says.

Fins says that the overarching implications for the study extend beyond people like Maggie or the unnamed man in France. He adds that this line of research could prove fruitful for people with stroke, aphasia, and autism.

"We need to really see this as a clarion call for the potential of the injured brain to recover," Fins said, "and that it still has some hidden secrets we need to discern."

(Source: newsweek.com)

Iran's tourism potentials, traditions in limelight at Paris festival

TOURISM desk **TEHRAN —** Tourism potentials of Iran, its rich cultural heritage, traditions, and handicrafts are under the spotlight at the 39th IFTM Top Resa, a four-day French tourism exhibit that comes to an end on September 29 at the Paris Expo Porte de Versailles.



People visit Iran's pavilion at the 2017 IFTM Top Resa in Paris.

Iran's Travel Marketers in France along with some 15 tourism-associated businesses and tour operators including Aito Iran Tours, Eavar, Marcopolo Voyages Company, Ghoghnos Travel Agency are contributing to the event, CHTN reported on Wednesday.

The Touring & Automobile Club of the Islamic Republic of Iran (TACI) under the auspices of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization is running the country's booth, which is also holding variety of live performances, exhibits, meetings, and workshops on handicrafts.

"The Iran pavilion's area will be increased by 100 percent to 99 square meters thanks to significant welcome of participants last year," IRNA quoted TACI Director Ebadreza Eslami as saying earlier in June.

Iran hosts some of the world's oldest cultural monuments, including 22 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and its varied terrain ranges from desert locales to ski resorts.

Founded in 1978, the event is estimated to attract over 30,000 professional visitors form more than 1,600 brands at its vast venue, the Paris Expo Porte de Versailles. Today, IFTM Top Resa has become a multi target trade show for all travel segments: leisure, business and events.

France criticizes U.S. travel ban on Chadian ally, urges reversal

France said on Wednesday it was surprised by new U.S. travel restrictions on citizens from Chad, which Paris said was an ally in the fight against terrorist groups, and urged the United States to quickly reverse its decision.

U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday imposed a new ban on citizens from North Korea, Venezuela and Chad, expanding to eight the list of countries covered by his original travel bans that have been derided by critics and challenged in court.

"We learnt with surprise of the United States' decision to expand its entry ban on Chadian citizens," French foreign ministry spokeswoman Agnes Romatet-Espagne said.

"Chad is a decisive partner in the fight against terrorism. It has mobilized from the start and paid a heavy price in this battle."

ROUND THE GLOBE

Agave Landscape and Ancient Industrial Facilities of Tequila

The Agave Region, in the Valles Region of the Jalisco State, is one of the most important cultural landscapes in Mexico, not only for the importance of the natural landscape that offers, but for the cultural tradition that has kept for several centuries and from which has arisen one of the main icons that identify this country: the tequila.



The 35,019 ha site, between the foothills of the Tequila Volcano and the deep valley of the Rio Grande River, is part of an expansive landscape of blue agave, shaped by the culture of the plant used since the 16th century to produce tequila spirit and for at least 2,000 years to make fermented drinks and cloth.

Within the landscape are working distilleries reflecting the growth in the international consumption of tequila in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Today, the agave culture is seen as part of national identity. The area encloses a living, working landscape of blue agave fields and the urban settlements of Tequila, Arenal, and Amatitan with large distilleries where the agave 'pineapple' is fermented and distilled.

A UNESCO World Heritage site, Agave Landscape and Ancient Industrial Facilities of Tequila is also a testimony to the Teuchitlan cultures which shaped the Tequila area from 200-900 CE, notably through the creation of terraces for agriculture, housing, temples, ceremonial mounds and ball courts. *(Source: UNESCO)*

UNESCO experts in Iran weighing historical Sasanian ensemble

1 → According to its dossier, 'The Ensemble of Historical Sasanian Cities' embodies the political, historical, cultural and artistic developments of the Sasanian Empire, which was recognized as one of the leading world powers alongside its neighboring arch-rival the Roman-Byzantine Empire.

The site along with the Arasbaran Protected Area is candidate for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list for 2018.

Currently, Iran hosts some of the world's oldest cultural monuments, 22 of which have been inscribed on the prestigious World Heritage list.

According to Britannica, under the leadership of Ardashir I (reigned 224–241), the Sasanians overthrew the Parthians and created an empire that was constantly changing in size as it reacted to Rome and Byzantium to the west and to the Kushans and Hephthalites to the east.

Under the Sasanians, Iranian art experienced a general renaissance. Architecture often took grandiose proportions, such as the palaces at Ctesiphon, Firuzabad and Saravan.

Perhaps the most characteristic and striking relics of Sasanian art are rock sculptures carved on abrupt limestone cliffs, for example at Shapur (Bishapour), Naqsh-e Rostam, and Naqsh-e Rajab. Metalwork and gem engraving became highly sophisticated.



Picture depicts vestiges of a Sasanian-era monument in Bishapour, Fars province, southern Iran.

Menacing Bali volcano throws tourists' plans into jeopardy

Some tourists are having second thoughts about visiting the tropical Indonesian resort island of Bali after repeated warnings that its highest volcano could erupt at any time, half a century after it killed more than 1,000 people.

Strong volcanic tremors rumbling underground and billowing white smoke over the scenic Mount Agung have raised alarm, prompting the evacuation of more than 75,000 people within 12 km (7.5 miles).

Sitting on the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, Indonesia has nearly 130 active volcanoes, more than any other country. Many Indonesians live near volcanoes because lava flows make the surrounding soil and land fertile for farming.

Several countries, including Australia, Singapore, and the United States, have issued travel advisories alerting holidaymakers to the new risk. And a hotel operator in Bali said news of the volcano had caused cancellations.

"Business is getting low since Mount Agung's alert status was raised to the highest level," said Ketut Purnawata, manager of Dasawana Resort, which is in the same district as the volcano, popular with tourists and hikers.

Nearly five million people visited Bali last year - most of them from Australia, China and Japan.

Airlines in Australia and Singapore said they were preparing for any disruptions due to an eruption, but flights were running normally for now.

Virgin Australia and Jetstar, both of which fly to Bali from Australia, said they would carry extra fuel in case they needed to change course.

(Source: Reuters)

Your airliner may be flying electric within a decade

Major European carrier EasyJet announced Wednesday that it is teaming up with U.S. startup Wright Electric to build an all-electric airliner.

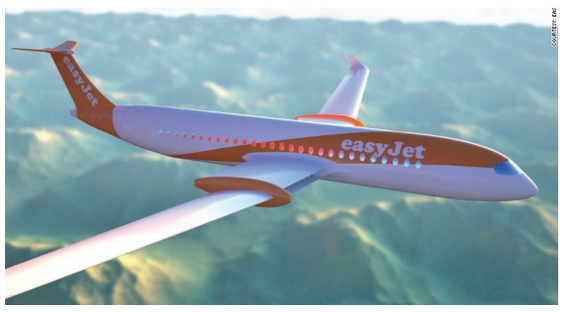
The aircraft they have in mind would handle short routes of 335 miles or less -- think New York to Boston or London to Paris.

EasyJet, a budget airline that specializes in shorter flights, said the new aircraft would cover 20% of its passenger journeys.

The airline said it has been working closely with Wright Electric this year and it hopes to have an electric commercial aircraft flying in the next decade.

"We can envisage a future without jet fuel and we are excited to be part of it. It is now more a matter of when not if a short haul electric plane will fly," said EasyJet CEO Carolyn McCall.

Wright Electric was founded in 2016 by a team of battery chemists, aerospace engineers and electric vehicle experts from NASA, Boeing (BA) and Cessna.



What an electric plane might look like, according to EasyJet.

It received funding from Harvard University and start-up incubator Y Combinator, which helped fund Dropbox, Reddit and Airbnb. EasyJet did not reveal the financial terms of its partnership with the startup.

Jeffrey Engler, the chief executive of Wright Electric, said that working with EasyJet is "a powerful validation of our technology approach."

EasyJet said the startup has already demonstrated its first two-seater plane, showing it can make the technology work on a smaller scale.

Electric planes could be a game changer for airlines, because fuel is one of their biggest costs.

They are also better for the environment.

"Just as we have seen with the automotive industry, the aviation industry will be looking to electric technology to reduce our impact on the environment," McCall said.

(Source: CNN)

How to eat healthy on a trip

When you're on vacation, the temptations to overdo the eating and drinking are everywhere, said the New York-based nutritionist Joy Bauer.

After all, the specialties of your destination, the buffet breakfast at your hotel and treats are always at the ready.

But Ms. Bauer said that a sensible diet doesn't have to and shouldn't fall by the wayside when on vacation.

"Overindulging will leave you feeling sluggish and likely with a few extra pounds, but if you know how to eat smartly, you can still eat enjoyably," she said.

Below, Ms. Bauer's tips on eating healthfully, yet pleasurably, on the next getaway.

Travel with food

As a frequent traveler herself, Ms. Bauer never leaves home without a stash of healthy snacks and advised other travelers to do the same.

"When you have food handy that you like eating, you're far less likely to grab something unhealthy," she said.

Options include whole fruit such as apples, nuts already portioned in quarter-cup serving sizes, pumpkin seeds and roasted edamame.

If you're traveling by car, Ms. Bauer suggested taking a small cooler along filled with mess-free foods like hard-boiled eggs, string cheese and nut butter, or turkey sandwiches.

Fast food can be healthy

Fast-food restaurants abound at airports and at highway rest stops, and Ms. Bauer said that they're not off-limits so long as you they order the right foods.

Choose a grilled chicken sandwich with lettuce and tomato (hold the mayo) and a side salad. If you enjoy hamburgers, order a single patty, and top it with extra lettuce and tomatoes. Can't resist French fries? Order the smallest size, and eat half.

Ms. Bauer also said that several fast-food chains offer fruit-topped oatmeal and yogurt parfaits that make for satisfying and tasty snacks.

