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# Iran threatens to retaliate against new sanctions

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## Oil tanker tragedy: 2 bodies found, black box retrieved

**ECONOMY** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Chinese relief and rescue teams have located bodies of two of the Iranian oil tanker's crew on Saturday morning, six days after the ship collided with a bulk freighter and caught fire off China's east coast.

Sirous Kianersi, managing director of the National Iranian Tanker Company (NITC), said although the rescue team was

able to retrieve the ship's black box but they were turned back by high temperatures and lack of oxygen, Shana reported.

Last Saturday, the tanker Sanchi, owned by NITC, which was carrying one million barrels of condensate to South Korea, collided with the freighter CF Crystal that was carrying grain from the United States about 184 km off China's coast near Shanghai. **→4**

## Africa: Trump must apologize to continent

The African group of ambassadors to the United Nations has demanded an apology from the United States President Donald Trump, after the U.S. president reportedly aimed a racist remark at some Caribbean nations and Africa.

Trump criticized immigration to his country from El Salvador, Haiti and the African continent, by calling the group

"shithole countries" at a meeting with Congress members at the White House on Thursday, according to the U.S. media.

"The African Union mission to the UN is extremely appalled at, and strongly condemns the outrageous, racist and xenophobic remarks attributed to the U.S. president as widely reported by the media," **→13**

## Saudi regime accused of rights abuses in Yemen civilian deaths

A United Nations report on human rights abuses related to foreign intervention in Yemen details the extensive civilian casualties inflicted by the House of Saud regime-led coalition's air attacks.

The United Nations panel examined 10 air attacks in 2017 that killed 157 people, and found that the targets included a migrant boat, a night market,

five residential buildings, a motel, a vehicle and government forces, according to a copy of the report shown to Al Jazeera.

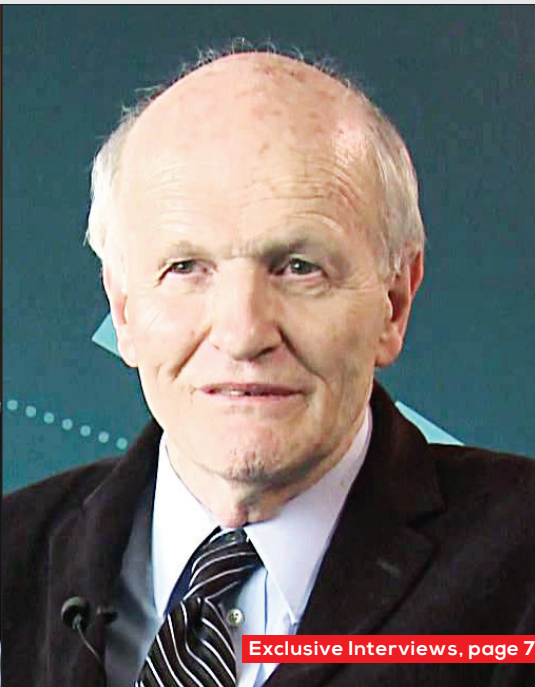
"This is a report to the UN Security Council that has not been made public, but I've been allowed to read a copy," Al Jazeera diplomatic editor James Bays said. **→13**



Trump wants to destroy Iran's ability to defend itself against aggressors: professor



I doubt the dates in JCPOA will be changed: Matthew Bunn



Trump demand limits on Iran enrichment program unrealistic: ex-White House official

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## ARTICLE

By Hanif Ghaffari  
Political analyst

## What is Steinmeier thinking about?

The President of Germany have difficult and busy days. The Christian parties and the Social Democratic Party have begun negotiations for a major coalition in Germany since January 7th. The talks that European leaders are hoping to put an end to months of political instability in Berlin. However, Frank Walter Steinmeier is well aware that it won't be easy to direct and manage negotiations inside the German coalition government.

Steinmeier recently called for progress on negotiations to re-establish a major coalition at a meeting with senior government officials on the occasion of the New Year in the presence of "Angela Merkel", Christian Democrat leader and Social Democratic Party leader "Martin Schultz". This is Steinmeier's standpoint as one of the leading figures in the Social Democratic Party. He was also the former Minister for Foreign Affairs in Merkel's government.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel is specifically counting on the support of Steinmeier in forming a coalition government. However, Steinmeier has concerns that can't be easily overtaken. The most important concern of Steinmeier in this regard is the fundamental disagreement between the Social Democratic Party and Christian Democrats. This disagreement, over the past four years, have shown itself in issues such as German foreign policy in Europe, the regulation of economic relations between Berlin and Europe, and most importantly, during the crisis of asylum seekers.

On the other hand, Steinmeier, who, not long ago, was the rival of Merkel for winning the German Chancellorship, is well aware of Merkel's particular and rigorous political ethics in a possible coalition government. That's why Steinmeier as Germany's President, called for the quick formation of a coalition government on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as a senior Social-Democratic Party member, has concerns over this issue.

Steinmeier is also worried about the fall in the popularity of traditional parties in Germany. The results of recent polls in Germany show that the popularity of the two Social Democratic Party and Christian Democrats in Germany has declined. Meanwhile, the "Alternative for Germany" was able to attract the public opinion of Germany by gaining about 13.5 percent of the vote. **→13**

## People support, strategic external partnership to push back U.S. threat against Iran: Kovacevic

### EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Payman Yazdani

**TEHRAN** - Filip Kovacevic, professor of geopolitics, University of San Francisco believes the only way to thwart the U.S. threats against Iran's Establishment is to meet the needs of people inside and having strategic external partnerships.

Following is the full text of the interview with him:

■ What is the relation between the failure of the U.S. regional policy in the Middle East due to Iran's resistance and influence and the recent unrest in some of Iran's cities?

A: The policy is simple and has been in place for decades. It is a well-thumbed playbook that

we have seen throughout Eastern Europe, North Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America. If you want to step out of the geopolitical framework imposed on you by the U.S. Empire, you pay for it dearly. Your country is destabilized, and your people are pushed into uncertainty, poverty, and ultimately, into a civil war.

No one country can resist this devious strategy by itself. The only genuine, systemic threat to neoliberal globalism was the Soviet Union, but, in the period of several decades, it, too, was weakened internally through various corrupt officials and agents of influence until it ultimately broke up. This is the painful lesson for all political elites who oppose or want to oppose the Anglo-American Establishment. Not only do they have to be

very careful and cautiously make their moves, but they also need both the support of their own people and the support of external allies. If ordinary people in a country are happy with their living standards, it is very difficult to sway them by internal subversive political actors sponsored by the outside powers, such as the U.S. In addition, it is only in a firm strategic partnership with Russia and China that Iran will be able to push back the threat to its political and economic stability in the long run.

■ What is the real goal behind Trump and the U.S. congress support to protesters in Iran?

A: The goal of any U.S. administration, be it Republic and Democrat, since the 1980s, has been the regime change in Iran. **→7**

## JCPOA not prohibit development of ballistic missiles by Iran: professor

### EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — Professor Farhang Jahanpour, part-time tutor on the Middle East in the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Oxford, tells the Tehran Times that "It should be remembered that a greater part of the statement released by President Trump is for domestic consumption, and also it is a face-saving formula to persuade his base that he has remained firm in his decision."

"The nuclear agreement does not prohibit the development of ballistic missiles by Iran," Jahanpour tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

He also adds that "The Security Council Resolution that confirmed the deal, in an annex "calls

on Iran" to refrain from manufacturing ballistic missiles, but it has been made clear that it is not a binding requirement."

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ U.S. President Donald Trump has approved the Iran nuclear deal for only one more time before abandoning it if it is not changed. What are the changes that Trump has in mind?

A: Given President Trump's earlier statements about the Iran nuclear deal calling it the worst deal in history, and the concerted efforts of the Neo-Conservatives to force him to kill the deal, his decision to waive nuclear-related sanctions one more time is very significant and is probably the best outcome that could be expected under the circumstances. Last time when he decertified the nuclear deal, he called on the U.S. Congress to come up with an amended deal that he could

agree with. However, Congress refused to propose an alternative and turned the decision back to the president.

At this point, the president had two choices: either to pull the plug on the deal, or to find a face-saving formula to continue with it, and he has chosen the second option.

The important fact is that not only Russia and China, but the U.S.'s closes allies in Europe strongly urged him to preserve the deal. The EU High Commissioner for Foreign Policy and Security Federica Mogherini chaired a meeting of British, French, German and Iranian foreign ministers only a few days ago, and all the participants openly supported the deal. Ms Mogherini herself said: "The unity of the international community is essential to preserve a deal that is working," **→7**



## Tehran Auction sells all 120 lots

**A R T** **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Tehran Auction sold all 120 lots at its modern and contemporary sale grossing about 150 billion rials (over \$3million), revealing glimmers of hope for Iran's economy of art.

An untitled triptych mirror mosaic and plaster on wood by the 95-year-old artist Monir Farmanfarmaian, famous for her mirror mosaics and geometric drawings, sold for 13 billion rials (over \$290,000), being the most expensive item sold at the auction, which was held at the Parsian Azadi Hotel. **→16**



## ARTICLE

By Masoud Hossein  
Head of the Sport Desk of the TehranTimes

## Saudi Arabia, the UAE mix politics with sports

There is "no justification" for direct government intervention in the governance of the game, but it seems Saudi Arabia and the UAE are adamant to reaffirm their stance which is NOT playing in Iran and Qatar.

In late November, the Asian Football Confederation released a statement in which it declared that matches among the west Asian teams will continue on a home-and-away basis in the next year's Asian Champions League despite an on-going diplomatic dispute between the Persian Gulf states. The flip side of that is Saudi Arabia along with the UAE wish not to abide by the international rules.

Mohamed Khalfan al-Rumaihi, Chairman of the UAE's General Authority for Sports, in an interview with Abu Dhabi Sports channel noted that they will play in the Asian Champions League this year but at neutral venues.

"We will not play although our success in the AFC Champions League is of high importance to us. NO ONE can force us to play in locations where we are not willing to play," AFP's Arabic service reported.

President of the Saudi Football Federation, Adel Ezzat, also echoed the same view.

"We have met the (AFC) delegation. Our clubs will not play in Qatar," Ezzat said.

Saudi Arabian clubs have already declared that they refuse to play in Iran as well.

A total of six teams from Saudi Arabia and the UAE will have to represent their countries in the AFC Champions League and their withdrawal from the competition could jeopardize it. The FIFA Article 3 reads, "Discrimination of any kind against a Country, private person or group of people on account of race, skin colour, 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."

But the question remains as to why the Asian Football Confederation and FIFA will not budge an inch on the issue. Without a shadow of doubt, Iran and Qatar are safe and secure countries and have taken all measures to welcome sports teams. The two countries are able to differentiate between sports and politics.

In my opinion, the AFC and FIFA must hold Saudi Arabia and the UAE accountable for bending the law.



MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



**Zarif talks to Chinese counterpart on trapped tanker crew**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif and his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, in a phone conversation on Saturday discussed the ongoing efforts to find the Iranian crew after their oil tanker collided with a Chinese freighter in the East China Sea on January 6 and caught fire.

Zarif urged the Chinese government to follow up on the recent tragic incident.

Wang expressed his deep sorrow over the accident, saying, “Chinese relief and rescue forces will make their utmost efforts to tame the fire.”

The ship, run by Iran’s top oil shipping operator National Iranian Tanker Co, was carrying 136,000 tons of condensate, an ultra-light crude that is highly flammable, to South Korea.



**Khavari still able to file appeal: Tehran chief justice**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Tehran Province’s chief justice has said that former banker Mahmoud Reza Khavari is still able to file an appeal against the verdict against himself.

Khavari, a former banker involved in the 2011 massive fraud, was sentenced last month to long-term imprisonment. He was tried in absentia on November 21 and was found guilty of disrupting the economic, monetary and banking system.

Speaking to Mehr on Saturday, Qolamhossein Esmaili said since Khavari is not in Iran, he has a two-month deadline to file an appeal.



**IRGC seizes explosives in southeast Iran**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) forces have confiscated a consignment of explosives and suicide belts in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan.

In a statement on Friday evening, the IRGC Quds unit said its forces had seized the consignment in the Saravan region.

It said the consignment was smuggled into the country for terrorist attacks, Tasnim reported.

Members of the so-called Jundallah terrorist group had moved the cargo into the country to foment insecurity and unrest and carry out terrorist attacks, it said, adding that the IRGC will work hard to foil the enemy’s plots to destabilize Iran.



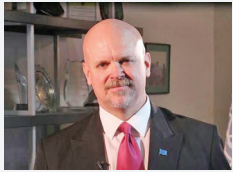
**OIC parliamentary conference begins in Tehran**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The 13th Conference of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC member states (PUIC) and related meetings started in the capital Tehran on Saturday, IRNA reported.

Fifty-four states had been invited to the PUIC conference of which 44 countries expressed readiness to attend the event, said Abdolreza Azizi, a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Parliamentary Union.

The Tehran PUIC conference is hosting 16 parliament speakers, 14 vice speakers and several parliamentary delegations from various Islamic countries.

The 13th PUIC conference will end on Wednesday after issuing a final statement, Azizi said.



**Iran always in my heart: Gary Lewis**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Gary Lewis, the outgoing UN ambassador to Iran, has said that Iran will always be “in my heart and I was very much impressed by the great Iranian civilization in the past five years living and working there.”

In an interview with IRNA published on Saturday, Lewis said the Iranian people are powerful and can “play a very important role” in building the future of the mankind.

He also pointed to the need to pay more attention to the environment, urging cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan to resolve the environmental problems in the border regions.



**Archbishop lauds police’s restraint in face of protests**

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Archbishop Cipan Kashjian, the religious leader of the Armenian Christians in Isfahan and south Iran, on Saturday praised the conduct of police in the face of recent protests in some cities across Iran, saying police succeeded to restore calm through their “might” and “restraint”.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Isfahan Police Chief Brigadier General Masum Beigi, IRNA reported.

“We believe the recent unrest was organized abroad and ordinary people are different from rioters, because no Iranian agrees to insecurity and riot,” the archbishop remarked.

# World dismisses Trump’s deadline on nuclear deal



According to Reuters, A German foreign ministry spokeswoman also said that Germany will consult with Britain and France on how to proceed in implementing the nuclear deal with Iran.

“The federal government will continue to campaign for the full implementation of the nuclear agreement,” the spokeswoman said.

French Ambassador to the U.S. Gerard

Araud also expressed support for the nuclear deal.

“Certification is a purely U.S. domestic decision. The Europeans didn’t pretend have a say in it. We emphasized our commitment to the JCPOA and our concerns about other Iranian activities (missiles, regional),” he tweeted on Friday.

Representative Eliot Engel, a New York Democrat, also criticized Trump’s approach in a statement, saying that “the wrong approach is to bully countries with arbitrary and unenforceable deadlines.”

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Moscow has a “very negative stance” on the decisions and comments made by Trump about Iran, according to state news agency Sputnik.

“Our worst expectations are coming true,” Ryabkov said Saturday.

The prospect of a U.S. withdrawal from the deal “will deliver a very serious blow to the whole system of international agreements and to the enhancing of the nuclear non-proliferation regime,” the top Russian diplomat added.

## Trump insults other nations, Zarif says



**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Saturday that U.S. President Donald Trump insults other nations.

“Unfortunately, we see that a person who addresses all nations with derogatory, unacceptable and even unbelievable expressions has taken the power in the United States,” Zarif said during a speech at the Asian Cultural Dialogue summit in Tehran.

Such an attitude impedes reaching a “comprehensive paradigm for dialogue,” he added.

“We all seek to build a better world and we need to counter such attitudes which are based on egoism,” he noted.

## Iran’s response to U.S. breach of JCPOA to astound the world: MP

**POLITICS** The spokesman for the Iranian parliament presiding board has warned that in case the U.S. violates the 2015 nuclear deal, called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the Islamic Republic’s reaction would surprise the world.

The remarks by Behrouz Nemati came one day after Donald Trump declared his new Iran strategy.

“The JCPOA is an international agreement that neither Trump nor any other official of the member states of the P5+1 (Russia, China, U.S., Britain, France, and Germany) can violate unilaterally,” Nemati told Tasnim.

On Trump’s attempts to prevent the expiration of restrictions on Iran’s nuclear activities, he said the expiration of 15-year restriction is one of the key provisions of the JCPOA and the U.S. cannot violate it.

The parliamentarian went on to say that if the U.S. really makes such a move (violating the key provision), Iran will show a reaction that would astound not only the U.S. but the entire world.

The remarks came after Trump again waived sanctions against Iran that were lifted as part of the landmark 2015 nuclear deal, but threatened he would terminate the agreement if “significant flaws” in it are not fixed.

“Today, I am waiving the application of certain nuclear sanctions, but only in order to secure our European allies’ agreement to fix the terrible flaws of the Iran nuclear deal,” Trump said in a statement Friday, according to AP.

“This is a last chance. In the absence of such an agreement, the United States will not again waive sanctions in order



to stay in the Iran nuclear deal. And if at any time I judge that such an agreement is not within reach, I will withdraw from the deal immediately. No one should doubt my word.”

In October, Trump said he would not certify Iran’s compliance with the nuclear agreement that was negotiated under the previous administration because it was “in violation of the spirit” of the accord.

The Trump administration asked Congress then to come up with and pass a companion agreement that addresses those issues.

It said it would also like Congress to amend the legislation that gives lawmakers the authority to slap sanctions on Iran if it decides Tehran is in violation of the nuclear agreement, outlining “trigger points” instead that set off automatic sanctions.

Trump said he wants Congress to fix “the deal’s many flaws” such as existing sunset provisions.

## Trump backs down from upending Iran deal: ex-diplomat

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — A former Iranian nuclear negotiator says U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision to extend sanctions relief over the 2015 nuclear accord showed that he had backed down from his plan to exit the deal.

Trump vowed to withdraw from the deal if Congress failed to meet his conditions, but Congress remained unaffected by his threats, which in turn forced the U.S. president to repeat his empty threats while extending sanctions relief for Iran, Seyed Hossein Mousavian, who is currently a researcher at Princeton University, told ILNA on Saturday.

Iran and six world powers – the U.S., UK, Russia, France, China, and Germany – on July 14, 2015 struck the landmark nuclear deal, which is officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

On Friday, Trump avoided upending the JCPOA which he has repeatedly disparaged, agreeing to waive key sanctions the U.S. lifted as part of the deal.

He warned in a statement that the waiver – which must be issued every 120 days to keep the sanctions from kicking back in – will be the last he issues and he delivered a stark ultimatum to European allies on Friday: “Fix the deal’s disastrous flaws, or the United States will withdraw.”

The U.S. president coupled his waiver announcement with new sanctions on 14 Iranian individuals and entities, claiming they have committed human rights abuses or supported the country’s ballistic missile programs, which are outside the scope of the nuclear pact.

Mousavian said the new sanctions were “superficial” and did not pose a threat to Iran’s economy. But, he said, since Trump keeps



blowing hot and cold on the issue, other countries – especially Europeans – have become reluctant to invest in Iran’s economy.

This has severely hurt Iran’s trade with the world, he said, predicting that the U.S. will continue adopting such policy toward Tehran.

### ■ Europeans strongly defended the JCPOA

The ex-nuclear negotiator also highlighted the role European countries played to preserve the JCPOA, saying they have strongly defended the deal, since they see it as one of their diplomatic successes.

He said the Europeans have been lobbying hard in the United States to put pressure on Trump to remain committed to the JCPOA.

Trump also failed to persuade Congress or any member of his cabinet to exit the pact, he said.

This convinced him that exiting the nuclear agreement unilaterally would isolate him and the U.S. in the world, he added.

## Iran threatens to retaliate against new U.S. sanctions

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on Saturday condemning the new U.S. sanctions on a number of Iranian individuals and entities, threatening to retaliate.

The statement followed after U.S. President Donald Trump extended waivers of key economic sanctions on Iran for another 120 days, but imposed new sanctions on 14 Iranian individuals and entities including Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani, the Iranian Judiciary chief.

Trump also gave Europeans only 120 days to agree to an overhaul of the nuclear agreement – officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – or he would pull Washington out of it.

The Foreign Ministry rejected any changes to the JCPOA. Following is an excerpt of the Foreign Ministry’s statement: The Islamic Republic of Iran and the international community have said that the JCPOA is an international valid

document and is non-renegotiable under any circumstances.

Iran will not accept any commitment beyond what has been mentioned in the JCPOA and will not accept any change in the deal either.

The U.S. government, like other signatories to the JCPOA, is duty bound to fulfill its obligations under the JCPOA and must take consequences in case of violation.

The U.S. decision in imposing new sanctions on the Iranian individuals and entities proves the U.S. government’s

### The U.S. has “crossed a red line” by imposing sanctions on Judiciary chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani, the Foreign Ministry says.

## China says nuclear deal not derailed, pledges constructive role

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — China on Saturday pledged to continue playing a constructive role in maintaining and implementing the Iran nuclear deal, after U.S. President Donald Trump set an ultimatum to fix “disastrous flaws” in a deal.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif by phone that implementation of the deal had not been “derailed” but would face “some new complicating factors”, the state news agency Xinhua reported.

Continuing to implement the nuclear deal was the responsibility of all parties concerned and the common wish of the international community, Wang was quoted as saying during the call, which took place on a visit to Rwanda. The deal would help uphold the in-

ternational non-proliferation regime, maintain regional peace and stability and solve “other hot issues” around the world, he said.

He urged Iran to remain calm and continue to fulfill its obligations under the deal.



# U.S. ambassador to Panama resigns, says he cannot serve Trump

The United States Ambassador to Panama John Feeley has resigned, saying he no longer felt able to work for President Donald Trump.

Feeley, a former Marine Corps helicopter pilot, had informed the U.S. State Department about his departure on December 27, U.S. officials said.

His resignation was not a response to Trump's alleged use of the word "shithole" to describe Haiti and African countries at a meeting on Thursday, reports said.

Feeley, among the State Department's most senior officers and a Latin America specialists, said his decision was clearly prompted by differences with the Trump administration.

"As a junior foreign service officer, I signed an oath to serve faithfully the president and his administration in an apolitical fashion, even when I might not agree with certain policies," Feeley said, according to an excerpt of a resignation letter.

"My instructors made clear that if I believed I could not do that, I would be honor bound to resign. That time has come."

A State Department spokeswoman confirmed Feeley's departure, saying he will retire on March 9 of this year.

Under Secretary of State Steve Goldstein said the ambassador was leaving for "personal reasons" and was not related to Trump's alleged use of the vulgar term.

"Everyone has a line that they will not cross," Goldstein told reporters at the State Department. "If the ambassador feels that he can no longer serve ... then he has made the right decision for himself and we respect that."

Much of Feeley's long career was spent working on Latin American issues. Some of Trump's policies have been widely regarded within the region as hostile to Central and South America.

The Trump administration has taken a tougher stance on immigration from Latin America, most notably with moves



to expel hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Haiti and El Salvador.

During the meeting at the White House on Thursday, Trump reportedly asked why "people from shithole countries come to" the United States.

His contemptuous comments, which were about immigrants from El Salvador, Haiti and African countries, have provoked

sever criticism in the U.S. and abroad.

The administration has been rocked by a series of high-profile exits — including Sean Spicer as press secretary, James Comey as FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) director, Anthony Scaramucci as communications director and Steve Bannon as chief strategist— since Trump took office.

(Source: AP)

## Tunisia president meets employers, unions after unrest



Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi was to hold talks on Saturday with political parties, unions and employers to discuss means to overcome unrest triggered by austerity measures.

The North African country has been shaken by a wave of protests over poverty and unemployment during which hundreds have been arrested before the unrest tapered off.

The demonstrations broke out ahead of Sunday's seventh anniversary of the toppling of veteran dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in a revolt that sparked uprisings across the Arab states.

The trigger of the protests last Sunday was a finance law imposing tax hikes after a year of rising prices.

A man in his 40s died in unrest on Monday night in the northern town of Tebourba though police have insisted they did not kill him.

