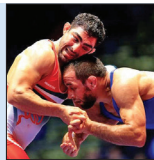




Symbolic court sentences Suu Kyi to 25 years in jail **2**



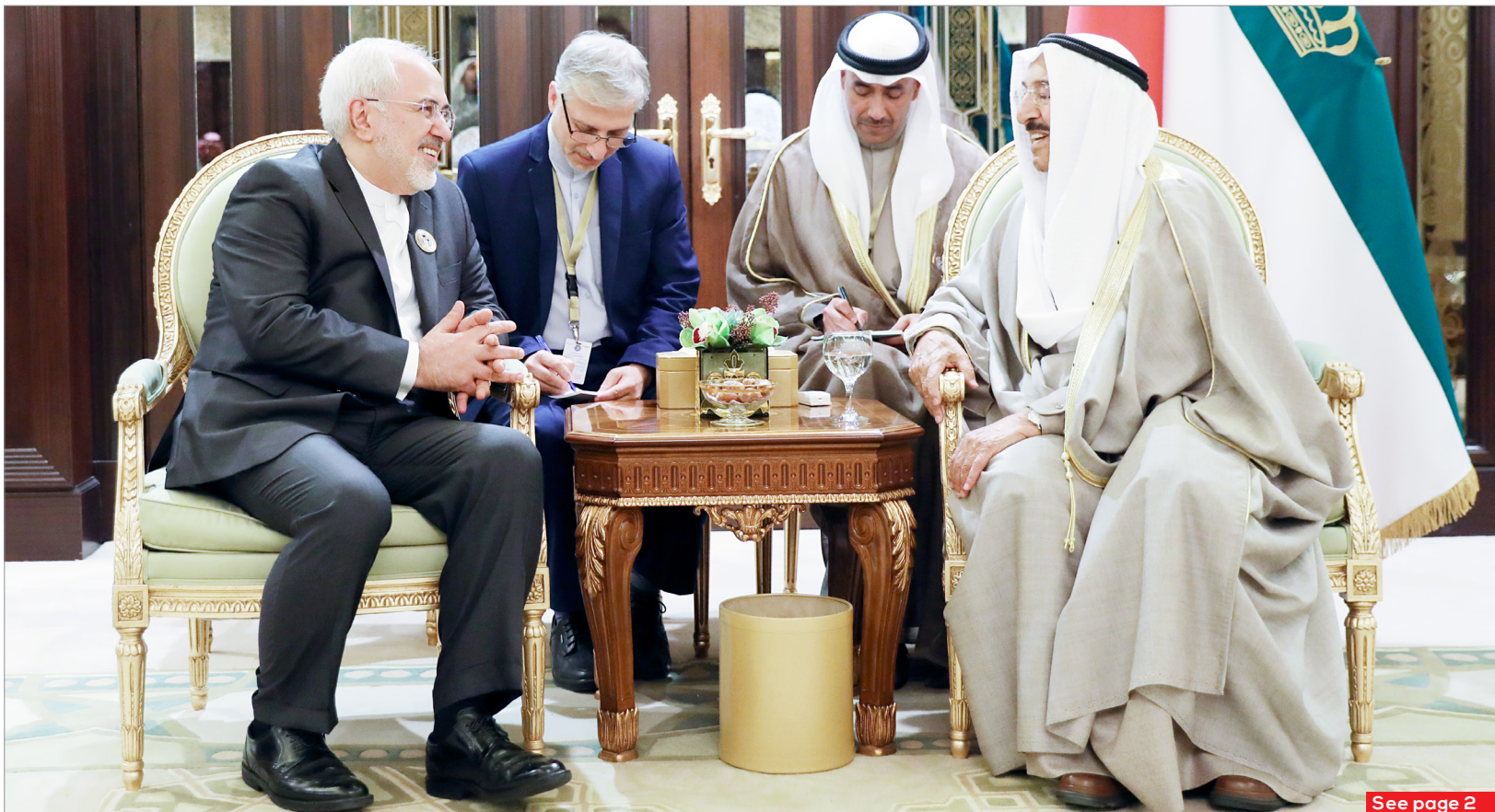
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Zarif holds talks with Kuwaiti emir

© Tehran Times/ Majid Asgarpour

Post-JCPOA FDI in Iranian industry hits \$9.7b

ECONOMY **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian industry, mining and trade minister said \$9.7 billion of foreign direct investment (FDI) has been attracted to the country's industry, mining and trade sectors since the implementation of the nuclear deal,

known as JCPOA in January 2016. As reported by Mehr news agency on Wednesday, underlining industry sector's 6.5-percent growth in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2017), Mohammad Shariatmadari noted that the sector is following a positive trend. **→4**

Dusty Khuzestan still in tight spot, out of breath

ENVIRONMENT **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Once again the old story of recurrent sand and dust storms in the southwestern province of Khuzestan is going around. For some years now elevated levels of PM 2.5 fine particles, tens of times above the standard average, is the new normal for the province. This week the area is yet again hit by

another strong sand and dust storm. According to the provincial officials the concentration of the fine particles have reached some 9,000 micrograms per cubic meter while according to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the short-term standard (24-hour or daily average) is 35 micrograms per cubic meter of air. **→12**

U.S. clinging tight to Iraq occupation

By Yosra Bakhakh **TEHRAN** — It has been almost 15 years since the US invaded Iraq and overthrew Saddam Hussein, falsely claiming he had WMD. While Iraq has defeated ISIS, also known as Daesh, Washington is still seeking excuses to prolong its stay in Iraq. The invasion of Iraq, dubbed by the US as “Operation Iraqi Freedom” lasted from 20 March to 1 May 2003 in which a combined force of troops from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Poland came together to destroy

the regime and, in turn, much of Iraq's infrastructure. Military intervention for the alleged promotion of “democracy” is one of the most controversial US policies in the Middle East. It's a joke, actually. The US presence in Iraq has not brought liberty and peace, but after the passage of almost 15 years since the invasion, Iraq remains in much worse shape that it was before March 2003. The war in Iraq claimed by some accounts over a million lives and almost 5000 US lives. **→7**



EDITORIAL

By Mohammad Ghaderi
Tehran Times editor-in-chief
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Washington and Paris play doubles against Iran

Existing evidence and documents suggest that Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron, Presidents of the U.S. and France, have sought to redefine policy on the JCPOA.

Last September on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly, we saw the joint work of Washington and Paris on how to deal with the nuclear question. Trump and Macron decided to launch and lead the “the JCPOA transformation process” using the U.S. Congress. Macron's remarks on the “possibility of completion of the JCPOA” by including Iran's missile armaments and new constraints on Iran's nuclear program were the proofs of this bilateral agreement between the White House and the Élysée Palace.

Following Trump's controversial speech on the nuclear deal and his two-month time limit to the U.S. Congress to review the JCPOA, Macron continued his negative maneuvers in dealing with Iran's missile program. But the U.S. Congress could not reach consensus on the matter and U.S. Vice President Mike Pence announced that the Trump administration and the Congress will continue cooperation to revise the JCPOA.

“Now, we're also working with the Congress to arrive at a new agreement, a new set of conditions for sanctions going forward. The reality is that the nuclear deal was so ill-founded, because it did not deny that Iran could develop a nuclear weapon. Being a 10-year agreement, it virtually guaranteed that they would develop a nuclear weapon after that 10-year period. Whether we'll continue to waive sanctions will be decided soon,” said Pence.

According to the Vice President, the Trump administration and the Congress are drafting a law stating that if Iran ever resumes its efforts to develop a nuclear weapon and missile to deliver it, all nuclear sanctions will immediately be imposed against Tehran. About three weeks ago, Emmanuel Macron explicitly stated that “the JCPOA” is unchangeable, but he still talks about completing the nuclear deal. What is certain is that completing the nuclear deal means altering this agreement. **→7**

Trump's new nuclear doctrine just rhetoric: expert

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Prof. Filip Kovacevic believes Trump's new nuclear doctrine and threats against Russia is just campaign rhetoric because any kind of use of nuclear weapons against Russia or against its allies would quickly lead to mutual destruction.

Recently the U.S. President Donald Trump unveiled his new nuclear doctrine which had remained unchanged since 2010. Many experts consider Trump's new doctrine which enjoys many ambiguities as just campaign rhetoric.

To shed more light on the issue we reached out to Prof. Filip Kovacevic, University of San Francisco geopolitics.

Following is the text of interview with him:
■ The U.S. new nuclear doctrine was published several days ago. This document had remained unchanged since 2010. What are the reasons for new changes?

A: According to the U.S. military establishment, the most important reason for changes is that the world has been a more dangerous and geopolitically unstable place. What the generals are not saying, though, is that it was their own actions which are responsible for this state of affairs. The hegemonic U.S. foreign policy, the attempt to force a neo-liberal Pax Americana on the diversity and richness of the world's cultures and traditions, is the cause of the present world problems.

Of course, you won't find this stated openly

in the doctrine. What you will find there, in a typical manipulative fashion, are the accusations of others for the problems that the U.S. foreign policy has caused itself. In fact, this hypocritical pattern of behavior, where you take the legitimate reactions of others to your own provocations and aggressive moves as the main cause of tensions and conflicts, goes back many decades into the past.

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

A: In my opinion, the most significant difference is that a lot more money will be poured into the development of nuclear weapons. This will inevitably lead to a nuclear arms race with other states and to the proliferation of nuclear weapons as more and more countries will want to acquire them. **→7**

Nuclear deal must be implemented without any change to it, Iran insists

POLITICS **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Wednesday that the 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), must be implemented without changing a word of it.

“We do not care about others' interaction with the United States. Our position is clear: The JCPOA must be implemented without adding a word to it or omitting a word from it, and there is no possibility for renegotiation,” he told reporters before his meeting with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov in Tehran.

It is not possible to renegotiate the JCPOA or revise it, the deputy foreign minister asserted. “All sides are duty bound to implement their obligations, otherwise they must accept conse-



quences of their decision,” he added.

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

the U.S. from it.

Iran, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the U.S., UK, France, Russia, and China – Germany and the European Union struck the nuclear deal on July 14, 2015. Immediately after the forging of the nuclear agreement the UN Security Council adopted a resolution turning the deal into an international agreement.

Since the JCPOA went into force in January 2016 the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency has issued nine reports each time confirming Tehran's complete compliance with the multilateral agreement.

According to the agreement, Iran is obliged to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of nuclear-related sanctions.



ARTICLE

By Yadollah Javani
Political analyst

“U.S. sees own interests as benchmark for good, evil”

Over the past few days, some U.S., Zionist, European and Saudi officials tried, in one way or another, to create the impression that they have stood by Iranian people and supported their demands. Accordingly, Western, Zionist and some Arab media outlets claimed they were supporters of Iranians and their demands. Amid such claims of support, a question comes to mind, and that is who they think Iranian people are?

The question becomes all the more important when one ponders on U.S. President Donald Trump's calling Iranians a “terrorist nation!” Also, a U.S. secretary of state said years ago that the root of the Iranian nation must be burned! The answer to the above-mentioned question contains a delicate point. The Americans define key concepts in the language of politics with their own criteria, concepts such as human rights, freedom, independence, peace, justice, security, terrorism and people. Therefore, when U.S. statesmen introduce themselves as advocates of peace, stability, human rights, security and people, one should pay attention to the way they define the concepts.

In this regard, we can categorize every one of these fundamental concepts in the language of politics into “good” and “bad” based on the definitions given by the Americans. For instance, in the eyes of Washington, there is both good terrorism and bad terrorism.

From the Americans' standpoint, people in every country are categorized into good and bad. When Trump calls Iranians terrorists, he refers the group of people who are “bad” in the eyes of the U.S. “Good” people in Iran, according to Washington, are those who are ready to serve as mercenaries for the U.S. and stand up to the Islamic Republic of Iran's establishment and the values of the Islamic Revolution. **→7**



Ill treatment of dissidents in Bahrain continues

By Ramin Hossein Abadian

The Bahrain revolution has turned eight years old as of February 14 and the al Khalifa regime has increasingly been intrusive and ineffective in ending the unrest.

On the occasion of the anniversary of the start of the popular movement in the country, the Deputy Secretary General of the Islamic National Accord Association (Al-Wefaq), Sheikh Hussain al Daihi, wondered whether Bahrain needs to address and solve the problems and crises that besiege it from all sides and who is responsible for the absence of solutions. He condemns the lack of any accord form years. **→7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani offers condolences to Putin over plane crash

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani late on Tuesday offered condolences to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin over the recent deadly plane crash near Moscow.

In his message, the president offered sincere sympathy for the families of those who perished in the incident.

The Russian passenger jet crashed several minutes after takeoff from Moscow's Domodedovo Airport on Sunday, killing all 71 people on board.



Rouhani starts three-day tour of India

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani is scheduled to leave Tehran for India on Thursday morning for a three-day trip, the presidential communications director Parviz Esmaeili said on Wednesday.

Esmaeili said Rouhani's visit is in response to the historic visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Tehran back in May 2016.

Meeting with Muslim scholars in Hyderabad, the capital of southern India's Telangana state, as well as paying a visit to cultural and religious centers, and meeting with Iranian expatriates are among the president's plans while in Hyderabad.



Army to employ advanced homegrown tank

POLITICS TEHRAN — The domestically made advanced tank called "Karrar" will be employed by the army in the near future, the Army Ground Forces commander announced on Wednesday.

Speaking to reporters in Tehran, Kiomars Heidari said the tank is one of the country's unique products and the contract for employing it has been signed by the Army Ground Forces, Tasnim reported.

Karrar is a class of tanks that enjoys modern technologies. Its earlier version is already in service, together with other locally-made tanks like Zolfaghar.