When in Rome, splurge strategically

Trying the local cuisine, Ms. Bauer said, is a pleasurable part of any vacation. "You can and should let yourself enjoy one 'cheat' food each day, but be selective and pick something that is unique to that destination," she said.

That could mean veal Milanese in Milan, a lobster roll in Maine, a chocolate croissant in France and pad Thai in Thailand. Stick to a reasonable portion of whatever you choose, and savor every bite.

Watch those sips

Drinks don't fill you up, and many are packed with sugar and calories. Ms. Bauer said that it's best to skip sweetened iced teas and lemonades throughout the day — seltzer flavored with fruit is an appealing alternative.

(Source: The New York Times)

Gahar Lake, a heaven for eco-tourists, environment lovers

TOURISM desk Encircled by snow-capped mountains, Gahar Lake is a bustling tourist resort in western Iran that attracts many sightseers and environment buffs every year.

The property is nestled under the southern wall of Oshtoran Kuh range in a protected nature reserve. It is in fact made up of two smaller lakes that are situated within 100 meters of each other named the Upper Gahar and the Lower Gahar in Lorestan province.

There is no motorway to the lake and the best recommended way to get there is to climb. Beginning at the ranger hut and car park at Haft Cheshmeh, 23km from Dorud, the walk in skirts of the mountain flanks and takes four hours.

Even if one doesn't hike, great views justify the car journey as far as Darb-e-Astaneh, a mud-house village 18km from Dorud.

The lake is among the best sample of lakes that has been appeared due to the landslide. It is fed from rills and springs flowing from adjoining highlands. The climate is generally sub-humid continental with winter precipitation, a lot of which falls as snow.



New study could help locate subsurface deposits of water ice on mars



It is a well-known fact that today, Mars is a very cold and dry place. Whereas the planet once had a thicker atmosphere that allowed for warmer temperatures and liquid water on its surface, the vast majority of water there today consists of ice that is located in the polar regions. But for some time, scientists have speculated that there may be plenty of water in subsurface ice deposits.

If true, this water could be accessed by future crewed missions and even colonization efforts, serving as a source of rocket fuel and drinking water.

Unfortunately, a new study led by scientists from the Smithsonian Institution indicates that the subsurface region beneath Meridiani Planum could be ice-free. Though this may seem like bad news, the study could help point the way towards accessible areas of water ice on Mars.

Evidence of porous sediments

This study, titled "Radar Sounder Evidence of Thick, Porous Sediments in Meridiani Planum and Implications for Ice-Filled Deposits on Mars", recently appeared in the Geophysical Research Letters. Led by Dr. Thomas R. Watters, the Senior Scientist with the Center for Earth and Planetary Studies at the Smithsonian Institution, the team examined data collected by the ESA's Mars Express mission in the Meridiani Planum region.

Despite being one of the most intensely explored regions on Mars, particularly by missions like the Opportunity rover, the subsurface structure of Meridiani Planum has remained largely unknown. To remedy this, the science team led by Dr. Watters examined data that had been collected by the Mars Advanced Radar for Subsurface and Ionospheric Sounding (MARSIS) instrument aboard the ESA's Mars Express orbiter.

Developed by researchers at the University of Rome in partnership with NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (and with the help of private contractors), this device used low-frequency radio pulses to study Mars' ionosphere, atmosphere, surface, and interior structure. The way these pulses penetrated into certain materials and were reflected back to the orbiter was then used to determine the bulk density and compositions of those materials.

After examining the Meridiani Planum region, the Mars Express probe obtained readings that indicated that the subsurface area had a relatively low dielectric constant.

Presence of pure water

In the past, these kinds of readings have been interpreted as being due to the presence of pure water ice. And in this case, the readings seemed to indicate that the subsurface was made up of porous rock that was filled with water ice.

However, with the help of newly-derived compaction models for Mars, the team concluded that these signals could be the result of ice-free, porous, windblown sand (aka. eolian sands).

The "relatively low gravity and the cold, dry climate that has dominated Mars for billions of years may have allowed thick eolian sand deposits to remain porous and only weakly indurated," they concluded.

(Source: Universe Today)

Despite being one of the most intensely explored regions on Mars, particularly by missions like the Opportunity rover, the subsurface structure of Meridiani Planum has remained largely unknown.

Giant wombatlike creatures migrated across Australia 300,000 years ago



About 300,000 years ago, herds of rhino-sized creatures migrated across the floodplains of east-central Australia, mimicking the treks that zebras and antelopes make across Africa's Serengeti today. But these migrants weren't majestic, long-limbed grazers. Instead they were car-sized relatives of today's short and stocky wombat. Evoked by a new analysis of a fossil tooth of the long-extinct animal, called Diprotodon, the scenario would be the only known seasonal mass migration among marsupials and their close kin.

The team's findings are "pretty convincing to me," says Anthony Stuart, a vertebrate paleontologist at Durham University in the United Kingdom. "For the first time, someone has demonstrated that Diprotodon migrated seasonally." Similar analyses of fossils of other members of the same ancient ecosystem may reveal that multiple species participated in the ancient migrations, scientists say.

Recent ice ages

Like many parts of the world during the most recent ice ages (the last of which ended about 12,000 years ago), Australia had its share of weird giant animals, including a supersized relative of the Komodo dragon, today's largest land lizard. But most of the continent's so-called megafauna were marsupials.

The largest was Diprotodon, 1.8 meters tall, nearly 3000 kilograms in weight, and named for its dentition — roughly translated from Greek, Diprotodon means "two forward teeth." That pair of teeth, like the incisors of modern-day rabbits, never stopped growing, says Gilbert Price, a vertebrate paleontologist at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. As they grew, they incorporated trace elements dissolved in the water that the creature drank, as well as carbon, oxygen, and other elements from the food it ate. Because the isotopic makeup of those elements varies from place to place, Diprotodon's steadily growing teeth became, in essence, a chronicle of its movements, in layers akin to tree rings.

He and his colleagues took dozens of small samples from a 30-centimeter-long Diprotodon incisor.

Cyclic variations

Using radioactive dating techniques, the team found that the creature lived about 300,000 years ago. Samples drilled from evenly spaced sites along the tooth also revealed cyclic variations in isotope ratios, including strontium, carbon, and oxygen, suggesting that this animal migrated about 200 kilometers each year, Price and his colleagues report today in the Proceedings of the Royal Society B. As a comparison, annual mass migrations of animals across the Serengeti plains of Africa cover about 800 kilometers.

The regular variation in isotope ratios suggests that rather than wandering at random from site to site, Diprotodon made the same round trip each year, following seasonal shifts in vegetation and rainfall. It's the first time any marsupial living or extinct has been shown to migrate regularly, the team notes.

Modern-day marsupials such as red kangaroos do roam to find ephemeral food sources, says Stephen Wroe, a paleo-ecologist at the University of New England in Armidale, Australia. But those rovings are random, not regular, as Price and his colleagues propose is the case for Diprotodon. *(Source: Science Magazine)*

Researchers claim they just invented the "ultimate" method for QC

Today's working quantum computers are already more powerful than their traditional computing counterparts, but a pair of researchers from the University of Tokyo think they've found a way to make these remarkable machines even more powerful.

In a research paper published in Physical Review Letters, Akira Furusawa and Shuntaro Takeda detail their novel approach to quantum computing (QC) that should allow the machines to perform a far greater number of computations than other quantum computers.

At the center of their new method is a basic optical quantum computing system - a quantum computer that uses photons (light particles) as quantum bits (qubits) - that Furusawa devised in 2013.

A single pulse of light

This machine occupies a space of roughly 6.3 square meters (67 square feet) and can handle only a single pulse of light, and increasing its capabilities requires the connecting of several of these large units together.

So instead of looking into ways to increase its power by expanding the system's hardware, the researchers devised a way to make one machine accommodate many pulses of light via a loop circuit.

In theory, multiple light pulses, each carrying information, could go around the circuit indefinitely. This would allow the circuit to perform multiple tasks, switching from one to another by instant manipulation of the light pulses.

Unlike traditional binary bits that are either a one or a zero, qubits are entangled particles that can be either a one, a zero, or both at the same time.

These qubits allow quantum computers to perform computations much faster than regular computers can, but most quantum computing models today can manipulate only a dozen or so qubits.

Earlier this year, a team of Russian researchers revealed their quantum computer that could handle 51 qubits, and that was a huge breakthrough in the field

Furusawa and Takeda believe they've managed to go well beyond this, asserting in a press release that one of their circuits is theoretically capable of processing over a million qubits.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Taking Maximum Advantage of National Power Requires for Materializing Objectives of Resistance Economy

Materializing objectives of resistance economy strictly hinges on taking maximum advantage of national capacity and power, Public Relations Department of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) announced the above statement.

In his visit to MAPNA Locomotive Factory along with his accompanying delegation, Chief Executive of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) Mansour Mo'azzami was briefed on the high capabilities and potentials of this industrial and production group.

It should be noted that MAPNA Locomotive Group is busy active in the field of rail industries.

Materializing objectives of resistance economy strictly hinges on using high potentials and capabilities of the national power.

He, who is the deputy minister of industry, mine and trade, pointed to the economic challenges facing the country and said: "Unemployment is one of the most important challenges facing the country especially among educated and learned strata of society."

MAPNA Group is a national asset for the country and this issue should be taken into serious consideration, he said, adding: "Benefitted from the cooperation of 15,000 industrial manpower, this industrial and production unit plays a leading role in generation of employment in the country and it is an important issue at the current situation."

While placing special emphasis on boosting rail industry in the 6th Five-Year Socioeconomic and Cultural Development Plan, he pointed to the dire need of approx. 8,000 to 10,000 urban wagons and also 25,000-35,000 intercity wagon in the course of this Plan and reiterated: "Presently, suitable ways have been paved for the government in rail industry of the country, so that high capabilities of MAPNA Group should be used optimally."



