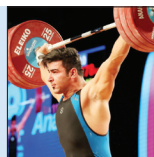




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Rouhani, Erdogan seek OIC action on al-Quds

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — During a phone conversation on Wednesday, President Hassan Rouhani of Iran and his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan discussed recent moves surrounding al-Quds (Jerusalem), urging the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to take action.

Rouhani thanked Erdogan for making the phone call and accepted his invitation for an

emergency summit of the OIC in Istanbul. Rouhani called on Islamic states to join hands in opposing the "dangerous" move by the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump.

Rouhani has warned the U.S. against relocating its Israel embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds (Jerusalem), saying the "illegal" move would further destabilize Palestine and the region. ➔2

No legal disagreement should remain about Caspian sea

By Hanif Ghafari

MOSCOW — The recent meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Neighboring Countries of the Sea in Moscow was held. Foreign Minister Dr. Mohammad Javad Zarif was present at this meeting. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also concluded at the end of the meeting and in a gathering of journalists that the final steps have been

taken to formulate the legal regime of the Caspian Sea.

During this meeting, legal, economic, strategic and security cooperation between the Caspian Sea countries was discussed.

In general, in the case of the Caspian Sea, there are some points to note: Undoubtedly, the recent meeting of foreign ministers of the coastal Caspian countries is of great importance. ➔7

Transit of goods via Iran rises 21% in 8 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Transit of goods via Iran rose 21 percent during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21) compared to the same period of time in the past year, according to a transport official.

Reza Nafisi, director general of Transit and International Transportation Department

in Iran Road Maintenance & Transportation Organization, said over 6.053 million tons of commodities have been transited via Iran's sea and land borders during the mentioned time, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Of the mentioned figure, above 1.77 million tons were oil products and more than 4.28 million tons were non-oil goods, he added. ➔4



ARTICLE

By Masoud Hossein
Head of the Sport Desk of the TehranTimes

Iran should be thankful for World Cup draw

Iran coach Carlos Queiroz says it would have been no matter what group they were in at the 2018 World Cup and he is completely right because regardless of how far Iran can go, WORLD CUP is a real opportunity for Team Melli improving their level.

Iran will face Morocco in the competition's opener in a must-win game because the Asian giant know that Spain and Portugal are teams to beat, however, nothing is impossible in football.

Spain, a World Cup winner, and Portugal, European champions, couldn't be better for Team Melli since the Persians can measure themselves against the best in the west.

Iran and Morocco are well aware that their first match could be decisive, but they will be forced to put aside their own unique defending styles in the World Cup qualifications in the first match.

Queiroz says to be drawn with his homeland Portugal and Real Madrid is very emotional and special and it seems he is completely right.

Queiroz was sacked by Portuguese Football Federation in September 2010 and seven months later he took charge of Team Melli.

Needless to say, it will be a golden opportunity for the Mozambique-born mentor to prove himself because he has a good knowledge of Fernando Santos's team.

Furthermore, World Cup could be an ideal launchpad for his greater ambition of being appointed as a greater team.

Queiroz has already worked in Spain as Real Madrid coach in 2003-04 and he is no stranger to Spanish football and it is another privilege to him in group stage.

Finally, Group B is a tough group for the Iranian team, who have never gotten past the group stage in four World Cup appearances, but the group can be helpful for the country's future.

Trump's al-Quds move: A fireball

By Mohammad Ghaderi

The United States President Donald Trump will recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's capital on Wednesday despite intense Arab, Muslim and European opposition to a move that would upend decades of the U.S. policy and risk potentially violent protests.

Trump will instruct the State Department to begin the multi-year process of moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to the holy city, U.S. officials said on Tuesday. It remains unclear, however, when he might take that physical step, which is required by the U.S. law but has been waived on national security grounds for more than two decades.

The officials said numerous logistical and security details, as well as site determination and construction, will need to be finalized first.

Because of those issues, the embassy is not likely to move for at least 3 or 4 years, presuming there is no future change in the U.S. policy.

To that end, the officials said Trump will delay the embassy move by signing a waiver, which is required by the U.S. law every six months. He will continue to sign the waiver until preparations for the embassy move are complete.

■ Hamas: Israel has no land to claim 'capital'

The Palestinian resistance movement of Hamas says Israel has "no land" and naturally no right to designate "a capital" city. The announcement came shortly before the United States President Donald Trump's expected declaration of the recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's "capital."

Hamas Spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri tweeted the remark on Wednesday, shortly after Trump report-

edly "informed" Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas of his intention to relocate the American embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds (Jerusalem).

Zuhri, the Hamas spokesman, added that such recognition "would harm Israel" and ultimately bring it "regret."

■ Crossing every red line

Elsewhere, on Tuesday, Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh warned the United States that the potential relocation of the U.S. embassy would cross "every red line."

In a statement addressed to world Muslim leaders, Haniya said, "Moving the American embassy to Jerusalem is a dangerous escalation and provides cover for the extremist government of [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu to carry out its plan to Judaize the city of Jerusalem." ➔3

DOE proposes \$375,000 budget for cheetah conservation

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN**

— Iran's Department of Environment (DOE) has presented a 15-billion-rial (nearly \$375,000) budget proposal to Budget and Planning Organization for Asiatic cheetah conservation plans.

"Department of Environment chief [Isa Kalantari] and Budget and Planning Organization director [Mohammad Baqer Nobakht] have agreed on a budget of 15 billion rials in cash for cheetah conservation project," ISNA quoted Hamid Zohrabi, caretaker for DOE natural environment and biodiversity directorate, as saying.

"We are following up on the matter," he added.

Zohrabi further explained that Environment chief has ordered another 10 billion-rial (nearly \$250,000) allocation of funds from DEO's other

projects to shrink Asiatic cheetah conservation project budget deficit.

So far DOE natural environment and biodiversity directorate has allocated some 5 billion rials (nearly \$125,000) for cheetah conservation projects, but unfortunately over the past two years the department was under budget strain and could not spend budget on any of national conservation plans namely Asiatic cheetah conservation, Zohrabi regretted.

Speaking on United Nations Development Program (UNDP) latest decision about Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project (CACP) by not extending the project and cutting the international funds to it, he noted that in order to keep carrying out the project "we have to support it

financially with tight DOE budget".

■ Asiatic cheetah conservation relatively successful

Regarding the numbers and the budget limits it unfair to criticize Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project (CACP), he highlighted, saying, the project may have not been able to fully counter all the threats constituting to cheetahs impeding extinction but it has been partly successful.

The cheetah/livestock interactions and the presence of human beings and guard dogs in cheetah's habitats, road accidents and habitat fragmentation due to human encroachment, water shortage, etc. are of the threats making the cheetah's future uncertain and posing constant threats to cheetahs in Iran. ➔12



© IRNA

Homemade missile-launching warship in Caspian Sea

A new hometown missile-launching warship, described as the "symbol of peace at sea", has joined Iran's naval fleet in the Caspian Sea, Press TV reported.

The Separ (Shield) warship was unveiled and delivered to the naval forces during a ceremony held on Tuesday in the northern Iranian port city of Bandar-e Anzali.

Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami and Navy Commander Rear Admiral Hossein Khanzadi attended the ceremony.

The vessel is 47 meters long and 3.9 meters high, and has a cruising speed of 35 knots (over 64 kilometers per hour).



PERSPECTIVE

By M.A. Saki
Deputy editor-in-chief

Trump's endorses Israeli occupation, invites violence

In a speech on Wednesday U.S. President Donald Trump recognized al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's capital and directed the State Department to begin the process of moving Washington's embassy from Tel Aviv to the city.

The move was an invitation for more violence and bloodshed in the occupied territories and probably the wider region. The decision came despite warnings by the Pope, Washington's allies, the United Nations, and the entire international community which do not recognize Israel's ownership of the city.

The decision will indeed make the seven-decade long conflict in the occupied Palestinian territories more complicated.

Through this announcement the U.S. openly endorsed the annexation of East Jerusalem occupied by Israel in 1967. It was a clear violation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions which state Israel must withdraw from the lands it has occupied.

Palestinians have been considering East Jerusalem as their future capital while Israel considers Jerusalem to be a "united" city. In light of these bitter facts only a naïve person can believe that there will be a hope for a two-state solution in which Israelis and Palestinians can live peacefully side by side.

Prior to the declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the Zionists had started wiping out Palestinians from the eastern part of the city by ruthlessly demolishing their houses. It was intended to Judaize the entire city, similar to what Daesh did to Christians, including Yazidis, in northern Iraq.

Trump and his allies are acting like Daesh who temporarily established their own caliphate in parts of Iraq and Syria by luring extremists from around the world.

No time in recent memory the United States has been moving the world toward such anarchy. Through such act the U.S. and Israel are pushing people toward a religious war as Jerusalem's Old City houses Islam's third-holiest mosque. ➔13

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Leader pardons over 1,000 prisoners

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei pardoned or commuted prison terms of 1,007 convicts sentenced by various courts across the country, Tasnim reported on Tuesday.

The pardon was granted at the request of Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani on the occasion of the birth anniversaries of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and Imam Jafar Sadiq (AS), the sixth Imam of Shiite Muslims.

Article 110 of the Constitution grants the Leader the right to pardon or reduce the sentences of convicts upon a recommendation from the head of the Judiciary.



Iran warns against recognition of al-Quds as Israel's capital

POLITICS TEHRAN — Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said on Wednesday that any decision on the future of the Palestinian land should be made by the country's aborigines and non-immigrants.

Shamkhani condemned U.S. government's decision to recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's capital and move U.S. embassy there, warning against any "incendiary move" against the interests of the Muslim world, Mehr reported.

"Muslim countries have condemned this conspiracy which is a violation of the rights of innocent Palestinians and a continuation of the Zionist regime's occupation," he added.



No obstacles for new supplies of Russian weapons: MP

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran sees no political obstacles for new supplies of Russian weapons, Chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Alaeddin Boroujerdi told the TASS news agency. "We have been maintaining military cooperation for many years," Boroujerdi said, pointing out that Tehran had purchased S-300 missile systems from Russia.

"It [the supply of S-300 systems] was indeed a key point of our cooperation. The military should make decisions concerning future weapons supplies. From the political standpoint, there are no obstacles," he said when asked if Tehran was mulling the possibility of purchasing more weapons from Russia.



Leader's representative calls for relations with Russian Muslim

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Qazi Askar, the Leader's representative in Hajj affairs, on Monday called for expansion of relations with Russia's Muslim community through Hajj rituals.

Islam is the second largest religion in Russia, with more than nine million Muslims.

Qazi Askar also warned that terrorism threatens both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim countries, urging efforts to counter terrorism, IRNA reported.

He also praised Russian President Vladimir Putin as a "clever leader" who played an important role in the fight against terrorism in Iraq and Syria.



Parliament to target lack of economic transparency

POLITICS TEHRAN — Under a plan circulated in the Majlis, public institutions and organizations which lack transparency will be fined, a lawmaker has said, ISNA reported.

Farid Mousavi said 40 parliamentarians have so far supported the motion which tries to boost economic transparency.

He said lack of transparency is an obstacle for achieving economic prosperity.

Regulating the financial affairs of public organizations and institutions plays an important role in boosting the transparency of the country's economy, the lawmaker added.



Turkey to follow up on border attack

POLITICS TEHRAN — Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu has expressed sympathy with his Iranian counterpart Javad Zarif over a recent attack on Iranian border guards that killed two troops in the northwestern Maku region.

The Turkish minister said Turkey will follow up on the case and the result will be communicated to the Iranian authorities, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Wednesday.

The attack happened near the town of Maku in Iran's West Azerbaijan province.

Move on Quds is sign of despair: Leader

Palestine will eventually be freed from occupation, Ayatollah Khamenei says

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Leader of the Islamic Revolution has said a new decision to designate Quds as the capital of the Zionist regime of Israel is a sign of the enemy's "incompetence and despair".

Speaking on Wednesday to state officials, ambassadors of Muslim countries and participants at the 31st International Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said, "Palestine today tops the political issues facing the Islamic Ummah and everyone is duty-bound to make endeavors towards its freedom and salvage."

The Muslim world will stand against the U.S. plot to declare Quds as Israel's capital, he said, stressing that Palestine will eventually be freed from occupation.

"The Muslim world would undoubtedly stand against this conspiracy and the Zionists will be dealt a heavy blow with this move and dear Palestine will at last be liberated without doubt," he added.

Elsewhere in his comments, Ayatollah Khamenei described the U.S., the Zionist regime and the reactionary elements as well as those tied to big powers as



"today's Pharaohs," noting that they are trying to sow divisions and pit Muslim nations against each other.

"Some American politicians have wittingly or unwittingly acknowledged that a war should start in the Western Asia region in order to provide the Zionist

regime with a margin of safety," the Leader noted.

The Leader also said resistance is the key to counter Takfiris, who are the proxies of the U.S. and Zionists.

The enemies' ultimate goal in creating Takfiri groups was to spark a war between the Shia and Sunni Muslims.

Iranian, Russian lawmakers discuss bilateral, regional issues

POLITICS TEHRAN — At a joint meeting of foreign policy committees of the Iranian Majlis and the Russian State Duma in Moscow on Tuesday, Iranian and Russian lawmakers discussed parliamentary cooperation, economic ties, war on terror in Syria, and the July 2015 nuclear agreement.

Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani and some members of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee represented the Iranian side.

In reference to the conflict in Yemen, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said, "It is the third year of the war and 10,000 people have been killed."

According to Al-Masdar news, Boroujerdi said, "About 800,000 people are suffering from cholera in Yemen. The



reason for all these disasters is Saudi Arabia and its coalition."

He added, "The developments in Yemen are not related to Iran. The death of the former president (Ali Abdullah Saleh) has nothing to deal with Iran. It's all about Saudi Arabia."

The senior MP also said that Iran would "help and support" Syria, and not abandon the country "during the post-war reconstruction."

Tillerson's accusations are 'unfounded', Iran says

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Wednesday that accusations levelled by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson against Iran are "unfounded" and "false".

"Repeating unfounded and false accusations will not help the U.S. make up for its strategic mistakes about Iran and the region in the past decades, and levelling accusations against other countries will not heal deep and old wounds inflicted by the U.S. aggressive policies and excessive demands in the region," Qassemi said.

Qassemi's remarks came as the U.S. secretary of state

accused Iran of destabilizing the region after a meeting with European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini in Brussels on Tuesday.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman called on Tillerson to "get familiarized with the realities in the region and its history and also the U.S. policies and their consequences".

Tillerson criticized Iran's support for Syria in its fight against terrorists and Tehran's support for the Hezbollah resistance movement which is the only force which humiliated Israel in its 2006 war on Lebanon.

Iran emerged as one of the strongest forces against ter-

Admission of Saudi Arabia's ties with Israel is painful: Rouhani

POLITICS TEHRAN — In an indirect reference by Saudi Arabia which has tacitly admitted it has ties with Israel, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said on Tuesday that an acknowledgement by "certain regional countries" for having ties with Israel is "painful".

Saudi Arabia and Israel have no formal diplomatic relations but there have long been rumors and reports of the two sides secretly working together.

Telegraph reported on November 20 that Yuval Steinitz, Israel's energy minister, confirmed there had been contact between Israel and Saudi Arabia but said that Riyadh was eager to keep the cooperation a secret.

"The bitter part of recent developments is some regional countries' boldness in cooperating with the Zionist regime of Israel," he said during



a speech at the opening ceremony of 31st International Islamic Unity Conference.

"In the past, some of these countries used to deny covert talks and cooperation with the enemies of the region, and ties with Israel were so evil and detestable that no head of state could consider Israel a friend of the region and the 'axis of resistance' enemy," he said.

He noted that animosity towards the axis of resistance is a plot that will be foiled.

Mogherini: Nuclear deal is a key strategic priority for EU

POLITICS TEHRAN — In discussions with U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in Brussels on Tuesday EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini called on Washington to uphold the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran.

"The Iran nuclear deal is a key strategic priority for European security but also for regional and global security," Mogherini told reporters after the meeting, Bloomberg reported.

She emphasized that the nuclear agreement, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), only

dealt with nuclear issues.

"Dismantling an agreement on nuclear issues that is working — as the International Energy Agency has certified nine times — would not put us in a better position to discuss all the rest on the country," she added.

Tillerson said it was important to "hold Iran fully compliant [with the terms of the nuclear deal] but to recognize [that the Iranians] are carrying out destabilizing actions throughout the region."

Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security

Coup plot in Yemen nipped in the bud, IRGC says

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's Revolution Guards Corps Commander Mohammad, Ali Jafari, said on Tuesday that a coup plot against the Houthis in Yemen was nipped in the bud.

Jafari's comments came a day after Yemen's former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, was killed while escaping from the capital, Sana'a, to Ma'arib Province. His death came days after he broke alliance with the Houthis and said he wanted to open a new chapter in relations with Saudi Arabia. That had angered the Houthis as Saudis have bombed their country for over two years.

"Unfortunately, the traitorous Saudis have been involved in conflict with other Muslim countries in the region and seek to undermine the Islamic countries' security and create division which are backed by the U.S. and Israel," the IRGC



chief remarked.

Jafari noted that the people in regional countries have learned lessons from the Islamic Revolution and refuse to bow to blackmailing.

Speaking after the death of Saleh, leader of Yemen's Ansarullah movement, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, said that the movement had managed to foil a major threat to the country's security by defeating the plot hatched by Saleh and his forces, Press TV reported.

Council — the U.S., France, Britain, Russia and China — plus Germany and the European Union signed the JCPOA on July 14, 2015. The deal went into effect on January 16, 2016.

The U.S. government has occasionally accused Iran of not being committed to the nuclear accord. Last month, U.S. President Donald Trump stated that Tehran was not upholding "the spirit" of the JCPOA.

However, since the pact went into force, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has repeatedly verified Iran's compliance with the deal.

■ 'Quds belongs to Islam'

Earlier the day, Rouhani also addressed the issue of Palestine as he spoke during a meeting of officials with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon Him).

Rouhani stressed during the speech that "Quds belongs to Islam, Muslims and the Palestinians, and there is no room for new adventurism by global arrogance."

He also emphasized that Muslims, including Palestinians, should stand up against the conspiracy to declare Quds as the Israeli "capital," saying Muslim states and the OIC have a great responsibility in that regard.

Trump’s al-Quds move: A fireball

Amid international warnings, Trump forges ahead on al-Quds-as capital

1 → In a separate statement, Hamas called for Palestinians to “make Friday a day of rage against the occupation, rejecting moving the American embassy to Jerusalem and recognizing it as the capital of the Zionist entity.” It called on young people in the West Bank to rise up and “respond to the American decision that targets our Jerusalem in every possible way.”

■ Palestinians call days of rage over U.S. al-Quds plan

The developments follow as protests have broken out in the Gaza Strip in response to Trump’s expected decision to recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel’s capital, as Palestinian leaders called for three days of rage against the move.

Hundreds of Palestinians took to the streets in Gaza City on Wednesday, carrying banners denouncing Trump, hours ahead of his impending declaration that would also see the U.S. embassy move from Tel Aviv to al-Quds.

The declaration, which is expected at 18:00 GMT on Wednesday, comes amid global condemnation of the decision.

Elsewhere, in Lebanon’s capital, Beirut, hundreds of demonstrators gathered in the Palestinian refugee camp Bourj el-Barajneh to protest against Trump.

Jerusalem remains at the core of the perennial Israel-Palestine conflict as Palestinians want Israeli-occupied East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state.

■ Trump’s pictures set ablaze

People, meanwhile, rallied in the city of Bethlehem (Beit Lahm) in the south of the Israeli occupied West Bank to protest the prospect, setting fire to pictures of Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Abbas has also warned Trump of the “dangerous consequences of such a decision.”

■ Israel alerts forces

Meanwhile, Netanyahu said Israeli forces had been placed on alert for a potential escalation of the already-tense situation in the Palestinian territories.

Hundreds of Israeli settlers reportedly traveled to the city of Nablus in the northern West Bank to visit Joseph’s Tomb on Wednesday. Violent confrontations were also reported around the site between Palestinian youths and the Israeli forces, who fired sound bombs and teargas canisters at the protesters.

Separately, Palestinian al-Aqsa television network said dozens of Israeli forces had stormed the village of Yabod in the city of Jenin in the northern West Bank, raiding houses and beating residents.

Palestinian Shehab News Agency cited American media outlets as reporting that the U.S. had deployed Marines to its embassies in the region to avoid incidents following the potential announcement.

■ Chorus of international outcry

Various world leaders have also raised concern about the controversial American plan.

■ The United Nations

Most recently, the United Nations (UN) envoy for the Middle East negotiation process said on Wednesday that al-Quds’ future status had to be negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians and warned of the repercussions of any action over the city.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has “consistently warned against any unilateral action that would have the potential to undermine the two-state solution”, his spokesman, Stephane Dujarric, told reporters in New York.

“The [UN] secretary general has spoken many times on this issue... and he has said that we all have to be very careful with the actions we take because of the repercussions of these actions,” Nickolay Mladenov also told a conference. “The future of Jerusalem is something that needs to be negotiated with Israel, with the Palestinians, sitting side by side directly in negotiations.”

■ The EU

The European Union warned of the “serious repercussions” of the prospect.

Federica Mogherini, the European Union’s top diplomat, said “any action that would undermine” peace efforts to create two separate states for the Israelis and the Palestinians “must absolutely be avoided.”

■ Arab League

Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul-Gheit warned the United States not to take any measures that would change al-Quds current legal and political status.

Aboul-Gheit spoke on Tuesday during a meeting in Cairo of Arab League representatives gathered to discuss Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. He said the possible U.S. decision is be a “dangerous measure that would have repercussions” across the entire Mideast region.

He also urged the Trump administration to reconsider the issue.

■ Jordan and the Palestinians request Arab League meeting

The regional Arab League grouping said Jordan and the Palestinians had requested an emergency meeting of the body’s foreign ministers to discuss the U.S. scheme.

The meeting is likely to be convened on Saturday, a diplomatic source told AFP.



“President Abbas warned of the dangerous consequences such a decision would have to the peace process and to the peace, security and stability of the region and of the world,” Nabil Abu Rudeina, the Palestinian president’s spokesperson, said in a statement after Trump’s call.

Echoing Abbas’ comments, Jordan’s King Abdullah II told Trump that such a decision would have “dangerous repercussions on the stability and security of the region”, according to a statement released by the palace.

The king also warned the U.S. president of the risks of any decision that ran counter to a final settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the creation of an independent Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem.

“Jerusalem is the key to achieving peace and stability in the region and the world,” the statement said, adding that an embassy move would inflame Muslim and Christian feelings.

King Abdullah also called Abbas and said they had to both work together to “confront the consequences of this decision”.

Jordan had also said earlier that it planned to convene an emergency meeting of the OIC on how to face the “dangerous” consequences of Trump’s decision.

