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Tehran says seeking co-op with UN on human rights

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Javad Larijani, secretary of the High Council for Human Rights in Iran, has said that Iran is seeking close cooperation with the United Nations on issues related to human rights.

Larijani made the remarks in a message read to a conference on Human Rights Achievements in the Islamic Republic of Iran. **→2**

4.6% economic growth forecasted in current fiscal year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Latest data released by Iran’s Parliament Research Center sees the country’s economic growth to reach 4.6 percent by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018).

Meanwhile, the services sector is seen to have the largest share of the growth with 5.9 percent, a significant increase compared to the last year’s figure for this sector which was 3.6 percent.

The agricultural sector will grow by 3.8 percent, a 0.4 percent drop year on year, the same data confirmed.



ARTICLE

By Martin Love
Political analyst from North Carolina

Pence and the troubling prospect he is

I enjoy a number of news sources about Iran here in the US. This is the wonder of the Internet. Some of these sources are Iranian dissidents in the West; Iranians who likely would not be welcome in Iran. I feel bad for them in this regard, but this is nothing new. I can’t think of any country that welcomes all its past and current citizens, whatever their current or past views. Some countries, like the US, have even assassinated American citizens overseas, even children, in drone strikes and other horrific actions. And like anyone with half a brain, it is at the least annoying when I read about, say, Iranians with dual citizenship, and some of them notable people, who have been imprisoned in Iran. The Western mainstream media makes a big deal of such action. It’s always looking for a reason to vilify Iran, because Iran rejects Western/US imperialism. But Saudi Arabia, for example, chops off heads willy nilly, and the US calls it an “ally” and says nothing about the chops. Sickening.

Israel, another example, tries to eject entire classes of people or at the least puts them in virtual prisons under threat, such as African “Jewish” refugees. Israel jails its own Arab citizens, and of course many thousands of native Palestinians who have no rights at all, including hundreds of innocent children, and charges few of them with anything, and even if it does bring charges, most of them are baseless or absurd, and the punishment rarely fits any alleged “crime”. I have not read of a single instance of Iran jailing children.

At any rate, it can be useful to look at countries that some may call socially or politically oppressive, and to compare them with countries that claim they are democracies that also allegedly abide by the rule of law internally and internationally. Personally, I believe in the separation of church and state. I believe that one’s religious convictions might better be a private matter, but that’s just my opinion. Theocracies, wherever and whenever they have been instituted, don’t often work out very well in the long run. This is a simple, historical fact.

What’s interesting about Iran is that while one can posit some “human rights” abuses, they are nowhere as bad as some in the US. No other country has incarcerated so many people, **→7**

Zionists control US national security policy: ex-CIA officer

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN - Robert David Steele, the former CIA clandestine operations officer, tells the Tehran Times that the U.S. “new nuclear doctrine is about borrowing and spending hundreds of billions of dollars that will go into the pockets of the one percent.”

Steele adds that Zionists control US national security policy using blackmail and bribery (for instance, Jeffery Epstein and pedophilia blackmail tapes combined with bribery of all members of Congress.)

“The only thing more dangerous than the US nuclear policy is the naked dishonest of the European leaders,” Steel says.

Following is the complete text of the interview

with Robert Steele.

■ The US new nuclear doctrine was published a few days ago. This dossier had remained unchanged since 2010. What are the reasons for the new modifications?

A: The President has either been lied to, or the President is being bribed, or blackmailed, or both. The new nuclear doctrine is about borrowing and spending hundreds of billions of dollars that will go into the pockets of the 1%.

■ What is the most important difference between the new nuclear doctrine and the previous one?

A: We are doubling the amount of money being spent on weapons that no one wants to use, that may not work (none have ever been tested operationally) and that are in fact simply

another way of taking money from the poor to further enrich the 1%.

■ In the new nuclear doctrine, the use of nuclear weapons are allowed in extraordinary situations. There are some ambiguities around this. What are those extraordinary conditions exactly?

A: The USA can no longer win wars. Nuclear weapons are the last resort for idiots and madmen.

■ Washington considers the first strike on Russia allowed, meaning the spirit of the cold war is still governing this new nuclear doctrine. Why has the US taken this approach?

A: Do not confuse propaganda and stupidity with spending. The US nuclear policy is about spending, not war -- that is the only good new we have on this. **→13**

JICA funds Iran for medical, air pollution analysis equipment

TEHRAN — Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) signed two grant agreements with Ministry of Health and Tehran Municipality to provide grant aid for medical testing and treatment equipment as well as improvement of equipment for air pollution analysis here on Sunday.

The Japanese agency has committed to provide grant aid of up to 1.534 billion yen (nearly \$14 million) for the project for improvement of medical equipment and a grant aid of up to 1.242 billion yen (nearly \$11.5 million) for the project of equipment for air pollution analysis.

■ Provision of medical equipment to improve services

The project will provide the equipment

required for the early detection and treatment of cancer and cardiovascular diseases to Imam Hussein Hospital and Arash Women’s Hospital in Tehran, strengthen the functions for diagnosing and treating such diseases which contribute to improvements in medical services.

Due to limitations arising from economic sanctions advanced medical equipment has not been constantly upgraded at medical institutions in Tehran.

As a result, not only are the physical and mental burdens on patients increasing, but also is the burden on the national finances for the treatment of cancer and cardiovascular patients. Under such

circumstances, providing the medical equipment necessary for the early detection and treatment of those diseases is a priority.

■ Provision of air pollution measurement and analysis equipment

The project will provide air pollution analysis equipment needed to measure emission gases, carry out chemical analysis on particulate matter and implement other related activities in Tehran so that the sources of polluting substances, emission volumes and the generation mechanisms in Tehran can be evaluated and analyzed with higher precision, contributing to mitigation of air pollution



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Qom paragliding site hosts enthusiasts

Abbas Babaei paragliding site hosts the enthusiasts during the week.

Abbas Babaei site, situated in Qom Salt Rock, is located 15 kilometers from the city of Qom in the southwest of the Iranian capital.

Paragliding is the recreational and competitive adventure sport of flying paragliders: lightweight, free-flying, foot-launched glider aircraft with no rigid primary structure.

The pilot sits in a harness suspended below a fabric wing. Wing shape is maintained by the suspension lines, the pressure of air entering vents in the front of the wing, and the aerodynamic forces of the air flowing over the outside.

Saudi Arabia spends a bundle to restore tarnished image for Yemen war

Saudi Arabia has recruited an array of foreign consultants and public relations firms to draw up a contract to promote its new multi-billion dollar aid plan for Yemen. The contract could reduce imports of vital goods into Hodeidah port, an IRIN investigation reveals.

Critics say the extent of the PR campaign betrays the kingdom’s intention to win the propaganda battle after nearly three years of conflict marked by high civilian casualties. Yemen is now affected with food and fuel shortages, a record cholera epidemic, and there is also fear of famine in the country.

Late last month, Saudi Arabia and its allies proclaimed the launch of a new operation that pours billions of dollars “to relieve suffering” in Yemen, known for its largest humanitarian crisis.

The plan called Yemen Comprehensive Humanitarian Operations, YCHO, promises \$1.5 billion in “new humanitarian funding for distribution across UN agencies and international relief organizations”, plus the setting up of “safe passage corridors” to deliver relief, improved capacity at coalition-controlled ports, and regular flights of humanitarian aid to coalition-controlled Marib. It also includes the \$2 billion Saudi Arabia recently said it would deposit in Yemen’s Central Bank to shore up a flagging currency.

But the plan rejects calls by the UN to lift an on-off blockade of Hodeidah port, a vital lifeline for civilians in the rebel-held north: it proposes reducing the overall flow of cargo into the city and stepping up imports into coalition-controlled areas.

Exact details of how (and if) the plan is intended to help hundreds of thousands of vulnerable Yemeni civilians – especially in rebel-controlled areas – are not yet clear. However, IRIN can reveal the lengths Riyadh has gone to in preparing and promoting it.

The news came neither from the coalition nor from Saudi aid officials. It came, along with an invitation to visit Yemen, straight from a British PR agency.

UK- and U.S.-based consultants and PR firms, including U.S. defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton, helped to write and promote YCHO, which is tagged as “counter-terrorism” on a website funded by the kingdom’s U.S. embassy.

In reality, the plan is intended more to gloss over the Hodeidah issue and improve Saudi Arabia’s battered image, or both. (Source: irinnews.org)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

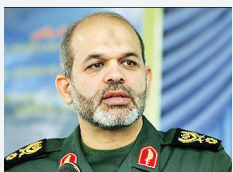


‘It’s even impossible to send medicine to Yemen let alone missiles’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Judiciary Chief Ayatollah d e s k Sadeq Amoli Larijani on Monday rejected U.S. allegations that Iran had supplied missiles to Yemen, saying even sending medicine to Yemen is impossible under the Saudi blockade, let alone missiles.

“These claims are new plots, which of course will again be foiled by the people,” Amoli Larijani was quoted by Fars as saying.

On December 14, 2017, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley presented what she claimed were parts of an Iranian-made ballistic missile fired from Yemen at Saudi Arabia. She claimed the “evidence” proved Iran’s violation of UN resolutions banning the transfer of weapons to the Houthi Ansarullah fighters.



Iran quite determined to bolster missile power: general

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran is more determined d e s k than ever to strengthen its missile power, a general said on Monday.

“The nation is also more determined than ever to support the Islamic establishment in order to strengthen the country’s defense and missile power,” Ahmad Vahidi, president of the Supreme National Defense University of Iran, noted.

General Vahidi, who served as defense minister from 2009 to 2013, also lauded the Iranian nation for their massive presence in rallies marking the 1979 Islamic Revolution, saying the people showed that they do not respect the words of the hegemonic powers.



Environmental activists arrested for espionage: Judiciary

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Judiciary spokesman Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i said on Monday d e s k that a number of environmental activists have been arrested in recent days on charges of espionage for foreigners.

Mohseni-Eje'i said the individuals were arrested for revealing information on Iran’s sensitive sites to foreign spy services, including those of the Zionist regime and the U.S., ILNA reported.

On suicide of Kavous Seyed-Emami, an environmentalist and sociology professor of Imam Sadiq University, the spokesman said he does not know the details of his suicide, adding that the issue is still under investigation.



Iran, Ansarullah discuss ways to end Yemen war

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Muhammad Abdusalam, the d e s k spokesman for the Yemeni Ansarullah, held talks in Tehran on Monday with Hossein Jaber Ansari, the special assistant to the Iranian foreign minister, discussing ways to settle the Yemen war politically.

The two sides exchanged views how to end the cruel war on the Yemeni people.

In a similar meeting with Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Saturday, Abdusalam presented a report on the current situation in Yemen, especially on the chaotic humanitarian situation.

Millions of people have been pushed to starvation and at least 13,600 have been killed since the onset of the Saudi-led military campaign against Yemen in March 2015.



Bodies of three Sanchi crew members on way to home

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The bodies of three crew d e s k members of the oil tanker Sanchi, which sank off east coast of China, were scheduled to arrive home on Wednesday morning, Iran’s consul general in Shanghai announced on Sunday.

Speaking with IRNA, Alireza Irvash said the bodies are being flown to Imam Khomeini International Airport after going through legal procedures.

Carrying over 136,000 tons of gas condensates, Sanchi collided with a Chinese freight ship in East China coast on January 6. Bodies of three out of 32 crew members were found before the tanker sank on January 14.



Diplomat says Iran’s proposal for regional dialogue still up for grabs

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran’s Ambassador to Copen- d e s k hagen, Morteza Moradi, said on Sunday that Tehran’s proposal for dialogue among Middle Eastern countries is still up for grabs, ILNA reported.

“We are waiting for a day when our neighbors accept this invitation and also encourage their allies in Europe and the West to join in,” Moradi said during a ceremony marking the 39th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution.

He also pointed to Iranian foreign policy’s success, especially in the region, saying Tehran’s cooperation is a necessity in the fight against terrorism and establishing peace in the region.

Tehran says seeking co-op with UN on human rights

1 → “Islamic Republic is willing to work with international HR bodies, especially Human Rights Council,” Larijani told the conference attended by a number of foreign diplomats based in Tehran.

Following is an excerpt of the message:

The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly believes in supporting and promoting the human rights. This belief comes from the Iranian society’s values and principles.

Islamic Republic is willing to work with international HR bodies, especially Human Rights Council to advance our aim of improving justice globally and maintain peace, security and development by strengthening human rights.

Iran’s policies on the human rights are based on interaction and cooperation to support and promote the issue.

The Islamic Republic of Iran’s approach towards human rights is a comprehensive one. In addition to the political and civil rights, the social and economic rights have been paid much attention as well and many tangible achievements have been made in this regard. Apart from international interactions, Iran has made continuous efforts in order to ensure and promote human rights domestically.

Iran has made any efforts to promote the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process



since the UN Human Rights Council started applying it. This mechanism should be strengthened and it is regrettable that certain countries seek to weaken it.

Double standards and selective approaches should be avoided in the area of the human rights. The special rapporteurs are obliged to

be professional and neutral and avoid their political motivations affect their mission.

Unfortunately, the special rapporteurs to Iran have mostly refrained to respect these principles and made claims far from realities. The special rapporteurs should have methodology and should not simply publish

what they receive from unreliable sources.

There are impediments to hold a constructive talks on the issue of human rights at the international level. The first impediment is double standards which are destructive. The second is using the human rights as tool to reach political motivations and the third is terrorism and supporting terrorists as defenders of human rights.

■ ‘Women to be given more executive posts’

Addressing the same conference, Masoumeh Ebtekar, the vice president for women and family affairs, said 30 percent of executive posts will be given to women in Iran within the next four years.

It is expected that women will have more active presence in future parliamentary elections, she said.

She also noted that “effective actions” have been taken to counter violence against women.

Shahindokht Molaverdi, presidential aide for civil rights affairs, also told the participants that the first report on advances and strategies taken to remove impediments to realize civil rights will be published soon.

She said that the Rouhani administration is determined to take practical steps in implementing the civil rights charter which is possible through cooperation of all bodies.

Zarif to attend Iraq reconstruction conference

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian d e s k Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is going to take part in a conference on the reconstruction of Iraq.

Iran welcomes holding the conference and believes that participation of countries to rebuild Iraq is a necessity, Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Monday.

“We stress honest and non-condi-

tional participation of the international community in this rebuilding process,” Qassemi said.

He reiterated Iran will continue supporting the post-Daesh Iraq in economic, political and security fields.

The International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq kicked off in Kuwait City on Monday and will close on Wednesday.

Iran’s Air Force chief: Negotiations on missiles is a ‘red line’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The com- d e s k mander of the Iranian Air Force on Monday strongly dismissed Western proposals for negotiations on Iran’s missile program, asserting it is “a state red line”.

“Iran’s defense might does not threaten the region,” Hassan Shah Safi told a conference of foreign military attaches in

Tehran, stressing that missile capability “is attached to the country’s preservation and national security.”

He said an ongoing U.S.-Israeli-led campaign against Iran’s missile power is part of a grand scheme to limit Iran’s defense power so that they would pursue their regional policies with more ease and peace of mind.

Leader: Massive rallies are ‘crushing response to enemies’

TEHRAN — Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Leader of the Islamic Revolution, issued a message on Sunday saying the high turnout in rallies marking the Bahman 22 rallies was a “firm and crushing response to foreigners, enemies and the disloyal”.

The Bahman 22 rallies mark the victory of Islamic revolution in 1979. In the rallies on Sunday, Feb. 11, millions of people took to the streets in about 1000 cities and town renewing their loyalty to the Islamic Republic system

The text of the Leader’s message, appeared on his official website, is as follows:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

Beloved and proud Iranian nation! Today, your resolve and insight gave rise to a great and stunning event. The greatness of your rallies today, which, according to meticulous estimators, was marked by a higher turnout and was more vigorous than those of the previous years, was a firm and crushing response to foreigners, enemies and the disloyal. By relying upon its defective and flawed assumption of Iran and Iranians, the enemy had mobilized all its capability and propaganda efforts to turn this year’s February 11 [rallies] into dull and maybe self-defeating ones. You showed off to them, in practice, the living and dynamic nature of the Revolution, and through your

chants and warm participation shouted out loud your commitment to the ideals of the late Imam [Khomeini]. The grandeur of the Iranian nation drives the enemies back, and its resolute determination wrecks their calculations. The officials of the country must appreciate this unique phenomenon and serve the dear nation and defend the goals of the Revolution with full perseverance, a revolutionary spirit and diligence. The future belongs to our vigilant and insightful nation; we officials must strive not to fall behind the nation. “[Quranic verse] So lose not heart, nor fall into despair: For ye must gain mastery if ye are true in faith.”

Moscow, Tehran in talks to use national currencies: Russian ambassador

POLITICS The Russian Ambassa- d e s k dor to Tehran has said that Russia hopes to achieve progress in talks with Iran on using national currencies in settlements in 2018.

“Central banks’ working groups have met several times. As far as we can understand, intense contacts and negotiations are underway,” Levon Dzhagaryan said in an interview with TASS on Sunday.

In March 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin, after talks with his Iranian counterpart Hassan Rouhani, said the two countries would be working on favorable conditions for using national currencies in settlements.

Commenting on protests in Iran in late December and early January, Dzhagaryan said the protests were caused by inner reasons, though were fueled by the Western media, including BBC and Voice of America.

“The wave of protests in Iran in late 2017 - early 2018 was caused first of all by the fact the locals were not happy about the social and economic situation in the country (inflation, growing prices on essentials, high level of unemployment, corrupted authorities, expensive foreign policies and so forth),” the diplomat said. “The Iranian officials admitted existing problems.”

■ ‘Russia satisfied with level of co-op with Iran’

Dzhagaryan also said that Moscow is satisfied with the level of Russia-Iran cooperation within the framework of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

He said that a delegation from Russia’s nuclear agency Rosatom, which is visiting Iran, has discussed “certain practical aspects of the project to reconfigure the Fordow reactor”.

“We hope to see soon the results of these consultations,” he added.

The ambassador also noted that both Tehran and Moscow are concerned about the situation around the JCPOA.

“There are reasons to understand our European counterparts also worry about this, as they had applied much effort to reach the deal,” he remarked.

“I would like to stress once again - Iran observes fully its obligations under the JCPOA. This deal is the result of long complicated international talks and it should remain as it was made in summer 2015. There can be no question of any changes.”

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

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

Anti-Iran cyberattacks conducted from U.S., UK: general

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The recent d e s k cyberattacks against the websites of some Iranian newspapers were conducted from the United States and Britain, Police spokesman Brigadier General Saeed Montazerolmahdi has said.

Speaking to Tasnim news agency, Montazerolmahdi said the Iranian Cyber Police (also known as FATA) is pursuing the issue of the cyberattacks, which targeted the websites of Ghanoon, Arman and Setare Sobh newspapers.

No one has yet claimed responsibility for the attacks. The Information and Communications

Technology Ministry issued a report on Sunday, saying the three websites can be targeted again.

The report said security issues were one of the important factors that led to the attacks. It also published the names of 27 more websites with similar issues.

General Montazerolmahdi said the attacks were “trivial” and the hackers did not gain full access to the websites’ servers.

Fortunately, the administrators of the hacked websites immediately reported the issue on their social media accounts, he remarked.

He further made assurances that Iranian

Total chief told Trump to stick with nuclear deal

The chief executive of French oil company Total has urged Donald Trump to keep faith with the Iran nuclear deal.

Patrick Pouyanné said he delivered the message at a dinner with Trump and other European chief executives in Davos in January, highlighting Total’s emergence as the most vocal corporate champion of economic engagement with Iran.

“When I had the chance to have dinner with the president of the U.S., I asked the question [about Iran],” Pouyanné told the Financial Times... I think Donald Trump listened; it does not mean that he agrees.”

Total signed a multibillion-dollar deal in July last year to develop the next stage of South Pars, the world’s largest gasfield shared between Iran and Qatar, marking Tehran’s first major contract with a Western energy company since the lifting of some international sanctions in 2016.

Pouyanné remained “fully committed” to the project but said Total had “several ways to exit” if sanctions were reimposed. “If the framework, the rules of the game, change, of course we will have to re-evaluate,” he said.

Trump has threatened to pull out of the deal backed by his predecessor, Barack Obama, unless tougher conditions are imposed on Tehran.

A U.S. withdrawal would take Iran “back to the past” when it was impossible for European companies to operate there,

Pouyanné added, particularly if so-called secondary sanctions were reintroduced targeting international entities active in the country.

Total has a 50.01 percent stake in the South Pars project and China’s state-owned CNPC has 30 percent while Iran’s Petropars owns the remainder.

Pouyanné said the project was “moving along” but Total had so far spent only about \$50m — allowing it to withdraw without large losses if political circumstances change.

The FT understands that CNPC would be obliged to take over Total’s stake in the South Pars project if the French company was forced to withdraw, provided that the Chinese company was itself able to avoid sanctions.

Pouyanné acknowledged that selling out to CNPC was a possibility but declined to discuss contractual arrangements. Another option would be stopping the project altogether, he added, but stressed that Total hoped an exit would not be necessary.

He noted that North Korea had been a bigger focus of discussion at the Davos dinner than Iran but warned that a breakdown of the nuclear agreement with Tehran would make diplomacy harder with Pyongyang. “If you want to make a deal with North Korea on nuclear and at the same time explain that a deal done on nuclear [with Iran] is not good, what is the chance?” said Pouyanné.



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Israel deploys anti-missile system on Syria border

Russia warns of ‘dangerous escalation’ after Israeli raid

An agitated Israeli war machine has reportedly deployed anti-missile systems to the Syrian border, a day after it lost an advanced F-16 warplane in Syria's first serious air defense operation to confront Israeli violations of its airspace.

The Jerusalem Post cited witnesses as saying that they had seen convoys of “missile defense batteries” north-bound near the city of Baka al-Gharbiya. It said others had posted photos of “trucks carrying the batteries on central highways in northern Israel.”

The report said the Israeli army had “refused to comment.” Early on Saturday morning, reportedly eight Israeli warplanes were deployed to target positions inside Syria. The Syrian military, which has previously absorbed occasional Israeli strikes, activated its air defense systems and shot down at least one Israeli F-16.

PTSD in Israel

Israel claimed that it had earlier intercepted an Iranian drone, and that the warplanes had been dispatched to hit the site where the drone had been launched from, only to face Syrian anti-aircraft fire.

Iran rejected the claim about an Iranian drone as “too ludicrous to warrant a response.” And the Syrian military said it had responded to Israeli “aggression” and had hit more than one aircraft.

More than 24 hours after the incident, however, Israeli accounts of the developments were varied and confused. One Israeli report quoted the pilots of the downed F-16 — who parachuted out of the warplane — as saying that they realized they had been “hit” only after hearing an explosion. “[We heard] an explosion and realized we were hit,” Israeli Channel 2 cited them as saying.

