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Iran honors top books of the year **16**



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U.S. presence in other states 'a recipe for disaster'

Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi (L) talking to Tehran Times & Mehr News Agency Managing Director Ali Asgari.



Sochi summit helping solve the Syrian crisis

Last Tuesday, the Syrian Peace Summit, called the "National Dialogue Congress", was held in Sochi, Russia, with different groups of participants including members of the Bashar al-Assad's administration, its supporters and some opposition groups.

Russia initiated the summit and received support from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey. The talks aimed to foster peace with direct dialogue between the Syrian government and its opponents. Russia invited 1,600 politicians and political activists to the conference, but for various reasons only about 350 people showed up.

Opponents of the Syrian government interrupted the opening speech by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who said that Russian President Vladimir Putin also supported the United Nations peace talks.

Many Syrian opponents, as well as Western countries, were skeptical about Russia's intentions and purposes at Sochi. They believe Putin's goal is to create a post-war structure in Syria to promote the continuation of the presidency of Bashar al-Assad. This is fundamentally different from the goals of the anti-Syrian Front, which initially sought to reform the existing structure and overthrow Assad.

In response to the Sochi Summit, the US claimed the conference was unilateral and designed to benefit the Syrian regime solely. Subsequently, charges were brought against the Syrian government, such as the use of chemical weapons. A spokesman for the U.S. also blamed Russia, while Kurds and secular forces fighting with Turkey's government boycotted Sochi. The main reason for the Kurds' lack of participation in this conference was Turkey's attack on Afrin in northern Syria and the suppression of the Kurds. Russia was apparently silent on this issue.

The Kremlin spokesman said that perhaps little could be expected from the Sochi conference. However, the meeting ended with a final statement.

The presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Russia and Turkey issued a joint statement reaffirming the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Syria, and agreed to continue to work together until the final defeat of the terrorist groups. **->7**

Qatar won't compromise on its national interest: Adib-Moghaddam

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — According to a Professor at the London Middle East Institute, the mistrust between Qatar and the UAE-Saudi is so pronounced that it is unlikely to be overcome in the short term.

Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, who is also the author of Psycho-nationalism: Global thought and Iranian imaginations believes that the crisis is resolvable, as of yet, because "the demands are unreasonable and the treatment of Qatar by Saudi Arabia and the UAE has been disrespectful and self-defeating."

Adib-Moghaddam, too, a professor in Glob-

al Thought and Comparative Philosophies and Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute, adds that "I don't see Qatar committing to anything. The country's diplomats will not compromise on the national interest of the country."

Here is the full text of the interview:

■ A summit is to be held in May in the United States where the Emir of Qatar, crown prince of Saudi Arabia and crown prince of the UAE are going to address the crisis in Qatar. Will the talks bring forth real solutions to the disputes between these Persian Gulf Arab states and Qatar?

A: The Trump administration has tried to solve the problem for some time now without success. I

think the mistrust between Qatar on the one side and the UAE/Saudi on the other is so pronounced that it is unlikely to be overcome in the short term. Diplomacy can only work within a context that allows for it. This is not the case here yet.

■ US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said that the crisis in the Persian Gulf region is not only limited to the Arab countries, but it will eventually affect the United States. What kind of losses does the United States have to endure?

A: The Trump administration has tried to forge a new block with so called "friendly Arab states", which always also means that they are mute about the plight of the Palestinian people, Israel and the United States. **->7**

Lebanon Higher Defense Council: Israel border wall an act of aggression

The country's top council of political, military and security heads Wednesday issued instructions to confront Israel if it builds a planned border wall on territory considered Lebanese.

The Higher Defense Council held an extraordinary meeting to address the Israeli plans to build a security wall on the southern border and also its recent claims to areas where Lebanon is looking to explore oil and gas resources.

"A decision was made to give orders to counter any Israeli attempt to build a wall along the Lebanese border as well acting on all levels to counter Israeli statements surrounding [oil and gas exploration] Block 9," a statement from the Higher Defense Council said.

The council said that any action to build the wall on Lebanese territory would be seen as an act of aggression and President Michel Aoun demanding that attention is paid to 13 specific

points that the government has reservations about. The statement also said that the wall - if constructed - would contravene UN Security Council Resolution 1701 that ended the 2006 war.

The planned wall is expected to cross some numerous points near south Lebanon's Blue Line that Lebanon has reservations about the border demarcation.

The council consists of Lebanon's top security and political leaders including the head of the Army, Internal Security Forces, General Security as well as the president and the prime minister.

The specifics of decisions taken at the meeting remain confidential, in accordance with Lebanese Law, the State-run National News Agency reported.

However, the NNA did divulge that the meeting tackled Israel's "intentions to establish a wall on the southern border of Lebanon," and their "ambitions for Block 9."

Lebanese officials have sounded the alarm over comments made last week by Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman that oil and gas exploration projects in Lebanon's maritime Block 9 were "very provocative." Lieberman urged international firms not to carry out work in the block and said it belonged to Israel. A consortium of companies has already won a license to make explorations in the block.

President Aoun chaired the meeting with Prime Minister Saad Hariri; various ministers; Army head Gen. Joseph Aoun; General Security head Maj. Gen. Abbas Ibrahim; Internal Security Forces head Maj. Gen. Imad Othman; the head of State Security Maj. Gen. Tony Saliba; the Director-general of the Higher Defense Council Brig. Gen. Tony Mansour and the Head of the ISF's Information Branch Brig. Gen. Khaled Hammoud. (Source: Daily Star)



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"Emperor of Hell" neutralized by censorship: producer

A R T **TEHRAN** — Producer Mohammad Khazaei has said that his movie "Emperor of Hell" on the key role of Saudi muftis in the rise of Daesh has been nullified in the wake of state censorship.

"The screenplay was revised 27 times to get the approval of cultural officials and everybody tried to prevent the film from being made," Khazaei said in a press conference on Tuesday after a screening of the movie during the 36th Fajr Film Festival. **->16**

Turkish FM visits Tehran for talks with Zarif, Rouhani

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Turkish foreign minister visited Tehran on Wednesday to hold talks with his counterpart Mohammad Javad Zarif and President Hassan Rouhani.

"Visiting Tehran. Had a fruitful meeting with Foreign Minister @JZarif. Will also meet President @HassanRouhani," Mevlut Cavusoglu tweeted after his meet-

ing with Zarif.

According to media, the Iranian and Turkish officials held talks on bilateral, regional and international issues, including the results of a recent conference in Sochi on the settlement of crisis in Syria.

Iran has criticized Turkish military operation in northwestern Syria, saying it is a violation of the Syrian territorial integrity.

Over 4,600 industrial projects inaugurated during 10 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — During the ten-month period ended on January 20, 2018, some 4,616 industrial projects have been inaugurated in Iran, IRNA quoted the deputy industry minister on Wednesday.

According to Mahmoud Navvabi, who made the remarks during the inaugural ceremony of two industrial parks in the northern province of Gilan, the number will reach 6,000 by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018).

Iraqi forces launch offensive against new militant outfit in north

Iraq's armed forces have launched a large-scale military operation along a planned oil transit route in the north against a new militant outfit reportedly comprised of Daesh remnants and Kurdish mafia elements.

Iraqi army and police forces, backed by the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), also known as Hashd al-Sha'abi, started the campaign in coordination with the Kurdish Peshmerga troops in the cities of Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu on Wednesday.

"With the goal of enforcing security and stability, destroying sleeper cells, and continuing clearing operations, an operation was launched in the early hours of this morning to search and clear areas east of Tuz Khurmatu," the Iraqi armed forces said in a statement.

Shortly after the beginning of the operation, Iraqi media reported that the government forces had managed to liberate two villages from the grip of the militants. **->13**



Woe to leaders mired in the "credibility trap"

What's really going on in the U.S.? Why is there internal political and social turmoil and division?

Why are groups and so-called leaders at each other's throats and why is the general populace so apparently discontented? Why do things seem to be falling apart in some respects and the finger of blame has been improperly pointed at other countries and their leaders such that the U.S. vilifies Russia and Iran and Syria and North Korea, to name four, and other countries and sometimes with deadly military consequences? (And woe to other countries that finds themselves in the same straits, for it will have landed there not because of some twist of fate, but rather because internal systems of checks and balances have been badly abused and compromised in the U.S. And interestingly, there is a name for this state of affairs, when reform and healthy change become virtually impossible. It's called the "credibility trap".

So what is this, this "trap"? It exists when the regulatory, political and informational functions of a society have been so badly damaged by a long term, lambent corruption in vital spheres that they can no longer address any meaningful correction or reform without also, at least incidentally, implicating those who point it out. The status quo in such a society has at the least and for too long tolerated the corruption and fraud, and probably those in power also profited and continue to profit from it, such that the society's power brokers have become susceptible to blackmail. The net result of this is that failed or failing policies are often sustained, because the admittance of failure is just not an option, and it has become almost impossible to dislodge the perpetrators even if, on the surface anyway, there still exists "democratic" or other mechanisms that ought to be capable of ridding the society of them.

If this concept called the "credibility trap" seems like a lot to take in, read the above paragraph again. It makes sense, and it is precisely where the U.S hangs now, and maybe some other countries, too, that have lost their way. **->7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Shamkhani
lauds Setad for
serving people

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani on Wednesday lauded Setad as a legacy of Imam Khomeini, who founded the organization to serve the people.

Setad's duty is to serve the deprived and poor people and has served the nation since it was founded, Shamkhani said, ISNA reported.

"The vast activities of this valuable organization are in support of the important and spiritual pillars of the Islamic Republic that directly and indirectly supports the deprived and poor," he stated.

He also said Setad should be complementary to public and private sectors and not a competitor.



Iran to sue
U.S. over troop
deployment in
Persian Gulf

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The commander of Iran's border guards has blamed the presence of foreign forces, including those of the U.S., for insecurity and turmoil in the Persian Gulf, stressing that Tehran will lodge a complaint with the international bodies against them.

"We will pursue the issue legally through the international bodies to prevent possible harms and we will not allow this presence to foment insecurity and fear in the region," Brigadier General Qassem Rezayee told reporters on Wednesday, according to Fars.



Tehran-Moscow
contract not an
oil-for-goods
deal: ambassador

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Half of the funds that Iran receives from the contract to supply oil to Russia will be spent on financing joint projects, Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Mehdi Sanaei has said.

"We do not have a contract on oil swap for goods," Sanaei said in an interview with RIA Novosti published on Wednesday.

He added that this is a contract for the purchase of oil. Under the contract, 50 percent of revenues from oil sales will be spent on implementation of various joint projects, while the remaining part of the amount is transferred to the Central Bank of Iran, he said.



Intelligence
forces discover
one ton of
narcotics

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian intelligence forces have confiscated one ton of opium in the southern province of Bandar Abbas.

The drugs were hidden in huge stones, Intelligence Ministry said, IRNA reported.

The shipment, comprising 100 packages weighing about one ton, was discovered in an operation. One person was arrested during the operation, the ministry added.



Russian
parliament
speaker to visit
Tehran in April

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Vyacheslav Volodin, chairman of the Russian State Duma (lower house of parliament), said on Wednesday that he plans to make a visit to Iran on April 8-9.

"We are scheduled to visit Iran on April 8-9," Volodin told reporters.

A source in the office of the Duma speaker told TASS that it was going to be an official visit.

The political and economic relationship between Iran and Russia has increased considerably in recent years. The two countries have set high goals for deepening economic ties.



Iraqi army
moves to secure
planned oil
route to Iran

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iraqi forces launched a security operation along a planned oil transit route to Iran on Wednesday, saying it was clearing and "destroying sleeper cells" in the mountainous border area where two armed groups operate.

"With the goal of enforcing security and stability, destroying sleeper cells, and continuing clearing operations, an operation was launched in the early hours of this morning to search and clear areas east of Tuz Khurmato," the Iraqi armed forces said in a statement, Reuters reported on Wednesday.

Iraq and Iran have agreed to swap up to 60,000 barrels per day of crude produced from Kirkuk for Iranian oil to be delivered to southern Iraq.

Iran: U.S. regards UN Security Council as 'toolbox'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian deputy ambassador to the UN said on Tuesday that the Trump administration is using the UN Security Council as a "toolbox".

"It seems that the current U.S. administration now is even more enthusiastic to follow that reckless and failed pattern of regarding the Security Council as its 'toolbox'," Es'haq Al-e-Habib said during a speech at the UN.

Following is full text of his speech published by IRNA:

Allow me to first congratulate the State of Kuwait for assuming the Security Council Presidency and convey my Delegation's appreciation for convening this open debate on the working methods of this Council. Indeed, this is an interesting topic for discussion needed now, more than ever, in order to examine and identify the practical and efficient methods to confront the real challenges of international peace and security.

In view of the time limit, I will highlight the following UN Charter based points that can improve the working methods of the Council upon their implementation and enhance its efficiency in fulfilling its primary responsibility.

The provisional rules of the procedure of the Security Council, which have remained provisional for 70 years, should be formalized in order to improve its transparency and accountability.

Closed meetings and informal consultations should be kept to a minimum and should be the exception rather than the rule.

The establishment of subsidiary organs, mechanisms or formats by the Council should be in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations. Furthermore, the Council has a responsibility to ensure that they function within the limits of their mandates. For example, some of the activities undertaken by SCAD clearly fall beyond Note 44 by the President of the Security Council



regarding the tasks under the resolution 2231, while they resist to undertake activities being assigned to them by the same Note. Despite the fact that this Council has been repeatedly informed by us and some Members of the council, those deficiencies continue to exist in SG reports each time the Council discusses this issue.

The annual reports of the Security Council to the General Assembly should be more explanatory, comprehensive and analytical. They should assess the work of the Council, including cases in which the Council has failed to act. They should also include the views expressed by members during the consideration of agenda items. We also call on the Council to elaborate on the circumstances under which it adopts the various outcomes, be they resolutions, presidential statements, press statements or other elements to the press.

Pursuant to Article 15, paragraph 1, and Article 24, paragraph 3, of the Charter, the Council should submit special reports for

consideration by the General Assembly. However, it does not.

The Council should ensure that its monthly assessments are comprehensive and analytical. The General Assembly may consider proposing parameters for the elaboration of such assessments.

The Council should fully take into account the recommendations of the General Assembly on matters relating to international peace and security consistent with Article 11, paragraph 2, of the Charter.

The Council should cease its ongoing attempts to shift issues on the agenda of the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council over to the Security Council and the encroachment by the latter on the functions and powers of the Assembly.

It is absolutely vital for the credibility of the Security Council to reject the intentions to turn it into a tool to pursue national political interests and agendas. Unfortunately, it is happening. This intention to use the Council only as a tool for more dangerous ends could

not have been made clearer than in the statement by the Permanent Representative of the United States at the meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee on 5 March 2006: "It is critical that we use the Council to help mobilize international public opinion. Rest assured, though, we are not relying on the Security Council as the only tool in our toolbox to address this problem."

It seems that the current U.S. administration now is even more enthusiastic to follow that reckless and failed pattern of regarding the Security Council as its "toolbox".

Two outrageous examples of such an approach occurred in January this year:

- On 5 January 2018, the United States pushed for an emergency meeting on an issue that flagrantly falls outside of the scope of its mandate.

- On 29 January 2018, the US Mission set up a show in DC to present the members of the Security Council with some fabricated evidence, such as a Saudi-supplied destroyed yet intact missile.

These examples are a discredit for the Security Council, especially when recalling the increasing list of Security Council failures to take the slightest action when it comes to genuine issues, such as the long-lasting occupation of Palestinian territory by the Israeli regime, a regime, emboldened by impunity provided by U.S. to it, shamelessly and flagrantly continues to ridicule and violate all Council's resolutions on the Middle East or the most catastrophic humanitarian situation in Yemen after almost three years of war. These failures of the Council attributable to the obstructionist approach by the U.S., is a matter of disappointment and frustration for multilateral diplomacy.

I hope this open debate will help to render the Council more democratic, representative, transparent and accountable in all its activities, approaches and procedures, functioning more efficiently and effectively as well as focusing on its real responsibility in maintaining international peace and security.

Boosting Iran-Russia co-op essential: Larijani

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Tuesday that it is essential for Iran and Russia to expand cooperation in order to "make more advances".

"Iran and Russia have had good cooperation especially on regional issues and the Syrian issue," he said during a meeting with Leonid Slutsky, the special envoy of State Duma.

Larijani said that Iran welcomes

expansion of cooperation with Russia in various other areas.

He added that the two countries have capacities to expand economic ties.

Elsewhere, he praised Chairman of the State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin's efforts to boost relations.

For his part, Slutsky said that Russia is ready to study all the capacities to expand ties.

He also called for expansion of parliamentary relations.

The motion to question Rouhani submitted to Majlis economic committee

POLITICS **TEHRAN** —The motion to ask questions from President Hassan Rouhani was submitted to the Majlis economic committee on Tuesday, Hassan Hosseini Shahroudi, a committee member, told Tasnim news agency on Wednesday.

The MP said the questions center around finance and credit institutes, Hosseini Shahroudi said.

The move to ask questions from the president would start after the Majlis finishes its

study of the national budget bill, he said.

The proceeding is that either the president himself attends the parliament to answer questions or he instead names a representatives to the committee members.

If the MPs who have raised questions become convinced by the answers of the president's representative there would be no need for the president otherwise he himself should come to the Majlis and answer the questions.

The plan to ask questions from the president has been signed by 76 MPs.

U.S. presence in other states 'a recipe for disaster': Qassemi

"I think America and other countries should leave the region alone and let North and South Korea resolve their issues and differences through dialogue."

good relations with Iran's leaders.

"We have many similar viewpoints about the region, but we have our differences as well."

He emphasized that U.S. activities in Syria would lead to instability and growth of extremism and terrorism in the region.

"So America's presence in Syria can definitely be a dangerous presence which can create problems for Syria as well as the entire region," he said.

Due to the conflict of interests between America and other countries in Syria, it can fan the flames of war, terrorism and insecurity in the war-torn country, he warned.

In recent decades, the Foreign Ministry spokesman said, Washington's "flawed policies" as well as its "unjustifiable" presence have been the root causes of many of the region's problems.

"As an example," he said, "you can see Afghanistan's domestic circumstances today, years after America entered the country."

"U.S. President Donald Trump is more of a businessman than politician, and tries to intensify frictions across the world so that his country could benefit."

through creating a new epic in this rallies and tell the ill-wishers of the Islamic Iran that we follow path of Imam Khomeini," Rouhani told a cabinet meeting.

He added, "We are very happy that at the 39th anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the people of Islamic Iran are moving on the path of the revolution's causes and goals more powerfully than

ever."

People's participation at this year's rallies will disappoint the ill-wishers, he noted.

In an indirect reference to the unrest in early January during which some rioters tried to derail protestors' main demands, Rouhani said, "During the past months, enemy hatched plots against the Islamic Republic of Iran and the people responded them vigilantly... this year, the people



yet important region which is not in good conditions right now," he said, stressing that the tension that exists there is not to the benefit of the region and the world.

The spokesman said other countries' interference in the Korean Peninsula can lead to dire consequences, whose ultimate result would be nothing but "war, bloodshed and insecurity" for the region and the entire globe.

Unfortunately, he continued, U.S. President Donald Trump is more of a businessman than politician, and tries to intensify frictions across the world so that his country could benefit.

"Since last year, tension across the world has soared and concerns about such heightened tensions are expressed more regularly," he said.

Qassemi further said that such approach toward politics can be "very dangerous" for world peace.

Fortunately, he said, the majority of the world, including European countries, do not see eye to eye with Trump and more and more countries openly voice their protests toward his policies.

should show their support for religious and national culture and also national and revolutionary goals more determinedly than ever."

In the protest rallies which started on January 28 and died down after a week, U.S. President Donald Trump, Mojahedin Khalq Organization (MKO) and Reza Pahlavi, the son of the last shah of Iran, were provoking people against the Islamic Republic system.

German coalition government formed

German Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservatives and the Social Democrats (SPD) Wednesday agreed to a coalition deal, taking Europe's economic powerhouse closer to a new government after months of uncertainty that unnerved partner countries and investors.

In a move likely to mean a shift in Germany's euro zone policy, media reported the SPD would take the finance ministry that was until recently presided over by conservative Wolfgang Schäuble, widely despised in struggling euro zone states during his eight-year tenure for his focus on austerity.

SPD leader Martin Schulz said earlier this week that his party had ensured that an agreement with the conservatives would put an end to "forced austerity" and set up an investment budget for the euro zone.

Handing over the crucial finance ministry suggests the conservatives had to make big concessions to get the SPD to agree to renew the 'grand coalition' that has governed Germany since 2013.

Bruised by its worst election result in the post-war era, the SPD had planned to revamp itself in opposition and only agreed to the coalition talks reluctantly. Its 464,000 members still have the chance to veto the deal in a postal ballot.

In a message posted alongside a photo of Schulz and other SPD negotiators smiling, the SPD negotiators wrote: "Tired but happy. There is a treaty! Finally. Now the final details are being worked into the text."

The agreement will lift much of the uncertainty that has weakened Germany's role in international affairs and raised questions about how long Merkel will stay in her job.

News of a deal will bring some relief to investors and partner countries, who had been concerned by Merkel's failure to cobble together a government in more than four months at a time when Europe is facing multiple challenges - including the need for euro zone reform and Britain's looming departure from the EU.