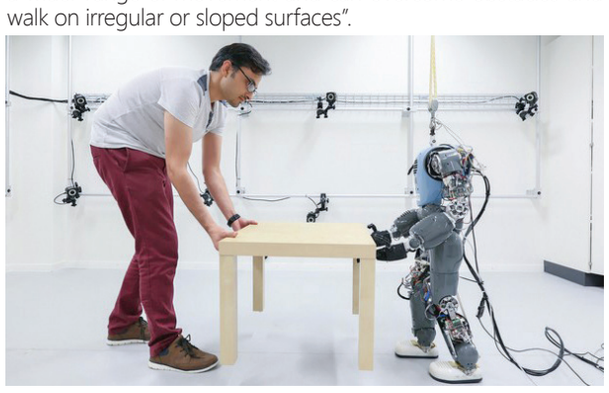
In the end, Chief Executive of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) Mansour Mo'azzami expressed his hope to the joint cooperation between IDRO and MAPNA Group and reiterated: "Rosy and bright future is waiting for this industrial and production group in the country."

Iranian researcher, colleagues develop robot that walks like humans

Engineers from Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL) in cooperation with an Iranian researcher and engineer have made a robot that walks like humans.

Although technological advancements in humanoid robotics have developed over the years, the one challenge researchers haven't seem to overcome is replicating the natural movement which mimic humans, designboom reported.

"Making the robots more stable is just the tip of the iceberg," says the Iranian researcher and engineer Hamed Razavi, the "next step is refining the algorithms so that the humanoids have a wider range of movement and can overcome obstacles and walk on irregular or sloped surfaces".



Engineers from Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (l'école polytechnique fédérale de lausanne's biorobotics) are testing new walking algorithms on a platform called COMAN, short for COmpliant huMANoid.

This 95-cm-tall humanoid is designed specifically for studying walking, which is why it has no head.

One of COMAN's distinguishing features is its joints which are integrated with elastic elements that give it greater flexibility when performing different tasks.

The team of EPFL researchers designed a novel control algorithm for the robot, based on the existing symmetries in the structure and dynamics of the robot, as well as the mathematical equations representing the robot dynamics.

The control algorithm uses sophisticated computer programs to carefully analyze the date received from the robot – including its position, velocity, joint angles – and sends appropriate commands to the motors, telling them what to do in order to maintain the robot's balance.

The algorithms developed by the skilled team of researchers are geared towards three types of real world applications: the first is carrying out rescue missions in disastrous scenarios, the second is helping with banal tasks like carrying heavy boxes or moving objects and the third is creating exoskeletons for the disabled. *(Source: ISNA)*

Understanding why these penguins yell could be the key to saving all penguins

The Gentoo penguin colonies of Antarctica are not a place for quiet conversation. "My first season down, I was blown away by how loud they were," Maureen Lynch, a doctoral student at Stony Brook University in New York who spends her winters studying the Antarctic birds, told Newsweek.

But somehow, the penguins make sense of the situation,

a talent Lynch compares to being able to pick out your best friend's voice across a room full of hundreds or a thousand people talking. That's despite the fact that during breeding season the tuxedoed birds rely on just one type of call for almost all of their communication needs, Lynch says.

Lynch has spent four Antarctic summers mounting heavy-duty recorders by penguin nesting sites and collecting audio files of the Gentoos shouting as they incubate their eggs and raise their chicks. Her analysis of that call was published Wednesday morning by the journal The Auk.

The Gentoos penguins take these calls seriously. "It's energy intensive, they have to stand up, you can see their chest heave as they make this call," Lynch says. Sometimes they're clearly communicating with mates, but sometimes they call when no other penguins are around. Sometimes they call when they seem irritated, and sometimes they call when they've just woken up from a nap. Lynch says her analysis is the first step to understanding what the calls actually mean.

Lynch's work was possible because her lab works with a non-profit organization that teams up with cruise ships to give scientists rides around Antarctica, which meant she could record sites across the Gentoo's habitat to look for differences between colonies as well as between individual birds at the same site. *(Source: Newsweek)*

Climate change made Lucifer heatwave far more likely, scientists find

The scorching temperatures across Europe's Mediterranean nations this summer were made at least 10 times more likely by climate change, according to scientists.

Furthermore, without action to tackle global warming, such summer heatwaves with temperatures soaring over 40C will become normal by 2050.

The new analysis by the World Weather Attribution (WWA) group also analyzed the particular "Lucifer" heatwave which struck south-east France, Italy and Croatia in early August and found it was made at least four times more likely by human-caused climate change.

The Lucifer heatwave saw temperatures fail to drop below 30C for three days and nights in the hottest spots, and was linked to a 15% surge in emergency hospital admissions in Italy. Prolonged heat is known to be very dangerous to health and a severe heatwave in Europe in 2003 was linked to 75,000 deaths by subsequent analysis. *(Source: The Guardian)*

LEARN ENGLISH

The World Cup

A: What are you doing?
B: What am I doing? What am I doing? Don't you know what day it is?
A: Ummm no.
B: It's only the day when the world's biggest sporting event is **kicking off**.
A: What?
B: The World Cup! The first **match** is today! It's Mexico vs. South Africa! It's going to be a really good match! Both teams have a very strong **offense** and have skilled players. I think that South Africa will probably **dominate** the first half since they are the **host** country, and all.
A: I have no idea what you're talking about. The only sporting event we watch at home is the Super Bowl.
B: This is bigger than the Super Bowl, man! Teams from 32 countries compete against each other every four years and fight to win that trophy. They first start in a group **stage** with bigger groups, each group having 4 teams. The top 2 teams pass on to an **elimination** stage before going on to the quarterfinals and semifinals.
A: Sounds interesting, but soccer doesn't really **appeal** to me.
B: Are you kidding? Over seven hundred million people watched the final match of the World Cup! It's a very exciting and **nerve wracking** sport! Each nation is cheering on their team, hoping they will become the next champion. So far Brazil is the team with the most titles **under their belt**; they're really good!
A: All I know about soccer is that you can't use your hands and that players are always falling down, trying to get a free kick or penalty kick. It seems like a **sissy** sport to me!
B: Whatever dude, I'm going to go watch the opening match.

Key vocabulary

to kick off: to officially begin something
match: game
offense: the part of a game such as American football, which is concerned with getting points and winning, or the group of players who do this
dominate: have power and influence over
host: one who provides services, etc. as for a convention
stage: a step in a process
elimination: the defeat of a team or player in a competition, so that they may no longer take part
appeal: if someone or something appeals to you, they seem attractive and interesting
nerve-wracking: a nerve-racking situation makes you feel very nervous or worried
have/get something under your belt: to have achieved something useful or important
sissy: something only appropriate for girls or women

Supplementary vocabulary

rival: a person or team who above everyone else attempts to win against you
disinterest: to not have interest in something
competition: a match between two teams or persons
oblivious: to be unaware
qualify: to show an ability to progress in a competition

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Farewell to hero

Iranians will never forget the young soldier's fate and the great sacrifices he made

Maryam Qarehgozlou



© Tehran Times/ Mohammad Mohsenifar

TEHRAN — It is 8:30 in the morning; mourners are walking towards Tehran's Imam Hussein Square where the procession is planned to begin. The streets are closed to vehicles from a kilometer to the square. Groups of men and women while holding pictures of Hojaji are strolling down the streets.

Once I get closer to the square the gathering crowd gets packed. There is no way to move any further. The massive crowd are here to pay tribute to the 25-year-old Mohsen Hojaji who bravely fought ISIS and didn't turn a hair while taken hostage by the savage terrorists in Syria near the border with Iraq.

Hojaji's last picture, taken by an ISIS terrorist, went viral. It inflamed deep sentiment among the public.

The young soldier's fate and the great sacrifices he made are what Iranians will never forget. Hojaji and others are fighting terrorists to show the world the true face of Islam which is based on empathy and kindness.

These blood thirsty vampires cannot stand differences and believe that "all religions who agree with democracy have to die". They argue their intention is to fight "ignorance" in the world and fill it with "justice and truth".

The kind of Islam they believe in is something one cannot find in any of the holy religions sent by God. All divine religions are based upon altruism, where everyone is caring and giving and consider the differences as a part of God's plan in the creation.

According to the holy Quran, the differences are to distinguish nations from one another and that no nation or group excels the other. Quran says, "He who is the most pious is the best of mankind."

Actions by these savage groups have caused Islamophobia in the world. Hojaji and the likes of him are selflessly fighting to eradicate the violent image from the face of Islam.

Citizens including men, women and children held an impressive funeral procession in Tehran to pay homage to the legendary martyr who was decapitated by the ISIS terrorist group in Syria last month.

The procession coincided with the mourning month of Muharram which is the remembrance of Imam Hussein (AS), the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who was beheaded and martyred in the battle of Karbala in 680 AD.

He is buried in his hometown, Najafabad. May his soul rest in peace.

World Heart Day 2017: Share the power

World Heart Day on September 29 is the World Heart Federation's biggest platform for raising awareness about cardiovascular disease (CVD).

In May 2012, world leaders committed to reducing global mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) by 25% by 2025. Cardiovascular disease (CVD), including heart disease and stroke, is accountable for nearly half of all NCD deaths making it the world's number one killer and claiming 17.5 million live each year.

Created by the World Heart Federation, World Heart Day is the perfect platform for the CVD community to unite in the fight against CVD and reduce the global disease burden. Our aim to drive action to educate people that by controlling risk factors such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet and physical inactivity, at least 80% of premature deaths from heart disease and stroke could be avoided.

World Heart Day is a truly global event that sees individuals, families, communities, organizations and governments around the world take part in activities to take charge of their heart health and that of others. It has the power to unite people from all countries and backgrounds in the fight against the CVD burden, and inspires and drives international action to encourage heart-healthy living across the world.

Share the power!

This World Heart Day, we want everyone to share how they power your heart and inspire millions of people around the world to be heart healthy. Your heart is at the heart of your health. And it's easy to give it the care it deserves.

Just a few simple steps such as eating more healthily, cutting down on alcohol and stopping smoking can improve your heart health and your overall wellbeing.