Another said the pilots ejected “when they recognized that one of the missiles had locked onto their jet.”

Some Israeli reports claimed that a direct hit had not occurred and that shrapnel from an exploding missile had pierced through the warplane.

Trash talk, lots of it

The Israeli war machine has long boasted of superior aerial power. Before Saturday's crash, the Tel Aviv regime had not lost a warplane in 35 years — since the first Israeli war on Lebanon, in 1982.

The downing by Syria of the Israeli jet worked to deflate that narrative, particularly since it was only the first time Syria was actively confronting intruding Israeli aircraft.

Various Israeli news articles and analyses reflected the sentiment that the self-proclaimed Israeli “invincibility” had been shattered. Reports spoke of “cracks” in Israeli “arrogance,” and “a blow to the pride” of the Israeli regime.

A flood of Israeli trash talk against Iran also followed. One Israeli minister, Yisrael Katz, took to a telling podium to speak, namely Saudi Arabia-linked outlet Elaph.

“The Syrian army will find itself under fire if it continues to cooperate and allow Iran to position itself on Syrian soil,” Katz said, repeating a paranoid Israeli mantra about Iranian activity in Syria.

Iran has said it has no military presence in Syria and is only offering Damascus advisory military help.

Observers say that the downing of the Israeli jet sent Tel Aviv the message that Syria and other countries whose airspace is violated by Israel are now ready to stop those violations.

Israel puts on defiant face

Meantime, on Sunday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin



Netanyahu suggested that the Israeli attacks against positions in Syria would continue.

He said the regime had conducted strikes after the downing of the F-16, which he said showed “that our modus operandi has not changed one bit.”

Russia warns of “dangerous escalation”

The developments followed as a senior Russian official has warned against further escalation in the Middle East after Israel carried out an airstrike in Syria, only to have one of its F-16s shot down for the first time.

Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov also said on Monday Russia, Turkey and Iran have discussed a possible meeting of their foreign ministers on Syria, which could be held in Kazakhstan's Astana in March.

“We call on everyone to be calm, to prevent a very dangerous escalation in countries of the region,” RIA Novosti quoted Bogdanov as saying.

Following the Israeli airstrike, President Vladimir Putin on Saturday asked Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during phone talks to avoid moves that could lead to “a new round of dangerous consequences for the region.”

The official announcement by the Russian Foreign Ministry objected to the violation of Syrian sovereignty and totally ignored Tel Aviv's claims that it had responded to the infiltration of an Iranian drone into Israeli airspace.

The Russians are also concerned about the proximity of the Israeli bombings to sites where their soldiers and advisers are serving, including base T-4 near Palmyra.

Israel claims it bombed a post controlled by Iran near T-4 from which the anti-aircraft missile was fired and downed its jet.

Bogdanov said Russia has no information about Iran having a military base near Palmyra (Tadmor). “No, I do not have such information,” Bogdanov told reporters when asked whether Moscow was aware of such a post.

Israel helpless before Hezbollah power

Elsewhere, the Lebanese resistance movement of Hezbollah says the Israeli regime knows not how to deal with the rising power of resistance forces in Lebanon.

Speaking at an event on Sunday evening, Hezbollah Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naim Qassem said Tel Aviv faced two equally unfavorable realities.

“Israel cannot make a decision to wage war [on Leba-

non] as it can have grave consequences for it (Tel Aviv)...; on the other hand, it can't watch the other side growing [in power], and it does not know how to deal with this power,” Sheikh Qassem said.

The Israeli regime has waged three wars on Lebanon — in 1982, 2000, and 2006. It has also carried out assassinations in Lebanese territory.

Since its establishment in 1985, the Hezbollah resistance group has helped the army defend Lebanon both in the face of foreign aggression, including in the 2000 and 2006 wars, and against terrorism.

The Israeli regime considers the presence of Hezbollah a major threat, and has repeatedly threatened the Lebanese state with new aggression. In November 2017, the Israeli military said Hezbollah's Secretary General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah would be a target in a future Israeli war on Lebanon.

Most recently, Israeli war minister, Avigdor Liberman, said, “Lebanon's army and Hezbollah are the same — they will all pay the full price in the event of an escalation.”

In January, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri said Israel was “the real threat” to Lebanon.

“The only threat I see is Israel taking some kind of action against Lebanon, out of a miscalculation,” Hariri said. “And this is the real threat, I believe.”

The Israeli regime has also been violating Lebanese airspace on an almost daily basis, carrying out what it calls “routine reconnaissance missions.”

In his Sunday remarks, Sheikh Qassem said the recent downing of an advanced Israeli F-16 that had violated Syrian airspace meant that Israeli violations would no more go without a response.

Syria on Saturday fired anti-aircraft missiles at Israeli warplanes that had violated its airspace to conduct airstrikes. At least one Israeli warplane was hit and went down in northern Israel.

“The shooting down of the Israeli fighter jet means that the principle of not responding to attacks is obsolete, and that Israel can no more rely on that principle in confrontations,” Hezbollah's number two said.

On Thursday, President Michel Aoun, who is allied to Hezbollah, said the Lebanese “military has been given the orders to confront any [Israeli] threat to our sovereignty.”

(Source: agencies)

Abbas in Moscow to discuss larger Russia role with Putin

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas has arrived in Moscow for a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss an international multilateral mechanism for the so-called peace negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis in a bid to supplant the “biased” United States.

Palestinian Authority officials said Abbas aims to include Russia and other countries in any peace process with Israel in the wake of Washington's pro-Israel policies.

“Russia and Putin can play an important role within the frame of an international forum for peace,” Abbas' diplomatic adviser, Majdi al-Khalidi said.

The meeting was initially slated to be held in the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi, but was moved following Sunday's plane crash near Moscow that left 71 people dead.

It comes amid anger among Palestinians at the United States President Donald Trump's latest hostile measures in favor of Israel, including his decision last December to recognize al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the “capital” of the regime and begin work to transfer Washington's embassy from Tel Aviv to the occupied city.



Trump's declaration prompted Abbas to formally declare that Palestinians would no longer accept the U.S. as a mediator to resolve the decades-long conflict as Washington is “completely biased” towards Tel Aviv.

In response to Abbas' position, the Trump administration said in January that it would withhold \$65 million of a \$125 million aid installment to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

Al-Khalidi noted that Russia's membership in the UN Security Council and the so-

called Quartet on the Middle East, which also comprises the UN, European Union and the U.S., enables it to play an active role in any effort to achieve elusive peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

The official described the upcoming meeting as “important” as it comes on the eve of Abbas' address before the UN General Assembly later this month.

Another top official in Ramallah said that Abbas will renew his call for an internationally-backed panel to broker any talks with Israel as a substitute for a U.S.-sponsored

process during his upcoming speech before the UN body.

“President Abbas is hoping to win Putin's support for the idea of an international multilateral mechanism for achieving peace in the Middle East,” the official added.

The official noted that the U.S. has opposed holding an international conference for peace in the Middle East, insisting on direct talks between the Palestinian and Israeli officials as the preferred method.

All rounds of talks between Israelis and Palestinians have stalled so far mainly due to the Tel Aviv regime's refusal to stop its unlawful settlement expansion on the occupied territories.

The Palestinian envoy to the UN on February 8 suggested that China and Arab League (AL) could also be part of any future “peace process” on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In late January, Abbas addressed an African Union (AU) meeting in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa, also calling on African states to join the multilateral mechanism to discuss the conflict between Israel and Palestinians.

(Source: Press TV)

France FM in Iraq for ‘reconstruction’ talks but oil in mind

France's Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian has visited Iraq to discuss the war-torn country's reconstruction after the United States announced that it will not contribute to the campaign.

Baghdad is looking to absorb funds at a reconstruction conference in neighboring Kuwait from Monday to Wednesday after announcing the defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorists nationwide at the end of last year.

The country is demanding \$100 billion in foreign investment in transport, energy, and agriculture as part of a plan to rebuild the country which has faced a cycle of violence since the U.S. invasion in 2003.

On Thursday, U.S. officials quoted by Reuters said Washington does not plan to contribute any money at the conference in

Kuwait.

Le Drian visited Iraq on Monday, saying he had “come to tell you of France's support and to accompany you.”

“We will always be there. We were there to participate in the coalition. We will also be there in the reconstruction phase,” Le Drian said.

Iraq's Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari welcomed the offer, saying “We hope French expertise will be used for the reconstruction.”

France has been a key member of the U.S.-led military campaign which alleges to be fighting the ISIL terrorist outfit.

However, with the defeat of the ISIL in the country, the U.S. and its allies appear bent for a long haul in Iraq.

Le Drian was also to head to Iraqi Kurdistan, an autonomous region hit by a crisis

after a controversial secession referendum led to Baghdad retaking the oil-rich province of Kirkuk from the Kurds last year.

The French minister's visit coincided with Iraq asking British energy giant BP (BP plc, formerly British Petroleum) to help bolster production at oilfields in Kirkuk.

Iraqi Oil Minister Jabbar al-Luaybi told AFP on Sunday he wanted to discuss a request for BP to draft a study on increasing output when the company's boss visits Kirkuk in the coming days.

U.S. future in Iraq

Former head of USAID's Office of the U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Jeremy Konyndyk said by not contributing to Iraq's reconstruction, the administration of the U.S. President Donald Trump could help set the stage for new militancy.

The U.S. instead is calling for a formal NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) mission to Iraq with a semi-permanent or permanent command to purportedly train Iraqi forces, Reuters quoted five senior NATO diplomats as saying on Wednesday.

The United Nations children's agency UNICEF said on Sunday one in every four children is in poverty in Iraq.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe told a summit held in Dubai that the idea to export democracy by force through past U.S.-led interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya had been a mistake.

“Military interventions like we have seen in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya to impose democracy through fire failed to achieve their objectives,” he said on Sunday.

(Source: agencies)

Trump: Al-Quds, is off negotiation table



The United States President Donald Trump has reiterated that the issue of al-Quds (Jerusalem) is off the negotiating table after his decision to declare the city as the capital of Israel and move the U.S. embassy to the holy city from Tel Aviv.

“By taking Jerusalem (al-Quds) off the table I wanted to make it clear that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and as for specific boundaries, I would support what both sides agreed to,” Trump told newspaper Israel Hayom.

Trump's comments echoed those he made during his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland last month.

“They never got past Jerusalem. We took it off the table. We don't have to talk about it anymore,” Trump told reporters.

Breaking with years of the U.S. policy, Trump announced the move on December 6, drawing international condemnation and sparking a wave of heated protests around the world.

A resounding majority of United Nations member states declared Trump's move as “null and void” in a non-binding resolution.

The status of al-Quds, which is home to holy religious sites and has particular significance for Muslims, Christians and Jews, has long remained a sensitive topic and one of the core issues in the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

In the exclusive interview with Israel Hayom, Trump also urged both Israel and Palestine to make “hard compromises” to reach a peace agreement, as he warned against Israeli settlements.

In a rare criticism of the Israeli leadership, the U.S. president questioned Israel's commitment to making peace with the Palestinians.

“Right now, I would say the Palestinians are not looking to make peace, they are not looking to make peace,” he told the Hayom, which is owned by American billionaire and Trump backer Sheldon Adelson.

“And I am not necessarily sure that Israel is looking to make peace,” the Republican president added.

Careful with settlements

Israel occupied East al-Quds (Jerusalem) in 1967 and proceeded to effectively annex it, in breach of international law.

The Palestinian leadership in the occupied West Bank, however, see East al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

Today, 86 percent of East al-Quds is under the direct control of the Israeli authorities and Jewish settlers.

Trump warned Netanyahu's government against Israeli settlements getting in the way of negotiations.

“The settlements are something that very much complicates and always have complicated making peace, so I think Israel has to be very careful with the settlements,” he said.

Between 600,000 and 750,000 Israelis live in sizeable settlements, beyond the internationally recognized borders of their state.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

James Mattis: Some PYD/ PKK shifting to Afrin

Turkey has legitimate security concerns along its southern border with Syria, James Mattis, the United States defense secretary, said, as Turkish forces continued their offensive against Kurdish fighters in Afrin.

Mattis acknowledged that some members of the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) had shifted to the Afrin region in Syria's north, amid Turkey's ongoing operation against the coalition of armed groups, Anadolu news agency reported.

“The distraction of what's going on up in Afrin right now, which is drawing off some of the [SDF] forces, which have got about 50 percent [of the Afrin region],” Mattis told reporters during his flight to Europe on Sunday, adding that the percentage could be less or more.

The U.S. has long supported the SDF as a “reliable ally” in its fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh), despite strong objections by Ankara, which sees the coalition as the Syrian branch of the outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party, (PKK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê).

The armed wing of the PKK - listed as a terrorist group by the U.S., European Union, and Turkey - has taken about 40,000 lives in Turkey, including 1,200 since July 2015.

Describing Turkey as the only NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) ally facing an active revolt, Mattis also reiterated that Ankara has real security concerns in the region.

“They [Turkey] have a legitimate security concern, and we do not dismiss one bit of that, along that border with Syria,” he stated, adding that Washington will continue to work closely with Turkey.

The forces aligned to the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD/Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat?) and the PKK in Afrin have launched hundreds of cross-border rocket attacks on Turkey, including dozens since late last month, killing and injuring many civilians.

The Pentagon had previously stated that some PYD/PKK-led SDF elements were shifting its fighters, but did not specify where they were headed.

Mattis is expected to meet his Turkish counterpart Nurettin Canikli in Brussels this week.

Turkey launched Operation Olive Branch on January 20 to clear PYD/PKK and ISIL from Afrin.

(Source: Anadolu)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	97924.7
IFX	1092.41

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	48,120 rials
EUR	61,040 rials
GBP	68,73 rials
AED	13,490 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	60.33/b
Brent	63.85/b
OPEC Basket	62.69/b
Gold	\$1,318.45/oz
Silver	\$16.44/oz
Platinum	\$966.35/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran plans to join Europe’s electricity network through neighbors

E N E R G Y **T E H R A N** — Iran’s Energy Minister Reza Ardakanian said Iran is planning to access Europe’s power network through adjacent neighbors’ electricity networks.

According to IRNA, the official noted that Iran is currently exchanging electricity with almost all of its neighboring countries including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Iraq for some of which like Iraq and Afghanistan Iran is the sole exporter of electricity.

Petchem output at 44.202m tons in 10 months

E N E R G Y **T E H R A N** — Iran produced 44.202 million tons of petrochemical products during the ten-month period ended on January 20, 2018, Shana news agency reported on Monday citing the data announced by National Petrochemical Company (NPC).

Production units in Assalouyeh and Mahshahr petrochemical zones, both in southwest of Iran, accounted for 18.687 million tons and 16.254 million tons of the 10-month output, respectively, and 21 petrochemical units in other parts of the country accounted for 9.261 million tons of the figure.

Last July, Ali-Mohammad Bossaqzadeh, the production control director of NPC, announced that seven new petrochemical projects were planned to be implemented in the country by the end of the current calendar year (March 20, 2018).

He put petrochemical output at 51 million tons in the past calendar year, saying that the figure is estimated to reach 56 million tons by the end of this year, posting a record for the second consecutive year.

Given that Iran ranks the first and fourth in the world in terms of gas and oil reserves, respectively, no country enjoys feedstock as much as Iran to develop its petrochemical industry, according to Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh.

Oil gains 2 percent as global markets stabilize, dollar dips

Oil rose 2 percent on Monday, recovering some of last week’s steep losses as global equities steadied after their largest one-week slide in two years.

Brent crude futures rose 95 cents to \$63.74 a barrel by 1012 GMT, up nearly 2 percent, while U.S. West Texas Intermediate futures gained \$1.03 to \$60.23, up 1.8 percent.

A weaker dollar helped to boost oil by making dollar-priced crude cheaper for holders of other currencies.

European shares took their lead from Friday’s rise on Wall Street, while other commodities including copper and gold also strengthened.

Consumption remains robust, even though rising U.S. crude production has knocked oil off its 2018 highs above \$70 and threatened the efforts of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to prop up prices by reining in supply.

“Demand growth is very strong and with declines in places like Venezuela, is helping the situation. If demand stays strong, it still looks like OPEC will be in control in 2019,” SEB chief commodities strategist Bjarne Schieldrop said.

“If global growth does slow down and oil demand starts to slow, then production growth in the U.S. becomes a problem, because OPEC’s cake starts to shrink and that will be the line in the sand,” he said.

U.S. oil production has risen above 10 million barrels per day (bpd), overtaking top exporter Saudi Arabia and coming within reach of top producer Russia.

OPEC and partners including Russia have agreed to cut their crude output by 1.8 million bpd for a second year, but U.S. production looks set to continue to grow.

U.S. energy companies added 26 oil rigs looking for new production last week, boosting the count to 791, the highest since April 2015, energy services firm Baker Hughes said on Friday.

“The increase over the last month has been driven primarily from private producers,” U.S. bank Goldman Sachs said in a note. “Investor fear around greater U.S. oil production/lack of producer discipline has risen.”

(Source: Reuters)

Iran, India to discuss development of Farzad B gas field this week

E N E R G Y **T E H R A N** — Discussing India’s contribution to the development of Iran’s Farzad B gas field in the Persian Gulf is among the issues to be discussed between the two countries during the trip of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to India this week, according to the Indian media.

Farzad-B, with estimated reserves of 12.8 trillion cubic feet of gas, was opened in 2008 by a consortium of three Indian companies: ONGC, Oil India Limited and Indian Oil Corporation.

The Indians were supposed to develop the field after its exploration, but they stopped their activities after the West intensified sanctions on the Islamic Republic in 2012.

With the lifting of the sanctions, India once again called for the development of Farzad B by ONGC Videsh which is the overseas investment arm of the country’s biggest energy exploration firm.

According to an agreement, the Indians were first to submit a technical plan and



then a financial proposal for the development of the field, but Iran did not agree

with the other side’s financial proposals. In July 2017, India reduces its purchases

Iranian airlines examining Russian Sukhoi superjet for possible purchase

E C O N O M Y **T E H R A N** — A Russian Sukhoi Superjet 100 landed on Tehran’s Mehrabad Airport on Monday morning and was examined by Iranian aviation experts deciding about its future purchase, Tasnim news agency reported.

“The Russian airplane maker asked Iran to let its aircraft land on Mehrabad on its way back from Singapore Air Show 2018,” the Secretariat of Association of Iranian Airlines Maghsoud Asadi Samani told Tasnim on the sidelines of the superjet’s examination.

Referring to previous negotiations with Sukhoi, the Iranian official explained that the Russian company had announced that it would sell its aircrafts to Iran in case of receiving U.S. Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) license. “Regarding the changes made in the structure of Sukhoi superjet 100 and due to the fact that less than 10 percent of



its current model is comprised of American parts, there is no need of OFAC permission,” Asadi Samani said.

“Sukhoi Superjet 100 can be used to develop Iran’s aviation fleet, in case Iran Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) approves it purchase after conducting the required examinations,” he underlined.

The Sukhoi Superjet 100 is a fly-by-wire twin-engine jet with 8 to 108 passenger seats.

OPEC’s oil price nightmare is coming true



shale boom of 2014-15 look sluggish.

True, that growth rate probably wasn’t kept up through the winter’s cold snaps, but January’s average production rate will almost certainly turn out closer to the 10.25 million barrels a day in the DoE release than to the 9.86 million calculated from the weekly data.

■ What does this mean?

First, bragging rights. The U.S. is close to becoming the world’s largest producer of crude and condensate -- a form of light oil extracted from gas fields -- even if it’s not quite there yet. It’s pretty much level with Saudi Arabia’s combined output, itself boosted by condensates not included in headline production numbers, and is closing on

Russia’s 10.95 million daily barrels. That could be passed by the end of the summer, according to Citigroup.

Of course, size isn’t everything. Saudi Arabia and Russia export far more production than the U.S. is ever likely to. They’re also willing to cut supply to bolster the market. They brought about the recovery in prices on whose coat-tails the shale producers ride.

The second, and more important, consequence is that OPEC and friends’ worst fear has come to pass: rising crude prices are spurring a U.S. production revival. Their horror scenario is that this shale surge goes hand-in-hand with a slowdown in oil demand growth, triggered by the price rise.

■ Shale hyperdrive

Monthly production figures have soared above estimates based on weekly data since September.

There’s little sign of that happening yet. Economic forecasts remain strong and that ought to underpin another big increase in the thirst for oil this year. But any signs of global demand growth falling below the 1.53 million barrels a day OPEC forecast could cause ministers some sleepless nights. Both OPEC and the International Energy Agency will publish updated forecasts this week and the IEA already sees growth slowing, as higher crude prices work their way through to consumers. The other half of the nightmare is looming.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Big Oil takes stage for post-austerity beauty contest

With years of austerity in their rear-view mirrors, the world’s biggest oil companies are locked in a beauty contest to lure investors with promises of growth and greater rewards.

Royal Dutch Shell and Total are emerging as frontrunners after a three-year slump thanks to strong growth projections but Exxon Mobil, the biggest publicly traded oil company, has largely disappointed with a weaker outlook.

Major oil companies slashed spending and cut costs after oil prices collapsed in 2014 and can now generate as much cash with crude at \$50-\$55 a barrel as they did when the price was around \$100 earlier in the decade.

Cash flow at oil companies in 2017 rose to its highest since before the slump, helped by the drastic cost cutting plans and a recovery in oil prices, and executives are once again turning their attention to growth.

With crude expected to hold above \$60 a barrel into the end of the decade, major oil companies are confident they can boost already attractive payouts to shareholders.

Total sent the strongest signal, announcing plans to increase dividends by 10 percent, buy back \$5 billion of shares by 2020 and abolish its so-called scrip policy introduced in the lean years of offering shares instead of cash dividends.

Analysts at Bernstein hailed the French company, which reported a 28 percent rise in fourth-quarter profit on Thursday, as “the

new benchmark in shareholder returns” and upgraded their share recommendation to “outperform”.

“Clearly the U.S. companies disappointed more whereas Total cheered everyone up together with Shell, even if it had a small miss,” said Alasdair McKinnon, portfolio manager at The Scottish Investment Trust.

■ Back to buybacks

Norway’s Statoil and U.S. company Chevron Corp. have also raised their dividends over the past week, while BP was ahead of the pack by resuming share buybacks in the fourth quarter of 2017.

Shell, whose profits and cash flow beat Exxon’s last year, is now set to buy \$25 billion of shares by the end of the decade after abolishing its scrip policy in November.

Analysts say Exxon remains an outlier after a disappointing drop in cash flow and production in the fourth quarter raised concerns among investors about its strategy. Shares of the Irving, Texas-based company have fallen by more than 10 percent over the past week, wiping \$35 billion off its value. Its stock has trailed rivals significantly over the past two years, reflecting its weaker outlook.