Interior ministry spokesman Khelifa Chibani on Saturday said a total of 803 people suspected of taking part in acts of violence, theft and looting have been arrested this week.

Some 97 security forces and members of civil protection units were also injured, he said. There was no immediate toll for the number of protesters injured in the unrest.

Calm returned to the country on Thursday night and there was "no attack against

public or private property" in the night of Friday to Saturday, Chibani said.

AFP correspondents reported one small protest overnight Friday in the central city of Sidi Bouzid -- the cradle of the 2011 Islamic Awakening (Arab Spring) uprising -- and said police fired tear gas to disperse the demonstrators.

Tunisia is considered a rare success story of the Islamic Awakening uprisings that began in the North African country in 2011 and spread across the region, toppling autocrats.

But the authorities have failed to resolve the issues of poverty and unemployment.

Essebsi was expected to discuss a way out of the latest crisis with representatives of political parties, the powerful UGTT trade union and the UTICA employers federation.

In 2015, UTICA -- an acronym for the Confederation of Industry, Trade and Handicrafts -- shared a Nobel Prize with the UGTT for their work during Tunisia's transition towards democracy after the revolution.

Protests are common in Tunisia in January, when people mark the anniversary of the revolution that ousted Ben Ali.

This year, the country has seen rising anger after the government adopted the 2018 budget which includes hikes in value-added tax, on mobile phones and real estate as well as in social contributions.

(Source: AFP)

## Israeli PM on long tour of India with eye on arms trade



Israel's prime minister starts a six-day-long tour of India, a major buyer of Tel Aviv's arms, as controversy bubbles away over the regime's arms sales in Asia.

On Sunday, Benjamin Netanyahu began the visit spanning India's financial capital of Mumbai and his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi's home-state of Gujarat, as well as New Delhi. Accompanying the premier is a 130-member delegation from Israeli military, cyber and agriculture sectors.

Bilateral arms trade was worth an overall \$9 billion during a decade ending in 2009. In 2016 alone, the volume of the trade stood at \$600 million, making the subcontinent the most demanding arms buyer from Tel Aviv.

The two sides also share intelligence and carry out joint military training.

Netanyahu's visit seeks to do away with a snag in the monumental military relations revealed in early 2018, when Israeli military contractor Rafael said India had cancelled a \$500-million order to buy its Spike guided missiles.

"If there is a problem, it can, it should and it will be solved," said Daniel Carmon, Israel's ambassador to India, AFP reported.

Despite the cancellation of the missile deal, India's Defense Ministry said this month that it had cleared a plan worth \$72 million to buy 131 Barak surface-to-air missiles built by Rafael.

Tel Aviv is still the target of international criticism since last October, when Israeli daily Ha'aretz said the regime had continued to sell advanced weaponry worth tens of millions of dollars to Myanmar even after a deadly government-sanctioned military campaign against Rohingya civilians in the Southeast Asian country came to light.

Myanmar, a Buddhist-majority country, has been accused by the United Nations of engaging in "textbook ethnic cleansing" of the minority Muslims.

A month later, the regime "reprimanded" Myanmar's ambassador to Tel Aviv for revealing that Tel Aviv had signed a new arms deal with Naypyidaw.

Also in sight during the Israeli premier's tour of India is boosting "trade, investment, and tourism between both countries, said Gilad Cohen, deputy director-general for Asia and the Pacific in Israel's ministry for foreign affairs.

Since 2014, India has been the third-largest Asian trade partner for Israel.

Modi took office that year and became the first sitting Indian prime minister to visit Israel in 2017.

New Delhi, however, joined the more than 120 countries last month to vote in favor of a resolution calling for the United States to drop its earlier recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's capital.

(Source: agencies)

## Syrian forces liberate over dozen towns in Aleppo



Syrian army forces, supported by allied fighters from popular defense groups, have managed to retake complete control over all the towns lost a day earlier to members of the Takfiri Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS/Organization for the Liberation of the Levant/Levant Liberation Committee) terrorist group in the country's northwestern province of Aleppo.

Syria's official news agency, SANA, reported that Syrian troops and their allies had carried out fresh operations against militant strongholds, and had liberated 13 villages, including Umm Anaksh, Salehiyah, Tell Soumeah, Hardana and al-Assadiyah, following fierce clashes with HTS terrorists.

The report added that the counter-terrorism operations led to the destruction of a number of terrorist positions, and left scores of Takfiris dead and injured.

The media bureau of Syria's Operations Command also announced in a statement that government troops and fighters from popular defense groups had established full control over a number of villages in al-Safirah district in Aleppo.

Syrian bomb disposal units also defused several booby-trapped houses in the town of Khanasi.

The developments came only a day after Syrian army soldiers and allied fighters regained control of the villages of Umm Khan and Umm al-Amad Qabli in the southeastern countryside of Aleppo province.

The offensives dealt heavy blows to the personnel ranks and military ranks of terrorists from the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham Takfiri group, formerly known as al-al-Nusra Front (Jabhat al-Nusra).

Meanwhile, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that Syrian government forces and their allies had expanded their control to 120 towns in Hama and Idlib provinces ever since they started their military campaign there on December 25 last year.

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. The Syrian government says the Israeli regime and its Western and regional allies are aiding Takfiri terrorist groups that are wreaking havoc in the country.

(Source: SANA)

## Erdogan: Turkey to crush Kurdish militia in Afrin

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday that Turkey's military incursion in northern Syria's Idlib province would crush Kurdish militia forces that control the neighboring region of Afrin.

The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/Yekineyên Parastina Gel) militia said Turkish forces inside Syria fired shells into Afrin on Saturday, but no one was wounded.

Turkish troops entered Idlib three months ago after an agreement with Russia and Iran for the three countries to try to reduce fighting between pro-Syrian government forces and rebel fighters in the largest remaining insurgent-held part of Syria.

But the few observation posts which the Turkish army says it has established are close to the dividing line between Arab rebel-held land and the Kurdish-controlled region of Afrin.

"If the terrorists in Afrin don't surrender we will tear them down," Erdogan told a congress of his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP/Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) in the eastern Turkish city of Elazig.

The Kurdish YPG militia said Turkish forces stationed in Syria shelled several Kurdish villages in the Afrin region on Saturday, without causing casualties.

Rojhat Roj, the YPG spokesman in Afrin, told Reuters the shelling was carried out by Turkish forces in Dar Taizaah and Qalat Seman - areas where he said Turkish forces had deployed as part of the agreement with Russia and Iran.

"From our side, there is no shelling at present," he added.

Erdogan has said the Kurdish YPG militia is trying to establish a "terror corridor" on Turkey's southern border, linking Afrin with a large Kurdish-controlled area to the east.

In 2016 Turkey launched its Euphrates Shield military offensive in northern Syria to push back the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group from the border and drive a wedge between the Kurdish controlled regions.

"With the Euphrates Shield operation we cut the terror corridor right in the middle. We hit them one night suddenly. With the Idlib operation, we are collapsing the western wing," Erdogan said, referring to Afrin.

He also said Turkey could drive YPG forces out of Manbij. The mainly Arab town lies west of the Euphrates, and Turkey has long demanded that Kurdish fighters pull back east of the river.

"In Manbij, if they break the promises, we will take the matter in our own hands until there are no terrorists left. They will see what we'll do in about a week," Erdogan said.

Turkey was a major supporter of rebels fighting to overthrow Syria's President Bashar al-Assad, but is alarmed by the strength of Kurdish forces - which Ankara says are linked to Kurdish militants fighting in southeast Turkey.

It has criticized the United States for arming YPG and Arab fighters in the Syrian Democratic Forces, which drove ISIL out of Raqqa and other parts of Syria.

"The U.S. sent 4,900 trucks of weapons in Syria. We know this. This is not what allies do," Erdogan said. "We know they sent 2,000 planes full of weapons."

(Source: Reuters)

## U.S. to sell 17 Black Hawk helicopters to Saudi regime

The United States Army has awarded Sikorsky, a leading American aircraft manufacturer based in Connecticut, a contract worth nearly \$200 million to supply 17 Black Hawk helicopters to the House of Saud regime.

The terms of the "firm-fixed-price" agreement between the Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation, a Lockheed Martin company, and the army were announced on Thursday by the Department of Defense.

The House of Saud regime is expected to receive eight UH-60Ms for the regime's National Guard, while the other nine helicopters will go to the Royal special security forces.

The UH-60M Black Hawk, a medium-lift, rotary-wing helicopter, has been in use by military forces around the world since it was first introduced in 1979.

It has multi-mission capabilities and can be used in combat search-and-rescue, airborne assault, command-and-control, medical evacuation, search-and-rescue, disaster relief and fire-fighting. Sikorsky will begin work under the \$193.8 million deal to manufacture the



helicopters with an estimated completion date of the end of 2022.

The deal comes as the U.S. is under pres-

sure to suspend its arms sales to the Saudi regime, which has been waging a deadly military aggression against Yemen since 2015.

(Source: Press TV)



STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	96627.6
IFX	1086.97

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	43,550 rials
EUR	54,100 rials
GBP	60,900 rials
AED	12,100 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$69.87/b
WTI	\$64.30/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.38/b
Gold	\$1,338.90/oz
Silver	\$17.28/oz
Platinum	\$998.45/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



**Kish to host ENEX 2018 intl. exhibition in late Jan.**

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — The 14th International Petro Energy Exhibition (ENEX 2018) of Iran is due to be held on Kish Island (in south of the country) from January 22 to 25, the event’s website reported.

Companies from China, the Netherlands, India, Turkey, South Korea, Azerbaijan, Malaysia, France, Austria, United Arab Emirates, Spain, Germany, Belgium, Australia and Russia are going to attend the Kish International Energy Exhibition.

The exhibition aims at showcasing the latest investment opportunities and achievements in the fields of oil, gas, petrochemical, water resources and electricity.



**Letters of guarantee worth \$41.3m issued for SMEs**

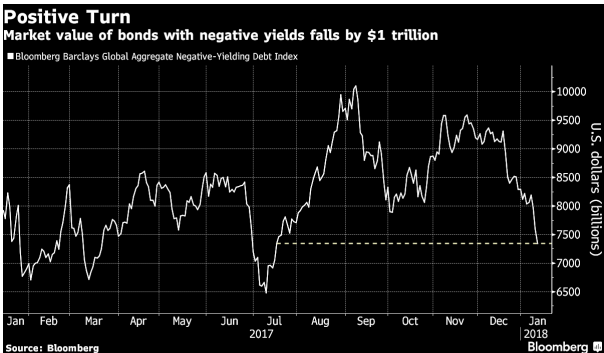
**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — The Investment Guarantee Fund of Iran for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises has issued letters of guarantee worth 1.8 trillion rials (about \$41.3 million) during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (ended December 21, 2017), IRIB news reported on Saturday.

The figure shows 82 percent rise in comparison with the same time in the preceding year.

As reported, some 147 letters of guarantee have been issued in this time, while 115 ones have been extended.

\$1t in bonds have left the negative-yield zone this year

As the global bond market comes to terms with the unwinding of quantitative easing from the U.S. to Europe, it’s cutting inventory of the assets that bear the hallmark of a decade of distortion: negative-yielding debt.



In the first eight trading sessions of the year, the pool of bonds with sub-zero yields has shrunk by about \$1 trillion to \$7.3 trillion, the smallest since July, signaling an uptick in growth and inflation prospects that’s helping to normalize bond markets around the world.

Buying bonds with negative yields made sense when investors anticipated deflation and the potential to make capital gains as QE drove rates lower. But with the world economy set to enjoy its strongest year since 2011, factories struggling to keep up with demand, and inflation expectations steadily rising, central banks have the room to withdraw support and normalize rates.

Minutes of the European Central Bank’s December meeting on Thursday showed policy makers are considering a hawkish shift in their communication in the early months of 2018. Days before, the Bank of Japan trimmed longer-dated bonds in an asset-purchase operation, though officials said it shouldn’t be taken as a new sign they’re planning to exit stimulus.

Policy makers in Europe have halved the ECB’s bond-buying program, leaving it open as to whether they would carry on after the targeted end in September. And stimulus looks set to last even longer in Japan. Governor Haruhiko Kuroda this month emphasized the BOJ is far from its 2 percent inflation target, highlighting the nation’s “deflationary mindset.”

(Source: Bloomberg)

Iranian light crude oil price up \$1.8 per barrel in a week

**ENERGY** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s light crude oil price rose \$1.8 in the week ended on January 5 to settle at \$67.57 per barrel, Shana news agency reported on Saturday.

The country’s light oil price was reported \$64.57 on average since the beginning of 2018.

Meanwhile, the country’s heavy crude oil also experienced a \$1.4 growth in the said week to settle at \$64.38 per barrel.

In the mentioned week, Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)’s basket price stood at \$65.49 per barrel with

\$1.5 increase compared to the preceding week.

Analysts and traders warned about the risks of a price correction since the start of 2018, but they say overall market conditions remain strong, mainly due to output cuts led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and Russia, Reuters reported.

In addition to the OPEC and non-OPEC production cuts of 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) that are expected to last until the end of 2018, oil prices have found support from eight consecutive weeks of U.S. crude inventory drops.



A market survey of more than 1,000 energy professionals conducted by Reuters in

January showed crude price expectations in a range of \$60 to \$70 per barrel for 2018.

Oil tanker tragedy: 2 bodies found, black box retrieved

**1 →** **Japan, South Korea to join rescue mission**

Iranian Minister of Labor Ali Rabiei, who is tasked to head a committee investigating the stricken oil tanker, said on Saturday that Iran has asked Japan and South Korea to join Chinese rescue teams on taming the fire on Sanchi.

As IRNA reported on Saturday, Rabiei who arrived in China on Saturday noted that a joint committee has been formed between Iran, China and Japan to work out the best ways to carry out rescue and search operations.

The official said that an agreement has also been signed



between Iran and China on handling the rescue operations on Sanchi oil tanker.

**Iranian, Chinese foreign ministers talk on Sanchi**

In a telephone conversation on Saturday, Iran’s Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif spoke to his Chinese counterpart, urging the Chinese government to take all necessary measures regarding the matter.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi for his part expressed sympathy for the Iranian tanker’s crew saying that the Chinese relief and rescue will continue their efforts to restrain the fire.

Tehran, Islamabad in accord to expand trade ties

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — In a Friday meeting between Iranian Ambassador to Islamabad Mehdi Honardoost and Pakistani Minister of State for Finance and Economic Affairs Rana Muhammad Afzal Khan, the two officials agreed on enhancement of bilateral trade between the two brotherly Muslim countries, the

Daily Times reported on Saturday.

Keen interest was evinced in the banking sector and both sides expressed their desire to enhance cooperation in it, the same report confirmed.

Both sides expressed satisfaction over the ongoing Free Trade Agreement negotiations.

Besides, commonality of viewpoints was found on various national and international issues and it was affirmed that both sides will cooperate in all sectors.

Elaborating on the measures and targets for the expansion of trade between Iran and Pakistan, Nazar Muhammad Ranjha, the commercial counselor of Pakistan to Tehran,

told the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview in last November: “We have already achieved some targets. In 2016, the trade between the two countries crossed the level of \$1 billion and during April-September, 2017, total trade between the two countries was \$660 million which is a very good one. We hope that this will increase a lot.”

Gold prices notch fifth week of gains in a row

Gold prices marked a fresh four-month high on Friday to tally a fifth week of gains in a row, finding support as the dollar extended its earlier decline despite a slightly higher-than-expected climb in core U.S. inflation.

Some “momentum and positioning for next week” may have given gold an “extra boost,” said Jeff Wright, chief investment officer at Wolfpack Capital.

February gold GCG8, +1.19% rose \$12.40, or 0.9%, to settle at \$1,334.90 an ounce. Prices finished at the highest for a most-active contract since Sept. 11, according to FactSet data.

Gold saw a weekly gain of roughly 1%. It tallied a fifth week of consecutive gains, the longest since April. Month to date the metal has climbed 2.2%.

“Persistent U.S. dollar weakness is keeping the extended bull run in gold alive and well,” Michael Armbruster, managing partner at brokerage firm Altavest, told MarketWatch. “Most traders are at a loss to explain the dollar’s weakness given that the Federal Reserve is leading the way among central banks in raising interest rates.”

The ICE U.S. Dollar Index DXY, -1.08% —a gauge of the greenback against a half-dozen rivals—fell 0.8% as the dollar traded at its lowest against the euro in about three years. The index traded nearly 1% lower for the week. A weaker dollar can boost the appeal of gold as an investment, as



most commodities are priced in dollars.

“Typically, higher interest rates make an underlying currency more attractive relative to foreign competition,” said Armbruster. “This suggests there are other drivers conspiring to undermine the dollar. One possibility is that nation states, particularly those who are not friendly with the United States, are moving away from the US dollar in their international trade of commodities and goods.”

Among U.S. economic data Friday, the so-called core rate of consumer inflation, with gas and food stripped out, rose a sharper 0.3% in December, a notch above the MarketWatch forecast and the highest reading in almost a year,

Indonesia central bank warns over cryptocurrencies

Indonesia’s central bank has issued a fresh warning about trading in cryptocurrencies like bitcoin because of the risk of losses to the public and even a potential threat to the stability of the financial system.

Bank Indonesia (BI) has previously said that cryptocurrencies were not recognized as a legal medium of exchange, so that they could not be used as a means of payment in

Indonesia.

“The ownership of virtual currencies is high risk and prone to speculation because there is no authority who takes responsibility, there is no official administrator and there is no underlying asset to be the basis for the price,” BI spokesman Agusman said in a statement issued late on Friday.

He said that virtual currencies could also

be used in money laundering and terrorism funding, and due to all these factors could have an impact on the stability of the financial system and causes losses for society.

“(Cryptocurrency) is not a legal medium of exchange. We remind (people of) its risks. When the risks occur, the losses will be borne by the public. We are obliged to protect consumers and protect them from

a bubble,” Agusman said by telephone on Saturday.

Asked whether such statements from authorities could stir panic among those who had already invested in cryptocurrencies, he said: “They didn’t consult with us when buying....please help us make the people understand.”

(Source: Reuters)

Rising rents, healthcare costs boost underlying U.S. inflation

Underlying U.S. consumer prices recorded their largest increase in 11 months in December on strong gains in the cost of rental accommodation and healthcare, bolstering expectations that inflation will accelerate this year.

The strengthening domestic demand was also underscored by other data on Friday showing retail sales rising at a solid clip in December. The reports probably will keep the Federal Reserve on course to increase interest rates in March.

They raised the prospects of a more aggressive monetary policy tightening this year, especially against the backdrop of a \$1.5 trillion package of tax cuts passed by the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Donald Trump last month.

The U.S. central bank is forecasting three rate increases this year. It raised borrowing costs three times in 2017.

“The economy is doing quite well right now ... and well enough for the Fed to feel compelled to take steps to take the edge off before inflation truly becomes problematic,” said Jim Baird, chief investment officer at Plante Moran Financial Advisors in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

The Labor Department said its Consumer Price Index, excluding the volatile food and energy components, rose 0.3 percent last month as prices for new and used cars and trucks and motor vehicle insurance increased.

That was the biggest advance in the so-called core CPI since January 2017 and followed a 0.1 percent gain in November. The core CPI increased 1.8 percent in the 12 months through December, picking up from 1.7 percent in November.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast core CPI rising 0.2 percent month-on-month and holding steady



at 1.7 percent on an annual basis. Weak import and producer price data this week had raised concerns about the inflation outlook, although the two reports do not have a strong correlation with the CPI.

Economists are hoping that a tightening labor market, rising commodity prices, a weak dollar and fiscal stimulus will lift inflation toward the Fed’s 2 percent target this year.

The central bank’s preferred inflation measure, the personal consumption expenditures price index excluding food and energy, has missed its target since May 2012.

The dollar briefly trimmed losses against a basket of currencies after the CPI data, but later slumped to a four-month low on expectations that the European Central Bank would wind down its bond buying program this year.

Prices for U.S. Treasuries fell, with the yield on the interest-rate sensitive two-year note rising to its highest since September 2008. Stocks on Wall street were trading higher.

**Broad Price Increases**

Supporting the rise in underlying inflation pressures last month, rents increased 0.4 percent. Owners’ equivalent rent of primary residence climbed 0.3 percent after gaining 0.2 percent in November.

The cost of medical care increased 0.3 percent, with prices for prescription medication surging 1.0 percent after rising 0.6 percent in November. The cost of both hospital and doctor visits increased 0.3 percent. The higher healthcare costs led economists to expect the core PCE price index probably rose 0.2 percent in December after nudging up 0.1 percent in November.

The government will release the December core PCE price index data later this month.

Cheaper gasoline prices, however, limited the increase in the overall CPI to 0.1 percent in December after a 0.4 percent rise in November. That lowered the year-on-year increase in the CPI to 2.1 percent from 2.2 percent in November.

Last month, gasoline prices fell 2.7 percent after rebounding 7.3 percent in November. Food prices rose 0.2 percent after being unchanged for two straight months.

Separately, the Commerce Department said retail sales rose 0.4 percent last month after advancing 0.9 percent in November. Retail sales increased 5.4 percent from a year earlier.

Sales last month were lifted by a 1.2 percent jump in receipts at gardening and building material stores and a 0.2 percent rise for auto dealerships. Excluding automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, retail sales increased 0.3 percent last month after an upwardly revised 1.4 percent surge in November.

(Source: Reuters)



# Oil’s path to \$70 defied pressures that still threaten prices

Oil’s rise to \$70 a barrel for the first time in three years had clear triggers as supplies tighten and demand climbs, yet it still surprised many traders because there were so many reasons for prices to falter.

Those bearish pressures are still in place, and could make it tough for crude to hold onto its gains.

### ■ Stockpiles grow again

One thing the major forecasters agree on is that, after shrinking dramatically in 2017, oil stockpiles should be starting to build up again.

Global oil demand dips seasonally as the need for winter fuels recedes, and data from both OPEC and the International Energy Agency suggest that will tip the market back into surplus in the first half of this year. Inventories will shrink again in the second half, their data indicate.

### ■ Oil surplus returns

Both OPEC and IEA forecasts suggest stockpiles will grow again in 1H.

While weekly U.S. data shows that crude inventories are declining, it’ll be another couple of months before a clear picture for



other consumers emerges.

### ■ Disruptions fade

Supply disruptions boosted prices in early December, when a critical North Sea pipeline was halted, and at the end of the month when a pipeline explosion curbed flows from OPEC member Libya.

The suspension of the Forties Pipeline System -- one of the North Sea’s biggest disruptions since the 1980s -- was resolved by the end of last month, and repairs on the conduit to Libya’s Es Sider terminal were completed about the same time. Yet the resolution of both outages did little to push prices lower.

Risks to production still remain, though, with Goldman Sachs Group Inc. considering Venezuela and Nigeria to be among the most vulnerable.

### ■ Political dangers recede

Political risks in major oil producers also bolstered the market, yet as these stabilized or receded prices still stayed strong.

A corruption crackdown by Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in early November sparked concerns the world’s biggest oil exporter would suffer a backlash and instability that didn’t materialize.

An even bigger boost came last month when Iran, OPEC’s third-largest producer, faced street protest. Though these didn’t escalate or threaten oil facilities, crude prices didn’t fall back.

Another risk to Iranian exports appears to have been dodged as U.S. President Donald Trump backs away from tearing up an accord on Iran’s nuclear program, which would have slapped American sanctions back on oil shipments.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Oil drillers in Canada boost rigs to 10-month high

Energy firms in Canada almost doubled the number of rigs drilling for oil this week to the highest level in 10 months as producers returned en masse from Christmas breaks and crude prices remain around three-year highs.

Drillers added 87 oil rigs during the week ended Jan. 12 bringing the total count up to 185, the highest level since March 2017, General Electric Co’s Baker Hughes energy services firm said in its closely followed report on Friday.

That was the biggest weekly increase since drillers added 89 rigs during the same week in 2017.

Energy firms in both the United States and Canada have mostly increased the number of rigs operating since the summer of 2016 as U.S. crude prices climbed over the key \$50 a barrel level that analysts said would prompt drillers to return to the well pad.

