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© Defence Ministry

Turkish actions in Syria to bring back terrorists: Tehran

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has called on Turkey to end its major offensive in the northwestern Syrian city of Afrin, saying the operation would bring back terrorists to the war-torn country.

Ankara needs to reconsider its policy in Syria, Qassemi said on Monday during a press conference.

"The continuation of Turkey's military operation will facilitate the return of instability and terrorism to Syria," he warned.

He further called on Turkey to follow up all Syrian-related developments within the framework of the Astana peace process. →2

Ali Khomeini: Western human rights not good for Iran

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — Ali Khomeini, the grandson of Imam Khomeini, said on Monday that the Western human rights is good but not for Iran.

During a speech at Imam Sadiq University, he also said the UN does not support Iran in its resistance against the Western pressure.

In August 2017, Tehran hosted a ceremony to commemorate the Islamic Human Rights and Human Dignity Day.

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said in December 2017 that the Islamic Republic should become the forerunner of the Islamic human rights across the globe.

Iran planning to become gas technical–engineering services exporter

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN — Iran is planning to become an exporter of technical and engineering services in gas sector, National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Managing Director Hamidreza Araqi announced.

"We have already negotiated with some neighboring countries to export such services to them", the official said in a press conference on Monday.

"We, in NIGC, have materialized quantity objectives in this due over the past two years and now we are working on the issue of quality and standard making which will lead to the exports of technical and engineering services", the managing director noted.

Answering a question about NIGC's gas export priorities, he said: "Supplying gas for domestic consumption in a safe and stable way is of higher significance to us, but we have the potential and capacity of exports." →4

PERSPECTIVE

Mahmood Monshipouri
Francisco State University and the University of California, Berkeley

U.S.-Qatar strategic dialogue: What's the target exactly?

The United States and Qatar have had longstanding economic and political ties since the 1970s. Rarely, if ever, has any domestic, regional, or international development fundamentally changed or even undermined this valued and cooperative relationship. On January 30, 2018, U.S. Defense Secretary James N. Mattis and Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson, alongside their Qatari counterparts, remarked in favor of further cooperation between the two countries at the opening session of the inaugural U.S.-Qatar Strategic Dialogue at the State Department. How should one gauge the significance of this initiative? This event raises a question: Is embarking on a new strategic talk between the two countries aimed at repairing the rift within the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC)? Or is this new foreign policy directed at rolling back the resurgent regional powers of Iran and Turkey given the current conflict in Syria?

Looking at the bigger picture, it is worth noting that since the fractures within the [P] GCC have concrete geopolitical and economic—and to a lesser extent, ideological—roots, it is highly unlikely that such divisions will be overcome any time soon. I would make the case that the United States is neither willing nor capable of reconciling differences between and/or among the [P] GCC states. The U.S.-Qatar strategic dialogue, therefor, has one central goal: to contain the regional influence of Iran and Turkey.

The dispute between Saudi Arabia and Qatar has intensified divisions within the [P] GCC, but it also has benefited countries such as Turkey and Iran, whose economic ties with Qatar have dramatically deepened. The dispute has placed Qatar in a much stronger position to outlast the political ambitions of the three other Persian Gulf states (the United Arab States, Kuwait, and Bahrain) that have followed the Saudis' lead to punish Qatar for its unorthodox support for the Arab Spring uprisings and their pragmatic economic and political relationship with Iran. Similarly, Qatar's moves in the region to protect migrant workers' rights, as well as serving as a mediators in some key regional conflicts →7

Kashmir Solidarity Day marked in Pakistan embassy in Tehran

By Afshin Majlesi

TEHRAN — The embassy of Pakistan in Tehran observed Kashmir Solidarity Day on Monday to express unity with the Kashmiri people who have long been struggling for self-determination in northern India.

A host of people from the Pakistani community as well as Iranian scholars and college students attended the event.

Delivering a speech, Ambassador Asif Durrani paid tribute to the "valiant" people of Kashmir who have laid down their lives in the struggle for "attaining their right to self-determination".

"Kashmir and Palestine are the two oldest issues on the UN agenda and UN resolutions on the Kashmir issue clearly state that the Kashmiri people will decide their fate in a UN supervised plebiscite."

The Pakistani ambassador added, "Recently, the Indian forces have employed new tactics [against the Kashmiris] ..., blinding thousands of innocent civilians by pellet guns."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the top diplomat reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to a just and peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute and extended Pakistan's unwavering moral, political and diplomatic support to the cause of the Kashmiri people.

Two Iranian scholars Reza Mostafavi, and Qasem Safi, as well as an Iranian student from the University of Tehran, Department of Urdu Language and Literature, also delivered speeches in which they highlighted the plight of the Kashmiri people. The speakers covered the history of the region as well as the landscape, political and cultural climate of Jammu and Kashmir, often denoted by the acronym J&K.

A short documentary on the Kashmir solidarity Day was screened as well.

Every year, on February 5, Kashmir Solidarity Day is widely marked across Pakistan and by Kashmiri nationalists worldwide, holding special programs.

Europe will not accept Trump's conditions about the JCPOA: Nephew

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Richard Nephew, who served as the lead sanctions expert for the U.S. team negotiating with Iran, believes that neither Europe nor Iran will accept Trump' conditions about the JCPOA.

Nephew adds that "I think that European officials would be pleased to have the kinds of measures agreed to by Iran, but the fact that Iran will not agree -- and certainly not in this context -- will mean that the Europeans will reject the attempt as prejudicial to the JCPOA."

Fellow at the Center on Global Energy Policy at Columbia University, says "Trump will either have to back down from his demands, which is possible but increasingly hard to believe, or there will be a confrontation."

Following is the text of the interview with Nephew:

■ President Trump has announced that removing time limitations from Iran's nuclear activities, unrestricted inspections and relating Iran's missile program to the JCPOA are all necessary for the U.S. not to withdraw from the JCPOA. Will Europe bow down to these conditions? What about Iran?

A: No, I do not think that Europe will accept these conditions, much less Iran. I think that European officials would be pleased to have the kinds of measures agreed to by Iran, but the fact that Iran will not agree -- and certainly not in this context -- will mean that the Europeans will reject the attempt as prejudicial to the JCPOA.

■ Over the past three month, the European states have made great efforts to persuade the U.S. congress and administration that a better agreement with Iran cannot be made on the ruins of the JCPOA. Will the EU and the U.S. congress be able to reach an agreement on the JCPOA that can meet Trump's demands? What is such an agreement like?

A: I think that the EU and the U.S. Congress actually understand this issue the same way. But, Trump does not.

In other words, I think that he -- and a few of his allies in Congress and the think tank community -- are the ones who are the outliers. But, this may not matter. After all, I could have said the same thing about a number of different issues.

■ Iran has said time and again that it will not accept any changes to the JCPOA and will not welcome any limitation on its missile program. The EU defending the Iran deal is under Trump's pressure. How can EU meet Trump's demands but at the same time allow Iran to reap the benefit from the JCPOA?

A: As I've said, I do not think that the EU will be able to meet Trump's demands. →13

Germans are losing power in Europe

By Saeed Sobhani

TEHRAN — Germans are deeply concerned about the prolongation of the process of forming a coalition government between the Social Democratic Party and the Christian Social Party. In a recent poll conducted in Germany, 71 percent of German citizens consider the delay in forming a coalition government incomprehensible, while about 28 percent have considered the process normal. A simple analysis of this survey shows that even a large number of supporters of the Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and Christian Socialists consider the current process unacceptable.

Most German citizens surveyed believe that the delay has disturbed the country's internal affairs and reduced Germany's influence in the European Union. Certainly, over the coming years, we're going to witness increasing concern over this issue, even if a coalition government is finally formed. And if that is the case, the next government may no longer have the power to lead the European Union and the Eurozone given domestic challenges.

The poll results indicate that a "coalition government" doesn't necessarily mean the end of the challenges for Merkel either domestically or in the European Union. On the contrary, it will exacerbate further concerns. During the last three years, German citizens have witnessed Merkel's strong maneuvers within the EU and the Eurozone. During this time, Germany played a major role as the EU's primary economic power. The imposition of Merkel's austerity policies on other European countries was what led to dissatisfaction among European citizens. What is clear is that Merkel can't go on like this, because the sharp fall of the Christian Democrats' vote count in the recent election was a clear indication of the decrease in the popularity of the country's Chancellor. Some Christian Democrats were opposed to Merkel's candidacy in recent elections, because they believed Merkel had to step down by the end of her third term. They thought Merkel as an influential person might have continued with political activities in the Christian Democrat Party and in Germany, however. But Merkel has been determined to save position and not to everyone's satisfaction.

Leaders of the German Liberal Democratic Party have repeatedly criticized the ruling political approach. Wolfgang Kubicki, the vice chairman of the Free Democratic Party, has emphasized that there will be no Grand Coalition →7

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Actor Hamid Farrokhnejad takes a selfie during a photocal for "Lottery" at the 36th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran.

Protagonists are always unconventional: "Lottery" director

ART desk

TEHRAN – Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian, director of the sex trafficking drama "Lottery", has said that protagonists in all film genres act unconventionally.

He made the remarks at a press conference on Sunday in response to comments from journalists that claimed the revengeful act of the film's main character might be harmful to society.

"Anyway, this is a film and when the law is inefficient, illegal acts are perpetrated, and this may occur in any society," Mahdavian said during the press conference that was organized after a screening of his movie at 36th Fajr Film Festival. →16

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

Executives engaged in nepotism to be dismissed: labor minister

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — Labor Minister Ali Rabiei has said that any executive who is engaged in nepotism or uses his power for personal interests will be dismissed immediately.

In a directive to fight corruption, Rabiei said administrative and financial corruption is a big issue that prevents progress of the society and imposes irreparable damage on the country's development, the Etemaad newspaper reported on Monday.

Warning against the consequences of nepotism, the minister said he will spare no efforts in fighting such issue, which he said halts economic growth and prevalence of meritocracy.

'14 public, private bodies responsible for Plasco tragedy'

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — Tehran's prosecutor general said on Monday that 14 public and private bodies were found responsible for the collapse of Plasco building more than a year ago.

Abbas Jafari-Dolatabadi said, according to a report by a panel of experts, the organizations were found responsible for the catastrophic incident.

On January 19, 2017, Plasco building, a 17-storey shopping center, caught fire and three and a half hours later, #PlascoTragedy went viral on the internet and social media as the building collapsed. 15 firefighters and a number of civilians lost their lives and hundreds of people their jobs and business.

IRGC has purchased equipment for cloud seeding

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has purchased the necessary equipment to conduct cloud seeding operations as part of a program to fight drought, the IRGC's representative for parliamentary affairs has said.

Mohammad Saleh Jokar said that the IRGC is ready to help cloud seeding in order to resolve the water crisis, ISNA reported on Monday.

"Although the government has not asked for Sepah's help, we have announced our readiness to help the government if necessary," he said.

Weeks ago, the IRGC Aerospace Force said it would mobilize all equipment to help the government.

Poll: 58% Iranians use Telegram messaging app

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — According to a recent poll conducted by the Center for Strategic Studies, 58.3% of Iranians say they use Telegram messaging app, with 63% them saying they circumvented the government's ban on the app during the latest protests across the country.

Since the recent unrest broke out, the Center for Strategic Studies has conducted various polls to better understand the root causes of the protests in order to find solutions.

One of the polls, according IRNA, showed that 39.4% percent of those who use Telegram, follow recent news stories and political issues through the messaging app.

Police shoot knife-wielding man at presidential office entrance

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — On Monday, security forces shot and arrested a man armed with knife who was trying to enter the presidential office through the main gate.

Mohsen Hamadani, the deputy governor of Tehran Province, said the man wanted to pass the gates but was shot in the foot and injured.

Security forces opened fire at the person after he neglected warnings to stop, the official said.

According to the deputy governor, the man is alive and an investigation is underway to find about the motivation behind his move.

U.S. Congress unwilling to quit Iran deal: expert

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — The U.S. Congress is not inclined to withdraw from the Iran nuclear agreement, but it is willing to modify it, a U.S. expert said, noting that the legislative body is evaluating the stances of their European allies.

"There is going to be some decisions among the Europeans. There are several problems for the Europeans. One is that the UK, France and Germany do not like Trump at all," James George Jatras said in an interview with IRNA.

Except the Trump administration, all other signatories to the nuclear deal have rejected the idea of revising the deal.

Russia says revision of nuclear deal out of question

POLITICS desk

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov has said that revision of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), is out of question.

Ryabkov made the remarks in an interview with Izvestia newspaper published on Monday.

"There is no way of revising, improving, updating or otherwise rectifying the JCPOA in the current climate. Too many events, which have unfolded recently, have deepened distrust between Washington and Tehran. Certain steps are being taken, which not only placed doubts on the U.S. commitment to the nuclear deal, but in fact intensify pressure on the Islamic Republic. Under such conditions, I personally can't imagine any reset of negotiations [on the issue]," Ryabkov said, according to TASS.

In a statement on January 12, U.S. President Donald Trump gave Europeans only 120 days to agree to an overhaul of the nuclear agreement and said if the text of the nuclear deal is not revised he would unilaterally withdraw the U.S. from the agreement.

Ryabkov described Washington's ultimatums demanding further concessions from Iran as an "unacceptable method" which will yield no results.

"So, I do not really see how the American side is going to move ahead on this issue. In any case, we have repeatedly stressed, and I do so once again, that we should not proceed with reconsidering the JCPOA, it is a direct path to undermining the agreement. We feel it is only more than obvious that the consequences of the deal's possible termination, if it comes to it, would be extremely negative. Both in terms of sustainability of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime and in terms of the perception of the U.S.' negotiation abilities in a number of capitals," he added.

Iran and six world powers, including the U.S., UK, France, Russia, China and Germany, struck the nuclear deal on July 14, 2015. The deal went into effect in January 2016. Since the nuclear deal went into force, the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency has issued nine reports each time confirming that Iran has been living up to its nuclear obligations.

Iran, Russia, Syria, Iraq hold security meeting in Baghdad

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — High-ranking officials from Iran, Russia, Iraq, and Syria held talks about a range of security issues in Baghdad and stressed the need to boost cooperation between the four countries in the fight against the Daesh (ISIS or ISIL) and other terrorist groups.

During the Sunday meeting of the Baghdad-based Quadrilateral Intelligence Center of Iran, Russia, Iraq, and Syria chaired by Iraq's Director of Military Intelligence Major General Saad Mezher Al-Alaq, the participants discussed activities of the four countries in the security and intelligence fields and counter-terrorism.

Speaking at the session, Major General Alaq expressed his gratitude to Iran for supporting the Iraqi nation in the fight against Daesh terrorists and said although Daesh was defeated in Iraq, vigilance should be exercised to counter their activities to insecure the Arab country under new names.

The Iranian ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjejdi, also praised the role of the intelligence center in the collapse of Daesh and thanked all members of the quadrilateral coalition, including Russians and Syrians.

On November 19, Daesh terrorists were flushed out of their last stronghold in Syria's Al-Bukamal. The city's liberation marked an end to the group's self-proclaimed caliphate it had declared in 2014.

Daesh militants made swift advances in northern and western Iraq over the summer of 2014, after capturing large areas of Syria.

But the timely support by Iran helped Syria and Iraq fight off Daesh. In addition, formation of military units by volunteers in Iraq, known as Hashd al-Shaabi or Popular Mobilization Units, blunted the edge of Daesh offensive and later made the terror group withdraw from much of the territories it had occupied.

(Source: Tasnim)

Technology is a tool against efforts to undermine Iranian independence: official

TEHRAN — Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani cautioned against enemies' plots to deal blows to the country's political independence, saying utilizing domestic technology can help the country counter such plots.

Using local technology and capital would thwart enemy plots to deal blows to the country's political independence, Shamkhani told reporters on the sidelines of a ceremony to inaugurate two major industrial projects in the northern province of Alborz on Monday.

"One of the main foundations of the continuity of the Islamic Revolution and the social values emanating from it is the completion of the chain of (the country's) scientific independence and, consequently, economic independence," he said.

The official further said the body under his leadership is duty bound to ensure the security of national economy through protecting the rights of economic activists and creating mechanisms for discovering, tackling and eliminating economic corruption.

In similar remarks in December, Shamkhani had said that implementing the Resistance Economy policies is the only solution to the current economic conditions of the country.

Back in 2014, Ayatollah Khamenei had sent a proclamation to heads of Iran's branches of power and outlined general policies to boost the country's economy and lower its vulnerabilities under a grand plan, dubbed Resistance Economy.

(Source: Tasnim)

Iran starts mass production of smart, precision-striking drone

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — The Iranian Defense Ministry on Monday launched the mass production of a tactical drone, named Mohajer 6, with the capability to carry "smart" bombs with high "precision-striking" capability.

Defense Minister Amir Hatami said the drone is able to conduct different reconnaissance, patrolling and combat missions in distant areas and enjoys high flight endurance.

The new drone is planned to be delivered to the IRGC Ground Forces.

"Drone Mohajer 6, equipped with the smart Qa'em precision-striking bombs and different electro-optical explorers and different warheads, can trace, intercept and destroy the target," Fars news agency quoted Hatami as explaining.

It can destroy different fixed and mobile targets in day and night missions and can infiltrate various types of installations and facilities, he added.

According to Fars, Iran has so far unveiled various domestically produced drones, including Ababil, Fotros, Hazem, Karrar, Mohajer, Sarir, Shahed 129, Yasir and Zohal.

Iran has made great advances in building unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). "There is credible evidence to suggest that Iran is capable of producing the engines used by the majority of their UAVs," says Galen Wright, an analyst who analyzes Iranian military capabilities at The Arkenstone.

Former diplomat calls Sochi meeting 'promising'

POLITICS desk

TEHRAN — Hossein Sheikholeslam, a former Iranian ambassador to Syria, has said that the latest meeting on Syria in Russia's northern city of Sochi was "promising".

"The process of the Sochi meeting was promising. Russia, Iran and Turkey, as countries that guarantee peace in Syria, should make efforts to make this conference more comprehensive and closer to the Syrian people's demands," he told ISNA in an interview published on Monday.

The latest round of the Sochi meetings was held on January 29 and 30.

Sheikholeslam said during the conference it was decided to reform Syria's current constitution.

He added there is no alternative for the Sochi and Astana conferences, describing them as the "only effective dialogues" on the seven-year old Syrian crisis.

Commenting on Iran's policy on the Syria conflict, he said, "We have always stressed that the Syrian people's demands should be met and other countries are not permitted to decide for the Syrians."

Iran, Turkey and Russia brokered the Astana dialogue on Syria and the first five rounds of the talks were held on January 23-24, February 15-16, March 14-15, May 3-4 and July 4-5, 2017.

The sixth round of talks were held on September 13-15 and the seventh round in October.

Turkish actions in Syria to bring back terrorists: Tehran

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'No EU request for missile talks'

Qassemi also said Iran had not received any official request from the European Union for negotiation on Tehran's missile program.

Pointing to Iran's strong ties with European countries, he said the two sides exchange their views on various subjects, but what the Western mainstream media say is different from what is taking place in reality.

"What is certain is that the Americans are dissatisfied with Iran's ties with regional countries as well as the European Union," he said, adding that the Americans "are trying to bring them in line with their interests through exerting pressure on them."

The spokesman further said current relations between the Islamic Republic and the European bloc were strong enough and on a "logical track".

'Sheikhzadeh's verdict politically motivated'

Elsewhere in his remarks, Qassemi pointed to the case of Ahmad Sheikhzadeh, an Iran-born U.S. citizen, who was sentenced to three months on Friday for evading taxes by concealing his income and helping family and friends make money transfers that violated U.S. sanctions against Iran.

He said the United States' jailing of a former consultant to Iran's mission to the United Nations is part of a campaign of "psychological warfare".

The Foreign Ministry spokesman says the current relations between the Islamic Republic and the European bloc are strong enough and on a "logical track".

"The accusations against him are unacceptable and baseless." Sheikhzadeh, 61, admitted that he had not disclosed his income from the mission, which was paid in cash, on his tax returns, but called the prison sentence "very unfair" and said his prosecution had been an attempt to coerce him to act as an informant from within the Iran mission.

"This verdict was politically motivated as the Americans are constantly engaging in psychological warfare against Iran," Qassemi said.

He also called on Washington to stop its "continuous pressure" on Iranians in the United States and other countries.

"The Americans should reverse this wrongful policy and release all Iranian detainees immediately," he stressed.

An Iranian judicial official said last year more than 56 Iranians were imprisoned in the United States, most of them on charges of violating U.S. sanctions against Tehran.

Respect nuclear limits under New START Treaty: U.S. to Russia

Russia confirms commitment to New START treaty

The United States, which unveiled a new aggressive nuclear strategy, has met the limits set on its arsenal under the New START Treaty, which enters a new phase Monday, and reminded Russia to uphold its commitments.

The strategic arms reduction treaty was signed by Washington and Moscow in 2010, and took effect in February 2011.

It calls for the gradual reduction over 10 years of the number of nuclear warheads held by both sides, limits on the number of delivery systems, a strict verification regime and data exchanges.

"The United States of America and the Russian Federation have implemented the Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms [New START Treaty] for seven years," the State Department said in a statement.

"February 5, 2018 marks the date that the treaty's central limits on each country's strategic nuclear arsenal take effect."

Washington said it had already fulfilled its commitments by August 2017, said the statement issued by department spokeswoman Heather Nauert.

Russia has "repeatedly stated its commitment" to the treaty, including meeting the central limits, and we expect our upcoming data exchange under the treaty to reaffirm that commitment."

On Thursday, Nauert said that Washington had "no reason to believe" that Russia would not meet its goals.

"Within the next month or so, both countries will exchange their data under the strategic nuclear arsenals, as we have done bilaterally under the treaty's terms for the last seven years," she said.

"We hope each country will confirm the compliance of the other as soon as possible after this data exchange."

Russia said for its part Monday it was committed to the treaty and would provide Washington with data on its strategic nuclear arsenals in "the near future."

The Russian foreign ministry said in a statement that Moscow accepted Washington's assurances that the United States had met the limits set on its arsenal under the treaty.

Yet the statement said that the United States reached the target limits not only due to cutting the amount of weapons but also thanks to the refurbishment of launchers of submarine launched ballistic missiles, among other weapons.

"Russia confirms its commitment to the START treaty,"

the foreign ministry said.

"At the same time Russia strongly calls on the United States to continue a constructive search for mutually acceptable solutions in relation to problems related to the refurbishment" of strategic nuclear weapons.

The beginning Monday of the new "central limits" phase under the New START Treaty comes just days after the Pentagon announced its new nuclear policy.

The Defense Department said Friday it wanted to revamp the U.S. nuclear arsenal and develop new low-yield atomic weapons, largely in response to Russian actions in recent years.