“All the majors are cheap at the moment but maybe Exxon is not the best major out there. We prefer Shell,” McKinnon said.

Shell’s shares have outperformed rivals with total shareholder returns of 90 percent over the past two years, said Simon Gergel, chief investment officer for UK equities at

Allianz Global Investors.

“We were encouraged by the cost cutting plans of the company and the potential transformation of its future cash flows,” he said.

■ The race is on

After three years of finding ways to save money through job cuts, lower exploration budgets and harnessing new technology to become more efficient, executives have moved growth to the fore and are scrambling to outshine each other.

“The priority of the board is to maintain our ambitious growth and continue to add value for shareholders,” Total Chief Executive Officer Patrick Pouyanne told investors on Thursday.

During a meeting with analysts last week, Shell Chief Executive Ben van Beurden and Chief Financial Officer Jessica Uhl said nine times that their goal was to make the Anglo-Dutch company a “world-class investment”.

The ambitious Dutch CEO has publicly said he wants Shell to challenge Exxon’s financial dominance in the sector, even though the U.S. giant is still significantly larger than Shell by market value.

To reach that goal, Shell made by far the boldest move in the downturn, buying rival BG Group for \$54 billion in 2016 and transforming the company into the world’s largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) trader and a major oil producer in Brazil.

But Shell was not the only one to take

advantage of the slump to secure growth by snapping up rivals reeling from the slide in Brent crude from a 2014 high of \$115 a barrel to just \$27 in January 2016.

Total bought Maersk Oil for \$7.5 billion and Engie’s LNG business for \$1.5 billion last year, BP made a number of investments in Africa and Norway while Exxon boosted its U.S. shale position with a \$6 billion acquisition.

Biraj Borkhataria, an analyst at RBC Capital Markets, said while Shell still had the strongest potential to return cash to investors, a measure known as shareholder yield, Total was now close behind following its results and dividend announcements.

“Total is the clear winner to us so far, with a growing dividend and buyback combination that is closer to Shell in terms of total return, but with more upstream growth and less reporting volatility,” Borkhataria wrote in a note.

Shell’s shareholder yield for 2019 is forecast at 8.2 percent compared with Total’s 6.7 percent, BP’s 5.9 percent and Statoil’s 5.2 percent, while Exxon’s yield is at 4.7 percent and Chevron’s 4.2 percent, according to Borkhataria.

“Overall, it was a strong year for the majors. Cash has been up, production was up, they look quite confident, these are things I like to see,” James Laing, equities fund manager at Aberdeen Asset Management, said.

(Source: Reuters)

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If we don't get the peace right, Iraq will slide back into the morass

By Linda Robinson & Shelly Culbertson

With Iraq's cities now liberated from ISIS, returning to some semblance of normalcy is now the country's most urgent task.

Iraqi civilians need to believe that their situation in the future will be better than the difficult times under ISIS.

Visiting Iraq last week, we heard story after story about the hurdles to getting Iraq's cities back up and running after the battles with ISIS.

United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) workers described how they just blew up 12,000 bombs and suicide belts left behind by ISIS in Mosul's Shifa Hospital, a former ISIS headquarters that is thoroughly laced with explosives. A United Nations engineer laid out the tedious work of restoring Mosul's power stations and electrical grid; since steps must be done in sequence, it will take a year to fully restore power to the city.



Jassim Mohammed al-Jaaf, Iraq's minister of migration and displacement, spoke of the challenges faced by the 2.6 million Iraqis who remain displaced from their homes, driven from war-ravaged cities like Mosul and the surrounding Ninewa Province. "The priority now," he says, "is to bring back normal life to Iraq's cities so that people can return home — or choose to stay in a new city." As a former displaced person himself, al-Jaaf understands the magnitude of the challenge as well as the human toll.

This coming week will tell a lot. That's when government and business leaders from around the world, including Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and representatives from over 100 U.S. companies, will assemble in Kuwait to plan solutions to Iraq's recovery challenges as well as investments in its economic future.

The turnout and aid pledges could indicate whether the international community is prepared to keep Iraq moving on what at last could be a hopeful trajectory, and whether the Iraqi government is prepared to take the steps needed to make the most of this opportunity.

Of the 2.6 million Iraqis who remain displaced (of 5.7 million displaced since the beginning of the conflict in 2014), 1.6 million are from Ninewa Province. These remaining displaced Iraqis need to be able to go home if they choose to, and, more immediately, provisions must be made for them to vote.

The effort to register all these displaced, mostly Sunni, Iraqis to be able to vote in May elections will be critical as a sign of their political incorporation post-ISIS. Progress on this front is minimal to date, and Iraq's electoral commission will need to move faster.

The UNMAS workers who are leading the efforts to clear Mosul and other cities of massive amounts of explosive material find more improvised explosive devices and bodies the deeper they dig into West Mosul's rubble.

ISIS systematically mined public buildings, utilities, schools, hospitals, and houses as a tactic to prevent civilians from returning; there is also a lot of unexploded coalition ordnance. The frontline clearance personnel say this is the most heavily contaminated site they have encountered anywhere in the world; over 90 percent of the public buildings that they have assessed are booby-trapped with a least one mine and usually more.

Desperate to return home, many Iraqis are braving the dangers and paying the price. UN officials say to tackle the enormity of the task they need more financial resources from the international community, specialized equipment, and resolution of liability issues.

Sixteen of Mosul's neighborhoods were completely destroyed, with extensive damage elsewhere. While some damage was from ISIS, much was by coalition bombing that crumbled buildings and ruined the electrical super grid and water pipes through explosive vibrations.

The United Nations Development Program, in charge of stabilization, has 1,600 restoration projects underway in Mosul and across Iraq, and the World Bank and others also have assistance projects. But we learned that private sector investors are hesitant to commit to additional longer-term projects without needed Iraqi initiatives to improve financial transparency.

Aid workers report that a critical obstacle to people returning to their homes is fear of reprisals from security services, militias or their neighbors who allege they supported ISIS.

Yet, there has been little international assistance to date at local reconciliation efforts; one UN official we talked with estimated that local dialogues in Mosul would cost \$2 million, and another Western official estimated that this could be done for \$10 million for all of the affected parts of Iraq.

The Iraqis are immensely proud of the military victory against ISIS, but Sunnis are concerned about the Shia-dominated militias and the Federal Police that are still present as security forces in the liberated areas.

The Iraqi government did listen to their concerns, and ordered the Federal Police out of West Mosul. They are being replaced with Iraqi army forces under the command of Ninewa native Major General Najm al-Jabouri.

Now the residents of Ninewa plains to the east of Mosul should be listened to as well, as they are asking for the Popular Mobilization Forces to be moved out of their areas.

We realize that there is "Iraq fatigue" in all quarters of Washington. But steps taken now by the U.S., the government of Iraq and private parties could well determine Iraq's future.

The message the Sunnis receive in these next six months (whether or not they get help in rebuilding their lives after warfare) will determine whether Iraq is on the path to stability.

(Source: Newsweek)

North Korea heads for diplomacy gold medal at Olympics - analysts

By Soyoung Kim & James Pearson

North Korea has emerged as the early favorite to grab one of the Winter Olympics' most important medals: the diplomatic gold.

That is the assessment of a former South Korean government minister and political experts who say the North has used the Games to drive a wedge between South Korea and its U.S. ally and to potentially ease pressure on its sanctions-crippled state.

In barely a month since North Korean leader Kim Jong Un surprised the world and said his nation was ready to join the Games, South Korean President Moon Jae-in has delayed military exercises, feted Kim's sister at the Pyeongchang Olympics and given conditional consent to a bilateral summit in the North.

"North Korea clearly appears to be winning the gold," said Kim Sung-han, who served as Korea's vice foreign minister in 2012-2013 and who now teaches at Seoul's Korea University.

"Its delegation and athletes are getting all the spotlight, and Kim Jong Un's sister is showing elegant smiles before the South Korean public and the world. Even for a moment, it appears to be a normal state."

U.S. Vice President Mike Pence, who attended Friday's opening ceremony along with the North Koreans, said "no daylight" existed between the United States, South Korea and Japan on the need to isolate North Korea.

A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said more important would be how Pyongyang behaved after the Olympics. It had shown no interest so far in negotiating over demands to give up its nuclear and missile programs.

Pence cast one of the loneliest figures at the opening event. He remained seated when the joint Korean team entered the stadium, in contrast to Moon who stood along with Kim Jong Un's younger sister, Kim Yo Jong, to applaud.

Douglas Paal, a former senior U.S. diplomat under previous Republican administrations, said North Korea held the propaganda edge for now because, "it's tough not to get caught up in the emotions of an Olympics event".

But he said it would be hard for Moon to keep up the momentum after conservatives at home and allies abroad remind him of what is at stake in the North Korean nuclear threat.

■ Nightmare for Japan?

The warm North-South body language at the Games not only fanned talk of a split between Seoul and Washington, it contrasted with a cold encounter between South Korea and Japan, an ally in U.S.-led efforts to pressure North Korea.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who looked uncomfortable at times during the opening ceremony, irritated his hosts by telling the South Korean leader that joint



South Korean President Moon Jae-in, left, shakes hands with Kim Yo Jong, North Korea leader Kim Jong Un's sister

The warm North-South body language at the Games not only fanned talk of a split between Seoul and Washington, it contrasted with a cold encounter between South Korea and Japan, an ally in U.S.-led efforts to pressure North Korea.

South Korea-U.S. military drills should be promptly resumed after the Games.

To pave the way for the North's participation at Pyeongchang, South Korea had delayed the annual exercises with U.S. forces, which usually take place between February and March, until after the Olympics.

"Now is not the time to postpone U.S.-South Korea military exercises," Abe said, according to South's presidential Blue House. Moon replied that it was not appropriate for Abe to have raised the issue, describing it as an internal affair.

Japan does not participate in the military exercises, but it is within reach of North Korean missiles and relies heavily on U.S. forces and their readiness to deal with that threat.

"For Japan it's a nightmare scenario," said Takashi Kawakami, a professor of international politics at Takushoku University in Tokyo. "North Korea is skilfully driving a wedge between the U.S., Japan and South Korea."

A senior Japanese defense official said North Korea's Games charm offensive could "simply be a way to gain time" until it completed its nuclear and ballistic missile development.

But in an interview in the Washington Post on Sunday, Pence said he and Moon had agreed on terms for more diplomatic engagement with North Korea, first with Seoul and then possibly leading to direct talks with Washington without pre-conditions.

"No pressure comes off until they are actually doing something that the alliance believes represents a meaningful step toward denuclearization," Pence was quoted as saying. "But if you want to talk, we'll talk," he added.

■ Sanctions biting?

North Korea is under a heavy UN sanctions regime which was originally targeted at stopping the proliferation of arms and nuclear and missile technologies, but has become more all-encompassing after its accelerated missile testing.

After years of ineffective implementation, those sanctions may have begun to finally bite, which, according to a Japanese government official and experts, helps explain why Kim Jong Un agreed to send a national team and his sister to the Olympics.

A foreign resident living in the North Korean capital, Pyongyang, told Reuters he had seen fewer people in restaurants and luxury

goods in shops in recent months.

Fuel prices have risen and more wood-fired Soviet-era trucks have been seen on the outskirts of the capital, said the resident, speaking on condition of anonymity. Seafood, once a major North Korean export, was now more widely available at home after UN sanctions banned these exports in August.

When a ferry carrying North Koreans to the Games docked in South Korea last week, the North asked its hosts for the fuel needed to get it home, Seoul's Unification Ministry said. The North then dropped its request after it asked for more fuel than Seoul was willing to provide, a Seoul official added.

In Pyeongchang, though, the two Koreas avoided talk of sanctions and basked instead in Olympic goodwill, which was nowhere more evident than on Saturday night when a joint Korean women's ice hockey team took to the ice.

It inspired an American member of the International Olympic Committee to call for the team, which included 12 North Korean players, to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

(Source: Reuters)

Trump's Palestine deal is a real estate transaction



While the world sits back and watches, those who will be expelled from what is left of their land will be the Palestinians.

us anything, it is that the most extreme and ludicrous of positions can morph quickly into a crude and ugly reality.

Now two stories are helping to nudge the sanctuary narrative along. The first was broken by the New York Times on February 3 about military support the Israelis have been providing Egypt in its fight against Ansar Beit al Maqdis (ABM), an affiliate of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) on the Sinai Peninsula. In 2014 ABM pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed ISIL caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The peninsula was declared Wilayat Sinai, the Sinai Province of ISIL.

Over the years, the Egyptians have lost hundreds of police and soldiers in battling the terrorists in Sinai. In November 2017, the ISIL affiliate carried out an attack on a Sufi mosque that left more than 300 people dead. It was the single worst terrorist atrocity in Egypt's recent history.

According to the New York Times, what it called a "secret alliance" has enabled the Israelis to carry out more than 100 air raids inside Egypt against the ABM over the past two years. The Egyptians have denied the claim, but crucially the Israelis have neither confirmed nor denied it. Using unmarked drones and fighter jets with their markings concealed, the Israelis have been trying to degrade the fighters' military capability, something that the Egyptian army has not been successful in doing.

To return to the analogy of a real estate deal, if you are Jared Kushner and you want to evict problem tenants from a highly desired property with as little

awkwardness as possible, you have to offer them something in return, and that something can't be a property overrun with heavily armed gangsters. So the Israelis are doing their bit to help secure the neighborhood.

For his part, President el-Sisi desperately needs to keep both the Saudis and the Israelis on side as he struggles with a sluggish economy and growing disenchantment with his heavy-handed rule. Saudi cash to the tune of several hundreds of millions of dollars will help keep the economy and el-Sisi afloat. For the Egyptian president, giving up a troublesome North Sinai may seem a small price to pay.

For Mohammed bin Salman, a solution to the Palestinian "problem" that he helps to bring about, one that is very favorable to Israel, means that he can then draw on the Israelis - who after all have nuclear arms. And the Egyptians now living in North Sinai? Well, that is a question to be sorted out down the road presumably.

Meanwhile, the forced relocation of large numbers of people is an uncomfortable scenario for the Israelis to contemplate, given the horrific fate of Jews in the Holocaust. What better way to soften Israeli public opinion to a mass eviction of Palestinians than to first launch the deportation of undocumented African immigrants? Some 35,000 are facing precisely that plight.

The Netanyahu government has vowed to forcibly repatriate these desperate economic migrants with a take it or leave it offer: \$3,500 and a one-way ticket back to Africa, or jail.

Gideon Levy, a columnist for the Israeli daily Haaretz, in denouncing the forced repatriation project, wrote recently about what he called "far-reaching plans that only the extreme right talks about for now".

With commendable clarity, he lays out what will come next should the government proceed with its efforts to remove the Africans:

"If this mini-expulsion succeeds, expect more to come: prepare for a population transfer. If the first operation is successful, it will buoy hopes for additional expulsions. Israel will learn it can do it; that no one will stop it."

So while the world sits back and watches, those who will be expelled from what is left of their land will be the Palestinians.

Trump's desire to pull off the "biggest deal ever" coupled with Saudi money, Israeli backing and Egyptian connivance could see this ugly dream become a reality, one that yet again excludes the Palestinians from having any meaningful say. It is, to put it simply, a nightmare that should never be allowed to see the light of day.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Iran is very different from North Korea: ex-White House official

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Frank N. von Hippel, former assistant director for national security in the White House Office of Science and Technology says “Iran has been very helpful in unilaterally limiting the range of its ballistic missiles to 2000 kilometers.”

“Iran’s restraint reassures Europe and the United States that Iran is very different from North Korea,” Frank N. von Hippel tells the Tehran Times in an exclusive interview.

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ The U.S. new nuclear doctrine was published few days ago. This document had remained unchanged since 2010. What are the reasons for new changes?

A: Since the end of the Cold War, each new Administration has done a nuclear posture review: Clinton: 1994; Bush: 2001; Obama, 2010; Trump, 2018.

■ What is the most important difference between the new doctrine and the previous one?

A: The differences are subtle but potentially important as indicators of the direction of U.S. nuclear policy.

President Obama was trying to limit U.S. threats of nuclear use to the deterrence of nuclear attacks against the U.S. or its allies. That is logical if you want to get rid of nuclear weapons. It would mean that, if other countries agree to get rid of their nuclear weapons, we could too. There was too much opposition, however, and the Obama Administration’s Nuclear Posture Review stated as a compromise that “the role of U.S. nuclear weapons to deter and respond to non-nuclear attacks—conven-

tional, biological, or chemical—has declined significantly. The United States will continue to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in deterring non-nuclear attack.” It also stated, “the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.”

The Trump Nuclear Posture Review renews the commitment that, “the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.”

It then hedges, however: “Given the potential of significant non-nuclear strategic attacks, the United States reserves the right to make any adjustment in the assurance that may be warranted by the evolution and proliferation of non-nuclear strategic attack technologies and U.S. capabilities to counter that threat.”

This is the general difference: less emphasis on nuclear disarmament and more on nuclear deterrence. This includes calling on the development of low-yield nuclear warheads for submarine-launched ballistic missiles because threats that they might be used might seem more credible than threats to use the current high-yield warheads.

■ In new doctrine, the use of nuclear weapons are allowed in extraordinary situation. There are some ambiguities around this. What are those extraordinary situations exactly?

A: The Trump Administration’s Nuclear Posture Review states, “We must, and will,



posture our nuclear capabilities to hedge against multiple potential risks and threat developments. We will, for example, hedge against the potential rapid growth or emergence of nuclear and non-nuclear strategic threats, including chemical, biological, cyber, and large-scale conventional aggression. The capacity to hedge helps ensure our ability to sustain effective deterrence and assurance amid unexpected change.”

I interpret that as saying that some non-nuclear attacks could be so devastating that we must leave open the possibility of a nuclear response.

■ US considers the first strike on Russia allowed it means the spirit of the cold war is governing this new doctrine. Why the

■ How do you assess the US new doctrine toward Iran? What are the new points?

A: The Nuclear Posture Review expresses concern that, after the limits in the JCPOA expire, Iran might use its nuclear program to acquire nuclear weapons. It also expresses concern that Iran’s ballistic missiles could in the future carry nuclear warheads. It also says that Iran could, even today, acquire a nuclear weapon within a year if it decided to do so. It also says, “Our deterrence strategy is designed to ensure that the Iranian leadership understands that any non-nuclear strategic attack against the United States, allies, and partners would be defeated, and that the cost would outweigh any benefits.”

I can find no nuclear threats against Iran, however. That is consistent with the assurance that “the United States will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and in compliance with their nuclear non-proliferation obligations.” Iran is a party to the NPT and, since the JCPOA came into force, the IAEA has found no non-compliance with Iran’s non-proliferation obligations. I would hope that we could begin to discuss post-JCPOA confidence-building arrangements such as multinational control over uranium enrichment worldwide. But I understand that it is difficult to have such discussions while President Trump threatens to end U.S. participation in the JCPOA. If he does (God forbid) then I hope that Iran and the other parties to the JCPOA can keep it alive and discuss how to strengthen the post-JCPOA nonproliferation regime.

Iran has been very helpful in unilaterally limiting the range of its ballistic missiles to

2000 kilometers.

Iran’s restraint reassures Europe and the United States that Iran is very different from North Korea.

I am very grateful also that South Korea’s new president is trying to deescalate the very dangerous situation with North Korea. I wish the leaders of Japan and the United States were more helpful.

■ German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel showed great concern over the new US nuclear doctrine saying Trump’s strategy would send the wrong signal as in the days of the Cold War and pose a serious challenge to Europe. What are the EU’s specific concerns?

A: During the Cold War, NATO feared that the Soviet Union might send its more numerous tanks into West Europe and the U.S. deployed thousands of nuclear weapons into West Germany. The Soviet Union responded by deploying thousands of nuclear weapons on its side. Today, Russia is trying to regain influence in Ukraine, the Baltic Republics, and East Europe, in part by low-level military actions, as in Crimea and East Ukraine, and in part by clandestine political interference. It tries to deter military reactions from NATO by nuclear threats. The Trump Administration is responding by trying to make clear that nuclear actions would beget nuclear reactions.

It is understandable that the Europeans worry about a new Cold War. We were lucky that we escaped the old Cold War without destroying civilization, starting with an accidental or unauthorized or simply stupid nuclear use.

We must put the age of nuclear weapons behind us before our luck runs out.

Pence and the troubling prospect he is

➔ and many of them Blacks and other minorities, and the numbers may outstrip that of even the old USSR. Many in U.S. prisons, if you were to look really hard, are either “political” prisoners who as prisoners can no longer cast a vote, or just poor people who, unlike some well-known politicians, just don’t have the clout or money to buy their freedom from prosecution. Moreover, the rule of law nowadays is frequently violated by the “elite”, by politicians especially, and even by the two political parties. But also by U.S. banks, Wall Street, corporations, etc. And the violations have increasingly been ignored by regulatory bodies and the courts. It’s all about power, or the maintenance of it, in the hands of the few. In the international arena the U.S. is anything but law abiding, at least as far as longstanding international laws are concerned. Think Iraq, Libya, Syria and many other countries, including Iran as far back as Mossadegh’s overthrow by the CIA. The U.S. currently is occupying oil rich parts of Syria, and recently murdered over 100 Syrian soldiers. These are war crimes, and meanwhile in recent decades U.S. presidents

have gone to war without, as demanded in the U.S. Constitution, the formal assent of the U.S. Congress. Such matters would be unbelievable were they not facts, even if many Americans don’t look hard enough to discover the truth, so busy they are waving flags at football games and imagining that a “Support Our Troops” mantra is all that’s required to be a patriot.

As far as theocracies go, history speaks of relatively benign and nefarious ones. And also the same regarding countries alleged to be “democratic”, like the US today. But what’s weird is that it may be the case that the US is a heartbeat away from becoming a theocracy (a Christian one) itself, if not in name, to some extent in fact. Consider Vice President Mike Pence of Indiana.

Pence may be good reason to hope Trump serves out his term, and the potential next one, in the White House. Pence is, in the words of a journalist friend, “both a Christian fundamentalist and a dispensationalist, which means that he thinks every word in the Good Book (Bible) is literally true and that Christianity is going through phases or dispensations that will

lead to the rapture of true believers into heaven followed by the wrath of God descending on those who refuse to see the light.” You can’t make up this garbage! Trump, incidentally, is no real Christian and never was at least if you gauge that by his deeds, but Pence maybe is, if you fall in line with an estimated 20 percent of the U.S. electorate, the evangelicals and their embarrassing kin. Trump did indeed choose Pence as his VP running mate in 2016 because he knew such a ticket would easily capture this big chunk of voters, whether they deemed themselves Republicans or Democrats.

Pence in any event is smooth, a better talker than Trump, and absolutely convinced of the rectitude of his ideas. He is even such a “Christian” as to forbid himself to dine alone with any woman who is not his wife, so as to avoid even the possible temptation of a sexual liaison outside his marriage. Does this make him a “good” man. No. It makes him a blind man.