Iranian Navy to arm vessels with point-defense system

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iran's Navy is going to equip its vessels with a point-defense weapon system that has passed all tests, a military official said.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Rear Admiral Ali Kaviani, a Navy commander, said the system has passed all tests on the ground and in the sea, and will be installed on the vessels by the end of the current Iranian year (March 20).

In recent years, the Navy has made great advances in making homegrown equipment and has increased its presence in high seas.



Police arrest currency traders amid growing currency prices

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian police in collaboration with experts from the central bank have arrested 90 currency dealers amid growing foreign currency prices.

According to Tehran Police Chief Brigadier General Hossein Rahimi, at least 10 currency exchange shops have been sealed and 16 others received warnings, Tasnim reported.

According to the country's real-time data sharing system, SANA, euro valued 59,860 rials in the free market on Tuesday, adding 1.43 percent. The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) put the official rate of euro at 45,539 rials.



Symbolic court sentences Myanmar's Suu Kyi to 25 years in jail

POLITICS TEHRAN — A symbolic court in Iran has respectively sentenced Myanmar's de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and Commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing to 25 and 15 years in jail for ethnic cleansing against Rohingya Muslims.

During the symbolic court held at Imam Sadiq University in Tehran on Tuesday, a number of Muslim rights activists from Iran and Bangladesh as plaintiffs accused the two leaders of human rights abuses against the Rohingya, Tasnim reported.

The sentences come as Myanmar's troops have intensified attacks against Rohingya Muslims in Rakhine state, home to over a million members of the desperate minority, since October 2016.

European Parliament backs nuclear deal

POLITICS TEHRAN — A senior member of the European Union's legislative body says the European Parliament and the EU support a full implementation of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

David McAllister, chairman of the European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee, made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran on Wednesday with Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chief of the Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee.

McAllister also said the European Parliament "welcomes and supports" the removal of sanctions against Iran under the nuclear accord.

David McAllister, who is in Tehran at the head of a European parliamentary delegation, said Europe considers the JCPOA a useful document which promotes international peace and stability. He also said all sides must respect their obligations under the deal.

He added the MEPs have traveled to Tehran to enhance common understanding and consult with Iranian officials about issues of common interest as well as regional and international challenges.

Boroujerdi, in turn, hailed Europe's support for the nuclear agreement, expressing hope that its continued implementation ushers in further development in mutual relations, especially in commercial and economic areas.



David McAllister

The senior Iranian lawmaker pointed to

U.S. President Donald Trump's stonewalling attempts targeting the deal, and said if Washington violated the accord's provisions, Tehran would, in turn, act "based on its own interests."

"America and other parties to the document should understand that the JCPOA is not changeable and negotiable under any circumstances," Boroujerdi asserted, according to Press TV.

The European delegation's visit was a response to one by Boroujerdi to Brussels on January 24, when he met with McAllister and other officials.

The agreement, reached between Iran and the P5+1 countries -- the U.S., the UK, France, China, Russia and Germany -- put limitations on parts of Iran's nuclear program in exchange for removing all nuclear-related sanctions.

Over the past year, Trump has been trying to weaken the agreement in numerous ways, including by advising Europe not to resume its post-JCPOA economic transactions with Iran as well as threatening to "tear up" the deal and reintroduce nuclear-related bans against the Islamic Republic.

In January, he extended waivers of economic sanctions on Iran for another 120 days but said he was doing so "for the last time."

Washington has also been seeking to lobby the European signatories to develop a "side agreement" to the Iran deal.

Zarif: We did not pin all hopes on Clinton victory in elections

POLITICS TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has said that Iran did not pin all hopes on victory of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections.

During presidential campaigns, Clinton, a Democrat who was Barack Obama's secretary of state from 2008 to 2012, said she would stick to the nuclear agreement. However, her rival Donald Trump from the Republican Party, who surprisingly emerged victorious in the election, vowed to tear up the JCPOA in the first days if he enters the White House.

In an interview with the Jaam-e Jam daily published on Wednesday, Zarif said, "We believed and do believe that the JCPOA [the official name for the

nuclear agreement] is so strong that the U.S. government, no matter how much anti-JCPOA it is, cannot ignore the deal as Trump could not tear up the deal in spite of all the threats."

He noted that the U.S. has not pulled out of the JCPOA due to fear of becoming isolated internationally.

"What has prevented the U.S. from quitting the JCPOA is not its interests in the deal, but is evading international isolation. The U.S. feels that if it wants to pull out of the JCPOA, it will be isolated in the international community. So, it [the Trump administration] has made any efforts, especially during the past months, to find a way out of the deal and be less isolated," Zarif explained.

Zarif also noted that Iran will take appropriate actions if the country's interests are harmed.

Iran and six world powers, including the U.S., UK, France, Russia, China and Germany, struck the nuclear deal on July 14, 2015. The deal went into effect in January 2016.

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

European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said on January 11 that the EU remains committed to support the full and effective implementation of the agreement.

Velayati says U.S. should leave Syria

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, on Wednesday defended Iran's presence in Syria, saying countries like the United States which are not wanted in Syria must leave the country.

"Iran is in Syria legitimately and based on the invitation of the Syrian government. Those who have to leave Syria are the ones who have not been permitted by the Syrian government," Velayati was quoted by Mehr as saying.

On the same day, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had repeated a U.S. call for Iran to withdraw from Syria, claiming Tehran's military presence there is destabilizing the region.



U.S. moving ISIL to Afghanistan to possibly create problem for Iran, Russia: Larijani

POLITICS TEHRAN — The United States is moving Daesh (ISIL) militants to Afghanistan by helicopters to possibly create problems for Iran and Russia, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said on Wednesday.

Larijani made the remarks during a meeting with a European Union's parliamentary delegation headed by David McAllister, chairman of the European Parliament's

Foreign Affairs Committee.

By transferring Daesh terrorists to Afghanistan, Larijani said, the U.S. is making the same mistake it did a few decades ago with Taliban.

Nevertheless, he said, "We know how to deal with them."

The terrorists that they are supporting now will become a big problem for them in the near future, the parliament speaker predicted.

Iran, Russia share common interests, threats: envoy

Iran's Ambassador to Russia Mehdi Sanaei has hailed the close relations between Tehran and Moscow, saying the two sides' cooperation is based upon common interests and common threats.

Addressing a round table at Russia's State Duma on Tuesday, Sanaei said the cooperation between Iran and Russia is shaped by the common threats that the two countries face, and the common interests they share in the region, particularly in the Middle East and Asia.

He also pointed to narcotics trafficking as one of the main common problems faced by the two countries, bemoaning the fact that drug production over the past 15 years has risen by 40 times following the NATO invasion of Afghanistan.

Another major threat is terrorism, which of course is a global threat, RIA quoted the ambassador as saying.

Hailing the victories achieved by Iran and Russian in the "genuine" fight against terrorism, Sanaei said the two countries

are also opposing the unilateral policies of the U.S.

Denouncing the Western sanctions against Iran and Russia, the envoy said the new U.S. nuclear arms policy is a threat to both Tehran and Moscow.

As regards the common interests contributing to cooperation between Iran and Russia, Sanaei said the two nations work together in the energy industry, stabilization of energy prices, as well as cooperation in the Caspian Sea.

On the international cooperation between Iran and Russia, the envoy lauded coordination within the framework of international organizations, such as the UN, and the "active and constructive" cooperation in implementing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the nuclear agreement between Iran and the Group 5+1 (Russia, China, the U.S., Britain, France and Germany).

(Source: Tasnim)

Zarif holds talks with Kuwaiti emir

POLITICS TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Wednesday held separate talks with Kuwaiti Emir Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi on the sidelines of a conference on rebuilding Iraq hosted by Kuwait.

During the talks, the emir of Kuwait appreciated Iran's contribution to the economic stability in Iraq.

For his part, Zarif expressed hope that regional problems would be tackled through negotiations.

In his meeting with al-Abadi, Zarif said Iraq is "an important political and economic partner" to Iran, stressing Tehran will support reconstruction efforts in Iraq as it supported Baghdad' war against terrorism.

Al-Abadi thanked Iran for helping Iraq get rid of Daesh as well as Iranian companies' involvement in the reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

Zarif also held talks on Tuesday with Federica Mogherini, the European Union's chief diplomat, who had participated in the conference on Iraq.



Iranian FM Zarif talking to Iraqi PM al-Abadi (L)

Zarif and Mogherini discussed the ways to counter America's hostile approach to the 2015 nuclear deal negotiated between Iran, the European Union, Germany, and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

The top Iranian diplomat also met Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah al-Khalid al-Hamad al-Sabah

on Tuesday.

Highlighting the significance of the ongoing conference, Zarif expressed the hope that Iraq could repair the huge damage caused by terrorism through assistance from the neighboring countries and the international community.

Speaking to reporters upon his arrival in Kuwait, Zarif said Iran has remained a supporter of the Iraqi nation in the fight against Takfiri terrorism and has fully honored its commitments after the previous conference on reconstruction of Iraq.

Authorities estimate that Iraq needs \$88.2 billion to restore a country smashed after Daesh terrorists seized its second-largest city of Mosul and a mass of territory in June 2014.

Of the money needed, Iraqi officials estimate \$17 billion alone needs to go toward rebuilding homes, the biggest single line item offered Monday on the first day of meetings. The United Nations estimates 40,000 homes need to be rebuilt in Mosul alone.

Kuwait confab: Donors pledge funds for Iraq reconstruction

The Kuwaiti capital hosted the second day of an international conference aimed at raising funds for reconstructing Iraq, which is reeling from the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group's campaign of death and destruction.

The event, dubbed the Kuwait International Conference for Reconstruction of Iraq, entered its second day in Kuwait City on Tuesday, with world leaders and senior politicians in attendance.

Addressing the forum, Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad Al Sabah pledged \$2 billion towards the reconstruction of Iraq.

He said that \$1 billion would be in the form of loans, and the rest would be invested in projects.

"This large assembly of international communities that are here today is reflective of the large loss that Iraq withstood in facing terrorism," the Kuwaiti emir said. "Iraq cannot commence the mission of rebuilding itself without support."

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu also pledged \$5 billion in the form of loans and investment.

The House of Saud regime and Qatar also said they would allocate \$1.5 billion and \$1 billion, respectively.

Meanwhile, the United Nations chief also urged the global community to back the reconstruction of Iraq.

"The whole world owes you a debt for your struggle against the deadly global threat posed by Daesh (ISIL)," Antonio Guterres told the donors' conference in comments directed at the Iraqi delegation.

Guterres said 2.5 million remain displaced in the aftermath of the devastating war in Iraq.

"The UN Development Program's Funding Facility for Stabilization is working in 25 cities and districts, supporting the return of displaced people to their homes," he said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi also told the meeting that his government had managed to repatriate half of the displaced.

"There are more than five million internally displaced persons in Iraq. There are also refugees from Syria. The



government managed to repatriate more than half of them at their regions," he said.

Iraq is seeking \$88.2 billion in aid from donors to fund its reconstruction efforts.

The ISIL terrorist outfit unleashed a campaign of death and terror in Iraq in 2014, overrunning vast swathes in lightning attacks. Iraqi army soldiers and allied fighters then launched

operations to eliminate ISIL and retake lost territory.

It took over three years for Iraqi armed forces to fully liberate the country's territory from the clutches of ISIL terrorists.

Abadi declared victory over the Takfiri outfit in December 2017.

(Source: Press TV)

France to attack Syria if chemical bombs use proven

French President Emmanuel Macron says if the use of chemical weapons against civilians is proven in Syria, "France will strike" while noting that no proof of such an action has been presented.

"On chemical weapons, I set a red line and I reaffirm that red line...If we have proven evidence that chemical weapons proscribed in treaties are used, we will strike the place where they are made," he said on Tuesday. "Today, our agencies, our armed forces have not established that chemical weapons, as set out in treaties, have been used against the civilian population," he added.

Macron also noted that he had recently discussed the topic of chemical weapons use in Syria with Russian President Vladimir Putin in a Friday phone conversation.

"I've reiterated it to President Putin, asking to make it very clear to the Syrian regime, which has reaffirmed that it does not use chemical weapons ... but we are watching it," Macron stated.

On Friday, France's defense minister also noted that there is no proof that the Syrian government has used the chemical agent chlorine in the country.

"We have some indications of possi-

ble chlorine use [in Syria], but we have no absolute confirmation," said Florence Parly on Friday.

In January, pro-militant sources in Syria, the White Helmets and the Britain-based so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), claimed that the Syrian government had used chlorine gas against militants in northwestern Syria.

The United States and Britain raised the issue at the United Nations Security Council on February 6, but the Syrian envoy rejected the allegations as "false and cheap."

Since the beginning of the conflict in Syria in early 2011, the Western governments have on several occasions accused Syria of using chemical weapons against militants. Damascus has denied the allegation, saying it is meant to pile more pressure on the government forces and delay their success in the fight against terrorists.

The Syrian government surrendered its stockpiles of chemical weapons in 2014 to a joint mission led by the UN and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which oversaw the destruction of the weaponry.

(Source: al Alam)

South Africa: ANC prepares Zuma no confidence vote

South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) party will table a motion of no confidence against President Jacob Zuma in parliament on Thursday, following the president's refusal to resign.

Wednesday's decision of the ANC to push ahead with the vote came amid high drama in which police in Johannesburg raided a luxury home of the Gupta family, an Indian immigrant businessmen family that lies at the heart of corruption allegations levelled at Zuma.

On Tuesday, the ANC asked Zuma to step down over the allegations.

In a briefing to South African state television on Wednesday, Zuma said he was confused about why he was recalled by the ANC.