A negotiating source said the SPD would have the finance and labor ministries while media reported the party would also secure the justice, family and environment ministries.

Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) will get the economy and defense ministries while their Bavarian allies,



the Christian Social Union (CSU), will provide the interior minister in the form of Horst Seehofer, who talks tough on migration, media reported.

The conservative bloc and the SPD began talks about renewing their alliance after Merkel's coalition talks with two smaller parties collapsed last November. Both camps have seen their support wane.

An Insa poll Monday had support for the SPD dropping to 17 percent, below its election result of 20.5 percent. The conservatives slipped to 30.5 percent, suggesting there would be no majority for a grand coalition if an election were held now.

The two blocs had aimed to strike a deal on Sunday, but extended that deadline as they grappled with health insurance reform and employment policy demanded by the SPD, which promised members it would negotiate until the conservatives squealed.

CDU leaders were due to meet at 3 p.m. to give the coalition treaty the green light.

Alice Weidel, leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), the biggest opposition party, tweeted: "Things could not get worse for Germany," calling the coalition deal "insane" as it did not contain an upper limit for migration. (Source: Reuters)

U.S. to unveil 'toughest sanctions ever' on N. Korea

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence said Wednesday Washington would soon unveil its "toughest sanctions ever" on North Korea, adding that the regime in Pyongyang would not be allowed to "hijack" the upcoming Olympics.

Speaking in Japan before attending the opening ceremony of the Winter Games in South Korea, Pence pledged that Washington would "intensify its maximum pressure campaign" on the North, working with Tokyo.

"I'm announcing today that the United States will soon unveil the toughest and most aggressive round of economic sanctions on North Korea ever," he said, without giving further details.

Pence's three-day visit to Japan came as Washington seeks to bolster ties with its allies in the region and maintain pressure on the regime in Pyongyang despite a recent thaw on the peninsula.

"All options are on the table and the U.S. has deployed some of our most advanced military assets to Japan and the wider region to protect our homeland and our allies and we will continue to," vowed Pence.

To highlight what Washington calls the regime's human rights "abuses", the vice president will attend the opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Olympics with the father of the late former North Korea prisoner Otto Warmbier.

The U.S. and North Korea have been locked



in a fierce war of words.

U.S. President Donald Trump has mocked North Korean leader Kim Jong-un as "rocket man" and the young dictator has threatened to rain nuclear destruction on the United States.

But Kim has taken a more conciliatory tone in 2018, calling for detente with the South Koreans and accepting an invitation for his country to participate in what is being billed as the "peace Olympics."

The two Koreas held a rare high-level meeting last month and the North's ceremonial head of state is due to arrive Friday,

the highest-ranking Pyongyang official ever to visit the South.

Nevertheless, the peninsula remains tense, with the North slamming anti-Pyongyang activists who protested against its participation as a "spasm of psychopaths."

For his part, Abe said that Japan and the U.S. had "confirmed... that we can never accept a nuclear-armed North Korea."

Abe added that the allies would urge other countries not to be "captivated by the charm offensive of North Korea."

En route to Japan, Pence declined to rule

out a meeting with the North Korean delegation also attending the opening ceremony, offering the faintest hope of a diplomatic breakthrough.

"I have not requested a meeting, but we'll see what happens," Pence said during a stop in Alaska.

However, he appeared to take a tougher line in Tokyo, saying that North Korea must not be allowed to "hijack the message and imagery of the Olympic Games."

"We will not allow North Korea to hide behind the Olympic banner the reality that they enslave their people and threaten the wider region," he said.

It is not clear how long any respite in tensions will last after the Games, especially when the United States and South Korea resume their delayed joint annual military exercises, a perennial irritant for Pyongyang.

North Korea's official KCNA news agency warned Tuesday the resumption of the drills will throw the Korean peninsula back to "the grim phase of catastrophe."

Earlier Wednesday, Pence inspected Japan's missile defense system and stressed the "unwavering" commitment to what he called a "critical" alliance.

He will address troops at a U.S. air base outside Tokyo Thursday before heading on to South Korea.

(Source: AFP)

UN chief plans major disarmament push but U.S. skeptical

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is to launch a major push for disarmament talks covering everything from nuclear and cyber war to small arms, braving certain U.S. resistance to such bold initiatives, officials and experts told Reuters.

Guterres aims to forestall a new nuclear arms race and get the big powers back into negotiations after two decades of stalemate, according to a Geneva-based expert familiar with the plans, who requested anonymity.

The expert said Guterres also wants to end "state-led paralysis" in talks on cyberwarfare and robotics by getting the private sector involved, and to start talks on use of explosives in urban areas and curbing access to conventional weapons, the biggest killer.

Chances of success are uncertain at best. But with nuclear tensions rising, Guterres may be uniquely placed to oil the wheels of negotiations given a 2009 UN Security Council pledge to "create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons".

"If Guterres is clever he can use that to say: 'Okay what have you done in the past 10 years?'" said Marc Finaud, an expert at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy.

But a U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters that nuclear disarmament was an "aspirational goal" only, and it was hard to conceive of it in the near term.

"We don't believe that it's time for bold initiatives, particularly in the area of nuclear weapons," the official said, adding Guterres should also tread carefully in new technologies such as killer robots, known as "autonomous" weapons.

"I worry that the Secretary-General may be trying to treat the symptoms and not the root causes of why countries arm and rearm."

The U.S. Nuclear Posture Review, published on Friday, aims to improve deterrence, ensuring Russia, China, North Korea and Iran cannot mistake the U.S. willingness to defend itself, the official added.

The U.S. official said the problem was political will and the fact Russia - with whom tensions have risen over issues ranging from Russian involvement in Ukraine's conflict to alleged Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. election campaign - was not a willing or trusted negotiating partner.

"We have to let them (Russia) know that we are dealing with them from a position of strength. Over the last eight years there's been a perception of weakness. We want to disabuse them of that notion."



■ Outside the box

Guterres' strategy, to be spearheaded by his disarmament chief Izumi Nakamitsu, seeks to revive talks across the spectrum despite deepening U.S.-Russian mistrust and heightened tensions on the divided Korean peninsula.

"The path to peace through disarmament does not lie waiting for the right security situation to materialize, while countries increase their military budgets and stockpiles year after year," she said in a speech last October.

"We should not shy away from bolder thinking."

The U.S. official said the negotiating forum was "littered" with stalled initiatives aiming to think outside the box.

They include China and Russia's thrust for a treaty on weapons in space and Russia's hope for a treaty to stop Islamist militants obtaining weapons of mass destruction.

Nakamitsu is expected to invite key officials, including diplomats from the United Nations' five veto-wielding powers,

including Washington and Moscow, to a retreat near New York later this month for discussions.

Guterres hopes to unveil his initiative in Geneva at the end of February, when foreign ministers, including Sergei Lavrov of Russia, are expected at the UN Human Rights Council and the Conference on Disarmament, before a full launch in April.

Richard Lennane, head of the non-profit Geneva Disarmament Platform, said it was the right time for what appeared to be an unprecedented and ambitious move, and encouraging that Guterres was launching it early in his tenure.

"The tensions between Donald Trump and the North Korean leader have frightened a lot of people, and for the first time in a long time people have realized that there's an imminent prospect of a nuclear war starting. So I think that is fertile ground to try an initiative like this," he said. (Source: Reuters)

Facing Trump's demands, NATO to consider larger Iraq training mission



The United States is renewing pressure on its European NATO allies to establish a long-term train-and-advise mission in Iraq, diplomats said, reviving a divisive issue for an alliance wary after a decade in Afghanistan.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis sent a letter to NATO headquarters in January calling for a formal NATO mission to Iraq with a semi-permanent or permanent command to train Iraqi forces, according to five senior NATO diplomats.

After a three-year war with ISIL, Washington wants to ensure the militants do not re-emerge. While NATO does have trainers in Iraq already, they number less than 20. NATO defense ministers are expected to discuss the U.S. request in Brussels next week, with a possible decision at a summit in July.

In his letter, Mattis left many details open but suggested developing military academies and a military doctrine for the Iraqi defense ministry, diplomats said. Other ideas cited by diplomats include bomb disposal training, maintenance of Soviet-era vehicles and medical training.

"The United States is pushing hard for a NATO role in Iraq, not in a combat role, but for a long-term assignment," said one senior NATO diplomat on condition of anonymity.

"This looks suspiciously like another Afghanistan," the diplomat said, referring to the long-running conflict where NATO is funding and training Afghan forces. "Few allies want that."

Pentagon spokesman Johnny Michael declined to discuss whether Mattis had sent a letter to NATO but said: "The administration continues to look for ways allies can do more to counter terrorist organizations."

A NATO official said that the alliance is "looking into how we can step-up our training efforts".

NATO defense chiefs will provide ministers with a range of options for an Iraq mission, while NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has discussed the issue with Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who supports a mission, diplomats said.

The U.S. push is also part of President Donald Trump's demand that the Western alliance go beyond its core task of defending its territory and help stem militancy.

Trump scolded allies last May at a summit in Brussels, warning of more attacks in Europe if NATO did not do more to stop militants. Even his predecessor Barack Obama sought a greater NATO role in the Middle East.

Then, U.S. officials had raised the possibility of NATO taking over the running of the U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State, as it did of the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan in 2003.

The United States sees NATO's long experience in Afghanistan as putting it in an ideal position to help build up Iraqi forces after recapturing territory taken by Islamic State. The United States has more than 5,000 troops in Iraq.

But European allies fear being pulled into another open-ended foreign assignment that is costly, unpopular at home and potentially dangerous.

In a gesture to Trump, the 29-nation alliance agreed last year to join the coalition. However, France and Germany insisted that the decision was mainly symbolic.

(Source: Reuters)

Egypt warns Turkey over eastern Mediterranean economic interests

Egypt Wednesday warned Turkey against any infringement of its economic rights in the eastern Mediterranean under a maritime border demarcation agreement signed in 2013 with Cyprus that allows exploration for gas in the area.

The discovery of the massive Zohr gas field in 2015 has spurred a race for exploration in the eastern Mediterranean, an area that is believed to hold big natural gas deposits crucial for energy-hungry Europe.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu appeared to raise objections over the 2013 agreement when he announced that Turkey was planning to start exploration work in the eastern Mediterranean soon.

Cavusoglu accused Greek Cypriots of conducting "unilateral hydrocarbon activities in the eastern Mediterranean." He was speaking in an interview with Greek Kathimerini newspaper published Sunday.

"Turkish Cypriots, as co-owners of the island, have inalienable rights to the natural resources around it," he told the newspaper.

In response, Egypt's Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmad Abu Zeid warned against any attempt to contest the 2013 accord and said it had been deposited with the United Nations.

"Abu Zeid warned against any attempt to infringe or diminish Egypt's rights in that area," the statement said, adding that any such attempt "was rejected and would be confronted".

Relations between Cairo and Ankara have been strained since then army chief Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi toppled President Mohammad Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 after mass protests against his rule.

Egypt has started production from the massive Zohr gas field, which was discovered by Italy's Eni with an estimated 30 trillion cubic feet of gas.

(Source: Daily Star)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98317.3
IFX	1103.74

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	47,820 rials
EUR	61,090 rials
GBP	68,230 rials
AED	13,350 rials

Source: Mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$66.70/b
WTI	\$63.02/b
OPEC Basket	\$65.70/b
Gold	\$1,325.85/oz
Silver	\$16.67/oz
Platinum	\$987.75/oz

Sources: Oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Liquidity at \$309b in a month

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s liquidity stood at 14.45 quadrillion rials (about \$309 billion) during the ninth Iranian calendar month of Azar (November 22- December 21, 2017), according to a report released by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

The CBI announced that the liquidity figure shows 22 percent growth in comparison with the same period in the preceding year, Tasnim news agency reported on Wednesday.



4 new cars co-produced with foreign companies to enter Iran’s market

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — In collaboration with foreign companies, Iranian carmakers are going to introduce four new passenger car models into the country’s market during the next Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2018- March 20, 2019), according to an industry official.

Head of the Industrial Development and Revolution Organization (IDRO) Mansour Moazami, said since the implementation of the nuclear deal in 2016, Iran has signed six contracts with foreign carmakers to coproduce passenger cars inside the country, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Oil steadies, with lower inventories offset by higher U.S. output

Oil prices were broadly steady on Wednesday, as the boost from a report showing a drop in U.S. crude inventories last week was offset by evidence of soaring U.S. output.

Brent crude futures LCOc1 were down 2 cents at \$66.84 a barrel by 1135 GMT, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures CLc1 eased 18 cents to \$63.21 a barrel.

The oil price has fallen by 3.2 percent in the last week, but has still performed better than shares on Wall Street, which have lost more than 4 percent. *(Source: Reuters)*

Franco-Italian aircraft manufacturer ATR is looking for success in China

Franco-Italian aircraft manufacturer ATR is setting its sights on China as its next market, with as much as half of its worldwide sales of turboprop planes coming from Asia, the company’s chief executive said Wednesday.

“The order pipeline is about 50 percent out of the Asia Pacific region,” Christian Scherer told CNBC at the Singapore Airshow — and that’s excluding China.

That may be about to change, however, with the company awaiting approval from Chinese authorities for the latest version of its ATR-600 series aircraft.

“That’s a prerequisite,” Scherer said. “Once we are certified — we already have the first indications of interest from customers in China — then we expect larger quantities of orders.”

The Toulouse-based company — a joint partnership between Airbus and Leonardo — said that it predicted sales of over 1,000 aircraft in Asia over the next 20 years.

“This region accounts for more than a third of the worldwide market. We see the worldwide market for turboprops to be in excess of 3,000 airplanes, so the math is simple — it’s over 1,000 airplanes over the next 20 years,” Scherer said.

The chief executive also brushed off those who claimed that turboprop engines were past their expiration date in the era of jet engines.

“Let me correct that misconception, the turboprop engine first of all, is driven by turbo machinery just like jet engines,” Scherer explained. “And the fact that it’s driving a propeller, allows it to offer fuel efficiency that is 50 percent greater than that of a conventional jet engine. So you can imagine that fuel efficiency represents a major economic bonus for the turbo-prop aircraft.”

(Source: CNBC)

Iran Air to receive 14 new planes in a year starting from March

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s flag carrier Iran Air will add

at least 14 new airplanes to its fleet in the next Iranian calendar year (which starts on March 21), according to the company’s CEO.

Farzaneh Sharaefbafi added that no new airplane will join Iran Air fleet by the end of current year, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

The implementation of the nuclear deal in January 2016 led to the removal of sanctions against Iran, allowing the country to purchase

hundreds of commercial aircraft from Airbus, Boeing and a number of other companies.

Transport Minister Abbas Akhoundi announced in mid-January 2016 that renovation of Iran Air fleet has begun, adding that according to the contracts with world major plane makers, Iran Air is to receive 200 new planes, of which 100 will be purchased from Airbus and 80 from Boeing.

The first, second and third planes that Iran purchased from the European aviation gi-



ant Airbus landed in Tehran on January 12, March 11, and March 25, 2017, respectively.

Also, Iran Air has already received six of

its ordered 20 turboprop passenger planes purchased from the French-Italian aircraft manufacturer ATR.

Paris to host Euromoney Iran Conference

ECONOMY

TEHRAN — Co-hosted by Central Bank of Iran (CBI), the second round of Euromoney Iran Conference will kick off in the France’s capital on Thursday, IRNA reported.

Heading a delegation comprised of CBI and Finance Ministry’s scholars and experts, Iranian Deputy Finance Minister Mohammad Khazaie will attend this year’s event.

The conference aims to bring together Iranian bankers and industrial leaders with their international counterparts to discuss and debate the key issues around Iran’s reintegration into the global economy.



Discussing development of economic and banking cooperation between Iran and France is also on the agenda for the Iranian representatives.

CBI Governor Valiollah Seif, Abdolnaser Hemmati, the president of Iran Central Insurance, and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi are among the speakers of the conference.

According to the event website, the one-day conference is going to highlight successes in Iran’s banking sector so far, the international correspondent banking relationships achieved and the cross border trade finance which is on-going.

China’s becomes world’s next top oil importer

For most of 2017, China’s crude oil imports exceeded those of the U.S. on a monthly basis. Now Chinese crude oil import volumes also surpassed the American imports in annual figures. China was the top oil importing country in the world last year as it brings more refining capacity online and fills strategic inventories, while domestic oil production continues to decline.

Chinese crude oil imports will continue to grow over the next few years as the use of oil products grow along with the economic

and refinery capacity expansion, analysts say. The country’s import dependence is also expected to grow as imports rise and production at home declines.

Last year, China surpassed the U.S. in annual gross crude oil imports, EIA data showed on Monday. China imported on average 8.4 million bpd in 2017, compared with 7.9 million bpd of imports for the United States. In total petroleum and other liquid fuels imports, China had become the top global net importer back in 2013.

Meanwhile, U.S. crude oil imports have been lower than 8.5 million bpd in each month since 2013 when the shale revolution was in its first period of expansion, compared to more than 10 million bpd in monthly imports in many of the years of the 2000s.

The continuous rise in Chinese oil imports is due to several factors, the EIA says. These are declining domestic production, growing oil and liquid fuels consumption, a build-up in strategic reserves, refinery sector reform which

allows independent refiners to import quotas of crude oil, and increasing refinery capacity and utilization.

China’s crude oil and other liquids production dropped the most among non-OPEC nations in 2016, and the EIA expects production to have booked the second-biggest such drop last year. Liquids production in China fell by 2 percent annually to 4.8 million bpd last year and is further expected to drop this year and next.

(Source: oilprice.com)

U.S. solar industry lost nearly 10,000 jobs in 2017

The U.S. solar industry lost nearly 10,000 jobs last year, led by steep losses in mature markets like California and Massachusetts where installation growth has slowed, according to a new report published on Wednesday.

It was the first time employment has contracted in the fast-growing industry since the non-profit research firm The Solar Foundation began tracking solar jobs in 2010.

Nationwide, solar employment fell 3.8 percent to 250,271 jobs in 2017 from a high of 260,077 in 2016. A drop in both utility-scale and residential solar installations, as well as industry jitters about tariffs on imported solar panels, were to blame for the decline, the report said.

Employment in the solar industry far outpaces that of the coal, wind and nuclear energy industries, the report



said, citing federal jobs data.

U.S. solar installations fell in 2017 after logging a record-breaking year in 2016 as developers raced to take advantage of a federal tax credit that was meant to expire that year. The credit was extended by Congress, but it takes time for companies to rebuild their project pipelines.

In addition, demand for residential systems has slowed in large markets like California, Massachusetts and Nevada because incentives have become less lucrative. Home solar also broadly pulled back after Tesla Inc bought SolarCity, putting the brakes on the installer’s aggressive expansion in part by eliminating its vast door-to-door sales operation.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. oil heads to Middle East in sign of shale’s spread

U.S. oil headed to the Middle East in December, an unthinkable trip just a few years ago.

The United Arab Emirates purchased condensate from the U.S. in December, according to a person with direct knowledge of the matter who asked not to be named because he isn’t authorized to speak to media. The cargo will be used to meet requirements for its condensate splitters, the person said, adding that it preferred to buy the oil from the U.S. because it has superior quality to that sourced from the region.

“As a member of OPEC and a large crude producer, I would imagine they would be very self-sufficient in their own crude supply,” said Andy Lipow, president of Lipow Oil Associates. The purchases of U.S. oil aren’t likely to continue, given the U.A.E.’s own supply, Lipow said.

A shipment of American oil to the Middle East is the latest sign of how the shale boom and the lifting of a ban on U.S.



exports has changed the flow of petroleum around the world. U.S. production is

expected to grow by 2 million barrels a day between February 2017 and November this year, according to the Energy Information Administration. Exports have increased from a little more than 100,000 barrels a day in 2013 to 1.53

million in November.

■ **U.S. exports**

The U.S. exported about 700,000 barrels of light domestic crude in December to the U.A.E., the Census Bureau reported Tuesday. It’s the fourth-largest OPEC producer’s first cargo of U.S. oil, according to EIA data. The

Middle Eastern country typically brings in extra-light oil, known as condensate, to process in a unit known as a splitter.

U.A.E. crude production was 2.85 million barrels a day in January, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. Output has declined from 3.07 million at the end of 2016 as OPEC and allies cut production to reduce a global glut and prop up prices. Brent crude rose 0.8 percent to \$67.37 a barrel by 10:13 a.m. in Dubai.

The cargo was shipped from Enterprise Products Partners LP’s Houston terminal on the tanker Seoul Spirit, which arrived Jan. 31 at the Port of Ruwais in Abu Dhabi, according to ship tracking data compiled by Bloomberg.

Until last year, the U.A.E. relied on Qatar for its condensate supply. But the two countries are embroiled in a political dispute, and the U.A.E. decided in June to ban all petroleum ships from Qatar. *(Source: Bloomberg)*

European markets move higher after recent market turmoil

European stocks were higher on Wednesday, as markets worldwide attempted to shake off the major volatility seen in recent sessions.

The pan-European Stoxx 600 was up around 0.84 percent during mid-morning deals, with most sectors and major bourses in positive territory.