Take the matter of Pence and the Zionist state, Israel. To him, Israel’s creation and survival are part of some (un) godly master

plan that will lead to the end of the world. He’s so blind he cannot see that the “end” of the world is not at all a good plan for anyone on earth, including his loved ones, and especially not for Jews, who won’t, by the terms of the plan, ever get to heaven, dead or alive. His views on the Middle East were strikingly obvious when he visited Israel not long ago. He even damned Iran in a speech before the Knesset, after Arab Knesset members were evicted. He claimed to “stand” with Israel absolutely, seemingly unaware that most Americans have never been anything but ambivalent about Israel and don’t themselves “stand” with the Zionists. So as misguided as many think Trump is, particularly about the Mideast, one would have to say that a person like Pence, who as President could potentially affect many aspects of billions of lives across the globe, is downright crazy. On that note I fervently hope, in the absence of another VP, that Trump remains in office. Pence would, it seems, manage the US like some kind of frightful and odious theocracy. Being forewarned may be a step to being forearmed.

The controversy of Trump and Congress continues

By Saeed Sobhani

TEHRAN — The conflict between the president of the United States and Congress is on the rise. The closure of the federal government reflects tensions between Trump and US senators. This is while the US Congress is currently in the hands of Republican Party members. In other words, the Democrats currently do not have the majority of Congress. However, in the 2018 congressional election, Democrats seem to be able to win an easy win against Trump and the Republicans. So, in the New Year, we will see the intensification of the White House and the congress. A review of the reports published in this regard can be considered.

Bloomberg reported in this regard: Last year, congressional Republicans had the leverage to ram through a huge tax cut, repeal the requirement to buy health-insurance coverage, and put a conservative jurist on the Supreme Court.

This year the tables have turned. Democrats, though still in the minority, have more leverage on spending and responses to the opioid epidemic, and maybe also on immigration and infrastructure and revisions to the Affordable Care Act.

Democrats have political tailwinds after winning big election victories in November, and Republicans lost all chance to forge alliances with Democrats by pushing through a partisan tax bill. Democratic voters would bolt if their leaders helped award Trump anything that looks like a victory, so achievements will have to be largely on their terms.

The White House always matters in any legislative agenda. The author of «The Art of the Deal» has shown that he’s in over his head when it comes to deal-making in Washington. Some important Republicans consider him unstable and ill-informed — a conclusion they were reaching long before last week’s uproar over a new book describing Trump as a political and personal misfit.

The administration insists on higher military spending; Democrats say the price will be higher domestic outlays. (It’s become easier to have both since Republicans overcame their aversion to red ink when deficit hawks like Senator Bob Corker and the right-wing House Freedom Caucus members voted for the budget-busting tax cut last month.)

Democrats also insist that the funding measure has to be tied to an immigration deal to prevent the deportation of people who were brought to the U.S. as kids and have come to be known as Dreamers. Trump, playing to his anti-immigrant base, on Friday demanded \$18 billion for his infamous wall along the Mexican border, a crackdown on immigrants who want to bring in family members, and a beefed-up internal deportation force.

Senator Jeff Flake, the Trump-skeptical Arizona Republican, still thinks a deal is possible if Trump is given a way to back down without losing face. For example, Democrats could agree to provide money for border security that Trump could falsely claim lays the groundwork for a wall.



Democrats can successfully insist on protection for Dreamers, but they won’t get something else that’s important to many of their voters: a pathway to citizenship for those children who’ve spent their lives in the U.S. Trade-offs are possible to resolve less fraught immigration controversies over certain visa programs and the status of temporary residents like Haitian earthquake victims. The odds of an eventual immigration deal appear little better than 50-50.

Later in the year, Democrats will probably take charge of a major initiative on the opioid crisis, a topic Trump talked about a lot and acted on little. On infrastructure, the White House probably will propose a big plan, primarily privately financed. That will be rejected by Democrats; any successful infrastructure initiative will be chiefly financed from public funds. The odds on this today are less than 50-50.


In Congress, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, after winning the tax cut welcomed by his political contributors and seating a Supreme Court justice much admired in conservative circles, will be open to agreement on almost any opioid or infrastructure deal. He’d even back an immigration compromise as long as Trump supported it to provide political cover for Republican candidates. McConnell’s main concern is the re-election of incumbent Republican Senators, and only one or two of them face a serious test in November.

House Speaker Paul Ryan faces tougher challenges with a more resistant, ideologically driven caucus. Ryan knows policy details but possesses minimal political skills.


He once had three priorities. The first was a tax overhaul, which he achieved. He also wanted foreign-trade pacts, but knows these can’t be sealed over the nationalist opposition of the Trump White House. The third is to reduce spending on Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, which he’s vowed to do this year even though McConnell and the White House have said it’s a non-starter. The odds that Ryan is serving his last term as speaker are probably 80-20.

The Trump factor will be omnipresent. Democrats say that if he fires special counsel Robert Mueller, or pardons targets of Mueller’s investigation of possible links between Trump loyalists and the Kremlin, it will freeze everything.

Second Announcement



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National Iranian Drilling Company

PUBLIC CALL FOR PRE-QUALIFICATION OF TENDERERS (FIRST/SECOND TURN)

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5136-33/06-KB/96	3150808	Provision (Rent) of 3 Cargo Vessels made in year 1990 or above to support Drilling Projects located in Persian Gulf	23,608,200 (AED)

Service summary to be executed:

National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC) a wholly subsidiary of National Oil Company (NIOC) intends to grant the provision of above-mentioned services to a well-known and qualified contractor through the public call for Tenderer's pre-qualification & signing the related rental contract based on following terms and condition.

Quality Evaluation Criteria of Tenderers:

- 1- This pre-qualification shall be made according to Article 12-3 of the Iranian Tenders Law and based on the sheets of the Tenderer's pre-qualification as attached to the Tender – documents.
- 2- The minimum acceptable qualitative score in 60. Therefore tenderers who obtained this minimum qualitative score (60) are invited in writing to participate in the Tender.

Receipt of Tender Documents:

Applicants intend to participate in the process of services award are supposed to deposit the amount of IRR 990,000 in MELLI Bank account No. 2174652205004 in favor of National Iranian Drilling Company (NIDC).

Documents Receipt:

All applicants legal and real persons may obtain pre-qualification and Tender Draft documents by sending their formal application to the NIDC's Contracts Department and refer to NIDC Contracts Department – First Floor – Operational Building – Koyee Mellat – Ahvaz – Iran within 7 days from the date of the issuance of this advertisement dated on February 13, 2018 until end of working time of Monday dated February 19, 2018.

Important Points:

- 1- Legal and none legal persons who applied within valid time mentioned in this advertisement can be called as tenderers.
- 2- The Tenderers which have more than four active contracts with NIDC, have no right to participate in the present Tender or any other Tenders and submitted Pre-Qualification documents and envelopes of the companies which may not have this essential and indispensable condition will not be reviewed and evaluated and these companies have no right for objection.

Method of Quality Assessment Document Delivery:

Pre-qualification forms shall be filled in and signed and sealed by competent persons and within 14 days from Wednesday dated on February 21, 2018 until the end of working time of Tuesday dated on March 6, 2018 accompanied with necessary documents (experience records according to the assessment forms available on C.D) deliver to NIDC Tender Committee Department Room No.107 – Part B – First Floor – Operational Building – Kooyee Mellat – Ahvaz – Iran

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Price of Tender Guarantee is IRR 6,015,000,000 or EURO 135,050 or AED 605,009.

Guarantee Type:

- Bank Guarantee and or Guarantee issued by non-bank credit institute which has permission from central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran.
- Original receipt of cash payment to deposited in NIDC account.

Tender Guarantee validity Period:

This period (along with tenderers offers validity period) is 90 days and it is extendable for once based on the original validity.

Will Boris Johnson topple Theresa May?

By Curt Mills

Touching down in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Friday, the UK top diplomat who once asked if it was appropriate to recite Kipling's "Road to Mandalay" in a Myanmar temple, arrived in another former British satellite.

"Such a visit is taking place after quite a long time. We welcome him. We have a very close relationship with the UK," Foreign Minister Abdul Hassan Mahmood Ali said.

Johnson will likely get a reprieve in the devout Muslim country: he's spent the past week not only engulfed by speculation that he may replace Prime Minister Theresa May, but also defending London's decision not to intervene in Bermuda's surprise decision to reverse gay marriage. Johnson's office says "it would not be appropriate" to stop the Bermudan move; observers have long noted that May's team is the most culturally conservative since

Thatcher. "Boris Johnson has put politics above principle in Bermuda," wrote Jonathan Cooper in liberal standard The Guardian.

Maybe so, but May is likely not long for the job — the only thing slowing a change is that "Boris really doesn't want to be the one to wield the knife since, notoriously, that means you lose," noted the London Spectator's deputy editor Freddy Gray.

What should DC make of a Prime Minister Johnson, Deputy PM Michael Gove and Chancellor Rees-Mogg?

■ To end May's office

Boris Johnson, along with his frenemy Michael Gove, the environment secretary, and Jacob Rees-Mogg, Britain's outlandish aristocrat du jour, have cobbled together a plan to end Theresa May's largely tortuous year-and-a-half run in office. Consumed by budget negotiations and wrangles over immigration, Washington has taken little notice. But with

a deal struck and signed to fund the government as of Friday morning, some attention may soon turn to London.

"Mr. Johnson and Mr. Rees-Mogg are intelligent men with achievements to their name that predate their arrival in Westminster," argues Janan Ganesh. "But neither would vie for stewardship of the party in normal times."

But this is no ordinary American administration. Characters like Johnson and Rees-Mogg, as well as the "neoconservative" Rupert Murdoch pal Michael Gove, could be received well with the Trump administration — or at least gain some ground back from Emmanuel Macron of France.

■ Launching a budding bromance

Unlike the Brits, Macron is at minimum actually able to host President Trump — and apparently further inspire the New York mogul's desire for a military parade in Washington; the "Jupiterian"

French president and the American insurgent have launched a budding bromance, to the detriment of the traditional role of the British prime minister.

"Boris Johnson and the pals — the Brexit dream team is back," observes The Financial Times. But it may be no joke here in Republican Washington. "I love a good triumvirate," a former Trump State Department official tells me. "New U.S. administrations are often skeptical of the incumbent British leadership because of their connection to the previous White House," adds a national security advisor to the Pentagon. Former U.S. president Barack Obama was never close with (former British prime minister) Gordon Brown because of the Bush-Blair connection and Iraq. Cameron and Obama appeared chummy in office, though Cameron's political consigliere, London kingmaker and aspirant to power at Fox News Steve Hilton, says that was a mirage, at least by

the end. A former White House official also adds caution, alleging: Johnson isn't terribly impressed with Trump's intellect.

Prime Minister Rees-Mogg?

Johnson has been widely scolded for his recklessness over his career, but he could be seen as saving Britain from even more radical option: Rees-Mogg not as a chancellor, but as prime minister himself. But a Moggian ascension is exactly what some conservatives want. Even some liberals and leftists credit him with considerable performative skills and apparent candour. "After decades in the making, Rees-Mogg's time may be coming," said The Guardian Thursday, which earlier in the week argued that "Jacob Rees-Mogg has become the perfect politician for our confused times." So far, however, Rees-Mogg has had to content himself with encomiums like that as May continues to cling to power.

(Source: nationalinterest.org)

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کمپانی اروپایی، فوری نیازمندیم.
خانم دبیا: ۰۹۱۲۸۱۰۳۲۰۶
دفتر: ۲۸۱۴۱ - ۲۲۶۶۲۴۵۴

مالکین محترم

ملک های فروش و اجاره ای خود را (آپارتمان،
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Persian decor should be updated: designer

L I F E The Iranian-style decors and designs should be updated so that people use such elements more in their homes, interior designer Omid Farahani has said. There are few people who use Persian elements and handicrafts in their homes and interior design but unfortunately there is no media to cover such achievements, Farahani told Mehr news agency.

Moreover, people prefer Western design for their homes, which do not have any affinity with our culture, he added.

Supply and demand is an important factor in handicraft industry. When people ask more for a product, it affects its price, he explained.

"We must change our view about using handicraft in interior design. What is wrong with adapting handicraft as a part of decoration for our houses?" he said.

The problem is modernization of handicraft by artists and make them up to date, he added.

In addition, many people still consider

interior design services opulence and think it is not a necessity, they think of opulence and so consider the use of the service as a want and not a need, Farahani said.

Of course many people wear brands but clothing is a necessity for human being. It is the same for interior design. All of us need to embellish the place we live in and it is not necessary to use luxury items, he explained.

Some people think interior design as costly and luxury service, however, you can embellish your home with very simple objects, he said.

He called interior design as a professional work, which should be done with consultation with interior designers.

"Many people imitate interior designs, which are used in foreign countries, however, it is not true. The structure of houses varies in different parts of the world," he explained.

He also highlighted the importance of social media in formation of tastes of people for decorating their houses.



Friendship in Islam: A divine blessing

Man by nature is a social creature who is in need of companions and friends. Most of our lives depend on interactions with others and man is therefore compelled to live in society and with other individuals. In Islam, friendship is considered as one of the Divine blessings through which one overcomes loneliness and solitude.

Islam has placed tremendous importance on sociability and friendship. In the Quran, great emphasis has been placed on the concept of friendship because maintaining good company plays a pivotal role in shaping the life of the individual and it influences the path that will be chosen in life. Likewise, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his Ahl al-Bayt (AS) on different occasions had clearly stated its importance, criteria for choosing a friend, characteristics of a good friend and the rights of a friend.

Friends are an integral and important part of our social life as they contribute greatly in the development of one's personality and they affect many aspects of our lives. Islam, in complete harmony with man's nature deals extensively both in the Quran and the narrations (Hadiths) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with the issue of friendship.

In the Quran, Allah says:

"On that day, friends will be one another's enemies, except for the Godway." (43:67)

The Holy Prophet (PBUH) while explaining the impact of friends says:

"Man is influenced by the faith of his friends. Therefore, be careful of whom you befriend."



Similarly, Imam Ali (AS) says:

"Try to have as many as possible true friends, for they are the supplies in joy and the shelters in misfortunes."

Islam attaches great emphasis on the choice of a friend to be selected in life. For this purpose, it is expected that one should employ his/her judgment in a manner free from emotion and try to set aside the criterion for assessing his/her real worth. "One must know his/her inadequacies and weak points, his/her ideas, feelings, dislikes and infirmities. Ultimately, one must discover the human merits and desirable qualities that he/she carries in the depth of his/her spirit

so that one may benefit from his/her outstanding virtues."

Therefore, for the great good or bad influences friends can have on the characters and personality of each other, it is important for every man of reason to choose friends that are characterized by good mannerism and behavior.

Meanwhile, in accordance with the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) and his Ahl al-Bayt (AS), a Muslim must avoid certain sets of people as friends: transgressor, hypocrites, foolish, liar, sinful, stingy, and disregarding to his/her relatives. Similarly, non-Muslims should not be taken as intimate friends or allies.

However, there is no hindrance for a boy having a girl as a friend or vice versa, so far as the Islamic regulations (such as the Islamic Hijab, avoidance of indiscriminate touching etc.) are observed and they avoid any sinful act.

Concisely, friends are integral parts of our social life and it is important to be selective in the choice of companions and friends. The righteous ones who lead one to righteousness in this world and prosperity in the Hereafter should be considered as friends. In contrast, hypocrites and ill-mannered individuals who are sources of plights in this world and in the Hereafter should not be taken as friends. Similarly, Islam teaches the Muslims to observe certain matters in friendly relations. This is because immoderation in this regard may lead to deplorable consequences and bring regret and pain.

(Source: salamislam.com)

28 simple and natural ways to detox your body

7. Try acupuncture for a truly balanced body:

This is one of the best forms of cleansing, but few of us know much about it. Acupuncture is a part of holistic medicine that may help to naturally heal some of your biggest health problems, while also helping you to cleanse any blockages of toxins in the body.

■ You may have heard of it but felt unsure about trying it. Even if you have never heard of it, welcoming acupuncture into your life can be a real lifesaver. Not only can this ancient practice help you with ailments or medical conditions, but it can be an excellent way to naturally cleanse the body.



■ This practice has been around for centuries and is a main component in Eastern world medicine. As a patient lies down, small needles are placed at the surface of the skin in areas that may be blocked or causing pain or discomfort. Though it may not sound like it, this can be a very relaxing process and show results almost instantly.

■ It's important to go to a licensed acupuncturist who really knows what they are doing, and when you do you will love what this does for you. Many have sought out acupuncture for everything from fertility issues to sinus problems to injuries.

(Source: bembu.com)

How to increase organization and productivity?

When assessing organizational needs look at five functional areas before making specific recommendations:

■ Paper flow: Identify the types of paperwork (bills, correspondence, contact information, etc.) that flows into your office. Divide them into categories to serve as action items, then devise a system for keeping them organized according to the categories.

■ Your ability to find things: Consider how quickly you're currently able to locate individual documents in your office. If you spend a lot of time searching for stray papers or files, you may need to build a filing system (or revamp an existing one) to help you stay organized.

■ Your working categories: Identify and list the eight to 10 broad categories that make up the bulk of your product or service. Doing so is the first step in setting up an efficient filing system as well as a system for your computer (including databases, digitally stored files, contact manager, etc.).

■ Time-management system: Decide



upon a time-management system that will work for you. Some people prefer traditional day-planners; others prefer computer-based systems, possibly linked to a PDA.

■ Tracking of "to-do" items: Decide on a system for tracking business action items. As with time-management systems, some people prefer traditional methods (such as keeping hand-written lists or memos), but software programs that help facilitate this function are becoming increasingly preferred.

(Source: diynetwork.com)

Employment

A reputable trading company needs a qualified secretary for the managing director's office with the following specifications:

Female with BA degree or higher,

Maximum age: 30 years

Working experience in the field of secretary for three to five years,

Full command of English (good at typing and speaking)

Fluency to Office, Excel, Word

Qualified and eligible applicants may send their resume to the following e-mail address and/or fax to: **22661406**

info@kooshasetareh.com

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Employment Notice

To prepare a select panel of Teaching/Non-teaching Staff on purely contractual basis for 2018-19 a Walk-in-Interview is scheduled on **21st February 2018 at 9.00 hrs** in the office of the Principal. The details of the various posts and essential qualifications are mentioned below:

No.	Post/Designation	Essential Qualification
1	Nursery Teacher	10+2, NTT (Nursery Teacher Training)
2	Primary Teacher	10+2, Elementary Teacher Training/ Junior Basic Training/ or Equivalent
3	Trained Graduate Teacher to teach English, Hindi, Punjabi, French, Physical Education, and Social Science.	Graduation Degree in the relevant subject and B.Ed.
4	Senior Secretariat Assistant (SSA)	1) B.Com, 2) Working knowledge of Computers 3) Knowledge of Persian language is desirable
5	Junior Secretariat Assistant (JSA)	10+2/ Typing speed 30-35 WPM on computer
6	Maids(Nazafatchi) & Care-taker (Negehban)	Experienced ,Energetic and English knowing persons shall get preference
7	Coaches	Judo Karate/Table Tennis/Basket Ball having sufficient experience to train school children.
8	Computer Teacher	B.Sc(Computer Science), BCA, B. Tech.
9	Art /Dance Teacher /Music Teacher (Vocal/Instrumental)	Graduation Degree in the relevant subject (Experienced ,Energetic and English knowing persons shall get preference)

Please send your Resume (CV) to **kvtehran@yahoo.com** on or before **21st February 2018 (Wednesday)**.

Eligible and interested candidates may attend the Interview on the date and time mentioned above along with Original Certificates /and one set of Attested Copies of all Certificates at:

KV (Embassy of India School), Tehran, Saadi Ave, Qayedi (Hedayat) Ave, Noormohammadi Ave, Darvish Street, No. 24 Telephone No: 77531183

(P.C.Sharma)
Principal

MY PERSIAN KITCHEN

Tah-Chin : Upside down layered saffron rice & chicken



This is a divine dish of layered saffron rice and cooked chicken breasts bound together by seasoned yogurt and egg yolk mixture. We Iranians love our rice and love to layer it with different types of vegetables and meat. However, the most tasty and desired part of this dish is the bottom layer of the rice (tah-dig). Tah-chin is the tah-dig lovers' galore! Since the rice is served upside down and cuts like a cake, you can have your rice cake with a thick tah-dig and eat it too! "Tah" is a Persian/Farsi word for bottom and "chin" is the root word for "chidan" which means putting things in order, arranging and in this case, layering.

■ Ingredients:

Serves 4-6

2 1/2 cups long grain basmati rice, rinsed and soaked in water with 2 tablespoons of salt for a couple of hours. Drain.

2 boneless skinless chicken breasts

3 eggs, yolks only

1 1/2 cups plain yogurt

1/2 teaspoon ground saffron, dissolved in 3-4 tablespoons of hot water

1 large onion, peeled, and thinly sliced

A pinch of turmeric

Salt to taste

Butter or vegetable oil

Chicken stock *optional

Water

Garnish: barberries, slivered almonds or pistachios *optional

■ Method:

Place the raw chicken breasts in a pot along with onion, add turmeric, 1/2 teaspoon salt and a cup of water, bring to boil on medium-high heat, reduce heat, cover and cook for an hour on medium-low heat. Set aside to cool. Cut the chicken into small pieces.

Bring 6 cups of water to a boil in a large pot on medium-high heat, add the rice and boil for about 8-10 minutes or until rice grains are soft on the ends and firm in the center. Drain and pour some cool water over it to wash away the starch and to separate the rice grains. This cool water rinse helps bring about a more fluffy rice. Set aside.

In a large mixing bowl combine yogurt, yolks, salt and saffron. Mix well.

Add the rice to the yogurt mixture, blend well.

In a nonstick pan, add 3 tablespoons oil and a tablespoon of liquid saffron. Move the pan in a circular motion to cover the bottom uniformly. Ladle 2/3 of the rice into the pan, flatten with a wooden spoon, layer chicken pieces evenly and cover the entire surface. Pour the rest of the rice over the chicken pieces, flatten the top with the back of a large spoon while pressing down. Pour 2-3 tablespoons strained chicken stock, 2 tablespoons oil or melted butter and the remaining liquid saffron over the rice.

Place the pot on medium-high heat. When you notice a steam coming up, lower the heat, cover and cook for one hour until the crust forms and the flavors come together. Since there's yogurt and egg yolk at the bottom of the pan it can easily burn, so adjust the heat setting of your stove accordingly.

To serve this dish let it cool for a few minutes, this way the crust comes off easier. Place a round serving platter that is larger than the diameter of the pot. Hold firmly while wearing mittens, you don't want to burn your fingers! Then gently turn the pot over. Garnish as you like.

