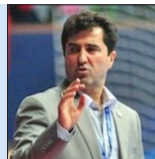




Trump's remarks confirm his 'ignorance' of Iran: Zarif **2**



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Expectations are very high, Iran futsal coach says **15**



Iranian artist Sadeq Tabrizi dies at 79 in London **16**

# Fajr festival to premiere two Daesh dramas



Ali Nasirian (2nd R) acts in a scene from "Emperor of Hell" by director Parviz Sheikhtadi.

File photo

## Nation backs Islamism, Republicanism despite foreign pressure: Rouhani

**POLITICS** **TEHRAN** — President Hassan Rouhani said on Wednesday that the Iranian people continue supporting the Islamic Republic system despite pressure by foreigners.

Rouhani made the remarks while visiting - along with his cabinet members - the shrine of Imam Khomeini and the tombs of the martyrs of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Rouhani said, "Those who think they can decide for Iran's future by resorting to the United Nations Security Council should realize that the Iranian nation will never give up Imam Khomeini's legacy: Islamism and Republicanism."

"Return is impossible," he stressed. The remarks came just hours after U.S. President Donald Trump said Washington stands with the people of Iran against the country's ruling establishment. **→2**

## Iran plans to add 1GW solar, wind capacity to current 400MW in a year

**ECONOMY** **TEHRAN** — Iranian deputy energy minister put the country's current solar and wind farms capacity at 400 megawatts (MW) saying that the figure will increase to 1.4 gigawatts (GW) in the next Iranian calendar year (March 2018-March 2019). Homayoon Haeri said: "At the moment,

Iran's power capacity is 80,000 MW and renewables have the potential to make up at least 20,000 MG of this number", IRNA reported on Wednesday.

The official noted that the country plans to add 1,000 megawatts (MW) or 1 gigawatt (GW) of new renewable power capacity every year over the next five years. **→4**

## Hepatitis Network urges end to employment discrimination

**SOCIETY** **TEHRAN** — The head of Iran's Hepatitis Network has officially demanded elimination of employment discrimination against patients suffering from hepatitis.

In a letter to the Administrative Justice Court, Seyed Mo'ayyed Alavian said it is necessary to lift ban on employing

hepatitis patients in state bodies, Tasnim reported on Tuesday.

On behalf of 1.6 million hepatitis patients nationwide, Alavian mentioned that some governmental bodies, including the Education Ministry, require pre-employment anti-hepatitis testing for applicants. **→12**

## Sochi talks and strategic agreement in the shadow of rifts

By Ramin Hossein Abadian

A new round of peace talks between the Syrian government and the Syrian opposition wrapped up in the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi with an accord that called for establishment of a "constitutional committee."

The Syrian peace talks commenced in Sochi after a long struggle. The meeting ended after Syrian opposition voices did their utmost to defeat the talks. Some of the armed opposition groups who were also part of talks set prior preconditions but faced serious objections from Moscow, the host of the event.

The Syrian dissidents delayed the meeting for two and a half hours.

During the meeting, the parties agreed to continue talks in Geneva to resolve outstanding issues.

The talks began Monday and ended on Tuesday. The Syrian government and opposition did agree to draft a new constitution. According to the UN special envoy for Syria, Steffan de Mistura, who also took part in the meeting, the Syrian government and all Syrian opposition groups will

be collaborating in writing the new constitution to end the seven-year conflict in the country.

At the end of the meeting, a statement was issued in which it put emphasis on the Syrian territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty.

The statement read: "We agreed that the constitutional committee consisting of the Syrian Arab Republic delegation should be formed along with the present delegations to formulate constitutional amendments that would assist in the UN-mandated political settlement and in accordance with Security Council resolution 2254."

The statement also said, "The constitutional committee is at least composed of representatives of Syrian opposition, Syrian experts, civil society, independent and nomadic leaders as well as women."

According to the statement, "mission, definition of referrals, authorities, rules of procedure and selection of composition of the constitutional committee" are all to be determined by the Geneva talks, which is under the control of the United Nations. The fact is that coming to an agreement

to establish a constitutional committee was one of the key outcomes in the Syrian political crisis. The agreement came at a time when the Syrian opponents had made all efforts to defeat the talks.

While some reports suggested postponement of the Sochi talks till February, the vigilant Russian authorities defeated the subterfuges and the talks moved on as planned.

Russian officials contacted the Turkish government, as the main sponsor of the opposition groups, for a solution. That is how the negotiations managed to get going.

The meeting ended with an agreement among all influential actors in the Syrian crisis in the presence of the United Nations, the primary observer of the wrangling, which expressed strong support for the accord.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also described the meeting as a "successful step" in the development of a solution to the Syrian crisis and added that even groups who didn't attend the Sochi meeting could be members of the planned constitutional committee. **→13**



**ARTICLE**  
By Hanif Ghaffari  
political analyst

## Trump may be digging his own political grave

Donald Trump is facing difficulties these days. The recent halt of the U.S. government because of a temporary absence of funding demonstrated that not only Democrat senators but also some Republican senators oppose him. In other words, Trump's popularity troubles are not just about general public opinion but it includes a few dissenters from his own party. Senators like Jeff Flick, John McCain, and even Lindsay Graham are unhappy with some of the policies and behaviors of the President. They know all too well that Trump threatens their reelection bids later this year and could lead to the loss of the GOP majority in the Senate and Congressional dominance by the Democrats.

Another important point is that the possible Democrats' victories in the coming Congressional elections may be a prelude to their victory in the 2020 presidential election. Thus, some Republicans have decided to react with some negativity to Trump's outrageous postures. Polls conducted in late 2017 found that 31 percent of Republican supporters were unwilling to vote for Trump in the next presidential election. This has emboldened the Democrats, and especially those like Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders, who are considered likely candidates for the Democratic Party nomination in the 2020 presidential election, and we may again witness Democrats in the White House.

Many American analysts believe that if this sentiment advances, Trump could be rejected. It should not be forgotten that in the 2016 presidential election, Trump did not beat Clinton in the popular vote count, **→13**



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## Leader pays tribute to Imam Khomeini

Leader of the Islamic revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday morning paid tribute to the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, ahead of the Ten-Day Fajr (Dawn) ceremonies that mark the victory of 1979 Islamic revolution.

The Leader also paid homage to Iranian martyrs laid to rest in Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery in southern Tehran.

The Iranian nation toppled the U.S.-backed Pahlavi regime 38 years ago, on February 11, 1979, ending the 2,500 years of monarchic rule in the country.



**PERSPECTIVE**  
Javad Heirannia  
political analyst

## Urgently needed: a new security framework for Persian Gulf

The implementation of effective security mechanisms in the Persian Gulf region has always been a matter of concern for the Gulf States. The main objective is to have a common goal, and hence, construct techniques to achieve stable regional security.

But the Gulf States have not been able to establish a clear definition of the level of security needed in the Persian Gulf and how to maintain the peace in this strategically significant region. A power struggle has grown more intense among the Gulf States, some of whom demand supremacy in their absolute power and control over the Persian Gulf. A case in point is the current conflict between Saudi Arabia (and the UAE) and Qatar. But there is also the ongoing war in Yemen as well as the larger confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Because of these conflicts, it is vital for all the regional states to negotiate a new security order for the Persian Gulf.

There are various obstacles that have hindered the establishment of stable and sustainable security in the Persian Gulf region. The demand by some Gulf States for dominance over the region, political and ideological differences, and the competitive procurement of weapons have all caused friction among the Gulf States, thereby preventing them from cooperating with one another in creating security in the region.

Although it is imperative that security be arranged over the long term, the manner by which this can be achieved has remained elusive. **→7**

### TENDER INVITATION NO. 96/1014

IRAN ALUMINIUM COMPANY (IRALCO) , Would like to invite eligible suppliers for the supply of new cathode Block on tender basis.

Interested companies are allowed to send their competitive offer till

**14-Feb-2017** based on our required instruction to mentioned address in tender document:

For obtaining tender's documents and more information, please check:

[www.iralco.ir](http://www.iralco.ir)

Public Relations Department of Iran Aluminum Company



### TENDER INVITATION NO. 96/1013

IRAN ALUMINIUM COMPANY (IRALCO) , Would like to invite eligible suppliers for the supply of Side Wall cathode Block on tender basis.

Interested companies are allowed to send their competitive offer till

**14-Feb-2017** based on our required instruction to mentioned address in tender document:

For obtaining tender's documents and more information, please check:

[www.iralco.ir](http://www.iralco.ir)

Public Relations Department of Iran Aluminum Company





MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



President Rouhani to visit India in February

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani is scheduled to make a visit to India in February, The Times of India reported on Wednesday.

Rouhani's visit is scheduled to take place after Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns from another trip to West Asia, including Palestine, the UAE and Oman.

India and Iran have started development of Chahbahar port, giving Afghanistan a route to the sea bypassing Pakistan.

On Dec. 25, Rouhani signed into force the Chabahr international transport and transit corridor agreement between the governments of Iran, Afghanistan and India.



Adviser hails Hamas, Islamic Jihad Movement

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — A special assistant to Iran's parliament speaker has praised Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement for their leading role in their struggle against the occupation of Palestinian lands by Israel.

In a meeting with the representative of Hamas in Tehran on Tuesday, Hossein Amir Abdollahian said Hamas and Islamic Jihad Movement are two pillars of resistance against the Zionist regime, Tasnim reported.

For his part, Khaled Qadoumi expressed gratitude to Iran for supporting Palestine and for its stances against the U.S. administration's move to recognize Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of Israel.



Ali Khomeini to address ceremony marking Imam Khomeini's return

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Seyed Ali Khomeini is scheduled to address a ceremony on Thursday marking the anniversary of Imam Khomeini's return to Iran from exile on Feb 1, 1979.

The anniversary is scheduled to be held at the Imam Khomeini mausoleum from 9 to 11 a.m. local time

The day that Imam Khomeini returned to Iran from exile marks the beginning of the Ten-Day Dawn ceremonies which culminate with the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution on February 11, 1979.



Al-Nujaba's secretary general meets Gen. Soleimani

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Sheikh Akram Al-Kaabi, secretary general of the al-Nujaba resistance group, has met with Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's Quds Force, al-Nujaba Telegram channel reported on Wednesday.

Hezbollah al-Nujaba group is a major Iraqi Shia resistance movement which has been fighting Daesh (ISIL) terrorists in Iraq and Syria.

Earlier this month, Mojtaba Hosseini, the Leader's representative, met al-Kaabi in Baghdad, lauding the group's role in the defeat of Daesh in Iraq and Syria.



MPs visit Evin prison, view footage of inmate's suicide

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Ten Iranian lawmakers visited the Evin prison for three hours on Tuesday afternoon to visit those detained in the recent unrest.

The head of Majlis Judicial and Legal Committee Allahyar Malekshahi said on Tuesday that while at the prison the group of MPs viewed CCTV footage of the suicide of a young man while in custody, ISNA reported

The MPs were accompanied by head of Prisons Organization and also director general for prisons in Tehran Province.

They had requested to visit the Evin Prison after reports emerged that one of the detainees had committed suicide.



Press TV crew attacked in Turkish military operation in Syria

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Press TV's crew has come under attack in the Syrian town of Rajo in the Afrin district near the Turkish border during Turkey's military operation in northwestern Syria.

The incident occurred on Tuesday, as the Press TV team was investigating the damage to a school during the Turkish offensive.

According to Press TV correspondent Zahra al-Derzi, members of the team suffered injuries during bombing and shelling of the town.

Turkey launched the so-called Operation Olive Branch against Afrin in northwest Syria on January 20 in a bid to eliminate the U.S.-backed YPG.

# Quds is undeniable capital of Palestine: Araqchi

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — In response to U.S. President Donald Trump's recent decision to recognize Quds (Jerusalem) as capital of Israel, a top Iranian diplomat said on Wednesday that Quds is the undeniable capital of the Muslim world and Palestine.

Addressing a conference entitled, "Al-Quds, Capital of Peace among Religions," Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said Trump's decision on Quds has been rightly condemned by the Muslim world as well as the international community, Mehr reported.

On December 6, the U.S. president declared that he recognizes Quds as the capital of Israel and ordered the relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Quds.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will always voice vehement condemnation against this irrational move by the American president, and will stand against any attempts at making a change in the status quo of Quds city," Araqchi remarked.

"[Trump's] move is not only unfair, but it also contravenes the UN resolutions," he added.

Quds is a respected place for all divine religions and it should remain so, Araqchi stressed.

Describing Quds as the first Qibla of Muslims, he emphasized that the issue of Quds is considered as the main issue of the Muslim world and should be kept alive.



## Quds is a respected place for all divine religions and it should remain so, Araqchi stresses.

He also condemned any move to attract attention to the Muslim world except for the issue of Palestine and Quds.

The Zionist regime should be described as a threat to the Muslim world, the official said.

Araqchi once again reaffirmed the position of the Islamic Republic in support of Quds as the "inseparable and inviolable" capital of Palestine, calling on all Muslims in the world to work together toward the liberation of Quds.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Araqchi said the enemies are trying to derail Muslims from their main goals through formation of terrorist groups, fanning the flames of civil wars and creating division among Muslims.

## Trump's remarks confirm his 'ignorance' of Iran: Zarif

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has rejected the U.S. president's latest claim that he is standing alongside Iranian people, saying Donald Trump's assertion once again demonstrated his "ignorance" of the realities on the ground in Iran and the wider region.

According to Press TV, in his first State of the Union address to Congress on Tuesday, Trump claimed his foreign policy is focused on strengthening "friendships around the world" while "restoring clarity about our adversaries."

Trump also boasted of his meddling stance on a wave of scattered riots that hit a number of Iranian cities last

month, saying, "I did not stay silent. America stands with the people of Iran in their courageous struggle for freedom."

He also reiterated his hostile stance on the 2015 multilateral nuclear agreement, saying, "I am asking the Congress to address the fundamental flaws in the terrible Iran nuclear deal."

Shortly after the address, Zarif tweeted that the U.S. president's comments show he actually lacks knowledge about issues concerning Iran and the region.

"Trump again confirms his ignorance of Iran & region. Everyone knows where he stands; and it's certainly not with Iranians," Zarif remarked.



## Tehran says military advisors to leave Syria after victory over terror

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — An Iranian diplomat who had participated in the Sochi talks on Syria said on Tuesday that Iranian military advisory forces will leave Syria after victory over terrorism.

Hossein Jaber Ansari, the assistant foreign minister for political affairs, made the remarks in talks to reporters on the sidelines of the Syrian peace conference in the Russian resort city of Sochi.

"Iranian forces entered Syria at the request of the Syrian government in order to help the Syrian government in the battle against terrorism," said Jaber Ansari, who was leading the Iranian delegation to Sochi.



"It is obvious that once their job is finished, they will withdraw from the Syrian territory," he added.

Sochi hosted talks between the Syrian government and the opposition in the hope

of paving the way for a peaceful settlement of the seven-year conflict gripping Syria.

The Syrian Congress of National Dialog started on Monday and continued till Tuesday. The talks were moderated by Russia and Iran, on the side of Damascus, and Turkey, which aligns itself with several armed opposition groups.

Jaber Ansari earlier on Tuesday said that the Sochi conference was a positive step in efforts to end the Syrian crisis, adding that the various segments of the Syrian political community were represented in the congress.

Ansari added that Iran called on Turkey

to urge the different opposition groups to attend the conference, however it appeared that Turkey's influence was limited.

Commenting on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Moscow, Ansari said that Israel is the main beneficiary of the Syria crisis and that Russia would not be involved in the Israeli scheme.

Also on Tuesday, Jaber Ansari held talks with United Nations Special Envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura.

The two sides stressed the importance of continued consultation and cooperation to find a peaceful solution to the ongoing conflict in Syria.

## CIA chief's remarks solely intended to sow discord among regional nations, Iran says

The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman says CIA Director Mike Pompeo's anti-Tehran accusations are an example of the United States' meddling policies.

"The repeating of such cheap accusations is solely aimed at establishing division among Muslim countries and nations in the region," said Bahram Qassemi early on Wednesday.

He added that Washington's policies in the Middle East are a serious threat to the interests of regional nations, and a major hindrance towards their coming together.

Qassemi also said that the U.S. plays a major role in the rise of extremism and instability in the region by supporting terrorist groups.

"Neighbors always come first in Iran's foreign policy," he said while stressing Tehran's respect for its neighbor's sovereignty and territorial integrity.



The Foreign Ministry spokesman's comments were made in response to remarks made by Pompeo during a BBC interview published late Monday.

## Nation backs Islamism, Republicanism despite foreign pressure: Rouhani

**1 →** During his State of the Union address, Trump called the Islamic Republic a "corrupt dictatorship" and said "America stands with the people of Iran in their courageous struggle for freedom."

"As long as people love the culture of Islam and love their Iran and safeguard their national unity, no superpower can change the path of this nation," Rouhani

responded.

He also hinted that the country's authorities should listen to what people want and draw on the lessons of the past, especially the Shah's fall.

"All officials of the country should have a listening ear for people's demands and wishes," he said.

"The previous regime thought it would

rule forever, but lost everything because it didn't listen to people's criticism and advice," the president warned. "It only heard the voice of people's Revolution."

Rouhani and his entourage also visited the tombs of the martyrs of the eight-year Holy Defense against the invading Saddam army and the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The day Imam Khomeini returned to Iran from exile (Feb 1, 1979) marks the beginning of the Ten-Day Dawn in ceremonies which culminate with the anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution on February 11, 1979.

Iranians toppled the U.S.-backed Pahlavi regime 39 years ago, ending 2,500 years of monarchy in the country.

## Iranian governor fired for insulting journalist

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Hossein Ferasat, the governor of Golpayegan city in central Iran, was sacked on Wednesday after insulting and threatening a journalist.

Golpayegan is a city in Isfahan province.

"The (local) official was dismissed for his ill behavior towards a journalist in Golpayegan," said Gholamreza Qa'ediha, an official from Isfahn province.

He added that Mohammad Reza Tavassoli has been appointed as caretaker governor of Golpayegan.

Ferasat had shown violent behavior towards a journalist while visiting a project in Golpayegan on Tuesday.

"If you take a photo of me, I will beat you and kick you out of here," he had told the journalist.

The governor was captured on a video which went viral in a matter of hours.

Mohsen Mehrizadeh, the governor of Isfahan province, extended an official apology to the journalist last night and vowed to sack the local governor.





# Bahraini top cleric hospitalized after long delay for urgent treatment

Senior Bahraini cleric Sheikh Isa Qassim has been transferred to hospital to undergo a hernia surgery, 10 days after he was said to be in critical condition under house arrest.

Bahrain's main opposition party, al-Wefaq National Islamic Society announced the news in a statement on Wednesday.

Al-Wefaq said Sheikh Qassim slammed the Bahraini regime's total indifference toward the cleric's deteriorating health condition and said Sheikh Qassim had been in desperate need of surgery for ten days.

The cleric has been living under virtual siege since Manama revoked his citizenship in June 2016, prompting protests and sit-ins in his home-town of Diraz. Bahraini authorities later dissolved the Islamic Enlightenment Institution, founded by him, in addition to the opposition al-Risala Islamic Association.

In May 2017, a Bahraini court convicted Sheikh Qassim of illegal collection of funds and money laundering, and sentenced him to one year in jail.

It also ordered him to pay \$265,266 in fines. The court ruling sparked widespread demonstrations across the kingdom.

On Monday, a legal source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Bahrain's Supreme Court upheld the one-year jail term for Sheikh Qassim.

## Two sentenced to death

Meanwhile, a court in Bahrain has issued death sentences against two people and handed down heavy sentences to dozens of others over accusations of forming an illegal group, engaging in terrorist activities and killing a police officer.

The court, which tried 60 people over accusations of forming an illegal group, handed down life prison terms to 19 individuals and issued long jail terms, from 15 to five years, for 27 others. The court also revoked the nationalities of 47 defendants and confiscated all their assets.

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



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

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

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of

others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the House of Khalifah regime's crackdown.

On March 5, 2017, Bahrain's parliament approved the trial of civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countrywide. King Hamad ratified the constitutional amendment on April 3 last year.

(Source: Press TV)

## Syrian Congress of National Dialog: final statement

The following is the final statement of the Syrian Congress of National Dialog, which was hosted by Russia in the resort city of Sochi on January 29 and 30, 2018, with delegates from the Syrian government and opposition in attendance:

### Final statement

We, the delegates of the Congress of the Syrian national dialog, representing all segments of Syrian society, its political and civil powers, ethnic, confessional, and social groups, have assembled at the invitation of the friendly Russian Federation, in the city of Sochi, with the intention to put an end to seven years suffering of our people, through the achievement of a common understanding of the necessity for the salvation of our homeland from armed confrontation, social, and economic ruin, the restoration of its dignity on the regional and world stage, the provision of fundamental rights and liberties for all its citizens, and most importantly, the right to a peaceful and free life without violence and terror. The only way to achieve this particular goal is the political settlement of the problems of our homeland on the basis of the following principles:

1. Respect of and full commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and unity of the [Syrian Arab Republic/state of Syria] as a land and a people. In this regard no part of the national territory shall be ceded. The people of Syria remain committed to the recovery of the occupied Syrian Golan by all lawful means in accordance with the United Nations Charter and international law;
2. Respect of and full commitment to Syria's national sovereign equality and rights regarding non-intervention. Syria shall take its full role in the international community and the region, including as part of the Arab world, in conformity with the UN Charter, and its purposes and principles;
3. The Syrian people alone shall determine the future of their country by democratic means, through the ballot box, and shall have the exclusive right to choose their own political, economic, and social system without external pressure or interference, in line with Syria's international rights and obligations;
4. The [Syrian Arab Republic/state of Syria] shall be a democratic and non-sectarian state based on political pluralism and equal citizenship irrespective of religion, ethnicity and gender, with full respect for and protection



of the rule of law, the separation of powers, judicial independence, the full equality of all citizens, the cultural diversity of the Syrian society, and public freedoms, including freedom of belief, featuring transparent, inclusive, accountable, and answerable governance, including before the national law, with necessary effective measures to combat crime, corruption, and mismanagement;

5. A state committed to national unity, social peace, and comprehensive and balanced development with fair representation in local administration;

6. Continuity and improved performance of state and public institutions, with reforms where necessary, including the protection of public infrastructure and property rights and provision of public services to all citizens without discrimination, in accordance with the highest standards of good governance and gender equality. Citizens shall benefit from effective mechanisms in their relations with all public authorities in such a way as to ensure full compliance with the rule of law and human rights and private and public property rights;

7. A strong, unified, meritocratic and national army that carries out its duties in accordance with the constitution and the

highest standards. Its functions are to protect the national boundaries and the people from external threats and terrorism, with intelligence and security institutions to maintain national security subject to the rule of law, acting according to the constitution and the law and respecting human rights. The use of force shall be the exclusive prerogative of competent state institutions;

8. Unqualified rejection of - and active commitment to combat - terrorism, fanaticism, extremism and sectarianism in all its forms and to tackle conditions conducive to their spread;

9. Respect and protection of human rights and public freedoms, especially in times of crisis, including non-discrimination and equal rights and opportunities for all without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, cultural or linguistic identity, gender or any other distinction, with effective mechanism for their protection, which give due regard to the political and equal rights and opportunities of women, including by the taking of active measures to ensure representation and participation in institutions and decision-making structures, with mechanisms aimed to achieve a level of representation of at least 30% for women, and the goal of parity;

10. A high value placed on Syria's society and national identity, its history of diversity and the contributions and values that all religions, civilizations and traditions have brought to Syria, including the coexistence among its various components, along with the protection of the national cultural heritage of the nation and its diverse cultures;

11. Combatting and eliminating poverty and providing support for the elderly and other vulnerable groups, including persons with special needs, orphans and victims of war, which shall include ensuring the safety and refuge of all displaced persons and refugees, as well as protecting their right to voluntary and safe return to their homes and lands;

12. Preservation and protection of national heritage and the natural environment for future generations in accordance with environmental treaties and the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) declaration concerning the intentional destruction of cultural heritage.