The state of Jordan has been the custodian of all Muslim and Christian sites in al-Quds (Jerusalem) since 1994.

■ **Palestinian resistance groups**
Resistance groups in Gaza called on the Palestinian Liberation Organization to withdraw its recognition of Israel in response to Trump’s expected move.

“At a time when the city of Jerusalem is subjected to systematic Judaization and our people are exposed to the suffering from repression, displacement and exile comes the American decision to declare the city of Jerusalem as the capital of [Israel] in violation of all international conventions and norms,” the factions said in a statement.

■ Iran

Iranian Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the U.S. move was “because of their incompetence and failure”.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has also warned the U.S. against relocating its Israel embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds (Jerusalem), saying the “illegal” move would further destabilize Palestine and the region.

During a phone conversation with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday, Rouhani called on Islamic states to join hands in opposing the “dangerous” move by the administration of Trump.

■ Turkey

In the harshest reaction so far, Turkey threatened to cut ties with Israel if the U.S. carried out the recognition.

Later, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called a summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul on December 13 to discuss the U.S. plan.

Erdogan called for the meeting “in order to display joint action among Islamic countries,” presidential Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin told reporters in the Turkish capital. “Jerusalem is a red line for Muslims,” said Erdogan. “We implore the U.S. once again: You cannot take this step.”

Ankara currently holds the chairmanship of the OIC.

■ Russia

The Kremlin said Russia was concerned that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian authorities could be aggravated further by the embassy plan.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov added however that “we would not discuss decisions

that have not been taken yet.”

■ China

China warned that Trump’s plan could fuel tensions in the region.

“We are concerned about the possible escalation of tensions,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang told a regular news briefing. “All relevant parties should bear regional peace and tranquility in mind, be cautious in words and deeds, avoid impacting the foundation for the settlement of the issue of Palestine, and avoid causing new confrontation in the region.”

■ Britain

Hours ahead of Trump’s expected announcement, British Prime Minister Theresa May said she intended to speak to the U.S. president about the status of al-Quds (Jerusalem), adding that the fate of the city should be determined through negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

“Jerusalem should ultimately form a shared capital between the Israeli and Palestinian states,” said May.

May told parliament on Wednesday she planned to “speak to President Trump about this matter,” but she declined to criticize his plan.

British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said he was concerned about reports that Trump would recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel’s “capital.”

“Let’s wait and see what the president says exactly. But, you know, we view the reports that we have heard with concern because we think that Jerusalem obviously should be part of the final settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians,” he told reporters in Brussels.

■ The U.S.

Key national security advisers — including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis — have urged caution, according to the officials, who said Trump has been receptive to some of their concerns.

However, some U.S. officials said that Trump “remains committed to achieving a lasting peace agreement between the Israelis and Palestinians and is optimistic that peace can be achieved”.

One official said that Trump’s decision “doesn’t change the status quo with respect to the holy sites and other sensitive issues”.

■ Germany

Germany’s foreign minister warned that any U.S. move toward such recognition would be dangerous and could deepen the Middle East conflict.

Sigmar Gabriel said such a move “does not calm a conflict, rather it fuels it even more” and “would be a very dangerous development.”

Gabriel told reporters at NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) headquarters in Brussels that, “It’s in everyone’s interest that this does not happen.”

■ France

French President Emmanuel Macron also said he was concerned about the potential relocation during a phone call with Trump.

■ The Pope

Pope Francis called for al-Quds’ “status quo” to be respected.

The pontiff expressed his hope for “peace and prosperity” for the Palestinian people during a scheduled meeting with a Palestinian delegation of religious and intellectual leaders.

■ Egypt

In a statement, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi also cautioned Trump against “taking measures that would undermine the chances of peace in the Middle East”.

“The Egyptian president affirmed the Egyptian position on preserving the legal

status of Jerusalem within the framework of international references and relevant UN resolutions,” the statement said.

■ Saudi regime Salman

Following a separate phone conversation with Trump, the House of Saud regime King Salman also told the U.S. president “that any American announcement regarding the situation of Jerusalem prior to reaching a permanent settlement will harm peace talks and increase tensions in the area”.

A statement by state-run news agency SPA quoted the king as saying that the kingdom supported the Palestinian people and their historic rights and asserted that “such a dangerous step is likely to inflame the passions of Muslims around the world due to the great status of Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa mosque”.

■ Syria

The Syrian foreign ministry said: “[The move] is the culmination of the crime of usurping Palestine and displacing the Palestinian people.”

■ Trump’s al-Quds move to please friends

Moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds (Jerusalem), and recognizing the holy city as Israel’s capital, was a promise Trump made during his election campaign last year.

Wednesday’s announcement will thrill key financial donors like Las Vegas casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, who reportedly gave \$25m to groups backing Trump ahead of the 2016 election. In April, the Politico news website reported that Sheldon had expressed anger at Trump over his failure to fulfill the al-Quds (Jerusalem) pledge.

The shift is likely to boost Trump’s popularity with his core, right-wing evangelical base.

The measure has broad support among American lawmakers too. The al-Quds (Jerusalem) Embassy Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1995, calls for the U.S. embassy to be moved to Jerusalem.

Trump’s predecessors, however, have repeatedly invoked an inbuilt waiver every six months, citing security concerns.

In June, Trump also delayed the relocation, while instructing his son-in-law Jared Kushner to begin an effort at restarting long-stalled peace talks between the Palestinians and Israelis.

This week, the six-month deadline passed without Trump renewing the waiver.

■ Saudi-U.S. behind the curtain deal

Meanwhile, The New York Times on Sunday reported that the U.S. and the House of Saud regime are backing a peace plan that gives Israel full-control over Jerusalem.

Citing unnamed Palestinian, Arab and European sources, the newspaper said Saudi regime Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), who is very close to Kushner, presented the plan to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in November.

Both the U.S. and the Saudi regime denied the report.

■ Al-Quds

Al-Quds (Jerusalem) includes the holiest ground in Judaism. But it’s also home to Islam’s third-holiest shrine and major Christian sites, and forms the combustible center of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Any perceived harm to Muslim claims to the city has triggered volatile protests in the past, both in the Holy Land and across the Muslim world.

After occupying the city’s eastern part in the 1967 War, Israel annexed the territory, and proclaimed it as its “eternal, undivided capital.” The Palestinians, however, see East al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of their future state.

Mueller appears to be looking deep into Trump’s finances

House committee to question Donald Trump Jr. on Russian contacts

The United States Special counsel Robert Mueller has reportedly subpoenaed Deutsche Bank for financial information on President Donald Trump and his associates as part of the investigation into potential collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia during the 2016 presidential election.

Multiple news outlets report that Germany’s largest bank received a request from Mueller’s team several weeks ago for data on money and financial transactions made by Trump and his associates.

This German bank has dealt with Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner before.

It’s still unclear which specific individuals Mueller requested information on and whether the president himself was one of them. One of Trump’s personal lawyers, Jay Sekulow, disputes the reports. “We have confirmed that the news reports that the Special Counsel had subpoenaed financial records relating to the President are false,” he said in a statement. “No subpoena has been issued or received. We have confirmed this with the bank and other sources.”

Trump’s family has relied Deutsche Bank for past business loans: The real estate company owned by Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law and top White House adviser, finalized a \$285 million loan from Deutsche Bank one month before election day as part of a refinancing package for one of Kushner’s company’s properties in Times Square.

The bank has also been linked to criminal activity. In January 2017, Deutsche Bank received \$630 million in penalties because it was involved in a \$10 billion Russian money-laundering scheme that involved the bank’s Moscow, New York, and London branches, CNN reports.

So far, four members of Trump’s inner circle have been charged in connection to the Mueller probe: former campaign chair Paul Manafort and his business associate Rick Gates, campaign foreign policy adviser George Papadopoulos, and former National Security Advisor Mike Flynn. Only Papadopoulos and Flynn have pleaded guilty and both are now working with investigators.

Analysts are speculating that Kushner may be Mueller’s next big target, which may help explain why the special counsel’s office is asking for this information. But this isn’t the first time Mueller’s team has examined financial records as part of its probe, and they retain campaign finance experts on staff.

Deutsche Bank declined to comment on the Reuters report when Vox called to confirm the story, but did tell NBC News that “Deutsche Bank takes its legal obligations seriously and remains committed to cooperating with authorized investigations into this matter.”

■ House committee to question Donald Trump Jr. on Russian contacts

Meantime, lawmakers probing potential collusion between Russia and the Trump presidential campaign will question the president’s son about his direct contacts with Kremlin-connected officials on Wednesday, in the first of two expected interviews before congressional intelligence committees.

Donald Trump Jr.’s appearance before members of the House Intelligence Committee follows a September meeting with the Senate Judiciary Committee in which he said he agreed to meet in June 2016 with a Russian lawyer at Trump Tower in hopes of obtaining information about Hillary Clinton’s “fitness, character or qualifications,” though he denied ever colluding with the Russian government in the campaign.

NBC News reported on Tuesday that the lawyer, Natalia Veselnitskaya, told the Senate Judiciary Committee that Trump Jr. asked for evidence of illegal donations to the Clinton Foundation, information she said she did not have. Trump seemed to lose interest in the conversation at that point, she told the panel in a 51-page statement in which she also denied working for the Russian government.

Trump Jr. will also likely face questions about a May 2016 meeting with another Russian with Kremlin ties, Alexander Torshin, at private dinner during a National Rifle Association convention in Kentucky. Trump Jr.’s lawyer has confirmed that the two spoke but characterized the encounter as brief small talk.

Rep. Michael Conaway, R-Texas, the lead Republican in the House Intelligence Committee’s Russia probe, told NBC on Tuesday that he expected lawmakers will ask “all the questions that are appropriate” about the Trump Tower and Torshin meetings.

The Senate Intelligence Committee is also expected to interview Trump Jr. soon, though a date has not been identified yet.

Conaway said he did not see the panel shifting its focus one week after former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn agreed to cooperate with special counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation of potential Russian collusion, saying the scope of their inquiry did not include Trump officials’ conduct during the transition period or once arriving at the White House.

The committee has, though, been provided with additional potential leads to pursue about the nexus between Trump and Russian entities. During a committee interview with the firm behind a 35-page dossier on then-candidate Trump last month, a Fusion GPS official not only stood by its claims but provided additional leads about Russian money flowing to Trump real estate projects, particularly those overseas, according to two sources present for the interview.

Trump Jr. continues to oversee the family’s real estate business.

In response to questions from Senate investigators, Veselnitskaya also acknowledged that she worked with Glenn Simpson, a former Wall Street Journal reporter and co-founder of Fusion GPS, in a separate investigation of hedge fund investor Bill Browder, the accountant for Sergei Magnitsky, whose death spurred Congress to pass a law restricting Russians’ access to the United States banking system.

Months after that closed-door meeting with the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., on Tuesday asked Chairman Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, to subpoena Trump Jr. for public testimony, saying he has failed to fully comply with the panel’s subsequent document requests. Blumenthal, in a letter to Grassley, points to new disclosures since the committee’s previous interview including his exchange of messages with WikiLeaks that had not been provided to the committee but were in the scope of its requests.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	91092.2
IFX	10.1326

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	41,950 rials
EUR	51,150 rials
GBP	58,000 rials
AED	11,500 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$62.24/b
WTI	\$56.88/b
OPEC Basket	\$61.46/b
Gold	\$ 1,266.15/oz
Silver	\$16.10/oz
Platinum	\$909.50/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

ICCIMA delegation to embark for Netherlands in late Jan. 2018

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — A delegation from Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) will visit the Netherlands from January 28 to February 1, 2018, the portal of ICCIMA reported.

The delegation, to be headed by ICCIMA Chairman Gholam-Hossein Shafeie, includes Iranian entrepreneurs active in agriculture, green energies, irrigation and related industries, healthcare, logistics, transportation, oil, gas, and petrochemicals.

The visit will be paid with cooperation of Iran-Netherlands Joint Chamber of Commerce, the report said.

Japan to help finance China’s Belt and Road projects

The Japanese government plans to cooperate with China on its Belt and Road initiative by financially supporting private-sector partnerships, as Tokyo seeks to improve bilateral ties with its Asian neighbour.



Cooperation will centre on the environmental sector, industrial modernization and logistics, according to guidelines compiled by the government, the Japanese business daily said.

Assistance will include loans through government-backed financial institutions to promote cooperation among private Japanese and Chinese firms working on projects in third-party countries, it said.

Chinese President Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road initiative is an extensive infrastructure plan that will link Asia with the Middle East and Europe, although critics say it is more about spreading Chinese influence.

Japan has taken a cautious stance but has recently shown signs of warming to the initiative.

Kyodo News quoted Prime Minister Shinzo Abe as telling a gathering of Japanese and Chinese business executives this week that he believed “Japan will be able to cooperate well with China.” Abe met Xi on the sidelines of an Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit last month and said the two had made a “fresh start” to relations between the two nations, which have been plagued by a long-running territorial dispute over a cluster of East China Sea islets.

The Japanese premier has proposed visiting China at an appropriate time, which would then be followed by a visit by Xi to Japan.

(Source: Nikkei)

Transit of goods via Iran rises 21% in 8 months

1 → In the said time span, Shahid Rajaee Port in the south of country, being a gateway for transit of over 2.19 million tons of goods i.e. 36.2 percent of the total transited goods, was the crowded border of Iran, Nafisi announced.



According to him, the largest number of trucks carrying the transited goods via Iran in this period came from Iraq heading to the United Arab Emirates.

India to export container cargo to Russia via Iran from Jan.

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — India will start export of container cargo to Russia via Iran from January 2018, S. Kumar, the commissioner of Indian Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC), announced.

The official said this shipment will be done as India moves forward to operationalize international corridor INSTC, India Today reported.

The move, he said, would cut down cargo transport time by half to nearly 17 days, from the earlier 35 days, using just the sea route.

“India will shift its first export consignment via Bandar Abbas to Russia from mid-January. It will probably transit Iran, Azerbaijan and then reach Russia,” Kumar told reporters.

The Customs department has been receiving a lot of enquiries from different sectors for using this route, he said, adding that the route would help in saving money as well

as time.

“This initiative will operationalize the INSTC,” Kumar said.

International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a multi-mode network of sea, rail, and road route for moving freight among India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia. The proposed 7,200-km long corridor is expected to increase trade connectivity among major cities of Mumbai, Moscow, Tehran, Baku, Bandar Abbas, Astrakhan and Bandar Anzali.

India also plans to send seven shipments of wheat to Afghanistan through Iran’s south-eastern Chabahar Port by the end of January, Reuters has previously reported.

India launched a trade route to Afghanistan via Iran through shipping its first consignment of wheat to Afghanistan on October 29, bypassing longtime rival Pakistan.



Free trade agreement draft finalized between Iran, Pakistan

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran and Pakistan finalized the draft of a much-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA), official sources told Business Recorder.

As reported, this agreement was reached during the third meeting of the Trade Negotiation Committee (TNC) on Pakistan-Iran Free Trade Area Agreement (PIFTA) held on November 21-22, 2017 in Tehran.

The sources said that text of FTA was finalized after two days negotiations between the officials and technical experts. Both par-



ties reviewed the status of the negotiations held so far and the progress made in order to proceed further on all decisions taken earlier by the TNC particularly during the second TNC meeting in Islamabad. Various ways and means were discussed to expedite the issues at hand.

Both parties reviewed the recent trade statistics of bilateral trade and reaffirmed the necessity of formal exchange of trade statistics by their customs authorities regularly in the format which has already been determined.

Iraq to import more natural gas from Iran

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Iraq will increase its import of Iranian natural gas which started earlier this year.

Iraqi government said in a statement on Tuesday that it has approved a deal to import natural gas from Iran to the eastern border province of Diyala, Reuters reported.

Iran has exported 1.2 billion cubic meters of gas to Iraq since late June, Shana reported quoting the managing director for the Iranian Gas Transmission Company, Saeed Tavakoli, as saying on November 20.

According to Tavakoli, Iran has agreed to export up to 25 million cubic meters of gas to Baghdad on a daily basis and exports of the same amount of gas to Basra will also start as soon as Iraq is ready.



Iran signed two contracts in June to export gas, one for the Iraqi capital Baghdad and the other for southern Iraqi city of Basra.

The two countries initially signed a deal in 2013 for Iran to supply Iraqi power stations, but officials in the past blamed poor security in Iraq for hampering implementation.

Australian economy gets investment lift, but consumers struggle

Australia’s economy expanded at the fastest annual pace in over a year last quarter thanks to a long-awaited jump in business investment, though marked weakness in household spending cast a cloud over the outlook for growth.

Wednesday’s data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 0.6 percent in the third quarter, from the previous quarter when it rose 0.9 percent.

Growth for the year sprang ahead to 2.8

percent, from 1.9 percent, in part because a rare contraction suffered in the third quarter of last year dropped out of the calculation.

The result just missed market forecasts of growth of 0.7 percent for the quarter and nudged the local dollar down a quarter of a cent to \$0.7580.

The result would be no surprise to the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) which only Tuesday kept interest rates steady at 1.5 percent in anticipation of faster growth and a gradual revival in inflation.

Iran-Spain economic co-op opportunities forum held

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran-Spain economic cooperation forum was held at the place of Spanish Chamber of Commerce, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

The forum was held simultaneous with the 1st Iran-Spain Economic Committee meeting and with participation of 200 economic officials and entrepreneurs.

During the forum, Mojtaba Khosrotaj, head of Iran’s Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), called on Spanish companies to broaden their economic ties with Iranians, in particular in making investments in infrastructure projects and transfer of technological know-how.

Referring to Iran’s new applied policies for easing international ties and supporting



foreign investments, he suggested that to become successful in Iran’s competitive market, Spanish companies are better to focus on modern ways of transferring knowledge to Iran as well as making joint investments and joint products with their Iranian counterparts to meet the demands of secondary markets.

by saving less, with the savings ratio down at a lowly 3.2 percent.

“The big surprise was consumer spending - looks horrible,” said Shane Oliver, chief economist at AMP Capital.

“The clear message from this is that constrained consumer remains a big source of uncertainty for growth in Australia.”

The lack of demand meant inflation was also a no-show, with a key measure of domestic prices flat in the quarter.

(Source: cnbc)

Bitcoin climbs to \$12,000 as futures move closer to reality

Bitcoin surpassed \$12,000 for the first time amid speculation that the widespread use of futures will help lead to digital currencies being viewed as a legitimate asset class for mainstream investors.

The largest cryptocurrency by market value has soared from less than \$1,000 at the start of the year as optimism

climbs for the distributed ledger technology known as blockchain that is at the heart of bitcoin. The price surge has been accompanied by a growing chorus of warnings that the speculative frenzy is an asset bubble poised to burst.

Choe Global Markets Inc. has said it will start trading bitcoin futures on Dec. 10, while CME Group Inc.’s con-

tracts are set to debut on Dec. 18. Nasdaq Inc. is planning to offer futures in 2018, according to a person familiar with the matter. Cantor Fitzgerald LP’s Cantor Exchange is creating a bitcoin derivative, and startup LedgerX already offers options.

(Source: Bloomberg)

It looks like another rough year for the dollar in 2018

A hawkish Federal Reserve, an economy firing on all cylinders, the tentative revival of the “Trump Trade” -- all that won’t be enough to boost the dollar next year, according to a chorus of Wall Street strategists.

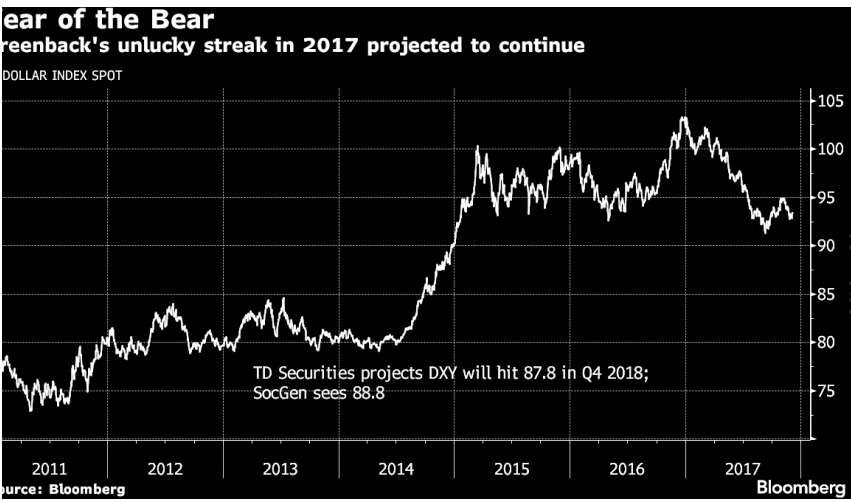
The dollar is heading for its worst year in more than a decade, and bearish projections are still piling up. Analysts say the steady unraveling of the greenback’s post-crisis bull run will be confirmed next year as global growth gathers pace and central banks converge on a more hawkish tone.

“Beware of sleeping volcanoes and seriously undervalued currencies,” Kit Juckes, global fixed-income strategist at Societe Generale SA, wrote in a report Tuesday. With global “growth becoming more balanced and more synchronized, the dollar looks expensive.”

Traditional valuation models are set to stage a tentative recovery as central banks become more tolerant of currency appreciation, while yields in overseas markets rise, according to analysts.

“We think 2017 was a watershed year for the dollar,” said Ned Rumpeltn, currency strategist at TD Securities Inc. “As long as global growth maintains a steady pace, reflationary tailwinds persist, and U.S. inflation does not unexpectedly -- and uniquely -- surge, the global macro landscape should favor a steady depreciation of the dollar.”

Case in point: The dollar’s underwhelming



reaction to legislative progress on U.S. tax reform, which was seen as the linchpin for reflation after Trump was elected.

For greenback bears, the reasoning is simple. The tax plan is unlikely to spark a sudden surge of repatriation, while stronger global growth spurs higher yields overseas and the euro-zone recovery gains more traction.

“Bringing the money back will merely involve an ‘accounting’ shift rather than a withdrawal of offshore dollar liquidity,” George Saravelos, head of foreign-exchange research

at Deutsche Bank AG, wrote in a note.

While the first half of next year may deliver more of the same, the dollar will likely be under even more pressure in the second half of next year as interest-rate markets price in less monetary stimulus from the European Central Bank, analysts said.

The Federal Reserve would likely need to deliver a hawkish shock accompanied by much higher real yields to give dollar bulls hope.

While the U.S. Dollar Index has tumbled 8.6 percent this year, it remains 25 percent

above its 2011 low, and, in real terms, the exchange rate is 5 percent above its 20-year average, according to Societe Generale.

What’s the line in the sand to watch for? The yield on 10-year Treasury Inflation-Protected Securities doubling to 1 percent, according to Juckes. Even a one percentage-point increase in the federal funds rate is unlikely to juice the U.S. currency given the improving foreign-exchange fundamentals overseas, he said.