Tah-chin goes well with plain yogurt, mast o khiar, salad Shirazi, or torshi.

Enjoy!

(Source: turmericaffron.blogspot.co.uk)

Eco-friendly tips for self-care

■ Warmth

Remember when you made blanket and pillow forts as a kid? The same principle applies here. Find your warmest, coziest blankets – start with the comforter from your bed and work your way around the house if you need to – and some squishy pillows. Grab a book, or put on a favorite CD, TV show, or podcast, wrap yourself up, and lose yourself in a cozy other world for an hour or so. Take the opportunity to slow down and soak up a few of your favorite things along or with a friend or partner.

■ Light

Don't get too caught up with the nesting instinct, though. We need Vitamin D from the sun to keep our teeth and bones strong, and to help us keep our spirits up during those shorter days. That means steeling yourself to go outdoors at least once a day (and a quality supplement wouldn't hurt either!)

We tell ourselves all kinds of things to justify staying indoors when it's cold, but the fact is that as long as you keep yourself warm and hydrated, a quick trip into the world outside is more likely to do you good than harm.

■ Comfort

If the winter blues are wearing you down and you need a quick pick-me-up, you don't need to do anything complicated or fancy. Take a moment to check in with yourself. What's bugging you right now that you can easily fix? Grab a sweater or make yourself a warm drink if you're feeling chilled. Dry skin? Chances are you have a few things around that can help with that, whether it's coconut oil or a tub of petroleum jelly.

■ Peace

During the hectic holiday season, peace and quiet can be pretty hard to come by. Deadlines are looming, shopping lists are growing by the second, and there's always something to plan. Luckily, peace and quiet comes free of charge and has no environmental impact.

(Source: thespruce.com)

Foreign experts to help protect Persepolis against lichens

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN – Separate teams of Italian and Spanish experts will join hands with Iranian counterparts to cope with spreading lichens in Persepolis, a World Heritage site in southern Iran.



Prehistoric Bas-relief carvings are surrounded with spreading lichens in Persepolis, a World Heritage in southern Iran.

To fulfill separate memoranda of understanding, Italian and Spanish researchers will soon start their studies on various types of lichen in Persepolis, ILNA quoted Masoud Rezai-Monfared, director of the world heritage site, as saying on Monday.

“To date, no comprehensive investigation has been carried out on lichens in Persepolis, so that there is no accurate estimate for damage to the structure.”

“All over the world, open-air stone works are facing such a problem which is impossible to eradicate ... this is a problem that must be treated with ease,” he added.

Researchers intend to devise a risk-free method to cope with lichens without damaging the integrity of the glorious structure, the report says.

Persepolis which was once a ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BC), lies just only an hour’s drive from north-east of Shiraz.

Tourist arrivals, spending in Singapore hit record high for 2nd straight year

Singapore hit a record high in tourist arrivals and spending for the second year in a row last year, with China overtaking Indonesia as the top source of visitors for the first time.

The overall number of arrivals increased year on year by 6.2 per cent to 17.4 million, while tourism receipts rose by 3.9 per cent to \$26.8 billion, according to preliminary estimates released by the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) on Monday.

The jump in spending was driven by the growth in arrivals across all 10 of Singapore’s top markets, including high-spending ones such as China, South Korea and the United States.

Chinese tourists were the biggest spenders for the third year in a row, spending \$3.08 billion, while tourists from Indonesia spent \$1.98 billion, based on estimates for January to September 2017.

Visitors from Britain and the U.S. meanwhile posted the highest growth in spending.

Visitors to the Republic spent 9 percent more on shopping between January and September 2017, compared with the same period in 2016, thanks to higher spending on confectionery, fashion accessories and health and wellness products.

Sightseeing, entertainment and gaming enjoyed a 6 per cent boost, while the food and beverage sector saw a 5 per cent dip as tourists chose to forgo fine dining for casual eating and hawker fare.

(Source: The Straits Times)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Medina of Marrakesh

A UNESCO World Heritage, the Medina of Marrakesh is an old Islamic capital originating from the 11th century. It is enclosed by 16km of ramparts and gates.

Founded in 1070-1072 by the Almoravids (1056-1147), capital of the Almohads (1147-1269), Marrakesh was, for a long time, a major political, economic and cultural center of the western Muslim world, reigning in North Africa and Andalusia.

Vast monuments dating back to that period: Koutoubia Mosque, with the matchless minaret of 77 meters, an essential monument of Muslim architecture, is one of the important landmarks of the urban landscape and the symbol of the City, the Kasbah, ramparts, monumental gates and gardens.



Travelers visit the Ben Youssef madrasa in Morocco

Later, the town welcomed other marvels, such as the El Badia Palace, the Ben Youssef madrasa, les Saadians tombs, Bahia Palace and large residences. Jamaa El Fna Square, inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, is a true open-air theatre that always amazes visitors.

Due to its still protected, original and well conserved conception, its construction materials and decoration in constant use, and its natural environment (notably the Gardens of Aguedal, Menara and the Palm Grove (Palmeraie) the plantation of which is attributed to the Almoravids), the Medina of Marrakesh possesses all its initial components both cultural and natural that illustrate its outstanding universal value.

(Source: UNESCO)

18th-century Sistani House back to its former glory

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN – Sistani

House in southeast Iran has been fully restored to its former glory after a massive earthquake in 2003 razed the historic monument to the ground.

The 18th-century building was renovated by German academics and restorers from Dresden University through a decade-long collaboration with their Iranian counterparts.

Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization will reopen the mansion next month in a ceremony which is to be attended by German diplomats and experts, Mehr reported.

A significant feature of the project is that it kept a balance between essential demands of a world cultural heritage site and modern retrofitting techniques which will protect it from future earthquakes.

In December 2003, a 6.6-magnitude earthquake heavily damaged Sistani House and Arg-e Bam, which are parts of the UNESCO-registered Bam and its Cultural Landscape.

Bam and its Cultural Landscape is located on the southern edge of the Iranian high plateau, in Kerman province. It’s highly regarded as an outstanding example of an ancient fortified settlement.



Behind scaffolding poles, Sistani House is being restored in an undated photo.

Iranian tourist arrivals in Turkey sharply rise in 2017

TOURISM d e s k TEHRAN – Some 2.5

million Iranians visited Turkey in 2017, a considerable rise of 50.2 percent from 1.66 million in 2016, according to data compiled by Turkey’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Turkey ranked first among the countries that Iranians preferred most during their overseas holidays, according to a statement released by the Hotel Association of Turkey (TUROB), Daily Sabah reported.

TUROB also announced that Iranian travels to the neighboring country is expected to increase in March on the occasion of Noruz, the Iranian New Year.

Iranian tourists spent at a high level in Turkey as the average number of overnight stays of Iranian tourists was six nights and their average expenditure per capita was \$1,000, the report said, adding “The average spending by foreigners visiting



Travelers visit Istanbul’s Grand Bazaar that is one of the largest and oldest covered markets in the world.

Fifteen ways to get paid to travel the world

From teaching English to authoring your own book, there are many ways you can fund your explorations.

Traveling the world is a dream for many people.

While there are ways to do it cheaper and safer than ever with sharing platforms like Airbnb and Couchsurfing and more information on budget backpacker travel than could fit an encyclopedia, the cost is still out of reach for most.

But what if you could travel and not spend a dime? What if you could even get paid?

Many would jump at the opportunity to experience new cultures, traverse through beautiful landscapes and satisfy their insatiable wanderlust.

Luckily there are more ways than ever to travel and get paid. They aren’t easy, most are a lot of work, but the opportunities are out there if you want it bad enough.

Here is 15 ways for just about anyone to get their golden ticket to spending weeks or years, in exotic lands while earning some cash.

■ Teach English

If you’re looking for adventure in a foreign land, one of the most accessible and lucrative ways to get there is by taking up a job teaching English. Jobs in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America are abundant and most of them do not require that you speak the native language.

Schools are looking for native English speakers with bachelor degrees who can teach the “direct method”, by which students learn through concepts, pantomiming and the target language exclusively.

■ Research for a travel guidebook

There aren’t many professions as romanticized and misunderstood as researching and writing for travel guidebooks such as Lonely Planet and Fodor’s. While the job is exhilarating — jetting you off to hundreds of places to try the local culture, food and hotels — the reality of the work is a grind.

Most guidebook researchers and writers report having to meet unrealistic deadlines that require them to work 12-to-14-hour days. In addition, seeing the sights is a small part of the job. Researchers and writers must crank out reports and articles, make maps of the areas they visit and engage in extensive, tedious data entry.

■ Become an Instagram influencer

Instagram is flooded with “influencers” trying to grow their reach on the platform, but if you are one of the few lucky enough to build a sizeable following, there are opportunities to turn it into serious income.

Twentysomething travel ‘grammers Jack Morris and Lauren Bullen currently parlay the more than three million Instagram followers under the names of their successful travel blogs into travel around the world and a six-figure salary. Morris told Cosmopolitan last year he once earned \$9,000 for a single post on Instagram, while Bullen has received \$7,500 for one photo. Typically he and Bullen are paid to promote various brands and locations through their feeds.

■ Become a flight attendant

If you don’t mind taking your travel with a side of 9-to-5, a great option could be applying to become a flight attendant.



Flight attendants make between \$45,000 and \$100,000 a year, and they get free travel benefits for not just themselves but also their families.

The pay isn’t bad, but consider that the average schedule has attendants working 80 hours a month.

■ Apply for The New York Times’ 52 Places to Go job

Traveling the world and getting to write for one of the most prestigious publications in the world sounds too good to be true right? Wrong.

In October, the New York Times announced the creation of a travel correspondent position for the newspaper’s annual 52 Places to Go feature. The correspondent was to spend a week in each place and write about life on the road.

By the time the application deadline for the 2018 post closed, the job had received over 13,000 applicants from all walks of life. The New York Times eventually chose Jada Yuan, a veteran New York magazine editor.

■ Trade speciality, foreign goods

Looking to travel and have a little capital to start with? Consider getting in the import-export trade and head out to exotic countries to find local, speciality, and handmade goods that will appeal to travel-hungry consumers back home.

Pick up goods that areas are known for (examples include Italian leather, Mexican hammocks, and Turkish ceramics) as well as one-of-a-kind pieces that can’t be purchased by the truck full. Once you are back in the US, sell them to stores, collectors, or on e-retailers like eBay and Amazon for a handsome profit.

■ Start a side-gig and work remotely

If you have a laptop, the internet and some skills, there are tons of side-gigs you could pick up to earn cash while you travel. Sites like Fiverr and Up work are built to make it easy for freelancers to pick up work anywhere, whenever they need it.

Of course, it’s a lot easier if you have a track record and marketable skills, like coding, graphic design, writing, translation or editing.

■ Work for a cruise line

Working on a cruise ship will send you to exotic locales for pay, yet there are a few key things to remember.

The job comes with long hours for comparably poor pay, but with all expenses paid and free travel. Crew members

Turkey was \$630.”

“Iran’s banking system is not compatible with Turkey – which is causing tourists from Iran to come to Turkey at a rate that’s below its potential. Since there is no credit card usage, Iranians have to travel with substantial amounts of cash,” TUROB explained.

Last August, Turkish travel sources announced that Iranians account for 7.5 percent of all tourists arrivals to Istanbul, and numerically they may soon surpass that of Germans, who make up for 9.4 percent of the visitors to the city.

Iran ranked seventh in 2013 in the distribution of tourists visiting Istanbul, while the position jumped to second after in 2014, 2015, 2016 and the first six months of 2017. The number of Germans visiting Istanbul in the first six months of this year stood at 403,235.

have their own dining halls, shops, Internet cafes, gyms, party areas and even organized activities, which creates a fun culture.

■ Become a tour guide

Leading tours through some of the world’s most iconic and historic places sounds like a dream come true. It can offer tons of variety, depending on how you approach it.

Do you become a tour guide in one dream place – say, Paris! – and lead hordes of American tourists through the Louvre, the Bastille, and the Eiffel Tower? Or do you lead groups on longer trips that go through a series of destinations?

■ Go WWOOF’ing

WWOOF, or Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms, is not a traditional business. Volunteers go for a set period to work on a farm with like-minded travelers in exchange for accommodation and home-cooked meals.

The terms are flexible with WWOOFers staying as long or little as they want, and the opportunities are plentiful. While you’ll have to pay your own way to fly to the farm, once you are there, there are plenty of people who can offer a ride to the next destination.

■ Start a travel blog

Being a professional travel blogger is a tough gig. While travelling to every sight imaginable is a tantalizing part of the job, it takes a lot of work to make it happen.

Most travel bloggers spend a year building their sites, churning out several posts a day and building up a following on social-media before they ever see any money from their sites.

■ Work as an au pair

An au pair or an extra pair of hands, is an international nanny who lives with a family for a set period, taking care of their children in exchange for travel, room, board and pocket money.

It can be a fantastic way to see a new culture from the locals’ perspective and make some money. Most au pairs are students or recent graduates, so get in before it’s too late.

■ Become a destination wedding photographer

This one requires a bit of skill, but for those with the artistic temperament a wedding-photography business can offer free travel and an outlet for creative expression. It goes without saying that you will have to be a talented photographer, or at least a well-practiced one.

■ Join the Peace Corps

Joining the Peace Corps is not a decision to be taken lightly. It requires a 27-month commitment in a developing country with few modern conveniences and not much opportunity to see friends or family.

If you’re still on board, and have a desire to make a difference in the lives of others, the Peace Corps can be a life-changing and rewarding experience.

■ Write a literary account of your travels

If all else fails (or you are an incredible wordsmith), take a crack at writing the next Green Hills of Africa, Homage to Catalonia or The Sun Also Rises.

If the book does well, you could have a cash cow on your hands in the form of royalties and advance checks.

(Source: Independent)

TSRI scientists take big step toward stopping cancer metastasis

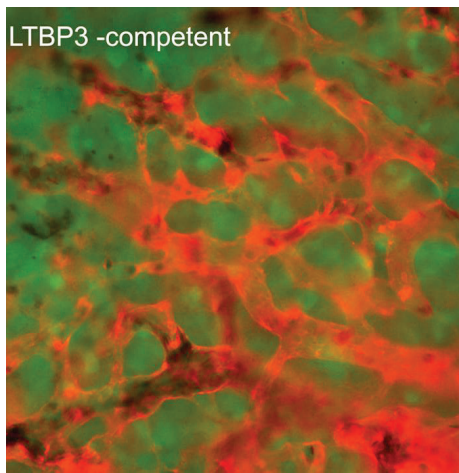
New research from The Scripps Research Institute (TSRI) may give scientists a chance to target tumors before they metastasize. The study, published recently in the *Nature* research journal *Oncogene*, shows that a protein called LTBP3 fuels a chain reaction that leads some early developing tumors to grow new blood vessels. These vessels then act like highways to spread cancer cells throughout the body, seeding metastatic tumors very early on.

“Lower LTBP3 levels appear to be associated with better prognosis in patients with certain types of cancer,” says Elena Deryugina, Ph.D., an assistant professor at TSRI and first author of the new study. Deryugina led the collaborative study with senior authors James P. Quigley, Ph.D., a TSRI professor, and Daniel Rifkin, Ph.D., a professor at NYU School of Medicine.

Their research addresses a long-standing challenge in medicine. Over the years, a potent growth factor molecule called TGF has caught the eye of many cancer researchers.

■ TGF’s multiple roles

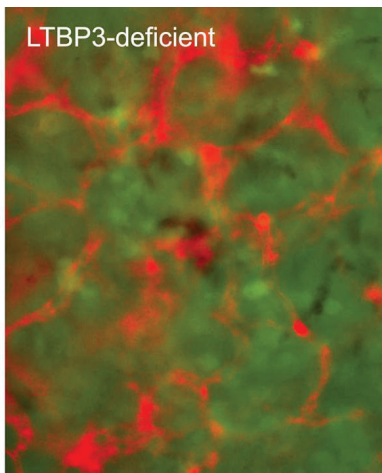
TGF has multiple roles in healthy people and in disease, and it can be both a promoter and suppressor of tumor cell growth. Although TGF has been a tempting cancer therapy target for a long time, scientists still do not know how to dampen its harmful



LTBP3-competent

effects without interfering with its normal roles in the body.

As long-time collaborators, Deryugina and Quigley have led research that shows that the initial steps of tumor metastasis can occur when a primary tumor is barely



LTBP3-deficient

detectable. This work sparked their interest in the role of LTBP3, short for Latent TGF Binding Protein 3. They knew that LTBP3 partners with TGF to regulate its secretion, activation and maturation, but wondered what else LTBP3 might control.

Could LTBP3 set TGF on its harmful path of action in early-stage tumors, and might LTBP3 have its own role, independent of TGF in cancer metastasis?

Researchers used chick embryo tumor models and a rodent model of head and neck cancer to discover how LTBP3 is involved in the spread of aggressive tumor cells. They knocked down LTBP3 expression and secretion in human tumor cell lines representing carcinoma, head and neck carcinoma and a fibrosarcoma.

■ Primary tumor cells

In each model, the team found that without LTBP3, primary tumor cells could not metastasize efficiently.

“Our experimental findings showed that LTBP3 is active in the very early steps of metastatic spread,” says Quigley.

“Specifically, LTBP3 appears to help tumors grow new blood vessels in a process called angiogenesis, which is critical for tumor cell intravasation. That is when cancer cells enter into blood vessels of defined size and permeability,” adds Deryugina.

Importantly, the new data is in line with clinical findings that LTBP3 levels can indicate better overall survival in cancer patients with early-stage head and neck carcinomas.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Climate scientists are working on a way to predict snow eight months in advance



In Sarah Kapnick’s world, Atlantic hurricanes and California snowstorms aren’t far apart. Like all climatological phenomena, both are the outcome of chaotic and seemingly untangle - able variables that affect huge swaths of the United States. And so when she was working on a model to predict seasonal hurricanes and tropical cyclones on one coast, it occurred to her that the very same model might be able to predict snowfall.

This might seem like an odd use for a climate model, but that’s only because we so often think of snow storms as localized, intermittent events. We’ve reached a point in climate science where we can predict general temperatures and precipitation quantities about three months out, but when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration — where Kapnick works — publishes their forecast for winter weather, it keeps snow out. For now, such forecasts elude us.

■ Predicting snow

“This is really the first time that we’ve tried to answer this question,” Kapnick says excitedly. The question being: how do you predict whether a winter will be snowy — and why is it so hard to do? She explains that unlike temperature or precipitation, forecasting snow several months out involves interconnected variables.

“Snow is harder because you need the right temperatures and falling speeds for it to become snow,” she says. You’d need to predict the conditions during every

precipitation event, not just how much water will generally fall over an area in the course of a season. Our atmosphere has layers, each with its own density and temperature, so the rate at which water falls helps determine whether it stays as a liquid or turns to snow or ice, all of which you’d need to predict to figure out whether you’d get six inches of fluffy snow or just cold rain.

■ Snow tends to melt

And overall snowiness depends not just on the total snowfall, but also how long it sticks around. On the East Coast, snow tends to quickly melt away, whereas on the West Coast (especially in the mountains) it often builds up into snowpack. Kapnick and her team are focused specifically on snowpack, since for many regions it’s the accumulation that matters.

The amount of snowpack in the mountains determines how much water flow there will be the following spring. Cities that rely on runoff can usually figure out how much water supply they’ll have once the snow has fallen, but Kapnick’s method would allow them to know in July whether they’ll have substantial runoff in March of the next year.

It does that by modeling the entire Earth’s climate for a year. Hurricanes are the result of so many interacting bits of the ocean and atmosphere that the model she helped build to predict them is also capable of predicting other climatic events—like snowstorms.

(Source: Popular Science)

Why are people outside high-risk groups dying from the flu?



As far as flu seasons go, experts are saying the levels of visits to hospitals and emergency rooms for this one are comparable to the 2009 swine flu.

As such, reports of otherwise healthy or young people dying from the infection are flying around. The stories have been shocking, especially because many of these people were outside the high-risk groups for flu-related death that include pregnant women, small children and the elderly.

So far in the 2017-2018 season, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recorded 63 pediatric deaths. This compares to 110 deaths in 2016-2017, 93 in 2015-2016 and 148 in 2014-2015.

■ Many deaths

The CDC does not know how many deaths are caused overall from the seasonal flu because, among other reasons, flu-related deaths happen a few weeks after someone is infected and are often caused by a secondary illness or a pre-existing condition. From the 2010-2011 to the 2013-2014 seasons, the CDC gives a range of 12,000 (during the 2011-2012 season) to 56,000 (2012-2013) deaths.

The infection causes inflammation in your lungs and can attack just after the flu. Harmful bacteria already in your body, or that enters while your immune system is fighting the flu, can multiply when your system is compromised.

Pneumonia can come on when you’re just starting to feel better a few days after the flu has struck, according to *Popular Science*. WebMD outlines symptoms including chills, fever, chest pains,

sweating, a cough producing green or bloody mucus, and bluish lips or nails caused from an inadequate amount of oxygen.

Especially if you experience a high fever or it’s difficult to breathe, call your doctor or visit a hospital. Depending on the type of pneumonia you have, antibiotics could help.

A January article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found a “significant association” between respiratory infections, including the flu, and acute myocardial infarction — the medical term for a heart attack.

The authors found that people were six times more likely to have a heart attack during the first seven days after being diagnosed with the flu than in the year before and after it.

■ Infections trigger sepsis

Infections in your lungs, kidneys, skin and gut can trigger sepsis. As your body releases chemicals into the bloodstream to fight infections, your immune system can go too far and cause inflammation in — and damage — several organs.

The CDC calls sepsis life-threatening and highlights that without treatment, it can result in damaged tissues, failed organs and death. According to WebMD, symptoms include rapid breathing, confusion, fever and chills, low body temperature, urinating less than usual and diarrhea. Catching it in the early stages is key to treatment and survival.

If these symptoms are somewhat mild, the CDC suggests staying home to avoid spreading germs. (Source: WFAA)

1st Exemplary Islamic Banking Branch of Ansar Bank Inaugurates in W. Azarbaijan Prov.

The first exemplary branch Islamic Banking branch of ANSAR BANK was opened in Urmia, West Azarbaijan Province, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

The bank branch will start its activity under the strict supervision of scholars of Shia and Sunni.

Dr. Ebrahimi Chief Executive of ANSAR BANK was the first speaker in the inaugural ceremony of the bank branch in Urmia who said: “Giant steps have been taken by the bank in launching the first exemplary Islamic Banking branch and it is hoped that this branch will be set up in other provinces of the country.”

The bank does not follow up the rule of obtaining maximum interest rate at any cost as practiced by some other commercial banks, he said, adding, “relying upon the assistance of the Almighty God, the bank has focused on its social responsibility within

the framework of religious banking criteria in the banking arena.”

The bank was established with the aim of meeting customers’ demand and sense of responsibility based on Jihadi management and strengthening the banking system in the country, the CEO of the bank reiterated.