We, the representatives of the proud people of Syria, having lived through terrible misery and having found enough strength to fight against international terrorism, herewith declare our determination to restore the well-being and prosperity of our homeland and to make life decent and comfortable for each and every one of us.

To that end we agreed to form a constitutional committee comprising the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic delegation along with wide-represented opposition delegation for drafting of a constitutional reform as a contribution to the political settlement under the UN auspices in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2254.

The Constitutional Committee would at the very least comprise Government, Opposition representatives in the intra-Syrian talks, Syrian experts, civil society, independents, tribal leaders and women. Care would be taken to ensure adequate representation of Syria's ethnic and religious components. Final agreement is to be reached in the UN-led Geneva process on the mandate and terms of reference, powers, rules of procedure, and selection criteria for the composition of the Constitutional Committee.

We appeal to the United Nations Secretary-General to assign the Special Envoy for Syria for the assistance of the Constitutional Committee work in Geneva.

(Source: agencies)

## Taliban active in 70 percent of Afghanistan: BBC study



The Taliban are openly active in 70 percent of Afghanistan's districts, fully controlling 4 percent of the country and demonstrating an open physical presence in another 66 percent, according to a BBC study published on Tuesday.

The BBC estimate, which it said was based on conversations with more than 1,200 individual sources in all districts of the South Asian country, was significantly higher than the most recent assessment by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led coalition. The coalition said on Tuesday that the Taliban contested or controlled only 44 percent of Afghan districts as of October 2017. Afghanistan has been reeling over the past nine days from a renewed spate of violence that is adding scrutiny to the latest, more aggressive United States-backed strategy to bolster Afghan forces battling the Taliban in a 16-year-old war.

A bomb hidden in an ambulance struck the city center and killed more than 100 people, just over a week after an attack on the Hotel Intercontinental, also in Kabul, which left more than 20 people dead, including four U.S. citizens.

The BBC counted 399 districts in Afghanistan, but the NATO-led force counted 407. The reason for the discrepancy was not immediately clear. The BBC study said the Afghan government controlled 122 districts, or about 30 percent of the country. Still, it noted, that did not mean that they were free from Taliban attacks.

"Kabul and other major cities, for example, suffered major attacks - launched from adjacent areas, or by sleeper cells - during the research period, as well as before and after," the report said.

Asked about the BBC's study, the U.S. Pentagon did not comment directly, but pointed to the latest figures by the NATO-led coalition asserting that about 56 percent of Afghanistan's territory was under Afghan government control or influence.

Captain Thomas Gresback, a spokesman for the coalition in Kabul, said the BBC estimate overstated the militants' "influence impact". "This is a criminal network, not a government in waiting," Gresback said in an emailed statement.

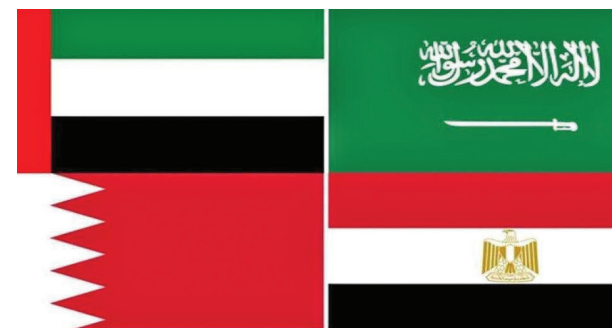
"What really matters is not the number of districts held, but population controlled. RS assesses that around 12 percent of the population is actually under full Taliban control," he said, referring to the Resolute Support mission.

The study by Britain's public broadcaster quoted a spokesman for Afghan President Ashraf Ghani playing down the findings.

The BBC study also said Islamic State had a presence in 30 districts, but noted it did not fully control any of them.

(Source: Reuters)

## Arab quartet accuses UN commission of Qatar bias



The House of Saud regime, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Egypt have strongly condemned the results of a report by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (OHCHR) on how severing diplomatic and trade ties with Qatar affected the country. In a joint statement issued on Tuesday, the blockading quartet said that the findings of OHCHR, whose members visited Qatar in November 2017, were misleading, inaccurate, and based on unfounded allegations, SPA news agency reported.

When documenting and assessing the effect of the blockade on human rights infringements and violations among Qatar's population, the findings noted that the actions carried out by the four countries were discriminatory, without legal basis, amounting to "economic warfare".

The four countries accused the commission of misunderstanding the historical context of the ongoing diplomatic crisis.

"The basis of this crisis goes back to the background of Qatar's support for individuals and entities internationally involved in financing terrorism and supporting its activities, and promoting their extremist ideology, which incites violence and promotes hate speech in the Arab region through Qatari media platforms or funded through Qatari figures," the statement read.

The countries also noted that it was within their "sovereign right" to cut ties with Doha in order to protect their national security interests. According to the report, the measures taken by the quartet were unilateral, coercive and arbitrary that has had a permanent effect on the union of families and the social fabric of the region as a whole. Earlier this month, Ali Bin Smaikh al-Marri, chairman of Qatar's National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), told a news conference in Qatar's capital, Doha, that the report proved the blockade was arbitrary and racist in nature.

"This report shows without a spec of doubt that these procedures undertaken by blockading countries are not mere diplomatic severing of relations, they are not just an economic boycott," he said.

He also pointed out the OHCHR team reached out to the blockading countries before releasing the report, but received no response.

OHCHR representatives conducted interviews with 20 government and non-governmental organizations, and 40 victims during the course of their evaluation.

The diplomatic crisis started when the four countries imposed an air, sea and land blockade on Qatar on June 5, 2017, accusing it of harboring "terrorism". Qatar has repeatedly denied the allegations.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Putin reacts to U.S. Treasury 'Kremlin List': 'dogs bark but the caravan moves on'

Russian President Vladimir Putin has weighed in on the United States Treasury's recently released 'Kremlin List,' saying the action borders on "stupidity" because it shows inconsistency in Washington's policies.

"The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on," Putin said on Tuesday, several hours after the report featuring the entire Russian government and scores of prominent Russian business people was issued.

The list of 210 people fails to mention the Russian leader - much to his 'distress'.

"It's a pity," Putin said sarcastically in answer to a journalist's question on how he feels about his absence.

However, the move is "certainly unfriendly" as it damages already deteriorating Russian-U.S. relations, Putin added.

"What do they want? They must decide for themselves," Putin said, referring to Washington's policy.

Russia is eager to build long-term relations which are "stable and based on international law," the Russian leader



added. In a tougher comment, Putin slammed Washington for inconsistency and "stupidity." The Russian president noted that the U.S. equates Moscow with Tehran and Pyongyang, while at the same time calling on Russia to help solve the North Korean crisis and mediate on issues involving Iran.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Treasury published a list featuring the entire Russian government among some 114 other top officials, as well as 96 prominent businessmen. The document claims it is in no way "a sanctions list," despite being part of a sanctions law that targeted Moscow as well as Tehran and Pyongyang.

The move has already received condemnation from Moscow. Russian MP Irina Yarovaya likened the step to the U.S. opening "an 'economic Guantanamo' for global business." Senior Russian senator Vladimir Dzhabarov said that the list virtually amounts to a breakdown in ties between Moscow and Washington.

(Source: RT)



STOCK MARKET	
TEDPIX	98557.9
IFX	1084.11
Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir	

CURRENCIES	
USD	45,220 rials
EUR	57,700 rials
GBP	66,550 rials
AED	12,470 rials
Source: Mehrnews.com	

COMMODITIES	
Brent	\$68.79/b
WTI	\$64.89/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.94/b
Gold	\$1,346.50/oz
Silver	\$17.31/oz
Platinum	\$1,010.15/oz
Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com	

## NEWS IN BRIEF



### Sanchi complies with all DNV GL standards

**ENERGY DESK** TEHRAN — Kjell Olaisen, the director for technical support in Norway's DNV GL (an international accredited registrar and classification society) said Iran's Sanchi oil tanker, which sank on January 14, has complied with all standards of this society, Shana news agency reported.

Olaisen said Sanchi has passed its periodical classification successfully on March 2, 2017 and received related permits afterwards.

On January 6, the Panamanian-flagged, Iranian-owned tanker Sanchi, with a full natural-gas condensate cargo of 136,000 tons (960,000 barrels), sailing from Iran to South Korea, collided with the Hong Kong-flagged cargo ship CF Crystal 160 nautical miles (300 km) off Shanghai, China. 32 sailors lost their lives in the incident.



### Over \$1b to be allocated for joining rural areas to gas network

**ENERGY DESK** TEHRAN — Iranian parliament (Majlis) has approved a bill to allocate 50 trillion rials (about \$1.1 billion) for expanding the country's gas network to new rural areas, IRNA reported.

According to the bill, the banks will be allowed to provide the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) and provincial gas companies with the mentioned fund under the Oil Ministry's guarantee.

The facilities will be used to lay gas pipelines to rural areas and cities which are not connected to the country's gas network.



### 261 new projects to be inaugurated in industrial estates

**ECONOMY DESK** TEHRAN — Some 261 new projects are planned to be inaugurated in industrial estates across the country on the occasion of Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-10, marking the victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution), IRNA reported on Wednesday.

According to Sadeq Najafi, the head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization, the mentioned projects will create job opportunities for over 9,000 people and the total investment put in to these projects is estimated at near \$600 million.



### Iranian parliament approves budget bill outlines

**ECONOMY DESK** TEHRAN — After approving the outlines of the government's proposed budget for the next Iranian calendar year (starting on March 21, 2018) Iranian Parliament (Majlis) started investigating the bill in detail on Wednesday, IRNA reported.

From the total of 261 parliament members present in the session, 182 MPs voted in favor of the bill, 73 were against, while six MPs abstained.

The parliament had rejected the bill outlines on Sunday.



### Bank of Japan offers to buy more bonds for 1st time since July

The Bank of Japan increased the amount of bonds it offered to buy at a regular operation for the first time since July, helping to bring down yields and weaken the yen.

The BOJ sought to buy 330 billion yen (\$3 billion) of 3-to-5 year debt, more than the 300 billion yen at the last operation, it said a statement.

The Japanese central bank is acting amid a global bond rout that is challenging its yield-curve control policy. Governor Haruhiko Kuroda told lawmakers Wednesday that the central bank will continue easing to reach its 2 percent inflation target.

(Source: Bloomberg)



### Eurozone inflation slows as ECB officials ponder policy stance

Inflation in the euro area slowed at the start of the year, highlighting the hurdles faced by the European Central Bank as it attempts to foster price growth in a region still beleaguered in places by high unemployment.

Consumer prices rose 1.3 percent in January, the European Union's statistics office said on Wednesday. The reading exceeds the median forecast of 1.2 percent in a Bloomberg survey but is below December's rate of 1.4 percent.

Just minutes before the report, Executive Board member Benoît Coeure said inflation would "only very gradually" converge to the ECB's goal of close to but below 2 percent, justifying continued stimulus.

While economic growth in the 19-country region is at its strongest in a decade and joblessness has declined, price pressures have failed to pick up to a similar extent despite unprecedented efforts by the ECB. President Mario Draghi said last week that developments were still heavily reliant on monetary support, arguing that it's too soon to discuss winding down asset purchases later this year.

In the euro area, the "labor-market recovery is still a few years behind other advanced economies like the U.S. and the U.K.," said Jack Allen, an economist at Capital Economics in London. That means "domestic price pressures are going to build only very slowly,



### Uphill Battle

Euro-area headline inflation slows as ECB officials ponder policy stance

■ Euro-area headline inflation (flash) ■ Core inflation

Source: Eurostat

Bloomberg



### What our economists say...

Complicating matters for the ECB, the euro has risen to a three-year high against the dollar. Draghi has termed the development a "source of uncertainty," while company executives were more blunt in expressing their concerns.

Bill McDermott, chief executive officer of Walldorf, Germany-based SAP, said in an interview with Bloomberg Television's Guy Johnson and Matt Miller earlier this week that the single currency's gain is a headwind and "I would prefer it wasn't as strong, for sure."

As for stagnant wages, at least in Germany, where unemployment dropped to a fresh record low, signs are mounting that could finally change. Volkswagen this week offered employees two wage increases in stages of 3.5 percent and 2 percent. Labor union IG Metall, which represents 3.9 million members, is pushing for 6 percent more pay and prepared to stage walkouts that could aggravate production bottlenecks.

"We're watching Germany very closely," said Societe Generale economist Anatoli Anenkov. "It will matter for the ECB, at least you get an indication of what will happen eventually when slack in the labor market is exhausted."

(Source: Bloomberg)



### Iran's exports to Qatar rise 126% in 9 months

**ECONOMY DESK** TEHRAN — Iran's exports to Qatar increased 126 percent during the first nine months of the present Iranian calendar Year (ending on December 21, 2017), IRIB news quoted an official from Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) on Wednesday.

According to Director General of TPO Arabic-African Affairs Office Farzad Piltan, Qatar's imports of Iranian goods was \$188 million in the said time, registering 126.25 percent growth in comparison with the same time in 2016.

The official expressed hope that the



### U.S. dollar in broad decline; renminbi rallies to highest since 2015

The dollar slipped in early European trade, facing losses against developed and emerging markets currencies, with traders digesting President Trump's State of the Union address and awaiting a Federal Reserve decision.

China's currency posted robust gains. The onshore renminbi climbed 0.55 per cent while its offshore counterpart rose 0.43 per cent to Rmb6.29 and Rmb6.30 respectively. The dollar is at its weakest point against the renminbi since 2015.

Other major emerging market currencies also rallied: South Africa's rand jumped 1 per cent to R11.85, while Mexico's peso jumped 0.61 per cent to Mxn18.65.

An index tracking the US currency against a basket of six developed market peers was off as much as 0.36 per cent. The pound was up 0.4 per cent at \$1.4195, while the euro climbed 0.3 per cent to \$1.2441. Japan's yen strengthened



### Theresa May says she wants a free trade deal with China

Britain is seeking a free trade agreement with China, Prime Minister Theresa May said on Wednesday as she flew to the country for talks with Chinese leaders, adding that more should be done immediately to open up market access for British firms.

The ambitious long-term goal of securing a free trade deal with the world's second-largest economy comes as May begins a three-day visit to China accompanied by businesses from sectors where Britain feels it can capitalize on China's growing middle class consumers and rapidly expanding services sector.

"China is a country that we want to do a trade deal with," May told reporters aboard her Royal Air Force jet on the way to Wuhan — a university city where she will announce half a billion pounds worth of education deals.

"But, I think that there is more we can be doing in the interim ... in terms of looking at potential barriers to trade and the opening up of markets to ensure ... British businesses able to do good trade



### Venezuela says will pre-sell 'petro' cryptocurrency on Feb. 20

A pre-sale of Venezuela's new "petro" cryptocurrency will begin on Feb. 20, President Nicolas Maduro said, a move that the government hopes will help pull the country out of a dire economic crisis.

Critics have slammed the initiative as not only illegal but nothing more than a debt issuance by the government amid quadruple-digit inflation and major shortages.

Maduro has previously said Venezuela will issue 100 million tokens, each valued at — and backed by — the equivalent of one barrel of Venezuelan crude.

That would put the value of the entire petro issuance at just over \$6 billion.

"All the cryptocurrencies of the world have been revalued after Venezuela's announcements about the creation of the petro," said Maduro in a speech broadcast on state television.

Venezuela is seeking to raise hard currency amid a crippling crisis.

The government has said that the petro issue will help the cash-strapped country



### Iran plans to add 1GW solar, wind capacity to current 400MW in a year

1 → Of the country's total renewable capacity, wind power represents 141 MW, while the potential for wind power capacity in Iran is 100,000 MW.

Renewables, including hydropower, account for just six percent of energy generation, versus natural gas' 90 percent share.

In September 2017, Mohammad Sadegzadeh, the head of state-held Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization, known as Satba, claimed that Iran's renewables could come to account for a quarter of power generation by 2022.



### Iran plans to add 1GW solar, wind capacity to current 400MW in a year

Under the present interpretation of the Article 44 of Iran's Constitution, hundreds of state-owned companies have been privatized.



### Five-Year National Development Plan (2010-2015), aiming to privatize about 20 percent of the state-owned firms each year.



### State-owned shares worth over \$110m to be divested by late March

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# Oil drops for a third day; set for strongest January since 2013

Oil fell for a third day on Wednesday, but remained on track for its biggest gain in January in five years, in spite of data that showed U.S. crude stocks rose more than expected last week and a broader selloff in other commodities, stocks and bonds.

Brent crude, the global benchmark, was down 49 cents at \$68.43 a barrel by 1015 GMT, after touching a two-week low earlier in the day. U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures were down 39 cents at \$64.11.

On Tuesday, U.S. crude fell 1.6 percent to close at \$64.50 a barrel, far outpacing a 0.6 percent drop in the price of Brent.

"The extent of the latest pullback in oil prices has taken many by surprise. Whether this weakness will be short-lived or are we witnessing the precursor to a violent downside correction remains to be seen," PVM Oil Associates strategist Tamas Varga said.

"Still, what is apparent is that positives are increasingly in short supply for skittish buyers and the early-year optimism is hanging by a thread."

Prices of WTI and Brent are still on track



for a fifth month of gains and Brent is set for its largest percentage increase in the month of January since 2013, with a rise of 2.7 percent.

But as prices have risen, U.S. producers have increased their rig count. Energy com-

panies added 12 oil rigs last week, the biggest weekly increase since March.

"The rig count will only continue to rise and the U.S. system will only become more efficient," said Matt Stanley, a fuel broker

at Freight Services International in Dubai.

"I see a correction on the horizon down toward \$60 before the inevitable OPEC minister comes out and talks about new cuts," he added.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, along with other producers including Russia, has been waging a battle against U.S. shale producers, agreeing to take 1.8 million barrels a day off the market through the end of 2018.

A report from the American Petroleum Institute late on Tuesday showing U.S. crude stocks rose by 3.2 million barrels last week cast a further bearish pall over the market.

U.S. Energy Department data on Wednesday is expected to show an increase in inventories for the first time in 11 weeks. Analysts polled by Reuters forecast an average 100,000-barrel build in crude stocks.

Crude stocks tend to rise in January, but this year they have fallen by more than 12 million barrels, making this the largest drop in the first month of the year in 30 years.

(Source: Reuters)

## As oil majors escape the rout, key questions emerge for 2018

For the world's largest oil explorers, it's a time of transition.

Crude prices are on the rise as OPEC curbs production for a second year. New efficiencies have dropped the cost of drilling in America's fertile shale basins, pushing U.S. drillers to record output. Investors are insisting on higher returns. And companies are dealing with changing U.S. tax rules.

The first hints showing how Big Oil -- an elite clique of companies so massive their combined annual sales dwarfs the economies of all but 15 of the world's nations -- is preparing to deal with these changes will come in fourth-quarter earnings reports starting this week. First up, Royal Dutch Shell Plc, Exxon Mobil Corp. and Chevron Corp.

These are the key questions investors will be asking:

### 1. Who gets the cash?

The question everyone is asking is what will oil companies do with the additional cash with Brent at \$70 barrel. Will more money

go to shareholders in the form of dividend increases and buybacks, or will spending pick up? The supermajors slashed expenditures during the downturn and focused on efficiency. Some analysts are worried the companies will waver from their hard-earned financial discipline now that they are once again flush with cash.

Years of cost cuts mean explorers are starting to repair balance sheets and allay concerns about fully funding dividends. Exxon and Shell have said they are generating enough cash to cover the payouts.

Chevron may raise its dividend this week for the first time since late 2016, according to Bloomberg estimates. BP, which said it will reduce its cash breakeven to \$40 a barrel oil by the end of the decade, has some way to go as it is still paying penalties related to the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster.

There are many reasons for the industry to feel sunny this earnings season. It is no longer lagging the broader market. Still,

there's some catching up to do with oil's surge. The companies are facing long-term questions about the sustainability of fossil fuels with the world increasingly focusing more on cleaner energy and electric vehicles.

### 2. Tax overhaul impacts?

Corporate America is cheering President Donald Trump's tax overhaul but the impact on oil companies is likely to be more muted. U.S. upstream operations typically aren't big taxpayers because they invest heavily in projects over many years before turning a profit, so they won't benefit as much as other industries.

Other provisions such as lowering deductions for interest payments and reducing the ability to amortize exploration costs also minimize the benefits.

BP and Shell said they may write off as much as \$4 billion in American tax assets as a result of the reform. But investors should be wary about reading across to other companies: shale explorer EOG Resources Inc. said

it would post a one-time gain of \$2.2 billion. Exxon and Chevron have yet to comment.

### 3. Pushing the Permian?

U.S. shale production, which will reach a record this year, has upended energy markets, geopolitics and major oil companies' capital spending. Once overlooked as niche and inconsequential, the Permian Basin, the most prolific U.S. field, is now a key part of Exxon and Chevron's planning for the next decade.

Chevron has committed to investing \$3.3 billion in the region this year and sees production rising at least 50 percent by the early 2020s. Exxon last year spent as much as \$6.6 billion on drilling rights in New Mexico and on Tuesday announced plans to triple output in the region by 2025. There have been few further details so investors will be looking closely for commentary around whether they will be able to reverse recent net losses at their U.S. upstream divisions.

(Source: Bloomberg)

## Kuwait's KPC says crude oil production capacity to reach 4.75m bpd in 2040

Kuwait Petroleum Corp said on Wednesday it aimed to reach crude oil production capacity of 4.75 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2040.

Chief Executive Officer Nizar al-Adsani also said refining capacity was expected to grow to 2 million bpd by 2035.

KPC is expected to spend \$114 billion in capital expenditure over the next five years and an additional \$394 billion beyond that to 2040, he said.