Strategists at TD Securities are more bearish, casting the dollar as the most overvalued currency in the Group of 10 nations. Amid synchronized global output, only a financial shock is likely to rally the greenback, according to TD Securities.

The bank recommends long positions in an equal-weighted basket of the euro, Swedish krona and New Zealand dollar versus the U.S. currency and the Swiss franc.

Societe Generale projects the benchmark U.S. dollar index will drop 4.5 percent by the end of 2018, and is bullish the euro, Australian dollar, the Norwegian krone and a slew of eastern European currencies against the dollar.

“The main theme for major currencies in 2018 will be how long the dollar can continue to trade at historically strong levels following its long bull run since 2011,” Mansoor Mohi-uddin, head of currency strategy at NatWest Markets, wrote in a note last month.

(Source: Bloomberg)

An Interview with CII Chief:

Insurance Industry, a Dynamic, Active and Powerful Industry in Country



بیمه مرکزی جمهوری اسلامی ایران
Central Insurance of Iran (CII)

Insurance industry is a dynamic and powerful industry in the country that is able to materialize most economic objectives of the country in the best form possible.

To learn more about the details, our correspondent has conducted an interview with Abdol-Naser Hemmati Chief Executive of Central Insurance of Iran (CII) which comes as follows:

Let's review the interview in questions and answers.

■ After the 11th government dubbed "Hope and Prudence" assumed power, events happened in international arena especially after a landmark nuclear deal inked between Iran and P5+1 (the five permanent members of UN Security Council plus Germany) in Austrian capital Vienna in mid-July 2015. In general, Iran's insurance industry resumed its activity in the world markets. It should be kept in mind that insurance industry had to circumvent rules as a result of sanctions imposed against the country. As chief executive of Central Insurance of Iran (CII), to what extent do you evaluate the internationalization process in favor of insurance industry? What is the outlook of the government in this respect?

A: In response to your question, I should say that strong and firm steps cannot be taken for the development of the country without existence of developed and comprehensive financial markets. Of total \$3,000 billion risk hidden in specific investment activities of the country, \$1,000 billion of which has been put under the insurance coverage. Despite high capacities of the insurance industry, Demand for covering insurance stands at 30 percent of risks. For example, it can be referred to the 13 percent share of number of insurance policy for car body, 11 percent of fire insurance of residential units and 14 percent of life insurance.

Currently, share of MENA (Middle East and North Africa) from life insurance stands at 25 percent, the rate of which stands at 60 percent in the world. Fortunately, the situation of life insurance in our country has witnessed a considerable 70 percent growth due to special attention of people to their future especially in the past two years.

Given the above issue, Iran's insurance market is an untapped and virgin market for foreign investors. For this purpose, we have negotiated with world's top and leading insurance firms, most of them have expressed their readiness to have a strong presence in Iran's lucrative insurance market.

■ Would you mind explaining on the implementation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and its role in facilitation of this international relations in insurance field?

A: I should say that giant steps were taken in insurance industry of the country especially after the implementation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the official title of nuclear deal. Given the above issue, CII managed to ink insurance deals with most prestigious European firms. In this regard, feasibility studies for two demands from Italian and German insurance firms for purchasing some part of stocks of insurance companies are underway. Hence, talks are underway in this respect and the government has determined to delegate its share at two insurance companies i.e. ASIA Insurance Company and DANA Insurance



Company. In general, suitable ways have been provided for foreign investment.

■ In recent months, we are witnessing some sabotaging and stonewalling by the U.S. government. Can these provocations affect insurance contracts inked in international arena negatively?

A: Under the contracts inked with European companies, the only thing that can affect negatively on the insurance contracts is the sanctions imposed by EU and UN against Iran, otherwise, any other events cannot affect our contract. Insurance is an international affairs but its vast distribution is much more important. When you insure a large project, you should be able to distribute its relevant risk across the world.

After a landmark nuclear deal, we managed to negotiate with most prestigious insurance companies in the world interactively. In sanctions period, we managed to cover insurance risks appropriately but insurance risk remains in place. Recently, we have managed to reach agreement with large insurance companies in the field of reinsurance. As mentioned in above, giant steps have been taken in the country in the field of reinsurance especially after landmark nuclear deal inked with six world's major powers.

Of course, U.S. has always created serious problems in this respect in a way that some prestigious insurance companies in the world do not want to offer RATING to Iranian insurance companies.

■ You have been named as forerunner of privatization system in Iranian insurance industry. The project of liberation of tariffs kicked off after the end of your first term in office and consequently, some problems happened in the competitive methods. It seems that insurance industry is yet grappling with its results. What is your opinion in this respect?

A: When I was not working in the insurance industry, insurance system was liberated and consequently, insur-

ance rates were released. I myself was against the way of release of insurance tariff. You know that market should first be developed in order to supply something to the market. One of the main tasks of the CII is this that strategy and mechanism of insurance market should first be amended, then, competition should be allowed. When this issue is not taken into consideration, unhealthy competitions will emerge. Unfortunately, some insurance companies are competing with each other in an unhealthy environment. With regard to the unhealthy competitions, I should say that Central Insurance of Iran (CII) managed to prevent unhealthy competition appeared in the field of third-party insurance.

Generally speaking, CII took giant steps in the field of correcting and amending wrong policies taken in insurance industry.

■ Activists of insurance industry believe that your excellent position on the company is an undeniable principle which is mostly focused on the issue of supervision? Would you mind explaining more on this?

A: In response to your question, I should say that the issue of supervision and monitoring is the main task of Central Insurance of Iran which is repeatedly emphasized in its articles of association. Continuation of support of CII from insurance companies remains in place as an undeniable principle. However, giant steps have been taken in the field of supervision and monitoring. For this purpose, efforts are underway to develop and implement "SANHAB" System for mechanization of internal affairs of insurance industry, the issue of which has been put atop agenda.

It is worth mentioning that financial affordability of insurance companies are available in website of the company in order to clarifying, crystallizing and boosting welfare condition of people.

■ Life insurances and wide gap of our country with the international standards have always been considered as your major concern. How do

you evaluate the future of life insurance in the country and its current situation?

A: What is certain is this that life insurances have not pleasant and favorable situation in our country but I myself predict a bright and rosy future for this discipline. Fortunately, insurance industry of the country has experienced considerable 20 percent growth in the first half of the current Iranian calendar year in 1396 (from March 21 to Sept. 22) under the unsparing efforts of insurance companies. Total insurance premium produced in the first half of the current year has stood at approx. 166,000 billion rials in a way that insurance companies managed to sell 22,000 billion rials worth of insurance policies, showing a considerable 35 percent growth as compared to a year earlier.

Currently, main mission of the Central Insurance of Iran (CII) is merely to grant license of activity to the specialized and holding insurance companies.

■ The issue of "Resistance Economy" is the major concern of supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution in a way that this issue has repeatedly been reiterated by the Leader to all government officials. To what extent do you evaluate that CII has managed to materialize objectives of resistance economy in the country?

A: In response to your question, I should say that "resistance economy" is not merely considered as an economic issue, rather, resistance economy include social and cultural layers. As mentioned in above, I myself see the insurance industry as manifestation of actual resistance economy. Hence, insurance industry has been developed appropriately under the auspices of insurance activists. We are of the opinion that insurance industry can help boost national economy.

■ In view of insurance industry activists, amending and correcting third-party insurance law is considered as major economic achievement of 11th government dubbed "Hope and Prudence". To what extent do you

evaluate that amending this law can be beneficial for both the insured and insurers?

A: It should be noted that third-party insurance has got the lion's share of portfolio of insurance industry to itself. Third-party insurance faced many problems in past years but necessary amendments were made on third-party insurance in the last Iranian calendar year in 1395 (ended March 20, 2017).

■ Since you are considered as one of the salient economic figures in the country, to what extent do you defend investment in insurance industry of the country?

A: As mentioned in the beginning, strong and firm steps cannot be taken for the development of the country without existence of comprehensive and developed financial markets. However, Iranian insurance industry is an untapped and virgin market for foreign investors.

A glance at report of general assemblies of insurance companies, it can be concluded that making investment in this field is profitable and lucrative.

■ When a deadly earthquake happened in western province of Kermanshah, Central Insurance of Iran (CII) took effective steps in order to put the families of victims of the earthquake under quality insurance packages. Would you mind explaining more on this?

A: It is natural at all responsible organization and institutions managed to meet basic requirements of quake-stricken people in the early hours of earthquake. Here, successful performance of foreign insurance companies at the time of earthquake should be taken as a role model in the country.

■ In recent years, ministers of economy have always promised that taxes on the insurance industry should be lifted or adjusted but unfortunately, this issue has not been materialized. Many activists of the insurance industry consider imposition of tax on insurance industry as "illogical and unwise". In your opinion, what effective strategies should be adopted in this regard?

A: In response to your question, I should say that insurers should be able to live up their commitments rapidly, precisely, accurately and meticulously. In this regard, Ministry of Economy, other public and private sectors, Majlis, Judiciary Branch should help improve the business environment and activities of insurance companies. Imposition of unconventional tax is not logical, so that this issue should be taken into serious consideration by responsible officials.

■ To what extent do you evaluate the key role of media in materializing objectives of insurance companies?

A: Sustainable development of economy of the country strictly hinges on the key role of media outlets. However, media can take giant strides in this field. Generally speaking, media outlets can strengthen the social asset in the country appropriately.

Fortunately, good interaction has been established between media and insurance industry especially in recent years.

The strange case of Lebanon, France, and a PM's unresignation

Saad Hariri is back. The prime minister of Lebanon, who unexpectedly resigned from his post in November under mysterious circumstances in Saudi Arabia, returned to Beirut last week, and announced on Dec. 5 that he was revoking his resignation. The announcement came following a consensus deal reached with rival political parties in the course of coalition talks. For this, he has made clear, he has one person to thank: Emmanuel Macron, the president of France.



The announcement was yet another strange moment in an eventful month for Lebanon. The saga's cast of characters alone would make for great television: The new Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, who allegedly orchestrated Hariri's resignation from Riyadh, and proceeded to arrest some 500 people on corruption charges; the Lebanese president, Michel Aoun, a Maronite Christian, who claimed that Hariri had been kidnapped by the Saudis; Hariri himself, a dual Saudi-Lebanese citizen who went to Riyadh without notifying his own advisers and has extensive business holdings in, and personal ties to, the Persian Gulf kingdom; and, finally, Macron, who convinced Mohammed bin Salman to let Hariri come to France (where he stayed in the official presidential residence for three days) and, last week, to go back to Lebanon.

Macron's decision to insert himself into this crisis surprised many. France, after all, is no longer the great power of the region, as it once was. But his motivations for doing so were rooted in a shared history, one based on mutual economic and strategic interests. Lebanon was a French protectorate from 1920 to 1944 and retains strong economic, cultural, and political ties with its former colonial power (French is Lebanon's second language, after Arabic). Lebanon hosts a French military base and 900 French soldiers under UN mandate. France is one of Lebanon's largest trading partners, and Lebanon is the biggest beneficiary of French foreign aid in the region. Lebanon is also a crucial partner in the refugee crisis and the fight against the Islamic State (ISIL). There are good reasons that Macron is deeply invested in Lebanon's stability.

For Hariri, Macron's backing gives his weakened government a lifeline. Burdened by an widening public deficit, an unprecedented influx of refugees into the country, and the Syrian civil war at its border, Lebanon's economy has worried analysts and elicited comparisons to that of Greece in 2009, at the verge of the eurozone crisis. In September, after Lebanese President Michel Aoun's visit to Paris, Macron pledged to organize two international conferences, one in support of the Lebanese army and the other for potential investors. He has also maintained France's pledge (made by his predecessor, François Hollande) of €100 million to help strengthen the Lebanese military over three years. Macron's support, in short, helps buy Hariri legitimacy, both in Lebanon and in the international arena.

■ Stabilizing force

What Macron gets out of supporting Hariri is perhaps less obvious, but crucial to understanding his policy towards the Middle East and North Africa region. Hakim El Karoui, an expert on Africa at the Paris-based Montaigne Institute, argued in a recent paper that France should reclaim its historical role as a "stabilizing force" in the Middle East, including through mediating regional conflicts, as it has in the past. "Macron has understood that," he stressed. Of Hariri's shock resignation in Saudi Arabia, Karoui said, "A few years ago, France would never have allowed this to happen."

In helping Hariri, and mediating between the Saudis, the Lebanese, Macron seems to also be taking advantage of America's seeming retreat from regional diplomacy. President Donald Trump has not yet nominated ambassadors to either Saudi Arabia or Lebanon. "A space has opened up due to America's absence," El Karoui said.

But it is unclear how he plans to square his wish to be a major player in the region with his aversion to getting involved in sectarian battles, or even how he plans on convincing the Middle East that it should welcome France's return. France's track record in the region is not particularly good, and presidents before him (most notably, Nicolas Sarkozy) have promised and failed to reform relations with the region. What makes Macron think he can do better?

As for what France plans to do in this space, Macron gave a few hints in a press conference last month. France, he said, would focus on "peace building," and avoid "interfering in any national or regional divisions, or choosing one side against the other."

Macron has taken great care to show that, on this and other issues, he is different from his predecessors, notably by emphasizing that he comes from a younger generation of politicians, untainted by previous scandals. Still, it would be difficult for him to dodge this past entirely with the emergence of a new Hariri on the French political scene.

And Macron already has a Hariri scandal of his own. When the Hariris' construction company, Saudi Oger, went bankrupt in July 2017 and fired thousands of its employees, 240 French workers were laid off and are now claiming roughly €20 million (\$23.7 million) in back pay and social security taxes. When asked about the matter in his recent interview, Hariri stated: "They will be paid as soon as we get paid [by the Saudi government]."

She said that the Élysée's diplomatic arm reached out to her this week about the case, indicating that Macron is interested in finding a solution for the workers — good timing, since Hariri now owes him a favor (or two).

Macron scored a major diplomatic win in the Middle East by engineering Hariri's return to Lebanon, but there is a cost to every victory. If he intends to fill the diplomatic space left in the region by the United States, it's likely he'll have many more opportunities to try out conflict mediation — and like the United States, will find that the big wins are rare.

(Source The Atlantic)

The insidious erosion of the Turkish-U.S. partnership



In terms of Turkish-American bilateral relations, the row over Jerusalem is just the latest example of a succession of disagreements, rows and disputes.

appointment to many influential Turks, leading some Turkish analysts to indulge in historical revisionism by reframing the relationship as one characterized by an "ambivalent" alliance.

At deeper levels, the ending of the Cold War brought Turkey's unfulfilled regional potential into sharp relief. Suddenly it dawned on Turkish strategists and analysts that the country had been so consumed by the Cold War that it had failed to develop even the semblance of a regional strategy.

Even Turkey's singular attempt at regional strategizing, namely its membership in the ill-fated Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), was ultimately subsidiary to its broader role in the Western alliance in so

far as CENTO was essentially a British-led effort aimed at containing the former Soviet Union.

It is against this historical backdrop that Turkey's re-engagement with the Middle East since the 1990s has caused tension with its American ally. Beginning with Turkey's veto of U.S. plans to open up a "northern front" as part of the invasion and occupation of Iraq in March/April 2003, Turkey has not shied away from opposing destabilizing U.S. policies.

More recently, Turkey has opposed many aspects of the U.S.' half-hearted and convoluted plans in the Syrian conflict, notably America's controversial partnership with Syrian Kurdish forces linked to the outlawed

Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

■ Pulling apart

Focusing on the future, the dynamics undermining the Turkish-U.S. alliance are in part centered on the diminishing strength and appeal of large alliances which the U.S. either leads (such as NATO) or which it relies on for broader strategic impact (such as the European Union).

For its part, Turkey is no longer pursuing EU membership in earnest, and as the emerging outcome of the Syrian conflict has demonstrated Turkey can just as easily find accommodation with Russia.

But external pressure is only part of the story. Arguably the bigger part of the equation is internal developments in Turkey, particularly since last year's failed coup and the subsequent consolidation of power by Erdogan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The mainstream Western media has identified Turkey's purported drift toward "authoritarianism" as the main reason behind the country's increasing estrangement from the EU in particular and the Western world in general.

Predictably, this myopic analysis fails to take sufficient stock of the deeper forces at play, notably Turkey's struggle to come to terms with its modern heritage. By any standard, Turkey's transition from a "Caliphate" to a modern European-style Republic in the early 1920s was a rapid and ill-thought out process.

Whilst any analysis centered on the partial restoration of the past is necessarily extreme and wide off the mark, the fact remains that an authentic modern Turkish polity will look and operate differently to Western political systems.

Indeed, it is this quest for an authentic Turkish polity that is at the heart of Turkey's gradual drift away from Europe and America. In due course this drift will produce a shift in Turkey's strategic profile from one of Western ally to a more or less independent player in the Middle East and wider international stage.

(Source: middleeastmonitor.com)

Killing of Ali Abdullah Saleh changes dynamics of Yemen's civil war

The killing of Ali Abdullah Saleh, the former Yemeni president, removes the country's most important political figure for four decades from a complex equation that has plunged the Arab world's poorest nation into conflict and sparked the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

His death marks a dramatic shift three years into a war in a state of stalemate. It risks the conflict becoming even more intractable.

Saleh was an important player in Yemen's descent into civil war. His reluctant departure from power in 2012 — forced upon him by the Arab spring after 33 years of rule — brought his Saudi-backed deputy, Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi, into office.

But in 2014 Saleh forged an uneasy, unlikely alliance with his former enemies, the Houthis, to facilitate their takeover of Sana'a and ultimately to force Hadi to flee to Saudi Arabia.

It was an alliance doomed to fail, but few predicted the man who sided with the Houthis he fought six wars against between 2004 and 2011 would eventually be killed by them.

While it lasted, the alliance benefited both sides. Saleh used Houthi firepower and manpower, while they gained from Saleh's governing and intelligence networks.

In the past week, that equation changed as Saleh moved to increase his power in Sana'a and signaled that he was swapping sides, seeking a dialogue with the Saudis and their allies, including the United Arab Emirates. There were reports that Saudi bombing of Sana'a in recent days was targeting Houthi areas in a move to help Saleh.



Former president's death at hands of his erstwhile Houthi allies marks end of uneasy alliance that sparked war in 2014.

Without Saleh, the Houthis are strengthened — at least in the short term. "There's a possibility that [Saleh's] apparatus will be radically weakened, if not marginalized in the coming period; this leaves the Houthis as the key

power in northern Yemen," said Adam Baron, visiting fellow at European Council on Foreign Relations.

Saleh, a former military officer, became the president of North Yemen in 1978 after a coup but, when north and south reunited in 1990, was elected as the first president of the new country. He once likened his time in power to "dancing on the heads of snakes".

The war in Yemen has hit a stalemate, and it is hard to say which side is winning. "For Houthis, the definition of winning is just survival, and they're doing a pretty good job at that; for the Saudis the definition of winning is restoring the internationally recognized government," Baron said.

"Houthis spent a decade fighting an insurgency isolated in the mountains of northern Yemen. Just being able to hold on to Sana'a, let alone to vanquish Saleh, their historical enemy, that's a big deal."

Since then Houthis have launched at least one other missile towards Saudi Arabia and last week claimed to have hit a nuclear plant under construction in the UAE, a claim denied by the Emirates.

The New York Times reported on Monday that missile experts had cast doubt on claims that American defense systems were able to intercept a Yemeni missile fired towards Riyadh airport.

One thing that is clear is Yemen without Saleh will be a different, yet still unpredictable, country.

"Even when people want to play on the ground in Yemen from outside," Baron said, "internal dynamics have a way of shifting in a way that nobody really expected."

(Source: The Guardian)

State Dept. shift flags more hawkish policy

He's a far better communicator than Tillerson, and he'll probably do better conveying to Congress, the public and U.S. allies his version of diplomacy than did Tillerson, whose dislike for his job was palpable.

The atmospheric is will be a more activist, hawkish, extroverted U.S. foreign policy. Pompeo is good at the things Tillerson wasn't. And he has the president's confidence and speaks with the tough, confident voice that Trump wants to project.

How big will the substantive policy changes be? That's hard to predict. Mattis and Tillerson have been joined at the hip on most policy issues, especially North Korea. They presented a formidable united front in the Situation Room; the power axis may now shift a bit, because of the chemistry between Trump and Pompeo.

On North Korea policy, there will likely be continuity in the short run. Pompeo knows as well as Tillerson did that U.S. military options are bad, and that working with allies is an essential requirement. Pompeo has been aggressively developing covert options for

North Korea, but he probably agrees with Tillerson that there is no "silver bullet" for solving this problem.

Tillerson said Tuesday, after North Korea's latest missile test: "Diplomatic options remain viable and open, for now." That's still the operative policy. So is Tillerson's plan to convene in Canada a meeting of the so-called "sending states," the 15 U.S. allies that sent troops to fight North Korea in 1950 under a UN Security Council resolution. Mattis was the first to endorse this idea publicly, and he still backs it strongly.

North Korea boasted last Wednesday that with its latest missile test, it had completed its goal of a "rocket weaponry system development."

Pyeongang may now want to talk from a position of strength. But Tillerson recently told Chinese diplomats that North Korea must "earn its way" to negotiations by moderating its actions. Obviously, that still holds, too.

The wild card in the new team is Sen. Tom Cotton, reputed to be the president's choice to replace Pompeo as CIA director. Cotton

Mike Pompeo, the feisty and politically ambitious CIA director who's likely headed to State, is the anti-Tillerson.

has played an outsize policy role in recent months. He cultivates the image of a hard man, lanky, laconic and Arkansas tough. Like Pompeo, he combines book smarts with a high tolerance for risk.

This team has not been selected to manage compromise.

U.S. allies will probably be worried, too. Tillerson was liked and trusted by key allies and seen as a check on Trump's impulsiveness. Cotton's reputation at the Pentagon is that of the "smart young captain" who fought courageously in Iraq but is untested in senior command. CIA operations officers will like his reputation as a "doer"; analysts will worry that he's too close to policymakers at the White House. Most successful CIA directors quickly learn how much they don't know; humility is part of the job description, along with boldness.

In the early months of the Trump administration, the Mattis-Tillerson alliance led many analysts to say that the "adults" were in charge of foreign policy, their influence checking the tweet-happy president. Trump hated that formulation. Now he'll have a new team, one that is tuned more closely to his pitch.

The new ascendancy of the hawks doesn't necessarily mean conflict is ahead.