U.S. crude futures traded around \$64 a barrel this week, their highest levels since December 2014.

Drilling in Canada is seasonal.

The Canadian rig count usually increase in January as producers start drilling again after a Christmas break before declining in the spring when the snow melts and it becomes too muddy to operate. The industry calls that snow melt the spring break up.

The rig count usually increases again in the summer when the ground dries and holds around those levels through the end of December when the count drops during the last week of the year for the Christmas break.

In 2017, the oil rig count jumped from 52 during the last week of 2016 to a high for the year of 207 in February before falling to as low as 24 during the spring break up in April.

The count then climbed to 129 rigs during the summer and continued to grow to a high of 134 by mid December as rising crude prices encouraged drillers to add rigs before falling to 62 during the Christmas week of 2017.

(Source: Reuters)

## The Trump administration keeps trying to sell federal land for oil drilling, but nobody wants it

Last month, the Trump Administration put more than 10 million acres of land in Alaska on the auction block for oil and gas companies to lease and eventually drill. The move — a key part of Trump’s energy strategy — was billed as the President making good on his promise to bring U.S. “energy dominance” to the rest of the world.

But by the end of the auction the Bureau of Land Management had received only seven bids for land covering 80,000 acres, less than 1 percent of the area offered. In total, the federal government would collect just under \$1.2 million, or \$15 per acre. The high cost associated with new drilling projects combined with relatively low oil prices made the area simply an undesirable investment for the industry.

Alaska is not the only place where Trump’s plan to drill has met with tough market realities. The Administration has taken steps to open millions of acres to oil drilling across the country and off the coast of the U.S., from using the tax reform bill as a vehicle to open drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to considering most of the waters of U.S. coasts for oil exploration. But analysts and key industry players say it remains uncertain how much of it will actually be developed to produce oil or gas.

“We’ll have to see,” said Jack Gerard, CEO of the American

Petroleum Institute, asked about the business case for developing new areas proposed by the Administration for offshore drilling last week. “The market will eventually drive where those dollars are invested: are the onshore are they offshore? are they in the United States or elsewhere?”

Trump has promised that his shift “unlocks million and millions of jobs and trillions of dollars in wealth,” but the market reality is more complicated. Oil prices remain low enough that pouring billions into exploring vast new areas offshore, in the Arctic and in Alaska — key regions Trump has sought to open to drilling — would be a risky investment. That’s especially the case as fracking in the U.S. remains a relatively cheap and accessible alternative. “The cost of the resource from shale is just more predictable,” says Roger Stern, a faculty fellow at the University of Tulsa’s School of Energy.

More broadly, oil investors have sought to stem overproduction, which has contributed to low prices, rather than finding new sources of supply. OPEC, the oil cartel that represents 14 oil producing countries including Saudi Arabia, the world’s second-largest oil producer after the U.S., has pushed production cuts. In the U.S., investors told shale oil and gas producers to focus on profits rather simply generating more of the product, according to a Wall Street Journal report.

In the longer term, oil and gas projects can take more than a decade to develop, analysts say oil companies remain concerned about whether demand will stagnate. Policies fighting climate change and the rise of the electric vehicle could both shrink demand. A 2017 report from the International Energy Agency shows global oil demand continuing to grow through 2040, but at a markedly slower pace.

Oil and gas companies nonetheless cheered Trump’s move. The companies that purchase the right to drill despite low demand tend to be the big oil giants that can afford the risk. Those companies could hoard some leases in case prices do recover and will be positioned for a windfall profit if they do. This means the government may forego opportunity for profitable auctions in the future while all but giving away the right to drill on public land today, says Hillard Huntington, executive director of Stanford University’s Energy Modeling Forum

“I’m not against developing these areas,” says Huntington. But “if the government sells the leases, I’m not sure how much money they’re going to get at this point. They could be sold at a relatively low fee, which would not be good for American citizens.”

(Source: time.com)

## WWF Russia says not against Nord Stream 2 construction provided route changes

The Russian branch of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) will not be opposed to the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project so long as the route is changed from along a nature reserve in the Leningrad region to the coastline of the Gulf of Finland, the environmental fund told Sputnik.

“WWF of Russia is not against the deliveries of gas to Europe, including within the framework of Nord Stream 2, as long as the route of the pipeline is changed. We have only one complaint – the change of the route. The main problem is the route through the Kurgal nature reserve. The rest does not represent a crucial concern for the environmental community of Russia,” Alexey Knizhnikov, WWF Russia’s oil& gas program leader said.

With the fund’s efforts, the consultations with the Russian state energy giant Gazprom, which is involved in the pipeline project, were held throughout 2017 and now are at the stage of state expertise, Knizhnikov noted.

“The project is not secret. It is absolutely open and we have no complaints in this regard. In autumn of 2017, at the initiative of the Public Chamber and WWF, a roundtable was held at the Russian government’s Analytical Center. The final document was sent to the government to find solutions to an alternative route along the Gulf of Finland,” the WWF oil& gas program leader added.

At the same time, pipeline project’s media



representative Steffen Ebert said that Claims against the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project put forward by Germany’s Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) contradicted facts about minimal short-term and locally limited impact of the project on the environment.

“The claims put forward by the environmental associations do not stand up to fac-

tual examination ... As part of the permitting process according to German legislation, Nord Stream 2 AG made its extensive permit application documentation available to the public as early as in the spring of 2017. These documents provide detailed information on topics,” Steffen Ebert, an adviser to Nord Stream 2, said.

The documents provided by the Nord Stream 2 project include the results of the

comprehensive monitoring program for the existing Nord Stream pipeline, which shows that Nord Stream 2 is compatible with the environment, as its impacts are locally limited and short-term only, Ebert added.

According to the representative, Nord Stream 2 is an economically and ecologically effective way to supply consumers with natural gas, which is necessary in light of the projected reduction by half of the domestic gas production in Europe.

The WWF and the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU) urged on Thursday German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Christian Social Union (CSU) party leader Horst Seehofer and Social Democratic Party (SPD) head Martin Schulz to ban the construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, claiming it threatened the fight against climate change and the fragile ecosystem of the Baltic Sea.

The Nord Stream 2 twin pipeline implies the construction of two strings with an annual gas capacity of 55 billion cubic meters. The new pipeline is planned to be laid along the original Nord Stream pipeline route, starting from the Russian coast, then through the Baltic Sea to a hub in Germany, bypassing Ukraine.

Nord Stream 2 is a joint venture of Russia’s Gazprom with France’s Engie, Austria’s OMV AG, UK-Dutch Royal Dutch Shell and Germany’s Uniper and Wintershall.

(Source: Sputnik)

## Russia’s Novak says to discuss possible exit from OPEC+ deal in Oman

Ministers from leading OPEC and non-OPEC producers will discuss the possibility of a smooth exit from a global deal to cut oil output next week, Russia’s energy minister said on Friday.

Russia and Saudi Arabia are leading a joint OPEC and non-OPEC effort to limit production to prop up prices. Brent crude oil futures have risen by more than 50 percent since mid-2017, hitting \$70 a barrel this week for the first time since December 2014.

Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak said the current oil price level was short term and he would discuss the situation at a ministerial monitoring committee meeting in Oman, which is scheduled for Jan. 21 next week.

Asked whether ministers would discuss a possible exit from the deal, he said: “I don’t think anyone is going to stop us from discussing these issues, and we will be able to discuss them in terms of the mechanisms which can be considered.”

The head of one of Russia’s largest oil producers, Lukoil, said earlier on Friday Russian should start exiting the oil pact if crude prices remain at \$70 per barrel for more than six months.

But Novak said not all surplus supply had been removed from the oil market.

“We see that the market is becoming balanced. We see that the market surplus is decreasing, but the market is not completely balanced yet,” he told reporters. “Of course, we need to continue monitoring the situation.”

(Source: Reuters)

## Renewable power is not the only solution to energy poverty

By Michael Lynch

A recent story about a solar power project at a Syrian refugee camp made me cringe a bit. There are good reasons to use solar power in this instance: the camp is isolated and (hopefully) temporary, so that connecting it to the grid is unlikely to be cost-effective. And refugees are much more tolerant of intermittent power than homeowners, although the idea that it reliably powers refrigerators might be a stretch. Charging a cell phone, on the other hand, is the perfect use for unreliable, intermittent power. (Unless you’re using the phone to watch Game of Thrones, and then you might not tolerate waiting for daytime to get caught up.)

The crucial part of the story is not “refugees get solar” but “refugees get power.” Their carbon footprint is probably not a priority for a war refugee, although many pundits in the West will no doubt feel that they are being ‘empowered’ by renewables. It reminds me of the story about the Californian who wanted to provide fitness classes for the homeless, or the tattoo artist raising money for the same to get tattoos.



The energy impoverished are often told that renewables is the answer for them, even when it’s not. Solar power stations can be the solution to an isolated village’s lack of power if it isn’t near the grid, but the high-cost and intermittency will afflict the just and unjust alike. And when solar is more expensive, and governments have limited budgets, telling the poor that they cannot have power until the government has money for solar is rather like Marie Antoinette’s “let them eat cake.”

Activists reply that solar power is actually superior in many ways, but as Rachel Pritzker, co-author of “The Ecomodernist Manifesto” put it: “If we knew how to power a modern life on a small amount of intermittent energy we’d be doing it in the OECD already. Why expect the poorest to do something we haven’t figured out yet, and thereby slow their ability to escape poverty? Poverty is not my favorite climate solution.”

There was a real-life application of the “what they really need” approach when Enron developed the Dadhol project in India, intended to rely on imported LNG to power gas turbines and sell very expensive electricity. It would, however, be clean and reliable, something the company insisted were priorities for India. Reliability was definitely valuable for Indian industry, but the political backlash resulted in the contract being rewritten to reduce the power price (and the project’s viability). The plant is now owned by the Indian government, but the reliance on imported LNG (or petroleum), far more expensive than domestic coal, means it still struggles (to put it mildly).

Better to emulate Alan Lloyd, Chairman of the California Air Resources Board in the late 1990s, who canceled the electric vehicle mandate, arguing that his job was to reduce pollution, not promote electric vehicles. Too many proponents of renewable energy in Africa want to promote renewable energy, regardless of whether it is the optimal approach in a given place and time, because they are not addressing either energy poverty or climate change, but because they have fixed on renewable energy period, as if it were a moral question rather than one of costs and benefits.

This kind of posturing is all too common amongst many in the West. GMO foods, for example, have an excellent safety and health record, yet there are activists who oppose its use in poor nations because malnutrition is better than, well, whatever is wrong with GMOs. As The Economist says, “The more sensible reason for being wary of GM foods is that there are people who, not being in any danger of starvation, are precious about what they eat. They are called Europeans.”

Actually, I would call them “Antoinettes,” as in “Let them eat organic cake baked on solar ovens.”

(Source: Forbes)



## Iraq cracks down on online gun sales

By Mustafa Saadoun

Iraq is upping its efforts to restrict the public's access to weapons, which will be a daunting task given the prevalence of weapons on the market and their wide exchange on social media.

When the country's top Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, demanded Dec. 15 that the government escalate operations to put all weapons under its control, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced a plan to do just that. At times in the past, sales were blatant and widespread; after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, weapons were sold on the streets in most Iraqi cities. That's no longer the case — but now dealers have the internet.



Facebook and other social media platforms have become hubs for the weapons trade. Although arms dealing is illegal in Iraq, dealers started using social media when the Islamic State [ISIL] invaded the country.

When Mohamed Akram wanted to buy a weapon, he searched Facebook. After about an hour, he was able to purchase a Kalashnikov rifle from a group that otherwise focuses on car sales. Although the name of the group has nothing to do with weapons, it actually promotes their sale along with shoes, personal-care items and miscellanea including hair tonic.

"Many people recommended that I search on Facebook and look for available weapons," Akram, who lives in the al-Hurriya neighborhood north of Baghdad, told Al-Monitor. "I didn't find any other way to buy weapons, [but] many people buy from these groups."

Anyone can ask to join such groups, and once the group administrator approves a request, a new member can buy and sell weapons.

In the group Al-Zaafaraniya for Sales and Purchases, an Al-Monitor reporter found a Kalashnikov for sale, called the number provided and asked if he could buy the weapon without getting arrested. The seller answered, "We can meet somewhere far from the security forces, and if we get caught, I know someone who can make sure we don't get arrested."

Online sales aren't limited to guns. One of the members of the Al-Zaafaraniya group offered three hand grenades for \$30 each. In another group, Baghdadi Market for the Trade of Weapons, an account under the name Diyaa al-Baghdadi even advertised military equipment, including a Russian-made cylindrical ammunition reservoir, a rocket launcher and binoculars.

In addition to weapon sales, exchanges also can be arranged and are usually advertised in the comments section.

Interior Ministry spokesman Saad Maan told Al-Monitor, "These groups play a negative role in the process of making weapons exclusive to the Iraqi government. The Interior Ministry, however, has a plan to help deal with them." He said the ministry's intelligence agency is consistently following up on such groups and has used informants and ambushes to arrest some members, though he didn't say how many.

A security source told Al-Monitor on the condition of anonymity, "It has been more than a year since our agents have infiltrated such groups, and we were able to arrest some of their members. We are observing them closely and focusing our efforts on stopping them, especially in the capital, Baghdad."

Security analyst Fadel Abu Raghif told Al-Monitor that security institutions plan to target the administrators of the groups promoting sales. "The number of those arrested in Baghdad a couple of months ago is too low because they are already taking safety measures to avoid security officers, and they have so many ways of delivering weapons," he added.

Some arms dealers on social media resort to scams and fraud, according to Thoalfqar Mowaffaq, an activist working with Tamuz Organization for Social Development.

During a talk with Al-Monitor, Mowaffaq said he knew of a man who allegedly was scammed when he bought a Kalashnikov from the Baghdadi Market for the Trade of Weapons group.

"He was asked to show up during the night to complete the arms purchase. After he got to the dark location in the famous Souq Moridi [Moridi Marketplace] in Baghdad, he found out that the weapon he was sold is not the one he was offered in the group and agreed on," Mowaffaq said. Souq Moridi is known for weapons sales, and Iraqi forces raided the marketplace Dec. 30 searching for dealers.

(Source: Al Monitor)

## U.S. media bias ranks worst in the world

by Paul Bedard

Americans on both sides of the political aisle believe the media does a poor job covering political issues fairly, according to a blockbuster new survey of media consumption in 38 nations.

What's more, the Pew Research Center's study found that supporters of President Trump believe the media is doing a worse job covering politics than the supporters of any of the other international political leaders in countries surveyed.

"Large gaps in ratings of the media emerge between governing party supporters and non-supporters. On the question of whether their news media cover political issues fairly, for example, partisan differences appear in 20 of the 38 countries surveyed. In five countries, the gap is at least 20 percentage points, with the largest by far in the U.S. at 34 percentage points," said Pew.

The survey found that just 21 percent of Americans supportive of Trump and Republicans believe the media is fair. Some 55 percent of those who don't back Trump also believe the media is fairly covering politics in the U.S.

In every other case, those numbers are flipped, said Pew.

"The U.S. is also one of only a few countries where governing party supporters are less satisfied with their news media than are non-supporters. In most countries, people who support the political party currently in power are more satisfied with the performance of their news media than those who do not support the governing party," said the study.

(Source: Washington Examiner)

# Trump's hateful remarks bring new level of shame to the nation

By Maria Cardona

Just when we think we can't go any lower in our public discourse, the president takes us there. President Donald Trump, in a meeting Thursday with lawmakers discussing the Dream Act and immigration policy, tellingly asked why would we want more immigrants from "shithole countries?" He was specifically referring to immigrants from El Salvador, Haiti and Africa.

As outraged as many Americans are — and with good reason — we should not be surprised at this point in time. The president's comments were racist, anti-immigrant, xenophobic and bigoted because that's exactly the type of person the president of the United States is.

He has been that way his entire life. Remember the Central Park Five? Remember all the government lawsuits he and his father were slapped with for allegedly discriminating against potential renters who were African-American?

Remember Trump's launch of his five-year crusade to push the racist "birther" movement and discredit the first African-American president of the United States? Remember his insults to Mexicans, calling them rapists and criminals the day he announced his presidential campaign?

Remember his slight against an American-born judge of Mexican descent because Trump doubted Judge Curiel could do his job due to his heritage? Remember Charlottesville?

The list goes on. Trump has showed us time and again who he is at his core and in his heart. As an immigrant from a country Trump would surely consider a "shithole," I am proud to be an American. But I am embarrassed every day that Trump is president of this great nation, and yesterday marked a new level of shame accompanied with great anger and even greater sadness.

Our American children are growing up with a commander in chief who believes that a third of the country is less than American and not worthy of what the nation has to offer. African-Americans, Latinos and other immigrants have contributed billions to our



**The president's comments were racist, anti-immigrant, xenophobic and bigoted because that's exactly the type of person the president of the United States is.**

economy in the form of both low- and high-skilled labor.

When Trump trashes our immigrants and Americans of color, does he realize he is trashing America? Where exactly does Trump believe the fruits and vegetables on his plate come from? Who does he think cleans the rooms, waits the tables, cooks the food, tends the grounds and greets the guests at his five-star hotels?

The fact that this president would so nonchalantly insult so many Americans and immigrants who only want to make a better life for themselves and their families, just to rile up his anti-immigrant, far-right base, proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that he has zero interest in uniting the country or finding common ground on the tough issues of immigration.

Trump only wants to earn back the praise of people like Ann Coulter, Laura Ingraham, Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa) and other extremists who want to close our borders. That is not leadership and it certainly should not be the guiding principle of the president of the United States. America deserves better.

Ronald Reagan once said: "A man wrote and found it necessary to say this, and I'm pleased that he did. He said, 'You can go to live in another land — you can go to live in France, but you can't become a Frenchman. You can go to live in Germany, but you can't become a German. You can go to live in Japan or Turkey, and you cannot become Japanese or Turkish. But anyone, from any corner of the world, can come to live in the United States and become an American.'"

## Tunisia's revolution



those in the region say they could criticize the government without fear. Arabs may not have many civil liberties. Yet many more now feel a liberty of conscience.

"Arab citizens are unlikely to remain docile as socioeconomic stresses increase and welfare systems are curtailed in the years to come," states a recent report by the Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace. "Citizens will increasingly use activism, albeit in forms different from those associated with the Arab Spring, to influence the fate of their countries."

As in many democracies, youths in Tunisia resent the lack of job opportunities and a persistence of corruption. They are also upset about the long-range demands of foreign creditors who insist the government rein in subsidies. Public debt is 70 percent of gross national product. A fifth of all Tunisian workers are employed by the government, an unsustainable situation. Austerity is necessary for economic growth and the creation of private jobs.

Democratic revolutions like Tunisia's are first and foremost about liberty for the individual. That lesson helped the country's Islamist party, Ennahda, fully embrace democracy. Yet with liberty comes the need to define the collective good, often through individual sacrifice. The current protests are part of that process.

As it did seven years ago, the rest of the Arab world can watch as Tunisia again provides a model of reform. This time, the lesson is in how to build a healthier and more inclusive economy.

(Source: The CSM)

## Supporting Turkey's refugee response



**Unfortunately, opposition to Turkey's record on civil liberties is preventing many countries from working with Turkey on refugee protection.**

these displaced people. Erdo'an found that, although Turkish society is "anxious and deeply pessimistic" about Syrian refugees, the prevailing sentiment is one of "reluctant acceptance." Despite lingering concerns about coexistence, societal attitudes "do not escalate into reactionary behavior except for very exceptional circumstances." While Turks rarely define Syrians as brothers and sisters in religion, or consider them cultural allies, they nonetheless tolerate their presence.

As in other countries, immigrants in Turkey exacerbate existing economic anxiety. The majority of Turks do not think Syrians should have the right to work, and many Turks are skeptical of refugee assimilation. While more than 70% of Turks believe Syrians

will one day become permanent residents in Turkey, nearly 76% oppose giving Syrians Turkish citizenship.

But Erdo'an discovered that, despite the standoffish attitude of their hosts, more than half of Syrian refugees in Turkey are happy in the country, and that only 21.9% are "not happy at all" or "not happy." Despite the difficulties they face finding work or accessing education, two-thirds of Syrians surveyed said they did not want to settle anywhere other than Turkey.

In addition to being unpopular among Turks, the accommodation of so many refugees from Syria and other conflict zones has cost the Turkish economy tens of billions of dollars. This suggests that the Turkish government

has acted for humanitarian reasons, rather than in pursuit of domestic political gain. Even if the Turkish public is unenthusiastic, it has broadly accepted the government's approach to the crisis, making the authorities' actions all the more admirable. It is all the more impressive that most Syrians appear satisfied with their treatment.

There has been a great deal of discussion in Europe about how to manage the large inflow of refugees. Burden sharing by the European Union has produced very modest financial support for refugees in Turkey, with most of the aid going to help Turkey's government stop further westward migration of the displaced.

But the findings of Erdo'an's study — which was funded with support from the Open Society Foundation of Turkey — suggest that there may be a better approach. Rather than fund programs that prevent refugees from leaving Turkey, why not provide financial support to help them stay? Erdo'an's data show most Syrians prefer remaining where they are, and no doubt Turkey could use help bearing the huge costs.

Turkey's curbs on political freedom have made Europe understandably hesitant to provide financial support for any human-rights-related initiative that entails cooperation with the government. But Turkey's humanitarian response to the refugee crisis is deserving of support; indeed, to the extent that such support advances integration of refugees, it would reduce the need for aid intended to keep asylum-seekers out of the EU. For the international community, decoupling two legitimate concerns — human rights and management of refugee flows — may be the only way to address either successfully.

(Source: Project Syndicate)



# People support, strategic external partnership to push back U.S. threat against Iran: Kovacevic

➡ Everything else, soft or hard, overt or covert, under the cover or above the belt, are the manifold variations leading to that ultimate policy goal. There is no middle way nor peaceful coexistence over the extended period of time. Given the present geopolitical realities, peace, unfortunately, serves only as a preparation for war.

The U.S. military and intelligence community are experiencing their renaissance under Donald Trump. The CIA director Mike Pompeo, very likely on the way to replacing Rex Tillerson and becoming the next U.S. Secretary of State, wanted a “more vicious CIA” (his words) and he is getting it. The war hawks in the Pentagon want more advanced conventional and nuclear weapons and they are getting them. As somebody wisely said – “if you hold a hammer in your hand, everything looks like a nail.”

The day will come soon when all these new shining military tools will be used openly against all perceived opponents of the U.S. across the globe. Perhaps that day is already here. The protests in Iran may be just the beginning. The whole of Central Asia is likely to be enveloped in chaos and flames in the coming months and years. After the demise



of ISIS in Syria, the terrorist fighters are on the move. Iran, Russia, China are all on their new target list.

■ The U.S. took the issue to the UN Security Council. To what extent is this in line

with the UNSC responsibility asserted in the Charter of the UN? What was the results of the move for the U.S.?

A: This was an unsurprising diplomatic manoeuvre to attract the attention of the

international community for the U.S. geopolitical agenda. However, it was clear from the beginning that no U.S. proposal would pass because of Russia's veto in the U.N. Security Council. And the Chinese were not too happy about it either. All such U.S. initiatives will meet the same fate.

And, if we look at the General Assembly of the U.N., the prospects for the U.S. success are also fairly low. The earlier Jerusalem decision was not supported even by some of the closest U.S. NATO allies. The European Union is weakly trying to develop some semblance of foreign policy independence, but I think it is probably too late to save it from fragmentation into the German- and the U.S.-dominated blocks. In any case, everybody knows that the U.N. is not the place where the key decisions will be made. If the U.S. wants to do something, it will do it on its own or with the “coalition of the willing.” The U.N. formalities will not stop it. We will see even more of that with the Trump administration than in the past. The U.S. is buying time until it is ready to strike. Vigilance based on the careful analysis of trends is therefore of utmost importance.