So this World Heart Day, let's make sure we all take action to keep our hearts – and those of the people we care about – healthy... and make a lasting difference to our health and the world's health.

(Source: worldheartday.org)



Martyr Hojaji's funeral procession in picture

SOCIETY desk

TEHRAN — Huge crowds of Iranian people on Wednesday took part in a funeral ceremony in Tehran held for Mohsen Hojaji.

Hojaji, a holy shrine defender, was taken hostage by the ISIS Takfiri group near the Iraqi border on August 7 and was beheaded two days later.



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Iraqi Kurds under pressure after secession vote

Iraqi PM: Kurds must hand over airports or face embargo

The authorities of Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq are under increasing pressure after Monday's independence referendum, as the Iraqi government calls for a suspension of international flights to airports in the Kurdish region.

Lebanon's Middle East Airlines (MEA) will suspend flights to and from Erbil airport in northern Iraq from Friday, citing an Iraqi government decision to block international flights at the airport, MEA Chairman Mohammad al-Hout said by phone.

"For now, we're stopping. The last flight is on the 29th, until they solve the issue," he told Reuters news agency on Wednesday.

MEA's decision comes just hours after Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi threatened to impose an international air embargo on the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region if it does not hand over control of its airports.

Humanitarian and "emergency" flights are exempted, provided they are pre-approved by Baghdad, Abadi said.

The semi-autonomous Kurdistan region's transportation ministry rejected the Iraqi government's ultimatum and insisted that the region's airports will remain under the control of Kurdish authorities.

On Tuesday, Kurdish Leader Masoud Barzani announced that the majority of Kurdish voters supported secession in Monday's referendum.

The embargo threat is the latest in a string of retaliatory measures against the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region's push for separation.

Domestic flights are not involved in the ultimatum and in the worst case,



international travel to and from the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region will be re-routed through Baghdad and other Iraqi airports, Abadi said.

Baghdad last week asked foreign countries to stop direct flights to the international airports of Erbil and Sulaymaniya, in semi-autonomous Kurdistan territory, but only Iran declared such an air embargo, halting direct flights to and from northern Iraq.

Baghdad will also ask neighboring countries to shut the border with Iraq's Kurdish region if the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region does not hand over border posts to the central government by Friday.

In response, Barzani urged the world to "respect the will of millions of people" who voted in Monday's referendum. He called on Baghdad to engage in a "serious dialogue" with the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

Despite Baghdad's opposition along with the United Nations, the United States, the Arab League, the European Union and Iraq'd neighboring countries, Turkey and Iran, Iraqi Kurds went to the polls on Monday, with an estimated 72 percent voter turnout, according to the election commission.

Erdogan: Kurdish vote risks 'ethnic and sectarian war'

Meantime, Turkey's president has warned of an "ethnic and sectarian" war in response to the referendum in the Iraqi Kurdish region, while the Iraqi prime minister has ruled out talks with the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region over the outcome of the controversial vote.

In a televised speech from Ankara on Tuesday, Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened to impose sanctions against the semi-autonomous Kurdish region, saying it "will be left in a lurch" and its people would go hungry.

"If [Iraqi Kurd leader Masoud] Barzani and the Kurdish Regional Government do not go back on this mistake as soon as possible, they will go down in history with the shame of having dragged the region into an ethnic and sectarian war," Erdogan said.

The comments came as Iraqi troops joined the Turkish army for joint military exercises near Turkey's border with northern Iraq.

Turkey has long been northern Iraq's main link to the outside world, but sees the referendum as a threat to its own national security, fearing it will inflame separatism among its own Kurdish population.

"It will be over when we close the oil taps, all [their] revenues will vanish, and they will not be able to find food when our trucks stop going to northern Iraq," Erdogan said.

Erdogan described the vote as a "treason to our country" since it had come at a time of good relations between Turkey and its neighbor, semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

He urged Barzani to "give up on an adventure which can only have a dark end".

In a separate televised statement on later on Tuesday, Haider al-Abadi, Iraq's prime minister, appealed for unity in the country as the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group continues.

"We will never abandon the unity of Iraq. We will never abandon the unity of our territory."

(Source: agencies)

Yingluck Shinawatra sentenced to five years in absentia

Thailand's Supreme Court finds former Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra guilty of negligence in a rice subsidy case, sentencing her in absentia to five years in jail.

"The court found that the defendant is guilty as charged...the court has sentenced her to five years in prison and the court also unanimously agreed that the sentence will not be suspended," the judge said.

Al Jazeera's Wayne Hay in Bangkok said that it took the nine Supreme Court judges four hours to read the verdict.

The maximum penalty for this negligence act is ten years in jail, and the judges did not offer an explanation for why Yingluck was sentenced to five years.

Yingluck has not attended court hearings, and it is believed that she has been in hiding overseas for a month.

Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha told reporters before the verdict that he knew where Yingluck was but would not give more details.

Yingluck's elected government was toppled in a 2014 coup, and she faces up to a decade in jail for negligence over mismanaging a rice subsidy scheme that pumped cash into her family's rural base in the northeast. Authorities say that this caused the country 8 billion dollars in financial losses.

The Supreme Court ruling was supposed to be read on August 25, but the 50-year-old failed to show up, stunning thousands of supporters who had gathered outside.

(Source: agencies)



Saudi women driving ban lifted: Euphoria and sarcasm

Barely a week after a senior Saudi scholar said women in the country should not be allowed to drive because they have "a quarter the brainpower of men", the House of Saud regime's king issued a decree that women will now be able to obtain a driver's license.

The decree said that women would be allowed to drive "in accordance with the Islamic laws" and a high-level committee of ministers has been set up to organize the implementation of the order.

Saudi regime state TV said that the rollout of the changes would take until June 2018. However, the Saudi regime ambassador to the United States reportedly said that Saudi women with a driver's license from any of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) states would be allowed to drive immediately in the country.

The decision has sparked euphoria and disbelief among activists in the kingdom, which was the only country in the world to still ban women from driving.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Thousands march against corruption in South Africa

Thousands of workers have taken to the streets in cities across South Africa to protest against government corruption, state capture and job losses.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP), both in alliance with the ruling ANC, say the strike on Wednesday is largely against corruption, but the call to take to the streets is also seen as an indictment against President Jacob Zuma.

Protests took place in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban, among other cities, with marchers carrying 'Zuma Must Fall' placards and singing anti-Zuma songs.

COSATU wants Zuma to appoint a judicial commission of inquiry to investigate state corruption.

This mass action is a show of force and this is what democracy is about.

In a statement released by COSATU, the union confederation said "corruption has become endemic under



this administration".

"This calls for all of us as workers and citizens to stand up and push back against this rot."

Solly Mapaila, SACP deputy general secretary, on Tuesday called for all workers to join the strike.

He also called on MECs and members of parliament to excuse themselves from work and support the strike.

Senior members of the ANC have urged Zuma to step down following a series of accusation that the Gupta family have "captured the state".

In August, Zuma narrowly survived a no-confidence vote held by secret ballot in parliament. Members of the 400-seat parliament voted, 198 to 177 with nine abstentions.

COSATU is now backing Vice-president Cyril Ramaphosa for the top job in the ANC, which will be decided at the party conference in December.

Earlier in September, COSATU said they would be marching following revelations that private interests had captured the South African state.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Interpol approves Palestinian membership bid

Interpol has approved the Palestinian Authority's membership bid, a new victory in its drive for international representation despite strong Israeli opposition.

Israel lobbies hard against Palestinian efforts to join global organizations to advance their goal of statehood. It claimed victory last year when the Palestinian bid to join the global police body was suspended.

Interpol approved the Palestinian application along with a bid by the Solomon Islands during its annual general assembly in Beijing on Wednesday.

"New member countries, State of Palestine and Solomon Islands bring Interpol's membership to 192," it said on its Twitter account.

It did not detail the voting but candidacies require the approval of a two-thirds majority of countries present at the general assembly, excluding abstentions.

The Palestine Liberation Organization's negotiations affairs department said on Twitter they had received more than 75 percent of the vote.

"Palestine's membership is the outcome of members defending this organization's raison deter and advancing its core values, and a clear rejection of attempts at cynical manipulation and political bullying," Palestinian foreign minister Riyad al-Malki said in a statement.

Israel's foreign ministry did not immediately comment.

Palestine gained observer status at the United Nations in 2012 and since then has joined more than 50 international organizations and agreements, according to the Palestinian foreign ministry.

Among them are the International Criminal Court and the United Nations heritage body UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization).

Interpol, which is based in the French city of Lyon, eases the exchange of information between police forces and issues "red notices" - non-binding notifications of arrest warrants - at the request of a member state or an international tribunal.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. Republicans fail to scrap Obamacare again

The United States Republicans have fallen short yet again in their seven-year drive to repeal Obamacare, in a bitter defeat that raises more questions about their ability to enact President Donald Trump's agenda.

The party was unable to win enough support from its own senators for a bill to repeal the 2010 Affordable Care Act and decided not to put it to a vote, several Republicans said.

The bill's sponsors vowed to try again, but face steeper odds after Sunday, when special rules expire that allow them to pass healthcare legislation without Democratic support.

"We basically ran out of time," said Senator Ron Johnson, a co-sponsor of the measure with Senators Bill Cassidy, Lindsey Graham and Dean Heller.

Republicans have now repeatedly failed to deliver on their longtime promise to roll back former Democratic President Barack Obama's signature domestic accomplishment.

They have yet to achieve any major domestic policy successes in Congress this year, which could hurt their efforts to retain control of the Senate and House of Representatives in the November 2018 congressional elections.

Republicans widely view Obamacare, which provides coverage to 20 million Americans, as a costly government overreach. Trump vowed frequently during the 2016 election campaign to scrap it. Democrats have fiercely defended it, saying it has extended health insurance to millions.

After falling short in July, Senate Republicans tried again this month with a bill that would have given states greater control over the hundreds of billions of dollars that the federal government spends annually on health care.