Oil and gas stocks were among the top performers, up more than 1.1 percent amid corporate earnings news. Statoil announced stronger-than-anticipated fourth-quarter results, marking the latest oil company to benefit from a rapidly improving environment for big energy firms. Statoil’s shares were up more than 2.5 percent during mid-morning trade.

Swedish industrial technology firm Hexagon surged to the top of the European benchmark on Wednesday. The company said like-for-like sales in the final three months of 2017 had increased sharply from the previous quarter. Its shares were up over 8 percent on the news.

Meanwhile, Danish enzymes maker Novozymes slipped to the bottom of the index after it reported weaker-than-expected earnings results. The firm cited challenging conditions in agriculture markets as it missed analyst projections for fourth-quarter results. Its shares were down over 6 percent.

■ **Topsy-turvy moves**

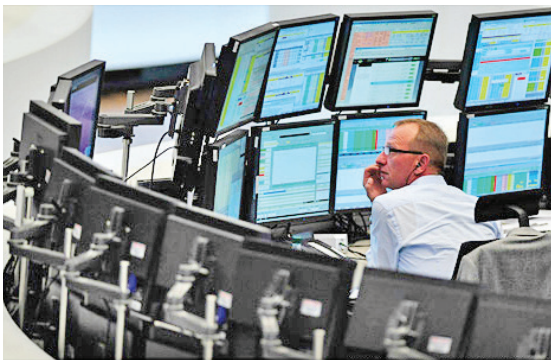
After finishing Tuesday’s European session deep in negative territory, markets in the U.S. went on a roller-coaster ride during its trading session. The Dow Jones industrial average started the session significantly lower, before rallying, closing up 567.02 points at 24,912.77. The index traded in a range of 1,167.49 points during the session.

Some of the reasons that investors gave to the topsy-turvy moves seen on Wall Street included fears over interest rates, obscure volatility funds that use leverage, and computer-driven trading. Consequently, indexes in the Asia-Pacific region bounced back following Wall Street’s performance, going back over some of the losses seen in the previous session.

■ **Coalition deal**

Elsewhere, political leaders in Germany reportedly reached a breakthrough in talks to form a new government Wednesday. Chancellor Angela Merkel’s Christian alliance and the Social Democrats agreed on a deal, according to media reports, after months of uncertainty following elections in September.

Looking to the central banking space, ahead of the Bank of England’s monetary policy meeting and inflation report — both of which are due out Thursday — the



European Central Bank’s Governing Council is due to hold a non-monetary policy meeting in Frankfurt, where the group is set to exchange views with the EU’s chief Brexit negotiator, Michel Barnier.

Across the Atlantic, the U.S. House of Representatives managed to pass a short-term spending bill during Tuesday’s late hours, which not only would provide support to defense spending for 2018 but also fund the rest of the government for another six weeks.

(Source: CNBC)

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Trump is playing to lose

By J. Bradford DeLong

After a year in office, U.S. President Donald Trump's approach to policymaking has been nothing if not bizarre. Whereas past presidents have sought the middle ground in an effort to develop effective policies and win re-election, Trump seems dead set on antagonizing the majority of Americans who did not vote for him.

America certainly has a different kind of president than what it is used to. What distinguishes Donald Trump from his predecessors is not just his temperament and generalized ignorance, but also his approach to policymaking.

First, consider Bill Clinton, who in 1992 was, like Trump, elected without a majority of voters. Once in office, Clinton appealed to the left with fiscal-stimulus and health-care bills (both unsuccessful), but also tackled center with a pro-growth deficit-reduction bill. He appealed to the center right by concluding the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which had been conceived under his Republican predecessors; and by signing a major crime bill. And he reappointed the conservative stalwart Alan Greenspan to chair the U.S. Federal Reserve.

Clinton hoped to achieve three things with this "triangulation" strategy: to enact policies that would effectively address the country's problems; to convince voters who hadn't supported him that he was looking out for their interests, too; and to keep his own base intact.

In 2008, former President Barack Obama was elected with a popular majority. But, like Clinton, he moderated many of his positions once in office. He tackled to the center with technocratic financial-rescue and fiscal-stimulus plans. And he pushed through a market-oriented health-care bill modeled after legislation that Mitt Romney had enacted while serving as the Republican governor of Massachusetts.

Obama also appealed directly to the right with an (unsuccessful) attempt at a "grand bargain" to cut deficits and social spending. His market-oriented cap-and-trade plan to regulate greenhouse-gas emissions was almost indistinguishable from that of his Republican opponent in the 2008 presidential election, Arizona Senator John McCain. And he reappointed Ben Bernanke, originally nominated by Republican President George W. Bush, to chair the Fed.

Obama strove to represent not "red" or "blue" America, but "purple" America. He pursued cautious and technocratic policies that he hoped would attract Republican support. And when his own supporters objected, he reminded them that national unity and mutual respect, not narrow partisanship, would eventually bend the moral arc of the universe toward justice.

Trump, by contrast, won the presidency while losing the popular vote by a wide margin. Yet, once in office, he promptly appealed to right-wing white nationalists by issuing his promised travel ban against Muslims. He tried to destroy the 2010 Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) without having a plan for what would replace it. He again appealed to the nativist right by dismissing police brutality against African-Americans, and by describing white supremacists as "very fine people." And he finished his first year by signing legislation that cuts taxes for the rich, but does little to win over anyone else.

This is not normal politics. Trump clearly has no interest in unifying the country or enacting policies that will actually work. He has not given the majority of Americans who oppose him any reason to change their minds, nor has he counseled his base on the need for durable policies rather than evanescent legislative victories. Most importantly, he has done nothing to help himself get re-elected.

Of course, the same now applies to many Republicans. Here in California last year, we were treated to a remarkable spectacle in which the state's Republican delegation in the U.S. House of Representatives did not even bother to argue for a tax package that would benefit their constituents. It was as if they had already given up on winning re-election, and were all looking forward to leaving Congress to take high-paying jobs as lobbyists.

According to the Trump administration, its next legislative priority is infrastructure. That sounds like an issue where Trump could tack left, by devising a plan with egalitarian distributional effects and evidenced-based provisions to boost economic growth.

But we shouldn't count on that outcome. The Trump administration doesn't seem to have any coherent policy-design process. There have been no hearings or white papers to assess the costs and benefits of various infrastructure proposals. Nor have there been any discussions with lawmakers to establish a rough consensus upon which to base legislation. As with the travel ban and the attempt to repeal Obamacare, there has been no public deliberation whatsoever. All we have are the president's tweets.

Back in 1776, Adam Smith argued that, in a system founded on "natural liberty," the government's three tasks are to provide national defense, ensure public safety and the enforcement of property rights and contracts, and supply infrastructure.

What distinguishes Donald Trump from his predecessors is not just his temperament and generalized ignorance, but also his approach to policymaking.

According to Smith, the government has the duty to "[erect and maintain] certain public works and certain public institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain."

To Smith, the reason why governments must take up the task of building infrastructure was clear: "the profit could never repay the expense to any individual or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society." Today, we know that public goods actually can be made profitable, but only by granting monopolies, which comes at a high cost to society.

Unfortunately, Trump's staff does not seem to have gotten Smith's memo about good government. The administration will most likely propose an infrastructure program based on public subsidies for private investors, who will then select projects from which they can profit by charging monopoly prices. The plan will be well-received at Fox News, and possibly even by pundits at The New York Times, who might stroke their chins and lament that the Democrats are rejecting Trump's open hand on infrastructure.

But, unlike Clinton and Obama, Trump will have shown yet again that he does not intend to be the president of most, let alone all, Americans. Rather than use the opportunity provided by a debate over infrastructure to advance the cause of national unity, he will instead push the U.S. further toward kleptocracy.

(Source: Project Syndicate)

Why the Saudi Crown is not welcome in the UK

While Theresa May will roll out the red carpet for the Saudi Arabian Crown Prince, the British public won't be so welcoming

By Andrew Smith

The Metropolitan Police has told campaigners that the Saudi Arabian Crown Prince, Mohammad Bin Salman, will arrive in London 7 March for three days of high-profile meetings. He won't just be met by civil servants and politicians, he will also be met by protesters.

The visit will be part of the ongoing charm-offensive being waged by the Crown Prince, who has already enjoyed high profile meetings with Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin and other world leaders. Next month it will be Theresa May playing host.

Beneath the "modernizing" and liberal image he has worked so hard to build, there has been very little change. The Saudi Crown Prince might be a PR-friendly figurehead for one of the most authoritarian regimes in the world, but he has been the lead architect of the devastating three yearlong bombardment of Yemen.

The war has killed thousands of people, and created one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. The destruction of vital infrastructure has caused the worst outbreak of cholera on record: with over one million people having been infected by the deadly disease.

Aid has not been able to reach the millions of people that need it, with a Saudi-imposed blockade having stopped food and medical supplies from entering Yemen. Despite some relief over recent months, over 20 million people have been left in need of humanitarian assistance.

The response of Theresa May and her colleagues hasn't been to condemn the bombing and call for a much-needed ceasefire. On the contrary, the UK government has armed and supported the bombing campaign since day one.

Since the bombing began in 2015, the UK has licensed over £4.6bn worth of fighter jets and bombs to the Saudi military. These include Typhoon fighter jets, which are flying over Yemen right now, and Paveway IV bombs, which investigators from Human Rights Watch have linked to attacks on civilian infrastructure.

There is no doubt that arms sales will be on



Poll after poll has shown that the overwhelming majority of the UK opposes arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

the agenda during next month's visit. The UK Government is currently working with BAE Systems to sell even more military aircraft.

The ruthlessness of the new Crown Prince has not just been on display in Yemen, but also in Riyadh, where he has overseen one of the most extensive crackdowns in recent years.

The luxurious Ritz-Carlton hotel in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, would usually set you back £460 per night, but for the last few months it has served as a prison for Saudi royalty. Last November, over 300 princes, government ministers and businessmen were taken to the 52 acre-site and locked-up for interrogation as part of what was claimed to be a major anti-corruption probe.

The scale of the suppression has been

mirrored on the streets, although the prisons for Saudi civilians have been far less decadent. Last year, the Saudi authorities executed 141 people and detained scores of human rights campaigners as part of what UN experts branded a "worrying pattern of widespread and systematic arbitrary arrests and detention."

The visit won't just provide a boost for military relations between the UK and the Saudi dictatorship, it will also provide a major propaganda coup for the regime.

The images of the Crown Prince on the steps of Downing Street will be broadcast all over the world. They will be seen as an important and uncritical endorsement. They will also send a clear message to human rights

campaigners in Saudi Arabia that their rights don't matter.

* The Crown Prince may have convinced Theresa May and her colleagues that he is a "modernizer" and a force for liberty, but the UK public has not been so easily fooled. When the Crown Prince arrives he will be met with protests and opposition from across the political spectrum.

Poll after poll has shown that the overwhelming majority of the UK opposes arms sales to Saudi Arabia. Next month, campaigners will take to the streets and send the message loudly and clearly that this visit is not in our name and that the Saudi Crown Prince is not welcome.

(Source: Independent)

EU is all talk and no action on Israel-Palestine conflict

If it is to be taken seriously as a broker for peace, the EU must make disruptive decisions to pressure Israel, just as the U.S. has been doing against Palestinians

The past few weeks have been transformational for the prospects, or rather lack thereof, for peace between Israel and Palestine.

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence gleefully confirmed in a speech to the Israeli Knesset that his country's embassy would move to Jerusalem by the end of 2019, as the U.S. administration announced it would withhold \$65m for UNRWA, the UN agency that provides services for Palestinian refugees.

This, coupled with U.S. President Donald Trump's insinuation that millions of dollars in U.S. aid to the Palestinian Authority (PA) should be cut after their "disrespectful" snub of Pence, has confirmed the current administration's bias towards Israel, underscoring the PA's conclusion that the Americans cannot play a role in any future peace process.

Bullying and blackmail of Palestinians

Husam Zomlot, the Palestinian ambassador to the U.S., said in a speech to the Middle East Institute that Trump had backstabbed Palestinians, not only taking Jerusalem off the peace table, but also taking "the table altogether".

The Americans continue to claim they are developing the "deal of the century" while using a combination of bullying and blackmail to attempt to force Palestinians back to the negotiating table, from which they believe they have removed both Jerusalem and refugees' right of return.

In his highly analyzed speech to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Central Council, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas recommitted to negotiations and peaceful popular resistance as the two strategic pillars to reclaim Palestinian rights.

The reality is that the EU has the tools to match its words with action, but it has thus far shied away from using any of them

However, the PA has shown little leadership in developing a national strategy for popular resistance, and is continuing security cooperation with Israel - which Abbas has called "sacred".

The central council recommended the suspension of this security cooperation and, for the first time, urged the PLO's executive committee to adopt the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement as a means of pressuring Israel. It also recommended suspension of the PLO's recognition of Israel and announced the expiration of the Oslo Accords.

The PLO's Executive Committee recently met in Ramallah to discuss the Central Council's recommendations. It agreed to set up a higher level committee to study the recommendation to suspend recognition of Israel. No date was set for it to report on this important decision.

There was no mention of the recommendation -made for the second time- to suspend security cooperation with Israel. In terms of a change in the PA's strategy for achieving Palestinian rights, there was little emerging from the meetings of the Central Council or Executive Committee.



Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and European High Representative for Foreign Affairs Federica Mogherini give a press statement before a meeting with European Union foreign ministers in Brussels, Belgium, January 22, 2018.

Thus, far from rising to the occasion and using its historic and financial ties to Israel and Palestine to play a greater political role in formulating a way out of the current impasse, the EU will simply sustain the status quo.

Reiteration of longtime position

The key change the PA might be pursuing is a search for an alternative to the U.S. as a sponsor for future peace talks. The PA initially saw the EU as the prime body to replace the U.S.; shortly after his speech in Ramallah, Abbas flew to Brussels to meet Federica Mogherini, the high representative of the union for foreign affairs and security policy.

What he heard was a reiteration of the EU's longstanding position. Mogherini said: "I want to, first of all, reassure President Abbas and his delegation of the firm commitment of the European Union to the two-state solution, with Jerusalem as shared capital of the two states ... based on the Oslo Accords and the international consensus embodied in the relevant UN Security Council resolutions."

Mogherini also reaffirmed the EU's opposition to the "settlement activity that we consider illegal under international law". She reminded Abbas that the EU has "already invested a great deal in the Palestinian state-building project" and vowed that EU financial support would continue, "including to UNRWA".

For his part, Abbas thanked the EU for its financial support and asked that it continue to play a political role in the Middle East peace process. He reiterated the Palestinian commitment to fighting "terrorism, violence and extremism".

In a direct snub to the PLO Central Council, Abbas affirmed his commitment to previously signed agreements-meaning Oslo Accords - to which he said Palestinians had adhered, and urged Israel to implement its responsibilities

under the deals. He also called on EU member states to recognize the state of Palestine.

In a subsequent announcement, Mogherini pledged the EU would contribute an additional €42.5 (\$53m) to Palestinians after Trump's decision to cut support, including €14.9m to "preserve the Palestinian character of East Jerusalem".

On the political front, Mogherini told reporters in Brussels that any framework for negotiations must involve "all partners", sending a strong message that the U.S. could not be excluded: "Nothing without the United States, nothing with the United States alone."

Sustaining the status quo

Thus, far from rising to the occasion and using its historic and financial ties to Israel and Palestine to play a greater political role in formulating a way out of the current impasse, the EU will simply sustain the status quo.

Nine European states, including Sweden, already recognize Palestine as a state and it seems Slovenia may be next - yet the EU as a bloc has not given any indication that it may follow suit. The EU continues to support Israeli universities through its research program, Horizon 2020, though it distinguishes between institutions on either side of the Green Line. Its position that Israeli settlements are illegal under international law has not been matched with commensurate action.

It took the EU many years to simply take a position that goods from the illegal settlements should be labelled. To counter Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the EU could have moved to ban goods from the settlements and to compel businesses and banks to seize any activities that support their continued existence through trade. However, there are no signs it will do this.

Following the decision by Israel to deny entry to human rights activists from EU member states for their solidarity and support for BDS, including European elected officials, the EU could have moved to impose a tougher visa regime or even ban settlers from EU countries due to their violation of international law. This would include some senior Israeli politicians and members of the extremist Israeli government who are not committed to a two-state solution and have called for annexation of the West Bank.

Action-light versus action-heavy

The EU could ban the sale of arms to Israel, as these could be used to violently entrench the occupation and to attack Gaza.

The reality is that the EU has the tools to match its words with action, but it has thus far shied away from using any of them. Its policy can be seen as action-light.

In contrast, America's support for Israel is action-heavy, politically through the use of its veto in the UN Security Council and financially through providing it with half of its annual aid budget, while threatening to reduce the pittance it gives to Palestinians to bully them into negotiations.

If the EU is to be taken seriously as a broker for peace, it must make disruptive decisions to pressure Israel - moves as significant as America's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Can the EU walk the walk or will it simply continue to talk the talk?

(Source: The Middle East Eye)

Turkey claims it won't stay in Syria

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Fateme Mohammadi-pour

TEHRAN — On January 20th the Turkish Army started Olive Branch operation in the city of Afrin, in northern Syria, and since then Turkey's operation, aimed at maintaining its national security, has been met with varying responses.

A reporter at Mehr news agency recently interviewed Jeffrey Lefebvre, a professor of political science at the University of Connecticut to further discuss the issue.

Following is the complete text of the interview with Professor Lefebvre.

■ What are Turkey's reasons for attacking Afrin?

A. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan became extremely upset when on January 13 the Trump administration announced that the U.S. would support the creation of a 30,000-strong border security force of which approximately half its members would be comprised of members of the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). Erdogan denounced this proposed force as a 'terror army' the next day. Ankara views the YPG as linked to the PKK which Turkey considers a terrorist organization with which Ankara has been waging war since the late 1970s. So this was a preemptive political/military action brought on in part by Washington not coordinating its policy with Ankara. It also is not surprising as Erdogan has been threatening to take such an action for almost a year.

■ What are Turkey's geopolitical goals for the attacks?

A. In terms of geopolitics, the Syrian Kurds (YPG) and their allies in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) control a large swath of territory along the Turkish border with Afrin serving as the main base in northwestern Syria north of Aleppo. Ankara fears the consolidation of political power by the YPG/SDF forces would create a Kurdish power base that would fuel the PKK struggle in Turkey.

■ President Erdogan has said that he has no intention of occupying Syria. Will Turkey leave Syria after the operation?

A. I think the Turks would prefer to get in and out as quickly as possible so not to be seen as an occupying power. Turkey was only able to carry out this operation with the quiet consent of Russia which had been operating a 'no-fly zone' over Afrin. Given Russia's alignment with the Assad regime, Turkey must be careful that this action is not seen as a territorial grab by Damascus. Although Damascus has essentially coexisted with the YPG as it led the battle to de-



Ankara views the YPG as linked to the PKK which Turkey considers a terrorist organization with which Ankara has been waging war since the late 1970s.

feat the Islamic State in Syria, Assad also quietly applauds the degradation of the political and military position of the YPG/SDF in Syria.

■ Why didn't the international community take appropriate action against Turkey's involvement in northern Syrian?

A. The main problem the YPG faces in gaining international support relates to Turkey's membership in NATO

and the reluctance of its American and European allies to upset Ankara and endanger the alliance. Moreover, the YPG's alleged links to the PKK, which has been designated a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department and the European Union, coupled with the seeming approval of this action by Russia and the Syrian governments, acts as a further constraint on international condemnation of Turkey.

Sochi summit helping solve the Syrian crisis



1 → The leaders said that after years of international efforts by the UN Security Council to defeat the terrorist groups in Syria, 11 months after the establishment of an incomplete ceasefire in late 2016, ISIS had been mostly hobbled along with the al-Nusra Front and other terrorist organizations designated by the United Nations Security Council.

They agreed to help Syrians unify and restore their country with a political solution to the crisis through a comprehensive, free, fair and transparent process that leads to a new constitution under the proper supervision of the United Nations based on UN Security Council Resolution 2254.

The Presidents stressed the need for quick, safe and unhindered access to humanitarian aid, too, as well as the need for confidence building measures from the Syrian parties, including the release of detainees and the delivery of bodies, including identification of the missing, to create better grounds for the political process and a durable ceasefire.

They urged the members of the international community to support the process of reducing tension and stabilizing in Syria, and asked for more assistance from the Syrian people. Demining, the preservation of Syria's historical heritage, and reconstruction of basic infrastructure both economic and social were also cited as important goals.

Along with the final statement covering the core issues for the benefit of Syria and its people, the United Nations approval,

and the presence of Staffan De Mistura, the UN special envoy to the Syrian peace talks, helped make the Sochi talks productive.

While the West boycotted the Sochi Summit, De Mistura's presence in it had a special meaning. De Mistura said he hopes that the meeting will be the basis for further negotiations in Geneva, and will pave the way for finding a lasting solution to the Syrian crisis.

The Sochi talks did cast a shadow over the Washington Group document. The United States, Britain, France, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, called the 'Washington Group', recently issued a document to resolve the Syrian crisis. The dossier is clearly an indicator of the apparent interference of these states in Syria's internal affairs. But the Sochi Summit is in fact an attempt to bring all the Syrian disputants together with the purpose of determining this country's political future by the Syrian people, which is in perfect harmony with international documents and laws, including the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2254.