(Source: The Daily Star)

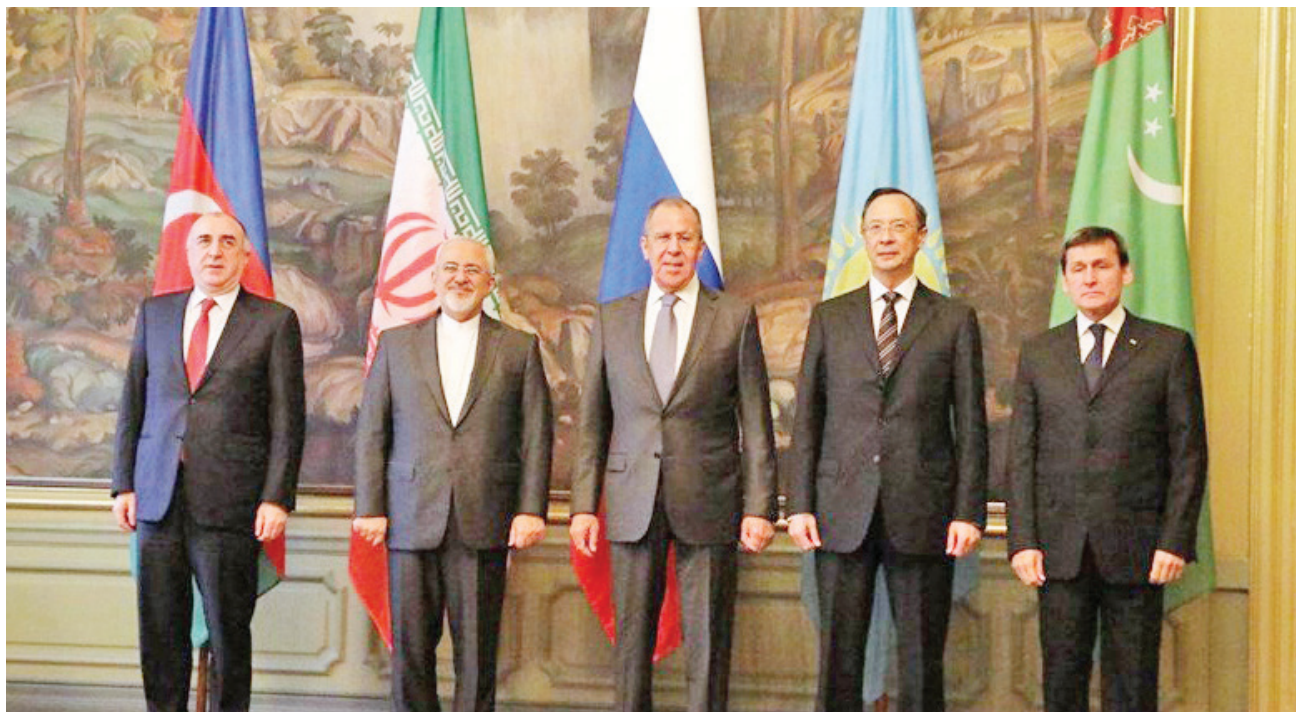
No legal disagreement should remain about Caspian sea

1 → The discussions at the meeting have shown that all five countries of Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan agree on a common understanding about the Caspian Sea. During the 6 meetings with the presence of foreign ministers of the countries along the coast of the Caspian Sea, many discussions were held. During these meetings, legal, security, economic and even cultural cooperation between the countries on the borderline of the Caspian Sea has been studied, and good agreements have been reached among the five countries.

However, as long as all disputes, especially legal disputes between the participating countries aren't settled, persistent and sustainable relations among the Caspian littoral states can't be established. In the recent meeting in Moscow, in addition to legal issues, economic and security issues and transportation in the Caspian Sea will be discussed. Foreign ministers from Iran and four other countries are trying to complete the statement of the fifth summit of the Caspian littoral states.

The negotiations between the Caspian littoral states based on good neighbor policy, shouldn't lead to ignoring the facts about the Caspian Sea. It should be noted that the infrastructure of settling disputes on the Caspian Sea and the resulting cooperation, relies on formulating the Convention of the Caspian Sea Legal Regime. Basically, an important part of the security and economic cooperation is a variable of formulating this convention. As long as the five Caspian littoral states aren't able to achieve a common legal understanding over the Caspian Sea, the scope of authorities and limitations of countries of the joint security and economic dealings is not to be determined.

In other words, the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea can't be defined at the same level with the security and economic cooperation between the coastal countries. Undoubtedly, the definition of economic, security and even cultural cooperation between the Caspian littoral states is dependent on the settlement of legal disputes between the coastal countries of the Caspian Sea, as well as the establishment of a common legal regime. How to deal with security crises and defining the scope of fishing and interactions in the energy sector, are all issues



that should be discussed after determining the limits of authority and ownership of each Caspian littoral state.

Undoubtedly, the prolongation of the process of resolving a case would not be undesirable if it would be due to a precise technical and legal examine of the issue. This is the case with regard to the legalization of the Caspian Sea Convention. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, we witnessed a kind of transformation in the Caspian legal regime. The Soviet Union was divided into several countries, and with its decay and collapse, Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan each became independent legal variables in this equation. Undoubtedly, the transformation of a two variable equation into a «legal-security» multi-variable equation is not a simple transformation.

Therefore, one should understand the complexities of the Caspian case. On the one hand, we are faced with the specific economic and security expectations of Caspian coastal players, and on the other hand, we're dealing

with the demands and attempts to gain more scores by some of the Caspian Sea neighbors. These made the «Caspian equation» complicated and difficult to a great extent.

In the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of our country has first and foremost tried to simplify this complex legal equation. In other words, Iran has taken two simultaneous strategies toward resolving the Caspian case: one transforms the Caspian case from a «geo-strategic knot» to a «negotiable case». And another, is the rational propound of Iran's demands, and the management of the other party's conduct. A focus on these two strategies shows that the Caspian Case is very complex.

As emphasized, the recent meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Caspian littoral states in Moscow has been one of the most transparent meetings on the legal regime and economic and security relations between the countries neighboring the Caspian Sea. The very fact that today, the ministers of foreign

affairs of the Caspian littoral states unanimously emphasize the need for the absence of foreign troops in this geographic region, is a positive and upward trend.

Similarly, regarding the statements made by the Foreign Ministers of the Caspian littoral states, it seems that they have accelerated their cooperation on resolving existing disputes. However, until all legal agreements between Caspian coastal states are resolved and the Convention on the Caspian Sea Legal regime is officially codified, we can't speak of the finalization of this legal and strategic case. Here it is emphasized that even one single legal disagreement should not remain among the players. Meanwhile, the mechanism for resolving disputes on the Caspian Sea should be carefully elaborated. Therefore, while welcoming the settlement of the existing disagreements over the Caspian Sea, it should not be expedited in completing this process. In such a situation, speaking of optimism or pessimism about the resolution of existing differences is no longer relevant.

Damascus could have been in danger without Tehran's Support: U.S. analyst



TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A California-based political analyst hailed recent liberation of the last strongholds of Daesh (ISIS or ISIL) terrorist group in Syria and said without Iran's advisory support, many more Syrian lives would have been lost and Damascus could have been in danger.

"Hundreds of Iranians and Lebanese have given their lives supporting their Syrian brothers and sisters," Rick Sterling from San Francisco Bay said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

"Without that support, many more Syrian lives would have been lost and Damascus could have been in danger," he added, pointing to Iran's advisory assistance to Syria in the war against Takfiri terrorists.

"The Iranian forces have helped their Syrian brothers and sisters weather the storm and turn the tide," he noted.

Rick Sterling is a retired aerospace engineer who now writes about international issues. As a member of the Syria Solidarity Movement and a prominent analyst, his works and interviews have appeared in media outlets around the world.

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ As you know, the resistance forces and the armies in Syria and Iraq have recently liberated last strongholds of Daesh (ISIS or ISIL) terrorist group in the Arab countries. What do you think about the recent military achievements? Do you have a positive perspective on the security situation in Syria?

A: It is tremendously positive that Syria and allies have resisted and appear close to defeating the terrorist armies, which have besieged Syria for the past six years. The armed opposition was supported by many of the richest and most powerful countries in the world - from the U.S., UK and France to the Persian Gulf monarchies plus Turkey and Israel. They were all involved in this ugly sectarian campaign to destroy one of the oldest civilizations on earth. With support from its allies, Syria has withstood the political, information and military assault intended to break down the country.

The defeat of ISIS / Daesh is very important but it seems premature to declare victory. There are Turkish and American troops on Syrian soil in the north and east. When are they going to leave? Meanwhile, Nusra / Al Qaeda terrorists still dominate and control Idlib province and other areas in the south and even the outskirts of Damascus. The situation and trend is very positive but the conflict is not over. The enemies of Syria have not yet given up. They are still trying to manipulate the U.S. into direct military involvement.

■ Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), recently declared the collapse of the Takfiri terrorist group in Iraq and Syria. What is your assessment of Iran's role in the anti-terrorism campaign in the Middle East region?

A: About one hundred thousand Syrian soldiers have died defending their country.

Alongside them, the Iranian and Lebanese forces have provided crucial moral and military support. Hundreds of Iranians and Lebanese have given their lives supporting their Syrian brothers and sisters. Without that support, many more Syrian lives would have been lost and Damascus could have been in danger. The Iranian forces have helped their Syrian brothers and sisters weather the storm and turn the tide. This may be a historic turning point.

■ Secretary-General of the Lebanese Hezbollah Resistance Movement Hassan Nasrallah said recently that despite the U.S. claims about fighting terrorism, it spared no effort to help Daesh forces in the Syrian town of Albu Kamal. "The U.S. helped Daesh as much as it could in Albu Kamal short of directly engaging forces that fought to liberate the town from Daesh," the Hezbollah leader noted. What do you think about the remarks?

A: Nasrallah's statements are remarkable. He gives detail such as the U.S. drone operations which helped Daesh by providing video. He also describes how the U.S. was using electronic warfare to disrupt the mobile communications of the Syrian army and allies. A few weeks ago the BBC ran a photo story showing how the U.S. and UK helped Daesh forces depart Raqqa and travel to Albu Kamal. The U.S. has used ISIS / Daesh as a dirty part of its arsenal. ISIS was the justification for the U.S. to be in Iraq and Syria. Now that the Daesh is no more, there is no more justification. The U.S. needs to leave Syria but they are looking for a justification to stay.

GOLRANG Industrial Group Offers Student Scholarship at Tehran University

GOLRANG Industrial Group offered scholarship to a number of top and talented students studying at University of Tehran in line with fulfilling its social responsibility.

The 3rd Gathering of Student Scholarship of the Foundation to Support University of Tehran was held in Ferdowsi Amphitheater of Faculty of Literature and Humanities in the presence of top and talented students, a number of benefactors and supporters of University of Tehran.

Given the above issue, GOLRANG Industrial Group undertook the scholarship of top Iranian and foreign students.

According to a report released by the Public Relations Dept. of GOLRANG Industrial Group, the Group embarked on granting scholarship to a number of 60 foreign students and 40 domestic students in MA and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Tehran in line with fulfilling its social responsibility and promoting the training capacity of the country.

Moreover offering scholarship to the talented students, GOLRANG Industrial Group also granted scholarship to five students injured in quake-hit Province of Kermanshah, the issue of which was highly welcomed and appreciated by participants.

For his part, Mahmoud Nili Ahmadabadi Chancellor of University of Tehran expressed his special thanks to the senior management of GOLRANG Industrial Group in granting scholarship to foreign students and stated: "This year, the Group granted scholarship to 60 foreign students, the issue of which is appreciable, because, students are the precious assets who go to all parts of the world and will be considered as ambassador of peace and friendship among other nations."



The Chancellor of University of Tehran pointed to the students' demands in the field of business and reiterated: "Some students ask us to empower them to set up or build a business and want us to allow them to acquire skill in entrepreneurship and generation of employment along with learning."

"This issue is so important that I myself talked about with benefactors, who are considered as main economic pillars in the country, on the possibility of empowering and entrepreneurship of students," he said, adding: "It is hoped that this issue will be put atop agenda along with granting scholarships."

In the end of gathering, a get-together meeting was held in the presence of benefactors and chancellor of University of Tehran.

The issue of employment of graduated students and crisis of brain drains was considered as major concern of both students and benefactors.

At the proposal of GOLRANG Industrial Group, it was decided that a Working Group should be set up in order to study the requirements of industrial and economic sectors meticulously on the one hand and introduce competent and able students to the industrial and economic enterprises in required field on the other hand.

It should be noted that GOLRANG Industrial Group meets a part of its required manpower through attraction of able and competent students studying in prestigious universities with the aim of having strong presence in the world markets.

Prior to attracting students, the Group offers quality training services to students for further familiarity with the business environment.

By: A. Saiedi

There is a solution to the Irish border imbroglio. But blind ideology prevents it

By Caoimhín de Barra

The frustrating thing about the row over the impact of Brexit on the Irish border is that there is an obvious and straightforward solution. When Britain eventually leaves the EU, Northern Ireland should remain within the customs union.

While not perfect, it is undeniably the simplest way to avoid the difficulties that would come with a hard border between the two parts of Ireland. But this proposal has been rejected by the DUP. Yet it is tough to be sympathetic to their stance, because ultimately it is one based exclusively on symbolism rather than pragmatism.

DUP MP Sammy Wilson stated recently that if the Conservatives are prepared to "have Northern Ireland treated differently than the rest of the UK", his party could no longer support the government.

The problem with this logic is that since the formation of the United Kingdom in 1707, there has always been considerable differentiation between its constituent parts. Scotland had the Presbyterian kirk as its official state church while England had an Anglican equivalent. An independent and separate Scottish legal system is still in place today.

Nor is Northern Ireland any different in this regard. Northern Irish banknotes are not accepted in Britain. Gay marriage and abortion are legal in Britain, not so in Northern Ireland. Indeed unionists over the last century have shown themselves to be quite willing to accept different treatment from the rest of the UK when it suits their own predilections.

■ Administrative flexibility

Some would argue that the key to the union

enduring over the last 300 years has been the willingness to show administrative flexibility toward local particularisms. Northern Ireland remaining in the customs union would not change that.

It is hard to see what practical difficulties the DUP see with this proposal. Granted, the need to inspect trade goods entering Britain from Northern Ireland could conceivably add something to their cost. But would this really not be compensated for by Northern Ireland retaining free access to the EU markets?

Such considerations appear pointless, however. The DUP position is unassailable. Through their "confidence and supply" arrangement with the Tories, Arlene Foster and colleagues can block any move to keep Northern Ireland in the customs union.

Or so we are told. But the reality is different. If the DUP feels its "confidence and supply" arrangement serves as a big stick to keep the Tories on their side, then they fail to realise that the Conservatives potentially have a howitzer to deploy against their government allies. And that is a border poll.

Under the Good Friday agreement, a border poll can only be called by the secretary of state for Northern Ireland. The agreement says the secretary can order such a vote "if at any time it appears likely to him that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should ... form part of a united Ireland".

This language is intentionally vague. The current secretary is James Brokenshire, a Conservative MP. If he decided to initiate a border poll tomorrow, there is nothing the DUP could do to stop him.

The DUP might not like the idea of remaining in the EU customs union, but it would look a great deal more appealing if the alternative was dealing with a border poll.

In the 2016 Northern Irish assembly elections, 46% of first-preference votes went to parties opposed to Irish unity, with 40% for those in favor. That same year, 56% of the Northern Irish vote was cast against leaving the EU. A vote to retain the status quo would probably begin as the favorite, but a unionist victory in a border poll would be far from a certain thing.

■ Stymying border solution

In other words, if DUP resistance is the only thing stymying the best solution to the Irish border issue, then the Tories have ample ammunition to play hardball. ➔13

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Sofreh: Meal serving custom in Persian style

L I F E
d e s k In every language and culture, there are some untranslatable words and terms which do not have equivalents in other languages. 'sofreh' in Persian language is in this category.

Sofreh, traditional table cloth available in various materials and patterns, is in fact a connotation, which is far beyond a piece of cloth spread for serving meals. It is associated with meal and table manners in our culture.

In Iran, all family members gather around sofreh, which is spread either on the table or on the floor during meals.

Although Iranian lifestyle has faced many changes over the recent years, the ritual of gathering during meal time still exists in most of families.

There are several proverbs and folktales in Persian language in which, sofreh is mentioned as an element of being wellborn and polite.

In Iranian Islamic traditions, sofreh is respected and those who sit around a sofreh are aware of it. If two persons sit around a sofreh, they should observe this as a kind of friendship, which should be honored and kept.

People around sofreh, begin the meal with eating some salt and end the meals with praying.

Respecting elder members of family is another ritual which is considered while spreading sofreh. They sit above and the elder person is the first one who begins eating food.

No one is allowed to lie down or even stretch their legs when the sofreh is spread.

■ Different kinds of sofreh

Sofreh is an important element in Iranians celebration and mourning ceremonies as well as religious ceremonies. Here we pointed to some kinds of sofreh spread in special occasions:

● Sofreh aqd

Spreading sofreh in Iranian traditional wedding ceremonies is very customary.

Several symbolic items are put on sofreh aqd (an engagement ceremony held before the wedding) while a young couple are tying the knots.

Every sofreh aqd design has traditional must-haves; however, design of it changes due to the beliefs and budget of bride and groom. Mirror, candles and candelabra, Sangak bread accompanied with feta cheese, egg, almond, walnut and hazelnut, seasonal fruits, rock candy, coins, honey, rose water, Holy Quran, sweets and pastries, sugar cones, wild rue and coal brazier are some of common elements, which are put on a



Sofreh, traditional table cloth available in various materials and patterns, is in fact a connotation, which is far beyond a piece of cloth spread for serving meals.

piece of termeh used as sofreh aqd.

● Sofreh haft-seen

Setting a "haft-seen" table for Noruz, the Iranian new year, which starts on March 20, is a custom which is being observed by almost all Iranians worldwide.

There are seven items on the table which start with 'S' in Persian language in addition to gold fish, colorful eggs, Quran, candles, and mirror .

The seven items include sabzeh (wheat, barley, mung bean or lentil sprouts growing in a dish), samanu (sweet pudding made from wheat germ), senjed (wild olive fruit), seer (garlic), seeb (apple), sekkeh (coin)

and serkeh (vinegar).

● Iftar time on Persian sofreh

During holy, fasting month of Ramadan, Muslims break their fast with an evening meal, called iftar. In Iran, members of family gathered around a sofreh during time of iftar and they also host their guests on the same sofreh.

Tea, dates, halva, bread and cheese with fresh herbs, ash or soup and a kind of sweet named zulbia and bamieh.

● Yalda goodies on Iranian sofreh

Iranian spread their sofreh for other occasions as well like Yalda night, known as the longest and darkest night of the

year, marking the last eve of autumn and the beginning of winter on December 20.

Guests are served with fresh fruits and colorful Ajil (a mixture of dry fruits, seeds and nuts) in bowls.

Watermelon and pomegranate, symbols of bounty, are the traditional fresh fruits of this night. All food items are arranged on a sofreh usually by women of the house.

Sofreh is a manifestation of several Persian culture like togetherness, family ties and hospitality.

Be sure that you are always welcome to Iranian sofreh and enjoy a good memorable meal.

MY PERSIAN KITCHEN

Iranian tomato soup with tiny meatballs



L I F E
d e s k Every region of Iran has its own version of tomato soup or ash-e goje farangi. They may use different kinds of herbs or spices, add beans, or peas. The Khuzestani (southern-style) version is hot and spicy.

Ingredients:

- 5 large tomatoes, peeled, chopped
- 1/2 cup basmati rice, rinsed
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 bunch parsley, chopped
- 1 bunch chives or scallion, chopped
- A handful of basil, roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric
- A pinch of red pepper
- Salt
- Pepper
- Vegetable oil/olive oil
- Juice of 1 lime or 1-2 tablespoons verjuice, juice of sour grapes
- Water
- For meatballs (Koofteh Qelqeli)
- 1/2 pound ground beef or lamb
- 1 small onion, grated
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper

Method:

In a bowl combine beef, onion, salt and pepper and shape into mini meatballs. Place on a large plate and set aside.

Bring a pot of water to a boil. Cut an "x" in the bottom of each tomato with a sharp knife. Place the tomatoes in the boiling water and cook for a minute or two. Remove from the pot, allow to cool and peel the skins. Chop or grate the tomatoes on a box grater.

Remove the seeds if you prefer. Add three tablespoons of oil to a pot, saute chopped onions over medium-high heat until the onions become translucent. Add turmeric, stir and add the chopped garlic. Saute for a couple of minutes. Stir in the tomato paste and cook for 2-3 minutes before adding the tomatoes. Cook for 5 minutes. Add the rice, parsley, scallion, basil, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1/4 teaspoon pepper and a pinch of red pepper.

Add six cups of water, stir, bring to a boil, add the meatballs, reduce the heat, cover and cook over low heat for 45-50 minutes. Periodically, stir the soup and add a little water if needed.

Taste and adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper. Add lime juice/verjuice just before serving.

Serve hot with fresh herbs and warm bread.

■ Note:

For a vegetarian version of this soup you can make it without the meatballs. For a lighter soup you can reduce the amount of rice to 1/4 of a cup. You can drizzle nana dagh (fried dried mint) on top.

Enjoy!

(Source: turmericsafron.blogspot.com)

Colorful Iran: Pir-e Shaliar ritual in Kordestan



L I F E
d e s k The Pir-e Shaliar ritual is annually held in Uramantakht village, western Kordestan province, from January 21 to February 19.

It celebrates the wedding anniversary of a mythical old man called Shaliar, a revered person who was considered as a saint by local people. Several tourists also travel to the place to witness the two-week celebrations. It is held at a house known as the house of Pir-e Shaliar.

Walnuts belonging to Pir-e Shaliar garden are distributed among the villagers

and then they sacrifice cows, sheep and goats to cook special food.

They play tambourine and perform traditional dances, recite prayers, pass the leather shoes of Pir-e Shaliar to each other and cook a special bread called 'Kallreh Mozgeh' (made of flour, walnuts and onions) for three days.

Various tribes and ethnic groups who live in different parts of Iran are just like colors, which make a great painting. Iran is home to about 20 ethnic groups who live in different regions of the country.

How to reduce and manage kitchen waste?



■ Bring your own bags and containers
Plastic bags, cardboard containers and plastic boxes have a long life span. Reuse old plastic bags for holding vegetables and bulk goods when shopping.

■ Bring a container for leftovers to restaurants
If every time you go out for Chinese food you're unable to finish what you ordered, bring along a sealable container and put leftovers in it at the end of the meal.

■ Carry a steel Thermos
Cups and bottles get discarded, and even the few that get recycled still carry a high

cost in the fossil fuel production required to make and transport them, as well as in the recycling process itself. By contrast, a steel Thermos is light and easy to sanitize' just wash it out after using, and boil the parts every few weeks.

■ Shop in bulk

Bulk shopping helps to eliminate excess packaging and saves money. Both traditional supermarket chains and boutique health food stores sell food in bulk, but it's not an option in enough stores.