Elsewhere in his remarks, CEO of the bank expressed his thanks to the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran for his unsparing and unflinching support of the bank in line with materialization of objectives of resistance economy and generation of employment and said: “nowadays, the bank has backed SMEs in the country in line with spurring production.”

In the end, Dr. Ebrahimi Chief Executive of ANSAR BANK said that his bank will take giant stride in the current year in order to realize most of its goals.

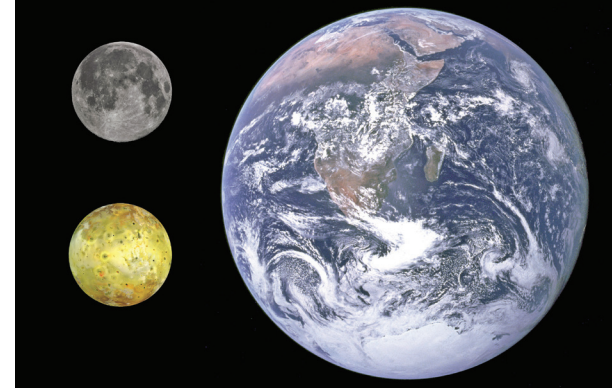


How the moon left Earth 4b years ago

That orbiting lump of rock we call the moon is thought to have been formed by a giant object smashing into Earth’s crust, and a new study has revealed more about how the moon might have slowly retreated from Earth around 4 billion years ago.

The dynamic simulation model paints a picture of a moon that drifted slowly away from an icy Earth, lit by a Sun shining around 30 percent less brightly than it does today.

As well as filling in some of the blanks about how Earth and the moon first became neighbors in the Hadean period, this latest



research also helps to explain the moon’s equatorial or fossil bulge — the way it’s thicker than it really should be around the middle.

The “moon’s fossil bulge may contain secrets of Earth’s early evolution that were not recorded anywhere else,” says co-lead researcher Shijie Zhong, from the University of Colorado Boulder.

“Our model captures two time-dependent processes and this is the first time that anyone has been able to put timescale constraints on early lunar recession.”

The moon is currently moving away from our planet at the rate of about 4 centimeters (1.57 inches) a year, which is why Earth’s rotation is gradually slowing down and our days are always getting ever-so-slightly longer.

We can log those measurements for ourselves, but what the new study does is examine how that movement might have happened billions of years ago. The model the researchers came up with shows a slow separation over several hundred million years.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Scientists are helping to treat schizophrenia using a video game

A pilot study by researchers at King’s College London’s Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IPPN) and the University of Roehampton has suggested the new technique can help patients who experience hallucinations but do not respond to medication.

They said their research shows sufferers can learn mental strategies to help ease their symptoms.

The study, which is published in the journal *Translational Psychiatry*, involved 12 patients who experienced verbal hallucinations on a daily basis.

Around 70 percent of people with schizophrenia hear voices, which can cause a high level of distress and disruption to daily life, and medication is ineffective for around 30 percent of patients in treating these verbal hallucinations.

Brain imaging experts targeted a region of the brain which is sensitive to speech and human voices, and is hyperactive in people with schizophrenia and verbal hallucinations.

They designed a “neurofeedback” technique, where patients in a MRI scanner could monitor their own neural activity in the speech sensitive region of the brain.

Neural activity was represented by a computerized space rocket, and patients were instructed to land the rocket by bringing it down to earth.

No explicit instructions were given to patients about how to move the rocket, instead patients were asked to develop their own mental strategies to move it.

After four visits to the MRI scanner, patients were able to reduce neural activity in the speech sensitive region of the brain and were able to control their brain activity without the visual feedback from the space rocket.

After training, patients had learned lasting strategies which they could apply during their daily lives.

Researchers said it is the first time neurofeedback techniques have been investigated for schizophrenia and verbal hallucinations.

(Source: South Wales Argus)

Future cities built from concrete made of volcanic ash

Imagine concrete buildings filled with volcanic ash — ash that’s embedded into the walls making them stronger and more environmentally friendly. That’s what a team of international scientists sees in future cities based on research analyzing a unique concrete material made from volcanic ash and traditional cement. The new concrete could also reduce energy costs during concrete production, and some mixes are stronger than traditional cement.

Scientists from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and Kuwait University created a material that mixes pulverized volcanic rock with traditional cement. The material, based on calculations in the *Journal of Cleaner Production*, would take 16 percent less energy to construct a neighborhood of 26 concrete buildings, for instance. That specific energy reduction was found in a material made with 50 percent volcanic ash and 50 percent traditional cement—technically called Portland cement.

“When they make the Portland cement, it goes through so many different processes—from limestone collection, to grinding, to treatment, and then finally production,” Kunal Kupwade-Patil, first author and research scientist in concrete durability and alternative cementitious materials.

“It’s a very high energy intensive process.

Portland cement accounts for about 5 percent of the world’s carbon dioxide emissions, according to the researchers. The heat required for its production is where much of its energy use originates.

Researchers tested various volcanic ash and cement mixtures with different percentages of each component. Examining the relationship between ash size, energy use to produce the materials and ratio between cement and volcanic ash revealed how the material itself was customizable. For instance, the tinier the ash was broken down, the stronger the concrete was.

(Source: Newsweek)

International Day of Women and Girls in Science: UN calls for smashing stereotypes

It is time to support and invest in women and girls who want to pursue careers in scientific research, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said in a message to mark the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, observed annually on 11 February.

Mr. Guterres said that although both girls and boys have the potential to pursue their ambitions in science and mathematics, in school and at work, systematic discrimination means that women occupy less than 30 percent of research and development jobs worldwide.

“We need to encourage and support girls and women achieve their full potential as scientific researchers and innovators. Women and girls need this, and the world needs this, if we are to achieve our ambitions for sustainable development on a healthy planet,” he stated.

The UN chief called for “concerted, concrete efforts” to overcome stereotypes and biases, such as media representations of scientists and innovators as being mainly men.

His concerns are being echoed by two other top UN officials.

In a joint statement on the day, the director-general of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Audrey Azoulay, and the Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, stressed that such imagery makes it difficult for girls to believe they can be scientists, explorers or inventors, for example.

They said the future will be marked by scientific and technological progress which “will be the greatest when it draws on the full talent, creativity and ideas of women and girls in science.”

They added that the rapidly growing science and technology sectors are “vital” to national economies.

However, UNESCO data shows only around 30 percent of all female students in higher education select the so-called STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering or mathematics. One of the main tools for tackling gender inequality in the sciences is dismantling the barriers to girls and women, at home, in the classroom and in the workplace. This requires a change in attitudes and the challenging of stereotypes, they said.

(Source: UN News Center)

RECIPE OF THE WEEK

Grilled salmon

“A simple soy sauce and brown sugar marinade, with hints of lemon and garlic, are the perfect salty-sweet complement to rich salmon fillets. Even my 9 year old loves this recipe!”

Ingredients:



1 1/2 pounds salmon fillets
Lemon pepper to taste
Garlic powder to taste
Salt to taste
1/3 cup soy sauce
1/3 cup brown sugar
1/3 cup water
1/4 cup vegetable oil
■ **Directions:**
Season salmon fillets with lemon pepper, garlic powder, and salt. In a small bowl, stir together soy sauce, brown sugar, water, and vegetable oil until sugar is dissolved.

Place fish in a large resealable plastic bag with the soy sauce mixture, seal, and turn to coat. Refrigerate for at least 2 hours. Preheat grill for medium heat.

Lightly oil grill grate. Place salmon on the preheated grill, and discard marinade. Cook salmon for 6 to 8 minutes per side, or until the fish flakes easily with a fork.

LEARN ENGLISH

Going To The Gym

A: Hey there, you look a little lost. Are you new here?

B: Yeah how'd you know?

A: You can always spot the **newbies**. I can give you a few **pointers** if you want. Were you trying to use this machine here?

B: Yeah! I just started my training today and I'm not really sure where to begin.

A: It's ok, I know how it is. This machine here will work out your upper body, mainly your **triceps** and **biceps**. Are you looking to develop strength or muscle **tone** and **definition**?

B: Well, I don't want to be **ripped** like you! I just want a good **physique** with weights and **cardio**.

A: In that case you want to work with less weight. You can start off by working ten to fifteen **reps** in four sets. Five kilo weights should be enough. Now it's very important that you **stretch** before **pumping iron** or you might **pull a muscle**.

B: Got it! Wow is that the weight you are lifting? My goodness that's a lot of weight!

A: It's not that much. Just watch... I'm ok...

■ Key vocabulary

newbie: someone who has just started doing something

pointer: suggestions, help

triceps: the large muscle at the back of your upper arm

biceps: the large muscle on the front of your upper arm

tone: how firm and strong your muscles or skin are

definition: the clear edges or shapes that something has

ripped: having a strong and muscular body or shape

physique: the size and shape of a person's body

cardio: any type of exercise that makes the heart stronger and healthier, for example running

rep: one exercise that you do in a series of exercises; repetition

stretch: to straighten your arms, legs, or body to full length

pump iron: to lift weights in order to make your muscles strong

pull a muscle: to hurt (a muscle, tendon, or ligament) by stretch

■ Supplementary vocabulary

barbell: a long metal rod to which heavy discs are attached at each end for weightlifting

treadmill: an exercise machine that consists of a continuous moving belt on which to walk or jog

spinning: an aerobic exercise that takes place on a specially designed stationary bicycle

scale: an instrument or machine for weighing

sit-up: an exercise performed to work out the abdominal muscles

push-up: an exercise in which you lie on the floor on your chest and push yourself up with your arms

chin up: an exercise in which you hang on a bar and pull yourself up until your chin is above the bar

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Fertile earth, fruitful mothers valued in ancient Iran

By Naghmeh Mizanian

Fertility is the character of both women and the earth.

Love and devotion of mothers was illustrated with its fertility and fruitfulness in ancient Iran.

Since seeds grow in women and on earth, they both are symbols of birth and creation. The qualities of earth such as love, piety, generosity, purity, and birth are undoubtedly hidden in women and mothers.

Esfandgan, or Sepandarmazdgan, is an ancient Iranian celebration devoted to women and mothers. According to ancient Iranian calendar it is celebrated on Sepandarmazd Day in the month of Esfand, the last month of the Iranian calendar.

In ancient Iran, the dignity of women and mothers was commemorated on the 59th day of winter under the name Esfandgan, the celebration of lovers.

Esfandgan falls on February 18.

Esfand or Sepandarmazd (ancient pronunciation) means the mother of creation, love, piety or holy perfect-thinking and it is one of the qualities of God.

The earth is the worldly symbol of Esfand and it is the source of life, birth, piety and purity.

In ancient Iran, Izads were symbols of the qualities of God, and each day of a month was named after an Izad.



Esfandgan is a celebration for honoring the dignity of Izad Sepandarmazd whose maternalistic symbols are women and the earth. According to the ancient Iranian calendar,

“I never let disability stop me”: story of a successful young woman

By Sadaf Abbassi

Professional identity has a huge impact on individual's self-confidence, sense of satisfaction and creativity. Generally, it is very difficult for healthy and normal people to find a proper job and settle down. Now, imagine how this process will be challenging for a young woman with disability to shape her professional identity.

Yet, Samaneh Eftekhari, 32, who is suffering cerebral palsy, has successfully managed to go through such a difficult path that not every person has the courage to experience.

The story of Samaneh, like all those who were born with disability, is full of pain and doubts, but the way she overcomes the barriers and adjusts herself with the situation, is what makes her inspirational.

■ She was different

“I was born in a large family with 4 brothers and 3 sisters and I was the youngest of all. Due to the complications that occurred while the doctors were delivering me my brain suffered damages as it was deprived of oxygen and I lost some of my neurotransmitters responsible for my left arm and leg which caused me some movement restrictions,” Samaneh said.

“This made my life different from others. When I was little, rehabilitation services were not common and I had to be hospitalized without receiving any specific treatment. You can imagine how hard it is for a one or two-year-old child seeing her mother only for one hour a day,” Samaneh explained.

She realized how people look at her, when she went to school for the first time. “Before school, I never had a best friend. Children used to play in the alley but I couldn't even walk until I was three, and after that, I couldn't play at park due to my disability. When I first attended elementary school or when I was going to play in a park, I was mocked by other children and even their families because of their lack of awareness about my condition,” Samaneh recalled.

■ She tried hard to prove herself

Samaneh recalled how hard she had to try at school to change the way others looked at her. “I always faced this challenge to prove that I am as talented and intelligent as other students, which was like a torture to me.”

“I didn't like to be seen as an unearthly creature. In middle school, though I passed the entrance exam and was accepted at a top school, I had to face similar challenges as well. I have learnt to do my personal affairs and become independent,” she highlighted.

“When talking to my friends with disabilities, I find out that they really don't care about their disability, but unawareness of the public is what causes problems.”

Samaneh talked about her sad experiences and the way others treated her due to her disability and said she didn't want other people with disability to go through the same thing.

“When Heidi, Girl of the Alps (a popular Japanese anime aired in Iran during 1990s) was being broadcast from the TV, I wished Clara (a paralyzed personage) could never walk again. When people were telling me that they pray for me to heal, I used to think maybe I am not a good girl and that is why I can't be healthy.”

■ University as a turning point

Regarding the difficulties Samaneh had to go through, she got accepted at university; a stage she considered as a turning point in her life which increased her self-esteem.

“I was admitted in agricultural engineering in Zanjan's public university, but I chose to study applied chemistry at Azad University; I made that decision because I liked my chemistry teacher at high school so much. The fact that everybody at the university knew that I was admitted by taking Konkour (university entrance exam) and without having any special privileges (due to my disability), was pleasant for me,” the young woman explained.

At this point, she got to know some NGOs working for people with disability that changed the way she saw the world.

“It changed my point of view. When I started to participate in NGOs events, I realized there are other people with disability and I was shocked when I saw they even made jokes about each other's disability! Then I became a volunteer in these organizations that made me feel good about myself and increased my self-confidence. Having experiences in NGOs, improved my



computer skills so that-it may seem funny now- I was being asked to create email accounts for my classmates over and over again. I am glad that even when I started my activities in social networks like Facebook, unlike other girls my age, I had different concerns and I sought to find people like myself,” Samaneh said proudly.

■ When there is no job in chemistry

Young Samaneh who saw herself as a competent expert in her favorite field of study, chemistry, was determined to start her career in this field: “When I finished university, I tried to find a relevant job. I was so confident during my internship in the laboratory that I've been asked to do all the quantity control by myself. I remember during my last day as an intern, I was working while the supervisor was sleeping. Maybe someone who was actually there seeing how I was doing my job would appreciate my abilities but there were other factors involved for employing me; for one, the human resources department and the CEO didn't agree with me being employed there.”

Finally, she decided that she can find a job in other fields rather than chemistry: “For a year, I focused on finding a job in chemistry, but I couldn't find any. There were so many occasions that I was ready to start my job as an intern, but employers wouldn't agree. So I decided to expand the lists of the jobs I could find. In 2013, I started my work as a clerk in an NGO where I was a volunteer before. This working experience increased my self-confidence and improved my speaking skills. However, after one year of working there, I started to think that despite the friendly atmosphere there, I could no longer make progress at this workplace,” Samaneh said about her career path.

■ Fitting in a flourishing workplace

Samaneh's efforts to find a better job led her to a position in an insurance agency, but things did not go well as expected: “In 2014, I started my career in an insurance agency and

I had planned to establish my own office after learning on the job by relying on my family's financial support. But it seemed my employer didn't like me to make any progress. Therefore, despite all the threats, I managed to stand up for my financial rights after one year of hard working, however, I quit.”

But it didn't make the persistent young woman to stop following her dreams: “After quitting the insurance agency, I remained unemployed for 4 months, until I received an email about a career development and job placement strategies workshop from a charity foundation to enhance NGOs function. At this workshop, I realized that not only my disability kept me from finding my favorite job, but also my mistakes in writing a resume and job interviews were involved. Finally, I sent my resume for a customer service company and after going through all routine processes and meeting their requirements like everybody else I was employed there. It has been 4 years that I am working for this company and currently I am working as an expert at the company.”

“I'm positive that I can make progress in my job and I am happy to see that it is a friendly workplace,” says Samaneh with her shining eyes.

■ Increasing awareness about people with disability

Samaneh who is now happy with her job tries to increase public awareness about disability and the way society deals with it: “There are so many people who complain and blame society but I never let others believe that I am less competent due to my disability and I have tried to act as a promoter and share my experiences. For example, when I go to receive occupational therapy, I see children with disability and their parents who are suffering and are not willing to accept the fact that their children are different from others. I tell them my story and I usually get positive feedbacks,” she says.

The self-made courageous young woman believes that there are only few NGOs active for people with disability and they need to increase. She also says the more families are open to this matter, the easier it would be for children to cope with their disability: “In my Instagram page, I try to normalize disability so people in society treat this group of people better.”

These days, career coaching is a well-known process in which a coach provides guidance for someone who has just started his or her work; I believe career coaching must be taken more seriously for people with disability. On the other hand, social media's reflection of disability is very crucial. Whether they believe in traditional clichés about disability or consider it as a normal condition that can occur to everyone, even to myself,” concluded Samaneh.

Embassy of India Tehran

New Address to collect Indian Visa applications:

All type of visa applications (except Diplomatic and Official Visa) will be accepted at new address at

1st Floor, No.2, Anahita Alley, Afriqa Blvd, Tehran (Tel: +98 21 91005012)

with effect from 20.02.2018.

Consequent to IVS Global Services Pvt Ltd appointing **Hamsafaran Alborz** Travel Agency as local partner

replacing Negin Parvaz Pars, all concerned are hereby informed that with effect from 20.02.2018,

Hamsafaran Alborz Travel Agency will be accepting all type of visa applications at **1st Floor, No.2, Anahita Alley, Afriqa Blvd, Tehran.**

Negin Parvaz Pars, address: No.145, Negin Building, Dr Beheshti Street, after Soheravardi Junction, Tehran

is not authorised to collect visa applications on behalf of Indian Embassy Tehran after 19.2. 2018 at its offices at Tehran, Esfahan, Mashhad and Shiraz.

Till next information, all Visa applications will only be accepted at

Hamsafaran Alborz Travel Agency, **1st Floor, No.2, Anahita Alley, Afriqa Blvd, Tehran**

from 20.02.2018.



सत्यमेव जयते

Pence raises prospect of talks with North Korea alongside 'intensified' pressure

Head held high, Kim's sister returns to N. Korea

Comments by the United States Vice President Mike Pence suggest the United States may be looking more favorably at diplomatic engagement with North Korea as South Korea considers a rare summit with its neighbor and long-time foe.

Pence said in a newspaper interview the United States and South Korea had agreed on terms for further diplomatic engagement with North Korea, first with Seoul and then possibly leading to direct talks with Washington.

The prospect of talks comes after months of tension between Pyongyang, Seoul and Washington over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, with the U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un trading insults and threats of destruction amid tightening sanctions from the United Nations.

Speaking to the Washington Post aboard Air Force Two on his way home from the Games, Pence said Washington would keep up its "maximum pressure campaign" against Pyongyang but would be open to possible talks at the same time.

"The point is, no pressure comes off until they are actually doing something that the alliance believes represents a meaningful step toward denuclearization," Pence was quoted on Sunday as saying. "So the maximum pressure campaign is going to continue and intensify. But if you want to talk, we'll talk."

The U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on Monday it was too early to judge whether latest developments represented the start of a diplomatic process.

"We've said for some time it's really up to the North Koreans to decide when they're ready to engage with us in a sincere way, a meaningful way," Tillerson told reporters in Egypt.

"They know what has to be on the table for conversations."

Trump has at times questioned the purpose of further talks with the North after years of negotiations by previous U.S. administrations failed to halt the North's weapons programs.

Last year, North Korea conducted dozens



of missile launches and its sixth and largest nuclear test in defiance of the UN Security Council resolutions as it pursues its goal of developing a nuclear-armed missile capable of reaching the United States.

Relations between the two Koreas have improved in recent weeks, with Pyongyang sending its highest ranking delegation ever to attend the Winter Olympic Games, being held in the South Korean resort of Pyeongchang.

The visit included an invitation for South Korean President Moon Jae-in to travel to Pyongyang for talks. Such a meeting, if it came about, would mark the first inter-Korea summit since 2007.

A South Korean government official said Seoul's stance was that separate talks with North Korea by South Korea and the United States should both lead to the denuclearization of the North while sanctions and pressure continue to be applied.

North Korea defends its weapons programs as essential to counter the U.S. aggression, saying regular war drills between the United States and the South are preparations for invasion. The South hosts 28,500 U.S. troops,

a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean war.

■ **Tillerson says up to North Korea to decide when ready to engage in talks**

Meanwhile, the U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in Cairo on Monday it was up to North Korea to decide when it was ready to engage in sincere talks with the United States.

Pence said in a newspaper interview that Washington and Seoul had agreed on terms for further diplomatic engagement with North Korea, possibly leading to direct talks without pre-conditions.

Tillerson told a news conference it was too early to judge whether this was the start of a diplomatic process.

■ **Kim's sister returns to N. Korea**

A prim, young woman with a high forehead and hair half swept back quietly gazes at the throngs of people pushing for a glimpse of her, a faint smile on her lips and eyelids low as four bodyguards jostle around her.

In her first appearance on the global stage, Kim Yo Jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, had her every move closely scrutinized.

Crowds applauded as she stood for the

South Korean anthem during the opening ceremony for the start of the Winter Olympic Games, while her big smiles and relaxed manner left a largely positive impression on the South Korean public.

But her sometimes aloof expression and high-tilted chin also spoke of someone who sees herself "of royalty" and "above anyone else", leadership experts and some critics said.

Kim Yo Jong's visit to South Korea, the first by a member of the North's ruling bloodline since their 1950-53 war, could hardly have come at a more acute time.

U.S. Vice President Pence was also in town, leading international pressure on North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program and reminding the world of the Kim family's brutal regime.

When shaking hands or eating meals with officials such as South Korean President Moon Jae-in, Kim Yo Jong was all smiles, even agreeing to give a toast suddenly requested of her by the presidential Blue House's chief of staff.

"I can't speak very well in public," she told guests attending a dinner at the five-star Banyan Tree Club and Spa in Seoul.

"I never thought I would visit [the South] so suddenly and believed much would be strange and different but I saw many things that were similar or the same. I hope the day we become one comes soon and hope to see all your friendly faces in Pyongyang."

With so little known about her (even her age of 28 is unconfirmed), scrutiny on Kim Yo Jong was intense, dominating local media and internet chat rooms.

Reportedly schooled in Switzerland, the youngest daughter of former leader Kim Jong Il was promoted by her brother to the country's top decision-making body in October.

Kim Man-heum, head of the Korea Academy of Politics and Leadership, said Kim Yo Jong left a largely positive impression on the South Korean public.

