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## Death penalty upheld for Mossad spy

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Supreme Court has approved the death sentence against an Iranian researcher for spying for Israel's Mossad spy agency, Tehran Prosecutor Abbas Jafari-Dolatabadi confirmed on Monday. Ahmad Reza Jalali, who has been in prison since April 2016, was shown on national TV earlier this month confessing

to providing information to Mossad about Iranian military and nuclear scientists, including two who were assassinated in 2010.

The convict had admitted that he had eight meetings with Mossad's agents and that he had received money in exchange, Jafari-Dolatabadi told a meeting of judiciary officials, IRNA reported. **->2**

## No conditions set for Macron's visit to Tehran

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Monday that French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to Tehran will take place without any pre-conditions by the two sides.

"There are no pre-conditions in exchanges of visits and relations by delegations. The two countries enjoy friendly relations and there is much interaction

between Tehran and Paris, which will continue," Qassemi told a press briefing in Tehran.

He said Macorn's visit to Tehran will take place soon, dismissing rumors that the trip has been "delayed."

"Mr. Macron's trip is on the agenda of the two countries... and it has certainly not been delayed because no date has been set for it yet," he said. **->2**

## Palestinian Christian leaders: Trump's move on al-Quds 'insulting'

Palestinian Christian leaders have decried as "dangerous" and "insulting" the United States President Donald Trump's decision to recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's so-called capital.

"We, Palestinians, Christians and Muslims reject the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel," Atallah Hanna, the archbishop of

Greek Orthodox Church of al-Quds (Jerusalem), said at a news conference in the West Bank city of Beit Lahm (Bethlehem).

The U.S. move, he said, was "an insult to Christians and Muslims around the world, who consider Jerusalem as an incubator of their most sacred, spiritual and national heritage." **->13**

**ARTICLE**  
By Hanif Ghaffari  
Political analyst

## Immigrants crisis in Europe

The European authorities' challenge over the asylum seekers crisis continues. Since the formation of the Austrian coalition government, this challenge has been strengthened. The Austrian coalition consists of the Freedom Party and the Central Right, and this government is one of the main opponents of the current approach of the EU towards asylum seekers. Recent comments by the Austrian Chancellor "Sebastian Kurz" is an indicator of this profound and fundamental opposition. The young chancellor of Austria, who is one of the main critics of EU immigration policies at the current time, stated:

"The distribution of immigrants in the EU countries based on a fixed quota is wrong. It doesn't help Europe if we force countries to accept refugees. I criticize the plan according to which 120 thousand refugees were divided in the European Union member states, which the ministers of this union had about two years ago agreed upon. If we do this, the European Union would be further divided. It should be to EU member states to decide on the number of refugees they want to accept."

However, the heads of the European Union believe that the only way to cope with the immigration crisis in Europe, is the commitment of all members of the United Europe to this issue. Otherwise, only countries like Germany and Sweden will be in crisis over asylum seekers, and this will increase the social vulnerability in them. Since 2015, we have witnessed widespread criticism all over Europe about how to deal with this crisis.

However, the Chancellor of Austria, in his first official position on the issue, considered the quota of immigrants to be completely meaningless. Sebastian Kurz has his own argument:

"Most of the immigrants don't want to go to Bulgaria or Hungary, they especially want to come to Germany, Austria or Sweden." In addition to Bulgaria and Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland also don't want to accept refugees. According to the European Statistics Office, most immigrants coming to the European Union are seeking asylum in Germany. **->7**

## Kabul: Iran gives helping hand to Afghanistan in drug fight

By Maryam Qarehgozlou

TEHRAN — Iran is giving a helping hand to Afghanistan in fight against drug trafficking and distribution, Spokesman for Afghanistan Ministry of Counter Narcotics Mohammad Hanif Daneshyar has said.

Illicit narcotic cultivation, production, trafficking, and consumption flourish in Afghanistan, particularly in areas where instability is high and state institutions are weak or non-existent. About 90 percent of illicit poppy cultivation takes place in these regions.

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics estimate that 224,000 hectares (ha) of opium were cultivated in Afghanistan in 2014, with a total yield of 6,400 metric tons (MT) of raw opium. This represents a seven percent increase in cultivation and a 17 percent increase in opium



production from 2013.

Traffickers provide weapons, funding, and other material support to the insurgency in exchange for the protection of drug trade routes, fields, laboratories, and trafficking organizations. Some insurgent commanders engage directly

in drug trafficking to finance their operations. However, drug trafficking is not limited to insurgent-controlled areas and the narcotics trade and undermines governance and rule of law throughout the country.

Afghanistan is deeply involved in every facet of the narcotics production cycle, from cultivation to heroin production to consumption. Drug traffickers trade in all forms of opiates, including unrefined opium, semi-refined morphine base, and refined heroin. The Afghan narcotics trade is highly evolved.

Afghanistan leans heavily on assistance from the international community to implement its national counter narcotics strategy.

Among the neighboring countries as Daneshyar has told Mehr news agency Iran is one of Afghanistan's main partners in fighting narcotics along with some central Asian countries. **->13**

## 'I don't see the strategy aborning traditional elements of U.S. soft power'

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Rodney Bruce Hall, a professor of international relations at the University of Macau, says, "U.S. Grand Strategy has long relied on keeping its armed forces to a strength level that the threat of new U.S. military interventions is always credible."

In an interview with the Tehran Times, Hall says, "I don't see the strategy aborning traditional elements of U.S. 'soft power.' U.S. wealth and culture are major elements of this. The Trump administration, like the Reagan administration before him, seems to want to turn back to Realpolitik as a basis of policy and getting matters that harm the U.S. economy (such as trade imbalances and too high domestic corporate and other tax burdens) addressed, and measures harming domestic employment thus

country, improving public wealth, displaying peace resorting to the U.S. power and influence. To what extent in this new strategy the soft security aspects have been considered?"

A: I don't see the strategy aborning traditional elements of U.S. "soft power." U.S. wealth and culture are major elements of this. The Trump administration, like the Reagan administration before him, seems to want to turn back to Realpolitik as a basis of policy and getting matters that harm the U.S. economy (such as trade imbalances and too high domestic corporate and other tax burdens) addressed, and measures harming domestic employment thus

domestic social cohesion. It also includes rapidly rebuilding military capability where it has been neglected. The strategy aims to render the U.S. secure, not loved.

Some criticize the new strategy and believe trump's new strategy excludes some issues like human rights and climate changes. Considering this approach, will Trump's new strategy result in security and stable peace?

A: President Jimmy Carter focused on human rights. The U.S. electorate thought he was a disastrous President and voted him out of office. Climate change is a problem. Who bears the burdens of adjustment is a matter of negotiation. **->7**

**ARTICLE**  
By Maryam Qarehgozlou  
Tehran Times journalist

## Illogical reservations about bill on violence against women

While there are news about adoption of a bill on banning violence against women there seems to be unreasonable reservations about the issue.

Violence against women is the violation of human rights which would seriously affect the women and young girls and even the whole society.

Regarding women's role in the family as those in charge of bringing up children their physical and mental health is of great significance. Therefore, violence not only has negative consequences for women but also their families, the community and the country at large.

Drawing up national plans and policies to address violence against women in each country with regard to its constitutional laws and religious belief can play a major role in curbing such brutalities against women.

Despite the figures revealing social vulnerability of women in the country Majlis (the Iranian parliament) has been delaying discussing bills on banning violence against women for years, ISNA quoted women's rights activist Leila Arshad as saying, "What matters more than safety of women and young girls that is delaying the adoption of the bill," she asked rhetorically.

However, La'ya Joneidi, vice president for legal affairs, has said that the administration is utterly determined to approve the bill.

"The directorate for legal affairs have done its best to draw up and submit the bill in association with the directorate for women and family affairs," Joneidi said, adding, "we hope that the bill will be brought to a vote at the cabinet and then before the parliament at the earliest opportunity."

Due to its legal nature the bill was brought before the judiciary by the Guardian Council, it should not take long before it's passed by the legislative body, IRNA quoted Joneidi as saying.

However, she stated, "the procedure is pretty time-consuming and we cannot decide an exact time for the formal adoption of the bill." **->12**



## Rouhani visits Christian Armenian family

Late on Sunday, President Hassan Rouhani visited the Christian Armenian family of Edvin Shahrmirian whose son was martyred in the Iraqi war against Iran in 1987. The visit came on the eve of the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ.

Rouhani said these days all Iranians, especially Iranian Christians, and other Christians around the world are celebrating the birth anniversary of Jesus Christ. The president also said Armenians have a high status among Iranians. Rouhani also said all Iranians with different religions and ethnicities have been alongside each other in ups and downs.

**MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS**



**Tehran calls on Australia to reconsider Iranian woman's case**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Monday called on Australia to reconsider the case of Negar Qods Kani, an Iranian woman detained in Australia since June 16, for "humanitarian reasons".

Qassemi said the ministry has been pursuing the case, expressing the hope that the Australian government takes appropriate actions to find a solution to her case.

Negar was detained by Australian authorities on charges of violating U.S. commercial laws. She was pregnant at the time of her arrest.

Qassemi said she has given birth to her child.



**Vaezi appoints Verdinejad media advisor**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Presidential Chief of Staff Mahmoud Vaezi on Monday appointed former managing director of the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) Fereydoon Verdinejad as his media advisor.

Verdinejad, 61, also served Iran's ambassador to China from 2001 to 2005, IRNA reported.

He who has a PhD in management launched IRNA's School of Journalism.

"Based on your invaluable commitment, knowledge and experience, you have been appointed as the media advisor to the president's chief of staff," Vaezi said in his decree.



**Majlis security committee slams Dutch politician**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee has condemned a Dutch politician for throwing a Christmas present from the Iranian embassy into a garbage can.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran expresses good wishes on the New Year to all Christians across the world," the committee said in a statement released on Monday, emphasizing that the Dutch politician's action was impolite.

Recently, a TV report showed Henk Krol, leader of the 50PLUS political party, dumping the present he received from the embassy on the pretext that female figures have not received presents.



**Female Iranian, Syrian MPs discuss ways to empower women**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Female Iranian and Syrian lawmakers held a meeting on Sunday underlining the need to promote parliamentary cooperation to empower women.

During the meeting, Fatemeh Zolqadr, the deputy chief of women's faction in the Iranian parliament, said by using capacities of Iran and Syria, the two countries can promote the status of women, IRNA reported.

She further called for the active role of Iranian and Syrian parliaments in empowering women.

Georgina Rizk and Mari al-Bitar, two female members of Syrian parliament, for their parts, expressed the hope for the promotion of women's status in Iran and Syria through mutual cooperation.



**Drug smugglers kill Iranian border guard**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — An Iranian border guard was killed on Monday in an armed clash with narcotics smugglers in Sistan-Baluchestan Province, southeastern Iran.

Major Rasoul Talebi was shot in the neck and died while being transferred to the hospital, Saravan's Governor Darvish Narouie said.

"About two tons of illegal drugs were confiscated by Iranian border guards and two smugglers were also killed," Narouie was quoted by IRNA as saying.

"The clash lasted for three hours," the governor added.



**Police seize one ton of drug precursor in northwest Iran**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Police officers have seized one ton of meth precursor chemicals from smugglers in northwestern Iran, Mahabad police commander said.

"Police officers stopped a suspicious car and seized the drug consignment," Colonel Reza Zahirian was quoted by IRNA as saying on Monday.

"Three smugglers were arrested and their case was sent to court," he added.

Drug precursors are chemicals that are primarily used for the legitimate production of a wide range of products, like pharmaceuticals, perfumes, plastics, cosmetics, etc. However, they can also be misused for the illicit manufacture of drugs such as methamphetamines, heroin or cocaine.

**Pakistan calls Iran 'strategic partner'**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said on Monday that Iran is an "important friend" and "strategic partner" for Pakistan.

During a meeting with Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani on the sidelines of a conference on terrorism and inter-regional connectivity in Islamabad, Sadiq said that Iran and Pakistan have common friends, enemies and international objectives.

He said that the two countries have good political relations and called for expansion of economic ties.

For his part, Larijani said Iran attaches great importance to expansion of cooperation with neighboring Pakistan.

The two-day conference on terrorism began in Islamabad on Sunday with the participation of parliament speakers from Pakistan, Russia, China, Turkey and Afghanistan.

During his speech at the conference on Sunday, Larijani said the occupation of other countries' land, extremism and intelligence services are chief reasons behind spread of terrorism in the region.

The senior lawmaker added attacks on Afghanistan by the Soviet Union and later by the U.S. and NATO led to formation of terrorist groups in the country.

He called on China and Pakistan to join a counter-terrorism campaign being spearheaded by Iran, Russia and Turkey.

He described cooperation among Iran, Turkey and Russia as an example of successful cooperation in fighting terrorism in Syria.

■ **'U.S. is symbol of evil'**

Larijani also called the U.S. "symbol of devil" in the region.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has been fighting terrorism for many years and it was the U.S. who created Daesh," he noted.



■ **Larijani meets Turkish, Afghan counterparts**

Larijani held separate meetings with his Turkish and Afghan counterparts Ismail Kahraman and Abdul Rauf Ibrahim on the sidelines of the regional conference on Monday.

During the meeting with Kahraman, the two sides stressed the need for increased cooperation and development of economic ties between Tehran and Ankara.

Kahraman, for his part, expressed pleasure

in the growing ties between the two countries, saying, "Exchanging parliamentary delegations is complementary to bilateral relations."

Also, during his meeting with Ibrahim, Larijani underlined Iran's willingness to broaden ties with Afghanistan in different political, economic, cultural and security fields.

Ibrahim, for his part, asked Larijani to use his influence as representative of a great country like Iran to help Afghanistan to develop ties with other regional states.

**Top general urges support for Basij to promote deterrence power**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Major General Mohammad Baqeri, chief of the Iranian armed forces, said on Monday that Basij should be given high priority in order to strengthen the national deterrence power.

On the sidelines of his visit to an exhibition displaying the performance of Basij, he said, "We should not ignore the enemies' threats even for one moment."

"The Islamic Revolution is at a critical situation and Basij has an important responsibility to empower the system

and increase the country's deterrence power," he said.

He noted that the enemies constantly seek to hatch plots against the Islamic Revolution.

During a ceremony held in Imam Hossein University on Sunday, Baqeri said that enemies will not remain "inactive" and hatch "religious" and "ethnic" plots against the country.

He added, "They (the enemies) know that they will be harmed a lot by launching war against the Islamic Iran."

**Iranian president may visit Azerbaijan, Central Asia**

**TEHRAN** — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani is likely to pay a visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries in the next year, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Monday.

"According to plans that are currently being prepared, Mr. President will presumably visit Baku and a couple of Central Asian countries. I assume that the visit will take place early in the coming solar year [Iranian calendar year

starting March 21, 2018]," ISNA news agency quoted Bahram Qassemi as saying.

Ties between Iran and Azerbaijan over the recent years have improved.

According to Azerbaijan's State Customs Committee, trade turnover with Iran amounted to almost \$229 million in January-November 2017, more than \$213 million of which accounted for the import of Iranian products.

(Source: Trend)

**Rouhani appoints new advisors, vice-president**



Reza Farajidana



Akbar Torkan



Ali Yunesi



Hossein-Ali Amiri

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — In separate decrees on Monday President Hassan Rouhani appointed Hossein-Ali Amiri as vice president for parliamentary affairs and Reza Farajidana, Akbar Torkan and Hojatollah Ali Yunesi as his advisors.

Hossein-Ali Amiri, born in 1967 in Kermanshah, holds a PhD degree in public law. He was vice-president for parliamentary affairs during the first term of Rouhani as well.

Rouhani appointed Reza Farajidana as his advisor for scientific affairs.

He was born in Qom in 1960. He studied electrical

engineering at the University of Tehran and at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada. He graduated with a PhD degree from University of Waterloo in 1993.

He was minister of science, research and technology from October 2013 to August 2014.

Akbar Torkan was appointed as presidential advisor for renovation of rundown areas in cities.

He was born in Tehran in 1952. He graduated from the Sharif University of Technology with a mechanical engineering degree. He is the current CEO of the Construction Engineering Organization.

Torkan was also the secretary of the High Council for Free Zones.

He was the minister of defense and minister of transport in the administration of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

Rouhani also reappointed Ali Yunesi as presidential advisor for ethnic and religious minorities.

Born in 1951 in Nahavand, Yunesi was the head of the Islamic Revolution Court of Tehran and later head of the politico-ideological bureau of Islamic Revolution Guards Corps.

Younesi was also intelligence minister from 2000 to 2005 in the Khatami administration.

**Death penalty upheld for Mossad spy**

**Ahmad Reza Jalali admits had eight meetings with Mossad agents**

➔ The prosecutor said Jalali had passed information to Mossad agents about projects related to the Defense Ministry and the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), including information about the AEOI plants, the ministry's plans and blueprints of important buildings belonging to the ministry and the AEOI.

He had also provided Mossad with the names and information of top executives of

the AEOI and the Defense Ministry, Jafari-Dolatnabi said, adding that according to Jalali's confessions, he had used flash memories to gather information from the individuals' computers.

"Most of the information provided by the aforementioned person included complete and documented information about thirty top figures working on research, military,

defense and nuclear projects, including the two martyred [scientists] Ali Mohammadi and [Mohammad] Shahriri," he remarked.

The convict was given money and Swedish citizenship for himself and his family in exchange for the information, he added.

The prosecutor also said Jalali's death sentence was upheld by Supreme Court on December 2, 2017.



**No conditions set for Macron's visit to Tehran**

➔ Although Iran and France see eye-to-eye on many issues, the spokesman said, there are always matters on which the two sides disagree.

Asked about Macron's occasional harsh comments against Iran, Qassemi said certain European leaders, influenced by hostile comments by Iran's foes and those who promote Iranophobia, sometimes make inaccurate remarks.

"I think, in a constructive meeting, we can make French leaders aware of the region's realities and how certain [regional actors] are trying to drive a wedge between Iran and Europe," he added.

The spokesman further pointed to the fourth round of political talks between Tehran and Paris, saying during the talks Iran reminded the French side that they should be more informed of the realities in the region, understand Iran's regional role, and avoid adopting stances aimed



at appeasing others.

The talks were held between Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi and Secretary General of France's Ministry

of Foreign Affairs Maurice Gourdault-Montagne in Paris on Wednesday.

■ **'U.S. blatantly hostile toward Tehran'**  
Elsewhere in his remarks, Qassemi downplayed the new U.S. National Security Strategy as "unimportant", denouncing Washington for "blatant hostilities" towards Tehran.

The new U.S. National Security Strategy is a hollow, unconventional, imprecise and unbalanced text which will not affect Tehran's policies in the region, the Foreign Ministry official explained.

He added Washington's failures and defeats in the region have angered President Trump.

"Due to their consecutive mistakes in the region, the Americans have become isolated," he said, warning European countries not to fall victim to the "erroneous policies" of the United States and some of its "insipid" allies.

# Russian FM calls on U.S., N. Korea to start talks, says Moscow ready to mediate

Russia has called on the United States and North Korea to start negotiations aimed at putting an end to tensions on the Korean Peninsula, days after the United Nations slapped a new round of sanctions on Pyongyang over its nuclear weapons program.

Russian media on Monday quoted Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov as saying that Moscow is ready to mediate such talks.

Lavrov gave assurances that Russia "will never tolerate nor welcome" Pyongyang's ambition to become a nuclear state, but said attempts to pressure and blockade North Korea were equally dangerous.

Instead of drawing "red lines" and trying to punish Pyongyang, steady diplomatic efforts must be made to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, he added.

The top Russian diplomat further warned those countries pursuing a strict blockade on North Korea that "the execution of such a plan would cause a genuine humanitarian disaster."

## China urges 'constructive efforts'

Meanwhile, China, which is North Korea's main trade partner, called for all the countries on both sides of the dispute to "make constructive" efforts to ease tensions.

"In the present situation, we call on all countries to exercise restraint and make proactive and constructive efforts to ease the tensions on the peninsula and appropriately resolve the issue," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said in Beijing on Monday.

Hua pointed out that the new round of UN sanctions reinforced the previous ones; however, they were not designed to affect ordinary people, normal economic exchanges and cooperation, or humanitarian aid.

Pyongyang on November 29 tested an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which it said put the U.S. mainland within the range of its nuclear weapons.

The test prompted the UN Security Council to unanimously impose a new round of sanctions against the country, which restrict fuel exports to the North and demand the repatriation of its nationals working aboard, mostly in China and Russia.

North Korea's Foreign Ministry said the new UN sanctions were an act of war and tantamount to a complete economic blockade against the nation.

Pyongyang has repeatedly said the U.S.-backed interna-



tional bans cannot prevent it from developing its nuclear military program. It views its ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons as a deterrent against foreign aggression.

China and Russia, which are viewed as traditional allies of the North, have criticized Pyongyang's missile and nuclear tests.

They have backed the UN sanctions against North Korea,

but say such punitive measures should not affect the lives of ordinary people in the country.

Earlier this month, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Igor Morgulov said that Moscow was not ready to sign up to draconian measures set forth in the U.S.-drafted sanctions that would strangle North Korea economically.

(Source: RT)

## Pope urges world not to ignore refugees at Christmas Eve Mass

Pope Francis has used the Christmas Eve Mass to call on the world not to ignore the plight of millions of refugees who are "driven from their land."