He said he did not understand why he is being told that he had to leave office, as the party previously stated it wanted "to avoid two centers of power".

After Cyril Ramaphosa won the election for the ANC presidency in December, it was decided that Zuma was to be president of the country for a further 19 months before scheduled elections.

■ What's the rush?

(Source: Al Jazeera)

UN: Rohingya still not allowed to return to Myanmar

Rohingya refugees are still not allowed to return to Myanmar, the United Nations high commissioner for refugees has told the UN Security Council.

According to Filippo Grandi, "conditions in Myanmar are not yet conducive" for the 668,000 Rohingya to return home.

The refugees fled to neighboring Bangladesh after the Myanmar authorities launched a violent crackdown in northern Rakhine state last August.

"The causes of their flight have not been addressed, and we have yet to see substantive progress on addressing the exclusion and denial of rights that has deepened over the last decades, rooted in their lack of citizenship," he said.

Grandi also said the office of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) lacks access to Rakhine, where hundreds of villages have been burned down by the Myanmar military.

"Humanitarian access, as you have heard, remains extremely restricted. UNHCR has not had access to affected areas of the northern part of Rakhine state, beyond Maungdaw town, since August 2017, and our access in central Rakhine has also been curtailed," he said.

"UNHCR presence and access throughout the state are essential to monitor protection conditions, provide independent information to refugees, and accompany returns as and when they take place."

Grandi recognized the efforts put in by both the government and the people of Bangladesh to house the Rohingya refugees, but warned that conditions have to improve for the hundreds of thousands of refugees especially with monsoon season starting in March.

"We are now in a race against time as a major new emergency looms. We estimate that more than 100,000 refugees are living in areas prone to flooding or landslides. Tens of thousands of particularly vulnerable refugees need to be urgently relocated," Grandi said.

"Their lives are at grave risk."

After Grandi gave his recommendations to the Security Council, Nikki Haley, the United States ambassador to the UN, commented that the UN had so far failed in its response to the crisis in Myanmar. Haley, for her part, criticized Myanmar's leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San



Suu Kyi for failing to halt the violence against the Rohingya.

"This council must hold the military responsible for its actions and pressure Aung San Suu Kyi to acknowledge the horrific acts taking place in her country," Haley said.

"No more excuses."

"Ambassador Haley went on to say that the goal of the Myanmar authorities is to blame the media for what's going on," Al Jazeera Diplomatic Editor James Bays, reporting from New York City, said.

Haley and several other UN ambassadors referred specifically to the arrest of two journalists from international news agency Reuters.

The journalists were arrested while investigating a story about mass graves in Rakhine.

"For the Myanmar government, their ambassador said

that the country respects the freedom of the press. It says the journalists were arrested because they broke state secrecy laws," our correspondent said.

Nearly 690,000 Rohingya have fled Rakhine and crossed into southern Bangladesh since August, when attacks on security posts by rebels triggered a military crackdown that the UN has said may amount to genocide.

Myanmar's government has denied the allegations.

Since August, the number of refugees fleeing to Bangladesh has gone down, with up to 1,500 arriving in the last month, according to the UN.

Last month, Bangladesh announced it would delay the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of displaced Rohingya amid fears over their safety once they return.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Tillerson: Hezbollah part of political process in Lebanon



The United States Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on Wednesday reportedly said that it must be acknowledged that the Lebanese resistance movement of Hezbollah is part of the political process in Lebanon.

Tillerson's comments came during a visit to Jordan, Reuters reported, without providing further details.

The comments came a day after he said that the United States doesn't have a problem with the Lebanese people, but rather with Hezbollah, in an interview from Kuwait with Al Hurra TV.

Asked if the Lebanese government was cooperating with the U.S. in regards to putting more pressure on Hezbollah, Tillerson said, "Well, it is - it's a very good question, and we're very mindful of our issue is with [Hezbollah], it is not with the Lebanese people, it is not with the Lebanese government. So we try to be very precise in the actions we take to not harm the Lebanese people."

Tillerson added that the U.S. needs support from the Lebanese government to deal with the activities carried out by Hezbollah "that are unacceptable to the rest of the world."

Responding to a question on the potential for a war between Lebanon and Israel, the top U.S. diplomat said his country is trying to avoid conflict as best as possible. "We will continue to play a role there to strengthen an independent government, again, in Lebanon, to strengthen independent Lebanese security forces."

Tillerson said Lebanon is going through "what will likely be a long transition period," commending the new dissociation policy adopted by the government. "And we're there to support Lebanon through this long transition."

He is expected to arrive in Beirut on Thursday for a one-day visit, where he is set to meet with President Michel Aoun, Speaker Nabih Berri and Prime Minister Saad Hariri.

(Source: Daily Star)

Erdogan threatens U.S. forces in Syria with an "Ottoman slap"



A United States decision to continue funding the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG/Yekineyên Parastina Gel) militia will affect Turkey's future moves, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said ahead of a visit this week by the U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

U.S. officials have said that Tillerson expects to have difficult conversations when he visits Turkey on Thursday and Friday, given that the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies have starkly diverging interests in Syria.

Turkey has been enraged by U.S. support for the YPG, which Ankara sees as a terrorist organization and an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PK/Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) that has been waging an insurgency on Turkish soil for over 30 years. Washington has backed the YPG in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) in Syria.

"Our ally's decision to give financial support to the YPG... will surely affect the decisions we will take," Erdogan said in a speech to members of his Justice and Development Party (AKP/Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) in parliament.

Turkey last month launched a military incursion, dubbed "Operation Olive Branch", into the Kurdish-held Afrin region of Syria to sweep the YPG away from its southern border.

It has also threatened to press on to the Syrian town of Manbij, under the control of a YPG-led force, and warned the U.S. troops stationed there not to get in the way.

"It is very clear that those who say 'we will respond aggressively if you hit us' have never experienced an Ottoman slap," Erdogan said in parliament.

That was an apparent reference to comments made by the U.S. Lieutenant General Paul Funk during a visit to Manbij.

But Washington says it has no plans to withdraw its soldiers from Manbij and two U.S. commanders visited the town last week to reinforce that message.

The Pentagon has requested \$300 million for Syrian "train and equip activities" and \$250 million for border security requirements, according to a copy of the U.S. Department of Defense's 2019 budget.

While it did not specify how much of this, if any, was earmarked for YPG-led forces, Turkish media interpreted that to mean that the Pentagon had allocated \$550 million to the YPG in 2019.

"It will be better for them not to stand with the terrorists they support today. I am calling on the people of the United States - this money is coming out of the budget of the United States, it is coming out of people's pockets," Erdogan said.

(Source: Euro News)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	98347.9
IFX	1108.07

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	48,350 rials
EUR	61,650 rials
GBP	70,200 rials
AED	13,710 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	58.44/b
Brent	62.18/b
OPEC Basket	61.04/b
Gold	\$1,328.40/oz
Silver	\$16.52/oz
Platinum	\$978.50/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Post-JCPOA
FDI in Iranian
industry hits
\$9.7b

1 → The minister pointed to the increasing demand for the establishment of industrial units, saying that the requests for registration of new industrial units in the first ten months of the current calendar year (March 21, 2017-January 20, 2018) has increased by 15 percent compared to the same period last year.

“New industrial units are being established in over 50,000 different regions across the country,” he added.

According to the deputy industry minister Mahmoud Navvabi, during the ten-month period ended on January 20, some 4,616 industrial projects have been inaugurated in Iran, IRNA reported.

The number will reach 6,000 by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018).



Fishery exports up
37% in 9 months
year-on-year

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Fishery exports from Iran during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2017) rose by 37 percent compared to the same time span last year.

Meanwhile, the imports of fisheries and fish products decreased 24 percent in the same period, IRIB news reported on Wednesday quoting the Deputy Agriculture Minister Hassan Salehi as saying.

Iran plans to increase the value of its fishery exports up to \$450-\$500 million by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018).



Germany’s
Rhineland to
dispatch trade
delegation to Iran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— A German trade delegation to be dispatched by the Federal State of Rhineland-Palatinate is scheduled to visit Iran on February 25 to discuss mutual trade cooperation, Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) announced.

To be headed by a director general with the Ministry of Economy, Transport and Agriculture of Rhineland-Palatinate, the delegation will be comprised of the representatives of several renowned companies active in various areas, including new irrigation systems, water and wastewater management, renewable energies and urban waste management.

Japan fourth quarter GDP
rises 0.5% on consumer
spending



Japan’s economy grew at an annualized rate of 0.5 percent in the October to December period, posting the eighth straight quarter of expansion due to growth in consumer spending and capital expenditure.

That marked the longest streak of growth since a 12-quarter stretch between April to June 1986 and January to March 1989 around the height of Japan’s economic bubble.

The preliminary reading for fourth-quarter gross domestic product compared with a median

estimate of a 0.9 percent annualized increase in a Reuters poll of economists.

It followed a revised 2.2 percent annualized rate of expansion in the third quarter, the Cabinet Office data showed on Wednesday.

On a quarter-on-quarter basis, GDP rose 0.1 percent, slightly less than the median estimate for a 0.2 percent increase.

(Source: CNBC)

Cabinet approves plan for
controlling forex market

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian cabinet, on a Wednesday meeting headed by President Hassan Ruohani, approved the Central Bank of Iran(CBI)’s suggested plans and measures to be taken for controlling domestic foreign exchange market, IRNA reported.

The cabinet also made the required decisions in this regard.

CBI is to issue two different types of foreign exchange bonds in future, the report quoted CBI Governor Valliolah Seif as saying last week.

“CBI will provide investors, who want to invest on foreign currency assets, with



suitable options,” he announced at the time, “the bank is also studying possibilities of other regular options including opening currency deposits and other complementary plans.”

Iranian police arrested around 100 money changers on Wednesday as it scrambled to contain the decline of the rial, which has lost a quarter of its value in six months, AFP reported.

Teheran’s chief of police, General Hossein Rahimi, told local media that 10 exchange offices had also been shut.

Iran’s currency has collapsed from 38,400 rials to the dollar in July to a record low of 48,400 on Wednesday.

Petrochemical exports at over \$9.6b in 10 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— Iran exported more than 18.588 million tons of petrochemical products worth \$9.69 billion in the ten-month period ended on January 20, 2018, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

The country’s petrochemical output stood at 44.202 million tons during the mentioned time span.

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.

Iran stands at the second place in the Middle East in terms of petrochemical production, holding 23.6 percent of the total production capacity of the Middle East.

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.



Wall St. advances; investors lock on inflation data

Wall Street climbed on Tuesday for a third straight session, buoyed by Amazon.com and Apple, while investors focused on inflation data on Wednesday that could upset the market’s fragile recovery -or clear the way for additional gains.

Amazon.com rose 2 percent while Apple added 1 percent, both helping the S&P 500 shake off a negative open to the session and climb 0.26 percent by the close.

Investors said data on U.S. consumer prices

and retail sales due out on Wednesday will be key to where stocks move in the short term. Inflation and interest-rate fears sparked a stock market rout after U.S. jobs data was released on Feb. 2.

Rob Haworth, a senior investment strategist

at U.S. Bank Wealth Management, said the market’s recovery from a negative start earlier in the session was a good sign, but that it remained too soon to predict the market’s return to stability.

(Source: New York Times)

Cash is king no more in Germany as
plastic money gains ground

Cash no longer makes up most of the money spent in Germany, a Bundesbank study showed on Wednesday, denting a historical supremacy over other means of payments rooted in the country’s longing for privacy and freedom.

The survey showed cash accounted for 47.6 percent of German transactions by volume last year, down from 53.2 percent three years earlier and below the half mark for the first time since polling started in 2008.

Cards were mostly responsible for the change as they grabbed a 39.4 percent market share last year compared to 33.4 percent in 2014, mirroring a global trend that has long taken hold in many other countries including Sweden and Britain.

“Cash remains the most popular, but card payments are increasing,” Bundesbank board member Carl-Ludwig Thiele said.

Internet payments also grew but still accounted for a modest 3.7 percent of total volume.

Germans and Austrians are the biggest users of cash among countries in the euro zone’s richer “core”, according to a recent study by the European Central Bank (ECB).

This preference has been associated to worries about their privacy and a deeply ingrained diffidence towards the state, which some trace back to the era of the

Nazis and of communist East Germany.

The Bundesbank survey found most Germans thought that cash was useful to teach children about the use of money and to ensure a better control of one’s personal finances.

The vast majority also believed the abolition of notes and coins would cause problems to parts of the population, such as the elderly, while only a third saw it as a way to fight tax evasion and money laundering.

A government plan to push for an upper limit of 5,000 euros to cash payments was met with fierce resistance two years ago, including by the country’s own central bank.

And the Bundesbank mounted a lonely opposition in 2016 to the ECB’s decision to retire the 500 euro note, its highest denomination, due to suspicions it was used by criminals.

Thiele said on Wednesday he was still hoping the purple bill would make a comeback when a new series of euro banknotes is unveiled.

He added that an estimated 50 percent of cash issued by the Bundesbank ends up outside the euro zone, brought by migrant workers, German holidaymakers and citizens from high-inflation countries seeking a way to preserve the value of their money.

(Source: CNBC)

Eurozone production jumps more than
expected in Dec. as economy powers on

Eurozone industrial production jumped more than expected in December, data from the EU statistics office Eurostat showed on Wednesday, underlining the fastest economic growth rate in a decade that economists expect to continue in 2018.

Eurostat said industrial production in the 19 countries sharing the euro rose 0.4 percent month-on-month for a 5.2 percent year-on-year gain. Economists polled by Reuters had expected a 0.2 percent monthly and 4.2 percent annual rise.