"North Korea used 'soft power' this time to engage the South and her being a woman may have contributed more in that aspect," Kim told Reuters.

(Source: agencies)

Ukraine crisis needs 20,000-strong UN force

The United Nations should consider a force of some 20,000 soldiers from non-NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) countries and 4,000 police to help resolve the crisis in Ukraine, according to a new report to be presented to top officials this week.



More than 10,000 people have been killed since April 2014 in a conflict that pits Ukrainian forces against Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. Intermittent clashes continue despite a notional ceasefire and diplomatic peace efforts.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has suggested a limited United Nations peacekeeping mission to eastern Ukraine, which many in the West see as an opportunity to negotiate a broader UN force to restore order, diplomats say.

A report commissioned by former NATO chief Anders Fogh Rasmussen - now an adviser to Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko - will be presented to officials including the United States special envoy to Ukraine, Kurt Volker, at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday.

Over 700 unarmed civilian observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) currently operate monitoring missions on the conflict, but these have not reduced tensions.

Difficult obstacles remain to the approval of any UN force. Russia, which has a veto as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, would have to agree to the details, and it is unclear whether Sweden would agree to lead the mission.

(Source: Reuters)

Taliban invites Rand Paul to peace talks

The Taliban is extending an invitation to the United States Sen. Rand Paul, Kentucky Republican, to their political office in Doha, to discuss possible peace plans to end the 17-year Afghan war.



The invitation, proposed on the terror group's social media accounts under the moniker of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan," was extended in response to Paul's recent comments on the status of the war.

"We invite the respectable U.S. Senator Rand Paul, in his official capacity to visit our political office in Doha for mutual talks," the Twitter post by the Information Committee of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan read.

"We'll prove to Mr. Rand Paul, the immediate US withdrawal from [Afghanistan] will bring peace to our country & will enhance international security," the group added in the social media post.

During an interview with Fox News on Thursday, Sen. Paul lambasted Washington's continued investment in the Afghan conflict, with no clear endgame in sight. "The war in Afghanistan is costing us \$50 billion a year... It's time to come home. There is no military victory there," Paul said.

(Source: The Washington Times)

Zionists control US national security policy: ex-CIA officer



How do you assess the US new nuclear doctrine toward Iran? What are the additional points?

A: The USA does not have a functional intelligence community and knows nothing about the real world. Zionists control US national security policy using blackmail and bribery (e.g. Jeffery Epstein and pedophilia blackmail tapes combined with bribery of all Members of Congress. There are no new points. The USA has not learned anything in 40 years, it is like a retarded child that keeps on growing and being more dangerous without ever becoming more intelligent or more aware of the real world and the consequences of its misbehavior.

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel showed great concern over the new US nuclear doctrine saying Trump's strategy would send the wrong signal, as in the days of the Cold War, and pose a serious challenge to Europe. What are the EU's specific concerns?

A: The EU was never a union, it has always been a cartel, and the EU leaders have betrayed all EU citizens with the Barcelona Agreement that in the background provided for unlimited illegal immigration by Muslims fleeing Arab dictators, into Europe. Bribes appear to have been paid by the Arab leaders to the European leaders. The only thing more dangerous than the US nuclear policy is the naked dishonest of the European leaders.

Dutch foreign minister admits lying about meeting Putin in 2006

Dutch Foreign Minister Halbe Zijlstra admitted on Monday that he lied about hearing Russian President Vladimir Putin make comments about plans for a "greater Russia."

While election campaigning two years ago, Zijlstra said that in 2006 he had been at Putin's dacha when he heard the Kremlin leader speak of plans for a "greater Russia" which would include some of Russia's neighbors.

"I was tucked away back in the room, but I could clearly hear Putin's answer to the question about what he considered greater Russia," Zijlstra told a gathering then of his People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, which heads the new Dutch government.

"He said this included Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and the Baltic states, and, well, Kazakhstan would be 'nice to have'," he said in his speech which was recorded on video.

But on Monday he acknowledged he had never been at the meeting with Putin and had heard of the comments second hand.



"The discussion did take place and someone who was there told me what President Putin said about greater Russia," Zijlstra said in a statement after admitting the lie in an interview with the Dutch daily De Volkskrant.

Zijlstra's admission comes ahead of a scheduled meeting on Wednesday with Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov with relations at a poor ebb since the downing of Malaysia Airlines MH17 in July 2014, with 196 Dutch citizens onboard.

The Dutch have blamed the Russians for the downing of the airplane and are narrowing down their investigation to identify the suspects to be tried in the Netherlands.

Opposition parties called for a debate on Zijlstra's position. But Prime Minister Mark Rutte said that though Zijlstra had made a "big mistake" he remained a credible member of the government and did not have to resign.

Rutte, speaking to reporters, said he did not see relations with Russia deteriorating further. "The Russians know the content of the story is true", he said.

(Source: Daily Star)

Spend Afghan war money at home: Paul to Trump

The United States Republican Senator Rand Paul has called on President Donald Trump to scrap his plans for extending years-long American military presence in Afghanistan and spend the Afghan War funding at home instead.

"I think the Afghan war is long past its mission," Paul told CBS, referring to the 2001 invasion and the following occupation of Afghanistan by American forces.

"I think now it's a nation building exercise. We're spending 50 billion dollars a year. And if the president really is serious about infrastructure, a lot of that money could be spent at home," he argued.

The Kentucky senator, who bowed out of the 2016 Republican presidential primary after failing to compete with Trump, said the U.S. had no business rebuilding the war-ravaged country or build bridges and buildings in Pakistan.

On August 21, Trump announced that he would increase the U.S. troops in the country, prolonging a 17-year war which he had once described as a "complete waste."

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

U.S. officials have estimated that the military presence in the war-torn country

will cost taxpayers more than \$45 billion this year.

Paul said Trump was one of "the least interventionist" U.S. presidents but he was surrounded with people who kept telling him there was a military solution to the Afghanistan debacle.

"The generals who surrounded him with don't want to admit that there isn't a military solution. And so the war goes on and on and on," Paul argued. "And really I think after 15 years and a trillion dollars that the Afghan it's time for them to take over their country."

The second longest war in the U.S. his-

Duterte: Shoot female rebels in their genitals

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has drawn condemnation from human rights watchdogs and women's groups, after he said that female communist rebels in the country should be shot in their private parts as punishment for fighting the government.

Duterte's declaration "is just the latest in a series of misogynist, derogatory and demeaning statements he has made about women," Human Rights Watch said in a statement sent to Al Jazeera on Monday.

"It encourages state forces to commit sexual violence during armed conflict, which is a violation of international humanitarian law," Carlos Conde, a Human Rights Watch representative in the Philippines, said.

According to a government transcript of a speech he delivered on February 7, Duterte said Philippine soldiers should not kill women rebel fighters.

"We will just shoot your [genitals], so that if there are no more [genitals], you would be useless," Duterte said using a word in his native Visayan, a language spoken in central and southern Philippines.

The president also chastised female fighters for abandoning their children and families, in order to join the communist movement.

Emmi de Jesus, a Congress member representing the Gabriela Women's Party, denounced Duterte's "nasty remark", saying it contributes to the culture of "impunity" in the country.

De Jesus said the president "further confirms himself

as the most dangerous macho-fascist in the government right now".

She added that Duterte is taking "state terrorism against women and the people to a whole new level", and pushing soldiers "to commit more bloody human rights violations and grave abuses of international humanitarian law."

Duterte has been under fire several times for making misogynistic comments.

In January, during his visit to India, he told a group of Indian and Filipino business leaders in New Delhi that he would like to attract visitors to the Philippines by offering "42 virgins".

In July 2017, he also made rape jokes while talking about Miss Universe.

Two months earlier, Duterte told soldiers fighting Muslim armed fighters in Marawi that they could rape up to three women without getting punished.

"I'll imprison you myself," he said, referring to soldiers who commit violations. Then he said: "If you had raped three, I will admit it, that's on me."

In the lead-up to his presidential election win in 2016, critics were outraged when he recalled a 1989 prison riot in which an Australian missionary was killed, and inmates had lined up to rape her.

Duterte said the victim was "beautiful" and as mayor of Davao City, where the riot took place, he should have been first in line. He later apologized and said he did not intend to disrespect women or rape victims.



On Wednesday, Harry Roque, Duterte's spokesman, defended the president's string of sexist comments, saying critics should lighten up.

"You know, sometimes, these feminists are really a bit OA," Roque said using the Filipino term to mean over-acting. "I mean, that's funny. Come on. Just laugh," he told a pro-Duterte social media personality, adding that people "identify with his humor".

The Duterte administration has been engaged in an on and off peace negotiations with the communist rebels in the Philippines, since he came into office in mid-2016.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Man City titles can help De Bruyne win Ballon d’Or, says Guardiola

Manchester City playmaker Kevin De Bruyne will be a serious Ballon d’Or contender if he wins major titles with the Premier League club, according to his manager Pep Guardiola.

De Bruyne has been vital to City’s dominance this campaign with the 26-year-old notching a league-high 14 assists including three in Saturday’s 5-1 rout of Leicester City.

“No doubt,” Guardiola told reporters when asked if the Belgian could win the prestigious individual award. “He is not (just doing it in) one game. It’s the whole season, every three days playing that way. “But he knows and everyone knows, to be there you have to win titles - and titles and titles, especially one. But the way he’s played it’s difficult to find one (better) in Europe.”

De Bruyne has scored 11 goals and provided 18 assists across all competitions for City this season, helping them establish a 16-point lead atop the league table, but the midfielder is not focused on individual honours.

“To be fair, when I am busy playing football I don’t care (about that),” De Bruyne said. “I do everything to win titles with the team. What happens after is an extra. I am very pleased with the way everything is going for me. I am playing this way because the team is playing this way...”

“At the end, if you get an individual honour, it is beautiful.” City remain in contention to win the quadruple as they prepare for Tuesday’s match against Basel in the Champions League knockout stages followed by an FA Cup fifth-round clash against Wigan Athletic and the League Cup final against Arsenal.

(Source: Mirror)

Ukraine declines to broadcast Russia 2018 matches

The National Television Company of Ukraine (NTCU) has declined to broadcast matches at the FIFA 2018 World Cup Russia this summer, company chief Zurab Alasania announced Monday.

“The Russia 2018 World Cup will take place this year. We are not going to broadcast [the World Cup]. It’s a huge, multi-million-dollar thing, the rights to broadcast were acquired even before 2013. It’s a tough decision. Can we broadcast the World Cup in Moscow? No,” NTCU chief Alasania said.

NTCU also failed to show the World Cup Final Draw, held at Moscow’s State Kremlin Palace in December, which determined the group stages of the tournament.

It is reported that Ukraine’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pavlo Klimkin, is conducting negotiations with football federations and fan organizations on the possibility of boycotting the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia altogether.

“We are negotiating with different federations. I can open this question. We also talk to different fan organizations about the ways to open different political issues: boycotting this tournament or clearly stating the position on the stay in Russia,” Klimkin said, 112 reported.

Ukraine failed to reach the Russia 2018 tournament, finishing 3rd in their qualifying group behind Iceland and Croatia. The country is famous for producing former AC Milan striker Andrey Shevchenko.

The World Cup Russia 2018 will be held from June 14 to July 15 in 12 stadiums across 11 different Russian cities, including Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kazan, Sochi, and Volgograd.

Russia will take on Saudi Arabia in the opening game at Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow on June 14.

(Source: RT)

A frosty reception: Ostersunds prepare wintry welcome for Arsenal

Arsenal head to unfamiliar territory in the Europa League this week and Arsene Wenger’s men are in for a cold shock if their hosts Ostersunds live up to their promise of unusual hospitality arrangements.

Having cruised through to the last 32 as winners of Group H, the Gunners are up against the Swedish outfit, whose 2018 Allsvenskan campaign does not begin until April.

With temperatures in Ostersund currently below zero, Arsenal will have to contend with the cold as well as a side who have defeated Galatasaray, PAOK, Zorya and Hertha Berlin and held Athletic Bilbao to a draw en route to the knockout stages.

And three days ahead of the opening leg at Jamtkraft Arena, Ostersunds teased their opponents with pictures of what they can expect to find in the away dressing room.

The images depict a number of Ostersunds kits and other club wear adorning the walls of an igloo-like interiors of icy walls, promising a truly frosty reception for the visitors.

(Source: Four Four Two)

UEFA orders Anderlecht to refund Bayern Munich fans

Anderlecht have been ordered by UEFA to partially refund Bayern Munich fans for their tickets for last November’s Champions League group game.

The Belgian club charged €100 per ticket for the travelling supporters for the game at the Constant Vanden Stock Stadium, which Bayern won 2-1.

UEFA has ruled the price was excessive and has instructed Anderlecht to reimburse Bayern by €30 per ticket.

In a statement released by their Control, Ethics and Disciplinary Body, UEFA said: “RSC Anderlecht is ordered to contact FC Bayern Munich within 15 days to compensate their supporters with an amount of €30 per ticket to those away fans located in the upper tier section (sections S14, S15, S16 and S17).”

In December, UEFA fined Bayern €20,000 after their fans protested against the inflated ticket costs.

Supporters threw fake bank notes onto the pitch and displayed a banner, which read: “€100? Is your gr€€d [sic] now finally \$atisfied?”.

(Source: Goal)

Champions League: Match previews as round of 16 kicks off



The UEFA Champions League is finally back after a two-month break and you can bet football fans around the world are already preparing for the upcoming game nights with their friends. The group stage came to a close in December and now it’s time for the real action as the Last 16 begins.

There are four matches set to take place this week on Tuesday and Wednesday.

■ JUVENTUS VS. TOTTENHAM

Tottenham enjoyed a memorable group campaign after taking four points off back-to-back reigning holders Real Madrid, which included a stunning 3-1 win over Los Blancos at Wembley. Juventus, who were beaten to the top spot in their group by Barcelona, are a historic giant cut from the same cloth as Real and would be another huge scalp for the Premier League side, who are definitely still ‘small fish’ in this ‘big fish’ pond.

It’s not exactly David vs Goliath, but it’s not a level playing field either.

While a dominant force in Italy throughout their history - 33 Serie A titles can definitely attest to that - Juventus are the ultimate chokers when it comes to the Champions League.

Including the days of the original European Cup, Juve have played in nine finals over the years and managed to lose seven of them. The most recent was, of course, last season against Real Madrid, while they were also played off the pitch by Barcelona in 2015.

‘Spurs’ Spurs have long held a reputation as being England’s chokers of choice, although it is a label they have started to shed under Mauricio Pochettino.

■ A Story of Two Number 10s

The hopes for both teams will ultimately rest on their respective No. 10s, Paulo Dybala for Juve and Harry Kane for Spurs.

Each man is currently 24 years of age and both are expected to kick on and establish

themselves as the best in the world in the seasons to come - these are two players who could genuinely win the Ballon d’Or when the Ronaldo/Messi duopoly is finally over.

What’s more, each is having a ‘career’ season in 2017/18. The typically deeper Dybala is fast closing in on 20 goals so far, while Kane has astonishingly found the net over 30 times already.

■ BASEL VS. MANCHESTER CITY

National champions on 12 occasions this century, Basel have been Switzerland’s regular representative in the Champions League. But the club has never gone beyond the Last 16.

Manchester City were eliminated at the same stage last season, falling to Monaco, and have only been further on one previous occasion, despite six attempts in total - that

was when Manuel Pellegrini led a team to semi-finals in 2015/16.

This time, one of the two sides has to go beyond the Last 16.

■ Does a ‘Quadruple’ Beckon?

With the Premier League all but sewn up and a place in the Carabao Cup final booked for the end of the month, City are looking at the next small step in completing a never-before-seen ‘quadruple’ by getting off to a good start against Basel.

No English team has ever won four major trophies in the same season to complete what has always been seen as the impossible dream.

A ‘quadruple’ would be a massive step because City have only ever done a ‘double’ once before, combining the 2013/14 Premier League and League Cup - and that’s not even

the real ‘double’. Ironically, Basel are actually well accustomed to ‘doubles’ in Switzerland.

■ You Look Familiar

The only scary thing for City fans about Basel striker Ricky van Wolfswinkel is getting hopelessly tongue-tied trying to utter the Dutchman’s name. That is because he was worse than awful during a single season at Norwich back in 2013/14.

The thing is, he could actually come back and bite City, though. Van Wolfswinkel scored 23 goals in the Netherlands for Vitesse Arnhem last season and had netted eight in 14 for Basel this season before suffering a fractured foot in September.

He’s fit again now and should be getting back to his former sharpness for City’s visit.

(Source: Sports Illustrated)

IOC boss to visit North Korea after winter Games



International Olympic Committee (IOC) President Thomas Bach plans to visit North Korea after the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, cementing ties with the reclusive state which used the event to restart political dialogue with South Korea.

Bach told Reuters in an interview on Monday he would make the visit on the North’s invitation as part of an agreement between the IOC and both North and South Korea. The parties were still discussing a convenient date, he added.

The Games in South Korea are due to finish on Feb 25. “All the parties concerned have welcomed this invitation to North Korea...,” he said. “We are talking about this convenient date in order to continue the dialogue on the sports side. We will see when this is going to happen.”

North and South Korean leaders swapped warm handshakes and smiles at Friday’s opening ceremony, enabling the IOC to present the Games as enablers of peace and take the media spotlight away from a Russian doping scandal that has plagued it for years.

Russian athletes marched under the Olympic flag, and in neutral colors, at

the ceremony, having been banned from competing formally for their country by the IOC. Many critics had called on the IOC to ban Russia outright.

North Korea agreed to participate in Pyeongchang after the South and IOC encouraged the heavily sanctioned state to participate as a gesture of peace.

Athletes from both sides, technically still at war, marched together at the opening ceremony and have fielded a unified women’s ice hockey team, the first time an inter-Korean team has competed at any Olympic Games.

South Korean President Moon Jae-in has been using the Games in his efforts to break the ice with the North and pave the way for talks over the North’s weapons programme.

“We can set the symbols, we can show that it is worthwhile sitting down together discussing, negotiating, and that then you can come to a good result,” Bach said.

“For our side, for the sports side, this dialogue will continue...,” he said, adding that the IOC was in constant dialogue with North Korea’s national Olympic committee.

(Source: Reuters)

Russia whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov ‘fears for life’

The whistleblower who made allegations of Russian state-sponsored doping says his “life is in jeopardy” and the Russian government want him to “stop talking”.

Former Russian anti-doping official Grigory Rodchenkov has given his first televised interview in disguise since fleeing to the United States in 2015.

His evidence led to Russia’s ban from the ongoing Winter Olympics. “The Kremlin want me to stop talking,” he told CBS news show 60 Minutes.

Rodchenkov has dyed his hair and shaved his moustache for “security reasons”, and the disguise applied for the interview was not the same as his usual appearance.

“There is information that my life is in jeopardy and we took all necessary steps,” he told the show.

Rodchenkov added he believes Russian president Vladimir Putin was aware of the doping programme, despite denials from the Kremlin, while Putin has said Rodchenkov is “under the control of American special services”.

“I am not a liar - I was not telling truth in Russia but since coming to United States I am telling the truth now,” said Rodchenkov, who is seen putting on a bulletproof vest during the show.

Putin has previously called for “professional co-operation” with anti-doping bodies.

Russia was banned from Pyeongchang 2018 after Rodchenkov’s claims were investigated, with the International



Olympic Committee (IOC) initially giving life bans to 43 athletes involved in the doping programme.

Earlier in February the Court of Arbitration for Sport (Cas) overturned the suspensions of 28 Russian athletes, partially upholding 11 other appeals.

And 168 Russian athletes are competing in South Korea as neutral Olympic Athletes from Russia (OAR), having received invites from the IOC for proving they are clean.

Russia won 13 golds to top the medal table at Sochi 2014 and Rodchenkov claims five of those were won by athletes who were doping.

Cross country skier Alexander Legkov, skeleton’s Alexander Tretiakov and Russia’s two and four-man bobsled

teams were all stripped of their gold medals, but Legkov and Tretiakov had their results reinstated on appeal.

■ ‘The plumber was a Russian agent’

Rodchenkov was the director of Russia’s anti-doping laboratory in Moscow and told the show that the aim was to “win at any cost at world championships and Olympics”.

He added that the laboratory had a “dual” aim as it had to report “1% to 2% of positives” despite its main role being to “protect the Russian national team”.

He also showed how he and his colleagues were able to exchange clean urine for the samples given by doped Russia athletes after their events at Sochi 2014.

He also added that Evgeni Blokhin, an agent of Russia’s intelligence service the FSB, posed as a plumber to gain access to a non-secure room next to the locked doping laboratory, passing the sample bottles through a hole in the wall that was obscured by furniture.

“It was so simple and so effective,” said Rodchenkov.

He claims “genius” experts from the FSB were able to reopen the supposedly tamper-proof bottles to replace the urine. Rodchenkov provided evidence for the McLaren report which found evidence of marks on the bottles from where tools were used to prize them open.

“I never saw how it was done - I saw only the same miracle. The bottle was closed and now the bottle is opened,” he said.

(Source: BBC)

First match the toughest: Branko Ivankovic

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic says the first match in a tournament can be the most difficult match.

Persepolis football team will host Uzbekistan's Nasaf Qarshi in Group C of the 2018 AFC Champions League in Tehran's Azadi Stadium on Tuesday.

The Iranian giants' outstanding form led them to achieve their best AFC Champions League performance ever in reaching the semi-final last year.

Persepolis also are on the verge of retaining their title in the Iranian league.

"Playing in the AFC Champions League is a great honor for me and I am very happy we play in front of our fans at home this year. I expect our fans to be our 12th man on Tuesday," Ivankovic said in the pre-match news conference.

"Experience has proved to me that the first match always is the hardest match. We respect Nasaf and know that the Uzbek team have won four matches out of their five matches," the Croat added.

"Nasf are a well-organized team and are among the country's top four but we are also ready to meet them.

"For us is very important to begin the campaign with a win but we're not taking anything for granted. We qualified for the ACL semis last year and it's normal we are going to repeat our success in the current season," Ivankovic stated.

"We've analyzed Nasaf in the previous days and I also know they've analyzed us but we believe in what we do and I am sure our players will prove their potential," the Persepolis coach concluded.



Esteghlal aim to beat Al Rayyan: Winfried Schafer

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Esteghlal football coach Winfried Schafer says that they are going to defeat Al Rayyan of Qatar in Group D of the AFC Champions League.

The Blues have been scheduled to meet the Qatari giants in Doha's Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on Tuesday.

"We know how good Al Rayyan are but we want to defeat them, that's why we are here. Al Rayyan have several good

players but as I've already said we are going to defeat them," Schafer said in the pre-match news conference.

"Our players are highly motivated to participate in AFC Champions League. I am also happy to take part in the competition because it's a very special competition," the German coach added.