Leading a ceremony on Sunday for about 10,000 people in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican City, the head of the Roman Catholic Church compared refugees to Mary and Joseph, who had to travel from the Biblical city of Nazareth to Beit Lahm (Bethlehem) but found no place to stay.

"So many of our footsteps are hidden in the footsteps of Joseph and Mary," he said. "We see the tracks of entire families forced to set out in our own day. We see the tracks of millions of persons who do not choose to go away but, driven from their land, leave behind their dear ones."

The pope said many refugees, the number of whom stands at 22 million worldwide, were being forced to flee from leaders who "see no problem in shedding innocent blood."

Francis drew a parallel between the biblical story and the developments in the world today, including conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa, human trafficking, Myanmar's state-sponsored ethnic cleansing

campaign against its Rohingya Muslims and the United States travel ban on people from predominantly Muslim countries.

The 81-year-old Argentine pontiff, himself born to Italian immigrants, has spoken out for refugees since his election in 2013.

A few weeks ago, Pope Francis spent six days in Myanmar and neighboring Bangladesh to address the sufferings of Rohingya Muslims, who have been subjected to a state-sponsored ethnic cleansing campaign at home in Rakhine State.

In Bangladesh, he had an emotional encounter with Muslim refugees, during which he asked for forgiveness from the Myanmarese refugees for all the hurt and indifference they have endured.

Almost 870,000 Rohingya Muslims have so far been forced to flee the Myanmar military's state-sponsored crackdown on Bangladesh.

"The presence of God today is also called Rohingya," he said back then. "In the name of everyone, of those who have persecuted you, of those who have done you harm, above all for the indifference of the world, I ask forgiveness. Forgiveness."

(Source: agencies)

## U.S. secures \$285 million cut in UN budget

The administration of the United States President Donald Trump says it has negotiated a major \$285 million cut in the United Nation's 2018-2019 budget.

The U.S. mission at the UN said in a statement on Sunday that the "significant cost savings" would better suit Washington's priorities across the globe.

"In addition to these significant cost savings, we reduced the UN's bloated management and support functions, bolstered support for key U.S. priorities throughout the world, and instilled more discipline and accountability throughout the UN system," the statement read.

The UN General Assembly had agreed on a \$5.4 billion operating budget for 2016 and 2017. This was separate from the world body's budget for peacekeeping missions, which went as high as \$7.8 billion in 2017 alone.

The U.S. currently provides about 22 percent of the annual budget—around \$3.3 billion per year. The Trump administration has been seeking to reduce Washington's stake in the budget.

The U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley said that the budget cut was a "big step in the right direction" for Washing-

ton. The former South Carolina governor said she will continue to explore "ways to increase the UN's efficiency while protecting our interests."

"The inefficiency and overspending of the United Nations are well known," Haley said. "We will no longer let the generosity of the American people be taken advantage of or remain unchecked."

This historic reduction in spending—in addition to many other moves toward a more efficient and accountable UN—is a big step in the right direction."

The U.S. Republicans have long been calling on the UN to be more supportive of American policies.

The criticism was amplified days ago, after the global body overwhelmingly voted in support of a resolution that opposed Trump's controversial move in recognizing al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the "capital" of Israel.

Ahead of the vote, Trump threatened to cut foreign aid to nations who supported the UN resolution. Haley even warned that the U.S. would be "taking names."

The 193-nation assembly went ahead and adopted the resolution in a decisive 128 to 9 vote, with 35 abstentions.

(Source: agencies)

## At least 15 killed in Saudi regime airstrikes in Sana'a, other cities

At least 15 people have been killed in new House of Saud regime's airstrikes hitting various areas across Yemen, including the capital Sana'a, the al-Masirah television network reports.

The Saudi regime warplanes bombarded two farms in Zabid District in Hudaydah Province in the country's extreme west early on Monday, the report said.

Eight people were killed in the attack, including two women, while two more women sustained injuries.

Separately, the Saudi regime jets carried out a string of attacks against the capital, killing seven civilians and injuring five more.

The casualties included three children and two women, the television reported, adding two people also went missing during the strike.



It said one residence targeted during the raid was completely destroyed, and that rescue workers trying to retract bodies from under the debris had also come under attack.

Eye witnesses said the number of the casualties could rise.

In western Yemen, the Saudi regime warplanes hit the customs' office in the city of Dhammar, which is the capital of a province of the same name, leading to at least 10 casualties.

In retaliation, Yemen's Popular Committees and their allied Army forces hit the Saudi regime-backed militants around Sana'a, inflicting unspecified casualties on them.

The mercenaries have been aiding the kingdom's war on Yemen since March 2015, in which more than 14,000 have lost their lives.

(Source: Press TV)

## Syrian forces advance in border area near Israel

Syrian army forces pushed deeper into the last rebel-held enclave near a strategic border area with Israel and Lebanon.

The army and the Shia forces advanced east and south of the rebel held bastion of Beit Jin backed by some of the heaviest aerial bombing and heavy artillery shelling since a major assault began over two months ago to seize the area, rebels said.

The Syrian army said it had encircled the village of Mughir al Meer at the foothills of Mount Hermon as troops moved toward Beit Jin amid fierce clashes.

The enclave is the last rebel bastion left in the south west of Damascus known as the Western Ghouta that had since

last year fallen under government control after months of heavy bombing on civilian areas and years of siege tactics that forced rebels to surrender.

A western intelligence source confirmed rebel reports that the powerful Lebanese Hezbollah resistance group were playing a major role in the ongoing battles.

The southwest of Syria is part of a de-escalation zone in southern Syria agreed last July between Russia and Washington, the first such understanding between the two powers. The area has not seen Russian bombing unlike other ceasefire areas in Syria.

Diplomatic sources say several thousand Shia fighters who have been amassing from outside the Quneitra province are

pitted against hundreds of extremist and mainstream Free Syria Army (FSA) rebels closing ranks under the banner of Itihad Qwtw Jabal al Sheikh "Union of fighters of Jabal al Sheikh". They are mainly drawn from local fighters from the area.

Rebels still have a sizeable presence in central and southern Quneitra, in the Syrian Golan Heights.

Western diplomatic sources say the crushing of the rebel presence in areas they have been in since 2013 will allow Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement to open another secure arms supply line from its border in southern Lebanon into Syria.

(Source: Reuters)

## Kabul: Five killed as ISIL bomber targets spy agency



At least five people have been killed in a suicide blast near the intelligence agency in Kabul, the Afghan capital, officials said.

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group claimed responsibility for the blast on Monday morning.

The attack near Abdul Haq Square comes one week after gunmen stormed a military training center in Kabul, an assault also claimed by the ISIL terrorist outfit.

The interior ministry said the attacker blew himself up near the gate of the National Directorate of Security.

Video posted to social media showed emergency services on the scene.

Local media said at least two people were also wounded. The Afghan capital has come under attack several times in 2017.

On March 8, more than 30 people were killed when gunmen dressed in white lab coats stormed a hospital in the center of the city. The ISIL claimed responsibility for that attack, but officials considered other groups could have been responsible.

On May 31, a truck bomb exploded near the diplomatic district, killing more than 150 people. It remains unclear who was behind the assault.

On October 21, the ISIL terrorist group claimed responsibility for killing at least 39 people at a Shia mosque in Kabul.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Following Trump, Guatemala to move embassy to al-Quds

### Israel praises Guatemala over embassy move

Guatemala has announced plans to relocate its embassy to al-Quds (Jerusalem), following in Washington's footsteps.

President Jimmy Morales confirmed the move from Tel Aviv on Sunday, days after Guatemala voted with the United States against a non-binding United Nations General Assembly resolution on the matter.

"Today I spoke with the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu. We are talking about the excellent relations that we have had as nations since Guatemala supported the creation of the state of Israel," Morales said in a Facebook post on Sunday.

"One of the most important topics was the return of the embassy of Guatemala to Jerusalem."

"So I inform you that I have instructed the chancellor to initiate the respective coordination so that it may be."

Israeli Foreign Ministry Spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon welcomed the move and expressed gratitude, describing the move as an "important decision" in a Twitter post.

On Thursday, Guatemala, the U.S., Israel, and six other countries voted against the resolution at an emergency UN General Assembly meeting, which declared Washington's move as "null and void".

Previously, Morales told local news outlets that his country has historically been "pro-Israel".

"For 70 years we have maintained relations with Israel, which has always been our ally," he had said.

Despite threats by the U.S., a majority of UN member states—128 members—voted in favor of Thursday's resolution.

### Widespread protests

On December 6, the U.S. announced that it recognized al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of Israel and said his administration would be moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to the Holy City, prompting international condemnation and widespread protests across the world.

Currently, there are no embassies in al-Quds (Jerusalem). The status of al-Quds is extremely sensitive and is one of the main sticking points in efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Palestinian leaders want occupied East al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of a future state, while Israel says the city cannot be divided.

In the occupied West Bank and East al-Quds, demonstrations have been met with violence by Israeli forces, who fire live ammunition, disperse tear gas canisters, and carry out a wave of arrests against protesters.

More than 2,900 people have been left injured and more than 500 have been jailed.

In the Gaza Strip, several Israeli air raids killed at least six people, and injured many others.

In total, at least 15 people have been killed across the occupied Palestinian territories in the last three weeks.

On December 13, Muslim leaders from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) declared that that East al-Quds is the capital of Palestine.

The pan-Muslim body called on the international community to follow its example by rejecting the U.S. stance on al-Quds (Jerusalem) as "dangerous", and called on the UN to "end the Israeli occupation" of Palestine.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98358.4
IFX	1105.38

Sources: tse.ir, lfb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	41,750 rials
EUR	50,100 rials
GBP	56,650 rials
AED	11,500 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$64.73/b
WTI	\$58.47/b
OPEC Basket	\$62.16/b
Gold	\$1,275.85 /oz
Silver	\$16.45/oz
Platinum	\$919.75/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Tehran to host intl. office furniture expo in mid Jan.

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — The 7th International Exhibition of Office Furniture of Iran (HOFEX 2018) is due to be held on January 11-14, 2018 at the Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds.

As reported by IRIB news, foreign exhibitors from different countries including China, South Korea, Italy and Taiwan along with renowned Iranian companies are going to showcase their latest products and achievements in this four-day event.

S. Korea pulls off 3rd highest economic growth among G20 members in Q3

**SEOUL (Yonhap)** — South Korea's economy grew at the third fastest pace among the Group of Twenty (G20) nations in the third quarter, official data showed Monday.

According to findings by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development the gross domestic product of Asia's fourth-largest economy advanced 1.5 percent compared to the previous quarter. This placed it after 1.7-percent growth posted by China and 1.6 percent tallied for India.

The latest findings showed that in terms of growth, the country advanced 0.9 percentage point in the July-September period which is the sharpest gain among the systemically important industrialized and developing economies that were checked.

The high ranking can be attributed to the country's solid growth coupled with slower growth by other G20 member states. South Korea's exports surged in the quarter on strong overseas demand for computer chips, with a rise in facilities investment further propping up growth.

Countries like Australia, South Africa and Turkey that posted solid growth in the second quarter backtracked in the three-month period.

Turkish exporters hope to break records in 2018

Turkey will break previous export records by crossing the medium-term program's (MTP) \$169 billion target in 2018, the country's largest exporters' association said on Sunday.

Mehmet Buyukeksi, chairman for Turkish Exporters' Assembly (TIM) said 2017 was a spurt year and they had prepared a route map to exceed targets.



"The support from the government and the recovery of global economy was reflected in our exports," he said.

He added that MTP's export target for 2017 was \$153.3 billion and it had been revised to \$156.5 billion.

"We expect that Turkey's export will rise over 10 percent to \$14 billion in December and we will overtake this target by reaching \$157.3 billion," he said.

Turkey's exports amounted to \$13.6 billion in November and \$142.7 billion in the first 11 months of 2017, according to TIM's data.

Early November, Turkish Economy Minister Nihat Zeybekci had said that the country is expected to exceed its revised export target of \$156.5 billion by the end of 2017.

He expressed that exports reflect Turkey's growth forcing international ratings bureaus to revise Turkey's growth estimate figures.

IMF, Fitch, Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan, Morgan Stanley, Nomura, the World Bank and Moody's improved their growth estimates for Turkey, after its economy grew by 5.1 percent in the second quarter.

Turkey also exceeded all growth estimates by reaching 11.1 percent growth rate in the third quarter of 2017.

He said that they believe Turkey's growth rate will be 5.5 percent in 2018.

(Source: Anadolu Agency)

Exports of livestock, poultry products up 7% in 8 months yr/yr

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Exports of livestock and poultry industry during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-November 21) increased by seven percent compared to last year's same period.

According to Deputy Agriculture Minister

Hassan Rokni, the country exported some \$867 million worth of such products to the world markets in the said time span, IRIB news reported.

The official noted a significant rise in the exports of dairy products as one of the main drivers of the raised exports.

"We had a significant increase in



exports of dairy products such as milk so that near 690,000 tons of such products were exported (in the mentioned period)," he said.

Earlier in April, Rokni put the value of exports from livestock and poultry industry at \$1.2 billion in the last Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2017), noting

that the sector enjoyed a trade surplus of \$554 million.

As reported by Mehr news agency, on exports volume of such products in the previous year, Rokni said total exports of poultry and eggs stood at about 100,000 tons while 750,000 tons of dairy products were also deployed to global markets.

Rag-Sefid still burning despite killing operations

By Mahnaz Abdi

A blowout occurs in Rag-Sefid offshore oilfield in Iran's south-western Khuzestan Province on October 29. The accident happened when drilling operation was ongoing in depth of 2,403 meters in the well No. 147 of the field. It burnt the drilling rig and killed two persons working for the National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC).

One week after the blowout, Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said that the blaze would be brought under control within one and half month, but the well is still burning after 58 days.

Although, Iran has the experience of controlling such accidents in the oil and gas fields, as the country has brought 12 blowouts under control over the past 12 years, this one is a rare case given the high pressure of the oil exiting from the well.

Many oil officials, including Ramin Hatami, the managing director of Iranian Central Oil Fields Company (ICOFC), believe that considering its high experience in controlling



the burning wells, Iran has no need for help from outside to bring Rag-Sefid under control.

For controlling the blaze in this well, Iran has conducted the two main methods of well killing (putting out oil well fire),

i.e. top killing and bottom killing, and says that big jobs have been done in this due.

For conducting top killing operation, water was poured on the deadly blaze from ten sides. A very large pool has been dug in 150 meters distance from the well and five pipelines have been built to transfer water from different spots to this pool. Given that Rag-Sefid is located in a mountainous area and the ground is very hard in that region, digging this pool was a difficult job and took 14 days.

And for conducting bottom killing operation, two wells were dug near the burning well.

Bijan Alipour, the managing director of National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC), says that bringing Rag-Sefid under control is one of the most difficult operations for controlling an offshore well and underlines that digging the mentioned pool and laying 250 kilometers pipeline to bring water to it during 10 days, also digging the two wells near the burning well during 11 days are two records in the country's history of controlling such blowouts.

China signals slower growth is acceptable to tackle debt, smog

China can achieve a goal of doubling the size of its economy by 2020 even if annual expansion slows to 6.3 percent, according to a senior Communist Party official, signaling a greater willingness to tackle debt and pollution at the expense of growth.

In its blueprint for 2016 to 2020, China set a minimum annual growth target of 6.5 percent for the five-year period to achieve the goal of doubling gross domestic product from 2010

levels. But over the weekend, Yang Weimin, an official from the Communist Party committee overseeing economic policy, said annualized growth of 6.3 percent in 2018-2020 would do.

Based on current economic performance, the 2020 target won't be a "huge barrier," the official Xinhua News Agency cited Yang, deputy head of the Office of the Central Leading Group on Financial and Economic Affairs, as saying, China is seen growing 6.8 percent this year and

6.5 percent in 2018, according to economist estimates compiled by Bloomberg.

President Xi Jinping and other top leaders have likewise signaled less emphasis on growth, pledging earlier this month to focus on "critical battles" against financial risk, pollution and poverty in the next three years. Yang dismissed the notion that China would abandon a growth target before 2020 while investment banks including UBS Group AG see China potentially

giving a 2018 target that is worded similar to this year's "around 6.5 percent" but without language that it should be higher if possible.

"What Yang Weimin said is no surprise except that he's preparing for a publicly acceptable official soft landing for the already-determined policy," said Chen Zhiwu, an economics professor at the University of Hong Kong. "The target growth rate for 2018 will be lower than 2017." (Source: Bloomberg)

BOJ says low rates hurting banks but woes won't ease post-stimulus

**TOKYO (Reuters)** — Prolonged ultra-easy monetary policy is weighing heavily on Japanese bank profits but financial institutions should not expect business conditions to brighten dramatically even after the central bank raises interest rates, a senior Bank of Japan official said.

Many regional banks could suffer losses in the long run as intensifying competition forces them to cut lending rates to attract borrowers in a shrinking domestic market, said BOJ Executive Director Atsushi Miyanoya.

"The BOJ's monetary policy, including negative interest rates, undoubtedly has a significant impact on bank profits," said Miyanoya, who oversees a division in charge of monitoring Japan's banking system.

"Even when monetary policy is eventually normalized, banks shouldn't expect profits to return to levels before ultra-easy policy was put in place," he told Reuters on Decemebtr 22.

After three years of heavy asset buying failed to fire up inflation, the BOJ last year adopted negative interest rates and a pledge to guide 10-year bond yields around zero percent.

Miyanoya said the BOJ's policy has not excessively hurt bank profits yet, countering criticism from the financial sector that the costs of monetary stimulus were exceeding the benefits.

But he warned that banks may see profitability fall further if monetary policy remains ultra-loose, and called on regional banks to seek new revenue sources instead of meeting intensifying competition just by cutting lending rates.

"In the medium- to long-term, there's a risk many financial institutions may record net losses simultaneously. We can't deny the risk financial intermediation may not function properly at the same time," Miyanoya said.

"With the economy in good shape and banks having sufficient capital, now is the time to act," he said. "Mergers and consolidation are among options to improve profitability and efficiency."

Years of crisis-mode stimulus have squeezed bank margins in many advanced nations. The problem is more acute in Japan, where more than 100 regional banks compete in an overcrowded market that is shrinking amid an aging population.

An industry watchdog said in October that more than half of Japan's regional banks lost money on their core business in the year ended March 2017.

Regional banks' plight has piled pressure on the BOJ to focus on the demerits of its policy, though Governor Haruhiko Kuroda said he saw no need to dial back stimulus now.

Even when the BOJ withdraws stimulus, banks may not see margins improve sharply due to severe competition, Miyanoya said.

"It's true our monetary policy is exerting downward pressure on banks' profits, but that's not the whole story," Miyanoya said. (Source: Reuters)

IN THE NAME OF GOD  
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING

## INTERNATIONAL TENDER NO. 96/109-112/26

*Second Announcement*

**Tender Holder:**  
ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN BROADCASTING (IRIB)

**Subject of Tender:**  
Purchasing Non-chemical materials usable in film laboratory in accordance with the technical specification and other terms and conditions mentioned in the tender documents.

**Deadline and How to Receive the Tender Documents:**  
From **26<sup>th</sup> Dec 2017 (1396/10/05)** by **4 p.m.** on **Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan 2018 (1396/10/13)** with presentation of introductory letter by company or its representative and the receipt of paying the documents fee.

**Place of Receiving the Tender Documents:**  
Interested participants may refer to purchasing (KALA) Dept., 4<sup>th</sup> Floor of IRIB Administration Complex, Hotel Esteghlal St., Vali-e Asr Ave., Tehran Iran.

**The Fee of the Tender Documents and How to Deposit it:**  
Submission of payment receipt for the amount of **3,000,000 Rials** to account No.2172918037001 Meli Bank Amaniye Branch in the name of IRIB.

**Type and Amount of Guarantee for Participation to Tender:**  
The amount of deposit for participant in tender is **USD 5000** fixed or its equivalent in **210,000,000 Rials** which should be in the form of Bank Guarantee.

**Time and Place of Delivering Priced Bid:**  
The sealed A, B & C packages/envelopes should be submitted no later than **4 p.m.** on **3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2018 (1396/11/14)** and at the address mentioned in the 4<sup>th</sup> clause.

**Time and Place of Opening Envelopes:**  
The date of opening envelopes A&B is on **5<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2018 (1396/11/16)** at **3 p.m.** in the office of Financial Vice President and opening of envelope C will be after technical evaluation.

**For more information, please see:** [www.iriboffice.ir/tenders](http://www.iriboffice.ir/tenders) and <http://iets.mporg.ir/>.

Purchasing (kala) Dept. of IRIB

# Oil price optimism would be 'misplaced' in early 2018, strategists say

There's little reason to expect oil prices to extend gains through the first quarter of 2018, energy strategists have told CNBC.

The prospect of rising U.S. shale production, subdued price movements and intensifying geopolitical risks is likely to offset a rally in prices at the start of next year, the analysts said.

Harry Colvin, director and senior economist at Longview Economics, told CNBC in a phone interview that he was "pretty bearish" over the price of oil over the next three months.

"While we could easily see an escalation of tensions in the Middle East, in the absence of that, optimism is probably misplaced for up to six months... Everybody seems to be facing the same way over oil at the minute and it's when this happens that you need to be especially careful," he said.