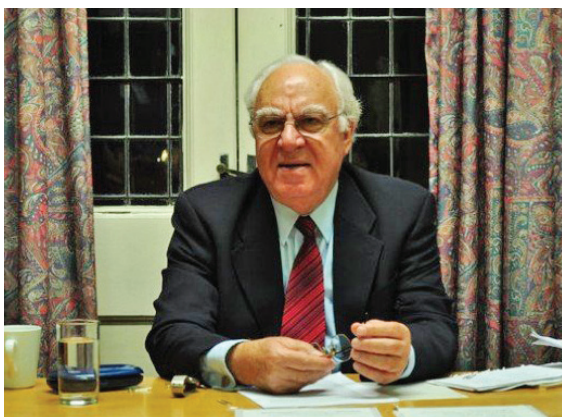
## JCPOA not prohibit development of ballistic missiles by Iran: Professor

➡ that is making the world safer and that is preventing a potential nuclear arms race in the region. And we expect all parties to continue to fully implement this agreement.» In the light of almost unanimous international support, President Trump had no option but to waive nuclear-related sanctions against Iran.

■ The White House wants a deal with EU signatories to make restrictions on Iran's uranium enrichment permanent. Under the current deal they are set to expire in 2025. Do you think the EU will accept this condition? If so, Will Iran accept it?

A: It should be remembered that a greater part of the statement released by President Trump is for domestic consumption, and also it is a face-saving formula to persuade his base that he has remained firm in his decision. Most of what he has said in the introduction to the statement is the repetition of the charges that he has made in the past against Iran, and they do not contain anything new.

When he says that he calls on Congress to work on bipartisan legislation regarding Iran, this is exactly what he said the last time, and Congress did not take the bait. Some of the points that he makes in his statement are also the points that have already been included in the nuclear deal. The first point is that Iran should allow inspection of all the sites. This is something that Iran has been doing for the past two years. The second point is that Iran should never come close to possessing a nuclear weapon. This too is a part of the agreement and Iran has denied that she was ever intending to manufacture nu-



clear weapons. The third point is that “unlike the nuclear deal, these provisions must have no expiration date.” Those provisions do not have an expiration date, but it is interesting to note that he has implicitly accepted the expiration dates for the nuclear deal.

■ Mr Trump also wants Iran's ballistic missile programme to be addressed. Iran frequently has emphasized that the ballistic missile programme is not related to the JCPOA and will not negotiate it. According to this, do you think that this condition means the end for the JCPOA?

A: The issue of ballistic missiles is nothing new either. The nuclear agreement does not prohibit the development

of ballistic missiles by Iran. The Security Council Resolution that confirmed the deal, in an annex “calls on Iran” to refrain from manufacturing ballistic missiles, but it has been made clear that it is not a binding requirement. What the nuclear agreement requires is that Iran does not develop ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. As Iran does not have nuclear weapons and does not intend to manufacture them that condition too is already in force.

On the whole, Iran should continue to abide by the terms of the nuclear agreement and cooperate with the IAEA and with other signatories to the deal. The fact that President Trump has again waived nuclear-related sanctions sets a precedent for the future. So, despite his threats that he would not certify the deal again, it seems that if the other signatories to the deal continue supporting its implementation, President Trump will have no option but to continue with it. Of course, the best option would be for Congress not to require him to certify it every three months, thus preventing his reluctance to keep certifying it.

If there is goodwill on all sides, it is possible to discuss other contentious issues between Iran and the West under different headings. The Iranian government has repeatedly stated that it intended the nuclear deal to be the floor, not the ceiling of agreements with the West. There are many issues on which Iran can cooperate with the West, such as the war against terrorism, helping to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, and also putting pressure on Saudi Arabia to put an end to the carnage in Yemen and to reach a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

## Trump wants to destroy Iran's ability to defend itself against aggressors: Professor

### EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — A senior expert in Arab affairs who teaches international business at George Washington University is of the view that Trump in reality “wants to destroy Iran's ability to defend itself against aggressors from the region and farther afield.”

Hossein Askari tells the Tehran Times that “Iran found itself isolated and defenseless after it was invaded by Saddam Hussein”.

He also adds that “The United Nations and international law did not come to Iran's rescue! Iran cannot let itself be defenseless again.”

Following is the text of the interview:  
■ U.S. President Donald Trump will today approve the Iran nuclear deal only one more time before abandoning it if it is not changed. What are the changes that Trump wants?

A: He says he wants to ban Iran's uranium enrichment program when it is set to expire in 2025 and to curtail its ballistic missile program. But in reality he wants to destroy Iran's ability to defend itself against aggressors from the region and farther afield. So he will continue to accuse Iran of wrongdoings until he has an Iran that is defenseless. Iran has no choice but to stand firm against his bullying.  
■ The White House wants a deal with EU signatories to make restrictions on Iran's uranium enrichment permanent. Under the current deal they are set to expire in 2025. Do you think EU will accept this condition? If so, will Iran accept it?

A: Let me first address the second part of your question. I do not believe Iran will accept any new conditions. The reasons are many. To begin with, the nuclear powers have not kept their end of the bargain under the NPT (Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons). They were supposed to support peaceful activities of all signatories. Well they pick and choose and they have decided that Iran cannot be trusted. They agreed to eliminate their own nuclear arsenals over time and yet the U.S. has developed a ‘new class’ of such weapons that can be more



readily used!

They were supposed to refrain from assisting non-signatories to the NPT, yet the U.S. has rewarded at least one non-signatory, namely India. More practically, look at Libya and North Korea. When Libya gave up its program, it was invaded and a nuclear-armed North Korea gets respect and has not been attacked. I could go on but the most important reason why Iran cannot compromise is that Iran has seen that international law is highly malleable.

Iran found itself isolated and defenseless after it was invaded by Saddam Hussein. The United Nations and international law did not come to Iran's rescue! Iran cannot let itself be defenseless again. And now a U.S. that reportedly champions international law and order wants to unilaterally change an agreement it signed. Iran cannot and will not accept a permanent prohibition of enrichment in such a lawless world where might makes right.

Turning to Europe, I think that the Europeans will try to pressure Iran behind the scenes, but not publicly, to make some concessions. And if Iran does not accept, something that it should not accept, the Europeans will say that they will continue to honor the agreement. So, the EU will not go along with Trump.

■ Mr Trump also wants Iran's ballistic missile program to be addressed. Iran frequently has emphasized that ballistic missile is not related to JCPOA and will not negotiate about it. According to this, do you think that this condition meaning the end for JCPOA?

A: Again, I believe that the EU will not insist on this demand of Trump's. But you should note that Saudi Arabia has bought long-range Chinese missiles that can carry nuclear warheads. So even if the Iranian missile were for this purpose, why can others do what they want while Iran is handcuffed? Because the EU will again not go along with

Trump, I don't think that this is necessarily the end of the JCPOA.

The agreement will end if Iran does not receive the promised sanctions relief, which it has not and may not as long as the U.S. threatens companies and institutions outside the U.S. not to do business with Iran. This is the real threat, which would push Iran to abandon the agreement.

But I can also imagine conditions that would drive Iran to withdraw from the NPT. This is not as unlikely as some may think.

There may be a silver lining for Iran in Trump's opposition to the JCPOA. There is no way that the agreement could be changed in 120 days even if the parties wanted to. Trump will have to back down or if he does not and the U.S. withdraws, then Iran should insist on concessions from Europe on a number of issues.

First, they would protect their companies that did business with Iran from any and all U.S. retaliation. Second, they would protect Iran's access to SWIFT and to the international financial system generally. Third, they would reach a special trade agreement with Iran. Please note that all of this would also drive a wedge between the EU and the United States, something that would be welcomed by Russia and China.

■ What general advice do you have for Iranian leaders in the face of these developments?

A: My most important advice has been, and will continue to be, that Iran must improve its economic performance with equal opportunities for all Iranians. Faster growth with more inclusive benefits for all Iranians is Iran's urgent need. Iran must deal with the corruption that is destroying its economy. It must develop more effective institutions, including the rule of law, stronger property rights, growth enhancing rules and regulations, comprehensive and equitable system of taxation, and consistent policies. When and if Iran is strong economically, it would be a united nation and other countries would hesitate to threaten it. Iran would then be safer and more secure.

## I doubt dates in JCPOA will be changed: Matthew Bunn



### EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — Matthew Bunn, a specialist in nuclear security at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, believes that “The dates in the JCPOA were the result of hard-fought compromises. I doubt they will be changed.”

“JCPOA makes clear that Iran IS permitted to enrich uranium. With sovereign rights already established, Iran now has to make decisions on how much enrichment to have based on costs and benefits, like anything else,” Bunn tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ U.S. President Donald Trump approved the Iran nuclear deal only one more time before abandoning it if it is not changed. What are the changes that Trump emphasize on them?

A: President Trump is unsatisfied with some of the fundamental compromises made in negotiating the JCPOA. In particular, he would like the restraints on Iran's enrichment program to last much longer, and he would like restraints on Iran's ability to test long-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons.

■ The White House wants a deal with EU signatories to make restrictions on Iran's uranium enrichment permanent. Under the current deal they are set to expire in 2025. Do you think EU will accept this condition? If so, Will Iran accept it?

A: The dates in the JCPOA were the result of hard-fought compromises. I doubt they will be changed. But I think the JCPOA should be seen as the first step toward a more cooperative environment – and reaching such a cooperative environment might involve additional supplementary agreements in the future, in which all sides agree to additional steps. In the U.S.-Soviet relationship, for example, there was a SALT I nuclear arms control agreement, followed by SALT II, followed by a change of name to START, then START II, and then the Moscow Treaty, and then New START.

JCPOA makes clear that Iran IS permitted to enrich uranium. With sovereign rights already established, Iran now has to make decisions on how much enrichment to have based on costs and benefits, like anything else. My guess is that a careful analysis would conclude that Iran's national interests would be best served by spending very little on more uranium enrichment.

Most countries with nuclear energy don't bother with their own enrichment, because the commercial market is highly reliable, other countries have invested for decades in highly efficient technology that would be hard to match, and it's much cheaper and easier to buy enrichment on the market than to spend billions trying to compete in what's already an oversupplied market where nobody is making much profit.

No nuclear power reactor has ever been forced to shut down because it couldn't get fuel from the international market. If Iran concludes it doesn't actually need very much enrichment, it might conclude that there's room for future compromises on enrichment issues.

■ Mr Trump also wants Iran's ballistic missile programme to be addressed. Iran frequently has emphasized that ballistic missile is not related to JCPOA and will not negotiate about it. According to this, do you think that this condition meaning the end for JCPOA?

A: I think Iran was wise to announce that for now, it had no need for missiles with ranges greater than 2000 kilometers. It's my hope that in the future, Iran and the P5+1 can come to an arrangement that protects Iran's legitimate self-defense interests but restricts the kinds of missiles that could carry nuclear weapons to long distances. Such missiles are a real concern not just to the United States but to European countries and others. One of the factors creating the dangerous crisis with North Korea, for example, is North Korea's relentless testing of very long-range missiles intended to carry nuclear weapons.

## Trump demand limits on Iran enrichment program is unrealistic: ex-White House official



By Javad Heirannia

**TEHRAN** — A former assistant director for national security in the White House Office of Science and Technology says “I think that the EU position is that Iran would not accept indefinite limits on its enrichment program and that Trump's demand is therefore unrealistic.”

“Iran's unilateral decision to limit the range of its ballistic missiles to 2,000 kilometers was very wise and important,” Frank N. von Hippel tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview. Following is the full text of the interview:

■ U.S. President Donald Trump approved the Iran nuclear deal only one more time before abandoning it if it is not changed. What are the changes that Trump emphasize on them?

A: According to the New York Times, Trump and some Republicans in Congress would like the duration of the limits on Iran's enrichment capacity extended indefinitely. ➡ 13



# Germany's future: Merkel without Merkelism

By Paul Hockenos

Amid all of the uncertainty of Germany's laborious search for a new government, the one certainty is that, in the end, Angela Merkel will be Chancellor again.

Yet the cornerstones of Merkel's style and principles -- described in Germany jokingly as Merkelism -- have been so eroded that the Chancellor's final term will be a feeble incarnation of the first three.

The Chancellor is greatly weakened. Fierce attacks on her person, politics and lordly bearing come not just from the opposition -- now bolstered by far-right populists -- but also from within her government and even her own party.

This may unnerve some Germans, who have grown used to the simplicities of life under Merkelism, and cause to distress the Chancellor herself, who is unused to it. But, sanguinely, it will rejuvenate politics in the republic after a long hiatus.

Merkelism is less of an ideology than the way Angela Merkel rules. While she is indisputably in charge -- even authoritarian in her command

of her Cabinet and party -- she governs not with a big-picture political vision but rather as the final arbiter of differences and disputes between her ministers and the wings within her Christian Democrats.

Merkel is never hasty, waiting and testing public sentiment as long as possible before making a decision -- and then when she does, it is final, irrefutable and beyond question. «There is no alternative,» Merkel says, which until now much of the German public and her conservative party have taken her word, and dutifully fallen in line.

## ■ No alternative to Merkel

Another tenet of Merkelism is that there is no alternative to Merkel herself. This applies to the country -- indeed her own party, the Christian Democratic Union, which has no rival of its size -- but also within the CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union.

Over the years, Merkel has ruthlessly eliminated one (usually male) contender after another, leaving her without a challenger -- or successor -- in

the party. This is why, no matter her diminished popularity and clumsiness in forming a government, Merkel will be the next Chancellor as surely as she is the current one.

But today is not like the aftermath of the 2009 or 2013 votes, when both Merkel and Merkelism were as solid as the Rock of Gibraltar.

The Chancellor and her party crawled away from the autumn 2017 vote badly battered: chalking up the CDU's worst showing since its first election in 1949, the dawn of the republic.

The CDU/CSU's 32.8% tally was down almost 10% from 2013 (41.5%) -- and much worse than the numbers alone, for the first time in postwar Germany, a xenophobic nationalist party, Alternative for Germany, or AfD, roared into the Bundestag with 12.6% of the vote.

Much of the AfD's support had shifted over from the Christian Democrats' right wing, which has been profoundly unhappy with the conservative Chancellor's more liberal turns.

Despite her diminished standing, Merkel (who

else?) led the first post-vote coalition talks in October and November between four parties -- one of the few possible coalition options in light of the CDU/CSU's miserable performance. But the old magic of Merkelism had obviously worn off: The talks collapsed after almost five weeks, with many observers blaming Merkel's hands-off approach.

Since then, as the Social Democrats deliberated over opening negotiations on forming another grand coalition, the Chancellor's popularity numbers have dropped further, and ever more Christian Democrats are fleeing the party.

If there were leadership alternatives to Merkel in either Christian Democratic party, their names would at least surface and cases be made for and against them. But not only has Merkel drained the pool of serious competitors, she has refused to groom a successor.

## ■ Conservative politicians

All of the possible conservative politicians who might harbor larger ambitions are years from being ready to take over: Either they lack experience

or support in the party or sufficient popularity.

Take the defense minister, Ursula von der Leyen, who has held three ministerial posts, but is even more liberal than Merkel, and thus wholly unsuitable for party conservatives. The conservatives' hopeful is Jens Spahn, a deputy minister dealing with finance.

Yet at 37, he is young and untested in the big leagues. Moreover, a gay person with a loud mouth isn't what Germany's Christian Conservatives had hoped for after languishing for so many years under Merkel.

In the next administration, as well as in the CDU party structures, Merkel is going to have to give figures such as Spahn meaningful posts that come with real political power. By 2019 or 2020 at the latest, she will probably have to hand over party leadership to a junior colleague, which would at least make her preference for a successor clear. But the party as a whole will vote on it, and she can expect the knives to come out and the warfare to be fierce. ➤13

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# Challenges of parenting twins and multiples

**L I F E** The wonder of twins and multiples begins at birth. With two or more healthy bundles in your arms, what does life look like afterward?

As a new parent, dealing with a newborn is daunting task let alone twin or multiple(s).

In such conditions, emotional help and money backing seems more urgent.

With having two or more at the same time, you and your husband are not enough. You should count on the help of others like a nurse, grandparents or part-time baby sitter.

Having two or more infants bring multiple joy to the family, however, one should consider the added expenses as well.

Where you live, your family income, and whether you have health insurance or not are crucial in your expenses for children. Some expenses like having an appropriate nursery for more than one child is one time, however, taking care of babies other needs are ongoing for years and will grow in quantity as the babies grow up.

## ■ Multiple birth rate in Iran

In Iran, the expenses for diaper, formula, clothing and supplement costs about three million rials (about \$70) a month. The cost of daycare will be added for working moms.

Hence, three newborns costs at least 210 dollars during a month, which roughly equals the national minimum wage of 930,000 rials (about \$215) set in the current Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017-March 2018).

Iran's National Organization for Civil Registration recorded 801 sets of multiple births during the past Iranian calendar year including 774 triple sets, 24 quadruplet sets and three quintuplet sets and more.

Tehran, Qom and Isfahan are on the top of list for quadruplets.

Bonyad Alavi, a fundraising charity, is a state-run organization, which helps families who have twins and multiples.

Affiliated to the Islamic Revolution Mostazafan Foundation, Bonyad Alavi supports 398 families with triples or more.

"The charity funds 50.55 billion rials (about \$1.1m) to parents with multiple sets to buy diaper, formula and fund for buying and repairing their houses," the managing director of Bonyad Alavai Musa Barzegar said.



He said that underprivileged families are provided with free formula and diaper for two years.

## ■ Multiple birth babies worldwide

The world record for high-order or multiple births, notably twins, belongs to the Yoruba race. For decades, it has been established that the South Western zone of the country perpetually holds the gold medal for the highest number of twin births worldwide. Statistically, Igboora in Oyo State has what is arguably the highest incidence of twin births – a fact documented far back as the 1960s. From Igboora, the land of twins, to Ekiti, Ondo and Ebonyi States, the story is the same.

Nigeria's first known multiple birth babies were sextuplets. Historical and medical records show that their birth dates back over 110 years ago to 1907 when an unnamed

19-year-old woman from the South East region was delivered of six babies in a row after a short labor.

Although it is not known what their male/female sex ratio was or how many of the babies eventually survived, the event elicited drama and a graphic insight as to just how demanding all multiple births can be.

The world record for high-order or multiple births, notably twins, belongs to the Yoruba race. For decades, it has been established that the South Western zone of the country perpetually holds the gold medal for the highest number of twin births worldwide. Statistically, Igboora in Oyo State has what is arguably the highest incidence of twin births – a fact documented far back as the 1960s. From Igboora, the land of twins, to Ekiti, Ondo and Ebonyi States, the story is the same.

## Easy ways to be healthier than ever in 2018

### ■ Cook more

Homemade meals tend to be healthier than take-out because you know what's in them, plus you're not tempted to order something deliciously unhealthy that catches your eye. You can ensure you get the protein, fiber, and nutrient-rich veggies your body needs to run and can limit your fat, sugar, and salt intake, all of which put you at greater risk for obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.

If you're short on time, invest in a Crockpot slow cooker for effortless one-pot meals—by the time you get home from work, dinner is ready.

### ■ Schedule all your medical appointments at once

Make a list of all your doctor and dental appointments at the beginning of the year,

then schedule them right away. "This way they are on your calendar and it sets the intention that taking care of your health is a priority," says Josie Znidarsic, DO, a family medicine physician at the Cleveland Clinic's Wellness Institute in Cleveland, Ohio. "Otherwise, it gets easy to postpone appointments." Find out the secrets to getting the most out of your doctor's appointment.

### ■ Create a sleep sanctuary

Snooze better by revamping your bedroom. Make sure it's cool, quiet, and dark. Ban electronics (yes, even TV!) about 30 minutes before bed; the blue light emitted can cause insomnia by reducing the amount of sleep hormone melatonin your body produces. Add a few drops of lavender essential oil to a diffuser; studies

show this scent promotes relaxation.

### ■ Harness positivity

"We often get so busy that we lose sight of our emotional well-being, which can lead to stress or negativity. Commit to doing a daily emotional check-in with yourself," says Kaiser. Choose a time—when you wake up, midday, or right before bed—and focus on how you feel, even if it's sad or angry. "Once you have assessed how you're feeling, think of something that makes you happy to shift your mood to a more positive place," she says.

### ■ Make over your digital habits

Disconnecting from your smartphone or laptop not only allows you to connect more with those around you, it can also prevent uncomfortable side effects of staring at a

screen, such as blurred vision, headaches, neck pain, or irritated eyes. Limit social media use to one hour a day, resist checking e-mail after hours, or designate one night a week as a "no phone zone."

### ■ Commit to exercise

Getting the recommended 150 minutes of moderate activity per week doesn't mean you have to spend hours in the gym. "You can spread this out over the whole week or do a few days of longer activity," says Dr. Znidarsic. "It can be walking in your neighborhood or even at the store. Dance in your living room or enlist a friend to try a new class with you. Exercise is good for both your mood and physical well being."

(Source: Reader's Digest)

## Colorful Iran: Ushar ritual in Hormozgan



**L I F E** In the southern Iranian province of Hormozgan, owners of Lenj vessels perform Ushar ritual when they want to launch the vessels for the first time.

Lenj vessels are traditionally hand-built and are used by inhabitants of the northern coast of the Persian Gulf for sea journeys, trading, fishing and pearl diving.

They usually launch the Lenjes on Saturdays or Mondays during Ushar ritual, which includes animal sacrifice, choral singing of local folk and special praying.

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 organize and keep photos?



Rather than store photos in a shoebox where they may get creased or torn, place the photos from a single year in an 8 1/2" by 11" manila envelope, write the year on the envelope, and place the envelopes in a corrugated-cardboard storage box. You can keep 10 or 12 years' worth of photos in one storage box.

Use collage photo frames to display se-

lected photos from the entire year. Choosing the photos can be a family project that brings back memories of events from the year.

Look for photo albums that have acid-free pages; the acids in ordinary paper can cause photographs to deteriorate.

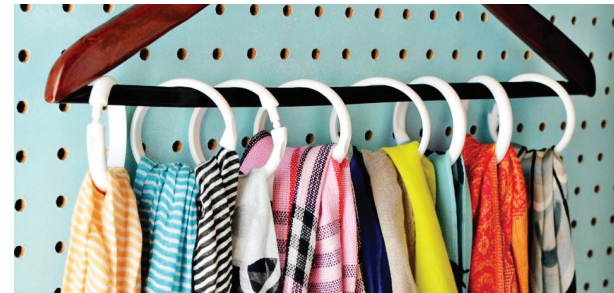
Memory books and scrapbooks are the latest creative way to display photos.

(Source: diynetwork.com)

## Creative organization hacks for your home

Creating a welcoming space takes a combination of style and tidiness. Being organized is important because clutter has a way of spoiling decor and making a room feel drab. But, contrary to what home stores say, you don't need a lot of money to get your house in order.

You can add style to your home and keep it organized while saving yourself some hard earned cash. The most important thing to remember is not everything needs to be used for its intended purpose. These home organization hacks will help you think outside the box the next time you have a pile of household items to sort through.



### ■ Use shower rings to hang tank tops in the closet

Tank tops have a tendency to pile up in any drawer or closet since they are an inexpensive staple to most wardrobes. Want to keep them in order? All you need is one clothes hanger and a package of shower rings that you can pick up at the Dollar Tree. Adhere rings to the hanger and drop the tank top straps into the shower ring before shutting.

Don't limit yourself to just tank tops; This shower ring hack can also be used to organize scarfs, ties, necklaces, belts and hats.



### ■ Recycle tin cans into pencil holders for the office

Recreating tin cans into something new is not a new concept, but it is a hack that has endless possibilities. Depending on your decor aesthetic, you can either decoupage, paint, embellish or leave the tin cans in their current state.