“The acceleration of production growth is unlikely to be a one-off as the outlook for industry remains rosy,” said Bert Colijn, senior euro zone economist at ING bank.

“Given the current backlog of work in industry, it is no surprise that hiring and investment in capital goods are high on the list of businesses. This adds to the strong economic picture for the start of 2018,” he said.

The statistics office also confirmed its earlier preliminary estimate of gross domestic product growth in the euro zone in the last three months of 2017 at 0.6 percent quarter-on-quarter and 2.7 percent against the same period of 2016.

Overall in 2017, euro zone GDP rose 2.5 percent, Eurostat said, the fastest growth rate since a 3.0 percent rise in 2007.

“Looking ahead, surveys suggest that the region’s upturn will gather pace,” said

Stephen Brown, European economist at Capital Economics. “We expect the euro zone’s upturn to match last year’s strong pace in 2018, with annual GDP growth of 2.5 percent.”

■ Upswing seen continuing

The GDP of Germany, the euro zone’s biggest economy, grew 0.6 percent on the quarter and 2.9 percent year-on-year in the fourth quarter, with France at 0.6 percent and 2.4 percent respectively and Spain at 0.7 and 3.1 percent respectively.

“For the year 2018 as a whole, a strong increase of 2.5 percent is still likely, even if the statisticians have slightly revised previous data downwards,” Joerg Kraemer, chief economist at Commerzbank, said in a note on Germany.

“We continue to believe that the upswing could continue for another two or three years despite the roll-back of labor market reforms because cyclical tensions on the labor market are not yet in sight,” he said.

Eurostat also revised upwards November production figures to 1.3 percent month-on-month from 1.0 percent and to 3.7 percent year-on-year from 3.2 percent.

The production surge was fueled by durable consumer goods such as refrigerators and TV sets, the output of which jumped 2.7 percent on the month in December and was 7.4 percent higher than a year earlier.

(Source: Reuters)

China’s central bank says has cut leverage, but will continue to fight risks

China’s central bank said on Wednesday it has achieved initial results in financial deleveraging but will continue to fend off systemic risks as debt levels in the economy remain relatively high.

“The overall level of leverage is still high, especially the debt pressure on state-owned enterprises is still large,” the People’s Bank of China said in its fourth-quarter monetary policy implementation report.

“We will fight a tough battle against major financial risks and safeguard the bottom line of systemic financial risks.”

Since the fourth quarter of 2017, growth of China’s macro leverage ratio has started to fall and financial deleveraging has achieved initial results, the central bank said.

The central bank said it would also strike a balance between stabilizing growth, deleveraging and controlling risks.

The weighted average lending rate for non-financial firms, a key indicator reflecting corporate funding costs,



fell 2 basis points in the fourth quarter to 5.74 percent, following a rise of 9 basis points in the third.

The central bank pledged to unwind some of its earlier

Gold shines as traders count down to ‘critical’ CPI

Gold held gains as the dollar slipped, with investors counting down the hours before key U.S. inflation data that may offer fresh clues on monetary tightening. Adding luster for the metal, filings showed billionaire hedge fund manager Ray Dalio increased holdings last quarter.

Bullion for immediate delivery rose as much as 0.6 percent to \$1,337.02 an ounce, the highest since Feb. 6, and was at \$1,330.92 at 10:32 a.m. in London. Gold’s about 2 percent higher this year. The Bloomberg Dollar Spot Index fell for a fourth day, the worst run in a month, and is down 2.9 percent in 2018.

There are “some G-10 traders arguing this is the most significant economic release in the past three years,” Stephen Innes, Singapore-based head of trading for Asia Pacific at Oanda Corp., said in a daily markets note. Oanda cited “last week’s market carnage in the wake of an inflationary uptick

in wage growth.”

Global markets from commodities to equities to bonds were whipsawed last week after the Feb. 2 wage data spurred investors to reappraise the outlook for global inflation and weigh consequences for monetary policy and asset valuations. Bullion fell as share markets tumbled, but has regained some ground since Monday. New Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell has suggested the central bank will push ahead with hikes even as it remains on the lookout for threats to the financial system in the wake of the selloff.

■ ‘Hard to predict’

“Gold’s reaction to inflation data is profoundly hard to predict,” said Barnabas Gan, an economist at Oversea-Chinese Banking Corp. “Given how markets have been pricing in more Fed rate hikes into 2018, faster-than-expected inflation pressures would likely persuade higher policy rates

across key central banks and pressure prices lower, rather than lift gold’s status as an inflation hedge.”

Data this week showed Dalio’s Bridgewater Associates raised its stake in SPDR Gold Shares and iShares Gold Trust in the final quarter of 2017. That filing followed comments on Monday, when the fund manager said that risks of a recession in the next 18 to 24 months are rising. Last year, he recommended investors consider placing 5 percent to 10 percent of assets in gold.

The dollar fell on Wednesday, with the yen hitting a 15-month high, amid concern a faster-than-expected inflation result will trigger selling of U.S. shares and weigh on the country’s currency. This month, hedge fund head Paul Tudor Jones said inflation is about to appear “with a vengeance” and may force the Fed to accelerate interest rate hikes.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Oil dips on looming oversupply; weak dollar, economic growth provide some support

Oil dipped on Wednesday, squeezed by lingering oversupply including rising U.S. inventories and ample physical flows, though the prospect of Saudi output dropping in March, economic growth hopes and a weaker dollar all combined to cap losses.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude futures were at \$59.06 a barrel at 0741 GMT, down 13 cents from their last settlement. WTI was trading above \$65 in early February.

Brent crude futures were at \$62.68 per barrel, down 4 cents. Brent was above \$70 a barrel earlier this month.

The Saudi energy ministry said on Wednesday that Saudi Aramco's crude output in March will be 100,000 barrels per day (bpd) below its February level while exports would be kept below 7 million bpd.

Ongoing weakness in the U.S. dollar as well as economic growth were also somewhat supporting oil markets.

Despite this, analysts warned that not all indicators were bullish.

"While we continue to see a firming fundamental backdrop over the course of this year...investors should not discount the caution signs that have been emerging," investment bank RBC Capital Markets said in a note to clients.



"Pockets of oversupply have been emerging in the physical market," the Canadian bank said. "The tempering physical oil backdrop is ... playing a central role in the recent price softness," it said.

The American Petroleum Institute said on Tuesday that U.S. crude inventories rose by 3.9 million barrels in the week to

Feb. 9, to 422.4 million.

That was largely due to soaring U.S. crude production, which has jumped by over 20 percent since mid-2016 to more than 10 million bpd, surpassing that of top exporter Saudi Arabia and coming within reach of Russia, the world's biggest producer.

U.S. crude is also increasingly appearing on global markets, and more is set to come as the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port starts testing supertankers for exports.

The surge in U.S. supplies means oil may be in oversupply again soon, flipping the 2017 deficit induced by supply restraint led by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and Russia.

"I am confident that our high degree of cooperation and coordination will continue and bring the desired results," Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Khalid al-Falih said on Wednesday.

Not all agree. The International Energy Agency said expects oil demand to grow by 1.4 million bpd in 2018, but adding that output growth could outpace demand.

Citi said it expected 2018 oil markets to be balanced or in slight oversupply, forecasting a "market surplus of 0 to 0.2 million bpd."

OPEC and the IEA "are vastly underestimating the magnitude and sustainability of non-OPEC oil supply growth," Citi said.

Markets are already reacting, with physical prices for crudes from the North Sea, Russia, the United States, and Middle East becoming cheaper.

(Source: Reuters)

Oil price correction unlikely to harm european majors

Europe's oil supermajors have largely adapted to lower oil prices thanks to strict financial discipline and efforts to bring down their breakeven levels, a new report from Fitch says, adding to a growing body of evidence that the oil industry has managed to weather the effects of the latest price collapse.

In fact, these companies have managed that so well that now they are canceling their scrip dividend policies and raising dividends, following the confidence boost from last year when improving prices and continuing cost discipline led to financial results beating analyst expectations.

French Total, for instance, reported a 28-percent increase in net profits for 2017 and announced it will start buying back shares issued to shareholders instead of dividends. The French company also said it will hike dividends by a tenth over the next three years

in further demonstration that the worst is over and the horizon is clear.

BP also reported strong results, with operational cash flow rising to \$24.1 billion from \$17.6 billion a year earlier, and like Total, pledged to start paying cash dividends. The company also has plans to reduce its organic breakeven point to \$50 a barrel this year and further to \$35-40 in 2019. Eventually, BP sees its breakeven level at \$30 a barrel.

The third European supermajor, Shell, which recently made clear it plans to take on Exxon as the world's largest oil company, is basking in the light of a fatter bottom line, though the Anglo-Dutch reported lower cash flow for 2017 than for 2016. Despite this, profits from oil at \$60 a barrel are on par with the profits the company generated when Brent traded at \$100 a barrel.

All three have declared their intentions

to return more cash to shareholders, but this could cost them a downward revision of their credit ratings, according to Fitch. The supermajors need to treat debt reduction as a top priority, the ratings agency said, rather than shareholder returns. If they reprioritize in favor of returns, some of their ratings might have to be revised.

The reason for this cautious attitude seems to be that Fitch is quite a bit more skeptical about oil prices' potential to rise further, unlike most leading investment banks. Fitch expects Brent crude to fall to around \$50-60 and stay within that range. This could do Big Oil good, though, at least according to Fitch. Whenever oil prices rise, oil companies tend to give away their cost savings in the form of improved shareholder returns. In a still volatile environment and with pretty hefty debt piles, this would not

be the best idea at the moment, the ratings agency argues.

This is not how Big Oil sees things, however. A recent story by Reuters' Ron Bousso noted how now that the worst is over, the supermajors will be fighting for investors' favors with promises of stable, strong growth and higher dividends. Bousso called this a beauty contest, noting Shell's and Total's asset-buying program aimed at making the companies more attractive to shareholders by ensuring that growth they are now making a top priority along with shareholder returns.

So, it seems that though most of the clouds have cleared and supermajors have money to pay cash dividends and buy smaller rivals and alternative energy players, the sky is not yet bright blue — there's still debt to be paid.

(Source: oilprice.com)

Russia's RDIF says to finalize Eurasia Drilling deal with Aramco

The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) on Wednesday said it expected to finalize a deal with Saudi Arabia's Aramco to invest in oilfield services firm Eurasia Drilling.

"We expect to finalize an agreement very shortly to have our energy platform with Saudi Aramco invest in Eurasia Drilling and also provide services to Saudi Aramco," Kirill Dmitriev said in the Saudi capital Riyadh.

Russia also has significant investments in Saudi Arabia's petrochemicals industry, he said.

Sibur, Russia's largest producer of petrochemicals, is building a petrochemicals facility in the Kingdom. Russia's Energy Minister Alexander Novak had said in October the deal would be worth \$1.1 billion.

"Sibur, jointly with us, is building a petrochemical facility focused on ... manufacturing which is really one of the big Russian projects in Saudi Arabia and underscores the potential of cooperation in petrochemicals," Dmitriev said.

An announcement is also expected later on Wednesday on a partnership between Aramco and an LNG project in Russia, Dmitriev said.

Dmitriev said a deal between OPEC and non-OPEC members to cut crude oil supply was stabilising the oil market.

Russia and Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil producers, are leading a global oil cut deal between OPEC and some non-OPEC members. The current deal runs through to March 2018. (Source: Reuters)

Iraq oil minister says talks on supply cut agreement to wait until Dec.

Iraq oil minister Jabar al-Luaibi said on Tuesday there was no discussion about exiting the agreement between OPEC and non-OPEC producers on supply cuts and such talks will have to wait until December.

Speaking at a conference on reconstruction of the war-torn country in Kuwait city, he also said Iraq is in full compliance with its quota of cuts. He added that he was not worried about current prices, which are "normal fluctuations". (Source: Reuters)

Japan's Fuji Oil buys April-loading Mid-East crude at discounts: sources

Japanese refiner Fuji Oil bought three Middle East crude cargoes loading in April at discounts, three trade sources said on Wednesday

The company bought one Upper Zakum cargo at 15-19 cents below its OSP and two Qatar Land cargoes at discounts of 20-23 cents a barrel to its OSP, they said.

Spot discounts for both grades have widened amid weak Asia demand as refineries typically shut for maintenance during the second quarter. (Source: Reuters)

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The reconstruction of Iraq is no longer a priority for the U.S.

Iraq's troubled reconstruction timeline entered a new chapter as representatives from 70 states poured into Kuwait in attendance of The International Conference for the Reconstruction of Iraq, the first of its kind in the history of the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula. The fact that Iraq's IMF ranks at 164 out of 182 least business friendly states was not enough to shake investor confidence. Even riskier is the fact that few guarantees are in place to ensure contractual obligation is honored. This too, did not avert donors from pledging \$330 million.



The lofty dream of turning failure into prosperity sits in stark contrast with stern warnings from representatives of the Red Cross and United Nations relief wing. Both have underlined potential shortcomings should vital stages beyond remedying physical damages be ignored by the government. The rehabilitation of health services and the staff needed to operate them were of greatest concern.

The cost of restoring the built landscapes flattened during the battle against Daesh is estimated at anywhere between \$46 and \$61 billion. Beyond these costs, lives have been stalled, while educations are placed on hold. The nine-month battle in Mosul ravaged its historic center, incinerated six of its western districts and its international airport. Thousands are slowly repopulating lands where their homes stood, but some former residents may never return.

"What I and my great grandfather have built, we lost it all in a single night. Just like that. Are we foolish enough to set foot in a country where the central government continues to treats us like a commodity for political gains," a former Christian Maslawi told MEMO.

"Return is not just bricks and mortar," UNHCR representative Bruno Geddo described in a statement published today. "Return is not just going back to a house, it is going back to a community."