(Source: Reuters)

## S.Korea's SK Innovation forecasts 2018 refining margins holding firm

South Korea's SK Innovation, owner of the country's largest crude oil refiner SK Energy, said on Wednesday solid demand is expected to keep refining margins firm throughout the year.

The company said in a quarterly earnings statement that tighter fuel supply availability because of planned refinery maintenance along with strong seasonal demand for middle distillate fuels like diesel and jet fuel are likely to support refining margins.

"In 2018, oil products demand are expected to be firm amid the global economic recovery," Cha Jin-seok, head of the finance division at SK Innovation, told a call with analysts.

On Monday, S-Oil, South Korea's third-biggest refiner, said regional refining margins were expected to remain firm in 2018 backed by healthy growth in oil demand.

For the October to December period, SK Innovation's operating profits dipped 0.5 percent from a year ago to 845.2 billion won (\$791.5 million) due to slightly lower refining margins.

Last year, SK Innovation said it would invest nearly \$900 million to build a new fuel oil desulphurization unit at its Ulsan refinery by 2020 to deal with the tighter sulfur rules for fuel on ships set by the International Maritime Organization. The new rules will come into effect by 2020.

Responding to an analyst question on the impact of the new rules on the fuel oil market, Kang Dong-soo, head of the corporate planning office at SK Energy, said that spreads between low-sulfur fuel oil and high-sulfur fuel oil should narrow after 2020 from their current level of about \$26.

Additionally, the company said it is considering an initial public offering (IPO) of its lubricant oil unit, SK Lubricants Co Ltd, but the schedule and size of the IPO have not been decided yet.

In the fourth quarter of 2017, SK Innovation ran its crude distillation units at its refineries in Ulsan and Incheon at 93 percent of capacity on average, up from 83 percent over the same period in 2016, the company said in the earnings statement. SK Innovation shares fell 2.6 percent on Wednesday while the KOSPI index dropped 0.05 percent.

(Source: Reuters)

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## Europe’s migration crisis is anything but over

By Rachel Rizzo

Since the European migration crisis captured the world’s attention in 2015, headlines on the subject have significantly decreased. Many assume Europe is receiving far fewer refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, and that the continent has found a way to settle and integrate those who arrived during the height of the wave. The reality is far more complex.

The EU’s future refugee policy now dominates political agendas. Although overall numbers are down, refugee flows to Europe have not stopped. The continent saw around 171,000 sea arrivals in 2017, compared to over one million in 2015. About 1.2 million refugees that made it to Europe applied for asylum in 2016. This exposed deep fissures in the EU’s current system. It divided the continent on how to handle the refugees who have already arrived, and what to do with the many thousands that will inevitably land on Europe’s shores in the coming years. Europe now needs a strategy that can simultaneously address the legitimate concerns of some EU members but also place refugee well-being at the forefront of decision making.



This is no easy task. In recent months, the EU has been working to reform of Dublin regulation, which stipulates that the country in which the asylum seeker arrives is the country responsible for them. That rule has proven to be difficult for frontline states like Italy and Greece.

The EU has also tried, with little success, to mandate refugee quotas. Central and Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, are concerned about losing social homogeneity and cohesion, and have refused to accept relocated refugees or only taken a very small number. Each of these countries (except Poland) voted against mandatory refugee quotas back in 2015, and according to Dimitris Avramopoulos, the European Commissioner for Migration, are “in breach of their obligations.” The EU is now suing all three for failing to accept their required refugee quotas.

The debate around refugees has also created localized political crises. Germany is a prime example, as Chancellor Angela Merkel pursued a largely “open-door” refugee policy over the last two years. In 2017, Germany processed more asylum claims than all other twenty-seven EU countries combined. The country is now so under-water with asylum applicants that the government proposed a program that would give rejected asylum-seekers three thousand euros as an incentive to accept deportation back to their country of origin if they leave by February 2018. Merkel’s policies sparked heavy antirefugee sentiment throughout the country, leading to the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party securing a seat in the German parliament, the first time a nationalist far-right party has done so since WWII. Refugee policy also resulted in a breakdown of Merkel’s postelection coalition talks last fall.

With these challenges, how does Europe approach refugee policy with compassion for those fleeing conflict, while at the same time addressing push back from around the continent?

Any strategy must start with fighting disinformation propagated by state actors like Russia. Spreading false stories about refugees and stoking antimigrant sentiment is one of Moscow’s primary tools to weaken European cohesion. The EU must counter disinformation so that attitudes toward Europe’s refugee communities are not warped by false stories.

The EU must also work harder to support those who end up staying in Europe long term — Europe needs immigrants to sustain its economy. According to Eurostat, Europe’s population rose in 2016 only because of migration. Eurostat also estimates that without migration, only Ireland, France, Norway and Britain would see rising populations by 2050; Germany and Italy would both see population declines. Many countries are also dealing with a shortage of skilled labor, and the increase in labor force potential “is an opportunity for Europeans to jump-start the continent’s economy,” according to French economist Thomas Piketty. To capitalize on this, the EU could increase programs and better partner with private organizations that help with language and vocational training for refugees. More resources should also be dedicated to turning part time employment into full time, long-term careers.

Still, it would be unwise for the EU to ignore concerns from their citizens about mass migration, or the resistance from refugee-skeptic countries like Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. This will only lead to anger by those who feel like they’ve been left behind by the current system. With conflicts in the Middle East showing no signs of abating, far-right parties across Europe will have easy selling points on the threat of migration for the foreseeable future. Listening to fears and addressing concerns openly is the better approach.

Although migration may no longer dominate headlines, it will continue to shape the future of Europe in profound ways. The United States should follow this issue closely. How Europe ultimately shapes its refugee policy will play an important role in the future of the transatlantic relationship for years to come.

(Source: The National Interest)

Europe now needs a strategy that can simultaneously address the legitimate concerns of some EU members but also place refugee well-being at the forefront of decision making.

# The South China Sea and the decline of U.S. influence

The United States’ ability to sway Southeast Asian states to its side is waning

By Mark J. Valencia

For 70 years the United States has dominated Southeast Asia with both hard and soft power — the capability to use economic or cultural influence to shape the preferences of others. Soft power underpins and makes possible robust hard power relationships. But some analysts and policymakers refuse to recognize that U.S. influence and its relationships in Southeast Asia are much shallower and more ephemeral than assumed.

Indeed, despite U.S. enticement and pressure, U.S. allies Australia, Japan, and the Philippines have so far declined U.S. requests to join its freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea against China’s claims. Indonesia has expressed disapproval over such U.S. “power projection” in the area. U.S. relations with Thailand have not been close since the military coup there in 2014 and Bangkok seems to be leaning toward China. Malaysia-U.S. relations have been brittle since the United States took a legal interest in Prime Minister Najib Razak’s international financial dealings. Even staunch U.S. strategic partner Singapore seems to be seeking a more neutral position between Washington and Beijing.

A recent example of this decline of U.S. soft power was the reaction of the Philippines regarding the January 17 USS Hopper freedom of navigation operation (FONOP) near Scarborough Shoal. The Shoal is claimed by China, Taiwan, and the Philippines. The U.S. Navy guided missile destroyer sailed through the 12 nautical mile territorial sea around the disputed feature. The Hopper’s transit was in innocent passage, which is generally considered legal (if somewhat provocative). China requires permission for innocent passage by warships and objected.

For the United States, this FONOP was a demonstration of international law. But it got no support from its ally, the Philippines. Indeed, to Washington’s chagrin, Philippine presidential spokesperson Harry Roque told the Straits Times, “For us, that [referring to China’s protest against the FONOP] is really a problem of America because we have come to a point that we now have an independent foreign policy... The problem of America today is no longer



## Many in Southeast Asia fear getting caught between the United States and China in their struggle for dominance in the region.

the problem of the Philippines.”

The U.S. Embassy in Manila responded, “[We] believe that ‘U.S. military personnel partnering with the [Armed Forces of the Philippines] is a more accurate description of the role of any U.S. military presence here.”

Some U.S. observers seemed shocked at the Philippines’ position, but this reality has been evolving for some time. It clearly manifested itself last August when ASEAN leaders and their dialogue partners, including China and the United States, held a series of key security meetings in the Philippines, which then held ASEAN’s rotating chair. The joint communiqué of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting strongly favored China’s preferences over its opponents within ASEAN as well as the United States. Some saw this as a new diplomatic low for Washington. Indeed, according to Philippine analyst Richard Heydarian, it was “a slam dunk diplomatic victory for China.”

Around the same time, in August 2017, Philippine Foreign Minister Alan Cayetano scolded those pundits who criticized the presence of Chinese

ships in the South China Sea but did not criticize the presence of U.S. warships in the disputed waters. He said, “You have to realize that their reason for being is to pursue the interest of the American people. So ... we have to pursue Philippine interest.” If Southeast Asian senior officials are stating such sentiments in public they may well be expressing more fundamental concerns in private. But it seems that the United States is not listening.

Instead, the United States has doubled down on its current policy regarding the South China Sea in stepping up the frequency of its FONOPS and declaring China a “strategic competitor.” Many in Southeast Asia fear getting caught between the United States and China in their struggle for dominance in the region. Yet some analysts continue to support provocative U.S. military forays there, ignoring the fact that such moves are increasingly unwelcome even among China’s rival claimants.

One example is a recent piece in Foreign Affairs. After disparaging what it perceives to be the tepid U.S. response,

the piece offers some wishful thinking as to how the United States can deter China in the South China Sea. In particular, it encourages Washington to convince “the Duterte government to follow through on plans to allow upgrades at all five previously agreed-upon bases, reverse its decision to ban the storage of ammunition at them, and permit a regular schedule of U.S. combat aircraft rotations.” It also urges “the U.S. government to publicly state that its commitment to defend Philippine troops, ships, and planes from attack under Article V of the two countries’ Mutual Defense Treaty applies to contested waters and islands in the South China Sea.” No mention is made as to how the United States can convince the Philippines to do something its government is not particularly interested in doing.

They say the most difficult journey begins with the first step. The first step for the United States regarding Southeast Asia is to recognize reality. Then Washington needs to adjust its policies and approach accordingly.

(Source: The Diplomat)

## Two men can stop the war between Turkey and the Kurds

By Amberin Zaman

The conflict between Turkey and the Kurds has escalated since Turkey started a military offensive against the Syrian Kurdish enclave of Afrin on Jan. 20. The Kurdish militia, the People’s Protection Units, which is the United States-led coalition’s top partner in the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS), controls Afrin. And Turkey is a critical NATO ally.

The Trump administration is floundering. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey has ignored President Trump’s appeal to avoid actions that might risk conflict between Turkish and American forces and torpedoed the campaign against the ISIS. Erdogan has vowed to carry the battle further east to militia-controlled territory stretching all the way to the Iraqi border, where an estimated 2,000 American Special Operations Forces are deployed.

Turkey blames Washington’s support for the People’s Protection Units for the meltdown in American-Turkish ties. Many of the militia’s top cadres are drawn from the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, the armed group that has been waging a bloody campaign for self-rule inside Turkey. The State Department lists the PKK as a terrorist organization but does not so designate the People’s Protection Units. Turkey insists that the PKK and the militia are the same.

Turkish officials believe that once the ISIS is defeated, the People’s Protection Units will melt back into the PKK and train its American weapons on Turkey. American officials retort that it was Turkey’s tolerance for — if not outright collusion with — thousands of terrorist fighters who flowed into Syria through Turkey that forced them to embrace the militia. Both arguments have merit.

The truth is that Turkey’s Kurdish problem was not concocted by Western powers but is a result of decades of brutal suppression of its Kurdish population. Syria, a former Ottoman dominion, has always figured in the fight.

In the early 20th century, Kurdish rebellions erupted across Anatolia and were savagely suppressed. Turkey’s founding father, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who won the Kurds’ support against Allied occupation, embarked on an unremitting campaign of assimilation. The Kurds were dismissed as “mountain Turks.” Thousands fled to Syria, then under French mandate, where Kurdish intellectuals, tribal leaders and sheikhs united around a society called Xoybun, established to liberate Kurds from Turkey’s grip.

In 1984, Abdullah Ocalan, the founder of the PKK, started his insurgency against Turkey from Damascus with the blessings of Hafez al-Assad. Assad saw Ocalan as leverage in Syria’s dispute with Turkey over Euphrates water and the PKK as a distraction for his own restless Kurdish population.

At the height of the PKK’s rebellion in the 1990s, about a third of its fighters were thought to be Syrian Kurds. And



## The truth is that Turkey’s Kurdish problem was not concocted by Western powers but is a result of decades of brutal suppression of its Kurdish population.

even today, it is not unusual for a Syrian Kurdish family to have one son fighting for the People’s Protection Units against the ISIS and another for the PKK against Turkey.

Ending the PKK conflict in Turkey is inextricably linked to peaceful relations with Syria’s Kurds. Erdogan just made that harder. Only one man can help extract Turkey from this mess: Abdullah Ocalan.

Despite 19 years in Turkish captivity, Ocalan remains the uncontested leader of the PKK — and is revered by millions of Kurds across the globe. He retains the authority to negotiate peace with Turkey, as he did in 2008 with Erdogan, then a reform-minded prime minister who became the first Turkish leader to hold secret talks with the PKK. With Turkish soft power at its height, Ocalan giddily imagined a new regional order where Turks and Kurds might prevail.

In hindsight it is clear that Erdogan’s idea of peace was to impose his own terms: for the PKK to disband; for the Kurdish militia to join Turkish-backed Syrian Arab rebels to fight the Assad government; and for the biggest pro-Kurdish political bloc, whose core constituents are PKK sympathizers, to back Erdogan’s now fulfilled goal of expanding his executive powers. The Kurds refused. The peace talks collapsed along with a two-and-a-half-year cease-fire.

Turkey proceeded to jail its democratically elected Kurdish lawmakers, who might have helped sideline PKK hard-liners, and Ocalan has been held incommunicado ever since. Erdogan’s hawkishness shores up his national-

ist base ahead of critical presidential elections in 2019.

But such brinkmanship is fraught with danger. Violence between Turks and Kurds inside Turkey, miraculously averted thus far, could erupt. A new generation of Kurds who see no common future with Turkey will continue to swell the PKK’s ranks.

Washington’s shift influenced Russia’s decision to let Turkey intervene in Afrin, and the Kurds are paying a heavy price.

There is a strong moral argument for the United States to not abandon the People’s Protection Units. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson recently stated that American troops would stay on in Syria after the battle against the ISIS, to counter Iranian influence and to squeeze the Syrian government until Bashar al-Assad is forced to step down.

It is uncertain whether the United States is prepared to commit the thousands of troops and billions of dollars that such an endeavor would require. Or whether the United States is ready to offer the Syrian Kurds the diplomatic recognition they crave.

The United States is also unlikely to go for a total rupture with Turkey and push it irreversibly into Russia’s arms, especially because Turkey is better placed than the Kurds to counter Iran.

Without a firm answer, Ocalan’s children are savvy enough to not get dragged into an inconclusive fight with either Iran or the Syrian government. They view the relationship with the United States as leverage for a better deal from the Assad government. The fertile and oil-rich territories the Kurds hold thanks to American air power can be bartered for some form of autonomy.

The United States’ presence twinned with Russian backing might help them ram through a deal. Wary of a ripple effect among its own rebellious Kurds, Iran would certainly oppose moves that would grant their Syrian cousins greater rights. But it is worth a try.

However, the notion that the PKK can use American muscle to wrest concessions from Turkey is misguided at best. American pressure will only harden Erdogan and the Turkish public against the Kurds.

Turkey and the PKK must not wait until they have both paid a punitively high price in war to talk. Despite his authoritarianism, Erdogan remains the most popular and boldest leader in recent Turkish history. He and Ocalan can end this war, and they should agree on an immediate cease-fire inside Turkey and Syria.

Turkey should free Kurdish lawmakers and mayors being held on flimsy terror charges and resume stalled peace talks. In exchange, the PKK should free Turkish captives and withdraw its fighters from Turkey to show good faith. But Erdogan, who doesn’t seem inclined toward compromise, apparently believes as did many before him that the Kurds can be defeated by military force. They can’t.

(Source: The Washington Post)



# Saudi Regime intends no meaningful social reforms: U.S. analyst

**TEHRAN (Tasnim)** — A senior political analyst from the US State of Illinois lashed out at the Saudi regime for its “horrendous human rights abuses” and said Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s social reforms are nothing but an illusion of positive change.

“Saudi Arabia is one of the world’s most ruthless countries, notorious for horrendous human rights abuses, complicit with Washington in supporting ISIS and other terrorist groups in Syria,” Chicago-based Stephen Lendman said in an interview with the Tasnim News Agency.

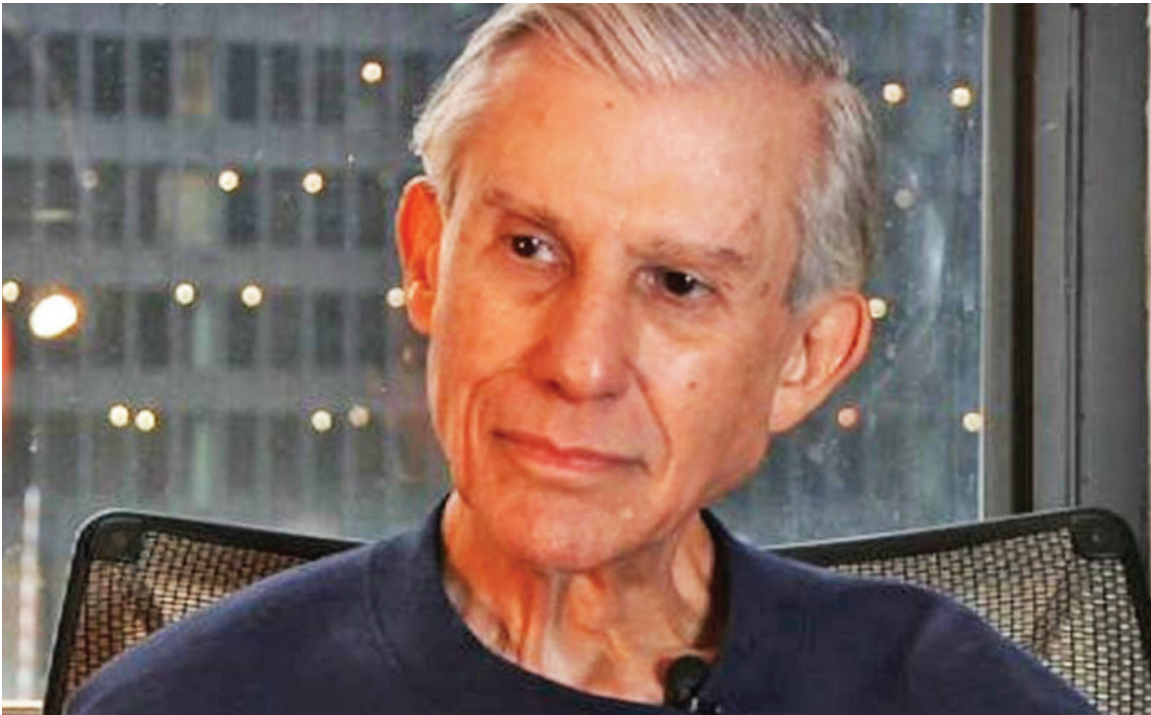
“Crown prince bin Salman (MBS) intends no meaningful social reforms, just the illusion of positive change, nothing more,” he added.

Stephen Lendman is a writer, syndicated columnist, activist, News TV personality, and radio show host. He currently writes for MoneyNewsNow.com and VeteransToday.com and hosts, since 2007, a progressive radio show at The Progressive Radio News Hour on The Progressive Radio Network.

The following is the full text of the interview:

■ Recently, the Saudi regime led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has announced dramatic social reforms. The oil-rich kingdom, which has some of the world’s tightest restrictions on women, has long barred women from sports arenas. The kingdom’s General Sports Authority announced in October that stadiums in Jeddah, Dammam, and Riyadh will be set up to accommodate families from early 2018. The announcement is in line with bin Salman’s ambitious reforms shaking up the kingdom, including the historic decision to allow women to drive from next June. What is your assessment of the dramatic changes in the Saudi regime’s domestic policy? What objectives is the kingdom pursuing by such social reforms? Do not you think that the increasing protests in the Arab country have led to them?

A: As we know, Saudi Arabia is one of the world’s most ruthless countries, notorious for horrendous human rights abuses, complicit with Washington in supporting ISIS and other terrorist groups in Syria. Crown prince bin Salman (MBS) intends no meaningful social reforms, just the illusion of positive change, nothing more. The kingdom’s tyrannical rule under his father, himself and others reflect cruel and inhumane treatment of anyone wanting meaningful change, opposing their ruthless rule. Letting women drive and other gestures fail to address fundamental issues. The kingdom is deeply corrupted and ruthless, far too debauched to fix.



■ Do not you think that one of the objectives behind the reforms is to silence the voices of dissent and the human rights defenders? In your opinion, are these reforms only a show by bin Salman to ingratiate himself with the US as his staunch ally?

A: MBS’ objective is deception, regime policies continuing unchanged, including the shaking down of numerous princes for billions of dollars to provide the kingdom with more money for Yemeni aggression, support for terrorist groups, and repressing its own population. He will silence no one once it is apparent nothing in the kingdom is changing. Washington under Republican and undemocratic Dem administrations does not give a hoot how oppressively the Saudis treat their citizens and residents. Keeping their oil flowing and supporting America’s imperial agenda is all US officials care about.

■ The reforms are in apparent contradiction with sys-

tematic genocide of Shiites and violations of human rights in the Shiite-populated city of Awamiyah. Saudi military bulldozers have recently almost razed the besieged town to the ground amid the deadly crackdown there, forcing hundreds of its residents to flee their homes. Do not you think that the Wahhabi ideology is behind this genocide?

A: Indeed stated reforms contradict reality on the ground. Saudi officials are like the US and other Western ones - promising one thing, doing entirely different things, continuing dirty business as usual, including forever wars of aggression and cracking down hard on homeland nonbelievers. I wrote a little about Awamiyah last summer, not current on what is going on now. I know the Saudis attacked the town with heavy weapons, defenseless Shia civilians targeted, brutalized and displaced from their homes. Prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr came from the area, executed by Riyadh two years ago to silence him.

## Shining spotlight on U.S. abandoning Kurdish allies in Afrin

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — Turkey has announced that their illegal invasion of Northern Syria is going to be expanded eastward, all the way to the Iraqi border, a threat most analysts and experts believe would never come true.

Washington has expressed sort of opposition to the decision. NATO nations have also been expressing growing disquiet about the risk of direct conflict between two of their most substantial member nations, and are saying the US and Turkey have been working hard to avoid direct conflict within Afrin District. That’s been made quite a bit simpler by the fact that the US, though its occupying troops are illegally embedded in Syrian Kurdish territory, are not generally believed to be in Afrin in the first place. Once and if the Turkish forces move onward to Manbij and elsewhere that will no longer be the case. So here we go again:

A- Western media outlets say US calls to keep the war confined to Afrin and Turkey’s warnings that the US troops would be targeted if they keep helping the Kurds, point to this being the tip of a potentially calamitous iceberg, with both nations determined not to let the other dictate their Syria policy. Even in doing so they won’t steer themselves into a direct confrontation. That will never happen.