(Source: Reuters)

Iraq forces thwart ISIL attack in Ramadi

Iraq's army, police, and Popular Mobilization Units (PMU/ Hashd al-Shaabi) have foiled a push by the Takfiri terrorist group of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) to stage a comeback in Ramadi, the capital of the western Iraq Anbar Province.



Halaf al-Jalibawi, the head of the popular forces in the sprawling province, said on Wednesday that the terrorists had launched the attack from Ramadi's Attaash area, which they already had under control, Iraq's al-Sumariah news network reported. He said the combined forces not only foiled the offensive but also managed to fully liberate Attaash.

The terrorists had used 20 vehicles to launch a strike against the so-called Five Kilo, Seven Kilo, and al-Jame'eh areas in western Ramadi.

The Iraqi forces forced the ISIL terrorists out of all those areas.

Twenty terrorists were killed and 33 civilians were injured during the confrontation.

ISIL started its terror campaign in Iraq in 2014. It soon overran vast expanses of the country's soil.

The country enlisted the assistance of Shia-dominated popular fighters to push back against the terrorists. The joint forces retook Ramadi from ISIL back in December the next year, in the most decisive victory against the terrorists until that date.

Ever since, the ISIL has been losing more of the territory that it had overrun in Iraq.

Most notably, it lost the northern city of Mosul in July. It had seized the city shortly after taking on Iraq, and had named it as its so-called headquarters.

Iraq: ISIL kills seven soldiers in Anbar province

Meantime, the ISIL terrorists have killed at least seven Iraqi soldiers and wounded 16 others in a series of attacks in the country's Anbar province, security sources said.

Wednesday's attacks targeted several positions held by Iraqi forces in Anbar province, west of Baghdad, the sources added.

Iraqi forces were bringing reinforcements to the area under attack, near the city of Ramadi, as clashes continued several hours after the ISIL, fighters attacked the troops with suicide car bombs, mortars and machine guns.

ISIL terrorists were driven out from Ramadi in late 2015 but a low-intensity guerrilla war has continued in the region.

The attacks follow a series of military setbacks suffered by the ISIL in Iraq.

Earlier this month, ISIL reportedly killed at least 60 people and injured dozens more in a pair of gun-and-car attacks near the city of Nasiriyah in southern Iraq.

Those attacks started with unidentified assailants opening fire inside a restaurant on the main highway that links the capital Baghdad with the southern provinces. Shortly afterwards, an explosives-laden car targeted a security checkpoint in the same area.

In July, Iraqi forces retook control of Mosul, ISIL's key stronghold in the north, after a campaign of nearly nine months.

In August, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory over the group in Tel Afar, west of Mosul.

ISIL still controls Hawija in Iraq's oil-rich province of Kirkuk and western areas in the country's largest province of Anbar.

In 2014, ISIL captured almost one-third of Iraqi territory in a lightning offensive. It now only holds two pockets of territory in the country.

(Source: agencies)

RB Leipzig's Werner forced off against Besiktas due to fan noise



RB Leipzig striker Timo Werner reportedly requested to be substituted during his team's UEFA Champions League defeat to Besiktas on Tuesday because of the incredible noise generated by the Turkish fans.

According to the Telegraph, despite wearing earplugs, the 21-year-old could be seen covering his ears to protect himself from the remarkable atmosphere and had to be withdrawn after little more than half an hour with "hearing issues."

Manager Ralph Hassenhutl said: "It is impossible to prepare your team for an atmosphere like this. There was a deafening noise [and] at the start of the game we were a bit affected."

Ryan Babel and Anderson Talisca fired Besiktas to a 2-0 victory in what was Leipzig's first away match in the Champions League. According to Bild, he had "circulatory problems" and dizziness, and Turkish outlet CapaMag Spor quoted Werner as saying: "I have never seen such an atmosphere in my life. I could not focus on the match. I asked for a headset, and it did not help either. I still do not feel well."

Turkish clubs have long been known for generating some of the most intense atmospheres in European football, and this latest evidence only serves to confirm that.

Given the fans were able to nullify their opponents' biggest threat, it will hardly be surprising if it's even more heightened during their next home match in the Champions League.

(Source: Goal)

Man City's Mendy facing major setback with knee injury- Guardiola

Benjamin Mendy is facing a significant spell on the sidelines with a knee injury, according to Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola.

The French full-back is to visit a knee specialist in Barcelona after suffering the injury last weekend.

"I think it is going to be a major setback," said Guardiola after City's Champions League win over Shakhtar Donetsk on Tuesday. "We are going to see finally what he has."

Asked how long he expected Mendy - a £52m signing from Monaco in the summer - to be out for, Guardiola added: "I don't know.

"Wait until Thursday but I am pretty sure that it will unfortunately be a little bit longer than we expected or would like."

Asked whether he would consider looking for a replacement left-back in January, Guardiola said: "We will see in January. "We thought next summer about looking for another left-back, another replacement, but we will see what we do.

"We have alternatives in our squad - Danilo, Fabian Delph, Fernandinho, can play there so we will see as we go along."

Mendy will travel to see Barcelona-based Ramon Cugat, a close friend of Guardiola, who treated City duo Vincent Kompany and Kevin de Bruyne last season.

(Source: BBC)

Spartak charged again by UEFA over fireworks

Spartak Moscow have again been charged by UEFA after fans criticized the governing body with a banner during their Champions League clash with Liverpool.

The home supporters at Otkrytiye Arena unveiled a banner that read "UEFA Mafia" and also let off smoke bombs at the 1-1 draw against their English opposition.

UEFA have subsequently charged the Russian champions for the banner as well as what UEFA described as "illicit chants", setting off fireworks and blocking of stairways.

The charges come after Spartak were charged for fans firing a flare in the direction of the referee in the Champions League meeting with Maribor.

(Source: SBS)

Varane agrees new five-year Real Madrid contract

Real Madrid have announced that Raphael Varane has agreed a new five-year contract.

The France international centre-back will stay with the Spanish and European champions until the end of the 2021-22 season.

Varane follows Marcelo, Isco, Dani Carvajal, Karim Benzema and Marcos Llorente in committing his future to the club.

The 24-year-old, who signed from Lens in 2011, has established himself as a crucial part of Madrid's spectacular success under head coach Zinedine Zidane.

He has won 13 major trophies since arriving from France, including three Champions Leagues, two Club World Cups and two LaLiga titles.

(Source: Soccerway)

North Korea: Playing football in one of the world's most secretive states

Professional footballers often have to play in hostile and intimidating atmospheres, but Australian footballer Erik Paartalu found himself under the flight path of a ballistic missile in North Korea.

The much-traveled 31-year-old visited the secretive nation with his Indian Super League side Bengaluru FC for an AFC Cup play-off semifinal against North Korean team April 25.

Waking up one morning in his hotel in Pyongyang, Paartalu learned of North Korea's launch of a missile over the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido.

"We got up for breakfast and on the TVs in the hotel rooms we saw, 'Breaking News, missile shot from Pyongyang over Japan,'" Paartalu recalls.

"If you would have been out the front of the hotel at 6 a.m., you would have seen the trajectory of the missile.

"I just kind of looked at my roommate and we were just both very shocked. When we heard about that we thought, 'Let's just get the hell out of here.'"



'Intimidating environment'

North Korea has rapidly progressed its missile program this year, launching 22 missiles during 15 tests since February, including one over Japan on Sept. 15 — the one that flew over the Bengaluru FC team hotel.

It has lead to heightened tensions with neighboring countries and, in particular, the United States and President Donald Trump, who North Korea recently said had "declared a war" on the country.

The launch over Japan was the third intermediate-range ballistic missile North Korea had tested since the turn of the year.

"For us it was a pretty intimidating environment just because of the situation that was going on," said Paartalu, who has played in Australia, Scotland, China, South Korea, Thailand and India.

"A few of the boys weren't even interested in football, they were just thinking about other things. And who can blame them?"

Force for good

Paartalu believes football teams should "absolutely not" be playing in North Korea and was vocal on his own social media accounts about moving the match to a neutral venue, as is often the case with international matches.

Despite initially not wanting to travel, one incident at the end of the match reaffirmed in Paartalu's mind that football can always be a force for good.

"Football is an amazing sport, it's the world game," he says. "And even after the full-time whistle blew, the striker for the North Korean team came and gave me a hug and just said, 'Congratulations.'

"You really felt like there was nothing else in the world, it was just two guys on a football pitch running around together."

(Source: CNN)

Ronaldo: My numbers speak for themselves, but criticism is getting worse



Real Madrid forward Cristiano Ronaldo has dismissed critics of his form this season following his two-goal showing against Borussia Dortmund in the UEFA Champions League on Tuesday.

The Portuguese was at his clinical best as Madrid won 3-1 against the Bundesliga side. It was the highlight of a slow-starting 2017-18 for Ronaldo, having been suspended for five domestic games earlier in the campaign and struggling to get going in his two La Liga matches. However, speaking after the match against Dortmund, Ronaldo admitted he was baffled as to why he has been consistently doubted.

"It seems that I have to keep showing exactly who I am in every match," said the Los Blancos legend. "I am surprised by what the public thinks of me, my numbers speak for themselves, I am an exemplary professional and I always have a clear mind. The criticism is getting worse."

It's hard not to agree with Ronaldo's assessment, as his exceptional record for Real Madrid is there for all to see.

In many respects, he's a victim of the high standards he has set at the Santiago Bernabeu and beforehand at Manchester United.

If any other player on the planet had gone two games without a goal, as was the case for Ronaldo in recent La Liga matches, it wouldn't be a story. But for a man whose currency is hitting the back of the net with such regularity, not netting for a couple of fixtures is a big deal.

Those who have doubted Ronaldo may be best served looking at last season. In 2016-17 he was also slow out of the blocks in La Liga, scoring just twice in the first seven games he played in. However, the forward ended up having a decisive role in Madrid winning the Spanish top flight and the Champions League.

Ronaldo has had naysayers focus on him throughout his football career, and he has continually quelled them with his incredible goal scoring feats. At this point, it's tough to see how any doubts linger about his talent or his temperament.

