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No sense to stay in JCPOA if new conditions set: Takht-Ravanchi

POLITICS TEHRAN — Majid Takht-Ravanchi, deputy director of the presidential chief of staff for political affairs, has said that it would be "nonsense" for Iran to stay in the 2015 nuclear agreement if the U.S. links the survival of the deal to new conditions.

Takht-Ravanchi made the remarks in an

interview with ISNA published on Saturday. In a statement on January 12, U.S. President Donald Trump extended waivers of key economic sanctions on Iran for another 120 days. However, Trump contended that he cannot continue to certify the deal in its present form for three reasons: First, the agreement is not permanent. Second, Iran is testing ballistic missiles. And third, the IAEA should be allowed to inspect any military site in Iran, even without reasonable evidence that nuclear activity had occurred there.

Takht-Ravanchi said, "The U.S. should not set conditions or give ultimatum. It should be obvious for the U.S. that Iran will not be scared. →2

Golestan Palace, source of inspiration at Fajr festival

TEHRAN – Tehran's e s k architectural treasure, the lavish Golestan Palace, will provide Iranian fashion designers with inspiration at the coming edition of Fajr International Fashion and Clothing Festival.

For the first time, the festival plans to take up an impressive collection of clothes with the concept of a historic monument, Golestan Palace, in the competition section.

The fashion and textile designers will submit their works revolving around the Golestan Palace during the festival, which runs from February 25 to March 4 in Tehran. →9

Iraqi PM meets Kurdistan PM Barzani: official

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi met on Saturday in Baghdad with the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region's Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, a Kurdish official said.

It is the first meeting between Abadi and a top leader of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) since conflict broke out between Baghdad and the region's authorities over a Kurdish independence referendum held in northern Iraq on Sept. 25.

"Kurdistan delegation headed by PM Barzani is in Baghdad now, met with Haider AlAbadi," said Hemin Hawrami, a senior official of Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic (Source: Reuters) Party in a tweet.



Why Is Paris insisting on imposing missile limits on Iran?

n last September and during the United Nations General Assembly in New York, extensive talks were held between US, British and French officials over the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Britain, as the United States traditional ally, and France as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, had a perfect deal with Washington in this regard. Although Paris and London have repeatedly voiced their opposition to the withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA and called for respecting the nuclear deal, in practice, we see France and Britain cooperation with the U.S. over making reforms in the content of the nuclear deal. In other words, France and the United Kingdom intend to make these reforms look acceptable, and to distinguish between it and the breach of the nuclear deal. This is while any modification of the JCPOA is equal to changing it, and any changes in the JCPOA means a breach of the nuclear deal. This is what neither France nor Britain can deny.

In this equation, France plays an important role. The evidences show that "Donald Trump" and "Emmanuel Macron", the presidents of the United States and France, have sought to redefine the "White House Policy towards the JCPOA". Macaron's words about the "likelihood of completing the JCPOA," and including the issue of Iran's missile power and the new time limitations against Iran's nuclear program in the context of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, can't be

About a month ago, Emanuel Macron explicitly stated that "the JCPOA" is unchangeable. However, he still talks about completing the nuclear deal! What is certain is that completing the nuclear deal means changing this agreement. Under such circumstances, it is not clear what Macron means by changing the nuclear deal. Donald Trump called for the inclusion of new conditions, such as inspections of Iranian military sites, the inclusion of Iran's missile capability in the content of the nuclear deal and removal of the clauses related to time constraints of the JCPOA. →13

Trump's threat to break JCPOA is not serious

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Dr. Pastori Gianluca believes that the U.S. president's threats to withdraw from the JCPOA should not be taken serious because he knows breaking the agreement will put the U.S. in a difficult position.

U.S. president Trump on Friday renewed Iran sanctions relief once again and at the same time warned that it was the last time that he renewed the Iran sanctions relief and asked the Europeans to work on changes to the JCPOA.

The issue was discussed with political science professor of Milan Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Dr. Pastori Gianluca.

Following is the full text of the interview: Donald Trump on Friday renewed Iran sanctions relief once again and at the same time warned that was the last time he renewed the relieves and the Europeans should work on changes to the JCPOA. What is your general assessment of Trump's latest approach toward

A: Trump's vagaries on the JCPOA are a product of his contrasting priorities. On the one hand, he needs to remark his difference from Barack Obama and his policies assuming a non-conciliatory position the issue; on the other, he needs to take into accounts the opinions of his entourage, who largely sees the agreement as the less bad possible option. In this perspective, playing the good cop/bad cop is a way to appease anti-Iranian sentiments without really jeopardizing the agreement.

■ What changes is Trump after?

A: In my opinion, President Trump is not really interested in breaking the deal. Breaking the deal will put him in a very difficult position both at home and abroad. I think his aim is having some amendments approved (maybe more formal than substantial), to boost them as a major political success. His main focus is domestic politics, where he needs to strengthen its position; and relations with Iran are, traditionally, in important and highly emotional issue in the US political agenda. →7

TOD may be a way round air pollution, traffic jam

While air pollution and torturous traffic jam are in the Iranian capital, the government is mulling over implementing transit-oriented development (TOD) programs.

In a seminar held on January 17 in Tehran, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Iran Municipalities and Rural Management Organization (affiliated with Interior Ministry) officially marked the beginning of yet another joint cooperation to tackle the problem of air pollution and traffic congestion through development of public transport.

The "Data Collection Survey on Transit-Oriented Development in the Islamic Republic of Iran" is only the beginning of a bigger project for better urban planning and development.

"TOD is a type of urban planning which is not

dependent on private cars but on public transport," Yukiharu Kobayashi, Chief Representative of JICA Iran office, said over his opening remarks at the seminar

However, Kobayashi continued, TOD concept is quite new in Iran so, the Iranian government requested Japanese government to provide technical assistance for preparation of TOD guidelines, and JICA decided to implement this survey, as well as collection and analysis of further information and consider the support methods by Japan in order to encourage Iran's TOD.

What is TOD

According to tod.org transport oriented development or as it is well-known TOD is the creation of compact, walkable, pedestrian-oriented, mixeduse communities centered around high quality train systems. This makes it possible to live a lower-stress life without complete dependence on a car for mobility and survival.

TOD can be an optimal solution to the complicated, pressing problem of climate change and which greatly minimize the need for driving and energy consumption. This type of living arrangement can reduce driving by up to 85%.

Components of TOD

• Walkable design with pedestrian as the highest priority

• Train station as prominent feature of town

· A regional node containing a mixture of uses in close proximity (office, residential, retail, civic)

· High density, walkable district within 10-minute walk circle surrounding train station Collector support transit systems including

streetcar, light rail, and buses, etc. • Designed to include the easy use of bicycles

and scooters as daily support transport →12



Fallen firefighters commemorated on Plasco anniversary

People commemorated the brave firefighters who lost their lives trying to save people from the Plasco building, a shopping center which caught on fire and collapsed on January 19, 2017.

The towering 17-stroey shopping center in downtown Tehran turned into piles of rubble within seconds after fighting the blaze for more than three hours leaving dozens injured, missing, and dead.

Some of the firefighters got trapped on the rubble of the 55 years old building. The remains of 15 firefighters were recovered after nine days of relief and rescue operations.



Time for reflection on unrest in Iran

t was after midnight on December 31 and I was checking the latest news about protests in Iran on twitter when one post attracted my attention. It claimed the "Iranian regime lost control of the central city of Kashan" -- my hometown -- and that "people have taken control of police stations and military installations in the city". The writer of that post, who is the political editor of a very popular tabloid in Germany, further speculated in another post that this could be the beginning of "syrification of the conflict" in Iran!

By the time that gentleman decided to do some fact checking and deleted the fake news from his page, it was already retweeted nearly 600 times, allowing falsehood to proliferate in public discussion.

This was just one small example of distortion of reality regarding the unrest in Iran. But now that the dust of the protests has settled, it is time for some serious reflection on what happened.

The demonstrations began on December 28 in Iran's second largest city, Mashhad, over alleged corruption, economic hardships and high unemployment and swept to other cities and towns. The number of people that were arrested in days of protests remains disputed. Iran's judiciary spokesperson said "a total of 400 people were detained and 25 killed". Other less official sources have given a higher number.

Post truth, information, and emotion

The news about the protests quickly spread on social media and in turn was picked up by foreign-based satellite channels. On the same outlets exiled journalists and activists living in their own bubble, urged people inside Iran to engage in civil disobedience with absurd actions which drew ridicule from many inside Iran.

In the midst of turmoil, the striking point was the coverage of major foreign media outlets from the U.S. to France and Germany seeking to hype the situation by disseminating sensational information, and assertions under the guise of news reporting. Their coverage was for most part one-sided comprising reports and interviews with foreign observers, exiled journalists and activists who were repeating the same old, emotional and gibberish narrative against the Iranian government. →2



Tehran prosecutor: 54 indictments rioters

TICS TEHRAN — Abbas Jafari-Dolatabadi, the Tehran prosecutor general, said on Saturday that 54 indictments have been issued against those who destroyed public property during the recent unrest.

Jafari-Dolatabadi said the number of those held in custody is now down to 20, adding that decisions would be taken for the remaining detainees in coming days, Tasnim reported.

He also said close cooperation and coordination among officials helped calm the riots.

In protests, which lasted for a week, 25 people were killed. Security forces were among the dead.



Kurdistan premier scheduled to visit **Tehran on Sunday**

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Nechirvan Barzani is scheduled to visit Tehran on Sunday to hold talks with Iranian officials.

Barzani will visit Tehran as an extension of his diplomatic endeavors and dialogue with other countries in order to talk about political, economic, security and cultural issues, according to a statement from Iran's consulate in Erbil that was released on Saturday.

The premier will be accompanied by a delegation including Deputy PM Qubad Talabani, according the consulate. The consulate considers the visit very important and positive.



IRGC voices readiness to help seeding clouds

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force on Saturday voiced readiness to conduct cloud seeding operations as part of a program to fight drought.

Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh said his forces are prepared for cooperation with the Energy Ministry in cloud seeding, Tasnim reported.

He also underlined that the IRGC Aerospace Force would mobilize all equipment to help the government.



Number of police stations to increase across Iran

POLITICS TEHRAN — Police Chief Brigadier General Hossein Ashtari said on Saturday that the

number of police stations across the country will be increased. Months ago, Tehran Police Chief Hossein Rahimi said police stations in Tehran province should be increased to be better able to fight crimes, which occur more frequently in Tehran's suburbs.

Ashtari said the increase will not be restricted to Tehran province and will be implemented throughout the country, Mehr reported.

He stressed that police forces should act with power, kindness and mercy at the same time.



Expediency Council chief urges resolution of economic problems to foil plots

POLITICS TEHRAN — Chairman of Iran's Expediency Council Seyed Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi has urged officials to solve the economic problems, warning of enemy plots to exploit the issue.

Today, the enemies are exploiting the country's economic issues to put pressure on Iran and hamper the country's progress, Ayatollah Shahroudi said in a council meeting

He said economic issues are among the most important issues of the country which needs to be dealt with in order to boost people's livelihoods, ISNA reported.

The Expediency Council chief also thanked the people for their prayers during the time he spent in the hospital.



General: People foiled plot to create rift between **IRGC** and nation

POLITICS TEHRAN — IRGC spokesman Brigadier General Ramazan Sharif on Saturday lauded the Iranian nation for foiling a plot by the enemy to drive a wedge between the nation and the IRGC.

The enemy's failure to foment discord between the Iranian nation and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps was owed to the nation's cleverness and efforts by media, Sharif was quoted by ISNA as saying.

He further praised the country's media outlets, saying the national media, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), defended the IRGC from the hegemonic powers' propaganda and slanders.

issued against

Rouhani receives credentials of four ambassadors



POLITICS TEHRAN — President k Hassan Rouhani received credentials of new ambassadors of Cuba, Ghana, Chile and Cyprus in separate meetings on Saturday.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to expand relations with the Cuban government," Rouhani said during his meeting with Alexis Bandrich Vega, the new Cuban ambassador to Tehran.

Rouhani said that the two countries have good capacities to expand ties especially in areas of science, economy and energy. Elsewhere, he said that Iran is against

pendent countries including Cuba. The Cuban ambassador said expansion of ties is the best "tool" to counter "unfair'

sanctions against Havana and Tehran. He said that Cuba is determined to expand political and economic relations with Iran.

Iran seeks to expand ties with Latin American countries' In his meeting with Ignacio Lianos, the

new Chilean ambassador, Rouhani said that Iran seeks to expand ties with Latin American countries, especially Chile.

The president added that the two countries



private sectors should expand cooperation and also remove banking obstacles.

Elsewhere in his talks with the ambassador, Rouhani said Iran and Chile can hold positive consultations" in helping boost international peace and security.

For his part, Ambassador Lianos described Iran as an "important" and "effective" country and highlighted the necessity of expanding cooperation in promoting international peace. Lianos is the first Chilean ambassador to

Iran since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. 'Iran ready to expand ties with Ghana' In his meeting with Ghanaian Ambassador



Sayuti Yahaya Iddi, Rouhani said that Iran is ready to expand relations with Ghana in various spheres of economy, culture and science.

The ambassador of Ghana also called for expanding ties.

Rouhani calls for expanding banking ties with Cyprus

During his meeting with Petros Nacouzis, the new ambassador of Cyprus, the Iranian president called for expansion of banking ties.

Nacouzis said that Cyprus is determined to expand ties with Iran is various areas especially in banking sector.

Tehran blames U.S. for deteriorating **Afghan security**

POLITICS TEHRAN — A senior Iranian diplomat has blamed the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan as the main cause for the deterioration of security situation in the central Asian country.

Es'haq Ale Habib, Iran's deputy ambassador to the United Nations, made the remarks on Friday at a Security Council meeting on the issue of Afghanistan's relations with its Central Asian neighbors and the link between peace and security.

'Afghanistan has not become more secure in the wake of the U.S. invasion," he said, according to Press TV. The diplomat said, "The fact is that the invasion of Afghanistan, and basically any

invasion in our region, has failed to improve the security situation. The Islamic Republic believes that Afghanistan should be turned into a place for international cooperation rather than

rivalry, he added. "In the world today, peace, security and development cannot not be bound to a single country's borders and can only be achieved within all-inclusive regional frameworks," the envoy remarked.

Ale Habib further stressed that increasing economic cooperation with Afghanistan promotes the fight against terrorism.

Over the past decade, Iran has stressed the need for reinforcing economic ties with Afghanistan as an approach towards restoring regional peace, the diplomat said.

Iran has implemented more than 300 infrastructure projects in Afghanistan, worth about \$500 million in total, and hosted millions of Afghan refugees over the past three decades, he pointed out.

The U.S. and its allies invaded Afghanistan under the guise of the so-called war on terror. Some 17 years on, the local Taliban militant group has only boosted its campaign of violence across the country, targeting both civilians and security forces in bloody assaults.

More recently, the Daesh terror group has also taken advantage of the chaos and established a foothold in eastern and northern Afghanistan.

No sense to stay in JCPOA if new conditions set: Majid Takht-Ravanchi

1 → We have said for several times that we will not be the first to pull out of the JCPOA, however, if we reach the point that we will not enjoy benefits of the agreement, we will quit the deal without paying attention to threats,"

The official also noted that Iran's defense capabilities are non-negotiable.

Officials in Tehran have said in case the nuclear deal falls apart Iran will accelerate its nuclear activities much higher than the level existed prior to the implementation of the agreement.

■ 'Iran, Europe have held talks to remove banking obstacles'

Takht-Ravanchi also said that Iran and Europe have held talks to remove obstacles to banking relations.

"So far, the talks have proceeded well and will be continued by the time a good solution is reached," he said.

He also said that the Europeans are well aware of the JCPOA achievements for the international community and will not be influenced by U.S. President Donald Trump's comments to change

their stance on the agreement in the next four months.

Takht-Ravanchi said that a day before Trump's announcement Iran and Italy signed a deal which proves willingness on the part of Europe to cooperate with Iran.

The Europeans seek to enjoy economic interaction with Iran, he said.

"The reason behind the Europeans" $full \, support \, for \, the \, JCPOA \, is \, that \, they \, see$ the deal as a multi-sided project which have been able to settle economic and security problems," noted Takht-Ravanchi who was involved in nuclear talks to craft the 2015 nuclear agreement.

It will not be end of world if Europeans scrap JCPOA'

However, Takht-Ravanchi said Iran is ready for the worst scenario in regard to the nuclear deal, saying it will not be "the end of the world" even if the Europeans decide to withdraw from the JCPOA.

But the Europeans do not seem to be willing to terminate the deal, he added.

Germany weighs new sanctions against Iran: report

Germany is lobbying among European allies to agree new sanctions against Iran in an attempt to prevent U.S. President Donald Trump from terminating an international deal curbing Tehran's nuclear program, Der Spiegel magazine reported on Saturday.

The report cited diplomats in Brussels as saying that Germany was pushing for new sanctions together European allies were taking Trump's criticism against

A German foreign ministry spokeswoman and another government spokesman both declined to comment on the report.

Germany wants to punish Iran for its missile program and its meddling in conflicts in other Middle East countries, such as the war in Yemen and Syria, the report said.

Above all, the aim of the Europeans is to prevent the States from terminating the nucl sealed in 2015, as repeatedly threatened by Trump, Der and others.

Iran said last week it would retaliate against new sanctions imposed by Washington after Trump set an ultimatum to fix what he called "disastrous flaws" in a deal curbing Tehran's nuclear program.

Trump has said he would waive nuclear sanctions on Iran for the last time to give the United States and European allies a final chance to amend the pact. Washington

(Source: Reuters)

Time for reflection on unrest in Iran

1 -> This setting is a central part of the "post-truth" world which Oxford Dictionary defined as "circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and per-

The "post-truth" concept is not a new phenomenon and has been around for a while. But its usage spiked in 2016 both with the populist Brexit movement, resulting in the UK's vote to quit the European Union, and Trump's rise to the presidency.

Author Ralph Keyes in his book, the Post-Truth Era: Dishonesty and Deception in Contemporary Life, defines post-truth era as a time when "borders blur between truth and lies, honesty and dishonesty, fiction and nonfiction. Deceiving others becomes a challenge, a game, and ultimately a habit.3

Of course trying to mislead the public is nothing new but in the case of Iran one can hardly think of any other country where the outbreak of protests leads observers to reach for their revolutionary theory and hyperbole and "the fall of regime"

What was different this time?

The latest demonstrations in Iran were different from most protests that have previously roiled the country since the 1979 Islamic revolution

Firstly, despite the geographical scale, the number of demonstrators was small and limited. While mostly ordinary working class people with contradictory slogans were taking part in the protests, middle

class in large population centers stayed at home because they were not sure about the outcome. Moreover, this was not an authentic civic movement for change because it lacked clear goals and leadership that naturally turned chaotic in several provinces and towns when thugs and mobs set fire to state-owned buildings and damaged public properties.

Secondly, let's not forget, just seven months ago more than 41 million people turned out in the presidential election with over 57 percent of them voted to continue Hassan Rouhan's government of "hope and prudence". That's why it was highly unlikely that such overwhelming show of support and hope suddenly disappear.

What comes after is important The unrest was a convenient pretext for anti-Iran opposition warmongers in the U.S. and elsewhere to exploit it for their own purpose of promoting regime change and substitute Iranian exiles as representatives of people who were protesting in the streets. Foreign media outlets gave some coverage to the remnants of the old monarchist Pahlavi regime but it was the notorious Mojahedin-e Khalq terrorist Organization (MKO) that received the most coverage on Fox News, Voice of America and other outlets.

Just as a side note, during a week of turmoil, the Voice of America Persian service "set an all-time traffic record with their coverage of the Iran protests with 5.5 million Facebook video views & nearly 3 million site visits," Amanda Bennett, the head of VOA, wrote

in a tweet on January 2.

Other major outlets misleadingly used propaganda pictures of rallies organized by MKO in the United States and Europe to distort perception of protests in Iran. MKO fought alongside the Iraqi army in Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. The group also carried out numerous bombings and assassinations after the Islamic revolution in 1979. The group was until 2012 on the U.S. terrorism list and now is pushing for sanctions against Iran. That's why the group has no support

among Iranians. It is important to note that people of Iran are political savvy and while many may want a more liberal and Western like society, they hate U.S. antagonism and have reasons to distrust the United States. They have also seen the outcome of U.S. regime change policies in places such as Syria and Libya. Therefore, no sensible and intellectually honest Iranian takes MKO, monarchists, or other opposition groups and activists outside Iran as viable alternative to the current government.

■ Blindness to evidence

Gradual changes are taking place from Iran's political development, social freedoms, human and minority rights, government accountability and transparency to even people's style of living. One might argue for those changes in the merits but the truth is that foreign meddling in Iran has always adversely affected these developments.

Some people may not like history but they should be reminded that in 1953, the democratically-elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh was overthrown in a coup orchestrated by the CIA and British intelligence service. The U.S. and Britain backed Saddam Hussein in the war against Iran and over the past decades, Washington has imposed punishing economic sanctions on Iran, threatened it with war and funded anti-government opposition groups.

When Iran signed a landmark nuclear deal with six world powers in 2015, many Iranians had expectations that their economic situation would improve. Even part of Rouhani's electoral appeal stemmed from expectations that the accord would bring foreign investment and jobs. Iran's economy has recovered since, but because of U.S. sanctions such recovery was not enough to match the expectations or alleviate growing inequality

Under President Donald Trump, the U.S. has stepped up efforts to isolate Iran -- adding the country's handling of protests to its list of reasons. The Trump administration's support for unrest, regime change and encouraging social unrest including political statements of condemnation and biased media coverage to undermine the legitimacy of the government is definitely an obstacle to Iran's democratic progress.

Post-truth era is characterized by "willful blindness to evidence and appeal to emotionally based argument," and when it comes to covering Iran, misrepresentation of facts can really be harmful.

Germany stops arms sales to Saudi Arabia

Germany has stopped selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and almost all of its allies waging war on Yemen, in a decision likely to have both an impact on the Riyadh regime and a domino effect on other Western and non-Western countries exporting arms to Saudi Arabia.

German government spokesman Steffen Seibert said on Friday that the Federal Security Council was no longer issuing export licenses that "are not in accordance with the conclusion of the exploratory talks," Germany's official DPA news agency reported.

The official was referring to ongoing negotiations among the German political factions of the Christian Democratic Union, the Christian Social Union, and Social Democrats on the formation of a new coalition government.

A draft paper on arms exports that came out of those talks said "the federal government, with immediate effect, will no longer export arms to countries as long as they are

involved in the Yemeni war."

Around 13,600 people have died since Saudi Arabia started leading a number of its vassal states in an invasion of Yemen in March 2015. The war, which enlists the participation among others of the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, Morocco, Sudan, and Senegal, has been reinforced by weapon supplies and logistical support from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Washington signed a \$110-billion arms deal with Riyadh last year.

By stopping its own arms sales to Saudi Arabia, European heavyweight Germany may become a model for other Western and non-Western powers already under pressure



to end their arms sales to the Riyadh regime. Rights groups have long called for an arms embargo on Saudi Arabia over potential war crimes in Yemen. A United Nations panel recently compiled a detailed report of civilian casualties caused by the Saudi military and its allies during the war, saying the Riyadh-led coalition has used precision-guided munitions

"The attacks were carried out by precision-guided munitions, so it is likely these were the intended targets," the panel's report said, according to Al Jazeera.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE were among the top recipients of German-made weaponry in 2016. The DPA report said, "The German public is traditionally wary of arms deals and [Chancellor Angela] Merkel has been pressured to end sales to countries with precarious human rights records."

The only exception to the German freeze is Jordan, which will be receiving 130 million euros' (158 million dollars') worth of military equipment. Jordan hosts a squadron of German Tornado fighter planes and other hardware used by German Armed Forces.