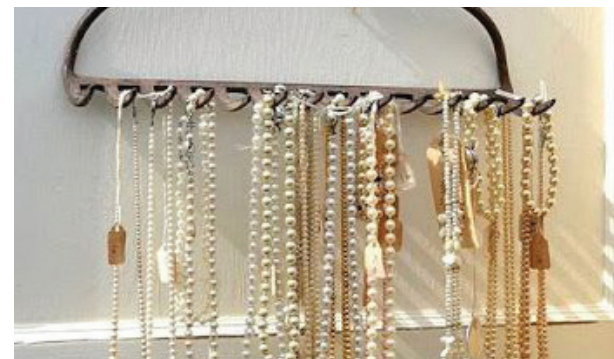
We like using tin cans as pencil and pen holders in the office, but that's just the beginning. Organize makeup brushes, toothbrushes, art brushes or utensils. Need extra organization in the basement? Use tin cans for nails, screws and small accessories.



### ■ Organize cords behind your tv with old bread tags

The more technology we introduce into our home, the more cords we have to keep straight. While some things are wireless, most electronics connected to your TV are not. If you've ever had to go behind your entertainment console, you'll know how easy it is to be stumped as to which cord is which. Organize them for good using old bread tags.

This home organization hack also works well behind your computer in the office. Need other ways to keep your cords straight? Clip some binder clips to...



### ■ Display jewelry in a bedroom on a vintage rake

Necklaces need to be organized in a hanging fashion so you can avoid stubborn knots and tangles. But there's no need to go out and buy an expensive jewelry organizer. Consider repurposing something you already have, like an antique rake in your garage.

Antique rakes have been used for a lot of organizing missions. Consider hanging cooking utensils, garden tools or paint brushes.

(Source: thespruce.com)



## 101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

### #25. Do volunteer work

Volunteering is a wonderful way to give back to the world.

Volunteer work is one of the best ways to expose yourself to a new medium of helping other people. There are tons of volunteer work out there, from assisting the elderly at the old folks' home, working with delinquent kids, being a mentor to kids at orphanages, helping out at animal shelters, beach cleanups, and so on.

Volunteer work doesn't have to be some grandiose act. As long as you are offering a part of yourself pro bono to the world (be it in terms of skills, knowledge, time, effort, or money), you are in fact volunteering.

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

(Source: personalexcellence.co)



## #IRANIANLIFESTYLE



A number of setar instruments are hung on a wall of a store in the city of Mashhad, Khorasan Razavi province, northeastern Iran (Instagram/@Shahresaz)



## Ancient China: 1,000-year-old royal palace discovered

Archaeologists have discovered the ruins of an ancient palace that served as the summer retreat for the elite members of the Liao Dynasty. To escape the oppressive heat, each year from mid-April to mid-July the Liao emperors would move the royal family, along with palace officials, into the mountains of what is now China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, according to Chinese state news agency Xinhua.



The Temple of Heavenly Peace in Beijing, the oldest and one of the only surviving remnants of Beijing's Liao Dynasty capital.

Archaeologists discovered more than 100 structural components at the site in Duolun County, including glazed tiles, pottery and copper nails, according to Xinhuanet. They recorded the foundations of 12 buildings—more than 2,500 square feet in total. Ge Zhiyong, a researcher with the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Institute of Archaeology, said that artifacts excavated at the site appear to date the palace to the mid-Liao Dynasty, according to Xinhua.

The palace's discovery should give archaeologists new insights into both the architecture and cultural customs of the Liao Dynasty, Ge told Xinhua. Large-scale excavations are expected to begin at the site.

The Liao Dynasty rose from the Khitan, the nomadic people of what corresponds to modern-day Mongolia and parts of northern China, Russia and Korea. It was founded by a Kaghan (a Khitan emperor) known as Abaoji, according to International Business Times. The dynasty came to power in either 907 A.D. or, depending on historical interpretation of what constitutes the dynasty's early days, in 916 A.D., when Abaoji officially declared himself as ruler. The dynasty excelled in art, music and poetry, according to Ancient Origins. In 1125, the Liao Dynasty fell to the rising Jin Dynasty, which would reign for more than a century afterwards.

Though the dynasty began with no written language for their "proto-Mongol" spoken dialect, its members developed two kinds of written scripts which, despite containing similarities to Chinese characters, have yet to be fully deciphered, according to the non-profit Asia Society.

They expanded aggressively, but to retain the "purity" of the Imperial family, ruling emperors couldn't marry from any foreign populations the Khitan conquered, according to Asia Society. However, the women who were part of the Imperial family may have had more political influence than their Chinese counterparts at the time. At least three Liao empresses have been historically documented as wielding "tremendous power" and dictating court policies, according to Asia Society.

The dynasty was the first foreign one to merge its original nomadic structure of conquest and cultural assimilation with prevailing Chinese style of government at the time, according to Asia Society, a strategy later emulated by the Mongol hordes—who came to power after they conquered the Jin dynasty.

(Source: Newsweek)



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Pre-Hispanic City and National Park of Palenque

The archaeological site of Palenque in the state of Chiapas is one of the most outstanding Classic period sites of the Maya area, known for its exceptional and well conserved architectural and sculptural remains.



The elegance and craftsmanship of the construction, as well as the lightness of the sculpted reliefs illustrating Mayan mythology, attest to the creative genius of this civilization.

The city was founded during the Late Preclassic, which corresponds to the beginning of the Christian era. Its first inhabitants probably migrated from other sites in the nearby region.

They always shared the cultural features which define the Maya culture, as well as a level of development that allowed them to adapt to the natural environment. After several centuries, ca. 500 CE, the city rose to be a powerful capital within a regional political unit. Without a buffer zone the total area of the archeological site is 1780 hectares, 09 areas and 49 square meters and 1,400 buildings have been recorded, of which only about 10% have been explored.

Palenque has been the object of interest of numerous travelers, explorers and researchers since the 18th century. It illustrates one of the most significant achievements of mankind in the American continent. The ancient city has a planned urban layout, with monumental edifices and some of the largest clearings found in all the Maya area.

The architecture of the site is integrated in the landscape, creating a city of unique beauty.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Chalous Road not for the faint of heart

By Marjan Golpira

From northern Karaj the very popular and long Chalous Road will give you an unforgettable journey to the rich greenery of northern Iran where cities lie on the coasts of the Caspian Sea.

The winding, sharp bends of Chalous Road embraces travelers with fresh crisp air and gives them a thrilling, and sometimes scary, break from the smog and chaos of crowded Tehran.

As a piece of history, Chalous Road, also less well known as Road 59, was constructed during Qajar era by the local people with very primitive hand tools.

The 160 km road crossing and crawling up the Alborz Mountains offers beautiful landscape, waterfalls and springs. Each season presents its own special beauty along the road.

The mesmerizing view changes as you travel on Chalous; from trees lining up on both sides of the pavement to getting engulfed and surrounded by the Alborz, and sometimes having dramatic views of the Karaj River, which runs along part of the road.

As you drive farther away from the city, you get the most picturesque view of nature, fluffy cotton ball clouds appear in the sky and the air cools as the temperature drops with increasing altitude.

Another breathtaking view and tourist attraction of the road is Karaj dam or Amir Kabir dam, 23 km from the city of Karaj, and the shining, turquoise color waters of a lake right behind it.

The road between Tehran and the Caspian Sea has become a destination in itself for many Tehranis who take it just to escape the hustle and bustle of the city or for a relaxing day out with family and friends.



Numerous traditional restaurants and tea houses, old and new in all sizes, are set by the Karaj River to welcome visitors and hungry travelers for a good time.

Reza, a convenience store owner, whose six generations has lived in the area and for four generations have run the store, calls Chalous Road "home" where his house, which takes 60 steps to climb to, is almost right next door to his business.

The middle-aged owner makes most of his income during summer time because in colder seasons fewer people travel on the road and those who do mostly go skiing in Dizin, one of the largest ski resorts in the Alborz mountain range, near Tehran and also the city of Karaj.

Reza recommends that travelers take the journey on the road on weekdays; otherwise they should expect traffic jams on weekends and holidays.

Whatever reason any particular traveler cites for a journey on Chalous Road, the ribbon of pavement into the remote high mountains demands attention and provokes

emotional responses including excitement and even fear at times, and a bit of dizziness along with it.



## Trump's tourism slump: U.S. slips in global ranking of international visitors

Call it the Trump Slump. The number of international tourists heading to the U.S. continues to fall—to the point that America is no longer the world's second most popular country to visit.

Spain now holds the number two spot, with the U.S. dropping to third. (France remains atop the list.) Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy announced the shift earlier this week in Italy.

According to Rajoy, 82 million people visited Spain in

2017. The U.S. number was 78 million.

It's a trend experts saw coming. In the first half of 2017, the Commerce Department released figures showing that the number of international visitors had fallen by nearly 700,000—a loss of nearly \$2.7 billion in spending.

Central to the issue is Donald Trump's ongoing comments about immigration, making international visitors feel less welcome.

"The [immigration] crackdown and the image of the U.S.

as an inhospitable place to anybody who's not a U.S. citizen is a byproduct of what is going on," David Leopold, partner and chairman of immigration law at Ulmer & Berne in Ohio, told Newsweek.

Tourism is a critical industry in the U.S. According to SelectUSA, the travel and tourism industry generated over \$1.5 trillion in economic output in 2016. And one out of every 18 Americans is employed directly or indirectly in a travel or tourism-related job. (Source: Fortune)

## How to check the safety of a charter airline



"People believe air operators are totally checked out and connected to and insured by the cruise ships or tour people," he said, but that is not always the case. Mr. Alexander said that travelers on charters they have not booked themselves should always ask the cruise line, "What have you done to assure yourself this is a safe and experienced operation?"

Air travel has never been safer than it was in the year just past with just two fatal accidents among commercial airlines worldwide. Still, risk varies by region. The Middle East and North Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean and the Commonwealth of Independent States in Eurasia have the highest accident rates; between 2.8 and 5.8 accidents per million flights. That's three to five times the rate in North Asia and North America, according to statistics compiled by the International Air Transport Association.

Many factors contribute to the disparity including how pilots, mechanics, ground personnel and air traffic controllers are hired and trained, how airplanes are maintained and the state of the runways, radar, weather forecasting and communication systems. Governmental oversight is critical, safety specialists said.

As a former air accident investigator and the author of two books on the subject, I am often told by people that they assume regulation is the same around the world, but that is not the case.

"Oversight can be anywhere from pretty good in the U.S. and Europe while in many other places it's a crapshoot," Mr. Alexander said.

Travelers need to keep safety in perspective. A government not controlling hazards in aviation is probably equally lax on other modes of public transport. Statistically speaking, long distance commercial aviation is safer than driving or any other form of transportation, according to the I.A.T.A.

Here, some ideas for checking out air charter services.

Inspect the facility Aviation requires attention to detail and an aversion to hazards. Consider it a warning if you arrive at the airport and the appearance of the company, the airplane or the flight crew doesn't seem professional. Michele Markarian, the director of strategic accounts for the website Air Charter Guide and an experienced traveler, once walked away from a flight she had booked because the airplane didn't look up to snuff.

Allow extra time Travelers may be tempted

to set aside their worries if rushing to the next destination. Having extra time to find an alternative will alleviate the pressure of getting on a plane you don't feel comfortable about.

Check references Call the company and ask for references. Trip Advisor also has an airline review page, and a Twitter search using a hashtag with the airline name can also be illuminating. Already there? Frank Craven of Air Charter Guide recommends asking locals for their opinion by saying, "I'm about to fly with ABC, what's their reputation?" They might tell you, 'My drunk uncle is one of the pilots.' So asking for information is good."

What does the United States government think? The Federal Aviation Administration's online International Aviation Safety Assessment contains a list of countries that meet international aviation safety and oversight standards. The list is comprehensive but only includes countries whose airlines are permitted to fly to the United States.

See the paperwork There are three documents that all charter airlines ought to be able to show you, according to Wyvern's Mr. Dawley: its air operations certificate, its insurance certificate and the pilots' qualifications — all should be available at the airline office.

Network protection Any domestic or regional carrier, including those that offer charter flights that are associated with an airline alliance like Oneworld or Star Alliance, will have to pass a safety audit; if it has an intercarrier ticketing arrangement, the major carrier, is responsible for auditing their operations, according to John Darbo, a retired safety manager for a United States airline who is now a private safety consultant. Recently, I.A.T.A. started a review process for small planes. The few companies participating can be found online.

Google it Aviation's thriving online community makes it possible to find out nearly everything you want to know about airplanes. The Air Charter Guide offers information about planes, pilots, operators and a glossary of terms.

(Source: The New York Times)



# A 94-million-year-old warning about the ocean's future

The ocean is losing its oxygen. Last week, in a sweeping analysis in the journal *Science*, scientists put it starkly: Over the past 50 years, the volume of the ocean with no oxygen at all has quadrupled, while oxygen-deprived swaths of the open seas have expanded by the size of the European Union. The culprits are familiar: global warming and pollution.

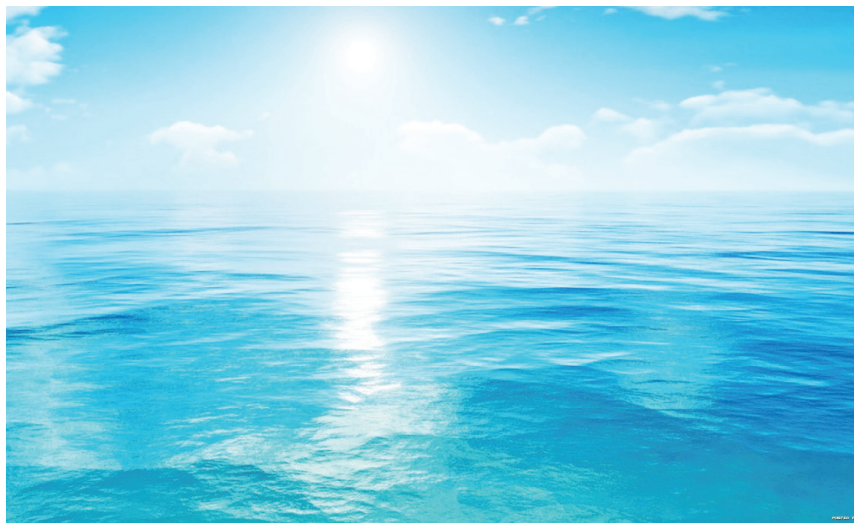
Warmer seawater both holds less oxygen and turbocharges the worldwide consumption of oxygen by microorganisms. Meanwhile, agricultural runoff and sewage drives suffocating algae blooms.

The analysis builds on a growing body of research pointing to increasingly sick seas pummeled by the effluent of civilization. In one landmark paper published last year, a research team led by the German oceanographer Sunke Schmidt quantified for the first time just how much oxygen human civilization has already drained from the oceans.

## ■ Floating palaces of ice

Compiling more than 50 years of disparate data, gathered on research cruises, from floating palaces of ice in the arctic to twilit coral reefs in the South Pacific, Schmidt's team calculated that the Earth's oceans had lost 2 percent of their oxygen since 1960.

Two percent might not sound that dramatic, but small changes in the oxygen content of the Earth's oceans and atmosphere in the ancient past are thought to be responsible



## Dramatically declining oxygen in the oceans like we see today is a feature of many of the worst mass extinctions in Earth history.

for some of the most profound events in the history of life. Some paleontologists have pointed to rising oxygen as the fuse for the supernova of biology at the Cambrian explosion 543 million years ago.

Similarly, the fever-dream world of the

later Carboniferous period is thought to be the product of an oxygen spike, which subsidized the lifestyles of preposterous animals, like dragonflies the size of seagulls. On the other hand, dramatically declining oxygen in the oceans like we see today is a feature

of many of the worst mass extinctions in earth history.

Nielsen is one of a group of scientists probing a series of strange ancient catastrophes when the ocean lost much of its oxygen for insight into our possible future in a suffocating world. He has studied one such biotic crisis in particular that might yet prove dreadfully relevant. Though little known outside the halls of university labs, it was one of the most severe crises of the past 100 million years. It's known as Oceanic Anoxic Event 2.

## ■ Severe ocean changes

The Mesozoic era, stretching from 252 to 66 million years ago, is sometimes mistakenly thought of as sort of long and uneventful Pax Dinosauria — a stable, if alien world. But the period was occasionally punctuated by severe climate and ocean changes, and even disaster.

Ninety-four million years ago, while the supersonic asteroid that would eventually incinerate dinosaurs was still silently boomer-ang around the Solar System, a gigantic pulse of carbon dioxide rose from the bottom of the ocean. The Earth warmed, the seas rose, and oxygen-deprived waters spread.

The smothering seas mercilessly culled through plankton, bizarre bivalves, and squid-like creatures whose tentacles long dangled from stately whorled shells.

(Source: The Atlantic)

## Genetic analysis can improve depression therapy

The failure of drugs such as SSRIs, used to treat depression, can be a result of genetic variations in patients. Variations within the gene that encodes the CYP2C19 enzyme results in extreme differences in the levels of escitalopram achieved in patients, according to a new study published in *The American Journal of Psychiatry*.

Prescribing the dose of escitalopram based on a patient's specific genetic constitution would greatly improve therapeutic outcomes. The study was conducted at Karolinska Institutet in Sweden in association with researchers at Diakonhjemmet Hospital in Oslo, Norway.

Pharmaceutical treatment of depression commonly makes use of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) of which escitalopram is the most frequently administered clinically. However, escitalopram therapy is currently limited by the fact that some patients do not respond well to the drug, while others develop adverse reactions requiring discontinuation of treatment.

## ■ Drug therapy

In order to individualize drug therapy, researchers are attempting to establish genetic biomarkers that can predict an individual's response to drugs.

In a recent study, it was discovered that variation in the gene encoding the enzyme responsible for escitalopram metabolism (CYP2C19) is very important in this respect.

Individuals with a variant of the gene promoting increased enzyme expression had blood levels of escitalopram too low to impact the depression symptoms, whereas patients with a defective CYP2C19 gene reached drug levels which were too high. Overall, one third of the 2,087 study participants achieved escitalopram blood levels that were either too high or too low.

Interestingly, the researchers found that 30 per cent of the patients carrying gene variants causing excessive or inadequate enzyme levels switched to other drugs within one year, in contrast with only 10 to 12 per cent of patients carrying the common gene.

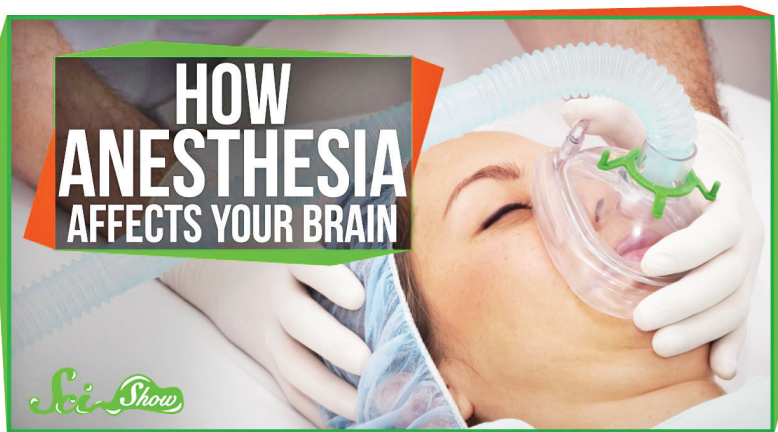
## ■ Clinical value

"Our study shows that genotyping of CYP2C19 could be of considerable clinical value in individualizing doses of escitalopram so that a better all-round antidepressant effect could be achieved for the patients," says Professor Magnus Ingelman-Sundberg at Karolinska Institutet's Department of Physiology and Pharmacology who led the study together with Professor Espen Molden. "Because CYP2C19 is involved in the metabolism of many different SSRIs, the finding is also applicable to other types of antidepressants."

The study was financed with grants from the Swedish Brain Fund, the Swedish Research Council and Horizon 2020 (the EU framework programme for research and innovation). Co-author Espen Molden has declared a fee from the company Lundbeck for running psychopharmacology courses for doctors; the other authors have reported no commercial interests.

(Source: eurekaalert.org)

## Scientists just changed our understanding of how anesthesia messes with the brain



It's crazy to think that we still don't quite understand the mechanism behind one of the most common medical interventions - general anesthesia.

But researchers in Australia just got a step closer by discovering that one of the most commonly used anesthetic drugs doesn't just put us to sleep; it also disrupts communication between brain cells.

The team investigated the drug propofol, a super-popular option for surgeries worldwide. A potent sedative, the drug is thought to put us to sleep through its effect on the GABA neurotransmitter system, the main regulator of our sleep-and-wake cycles in the brain.

## ■ Anesthetic feels

But anyone who's been "put under" will know that waking up from a general anesthetic feels rather different from your usual morning grogginess.

On top of that, some people can experience serious side-effects, so scientists have been trying to figure out what else the drugs might be doing in the brain.

Using live neuron cell samples from rats and fruit flies, the researchers were able to track neurotransmitter activity thanks to a super-resolution microscope, and discovered that propofol messes with a key protein that nerve cells use to communicate with each other.

This protein, called syntaxin1A, isn't just found in animal models - people have it, too.

"Every neuron communicates with other neurons by way of syntaxin1A-mediated neurotransmission, which is highly conserved from worms to humans," the team

writes in the study.

And it looks like the anesthetic drug puts the brakes on this protein, making otherwise normal brain cell connections sluggish, at least for a while.

"We found that propofol restricts the movement of (syntaxin1A), required at the synapses of all neurons. This restriction leads to decreased communication between neurons in the brain," says lead author of the study, Ph.D. student Adekunle Bademosi from Queensland Brain Institute (QBI) at the University of Queensland.

The researchers think this disruption could be key to how propofol allows for pain-free surgery to take place - first it knocks us out as a normal sleeping pill would, and then takes things up a notch by disrupting brain connectivity.

The team's results are a significant step up in what we know about the workings of general anesthesia - a long-standing medical mystery.

## ■ Unresolved mysteries

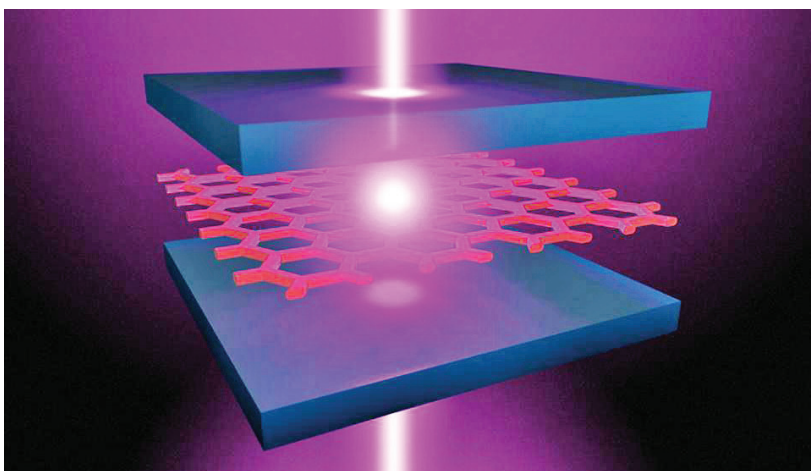
"It is indeed a 180-year-old question, one of the unresolved mysteries in medicine," senior author of the study said.

"I think it has been a hard problem to solve because our hypotheses for explaining general anesthesia have largely paralleled our growing understanding of how the brain works."

To be able to track down the movements of a protein in the synapses - the connecting points between nerve cells - scientists needed to know how this synaptic process even works, a discovery that was only awarded a Nobel Prize as recently as 2013.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

## 'Mind-bending' negative mass device reveals new way to create lasers



Physicists have designed the first-ever device to create particles with charged negative mass. The breakthrough could lead to an entirely new way to generate laser light using only a tiny amount of energy.

The success hinged on making a device that allowed for the creation of strange particles called polaritons.

For the device, researchers at the University of Rochester positioned two mirrors to form an 'optical microcavity.' Inside that space, light is held at different colors of the spectrum depending on how the mirrors are arranged, according to a press release from the University of Rochester.

The researchers outfitted the microcavity with a semiconductor made from two chemical elements, one that is metallic and one that is not. This particular semiconductor was about the width of an atom, which is more than a million times smaller than a human hair. The semiconductor was strategically placed to interact with the trapped light.