(Source: besthealthmag.ca)



101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

#12. Climb a mountain

Why risk your life to climb a mountain when the journey is fraught with rocky terrains and with ever-changing weather conditions? For some, mountain climbing is an external conquest; some find enjoyment in the sport; others see it as a step in their personal growth journey. Whatever it is, mountain climbing is a feat that takes physical endurance and mental tenacity to accomplish, and is definitely a bucket list worthy item. I haven't climbed a mountain yet but I plan to do that sometime in the future!

Here we share 101 items to consider for your bucket list. Look through the list — any item that resonates with you? Take the items that resonate with you and use them for your own list!

(Source: personalexcellence.co)



#IRANIANLIFESTYLE



A woman in traditional dress in the Sarvelayat district near Neyshabur, northeastern Iran (Instagram/greatneyshabur)

Genius solutions to declutter and get—and stay—organized

Just when you thought getting and staying organized was all about throwing stuff away, this genius declutter solution comes along: Straighten up!

■ Pick up in the pantry

Putting groceries away in a rush means they are not always shelved in the right spot. Smaller items get lost towards the back of the shelf, and you might not realize you have three of the same cracker boxes open.

Sort and store like foods together, shelve them in your pantry in the same groupings as they are in the aisles of the grocery store.

■ Realistic refrigerator results

It is time to straighten up the shelves, move things around, and toss any unidentifiable food. Designate one shelf for leftovers so you'll see it and remember to eat it before it goes bad. Try this trick to prevent wasting wilted food: Swap shelves with drawers, move fresh produce from the drawers to a shelf, and place bottles and jars in the drawers. That way you'll see the fresh food on a center shelf and remember to use it.

■ Ditch drawer disasters

Between the expired coupons, random charging cords, and empty packets of chewing gum, it is no wonder you can't find what you need in the drawer. Recycle any papers you can, and store the charging cord in an empty mint tin. (Don't forget to wrap them to keep them tangle-free.) Add organizers to the drawer to help with the small pieces and parts; try shallow box lids or plastic food storage containers.

■ Clean-out linen closet clutter

Straightening out the shelves in the linen closet will make it a whole lot easier to find a matching set of sheets. Store the sheets inside one of the matching pillowcases so you have the whole set together. Re-fold any blankets or towels that have gotten messy, stack hand towels with matching washcloths.

■ Curb hall closet clutter

Between all the coats, umbrellas, and tote bags there is a good chance the closet door barely even shuts anymore. Straighten out the closet and clear out the clutter by swapping out coats. Bring the jackets and coats you use this time of year towards the front and slide the other, out-of-season coats towards the back. Mate up the shoes to make sure you have matching pairs, then line them up or store them by pairs in a shoe organizer.

(Source: Reader's Digest)

Qeshm to host intl. mat-weaving workshop

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN — An international workshop on professional mat-weaving skills opens today in the Persian Gulf island of Qeshm.

“The workshop is aimed to promote matting as one of authentic handicraft skills practiced in southern parts of the country and in Hormozgan province in particular,” Mehr quoted Mohsen Ziaei, the provincial tourism chief, as saying on Tuesday.



An Iranian artisan makes a piece of mat board.

During the event [Iranian] artisans will be familiarized with novel fashions and designs of matting by Chinese experts, Ziaei added.

The five-day workshop is organized by Qeshm Free Trade Zone in close collaboration with the World Crafts Council-Asia Pacific Region (WCC-APR).

Matting is the art of weaving or plaited strips of organic fibers into mats which are cool and suitable to the hot tropical climate.

Vector Architects converts sugar mill into Alila Yangshuo hotel

Vector Architects has transformed a disused sugar mill in China’s mountainous Yangshuo County into a resort hotel featuring a group of gabled masonry structures designed to complement the existing industrial architecture.

Alila Yangshuo hotel is situated in a col between two of the karst mountains that makes this area in the Guangxi region a popular destination for tourists looking to take in the picturesque scenery.

Beijing-based studio Vector Architects was tasked with creating a hotel on the site of the disused sugar mill, which was constructed in the 1960s and comprises a cluster of buildings alongside a truss used for loading sugar cane onto boats.

The project involved retaining and repurposing the existing structures and introducing new accommodation buildings that complement their industrial aesthetic. Interiors designed by Ju Bin of Horizontal Space Design aim to emphasize the connection between old and new.

The original buildings now contain amenities including the hotel’s reception, a cafe, bar, multipurpose hall, gallery and library, which are all arranged around a reflecting pond and sunken plaza at the center of the complex.

Flanking the old mill are a pair of new blocks housing a variety of rooms and guest suites. These additions feature gabled forms and a material palette that references the existing architecture.

“We kept the profile of the new buildings as simple as possible to avoid unnecessary distraction to the old sugar mill caused by overly expressive geometry,” said the studio, which previously refurbished a house in a Chinese port by adding a vaulted concrete roof.

The cluster of shed-like structures are constructed using hollow concrete blocks and board-marked concrete with perforated surfaces that offer a lightweight and modern interpretation of the methods used to build the original mill.

(Source: dezeen.com)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Schokland and surroundings

The struggle of the people of the Netherlands against water has endured, for more than six thousand years, and still continues today; without constant vigilance, more than half the present area of the country would be entirely submerged or subject to periodic inundation.

A World Heritage, Schokland was a peninsula that by the fifteenth century had become an island. Occupied and then abandoned as the sea encroached, it had to be evacuated in 1859.

Schokland has vestiges of human habitation going back to prehistoric times. It symbolizes the heroic, age-old struggle of the people of the Netherlands against the encroachment of the water.



A view of Schokland which is a popular archeological site and UNESCO World Heritage in the Netherlands.

As a result of the colossal reclamation program that began in the early years of the 20th century, Schokland and the settlement mounds and other human interventions that surround it stand as mute testimony to the skill and fortitude of the Dutch people in the face of this never-ceasing natural threat.

The area provides exceptional evidence of a cultural tradition of island-dwellers threatened by the water and ultimately evacuated; the first residents on the land reclaimed from the sea cultivated and developed that new land.

The area is an exceptional example of a traditional type of settlement and land use that is representative of cultures, primarily when these have become vulnerable due to the influence of irreversible change.

(Source: UNESCO)

Centuries-old Indian offerings on show at Golestan Palace

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN — A collection of exquisite Indian offerings to monarchs and courtiers of Qajar era [1785 to 1925] is on display at the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace in downtown Tehran.

Envoys and officials from around 20 countries along with their Iranian counterparts attended the inauguration ceremony of the exhibit on Wednesday evening, CHTN reported.

“It’s the first time that Golestan Palace has selected a number of magnificent Qajar-era Indian handicrafts from its own treasure trove,” said Masoud Nosrati, director of the historical site.

“By examining relationship between Iran and India over the course of history, it can be noticed that the two nations have lots of cultural commonalities ... in arts, architecture, mysticism, literature and music.”

The exhibit includes an engraved and embossed jewelry plate adorned with gemstones, variety of mirror frames, a sword case, a silver box presented by Indian Armenians, various types of sofa and carved tables as well as a Safavid-era (1501–1736) brass box and a hunting gun offered by Jawaharlal Nehru, Nosrati said.

It also showcases a patchwork of illustrated manuscripts that bear poems by Persian poets Jami (1414–1492) and Amir Shahi of Sabzevar (d. 1453) as well as the ones by Indian poet Amir Hasan Dehlavi (1253–1327), the official said.

The exhibit will wrap up on December 21. Golestan Palace became a center of Qajari arts and architecture and has remained a source of inspiration for Iranian artists



A view of a Golestan Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage in downtown Tehran

and architects to the present day.

The lavish palace embodies a successful

integration of earlier Persian crafts and architecture with Western influences. It

is being visited by tens of foreign tourists every day.

Photo exhibit to recall Silk Road caravanserais

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN — An exhibition of photographs depicting centuries-old caravanserais will open its doors to the public in Tehran on Saturday.

A total of 53 shots by Iranian photographer Babak Sadiqi have been designated for the exhibit, CHTN reported on Tuesday.

Titled “Selective Silk Road Caravanserais”, the event will be running through December 14 at the headquarters of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization.

It will put the spotlight on mud-brick roadside inns, which were once thriving

along the legendary Silk Road.

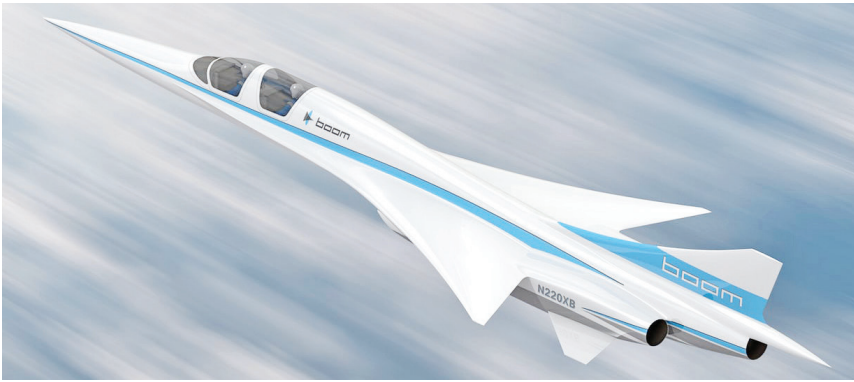
Along the major roads that connect Iranian cities one can see many abandoned caravanserais that in their heyday brought comfort to travelers and their livestock on trade routes.

For the time being, caravanserais have largely lost their original usage and popularity as places to stay and rest. Now, they daily draw clusters of visitors who desire to revel in their atmospheric chambers and courtyards that still evoke rich tastes of Persian architecture.



The 16th-century Zeinoddin Caravanserai in the city of Yazd has been restored and turned into a tourist lodge.

The new Concorde? JAL buys into Branson’s supersonic dream



The Boom XB-12 prototype

haru Ueki, the president of JAL. “Through this partnership, we hope to contribute to the future of supersonic travel with the intent of providing more time to our valued passengers while emphasizing flight safety.”

Blake Scholl, the founder and chief executive of Boom Supersonic, said the company had

been secretly working with JAL for more than a year to understand more about the dynamics of commercial flight operations. “Our goal is to develop an airliner that will be a great addition to any international airline’s fleet.”

Branson’s Spaceship company is already working with Boom on the development of the

supersonic jets, which are expected to have 45-55 business class seats. Branson has the rights to the first 10 Boom aircraft produced.

Scholl, a pilot and former Amazon executive, has said his Boom will be “better than Concorde” and commercial flights could be up and running as soon as 2025. While several other companies, including Boeing and Lockheed Martin, are developing new supersonic jets, Scholl said his plan was likely to beat them to the market as it does not require any new technology for regulator approval.

“Think about for a moment the families that are separated because of the long flights. Think about the trips not taken because when you add up the lost hours, the trip just doesn’t feel worth it,” he said at the Dubai Airshow last month.

“You won’t have to be on the Forbes’ list to be able to fly, it will cost about the same as flying business class today. The ultimate goal is to make supersonic affordable for anyone who flies.”

(Source: The Guardian)

Travel for the arts: how opera is luring high-spenders back to Paris

By Claire Wrathall

Last year occupancy rates in Paris’s premium hotels fell to 52 percent, according to data commissioned by the property company Jones Lang Lasalle. The city’s hoteliers have therefore been exploring ways to tempt high-spending leisure visitors back to the city, and several – wisely it seems – are now capitalizing on the city’s thriving opera scene.

Earlier this autumn I spent a weekend at the glorious Hotel Le Bristol (from €850), which had managed to secure rare-as-hen’s-teeth front stalls tickets for Jonas Kaufmann in Verdi’s Don Carlos at the Bastille and created an opera package.

Not that the fabler tenor was the only star; Elina Garanca’s Eboli and Sonya Yoncheva’s Elisabeth were, if anything, yet more thrilling. Factoring in the 20-minute standing ovation, the exhilarating performance lasted more than five hours, but I could have watched it all again. It was a night I will never forget. And the Bristol, incidentally, was full.

Last week, I was in Paris again, this time with the British travel specialist Travel for the Arts, for Mozart’s La Clemenza di Tito at the Palais Garnier, the Opéra de Paris’s fabulously ornate historic home.

It, too, was hard to fault, and if the cast was less stellar, the principal performances

were first-rate, especially the scintillating Sesto of Marianne Crebassa. Remember that name; she’s sensational!

This time I stayed at the less expensive, though no less alluring Pavillon de la Reine (from €330 a night), tucked away in a private courtyard just off the city’s most beautiful square, the Place des Vosges in the Marais (a 10-minute walk from the Bastille, rather further from the Garnier, for which, as it happens, the Bristol is better placed).

A longstanding favorite of mine, this low-key, family-owned 56-room conversion of a 17th-century mansion has recently been accorded its fifth star, and I couldn’t have been happier in my quiet, comfortable, neo-classically furnished third-floor junior suite, its walls dramatically lined in black silk – a contemporary cross between a damask and an ikat – in contrast to its cream-upholstered furniture.

Since I’d last stayed there, they’ve converted the basement breakfast room into a small Codage spa (the generous breakfast is now served in the ground-floor sitting room and, when it’s warm enough, outside). A restaurant will open next year.

Even Eurostar has undergone a series of upgrades: first the introduction of its Pininfarina-designed carriages and improved catering (“designed by Raymond Blanc”) and, earlier this year, a well-designed new lounge at the Gare du Nord – an immense improvement on what was there before – for those travelling on Business Premier tickets or Carte Blanche-level members of its loyalty program, which relaunched this week as Club Eurostar.

Unlike so many lounges, it takes account of the fact that passengers are often as not travelling alone and don’t want to sit in big groups, with well-spaced, well-lit armchairs, but also plenty of desk space.

Eurostar does need to do something about the flaky wifi on its trains, though. I’ve been in carriages where it’s functioned, but it worked on neither the outward, nor return leg of this trip. If even Chiltern Railways have been running trains with effective wifi for years, you’d think Eurostar could get it to work.

Travel for the Arts offers individual one-night opera breaks to Paris from £695pp based on two sharing, including a night at the Pavillon de la Reine and return tickets on Eurostar.

It is also offering a three-night escorted tour to Paris over Christmas, with performances of La Clemenza di Tito on Christmas Day, La Bohème at the Bastille on Boxing Day, and optional tickets to the ballet Don Quixote on Christmas Eve, from £1,775 per person, including Eurostar tickets, accommodation



Travel for the arts is offering a three-night escorted tour to Paris over Christmas

at the four-star Hotel Scribe and a festive Christmas lunch. travelforthearts.com

(Source: The Telegraph)

A new antibiotic weakness — drugs themselves help bacteria survive

Antibiotics save lives, but they are not fail-safe. Even when microbes haven’t acquired drug-evading genetic mutations — a hallmark of antibiotic resistance — the medications don’t always clear infections. A new study identifies a surprising reason why: At infection sites, antibiotics change the natural mixture of chemicals made by the body in ways that protect infecting bacteria. They also thwart the ability of the host’s immune cells to fight off the intruders.

These findings, published Thursday in Cell Host & Microbe, could help scientists “build more effective treatments,” says James Collins, a biological engineer at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and senior author of the paper. Down the line it may be possible to administer antibiotics along with other substances that either mitigate these changes or have the opposite effect, making drugs more effective, he says.

Collins and his colleagues at MIT’s Broad Institute, Harvard University and the University of California, San Diego, infected mice with Escherichia coli bacteria and gave some of them antibiotics.

■ **Tissue samples**

The scientists then took tissue samples from the mice and analyzed levels of certain bodily chemicals — known as metabolites — that bacteria can use to grow and multiply. At the sites of their infections, mice fed antibiotics had higher levels of some metabolites



when compared with drug-free mice. The levels were also higher than what scientists detected in healthy mice.

To see if the metabolites changed antibiotic effectiveness, Collins and his colleagues added

these isolated chemicals to E. coli grown in lab plates. They found that they needed to add higher drug concentrations to kill the bacteria when some of the chemicals were present. In other words, the chemicals that

Antibiotics are supposed to be ‘magic bullets’ directed at bacteria but not at the person suffering from infection.

had been ramped up in the infected, antibiotic-treated animals were, ironically, making bacteria less susceptible to the drugs.

These chemical changes were incited not by bacterial cells, but by the animals’ own cells.

The researchers learned this after giving antibiotics to so-called “germ-free” mice that had no bacteria and saw the same chemical changes. “It really is surprising,” says Eric Brown, the Canada Research Chair in Microbial Chemical Biology at McMaster University in Ontario, who was not involved in the research.

■ **Magic bullets**

“Antibiotics are supposed to be ‘magic bullets’ directed at bacteria but not at the person suffering from infection.

It is unclear how much these changes might reduce antibiotic efficacy in infected people. “We suspect that the strength of this effect will really depend on the type of infection and types of antibiotics used,” says one of the paper co-authors, Jason Yang, a postdoctoral bioengineer at MIT. Some drugs, such as streptomycin, are very sensitive to local chemical changes, he says, so these effects could significantly impair the medication, but more studies are needed.

Collins also is not sure how the chemicals elicit these effects. But he notes some of the compounds slow down aspects of bacterial metabolism, making the antibiotics less lethal.

(Source: scientificamerican.com)

Underwater volcano eruptions can travel 10,000 miles through the ocean: study

Buried in the depths of the oceans, over a million enormous underwater volcanoes puncture the seabed. Their violent eruptions are extremely powerful and very difficult to detect in the early stages — but new recordings may help scientists map these incredible events much more quickly.

Using hydrophones — special microphones designed for use underwater — scientists from the Alaska Volcano Observatory (AVO) and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) recorded the sounds of two volcanoes erupting.

Presenting their findings at the 174th Meeting of the Acoustical Society of America in New Orleans, the team, led by Gabrielle Tepp, from the AVO, show how different eruptions sound drastically different — while some explosions lasted hours, others ripped through the sea like gunshots.

Above the surface, submarine eruptions may go unnoticed.

■ **Powerful shockwaves**

Underwater, however, they can send incredibly powerful shockwaves many miles. As Chip Young, leader of a scuba diving team swimming near the Ayhi underwater volcano at the time of its 2014 eruption, attests: “While we were diving, we could hear eruptions underwater. It wasn’t casual, in fact, it sounded like bombs exploding with the concussion felt through your body.”

“I don’t know how close we were to the event, none of the ... divers saw volcanic activity, but at least one explosion was so powerful, that it reverberated through the hull of the ship and the crew onboard thought that something had happened to the ship.”

The Ayhi volcano sits in the Northern Mariana Islands in the Pacific Ocean. Its enormous eruption was just one of many that year. In fact, far more volcanoes erupt under the sea than on land. As well as terrifying local



divers, they can produce blankets of floating rocks, blocking sea ports and damaging boats.

Volcanic activity is usually monitored using seismology. Devices buried deep below the ground pick up vibrations. Seismologists can recognize and record the size and depth of volcanic activity using this data. Sound waves travel differently in vast bodies of water like oceans, so normal seismology can fall short in recording underwater eruptions.

“Unlike the land-based volcanoes, it’s very rare that we detect increases of activity before an eruption begins. This doesn’t mean the signs aren’t there—they’re likely just undetected by the sparse instruments that we have in the oceans,” Gabrielle Tepp said.

■ **Different sounds recorded**

Using sophisticated hydrophones, the team recorded vastly different sounds from the Ayhi eruption and from the 2015 and 2016 eruptions of Bogoslof, a volcano near Alaska.

“The eruption styles of Ayhi and Bogoslof were different. This could be due to differences in the two systems, such as magma composition, amount of gas, and pressurization of the system,” Tepp says. “Ayhi is also completely submerged at around 250 feet deep, while Bogoslof is very shallow with part of its top just peeking out of the water.”

(Source: Newsweek)

Eating cheese every day may actually be good for people, new research finds

Cheese is typically considered more of an indulgence than a health food, but a new review of research suggests that it may not be as bad for you as once thought. In fact, people in the analysis who ate a little bit of cheese every day were less likely to develop heart disease or have a stroke, compared to those who rarely or never ate cheese.

Cheese, like other dairy products, contains high levels of saturated fat — which has been linked to high cholesterol, atherosclerosis and an increased risk of heart disease. (Recently, however, some nutrition experts believe that saturated fat is more benign.) But cheese also contains potentially beneficial ingredients like calcium, protein and probiotics, wrote the authors of the new paper, published in the European Journal of Nutrition.

■ **Long-term cheese consumption**

To learn more about how long-term cheese consumption affects a person’s risk for cardiovascular disease, researchers from China and the Netherlands combined and analyzed data from 15 observational studies including more than 200,000 people. All but one of the studies excluded people with existing heart disease, and all but two tracked people for 10 years or more.

The researchers’ findings were “certainly different from what people might expect,” says Dr. Allan Stewart, director of aortic surgery at Ichan School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Medical Center, who was not involved in the new analysis.

Overall, people who consumed high levels of cheese had a 14% lower risk of developing coronary heart disease and were 10% less likely to have a stroke than those who rarely or never ate cheese.

The relationship, however, was U-shaped rather than linear — meaning that higher quantities of cheese were not necessarily



better. The people who had the lowest risks for heart disease and stroke were those who consumed, on average, about 40 grams a day — about the size of a matchbook.

■ **Specific foods**

“This is not the same as eating a big slice of cheesy pizza every day,” says Stewart. He also cautions against reading too much into data that’s self-reported — as much of the data was — because people tend to over- or under-estimate their consumption of specific foods.

Stewart points out that the study was only able to find an association between cheese consumption and decreased risk of heart disease, rather than a cause-and-effect relationship. It could be that people who eat cheese on a daily basis are healthier overall, or have more disposable income and higher socioeconomic statuses.

But it’s also possible that cheese has beneficial qualities that offset the negative impact of its high saturated fat content, says Stewart. “Cheese can be high in probiotics, which tend to put you in less of an inflammatory state,” he says. Cheese also contains conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), an unsaturated fatty acid that may increase the amount of HDL “good” cholesterol and decrease “bad” LDL levels.

(Source: time.com)

KANS Forum takes place in Tehran universities to enhance academic collaborations

KANS (Knowledge Application and Notion for Society) Forum, launched by Mustafa(PBUH) Science and Technology Foundation (MSTF), took place on December 4 at Sharif University of Technology, continuing with the presentation of scientific panels at Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University and Iran University of Science and Technology.

Aiming to involve university students in finding scientific solutions to problems including areas of water and environment, energy, health, information technology, economics and Islamic banking KANS forums was attended by international scholars and two laureates of Mustafa(PBUH) Prize. The forum is exploring topics ranging from basic science to revolutionary techniques and keynote presentations from world renowned researchers.

International scientific collaboration between the Islamic World and MSTF has held a series of Forums to debate in the topics of the Islamic World problems relying on Knowledge Application and Notion for Society.