B- There has been a lot of evidence in Iraq that when necessary Washington will surely abandon the Syrian Kurds. Even now the US sits idle while the Turkish government proceeds with bombardment of Afrin in Northern Syria. The argument is that Washington is not in Syria to serve the Kurds. It is there to protect its illicit interests.

C- If the US is to truly stand for international law and democracy as it claims, it must be decisive in protecting Afrin as well as the other two Kurdish regions in Syria. To abandon the Kurdish people now is to once and for all forsake any historical claims



**The Pentagon regime will never defend the Kurds against Turkish forces. What the US is doing with the Kurds should surprise no one.**

America has as a defender of democracy.

D- President Trump has promised his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan that the US will no longer provide weapons to the YPG. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoglu has welcomed Trump’s guarantee, saying Turkey wants to see the decision being implemented. Guess what? This is a done deal as America sits idle watching Turkey bomb its Kurdish allies.

E- Washington can never imagine NATO

without Turkey. They need Turkey to counter Russia’s influence in the region and at the same time contain the flow of migrants and refugees from the Middle East to Western Europe. That’s a long-term strategic alliance. Besides, they cannot feel outraged morally because their Turkish ally is murdering their Kurdish allies from the air by F-16s and tanks they sold to Turkey.

F- President Erdogan clearly knows he can contravene US interests without conse-

quence. His insurance policy is the country’s geographical location. Throughout the Cold War, Turkey’s proximity to the Soviet Union made it a great base for NATO troops and missiles. The US wars on Iraq and Afghanistan assured that the air base at Incirlik remained crucial to American military efforts. Even President Trump is in the know that Turkey is still a nice place to have a troop presence.

G- The Syrian government and its allies, including Iran, eventually overcame US efforts to regime change the nation, and Kurdish fighters are now paying for siding with war-party Washington. While Iran and Russia back the Syrian government against various terrorist groups and separatists, the US supports an irregular coalition of regime change mercenaries, made up mostly of Kurds and Al-Qaeda affiliates. Despite the group’s recent successes in storming ISIL’s de facto capital of Raqqa, the game is finished for US plans to overthrow President Bashar Assad or compete with Iran’s success in post-ISIL Syria.

In summation, tensions between Washington and its Kurdish allies will continue to rise on multiple fronts. Siding with the US, clearly, has turned out to be a grave mistake for the Kurds. All the evidence in Afrin suggests that US support for Kurds will soon disappear, as it did in post-invasion Iraq.

The Pentagon regime will never defend the Kurds against Turkish forces. What the US is doing with the Kurds should surprise no one. The Syrian Kurds made their biggest mistake in trusting Washington. The US wants Kurds only to the extent that they fight the Damascus government and prove useful in partitioning the country into smaller states. But when it comes to others, the US becomes a completely strange party to the Kurds. Loyalty is apparently a word that finds its meaning only in the East, as everything is for sales in the West.

## Urgently needed: a new security framework for Persian Gulf

**1 →** The creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), established in 1981 to confront Iran and Iraq, did not serve as a long-term solution, in part because it did not alter its scope from a military agreement to an official treaty unit.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a model for cooperation that the Persian Gulf states could emulate. However, due to the heterogeneity of ASEAN member-states, this treaty has not been effective in dealing with security issues. ASEAN became largely economically oriented after the Bali conference in 1976.

Another alternative model for cooperation among the Persian Gulf’s member states is the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), the precursor of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Created with the 1975 Helsinki Accords, the CSCE allowed members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the signatories of the Warsaw Pact to engage in talks about their security concerns. The CSCE was based on principles such as nonaggression, the acceptance of defined borders, the pursuit of peaceful resolution in times of crises, and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of sovereign states by foreign entities.



This model could be successfully implemented in the Persian Gulf region since it stresses cooperation, common objectives, and non-aggression, but it would have to be comprehensive—including Iran, Iraq and the members of the GCC. The Gulf States could discuss a collaborative security agenda and explore symmetrical measures like trust-build-

ing initiatives and arms control agreements. Lack of trust has been a major source of insecurity and instability in the Persian Gulf. But the experiences of the Damascus Declaration (6+2 Treaty) and the GCC have demonstrated that a comprehensive security framework in the Persian Gulf region can be reached in an atmosphere of cooperation. Even if such a CSCE-like framework does not lead to a permanent treaty, it could nevertheless create better security relations in the region.

Such a regional security framework could begin with a dialogue between Iran and the GCC, with the support of the U.S. to strengthen this process. Dialogue among member states in the region would begin at the political level before moving on to security issues. Strategic stability can come from mutually implemented measures and policies adopted by all sides on matters relating to Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Lebanon. Inspired by political scientist Karl Deutsch’s “pluralistic security community,” such a framework would require sovereign states to refuse to use aggression and war in their mutual relations.

Ultimately, however, such a framework requires trust, a commodity that is in short supply in the Persian Gulf today.

## Exhibiting confidence and strength can be a delicate dance



By Martin Love

**North Carolina** — Fiction or not, and it’s probably not at all, there is this term floating about regarding who really runs the U.S. government called the “Deep State”. This entity, assuming it is something fairly organized and real, consists of institutions like the CIA, and NSA and perhaps even the big players in the mainstream media such as the New York Times and the Washington Post and the big network broadcasters. And it may include major so-called “think tanks” as well, this latter staffed by pundits, alleged intellectuals, writers and policy promoters in or around what Donald Trump in 2016 characterized as “the Swamp”, denoting Washington. Well, one thing is for sure, the U.S. is now a democracy in name only, even with elections, because many of those who manage to become candidates for public office have already passed a litmus test and if their views diverge too far from this Deep State (it would seem), they never manage to become acceptable candidates, even if they claim they are.

One case in point is that of Chelsea Manning, a former U.S. soldier, who blew the lid off war crimes in Iraq in 2010 when he gave Wikileaks classified documents and videos detailing some of the military abuses in the Middle East. Manning, a transgender, was imprisoned and ultimately sentenced to decades in prison until Barack Obama pardoned him. Now, Manning is apparently going to run for the U.S. Senate in his current home state of Maryland. Most people think he hasn’t a chance of winning any election, but stranger things have happened and his campaign ahead, whatever it consists of, will at least be interesting to watch.

Now, in the U.S., huge efforts are underway to limit public exposure to the ideas and reports of dissenters on Facebook, Twitter, the Internet and other social and informational media platforms. And we already know billions of dollars have been spent to keep tabs on not just Americans but a good portion of the entire world by vacuuming up e mails, telephone conversations and more. It’s like nothing ever seen before, in part because the technology is available, and it would put past totalitarian or repressive regimes like, say, East Germany with its Stasi apparatus, or perhaps even the reign of the Shah in Iran with his Savak goons, to shame for having nothing so intrusive and objectionable.

Meanwhile, regarding Iran, we see the Trump administration and others attacking the JCPOA, a good agreement addressing the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons based not on trust but on tough verification procedures. But here’s what is especially galling. That whenever one reads reports in the U.S. from academia or the mainstream media about the JCPOA and its merits or demerits, the almost universal presumption is that Iran was aiming to have nuclear weapons, or eventually build them. And yet Iranian authorities have at bottom said that such weapons are anathema to Islam and Islamic values, and that Iran never had any serious intention, at least as the Islamic Republic since 1979, to build them, even if Iran developed some rudimentary capacity to do so. You really can’t get any clearer if Iran, as the ISLAMIC Republic, declares nukes verboten to Islam. Otherwise, Iranian authorities could be treading into a supreme hypocrisy that undercuts the very ideological foundation of the revolution and the current state! So, one must ask, why the presumption in the West? Why can’t Iranian authorities be believed?

I really don’t think the non-belief is about nukes, or the gripes about Iran. One reason is simply that it makes NO sense for Iran to have nuclear weapons, because they would not be a real deterrent against attack by the U.S. and Israel and maybe other countries. The nuclear arsenals of the U.S. and Israel would ever be far superior and more dangerous, and Iran might only invite a preemptive attack that would be disastrous for the entire Middle East. Netanyahu for one has been itching to attack Iran for decades and drag the U.S. into a joint campaign. Frankly, we now know from recent history that countries that wind up as alleged or implied enemies of the U.S. land in such an onerous position because, quite simply, they won’t align themselves with U.S. “empire” or hegemony, which anyway is very slowly melting away. Remember what happened to the USSR in the late 1980s. It exhausted itself trying to maintain military might, and in Afghanistan, too. This, I believe, this exhaustion is ahead for the U.S. It seems inevitable and patience is required to see it play out, and then, perhaps, a more peaceful world, one would hope or dream.

But some observers in the U.S. like me wonder. Iran must try to do its part and try to appear magnanimous to some degree, to obviate criticism from the U.S. and so-called “allies” like Israel. The latest suggestion by Mohammad Javad Zarif about setting up mechanisms for real dialogue between countries on the Persian Gulf is a fabulous idea. We see, for example, the two Koreas attempting to do just this, an effort which in some respects makes tremendous sense and excludes the U.S. from pretending it is “protecting” that part of Asia when, in fact, it’s mostly looking after its own narrow interests. The same might be accomplished, say, between Iran and other Mideast countries.

Obviating Western criticism of Iran may also be inherent in much smaller matters, such as perhaps going easier on some Iranians who have been in the West and then imprisoned in Iran when they returned to their native country. Whatever the charges against them, some of them (if not all) may not truly be serious “threats” to Iran and letting them go could improve Iran’s standing from a PR perspective. Again, the matter of handing the U.S. “ammunition”. Magnanimity and forgiveness, which seems to be a deeply forgotten concept in the U.S., really is or can be a real, convincing sign of confidence and strength whether one is talking about an individual OR an entire country such as the U.S. or Iran. We certainly don’t see magnanimity in the U.S., not with any government in several decades, although Obama did do a good thing in letting Chelsea Manning out of prison for revealing truths, even if they were “classified”.



# Trump repeats Nixon's fateful panic

By Charles M. Blow

The president attacked the investigation into his wrongdoing at the most inappropriate of places and in the most indecorous of ways, saying:

"Let others spend their time dealing with the murky, small, unimportant, vicious little things. We have spent our time and will spend our time building a better world."

Moments later, he came back to his grievances, saying that the nation should "not let ourselves be remembered only for the petty, little, indecent things that seem to obsess us at a time when the world is going by." That could well have been Donald Trump, but it's not. You can tell by the complexity of syntax and the absence of nicknames, charges of "fake news" and the guilt-triggered repetition of "there was no collusion."

No, the person speaking was Richard Nixon in 1973 at a dinner for the Japanese premier. It was at the height of the Watergate investigation. Nixon, like Trump, was trying to minimize the import of the investigation and to cast it as a personal, "vicious," and "petty" attack. It wasn't.

Indeed, the parallels between Trump now and

Nixon then are extraordinary.

As revelations of wrongdoing multiplied, many Republican senators continued to try to protect and console Nixon.

I have never thought about moving to another country, until the last few months. I'm not thinking about renouncing citizenship.

Trump said he could get away with shooting someone in the middle of Fifth Avenue ... but it is America that he killed.

Nixon's hostility toward the press grew, and the press was emboldened by his aggression. As one reporter then told The Times, the "president has declared war, and the war is on."

Nixon was fighting — and losing — his battle to keep secret White House tapes from being released. The very real possibility of a constitutional crisis loomed as Nixon signaled a desire to defy the courts on the matter, offering instead a written summary of the tapes.

Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox rejected the compromise and insisted that he would return to court to compel the release of the tapes.

Feeling increasingly cornered and desperate,

Nixon did the unthinkable in October of 1973: He ordered the firing of Cox and the abolition of Cox's office in what would become known as the "Saturday Night Massacre."

On July 24, 1974, the Supreme Court ordered Nixon to turn over the tapes. In less than a week after the tapes' release, the House Judiciary Committee approved three articles of impeachment: obstruction of justice, abuse of power and contempt of Congress.

## ■ Nixon obstructed justice

You agree to receive occasional updates and special offers for The New York Times's products and services. But, the actual language here is instructive. In Article I, the committee found that Nixon had "prevented, obstructed, and impeded the administration of justice."

In Article II, it found that he had "repeatedly engaged in conduct violating the constitutional rights of citizens, impairing the due and proper administration of justice and the conduct of lawful inquiries, or contravening the laws governing agencies of the executive branch and the purpose of these agencies."

And, in Article III, it found Nixon had "failed without lawful cause or excuse to produce papers

and things as directed by duly authorized subpoenas issued by the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives," concluding that "In all of this, Richard M. Nixon has acted in a manner contrary to his trust as President and subversive of constitutional government, to the great prejudice of the cause of law and justice, and to the manifest injury of the people of the United States."

It is hard to read all of this, based simply on what is publicly known and excluding what special counsel Robert Mueller may know, without concluding that we are already in the territory where a case for impeachment can credibly be made.

The Republican Party is so infected with Trumpism, so fevered in its defense of him, so completely compromised by its alignment with him, that its members are not placing the well-being of the nation and fidelity to the Constitution first and foremost.

But even during the Nixon presidency, Republicans didn't feel compelled to act until they were jolted out of inaction by the unassailable proof of Nixon's voice on tape.

It is not clear even that would move today's Republicans. Trump has already been caught on

tape bragging about sexually assaulting women. He was still elected, and now congressional leaders grovel at his feet and laud his leadership.

## ■ Looking to purging anyone

We now see Trump trying to portray an air of confidence and control, but being betrayed at every turn by his own actions, which reveal a panicked man looking to purge anyone conducting an honest investigation.

The Times's report last week that Trump wanted to fire Mueller only underscores this. That move would have brought us right back to Nixon's firing of Cox.

This is no longer about Trump alone. This is now an indictment of the entire Republican Party — the elected officials and the still strident Trump voters — as well as the Trump propaganda machine at Fox News ("news" clearly being a misnomer).

These folks are engaged in an attack on the country from within. They are attacking our institutions. They are attacking the truth. All of this is being done to protect Trump rather than protect America.

This inches us further away from democracy and closer to despotism. Might as well call a thing a thing.  
(Source: The NYT)

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# Children’s clothing in limelight at Iranian national festival

**L I F E** The first national clothing and fabric design festival is an opportunity to compensate for the shortcomings in children’s apparel in the country. The first national clothing and fabric design festival will be held from February 14 to 16 at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in Tehran (IIDCYA).

IIDCYA is one of the main organizations, which has been involved in children’s cultural affairs for many years. The festival aims to provide an opportunity for children’s dress designers to provide national products in the realm of textile designs and clothing appropriate for this age group.

The event runs in seven sections including textile design, clothing, fashion show, workshops, meetings, clothing industry and completion. “A Survey on Innovation and

Children” and “Color and Form in Children World and Art” are the workshops, which will be held on the first day of the festival.

The event is co-organized by the National Islamic-Iranian Fashion and Clothes Foundation and Iranian Fashion and Textile Design Association.

Childhood is often defined as the time between infancy to adolescence. Due to children’s rapid physical and mental development, concerning their capabilities and limitations, there is a need for focusing on their clothing and textile design separately.

Clothing plays an integral role of the “look” of childhood in every era.

The children’s clothing in each society, provides insights into changes in child-rearing theory and practice, gender roles, the position of children in society, and similarities and differences between children’s and adults’ clothing.



## Daily habits of naturally productive people

Who knew putting pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, could be as simple as these easy steps.

### ■ They make productivity a priority

When it comes to being more efficient at your job, you know the basics, from spending less time procrastinating—here’s how to pull off that miracle—to tuning out distractions like your loud coworkers. But research shows a whole new side to productivity you may not have realized.

### ■ They focus on being happier

Surprise, surprise: One of the biggest obstacles holding back successful people is their state of mind—which is why most of us could use these tips for stopping negative self-talk. One study by the University of Warwick in the UK found happier people to be 12 percent more productive in a work environment than their unhappy counterparts.

### ■ They prioritize fitness

You know the countless benefits of exercise—here’s a reminder. It also seriously improves your mood by releasing feel-good endorphins that provide stress relief and increase your brain’s productivity. Even 30-minute bursts of moderate-to-high physical activity just three to four times a day can go a long way in helping you accomplish your personal and professional goals.

### ■ They take breaks

Pressing pause is important. Studies show that prolonged tasks that require high levels of focus, energy, and attention can cause you to become less productive and focused over



time. A better move? Take brief mental breaks. “Setting aside a little time here and there to release your focus can significantly help maintain it for longer periods of time,” says Dr. Iyer.

### ■ They work by a window whenever possible

Of course, most offices don’t let you hand-pick your workstation, but if you do have the freedom to work remotely or can hang out in an open complex that offers a view, seek it out. Research shows that daylight exposure enhances your well being, sleep quality, and levels of activity. Dr. Iyer also points out that prolonged exposure to darkness can result

in increased melatonin, which can drive down your mood and energy levels.

### ■ They unplug from electronic devices

This may sound counterintuitive given that for most people, work requires you to be plugged in. But research shows that an over-immersion in technology, particularly computer-related work, not only leaves you less productive over time but can also cause you to be more stressed out and fatigued. Here are some compelling reasons to unplug.

### ■ They don’t try to do everything at once

Settle down, super men and women. While it’s fine to pride yourself on your abilities to multitask, it’s in your best interest (and your employer’s) if you stick to one to-do at a time. Here’s how to boost your mindfulness and live more in the moment. “Somewhere along the lines, our culture has embraced and promoted this idea that the more we can do at once, the better. However, research shows the opposite,” says Dr. Fisher.

### ■ They clock a full night’s sleep

In college, you may have pulled one too many all-nighters to finish a paper or study for an exam, but, despite your best efforts, research shows this is not the way to do business. Poor sleep or lack of sleep carries some pretty stiff penalties—check these out. In fact, studies have linked insufficient sleep to decreased levels of productivity, impaired work performance, and poorer safety outcomes.

(Source: Reader’s Digest)

## 28 simple and natural ways to detox your body



### ■ 3. Get a good and intense massage:

Suffice it to say that if you are interested in getting rid of toxins in the body, you absolutely have to get a good intense massage that focuses greatly on the pressure points within the body. A typical Swedish massage is good, but something more intense and focused like a Sports massage can work even better.

You want to get deep into the muscle tissue to make this work for you. When you push on these pressure points or spots where toxins tend to build up, then you give them a chance to release. This helps

you to naturally detox the body and get rid of the things that may have been making you sick.

Be sure that this comes from a registered massage therapist and that they know what they are doing in terms of ridding the body of toxins. To make it work effectively you want to drink a lot of water afterwards to flush out the system and be sure that the toxins leave the body immediately. Get into this as a regular habit and you will feel a very positive effect from it, above and beyond relaxation at the core.

(Source: bembu.com)

## How to organize room of a toddler or preschooler?



Most toddlers and preschoolers enjoy matching games. That is what organization is. You can use open containers; color coding -- red for blocks, blue for cars and greens for dinosaurs. Unused and outgrown items have to leave the room. Work with your child to help them creatively label their own drawers and bins. They can make their own drawings as labels. Another idea is to take a picture of them with a toy and place the photo on the toy box where it belongs.

■ Keep your child’s size in mind. Store their favorite toys and books low where they can take them and put them back. Put “look

at toys” and toys or art kits that require adult supervision up high where they have to be asked for.

■ You can make clean up a lot more fun by playing the timer game. The timer game pits the cleanup time against the clock instead of against the clutter. Set a timer for a few minutes. Have a little reward for them if they finish by the time the timer goes off.

■ Avoid big toy boxes because although they are a great catch-all, they are impractical if your child dumps everything out to find the teeny-tiny toys that have sifted to the bottom.

(Source: diynetwork.com)

## Surprising foods that keep your body warmer

As the temperature outside continues to drop, you’re probably layering on mittens, scarves and big cozy sweaters to shield yourself from the elements—and we’re doing the same! But what you eat could actually help by regulating your internal body temperature. And no, it’s not just soup, hot tea, and warm sammies. These foods are so incredibly surprising but are backed by scientific data to help convince you.

We looked over the science and spoke to Lauren Minchen MPH, RDN, CDN, a Registered Dietitian and Nutritionist based in New York City, about which foods may make brisk days more manageable. Read on to learn more and discover healthy and delicious ways to eat each one. And if you really must have that warm tomato soup and grilled cheese, at least check out these The 20 Best Carbs for a Flat Belly!

### ■ Iced coffee



Yup. You read that right: Iced—not just hot—coffee can keep you toasty on cold mornings. While it may seem counterintuitive, it’s not the hot temperature of the coffee that warms you, it’s the caffeine. “Caffeine increases metabolism by stimulating the release of fatty acids from the body’s fat tissues, which in turn can increase body temperature,” explains Minchen. Bonus: Add low-fat, Vitamin D-fortified milk to your morning cup. A 2011 Clinical Nutrition study found the nutrients increase diet induced thermogenesis (the process of converting calories to heat). The result: You feel warmer from the inside out. Don’t miss our round-up of What Happens to Your Body When You Drink Coffee!

### ■ Lean meats



If you always seem to have cold hands and feet, you may have iron deficiency (or, anemia). Some people with the condition get enough of the nutrient, but have trouble absorbing it; others simply aren’t eating enough iron-rich foods. If you chat with your doctor and find out it’s the latter, adding foods rich in the mineral can help warm you up. Lean beef, poultry and pork tenderloin all fit the bill while remaining low in saturated fat. Although there are plant-based sources of the nutrient, like iron-fortified cereals and beans, the body absorbs more iron from meat than it does from other sources, notes Minchen. And don’t forget to add a tangerine into your spinach salad mix, since the citrus fruit helps your body to absorb the iron from your spinach. It’s just one of the 20 Ways Tangerines Make You Look and Feel Younger.

### ■ Whole grains and complex carbs



“Because of the fiber, whole grains and other complex carbs like potatoes and lentils require more energy to break down than simple carbs like cookies and white bread. This process not only keeps you fuller longer, but because the body is working so hard to digest your food, it may also increase body heat,” says Minchen. Don’t believe it? Scientists confirm it true. A 2011 study published in Nutrition found that thermogenesis increases after carb-rich meals. That’s not permission to go carb-crazy, though; find out the 20 Worst Carb Habits of All Time!

### ■ Cumin



Despite popular belief, spicy foods—like hot peppers—won’t help keep you warm. Since they make you perspire, they actually cool you down—not exactly what you want when it’s a blizzard outside. Cumin, on the other hand, generates less intense heat that will warm you up without drenching you in sweat. How does it work? That’s not exactly known yet, says Minchen. But we’re confident plenty of scientists are working to understand the mechanism.

(Source: eatthis.com)



## 101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

### #32. Witness a solar eclipse

A solar eclipse is an eclipse that happens when the moon passes between the sun and earth, and the moon fully or partially blocks the Sun from our view.

As you may have learned during science class, the moon orbits around the earth while the earth orbits around the sun. Technically, if the Moon were in a perfectly circular orbit and in the same orbital plane, there would be total solar eclipses every single month. However, this isn’t so as the Moon’s orbit is tilted at more than 5 degrees to Earth’s orbit around the Sun.

The orbital planes of the earth’s and moon’s cross each year resulting in anywhere from 2 to 5 solar eclipses occurring each year. That means 2 to 5 opportunities for us to catch this natural phenomenon!!

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

Fresh vegetables, Tajrish bazaar, Tehran, Iran (Instagram/@friend\_from\_iran)





## Smart system aimed to integrate Iran’s tourism records

**TOURISM d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iran’s tourism body has recently unveiled a smart management network that makes it easy for integrating and monitoring all nationwide data on travel and hospitality sectors.



Mohammad Moheb-Khodaei in an undated photo

Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization Deputy Director Mohammad Moheb-Khodaei said on Monday that the centralized network, which is in the reach of everyone, provides useful information for managers, investors, the academia and other travel associates.

It simplifies centralized supervision on tourism affairs, yet helps to appropriately develop new plans and strategies, he explained.

Moheb-Khodaei added, “The integration of all arrangements to help avoid redundancy.”

“By the means of that system, we are able to control provincial departments and their satellite offices. Clienteles won’t be waiting behind the doors, yet can directly submit their requests.”

People can easily learn about potentials and opportunities [of each region], meanwhile it registers their comments, complaints and suggestions, Moheb-Khodaei stated.

The official added the system provides fresh and year-on-year data on health and medical tourism, ecotourism, pilgrimage, historic and cultural travels and sports tourism.

Filled from corner to corner with ancient bazaars, museums, mosques, monuments, gardens, historical sites, rich natural and rural landscapes, Iran hosts some of the world’s oldest cultural monuments, including 22 UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

## Malaysia tourist board ridiculed for ‘hideous’ new logo

The Malaysia tourist board’s slogan might be “Travel. Enjoy. Respect”, but they aren’t receiving much of the latter when it comes to the public reaction to their new logo.

The technicolored design, released on Friday at the Asean Tourism Forum in Chiang Mai, features clip-art style illustrations of the Petronas Towers, an orangutan and proboscis monkey wearing sunglasses, a turtle (also wearing sunglasses) and a palm tree.

Critics have turned to Twitter, slamming the 2020 tourism logo as “hideous”, “a joke” and an “insult to all professional graphic designers” for its retro imagery and mismatched font sizes.

Malaysia’s Tourism Minister, Nazri Aziz, has defended the logo – which was designed by an in-house graphic designer at Tourism Malaysia – and says that it will not be changed.

Responding to the critics, he said: “On why these animals were wearing sunglasses, it is to show that Malaysia is a sunny country with beautiful beaches and that we are into conservation of the environment,” reports the New Strait Times.

(Source: The Telegraph)



## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Lower Valley of the Awash

The Lower Awash Valley paleo-anthropological site is located 300 km northeast of Addis Ababa, in the west of the Afar Depression. It covers an area of around 150 km2.

The Awash Valley contains one of the most important groupings of paleontological sites on the African continent. The remains found at the property, the oldest of which date back over 4 million years, provide evidence of human evolution, which has modified our conception of the history of humankind. The most spectacular discovery came in 1974, when 52 fragments of a skeleton enabled the famous Lucy to be reconstructed.



A view of Awash river in Ethiopia

Excavations by an international team of palaeontologists and pre-historians began in 1973, and continued annually until 1976, and ended in 1980. In that time, they found a large quantity of fossilized hominid and animal bones in a remarkable state of preservation, the most ancient of which were at least four million years old.

In 1974, the valley produced the most complete set of remains of a hominid skeleton, Australopithecus afarensis, nicknamed ‘Lucy’, dating back 3.2 million years. Afarensis has since been proved to be the ancestral origin for both the Genus Australopithecus and Homo-sapiens.

A recovered female skeleton nicknamed ‘Ardi’ is 4.4 million years old, some 1.2 million years older than the skeleton of Australopithecus afarensis ‘Lucy’.

There is a wealth of paleo-anthropological and pre-historic tools still awaiting discovery and scientific study and these are seen as constituting an exceptionally important cultural heritage resource.

(Source: UNESCO)

# Iran’s 9-month handicraft export rises 70% yr/yr

**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The value of Iranian handicrafts exports, excluding suitcase trade, has witnessed some 70 percent hike in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year compared to the same period last year, an official said on Tuesday.

The current Iranian calendar year started on March 21, 20017.

The growth is associated with generating some 40,000 relevant jobs, Bahaman Namvar-Motlaq, deputy director of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (CHHTO), said while addressing the closing ceremony of the second Fajr handicrafts festival, held at the Iranian Artists Forum in downtown Tehran.

Another speaker, CHHTO chief Ali-Asghar Mounesan reminded attendees of the organization’s goal to increase handicraft exports per annum to \$2 billion by 2025.

“We foresee that the figure will reach \$2 billion by the [Iranian calendar] year 1404 if the country attracts 20 million tourists per annum,” CHTN news agency quoted Mounesan as saying.

Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, Iran is expecting to increase its tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

Of the total sum, one billion dollars is expected to be earned from “direct” exports and the rest through the suitcase trade, he explained.

Handicrafts exports from Iran hit a record high over the first four months of the current calendar year with 45.4 percent growth in contrast to the same period a year earlier.



A shop window displays handcrafted metalwork by Iranian artisans

Traditional ceramics, pottery vessels, handwoven cloths as well as personal ornamentations with precious and semi-

precious gemstones are among Iranian exports to Iraq, Afghanistan and Germany, the U.S., the UK and other countries.

Over the past couple of years, dozens of Iranian handicrafts have gained the UNESCO Seal of Excellence.

## Fresh archaeological season starts near Burnt City

**HERITAGE d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The seventh season of archeological explorations has recently commenced in Tappeh Sadeq, one of satellite hills of the Burnt City, a UNESCO-registered site in southeast Iran.

“This chapter of explorations is aimed to shed a new light on previous findings of the crafts and residential accommodation in the ancient site,” ISNA quoted Rouhollah Shirazi, director of the world heritage site, as saying on Tuesday.

Human remains, vestiges of pottery vessels as well as pieces of animated designs were brought to light over the past six seasons, Shirazi said.

A total of ten university students and archaeologists from the University of Sistan and Baluchestan are contributing



An archaeologist unearths an ancient pottery vessel at Tappeh Sadeq in southeast Iran, January 30, 2017. (Photo: Hamed Gholami/IRNA)

## Cuba tourism slides in wake of Hurricane Irma, Trump

**HAVANA (Reuters)** — Tourism to Cuba, one of the few bright spots in its ailing economy, has slid in the wake of Hurricane Irma and the Trump administration’s tighter restrictions on travel to the Caribbean island, a Cuban tourism official said on Monday.

Although the number of visitors rose nearly 20 percent in 2017, it fell 10 percent on the year in December, and is down 7-8 percent this month, Jose Manuel Bisbe York, the president of Cuban state travel agency conglomerate Viajes Cuba, said.

Arrivals from the United States, which had surged in the wake of the U.S.-Cuban detente in 2014, took the worst hit, dropping 30 percent last December, he told Reuters.

“Since Hurricane Irma, we’ve seen arrivals shrink,” Bisbe York said on the sidelines of the event organized by U.S. travel agency insightCuba to dispel tourist misperceptions about Cuba.

Irma hit in September, just as the tourism sector was taking reservations for its high season from November to March.

Images of destruction put many would-be visitors off although Cuba had fixed its tourism installations within two months, said Bisbe York. Arrivals of Canadians, the largest group of tourists to Cuba, were down 4-5 percent.

“But we see this as a temporary thing and what we are seeing is that arrivals are recovering from month to month,” said Bisbe York, adding that Cuba would go ahead with its

plans to launch more than 15 hotels island-wide this year.

“The first trimester will be the most difficult, because logically the change in the public perception takes time.”

Occupancy rates at the hotels in Cuba managed by Spain’s Meliá Hotels International S.A. were down around 20 percent on the year in December and January, said Francisco Camps, Meliá’s Cuba deputy general manager.

“From February though, we are already reaching figures similar to those we had in previous years,” he said.

Republican President Donald Trump’s more hostile stance towards Cuba than his Democratic predecessor Barack Obama looks set to have a more lasting impact than Irma.

The number of U.S. visitors had surged since the Obama administration created greater exemptions to a ban on tourism to the Caribbean’s largest island and restored regular commercial flights and cruises.

Arrivals reached a record 619,523 last year, up from 91,254 in 2014.

But the Trump administration in September issued a warning on travel there due to a spate of alleged health attacks on U.S. diplomats in Havana. In November, tighter travel regulations also went into effect.

The double whammy seriously depressed U.S. visits, American tour operators and a cruise line said at Monday’s event, although in reality the restrictions remain looser than before the detente and travel easier.

## How to have a luxury vacation in Norway for less

By Shivani Vora

Norway is an affordable destination for budget travelers eager to score luxurious digs and once-in-a-lifetime experiences without breaking the bank.

Scandinavia can be one of the most expensive regions in the world to visit, according to Kelly Brennan, a travel adviser at the New York City travel company Indagare. However, Norway — a country with a bustling capital (Oslo), an unspoiled countryside and stunning fjords — is the exception.

“Norway is a great choice for travelers on a limited budget who want a luxury experience, because it’s still up-and-coming in popularity,” Ms. Brennan said. She also offered some tips on how to enjoy a luxury vacation in Norway without emptying your wallet in the process.

### ■ Stay at the most upscale hotels

The best hotels in Norway are a bargain compared with other countries in Scandinavia and other global tourist destinations.

Luxury properties like the Storfjord Hotel, which is the best place to stay to explore the fjords and the charming town of Alesund, have rates starting at \$200 a night. “Upscale tourism is still new to Norway so travelers don’t have to break the bank to enjoy high-end accommodations,” Ms. Brennan said.

### ■ Book shared excursions

Many of Norway’s best activities are offered as small group experiences. Consider gathering a small group and booking a sailboat tour in the fjords, going dog-sledding and ice-fishing in Tromso, or enjoying a boat tour complete with a prawn buffet and cocktails in Oslo.

Ms. Brennan encourages travelers to book these instead of springing for private tours because they’re often 75 percent cheaper and

are equally enjoyable when shared with others. Learn more about available group excursions through your hotel’s concierge, an online search or through a local tourist office.

### ■ Splurge on a few private activities

Whether it’s spending the night in a 150-year-old restored lighthouse in Alesund, seeing the Northern Lights by car or another unique excursion, Ms. Brennan said that special, intimate activities are the ones worth booking privately. She noted that it’s not going to cost travelers more than a few hundred dollars per person to book for an individual or a couple. “Many private activities are so reasonably priced that most travelers can afford to splurge on one or two,” she said.

### ■ Visit Oslo in the winter

While Oslo receives very little sunlight in the winter, the season is a great time to visit the city because hotel rates and prices for airline tickets and tours are at their lowest.

Ms. Brennan said that travelers will also be rewarded with a lively atmosphere.

During the coldest months, restaurants offer sheepskin wool blankets and space heaters so patrons can dine outside; outdoor movies play in the downtown area.

### ■ Take advantage of free attractions

Many of Norway’s iconic landmarks are outdoor sites that are free to see. They include the magnificent Geiranger Fjord, the Trollstigen, a serpentine mountain road, and National Tourist Routes, a collection of scenic highways throughout the country that are dotted with marked spots where drivers can stop and take in the views.

The country also happens to be a paradise for driving, Ms. Brennan explained. “Car rentals are affordable, driving around is easy, and if you get lost, most Norwegians speak English,” she said.

(Source: The New York Times)



Tourists ride in a vintage car beside the U.S. Embassy in Havana, Cuba, December 12, 2017. REUTERS/Alexandre Meneghini

Cuba is also still one of the safest destinations world-wide, they said.

“While the regulations he changed very little the perception in the U.S. was that you no longer could travel to Cuba legally,” said insightCuba’s Tom Popper, noting his agency’s reservations were down 50 percent this year.

“Part of hosting this event was to communicate that it is 100 percent legal to travel to Cuba.”



# Earth went strangely quiet about 2b years ago: new study

A new study has added evidence to the hypothesis that our planet experienced a lull in geology between 2.2 and 2.3 billion years ago, when not a lot went on as far as rock-forming processes go.

The relatively dormant phase in our planet's history signals a significant change in tectonics, one that is fuelling discussion on exactly how continents form and could possibly provide better details on exactly where we can find new deposits of various mineral resources.

The era known as the Paleoproterozoic covers a rather exciting time in Earth's history, starting 2.5 billion years ago and ending around a billion years later.

Life was literally a lot simpler then. Days were four hours shorter. Our atmosphere was yet to have a lot of oxygen. There were the first global glaciation events. And the planet's first supercontinent – a huge chunk of land called Columbia, or Nuna – was in the process of being formed.

## ■ Today's mature globe

As you might imagine, geologists are keen to understand how this far younger Earth behaved compared to today's more mature globe.

It seems as if around 2.45 billion years ago, there was something of a quiet spell beneath the surface, one that lasted around 250 million years.

Not that everybody is convinced – oth-



er interpretations of the research suggest it was business as usual throughout the Paleoproterozoic.

A close look at the existing data as well as new rock samples collected from Western Australia, China, Northern Canada and

Southern Africa has added weight to what's described as a tectono-magmatic shutdown.

"Our research shows a bona fide gap in the Paleoproterozoic geologic record, with not only a slowing down of the number of volcanoes erupting during this time, but

also a slow-down in sedimentation and a noticeable lull in tectonic plate movement," says Curtin University geoscientist Christopher Spencer.

Earth's guts were a lot hotter a few billion years ago. For a while all that churning resulted in a whole lot of volcanic activity.

Whether that directly led to significant cooling, or if something else happened beneath the crust, nobody is sure.

## ■ Plate movements

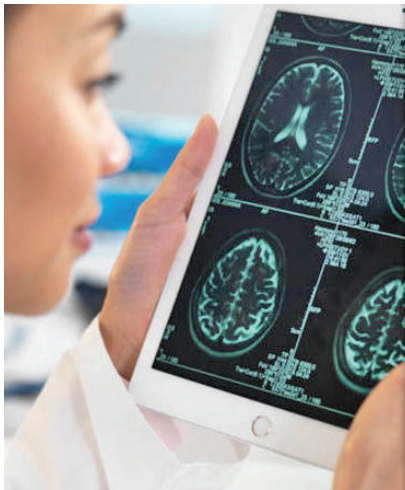
But we can now be fairly confident that about 2.3 billion years ago, things went quiet under the lid. Volcanoes were temporarily out of fashion. Plate movements were subdued.

"This 'dormant' period lasted around 100 million years and signaled what we believe was a shift from 'ancient-style' tectonics to 'modern-style' tectonics more akin to those operating in the present day," says Spencer.

After a bit of a breather, things ramped up again. Chunks of ancient crust fractured into smaller pieces called cratons, which can today be found deep inside continental plates.

"Following this dormant period Earth's geology started to 'wake-up' again around 2.2 to 2.0 billion years ago with a 'flare-up' of volcanic activity and a shift in the composition of the continental crust," says Spencer. (Source: sciencealert.com)

## Brain 'pacemaker' might help slow Alzheimer's disease, pilot study suggests



Stimulating the brain with an implantable device may be safe -- and possibly helpful -- for some people with Alzheimer's disease, a small pilot study suggests.

In what researchers described as a "proof of concept" treatment, three Alzheimer's patients had deep brain stimulation (DBS) wires implanted in the brain -- in areas related to skills like planning, judgment and problem-solving.

Over the next 18 months or more, the tactic appeared to be safe. And there were "signals" that it was slowing down two of the patients' decline, said lead researcher Dr. Douglas Scharre, director of cognitive neurology at Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center.

## ■ Deep brain stimulation

Deep brain stimulation is already used to treat some cases of Parkinson's disease and certain other brain disorders.

It's "much too early" for patients or caregivers to seek out DBS, said Fargo, who was not involved in the study.

Instead, he said, these findings suggest that deep brain stimulation is a "reasonable route" to study in larger clinical trials.

The results were published online Jan. 30 in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease.

Deep brain stimulation involves implanting electrodes in the brain, then connecting them to a pulse generator placed under the skin of the chest. Sometimes called a "brain pacemaker," it delivers electrical pulses that alter the activity in specific brain "circuits."

The theory behind trying DBS for



Alzheimer's patients, Scharre said, is similar to the "use it or lose it" principle: If key brain areas can be stimulated to form new connections among cells, it might slow decline.

Right now, Scharre noted, medications for Alzheimer's target brain chemicals involved in memory.

But Alzheimer's impairs all kinds of mental functions -- including judgment, planning and decision-making. And those issues have a huge impact on daily life, for patients and their caregivers, Scharre added.

## ■ Regulating mental skills

So, the patients in his study received DBS, for at least 18 months, to brain areas that regulate those mental skills. All three patients were in the earlier stages of Alzheimer's and were on standard medications.

After starting DBS, all saw a general decline in their memory, problem-solving and other skills. But they declined at a slower rate, compared to 96 similar patients whose information was taken from an Alzheimer's research database.

Two of the DBS patients declined at a "meaningfully" slower rate, according to Scharre. That included one who actually showed some improvements.

That patient was LaVonne Moore, 85, of Delaware, Ohio. When she entered the study, she was not preparing any meals. After two years of deep brain stimulation, she'd regained that skill -- and was better able to perform some other simple tasks, like selecting her clothes and organizing outings.

(Source: HealthDay News)

## Mammals and birds more likely to survive climate change, new study says



A new study indicated that warm-blooded animals like birds and mammals have a better chance of surviving man-made climate change than cold-blooded animals like amphibians and reptiles.

Birds and mammals have a better chance of surviving the fast-changing climate on Earth in comparison to reptiles and amphibians.

A new study analyzed around 11,500 species to see how they fared over the past 270 million years when the weather fluctuated between hot and cold. The findings suggest that warm-blooded creatures have a better coping mechanism than amphibians and reptiles.

"We see that mammals and birds are better able to stretch out and extend their habitats, meaning they adapt and shift much easier," said lead author Jonathan Rolland, a University of British Columbia researcher.

## ■ Rate of extinction

Rolland added that adaptability has a strong effect on the rate of extinction and what the planet could look like in the future.

The research team noted that around 66 million years ago, a huge asteroid smashed into the Yucatan Peninsula. The ensuing debris in the atmosphere made Earth's temperatures colder. The collision and its aftermath annihilated all dinosaurs that were non-avian, right from the triceratops to the T-Rex.

The warm-blooded animals, however, survived and thrived, the latter also because predatory dinosaurs were extinct.

Today, another mass extinction event has been triggered by global warming. It is the first since the dinosaurs disappeared

and the sixth in Earth's last half-billion year history. In fact, species are becoming extinct 100 times faster in comparison to the situation prior to the Industrial Revolution.

Rolland and his colleagues looked at genetic data and fossil records to reconstruct where animals flourished over the last 270 million years and the temperature that enabled them to live.

When a balmy Earth gradually became cooler around 40 million years ago, birds and mammals could successfully move and adapt to new habitats. However, the same was not true for cold-blooded animals.

## ■ The environmental pressure

Rolland explained that this could be the reason why so few amphibians and reptiles can be seen in temperate climates or in the Antarctic. Though environmental pressure can make them evolve too, it takes more time.

Warm-blooded animals belong to the group called endotherms that are able to regulate body temperature, which enables them in keeping their offsprings and embryos warm and boosts the chance of survival. The group, which is inclusive of birds and mammals, can also hibernate or migrate in an easier way than ectotherms, the group to which cold-blooded creatures belong and whose temperature is influenced by the environment.

The findings are important because more knowledge about the past extinction and evolution of species can help humans know how manmade climate change can impact the biodiversity of the Earth.

(Source: Tech Times)

## Global cancer survival up, but progress uneven: study

Cancer survival is increasing across the world but large gaps endure between nations, while some cancers remain hard to treat everywhere, according to a major review released Wednesday.

The progress, and the gap, are especially large for childhood cancers, according to the CONCORD-3 study covering 71 nations and 18 types of cancer, published in the medical journal The Lancet.



For children with brain tumors, for example, five-year survival has improved across the board from 54 percent for the period 2000-2004, to more than 60 percent for 2010-2014.

In the United States, Denmark, Sweden and Slovakia, the survival rate progressed to 80 percent or better. In Mexico and Brazil, however, less than 40 percent of children diagnosed with brain tumors survived in the 2010-2014 period.

Similarly, five-year survival for the most common type of childhood cancer -- acute lymphoblastic leukemia -- rose to higher than 90 percent in Canada, the United States and nine European countries, but remained below 60 percent in China and Mexico.

"This likely reflects the availability and quality of diagnostic and treatment services," the authors said in a statement.

The world has seen across-the-board progress on breast cancer, the study showed.

For women diagnosed with the disease in the United States and Australia between 2010 and 2014, five-year survival was 90 percent. In 16 western European countries, the rate improved to 85 percent, and stood at 71 percent for eastern European nations.

In India, breast cancer survival improved during those five years to 66 percent.

Liver and lung cancers remain quick killers in both rich and developing countries, but the last 20 years have seen some progress. (Source: Medical Xpress)

## Alien life could exist even without weak nuclear force, say researchers

Matter is ultimately governed by one of four fundamental forces: strong nuclear, weak nuclear, electromagnetic and gravity, according to the Standard Model of physics. Yet we need some of them to maintain the physical laws of our universe more than we need others. Physicists have long theorized that weak nuclear is the weak link, the one that could be removed from the equation while causing the least damage, according to ScienceNews. Now, they've shown that in an alternate universe without any weak nuclear, galaxies and even alien life could still form.

The delicate balance between the four forces is crucial for the existence of life. Take gravity -- if it were too weak, matter wouldn't be able to assemble into anything (galaxies, stars, planets) but if it were too strong, matter would just be sucked into powerful black holes, according to ScienceNews. The equivalent scenarios are true for the balance of strong nuclear, which keeps the nuclei of atoms together, and of electromagnetic, which is what allows photons to travel throughout the universe.

Researchers from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, designed a simulation of the process by which matter formed and then coalesced into stars during the Big Bang -- with only three of the fundamental forces instead of four. A paper describing the research was published at the online study repository arXiv.

Weak nuclear force governs the decay of an atom's neutron into protons and electrons, according to Live Science. Those protons are what get fused with various elements (like helium) by the heat emanating from stars to create celestial bodies like planets (and life, human or otherwise). Weak nuclear is stronger than gravity (which in turn is weaker than electromagnetic) but weaker than strong nuclear force.

(Source: Newsweek)

## Bacteria in milk may trigger rheumatoid arthritis: study

Researchers have found that a strain of bacteria commonly found in milk may be a trigger for developing rheumatoid arthritis in people who are genetically at risk.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune and inflammatory disease that causes the immune system to attack a person's joints, muscles, bones and organs.

Patients suffer from pain and deformities mostly in the hands and feet. It can occur at any age but the most common onset is between 40 and 60 years old and is three times more prevalent in women.

The study showed a link between rheumatoid arthritis and Mycobacterium avium subspecies paratuberculosis, known as MAP.

Humans can contract the bacteria through the consumption of infected milk, beef and produce fertilized by cow manure.

"We don't know the cause of rheumatoid arthritis, so we're excited that we have found this association," said one of the researchers Shazia Beg from the University of Central Florida (UCF) in the U.S.

The study involved 100 of her patients who volunteered clinical samples for testing.

Nearly 80 per cent of the patients with rheumatoid arthritis were found to have a mutation in the PTPN22/22 gene, and 40 percent of that number tested positive for MAP.

"We believe that individuals born with this genetic mutation and who are later exposed to MAP through consuming contaminated milk or meat from infected cattle are at a higher risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis," said Saleh Naser, an infectious disease specialist at UCF.

"Understanding the role of MAP in rheumatoid arthritis means the disease could be treated more effectively," Naser said.

(Source: indianexpress.com)

## Two Research Activists to Be Honored at 4th Intl. Iran Energy Management Conf.

Two veteran activists in the field of research and energy sector of the country will be honored concurrent with the 4th Iran International Energy management and Technology Conference, the Public Relations Dept. of Iranian Energy Association reported.

The two researchers named "Dr. Georg Gharehpetian from Amirkabir University of Technology and Dr. Mahmoud-Reza Haghifaam from Tarbiyat Modares (Teacher Training) University were introduced to won award in 1st Iran Energy Association.

Dr. Behnam Mohammadi Secretary of Iran Energy Association and Scientific Secretary of the Conference announced the above statement and added: "Considering that making decision based on the publications related to the energy field is the main objective of the Association, results were used by SciVal which is considered as one of



the most professional bases for ranking researches of the organizations and researchers.

Results of top theses of top Iranian Energy Association were specified.

With due observance to the said issue, Iran Energy Association appreciates the theses selected in the field of energy sector of the country annually.

The articles, papers, patents registered with relation to the thesis, cooperating in relevant research projects, Book Chapter and score of the Thesis are considered as important criteria in the selection of top thesis, he maintained.

From among the theses received in Ph.D. level, Dr. Hamid-Reza Baqaei from Amirkabir University of Technology in MA level and thesis of Eng. Hadi Tarzmani from Tabriz University in MA level were selected as top theses, the report concluded.



## Hepatitis Network urges end to employment discrimination

**1 →** “This is scientifically baseless and leads to isolation and cause substantial damage to the patients’ future,” he added.

He went on to say that hepatitis B and C spread through the blood [or body fluids] not by typical interactions such as handshaking in the workplace.

All the newborns have been receiving vaccination for hepatitis B since 1994, so the disease does not threaten the students, he highlighted, adding, “On the other hand hepatitis C is 100 percent curable with new drugs.”



■ **10 percent of all hepatitis C patients in prison**  
In another letter to Health Minister Hassan Qazizadeh Hashemi, Alavian touched on the fact that hepatitis screening schemes have indicated that 10 percent of all hepatitis C patients are in prisons and recognized this as a good opportunity to fight the disease.

Appreciating the adopted measures of the Health Ministry to control hepatitis in prisons, which have reduced the spreading rate, Alavian called for allocating more budget to provide drugs since most prisoners cannot afford them.

The advent of efficient methods for screening, diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C has raised hope for eradicating the disease by 2030, he concluded.

■ **Hepatitis**  
Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis viruses are the most common cause of hepatitis in the world but other infections, toxic substances such as alcohol, certain drugs, and autoimmune diseases can also cause hepatitis.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) there are 5 main hepatitis viruses, referred to as types A, B, C, D and E. Hepatitis is a matter of greatest concern because of the burden of illness and death it causes and the potential for outbreaks and epidemic spread. In particular, types B and C lead to chronic disease in hundreds of millions of people and, together, are the most common cause of liver cirrhosis and cancer.

Ingestion of contaminated food or water are the leading causes of hepatitis A and E. Hepatitis B, C and D usually occur as a result of parenteral contact with infected body fluids. Common modes of transmission for these viruses include receipt of contaminated blood or blood products, invasive medical procedures using contaminated equipment and for hepatitis B transmission from mother to baby at birth, from family member to child, and also by sexual contact.

WHO data show an estimated 325 million people worldwide are living with chronic hepatitis B or chronic hepatitis C. Viral hepatitis caused 1.34 million deaths in 2015, a number comparable to deaths caused by tuberculosis and HIV combined. While deaths from tuberculosis and HIV have been declining, deaths from hepatitis are increasing.

## LEARN ENGLISH

### I’m Sorry

A: Steven! Where have you been? I’ve been trying to **get a hold of** you for hours!

B: I... um... there was an emergency at work, so...

A: I was waiting for you in the restaurant for three hours! And you didn’t even have the **decency** to call me! **Do you have any idea** how embarrassed I was?

B: Honey, I promise this won’t happen again, it’s just that I...

A: Yeah, right. I’ve heard it all before. I’m not going to take any more of your **empty promises**. This is the fifth time you’ve **stood me up** in two weeks! You need to **get your priorities straight**. I’m tired of you **putting your job first** all the time!

B: Come on, Veronica, that’s not fair. I do care about you a lot, you know that. I tried to...

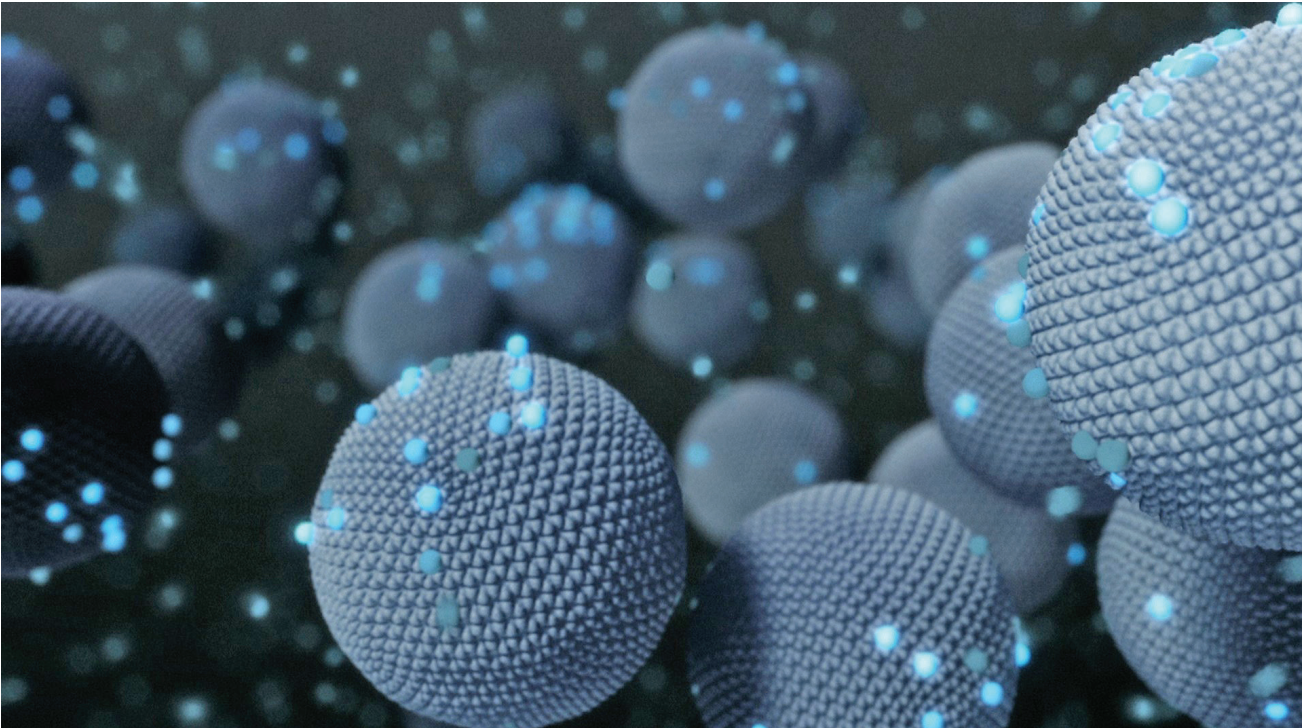
A: You know what? Maybe we should just **take a break**. I need some time to think about where this relationship is **heading**.  
B: But... Veronica, would you just listen to me? There was a fire alarm at my office building today and I was stuck...

■ **Key vocabulary**  
**get hold of:** find or contact someone  
**decency:** polite or moral behavior  
**do you have any idea:** do you know  
**empty promises:** words etc. that are not sincere, or have no effect  
**stand (someone) up:** fail to keep the appointment to meet someone  
**get your priorities straight:** realize what is more important  
**put something first:** to consider someone or something as the most important person or thing  
**take a break:** stop seeing each other or going out with each other for a short period of time  
**head:** go towards a specified direction or place  
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**  
**break up:** end a relationship  
**cheat on (someone):** to be unfaithful to your husband, wife  
**get back together:** restart a relationship that ended  
**ex:** someone’s former wife, husband, girlfriend, or boyfriend  
(Source: [irlanguage.com](http://irlanguage.com))



Without water,  
everything  
withers

# Iran ranks 4th in nanotechnology worldwide



**Nanotechnology is hailed as having the potential to increase the efficiency of energy consumption, help clean the environment, and solve major health problems. It is said to be able to massively increase manufacturing production at significantly reduced costs.**

nanotechnology, Iranians have had boosted researches in the field year on year.

There are 257 companies active in this field, 33 percent of which working on na-

nomaterials, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

These companies have manufactured 376 different products using the nontech-nology, showing that this is a field with

huge economic and practical advantages.

The reports also demonstrate that these products are being exported to 47 different countries.

## Labor ministry to stand up for rights of working children

**SOCIETY d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare is tasked with defending the rights of working and street children, especially those living in Tehran, IRIB reported on Tuesday.

The Interior Ministry has delegated the task to the labor ministry to stand up for the rights of working children with Tehran being the top priority, the secretary for the Convention on the Rights of the Child said.

The right to have a family, the right to education and the right to health and social services are recognized for all children and working children should also benefit from these rights, Mahmoud Abbasi explained.

Abbasi called for “precise and coherent” programs so that laboring children would not return to their previous situation after undergoing such plans.

Referring to the vast presence of foreign laboring children in Iran, Abbasi said, “We have come up with plans for



laboring children on humanitarian grounds.”

Abbasi, however, didn’t elaborate on the details of the plans for recognizing, regulating street and working children and claiming their rights.

On the related subject, MP Mohammad Kazemi has said earlier this month that the law on children’s right is still being hammered out in the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) and it will be adopted by the end of the [Iranian calendar] month of Bahman (February 19).

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is a treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 and sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.

Trying to improve the life of laboring children, Iran signed the convention in 1991 but it seems that far more measures are needed to tackle this social challenge and that Iran is still in the beginning of the road.

## London reaches legal air pollution limit just one month into the New Year

Air pollution in London has reached the legal limit for the whole of 2018 less than a month into the year, prompting calls for the government to “get a grip and show they’re serious about protecting health”.

Toxic air has been at illegal levels in the capital and most urban areas in the UK since 2010 and results in around 40,000 early deaths a year.

The date of this year’s reaching of the limit, at Brixton Road in Lambeth, is actually a significant improvement on previous years: for the last decade air pollution has reached illegal levels no later than six days into the year.

The improvement is partly the result of action taken by the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, who introduced cleaner buses on routes through pollution blackspots and charges to deter dirty vehicles from central London. “But I have one hand tied behind my back due to government policies and inaction,” he told the Guardian.

Clean air plans put forward by ministers have already twice been declared illegal at the high court for failing to cut air pollution in the “shortest time possible”, as EU law

requires. The government is now awaiting the verdict in a third case brought by environmental lawyers ClientEarth, after a hearing earlier in January.

“Londoners are still breathing filthy air on a daily basis,” said Simon Alcock at ClientEarth. “There’s much more to do. But the mayor can’t solve this problem alone. Ministers have to get a grip and show they’re serious about protecting our health by committing to real action to tackle our toxic air.”

Modern air pollution records for London began 18 years ago and Khan said this is the first time London went almost a month before reaching the legal limits: “This shows the measures we have already taken in the capital are beginning to take effect. I am using all the powers I have to their fullest extent to tackle this health crisis. But it’s about time the government recognized the true scale of this issue.”

The law requires that the hourly measurement of toxic nitrogen dioxide (NO2) must not exceed 200 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m3) more than 18 times in a whole year. But Brixton Road has now recorded 18

breaches and is expected to break the limit in the next day or two.

Over the year, the most polluted places have vastly exceeded this in the past. In 2016 Putney high street broke the hourly limit more than 1,200 times. Khan’s cleaner bus plan is now in place in both Brixton and Putney.

Air quality has also improved on Oxford Street, which broke the annual limit in just five days in 2015. But following changes to bus routes, there have been no breaches so far in 2018. Initial hourly readings are checked and very occasionally recalibration means a result is corrected to a level below the legal limit, but even if this happens Brixton Road is certain to break the annual limit very soon.

ClientEarth’s barrister told the high court last week that the government’s own assessment showed “a very significant impact on human health for many years” with pollution not forecast to fall below legal limits until 2028 in London and 2021 in most other urban areas.

The government’s own analysis shows charging zones to deter dirty cars from urban centers are by far the most effective policy, but

ministers have told councils they should only be the option of last resort. The government has already spent £370,000 of taxpayers’ money in failed attempts to fight lawsuits aimed at forcing stronger action.

Nitrogen dioxide pollution, mostly produced by diesel vehicles, has been illegally high in most urban parts of Britain since 2010. The government’s latest plan, produced in July, was condemned as “woefully inadequate” by city leaders and “inexcusable” by doctors.

Particulate pollution is also a serious health hazard and, while levels are generally under existing legal limits, research released in October showed every person in the capital is breathing air that exceeds World Health Organization guidelines.

Khan is introducing a wide ultra-low emissions zone in London in 2019 and planning to limit the use of wood-burning stoves in future. “The government also urgently needs to set out plans for a vehicle scrappage scheme that removes the filthiest cars off our roads,” he said.

(Source: *The Guardian*)

## ENGLISH IN USE

### LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → چ

### Free tuberculosis testing at Tehran subway

Temporary units which test for tuberculosis (TB) free of charge are set up at three stations of Tehran subway, IRIB reported on Tuesday.

The units are designed to heighten public awareness with experts explaining TB risk factors, its diagnosis, prevention and reasons for developing such a disease using brochures.

The scheme is co-planned by Tehran subway company department for social and cultural affairs and western Tehran healthcare center.

### PREFIX/SUFFIX

#### “circum-”

■ **Meaning:** around

■ **For example:** When considering your special *circumstances*, the Financial Aid Office takes into account the availability of funds.

### PHRASAL VERB

#### Flesh something out

■ **Meaning:** to add more details to something in order to make it clear, more interesting etc.

■ **For example:** You need to flesh out your argument with a few more examples.

### IDIOM

#### Blue chip company

■ **Explanation:** a company with a solid reputation for the quality of its products and the stability of its growth and earnings

■ **For example:** It’s usually safe to invest in a blue chip company.



# First State of Union address: Trump warns Americans of nuclear threat from ‘depraved’ N. Korea

The United States President Donald Trump delivered his first State of the Union address before a joint session of Congress, covering a range of issues from the Iran nuclear deal to tax cut reforms to immigration policy and the so-called war against terrorism.

Branding North Korea's leadership "depraved," Trump told Americans on Tuesday that Pyongyang's pursuit of nuclear missiles could "very soon threaten our homeland" and vowed a continued campaign to prevent that.

In his maiden speech for national unity on Tuesday evening, the U.S. president stood on the podium before Republican and Democratic lawmakers to elaborate on his policies over the past year.

Trump began the speech by congratulating members of his administration for their efforts to "make American great again for all Americans," winning a standing ovation from Republicans while Democrats remained in their seats.

## ■ N. Korea to 'threaten homeland soon'

Elsewhere, Trump struck a dire note of warning about North Korea, saying the country's "reckless pursuit of nuclear missiles could very soon threaten our homeland."

He said Washington was applying "maximum pressure" to prevent any such attack.

"Past experience has taught us that complacency and concessions only invite aggression and provocation," Trump said. "I will not repeat the mistakes of past administrations that got us into this very dangerous position."

Trump's warning about North Korea follows Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Mike Pompeo's assessment on Monday that Pyongyang will be capable of delivering a nuclear-tipped missile to the U.S. mainland in "a handful of months."

## ■ Start living the American dream

As for the tax cuts, Trump said the government had slashed business tax rate from 35 percent to 21 percent, causing average family income to increase by more than 4,000 dollars.

The president said his agenda was working and the economy was growing because of the tax bill passed by Congress in December. "This is our new American moment," Trump said. "There has never been a better



time to start living the American dream."

## ■ Terrible Iran deal

Trump reiterated previous accusations regarding "fundamental flaws" in the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and six world powers, once again denouncing the deal as "terrible."

This is while Iran has vehemently rejected the possibility of renegotiation, warning that any hostile action against the accord will jeopardize regional and global peace and security.

## ■ Gangs taking advantage of open borders

On immigration, the U.S. president announced that the House and Senate would be voting on an immigration reform package "over the next few weeks."

"In recent months, my administration has met extensively with both Democrats and Republicans to craft a bipartisan approach to immigration reform. Based on these discussions, we presented the Congress with a detailed proposal that should be supported by both parties as a fair compromise," he said.

Trump proposed a plan for immigration based on four pillars, which he claimed "represent a down-the-middle compromise and one that will create a safe, modern, and lawful immigration system."

The president called on Congress to advance legislation to fund his proposed wall on the Mexican border and cut back on legal immigration by overhauling long-standing programs.

The deal would also allow nearly 2 million "Dreamers" illegally brought to the country as children a path to citizenship.

"Americans love their country. And they deserve a government that shows them the same love and loyalty in return," the president said.

Trump, however, claimed that America's "open borders" had allowed drug gangs to pour into the country, citing groups like El Salvador's MS-13.

"Many of these gang members took advantage of glaring loopholes and our laws to enter the country as illegal, unaccompanied, alien minors," he said.

## ■ Proud of ISIL defeat

Elsewhere in his speech, Trump also claimed full credit for the elimination of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group in Iraq and Syria.

"Last year, I also pledged that we would work with our allies to extinguish ISIL from the face of the Earth. One year later, I am proud to report that the coalition to defeat ISIL has liberated almost 100 percent of the

territory once held by these killers in Iraq and Syria. But there is much more work to be done. We will continue our fight until ISIS is defeated."

## ■ Modernization of nuclear arsenal

He also vowed to revamp the country's decrepit nuclear arsenal amid his war of words with North Korea.

"As part of our defense, we must modernize and rebuild our nuclear arsenal, hopefully never having to use it, but making it so strong and powerful that it will deter any acts of aggression," he said.

"Perhaps someday in the future there will be a magical moment when the countries of the world will get together to eliminate their nuclear weapons. Unfortunately, we are not there yet, sadly."

The Pentagon is expected to release the results of its months-long nuclear posture review ordered by the president.

## ■ Ending caps on military spending

Trump's call for rebuilding the U.S. nuclear arsenal came as he reiterated his desire to end the caps on military spending.

"Around the world, we face rogue regimes, terrorist groups and rivals like China and Russia that challenge our interests, our economy and our values," he said.

"In confronting these horrible dangers, we know that weakness is the surest path to conflict, and unmatched power is the surest means to our true and great defense. For this reason, I am asking Congress to end the dangerous defense sequester and fully fund our great military," he added.

## ■ keeping Gitmo open

Trump also said he had signed a new executive order to keep the notorious Guantánamo prison open.

"I just signed, prior to walking in, an order directing (Defense) Secretary (James) Mattis ... to re-examine our military detention policy and to keep open the detention facilities in Guantánamo Bay," he said.

The address before Congress comes amid a partisan divide that has worsened since Trump's inauguration. Following a three-day government shutdown earlier this month, Congress faces a February 8 deadline to pass legislation to fund the government.

(Source: agencies)

## Deadline looms for Afghan refugees in Pakistan

A deadline on the validity of legal refugee status for many Afghan residents in Pakistan is due to expire, throwing into doubt the futures of more than a million refugees, many of whom have lived in the country for decades.

The deadline is due to expire on Wednesday, with Pakistan's federal cabinet expected to discuss the matter during a weekly meeting.

Separately, Afghan Interior Minister Wais Ahmad Bar-mak and intelligence chief Mohamed Masoom Stanekzai also arrived in the Pakistani capital Islamabad for talks on Wednesday.

Pakistan has extended the validity of Afghan refugees' 'Proof of Registration' (PoR) cards at least six times in the past, but the last extension - granted on January 3, days after the refugees' status expired - was for only a month, the shortest ever awarded.

"Pakistan's economy has carried the burden of hosting Afghan refugees since long and in the present circumstances cannot sustain it further," read a government statement released after that extension.

The refugees have become a bone of contention in the increasing souring diplomatic relations between Pakistan and the United States, with the South Asian country accusing them of being a "security risk".

On Thursday, following a United States drone strike in the northwestern Pakistani district of Kurram, Pakistan's military said that the target had been hiding in an Afghan refugee camp.

"This validates Pakistan's stance that left over terrorists easily morph into Afghan refugees' camps/complexes," the military said in a statement.

"Thus their early and dignified return to Afghanistan is essential."

## ■ Refugee push factors

Pakistan is home to at least 1.38 million registered Afghan

refugees, according to the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). There are at least another million refugees estimated to be outside the formal refugee registration system.

"The 2.3 million refugees in Pakistan, it is impossible for all of them to go back immediately," says Baryali Miankhel, the president of an Afghan refugee welfare organization in the northwestern province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, where most reside. "We have told the Pakistani government this."

Last year, more than 150,000 refugees left Pakistan to return to their native Afghanistan. Of those, more than 59,000 were registered refugees assisted by the UNHCR, while the rest either spontaneously returned or were deported by Pakistan.

UNHCR says it is concerned at the increasingly shorter durations of extensions being offered to Afghan refugees regarding their legal status in the country.

"In terms of the length of time for the PoR extensions, the deadlines that are created for those registered Afghan refugees do create some uncertainty for refugees," Dan McNorton, the UNHCR spokesperson in Pakistan, told Al Jazeera. "That is certainly something that UNHCR has been concerned about in the past, and [...] that remains the case."

Refugees themselves testify that the shorter extensions have been leading some to choose to leave the country, despite an uncertain security situation in their home country.

"Refugees are leaving because of the shorter extensions from the government of Pakistan, that is one of the reasons," said Miankhel. "Because there is no peace in Afghanistan, there are no opportunities for employment or even a place to live."

## ■ Deteriorating security situation

The security situation in Afghanistan, where the US-led coalition forces and the Afghan army continue to battle the Afghan Taliban for control of areas of the country, has been



deteriorating in recent weeks.

On Sunday, at least 103 people were killed in a suicide attack in the heart of the capital Kabul.

A day later, at least 11 soldiers were killed when gunmen attacked a military academy, also in Kabul.

Afghanistan and the United States have regularly blamed Pakistan for allegedly providing safe havens to elements of the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network armed groups. Pakistan denies the charge, alleging that it is Afghan forces that offer sanctuary to elements of the Pakistani Taliban.

In a rare development, Pakistan's foreign ministry on Tuesday announced that it had handed over 27 individuals suspected of having links to the Haqqani Network and the Afghan Taliban in November.

"Pakistan continues to push any suspected [Afghan Taliban] and [Haqqani Network] elements to prevent them from using our soil for any terrorist activity in Afghanistan," said Muhammad Faisal, the foreign ministry spokesperson.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

## Israeli troops shoot and kill Palestinian teenager

Israeli forces have shot and killed a 16-year-old Palestinian boy in the occupied West Bank in a village north of Ramallah.

According to the Palestinian Health Ministry, Layth Abu Naeem was shot in the head at close range by Israeli troops who had entered his village of al-Mugheir.

He died en route to a hospital in Ramallah.

The Israeli military regularly opens fatal fire on Palestinians, accusing them of attempting to carry out stabbing attacks against its forces.

Human rights groups have repeatedly criticized the Tel Aviv regime for its policy of shoot-to-kill as a large number of the Palestinians killed at the scene of attacks did not pose serious threats to Israelis.

The Palestinian Information Ministry says Israeli forces have killed three Palestinian minors and detained 52 others since the start of this year.

The number of Israeli attacks have sharply risen since the United States announced decision to recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's capital and relocate the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to the occupied city.

## ■ No U.S.-Palestine talks until al-Quds decision reversed: Erekat

Meantime, Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat says Palestine will hold no talks with the U.S. until the administration of President Donald Trump reverses its recognition of al-Quds (Jerusalem) as Israel's capital.

"The minute any Palestinian goes and meets with American officials, it is an acceptance of their decision. Now they are threatening us with money, with aid," the secretary-general of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Palestinian's longtime chief negotiator said in a Tuesday interview with AFP.

Erekat rejected Washington's efforts to hold an international conference on finding a two-state solution for the Palestinian conflict and noted, "They promised not to impose any solution, and now they want the meeting for the sake of the meeting."

## ■ Irish Senate delays vote on anti-settlement bill under Israeli pressure

Elsewhere, under pressure from the Tel Aviv regime, the Irish Senate has postponed a vote on a bill that forbids the import and sale of products from Israeli settlements as well as the services originating from the occupied territories.

The bill, entitled Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill 2018, states that it is "an offence for a person to import or sell goods or services originating in an occupied territory or to extract resources from an occupied territory in certain circumstances; and to provide for related matters."

It also says that those who "assist another person to import or attempt to import settlement goods" would be committing a crime punishable with up to five years in prison.

The Irish Senate debated the motion on Tuesday. Senator Frances Black, who had put forward the motion, described the Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, East al-Quds and the Golan Heights as a "war crime."

She also stressed the anti-settlement bill was actually about respect for international law and standing up for the rights of vulnerable people.

"It is a chance for Ireland to state strongly that it does not support the illegal confiscation of land and the human suffering which inevitably results," Black said.

"In the occupied Palestinian territories, people are forcibly kicked out of their homes, fertile farming land is seized and the fruit

and vegetables produced are then exported to pay for it all," she added.

A group of Irish activists, among them former lawmakers and ambassadors as well as legal experts, artists and academics, had also sent a petition to the Irish parliament, asking it to support the motion.

They urged "Ireland to support any legislation that will help enforce differentiation between Israel per se and the settlements in the occupied territories," read the petition. "The Israeli occupation of the territories beyond the 1967 borders, ongoing for more than 50 years with no end in sight, is not only unjust but also stands in violation of numerous UN resolutions."

However, the Irish Senate suddenly decided to adjourn the debates regarding the bill until July as the regime in Tel Aviv scrambled to torpedo the measure.

Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney had asked today for time... He has given a commitment in writing that if the debate is adjourned today the government will facilitate time for this debate to be resumed before the summer recess in July," Senator Alice Mary Higgins said.

(Source: Press TV)

## Macron warns Turkey over Syrian operation

## Russia says hundreds killed in Turkish operation in Afrin

French President Emmanuel Macron warned Turkey that its operation against Kurdish militias in northern Syria should not become an excuse to invade the country and said he wanted Ankara to coordinate its action with its allies.

Turkey last week launched an air and ground offensive in northwest Syria, targeting the Kurdish YPG militia in the Afrin region. That has opened a new front in the seven-year-old civil war and strained ties with Turkey's NATO allies.

"If it turns out that this operation takes a turn other than to fight a potential terrorist threat to the Turkish border and becomes an invasion operation, (then) this becomes a real problem for us," Macon said in an interview with Le Figaro newspaper published on Wednesday.

Turkey considers the YPG a terrorist organization and an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has waged a three-decade-long insurgency in Turkey's largely Kurdish southeast.

Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim defended the operation saying it was solely aimed at securing his country's security and protecting Arabs, Kurds and Turkmens from "terrorist organizations."

"If France is interpreting this issue as such (invasion operation), we need to assess what they have done in Syria accordingly," Yildirim said at a news conference.

"This is a crooked idea from the start. The whole world knows that Turkey is not acting with an invasive mind. They should know it." The United States and France have armed and trained YPG-led militia in the fight against ISIL in Syria.

Macron said he would bring the issue up again with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan and that the nature of the operation meant there should be discussions between Europeans, but also more widely among allies.

## ■ Hundreds killed in operation

Several hundred people, including civilians, have been killed during Turkey's military operation in Syria's Afrin, Interfax news agency cited Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova as saying Wednesday.

(Source: agencies)

## Yemeni forces fire ballistic missile at Saudi airport

Yemeni army forces and allied fighters from Popular Committees have reportedly launched a locally designed and manufactured ballistic missile toward an area deep inside Saudi Arabia in response to the Riyadh regime's devastating aerial bombardment campaign against its crisis-stricken southern neighbor.

Brigadier Yahya al-Mahdi told Yemen's Arabic-language al-Sahat satellite television network that Yemeni soldiers and their allies had fired a Burkan 2-H (Volcano H-2) missile towards King Khalid International Airport, located 35 kilometers (22 miles) north of the Saudi capital city of Riyadh, on Tuesday afternoon.

Mahdi added that the liquid propellant missile had hit its target accurately and left massive destruction at the airport.

There were no immediate comments from Saudi officials on the missile attack.

## ■ Fresh Saudi strikes claim 5 civilian lives in Yemen

Meanwhile, at least five civilians have lost their lives and two others sustained injuries when Saudi fighter jets carried out a string of airstrikes against an area in Yemen's west-central province of Sana'a.

A local source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the casualties happened as Saudi warplanes launched four aerial assaults against a building in the Bait Maran area of Arhab district, Yemen's Arabic-language al-Masirah television network reported.

Earlier in the day, a child sustained serious injuries when an internationally-banned cluster bomb, dropped earlier by Saudi military aircraft, went off in the Bani Moein area of Razih district in Yemen's mountainous northwestern province of Sa'ada.

(Source: Press TV)

## Sochi talks and strategic agreement in the shadow of rifts

➔ After the talks in Sochi, the Turkish Foreign Ministry also said that the agreement to form a constitutional committee and the creation of a list of 150 candidates for membership in the committee was "the most important outcome of the congress".

Now, the important strategic agreement for the formation of a constitutional committee in Syria showed that intensive diplomatic efforts could be a step towards the political settlement of the Syrian conflict, although the United States and its Western counterparts are now also in a position to disrupt what was agreed on in Sochi.

In that regard, the French foreign minister, in a strange comment without referring to the important agreement reached in Sochi, said "the solution to the Syrian crisis must go through Geneva and not Sochi." In any event, the talks in Sochi made the Syrian crisis a step closer to resolution, and all the participants left the meeting satisfied with this outcome.

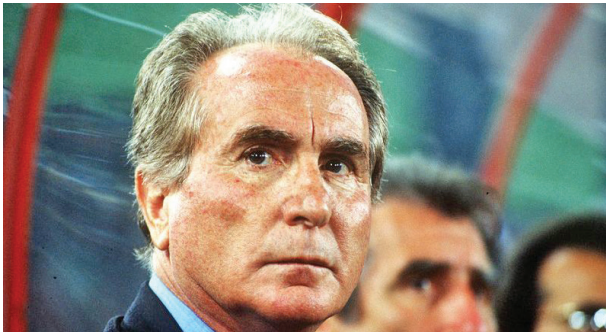
We must wait and see whether the opponents will again act up or will cooperate with the UN and parties involved to draft a new constitution. We shall see whether the United States uses its financial and political influence on UN officials in the preparation of the final list for membership in the constitutional committee. The answer to these questions depends on the developments that will take place in the Syrian political arena during the coming days and weeks.

## Trump may be digging his own political grave

➔ but was able to enter the White House based on the Electoral College tally. Currently, Trump's support in some states like Florida (which played an important role in his victory in 2016) have also eroded. If Trump continues to frighten voters further, more allegations that he is incompetent will be heard. But Trump is a stubborn man and he may be digging his party's and his own political grave. He may be his own worst enemy.



## Italian football in mourning for Azeglio Vicini



Former Italy coach Azeglio Vicini has died in Brescia aged 84. Vicini had a long association with the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) which culminated in his five-year stint as coach of the Azzurri team that reached the semi-finals of the 1988 UEFA European Championship and the FIFA World Cup in Italy two years later.

However, he started out in the game as a midfielder with Vicenza and Sampdoria in Serie A, ending his playing days in 1966 with Brescia, the club where he started his coaching career the following year.

In 1968 he began working for the FIGC and in 1976 he served as Italy's Under-23 coach. He was swiftly appointed to the Under-21 helm, though, and during a ten-year tenure he oversaw one of the Azzurri's best-loved U21 sides – his charges lost their 1986 UEFA European Championship final on penalties to Spain.

That same year Vicini was promoted to lead the senior squad, bringing with him several U21 starlets. Vicini's youthful Italy got as far as the semi-finals at EURO '88 in West Germany, going down 2-0 to the USSR. Then as hosts of Italia '90, the Azzurri were again vanquished semi-finalists, this time on penalties against Argentina, having conceded just one goal en route. The home nation eventually finished third.

Vicini was later succeeded by Arrigo Sacchi after Italy's failure to qualify for EURO '92. After subsequent brief spells with Cesena and Udinese, he rejoined the FIGC as president of the federal technical sector, a role he kept until 2010.

A father of three, Vicini is survived by his wife Ines.

(Source: UEFA)

## Ancelotti eyeing club job over Italy role

Carlo Ancelotti's focus is on working in club football again, and not taking charge of Italy's national team.

Ancelotti, sacked by Bayern Munich in September following a 3-0 Champions League loss to Paris Saint-Germain, is seen as one of the top contenders to replace Gian Piero Ventura as Azzurri boss. Ventura's tenure came to an end after Italy failed to qualify for the World Cup for the first time since 1958.

But asked about the possibility of taking charge of the national team, Ancelotti told Corriere dello Sport: "My answer is this: the FIGC [Italian Football Federation], with the help of CONI [Italian National Olympic Committee], has to create its new structure. "After that they'll take the decision. I remain with my idea, first you need clarity, then we can talk about it, even if my goal is to coach a club team.

"Which one? I still don't know, it's all on the high seas, we'll need to wait a couple of months."

(Source: Goal)

## Neymar demands Barcelona pay him 30 million euros

Barcelona and Neymar are set for a legal battle, with the player having demanded the second part of the renewal bonus on his old contract, which is worth 30 million euros.

When the Catalan club learned of the Brazilian's intention to move to Paris Saint-Germain last summer, they decided not to pay him the second part of the renewal bonus for the contract which should have kept him at the Camp Nou until 2021.

Those at the Camp Nou believe that his decision to move to France meant that the terms had been breached.

Even though they kept the money in the bank, just in case he decided to stay, his move to Ligue 1 meant he was not paid the 30m euros. Now Neymar is pursuing this money, according to El Mundo, and if he wins this legal battle then the total cost to Barcelona for the four years of Neymar will surpass 230m euros.

The Blaugrana, though, are responding with their own complaint, worth 75m euros, based on the player's profits from the renewed contract, plus damages.

(Source: Marca)

## Arbitration court to announce verdicts in Russian athletes' doping appeals on Thursday

The verdicts on appeals from 39 Russian athletes who were given lifetime Olympic bans for doping violations at the 2014 Sochi Games will be announced on Thursday, the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) said in a statement on Wednesday.

CAS said that its secretary general Matthieu Reeb would make a statement at 1700 local time (3.00 a.m. ET) in Pyeongchang, South Korea, where the tribunal has set up a temporary office for next month's Winter Olympics. The decisions will also be issued on its website, CAS said.

The athletes were disqualified from their events, banned from participating in future Olympics and in some cases stripped of their medals following the International Olympic Committee's investigation of widespread doping in Sochi.

Russia has repeatedly denied any state involvement in the doping which was exposed by an independent report commissioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

(Source: Reuters)

# Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang joins Arsenal for reported €64 million

One of the Bundesliga's longest-running transfer sagas has come to an end, with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang signing for Premier League side Arsenal. The reported €64 million fee is a record for the English side.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang has left Borussia Dortmund and joined Arsenal for a reported fee of €64 million (\$79 million). The 28-year-old's deal completed on deadline day is thought to be worth €205,000 a week, according to various media.

Dortmund announced the transfer in a statement without giving details, but Arsenal in their own statement said it was a record buy for the Premier League outfit and he had penned a long-term contract.

"I think the club has such a big history and great players like Thierry Henry. He's an example for us strikers. I'm really happy," Aubamayang told the Arsenal website as he gears up for the sixth-placed side's game with Everton on Saturday.

"I hope that we will come back to the top as soon as possible. I will do my best to join in."

Dortmund sporting director Michael Zorc said: "Apart from the unpleasant events of recent weeks, we remember that the story of



Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang at Dortmund was a huge success for more than four years. He has done great things for Borussia Dortmund, scored many important goals and was part of the team that brought the German Cup to

Dortmund in 2017. We wish Pierre-Emerick all the best for his future at Arsenal."

Michy Batshuayi is set to be Aubameyang's replacement if he joins on loan from Chelsea, where the Belgium striker has failed to es-

tablish himself in two years since a big move from Marseille. The complicated transfer triangle also involves Olivier Giroud possibly going to Chelsea from Arsenal.

Aubameyang's departure comes at the end of a fairly drawn-out transfer saga that looked at one point like it would not to be completed by the end of the January window.

Despite a prolific stint with the German club, Aubameyang leaves under something of a cloud. Ill-discipline saw him suspended on three occasions and he was even booed by Dortmund's famous Yellow Wall - the same fans that used to celebrate his goals wildly.

Aubameyang joined Borussia Dortmund from St. Etienne in the summer of 2013 for €13 million and he went on to make 213 appearances for the club, leaving as their third all-time leading goalscorer with 141 goals in all competitions.

The pacy frontman notched 13 goals or more in each of his five Bundesliga seasons but his best haul came last season when he scored 31 in 32 Bundesliga games. The Gabon forward also leaves Germany as the Bundesliga's top-scoring African player with 98 goals.

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

## English clubs the big spenders in record transfer year - FIFA report

Football clubs across the world splashed out a record \$6.37 billion on players during 2017 with English teams again the biggest spenders, FIFA's Global Transfer Market Report said.

The total paid out was about 33 percent more than in 2016 as English clubs led the way with a net spend of \$988 million on squad improvement.

Deals such as Romelu Lukaku's 75 million-pound move from Everton to Manchester United and Alvaro Morata's 60 million-pound switch from Real Madrid to Chelsea put English teams at the top of the list. But those individual deals were eclipsed by Brazilian forward Neymar's move from Barcelona to Paris St Germain in a world-record transfer

worth 222 million euros (£195.4 million).

The fee was over double the previous record which took France midfielder Paul Pogba to Manchester United from Juventus for \$126 million (£89.5 million).

"Spending growth is driven by a relatively small group of clubs," the report said, with over two-thirds of the total amount spent by 50 clubs in 13 different countries.

The average transfer fee for a player in the top 50 most-expensive moves was \$48.4 million, up from \$35.2 million in 2016. The report shows that only 15.8 percent of transfers involved fees being paid from one club to another.

Fees paid to agents also increased significantly. English

clubs forked out a reported \$125.7 million on intermediary payments and \$447 million was handed over worldwide – up from \$387 million in 2016.

Brazil was the country most involved in international transfers with 1,755 of their players switching teams in 2017.

Two hundred and fifty four Brazilian clubs conducted international transfer deals with Germany (143), England (132), Argentina (111) and Spain (98) making up the top five.

Spanish clubs received the most money in transfer fees (\$840.4 million), but Portuguese ones posted the highest net receipts of \$707.5 million.

(Source: Guardian)

## Ex-USA Gymnastics doctor faces second sentencing



Former USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar is scheduled to appear in a Michigan courtroom on Wednesday for a second sentencing hearing, after already being sentenced to 40 to 175 years in prison for abusing young female gymnasts who were entrusted to his care.

Dozens of victims are expected to appear in court, as they did in the previous hearing, to tell a judge how Nassar abused them as young athletes under the guise of medical treatment. The hearing is expected to last several days.

More than 150 victims offered searing accounts of his sexual assaults in another courtroom in Lansing, Michigan.

As part of his agreement with state prosecutors, Nassar, 54, pleaded guilty last fall to two sets of charges in different counties and must be sentenced separately for each set. The latest proceeding in Eaton County, Michigan, will unfold as fallout from the scandal continues.

Around 140 victims have filed a lawsuit against Nassar, USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University (MSU), claiming the institutions knew about allegations of abuse years ago and failed to act.

USAG said last week after Olympic officials threatened to decertify the organization as the sport's U.S. governing body that its

entire board had resigned, and sponsors have already backed away ahead of the 2020 Olympic Games.

The USOC, which has been criticized by victims as well, has announced an independent investigation into both its own conduct and that of USAG.

The Michigan attorney general's office, which prosecuted Nassar, is pursuing a criminal probe into the school over its handling of allegations against Nassar. The university's president and athletic director stepped down in the wake of Nassar's sentencing.

At least one congressional committee plans to hold hearings on the scandal. The U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation on Monday and the Senate on Tuesday to require USOC officials to immediately report any allegations of abuse to law enforcement.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott on Monday asked a state law enforcement agency to investigate Karolyi Ranch, a training facility where female athletes said they were molested by Nassar.

Nassar faces a minimum of 25 years in prison in Eaton County, though he is already assured of spending the rest of his life in prison.

(Source: Reuters)

## Japan's revised smoking measures threaten smoky 2020 Olympics, critics say



Two Japanese doctors on Wednesday raised concerns about the government's latest effort to prevent second-hand smoking, saying it could lead to the 2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo being held in an "extremely smoky environment".

The criticism comes a day after the government announced the thrust of planned revisions to a law on second-hand smoking, saying smoking would continue to be permitted in small bars and restaurants that put up warning signs for potential customers.

The health ministry gave no specifics, but Japan's major newspapers said it contemplated allowing smoking in establishments with floor space of 150 square meters (1,615 square feet) or less.

That would be far more accommodating to smokers than the ministry's plan of last March that limited smoking to bars and other liquor-serving spots with a floor space of 30 square m. (323 sq feet) or less.

"If establishments with a floor space of 150 square meters or less are exempt from the smoking ban, about 90 percent of bars will escape the restrictions," said Yumiko Mochizuki, a doctor and member of the Japan Cancer Society.

"If things stay this way, the Olympic Games in 2020 will be held in an extremely

smoky environment."

Health ministry officials were not immediately available for comment.

Japan ranks at the bottom globally in anti-smoking measures, going by the types of public spaces that are entirely smoke-free, says the World Health Organization, which has teamed with global Olympics officials to ensure smoke-free Games venues.

Ahead of the 2020 Olympics, the International Olympics Committee (IOC) is among those pressuring the Japanese capital to follow Rio de Janeiro and other recent games hosts in banning smoking in all public areas.

Asked how smoking restrictions at the 2020 Olympics would compare with previous Olympics, Toshiharu Furukawa, a ruling party lawmaker who is a medical doctor, said. "It would look considerably less favorable."

In contrast, Tomoyuki Utsuno, an official of an industry grouping of about 10,000 small bar and restaurant operators in Tokyo, welcomed the latest development.

"This is one step forward," Utsuno said. "Our activities, such as collecting signatures, are bearing fruit," he added, referring to those who oppose tough measures against smoking.

(Source: Reuters)

## Vladimir Putin admits 'instances of doping' in Russian athletes

Russian President Vladimir Putin has admitted there had been "instances of doping use in Russia," but said the issue was a global problem.

Addressing supporters on Tuesday, Putin said: "There were instances of doping use, true -- I want the audience to know this and the whole country to know this."

But the Kremlin leader added: "There are many such examples around the world, but no one is making a big show of it."

Last year the International Olympic Committee (IOC) barred Russian athletes from competing in the 2018 Winter Olympics over allegations of state-sponsored doping by Russia in the 2014 Sochi Olympics, but will allow some individuals to compete as neutral athletes.

On Monday, the PyeongChang Organizing Committee confirmed to CNN that 169 Russian athletes will compete in all 15 sports at the Winter Olympics. Those 169 athletes are the ones who have been cleared by the IOC.

Russia routinely denies allegations of systematic, government-sponsored doping, and attacks whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov whose evidence led to the IOC ban.



In his comments Tuesday, the Russian president directed most of his criticism toward Rodchenkov, saying he considered it "strange" that doping accusations against Russian athletes are based on words of an "idiot" who has "problems with the law."

■ 'Right from the top'

Putin's comments followed Rodchenkov's first interview since the Russian Olympic Committee was banned for the upcoming Winter Games in PyeongChang.

"Of course it came right from the top, from the president," Rodchenkov told German broadcaster ARD. "Because only the president can appoint the domestic secret service FSB for such a specific task."

Appointed as the director of the anti-doping center in 2006, Rodchenkov went public with the revelations that formed the basis of the 2016 McLaren Report, alleging that Russia's doping scheme and coverup benefited more than 1,000 summer and winter Olympic athletes.

The former anti-doping official fled Russia in 2015 after receiving a warning that his life was in danger. The Russian government now describes him as a fugitive and an alleged criminal. In 2011, the Investigative Committee of Russia initiated a criminal case, accusing Rodchenkov of illegal substance trafficking, but the case was suspended in 2015, sources told state-run news agency RIA Novosti.

Russia opened another criminal case against Rodchenkov in June 2016, accusing him of "abuse of office," according to an Investigative Committee statement. A Russian court ordered his arrest in absentia in May 2017.

(Source: CNN)



# Nottingham Forest keen on winger Ashkan Dejagah

Ashkan Dejagah has been a free agent since the end of last season but could return with Championship giants Nottingham Forest.

It has been a quiet transfer window at Nottingham Forest, but that could all change with just over a day remaining in January.

Record claims that Forest have agreed a deal to sign Portuguese Under-21 center-back Tobias Figueiredo on loan from Sporting Lisbon with a view to a £2 million permanent move.

And it appears that Figueiredo could be joined at the City Ground by Adlene Guedioura, who impressed at Forest during a spell at the club between 2012 and 2013.

The Middlesbrough midfielder moved to the Riverside from Watford last January and is expected to reunite with his former manager Aitor Karanka with the North Eastern outfit willing to sell.

And The Mail reports that Karanka could then turn his attention towards handing Ashkan Dejagah a fresh start in English football.

The 31-year-old winger has been a free agent since his six-month deal at Bundesliga side VFL Wolfsburg expired at the end of last season. But he could be given a chance to kick-start his career in the East Midlands, with Karanka open to a deal.

Dejagah spent two years at Fulham between 2012 and 2014 and largely impressed at Craven Cottage with his speed, unpredictability and eye for the spectacular.

The Iranian international was named the fans' Player of the Season when Fulham were relegated during a calamitous 2013/14 campaign before leaving for Qatari club Al-Arabi.

The former Germany under-21 ace would give Karanka some much-needed depth in the wide positions after Forest lost out to Celtic in bids for both Lewis Morgan and Charly Musonda.

(Source: HITC)



## Persepolis striker Godwin Mensha on Bursaspor's radar



**S P O R T S** Turkish football club Bursaspor has reportedly shown interest in signing Persepolis Nigerian striker Godwin Mensha.

It seems the Iranian team are reluctant to sell their iconic forward since Persepolis have banned from signing players for the next two transfer windows after their former striker Mehdi Taremi breached his contract with Turkish club Çaykur Rizespor dating back to June 2016.

Bursaspor French coach Paul Le Guen

is going to strengthen their attacking line after their Romanian striker Bogdan Stancu could not meet expectations.

Mensha is in starting lineup in Persepolis after Taremi joined Al Gharafa of Qatar.

The 28-year-old striker has joined Persepolis in May 2017 on a two-year contract.

Mensha, who scored four goals in Iran Professional League current season, helped Persepolis advance to the 2017 AFC Champions League semi-final.

## Expectations are very high, Iran futsal coach says



**S P O R T S** The head coach of the Iranian men's national futsal team Mohammad Nazemosharia says they will have a difficult task in the 2018 AFC Futsal Championship because the expectations from Team Melli are very high.

Iran have been drawn with China, Iraq and Myanmar in Group C of the upcoming continental sports event.

The 2018 AFC Futsal Championship will be held in Taiwan from Feb. 1 to 11.

"We have a difficult task ahead in the competition because the Asian teams have

improved so much during the recent years. Japan and Thailand are always favorites to win the title and Uzbekistan are a title contender as well," Nazemosharia added.

"We must meet expectations and that is what makes it more difficult for us. Team Melli are under pressure to win the title," he added.

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.

## Team Melli have potential to turn into powerhouses in 10 years: Poves Gómez

IFPnews.com — Javier Poves Gómez, a Spanish football coach, says Iran's national football team have the potential for turning into a powerhouse in the next ten years.

Gómez, a former defender in La Liga who now serves as a coach in Real Madrid's academy, has recently arrived in Iran and says he has had a wonderful feeling about the country since his arrival.

"I admire the beauties of Iran as well as its people. I experience an overwhelming feeling which cannot be described in words. I love Iran. I long for launching a career in Iran's football. I've visited the country many times and become infatuated with the country. I like to teach football to Iranian youths in some parts of the country. That's why I decided to begin a career here."

"Iranians enjoy great potential for playing professional football. The country's national team can turn into a powerhouse in the next ten years. To this end, the coaches should put their focus on the juniors," he was quoted as saying in an interview with Mashregh News.

The Spanish football coach also noted that Iran has always appeared as a dark horse in major events adding the country need to make their football more professional so that their presence in FIFA World Cup turns into a usual event for all people.



unlike Portuguese players, Iranian youths realize the importance of this international competition.

"The great passion I've seen in the Iranian players is the trump card of Iran national team's head coach Carlos Queiroz. Iran have great players which cannot be ignored. I know some of Iranian old and new players like Khodadad Azizi as well as Masoud Shojaaee and Javad Nekounam. These are great players. I've played against Shojaaee when he was playing in CA Osasuna. It was an

interesting experience," he added.

Queiroz a Smart Coach

Javi then referred to the defensive tactics of Queiroz and said he may continue to adopt his usual defensive tactics against Spain.

"But this is a part of professional football. It is an art. Queiroz is a smart guy. He has decided to strengthen his defense line. He is focused on the results and it is good."

Born in Madrid, Javi played youth football with hometown clubs Atlético Madrid and Rayo Vallecano, going on to make his senior debuts in amateur football also in the community, with Rayo Vallecano B, Las Rozas CF and CDA Navalcarnero. In 2008 he joined Sporting de Gijón, being assigned to the reserve team in Segunda División B. Real Madrid Camp in Iran

Javi's agent Faramaz Palangbod also says he has obtained the certificate to establish Real Madrid's summer camp in Iran. "We will also hold courses for training coaches."

He then referred to the visit of Javi to the holy city of Mashhad and said during the stay, Javi paid tribute to the shrine of the eighth Shiite Imam. "During our stay in Mashhad, we were warmly welcomed by the people and enjoyed the warm hospitality of Khodadad Azizi," he concluded.

## Daniel Arzani could be Australian soccer's next \$1 million man

City Football Group looks set to offer Melbourne City starlet Daniel Arzani an Aaron Mooy-style deal in a bid to lock in Australia's hottest young property.

Arzani, 19, is destined to become Australia's next \$1 million dollar talent, producing the most electric batch of debut starting performances for a teenager in the A-League era.

The attacker, this week flagged as a 2018 World Cup hopeful by Sydney FC coach and future Socceroos coach Graham Arnold, is believed to be on the radar of Iran.

Australian youth international Arzani's parents are Iranian.

His emergence was rewarded on Tuesday with January's NAB Young Footballer of the Month nomination.

Arzani's contract expires at the end of the season and he was attracting interest from

A-League clubs before his breakthrough.

City tried to open negotiations in December but it's understood Arzani balked at re-signing as he'd played just 23 A-League minutes.

A clause in Arzani's contract will trigger an extension if he plays out the rest of the season, but City is leaving nothing to chance.

CFG want to sign Arzani on a multi-year deal and offer him similar pathways to that of Mooy, who was loaned to Huddersfield Town before they paid a \$15 million-plus transfer fee after he helped them win promotion.

Arzani could be signed by CFG and loaned back to Melbourne City or remain a City contracted player before a sister-club — presumably Manchester City — signs him in coming years and potentially loans him

out as with Mooy.

City refused to comment on Arzani's contract negotiations but did confirm the trigger clause in his existing deal.

Coach Warren Joyce praised Arzani's poise last week and conceded his teammates under-utilized him.

"It frustrates me that after the first 10-15 minutes when he (Arzani) has gone past the full-back three times like he's not there, that we then stopped giving him the ball," Joyce said.

"We've got to recognize that during games. In that little bit of a spell (for a player), if you keep getting the ball, the left-back's got a problem. We stopped doing it."

Third-place City is away to Brisbane Roar on Sunday.

(Source: Herald Sun)



## Imam Reza Stadium nominated for Stadium of the Year 2017

TASNIM — Imam Reza Stadium, located in Mashhad, northeast of Iran, has been nominated for Stadium of the Year awards.

The Imam Reza Stadium has a seating capacity of 25,000 and is the sixth biggest stadium in Iran. It will host some matches of Iran national football team.

The stadium completed in January 2017 and was opened on 14 March 2017.



Along the Public Award, the Jury of stadium specialists will reveal their choice of best stadium built in 2017.

Winners in both categories will be announced on March 10, stadiumdb.com reported.

The list of 27 stadiums are as follow:

Imam Reza Stadium (Iran), Bingu National Stadium (Malawi), Estadio Banco de Pacífico Capwell (Ecuador), Estadio General Pablo Rojas (Paraguay), Estadio Nemesio Díez (Mexico), Estadio Único de Villa Mercedes (Argentina), Gaziantep Stadyumu (Turkey), Intility Arena (Norway), Luzhniki (Russia), Malatya Stadyumu (Turkey), Mercedes-Benz Stadium (USA), Mikuni World Stadium (Japan), Orlando City Stadium (USA), Sakarya Stadyumu (Turkey), Samsun 19 Mayıs Stadyumu (Turkey), Saparmyrat Türkmenbasy adyndaky Olimpiya Stadiony (Turkmenistan), Sonny Lubick Field at Colorado State Stadium (USA), Stade d'Oyem (Gabon), Stade de Port Gentil (Gabon), Stadio Benito Stipre (Italy), Stadion Miejski Widzewa Łódź (Poland), Stadion Sankt Petersburg (Russia), Stadion Slaski (Poland), Stadionul Ion Oblemenco (Romania), The Arena by TransStadia (India), U Arena (France) and Wanda Metropolitano (Spain)

## Celta Vigo interested in Saman Ghoddos

La Liga team Celta Vigo have been reportedly linked with Iranian international striker Saman Ghoddos.

Östersund chairman Daniel Kindberg said that Ghoddos would be valued at around \$6.4 million and they will not sell him for less than this.

"I think Saman will stay with us. He can receive a couple of good offers after a good World Cup. All summer transfers are better than January transfers. That is quite obvious," Kindberg told Expressen.

The 24-year-old was previously linked with a move to English teams Wolves, QPR and Fulham.

Ghoddos has been OFK's standout player in the Europa League this season, and the game with Arsenal in February will surely put the player in the shop window ahead of next summer's transfer window.

(Source: Expressen)

## 23 foreign chess teams to attend International Fajr Cup

Press TV — President of Mazandarn Chess Association, Mohammad Alinejad, says twenty-three foreign teams are going to participate in the 26th edition of Fajr Cup 2018 (Group A), which will be held in the northern Iranian city of Amol early next month.

Alinejad said some 80 chess players from Afghanistan, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Denmark, France, Georgia, Ghana, India, Iraq, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Syria, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Ukraine have expressed firm determination to attend the forthcoming event.

He added that roughly 350 Iranian chess players, including members of the Iran men's and women's national chess teams, will also be in action.

The 26th edition of Fajr Cup 2018 (Group A) will begin at the Oxin Recreational and Commercial Resort of Amol on February 3, and will finish on February 10, 2018.

The championship will be played as a Swiss System team tournament. Trophies, medals and certificates will be awarded to the top three athletes.

A total of 500 million rials (\$13,557) cash prizes will also be awarded to the top three participating chess players.

## No Love for Cleveland after Cavs forward breaks hand

Cleveland Cavaliers forward Kevin Love can expect an extended spell on the sidelines after he suffered a broken bone in his left hand against the Detroit Pistons on Tuesday.

Love was jostling for position on an entry pass under the basket during the first quarter but stooped over after failing to control the ball, grabbed his injured hand and jogged to the locker room to assess the injury.

"He received X-rays at the arena which revealed a non-displaced fracture in his left hand fifth metacarpal," the Cavaliers said in a statement.

The team said Love would be evaluated further on Wednesday before updating his status.

The Cavaliers (29-19) lost the road game 125-114 to extend their recent struggles, which include a much-publicised team meeting where Love was a target for the group's frustration.

The 29-year-old was averaging 18.2 points and 9.6 rebounds ahead of Tuesday's encounter but will now likely miss next month's All-Star Game after being named on the roster for a fifth time.

"It's a huge blow for our team, obviously," Cavs small forward LeBron James told reporters. "Any time you lose an All Star, or anybody (that's) part of your crew. We're already limited in our bigs anyway, so we even get a lot smaller now."

(Source: Reuters)



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## Kitaro to tour Iran

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — The Japanese musician and artist Masanori Takahashi, who is known as Kitaro, will begin a concert tour across Iran in May.

“His first Iranian concert in Tehran organized during October 2014 was warmly received by concertgoers, and there have been more requests from other cities to host the event,” Ali Cheraghali, the organizer of Kitaro’s concerts in Iran, said in a press release on Wednesday.



*Japanese musician Kitaro performs a concert at the Grand Hall of the Interior Ministry in Tehran on October 15, 2014. (Tasnim/Meqdad Madadi)*

The concert tour has been authorized by Iranian officials and ticket sales will begin soon, he added.

Kitaro in his first Iranian concert in Tehran said that nature plays a significant role in his compositions, therefore he has been living in a mountainous region over the past 35 years.

“All the music I have composed emerges from the heart of nature,” he stated.

The artist, who composed music for NHK’s “Silk Road” documentary series from 1980 to 1985, had said that he became familiar with Iranian traditional songs and folklore when he began to compose music for the documentary.

Kitaro won a Golden Globe Award for Best Original Score in 1993 for Oliver Stone’s “Heaven and Earth”, and he won a Grammy Award for Best New Age Album in 2000.

## Iranian artists hang works in Kuala Lumpur

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — An exhibition of artworks by contemporary Iranian artists named “Signature of Iranian Art” opened at the Hotel Palace of the Golden Horses in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday.



*A calligraphy work by Esrafil Shirichi*

Sixty artworks created by about 30 artists, including calligraphers Ali Shirazi and Esrafil Shirchi, and painters Farah Osuli and Bitva Vakili, can be seen at the exhibit, the Persian service of IRNA has reported.

The collection was previously displayed at Syeun Hotel in Ipoh, a city in northwestern Malaysia in October 2017 and later was showcased at the Art Expo Malaysia.

According to Hafez Hakami, the administration manager of the exhibit and the chairman of Iran-Malaysia Exhibition and Business Platform (IMEX), the exhibit is the first phase of expanding bilateral, cultural and business relations between Iran and Malaysia.

The exhibit has been organized to promote the message of peace and love through Iranian and Islamic art, he added.

The exhibition will run for about three weeks and will then return to Iran.

## Life’s a beach: Cannes ships in sand for film festival

**CANNES, France (Reuters)** — Every year the French Riviera town of Cannes rolls out the red carpet to A-list celebrities at the world’s most glamorous film festival. Now it wants to roll out a bigger beach too.

The Mediterranean resort is shipping in 80,000 cubic meters of white sand - enough to fill 32 Olympic swimming pools - to widen the beach along a 1.4 kilometer (0.9 mile) stretch of sea-front beside the famed “Croisette” promenade.

From Brigitte Bardot in the 1950s to Nicole Kidman and Leonardo DiCaprio in more recent years, the Croisette’s fine sands, glitzy hotels and gourmet restaurants have hosted film’s biggest stars during the annual festival.

By the time of this year’s event in May, the expanded stretch of sand should be in place and for private beach managers means more room to make money.

# Fajr Film Festival to premiere two Daesh dramas

**By: Seyyed Mostafa Mousavi Sabet**

**TEHRAN** — The 36th edition of the Fajr Film Festival, Iran’s major annual event that celebrates the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, will premiere “At Damascus Time” and “Emperor of Hell” that both recount stories on Daesh extremism.

Due to the theme running through their stories, both movies have been predicted to take center stage at the festival.

“At Damascus Time” directed by Ebrahim Hatamikia tells the story of an Iranian pilot and his son as copilot who are seized by the Daesh forces in Syria when are in the country to deliver a cargo of humanitarian relief supplies to people in a war-torn region.

Directed by Parviz Sheikhtadi, “Emperor of Hell” reveals the key role that Arab muftis played in the rise of the radicalism of Daesh.

Hatamikia has previously made “Glass Agency”, “In the Color of Purple” and several other acclaimed movies that were mostly on the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war and the repercussions the event had in Iranian society.

Two years ago, when he attended the premiere of his movie “Bodyguard”, about a middle-aged man who protects high-ranking political figures in Iran, at the Fajr festival, he expressed his regrets for placing full-body scanners at the entrance of the theaters due to threats from the Daesh forces.

He lamented that Iranian filmmakers have not yet understood the meaning of the scanners and said many Iranian soldiers lost their lives to prevent the threat from reaching Tehran.

Such remarks seemed to imply that a Daesh story would be the subject of his next film.

“At Damascus Time” has been made at the Owj Arts and Media Organization, a Tehran-based institution producing revolutionary works in art and cinema.

The film was shot on location in Iran and Syria. Hadi Hejazifar and Babak Hamidian are the sole Iranian actors of the cast, which is composed of a number of Syrian and Iraqi actors.

In a press conference held in last August, Owj director Ehsan Mohammad-Hassani roughly estimated that the project would cost 80 billion rials (over \$1.7 million).

Hatamikia’s name has always added weight to the Fajr festival. He began his career with movies such as “Identity”, “The Scout”, “The Emigrant” and “The Union of the Benevolent”, which directly involved stories about the war.

All these movies brought him numerous awards at various editions of the festival, but



*Ebrahim Hatamikia (R) directs Hadi Hejazifar (L) and Babak Hamidian in a scene from “At Damascus Time”.*

the war had come to an end and Iran was pulling away from it.

Consequently, Hatamikia shifted on stories that were criticizing the government and society over their negligence of the veterans who made sacrifices during the war. “Glass Agency” and “From Karkheh to Rhine” belong to this category.

The gap between the revolutionaries and the younger generation, mammonism among the officials, and the waning of revolutionary values, were the subjects of several of Hatamikia’s other movies.

The films with such subjects were not acceptable to certain people who always expected films about moral values of the war from Hatamikia.

Then, his 2014 drama “Che” about the guerrilla war commander Mostafa Chamran was produced. It can be viewed a return to his attachment to war films.

However, his 2016 movie “Bodyguard” about the assassination of Iran’s nuclear scientists highlighted the generation gap again.

## Iranian artist Sadeq Tabrizi dies at 79 in London



*Sadeq Tabrizi in an undated photo.*

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Sadeq Tabrizi, a pioneer of calligraphic-painting in Iran, has died in London. He was 79.

Tabrizi was suffering from liver cancer, several Persian news websites announced on Wednesday.

He was in London to receive further treatment, Persian media reported on

Wednesday.

Tabrizi was an influential figure in the formation of the Saqqakhaneh School, a neo-traditional style of art that derives inspiration from Iranian folk art and culture.

For the first time in 1959, Sadeqi painted and inscribed some illegible words on a ceramic panel, which some experts believe to have been the first calligraphic-painting.

## “Black Panther” stars on importance of African culture in Marvel film

**LOS ANGELES (Reuters)** — The stars of “Black Panther” dressed in their finest African-inspired royal attire and spoke about the importance of representing a black superhero story on screen at the premiere of the new film from Walt Disney Co’s Marvel Entertainment.

Chadwick Boseman, who plays T’Challa, the titular hero and king of fictional African nation Wakanda, led his co-stars including Lupita Nyong’o, Daniel Kaluuya, Michael B. Jordan, Danai Gurira and Angela Bassett, on the purple carpet on Monday.

“Something like Marvel has a way of really affecting popular culture, and to have that popular culture informed with things that are of African origin and people knowing they are of African origin ... is powerful,” Nyong’o, who plays warrior Nakia, told Reuters.

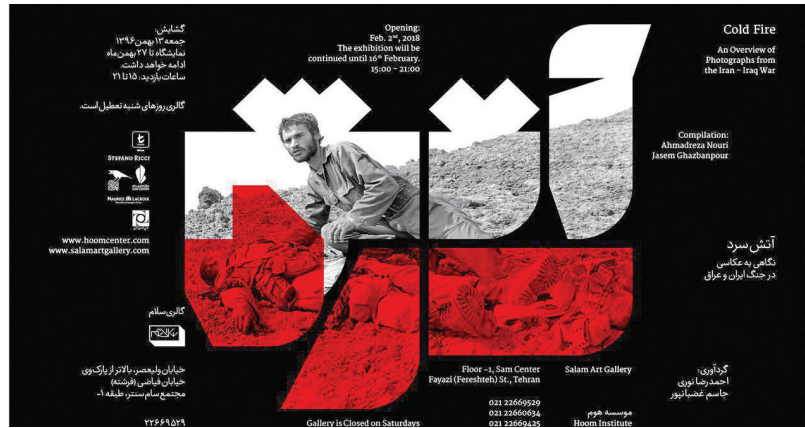
“Hopefully it changes the general idea of what being an African is. Too often times we see Africa as a place that is wanting and here it’s a place that you want to go,” she said.

The Oscar-winning actress matched the purple carpet in an amethyst-hued Versace



*Michael B. Jordan (left) and writer/director Ryan Coogler at the “Black Panther” world premiere*

## “Cold Fire” to break out at Tehran gallery



*A poster for “Cold Fire”, an exhibit that displays photos of the Iran-Iraq war*

**A R T d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Photos of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war will be showcased in an exhibition titled “Cold Fire” at Salam Gallery in Tehran from February 2 to 16.

Photos by Mehrzad Arshadi, Saeid Janbozorgi, Mohammad-Hossein Heidari, Jahangir Razmi, Jasem Ghazbanpur, Ali Fereiduni, Bahram

Mohammadifar, Sasan Moayyedi and Arabali Hashemi have been selected for the exhibition.

The showcase has been organized in collaboration with Ghazbanpur and Ahmadrza Nuri.

The gallery is located at the Sam Center, Falyazi St. off Vali-e Asr Ave. near the Parkway Intersection.

gown with gold-detailed shoulders and belt. Gurira wore a bright pink Viktor & Rolf dress with a dramatic shoulder ruffle, and Bassett opted for a golden yellow Naeem Khan fringe jumpsuit.

The men also served up colorful looks. Boseman rocked a gilded print Emporio Armani suit, actor Donald Glover opted for a tangerine Dolce & Gabbana suit, and the film’s director, Ryan Coogler, added a printed scarf to his black Ikire Jones suit, a Philadelphia label that draws from West African influences.

“Black Panther”, out in theaters on Feb. 16, earned rave early reactions from attendees at the premiere, including “Guardians of the Galaxy” director James Gunn, who praised the film as an “extraordinary work.”

“It’s just filled with so much talent, so much beauty, the aesthetic of it is so pleasing and so black and Afro-centric and African and modern and worldly and futuristic. You know, it’s got a lot of swag. This movie is on fire,” said Bassett, who plays T’Challa’s mother.