Beyond genuine and noble instincts the greater mission to clean up the act of one of Iraq's worst performing governments was a topic of conversation missing from the conference. Repetitive acts of corruption exercised at the highest ranks of the Iraqi state present the highest wall for the international community to climb. The prevailing "can we help logic" through rickety nods to the elite buys the silence of Iraq's allies in exchange for generous financial compensation.

Much like the Iraqi street, Washington's patience is wearing thin. Reconstruction of Iraq, unlike its oil reserves, is no longer on the list of its ally's spending priorities. Since America invaded, it has spent \$23.3 billion across sectors of oil, security, electricity and water according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GOA). Barely a quarter of the sum accounts for Baghdad's own expenditure (\$3.9 billion) on the same areas between 2005 and 2008.

Three days ahead of the Kuwait conference Reuters reported that America would not necessarily pledge any money towards rebuilding. The spending priorities of America's transactional leader President Trump are tilting but the void will not take time to fill. Even before Trump's election, Washington vocally admonished Iraq's failures to repair infrastructure, behind closed doors at least. America believes that with abundant oil and gas reserves, Iraq can foot the bill for its palpable failures. Replacements have therefore been ushered in to take America's place, unable to trust Baghdad to handle the task alone. Whether the World Bank or the European Union, the next days will determine the role they play in post-Daesh Iraq.

The rallying call behind the latest effort to finance national development was the "total victory" claimed by the Iraqi premier back in December 2017. Yet the limelight spreads beyond Mosul. Extravagant proposals from today and the days to come will revive old plans to rehabilitate other areas of potential growth, namely the south and long abandoned cross country rail lines. International airports may be another favored talking point. By commercializing the pilgrimage season, Abadi's government hopes to generate greater income and healthy competition with other religious centers in the region. The sector that holds the keys to future wealth however is agriculture, a talking point that has been muted so far.

Even before Trump's election, Washington vocally admonished Iraq's failures to repair infrastructure, behind closed doors at least.

In light of the country's track record, it is easy to conjecture that the conference is designed to keep the pendulum of awaited reconstruction swinging.

An improved economic performance may help place Iraq back on the track towards recovery but without hard cash from investors, the purchase of much needed materials, resources and technical skills will require time and cost-consuming efforts.

Every country present has reiterated "strong support" but when words fail to materialize, afflicted communities cannot be expected to take them seriously. (Source: The Middle East Monitor)

The spiraling war in Syria might be the crisis that breaks the UN

By Richard Gowan

Analyzing the United Nations is rather like being a nervous seismologist in California.

Geological experts are accustomed to tremors and small quakes along the San Andreas Fault, which bisects America's most heavily populated state. But they are on alert for a much more powerful earthquake that could wreck some of the country's most prosperous cities. Some say this will come soon.

UN experts are likewise hardened to the regular crises that shake the organization but do not upend it.

From Mali to Syria, the UN is struggling to bote or keep peace. But despite occasional bouts of diplomatic frustration, the Security Council trundles onward with these processes. Having watched the UN at close quarters since 2005, I often wonder if it could ever screw up badly enough to make the world take notice.

The big powers that pay for the UN do not exactly turn a blind eye to its failings, but they do not pursue them to the death. Even the current American administration, which has made bashing the UN a trademark, largely lets it get on with its business. China likes to boast about its growing influence in New York and Geneva. The UN, it seems, can get away with a whole load of failures at once.

There are historical examples of major crises that have led to massive losses of confidence in the UN. The failure of peacekeepers to save civilians in Somalia, Rwanda and the Balkans in the 1990s almost spelled the end of blue-helmet operations. The Iraq crisis in 2003 left UN officials and diplomats dazed and disoriented.

It took the institution some painful years to recover from both episodes. UN officials and friendly diplomats crafted reform programs to get multilateralism back on track. It is possible that the UN is now on the cusp of a jolting crisis in the Middle East that could create a decisive breakdown in New York.

Over the past week, the danger of the Syrian war morphing into an all-out Middle



It is hard to see how the UN could brush off a situation in which the Security Council was paralyzed, a major nonproliferation agreement collapsed and a well-established peace operation imploded.

East conflict has spiked.

Israel has launched large-scale air attacks against positions in Syria. U.S. special operations forces and warplanes have also killed hundreds of pro-government fighters, in response to an attack on rebels backed by Washington. The war appears to be on the verge of spiraling out of control.

Let us assume that friction between Israel and Iran escalates into a more open conflict in Syria and, by extension, Lebanon. Israeli officials have discussed this risk for years. What would that mean for the UN?

The first-order effects are pretty easy to identify. The long-running UN effort to make peace in Syria, involving repetitive meetings in Geneva, would falter or go into limbo. The

organization's increasingly desperate efforts to get humanitarian supplies into Syria would also stall. But that would just be the start.

The Security Council could reach a level of paralysis over Syria far worse than those it has suffered to date. Russia would almost certainly use its veto to protect Iran and Syria, and the U.S. would probably be even firmer in defense of Israel. The council could enter a hopeless cycle of vetoes and counter-vetoes.

This charade would also spell the death of the Iranian nuclear agreement. To date, the Trump administration has attempted to undercut the nuclear bargain through limited diplomatic steps at the UN. But even U.S. allies including Britain and France have so far offered lukewarm backing at best. An ex-

North and South Korea must remember that Trump is watching them

By Jonathan Cristol

After only five days, the PyeongChang Olympics have already brought us some amazing athletic feats, including Red Gerard's gold medal-winning slope-style run and Evgenia Medvedeva's record-breaking figure skating.

But these feats have been overshadowed by the presence of Kim Jong Un's sister, Kim Yo Jong, who delivered a letter from her brother to South Korean President Moon Jae-in, inviting him to Pyongyang for talks.

This invitation could not have been unanticipated, but it nevertheless puts South Korea in a difficult position. It is likely impossible for President Moon to decline, but there are major risks involved in any talks with North Korea.

Ironically, there has never been a better time for talks between the two Koreas. They both share a primary interest -- preventing the U.S. from launching a preventive strike against the North. But their secondary interests are diametrically opposed -- the North hopes to break the U.S.-South Korea alliance, while the South hopes to strengthen it.

The Washington Post reported that the U.S. would support inter-Korean talks, without preconditions, as long as the campaign of maximum pressure is maintained. U.S. support may help alleviate concerns about "decoupling," the North Korean strategy of splitting South Korea from its American ally, but there are still major risks that could make the situation on the Korean Peninsula more tense.

The major risk is that talks are held but fail to reach an outcome acceptable to the U.S. And if the U.S. continues its insistence on denuclearization, talks will inevitably fail. The failure of talks will make it easier for administration hawks -- including President Trump -- to argue in favor of a so-called "limited strike" against North Korea. The failure of talks could be perceived as the exhaustion of every alternative and may make the conditions for pre-



The major risk is that talks are held but fail to reach an outcome acceptable to the U.S. And if the U.S. continues its insistence on denuclearization, talks will inevitably fail.

ventive war more favorable.

The other risk is that talks succeed and a "freeze for freeze" is agreed: Pyongyang agrees not to test any more missiles or nuclear devices and Seoul agrees to halt U.S.-South Korean military exercises. This outcome would confirm the worst fears about President Moon in the U.S. -- that he is naïve about the threat posed by Kim Jong Un.

Historically, it would be hard to imagine Washington allowing this outcome, but in addition to President Trump being hawkish, he is also skeptical of American alliances and has repeatedly questioned the U.S.-South Korea alli-

ance. The "freeze for freeze" would also cost Seoul support in the Pentagon, and right now the Pentagon is crucial both for maintaining the alliance and for preventing a conflict.

President Moon must agree to talks in such a way that both shows the world that he favors peace and is willing to talk without preconditions and shows that he is keenly aware of the North Korean threat. His government should coordinate closely with the Pentagon as talks proceed and make sure that there is buy-in from U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis. As long as Mattis assures the President -- and the public -- that war is unnecessary, it is unlikely that Trump will have the political capital to pursue one.

Because the American insistence on denuclearization is likely to be maintained, the best outcome is neither success nor failure. The best outcome will be no outcome at all.

President Moon should delay his affirmative response for as long as possible, then the inevitable protocol discussions should be dragged out for months, and finally the talks should be continuous and never adjourn without a date for resumption.

Maybe at some point the Trump administration will drop the insistence on denuclearization and a legitimate arms control and limitation agreement can be reached. But until then, because both sides have a mutual interest in preventing the U.S. from starting an unnecessary war, the shared but unstated goal should be to get through the Trump administration unscathed and to reassess the situation under the next U.S. president.

It may yet be that inter-Korean talks are harmful, but President Moon must pursue them anyway. If he does not, President Trump may learn the wrong lesson -- that even Seoul thinks talking to the North is pointless. That should not make war inevitable, but with a President unable to see shades of gray, talks may be the least bad of bad options.

(Source: CNN)

Why South Africa matters to the world

By Gideon Rachman

During the 1980s and 1990s, the struggle against apartheid made headlines all over the world. Nelson Mandela's dignity, first as a prisoner and then as president, gave him the international status of a Gandhi. Events in post-apartheid, post-Mandela South Africa, were always likely to seem relatively humdrum. But the political struggle currently under way in the country still matters to the world. Its outcome may determine whether South Africa can arrest an alarming slide in its fortunes. Cyril Ramaphosa, the new leader of the governing African National Congress, is attempting to ease President Jacob Zuma out of his job early. The operation is delicate and its outcome uncertain. Even if Ramaphosa succeeds, he will face formidable challenges in reforming a corrupted government and a stuttering economy. But that makes it all the more important that South Africa's slide is halted quickly -- before the glory of the Mandela years gives way to something altogether more disturbing. In the immediate post-apartheid years, South Africa seemed poised to buck the dismal trend of much of post-colonial Africa. Mandela, its first leader, was a liberation hero who governed wisely and did not attempt to cling to power in the style of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe

or Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire.

But even at the moment of peak Mandelaworship, there were dissenting voices on both the right and the left. One argument -- mainly heard from conservative whites -- was that in the end South Africa would become a failed state. The Mandela story, according to this narrative, was a comforting fairytale that was belied by the history of post-colonial Africa. The second form of dissent -- mainly heard from blacks on the left -- was that Mandela had sold out. He had bought white assent to a peaceful transition by allowing existing power structures and economic privileges to remain largely undisturbed. As a result, ordinary blacks had failed to see their lives improve significantly. Both of these rival narratives have gained more adherents during the Zuma years. Those who argued that South Africa would eventually slide into state failure can point to burgeoning corruption, power cuts, high unemployment and a weak economy. South African bonds were downgraded to junk status by S&P in November. In April, the taps may run dry in drought-stricken Cape Town.

South Africa under Zuma has not even come close to the political brutality and economic collapse of other southern African states, such as Zimbabwe or Congo. But as the Zuma years advanced, it was not just white

racists who were muttering that South Africa was heading the way of Zimbabwe. The same fears were expressed by some veterans of the anti-apartheid struggle. Zuma's presidency has also seen increasingly vociferous complaints on the left about continuing inequality and economic injustice. Critics have pointed out that the post-apartheid period has seen the creation of a small, black elite, but continued poverty for the masses. Ramaphosa is, in some ways, the epitome of these trends. He is a former leader of the mineworkers' union, prominent in the liberation struggle, who became a seriously wealthy businessman. On the other hand, nobody doubts Ramaphosa's intelligence or administrative ability. And, unlike Zuma, he has never been charged with corruption. In fact, his background equips him to understand both the struggles of ordinary South Africans and the concerns of big business.

Whether Ramaphosa succeeds matters well beyond South Africa. The population of the African continent is expected to nearly double to 2.4bn by 2050. A population explosion of that magnitude means that what happens in Africa will not stay in Africa. The EU is already struggling to cope with desperate refugees and migrants from countries such as Eritrea, Nigeria, South Sudan and Somalia. Those migratory pressures are only

panding Middle East war would cut through such niceties. Washington would likely go all out to nix the nuclear bargain, and while the British and French might struggle over how to respond, China and Russia would likely oppose the U.S., setting the stage for more Security Council vetoes and paralysis.

UN troops would, meanwhile, be in the firing line in any escalating conflict between Israel, Iran and Hezbollah. The long-running blue-helmet force in southern Lebanon, UNIFIL, would almost certainly find itself trapped in a firefight between Israeli and Hezbollah forces, as it previously did in 2006. If the fighting got out of control, UNIFIL units would have little choice but to evacuate. The sight of blue helmets stumbling toward the sea would only affirm a general sense that international diplomacy was failing.

It is hard to see how the UN could brush off a situation in which the Security Council was paralyzed, a major nonproliferation agreement collapsed and a well-established peace operation imploded. The organization can endure many crises, but a total meltdown in the Middle East would be the diplomatic equivalent of "the big one" in California: an institution-wrecking quake that would leave everyone in shock.

So UN officials should track the latest violence in the Middle East closely and fearfully. It may be the crisis that reshapes their institution. Yet it is not alone. A war on the Korean Peninsula is still a real threat, whatever the outcome of the current Winter Olympics détente between Seoul and Pyongyang. It, too, could leave the Security Council in disarray.

In international politics, unlike seismography, there are no absolutely reliable instruments to predict oncoming tremors. But the current proliferation of international tensions that are encroaching on UN diplomacy is hard to ignore. The UN has endured many crises without absorbing too much damage over the past decade. It now faces two situations that could reduce it to diplomatic rubble with very little warning.