Having won his fourth Champions League title—third with Madrid—in June, the desire for goals and silverware seems to still be burning in the Los Blancos No. 7. And having found the net twice here, expect him to move through the gears in the weeks to come.

(Source: Bleacher Report)

Trump urges NFL to ban players kneeling during anthem



U.S. President Donald Trump ramped up his fight with the National Football League on Tuesday, calling on the league to ban players from kneeling in protest at games while the national anthem is played.

"The NFL has all sorts of rules and regulations. The only way out for them is to set a rule that you can't kneel during our National Anthem!" Trump wrote on Twitter.

For the fifth straight day the president denounced the symbolic gesture, which has been adopted by some black players in the last year to protest against racial disparities in the criminal justice system.

Trump praised two teams that played on Monday night and largely steered clear of the controversy. The Arizona Cardinals linked arms and stood for the "Star-Spangled Banner" along with the Dallas Cowboys, who knelt before the song.

Last Friday, Trump told a political rally any protesting player was a "son of a bitch" who should be fired, and urged a boycott of NFL games, triggering protests by dozens of players, coaches and some owners before Sunday's games.

Trump's verbal assault may appeal to his conservative base as the Republican president grapples with critical issues including North Korea's nuclear threats, a humanitarian crisis in hurricane-struck Puerto Rico, an investigation into Russian meddling in the 2016 election and the healthcare struggle in Congress.

Paul Ryan, the most senior Republican in the U.S. House of Representatives, said he also disapproved of the gesture.

"People are clearly within their rights to express themselves how they see fit," he told reporters. "My own view though is that we shouldn't do it on the anthem."

U.S. Attorney General Jeff Session told an audience at Washington's Georgetown Law School that the protesting athletes were wrong.

"The players aren't subject to any prosecution, but if they take a provocative act, they can expect to be condemned," he said.

Hillary Clinton, Trump's Democratic rival in the 2016 election, called Trump's comments "a huge, loud dog whistle to his supporters" in an interview with CBS.

Former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick first kneeled during the anthem last year to protest police shootings of unarmed black men.

His former teammate Eric Reid wrote in a New York Times opinion article that he and Kaepernick chose to kneel as a "respectful" gesture, comparing it to "a flag flown at half-mast to mark a tragedy."

(Source: Reuters)

Harry Kane right to aim for Messi and Ronaldo

Harry Kane has declared that he wants to emulate Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo. The Tottenham striker is scoring goals at an astonishing rate. Three more against Apoel Nicosia on Tuesday night brought his season's tally to 11 for club and country. Not bad, especially when you consider that he didn't score once in August.

The man derided as a one season wonder after hitting 21 league goals in the 2014-15 campaign has since added 25 and 29 goal hauls to his CV, and that was in the league alone. In 2017, he's scored more league goals than Ronaldo (25 in 23 compared to the Real Madrid man's 15 in 20) and only slightly fewer than Messi (a superior 34 in 27).

Numbers only tell some of the story, of course, though you do wonder how those numbers would look if Kane had been playing for Real or Barca rather than Spurs over that time period. Kane is a fine forward, but he is unlikely to impact world football like Ronaldo or Messi for the simple reason that very few people ever will. Those two are really once in a generation players — we just happen to have been fortunate enough to get them at the same time.

But that's no reason to laugh at Kane for trying to emulate them. No-one learns to cook so that they can



burn cakes. If you want to do something, you look to the best for inspiration. Laughing at someone for aspiring to be the best is the preserve of the perpetual loser, whose only recourse is to try to drag everyone else down with them.

But for all that, Kane would be onto a winner if simply tried to be the best player he could be. After all, he is a very different sort of forward to Messi and Ronaldo. He is not, and never will be, the ethereal presence who shifts through defenders with a supernatural flourish that doesn't seem entirely fair. Nor is a rippling stack of bronzed muscle whose blurry-legged runs can sometimes only be stopped with a net and a tranquillizer dart.

Kane is not slow, but he is hardly lightning fast. He can run with the ball and he has a trick or two, but that's not his main selling point. What sets Kane apart from his peers, besides that goal scoring rate, is that his value as an individual is equal to his value as a team player.

He's still only 24 and still improving. And those improvements won't be limited to his on-field attributes. He's already been displaying a maturity that belies his years and an awareness of the responsibility of his role. His declaration that you'd "have to be stupid to leave (Spurs) now," was quite an outspoken statement for a modern day footballer, but one that marked him out as a future club captain (he's already captained England).

Kane is quite right to set his targets high and seek to match the achievements of this generation's finest footballers. But the truth is that he is already one of the hottest talents in Europe; if he keeps working as hard as he's working, he's only going to get better. And, for the rest of Europe, that will be no laughing matter.

(Source: ESPN)

AFC Champions League Semi-finals 1st Leg: Al Hilal 4 – 0 Persepolis



Omar Khribin's hat-trick helped ensure Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia will take a commanding four-goal lead into the second leg of the 2017 AFC Champions League semi-final in three weeks' time after posting a 4-0 first leg victory over Islamic Republic of Iran's Persepolis at Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium on Tuesday.

After a lively opening, Carlos Eduardo should have put Al Hilal in front in the eighth minute but was denied by a fine save from goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand, before Nicolas Milesi's effort zipped just wide 10 minutes later as the Saudi side took control of the game.

But Al Hilal did open the scoring on 31 minutes when Syrian forward Khribin popped up at the back post to head home Mohammed Al Burayk's deep cross from the right.

Yasser Al Shahrani then doubled the advantage five minutes before the interval by drilling into the bottom right corner from 18 yards after good work from Salem Al Dawsari.

Persepolis were thrown a lifeline early in the second half, though, when Abdullah Otayf was dismissed for picking up two yellow cards in quick succession.

However in the 54th minute, Khribin nipped in behind the Iranian backline to produce a neat finish for his second – and sixth of the tournament – after a lovely low ball from Al Dawsari on the right.

Ahmad Nourollahi could have pulled one back with 15 minutes to play but saw his effort saved by Abdullah Al Mayoof in the Al Hilal goal, before Al Dawsari came close to adding another with 10 minutes to play but miscued from inside the box.

But the misery was not over for Persepolis as Khribin broke through their defence in the final minute to fire a fabulous low drive from 20 yards beyond Beiranvand to give the Iranian side a mountain to climb in Oman next month.

(Source: the-AFC)

Sareh Javanmardi wins gold at World Shooting Para Sport World Cup



SPORTS desk Rio gold medalists Sareh Javanmardi claimed the gold medal at the World Shooting Para Sport World Cup on Tuesday.

The Iranian para shooter finished in first place in the P4 50m Pistol Mixed SH1 with 228.2 points.

Serbian Zivko Papaz won the silver medal, scoring 219.7 and the bronze medal went to her compatriot Rastko Jokic with 199.7.

Javanmardi had already won a silver medal in the P2 10m Air Pistol Women SH1 after accumulating 236.5 points in the event.

The 32-year-old became Iran's first female Paralympic champion in shooting Para sport when she bagged two gold medals in the P2 (women's 10m air pistol SH1) and P4 (mixed 50m pistol SH1) in Rio.

Mehdi Zamani had snatched a gold medal in the P1 10m Air Pistol Men SH1 on Monday.

More than 100 athletes from around 20 countries competed at the World Shooting Para Sport World Cup in Osijek, Croatia.

Esteghlal midfielder Jabbari to hang up his boots: report



SPORTS desk Esteghlal midfielder Mojtaba Jabbari will reportedly bid farewell to football.

The 35-year-old player joined the Iranian popular football team in late June on a two-year contract.

Jabbari was signed by Alireza Mansourian but the coach is no longer Esteghlal coach.

He was sacked last week following disappointing results in Iran Professional League.

Jabbari is not allowed to take part at the Esteghlal's training for two weeks and local media reports suggest that he will hang up his boots.

Jabbari started his playing career at Rah Ahan in 1995. He joined Esteghlal youth team after four years.

He was transferred to Aboomoslem in 2002 and returned to his former club Esteghlal in 2005.

The attacking midfielder moved to Al-Ahli of Qatar in 2013 and rejoined Esteghlal after four years.

Jabbari has also played for Iran national football team 31 times and scored three goals.

Diaz credits players' mental strength for Persepolis triumph

Coach Ramon Diaz was in an ecstatic mood as he paid tribute to his Al Hilal players following their 4-0 win over Persepolis in the first leg of the AFC Champions League semi-final on Tuesday.

The Argentine extended his unbeaten run in the competition to 11 games and his side take a comfortable four-goal lead into the second leg in Muscat in three weeks' time.

"The players did very well tonight. We were at our best and the players made the most out of their technical abilities." said the former Paraguay coach.

Al Hilal were reduced to 10 men early in the second half after Abdullah Otayf was sent-off for two bookable offences with the score at 2-0. But Diaz's men went on to add another two goals to cement their win. He believes mental strength was behind the way his team reacted.

"The secret to our win is hard work and concentration. The players are used to this type of pressure and they were mentally present today and that helped us a lot."



Despite the big winning margin, Al Hilal could have scored more if it was not for wasteful finishing in the final half an hour, especially from Salem Al Dawsari who failed to find the back of the net despite being presented with multiple chances.

Diaz is not too concerned and believes mistakes will always be there.

"We are all very happy with this result. Mistakes are just part of football. The players did well and executed my instructions. Of course, we will work on rectifying our mistakes from this game so we can do better next time."

Hat-trick hero Omar Khribin dedicated the win to his boss and to the fans who rallied behind the team at Mohamed bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

Despite the comfortable lead, Khribin insisted that remains no room for complacency.

"We came here to get a result and we did. This is just the first half and there is still a second half in Muscat. We need to do a good job there to progress to the final."

The Syrian international's three goals against Persepolis take his AFC Champions League tally to seven, level with teammate Carlos Eduardo and just one behind Shanghai SIPG's Hulk, who leads the goal scoring charts.