Russia slams U.S. bids to form Syria 'alternative authority'

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has lashed out at the U.S. for undermining the territorial integrity of Syria through efforts to form "alternative bodies of authority"

across the Middle Eastern country. "The U.S. [is] trying to form... alternative bodies of authority on vast... parts of the Syrian territory," Lavrov said

in a news conference at the UN headquarters in New York. "That is a fact and that does contradict their own obligations... to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Syria," he added.

On Wednesday, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said U.S. troops would stay in Syria for the foreseeable future, adding that the U.S. would not fund the reconstruction of any part of Syria, where President Bashar al-Assad is in power.

Tillerson elaborated on a U.S. plan to push for a faster political transition in the country by discouraging economic relationships between Damascus and any other country.

Syria strongly condemned the U.S. plan to maintain its military presence in the country as interference in its internal affairs and a blatant violation of international law.

According to figures the Pentagon released in December, there are at least 2,000 U.S. troops in Syria as well as a

diplomatic presence in cities such as Kobani. 'U.S. confrontational strategy'

Lavrov also rejected U.S. allegations that China and Russia were undermining efforts to enhance the international security, describing the strategy as "confrontational."

"It is regrettable that instead of having a normal dialogue, instead of using the basis of international law, the U.S. is indeed striving to prove their leadership through such confrontational strategies and concepts," Lavrov said.

He made the remarks in reaction to the latest U.S. national

defense strategy released by Defense Secretary Jim Mattis on Friday which shifted focus from the country's so-called campaign against terror to "competition" with great powers.

Mattis claimed that Russia and China seek to "create a world consistent with their authoritarian models.'

The Russian foreign minister described the strategy as the Pentagon's campaign for "additional financial resources." Lavrov expressed Russia's preparedness "for dialogue" over military doctrines and expressed confidence that many U.S. military officials understand the need for "strategic stability" which involves cooperation between Moscow and Washington.



Criticism of Russo-phobic intrigues

Elsewhere in his remarks, Lavrov urged Trump to counter "Russophobic" intrigues against the U.S. president, in an attempt to improve relations between Washington and

He argued that any improvement in Moscow-Washington relations is contingent upon "the preparedness and capability of Mr. Trump to counter the domestic intrigues which are directed first and foremost against him."

"Such intrigues are playing the Russophobic card," Lavrov said. The senior Russian diplomat expressed confidence that Americans will eventually get tired of the anti-Russia rhetoric and recognize the fact that mending bilateral ties will be in their own interest.

"We see that all problems are blamed on Russia, and this domestic political life is using the Russophobic card for bad

"But I am positive that the time of those who use such practices will pass," he added.

Since early 2017, American intelligence agencies have claimed that Russia interfered in the 2016 election to try to help Trump defeat Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton. They alleged at the time that Moscow's interference included a campaign of hacking and releasing embarrassing emails, and disseminating propaganda via social media to discredit Clinton's campaign.

Trump, for his part, has long denied any collusion between his campaign and Russian operatives during the White House race, which led to Clinton's loss.

Russia has strongly rejected the claims about Moscow's interference in the U.S. election in favor of Donald Trump, with Russian President Vladimir Putin calling the allegations

(Source: TASS)

Sisi, ex-army chief Sami Anan to run in 2018 election

Egypt's President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has announced he will run for a second, four-year term in the country's presidential elections that will take place in March.

Sisi made the expected announcement during a televised conference in Cairo where he stressed the importance of citizens voting to "preserve the democratic experience that began four years ago".

"Your participation in the election will be a strong message," he said, before jokingly adding that Egyptians would "become exhausted with me again because Egypt needs every sacrifice"

Following the president's announcement, former Egyptian armed forces chief of staff General Sami Anan said on Saturday that he will contest Sisi in the election.

"I call on civilian and military institutions to maintain neutrality towards everyone who had announced their intention to run and not take unconstitutional sides of a president who will leave his post in a few months," Anan said in a video statement on Facebook. Egypt must be saved from incorrect pol-

icies. Anan said.

The presidential vote will be held on March 26-28, with a runoff scheduled for April 24-26, if needed. Candidates must register between January 20-29.

"It was just 11 days ago when the election commission announced that the elections



will be held in March - that's just eight weeks away," Dalia Fahmy, associate professor of political science at Long Island University, told Al Jazeera from New Jersey in the U.S., adding that "Sisi has been systemically consolidating power around him."

Fahmy noted that the announcement of the January 29 deadline left hopefuls with "just a couple of weeks to announce candidacy, submit paperwork, assemble a campaign team, campaign for president and actually get election monitors in place".

So far, two other candidates have stated

their intentions to run: Khaled Ali, a human rights lawyer and opposition leader, and Essam Heggy, an Egyptian space scientist who served as the country's adviser for scientific affairs from 2013 to 2014. Earlier this month, Ahmed Shafik, former

prime minister, backtracked on his stated intention to be a presidential candidate.

The 76-year-old had previously announced his plan to run in an exclusive video message to Al Jazeera.

The New York Times quoted one of Shafik's lawyers, who asked not to be named, as saying

that the Egyptian government had forced him to withdraw by threatening to investigate previous charges of corruption against him.

As Egypt's army chief, Sisi became president in 2013 after removing Mohamed Morsi, of the Muslim Brotherhood, in a coup. He went on to win by a landslide in the 2014 presidential elections.

Under Sisi, human rights in Egypt have deteriorated, with organisations reporting that at least 60,000 people have been imprisoned since the general came to power.

There have also been reports of forced disappearances and a clampdown on press

Fahmy said the upcoming vote was just an election to rubber stamp the existing reality of Sisi's rule.

"Will the elections be free and fair? No, because there is no contestation - we've seen viable candidates withdraw or pull out, and we have two right now who are very weak in nature and really haven't done the legwork,'

she said. "So what we're looking at, exactly almost seven years after the initial Arab Spring in 2011, is that we are returning to a time where elections are nothing more than window trappings of the vestiges of democracy but not really institutions that lead to the voice of the people to be heard."

(Source: Al Jazeera)

U.S. government shuts down as Trump feuds with **Democrats**

The world's most powerful government shut down on Saturday after President Donald Trump and the U.S. Congress failed to reach a deal on funding for federal agencies, highlighting the country's deep political divisions.

For the first time since October 2013 - when a similar standoff that lasted 16 days kept only essential agency operations intact federal workers were being told to stay at home or in some cases to work without pay until new funding is approved.

The shutdown began a year to the day after Trump was sworn

His inability to cut a deal despite having a Republican majority in both houses of Congress marks arguably the most debilitating setback for his crisis-plagued administration. Democrats had insisted that any bill to renew government

funding also contain permanent protections for approximately 700,000 young, undocumented immigrants who were brought illegally into the United States as children. Last week, Trump rejected a bipartisan Senate deal that would have accomplished that as well as hand the White House \$2.7

billion in new money for immigration enforcement at America's

Minutes before Friday's midnight deadline for a funding deal, Trump's White House issued a statement blaming Democrats for the shutdown. "We will not negotiate the status of unlawful immigrants while Democrats hold our lawful citizens hostage over their reckless demands," it said.

The shutdown was cemented when the Senate, meeting late into Friday night, blocked a bill to maintain the federal government's funding through Feb. 16.

The vote was 50-49, well short of the 60 needed in the 100-mem-

ber chamber to vault the bill over a procedural hurdle.
Four Republicans joined most Democrats in killing the measure.
A fifth Republican, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, voted "no" too, but only as part of a parliamentary maneuver to make it easier to bring another bill to the floor.

The breakdown ended a long day of closed-door meetings in Congress and at the White House.

Even as they promised to work on getting the government back up again as soon as possible, Republicans and Democrats blamed each other for the predicament.

--Blame game

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell joined Trump in attacking Democrats.

What we've just witnessed on the floor was a cynical decision by Senate Democrats to shove aside millions of Americans for the sake of irresponsible political games," McConnell said. Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said his party took

significant steps to reach a deal, including raising the possibility of funding for Trump's proposed wall along the U.S. border with Mexico, which they have ardently opposed.

"It's almost as if you were rooting for a shutdown," Schumer said in comments on the Senate floor aimed directly at Trump. Republican and Democratic leaders were expected to renew negotiations on Saturday in the hope of restoring government

financing before Monday. The immediate impact of the government shutdown was also eased somewhat by its timing, starting on a weekend when most

government employees normally do not work anyway. No matter the timing, the Defense Department said its combat operations in Afghanistan and other military activities would continue, while federal law enforcement officers also would remain on duty.

Without a quick deal, most day-to-day operations in the federal government will be disrupted. Hundreds of thousands of government employees will be put on temporary unpaid leave, including many of the White House's 1,700 workers.

Trump's administration said it planned to keep national parks open with rangers and security guards on duty. The parks were closed during the last shutdown in 2013, upsetting many tourists and resulting in the loss of \$500 million in visitor spending in areas around the parks and at the Smithsonian museums.

No one is likely to be on hand, for instance, to manually wind an historic clock outside the U.S. Senate chamber. Many Capitol maintenance workers also were being instructed to stay home. The shutdown will start to have more serious consequence

on Monday as government employees ranging from financial regulators and tax collectors to scientists and civilian staff at the Pentagon will have to stay away from work. Early on Saturday, McConnell offered up a new plan. In-

stead of the Feb. 16 end date for the temporary spending bill, he proposed Feb. 8. Senate Democrats had argued this week for an extension of

just four or five days to force both sides into serious negotiations on the immigration issue.

(Source: Reuters)

Syrian army, allies take Idlib air base

The Syrian army and allied forces captured Abu Duhur airport in Idlib province from insurgents on Saturday, a Hezbollah military media unit said.

They had pushed into the military air base hours earlier, pressing their offensive in Syria's largest rebel stronghold, said the media unit run by Hezbollah, which fights alongside the Damascus government.

The air base has been under the control of the militant rebel faction Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and its allies since Sep-

"Its capture should roughly mark the closing of east Idlibsouth Aleppo loop, as the regime cuts off this big expanse of desert territory that it can then systematically clear," Sam Heller, fellow at the Century Foundation told The Daily Star.

'It safeguards existing routes into Aleppo from Syria's center and south, while exposing the length of rebel-held Idlib to a major attack," he said.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that in anticipation for the regime's recapture of the base, HTS withdrew from a number of villages in Jabal al-Hass in the south Aleppo countryside. A blast in the city of Idlib also killed seven, most of whom it said were HTS fighters. The regime has now retaken control of 117 towns and villages in the Idlib province, the Observatory reported.

(Source: Daily Star)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98817.3
IFX	1083.51

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	44,840 rials
EUR	55,700 rials
GBP	62,400 rials
AED	12,450 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

Brent	\$68.61/b
WTI	\$63.31/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.20/b
Gold	\$1,333.15/oz
Silver	\$17.05/oz
Platinium	\$1,016.25/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Britain able to have bespoke deal with EU: Macron

French President Emmanuel Macron said on Saturday Britain would be able to have a bespoke deal with the European Union after Brexit, one of Prime Minister Theresa May's objectives.

But in an interview with the BBC, Macron said London's financial center could not enjoy the same level of access to the EU under May's current Brexit plan, which envisages Britain leaving the EU's single market and customs union.

Macron has said in the past Britain could have pacts with the EU along the lines of those with Canada or Norway but not its own, special deal.

But asked in the interview whether that was fair, given how long Britain had been part of the EU, Macron said: "No, it's not a question to be fair or unfair. I take that as a reference. But for sure, you will have your own solution.'

Asked whether there would be a bespoke, special solution for Britain, he replied: "Sure, but you will ... I take these two references because this special way should be consistent with the preservation of the single market and our collective interests.

"And you should understand that you cannot by definition have the full access to the single market if you don't tick the box.

Macron insisted Britain would not get full access to the EU's single market without accepting its basic principles of freedom of movement and willingness to abide by EU jurisdiction.

"As soon as you decide not to join these preconditions, it's not full access," he said. "So it's something perhaps between

this full access ... and a trade agreement."

Macron repeated a warning he made during a visit to Britain on Thursday that full access to the EU single market for Britain's financial services was not possible. [nL8N1PD1PY]

"It depends on the proposals made by the UK," he said. "But for sure, full access for financial services to the single market is not feasible, given the functioning of the single market - so by definition it's not a full access."

Britain and the EU struck a divorce deal last month that paved the way for talks on future trade ties and boosted hopes of an orderly Brexit.

The BBC released extracts on Saturday of the Macron interview which it will broadcast in full in the Andrew Marr Show on Sunday

(Source: Reuters)

2017's worst-returning precious metal becomes hedge fund darling

After lagging behind other precious metals last year, platinum is finally outperforming, and hedge funds are taking notice.

Money managers increased their bets on a rally for platinum, a commodity used in pollution-control devices for cars. Investors had been pessimistic on prices until the start of this year, but that sentiment changed as signs of synchronized global growth boosted expectations for demand. The metal's strong correlation to gold is also providing support as a weaker dollar propels alternative assets higher.

While platinum rose in 2017, it was a lackluster performance compared with gold, silver and palladium. After Volkswagen admitted falsifying pollution data for its cars in 2015, the outlook for platinum had dimmed as purchases of diesel-fueled vehicles fell in Europe. Now, things are turning around as China starts implementing stricter emissions standards, fueling increased demand for the metal.

Precious metals have continued to climb even after the Federal Reserve raised borrowing costs in December for the third time in 2017 as traders sought a store of value. The dollar is trading near a three-year low against a basket of 10 currencies.

Sentiment change'

"There has been a change in sentiment in platinum," said Maxwell Gold, a director of investment strategy at ETF Securities, which overseas \$2.5 billion in assets in the U.S. "With the price rebound since the Fed raised rates last year, platinum is beginning to catch up to palladium and gold.

In the week ended Jan. 16, money managers raised their net-long position, or the difference between bets on a price increase and wagers on a decline, by 79 percent to 19,806 futures and options, according to U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission data released Friday. That's the highest since mid-September.

Platinum futures have climbed 8.7 percent in January to \$1,020.10 an ounce on the Comex in New York. That compares with this month's 3.5 percent gain for palladium, 1.8 percent for gold and a 0.6 percent slide for silver.

Tighter emission standards in China include lower pollution limits set this year for all diesel vehicles, which will mean higher use of platinum catalytic converters to meet the requirements, (Source: Bloomberg)

Iran's crude monthly output rises 8,000bpd

ECONOMY TEHRAN—According e s k to OPEC's latest monthly report published on January 18, Iran's oil production, based on secondary sources, stood at 4.405 million barrels per day (bpd) in December, up 8,000 bpd from that of November.

The country produced 4.397 million barrels per day of crude oil in November, the

The OPEC's report also put Iran's oil output based on direct communication in the mentioned month at 3.811 million bpd, a 67,000 bpd fall from 3.878 million bpd in November.

Meanwhile, the report also presented the country's heavy oil price to be \$60.87 in December, an increase of \$1.6 or 2.7 percent



from \$59.27 in November.

According to the report, the country's year to date average heavy crude price stood at \$51.71 almost \$12.14 more than the figure for last year's same time span.

The report stated that OPEC NGLs and

non-conventional liquids output in 2017 is estimated to grow by 0.17 million bpd, averaging 6.31 million bpd, while for 2018, growth of 0.18 million bpd is forecast to average 6.49 million bpd. Production growth is expected to be mainly in Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Iranian light crude oil price rises \$1.69 per barrel in a week

ENERGY TEHRAN—Iran's light crude oil price rose \$1.69 in the week ended on January 12 to settle at \$69.26 per barrel, Shana news agency reported on Saturday.

The country's light oil price was reported \$68.51 on average since the beginning of 2018. Iran's heavy crude oil price also experi-

enced a \$1.24 growth in the said week to settle at \$65.62 per barrel. The country's heavy oil price was reported \$65.07 on average since the beginning of 2018. In the mentioned week, Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

(OPEC)'s basket price stood at \$66.81 per barrel with \$1.32 increase compared to the preceding week.

56,076 cars imported in 9 months

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran e s k imported 56,076 cars valued at over \$1.488 billion during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2017), ISNA reported on Saturday citing the data by Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

In last June, the Iranian government shut down the online auto import registration system saying that the import regulations are being revised.

The system was run in late December and the government boosted import tar-



iffs which seem to increase imported cars prices, but there are still controversies over the issue of tariffs in the country.

Belarus determined to tighten economic ties with Iran

ECONOMY TERHAN — On the threshold of the 14th meeting of Iran-Belarus Joint Economic Committee, Belarusian Industry Minister Vitali Vouk told IRNA on Friday that his country is determined to boost economic ties with Iran.

"In the occasion of the two-day economic committee which is planned to be held in Tehran on January 22 and 23, a Belarussian delegation will make a visit to the Iranian capital," he announced.

"Our visiting delegation to Tehran is bigger than the previous ones, since new areas of cooperation for the two sides have been created and we hope that financial turnover between Iran and Belarus will hit \$500 million in near future," he said.

We are to discuss further cooperation with representatives from Iran's various sectors such as industry, medicine, electrical vehicles, petrochemicals, and agriculture," the Belarussian minister added.

The delegation includes representatives from the Belarussian industrial sector, since our country pays a special attention to this sector and is ready to transfer its industrial knowledge to Iranians," Vouk added.

As reported Vouk had a meeting with Iran's Ambassador to Minsk Mostafa Oveisi on Friday, where the two officials conferred on bilateral cooperation and the planned programs of the 14th meeting of joint economic

Trump administration says U.S. mistakenly backed China WTO accession in 2001

The United States mistakenly supported China's membership of the World Trade Organization in 2001 on terms that have failed to force Beijing to open its economy, the Trump administration said on Friday as

it prepares to clamp down on Chinese trade.
"It seems clear that the United States erred in supporting China's entry into the WTO on terms that have proven to be ineffective in securing China's embrace of an open, market-orientated trade regime," the administration said in an annual report to Congress on China's compliance with WTO commitments.

"It is now clear that the WTO rules are not sufficient to constrain China's marketdistorting behavior," the report said.

While the annual report from the U.S. Trade Representative's office has long taken China to task for unfair trade practices, the Trump takes a harsher tone against Beijing.

between the world's two largest economies and as the administration prepares actions to curb China's alleged theft of intellectual property. A decision in the so-called "Section 301" investigation is expected in the coming weeks.

The report also points at Russia's behavior, saying Moscow had no intention of complying with its WTO obligations, a trend the administration said was "very troubling."

A White House official said despite consultations with China, it had failed to follow through on promises of moving more toward a market-orientated economy and playing by international trading rules.

"The president and his principal advisor are united in the belief that this is a problem that has gone on for too long and needs to be addressed," the official said.

"In the past, conversations have focused first such review under U.S. President Donald more on discreet opening for discreet products, and what we're saying is systemati-It comes amid worsening trade tensions cally we're not going to tolerate broad-based

policy that attempts to promote state-led enterprises," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Trump told Reuters in an interview this week he was considering a big "fine" against China for forcing U.S. companies to transfer their intellectual property to China as a cost of doing business there.

While the administration is also looking at whether foreign imports of steel, aluminum, washing machines and solar panels are harming U.S businesses, China's alleged theft of intellectual property is a particular concern to Trump because it affects a large swath of American firms, the official said.

Trump did not specify what he meant by a "fine" against China, but the 1974 trade law that authorized an investigation into China's alleged theft of U.S. intellectual property allows him to impose retaliatory tariffs on Chinese goods or other trade sanctions until China changes its policies.

In Beijing, many experts believe Washing-

ton is unwilling to pay the heavy economic price needed to upset prevailing trade dynamics between the two countries. In the report released on Friday, Trump's

trade envoy, Robert Lighthizer, said the global economy was threatened by major economies who undermined the global trading system.

"The global trading system is threatened by major economies who do not intend to open their markets to trade and participate fairly," Lighthizer said. "This practice is incompatible with the market-based approach expressly envisioned by WTO members and contrary to the fundamental principles of the WTO.

The Trump administration has already pledged to transform 164-member trade body and has blocked WTO judicial appointments in a move to win WTO reforms.

"What we want to do is see countries behave responsibly within the international trading system," the White House official said. (Source: Reuters)

All eyes will be on Davos 2018, but what can we expect?

■ What is Davos?

It's a small town in the Swiss Alps, about 92 miles from Zurich. Most of the year it's filled with skiers and walkers. A fascinating but little known fact is that it is the highest town in Europe.

But, more importantly, once a year, for a week in January, it is home to the World Economic Forum.

The World Economic Forum? Yes. Catchy name, isn't it? It was originally called the

European Management Forum. The WEF moniker took hold from 1987.

It's a gathering of the world's business leaders, economists, politicians, and a smattering of celebrities. This year Cate Blanchett and Elton John will provide some

When is Davos 2018?

It officially runs from Tuesday, January 23, to Friday, January 26. But because of the difficulties in getting thousands of people up and down the mountain, it really starts on the preceding weekend.

How do they all get there?

Some people - think the most important of world leaders, who this year include Indian prime minister Narendra Modi, Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the European Commission, and the UK's own Theresa May - arrive by helicopter or private jet.

Lesser mortals either take shuttle buses from Zurich airport, which wind up each and every bend of the long, mountain road, or three different trains, to enjoy the picturesque scenery and reach the summit.

And what happens?

Essentially, it's a conference. But it's much more than that. There are panel discussions and speeches and oneon-one on-stage interviews, the sort of things you'd find at a normal conference.

But there are also behind the scenes background



as well as groups of senior bankers discussing the latest crisis, and all sorts of other background chats, many of which go unreported.

Discreet dinners and lunches in remote mountain chalets are also de rigeur - none of which appear on the official programme.

There are also a range of dinners at which the great and good speak, as well as evening drinks parties, known in Davos speak as 'nightcaps', which run into the wee small hours.

■ What are they talking about?

The WEF began life in 1971 when Professor Klaus Schwab of the University of Geneva gathered European business leaders to talk about global management practices and how to catch up with US rivals.

It has ballooned from there.

Each year there are official themes that are decided following consultation between the WEF and its members, as well as discussions with economists and journalists.

Those discussions are honed down by Schwab, the executive chairman, and that year's co-chairs. The allfemale co-chairs this year include Sharan Burrow, general

secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation; Fabiola Gianotti, director general of Cern; Christine Lagarde of the International Monetary Fund; and Erna Solberg,

prime minister of Norway.

The theme of 2018 is: "Creating a Shared Future in a Fractured World". It will look at ways of reaffirming international co-operation in areas such as international

security, the environment and the global economy. But in reality those topics tend to get overshadowed by the people who attend.

Who is going this year - any big names?

A certain President Donald Trump is lined up to give the closing keynote address. Trump's speech is likely to attract plenty of attention - not just because of the controversy that follows him everywhere but because the president is a champion of protectionist economic policies, the antithesis of what the Davos elite is supposed to believe in.

From the UK side, shadow chancellor John McDonnell - himself no avowed friend of the global elite - will also

be attending. Who decides who goes?

The WEF is funded through corporate partners, who pay different amounts of money depending on the tier of membership. Membership delivers entry.

CNN estimated in 2014 that the cost of sending a delegate to Davos was \$40,000.

In addition, economists, politicians and journalists are invited.

The whole access system is tightly controlled through a badge system. Delegates have a white badge, but there are different white badges depending on who you are - ranging from white with a hologram if you're a senior politician to plain white if you're the spouse or partner of a delegate.

There's also a whole rainbow of other badges, from orange for reporting journalists to green for a delegate's (Source: The Telegraph)

Speculation grows that OPEC will end cuts early as prices rise

As oil trades near a three-year high and crude stockpiles fall rapidly, analysts are questioning whether the OPEC-led production cuts will last until the end of the year. As the producer group gears up for a meeting with its partners to review strategy in Muscat, Oman, this weekend, there are growing expectations that the deal will be phased out early.

The "probability is growing" that the accord may conclude before the end of the year, said Harry Tchilinguirian, BNP Paribas SA's head of commodity strategy. Discussions around an early exit are likely to emerge at the next OPEC meeting in June, he said.

"If Brent is still trading around \$60 a barrel and oil inventories are close enough to OPEC's five-year average," the deal may be phased out informally by nations gradually weakening their compliance with production cuts, Tchilinguirian said. It would be "prudent" to expect OPEC members will start cheating given higher oil prices, said Energy Aspects Ltd.'s chief oil



analyst Amrita Sen. Other analysts predict a more formalized

unwinding of the cuts. "I don't think the deal per se will end" as

inventories near the five-year average, said Bjarne Schieldrop, chief commodity analyst at SEB AB. The Declaration of Cooperation -- the 2016 accord that first established the group of 24 oil producers-- will still stand, but be modified to allow for production cuts to gradually unwind from mid-2018, he said.

Giovanni Staunovo, commodity analyst at UBS Group AG, expects a similar outcome. Citigroup Inc., whose data show that global oil stockpiles are already back in line with the fiveyear average, predicts a summer agreement to ramp up production.

The oil producers themselves say they're sticking to the plan. While Russia's Energy Minister Alexander Novak told reporters on Jan. 12 that the meeting in Oman could include discussion of mechanisms for gradually exiting the cuts, four days later he affirmed that the pact should continue. Ministers from the United Arab Emirates, Iraq and Kuwait also insisted there's no need to change tack. (Source: Bloomberg)

Asia spot LNG prices climb to three-year high on winter demand

Asian spot prices for liquefied natural gas (LNG) hit their highest in more than three years this week, with traders in Asia and Europe flagging temperatures in northern Asia are set to dip further as production outages curb supply.

The cold wave in northern Asia - by far the world's biggest LNG-consuming region - has also opened up arbitrage opportunities for traders, attracting several LNG tankers from the United States, shipping data from Reuters showed.

Spot prices climbed to \$11.70 per million British thermal units (mmBtu), according to LNG traders in Asia and Europe. Several February cargoes were sold this week in the \$11.50 to \$11.80 per mmBtu range, traders said, including to Japan and China.

March spot LNG prices traded in the \$10 per mmBtu range. Some March bids were reported at \$10 per mmBtu.

"Given the spike up in Asian prices over win-

ter-largely due to China-arbitrage is probably looking quite attractive and that is what has been pulling cargoes west to east," said Emma Richards, senior oil and gas analyst at BMI Research.

Asian spot markets are not only at their highest since November, 2014, but they have also been above oil-linked LNG prices since the beginning of last December - a sign the market is unusually tight.

Most of Asian LNG is supplied under fixed monthly volumes priced under a link to crude oil.

When spot LNG becomes more expensive than this oil-indexed gas - which currently costs around \$8.50 per mmBtu - traders say it points to a market that has become so tight that buyers are willing to pay more than usual to secure supplies.

As well as cold weather, the current tightness is partly due to a massive gasification program in China under which millions of households

are being switched from using coal to natural gas for heating.

Although demand is expected to taper within weeks, with winter drawing to a close and the Chinese New Year holiday approaching, traders said a last bout of strong buying was now under way amid a cold snap that is expected to see unusually cold weather - Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo are all expected to see temperatures plummet by mid-next week.

In preparation, utilities across the region have ordered extra cargoes in the spot market, especially from the United States, to meet demand and stock up inventories.

Shipping data on Thomson Reuters Eikon shows at least six tankers currently crossing the Pacific from the United States. Tankers are also coming in from Peru and Trinidad and Tobago.

Furthermore, Egypt Natural Gas Holding Company (EGAS) is preparing to launch a tender to buy liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies for the second quarter of 2018, according to an EGAS company source and trade sources.

Production curbs at Malaysia's Bintulu production complex, operated by state-run Petronas, and Angola LNG are also boosting prices, said one Singapore-based LNG trader.

Responding to shortfalls, Petronas purchased a spot cargo loading on Feb. 4 from Australia's AP LNG plant to replace lost output, paying an estimated price in the high \$11 per mmBtu range

'The volumes from U.S. are mainly to fill Chinese demand. Cheniere has snapped up all available tankers in the Atlantic," the trader said.

Gail India awarded a spot cargo purchase tender for a cargo to be delivered from Feb. 5-15, though it was not possible to confirm the identity of the supplier.

(Source: Reuters)

Shell buys into blockchain company

After backing a blockchain-based trading platform last year, now Shell has gone a step further into what's possibly the hottest tech segment right now, scooping up a minority stake in a startup dubbed Applied Blockchain.

Applied Blockchain has been around for three years now, and has clients from the banking, telecoms, carmaking, manufacturing, and aerospace industries. This is the company's entry into energy.

The size of the deal was not disclosed.

Blockchain is making its way into oil and gas slowly but surely. Last November, media reported that a consortium involving Shell, BP, and Statoil is working on the development of a blockchain-based energy commodity trading platform, along with three large commodity traders—Gunvor, Koch Supply & Trading, and Mercuria, Reuters reports, citing

The platform, which has financial backing from Dutch ABN Amro, ING, and French Societe Generale, should launch by the end of this year.

In January 2017, Mercuria, in partnership with ING and Societe Generale, announced it was preparing the first oil trade using blockchain technology. The trade involved an African crude shipment to Mercuria shareholder Chem-China. When he announced the test at the Davos World Economic Forum, Mercuria's CEO, Marco Dunnand, said, "The energy industry will have to digitalize more and more

in oil production, refining, shipping. So traders will also have to participate.

The purpose of digitizing commodity trading is to save costs as well as time, and to simplify the whole process of trading. As a senior ING executive said in February following the successful test trade with the Mercuria shipment, The commodity finance industry is hampered by nature by inefficiencies and outdated procedures. By applying blockchain technology, we expect that we can eliminate a lot of these, making the overall process faster and more cost effective and the tests we have been able to carry out

(Source: oilprice.com)

U.S. solar has a \$1.5 billion, long-shot plan to end a trade war

While President Donald Trump prepares to announce his decision on new solar panel import tariffs, the U.S. industry is quietly trying to broker a sweeping deal to settle a different trade dispute with China involving an estimated \$1.5 billion held by Washington.

Since 2012, the U.S. has been collecting duties on panels imported from China. American solar companies are pushing to divvy up that money between manufacturers and suppliers in both the U.S. and China as part of a deal that, they say, could effectively reset solar-trade relations between the two nations.

The proposal, which trade experts describe as a long shot at best, would call for Trump to drop existing duties on solar panels -- and for the president to not levy new ones. China, in turn, would abandon its own tariffs on U.S. polysilicon, a key solar-panel ingredient. There would be many hurdles to making it all happen. Chief among them, of course, is convincing Trump to take a conciliatory stance with China. Yet solar companies say the deal would fit squarely into the president's agenda.

"This administration has a real opportunity to succeed where others failed as a result of your commitment to a re-balancing of trade relations," Craig Cornelius, senior vice president of renewables at power generator NRG Energy Inc., said at a hearing before Trump's trade representative in December.

The White House didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. Emily Davis, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Trade Representative, declined to comment.

Deadline looms

Trump has until Jan. 26 to decide whether to impose tariffs, making it unlikely that any deal will be brokered in time to prevent new duties. Most U.S. solar companies oppose tariffs, saying they will cripple the industry and kill tens of thousands of jobs. In the short-term, many are lobbying to keep any duties as low as possible. Ultimately, they are pushing for a broad deal to end all solar trade barriers between the U.S., China and other nations.

"We maintain our position that a global settlement, following the general construct proposed last month by NRG's Craig Cornelius, would be a welcome outcome to these cases," Solar Energy Industries Association President Abigail Ross Hopper said in an emailed

The push for the tariffs Trump is considering began in April, when Suniva Inc., a bankrupt, Georgia-based panel maker filed a trade complaint arguing it had been crippled by a flood of imports. SolarWorld Americas, the U.S. unit of a bankrupt German manufacturer, joined the case the following month.

Suniva's chief creditor is $\widecheck{\mathrm{SQN}}$ Capital Management. The creditors of SolarWorld AG, the German company, include Centerbridge The U.S. International Trade Commission voted in October to

recommend tariffs of as much as 35 percent on imported panels. The president has the final say on the size, scope and duration of any duties. They could affect panels imported from nearly every nation 2012 tariffs

The tariffs that the U.S. first imposed in 2012 initially targeted Chinese panels and later were broadened to include those from Taiwan. The duties came after SolarWorld Americas accused Chinese

manufacturers of illegally selling panels at prices below the cost of production. China hit back in 2014 with tariffs on solar-grade polysilicon from the U.S. Over the last five years, the U.S. is estimated to have collected

more than \$1.5 billion in duties on imported panels, Cornelius said in his December testimony. James Rockas, a Commerce Department spokesman, declined to comment.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Tanker delivering Russian LNG to Boston makes U-turn in Atlantic: reports



The vessel was due to arrive in the United States on Saturday, but now it is heading back toward the Spanish port of Algeciras near Gibraltar.

A tanker carrying Russian-produced liquefied natural gas (LNG) has turned back while on a trip in the Atlantic, a day before it was scheduled to deliver the shipment on the U.S. East Cost, Bloomberg reported, citing ship-tracking data.

The data shows that the Gaselys vessel is now heading toward the Spanish port of Algeciras near Gibraltar and should arrive there next week.

The vessel is carrying a cargo from the Isle of Grain terminal in Britain meant for the Everett regasification terminal near

The tanker is owned by the French energy company Engie. However, earlier this week the Russian business daily Kommersant reported, citing sources, that the gas had been produced at the Yamal LNG plant in Russia.

'The LNG cargo that ENGIE Gas & LNG recently purchased was loaded onto a tanker from ENGIE's fleet at the Isle of Grain facility in the United Kingdom. Isle of Grain is a large global

import/reexport facility receiving LNG from nearly all exporting countries, and is well situated to serve markets on either side of the Atlantic," Carol Churchill, a spokesperson with the Engie's office in Boston, said in an emailed statement to Sputnik.

Earlier, Russia's Novatek, which co-owns the Yamal LNG project, said the company sold the gas to a trader, after which it is no longer responsible for its movement.

'Yamal LNG sold the gas to our trading partner Novatek Gas & Power. In turn, the company resold the gas to Malaysia's Petronas, after which we have no relation to the shipment. We just sold it and this is it. We don't know what will happen to this gas in the future," Novatek spokesperson Yury Melikhov told the newspaper Izvestia.

The shipment was due to the cold temperatures that hit the northeastern U.S. earlier this month, driving up gas prices to an unprecedented \$6,300 per thousand cubic meters.

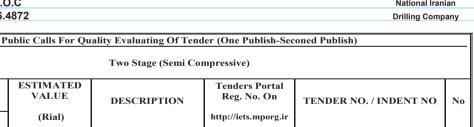
"Given the exceptionally cold temperatures and resulting high gas demand in the U.S. Northeast, ENGIE Gas & LNG purchased this spot cargo to supplement our other contracted supplies from Trinidad," Churchill said.

According to Bloomberg, the situation is unusual, but sometimes it happens that a tanker carrying an LNG cargo which is not tied to a contract with fixed destination changes course en route as owners wants the highest price and the best market.

Kommersant reported that the shipment contradicts Washington's energy policy which is aimed at turning the U.S. into a major LNG-exporting country. According to data from the U.S. customs service, it is the first shipment to the Everett terminal since 2014. Experts, however, suggested that this shipment is unlikely to become a new trend and rather indicates the increasing globalization of the gas market.

(Source: Sputnik)

have proved this.



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Brief discription of subject

National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) address pasdaran Blev., Airport Saqare, Ahvaz, Iran hereby intends to purchase its requirements from qualified and interested tenderers through Two-stage public tender (semi pressed) upon following terms and conditions: A) Qualitative evaluation of tenderer:

The evaluation is based on article (G) implementing regulations of the law of tenders and also carried out base on worksheets qualitative evaluation inquiry in the tender doucments. Minimum acceptable point of quality is 60.

B) Preparation of tender documents: Purchasing of documents:

In order to receive the tender documents, 510,000 Rials should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.

Reciving of documents:

Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum 10 days after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Sector Tenders, Foreign Procurement of Capital Goods dept., end of the workshop No. 8, Karoon Industrial Area, Ahwaz, IRAN.

Tel No.: 061-34142387 or Room #431, coordination office of NIDC, NIOC No. 8 center Building, Yaghma alley, Jomhoori St., Tehran, IRAN, Tel No.: 021-66700249.

Only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and recieve tender ducments from foreign procurment department in due date will be known as tenderer from tender committee. C) Delivery of call quality evaluating:

Tenderers shall submit the completed documents including qualification worksheets in form of software in CD/DVD within 14 days from last day of document recived deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1th floor, Tender Committee, Building operations, National

Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel No.: 061-34148205~6, 061-34148580 Type of guarantee:

A) Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activites licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranain Drilling Company.

Duration of credit guarantee & quotation

This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on. WWW.NIDC.IR NIDC Telegram Channal: @nidc_pr **National Iranian Drilling Company Contracts Department** تهران تایمز: نوبت اول ۹۶/۱۱/۱ نوبت دوم ۹۶/۱۱/۲

Oil price rally will not persuade OPEC to end production cuts, analyst says

The recent uptick in oil prices is not likely to be enough to persuade OPEC to end production cuts this summer, Richard Mallinson, geopolitical analyst at Energy Aspects, told CNBC on Friday.

Crude futures have climbed to highs not seen since the early days of a slump in December 2014, prompting some analysts to suggest the recent price rally could hasten the process of OPEC devising an exit strategy. Brent crude futures hit a peak of \$70.37 a barrel on Monday, with the global benchmark since paring some of its recent gains to trade at \$68.90 on Friday afternoon.

However, when asked at what stage oil traders could expect OPEC to begin phasing out the current level of production cuts, Mallinson said the major oil producing group would need to wait until the middle of 2018 before it could "confidently" feel the market had leveled out.

Nonetheless, he did not expect the 14-member cartel to end its deal with 10 other allied producers in June.

"We will see compliance drop in the second half of the year (so) they are going to want to really cement the gains they have made and the rebalancing they have achieved," he added. In recent weeks, big investment banks have raised their target price for oil as crude futures have risen to multi-year highs.

Bank of America Merrill Lynch and Morgan Stanley both upped their forecasts for crude prices this week, while Goldman Sachs said the risks of prices overshooting its current targets are mounting.

The main price driver has been a supply cut from OPEC and Russia, who started to withhold output in January last year. The OPEC-led production cuts, that are scheduled

to last throughout 2018, are aimed at clearing a supply overhang and propping up prices. OPEC is next scheduled to meet in Vienna, Austria, on June 22.

Mallinson said that while it was understandable for oil traders to be wary of the group's summer meeting, he emphasized they would be mistaken in thinking the major oil producing group's only options were to either stick with the current level of supply cuts or to allow flat-out global production.

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

(Source: CNBC)

The center must hold in Germany

Let's hope the Social Democrats know half a loaf is better than none. After four months of uncertainty, it's a relief that Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union, its Bavarian sister party, and the Social Democratic Party have struck a preliminary deal to form a new coalition government. Their agreement isn't perfect -- coalitions are inevitably messy -- but the outlined program is pragmatic and centrist. Germany needs to prove to itself, and to the rest of Europe, that platforms like this can work.

Unfortunately, though, the pact isn't signed and sealed. The SPD is wavering. Its leader, Martin Schulz, must sell it to delegates on Jan. 21 and then to the broader party ahead of a vote in March. If he fails, it will be serious setback for Germany and the European Union.

The SPD, Germany's traditional workers' party, is divided between centrists and socialists. There's no easy way to resolve their differences, and doing so is a longer-term challenge for Schulz and his successors. Right now, though, they need to recognize the opportunity before them. This is a moment to counter extremism in Germany while bringing forward much-needed reforms to the euro zone.

The agreement makes a strong commitment to European integration, proposing an expanded EU budget with Germany bearing its full share of the cost. That suits the SPD fine. Domestically, the party got less than it wanted. It gave up its demand for a higher top tax rate. It also compromised on its proposal for a universal mandatory health-care system, agreeing instead that employers will pay more to cover their employees. But the deal

This is a moment

to counter

extremism in

much-needed

Germany while

bringing forward

proposes to invest more in education, research and development, housing, elder care and student loans -- all measures the SPD can claim credit for.

In many places, the pact is suspiciously short on details. It talks of stricter immigration controls but doesn't say much about integrating the immigrants Germany already has.

reforms to the euro zone. There's little on digital infrastructure, where Germany lags. And though the partners promise to reach the country's 2020 target for carbon emissions, they don't say how. (Coal provides 40 percent of the country's energy; the agreement is silent on

the need to close coal-fired power plants.) All being well, the

final agreement will fill these gaps. Even if the new coalition is formed, it will control barely half the seats in the Bundestag, not the 80 percent it did before. Six parties sit in parliament today, not four, and the fringes -- including the anti-immigrant, far-right Alternative for Germany -- are getting louder. Governing this new Germany won't be easy, whatever happens. But the country's best bet, and Europe's too, is a revived alliance of the political center.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Myanmar is fraught with danger for Rohingyas

The world must not stand by if the refugees are forcibly returned If all goes to plan, Bangladesh will begin next week to repatriate Rohingya Muslim refugees to Myanmar. More than 700,000 fled military operations in Rakhine province last year in what the UN deemed a classic case of ethnic cleansing. The same army that conducted the crackdown - burning villages, raping women and executing men — remains in charge of the province. So long as this is the case, and there is no process to ensure returnee rights are respected, conditions for a safe repatriation are not in place. It is a source of great disappointment in the west that Aung San Suu Kyi, the de facto leader of the Myanmar government, has found herself on the wrong side of this tragedy. She has failed to stand up for the Rohingyas, and has been ineffectual at best in countering horrific abuses by the army. Should the agreement between her government and Bangladesh lead to the forcible repatriation of refugees, it would compound the sense in western capitals that the former torchbearer of democracy is a fallen angel. The governments of both Bangladesh and Myanmar insist that the repatriation process will be voluntary. Yet, if enough volunteers do come forward to fulfil an agreed quota of 300 returnees a day, it would likely be because conditions on the Bangladesh side of the border are also extremely difficult. Makeshift settlements housing the refugees are squalid and frightening as local hostility mounts. Nor has Myanmar prepared a suitable welcome. Muslim villages have not been rebuilt. It is unclear anyway whether the army intends to allow villagers back to their land. They appear to be constructing a holding site instead. Prior evidence suggests this will be little better than a concentration camp. Nor is there any guarantee that soldiers will not repeat the same abuses that provoked the exodus. UN officials are right to push for a stay until such fundamental issues are resolved.

Until now, the army has strictly limited access to Rakhine by aid agencies and journalists. That needs to change. Understand-

ably, the refugees want their return to be supervised internationally. They want to be granted the citizenship that until now has been denied them. At the very least, Myanmar should allow the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to supervise the process. Even this basic request has been refused. In the face of such flouting

Western outrage alone is unlikely to sway the generals, who survived years as international pariahs.

of international law, it was inevitable that western capitals would review their terms of engagement with the country. But they should be wary of overestimating their leverage, and of confounding the government and an army. The two share power, but the civilian leadership has no formal or informal control over the military. There is a fine balance to be struck between censure and continued engagement. Ideally there would be a firmer multilateral response. Persian Gulf countries could lean more heavily on Bangladesh and lend more financial support to ease the burden of hosting so many refugees. The UN Security Council could also stiffen its response. Western outrage alone is unlikely to sway the generals, who survived years as international pariahs. The Chinese on the other hand have more leverage as big investors in the country and as a regional hegemon. China is keen to be seen as a responsible global power. Using its influence to ease the plight of the Rohingyas would be a step in that direction.

(Source: FT)

Trump is helping to make the region a crueler place



There really is no point any more in talking about Donald Trump or U.S. foreign policy. They do not exist. Indeed, the Trump "presidency" is about as real as "Palestine". Both deserve inverted commas although the first fantasy would clearly represent white and largely Christian Americans trying to make their country great again at the expense of lesser creatures, while the second – which is not even a state – obviously qualifies as a Trump "s***hole country"; its people are not exactly white, they are largely Muslim and many seek asylum from the enslavement of the longest military occupation of modern times. For Norway, of course, read Israel.

So in the crazed mind of the booby who thinks he's running the United States, there's not much point, surely, in peace between a modern and much loved ally and the third world people forced to live in the manure pits further east and south. Jerusalem is thus the capital of Israel, the Oslo of the Middle East, built on the "green hill far away" - though in the hymn it is supposed to be "without a city wall". But what the hell? Trump likes walls, and Cecil Frances Alexander, the 19th century Irish hymnodist of "There is a Green Hill Far Away" also wrote "All Things Bright and Beautiful" which surely appeals to the crackpot in the White House who speaks so eloquently about "beautiful babies" (in Syria, when they are dead) and "beautiful weapons" (in Riyadh, before they have killed any babies).

In fact, to talk about Trump's Middle East, it's necessary to enter the lunatic asylum. After all, "Palestine" does not qualify as a state and Israel, which does, has not the slightest idea where its eastern border lies geographically. In the middle of Jerusalem? Halfway across the Palestinian West Bank? Along the entire length of the Jordan River? And what about poor Gaza? When the Israelis bombed the place to bits in 2008-2009 (they did the same again in 2012 and 2014), they dropped munitions on the Palestinian sewage system and contaminated both drinking water and the sea with ... Oh well, yes, of course, they turned part of Gaza, quite literally, into a s***hole.

Not even Jared Kushner, the beloved sonin-law and real estate magnate and dealmaker supreme - a woeful Dickensian hero, if ever there was one - can work out the dimensions of this particular Middle East property or, for that matter, either part of it. Since, along with the U.S. ambassador to Israel, Kushner supports the Jewish colonization of the Arab West Bank – and, believe me, there are no s***holes on those hilltop set-



President Donald Trump in the Arab Islamic American Summit on May 21, 2017, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

A presidency built on such weak foundations will do little to help little to help any negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and has already made things worse.

tlements – even he will not be able to tell us exactly where the eastern border of Israel runs, or may run or will run, eternally and forever and ever, Amen.

And that's the problem, I fear, for the crank in the Oval Office. Much of the world is a land of "vapours" - the kind that supposedly affected your brain (Trump might consult Caliban about this) – and apparitions. The Middle East, as we all know, is a place of djinns, ghosts, Crusaders, Saracens, Apocalypses, 12th Imams and Christ figures and bearded men in caves. But all of them have a greater chance of appearing or reappearing in the second year of Trump's "presidency" than a peace between two states whose physical dimensions are way beyond the comprehension of Jared and his "Kushner Companies"

Acknowledging all this has a price, of course. Several times, most recently in Dublin, I have pointed out – in discussions about the Middle East, especially after the U.S. claim that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel – that Donald Trump is mad, insane, crackers, and should be in a mental institution. And on each occasion I've been reminded – by presenters or producers - that I am not qualified to say this since I am not a medical doctor. I find this strange. If, for example, I had stated that Trump was utterly sane and level-headed, I don't think I would have been reminded of my lack of medical qualifications. Nor would this have happened if I had described (as I have) Muammar Gaddafi as a lunatic, which

But you have to watch out for those Trumpites who pop up to call you "fake news" and who frighten radio station editors. The media's continuing respect for "fair play" when discussing a president who is selfevidently a dangerous and racist xenophobe (as opposed, for example, to the Arab variety) should one day be examined. Gaddafi, mad. Saddam, mad. But try that on Trump and, hem, you'll have to produce your general practitioner's certificate to make any such aspersion about this infantile person.

So let's not be fooled. Trump, in whatever fantastical, delusional form, is making the Middle East a more brutal and cruel place, and will continue to do so, aided by his eversmiling, ever hopeless son-in-law and his

clutch of generals - "Mad Dog" Mattis did not earn his nickname because of his military wisdom, and his conviction that Iranian Shiites rather than Iraqi Sunnis messed up America's plans in post-invasion Iraq suggests that he is dangerously emotional rather than professionally rational. It's easy to convince oneself that very odd soldiers - chaps who ride across the Rubicon, capture Moscow when it's on fire or wear moustaches after serving as Unteroffiziers on the Western Front - don't really have much influence on history

The Arabs know all about the power of soldiers. Remember Colonel Nasser and Colonel Gaddafi, Colonel Ali Abdullah Saleh, Air Force Commander Assad and Air Chief Marshal Mubarak and former Second Lieutenant Sadat and Field Marshal al-Sisi? Three were assassinated, two died of heart attacks and two more are joyfully still with us. Of course, they all live or lived in nations which Trump would presumably categorize as "s***hole countries". But at

(Source: Independent)

Qatar remains an important French partner in the Persian Gulf, but it's not the only one

On Dec. 7, French President Emmanuel Macron arrived in Qatar for a short yet very profitable visit. It took place in the wake of Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani's own trip to Paris in September. During his eight-hour stay in Doha, Macron visited al-Udeid Air Base —the largest U.S. military base in the Middle East — where France also has a contingent of soldiers. He was then received at Sheikh Tamim's administrative office, the Emiri Diwan, to discuss several matters of bilateral interest, as well as the diplomatic standoff in the Persian Gulf, before flying back to Paris.

Macron and Sheikh Tamim signed various defense and transportation agreements totaling \$14 billion, the most prominent being Qatar's purchase of 12 Rafale fighter jets, with an option to buy 36 more. Qatar already acquired 24 Rafales back in 2015, for some \$7 billion. The deals also included Qatar's order for 50 narrow-body jets from Airbus, with an option for 30 more, and a letter of intent to acquire 490 Nexter armored vehicles, worth nearly \$1.8 billion. Major civil engineering deals included the \$3.5 billion contracts to run the Doha metro and a new tram line north of the city, awarded to the French national railway company SNCF and the Paris metro operator RATP, and a \$130 million contract to French utility company Suez to dredge and clean up a vital lagoon.

These deals crown decades of diplomatic and commercial relations since the French Republic was one of the first Western countries to recognize newly independent Qatar in 1971. The tight ties can be measured by the sincere Francophile of the Oatari elite. The emir is an avowed francophone, and Oatar joined the International Organization of La Francophone in 2012 as an associate member — the only country in the region to be granted such status. Relations never really suffered from changes in French administrations, and although Macron has yet to define his strategy for Persian Gulf countries, one can safely assume that he will not revolutionize his country's policy in the region.

Doha is an important interlocutor and partner on several major regional topics, chief among them combating terrorism. A substantial part of Macron's December talks in Doha was the signing of a declaration of intent regarding bilateral cooperation to take on terrorist financing. Qatar is also an important trading partner for France, which is seeking to maintain its hard-won strategic position. In 2015, France's trade balance with Qatar amounted to a record \$3.2 billion — an 89 percent increase from 2014 — primarily due to major defense contracts. The French market share in Qatar grew steadily at an average pace of 3.7 percent until 2015, when it hit a historic 9 percent. In 2016, Qatar ranked seventh in bilateral trade surplus with France, according to the French Treasury.



French President Macron(L) and Emir of Qatar(R) addresses press conference on Dec.7,2017.

In his dealings with the Persian Gulf, Macron has so far stayed on the path of his predecessors.

Qatar has thus been an important partner for France for a long time. Nonetheless, the existence of a so-called special relationship between the two countries, truly distinct from France's other bilateral relationships in the Persian Gulf, is somewhat exaggerated

Paris has had close relations with Saudi Arabia since the late 1970s and with the United Arab Emirates — currently its main economic partner in the Persian Gulf region — since the early 1990s. Oatar was only one out of the three Persian Gulf monarchies, along with Kuwait and the UAE, with which France signed a formal defense agreement, including a security guarantee for defense against external threats, in 1994, after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. France does not have such an agreement with Saudi Arabia.

There is, however, a Qatari exception. The French government has signed financial and tax agreements with other Persian Gulf Arabe states, but its deals with Doha are especially favorable to Qatari investments in France. The convention with Doha was signed in December 1990 and entered into force four years later. Qatari residents in France, as well as the Qatari state, are exempt from taxation on financial assets, provided that the value of their French real estate assets does not exceed their other assets. An additional provision signed in 2008 that took effect a year later even exempts Qatari investors in France from taxes on the profits they make when they rent or sell properties.

That inordinate advantage was granted by then-President Nicolas Sarkozy, who had a close personal relationship with Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, the current emir's father who abdicated in 2013. It is very likely that he may have wanted to thank the ruling family for its role in the liberation of the Bulgarian nurses held hostage in Libya, a political operation France was closely involved in.

This does not seem to have been in vain. Qatari investment has skyrocketed in France since the 1990s and now exceeds \$20 billion, including iconic assets such as the Paris Saint-Germain football club. In 2015, France was the second-highest recipient of investments from the Qatar Investment Authority, the country's sovereign wealth fund, representing 11 percent of its assets. The Qatar Investment Authority also holds minority shares in France's top listed companies, such as AccorHotels, LVMH, Veolia, Vinci,

Total, Engie, Suez, Airbus and more. These close ties have stirred critics in France, who denounce an unhealthy relationship between French and Qatari elites, including allegations of numerous Qatari invitations, gifts and privileges offered to French politicians, iournalists and intellectuals. Others decry Qatari support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which has influence among some French Muslim organizations.

As a candidate, Macron had promised to review the exorbitant financial privileges France gives to Persian Gulf Arab states. He even singled out Qatar as being one of the countries, along with Saudi Arabia, that allegedly contributed to funding terrorism. As president, he maintained in an interview last summer that Qatar and Saudi Arabia had financed groups that had "contributed to terrorism."

Yet such statements did not lead to a significant shift in bilateral relations. Whereas Sarkozy was keen to develop relations with Qatar and his successor, Francois Hollande, reinforced the longstanding partnership with Saudi Arabia, Macron was expected by many to distance France from both countries. Instead, diplomatic reality, as well as commercial interests, prevailed, and Macron has so far maintained the paths of his predecessors, nurturing both Riyadh and Doha without favoring one over the other.

In fact, France has never really considered its policy in the Persian Gulf to be a zero-sum game. But intra- Persian Gulf tensions could interfere with that. Since a severe diplomatic crisis erupted between Saudi Arabia and Qatar last June, which still has no resolution in sight. Paris has tried to build bridges between Doha and Riyadh, with shuttle diplomacy between its two anchors in the Persian Gulf, neither of whom it wants to lose.

(Source: WPR)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY TEHRANTIMES 7

Trump's threat to break JCPOA is not serious

☐ Considering the EU, Russia and China supports to the IAEA and Iran's opposition to any changes to it, how realistic are Trump's requests? Will the EU and other signatories to the deal give up to his requests?

A: I don't think the EU, Russia or China will ever follow Trump's path; it strongly contrasts with both their interests and their policies. On this assumption, it seems difficult to envisage any Iranian concession. On the domestic side too, President Rouhani cannot afford appearing too 'soft' on the nuclear issue, not to strengthen his domestic opposition. However, as long as Iran keeps on 'playing by the rules' (and IAEA certifies it), US room for manoeuvres is quite limited.

Are European countries able to resist Trump's requests? A: Broadly speaking, European countries don't like Trump, his attitude, and his choices; for these reason — as stated above — I don't think they will ever follow him on the de-certification path. At the same time, I don't think Trump will ever put a real pressure on European partners to pursue his Iranian agenda. Currently, U.S.-Europe relations are at a low ebb, and, if Trump is not really interested in breaking the deal (as I assume), I see no reason to put under stress an already troublesome relation.

How serious should his threat be taken?

A: Trump's attitude is quite unpredictable, on Iran as well as on other international issues. However, I don't think his threat to break the deal or to decertify Iran again should be taken too seriously. Breaking the deal may appease some parts of the U.S. public opinion but is quite a dangerous political option, and both the Congress and the administration are well aware of this fact. Worth noting, when the President decertified Iran for the first time, the Congress chose to take no action against Teheran.

What will be the consequences of possible withdrawal of Trump from JCPOA for U.S.? What will be Iran's possible



reaction?

A: Breaking the agreement will put the U.S. in a difficult position, increasing its isolation, especially if EU, Russia and China continue to support the deal. If these countries stick to their commitment, Teheran's best option is sticking to its current 'conciliatory' position.

Rouhani and its supporters have the utmost interest in promoting loyal adherence to the JCPOA, but they can do so only by proving to the Iranian public opinion that the 'nuclear deal' makes their country better off.

■ What can Iran do to reduce the U.S. pressures?

A: On the nuclear issue, Iran currently enjoys large international support. On this assumption, from my point of view, Iran's best strategy is loyally fulfilling the duties the agreement entails, leaving the U.S. with the burden to prove its non-compliancy, possibly against IAEA's opinion. Anyway, as far as the EU and the other supporting countries remains committed to the JCPOA, the political and economic impact of a U.S. unilateral rejection will be probably limited.

Trump should stop fantasizing about killing the Iran nuclear deal

(The Tehran Times does not agree with all the views expressed in this article because Iran, as a signatory to the NPT, has never been seeking to build nuclear arms and all the commotion created over Tehran's nuclear program prior to the July 2015 nuclear agreement were politically motivated. Yet the article written by Lawrence J. Korb and posted on the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists on Jan. 15, cites reasons why Iran's nuclear program is separate from its missile program and that attempts by Donald Trump to change the text of the nuclear agreement is mere fantasy).

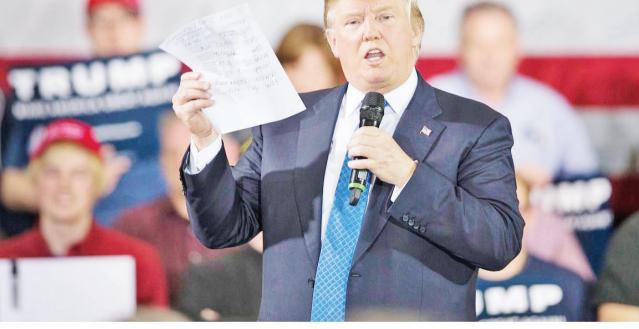
To understand President Trump's recent decision to keep the Iranian nuclear deal alive by waiving sanctions against Iran for the third time—but saying this will be the last time he will do so, unless the deal is significantly renegotiated—requires an understanding of the history of arms control deals negotiated by the United States. Taken in context, the president's repeated attempts to force a renegotiation of the Iran agreement can be seen as the counterproductive fantasies they have been. They should stop, as the president and Congress turn to focus on more pressing security challenges.

Before the Iranian nuclear deal of 2015, the United States had negotiated a series of deals over four decades to limit the development and deployment of nuclear weapons. But these previous arrangements were all bilateral, with either the Soviet Union or Russia on the other side, and were ratified by at least two-thirds of the Senate, in effect thus becoming treaties. Moreover, all had specific end dates. For example, the New START agreement that President Obama negotiated with the Russians in 2010 was ratified by a Senate vote of 71-26; it is due to expire in 2021.

The Iranian nuclear deal, or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed by President Obama in 2015 is not a treaty; neither is it bilateral. It is a multilateral agreement that reflects political commitments by the United States and five other nations (i.e. the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, plus Germany, or P5+1), three of whom are our NATO allies. to waive international sanctions against Iran if it halted its nuclear weapons development program. After trying unsuccessfully to block the agreement through a resolution of disapproval, the Congress passed and Obama reluctantly signed the Iran Nuclear Review Act of 2015. This measure not only allowed the Congress to review the agreement but imposed a requirement that the president certify every 90 days that Iran is complying with the deal or else sanctions could be reimposed.

During his campaign, President Trump, Obama's eventual successor, not only criticized the Iran deal, calling it the worst imaginable, but also denigrated several other arms control agreements with the Soviets and Russians. In fact, according to NBC news, he told his military advisors in a July 2017 meeting that he wanted to increase the size of the U.S. nuclear arsenal to its Cold War peak of 30,000 nuclear weapons, from the current New START limit of 1,550 deployed nuclear weapons. Moreover, Trump refused President Putin's offer to extend New START from its current 2021 expiration date for five years, something that could be done without the approval of the Senate or Russian Duma.

But he has not publicly threatened to withdraw from that treaty, nor is there any



political pressure on him from his supporters or congressional hawks to do so at this time. Trump has, however, repeatedly threatened to pull the United States out of the JCPOA unless it is renegotiated in some way—a renegotiation that Iran and all the other countries in the agreement have rejected.

 $Some of Trump's \, predecessors \, inherited$ arms agreements they did not like. During his campaign against then-President Jimmy Carter, for example, President Ronald Reagan criticized SALT II, a nuclear arms control pact that the Carter administration had negotiated with the former Soviet Union. After the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Carter withdrew the treaty from Senate consideration. Nonetheless, after he took office in 1981, Reagan essentially abided by its terms, thus laying the groundwork for the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces and START treaties with the Soviets-agreements that hastened the end of the Cold War.

President Trump has a real political problem in regard to the Iran nuclear deal: He must publicly certify every 90 days that the Iranians are complying with it, something that he believes they are not doing and that draws attention to his campaign promise to quickly tear up the agreement. During his first six months in office, the president reluctantly did certify Iran's compliance with the deal twice. For the two most recent deadlines, however, he has refused to certify Iranian compliance, even though the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has offered overwhelming evidence that Iran is abiding by the agreement, and the other five nations that are part of the deal agree.

Even though he has refused to certify Iranian compliance, Trump has not taken the next step toward withdrawing from the JCPOA—snapping back the sanctions that the UN and U.S. imposed on Iran for violating the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In October, the president kicked the ball to Congress, which did not re-impose the sanctions. On January 12, Trump waived the sanctions once again. But the president said he would not agree to another waiver unless the agreement is amended to permanently block Iran from a potential

path to build nuclear weapons.

Trump and his supporters contend that he cannot continue to certify the deal in its present form for three reasons: First, the agreement is not permanent. After 15 years, Iran will be allowed to begin enriching uranium so it contains more of the fissionable isotope uranium 235 than is required for commercial power production. (Low-enriched uranium used in most power plants contains from 3 to 5 percent uranium 235; 90 percent enrichment is a level appropriate to nuclear weapons.) Second, Iran is testing ballistic missiles and supporting terrorist groups throughout the Middle East. And third, they complain, the IAEA should be allowed to inspect any military site in Iran, even without reasonable evidence that nuclear activity had occurred there.

Actually, none of these reasons justifies withdrawing from the JCPOA. First, most arms control agreements have expiration dates. As mentioned above, New START expires in 2021. The enrichment portion of the JCPOA does sunset after 15 years—but the agreement's prohibition against Iran developing nuclear weapons is permanent.

The second complaint about the JCPOA is similarly fact-challenged: The JCPOA deals only with Iran's nuclear program, not its ballistic missile or other military efforts. The United States historically has not linked outside concerns to continuation of arms control treaties: President Carter, for instance, did not abrogate the SALT and the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, both signed during the Nixon administration, even though the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan during Carter's tenure.

Third, as with most arms control agreements, the inspection regime set out in the JCPOA does not allow the IAEA to inspect just any military base without reason. In fact, the agreement sets out a process for dealing with inspection disputes. If the IAEA requests to inspect a military site and Iran refuses, the issue is referred to an independent commission that would examine the evidence supporting the inspection request. (A concrete example points up just how weak Trump's inspection argument is: Imagine how the United States would react if Russia said it wanted to inspect Joint Base Andrews near Washington,

DC, as part of New START, even though there is no evidence that Andrews ever had nuclear weapons?)

If Trump had chosen to reimpose sanctions against Iran last week (Jan. 12), it would have given the United States the worst of all possible worlds. The Iranian government could have blamed the United States for the Iranian economic problems that have led to recent mass demonstrations in that country—problems that would be Moreover, our European allies (not to mention Russia and China, which also signed the JCPOA) have indicated they would refuse to snap back sanctions in parallel with the United States, leaving those countries to capitalize on economic opportunities with Iran that U.S. companies could no longer pursue.

When Congress passed and President Obama reluctantly signed the Iran Nuclear Review Act, no one could have envisioned that Trump would succeed Obama. A President Clinton, Sanders, Bush, or Kasich (or other traditional Republican candidate) would likely not have felt hemmed in by the 90-day certification process, regardless of their campaign promises. But Trump's own simplistic rhetoric on the Iran nuclear deal has put him in a corner.

There is a reasonable answer to the president's political dilemma: The administration and its Republican congressional supporters can continue to place targeted sanctions on those Iranian individuals and groups who are responsible for Iranian ballistic missile tests, for support for organizations like Hezbollah or Hamas, and for human rights abuses. And the Republican-led Congress can eliminate the politically problematic (for Trump) 90-day certification requirement and rely on the IAEA to ensure that Iran is in compliance with the deal.

Obviously, if Iran should actually violate the nuclear deal, the P5+1 can and should reimpose the UN sanctions on Iran. But until and unless international inspectors find evidence of a violation, the president and Congress need to recognize that any prospect of renegotiating the Iran nuclear deal is pure fantasy and to turn their focus to other, more pressing security challenges. (Source: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientist)

The global structure and perspective of cyber defense

By Saeed Sobhani

TEHRAN — Cyber defense and its associated strategies involve a vast number of issue; the most important being the justification of complex systems implemented to provide impenetrable defense and prevent damages caused by cyber attacks. The dangers of cybercrime (the constant hostile acts affecting information systems globally) cannot be easily determined.

Based on available evidence, there have been a significant number of cyber attacks since 2007 (including spyware interventions), all of which indicate cybercriminals that are more likely to be malicious actors; while information and communication systems in everyday activities carry out physical and material operations, store confidential personal information and exchange information among actors at distances.

Considering the wide range of malicious activity online, the overall role of cyber defense must be clearly identified. First and foremost, it must have defensive and aggressive abilities.

Establishing "credible defense" in cyberspace is a complicated problem, and identifying the root and the objectives of the attack will exacerbate it. The "Conficker" virus is a good example in this regard. Conficker infected millions of computers in 2008 and 2009, and to date, its author has not been identified.

Sometimes actors demonstrate "reputable defense" to showcase their cyber defense capabilities. The current structure of the Internet and information systems, however, prevents any kind of defense capability being displayed in real dimensions. An attack against a specific information system, for example, a power system for displaying power, allows you to convey persuasive reasons that prove the impact of the aggressive and defensive capabilities of the aforementioned actor.

On the other hand it can also have adverse effects and the user should be cautioned of its harmful properties. Displaying power in a packet network will not have the same effect on a network.

For example, analysis of the mysterious component of the Stuxnet worm unveils its techniques and increases the likelihood that other potential authors will develop the same kind of virus. It does not, however, provide us with a profile of the author. There have been individuals who have taken credit for the Stuxnet worm.

Gabi Ashkenazi, the Chief of General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces from 2007 to 2011, upon retiring, claimed he was the father of the Internet worm of Stuxnet.

The Stuxnet worm confronts us with many questions, such as why the same techniques have not been used to hide the remains of the work. The "Stuxnet" worm, upon completion of the attack, will destroy itself to prevent the spread of knowledge used in it. By removing footprints, the author does not allow the aggressive ability of the worm to be discovered, analyzed.

Perhaps the Stuxnet worm has a two-way approach: showing its power at the expense of diffusing technique (which may indicate that the author has more capabilities), and provide evidence to prove your defensive ability.

Another issue in "prestigious defense" is the dependability of statements and claims: we must clarity information so that the flow of data is accelerated and false claims are not made.

For example, the US firm HBG (Federal Security Software Development Company) in 2010 claimed that it has developed technology capable of detecting hackers by analyzing data transmitted via social networks. Earlier this year, HGB claimed that it had penetrated the Anonymous Group, has accessed some of its members, and that the identity of the members could be divulged to the FBI for the right price.

It also attacked the company's site and published tens of thousands of confidential emails over the Internet, disclosing the company's intentions against WikiLeaks. Additionally, he announced that the people who had been nominated by HBG as members of the Anonymous Group were not really members of this group, and questioned the methods used by HBG to be technically unfeasible. Following this revelation, the "HB" customers have gradually diverted from the company and the US government has begun research on the deal set between its defense services and the company.

A similar situation was made between NATO and the Anonymous Group. In the spring of 2011, NATO released a report addressing the challenges of recent developments in cybercrime activism, in particular the operations of both WikiLeaks and Anonymous, claiming that its members will be identified and prosecuted. In response to NATO's action, the Anonymous Group stepped up its attacks on official sites, in particular the FBI, and announced in late July 2011 that it had attacked NATO sites and obtained several gigabytes of documents.

It should be noted that this action (prosecution of non-state actors), although not in the defense field, can undoubtedly proceed in the context of a long-running dispute between governments and an illegal group towards progression. In fact, this type of counteraction (and its methods used) is a reminder of the struggle against transnational or national criminal organizations.

The lack of documented confrontations between governments in cyberspace does not mean that there is no such conflict. Rather, it shows that hostilities between governments are more or less hidden for specific reasons (including the insistence on concealment of their abilities, attempts to avoid physical or economic coping, etc.). In addition, most of the activities in cyberspace are made using spy services, and these groups have a prominent place in defensive actions. In the perspective of developing and developing cyber defense, this should be considered. There are two main options for governments to organize the development of defensive and aggressive capabilities:

France has chosen and confirmed with the White Defense and National Security Council of France, that two defensive and aggressive functions should be separated:

France has assigned the Department of Defense to the "National Security Agency for Information Systems" and the offensive section of the Ministry of Defense and the General Directorate of Security.

A strategy for combining two defensive and aggressive functions in one set, and both have been transferred to a single organization (the NSA).

Finally, it is important to emphasize that, in order to make the attacking and counteracting functions more effective, it is essential to apply multi-sectoral industrial relations in the field of informatics and to establish international cooperation and develop defense acceptable cybercrime influences.

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TEHRANTIMES

Golestan Palace, source of inspiration at Fajr festival

d e s k There is a common ground between the design elements involved in both architecture and fashion and many fashion designers around the world are inspired by architecture in their works.

Golestan Palace became a center of Qajari (1785 to 1925) arts and architecture of which it is an outstanding example and has remained a source of inspiration for Iranian artists and architects to this day.

The lavish palace consists of 17 structures including nine separate museums and sites, or lounging in the shade next to a dancing water fountain. It embodies a successful integration of earlier Persian crafts and architecture with Western influences.

Workshops, professional meetings

A total of 12 meetings and workshops will be held on fashion design and clothing one month before the inauguration of the festival.

The meetings will be mainly on the theme of regional costumes and job creation in the field of clothing and jewelry designs.

All fashion designers, clothing industry managers and those who are interested in the clothing and fashion industry can attend the events free of charge.



Men and women pose for a photo in Iranian local costumes at Golestan Palace (Photo: Alireza Nasseri)

Silent signs of high functioning anxiety

While "high-functioning anxiety" isn't an actual clinical diagnosis, it's a phrase that's become increasingly popular in the past few years. When we talk about people with high-functioning anxiety, we are talking about people who, at least on the surface, seem successful at school, at work, or at home, explains clinical psychologist Inna Khazan, PhD. On the inside, however, they are experiencing a near-constant state of anxiety. Here are some common high-functioning

anxiety symptoms.

You worry excessively

Life gives us a lot to worry about, and it's normal to ruminate over things and have brief periods of worry. (Here's the correct way to worry, if you're going to do it.) But if this is the mental state you experience 15-plus days a month for six months or more, you have an anxiety disorder, says Annie Wright, a licensed psychotherapist with a

distilled water

Persian traditional medicine: Chicory

private practice in California. "This worry can and likely includes everything from worries about your career to your love life, to not having saved enough for retirement to wondering how you're going to cope with the family at Thanksgiving this year, etc.," she explains. "And, often, the amount and intensity of the worry you have are likely disproportionate to the event itself. In other words, everything feels like a really big deal when it, perhaps, isn't."

You can't control your anxiety (but nobody realizes this)

Even if you know all the tricks—three deep breaths, making lists of your worries, releasing it all on the yoga mat, meditating—you still worry as much as ever, living with your anxieties on a daily basis. Despite your self-care practices, your anxiety may get the better of you because you simply cannot control it, says Wright. Despite this, high-

ease digestion. However, in case it gets

abundant in the body it can trigger some

health conditions such as liver disorders.

Chicory distilled water is diuretic and

Chicory has been listed as one of the 38

plants that are used to prepare traditional-

remedies, a kind of alternative medicine.

However, according to Cancer Research UK,

"there is no scientific evidence to prove that

flower remedies can control, cure or pre-

vent any type of disease, including cancer".

functioning anxiety often goes undetected, reveals Khazan. "People who experience it do not look like what we expect a highly anxious person to look like—frozen, unable to make decisions, failing to get things done. Also, people with high functioning anxiety rarely allow themselves to ask for help or admit that there is anything wrong," she says.

People who have anxiety disorders often feel a constant pressure to perform at topnotch standards in all areas of life, including parenting, school, work, relationships, etc.," says Thai-An Truong, a therapist in private practice in Oklahoma City. A perfectionist over-worries about failure, mistakes, and disappointing or losing the respect of others,

and equates making a mistake to complete

failure, adds Truong. "Generally, a person who

we might classify as having high-functioning

anxiety is ambitious, perfectionistic, and set

home?

in their way of doing things," says Khazan.

Your anxiety is interfering with your daily life

While other people may not be able to see just how much your anxiety is affecting your daily life, you may be aware that it's becoming harder to feel secure and competent at work and in your relationships with partners, relatives, and friends, says Wright. You may appear calm and in control on the surface, but it's a different story on the inside. As Wright puts it, "inwardly, you're living out a high-drama movie each day and it's starting to wear on your quality of life."

You can't sleep

Sleep issues are common in people with anxiety disorders—and they come in all shapes and sizes: trouble falling asleep, trouble staying asleep, having a restless or unfulfilling sleep, etc.

(Source: Reader's Digest)

How to prevent a grease fire in your



Have a class ABC fire extinguisher in your kitchen. It is recommended to have at least three fire extinguishers in your home, in the kitchen, garage and main living area.

The most common reason for a grease fire is leaving a hot pan unattended. Keep your eye on it.

If grease is smoking, it is too hot. The flash point of a grease fire is 500 degrees Fahrenheit. Grease will smoke furiously before it ignites, so if you notice smoke

turn the heat down immediately.

Execution Execution Representation R

If your pan does catch fire, the best thing to do is to smoother it. Use an oven mitt and place the lid on top of the pan. Never throw water on the fire or try to run it to the sink or outside.

or outside. (Source: diynetwork.com)

101 ITEMS FOR OUR BUCKET LIST!

has laxative effects.

#28. Walk barefoot in the rain

From past time, Chicory

Arag-e Kasni in Persian, has been on hand

in most Iranian houses. With its cooling

characteristics, Chicory distilled water re-

duces body temperature and is great for

the liver. Yellow bile facilitates the trans-

fer of blood and nutrients from capillaries

to the remote body organs and is also in

charge of metabolism of fats and lipids and

It decreases the amount of yellow bile in

liver diseases.

distilled water, called

We are all used to following a "proper" conduct: to be clothed when we are out, to always wear shoes when we are outside the house, and to always use an umbrella when it's raining (with good reason of course, so that we don't catch a cold).

While all these make sense, how about breaking the "rules" for a change... and just walk... or even dance barefoot the next time it rains? Feel the pavement, feel the earth, and feel the wet surface against your feet. Better yet, find someone to do this with you. Perhaps it will make you feel like a child again.

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: personal excellence.co)

0)

#IRANIANLIFESTYLE

A man in Isfahan bazaar repairs a carpet in an undated photo (Instagram/@ trallina88)



Loobia Polow - Rice with green beans



Loobia polow is a delicious one-dish meal for the whole family. A tasty combination of rice, diced lamb/beef and cut green beans. Ingredients:

Sarves 4-6

- 2 cups long grain basmati rice
- 1 1/2 pounds lamb or beef, cut into small pieces
- 1 lb fresh string beans, washed, cut into 1-inch lengths
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 1 large ripe tomato, diced 1 (16-ounce) can tomato sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
- Juice of a lime/lemon Salt and pepper to taste
- Vegetable oil
- Water

Method:

In a large bowl wash the rice thoroughly, rinse with cold water and drain. Soak the rice in 6 cups of water, add 2 tablespoons of salt and set aside for a couple of hours.

In a pan, saute chopped onions in 3 tablespoons of oil over medium heat for 5-7 minutes or until transparent. Add turmeric powder and stir well.

Add the meat and cook until it's browned. Add tomatoes and the green beans to the pan and cook for another 5-7 minutes. Add tomato sauce, juice of a lime/lemon, cinnamon, salt and paper to taste. Cook for another 15-20 minutes on low heat.

In a large saucepan, bring 6 cups of water to a rapid boil. Drain the rice and pour into boiling water. Bring the water back to a boil, cook for about 7-10 minutes on medium-high heat or until the grains are long, soft on the outside and firm in the center. Test to see if the rice is ready. Drain the rice in a colander and rinse it well with cool water.

Add 3 tablespoons of oil to the bottom of a non-stick pot. Add a layer of rice and the mixture of meat and bean sauce, building it up to a pyramid shape away from the sides of the pot. Make 4-5 holes in the rice with the bottom of the spatula. Cook for about 7-10 minutes on the medium-high heat until rice is steaming. You may cover the lid with a kitchen towel to prevent the moisture from building up in the pot. Cover, reduce heat to low and cook for 50 minutes to an hour. Don't overcook this rice. You don't want it to become too mushy.

Place rice on a serving platter, gently remove the crusty bottom (tahdig) and serve in a separate plate. Serve with salad, mast o khiar or some torshi (pickles).

Enjoy!

(Source: turmerics affron.blogspot.com)

Which egg substitute is best for you?

What you use to substitute for eggs in a recipe depends on the recipe. Whether you are allergic to eggs, lowering your cholesterol or trying to go vegan, replacing eggs in recipes requires some thought. The biggest lesson is learning which egg substitute works best in your particular recipe.

Generally, the fewer eggs a recipe calls for, the easier they are to substitute. If a cookie recipe calls for one egg, using an egg substitute works better than if a recipe requires three or four eggs.

Taste matters too. Using bananas as an egg substitute may add a welcome hint of fruity sweetness to pancakes and cookies, but if you are making a casserole or savory dish, you want to use something else.

In a cake, the eggs serve as a leavening agent to make the cake light and fluffy. In cookies and muffins, eggs add moisture and act as a binder, gluing all the other ingredients together. If you're looking to substitute eggs in a quiche or mayonnaise, where eggs are central to the finished product, you'll need something like tofu to mimic the consistency of the eggs, while making other adjustments to the recipe as well to add flavor and body.

Just about any recipe that calls for eggs can be made vegan by using the proper commercial egg substitute. Several brands of egg replacers can be used in baking or whenever a recipe calls for egg replacer.

Versatile and easy-to-use commercial egg replacers are available in most health food stores and large grocery stores. Storebought egg substitutes are relatively flavorless and work best in baked goods, such as cookies, muffins, and cakes. They can also be used to bind ingredients in a vegan casserole or loaf.

Smash up or blend about a half a banana or 1/4 cup applesauce to use as an egg replacer in baked goods such as muffins, pancakes and yeast-free quick bread such as pumpkin bread and banana bread. Bananas and applesauce add the perfect amount of thick moisture like eggs, but they don't help your dishes rise or turn out light and fluffy, so be sure the recipe you are using includes a bit of baking powder or baking soda to help it rise if needed.

Tofu is the best way to substitute eggs in dishes such as a quiche, frittata or egg salad. The texture of silken tofu or crumbled regular tofu is surprisingly similar to boiled or cooked eggs when used in a similar recipe, and the addition of a bit of mustard, turmeric or nutritional yeast to the dish give it a yellow hue, so your eyes are tricked as well as your taste buds. Because other recipe adjustments are probably needed to make an egg-free frittata, it's best to follow a recipe rather than just replacing the eggs with tofu.

Silken tofu is also an appropriate egg substitute in baked goods. To use it in recipes, blend 1/4 cup silken tofu with the liquid ingredients until the tofu is smooth and creamy. While it won't alter the flavor of a recipe, using tofu as an egg substitute makes baked goods a bit on the heavy and thick side, so it works well in brownies and pancakes, but doesn't work well in something like an angel food cake that needs to be light and fluffy.

(Source: thespruce.com)

Mother of Iranian caravanserais

HERITAGE TEHRAN – The lonely Deyr-e Gachin caravanserai located on the outskirts of Qom, central Iran, is commonly known as the mother of Iranian caravanserais. Deyr-e Gachin (meaning plaster-covered monastery) has

repeatedly been restored over its history.



An external view of Deyr-e Gachin caravanserai in central Iran

Most of what modern visitors to the caravanserai see dates back to the Safavid era (1501–1736), though narratives say it was originally constructed in the time of Sassanids (224-651 CE).

Located 65 km south of Tehran in the heart of the Kavir National Park, the caravanserai embraces a bathroom, a cistern, and a mosque that are surmounted by mudbrick domes, all encircling a vast backyard. Its total expanse adds up to some 12,000 square meters.

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

For the time being, such roadside inns have largely lost their original usage though their atmospheric architecture comprising adjoining arcades, chambers, porticos, domes and courtyards still draw avid visitors.

Advanced plumbing and metalwork found on ancient Greek island

During the dawn of the Cycladic Bronze Age, a gleaming white monument rose up out of the Aegean Sea. A manmade network of terraces and buildings constructed out of more than 1,000 tons of imported white stone, the massive monument took up practically every inch of the Dhaskalio promontory that was once connected to the Greek island of Keros.

Thousands of years later, Keros is an uninhabited and protected archaeological site. Time has weathered the monument and rising sea levels threatens Dhaskalio. But thanks to a recent excavation, a team of international researchers are digging into the island's thriving but mysterious past.

"It must have been absolutely striking to approach that from the sea," says excavation co-director Michael Boyd. "The island itself is visible from quite some distance.

Archaeologists have known that ritual practices took place on Keros 4,500 years ago, and past excavations have unearthed a sanctuary and thousands of marble sculptures. Experts believe the objects were made elsewhere, intentionally broken, and brought to the island for burial.

As the oldest excavated site on the island, the sanctuary likely drew people to Keros from nearby lands, Boyd says. With them, they brought food, metal, and the volcanic glass obsidian, among other raw materials. Keros grew to be a sophisticated metropolis over time, complete with experienced metalworkers and engineers. It's the largest known Cycladic monument to date. (Source: National Geographic)

ROUND THE GLOBE

Khangchendzonga **National Park**

Situated in the northern Indian State of Sikkim, Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP) exhibits one of the widest altitudinal ranges of any protected area worldwide.



Lumba Sumbha Pass Camp Site, Kanchenjunga National Park Great Himalaya Trail - YouTube

The Park has an extraordinary vertical sweep of over 7 kilometers (1,220m to 8,586m) within an area of only 178,400 ha and comprises a unique diversity of lowlands, steep-sided valleys and spectacular snow-clad mountains including the world's third highest peak, Mt. Khangchendzonga. Numerous lakes and glaciers, including the 26 km long Zemu Glacier, dot the barren

The property falls within the Himalaya global biodiversity hotspot and displays an unsurpassed range of sub-tropical to alpine ecosystems.

The Himalayas are narrowest here resulting in extremely steep terrain which magnifies the distinction between the various eco-zones which characterize the property. The Park is located within a mountain range of global biodiversity conservation significance and covers 25% of the State of Sikkim, acknowledged as one of India's most significant biodiversity concentrations.

The property is home to a significant number of endemic, rare and threatened plant and animal species. The property has one of the highest number of plant and mammal species recorded in the Central/High Asian Mountains, and also has a high number of bird species.

Khangchendzonga National Park's grandeur is undeniable and the Khangchendzonga Massif, other peaks and landscape features are revered across several cultures and religions. The combination of extremely high and rugged mountains covered by intact old-growth forests up to the unusually high timberline further adds to the exceptional landscape beauty. (Source: UNESCO)

Iran's ancient village of little people

By Shervin Abdolhamidi

In the first part of Jonathan Swift's book Gulliver's Travels, Lemuel Gulliver washes ashore on the island country of Lilliput, where he encounters the Lilliputians, who stand barely taller than 15cm.

While Swift's Lilliput is merely a fantasy, a comparable village exists in the eastern extremities of Iran. Up until around a century ago, some of the residents of Makhunik, a 1,500-year-old village roughly 75km west of the Afghan border, measured a mere meter in height – approximately 50cm shorter than the average height at the time.

In 2005, a mummified body measuring 25cm in length was found in the region. The discovery fueled the belief that this remote corner of Iran, which consists of 13 villages, including Makhunik, was once home to an ancient 'City of Dwarfs'. Although experts have determined that the mummy was actually a premature baby who died roughly 400 years ago, they contend that previous generations of Makhunik residents were indeed shorter than usual.

Malnutrition significantly contributed to Makhunik residents' height deficiency. Raising animals was difficult in this dry, desolate region, and turnips, grain, barley and a date-like fruit called jujube constituted the only farming. Makhunik residents subsisted on simple vegetarian dishes such as kashk-beneh (made from whey and a type of pistachio that is grown in the mountains), and pokhteek (a mixture of dried whey and turnip).

Arguably the most astonishing dietary anomaly was a disdain for tea – one of the hallmarks of Iranian cuisine and hospitality.

"When I was a kid no-one drank tea. If someone drank tea, they'd joke and say he was an addict," recalled Ahmad Rahnama, referring the stereotype that opium addicts drink a lot of tea. The 61-year-old Makhunik resident runs

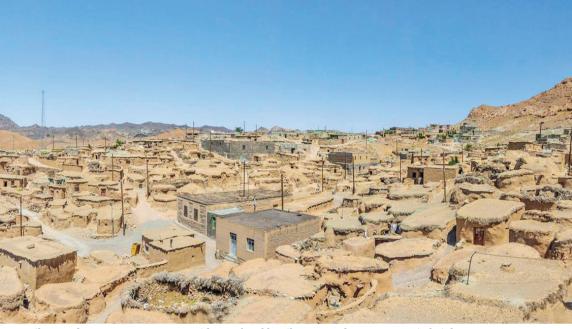


Some believe that Makhunik was once home to an ancient 'City of Dwarfs'

a museum dedicated to Makhunik's historic architecture and traditional lifestyle.

In the mid-20th Century, the construction of roads and the proliferation of vehicles allowed Makhunik residents access to ingredients found in other parts of Iran, such as rice and chicken.

When the vehicles came, people could bring food from nearby towns so there was more to eat than just kashk-beneh



Up until around 100 years ago, some residents of Makhunik measured a mere meter in height

Although most of Makhunik's 700 residents are now of average height, reminders of their ancestors' shorter statures still persist. Of the roughly 200 stone and clay houses that make up the ancient village, 70 or 80 are exceptionally low, ranging between 1.5 to 2m – with the ceilings of some as

Stooping down, I followed Rahnama into one of Makhunik's 'Lilliputian' homes, ducking through the wooden door that was located on the house's southern side to let in more light and protect the home's single room from strong northerly winds. I found myself in a small living quarters known as the 'sitting room' – aptly named as I was forced to sit due to the low ceiling. This roughly 10- to 14-sq-m space consisted of the kandik (place for storing grain and wheat), a karshak (a clay stove for cooking) and a sleeping space.

Constructing these tiny homes was no easy feat, Rahnama said, and residents' short stature wasn't the only reason to build smaller houses. Domestic animals large enough to pull wagons were scarce and proper roads were limited, meaning locals had to carry building supplies by hand for kilometers at a time.

Smaller homes required fewer materials, and thus less effort. Additionally, although cramped, smaller houses were easier to heat and cool than larger ones, and blended in

The discovery fueled the belief that this remote corner of Iran, which consists of 13 villages, was once home to an ancient 'City of Dwarfs'.

more easily with the landscape, making them harder for otential invaders to spot.

Life in the village still isn't easy; the little agriculture that existed has declined in recent years due to drought, forcing younger residents to look elsewhere for work.

"Nowadays young people go to nearby cities for work and bring back money and food. The women do some



Of the roughly 200 houses in Makhunik, 70 or 80 stand

weaving, but aside from that there is no work," Rahnama said. Meanwhile, older residents have had to rely heavily on government subsidies.

Despite the difficult circumstances, Rahnama is hopeful that interest in the village's unique architecture will lure visitors and that tourism will create more jobs and business. For now, though, "it is what it is," he told me with a resigned smile.

"But," he added, chuckling, "things are better now than they used to be before. Before people were short and stocky, and now they're tall and lean."

English regions welcoming increasing visitor numbers

More international tourists are visiting the English regions than ever before.

Official statistics released today show that in the first nine months of 2017 there were a record 12.7 million visits to English regions outside London, up four per cent compared to the same period in 2016.

International visitors spent £6.1 billion across England's regions during this period.

There were 909,000 overseas visits to Wales from January to September last year up six per cent compared to the same time

In Scotland, overseas visits increased 14 per cent to 2.6 million in the first nine months of 2017 compared to the same time in 2016, with overseas visitors spending £1.8 billion.

Tourism minister, Michael Ellis, said: 'It is fantastic news that towns and cities across the UK are benefitting from the boom in tourism, and as the new tourism minister I want to ensure that this trend continues.

"Promoting the UK as a must visit destinan to the rest of the world is paramount in ensuring that local areas can reap the benefits of tourism and I am committed to working UK from China from January to September

with the sector to drive economic growth across the UK."

Of the English regions, the north-west and the west Midlands had the largest percentage growth in overseas visits, both up ten per cent compared to January to September 2016, to 2.4 million and 1.8 million respectively.

Overall, there were a record 30.1 million inbound visits to the UK from January to September 2017, up seven per cent on the

There were a record 268,000 visits to the

last year, up 33 per cent and spending up 48 per cent to a record £557 million.

VisitBritain director Patricia Yates said: "Boosting inbound tourism throughout Britain is at the heart of our work, so it is very encouraging to see the growth across our nations and regions.

"Tourism is one of our most valuable export industries and we are forecasting that growth will continue in 2018, with 41.7 million overseas visits to the LIK and visitors spending almost £27 billion.'

(Source: breakingtravelnews.com)

International tourism is booming, but not to the U.S.

International tourism is growing at its fastest clip in seven years, but the U.S. is on pace for its sharpest drop in foreign travelers since the wake of the recession.

It's a worrying trend for the travel and retail industries. International travelers tend to stay longer and spend more than their domestic counterparts.

In the first seven months of 2017, the U.S. took in 41 million international visitors, a 4 percent decline from the year-earlier period, according to the Commerce Department. That follows a more than 2 percent drop a

It's a worrying trend for the travel and retail industries. International travelers tend to stay longer and spend more than their domestic counterparts.

Tourism and retail industry leaders this week launched the Visit U.S. Coalition, which wants backing from the Trump administration to help stem the decline. The coalition was founded by U.S. Travel, a lobbying group whose members include Marriott International and Macy's.

"Fewer visitors means fewer hotel stays, fewer meals eaten in our restaurants, fewer goods purchased in our retail stores, and fewer visits to our national attractions. It also means fewer American jobs and a loss to our economy,' said Katherine Lugar, president and CEO of the American Hotel & Lodging Association, a coalition member. "We are committed to working together with the Administration to balance a welcome message with strong security to ensure we don't fall behind to other countries.

Roger Dow, president and CEO of U.S. Travel, called some of President Donald Trump's rhetoric "not helpful" but stopped short of blaming him or his policies for the drop directly. Dow pointed to a strong dollar and competition from other nations.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request to comment.

U.S. Travel, whose aim is to boost tourism in the United States, has had its share of headaches under the admin-



A tourist takes a selfie with the Statue of Liberty as cloud

istration and has weighed in during various travel bans, the short-lived laptop ban and more stringent visa checks for international visitors.

'Mr. President, please tell the world that while we're closed to terror, we're open for business," Dow said last March. "Imbalanced communication is especially susceptible to being 'lost in translation' — so let's work together to inform our friends and neighbors, who could benefit from reassurance, not just who is no longer welcome here, but who remains invited to invest and vacation here.

If the U.S. had maintained its market share of global long-haul travel over the past two years, it would have meant 100,000 new jobs and more than \$32 billion in spending, U.S. Travel estimated this week.

Strong global economy, stronger competition The U.S. travel industry is no stranger to downturns, but this one is occurring at a time of economic growth. Previous slumps occurred in the wake of the financial crisis and Great Recession or after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Globally, a record 1.32 billion tourists traveled internationally in 2017, a 7 percent increase from a year earlier,

the fastest pace since 2010, according to a projection from United Nations World Tourism Organization. While the U.S. is on track to post a decline for 2017, European tourist arrivals surged 8 percent to 671 million, and every other continent posted an increase, the UNWTO said.

Travel industry executives worry about the lost U.S. market share as travelers opt to visit other destinations.

From 2015 to 2017, the United States and Turkey posted a decline in long-haul travel, according to U.S. Travel. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia, Canada, the U.K. and Australia all logged double-digit increases.

Decline in spending

Not only were fewer travelers here but spending also dropped. The Commerce Department said international traveler spending dropped more than 3 percent in the first 11 months of 2017. U.S. Travel said this equals the loss of \$4.6 billion and 40,000 jobs.

NYC & Co., a marketing agency for New York City tourism, said it expects that the city took in 100,000 fewer international tourists in 2017, the first decline since the

recession, while domestic travel increased But international travelers are extremely valuable for hotels, restaurants and retailers. They accounted for about 48 percent of the total direct spending in the city, but were 21 percent of visitors, said Kim Klein, NYC &

Co.'s director of public relations. Los Angeles appears to be bucking the trend. The city attracted a record 48.3 million tourists last year, its tourism board said last week.

But the tourism board hasn't been complacent. Last year, shortly after the travel ban on visitors from majority-Muslim countries, the board launched a campaign with the slogan "Everyone is Welcome in L.A."

"We have a delegation headed to Mexico next week," said Jamie Foley, the board's vice president of global communications. "We think our timing couldn't be more (Source: CNBC)

New blood test can detect 8 types of cancer, study says

sity have come up with a blood test that can apparently detect eight common types of cancer. They aim to release an annual test to aid people in the early detection

A team of researchers have successfully taken the first few steps toward developing a new kind of blood test that detects not just one type of cancer but eight - impressively even before the host notices any symptoms.

The team at Johns Hopkins University has experimented with an innovative blood test method that can determine whether a person might have common types of cancer.

As published in the Science, the researchers eventually want to launch an annual \$500 test designed to screen cancer early when it's in its earliest stages and more treatable. However, they have a long way to go.

A simple blood test

How can a simple blood test detect signs of cancer? Nickolas Papadopoulos, an oncology and pathology professor at the Johns Hopkins Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center, worked with several colleagues at the school to develop the blood test, which involves two methods fused into one.

The test, called CancerSEEK, detects eight of the most common types of cancer: breast, colon, pancreas, liver, lung, stomach, esophagus, and ovary. They sought more than a thousand people who have



Nickolas Papadopoulos, an oncology and pathology professor at the Johns Hopkins Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center, worked with several colleagues at the school to develop the blood test, which involves two methods fused into one.

been diagnosed with the aforementioned cancer in 70 percent of them. cancers. The test was able to find sings of

in 16 genes that typically arise in cancer and eight proteins that are often released in the bloodstream.

This field of early detection is critical, and the results are very exciting,' said Cristian Tomasetti from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. "I think this can have an enormous impact on cancer mortality.

Early detection mthods

Indeed it can. Presently, five of the eight cancers mentioned above have no early detection methods, making it hard for an individual to pinpoint whether a seemingly benign ache in certain regions of their body is a sign of cancer or not. In fact, pancreatic cancer exhibits so few symptoms and is usually detected when it's almost too late that four out of five patients die within the year of their diagnosis.

"This is of massive potential," said Gert Attard, a team leader at the Institute of Cancer Research's Centre for Evolution and Cancer. "I'm enormously excited. This is the Holy Grail — a blood test to diagnose cancer without all the other procedures like scans or colonoscopy.'

It should be noted, however, that the test was successful only about 40 percent of the time when it came to testing patients who had the earliest stage 1 cancers. The number, while still a staggering milestone, means that the test fails to detect cancer more often than it finds it.

(Source: Tech Times)

Our universe could be littered with alien viruses, scientists claim

It's generally agreed that some kind of microbe will be the first form of life we discover on another planet, moon, or other space rock. But hardly anyone thinks we'll find an alien virus, which is weird, given how prolific and successful these biological entities are on Earth.

A new study seeks to correct this oversight, calling for an entirely new discipline known as "astrovirology."

Viruses exist in massive numbers on Earth, and they date back to the very beginnings of life. More viruses exist on our planet than any other cellular organism — upwards of about 10 to 100 times more — so it's a reasonable bet that viruses exist on other worlds.

Yet scientists know surprisingly little about these "bags of genes" and how they work, with even less attention paid to the possibility of viruses existing elsewhere in the Solar System and beyond.

Alien microorganisms

Problematically, NASA's 2015 Astrobiology Strategy makes scarce mention of viruses, focusing primarily on the search for fully cellular alien microorganisms.

A new paper, now published in the science journal Astrobiology and led by Portland State University scientist Kenneth Stedman, argues that this is a missed opportunity,



and that astrobiologists should explore the possibility that viruses exist en masse throughout the universe.

To that end, Stedman proposes the field of "astrovirology," and asks that scientists start developing strategies and tools required to detect viruses off-planet. He said his proposal isn't about subdividing the field of astrobiology even further, but more of an attempt to integrate viruses into "mainstream" astrobiology.

Many of you are probably wondering how viruses are distinguished from other forms of microbial life, and why

there's even a need to distinguish between the two. Scientists struggle with this very question.

■ Viruses are entities

"Virus definitions are somewhat problematic," Stedman told Gizmodo. "My favorite is the one we cited in the manuscript: 'Viruses are entities whose genomes are elements of nucleic acid that replicate inside living cells using the cellular synthetic machinery and causing the synthesis of specialized elements that can transfer the viral genome to

Stedman admits this isn't a very "reader friendly" definition, offering this simpler translation: "Viruses can get their genetic information inside cells and reprogram the cells to make more virus." He calls them "information-transfer agents" capable of carrying the instructions to make more of themselves when in the right conditions.

Stedman should know a thing or two about viruses and the kinds of conditions they need to replicate. Back in 2012, he discovered a completely new group of viruses capable of living in acidic hot lakes (basically boiling acid)—a discovery that demonstrated the extreme conditions under which viruses can evolve, live, and even thrive.

(Source: Gizmodo)

New study suggests coastal and deep ocean sharks have different feeding patterns

An international team of researchers studying globally declining shark populations report today that they used carbon isotopes as biochemical markers in shark muscle tissue to identify where in the oceans the mobile predators have been feeding, in the hope that such analyses provide a useful tool for conservation. Details appear in the current issue of Nature Ecology & Evolution.

Michelle Staudinger, an adjunct faculty researcher at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, worked with her former environmental conservation department colleagues Amy Teffer and Francis Juanes, now at the University of Victoria, Canada, and lead author Christopher Bird at the University of Southampton, UK.

Shelf-dwelling sharks

With an international research team

representing 73 scientists from 21 countries, they show that shelf-dwelling sharks forage in a range of different coastal food webs, while deeper ocean sharks seem to get most of their food from specific areas of colder water in both the Northern and

Southern hemispheres.
As Bird explains, "We were able to show that sharks living close to land and those that live in the open ocean have very different ways of feeding." He adds that knowing which parts of the world's oceans are important shark feeding areas may help conservationists to design more effective ways to protect declining populations. He says there are over 500 shark species identified around the world but scientists still know little about their habits and behavior, particularly as related to feeding and movement.

Staudinger, who contributed expertise in large pelagic predator foraging ecology to this research, says, "It's been exciting to be a part of this collaborative effort and have data that we collected in regional waters off of Cape Cod and the islands of Massachusetts contribute to a global understanding of how sharks move and feed."

Marine mammals

Teffer and Staudinger published a par in 2014. when Teffer was completing her master's degree with Juanes as her advisor, providing results from a broader sampling program led by Staudinger for sharks, tuna, dolphinfish, billfish and marine mammals from waters off New England down to South Carolina. It was this work, on large pelagic fish foraging

ecology and transfer of mercury up the food chain that caught Bird's attention at the University of Southampton and led to the UMass Amherst researchers joining

For the current work, the research team used biochemical markers in muscle tissues from 5,394 sharks from 114 species to compare original sites of primary production, which vary across coastal, open ocean and deep-sea food-webs of the world's oceans. Bird says, "If an animal feeds in the same place where it was caught, the carbon isotope signals in the shark and phytoplankton will match. However, if the shark has moved between feeding and where it was caught, then the signals will be different.'

(Source: eurekalert.org)

BSI Stands at Forerunner of Production Boom among Other Public and Private Banks in Country

Bank Saderat Iran (BSI) stood at forerunner queue of production boom among private sector banks of the country in the seven months of the current Iranian calendar year in 1396 (from March 21 to Oct. 22), the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Among public and private banks, Bank Saderat Iran paid the maximum number of facilities and loans to Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) and also semi-finished projects.

In line with implementing programs of "resistance economy" and supporting "production" and increasing "employment opportunities", Bank Saderat Iran (BSI) paid a number of 187 counts of facilities, valued at



1,546 billion rials, to economic enterprises and Smalland Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs).

Moreover, the bank has also paid facilities to the semi-finished projects with more than 60 percent physical progress, the report added.

According to the statistics, total banks of the country paid 3,954 counts of facilities, valued at about 25,000 billion rials, to the aforementioned units.

It should be noted that Bank Saderat Iran stood at 4th rank in terms of the number of facilities paid and also 1st rank in terms of supporting production boom in SMEs, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank

EGFI Backs Exporters in 2017 Wholeheartedly

Export Promotion Commission meeting of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCI-MA) was held in the presence of Seyyed Kamal Seyyed Ali Chairman of the Board of Directors and Managing Director of Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI), the Public Relations Dept. of the Fund reported

According to the Fund's Public Relations and Customers' Affairs Management Office, Chief Executive of Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) Seyyed Kamal Seyyed Ali was the first speaker who expounded on the latest instructions and new services to support exemplary exporters effectively and said: "With the coordination made in this regard, the Fund managed to back about 70 percent of exporters in the current year as compared

to a year earlier."

He went on to say that the Fund will support exporters of the country by paying \$2 billion in the current year in 1396 (to end March 20, 2018).

Upon signing and sealing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO), the Fund intends to make more giant strides in line with helping develop and boost nonoil exports.

In the end, after hearing the views of members of the Commission, senior official of the Fund pointed to the problems facing exporters in the country and said, "effective steps have been taken in order to solve pertinent problems in an expert-level session.



Test of Einstein's theory shows our sun is losing mass

As our sun gets older, it's losing mass, and so its gravitational pull becomes weaker. As a result, the orbits of all the planets in our Solar System are expanding, not unlike the "waistband of a couch potato in midlife," according to a new NASA press statement.

A team of researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the University of Maryland and the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center has shown that the aging sun is behaving according to Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity. The key to testing his theory? The planet Mercury.

In 2015, NASA's MESSENGER probe crashed into Mercury (intentionally; this is just how NASA wraps things up a lot of the time) ending its planetary exploration mission. But the seven years' worth of data it gathered while still active provided the researchers with everything they needed to estimate the relevant parameters for both general relativity and the sun's own life cycle. A paper describing the research was published in the scientific journal Nature.

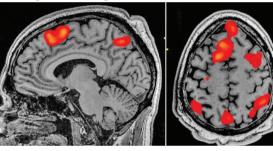
"Mercury is the perfect test object for these experiments because it is so sensitive to the gravitational effect and activity of the sun," lead author Antonio Genova, an MIT researcher working at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, said in the press statement.

Einstein's famous theory accounts for the fact that the gravitational fields of huge objects — like the sun — warp the spacetime continuum around them, according to Gizmodo. Because Mercury is the planet in our Solar System closest to the sun, its orbit is the tightest.

"We're addressing long-standing and very important questions both in fundamental physics and solar science by using a planetary-science approach," Goddard geophysicist Erwan Mazarico said in the NASA statement. "By coming at these problems from a different perspective, we can gain more confidence in the numbers, and we can learn more about the interplay between the sun and (Source: Newsweek)

Neuroscientists have followed a thought as it moves through the brain

A study using epilepsy patients undergoing surgery has given neuroscientists an opportunity to track in unprecedented detail the movement of a thought through the human brain, all the way



The findings confirm the role of the prefrontal cortex as the coordinator of complex interactions between different regions, linking our perception with action and serving as what can be considered the "glue of cognition".

Previous efforts to measure the passing of information from one area to the other have relied on processes such as electroencephalography (EEG) or functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), which, while non-invasive, offer less than perfect resolution.

The study led by researchers from the University of California, Berkley, recorded the electrical activity of neurons using a precise technique called electrocorticograhy (ECoG).

This required hundreds of tiny electrodes to be placed right up against the cortex, providing more spatial detail than EEG and improving the resolution in time of fMRI.

While this poses an unethical level of risk for your average volunteer, patients undergoing surgery for epilepsy have their brain activity monitored in this very way, giving the researchers a perfect chance to conduct a few tests.

Each of the 16 test subjects performed a number of tasks varied to suit their individual arrangement of electrodes, all while having their neural activity monitored and tracked.

Participants were required to listen to a stimulus and respond, or watch images of faces or animals on a screen and asked to perform

Some tasks were more complex than others; for example, a simple action involved simply repeating a word, while a more complex version was to think of its antonym. (Source: sciencealert.com)

Study confirms flu spreads by aerosols, not just coughs, sneezes

Sick people can pass flu to others just by breathing, according to a new study showing how the virus can spread by airborne routes, with the role of transmission from coughing and sneezing smaller than previously thought.

The new details about how flu spreads — a topic that in the past has stirred up scientific controversy over which size of respiratory droplets can carry the viruses — come as the United States and other countries battle a tough flu season (see related CIDRAP News story).

And the findings might fine-tune future recommendations on nonpharmaceutical steps people can take to reduce their risk of contracting flu. A research team led by the University of Maryland reported its findings yesterday in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

The team recruited volunteers with flulike illness on the University of Maryland's College Park campus and surrounding areas from December 2012 through March 2013. Of the 355 college-age people they tested, 142 were positive for flu. Among those with flu, the researchers obtained nasopharyngeal samples on days 1 through

To measure transmission, each participant sat in a chamber for 30 minutes with his or her face in a large metal cone, part of a "Gesundheit machine" that captures and measures influenza virus in exhaled breath. Patients were also asked to cough, sneeze, and say the alphabet three times.

When the team analyzed the samples, they found that a significant number of patients routinely shed infectious virus - not just RNA particles-into particles small enough for airborne transmission. They were surprised to find that 11 (48%) of the 23 fine aerosol samples acquired when patients weren't coughing had detectable viral RNA, and of those 8 contained infectious virus, suggesting that coughing isn't a prerequisite for generating fine aerosol droplets.

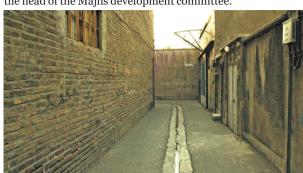
(Source: CIDRAP)

Majlis approves \$200m for rundown areas renovation

SOCIETY

TEHRAN — In the national budget bill proposed for the next Iranian calendar year 1397 (starting on March 21), Majlis (the Iranian parliament) has approved a \$200 million budget for renovation of rundown areas.

The administration had proposed a budget of \$100 million from the National Development Fund for renovating rundown areas, but Majlis has approved a \$200 million withdrawal, said the head of the Majlis development committee.



The parliament lays great emphasis on the renovation of rundown areas, Mehr quoted Mohammad Reza Rezaei as saying on Friday.

Speaking on the challenges of air pollution, renovation and developments of public transit, and rundown areas Rezaei highlighted that "substantial" budget has been allocated to address these issues.

He didn't give any further details about the amounts of budget earmarked for the aforesaid matters.

60% of Iranian adults are overweight: official

SOCIETY TEHRAN — Overeating has turned to a e s k serious challenge for Iranians causing 60 percent of the country's population aging above 18 to suffer from obesity, said the deputy health minister Alireza Raeisi, Fars reported on Friday.

As far as gender is concerned, women outnumber men in this regard, said the official, adding, "This is directly related to lack of exercise and physical activity



Underweight and the overweight are both considered as malnutrition, he highlighted.

Food insecurity

Elsewhere in his remarks, Raeisi added that seven provinces, namely Sistan-Baluchestan, Hormozgan, Ilam, Kerman, Bushehr, Ardebil and South Khorasan, are facing food insecurity in terms of nutritional value of the foods, social and economic access to nutritious food, healthy food production and other food-related environmental factors.

"3.5 percent of children under age 5 living in these provinces are suffering from malnutrition," he regretted.

LEARN ENGLISH

Describing Someone's Face

A: Let's play a game!

B: Ok! How about Scrabble?

A: No, no, a friend of mine taught me this really fun game. I'm going to describe someone's face, and you guess who it is!

A: Let's see. He has a **Roman nose**, **bushy** eyebrows and **dimples**! B: Our cousin Pete! My turn! She has a pointy nose, sunken eyes and a mole on her chin!

A: Aunt Rose! That mole is so huge! Ok, my turn. He has a **crooked** nose and full lips. He has quite a few freckles and an oval face. Oh, he is also **hald!**

B: Your future husband!

A: Not funny. Key vocabulary

scrabble: a game in which players try to make words from the separate letters they have

Roman nose: a nose that curves out near the top

bushy: bushy hair or fur grows thickly dimple: a small natural indentation in the flesh

pointy nose: a nose that is pointy is sharp, and in most instances,

it can be noticed straight away sunken eyes: eyes that have fallen inwards, especially because

of age or illness mole: a small, dark brown spot on a person's skin

crooked: bent, twisted, or not in a straight line freckle: a small, brownish spot on someone's skin

oval: having the shape of an egg

bald: having little or no hair on your head

■ Supplementary vocabulary

cheeks: the fleshy side of the face

nostrils: the holes in the nose that allow the pass of air **forehead:** a part of the face above the eves

eyelash: the hair on the eyelid that protects the eye chin: the lower portion of the face including the jaw

(Source: irlanguage.com)



TOD may be a way round air pollution, traffic jam

1 → Large ride-in bicycle parking areas within stations

- Bikeshare rental system and bikeway network integrated into stations

- Reduced and managed parking inside 10-minute walk circle around town center / train station

- Specialized retail at stations serving commuters and locals including cafes, grocery, dry cleaners

■ Benefits of TOD

– Higher quality of life with better places to live, work, and play

- Greater mobility with ease of moving

– Increased transit ridership

- Reduced traffic congestion, car accidents and injuries

- Reduced household spending on transportation, resulting in more affordable housing

– Healthier lifestyle with more walking,

– Higher, more stable property values Increased foot traffic and customers for area businesses

- Greatly reduced dependence on foreign oil, reduced pollution and environmental

- Reduced incentive to sprawl, increased incentive for compact development

 Less expensive than building roads and sprawl

- Enhanced ability to maintain economic competitiveness

How TOD developed in Tokyo

Over a presentation, Shigehisa Matsumura, PhD, who has been engaged in urban, regional and housing planning projects in and out of Japan for 27 years explained the fairly long way Japan has come to be one of the world pioneering cities in TOD.

Matsumura compared Tehran and Tokyo with regard to their population and land area saying that they both are stretching over a land area of some 600 square kilometers with some 9 million population. After World War II in 1950s air pollution

caused by concentration of industries in the coastal areas, cars, and traffic congestion was even worse than current Tehran's condition, Matsumura, the leader of the TOD data collection survey in Iran said.

So in 1959 the government issued a law to relocate the factories and from the center to suburban areas, he said, adding, so as per the national policies Tokyo was divided into sub-centers and regional core cities developed in suburban area.

Therefore, integrated urban functions

along railways was established in a collaborative effort between the private sector and the public sector in various suburban areas, he added.

It is important to note that one of the main characteristics of the TOD in Tokyo was the simultaneous promotion of railroad construction and operation and urban development along the railway which secures profits for real estate ventures and guarantee the number of passengers using the railway line, as well as generating stable earnings and profits in the operation.

In addition, by attracting famous universities, as well as large-scale facilities, and establishing various types of mechanisms to facilitate the flow of people to the suburbs, a stable number of passengers can be secured to improve railway operation efficiency and encourage the use of the railway in the reverse direction.

Matsumura further explained that development of a feeder-bus route network makes the residential areas highly convenient even in areas that are outside of the station walking area.

Leader of TOD data collection survey in Iran also highlighted that city scale is set based on the walking distance from around the station and urban development the station (750 m to 800 m). Distance

between stations is set where the walking area is continuous. Integration of stations, bus stops, and building which offers easy transfer for the citizens is also an important factor in TOD, he suggested.

Something is wrong with Tehran It is a well-known fact that Tehran public transport is inefficient. The old, scanty public transit in Tehran, including buses, BRT, and subway is forcing the citizens to consider using their private cars instead of taking the busy, inadequate public transit which leads to air pollution.

On the other hand the clunker buses plying the cities are releasing greater amounts of pollutants than private cars.

Many Tehraners are already using Tehran metro to run errands and go to and back from work, but it doesn't mean that the metro is flawless.

In an analogy between Parand residential town, southwestern Tehran, with Tama New Town in Tokyo Matsumura said that while both regions are almost in the same scale the railway network in Parand (owned by Islamic Republic of Iran Railway Company) is inadequate and inefficient.

The rail network service in Parand can be directly connected to the residential area, to improve the accessibility to the districts with higher population density, he suggested, adding, the present single track railroad from Parand to Tehran could be doubled and electrified to cover the further demand to corridors to Tehran.

The rail can extend inside of the city district to catch the urban population, and Monorail, AGT, LRT services can be proposed to cover the area with high population density, he added.

We need to act now

It may have taken Japan and many other world cities which are among pioneers in TOD decades to be where they are.

The good news is that we have set foot in the right path, there are shortcomings, it would be a hard job to accomplish and it may take years, but what we gain in return is invaluable. Currently we are trading the citizens' health for excuses such as budget

Taking firm decisions and allocating budget to development of public transit within the framework of TOD will pay off in a long run. It is important to join hands and take the surveys and data collection to the next level and develop structured transit system which meet international standards and save millions from immature death caused by air pollution.

Lake Urmia depletion will cause great discomfort

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — The total dryness of Lake d e s k Urmia will have a large negative impact on the health and livelihood of local communities and even beyond.

One of the largest permanent hypersaline lakes in the world, Lake Urmia is located in the northwestern province of East Azarbaijan and was considered the largest lake in the Middle East. The volume of water at the lake in 1997 measured at 30 billion cubic meters which has dramatically decreased to 2.5 billion cubic meters in 2017.

If reviving programs fail, Lake Urmia will become the source of future dust and salt storms, which in turn drastically influence the health [of some 14 million people] and agriculture of neighboring regions resting within a radius of 500 km, said Khalil Saei, the head of East Azarbaijan province's disaster management organization.

Saei further recognized the most devastating outcomes of the lake's disappearance as the conversion of once cultivated fields to deserts, reduction of people's income and the spread of respiratory diseases, IRNA



reported on Saturday.

Moreover, Ali Taher-Aqdam, vice president of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences mentioned the overall 14 million population living in the region and called for more

engagement by people, stating, "Whenever the public engage in an issue, it will resolve more easily." "We should conduct extensive researches and prepare

ourselves for possible issues caused by the lake's drainage and water shortage in summer," said Ali Taher-Aqdam, vice president of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences.

Restoration programs

Lake Urmia restoration committee was established

The restoration committee has proposed 29 different projects based on academic researches, hoping to revive the lake in a 10-year period.

Dredging rivers flowing into the lake, modifying irrigation practices in agricultural lands located at the lake basin and recycling wastewater are among the most important projects in the revival program.

lake officials has announced on multiple occasions that while owing to the restoration programs the lake condition is stabilized and it is saved from certain death budget deficiency is impeding the lake's full revival.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

IRCS launches natural disaster preparedness scheme

Iran's Red Crescent Society has initiated a nationwide scheme to improve public disaster preparedness.

Unfortunately public disaster preparedness is about 9.3 percent on average while some 99 percent of the cities of Iran are most likely to be hit by an earthquake and 50 percent are vulnerable to flood, IRIB quoted Hamid Jamaleddini, an official with IRCS, as saying on Wednesday.

Accordingly, Jamaleddini said, some 250,000 Iranian families will be trained for disaster preparedness by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (Mar. 2017) and the scheme will cover all families by Mar. 2022.

راه اندازی طرح ارتقای آمادگی در برابر بلایای طبیعی توسط جمعيت هلال احمر

جمعیت هلل احمرایران طرح ملی افزایش آمادگی مردم را در مقابله با حوادث

به گـزارش خبرگـزاری صداوسـیما حمیـد جمـال الدینـی معـاون آمـوزش ، پژوهـش و فناوری جمعیت هلال احمر با بیان اینکه ۹۹ درصد شهرهای کشور در معرض خطر زلزله و ۵۰ درصد آنها در مسیر سیل قرار دارند آمادگی مردم را در مقابله با اینگونه حوادث به طور متوسط ۹ و سه دهم درصد اعلام کرد. جمـال الدينــى افـزود: تـا پايـان امسـال ٢٥٠ هـزار خانـوار ايرانــى تحت پوشــش اين طـرح قرار

می گیرند و ایس طرح تا پایان سال ۱۴۰۰ همه خانوارهای ایرانی را پوشش می دهد.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"-en"

Meaning: to have or become

For example: Rescue teams widen hunt for missing

PHRASAL VERB Finish something up

Meaning: to eat or drink all the rest of something, so there is none left

For example: Come on, finish up your drinks!

IDIOM

Blow a gasket

Explanation: when a furious person blows a gasket, they explode with anger

For example: When the shop was burgled for the third time, the owner blew a gasket.

Qatari royal discloses Saudi-UAE plot

'Persian Gulf crisis to seize Qatar's wealth'

By staff & agencies

A member of the Qatari royal family, who was allegedly held against his will in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has accused Saudi Arabia and the UAE of orchestrating a months-long Persian Gulf crisis in order to seize Qatar's wealth, and threatened to commit suicide.

Sheikh Abdullah bin Ali Al Thani was previously portrayed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE as an alternative to the Qatari leadership amid the major diplomatic dispute.

In an audio recording from January 15 obtained by Al Jazeera, Sheikh Abdullah said the rift was triggered by the Saudi and Emirati crown princes, whom he accused of plotting to take Qatar's wealth by force.

"The Persian Gulf crisis is based on interests and the desire of both Mohammed bin Zayed and Mohammed bin Salman to usurp the wealth and riches of Qatar," the sheikh said, referring to the Abu Dhabi and Saudi crown princes respectively.

"I urge my fellow Qataris to defend your position," he added, warning his countrymen that the two crown princes "may blind you with money to destroy your own country".

He went on to blame Mohammed bin Zayed "for the pressures on me, my confinement, and inability to return home (Qatar) or join my family, namely my two daughters", and added: "I have decided to end my life with the aim of preventing any harm to others."



Majed al-Ansari, a professor at Qatar University, told Al Jazeera that the recording came as "no surprise"

"We know that [Sheikh Abdullah] has been pressured in the past couple of months," he said. "He hasn't been as visible as he was in the beginning of the crisis, which tells us basically that he wasn't cooperating with

"There's nobody better situated than Sheikh Abdullah to talk about what Mohammed bin Zayed and Mohammed bin Salman really want as he was their partner during this crisis," added Ansari.

'He was in on everything; he was part of attempts against Qatar through this design to be the replacement of the Emir [Sheikh Tamim]. But it was clear that there was only so much that he could do when it comes to bad things he could say about Qatar."

Prisoner' in the UAE On January 14, Sheikh Abdullah had released a video statement, saying he was a "prisoner" in the UAE, and that if anything happened to him, "Sheikh Mohammed" is

responsible.
While he did not specify, Sheikh Abdullah appeared to be referring to Abu Dhabi's

Abu Dhabi denied detaining Sheikh

On Wednesday, he flew to Kuwait where he was transferred to a hospital shortly after his arrival in a wheelchair.

A day earlier, Abdullah's brother, Sheikh Khalid, told Al Jazeera that his sibling's health had deteriorated due to exhaustion and pressure he was exposed to under Emi-

Sheikh Khalid had added that his brother was in stable condition and should be leaving the hospital soon.

After Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt imposed a land, sea and air blockade on Qatar in June, Sheikh Abdullah appeared frequently on Saudi and UAE television programs expressing his views in support of the measures against Doha.

Sheikh Abdullah was residing in Saudi Arabia since the blockade began.

The Saudi-led group of countries accuse Qatar of supporting "terrorism", an allegation

Erdogan: Turkey launched ground operation on Afrin

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Saturday that Ankara has launched an operation on the ground to oust Kurdish militia from the Syrian town of Afrin.

'The Afrin operation has de-facto been started on the ground," Erdogan said in a televised speech in the city of Kutahya, without

"This will be followed by Manbij," he added, referring to another Kurdish-controlled Syrian town to the east.

Afrin and Manbij are controlled by the People's Protection Units (YPG) Syrian Kurdish militia, which Ankara regards as a

Turkey has in recent days sent dozens of military vehicles and hundreds of troops to the border area amid repeated threats from top officials that an operation could be launched at any moment.

Turkish forces have over the last two days shelled YPG targets around Afrin and also mobilized pro-Ankara rebel fighters in

The promises made to us over Manbij were not kept. So nobody can object if we do what is necessary," said Erdogan, referring to past American assurances that the YPG would move out of Afrin.

"Later we will, step by step, clear our country up to the Iraqi border from this terror filth that is trying to besiege our country." He added that Turkey would "step by step" destroy a "terror

corridor" that he said had been set up by the YPG. Turkey accuses the YPG of being the Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which has waged a rebellion in the Turkish southeast for more than three decades and is regarded as a terror group by Ankara and its Western allies.

But the YPG has been the key ally of Turkey's fellow NATO member the United States in the fight against Daesh (ISIL) militants, playing a key role in pushing the extremists out of their Syrian strongholds.

(Source: AFP)

China says U.S. warship 'violated' its sovereignty



China has slammed the U.S. for intruding into its territorial waters by sailing a missile destroyer close to a disputed South China Sea island, and vowed to take "necessary measures" to protect its sovereignty.

In a statement published on its official website on Saturday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said U.S. missile destroyer USS Hopper approached within 12 nautical miles of Huangyan Island in the South China Sea on the evening of January 17.

The ministry's spokesman Lu Kang said Chinese naval forces ordered the American warship to pull back after establishing its identity.

Lu further stated that the U.S. destroyer infringed upon China's sovereignty and security interests and threatened the safety of Chinese naval vessels and personnel in

The official added that China "firmly opposes" U.S. efforts to use freedom of navigation as a pretext to harm its sovereignty and called on Washington to "correct its mistakes.

This is while China's Defense Ministry also announced in a separate statement on

Saturday that the persisting deployment of U.S. warships to the region was "undermining regional peace and stability" as well as damaging bilateral ties. Huangyan Island, also known as the

Scarborough Shoal, is claimed by both China as well as the Philippines. Its status is often discussed in conjunction with other territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

The sea has long been at the center of maritime disputes between China and several regional countries, including Vietnam, Taiwan, Brunei, Malaysia and the

China has repeatedly warned the United States against any military activities in the South China Sea.

In the past, the U.S., which has sided with China's rivals in the territorial rows, has censured Beijing for constructing islands as well as military installations in the region, claiming that such build up could

be used to hamper free nautical movement. Meanwhile, American warships have carried out a series of "freedom of navigation" patrols in the region.

(Source: AFP)

U.S. military edge over Russia, China eroding: Mattis



U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has warned of "growing threats" from Russia and China, saying the U.S. military's advantages over the two countries have eroded in recent years.

The assessment is part of an unclassified summary of the Pentagon's new National Defense Strategy Mattis unveiled on Friday.

We face growing threats from revisionist powers as different as China and Russia, nations that seek to create a world consistent with their authoritarian models. he said in a speech at Johns Hopkins University's Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies.

"Our military is still strong, yet our competitive edge has eroded in every domain of warfare -- air, land, sea, space and cyberspace -- and is continually eroding," he added.

He also said that the U.S.' so-called campaign against terrorists "will continue," but added that "great power competition — not terrorism — is now the primary focus of U.S. national security.

His remarks come as President Donald Trump and his administration are concerned that the U.S. military force is being

affected by years of budget shortfalls and atrophy, and that it has to fully reboot in order to restore it to an ideal strength.

"We will modernize key capabilities, recognizing we cannot expect success fighting tomorrow's conflicts with yesterday's weapons or equipment," Mattis said.

In December 2017, Trump unveiled a new "America First" national security strategy that named China and Russia as "competition," claiming that the two countries sought to "challenge American power, influence, and interests.

In the same month, the U.S. think tank RAND Corporation released a report, warning that the United States would likely lose a simultaneous military confrontation with Russia and China.

Thanks to their major technology advancements over the past years, the two Asian countries have now reached a level that they can top the U.S. in certain areas of military prowess, the report said, warning that limited budget and a lack of enough forces to support the "ambitious" U.S. military plan were hindering American forces.

(Source: Agencies)

South Africa's ANC to force Zuma to quit as president

South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) declined on Saturday to comment on a report its executive plans to force Jacob Zuma to quit as president, as its leaders gather to outline the party's program for the coming year.

National broadcaster eNCA said on Saturday that the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) had resolved on Friday to ask Zuma to resign and that, if he refused, he would be forced to step down by the party's six-strong leadership group. The station did not name its sources.

An anonymous NEC member quoted by online news site News24 said that decision had been reached unanimously. Zuma's second presidential term is due to run until 2019. The newly elected NEC made no mention of his possible early exit in a statement it issued after meeting for the first

Asked about the reports that Zuma would be asked to resign, an ANC spokeswoman said: "We can't confirm rumors of things that we don't know. The NEC has issued a

time on Thursday and Friday under the party's new leader,

statement on the totality of discussions yesterday."

Divided party

Zuma's presidency has been tainted by a series of corruption allegations, all of which he denies.

He retains the support of one part of the ANC leadership, but many others in the party argue that he has tarnished the image of Africa's oldest liberation movement. While he has been in office, the economy has also slowed to a

Ramaphosa succeeded Zuma as ANC head last month, making him likely to replace Zuma as the country's next

The party's Secretary-General Ace Magashule said on Thursday that Zuma's early removal as head of state was not on the agenda of the NEC meeting, which runs

But in recent days Ramaphosa has gone on the offensive against companies controlled by the Gupta family, businessmen friends of Zuma accused of unduly using political connections to win work with the state. They deny all

That has fueled speculation the new ANC leader and his allies are moving to lobby support for Zuma's

In its statement following the first half of the meeting, the NEC said officials led by President Ramaphosa "will continue their engagement with President Jacob Zuma to ensure effective coordination between the ANC and government.'

The main agenda item for the second part of the meeting, which will run until Sunday, is the party's program for the coming year.

Markets have rallied since Ramaphosa's election as ANC leader in December, as investors have warmed to his promises to root out corruption and kick-start economic growth.

Any sign that Zuma could step down before his second presidential term ends in 2019 has tended to lift South African assets, including the rand currency ZAR=D3.

(Source: Reuters)

'Yemeni ballistic missile hits Saudi base'

Yemeni army forces, supported by allied fighters from Popular Committees, have fired a short-range ballistic missile at a military base in Saudi Arabia's southwestern border region of Najran, in retaliation for the Saudi regime's military campaign against the crisis-hit country, Yemeni media report.

Cyril Ramaphosa.

A military source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Yemen's Arabic-language al-Masirah television network that the projectile struck Quwwah base in the region, located about 844 kilometers south of the capital Riyadh, on Saturday afternoon.

There were no immediate reports of

casualties or the extent of damage caused. A Saudi military spokesman later claimed that air defense forces had intercepted the

Separately, scores of Saudi-sponsored militiamen loyal to Yemen's former president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi were killed or injured when Yemeni troops and their allies stormed their position in an area of the southern Yemeni province of Bayda.

Also on Saturday, a couple lost their lives when Saudi fighter jets carried out an airstrike against a residential area in the Razih district of Yemen's northwestern province of Sa'ada.

At least 13,600 people have been killed since the onset of Saudi Arabia's military campaign against Yemen in 2015. Much of the Arabian Peninsula country's infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and factories, has been reduced to rubble due to the war.

The Saudi-led war has also triggered a deadly cholera epidemic across Yemen. According to the World Health Organi-

zation's latest count, the cholera outbreak has killed 2,167 people since the end of April 2017 and is suspected to have infected 841,906.

In November 2017, the United Nations

children's agency (UNICEF) said that more than 11 million children in Yemen were in acute need of aid, stressing that it was estimated that every 10 minutes a child died of a preventable disease there.

Additionally, the UN has described the current level of hunger in Yemen as "unprecedented," emphasizing that 17 million ople are now food insecure in the country.

The world body says that 6.8 million, meaning almost one in four people, do not have enough food and rely entirely on external assistance.

(Source: agencies)

Why Is Paris insisting on imposing Missile Limits on Iran?

1 Dobviously, applying any changes to these clauses, even in the form of a complementary agreement, means a violation of the main agreement and is equal to the withdrawal of the opposing sides of the nuclear deal. Macron knows well that a proposition called "completion of the nuclear deal" through an addendum, a supplementary agreement or even an interim agreement means a breach of the initial agreement. In such a situation, the JCPOA is going to lose its value, so France, like the United States, seeks to change the nuclear deal, but with a different literature! Inter $estingly\,enough,\,British\,Foreign\,Secretary, "Boris\,Johnson"\,also$ said recently in a statement that U.S. officials are not trying to step out of the JCPOA, but are seeking a reform of the nuclear deal. As noted, there has been remarkable softness in the positions of Paris and London towards the United States. But such softness has to be condemned by our foreign policy. Britain and France continue to emphasize on the "completion of the JCPOA" and are trying to indicate it as a common approach to the nuclear deal! This is while the term "completion of the JCPOA" has essentially no meaning other than "changing the JCPOA". In this equation, the supplementary agreement essentially means the withdrawal of the United States and the European Troika of the JCPOA. As noted, during the meetings between Macron and Trump on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, the parties agreed on what they called "reforming the JCPOA"



A review over the positions of the French President indicates the same point. Emmanuel Macron, on the one hand, states that the nuclear deal is unchangeable and, on the other hand, calls for the completion of it, by including Iran's missile power and imposing permanent restrictions on Iran! Obviously, this contradictory approach is not acceptable at all. What is clear is that the slightest change in the content of the nuclear deal means the lack of commitment of the other party, or in other words, the official withdrawal of the P1 + 5 members of the nuclear deal. Insisting firmly on this stance by our country's diplomacy system and foreign policy apparatus can counteract American-French Now the joint game of France and the U.S. has to be carefully

scrutinized by our country's diplomacy apparatus and foreign policy system. It should not be forgotten that Washington and Paris are completing a common puzzle. In other words, we shouldn't see the games of Paris and Washington separate in this field. Speaking of France as a "medium player" or an "independent player" would be a mistake in our foreign policy. Paris has now entered the scene of confronting the JCPOA as a "player completing the U.S. game." Meanwhile, the soft literature of the French authorities shouldn't deceive us so that we may ignore the danger of a sudden change in this country's conduct. The reality is that the French president and its Foreign Minister are not going to have a similar approach like the previous government of the country (Hollande and Laurent Fabius) towards the nuclear deal, rather the same approach used by their former government in opposing to our peaceful nuclear activities will continue. Therefore, here "the behavior of the French government" shouldn't be taken as the "French government's approach" towards the nuclear deal. As it can be seen, there is a difference between the statements made by the French and English authorities about the JCPOA and their practical approach towards the nuclear deal. This difference should be well understood by Iran. However, if the nuclear deal is violated by the United States, European troika will also be part of the process. In this condition, the only way before the three European countries is the emphasis on the JCPOA as a non-negotiable agreement. Nonetheless, countries like France and Britain have shown that they're not reluctant to re-negotiate the nuclear deal! A subject which is fully visible in the positions of people like Macron and Boris Johnson.

Hazard dazzles as Conte's men get back on track

A masterclass from two-goal hero Eden Hazard helped Chelsea stylishly return to winning ways with an entertaining 4-o Premier League triumph at Brighton and Hove Albion.

Antonio Conte's men had been held to five consecutive draws - three games ending goalless - in all competitions, needing a penalty shootout to get past Norwich City in the FA Cup on Wednesday

Progress to the fourth round came at a price, with forwards Alvaro Morata and Pedro receiving red cards, but Hazard and Willian made light of their absence with goals inside the first six minutes - the Brazilian's eighth of the campaign certainly one to trouble the end-of-season lists.

To their credit, Brighton did not buckle. Ezequiel Schelotto was unfortunate to have penalty claims rejected and Davy Propper hit the post after half-time.

Willian came similarly close to his second before turning provider on his 50th consecutive Premier League appearance

Victor Moses added gloss to the scoreline in the 89th minute as the reigning champions moved up to third in the table.

(Source: Guardian)

Dortmund confirm Arsenal bid for Aubameyang

Arsenal have made an official bid to sign Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang, Borussia Dortmund chief executive Hans-Joachim Watzke has confirmed.

After sitting out last weekend's stalemate against Wolfsburg for disciplinary reasons, Aubameyang did not travel with Dortmund for Friday's 1-1 draw at Hertha Berlin.

The striker has been linked with Arsenal as a replacement for Alexis Sanchez, who appears set to join Manchester United in a deal that could see Henrikh Mkhitaryan move

And Arsenal have now stepped up their interest, with an offer for Aubameyang reported to be worth €50million.

"I can confirm that there has been a first request from Arsenal for Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and we are not commenting on the sums that have been mentioned," Watzke was quoted as saying by Ruhr Nachrichten.

It is believed Dortmund will demand upwards of €60m for Aubameyang, who has scored 13 goals in 15 Bundesliga appearances this term.

Despite ongoing uncertainty around the 28-year-old's future, sporting director Michael Zorc and Peter Stoger suggested he could be reintegrated if he remained at Signal Iduna Park following the transfer deadline.

"I felt like he was busy with many things but not this important match. That's why he wasn't with us," said Stoger after the draw against Hertha.

"If he is also playing football all the time next week and there are photos of him [a reference to Aubameyang reportedly playing in a five-a-side game on Friday], then he will be in the squad against Freiburg.

(Source: Four Four Two)

Federer eases past Gasquet into fourth round

Roger Federer eased into the second week of the Australian Open with a 6-2 7-5 6-4 win over Richard Gasquet on Saturday evening that kept the Swiss on course for a 20th

The 36-year-old defending champion reached the fourth round of the Melbourne Park tournament for the 16th time by shifting up the gears when required to see off his French opponent in just under two hours on Rod Laver Arena.

Gasquet played a solid match, studded with his trademark occasional moments of shot-making brilliance, but that was never enough to overcome one of the best players of all time.

Watched from the stands by 11-times grand slam champion Laver, second seed Federer sealed the victory with a backhand winner to set up a first career meeting with Hungarian Marton Fucsovics for a place in the quarter-finals.

(Source: Reuters)

North Korea to send 22 athletes to Pyeongchang

North Korea will send 22 athletes to the Winter Games in the neighboring South next month and compete in three sports and five disciplines, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Saturday.

The IOC said in a statement that the North and South had agreed to march under a single flag at the opening ceremony and would field a united team in the women's ice hockey, confirming earlier reports. The North will also send 24 officials and 21 media

North Korea's planned involvement in Pyeongchang is viewed as a sign of easing tensions over its nuclear and missile programme.

The IOC said that the united Korean delegation would be led into the Olympic Stadium for the opening ceremony under the Korean Unification Flag which would be carried by two athletes, one from each country.

The three sports in which North Korea will compete are ice skating and skiing in addition to women's ice hockey, the IOC said. Until Saturday, a figure skating pair were the only North Koreans to have secured a spot at the Games.

"Today marks the milestone on a long journey," said IOC president Thomas Bach in a prepared declaration. "Since 2014, the IOC has addressed the special situation of having the Olympic Winter Games on the Korean peninsula.

"Such an agreement would have seemed impossible only a few weeks ago," he added. "The Olympic Winter Games are hopefully opening the door to a brighter future on the Korean peninsula.

(Source: Fox Sports)

Alexis Sanchez to be unveiled as Manchester United player on Tuesday

Alexis Sanchez's proposed move from Arsenal to Manchester United took a step closer to completion on Saturday when the forward was set for a medical.

According to Daily Mirror, Sanchez left the Gunners' team hotel before 11 p.m. on Friday and set off for Manchester in order to finalize his switch to the Red Devils.

"Sanchez was due to be in the Arsenal squad after Arsene Wenger named 19 players but then got pulled out and said his goodbyes to his team mates after a breakthrough in negotiations," Mirror continued. "It appears Arsenal forced United's hand by picking him but he then dropped out after a dramatic

It's added that Henrikh Mkhitaryan is poised to move in the opposite direction, as he said farewell to his United team-mates

According to Mirror, the breakthrough means a deal to take Sanchez to Old Trafford will most likely go through over the

Jose Mourinho spoke candidly of the club's interest in the Chile international on Friday, although he said there is still work

Speculation about Sanchez's future has developed into a saga, with United moving ahead of rivals Manchester City in pursuit of the forward, whose contract at the Emirates Stadium is set to expire at the end of the

It means the Red Devils will be getting one of the most talented and effective players in the Premier League for a knockdown fee, while a player on the fringes in Mkhitaryan will be moving on. While there has Sanchez is a force of nature at full flight. been plenty of talk about the potential salary United will pay Sanchez-Joe Bernstein of the Daily Mail reported United are ready

getting a good deal. As the transfer wrangle seemingly edges closer to completion, United fans will be

to shell out a weekly wage of £350,000 to

sign the forward—Red Devils legend Gary

Neville believes the Old Trafford outfit are

getting more and more excited about the player they're getting.

'he 29-year-old has many positive attacking attributes in his locker, as he is versatile in terms of positioning, can dribble, can pick a pass and can find the net. Since his arrival in the Premier League, he's been one of the est in the division.

All parties involved in the transfers of Sanchez and Mkhitaryan will be delighted the finishing line is in sight, as each club will be keen to get their new players settled and

Provided all does go to plan, Sanchez could make his United debut against Yeovil Town in the FA Cup on Friday night. It's in that competition and the UEFA Champions League, where the Red Devils still have a chance of silverware, that the forward will be desperate to make

Alexis Sanchez will be formally unveiled as a Manchester United player on Tuesday, according to media reports.
(Source: Staff & Agency)

Kerber thrashes Sharapova to reach fourth round



Maria Sharapova's hopes of a title-winning return to the Australian Open were unceremoniously crushed by Angelique Kerber as the battle of the former champions ended 6-1 6-3 in the German's favor on Saturday.

The Rod Laver Arena evening clash between the only two grand slam winners left in the women's draw had the feel of a showpiece final rather than a third-round match-up but only 21st seed Kerber rose to the occasion.

Unseeded Russian Sharapova, back in Melbourne after testing positive for a banned substance following her quarter-final defeat by Serena Williams here in 2016, which resulted in a 15-month ban, had looked menacing in the opening two rounds.

But the form she showed in beating 14th seeded Latvian Anastasija Sevastova deserted her.

Kerber, who plummeted down the rankings last year after finishing the previous campaign at number one, broke Sharapova's serve in the first game of the match and that set the tone.

The German made only seven unforced errors in the 64-minute contest and, on the court on which she stunned Serena Williams to win the title two years ago, celebrated victory with the look of a woman who firmly believes she is back in business.

"Of course this was quite a big match," Kerber, who began working with new coach Wim Fissette at the end of last year, told re-

porters. "Maria is a champion. She's always dangerous, especially at the grand slams.

"But I was really trying to not think about everything around and everything about the match, about against who I was playing. I was just more trying to go out on the special court for me and play good tennis.

Kerber streaked away with the first set, aided by the erratic nature of Sharapova's game, and although the 2008 champion briefly threatened a fightback after falling behind in the second, it was not to be the Russian's night.

An error-prone Sharapova double-faulted on the way to dropping serve to trail o-2 $\,$ in the second set.

The Russian replied with a break of her own and when she slapped a running forehand winner down the line to make it 2-2 it appeared battle was truly about to commence.

Alarm bells were ringing for Kerber when Sharapova rifled away a backhand winner to earn a break point at 3-3 but the Russian missed a regulation forehand to waste the chance.

Sharapova, playing only her second grand slam since returning from her doping suspension, took it on the chin.

Kerber will face either 26th seed Agnieszka Radwanska or Hsieh Su-Wei of Taiwan in the next round.

(Source: Reuters)

Olympian abused by team doctor sees USA Gymnastics as 'rotten'



Olympic gold medalist Aly Raisman blasted U.S. gymnastics officials on Friday for failing to protect her and other women from years of sexual abuse by former team doctor Larry Nassar, calling the sport's governing body "rotten from the inside."

Raisman, co-captain of the U.S. women's gymnastics squad at the 2012 London and 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Games, called for an independent investigation into U.S. gymnastics and Olympic officials who she said had the power to stop Nassar.

Nassar pleaded guilty to 10 counts of first-degree sexual assault in November. "For this sport to go on, we need to

demand real change, and we need to be willing to fight for it," she said. "It's clear now that if we leave it up

to these organizations, history is likely to repeat itself," she said, referring to USA Gymnastics and the U.S. Olympic Committee. The 23-year-old gymnast was the latest

of dozens of athletes to testify this week at a hearing ahead of Nassar's sentencing at the Ingham County Circuit Court in Many of them spoke tearfully of how

the abuse at the hands of Nassar, the former national medical coordinator for USA Gymnastics, left them emotionally scarred

In calling for an independent investigation, Raisman said she was dismayed that

USA Gymnastics had offered only "empty promises" as the scandal unfolded.

Raisman, who won six Olympic medals, three of them gold, during her career, called on the governing body's newly installed CEO Kerry Perry to heed a chorus of demands for more accountability.

"Unfortunately you have taken on an organization that is rotten from the inside,' Raisman said to Perry, who was not in the courtroom on Friday. "You will be judged by how you deal with this.

Glaring at the former team doctor as she read a 15-minute statement during a fourth day of hearings in the Lansing, Michigan courtroom, Raisman defiantly told Nassar that his victims were no longer isolated and weak.

"We have our voices and we will not be silenced," she said. "I'm no longer that little girl you met in Australia who you first began grooming and manipulating.'

Prosecutors have asked for a sentence of 40 to 125 years for Nassar, 54, who was also a prominent physician at a Michigan State University sports clinic. That would add to a 60-year sentence he is serving in federal prison on child pornography convictions.

With about 120 victims now expected to make statements at the hearing, more than initially expected, Nassar's sentencing has been delayed to early next week.

Zidane: I will never throw in the towel at Real Madrid

Zinedine Zidane bullishly rejected the notion of walking away from Real Madrid as he dismissed suggestions of a rift between himself and the Santiago Bernabeu board on transfer policy.

Madrid entertain Deportivo at the Bernabeu on Sunday, aiming to bounce back from last weekend's 1-0 loss to Villarreal that left them fourth in the table - 19 points behind bitter rivals Barcelona at the summit.

Zidane suggested Marco Asensio's late goal to beat Leganes 1-0 in the Copa del Rey during midweek could stand as a turning point and told a pre-match news conference for Sunday's match against Depor that he was not considering the end of his tenure with the reigning Spanish and European champions.

"I don't think about negative things like that. I think about positive things. Even if you think there's not a lot of positives, we find positive things.

"I'm never going to throw in the towel. Everything can happen here but I'm going to keep going, fighting - as I've always been shown to do.

"I'm never going to give up. Those are the values of this



club and the people who work here at this club." Sergio Ramos will return to full training next week following a calf injury, although Jesus Vallejo's hamstring

problem leaves Madrid short at the back.

Zidane maintained this would not force him into the January transfer market and insists his employers support

"No, there aren't different opinions. I don't think so," he said in a particularly terse exchange with a reporter. "You're asking and I'm replying, so it's clear for you.

"You have to ask someone else [for a different answer]. If you're asking me, I don't think there is a difference of opinion between the club and me as a coach.'

Villarreal became the third visiting team to win at the Bernabeu this season and Zidane was asked whether Madrid's famed arena had lost an element of its fear factor.

"I'm not worried about that," he replied. "We need to

think about us, as ever. "We're a team, we're united and the solution is within the squad. Whatever people think, that they can come to the Bernabeu and get points... we have to show who we are. Tomorrow we have a chance to show that.

(Source: Goal)

Iran's Esteghlal to sign Yazalde Gomes Pinto

S P O R T S Iranian football club Esteghlal are going to sign Yazalde d e s k Gomes Pinto, known simply as Yazalde, in the January transfer window.

Yazalde, who most recently played for Portuguese team Rio Ave, has represented Portugal at under-21 level.

He will take his medical examination with Esteghlal.

Yazalde began his playing professionally with second division's Varzim SC in Portugal in 2007 and joined Braga after two years on a five-and-ahalf-year contract.

The Iranian media reports suggest that Esteghlal has reached an initial agreement with the 29-year-old striker.

Esteghlal have been already linked with Nigerian striker Salisu Abdullahi "Alhaji" Gero but Östersund didn't let him to leave the team. The Blues need to strengthen their forward line for the AFC Champions League.

Esteghlal have been drawn along with Al-Rayyan of Qatar, Al-Hilal of Saudi Arabia and Winner Play-off West 1 in Group D of

Esteghlal will meet Al-Rayyan of Qatar on Feb. 13 in Doha in their opening match.

Winfried Schafer's team also sit sixth in Iran Professional League, 16 points behind pacesetters Persepolis.

participate at Takhti Cup

Cuba Greco-Roman wrestling team to

Iran Defeats Japan at Asian Handball Championship



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Borut d e s k Macek's team earned its second victory in a row at the 2018 Asian Men's Handball Championship.

Iran handball team defeated Japan 37-32 at the Seo-Suwon Chilbo Gymnasium in Suwon, South Korea on Saturday.

18 in its opening Group A match on Friday. Iran will meet the Group D second finisher on Monday.

The 2018 Asian Men's Handball Championship is the 18th edition of the championship held under the aegis of Asian Handball Federation.

The championship is being held at Suwon, South Korea from January 18 to

It acts as the Asian qualifying tournament for the 2019 World Men's Handball Championship. For the first time, Australia, New Zealand and Bangladesh participate.

and Antonio Duran (82kg) will represent Iranian history, died on January 7, 1968. He claimed the gold medal in Melbourne Team Melli had defeated Uzbekistan 37the Cuban team in the tournament. The competition will be held in 1956 Olympic Games and won two silver medals in 1952 Helsinki and 1960 Rome Mahshahr, Iran on Jan. 25-26.

A total of 12 countries, namely Ukraine,

S P O R T S Cuba will send three

d e s k Greco-Roman wres-

tlers to take part at the 38th edition of

Molina (60kg), Luis E. Gutiérrez (77kg)

Olympic gold medalists Ismael Borrero

the Takhti Cup.

Zlatko Kranjcar parts company with Sepahan

Olympic Games.

S P O R T S Zlatko Kranjcar has parted company with Iranian top-flight football club Sepahan. Kranjcar replaced Abdollah Veisi in May on a twoyear contract but was forced to leave Isfahan after a run of results that has seen Sepahan creep closer to

Karim Ghanbari has taken charge of the team as in-

Kazakhstan, Italy, Tajikistan, Finland,

Bulgaria, Romania, Azerbaijan, Turkey,

Georgia, Poland and Cuba are announced

their readiness to take part in the compe-

Takhti, the most famous wrestler in

Sepahan newly-appointed General Manager Masoud Tabesh said that Kranjcar has parted ways with them by mutual consent.

According to him, a European coach and an also Iranian coach are candidates to be named as Sepahan new coach. Sepahan are struggling in the Iran Professional League

current season and they are just seven points above the relegation zone.

Sepahan are the most decorated football team in Iran Professional League, winning the title five times.

Iranian media reports suggest that former Zob Ahan coach Mansour Ebrahimzadeh is a nominee to coach

Barcelona deny reported Antoine Griezmann agreement made

Barcelona have denied reaching an agreement with Atletico Madrid forward Antoine Griezmann, contradicting reports which had appeared in the Catalan press on Saturday.

Diario Sport suggested Barca and Griezmann have already agreed on personal terms over a summer transfer, adding that if either party broke the deal there would be a "financial penalty."

Reports across the Spanish media had previously claimed on Friday that Philippe Coutinho would not take the No. 7 shirt at Camp Nou because it was being reserved for Griezmann.

The France international's release clause reverts to €100 million at the end of the season and Barca are thought to be willing to pay it, if they can't come to an agreement with Atletico first.

However, after being reported to FIFA by Atletico last month following comments made by director Guillermo Amor about Griezmann, Barca have reacted angrily to the latest bout of rumours.

"Barcelona strongly deny the information which has appeared in different media outlets in recent hours in reference to Atletico Madrid player Antoine Griemzmann and a supposed move to our club," the Catalans said in a statement. Barcelona express their unease at the reports and reiter-



ate our respect towards the institution of Atletico Madrid." Amor was asked in December about Barca's desire to sign Griezmann after a Mundo Deportivo report that president Josep Maria Bartomeu had held a meeting with the

"If that's what [Mundo Deportivo] said, it's possible," Amor told Movistar+. "Maybe there's been a meeting and things have advanced, although I don't know. There's a good understanding, maybe there have been talks.

"Rumors are inevitable in football. In the case of Griezmann. there are a lot of players we could be talking with, initiating some kind of relationship with if there's an opportunity.

"We're obliged to have contact with players. It's some-

After Atletico made a complaint to FIFA due to Barcelona's "repeated contact with Griezmann and his people," a source at the Catalan club told ESPN FC "there have been no negotiations with Griezmann and, therefore, no irregularities have been committed."

Griezmann, 26, signed a new contract with Atletico last June, turning down a move to Manchester United after the La Liga side's appeal against a transfer ban was rejected.

However, Atletico coach Diego Simeone has since said he would not stand in Griezmann's way if he decided to leave the Wanda Metropolitano for pastures new.

And despite breaking their transfer record twice in the last six months with the signings of Ousmane Dembele and Coutinho for a combined €300m, Barca are still thought to be keen on signing Griezmann in the summer.

(Source: ESPN)

Vietnam hold nerve in penalty shootout to reach last four

Bashar Resan's miss from the penalty spot earned Vietnam a place in the semi-finals of the AFC U23 Championship 2018 on Saturday as Park Hang-seo's side defeated former champions Iraq 5-3 in a penalty shootout after an extraordinary 3-3 draw following

Resan's attempt to float his penalty down the middle of the goal in the opening round of spot-kicks failed to fool goalkeeper Bui Tien Dung and the Vietnamese goalkeeper calmly collected the ball in his arms to, ultimately, seal Vietnam's victory.

The shootout brought a remarkable game to a tense conclusion and sends Vietnam into the last four for the first time ever, and they will take on Qatar in the semi-finals in Changzhou on Tuesday.

Iraq went into the game in confident mood after topping Group D and dictated the opening exchanges but, with Vietnam's defensive discipline to the fore in the early exchanges, there was little Abdulghani Sha-

had's side could do to find a way through. Indeed, it was the Vietnamese who took the lead with just 12 minutes on the clock after Irag's defense failed to clear a corner. The ball fell to Phan Van Duc, whose mis-hit attempt at an overhead kick landed at the feet of Nguyen Cong Phuong, who scored past

Ahmed Basil from inside the six-yard box. Undeterred by going a goal down, Iraq

continued to push forward and their pressure paid off in the 29th minute when Aymen Hussein was fouled inside the area and referee Christopher Beath pointed to the spot. Hussein converted to level the scores.

With three minutes remaining Alaa Mhawi had the chance to ensure the game did not go into extra-time, but he sent his attempt over the bar after being set up for the opportunity by Resan.

Iraq looked the more determined to ensure the outcome was decided without the need for spot-kicks and, just four minutes into the first additional period, the former champions took a 2-1 lead when Hussein headed in Resan's corner.

Vietnam, however, were level again in the 108th minute as Basil's mistake gifted possession to Nguyen Quang Hai, and he set up Van Duc to score.

The frenetic pace of extra-time continued when Ha Duc Chinh headed home Luong Xuan Truong's corner to put Vietnam 3-2 ahead, only for parity to be restored yet again with four minutes remaining as Alaa Mhawi struck from a tight angle, sending the game into a shootout.

That left Resan to fluff his lines, missing with his penalty in the first round as all five Vietnamese penalty takers held their nerve from 12 yards to claim a famous win.

(Source: AFC)

Norouzinejad joins **Gummersbach handball team**

TASNIM — Iranian handball player Pouya Norouzinejad has joined Germany's VfL Gummersbach.

The 23-year-old player has joined the German team

from Swiss Kadetten Schaffhausen. Norouzinejad will play in Gummersbach in the 2018–19 $\,$

Handball-Bundesliga which will kick off in August. He is a member of Iran national handball team who competes in the 2018 Asian Men's Handball Champion-

ship in South Korea. Norouzinejad has penned a two-year contract with Gummersbach.

VfL Gummersbach are a handball club from the German city of Gummersbach.

Currently, the team compete in the German First League of Handball and the DHB-Pokal. Gummersbach are one of the most successful team-handball club ever.

USADA hands Francisco Rivera four-year suspension

Former UFC bantamweight Francisco Rivera is the second fighter since the UFC formed its relationship with the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) to get a four-year

USADA today announced the news after Rivera's (11-7 MMA, 4-6 UFC) case and subsequent suspension were reviewed by an independent arbitrator. Rivera tested positive for the banned substance clenbuterol during an out-of-competition urine sample collected on July 23, 2016.

According to USADA, Rivera's four-year ineligibility period began on Aug. 17, 2016. "Cisco" last competed at UFC 201 in July 2016 where he suffered a unanimous-decision loss to Erik Perez. He's currently on a three-fight losing skid and will be almost 40 when his suspension is complete.

In December 2017, Rivera announced he was a free agent Whether he will choose to accept fights in a region which does not adhere to USADA's oversight remains to be seen. (Source: MMAjunkie)

Olympics - 1928 silver medalist Marangoni dies at 102

MILAN (Reuters) - Carla Marangoni, whose silver medal at the 1928 Olympic games made her the oldest living Olympic medalist, has died at the age of 102, the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI) said on Friday.



CONI said that Marangoni, who competed in the team gymnastics, was the only surviving participant of the 1928 games in Amsterdam.

'She will remain an unforgettable protagonist in the history of Italian sport and the Olympic movement," said

Marangoni was 12 years old when she helped Italy win their first-ever women's medal at the modern Games.

The Italian sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport said she died at her home in Pavia on Thursday morning.

Chelsea chase Roma pair

Despite reports that Roma are reluctant to discuss a deal for Edin Dzeko, Chelsea remain keen on the striker as well as his teammate Emerson Palmieri, the Telegraph reports.

Blues boss Antonio Conte is eager to recruit a target man this month to provide a Plan B in attack, with Peter Crouch and Christian Benteke also in the frame after an ankle injury ruled out West Ham's Andy Carroll.

Given Crouch turns 37 later this month, Dzeko may be viewed as a longer-term option but would be cup-tied for the Champions League, having already appeared in the competition this season.

Chelsea want a loan deal for Palmieri, who would provide competition for Marcos Alonso at left-back, but Roma are

holding out for a £22 million transfer. (Source: Soccernet)

Will Qatar turn to Iran for help with 2022 World Cup?

Qatar is apparently behind schedule in building hotels and stadiums needed to host the world tournament. Analysts deem that the country, lacking a football culture, will be unable to fulfill the promises it has made. The dispute with its neighbors has diminished chances of cooperating with Bahrain or the UAE to host some of the matches.

The Economist reported that Iran is in early talks with Oatar to take on some of the hosting duties. The Iranian islands of Kish and Qeshm have hotels aplenty that could accommodate fans. But the strict Sharia rules banning alcohol may dissuade fans.

The magazine notes that Qatar has no choice but to cooperate with its neighbor Iran. It adds that Qatar promised to build 100,000 hotel rooms by 2022, it will struggle to reach 45,000 at best.

'Qatar may come up short on stadiums, too. It says eight will be ready by 2022, not the 12 it promised," the magazine said. (Source: Me Confidential)

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■ Managing Director: Ali Asgari

- Editor-in-Chief: Mohammad Ghaderi Editorial Dept.: Fax: (+98 21) 88808214 — 88808895
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TMCA to hold Ali-Akbar Sadeqi retrospective

A R T TEHRAN - A retrospective of the d e s k veteran Iranian painter, illustrator, animator and sculptor Ali-Akbar Sadeqi will open at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMCA) on January 28.

The exhibition will

showcase his career that

spans over 60 years, the

organizers announced on

of his 200 paintings,

sculptures, drawings and

illustrations has been accumulated for the exhibit. In addition, a number

the retrospective.

A collection composed

Saturday



of his rarely-seen short animated movies will also be screened during

The Los Angeles County Ali-Akbar Sadeqi poses in an Museum of Art (LACMA) in undated photo. collaboration with Shirin

Gallery in Tehran organized an exhibition of artworks by Sadeqi in October 2016.

Earlier in March 2016, Art Dubai Modern, a major international art fair in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia, showcased works by the 80-year-old artist.

Actress Baran Kowsari appointed new ambassador of Yari Foundation

TEHRAN – Actress Baran Kowsari has d e s k been appointed the ambassador of the Yari Foundation, an Uppsala-based charity organization founded



by Iranian expatriates living in Sweden, the organization has announced. Yari supports street

children in Iran, enabling them to attend school, and also raises funds for construction of schools and libraries for children in the country.

The organization has also organized the Yari Iranian Film Festival in the Swedish cities of Uppsala and Stockholm every year since

Actor Pejman Bazeghi was Actress Baran Kowsari in an appointed the ambassador

NEWS IN BRIEF



sion Art and Cultural Institute.

Marco Rhauderwiek to stage sound performance in Tehran

TEHRAN – The German music producer e s k Marco Rhauderwiek will organize a sound

performance in Tehran on February 1. The performance will take place at the Rooberoo Man-

In his previous works, he has collaborated with famous figures such Paul St. Hilaire from Dominica, the legendary dub vocalist and producer.



"Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" on stage in Tehran

TEHRAN – An Iranian troupe directed e s k by Arman Hossein-nejad is performing a stage adaptation of Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson's "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" in Tehran.

The play named "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" will be on stage at Arghanun Theater until January 28, the theater announced on Saturday.

The gothic novella, which was first published in 1886, is about a London lawyer named Gabriel John Utterson who investigates strange occurrences between his old friend, Dr. Henry Jekyll, and the evil Edward Hyde.



"The Blue Pink" (Jamejamonline/Reza Jalali)

TEHRAN – A play that d e s k spotlights transsexuals in Iran was staged during the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival in Tehran on Friday night.

"The Blue Pink" was staged by a cast of nine $actors \, helmed \, by \, the \, promising \, young \, director$ and writer Sanaz Bayan at Paliz Theater.

Bayan was familiar with the trans persons issue through an article her mother, as a journalist, wrote about the people during the 1990s, she said once in an interview with the Persian service of MNA.

She noted that the play shows how much sexual identity is important in Iranian society. "In such a society, I retain my individual identity by my gender and the society judges

me based on my sex," she added.

"Talking about the trans issue is a cultural taboo," she said and added that several actors denied her offer to collaborate with her on the project due to fear of being labeled with inappropriate titles.

However, veteran actress Nasim Adabi dressed in drag to play the role of a trans named Amir.

A synopsis written by Bayan for the play reads, "The words of man and woman are nothing but illusions. No man is completely a man and no woman is completely a woman, otherwise we all would turn into monsters." Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi along with his wife sat to watch the play on Friday.

In his meeting with Bayan and the cast, Qazizadeh-Hashemi praised the play for raising people's awareness about the trans-

He said that his organization is ready to support plays focusing on such issues.

Fajr festival to honor three theater experts

TEHRAN – The veteran d e s k theater experts Ahmad Damud, Hushang Azadivar and Jamshid Khanian will be honored with lifetime achievement awards at the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival.

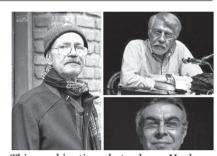
The honoring ceremony will take place during the closing celebration of the event on January 29, the organizers announced on Saturday.

Damud is a director, actor, researcher and

university teacher. He has studied psychology at the University of Tabriz, and is a graduate of TV and cinema communications from Columbia University in New York. Damud was selected the best researcher of the year by the Iranian Association of Theater Critics

Azadivar began his professional career with making documentary films. He also studied cinema in the United States. He followed his interest through translating several plays and books into Persian including "History of the Theater" by Oscar G. Brockett and William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet". Khanian is a researcher and a playwright.

Among his credits are "A Half Day in the Interrogation Room" and "Compass". He is also the writer of several stories, including "Money" and "Where is My Joseph", which have been translated into English, Russian and Polish.



This combination photo shows Hushang Azadivar (L), Ahmad Damud on the top, and Jamshid Khanian on the bottom.

"Upside down" artist Baselitz celebrated in retrospective

RIEHEN, Switzerland (Reuters) -Georg Baselitz, a provocative German artist who inspired a generation with challenging depictions of the Nazi era and the post-war division of Germany, is being honored by a retrospective to mark his 80th birthday.

Born Hans-Georg Kern in the German town of Deutschbaselitz in 1938, Baselitz gained worldwide fame in the 1970s with his portraits often bizarrely showing his subjects upside down - which he painted in a neo-expressionist style.

"Seeing 60 years of one own's pictures is a difficult undertaking," Baselitz said at a news conference marking the opening of the exhibition at the Swiss Fondation Beyeler in Riehen, near Basel

"But I don't recognize it (the art) any more'. And it's almost as if I were to re-encounter myself now as a baby. I would not recognize myself."

In a manifesto in 1961 when he was 23, he said he was "swollen and bloated" with memories of the Nazi era - his



Director Sam Keller (L) of the Fondation Beyeler listens to German artist Georg Baselitz during a media preview of the exhibition "Baselitz" in Riehen near Basel, Switzerland January 19, 2018. (Reuters/ Arnd Wiegmann)

father had been a party member - and the aftermath of a divided Germany and the socialist East, which he fled in 1957.

His early paintings in the 1960s, he said, were "aggressive, wholly malicious", referring to works which at the time German prosecutors seized as lewd.

"Fast & Furious" star Diesel brings high-octane live show to London

LONDON (Reuters) — The roaring engines and burning rubber of "The Fast & The Furious" films - one of cinema's highest-grossing franchises - are skidding off the screen and into the real world, as a live stunt show based on the movies opened in London on Thursday.
"Fast & Furious Live," held in London's

O2 arena, aims to recreate the elaborate stunts for which the films are known.

'We talked about a live show, but we'd never imagined it in the way that Rowland (creative director, Rowland French) imagined it," actor Vin Diesel, one of the films' main stars, told Reuters.

The show features around 40 vehicles, including tanks, trucks, a submarine and dozens of fire-spitting, customized muscle cars. It uses 3D projection technology to help give the illusion that car chases are taking place over distances much greater than the inside of an arena.

"Fast and The Furious", about a gang of illegal street racers, has spawned eight films since 2001, with two more in development,



a photocall to promote his film "Fast & Furious 8" in Madrid, Spain April 6, 2017. (Reuters/Sergio Perez)

a forthcoming spin-off film, video games and theme park rides.

The franchise survived the death of one of its main stars, Paul Walker, killed in a

"I think he would totally get a kick out of, out of seeing our little movie turn into this show at the O2 arena," Diesel said. "He'd get a kick out of that."

Hollywood producers issue anti-harassment guidelines

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Hollywood producers on Friday outlined steps aimed at preventing sexual harassment on and off television and movie sets in a response to revelations of misconduct that have shaken the entertainment industry in recent months.

The voluntary guidelines from the Producers Guild of America (PGA) recommend that all productions provide in-person anti-sexual harassment training for all cast and crew before the start of each season.

They also urge producers to conduct meetings and casting sessions in a "professional, safe and comfortable" environment, among other steps.

"As producers, we provide key leadership in creating and sustaining work environments built on mutual respect, so it is our obligation to change our culture and eradicate this abuse," PGA Co-Presidents Gary Lucchesi and Lori McCreary said in a statement.

The guidelines are initial recommendations from a task force the PGA created in October after allegations of misconduct against entertainment industry figures including producer



A view of the Hollywood sign in the Hollywood Hills in Hollywood, California in this December 13, 2009 file photo. (Reuters/Fred Prouser)

Harvey Weinstein, who has been accused by more than 70 women of sexual misconduct, including rape.

Many of the accusations against Weinstein stemmed from actresses who said they were sent to meetings with him alone in hotel rooms. Weinstein has denied having non-consensual sex with anyone

The PGA expelled Weinstein from the group in October. The new guidelines are especially important for independent productions that are not being done at a movie or TV studio with a human resources department, McCreary said in an interview.

Lucchesi said the steps, which were unanimously ratified by the PGA's board of directors, are meant to serve as "best practices" for the PGA's 8,200 members.

"It's really about setting the right tone and having the proper behavior," he said. "You don't want people to be insensitive anymore.

The recommendations also offer advice to victims of harassment, starting with going to authorities if they believe a crime was committed, and taking notes shortly after an incident.

Mexican hotel keeping Hotel California name after Eagles settlement

NEW YORK (Reuters) - A hotel in Mexico named Hotel California plans to continue using the name in that country after settling a lawsuit brought by the Eagles over rights related to the country-rock band's classic 1976 song.

Hotel California Baja LLC said on Friday it will "continue to use the service mark and trademark 'Hotel California' in Mexico," where it owns about 28 valid trademark registrations for the name and variants.

The settlement with the Eagles was made public on Thursday, after the U.S. Patent and

Trademark Office accepted Hotel California Baja's request to abandon a trademark application in the United States.

In a federal lawsuit filed in Los Angeles, the Eagles had accused the hotel of improperly encouraging guests to believe the band had authorized its use of the song's name, in part to sell T-shirts and other merchandise.

The hotel is located in the town of Todos Santos on Baja California Sur, about 1,000 miles (1,609 km) south of San Diego and 48 miles (77 km) north of Cabo San Lucas.

"Hotel California" is known for abstract lyrics that lead singer Don Henley has said describe excess in America. The song appears on an album with the same title.

Hotel California Baja said the hotel "claims no association with the Eagles or with their song and record album 'Hotel California.'

The hotel's owners are not affiliated with the Eagles, the hotel's website says, although "many visitors are mesmerized by the 'coincidences' between the lyrics of the hit song and the physicality of the hotel and its surroundings.'



Tourists walk past Hotel California in the town of Todos Santos, Baja California Sur, Mexico, May 2, 2017. (Reuters/Fernando Castillo)