The Mustafa(PBUH) Prize is a science and technology award of the Islamic world, awarded every 2 year to the best scholars of the Islamic world. This award is named after the Prophet of Islam(PBUH) due to his great emphasis on learning science, named after one of his titles, Mustafa(PBUH).

Meanwhile, KANS Forum is a competition amongst scholars, students and professors who present their ideas in the format of a 5-minute video clip. Therefore, the best scientific solutions to solve the problems of Islamic countries with the goals of using the capacities of the community of experts, an accumulation of works for future exploitation, raising the level of motivation and creativity of young elites, establishing a platform for the identification and exchange of scientific and technological ideas, the continuity of researchers’ interaction through cyberspace and capacity building of study opportunities are selected.

Doctor created 3D-printed euthanasia machine that can end life painlessly

Close to 800,000 people die because of suicide every year and many more attempt to end their own life. An innovation by an Australian doctor may potentially up suicide rates worldwide.

Philip Nitschke created a death machine with the aim of helping people commit suicide in an efficient and painless manner. Also known as “Dr. Death,” the founder of an organization that promotes voluntary euthanasia, and writer of the suicide handbook The Peaceful Pill thinks that his invention can help people die peacefully.

Nitschke used to speak about euthanasia only for those who are terminally ill but he appears to have changed his mind as he now thinks that each individual has the right to choose to live or die. He also developed a machine that can be used by people who no longer wishes to live.

The 70-year old doctor developed the Sarco capsule in The Netherlands, where people have been able to legally end their lives with the assistance of a doctor since 2001. Use of the machine, however, does not require help from a doctor.

“In my opinion — and when it comes to the Sarco-a doctor is not necessary. There are still certain conditions that people need to meet before they are considered, like being of sane mind. This is determined by an online questionnaire,” Nitschke said.

The device is made up of a reusable machine base and a capsule that can serve as a coffin after detaching. These parts can be created using a 3D printer and can be assembled anywhere.

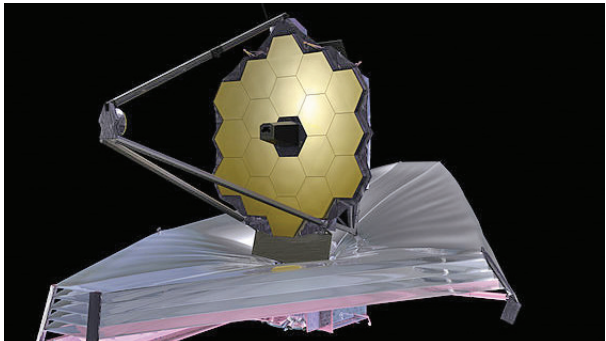
Nitschke said the coffin uses liquid nitrogen, which can be legally bought. The fluid will start to flow once a person takes a seat inside the machine. The person will then start to feel disoriented within two minutes, a feeling the doctor said is comparable to having too many drinks.

(Source: Tech Times)

NASA’s James Webb Space Telescope emerges from giant vacuum chamber

For more than three months, the science instruments and optical element from the \$8.8-billion observatory lived inside a chamber at NASA’s Johnson Space Center in Houston.

In a chamber called Johnson A, technicians put the telescope equipment through its paces. The goal was to make sure James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) can work in the cold, airless environment of space.



With testing complete, NASA will study the results even as engineers prepare to put the telescope together, agency officials said in a statement. But that will require a move from Houston to Redondo Beach, California. Once the parts arrive at the Northrop Grumman Aerospace Systems facility there, the instruments and optics will be put together with the sunshield and spacecraft bus — completing the telescope’s assembly.

JWST will launch in spring 2019 from a European spaceport in French Guiana; in late September, NASA once again pushed back its expected launch date, due to integration issues. After launch, the telescope will journey to the sun-Earth Lagrange point 2, which is a gravitationally stable location 930,000 miles (1.5 million kilometers) from Earth.

The telescope will operate in infrared wavelengths and like its predecessor the Hubble Space Telescope, will have plenty of different science work to keep it busy. Some of JWST’s missions include looking at the universe’s first light, examining exoplanets and figuring out how galaxies assembled early in the universe’s history.

(Source: space.com)

Test Pilot of NB-IoT System Conducted in Iran Successfully: IRANCELL

As leading operator of mobile phone in the country, IRANCELL tested Object Internet Ecosystem successfully which is based on Narrow Band Information Technology (NB-IoT), the Public Relations Dept. of the company in Mashhad reported.

It should be noted that this comprehensive test was conducted for urban gas transfer in the shrine city of Mashhad which include: tests related to the accuracy of connection of SIM card to the network, testing full transfer of data transferred from meter to the platform and simultaneous reading of data related to the consumption of energy from

gas meters.

Object internet ecosystem is based on NB-IoT technology which is formed from various parts including NB-IoT network, NB-IoT meter and Meter Data Management and NB-IoT SIM Card, the report added.

National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) held tender for the pilot implementation of reading 5,000 gas meters on LPWAN networks in third three months of the last Iranian calendar year. After the analysis of necessary feasibility studies with regard to the selection of proper LPWAN network, IRANCELL unveiled the first NB-IoT site in Feb.

2017 in the presence of the then Minister of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

It is worth mentioning that NarrowBand IoT (NB-IoT) is a Low Power Wide Area Network (LPWAN) radio technology standard developed to enable a wide range of devices and services to be connected using cellular telecommunications bands. NB-IoT is a narrowband radio technology designed for the Internet of Things (IoT) and is one of a range of Mobile IoT (MIoT) technologies standardized by the 3rd Generation Partnership Project (3GPP).

EDBI and Hungarian Bank Establish Fair Interaction: MEAF Minister

Iranian Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance (MEAF) Masoud Karbasian evaluated the cooperation between Export Development Bank of Iran (EDBI) and a Hungarian bank as “positive, constructive and successful ex-

perience”, Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

In his meeting with Hungarian Minister of Economy, Karbasian said: “Giant steps have been taken in this field and suitable ways have

been paved for both sides to do their trade and business exchanges easily.”

He pointed to a Memorandum of Understanding inked between EDBI and Exim Bank of Hungary and said: “A special credit line has

been opened by Hungarian Exim Bank, worth €85 million, in order to intensify the bilateral business interactions.”

The credit line can be used jointly for implementation of economic projects, the report ended.

SHATEL Provides Shuttle Mobile Internet Packages for 1st Time in Country

For the first time in the country, SHATEL, leading Internet Service Provider (ISP) in the country, supplied shuttle mobile internet packages along with conversation minutes and NAMAVA (online downloading and displaying of TV serials and feature-length movies) subscription package for its dear subscribers, the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

SHATEL’s new mobile phone packages

are applicable across the country using high-speed mobile broadband services with no restriction in terms of speed and hours of use in 600 cities as the most affordable and fairest internet tariffs, the report added.

Generally speaking, SHATEL Company offers its mobile services to its subscribers with fair and reasonable prices.

For more information on the price list of all internet packages, applicants and

subscribers of the company can get in touch with the following phone number: 0098 1000000 and/or refer to the below website address at: www.shatelmobile.ir.

It should be noted that Shatel is an Iranian Internet Service Provider and a “Large” Local Internet registry based in Tehran, Iran. Shatel is the first ADSL2+ service provider in the country, and the first gigabit wireless network operator based on registered microwave frequency.



UN commits to stop ocean plastic waste

By Roger Harrabin, environment analyst

Nations have agreed that the world needs to completely stop plastic waste from entering the oceans.

The UN resolution, which is set to be sealed on Friday, has no timetable and is not legally binding.

But ministers at an environment summit in Kenya believe it will set the course for much tougher policies and send a clear signal to business.

A stronger motion was rejected after the U.S. would not agree to any specific, internationally agreed goals.

Under the proposal, governments would establish an international taskforce to advice on combating what the UN’s oceans chief has described as a planetary crisis.

Environmentalists say ministers are starting to take plastic waste more seriously, but need to move much more quickly.

Li Lin from the green group WWF said: “At last we are seeing some action on this issue, but we still don’t have the urgency we need. The problem needs solving right now.”

One contentious issue is the wish of delegates to include businesses on the global taskforce.

Ministers say the problem will not be solved without business, but green groups point out that some firms in the plastics industry have been lobbying against restrictions for decades.

Vidar Helgesen, Norway’s environment minister, a leading voice in the talks, told BBC News: “Business is listening to markets and seeing how marine litter is a growing popular concern.

“It’s possibly the fastest-growing environmental problem and it’s therefore a fast-growing problem for business.

“We need to bring on board those companies that want to change things, then look at taxes and regulations to make more companies act sustainably.

“We also need to mobilize businesses like aquaculture that suffer from marine pollution.”

Certainly, there has been a flurry of resistance from plastics firms to the bans occurring across Africa.

One UN delegate, who did not want to be named, told me journalists in some countries were being paid by the plastics industry to write stories about job losses following the plastic bag ban.

Here in Kenya, a long newspaper report counted job losses from the sudden closure of a plastics plant. But it did not mention the jobs being created in alternatives, such as labour-intensive basketwork, which provides work for the rural poor.

But some governments are standing firm, and the meeting has witnessed individual nations declaring tougher action against single-use plastic bags on their own territory.

South Africa and Cameroon are the latest to declare a tax on the thin bags which strew Africa’s fields and cities.

Nations with a near total ban include Mauretania, Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mauritius, Zanzibar and Uganda.

Bangladesh imposed a ban in 2002 after plastic bags blocked drains and contributed to major floods.

Sri Lanka and others adopted a ban for similar reasons, although in Mauretania a ban came because cattle were getting sick from eating plastic.

Whatever the motivation for restrictions, sea creatures will eventually benefit from a slackening in the tide of waste.

The UN’s spokesman Sam Barratt told BBC News: “Of course we would have liked to have gone further, but this meeting’s made real progress.

“There’s now a sense of urgency and energy behind the issue that we haven’t quite seen before.

“What is obvious, though, is that the UN can’t solve this problem on its own. We need to do it in partnership with governments, businesses and even individuals.”

Whilst the UN grinds slowly forward, one delegate told me the meeting had been really useful for ministers to share their experiences on action they had taken in their own countries. Laggards were learning from progressives, he said.

He highlighted collaborative action from states along Africa’s Atlantic coast to clamp down on the waste that infests their seas. The UK may be brought into that partnership thanks to its British Overseas Territory of St Helena.

(Source: BBC)

LEARN ENGLISH

I’m sorry

A: Whoa, whoa, what’s going on? Watch out!

B: Hey, watch where you’re going!

A: Oh, no! I’m so sorry! Are you all right?

B: Oh...I don’t know.

A: I ‘**feel terrible**’, I really didn’t ‘**mean**’ to ‘**knock you over**’. My tire, just ‘**exploded**’, and I lost control of my bike. Really, it was an ‘**accident**’. Please accept my apologies.

B: Just let me try to stand up.

SONG: Why do birds suddenly appear, every time you are near?

A: Are you okay?

B: Oh, wait a second, you seem really ‘**familiar**’, I think I know you from somewhere.

A: Yeah, I think we have met somewhere before. That’s right! We met at Aaron’s ‘**place**’ last weekend! What a ‘**coincidence**’! But anyway, I’m glad to see that you’re not too badly hurt, and I should probably get going. I have a nine o’clock meeting.

B: Ouch! My ankle! I think it’s broken! You can’t just leave me like this! Are you calling an ambulance?

A: Nope, I’m canceling my appointment so that I can stay here with you.

■ Key vocabulary

feel terrible: sorry

mean: intend, plan

knock over: make something fall over

explode: suddenly break apart

accident: an event that is not planned or intended

familiar: probably known, but not clearly remembered

place: house

coincidence: situation when two or more things happen at the same time in an unplanned way

■ Supplementary vocabulary

regret: feel sad or sorry about something

apologetic: feeling or showing regret, showing an apology

feel guilty: feel responsible for doing something bad

unfamiliar: not familiar

(Source: irlanguage.com)

DOE proposes \$375,000 budget for cheetah conservation

1 → Based on the sightings the number of remaining Asiatic cheetahs can be estimated at almost 50. However, due to the shortcomings of counting methods the number is not exact.

Asiatic cheetahs’ population was once believed to roughly stand at 70 to 120, Zohrabi said, explaining, however, the numbers are not reliable and were only based on unrealistic and inaccurate estimates.

“So once being compared to today’s estimates [about 50] some deem Conservation of Asiatic cheetah project inefficient,” he added.

Many may attribute the dramatic decrease- though unreasonable- to the Conservation of Asiatic Cheetah Project unproductive techniques in safeguarding the precious species.

“Nonetheless the project has prevented total extinction and we hope to reverse the extinction by eliminating the threats in the near future,” he suggested.

■ Female cheetah, two cubs spotted in national park

On a happier note concurrent with the International Cheetah Day, December 4, a female cheetah and her two cubs were spotted in Touran National Park, Semnan province, by the rangers patrolling the area, Iran’s environment and wildlife watch website reported.

The Asiatic cheetah mainly inhabits the desert areas around Dasht-e Kavir in the eastern half of Iran, including parts of Kerman, Khorasan, Semnan, Yazd, Tehran, and Markazi provinces. Most live in five protected areas, Kavir National Park, Touran National Park, Bafq Protected Area, Dar-e Anjir Wildlife Refuge, and Naybandan Wildlife Reserve. The cheetah has been listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List since 1996.



© Ali Mohammadi

On a happier note concurrent with the International Cheetah Day, December 4, a female cheetah and her two cubs were spotted in Touran National Park, Semnan province, by the rangers patrolling the area.

No link between recent quakes across Iran: seismologist

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Recent earthquakes hitting provinces of Kermanshah, Tehran, Kerman, Bushehr and Gilan are not connected to each other, professor of engineering seismology Mehdi Zare said.

No one can find any direct relation between the recent quakes which rocked Azgaleh in Kermanshah on November 12, Damavand in Tehran on November 30, Hejdak in Kerman on December 1, Dayyer in Bushehr and Langarud in Gilan on December 5, he explained.

Each of the aforesaid earthquake occurred in a separate fault zone and are not practically linked to each other so predicting them is impossible not only in Iran but also in any other developed countries, Khabaronline quoted Zare as saying.

That over the past three week consecutive earthquakes have shook different provinces of Iran is a truth and is reflecting the fact that Iran’s fault systems are active, he stated.

“Delete all messages shared on social media which are



Mehdi Zare

relating such incidents to one another and stop them from going viral,” he suggested.

Retired cooks partake in Tehran food festival

SOCIETY d e s k

TEHRAN — Retired cooks took part in a food festival dubbed “food and colorful tables” at Tehran’s Milad Tower on Tuesday.

Hundreds of retired Tehrani cooks, their children and grand-children joined the cooking festival and prepared more than 1,550 full-course meals including appetizers, main courses, and desserts in two sections of international and Iranian cuisine.

This was the fourth time that retired cooks have gathered together in a cooking event. Each year participants grow in number as some 3,000 cooks and their family members have joined the festival this time, director for Tehran municipality’s pensioners’ organization, Mostafa Montazeralmahdi, said.

The joyful event culminated in selecting and awarding the 20 winning foods.



ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → €

Flood leaves 2 dead, 2 missing in Iran

Severe flood in Golestan Province in northeastern part of Iran has so far claimed two lives and left 2 missing.

Heavy rain and storm happened on Thursday evening across Aliabad, Kalaleh, Gonbad-e Kavus and Azadshahr countries, Fars reported.

One individual died after falling from the roof of a house due to heavy wind in Gonbad-e Kavus, Iran’s Emergency Medical Services official Hassan Nouri announced.

Two individuals onboard a car in Aliabad are still missing and one found dead, however the car has been found, he noted.

Search and rescue is still going on in the region, he concluded.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“alti-, alto-, alt-”

■ **Meaning:** high

■ **For example:** At high *altitudes* it is difficult to get enough oxygen.

PHRASAL VERB

Dump something on somebody

■ **Meaning:** to unfairly give someone an unwanted job, duty, or problem to deal with

■ **For example:** Don’t just dump the extra work on me.

ENGLISH IDIOM

Bite the dust

■ **Explanation:** the expression ‘bite’ or ‘hit the dust’ is a humorous way of referring to death

■ **For example:** It’s a story about an old cowboy who hits the dust during a train robbery.

سیل و طوفان در استان گلستان، ۲ کشته و ۲ مفقودی

معاون فنی و عملیات سازمان اورژانس کشور گفت: ۲ کشته و ۲ مفقود به دلیل وقوع سیل و طوفان در استان گلستان به جا ماند.

به گزارش خبرنگار خبرگزاری صدا و سیما، حسن نوری درخصوص خسارت و تلفات ناشی از حادثه سیل و طوفان در استان گلستان افزود: ۲ کشته و ۲ مفقود به دلیل وقوع سیل و طوفان در این استان بجای مانده وشهرستان‌های علی‌آباد ، کلاله ، گنبدکاویس و آزادشهر متأثر این حادثه شدند و متأسفانه این ۲ نفر بر اثر گیر افتادن خودروی پراید در مسیر سیلاب علی‌آباد مفقود شده‌اند.معاون فنی و عملیات سازمان اورژانس کشور افزود: همچنان به دلیل بارش شدید باران در شهر کلاله یک نفر در مسیر سیلاب گرفتار شده است که تیم‌های امدادی در حال انجام عملیات نجات آن هستند.

White House press briefing, always a spin zone, now approaching uselessness

The White House press briefing reached an ignominious milestone this week when a spokesman stood before reporters aboard Air Force One, read a series of prepared statements, and then refused to take on-the-record questions during one of the newsiest days of the Trump presidency.

The briefing for decades has been a mix of spin and information. But under President Donald Trump, a practice established to keep the public informed and the president accountable has increasingly failed to do either, according to academic experts and current and former journalists.

Concern over the demise of the briefing began before Trump was elected, part of a general concern about administrations trying to bypass the news media. President Obama, for example, drew criticism when he hired an official videographer who reporters feared might substitute for news cameras.

Trump, however, has accelerated the trend with a stream-of-consciousness Twitter feed that reaches more than 44 million accounts, open attacks on the news media and an administration that has been in a defensive posture since its beginning.

Add to that a media built around confrontational moments, where reporters are rewarded for dramatic face-offs that are often devoid of traditional news value.

Concern over how the Trump White House would use the press briefing began on the first full day of his presidency, when then-press secretary Sean Spicer, defying



evidence, declared Trump's inauguration audience had been the biggest in history and lashed out at reporters who accurately reported that it had drawn a smaller crowd than prior ceremonies.

Spicer's replacement, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, has pushed the briefing toward implausibility in other ways in recent weeks and has sharply limited the opportunity for public questioning of administration decisions.

Last Thursday, for example, was the first on-camera briefing since Trump had retweeted inaccurate and inflammatory anti-Muslim

videos from a British extremist group. At the same time, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson was the subject of intense speculation over his future, the Senate was finishing work on a massive tax bill, and the administration was contemplating recognizing al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's capital, rattling the Middle East.

The briefing that day lasted fewer than 20 minutes, seven of which were taken up by an appearance from the acting secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, who talked about Trump donating his

quarterly salary to combating opioid abuse.

When reporters did get a chance to ask Sanders whether Trump's tweets of the misrepresented videos risked inciting anti-Muslim violence and elevating a fringe political group, she gave a memorable response:

"What he's done is elevate the conversation to talk about a real issue and a real threat, and that's extreme violence and extreme terrorism," she said.

In other recent briefings Sanders told reporters that it was "highly inappropriate" to question a story from Trump's chief of staff, John F. Kelly, because he has served as a four-star Marine general and that the sexual misconduct accusations against Democratic Minnesota Sen. Al Franken and Trump differ because "Franken has admitted wrongdoing and the president hasn't."

Sanders said the press shares the blame. She noted accurately that Trump has been more accessible than his recent predecessors and provides on-the-record information frequently. She also pushed back at the suggestion that the White House speaks falsely.

"We believe the truth is fundamental and to suggest otherwise is outrageously insulting," she said. "Have you asked any of your colleagues who have published inaccurate stories this question as well?"

Several reporters for relatively small news outlets have landed cable news contracts following viral exchanges with Spicer, Sanders or both.

(Source: Tribune Washington Bureau)

U.S. is recruiting Russian journalists as agents: Moscow

Russia is accusing the United States intelligence agencies of trying to recruit its journalists as agents in an act of "severe pressure," the Interfax news agency reports.

Speaking at her Wednesday press briefing, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the trend was something Moscow has observed among its journalists in the U.S. and elsewhere.

"This is aggression," she said, though provided no evidence or anecdotal example of this alleged recruitment drive. "Aggression in the information sphere and not only in relation to the Russian Federation. We regard this as an attempt against the freedom of speech in the world as a whole."

Zakharova said that Russia would raise the issue with "American colleagues" and "the global community," arguing that Russian media overseas was under duress. The issue is on the agenda of Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov ahead of the meeting he plans to have with his U.S. counterpart this week in Austria.

"The relevant information will be handed to the American side tomorrow over the course of planned negotiations in

Vienna," Zakharova said. She made similar allegations in January, telling Russian state TV channel Rossiya 1 that the U.S. attempted to recruit an unnamed Russian diplomat.

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said earlier this week that relations with the U.S. at present resemble the Cold War, as the two countries have requested that one another's state-funded media outlets register as "foreign agents" on one another's soil.

In the U.S. this applies to RT and Sputnik while in Russia this applies to Voice of America and eight other outlets. The main difference between the moves is that while the U.S. media can often be critical of the government and the big media companies are privately owned, in Russia the state owns the largest outlets in print and broadcast.

This takes place against a backdrop of ongoing controversy, namely the allegations of all U.S. intelligence agencies that Russia hacked the U.S. election campaign last year, in an attempt to interfere with the result and the credibility of the U.S. election system.

During their meeting in Vienna, Lavrov and Tillerson will



likely also discuss the mounting crisis around North Korea's incessant missile and nuclear testing, Ryabkov has said.

The Department of State was not immediately available to comment on Zakharova's accusations.

(Source: Newsweek)

Trump impeachment vote to be forced Wednesday

A vote to impeach the United States President Donald Trump will happen on the House of Representatives floor on Wednesday, a Democrat has vowed.

Rep. Al Green of Texas in a House speech on Tuesday said he would bring articles of impeachment against Trump and force a vote the following day, after three prominent Democrats asked to meet with him to discuss the matter.

"I will tell them that impeachment is not

about Democrats that it's not about Republicans. I will tell them that it is about democracy," Green said of the Democrats he plans to meet with in his office. "It is about government of the people, by the people, for the people. I will tell them it is about the republic, it is about what (Benjamin) Franklin said, 'We have a republic if we can keep it.' I refuse to sit on the sidelines while the world is considering one of the greatest issues of our time."

The impeachment vote will likely only be procedural.

Green last week said that he would bring a vote this week but had not given a specific date.

The Texas Democrat previously called Trump "the chief inciter of racism, bigotry, hatred, xenophobia, sexism, and ethnocentrism." Impeachment articles he introduced in October state that Trump "brought disrepute on the presidency"

and "undermined the integrity of his office" but did not make criminal accusations.

Besides Green, five other House Democrats introduced impeachment articles last month. The sponsors are Reps. Steve Cohen of Tennessee, Adriano Espallat of New York, Marcia Fudge of Ohio, Luis Guterrez of Illinois and John Yarmuth of Kentucky.

(Source: The Hill)

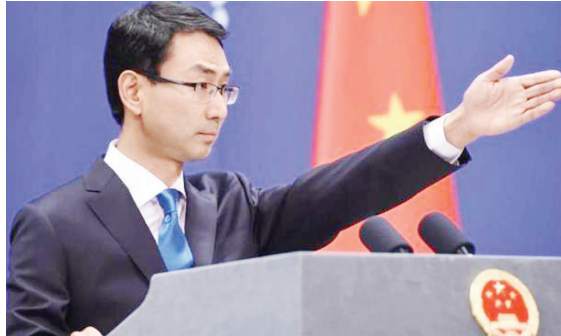
China warns against escalation on Korean Peninsula

Chinese authorities have again warned against moves that could escalate the crisis on the Korean Peninsula, saying parties to the conflict should avoid actions that add to the already simmering tensions in the region.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said on Wednesday that a United States decision to send powerful fighter jets to areas on the peninsula where the U.S. and South Korean militaries are holding joint drills would further complicate the situation.

"We hope relevant parties can maintain restraint and not do anything to add tensions on the Korean Peninsula," Shuang told a regular briefing with reporters in Beijing.

The remarks came after the U.S. B-1B bombers that flew from the U.S. territory of Guam in the Pacific joined the large-scale U.S.-South Korean military exercises. North Korean officials have slammed the drills, dubbed as "Vigilant Ace" and slated to run until Friday, as another attempt by the U.S. and its allies in the region to provoke a nuclear war.



The U.S. military, which maintains around 30,000 troops in South Korea, has rejected Pyongyang's claims, saying the drills are never meant to simulate an invasion.

However, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)

said in a statement last week that the U.S. under President Donald Trump was "begging for nuclear war" by staging the drills.

The stand-off on the Korean Peninsula was escalated in July when the North tested two intercontinental ballistic missiles. It then launched missiles over Japan and carried out its sixth and most powerful nuclear tests in August. Pyongyang says the actions are in response to increasing the U.S.-led economic pressure on the country while it also serves as a deterrent against potential invasion.

The issue of joint drills between the U.S. and South Korea remains a thorny issue in the way of efforts to bring about a solution to the crisis in the peninsula. China and Russia, two countries that enjoy better ties with Pyongyang, have reiterated that Washington and Seoul need to stop the regular drills if they want North Korea to halt its weapons program.

(Source: agencies)

Demo in memory of Greek teen killed by police in 2008 turns violent

Masked youths have thrown stones and vandalized property in Athens during annual protests in remembrance of a teenage boy killed by police in 2008.

The small groups of youths also tore down street signs, toppled garbage bins and set fire to debris on Wednesday.

Riot police were on the scene, but generally

did not interfere.

School pupils, university students and left-wing organizations are holding protests in Greece's main cities in memory of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos, who was fatally shot by a police officer in 2008.

At the time, Grigoropoulos' death sparked days of youth unrest around Greece.

Greek police are already on alert over a two-day visit by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan starting on Thursday.

The officer who shot Grigoropoulos following a street row, Epaminondas Korkoneas, was in 2010 found guilty of culpable homicide and sentenced to life in prison for the killing.

At his trial, Korkoneas claimed he had fired

warning shots to keep back youngsters who were hurling objects at him and his patrol partner.

One of his bullets deflected onto the boy's chest, killing him before he could be taken to hospital.

His patrol partner Vassilios Saraliotis was sentenced to 10 years for complicity, but was conditionally freed in 2011.

(Source: AFP)

Congressman Conyers resigns amid allegations of sexual misconduct

Rep. John Conyers, the longest-serving United States congressman, has announced that he will immediately resign from the House of Representatives amid allegations of sexual misconduct leveled by multiple women.

Conyers, a Democrat from Michigan, sent a letter to House Speaker Paul Ryan and Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi informing them of his decision to step down from Congress as of Tuesday.

"I was taught by a great woman, my mother, to honor women," Conyers wrote, according to Rep. Sheila Jackson

Lee who read the letter before the House.

"Given the totality of the circumstance of not being afforded the right of due process in conjunction with current health conditions and to preserve my legacy and good name, I am retiring," the letter said.

Last month, Conyers admitted to settling a wrongful dismissal complaint in 2015 with a former employee who claims he sexually harassed her.

Media reports said at the time that the 88-year-old paid more

than \$27,000 dollars to the woman who allegedly had been fired because she would "not succumb to (his) sexual advances."

Since then more women have come forward to accuse the lawmaker of sexual harassment, but he rejects the allegations and vows to fight his accusers in court.

Conyers told the local media on Tuesday that "I am retiring today," and that he endorsed his son, John Conyers III, to replace him in Congress.

(Source: Press TV)

Saudi regime-led coalition intensifies airstrikes against Yemen after death of Saleh

The House of Saud regime-led coalition has intensified its airstrikes against the Yemeni capital, Sana'a, and other areas following the killing of the former Yemeni president, Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The coalition's warplanes conducted dozens of airstrikes on positions of the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement in Sana'a and other northern provinces early on Wednesday despite calls for a humanitarian ceasefire in the country, Yemen's al-Masirah television reported.

The coalition also bombed the presidential palace, Saleh's residence and houses of his family members.

Local residents said loud explosions were heard in downtown Sana'a.

The airstrikes also targeted other Yemeni provinces, including Ta'izz, Hajjah and Sa'dah.

The assaults on Hajjah left a woman and a girl dead and injured 10 others in Mabyan District. The Saudi warplanes also fired more than 150 rockets and mortar shells at Razih and Shada'a districts in Sa'dah Province.

Elsewhere in the southwestern province of Ta'izz, four people were wounded following the bombardment of a fuel station in Mukha District.

Yemeni forces, on the other hand, targeted the positions of the Saudi-led mercenaries in Nihm District in Sana'a Province and Maton district in the northern province of Jawf.

Saleh was killed on Monday while attempting to escape Sana'a to Ma'arab Province. This came shortly after he broke ranks with the Ansarullah movement in favor of the Saudi regime-led military coalition, which has been pounding Yemen to reinstall its former Riyadh-allied government.

On Tuesday afternoon, tens of thousands of Yemenis staged a demonstration against the Saudi regime-led war against Yemen, calling for unity among all factions in the country.

The Ansarullah movement has been both running state affairs and defending the country against the Saudi regime aggression.

More than 12,000 people have been killed since the onset of the House of Saud regime's military campaign in March 2015. Much of the Peninsula country's infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and factories, has been reduced to rubble due to the war.

According to the United Nations, the country is experiencing "the worst humanitarian crisis on the planet."

The new round of airstrikes came a day after Saleh's son Ahmed Ali vowed to lead a campaign against the Ansarullah movement.

In a briefing to the Security Council, UN Special Envoy for Yemen Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed has urged all parties to exercise restraint.

According to Yemen's Interior Ministry, Yemeni forces, backed by fighters from the popular Ansarullah movement, are in full control of all positions previously held by Saleh's militias in Sana'a.

■ Riyadh sought to use Saleh to save itself

Omar Nashabi, editor of Al-Akhbar newspaper believes that the Saudi regime in fact intended to use Saleh's position to find a way out of the quagmire it is stuck in.

"The Saudis would like to find a way out of this situation. They thought perhaps the way out would be by actually engaging Ali Abdullah Saleh and getting him back in control of the capital Sana'a at least and pushing for a solution in a forced way. They thought they could turn the time and go back to the past where Ali Abdullah Saleh was always a player who used to know how to deal with the situations inside Yemen," he told Press TV.

As it turned out, the Ansarullah movement succeeded in foiling the Saudi regime "conspiracy," he noted, insisting that the need for unity in Yemen is now greater than ever before.

Nashabi warned of "the very tight" situation in Yemen and predicted that there will be further escalation on the part of the so-called Saudi-led coalition in the coming weeks.

He also emphasized that Saudi Arabia's military aggression should stop as fast as possible, and that more interference in the internal affairs of Yemen will only complicate things further.

There needs to be an immediate ceasefire for the Yemenis to figure out their future, because if the Saudi aggression continues, there will not be a way forward to the negotiating table for a political settlement, he stated.

Also talking to Press TV, a professor at George Washington University, Nabil Mikhail, predicted that the killing of Saleh will "expand the regional scope" of Yemen's conflict.

He warned of a possible involvement of Egypt in the conflict by moving closer to Saudi Arabia as well as efforts to get Russia to also play a role.

(Source: Press TV)

Trump's endorses Israeli occupation, invites violence

➡ Daesh and the Trump-Netanyahu coalition are two ends of an extreme. The end results are the same: spread of violence and extremism.

The U.S. has been paying dearly for such decisions in the past. Its support for the Israeli regime which has been humiliating Palestinians for over seven decades have radicalized the youth, especially those in the Arab world.

Ignorant of history Washington is again buying hatred and inviting violence.

There is a solution to the Irish border imbroglio. But blind ideology prevents it

➡ Except, of course, that this has ideological problems for them as well. John Major's 1993 declaration that the British government has no "selfish interest" in keeping Northern Ireland within the UK probably reflects the attitude of the majority of British people. But not that of hard Brexiters.

They suffer from what JA Hobson once termed "milomania", the desire to hoard land on a map. They could no more stomach a border poll than the DUP, afraid of the vote going the "wrong" way. After all, the worst way to launch empire 2.0 would be to surrender the final original piece of empire 1.0.

Thus, ideological blindness stops the DUP from accepting a reasonable solution and stops the Tories using their obvious leverage to break the impasse. The irony is that, for over two centuries, the political difficulties between Britain and Ireland have been largely attributed to irrational Irish intransigence in response to enlightened and practical British benevolence. How times have changed.

(Source: The Guardian)

Serena Williams ‘has entered’ Australian Open

Serena Williams has entered the Australian Open in January, tournament director Craig Tiley has said.

The 36-year-old won this year’s event in Melbourne while in the early weeks of pregnancy and gave birth to a daughter in September.

Tiley told the Herald Sun the 23-time Grand Slam winner is “very likely” to return to tennis in Melbourne.

“She’s got her visa, she’s entered, she’s practising,” he said. “There’s no question she’ll be ready in our view.”

Williams, who has won the Australian Open seven times, has posted on social media that she has returned to training.

Australia’s Margaret Court, with 24, is the only player still ahead of Serena in terms of Grand Slam singles titles.

“She wants to break a record that is Margaret Court’s,” added Tiley. “It would be a pretty significant accomplishment for her to be able to do that.”

(Source: BBC)

Novak Djokovic adds Radek Stepanek to coaching team

Former world No 1 Novak Djokovic has confirmed Radek Stepanek will join his coaching team.

The 30-year-old Serbian has been without a permanent coach since parting company with Marian Vajda in May, with Andre Agassi stepping in as a temporary advisor at Grand Slams.

But Djokovic has endured a difficult 2017, slipping to 12th in the world rankings. And in response he has turned to Stepanek – news he confirmed in an Instagram Live.

The 39-year-old ended his lengthy playing career in November last year and will join Agassi as part of Djokovic’s staff, working primarily at ATP Tour tournaments.

A quarter-final appearance at Wimbledon in 2006 was Stepanek’s best singles performance in a Grand Slam, but in the latter years of his career Stepanek excelled in doubles, winning the US Open, Australian Open and Davis Cup (twice). He also won the Davis Cup with the Czech Republic in 2012 and 2013.

Djokovic will make his comeback at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in late December before starting his competitive season in Doha.

(Source: Eurosport)

Russian athletes appeal against IOC’s Olympic bans, court says

Twenty-two Russian athletes banned for life by the International Olympic Committee for doping offences at the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics are appealing their ban, the Court of Arbitration for Sport said on Wednesday.

Their appeal comes a day after the IOC banned Russia from next year’s Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, allowing only invited clean athletes to participate as neutrals.

“The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) has registered 22 appeals filed by Russian athletes against decisions taken by the Disciplinary Commission of the International Olympic Committee,” CAS said.

It said the athletes had asked CAS to rule before the start of the Feb. 9-25 Pyeongchang Olympics in South Korea.

Among those appealing are gold medalist bobsledders Aleksandr Zubkov and Dmitry Trunenkov, cross-country gold medalist Alexander Legkov and champion skeleton racer Aleksander Tretiakov.

The IOC found the athletes violated anti-doping rules as part of a wider, systematic doping effort by Russia at the Sochi Games. It barred them from the events they had competed in, confiscated all medals they had won and banned them from taking part in any future Olympic games.

Lifetime Olympic bans have been overturned at CAS in the past, with the court ruling that athletes who had been suspended for doping could not be punished again by being left out of the Olympics.

The 22 Russians are set to miss February’s Games whatever happens, because doping violations carry bans of two to four years for first-time offenders.

(Source: Reuters)

We are Bayern - Muller bristles after PSG revenge

Thomas Muller invited Paris Saint-Germain’s admirers to be “off the gas” after Bayern Munich gained a measure of Champions League revenge against the Ligue 1 leaders.

PSG thumped Bayern 3-0 at Parc des Princes in September, a result that prompted the sacking of boss Carlo Ancelotti.

Under Jupp Heynckes, the Bundesliga champions secured a closing 3-1 Group B win – not enough to snatch top spot but Robert Lewandowski’s early opener before a brace from Corentin Tolisso did plenty in terms of restoring pride.

Muller featured as a second-half substitute and later reminded reporters of Bayern’s long-standing European pedigree.

“I think we won 3-1. Of course, PSG had one or two good chances but you did not feel that another team was superior to us here,” he said. “We are still Bayern.”

“When it was 3-0 in Paris, we had a corner ratio of 18-1 for us and it is pretended that PSG had a potion or something.

“Of course, they have very good offensive players but you should be off the gas when it comes to talking up other teams.”

Muller also claimed PSG were the beneficiaries of favourable officiating on Tuesday because of the reaction to their win in the French capital earlier in the group.

“I think the referee also read your articles because I felt I had an away game in Paris as to how much the referee protected the PSG players,” he added.

“So, we are still Bayern.”

(Source: Goal)

Russia banned from Winter Olympics but ‘clean’ athletes can compete



chenkov. There was also scientific evidence, witness statements documents and correspondence, he said.

“The facts are that in Russia there was systemic manipulation of doping and the anti-doping system... that also took place at Sochi 2014,” added Schmid.

RUSSIAN APOLOGY

IOC President Thomas Bach said: “Today we gave the Russian delegation the opportunity to express themselves. In this meeting this afternoon the president of ROC (Russian Olympic Committee) has apologized.

“As a former athlete I am feeling very sorry for all the clean athletes who are suffering from this manipulation... but because we are

allowing clean athletes to participate they can set about building a bridge for the future (rather) than erecting a new wall between Russia and the Olympic movement.”

Zhukov described the IOC decision as contradictory. “There are positive and negative sides,” he said. “The IOC has allowed all clean athletes in all sports.”

Other Russians were more forthright, with Alexei Kravtsov, president of the Russian Skating Union, saying: “The decision is offensive, insulting and completely unjustified.

“I consider that this decision will deal a great blow to the whole Olympic movement.”

Alexei Kurashov, president of the Russian freestyle federation, added: “The Olympic

movement has discredited itself and there will be fundamental consequences to this.

“These are not the principles of Olympism. I can’t say that the activities of the IOC are honest.”

“WELCOME STEP”

U.S. Senator John McCain, a frequent critic of the Kremlin, praised the IOC announcement.

“The International Olympic decision to ban Russia from the 2018 Winter Olympics is a welcome step in serving justice to Vladimir Putin’s government for its elaborate doping scheme in 2014,” he said in a statement.

“Today’s announcement sends an important message to Putin’s Russia that being a member of the international community means abiding by rules, norms, and standards - and that anything less will not be tolerated.”

The IOC’s decision comes 18 months after it decided not to impose an outright ban on Russian athletes ahead of Rio and told international sports federations to decide individually on the participation of Russians at the Olympics in Brazil.

While all of Russia’s track and field athletes bar one and the weightlifting team were banned from Rio, about 70 percent of Russia’s original 387-strong squad took part at those Games. Bach said on Tuesday, however, that the situation was different now.

“(Ahead of Rio) there was no opportunity to hear the Russian side and at the time of Rio it was mainly about the failure in the Moscow lab. Now it’s about the manipulation of an Olympic lab. The conditions then and now are totally different.”

(Source: Reuters)

I’m telling the truth - Mourinho accuses Guardiola of lying over Silva injury



Manchester United boss Jose Mourinho tried to ramp up the derby-day mind games by accusing Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola of dishonesty with regards to David Silva’s fitness.

Influential City playmaker Silva scored a late winner last time out against West Ham to preserve an eight-point lead for Guardiola over Mourinho at the top of the Premier League table. But the Spain international has not travelled for Wednesday’s Champions League game against Shakhtar Donetsk, where Guardiola is expected to rest other key stars given his team have already secured progress to the knockout stages as Group F winners.

The former Barcelona coach told a pre-match news conference that Silva was a doubt for Sunday’s game at Old Trafford, although he failed to specify the nature of the 31-year-old’s complaint.

Speaking after Tuesday’s 2-1 win over CSKA Moscow, Mourinho was not buying it and grouped Guardiola’s claims with those of Arsene Wenger, the Arsenal manager who said Alexandre Lacazette would not face United last weekend before he promptly

played and scored in the Emirates Stadium thriller that the visitors won 3-1.

“The truth is Eric Bailly, no chance for the weekend, Phil Jones a chance, [Marouane] Fellaini a chance, Zlatan [Ibrahimovic] a big chance and [Nemanja] Matic is injured but will play for sure. [Michael] Carrick no chance,” Mourinho told a news conference “I’m telling the truth, he’s injured but will play for sure. No stories of Lacazette or David Silva. All the truth.”

Speaking to BT Sport, Mourinho maintained his theme and claimed United are “a bit more humble” than their rivals.

He also picked up a thread from earlier in the season – his perception that opponents complain about injuries in a manner that he does not. “No, we have no injuries,” he said. “Our opponents have all these issues. They have a big issue but in the end everybody is ready to play.

“They have phenomenal organizations. We are a bit more humble.

“When we have a problem, we have a problem. When players are injured, they are injured. I tell you the truth.”

(Source: Mirror)

Conte: Chelsea don’t fear Barcelona or PSG



Chelsea could face Barcelona or Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League last 16 but Antonio Conte insisted no one would be happy to play his side in the knockout round.

Chelsea lost their grip on top spot in Group C after being held to a 1-1 draw by Atletico Madrid as Roma leapfrogged the Premier League champions with a 1-0 win over Qarabag. Conte’s men salvaged a point at Stamford Bridge on Tuesday courtesy of a Stefan Savic own goal following Saul Niguez’s opener for Atletico. As it stands, Chelsea’s only possible last-16 opponents are LaLiga leaders Barca, Ligue 1 pacesetters PSG and Turkish giants Besiktas due to English teams leading four of the other seven groups.

However, Conte is not daunted about what lies ahead for Chelsea in Europe.

“When you go through to the next round in this competition, you must be prepared to face the best teams,” Conte said.

“We could play against Barcelona, PSG or Besiktas, but we must be ready. This is the best tournament. That’s why you want to go through and try and be a protagonist

in this tournament.

“At the same time, our opponents won’t be happy to play against us. We’ll see what happens. I remember during the European Championship with the national team we finished first in our group and played against Spain, then Germany and, if we’d beaten Germany, we’d have to play France. Sometimes it’s not so important [to finish first].

“We reached the next round and we must be happy with this. After a performance like this, the coach must be [happy].”

On the match itself in London as Chelsea finished level on 11 points with Roma but adrift due to their head-to-head record, Conte added: “I think it was a good game. A good performance. I think we deserved to win the game. “When you create so many chances to score – important chances, not simple chances – you have to try to take them. Instead, the goalkeeper was the best player for them. In other circumstances, we could be more accurate in our finishing. But, at the same time, we conceded a goal that shows we must improve.

(Source: Soccerway)

Ballon d’Or 2017: Why Ronaldo, not Messi, should claim the trophy

Lionel Messi has the statistical edge, but Cristiano Ronaldo’s big-game performances make him the obvious choice for the Ballon d’Or.

Either Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo will be awarded the Ballon d’Or on Thursday and, when comparing the two in 2017, the numbers mostly favor the Barcelona superstar.

For his club, Messi has scored more goals than Ronaldo (48 to 37), contributed more assists (14 to eight) and created more big chances (35 to 16).

But stats only count for so much. What really counts is how you perform in the biggest of moments and, in 2017, nobody has come close to touching Real Madrid’s Ronaldo in that regard. Messi did salvage a place at the World Cup for Argentina with a stunning hat-trick as they put Ecuador to the sword, but that rescue mission after a farcical qualifying campaign pales in comparison to what Ronaldo achieved in the month of May.

A hat-trick in the first leg of a Madrid derby Champions League semi-final all but sealed a place in the Cardiff showpiece, and that was followed by a superb run of five goals in Madrid’s final three LaLiga games to dethrone Barca and lift the title. Ronaldo had an encore in him, though, the Portugal superstar helping Madrid stick four past a dogged Juventus in the Champions League final, providing the masterstroke as Los Blancos became the first team to win back-to-back European Cups in the Champions League era.

17- Cristiano Ronaldo has scored 17 goals in El Clasico and he is only one away from the all-time R Madrid top-scorer: Di Stéfano (18). Though his LaLiga form has tailed off this season, Ronaldo remains at his brilliant best in the Cham-



pions League. He ended last season’s campaign by scoring 10 of Madrid’s 14 goals from the quarter-finals onwards and already has eight in the competition this season.

Of the two, Messi may have the better all-round game, he is more of a creator whereas Ronaldo largely prefers to stick to the role of predator, and it is also rare at this point in his career to see Ronaldo attempt the mazy dribbles that have become a trademark of the diminutive Argentinian’s play - he has completed 228 dribbles to the former Manchester United forward’s 45 in club football this year.

Yet, while Messi enjoys statistical supremacy almost across the board, Ronaldo has racked up records that speak

to why he deserves to receive football’s most prestigious individual honor, which will be presented to the winner at the Eiffel Tower. Ronaldo surpassed Jimmy Greaves as the all-time top scorer in the top five European leagues on May 17, and by netting against Juve, became the second player after Madrid legend Alfredo Di Stéfano to score in three different Champions League finals.

When the lights are on, it is rare that anybody shines brighter than Ronaldo. And, for that reason, it is he who deserves to receive the Ballon d’Or at the most famous landmark in the City of Light.