(Source: WPR)

likely to increase as the African population surges and the effects of climate change take hold. To avoid that situation, governance and economic performance need to improve dramatically across Africa. If things go really well the continent could even become a new pole of growth for the world economy. What happens to South Africa will matter hugely in this story. In the post-apartheid era, South Africa became the informal spokesman for a continent. It is the only African country that is a member of the G20. Although it is not the largest economy on the continent (that title belongs to Nigeria), South Africa has the highest per capita gross domestic product of any large African country, world-class companies, a sophisticated financial sector and excellent transport infrastructure. If, despite all this, South Africa slides inexorably backwards, cynicism about the future of the African continent will grow in the rest of the world. Some Africans will be infuriated by this tendency to generalize about the fate of an entire continent from the events in just one country. But the drama of South Africa's recent history and the sophistication of its economy means that it inevitably has become a standard-bearer for Africa. Ramaphosa's responsibilities extend well beyond the borders of his own country.

(Source: FT)

Trump's new nuclear doctrine just rhetoric: expert

➡ But it will bring tremendous profits to the U.S. military-industrial complex. In fact, the Trump administration is completely under the control of this section of the U.S. corporate oligarchy. Trump is essentially breaking down all the institutional checks and balances in the U.S. political system and paving a way for a military dictatorship. I have no doubt that the next U.S. president will be a military officer. This means that we are about to see more wars and more deaths around the world, including in the Middle East. Many old, frozen conflicts will be re-opened across Asia and, apparently, the U.S. is also setting a stage for the first-time use of a low yield nuclear weapon. Let's not forget, though, that the bombs with depleted uranium have already been extensively used in the U.S./NATO conflicts, starting with the attack on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, causing horrific public health and environmental problems for generations to come.

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

A: The fact that the U.S. reserves the right to respond with a nuclear weapon to a non-nuclear attack is nothing new. In fact, the U.S. dropped nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki even though there was no nuclear threat from the Imperial Japan. However, what is new in this doctrine is that now the U.S. considers the potential use of a nuclear weapon against a large-scale cyber-attack. This is extremely worrying, because, as is well known, it is very difficult to correctly attribute the source of a cyber-attack. This could make a false-flag attack by some rogue terrorist faction or by the inside provocateurs misinterpreted as an attack by another nuclear power and lead to the nuclear annihilation of all life on Earth.

■ As the U.S. considers the first strike on Russia acceptable, it means the spirit of the cold war is governing this new doctrine. Why has the U.S. taken this approach?

A: Provoked by the rapid and aggressive expansion of the U.S. political, economic, and cultural influence in Central and Eastern Europe under the umbrella of NATO, Russia has embarked on the campaign of re-arming and strengthening its defense and security apparatus in recent years. It appears that the U.S. thought that Russia would cave in under its demands and accept to be a third-rate power in Eurasia. However, this was a serious misunderstanding of the Russian history and tradition. Now that Russia pushes back, the U.S. establishment does not know what else to do but to make threats. However, these are empty threats because any kind of use of nuclear weapons against Russia or against



Iran is one of only four states separately mentioned in the doctrine. The others are Russia, China, and North Korea. Iran is given the least coverage because it is not seen as an immediate nuclear danger to the U.S. The main emphasis is on what will happen after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) ends in 2031.

its allies within the Collective Security Treaty Organization would quickly lead to mutual destruction. The spirit of the old Cold War has returned, and it will be with us for a long time to come. Accordingly, we will see the flare-up of proxy conflicts and covert actions across the world.

■ How do you assess the U.S. new doctrine toward Iran? What are the new points?

A: Iran is one of only four states separately mentioned in the doctrine. The others are Russia, China, and North Korea. Iran is given the least coverage because it is not seen as an immediate nuclear danger to the U.S. The main emphasis is on what will happen after the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) ends in 2031. It is stated that after this

period, Iran will be able to produce a nuclear weapon within a year. Interestingly, there is no mention of the U.S. getting out of the JCPOA before that time, which is in contradiction to what the U.S. president Donald Trump has been saying recently. It appears that Trump's statements are just campaign rhetoric intended to please some important and wealthy interest groups, but that, in reality, it will be difficult for the U.S. to get out of the JCPOA, considering that all other signatories are still backing it. However, this is not to say that the U.S. will not use all other means at its disposal, including its vast media and intelligence resources, to sow discord within the Iranian political elite and create an economic and political crisis in the country.

U.S. clinging tight to Iraq occupation

➡ In 2011, after nearly nine years, the U.S. formally claimed an end to U.S. military operations in Iraq. But in fact they did not end. U.S. bombing of targets in Iraq has long continued, but most of the U.S. effort has been to train Iraqi security forces.

Washington called the day "historic" and claimed that it brought closure to the U.S. mission in Iraq's soil, and also created a democratic and stable Iraq, but in reality only chaos remained.

■ **Terrorism, U.S. gift for Iraqis**

At the alleged end of U.S. mission in Iraq, and while the Iraqi military was moribund, the climate was set for the rise of violence and the birth of a new type of terrorist entity, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or ISIL. Although after the onset of Syrian crisis, ISIL gained more momentum, the roots of the menace was in the occupation of Iraq by U.S. forces. Following the rise of ISIS, and the occupation of Iraqi cities such as Mosul, by ISIL, American forces created more bases in the country.

In June 2014, an American-led intervention in Iraq started, when President Barack Obama ordered U.S. forces to be dispatched to the region, in response to offensives in Iraq conducted by ISIS. The White House described the operation as an attempt to defeat ISIS and provide consultation for Iraqi security forces. The real defeat of ISIS, however, was really accomplished by Iraqi forces. Iraqi Prime



It appears to some Iraqi observers that the U.S. may be attempting to bribe the Iraq government in same fashion, including the refusal to supply funds for reconstruction, to maintain its presence in the country.

Minister Haidar al-Abadi's government announced that U.S. troops should leave Iraq

territory and consequently the withdrawal process began. But there are still fears that the U.S. may find other reasons to stay in Iraq.

Earlier, al-Akhbar newspaper reported that the Unity Alliance of Iraq (Ittilaf Wahdat al-Iraq) decided to seek Americans to take responsibility for securing elections in Sunni Iraqi provinces and to be deployed instead of the People's Mobilization Committee (PMC), the anti-terrorism forces in these provinces. In this regard, the People's Mobilization Committee (PMC) criticized these requests, which could be used to legitimize the continued occupation of Iraq by the Americans.

■ **Washington's pretext to stay in Iraq**

Iraqi PM Haitham al-Jubouri recently announced in a television interview that there are more than 35,000 to 40,000 U.S. troops in Iraq. Some of them are merely advisors, but many are not. The President of the parliamentary Commission of Security and Defense, Hakim al-Zamly, has emphasized that U.S. occupation forces are seeking permanent military bases in Iraq and have set about trying to create them. "America's goal is apparently to establish a balance of power with Iran and Russia," he said.

It appears to some Iraqi observers that the U.S. may be attempting to bribe the Iraq government in same fashion, including the refusal to supply funds for reconstruction, to maintain its presence in the country. It seems the U.S. does not want a sovereign Iraq after all.

Ill treatment of dissidents in Bahrain continues

➡ The Bahraini people have repeatedly called for a halt to peaceful protest in various parts of the country along with the end of discriminatory practices by the regime.

Since the start of the peaceful demonstrations against the al Khalifa regime in Bahrain, the regime has taken many measures to confront its opponents. Targeting the homes of dissidents, threatening them with arrest and, in some cases, sexual assault, have been common ploys by the government.

But what exactly caused the patience of the Bahraini people to end on February 14, 2011? What are the demands being made by the discontented, especially Bahrain's Shi'a community?

1. Drafting a new constitution in which all religions in Bahrain enjoy the same rights.
2. Fully Democratic Parliamentary Elections.
3. The release of all political prisoners who were arrested only for opposing the regime.
3. Holding democratic elections in the country so that the power in the country is not limited to a particular clan such as the al Khalifa's.

However, the authorities of the regime have not responded positively to the legitimate demands of the Bahraini people. The martyrdom of a large number of Bahraini revolutionary youth and the arrest of countless scholars and intellectuals continues.

Over the past few months, regime officials have carried out numerous acts against the Bahraini revolutionaries and, particularly, revolutionary political parties and movements.



The President of the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights, Baqer Darwish, recently announced torture methods used by the regime on prisoners.

The most important actions have been the intensification of Sheikh Ali Salman's imprisonment, the secretary general

of the Wefaq association, and the stripping of Sheikh Isa Qassim's citizenship.

The regime is extremely frustrated that the discontent continues and has even grown of late. The main feature of the Bahraini revolution has been "peaceful". In recent years, the people of Bahrain have not moved aggressively with attacks on government property and institutions. The security forces have not been targeted by the revolutionaries until recently. Even the deployment of Saudi security forces to save the regime in Bahrain did not provoke violence.

Lately, the regime's attack on scholars and intellectuals has aimed to nullify the influence of leaders on the general population. The regime knows that the Bahraini people are not able to maintain their solidarity to continue the protests against without leaders that are heard. Intimidation and acts of violence against those imprisoned in Bahrain have also increased.

The President of the Bahrain Forum for Human Rights, Baqer Darwish, recently announced torture methods used by the regime on prisoners. This has included the withholding of medical care to detainees when needed.

Regime officials worry that their human rights violations against Bahraini political prisoners will further undermine their reputation. The focus on intimidating and imprisoning Shiite citizens especially continues apace. Courts claim they are subversives planning violence. Even worse has been the treatment of Sheikh Isa Qassem, whose physical condition has deteriorated markedly.

Washington and Paris play doubles against Iran



➡ Macron himself knows that an annexation, supplementary agreement or even a secondary agreement is a clear breach of the original agreement. In such a situation, the JCPOA will lose its value. There are some points in this regard that need to be addressed.

Firstly, the U.S. officials will first try to agree on a joint plan to «transform the deal». Over the past two months, Tom Cotton and Bob Corker, two Republican senators, have made great efforts to persuade the Congress to address Donald Trump's concerns, but they failed in this regard. According to the Cotton-Corker joint plan, Iran's missile activities will be linked to the nuclear deal, and if the Islamic Republic prevents the IAEA from inspecting its military sites, the deal will automatically be nullified.

Also, according to their plan, the so-called sunset clauses will be removed, and the restrictions on Iran's nuclear program would be permanent. Democrat Senators believe that the plan will mean the withdrawal of the U.S. from the deal, and therefore they have not agreed with it. Some Republican Senators such as Ron Paul and Jeff Flake are also concerned. Nevertheless, the joint talks between the Congress and the White House on this project continue.

Secondly, the Élysée Palace is still clinging to the term «completion» of the JCPOA. This is bizarre because Macron also states that the deal is unchangeable, while he wants to incorporate restrictions on Iran's missiles into the deal. What is certain is that the slightest change in the nuclear deal means the other party's failure to fulfill its obligations. In other words, it means the official withdrawal of the P5+1 from the nuclear deal. The insistence on this explicit and decisive stance by the Iranian diplomats can perhaps effectively counterbalance the U.S.-French designs on the JCPOA.

A third point is that it should not be forgotten that Washington and Paris are jointly trying to muck up the nuclear deal. We should not consider Paris and Washington's game separately. Considering France as a «mediating actor» or «independent actor» would be a mistake. Paris is clearly against the JCPOA and acting as a supporting actor with the U.S. The softer tone of the French authorities should not deceive Iran.

It appears that the French president and his foreign minister are not going to behave in the same way as the previous governments of the country regarding the nuclear deal. Nonetheless, the French continue the same approach of former governments regarding peaceful nuclear activities in Iran.

«U.S. sees own interests as benchmark for good, evil»



➡ «Bad» people, from the Americans' point of view, are those who insist on their Islamic, revolutionary and national identity, and stand up to the United States and its excessive demands in order to safeguard their independence and dignity.

So, in Iran, the U.S. seeks to back and reinforce those who, due to whatever reason and with whatever motive, set the stage for the U.S. to regain its domination over Iran. They are the ones who are standing against the Islamic Republic of Iran.

With such a criterion, if a few hundred people in a city with a population of a few hundred thousand stage riots and vandalize public property and chant iconoclastic slogans, those few hundred are Iranian people in the eyes of the Americans and should be supported. The U.S. says it should lend its unflinching support to such people through the UN Security Council and the imposition of sanctions on Iran over human rights issues. But if in the same city, hundreds of thousands of people take to the streets following the riots to express their support for the Islamic Republic of Iran's establishment and the values of the Islamic Revolution, they are not people; rather, they are supporters of the Islamic Republic! In other words, they are the very same «bad» people who must be called terrorists and whose roots must be burned.

Such behavior by the Americans has its roots in their arrogant attitude. Arrogant Americans are, in fact, those who regard their interests as a yardstick against which to measure all good and evil, and who act accordingly. So, if a nation such as oppressed Yemenis stands against the U.S., that nation must be eliminated. But, on the other hand, if a tyrannical regime such as the Al-Saud rulers serves the interests of the U.S., it must be given all-out support.

Separating myth from reality in Polish immigration policy

By Anna Maria Anders

The European Commission has been highly critical of Poland in recent months. A major target of attack has been Poland's refusal of European demands that it allow Syrian and other Middle Eastern refugees to flood across its borders — a "rejection of European values" some have charged. We Poles see it differently. We want to separate myths from reality.

We reject immigration in principle. Not so. The truth is that Poles reject having immigrants imposed on Poland, a sovereign state, against voters' will. Nearly 80 percent of our voters are against EU-mandated relocation. Even the opposition Civic Platform party, initially in favor of accepting refugees, has quietly changed its position and is now opposed.

Meanwhile, Poles have opened their doors to refugees nobody else in Europe wants: Ukrainians, displaced by Europe's own war. No other country

has even acknowledged them. More than one million Ukrainians Russia have found safety here. Poles believe it is for them to decide whom they invite, and that Europe should protect its borders.