In the end, the summit did reveal the ongoing discord between the opposition groups and the Syrian government, as well as the internal disputes between the opponents of Assad's administration. The intense competition between foreign players was remarkable in the meeting. Given the existing complexities and differences, much cannot be expected of the Sochi Summit. But this conference can be regarded as an important step forward in attempts to settle the basic issues of the post-war Syria.

Woe to leaders mired in the 'credibility trap'



1 → Consider, for example, U.S. military engagements in various foreign countries. As "powerful" as the military may seem, with some 800 or more bases spread all over the planet, and U.S. defense all told costing \$1 trillion a year of printed, fiat currency generated with piles of debt, no "wars" have been won, and not even the Vietnam War decades ago. The war in Afghanistan has dragged on for almost two decades, and nothing has been "won" but enmity. If, say, a top U.S. military person were to come right out and declare the failures, that person would essentially be indicting themselves as a failure strategist or commander. So the Pentagon literally pretends and claims that military progress is being made to justify the costs. (It does keep a lot of people employed.) And the mainstream media goes along with this, with many of the top mainstream journalists extolling the false successes. It's a vicious circle. Washington depends on creating enemies to sustain the fear necessary to justify the so-called "defense" budget of about \$1 trillion annually.

And Trump, campaigning in 2016 for the Presidency, promised differently. He literally claimed the U.S. was going to back off from hostile engagements overseas, that there may be a "peace" dividend almost three decades after the end of the original Cold War. The Nunes memo suggesting FBI abuse and the corruption of the surveillance system in the U.S. was not an issue, until it became one for the Republicans

for political reasons, and war hawks on both sides of the aisle in Congress used the (by and large false) charges against Russia to create animosity among average Americans to keep the money flowing into "defense" coffers and, ultimately, to some extent, into their own pockets. But without a complicit mainstream media (New York Times, Washington Post, MSNBC, Fox News, CNN, etc), the U.S. might have been on the road to reform.

Last week I sent a note to the top foreign policy international columnist at the Washington Post, one David Ignatius, whom I have known marginally for decades. I suggested that he retire eventually (he's approaching 70) in a blaze of glory by writing his final book: an expose of why and how he and others, especially the so-called Neocon pundits and writers, have often been in thrall to government, rather than serving as effective checks and balances to corruption and misdeeds in government, as was the case during the Watergate scandal in the early 1970s.

Such truth telling, as he could accomplish, given all that he has seen and knows, would make him a rich(er) man with huge sales, too. Sadly, he snubbed the idea. But this snubbing is the "credibility trap" in action. Because if this writer exposed as much as I suggested in a personal memoir, he'd have at the same time discredited some of his past work as dishonest and partisan. Meanwhile, the Washington and Wall Street gravy train rolls along without a hitch, until it doesn't. And someday it won't.

Who's got the grip on power in Saudi Regime?



By Saeed Sobhani

TEHRAN — Saudi Arabia's 81-year-old King, Salman bin Abdul Aziz announced the launch of a new committee called the Anti-Corruption Committee headed by Crown Prince Mohamed bin Salman. According to the Saudi Arabia Ministry of Finance, the decision was made to reinforce the rule of law and build confidence in investments.

The action led to the arrest of 11 Saudi princes, four ministers, dozens of former ministers, and several prominent officials in the country for corruption. According to a report from Al Arabiya television channel, these arrests stemmed from investigations that began after the flood in Jeddah on November 25, 2009, and the outbreak of the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012. The Saudi government allocated substantial funds for services to affected citizens, but a significant part of the outlays disappeared.

The unprecedented arrests and detentions clearly portrayed the Saudi crown prince's intentions: to consolidate his power and eliminate political opponents as this would eventually pave the way for his future absolute rule. Over time, reports came out about the release of a number of detainees who had to give up part of their assets to Mohamed bin Salman in return for their freedom. Eventually, the embarrassing reports on the Saudi crown prince had him put a halt to the anti-corruption probe. (Consider that last year he allegedly bought himself a yacht and a European

Aside from Reuter's interview with bin Talal, the BBC had previously reported that Alan Bandar, a Saudi-Canadian businessman, brokered deals between bin Talal and Saudi officials. According to the report, Bandar had traveled to Saudi Arabia last December to negotiate with Saudi officials, but he wasn't allowed to visit bin Talal.

an chateau worth all told about \$1 billion himself.)

Among Saudis arrested under a sweeping anti-corruption drive was Waleed bin Talal, one of the wealthiest people in the world, who apparently wasn't especially willing to hand over a significant portion of his assets.

But following some financial agreements, the Saudi authorities decided to release Waleed bin Talal and a number of other prisoners, including Waleed Al Ibrahim, the owner of the MBC TV channel, Fawaz al-Hakir, a major Saudi shareholder, Khalid al-Tawijeri, former chairman of the Crown Court, and Turki bin Nasser, the former head of the presidency of meteorology and environment.

The emancipation of bin Talal has sparked allegations about secret deals among Saudi potentates. Prince bin Talal's fortune is estimated at around \$17

billion. It has been reported that he was severe pressure and may have been tortured in the dreaded al-Ha'ir prison to give up about \$6 billion of his assets in exchange for freedom.

Just hours before the release of bin Talal, the Saudi prince had announced his imminent freedom in an interview with the Reuters news agency. What is puzzling here is that Reuters had repeatedly called for an interview with bin Talal and other Saudi officials, but they were denied each time. It is possible that at the time of the interview an agreement was already reached between bin Talal and Mohamed bin Salman.

In his interview, Waleed bin Talal claimed that he had been treated very well during his imprisonment and all that was reported about his mistreatment were lies. But his physique during the interview said something else. He looked as if he had been starved.

Bin Talal's claim that he will continue to control all of his companies and that what happened was just a misunderstanding and he would like to continue to live in Saudi Arabia, also may indicate the existence of a secret agreement.

Aside from Reuter's interview with bin Talal, the BBC had previously reported that Alan Bandar, a Saudi-Canadian businessman, brokered deals between bin Talal and Saudi officials. According to the report, Bandar had traveled to Saudi Arabia last December to negotiate with Saudi officials, but he wasn't allowed to visit bin Talal.

Speaking to the BBC, Bander stressed that evidence suggested bin Talal was not well treated, and although there was no firm evidence of torture, it was clear that he was worried.

This was why Mujtahid, a Saudi activist outfit, stressed that the Reuters interview was planned by the Saudi authorities to indicate that what was published by the BBC was a lie and that bin Talal had not been tortured.

According to Mujtahid, the Prince Salman asked Reuters to arrange an interview with bin Talal, stating that the BBC report was false. This media activist believes that the release of bin Talal doesn't mean he has full freedom of action. He will most likely be under strict control.

Prince bin Talal's case in the Saudi court illustrates the widespread corruption inside the Saudi government and family – gangsters dealing with gangsters. Salman has been using everything at his disposal to augment his power even if he has to sacrifice his former colleagues and friends. He may be a dangerous person who, along with his friend Donald Trump, is putting the future of the Persian Gulf region and Saudi Arabia and grave risk.

Qatar won't compromise on its national interest: Adib-Moghaddam

1 → This is meant to roll back real and alleged Iranian influence in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. Again, I don't see the Trump administration in the position to move decisively and successfully here as well.

■ Qatari Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani has declared that his country is ready for the summit. But he argued that Doha would not be willing to accept conditions set for his country and demanded equal footing of all states involved in the talks. At the end of the day, is the Qatar crisis resolvable?

A: I don't think the crisis is resolvable at this stage

because the demands are unreasonable and the treatment of Qatar by Saudi Arabia and the UAE has been disrespectful and self-defeating. Respect is an important factor in human interactions and it is the same in international diplomacy. For that language, a country requires a deep political culture and good knowledge of international relations. More philosophers than tankers if you like. A cast of neo-Adibians who would safeguard and translate high culture into the realm of international relations. Qatar has tried to build that capacity in the last two decades with some impressive results in terms

of academia, but there is no such infrastructure in Saudi Arabia and the UAE where you find more decadent glitz and glamour, than scholarship and knowledge. Iran lacks this kind of diplomatic capability as well, in particular in the embassies which are not staffed by the right people.

■ Of the 13 terms and conditions promulgated by Saudi Arabia and its allies for Qatar, which ones may Qatar have to accept?

A: I don't see Qatar committing to anything. The country's diplomats will not compromise on the national interest of the country.

Is Mexico the most dangerous country on Earth?

By Belen Fernandez

In 2006, Mexico launched a war on drugs with the fervent backing of its ever-helpful neighbor to the north, the United States of America.

Now a bit more than a decade later, some 200,000 people are estimated to have been killed thus far as a result, with an additional 30,000 or more disappeared and a continuous discovery of unmarked mass graves.

Recent reports suggest that 2017 was, in fact, Mexico's most violent year, in terms of homicides, since the Mexican government began publicizing crime data in 1997. More than 29,000 murders were recorded last year alone.

Drugs continue to flow into the U.S., where the proscription of mind-altering substances that are in sky-high demand is precisely what has rendered the drug business in Mexico so lethally lucrative in the first place.

Arturo Cano, a journalist with the prominent Mexican newspaper La Jornada, once commented to me on the perverse symbiosis that has long characterized the U.S.-Mexico relationship: "Mexico provides the cheap labor and the U.S. provides the deportees. Mexico provides the dead and disappeared and the U.S. the armies of drug users".

Cano went on to invoke a lament attributed to former Mexican dictator Porfirio Diaz, who died in 1915: "Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States".

Indeed, thanks to acute geographical misfortune, Mexico has been an easy target for economic abuse by its northern neighbor - entailing magical forms of "free trade" in which the U.S. is permitted to freely bombard the Mexican market with subsidized products while driving several million Mexican farmers out of business.

Unsurprisingly, destroying a whole lot of live-

lihoods is not the best way to deter people from pursuing options more conducive to financial survival - including, as it turns out, in the field of narco-activity.

Meanwhile, the U.S. handily offsets its considerable contributions to the forging of the Mexican narco-state by donating billions of dollars to the drug war effort.

This arrangement effectively amounts to throwing more money into a landscape of impunity in which notoriously corrupt security forces are implicated in extrajudicial massacres and deadly collaboration with drug cartels.

Not that a country where police regularly kill unarmed black people should be regarded as the standard bearer for ethical behavior.

■ **Amnesty International**

Amnesty International has noted that, as a result of Mexico's drug war, reports of torture and other

ill-treatment by Mexican police and military officials grew by 600 percent between 2003 and 2013.

And according to a 2016 Amnesty International document, Mexican security forces "routinely torture and ill-treat women" who they detain in group arrests in order to "to boost figures and show society that the government's security efforts are yielding results".

When it comes to keeping the old casus belli alive, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is in the very same boat on the other side of the border; after all, if you actually win a war on drugs, there'll be no more incoming funds to fight that war forever and ever.

As Carmen Boulosa and Mike Wallace observe in their book A Narco History: How the United States and Mexico Jointly Created the 'Mexican Drug War', the DEA would "be hard-pressed to justify its annual budget of roughly \$2.5b if the

legal ground shifted beneath it" towards drug decriminalization.

In 2006, as Ginger Thompson ably narrates in a New Yorker piece titled "Trafficking in Terror", the DEA hoisted itself onto the ever-profitable war on terror bandwagon with the help of the scary new crime of "narco-terrorism".

But just as the U.S. is unqualified to fight a literal war on terror - engaging as it does in regular bouts of terror-inducing activity across the globe - the country's drug war credentials are somewhat less than impeccable, particularly when one considers New York Times headlines like "The CIA Drug Connection Is as Old as the Agency".

It would require a document longer than Donald Trump's fetishized border wall to adequately delve into the U.S.' history of complicity in the international drug trade - from Vietnam to Pakistan to Panama and Honduras. ➔13

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People’s taste in fashion matters at Fajr festival

L I F E Meeting the taste of people in fashion is one of the most important aims at the 7th Fajr International Fashion and Clothing Festival, the secretary of the National Islamic-Iranian Fashion and Clothes Foundation said.

The festival aims to reconnect dress designers, producers and target market as the golden triangle of fashion and clothing, Hamid Qobadi told the Mehr News Agency on February 1.

“We have invited fashion designers from foreign countries including France, Italy, Germany and Oman to attend the festival,” he noted.

He said that a collection of clothing, which were competed in the previous edition of festival and went into mass production during past year, will go on display in a special exhibition on the sidelines of the festival.

“Holding meetings, which will be held during the festival, compensate our theoretical deficiency in the field of clothing and fashion,” he explained.

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

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

“Clothing in Persian Literature” by Asa-dollah Moazami-Gudarzi, “Job Creation in Fashion and Clothing” by Shahin Fatemi, “The Role of Beliefs in Clothing of Iranian Tribes” by Hassan Zolfagari, “Fashion and” Globalization by Seyyede Razieh Yasini and “The Role of Clothing in Ancient Religion” by



Hadi Vakili are some of the items discussed during the meetings.

He also pointed to selection of Golestan Palace, Tehran’s architectural treasure, as one of main themes of the festival.

“The rich Islamic-Iranian architecture of Golestan Palace has potential to be a good

inspiration for variety of perspective by the fashion designers,” he explained.

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

The fashion and textile designers will

submit their works revolving around the Golestan Palace during the festival, which runs from February 25 to March 4 in Tehran.

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

Why is charity so important in Islamic lifestyle?

Although all social systems try to conceal poverty from their society, poverty has always been an important challenge in different societies. Poor people have always existed in the world throughout history. Some people may not like to give charity to others. Since they think that giving charity to the poor will make them more useless and will make the view of the society unpleasant. At the time of the prophet (PBUH), the same way of thinking existed. With regard to that, this verse of the holy Quran was revealed: “When they are told, ‘Spend out of what Allah has provided you,’ the faithless say to the faithful, ‘Shall we feed [someone] whom Allah would feed, if He wished? You are only in manifest error.’” (36: 47)

■ Voluntary charities

As its name shows voluntary charity is any kind of charity or alms giving that are not obligatory on people, but they intend to pay it out to help the needy. Those who give

voluntary charity are not necessarily wealthy people. But they share whatever they have, even if not that worthy, with those who may need them too.

■ Obligatory charities

Obligatory charities are known as Alms-Tax (Zakat), khums and Kaffarah. They are not compulsory on all Muslims unless they meet the necessary criteria to pay them.

1. Zakat

“A person will be obliged to pay Zakat if he is grown-up, of sound mind and in possession of something... The amount of money that should be paid depends on the kind of the material through which Zakat has become obligatory; these are two kinds of metal- gold, and silver-, four grains- barely, wheat, date, and raisin- as well as three kinds of animal -cow, sheep, and camel.”

2. Khums

“Khums becomes obligatory in seven cases, but the one which is inscribed to income is considered as the most salient kind. In this case, one has to pay one-fifth of what has remained from his income after subtracting his own expenses on the exact date that he has paid Khums in the previous year.” [ii]

3. Kaffarah or Fidy

Kaffarah or Fidy is the penalty imposed by Islamic law for those who commit a sin or make a mistake and wish to make it up. Kaffarah is used in the following cases:

If someone breaks his/her obligatory fast (sawm), if someone breaks an oath, if someone makes some specific mistakes in his/her pilgrimage (Hajj), if someone kills a person, Allah orders Muslims to pay their penalty for their mistakes by donating to the needy. This shows the importance and the value of helping the poor.

(Source: salamislam.com)

28 simple & natural ways to detox your body



■ 6. Get in more exercise and sweat it out:

We all know that exercise is an essential part of a truly healthy lifestyle and that it helps with weight loss—but there is much more to it than that! When it comes to naturally and effectively cleansing the body, exercise can be a great option to turn to. Though many people don’t think of exercise in this manner, it can be what helps you with the cleansing process dramatically.

When you are exercising you are not only helping the body to shed fat and excess weight, but you are also helping to get rid

of toxins that may build up. As you sweat these toxins can come out and therefore the cleansing is taking place. Not only that but you are also helping with digestion, circulation, and to keep the organs functioning as they should with a challenging fitness regimen.

The perspiration, the breathing, and the movement all help the body to achieve fitness and also to get rid of the bad and potentially harmful substances that have built up over time.

(Source: bembu.com)

How to clean tarnished silver with home remedy method?



“You can clean all your silver objects the same way. You just have to be careful if you are cleaning something that shouldn’t be immersed or rinsed in water, like a picture frame,” Carolyn Forte, director of the Good Housekeeping Institute Cleaning Lab.

Put a small amount on a clean cloth, dampened if necessary. Rub the polish on your item in an up-and-down motion, not circular to avoid highlighting fine scratches.

Turn the cloth frequently as you work, so tarnish isn’t deposited back on your item. Rinse in warm water and buff with

a clean, dry cloth to shine.

For items that are dull, filmy or just starting to discolor, mix a few drops of mild dish soap with warm water and dip in a soft cloth. Rub the jewelry, then rinse in cool water and buff with a cloth until dry.

For heavier tarnish, mix a paste of three parts baking soda to one part water. Wet the silver and apply the cleaner with a soft, lint-free cloth (not paper towels, which can scratch). Work the paste into the crevices, turning the cloth as it gets gray. Rinse and buff dry.

(Source: goodhousekeeping.com)

Flavor cold nights with edibles

L I F E Not very long time ago, people in most parts of Iran, especially in cold regions, spent long nights of winter gathering together.

The long nights provided an opportunity for relatives to meet each other and a time for reading stories of Shahnameh while sitting around Korsi, a four-legged table with a heater underneath it, and a comforters thrown around it.

There are some edibles, which were served during these night gatherings. Most of them were prepared by housewives during year. For instance, they dried grapes to provide raisins and dried fruits like apricots were great choice for such gatherings.

Such edibles are still consumed by the Iranian families all around the country. Here we named some of them.

■ Pumpkin and beets



The sliced pumpkin cooked in aluminum pots is one of the favorite foods during cold season in Iran.

Some add sugar to sweeten it. Some other add some slice of beets in middle of pumpkin slice so that it is sweeten by beets.

In past time, they put the pot in furnace, however Iranians cook pumpkin on their ovens.

Cooked beets is another popular edible in cold weather. One can put beets in water and cook them or slice them into pieces to reduce the cooking time.

■ Baghali pokhteh (cooked fava beans)



Wash, rinse and pat dry pods, without shelling the beans and sprinkle with salt.

Steam pods for 10-15 minutes. You can boil them for 5-7 minutes. Drain pods and sprinkle vinegar or freshly squeezed lemon.

Try these delicious Persian winter foods and enjoy their taste, which is great in cold weather.

Easy ways to clean hard-to-reach places around the house

Out of sight, out of mind doesn’t always work when it comes to cleaning. Sure, you can pretend that those areas you can’t easily see or reach are immaculate.

You’ll reduce dust that can trigger allergies and asthma, kill some bacteria that can cause illness and make your mother proud.

■ Ceiling fans and light fixtures

You don’t have to sit on someone’s shoulders to clean a ceiling fan or high-up light fixture (nor is that a good idea). A disposable duster with an extendable handle is a much better way to capture dust and spider webs. Choose a disposable duster over a feather duster because the disposable dusters are made of materials that cause the dust to cling rather than simply be scattered around.

■ Ceilings and moldings

Take a minute to look up; you may be shocked to see all the dust and spider webs that have taken hold near your ceiling and crown moldings. Use a long handled duster, clean and dry sponge mop, or broom to whisk down the dirt. Always do this first when cleaning a room so you can vacuum up the fallen debris.

■ Cabinet tops and tall furniture

When you buy a disposable duster with an extendable handle, be sure to get one with a pivoting head so you can adjust the angle to reach to the tops of cabinets and tall pieces of furniture.

If you have allowed dust and particles of grease to accumulate on kitchen cabinets, use a sturdy step stool and clean with a soft cloth dipped in a solution of two cups warm water, one teaspoon dishwashing liquid and one teaspoon household ammonia.

■ Window blinds

When you dust blinds with a static duster, remember to close them and clean one side and then reverse the direction to clean the other side. Or, to clean both sides of the slats at once, wrap two microfiber cloths around each end of a pair of kitchen tongs and secure with a rubber band. Then simply slide the tongs along each slat to wipe away the dust top and bottom. Toss the microfiber cloths in the washer and you’re done.

■ Window, sliding door and shower door tracks

Window, sliding door and shower door tracks attract dust and dirt in amazing amounts and cleaning them can be difficult because of the tight spaces. When it’s time to clean, start by using the crevice tool on your vacuum. A quick search on Amazon can also provide options on special brushes that that are shaped to fit in the tracks to help loosen soil. Removing as much loose dust and grime will make the rest of the cleaning easier.

After vacuuming, mix a solution of two cups warm water, one teaspoon dishwashing liquid and one teaspoon household ammonia. Use a flexible stiff bristled brush to scrub out the tracks and then rinse with plain water. You may have to use some vinegar and extra care to remove soap scum on shower door tracks depending on the type of metal.

■ Behind the toilet

Unfortunately, the floor and wall behind the toilet is very difficult to reach since most mops and cleaning tools simply won’t fit the space. This is when it’s time to grab some knee pads and rubber gloves and get down to work. Start by using a dry stiff brush to remove loose dust, hair and soil (don’t forget the baseboard).

(Source: thespruce.com)



101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

#35. Get a pet

Aren’t pets the most adorable creatures in the world? I love animals but never saw the point of having a pet... after all, they take time, cost money, and are overall just a huge commitment!

Do you have a pet? And if not, should you get one? The answer is a big “yes”, especially if you have children, according to The Pet Report 2015, compiled by Pets At Home.

The report surveyed 2,438 pet owners, using their responses to piece together a better understanding of the role that pets play in our lives.

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 man organizes textiles at a fabric store in Bazaar Vakil in Shiraz in an undated photo (Instagram/@nasmeh_potovanja)

NEWS IN BRIEF



Kashmar's first eco-lodge makes debut

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – The first-ever eco-lodge came on stream in Kashmar county, northeastern Khorasan Razavi province, aiming to buttress hospitality industry in the region.

Four other eco-lodge inns will soon be inaugurated in rural areas of Kashmar, ISNA reported on Tuesday.

Currently, some 600 eco-lodges are operational across the country, the number shows a record high compared to that of 30 in 2013.



Nationwide museums holding special workshops, exhibits

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Over 70 cultural exhibits and 30 craft workshops are underway at museums that are affiliated with the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization.

Amongst the hosts are the National Museum of Iran, Sadabad Cultural-Historical Complex, and Niavaran Cultural-Historical Complex, CHTN reported on Tuesday.

The scheme that also includes a variety of special meetings is arranged on the occasion of the Ten-Day Dawn (February 1-11) to mark the 39th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

At least six killed, 60 missing after quake rocks Taiwan tourist area

HUALIEN, Taiwan (Reuters) — Rescuers combed the rubble of collapsed buildings on Wednesday, in a search for about 60 people missing after a strong earthquake killed at least six near Taiwan's popular tourist city of Hualien.

The magnitude 6.4 quake, which hit near the coastal city just before midnight (1600 GMT) on Tuesday, also injured 258 people and collapsed four buildings, officials said.

Hualien Mayor Fu Kun-chi said the number of people missing was now close to 60, although an exact figure was not provided. As many as 150 were initially feared missing.

Many of the missing were believed to be still trapped inside buildings, some of which were tilting precariously, after the quake hit about 22 km (14 miles) northeast of Hualien on Taiwan's east coast.

At the city's Marshal Hotel, rescuers trying to free two trapped Taiwanese pulled out one alive, but the other person was declared dead, the government said.

Among the injured were mainland Chinese, Czech, Japanese, Singaporean and South Korean nationals.

"This is the worst earthquake in the history of Hualien, or at least over the past 40 years that I've been alive," said volunteer Yang Hsi Hua.

"We've never had anything like this, we've never had a building topple over. Also, it was constantly shaking, so everyone was really scared, we ran to empty open spaces to avoid it."

Aftershocks with a magnitude of at least 5.0 could rock the island in the next two weeks, the government said. Smaller tremors rattled nervous residents throughout the day.

Residents waited and watched anxiously as emergency workers dressed in fluorescent orange and red suits and wearing helmets searched for residents trapped in apartment blocks.

Hualien is home to about 100,000 people. Its streets were buckled by the force of the quake, with around 40,000 homes left without water and around 1,900 without power. Water supply had returned to nearly 5,000 homes by noon (0400 GMT), while power was restored to around 1,700 households.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Notre-Dame Cathedral in Tournai

The Notre-Dame Cathedral in Tournai lies at the heart of the old city not far from the left bank of the Escaut, Belgium.

The present building is not homogeneous with regard to its chronology and conception, but the result of three coherent projects, completed and still distinguishable: the Romanesque nave and the transept, and the Gothic choir.

The construction of the first two was for the greater part carried out in one go during the early 12th century; no major modification was made to the building during the following centuries, limiting its adaptations to the times.

A view of Notre-Dame Cathedral in Tournai

It is difficult to associate the Cathedral with just one influence or school, but in its design and its elevations it presents layouts that influenced the development of early Gothic art.

In particular, it is distinguished by a Romanesque nave of impressive dimensions and richly sculptured and by a transept with five towers that indicate the beginnings of Gothic art. The choir, rebuilt in the 13th century, is of pure Gothic style. The conception of the nave illustrates a great originality with several important innovations.

(Source: UNESCO)



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(Source: UNESCO)

Apadana Staircase, a way to fabled Persian arts

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Apadana Staircase shows off and offers scenes of historic Persian arts to its domestic and foreign visitors.

The lavishly decorated monument stands within the UNESCO-registered Persepolis, which was once the ceremonial capital of Persian Achaemenid Empire (550 –330 BC).

The Staircase features finely crafted frieze in three major panels, each divided into several tiers depicting sovereigns, dignitaries and the then visitors to the city.

The northern panel itself is divided into three tiers of well-preserved bas-relief figures of Persian nobility including the Imperial Guard and the Immortals.

According to the Lonely Planet, on the upper tier, the figures are followed by the royal procession, valets and horses of the king's chariot; on the lower two tiers these figures precede Persians wearing feather headdresses and Medes in their round caps.

The central panel of the staircase is dominated by traditional symbol of Zoroastrianism which is flanked by two winged lions with human heads.

Elaborate panels at the southern end of the staircase depicts a record of nations, showing 23 delegations bringing their gifts to an Achaemenid king. The Ethiopians begin the frieze in the bottom left corner and are joined by Arabs, Thracians, Kashmiris, Parthians and Cappadocians. The



Detail depicts bas-relief carvings of some tribute bearers on the Apadana Staircase



A view of the Apadana Staircase in Persepolis

Elamites, Egyptians and Medians occupy the panel at top right. Accompanying this pantheon of guests are an assortment of delicately carved sheep with ram's horns and curled wool, two-humped Bactrian camels, oxen and mules.

On the northern panel exists inscriptions with fairly stereotypical texts by king Xerxes; one in Old Persian and others in Elamite and Babylonian.

According to livius.org, a website on ancient history written and maintained since 1996 by the Dutch historian Jona Lendering, parts of the inscriptions read as:

"A great god is Ahuramazda, who created this earth,

who created that heaven, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Xerxes king: the king of many kings, one ruler of many rulers."

"I am Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of all nations, having various kinds of people, king in this great earth far and wide, the son of king Darius, an Achaemenid."

In 330 BC, the staircase was miraculously survived the sack of Persepolis by the soldiers of Alexander the Great. The staircase is currently protected by a permanent shelter.

Iranian airline to start Mashhad-Islamabad weekly service



TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iran's ATA Airlines will open a weekly route from Mashhad to Islamabad on Saturday with return legs to be operated on the same days.

The service is expected to open up a new chapter in widening tourist-flows, particularly in religious travels between

Iran and Pakistan, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

Last September, Kish Airlines carried out its maiden direct flight between Tehran and Islamabad. Some other Iranian airlines, namely Iran Air, Taban Air and Mahan Air, have already established non-stop flights to various cities in Pakistan.

RICHT to hold professional meeting on ceramics



HERITAGE **TEHRAN** – Iran's Research Institute for Cultural Heritage and Tourism will hold a special meeting on traditional Iranian ceramics on February 17 and 19.

Several academics and masters of Persian pottery are scheduled to deliver speeches on Zarrin-faam skills which accounts for decorating

ceramics with glossy layers of enamel under very hot temperatures, Mehr reported on Monday.

The event will be held at the Glass and Ceramic Museum of Iran, also known as Abgineh Museum, in downtown Tehran.

It will embrace a workshop and an exhibition of contemporary ceramics and pottery vessels as well.

Gabala declared Islamic tourism capital

Azerbaijan's picturesque Gabala city was chosen the tourist capital of the Islamic world for 2020 by the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

This was announced at the 10th Islamic ministerial conference on tourism, where Dhaka (Bangladesh) and Gabala was selected as capital cities of Islamic tourism in 2019 and 2020 receptively.

Previously Konya (Turkey), Madina (Saudi Arabia) and Tabriz (Iran) were named the Tourism Capital of the Islamic world in 2016, 2017 and 2018, accordingly.

The Islamic trade fair should be staged in any of the two recipient cities as a means to further boost Islamic

tourism activities, the OIC said earlier.

The capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka is hosting the 10th session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (Session of Regional Integration through Tourism), which opened on February 6 and will be concluded with the adoption of Dhaka Declaration and a series of resolutions aimed at tourism development in the Muslim world.

Gabala, which is located about 225 km away from the capital city of Azerbaijan, is a perfect place for rest and tourism. The weather here is mild in spring and autumn, hot in summer and cold in winter. In addition to marvelous

weather, Gabala suggests gorgeous historical monuments, which emerge all around the city and its vicinity.

Just like in past, today Gabala is a magnet for international and local events. It can be said that the city is the second popular destination of Azerbaijan after capital Baku. Numerous meetings of politicians and summits are held in this wonderful city. In 2013, Gabala was declared the Cultural Capital of the Commonwealth of Independent States, in recognition of its long contribution to the history of Azerbaijan and the region. And today Gabala justifies its high title.

(Source: Azer News)

Two cities, two countries, common ground

The border between the United States and Mexico is in the news every day, in ongoing debates about immigration and spending on security initiatives. But what is it like to visit destinations along the border? To find out, writers for Travel spent time in five pairings of places: Brownsville, Tex., and Matamoros, Mexico; El Paso and Ciudad Juárez; Big Bend National Park and Boquillas; San Diego and Tijuana; and Nogales, Ariz., and Nogales across the border in Mexico.

"Please don't write another story about drugs," Sigrid Maitrejean, a volunteer guide at the Pimeria Alta Museum inside the old city hall in Nogales, Ariz., beseeched me in a playful tone. It was not the only time during my three-day visit to the region that people would make a similar plea: enough of the endless media stories and political rhetoric about the supposedly dangerous United States-Mexico border, which only serve to keep visitors away.

There are 16 sets of sister cities that line the 1,950-mile United States-Mexico border.

In 1841, when the territory was still part of Mexico, a family by the last name of Elias received a land grant from the government it established as Los Nogales de Elias, a name derived from the walnut trees that blanketed what today is known as the Santa Cruz River Valley.

The Spaniards had utilized that mountain pass during the previous two centuries when they explored the Pimeria Alta, as northern Sonora and southern Arizona were known, west to California, and it's believed indigenous groups had traveled the same path for millenniums. Nogales, then, has formed part of an important northern migratory route far before the United States became concerned with border walls.

The land was not part of the original territory gained by the Americans at the end of the Mexican War, but the United States government acquired it in 1853, through the Gadsden Purchase, to build the southern transcontinental railway line. Foreseeing the boon in international commerce that intersecting railroads could bring, two Russian brothers named Jacob and Isaac Isaacson set up a trading post in 1880, which was renamed Nogales by the U.S. Postal Service soon thereafter.

To support the new trade, a community emerged on the Mexican side of the line that people also referred to as Nogales. Unlike the Texas border, however, where the boundary is defined by the Rio Grande, Arizona's is a land border, and in Nogales, the border was an unobstructed street called International, half of which technically lay in one country, half in



The Mexican side of the border wall in Nogales, Sonora.

another. Around it, a seemingly singular town spread north and south.

But managing an international division, it turned out, wasn't simple. The first fence on the United States-Mexico border went up here

— after the Mexican government called for it.

The United States government had grown wary after the Mexican Revolution began in 1910, and relations had tensed as each side accused the other of banditry and incursions. The United States set up a military camp in Nogales, Ariz., and General John J. Pershing was dispatched to chase after the Mexican revolutionary leader Pancho Villa. The Sonora governor put up an 11-wire fence, which got torn down four months later.

In 1918, after the two cities went to war for a day because an American guard shot a Mexican citizen at the border crossing, authorities on both sides agreed to construct a permanent chain-link fence between them.

But as life resumed, the fence became a technicality, not a reflection of how people related across the line. During Prohibition, Mexicans built saloons that straddled the border, so that patrons could drink so long as they were on the correct side of the building.

Eventually, migration from other parts of Mexico grew through the area, and stricter United States enforcement followed. "The border crossing was getting more difficult," said Ms. Maitrejean, "and, of course, once they put up our horrible Vietnam landing-mat fence in the '90s, that was really the end."

(Source: The New York Times)

Hot tea may increase risk for esophageal cancer in cigarette smokers, alcohol drinkers

A study involving nearly 500,000 adults in China suggests that smokers and heavy drinkers who drink hot tea may have increased risk of developing esophageal cancer. How can the hot beverage cause the potentially fatal disease?

Smokers and those who drink alcohol excessively should think twice about drinking hot tea. Findings of a new study have found a link between drinking tea while it is hot and increase risk of developing esophageal cancer.

Esophageal cancer kills about 400,000 people per year and is currently the eighth most common cancer worldwide. It is often caused by repeated injury to the esophagus because of smoke, alcohol, acid reflux, and possibly hot liquids as suggested by the new study.

■ Esophageal cancer

In the new study, which was published in the Annals of Internal Medicine, researchers have found an association between drinking hot tea with up to fivefold increased odds in esophageal cancer but the link is only found in those who smoke or drink alcohol.

Study researcher Jun Lv, from Peking University, and colleagues followed nearly 500,000 adults in China for almost a decade. They found that in people who smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol excessively, drinking



hot tea regularly was linked to a higher risk of developing esophageal cancer.

Excessive alcohol use was defined as consuming at least 15 grams of alcohol per

“Drinking tea at high temperatures is associated with an increased risk for esophageal cancer when combined with excessive alcohol or tobacco use,” the researchers write in their study.

day, which is slightly more than the content of a 12-ounce glass of beer, 1.5 ounce shot of distilled spirits, or 5 ounce glass of wine. Greater risk for esophageal cancer was found in those who smoke at least one cigarette per day.

“Drinking tea at high temperatures is associated with an increased risk for esophageal cancer when combined with excessive alcohol or tobacco use,” the researchers wrote in their study.

■ Amounts of alcohol

Based on the findings, the researchers offered some advice for people who smoke or drink large amounts of alcohol. They can abstain from drinking hot tea to prevent esophageal cancer or quit smoking and excessive alcohol use.

“It’s important to abstain from high-temperature tea in excessive alcohol consumers and smokers for esophageal cancer prevention,” Lv said. “Of course, keeping away from both tobacco and excessive alcohol use is the most important means for esophageal cancer prevention.”

The study did not prove a causal association but researchers think that hot tea may damage the tissue lining of the esophagus, which can increase the odds of injury from other factors such as drinking and smoking.

(Source: Tech Times)

Scientists make it possible to rank the risk of resistance genes

The genes that are able to equip bacteria with resistance to clinically used antibiotics have been found in many different natural environments. Nevertheless, a functional overview of the resistance genes found in common human bacterial pathogens has been missing so far.

Research from the Novo Nordisk Foundation Center for Biosustainability at the Technical University of Denmark makes it possible to rank the risk of resistance genes and to predict the evolution of existing and future drugs.

“We are confident that the detailed phenotypic information on the large collection of individual resistance genes obtained in our study will help to expand the knowledge of antibiotic use and drug development. Such information has the potential to benefit both the pharmaceutical companies and the doctors that prescribe the antibiotics,” says Postdoc at the Novo Nordisk Foundation Center for Biosustainability, Andreas Porse.

■ Harmful pathogens

Bacteria are social creatures constantly sharing their genes with each other. The exchange of genes contributes to an emerging crisis of antibiotic resistance because of many harmful pathogens, including Escherichia coli, lives in communities where one trans-



fer event can turn harmless bacteria into “superbugs”.

The researchers exploited synthetic biology to sample a large mechanistic diversity of resistance genes to investigate the impact of gene transfer on a new bacterial host. By providing this diversity and resolution it was possible to show that the biochemical mechanism of a gene product and its com-

patibility with host physiology is far more important than for example the sequence composition of a gene.

“This information is useful when developing novel antibiotics because a company might want to avoid drugs that are likely to be targeted by resistance mechanisms that may easily disseminate among pathogenic hosts. For example, the results suggest that

genes causing resistance to penicillin may incorporate themselves more easily into new hosts compared to those involved in tetracycline resistance” according to Andreas Porse.

■ Resistance genes

Thus, the results published in Nature Communications may not only serve as a good reference for biomedical researchers to look up the functional profiles of the resistance genes they observe in pathogens but also help the industry in developing new products.

By sampling 200 genes it becomes clear which genes products of certain mechanisms that are easiest to integrate into a cell. Everything comes down to the biochemical mechanism and host in which the genes are naturally present. A better understanding of this issue is very useful for the construction of cell factories and biological circuits where genes from different organisms are often combined in a context distantly related to their original hosts.

“In biotechnology, we often wish to take genes from one organism and express them in another, sometimes distantly related organism to obtain novel functionalities in our favorite host. Our data might help engineers to predict the effects of different genes in novel cellular contexts.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

SHATEL Subscribers to Listen Free-of-Charge Book Online

SHATEL Company’s mobile subscribers will listen book as free of charge.

Promoting and enhancing book-reading culture has been cited as the main aim behind launching free book listening app. by this leading mobile phone operator in

the country.

For this purpose, SHATEL Company will hold Book and Book Reading Festival in cooperation with Audio Book app.

The festival will run up to Esfand 16 (March 7) and Audio

Book will be donated to all previous and new subscribers of SHATEL Mobile SIM Card, the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

In addition, special discount has been considered for buying Audio book apps, the report concluded.

Refah K. Bank Donates Two Equipped Dialysis Devices to Helal Pharmaceutical Complex

Refah Kargaran Bank donated two dialysis equipment to HELAL Therapeutic and Pharmaceutical Complex, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

This ceremony was held in the presence of chief executive and a number of managers and directors of the bank, senior officials of Red Crescent Society (RCS) and also some generous benefactors and benevolent and

charitable persons, physicians, etc.

For his part, Kourosh Saeedi Manager of Branches in District One Municipality of Tehran pointed to the health-based bank and added: “Refah K. Bank always tries to pay an important role in the field of offering quality medical services to the Medical Community.”

For his part, Dr. Peyvandi manager of

Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) expressed his thanks to the Bank Refah in offering quality medical services to the Medical Community of the country and added: “Red Crescent Society (RCS) is the responsible body for boosting health parameters in the country along with the Ministry of Health and Medical Education in order to meet health demands of people.”



“MY IRANCELL” Application Updated

Services such as observing areas covered by MTN IRANCELL network, easy accessibility to the applications, capability of three-dimensional (3D) touch and scoring were added to the new version of “MY IRANCELL”, the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

IRANCELL subscribers, who need to be aware of the areas covered by IRANCELL network, can refer to the right-hand list of

this software in order to view full information in the related field, the report added.

Also, Android app subscribers for easy access to apps can install entertainment part of app programs such as lens, tracks, browser, My Baby, breeze, rhythm and zone.

“My Irancell” subscribers to “iOS” can also use the 3D Touch capability with accessing the latest updated version of this app.

As the largest data provider in Iran and

the leading operator in gaining customers’ satisfaction, MTN Irancell has always been keen on receiving feedback of customers on the quality of services offered by the company to its subscribers. For this purpose, a customer satisfaction survey will be held once a month in order to promote and enhance services of the company, the report added.

Moreover, management of MTN Irancell will welcome constructive views and pro-

posals of subscribers and all walks of life in line with offering quality mobile services to the noble nation of Islamic Iran.

IRANCELL Telecommunications Company MTN, is operating in the field of mobile network service providers. It operates Iran’s second largest 2G-3G-4G-4.5G mobile broadband network, and fixed TD-LTE internet services.



CEO of Tose’e Ta’von Bank Awarded in 6th National Cooperatives Management Excellence Festival

A Plaque of Honor was awarded to Hojatollah Mahdian Chief Executive of Tose’e Ta’von Bank in 6th Nationwide Festival of Cooperatives Management Excellence for his unsparing and unflinching effort in financing and developing cooperatives sector in the country, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

The 6th Nationwide Cooperatives Management Excellence Festival was held

in the presence of cooperatives activists in the country.

While submitting report on the activities and services of the bank as the sole privately-funded bank in the field of cooperatives, he added: “the bank has taken giant strides in the field of supporting activities in the cooperatives sector according to its articles of association.”

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mahdian pointed to the implementation of law to

support, develop and generate employment in rural and nomadic areas of the country and added,

It should be noted that Investment Guarantee Fund was unveiled in the presence of Kalantari Deputy Minister of Labor, Cooperatives and Social Welfare and Chief Executive of the bank in order to identify and operate innovative and creative ideas with protecting intellectual properties.

SpaceX successfully launched the most powerful rocket on Earth

SpaceX’s Falcon Heavy rocket, currently the most powerful launch system on Earth, roared into the sky on Tuesday afternoon atop a pillar of smoke.

The rocket’s three reusable boosters lifted the vehicle skyward, sending company founder Elon Musk’s personal Tesla Roadster on a journey toward Mars orbit.



Musk was worried that the experimental 23-story rocket might explode with the force of 4 million pounds’ worth of TNT. But Falcon Heavy did not meet that fate: It successfully cleared launch pad 39A at Kennedy Space Center.

Musk has admitted his test payload is “silly,” but Falcon Heavy’s successful lift-off – a system that will cost about US\$90 million per launch – could disrupt the industry.

“It means we’re able to offer heavy-lift ... for not much more than the cost of a Falcon 9,” Musk told reporters on Monday, referring to SpaceX’s \$US62 million single-booster rocket. “If we’re successful in this, it is game over for all other heavy-lift rockets.”

The key to Falcon Heavy’s low cost lies, like Falcon 9’s, in the reusability of its 134-foot-tall boosters, each of which costs tens of millions of dollars to build.

Musk previously said Falcon Heavy’s success would be akin to placing it in a market “where one aircraft company has reusable aircraft, and all the other aircraft companies had aircraft that were single-use ... You sort of parachute out to your destination, and the plane would crash-land somewhere. Crazy as that sounds, that’s how the rocket business works.”

However, the car’s fate won’t be known for about six hours: Falcon Heavy’s uppermost stage, which carries Musk’s tricked-out car, will coast for about six hours through intense radiation fields around Earth’s magnetic Van Allen Belt.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Chemical in Mcdonald’s fries could cure baldness, study says

Japanese scientists may have discovered a cure for baldness — and it lies within a chemical used to make McDonald’s fries.

A stem cell research team from Yokohama National University used a “simple” method to regrow hair on mice by using dimethylpolysiloxane, the silicone added to McDonald’s fries to stop cooking oil from frothing.

Preliminary tests indicated that the groundbreaking method was likely to be just as successful when transferred to human skin cells.

A McDonald’s employee prepares french fries in Miami. Japanese scientists recently discovered that a chemical used in McDonald’s fries could be key in curing baldness.

According to the study, released in the Biomaterials journal last Thursday, the breakthrough came after the scientists successfully mass-produced “hair follicle germs” (HFG) which were created for the first time ever in this way.

HFGs, cells that drive follicle development, are considered the holy grail in hair-loss research. The scientists said use of dimethylpolysiloxane was crucial to the advancement.

The “key for the mass production of HFGs was a choice of substrate materials for the culture vessel,” Professor Junji Fukuda, of Yokohama National University, said in the study. “We used oxygen-permeable dimethylpolysiloxane (PDMS) at the bottom of culture vessel, and it worked very well.”

The technique created 5,000 HFGs simultaneously. The research team then seeded the prepared HFGs from an HFG chip, a fabricated, approximately 300-microwell array, onto the mouse’s body.

“These self-sorted hair follicle germs were shown to be capable of efficient hair-follicle and shaft generation upon injection into the backs of nude mice,” Fukuda said.

Within days, Fukuda and his colleagues reported black hairs on the areas of the mouse where the chip had been transplanted. The photos below demonstrate the findings.

(Source: Newsweek)

The approach to meditation that guarantees failure

I’m not usually one to get publicly excited about my calendar, but as we went around the room on the first day of a weeklong meditation retreat in Northern California, I found myself explaining my obsession with controlling every aspect of my day. I held out my iPhone and opened my iCal app: a slew of perfectly organized, multi-colored cells, stretching on for months. I should have been embarrassed, but when someone gasped, I was quietly satisfied.

Not long ago, I decided to get into the meditation game. I went into my calendar and blocked off a chunk of time for it each morning. The further into the future I scrolled, the more time I scheduled for it, confident that by a year out, I’d be meditating for an hour every day. I downloaded a few meditation apps, settling on one called Headspace, and got to work improving my happiness. But while I didn’t know it, the experts would say I’d run into a problem before I’d even started.

I approached meditation with concrete goals for myself: I hoped that it would make me happier and, ironically, less control-focused. But meditation, as psychiatrist Mark Epstein argues in his new book Advice Not Given: A Guide to Getting Over Yourself, is not like other goal-oriented tasks. Rather, it is about getting away from the self — about “opening oneself to the ceaseless flow we are made of.” This act of “developing” the mind to disconnect from the self, he writes, runs counter to our modern obsession with turning every action toward productive use. I could meditate for hours every day, but if I did it with the intention of accomplishing some form of self-improvement, I’d have already failed.

(Source: thecut.com)

1st International Conference on Green University held in Iran

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad hosted the 1st International Conference on Green University from February 6 to 7.



Mansour Gholami, the Iranian minister of science, research and technology and deans, deputies and other officials of universities participate in the conference.

The officials of Iranian and foreign universities shared their experiences in the fields of renewable energies, water and wastewater management, energy consumption management, waste management, green transportation, green information and communication technology at this conference.

Holding specialized workshops on implementation of green management and building energy management strategies was another part of the conference's program.

(Source: ISNA)

2017 was one of the hottest years on record, NASA says

President Trump may have doubts about climate change, but a pair of new federal reports indicate that our planet's long-term warming trend continues — and that 2017 was one of the hottest years on record.

Global surface temperatures last year were the second hottest since 1880, according to an analysis by scientists with NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. Average temperatures in 2017 were 1.62 degrees Fahrenheit warmer than the average between 1951 and 1980, the year global temperature measurements became possible.

Only 2016 was warmer, according to NASA.

A separate analysis by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration pegged 2017 as the third-warmest year on record. The agencies said the discrepancy in the rankings was the result of different methods that they use to analyze global temperature data, but that overall, their assessments on the state of the global climate are in agreement.

Data from both agencies show that the five warmest years on record have all occurred since 2010.

The five warmest years on record have all occurred since 2010. "Despite colder than average temperatures in any one part of the world, temperatures over the planet as a whole continue the rapid warming trend we've seen in the last 40 years," Gavin Schmidt, director of the Goddard Institute, said in a written statement.

Last year was the third consecutive year in which global temperatures were more than 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit above late 19th century levels, NASA said. The warming is most pronounced in the Arctic, where the loss of sea ice continues.

Scientists say global warming is attributable largely to the burning of fossil fuels, which releases carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Rising temperatures and the extreme weather events they're linked to are already having significant negative impacts on human health and productivity.

(Source: NBC news)

LEARN ENGLISH

Just-in-time strategy

A: I called this meeting today in order to discuss our manufacturing plan. As I'm sure you're all aware, with the credit crunch, and the global financial crisis, we're **obligated** to look for more **cost efficient** ways of producing our goods. We don't want to have to be looking at **redundancies**. So, we've outlined a brief plan to **implement** the just-in-time philosophy.

B: We have two basic points that we want to focus on. First of all, we want to reduce our **lead time**.

C: Why would want to do that? I think this is not an area that really needs to be worked on.

B: Well, we want to reduce production and delivery lead times for better overall **efficiency**.

A: Right, production lead times can be reduced by moving **work stations** closer together, reducing queue length, like for example, reducing the number of jobs waiting to be processed at a **given** machine, and improving the coordination and cooperation between successive processes. Delivery lead times can be reduced through close cooperation with suppliers, possibly by inducing suppliers to locate closer to the factory or working with a faster shipping company.

C: I see... That makes sense.

B: The second point is that we want to require supplier quality assurance and implement a zero **defects** quality program. We currently have far too many errors that lead to **defective** items and therefore, they must be eliminated. A quality control at the source program must be implemented to give workers the personal responsibility for the quality of the work they do, and the authority to stop production when something goes wrong.

C: I'm with you on this one. It's essential that we reduce these errors; we've got to force our suppliers to reduce their mistakes. A: Exactly. Well, let's look at how we're going to put this plan into action.

Key vocabulary

obligate: make a person do something because it is the right thing to do

cost efficient: cheap, not expensive

redundancy: lay off, the ending of workers' employment

implement: put a plan into action

lead time: the time between the beginning of a process and its end

efficiency: the ability to produce something more quickly

work station: an area where a person works and does his job

given: used to refer to a specific time, place or thing

defective: having a mistake or error that makes something not perfect

defect: a mistake or error that makes something not perfect

Supplementary vocabulary

inventory: supply of goods stored in a place

carrying cost: the cost of holding inventory

warehouse: large building where products or goods are stored

stock: the supply of goods for sale, or available

bottleneck: something that slows a process down

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Ground broken for a school in honor of Sanchi victims

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** – Construction of a school started in Tehran on Wednesday in a move to commemorate the victims of Sanchi oil tanker, which sadly sank in January with 32 crews on board.

The Sanchi oil tanker was carrying 136,000 tons of Iran's light crude oil and heading South Korea when collided with a Chinese freighter off east coast of China on January 6. The collision set fire to the oil tanker and after days of burning, Sanchi eventually sank on January 14. Following the tragic incident all those aboard, including 30 Iranian sailors and Bangladeshi ones, lost their lives.

A special ceremony was held with families of Sanchi victims and high ranking officials in attendance, including Tehran's Governor General Mohammad Hossein Moqimi, Mehr reported on Wednesday.

Funded by Tehran's organization for renovating, developing and equipping schools, which is a governmental body, this new 15-classes school is being built in district 22 of Tehran.

The school will be inaugurated in early February next year and will provide elementary-level education.

The name which is given to this school is roughly translated to English as "honorable courageous heroes".



Candlelight vigil held in Tehran on January 16 to honor victims of Sanchi

Why salmon eating insects instead of fish is better for environment

By Heather Brady

Why salmon eating insects instead of fish is better for environment

Researchers in the Netherlands have come up with a new, more sustainable way to feed salmon that are grown in aquaculture environments: insects.

Most of the salmon that consumers eat is raised in pens, where they are fed a specific diet that helps them grow. In the past, much of that diet has been based on fish meal, a protein and nutrient-rich mixture made from fish that were caught expressly for the purpose of feeding them to other fish.

That practice has drawn criticism from conservationists, however, who point out that it's an inefficient process that contributes to overfishing and the bycatch of sensitive marine organisms like whales and sea turtles.

Seeking an alternative, the Netherlands-based company Protix developed a fish meal that's based on insects. Researchers came up with the idea for the insect-based feed when they noticed animals like chickens, when they're young, eating insect larvae to gain protein.

"Salmon are one of the more demanding fish species to grow," says Tarique Arsiwalla, chief commercial officer of Protix. Right now, in order to create fish meal for salmon to eat, much of the aquaculture industry is "catching fish we don't like to eat to create the salmon that we want," he notes.

Starting in 2014, teams at Protix researched different types of insects. Eventually, they discovered that the black soldier fly has a large amount of protein stored during its larvae stage because the fly doesn't eat once it is hatched.

Salmon, which are notoriously picky, liked the food made from the black soldier flies better than the other alternatives.

Because salmon can take up to two and a half years to mature, and because most new types of feed are only tested for a couple of months, there is often reluctance in the aquaculture industry to try new kinds of feed, says Aarts. In an attempt to attract interest, Protix tested the new insect-based food for four years.

"We come from an age where we thought the big blue ocean was infinite," says Kees Aarts, Chief Executive Officer of Protix. "But with increasing demand for production of salmon, we need that alternative."



© AFP / Guillaume Souvart

Black soldier flies are being used for insect-based feed as an alternative to the controversial fish meal that was the aquaculture industry standard for decades.

Getting rid of fish meal

As recently as a few years ago, it took the equivalent of three fish ground up into meal to make enough food to sustain one farm-raised salmon. That's not an efficient use of the world's resources, environmentalists like Oceana and WWF said. At the same time, demand for salmon around the world has been soaring. In response, the industry worked hard and eventually got the ratio down to one and a half fish for every salmon produced (largely by adding plant-based foods like corn and soy to the mix). But that ratio still requires fishing.

The fish used to make the fish-based meal can contain traces of chemical runoff from soil, plastics that the animals may have encountered in the ocean, and other toxins (like mercury from power plant emissions). Those compounds can get ingested by salmon and eventually land on the dinner plate of the people who buy them.

Tim Cashion, a University of British Columbia Ph.D. student in the Fisheries Economics Research Unit of the Institute for the Oceans and Fisheries, says the industry has already reduced the amount of fish meal used in the process substantially, from 100 percent in the 1960s and '70s down to about 30 percent when he last published a study on it in Norway in 2012. However, those sources don't necessarily

replace all of the amino acids that salmon need, and they don't replace the fish oils that make salmon so healthy to eat.

"The oil might be the part that's harder to replace," Cashion says. "It's about getting the kinds of fats that people want in their salmon. That's why you can't do a complete replacement of fish oil with other kinds of oils."

While the insect-based feed only replaces the proteins that salmon eat, Aarts says alternatives for the fish oils, which are currently still sourced from ocean life, are also in development by companies like DSM and Evonik.

A major concern that companies like Protix are facing is the scale that's needed for insect-based feed to be successful in the aquaculture industry.

"The current demand for fish meal is approximately 6 million tons per year," Cashion says. "[If] the idea is to replace that 100 percent with insect feed or insect meal of various kinds, we need a lot of it. The current production as I understand it is not there, but this is obviously a fairly new kind of industry."

He wonders if it is feasible to meet that kind of demand in a timely fashion, and says its success also depends on the price of the insect-based feed.

"If they can buy insect meal for cheaper

than fish meal and they can get the same results, they will likely do it, if it can work at the scale they're producing at," he says.

Because it is still a new product, Aarts says the insect-based meal is still slightly more expensive than fish meal, but fish meal prices are expected to rise as the amount of fish in the ocean decreases and demand for salmon continues to increase. As Protix expands to address the amount of feed that is needed, Aarts expects scale factors to drive the cost of the feed down as well.

Different feed, same great taste

The flavor of the salmon that ends up on consumers' plates isn't impacted by insect-based feed, either, says Arsiwalla. "The best result we could get was that it tastes like a salmon should taste, even though we made a significant change in the feed," he says. "A salmon should taste like a salmon."

To prove it, the company had their salmon taste-tested in blind judging. No one could tell the difference between their salmon and the salmon raised on conventional feed.

Protix is now working on scaling up their production, which is based in the Netherlands but has new projects across Europe, Asia, and Mexico. They are working on using food waste from vegetables produced by other food companies to feed the fly larvae, which they grow in their own facility. They will be opening a second facility soon, and together with other companies that make insect-based feed, they successfully lobbied the European Union for approval to sell their products in countries that are a part of the union as of July 2017.

"We believe the industry is set to grow fast," Aarts says. "Our aim is to show safety, economic, and environmental potential of this new category of ingredients, from which new releases can be developed, like the inclusion in chicken feed."

After the EU's approval, Aarts says there was a fast increase in demand for insect-based feed. Protix is interested in working on feed for other aquaculture species as well, like trout and shrimp.

"We have to take care of our planet, and we believe that all people need to have access to proper nutrition in all phases of life," says Aarts. "That also means [proper nutrition] for the animals we grow to feed ourselves."

(Source: National Geographic)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ع

Iran to offer healthcare services to Arba'een pilgrims

Pilgrims who are travelling to the Iraqi holy city of Karbala to take part in Arba'een rituals are offered with healthcare services provided with Iran's Emergency Medical Services (EMS), IRNA news agency reported. Some 235 ambulances, 16 medical ambulance buses, 11 motorlances, and 4 helicopters are dispatched to the western borders of Mehran, Chazabeh, Shalamchah and the roads leading to Karbala, the EMS head Pir-Hossein Kulivand said. Additionally, seven field hospitals are set up along the roads, Kulivand added.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“co-, col-, com-, con-, cor-”

■ **Meaning:** with or together

■ **For example:** What will it take for us to **coexist** in peace?

PHRASAL VERB

Fluff something up/out

■ **Meaning:** to make something soft become larger by shaking it

■ **For example:** She fluffed up the pillows for me.

IDIOM

Feel blue

■ **Explanation:** to feel blue means to have feelings of deep sadness or depression

■ **For example:** I'm going to see my grandmother. She's feeling a bit blue at the moment.

ارائه خدمات بهداشتی به زائران اربعین

به گزارش خبرگزاری ایرنا اورژانس کشور آماده ی ارائه ی خدمات درمانی بهداشتی به زائرانی که برای شرکت در مراسم اربعین عازم کربلا هستند می باشد.

پیرحسین کولیوند رئیس اورژانس کشور گفت: ۲۳۵ دستگاه آمبولانس اورژانس، ۱۶ اتوبوس- آمبولانس، ۱۱ موتورولانس، و چهار فروند بالگرد به نقاط مرزی غرب کشور در مهران، چابزه و شلمچه و راه های منتهی به کربلا اعزام می گردند.

کولیوند افزود: هفت بیمارستان صحرایی در مناطق مرزی مسیره‌ها مستقر شده‌اند.

There are 64 U.S. terrorists in Iraq and Syria, finds new report

Sixty-four Americans have travelled to Iraq and Syria to join terrorist groups, according to a new report.

The George Washington University Program on Extremism's report, titled "The Travelers: American Jihadists in Syria and Iraq," included several people whose identities have never been released, as well as 12 people who returned to the U.S.

The study found that most of the American jihadists were associated with terror group ISIL and came mostly from Minnesota, Virginia, and Ohio, but were spread across more than 16 states.

Dr. Alexander Melagrou-Hitchens, the Director of the Programme on Extremism and one of the report's authors, told The Independent his team are still looking into why jihadists hail mostly from these places but there is "no obvious reason."

Mr. Hitchens said for Minnesota at least, recruiting networks are a "long-standing issue" because of the established Somali-American community, centered around Minneapolis.

The FBI and other law enforcement authorities found that several people had travelled to join up with another terror group called al Shabab in Somalia before ISIL really established itself, he explained.

So once ISIL became a real threat to the U.S., it had a "built-in network of recruiters" and "radicalized" people with information, propaganda, and links in the area.

Mr. Hitchens also said Ohio has, since the



early days after the September 11th attacks, also been a "hotspot" or "recruitment hub" for extremists.

In these and other cases, it may have just been an instance of "serendipitous" connections to radicalized, "charismatic" people within a person's community.

Researchers found a few characteristics in common for these 64 people, however – being male with an average of 27.

But, the authors of the report warned that no single profile, whether demographically or in terms of motivation, could be used to

peg these terrorist-travelers.

Mr. Hitchens also said that these 64 people are just a sample of those that have travelled and/or returned since information on others is still confidential due to ongoing investigations or for other security reasons.

As the report stated: "Far fewer foreign volunteers joined up with ISIL from the U.S. than from Europe."

"The estimated number of foreign volunteers from Europe ranges from 5,000 to 6,000, most of them from France, Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom, while U.S.

officials speak of several hundred," it said.

That figure – estimated to be 250-300 Americans – included people arrested prior to leaving the country, those arrested abroad, and those known to have been killed.

However, the real numbers remain somewhat unclear. "Most of the 250 to 300 American jihadist recruits mentioned by authorities have not been publicly identified, suggesting ongoing investigations, sealed indictments, and some uncertainty," Hitchens wrote.

Of the 64 identifiable travelers, 12 had returned to the U.S. by the time the report was completed.

Only one of them was identified by police to have come back with an intent to attack the U.S.

The sample in the report also included those who were arrested even before joining up with ISIL.

Hitchens explained those people have been arrested often at the airport gate just ahead of boarding a flight because they were already under a "reasonable suspicion" by the FBI or other agency.

These people's online activity and personal connections have been monitored for some time prior to their arrest on a charge of "attempt to provide material support" to ISIL.

It is rare, but sometimes they could also be reported by their family or community for exhibiting extremist tendencies, at which point an investigation is opened on them.

(Source: Independent)

Saudi crown prince's UK visit to be delayed amid protest fears

A report says a momentous planned visit by Saudi Arabia's scandal-hit Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the UK will be delayed amid fears of negative media coverage and popular protests.

The Middle East Eye (MEE) news portal reported Tuesday that Bin Salman's visit to London had been scheduled to take place later this month but it would be postponed to March 7 amid worries in Riyadh that the heir to the throne could be the target of protests against the Saudi regime's rights record and its war crimes in Yemen.

High-profile British activism groups, most notable among them Stop the War Coalition (StWC) and UK-based Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), have been voicing outrage for long over Riyadh's human rights violations and London's support for its roughly three-year-long invasion of Yemen.

Most recently, the activists staged a protest in front of the Saudi Embassy in London a few days ago.

The UK has increased its weapons sales by around 500 percent since the onset of the deadly Saudi military campaign against, The Independent reported last November. The military equipment sold to the kingdom ever since,



including warplanes, precision-guided bombs, and missiles, are worth more than \$6.4 billion.

Officials in Riyadh also started to grow wary about the prospect of unfavorable media spotlight during bin Salman's planned visit last month, when the BBC aired a three-part documentary, titled "House of Saud: A Family At War."

It showed how the Saudi ruling family was facing a

"moment of unprecedented instability" amid its ongoing diplomatic conflict with Qatar, friction with Iran and the bin Salman-led war against Yemen.

The MEE said Britain's difference of opinion with Saudi Arabia over Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world countries, which London has voiced support for but Riyadh stiffly opposes, could also overshadow the crown prince's visit.

It, meanwhile, cited officials at the Saudi Embassy in Washington as saying that the three-day trip to London is set to be "one of the most sensitive diplomatic visits" this year, as the UK is likely to endorse the crown prince's so-called 2030 Vision economic overhaul project. The project is aimed at weaning the kingdom's economy off oil.

Bin Salman has not stepped out of Saudi Arabia since the start of his so-called anti-corruption purge on 4 November, reportedly over fears of internal disorder in his absence. His visit to London will be part of an extended trip that is expected to also take him to Paris and Washington.

British Prime Minister Theresa May visited the Saudi kingdom last November.

(Source: agencies)

Turkey not at odds with Russia over Afrin operation: Cavusoglu

Turkey says it has no disagreements with Russia over its military operation underway against U.S.-backed Kurdish militants in the northern Syrian region of Afrin.

Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu was speaking to TGRT Haber in response to a question whether there were tensions between Ankara and Moscow over 'Operation Olive Branch', the codename for Turkey's aerial and ground attacks in Afrin.

He said, "We do not have any disagreements with Russia. We continue our contacts with Russia," which has been conducting an aerial campaign against terror groups in Syria at the request of Damascus.

"We need to inform each other in a timely manner, especially [regarding] air strikes and the developments in the field. We contact them in real time or in advance," the premier added.

Ankara launched the Afrin operation some two weeks ago after the US said it

would work with Kurdish militants to set up a 30,000-strong border force near Turkey.

Shortly after the operation was launched, Moscow voiced concern about the Turkish attacks, calling on the sides to exercise restraint. The Russian Foreign Ministry also said the country's troops had been withdrawn from the operation zone to "prevent potential" provocation.

Turkey views those militants as terrorists linked to the homegrown Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has been fighting for independence for decades.

The 'Operation Olive Branch' is currently focused on the Afrin region, but Turkey has said it could extend to the nearby Kurdish-controlled city of Manbij and beyond.

Ankara has warned the U.S. to halt its support for the militants of the so-called Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) or risk confronting Turkish forces on the ground in Syria.

Syria has slammed both Turkish and American military activities in the Arab country as a violation of its sovereignty, repeatedly calling on both actors to leave its soil.

Iran has also voiced opposition to the Turkish military operation in Syria, with President Hassan Rouhani saying on Tuesday that Ankara does not "have the permission of the [Syrian] government...and the consent of the people" for such an offensive.

Elsewhere, Cavusoglu also said Turkish forces had finished building a sixth observation point in Syria's northwestern Idlib Province as part of an agreement with the other two guarantors of the Syria ceasefire, Iran and Russia.

Early last year, Turkey, which has been backing anti-Damascus militants, as well as Russia and Iran, which side with the Syrian government, began moderating talks between the government and opposition in the Kazakh

capital of Astana.

The talks led to the demarcation of four de-escalation zones across the Arab country, which has been fighting foreign-backed militancy since 2011.

Idlib houses one of the zones. Turkey has agreed to set up 12 observation posts in Idlib and neighboring provinces.

■ **'Regular tripartite contact over Syria'**

In another development on Wednesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish and Iranian counterparts Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Hassan Rouhani were in regular contact to discuss the conflict in Syria, Reuters reported.

He added that the statesmen "do not rule out the possibility of an in-person meeting on the topic, though no plans are currently in place."

(Source: TRT)

Syria air defenses respond to new Israeli aggression near Damascus

The Syrian army says its air defenses intercepted several missiles fired by Israeli warplanes towards a military position near the capital, Damascus.

In a statement carried by state media on Wednesday, the army said the Israeli aircraft used Lebanese airspace for the missile strikes.

Loud blasts were heard in Damascus at around 3:30 a.m. local time.

"Our air defense systems blocked them and destroyed most of them," said the statement.

"The general command of the armed forces holds Israel fully responsible for the dangerous consequences for its repeated, aggressive and uncalculated adventures," it added.

The new Israeli act of aggression was first reported by state media, which said the missiles had been aimed at a scientific research center in Jamraya village.

Over the past few years, Israel has frequently attacked military targets in Syria in what is considered as an attempt to prop up terror outfits that have been suffering heavy defeats against Syrian government forces.



Israel has also been providing weapons to anti-Damascus militants as well as medical treatment to the Takfiri elements wounded in Syria.

■ **Netanyahu visits Golan Heights**

The latest attack on Syria came shortly after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu paid a rare visit to the occupied part of Syria's Golan Heights and peered

across the border.

Netanyahu said the regime was ready for "any scenario and I wouldn't suggest to anyone that they test us."

The warning came one week after the Israeli minister of military affairs stressed that a new war with Lebanon would also likely involve Syria.

"Israel's northern front extends to Syria; it is not just Lebanon. I am not sure that the Syrian government can resist Hezbollah's attempts to drag them into a war with Israel," Avigdor Liberman said.

Israel launched two wars on Lebanon in 2000 and 2006, in both cases the Hezbollah resistance movement inflicted heavy losses on the regime's military.

The regime seized the Golan Heights from Syria after the 1967 Six-Day War and later occupied it in a move that has never been recognized by the international community.

It has built tens of illegal settlements in the area ever since and has used the region to carry out a number of military operations against the Syrian government.

(Source: SANA)

Lebanon accepts lawsuit against Saudi minister over sowing discord

A Lebanese judge has accepted to look into a lawsuit against Saudi Minister of State for Persian Gulf Affairs Thamer al-Sabhan, who was in charge of the Lebanon file during Prime Minister Saad Hariri's shock resignation late last year.

Lebanon's state-owned National News Agency (NNA) reported on Wednesday that Beirut First Examining Magistrate Ghassan

Oueidat had decided to accept the court proceedings against the 50-year-old Saudi politician on charges of "sowing discord among various strata of the Lebanese society, provoking communal violence and disrupting Lebanon's ties with a foreign state."

The report added that veteran Lebanese inmate Nabih Awada, who has served time in

Israeli prisons and is close to Hezbollah, filed the lawsuit on January 31 through his lawyer Hassan Bazzi, stressing that Judge Oueidat will soon set a date for Sabhan's questioning.

On October 30, Sabhan issued threats against Lebanon's government as well as Iran and the resistance movement of Hezbollah via Twitter, stating that the movement needs to be "toppled" in Lebanon.

The Saudi minister also warned in an interview with Lebanese MTV television station that there would be "astounding" developments to "oust" Hezbollah.

He also said that Saudi Arabia would deal with Lebanon's government as a hostile administration because of Hezbollah's power-sharing role in it.

(Source: Press TV)

Iraqi forces launch offensive against new militant outfit in north

➔ The so-called White Flags militant outfit was formed in late 2017 when the Daesh terror group was on its last legs in the face of Iraqi army advances.

It has bases in Iraq's mountains and highlands and uses a banner depicting a black lion on a white background.

Some reports have put the number of its elements at hundreds, less than one thousand. It is said to be an alliance of former Daesh terrorists and disgruntled Kurdish mafia members.

PMU spokesman Ali al-Hussieni told the al-Sabah newspaper on Tuesday that the military campaign was aimed at Daesh remnants and White Flag militants.

"The troops received accurate intelligence reports on the locations of those terrorists, who have committed several violations in Iraq," he added.

Abadi unveils plan for U.S.-led forces' drawdown

Separately on Tuesday, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi unveiled a plan for the gradual drawdown of U.S.-led coalition forces from Iraq after the collapse of Daesh.

Speaking at a press briefing in Baghdad, Abadi announced "a governmental plan drawn to reduce number of forces of the international coalition in Iraq gradually."

Also on Monday, an Iraqi government spokesman said that U.S. forces had already begun pulling out but that some would remain. Moreover, two major Iraqi Shia groups, the Badr Organization and Kata'ib Hezbollah, have demanded a complete withdrawal of American troops from the country.

Badr Organization spokesman Kareem Nuri said Washington and Baghdad "should coordinate to ensure a full withdrawal. U.S. presence will be cause for internal polarization and a magnet for terrorists."

"We are serious about getting the Americans out, using the force of arms because the Americans don't understand any other language," Kata'ib Hezbollah spokesman, Jaafar al-Husseini, told the Beirut-based al-Mayadeen TV.

The U.S. has been leading a coalition of its allies in a military campaign against purported Daesh targets in Iraq since 2014. The alliance has repeatedly been accused of targeting and killing civilians.

(Source: Press TV)

Senators question Trump's Afghan strategy

Republican and Democratic senators have grilled Trump administration officials about the war in Afghanistan, saying American taxpayers' money is being wasted on a failed war.

During their first hearing Tuesday on the war since the Republican president unveiled his strategy in August, the lawmakers questioned whether Trump's policy will bring an end to the war that enters its 17th year.

The members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee expressed concern to State Department and Pentagon officials that the current strategy will not help achieve the stated goal of forcing the Taliban into peace talks and ending the conflict.

Senator Chris Coons, a Democrat, said, "I don't think there is a clear path out of Afghanistan and I worry that the Taliban will simply wait us out regardless of how long we are there, and as a result we may be there the rest of my life."

"Something is clearly not working," said Senator Ben Cardin, a Maryland Democrat and longtime Afghan war critic. "By any standard, the current security situation is grim."

Also, Republican Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, another war critic, said, "We're in an impossible situation. I see no hope for it," noting, "I feel sorry for putting the military in this position."

On August 21, Trump announced he would prolong the military intervention in the South Asian country, which he had once described as a "complete waste." Speaking at a nationally televised speech before a military audience at Fort Myer, he unveiled his decision to continue the U.S. military intervention, albeit with conditions.

"Our commitment is not unlimited, and our support is not a blank check. The American people expect to see real reforms and real results."

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

With U.S. officials estimating that the military presence in the war-torn country will cost taxpayers more than \$45 billion this year, the senators argued that those funds could be spent at home.

Meanwhile, Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan and Randall Schriver, the assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs, defended the strategy, arguing that it is governed by progress on the ground rather than a fixed timetable set out by Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama.

"We have a policy that we believe in," Sullivan said, noting that a U.S. withdrawal could lead to a Taliban victory which could give terrorist group al-Qaeda a stronghold from which it can attack the U.S.

(Source: agencies)

Is Mexico the most dangerous country on Earth?

➔ **Cocaine epidemic in U.S.**

In one especially memorable episode in the 1980s, an endearing U.S. partnership with right-wing Nicaraguan Contras led to a certain crack cocaine epidemic in the U.S. and the devastation of black communities in South Central Los Angeles.

In more recent years, U.S. shamelessness has included cooperation between the DEA and none other than Mexico's Sinaloa cartel.

Enter current U.S. president and disseminator extraordinaire of fake news, who tweeted on January 18 with regard to his proposed border monstrosity: "We need the Wall to help stop the massive inflow of drugs from Mexico, now rated the number one most dangerous country in the world".

Never mind that Mexico's homicide rate is in fact lower than that of other regional U.S. buddies - and preferred "drug war" partners - like Colombia.

In any case, Trumpian reality has now officially awarded the position of "number one most dangerous country in the world" to a place long victimized by the U.S. - the very same U.S. that, in cultivating a disproportionately trigger-happy culture at home, could very well stand to issue travel advisories for its own domestic classrooms, nightclubs, and playgrounds.

Add to these truths the U.S. habit of invading and traumatizing other countries at will, and the country itself might - just might - start to seem like the most dangerous one on Earth.

(Source: Aljazeera)

Nadal confirms participation in Queen’s Club Championships

World number one Rafa Nadal will return to this year’s Queen’s Club Championships in what will be the 10th anniversary of his memorable triumph that served as a prelude to his maiden Wimbledon title. Nadal came into the 2008 event on the back of his fourth French Open title and beat Serbia’s Novak Djokovic in the final at West London. He then outlasted his great rival and defending champion Roger Federer in five sets at Wimbledon.

“It is going to be the 10th anniversary of my victory there in 2008, it’s a great memory, winning there and three weeks later winning Wimbledon,” Spaniard Nadal said in a video posted to the tournament’s Twitter account.

“It was an unforgettable year. I am excited to be coming back and playing Queen’s again... I can’t wait to be there.”

Nadal last played the Wimbledon warm-up event in 2015 and lost to Alexandr Dolgoplov in the opening round. He pulled out of the event in the last two years due to injuries.

The 31-year-old retired with an injury in the fifth set of his Australian Open quarter-final match against Croatia’s Marin Cilic last month.

Three-times grand slam champion Andy Murray, who underwent hip surgery last month, is targeting a comeback at the event he has won five times, the organizers said.

The tournament will be held from Jun. 18-24.

(Source: Reuters)

Kick It Out alarmed by rising discrimination in English

English football experienced a 59 percent increase in incidents of racist, homophobic and other discriminatory abuse in the first half of the 2017-18 season, British anti-discriminatory body Kick It Out said on Wednesday. The organisation said it had received 300 reports relating to 282 incidents of abuse by the end of 2017, up from 177 incidents in the same period last season.

There was a 75 percent increase in incidents in professional football, a 14 percent rise in the amateur game and a 63 percent increase on social media. About 49 percent of the 131 incidents reported in professional football took place in the Premier League.

Racism was the most common form of discrimination across English football, accounting for 54 percent of incidents, with homophobia, biphobia and transphobia making up 22 percent.

Kick It Out chair Herman Ouseley acknowledged that the football authorities have improved procedures to identify discrimination but said the statistics should “act as a wake-up call to everyone in the sport”.

“Ultimately, tackling discrimination must be a collective effort,” he said in a statement. “The leaders across all sections of society and football, as well as the broader public and football supporters themselves, need to take action, report discrimination and help us eradicate hatred.”

Ouseley said the rise in discrimination in football came against a “backdrop of rising hatred in our society”.

(Source: Mirror)

Koeman named new Dutch boss

Ronald Koeman has been announced as the new national team coach of the Netherlands, signing a four-and-a-half-year contract, the KNVB (Royal Dutch Football Association) confirmed.

Koeman’s long-term mission will be to guide the Dutch back to the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar™ after they failed to qualify for the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia under head coach Dick Advocaat. The Netherlands finished in third place behind France and Sweden in UEFA Group A in 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifying.

The Netherlands also missed out on UEFA EURO 2016 prior to Russia 2018, so Koeman’s task will also be to get the Dutch back to the continental finals, which will be held in 12 cities in 12 different host countries.

For a country with great international pedigree—the Netherlands finished runners-up at the 2010 World Cup and in third place at Brazil 2014—Koeman will be eager to get them back to those great heights.

“I am really excited and really proud,” Koeman said at his introductory press conference. “It was always one of my ambitions. We have a lot of good players and talented players. I’m really positive about the future of the national team. If I wasn’t, I wouldn’t have taken this job.”

The 54-year-old takes charge of a national team for the first time in his career having managed nine clubs prior, the latest being with Everton in the Premier League. His first task as head coach will be guiding the Netherlands in the newly-formed UEFA Nations League, where they will compete in League A Group 1 with Germany and France. The KNVB also announced Nico-Jan Hoogma as a director of football. Hoogma has been working as a general manager for Eredivisie side Heracles Almelo for over ten years.

(Source: FIFA)

Putin plans to meet with FIFA president in Sochi soon

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said he plans to hold a meeting with FIFA President Gianni Infantino in Sochi soon.

“We will have an event in Sochi soon, we will meet with the FIFA president to outline the beginning of some stages of preparations for the World Cup,” Putin said at a meeting with members of the Totem football club, inviting them to take part in that meeting.

“Since you are too world champions, I invite you there so that you could talk with Mr. Infantino. I believe it will be interesting for him to have a look at our world champions in his category,” Putin added. Established in 2003, the Totem football club has more than 100 members belonging to various age groups who play football. That number includes 45 children from Krasnoyarsk’s Orphanage No.1 and its graduates.

The Totem children’s football team has won the city, regional, Russian and international football and futsal tournaments on numerous occasions. Since 2011, the club’s members have repeatedly entered the top three at the world championships for children from orphanages held in Warsaw.

(Source: TASS)

Doping dominates discussions at IOC Session



The Canadian’s comments sparked an unusually lively exchange with another IOC member, Gerardo Werthein, who defended Bach while attacking Pound. “For some reason if Mr. Pound doesn’t agree, then it’s wrong,” Werthein, an IOC member from Argentina, said. “We have to understand that this is not Mr. Pound’s organization. But this is the IOC.” “He makes statements that create an en-

vironment of doubt,” Werthein added. “In one way it discredits the work that is being done in the IOC.”

Pound responded by accusing Werthein of launching an attack on his character.

“The fact I have a different opinion from others... does not mean I am not entitled to the opinion. I think it’s very unfortunate in a collegial gathering like this to suggest

Home is where the heart is for Alana Ramsay



Canadian Alana Ramsay is heading into the World Para Alpine Skiing World Cup Finals full of excitement as she will competing in front of her family and friends at her home hill in Kimberley.

“It is really exciting because I grew up skiing in Kimberley, so I’ll be skiing at home,” the 23-year-old said.

This will be the third World Cup that Ramsay takes part in the season after competing in Kuhtai, Austria, and in Veysonnaz, Switzerland. Her best results so far have been three third places at the former, but with the home support she is expecting to close her World Cup participation on a high note.

“I could invite my family who lives in the vicinity, representing my country in front of my family.”

Ramsay, who has cerebral palsy, launched her international alpine skiing career back in 2010 and has been improving ever since. “Alpine skiing is just so much fun. It’s about being outdoors and the freedom to go fast.”

She has so far competed at two World Championships in Panorama, Canada, in 2015, and Tarvisio, Italy, in 2017. Her best results came in the latter, winning silver in the women’s super-G standing and three bronzes in the downhill, super-combined

and giant slalom.

She was also named Female Para Alpine Athlete of the Year at the 2016 Canadian Ski Racing Awards.

Two years before, she participated at her maiden Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia, ending ninth in the slalom and tenth in the super-G.

Although France’s four-time Sochi 2014 champion Marie Bochet and Germany’s Paralympic gold medallist Andrea Rothfuss will be the leading medal contenders, Ramsay will be hoping to reach her first podium in PyeongChang.

“Kimberley is going to be a boost to everyone’s confidence going into PyeongChang. Not just myself, not just the Canadians, but for everyone who is there competing at the Finals,” she said.

Live streaming, highlights and complete live results are available on a dedicated World Para Alpine Skiing World Cup website.

Broadcasters and news agencies interested in the 2018 World Para Alpine Skiing World Cup footage and interviews can contact Sascha Beck.

The Paralympic Winter Games take place in PyeongChang, South Korea from 9-18 March.

(Source: Paralympic.org)

Russians appeal against Pyeongchang exclusion adjourned



A decision on whether 47 Russian athletes and coaches can take part in the Winter Olympics may not be made until Friday - the day the Games start.

The Russians believe they have been wrongfully excluded from Pyeongchang by the International Olympic Committee.

They include the 28 athletes who had their life bans lifted by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Cas) last week.

A Cas panel started hearing the appeals on Wednesday but they have been adjourned until Thursday.

“The panel’s decisions are expected to be announced either late in the evening of 8 February 2018 or in the morning of 9 February 2018,” Cas said.

The Winter Olympics run from 9 to 25 February in South Korea - although some events start on 8 February, the day before the opening ceremony.

■ What are they appealing against?

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) invited 169 Russians to compete as independent athletes in Pyeongchang after their country was banned from the Games.

That ban followed an investigation into state-sponsored Russian doping at their home Games in Sochi in 2014.

The IOC also banned 43 Russians for life from the Olympics following a further

that I am not entitled to give that opinion.”

The IOC expects 168 Russian athletes who have been deemed “clean” to participate in the games under a neutral flag, with the team to be known as “Olympic Athletes from Russia.” Another 32 have appealed to the CAS to be granted invitations to compete in Pyeongchang.

■ Reforms to attract hosts

Bach also used the 132nd IOC Session to present a package of 118 reforms dubbed “The New Norm. These are designed to provide more support for host cities and boost long-term development. Bach said the reforms would lead to a “new norm” in Olympics from the candidature, the delivery and the legacy, and lead to “the biggest savings in the history of the Olympic Games.”

The move comes in reaction to dwindling interest in hosting Olympic Games. By the time the right to host the 2024 Summer Games was awarded, it came down to just two bidders, after Hamburg, Budapest, Boston, and Rome had all withdrawn from the race. Apparently worried that the loser would not bid for the next Summer Olympics, the IOC brokered a deal, which will see Paris host the Games in 2024, followed by Los Angeles in 2028.

(Source: AP)

Athletes, organizers locked in Pyeongchang cold war

■ Pyeongchang cold

The Korean Meteorological Administration (KMA) may just have provided a ray of sunshine for organizers on Wednesday, however.

“According to our forecast the temperature will not be problematic to have the opening ceremony,” KMA Deputy Director Choi Heung-jin told reporters.

Temperatures would range from minus 2 to minus 5 Celsius (28.4-23 F) which would not be overly concerning, he added.

Yoon Hee-dong, director of the KMA’s forecast bureau, said spectators coming to Gangwon province should realize that it was colder than other parts of Korea and that they should “bundle up” and take other precautions to keep the cold at bay.

A hardy construction worker at the media center in Pyeongchang, layered up with only his eyes and nose exposed to the elements, said the cold was “different” here.

“This is not Seoul,” he said. “This is Pyeongchang cold.”

The current cold snap is the latest to blanket the country over the past few months, prompting the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to issue warnings about cold weather injuries such as hypothermia and frostbite.

Not everyone is praying for the sweet release of spring, however, with manufacturers and retailers of cold weather gear enjoying something of a boon.

Sales of hot packs, which generate heat for hours when activated through shaking, have skyrocketed, creating shortages of materials for manufacturers, Yonhap News reported last week.

(Source: Reuters)



staff away from work.

But it is the threat of hypothermia at Friday’s opening ceremony that has set organizers on edge, with presidents, prime ministers and some 35,000 spectators scheduled to gather under the stars at Pyeongchang’s \$58 million open-air Olympic stadium.

The ceremony has been slimmed down to a brisk two-hour march from the typical four-hour procession and organizers plan to dish out hats, blankets and seat-warmers to combat the cold, though that has not been enough to reassure some spectators as a number of tickets have already been returned.

Sadie Bjornsen, a cross-country skier on Team USA, told Reuters they were taking the cold threat seriously.

“We’ve got these heated jackets from Ralph Lauren, and we’ve also been told that there’s going to be a warm area that we can stand in,” she said. “After it’s over it’s about getting back on the bus as quickly as possible.”

FIFA President Infantino to come to Iran on March 1

S P O R T S The Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has invited FIFA President Gianni Infantino to come to Iran on March 1.

The Iranian football officials will negotiate with the FIFA President about the AFC Champions League home and away basis in the current season.

The Saudi Arabian football teams will not travel to Iran to face their Iranian counterparts despite Asian Football Confederation has ordered they should not play in neutral venues.

The Iranian officials are optimistic about solving the problem.

Infantino will reportedly attend Tehran derby between Persepolis and Esteghlal in his two-day visit.

The Iranian media reports suggest that Infantino, who will travel to Tehran via private jet, is going to meet with Iran's President Hassan Rouhani.

The Swiss-Italian will also meet Iranian Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Masoud Soltanifar.

In the fifth FIFA Executive Football Summit in 2017/2018 series which was held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands in January, FFIRI President Mehdi Taj invited Gianni Infantino to travel to Iran.

Infantino visited Iran two years ago when he was seeking the Persian Gulf country's support for his bid to become FIFA President.



Uzbekistan reach agreement with Carlos Queiroz: Report



S P O R T S President of Uzbekistan Football Federation (UFF) have reportedly reached an agreement with Iran current coach Carlos Queiroz.

The Portuguese coach is under contract with Team Melli until the end of the 2018 FIFA World Cup. According to champion-at.com, President of Uzbekistan Football Federation (UFF), Umid Ahmadjonov, has reached a verbal agreement with Queiroz.

The former Real Madrid coach had already linked with Australia football team. Former Iran national football team and Persepolis current coach Branko Ivankovic had been already shortlisted to take charge of Uzbekistan football team.

Uzbekistan are without a head coach after Samvel Babayan was sacked in September following failure to qualify for World Cup 2018.

Persepolis sink Sanat Naft in Iran Professional League



S P O R T S Goals by Ali Alipour and Farshad Ahmadzadeh earned Iran Professional League (IPL) leaders Persepolis a 3-0 win at Sanat Naft in Abadan on Wednesday.

Just 13 minutes into the match, Ahmadzadeh found the back of the net from close range and Alipour extended Persepolis's lead in the 27th minute with a right-footed shot from outside

the box.

Alipour was on target once again in the 56th minute. He scored his 17th goal for Persepolis in the current season.

Tractor Sazi also defeated Gostaresh Foolad 2-1 thanks to a Mehdi Kiani's last grasp in Tabriz derby.

Persepolis lead the IPL table with 54 points, 16 points above second place Zob Ahan.

Quarter-final Preview: IR Iran v Thailand

Taipei: Head coach Jose Maria Pazos believes Thailand have every reason to be confident going up against defending champions Islamic Republic of Iran, after their convincing win over Kyrgyz Republic on Matchday Three of the AFC Futsal Championship 2018.

Iran not only maintained a 100 percent record but only conceded four goals to claim top spot in Group C, while Thailand opened their campaign with a 5-1 win over Jordan, suffered a 5-2 loss to Lebanon but bounced back to beat Kyrgyz Republic 8-1 to finish second on Group D.

Maria Pazos acknowledged the challenge but believed that his side have regained the confidence and momentum after their comprehensive win over Kyrgyz Republic, saying: "We all know that Iran are one of the best in the world. And if they play their best tomorrow, it's going to be difficult, but we will try our best to make it difficult for them too."

"Nobody here wants to face Iran in the quarter-finals, but if you want to be champions, you have to face them eventually. "It's not the game we wanted to play in the quarter-finals,



but because we didn't perform well enough in the group stage, we are here.

"I hope that our victory (against Kyrgyz Republic), and the

way we won will give us confidence to face this big challenge.

"The level they (Iran) have is incredible, but if we continue to play the same way we did yesterday, I know we can do it."

Iran head coach Mohammed Nazemasharieh respects the Thai team, recognising them as the ASEAN champions but believes his players focus will make the difference.

"We have passed the first stage of the qualification, and while we did our best in the group stage, we have Thailand ahead now," said Nazemasharieh.

"This shouldn't have happened like this, but in a continental tournament, anything can happen but we respect every team who have reached this far into the tournament, knowing how strong and what they are capable of.

"But the main thing for us is concentration, and if our players have that, they are going to perform beautifully, and we are aiming to play with full concentration against one of the strongest opponents."

Thursday's quarter-final will be at the Xinzhuang Stadium. (Source: the-afc)

Luis Enrique 'agrees deal' to replace Chelsea manager Antonio Conte

Luis Enrique looks ready to replace Antonio Conte as Chelsea manager with a report in Spain suggesting the former Barcelona boss has already agreed personal terms.

Conte's position in the Blues hotseat has become increasingly unstable in recent weeks following a 3-0 home loss to Bournemouth and then a 4-1 thrashing at the hands of Watford on Monday.

With Chelsea's position in the top four now coming under threat, owner Roman Abramovich could be forced to act and, according to Sport, he is set to hand 47-year-old Enrique a two-and-a-half-year contract until the summer of 2020. Enrique, who has also managed Roma and Celta Vigo, is available immediately after leaving Barcelona last summer. While in charge at the Nou Camp he led Barca to two La Liga titles, a trio of Copa del Rey triumphs and glory in the 2015 Champions League final.

One of Enrique's first games as Chelsea boss could be against Barca, who visit Stamford Bridge on February 20, before completing their Champions League last-

16 tie in Catalonia on March 14.

Speaking after Chelsea's humbling defeat at Watford this week, Conte insisted he does not fear being sacked and even challenged the club to wield the axe if they believe he is not good enough.

"No, I'm not worried. I'm not worried about my job," said Conte. "I work every day, and I give 120 per cent. Okay? If this is enough, it's okay. Otherwise, the club can take a different decision. But I'm not worried. Tomorrow is another day. I can be the Chelsea coach or not. Which is the problem? My soul is clear."

"I go to sleep without a problem that maybe, maybe, I could do this or that. I try to do everything. If it's not good, the club can make a different decision. Life goes on."

"To play football in a great club, it means you must have a personality because it's simple to play when there is the confidence."

"Especially in this time of moment, you can see who is (ready to play) for a great club. To play with personality and also to risk something."

(Source: Daily Mail)

Romanian Nastase's ITF ban reduced on appeal

Ilie Nastase, the 71-year-old former world number one and ex-Romania Fed Cup captain, has had his ban from International Tennis Federation (ITF) team competitions reduced on appeal.

He was banned from acting in an official capacity at ITF team competitions until Dec. 31, 2020, and from attending them until Dec. 31, 2018, after multiple breaches of conduct rules at a Romania-Britain Fed Cup tie in Constanta last April.

The ITF found Nastase guilty of making a "highly inappropriate and racially insensitive" comment about Serena Williams' then unborn child and of making "advances of a sexual nature" toward Britain's team captain Anne Keothavong.

He was also found guilty of directing "abusive and threatening comments" at Keothavong, British player Johanna Konta, match officials and a member of the press.

Nastase was eventually booted out of the Fed Cup tie after swearing at the referee, Konta and Keothavong. He was later

replaced as Romania captain.

Nastase appealed against his sanctions and the ITF announced on Wednesday that it had reduced the bans by eight months each. Nastase can now attend ITF team events from April 23 this year and work at them from April 23, 2020.

However, his initial \$10,000 fine has been doubled to \$20,000.

Nastase can still be involved in men's Association of Tennis Professionals and Women's Tennis Association events as they lie outside of the ITF's jurisdiction.

Nastase was heard speaking in Romanian to one of his team members about Williams' baby during the draw for his country's Fed Cup tie against Britain.

"Let's see what color it has. Chocolate with milk?" the former French Open and U.S. Open champion was quoted as saying by multiple media outlets.

Nastase also put his arm around Keothavong at a news conference ahead of the tie and asked for her hotel room number. (Source: Reuters)

Esteghlal signs Mame Baba Thiam

TASNIM — Iranian football club Esteghlal has signed Senegalese striker Mame Baba Thiam.

The details of the fee contract have not been revealed.

The 25-year-old player has been handed No. 25 shirt in the Tehran-based team.

Mame Baba Thiam started his playing career at Italian giant Inter Milan in 2011 and has also played at Avellino, South Tyrol, Lanciano, Juventus and Empoli.

Esteghlal also completed the signing of Macedonian central midfielder Bojan Najdenov on Monday.

The Blues are going to strengthen for the 2018 AFC Champions League.

Esteghlal has 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 its opening match.

Winfried Schafer's team also sits sixth in Iran Professional League, 19 points behind pacesetter Persepolis.

Samuel Sarfo joins Iran's Saipa

Ghana defender Samuel Sarfo has completed an 18-month deal with Iranian football club Saipa.

The former Liberty Professional skipper was on the verge of joining Ghanaian giant Kumasi Asante Kotoko but the deal fell through after both parties failed to reach an agreement.

Sarfo, who was an influential member of the Black Stars B side that won the 2017 WAFU Nations Cup, was reported to have been closely monitored by clubs in North Africa and Oman but Saipa hired him.

Sarfo was the top scoring defender in the 2016/17 Ghana Premier League with seven goals in 26 appearances.

(Source: ghanasoccernet.com)

Mehdi Ghaedi released from hospital

TASNIM — Esteghlal striker Mehdi Ghaedi has been released from hospital in Bushehr, south of Iran, nine days after he was involved in a car crash.

The 19-year-old player was hospitalized in Bushehr's Persian Gulf Hospital after suffering rib cage injuries in the incident.

Ghaedi has been sidelined for at least two months to make a full recovery, according to the doctors.

Ghaedi, who joined Iranian giant Esteghlal in June, was one of members of Iran Under-20 team in the 2017 FIFA U-20 World Cup.

Pope praises joint Korean Olympic teams

Pope Francis said on Wednesday the participation of North Korean athletes in the Olympics raised hopes for reconciliation on the Korean peninsula and that the Vatican was ready to back any peace initiative.

"The traditional Olympic truce acquires special importance this year," he told pilgrims and tourists at his weekly general audience.

Delegations from the two Koreas will march together under a single flag and athletes will compete as a single team in some sports at the Winter Games starting on Friday in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

"This allows for hope for a world where conflicts can be resolved peacefully through dialogue and reciprocal respect, as sport teaches us to do," he said.

"May these Olympics be a great feast of friendship and sport," he said, adding that the Vatican was ready to back any "useful peace initiative that favors peace and encounter among peoples".

Francis has in the past called on all nations to support dialogue to ease tensions on the Korean peninsula and to work for a legally binding ban on nuclear weapons.

Last year he said a third country, such as Norway, should try to mediate the dispute between North Korea and Washington, to cool a situation that had become "too hot" and posed the risk of nuclear devastation.

The pope, who is a soccer fan, said he would be accompanying the Games with his prayers.

(Source: Reuters)

Mbappe says Ronaldo still a top player

Paris Saint-Germain's Kylian Mbappe has laughed off the possibility that Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo is past his prime.

The France international and his teammates will face the Ronaldo next week in the first leg of the teams' Champions League round-of-16 clash.

Speaking after a 4-1 win away at Ligue 2 side Sochaux in the Coupe de France round of 16, the 19-year-old rejected the idea.

"If Ronaldo is on the wane, then so are many others," Mbappe said. "He is a top player."

"We must pay attention to all of Real's strengths and he is one of them. We are always in a hurry to get back into Champions League action."

Mbappe's starting role at the Santiago Bernabeu next week has been put into some doubt by Angel Di Maria's recent performances.

As Mbappe continues to struggle for form after colliding with Lyon goalkeeper Anthony Lopes last month, it could be that the two switch roles in Madrid.

Mbappe set up the first of Di Maria's three goals on Tuesday and it took less than a minute to arrive.

(Source: ESPN)

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“Alphabet” names best animation at Mexican festival

A R T **TEHRAN**— Iranian director Kianush Abedi’s animated movie “Alphabet” has won the award for best short animation at the Festival Sayulita in Mexico, the organizers announced.



A scene from “Alphabet” by Iranian director Kianush Abedi.

The story in “Alphabet” is set in a town located in nowhere land. It has been years since the people of this town have forgotten the alphabet of life. They have no sight, hearing or speech left... but the words are impatiently waiting to be sung again.

The festival, which opened on January 31, awarded winners on February 4.

The award for best film was presented to “Shine” by Anthony Nardolillo from the U.S. The film tells the story of two brothers, who once were New York City’s renowned Salsa dancers.

Comedian Abdi dons makeup for “Lasagna” character resembling Donald Trump

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Iranian comedy star Akbar Abdi had donned makeup to play a character in director Hossein Qana’at’s “Lasagna” that resembled U.S. President Donald Trump.



These photos show Iranian comedian Akbar Abdi donning makeup for a character in director Hossein Qana’at’s “Lasagna” that resembled U.S. President Donald Trump.

However, the makeup was cancelled for the character, said Abdoallah Eskandari, the makeup artist who published Abdi’s photos on his Instagram on Tuesday.

“The character was intended only to be associated with Trump in the comic movie, otherwise I would have made him broadly similar to Trump,” he noted.

The 57-year-old Abdi who has played roles in over 100 movies and series, most of which have been comedies, received a lifetime achievement award at the 36th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran last week.

Due to the wide variety of roles he played in the Iranian cinema and television, Abdi was dubbed “the man with a thousand faces of Iranian cinema.”

He has played women in several movies such as “I Feel Sleepy” by Reza Attaran and “Snowman” by Davud Mirbakeri.

New “Star Wars” films on way from TV’s “Game of Thrones” creators

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Disney on Tuesday announced it was expanding its “Star Wars” universe, hiring the creators behind HBO’s massive TV hit “Game of Thrones” to write a new series of films set in the galaxy far, far away.

The Walt Disney Co (DIS.N) said in a statement that David Benioff and D.B. Weiss would write and produce the new series, which will be separate from both the episodic Skywalker saga and the recently announced trilogy being developed by director Rian Johnson.

No release dates or plot details were given.

Shares in Disney, which also reported a quarterly profit that topped forecasts on Tuesday, rose nearly 3 percent in after hours trading.

Kathleen Kennedy, president of Lucasfilm, said in a statement that Benioff and Weiss’s “command of complex characters, depth of story and richness of mythology will break new ground and boldly push ‘Star Wars’ in ways I find incredibly exciting.”

Disney is also developing “a few” “Star Wars” television series for an upcoming streaming service from the company, Chief Executive Bob Iger said on a conference call.

“Emperor of Hell” neutralized by censorship: producer

1 → Directed by Parviz Sheikhtadi, “Emperor of Hell” was scheduled to have its premiere at the festival in 2017, but the organizers refused to screen it in the official competition. Therefore, Sheikhtadi and Khazaei withdrew the film from the festival.

They applied for the festival again this year and the new management of the event allowed “Emperor of Hell” to premiere. However, the filmmakers still remain disgruntled.

“After being revised for 27 times, the film has been cut again and what was screened at the festival is not ours anymore,” Khazaei said.

Addressing those officials who imposed censorship on the film he noted, “You achieved your goal, be at peace with yourself because the film is neutral now.”

Sheikhtadi called “Emperor of Hell” the second sequel to his trilogy, first part of which “Saturday’s Hunter” was produced about Zionism in 2009.

He also pointed to the officials and said, “They tell me not to be against Saudis in your film.”

“I am not an anti-Arab, but I will make films about all the threats against my country—even about anglophile Islamic clerics if necessary,” he added.

“The judgments are about a film that has been strictly censored and the incoherence in the film caused by the cuts,” he noted.

He praised the team of visual effects engineers that worked on the project and said, “Over 20 young engineers from my compatriots made the brilliant visual effects for the film within a few months.” He added that the film was entirely shot on location in Iran and the overseas scenes have been created by computer simulation.



Producer Mohammad Khazaei (L) and director Parviz Sheikhtadi attend a press conference during the 36th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran’s Mellat Cineplex on February 6, 2018 to speak about their movie “Emperor of Hell”. (Mehr/Majid Asgaripur)

Actor Kurosh Zarei also lamented the censorship of the film and said, “If this were screened entirely we would see that it is for the freedom-loving people of the world.”

Ali Nasirian, the 83-year-old star of the film said that he is not seeking political issues and added that he is dedicated to his profession.

“Of course, it doesn’t mean that I’m indifferent about political issues and that Mr. Sheikhtadi centers on the issues academically,” he stated.

Iran honors top books of the year

A R T **TEHRAN** — Top publications in various categories were honored at the 35th national edition of Iran’s Book of the Year Awards, which were presented by President Hassan Rouhani during a special ceremony at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall on Wednesday.

In his brief speech, Rouhani said, “Thoughts can link the world of the past with the world of today,” and added, “Thoughts can be saved either in words or through books.”

“Books reflect the thoughts of a nation in a period of time throughout history. Today our nobles and the scholars carry a heavy burden to clarify what is good and necessary for the people through words and books,” he noted.

The award in the general art category was presented to “The Encyclopedia of Art” by Ruen Pakbaz.

“This Street Has No Rumble Strip” by Maryam Jahani and “Booklessness” by Mohammadreza Sharafi-Khabushan shared the award in the contemporary literature section.

“The National Art Group” by Ruhollah Jafari received the award for best book in the dramatic arts category. The book reviews



President Hassan Rouhani honors Swiss author Regula Forster for her book “Transmission of Secret Knowledge” during Iran’s Book of the Year Awards at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall on February 7, 2018. Culture Minister Seyyed Abbas Salehi is also seen in the photo. (IRNA/Ehsan Naderipur)

dramatic arts in Iran from 1956 to 1978. “Study of Art of Music” by Majid Kiani

was named the best music book. “Euripides: Five Plays” translated by

Actress Fatemeh Motamed-Arya praises “The Lost Strait”

A R T **TEHRAN** — Fatemeh Motamed-Arya, the actress of war dramas “Abajan” and “Gilaneh”, has highly praised Bahram Tavakkoli’s drama “The Lost Strait”.

“The Lost Strait” is like no other war film. It is like its own self and like its topic, simple but powerful,” Motamed-Arya wrote in a statement published by the Persian service of MNA on Wednesday.

She watched the movie during the 36th Fajr Film Festival in Tehran on Tuesday.

The story of the film is set in the last days of the war just before Iran accepted UN Resolution 598, which ended the war on July 20, 1988.

“Powerful in the knowledge of the director and simple in portraying the heroes. The heroes who are being shot, wounded and are martyred without doing strange and unimaginable actions. They defend themselves, they escape, collect the wounded soldiers, stay thirsty but get up and become heroes and remain heroes in our minds so that we would not like to take our eyes off them.



Javad Ezzati acts in a scene from “The Lost Strait” by Bahram Tavakkoli.

“We like them and follow them. They become real heroes with the reality they have been into, without forcing you to believe they have come from the place of claiming to improve the world,” Motamed-Arya wrote.

EU regulators to examine Apple buy of UK music discovery app Shazam

BRUSSELS (Reuters) — EU antitrust regulators will examine iPhone maker Apple’s acquisition of British music discovery app Shazam following a request from seven European countries.

Apple has said that Shazam, an app that lets users identify songs by pointing a smart phone at the audio source, would be a natural fit with its Apple Music streaming service.

Apple had sought approval for the deal from the Austrian competition agency because the bid falls short of the revenue threshold for an EU review.

Austria subsequently asked the European Commission to take over the case. France, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Spain and Sweden also put in a similar request.

The EU antitrust enforcer said that based on preliminary data provided by the seven countries, the deal may have a



Illustration photo of the Shazam application on a mobile phone December 12, 2017. (Reuters/Thomas White)

significant adverse effect on competition in Europe.

Apple will now have to formally ask the Commission to approve the deal. The EU regulator can either clear the bid with or without conditions or open a full-scale investigation if it has serious concerns.

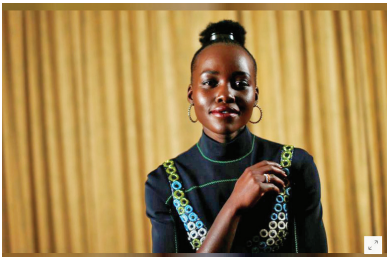
“Black Panther” gets superhero reception from critics

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — “Black Panther”, the first black standalone Marvel superhero movie, won rave reviews on Tuesday with critics praising both its adventure and its portrayal of a majestic Africa.

Directed by Ryan Coogler and featuring a predominantly black cast including Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong’o and Angela Bassett, “Black Panther” was hailed by the Daily Beast as “a love letter to every black person” and “a correction for years of diversity neglect” by Rolling Stone.

The Disney movie, opening worldwide next week, tells the story of T’Challa, the newly crowned king of the fictional, technologically advanced African nation Wakanda, who is challenged from factions within his own country.

The movie arrives after years of criticism about the under representation of actors



Cast member Lupita Nyong’o poses for a portrait while promoting the movie “Black Panther” in Beverly Hills, California, U.S., January 30, 2018. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

and filmmakers of color in Hollywood, including the #OscarsSoWhite campaign that prompted the Academy of Motion Pictures to increase diversity in its predominantly white, male membership.