"Esteghlal are a good team and we are ready for the competition," Schafer said.

Esteghlal better than Al Rayya of Qatar, stat says

Doha: Al Rayyan will kick off their 2018 AFC Champions League campaign with a home clash against the Islamic Republic of Iran's Esteghlal at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on Tuesday.

The Group D encounter will start Al Rayyan's eighth campaign in the competition but, despite coming close last year, the Doha team have never advanced beyond the group stage.

Al Rayyan scored eight goals in three home games last year, while one of their best performances came in a 3-1 home

victory over Esteghlal's city rivals Persepolis when star man Rodrigo Tabata netted twice.

Esteghlal did manage to make it out of the group stage last year, before a 6-1 defeat to Al Ain in the second leg of the Round of 16 brought their continental dream to an abrupt halt.

The Tehran side have played Al Rayyan six times in the past and have come out on top on four occasions, with the last time being a 2-1 victory in the 2014 group stage.

(Source: the-afc)

Persepolis ready to host Uzbekistan's Nasaf

Tehran: After achieving their best AFC Champions League performance ever in reaching the semi-final last year, Persepolis begin their 2018 campaign by hosting Uzbekistan's Nasaf in Group C at Azadi Stadium on Tuesday.

Branko Ivankovic's Persepolis produced some fine displays en route to the semi-final, where they ultimately fell to Al Hilal, who had also eliminated the Tehran side in the 2015 Round of 16.

Persepolis were unbeaten at their imposing home stadium last year, while

the previous time they hosted Uzbek opposition resulted in a 2-1 victory over Bunyodkor in 2015.

Nasaf, meanwhile, are appearing in their third AFC Champions League but have never managed to get beyond the group stage, exiting early in 2015 and 2016.

The Qarshi-based side have also won just once in six attempts, although that was on their only previous visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran when they defeated Tractor Sazi 2-1 in April 2015.

(Source: the-afc)

Zob Ahan lose to Al Duhail of Qatar: ACL Matchday 1

Al Duhail came from behind to record a 3-1 victory over Islamic Republic of Iran's Zob Ahan in Group B of the 2018 AFC Champions League on Monday.

Brazilian striker Kiros put the visitors in front 10 minutes into the game. Giorgi Gvelesiani's header was nodded on by Morteza Tabrizi to beat goalkeeper Amine Lecomte, but the forward who had scored twice in the play-off saw his headed effort ricochet off the cross bar and into the path of Kiros who headed home from point-blank range.

The visitors defended resiliently and were successful in keeping Al Duhail attackers at bay, until the 74th minute when Youssef Msakni's shot was spilled by goalkeeper



Mazaheri onto the path of Karim Boudiaf, who drove home the rebound to equalize for the Qataris.

One minute later the defensive midfielder got his second of the night from a powerful header after Nam Tae-hee's cross from the corner.

The Korean playmaker was his side's creative force once more, finding Msakni with a cross that was swept home to round the scoring with five minutes to go and seal an important victory at the start of the campaign for Al Duhail who travel to the UAE to face Al Wanda in their next game. Zob Ahan, meanwhile, welcome Lokomotiv to Iran in Matchday 2.

(Source: the-afc)

Kick It Out condemns Mario Balotelli's booking after racist abuse

Kick It Out have condemned the comments toward Mario Balotelli after the Nice forward claimed he had been the victim of racist abuse.

Balotelli received a yellow card from referee Nicolas Rainville after gesturing to the crowd during Nice's 3-2 defeat at Dijon in Saturday's Ligue 1 contest.

The former Manchester City and Liverpool forward complained that he had been targeted by racist comments.

The English anti-racism and discrimination organization released a statement, noting that it has contacted Football Against

Racism in Europe in order to raise its concerns with Ligue 1 officials.

"Kick It Out was shocked to see Mario Balotelli booked for bringing to the attention of the referee alleged racist chanting directed towards him by Dijon supporters," the statement read.

"It is unacceptable and wrong to see that once again, a match official has failed to apply the UEFA protocol -- in place for a number of years -- which requires action to be taken to stop the game to deal with the offending abuse."

The organization also said that it "expects

a strong response from the French football authorities in condemning both the alleged racist chanting from Dijon supporters and the failure of the referee to follow protocol to halt the behavior, as well as the decision to compound Balotelli's experience as a victim by booking him for merely asking the match official to do his job."

Meanwhile, Dijon striker Wesley Said has thrown his support behind Balotelli, acknowledging that the comments were made during the game.

"Black point of the evening: the insults towards Mario Balotelli," Said, who is black,

wrote in an Instagram post. "We know very well it's not our fans, just a handful of supporters with bad intentions. That has no place on a football pitch and even in everyday life."

Nice reportedly will study footage of the game in an attempt to verify Balotelli's claims as no other member of the visiting delegation heard the insults.

Balotelli did not ask Nice to make a complementary report to the referee, but the club are likely to take the matter further if they can find proof to substantiate the Italian striker's complaint.

(Source: ESPN)

IR Iran coach Nazemasharieh a happy man

Head coach Mohammad Nazemasharieh was a picture of joy after Iran claimed their 12th AFC Futsal Championship title on Sunday.

Iran took the lead in the first half with skipper and Most Valuable Player Ali Asghar Hassanzadeh finding the back of the net in the 19th minute, and continued to dominate the second half with goals from Farkhad Tavakoli, Hossein Tayebi and Hassanzadeh again to seal a comprehensive win over Japan.

"I'm the most happiest man in the stadium," said the former Giti Pasand coach.

"I want to say thanks to all who have helped us, from the organizers of this tournament to our own management staff.

"I am proud of my players, proud of these boys who are obeying my game plan like soldiers. Our team is a great team but it doesn't mean the other Asian teams, especially Japan, are low level teams, they are also good.

"It was clear that we've shown a fantastic performance

and proved to everybody that we're the best team in Asia. In fact, there were good reasons behind (our triumph) as you've seen. We had the top goal scorer, MVP and the team with the least goals conceded. That shows that our team is a little far ahead in Asia."

Nazemasharieh also attributed the victory to the aid provided by the team's technical group, saying: "I am also proud of my colleagues in the technical group who have helped us, supporting each other like brothers. Whenever we have any problems, they would advise us."

The 48-year-old head coach revealed that Iran has begun to focus on the future generation of players with their eyes on the 2020 FIFA Futsal World Cup.

"Our plan began two years ago, which told us to pay attention to our youth, keeping them busy with development and grow them as potential national team players, even though we were ahead.

"Now, we have already trained a really good youth team,



and they will be our main players in 2020. So you'll be sure to watch a revamped team then."

(Source: the-afc)

Three Iranian Para cyclists to participate at Asian championships

Paralympic.ir — Iran will take part at the 7th Para Asian Track Championships with three cyclists.

The competition will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from Feb. 16 to 20.

Mehdi Mohammadi, Alireza Ghasemi, and Bahram Soleymani will represent Iran in the competitions.

The three-man team, coached by Alireza Makvandi, will travel to Malaysia early Wednesday.

Cyclists will compete at 1km, sprint and individual pursuit events. Iranian para cyclists are preparing for the 2018 Asian Para Games.

The team has been training since mid-December in Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province.

Sohrabi pockets bronze at 2018 Asian championships

Press TV — Iranian professional racing cyclist Mehdi Sohrabi has managed to take a bronze at the 2018 Asian Road and Para Cycling Championships in Myanmar, and raised the Islamic Republic's medal tally to four at the conclusion of the continental event.

On Monday, the 36-year-old Iranian sportsman took part in the elite men's road race competitions, and completed the 176-kilometer (109-mile) task for a third-place finish, the Cycling Federation of the Islamic Republic of Iran website reported.

Earlier, Mohammad Ganjkanlou finished second in the men's road race, and got the silver medal.

A cyclist from Japan stood atop the podium, and a Mongolian contestant scooped the bronze.

Moreover, Iranian cyclist Arvin Moaz'zami Goudarzi competed against his rivals in the men's road race individual time trial on Saturday, and completed the 42-kilometer (26.1-mile) race in 50:52 to sit in the third place.

Hong Kong's Cheung King-lok snatched the gold medal after he finished the line in 49 minutes and 53 seconds – three seconds ahead of old rival Choe Hyeong-min of South Korea.

The Iranian cycling team also came second in the men's elite team time trial, and stood behind Japan. Hong Kong occupied the third spot. Mehdi Sohrabi, Arvin Moaz'zami Goudarzi, Behnam Ariyan, Mir Samad Pourseyeydi, Mohammad Rajablou and Mohammad-Esmaeil Chaichi were members of the Iran team.

The 2018 Asian Road and Para Cycling Championships kicked off in Myanmar's capital city of Nay Pyi Taw on February 6, and concluded on February 12, 2018.

The tournament brought together dozens of male and female cyclists from various Asian countries, including Hong Kong, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, the Philippines and South Korea.

Russia World Cup to lift economy, drive inflation: central bank

This year's soccer World Cup will bring a small boost to the Russian economy but could also cause a short-term spike in inflation, the Russian central bank said on Monday.

President Vladimir Putin is hoping to use the World Cup, set to run from June 14 to July 15, to showcase Russia as a global superpower and reinvigorate areas of the country where the economy has stagnated with an influx of tourists and spending.

In emailed comments to Reuters, the central bank said spending on preparations for the tournament had already helped support the economy, which returned to growth last year after a two-year downturn.

"Concerning the second and third quarters of 2018, the short-term positive impact on the Russian economy will be the growth in jobs and increase in demand for consumer products and services," the bank said. Analysts at Russia's Gaidar Institute said in January the World Cup, which will be hosted in 11 cities across the country, could add up to 0.2 percent to annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth in the second and third quarters.

But the central bank, which has fought to bring inflation down from double-digit levels to post-Soviet lows, also warned that the tournament could lead to an increase in consumer prices.

"A small, short-term increase in prices for some goods and services (food, entertainment, hotels) is possible, which will lead to profits for a few companies," the regulator said.

Russian authorities have already named and shamed hotels caught jacking up room prices ahead of the World Cup, with some increasing nightly rates by as much as 5,000 percent.

The central bank, however, still sees Russian inflation below its target of four percent in 2018 and has said it could fall to a record low near two percent in the second quarter.

(Source: Reuters)

Manchester City's €878m squad the most expensive in history

Manchester City boast the most expensive squad in football history after spending €878million in the transfer market, according to new figures.

A table published by the CIES Football Observatory shows Pep Guardiola's Premier League leaders have spent more than any other team in Europe's big five leagues, having made Aymeric Laporte their latest signing for a reported club-record fee of €65m in January.

City's investment eclipses that of Paris Saint-Germain, whose squad cost €805m, more than a quarter of which was spent on the world-record €222m deal to sign Neymar from Barcelona.

Manchester United are third in the list of the top 98 on €747m, ahead of Barcelona (€725m), Chelsea (€592m) and Real Madrid (€497m). There are six other clubs from the Premier League in the top 20, including Liverpool (€461m), Arsenal (€403m), Everton (€365m), Tottenham (€358m), Southampton (€229m) and Crystal Palace (€225m).

Indeed, spending in England's top flight averages out at a record €291m, well ahead of LaLiga (€131m), Serie A (€124m), the Bundesliga (€113m) and Ligue 1 (€97m).

In total, 42 clubs out of the 98 have broken the €100m barrier in recruitment cost, while Troyes prop up the table with just €2m spent.

The CIES Football Observatory is a research group within the International Centre for Sports Studies (CIES), an independent study center located in Neuchâtel, Switzerland.

(Source: Guardian)

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Kalhor, Erzincan to do duet in Tehran

A R T TEHRAN — World-renowned Iranian kamancheh virtuoso Kayhan Kalhor and Turkish baglama master Erdal Erzincan are scheduled to perform duets at Tehran's Vahdat Hall for one week beginning on February 23.



Iranian kamancheh virtuoso Kayhan Kalhor (L) and Turkish baglama master Erdal Erzincan perform at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on December 4, 2016. (ILNA/Mehdi Nasiri).

Kalhor and Erzincan, who released the joint album "The Wind" in 2006, have held several concerts together in different countries. They also gave a performance in Tehran in December 2016, and their last performance was in the Netherlands and France in November 2017.

Alibaba signs deal to offer Disney shows on video platforms

SINGAPORE (Reuters) — Alibaba Group Holding Ltd's entertainment arm has signed a licensing agreement with Walt Disney Co in a deal that will provide the Chinese group's Youku video streaming platform with the largest Disney animation collection in China.



A view of the Alibaba Group booth during the 2018 CES in Las Vegas, Nevada, U.S. January 9, 2018. (Reuters/Steve Marcus)

Alibaba said in a press release on Monday that the multi-year licensing agreement signed between Alibaba Digital Media and Entertainment Group and Disney subsidiary Buena Vista International Inc will see more than 1,000 Disney episodes released on Alibaba platforms which include set-top boxes.

The deal comes as Disney has faced obstacles in getting digital television content into China. In 2016, its DisneyLife online content venture, which it launched with Alibaba, was shut down by Chinese regulators less than five months after operations began. The reason for the shutdown was not made public.

"The addition of Disney content greatly enriches the library of quality international content on Alibaba's media and entertainment ecosystem, giving us a leading edge in foreign content distribution in China," said Yang Weidong, president of Youku at Alibaba Digital Media and Entertainment Group.

Alibaba did not disclose the value of the deal. Youku reaches 580 million devices and gets about 1.2 billion views each day, according to Alibaba's news website Alizila. It said the platform already has similar licensing deals with Warner Bros., Paramount, Fox, NBCUniversal and Sony Pictures Television, among others.

Disney raises prices of some U.S. theme park tickets

NEWYORK (Reuters) — Walt Disney Co said on Sunday it was changing the admission price for its U.S. theme parks, raising the cost of some single-day tickets by almost 9 percent.

Disney, which has a three-tier structure that charges visitors more during peak periods to help spread out crowds, said peak one-day tickets for a single theme park at the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim, California, would see the biggest increase, rising to \$135 from \$124.

Value and regular one-day tickets are now \$97 and \$117, respectively, compared to \$97 and \$110 last year.

One-day prices to the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida rose 2 percent to 4 percent, with tickets there now ranging between \$109 and \$129.

The company also said it plans to make changes to its annual pass program at Disneyland as well make its multiple-day tickets to Walt Disney World date-specific in order to help manage crowds, particularly as it prepares to open a new Star Wars attraction at both parks next year.

“Lost Strait” scores big success at Fajr filmfest



Left to right, this combination photo shows directors Bahram Tavakkoli, Hooman Seyyedi and Peyman Maadi, and producer Hamed Hosseini and actress Sahara Dowlatshahi after being honored during the 36th Fajr Film Festival at Tehran's Milad Tower on February 11, 2018. (FFF)

A R T TEHRAN — Director Bahram Tavakkoli's war film "The Lost Strait" was the big winner at the 36th Fajr Film Festival on Sunday as it earned awards in six categories including best film and best director.

The film was made based on a true story, which recounts an epic battle by Iran's Ammar Battalion during the last days of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war.

Producer Saeid Malekan called on his colleagues to come on stage to share his happiness when his film was announced as a winner during the award presentation ceremony at Tehran's Milad Tower.

"The great moment was when the audience at the theater applauded after the names of the martyrs of the Ammar Battalion were appearing on the screen," Malekan said at the ceremony.

The Crystal Simorgh for best director was shared by Tavakkoli and Ebrahim Hatamikia, the director of the Daesh drama, "At Damascus

Time".

In his speech, Hatamikia expressed his thanks to the Owj Arts and Media Organization for financing his film and severely criticized the Iranian TV and critics for allegedly undermining the movie.

The special jury award went to Peyman Maadi for directing "Bomb, a Love Story", a narrative about Tehran during the 1980s when the city was under Iraqi missile attacks.

Amir Jadidi was crowned best actor for his roles in "The Lost Strait" and Soheil Beiraghi's debut film "Cold Sweat".

The Crystal Simorgh for best actress went to Sara Bahrami for the portrayal of an addict in Behruz Shoeibi's child trafficking drama "Woodpecker".

The film also brought Jamshid Hashempur the award for best supporting actor while Sahar Dowlatshahi won the best supporting actress award for her roles in "Cold Sweat" and "Istanbul Junction", Mostafa Kiai's film on the collapse of Tehran's Palsco Building.

Tehran cineplex to host electronic music festival in March



A R T TEHRAN — Tehran's Charsu Cineplex will be hosting an electronic music festival during March.

14 performances by different bands have been arranged during the festival running from March 3 to 9, festival director Hamid Khosrobeigi said in a press release on Monday.

"The Charsu Cineplex was chosen

because of its good location in the center of town, providing better access to public transportation, and also the shops selling electronic music instruments are situated in the neighborhood," he added.

Several workshops will be organized during the event, he added.

The names of the participating bands were not disclosed in the report.

“Fifty Shades Freed” tops box office with \$38.8 million, “Peter Rabbit” hops to \$25 million

LOS ANGELES, (Variety.com) — Universal's opening of "Fifty Shades Freed" is dominating North American moviegoing this weekend with a solid \$38.8 million at 3,678 locations as cinemas await the arrival of "Black Panther".

Sony's launch of family comedy "Peter Rabbit" wound up with a better-than-expected \$25 million at 3,725 sites. Clint Eastwood's thriller "The 15:17 to Paris" from Warner Bros. arrived above forecasts at \$12.6 million at 3,042 venues for the weekend.

A pair of sturdy holiday season holdovers in their eighth weekends took fourth and fifth as Sony's "Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle" finished with about \$9.8 million at 3,126 sites and Fox's "The Greatest Showman" grossed \$6.4 million at 2,373 screens. "Jumanji" declined only 10 percent from the previous weekend and will finish the weekend with \$365.7 million in 54 days in 38th place on the all-time domestic grosser list, \$3 million behind "Despicable Me 2". "Showman" slid only 17 percent and has totaled \$146.5 million.

The finale of the "Fifty Shades" trilogy -- referred to in marketing materials as "the climax" -- is also launching in 57 international markets this weekend with about \$100 million, which brings the franchise total to about \$1.09 billion.

The weekend saw a significant increase in moviegoing in the wake of a slow Super Bowl session with \$138 million, up 46 percent, according to comScore. Overall business was off 27 percent from the same weekend a year ago, when "The Lego Batman Movie" led with \$53 million.

Moviegoing will receive another major boost over the Presidents Day weekend with Disney-Marvel's "Black Panther" opening Feb. 16 and forecasted to take in as much as \$150 million during the Friday-Monday period. Overall year-to-date domestic business as of Sunday is \$1.234 billion, down 1.8 percent from 2017.

"This weekend is merely the calm before the proverbial Marvel-powered storm as 'Black Panther' is poised to leap into theaters with potentially record-breaking results," said



Cast member Domhnall Gleeson poses at a photo call for the movie "Peter Rabbit" in West Hollywood, California, U.S., February 2, 2018. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

Paul Dergarabedian, senior media analyst with comScore.

"Fifty Shades Freed" sees Jamie Dornan and Dakota Johnson return as Christian Grey and Anastasia Steele in the conclusion of the events set in motion in 2015's "Fifty Shades of Grey" and 2017's "Fifty Shades Darker." Though the "Fifty Shades Freed" launch wound up above forecasts, it was not as strong as its predecessors. "Fifty Shades of Grey" opened with a sensational \$85.2 million in 2015, and "Fifty Shades Darker" opened with \$46.6 million on the same weekend last year.

"Fifty Shades Freed" generated a B+ CinemaScore with an audience that was 75 percent female with 55 percent under 30. "We were able to expand the audience beyond the core demographic, and it played well in all geographic areas," said Jim Orr, Universal's president of domestic distribution.

Orr credited the "exhaustive" marketing efforts and the chemistry between Dornan and Johnson for the continued

“Our Sunhi” coming to Tehran museum



A scene from "Our Sunhi" by Hong Sang-soo.

A R T TEHRAN — "Our Sunhi", a 2013 South Korean drama film written and directed by Hong Sang-soo will be screened at the cinematheque of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art on Wednesday.

The film will go on screen in the original

Cypress".

Best makeup artist: Saeid Malekan for "The Lost Strait".

Best composer: Karen Homayunfar for "At Damascus Time".

Best sound engineer: Rashid Daneshmand for "The Lost Strait".

Best sound effects engineer: Alireza Alavian for "At Damascus Time" and "Sheeple".

Best practical special effects supervisor: Mohsen Ruzbehani for "The Lost Strait".

Best computerized special effects supervisor: Farid Nasserfashi for "Istanbul Junction".

Best set designer: Abbas Bolondi for "The Underwater Cypress".

Best costume designer: Sara Khaledizadeh for "Bomb, a Love Story".

Best short film: "Animal" by Bahman Arg and Bahram Arg.

Best art and experimental film: "Sheeple" by Hooman Seyyedi.

strong performance of the franchise and noted that the studio expects strong playability in coming weeks. He also said there will be a significant bump in midweek performance with Valentines Day on Wednesday.

"Peter Rabbit", a live-action/CGI animated film from Columbia Pictures and Sony Pictures Animation, saw an uptick in Saturday business to finish well above recent projections. James Corden is voicing Peter Rabbit in a contemporary comedy highlighted by his feud with Mr. McGregor's heir (Domhnall Gleeson) as they rival for the affections of the warm-hearted animal lover who lives next door, played by Rose Byrne.

Eastwood's "15:17 to Paris" is based on the book "The 15:17 to Paris: The True Story of a Terrorist, a Train, and Three American Heroes" by Jeffrey E. Stern, Spencer Stone, Anthony Sadler, and Alek Skarlatos, about the 2015 Thalys train attack. The film, which is co-financed by Village Roadshow, stars Stone, Sadler, and Skarlatos as themselves. Judy Greer and Jenna Fischer also star.

Fox's third weekend of "Maze Runner: The Death Cure" finished sixth behind "Jumanji" and "Showman" with \$6 million at 2,923 sites. The finale of the dystopian trilogy has taken in \$49 million in 17 days.

Lionsgate-CBS Films' second weekend of Helen Mirren's historical horror film "Winchester" followed in seventh with \$5.1 million at 2,480 locations. Fox's eighth weekend of Steven Spielberg's "The Post" finished eighth with \$3.5 million at 1,865 venues to lift its domestic total to \$72.8 million.

Fox Searchlight's 11th weekend of Guillermo del Toro's "The Shape of Water" came in ninth with \$3 million at 1,780 sites. The fantasy romance, which scored a leading 13 Oscar nominations on Jan. 23, has a domestic total of \$49.7 million.

STXfilms' fourth weekend of heist thriller "Den of Thieves" edged Warner Bros. fourth session of "12 Strong" for the 10th spot with \$2.9 million at 1,468 locations for a \$41 million total. Afghan war drama "12 Strong" took \$2.7 million at 1,901 sites for a 24-day total of \$42 million.