Poland objects to Muslims. Again, the facts tell a different story. As an heir to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth known for religious tolerance even before the Reformation, Poland has had ethnic minorities, including its own Muslim community since the 16th century.

■ Poland's contemporary Muslims

The ancestors of Poland's contemporary Muslims chose the religious freedom of their adoptive county and its Western values over life in the neighboring Ottoman Empire. Today, as in centuries past, Polish Muslims are integrated into the nation's language and culture. In contrast, the few Middle-Eastern refugees who recently came to Poland did not want to stay, preferring our neighbor's more generous

benefits, government programs, existing Arabic-speaking communities, and numerous mosques.

Poland welcomes immigrants but has different relocation priorities than the EU. We want to finish repatriating Poles left behind in the Soviet Union after World War II. As a result of the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939 over a million Polish citizens — military and civilian — were arrested on Stalin's orders and deported in cattle cars from our Soviet-occupied territory to Siberian gulags, mines, and the barren lands of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Many were executed. Many others died of starvation, exposure, exhaustion, disease, and torture.

My father, Gen. Wladyslaw Anders, rescued 120,000 Polish deportees and POWs from the USSR in 1941. Released from the notorious Lubyanka prison in Moscow as a result of the Polish-Soviet treaty negotiated by the British, he was to form and train an army out of Soviet-held Polish citizens —

Poles, Ruthenians, Jews, Belarusians, Ukrainians and others granted "amnesty" by Stalin. Among them were 3,000 Jewish fighters, including future Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

Stalin had no choice but to let these people go. It was one month after Hitler attacked the USSR. Russians desperately needed the Western allies' help. Releasing the Poles captured by the Soviets became the condition of that help.

■ Liberating Europe

Anders' Army (40,000 men in uniform) fought to liberate Europe, making its first significant contribution in the Italian Campaign by taking the Abbey of Monte Cassino. But at the end of the war, those soldiers had no home to go back to — and hundreds of thousands of Poles never made it out of Soviet Russia. Now we want to bring back the few who remain and their descendants.

Since the fall of Communism, no prior Polish

government focused on the issue of repatriation. The current government has made it a priority. Within days of our October 2015 electoral victory, a plane was chartered to bring back from Russia the first group of survivors. President Duda reaffirmed our commitment when in May 2017 he signed the Repatriation Bill into law.

World War II ended more than 70 years ago, but for Poland, betrayed by its Western allies, the conflict lasted much longer. It was a 50-year occupation that did not end until the last Russian units departed on September 17, 1993.

There are still Poles waiting to come home. For us, they deserve to be first in line. Therefore, before we relocate anybody else to Poland — be they from the Middle East or North Africa or some other part of the world — we need to finish the job my father started and bring home the Poles who still long to return.

(Source: The Washington Times)

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یک ساختمان مستقل با ۲۰۰ تا ۳۰۰
اطاق خواب جهت سکونت کارمندان
یک شرکت بین المللی در شمال و شمال
غرب تهران جهت اجاره نیازمندیم
خانم دبیا: ۰۹۱۲۸۱۰۳۲۰۶
دفتر: ۲۸۱۴۱ - ۲۲۶۶۲۴۵۴

حدود ۳۰۰۰ متر بنا سند اداری در
شمال شهر تهران جهت اجاره به یک
کمپانی اروپایی، فوری نیازمندیم.
خانم دبیا: ۰۹۱۲۸۱۰۳۲۰۶
دفتر: ۲۸۱۴۱ - ۲۲۶۶۲۴۵۴

مالکین محترم

ملک های فروش و اجاره ای خود را (آپارتمان،
ویلا، مستغلات، اداری و تجاری) به ما بسپارید.

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شما را جهت اجاره به سفارتخانه ها و شرکت های خارجی نیازمندیم.

مالکین محترم

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Time to welcome New Year in Persian style

By Setareh Behroozi

TEHRAN – Esfand, the final month in the Iranian calendar year, is the month of hustle and bustle for all Iranians who are becoming prepared for the New Year celebration, Noruz.

However, the fresh air and the blossoms on the tree spur everyone on welcoming spring with traditional rites, which were performed over centuries by our ancestors.

Spring cleaning, providing new costume and cooking sweets and confectionaries, preparing items for Haft Seen, an arrangement of seven symbolic items traditionally displayed at Noruz, are some of rituals done by Iranians since long time ago.

House cleaning or khaneh tekani

A top-to-bottom cleaning is one of the traditions performed by most of Iranian across the country. Khaneh tekani, literally “shaking house”, is a spring cleaning tradition performed by all family members.

It includes cleaning of items, which were not cleaned during the rest of the year, such as silverware, carpets and furniture, as well as clearing the garden of winter debris.

Curtains and carpets are washed, all dust and debris are shaken and swept off, and all surfaces are cleaned. The stains on glass windows are also removed during house cleaning.

Houses might also get a fresh coat of paint. Some people burn sandalwood or an herb called esfand to freshen the air. Many people also buy new housewares and replace them with old ones before Noruz. Buying plants and flower pot is another tradition performed by some people in Iran.

This way, people invite spring, the renewal of nature, to every corner of their houses. In fact, khaneh tekani is not only physically



cleaning your house, it's also about getting rid of the past and of evil spirits.

New clothing for New Year

Buying new attire for New Year is another tradition performed by Iranians. It is very serious part of Noruz for children.

Noruz is known by children through new costume and also eidi, special gift given on the occasion of Noruz by elder member of families.

According to tradition, children wears new dress from top to toe on the first day of Noruz in front of Haft Seen.

Elder members of family also buy some clothing pieces to celebrate New Year.

In past, women sew the dress for all family members and they only bought shoes for Noruz. However today many families buy all clothing items for the New Year.

Preparing Haft Seen

Setting a “haft-seen” table for Noruz, the Iranian New Year, is a custom which is being observed by almost all Iranians worldwide.

There are seven items on the table which start with ‘S’ in Persian language in addition to gold fish, colorful eggs, Quran, candles, and mirror.

The seven items include sabzeh (wheat, barley, mung bean or lentil sprouts growing in a dish), saman (sweet pudding made

from wheat germ), senjed (wild olive fruit), seer (garlic), seeb (apple), sekkheh (coin) and serkeh (vinegar).

Growing sabzeh for Haft Seen is a task begin in Esfand. Soak grain seeds in water for 24 to 48 hours. Change the water 1-3 times a day. Drain seeds, then spread them on a paper towel. The bundle should be moist to the touch. If not, sprinkle with water.

On day 5 it's time to unwrap the bundle. By this time, you will notice that your seeds are sprouting in earnest.

Layer the sprouting seeds inside your container on top of the paper towel. Spread seeds evenly, so as to avoid bald spots! By day 7 your seeds should have officially sprouted.

However, during recent years, many environmentalists suggest to grow citrus seeds instead of grains.

In past, Samanu, a sweet pudding made from wheat sprouts, was also cooked by females during a ceremony at their homes.

They made saman in a big bronze pot on a handmade fireplace and stirred it with a very big ladle.

The water used for cooking saman was gathered from rains pour during Nisan, the first month on Assyrian calendar, which is concurrent with April for making saman. In Islam, the rain water collected during the spring month of Nisan (April) is advised for its benefits.

Nowadays, most of people buy saman and even sabzeh from market.

Esfand still is a great time to prepare for New Year. Although many items are not time-consuming these days, it is a time for resolutions, which may bring happier days in next year.

Things people with spotless houses do every day

Let's face it: No one wants to — or has time to — make a second job out of cleaning their home. And that's okay. We polled home bloggers and other busy folks to find out what little things they do daily to keep their places presentable. Good news: Each of these tasks takes a few minutes at most.

They make the bed

Before she even thinks about leaving the house for the day, Amy Bell, makes the bed. “Even if the rest of the room isn't picture-perfect, a neat bed instantly makes the whole space look pulled together,” the Cary, NC, mom says.

They wipe down the shower.

“We squeeze the shower door after every shower to prevent water spots and grime,” says Deanne Goodman, 33, from Oceanside, CA. “It only takes about 20 seconds, and it keeps the glass looking clear and bright.”

They clean the bathroom sink.

Blogger Traci Hutcherson keeps a container of wipes (baby wipes work just fine) under her sink. “Just pull out a wipe and give the sink a quick cleaning.” Try it and you'll never have to look at toothpaste dribbles again!

They wipe down the kitchen counters

“I wipe down our kitchen counters nightly with a homemade solution — one part vinegar, three parts water and a squirt of almond oil dish soap — that I store in a spray bottle,” says blogger Camilla Fabbri. “The vinegar cuts through grease and also does a great job clearing up the smudges on our stainless appliances.”

They clean as they go.

Blogger Chelsea Morhman never likes to go to bed with a dirty kitchen. The trick is cleaning up while she cooks. “If I have something in the oven, I wipe down counter tops and wash dishes while I wait for it to finish,” she says. “I try

to have almost everything cleaned up by the time dinner is ready, so that all we have to do after dinner is stick our dirty dishes in the dishwasher.”

They Swiffer before bed

Mary Beth Cooper from Peoria, IL, spends seven minutes (give or take) every night Swiffering her way through the downstairs rooms. A quick pass prevents dust bunnies from taking over the house.

They do an end-of-day clean sweep

Before bed, Fabbri gets everyone to pitch in for a quick tidying up session. The family of four picks up the dog toys, puts away the mail, hangs up jackets and puts items back in their place. “With everyone helping, it usually takes less than five minutes, and I feel so much better when I come downstairs in the morning and the house is organized.”

(Source: housebeautiful.com)

28 simple and natural ways to detox your body



8. Eat more fiber in its most natural form:

You've probably heard it time and time again that you need to be eating more fiber in your diet. Not only is this part of a healthy diet that will contribute to weight loss, but it's also an essential way of cleansing the body in its most natural form. Fiber can be an excellent supplement for a variety of reasons, and cleansing is just one of them.

Our bodies, particularly our digestive tracts, tend to hold onto substances that enter after time. This may be toxins, preservatives from foods that we eat, or just

waste that is not being properly disposed of by the body. Whatever the cause, the end result is that you may feel bloated, weighed down, unusually tired, and therefore health problems may result out of this.

When you introduce a proper serving of fiber into your diet, it helps to keep the digestive tract working properly. This means that all toxins, excessive waste, and anything else that has built up in the digestive tract will move through rapidly. You feel healthier and your digestive process works in the way that it is intended to.

(Source: bembu.com)

How to get organized with lunchbox storage?



Lunchboxes are a playful and portable way to keep the little things in your life organized. Think outside the box and use these clever containers in the car, kitchen and bathroom.

Stationary center

A lunchbox is the perfect size for note cards, postcards and envelopes, and it can hold your address book too. Look for a funky vintage lunchbox that suits your personality, whether you're Wonder Woman, Blondie or The Six Million Dollar Man.

Gadgets

If technology is supposed to make our lives simpler, why does it come with so many

cords, cables and accessories? Get a handle on high-tech hodgepodge with classic printed lunchboxes. Use one for each gadget, and you'll never forget where your memory card is again.

Guest box

Travel size trinkets stored in a fun lunch box are a great souvenir for visiting guests.

Make houseguests feel at home with a charming display of travel amenities. Fill a sleek silver lunchbox with sample-size shampoos, lotions and soaps. Welcome your visitors with a note that says “Enjoy your stay.” So cute, your friends might want it as a souvenir!

(Source: diynetwork.com)

Stories to add charm to student's Noruz holidays

L I F E TEHRAN — School children will entertain **d e s k** with book reading, storytelling and story writing during holidays of the Iranian New Year, Noruz, starting March 21.

After decades, the Ministry of Education has replaced Noruz holiday homework, which were offered to students in a pamphlet nationwide known as Peik-e Shadi, with book reading and story writing.



“Regarding the importance of book reading in developing creation and thought, we decided to assign story reading, story writing and storytelling as holiday homework during Noruz,” Rezvan Hakimzadeh an official with the Ministry of Education said.

“Digital games take most time of children nowadays and there is no space for book reading so they do not have reading and writing skill,” she lamented.

“With this replacement, students can narrate their experience during holiday and they have time for travelling and playing,” she explained.

According to the program, students can choose some books to read and summarize or they can write about their experiences during the holiday.

“I really become happy by hearing the news. Story and fiction is a very good way to conduct experience,” head of Madreseh Publications Hamidreza Shahabadi told Mehr news agency.

Madreseh Publications is affiliated to Iran's Ministry of Education.

He said that teachers should let students to read what they like and don't oblige them to summarize the book, because in this way, there is no difference between book reading and homework.

“Unfortunately students do not read books so they cannot narrate and tell stories in the right way. Book reading helps them to read, write and narrate in better way,” he explained.

Surprising health benefits of cold weather

There's no doubt about it, winter can be tough on our bodies and overall wellbeing. But it's not all bad!

Cooler temps boosts your brain

Colder temperatures help people think clearly. Research shows that people perform tasks better when the room temperature is set at a cooler setting than a warmer one. What's more, other research shows that people are less inclined to tackle cognitive problems in the summer, as opposed to winter, because the summer uses more glucose that's needed for mental processes.

It might help you burn calories

When it's cold, your body works harder to maintain your core temp. “Our bodies use a considerable amount of energy to keep us warm, and humidify the air we breathe when we're out in the cold,” explains Stacy Tucker, RN, natural health expert, founder of Almeda Labs. Be sure to follow these rules for working out in winter.

It increases brown fat

Most fat in human beings appears whitish in color, while brown fat is the mitochondria-packed fat cells that burn energy and produces heat in the body. “It was thought that only babies had brown fat, however, a study found that adults have some brown fat, and people with lower body mass index (BMI) tended to have a higher content of brown fat,” Tucker says.