According to Washington, Moscow is in process of modernizing its arsenal of 2,000 tactical nuclear weapons.

Those efforts are not monitored by the New START Treaty, which only accounts for strategic weapons that serve as deterrents.

The treaty was reached under the administration of Barack Obama, President Donald Trump's predecessor.

The State Department said Monday that implementation of the accord "enhances the safety and security of the United States and our allies and makes strategic relations between the United States and the Russian Federation more stable, transparent, and predictable."

U.S.-Russia ties are strained at best, as the controversy over what U.S. intelligence says was Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election drags on.

The State Department said adherence to the treaty was "critically important at a time when trust in the relationship has deteriorated, and the threat of miscalculation and misperception has risen."

(Source: AFP)

Hopes for talks grow with N. Korea's ceremonial leader to visit S. Korea

North Korea's ceremonial leader will make an unprecedented visit to South Korea this week, officials said on Monday, as hopes grow for high-level inter-Korean talks during the Winter Olympics that begin in four days.

North Korea's official KCNA news agency confirmed on Monday that Kim Yong Nam, president of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, would attend the Olympics' opening ceremony on Friday in South Korea's alpine resort town of Pyeongchang.

Seoul's Unification Ministry said on Sunday Kim would lead a 22-strong delegation that was expected to arrive in South Korea on Friday for a three-day trip.

Kim's visit comes as Seoul pins its hopes on high-level talks during the Feb. 9-25 Games between not only the two Koreas but also the North and the United States.

The South's presidential Blue House in Seoul said the visit by Kim, the most senior North Korean official to cross the border into the South since the Korean War ended with a truce in 1953, would create "various opportunities" for high-level talks.

"(Kim's visit) shows North Korea's resolve for improved inter-Korean relations and the success of the Olympics, as well as its sincere, earnest attitude," Blue House spokesman Kim Eui-kyeom told a news briefing on Monday.

The Games opening ceremony will also be attended by U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and other world leaders.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in told his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump in a phone call on Friday that the momentum of improved North-South relations would continue and that Pence's visit would be an "important prelude for that", according to the Blue House.

Trump said during a meeting with North Korean defectors on Friday that, despite a "very tricky situation", North Korea's participation in the Olympics could result in "something good".

However, a White House official has said Pence planned to use his attendance to counter what he sees as Pyongyang's efforts to "hijack" the Olympics with a propaganda campaign.

Sanctions exemption

A North Korean art troupe would also likely travel by ship to perform during the Olympics under an exemption from bilateral sanctions, the South's Unification Ministry said on Monday. With performances set for later this week, the North proposed on Sunday that the art troupe use a ferry for transportation and lodging, according to the Unification Ministry.

South Korea banned all North Korean ships from entering its ports in May 2010 and cut off most inter-Korean exchanges, including tourism, trade and aid, in response to a torpedo attack by the North on a navy ship that killed 46 sailors.

The Unification Ministry said no final decision had been made but it was in consultation with Washington and others to temporarily lift the ban to facilitate the North's proposal.

"We're seeking to apply an exemption for the May (2010) measures to support a successful hosting of the Olympics," ministry spokesman Baik Tae-hyun told a news briefing.

The North used the ship, the Mangyongbong 92, for similar purposes during the 2002 Asian Games in the South Korean port city of Busan. The ship now chiefly operates between North Korea and Russia.

The North had initially asked that the art troupe be allowed to cross the border by foot via Panmunjom, located in the demilitarized zone where a North Korean soldier staged a daring defection to the South in November.

The orchestra is scheduled to perform at Gangneung, near Pyeongchang, on Thursday and in the capital, Seoul, on Sunday.

Tight security

A lawmaker in Seoul said some 36,000 foreigners had been banned from entering South Korea, including people connected with extremist groups such as Islamic State, to ensure security during the Games.

Lawmaker Yi Wan-young told reporters of the ban after being briefed by the nation's spy agency on Monday. Yi said around 60,000 security personnel would guard Olympics venues.

Kim is North Korea's nominal head of state, while the reclusive country is ruled by Kim Jong Un, the third-generation hereditary leader.

Kim Yong Nam also attended the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing and the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.

He is not blacklisted by the United Nations or the United States because he is not involved in the North's illicit nuclear and missile programs or associated with related research institutes.

In 2014, Pyongyang sent Choe Ryong Hae, a close aide to Kim Jong Un, as part of a high-level delegation to attend the closing ceremony of the Asian Games in Incheon, South Korea.

Choe is subject to unilateral sanctions imposed by South Korea in 2016.

"Kim Yong Nam has little influence in North Korean internal politics, inter-Korean affairs or the nuclear issues, but has mainly been taking charge of summit diplomacy," said Cheong Seong-chang, a senior fellow at South Korea's Sejong Institute think tank.

"This time, if he gets to meet Moon, he could convey Kim Jong Un's message or invitation to Pyongyang," Cheong said.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. redeploying troops to Afghanistan from Iraq

The U.S. military is pulling its forces from a base in Iraq and shifting them to Afghanistan following the defeat of Daesh militants in the Arab country, the Associated Press reported on Monday.

The news agency quoted Western contractors at the base as saying that U.S. troops began the drawdown over the past week, with groups of soldiers leaving the base on daily flights.

According to the report, the exact scale of the redeployment was unclear.

The BBC said more than 5,000 U.S. troops were stationed in Iraq as of 2016, with nearly 4,000 others deployed later to purportedly assist local groups fighting Daesh. The remaining troops included special operations forces, logistics workers and soldiers on temporary rotations, the broadcaster said.

Iraqi officials said their government reached an agreement with the U.S. to reduce the number of troops in Iraq, Fox News reported.

The news came amid reports of a tiff between Baghdad and Washington over the United States' suspension of a maintenance program for Abrams tanks in Iraq.

It is also the latest sign of a growing U.S. military buildup in Afghanistan, contrary to President Donald Trump's election campaign promises to end the intervention.

Trump introduced a new Afghanistan strategy in August, hinting at relaxing the rules of engagement, accelerating strikes and other military actions aimed at producing "an honorable and enduring outcome".

Since he took office, the number of troops has nearly doubled in Afghanistan – from 8,500 in early 2017 to 14,000 today.

According to The Washington Post, the U.S. Army is floating plans to increase the total number of troops in Afghanistan by another 1,000.

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan with the express aim of defeating Taliban but the militants are openly active in 70 percent of the country, a study released by the BBC said last Tuesday.

Worse still, Daesh has established a foothold in the war-torn country with its trademark brutal attacks.

On Tuesday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said the U.S. was transferring the Takfiri group from Iraq and Syria to Afghanistan in order "to justify the continuation of its presence in the region and to create security for the Zionist regime".

(Source: agencies)

Dutch government formally withdraws Turkish ambassador over 2017 row

The Dutch Foreign Ministry on Monday said it had formally withdrawn its ambassador to Turkey, who has been physically barred from the country for almost a year, over a dispute that began during March 2017.

The Netherlands will also not accept the appointment of a new Turkish ambassador to the Netherlands.

In a statement, the ministry said it has "paused" talks with Turkey on resolving the matter.

The two governments originally fell out over the Netherlands' decision to block visas for Turkish officials to campaign among the Turkish diaspora in the Netherlands in favor of Turkey's constitutional referendum in March -- at the exact time the Netherlands was holding its own national elections.

(Source: Reuters)

Lebanon leaders to meet as Israel threatens 'Stone Age'

Senior Lebanese leaders will meet later this week to deescalate political tensions and discuss measures to counter Israel's threats against Lebanon's offshore oil and gas exploration projects, officials say.

President Michel Aoun will hold a meeting with Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Saad Hariri before noon Tuesday at the presidential palace of Baabda to boost stability amid rising Israeli threats against the Arab country.

The meeting comes after tensions flared last week between the Free Patriotic Movement, founded by Aoun, and the Amal Movement, presided by Berri, fueled by a video in which Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, who heads the FPM party, was shown calling Lebanon's parliament speaker a "thug." A wave of protests by Berri's supporters ensued.

"Hopes are pinned on this [Baabda] meeting to lay the foundation for bolstering stability and opening horizons of further cooperation in the interest of the country and its civil peace," Berri told visitors at his Ain al-Tineh residence Sunday night.

The gathering will focus on discussing the necessary measures the country needs to take after after Israeli remarks on oil and gas exploration in south Lebanon's Block 9.

"Although the Baabda Palace meeting has an open agenda, the main topic is the south and the Israeli aggression on Lebanon's Block 9 and Israel's plan to build a separation wall on the Lebanese-Israeli border," an official source at Baabda Palace said.

"The three leaders will seek to defuse political tensions and bolster stability to confront Israel's threats against Lebanon's right to explore its oil and gas wealth in its territorial waters," the source added.

Israel's minister of military affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, has described as "very provocative" a Lebanese tender for projects in two of its 10 offshore blocks in the Mediterranean Sea. Tel Aviv, which claims sovereignty over Block 9, also urged international firms not to bid.

Lieberman's remarks came a few days before February 9 when Beirut is set to officially sign contracts with three international firms, allowing exploration to start.

Commenting on a tripartite meeting between senior Lebanese, UN and Israeli army officers at the Lebanese border town of Naqoura scheduled for Monday to discuss Israel's plan to build a concrete wall on a disputed border area, Berri stressed Beirut's opposition to the project.

"Lebanon's representative has been instructed to reaffirm Lebanon's right to prevent any Israeli attempt to build a wall on the ground through which [Israel] aims to seize oil in the sea. This is what Lieberman clearly referred to on Block 9," Berri said.

In further hostile remarks against Beirut, Israel's Transportation Minister Yisrael Katz threatened to return Lebanon to "the Stone Age," if it is turned into what he said an Iranian factory of precision-guided weapons.

"Israel has set a red line—it won't allow Lebanon to become a factory for the production of precision-guided missiles for Iran," Katz said in an interview with the Ynet studio on Sunday.

He claimed that "Iran is working to turn Lebanon into an advanced post against Israel and has basically taken Lebanon hostage through Hezbollah by implementing its aggressive trends."

"We are being very clear. If an open, comprehensive conflict develops as a result of Hezbollah's aggression, we will act very firmly, much more than we did in 2006. Not a single target in Lebanon will be immune, and any infrastructure used both by Hezbollah and for military purposes will be hit. Lebanon will go back many, many years, some say to the Stone Age and others say to the age of cavemen."

About 1,200 Lebanese, most of them civilians, lost their lives during Israel's 33-day war on Lebanon back in the summer of 2006.

According to the 629-page Winograd Report by the Israeli regime itself, Hezbollah fighters involved in defending Lebanon against the Israeli war defeated the enemy and Tel Aviv was compelled to withdraw without having achieved any of its objectives.

Katz's remarks echoed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's statements before his last week's visit to Russia in which he accused Iran of trying to turn Lebanon into "one giant missile site" against Israel.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98033.5
IFX	1092.48

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	47,600 rials
EUR	62,170 rials
GBP	68,020 rials
AED	13,270 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	$67.76/b
WTI	$64.96/b
OPEC Basket	$66.83/b
Gold	$1,337.55/oz
Silver	$16.89/oz
Platinium	$998.20/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran to become gas technical–engineering services exporter

1 → "We are currently export eight million cubic meters (mcm) per day of gas to Iraq which will rise to 50 mcm based on our contract with the neighboring country and we have also the capacity of export to the Persian Gulf countries", Araqi further explained.

He said: "For gas export to Basra, we have been ready since the past two months and it is expected that the export will be commenced in the beginning of the next [Iranian calendar] year (late March) when the Iraqi side will be also ready."

One of world's largest gas pipeline network

Elsewhere in his remarks, the NIGC managing director said Iran holds one of the largest gas pipeline networks in the world.

He said the work on the sixth national gas pipeline with the length of 1000 kilometers is complete by 80-90 percent and the pipeline will be inaugurated in the next calendar year.

Some hard work in some difficult areas has been done for laying this pipeline and 70 trillion rials (about $1.45 billion) has been expended for it, the official underscored.

1bcm production capacity planned

Araqi further put the country's daily gas production at 800 mcm and said the figure is planned to reach 1 billion cubic meters (bcm) based on the country's Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (2016-2021).

The sixth plan has also envisaged the daily gas export of 200 mcm, he added.

He also said that 92 percent of people (98 percent of people in the urban areas and 76 percent in the rural regions) in Iran enjoys natural gas at present.

Projects worth $2.5b to come on stream by next week

The official announced that 3,000 projects worth 120 trillion rials (about $2.5 billion) will be put into operation throughout the country on the occasion of Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-10, marking the victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution).

He said of the figure some 90 trillion rials (over $1.87 billion) is for the pipelines and stations projects and the rest 30 trillion rials (about $625 million) is due to the projects for gas supplying to the rural areas.

Gas supplying to 5,000 villages underway

The NIGC managing director said that about 25,000 villages are currently enjoying natural gas and the projects to supply gas to 5,000 villages are underway, of which projects to supply gas to 3,000 villages will be commenced on the occasion of the Ten-Day Dawn.

He put the number of villages with no gas supply at 8,000 and anticipated that gas will be supplied to them by the next two years if necessary fund is allocated.

Transit of goods via Iran rises 20% in 10 months

ECONOMY desk

TEHRAN — Transit of goods through Iran rose 20 percent during the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2017-January 20, 2018) compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Reza Nafisi, director general of Transit and International Transportation Department in Iran Road Maintenance & Transportation Organization, said 7.614 million tons of commodities have been transited via Iran's sea and land borders during the mentioned time, IRIB news reported on Sunday.

According to the official, the commodities transited include Mazut, fabrics, automobile parts, rice, gasoline, rubber and cotton.

Nafisi has announced the highest volume of traffic for trucks carrying transited freights, as it was last month, from the source of Iraq to the United Arab Emirates, mainly for the transit of petroleum products.

Hossein Salari, the acting director of Transit Supervision Department of Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), said in January that transit via Iran rose 13 percent during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2017) compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Salari noted that the commodities of over 100 countries were transited via Iran in the nine-month period.

Iran-Armenia trade up 10.3% in 2017

ECONOMY desk

TEHRAN – The value of trade between Iran and Armenia reached $263.5 million in 2017, a 10.3 percent increase compared to the previous year.

According to Hamaiak Avadisyanes, Iran's commercial attaché in Yerevan, the country exported $179.3 million worth of goods to Armenia in 2017 and trade balance between the two countries has been $95 million tipped in favor of Iran, IRIB news reported on Monday.

Iranian exports to Armenia rose by 9.3 percent in 2017, the official noted.

Earlier on Sunday, Iran and Armenia also signed a gas for power transfer deal and inaugurated a radiotherapy center in an Armenian hospital.

The third phase of transmitting electricity from Armenia to Iran and transferring gas from Iran to that country was signed between the two sides in Armenia, IRNA quoted Iranian Ambassador to Yerevan Kazem Sajjadi.

NEWS IN BRIEF

TCCIMA inaugurates House of Economic Unions

ECONOMY desk

TEHRAN — In a ceremony on Monday, Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) inaugurated House of Economic Unions in a bid for creating more unity among members of the chamber and investigating their claims.

The inauguration ceremony was participated by some board members of TCCIMA and also ICCIMA (Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture) as well as some secretaries and board members of private sector unions, TCCIMA portal announced.

Addressing the ceremony, TCCIMA Chairman Masoud Khansari expressed hope that establishment of this house will open a positive chapter for the activity of private sector to promote national economy.

Chain's annual imports from Iran increases 25% in 2017

ECONOMY desk

TEHRAN — Iran's exports to China increased 25.2 percent in 2017 in comparison to the preceding year, Public Relations Department of Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) quoted one of the organization's officials.

"China imported $18.58 billion of goods from Iran in 2017," Hossein Rustaiee announced.

"Crude oil, various types of polyethylene, methanol, sulfur, styrene, iron ore, copper ore, chrome ore, lead ore, zinc ore, marble and travertine were among the major products exported to China in the said year," he added.

Hengam gas field's processing facilities to go on stream soon

ENERGY desk

TEHRAN — Gas processing facilities of Hengam gas field (in the Persian Gulf) is going to be officially inaugurated in near future, Shana reported on Monday quoting an official with the Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC).

According to IOOC's Managing Director Hamid Bovard, all the field's process, infrastructure and utility unites, including demineralization, sweetening, pipelines, tanks, boilers, compressors, etc. have been installed successfully during the last 70 days.

"The facility has been developed with 70 million cubic meters of daily gas processing capacity," the official said.

Once operational, the field's flare stack in Qeshm Island will snuff out, to help preserve the environment.

Moreover, the gas needed by the island's power plant and industries will be supplied from the field and the excess will be transferred to Bandar Abbas for consumption.

Saudi business gauge falls to record low as economy hit by VAT

A measure of business activity in Saudi Arabia's non-oil economy dropped sharply to a record low in January, as the implementation of a new value-added tax hit output and purchasing.

The Emirates NBD Purchasing Managers' Index fell from 57.3 in December to 53, the lowest reading in the survey's history, as production and new orders slowed. Companies had boosted output and purchasing at the end of last year, ahead of the new tax, meaning the slowdown "is likely to be transitory," Khatija Haque, head of Middle East and North Africa research at Emirates NBD, wrote in the report. A reading above 50 indicates that the economy is still expanding.

Saudi Arabia is entering a crucial year for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's plan to remake the oil-dependent economy as officials try to raise government revenue without snuffing out economic growth. It introduced the 5 percent value-added tax on Jan. 1 alongside higher fees for foreign workers and subsidy cuts that drove up fuel and electricity prices.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Euro-area companies boost jobs as output nears 12-year high

Economic momentum in the euro area surged to the fastest pace in almost 12 years, pushing firms to pile on the most additional workers since the start of the millennium.

A composite Purchasing Managers' Index rose to 58.8 in January from 58.1 in December, IHS Markit said. That unexpectedly beat the previous flash estimate of 58.6, with the revision driven mainly by better-than-expected momentum in the service sector, led by Germany.

The region's expansion has been underpinned by a pickup in global trade, steadily declining unemployment, and ultra-low borrowing costs from the European Central Bank. As companies continue to accumulate orders that push them to the limits of their capacity, IHS Markit says the rapid pace of job creation - - the fastest since late 2000 -- is likely to help growth become less dependent on monetary support.

"The strong upturn is also broad-based, which adds to the potential for the growth to become more self-sustaining," said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at IHS Markit. "If such impressive numbers continue to be seen in coming months, expect policy makers to sound increasingly hawkish."

ECB officials are currently considering when to discuss winding down their extraordinary stimulus measures, which include negative interest rates and a bond-buying program. *(Source: Bloomberg)*

Booming trade is clashing with geopolitical tensions in Northeast Asia

Looking at the volume and growth rates of the Sino-Japanese trade flows, one would never guess that those two Asian neighbors are still unable to come to terms with their painful war history and contested maritime borders while they observe the 40th anniversary of a treaty on «peace and friendship.»

Here are the numbers: Japan is reporting that its exports to China during the first 11 months of last year rose at an impressive annual rate of 18 percent to $151.4 billion, or 24 percent of Japan›s total export sales. That is more than double what Japan exports to the European Union, and 24 percent more than what the Japanese sell to the United States.

Taking a broader view of those numbers, it turns out that China is, arguably, the key driver of the Japanese economy. Indeed, five years of an ultra-loose monetary policy produced little during the first three quarters of last year: Household expenditures and business investments grew at respective annual rates of 0.7 percent and 0.4 percent, while residential investments, public spending and public sector investments showed no growth at all.

(Source: CNBC)

Oil skims one-month low, investors punish equities and commodities

Oil fell for a second day on Monday, nearing its lowest in a month, as rising U.S. output and a weaker physical market added to the pressure from a widespread decline across equities and commodities.

Friday's U.S. jobs report that showed the fastest wage growth in nearly nine years exacerbated a broader market sell-off that was already under way as Wall Street stocks backed off record highs, and a rising dollar dented commodities.

Brent crude futures were down 36 cents at $68.22 a barrel by 1010 GMT, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude fell 13 cents to $65.32.

"Oil is caught up in this general risk-off move, not helped at the margins by a little bit of strength in the U.S. dollar," said Ric Spooner, chief market analyst at CMC Markets in Sydney.

The S&P 500 saw its largest one-day fall since September 2016 on Friday, but is still up 3 percent since the start of this year and up 21 percent since February 2017, having hit a record high in late January.

"The size of the move in U.S. equities doesn't always mean this, but usually after a move like that and particularly when it follows such a long uptrend, there is follow-through selling," Spooner said.

The physical crude market has also deteriorated in the last few weeks, as the price of North Sea oil has hit its lowest in eight months, while Russian Urals crude changed hands last week at its lowest in a year.

"We're really going into a period of a lot of refining maintenance so it's not unexpected that (the sell-off) is happening," Petromatrix strategist Olivier Jakob said.

Saudi Arabia over the weekend said it had cut the official selling prices for its crude to European customers, a sign that the world's largest oil exporter may be warding off potential weakness in the region.

Adding to the pressure on oil, which hit its highest in nearly three years two weeks ago, has been evidence of rising U.S. crude production, which could threaten the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' effort to support prices.

Data from the U.S. government last week showed that output climbed above 10 million barrels per day in November for the first time since 1970, as shale drillers expanded operations after gains in oil prices last year.

U.S. energy companies added oil rigs for a second week in a row last week.

(Source: Nikkei)

Will rising crude inventories end the rally?

By Nick Cunningham

U.S. crude oil inventories jumped this past week for the first time in nearly three months, rising by 6.7 million barrels. The inventory increase, coming at a time of surging U.S. oil production, could rattle the oil price rally. However, the stock builds were always expected, and are typical at this time of year.

The jump in inventories put an end to 10 consecutive weeks of inventory drawdowns, which have the stock surplus within sight of the five-year average. That could test the oil price rally, which has sputtered in the last few weeks with Brent at about $70 per barrel and WTI in the mid-$60s.

But refineries tend to head into maintenance in February and March, retooling ahead of warmer months when demand usually rises. And as most major analysts have predicted (including the IEA, EIA and OPEC), the stock build was expected.

The inventory increase came not coincidentally in a week in which refinery inputs dropped significantly, falling from 17 million barrels per day (mb/d) for the week ending on January 19, to 16.67 mb/d for the week ending on January 26 (4-week averages). As refineries throttle back, the pull on crude oil from inventories declines.

But at least according to the most recent data, the trend isn't overwhelmingly bearish. Standard Chartered noted that the increase in inventories was not even that large on a seasonal basis, and it was less than the five-year average (although the past five years have included several years of extraordinary stock increases, so the "average" is somewhat misleading). While stocks increased on an absolute basis, they didn't really increase against that five-year average.

Adding a bit more comfort to oil bulls was the "counter-seasonal draw in gasoline and another sharp draw at Cushing that took inventories below their five-year range," Standard Chartered wrote in a note. Lower refining runs might mean a diminishing effect on crude demand, but it also means that refineries won't be stashing so much gasoline into storage. The EIA said that gasoline stocks fell in the most recent week by 1.9 million barrels.

In other words, the stock build is not the bearish news that it might seem, particular because it was widely expected to crop up at some point in the first quarter.

Moreover, the U.S. is only part of the picture. Stocks have been declining around the world, not least because production outside of North America is flat — and in some countries, falling by quite a bit.

"Ultimately, we think the U.S. market is a little bit of a smokescreen actually for the oil industry, with ongoing supply issues elsewhere and also the strong demand, really tightening up this market and further, I suppose, reducing that global inventory glut that OPEC has been targeting for some time," Daniel Hynes of ANZ told CNBC.

Indeed, Goldman Sachs stated that it believes the rebalancing effort is already here. Instead of just looking at U.S. inventories, OPEC is targeting inventories across the OECD. U.S. oil production is surging, which will push up inventories for a good part of this year, but that isn't the case elsewhere. Even that data omits what is going on in the non-OECD, where demand is growing at a much faster clip.

Goldman Sachs says the timespreads in the futures market implies that inventories are currently much lower than many people think. OECD stock data is published with a longer lag time, and while it will take time to see a clearer picture, the investment bank estimates that the long-awaited point of rebalancing has arrived. OPEC will keep the cuts in place, and the market will probably tighten well below the five-year average before that is reflected in the data. This is why the bank sees Brent going above $80 per barrel in the next six months.

Nevertheless, the oil market will have a murky picture for a little while longer. The market is tightening, and many expect it to tighten particularly in the second half of this year, but the expected increase in U.S. crude inventories over the next few weeks and months will muddy the waters. Oil traders will see soaring U.S. oil production and inventory builds as a sign that the market tightening has slowed. And indeed, with the preponderance of speculative positions on the bullish side, there is downside risk.

But last week's inventory increase, and the stock builds to come, don't necessarily mean that we're in for another protracted downturn.

(Source: oilprice.com)

China's newfound LNG appetite drives up Asian energy costs

Spot prices for liquefied natural gas are climbing in Asia as China imports more of the cleaner-burning fuel to combat air pollution.

Spot prices have jumped 110 percent in the six months through mid-January. The rise is expected to ripple through energy markets across the region, pushing up electricity costs for households and manufacturers alike.

As of early February, Asian LNG spot prices were around $10 per million British thermal units, after peaking at around $11 earlier in the month. They are still near three-year highs.

LNG prices typically rise in the winter, when heating demand peaks, but they are trending 10 percent higher now than they were this time a year ago.

Chinese authorities are shifting the country's energy mix away from coal toward natural gas to clean up the air, but supplies are tight. "The Chinese government is increasing purchases in the spot market, as there is not enough LNG to meet heating demand in the winter," said Tatsufumi Okoshi, senior economist at Nomura Securities.

China's LNG imports jumped 46 percent on the year to 38.1 million tons in 2017, exceeding gas imports delivered by pipeline for the first time, according to data from the country's customs agency. China's LNG imports are still relatively small compared with Japan, which imported 83.6 million tons last year. But China has overtaken South Korea to move into the No. 2 spot.

It is easier to adjust imports of LNG, which is transported by ship, depending on changes in spot prices, than is the case for natural gas transported by pipeline. But apparently the additional LNG imports were not sufficient to meet demand in China.

This has affected industrial users of gas in the country. In December, Yunnan Yuntianhua, a chemical company, reported to the Shanghai Stock Exchange that one of its units will suspend production of ammonia and urea due to a cutoff of natural gas for companies in southwestern China.

(Source: Nikkei)

Total buys stakes in offshore Guyana blocks

French oil and energy group Total has bought stakes in some offshore Guyana oil production blocks, boosting its presence in the potentially lucrative Guyana basin.

Total said it was buying a 35 percent working interest in the Canje Block, in an agreement signed with an affiliate of Canadian company JHI Associates Inc. and Guyana-based company Mid-Atlantic Oil & Gas Inc.

These two companies will retain a shared 30 percent interest alongside operator ExxonMobil, which has a 35 percent stake.

Total has also bought a 25 percent working interest stake in the Kanuku Block, in an agreement with Repsol and Tullow Oil. Repsol and Tullow each have stakes of 37.5 percent in that block.

Total added it had an option to buy a 25 percent working interest in the Orinduik Block, in an agreement with Canadian company Eco Atlantic Oil & Gas Ltd, which will retain a 15 percent interest following exercise of the option, alongside Tullow Oil which has 60 percent.

(Source: Reuters)

Israel's growing ties with former Arab foes

A number of recent reports have appeared to confirm one of the worst-kept secrets in the Middle East. In coordination with Egyptian authorities, Israel has for months been conducting clandestine airstrikes against terrorist groups operating in northern Sinai. The Israelis used unmarked drones, helicopters and jets to launch at least 100 strikes on the peninsula, all with the apparent blessing of Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi.

Both the New York Times and The Washington Post on Saturday ran stories, sourced to former U.S. and British officials, that confirmed the Israeli strikes. They come as Egypt is struggling to control a devastating insurgency in Sinai, and they mark a striking secret alliance between two countries that have fought three wars against each other and then presided over a fragile peace.

"Behind the scenes, Egypt's top generals have grown steadily closer to their Israeli counterparts since the signing of the Camp David accords 40 years ago, in 1978," noted the Times. "Egyptian security forces have helped Israel enforce restrictions on the flow of goods in and out of the Gaza Strip, the Palestinian territory bordering Egypt controlled by the militant group Hamas. And Egyptian and Israeli intelligence agencies have long shared information about militants on both sides of the border.

Authorities in both countries are not publicly admitting to the strikes. As part of its sweeping counterinsurgency in Sinai, Egypt has blocked journalists from reporting in the peninsula. Israel's military imposes its own form of censorship on local journalists covering matters of national security. One analyst likened Israel's treatment of the affair to its perennial silence over the existence of its covert nuclear weapons program.

"The Israeli strikes inside of Egypt are almost at the same level," said Zak Gold, an expert on Sinai affairs, to the Times. "Every time anyone says anything about the nuclear program, they have to jokingly add 'according to the foreign press.' Israel's main strategic interest in Egypt is stability, and they believe that open disclosure would threaten that stability."

One analyst likened Israel's treatment of the affair to its perennial silence over the existence of its covert nuclear weapons program.

The violence in northern Sinai, stoked by years of Egyptian misrule and the emergence of radical extremist groups in the region, shows little sign of waning. In November, militants linked to the Islamic State [ISIS] attacked a mosque there, killing more than 300 people. Israeli air power and technical know-how may be increasingly necessary for Sissi's government to keep pace.

"It's a symptom of how close the two countries have become in security cooperation," a former U.S. official familiar with the campaign told The Post. "But it illustrates how poorly the Egyptians have done dealing with the terrorist threat. Both Israel and the United States have complained about the fact the Egyptians have not taken advice and recommendations the United States have been offering for some time." →13

Turkey tackles 2 roles in Syria: Peacemaker, provocateur

By Fehim Tastekin

Idlib province was designated one of four de-escalation zones during negotiations last year aimed at ending the Syrian civil war. But two contradictory developments are taking place there.

For a deconfliction zone, it's quite conflicted.

In one development, opposition groups that Turkey actively supports are fighting to keep the Syrian army from moving inward, from north of Hama and south of Aleppo. In the other development, as part of a plan to lower tensions by deploying military observers, Turkey is trying to position itself as a barrier between the Syrian army and opposition groups. In other words, Ankara is provoking fights but also trying to lower tensions.

There's a lot of confusion. If Turkey is coordinating with Russia, why is the Syrian army trying to keep Turkey from deploying troops? Isn't there an accord between Damascus and Moscow? Or is Turkey choosing to interpret the deconfliction zone plans according to its own interests?

While the focus was on the Turkish Armed Forces' (TSK) Afrin operation, Turkey made a second move, at Idlib. The whole thing would have gone virtually unnoticed by the rest of the world had Turkey's military column not been attacked.

First, on Jan. 24, a six-vehicle TSK reconnaissance team checked out Tel al-Ais, southwest of Aleppo. On the night of Jan. 29, a 100-vehicle convoy that included 15 transporters loaded with tanks entered Idlib and then moved toward Tel al-Ais.

The Turkish column had entered Idlib after reaching an agreement with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). But the forces had to halt between Al Tawam and Kafr Kermin when they detected shelling ahead on their route. According to the Syrian Human Rights Observatory, the Syrian army and other pro-government forces based at Hazir shelled the Kammari area with artillery and rockets to prevent the Turkish column from advancing. Two Turkish jets entered Syrian air space to protect the Turkish column but left without any engagements.

The Turkish column pulled back to Kafr Kermin to spend the night. It resumed its movement about 10 hours later but was attacked with an explosive-packed vehicle at the entrance of Atarib. The TSK said a civilian was killed and a soldier and a civilian technician were wounded. The TSK blames the attack on the Kurdistan Workers Party, which Turkey considers a terrorist group.

There was a crescendo of accusations that Turkey was playing a "double game" when it became known that the opposition groups were using armored vehicles supplied by Turkey about five months ago.

Sheikh Abdullah al-Muhaysini, a Saudi-born leader of the terrorist movement in Syria, accused his own wing: "A Turkish convoy enters the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham controlled area as result of an agreement. Then [HTS] attacks that convoy with a bomb-laden vehicle. Such a despicable action can only be carried out by those bereft of religion and ethics."

This attack coincided with Russia's Syrian National Dialogue Congress in Sochi, held Jan. 29-30. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called Russian President Vladimir Putin and they agreed to intensify efforts to set up observation posts in Idlib.

On Jan. 31, there were unconfirmed reports of the Turkish military convoy moving again. The Syrian army doesn't appear to be guided by the Putin-Erdogan accord, as it continued to pound the positions of opposition forces.

As of Feb. 1, the Syrian army had reached to within 16 kilometers (10 miles) of its primary target at Serakib and 30 kilometers (18 miles) of the besieged Shiite towns of Fua and Kefraya.

An agreement reached during peace negotiations last year in Astana, Kazakhstan, divides Idlib into three areas: The first one, east of the railroad, will be cleared of armed groups and put under Russian supervision as a demilitarized zone. Civilian administration here will be by local councils. West of the railroad will be under Turkish observation. The area between the railroad and a major highway will also be under Turkish control from west of the road to the Turkish border. Groups supported by Turkey will settle in the third area until a political settlement is reached. The midsection between the railroad and the highway is called the second area. Al-Qaeda-linked HTS — which is not participating in the cease-fire — will be confined to this part.

Since Dec. 26, the Syrian army has effectively gained control of the first area by entering at least 120 settlements along the Aleppo-Damascus international highway. (There is, however, a part where the Islamic State is reorganizing.) Opposition forces say this is a crude violation of the Astana agreement.

Armed groups apart from HTS initiated an operation Jan. 11 to recover some of the area lost to the Syrian army. There was a crescendo of accusations that Turkey was playing a "double game" when it became known that the opposition groups were using armored vehicles supplied by Turkey about five months ago. Many groups that participated in Turkey's Afrin operation, some of which are affiliated with al-Qaeda and the Taliban, also took part in this new offensive.

Turkey's support of this operation could be interpreted as Ankara forcing Damascus to heed the Astana process, as well as Ankara's intention to keep playing the double game with these groups. If Afrin falls, it will give these groups considerably more room to maneuver. This is the way many people read Turkey's intention of deploying at Tel al-Ais.

Tel al-Ais is part of another de-escalation zone, east of the Damascus-Aleppo highway. If reports are accurate, Turkey would be violating the Astana agreement.

Tel al-Ais is about 1 kilometer from Hazir, where the Syrian army and its allies had made a forward base toward Serakib and Fua-Kefraya. Tel al-Ais is an important area of the Damascus-Aleppo M5 international highway. The critical question now is, if Turkish troops are deployed at Tel al-Ais, will the Syrian army give up its objectives of reaching Fua and Kefraya and clearing the highway of hostile elements?

The Syrian government wants to open the Aleppo highway and has been trying to capture Tel al-Ais for the past two years. The highway, which reaches Aleppo via Dara, Damascus, Homs and Hama, is still beyond the army's control at Han Seyhun, Maarat al-Numan and Serakib. This broken line also marks the boundaries of the third area allotted to Turkey. The highway was cut at the rural terrain of Hama, but that was recently cleared. The highway is also threatened by armed groups around Harasta in the rural periphery of Damascus.

Sources close to the Syrian government fear the road will now be dominated by the Turkish army.

(Source: Al Monitor)

GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company Inaugurates Projects during Ten-Day Dawn Ceremonies

شرکت معدنی و صنعتی گل گهر (سهامی عام)
GOLGOHAR MINING&INDUSTRIAL Co.

At the first day of 39th glorious victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution (Ten-Day Dawn ceremonies), development projects of GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company were inaugurated in the presence of President Rouhani, Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Shariatmadari, Minister of Energy, Interior Minister and city governor general as well as local officials.

According to the report released by the Public Relations and Intl. Affairs Department of GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company, the following development projects were inaugurated: Production Line No. 7 for producing concentrate, 1st Mega Model Factory for manufacturing sponge iron (Direct Reduction Iron) at GOLGOHAR Steel and Iron Development Company, gas units of GOLGOHAR Combined Cycle Power Plant.

It should be noted that construction operation of Sirjan-Kerman Railway started in this province.

Eng. Naser Taghizadeh Chief Executive of GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company was the first speaker who expressed his special thanks to the President Rouhani and unsparing and unflinching support of the respected Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Shariatmadari and said: "with owning six mineral anomalies, GOLGOHAR region accounts for 26 percent of Iranian iron ore reserves."

He put the number of laborers working in all projects of the company at more than 19,000, so that new employment opportunities have been generated for more than 5,700 job-seeking people in the recent two years.

Construction operation of project for the transfer of water of Persian Gulf to the region is underway in cooperation with GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company, he maintained.

Once liquidity problem facing this project as mentioned in above is removed, this national project will be put into operation in the next two years, the CEO opined.

Total productions of the company have increased 126 percent from 2013 to 2017, he said, adding: "In the meantime, total production volume of the company in this period experienced a considerable more than 70 percent growth."

For his part, Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Shariatmadari said: "GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company is a clear example of paying due attention to the social responsibilities in industries of the country."

In the inaugural ceremony of development projects of the company, the minister of industry said: "paying due attention of the chief executive of the company and other managers of the company is the clear example of social responsibilities according to the order of President Rouhani put forward in the beginning of the 11th government dubbed hope and prudence."

With due observance to the said issue, all senior managers, engineers, staff and personnel of the company have observed all criteria of social responsibility in the best form possible, he reiterated.

The industry minister expressed his special thanks to Eng. Taghizadeh and his industrious colleagues for the implementation and development of mineral and industrial projects.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Shariatmadari termed establishment of balance in the steel chain of the country as "important and significant" and explained: "Unlike the previous government, the management of the company took giant strides in the 12th government in line with materializing most economic objectives of the company."

Steel chain is an important subject for the establishment of balance, he said, adding: "62 percent of steel in the Middle East region is produced in Iran, major portion of which has been produced during the 11th and 12th governments."

Eng. Reza Ardakanian Minister of Energy was the next speaker during the inauguration of development projects by GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company and said: "Inauguration of two giant projects of Samangan Combined Cycle Power Plant in Sirjan and Shahid Kazemi Power Plant of GOLGOHAR are so important for boosting power and energy sector in this province."

Speaking in a video conference, he said: "Kerman Province is of the important provinces in the country that had not any power outage in a way that this province is equipped with the solar energy."

In the end, the minister of energy said that Kerman Province will witness rosy and bright future due to its high potentials and capabilities."

President Rouhani was the next speaker in the inauguration of development projects of the company in this province who said: "GOLGOHAR Mining and Industrial company is one of the mineral and industrial hubs in the country, so that it should be honored deservedly."

"It is hoped that this province will be developed with the transfer of water of Persian Gulf to this region."

This province has gained numerous successes in the fields of oil, investment and exploration especially after the implementation of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the official title of nuclear deal."

He pointed to Sirjan-Kerman Railway project in this province and said: "Sirjan-Kerman Railway project is the first rail project funded by the private sector at the initiative taken by GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company."

He commemorated the name and memory of the late Hashemi Rafsanjani and said: "The late Hashemi Rafsanjani was a true commander of reconstruction in the country in a way that his name is honored when an industrial and production unit goes on stream in the country."

■ Message of Managing director of GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company

The zealous and brave people of Sirjan in Kerman Province especially industrious staff and personnel of GOLGOHAR Mining & Industrial Company showcased a unique symbol of unity, amity, empathy and dignity concurrent with the 39th glorious victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

Once again, massive and huge turnout of people of the country showed that people are loyal to the sacred Establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran and government of "Hope and Prudence" during the President Rouhani's visit and the Cabinet of Ministers to this province.

During the President's trip to this province, we witnessed inauguration of large and important industrial projects in GOLGOHAR region which were put into operation at the unflinching and unsparing efforts of all industrialists in mining and mineral sector of the country. *(By A.Saeedi)*

EU, US working secretly to weaken Iran domestically, regionally: Professor

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Professor Nader Entessar from South Alabama University says he does not trust many of the public statements of the Europeans about their full commitment to the JCPOA.

While the EU's top officials have warned Donald Trump of "no alternative" to Iran's nuclear agreement, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), many experts believe that the EU is not able to stand against the US pressure.

Nader Entessar, Professor and Chair of Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice, at the University of South Alabama is among experts who believe many of the public statements of the Europeans about their full commitment to the JCPOA should not be trusted and taken seriously.

Following is the full text of his interview:

President Trump has announced that removing time limitations from Iran's nuclear activities, unrestricted inspections and relating Iran's missile program to the JCPOA are all necessary for the US not to withdraw from the JCPOA. Will Europe accept these conditions? What about Iran?

For all practical purposes, the Trump administration has already withdrawn from the JCPOA. Whether it will formally withdraw from the agreement or not is a moot issue for Iran at this point. If a party to an agreement repeatedly violates the letter and the spirit of an agreement, as the U.S. has done with respect to its obligations under the JCPOA, it is a clear and unambiguous signal that it no longer intends to fulfil its commitments. As far as Europe is concerned, some European countries are already in serious talks with the Trump administration to draft new restrictions on Iran's missile and defense capabilities. Of course, the Europeans may not add these conditions to the JCPOA, but they would like to have another side agreement to include these restrictions. Iran has repeatedly stated that it will not accept any changes and additions to the JCPOA. I am not sure if there is unanimity or strong will among all Iranian officials on this issue. I hope that Iran will not succumb to European pressure and compromise on the country's vital defense capabilities.

Over the past three months, the European states have made attempts to convince the US administration and Congress that a better agreement with Iran cannot be made on the ruins of the JCPOA. Will the EU and the US be able to reach an agreement on the JCPOA that can meet Trump's demands? What could such an agreement be like?

Unfortunately, I do not trust many of the public statements of the Europeans about their full commitment to the JCPOA. My sense is that both the Europeans and various elements of the US government are working behind the scene to come up with a package that will satisfy the Trump administration's demands. In other words, they are working on an agreement that will further weaken Iran domestically and trivialize its regional role. The Europeans will try to sugarcoat such an agreement as a "win-win" pact but the bottom line is that such an agreement will further erode Iran's sovereignty and expose the country to more intimidation and threats.

Iran has declared repeatedly that it won't accept any changes to the JCPOA and won't allow any restrictions on its missile program. Although the EU appears to respect the JCPOA, it is under Trump's pressure. How can the EU meet Trump's demands without jeopardizing Iran's benefit from the JCPOA?

The simple answer to your question is that many of Trump's new demands and the 5+1 obligations under the JCPOA are diametrically opposed to each other. As I indicated before, the US has decided to jettison its obligations under the JCPOA. The EU cannot meet President Trump's demands without violating its own obligations under the Iran nuclear agreement. We are at a crossroads with respect to the JCPOA. The Europeans will have to come clean in terms of their level of commitments under the Iran nuclear deal. The time for issuing statements, holding press conferences, and making publicity trips to Iran is over. As a signatory to the JCPOA, EU-3 countries owe Iran a clear answer, and they have to back their words by concrete and measurable actions now.

What could be the EU's alternative route if the US withdraws from the JCPOA? In case of US withdrawal, the situation for investment in Iran will worsen. What real guarantees can be offered to Iran by the EU?

The EU can publicly declare that it will not abide by US secondary sanctions on Iran and that it will pursue its obligations in full under the JCPOA. Short of this action, the EU will not be able to withstand US pressure and any guarantees it may give Iran will be vacuous and largely meaningless.

The EU can ask EBRD bank to monitor the small and medium companies' exchanges in order to not let the remaining sanctions be evaded. What bank guarantees can the EU offer Iran?

Again, any guarantee the EU can give Iran on the face of US economic threats against Europe's major companies, banks, and other financial institutions will amount to no more throwing Iran some breadcrumbs. Such moves will not allow Iran to gain meaningful economic benefits under the JCPOA.

Germans are losing power in Europe

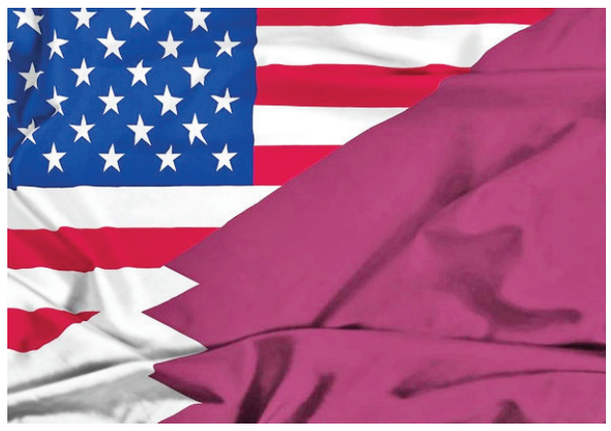
1 → (the coalition of Social-Democratic Union and the Christian-Parties Alliance) in Germany. He believes that the leaders of the Christian Democratic Union, the Social Democratic Union and Christian Socialists are merely fighting for their own political survival. The leaders of the Liberal Democratic Union believe that in case of the defeat of the coalition negotiation between the Christian parties and the Social Democratic Party, there should be another election, and then again, negotiations on the formation of the Jamaica coalition will begin. Also, the leaders of the German Liberal Democratic Party have repeatedly warned the Social Democrats not get engaged in negotiations with Merkel and the Christian Democrats, because the alliance of the Christian parties don't keep their word.

Angela Merkel blames leaders of the Liberal Democratic Party and Christian Lindner for the political turmoil in Germany. After Germany's general election, many German analysts argued that the Jamaica Coalition would eventually be formed (between Christian Democrats, Christian Socialists, Green and Liberal Democrats). However, Christian Lindner finally left the negotiating table for what he called "the lack of commitment of Christian parties", and thus the Jamaica Coalition wasn't formed. After that, Merkel began negotiations with the Social Democrats (their traditional rival) to form the Grand Coalition. Obviously, even if the Grand Coalition is formed, the Liberal Democrats will continue to oppose Merkel as the chancellor.

Christian Lindner has explicitly stated that if the Grand Coalition is not formed and if the elections were to be held again in Germany, he won't easily negotiate with the Christian Democrats for the second time. Lindner's precondition is Merkel's resignation of her post. Lindner said that only in this case would it be possible to re-negotiate with the alliance of Christian parties over the formation of the Jamaica Coalition. In any case, the Liberal Democrats are considered one of the main foundations of the Jamaica Coalition and a coalition government won't be formed if they refuse to attend this gathering.

Accordingly, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel is frustrated with Christian Lindner and the Liberal Democrats. She blames Lindner for the current political deadlock in Germany. On the other hand, Lindner's insistence on Merkel's resignation has angered her. It should be noted that not long ago, Liberal Democrats were considered the political allies of Merkel and the Christian Democratic Union. But now the Liberal Democratic Union and its leaders are serving as catalysts for Angela Merkel's defeat in the German political scene, and subsequently, her defeat in the European Union and the Eurozone.

U.S.-Qatar strategic dialogue: What›s the target exactly?



1 → (Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Palestine, to mention only a few), have clearly out-staged Riyadh's status-quo and counter-revolutionary proclivities. Meanwhile, the Al-Udeid Air Base in Doha, the region's largest U.S. air base and home to 11,000 U.S. personnel, has given Qatar a clear advantage in its bargaining position vis-à-vis the other [P] GCC member states. Several factors may account for the U.S. attempts at establishing an annual strategic dialogue with Qatar.

First and foremost, Iran's burgeoning status as a regional power has been strengthened by the widening divisions within the [P] GCC. Doha's increased commercial and political ties with Tehran enhanced Iranian stature and influence, both domestically and regionally.

Secondly, Turkey has benefited even more from the [P] GCC rift and its deepening ties with Qatar. This has occurred within the context of Turkey's expansive military role in Syria, the latest example of which, Operation Olive Branch, has witnessed the unleashing of Turkish military might against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). The YPG is a Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a faction that has long been at war with Ankara over its demands to Kurdish self-rule. This helps explain why Turkey has always prioritized fighting against the Kurds above defeating ISIS.

The recent Turkish military intervention in Afrin, northern Syria, apparently as part of an agreement reached with Russia, have opened a new front in Syria's lingering civil war and have further intensified existing tensions between Ankara and Washington. With an eye toward his country's presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019, Erdogan is keenly aware that a tough stance in Syria and strong support for Qatar are likely to bolster his electoral appeal.

Finally, Qatar's cooperation with the United States and other regional states to counter terrorist operations carried out by ISIS and Al-Qaeda agents is crucial to present and future counter-terrorism programs in place by the United States and its allies. Qatar's pivotal role in containing such threats has increasingly gained traction in Washington and throughout Europe. Without denying the importance of the anti-terrorism campaign, one should not lose sight of the fact that the U.S.-Qatar strategic dialogue is essentially designed to ratchet up U.S. pressure on Doha to align its foreign policy with that of Washington, while also keeping both Tehran and Ankara at bay. Strategic dialogues have almost always exceeded short-term transactional deals, and this one is no different.

RENEWAL OF ONE STEP INTERNATIONAL TENDER
AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT SERVICES COMPANY
26418/96/55
06/02/2018

Agricultural Support Services Company

Ministry of Jihad-e-Agriculture

Agricultural Support Services Company, hereinafter will be reffered as ASSC, affiliated to Ministry of Agriculture-Jahad of I.R of Iran, is considering the purchase of the below6 items of emulsifiers and technicals, through one step international tender:

1- **2500 Kgs ADJUVANT PAP**
2- **8724 Kgs PROPARGITE TECH 98 PCT**
3- **2551Kgs DELTAMETHRIN TECH 98 PCT**
4- **5102Kgs PERMETHRIN TECH 98 PCT**
5- **782 Kgs EMULSIFIER FF_4 or similar product**
6- **2726 Kgs EMULSIFIER FF_6 or similar product**

All of the qualified and interested companies are invited to receive tender documents fromMondayFebruary 5,2018untill Monday February 12,2018 (five working days) from our purchasing committee (9th floor , no. 1, Fourth Alley, Gandhi st., Tehran, Iran).

The bidders are requested to submit their letters of introduction, along with remittance bill of Iranian Rials 1,200,000 to ASSC's account no. 4001039704005791 with Sheba no. IR250100004001039704005791 at the Central Bank of Islamic Republic of Iran through payment order of Satna or Paya with the 30 character identification code no. 358039782263500650000000000006 will be possible.

The bidders are requested to submit their sealed and stamped envelopes containing offers latest on TuesdayMarch 13,2018 at 12:00 to our security office located on 8th floor. Meanwhile the meeting for the opening of the envelops will be on TuesdayMarch 13,2018 at 14:00 PM(on the same day)with the presence of bidder's representatives in our purchasing committee (9th floor , no. 1, Fourth Alley, Gandhi st., Tehran, Iran).

We would like to emphasize that the bid bond amount should be in cash or bank guarantee as follows:

A- **€233 for AdjuvantPAPequivalent of Iranian Rials10674000.**

B- **€2556 for PropargiteTech 98 pct. equivalent of Iranian Rials117342000.**

C- **€10500 for DeltamethrinTech 98 pct.equivalent of Iranian Rials480136000.**

D- **€3255 for Permethrin Tech 98 pct. equivalent of Iranian Rials149428000.**

E- **€131 for Emulsifier FF_4 or similar product equivalent of Iranian Rials6013000.**

F- **€465 for Emulsifier FF_6 or similar product equivalent of Iranian Rials21274000.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION, YOU MAY REFER TO OUR WEBSITE www.assc.ir AND http://iets.mporg.ir OR CONTACT US BY PHONE NO. 00982188776325.

Public & International Relations Department
Agricultural Support Services Company (ASSC)

First Announcement

N.I.O.C
1396.5215

National Iranian Drilling Company

Public Calls For Quality Evaluating Of Tender (One Publish-Seconed Publish)

One Stage (Compressive)

TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE	DESCRIPTION	Tenders Portal Reg. No. On http://iets.mporg.ir	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial	(Rial)				
7,565	327,600,000	6,552,000,000	Bottom Hole Sampler for Slick Line Operation	3,150,149	Indent No: 43-22-9403848010 TenderNo.: CGP/25-96/005	1

Brief discription of subject:
National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) address pasdaran Blev., Airport Saqare, Ahvaz, Iran hereby intends to purchase its requirements from qualified and interested tenderers through One-stage public tender (pressed) upon following terms and conditions:
A) Qualitative evaluation of tenderer:
The evaluation is based on article (G) implementing regulations of the law of tenders and also carried out base on worksheets qualitative evaluation inquiry in the tender doucments. Minimum acceptable point of quality is 60.
B) Preparation of tender documents:
Purchasing of documents:
In order to receive the tender documents, 510,000 Rials should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.
Reciving of documents:
Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum 10 days after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Sector Tenders, Foreign Procurement of Capital Goods dept., end of the workshop No. 8, Karoon Industrial Area, Ahwaz, IRAN .
Tel No.: 061-34142387 or Room #431, coordination office of NIDC, NIOC No. 8 center Building, Yaghma alley, Jomhoori St., Tehran, IRAN, Tel No.: 021-66700249 .
Notice:
Only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and recieve tender ducments from foreign procurment department in due date will be known as tenderer from tender committee.
C) Delivery of call quality evaluating and envelops suggestions:
Tenderers shall submit the completed documents including qualificaion worksheets in form of software in CD/DVD and documentary along with envelopes Tender Guarantee (A) and technical (B) and financial (C) offers within 30 days from last day of document recived deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1th floor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel No.: 061-34148205~6
D) Tender Guarantee:
Type of guarantee:
A) Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activites licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranain Drilling Company.
Duration of credit guarantee:
This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on. WWW.NIDC.IR
NIDC Telegram Channal: @nidc_pr
Foreign Procurement Dept
National Iranian Drilling Company

تهران تایمز : نوبت اول ۹۶/۱۱/۱۷نوبت دوم۹۶/۱۱/۱۸

Latin America's female leadership void

By Jennifer M. Piscopo

After President Michelle Bachelet of Chile leaves office in March, Latin America will have no female presidents.

There was a time in 2014 when the region had four: Laura Chinchilla in Costa Rica, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner in Argentina, Dilma Rousseff in Brazil and Ms. Bachelet. Now, Latin America is left with few prospects for female presidents in the near future.

More than most regions, Latin America has used affirmative-action laws to close the gender gap in political leadership. But to hold these gains, and to help ensure that women continue to rise to top political positions, Latin America needs to understand the limits of legal remedies for pulling women up.

Quota laws for female legislative candidates have created opportunities for women to advance in politics, but they have not fully transformed traditional attitudes about who should lead a country.

Women entered national congresses in significant numbers thanks to gender quotas. Argentina passed the world's first quota law for female candidates for Congress in 1991, requiring political parties to nominate women for at least 30 percent of the open positions. It was recently updated so that half of parties' congressional slates must be women. Today, all but two Latin American countries have a quota or parity law for legislative candidates.

Women hold more than 35 percent of legislative seats in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico and Nicaragua. Bolivia has a majority-female legislature. In the United States, by comparison, women make up just 19 percent of the House of Representatives and 22 percent of the Senate.

Increasing female candidates

Many of these quota laws do more than increase the number of female candidates. Many require political parties to place women in favorable ballot positions and to allocate portions of their budget to training female leaders.

But while affirmative-action laws help women get ahead, they do not save them from political crises.

Ms. Bachelet, Mrs. Kirchner, Ms. Rousseff and Ms. Chinchilla led popular incumbent parties when they were elected president, in a region already accustomed to female leaders. The three presidents on the left — Ms. Bachelet, Mrs. Kirchner and Ms. Rousseff — also benefited from the "pink tide," a wave of leftist leadership that swept Latin America from 1998 to 2016.

In this period, the region was buoyed by a commodities boom. Flush with resources, countries expanded social protections for workers, the poor, indigenous peoples, L.G.B.T. people and women.

Then the party ended: Economies declined and security concerns increased. Citizens became disillusioned, and the traditional parties and their coalitions broke apart. Voters decided to throw most incumbents out, men and women alike.

But the women fell harder than the men, making clear that there is still a double standard for male and female leaders.

Ms. Chinchilla's presidency was widely seen as a failure, even though the economy grew 4 percent to 5 percent during her term. Ms. Bachelet's favorability nose-dived following allegations that her son and daughter-in-law profited illicitly from real estate, while President-elect Sebastián Piñera apparently suffered no ill effects from allegations that he faked invoices to illegally finance a campaign.

In 2016, Congress impeached Ms. Rousseff and removed her from her office for accounting practices that were long held as normal in Brazil, and with no evidence of her personal enrichment. Upon taking over from Ms.

Rousseff, President Michel Temer chose only white men for his new cabinet, in a country where nonwhites are the majority. Mr. Temer recently faced accusations of corruption more serious than those against Ms. Rousseff, including allegations that he ordered his subordinates to pay hush money. He survived his impeachment vote.

Approval ratings

Neither the left nor the right in Latin America appears to want female candidates these days. The left, favored to win after Ms. Chinchilla's departure in Costa Rica, passed over the longtime political leader Epsy Campbell Barr. A prominent politician of African descent, Ms. Campbell Barr lost her bid for the party's nomination for president despite having approval ratings higher than those of her male competitors. →13

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4 Bdrs., fully furn, lobby
pkg, spj, nice balcony $4200
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Apt in Jordan
5th floor,120 sq.m, 2 Bdrs.
fully furn, lobby, pkg diplomatic,
$1500
Ms.Diba: 09128103206

Apt in Qeytarieh
4th floor 120 sq.m, 2 Bdrs.
fully furn, parking
near to Qeytarieh Park $1500
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مالکین محترم
ملک های فروش و اجاره ای خود را (آپارتمان، ویلا، مستغلات، اداری و تجاری) به ما بسپارید.

بهترین مشاوره، برترین سرویس، بالاترین رضایت
مالکین محترم املاک مبله و غیرمبله، مسکونی، اداری و تجاری، ویلا و مستغلات شما را جهت اجاره به سفارتخانه ها و شرکت های خارجی نیازمندیم.

مالکین محترم
ویلاهای شما را جهت اجاره به منزل سفیر و مدیران شرکت های بین المللی در مناطق شمالی تهران نیازمندیم.

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Iranian games, toys on display at Tehran fair

LIFE desk

A collection of toys and games made by Iranian producers and companies are on display at the 7th Iranian toy and game fair at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (IIDCYA).

Mind games, educational games as well as different kinds of toys including electronic toys, puzzles and dolls made by Iranian companies are on display at the showcase.

Many of the toys and games are designed by Iranian producers. The showcase will also display local games from different regions of Iran.

The event, which started on Monday, will wrap up on Friday.

Toys and games plays an important role in early ages. According to wehavekids.com, considering the amount of time children spend playing with toys, it seems strange that so little attention has been drawn to their contribution to development. It is even more surprising that the apparent disparity between girls' and boys' cognitive abilities in later years lasting into adulthood, especially concerning boys' average higher aptitude for spatial and mathematical tasks or girls' talent for empathy and language, has not been linked to the dualistic, gendered nature of children's toys and the media.

Children are not only able to learn skills early on, but they can recognize and internalize social cues from their environment. Adults therefore have a responsibility to ensure that children's potential to be influenced is used for good and not evil, and to prevent any internalizing of harmful information like prejudices and oppressive stereotypes

Running low on these nutrients trigger a mood disorder

There's little question that your emotions are influenced by what you eat. "Brain health and our mental health depend on certain key nutrients, like B12 and omega-3 fats," says clinical psychiatrist Drew Ramsey, MD. "Eating an American/Western diet almost doubles the risk of depression in large research trials, while a more traditional or Mediterranean pattern cuts the risk of clinical depression by 40-50 percent."

Indeed, an article in the Indian Journal of Psychiatry suggests nutrition can play a crucial part in the severity and duration of depression: "Nutritional factors are intertwined with human cognition, behavior, and emotions." Getting enough of these key nutrients from your diet could prevent you from developing a mood disorder.

Zinc

This important mineral helps your body's immune system fight viruses and bacteria, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Dietary Supplements. But it also impacts mental health. "Zinc has been used as a treatment for mood disorders, specifically depression and anxiety," says Torey Armul, a registered dietitian and spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Recommended daily intake is 9 mg for women and 11 mg for men, says Armul, who adds that good sources of zinc include oysters, red meat, poultry, beans, whole grains, and fortified cereals. Also make sure you're eating these foods proven to put you in a good mood.

Omega-3 fatty acids

Omega-3's are important to your immune system, endocrine system, lungs, heart, and blood vessels, according to the NIH. In addition, omega-3 fats are linked to improved mood and brain function, Armul points out. "The body can't make

omega-3 fats on its own, so it must get them through diet. Unfortunately, most diets are severely lacking in this healthy fat," Armul says, adding that women should aim for 1.1 grams per day, and men should try for 1.6. Good sources are salmon, tuna, flaxseeds, chia seeds, walnuts, and canola oil.

Vitamin D

You really need to know the symptoms of vitamin D deficiency, because falling short on this crucial nutrient is hard on your body and mind, potentially contributing to a mood disorder. Research has identified vitamin D receptors on cells in brain regions associated with depression, writes James M. Greenblatt, MD in Psychology Today, adding that studies also suggest the depressive symptoms of seasonal affective disorder (SAD) could be due to dipping levels of vitamin D. He points to various studies supporting the link between mental illness and D deficiency, including research from the Netherlands that found low D levels correlated with depression symptoms in adults.

The body makes vitamin D when exposed to sunlight, according to the NIH, but this nutrient could also be consumed through supplements and foods like fatty fish and fortified dairy. The recommended daily amount varies by age, with infants 12 months old and younger needing 400 IU, and adults 19-70 years old needing 600 IU.

Vitamin B

A study in the Journal of Clinical Psychiatry notes that, "Depression, dementia, and mental impairment are often associated with vitamin B12 and folate deficiency, especially in the elderly." Vitamin B12 is found in lots of foods, including beef liver, clams, fish, poultry, eggs, and dairy products, as well as multivitamins and supplements, says the NIH.

Recommended daily amounts vary with age: Infants six months and younger need .4 mcg, while adults need 2.4 mcg. Don't miss these other vitamins that can help treat depression.

Folate

This vitamin could play a big role in the development of a mood disorder, according to an Indian Journal of Psychiatry article. The authors point to findings that patients suffering from depression had blood folate levels an average of 25 percent lower than healthy individuals. "Depressive symptoms are the most common neuropsychiatric manifestation of folate deficiency," they wrote.

Many foods naturally contain folate, including asparagus, Brussels sprouts, dark leafy vegetables, oranges, peanuts, black-eyed peas, kidney beans, whole grains, and fortified cold cereals. Infants six months and younger should get 65 mcg a day, while adults aged 19-70 should aim for 400.

(Source: Reader's Digest)

28 simple and natural ways to detox your body

5. Replace the morning coffee with green tea:

A little caffeine is okay, but you do want to be careful about how much you take in throughout a day or week. You also want to be careful about where you get your caffeine from and how much you take in at any one time. Though an occasional cup of coffee is fine, if you are after detoxifying the body, then you want to change things up a bit.

Green tea offers important antioxidants that our body needs in the most natural form. It offers a slight caffeine boost that can help to get you jump started n the morning, just as coffee does. So if you choose to replace your morning cup of coffee with a cup of green tea you still get a caffeine boost and some actual health benefits as well.

Learning to detox the body doesn't have to be complicated, but it does mean that you will have to make healthy choices that really work for you. This means that you will have to make some adjustments, but they are well worth it.

(Source: bembu.com)

How to clean an oven with baking soda and vinegar?

Remove your oven racks, pizza stone, oven thermometer, and anything else you have inside the oven. Set aside.

In a small bowl, mix a 1/2 cup of baking soda with a few tablespoons of water. Adjust the ratio of both as needed until you have a spreadable paste. Spread the paste all over the interior surfaces of your oven, steering clear of the heating elements. The baking soda will turn a brownish color as you rub it in; it also might be chunkier in some places than others, which is fine.

Allow the baking soda mixture to rest for at least 12 hours, or overnight. After 12 hours or overnight, take a damp dish cloth and wipe out as much of the dried baking soda paste as you can.

Put a little vinegar in a spray bottle and spritz everywhere you still see baking soda residue in your oven. The vinegar will react with the baking soda and gently foam.

Take your damp cloth and wipe out the remaining foamy vinegar-baking soda mixture. Repeat until all the baking soda residue is gone.

(Source: thekitchn.com)

101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

#34. Plant a tree and watch it grow

Do you know that some trees can grow up to several thousands of years old? Trees are one of the most important living beings on the planet. Not only do they clean our air by removing it of carbon dioxide — a major greenhouse gas — and provide us with oxygen (a gas we can't live without), they cool the earth, prevent soil erosion, provide shelter from sun's rays, and provide food.

A tree takes about 10 to 20 years to grow depending on what it is, so plant a tree now, care for it, and watch it grow together with you!

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

(Source: personalexcellence.co)

#IRANIANLIFESTYLE

A house entrance decorated with flower pots in Yazd city, central Iran (Instagram/ @melileadimadimdunya)

Storage ideas for your entire home

Limited on space or have too much stuff to know what to do with? These storage solutions will help you keep every room in your home. To get you started, here are a few golden rules to follow for home storage:

Opt for square containers: Unless you have open shelving, square storage containers are always a better option because they maximize space well. Round containers are giving up a few inches on each side and will never fit flush against a wall.

Don't skimp on plastic containers: If you're storing clothes in a closet, you can get the basic containers, but if you're storing them in an area where they will be exposed to the elements or changes in temperature, spring for the better-made versions.

Don't buy in sets: Sets tend to have one container of each size. That's great, unless you keep the same amount of items for each container, in which case you'll need storage options of the same size.

Identify your storage space first: It's always best to locate a storage space before you start boxing everything up. Working backwards will save you time and headaches.

DIY canned food organizer

If you have a small kitchen, this could be a huge space saver for you! That space between the wall and the fridge is usually "dead space." Utilize that space by creating a tall, thin and mobile storage cart to store canned goods or spices and oils. This is truly a smart solution.

Magazine holders are perfect for storing

Magazine holders are surprisingly versatile when it comes to home storage solutions. In this example, you can use them to store root vegetables in your cabinets (aka: a cool, dry place).

Save counter space with a dish drying cabinet

This trick is currently all the rage in Northern Europe where modern design always seems to be on the forefront of everyone's minds (think: IKEA). Install a dish drying rack in a cabinet above your sink to save space on the counter top.

Organize your water bottles and travel mugs

This storage idea may seem really simple and obvious, but travel mugs and water bottles aren't the easiest things to organize. How often have you hunted through your cabinets looking for a travel coffee mug while on the way out the door? By labeling dishpans or shallow bins for smarter, more compact storage, you will not waste time searching again.

Organize your tupperware

Tupperware and food storage containers aren't that easy to store, either. By adding a drawer to your cabinet, you can nest your storage containers together and keep them streamlined and organized.

Tip: Rather than buying tupperware in sets, try to limit your collection to 3 or 4 different sizes, so you can nest them together more easily.

Pretend pull-out drawers

If you can't install pull out storage, bins are the perfect alternative. This allows you to be able to see what's in the back of your cabinet without having to touch and remove all of the items in the front of your cabinet.

Prevent food from going to waste

Do you end up throwing away plenty of spoiled or expired food? You can use a plastic bin or a drawer to create an "eat me first" storage area in your fridge. This visual cue will be helpful when choosing your next snack or meal, ultimately leading to less food going to waste.

Wire racks to organize baking dishes

Here's an idea that will work in any kitchen: These wire racks can help you store anything that's long and thin, like baking dishes, cutting boards or even saute pans.

DIY plastic bag dispenser

The idea of repurposing an item rather than throwing it away is not a new concept. But when a really good idea comes along, especially one so simple, it feels like a spark of genius: Save your empty tissue box to keep plastic bags organized and within easy reach.

DIY Plastic Bag Dispenser from Polished Habitat

Above-cabinet storage

Wire baskets have a design advantage over woven baskets because you can see through them. This makes wire baskets so much more useful than woven baskets when you're quickly trying to find something. It also makes them the perfect storage accessory for high places, like the top of your kitchen cabinets.

Paint pen kitchen organization

Decant the grains and spices you use most often into clear storage containers. Then find a fun way to label them (paint pens work well) for a unique display. This will make your grains and spices both more attractive and easier to find.

Recycle boxes to organize your freezer

If you like to stock up and store things in your freezer, you know what a mess it can become if you fail to institute some organization. This storage idea is simple but smart: cut the tops off of cardboard boxes, label them, and store your frozen items for easy retrieval.

DIY trash bag roll

Head to your local hardware store to gather the materials you'll need to install this garbage bag holder. This clever hack will save you frustration of wrestling a bag out of the box every time you take out your trash.

Hang your measuring spoons

You've seen knives mounted on the wall with magnets, but what about hanging your measuring spoons to the inside of a cabinet? Choose the cabinet with all your baking supplies for streamlined organization. All you need are some tiny command hooks to make this simple storage idea a done deal.

(Source: thespruce.com)

Malayer carpets to go on show at Golestan Palace

HERITAGE desk **TEHRAN** – A collection of antique and rare carpets handcrafted in Malayer, west-central Iran, will be put on display at the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace in downtown Tehran.

Close-up detail shows a typical Malayer carpet

A total of 17 carpets which are at least one century old have been selected for the event, Mehr quoted Masoud Nosrati, the director of the world heritage site, as saying on Saturday.

"It's the first time that these carpets, which are at least one century old, will find their way out from the palace's treasure trove to being showcased."

The Qajar-era (1785-1925) offerings are woven by tribespeople and nomads both in Malayer and its surrounding villages in Hamadan province, he added.

Every day, clusters of foreign travelers visit the lavish palace, which embodies a successful integration of earlier Persian crafts and architecture with Western influences.

The ten-day exhibition will open its doors to the public on February 7.

Thailand expects 300,000 tourists from China during Lunar New Year

BANGKOK (Reuters) — Thailand's tourism body expects 300,000 visitors from China during the Lunar New Year holidays, a nearly 18 percent rise from a year ago.

During the same holidays in 2017, the number of visitors from China was hit by a Thai government crackdown on budget tourism and the mourning period for the country's late king.

Tourism accounts for about 12 percent of gross domestic product in Southeast Asia's second-largest economy, making it one of the most important drivers of growth. The biggest number of foreign visitors come from China.

Chinese tourists during the Lunar New Year period, which this year begins on Feb. 15 and lasts until Feb. 21, will "generate about 8 billion baht ($253.9 million) in revenue", Santi Chudintra, a deputy governor at the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) told reporters on Monday.

In 2017, about 255,000 Chinese tourists visited during the Lunar New Year.

Thailand's Tourism Ministry said last month it expected this year's tourist arrivals to hit a record 37.55 million, with 2.1 trillion baht spending.

Chinese tourists, who accounted for nearly one-third of last year's record 35 million arrivals, are expected to rise this year to around 10 million from 9.8 million.

ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic Mosque City of Bagerhat

The Historic Mosque City of Bagerhat is an important evidence of medieval city in the south-west part of present Bagerhat district which is located in the south-west part of Bangladesh, at the meeting-point of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers. The ancient city, formerly known as Khalifatabad, sprawls over on the southern bank of the old river Bhairab and flourished in the 15th century BC.

A view of Shat Gombuj Mosque within the Historic Mosque City of Bagerhat

The magnificent city, which extended for 50 km2, contains some of the most significant buildings of the initial period of the development of Muslim architecture of Bengal. They include 360 mosques, public buildings, mausoleums, bridges, roads, water tanks and other public buildings constructed from baked brick.

This old city, created within a few years and covered up by the jungle after the death of its founder in 1459, is striking because of certain uncommon features.

The density of Islamic religious monuments is explained by the piety of Khan Jahan, which is evidenced by the engraved inscription on his tomb. The lack of fortifications is attributable to the possibilities of retreat into the impenetrable mangrove swamps of the Sunderbans.

The quality of the infrastructures - the supply and evacuation of water, the cisterns and reservoirs, the roads and bridges - all reveal a perfect mastery of the techniques of planning and a will towards spatial organization.

(Source: UNESCO)

'Younger generation is advocate of handcrafted arts'

HERITAGE desk **TEHRAN** — The younger generation in Iran is advocate of handcrafted arts, said Bahman Namvar-Motlaq, the deputy director of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization.

"At some time we were affected by repetition in the field of handicrafts, but currently with the emergence of young talented and educated artisans we are witnessing creation of innovative works," ICHHTO quoted Namvar-Motlaq as saying on Sunday.

"Fortunately, Iran ranks first in terms of having the highest number of university graduates in the field of traditional handicrafts and designs," he said.

Sales of handicrafts inside the country have been growing considerably, though there is still a lot to do to reach the desirable point, he added.

The value of Iranian handicrafts exports, excluding suitcase trade witnessed some 70 percent hike in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year compared to the same period last year. The progress is associated with generating some 40,000 relevant jobs as well.

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

An artisan paints a glass engraving based on traditional Iranian designs

Louvre-Lens exhibit to highlight Iran's Qajar-era handicrafts

HERITAGE desk **TEHRAN** – A vast collection of objects handcrafted by Qajar-era (1785-1925) talented Iranian court artists will go on display from March 28 to July 22 at France's Louvre-Lens art museum.

Titled "The Rose Empire Masterpieces of 19th-Century Persian Art", the exhibit will showcase over 400 works such as enamels, rugs, ceremonial weapons, clothing, personal ornamentation as well as paintings, drawings, and photographs, amongst others, according to claudinecolin.com.

The selectees will be loaned from private collections and major European, North American and Middle Eastern institutions.

According to the organizers, the art created during this period is widely deemed as original and rich driven partly by exceptionally-talented court artists.

The Qajar-era is one of the most fascinating periods in the history of the country, embracing European modernization while maintaining its identity.

Detail shows a depiction of ceremonial daggers being carried by a Qajar sovereign.

Scientists discover ancient Mayan city hidden under Guatemalan jungle

Aerial laser mapping detects thousands of hidden structures in Peten region, suggesting its population was millions more than previously thought

This digital 3D image provided by Guatemala's Mayan Heritage and Nature Foundation shows a depiction of the Mayan archaeological site at Tikal in Guatemala created using LiDAR aerial mapping technology.

Researchers using a high-tech aerial mapping technique have found tens of thousands of previously undetected Mayan houses, buildings, defence works and pyramids in the dense jungle of Guatemala's Peten region, suggesting that millions more people lived there than previously thought.

The discoveries, which included industrial-sized agricultural fields and irrigation canals, were announced on Thursday by an alliance of US, European and Guatemalan archaeologists working with Guatemala's Mayan Heritage and Nature Foundation.

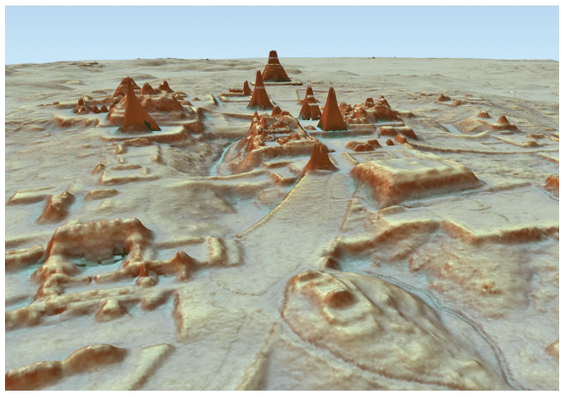
The study estimates that roughly 10 million people may have lived within the Maya Lowlands, meaning that kind of massive food production might have been needed.

"That is two to three times more [inhabitants] than people were saying there were," said Marcello A Canuto, a professor of anthropology at Tulane University.

Researchers used a mapping technique called Lidar, which stands for light detection and ranging. It bounces pulsed laser light off the ground, revealing contours hidden by dense foliage.

The images revealed that the Mayans altered the landscape in a much broader way than previously thought; in some areas, 95% of available land was cultivated.

"Their agriculture is much more intensive and therefore



sustainable than we thought, and they were cultivating every inch of the land," said Francisco Estrada-Belli, a research assistant professor at Tulane University, noting the ancient Mayas partly drained swampy areas that haven't been considered worth farming since.

The extensive defensive fences, ditch-and-rampart systems and irrigation canals suggest a highly organized workforce.

"There's state involvement here, because we see large canals being dug that are re-directing natural water flows," said Thomas Garrison, assistant professor of anthropology at Ithaca College in New York.

The 810 square miles (2,100 square kilometers) of mapping done vastly expands the area that was intensively occupied by the Maya, whose culture flourished between roughly 1,000 BC and 900 AD. Their descendants still live in the region.

The mapping detected about 60,000 individual structures, including four major Mayan ceremonial centers with plazas and pyramids.

Fallen cities: how artists have captured ruins, from Kabul to Rome – in pictures

Garrison said that this year he went to the field with the Lidar data to look for one of the roads revealed. "I found it, but if I had not had the Lidar and known that that's what it was, I would have walked right over it, because of how dense the jungle is."

He noted that unlike some other ancient cultures, whose fields, roads and outbuildings have been destroyed by subsequent generations of farming, the jungle grew over abandoned Maya fields and structures, both hiding and preserving them.

"The jungle, which has hindered us in our discovery efforts for so long, has actually worked as this great preservative tool of the impact the culture had across the landscape," noted Garrison, who worked on the project and specializes in the city of El Zotz, near Tikal.

Lidar revealed a previously undetected structure between the two sites that Garrison says "can't be called anything other than a Maya fortress".

"It's this hilltop citadel that has these ditch and rampart systems ... when I went there, one of these things [was] nine meters tall," he noted.

In a way, the structures were hiding in plain sight.

"As soon as we saw this we all felt a little sheepish," said Canuto said of the Lidar images, "because these were things that we had been walking over all the time."

(Source: The Guardian)

New discovery of ancient tools complicates our story of human evolution

It only takes one archaeological discovery to constantly challenging the story of human evolution we thought we knew. Just a few days ago, fossils found in Israel indicated that humans left Africa 50,000 to 70,000 years earlier than previously believed. Now, a new discovery in India further confuses the timeline.

This week, a study published in Nature, and reported in the Washington Post, details a wealth of ancient tools found in the southern Attirampakkam area of India. These tools aren't just old, they're extremely old. They were dated to 385,000 years ago, long before it's believed humans even left Africa.

So far, the oldest known human remains were discovered in a Moroccan cave. Those dated to 300,000 years ago. The recent discovery of a human jawbone in Israel suggests that by 194,000 years ago, humans were venturing out of Africa. But these timelines do not account for this new discovery.

The tools found at Attirampakkam are sophisticated. The oldest, which are about 1 million years of age, are large, pear- and oval -shaped hand axes, a style of tool that's known to have been carried out of Africa by early hominids. But more recent tools, which range in age from 385,000 to 172,000 years, are smaller and better crafted. Some even have a groove that indicates they may have been attached to a spear.

These kinds of tools have been found in Europe, where they were made by Neanderthals and other early hominids. But until now, researchers believed the techniques didn't reach India until about 100,000 years ago.

So far, no fossils have been discovered in the area, which makes it impossible to know what kind of hominid crafted the tools. If somehow humans did reach India that early, it would change everything we believe about the timeline of human evolution. But it's too soon to draw any conclusions. What's certain is that some kind of hominid with sophisticated tool-making abilities lived in India at that time. "It shows that simple linear narratives of dispersal only at certain time periods is incorrect," Shanti Pappu, a co-author of the project, told the Washington Post.

"We hope this will be a jumping-off point for a new look at regions like India," Pappu says. "They also have a story to tell."

(Source: The Washington Post)

Cancer 'vaccine' eliminates tumors in mice

Injecting minute amounts of two immune-stimulating agents directly into solid tumors in mice can eliminate all traces of cancer in the animals, including distant, untreated metastases, according to a study by researchers at the Stanford University School of Medicine.

The approach works for many different types of cancers, including those that arise spontaneously, the study found.

The researchers believe the local application of very small amounts of the agents could serve as a rapid and relatively inexpensive cancer therapy that is unlikely to cause the adverse side effects often seen with bodywide immune stimulation.

"When we use these two agents together, we see the elimination of tumors all over the body," said Ronald Levy, MD, professor of oncology.

Specific immune targets

"This approach bypasses the need to identify tumor-specific immune targets and doesn't require wholesale activation of the immune system or customization of a patient's immune cells."

One agent is currently already approved for use in humans; the other has been tested for human use in several unrelated clinical trials. A clinical trial was launched in January to test the effect of the treatment in patients with lymphoma.

Research in his laboratory led to the development of rituximab, one of the first monoclonal antibodies approved for use as an anticancer treatment in humans.

Some immunotherapy approaches rely on stimulating the immune system throughout the body. Others target naturally occurring checkpoints that limit the anti-cancer activity of immune cells. Still others, like the CAR T-cell therapy recently approved to treat some types of leukemia and lymphomas, require a patient's immune cells to be removed from the body and genetically engineered to attack the tumor cells.

Cancers often exist in a strange kind of limbo with regard to the immune system. Immune cells like T cells recognize the abnormal proteins often present on cancer cells and infiltrate to attack the tumor.

Many of these approaches have been successful, but they each have downsides — from difficult-to-handle side effects to high-cost and lengthy preparation or treatment times.

Changing medical practice

"All of these immunotherapy advances are changing medical practice," Levy said. "Our approach uses a one-time application of very small amounts of two agents to stimulate the immune cells only within the tumor itself. In the mice, we saw amazing, bodywide effects, including the elimination of tumors all over the animal."

Cancers often exist in a strange kind of limbo with regard to the immune system. Immune cells like T cells recognize the abnormal proteins often present on cancer cells and infiltrate to attack the tumor.

Levy's method works to reactivate the cancer-specific T cells by injecting microgram amounts of two agents directly into the tumor site. (A microgram is one-millionth of a gram). One, a short stretch of DNA called a CpG oligonucleotide, works with other nearby immune cells to amplify the expression of an activating receptor called OX40 on the surface of the T cells. The other, an antibody that binds to OX40, activates the T cells to lead the charge against the cancer cells. Because the two agents are injected directly into the tumor, only T cells that have infiltrated it are activated. In effect, these T cells are "prescreened" by the body to recognize only cancer-specific proteins.

(Source: Stanford Medicine)

When did flowers originate?

Flowering plants likely originated between 149 and 256 million years ago according to new UCL-led research.

A study in New Phytologist by researchers from the UK and China, shows that flowering plants are neither as old as suggested by previous molecular studies, nor as young as a literal interpretation of their fossil record.

The findings underline the power of using complementary studies based on molecular data and the fossil record, along with different approaches to infer evolutionary timescales to establish a deeper understanding of evolutionary dynamics many millions of years ago.

The "discrepancy between estimates of flowering plant evolution from molecular data and fossil records has caused much debate. Even Darwin described the origin of this group as an 'abominable mystery'", explained lead author, Dr. Jose Barba-Montoya (UCL Genetics, Evolution & Environment).

Solving mystery of flowers

To "uncover the key to solving the mystery of when flowers originated, we carefully analyzed the genetic make-up of flowering plants, and the rate at which mutations accumulate in their genomes."

Through the lens of the fossil record, flowering plants appear to have diversified suddenly, precipitating a Cretaceous Terrestrial Revolution in which pollinators, herbivores and predators underwent explosive co-evolution.

Molecular-clock dating studies, however, have suggested a much older origin for flowering plants, implying a cryptic evolution of flowers that is not documented in the fossil record.

"In large part, the discrepancy between these two approaches is an artefact of false precision on both paleontological and molecular evolutionary timescales," said Professor Philip Donoghue from the University of Bristol's School of Earth Science, and a senior author of the study.

Paleontological timescales calibrate the family tree of plants to geological time based on the oldest fossil evidence for its component branches. Molecular timescales build on this approach, using additional evidence from genomes for the genetic distances between species, aiming to overcome gaps in the fossil record.

"Previous studies into molecular timescales failed to explore the implications of experimental variables and so they inaccurately estimate the probable age of flowering plants with undue precision," said Professor Ziheng Yang (UCL Genetics, Evolution & Environment) and senior author of the study.

Fossil record

"Similarly, interpretations of the fossil record have not fully recognized its shortcomings as an archive of evolutionary history, that is, that the oldest fossil evidence of flowering plants comes from very advanced, not primitive flowering plant lineages," Professor Donoghue added.

The researchers compiled a large collection of genetic data for many flowering plant groups including a dataset of 83 genes from 644 taxa, together with a comprehensive set of fossil evidence to address the timescale of flowering plant diversification.

"By using Bayesian statistical methods that borrow tools from physics and mathematics to model how the evolutionary rate changes with time, we showed that there are broad uncertainties in the estimates of flowering plant age, all compatible with early to mid-Cretaceous origin for the group," said Dr. Mario dos Reis.

(Source: phys.org)

Dr. Hojjatollah Seydi Appointed BSI New CEO

In a directive issued by the Board of Directors, Dr. Hojjatollah Seydi was appointed as the Chief Executive of Bank Saderat Iran (BSI), the Public Relations Dept. of the best reported.

As a leading and outstanding manager in the Capital Market, he was the manager of Khwarizmi Investment Company.

Dr. Seydi, 50-year-old, holds BA, MA and Ph.D. degrees from Allameh Tabatabaei University in Accounting. He also holds a professional degree in Business Accountant and CIMA from UK Certified Accountants Association.

His other credits include as follows: member of the Board of Directors of Bank Saderat Iran (BSI) and deputy CEO for International Affairs, managing director of Khwarizmi Investment Company since 2013, deputy managing director of Ghadir Investment Company, vice chairman of the board of Directors of Iran Khodro Industrial Group (IKCO), etc.

The new chief executive of the bank started his first working day at the holy shrine of the late founding father of the Islamic Revolution, the late Imam Khomeini (RA).

For his part, he pointed to the significant role of banking industry in the country and emphasized: "Bank Saderat Iran has thus far taken giant stride in the field of materializing most economic objectives of the bank."

It is hoped that the management of the bank will make all its utmost efforts to materialize most economic objectives of the bank especially in the year named after "Resistance Economy, Production and Job Creation".

Showcasing Three Golden Cultural Heritage Works in BMI Museum during Ten-Day Dawn Ceremonies

Three golden works of cultural and national heritage works of the country will be unveiled on Feb. 6-8, 2018 concurrent with the 39th glorious victory anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in "Glory of National Heritage" Exhibition of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) Museum, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

These works include Marlik Golden Cup from the Caspian Sea Cultural Zone, Hasanlu Golden Cup from Lake Urmia Cultural Zone, Median Golden Takok from Qaflankouh Cultural Area (near Miyaneh city) which date back to 3,000 years ago (Iron Age).

The most well-known archeological findings indicate that Hasanlu is the same golden cup and images with the exaggerated bas-relief on the cup depict individual mythological scenes whose concepts were perceived by viewers of that time.

It should be noted that the exhibition is open to the public at 13 to 17 on Feb. 6-8, 2018 at the venue of Museum of Bank Melli Iran, located on Ferdowsi Ave., Tehran.

CEO of Refah K. Bank: Client-Centric, Macro Strategy of Banking System

Chief Executive of Refah K. Bank Dr. Mohammad-Ali Sahmani pointed out that client-centric concept in the macro strategy of banking system of the country, Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Speaking among senior officials of the bank in Bushehr Province, he pointed to the direct relationship of strategic program of the bank with the strategies of banking system and said: "gaining customers' satisfaction and focusing on clients is one of the most important strategies of the bank."

Refah K. Bank has an important status in banking system of the country, he said, adding: "For this purpose, partners, stakeholders and recipients of services of the bank expect to receive high-quality and variety services. All measures, activities and services of the bank should be designed and presented according to customer-centric approach."

He emphasized the creation of equilibrium between resources and consumptions at banks and said: "bankruptcy of finance and credit association is the result of imbalance of resources and consumptions."

He went on to say that equilibrium should be established between resources, consumptions, incomes and spending, the issue of which will lead to positive liquidity, positive performance and profitability.

In conclusion Dr. Sahmani emphasized: "Refah K. Bank has taken effective steps in the following activities: foreign exchange, guarantee letters, SHETAB (Interbank Information Transfer Network) services and electronic services of the bank within the framework of a reasonable and logical move and risk management and for this reason, the bank has compiled comprehensive programs."

Coffee could soon come with cancer warning, study says

Coffee shops in California could soon be required by law to warn customers about a possible cancer risk linked to their ready-made cup of joes.

In a lawsuit filed to the Los Angeles County Superior Court, the Council for Education and Research on Toxics (CERT), a non-profit organization, alleged that coffee sellers have "failed to provide clear and reasonable warning" that their products exposes people to harmful chemicals, reported CNN.

Acrylamide is created when coffee beans are roasted, according to the American Cancer Society website. The International Agency For Research on Cancer has classified the white odorless chemical a "probable human carcinogen."

Under Proposition 65 (the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986), businesses are required to give their customers a "clear and reasonable" warning if any of the 65 listed chemicals, including acrylamide, is present in their products.

The nonprofit alleges that some coffee shops, including Starbucks, GP, Gloria Jean's and 7-Eleven, have failed to do so and are therefore in violation of the policy, reported CNN.

To remedy this, their lawsuit is asking the state to force companies to post explicit cancer warnings on their store counters or walls.

Raphael Metzger, the lawyer representing CERT, told CNN that their goal is to reduce the use of acrylamide in coffees. According to Metzger, 13 of the defendants, including 7-Eleven, have already settled out of court and agreed to issue the warnings.

"CERT believes the best resolution of the case would be for the coffee industry to get the acrylamide out of coffee rather than giving acrylamide cancer hazard warnings," Metzger said in a statement, reported USA Today.

(Source: Newsweek)

Supermassive black holes can feast on one star per year

CU Boulder researchers have discovered a mechanism that explains the persistence of asymmetrical stellar clusters surrounding supermassive black holes in some galaxies and suggests that during post-galactic merger periods, orbiting stars could be flung into the black hole and destroyed at a rate of one per year.

The research, which was recently published in The Astrophysical Journal, also suggests an answer to a longstanding astronomical mystery about the behavior of eccentric stellar orbits near supermassive black holes and why the seemingly unstable dynamic survives long term.

A supermassive black hole's gravity creates a nuclear star cluster surrounding it, which gravitational physics would expect to be spherically symmetric.

Eccentric disks are suspected to be formed in the wake of a recent merger between two gas-rich galaxies.

Within the disk, each star follows an elliptical orbit that revolves around the supermassive black hole over time. The stars' orbits nearly overlap and interact with each other frequently. Eventually, gravitational disruptions to one star's orbit will bring it too close to the black hole.

The "force builds up in these stellar orbits and changes their shape," said Associate JILA Fellow Ann-Marie Madigan, who led the study. "Eventually, a star reaches its nearest approach to the black hole and it gets shredded."

"We predict that in a post-galactic merger period, a supermassive black hole will swallow one star per year," said co-author Heather Wernke, a CU Boulder graduate student. "That's 10,000 times more often than other rate predictions."

The finding bolsters observational evidence that some galaxies with supermassive black holes at their center have higher stellar mortality rates than others and suggests that eccentric nuclear disks may be more common than initially expected.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

How cashews may help improve cholesterol and lower blood pressure

Cashews have not always been touted as the healthiest of nut choices because of their high fat content. However, a new study shows that cashews may help to improve cholesterol levels and lower blood pressure.

Just a palmful of cashews can help to improve your good cholesterol (HDL) and reduce blood pressure according to this new study in the peer-reviewed Journal of Nutrition. The study involved 300 participants from Chennai, India. The common factor shared by all participants was type-2 diabetes. Half of the group was required to consume 30 grams of cashews a day, but they couldn't be just any cashews. The nuts had to be unsalted, raw, and broken.

Dr. V. Mohan of the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation was the lead author of the study. He stated: "Around 20% of the fat in cashew nuts is of the saturated variety."

After three months the study concluded, and a variety of parameters were taken into account concerning the participants' results. The participants' who consumed their daily allotment of cashews all had a blood pressure drop of 5mm and an HDL cholesterol increase of 2 milligrams. All 300 participants followed a standard diabetic diet, but it was the participants consuming cashews every day that received a 1.9-fold greater reduction in blood pressure and a 16-fold greater increase of HDL cholesterol compared to the non-cashew group.

Unfortunately, the cashews many Americans consume are the wrong kind. Healthy cashews are raw not roasted, salted, or seasoned by any other sugar or spice coating according to Dr. V. Mohan. Cashews are approximately 46% fat, but healthy fats in moderation can benefit your health as this study shows.

(Source: eMaxHealth)

Tehran to host congress on successful Iranian women

WOMEN desk

TEHRAN — The 2nd national congress on successful Iranian women is to be held in Tehran on March 17.

The congress pivots on studying the challenges women are facing in different social, cultural, and entrepreneurship fields, said Azam Entezari, secretary of the congress.

The event follows the objective of highlighting the crucial role of women in achieving sustainable development and to celebrate the successes of Iranian women, Mehr news agency reported.

The congress is specially provided for the women who enjoy high potential and capabilities in management and entrepreneurship and women who are taking steps in the path of success, Entezari added.

Women's role in economic development and sustainable development, is to be studied at the meeting. The topics to be discussed at the congress include challenges facing the participation of Iranian women in various social, cultural, political and economic fields.

Women's rights and women's employment issues based on Islamic viewpoints are to be conferred in the congress.

Specialized workshops and meetings will also be held on the sidelines of the event and participants will be granted certificates.

The event is co-sponsored by the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade, Tehran City Council, and different universities.

On March 6, 2017, Shahid Beheshti University hosted the first "National Congress on Successful Iranian Women" in Tehran, also attended by UNESCO representatives.

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Orange pumpkin loaf

"You can try this moist loaf with an orange cream spread, butter, or leave plain. For a variation, try substituting dates for the raisins."

Ingredients:

1 large orange
1/3 cup butter, softened
1 1/3 cups white sugar
2 eggs
1 cup canned pumpkin
1/3 cup water
2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground cloves
1/2 cup chopped walnuts
1/2 cup chopped raisins

Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F (175 degrees C). Grease a 9x5 inch loaf pan.

Cut orange into wedges, and remove seeds. Place orange, peel and all, in a food processor. Pulse until finely chopped; set aside.

In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar until smooth. Beat in the eggs one at a time, then stir in the pumpkin, water, and the ground orange. Mix together flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, and cloves. Stir into batter just until moistened. Stir in nuts and raisins. Spoon into the prepared loaf pan.

Bake for 1 hour in the preheated oven, or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. Let stand 10 minutes, then remove from pan, and cool on a wire rack.

LEARN ENGLISH

Canceling an Appointment

A: Hello, Samantha speaking.
B: Hi Samantha. This is Angela calling.
A: Oh, hi Angela, **what's up**?
B: I'm just calling about our meeting today. I wonder, is it possible to **reschedule** our appointment in the afternoon? I have a bit of an emergency that I need to take care of.
A: Let me see, it shouldn't be too much of a problem...
B: I'm really sorry, I hope it doesn't **inconvenience** you too much, it's just this thing **came up**, and...
A: Angela, you know what, I can't **make it** to our meeting, either. Why don't we **postpone** it to tomorrow afternoon at the same time?
B: Sounds great. See you tomorrow.
C: Angela... Angela, look up! See that lady over there who is trying on a red leather jacket? Isn't that Samantha?
B: What? **No wonder** she told me she couldn't make it to the meeting, oh, no, I think she saw me...

Key vocabulary

what's up: what is the matter
reschedule: schedule something for a different time
inconvenience: cause problem or trouble
come up: occur in an unexpected way
make it: come
postpone: decide to do something at a later time
no wonder: not surprisingly

Supplementary vocabulary

scheduling conflict: two or more appointments scheduled at the same time
call off: cancel
double-book: have two appointments or meetings at the same time
push back: move a meeting or appointment to a later time
rain check: a promise or offer to do something in the future that is not possible to do now

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Delegation of Iranian women visit Paris for economic talks

WOMEN desk

TEHRAN — A delegation of 32 Iranian women entrepreneurs, members of chambers of commerce, heads of private companies and other noble women in different fields visited Paris to attend economic meetings.

The group arrived in Paris on Wednesday to attend a seminar titled "Iranian woman, dynamic woman", and a round table talk in the French parliament, IRNA reported.

The visit was made in order to demonstrate the facts about women's position in Iran and the country's achievements in women's fields as well as economic talks with private sector.

The 32-member group visited Iran›s Ambassador to France Abolqasem Delfi, IRNA quoted a report by the Iranian embassy authorities.

Delfi put emphasis on the capabilities of Iranian women, and explained about the positive results of Iran's nuclear deal (JCPOA) as a window for interactions with other countries.

The Iranian ambassador to France stressed on the need to improve bilateral ties especially in economy and tourism sectors.

The Iranian women held talks over economic issues with representatives of the French private sector.

The group attended meetings to provide a better image of the Iranian women and also introduce latest achievements made in Iran to promote women›s status.

The noble Iranian women had meetings with the council of French entrepreneurs, tour cultural sites in Paris, and meet the head of the Parisian Region.

Women unite for World Hijab Day

Growing up in the Bronx in New York City with a hijab covering her head, Nazma Khan says she is all too familiar with religious discrimination from a young age.

The Bangladesh native migrated to the United States at the age of 11 and was constantly bullied throughout middle and high school.

The bullying took on another level after the deadly coordinated attacks of September 11, 2001.

"Every day, I would face different challenges just walking on the street," she told Al Jazeera. "I was chased, spit on, surrounded by men, called a terrorist, Osama bin Laden, etc."

To connect with others who were facing similar challenges because of their head covering, Khan invited Muslim women to share their experiences of discrimination on social media.

"As I read through the stories, I saw my own struggles in my sisters," the 35-year-old said.

That is when Khan decided to launch the World Hijab Day (WHD).

Each year on February 1, Khan's non-profit organization invites females of all faiths, backgrounds and ethnicities to wear the hijab for a day in solidarity with Muslim women worldwide.

The hijab is a headscarf worn by Muslim women who feel it is part of their religion.

"By walking in my shoes for one day on February 1, women would see that I am no different from them," the president and founder of the World Hijab Day Organization explained.

"Perhaps, this one day experience will make them see the hijab in a different light."

Breaking stereotypes

Since its inception in 2013, more than 70 global ambassadors from over 45 countries have been involved and women from around 190 countries participate in the annual event.

"I believe women should be free from prejudice and discrimination for their choice to cover their hair," said Lloyd, who is also Qatar's WHD ambassador.

"If I choose to wear a hat, I am not judged," she told Al Jazeera. "If I choose to wear my hair up or down or braided, I am not judged.

"So why is it fair for a woman who chooses to wear a scarf to be judged?"

Afaf Nasher, executive director for the New York chapter at the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), believes the yearly initiative helps break the "false stereotypes" about the religious head covering.

"A Muslim woman wearing a hijab is hypocritically viewed as foreign, submissive, and backwards," she told Al Jazeera.

"WHD shines a positive counter-message by highlighting the diversity and strength of Muslim women who observe hijab."

Meanwhile, others have raised concern that one day in a hijab does not give outsiders the true sense of being a Muslim.

Zahra Billoo, CAIR's executive director of the San Francisco Bay area, welcomed the effort from non-Muslim women but added: "Others are sometimes concerned that the hijab is not an accessory, and so even wearing it for a day, in solidarity, doesn't really give someone the full experience and can actually risk tokenizing the experience of Muslim women."

Islamophobia

Miroslava, a Czech native who works in the UK, has had derogatory slurs hurled at her like "bitch", "ISIS", received death threats, been spat in the face and followed ever since she started wearing the hijab four years ago.

"Walking on the streets, I get time to time funny questions such as: 'Don't you feel too hot in this?'" the 35-year-old divorcee told Al Jazeera.

"Few weeks after I moved into a new place, I came home and found a sprayed message over my windows: 'this is not your country!'"

Los Angeles resident Ojaala Ahmad says "hijab makes women more visibly Muslim and therefore an easier target for Islamophobes."

After President Donald Trump's election, the number of anti-Muslim hate crimes in the U.S. rose 91 percent in the first half of 2017, compared with the same period in 2016, according to a CAIR report.

"A Muslim woman's headscarf was a trigger in 15 percent of incidents," the group said.

Civil rights activists in the country are worried about the trend.

"We have a president who doesn't care and is attacking the Muslim community on a daily basis and so I am concerned about the people that are emboldened by his racism and bigotry," said CAIR's Billoo.

Meanwhile, Muslim women in the UK are three times more likely to be economically inactive, a government-commissioned report found in September 2017.

"I am particularly very concerned about discrimination women who wear the hijab face in the job market," said Khan.

The World Hijab Day Organization is working on building an educational program called "Corporate Anti-Islamophobia Program (CAIP)" to lessen discrimination against Muslims in the corporate sector.

There was anger among Muslim women in Europe last year when the European Court of Justice ruled that employers are entitled to ban staff from wearing visible religious symbols.

Beata Rocska, a Hungarian convert living in the capital Budapest, said her boss at a multinational firm was warned against hiring her for being a "terrorist".

"Everyday insult is such a common thing, especially since our politicians started to build their campaign upon hatred towards the [Muslim] immigrants," the 26-year-old told Al Jazeera.

(Source: aljazeera.com)

Female leaders fear women being sidelined in Nigeria's 2019 elections

Nigerian women risk being sidelined in elections next year, said female leaders, calling for greater training and support in a country where about only one in 20 lawmakers are female.

Few women are likely to win seats in Nigeria's 2019 general elections due to discrimination, a lack of will from political parties and a shortage of female candidates, politicians and civil society leaders said.

"Every party wants to put its best foot forward, and we are not sure that many are going to put women forward," said Olufunke Baruwa, head of the Nigerian Women Trust Fund, an advocacy group seeking to boost women's leadership.

Women occupy only 27 of 469 parliamentary seats, and the United Nations ranks Africa's most populous nation as one of the worst in the world for female representation in parliament.

Speaking this month at an event in the capital Abuja on boosting women's involvement in politics, several politicians said aspiring female leaders should be trained in skills such as fundraising and encouraged to join political parties.

"Instead (of focusing on the challenges women face), we should help women learn more about fundraising, negotiation, consensus," said Ebere Ifendu, the national publicity secretary of the Labor Party, one of Nigeria's main opposition parties.

Getting girls interested in and inspired by politics is crucial, said Olaoluwa Abagun, founder of the Girl Pride Circle Initiative, which helps girls obtain internships in parliament.

"If you walk into a room where you have adolescent girls, you most likely won't find them talking about politics," Abagun said at the event organized by the British government.

"Even boys as young as 10 say: 'I want to be president' ... We need to be conscious about investing in adolescent girls."

Nigeria's female lawmakers say more women are needed in government to support policies that affect women across the country, such as gender-based violence and maternal mortality.

(Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation)

First Announcement

N.I.O.C
1396.5216

National Iranian Drilling Company

Public Calls For Quality Evaluating Of Tender (First Publish/ Seconed Publish)

One Stage (Compressive)

TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE	DESCRIPTION	Tenders Portal Reg. No. On http://iets.mporg.ir	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial	(Rial)				
12,124	540,000,000	10,800,000,000	Under Balance Perforation Equipment with All Accessories for Well Logging	3,150,146	Indent No: 43-22-9603848102 TenderNo.: CGP/27-96/024	1

Brief discriptionof subject:
National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) address pasdaran Blev., Airport Saqare,Ahvaz, Iran hereby intends to purchase its requirements from qualified and interested tenderers through One-stage public tender (pressed) as leasing upon following terms and conditions:
A) Qualitative evaluation of tenderer:
The evaluation is based on article (G) implementing regulations of the law of tenders and also carried out base on worksheets qualitative evaluation inquiry in the tender doucments. Minimum acceptable point of quality is 60.
B) Preparation of tender documents:
Purchasing of documents:
In order to receive the tender documents, 510,000 Rials should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.
Reciving of documents:
Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum 10 days after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Sector Tenders, Foreign Procurement of Capital Goods dept., end of the workshop No. 8, Karoon Industrial Area, Ahwaz, IRAN.
Tel No.: 061-34142387 or Room #431, coordination office of NIDC, NIOC No. 8 center Building, Yaghma alley, Jomhoori St., Tehran, IRAN, Tel No.: 021-66700249.
Notice:
Only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and recieve tender ducments from foreign procurment department in due date will be known as tenderer from tender committee.
C) Delivery of call quality evaluating and envelops suggestions:
Tenderers shall submit the completed documents including qualificaion worksheets in form of software in CD/DVD and documentary along with envelopes Tender Guarantee (A) and technical (B) and financial (C) offers within 30 days from last day of document recived deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1th floor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN. Tel No.: 061-34148205~6, 061-34148580
D) Tender Guarantee:
Type of guarantee:
A)Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that haveactivites licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid toNational Iranain Drilling Company.
Duration of credit guarantee:
This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.
More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on. WWW.NIDC.IR
NIDC Telegram Channal: @nidc_pr
Foreign Procurement Dept
National Iranian Drilling Company
تهران تایمز : نوبت اول ۹۶/۱۱/۱۷نوبت دوم۹۶/۱۱/۱۸

'Bahraini royal visits Israel, due in Knesset'

Israel's Communications Minister Ayoub Kara has confirmed having met with a Bahraini prince in Tel Aviv.

"I met publicly for the first time in Tel Aviv with Mubarak Al Khalifa, the prince of Bahrain, in order to strengthen the relationship between our two countries," Kara tweeted on his personal account on Sunday, boasting of the meeting as a sign of growing relations with Manama, which publicly poses as Tel Aviv's traditional foe.

"On Monday I will also have the honor of welcoming him to Israel's Knesset," he added, also posting a photo of the royal guest grinning next to him.

The Times of Israel, however, says the foreign ministry has not confirmed a visit by any Bahraini national to Israel. The report even said "the Bahraini government and royal websites include no mention of any living member of the royal family who goes by the name Mubarak Al Khalifa."

The office of the Knesset speaker Yuli Edelstein said it was not aware of any visit to the parliament by a Bahraini official either.

But, the Kan public broadcaster reported that the man who appeared in the photo had told the news station that he was a distant member of the Bahraini royal family currently living in London and that he was visiting Israel on a "private trip" to see friends.

Israel's Communications Minister Ayoub Kara (L) appears in a photo he posted on his personal Twitter account on February 4, 2018, showing him with Mubarak Al Khalifa, a Bahraini royal, in Tel Aviv.

Kara declined media requests to comment on the visit.

Arab states have traditionally been depicting themselves as Israel's enemies and supporters of the Palestinian cause against Tel Aviv's occupation.

But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has admitted that his regime has ties with the Arab world, and that the relations are improving.

Late last year, media reports suggested that a Bahraini delegation had arrived in Israel with a message from the country's king.

In September, Israeli media said Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah had called at an event hosted by pro-Israeli group Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles for an end to the Arab boycott of Israel, and the establishment of diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv.

Israeli tourists and businessmen have been traveling to Bahrain in recent years.

In 2016, the tiny kingdom became the only Persian Gulf country to publicly mourn the death of former Israeli president Shimon Peres.

Also in 2016, Bahraini officials raised eyebrows by hosting and participating in the Israeli Hanukkah celebration.

Meanwhile, leaks obtained by WikiLeaks showed that senior officials from Israel and Bahrain had spoken in recent years. They cited a 2007 meeting between then Israeli foreign minister Tzipi Livni and Bahraini Foreign Minister Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa in New York.

In 2005, the Bahraini king boasted to an American official that his state had contacts with Israel "at the intelligence/security level," WikiLeaks' findings suggested.

(Source: Press TV)

Turkey detains nearly 600 for opposing Syrian offensive

Turkey has so far detained 573 people for social media posts and protests criticizing its military offensive in Syria, the government said Monday.

The crackdown, which has extended to the national medical association, has deepened concerns about free speech under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has criticized opponents of the military intervention as "traitors".

Turkey last month launched an air and ground offensive, dubbed Operation Olive Branch, against the Kurdish YPG militia in Syria's northwestern Afrin region. Authorities have repeatedly warned they would prosecute those opposing, criticizing or misrepresenting the incursion.

"Since the start of Operation Olive Branch, 449 people have been detained for spreading terrorist propaganda on social media and 124 people detained for taking part in protest action," the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

The operation has been widely supported by Turkey's mainly pro-government media and by most political parties, with the exception of the pro-Kurdish opposition.

Last week, a prosecutor ordered the detention of 11 senior members of the Turkish Medical Association, including its chairman, after the organization criticized the incursion, saying: "No to war, peace immediately".

Erdogan criticized the body as traitors. Detention orders were issued for another 13 people for supporting the medics.

Three of the doctors were later released on probation, according to the Hurriyet newspaper.

"There are laws that prohibit the glorification of terrorism, support for terrorism through propaganda and media. The prosecutors are implementing the laws," Erdogan's spokesman, Ibrahim Kalin, told reporters in Istanbul at the weekend.

Ankara considers the U.S.-backed YPG, which controls Afrin, to be a terrorist group and an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) which has fought an insurgency in Turkey's largely Kurdish southeast since 1984.

Turkey is in the midst of a widening crackdown that began after a failed coup attempt in July 2016. Some 50,000 people have been jailed and 150,000 sacked or suspended from their jobs.

Critics, including rights groups and some Western allies, say Erdogan is using the coup as a pretext to muzzle dissent. The latest arrests have also drawn criticism from the European Union.

Turkey says its measures are necessary due to the gravity of the security threats it faces.

(Source: Daily Star)

Protesters gather outside Saudi embassy in London to condemn UK arms sales

Protesters have rallied outside the Saudi embassy in London against UK's arms sales to the kingdom, which has been waging a destructive war on Yemen for some three years now.

The demonstration, organized by the UK-based Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) group, featured campaigners expressing their outrage at British profiteering from the ongoing bloodshed which has taken more than 13,500 Yemeni lives so far.

Ian Pocock, a spokesman for the CAAT, said London was "complicit in the assault on Yemen", calling on British citizens to protest against the government's arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

"They (the UK government) have sold 1.6 billion pounds (over $2 billion) worth of weapons to the Saudi regime since the war began in March 2015, so we want to see the government put an end to this profiteering for the sake of all the deaths and devastation it has caused in one of the world's poorest countries," he said.

Stephen Bell, spokesman for the British activism group Stop the War Coalition, said the UK government was "completely aligned, along with the US government, with the Saudi-led coalition."

Both campaigners said the tide of public opinion in the UK had turned significantly against London's support for the warfare.

The UK has increased its weapons sales by around 500 percent since the onset of the Saudi invasion, The Independent reported last November.

The weapons sold by Britain, which has also been providing logistical and arms support for the bombardment, include precision-guided bombs.

Last month, a UN panel which examined 10 airstrikes by Saudi Arabia that had killed 157 people in Yemen last year, reported that the kingdom had intentionally used precision-guided munitions in their raids on civilian targets.

"The attacks were carried out by precision-guided munitions, so it is likely these were the intended targets," the report said.

Last February, Scottish Daily Record newspaper reported that evidence submitted during a legal case into British arms sales to Saudi Arabia had revealed that the UK trained the Saudi air force on how to use precision-guided Paveway IV bombs.

Germany last month stopped selling weapons to Saudi Arabia and almost all of its allies in the coalition "as long as they are involved in the Yemeni war."

(Source: agencies)

German parties make final push for coalition deal

Negotiators for German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives and the center-left Social Democrats (SPD) reconvened Monday to hammer out compromises on healthcare and labor policy, the stumbling blocks in the way of another "grand coalition."

The parties missed a self-imposed Sunday deadline to reach a deal on renewing the coalition that has governed Europe's largest economy since 2013. But both sides cited progress and said the remaining differences did not appear insurmountable.

"It's going to work out," the SPD's Andrea Nahles said on arrival for Monday's negotiations at her party's headquarters. Another SPD negotiator, Karl Lauterbach, put the chances of the parties striking a deal on Monday at 50-50.

The Rheinische Post newspaper, citing an internal SPD schedule, reported that Merkel, the leader of her Bavarian allies Horst Seehofer and SPD chief Martin Schulz wanted to present a final coalition agreement on Tuesday.

But Alexander Dobrindt of the Bavarian Christian Social Union said: "The hurdles are still big."

Stung by its worst postwar result in September's election, the SPD is trying to extract concessions that could win over skeptics among its 443,000 members, who get the final say on whether to move ahead with another tie-up with conservatives.

Merkel's failure to cobble together a new government more than four months after the election has raised concerns among investors and partner countries at a time when

Europe is facing multiple challenges - including the need for euro zone reform and Britain's looming departure from the European Union.

Germany could face a new election or an unprecedented minority government if SPD members reject a coalition deal.

EU Budget Commissioner Guenther Oettinger told the Rheinische Post the parties should finalize a coalition deal as soon as possible, citing pending EU decisions on asylum, banking and budget matters.

SPD General Secretary Lars Klingbeil Sunday lauded deals reached by negotiators on rents and real estate, digitalization and culture, but said there was work to do on labor and healthcare.

Berlin Mayor Michael Mueller, another SPD negotiator, told German broadcaster ZDF he was heartened by an agreement to protect renters from excessive cost increases. "We have a basis that is getting better day by day," he said.

The parties agreed Sunday to invest more than 2 billion euros in social housing by 2021, to spend up to 12 billion euros on expanding broadband and to channel 33 billion euros to municipalities for investments, including in childcare.

Agreements were also reached on migration, energy and agriculture in recent days.

The SPD sees advances on labor rules and healthcare as crucial to winning over left-wing members and other skeptics.

Conservatives have thus far rejected a push by the SPD to ban short-term employment contracts imposed by employers without justification. But they have offered to prevent the repeated renewal of such short-term employment contracts as a compromise.

The two sides are also at odds over the SPD's call to replace Germany's dual public-private healthcare system with a universal insurance system for all.

Monday's talks are expected to focus on improving public healthcare, such as by changing billing rules for doctors, who earn more by treating privately insured patients.

(Source: Reuters)

Europe will not accept Trump's conditions about the JCPOA: Nephew

1 → He will either have to back down from his demands, which is possible but increasingly hard to believe, or there will be a confrontation.

■ What can be the EU alternative, if the U.S. withdraws from the JCPOA? If the U.S. withdraws, the situation for investment and work in Iran will get worsen. In this case, what real guarantees can be offered to Iran by the EU?

A: This is fundamentally a question for Iran: how much relief is enough to stay in the JCPOA without U.S. sanctions relief. More than a few European and Asian companies would withdraw if U.S. sanctions were to be imposed. If Iran can accept that, so long as a few companies remain, then the JCPOA may be salvageable in a rougher form.

But, if Iran will insist on no changes whatsoever to its ability to use relief, then I do not think there are sufficient guarantees that Europe can offer to keep all of its businesses in place.

■ EU can ask EBRD bank to monitor the small and medium companies' exchanges in order to not let the remaining sanctions be evaded. What banking guarantees can the EU offer Iran?

A: Well, I think that the real bank guarantees required is that lines of credit and whatnot will be provided. But, major banks are reluctant to do that now and will oppose in the context of U.S. sanctions pressure.

So, really, the best that can be achieved is that a few banks -- who may not mind being sanctioned by the United States -- stay in Iran while the rest leave. This, of course, assumes Europe will not impose retaliatory measures against U.S. banks and begin essentially a finance war with the United States. That is possible, but perhaps still not likely.

Israel's growing ties with former Arab foes

6 → Egypt, of course, is not alone in finding common cause with a former nemesis. Most conspicuously, the Israelis and Saudis have been deepening their security ties and contacts, joined by their mutual antipathy for Iran. But their growing cooperation is still officially covert; tightening bonds with the country that still holds millions of Palestinians under military occupation would be politically problematic for any Arab country.

"Palestine is not an easy issue," a senior Saudi official recently told the Wall Street Journal. "Saudi Arabia is expecting to hold Islamic leadership and will not let it go easily. And, if you need Israel in anything, you can do it anyway, without having a relationship."

It's clear also that Palestine is not the all-encompassing, emotive issue it once was. The Times published reports of secret calls between Egyptian military intelligence officials and prominent broadcasters that took place in the wake of President Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a move Egypt had publicly warned against.

In the phone calls, an Egyptian officer urges the journalists to not stir outrage over Trump's decision and even advises them to find a way to convince the Egyptian public that the Palestinians should let go of their claim to East Jerusalem.

"How is Jerusalem different from Ramallah, really?" the officer says on the taped call, referring to the West Bank town where the beleaguered Palestinian Authority is headquartered. Moreover, according to the Times, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has pressed Palestinian officials to accept an extremely curtailed version of statehood with a capital in East Jerusalem. (Though sourced to Western and Palestinian officials, the Saudis deny these reports.)

Arab leaders, of course, still voice their disquiet over Israel's expansion of settlements in the Palestinian territories. At an interview at the World Economic Forum last month, King Abdullah II of Jordan said Palestinians no longer see the United States as an honest broker in the moribund peace process. He also made a polite attack on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

'I reserve my judgment," he said, when asked whether Netanyahu is committed to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. "I have my skepticism."

Tightening bonds with the country that still holds millions of Palestinians under military occupation would be politically problematic for any Arab country.

"The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not as important for them as it was before, but they are afraid of making official relations with Israel without any major movement on the Israeli-Palestinian issue," said Israeli Brig. Gen. Udi Dekel, referring to other Sunni Arab states in the region. He was speaking at a recent security conference in Jerusalem where he also described Israel's "strategic situation" as "almost the best" since the founding of the state.

"Without that movement, the people on the street will ask them, 'for so many years you told us that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the most important problem," Dekel said. "How can you accept that Israel is controlling the West Bank and is not giving Palestinians any rights?'"

But as attention shifts even further away from the Palestinian plight, the Israelis are possibly banking on the Egyptians, Saudis and others finding new ways to live with that status quo.

(Source: The Washington Post)

Latin America's female leadership void

8 → And on the right, the Mexican politician and former first lady Margarita Zavala had strong poll numbers but no path to winning the nomination. She recently started an independent campaign for the presidency — in a video criticizing the party for closing ranks against her.

These are not isolated events. My research shows that political parties from the left and right nominate fewer women when voters think the economy is doing poorly. Political parties on both sides also nominate fewer women when there is increased competition. In Latin America, disillusionment has fueled the growth of new parties. More choices for voters means fewer seats for each party — and parties with fewer seats to win appear less likely to take chances on women.

More women in office also does not mean less discrimination or harassment. The glass ceiling remains.

While Latin America outpaces the global average for women in senior management roles, women hold only 5 percent of board seats in six of Latin America's largest economies. Within legislatures, women rarely lead their parties' delegations, and they remain absent from the most prestigious committees.

In Colombia, a study found that nearly a quarter of female elected officials felt silenced and were denied resources by their parties, and 40 percent of female mayors reported sexist treatment. Sometimes, resistance to female politicians takes violent forms. Parties have long undermined quotas by asking women to resign once elected: Juana Quispe, a councilwoman in Bolivia, was beaten to death for refusing to do so.

Gender and parity laws matter, and they have too much public support for politicians to roll them back. Even conservative Chile now has a gender quota for the legislature, which almost doubled the number of women in Congress in the election where the right made a huge comeback.

But ending the sexism and hostility that drives women from power requires changing cultural attitudes and ending impunity toward violence against women.

Costa Rica has tackled traditional notions about who should lead by applying quotas to the civil-society sector. By law, nonprofit organizations must have gender parity in their top leadership positions. This includes charitable, humanitarian and social-service organizations, bringing men into positions from which they've historically been absent.

After all, if more women take power in politics and business, men will need something else to do.

(Source: The NYT)

I felt contact and went down – Kane responds to dive claim

Tottenham striker Harry Kane says Liverpool's Virgil van Dijk was wrong to claim he dived to win a penalty during Sunday's 2-2 draw at Anfield.

Kane was brought down six minutes from time at Anfield by goalkeeper Loris Karius, who saved the spot-kick.

Defender Van Dijk, who later conceded an injury-time penalty Kane converted, said: "You see him diving clearly."

But Kane said: "I felt contact and I went down. I'm not going to jump out of the way because it's football."

Liverpool were angry the first penalty was awarded, with referee Jon Moss ruling Dejan Lovren's touch had played Kane onside before the England forward was brought down by Karius.

After the penalty was saved, Mohamed Salah's brilliant injury-time solo goal - his second of the game - looked to have given the Reds a win that would have taken them five points clear of Spurs. But the home side were further angered when Spurs were awarded a second spot-kick, after Moss punished Van Dijk for his challenge on substitute Erik Lamela with seconds remaining.

Reds boss Jurgen Klopp said: "If I said what I think, I would pay the biggest fine in world football."

But Kane praised Moss and assistant referee Ed Smart for their decisions. "I thought the linesman showed amazing character to give [the second penalty] because a lot happened for the first one so to give that penalty was massive - and it was a penalty," added the 24-year-old.

Former Spurs and England midfielder Jermaine Jenas said Moss and Smart got one of the decisions wrong.

(Source: BBC)

Spanish teenager Barbera dies after suffering cardiac arrest

Young Spanish footballer Nacho Barbera has died after suffering a cardiac arrest during a recent match.

Barbera had been playing in the 13-14 year-old age group of Valencia-based side UD Alzira and was the captain of his team.

A recent match against CD Esport Base Ontinyent saw the player taken ill on the field after falling to the ground and he later died in hospital. The youngster is not believed to have shown any previous signs of a heart condition.

UD Alzira took to their official website and social media to announce Barbera's passing and express the club's grief, while confirming all immediate fixtures will be suspended.

"The UD Alzira is in mourning. This afternoon footballer Nacho Barbera died during a game in Ontinyent, r.i.p. All the matches of the teams of the base football are suspended, both at home and of visitors," the club wrote via Twitter.

La Liga sides also offered their condolences upon hearing the news. A message from Sevilla's official account read: "We join the pain of the whole family for this irremediable loss. Rest in peace Nacho." A similar post from Deportivo Alaves' account said: "All the albiazul family adds to the signs of affection and support to family, colleagues and friends. Rest in peace, Nacho," while Osasuna released a short statement: "Rest in peace, Nacho. All our support and affection for your family and colleagues. A hug."

(Source: Sky Sports)

Di Biagio to coach Italy in March friendlies

Italy Under-21 coach Luigi Di Biagio will coach the senior side on a caretaker basis for the friendlies against Argentina and England in March, the Italian federation (FIGC) said on Monday.

Italy have been without a coach since Gian Piero Ventura resigned in November after they failed to qualify for the World Cup for the first time since 1958. Di Biagio, 46, is a former midfielder who played regularly for Italy between 1998 and 2002. His club career included spells at Inter Milan and AS Roma.

Italy play Argentina in Manchester on March 23 and England at Wembley four days later.

(Source: Mirror)

Garcia denies racially abusing Barca's Umtiti

Espanyol striker Sergio Garcia has denied Spanish media reports that he racially abused Barcelona defender Samuel Umtiti during the Catalan derby on Sunday. Garcia became embroiled in a heated argument with the French center back on the pitch in the 1-1 draw at the RCDE Stadium in Cornella. "First of all to clarify, I already spoke with Samuel yesterday," Garcia said on Instagram below a picture of the two players.

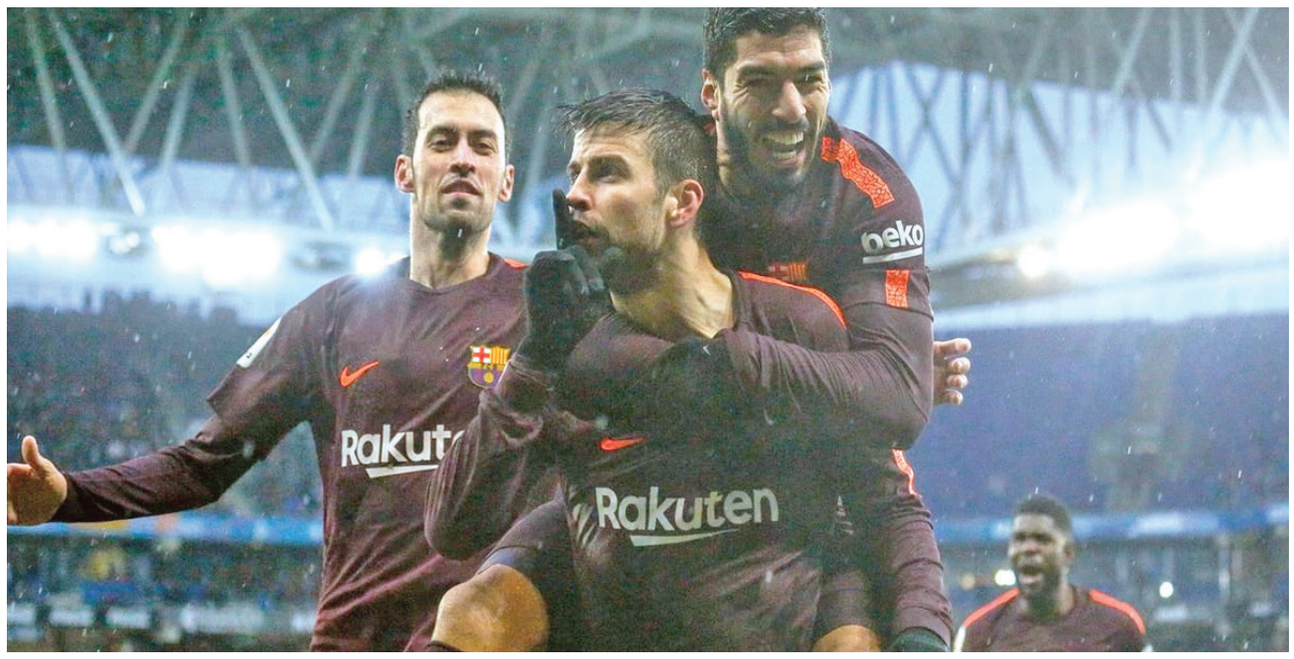
"In no way was it my intention to be racist. You all know my wife is from gypsy roots and I grew up in a neighborhood with every race in the world. "My brother-in-law, who I have a firm friendship with, is African-American too. In the tension of the game a lot of things are said that should stay on the pitch."

Spanish media said Barca defender Gerard Pique had to separate a furious Umtiti from Garcia, who later came to the Barcelona dressing-room to make peace with his opponent.

Pique's 82nd-minute goal earned Barcelona a point after Gerard Moreno headed home Garcia's cross to give Espanyol the lead in a feisty derby played on a waterlogged pitch.

(Source: Football Espana)

Gerard Piqué silences the chants after Espanyol almost clip Barca's wings



They were seven minutes away when Gerard Piqué appeared before them, a finger on his lips in the rain. "It was symbolic," he said, and he made sure of that. Espanyol, the only team to have beaten Barcelona in almost six months, were leading again. For the second time in 18 days Barcelona had taken the short bus ride to the RCDE Stadium and, for the second time in 18 days, they were losing 1-0. After Barcelona's defeat to Espanyol in the Copa del Rey, Gerard Moreno's header left them on the verge of a league loss after 21 matches and almost six months, to deny a new record. The water level was rising and the clock was ticking: 80, 81, 82, 83. And that was when Piqué reached the ball, sent it past Diego López and in.

Leo Messi had come off the bench for the final half hour, and it was his delivery that had made it. When the ball hit the net, Ernesto Valverde became the manager with the best unbeaten run in Barcelona's league history, the record clinched at the place where he has a gate named in his honour and his portrait hangs on the wall. Philippe Coutinho was back at the ground where he once played, and he thumped the best shot of the afternoon against the bar, but it had to be Piqué. As his header went in, he turned towards the Espanyol fans and gestured for silence. So they started shouting again.

Few Barcelona players feel the Catalan rivalry quite like Piqué. It is an uneven one and it's tempting to suggest few of the Barcelona players really feel it at all. Which, at heart, is partly what is at play here and is certainly what Piqué played upon. Barcelona's dominance stings, he knows. Espanyol fans feel ignored, like they are invisible in the city and across Catalonia, where the second most popular team is actually Real Madrid. Numerically, it is true, they are comparatively few and while they have tried to make a virtue of that, it is inescapable. "You'll never understand," one Espanyol line has it.

"They call themselves the 'marvellous minority'; I hope they fill their stadium one day," Piqué once said after they met in early 2016. A few days later, he posted a video alongside a message that said "you'll never understand". The video showed Espanyol fans chanting at him: "Shakira is a whore" and "Milan, die". Milan is his son. Recent clashes have been tense and sometimes nasty – another banner declared "Pau, your foot shows us the way", after Espanyol's keeper had trodden on Messi – and that provided some of the backdrop to this weekend's game, for Piqué especially. He, in turn, provided the rest.

When Espanyol beat Barcelona in the Copa del Rey, they erupted. Sergio Busquets accused them of celebrating too much. When Barcelona won the second leg, knocking Espanyol out, Busquets said things had been "put back in place". For many Espanyol fans, it was another illustration of how they feel looked down upon, how their identity is bound up in the fact that FC Barcelona, named as they are and projected as a symbol of Catalonia, eclipse everything and deny Espanyol status as a club that represents the region, nation and city. They have long felt ignored by the authorities. Or worse: sneered at, dismissed.

Named because they were founded by Spanish students, not as a rejection of Catalanism as is often assumed (although the two club's political identifications would become very different), Espanyol Catalanised their name in 1995, when they added "of Barcelona". But in 2009, after over a decade as tenants at the Olympic stadium Montjuic – their former home of Sarriá an increasingly distant memory, loved and lost – Espanyol moved to a new stadium outside the city, almost 20km out past Esplugues and Hospitalet, on a plot that straddled Cornellà and El Prat. And after the derby in the cup, Piqué referred to them as Espanyol de Cornellà instead of Espanyol de Barcelona. That, too, stung.

(Source: Guardian)

IOC rejects request to invite 15 cleared Russians to Pyeongchang

The IOC has rejected a request to invite 15 Russians, who have had their doping bans overturned, to compete at the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. The Kremlin has expressed regret at the decision.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) on Monday rejected a request to invite the 15 Russians to the Pyeongchang Winter Games just days after the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) had overturned their lifetime doping bans.

A statement posted on the IOC's website said that the decision came after a special panel had "unanimously recommended that the IOC not extend an invitation to the Olympic Winter Games Pyeongchang 2018 to the 15 individuals."

"The OAR IG (Olympic Athlete from Russia Implementation Group) confirmed that no additional invitations will be extended to these 15 individuals," it added.

The 13 active and two retired athletes were among 28 Russians whose bans were overturned by the Swiss-based CAS on Thursday. The IOC bans on 11 other Russian athletes was upheld. The two retired athletes, who had their requests denied, would have worked as coaches for the "Olympic Athlete from Russia" team at the Pyongchang Games.

The IOC statement said that the decision had been taken in light of evidence that had not yet been published and therefore was not examined in the CAS process.

Russia argued that the 15 athletes in question should be treated as clean, following last week's CAS decision.

"We very much regret it. We expected that the CAS decision would dispel all suspicions against the athletes," Dmitry Peskov, spokesman for President Vladimir Putin said."We're convinced that the CAS ruling has proved that such suspicions had no grounds."

Late last year, the IOC barred Russia from competing at the the Pyeongchang Olympics, which open on Friday, over evidence of state-sponsored doping. However, 169 Russians who have passed strict anti-doping protocols, are to compete under a neutral flag.

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

Athletes and fans shiver at Winter Games

Sub-zero temperatures could be a real issue for visitors in Pyeongchang for this month's Winter Olympics, but while Games fans shivered, athletes on Monday welcomed the cold.

With freezing temperatures of minus 10 degrees celsius in the day and around minus 20 (minus four degrees Fahrenheit) during the night it could prove challenging for the last week of preparation before the opening on Friday.

In Pyeongchang, big coats, gloves and good shoes were a must to face the cold, enhanced by strong winds. One student from Seoul, on holiday with his parents, said even South Koreans weren't used to such low temperatures.

"It's not usually this cold in this area in this season but very cold, I cannot even think of the words, I think my brain is frozen or something," shivered student Kyungtae Lim, visiting from Seoul.

"I'm a little bit worried about Olympic players... many of the players are from not so cold countries so I don't think they'll perform very well, and I'm also worried about the tourists."

On Friday, when the Games will be officially launched at the opening ceremony, spectators fortunate enough to have got a ticket will have to wrap up at the outdoor stadium at the Olympic Plaza where temperatures will be hard to sustain.

But for the athletes, cold temperatures are good news as the snow and the courses remain stable throughout the competition.

"I'm not (happy about the cold), like my body's not," smiled U.S. mogul skier Brad Wilson.

"But as far as the conditions go, absolutely (I am happy), we're in winter sports for a reason, when it's cold like this it's good, it's a good thing, yeah. As long as we can stay warm."

"We haven't had to deal with a ton of cold this year, it's been pretty warm," added U.S. mogul skier Jaelin Kauf.

"It just means pack more layers... maybe do a lot extra warmup at the top of the course, but that's about it."

(Source: Reuters)

Bach hails North, South Korea for harnessing Olympic spirit

North and South Korea will send a "powerful message of peace" to the world when they march together under one flag at the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Games, International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach said on Monday.

Bach, speaking at the opening of the IOC's 132nd Session in the South Korean coastal city of Gangneung which will host the sliding and skating events at the Feb. 9-25 Games, praised both governments for choosing to harness the Olympic spirit.

"The Olympic spirit has brought two sides together that for too long were divided by mistrust and animosity. The Olympic spirit has brought real hope for a brighter future for everyone on the Korean Peninsula," Bach said.

While the Olympics had opened the door to opportunity for talks between the two Koreas, Bach said it was important to see the process through.

"This initiative gives all parties the chance to reflect on what the future could look like, if we were all guided by this Olympic spirit," he added.

"But Korea's journey does not end here. The political tensions will not disappear overnight. Sport cannot create peace, but the Olympic Games can open the way with powerful symbols."

The talks between Koreas on the Olympics have brought some respite from the standoff over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs.

North Korea are sending 22 athletes to compete in Pyeongchang, including 12 ice hockey players who will form a joint team with the South.

It will mark the first time the two Koreas will compete as a unified team at the Olympics but the decision has been met with anger from some South Korean athletes, while an online petition against the move garnered tens of thousands of signatories.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in said the atmosphere on the peninsula had brightened significantly thanks to the approaching Olympic festival of sport.

"One or two months ago, many countries worried over safety at the Pyeongchang Olympics," Moon said.

"For many, North Korea participating in the Olympics or a peaceful Olympics where North and South Korea forming a unified team seemed impossible.

"However, those worries have disappeared and what seemed impossible is now a reality."

Hopes that the Olympics could prove a springboard to serious dialogue between the two Koreas during the Games received a boost earlier on Monday with news that North Korea's ceremonial leader is to make an unprecedented visit to South Korea this week.

North Korea's official KCNA news agency confirmed that Kim Yong Nam would attend the Pyeongchang Olympics' opening ceremony on Friday.

(Source: Reuters)

Kimia Alizadeh determined to win gold at Tokyo 2020

SPORTS desk

TEHRAN — Iranian taekwondo athlete Kimia Alizadeh says she will participate at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics to win a gold medal.

Alizadeh won a bronze medal at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games. This made her the first Iranian woman to win a medal at the Olympic Games.

"Now, I'm training in the camp far from my family. This time, I'm aiming for gold medal in the Olympics," she told the French magazine Paris Match.

Kimia lost 10kg to participate in the 57kg weight class at the 2016 Summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

She found it so hard to lose weight.

"I didn't like taekwondo at all! Then my coach told my mother I would become Olympics champion! So I thought, why not?" Alizadeh told the French journal.

She will return to the taekwondo court after six months on Friday.

Kimia underwent surgery to repair a torn anterior cruciate ligament in September.

Kimia Alizadeh adores her coach Mahroo Komrani, saying she has played a big role in her success.

"Ms Komrani is coaching me since I was a seven-year-old," she went on to say.

Kimia Alizadeh also won a gold medal in the women's 63-kg class at the Nanjing 2014 Youth Olympic Games.

She beat London 2012 and Rio de Janeiro 2016 gold medalist Jade Jones at the 2015 World Championship to win a bronze medal.

Kimia won a silver medal two years later at the 2017 World Taekwondo Championships.

Samimi elected as Iran Sports Federation for the Disabled President

SPORTS desk

TEHRAN — Hamid Ali Samimi was elected as new President of Islamic Republic of Iran Sports Federation for the Disabled on Monday.

Iran's Deputy Sports Minister Mohammad Reza Davarzani and Shahrokh Shahnazi, the National Olympic Committee Secretary General, attended the elections.

He will serve for four years as President after securing 24 out of 43 votes available in the elections held in Iran's Sports Federation for the Disabled, located in Tehran.

Iraj Rahmani and Abbas Baghestani came second and third with 18 votes and one vote respectively.

Samimi replaced Mahmoud Khosravi Vafa, who was in charge from 1981.

On Sunday, Khosravi Vafa remained as President of Iran's National Paralympic Committee for another four years.

Before the Islamic Republic of Iran Revolution, Sports for the Disabled has been governed under the supervision of Medical Federation as an inactive committee. Iran Sports Federation for the Disabled was established after the glorious Islamic Revolution of Iran, in the latest 1979.

Briton John Green wins Eight-ball Foreign Diplomats' Cup

SPORTS desk

TEHRAN — John Green from Great Britain claimed the title of the Eight-ball Foreign Diplomats' Cup in Tehran on Sunday.

The event brought together diplomats from Armenian, British, Bulgarian, Egyptian, German, Greek, Indian and Tajik embassies and missions at the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Cultural Institute in the Iranian capital city of Tehran.

The diplomats' cup started on Feb. 1, and ended on February 4.

Green finished in first place, followed by German duo Erik Feuring and Horst Stain.

Eight-ball (often spelled 8-ball and sometimes called solids and stripes) is a pool game popular in much of the world.

Standard eight-ball is the second most competitive professional pool game, after nine-ball.

The ultimate object of the game is to legally pocket the eight ball in a called pocket, which can only be done after all of the balls from a player's assigned group have been cleared from the table.

Three British athletes invited to London Marathon

Derek Rae, Rob Smith and Chris Goodwin have been invited to represent the British Athletics team at the Virgin Money London Marathon, which also incorporates the World Para Athletics Marathon Cup, on 22 April.

Rio 2016 Paralympian Rae recorded a significant personal best at the 2017 edition of the event, lowering his time to 2:33:24 to secure a bronze medal in the T56 marathon.

"London last year was very special and the reward for a lot of hard work in the build-up to the event. It was a great moment for me and I'm so glad I had the opportunity to do it in front of a home crowd," he recalled.

"To win a bronze medal in a British vest was an honour and I'm very excited to get another opportunity on this level. I've been training hard in Kenya so I have my eyes on another big performance on home soil in April."

Goodwin will make his maiden international appearance for the British team.

It had previously been announced that London Marathon has also directly invited T53/54 wheelchair athletes including multiple-Paralympic champion David Weir, who won a record seventh title at the prestigious event in the latest edition.

Alongside Weir will be Simon Lawson and JohnBoy Smith in the men's race, while Jade Jones will take part in the women's competition.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Disgraced USA Gymnastics doctor faces additional prison term

Former USA Gymnastics doctor Larry Nassar, already convicted of molesting young women athletes and sentenced to 175 years in prison, is due to receive a further sentence on Monday for his plea of guilty to related charges.

Nassar was sentenced last month in Michigan's Ingham County to sexually abusing female athletes under the guise of medical treatment, and will receive a further sentence on Monday in neighboring Eaton County.

He faces a minimum of 25 years behind bars for the related charges but he is already assured of spending the rest of his life in prison. Nassar is also serving a 60-year federal sentence for child pornography convictions.

The case against Nassar has sparked investigations into how U.S. Olympic officials, USA Gymnastics - the sport's governing body - and Michigan State University, where Nassar also worked, failed to investigate complaints about him going back years.

The fallout has rattled Michigan State and led to the resignation of the school's president.

Faculty leaders at Michigan State are moving to hold a no-confidence vote against the university's Board of Trustees, the Lansing State Journal reported on Sunday.

The newspaper said a ballot was emailed over the weekend to 2,776 faculty members who belong to the university's Academic Congress. The majority — nearly 87 percent of those who responded — called for a no-confidence vote in the trustees at an upcoming Faculty Senate meeting.

A time and date for that emergency meeting has not yet been determined, it said.

In the latest fallout from the scandal, Valeri Liukin, coordinator of the U.S. women's gymnastics team, said on Friday he was resigning. In a statement cited by NBC News, Liukin said, "The present climate causes me, and more importantly my family, far too much stress, difficulty and uncertainty."

USA Gymnastics said it had accepted Liukin's resignation.

(Source: Reuters)

Arzani would jump at chance to be part of Socceroos squad if called up

Melbourne City's teen sensation Daniel Arzani says that if he was selected for the Socceroos' upcoming pre-World Cup friendlies against Norway and Colombia, he would answer the call without hesitation.

Born in Iran, Arzani moved to Sydney with his family as a child and has grown up in Australia. All his soccer development has been in this country, but that hasn't stopped the mounting speculation about which national team he would represent, should he be given the chance.

At a Melbourne City pre-season press day he told journalists that it would be a hard choice between Team Melli and the Socceroos "if I am good enough in the future".

But nurture might be winning out over nature.

"It would be really exciting if I was included. It would be great to see the Socceroo set up and be a part of it. I have played for the junior national teams but never for the seniors," he said on Monday.

"I think for me I am leaning a bit more towards Australia. I grew up here, I played all my football here and went to the AIS. I have a lot of memories here."

The 19-year-old has been winning rave reviews since getting his chance in the Melbourne City line-up a little more than a month ago, tearing defenses apart and creating chances for teammates with clever passes and dribbles.

Such is the impression he is making that many seasoned observers are urging new coach Australia boss Bert van Marwijk to give him a chance in the green and gold to see if he could be the X-factor in the World Cup squad.

The games against Norway in Oslo on March 24 and Colombia in London four days later present the perfect opportunity, not just to see whether the youngster can operate at international level, but to cement his ties to Australia and lessen the chances of Iran calling him up to their World Cup squad.

Former Socceroos goalkeeper and Fox Sports TV pundit Mark Bosnich has no doubts that Arzani is ready despite having only played a handful of A-League games and that Australia should do whatever it takes to get him into national team colors

The ex-Manchester United shotstopper told Fox Sports on Sunday night that if it was up to him, he would "just arrange a game against anyone and just cap him".

Arzania has always said that his allegiance was a difficult choice.

He still speaks Persian at home with his family and will consult with his parents before making a final call, but, he says, "the decision will be made by me".

(Source: smh.com.au)

Macedonian Bojan Najdenov joins Iran's Esteghlal

TASNIM — The Iranian football club, Esteghlal, completed the signing of Macedonian central midfielder Bojan Najdenov on Monday.

The 26-year-old player has signed an 18-month contract with the Blues.

The details of the Najdenov's contract have not been revealed.

Free agent Najdenov most recently played at the Egyptian club Smouha Sporting Club.

The Blues need to strengthen their team for the 2018 AFC Champions League.

Esteghlal have been drawn along with Al Rayyan of Qatar, Al Hilal of Saudi Arabia and Al Ain of the UAE in Group D of the competition.

Esteghlal will meet Al Rayyan of Qatar on Feb. 13 in Doha in their opening match.

Winfried Schafer's team also sit sixth in Iran Professional League, 19 points behind pacesetters Persepolis.

Iran women's tennis team departs for Bahrain to attend BNP Paribas Fed Cup

Press TV — The Iran women's national tennis team has left for Bahrain to participate in the BNP Paribas Fed Cup (Asia Group II women), which is scheduled to be held in the tiny Persian Gulf kingdom later this month.

Sara Azaddoust, Kimia Rahmani, Kimia Asbaghipour and Sharzad Bani Saeed will represent the Islamic Republic of Iran during the continental sports event.

The squad will be under the tutelage of Mehrafza Manouchehri as manager, Farnaz Fasihi as head coach and Abbas Khiltash as technical manager.

The BNP Paribas Fed Cup (Asia Women II), which will be organized by Bahrain Tennis Federation (BTF) and staged under the supervision of the International Tennis Federation, will kick off in Isa Town on February 6, and will run through February 10, 2018.

Tennis players from fourteen countries, namely Bahrain, Indonesia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, New Zealand, Oman, Pacific Oceania, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Uzbekistan, will take part in the event.

Froome to make season debut at Ruta del Sol

Britain's Chris Froome will make his 2018 season debut at next week's Ruta del Sol, his Team Sky said on Monday.

The 32-year-old four-times Tour de France winner is under investigation after returning an adverse drugs test at last year's Tour of Spain which he won.

He was found to have double the allowed amount of the legal drug Salbutamol in his system in a test after stage 18 of the Vuelta in September.

Team Sky and Froome, who has denied any wrongdoing, are presenting their case to the International Cycling Union.

"I'm confident that we will be able to get to the bottom of what has happened and I'm working hard with the team to do that," Froome said in a statement.

"Obviously, I understand that this situation has created a lot of uncertainty. I completely get why there has been so much interest and speculation."

The Ruta del Sol starting on Feb. 14 will be Froome's first competitive appearance since his third-place finish in the time trial at the world championships in Norway last September.

Team Principal Dave Brailsford admitted it was a tough situation.

"We all recognize that these are difficult circumstances but it's important for all sides that this process is conducted fairly before a final conclusion is reached," he said.

"It is a complex situation but we're working as hard as we can with Chris to resolve things as soon as possible."

Froome will line up in the five-day stage race in Andalusia, which he won three years ago, after completing a training stint in South Africa.

"I have put in a hard training block in January," Froome said. "It's been good to be out on my bike and to get the miles under my belt."

(Source: Reuters)

Intl. Fajr Badminton Cup kicks off in Zanjan

MNA — The 27th International Fajr Badminton Cup began on Monday in Zanjan with 15 countries attending the games.

Zanjan is hosting teams from Germany, Turkey, India, Azerbaijan, Vietnam, Jordan, Iraq, Myanmar, Australia, Malaysia, Portugal, Mexico, Syria and Moldavia in the 27th International Fajr Badminton Cup, which is being held in single and double categories for both men and women.

The tournament is an open event, and has no age restrictions and players of all age groups can participate.

In the men's category, 12 national players along with six foreign athletes had been practicing and 25 women from Iranian provinces have been training for the annual event, in the women's category.

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Protagonists are always unconventional: "Lottery" director

ART desk

TEHRAN – Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian, director of the sex trafficking drama "Lottery", has said that protagonists in all film genres act unconventionally.

He made the remarks at a press conference on Sunday in response to comments from journalists that claimed the revengeful act of the film's main character might be harmful to society.

"Anyway, this is a film and when the law is inefficient, illegal acts are perpetrated, and this may occur in any society," Mahdavian said during the press conference that was organized after a screening of his movie at 36th Fajr Film Festival.

"This is an alarm at the inefficiency of laws... and we see such actions in the country," he added.

Mahdavian also criticized journalists for adapting a view that he claimed could cause more restrictive censorship on cinema.

He said that his film was repeatedly censored by official organizations and said, "Let's allow filmmakers to have their own views."

The story of "Lottery" revolves around trafficking in Iranian women to Arab countries.

Earlier in July 2017, the culture officials had refused to authorize the screenplay of the movie due to its sensitive subject and asked Mahdavian, as writer and director, to make modifications in his story.

"I really don't remember what parts of the screenplay were cut... but the original version had more violent and fascistic ending, by which I suppose would have made the film would be more astounding," he stated.

"However, we were forced to modify it frequently and the result was what you saw on the screen," he noted.

Producer Mahmud Razavi also said that he ruined pairs of his shoes on the way to get the green light from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for the film.

Director Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian (1st R) and producer Mahmud Razavi (2nd R) and their colleagues attend a press conference about their latest film "Lottery" during the 36th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran's Mellat Cineplex on February 4, 2018. (ILNA/Mostafa Safari)

Razavi was the producer of campaign films for Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf, Hassan Rouhani's main rival over the past two presidential elections. Therefore, some journalists accused him of undermining the Rouhani government with such a sensitive subject.

Razavi denied any scheme to undermine the Rouhani administration and said that he would make the film even if Qalibaf had been elected president.

"I would have made the film within ten days even if Qalibaf were president," he noted.

The organizers of the Fajr Film Festival have arranged additional screenings for "Lottery" by popular demand.

Razavi was also the producer of Mahdavian's debut film "Standing in the Dust" and his second movie "The Midday Event", both of which won the awards for best film at the Fajr festival in 2016 and 2017.

"Woodpecker" leads Fajr ten most popular movies

ART desk

TEHRAN – "Woodpecker", a drama that centers on the isolation of a female addict, topped the ten most popular movies at the 36th Fajr Film Festival, the organizer announced in a poll conducted online.

Sara Bahrami acts in a scene from "Woodpecker".

Starring Sara Bahrami, Amin Hayai and Mahnaz Afshar, "Woodpecker" has been directed by Behruz Shoeibi. In addition, Mahmud Razavi is the producer of the film.

"Woodpecker" is followed by "Cold Sweat" by Soheil Beiraqi and "Lottery" by Mohammad-Hossein Mahdavian.

The other films are as follows in descending order of popularity: "The Lost Strait" by Bahram Tavakkoli, "Istanbul Junction" by Mostafa Kiai, "Don't Be Embarrassed" by Reza Maqsudi, "The Underwater Cypress" Mohammad-Ali Basheh Ahangar, "Sheeple" by Hooman Seyyedi, "At Damascus Time" by Ebrahim Hatamikia and "Bomb, a Love Story" by Peyman Maadi.

The results of the poll may change before the end of the festival on February 11. The leading movie on the list will receive the best audience award during the closing ceremony of the event.

"Unfinished Lights" director Mostafa Soltani honored at Indian festival

ART desk

TEHRAN – Mostafa Soltani from Iran has won the award for best director for his movie "Unfinished Lights" at the 5th Noida International Film Festival in India.

Shaqayeq Farahani acts in a scene from "Unfinished Lights" by Mostafa Soltani.

The film is about a writer named Jalal who lives in poverty, but ignores suggestions to write something challenging his ideology.

The winners of the one-day festival were announced on January 28, the organizers have announced.

"Dad Is Pretty" by Soo-min Park & Seung-hyeob Kim from Korea won the best feature film award.

The festival is a tribute to the city Noida where Miniboxoffice, India's only independent short films marketing, promotion, distribution and film festival organizing company, was launched in 2010.

The goal of the festival is to empower independent filmmakers and help foster the growth of independent filmmakers.

Ashgabat to host Iranian artists for cultural festival

CULTURE desk

TEHRAN – An Iranian cultural festival will open at the Mukams Palace of the State Cultural Center of Turkmenistan in Ashgabat on Wednesday.

A poster for an Iranian cultural festival in Turkmenistan

Variety of programs, including concerts, film screenings and exhibitions of Persian handicrafts, have been arranged for the 3-day event, Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) announced in a press release on Monday.

The festival at the Magtymguly National Music and Drama Theater is scheduled to come to an end on Friday with a joint performance by musicians from the two countries.

Plans are for the Iranian artists invited to the country to visit tourist attractions and historical sites of the country during their stay.

The ICRO is the main organizers of the festival.

New Persian translation of "Pinocchio" published in Tehran

CULTURE desk

TEHRAN – A new Persian translation of the original Italian version of Carlo Collodi's 1883 novel "The Adventures of Pinocchio" by puppet theater director Behruz Gharibpur has recently been published in Tehran.

Ofoq Publications, which has obtained the right to publish the book in Iran, unveiled the Persian version in a special ceremony on Sunday.

The book, which carries the illustrations from the original version by Roberto Innocenti, has been edited by Mehdi Hajvani.

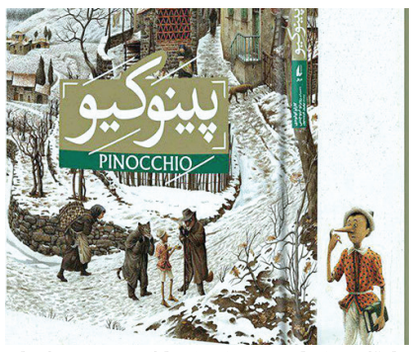
Gahribpur and Mostafa Rahmandoost, who had previously translated the book from its English version into Persian, attended the ceremony.

In his brief remarks, Gharibpur who has so far staged several puppet shows including "Khayyam" and "Rumi", talked of his wish to stage a puppet show of Pinocchio in the future.

He also recommended that people read other translations by famous figures such as Rahmandoost and Sadeq Chubak, and compare them with his version since each version has its own flavor.

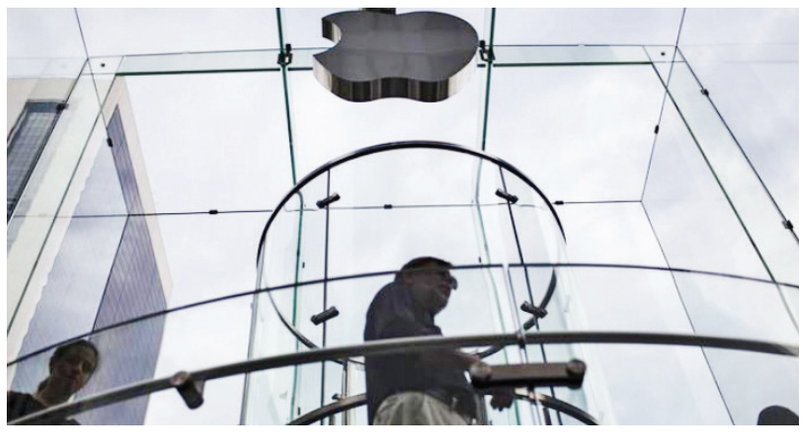
"I have somehow tried to feel the naughty Italian Pinocchio and have done my best to carve Pinocchio. So if you feel you have liked the translation it would be a great honor for me," he said.

Pinocchio is a wooden puppet carved by a woodcarver named Geppetto in a village near Florence and he dreams of becoming a real boy. He is famous for his nose that becomes longer when he lies.



The front cover of the Persian translation of "The Adventures of Pinocchio" by Behruz Gharibpur

Apple Music U.S. subscriber growth outpacing Spotify: WSJ



Customers enter the Apple store on 5th Avenue beneath an Apple logo in the Manhattan borough of New York City, July 21, 2015. (Reuters/Mike Segar)

NEW YORK (Reuters) — Apple Music is on track to overtake Spotify by number of U.S. subscribers, the Wall Street Journal reported on Sunday, citing people in the music business familiar with figures reported by the two services.

Spotify is currently the largest music streaming service globally, with Apple Music coming in second.

Representatives for both Apple and Spotify could not immediately be reached for comment on Sunday.

Apple Music's U.S. subscribers grow about five percent monthly, while Spotify's U.S. subscribers grow by about two percent monthly, the Wall Street Journal report said, citing people familiar with the numbers.

Neither Apple Music nor Spotify publicly breaks out figures for its U.S. subscribers or any other markets.

Apple Music told the Wall Street Journal it now has 36 million global subscribers, up from 30 million the company reported in September. Spotify said on Twitter in January that it had 70 million subscribers.

According to the report, the number of subscribers to both services are often boosted by individual users who are on family plans and users with discounted subscriptions that come in a bundle along with other services.

Spotify is due to carry out a highly anticipated initial public offering in the first half of 2018.

The company has confidentially filed for an IPO with U.S. regulators, according to a source familiar with the matter.

Note: Reuters has not verified this story and does not vouch for its accuracy.

Timberlake back at Super Bowl halftime, no wardrobe malfunctions

Justin Timberlake performs during half time of Super Bowl LII between the New England Patriots and the Philadelphia Eagles at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis, Feb 4, 2018. (Charles LeClaire-USA Today)

MINNEAPOLIS (Reuters) — Justin Timberlake posed for a selfie, paid tribute to music legend Prince and played it safe at a halftime Super Bowl performance on Sunday, returning to the gig where he and Janet Jackson introduced "wardrobe malfunction" to the American lexicon.

Timberlake danced and sang his way through a roughly 12-minute set before a television audience estimated at over 100 million people, mixing a song from his new album and staples such as "Can't Stop the Feeling" that made him an intentionally known solo artist.

In an homage in Minneapolis to the state's native son Prince, who died in 2016, Timberlake played a white piano and sat beneath a projection of Prince on a screen to sing a cover of "I would Die 4 U."

The only major piece of clothing that came off this time was Timberlake's jacket. In 2004, he infamously ripped off part of Janet Jackson's garment during their halftime show in Houston.

Timberlake said via social media just ahead of his 2018 performance that he would not be sharing the Super Bowl stage with Jackson on Sunday.

Jackson ended up taking most of the blame for the 2004 incident, with some radio stations boycotting her music. Timberlake came away from the incident with little damage to his career.

A few hours ahead of the game, Jackson's fans stormed social media and made #JanetJacksonAppreciationDay the top trending item on U.S. Twitter. Supporters of the singer flooded the social media platform with messages of appreciation for Jackson, who as a solo artist has sold more than double the number of records of Timberlake, according to Recording Industry Association of America data.

"Jumanji" regains top spot for modest Super Bowl weekend

LOS ANGELES, (Variety.com) — Sony's resilient "Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle" has returned to the top of the North American box office, leading a modest Super Bowl weekend with $11 million at 3,553 sites.

The session caps a remarkable run for the Dwayne Johnson-Kevin Hart action comedy, which also won the box office on its third, fourth and fifth weekends. "Jumanji" has become the 42nd highest domestic grosser of all time with $352.6 million, less than $500,000 behind Johnson's "Furious 7" for the 41st spot.

"Jumanji", which declined just 32 percent, is only the 11th title to top $11 million in its seventh weekend. It's the lowest total for a first-place film since the second weekend of "The Hitman's Bodyguard" won the final frame of August.

Fox's "Maze Runner: The Death Cure", which won the box office last weekend, finished second with $10.2 million from 3,793 locations. The weekend's sole opener, Helen Mirren's horror-thriller "Winchester", launched in third with $9.3 million at 2,480 venues, topping modest expectations which had been in the $6 million to $8 million range.

Overall domestic business was typically modest for a Super Bowl weekend with $92 million overall, according to comScore, as studios remain reluctant to open major titles during the frenzy surrounding the pro football championship. The lowest recent Super Bowl weekend came in at $86 million in 2014, when the third weekend of "Ride Along" led with $12 million.

The 2018 box office has remained close to even with last year thanks to "Jumanji", with $1.06 billion through Sunday, down 0.5 percent from last year at the same point.

"'Jumanji' gets the MVP box office award for Super Bowl weekend with a stunning late run ascension to the number one spot as 'Maze Runner' adds to its total and 'Winchester' enjoys a bit of counter programming success amidst a sea of Oscar contenders over what is a typically slow moviegoing weekend," said Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst with comScore.