## ■ Tiny exciton particles

This interaction generated tiny exciton particles from the semiconductor that then combined with photons from the light. This mixing formed new, hybrid particles called polaritons, some of which have negative mass.

A paper describing the research was published in the scientific journal *Nature Physics*.

Negative mass is hard to grasp mentally — and also physically. It's a matter that acts the exact opposite of however you'd assume it would. Anything an object

would be expected to do when some kind of force is applied, an object with negative mass does the inverse.

"That's a kind of mind-bending thing to think about," corresponding author Nick Vamivakas said in the press release, "because if you try to push or pull it, it will go in the opposite direction from what your intuition would tell you." Such matter is part of the theory behind how wormholes might work.

## ■ Negative mass

But these properties don't negate the more familiar laws of physics. "People have been asking me if 'negative mass' means instead of falling because of gravity the device would float. That's not what this means," Vamivakas, an associate professor of quantum optics and quantum physics at Rochester's Institute of Optics, told *Newsweek*. "Negative mass is a property of the particles within the material. The material still has mass; if I take my hand off it, it'll fall to the floor."

The physicists believe polaritons could lead to cheap, efficient methods for conducting electricity. Because the bizarre particles they've created have charges associated with them, they can be manipulated to push and pull an electric field.

"We want to push the envelope of how efficient things can be," Vamivakas said. "The particles are somewhat light-like, so they move around faster in a material than normal electrons. We're trying to come up with ways to make switches, to use negative-mass particles to turn things on and off in a clever way."

(Source: Newsweek)

## Self-healing robot muscles may revolutionize prosthetic limbs for amputees

Robotic muscles that can heal from electrical damage hold potential in revolutionizing prosthetics. What are its properties that make it comparable to human muscles and nerves? Figures from the Amputee Coalition show that there are nearly 2 million people in the United States who live with limb loss.

About 185,000 amputations also occur in the country each year mainly due to vascular diseases, trauma, and cancer.

Artificial limbs, or prosthetics, make it possible for these people to do activities that they may no longer be able to do. Now, a new technology may revolutionize the prosthetic limbs that amputees depend on to function more independently.

Researchers have developed robotic muscles that are flexible but strong. Unlike other robotic devices, these soft and powerful artificial muscles can also sense their own movements just like human muscles and nerves.

Best of all, it does not cost an arm and a leg to produce. Researchers said that it costs only 10 cents to make making it a promising technology for amputees who rely on prosthetic limbs.

Researchers were able to demonstrate the ability of the muscles called the "Hydraulically-amplified Self-healing Electrostatic" actuators, or HASEL actuators, to power mechanical arm while simultaneously sensing position.

It comes as no surprise that the device holds promise in the field of prosthetics. Christoph Keplinger, from the University of Colorado Boulder, and colleagues who work on the technology said that biological muscles served as a model for HASEL actuators.

"We draw our inspiration from the astonishing capabilities of biological muscle," said Keplinger. "Just like biological muscle, HASEL actuators can reproduce the adaptability of an octopus arm, the speed of a hummingbird and the strength of an elephant."

(Source: Tech Times)

## Ford Ojo Commuter Scooter might be the smallest vehicle

The latest vehicle to wear Ford's iconic Blue Oval badge isn't as fast as a Mustang, and it can't haul cargo like an F-150, but it is a lot easier to park. Debuting at CES 2018, the Ford Ojo Commuter Scooter is a Ford-branded version of an electric scooter from Ojo Electric.

This two-wheeled conveyance is essentially a Ford-badged version of the existing Ojo Commuter Scooter. It has a range of 25 miles per charge, a top speed of 20 mph, and an aluminum frame that can support up to 300 pounds. Its 500-watt electric motor provides enough power to handle grades up to 18 percent, according to Ojo, and front and rear disc brakes should provide plenty of stopping power for descents.

An onboard charger can plug into any standard 110-volt household outlet, and the scooter has a USB charging port for your phone as well. Other notable features include dual Bluetooth speakers, LED front and rear lights, and a key fob with alarm. The Ford-specific elements are limited to badging and special colors, including Race Red, Lightning Blue, and Ingot Silver, plus racing stripes.

The Ford Ojo Commuter Scooter starts at \$2,199. Ojo plans to begin "pre-sales" in the United States and Europe through its website and select retailers soon. It's planning a special version for select Ford dealerships, which will appear in early spring.

The company is making efforts to expand beyond making and selling cars, dabbling in everything from bike sharing to a shuttle service called Chariot. In a press release, Matt Monroe, Ford's marketing manager of Global Brand Licensing, said the Ojo "allows us to offer our customers versatile electric transportation around the globe."

(Source: Digital Trends)



## 'Breakthrough' breast cancer drug thwarted by chemical found in bread

A chemical found in bread and a range of other common foods can thwart treatment for breast cancer, scientists have warned.

New research suggested the benefits of the "breakthrough" new drug palbociclib, which is given to women with estrogen receptor-positive breast cancer, was effectively reversed by xenoestrogens.

They also suggested that, as well as hindering the benefit of the palbociclib, xenoestrogens may accelerate the growth of estrogen-fuelled cancers themselves.

Manufactured by Pfizer, the medication was approved for use on the NHS in November for women with estrogen receptor-positive breast cancer - which accounts for about 70 per cent of cases - in whom the disease was advanced and unlikely to be cured.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence gave the green light after trials showed palbociclib could double the period progression-free survival in some patients.

Currently available to up to 8,000 women in the UK, it has been described as the "closest thing to a cure", although scientists have hinted the drug may one day be improved to form a replacement to chemotherapy for women with early-stage breast cancer.

However, the new laboratory research by The Scripps Research Institute in California showed that even limited exposure to xenoestrogens largely reversed the impact of the medication when used in combination with letrozole.

"It's intriguing that even a low, background-level exposure to these xenoestrogens was enough to impact the effect of the therapy to this degree," said Dr. Benedikt Warth, lead author of the study, which is published in the journal *Cell Chemical Biology*.

(Source: The Telegraph)



## Parents of working children may lose custody

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — If approved by prosecutor general, **d e s k** parents will lose custody of working children who are regularly seen working, said the Welfare Organization’s deputy director for social affairs, Nasimonline reported on Friday. Most working children are forced to do jobs by their family or third parties, highlighted Habibollah Masoudi Farid, adding that not a penny of children’s income is given to themselves.



He went on to say that some families who deal with drug addiction or financial problems may sell or rent their children to others as well. Touching upon the growing presence of non-Iranian laboring children during past 13 years, Masoudi Farid noted that based on recent estimation, some 70 percent of working children in Tehran and near 50 percent of all laboring children in Iran are foreign nationals. Any kind of work that harms children, deprives them from their childhood or interferes with their school attendance is considered child labor. Once too common all around the world, child labor is now generally believed to be wrong by different societies and appropriate measures are continuously taken to fight the issue. However, there are still hundreds of thousand innocent children out there doing hazardous jobs and gaining a minimum income which is usually not for themselves.

## Scotland to become first UK country to ban plastic cotton buds

The Scottish government plans to ban the manufacture and sale of plastic-stemmed cotton buds in a move that will cut the country’s marine plastic pollution by half, according to campaigners. Launching a public consultation on the proposed ban, Scotland’s environment secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, said: “Banning plastic cotton buds would be a clear sign of our ambition to address marine plastics and demonstrate further leadership on this issue. “Despite various campaigns, people are continuing to flush litter down their toilets and this has to stop. Scotland’s sewerage infrastructure collects and treats some 945m liters of waste water each day. These systems are not designed to remove small plastic items such as plastic buds, which can kill marine animals and birds that swallow them.” The move, which would make Scotland the first country in the UK to impose an outright ban on the product, follows concerns about the number of buds being washed up on beaches after being flushed down toilets. Although most big retailers have switched to biodegradable paper-stemmed buds, imported plastic brands continue to be sold by smaller outlets. *(Source: The Guardian)*

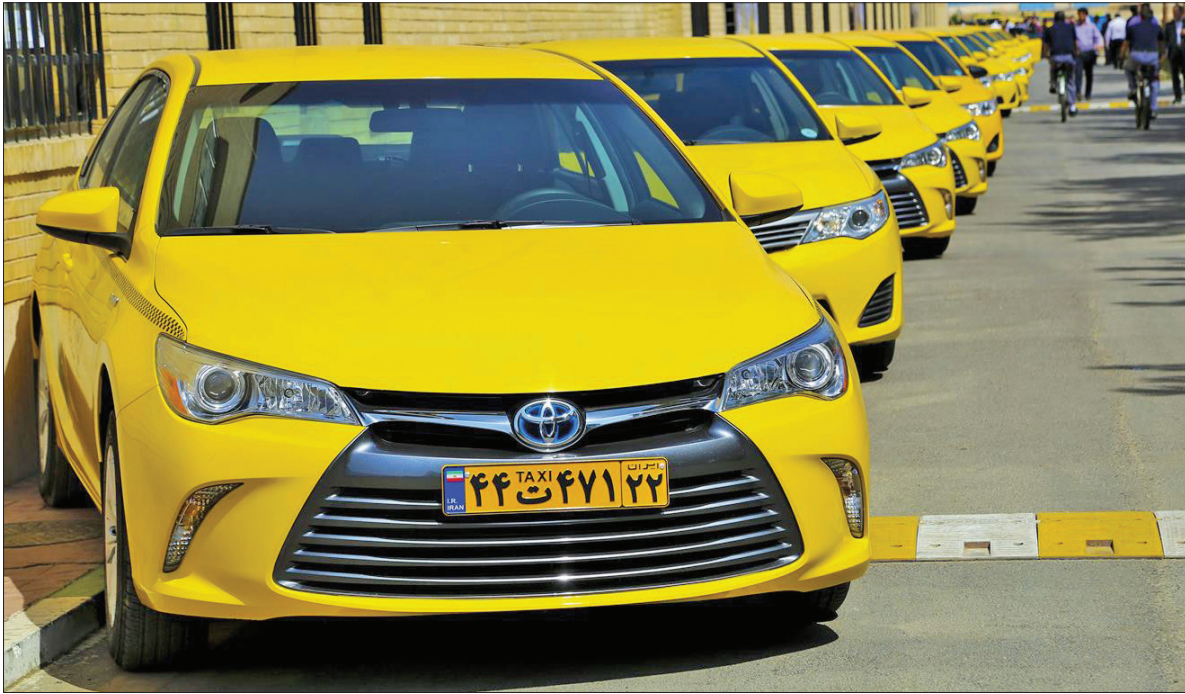
## LEARN ENGLISH

### Golf

A: Good morning golf **aficionados!** My name is Rick Fields, and you guessed it, I am here with my **main man**, Bob Copeland. B: Thank you, Rick! As you can see, ladies and gentleman, we are here in beautiful Pebble Beach where the top golfers in the world are trying to win the grand prize of one million dollars! A: Whoa, that’s a lot of **cash!** Let’s go to the **course** and see how Tiger Woods is doing. B: All right, we’re here at the eighth hole. It’s a **par** four, and has some very difficult **hazards** which many golfers find difficult to avoid. Although, I did see Jack Nicklaus hit a **hole in one** on this very same hole! A: Tiger Woods is about to **tee off**, and let’s see if he has the same luck as Jack. Tiger is asking his **caddie** for his **driver** and, he seems to be very nervous. B: Oh no! Not a good **swing** at all! It’s definitely **not his day today**. On the seventh hole he got a **bogey** and before that he barely **made par**. He will definitely not get a **birdie** on this **shot**. A: It seems that his ball has flown somewhere deep in the trees. He is having a **hard time** finding it and even his caddie has climbed a tree to try and **spot** it. B: Oh no! A bear! Run, Tiger, run! Somebody call animal control! ■ **Key vocabulary**  
**aficionado:** an enthusiastic admirer or follower; a fan  
**main man:** my right hand man, my important helper  
**cash:** money in the form of bills or coins  
**course:** an area of land where golf is played  
**par:** the number of strokes considered necessary to complete  
**hazard:** an obstacle, such as some water, found on a golf course  
**hole in one:** using only one shot to put the ball in the hole  
**tee off:** hit the ball for the first time on a hole  
**caddie:** person who carries the golf clubs and gives advice  
**driver:** the club you use to hit the ball long distances  
**swing:** the action of hitting the golf ball  
**not (someone’s) day:** not a good day for that person  
**bogey:** score that is one higher than it should be in golf  
**make par:** get the score you should for a certain hole  
**birdie:** one point lower than the score you should get  
**shot:** the action of hitting the ball  
**hard time:** a difficult time doing something; difficulty  
**spot:** to try to find something especially when they are difficult to see or recognize  
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**  
**putt:** light golf stroke made on the putting green in an effort to place the ball into the hole  
**green:** an area of short cut grass around the hole on a golf course  
**break:** the action of a ball moving away from its straight path  
**sand trap:** a hazard on a golf course consisting of a depression partly filled with sand  
**iron:** golf a club with an angled metal head  
*(Source: irlanguage.com)*

# Tehran’s taxi fleet renovation planned for next year

**ENVIRONMENT** **TEHRAN** — Tehran Municipality **d e s k** has announced plans to renovate 17,000 taxis for the next Iranian calendar year starting on March 21, Tasnim news agency reported on Friday. As per the plan, taxis aging over 10 years should be scrapped aiming to stimulate the automobile industry and remove inefficient, high emissions vehicles from the road. Shahriar Afandizadeh head of Tehran’s Taxi Driving Organization affiliated with the municipality has said some 15,000 old taxis are projected to be replaced with new ones by the end of the current [Iranian] year, however, so far only 3,599 taxis have been scrapped. The budget needed for granting 200-million-rial (nearly \$5,000) loans, which must be allocated by the Interior Ministry and the banking system, is yet to be provided, Afandizadeh regretted. The municipality has seriously considered renovating public transportation for the next year by adding new buses, replacing some 17,000 taxis, pushing for car loans allocation, and fostering the Interior ministry’s cooperation. Some 6,000 buses will be renovated by the end of the current [Iranian calendar] year, he highlighted. Air pollution is a challenge metropolitans of Iran, most significantly Tehran, are struggling with. The choking smoke is attributed to cars, outdated buses, taxis, and trucks, plying the city on a daily basis. While traffic schemes are designed to restrict personal cars from accessing city centers, which are the most congested and polluted areas, clunker taxis and buses are required to be replaced with modern, and low-emission models to save the Tehraners from breathing the suffocating smoke every day.



**The municipality has seriously considered renovating public transportation for the next year by adding new buses, replacing some 17,000 taxis, pushing for car loans allocation, and fostering the Interior ministry’s cooperation.**

## Global warming set to exceed Paris agreement’s 1.5C limit by 2040s: UN

### Rough paper suggests ‘very high risk’ target will be surpassed by middle of century

There is a “very high risk” that the most ambitious global warming limit set in the Paris climate agreement is likely to be exceeded by the 2040s, according to a draft United Nations (UN) report.

Only a dramatic and unprecedented shift away from fossil fuels will enable world governments to limit warming to 1.5C above pre-industrial times, it said. Hitting this target would “involve removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere,” said the report compiled by scientists on the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Sent out for comments from governments and experts this week, a copy of the current draft report was obtained by Reuters. Questioned about its contents, the IPCC said it did not comment on the contents of draft reports while work is on-going as “the text can change substantially” between the current draft and the final version. Changes could still be made as a result of feedback from reviewers and additional research findings published after the current draft was completed. The final version is due to be released in October. As part of the Paris agreement, the decision was made to “pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels”. In total, 195 countries signed the accord and 173 have become party to the document which aims to curb global carbon emissions and contain global warming. However, U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the agreement last year, claiming it put American workers – particularly in the coal industry – at an “economic disadvantage”. Although the agreement aimed to keep global temperatures “well below” 2C above pre-industrial times, the more ambitious target of 1.5C is seen as the best way to avoid the harmful impacts of climate change. These include devastating natural disasters such as droughts and flooding, which are increasingly being directly linked with rising temperatures. The negative impacts that could be avoided if the world sticks to the more ambitious goal were recently outlined in the Climatic Change journal. “We know that the 1.5C target is challenging,” said Professor Nigel Arnell, a climate scientist at the University of Reading who led that study. He added that it told us “that if we achieve this target then we can avoid between 60 and 95 per cent of the adverse



**“With regard to what measures might be implemented to avoid such a situation, the answer is straightforward: every country needs to stop adding to the problem, by increasing the urgency of effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions,” Dr Williamson, UK Natural Environment Research Council scientist said.**

impacts of climate change than we could otherwise see.” The IPCC report was commissioned to determine the likelihood of hitting these temperature targets. Previous research has suggested the 1.5C goal is unlikely, with some predicting it could be exceeded within the coming decade. The draft report states that there has been no historical precedent for the kind of changes required in energy use to keep global temperatures below the target limit. Renewable energy sources will have to rapidly replace fossil fuels and carbon dioxide will have to be actively

removed from the atmosphere. This kind of removal would require the roll-out of carbon capture and storage technologies and potentially the planting of forests to absorb carbon dioxide. “If the final version of the new IPCC Special Report should, in October, reach the conclusion that there is high risk of breaching the 1.5C limit by mid-century, that would be no surprise,” said Dr Phillip Williamson, a UK Natural Environment Research Council scientist who has been invited to review the current draft of the report, but has not yet seen the document. He noted the IPCC conclusions are drawn from and therefore consistent with published scientific literature concerning projected future greenhouse gas emissions. The most optimistic of these predictions suggest targets of between 1.5C and 2C might still be possible. However, even these will require an “overshoot” – a period in the coming decades when global temperatures rise beyond those limits, only to be brought down again. However, Dr Williamson also acknowledged that commenting on reporting of the leaked draft is “fraught with difficulties”. Other climate scientists also echoed the IPCC in their statement that the final report will likely differ from the current version. “The report is incomplete and findings can change substantially so I don’t think too much should be read into the statements,” said one of the report’s authors Professor Piers Forster, a climate change scientist at the University of Leeds. “The IPCC review process is very transparent and rigorous. We expect to get many thousands of review comments on this draft and will need to respond to each one carefully.” He added that the report as it stands, served as a reminder of how to countries should be approaching climate change. “With regard to what measures might be implemented to avoid such a situation, the answer is straightforward: every country needs to stop adding to the problem, by increasing the urgency of effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions,” said Dr Williamson. “Indeed, to achieve a stable climate, net zero emissions are required. That target was included in the Paris Agreement at the global level; it also needs to be the target at the national level, with each country setting an ambitious date as to when it will be achieved.” *(Source: Independent)*

### ENGLISH IN USE

#### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

## Iran, Latvia discuss closer scientific, technological co-op

The Latvian foreign ministry’s state secretary on a working visit to Tehran discussed closer bilateral scientific and technological cooperation with Iranian officials, IRNA reported on Tuesday. As part of his visit, Andrejs Pildegovics held talks with the Iranian deputy science minister for international affairs, Hossein Salar-Amoli. The two sides negotiated the possibility of signing memorandums of understanding between the ministries of education of both countries with the view to expanding cooperation between Latvian and Iranian higher education institutions. Initiating student exchange programs, offering scholarships, designing courses on Islamic arts and studying Iran are of the other fields Iran and Latvia are interested to work on.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “brady-”

- **Meaning:** slow
- **For example:** Dysfunction of the electrical pathways of the heart can cause **bradycardia**.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Fetch up

- **Meaning:** to arrive somewhere without intending to
- **For example:** I fell asleep on the train and fetched up in Glasgow.

### IDIOM

#### Blood out of a stone

- **Explanation:** the expression refers to something that is very difficult to obtain
- **For example:** Negotiating a reduction from that company is like getting blood from a stone!

## همکاری های علمی فناوری ایران و لتونی افزایش می یابد

به گزارش روز سه شنبه ایرنا قائم مقام وزیر امورخارجه لتونی در سفر به تهران بر تمایل و آمادگی دو کشور برای توسعه همکاری های علمی و فناوری تاکید کرد. اندری پیلد گوویچ در دیدار با حسین سالارآملی قائم مقام وزیر علوم، تحقیقات و فناوری در امور بین الملل از امکان امضای تفاهم نامه همکاری های علمی میان وزارت آموزش و پرورش دو کشور و توسعه همکاری در حوزه ی آموزش عالی سخن گفتند. همچنین از اعزام دانشجویان مقاطع تحصیلات تکمیلی برای دوره های کوتاه مدت، اعطای بورس به دانشجویان، توسعه همکاری در حوزه های ایران شناسی، هنر اسلامی، زبان و ادبیات فارسی به عنوان حوزه های همکاری دو کشور یاد شد.



# Saudi regime accused of rights abuses in Yemen civilian deaths

**1→** The panel said it requested information from the Saudi regime-led coalition for the rationale behind such attacks, but did not receive a response. The attacks were carried out by precision-guided munitions, so it is likely these were the intended targets, the report points out.

“Even if in some cases, the Saudi-led coalition had targeted legitimate military objectives, the panel finds it highly unlikely that the IHL [International Humanitarian Law] principles of proportionality, and precautions in attack were met,” the report stated.

The report also cited a “widespread and systematic” pattern of “arbitrary arrests, deprivation of liberty and enforced disappearances”. It was particularly scathing about the United Arab Emirates (UAE) camps, where it says torture has been taking place.

“The report talks about beatings, electrocutions, constrained suspension, and it talks about something called the cage which is confinement in a cage in the sunlight and the denial of medical treatment,” James Bays said.

## Threat to peace

Proxy forces funded and armed by the Saudi regime-led coalition “pose a threat to peace, security and stability of Yemen”, the panel said, and “will do more to further the fragility of Yemen than they will do to hold the state together”.

The report also said that southern secession in Yemen has become a genuine possibility, due in part to the length of the war, the lack of military progress and divisions



that have emerged in the country.

According to Bays, the report wonders if Yemen can remain one country.

“People in the south are displaying the old flag of South Yemen and they are not loyal to President Hadi even though they are under his command,” Bays said.

## Five Saudi regime forces killed in Yemeni retaliatory attacks

Elsewhere, at least five Saudi regime forces have been killed in Saudi Arabia’s southern border regions in attacks by Yemeni forces that were launched in retaliation for Riyadh’s

deadly war on Yemen.

The Sabq online newspaper reported on Saturday that a Saudi regime soldier was killed when an improvised explosive device (IED) went off in Saudi Arabia’s Najran region.

London-based Rai al-Youm daily also reported that four Saudi regime forces had been killed in clashes with members of the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement and by Yemeni sniper fire in Najran as well as the Jizan and Asir regions.

A Saudi regime armored vehicle was further set on fire following the Jizan attack.

Additionally on Saturday, the Yemeni army destroyed armored vehicles belonging to the Saudi regime mercenaries in Yemen’s southwestern Ta’izz Province.

Separately, a Saudi regime border guard shot dead a Yemeni citizen and injured another in the Monabbih district of Yemen’s northwestern Sa’ada Province.

On Friday, at least three Saudi regime soldiers were killed when a powerful landmine explosion ripped through their military vehicle in Najran, Yemen’s Arabic-language al-Masirah television reported.

On Wednesday, Yemeni forces captured a Saudi regime military base in Najran, killing several of the troops stationed there. A video released by the Ansarullah showed the Yemeni forces launch a surprise attack on the base, using simple weapons.

Yemeni forces regularly target positions inside Saudi Arabia in retaliation for the Saudi regime-led war on Yemen, which has claimed around 13,600 lives.

The House of Saud regime aggression was launched in March 2015 to reinstate a former Riyadh-friendly government and to eliminate the Ansarullah, who have been running state affairs in the absence of an effective administration.

The offensive has, however, achieved neither of its goals despite the spending of billions of petrodollars and the enlisting of the cooperation of the House of Saud regime’s regional and Western allies.

(Source: agencies)

## Africa: Trump must apologize to continent Trump’s “shithole countries” statement sparks global outrage

**1→** Martha Ama Akyaa Pobee, Ghana’s ambassador to the UN, said on Friday.

The group has demanded a retraction and apology from Trump.

According to the U.S. media reports, citing people with knowledge of the conversation, Trump asked during a conversation about immigration: “Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?”

Trump suggested the U.S. should instead focus its immigrant entry policy on countries such as Norway.

Following an emergency session of the African diplomats, Pobee added that the group “is concerned at the continuing and growing trend from the U.S. administration towards Africa and people of African descent to denigrate the continent and people of color”.

The ambassadors’ reaction comes after the 55-nation African Union said it was “frankly alarmed”.

“Given the historical reality of how many Africans arrived in the United States as slaves, this statement flies in the face

of all accepted behavior and practice,” AU spokeswoman Ebba Kalondo said on Friday.

## Global outrage

Trump’s latest comments have sparked global outrage and have been widely condemned as racist and extremely offensive.

Rupert Colville, a spokesman with the UN human rights office, earlier slammed Trump’s “vulgar language”.

“You cannot dismiss entire countries and continents as shitholes ... I’m sorry, but there’s no other word one can use but racist,” Colville said.

Trump denied the racist remarks, tweeting on Friday that the language he used “was tough, but this was not the language used”, as he called for a “merit-based system of immigration and people who take our country to the next level”.

He later tweeted that he has “never said anything derogatory about Haitians other than Haiti is, obviously a very poor and troubled country”.

The Republican president has also privately defended his

remarks, saying he was only expressing what many people think but will not say about immigrants from economically depressed countries, the Associated Press reported.

Democrats have dismissed Trump’s denial of the offensive comments, with Senator Dick Durbin, who attended the meeting, disputing Trump’s account.

“He said these hate-filled things and he said them repeatedly,” Durbin told reporters on Friday.

Members of his own Republican party have also distanced themselves from Trump’s comments.

“It is incomprehensible that these words came out of the mouth of the president of the United States of America, a country that was founded on being free from discrimination,” said Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Republican congresswoman.

Former U.S. ambassador to the UN Samantha Power has shared the statement on Twitter, saying: “Whoa. I’ve never seen a statement like this by African countries directed at the United States.”

(Source: agencies)

## Trump asked why “pretty Korean lady” analyst wasn’t in North Korea negotiations

Amid a global furor over his reported remarks about “shithole countries” and immigration, the United States President Donald Trump faced further controversy on Friday when it was reported that he referred to an intelligence analyst presenting information to him in the Oval Office as a “pretty Korean lady” and suggested she should be part of negotiations with North Korea.

NBC News reported the exchange between the president and a “career intelligence analyst who is an expert in hostage policy”. The analyst, the report said, was briefing Trump last fall on “the impending release

of a family long held in Pakistan”.

Citing two officials with direct knowledge of the exchange, said the president asked the analyst where she was from, to which she said New York City. Trump reportedly pressed, asking where “your people” were from.

The NBC report said the analyst said her parents were Korean, leading Trump to ask an adviser why the “pretty Korean lady” was not involved in negotiations with nuclear-armed North Korea.

NBC said it did not interview the analyst, whose identity and agency it did not reveal, citing concern for her privacy. The White

House did not immediately comment.

On Twitter on Friday morning, Trump denied having made the “shithole” remark. The senior Democratic senator Dick Durbin, who was in the meeting, subsequently said that he had.

According to NBC, the officials who discussed the “pretty Korean lady” remark “said the president likely meant no harm with his inquiry, but it raised concern of a lack of cultural sensitivity and decorum”.

The NBC report listed other instances of the president speaking with an apparent lack of sensitivity in formal surroundings,

in meetings with members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) and with Navajo code talkers.

The president reportedly expressed surprise that no CBC members knew Ben Carson, the housing and urban development secretary who is the only black member of his cabinet.

At the code talkers event, in November, Trump joked about the Massachusetts Democratic senator Elizabeth Warren, whom he has nicknamed “Pocahontas” over her claim of Native American ancestry.

(Source: The Guardian)

## Jailed pro-Kurdish leader appears in court for first time

The jailed co-leader of Turkey’s main pro-Kurdish party appeared in court for the first time since his arrest in late 2016, insisting that his detention was unlawful.

Selahattin Demirtas was given a hero’s welcome by supporters as he arrived at the Istanbul courthouse for a case where he is charged with “insulting” President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It is one of 96 legal cases that have enmeshed the politician.

The charismatic outgoing co-chairman is the best-known face of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP/Halklar’n Demokratik Partisi), which he led to great success in June 2015 polls when it entered parliament for the first time.

A smiling Demirtas, 44, wearing a black suit and white shirt, saluted those chanting “chief” as he was surrounded by members of the gendarmerie, an AFP correspondent inside the courtroom reported.

Over 1,000 people gathered outside the court in the district of Bakirkoy, as they chanted “Demirtas is our honor” and “shoulder to shoulder against fascism!”

Slogans chanted from outside -- including “chief Selo” (Demirtas’ nickname) and “dictator Erdogan” -- were heard inside the courtroom while Demirtas was speaking.

## I have immunity

In the court, Demirtas hit out at the trials taking place against him in which he has been unable to defend himself and insisted his immunity from prosecution as an MP (Member of Parliament) was still valid.

“I have immunity as much as all MPs in parliament, I have immunity as much as (prime minister) Binali Yildirim,”

he told the court.

In May 2016, a law was passed lifting 138 MPs’ immunity from prosecution. The HDP has previously said the measure is aimed at expelling its MPs from parliament.

Demirtas called for his conditional release but the judge said the request had to be presented in writing for “detailed examination”, before postponing the trial to May 17.

Addressing the court, the popular politician asked the court if he could take off his jacket. His supporters replied: “The chief is always handsome.”

## Alleged terror links

In the most serious case against Demirtas, which is being heard in Ankara, the former human rights lawyer is accused of links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) who have waged an insurgency against Turkey since 1984.

The PKK is blacklisted as a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies. If convicted, he faces up to 142 years in that case.

Demirtas was among 12 HDP MPs taken into custody in November 2016 under the state of emergency imposed following the failed overthrow of Erdogan in July of that year.

The party has come under heavy pressure with authorities opening investigations into 55 out of 59 HDP MPs, according to HDP officials.

In another blow to the HDP, parliament meanwhile voted to dismiss its deputy Leyla Zana as an MP. Zana, a former Sakharov Prize winner, had been jailed for ten years from 1994-2004 on charges of links to the PKK after using the

Iran would not accept indefinite limits on its enrichment program and that Trump’s demand is therefore unrealistic.

Mr Trump also wants Iran’s ballistic missile programme to be addressed. Iran frequently has emphasized that ballistic missile is not related to JCPOA and will

not negotiated about it. According to this, do you think that this condition meaning the end for JCPOA?

A: This is one of many issues but I did not see it raised in the discussion of the Trump decision today. I would add, however, that I believe that Iran’s unilateral decision to limit

the range of its ballistic missiles to 2,000 kilometers was very wise and important. I would like to see more of a positive response to that. That might be controversial in the U.S., since Israel would be within the 2,000-kilometer range but I would hope for some response from Europe.

## What is Steinmeier thinking about?

**1→** In the run-up to the 2017 general elections in Germany, the “Alternative for Germany”, by winning about 13% of the vote, entered the parliament as the third party in the country.



At the same time, the Social Democrats had the worst possible electoral results over the past few years. This is how the extremist AFD members have become a threat for the Social-Democratic Party. Under such circumstances, Steinmeier’s concerns about the current situation in his party can be understood. Steinmeier hopes that with the formation of a coalition government in Germany, it would be possible to restrain the movements of the “Alternative for Germany”, although some analysts of the German affairs believe that the turning of the right-wing extremists into the main opposition in Germany is strongly threatening the traditional parties in this country right now.

Polls in Germany show a decline in the popularity of traditional parties in the country. The two Social Democratic and Christian Democratic parties have begun negotiations for a coalition government, which according to the latest polls in Germany, the total popularity of these two parties barely exceeds 50%. This very well shows that the traditional parties are in the worst possible situation, and the views of the German citizens are changing in favor of the right-wing extremists.

According to the INSA Institute, the popularity of the extremist party of “Alternative for Germany” reached 13.5 percent. In other words, the popularity of right-wing extremists in Germany has even increased slightly since the time of the election. On the other side, a total of 51 percent of German citizens have a positive attitude toward both the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats. This is while until now, Germany’s main competition has been between the two traditional parties, and the coalition of these two parties is also referred to as the “Great Coalition.”

But if this trend continues, the total votes of the two traditional German parties will be below 50%. In such a situation, the coalition of the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats can’t be considered as a major coalition in Germany, because other German parties such as the Green Party, the Left Party, the Liberal Democrats and the AFD can easily challenge such a coalition in the German Parliament (Bundestag).

During the recent elections competitions in Germany, we saw a decrease in the votes of both Social Democrats and Christian Democrats. Both traditional German parties have made the worst possible results in recent decades. Now negotiations are underway on the formation of a coalition government in Germany. Some experts and analysts of Germany and Europe affairs mention that even if a coalition government is formed, the next German government will face continuous crises. These crises are due to the fundamental differences between the two traditional parties. The talks between the Christian parties and Social Democrats for re-forming the coalition has begun since January 7 this year.

Finally, surveys in Germany indicate a change in the political viewpoints of German citizens and their turning away from the traditional parties in this country. This is the best possible news for the far-right movements in Germany. Undoubtedly, now the leaders of the AFD are going to increase their efforts. It should be noted that if a coalition government is formed between Christian parties and the Social-Democratic Party, the Alternative for Germany will become the main opposition party of this coalition government. In this way, the party will enjoy popular support for itself, while challenging Merkel’s economic, political, security and social programs. And this is what many analysts of Germany’s affairs have been seriously warning about.

## Germany’s future: Merkel without Merkelism

**8→** Moreover, many right-wingers in her CDU and the arch-conservative CSU have signaled the definitive end of their grudging acceptance of Merkel’s lurch to the center, which they blame for enabling the far-right AFD to enter the Bundestag.

The CSU, which faces elections in Bavaria in the fall, remains adamantly opposed to Merkel’s immigration policies, insisting that they must be much harder on family reunion, and strictly limit refugee entries and all kinds of immigration.

Flying in the face of a conservative uprising, the Social Democrats, if they rejoin a grand coalition, intend to stake out robust left-wing positions and drive them forward with a vigor that distance their party from Merkel and conservatives.

The Social Democratic Party has underscored that it will not suffer the further deterioration of its profile by Merkel further encroaching on its turf -- another aspect of Merkelism. The grand coalitions of the past will look warm and fuzzy compared with the next one -- if it gets that far.

And complicating everything, the AfD -- which heaps abuse on Merkel, the European Union and the euro, along with Germany’s perceived political correctness -- will be the biggest opposition party in parliament if the Social Democratic Party is in government. This gives it a prized perch from which to hammer Merkel from the far right -- a new, uncomfortable phenomenon in the Bundestag.

All of this will make Merkel’s fourth term knottier and more tenuous than any before it, which will also sap her power to set German priorities in EU reform and in global affairs in general -- at a time when leadership and moderate conservatism are more critical than ever.

But another element of Merkelism that observers shouldn’t forget: Merkel is at her most savvy when embattled and underestimated. Until now, when she’s taken off the gloves, she’s won. (Source: cnn.com)



## Barcelona’s Turan returns to Turkey on loan

Barcelona have loaned former Turkey international Arda Turan to Istanbul Basaksehir for the rest of this season and two more, the Liga leaders said in a statement on Saturday.

Turan joined the club from Atletico Madrid for 34 million euros (\$41.46 million) plus add ons in July 2015, winning six trophies but only making 55 appearances and scoring 15 goals.

Spanish newspaper Sport last week estimated it cost Barca one million euros for each appearance made by Turan, taking into account an annual salary reported to be 8 million euros a year.

“During this period Barca reserve the right to transfer the player to a club belonging to UEFA, and will receive a variable fee according to his performances,” said the Barca statement.

“Meanwhile, Istanbul Basaksehir will reserve the right to buy the player from Barcelona.”

Turan quit the Turkey national team in June 2017.  
*(Source: Mirror)*

## Authorities issue statement denying Silvio Berlusconi is under investigation

AC Milan’s former owner Silvio Berlusconi is not under investigation by the authorities for his part in the club’s sale to Yonghong Li - which had been subject to claims of money-laundering.

Italy’s most successful club was sold by former Italian prime minister, Berlusconi, in April 2017 after several months of delays for €720m, which was reportedly €300m more than what the club was said to be worth.

The club was deep in debt and the time it took to thrash out the deal and the final figure had Italian outlets La Stampa and Secolo XIX, via Football Italia, claiming that investigations had been opened into potential money-laundering from Berlusconi, his Fininvest group and Yonghong Li.

The speculation of money-laundering was initiated when suggestions were made that Berlusconi overvalued the club in a deliberate attempt to bring a large sum of money into the country from abroad.

However, on Saturday the chief prosecutor of the city of Milan, Francesco Greco disclosed that all reports suggesting an investigation had opened were wide of the mark.

He said: “There are no criminal proceedings as of today regarding the sale of AC Milan.”

The Chinese consortium bought out the seven-time European champions from Berlusconi, who spent more than 30-years at the helm and oversaw the club win an astonishing 29 trophies and five European Cups.

The new owners splashed the cash throughout the summer with a host of signings which aimed to take the club back to the top of the Serie A pecking order, yet the club currently languish in 11th place - 23 points behind leaders Napoli.

*(Source: Sports Illustrated)*

## Klopp: I turned down Manchester United

Jurgen Klopp claims he turned down the chance to succeed David Moyes as Manchester United manager before taking the reins at Liverpool.

Klopp replaced Brendan Rodgers in the Anfield dugout in October 2015, four months on from stepping down at Borussia Dortmund. The 50-year-old’s celebrated tenure at Signal Iduna Park featured back-to-back Bundesliga titles and saw him become one of the most sought-after coaches in European football.

In an interview with former Liverpool player Phil Thompson on Sky Sports, Klopp said he was approached to become United boss before they appointed Louis van Gaal for the 2014-15 season.

“Yes, there was interest - Manchester United, yes, they were interested a year or a year and a half before, but it didn’t feel right,” he said. “I couldn’t say Man United is not my club, it didn’t feel right.”

Klopp explained his intention to take a sabbatical from football after an underwhelming final season at Dortmund, only for the football romantic in him to heed Liverpool’s call.

“Yes, I’m a football romantic,” he said. “I’m confident but not as confident as other managers, thinking this club will call, that club will call. “A lot of clubs called and I said ‘No, no chance, I need to make a break now’. Even my wife knew, if Liverpool is calling, I go. “When Liverpool called, I had no chance. It was actually too early for my plans. I said, ‘Wow, come on!’

“But then coming here and feeling the spirit immediately, it was just, for me, a match in heaven.”

Liverpool are on a 17-match unbeaten run in all competitions and host undefeated Premier League leaders Manchester City in a mouth-watering Premier League clash on Sunday.

*(Source: Four Four Two)*

## Wenger plans to stay at Arsenal until 2019

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger insisted he was still committed to the Premier League club and had no plans to leave before the end of his contract in 2019.

Ahead of a trip to Bournemouth on Sunday, Wenger is under some pressure with his side sitting sixth in the table – five points behind fourth-placed Liverpool.

Wenger, 68, signed a new deal at Arsenal last year and said he was as committed as ever to seeing out his contract.

«Did I ever walk away? Never. Why should I change?» he said. «I’m always committed.

«I’m here for 21 years. I just do, in every single decision I make, what is right for the club.

«If I stay for one year or 10 years, it’s exactly the same,» he added. «If it’s me in charge or somebody else, you can only do what is best for the club. And that’s what you try to do.

«That has nothing to do with my personal situation.»

Wenger has been in charge at Arsenal since 1996, winning three Premier League titles and seven FA Cup trophies.

*(Source: Goal)*

# Football Leaks: Lionel Messi’s 100-million-euro contract



In the employment contract dating June 30, 2017, the transfer fee listed for Lionel Messi was 300 million euros. But Messi didn’t sign the new contract publicly until the end of November, by which point his transfer fee had increased to 700 million euros. Following FC Barcelona’s involuntary sale of Neymar for 222 million euros to Paris Saint-Germain

in August, the team appears to have feared that the 300-million-euro clause for Messi was too low. Further documents obtained by DER SPIEGEL provide insight into just how sought-after Messi has long been. They reveal that a lawyer representing Messi spoke with negotiators at Real Madrid in June 2013. In an email to Messi’s father, the lawyer wrote

that Real wanted to buy his son out of his contract with FC Barcelona for 250 million euros, the transfer fee for Messi at the time.

Messi’s lawyer wrote to DER SPIEGEL that the publication of the content of confidential emails is unlawful. Real Madrid also wrote that the account was “totally false.”

*(Source: Der Spiegel)*

## Uncle Toni still ‘more than anything’ for Nadal



World number one Rafa Nadal embarks on a new era without his coach and uncle in the players’ box at the Australian Open but the Spaniard said he would always welcome advice from his lifelong mentor with open arms.

Nadal returns to Melbourne Park, where he lost a thrilling five-set final to long-time rival Roger Federer last year, hoping to continue his progress under new coach Carlos Moya.

Former world number one Moya will lead the Mallorcan’s team, having helped him back to the grand slam winner’s table in 2017 after a barren three years while preparing for Toni Nadal’s retirement.

Toni has departed to focus on his nephew’s tennis academy but Nadal said their relationship remained intimate and “easy”.

“He participates as much as he wants to participate. He’s my uncle,” Nadal told reporters at Melbourne Park on Saturday.

“He’s more than anything else. That’s it. Everything that he wants to do with me, I am happy with, no? It’s not about my decision. He has enough confidence with me, or I have enough confidence with him, to talk about anything I have to talk.

“It’s difficult to explain. But it’s part

of my family ... He loves me. I love him. It’s not about, you know, a professional relationship. It’s a familial relationship.

“In terms of professional things, I spoke to him few days ago, speaking about how the life is going, how the tennis is going.

“If I have something to ask, I ask him. If he has something to tell me, he calls me and tells me. No, it’s not a difficult situation. It’s a very easy situation.”

Nadal’s preparations have added to a sense of a journey into the unknown at Melbourne Park for the 31-year-old great.

He heads into his first round match against Dominican journeyman Victor Estrella Burgos without a competitive match since he pulled out of the ATP Tour Finals with a knee injury in November.

He missed warmup events in Abu Dhabi and Brisbane but had an exhibition match at the Kooyong Classic and another practice match with Dominic Thiem at Melbourne Park on Friday, complete with ball boys and a chair umpire.

The 16-times grand slam champion showed no sign of discomfort in defeating fifth seed Thiem and said he felt “good” and was “more or less” playing well.

*(Source: Reuters)*

## Novak Returning Djokovic still managing elbow injury



Former world number one Novak Djokovic admits his elbow is not yet 100 percent as the Serb prepares to return from six months out at the Australian Open.

The six-times champion, who last played competitively at Wimbledon in July, says he is still managing the injury, which has caused him to abbreviate his service action.

“It hasn’t been 100 percent yet healed,” Djokovic told reporters at Melbourne Park on Saturday. “But right now it’s at the level where I can compete, and every day is getting better.”

Djokovic said he had been convinced by doctors that he would not be doing the injury any more damage by playing in Melbourne.

“I’m hoping that it can be 100 percent at the start of the tournament. I don’t know how it’s going to behave. Even if it’s 100 percent healed, after six months of no competition, you never know how you’re going to react,” the 30-year-old added.

“So let’s see. There’s not much more I can do. I’ve done really everything in my power, with a team of people around me, to enable me to be right here in front of you guys, and to compete in Australian Open.”

Djokovic said the injury had been bothering him for about 18 months before the pain, which he felt on his serve, became too much.

The Serb confirmed the injury had not needed surgery but would not answer a question as to whether he required a pain-killing injection to play.

Djokovic tested out his elbow, and his new serve, in an exhibition match earlier this week, beating Austria’s Dominic Thiem, in straight sets.

“I’m happy with the new service motion,” he said. “I don’t want to say ‘new serve’, but new service motion.

“I feel like I spend less energy but I’m more efficient. I’m really looking forward to trying out my new serve here.”

Seeded 14th having dropped down the rankings during his injury hiatus, Djokovic said he was confident he could still compete.

“I still know what I’m capable of and I believe in my own abilities to win against the best players in the world,” he said.

“I know that if I get myself to desired level of performance -- mental and physical -- that I can actually have a good chance to go far in the tournament.”

*(Source: Reuters)*

# ‘Serious threat’ to Russian whistleblower’s life

The whistleblower whose evidence led to Russia’s ban from next month’s Winter Olympics is preparing to testify against those involved - even though his life is under “serious threat”, his lawyer says.

Former Russian anti-doping official Grigory Rodchenkov fled to the United States after his allegations about a state-sponsored doping programme.

Russia was banned from the Games after Rodchenkov’s claims were investigated - though athletes who can prove they are clean can compete as neutrals.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has handed life bans to 43 athletes involved in the doping programme - though 42 of those have appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Cas).

Their cases will be looked at in the coming weeks and Rodchenkov’s lawyer, Jim Walden, says his client will likely give evidence at the hearings.

Walden told BBC Radio 5 live that the threat to Dr Rodchenkov - who was director of Russia’s anti-doping laboratory during Sochi 2014 - from Russian retaliation needs to be taken “very seriously”.

He added: “We know that Dr Rodchenkov is at the top of the Russian hate list. We know that at least one official has called for Dr Rodchenkov’s execution.”

But Rodchenkov is still preparing to at testify at the Cas hearings of the athletes and that of Russia’s



Deputy Prime Minister and former sports minister Vitaly Mutko, who is also banned for his alleged part in the doping scandal.

“He’s very focused on what he needs to do in the next several weeks,” Walden said.

“Grigory is expected to testify at both proceedings. He’s focused on preparing for that. After he gets through these, it’s incumbent upon us to make sure he’s safe.”

Following previous claims that Rodchenkov also has information about doping in football, Walden told BBC Radio 5 live that Fifa, the sport’s world governing body, “is

considering whether to hire an independent investigator” to look into claims Russia’s alleged state-sponsored doping programme included football players.

Russia is hosting the World Cup this summer - though Mutko recently stood down from the tournament’s organising committee to focus on contesting his ban.

‘IOC chief should resign’

Also speaking to BBC Radio 5 live, Bryan Fogel - the film-maker whose Oscar-nominated Netflix documentary Icarus also helped to expose Russia’s alleged state-sponsored doping programme - called on IOC president Thomas Bach to resign.

“The damage to the Olympic movement is unfathomable,” Fogel said. “We have to start asking ourselves, why are we having these Olympics? What point are these Olympics other than for a lot of people to make a lot of money at the expense of clean athletes?”

“When faced with the biggest scandal in Olympic history - a 40-year-scandal that calls into question the entire history of the Olympic Games - how do they act? They act by giving Russia a slap on the wrist.

“The worldwide community should be calling for the resignation of Thomas Bach. The leadership at the IOC is not the leadership the world should be having if these Games are going to continue.”

*(Source: BBC)*



# Language is Esteghlal new coach Coley's greatest challenge

Coach Miguel Coley says his greatest challenge to work in Iran as Esteghlal coach is language.

Coley has teamed up again with former Jamaica coach Winfried Schafer in the Iranian team.

"I am very excited about the move. Knowing I will be coaching in a different country that is at the World Cup and that I will be coaching in the Asian Champions League," Coley said.

"My greatest challenge will be the language, but through the interpreter, I will be fine. Plus I am a professional, I have to adapt and learn quickly. As it relates to my professional development, it's a step in the right direction," added Coley, who also assisted Schafer in Jamaica set-up.

"As a coach, (this move) broadens my horizon and scope on the game to fully and highly concentrate on football on a high level.

"I look forward to working with coach Schafer as he is the one that brought global attention to me as a coach. He gives room to learn and express one's opinion, and he is very honest," added Coley.

"I hope young coaches can look on and see that there are many opportunities outside at a high level and continue being honest to their players, work and respect their fellow coaches and continue to make football in our country better," he added.