(Source: the-AFC)

Iran's delegation finish third at Asian Indoor & Martial Arts Games

Press TV — The fifth edition of Asian Indoor & Martial Arts Games has come to a close in Turkmenistan, with the Islamic Republic of Iran's delegation landing in the third slot of the medal count table at the end of the international and multi-sport event.

Iranian sportsmen and women took home a total of 118 medals (36 gold, 23 silvers and 59 bronzes).

Turkmenistan ended on the top of the medal count table with 245 medals (89 gold, 70 silvers and 86 bronzes).

China claimed the second spot with 97 medals (42 gold, 32 silvers, 23 bronzes).

Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Thailand, South Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Vietnam and Hong Kong earned the 4th to 10th places respectively.

On Tuesday, Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Farshad Belfakeh overpowered Turkmen representative Ali Seýhow 11-2, snatched a gold medal in the final bout of men's 71-kilogram weight category.

Pejman Poshtam also stood on the top podium in the 75-kilogram class.

Furthermore, Mahdi Ebrahimi and Saman Azizi clinched two gold medals for Iran in the 80-kilogram and 85-kilogram weight sections.

Amirhossein Hosseini and Behnam Mahdizadeh Arpatapeh added two more gold medals to Iran's tally at the sporting event in the 98-kilogram and 130-kilogram weight divisions.

In the men's 59-kilogram and 66-kilogram weight categories, Mohsen Hajipour and Amin Souri picked up two silver medals.

Iran men's national futsal team also struck its fifth consecutive Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games men's futsal gold on Tuesday, when it thrashed the Uzbek squad 7-1 in the final.

Iran asserted its dominance early on and Mahdi Javid took the lead in the fourth minute. Javid scored again in the ninth minute to give the Iranian outfit a 2-0 cushion at the break.

In the second half, Iranian futsal players jabbed five more goals through Ali Asghar Hassanzadeh in the 21st and 37th minutes, Hamid Ahmadidazaj in the 31st and Javid in the 32nd and 36th minute.

Davron Choriev scored Uzbekistan's consolation in the 29th minute.

In the men's low kick minus 81-kilogram final, Iranian kickboxer defeated his Uzbek opponent Javokhir Elboev 3-0, and claimed the gold medal.

Hossein Karami picked up a silver medal for the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Men's Full Contact minus 75-kilogram competitions.

Hamid Amni also clinched a bronze medal in the men's full contact minus 67-kilogram contests.

In the men's point fighting minus 79-kilogram final, Mohammad Pourfaraj beat his Uzbek rival Jakhongir Khusanov 15-5, and won the yellow medal.

Additionally, Iranian cueist Soheil Vahedi displayed noteworthy skills in the men's snooker singles, and earned a bronze medal.

The 2017 Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games, which is the 5th edition of the continental tournament, opened in the Turkmen capital city of Ashgabat on September 17, and finished on September 27.

Hamilton takes little for granted at Sepang

SEPANG, Malaysia (Reuters) — Formula One championship leader Lewis Hamilton was handed a lucky break in Singapore but the Mercedes driver can take little more than the heat and humidity for granted in Malaysia this weekend.

The Briton needs no reminding of just how fickle fortune can be as he returns to the steamy circuit where his 2016 title hopes suffered a blow that ultimately proved too great to overcome.

Hamilton has a 28 point advantage over Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel thanks to the German crashing out on the opening lap in Singapore from pole position and gifting him a third successive win.

The gap between the two is the biggest it has been all year and Hamilton will not need to win another race this year to clinch his fourth title if he triumphs on Sunday with Vettel lower than second.

But the 32-year-old will still be wary of Sepang, hosting its final race before Malaysia drops off the calendar, after last year's engine failure struck while he was leading from pole.

"I think it's going to be very close in the next races," said Hamilton, who has won every grand prix since the mid-season break, after celebrating his 60th career victory.

"We've just got to stay on our toes and keep trying to extract everything out of this car."

Hamilton won four of the five races after Malaysia last year but it was still not enough to stop team mate Nico Rosberg taking the title.

"The last race was a strong reminder that sport always has the power to surprise and defy all predictions," said Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff after the two Ferraris collided at Singapore.

"We have been on the receiving end of those bad moments before, and we know that they can happen as easily to us as anybody else."

Mercedes are expecting the circuit to suit them better than the tight twists of Singapore but they also have a mixed record there.

The champions, who are 102 points ahead of Ferrari in the constructors' standings, have won just once in Malaysia since the introduction of the 1.6 liter turbo-hybrid engines in 2014.

Vettel, who has a record four wins at Sepang to Hamilton's one, scored his maiden triumph for Ferrari there in 2015 while team mate Kimi Raikkonen chalked up his first Formula One victory at the track in 2003 with McLaren.

Red Bull cashed in on Hamilton's misfortune last year.

Barcelona search for airline sponsor after Qatar Airways talks break down

Barcelona have broken off their relationship with Qatar Airways and ended talks over the continued use of the company as the club's official airline partner, sources have confirmed to ESPN FC.

Qatar has been Barca's main shirt sponsor since 2011 -- first through the Qatar Foundation (via Qatar Sports Investments) and later through the state-owned Qatar Airways -- but was replaced by Japanese company Rakuten earlier this summer.

However, talks had taken place for Qatar Airways to continue as the Catalan club's official airline. In March, a loose agreement was reached over a four-year deal worth €12.5 million annually, with the initial contracts even drawn up.

That agreement has now fallen through, though, with Neymar's move to Paris Saint-Germain one of the reasons for Barca's U-turn. The French club are owned by Qatar Sports Investments and Barca have grown increasingly annoyed at money coming from outside football being able to distort the market.

"Something has to be done," president Josep Maria Bartomeu said earlier this month. "It can't be the case that there's money that comes from outside of football and is pumped into the industry.

"[Qatar] and Abu Dhabi [Manchester City are owned by the Abu Dhabi United Group] are two countries that have clubs. If Bayern [Munich], [Manchester] United, [Real] Madrid or Arsenal buy a player, you know [the money] comes from football. But these two clubs distort the market."

(Source: ESPN)

Nadal hails Moya's impact on training routine

World number one Rafa Nadal says the addition of compatriot Carlos Moya to his coaching team has added freshness and positive energy to the Spaniard's training routine.

Moya, a former world number one, joined Nadal's team to work with his uncle Toni Nadal last December and has helped revitalize the 31-year-old's career.

Plagued by injuries and a loss of form in the past two years, Nadal has risen to number one in the rankings and won his 10th French Open title and third U.S. Open this year. He lost to his great rival Roger Federer in the Australian Open final.

"Carlos has been a great support. He came with excitement and also the belief that with a few things, I could improve my results. And it has helped," Nadal told Spanish newspaper El Espanol.

"It has been a breath of fresh air, positive energy. We have changed the way we practice and for Toni it has been also good."

Nadal said Moya came on board and studied his daily practice sessions before offering specific ideas on how he could improve his game.

"When someone new arrives, it's easier to listen because it's something different. For Toni, having Carlos' reinforcement when he had to talk to me, has made everything much easier."

Toni had said earlier this year he intended to step down from his role at the end of the season and Nadal praised his efforts working with Moya and Francisco Roig.

"They have been a great team and I am very satisfied with their job, with the three of them," he said.

Nadal will play in Beijing and Shanghai next month as he looks to secure the year-end number one ranking and winning his first ATP Finals title.

(Source: Reuters)

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War photographer Reza Borji honored

ART desk **TEHRAN** — Reza Borji, Iranian filmmaker and photographer who is mostly known for his works on regional crises around the world, was honored for his lifetime achievements during a ceremony at Tehran's Resaneh Cultural Center on Tuesday evening.

"I am a photographer and a cameraman. Sometimes I write and sometimes I paint, but I am sure if I go back in time, I would still do the same things," Borji said in his short speech at the ceremony attended by a number of cultural figures.

Borji was a colleague of Morteza Avini, the acclaimed documentarian who was martyred by a landmine in 1993 when he was making a documentary in the former Iran-Iraq war zone in southwestern Iran.

"All these 35 years, I did what I think everybody would have done if he had the honor of working with Morteza Avini," Borji said.

"All these years, I took photos, made films, wrote and sometimes only cried since I could do nothing for those who were caught up in trouble. I saw and cried with a couple that had lost all three of their children and were crying on their graves," Borji explained.

"I witnessed sixteen regional wars and went to Afghanistan 30 times," he said, adding, "But I think my parents need to be honored since they lost their son 30 years ago in the [Iran-Iraq] war and the war still remains in our house since then."

Art Bureau director Mohsen Momeni-Sharif who also attended the ceremony pointed to his 30 years of friendship with Borji and said, "He has many good characteristics, with sacrifice and sincerity on the top."

He called individuals like Borji the ambassadors of the Islamic Revolution.

The ceremony ended with unveiling "Photographer of Peace", Ahmad Masuminejad's documentary on Borji that was produced by the Resaneh Cultural Center.



Reza Borji speaks during a ceremony organized by Tehran's Resaneh Cultural Center to honor the war photographer for his lifetime achievements on September 26, 2017. (Mehr/Mohammad Moheimani)

Borji began his career with making documentaries on the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war. He also has a large archive of photos from the conflict.

He is the director of "Seashores of Tears and Olives", the 33-day resistance by the Lebanese against the Israeli attacks in 2006.

His credits also include "Years of Bullets and Iris" and "Mothers of Srebrenica", both on the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and "Garnet of Badakhshan" on the Afghan war.

Borji has taken photos of the wars in Iraq, Karabakh, Kosovo and Chechnya as well as of the crises in Sudan, Somali, Kashmir and Ghana.

Shorts from Iran to screen at Tacoma festival

ART desk **TEHRAN —** Iranian shorts "If You Go Away" and "Retouch" will be screened at the 12th Tacoma Film Festival in the United States in October.



A poster for Iranian director Soheila Golestani's short film "If You Go Away"

Directed by Soheila Golestani, "If You Go Away" is a love story about Syrian war refugees.