Oil prices have recovered well over a third of their value since hitting 2017 lows in June. The gains are largely due to the global supply cuts implemented by OPEC and non-OPEC producers at the start of the year.

## What will happen with U.S. shale?

Goldman Sachs said a stronger-than-anticipated OPEC-led commitment to extend production cuts would likely support oil prices through 2018. The U.S. bank lifted its Brent price forecast for next year to \$62 a barrel and its West Texas Intermediate (WTI) projection to \$57.50 a barrel. The revisions were up from \$58 a barrel and \$55 a barrel respectively.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) and the International Energy Agency (IEA) have both indicated strong global demand growth in 2018 at 1.3 per-



cent or above.

"A really key nub of the debate with oil is what will happen with the U.S. shale?" Colvin said.

In recent months, U.S. shale producers have surprised market participants with how quickly they have ramped up production in the wake of rising prices. Almost all increases in American oil production over the last few years have stemmed from shale, which in total accounts for nearly two-thirds of the country's existing output.

The U.S. is not part of a global effort to withhold oil production levels.

Colvin said it would be "easy" for oil to go to \$50 a barrel by the end of the first quarter, before adding he would "not be

surprised" to see levels as low as \$45 a barrel.

## 'Volatility killer'

OPEC, Russia and nine other producers agreed to extend their deal to keep 1.8 million barrels a day off the market through the end of 2018. Having extended the deal once already, the producers again reached an agreement at the end of November to try to drain a global crude glut.

OPEC's latest deal was most likely a "volatility killer," Chris Main, energy strategist at Citi, told CNBC in a phone interview.

Despite expecting fundamentals to continue to support the market, Main said he forecast oil prices to fall back to around \$57 a barrel by the end of the first quarter.

"That price weakness could end up being

supportive to the OPEC commitment next year... It would certainly reinforce the will of the Saudis," he said.

OPEC kingpin Saudi Arabia is head of the cartel's compliance monitoring committee and is reportedly expected to try to ensure all other member countries stick to agreed production levels over the next 12 months.

## Bullish catalysts in short supply

"The major price driver in the first quarter of 2018 will be geopolitical developments," Stephen Brennock, oil analyst at PVM Oil Associates, said in an email to CNBC.

While Brennock cited Iran's relationship with the U.S. and Saudi Arabia as geopolitical risks worthy of keeping an eye on, he argued it was likely to be only a "matter of time" before Venezuela's worsening debt crisis started to significantly hamper the OPEC members' oil production.

The South American country has the largest proven oil reserves in the world but, amid intensifying economic pressure, its production levels have decreased to levels not seen in more than 30 years.

"All things considered, bullish catalysts will be in short supply and prices will therefore settle into their current trading ranges," Brennock said.

The price of oil collapsed from almost \$120 a barrel in June 2014 due to weak demand, a strong dollar and booming U.S. shale production. OPEC's reluctance to cut output was also seen as a key reason behind the fall. But, the oil cartel soon moved to curb production — along with other oil producing nations — in late 2016.

(Source: CNBC)

## Kuwait signs LNG import deal with Shell, has gas need

Kuwait Petroleum Corp. signed a 15-year liquefied natural gas import deal with Royal Dutch Shell Plc to help the oil exporting nation meet growing domestic energy demand.

The sales purchasing agreement with Shell International Trading Middle East Ltd. will start in 2020, the companies said Sunday in an emailed statement. Shell has supplied Kuwait with the super-cooled fuel since 2010 and declined to say how much gas is covered under the new contract. While KPC is working to boost local natural gas production,

Kuwait has a "pressing requirement" to secure natural gas supplies in the meantime, they said.

LNG could help meet Kuwait's domestic demand for power to run air conditioners during hot summer months and cut the amount of crude oil burned instead of exported for profit. The contract will cover 2 million to 3 million metric tons of LNG a year, priced at 11 percent below a Brent benchmark, a person familiar said, asking not to be identified because terms of the deal are private.

"The big issue for Kuwait is they burn a lot of oil, most of their power generated is from oil, and so importing LNG for them is cheaper and frees up oil for export," Robin Mills, chief executive officer of Dubai-based Qamar Energy, said by phone.

Kuwait wants cleaner burning energy sources such as natural gas to reduce emissions and improve air quality, according to the Shell and KPC statement.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Iraq invites bids to build new Kirkuk export pipeline

Iraq has given foreign energy companies a month to signal their interest in building a new export pipeline from the Kirkuk oilfields in the north of the country.

The new pipeline will replace an old and severely damaged section of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline. It will start from oilfields near Kirkuk and extend to the Fish-Khabur border area with Turkey.



Iraq's oil ministry set Jan. 24 as the deadline for companies to submit letters of interest in building the new pipeline, the ministry said in a statement.

The 350-km pipeline which will have the capacity to transport more than one million barrels per day and will be run under an investment model known as "build-operate-transfer," oil ministry spokesman Asim Jihad said.

Under the project terms, the interested companies or consortia should also build a gas pipeline, pumping stations and facilities for crude storage.

Jihad said interested companies must pay the project costs and can then recover them after operating the project for an agreed period of time.

Exports from oilfields in Kirkuk have been on hold since Iraqi government forces took control of them from the Kurds last month in retaliation for a Kurdish referendum on independence which was widely opposed by Turkey, Iran and Western powers.

Kurdistan has built another pipeline for Kirkuk exports to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan after the old Kirkuk pipeline belonging to the federal government had been damaged by Islamic State militants.

(Source: Reuters)

## Russia's Gazprom Neft sees 2018 investments unchanged

Gazprom Neft, the oil arm of Russian gas giant Gazprom, expects its investment program unchanged in 2018 comparing to the current year, the company said on Monday.

It said the 2017 investments seen at 385 billion roubles (\$6.6 billion). The lion share of investments is allocated for development of new oilfields and modernization of refineries.

(Source: CNBC)



LONGINES

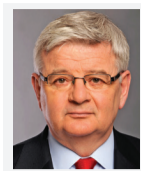
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The Longines Master Collection

## The new fulcrum of the Middle East



By Joschka Fischer

Former Germany's foreign minister

We live in a time of geopolitical transition. China's effort to replace the United States as the world's leading power, or at least to become a co-partner in global leadership, deservedly receives much attention. But the macro-level dynamics that have long defined the Middle East are also shifting, and here, too, U.S. influence is likely to diminish.

Just over a century ago, the Sykes-Picot Agreement divided the Middle East between France and Great Britain, and established national borders that remain in place to this day. But now the regional order is changing.

Since Israel's founding, the Arab-Israeli conflict has largely dominated the region's geopolitics. Israel won the first Arab-Israeli War in 1948 and all the wars that followed it. But whether the Israelis and the Palestinians could reach an acceptable settlement, and thus bring peace to the Middle East, remained a central concern in international affairs.

The closest the Israelis and the Palestinians have ever come to achieving peace was during the period between the signing of the first Oslo Accord on September 13, 1993, and the assassination of then-Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995. It is worth recalling that in both the 1993 and 1995 Oslo Accords, the status of Jerusalem was left unresolved. It was widely agreed that such a sensitive and complicated issue would have to be addressed at the end of the peace process.

The Israel-Palestine conflict lost its centrality in the region after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, and more so after the Arab Spring began in late 2010. After 2011, the Syrian civil war and the emergence of the Islamic State (ISIS) dominated the regional narrative. But now that an international coalition has deprived ISIS of its "caliphate" in Syria and Iraq, the struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia for regional dominance has come to the fore.

So far, Iran and Saudi Arabia have confronted one another mainly through proxy wars in Syria and Yemen. But each country's support for rival factions in Lebanon, together with the ongoing diplomatic dispute between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, is also part of their larger struggle.

Against this backdrop, the unresolved Israel-Palestine conflict seemed to have been downgraded to the status of a fringe dispute. That remained the case until U.S. President Donald Trump's administration decided unilaterally this month to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Israel's government and the Knesset (parliament) are based in West Jerusalem, and foreign dignitaries routinely make official visits there. But Israel's unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem after the 1967 Six-Day War has never been internationally recognized, and other countries, including the U.S., have kept their embassies in Tel Aviv, because they know that Jerusalem's status is a fraught political and religious issue.

Moreover, all other countries understand that weighing in on one side of the Jerusalem question would damage the prospects for an eventual two-state solution — the idea of which dates back to the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine — because both Israelis and Palestinians claim the city as their capital.

In 1947, a two-state solution was not viable, because Arab states responded to Israel's founding by waging war against it. When the Palestinians finally recognized the existence of Israel in 1993, that decision alone was seen as a big step forward.

Although diplomats still speak of a Middle East peace process, there has been no process to achieve peace for many years. A two-state solution remains the only conceivable option for satisfying both sides, but it is becoming less credible with time, and with the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. And now America's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital could mean the end of the two-state solution once and for all.

But the alternative, a binational arrangement, would confront Israel with the dilemma of remaining either democratic or Jewish, but not both. And with a two-state solution off the table, it would be only a matter of time before the Palestinians, having abandoned the struggle for their own state, instead demanded equal civil rights.

There is a third option, at least in theory: a Palestinian state could be created in Gaza, extended into the Northern Sinai, and put under Egypt's de facto control, while the West Bank could be divided between Israel and Jordan. But the Palestinians would never accept this outcome, and it would not solve the problem of Israel becoming a binational state.

One wonders why Trump decided to act on the Jerusalem issue now. Was it the result of his usual irrationalism, or of domestic politics? Or does he have in mind a new territorial solution that transcends the traditional parameters of the Israel-Palestine conflict? It is worth noting that Trump's unilateral demarcation drew only a moderate response from the major Arab powers — Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. For the Saudis, countering Iran is the top priority. And because Saudi Arabia is too weak to win that fight on its own — particularly in Lebanon and Syria — it will continue to strengthen its ties with Iran's other rivals, especially with the region's military superpower: Israel.

The emerging alliance between Saudi Arabia and Israel, once unimaginable, will likely become one of the driving forces of the new Middle East. Only time will tell what the price of such an anti-Iranian alliance will be? (Source: Project Syndicate)

**America's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital could mean the end of the two-state solution once and for all.**

# Why Saad Hariri had that strange sojourn in Saudi Arabia

Lebanon's Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, was summoned at 8:30 a.m. to the Saudi royal offices — unseemly early, by the kingdom's standards — on the second day of a visit that was already far from what he had expected.

Hariri, long an ally of the Saudis, dressed that morning in jeans and a T-shirt, thinking he was going camping in the desert with the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman.

But instead he was stripped of his cell-phones, separated from all but one of his usual cluster of bodyguards, and shoved and insulted by Saudi security officers. Then came the ultimate indignity: He was handed a prewritten resignation speech and forced to read it on Saudi television.

This, it seemed, was the real reason he had been beckoned to the Saudi capital, Riyadh, a day earlier: to resign under pressure and publicly blame Iran, as if he were an employee and not a sovereign leader. Before going on TV, he was not even allowed to go to the house he owns there; he had to ask guards to bring him a suit.

As bizarre as the episode was, it was just one chapter in the story of Prince Mohammed, the ambitious young heir apparent determined to shake up the power structure not just of his own country but of the entire region. At home, he has jailed hundreds of fellow princes and businessmen in what he casts as an anticorruption drive. Abroad, he has waged war in Yemen and confronted Qatar.

The day Hariri was ordered to report to Riyadh, he was just a pawn in the crown prince's overall battle: to rein in the regional ambitions of Saudi Arabia's longtime rival, Iran.

This is the back story of Hariri's long, strange sojourn in Saudi Arabia last month, as revealed in behind-the-scenes accounts from a dozen Western, Lebanese and regional officials and associates of Hariri.

### ■ Bold moves backfire

After delivering his speech, as his bewildered aides tried in vain to reach him from Beirut, Hariri did, indeed, eventually spend the evening in the desert with the crown prince, one senior Lebanese official said.

It was a surreal counterpoint to a series of events unfolding that day and into the night that set the entire Middle East on edge: a missile fired at Riyadh, the hundreds of Saudi princes and businessmen arrested, and Lebanon left stunned and confused.

Prince Mohammed had already launched a war in neighboring Yemen, and gotten bogged down. He had blockaded Qatar.

Now, he was looking to take out the prime minister of another country, one who was deemed not sufficiently obedient to his Saudi patrons. The prince intended to send a message: It was time to stop Iran's Lebanese ally, Hezbollah, the powerful Shiite organization that is Lebanon's most influential political actor, from growing still stronger.

The prime minister's monthlong saga was another example of a brash new leader trying to change the way Saudi Arabia has worked for years, but finding that action often results in unintended consequences, especially in such a complicated region. Now, Hariri remains in office with new popularity, and Hezbollah is stronger than before.

Saudi Arabia's heavy-handed — arguably clumsy — tactics alienated even staunch allies like the United States, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt and much of Hariri's Lebanese Sunni party. Saudi Arabia may yet clinch some modest concessions from Lebanon, officials and analysts say, but ones perhaps not worth the diplomatic storm.

The officials who described the saga were granted anonymity to speak freely about events that were highly secret and, for Hariri, deeply troubling and embarrassing. Some gaps in the story remain, given the intense pressure to keep quiet and the fact that no one person is privy to all the details — except, perhaps, Hariri, who rescinded his resignation immediately after an international diplomatic scramble brought him safely home.

Hariri did not respond to multiple requests for comment; he has said publicly that he acted freely and wants to put the Riyadh episode behind him. A senior Saudi official said in a statement only that Hariri was "treated with the utmost respect," resigned of his own accord, and remains an "honored friend" with the kingdom's support.

The Saudi moves that started on Nov. 4 came in rapid-fire succession. In the space of little more than a day, the Saudis extracted Hariri's resignation; accused Iran and Lebanon of an act of war after Yemeni Houthis fired a missile at Riyadh; and rounded up the princes and businessmen on opaque corruption charges. A week later, they ordered Saudi citizens



Saad Hariri arriving at Beirut's international airport last month, weeks after announcing his resignation as Lebanon's prime minister in Saudi Arabia.

**Separately, a Lebanese ally of the Saudis had urged jihadist factions in one Palestinian camp to form a "Sunni resistance" militia to counter Hezbollah — an idea so dangerous that the jihadists themselves refused, Lebanese and Palestinian officials and a Western diplomat said.**

to evacuate Lebanon.

The burst of contentious actions sent war tremors across the region.

With anxieties running high, Lebanese officials worked to head off what they feared was a long-range plan by Saudi Arabia to destabilize Lebanon's volatile Palestinian refugee camps. There were even concerns in Beirut that Saudi Arabia or its Lebanese allies were seeking to form an anti-Hezbollah militia in the camps or elsewhere, two senior Lebanese officials and several Western diplomats said. No such plots came to fruition, and the Saudi official said none were even considered.

Western and Arab officials say they are still puzzling over what the Saudis hoped to accomplish with all this intrigue. Several do not rule out the possibility that they aimed to foment internal unrest in Lebanon, or even war.

What is clear, they say, is that Saudi Arabia sought to instigate a broad realignment of Lebanese politics to reduce Hezbollah's power by forcing the collapse of Hariri's coalition government, which includes Hezbollah and its allies.

But crafting the nimble and activist foreign policy that Prince Mohammed wants requires "a depth of understanding of political dynamics in other countries and an investment in diplomatic ties that can't be created overnight," said Brian Katulis, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress in Washington.

"The competition for power and influence in today's Middle East has changed significantly," he said, "and the Saudis are playing catch-up, with very mixed results."

This risks miscalculations and escalations in a region riddled by wars and tensions, he said.

### ■ Pressure points

Trouble had been brewing for years between Hariri and the Saudis.

Like his father, Rafik, before him, Hariri owed his political career and considerable family fortune to Saudi backing. But the Saudis grumbled that Hariri's government was giving too much sway to Hezbollah, which is both a political party and a militant group not answerable to the state.

Hariri visited Riyadh in late October, and believed he had made the Saudis understand his need to compromise with Hezbollah to avoid political deadlock, officials said. Back in Beirut, to placate the Saudis, he asked Hezbollah's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, through intermediaries, to tone down his blistering speeches against Saudi Arabia's devastating war in Yemen and Prince Mohammed personally.

That same week, a Saudi minister known as a firebrand on Iran, Thamer al-Sabhan, warned Lebanon of "astonishing" developments on the horizon and accused Hezbollah of making war on Saudi Arabia.

On Nov. 3, Hariri met with a senior Iranian official, Ali Akbar Velayati, who then praised Iran's cooperation with Lebanon. That may have been the last straw for the Saudis.

Within hours, Hariri received a message from the Saudi king — Come now — ahead of a meeting that had been scheduled days later, a senior Lebanese official said. A well-connected Lebanese analyst, Johnny Munayyer, said the prime minister was invited to spend a day in the desert with the prince.

But when he landed in Riyadh, Saudi officials took Hariri to his house and told him to wait — not for the king, but for the prince. He waited, from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m. No one came.

The next morning, he was summoned to meet the prince. There was no customary royal convoy, so Hariri took his own car. And instead of meeting the prince, officials said, he was manhandled by Saudi officials.

Lebanese officials described the long hours between the arrival and the resignation as a "black box." They said they were reluctant to press Hariri for details. When asked, one of them said, Hariri just looked down at the table and said it was worse than they knew.

Saudi Arabia had many pressure points to use against Hariri. It could threaten to expel the 250,000 or so Lebanese workers in Saudi Arabia, damaging Lebanon's economy. And since Hariri is a dual Saudi citizen, with extensive business dealings in a country where kickbacks are endemic, they could threaten him personally. An Arab diplomat said Hariri was threatened with corruption charges.

The prime minister was handed a resignation speech to read, which he did at 2:30 p.m. from a room an official said was down the hall from the prince's office. The text blamed Hezbollah and claimed his life was in danger; it used words that associates said did not sound like him.

Hours later, the Saudi authorities began their corruption roundups, detaining two of Hariri's former business partners, a reminder of his own vulnerability.

### ■ Unrealistic expectations

In Lebanon, Western diplomats and Lebanese officials said, the Saudis expected the resignation would be taken at face value and bring about a mass outpouring of popular support from Hezbollah's opponents. Instead, Lebanon reacted with mass suspicion. No one took to the streets. And Lebanon's president, Michel Aoun, a Hezbollah ally, refused to accept the resignation unless Hariri delivered it in person.

After disappearing for hours, Hariri made his first known call to Aoun, who realized that the prime minister was not speaking freely. Lebanese officials began making the rounds to puzzled Western diplomats with an unusual message: We have reason to believe our prime minister has been detained.

Hariri, the officials said, was eventually placed with Saudi guards in a guesthouse on his own property, forbidden to see his wife and children. Within days, several Western ambassadors visited him there. They came away with conflicting impressions of how free he was. There were two Saudi guards in the room, officials said,

and when the diplomats asked if the guards could leave, Hariri said no, they could stay.

Lebanon's internal intelligence chief, Gen. Abbas Ibrahim, put it this way to envoys who could not quite believe a leader could be forced by foreign officials to resign, a senior official said: "It's simple: I could bring two soldiers and put you on TV saying you hate your country."

Meanwhile, the Saudi prince, apparently undaunted by international concerns, summoned yet another leader, the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, and issued instructions on Palestinian politics. Officials differ on what Abbas was told in Riyadh. But Lebanese officials were alarmed. They dispatched General Ibrahim and a Palestinian envoy to Amman, Jordan, to debrief Abbas, three senior Lebanese officials said.

Concerns were high for several reasons. The Saudi recommendations to Abbas could destabilize the fractious Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, a senior Lebanese official said. Separately, a Lebanese ally of the Saudis had urged jihadist factions in one Palestinian camp to form a "Sunni resistance" militia to counter Hezbollah — an idea so dangerous that the jihadists themselves refused, Lebanese and Palestinian officials and a Western diplomat said.

The Saudis and Abbas's spokesman denied the accounts.

On a visit to Washington soon after Hariri's televised resignation, Sabhan, the Saudi minister of gulf affairs, got a withering reception, Western and Arab officials said, from David M. Satterfield, the State Department's acting assistant secretary for Near Eastern Affairs. He demanded that Sabhan explain why Riyadh was destabilizing Lebanon.

Intense diplomacy followed by France, the United States, Egypt and other countries, producing a deal that allowed Hariri to leave Saudi Arabia.

But Prince Mohammed sent him home with a task: to get Hezbollah to withdraw its fighters from Yemen, Lebanese officials and Western and Arab diplomats involved in the deal said. That demand proved, the Western and Arab diplomats said, that the prince was not well-informed on Yemen, sometimes called "Riyadh's Vietnam." Hezbollah, a Western diplomat said, had only about 50 fighters in Yemen.

To end the war in Yemen, a Lebanese official said, Beirut is "the wrong P.O. box." Riyadh did get something out of the turmoil. Lebanese officials are seeking a deal with Hezbollah that could include toning down Hezbollah's anti-Saudi rhetoric — as Hariri requested even before the Riyadh episode — and shuttering a pro-Houthi television station in Beirut.

It remains unclear if Hariri can deliver enough to placate Riyadh. Nasrallah's speeches have omitted critiques of Prince Mohammed lately, and on Wednesday, he called for peace talks in Yemen, a major step.

Then again, on Tuesday, Yemen's Houthis fired another missile at Riyadh. (Source: The NYT)

# U.S. new strategy don't aborning traditional elements of soft power: Bruce Hall



1 → Trump aims to shift the burden elsewhere. Certainly international conflict could arise over these burden sharing issues, but conflict can arise over nearly any issue area. Different U.S. governments have made different decisions regarding how much global human rights and climate change mitigation the U.S. can afford. A new administration might make different decisions from Trumps. With a 4 year term of office, Trump's time horizons see him pushing in the directions he is currently pushing. He seems to judge that peace and stability will not be enhanced by a policy focus on human rights and climate change over enhancing U.S. economic and military capabilities. Europe, regarding herself to be a «normative power» focuses exclusively on these issues, being militarily marginal. One can argue over whether or not this is a reasonable division of labor in the U.S. alliance with Europe.

The new strategy allocates more money to the U.S. army. Does this mean that the U.S. foreign policy will become more militarized and the significance of the diplomacy will decline?

A: I don't accept the premise of the question. Diplomacy is meaningful and effective to the extent that it is backed by military and economic capabilities. I fear my constructivist orientation yet does not permit me to see the social institution of diplomacy functioning effectively in a vacuum, in the absence of credible military capabilities to back it up. U.S. diplomacy has always, when it has been effective, been backed by a surfeit of military power. The U.S. has been at war for over a decade now in the Middle East, and the American people are rather weary of it. I think it unlikely that Trump's government is investing resources in the U.S. armed forces in order to generate new wars «in lieu of» diplomatic activity. I think it's more likely Trumps is seeking to restore the



**Europe, regarding herself to be a «normative power» focuses exclusively on these issues, being militarily marginal. One can argue over whether or not this is a reasonable division of labor in the U.S. alliance with Europe.**

U.S. armed forces (especially the Navy) to the robust strength they enjoyed after the Reagan defense build up, to strongly discourage would be regional hegemony around the world. A possible exception would be North Korea. It is likely Trump has decided the N. Korean nuclear threat is unacceptable, that China lacks both the desire and capability to accomplish a reversal of the NK nuclear program, and that some form of non-nuclear military solution will be required by the time NK claims of its missile ranges and accuracies, an ability to miniaturize the warheads, and render them survival during a ballistic missile re-entry, are credible.

Considering the significance of the U.S. army in the new strategy, is there possibility for more U.S. military interventions in different parts of the world?

A: U.S. Grand Strategy has long relied on keeping its armed forces to a strength level that the threat of new U.S. military interventions is always credible. They are not more likely, however, as Mr. Trump is

an economic nationalist much more than a militant nationalist.

Trump calls Russia and China in his new strategy as rivals not enemies that the U.S. has to try to make economic relation with them. What is the reason for his positive approach toward these two countries?

A: While both Russia and China singularly or together lack both the ideological incentives and the military capabilities to become a concern as new Cold War enemies (I find Graham Allison's arguments to the contrary to be highly flawed) both countries, in the absence of counterproductive programs of autocratic, imperialist grandeur, have the capabilities of being strong partners to the U.S. in promoting and enforcing world peace, among other roles as economic partners. However, so long as Russia faces the world with autocratic Great Russian revanchism and China leans towards autocratic attempts to reconstruct regionally the ancient imperial kow-tow tribute system, both countries cannot

best be non-belligerent rivals to a democratic superpower. There are many reasons that true and deep friendships between autocratic and democratic states are never seen to develop. But the U.S. has no compelling interests in approaching other large powers from a position of belligerence, and thus surrendering cooperative outcomes where they may be found.

Trump defended his stance toward Iran and North Korea. As he hasn't certified the JCPOA, how do you see the fate of the JCPOA?

A: I see the fate of the JCPOA while Trump is in office similar to that of the U.S. nonproliferation initiative with respect to North Korea.

While the nuclear weapons and deployment strategies in question do not yet represent an immediate, clear and present danger to U.S. security, the U.S. can afford to go along to some extent with allies more timid about the consequences of suspending negotiations and starting over, or taking a more forceful strategy.

## Immigrants crisis in Europe

1 → Furthermore, the Chancellor of Austria is one of the main critics of the Joint action plan on the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement. The new Austrian government believes that this agreement should be terminated, and subsequently, negotiations with Turkey on joining the European Union should be stopped. However, the Austrian authorities have not actually proposed an alternative solution to the crisis of asylum seekers in the United Europe. They are merely critics of the status quo. Another important point is that Austria will take over the EU Presidency in the second half of the coming year (2018). Undoubtedly, in this case, we will witness the intensification of the disputes between the Austrian government and other members of the European Union over the resolution of the asylum seekers' crisis.

An issue that has already raised concerns among EU leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel. In any case, the statements of the Austrian Chancellor show that the European asylum seekers crisis will remain strong in the coming year.

European Authorities Concerns over Changes in Catalonia  
The recent victory of independent parties in the Catalan parliamentary elections has raised concerns among European officials. The Green continent politicians are concerned about the impact of this phenomenon in other parts of Europe. In any case, Spain is considered one of the EU and the Eurozone member states, and any political and geographical changes in this country can affect other parts of Europe. On the other hand, European authorities are worried about the raise of other independent parties in Europe (after the victory of the Catalan separatists). Although the European Union remained silent and didn't accept the referendum held in Catalonia in 2017, which was held without the permission of the central government, recent parliamentary elections have been held by the permit of the central government in a completely formal and legal manner. Therefore, the European Union will have to recognize the results of these elections.

Some European news sources have emphasized that European authorities, while not planning to directly enter into the conflict between the central government of Spain and Catalonia, but they secretly encourage «Mariano Rajoy», the prime minister of Spain, to negotiate with the leaders of Catalonia and resolve this conflict. Some analysts of the Europe's affairs argue that if more autonomy is granted to Catalonia and some adjustments are made to the tax and economic structure of the region, the public opposition towards the central government of Spain would drop to a great extent in this state. In this case, many of the separatists would retreat from their positions against the Spanish government. However, it doesn't seem that Madrid government is simply going to grant benefits to the separatists.

The Spanish government thought that after recent changes in Catalonia and the dissolution of the parliament by the central government, the independents have to accept defeat in the region's parliamentary elections. And so «Catalonia's concern» will be removed for at least four to five years. At the moment, the EU authorities are even more concerned with the current developments in Catalonia. However, as noted, European leaders do not intend to directly enter this equation because this would raise lots of sensitivities within the Spanish community.

The German newspaper «Tagesschau» writes in this regard: «After the local parliamentary elections in Catalonia which resulted in the victory of the separatist parties, the European Union has had a cautious reaction to its results. However, there are concerns behind closed doors. Many European delegations have called on both sides (the central government and the separatists) to enter into negotiations in this regard.»

Undoubtedly, over the coming weeks and months, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy will report on the latest developments in Catalonia in his private meetings with European authorities, and will ask for their help dealing with this issue.

## christmas congratulations to christians by muslim girls

### Muslim Youth gift Hundreds of Roses to Queen Elizabeth Hospital Healthcare staff on Christmas Eve



By Batool Subeiti

**BIRMINGHAM, UK** — For this year's #RosesForPeace campaign, Birmingham Ahlulbayt Society (ABSoc) dedicated it specifically to the hardworking nurses and healthcare assistants at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, one of the largest hospitals in the UK. Hundreds of roses were given to the healthcare professionals as a gift.

We wanted to show them our appreciation and express our love and thanks for all their selfless dedication to those who need care and support, especially on Christmas Eve, a time where families are gathered around together in comfortable environments, enjoying the festive holidays, appreciating their time together.


In addition to this, wider society does not give them their due credit or at least acknowledges enough their efforts and struggle, these amazing individuals have put in to cater for the needs and requirements of their fellow brethren in humanity.

The feedback we received was overwhelming, to say the least. With some tears of joy, laughter and hugs, whilst others


sharing stories about their patients and the current situation, 'you have made my day' was the most frequently said statement. Nurse Charlene, "you guys put some much thought into words, I am pleased thank you".

Other nurses went on to describe the current climate of the world, in which oppression and a lack of humanity is widely manifest, and stated they were in 'awe' to see our campaign, along with time and effort was spent in the way of others, without expecting anything in return but the happiness of others, no matter how small the contribution may seem. It's the value and meaning behind the message of spreading affection and love.

The messages on the colourful roses were ones that talk of peace, unity, kindness, love, with one side carrying a quote from Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) and the other side sharing a verse taken from the Bible. The most important thing we took out of this was the embracing of one another, the respect, appreciation and promotion of the values of peace and unity to be central and integral to the divine nature of man, no matter which faith or creed is taken to form the basis of one's identity.



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# Bit by bit, Trump is taking apart the New Deal's glorious legacy

Since January, there have been frightening signs that America is becoming an oligarchy overseen by a dictator. From the first, Donald Trump has followed an authoritarian playbook, beginning with his rejection of objective reality. Forced early on to defend the assertion that the crowd at Trump's inauguration was the biggest ever witnessed, presidential spokesperson Kellyanne Conway explained that the administration used "alternative facts". Since then, the president has repeatedly attacked fact-based media as "fake news". Indeed, with his insistence on an alternative reality, Trump sometimes seems like an elderly Fox News-addled neighbor suddenly given power to make his bizarrely warped view of America real.

But now, it feels all too real, with Trump delivering on the economic core of his vision. He has slashed regulations that protect workers, walked away from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, attacked the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") and gutted the government. Finally, in a dramatic "win" for his administration, the Republicans last week passed a major tax overhaul that slashes taxes primarily for the wealthy and is projected to create an almost \$1.5tn dollar

deficit. Republicans have already said that the only way to address that shortfall will be with cuts to Medicare and social security.

Since Democratic president Franklin Delano Roosevelt established the New Deal in the 1930s, radical conservatives have railed against the idea that the government should intervene in the economy. The New Deal responded to the Great Crash and the ensuing Depression by regulating business, providing a basic social safety net and promoting infrastructure in order to maintain a level playing field for all Americans. Opponents countered this principle by arguing that the government must not hem in America's business leaders. In their view, government regulations and laws to benefit poorer members of society crippled leaders' ability to prosper and, since their prosperity drove the economy by trickling down to everyone else, such laws destroyed progress.

But the New Deal was wildly popular, so conservatives sold their reactionary economic vision by enlisting white racism. As the federal government promoted civil rights, they warned that an active government redistributed the wealth of hard-working, white taxpayers to

African Americans, a "special interest" that wanted better treatment than everyone else. In contrast, conservatives offered the image of the American cowboy individualist.

## ■ Government not solution

Ronald Reagan, with his derision of the welfare queen and his mantra that "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem", rode that racist anti-government cowboy image into the White House. Trump is this conservative macho individualist exaggerated to caricature. He brags about how he knows better than anyone how to run a successful business, how to fight Isis, how to find "the best people" for office.

While Reagan hinted at the discrimination inherent in the conservative worldview, Trump revels in it. But Trump delivered not just on the racism and sexism of the individualist vision, but also on its economics. In short, Republicans under Trump have finally destroyed the New Deal, turning the government over to a small cadre of wealthy businessmen, unhampered, to run the country as they see fit. When Republican Senate candidate Roy Moore put on his cowboy hat and rode his horse to the polls

in Alabama in December, he was deliberately embodying Republican individualist principles.

And therein lies the rub. Moore lost the election. As Republicans under Trump have converted the nation into an oligarchy of rich individualists, Trump's extreme macho individualism has bred a backlash.

## ■ Republican individualism

Since 1980, Republican shredding of the social safety net has disproportionately hit women, particularly women of color. At the same time, the Republican vision defined women primarily as wives and mothers and suggested that since men took care of their dependants, any woman protesting against her deteriorating conditions was demanding special legislation. The election of a man who used his privilege not to protect women but to assault them gave women a clear way to rally against Republican individualism.

In October, the New York Times's exposé of film mogul Harvey Weinstein, who controlled women's access to work by demanding sexual favors, lit the #MeToo movement. One powerful man after another fell before what is not simply a pushback against sexual assault, but

is a rejection of the worldview that privileged dominant men.

Nowhere has the rejection of that vision been clearer than in the victory of Democrat Doug Jones over Roy Moore. Voters chose Jones, the federal prosecutor who brought to justice two Ku Klux Klan members responsible for the 1963 Birmingham church bombing that killed four African American girls, over Moore, an alleged sexual predator.

In 2017, Trump brought to life the alternative reality portrayed on Fox News, the individualist vision designed to destroy the New Deal. Now that it is exposed to reality, Americans reject it. Trump's approval rating is at 35%, a historical low.

And Trump has followers who appear to be willing to rally around him, no matter what he does, even, perhaps, to dismiss as "fake news" any evidence of collusion with Russia that Mueller produces or, maybe, as the president suggested, to let him "stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody". If Republican leaders are willing to enable Trump's autocratic enthusiasms in return for oligarchy, American democracy will die.

(Source: The Guardian)

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# Start your day with Iranian breakfast

**L I F E** Breakfast is always considered as an important meal among **d e s k** Iranian families. Eating breakfast provides a time for them to enjoy togetherness and is a great choice for beginning a day. Flatbread and tea are essential parts of Persian style breakfast. They are always present on the table during breakfast time.

## ■ Bread matters

Fresh bread is ready every day. There are different kinds of flatbread, which is popular for breakfast in Iran: noon-e barbari, a long, oval shaped bread with doughy ends; noon-e sangak, wheat flatbread baked on rocks; and noon-e taftoon, a round, white flatbread.

One cannot ignore the delicious savior of feta cheese and walnut with sangak bread or the great taste of fruit jam or honey with butter on barbari bread. Sometimes sliced cucumber and tomato are also served during an Iranian breakfast as well.

Tea is the most important drink amongst Iranian. They drink tea all through the day but they serve tea with sugar during breakfast time.

## ■ Warm breakfast

● Adasi, a kind of lentil soup, is amongst the options for Iranian breakfast. It is made with lentil, onion and sometimes pieces of potato.

● Haleem, a stew including wheat or barley and meat, is another choice for a warm breakfast. It is usually cooked in special stores in most of cities.

● Kalleh Pache, a dish of boiled cow or sheep's hooves and head, which has some fans as well. Some people enjoy eating it, however, there are some who despise it even the smell of the meal.

● Fried egg and tomato omelet, eggs scrambled with fresh tomatoes, is another warm breakfast usually served in Iranian houses.

Enjoy a day full of energy with Persian style breakfast full of tastes and colors.



## Signs you're way too addicted to your phone

### ■ You check the time, then immediately forget

We've all been there. You open your screen to check what time it is, then forget as soon as it goes dark again, and have to look once more. You're so used to glancing at your phone that it becomes a habit, rather than an actual way to gain information. While we're on the subject, make sure you're not committing one of these cell phone etiquette sins.

### ■ Your phone is your security blanket

You're waiting for your meeting to start, so instead of making small talk with your coworkers, you stare intently at your phone, going through those unimportant emails you'd purposely ignored before. Quit turning to your phone during awkward situations, and boost your confidence by forcing yourself to work the room. Those face-to-face interactions will be way more satisfying than scrolling through Twitter.

### ■ Your phone is always on you

Of course you wouldn't be so rude as to start texting when you're out for dinner, but you still leave your phone in your pocket or on the table (it's on silent, though!) where you can see it. Separation anxiety could be a major sign you should take a break from your relationship with your screen.

### ■ You lose track of time scrolling

You'd pulled up your phone to look up one quick thing,

and suddenly you've wasted half an hour scrolling deep into your Twitter feed. Set a timer to limit screen time if you find yourself getting (and staying) distracted easily. Turning off notifications and these other tricks could make you more productive.

### ■ You always carry your charger

Don't blame a poor battery for your phone's short life. If it's already drained halfway through the day, you're probably spending more time than you think on battery-sucking apps. Leave the screen black so it doesn't have to work so hard to keep up with your demands. Here are secrets to a better phone battery life.

### ■ "Low battery" gives you a heart attack

Just because your phone hits 20 percent doesn't mean you're about to be left lost and abandoned with no way to reach family and friends. Resist the urge to run for your charger or ask everyone around you if you can borrow one, and take it as a sign that you should take a breather from your screen.

### ■ You keep checking for notifications

No, you didn't feel your phone vibrate, but you still double check to make sure you didn't miss a message in the ten minutes since you last looked. Sorry, but that's just wishful thinking.

### ■ Phantom vibrations haunt you

Convincing yourself you felt your phone vibrate when it never went off could be your mind looking for an excuse to check your phone. Say no to the temptation to address every notification immediately.

### ■ You're a distracted driver

We know you know not to look down at your phone when you're behind the wheel. Yes, even at red lights. Yes, even in long, straight stretches. In the five seconds it takes to send a text, your car could have traveled the length of a football field. We promise your friend can wait the 15 minutes until you get home for your answer. Here's exactly how to handle these 11 scary driving scenarios.

### ■ You still don't know the way to your favorite store

"In 250 feet, turn right." How did we ever get around without an all-knowing voice telling us the way? Unfortunately, your phone's GPS could also make it harder to remember directions on your own. A study in the Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied found that participants who used a GPS that reoriented with the subject were able to find their destination more easily, but were less likely to remember landmarks than those who used a map.

(Source: Reader's Digest)

## Naqsh-e henna ritual in Hormozgan



**L I F E** Women in the southern province of Hormozgan **d e s k** adorn their hands and feet with henna designs known as 'naqsh-e henna'.

They perform different designs by a henna cone. The designs are inspired by embellishment women embroiders on their traditional dress like passementerie.

In the past, the henna design was only

used by brides and grooms during wedding ceremonies as well as some religious ceremonies. However, it has been turned into one of the tourist attractions of the region in modern time. 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 clean stained plasticware?



It might seem like your plasticware will never be clear again, but there's hope: Fill with warm water and drop in two or three denture tablets, depending on the container's size.

Another trick? Set reusable plastic containers in direct sunlight, says Donna Smallin Kuper, author of *Cleaning Plain & Simple*. "Prolonged exposure will make

the stain disappear," she says.

Sometimes, even glass containers are hard to get clean. In those cases, says Fuentes, try soaking the container in half a teaspoon of Clorox bleach per one to two cups of water before it goes into the dishwasher. Skip the drying cycle—it may set any stain that remains.

(Source: Real Simple)



## 101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

### #17. Give a heartfelt surprise to someone

When's the last time you gave someone a surprise? It's always heartwarming to come home to a nicely cooked dinner, to have a bouquet of flowers sent to you at work, or to even receive a simple text message from a loved one. Who is someone you would like to touch today? What surprise can you give to him/her?

We all love the feeling of discovering a \$5 bill stashed in a coat pocket. Even if \$5 isn't the same as winning a \$5 million lottery jackpot, the feeling of surprise is similar – and it feels awesome! What if you could give that fantastic feeling to someone else?

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](http://personalexcellence.co))



## #IRANIANLIFESTYLE



A man is resting on a pile of cut-down trees in Some'sara city, northern Gilan province. (Instagram/@majid\_ashoori\_63)

## PERSIAN DRUGSTORE

### Iranian traditional medicine: Magic of tangerine



**L I F E** According to the Iranian traditional medicine, **d e s k** consumption of tangerine and other citrus fruits which have wet and cooling characteristics, control body temperature in cold seasons.

Foods with warming characteristics are mostly used during cold seasons and citrus like tangerine modifies the warmth of body.

Tangerine, with cooling characteristic, is great for common cold and asthma and thirst.

The fruit decreases the extra warmth of stomach and liver and is a good choice for those who want to lose weight.

Tangerine is also diuretic and is great for renal system as well.

## Tips for getting your kids to sleep



Whether your child is a toddler looking for one more glass of water, an elementary-age child scared of having bad dreams or a preteen begging for "Just ten more minutes" before lights out, if you are a parent, you know that bedtime can be a struggle.

### ■ Customize a bedtime routine

Whether young or old, everyone benefits from a regular nighttime routine. Not only does it provide a way to unwind at the end of the day, but it lets the brain know that sleep is coming, triggering associated sleepiness. For the best effect, a bedtime routine should take 30 minutes to an hour, involve only relaxing activities and end in bed. If your child is very young, you'll carry out the routine with her, but older children can usually handle most of it themselves.

### ■ Power down

In today's wireless world, many kids spend several hours every day interacting with electronics. This is especially true with the preteen and older set. Unfortunately, one of the most common factors keeping kids awake at night is time spent looking at a glowing screen within an hour or two of bedtime. The light produced by computer, phone or tablet screens is enough to interfere with the brain's production of melatonin, the hormone that regulates the sleep cycle. MORE

### ■ Banish monsters

The dark is a scary place for many kids. Monsters under the bed, bad guys breaking into the house, the boogeyman lurking in the closet... as children develop active imaginations, it's very common for nighttime fear to be a side effect. Fear of the dark usually peaks between ages two and six, but can linger on for many kids (and even some adults.) You might not eliminate the fear entirely, but you can help your child handle the fear until it's naturally outgrown.

### ■ Serve the right snack

Serve your toddler a highly sugary snack before bed, or let your preteen help himself to a couple more slices of pizza before hitting the hay, and you'll likely have a child who can't fall asleep on your hands. An overly full stomach is a common cause of sleep difficulties, particularly if that stomach is full of sugar or fat. On the other hand, a hungry child won't sleep well either. The solution is a light bedtime snack that combines a small helping of protein along with carbs.

### ■ Set and enforce bedtime

One key to a good night of sleep is a consistent bedtime. Don't let your child decide when she wants to go to bed – that decision is up to you, and it is up to you to enforce it. According to the CDC, preschool-age children need at least 11 to 12 hours of sleep each day, elementary-school-age children need at least ten hours per day and teens should be sleeping nine or ten hours each night.

### ■ Sleep-friendly bedroom

Just like adults, kids sleep best in a dark, quiet room that is somewhat cool – generally between 65 and 70 degrees at night. If it's your child's bedroom conditions that are keeping him awake, take the necessary steps to correct the situation. It may take little more than a white-noise machine, a bedside fan or humidifier and heavier drapes to help your child sleep better.

### ■ Natural remedies

If your child occasionally needs a little extra help in falling or staying asleep, there are many natural remedies to try. One of the best is aromatherapy, the use of inhaled essential plant oils to induce health and mood benefits. Try a few drops of lavender essential oil on your child's pillow, or a fragrant lavender room mist. Herb tea is another possibility – there are several herbs that taste good and induce sleep. Try chamomile, hops, California poppy or passionflower tea. Have your child drink a cup of tea an hour or so before bedtime. If necessary, sweeten with a bit of honey.

(Source: The Spurge)

## 7000-year-old residence found in western Iran

**HERITAGE** TEHRAN – A previously spotted residence area at Nadali-Beig Hill in western Iran may date back to around 7,000 years ago, archaeological studies suggest. “The second season of excavations at the site has so far yielded several stages of construction, considerable numbers of pottery pieces, as well as remains of residential units associated with the everyday life that are estimated to date from the 5th millennium BC,” IRNA quoted Hannan Bahrani-pour, who leads the excavations team, as saying on Sunday.



Archaeologists unearthed considerable numbers of prehistoric pottery fragments at the Nadali-Beig Hill in western Iran.

Identification of ancient layers and its connected cultural sequence built the framework for the first excavation season, which was carried out during 2016 and 2017.

Meanwhile the second season seeks to shed a new light on architectural feature of the site by the means of a trench that measures 10 by 8 meters.

Nadali-Beig Hill is located on the southwest of Sonqor, a city in Kermanshah province. It is also in the vicinity of the River Jamishan.

“Following the construction of Jamishan dam over the River Jamishan the hill was faced a risk of decay,” Bahrani-pour added.

## CHHTO exhibits needlework handicrafts

**HERITAGE** TEHRAN – A collection of handicrafts bearing needlework embroideries has been put on show at the headquarters of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization in Tehran.



A file photo depicts a jacket richly ornamented with needlework.

Handcrafted by some 30 female breadwinners who are native of the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan, the collection contains women’s wear, household furniture, and sets of personal ornamentation amongst others, Mehr reported.

Needlework (Souzan-douzi in Persian) is a very common occupation among people of the province. It is the art of drawing images on plain fabrics by sewing delicate stitches using needle and colorful yarns.

Organized under the auspices of the CHHTO exports department, the weeklong showcase comes to an end on December 27.

# Drought poses no threat to Isfahan’s Si-o-Se-Pol: official

**TOURISM** TEHRAN – Years of drought conditions has not so far raised any “new” threat to Si-o-Se-Pol, a historical bridge with 33 arches in the city of Isfahan, a senior tourism official says.

“A thorough inspection by cultural heritage experts shows no defect in the infrastructure and beneath stories of the Si-o-Se-Pol bridge,” said Fereydoon Allahyari who presides over Isfahan province’s office of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization.

A team of top experts affiliated with the CHHTO dispatched to the bridge on Saturday, immediately after unendorsed stories on social media outlets referred the monument is under threat due to subsidence, CHTN reported.

Speaking to reporters, Allahyari said “Studies show creation of [existing] distortion (tilting walls) on the second floor of the bridge occurred over the past decades as some old images suggest this, and currently there is no evidence of ground subsidence at the site.”

Si-o-se-Pol, also known as Allahverdi Khan, was completed in the very early 17th century. It is one of a small number of Safavid-era bridges that span the Zayanderud river.

The 298m-long monument has been served as both bridge and dam. It is a popular meeting place when the locals and travelers gather to watch the sunset and catch the moment alongside the arches.



A view of Si-o-Se-Pol bridge in Isfahan

## Museum dedicated to sound and music to open in Tabriz

**HERITAGE** TEHRAN – A museum devoted to sound and music gear is due to open its doors to the public in the northwestern Iranian city of Tabriz, which will be the capital of Islamic tourism in 2018.

The museum is to contain over 300 items such as various traditional and classical musical instruments that Hossein Sajedi, an Iranian collector and tar virtuoso, has gathered around over the span of three decades.

It also features a rich archive of indigenous tonal and recorded music, comprising a collection of azan (the Islamic call to worship) soundtracks, pardeh-khani performances, which are dedicated to tragic stories of Muslim leaders, as well as Quran recitations, to name a few.

“The goal of launching the museum is to preserve and introduce Iran’s treasured culture and art as well as promote tourism,” CHTN quoted Sajedi as saying on Saturday.

Antique tube radios, phonographs, vinyl records, turn tables, gramophones, TV sets, loudspeakers, sound recorders, and centuries-old bells are among other objects of the museum, which will be running by the private sector under the auspices of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization.

In December 2015, the inter-governmental Organization of Islamic Cooperation selected Tabriz as the capital of Islamic tourism for 2018. The city was declared a world craft city of carpet weaving by the World Craft in 2016.

Tabriz hosts a number of renowned



A combination photo depicts Hossein Sajedi, an Iranian collector and musician, as well as some of his sound and music gear.

historical and religious sites, including Jameh Mosque of Tabriz and Arg of Tabriz, and UNESCO-registered Tabriz Historic Bazaar Complex.

## Vietnam aims to boost tourism

Vietnam wants to make tourism a key economic sector by 2020 that creates a driving force for the development of other sectors.

The country expects to attract 17-20 million foreign visitors and 82 million domestic ones by then.

Visitors are expected to spend US\$35 billion in the country in 2020, on-the-spot exports through tourism are expected to reach \$20 billion and the sector is hoped to create jobs for four million people including 1.6 million direct jobs.

Such ambitious goals are part of a Politburo resolution on developing tourism into a key economic sector, issued early this year.

Nguyen Van Tuan, General Director of National Administration of Tourism, told a workshop on restructuring Vietnam’s tourism sector yesterday that the resolution created motivation for the sector’s development and it also helped change public awareness about tourism – as not a single sector but a collective one relating to other sectors.

He said that last year, Vietnam welcomed 10 million foreign visitors and the World Tourism Organization ranked it in top ten countries with highest tourism growth globally.

In 2017, Vietnam expected to host 13 million foreign visitors and it was ranked in top six countries with highest tourism growth, Tuan said, adding that the expectation would likely become real and the National Administration of Tourism would greet the 13 millionth visitor next week.

“The tourism sector made achievements but these are still modest compared to Vietnam’s tourism potential and expectations as well as those made by neighboring countries,” Tuan said.

“Restructuring is an urgent need for Vietnam’s tourism sector,” he said, noting six issues that need restructuring – resources and funding for tourism, tourism products, developing tourism markets, tourism companies, human resources for tourism and management.

Vietstar Airlines Deputy General Director Luong Hoai Nam said that Vietnam’s tourism was “good at some things but bad at many things.”

Last year, Vietnam received 10 million foreign visitors but Thailand received 32.6 million, Malaysia 26.8 million, Singapore 16.4 million and Hong Kong 26.7 million.

Cambodia, with a population of about 15 million people, received 5 million foreign visitors. This means a neighboring country

with a population a sixth as big as Vietnam has welcomed half as many visitors.

Nam said that with advantages in natural resources and human resource, Vietnam’s tourism was hindered by bottlenecks relating to visa policies, information and communications technology readiness, health and hygiene, safety and security, airport infrastructure, ground and port infrastructure and tourist service infrastructure.

According to Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 of World Economic Forum, Vietnam’s tourist service infrastructure ranked 113 out of 136 economies.

“Few tourist products with high creativeness are available in Vietnam,” Nam said, adding that there are opportunities to develop new tourist products based on the conditions of individual localities.

Certain types of tourism could be exploited, for example, war tourism allows visitors to learn about wars in Vietnam through battle sites, golf tourism is popular in Asia and hiking and trekking tourism has possibilities as Vietnam has much natural beauty.

Vietnam ranked 82th out of 136 economies in the same survey index in terms of health and hygiene, necessitating an improvement in fighting rubbish and better

quantity and quality of public toilets.

In addition, Nam said that the country should have opened visa policies for tourists.

“The matter is not the visa fee but the inconvenience and displeasure people experience when applying for a visa,” he said.

Vietnam exempts tourist visa for citizens from 23 countries but Thailand does the same for 61 countries, Singapore 157 countries, Malaysia 155 countries, Indonesia 169 countries and the Philippines 157 countries.

Nguyen Quoc Ky, chairman and director general of Viettravel said tourism consists of four major components – travel, accommodation, transport and services. So, restructuring the tourism sector means implementing synchronized measures in related sectors like transport, commerce, services and customs.

Nguyen Dinh Cung, director of the Central Institute for Economic Management said that investment priority should be given to developing tourist infrastructure.

In any economic restructuring plan, enterprises should be placed at the center, he said, calling for stronger administrative reform and improved business environment so enterprises can run freely, safely and more creatively. (Source: Inquirer.net)

## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Archaeological monuments zone of Xochicalco

Xochicalco is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a fortified political, religious and commercial center from the troubled period of 650–900 that followed the break-up of the great Mesoamerican states such as Teotihuacan, Monte Albán, Palenque and Tikal.



A view of Xochicalco, a pre-Columbian archaeological site in Mexico.

The decline of the political and economic primacy of Teotihuacan in the 7th and 8th centuries CE marked the end of the Mesoamerican Classic Period and the beginning of an age of some two centuries that saw the fall of other large Classic capitals, such as Monte Alban, Palenque, La Quemada, and Tikal, which had dominated large territories.

The result was a reduction of urban populations or even complete abandonment. There was considerable movement of peoples and new relationships were established between different regions such as the Central Highlands, the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, Yucatan, Chiapas, and Guatemala.

This period, from ca. 650 to 900 CE, is known as the Epiclassic Period. New expansionist societies developed and their survival depended upon their success in controlling scarce resources, development of specialized productions, and dominance of commercial routes.

In this period of political instability and commercial competition, the military infrastructure became crucial, and new settlements were founded at easily defensible sites, equipped with ramparts, moats, palisades, bastions, and citadels.

Xochicalco is the supreme example of this type of Epiclassic fortified city. It appears to have been the creation of a confederation of settlements in the large region, which is now constituted of the States of Guerrero, México, and western Morelos.

(Source: UNESCO)

## Thailand November tourist arrivals up 23.2 percent: ministry

Thailand welcomed 3 million foreign tourists in November, the tourism ministry said on Monday, 23.2 percent more than the same month a year earlier.

The kingdom saw a total of 31.85 million foreign tourist arrivals in the period from January to November, up 8.1 percent from the previous year, Pongpanu Svetarundra, permanent-secretary of the tourism and sports ministry, said in a statement.

Pongpanu said Thailand expects a record 35.4 million visitors in total this year, up 9 percent from the previous year. Around 10 million of those visitors are

expected to be Chinese, he said.

Thailand’s tourism industry is a major employer and accounts for 12 percent of Southeast Asia’s second-biggest economy.

In 2016, there were a record 32.6 million visitors.

The tourism sector has weathered more than a decade of political upheavals in Thailand including several rounds of anti and pro-government street demonstrations and two military coups.

Tourist arrivals are driven by visitors from China.

(Source: Daily Mail)



Tourists visit the Grand Palace in Bangkok on May 24, 2014. (Reuters/Erik De Castro)

# Study claims supernovas affect cloud formation, but scientists remain skeptical

What do supernovas and fluffy white clouds have in common? That's not a riddle, it's a question several groups of scientists are seeking to answer. A dying star releases vast amounts of energy, some of it in the form of cosmic rays. We know these high-energy particles occasionally slam into Earth's atmosphere, but what effect do they have? A Danish team suggests that cosmic rays can affect cloud cover, and thus, Earth's climate.

Most cosmic rays are atomic nuclei that have been stripped of their electrons. These particles (usually hydrogen or helium) travel at a significant fraction of the speed of light. When impacting Earth's atmosphere, they produce a shower of secondary particles that we can detect on the ground.

The new study from Henrik Svensmark at the Danish National Space Institute points to a way this process could produce clouds. Svensmark claims this can even account for significant temperature swings over Earth's history.

## Electrically charged particles

Svensmark and his team based the assertion on experiments with an 8-square-meter cloud chamber. By increasing the number of electrically charged particles passing through the chamber, they were able to coax small clouds to form. This is similar



to the ionization effect when cosmic rays strike the atmosphere — it may produce an aerosol that leads to the formation of a cloud.

The study goes on to speculate on the potential scale of this effect with a computer

model. Svensmark suggests that clouds generated by distant cosmic events could shift the global temperature by several degrees. More cosmic rays mean more clouds and lower temperatures, and vice versa. Events

**Most cosmic rays are atomic nuclei that have been stripped of their electrons. These particles (usually hydrogen or helium) travel at a significant fraction of the speed of light.**

like the Little Ice Age between 1300 and 1900 CE could allegedly have been caused by our Solar System's passage through waves of cosmic rays.

## Pretty wild hypothesis

It's a pretty wild hypothesis, and Svensmark seems too fast to call this case closed. The scientific community remains unconvinced of "cosmoclimatology" as described in Svensmark's latest publication.

Other researchers question how the small increases in cloud formation demonstrated by Svensmark could have global effects that outweigh cloud-seeding particles already in the atmosphere. Additionally, temperature increases have tracked closely with atmospheric changes, but there's no such correlation with supernova activity.

This is an interesting idea that will no doubt be studied in detail.

CERN has a similar project running to study the effects of cosmic rays on the atmosphere. Thus far, that team has found no reason to expect cosmic rays to have a significant impact on climate or cloud cover. We need much more data than can be gathered in a tiny cloud chamber to say supernovas affect the climate, but it makes for a good headline.

(Source: extremetech.com)

## Eating leafy greens may keep your brain younger, a new study finds

Regular exercise, a healthy diet, and mental exercises are some of the things you can do to prevent cognitive decline as you age. Studies may present conflicting results, but there's no harm in keeping the body healthy.

A new study finds that eating a serving of leafy greens a day could help protect against age-related memory loss and decline. What are the other things said to be able to prevent cognitive decline?

A new research found that a serving of leafy greens per day could help slow down the process of cognitive decline related to aging. What's more, the participants of the study who ate mostly leafy greens were found to have a memory age of about 11 years younger than those who ate the least.

Researchers broke the 960 participants to five quintiles from those who ate the lowest portion of leafy greens (0.07 portions) to those who ate the most (1.14).

## Eating leafy greens daily

Researchers found that eating approximately one serving of leafy greens a day indicates slower memory loss related to aging, perhaps due to the effects of beta-carotene, lutein, phyloquinone and folate in the brain.

Just last September, the American Heart Association released an advisory of the seven things that people can



do to keep the brain healthy as people age. In it, they state that people should not wait for symptoms of dementia or heart disease to present themselves before taking action.

As such, they presented "Life's Simple 7," which are the things that people can do or take note of as they age in order to delay or avoid dementia. These are regular physical

activity, healthy diet, non-smoking, keeping a healthy body mass index (BMI), and maintaining healthy levels of blood sugar, cholesterol, and blood pressure.

These aren't exactly new messages, but the combination of activities could help people maintain healthy lifestyles and perhaps even keep dementia and cognitive decline at bay.

## Brain games

In fact, even socializing and engaging in brain games have been seen to be beneficial to memory and cognitive health while cannabis use has been linked to the reversal of cognitive decline.

The current research adds to the list of studies which point to healthy diet as an effective preventative measure for memory loss and cognitive decline. As it stands, with the mounting body of research that points to effective memory and cognition protectors in relation to age-related diseases such as dementia, there are also those that state otherwise.

For instance, just last Dec. 19, a research was published, stating that none of the currently known preventative measures can actually help prevent dementia. Still, perhaps there is no harm in keeping the body healthy as people age, especially since even researchers are continuous in their studies about age-related diseases.

(Source: Tech Times)

## This gene links red meat to cancer, we finally know where it came from

There's already an established link between eating red meat and a higher risk of cancer. Now a study on the CMAH gene has revealed how this link came to be, and could even help us figure out which types of meats are most risky to eat.

CMAH is responsible for synthesizing the sugar molecule Neu5Gc, present in red meat, as well as some fish and dairy products. In humans, the CMAH gene is mutated, which means our bodies don't produce Neu5Gc.

When we consume meat or other products containing this sugar, it can trigger an immune response to the foreign substance: and that reaction in turn can trigger inflammation, arthritis, and even cancer.

## A handful of animal species

However, until now, we've only known about a handful of animal species that produce Neu5Gc.

In an attempt to learn more, scientists from the University of Nevada in Reno analyzed 322 animal genomes and plotted them on an evolutionary chart, trying to identify when CMAH was deactivated in certain species.

"In a first analysis we scanned all the available genomes," says lead researcher David Alvarez-Ponce.

"We only found the gene in a few bacteria, in a pair of algae, and in the deuterostomes, a group of animals that includes vertebrates and echinoderms, among others."

One of the study's findings was small amounts of Neu5Gc sugar in the meat of fish with the CMAH gene, but high levels of the sugar in the caviar of these fish. That might be because the gene is expressed specifically in the fish eggs or oviducts.

"It turns out that caviar, one of the most expensive meals in the world, is also one of the products with the highest concentrations of Neu5Gc," says one of the team, Sateesh Peri. However, the research also turned up plenty of fish without the CMAH gene, whose caviar should be Neu5Gc-free.

Another surprising result was the presence of the functional CMAH gene in one species of lizard, the Carolina anole. The gene was



previously thought to be absent in all reptiles, having been lost somewhere way back in the evolutionary tree.

While the research doesn't change much about specific diet recommendations today, we now have much more background information on CMAH, and the evolutionary pressures on it.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

## Consultation session between the CEO of export guarantee fund of Iran and successful Iranian exporters

Chairman and CEO of Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) Seyed Kamal Seyed Ali and the Representative of Iran Export Confederation Mohammad Lahouti participated in a consultation session with a number of Iranian exporters in attendance.

During the session Mohammad Lahouti highlighted the constructive and influential role played by Export Guarantee Fund of Iran in boosting exports from Iran. He announced that a new supportive package has been prepared for successful exporters and asserted that if this



new supportive package is approved, it will prove beneficial to exporters in a number of ways.

For his part, Seyed Kamal Seyed Ali presented a brief summary of the services provided by the organization and announced that EGFI is ready to provide the said services for successful exporters. He said that the fund will provide financial support before and after the transportation of goods in order to deal with political and commercial risks of export and it will also ease exporters' worries about devaluation through using exchange rate insurance.

## Iran's IME starts exporting steel with 500 tons

On Sunday 24th of December 2017, Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) hosted transaction of 500 tons of mixed rebar basket at \$500 per ton, IME's Public Relations and International Affairs Department reported, adding that IME witnessed trading of 555 tons of bitumen.

Furthermore, on that day, IME's Mineral and Industrial Trading Floor witnessed transactions of 20,000 tons of slab type C, 2,200 tons of rebar basket A3 12-32, 110 tons of rebar A3 10and 940 tons of rebar basket.

On the same floor of IME, 80 tons of

molybdenum sulfur, 12 tons of precious metal concentrates and 500 tons of low grade copper.

Also on the same day, on the IME's Oil and Petrochemical Trading Floor, of 1,246 tons of chemicals, 2,354 tons of polymeric products, 500 tons of slaps wax, 560 tons of

sulfur, 17,000 tons of lube cut and 23,900 tons of vacuum bottom were traded.

Finally, IME's Agriculture Products Trading Floor witnessed changing hands of 3,632 tons of maize within the context of supportive price plan contracts and 6,800 tons of wheat.

## The Winners of the Children's Drawing Competition were selected

During a ceremony in the presence of Mr. Ali Akbar Owlia, head of the National Iranian Productivity Organization (NIPO), the winners of the 3rd Children's Drawing Competition were introduced and appreciated.

As reported by the Public Relations of NIPO, in the ceremony which was held on Wednesday, December 20, 2017 at the Shahnaz Chamber of the Iranian Artists Forum, the top 10 drawings at each age group were appreciated including 3 selected works, 4 appreciable works, and 3 works for entry to the exhibition. The winners received presents as well as a Letter of Commendation signed by the head of NIPO. At the same time, an exhibition of the selected drawings was displayed to the viewers.

A total number of 1850 artworks in four age groups

of 4-6, 7-9, 10-12, and 13-16 years of age were sent to the secretariat from all around the country.

The competition was aimed at raising awareness of children and adolescents toward the optimal consumption, preserving the environment, and water productivity, as well as dissemination of productive activities among the youngsters and encouraging them to present their abilities and potentials.

It is note-worthy that the 1st Children's Drawing Competition 'Productivity and the Quality of Life' was held in 1393 [2014], and the second competition 'Green Productivity and Preservation of the Environment' was held in 1395 [2016] by the National Iranian Productivity Organization.



## Toyota predicts end of internal-combustion engine by 2050

When it comes to the future of the internal combustion engine, Toyota has long been on the cutting edge. Consider how the company went out early and successfully with the Prius hybrid line of vehicles and how it has come to define the category with the largest market share by far of any hybrid model.

Now, Seigo Kuzumaki, Toyota's head of advanced R&D and engineering, is forecasting that the internal combustion engine will be dead as the principal form of vehicle power by 2050 and will power only about 10% of new vehicles as part of a hybrid system.



The impact on the environment will be profound. Kuzumaki says the reduction in emissions, compared with cars in 2010, will be 90%. Toyota's technology plan coincides with growing policy making by governments. Last July, for example, United Kingdom Environmental Secretary Michael Gove said that the sale of new 100% internal-combustion vehicles will be banned in his country by 2040.

That position differs dramatically from the espoused position of the current U.S. administration, which, in keeping with the Republican political party, continues to deny the impact of human-generated carbon emissions on climate change. The chief reason for that recalcitrance is the fear of carbon taxes on businesses, and the lack of cooperation on extensive environmental standards by other big industrial countries like China and India.

In the current tax legislation being drafted in the U.S. House of Representatives, there is a call, for example, to end tax incentives for EVs. "[This bill] would fully end the tax incentives for electric vehicles at the end of this year. That's a shortsighted policy that will increase pollution and undermine an important and growing industry," according to the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS).

(Source: forbes.com)

## Homegrown African climate model predicts future rains - and risks

One big problem confronts Africa as it tries to predict how its weather patterns will shift in the face of climate change: Almost all the climate models for the continent were created in the United States or Europe.

Now South African climate researcher Francois Engelbrecht has changed that by developing a climate model for Africa, in Africa.

The model aims to "generate reliable projections of future climate change over Africa," said Engelbrecht, the chief researcher for climate studies, modeling and environmental health at South Africa's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.

Those projections include figuring out which areas will get more or less rainfall — a key to adapting agriculture successfully — or looking at where African grasslands might give way to thickets as more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere drives the growth of trees.

"We know that climate is changing, risks are changing, including changes in the risk of heatwaves, flooding, drought, tropical cyclones, changes in growing seasons (and) rising temperatures," said Rachel James, a visiting climate researcher at the University of Cape Town.

"People everywhere will need to adapt to these changing conditions in the years and decades to come," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

The "problem is that we don't know exactly what will happen in any one location. It's challenging to predict which areas might get more rainfall and which might get less."

The new African-built climate model aims to generate much more detailed and place-specific projections, to give decision makers the information they need to prepare for coming changes.

It responds, in part, to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noting in 2014 that Africa was the only region of the world in which climate forecasts had not improved in recent years.

Developed in collaboration with Australia, the model will look at things such as how El Nino patterns are likely to affect Africa in the future and how African monsoons may shift, Engelbrecht said.

(Source: Reuters)

## NASA is planning an interstellar mission to Alpha Centauri — but not until 2069

One hundred years after man set foot on the moon, NASA hopes to launch an exploratory probe to investigate the system of our nearest neighbor, the star system Alpha Centauri.

An exclusive report in New Scientist reveals the plans of a group of engineers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in California. The mission concept, which was presented at the annual conference of the American Geophysical Union, also promises to use technology that doesn't exist yet. "It's very nebulous," said Anthony Freeman of JPL.

The only spacecraft that's ever left our solar system is Voyager 1, and it's travelling through interstellar space at about 30,000 miles per hour. Although Alpha Centauri is right next door in galactic terms, it's still 4.3 light-years away, or about 25 trillion miles to us Earthlings.

The NASA team hopes to develop technology that would propel the interstellar probe at one-tenth the speed of light. Outer Places speculates that such technology might involve generating thrust by using a laser shining on micro-organisms. Other possibilities being floated include using nuclear reactions or matter-antimatter collisions.

Breakthrough Starshot is a venture from Breakthrough Initiatives, a \$100 million non-governmental program created by Russian billionaire Yuri Milner, and they also have their sights set on Alpha Centauri. They plan to reach 20 percent of light speed using a tiny wafer attached to a superthin sail propelled by laser beams.

"With light beams, light sails and the lightest spacecraft ever built, we can launch a mission to Alpha Centauri within a generation," the researcher said during a news conference at the One World Observatory. The ambitious plan still has a few obstacles to overcome before it becomes a reality, however.

(Source: Digital Trends)

## Female faculty members on the rise

**W O M E N** TEHRAN — The growing rate of recruiting female faculty members in recent years has been satisfying, the head of faculty recruitment center of the ministry of science has said.



Some 6,500 faculty members, equaling 37 percent of the total number, are female, Mehr news agency quoted Mohammad Reza Rezvantalab as saying.

He went on to say that the ministry has never restricted the recruitment of female professors and that it is always eager to perceive stronger presence of women as faculty members in universities.

In an attempt to balance this ratio, “we approve women’s applications more easily,” he concluded.

## RECIPE OF THE WEEK

### Soft Christmas cookies

“Soft cut out sugar cookie that I have used for years. I sprinkle with colored sugar before baking or you could also try icing them when cool.”

#### Ingredients:



- 3 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup margarine, softened
- 1 1/2 cups white sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract

#### Directions:

Sift flour, baking powder, and salt together, set aside. In a large bowl, cream together the margarine and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs one at a time, then stir in the vanilla. Gradually blend in the sifted ingredients until fully absorbed. Cover dough, and chill for 2 hours.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F (200 degrees C). Grease cookie sheets. On a clean floured surface, roll out small portions of chilled dough to 1/4 inch thickness. Cut out shapes using cookie cutters.

Bake 6 to 8 minutes in the preheated oven, or until edges are barely brown. Remove from cookie sheets to cool on wire racks.

Aluminum foil can be used to keep food moist, cook it evenly, and make clean-up easier.

(Source: allrecipes.com)

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Cut It Out

Ed: Hey, Mary, can you **cut that out**?

Mary: Cut what out I’m not doing anything.

Ed: The tapping of your pen on your desk. It’s driving me crazy.

Mary: Fine! By the way would you mind not **slurping** your coffee every time you have a cup!

Ed: I don’t slurp my coffee. And plus, how can you hear it when you’re shouting into your phone all the time?

Mary: **You’ve got to be kidding me!** You’re complaining about me talking on the phone when you go out for a cigarette break ten times a day to **shoot the breeze**?

Ed: Look, we have a lot of **accumulated** anger from working in these conditions, and it’s probably okay to **let off steam** once in a while but, it’s probably not a good idea to **keep it up** I’m willing to **forgive and forget** and if you are.

Mary: Fine. Let’s **call a truce**. I’ll try to be more **considerate** and to keep the noise down

Ed: Yeah, I’ll try to do the same.

#### Key vocabulary

**cut that out:** tell somebody to stop

**slurp:** eat or drink (something) noisily

**you’ve got to be kidding me:** you must be making jokes with me

**shoot the breeze:** chat

**accumulated:** gathered

**let off steam:** to release excess energy, emotion etc.

**keep up:** carry on

**forgive and forget:** stop feeling anger and decide to let it go

**call a truce:** stop fighting

**considerate:** thinking about the feelings of other people

(Source: irlanguage.com)



Every action has a reaction. We have one planet; one chance.

# Illogical reservations about bill on violence against women

**I →** As explained by officials, Iran’s legislative body is seriously considering the adoption of the new bill on exercising women’s right but the reservations and procrastination may lead to some irreparable damage to this vulnerable group.

#### Key facts about violence against women

Violence against women – particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence – is a major public health problem and a violation of women’s human rights.

Global estimates published by World Health Organization (WHO) indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.

Most of this violence is intimate partner violence. Worldwide, almost one third (30%) of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner in their lifetime.

Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by a male intimate partner.

Violence can negatively affect women’s physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health, and may increase the risk of acquiring HIV in some settings.

Men are more likely to perpetrate violence if they have low education, a history of child maltreatment, exposure to domestic



**As explained by officials, Iran’s legislative body is seriously considering the adoption of the new bill on exercising women’s right but the reservations and procrastination may lead to some irreparable damage to this vulnerable group.**

violence against their mothers, harmful use of alcohol, unequal gender norms including attitudes accepting of violence, and a sense of entitlement over women.

Women are more likely to experience intimate partner violence if they have low education, exposure to mothers being abused by a partner, abuse during childhood, and attitudes accepting violence, male privilege, and women’s subordinate status.

There is evidence that advocacy and empowerment counselling interventions, as well as home visitation are promising in preventing or reducing intimate partner violence against women.

#### Prevention and response

There is some evidence from high-income countries that advocacy and counselling interventions to improve access to services for survivors of intimate partner violence are effective in reducing such violence. Home visitation programs involving health worker outreach by trained nurses also show promise in reducing intimate partner violence. However, these have yet to be assessed for use in resource-poor settings.

To achieve lasting change, it is important to enact and enforce legislation and develop and implement policies that promote gender equality by improving women’s access to paid employment and developing and resourcing national plans and policies to address violence against women.

## Women’s directorate awaiting budget for breadwinners: VP



**W O M E N** TEHRAN — The budget allocated to female breadwinners has not been cut, it has not been received yet, vice president for women’s and family affairs said, IRNA reported on Friday.

The proposed national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year 1397, starting on March 21, 2018, has approved 210 billion rials (\$5.25 million) for women’s affairs with an increase of 30 percent year on year, Masoumeh Ebtekar said, regretting, but the

problem is with getting the budget.

“Although all executive authorities are helping to overcome the problems of female breadwinners, more efforts are needed to receive this budget,” she said, adding, “We hope that Majlis [the Iranian parliament] will support us in this regard.”

According to official reports, more than 2.5 million female breadwinners live in Iran 70 percent of whom don’t have an appropriate job and need support for employment issues.

## I proved that wearing hijab is not a limitation: wushu champion



**W O M E N** TEHRAN — “I wanted to prove to all the world that wearing hijab is not a limitation,” said Khadijeh Azadpour, the winner of 2010 Guangzhou Asian Championships wushu gold medal.

“I’m so glad that I could take part in international competitions and won the gold medal while wearing hijab,” she said, Fars news agency reported.

“Some people consider hijab in Iran’s sport as a problem but I believe

that is not true,” she said, adding, “We wear hijab from the very first during practice sessions and get used to it.”

She generously sold her gold medal for 20 billion rials (nearly \$500,000) to aid victims of the recent Kermanshah earthquake. Appreciating the sportswoman humanitarian act, head of Women’s Basij Organization Minoo Aslani, described her as “the role model for Muslim girls.”

## Tunisia suspends Emirates flights over security measures targeting women

Tunisia suspended flights by Emirates airlines after a public outcry over security measures in the United Arab Emirates targeting women from the North African country.

The transport ministry said it has suspended Emirates flights to Tunis until the airline finds the appropriate solution to operate flights “in accordance with international law and agreements”.

A number of Tunisian women said their travel to the Gulf state on Emirates had been delayed and some had been forced to undergo additional examination of their visas.

That triggered angry reactions on social media and media outlets in Tunisia.



Anwar Gargash, the UAE foreign minister, said on Twitter: “We contacted our Tunisian brothers about security information that necessitated taking specific procedures.”

“We should avoid misleading attempts ... We highly value Tunisian women and respect them,” he added, without elaborating.

On Friday, Tunisia asked the UAE ambassador for clarification, the envoy saying the decision was for only a short period and the restrictions had been lifted.

Despite the clarification, Tunisian rights groups condemned the measures as “discriminatory and racist”.

(Source: The Guardian)

## With a green light from Karachi, Pakistan’s women-only taxis eye new cities

Braving whistles, catcalls and vulgar remarks, Karachi’s female taxi drivers are determined to stay on the road to ferry women safely around the teeming city - from home to the office, to college and even to late night wedding parties.

Since March, women in Pakistan’s commercial hub have been able to hail the pink taxis - called Paxi - by phone, app or simply by flagging one down on the street.

The women drivers say they have faced harassment from other road users, but will persevere with the service.

“This (harassment) that we face is the occupational hazard of this job. It’s best to ignore such people, they will get used to sharing the roads with us!” said Shamina Bano, 43, a mother of grown-up sons and one of the drivers with the first ever gender-segregated taxi service.

Wearing a hot pink headscarf, Bano said she left her previous job as a personal secretary after her boss started making “untoward advances”.

“Working in an all-female environment feels so much more comfortable; I don’t have to look over my shoulder anymore,” she said.

The app asks potential riders the number of passengers and if there are any men accompanying them. If the man is between 12 and 70 years old, the request will be turned down.

Mehreen Faizan, 28, also a Paxi driver, had initially applied to work for another taxi service. “When I found out I’d have to chauffeur male clients as well, my husband was not very happy about it. He then suggested I apply here,” she said.

Commuting in the sweltering city of 20 million is often an ordeal for women. A report by Karachi’s Urban Resource Center found most female commuters experience some form of sexual harassment while using public transport.

And before the pink taxis, getting a cab in Karachi could also be unpleasant for women.

From sitting in “messy and smelly cars” to being driven by drivers who are lost but refuse to use the GPS system, to being stared at through the rear view mirror or driven too fast, there is a long list of complaints women commuters have against male taxi drivers.

Women drivers, however, are careful and happy to accept directions, said regular pink taxi users.

“It’s very reassuring and comfortable,” said Sobia Athar, a college lecturer, who uses the service regularly despite it being a bit more expensive than other taxis.

**Ready for expansion**  
Bano said during the wedding season from December to March she is busy shuttling women to festivities which may continue till very late at night.

Nuzhat Siddiqi, an environmentalist and working mother said she prefers the idea of women drivers for her family.

“I would certainly not be too keen to send kids and young maids or teenaged daughters with male taxi drivers alone,” she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

By the end of this year the company would

have doubled its fleet of cars from 15 at its launch to 30.

And Paxi are soon to appear on the streets of Sukkur in Sindh province and then to Peshawar close to Pakistan’s border with Afghanistan, said Shaikh M. Zahid, the founder of the service.

Peshawar lies in the highly conservative province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where strict purdah is observed.

“It has a much higher ratio of educated women, but due to lack of a safe transport system, their mobility is greatly compromised and their full potential to be productive citizens gets somewhat lost,” said Zahid.

“I got very good vibes from informal talks I’ve been conducting with women there who say they would love having women drivers ferry them across the city,” said Zahid, who has also held informal talks with religious leaders to explain the advantages of a women-only transport service.

The challenge is finding enough female drivers.

“It was initially difficult to convince parents and families to let their womenfolk take this up in Karachi,” said Zahid.

“Today, these same women have become such strong role models for others and the response has been amazing.”

(Source: Reuters)

**From sitting in “messy and smelly cars” to being driven by drivers who are lost but refuse to use the GPS system, to being stared at through the rear view mirror or driven too fast, there is a long list of complaints women commuters have against male taxi drivers.**

# Death sentences in unjust Hamad court

A court in Bahrain has sentenced six anti-regime protesters to death and revoked their citizenship as the ruling House of Khalifah regime presses ahead with its heavy-handed clampdown on political dissidents and pro-democracy campaigners in the Persian Gulf tiny state.

On Monday, the Military High Court found the defendants guilty of "forming a terror cell, attempting to assassinate Commander-in-Chief Field Marshal Sheikh Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifah and committing other acts of terror."

Bahrain's state-run news agency reported that one of those sentenced to death, identified as Mubarak Adel Mubarak Mahanna, was a serving soldier before his arrest.

The court sentenced seven other defendants to seven-year jail terms and deprived them too of their citizenship. Five men were acquitted.

Only 10 of the defendants are in custody, while the other eight are on the run – either inside Bahrain or in neighboring countries.



Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country in mid-February 2011.

They are demanding that the House of Khalifah relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established.

Manama has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent. On March 14, 2011, troops from the House of Saud regime and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were deployed to assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the House of Khalifah regime's crackdown.

On March 5, Bahrain's parliament approved the trial of civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countrywide.

Bahraini monarch King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah ratified the constitutional amendment on April 3.

(Source: Press TV)

## British charity group warns of horrifying situations for homeless people

A Britain-based charity group raises the alarm about the number of homeless people in Britain, saying some ten thousands sleep rough in the country.

Crisis puts the number of "hidden" rough sleepers at 9,100 besides 9,000 more who are sleeping on the streets and 120,000 who will have to stay in temporary accommodation during the festive season.

The agency also said that the number of hidden homeless is expected to further increase by 47 percent to reach 13,400 during the next decade if no action is taken. The figure has already risen by 57 percent since 2011, when it stood at 5,800.

Commenting on the finding, which is based on research by academics at Heriot Watt University, chief executive Jon Sparkes said the homeless are at risk of being "hidden from help and trapped in horrifying situations."

Some of the people forced to sleep on public transport or in tents told Crisis they were worried about their safety due to a rise in violence.

The price for renting a home in England has risen three times faster than wages since 2010, according to a public spending watchdog.

Britain has been pushing painful austerity measures since 2010 to cap its budget deficit, targeting key benefits helping the homeless.

(Source: Press TV)

## Palestinian Christian leaders: Trump's move on al-Quds 'insulting'

Palestine's girl hero may face sexual harassment in Israeli custody

➔ Hanna said Trump's decision was "dangerous" to the Palestinian cause, adding the U.S. "gave the occupation what it does not deserve."

Trump announced earlier this month the U.S. decision to recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's so-called capital and relocate the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to the holy city.

As tensions rose in Palestine over Trump's bid, a split occurred between Palestinian Christians and the Greek Orthodox Church, which serves as a custodian for many sites, for giving up control of its properties to Israel through land sales or multi-decade leases.

The church's followers, who are overwhelmingly Arabic-speaking Palestinians, have been angered by the practices of its leadership, Holy Synod, made up mostly of Greeks.

Local Christians expressed concerns that disposing of the land erodes their already shrinking presence in the Holy Land. They further said the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate essentially has no right to sell or lease the properties, adding it is the land that belongs to them, given by their ancestors to the church for protection during turbulent times.

The church members have staged protests in the West Bank and al-Quds over the past few months and launched a campaign on social media. Some have called for the resignation of their leader, Patriarch Theophilos III of al-Quds (Jerusalem).

Church members say authorities have made secret deals with right-wing Israeli groups seeking to expand their presence in the Palestinian areas or with investors more interested in making a profit than in preserving the integrity of the sites.

Patriarch Theophilos has also said that Israel pressured him into selling or leasing the property cheaply in some cases or even seized it.

### ■ Palestinian hero

Meantime, a 16-year-old Palestinian girl, who has become the face of resistance by Palestinian youth against the Israeli occupation of their land, is facing threats of sexual harassment amid calls by radical Israelis to "exact a price" on her "in the dark."

Ahed Tamimi became the latest face of Palestinian re-

sistance when footage emerged of her slapping one and then another fully-armed Israeli officer in the face during a protest in her home village of Nabi Saleh, near the Palestinian city of Ramallah.

Israeli forces had earlier shot her cousin in the face. During a confrontation that reportedly erupted over that shooting, Ahed, recognizable since young age by her blond curly hair as well as her courageous posture, slapped and kicked two Israeli forces while protesting.

Faced with embarrassment as that video went viral, Israelis decided to arrest Ahed. They went on to take her into custody last week. According to some accounts, 20 Israeli army Jeeps arrived at Ahed's house before dawn to arrest her.

Footage appeared later of her ransacked room, with her belongings strewn across the room, her bed mattress overturned, and her closets emptied on the floor.

In the footage, a window can be seen with what seems to be a bullet hole.

Ahed was arrested along with her mother, Nariman, who has been nabbed five times before, including for filming her children and other youths protesting against Israel.

An Israeli columnist, reportedly notorious for his radicalism, has now called for the punishment of the duo away from the public eye, in what Palestinian and other media suggest is a tacit encouragement of sexual abuse and even rape.

"We should exact a price at some other opportunity, in the dark, without witnesses and cameras," Ben Caspit wrote. "The Tamimi family has to learn, the hard way, that such systematic provocations" come at a great cost.

### ■ All the children of Nabi Saleh

Since young age, Ahed has been filmed and photographed audaciously confronting Israeli forces. In one video, Ahed and her parents speak of their desire for freedom from occupation and "injustice."

"If there was no occupation, I would be a soccer player," Ahed says memorably in the video, a short documentary on her struggle and that of other Palestinian youths. "I can't



think far into the future because the occupation prevents it." "Right now, injustice is happening all across the world... We should extend our struggles to one another in order to end all of the world's injustices."

In another footage, she can be seen, along with other children from her village, appearing right in front of the sniper rifle barrel of an Israeli soldier lying on the ground aiming and ready to shoot to block him.

The Tamimi family are known for their strong resistance against Israeli forces in the small Nabi Saleh Village.

Ahed's mother says in the documentary video, "All Palestinian mothers raise their children to be strong, to demand their rights, and to stand against the occupation here on our land."

Speaking of her daughter and referring to the time when Ahed was even younger, she says, "She was only a child and yet she would participate in every demonstration with the other youth out in the street."

Nariman has seen her sons and daughter arrested before, and explains how children in all families have been taken into Israeli custody at one time or another.

"All the children of Nabi Saleh share the same story as the [Tamimi] family," she says.

(Source: agencies)

## Trump may face challenge in 2020 White House race

A United States Republican senator has warned that President Donald Trump may face competition to be the political party's nominee for the 2020 presidential election if he decides to pursue a second term.

"I do believe if the president is running for re-election, if he continues on the path that he's on, that that's going to leave a huge swath of voters looking for something else," Senator Jeff Flake, one of the few Republican lawmakers to publicly condemn Trump, said on Sunday in an interview on ABC's "This Week."

"If he's the Republican nominee again, we're likely to see an independent candidate"

in the November 2020 presidential election, said Flake, who announced in October that he was retiring in late 2018.

"He's probably inviting a Republican challenge as well" for the 2020 primaries to tap a nominee for the Republican Party, he warned.

Incumbent presidents are typically considered the presumptive nominee for their party at the end of the first term, although an intra-party challenge is not unprecedented.

Former President Jimmy Carter ran against late Senator Ted Kennedy in the 1980 Democratic presidential primaries.

Flake is among the few Republicans in

Congress who have publicly denounced Trump, both on a personal level and for his policies which the senator deems extreme.

"You look at the audiences cheering for Republicans... you look out there and say, those are the spasms of a dying party," he said in the interview.

"By and large, we're appealing to older white men. And there are just a limited number of them. And anger and resentment are not a governing philosophy."

Congressman Charlie Dent, a leading Republican in the House of Representatives who is also retiring next year, on Sunday criticized the party's blind loyalty to Trump.

Dent's advice to colleagues was, "Be prepared for the worst because this could be a really tough year."

Republican Party lawmakers and political advisers to Trump fear a backlash at next year's mid-term congressional elections if the Republican president fails to keep his campaign promises and improve his standing among working-class voters.

Trump's advisers have been directly warning him of a possible bloodbath in the 2018 midterms, which could obliterate the Republican congressional majorities and paralyze the president's legislative agenda.

(Source: Politico)

## More U.S. troops to hit frontlines in Afghanistan

More American troops are gearing up to hit the frontlines in Afghanistan, says General John Nicholson, who commands the United State forces in the country.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday, Nicholson said the U.S. troops levels in Afghanistan were slated to increase dramatically under President Donald Trump's new strategy to extend the military campaign that began in 2001.

There are "well over 1,000 advisers out at any given time," Nicholson said. "Next year, however, this will increase dramatically."

The general said the new plan required deploying more U.S. advisers in the battlefronts alongside Afghan military forces.

"Those teams [the Army brigade] will be backed up by U.S. combat enablers, not only for the protection of our own force, but for support of Afghans as well," Nicholson said.

The commander hailed the Trump administration's new South Asia approach as a "game changer," saying it had already begun to pay dividends.

Under the new strategy, the U.S. Army's 1st Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) will also be deployed to the conflict-ridden country this spring. The new unit is tasked with training and advising forces from U.S. allies.

The SFAB is currently under training to work with joint



terminal attack controllers — U.S. military personnel specialized in calling in close-air support.

"Any deployment to Afghanistan is inherently dangerous, and our soldiers, in particular those of the SFAB, are well-trained and prepared to handle themselves in a variety of operational environments," said Colonel Joseph Scrocca, a spokesman for the XVIII Airborne Corps.

(Source: agencies)

## Putin critic Navalny barred from Russian presidential election

Russia's central election commission voted on Monday to bar opposition leader Alexei Navalny from running in a presidential election next year, saying he was ineligible because of a past criminal conviction.

The commission said the conviction, for which Navalny received a suspended sentence and which he has repeatedly described as politically-motivated, meant he could not run for president in March.

Twelve members of the 13-member commission voted to bar Navalny. One member of the commission abstained, citing a possible conflict of interest.

Polls show Russian President Vladimir Putin is on course to be comfortably re-elected, meaning he could remain in power until 2024.

Navalny, 41, has been jailed three times this year and charged with breaking the law by repeatedly organizing public meetings and rallies.

(Source: Reuters)

## Tunisia suspends Emirates flights after ban targets women

Tunisia has suspended all flights by Emirates to and from Tunisia after the Dubai-based airline barred Tunisian women from boarding its flights.

The Tunisian presidency said on Monday the United Arab Emirates (UAE) authorities explained that they made the decision following "serious security information" about alleged plans for attacks by Tunisian women, or women with Tunisian passports, from "tense hotbeds" in Syria and Iraq.

UAE's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash wrote on Twitter that the ban was temporary and due to security reasons.

The barring of Tunisian women has caused anger among rights groups and political parties in Tunisia. A protest was scheduled outside the UAE's embassy in Tunis later in the day.

(Source: AP)

## Kabul: Iran gives helping hand to Afghanistan in drug fight

➔ "Afghanistan is not politically in a good condition and other regional countries are more capable to fight drug traffickers," he highlighted.

Terrorist groups are in close collaboration with drug traffickers in Afghanistan and the government is trying hard to stop them, he noted, regretting, terrorism and drug trafficking are inextricably interwoven in Afghanistan and the insurgent-controlled areas in the country are best places for drug traffickers.

Terrorist groups are deriving much of their income from the drug trade, he said. As reported by the United Nations the income arise from drug trafficking in Afghanistan amounts to some \$70 billion.

Iran has actively collaborated with Afghanistan along the border areas to fight drug gangs and traffickers, he added, stating, that's why the condition is much better in border areas with Iran.

However, Daneshyar criticized Pakistan for not undertaking real efforts to fight narcotics in Afghanistan.

He further reiterated that regional support can positively benefit Afghanistan in the bathe against narcotics.

According to UNDOC the Balkan and northern routes are the main heroin trafficking corridors linking Afghanistan to the huge markets of the Russian Federation and Western Europe. The Balkan route traverses the Islamic Republic of Iran (often via Pakistan), Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria across South-East Europe to the Western European market, with an annual market value of some \$20 billion. The northern route runs mainly through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (or Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan) to Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. The size of that market is estimated to total \$13 billion per year.

As per a report published on Politico last week Hezbollah exploded into a major cocaine trafficker for the United States over the past decade—and it happened under former President Barack Obama's watch to help score a nuclear deal with Iran. The report wrongfully claims that Project Cassandra, a campaign launched by the Drug Enforcement Administration in 2008, found that Hezbollah collected \$1 billion a year from money laundering, criminal activities, and drug and weapons trade.

Accordingly the report has falsely accused Iran of supporting drug trafficking including cocaine shipments from Latin America to West Africa, as well as through Venezuela and Mexico to the United States.

## Wilshere looking to seal regular first-team spot at Arsenal

Arsenal midfielder Jack Wilshere is targeting a regular spot in the starting line-up for Premier League games following his solid performance in Friday's 3-3 draw with Liverpool, the England international has said. The 25-year-old, who started all but one of Arsenal's Europa League fixtures so far, marked his third consecutive league start of the season against the Merseyside club after five previous appearances as a substitute.

"I feel good and I have said for ages that I want to be playing in the Premier League," Wilshere told British media.

"I've played a lot of games in the Europa League and built my fitness up." "I was patient and we've now got a few injuries and I've managed to get a few games in but I am happy and I want to stay in the team now. "It's a busy schedule over Christmas. There are a lot of games where we are going to need all of the squad so I am happy."

The draw at the Emirates left Arsenal in sixth position, behind Tottenham Hotspur on goal difference, ahead of Thursday's trip to 16th-placed Crystal Palace.

(Source: Mirror)

## Serena Williams set for comeback after pregnancy

Serena Williams is set to appear on court for the first time since giving birth after confirming she will play at the Mubadala exhibition event in Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates, next Saturday. The 23-grand slam winner has not played in tournaments since winning the Australian Open 11 months ago -- a feat even more remarkable given she was already two months pregnant at the time.

Williams, 36, appears to be preparing for a return to Melbourne Park in January after agreeing to take on French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko.

The pair will make history by becoming the first women to compete at the tournament which was previously for men only.

"I am delighted to be returning to the court in Abu Dhabi for the first time since the birth of my daughter," Williams, referring to her daughter Alexis, said in a statement on the tournament's official website. A win for Williams at next month's Australian Open would take her to 24 grand slam victories and place her alongside all-time leader Margaret Court.

Williams, who got married last month, is currently ranked 22nd in the world and would not require a wild card for the Australian Open which begins on January 15.

(Source: CNN)

## Ex-Arsenal defender Emmanuel Ebou reveals suicide thoughts

Former Arsenal defender Emmanuel Ebou revealed he had thoughts of committing suicide after facing monetary problems in his post-football life.

The 34-year-old who plied his trade for Turkish Cypriot sports club -- Türk Ocagi Limasol S.K. has been unable to play anymore due to ill-health. The right-back, however remains an Arsenal hero where he made 132 appearances from 2004 to 2011. He was also a part of the London club which finished as runners-up in the 2005-06 Champions League season.

"I want God to help me," the 34-year-old was quoted as saying by the Independent on Sunday.

"Only he can help take these thoughts from my mind," Ebou added. The former Ivory Coast international has also been struggling with the death of his grandfather, Amadou Bertin -- who raised him before being diagnosed with cancer and his brother N'Dri Serge -- who was killed in a motorbike accident. He has also faced divorce from his wife Aurelie -- who will be awarded all of their assets. The defender admitted he cannot afford a lawyer anymore and he stays scared and keeps himself away from meeting people. "I am in the house but I am scared. Because I don't know what time the police will come," Ebou who made 79 appearances for Ivory Coast said. "Sometimes I shut off the lights because I don't want people to know that I am inside. I put everything behind the door. "My own house. I suffered to buy my house but I am now scared. "I am not going to sell my clothes or sell what I have. I will fight until the end because it is not fair," Ebou added.

(Source: Mirror)

## Southampton's Austin banned for three games

Southampton striker Charlie Austin has been banned for three games by the Football Association for violent conduct.

Austin caught Huddersfield keeper Jonas Lossl in the face with his boot in Saturday's 1-1 Premier League draw.

The 28-year-old, Saints' leading scorer this season with six goals, will miss games against Tottenham, Manchester United and Crystal Palace.

He suffered a hamstring injury and was replaced in the 79th minute. Southampton boss Mauricio Pellegrino said the injury could keep Austin out for "a couple of weeks minimum".

But whatever the seriousness of the injury, the ban means Austin will not be available until their FA Cup tie at Fulham on 6 January. Austin, who scored the opening goal against Huddersfield, accepted the charge of violent conduct but argued the suspension was excessive, which was rejected by an independent panel.

Lossl was bleeding and needed treatment after the challenge, which was not seen by the referee or his assistants but was caught on video. Huddersfield boss David Wagner said after the game: "I will never say someone likes to hurt an opponent on purpose but to be honest it looks like this is the case. It should never happen."

"It looks very ugly from my point of view. I was a striker and I know Jonas was on the ball, so what you have to do is not touch him."

Pellegrino said: "I didn't observe any intention on the part of my player. I don't think Charlie went intentionally at this moment."

(Source: BBC)



# Nadal: "I can't see myself playing at the same age as Federer."

Rafa Nadal, 31, is going into the 2018 season with the confidence gained from reclaiming the world number one ranking and adding to his haul of Grand Slam titles with victory at Roland Garros and the US Open. To mark the 50th anniversary of AS, Nadal was named the greatest athlete in Spanish history, the perfect moment to recap a remarkable career that he describes as having "been more than I ever hoped for or imagined."

■ When you were 16 years you said in a video that you preferred fast surfaces and grass to clay, and that you wanted to emulate Carlos Moyá. How things have changed...!

I haven't seen the video but despite the slightly disproportionate success I've had on clay, I wasn't coached for that surface. My uncle Toni, when I was a kid, didn't train me to be a clay specialist, mentally or as a player. And despite what people think, I didn't train that much on clay. But it's true that my style of play and the success I had at the beginning of my career gave me a lot of confidence on the surface.

■ That seems odd now, under the circumstances...

I adapted very well to clay but the truth is that I always wanted to play well on grass because at that time it had been a while since any (male) Spanish players had been successful on grass. For me that was a huge source of motivation and I thought I had the ability to do well

because at the end of the day if you have the desire to improve, you have the possibility of doing so. Doing so well on clay helped me to become better on grass as well. It's a completely different game, but that confidence helped me. I started to adapt and to enjoy it although lately my knees haven't allowed me to. This year I was in good shape, I enjoy grass and the surface is good for me.

■ Those were your dreams when you were a kid. What are your dreams now, if you have any pending?

Well, I don't really have any dreams but everything that has happened in my career has been more than I ever hoped for or imagined. My motivation is the same as it has always been, to keep feeling that I'm competitive every year and to keep enjoying tennis.

I am lucky enough to be doing something that makes me happy. If one day I lose that feeling when I'm pushing myself to achieve something in my sport, that will be the moment to start thinking about doing something else. My goal is to keep playing at a level that gives me a chance to compete for the things that really motivate me for as long as possible.

■ You've regained the world number one ranking, a special achievement. Is keeping it something you think about or is it not an objective in itself?

At this stage of my career it's great that the opportunity to be world number one again presented itself. I took advantage of the chance and I'm happy to have done it, because it was results that took me there. But I never chased that objective and I never will. My challenge is to remain healthy and fight to be competitive because if I can do that then I'll have the

chance to achieve the things that I want to. If that isn't the case, that's when things start to get complicated. My calendar and my objectives are focused on staying fit and happy because at the end of the day obviously being number one is a source of happiness and it's another achievement in my career. But these things are temporary and the important thing, particularly at my age, is being able to train and feeling ready to compete.

■ Does it motivate you to see Roger Federer still playing at the highest level at 36?

I'm not thinking about that. Everyone has their path and they are all different. I think that what is good for one person isn't necessarily good for someone else. I'm 31 and the 37th birthday Federer is going to celebrate for me is a long way off. I just concentrate on my day-to-day and I doubt he was thinking down those lines six years ago. It depends on your fitness and your mind and where you want to go. When I was 26 I didn't think about whether I'd still be playing at 31.

And right now I can't see myself playing at the same age as Federer. But you never know, because it's all down to fitness, having the enthusiasm to carry on playing and being prepared to do so.

■ You're getting close now to Federer's career achievements.

At Grand Slam level I wouldn't say so; he still has three more, which is a lot. It's not something I think about anyway. I'm happy with what I'm doing and if things go well and that opportunity presents itself, then great. But when I hang up the rackets having overtaken Roger, if it happens, won't give me more satisfaction in my career.

(Source: AS)

## Herrera hits back with pointed Christmas message



Manchester United midfielder Ander Herrera has hit back at critics who "try to invent stories" in the wake of his side's 2-2 draw with Leicester City.

The Spain international appeared as a second-half substitute in the Premier League clash at the King Power Stadium, in which the 10-man hosts snatched a 94th-minute equaliser to deny United the win.

The goal came after United defender Chris Smalling was sent back into the heart of defence despite having required treatment for a groin injury in the closing stages, and it was his inability to meet Marc Albrighton's cross that allowed Harry Maguire the chance to score.

Former Red Devils captain Gary Neville later accused Herrera of refusing a call from team-mate Phil Jones to slot in at right-back as part of a reshuffle to cope with Smalling's injury.

Herrera appears to have responded to the criticism with a cryptic Twitter post on Christmas Eve.

"Happy Christmas to everyone, including the ones that try to invent stories that never happened," the 28-year-old wrote.

Neville, speaking on his podcast, had said: "Smalling has got to flag up as an experienced defender that he's struggling, get someone else into the centre. It didn't happen for two or three minutes."

"Then Phil Jones recognised it had happened and tried to reorganise -- as I saw it, Ander Herrera refused to go to right-back and told Henrik Mkhitaryan to go back there."

"All over a sudden Smalling sits down on the floor and then goes off the pitch and then comes back on at centre-back. He ends up picking up Harry Maguire."

"You can't believe the disorganisation and lack of leadership shown by Manchester United at the end of that game in a game they should have won. Jose [Mourinho] will be furious when he watches that back."

(Source: Four Four Two)

## German Football Association axes China U20 friendlies



Fan protests have borne fruit. Germany's Football Association (DFB) has decided against resuming the friendlies between China's U20 team and clubs from the Regionalliga Südwest. Clubs will "fight for the money" promised.

The German Football Association has decided to discontinue China U20's friendlies against Regionalliga Südwest opposition after just one game.

The official reason given for the decision is the Chinese team's reaction to pro-Tibet protesters that attended a friendly between China U20 and TSV Schott Mainz. The protesters flew the Tibetan flag, causing the Chinese team to leave the pitch until the flags were removed.

"The suspension has been decided by the DFB and the Chinese football association," said the short announcement by German football's governing body.

The Chinese team's next opposition, FSV Frankfurt, then refused to ban further protests. "We will not back a single centimeter off the basic rights of our democracy,"

the club's President Michael Görner said when asked about the prospect of banning fan banners and Tibetan flags. The game ended up being cancelled.

.....Clubs to demand payment

As part of the plan to introduce a series of friendlies with China's U20 team, every club that agreed to take part was promised a payment of 15,000 euros per game. Now that the project has been axed, questions will be asked as to whether the DFB will be paying that money.

"We, and other clubs, will fight for the money," Kickers Offenbach CEO Christopher Fiori said. "We have a contract, we reserved the dates and were ready to play. We will not be willing to give up the money."

FSV Frankfurt boss Görner agrees. "Our match (against China U20) has been canceled with less than 24 hours to go. The costs for the club amount to 6,000 euros, which we demand that the DFB will pay," he added. Both spoke to German daily newspaper Bild.

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

## Lukaku proves he can offer more than just goals for United

Manchester United have created fewer chances than Southampton in the Premier League this season, but after Romelu Lukaku's performance as a creator against Leicester City, Jose Mourinho may have found a new way for United to stay in the title race.

United made a blistering start to the season, winning four of their opening five league games, scoring 16 goals in the process, with the attack spearheaded by new striker Lukaku.

However, after scoring 10 in his first nine games in all competitions, the goals have dried up for the Belgian, with Mourinho's side now trailing league leaders Manchester City by 13 points.

United welcome Burnley to Old Trafford in the league on Tuesday with a busy festive schedule kicking in - the perfect time for Lukaku to have found a new facet to his game when not scoring.

On Saturday, the striker fulfilled an unfamiliar role, with no other player at the King Power Stadium creating more



chances for team mates.

"Lukaku's role has been different," former United defender Gary Neville said. "The chances that he has created should have killed the game off. His contribution will please Mourinho."

Lukaku created two big chances for Martial and Jesse Lingard with defence-splitting passes, but both were not converted which cost United as Leicester snatched a last-gasp point.

Such profligacy against Burnley would mean that United's hold on second place in the standings would be under threat, as Chelsea lurk three points behind in third.

Paul Pogba has five assists to his name despite having played just nine Premier League games, but such ability on the ball makes him a marked man. Lukaku, on the other hand, is a relative unknown in the creativity department. Having created just three big chances all season prior to Saturday, Lukaku proved he can adapt his game to give Mourinho more options.

Over a busy festive period, where any slip up by runaway leaders Manchester City could see United at least put pressure on their rivals, Lukaku could silence his doubters in other ways than just scoring goals.

(Source: Reuters)

# FIFA not against discrimination

**S P O R T S** Football must keep political impartiality and that national associations remain free from political interference. However, FIFA denies its own rule after allowing the Saudi Arabian teams to play Iranian counterparts in neutral fields.

In late November, the Asian Football Confederation made a statement that matches among the west Asian teams will continue on a home-and-away basis in next year's Asian Champions League despite an on-going diplomatic dispute between the Persian Gulf states. The flip side is that Saudi Arabia doesn't accept the international rule and wants to bend it.

President of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), Gianni Infantino, was warmly welcomed by King Salman bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud last week in Riyadh. But the big question is why Infantino travels to a country that breaches the FIFA rules?

FIFA has always said Football has nothing to do with politics and most recently threatened to kick Spain out of the 2018 World Cup over alleged government interference in its football association.

Here, FIFA clearly discriminates between the federations. FIFA Article 3 says discrimination of any kind against a Country, private person or group of people on account of race, skin color, ethnic, national or social origin, gender, language, religion, political opinion or any other opinion, wealth, birth or any other status, sexual orientation or any other reason is strictly prohibited and punishable by suspension or expulsion.

The question remains to be answered whether Infantino feels a sense of responsibility towards football fans who want to see their favorite teams' matches at home.

And, the answer is clearly a BIG NO!



## Mourinho called his Man United players 'childish' after Leicester draw

Jose Mourinho accused his players of being "childish" after Manchester United conceded a stoppage-time equalizer to draw with 10-man Leicester.

Harry Maguire made it 2-2 in the fourth minute of injury time at the King Power Stadium after two goals from Juan Mata had cancelled out Jamie Vardy's opener for Leicester, who had substitute Daniel Amartey sent off after 73 minutes.

Mourinho was particularly unhappy at his team missing what he called "joke" chances to kill the game. He was also left frustrated after his players failed to reorganize themselves following an injury to Chris Smalling in the closing stages.

It was Smalling, barely able to move because of a groin problem, who got caught under the ball at the back post allowing Maguire to score.

Mourinho told Sky Sports: "We did everything to win but we lost big chances in front of the goal and not just big chances, also possession moments. I would say childish lost possession."

"In the end, no maturity because Smalling was in trouble, he comes out of the game, they put Maguire as an extra man but the players on the pitch cannot react

and analyze the game and make a quick adjustment.

"So I think childish in our box and childish in their box. We were punished by our mistakes and what more can I say?"

Mourinho described the game as "an easy match to win" but saw his team lose more ground in the title race and fall 13 points behind Premier League leaders Manchester City, who beat Bournemouth 4-0 earlier in the day.

Anthony Martial, Jesse Lingard and Marcus Rashford all had golden opportunities to make it 3-1 before Maguire struck with almost the last kick of the game.

Mourinho added: "We didn't win because we missed incredible chances."

"I would say joke chances. In the last second of the game we make a big defensive mistake so it is an accumulation of mistakes in an easy match to win."

"I told to the players at half-time, when the result was 1-1, it was an easy match to win."

"The team was playing well and equalized before half-time."

"In the second-half, as we all know, the result should be four, five, six. But the reality is that it's

2-2. Sometimes you make mistakes and you are not punished but we were punished.

"Easy match to win. We were punished with two points in an easy match to win."

Yet despite the losses and the seemingly insurmountable gap to City in the table, Mourinho admits he is still happy in himself.

"I feel great," he added. "Seriously. It's one thing to be angry as a manager and it is another to feel great as a man. I feel great, I work hard."

Maguire said the result felt like a win.

"It feels great to get a last-minute draw. Kasper [Schmeichel] has pulled us out a few times and did it again today," Maguire said.

"It was a great moment today and we will go and enjoy it. We had to stick with it, it was crucial to keep it at 2-1 and when we kept it at 2-1 for as long as we did we knew we would get a chance."

"Thankfully it fell to me and I was able to put it away."

"It's one of those games that feels like a victory, but it's a point, it's a good point against a good side."

(Source: ESPN)

## Russian Premier League tests more than 50 players for doping



Around 60 footballers that play in the Russian Premier League, including members of Russia's national team, were tested for doping in the first half of the ongoing season.

The announcement follows reports that the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) included Russia's entire 2014 World Cup squad on a list of athletes that may have benefited from Russia's state-sponsored doping scheme.

All of the tests were carried out by RU-SADA, the Russian Anti-Doping Agency, and came back negative, the Championat sports website reported Friday.

Among those tested were 15 national players who competed for Russia in 2017. They include footballers that whistleblower

Grigory Rodchenkov said were part of a doping program during the 2014 World Cup, notably goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev and midfielder Alan Dzagoev.

Almost 20 players from the Russian national team have still not been tested, including Spartak Moscow star players Denis Glushakov and Alexander Samedov.

Players from CSKA Moscow, Lokomotiv Moscow and Krasnodar were tested the most. Eight players from CSKA underwent tests, while the other two teams had seven players tested. FC Zenit St. Petersburg had six players tested. Only two clubs in the Russian Premier League, Tosno and Amkar, did not undergo any tests.

(Source: themoscowtimes.com)

## Seahawks' Thomas tells Cowboys to 'come get me'



Seattle safety Earl Thomas courted controversy on Sunday when he appeared to offer his services to the Cowboys following the Seahawks' 21-12 victory in Dallas.

Thomas, who attempted to enter the Cowboys locker room following the game, approached their coach Jason Garrett in the tunnel and could be heard saying, "if y'all have the chance, come get me". The Texas native, who also played collegiate football at the University of Texas, has one year left on a five-year contract in Seattle and was asked about his post-game comments that are likely to anger the passionate Seahawks fans.

"I've always been a Cowboys fan growing up. The biggest thing when I said 'come get me,' I didn't literally mean, 'come get me now,'" Thomas, who added he was happy in Seattle, told reporters.

"I'm still in the prime of my career, I still want to be here. But when Seattle kicks me to the curb, please, the Cowboys, come get me. You know?"

"This is the place where I want to be when they kick me to the curb. So that's what I meant."

The victory kept Seattle's slim playoff hopes alive.

(Source: Reuters)

## Better than the 'golden 70s', Rummenigge revels in Bayern's dominance

Despite a slow start to the season and the sudden departure of Carlo Ancelotti, it will nevertheless be another 'frohe Weihnachten' for Bayern Munich, who have been congratulated for their efforts in 2017 by chief executive Karl-Heinz Rummenigge.

Bayern spluttered and stumbled early in the campaign, a 3-0 loss to Paris Saint-Germain in September prompting the club to part company with Ancelotti, who had led them to the Bundesliga title last term.

Luring 2012-13 treble-winning boss Jupp Heynckes out of retirement has prompted a sharp upturn in form, which has seen Bayern reach the mid-season break 11 points clear of second-placed Schalke at the top of the table.

And Rummenigge, writing in a festive letter to supporters, did not miss an opportunity to laud the team's achievements.

"We've rarely been able to celebrate Christmas in as relaxed a mood as this year," he wrote.

"We can be very satisfied with 2017."



"Last summer we won a fifth Bundesliga title in a row – that's an historic achievement!"

"Even the so-called golden 70s failed to produce such

utter Bavarian dominance, and our team is well on course to extend this streak.

"We're top of the table at the midpoint of the season for the seventh time in a row, with an 11-point lead over our rivals. I think that's remarkable! We're also on track in the Champions League and DFB Cup."

"Special thanks go to Jupp Heynckes and his coaching staff. Jupp has made a wonderful comeback."

"We've won 15 of our 16 matches since he returned, and I'm convinced he'll continue to help the team develop after the winter break, even though the mid-season training period is very short this time."

"And I'd also like to thank Carlo Ancelotti, who led us to the aforementioned fifth league title last summer."

Bayern return to Bundesliga action against Bayer Leverkusen on January 12, with a Champions League round-of-16 tie against Turkish side Besiktas coming up in February and March.

(Source: Four Four Two)

## Rower Mohsen Shadi comes out of retirement

Iranian rower Mohsen Shadi has come out of retirement after about two years.

Shadi won two gold medals at the 2010 Asian Games in the men's lightweight single sculls (LM1x) and 2014 Asian Games in the men's single sculls (M1x).



Shadi is the first Iranian who to win a gold medal in world championships after he finished in first place in the 2009 World U23 Championships (LM1x).

"I've started my training for 20 days. I am preparing for the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta," Shadi said.

"My rivals have not changed and I have a good knowledge of them," Shadi added.

The 29-year-old sculler has also won two gold medals in Asian championships in 2011 Hwacheon and 2013 Lu'an.

## Iran sitting volleyball team still tops in world

IRNA — Iran's male sitting volleyball team stood first for the tenth consecutive time in 2017 Para-volleyball world ranking.

Iranian male team with 5,215 points and female team with 2,825 points stood sixth in the world.

The world Para-Volleyball Federation also announced Iran's victory in Asia and Pacific championships on December 21.

Sitting volleyball (sometimes known as paralympic volleyball) is a form of volleyball for the athletes with a disability that entered the Paralympic Games as a demonstration sport for athletes with amputations in Toronto, Ontario, Canada in 1976 and played as a medal sport thereafter.

## Bonyadifar to officiate Bengaluru FC vs. Transport United

TASNIM — The Asian Football Confederation has appointed Iranian referee Mo'ud Bonyadifar as the man in charge of the match between Bengaluru FC from India and Transport United from Bhutan in 2018 AFC Cup's Qualifying play-off.

The Iranian referee will officiate the second leg, scheduled for January 30th.

Bonyadifar will be assisted by his countrymen Mohammad Reza Abolfazli and Saeed Ali Nezhadian.

Payam Heydari is also the fourth official.

Mo'ud Bonyadifar is an Iranian football referee who has been officiating in Persian Gulf Pro League for five seasons and has been on the international list since 2013.

## Iranian referee in 2017 UWW Olympic list

IRNA — The United World Wrestling (UWW) has listed Iran's Mazdak Gity as Olympic referee, Head of Hamedan wrestling committee said.

"According to UWW, Gity was promoted to S1 level," Mojtaba Tutuni told Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) on Sunday.

"Mohammad Ebrahim Emami, Ardavan Saheb and Mohammad Mosalaeipour had been earlier listed as Iran's Olympic referees," he added.

Gity who has 13-year experience in arbitration has so far judged many international events.

## Nigerian striker Gero linked with Iran's Esteghlal

TASNIM — Salisu Abdullahi "Alhaji" Gero has been linked with a move to Iranian football club Esteghlal.

The 24-year-old striker could join Esteghlal after the end of Allsvenskan (Swedish professional league).



Esteghlal coach Winfried Schafer is looking for a striker and it seems the German coach has found his man.

Salisu Abdullahi "Alhaji" Gero is Iran international striker Saman Ghodds's team-mate in the Swedish club.

Gero made his debut for the Nigeria national under-20 football team at the eight-nation tournament in South Africa.

Esteghlal sit sixth in Iran Professional League but are 14 points behind Iran league pacesetters Persepolis.

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## Kosovo artist Rrezeart Galica to hang posters at Tehran museum

**A R T** TEHRAN — An exhibition of posters by the 36-year-old Kosovo graphic designer Rrezeart Galica will open at the Palestine Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran today.

Forty posters will be showcased at the exhibition titled “Beyond Homage”, the museum announced on Sunday.

His works have been put on display at over 40 solo and group exhibitions around the world.

The exhibition will run until January 4, 2018 the museum located on Mozaffar St. off Taleqani Ave.

## TMCA to tell “Tales from the Golden Age”

**A R T** TEHRAN — Romanian director Cristian Mungiu’s acclaimed historical comedy “Tales from the Golden Age” will be screened at the Cinematheque of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art this afternoon.

The screening, which will begin at 4 p.m., has been arranged as part of “A Review of the New Wave of Romanian Cinema”, a program that will screen films from several other filmmakers from the country.

The film is about a young woman’s attempts to procure an abortion under the regime of Nicolae Ceausescu, the last Communist leader of Romania who served as president of the country from 1974 until his overthrow in the Romanian Revolution in 1989.

## Iranian studies center opens in Athens

**A R T** TEHRAN — An Iranian studies center opened at the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens, Greece on Sunday.

The center has been set up in collaboration with Iran’s Cultural Office in Athens, the Persian service of IRNA reported on Monday.

The rector of the university, Ismini Kriari-Katrani, and Iran’s Cultural Attaché in Athens Ali-Mohammad Helmi and a number of academics attended an opening ceremony of the center.

Speaking at the ceremony Kriari-Katrani said that the university welcomes any bilateral cooperation with Iranian academic centers.

## Sally Hawkins to star in Craig Roberts’ next film

**LONDON (Screen Daily)** — Oscar contender Sally Hawkins is preparing to reunite with Craig Roberts on the Welsh youngster’s second feature directorial effort.

Hawkins told ScreenDaily about the development in an interview about her acclaimed, Golden Globe-nominated performance in Guillermo del Toro’s “The Shape Of Water”.

The British actress said she was awaiting the start of production in 2018 on a project that has been known as “Eternal Beauty”, Roberts’ next stint behind the camera following his 2015 debut on “Just Jim”, a high school drama in which he starred alongside Emile Hirsch.

“He has written a beautiful script and has been waiting a long time. Hopefully we’re filming that in spring or summer next year,” Hawkins said of Roberts, whom she described as “very special”.

She added: “It’s a lovely part and I’m really honored he’s even thinking of me for it.”

Little is known about the project from Roberts’ Cliff Edge Pictures, although the multihyphenate said in a recent interview with culture website Another Man that the story will center on a woman who creates her own reality and deals with her own nightmare.

Hawkins played Roberts’ mother in Richard Ayode’s 2010 comedy “Submarine”.

# New corrected copy of Rumi’s Masnavi-ye Manavi unveiled in Tehran

**A R T** TEHRAN — A new d e s k corrected copy of Persian poet and mystic Jalal ad-Din Rumi’s masterpiece Masnavi-ye Manavi was unveiled during a special ceremony at the Academy of Persian Language and Literature in Tehran on Monday.

The 95-year-old Rumi expert, Mohammad-Ali Movahhed, spent years making the numerous major corrections to the book based on his in-depth studies on 11 copies of the Masnavi-ye Manavi, most of which were written 30 years after Rumi’s death.

Published by Hermes, the book begins with a comprehensive introduction in which Movahhed gives details on the process of his work.

Speaking at the ceremony, Movahhed expressed his thanks to those who helped him in completing the correction project.

He said, “I have fully explained how the corrections were made to the mistakes that exist in the previous copies, and the reasons why I began working on this project.”

He also said that there have been two attitudes towards the Masnavi-ye Manavi, adding, “Some considered Masnavi totally sacred and believed no changes should be made in the book, while others made changes in the copies inscribed about 23 years after the poet’s death.”

“As we have one standard text for the Holy Quran and the differences are discussed in the interpretations, I think it should be the same about the Masnavi, so I decided to present one standard text and mention the differences in the footnotes,” he added.



Rumi expert Mohammad-Ali Movahhed (R) unveils a new corrected copy of Rumi’s Masnavi-ye Manavi at the Academy of Persian Language and Literature in Tehran on December 25, 2017. A number of Iranian literati are also seen in the photo. (Mehr/Majid Haqdoost)

The ceremony was also attended by a large number of Persian literati, including Hushang Moradi Kermani and Bahaeddin Khorramshahi.

Born in Tabriz, Movahhed is a graduate of law and political science from the University of Tehran. He has always done research throughout his life, and has written and

translated numerous books. He has carried out comprehensive studies on mysticism in Persian literature and Rumi’s mentor, Shams-i Tabrizi.

## Kaliveh to celebrate New Year with “Melodies of the Orient”



Kaliveh Music Group in an undated photo

**A R T** TEHRAN — The d e s k Kaliveh Music Group will give a concert titled “Melodies of the Orient” at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall on Saturday night to celebrate the New Year in solidarity with Iranian Christians.

Seven vocalists each will perform songs from various cultures during the concert, bandleader Sara Ahmadi told the Persian service of MNA on Monday.

A repertoire of songs from the Iranian regions of Lorestan, Khorasan and Kordestan has been arranged for the first part of the concert. Ali Naderi, Mohsen Mirzazadeh and Foad Pishva are the singers for this part.

Iranian-Armenian singer Edvard Abrahamian is scheduled to perform the songs “You Wish for That” and “I’m an Armenian”, while Kabir Masumi will sing pieces from India and Pakistan in the second part.

This part will also feature some Afghan and Tajik songs by Aref Jafari, and some Turkish and Azarbaijani songs by Ali Tanha.

The group also plans to unveil a daf, an Iranian percussion instrument bearing signatures of a large number of musicians from around the world.

The group collected the signatures during a music festival in Mexico in June.

## Georgian publisher acquires rights to “Short Stories in Iran”

**A R T** TEHRAN — The d e s k Academic Press, a leading publisher in Georgia, has acquired the rights to “Short Stories in Iran” from Iran’s Pol Literary and Translation Agency.

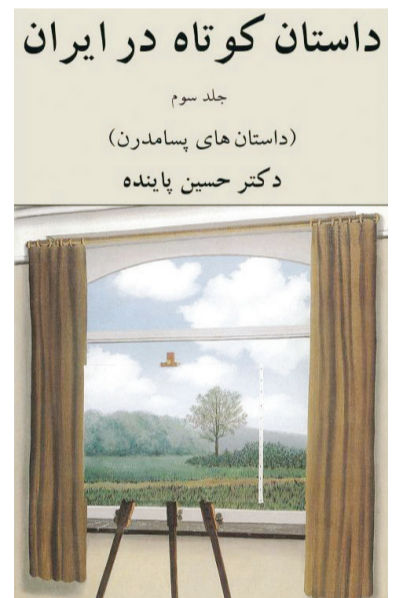
The three-volume book written by Hossein Payandeh will be published in Georgian in the near future, the director of the agency, Majid Jafari-Aqdam, told the Persian service of Tasnim on Monday.

The first volume centers on realistic and naturalistic stories, the second contains modern stories, and the last covers the post-modern stories.

Payandeh’s books were originally published by Nilufar Publications in Tehran.

Jafari-Aqdam said that the agency is in talks with a Georgian publisher to sell the rights for “Of a Girl Named Aram” by Morteza Karbalailu.

The Pol Literary and Translation Agency has inked contracts with several foreign publishers to publish books by Iranian authors.



Front cover of the third volume of “Short Stories in Iran” by Hossein Payandeh.

## “Star Wars: The Last Jedi” soars to 745\$ million worldwide

**NEW YORK (Variety)** — Disney-Lucasfilm’s “Star Wars: The Last Jedi” is showing plenty of force at multiplexes worldwide with \$745.4 million globally as of Sunday.

The North American take has hit \$365 million in its first 10 days as of Sunday with the studio projecting another \$32 million on Christmas Day on Monday - making it the third highest domestic release in 2017 following “Beauty and the Beast” with \$504 million and “Wonder Woman” at \$412 million.

“Star Wars: The Last Jedi” has totaled \$380.3 million in international box office. It is already the top grossing film of 2017 in both Denmark and Sweden and the fourth highest grosser in the overall European market. The U.K. is the top market with \$67.4 million, followed by Germany with \$40 million, France with \$29.3 million and Australia with \$26.9 million.

“The Last Jedi”, which picks up following the events of 2015’s “Star Wars: The Force Awakens”, is so far the 87th highest worldwide grosser of all time, trailing 2016’s “Suicide Squad” by \$1.4 million. Rian Johnson directed with Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, Adam Driver, Daisy Ridley, John Boyega, Oscar Isaac, Andy Serkis, Lupita Nyong’o and Domhnall Gleeson reprising their roles. It’s the final screen role for Fisher, who died a year ago.

Sony’s “Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle” and Universal’s “Pitch Perfect 3” have also opened solidly while Fox’s “The Greatest Showman” is drawing respectably at the domestic box office. But moviegoers are showing little interest in Paramount’s “Downsizing” and Warner Bros.-Alcon’s “Father Figures.”

“Star Wars: The Last Jedi” opened with the second-



Actor Mark Hamill poses for photographers in Shanghai Disney Resort for the premiere of “Star Wars: The Last Jedi” December 20, 2017.

largest North American launch ever in its first weekend with \$220 million. It faced competition for the first time on Dec. 20, with Sony’s action comedy “Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle”, which is leading the rest of the pack with \$34 million at 3,765 sites for Friday-Sunday and a six-day total of around \$64 million.

Josh Greenstein, Sony’s president of worldwide marketing and distribution, pointed to the A- CinemaScore as an indication that “Jumanji” is attracting all demographics. “We have incredible momentum as we go into the biggest moviegoing week of the year,” he added.

“Jumanji” also opened solidly with \$49.5 million in 53

international markets, finishing ahead of “Star Wars: The Last Jedi” in 28 territories. Its top performance came in the U.K. with a second-place finish at \$10.1 million including previews.

Universal’s “Pitch Perfect 3” took in \$20.5 million at 3,447 theaters and is on track for \$27 million by the end of the four-day period. The threequel brought back the Bellas singing group with Anna Kendrick, Rebel Wilson, Hailee Steinfeld, Brittany Snow, Anna Camp and Hana Mae Lee reprising their roles. “Pitch Perfect 3” also opened with \$9.8 million in 14 international markets.

Hugh Jackman’s “The Greatest Showman”, a musical take on circus founder P.T. Barnum, grossed \$8.6 million at 3,006 venues during Friday-Sunday. The movie, produced by Chernin Entertainment, opened on Dec. 20 and is on track to take in about \$18 million in its first six days.

“Downsizing” took in a quiet \$4.6 million at 2,558 theaters in its Friday-Sunday debut and should finish four-day frame with \$6.2 million. Paramount paid \$65 million for the near-future comedy in which Matt Damon agrees to be shrunk to five inches in exchange for a better life. Audiences were unimpressed, giving the film a C CinemaScore.

“Father Figures” grossed a tepid \$3.2 million at 3,902 theaters during Friday-Sunday and should add about \$1 million on Monday. The film follows brothers - played by Owen Wilson and Ed Helms - who set out to find their biological father.

“The Post”, directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep, dazzled with \$495,000 at nine sites for Friday-Sunday. Fox will go wide with the journalism drama on Jan. 12.

## Montreal Symphony Orchestra launches harassment probe following new Charles Dutoit claim

**MONTREAL (Hollywood Reporter)** — The orchestra has opened an investigation after receiving a complaint about the conductor, who has been accused of sexual assault by four women.

A Canadian orchestra launched a sexual harassment investigation after receiving a complaint that names renowned conductor Charles Dutoit, a spokesman said Sunday.

The probe by the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, where Dutoit served as music director for nearly 25 years, comes after The Associated Press on Thursday reported allegations against him by three opera singers and a classical musician who said

he assaulted them in incidents between 1985 and 2010.

Dutoit’s office issued a statement saying those allegations “have absolutely no basis in truth.” An email to his office seeking comment on the new complaint was not immediately returned Sunday.

The Montreal Symphony Orchestra said its executive committee on Saturday decided to have an independent, third party conduct an investigation following the complaint to “establish the relevant facts” and make recommendations on how to prevent sexual harassment.

Spokesman Pascale Ouimet confirmed

that the complaint refers to Dutoit. He also said it was not made by two women named in AP’s story.

Eight major symphonies have ended their relationships with Dutoit since the AP’s story was published.

Dutoit has traveled the world as a guest conductor and led several highly regarded orchestras, including the Orchestra National de France, the NHK Symphony in Tokyo and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra.

His long relationship with Montreal came to an end in 2002 following a dispute with the musicians’ union.



Charles Dutoit via Getty Images