Esteghlal are two-time AFC Champions League winners and have won the Iranian League on eight occasions.

(Source: Jamaica Gleaner)



## Ramin Tabatabaei elected Iran basketball president



**S P O R T S** **TEHRAN** — Ramin Tabatabaei has been elected as new president of Iran Basketball Federation on Saturday.

In the elections held in Tehran's Olympic Academy, Tabatabaei secured 23 votes out of 41.

Tabatabaei succeeded Mahmoud Mashoon, who was at helm for 14 years.

"First of all, I thank God and I have to say it's a great honor for me to head the

Iranian basketball federation. We need truth, cooperation and reconciliation for our beloved sport," Tabatabaei said.

"Iran basketball has capability of doing wonderful things. Establishing grassroots programs and hiring foreign coach for women are very important," he added.

Speaking out about importance of advancing to the 2020 Olympic Games, Tabatabaei said, "To qualify for the Olympics is our priority. We'll do our best to do that."

## Peyman Akbari steps down as Paykan volleyball coach



**S P O R T S** Peyman Akbari has stepped down from his coaching role with Paykan volleyball team.

He has parted company with the Iranian top-flight volleyball team by mutual consent after string of poor results.

Iranian giants Paykan have lost to Sar-mayeh Bank, Saipa and Havash Gonbad in the last previous matches and moved down to fourth place in the Iran Volleyball Professional League table.

Akbari is a retired Iranian volleyball player. He was part of the Iran men's national volleyball team at the 2006 FIVB Volleyball Men's World Championship in Japan.

He is the only Iranian assistant of Igor Kolakovic in the national team.

Akbari headed Iran B national team in the 2015 Asian Men's Volleyball Championship, where the team became runners-up after losing to Japan 3-1 in the final match.

## Saudi football stadium welcomes women for first time

Saudi women have attended a football match in Saudi Arabia for the first time, as part of reforms spearheaded by the kingdom's crown prince.

Female football fans wearing scarves and waving flags took their seats at the King Abdullah Sports City stadium in Jeddah for Al-Ahli's match against Al-Batin in the Saudi Pro League. However, the women had to enter through designated turnstiles for women and families.

Lamya Khaled Nasser, a 32-year-old from Jeddah, told Agence France-Presse she was proud and looking forward to the match. "This event proves that we are heading for a prosperous future. I am very proud to be a witness of this massive change," she said.

Ruwayda Ali Qassem, another Jeddah resident, said Friday was a "historic day in the kingdom which culminates [in] ongoing fundamental changes".

"I am proud and extremely happy for this development and for the kingdom's moves to catch up with civilized measures adopted by many countries," she said.

The Saudi government said last week that women would be allowed to attend a second match on Saturday and a third next Thursday. The rest of the country's football grounds will be ready for female fans by the beginning of the next season, including separate cafes and prayer rooms.



Al-Ittihad, one of the country's top football clubs, played in a derby game in front of mixed spectators on Saturday. It prepared for the historic match by tweeting an image featuring a woman's face painted in gold, the club's color.

"Ittihad fans, male and female, are the support of this club, and success is not complete without them coming together to serve this historic entity," the club tweeted. "With you, the scene is complete."

The move to open up stadiums to women for the first time was announced last October.

"The general sports authority has provided everything that would create an attractive sports environment for families and provide everything needed to ensure their privacy," the country's sports governing body said.

On Thursday, women flocked to Le Mall in Jeddah to view the kingdom's first car exhibition aimed at them, a few months after King Salman issued a decree granting them the right to drive from June 2018 — a move opposed by hardline clerics.

The exhibition, focusing on fuel-efficient cars, featured a team of saleswomen to help their new customer base. The showroom carried signs emblazoned with the slogan "Drive and Shop", a play on words in Arabic, using the female form of the verbs.

The driving and football developments are the latest in a series of social reforms ordered by the crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, who wields extraordinary power. Last year, he pledged to modernize the kingdom and to scale back the power of its ultraconservative clerics, returning Saudi Arabia to what he described as "moderate Islam".

(Source: Staff & Agency)

## Pep Guardiola backs Raheem Sterling to handle Anfield hostility

Pep Guardiola believes Raheem Sterling is now mature enough to take a hostile Anfield return in his stride.

Two years ago the England international was jeered and substituted at half-time during his first game back at Liverpool following his £49million move to Manchester City.

Sterling received similar harsh treatment from Reds fans as he endured another difficult match at his old ground last season.

But this time things could be different with Sterling enjoying the best form of his career ahead of the Premier League leaders' trip to Merseyside on Sunday.

The 23-year-old has been one of the key figures in City's outstanding start to the campaign and has 18 goals to his name, his previous best in a club season already smashed by seven.

City manager Guardiola said: "Normally when this kind of reaction happens it is because he was loved by the fans.

"I understand completely but it is not



the first time he has gone back. I think it is the second or third time. I think he's more mature. Of course he has to be calm and play the game he has to play."

City have won 20 of their 22 Premier League matches this season and drawn the other two. They seem to be powering to the title but, of all teams, Liverpool are considered one of the most likely to threaten their unbeaten record.

Jurgen Klopp's men have found form themselves and have not lost in 13 outings in the league, making them strong challengers for at least second place.

The encounter will also be a clash of two of the most exciting teams in the competition. City may be able to afford a slip-up but Guardiola views the contest as a stern test of his side's credentials.

He said: "It's a real test to go to Anfield,

one of the most prestigious stadiums and teams in the world. So we'll try to put in a good performance. It's a big game for us and we are going to prepare as best as possible.

"If you want to achieve something good or win titles you have to not just win, you have to win on these kind of stages.

"It is such an important game to see if we are able to do big things in this season, especially in the important stages of the Champions League, for when we arrive in Basel, or the FA Cup."

City have not won at Anfield since 2003 while top scorer Sergio Agüero's six goals against the Reds have all come at the Etihad Stadium.

Guardiola said: "I don't believe in these kind of things.

"Manchester City won twice there in 45 years, the last time 15 years ago, but that shows how difficult it is to play there. But records are always there to be broken so maybe on Sunday Sergio can break that record."

(source: Euro Sport)

## Iran learn fate at 2018 Goalball World Championship

Iran have learned their rivals at the 2018 International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) Goalball World Championship.

The 16 male teams were divided into two groups of eight, with the best four from each qualifying for the quarter finals.

Iran have been drawn into a tough-looking Group B with defending champion Brazil, Rio 2016 silver medalist USA, Canada, Germany, Egypt, Czech Republic and Japan.

Group A will see Paralympic and European gold medalist Lithuania facing African champion Algeria, Asian champion China, Belgium, Argentina, host Sweden, Australia and Turkey.

The 2018 International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) Goalball World Championship will be held in Malmo, Sweden from June 3 to 8. (Source: Paralympic.org)

## Saman Ghoddos linked with Chievo: Report

Iranian international striker Saman Ghoddos has been linked with a move to Serie A club Chievo.

The Italian media reports suggest that Sweden club Ostersund will not sell their striker for less than five million euros.

Ghoddos has been OFK's standout player in the Europa League this season, and the game with Arsenal in February will surely put the player in the shop window ahead of next summer's transfer window.

The 24-year-old forward had been already linked with a move to QPR and Wolverhampton Wanderers.

The Iranian-Swedish decided to wear the jersey of Iran's national football team in September despite being invited to play for Sweden.

(Source: calciomercato.it)



## IPC lauds Iran taekwondo fighter Mehdi Pourrahnama

International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has praised the Iranian taekwondo fighter Mehdi Pourrahnama.

Pourrahnama most recently won a gold medal in the men's K44 under 75 kilograms category in the IWAS World Games 2017 in Portugal in December.

Pourrahnama claimed his fourth straight world crown in the event and was named the tournament's top male fighter.

He has lost just once in the past five years.

The 2017 World Championships saw a record-breaking 260 athletes from 59 countries compete, while nearly 100 more competed at the biennial International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation (IWAS) World Games.

Taekwondo will be included in the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Program for the first time.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

## Blind football takes off around the globe

The International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) has released statistics showing the global expansion of blind football, with a significant increase in the number of countries developing the sport and taking part in international events.

All regional competitions were held last year, with the Asian, European, African, Americas and Central American champions being crowned. A total of 36 national teams competed across all events, an increase on the corresponding figure for 2013 (21 countries) and 2015 (28).

In 2017, 15 European, four African, 11 Americas and six Asian countries took part in international events.

In addition, Romania staged the first-ever qualifier for the European Championships earlier in the year due to the large number of countries competing in blind football across the continent.

The 2017 ASEAN Para Games also featured blind football and there were a number of international friendly tournaments involving more teams.

The female version of the sport is also enjoying rapid growth, with Belgium's Dorien Cornelis becoming the first-ever female player to compete at an IBSA Blind Football regional event, the first international club match taking place in Mexico and a number of countries announcing their women's teams.

(Source: IBSA)

## Rakitic: I don't think Messi will be nervous about Croatia

Ivan Rakitic believes anything is possible for Croatia at the World Cup, but does not expect his Barcelona team-mate Lionel Messi to be nervous when Argentina face them in Russia.

Midfielder Rakitic and superstar forward Messi are set to go head to head in the second Group D game on June 21 in Nizhny Novgorod.

Croatia were one of the better teams to watch at Euro 2016 before losing to eventual winners Portugal in the round of 16, and boast a hugely talented squad including Rakitic, Real Madrid's Luka Modric and Inter's Ivan Perisic.

But Rakitic still does not see Messi being worried at the prospect of taking Croatia, jokingly telling Marca: "I do not think he gets nervous if I say 'watch Croatia!'"

"It's the World Cup, you want to play against the best. And if it is against the best of all times, well better. That's what a World Cup is for." Asked what Croatia can do at the World Cup, where they will also take on Iceland and Nigeria in the group stage, Rakitic added: "I wish a lot. I think we've been the strongest group of all. Croatia has never had so many players in so many important teams, playing and setting the pace.

"If we get through the group, I believe that everything is possible."

(Sorce: Goal)



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Iran welcomes cultural interactions among Asian elites: culture minister

**A R T** **TEHRAN** – The Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Seyyed Abbas Salehi, has said that Iran welcomes any plan that can help cultural interactions develop among Asian elites.



The Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Seyyed Abbas Salehi, speaks during the First International Conference of Asian Cultural Dialogues at the ICRO in Tehran on January 13, 2017. (IRNA/Faraj Samadi)

He made the remarks during the opening ceremony of the First International Conference of Asian Cultural Dialogues in Tehran on Saturday.

“Asia has produced luminaries such as Rumi, Ferdowsi, Gandhi, Nehru and Muhammad Iqbal,” Salehi said.

“As culture minister, I declare that we support any plan to build up cultural relations and interaction between Iranian elites and the leading luminaries of other nations in the region,” he added.

“Such interactions can cause the Asian civilization to flourish,” he noted.

Over 70 cultural and academic scholars from 20 Asian countries are attending the 3-day conference, which has been organized by Iran’s Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO to put a spotlight on cultural and spiritual affinity among the Asian countries.)

The organizers will also hold several meetings at the Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mazandaran University in Babolsar and the Bu Ali Sina University in Hamedan.

Pars Orchestra performs with 450 musicians at Fajr festival

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The Pars Orchestra, an ensemble composed of children and young adults, gave a performance with 450 musicians at the 33rd Fajr Music Festival in Tehran on Friday.

The concert that was performed under the baton of conductor Nasser Nazar at Vahdat Hall was warmly received by an audience of children and parents.



The Pars Orchestra performs during the 33rd Fajr Music Festival at Vahdat Hall on January 12, 2018. (IRNA/Mojtaba Mohammadlu)

The orchestra has had active participation in Fajr music festivals over the past few years.

The concert was performed in two sections: the first of which was performed with 150 musicians, while 300 musicians performed in the second section.

Amir Moqarrab-Samadi, Golnush Salehi and Hamed Kermani collaborated with Nazar as conductors of different sections.

The 33rd Fajr Music Festival will be running until January 20 in several venues across the capital Tehran.

Viacom, CBS not in active merger discussions

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Viacom Inc (VIAB.O) and CBS Corp (CBS.N) are not in active merger discussions, although controlling shareholder Shari Redstone has had exploratory conversations with CBS directors about recombining the companies, two sources familiar with the situation told Reuters on Friday.

CBS and Viacom are both controlled by ailing Sumner Redstone, 94, and his daughter Shari, through their privately owned movie theater company, National Amusements Inc.

Sumner Redstone split Viacom and CBS into separate companies a decade ago. He and his daughter attempted to merge the two in 2016, but the effort failed.

National Amusements, CBS and Viacom declined to comment.

Entertainment and media news website The Wrap on Friday reported that Shari Redstone was seeking to merge Viacom and CBS, sending Viacom shares up as much as 15 percent, to \$35.55.

Tehran Auction sells all 120 lots

**1 →** The artwork was followed by “White Dome III”, an acrylic and black ink on linen by Kamran Yusefzadeh, also known as Y. Z. Kami, and “Only You”, a diptych painting from Farhad Moshiri’s Jar Series, that each was sold for 10 billion rials (about \$230,000).

Moshiri’s other painting entitled “Small Black Bowl” also stood third with 5.5 billion rials (about \$125,000), and an untitled abstract painting by the 95-year-old artist Manucmehr Yekta stood fourth at 5 billion rials (about \$114,000).

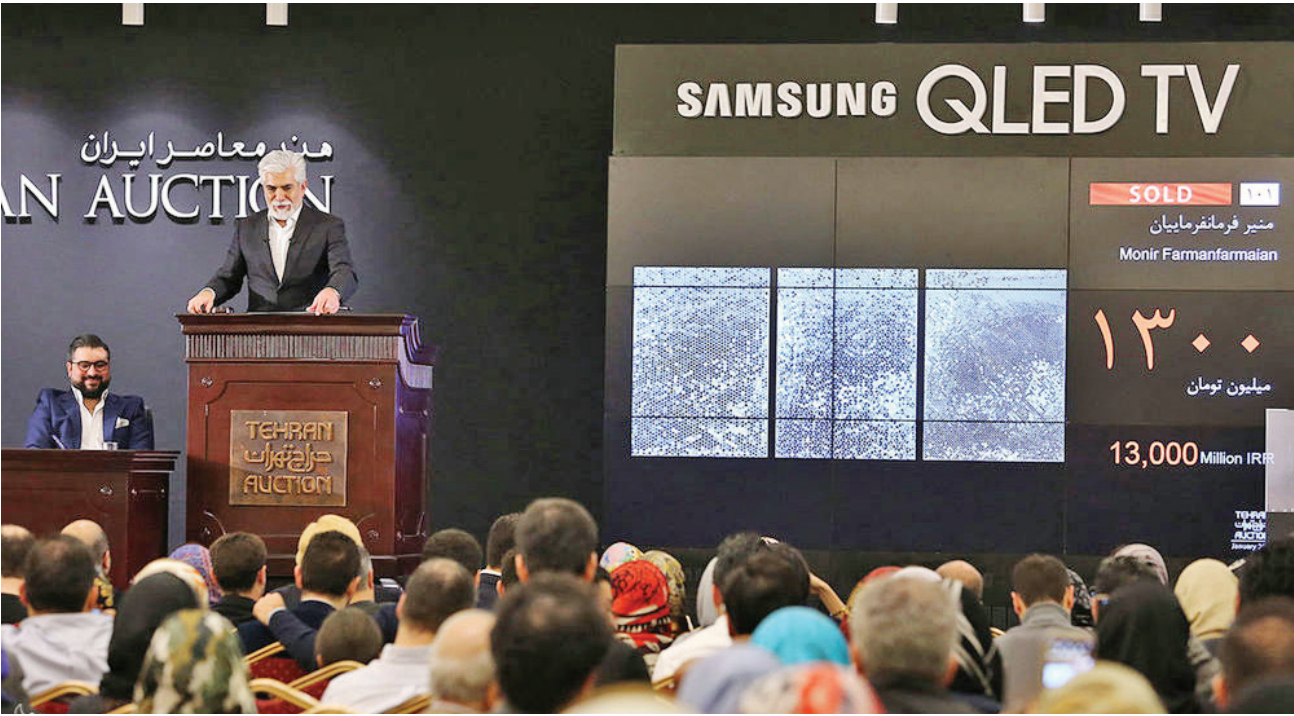
Works by 24 artists went under the hammer at the auction for the first time.

Works by Abbas Kiarostami, Aidin Aghdashlu, Hanibal Alkhas, Nasser Ovissi and Reza Derakhshani were among the highlights at the auction.

The Tehran Auction organizes two sales every year. The first sale dedicated to modern and classic artworks is held in late spring. The second sale, which focuses on modern and contemporary works, is organized in late autumn or early winter every year.

The 8th auction for modern and classic art was held in July 2017.

Art expert Alireza Sami-Azar, a former director of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, is the director of the auction.



Auctioneer Hossein Pakdel takes bid for the sale of an untitled triptych mirror mosaic and plaster on wood by Monir Farmanfarmaian during the Tehran Auction at the Parsian Azadi Hotel in Tehran on January 12, 2018. The artwork was the first top seller, fetching over \$290,000. (Honaronline/Mojtaba Arabzadeh)

Iranian films queue up for Goteborg Film Festival



Pejman Bazeghi (L) and Hedyeh Tehrani act in a scene from “Israfil”

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — A lineup of Iranian films will compete in various sections of the 41st edition of the Goteborg Film Festival, which will be held in the Swedish city from January 26 to February 5.

“Israfil”, director Ida Panahandeh’s elegiac tale of love, loss and loneliness will be screened in the international competition.

“The Invincible Diplomacy of Mr. Naderi”, a documentary co-directed by Maryam Moqaddam and Behtash Sanaeiha about a man named Naderi who wants to act as a mediator between Iran and the United States, has been selected for the Five Continents category.

Maximerat Animerat, a section dedicated to animated movies, will screen

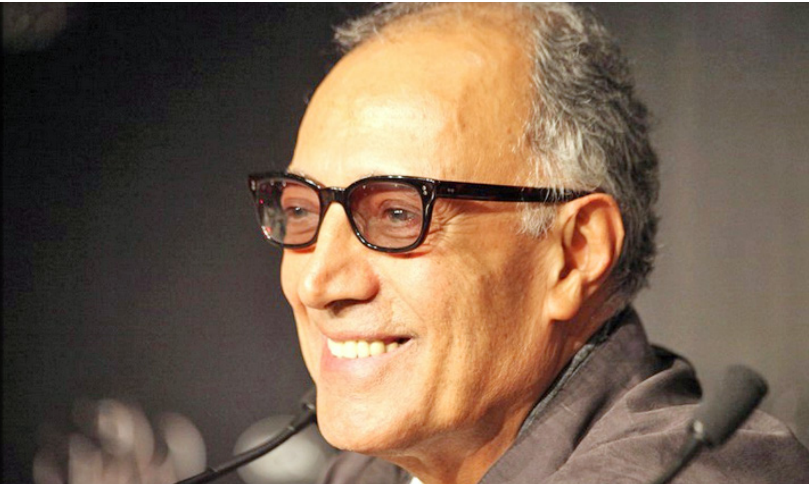
“Maned and Macho” by Shiva Sadeq-Asadi. It is about a girl’s repressed emotions and instincts, which are embodied in some animals that come out of her dreams.

The festival also plans to pay a tribute to the world-renowned Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami by two screenings for his “24 Frames”, a minimalist film triumph narrated through twenty-four hypnotizing frames, in the Masters section.

The Goteborg Film Festival, the largest film event in Scandinavia, will present 399 films from 78 different countries.

French actress Juliette Binoche is scheduled to receive an Honorary Dragon Award for her lifetime achievements. Her films “Three Colors: Blue”, “The Lovers on the Bridge”, “Let the Sunshine in”, and “Code Unknown” will be screened during a special program.

Belgian art center to pay tribute to Abbas Kiarostami



Abbas Kiarostami in an undated photo

**A R T** **TEHRAN** — The Bozar Center for Fine Arts in Brussels will pay tribute to the legendary Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami during a program on January 16.

Agnes Devictor, a French specialist in Iran’s war cinema, is also scheduled to attend the program, the organizers have announced.

Kiarostami’s close friend Seifollah Samadian’s montage film “76 Minutes and 15 Seconds with Abbas Kiarostami” will be screened at the program.

The title of the film refers to the duration of Kiarostami’s life, 76 years and 15 days, and shows a picture of Kiarostami as a filmmaker, photographer, poet, graphic designer, video artist and even as a carpenter.

In addition, “Take Me Home”, Abbas Kiarostami’s final work that is a

characteristically playful tour of the alleys and stairways of southern Italy, with a soccer ball as our guide, will also go on screen.

Kiarostami had been involved from 1940 in over forty films, including shorts and documentaries. He attained critical acclaim for directing “Close-Up”, “Taste of Cherry”, “The Wind Will Carry Us”, “Certified Copy” and “Like Someone in Love”.

A winner of the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival in 1997 for his “Taste of Cherry”, Kiarostami died July 2016 at the age of 76.

Paul Dujardin, the CEO and artistic director of Bozar, visited the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) Deputy Director Abbas Khameyar in Tehran in July 2016 and discussed the development of cultural relations between Iran and Belgium.

Japanese pop group chants cryptocurrency choruses

**TOKYO (Reuters)** — A Japanese pop group hopped on the bitcoin bandwagon on Friday, dedicating themselves to singing and dancing about the cryptocurrencies that have taken the world by storm, and especially their homeland.

In their debut, the eight “Virtual Currency Girls”, or Kasotsuka Shoyo in Japanese, cavorted in maid costumes with frilly skirts and full-face professional wrestling-style masks with fuzzy pom-pom ears, extolling the virtues of decentralized digital currencies such as bitcoin.

“They’re so convenient you kind of have to wonder why we didn’t have them before,” said Rara Naruse, 18, the group’s leader. “We want everyone to learn more about them.”

Each group member adopted the guise of a different cryptocurrency, offering a brief self-introduction to 20 fans gathered at the venue in downtown Tokyo.

Then they launched into “The Moon, Cryptocurrencies and Me”, a stirring anthem incorporating lines such as “Be careful about your password! Don’t use the same



Members of Japan’s idol group “Virtual Currency Girls” wearing cryptocurrency-themed masks pose after performing in their debut stage event in Tokyo, Japan, January 12, 2018. (Reuters/Kim Kyung-Hoon)

one!” to warn against the dangers of trading cryptocurrency, and also more obscure ones,

in English, such as “Hot day, forget myself, go to the moon.”

DiCaprio to star in Charles Manson-era Tarantino movie

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — Leonardo DiCaprio will star in a movie set around the Charles Manson murders, Hollywood entertainment publications reported on Friday, but he will not play the role of the American cult leader.

DiCaprio will instead take the part of an aging, out-of-work actor in the as-yet untitled movie being produced and by Oscar-winner Quentin Tarantino, Variety and Deadline.com said.

Plot details have not been released but Tarantino said in November that it was not a biographical movie but a story set during the summer of 1969, when a string of gruesome killings in Southern California were carried out by Manson’s followers.

Manson, one of the 20th century’s most notorious criminals, died in November at the age of 83. He had been serving a life sentence for ordering the murders

of nine people including actress Sharon Tate.

The Sony Pictures movie is to be released on Aug. 9, 2019, exactly 50 years after Tate and four friends were stabbed or shot dead.

Deadline and Variety said that Australian actress Margot Robbie has been asked to play Sharon Tate. Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt and Al Pacino are also rumored to be interested, or are being sought, for the movie.

Sony Pictures, part of Sony Corp, did not return a request for comment on the casting.

The movie will be the first Tarantino film to be released without the Weinstein Company following allegations by more than 70 women of sexual misconduct against its former chief executive Harvey Weinstein.

Weinstein, who has denied having non-consensual sex with anyone, was fired last November and his independent production company is currently up for sale.



U.S. actor Leonardo DiCaprio looks on prior to speaking on stage during the Paris premiere of the documentary film “Before the Flood” at the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris, France on October 17, 2016. (Reuters/Christophe Archambault)