(Source: Four Four Two)

Iran crowned 2017 IWF World champions

S P O R T S Iran won the title of the 2017 International Weightlifting Federation (IWF) World Championships at the Anaheim Convention Center early Wednesday.

The Iranian team finished joint equal top of the medals table with Colombia despite having a men-only team.

Iran's Saeid Alihosseini claimed a silver medal in the event's final day in the men's super-heavyweights.

Georgian Lasha Talakhadze won the gold with a total of 477kg, improving his own world record by 4kg. He also broke his own snatch world record by 3kg when he lifted 220kg.

Alihosseini and Behdad Salimi were second and third with totals of 454kg and 453kg respectively.

Salimi had two lifts overruled by the jury for press-outs – not having his arm locked straight – much to the annoyance of a large contingent of Iranians in the crowd, who roared their disapproval even while others were competing.

Salimi had failed to register a total in the Rio Olympic Games in similar circumstances.

Alihosseini, 29, who still holds the junior world records he set in 2008, was originally banned for life but successfully appealed and has trained at his father's gym since 2011 when CAS reduced the suspension to eight years. He intends to compete at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games.

Iran's Sohrab Moradi in 94kg, Ali Hashemi in 105kg won two gold medals. Saeid Alihosseini in +105kg claimed silver and Behdad Salimi (+105) and Seyed Ayoob Mousavijarahi (94kg) seized the bronze medals.

Ali Moradi, president of the Iranian Weightlifting Federation, said his nation expected to have females competing for the first time at next year's World Championships in Turkmenistan.



Iranian teams know their rivals at 2018 AFC Champions League

A	AL JAZIRA (UAE) AL AHLI SAUDI FC (KSA) TRACTORSAZI TABRIZ (IRN) WEST PLAYOFF 2 WINNER	E	JEONBUK HYUNDAI (KOR) KITCHEE (HKG) EAST PLAYOFF 4 WINNER EAST PLAYOFF 2 WINNER
B	AL DUHAIL (QAT) AL WAHDA (UAE) LOKOMOTIV (UZB) WEST PLAYOFF 2 WINNER	F	KAWASAKI FRONTALE (JPN) ULSAN HYUNDAI (KOR) MELBOURNE VICTORY (AUS) EAST PLAYOFF 3 WINNER
C	PERSEPOLIS (IRN) AL SAID (QAT) AL WASL (UAE) WEST PLAYOFF 4 WINNER	G	GUANGZHOU EVERGRANDE (CHN) JAPAN 2ND CLUB JEJU UNITED (KOR) BURIRAM UNITED (THA)
D	AL HILAL (KSA) ESTEGHGLAL FC (IRN) AL RAYHAN (QAT) WEST PLAY OFF 1 WINNER	H	SYDNEY FC (AUS) SHANGHAI SHENHUA (CHN) KASHIMIRA ANTILERS (JPN) EAST PLAYOFF 1 WINNER

S P O R T S Iranian football teams have learned their opponents at the 2018 edition of the AFC Champions League following the competition's official draw in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday.

Iran's Tractor Sazi have been drawn in Group A along with the UAE's Al-Jazira, Al-Ahli of Saudi Arabia and winner of Al-Gharafa of Qatar and Uzbekistan's Pakhtakor.

Group B consists of Qatar's Al-Duhail, Al-Wahda of the UAE, Uzbekistan's Loko-

motiv Tashkent and either Iran's Zob Ahan or Indian Aizawl.

Persepolis of Iran were drawn with Al Sadd of Qatar, UAE's Al Wasl and either Nasaf Qarshi from Uzbekistan or Al-Faisaly of Jordan in Group C.

Saudi Arabian giants Al Hilal, who lost to Urawa Red Diamonds over two legs in this year's final, have been drawn in Group A along with Iran's Esteghlal, Al Rayyan of Qatar and either Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates or Bahrain's Malkiya in group D.

Persepolis, Esteghlal emerge victorious at Iran Professional League



S P O R T S Iranian popular football teams Persepolis and Esteghlal defeated their rivals at the Iran Professional League (IPL) on Wednesday.

IPL leaders Persepolis earned a late win over Sepidrood in Rasht's Sardar Jangal Stadium.

Ali Alipour found the back of the net in the 82nd minute.

"It's very hard to play at the artificial turf because the ball cannot move in right direct. Anyway, I am very happy due to

this win and I have to say I am happy to be here in Persepolis," Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic said in the post-match news conference.

In Tehran, Esteghlal defeated Sepahan 3-0 thanks to a brace from Server Djeparov.

Ali Ghorbani opened the scoring for Esteghlal and Djeparov scored twice in the 36th and 47th minutes.

Moreover, Zob Ahan defeated Naft Tehran 2-0, Tractor Sazi drew 1-1 with Foolad and Padideh lost to Gostaresh Foolad 2-0.

The Draw - Fans View: Islamic Republic of Iran

Islamic Republic of Iran, Asia's top ranked side, will have their work cut out for them when they make their second successive FIFA World Cup appearance in Russia next summer, after being drawn to play Spain, Portugal and Morocco in Group B.

Atbin Moayedi, a passionate Iranian fan who supported the team in Brazil at the last FIFA World Cup, spoke to the-AFC.com after the draw, giving his take on Team Melli's group stage opponents.

■ How would you rate your opponents in Group B?

A: I think the best team in Group B are Spain. Their track record, having won the European Championships and the World Cup in 2008 and 2010 respectively, speaks for itself. But we all know that they can disappoint, as they did not progress from the group stage in 2014.

In terms of strength, Spain are closely followed by current



European champions Portugal, who are captained by the best player in the world. Morocco too are a good team with a coach who has a record of success in Africa.

■ Which player are you most worried about facing?

A: In Cristiano Ronaldo, Portugal have the best player in the world. We know what he is capable of; he can turn a match around without much help from the rest of his team.

■ How would you rate your team's chances in light of the draw?

A: Taking everything into account, I think this is the 'Group of Death' in the tournament. But if we can hopefully start off with a win against Morocco and then get a point against Portugal or Spain, while hoping one of them beats the other in their first game, maybe we can progress with four points.

We could do a better job in a slightly easier group, but I think we'll put on a good show. We have an excellent defense that hasn't conceded a goal in 12 games on the trot and we're also unbeaten in 18 games. So, I'll have my fingers crossed!

(Source: the-afc)

Vingada resigns as Malaysia's national team coach



Accepting responsibility for Malaysia's poor form in the AFC Asian Cup 2019 Qualifiers, Nelo Vingada has resigned as the national team coach.

In a statement posted on the FA of Malaysia website, Vingada said: "After discussions with the President of the Football Association of Malaysia (FAM), HRH Major General Tunku Ismail Ibni Sultan Ibrahim, Crown Prince of Johor, I take responsibility for the performance of the national team.

"With this sense of responsibility, I hereby announce to relinquish my position as national head coach with immediate effect and the Tunku President himself has also accepted my decision."

Malaysia suffered back-to-back 4-1

defeats to DPR Korea in the AFC Asian Cup 2019 Qualifiers last month, which dashed their hopes of qualifying for the tournament to be hosted by the United Arab Emirates.

"I would also like to inform that my two assistants that I brought along, Joao Arnaldo Correia De Carvalho and Francisco Jose Bruto Da Costa have also resigned from their respective positions as national assistant coach and national fitness coach respectively.

"Finally, I like to take this opportunity to hope and pray for Malaysian football to shine again and that I was proud to be part of Malaysian football in this relatively short period of time," said Vingada.

(Source: the-afc)

Argentina end Brazil's winning streak



Brazil's 57 match unbeaten run in football 5-a-side came to an end on Monday (4 December) when they were beaten on penalties by arch-rivals Argentina in the final of the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) Blind Football American Championships in Santiago de Chile.

The match headed to penalties after neither side managed to find the goal during normal time. Brazil's Ricardinho was the first to score in the shoot-out, but Silvio Velo and Maximiliano Espinillo came through to secure Argentina the title for the first time since 2005.

Colombia defeated Mexico 3-0 to take the bronze medal, while Chile beat

Peru 2-1 on penalties after a 1-1 draw to secure fifth place.

Colombia's Juan Quintero was awarded top goal-scorer with 12, and his teammate Jhon Gonzalez was named player of the tournament.

Argentina, Colombia and Mexico have qualified to take part in the IBSA Blind Football World Championships in Madrid, Spain, in June 2018. As reigning world champions (Tokyo 2014), Brazil had already qualified automatically for Madrid 2018.

The Chilean Sports Federation for the Visually Impaired and the Paralympic Committee of Chile hosted the competition.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Supreme Leader extends congratulations on weightlifting team's victory

IRNA — Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has extended a congratulatory message on the championship of Iran's national weightlifting team in the world championship competitions in the US.

Ayatollah Khamenei also thanked young Iranian wrestling champion and member of Iran's national Omid wrestling team for his invaluable efforts.

"I thank the champion team in the world weightlifting competitions which have made Iranian nation happy; I am also sincerely thankful of Mr. Ali-Reza Karimi, our country's prosperous champion, who has turned the symbol of Iranians' dignity," read the message.

The 2017 IWF World Weightlifting Championships were held in Anaheim, California from November 27 to December 5.

Kianoush Rostami in 85 kg with a silver medal, Sohrab Moradi with three gold medals in 94 kg, Ayyoub Mousavi with two bronzes in 94 kg, Ali Hashemi with two golds and one bronze in 105 kg, Behdad Salimi with one silver and one bronze and Ali Hosseini with two silver medals and one bronze helped Iran stand on the first podium of the Championships.

Iran's adult team of weightlifters had previously gained two best team titles, one in France 2011 with 495 points came the third, and then in 2013 in Poland scored 442 and ranked the third.

Iran beat Russia to win Isfahan International Tournament

Iranian national futsal team finished Isfahan International Futsal Tournament on a high note on Wednesday.

Mohammad Nazemasharieh's team defeated Russia 4-0 in Isfahan's Naghsh-e Jahan Stadium.



Mehdi Javid scored twice for the host in the 19th and 29th minutes.

Alireza Rafiei made it 3-0 in the 32nd minute and Mohammad Shajari scored Iran's fourth goal in the 38th minute.

Iran started the competition with a 3-3 draw against Azerbaijan and edged past Kazakhstan 2-1 in their second match.

Iran won the title with seven points, followed by Russia (four points), Azerbaijan (two points) and Kazakhstan (two points).

Farzin takes gold at World Para Powerlifting C'ships

PARALYMPIC.ir — Iran's two-time Paralympic gold medalist Majid Farzin won a gold medal at the World Para Powerlifting Championships underway in Mexico City on Wednesday.

The Iranian started as favorite, especially after setting a world record of 240kg at Rio 2016 to finish ahead of Gu Xiaofei on the podium in a repeat of London 2012.

The Chinese emerged triumphant the only time they competed against each other outside the Paralympic Games, when he topped the podium at the 2014 Asian Para Games.

In the men's up to 80kg in Mexico City, Farzin won the gold medal with 227kg. Xiaofei seized the silver medal after lifting 222kg.

The bronze medal went to Jordan's Abdelkareem Khattab with 221kg.

Team Melli to play Algeria in friendly

TASNIM — Head coach of Iran national football team Carlos Queiroz says Team Melli will play a friendly match against Algeria ahead of the 2018 World Cup.

According to Queiroz, Iran will face Algeria in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on June 2.

Team Melli will kick off the 2018 World Cup with a match against Morocco in Group B and is going to play Algeria in a friendly match because of the similarities between the two teams.

"The match against Morocco will be like our World Cup final - we'll play like we are playing for our lives," said Queiroz.

"It's a great team with fantastic players and a great coach (Herve Renard)," he added.

FIFA lifts Kuwait's two-year ban from international soccer

FIFA says it has lifted Kuwait's ban from international soccer.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino is in Kuwait to confirm the government is no longer interfering in how the soccer federation is being run.

FIFA says the "Kuwait Parliament has adopted a new sports law" which complies with its statutes.

The ban was imposed in October 2015, leaving Kuwait unable to play its World Cup qualifiers. Because the 2019 Asian Cup qualifying program was linked to the World Cup, Kuwait also dropped out of the continental competition.

Kuwait remains suspended by the International Olympic Committee. Its athletes competed at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics as an independent team.

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Iranian cineastes to hold workshops in Vietnam

A R T **TEHRAN** — Iranian director Reza Dormishian and stage and screen star Parsa Piruzfar are scheduled to hold workshops at Ho Chi Minh City University of Theater and Cinema in Vietnam.

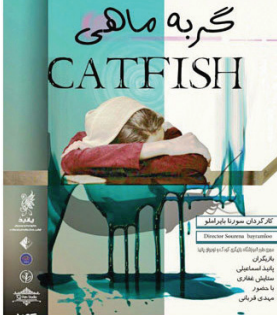


This combination photo shows Parsa Piruzfar (L) and Reza Dormishian.

Directing and acting in the cinema and theater will be reviewed during the workshops, which will be held on December 11 and 12. The Vietnam Cinema Association is the organizer of the workshops that will be open to Vietnamese filmmakers, screenwriters, and students and lecturers of the movie industry. Dormishian is the director of “Lanturi”, “I Am Not Angry” and “Hatred”, which have been acclaimed at several Iranian and international festivals.

Movies from Iran nominated for Golden Fox Award

A R T **TEHRAN** — Three Iranian movies have received nominations at the Golden Fox Award of the Calcutta International Cult Film Festival in India.



“Catfish” by Surena Bayramlu was nominated for the best student film award, while “I Don’t Like Her” by Javad Darai received a nomination for the best free speech film award. “Flatland”, co-directed by Alireza Keymanesh and Amir Pusti are among the nominees in the best experimental film category.

The winners will be announced during a ceremony on December 11.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Indian musicians to hold raga workshops in Tehran

A R T **TEHRAN** — Three Indian musicians are scheduled to hold two joint workshops on raga, a melodic mode in Indian classical music, at the Iranian Academy of Arts in Tehran on Saturday.

Sarod virtuoso Pandit Ranajit Sengupta, tabla player Kousik Banerjee and tambura player Anik Chakraborty will hold the first workshop on Friday at 8:30 p.m., the academy announced on Tuesday.

The second workshop will be held on Saturday at 10 a.m. The workshops are open to the public.

Final “House of Cards” season to focus on Robin Wright after Spacey exit

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — The final season of Netflix’s political drama “House of Cards” will focus on Robin Wright’s first female president character and will start production in 2018, following a hiatus after the exit of star Kevin Spacey, the company said on Monday.

Netflix’s Chief Content Officer Ted Sarandos told the UBS 45th Annual Global Media and Communications Conference in New York that the sixth season would be shortened to eight episodes instead of the usual 13.

Netflix Inc severed ties in November with Spacey, one of its biggest stars who played fictional U.S. president Frank Underwood in “House of Cards”, after accusations of sexual misconduct against the Oscar-winning actor.

Reuters was unable to independently confirmed the accusations. “We have made an arrangement to produce six seasons of ‘House of Cards’. It will be an eight-episode season. It will start production in early 2018 and it will not involve Kevin Spacey,” Sarandos said.

Sarandos did not say when season six would air or how Spacey’s character would be treated in the show.

A representative for Spacey did not respond to a request for comment.

Wright’s character, Claire Underwood, finished season five by winning election as the first U.S. female president after wresting power from her husband.

Italian maestro Giuranna impressed by President Rouhani’s remarks on unity

A R T **TEHRAN** — Italian maestro Damiano Giuranna who is the conductor of the World Youth Orchestra said that he was impressed by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani’s recent remarks on the need for unity among Muslims in the world.

Giuranna made the comment in a meeting with the musicians of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra in Tehran, Iran’s Rudaki Foundation announced on Wednesday.

In his speech at the opening ceremony of the 31st International Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran on Tuesday, Rouhani stressed the need for unity among Muslims in the world.

Giuranna said that the need for unity is not only vital for Muslims but also for all people of the world.

He added that people from all walks of life in the world should do their best to promote unity and solidarity.

Giuranna is in Tehran to supervise the second leg of a joint concert by the musicians of the Tehran Symphony Orchestra and the World Youth Orchestra from Italy, which is scheduled to be performed at Vahdat Hall this evening.

The first part of the performance was held at the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome on December 3.

The Tehran Symphony Orchestra and the World Youth Orchestra gave joint performances in Tehran in August, 2016.

Maestro Giuranna also held a series of

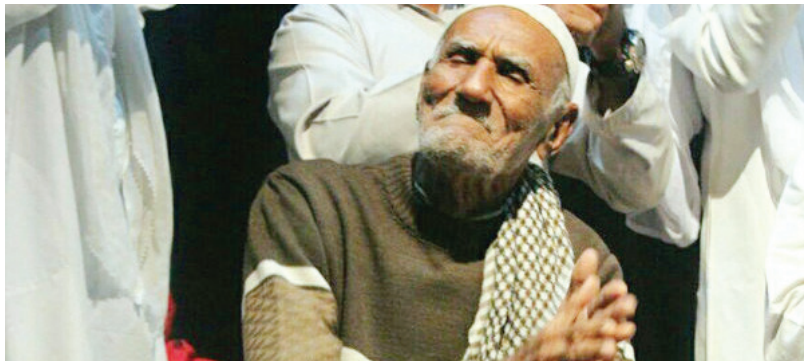


Italian maestro Damiano Giuranna conducts a rehearsal by the World Youth Orchestra and the Tehran Symphony Orchestra at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall on December 5, 2017. (Mehrf/Iman Hamikhah)

master classes at the Culture and Art Applied Science University in Tehran in February, 2017.

The collaborations are based on an agreement made by the Sapienza University of Rome, the Tehran University of Art and the Rudaku Foundation.

Musician Khalu Mohammad-Qanbar Hormozi dies in Tehran



This picture shows Khalu Mohammad-Qanbar Hormozi during his last performance at Tehran’s Baran Theater on December 4, 2017.

A R T **TEHRAN** — Khalu Mohammad-Qanbar Hormozi, a musician with Liva, a regional music band from the southern Iranian province of Hormozgan, died of a heart attack in Tehran on Tuesday.

The 88-year-old veteran passed out while performing on stage at Tehran’s Baran Theater on Monday night and was immediately taken to Firuzgar Hospital where he died the next day.

Khalu Mohammad was an expert on percussions, and was in Tehran with Liva

to give performances during the Hormoz Art Week, which opened on Sunday.

Liva’s next performances were canceled following the death of the musician. He was transferred to Hormoz to be buried in his homeland.

Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi visited the Liva band at the Baran Theater on Tuesday to extend sympathy and condolences to the members.

Liva is one of the oldest bands from the city of Hormoz in Hormozgan Province.

Italian illustrator Philip Giordano to hold workshops in Tehran

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Tokyo-based Italian illustrator Philip Giordano is in Tehran to hold workshops for a number of Iranian illustrators today and tomorrow.

Organized by the Iran Cultural Fairs Institute (ICFI) in collaboration with the Iranian Illustrators Society, the workshops will be held at the institute under the title “Geometric Characterization”, the ICFI announced on Wednesday.

Giordano will also hold another workshop for illustrators from Gilan Province, which is scheduled to be organized on the sidelines of the Gilan Book Fair running in the city of Rasht from December 7 to 12.

He is also slated to lecture at the University of Gilan and the Academy of Fine Arts of the University of Tehran.

Giordano works for several magazines and does designs for books and toys. His picture books have been published in many countries, including Japan, France, South America, United Kingdom, China, Spain and Portugal.

He is also the recipient of several awards, including a silver medal from the Society of Illustrators NY, and the



“Le Petit Prince”, an illustration by Philip Giordano.

International Award for Illustration from the Bologna Children’s Book Fair in 2010.

Johnny Hallyday, “French Elvis”, dies at 74 after cancer



French singer Johnny Hallyday waves to fans attending a ceremony to promote his new album “Jamais Seul” (Never Alone) at the Virgin Megastore in Paris early March 28, 2011. (Reuters/Charles Platiau)

PARIS (Reuters) — Johnny Hallyday, whose death at 74 was announced by his wife and the French president on Wednesday, was a rock and roll giant in his native France and survived drug use, family strife and near-death episodes to strut the stage for more than fifty years.

Hallyday, with his cowboy swagger and gravelly voice, was a “French Elvis” for hundreds of millions of followers, mostly if not all in his native country, where he sold more records than any other singer.

He had been fighting lung cancer, and also preparing yet another album recording and stage tour.

News of his death after weeks of frenzied speculation about his health, set social networks alight with tributes from fans, politicians and celebrities.

“For more than 50 years, he was a vibrant icon,” President Emmanuel Macron’s office said in a statement.

Hallyday is credited with sales of more than 100 million albums over the decades.

While never earning stardom in the United States, where he lived in Los Angeles in later years, he won a legion of followers in France and elsewhere in the French-speaking world.

“Johnny Hallyday has left us,” the singer’s wife, Laeticia, said in a statement to Agence France Presse. “I write these words without believing them. But yet, it’s true. My man is no longer with us.”

It was not immediately clear where he died.

Hallyday, who issued his first recording in 1959, had been preparing a new album and tour when news of his admission with respiratory difficulties at a Paris hospital was announced last month.

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Walt Disney Co (DIS.N) is in the lead to acquire much of Twenty-First Century Fox Inc’s (FOXA.O) media empire, though rival suitor Comcast Corp (CMCSA.O) remains in contention, people familiar with the matter said on Tuesday.

The Murdoch family, which controls Fox, prefers a deal with Disney because it would rather be paid in Disney than Comcast stock, and expects a potential deal with Disney to be cleared by U.S. antitrust regulators more easily, one of the sources said.

However, no deal between Disney and Fox is imminent and several issues have yet to be fully negotiated, the sources said.

The Reuters sources asked not to be identified because the negotiations are confidential. Fox and Comcast declined to comment, while Disney did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Fox is exploring a potential sale as it has been considered undervalued relative to its peers, said Brian Wieser, an analyst at Pivotal Research.

“At the beginning of this year, Fox was

the only buy-rated stock I had because it was so depressed relative to everything else in the sector,” Wieser said.

Fox Chief Executive James Murdoch, speaking at the UBS Global Media and Communications Conference in New York on Tuesday, declined to comment on reports about a potential sale.

“It’s always good to look at what’s going to create the most value for our shareholders,” he told attendees.

CNBC had reported earlier on Tuesday that a deal for Disney to buy Fox’s movie

studio and television production assets for more than \$60 billion could come as early as next week.

Fox shares were up 0.57 percent in late afternoon trading, while Disney was down 2.45 percent. Comcast shares were down 1.56 percent.

Disney, which has a market value of around \$166 billion, would acquire Fox’s FX and National Geographic cable channels, its movie studio, the Star network in India and stake in European pay-TV provider Sky PLC (SKYB.L).