A couple forced to migrate because of war become separated from each other. The woman tries to fight against her destiny and get back to her husband.

"Retouch" by Kaveh Mazaheri is about a young woman whose husband is trapped under a barbell during a workout, but she declines to save him and, consequently, he dies.

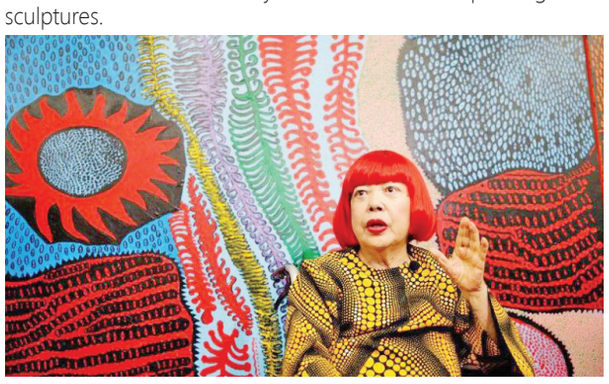
The Tacoma Film Festival will be held in the U.S. city from October 5 to 12.

"Retouch", which has been acclaimed in several international events, is also scheduled to go on screen at the Hamptons International Film Festival, which will run in New York from October 5 to 9.

Beset by visions, artist Yayoi Kusama has no intention of slowing down

TOKYO (Reuters) — Japanese avant-garde artist Yayoi Kusama, whose work commands some of the highest prices of any living female artist, said on Tuesday that at age 88, she still fills her days painting and has no intention of slowing down.

Long known for her obsessive, dot-covered art and pumpkin motifs, as well as the use of mirrors to create mystical "Infinity Rooms", Kusama, whose exhibitions have been among the hottest tickets in the art world this year, is now opening a museum in downtown Tokyo dedicated to her paintings and sculptures.


Japanese avant-garde artist Yayoi Kusama speaks to journalists at her studio in Tokyo, Japan September 26, 2017. (Reuters/Toru Hanai)

But the diminutive Kusama, one of whose paintings sold for $7.1 million in 2014 - close to the record for a living woman artist - refuses to take it easy.

"From age five or 10, I've been painting, from morning to night. Even now, there isn't a single day when I'm not painting," she told a small group of journalists at her studio, where completed canvases in her typical bright colors stood piled against the walls and spots of paint dot the gray wall-to-wall carpeting.

Laid over two tables, a barely begun azure canvas bore lines of linked eyes in black paint.

Kusama left for New York at 27, where she made a name for herself with her painting, its motifs inspired by the hallucinations of flashing lights, dots and flowers she has seen since childhood.

She also wrote, took part in anti-war activities typical of the 1960s, and influenced artists such as Andy Warhol.

She has said that New York gave her neuroses. Around 1977, a few years after returning to Japan, she voluntarily entered a mental hospital and still lives there, being driven to her nearby studio each morning.

"I still see hallucinations even now," said Kusama, wearing her trademark scarlet wig and an orange and black dress derived from her artwork.

"Dots come flying everywhere - on my dress, the floor, things I'm carrying, throughout the house, the ceiling. And I paint them."

The dots that have helped make her name are present throughout the museum, which opens on Oct 1 - including in the toilet, where mirrors amplify their impact.

Other works, all chosen by Kusama, include detailed black line drawings and a fairytale-like "Infinity Room" filled with glowing pumpkins.

Two Iranian films to compete in Warsaw festival



A scene from the film "Boarding Pass", a film by Mehdi Rahmani.

ART desk **TEHRAN —** Two films by Iranian directors will be competing in the Warsaw International Film Festival, which will be held from October 13 to 22.

"Boarding Pass", a film by Mehdi Rahmani, will have its world premiere in the official competition of the festival, the organizers have announced.

Animation "Run, Rustam, Run" by Hossein Molayemi has been selected for the short film competition.

"Boarding Pass" is about body packers who swallow pre-packaged drugs willfully or under duress to transfer them across the borders. They usually carry drugs sealed in layers of plastic wrap. But the story begins when a package is not sealed properly and starts leaking.

The animation tells the story of Rustam, a main character of Persian poet Ferdowsi's epic masterpiece Shahnameh, who travels into the future and comes to Tehran in 2017.

Sadaf Asgari named best actress at Fiumicino festival


Sadaf Asgari acts in a scene from Iranian director Ali Asgari's drama "Disappearance".

ART desk **TEHRAN —** Iranian actress Sadaf Asgari was named best for her role in "Disappearance" at the 1st edition of the Fiumicino Film Festival in Italy, the organizers announced on Sunday.

Directed by Ali Asgari, the film is set on a cold winter night in Tehran where a couple of young lovers run into a serious problem. They have just a few hours to come up with a solution.

The Doha Film Institute is the producer of the film, which also went on screen in the Orizzonti (Horizons) section at the 74th Venice International Film Festival in early September.

The winners of the Fiumicino Film Festival was honored during a ceremony in the Italian city of Fiumicino.

Andrea Carpenzano was picked as best actor for his role in Italian film "All That You Want" by Francesco Bruni.

"The Journey" by British director Nick Hamm won the best film award, while "Nothingwood" by Sonia Kronlund from France received the best documentary award.

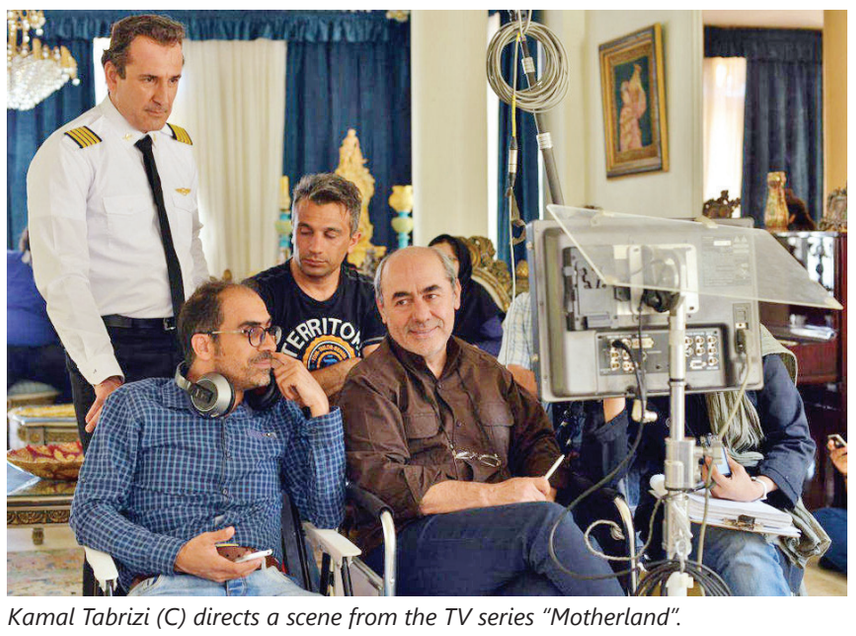
Modified "Ancient Land" to return to air with new title

ART desk **TEHRAN —** Kamal Tabrizi's controversial docudrama "Ancient Land" that was pulled off the air in early 2104 after protests from Bakhtiaris will return with some modifications and a different title.

The first episode of the series, which was renamed "Motherland", will be broadcasted from Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting's Channel 1 on October 6, the IRIB announced on Tuesday by the release of a trailer for the 60-episode serial.

The series recounts the historical events that occurred in Iran in the aftermath of the Allied occupation of the country during World War II.

IRIB's Channel 3 began broadcasting the series in January 2014. However, the IRIB stopped broadcasting the docudrama in early February following protests from large groups of Bakhtiari people in several cities in southwestern Iran. They claimed the series insulted Bakhtiaris by linking a Bakhtiari family to the Iranian monarchy and calling them British occupiers' agents.


Kamal Tabrizi (C) directs a scene from the TV series "Motherland".

"The scenes, which caused the misunderstandings, have been modified," Tabrizi told the Persian service of Honaronline on Wednesday.

"The series will be broadcast completely without any cuts," he added.

Tabrizi previously said, "Making a judgment about the good and bad characters of the series requires patience and time."

He and a number of his colleagues also wrote a letter to the then IRIB managing director Ezzatollah Zarghami, briefing him on the story of the TV series.

"Undoubtedly, the producers of the serial meant no disrespect to the honorable Bakhtiari people... However, we offer our apologies if any of the early parts of the serial caused distress to our Bakhtiari compatriots," they wrote.

George Clooney prays for unity as celebs back #TakeAKnee

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — George Clooney on Tuesday became the latest entertainer to add his voice to a divisive national debate over the rights of Americans to stage silent protests during the playing of the national anthem, saying he was praying for unity.

In a short poem, the Oscar-winning actor and director wrote that he was praying for America's children, police, those in the military, and that "dissent will always be protected in this great country."

The "Ocean's Eleven" star did not mention U.S. President Donald Trump by name but his poem follows five days of attacks by Trump on National Football League (NFL) players who kneel during the playing of the U.S. national anthem to protest racial disparities in the justice system.

On Tuesday, Trump called on the NFL to ban players who kneel.

"I pray that we can find more that unites us than divides us. I pray that our nation's leaders want to do the same," Clooney wrote in the poem, written for The Daily Beast news website.

"And when I pray, I kneel," he concluded.

Clooney is the latest celebrity to support the #TakeAKnee protest that has seen the likes of singers Stevie Wonder, John Legend, Pharrell Williams, Bette Midler and filmmaker Ava DuVernay drop to their knees at concerts, in photos posted to their social media accounts, or issue messages of support.

A photo posted by "X Files" stars Gillian Anderson and David Duchovny linking arms and kneeling on the set of their TV show, was a top trending item on Twitter on Monday night.

"American Idol" winner Jordin Sparks, who sang the "Star-Spangled Banner" before Monday night's game between the Dallas Cowboys and the Arizona Cardinals, had the bible reference "Prov. 31:8-9" clearly written on her hand.

The passage referred to in the Book of Proverbs reads, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves."