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Iran ranks 18th among world's top economies

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran is ranked world's 18th biggest economy in 2017 based on gross domestic product (GDP) measured upon Purchase Power Parities (PPP), ISNA reported on Saturday citing World Bank's latest data.
 As reported by knoema.com, with a GDP totaled at \$428 billion in 2017, Islamic Republic of Iran also occupied the 27th place in the world GDP ranking list based on current prices.
 The global GDP in current prices is expected to reach \$79.3 trillion in 2017, \$3.8 trillion more than 2016's total \$75.5 trillion. **→4**

Qafer fighter in pre-flight test phase

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Former Iranian Defense Minister Hossein Dehqan has said that Qafer, a state-of-the-art stealth fighter jet produced at home, has entered pre-flight test phase which is technically called "fast taxi" phase.
 "One of the tests is to check if the plane is able to move on the runway which is called taxi test and after this phase the plane should be able to move fast and get ready to take off which is called taxi test. In both phases, the plane's points of strength and weakness are revealed... The Qafer fighter has gone through the fast taxi phase," Dehqan, currently defense advisor to the Leader, told Tasnim news agency in an interview published on Saturday.
 The fighter jet Qafer-313 was unveiled in February 2013. The single-seat stealth fighter jet can take off and land on short runways, according to Tasnim. **→2**

Environment being sacrificed for auto industry: Kalantari

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — "Using job creation and domestic production as excuses no one can stop home grown, substandard car manufacturing in Iran and we are giving up citizens' health and the environment for that," Iran's environment chief said.
 "In such conditions we cannot expect clean air," Kalantari lamented, adding, "Domestic auto industry's annual income amounts to some 700 trillion rials (nearly \$15.5 billion) which is 150 times more than Department of Environment annual budget and three times more than the budget allocated to the Ministry of Health," Isa Kalantari said while addressing a conference on cancer here on Saturday. **→12**

EDITORIAL
 By Mohammad Ghaderi
 Tehran Times editor-in-chief
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Lady diplomat puts on a new show to grab attention

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations continues to spew forth inflammatory rhetoric against Iran. In the past year, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley has made every effort to oppose and discredit the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In her lame efforts, Haley has tried to convince other members of the U.S. cabinet, such as U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis, to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, claiming Iran has not been living up to the bargain.
 Haley's controversial trip to Vienna and her meeting with IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano was in line with her desperate attempts to find flaws in Iran's compliance with the JCPOA, but her efforts were all in vain.
 However, she has not given up. Haley had the cooperation of Senator Tom Cotton, a radical conservative Republican, on discrediting the Iran nuclear deal. On behalf of the Trump administration, she alleges that Iran has not been committed to the nuclear accord. This bogus claim has been called "a big mistake" by some members of Trump's cabinet and considered costly for Washington in the international arena, as it could cause a rift in U.S. relations with Europe.
 Recently, Haley falsely accused Iran of supplying ballistic missiles used to attack Saudi Arabian forces by the Yemenis, and alleges that she is seeking the endorsement of U.S. allies to provoke Iran. Much to her chagrin, even U.S. intelligence agencies have questioned her egregious claims, making it a hard defeat for the lady diplomat.
 Presently, Nikki Haley is making a feeble attempt to complete her "ballistic missile show" against Iran at the United Nation's Security Council meeting so that she gains more attention in the international political arena. Some analysts believe that her overambitious attitude in targeting Iran is to impress the White House, as Haley is impatiently waiting to replace U.S. Secretary of State Tillerson, when he either gets fired or resigns. Also of concern have been rumors that Trump was to install Cotton at head of the CIA, and make the current head of the CIA, Mike Pompeo, U.S. Secretary of State. **→7**

IRGC clashes with Daesh loyalists in western Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Forces from the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) clashed with Daesh-affiliated militants in western Iran on Saturday.
 According to Sepah News, a team of 21 Daesh fighters crossed into Iran from the west but were placed under surveillance before the IRGC attacked them on Saturday morning.
 Most of the militants have been arrested, the report said, but there was no mention of the number of people killed or wounded in the clashes.
 Trained mostly at the Saudi-run school of Takfirism, Daesh operatives have been attempting terror attacks inside Iran in the past.
 Last June, Daesh attacked the Iranian

parliament and the mausoleum of the Islamic Republic's founder Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in southern Tehran, killing at least 18 and wounding dozens.
 The IRGC fired several missiles at Daesh bases in Syria on June 18 in response to the twin attacks.
 Just on January 24, Iranian Intelligence Ministry agents announced that they had nipped in the bud a Saudi-operated scheme to carry out bombing attacks in the Islamic Republic.
 According to an announcement by the ministry, the agents found and confiscated 23 rigged bombs of the remote-operated kind

which "had been brought to the country according to plans by Saudi Arabian intelligence services to cause harassment and insecurity in eastern provinces".
 The terror group's two biggest strongholds, Mosul in Iraq and its de facto capital of Raqqa in Syria fell in July and October respectively to Iraqi and Syrian forces.
 Hisham al-Hashimi, an adviser to the Iraqi government in its battle against Daesh, told NBC News on January 20 that while the number of active fighters on the battlefield is probably in the range of 1,000 to 1,500, the actual number of Daesh loyalists in Iraq and Syria is closer to 10,000.

Syria rejects so-called peace plan by U.S., Saudi regime

The Syrian ambassador to the United Nations and head of the government delegation to intra-Syrian peace talks has strongly rejected a proposal offered by some countries, including the United States and the House of Saud regime, for the resolution of the Syrian crisis, saying the so-called peace plan is "not even worth the ink."
 Bashar al-Ja'afari made the remarks at a press conference held at the end of UN-brokered indirect peace negotiations between the Syrian government and opposition groups in the Austrian capital city of Vienna on Friday, referring to what he described as an informal paper about reviving the political process in Geneva proposed by the U.S., Britain, France, the Saudi regime and Jordan.
 "Every word and sentence of this unofficial paper is rejected. And it is not worth the ink that it is printed on because the people will not and do not accept solutions which come down on

parachutes or on the backs of tanks," Ja'afari said. Furthermore, he blasted the five countries and told reporters that the proposal was "tantamount to a black comedy."
 "All of them have participated in the bloodshed of the Syrian people," he said of the five nations, denouncing Washington as the creator, financial supporter and protector of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group.
 How can the U.S., which "has Syrian blood on its hands... and attacks Syria directly, speak of a political solution and the future of Syria? How can countries like Britain and France, which follow the American policy... be the makers of any political solution... in Syria?" Ja'afari added.
 The senior Syrian negotiator also blasted Jordan for opening "its territories for foreign terrorists" and becoming "a haven for training camps" for them. He also questioned Amman's

eligibility as a determinant of Syria's "politics, sovereignty and... future."
 Ja'afari went on to lambast the House of Saud regime for co-authoring such a proposal, describing Riyadh sarcastically as anything but a "beacon of freedom in the east."
 Speaking about the Vienna two-day meeting, he said the Syrian delegation had constructive discussions with UN Special Envoy on Syria Staffan de Mistura. "We used the meeting to answer many questions, especially with regard to Sochi's congress," Ja'afari said.
 Ja'afari's comments came just three days before a separate round of intra-Syrian national dialogue between Damascus and the opposition would commence in the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi. On Thursday, Russia said some 1,600 people had been invited to the Congress of National Dialogue aimed at resolving the years-long foreign instigated crisis in Syria. **→13**

ARTICLE
 By Hanif Ghaffari
 Political analyst

Downing Street mind is a mystery

British citizens are dissatisfied with the talks between Theresa May, the U.K Prime Minister, and the European Union over Brexit. The discontent can be seen in most surveys conducted in the country. Some surveys show that around 60 percent of British citizens are dissatisfied with the exit from the EU and believe that Theresa May can't be a proper negotiator for it.
 However, May continues her apparent activities negotiating with other European leaders. Obviously, British authorities are trying to look serious in leaving the European Union. But at the same time, they're creating distress and concerns in their society about the effects and consequences of Brexit.
 It should be noted that some like former Prime Minister Tony Blair are trying to exaggerate the cost of leaving Europe, and thus encouraging them to hold a second referendum on Brexit. Some analysts of European affairs believe that there has probably been a deal between European leaders and the British government in this regard.
 Accordingly, the European authorities' insistence on Britain changing its decision (on leaving the EU) is not without a reason. Furthermore, many British authorities actually agree with this reversal notion. In recent days, European authorities have insisted on their stance to hold stricter negotiations on London's exit from the European Union.
 On the other hand, some British authorities have explicitly stated that they are not satisfied with the negotiation process, and there is virtually no clarity about prospects for these talks. But the issue doesn't just end here. European leaders have clearly stated that London can change its decision on Brexit and remain in the European Union.
 Theresa May, of course, has stated that her country's decision to leave the EU is unchangeable. Although no one knows what's really going on in the May's mind, the question remains: Are Theresa May, Tony Blair and the European authorities cooperating in completing the same puzzle in secret?
 There are some other points that also should be taken into consideration. Tony Blair has called for a revision to Brexit. This idea was welcomed by some other British politicians. **→13**



Motorcycle trials held at Azadi Stadium

The second edition of the motorcycle trials competition was held at the Azadi Stadium on Friday.
 Motorcycle trials, also known as observed trials, is a non-speed event on specialized motorcycles.
 Motorcycle trials is often utilized by competitors in other motorcycle sports (such as motocross or road racers) as a way to cross-train, as trials requires fine throttle, balance, and machine control.

Tehran Times / Behnam Tofighi

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Financial partners have not paid Babak Zanjani's debt: oil minister

POLITICS TEHRAN — Foreign-based partners of Babak Zanjani, an Iranian billionaire and business magnate, had contacted the Judiciary vowing to pay his debt to the Oil ministry, but so far they have not made any payments, the oil minister announced on Saturday. "They have also entered into some negotiations, but haven't made any repayments," said Bijan Zangeneh, according to IRNA.

He also said that Zanjani's debt, with its interest, has reached \$3.5bn, while all his assets that have been transferred to the Oil Ministry is nearly about \$570m.



U.S. fortifying Kurdish forces against Turkey: Rezaee

POLITICS TEHRAN — Mohsen Rezaee, secretary of Iran's Expediency Council, said on Saturday that the United States is seeking to prop up Kurdish forces against Turkey, adding that Ankara in return is trying to disrupt U.S. plans.

"Regional confrontations will yield no positive results for any countries involved," Rezaee was quoted by Mehr as saying. "It would be better if everyone made efforts so that legitimate governments could establish sustainable peace in their countries."

He further said that the U.S. and Turkey's confrontation will bring about no positive outcome for the two sides.



Judiciary chief pledges to publicly name corrupt judges

POLITICS TEHRAN — Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani has said that he will not "tolerate" any form of corruption in the judicial system, pledging to publicly name all judges that were involved in such practices.

Speaking to attorneys general and heads of local courts on Thursday, Amoli Larijani said although there were some corrupt elements within the Judiciary's ranks, the body is not systematically corrupt as some had claimed.

"Malpractice is possible across the vast judicial system, just like it is in any other system," he said according to Press TV. "But this does in no way implicate that the whole system is corrupt."



Palestinian envoy: Trump's move was 'slap in our face'

POLITICS TEHRAN — Manuel E. Hassassian, the Palestinian Authority president's envoy to London, said on Saturday that U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of Israel was like a "slap in our face".

Speaking to IRNA, Hassassian said the U.S. has blatantly supported Israel against Palestine and has lost its credibility as a mediator.

Trump has made a mistake regarding the issue and has made the Zionist lobby in the U.S. happy, he said.

The diplomat also said Trump's unilateral recognition would only isolate America, as no other country would follow this decision.



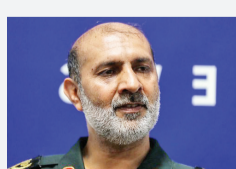
Iranian authorities can use uncensored internet

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian authorities can use uncensored internet if their positions require such usage, Information and Communications Technology Minister Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi said on Saturday.

Azari Jahromi made the remarks during a conference in Shiraz, southern Fars province, IRNA reported.

He also said although Twitter is legally banned from having activities in Iran, Iranian people are not banned from using the social networking service.

No judge can issue a verdict banning social networks, Azari Jahromi said, adding, "This will require a parliamentary legislation."



Commander: Iran riots stirred by U.S., Saudis, MKO

POLITICS TEHRAN — Rasoul Sanaee Raad, the IRGC deputy chief for political affairs, says the U.S., Saudi Arabia and Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MKO) were responsible for the recent riots in a number of Iranian cities.

Sanaee Raad said a number of MKO members were arrested in Kermanshah and Shiraz as they were provoking people to chant anti-government slogans and take part in riots, Fars reported.

He also said that the U.S. plots and the money spent by the Saudi regime were behind the recent riots in Iran.

Hamas figure lauds Iran's belief in Quds liberation

POLITICS TEHRAN — A top member of the Palestinian resistance group Hamas has said that Iran's belief in the importance of liberating al-Quds (Jerusalem) is the reason behind the letter by Hamas political bureau chief Ismail Haniyeh to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei.

Speaking to Tasnim, Salah al-Brodil pointed to a recent decision by U.S. President Donald Trump to declare al-Quds as the Israeli regime's capital, saying the reaction of some Arab and Muslim countries to the decision was "weak".

"In such a situation, Hamas welcomes any power that is capable of making a free decision against the Zionist regime," he was quoted by Tasnim as saying.

"...Haniyeh's letter to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution is actually a search for those who believe that the liberation of al-Quds is a source of dignity for the Islamic Ummah (community)," he explained.

In his recent letter to Ayatollah Khamenei, Haniyeh praised the Iranian nation and leadership for supporting Palestine and the anti-Israeli resistance front.



Haniyeh pointed to a major plot that the hegemonic powers have hatched against al-Quds and the Palestinian nation with the purpose of wiping out the Gaza Strip

as the bastion of resistance, ending the fight against the Zionist regime, and normalizing the relations between Israel and the dependent rulers of regional countries.

He also praised the Intifada (uprising) in the West Bank and the city of al-Quds as a phenomenon foiling the plots hatched by the U.S. and the "rulers of hypocrisy" who seek to terminate the issue of Palestine.

Last month, U.S. President Donald Trump officially declared al-Quds as the capital of Israel, despite warnings from around the world that the measure risks triggering a fresh wave of violence in the Middle East.

In a speech at the White House on December 6, Trump said his administration would also begin a years-long process of moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to the holy city.

The announcement was a major shift by Washington that overturns decades of U.S. foreign policy.

Palestinian leaders had previously warned the move would threaten a two-state solution.

Israel has occupied East Quds since the 1967 Middle East war. It annexed the area in 1980 and sees it as its exclusive domain. Under international law, the area is considered to be occupied territory.

Ayatollah Khamenei's message to university students in Europe

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ayatollah Khamenei issued a message to participants attending the 52nd conference of the Islamic Union Association for Iranian Students in Europe.

The full text of the message is as follows: In the Name of God, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful:

Dear Young University Students, The current era and its developments define certain expectations for young individuals, which did not exist or were not known in previous times. Young university students should, thoroughly, understand these developments and the corresponding expectations, and thus prepare themselves. Islamic associations and the religious climate within them can assist you in preparing yourselves. The main point is that you work for the sake of God, enthusiastically, fulfilling your duties. If you accomplish the blessed



opportunity [to do so], Divine Guidance will come to your aid, too. God willing.

I ask God to grant all of you bliss and success. Sayyid Ali Khamenei

January 24, 2018
(Source: khamenei.ir)

Zionist regime in weakest situation, adviser says

POLITICS TEHRAN — Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian parliament speaker, has said that the "fake" and "illegitimate" Zionist regime of Israel is in its weakest situation.

"Undoubtedly, Tel Aviv is in weakest situation in spite of Daesh service to the Zionists by weakening and damaging some of the Islamic countries," he said in a post on his Telegram on Saturday.

The former Iranian point man for the Arab world said the U.S. and Saudi Arabia will not be able to save Israel.

He said Israel is an occupier which is making efforts to "survive



by building cement walls" around itself.

The foreign policy advisor said Israel will not be permitted to play with the security of the Middle East.

Trump, UN Security Council diplomats to meet Monday on Iran

U.S. President Donald Trump will meet with United Nations Security Council diplomats on Monday as part of an effort to rally a coalition against Iran.

The meeting, which will be Trump's second working lunch with the Security Council, comes in the middle of a two-track effort in Congress and with European allies to address what Trump calls "flaws" in the nuclear deal negotiated by former President Barack Obama's team, according

to Washington Examiner.

It is one stop on a trip that Ambassador Nikki Haley arranged to highlight Iran's alleged role in conflicts around the Middle East.

Haley will lead the Security Council diplomats in an inspection of debris from a ballistic missile fired from Yemen into Saudi Arabia, according to the U.S. mission, as well as a tour of the Holocaust Museum's

exhibit on the war in Syria. U.S. officials declassified the wreckage to make the case that Iran is arming Houthi rebels in Yemen.

This is while the UN did not confirm that Iran supplied Houthi with weapons in a report that followed Haley's campaign to accuse Iran of otherwise. "The United Nations panel's report did not say Iran had supplied missiles to the Houthis," the New York Times noted.

Tillerson claims U.S., Europe begin talks on Iran deal

American, British, French and German officials met this week to begin formal discussions on addressing what President Trump claims "flaws" in the Iran nuclear deal, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson claimed on Saturday.

"President Trump's been quite clear on

his view that that agreement had a number of flaws and he intends to have those flaws addressed," Tillerson said, according to Wall Street Journal. "What we have agreed to do is work with our European counterparts...and ultimately the EU to

identify what areas we believe have to be addressed and the mechanism by which we can address those."

Tillerson earlier this week said working groups would meet as early as next week to discuss the deal, but a person briefed on

the meeting said Brian Hook, Tillerson's close aide and the State Department's policy planning director, met with European officials to begin the formal talks in London while Tillerson was in Davos, Switzerland, for the World Economic Forum.

U.S. plans to split Syria: Velayati

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy advisor to the Leader, said on Saturday that the U.S. military deployment in Syria is aimed at disintegrating the war-torn country.

"The Americans, with the support of certain regional elements, the Zionists and the al-Saud, have made attempts since seven years ago to occupy Syria, overthrow its legal government and disintegrate the country to establish security for the Zionist regime," Fars quoted Velayati as saying.

He made the remarks at a meeting in Tehran with Jan Kubis, the UN special representative for Iraq and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

However, Velayati said, the Syrian people and government as well as the country's allies would not let



this happen.

Emphasizing that most terrorists in Syria have been defeated by the Syrian army and its allies, the advisor said, "The Americans have now directly stepped onto the scene and deployed their forces on Eastern Euphrates and want to disintegrate Syria by inciting certain groups."

But, he said, the U.S. is doomed to fail again as Washington and its allies are much weaker than the past.

Tehran condemns horrible terror attack in Kabul

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on Saturday condemning a horrible terrorist attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, which left at least 95 people dead and 163 others injured.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always highlighted the necessity of constant fight against terrorism and has shown its determination in this respect. We believe that the regional countries' cooperation is the only way to counter terrorism," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi stated.

He also expressed sympathy with the Afghan government and people and the families of the victims.

An attacker driving an ambulance packed with explosives detonated them after the vehicle passed through a security checkpoint.

The explosion occurred near the old Interior Ministry building and offices of the European Union and High Peace Council.



Taliban claimed responsibility for the blast.

Nasrat Rahimi, the deputy spokesperson for Afghan Interior Ministry, said police had detained four suspects in connection with the attack.

Afghanistan has been target of terrorist attacks in past months.

A week ago, Taliban carried an attack on Afghan Intercontinental Hotel which left at least 22 people killed.

A bomb blast at a Shia cultural center last month also killed more than 40 people.

Qaher fighter in pre-flight test phase

Elsewhere in his interview, Dehqan said continuation of instability and insecurity in the Middle East region is a "fundamental strategy" pursued by the United States.

He noted that the U.S. has changed its policy to proxy

wars which are being conducted by countries such as Saudi Arabia and terrorist groups.

He also said that the U.S. formed a coalition against Daesh, but it actually provided the the terrorist group with financial and arms supports.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran warned the regional and extra-regional governments that Daesh was a threat against international security when the terrorist group was formed. However, no country took practical actions in fighting Daesh except for Iran," he said.

Assad: Syria set on combating terrorism

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has reiterated that Syria is bent on pushing ahead with counter-terrorism aided by friendly countries, namely Iran and Russia.

The president's remarks came as he received on Saturday the Iranian foreign min-

ister's Special Assistant in Political Affairs Hossein Jaber Ansari. Strategic Syrian-Iranian ties and the mutual desire to boost them were high on agenda during the meeting, as well as common counter-terrorism efforts and endeavors for the forthcoming Syrian

national dialogue congress in Sochi, Russia.

President also discussed the Turkish incessant aggression against Syrian territories and crimes against Syrian citizens.

The two sides agreed that the aggression is aimed at grabbing Syrian territories, back-

ing terrorist organizations, and torpedoing peace efforts in Syria.

Ansari, for his part, reiterated Iran's steady support for Syria in the fight against terrorism and in the reconstruction process.

(Source: Almanar)

Turkey: U.S. needs to withdraw from Syria's Manbij

U.S. promises to stop arming Kurds

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu says the United States military forces need to immediately withdraw from Syria's northern region of Manbij as Turkish troops are engaged in an operation in the country's Afrin region against militants from the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/ Yekineyen Parastina Gel).

Speaking to reporters in the capital Ankara on Saturday, Cavusoglu said Turkey wanted to see concrete steps by the United States to end its support for the Syrian Kurdish force.

The remarks came hours after the Turkish presidency announced in a statement that Presidential Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin and the U.S. National Security Adviser Herbert Raymond McMaster had discussed Turkey's ongoing Operation Olive Branch in Syria's northwestern Afrin region during a telephone conversation the previous night.

McMaster said that Washington would not give more weapons to YPG militants.

The two senior officials also agreed to boost mutual coordination and clear up misunderstandings on issues concerning Syria, the statement added.

Also on Saturday, the Turkish General Staff said in a statement that at least 394 YPG militants had been killed since the beginning of Operation Olive Branch in Afrin on January 20. The military said that only terrorists and their positions and shelters were being destroyed, and that "careful attention" was being paid not to harm any civilian.

The Syrian government has already condemned the "brutal Turkish aggression" against Afrin, rejecting Ankara's claim about having informed Damascus of the operation.

Damascus "strongly condemns the brutal Turkish aggression on Afrin, which is an inseparable part of Syrian territory," Syria's official news agency, SANA, cited a Syrian Foreign Ministry source as saying last week.

"Syria completely denies claims by the Turkish regime that it was informed of this military operation," the source added.

Ankara views the YPG as the Syrian branch of the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) that has been fighting for an autonomous region inside Turkey since 1984.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has repeat-



edly said that Afrin should be cleared of "terrorists," and demanded the deployment of Turkish troops there during a speech back in November 2016.

This is while the U.S. officials regard the YPG as the most effective fighting force against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in northern Syria, and have substantially increased their weaponry and technology support to the terrorist group.

The controversy over a possible Syria border force first started on January 14 when a report emerged on Reuters

saying that the military coalition led by the United States in Syria was planning to set up a large border force of up to 30,000 personnel with the aid of its militia allies.

Turkey deploys tanks into Syria's Afrin

The developments follow as Turkey has deployed more tanks across the border into Syria's Afrin region as their offensive against Kurdish YPG militants continues. Turkish artillery fire could also be seen across the border into Syria from Hassa district in Turkey.

(Source: agencies)

U.S.: Planned Russian pipeline would threaten European energy security

The United States sees the planned Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline between Russia and Germany as a threat to Europe's energy security, the United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on Saturday.

Poland, Ukraine and Baltic states fear the pipeline would increase Europe's dependence on Russian gas and provide the Kremlin with billions of dollars of additional revenue to finance a further military build-up on European Union's borders.

"Like Poland, the United States opposes the Nord Stream 2 pipeline. We see it as undermining Europe's overall energy security and stability," Tillerson said at a joint press conference with the Polish foreign minister in Warsaw.

"Our opposition is driven by our mutual strategic interests," he said.

The United States has already sanctioned Russian companies over Moscow's involvement in the Ukraine crisis, and foreign companies investing in or helping Russian energy exploration.

Poland, an EU member since 2004, sees Russia as its biggest potential threat, especially since Moscow took the Crimean peninsula from neighboring Ukraine in 2014.

Russia is also engaged in the long foreign instigated war in Syria, which has killed hundreds of thousands of people, driven millions from their homes, and fuelled a refugee crisis in the European Union.

Nordic nations have already voiced security concerns over the pipeline being laid near their shores under the Baltic.

But Germany and Austria have focused more on the commercial benefits of having more cheap gas from Russia.

German energy groups Uniper and Wintershall, Austria's OMV, Anglo-Dutch group Shell and France's Engie have invested in the 1,225 km pipeline, which is to pump more Russian gas via the Baltic Sea.

Poland, which spent four decades under Soviet domination after World War Two, still imports Russian gas to meet about two-thirds of its consumption.

But it has invested in a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal on the Baltic coast to diversify supplies and plans to build a gas link to Norway. In November, Poland signed a long-term deal to buy LNG from the United States.

"We are proud to support Poland's energy diversification and security," Tillerson said. (Source: Reuters)

Britain to launch new radar against 'severe' Russian threat

Britain's defense minister Gavin Williamson said a new radar off Scotland's Shetland Islands would help tackle the "severe and real" threat from Moscow.

In a return to the Cold War days when Shetland had hosted an early warning radar, the new Royal Air Force facility is being built to track unidentified military or civilian aircraft.

"We will always protect our skies from Russian aggression," Williamson said, describing the radar as vital to British defenses.

"Russia's actions are not limited to Europe's eastern borders - the threat to British livelihoods is severe and real," he added.

The £10 million (\$14.1 million) radar on Unst, Britain's most northerly inhabited island, is due to be fully operational soon, the Ministry of Defense said.

Once launched it will feed into the country's quick reaction alert system, which in the past has been used to scramble RAF jets to intercept Russian aircraft.

On Jan. 15 two fighter jets were launched to monitor two Russian military aircraft, which the Ministry of Defense said did not respond to air traffic control

authorities.

A total of 69 such operations have been carried out in the past five years, the ministry said without detailing how many involved Russian aircraft.

Williamson's praise for the radar comes as he and defense chiefs up their rhetoric against Russia.

On Thursday the defense minister accused Moscow of spying on Britain's crucial infrastructure, as part of possible plans to create "total chaos" in the country, in comments published in the Daily Telegraph newspaper.

His intervention came after the head of the British army warned Russia poses the "most complex and capable" security challenge since the Cold War.

Chief of the General Staff Nick Carter warned on Monday that Britain struggled to match Russia's military capabilities, saying the ability to respond to threats would be eroded "if we don't match up to them now".

The comments come as Williamson, in the post since November, is reportedly pressuring finance minister Philip Hammond for more money. (Source: AFP)

Saudi billionaire Alwaleed 'released' from detention

Prominent Saudi businessman Prince Alwaleed bin Talal has been released after more than two months of detention on allegations of corruption, according to a family source.

Prince Alwaleed, who was arrested among dozens of other royal family members, ministers, and top businessmen, arrived to his residence in Riyadh on Saturday, the Reuters news agency reported.

Hours earlier in an exclusive interview with Reuters, he said he expected to be cleared of charges and released from custody within days.

"There are no charges. There are just some discussions between me and the government," the 62-year-old said in a televised interview.

"I believe we are on the verge of finishing everything within days."

He and his counterparts were arrested in early November during the regime's "anti-corruption purge", and were held collectively in the country's Ritz Carlton hotel.

In his interview, Prince Alwaleed said he was continuing to maintain his innocence of any corruption in talks with authorities. He also said he expected to remain in full control of his global investment firm, without being required to give up assets to the government.

During a previous interview, a Saudi regime official said charges against the billionaire prince included money laundering, bribery and extorting of officials.

Also speaking to officials in the kingdom, Reuters said the House of Saud regime authorities were asking detainees to hand over assets and cash in return for their freedom.

The deals involve separating cash from assets, such as property and shares, and looking at bank accounts to assess cash values, one source told Reuters.

Prince Alwaleed had appeared frail in comparison to his last public appearance in a televised interview last October, but confirmed that he had been treated well, dismissing rumors that said otherwise.



Showing off his private office, dining room and kitchen in his hotel suite, Prince Alwaleed said he had agreed to the interview mainly to prove that such rumors were false.

The release of Prince Alwaleed, whose net worth has been estimated by Forbes magazine at \$17bn, may reassure investors in his business empire. Directly or indirectly through his firm, Kingdom Holding, he holds stakes in companies such as Twitter, Inc. and Citigroup, Inc.

He has also invested in top hotels around the world, including the George V in Paris and the Plaza in New York City.

Saudi regime authorities said they aimed to reach financial settlements with most suspects and believed they could raise

some \$100bn for the government this way.

In recent days, there have been signs the purge is winding down; several other prominent businessmen, including Waleed al-Ibrahim, owner of regional television network MBC, have reached financial settlements with authorities, an official source told Reuters on Friday, though terms were not revealed.

Prince Alwaleed said his own case was taking longer to conclude because he was determined to clear his name completely, but he believed the case was now 95 percent complete.

He has said he plans to live in the kingdom after his release. (Source: Reuters)

Carnage in Kabul: Blast near foreign embassies kills 95

A fatal car bomb attack has hit near foreign diplomatic missions and government buildings in the heart of the Afghan capital, Kabul.

The casualty toll from Saturday's ambulance bomb attack in Kabul reached at least 95 dead and 158 wounded, a health ministry official said.

The Taliban has claimed responsibility for the blast, a week after it claimed an attack on the Intercontinental Hotel in Kabul in which more than 20 people were killed.

An interior ministry spokesman blamed the Haqqani network, a militant group affiliated with the Taliban which Afghan and Western officials consider to be behind many of the biggest attacks on urban targets in Afghanistan.

Hours after the blast, a health ministry spokesman said the casualty toll had risen to at least 63 killed and 151 wounded but was likely to rise as more figures were collated from hospitals.

As medical teams struggled to handle the casualties pouring in, some of the wounded were laid out in the open, with intravenous drips set up next to them in hospital gardens.

"It's a massacre," said Dejan Panic, coordinator in Afghanistan for the Italian aid group Emergency, which runs a nearby trauma hospital.

The latest attack will add pressure on President Ashraf Ghani and his United States allies, who have expressed growing confidence that a new more aggressive military strategy has succeeded in driving Taliban insurgents back from major provincial centers.

The United States has stepped up its assistance to Afghan security forces and increased its air strikes against the Taliban and other militant groups, aiming to break a stalemate and force the insurgents to the negotiating table.

However, the Taliban has dismissed suggestions it has been weakened by the new strategy, and the incidents of the past week have shown its capacity to mount deadly, high-profile attacks is undiminished, even in the heavily protected center of Kabul.

Mirwais Yasini, a member of parliament who was nearby when the explosion occurred, said an ambulance approached the checkpoint and blew up. The target was apparently an interior ministry building nearby.

Buildings hundreds of meters away were shaken by the force of the blast, which left torn bodies strewn on the street amid piles of rubble, debris and wrecked cars.

Saturday is a working day in Afghanistan and the streets were full when the blast went off at around lunchtime in a busy part of the city near a number of foreign embassies and government buildings.

The casualty toll is the worst since 150 people were killed in a truck bomb explosion near the German embassy, not far from Saturday's blast, last May, an attack that prompted a major reinforcement of security in the city.

With much of central Kabul now a heavily fortified zone of high concrete blast walls and police checkpoints, there were angry questions about how the bomber had been able to get through and set off the blast.

People helped walking-wounded away as ambulances with sirens whined their way through the traffic-clogged streets of the city center.

The Swedish and Dutch embassies as well as the European Union mission and an Indian consular office are also nearby but there were no reports that any of their staff had been hurt in the attack. (Source: Reuters)

Yemeni army attacks Saudi regime-backed militants, inflicts heavy casualties

The Yemeni army has inflicted heavy human and material losses on the house of Saud regime-backed militants during attacks in northwestern Yemen.

On Saturday, the Yemeni army struck the positions of a group of militants backing Yemen's former Riyadh-allied regime the al-Mahashamah and al-Yatmah districts of al-Jawf Province, Yemen's al-Masirah television reported.

The attacks killed and injured a large number of the militants and destroyed much of their military hardware, it reported. A number of the militants also reportedly surrendered themselves to the army.

The militants have been receiving logistical and arms support from Riyadh to further its goal of restoring the government of former Yemeni president Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi to power. Hadi had resigned back in 2015 but later sought to reclaim power.

The Yemeni army and the Ansarullah (Houthi) movement fighters, who are helping the army fight off a Saudi regime-led war of aggression, also caused an unspecified number of casualties in similar attacks against Saudi regime mercenaries in the southwestern Yemeni province of Ta'izz on Friday. The operations also destroyed 20 military and armored vehicles, while three vehicles belonging to pro-Hadi forces were destroyed in the nearby Sana'a Province's Nihm District.

Saudi regime attacks

Also on Saturday, the Saudi regime-led warplanes carried out several attacks against Ta'izz, and the western provinces of Ma'rib, al-Hudaydah, and Sa'adah.

The latter two provinces, which border Saudi Arabia, were also subjected to rocket and mortar attacks by the Saudi regime border guards.

The house of Saud regime started leading a number of its vassal states in attacking Yemen in March 2015, shortly after Hadi resigned.

The offensive has failed to achieve any of its objectives. Around 13,600 people have, meanwhile, been killed in the Saudi regime-led war, which has also damaged Yemen's health infrastructure, fueling deadly cholera and diphtheria outbreaks.

A blockade imposed by the Saudi regime-led coalition on Yemen has also caused widespread famine in the already-im-poverished country.

The allied Yemeni forces have been conducting retaliatory strikes on the positions of Saudi and other invading forces, including a daring attack on a post inside Saudi territory earlier in January. (Source: Press TV)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	99355.6
IFX	1085.84

Sources: tse.ir, ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	45,150 rials
EUR	57,240 rials
GBP	66,570 rials
AED	12,570 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$70.15/b
WTI	\$66.14/b
OPEC Basket	\$68.46/b
Gold	\$1,350.85/oz
Silver	\$17.45/oz
Platinum	\$1,016.20/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran ranks 18th among world's top economies

Compared upon current-prices-based GDP, The United States, China, Japan, Germany, and France are world's top five economies followed by Britain, India, Brazil and Canada. The U.S. GDP reached a total of \$19.362 trillion and China as Asia's top economy registered \$11.938 trillion while Japan's GDP stood at \$4.884 trillion. According to the report, world's top five economies account for 50 percent of the global GDP. Iran's GDP growth stood at 4.5 percent in the first half of the present Iranian calendar year 1396 (ended September 22, 2017), based on the fixed prices in the Iranian year 1390 (ended March 19, 2012), Central bank of Iran (CBI) reported in mid-January.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Exports of sponge iron set to exceed 1mt by late-March

TEHRAN — Iran is expected to export over one million tons (mt) of sponge iron by the end of the present Iranian calendar year (March 20), IRNA reported quoting the head of the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) as saying. The exports of sponge iron, also known as direct-reduced iron (DRI), surpassed 600,000 tons in the first nine months of the current Iranian year (March 21-December 21, 2017), Mehdi Karbasian said.



Annual exports from free trade zones to surpass \$1b

TEHRAN — The value of exports from Iran's free trade zones is expected to reach \$1.05 billion by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20), the secretary of Free Zones High Council announced. According to Morteza Bank, \$2.4 billion worth of goods have been exported from the country's free trade zones in the last four years, Mehr news agency reported on Saturday. Exports from free trade zones stood at \$840 million in the last Iranian calendar year 1395 (ended on March 20, 2017).



Above \$177m allocated to renovate dilapidated vessels

TEHRAN — The government will grant some 8 trillion rials (about \$177.3 million) of inexpensive facilities to renovate old marine vessels, IRIB news quoted deputy head of Ports & Maritime Organization (PMO) on Saturday. "Modernization of old vessels will expand Iran's logistics and marine tourism," Mansour Arami said underling PMO's support for replacing old vessels with new ones by providing applicants with inexpensive loans.

Tanker with Russian gas to land in Boston over the weekend

The tanker carrying Russian natural gas that's been sitting outside of Boston Harbor for days will probably land over the weekend, according to the U.S. Coast Guard. The Gaselys carries liquefied natural gas originally produced in Siberia, according to vessel tracking data. The ship, poised to dock at Engie SA's Everett import terminal, would be the first LNG shipment from anywhere other than Trinidad and Tobago in about three years. "It is expected to be in the port over the weekend," Luke Pinneo, chief petty officer at the U.S. Coast Guard in Boston, said in a telephone interview. (Source: Bloomberg)

TEDPIX gains 599 points in a week

TEHRAN — Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE)'s main index (TEDPIX) gained 599 points to 99,522 during the five dealing days (Saturday-Wednesday) of the past Iranian week ended on Friday, IRIB news reported. Some 7.231 billion securities worth 21.864 trillion rials (about \$481.47 million) were traded through 338,000 deals in TSE,

indicating 41 percent and 73 percent rise in the number and value, respectively, while 0.3 percent rise in the number of deals. The first market's index rose 94 points to 70.804 and second market's index added 3 points to 211.346, showing 0.1 percent and 1.4 percent growth, respectively, in the mentioned week. TEDPIX gained 3,309 points or 3.5



percent to 98.817 in the tenth Iranian calendar month of Dey (December 22, 2017-January 20, 2018), according to Tasnim news agency.

As reported, 23,515 billion securities worth 57.227 trillion rials (about \$1.271 billion) were traded through 1.56 million deals in the stock market.

The 10 oil projects adding 1.1 million bpd to global supply

The ten largest upcoming onshore oil projects worldwide are expected to add 1.135 million bpd to the global oil supply by 2025, according to research and analytics firm GlobalData. The ten biggest onshore projects—out of a total of 126 such developments worldwide—are expected to consume \$83.1 billion of investment to bring them to production, Oilfield Technology reports, quoting figures by GlobalData. Of this spending, \$46.7 billion is expected to be made by 2025.

The ten largest onshore projects are expected to produce a total of 9.7 billion barrels of crude oil over their lifetime, according to GlobalData. In terms of single project development investment, the Kuyumbinskoye conventional oil development in Russia is the leader, with \$12.8 billion expected to be spent over the field's lifetime. The project is expected to have peak production at 215,485 bpd in 2029. The Kuyumbinskoye project is followed by Cenovus Energy's Telephone Lake oil sands project

with investment of \$10 billion throughout its lifespan, GlobalData says, as carried by Oilfield Technology. The average breakeven oil price for the upcoming top onshore fields is \$55 per barrel, with Canada at the lowest breakeven of \$52 a barrel and Russia at the highest at \$57 per barrel. Full-cycle capex per barrel of oil equivalent is expected to average \$7.5 for conventional oil projects, \$9.2 for oil sands developments, and \$9.8 for heavy oil projects, according

to GlobalData. Confidence in the oil and gas industry has started to return with higher oil prices, and a majority of respondents in a DNV GL survey have recently said that they plan to increase capital expenditure this year. The Norway-based energy industry advisory firm noted that while last year confidence in the growth prospects for oil and gas firms had stood at 32 percent of respondents, now it has gone up to 63 percent. (Source: oilprice.com)

Big oil companies expected to dominate another solid year for energy dealmaking

Analysts expect big energy companies to play a major role in dealmaking during another solid year for oil and gas mergers and acquisitions.

Oil majors and large independent drillers need to shore up their asset portfolios after several years of underinvestment during a price slump, analysts say. Buying up acreage and acquiring rivals is a quick way to lock up future production as old wells dry up.

Global dealmaking in the oil and gas exploration and production segment reached \$143 billion last year, the highest level since 2014, according to energy research firm Wood Mackenzie.

In 2017, drillers mostly focused on consolidating their positions in a few core areas and selling off other assets. Many made purchases that allow them to string together strips of land, drill more efficiently and improve their cash flow.

"For the supermajors, the U.S. shale may be just the portfolio medicine needed to repair short-, mid- or long-term portfolio damage as a result of the last several years of severe exploration cutbacks."

That strategy will help producers pay for the big, transformational deals they made in 2016, aimed at overhauling their business to contend with low prices, said Curt Karges, who leads consulting firm PwC's corporate finance team in Houston, in a year-end report.

That year, drillers packed into the Permian basin in western Texas, where the cost of producing oil is low but the price tag on land—and the companies who own it—has skyrocketed.

Amol Joshi, senior analyst at ratings agency Moody's, expects 2018's deals to be more strategic after a year of mostly tactical acquisitions and sales.

Integrated oil companies like Exxon Mobil and large independent drillers are prime candidates to make these deals, in



part because they are typically able to hold assets for long periods and have flexibility when oil prices are relatively low, he says.

"Larger companies with strong balance sheets will seek efficiencies of scale in higher-return basins," Joshi said in a recent research note. "Smaller, sometimes over-leveraged companies with decades of drilling inventory at the current pace can create value by combining with larger producers to accelerate development."

Who's most likely to buy? That doesn't mean all the world's massive oil majors will throw their hat in the ring. Wood Mackenzie thinks British oil giant BP and French peer Total are likely buyers. BP's project pipeline is looking thin, it says, while Total needs to speed up its plans to acquire low-cost, long-life assets and shift towards natural gas production by 2035.

Anglo-Dutch driller Shell's guidance on capital spending essentially rules out big deals, according to Wood Mackenzie—though it has been actively investing in alternative energy and retail electricity lately. The finances at Norway's Statoil leave it with less room

to maneuver than its peers, and Italy's Eni appears focused on growing without M&A, the firm says.

Exxon has a big war chest of its own stock, allowing it fund a takeover with shares. But takeovers might not be necessary because it has a strong long-term production stream and an established base in the U.S. shale oil patch.

Chevron's cash flow is "radically improved" after two big Australian projects recently started up, but it's not yet clear whether new CEO Mike Wirth will give a green light to big deals.

"The Majors have restructured portfolios to thrive under a 'lower for longer' outlook," Wood Mackenzie said, noting that managing their current portfolios is the primary order of business.

"But with strong balance sheets and improved cash generation, larger acquisitions targeting long-term production growth are a distinct possibility."

U.S. shale still in the mix Two big targets for majors are Brazil, which is holding lease auctions for offshore assets

with low-cost production, and the U.S. shale fields, where drillers use advanced technology called hydraulic fracturing to break up rock formations and free oil and gas.

Pittsburgh-based gas driller EQT Corporation's \$8.2 billion purchase of fellow fracker Rice Energy was last year's biggest U.S. exploration and production deal. Exxon's \$5.6 billion acquisition of Permian basin companies owned by the Bass family ranked second.

Brian Lidsky, managing director at Houston-based oil and gas advisory firm PLS, says big independents and the oil majors could make substantial purchases in 2018 to consolidate their position in the shale patch or enter hot areas this year.

"For the supermajors, the U.S. shale may be just the portfolio medicine needed to repair short-, mid- or long-term portfolio damage as a result of the last several years of severe exploration cutbacks," Brian Lidsky, managing director at PLS, said in a briefing on 2017 dealmaking.

A few factors could create headwinds for dealmaking. Analysts stress that many U.S. drillers have made promises to shareholders to focus on financial discipline rather than production growth, and may only do deals that boost efficiency and cut costs.

But Wood Mackenzie speculates that investors might not remain so stubborn with U.S. crude prices at three-year highs above \$60 and a corporate tax cut windfall on the horizon.

However, the impact of U.S. corporate tax cuts on energy M&A is uncertain, according to PwC. While the lower tax rate and other provisions could free up cash for some companies, the firm notes that borrowing costs could rise for others due to changes in rules on deductions. (Source: CNBC)

U.S. trade body backs Canadian plane maker Bombardier against Boeing

A U.S. trade commission on Friday handed an unexpected victory to Bombardier Inc against Boeing Co, in a ruling that allows the Canadian company to sell its newest jets to U.S. airlines without heavy duties, sending Bombardier's shares up 15 percent.

The U.S. International Trade Commission's unanimous decision is the latest twist in U.S.-Canadian trade relations that have been complicated by disputes over tariffs on Canadian lumber and U.S. milk and President Donald Trump's desire to renegotiate or even abandon the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Trump, who did not weigh in on the dispute personally, took his "America First" message to the world's elite on Friday, tellorters in Montreal.

Boeing said it would not consider such options before seeing the ITC's reasoning in February.

But Boeing said it was disappointed the commission did not recognize "the harm that Boeing has suffered from the billions of dollars in illegal government subsidies that the Department of Commerce found Bombardier received and used to dump aircraft in the U.S. small single-aisle airplane market." Bombardier, Delta and the U.S. consumer advocacy group Travelers United all called the ITC decision a victory for consumers and airlines.

The decision may end up helping Trump's goal of boosting U.S. jobs as the C-Series jets for U.S. airlines will be built in the United States rather than Canada. (Source: Reuters)

Second Announcement



SINGLE-STAGE INTERNATIONAL TENDER GOVERNMENT TRADING CORPORATION OF IRAN

Government Trading Corporation of Iran (hereinafter referred to as GTC), affiliated to the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad of the Islamic Republic of Iran, intends to purchase 45,000 MTs 10 pct M/L Indian 1121 sella rice, (in 3 separate cargoes of 15000 MTs 10% each. cargoes to be shipped in 3 lots at 10 days interval during May, June 2018) on CFR basis, through single stage international tender.

All qualified companies and suppliers who are interested to bid above tender are invited to receive tender documents from 27/01/2018 until 4/02/2018 from Trades & Tenders Committee located on the 4th floor of GTC building no 2, at No 225 Fatemi Avenue Tehran-Iran. along with an official letter of introduction.

The bidders are required to submit stamped and sealed envelopes containing their offers latest by 14:00 on 6/03/2018 to the Tender secretariat located on the 7th floor. The bid's envelope will be opened at 6/03/2018 By 15:00 In the presents of the bidder's representative in GTC's purchasing committee hall. (9th floor, No 12, Jihad Square, Tehran, Iran).

Bid bond: bid bond worth EUR 298,913 (IRR 13,750,000,000) for each 15000 MT cargo

Bid bonds may be deposited either cash in Rials or through an unconditional bank guarantee issued in Euros by renowned Iranian bank located in Tehran, with three months validity and extendible for another three months.

Note: participates who wish to bid for more than one cargo are obliged to deposit the above mentioned bid bond for each extra shipment.

For more information, you may refer to our website WWW.GTC-PORTAL.COM or contact us by phone No. 00982188957477 (foreign trade department).

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Trump is heading for ultimate failure in Middle East peace bid

By Aaron David Miller

Two events last week reflect stunning and unprecedented trend lines in U.S. Middle East policy. First, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley blasted the remarks that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas made against the United States last week. And President Donald Trump in Davos praised Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and threatened the Palestinians with aid cutoffs -- shortly before his formal meeting with Netanyahu.

Never has any U.S. administration so purposely or willfully aligned itself with the interests and politics of the Israeli government nor orchestrated a campaign of pressure against an already dysfunctional and directionless Palestine.

These policies are largely seen as good politics in "Trump-land" and reflect the President's preternatural tendency to think about his base and how to preserve it. But they are likely to have significant foreign policy implications.

Without some significant course correction, Trump's pursuit of his ultimate deal is almost certain to turn into the ultimate failure. Still, how much he cares about this issue is arguable, and as long as the politics turn out right -- Palestinians taking the hit instead of Israel, particularly in an election year -- the Trump administration may not care all that much.

Hand in glove

My own prediction at the start of this administration was that it was only a matter of time before Netanyahu and Trump -- both with large and brittle egos -- would eventually annoy the hell out of one another, most likely on some issue related to Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Not only has that not happened, but on most every issue, from Iran to the peace process to recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital to defending Israel at the United Nations, the Trump administration has sided with Israel.

All U.S. administrations argue with Israel about something. At the very least, the Trump administration has managed to keep whatever disagreements exist -- and they don't appear to be major -- out of the public space.

When Trump remarked on Thursday at Davos that relations have never been stronger, it wasn't just a throwaway. Trump is the first U.S. President to visit Israel so early in his term; the first sitting President to pray at the Western Wall; the first to declare Jerusalem the capital of Israel and likely next year the first to open a U.S. embassy in Jerusalem.

Blasting Palestinians

I remember former Secretary of State James Baker hammering Palestinians on the way to Madrid in an effort to get them to accept an invitation to come as a non-Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) delegation; and George W. Bush's refusal to deal with Yasser Arafat unless the Palestinian Authority was reformed and ceased its support for terror and violence.

But those paled in comparison with the triple-down pressure campaign the Trump administration has waged against Palestinians. Haley's speech in New York on Thursday reflects a fundamental deal-breaking bias. Although she appropriately called Abbas out on his intemperate anti-Israeli and even anti-Semitic remarks last week, Haley failed to even mention the fact that Israeli actions and policies had anything to do with the current impasse.

The administration is demonstrating an acute sensibility to Israeli interests -- and rarely to Palestinian requirements -- with threats to close the PLO office in Washington, restricting U.S. assistance to UNRWA, a UN relief fund for Palestinian refugees, unless the PA returns to the negotiating table, and failing to acknowledge Palestinian claims to Jerusalem. These all reflect a campaign of pressure to bring them to heel and impose consequences unless they accept the U.S. view on any number of issues.

Trump's threat at Davos that U.S. money to the Palestinians is "now on the table" and "that money's not going to them unless they sit down and negotiate peace," is virtually unprecedented even in the toughest of previous administrations.

Domestic politics as the driver

Pro-Israeli and Anti-Palestinian positions clearly play well with the President's base. Foreign policy considerations have taken a back seat. The recent visit of Vice President Mike Pence to the Middle East reflected these priorities. The visit achieved almost no concrete foreign policy agenda in Israel, but clearly reflected Pence's deep Christian faith and pro-Israeli sensibilities, which were bound to play well with millions of Evangelicals.

When Palestinians refused to see Pence, Trump had more material to blast them. Indeed, Thursday in Davos, the President criticized Palestinians for disrespecting "our great Vice-President."

All of this plays into one of the key domestic motivators of the President's foreign policy: the desire to demonstrate, certainly on the Israel issue, that he is the "un-Obama" and that his administration is light-years away from the quarrels and tensions of the Obama-Netanyahu years. Thursday, Trump praised his personal friendship with Netanyahu, something that, had Obama said it, nobody would have believed.

Where is all this going?

Given tensions with the Palestinians, one would have to conclude that any hope of a breakthrough in future talks between Israel and the Palestinians would be virtually impossible. The only conceivable logic, apart from domestic politics -- and there's no evidence to support it -- is that the Trump administration is showering the Israelis with honey to make it virtually impossible for Netanyahu to say no to the tough decisions the Trump administration will ask him to make when his peace plan is presented.

Together, with pressure on the Palestinians from the Saudis -- on which the administration is counting but Palestinian officials are denying -- Trump may believe that Netanyahu may be persuaded to give something significant. He said as much in Davos, opining that "Israel is going to do something that's going to be a very good thing." Maybe.

But what is more likely to happen, given what's been set into motion, is that the Palestinians will reject what Trump puts on the table; Israel will say yes, but no amount of pressure will bring the Palestinians around.

To quote my former boss, James Baker, the "dead cat" will be left on the Palestinians' doorstep, which should play well politically at home, particularly among Republicans. As for the peace process, it will likely remain in limbo -- trapped between a two-state solution that's still too important to abandon on the one hand, but still too difficult to implement on the other.

(Source: CNN)

What is the U.S. endgame in Syria?

By Samer Abboud

Those in the U.S. foreign policy establishment that had long clamored for clarity and vision to the American role in Syria finally had their wish fulfilled last week when Secretary of State Rex Tillerson outlined U.S. policy in Syria.

Tillerson's speech was effectively a declaration of intent to occupy Syria, an open-ended military commitment ostensibly to eliminate Islamic State remnants, contain Iranian expansionism in the region, and ensure regime change, the latter which the U.S. has never seemed very interested in.

A military commitment

These three goals are not novel and have long provided the public justification for U.S. engagement in Syria. What is new, however, is the acknowledgement of a serious military commitment to stay in Syria that is, for all intents and purposes, unconditional and permanent.

The U.S. has successfully slithered its way into Syria and established a permanent military presence in a changing and often vacuous battlefield.

The commitment to a Syria occupation may have been made out of convenience, ineptitude, a failure to imagine alternatives, the appetite of the domestic war machine, or all of the above, but what is certain is that getting out of the Syrian situation will unlikely be easier than getting in.

Having resuscitated the "Shia crescent" boogymen by referring to Iranian influence over Syria's "northern arch", Tillerson is situating U.S. policy squarely within a pre-existing regional framework in which a coalition of Arab countries, led by Saudi Arabia, and Israel, have found commonality in an Iranian enemy.

The U.S. occupation of Syria is the spearhead of this coalition, and while there may be divergences between the parties on the specifics of policies or alliances on the ground, there will be continuity wrought by the common Iranian threat.

The U.S. has thus assumed the mantle as the main force of this alliance.

Battlefield realities

The real question is the extent to which the new policy declaration, and the oc-



If the U.S. occupation of Syria cannot change the battlefield, protect its allies, or alter the policies of regional states, then what objectives can it achieve?

cupation itself, will be effectual on the ground. Military and political jockeying between Turkey, Russia, the Syrian government, and various Syrian Kurdish groups in the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria (DFNS) areas is one obvious indicator of Washington's inability to shape battlefield realities.

Turkey's ongoing invasion of Afrin, combined with its other military man oeuvers in Syria, seemingly undermine U.S. efforts to shore up elements of the Syrian Kurdish groups. Yet the U.S. has stood idly by as the Turkish invasion began.

Notwithstanding some boisterous opposition to the invasion, the U.S. has been completely incapable of redirecting Turkish policy in Syria.

In fact, Turkish leaders, among them President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, have publicly criticized U.S. policy and have used the Afrin operation to sever military ties between the U.S. and Syrian Kurdish forces.

And while there are certainly differ-

ences between Turkey and other regional players, the Astana process has provided a meaningful framework for conflict mediation between Turkey, Iran and Russia, to pursue their policies in Syria.

Undermining Syrian-Kurdish military -- and hence political -- capacity is foremost among the shared goals of the tripartite powers. Thus, when Turkish military incursions began they were effectively in support of the tripartite consensus around limiting Syrian-Kurdish aspirations.

On the Syrian-Kurdish issue and so many other political questions, there is consensus between the tripartite powers while the U.S. remains alone in its vision for the country.

Indefinite occupation?

If it is the case that the U.S. is incapable of driving a serious wedge between the tripartite powers through support of Syrian-Kurdish elements, then a pressing question is: how will these powers respond to the U.S.'s indefinite occupation of Syria? A military option is seriously unlikely,

and the professed political commitment of the U.S. to the United Nations-led Geneva process is totally at odds with the political commitments of the tripartite powers and the Syrian government to negotiate a peace deal beyond UN auspices.

It is unlikely, at this stage of the conflict, that either party would recommit to another political process.

What appears to be emerging then in Syria is a new military stalemate, not one in which battlefield control seesaws between various armed groups, but one in which regional powers negotiate their respective geographic enclaves and red lines.

Confrontation between the major military powers in Syria is seriously unlikely, so the question becomes how the Russian, Turkish and American military presence can co-exist.

U.S. policy is based simply on presence and the mistaken assumption that military posturing can achieve objectives. But this is a very dangerous assumption in Syria, which is neither Afghanistan nor Iraq, where the Americans have enjoyed military supremacy and effective control over various political elements in both countries. Syria is quite the opposite, in fact.

The incumbent government is not dependent on U.S. support, and a political transition -- a key U.S. goal -- is unlikely to bring about political elements favorable to U.S. interests. Meanwhile, the U.S. has demonstrated over the last few days that it is wholly incapable of protecting armed groups it supports from a full-scale assault from the Turkish army.

If the U.S. occupation cannot change the battlefield, protect its allies, or alter the policies of regional states, then what objectives can it achieve?

The answer to this question may not yet exist, and Tillerson's speech made it clear that a level of strategic ambiguity can be an end in itself. Either way, the U.S. has made a military commitment to Syria that is, in effect, an occupation.

Yet, it is an occupation that is limited, contained, and, for military and political purposes, paralyzed.

(Source: Middle East Eye)

The U.S. should not be rehabilitating Indonesia's abusive Special Forces

By Andreas Harsono

U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis was seen laughing and smiling last week as he watched a military exercise in Jakarta in which Indonesian troops drank snake blood, rolled in glass, broke bricks with their heads, and walked on fire. The spectacle would hardly be amusing, however, to anyone familiar with the Indonesian military's human rights violations, especially the record of its Special Forces unit, Kopassus.

Mattis's visit was part of U.S. efforts to improve military cooperation with Indonesia. During his stay, he discussed with Indonesian Defense Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu plans to resume U.S. assistance to Kopassus. Assistance to the unit had been halted in large part because of the U.S. "Leahy Law," which bars U.S. assistance and training to foreign military units known to have committed gross human rights abuses, unless the government has taken steps to remediate, address the abuses, and hold those responsible to account.

The U.S. military first announced plans to re-engage with Kopassus in 2010, hoping to train newer "untarnished" soldiers, but in subsequent years remained reluctant to proceed, in part because Indonesia had largely failed to address past abuses.

There are a whole series of abuses to address. The U.S. government first imposed restrictions on military assistance to the Indonesian military and Kopassus in 1999, after the military committed massive rights abuses during its scorched earth campaign in East Timor. Kopassus members were also implicated in abductions and enforced disappearances of student activists in 1997-98, and the murder of the Papuan activist and leader Theys Eluay in 2001.

But other incidents have also occurred since then as well. In 2003, Human Rights Watch documented how Kopassus soldiers used torture during military operations in Aceh. In a 2009 report, Human Rights Watch documented Kopassus soldiers engaging in arbitrary detention and mistreatment of civilians in Merauke, Papua, suspected of involvement in Papua's independence movement. More recently, Kopassus has been involved



The Indonesian military's past abuses should not be forgotten.

in unlawful spying activities against Papuan civilians.

In an interview with journalists in Jakarta, Mattis suggested that Kopassus had reformed and removed abusive personnel from its ranks. But that is not the appropriate legal test for whether U.S. assistance can be resumed. As Senator Patrick Leahy said on January 23, "The question Secretary Mattis needs to answer is whether the Indonesian government has punished the Kopassus officers who ordered and covered up those horrific crimes, and whether members of Kopassus today are accountable to the rule of law."

The answer to both those questions is no.

To be sure, there have been some prosecutions that the government has trumpeted. A military court found 11 Kopassus soldiers guilty in the case of the kidnapping of student activists in 1998. The men were never jailed, however, and after an appeal almost all of them were allowed to remain in the military. Their commanding officers were never even tried.

Likewise, in 2003, a military court in Surabaya found

seven Kopassus soldiers guilty in the death of Theys Eluay. But the men were sentenced to only two to three-and-a-half years in prison, and human rights groups can't even confirm that the men served their time. (At the time of their trial, Ryacudu, then the army chief, hailed the convicted soldiers as "Indonesian heroes" for killing a "rebel.") Notably, the troops' commanding officer, Lt. Colonel Tri Hartomo, was later promoted, now to lieutenant general, and heads Indonesia's military intelligence agency.

Many other Kopassus officers involved in abuses in East Timor, Aceh, and Papua, have never faced trial. One commanding officer, Prabowo Subianto, alleged to have led the 1983 Kraras massacre in East Timor where more than 300 people were killed, ran for president in Indonesia's last election and is now the leader of main political opposition party. Another officer, Muchdi Purwooprano, was tried on charges relating to the 2004 poisoning and murder of Munir bin Thalib, a prominent human rights lawyer, but was acquitted.

To be sure, there have been overall improvements in the unit's record, with few current allegations of abuse today -- although that is primarily because there are no significant counterinsurgency operations underway in Indonesia as in past years. And in 2013, the military prosecuted 11 Kopassus soldiers for breaking into a prison and killing four detained civilians allegedly involved in a lethal bar fight with another Kopassus member.

But impunity for past abuses remains, and there has been little remediation of the unit's record. The fact that abusive personnel have retired or transferred out of Kopassus cannot be seen as progress, and it certainly should not be mistaken for justice.

Only when the Indonesian government shows that it is serious about punishing past abuses and creating a culture of accountability should the U.S. government consider allowing U.S. military assistance to resume. For now, to restore assistance to Kopassus is to reward Indonesia for doing nothing.

(Source: The Diplomat)

Lula appeal ruling will not 'make Brazil great again'

The likely end of his candidacy throws the presidential election wide open

Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was once one of the most popular presidents in the world. In his two terms from 2003 to 2010, he presided over an economic boom that lifted millions out of poverty. But Lula, as he is widely known, also headed a government that even one of his own ministers called the most corrupt in Brazilian history. Last week, that past caught up with the former union leader. On Wednesday, he lost an appeal to overturn a corruption conviction. Furthermore, the appeal court's three judges added two years to the 10-year jail sentence. Although Mr da Silva will appeal against the decision, it severely handicaps his chances of being allowed to run in October's presidential election. As polls suggest he might otherwise win, the ruling also throws Brazil's election race wide open. Markets surged in the belief that the chances of a market-friendly next president have now improved. Critics of Mr da Silva, in a play on U.S. president Donald Trump's campaign slogan, meanwhile tweeted that

the court decision would "make Brazil great again". Supporters cried foul, claiming the ruling was part of an elite conspiracy to stop the former shoeshine boy and leftist icon from winning a third term.

It is remarkable that a court may have decided the course of Brazil's presidential election, rather than voters. But the notion that Mr da Silva is the victim of a conspiracy is off the mark -- as is his attempt to compare himself with Nelson Mandela. Brazil's sweeping anti-corruption probe, called Lava Jato, has seen an admirably independent judiciary charge and convict senior politicians of all ideological stripes. Michel Temer, the Centre-right president, has also been charged with taking bribes. If there is any bias in the judiciary it rather stems from the professionally-conservative mindset of prosecutors and judges. By training and temperament, they are law and order types.

Mr da Silva's many opponents are also

misguided in their glee. Even his long-time rival, former president Fernando Henrique Cardoso, has said his potential jailing would be bad for the country. His disqualification as a candidate would also further polarize an already polarized electoral race. Until the appeals process is exhausted, Mr da Silva has vowed to press on with his candidacy. Street protests in big cities are a near certainty. Markets may also have got ahead of themselves. It might well be that his probable electoral disqualification increases the chances that the next president will press ahead with the tough fiscal reforms that Brazil needs to put its public finances in order. But polarization is just as likely to work against the passage of such measures. The drama around the court ruling shows the depth of popular Brazilian rage. The country is angry: with corruption, with a grinding recession that only now is ending, and especially with politicians -- all of them.

Most of all, the ramifications of Mr da



Silva's potential disqualification reveals the leadership vacuum that lies at the heart of Brazil, and the absence of alternatives. It is remarkable that a country as charismatic as Brazil has not produced a new generation of politicians worthy of the name. Currently second in the polls is Jair Bolsonaro, a former army captain whose views make Trump's tweets seem mild. That is not great; it is sad. With only nine months to go until the election, it is also worrying.

(Source: FT)

India celebrates Republic Day in Tehran

By Marjan Golpira

TEHRAN — On Friday, January 26, the Indian embassy in Tehran celebrated the 69th anniversary of India's Republic Day.

Over 100 people, including diplomats, members of the Indian community in Iran, and some Iranian dignitaries attended the event held at a hotel in Tehran.

India's Constitution came into effect on January, 26, 1950, hence, replacing the Government of India Act (1935) as the governing document of India.

India's Ambassador to Iran, Saurabh Kumar, delivered a keynote speech at the event, where he highlighted some of the most recent economic interactions between India and Iran. He said the year 2017 was a "milestone year" in India-Iran relationship.

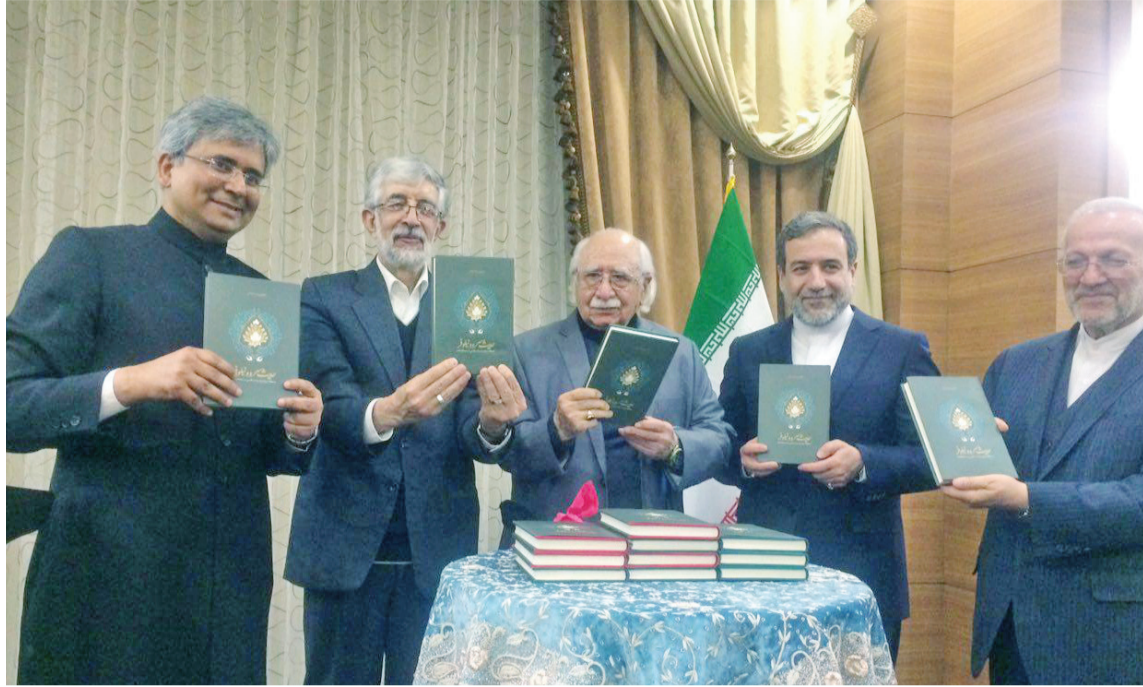
The Indian ambassador pointed to the inauguration of the first phase of the strategic Chabahar Port development plan in December 2017 by President Hassan Rouhani.

The launch of the project provides India with a transit route to Afghanistan and other Central Asian states via Iran. "Presently, a large consignment of wheat (110,000 metric tons) is moving from India to Afghanistan via Chabahar port," Ambassador Kumar said.

The diplomat also pointed to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, calling it a "diplomatic triumph". The Indian envoy said after the conclusion of the nuclear agreement - officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action - the relationship between Indian and Iran was given a "significant boost", enabling Iran to reclaim its position as the second supplier of crude oil to India. Iran's currently exports 27 million metric tons of oil to India, a big step up from the 13 million metric tons exported before the JCPOA, Kumar explained.

The ambassador concluded that both states have far more capacity, suggesting the sides can improve commercial ties by tapping their potential.

Another speaker at the event was Abbas Araqchi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for political affairs, who praised the historical ties between Iran and India.



Araqchi noted that after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the relationship between Iran and India continued to develop and was not deterred by the Western-led unjust sanctions on Iran.

The top Iranian diplomat referred to Iran and India as "emerging powers" in the region and said the two states have excellent opportunities to explore.

Araqchi expressed hope that the year 2018 will be a year of excellent results for both countries.

Another speaker at the ceremony was Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, former speaker of Iran's Parliament and author of

the book *An Account of the Cyprus and Lotus* which was introduced at the event.

The book *An Account of the Cyprus and Lotus* depicts cultural interaction between Iran and the Indian subcontinent wherein Cyprus represents Iranian civilization and Lotus the Indian civilization.

The author Haddad-Adel emphasized historical ties between Iran and India, saying the people of Iran and Indian have had common ancestors.

Haddad-Adel pointed to the fact that Iran and India have maintained their strong ties throughout history.

World should stand for unification of Koreas and reject American monkeyshines

TEHRAN (FNA) — North Korea has called on "all Koreans at home and abroad to make a breakthrough for unification without foreign assistance."

The rare announcement, which was made via the official Korean Central News Agency on Thursday morning, called on all Koreans to "promote contact, travel and cooperation between North and South Korea." It added that the North will "smash" all obstacles on the path towards the reunification of the Korean Peninsula, while stressing that military tensions on the peninsula were the "fundamental obstacle" for the better ties with the South. Joint military drills with "outside forces" were also hindering the progression of ties between the two Koreas, it added.

The announcement was issued after a delegation of North Korean officials and ice hockey players crossed the border into South Korea on Thursday for joint Olympics training. The group includes 12 North Korean players who will form a combined women's ice hockey team with their southern counterparts at next month's Winter Olympics in the South Korean mountain resort of Pyeongchang. Under an agreement worked out during the first official talks between the two Koreas in two years, the joint team will wear unity jerseys and march under a unified peninsula flag at the Games' opening ceremony on February 9.

Unsurprisingly, the official White House says Vice President Mike Pence will also attend the Winter Olympics in South Korea, with an eye seemingly toward ensuring that North Korea's attendance of the event doesn't lead to improved relations. They claim North Korea's Leader Kim Jong Un intends to "hijack" the Olympics with his country's involvement, and that Pence will be there to offset the "charade" that is North Korea's



Olympic team.

This is while bilateral talks between North and South Korea have already improved relations in recent weeks, and a big part of that is their agreement on the Olympics. The US clearly has problems with this improved relations between the two, and has gone to great lengths to present North Korea as somehow trying to trick everybody in being willing to negotiate. The hope appears to be that Pence can undermine this actual goodwill, though exactly how he manages to do this without making the US look like an obvious and literal spoilsport remains to be seen.

But we all know how Washington already imposed sanctions on North Korea and Chinese firms and individuals on the pretext of supporting Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. The US Treasury Department con-

tinues to systematically target individuals and entities doing business with Pyongyang, including officials complicit in North Korean sanctions evasion schemes. The US Treasury has also imposed sanctions on officials belonging to the Workers Party of Korea who are operating in China, Russia and Georgia's Abkhazia region and urged those countries to expel the individuals.

On this momentum: No doubt a US nuclear war with North Korea would be disastrous. As Pyongyang has shown, however, there are peaceful diplomatic alternatives. For South Korea, which would bear the brunt of any American conflict with North Korea, there is no military option. As a group of 58 retired US military leaders acknowledge in a letter to Trump, that military action "would result in hundreds of thousands of casualties." The people of Korea, North and South, the peoples

of the region, and United Nations member states all want peace.

The Winter Olympics and Paralympics offer a unique moment to promote peace on the Korean Peninsula. On a very encouraging note and against Washington's ill intentions, in November 2017, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for an Olympic Truce, or a cessation of hostilities during the Winter Games, which gained the support of 157 Member States including both Koreas and future hosts of the Olympic Games: Japan, China, and France.

The Olympic Truce - a tradition which dates to the ancient Greek Olympics - represents an important opportunity to defuse tensions and begin the work of reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula. The world should stop the United States from spoiling this unique opportunity for reunification and fully support both Korean governments' current efforts to restore a peace process.

To this end, the UN has a special responsibility to demand broader diplomacy as well. The world body should call for action during the Winter Olympics (February 9 - 25) and Paralympics (March 9 - 18), as well as the broader period of the Olympic Truce (February 2 to March 25). It should call on its regional members like Japan, China and Russia to organize regional peace forums or other events to stand for diplomacy and support the People's Peace Treaty.

The coincidence of the Winter Olympic and Paralympics being held in South Korea this year is a historic opportunity for peace and reunification in the Korean Peninsula that cannot be missed. Those who reject America's military adventures and wars in this volatile world must fully take advantage of it. Let them forget, this advantage is temporary, but the success will be matchless.

Washington, London 'complicit' in Saudi war crimes in Yemen: Int'l lawyer

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — A senior Canadian human rights attorney denounced Washington and London as "complicit" in the Saudi war crimes in Yemen and said the oil-rich kingdom's money has provided Riyadh with diplomatic protection in the United Nations Security Council.

"The profit some arms suppliers are making through selling weapons to the Saudis and their allies presents strong opposition to taking action against the Saudis," Edward Corrigan from Ontario said in an exclusive interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

"The US and British governments are providing diplomatic protection to the Saudis at the UN Security Council as they are making tons of money selling arms to the Saudis and their Allies," he said.

"The inaction of the US and Britain on the crimes being committed by the Saudis and their allies and their covert and even open support amount to complicity in the Saudi war crimes," the human rights lawyer noted.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ The UN children's agency has recently said the ongoing Saudi aggression against Yemen has killed or injured more than 5,000 children and left another 400,000 severely malnourished and fighting for their lives. The UNICEF said nearly 2 million Yemeni children were out of school, a quarter of them since the start of the war. In the meantime, the Saudi-led war on Yemen has led to a cholera epidemic in Yemen, which is one of the worst ever recorded in the world. The epidemic is likely to surge again around March, according to media reports. What do you think about the Saudi crimes in the Arabian Peninsula country? Why does



not the UN take a practical measure, like imposing sanctions against Riyadh, in the face of its crimes?

A: All of the above information is true. There has been some movement on these issues in the European Union and even at the United Nations. The profit some arms suppliers are making through selling weapons to the Saudis and their allies presents strong opposition to taking action against the Saudis. The Riyadh regime's money also is being used to fight the mounting campaign against the Saudis' attack on Yemen. The US and British governments are providing diplomatic protection to the Saudis at the UN Security Council as they are making tons of money selling arms to the Saudis and their Allies

■ Some Western countries that claim to be champions of human rights are pursuing double-standard policies on Saudi Arabia's atrocities. How do you see the role of Washington and London in the Riyadh regime's heinous crimes against Yemen?

A: There is a clear double standard on the part of the United States and Britain. They pretend to support human right but only do so when it suits their political purpose. It is actions that must be looked at. The inaction of the US and Britain on the crimes being committed by the Saudis and their allies and their covert and even open support amount to complicity in the Saudi war crimes. However, the opposition is growing in Britain and even in the United States. Let us hope that it continues to build and that concrete actions will be taken to curb the Saudis onslaught against the people of Yemen.

■ Since the start of its war on Yemen, the Saudi regime has reached none of its objectives. How do you assess recent developments on the battlefield?

A: It is essentially a stalemate. The will on the part of the people of Yemen to resist being dominated by the Saudis is truly amazing. The mercenaries and few troops being supplied by the Saudis and their allies do not have the will to fight and have no reason to fight in Yemen other than the money the Saudis and their allies pay them. However, money only goes so far and the mercenaries and soldiers fighting on behalf of the Saudis are not going to risk their lives for an unjust war against the people of Yemen. It is only through peace talks that this conflict will be resolved.

We examined Julian Assange, and he badly needs care — but he can't get it

By Sondra S Crosby, Brock Chisholm, Sean Love

Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, has not stepped outside the heavily surveilled confines of the Ecuadorian embassy in London since he entered the building almost six years ago. Naturally, much of the media attention has focused on his international legal drama and threats to his safety, including arrest and possible extradition to the US. In contrast, ongoing violations of his human rights, including his fundamental right to healthcare in the context of his unusual confinement, have received less coverage.

The only barrier to Julian Assange leaving Ecuador's embassy is pride

As clinicians with a combined experience of four decades caring for and about refugees and other traumatized populations, we recently spent 20 hours, over three days, performing a comprehensive physical and psychological evaluation of Mr Assange. While the results of the evaluation are protected by doctor-patient confidentiality, it is our professional opinion that his continued confinement is dangerous physically and mentally to him, and a clear infringement of his human right to healthcare.

Packing a stethoscope and blood pressure cuff, and after being conspicuously photographed entering the embassy, we performed our examinations in a poorly ventilated conference room. The reason for examining Mr Assange in these conditions is that he has no access to proper medical facilities. Although it is possible for clinicians to visit him in the embassy, most doctors are reluctant to do so. Even for those who will see him, their capacity to provide care is limited. At the embassy, there are none of the diagnostic tests, treatments and procedures that we have concluded he needs urgently.

As clinicians, it is our ethical duty to advocate for the health and human rights of all people as promised under international law, and to call on our colleagues to hold our professional societies, institutions and governments accountable. In 2012, Ecuador, in accordance with its right as a sovereign state, formally determined that Mr Assange meets the requirements enshrined by the 1951 convention and 1967 protocol relating to the status of refugees. Regardless of the allegations against Mr Assange, he remains a citizen of Australia and a refugee, and, as the Guardian reported last week, he is now also a citizen of Ecuador.

In 2016 the UN human rights council working group on arbitrary detention found that Mr Assange's situation within the Ecuador embassy had become a state of "arbitrary deprivation of liberty". It is the opinion of the working group that the embassy is not equipped for prolonged detention and lacks the necessary medical equipment or facilities to provide a reasonable environment for Mr Assange — a determination with which we concur. Experience tells us that the prolonged uncertainty of indefinite detention inflicts profound psychological and physical trauma above and beyond the expected stressors of incarceration. These can include severe anxiety, pathological levels of stress, dissociation, depression, suicidal thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic pain, among others.

Mr Assange is surrounded by credible personal threats from various governments and individuals. He is also unable to avail himself of his right to access medical institutions due to the threat of imminent arrest should he step outside the embassy, even for a medical emergency. It is unconscionable that Mr Assange is in the position of having to decide between avoiding arrest and potentially suffering the health consequences, including death, if a life-threatening crisis such as a heart attack were to occur. Further, our assessment reveals that he has had no access to sunlight, appropriate ventilation or outside space for over five and a half years. This has taken a considerable toll. It is our professional opinion that Mr Assange's physical and psychological circumstances at the embassy are in violation of the spirit of the UN standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners.

We must ask: why does Mr Assange remain unable to exercise his human right to health services? Are states allowed to choose who is entitled to this fundamental right and who is not?

We call on the British Medical Association and colleagues in the UK to demand safe access to medical care for Mr Assange and to oppose openly the ongoing violations of his human right to healthcare. As tensions between the UK and Ecuador escalate over Mr Assange's unsustainable situation, the international press has now reported new efforts to resolve the situation diplomatically through a mediator. Any such discussions must include a fair and transparent discussion of his access to healthcare. It is, we believe, the only correct and ethical course of action, and we champion the few clinicians who have sought to care for Mr Assange in these difficult circumstances.

(Source: The Guardian)

Lady diplomat puts on a new show to grab attention

➔ Political rivals of the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. are carefully observing her performance as allegations of an extramarital affair between President Trump and Nikki Haley have been making headline news as of late.

Recently, Haley has invited U.N. Security Council representatives to Washington in an attempt to further promote Iranophobia in the international community. According to Reuters, Haley is to present to the diplomats with what she claims to be part and parcel of the alleged missile shipments from Iran to the members of the Ansarullah movement in Yemen.

The diplomats are to meet with U.S. President Donald Trump at a White House banquet. The carefully devised misrepresentation prepared by Haley will provide fabricated evidence from Iran's nonexistent ballistic missile shipment to Yemen. This show of travesty has no basis and rational, and as such, has been highlighted by U.N. diplomats and by the permanent and non-permanent members of the U.N. Security Council.

Haley's despicable campaign against Iran is nothing more than a self-serving ploy to attract attention in the political arena and a failed effort to stand out in U.S. foreign diplomacy. Instead, Nikki Haley has become nothing more than a "defeated diplomat" and an "outdated symbol" of America's lack of diplomacy in the international community, a process that will inevitably make her an unwelcome and unreliable politician.

Will America stand again with the world's refugees?

By Matthew Soerens

One year ago on Saturday, President Trump issued an executive order to severely restrict the entry of refugees and other immigrant groups to the United States. This first version of the so-called travel ban set off protests at airports, lawsuits and global outcry — while thrilling some of the president's supporters who were pleased by his swift fulfillment of a campaign pledge.

After court rulings and subsequent decrees from the Trump administration, refugees are now being resettled in the United States at a distressingly slow rate, with many applicants are subject to delays and onerous reviews. The impact of the Trump policies has proved disastrous.

In the first year of the Trump administration only 29,725 refugees were admitted to the United

States, a big drop from the 99,183 allowed in the previous year. In 1980, by comparison, the United States welcomed more than 200,000 refugees.

In October, Mr. Trump set the limit for refugee arrivals for the current fiscal year at a historical low of 45,000. And unless the pace of arrivals increases significantly, the United States will not reach even half that goal. This year, the United States is on track to resettle fewer refugees than Canada, which has a population roughly one-tenth that of the United States.

I lived for most of the past decade in a community where most of my neighbors were resettled refugees. Many of these friends have relatives still living abroad — people threatened by persecution in their countries of origin or languishing in refugee camps in a neighboring country, whose hopes of

resettlement to the United States have been in a holding pattern, if not permanently dashed.

My colleagues at World Relief, which for about 40 years has partnered with the State Department and thousands of churches to welcome and help integrate refugees, have had to inform church partners that there are not enough refugees arriving to match their interest in helping.

Travel restrictions disparaged

The travel restrictions have been disparaged by critics as a "Muslim ban," and, indeed, Muslim refugees — including those fleeing the Syrian civil war — have been the most harmed. About 80 percent fewer Muslim refugees were allowed in during the first year of the Trump administration than in the first year of the Obama administration.

But despite Mr. Trump's statement that the

United States would prioritize persecuted Christians, the number of persecuted Christians resettled in the United States has also declined drastically. About 27,000 fewer Christian refugees were admitted in the first year of the Trump administration than in the previous year.

By slashing total refugee resettlement numbers — and by halting all resettlement from Muslim-majority countries such as Iraq had been a significant share of refugee arrivals — these policies have harmed thousands of Christians as well.

The harm goes beyond just the people who might have been resettled to the United States. Countries like Kenya, Lebanon and Jordan — each of which shelters hundreds of thousands who have fled persecution in neighboring countries — face domestic pressure to turn away those who need refuge. As the United

States takes in far fewer refugees, Americans have lost the moral credibility to insist that those countries continue to take in asylum-seekers.

The limits to refugee resettlement were imposed, ostensibly, to protect national security. Mr. Trump tweeted just this month that further limits to immigration were necessary for security.

Murders by native-born Americans

In reality, as an analysis by the conservative Cato Institute reveals, 78 percent of all murders in terrorist attacks in the United States since 2002 have been perpetrated by native-born Americans. Refugees, who are subjected to a more thorough vetting process than that of any other visitors or immigrants, have not taken a single American life in a terrorist attack since the Refugee Act of 1980 was passed into law. →13

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What names Tehrani parents choose for their children?

L I F E In all societies, the names people give to their children are subjected to different sociological and even political justifications.

Besides, most of the times, picking a name reveals beliefs and history of the parents.

Sociologist Abbas Abdi conducted a research on Tehrani babies born from Iranian calendar year 1375 (March 1996-March 1997) to 1394 (March 2015-March 2016) in a book titled "An Evolution in Picking Names for Children in Tehran".

The book was discussed during a meeting last week at the Iran's National Library and Archives.

He had previously conducted a research on the process of picking name in Tehran from Iranian calendar year 1345 (March 1966-March 1967) to 1375 (March 1996-March 1997) in a book named "A Voice that never Heard".

"The names people pick to give their children have always been an important criteria for sociological studies of a community," Abdi said.

"We never fully understand the reasons of parents for choosing a name for their babies. The criteria for choosing names have a very wide range and are complex as well."

He said that he considered items like the name of mother, father and the baby's birthplace, in this case Tehran, in his research.

Three cultures impact picking names in Iran, which are divided into subcultures themselves.

One is the Islamic culture, according to



which, people pick names like Fatemeh and Hossein for their children that is understandable, he explained.

Traditional Islamic and national Islamic are subdivisions for this kind of name picking, he added.

"Another one is the national culture, which leads to choosing names from sources like Shahnameh and some names with Zoroastrian roots have been added to this group in recent years."

"The third is the Western culture, which is controlled by laws imposed by National Organization for Civil Registration and mostly shows itself in names picked for baby girls,"

he explained. According to the National Organization for Civil Registration, Iranian Muslims cannot give names with non-Persian, non-Islamic roots to their children, however, folklore names are exceptions.

"Nonetheless according to statistics, picking Islamic names for Tehrani citizens began to rise from 1961 to 1966 and reached its peak from 1984 to 1985, in this period name of 85 percent of children in Tehran had religious backgrounds.

"After the victory of Islamic Revolution [1979], some Islamic names in line with revolutionary atmosphere like Abuzar, Meqdad and Someyeh rose by 18 percent.

After 1985, the inclination in using Islamic names declined until 2009, when there was a little interest in picking Islamic names.

"There is a stop in decrease of picking Islamic names by parents from 2009 to 2012 and there are some increase in such names as well," he explained.

Since 2012, two part first names consisting a combination of Persian and Islamic names like 'Nazanin Zahra' prevailed in Tehran, he added.

"Most of the times, baby boy name indicates cultural inclination of the parents. They try to show their history in names they choose for their sons. But the case is not the same for the daughter. The name families choose for their baby girl is avant-garde most of the times," he said.

Mainly, the name chosen for boys are more religious than name chosen for girls.

He also pointed to some short-term impacts for choosing names like popular TV series, which increase a wave of choosing name.

People with Kurdish and Azari roots and migrants from northern provinces in Tehran choose names of their children especially their girls according to their regional culture, he said.

"Many parents prefer the Hebrew equal for religious names for their children," he said. Abdi said that Tehran has a crucial role in picking names for all the country.

The book can be considered as a great source for sociological studies of Tehrani people during recent years.

Eating like an Iranian: A survey on Persian food



Part 3 By Samira Mohebali
senior expert in Iran studies

In this series of articles you can trace cookery art in Iran during history up to present. The survey sheds light on different aspects of Iranian life, culture and civilization.

Timurid Empire (1370-1507)

The Divan of Bos'haq At'ema, written by the 14th century satirical poet Fakhreddin Hallaj Shirazi, is one of the most ancient sources about Persian cuisine, offering information about a wide range of Iranian foods consumed during that time as well as past centuries.

Fakhreddin Hallaj Shirazi used Persian culinary vocabulary and kitchen terminology in his poetry. The book also is a great source for food manners and Iranian taste during past centuries.

In his poems and proses, he describes different kinds of food by detail. He named the ingredients of the foods like meat, dairy, fruits, herbs, breads and sweets in his writings as well.

Below you can find a general introductory to foods used during that era in different categories:

Meats

Meat, poultry and egg were frequently used for cooking during Timurid Empire. The meat was used by different social classes during the era and was one of the most important nutrition in that time.

Roasted lamb was one of the most favorite foods. Meat of chicken, duck, goose, partridge and grane were also amongst the ingredients widely used during that era, especially in coastal cities.

Kalleh pacheh (a dish of boiled cow or sheep's feet and head), tripe, lamb's heart and liver, and fat were also cooked during Timurid era.

In the Divan, there is recipe in which, a complete egg is used in middle of Kufta, a kind of meatball, which is cooked in some parts of Iran today.

Fakhreddin Hallaj Shirazi used Persian culinary vocabulary and kitchen terminology in his poetry. The book also is a great source for food manners and Iranian taste during past centuries.

Dairy

Milk and dairies have a great role in Persian cuisine from long time ago. Milk, yogurt, cheese, butter, animal fat and dough (a yogurt-based beverage) were used during that era.

Soaked figs in milk was one of the main breakfast items used during Timurid era. Shir Berenj (a kind of rice pudding), milk and date, and milk and honey

were also used during that time.

Cheese and bread accompanied with dates, walnut, fresh herbs and melon was considered as a complete meal.

Charbeh, which means clotted cream, made from the milk of cows, sheep, or goats, was also named several times as breakfast in Divan of Bos'haq At'ema.

According to his poems, borani (Persian appetizer made with yogurt and some type of vegetable such as spinach) with artichoke was also widely used during that time.

As it seems, butter was used as a kind of frying oil. However, tallow and animal fat were mainly used for frying during that era.

Dough and Kashk (dairy product made from drained yogurt) were either used as the main meal with bread or as a side dish.

Seeds and nuts

Different kinds of nut including walnut, almond, hazelnuts and pistachio and acorn as well as sesame, the black seeds, cardamom, lentil, mung and pea were widely used during that era.

The popular fruits were grape, lemon, figs, pomegranate, pear, black and white berries, quince, citron, bergamot, watermelon, rhubarb, tamarind, date and lemon.

As it is mentioned in the Divan, during Ilkhanate (1256-1335) and Timurid Empire (1370-1507) date played an important role in foods and was used as the meal during breakfast and dinner with cheese, walnut, yoghurt, tahini, Shir Berenj and animal oil.

Herbs:

Chives (tareh), cilantro (geshniz), purslane (khorfeh), lettuce, radish, onion, beetroot, garlic, carrot, pepper, turnip, bean, carnation, oregano, eggplant, zucchini and artichoke were also used during that time.

Breads and grains:

During Timurid era, grains were more widely used than today. Wheat, rice, barley, corn and millet were used that time. Wheat was used more than rice due to its abundance in different parts of country and was used for bread.

Different kinds of Aash and halva as well as haleem (Persian stew with wheat or barley) were cooked with wheat during that time. The haleem was served with cinnamon during that time. Sometimes they made haleem with corn as well.

In Persian cooking, rice has been always widely used as the main grain. Its flour was used for different kinds of food, halva and confectionaries.

Rice was cooked and served during that time in different methods, including kateh - sticky rice cooked in small amounts of water and oil - as well as chelo - rice boiled in a lot of water and cooked afterwards.

Discover your true passion with these questions

Of whom are you jealous?

Jealousy is often described as a sin, but there are ways to make jealousy work for you. Jealousy is a key indicator of something someone else has that you want. As a career and life coach, identifying my clients' jealousy often helps me zero in on things they want.

If you find yourself envious of a friend who is a corporate lawyer, even though you have no interest in the law, what can we learn from that? Dig deeper. Are you jealous of her prestige or advanced degree? The travel she does? The amazing suits? The money? How do you feel about the crazy hours she works and the fact that she has no personal life?

If I gave you \$250K for an advanced

degree, how would you spend it?

That's a lot of money—enough to become a doctor, a lawyer, and more than enough to become a pilot or a chef. How would you spend this big budget? What would you like to learn?

I once worked with a client who was an extraordinarily busy mom, responsible for her children, parents, pets, and a foreign exchange student and whose husband traveled extensively for work. We were working on her next career move when she realized that she had an incredibly important job as a homemaker. What she wanted was more opportunities to take care of herself. She pursued yoga certification, not because she wanted to teach, but because she wanted to learn self-care for the pure joy of obtaining

knowledge.

Who are your top three role models?

Think of three people who deeply inspire you. Then, determine what specifically about each of these people inspires you.

Who are your role models? Why? What are the common threads? This can help you identify your core values. And values are always part of your passion.

What is a passion that you stopped pursuing in your mid-20s?

Many high school and college athletes had to give up their sports in their mid-20s due to time constraints (like working full-time). Same goes for musicians who played in a band or a chorus. What did you like doing but had to stop pursuing? If you quit a sport due to

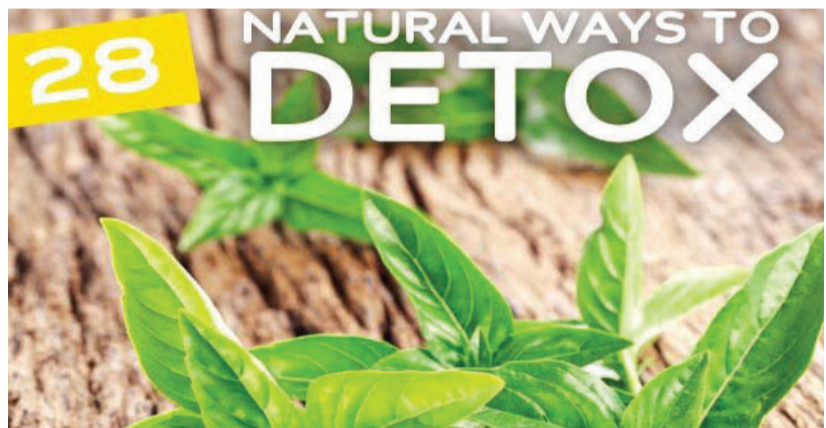
an injury, like one basketball player client I had, could you pick it up in a different way, maybe as a fan, an announcer for the local high school team, or even a coach?

If your company paid you to volunteer, how would you use that time?

As you may have noticed with these questions, how you spend your free time is revealing. How you spend your unexpected free time is even more telling—when you arrive somewhere early, assuming you don't bury yourself in your cell phone, how do you spend your time? How you choose to spend your volunteer hours is a powerful source of information about your passion. Would you work with animals, kids, or the elderly?

(Source: Reader's Digest)

28 Simple and natural ways to detox your body



1. Replace a meal with a detoxifying smoothie:

Just as you focus on the foods that you eat and proper exercise, there are many other elements to living your best and healthiest lifestyle. We take a look at the 28 simplest, most natural, and undoubtedly most effective ways of getting the bad toxins out and welcoming in the elements that your body needs.

Though you never want to go to extreme measures where your diet is concerned, there are some ideas that can work wonders. When it comes to naturally cleansing the

body a great measure can be to replace one meal a day with a detoxifying smoothie. This isn't extreme and won't cause any harm, but it can be exceptional for getting rid of the substances that your body doesn't need.

Turning to a smoothie for one of your meals is a great way to jumpstart your metabolism and to kick your digestive system into overdrive. You will notice that natural energy that you feel and you will also enjoy that some of the symptoms that you suffer with daily are gone with this natural boost.

(Source: bembu.com)

How to make all-natural dry carpet cleaner?



Revive a dirty, smelly rug with this homemade carpet cleaning powder. The dry mix will clean and freshen the carpets in your home, and promote good health at the same time.

Materials

2 cups baking soda, 1/2 cup cornstarch 1/2 cup cornmeal, 1 tablespoon borax 1 teaspoon cinnamon, 2-3 dried bay leaves

Measure all of the ingredients. This recipe is great for weekly refreshing in areas you sit and play, or heavy-duty cleanings in areas with heavier foot traffic.

Add all ingredients to an ordinary food processor (baking soda, cornmeal, cornstarch, cinnamon, borax and bay leaves). Blend them together long enough to break down the bay leaves into a fine powder.

Freshen and clean by sprinkling a layer of the powder directly onto the dry carpet surface (don't use this dry mixture on top of a wet cleaning solution). Use a broom or hand brush to further distribute the granules across the surface, and between the fibers of your carpet for better coverage.

(Source: diynetwork.com)



101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

30. Experience a sunrise/sunset

There are no guarantees that watching the sunrise will take away your seasonal sadness. The sun doesn't have an ad budget or marketing campaign to make promises. However, sunlight is free and extremely reliable: Every day, it rises without fail, and its light brings a lot of impressive benefits.

Sunset anywhere is a gorgeous time of day, whether the light is reflecting off a city skyline or you're watching the last rays shine out over the ocean.

Sunrises and sunsets are some of the most beautiful gifts from Mother Nature. And the best thing? We get them free every day.

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

(Source: personalexcellence.co)



#IRANIANLIFESTYLE

A Persian style breakfast at an eco-lodge in Bardaskan in Khorasan Razavi Province (Instagram/@eachsecondsof-life)



Booking.com adds Iranian currency

TOURISM TEHRAN – Booking.com, a world-famous online reservation company, has recently added Iran's rial to its currency system to address what used to be a challenge of limited financial access, CHTN reported on Thursday.



Now, a number of Iranian hotels and hostels have joined Booking.com to facilitate room reservation for both domestic and foreign travelers.

Established in 1996 in Amsterdam, Booking.com has been developed from a small Dutch start-up to one of the largest travel e-commerce companies in the world.

Its website supports 40 languages as well and over 1,550,000 room nights are reserved on its platform each day.

Water crisis hits Cape Town tourism

The water crisis in the Western Cape province, which could run out of supply in April if there are no rains, has hit the key tourism sector, an industry official said on Friday.

"We have been informed by our members that they been receiving cancellations from both international and domestic travelers," Cape Town Tourism CEO Enver Duminy told the African News Agency.



"Prospective visitors have questions and are looking for clarity regarding the water crisis and contingency plans for Day Zero. As long as there is uncertainty about the water crisis, there will be an impact.

"Besides the hotels, tourism businesses are acutely aware of the need for water conservation."

As Cape Town suffers its worst drought in a century, residents were warned on Tuesday that they face losing piped water to their homes on 12 April -- a whole nine days earlier than predicted.

If drastic consumption reductions are not achieved by "Day Zero", people will have to queue at 200 standpipes for daily rations of 25 liters.

The city, which attracts millions of tourists every year, has enforced strict waste controls including prosecution of homeowners who use more than the current 50-litre daily limit.

(Source: enca.com)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Joya de Cerén Archaeological Site

Joya de Cerén is an archaeological site located at the Canton Joya de Cerén, in the Department of La Libertad in El Salvador. The property has an extension of 3,200 ha.



The archaeological site contains the remains of a pre-hispanic farming village that was covered by a volcanic eruption in the seventh century AD.

Around AD 500, the central and western parts of the territory of the modern Republic of El Salvador were buried beneath thick layers of volcanic ash from the Ilopango volcano.

The area was abandoned until the ash layer had weathered into fertile soil and the Joya de Cerén settlement was founded. Not long afterwards, it was destroyed by the eruption of the Loma Caldera. The site was discovered during the construction of grain-storage silos in 1976, when a clay-built structure was exposed by a bulldozer. Excavations were resumed in 1989 and been continuing since that time.

The circumstances of the volcanic event led to the remarkable preservation of architecture and the artefacts of ancient inhabitants in their original positions of storage and use, forming a time capsule of unprecedented scientific value that can be appreciated in present times.

Underneath the layers of volcanic ash, the best preserved example of a pre-hispanic village in Mesoamerica can be found, with architectural remains, grouped into compounds that include civic, religious and household buildings. To date, a total of 18 structures have been identified and 10 have been completely or partially excavated. (Source: UNESCO)

Tourist camps planned for children, young adults

TOURISM TEHRAN – Iran plans to set up tourist camps special for children and young adults across the country with the aim of fostering a wider tourism culture that entails the role of younger generations.

"Plans to launch countrywide tourist camps dedicated to the youth are in the pipeline," Pouyan Qaem-Maqami, an official with Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, said on Wednesday.

Such campsites will familiarize young explorers with the cultural heritage, handicrafts as well as historical and natural attractions of the country, ICHTO quoted Qaem-Maqami as saying.

He made the remarks in an address to tourism officials, private sector representatives, tour operators and travel associates in a special assembly, held on the sidelines of the 11th Tehran International Tourism Exhibition.

In an innovative approach, the exhibition turned the spotlight on children's and young adults as motivators of travels in their families in order to make their trips more comfortable and convenient.

"Promoting indigenous puppets and dolls besides attending local games ... can tap into considerable potentials when it comes to little adventurers."

Elsewhere in his remarks the official stressed the need for modifying conventional tourist sites to suit children "because many of those sites dominantly attract adults."

Qaem-Maqami called on all relevant



A file photo depicts Iranian children going a sightseeing tour

businesses, organizations in particular the private sector to team up for achieving the goal, saying "the organization welcomes presence of the private sector in

this regard."

Filled from corner to corner with ancient bazaars, museums, mosques, monuments, gardens, historical sites, Iran hosts some

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

A brief look at biblical tomb in Iran

HERITAGE The tomb of the biblical prophet, Daniel, in southwestern Iran is daily revered by great numbers of domestic pilgrims including the Jewish community.

Surmounted by a massive cone in white plaster, the mausoleum of biblical prophet attracts foreign travelers as well.

The mausoleum cannot be missed while traversing Shush, though its architecture is of no great antiquity. It contains two courtyards, each encircled by adjoining chambers and porches.

The pilgrimage also offer some accommodations to visitors willing for an overnight stay.

According to Atlas Obscura, there are many places that claim to be the traditional burial place of the biblical prophet. But the tomb located in Shush is the most widely accepted and the first that was mentioned by Benjamin of Tudela, a medieval Jewish traveler whose journeys preceded Marco Polo's by about 100 years, and who first visited Asia between 1160 and 1163.

Shush, which was once a crossroads of various civilizations, is sprawled on parts of ancient Susa at the edge of the Iranian plateau in the lower Zagros mountain range.

UNESCO says the region contains several layers of superimposed urban settlements in a continuous succession from the late 5th millennium BC until the 13th century CE.

Under travelers' eyes

Here is a select of comments that visitors to the mausoleum have posted to TripAdvisor,



A view of Daniel mausoleum in Shush, southwest Iran

one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

"A Biblical Connection"

Located very near to the Susa Museum (which in itself is a fantastic place), Daniels Tomb is less famous and obviously less visited.

Yet when you think back to 500 BC, the proximity of this land to Mesopotamia, and of this Town to other biblical characters like Esther and Nehemiah - there is much to ponder. A city that has lived for over five millennia, a site that houses the tomb of Daniel,

and all the to-ing and fro-ing of humanity that has witnessed the churn of recorded history. Impressive. (Alex from Bangalore, India; reviewed April 2017)

"The bible comes alive"

The tomb of Daniel is not imposing from the outside, but is awesome once entering. There are mirrors reflecting light everywhere.

It is a peaceful but imposing sight. Men and women must go into separate (but equal) entrances. (PGIT from New Hyde Park, New York; reviewed June 2016)

"Tomb of Daniel, build in 19th Century"

The Tomb is in mosque. There is no sign in Latin alphabet, but the tower is visible from the distance. There is no entry fee. Since it is a mosque, it is not allowed (for non-Muslims) to enter during prayers. Men and women have separate entries. (Tomas Gal from Bratislava, Slovakia; reviewed September 2015)

"Religious, historical and cultural site"

One of the main reasons I came to Susa (Shush in Persian) was to visit this Jewish prophet's tomb, which is of Daniel. It is a mosque and 99% of the worshippers are Muslims. You might see tourists and if you ask them, they might be Jewish. It's a simple place. The main feature is the step, conical feature on top of the complex. For women, they need chadors, and there are spare ones out in the courtyard. (GZCS from San Francisco, California; reviewed November 2015)

The mysterious tunnels beneath Buenos Aires

In 1985, Jorge Eckstein, long-time resident of Buenos Aires' historical San Telmo neighbourhood, purchased an abandoned mansion near his home that he intended to transform into a restaurant.

Built in 1830, the mansion was grand but dilapidated. It was what many Argentines refer to as a 'casa chorizo' - so named because the rooms of the house are lined up in a row like a string of sausages, opening onto a series of side patios. Eckstein knew the house would need a lot of work; the walls were crumbling and the ground floor was covered in debris.

Not long after Eckstein began to renovate, he noticed something unusual about the foundation of the house, and it wasn't long before one of the patios was sinking. It turned out that Eckstein had stumbled onto what would become one of the city's most important archaeological sites: a portal to an underground labyrinth.

The idea of a mysterious underground world has long been a subject of interest and imagination in Buenos Aires. "The old myths about the existence of a great swarm of tunnels under the city come back to life again and again," said Ricardo Orsini, coordinator at the city's Interpretive Centre for Archaeology and Palaeontology.

After Eckstein discovered the sinking patio, a team of archaeologists from the University of Buenos Aires investigated the building's foundation to learn more about its history. The 20-room mansion had been abandoned in the late 1800s when its occupants fled from the deadly waves of yellow fever sweeping through the Argentine city. In the early 20th Century, the mansion served as tenement housing, but by the 1980s, it was abandoned once again.

"The decision to dig under the whole building

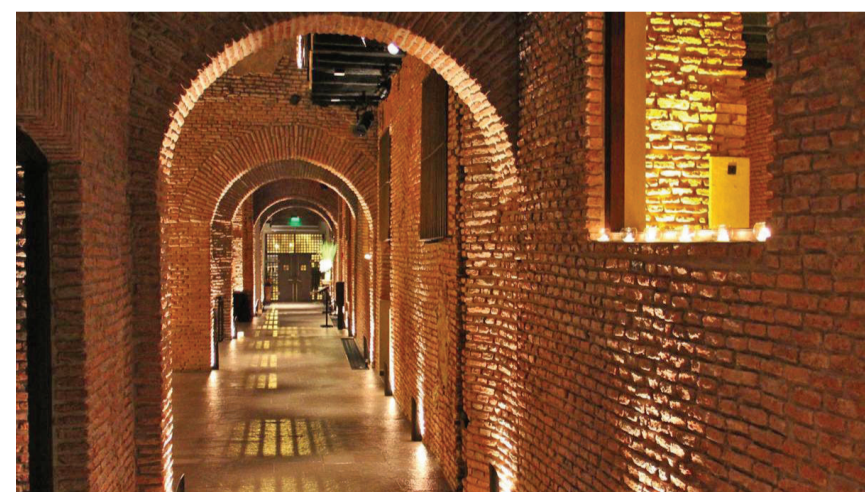
marked a dramatic change in our local concept of recovering the past," Eckstein said, "because it revealed not only the past that appears on the surface, but the past that existed under all the buildings."

Under the house, the archaeological team discovered an unusual vaulted construction, which further excavations revealed as the roof of an underground tunnel. But a tunnel leading to where? And for what purpose? These were the questions the archaeologists explored as they uncovered almost 2km of subterranean passageways. Their research revealed that the old house sat on top of an intricate drainage system. It seemed that neighborhood residents built the tunnels around 1780 to reroute a stream that caused flooding when it rained, bringing a flow of dirty water - including animal waste from farms on the outskirts of town - onto the city streets.

Today, the mansion - now the El Zanjón de Granados museum - acts as the entryway to the refurbished tunnels while also housing exhibitions that showcase objects found during the excavation. Standing inside one of the tunnels, I wouldn't have guessed that these broad passageways were used for such a practical purpose. They're eerily romantic; lined with exposed brick, they've been beautifully restored and illuminated.

While the discovery of the tunnels was a surprise to Eckstein, it wasn't news for some of San Telmo's older residents. Several of his neighbors remembered when segments of the dried-out tunnels were still open; no-one seems to know when and why they were closed off.

Until relatively recently, confirms Daniel Schávelzon - who led the excavation at El Zanjón de Granados and is now the found-



The El Zanjón de Granados museum acts as the entryway to some of Buenos Aires' tunnels (Credit: El Zanjón de Granados)

er and director of the city's Centre for Urban Archaeology - any knowledge about the city's underground passages was based on memory and word of mouth.

"Since I was a student, I was interested in the underground world," Schávelzon told me. "But everything I heard or read didn't make sense. It was all myth and fantasy. Nobody was doing serious work. Later, when I was working in the field of urban archaeology, I myself became seriously involved in the subject. And I found underground constructions of all kinds. It's fascinating."

Founded in 1536, San Telmo is the oldest part of the original settlement of Buenos Aires, and it's here that many of the city's underground tunnels are concentrated. But not all the tunnels

were built for plumbing purposes. More than a century before the residents of San Telmo rerouted a stream, Jesuit priests were busy at work on another set of tunnels.

In the late 16th Century, a Jesuit order from Spain settled in Buenos Aires with the intention of spreading Christianity to the New World. They established a mission consisting of a church, a museum, a library and even a pharmacy - a complex known today as the Manzana de las Luces (Block of Enlightenment).

But the Jesuits weren't exactly welcome in their new home - the region's indigenous populations strongly resisted the priests' attempts to convert them to Christianity. As conflict brewed, the Jesuits took steps to ensure their safety. (Source: BBC)

Smoking just one cigarette a day can raise heart disease risk, researchers find

Light smokers and those who smoke occasionally still carry substantial risk of suffering from heart disease and stroke. Experts recommend to stop smoking. Does this mean that smoking down is useless?

Smoking one cigarette a day isn't as harmless as some people think. Researchers said that lighting up even once daily may up a person's risk of heart disease and stroke.

The average pack of cigarettes contains 20 sticks, so the researchers thought the risk of heart disease or stroke for those who smoke one stick per day would just be about 5 percent of that of a pack-a-day smoker.

In the study published in *The BMJ* on Jan. 24, Allan Hackshaw, of UCL Cancer Institute at University College in London, and colleagues looked at data from 141 studies. It turned out that low-cigarette consumption still significantly ups risk for coronary heart disease and stroke.

One cigarette a day

The researchers found that in men who smoke one cigarette a day, their risk of developing heart disease is still 46 percent of that of a heavy smoker. The odds for stroke is also high at 41 percent of a heavy smoker's risk. In women, those who light up one stick a day have 31 percent of a pack-a-day smoker's risk of heart disease, and 34 percent of their risk of stroke.



"This probably comes as a surprise to many people. But there are also biological mechanisms that help explain the unexpectedly high risk associated with a low level of smoking," the study authors said. The authors said that the take-home message for smokers is there is no safe level of smoking. Smokers should quit the habit

The researchers found that in men who smoke one cigarette a day, their risk of developing heart disease is still 46 percent of that of a heavy smoker.

and not just cut down.

"Smoking only one to five cigarettes per day is associated with a risk of coronary heart disease and stroke that is substantially higher than many health professionals or smokers recognize (as much as half the risk of smoking 20 per day)," the researchers wrote in their study.

The findings can also serve as a warning to young adults who often smoke lesser amount of cigarettes than older adults. Light smoking still carries a high price for health.

Cardiovascular disease

"Light smoking, occasional smoking, and smoking fewer cigarettes all carry substantial risk of cardiovascular disease. Only complete cessation is protective and should be emphasized by all prevention measures and policies," wrote Kenneth C. Johnson, from the University of Ottawa, in an editorial.

Other health experts, however, said that while people who smoke needs to stop their habit, smoking down is not necessarily useless.

"There is more reason to believe that lower cigarette consumption will reduce the risk of chronic lung disease and lung cancer, the other two big causes of early death from smoking," said Paul Aveyard, from the University of Oxford.

(Source: *Tech Times*)

The sparrows seem to be shrinking, new study says

In 1847, German biologist Carl Bergmann posited that cold climates give rise to bigger bodies, and that animals who live in warm places typically are smaller. It made sense, since bigger bodies preserve heat more efficiently than smaller ones.

One question remained unanswered. What about birds who endure both hot and cold? As it turns out, it's all about the heat, a fact made clear by climate change.

Birds are shrinking, and the culprit appears to be rising temperatures, according to new research in the journal *The Auk: Ornithological Advances*. Nestlings that mature during hot summers grow into smaller adults, and they stay that way — even if the birds also live through cold winters. Scientists now suspect that exposure to excessive heat is a stronger influence on body size than bitter cold, a finding that raises worrisome implications about the health of birds on a warming planet.

Many species

Scientists studied house sparrows, but "many species might get smaller," said Simon Griffith, a researcher at Macquarie University in Sydney, and a senior author of the study. But he cautioned that it's still not clear what this means. "This might be an adaptive response, and may make animals better able to cope with changing conditions," he said. The "key thing is to understand why it is happening and what the



fitness consequences are likely to be for animals — that is, are they better off or worse off in a warming world?"

Doctoral candidate Samuel Andrew, the study's lead author, agreed, adding, "If these changes in size are an important part of adapting to warmer climates, then birds that don't change their size in response to temperature change could be the species that are more vulnerable."

The latest study adds to a growing body of research showing that animals are undergoing changes in response to increasing temperatures. Last summer, Canadian researchers reported that many species of fish were shrinking in response to cli-

mate change — some by as much as 30 percent — because warming ocean waters make it difficult for them to absorb the oxygen they need.

Maximum temperature

For the study, Andrew and his team captured and measured about 40 adult house sparrows at each of 30 locations across Australia and New Zealand. They found that maximum temperatures during the summer, when the birds breed, were a better predictor of adult body size at each location than winter minimum temperatures.

Because house sparrows are sedentary birds that live among humans, "this means you can compare the size of birds from different locations across a large distribution," said Andrew, the study's lead author.

The "interesting thing about the Australian (sparrow) populations is that some of them live in the arid center of Australia, where it gets very hot during the summer, but also cold during the winter. This is in contrast to more mild changes between the seasons for populations closer to the coast, or in the tropics. We expected that the hottest temperatures during the summer, or the coldest temperatures during the winter, would be most relevant to the survival of the birds."

(Source: *Popular Science*)

Many second-hand plastic toys could pose a risk to children's health, study suggests

The plastic used in many second hand toys could pose a risk to children's health because it may not meet the most up to date international safety guidelines, according to new research published in *Environmental Science and Technology*.

Scientists from the University of Plymouth analyzed 200 used plastic toys which they found in homes, nurseries and charity shops across

the South West of England.

These included cars, trains, construction products, figures and puzzles, with all of them being of a size that could be chewed by young children.

They discovered high concentrations of hazardous elements including antimony, barium, bromine, cadmium, chromium, lead and selenium — which are chronically toxic to children

at low levels over an extended period of time — in many building blocks, figures and items of jewelry that were typically either yellow, red or black.

Further tests showed that under simulated stomach conditions (involving extraction in dilute hydrochloric acid) several toys released quantities of bromine, cadmium or lead that exceeded limits set by the European Council's

Toy Safety Directive, with the release of cadmium exceeding its limit value by an order of magnitude in some cases.

The research was led by Dr. Andrew Turner, Reader in Environmental Science, who used x-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometry to analyze the presence of elements within individual toys.

(Source: *eurekaalert.org*)

National Messenger "YES" can interlink 13 banks

Indigenized and National Messenger "YES" is currently able to do banking services from the origin of 13 different banks and other banks.

This advanced messenger was launched for the first time in the field of fulfilling banking services on the platform of virtual networks in the country, the Public Relations Dept. of Bank Melli Iran reported.

In addition to two Android and iOS

platforms, its desktop version is also available. In addition to providing all the usual services of a messenger including dialogue, channel and group creation, use of sticker and arm (bah), this message is able to provide banking services such as charging, card-to-card operations, paying services' bills, paying car claims and also paying duties for exit from the country, etc.

Moreover, being used by Bank Mel-

li Iran, other banks including Ansar, Ayandeh banks, Post Bank of Iran, Bank Keshavarzi, Bank Shahr, Bank Hekmat Iranian, Bank Pasargad, Day Bank, Parsian Bank, Bank Mellat, Sarmayeh and TEJARAT Bank are not connected to this network, so that users can use cards of these banks as cart of origin.

Requesting for money concurrent with using the area of a messenger is salient

differentiation of this messenger with other messengers.

It should be noted that "YES" Messenger came to being at the unsparing support of Bank Melli Iran, the bank emphasized.

Currently, 600,000 users are the members of "YES" Messengers, so that 10,000 to 12,000 users are attracted in this messenger daily, the bank concluded.

Iran's credit risk rate improves: EGFI CEO

Chief Executive of Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) Seyyed Kamal Seyyed Ali said that Iran's risk rating experienced a considerable decline.

Given the above issue, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) took giant stride in the field of improving risk rating of the country from six to five.

Turning to the effects of promoting risk rate of the country, he said, "increasing ceiling of finances of the country and reducing commission of insurance premium of credit as well as increasing financing have been cited as the result of this move taken."

Head of Organization for Investment, Economic and Technical Assistance of Iran (OIETAI) and Deputy Minister of Economic and Finance Affairs Mohammad Khazaei said that political and security stability has promoted Iran's credit risk rating to a great extent.



Speaking in an interview with Mehr News Agency correspondent, he added, "unlike previous years, Iran's credit

rating improved considerably and stood at 5th rank." "The organization will make its utmost effort in the field of ameliorating credit risk rating in the coming months as well," he maintained.

He further noted that the Organization includes 35 countries, so that Iran's credit risk rating has an important impact in economic interactions of other countries as well.

For its part, Central Bank of Iran (CBI) reported that credit rating of any country indicates financial and credit situation and degree of trust of other countries to the economic and banking system of that country.

After a landmark nuclear deal inked between Iran and world's six major powers, Iran's credit risk rating was ameliorated significantly. However, imposition of tough sanctions against Islamic Republic of Iran incurred irreparable damage to the economic situation of the country in international level, the CBI reported.

ITC accounts for 50% of country's total cigarette production share: CEO

Chief Executive of Iranian Tobacco Company (ITC) Mosayyeb Mohammadian Shomali said that his company accounts for 50 percent share of tobacco production in the country.

Speaking in a press briefing, held at Gilan Province Tobacco Production Complex, he said: "with the studies made in this regard, ITC will increase both its production and sales rate before termination of the next Iranian calendar year in 1397 (to start March 21, 2018)."

Iranian Tobacco Company (ITC) was del-

egated improperly to the private sector in line with privatization process and implementation of Article 44 of the Constitution.

Dealing with illegal import of cigarette and also promotion of cultivation of tobacco are the main task of the company, he said, adding: "ITC was transferred to the Steel Pension Fund (SPF) inappropriately within the framework of implementation of Article 44 of the Constitution."

He pointed to the losses of the company caused by surplus purchase of tobacco from

tobacco growers in all cities of the country, and said: "Foreign cigarette production companies should also purchase the tobacco produced by the domestic farmers."

He went on to say that ITC managed to increase production and sales volume of cigarettes as much as 30 and 40 percent respectively in the current year as compared to a year earlier.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mohammadian Shomali revealed the installation of new tobacco production equipment and machin-

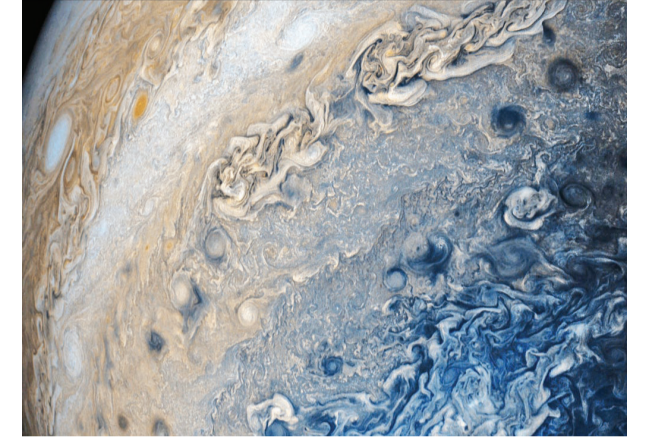
ery at the production lines of the company and added: "with the effective steps taken in this regard, the company will renovate all its production lines by the yearend."

In the end, Chief Executive of Iranian Tobacco Company (ITC) Mosayyeb Mohammadian Shomali said: "Relying upon the assistance of the Almighty God and at the unsparing efforts of industrious laborers of the company, the company will take giant stride in the current year named after "resistance economy, production and job creation."

New Jupiter images from Juno probe reveal amazing detail

NASA's Juno probe spent years en route to the gas giant, and the main observation phase hasn't gone completely smoothly. The probe is in a longer orbit of Jupiter, meaning it makes a close approach of the planet only once every 53 days.

Still, the images we're getting are really something. In a pair of recently released images, you can see an unprecedented amount of detail in Jupiter's clouds, and they were both created by citizen scientists.



Juno arrived in orbit of the gas giant in summer 2016, some five years after launch. It began sending back stunning images and scientific data in early 2017. However, an engine error forced NASA to err on the side of caution and skip the maneuver that would have tightened Juno's orbit.

We're waiting longer for new images, but the probe won't be pounded by radiation as much and citizen scientists have more time to process the raw data.

The newly released images actually come from NASA's citizen scientists. All the raw data from the JunoCam is posted on the Jet Propulsion Laboratory website for anyone to download and process into a final image. You can upload your creations, and NASA may choose to highlight the best ones as it has done here. (Source: *extremetech.com*)

Progress to molecular quantum computing

A quantum computer is predicted to bring with it an exponential speed up in computational power. This is because instead of performing calculations one after the other like a conventional computer, a quantum computer works in parallel, looking at all the possible outcomes at the same time. The result is massively parallel computing, allowing us to solve problems in minutes that otherwise would take thousands of years.

Michelle Simmons at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney, Australia, are developing their own ways of building quantum computers using silicon.

In May 2017, she founded an Aus\$83 million (US\$65 million) start-up called Silicon Quantum Computing, backed in part by the Australian government.

One thinks here of problems where computers work on large data bases or consider lots of variables, problems such as predicting the weather, stock markets, optimizing speech, facial and object recognition (such as self-driving cars), looking at optimizing aircraft design, targeting drug development to the patients DNA, optimizing traffic flow and working out the shortest possible delivery routes.

The potential rewards are certainly significant. I firmly believed when I arrived here that we had a viable yet ambitious pathway to get there.

Yet when we first proposed our concept, there were many critics all over the world, including senior scientists at IBM who said that whilst it was a nice idea, there were many technical challenges that had to be overcome.

On top of this, to make things work, we had to combine two technologies: linking the scanning tunneling microscope (which provides the ability to measure and manipulate individual atoms) with another technology called molecular beam epitaxy which allows us to grow, layer by layer, material to protect the atoms we have put down.

(Source: *nextbigfuture.com*)

NASA tests new alloy to fold wings in flight

NASA has successfully applied a new technology in flight that allows aircraft to fold their wings to different angles while in the air.

The recent flight series, which took place at NASA's Armstrong Flight Research Center in California, was part of the Spanwise Adaptive Wing project, or SAW. This project aims to validate the use of a cutting-edge, lightweight material to be able to fold the outer portions of aircraft wings and their control surfaces to optimal angles in flight.

SAW, which is a joint effort between Armstrong, NASA's Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, or GRC, Langley Research Center in Virginia, Boeing Research & Technology in St. Louis and Seattle, and Area-I Inc. in Kennesaw, Georgia, may produce multiple in-flight benefits to aircraft in the future, both subsonic and supersonic.

Folding wings

Folding wings in flight is an innovation that had been studied using aircraft in the past, including the North American XB-70 Valkyrie in the 1960s. However, the ability to fold wings in flight has always been dependent on heavy and bulky conventional motors and hydraulic systems, which can be cumbersome to the aircraft.

The SAW project intends to obtain a wide spectrum of aerodynamic benefits in flight by folding wings through the use of an innovative, lightweight material called shape memory alloy. This material is built into to an actuator on the aircraft, which plays a vital role for moving parts on the airplane, where it has the ability to fold the outer portion of an aircraft's wings in flight without the strain of a heavy hydraulic system.

Systems with this new technology may weigh up to 80 percent less than traditional systems.

The subscale testbed PTERA flies over NASA Armstrong Flight Research Center in California with the outer portions of its wings folded 70 degrees upwards. The aircraft took off with its wings zero degrees deflection, keeping them level during takeoff. (Source: *phys.org*)

Environment being sacrificed for auto industry: Kalantari

1 → “They are economically powerful and can tamper with and change scientific data [on the causes of air pollution and the major role of domestically produced car in exacerbating the situation], a greater power is required to fight them, but with informing the people we might be able to do something about it,” he suggested.



He further warned about the serious dangers of chemical pollutant saying that they are far more hazardous than PM 2.5 fine particles. “As people can see fine particles they are more sensitive to them while chemical pollutants released from the cars are much more perilous.”

Kalantari also mentioned overuse of pesticides in agriculture sector, low-quality diesel, and wetlands drainage as some of the biggest environmental challenges leading to serious health hazards in the country.

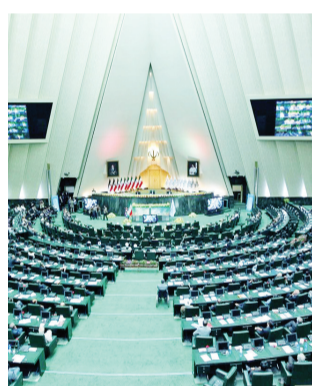
109,000 Iranians suffering from cancer

According to the reports published in 2014, some 109,000 Iranians are suffering cancer, deputy health minister Alireza Raeesi, said for his part.

The number of people diagnosed with cancer is 154 per 100,000 annually with men outnumbering women, Raeesi said, adding, breast cancer in women and stomach cancer in men are the most common cancers in the country.

\$100m allotted to address social vulnerabilities

TEHRAN — Majlis (the Iranian parliament) has earmarked some 4.5 trillion rials (nearly \$100 million) for dealing with social vulnerabilities within the framework of the budget bill for the next calendar year, starting on March 21, Mehr reported on Saturday.



The money is allocated to schemes to identify and address social vulnerabilities with a special attention to drug addicts, divorced families, working children, female breadwinners, and people living in shanty towns, MP Rasoul Khezri said.

Moreover, Khezri has explained that the administration has proposed a 30-trillion-rial (nearly \$670 million) budget for ending poverty which is yet to be approved.

LEARN ENGLISH

No Smoking!

A: It smells like an **ashtray** in here!
 B: Hi honey! What's wrong? Why do you have that look on your face?
 A: What's wrong? I thought we agreed that you were going to quit smoking.
 B: No! I said I was going to **cut down** which is very different. You can't just expect me to go **cold turkey overnight!**
 A: Look, there are other ways to quit. You can try the **nicotine patch**, or **nicotine chewing gum**. We **spend a fortune** on cigarettes every month and now laws are **cracking down** and not allowing smoking in any public place. It's not like you can just **light up** like before.
 B: I know, I know. I am trying but, I don't have the **willpower** to just quit. I can't fight with the **urge** to reach for my **pack of smokes** in the morning with coffee or after lunch! Please understand?
 A: Fine! I want a divorce!

Key vocabulary

ashtray: a receptacle for tobacco ashes and cigarettes and cigars
cut down: reduce the amount taken or used
cold turkey: immediate, complete withdrawal from something
overnight: suddenly or surprisingly quickly
nicotine patch: a patch that slowly releases nicotine into the body
nicotine chewing gum: gum that slowly releases nicotine into the body
spend a fortune: to spend a very large amount of money on something
crack down: to act more forcefully to regulate or repress
light up: to start smoking a cigarette
willpower: the strength of mind to carry out a decision
urge: a strong impulse, inner drive, or yearning
pack of smokes: a box of cigarettes

Supplementary vocabulary

drag: smoking a cigarette once, a puff, share a cigar with someone
tar: a solid, sticky substance that remains when tobacco is burned; it accumulates in the lungs of smokers and is considered carcinogenic
lighter: a mechanical device for lighting a cigarette, cigar, or pipe
match: a thin strip of wood or cardboard tipped with a chemical that ignites when scraped against a rough or specially treated surface
stogie: informal of saying cigarette
butt: the end of the cigarette which contains the filter and is placed in the mouth to smoke

(Source: irlanguage.com)



SDS hotspots in Ahwaz 5 times larger than Tehran

By Mohammad Ali Haqshenas

Geological researches demonstrate that the hotspots for and dust storms (SDS) developed around the city of Ahwaz, in the southwestern Khuzestan Province, cover more than 350,000 hectares of land, 5 times bigger than Tehran urban area.

There are seven different SDS hotspots near Ahwaz, each having special land use and specific reason behind their development as the source of this environmental predicament.

A brief history of the challenge

It was around the year 2005 that the first signs of sporadic SDS appeared in southwestern Iran. Just seven years later, sand and dust storms became so persisting and terrible that turned into environmental circles' hot topic.

Now after 14 years, unfortunately, the issue still remains and even aggravates year on year, depriving the people of those areas from the right of breathing clean air.

To have a tangible sense of the situation, here are the concentration of fine dust in some cities of Khuzestan Province published on January 20.

According to Khuzestan provincial department of environment, the concentration of fine dust in Ahwaz, Bebbahan and Masjed Soleyman stood at 627, 2926 and 2056 micrograms per cubic meter. This is while the normal level of fine dust concentration is 150 micrograms per cubic meter.

Internal SDS hotspots vs. external ones

Although experts still wrangle over the extent of the impacts of external and internal SDS hotspots, almost all of them agree that the former has a bigger share in this regard.

Estimations show that around 70 percent of SDSs are originated from outside Iran, the director of Khuzestan Province meteorological organization Kourosh Bahadori told Khabaronline on Wednesday.

Having a rather small 30-percent share is surely not a valid excuse to neglect internal hotspots, said Bahadori, adding, SDSs fed by these sources reach southwestern cities more quickly and have higher concentration. However, due to having larger dust particles, these storms have a shorter stay, he concluded.

What are the causes behind SDSs?

Certainly, long-lasting drought in the region is the number one culprit.

The report by meteorological organ-



ization which considers Standardized Precipitation Evapotranspiration Index (SPEI) over the past 84 months, shows that 27 percent of Khuzestan Province area is facing extreme drought. The report also indicates that 65.9 and 6.4 percent of the province is suffering from severe and moderate drought respectively.

Although water scarcity is the main reason behind SDSs, there are some other factors which have deteriorated the situation.

Civil projects impacting grasslands

The area of Khuzestan's grasslands and pastures which have turned to deserts in recent years account to more than 200,000 hectares, making it the widest area of land responsible for SDSs.

No one can deny the negative effects of drought here but it seems that some civil projects like building roads and railroads have accelerated the transition.

Dams and excessive water withdrawal

Not very long ago, there were some lands in the region that didn't have any vegetation but were made wet by seasonal floods. Lack of precipitation, inordinate dam building projects and excessive withdrawal from both surface and underground water

resources took the moisture form these lands and unlocked their great potential to turn to the source of a disaster.

The same scenario goes with wetlands as well. For instance, considerable part of Hour-al-Azim lagoon has turned into desert, although during recent years its situation has a bit improved with receiving more water from dams.

“We have no right to adopt measures based on researches that have been conducted in 1360s [1980s] ... the water that existed 30 years ago hasn't remained now,” said the chief of the Department of Environment Isa Kalantari in a live TV interview last week, criticizing the policies of the Ministry of Energy in the region.

Planting trees; one of the solutions

The administration has started planting trees in the region to stabilize the soil and prevent further SDSs in a long run. The officials claim that some 30,000 hectares of SDS hotspots will be covered by tree planting programs till the end of the current [Iranian calendar] year (March 20). The required water for this project will be provided by Karun River through a pipeline.

What is the stand of 'clean air law' on SDS?

Clean air law was adopted by Majlis

(the Iranian parliament) in July 2017. Comprising 34 articles, the law takes unprecedented steps to provide the right of clean air for Iranians.

The new law and its guidelines (still under development) clearly define the responsibilities of different organizations on the battle against air pollution and sand and dust storms.

As per an article of the law, the Ministry of Agriculture is tasked to conduct at least 300,000 hectares reforestation per annum, with the priority of areas facing with crisis, SDS hotspots and sensitive ecologies. And the administration should allocate the required budget in its budget bill.

According to another article, the Ministry of Energy should provide the water right of wetlands based on precipitation status, with the Department of Environment monitoring the process.

As far as external SDS sources are concerned, surely Iran cannot tackle the issue alone and deeply needs the help of international environmental bodies.

However, for the internal hotspots we have no excuse for further procrastination. We have to modify our water withdrawal and water transfer policies along with our irrigation systems in the agriculture sector as soon as possible.

Ramsar to host World Wetlands Day ceremony

TEHRAN — Iran will mark the World Wetlands Day in a ceremony which is scheduled to be held in the northern city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

World Wetlands Day is celebrated every year on February 2. This day marks the date of the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands in Ramsar in 1971.

The Standing Committee of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands approved “Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future” as the theme for World Wetlands Day in 2018.

The Ramsar Convention is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

The Convention came into force in 1975. Since then, almost 90% of UN member states, from all the world's geographic regions, have acceded to become “Contracting Parties”.

The Convention's mission is “the conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world”.

Wetlands are among the most diverse and productive ecosystems. They provide essential services and supply all our fresh water. However, they continue to be degraded and



converted to other uses.

The Convention uses a broad definition of wetlands. It includes all lakes and rivers, underground aquifers, swamps and marshes, wet grasslands, peatlands, oases, estuaries, deltas and tidal flats, mangroves and other coastal areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs and salt pans.

Iran currently has 24 sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), with a surface

area of 1,486,438 hectares.

Unfortunately wetlands in Iran are suffering drainage to various extents. The mismanagement in agriculture and water sector as well as climate change are among the most important reasons for the lakes disappearance in Iran.

There are more than 250 wetlands in Iran of which 28 are suffering dryness and have turned into hotspots for sand and dust storms, Hamid Zohrabi, caretaker for natural environment directorate at the Department of Environment (DOE) said on Saturday.

Unsustainable development at the wetlands basin is the major culprit of the current situation, Mehr news agency quoted Zohrabi as saying.

As director for wetlands ecosystem office of the DOE Masoud Baqerzadeh has explained on Saturday only 30 percent of the wetlands restoration programs are completed at best as only one third of the wetlands budget is actually allocated to the revival projects.

Lake Urmia, northwestern Iran, Hamoun, eastern Iran, and Hour-al-Azim in southwestern Iran are some of the main wetlands in Iran suffering unprecedented dryness and are causing great deal of inconvenience for the citizens residing the regions.

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

جزیره کیش میزبان نمایشگاه بین‌المللی تجهیزات پزشکی

سومین نمایشگاه بین‌المللی تجهیزات پزشکی «هرمزهلث» روز جمعه در جزیره کیش آغاز به کار کرد.

دبیر اجرایی نمایشگاه اسحاق عامری در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا گفت: در این نمایشگاه سه روزه که با کمک سازمان غذا و دارو و وزارت صنعت، معدن و تجارت راه اندازی شده ۱۳۲ شرکت داخلی و خارجی حضور دارند.

عامری خاطر نشان کرد: در این رویداد شرکت‌هایی از ۱۳ کشور همچون کره جنوبی، ژاپن، آمریکا، بلژیک، آلمان، چین و هلند در کنار شرکت‌های داخلی آخرین تولیدات و فناوری‌های خود را در فضایی به وسعت ۱۴ هزار متر مربع در معرض نمایش خواهند گذاشت.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“cerebro-, cerebr-”

■ **Meaning:** brain
 ■ **For example:** Cerebral people are very contemplative and methodical.

PHRASAL VERB

Flag somebody/something down

■ **Meaning:** to make the driver of a vehicle stop by waving at them
 ■ **For example:** I flagged down a taxi.

IDIOM

Blow your top

■ **Explanation:** if you blow your top, you suddenly become very angry
 ■ **For example:** When my mother saw the state of the house after the party, she blew her top!

Syria rejects so-called peace plan by U.S., Saudi regime

1→ Last December, Russia, Iran and Turkey agreed to hold the congress in Sochi on January 29-30. While the Syrian government at the time immediately announced that it would attend the event, 40 Syrian "opposition" groups rejected the Russian initiative, which is also aimed at agreeing on a post-war constitution in the country.

According to Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, international observers, including those from the UN, will participate in the congress along with Syrian parties. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov will also attend.

Earlier this week, Syria's main opposition group, the Saudi regime-affiliated Syrian High Negotiations Commission (HNC), announced that it would need further details before it could make a final decision on whether to take part in the congress, which dozens of opposition armed groups have already rejected.

Eight rounds of Syria peace talks, which took place in the Swiss city of Geneva, failed to achieve tangible results, mainly due to the opposition's insistence that the Syrian government cede power.



A parallel peace process between Syria's warring parties in the Kazakh capital Astana has resulted in significant achievements instead, leading to ceasefires and the establishment of de-escalation zones across the conflict-ridden country. The Astana talks have

been brokered by Iran, Russia and Turkey.

■ Syrian opposition faction 'won't attend Sochi Congress'

Meanwhile, a spokesman for a faction of the Syrian opposition says the outfit will not attend the Sochi talks.

Yahya al-Arabi said his faction had not seen "commitment" on the part of the Syrian government in the round of talks in Vienna and that the Sochi Congress was meant to "sideline" the Geneva process.

Syrian opposition groups, particularly those instructed by the House of Saud regime, have been dismayed by the progress made in the Astana process, and have often threatened not to participate in talks arranged by the three guarantor states of the Astana process, only to show up at the eleventh hour most of the times.

Separately, de Mistura, the UN envoy, said UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres would decide how the world body would respond to the invitation to attend Sochi. He added that Russia said Sochi was aimed at supporting the UN process.

(Source: agencies)

Most civilian deaths in Iraq, Syria occurred under Trump: report

Over three-quarters of civilian deaths in Iraq and Syria during the so-called United States-led war against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group, occurred under Donald Trump's presidency, according to new figures by the United States military.

A total of 831 civilians have been "unintentionally killed" by coalition forces since 2014, according to the Combined Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve, the joint task force established by the U.S.-led coalition against ISIL.

Data released by the coalition on January 2, 2017, just a few weeks before Trump took office, found that at least 188 civilians had been "unintentionally killed" by the U.S.-led strikes since the start of the operation in 2014.

But the death toll has increased significantly over the last 12 months since Trump's inauguration on January 20, 2017, albeit there is still an imprecise count of civilian deaths in the conflict.

A U.S. military helicopter targets vehicles in Iraq's al-Anbar Province, killing seven civilians and wounding 11 others, including a local official.

The coalition has been criticized by several experts

for under-counting the number of civilian deaths. It did not start issuing monthly civilian casualty numbers until March 2017.

Airwars, a watchdog group that monitors civilian casualties in Iraq and Syria, says the number of civilian deaths was between 11,000 and 18,000.

A report by The Associated Press last month put the estimated number of civilian deaths in Mosul alone at 9,000.

The group also said the number of airstrikes by the coalition, made up almost entirely of the U.S. military aircraft, had increased by nearly 50 percent in Iraq and Syria in 2017 compared with the previous year.

According to a report by The New York Times about civilian casualties in November, "in the effort to expel ISIL from Iraq and Syria, the coalition has conducted more than 27,500 strikes to date, deploying everything from Vietnam-era B-52 bombers to modern Predator drones."

The real number of American troops deployed to Syria and Iraq are much higher than what the Pentagon has announced, new U.S. government data shows.

The U.S.-led coalition has not obtained permission to operate within Syrian borders, has not been in coordination



with the Syrian government or military, and has failed to achieve its declared goal of degrading and destroying the ISIL terrorist outfit.

The U.S. is widely accused of assisting ISIL in both Iraq and Syria in a variety of ways, including air dropping weapons for them and striking local forces fighting the terrorist group.

(Source: Press TV)

China to launch first private rocket



A Chinese private company will launch the first self-developed rocket in the first half of 2018, said the company founder.

Shu Chang, the company founder, said his company was established in 2015, has just completed the tests and is confident with the launch.

Located in the Yizhuang District in Beijing, engineers are working to build a six-meter-long rocket, the first-generation product in Shu's company.

"This is the heart of our rocket. It is a solid rocket engine with a six-meter-long length and 35 tons of thrust," said Ai Zhiheng, a rocket engineer. Ai added that the part assembled at the rocket tail needs to

withstand the burning heat so it is very important how to design the thermal seal.

Added with the load, this rocket is about eight meters long. At the end of last year, engineers completed the tests on this rocket.

Talking about the cost, Shu said it is a problem they must face up to. "The investment in the aerospace industry is indeed heavy, and it takes very long period. This is only our first step, and we need much more investment in the future for making bigger rocket," said Shu.

In addition to the first-generation product, Shu's company is researching and developing another three types of rockets.

(Source: Reuters)

Bundeswehr sexual harassment jumps 80 percent in 2017: report



The number of sexual harassment cases among the unified armed forces of Germany, known as the Bundeswehr, reportedly increased by over 80 percent in 2017, compared to the previous year.

Germany's Funke Media Group reported on Saturday 234 cases of sexual offences among the armed forces last year while the number stood at 128 in 2016.

In addition, 14 cases of rape or attempted rape were recorded in 2017 in the 60,000-strong German military, showing an almost three-fold increase on the previous year when only five cases were reported.

The German military has been rocked

by a series of scandals involving the armed, including allegations of sexual abuses as well as a far-right plot.

In November 2017, German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen commented on the sharp rise in sexual abuse at the army.

She said that it did not mean that the number of sexual assaults had jumped, but rather that there had been an increase in reporting incidents that might have previously gone unreported.

"It is a positive sign that supervisors and teams more frequently report incidents," she told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper.

(Source: agencies)

Trump 'bluffs' about U.S. military capability in war against N. Korea: expert

The United States President Donald Trump has been "bluffing" about America's military capabilities in taking down North Korea's government, says a top nuclear expert, warning that any military strike against Pyongyang could trigger a prolonged bloody ground war.

Peter Kuznick, the director of Nuclear Studies Institute at American University, warned that a war with North Korea would be "far from a cake walk or a march to victory" for the United States.

"The reality of using the military capabilities is not as great as Trump would like it to be," Kuznick said in a recent interview with RT. "If there was a military solution, Trump would have acted on it long ago."

He argued that North Korea's military resources as the world's fourth biggest army combined with the difficult terrain on the Korean peninsula, would lead the United States into a drawn-out and bloody war.

"The U.S. is threatening a military strike; however, the top marine general this week said a military action would be really tough on the Korean peninsula," he explained. "In reality, we would be bogged down in very difficult terrain against the fourth largest army in the world, which is quite capable of striking Seoul

very, very easily."

Head of the U.S. Marine Corps General Robert Neller also warned on Thursday that a military conflict with Pyongyang "will be a very, very kinetic, physical, violent fight over some really, really tough ground and everybody is going to have to be mentally prepared."

He warned that the U.S. would have to be ready for unexpected circumstances given the amount of ground artillery North Korea has.

Trump has, on numerous occasions, threatened North Korea with military action, if Pyongyang refuses to halt its nuclear and missile programs.

In his first speech at the United Nations General Assembly last year, he threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea if necessary.

Formerly, the president threatened Pyongyang with "fire and the fury like the world has never seen," boasting that his country "has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea."

In reaction to the president's fiery rhetoric, the North reiterated that it "will further bolster our nuclear, treasured



sword of justice and defend our sovereignty and justice with nuclear weapons."

Pyongyang says its missile and nuclear development programs are purely defensive and safeguard the nation against aggression from the U.S. and its allies.

(Source: Press TV)

Aide to barred Egypt presidential challenger stabbed

Assailants on Saturday stabbed and seriously wounded Egypt's former anti-corruption chief who was also a top aide to a barred candidate for a March presidential election, his lawyer said.

Ali Taha said that Hisham Geneina was attacked by three men who "stabbed him in the face and beat him, breaking his legs," near his Cairo home. He was admitted to hospital for treatment.

Geneina was sacked by President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as head of the Central Auditing Authority in 2016 after he was accused of exaggerating the cost of corruption.

On Saturday he was on his way to a court hearing to contest his dismissal.

A security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed Geneina had been wounded but said it happened during "a dispute with three young men following a car accident".

Geneina was top campaign aide to Sami Anan, a former armed forces chief of staff who this month announced he intended to stand against Sisi in the March election.

Anan's challenge was swiftly crushed, however, when the army accused him on Tuesday of forgery and other crimes linked to his registration as a candidate.

Sisi looks set to sweep to a second term after most of his serious challengers either ruled themselves out or were sentenced to time in prison.

Anan campaign team member, Hazem Hosny, said the attack on Geneina was "politically motivated" — a claim rejected by the security source.

Following the accusations made by the army, Anan was summoned by the military prosecutor and since then his family and lawyers have had no news of his whereabouts, Hosny said.

He is "the victim of a forced disappearance".

Geneina's lawyer said he had been barred from seeing his client in hospital.

(Source: agencies)

Gunmen kill at least 14 Mali soldiers in attack on army camp

Unidentified gunmen on Saturday killed at least 14 soldiers in central Mali, an area targeted by a growing wave of attacks by militants, when they overran a military camp early on Saturday, two army officers said.

West Africa's arid Sahel region is suffering a spike in violence by militant groups, some with links to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) that is drawing an increasingly aggressive response from countries including France and the United States.

The military camp in the town of Soumpi, near the southern boundary of Mali's Timbuktu region, came under attack at around 6 a.m. (0600 GMT).

"The provisional toll is 14 dead, 17 wounded and two enemies killed. The search is still on for those missing," one of the sources said.

The second source said "around 15" soldiers had been killed. "The soldiers abandoned their position. The enemy carried away material," he said.

Both sources asked not to be named as they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Islamist fighters seized control of Mali's northern desert regions in 2012 before being driven back by a French-led intervention a year later.

But despite the presence of a United Nations peacekeeping mission and troops operating under a regional French anti-militant mission, violence is again on the rise and attacks are spreading further south towards the capital, Bamako.

A landmine explosion blew up a civilian passenger vehicle near the central Mali village of Boni on Thursday, killing 26 people and wounding several others.

(Source: Reuters)

Downing Street mind is a mystery

1→ Although May government has apparently opposed holding another referendum over Brexit, it is clear to everyone that she was one of the proponents of Britain's remaining in the European Union during the 2016 referendum.

All these factors indicate that the Brexit puzzle is arranged in a different way (contrary to what was initially thought). Accordingly, it is likely that London and the EU have secretly agreed on Britain remaining in the United Europe, and are now seeking to provide the grounds for executing this agreement and to manage British public opinion, too.

In the recent polls conducted in the UK, most citizens have opposed Brexit. This change of opinion is the result of a propaganda campaign led by British politicians warning the society about the threats and consequences of Brexit. At the same time, and as mentioned above, the talks are not well underway and the possibility of success in the negotiations is perhaps unlikely. In any case, Brexit negotiations should end by 2019.

Will America stand again with the world's refugees?

1→ One of Mr. Trump's executive orders mandated a report on the fiscal impact of refugee resettlement. But the administration never released that report, perhaps because the results did not suit its agenda.

A draft of the report from the Department of Health and Human Services obtained by The New York Times found that, over the past decade, refugees have contributed \$63 billion more in government revenues than they cost. That's consistent with the findings of economists, such as a recent study that found that refugees, on average, are paying more in taxes than they receive in governmental services and benefits by the ninth year after arrival.

The past year has been a disaster for refugees and for those of us who are deeply concerned — many because of the convictions of our faith — with their well-being. But, because of my Christian faith, I also believe that people can repent, turning from a wrong direction and moving in the right way.

It's not too late for our leaders to examine the facts, apply the values of the faith traditions that inspire many Americans' concern for refugees, and change course.

(Source: NYT)

Ronaldo 'still good looking' after facial injury

Cristiano Ronaldo has made light of the kick to the face that left him covered in blood last weekend, joking "I'm still good looking".

The Real Madrid forward scored his second goal in a 7-1 demolition of Deportivo La Coruna with a brave diving header, but was caught by the boot of defender Fabian Schar for his troubles.

Ronaldo then left the field inspecting the wound next to his left eye using the camera function of a mobile phone, apparently belonging to Madrid's doctor, and required stitches.

Speaking to Dongqiudi, the Chinese football app who named Ronaldo as their player of the year, the 32-year-old removed any fears over his fitness ahead of Saturday's LaLiga trip to Valencia.

"It's part of the game. Sometimes you hurt your leg, sometimes your back, this time it was my eye," he said.

"At the time I was thinking about scoring and I didn't think I'd get a boot in the face, but it's all part of the game.

"During matches I tend to get knocks because they are trying to stop me, but this time I didn't get lucky.

"I feel better now. I'm still happy, I'm still good-looking, and my vision is as good as before, so there's no problem."

(Source: Soccerway)

IOC issues conduct guide for Russian athletes at Olympic Games

Russian athletes who compete as independents at next month's Pyeongchang Winter Olympics cannot grab a Russian flag or stage alternate medal ceremonies as part of conduct guidelines issued on Friday. The International Olympic Committee, which in December banned Russia from the Feb. 9-25 Games in South Korea because of the country's doping violations, has invited 169 carefully screened Russian athletes who will compete under the Olympic flag as Olympic Athletes from Russia (OAR).

Russia was banned over "systematic manipulation" of the anti-doping system at the 2014 Sochi Games.

According to the IOC's "Conduct Guidelines for Olympic Athlete from Russia", athletes must wear only the authorized OAR uniforms and refrain from any public form of publicity associated with the Russian "flag, anthem, emblem and symbols".

They must also "not solicit or accept the national flag, anthem, emblem and symbols at any Olympic site," the IOC said.

Athletes and officials are also not allowed to stage or take part in 'alternate' victory ceremonies organized by the Russian Olympic Committee or a third party.

The IOC said it would be monitoring the application of these guidelines through a taskforce, led by IOC deputy Director General Pere Miro and sports Director Kit McConnell.

The suspended Russian Olympic Committee will also be responsible for their fans' behavior inside the venues and any display of national flags or emblems even at non-official venues must have IOC approval. The IOC has said if Russia respected the decisions it could potentially be admitted back under its own flag at the Games' closing ceremony.

(Source: Reuters)

United boss Mourinho not surprised by immediate Sanchez impact

Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho is not surprised how quickly new signing Alexis Sanchez has adapted to life at the club after an impressive performance on his debut on Friday.

The Chile forward, who joined United from Arsenal earlier in the week, assisted the opening two goals in the 4-0 FA Cup fourth round win at League Two side Yeovil Town.

"I think it's no surprise for anyone after three years in the Premier League, playing every week, so everyone knows what Alexis is," Mourinho told the club's website (www.manutd.com).

"He is the kind of player you buy and you don't think about adaptation in relation to English football, so it's no surprise for us," the Portuguese manager added. "He is a fantastic player and he showed that for three years and for the past three days when he was training for us, so he's an amazing addition for us."

Forward Marcus Rashford and midfielder Ander Herrera both struck either side of halftime, while Jesse Lingard and Romelu Lukaku scored late on to complete the rout.

Sanchez, who last played in Arsenal's goalless League Cup semi-final first leg draw with Chelsea earlier this month, was taken off after 72 minutes against Yeovil.

"He didn't play for Arsenal the last two or three games and his training was not good because half of his body was in the Emirates and half in Manchester, so you don't train well," Mourinho said.

"I was not sure about 90 minutes, I wanted to play him for 60, 70 or 75 and that was good because people understand his game better and he can understand his team-mates too."

(Source: Mirror)

Germany confirm friendly with Saudi Arabia

The German Football Association announced that its national football team will be facing Saudi Arabia in a friendly match as part of their 2018 World Cup preparations.

The Green Falcons are in Group A of the World Cup with Egypt, Uruguay and hosts, Russia. They will take on the hosts in the opening game on the 14th of June. Saudi Football Federation president, Adel Ezzat, stated that earlier that the national team will start preparing for the World Cup by having several internal and external camps with scheduled international friendlies against the likes of Iraq, Italy and Germany.

"Nowadays, it has become a tradition for our team to play their last game before a big tournament in front of our home fans. Of course, we will be hoping for a fantastic atmosphere, as we look to build momentum for the seriously tough weeks that await us in Russia," said national team coordinator Oliver Bierhoff.

Germany coach Joachim Low said that his team will be facing a different playing style and mentality when they face Saudi Arabia assuring that they have to prepare well for different styles as they get ready for the World Cup.

(Source: DFB)

Wozniacki wins first Grand Slam title with epic victory over Halep



Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki beat Romanian Simona Halep to win her first Grand Slam title and regain the number one ranking at the Australian Open. The second seed won 7-6 (7-2) 3-6 6-4 in punishing conditions to finally land a major title at the 43rd attempt.

Nine years after her first Grand Slam final defeat, and 17 months after she was ranked 74th, the Dane was overcome.

"I dreamt of this moment for so many years, and to be here today is a dream come true," said Wozniacki.

The victory means the 27-year-old will replace Halep as number one in the world rankings on Monday.

Twice a runner-up at the US Open, Wozniacki becomes the first Dane to win a Grand Slam singles title. Halep, too, had been hoping to end the wait for a first major title to add to her number one ranking, but she has now lost in the Australian Open final as well as two French Opens.

"Of course I am sad but Caroline was better than me," she said. "I fight and have many years to go, so hopefully will face another challenge like today."

The final might have been begun at 19:30 local time but conditions were brutal, with the temperature above 30C until well into the night and the humidity oppressive.

Both women had endured testing paths to the final, saving match points along the way, and at times looked on the point of exhaustion in a gripping final set.

Wozniacki deservedly took the opener in a tie-break, having let a 4-1 lead slip, and Halep appeared in trouble when she required treatment from the doctor midway through the second set.

However, after having her blood pressure taken, the Romanian returned to take three of the four next games, levelling at one set all with a forehand winner.

The heat rule was in effect should either

player wish to use it, and Halep took the chance to halt proceedings for 10 minutes and allow both finalists to head off court in search of air-conditioning.

Halep had now spent over 13 hours on court during the tournament, while Wozniacki - who saved two match points against Jana Fett in round two - was approaching 12 hours.

The final set was a huge test of mind and body, and it produced some thrilling tennis. After twice breaking serve to edge ahead, Wozniacki looked to have let another Grand Slam chance slip away when she fell a break down at 4-3 in the decider and needed treatment to a knee injury.

Instead, Wozniacki was the one who grabbed the moment, playing superbly in the final three games.

With Halep now serving to stay in the contest, Wozniacki's brilliant defensive skills eventually forced an error on match point, leaving the Dane flat out and tearful on the Rod Laver Arena court.

'I want to thank my dad'

Wozniacki has spent 67 weeks at number one in her career, but it had been six years to the day since she last reached those heights, and four years since her second and last Grand Slam final.

By the time her ranking had plummeted to 74th in 2016, few thought she would ever

be in contention for the major prizes again. A change of approach was required and in tandem with her father and coach, Piotr, they developed a more attacking style that has taken her back to the top of the game.

With more pace off forehand and backhand, a much improved serve, and a gameplan to go on the offensive rather than rely on her athletic defence, Wozniacki climbed back up the rankings.

Six runner-up finishes in 2017 showed progress, despite concerns over whether she could go the last step, but victory in Tokyo, and then the biggest win of her career at the WTA Finals, set her up perfectly for 2018.

(Source: BBC)

U.S. to send record 242 athletes to Pyeongchang Games



The United States will send the largest team ever to attend a Winter Olympics, 242 athletes, to next month's Pyeongchang Games, the U.S. Olympic Committee announced on Friday.

Alpine skier Lindsey Vonn, figure skating favorite Nathan Chen and speedskater Shani Davis, the winner of four Olympic medals, headline the team of 107 women and 135 men who will be seeking to earn the United States their 100th Olympic gold and 300th medal.

The Americans won 28 medals, including nine golds, at the 2014 Sochi Olympics and with 103 Olympians returning, they are looking for an equally strong showing.

"It's been pretty brutal to wait for another Olympics," said Vonn, who will be making her fourth appearance at a Games having missed out on a trip to Sochi in 2014 with a knee injury.

"I am so excited, it is probably my last Olympics," added the 2010 Vancouver downhill gold medalist who recently claimed a record 79th World Cup race.

For Chen, a prediction he made as a

10-year-old that he would become an Olympian is about to become a reality.

"It is crazy," said the figure skater, "to think that eight years later here I am, I made that dream happen."

Ten Olympic champions are on the team, including five looking to defend their titles from the 2014 Sochi Games - Jamie Anderson (snowboarding slopestyle), Maddie Bowman (freestyle skiing halfpipe), Ted Ligety (Alpine skiing giant slalom), Mikaela Shiffrin (Alpine skiing slalom) and David Wise (freestyle skiing halfpipe).

"My confidence is through the roof right now," said Wise.

With 10 African-Americans, 11 Asian-Americans and the first two openly gay male athletes, the 2018 team is the most diverse U.S. team ever.

The squad also will feature the first African-American women to represent the United States in speedskating (Maame Biney and Erin Jackson) and the first African-American on the U.S. hockey team (Jordan Greenway).

(Source: Reuters)

Messi: I would rather win Barcelona titles than beat Cristiano



Lionel Messi insists that collective honours with Barcelona mean more to him than personal accolades as the Argentine dismisses talk of a sixth Ballon D'Or award.

The talismanic forward has fiercely battled with Real Madrid icon Cristiano Ronaldo in recent years to be crowned the best player in the world - a battle the Portuguese has edged more recently, winning back-to-back Ballon D'Or trophies.

But with Ernesto Valverde's side continuing their three-pronged trophy attack before the end of the season, Messi's focus is on those collective achievements.

"I've already said my objective is not individual prizes but to get all the trophies available," he told reporters at a sponsor's event in Barcelona.

"Hopefully, we will finish [the season] in the best way. I think we're on the right track.

"Luckily, things are going well. I'm happy with how things are going, although there's still a long way to go. It's the same [goal] as every season: to try to win everything."

While the award may not be Messi's primary focus, he is the early favourite

to lift the 2018 trophy next with 26 goals already this season across all competitions.

And with Ronaldo suffering a major dip in form, coinciding with Real Madrid's ongoing struggles, the Barcelona star has showed no signs of taking his foot off the pedal. The Camp Nou side sit 19 points ahead of Madrid, who sit fourth, in La Liga with the domestic title appearing to be beyond doubt.

Messi also masterminded the Copa del Rey quarter-final against Espanyol with a semi-final duel with Valencia the next hurdle in the cup competition.

Since Valverde began the 2017-18 campaign with a 5-1 aggregate defeat to Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup, the Catalans have lost just once since then and are looking more and more the European force of recent years.

While the two domestic trophies edge closer to the Barcelona trophy cabinet, Messi and his team-mates will have a steely determination to wrestle the Champions League from Ronaldo and Real this year.

(Source: Daily Mail)

U.S. Gymnastics board announce resignations

The remaining members of the USA Gymnastics board of directors will resign under pressure from the United States Olympic Committee after the USOC threatened to decertify the organization if it didn't take more strident steps toward change amid the fallout from the scandal surrounding former team doctor Larry Nassar.

The executive board, including chairman Paul Parilla, resigned Monday. USA Gymnastics announced Friday that the remaining 18 board members, who are unpaid volunteers representing various threads of the sport across the country, will leave their positions. The announcement came two days after an open letter from USOC chief operating officer Scott Blackmun called for a "full turnover of leadership."

USA Gymnastics said in a statement Friday it would comply with the USOC's wishes.

"USA Gymnastics supports the United States Olympic Committee's letter and accepts the absolute need of the Olympic family to promote a safe environment for all of our athletes," the organization wrote in a statement. "We agree with the USOC's statement that the interests of our athletes and clubs, and their sport, may be better served by moving forward with meaningful change within our organization,

rather than decertification."

One of the crown jewels of the U.S. Olympic movement is reeling following Nassar's conviction. The longtime team doctor, who spent more than 20 years with the organization before leaving in 2015, was sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison Wednesday for multiple accounts of sexual abuse. Part of the sentencing process included impact statements from 156 people, several of them high-profile Olympians such as six-time medalist Aly Raisman, 2011 world champion and 2012 Olympic gold-medalist Jordyn Wieber and two-time Olympic-medalist McKayla Maroney.

The sentencing hearing that allowed the young women to give a face and a voice to their abuse to millions of television viewers did what nearly 18 months of lawsuits and admissions by some of the most high-profile gymnasts in the country could not: move the needle enough to spur significant action.

USA Gymnastics did force out former president Steve Penny last spring and hired Kerry Perry in November as his replacement. The rest of the power structure, however, remained intact. Rachael Denhollander, the first person to come forward as a Nassar victim in the fall of 2016, asked

the board's executive officers to resign in August. Raisman talked repeatedly about the need for a complete organizational overhaul after outlining the abuse Nassar subjected her to in her book released in November. Olympic-champion Simone Biles came forward as a Nassar victim on Jan. 15 and wondered why she had to continue to train at the Karolyi Ranch in Texas, a place where she said Nassar abused her earlier in her career.

USA Gymnastics announced shortly after Biles' critique that it was ending its long relationship with the Karolyi Ranch. The board's executive officers stepped down Monday and the rest of the group will now follow suit.

"USA Gymnastics supports an independent investigation that may shine light on how abuse of the proportion described so courageously by the survivors of Larry Nassar could have gone undetected for so long and embraces any necessary and appropriate changes," the organization wrote. "USA Gymnastics and the USOC have the same goal -- making the sport of gymnastics, and others, as safe as possible for athletes to follow their dreams in a safe, positive and empowered environment."

(Source: ESPN)

Zahra Nemati to vie for World Archery's 2017 Athlete of the Year award

S P O R T S d e s k Two-time Paralympic gold medalist Zahra Nemati will vie for the World Archery's 2017 Athlete of the Year award with four other archers.

Zahra Nemati, Stretton Jessica (GB), Gogel Jane Karla (Brazil), Tatiana Andrievskaia (Russia) and Jiamin Zhou (China) have been nominated for the prestigious award.

Nemati claimed a gold medal at the 2017 World Archery Para Championships held in Beijing, China in September after beating Merve Nur Eroglu of Turkey, 6-2, in the final and finishing with a perfect 10-10-10.

Public voting for six Athlete of the Year awards is open until 7 February 2018, worldarchery.org reported.

Voting for World Archery's 2017 Athlete of the Year award winners was officially opened to the public on 24 January 2018 across six categories: recurve men, recurve women, compound men, compound women, para men and para women.

Nominees include the four new World Archery Champions, plus World Archery Para Champions and world number ones.

Voting is open until midnight central European time on Wednesday 7 February 2018.

The winners will be announced during the Indoor Archery World Cup Final, held after the second day of The Vegas Shoot, on Saturday 10 February 2018.

There will be no World Archery Gala held at Vegas in 2018 due to the Winter Olympics.



Iran crowned at World Taekwondo Grand Slam Champions Series

Press TV — The Iran men's national taekwondo team claimed the title at the conclusion of the Wuxi 2017 World Taekwondo Grand Slam Champions Series in China.

On Saturday, the Iranian sportsmen featured praiseworthy displays of spinning kicks and fast kicking techniques during the final team contests of the tournament, and could prevail over the hosts 76-56 to lift the trophy.



Earlier, the Iranian outfit had overpowered the Russian squad 39-20, and booked a spot in the title challenge.

The Iran men's national taekwondo team consisted of Armin Hadipour, Mirhashem Hosseini, Seyyed Hossein Ehsani, Erfan Nazemi, Mehdi Khodabakhshi and Saeed Rajabi.

They were under the tutelage of Seyyed Ne'mat Khalifah and Reza Imanzadeh as the head coach and coach.

The Wuxi 2017 World Taekwondo Grand Slam Champions Series kicked off on December 30, and ran through January 27, 2018.

Iran to play Tunisia on March 23: report



S P O R T S d e s k According to Tunisian media reports, Tunisia will host Iran on March 23 at Stade Hedi Ennaifer in Le Bardo, west of Tunis.

Iran will play Tunisia because of similarity of the team with Morocco.

Carlos Queiroz's team have been drawn in the 2018 World Cup Group B along with Spain, Morocco and Portugal.

Team Melli will open the campaign with a match against African powerhouse Morocco at Saint Petersburg on June 15.

The Persians, meanwhile, face Spain in Kazan on 20 June before meeting Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal in Saransk five days later.

Iran will also face Algeria as part of preparation for the World Cup.

Iran futsal team named for 2018 AFC Futsal Championship



S P O R T S d e s k Iranian national futsal team coach Mohammad Nazemalsharia has named Team Melli for the 2018 AFC Futsal Championship.

Iran have been drawn along with Iraq, China and Myanmar in Group C.

The competition will be held in Taiwan from Feb. 1 to 11.

Iran, champions of 11 of the 14 editions of the competition, have won seven straight editions before their streak was broken by Japan.

Japan have won the other three editions of the competition.

Squad:

Sepehr Mohammadi, Alireza Samimi, Farhad Tavakkoli, Hamid Ahmadi, Alireza Rafiei, Mohammad Shajari, Moslem Oladghoba, Mohammadreza Sangsefidi, Aliasghar Hassanzadeh, Mehran Alighadr, Ahmad Esmailpour, Ghodrat Bahadori, Ghassem Orouji, Hossein Tayyebi, Mehdi Javid and Saied Ahmad Abbasi

Persian Beach Soccer Cup: Iran 3 - 2 Azerbaijan

S P O R T S d e s k Iran national beach soccer team started the 2018 Persian Beach Soccer Cup on a high note.

Team Melli defeated Azerbaijan 3-2 in in Bushehr, southern Iran. Mostafa Kiani (two goals) and Mohammad Moradi scored for the Iranian team.

The competition is being held from January 27 to 29. Earlier in the day, Spain defeated Ukraine 6-2.

On Sunday, much-changed Iran will face Ukraine and Spain play Azerbaijan.

Marco Octavio's team take part in the tournament with a mix of experienced and young players.

Iran won the title in the first edition which was held with the participation of Poland, Ukraine and Italy.

The Iranian squad defeated the national Italian beach soccer team - nicknamed Gli Azzurri (The Blues) - 4-3 in the final showdown on February 16, 2017.

Everton chief tried to sign Azmoun, according to Kurban Berdyev

Berdyev was cited as saying: "The Everton owner came to me and tried to negotiate a transfer."

Azmoun, dubbed 'the Iranian Messi', a comparison he isn't overly fond of, was the subject of "crazy interest" during the summer according to his manager Berdyev, who believes the clamor over his services affected his performances for Rubin during the first part of the current campaign.

The 23-year-old Iran international's father was apparently contacted by Arsenal and Celtic, but Berdyev revealed that Everton

chief Moshiri contracted him personally in order to try and pry his compatriot away from the Kazan Arena, where he scored once in 19 appearances for The Kamni this season.

"There was huge, crazy interest in Azmoun in the summer," Berdyev was quoted as saying by the Daily Record. "Top clubs called us and his father - Arsenal and Celtic. The Everton owner came on to me and tried to negotiate a transfer. Azmoun has millions of fans and gets incredible attention, he could not cope with his load."

"After a good season with Rostov, it all

turned his head - but he has passed through that now. He is back to himself."

Everton were linked with a whole host of forwards during the summer transfer window as they sought a replacement for the outgoing Romelu Lukaku, but it took them until January to eventually secure the Belgian's successor.

Cenk Tosun arrived from Turkish outfit Besiktas in a deal worth around £25m, while Spanish forward Sandro Ramirez, who arrived in the summer from Malaga, has endured a miserable time at Goodison Park and is angling for a move away from Merseyside already.

It remains to be seen whether Moshiri reignites his interest in Azmoun, who was courted by Everton's close rivals Liverpool not so long ago, in the summer, but the former Arsenal shareholder will not - and perhaps should not - have a much of a say in recruitment if PSV director of football Marcel Brands comes in to aid the much-maligned Steve Walsh; the Toffees are in talks with the Dutchman over a position that would see him tasked with improving the club's global scouting network.

(Source: ???)

Sidorov the hero as Uzbekistan emerge champion

substitute Andrey Sidorov struck in the final minute of extra-time to help Uzbekistan seal the AFC U23 Championship China 2018 title with a narrow 2-1 win over Vietnam on Saturday.

The striker was on hand to convert a Dostonbek Khamdamov corner with his first touch of the game, after a 1-1 draw had forced the game into an additional 30 minutes.

While Uzbekistan's victory saw them add to the AFC U-16 Championship title they won in 2012, it also brought the curtain down on a remarkable Vietnam campaign, one which will live long in the memory of the Southeast Asian nation's supporters.

In decidedly wintry conditions at the Changzhou Olympic Sports Center, it was Uzbekistan who controlled the early proceedings, and they duly took the lead on eight minutes when a poorly marked Rustamjon Ashurmatov headed home Khamdamov's outswinging corner.

Uzbekistan continued to press after the breakthrough, as both a Javokhir Sidikov header and Khamdamov's effort from 20 yards forced Vietnam goalkeeper Bui Tien Dung into smart saves.

Despite struggling to fully impose themselves on the



game, Vietnam briefly threatened to restore parity shortly after the half hour mark when Pham Xuan Manh's excellent cross narrowly eluded the onrushing Phan Vanh Duc and Nguyen Quang Hai.

However, after seeing Azizjon Ganiev fire narrowly over, Vietnam drew level on the stroke of half-time. Nguyen Cong Phuong was brought down on the edge of the area,

and from the resulting free-kick Quang Hai superbly curled the ball past the despairing dive of Botirali Ergashev to register his fifth goal of the tournament.

After a delayed restart to allow a layer of snow to be removed from the pitch, Uzbekistan were the first to shine once again, this time Khamdamov stinging the palms of Tien Dung courtesy of a 48th minute long-range drive.

Moments later, Tien Dung, the hero of Vietnam's semi-final win over Iraq, reacted well to deny Sidikov from six yards, before Uzbekistan captain Zabikhillo Urinboev fizzed a shot wide of the left-hand upright on 70 minutes.

In the last meaningful action of normal time, Urinboev could, and very possibly should, have won the match for the Central Asians, but the striker inexplicably lashed his attempt from eight yards over the bar after Tien Dung had parried Akramjon Komilov's cross into his path.

Urinboev's miss was to matter little in the end though, as Sidorov applied an expert finish to Khamdamov's last gasp corner at the end of additional time to seal the title for Uzbekistan and break Vietnamese hearts on a day of high drama.

(Source: AFC)

Ekwalla Herman linked with Esteghlal

TASNIM — Cameroonian striker Yves Ekwalla Herman has been linked with a move to Iranian top-flight football team Esteghlal.

The 28-year-old forward has traveled to Iran to participate at the club's medical examination.

He currently plays for China League One club Xinjiang Tianshan Leopard.

Cameroonian striker Christian Bekamenga, Portuguese forward Yazalde Gomes Pinto and Nigerian Salisu Abdullahi "Alhaji" Gero had been already linked with Esteghlal.

The Blues need to strengthen their forward line for the 2018 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 the competition.

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.

Iran to debut at Blind Football Worlds

Iran along with five other countries will participate at the 2018 International Blind Sports Association (IBSA) Blind Football World Championships for the first time.

The competition will feature sixteen national blind football teams for the first time in June in Madrid, Spain.

Iran, Mali, Costa Rica, Russia, Thailand and Mexico will make their debut at this competition.

Iran ensured their spot at the 2018 World Championships after taking silver at the 2017 Asian Championships.

They topped Group B and qualified for the semi-final, where Iran defeated Thailand 3-2 on penalties. Rio 2016 silver medalists Iran met China in the final as they did in 2015, but the latter won 2-0 to prevent Iran from retaining the title.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Mansour Ebrahimzadeh appointed Sepahan coach

TASNIM — Mansour Ebrahimzadeh has been named as new head coach of Sepahan football team on Saturday.

The former Zob Ahan coach has reached an agreement with Isfahan-based football club and will head Sepahan until the end of the season.

Ebrahimzadeh replaces Zlatko Kranjcar, who was sacked last week following poor results in Iran Professional League.

Yahya Golmohammadi, who has been dismissed as his coaching role in Tractor Sazi Tabriz, and former Esteghlal coach Alireza Mansourian were also among the candidates to coach Sepahan.

Sepahan sit 13th in Iran Professional League, just six points above the relegation zone.

Pelicans' Cousins suffers ankle injury

New Orleans Pelicans center DeMarcus Cousins could be out for the remainder of the season after sustaining a left ankle injury in Friday's game against the Houston Rockets.

Cousins went down in the final seconds after pursuing his own free throw and had to be helped off the court.

He finished with 15 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists.

Pelicans coach Alvin Gentry says Cousins would get an MRI on Saturday. He had just been picked as part of LeBron James' team in the upcoming All Star Game.

"We just have to keep going, that's all we can do," team mate Anthony Davis told reporters. "We have just got to move on to the next game Sunday and try and go out there and do the same thing."

(Source: Reuters)

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“Subdued” named best at Lebanese filmfest

A R T TEHRAN — “Subdued” by Hamid Nematollah from Iran has been named best narrative at the First Jounieh International Film Festival in Lebanon, the organizers have announced.



Leila Hatami and Kurosh Tahami act in a scene from “Subdued” by Hamid Nematollah.

The film had competed with five other movies at the event running in the Lebanese coastal city from January 17 to 22. “Dry Hot Summers” by Sherif El Bendary from Egypt received the Public Award and “Un Paese Di Calabria” by Shu Aiello and Catherine Catella won the award for best documentary. The film is a co-production of France, Switzerland and Italy.

A golden idea? Museum offered 18-karat toilet to Trump

NEW YORK (Reuters) — New York’s Guggenheim Museum offered to lend an 18-karat gold toilet to President Donald Trump after the White House asked to borrow a painting by Vincent Van Gogh, the Washington Post reported on Thursday.

The museum’s chief curator offered to loan the toilet, which had been used by tens of thousands of visitors, in a Sept. 15 email to a Trump administration official, the newspaper reported. A Guggenheim spokeswoman declined immediate comment on the Washington Post report and White House officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

It was not clear how the White House responded to the Guggenheim curator’s offer. The piece, by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan’s, is an 18-karat gold, fully functioning toilet. It is called “America”.

It was put on display in 2016 in a single-stall bathroom at the Guggenheim, where it was used in private luxury by more than 100,000 people, according to a Guggenheim blog post. The museum said the object, which was on display for a year, “skewers social complacencies” and the extravagances of the wealthy.

Trump, a real estate developer turned reality television star, campaigned for president as a savvy businessman with the commercial sense to succeed in the White House. His exact personal wealth is unknown.

The offer came in response to a White House request to borrow the painting “Landscape with Snow” by 19th century Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh, for installation at the president and first lady’s private living quarters, the Washington Post reported. The request for the painting was declined.



Maurizio Cattelan’s “America”, a fully functional solid gold toilet is seen at The Guggenheim Museum in New York City, U.S., August 30, 2017. (Reuters/Brendan McDermid)

Guggenheim chief curator Nancy Spector had previously written about the toilet in a 2017 blog post, in which she took swipes at the president. She wrote that the “Trump reference” inherent in the gold toilet resonated with people “during the sculpture’s time at the Guggenheim.”

“When the sculpture came off view on Sept. 15, Trump had been in office for 238 days, a term marked by scandal and defined by the deliberate rollback of countless civil liberties, in addition to climate-change denial that puts our planet in peril,” Spector wrote.

Trump is known to have a taste for gold and gilded objects. On Christmas Eve, he took calls from children while seated on a gold chair in a tapestried room at his Florida vacation home.

Charles-Henri de Foucheour honored for translation of Shams-i Tabrizi articles

A R T TEHRAN — French Orientalist and Hafez expert Charles-Henri de Foucheour has been honored for translating the articles of Shams-i Tabrizi, the wandering sage who later became the mentor of the Persian poet and mystic Molana Jalal ad-Din Rumi in the 13th century CE.

The honoring ceremony took place at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Inalco) in Paris last Wednesday in collaboration with Iran’s cultural office in the French capital.

De Foucheour has published the book under the title “La Quête du Joyau: Maqâlât-e Shams al-din Tabrizi” in October 2017.

The book contains the direct teachings of the outstanding master Shams, having been restored through notes taken by his disciples.

Born in the city of Tabriz, Shams lived together with Rumi in Konya for several years, and has been immortalized in Rumi’s collection of poetry named the “Divan of Shams ad-Din of Tabriz”.

A number of Iranian and French scholars including the France-based Iranian scholar Leili Anvar and French philosopher and Islamologist Christian Jambet attended the ceremony.

Speaking at the ceremony, Iranian Islamologist Mohammad Amir-Moezzi, who has been friends with De Foucheour for over 40 years, called the book unique for a distinctive character like Shams.

Jambet also regarded the translation as clear and lucid due to his comprehensive knowledge of Persian history and culture.

De Foucheour for his part called the book full of secrets and mysteries that feature



Enthusiasts of Persian literature come together at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Inalco) in Paris on January 24, 2018 to attend a ceremony held to honor French Orientalist Charles-Henri de Foucheour (3rd L).

traditions and thoughts.

De Foucheour is also famous for his translation of the Divan of Hafez. He served as the director of the Iranology Department of l’Institut Français in Tehran from 1975

to 1979. From 1972 to 1985, he also held the chair of Persian literature at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris.

His work in the field of classical Persian

literature is vast. He was the founder and director of Abstracta Iranica, a bibliographical and critical review of Iranian studies. He has published over 50 articles on Persian literature.

Swiss troupe cancels Fajr performance after actor injury

A R T TEHRAN — A Swiss troupe participating in the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival in Tehran with “Tschägg” canceled its Saturday night performance after director/actor Lucie Eidenbenz broke her foot during a rehearsal few days ago, the organizers announced on Saturday.

The organizers had arranged two performances for the play and Eidenbenz didn’t accept to cancel them due to her respect for the theatergoers who had booked tickets in advance.

Therefore, the play was performed on Friday night, but

she failed to continue for the second performance scheduled for Saturday.

Ticket refunds for the Saturday night will be available at the point of purchase, the organizers of the festival said.

“Tschägg” is an attempt to approach “inner raucousness” through dance. The performance questions our perception of outsiders by questioning authenticity, tourism and globalization.

The Fajr International Theater Festival will come to an end by honoring top performances at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall this evening.



Swiss director/actor Lucie Eidenbenz (R) and her colleague perform “Tschägg” during the 36th Fajr International Theater Festival at Tehran’s Charsu Hallon January 26, 2018.

“The Magic Mountain” opens Polish film festival in Tehran

A R T TEHRAN — Anca Damian’s “The Magic Mountain”, a mixed-media animated film about a Polish oppositionist who joined the Afghan mujahideen to fight the Soviet Union in the 1980s, opened a Polish film festival in Tehran on Saturday.



A still from “The Magic Mountain” by Anca Damian

Several films have been selected to go on screen during the six-day event running at the Cinematheque of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, the museum has announced.

“The Collector” by Feliks Falk will go on screen on Monday, and on Tuesday, “Papusza” by Krzysztof Krauze and Joanna Kos-Krauze will be screened.

“Essential Killing”, a 2010 Polish thriller by Jerzy Skolimowski, will be screened on Wednesday. The screening will be followed by a review session, which is scheduled to be attended by Polish film critic Artur Zebrowski and Iranian critic Hossein Eidzadeh.

“White Paper” by Jacek Lusinski and “Blindness” by Ryszard Bugaiski will be shown on Thursday. Zebrowski and Eidzadeh will also attend a review session for “Blindness”.

The films will go on screen in their original language with Persian subtitles.

“Polanski” to go on stage in Tehran

A R T TEHRAN — An Iranian troupe will go on stage at Tehran’s Paliz Theater tonight to perform “Polanski”, a play that is about the ups and downs the French-Polish director Roman Polanski has had in his life.

The play will be directed by Mohammad Mir-Aliakbari who is also the writer of the drama.

A cast of 27 actors, including Arash Falahatpisheh, Ali Najafi, Tinu Salehi, Parisa Mohammadi, Mehdi Nosrati and Armita Qobadi, will perform the play for 20 nights.

Since 1978, Polanski has been a fugitive from the U.S. criminal justice system where after being charged with drugging and raping a 13-year-old girl, he then fled the country.

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