It improves allergies

If you have outdoor allergies, good news! Pollen counts are virtually nonexistent in cold and snowy weather. If you have indoor allergies, however, you're not in the clear, because mold and dust mite allergies can be worse during the winter, especially if you're spending more time indoors, says Tucker.

It can lower risk of diseases

Sure, you might be more likely to catch a cold, but you're in the clear for several diseases and viruses that are more prevalent in warmer temps. That's because pesky mosquitoes hibernate during winter, which translates into a decrease of mosquito-borne diseases, including Zika, West Nile virus, dengue fever, and malaria during the winter season, says Tucker.

You'll sleep better

Your body's core temp naturally drops when you're trying to sleep; this process can take up to two hours in the heat of summer but is much faster in winter, says Tucker. Plus, one of the upsides of shorter days is darker mornings, so you can naturally sleep in later, no blackout curtains required. If your bedroom temperature is between 60 and 67 degrees, you might burn more calories, too.

It can help you fight infections

Yes, you might get more colds during the winter (not so great), but you are actually better primed to kick your immune system into gear and fight the infection more effectively. Studies have shown that the human immune system can be activated when exposed to the cold, and this enhances someone's ability to fight infections, explains Tucker.

It can rejuvenate skin

Moderately cold temperatures could be good for skin's health because it constrains blood vessels in the skin. This makes the vessels less prone to redness and swelling, as a result of a reduction in blood flow, explains Tucker. Plus, you tend to produce less oil and sebum in the winter, so you may have fewer breakouts. Find out the things dermatologists do in winter to keep their skin healthy.

It can better your ticker

Cold weather can actually do your heart some good when you're bracing it for your winter workouts outdoors. Cold weather makes working out a fun and challenging activity, and the heart will have to pump more oxygenated blood to not only compensate for the activity but also to ensure that the body maintains a warm enough temperature to stay within balance and to avoid any risks from a drop in temperature.

(Source: Reader's Digest)



101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

#36. Publish a book

Being a writer isn't about having tip-top grammar and literary skills, though it's important to write with good English. Being a writer is about having a message to share with the world. Prior to their hit series, J.K. Rowling (author of Harry Potter series) and Stephenie Meyers (author of Twilight series) were not professional writers — in fact, Meyer's only professional work was as a receptionist in a property company!

What is a message that you are passionate about? What do you want to say to the world? When can you start writing your book?

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

(Source: personalexcellence.co)



#IRANIANLIFESTYLE



A view from a traditional hotel in Shushtar, Khuzestan Province (Instagram/ @persianlifegram)

Iran seeks World Heritage listing for Tabas Geopark

TOURISM d e s k TEHRAN – Tabas Geopark authorities keep an eye on possible inscription of the vast geological region on the UNESCO World Heritage list, its director says.

Sprawled in the eastern province of South Khorasan, Tabas Geopark includes a variety of scenic landscapes and untouched terrains with the mysterious Kal-e Jeni (canyon of Jinn) located in Azmighan village, amongst them.



A view of Tabas Geopark

“Initial studies on Tabas Geopark commenced in 2011 with a task of identifying its various sites and choosing names for them ... however, we have been officially working on the project throughout the past year,” ISNA quoted Vesal Yahya-Sheybani as saying on Wednesday.

Yahya-Sheybani also highlighted some barriers that the scheme is facing with, saying there are still a number of local officials and residents who are opposing the project for what they argue is “anti-cultural”.

“We have endeavored to pave the way by holding meetings to make it clear that a [thriving] geopark leads to a sustainable development and an economy which will be based on the knowledge of indigenous people.”

Last May, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization registered Iran’s Qeshm Geopark on its Global Geoparks list.

Supersonic air travel is the ‘next big thing,’ Richard Branson says

Supersonic jetliner travel, which ended more than a decade ago with the Concorde, will make a comeback and transform the aviation industry in coming years, according to billionaire Richard Branson.

“The next big thing, hopefully in my lifetime, will be supersonic travel coming back and people traveling around the world in next to no time,” Branson told Bloomberg Television in an interview in Washington Tuesday. “And hopefully in a relatively environmentally friendly way.”

Branson’s Virgin Galactic is already working with Boom Technology Inc. on its supersonic jet, and Japan Airlines Co. in December took an option to buy as many as 20 of the aircraft from the Colorado startup.

Boom is planning to build a 45- to 55-seat aircraft that cruises at Mach 2.2 (about 1,500 miles per hour) - capable of whisking passengers between New York and London in about three hours. The Concorde, flown by British Airways and Air France, retired in 2003 after almost three decades in service as customers, weighed down by hefty operating costs, abandoned the jets.

(Source: Bloomberg)



ROUND THE GLOBE

Rock Art of Alta

A UNESCO World Heritage, the Rock Art of Alta is situated in the northernmost part of Norway, far north of the Arctic Circle at the head of the Alta Fjord.

The property contains thousands of rock carvings and paintings located at 45 sites in five different areas at the head of the Alta Fjord.

More rock art made by hunter-gatherers is found in Alta than anywhere else in northern Europe. The development of carvings in Alta through thousands of years can be related to the post-glacial land upheaval.



Prehistoric rock carvings and paintings in Alta, Norway

The oldest carvings are found at the highest points of the landscape. In Alta the changing landscape of prehistoric times is evident, and the position of the carvings also provides a key to understanding the chronology of rock art in the circumpolar region.

The Rock Art shows communication between the world of the living and the worlds of the spirits, and gives insight into the cosmology of prehistoric hunters and gatherers.

There is an exceptionally high number of human figures and compelling portrayals of prehistoric social life, dancing, processions, and rituals.

Moreover, the property provides a unique testimony to the interaction of hunter-gatherers with the landscape. The panels show hunting, fishing and boat journeys, and are thought to represent micro-landscapes.

A wide range of circumpolar fauna is depicted (reindeer, elk, bears, fish, whales, seabirds, etc.). Studies of material culture are enriched by the many different artefacts shown on the Alta panels.

(Source: UNESCO)

In Isfahan, Menar Jonban highly prone to vibration!

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN – Standing in Isfahan, Menar Jonban has long been a rather strange attraction of the central Iranian city. Its dual minarets are vastly prone to vibration!

Literary meaning “shaking minaret”, Menar Jonban is being visited by hundreds of domestic and foreign travelers each day.

It is a burial monument surmounted by two brick minarets that can be swung with little pressure; when one is shaken by the human force, the other starts to vibrate automatically.

Such dynamic behavior has become a puzzle to architects and structural engineers for many years as there is no crack running on it due to centuries of shaking.

Some believe that its considerable flexibility comes from a special type of mortar which has been utilized in its masonry.

Menar Jonban was originally built some 700 years ago as a mausoleum for “Amu Abdullah” who was a mystic figure in the Ilkhanid era (1256-1353 CE).

Archeological studies suggest that the dual minarets were later added to the mausoleum during the Safavid era (1501–1736).

Isfahan, central Iran, is a top tourist destination for good reasons, it was used to be a capital of the mighty



A close-up detail shows one of the “shaking” minarets



People visit Menar Jonban, a centuries-old monument in Isfahan, central Iran.

Safavid Empire.

The city is filled with unlimited visual appeals such as tree-lined boulevards, Persian gardens and majestic Islamic buildings while ubiquitous artisans underpin its reputation as a living museum of traditional culture as well.

■ Under tourists’ eyes

Here is a select of comments that foreign visitors to the monument have posted to TripAdvisor, one of the most popular travel websites in the world:

“Shaking minaret”

If you want to see they’re really shaking, choose the time to get there, otherwise you have to wait for nearly an hour. They shake the minarets every hour sharp (I mean 12, 1, 2...) Before the shaking, a guy will explain you the structure but only in Persian. Luckily the guy spoke English so he explained for us with the DVD they were selling as souvenir.

Interesting.... As a Japanese, who has earthquake often think it’s a bit scary for such building to shake a lot, but in a

ways, it may absorb the shake so it may be... good? Iran is also an earthquake country.... well? (MizuhoK from Hino, Japan; reviewed September 2016)

“This has to be the silliest thing ever!”

You hang around for 45 minutes and then a burly man climbs up into one of the minarets and shakes it, which causes a little bell on the other minaret to tinkle! There are plenty of other things to see in Isfahan. Don’t bother with this one. (Mandi B. from Sydney, Australia; reviewed December 2016)

“Interesting”

We managed to see both minarets shaking after waited for 20 minutes last week. A staff went up to shake one of the minarets (the right one when we were there), then we saw both minarets shaking mildly at the same time. We heard from the local guide that it was designed to be quake proofed. What a brilliant design! (travellholicc99 from Hong Kong, China; reviewed October 2016)

Zahedan to host culinary festival

TOURISM d e s k TEHRAN – The city of Zahedan, south-eastern Sistan-Baluchestan province, will host a culinary festival from February 28 to March 3.

Regarding the fact that many rituals and traditions are on the verge of becoming fade away, holding such festivals will liven up “our” cultural heritage and makes a way to be familiar with other folks’ food, Mehr quoted Mojtaba Mirhosseini, a provincial tourism official, as saying on Monday.

“We are striving to include local dishes and souvenirs that are native to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Oman and India as well as their traditional music with respect to

affinities the province share with its neighboring states.”

Exhibitors are set to wear traditional costumes during the event which will include indigenous music performances and free-of-charge cooking workshops, the official added.

The festival comes as part of nationwide campaign titled “Iranian Cuisine, Tourism Culture” and is initiated by the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization to encourage gastronomy tourism.

The Iranian cuisine, usually dominated with fragrant herbs, varies from region to region, but it principally accentuates freshness, deliciousness, and colorfulness.



Karnataka’s Hampi to be developed as iconic tourism site

The Hampi monuments which are part of Karnataka’s cultural heritage, will be one of the 10 tourist destinations across India to be developed as ‘Iconic Tourism Site’ by the central government.

In the Union Budget presented on February 1, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had said, “The government proposes to develop ten prominent tourist sites as Iconic Tourism destinations through holistic infrastructure and skill development. In addition, tourist amenities will be upgraded at 100 Adarsh Monuments of the Archaeological Survey

of India (ASD).”

The selected tourist locations were announced on Tuesday and Hampi is one of them.

As part of the initiative, the Centre will take up 100 Adarsh Smaraks such as toilet blocks, drinking water facilities, pathways and ramps (for the differently abled), seating benches, dustbins, improved parking facilities, ticket counters, landscaping and more.

Located in Hosapete taluk of Ballari district, there are 57 major monuments in Hampi, most of which come under the core

zone of Hampi, which includes four villages spread across 41.8 sq. km.

Lack of toilets at the monuments is one of the major drawbacks. “Many visitors use the space behind the monuments to attend to nature’s calls, which is a sad state,” an official told The New Indian Express.

Hampi was declared as a World Heritage Site by the United Nations for its architectural splendor.

The monuments in Hampi are maintained by the Central Archaeology Department. In September 2015, the state government

had proposed a tie-up between the iconic ruins of Hampi and Machu Picchu in Peru, South America, for both the sites to be developed as sister heritage sites.

The reason for this initiative was to get more international tourists to Hampi and increase their awareness about the heritage site.

As per the plan, the ticket for Machu Picchu would have a counterfoil that will provide free entry to Hampi for a period of two years.

(Source: thenewsminute.com)

How to fit in exercise while you travel

By Shivani Vora

Traveling, whether for business or pleasure, is no reason to leave your fitness goals behind. Here’s how to get a good workout, on the go.

Think you won’t have time to exercise on your next vacation? Not according to Annette Lang, a New York City-based certified personal trainer. “You can actually maintain and even improve your fitness level when you’re on the road,” she said. “And, you don’t have to bother with a gym to do it.”

Ms. Lang naturally has plenty of tips on how to get some exercise while you travel. Here are some of the ones she offers her clients when they tell her they’re leaving town.

■ Experience your environment through activity

Think about how you can include some activity on each day of your getaway, Ms. Lang said. If you’re in an urban destination that has a bike share program, for example, consider renting a bike for an hour or two, and take a ride along a waterfront or other scenic part of town.

When visiting sites with scenic views points at the top, such as a on the observation deck of a building or the roof of a cathedral, climb the stairs to the top, if that’s an option. Even a few minutes of stair climbing will boost your heart rate, and you’ll be rewarded by great views at the end of your journey.

And, if you’re hiking or exploring a local park, throw in a little exercise by doing 10 step-ups to a bench followed by



10 push-ups, and repeating the set at the next three benches you pass by. “This quick workout burst goes a long way in keeping you fit,” Ms. Lang said.

■ Create your own walking tour

Discovering your destination on foot is the ideal way to get an authentic sense of place and be active at the same time. Ms. Lang loves to design her own walking tours whenever she’s on vacation. “I make a list of the attractions I want to see and look at a map to find the best walking route that will hit them all,” she said.

On her recent trip to San Francisco, for example, Ms. Lang started her day at a popular breakfast joint, hit two museums, visited Fisherman’s Wharf and ended the day at several bars. All told, Ms. Lang logged more than 10 miles through the hilly city, and took in plenty of sights at the same time.

■ Start your day with a mini workout

Take five minutes in the morning on each day of your vacation to do a high-intensity workout. “You’ll burn calories first thing and also feel energized for the rest of the day,” Ms. Lang said.

Plenty of high-impact workouts that don’t require equipment are available for you to follow along online. Do a quick web search or visit YouTube for ideas, or drop by your hotel’s gym, if it has one.

Alternatively, try the following workout from Ms. Lang: 20 push-ups, 20 squat jumps (where you go into a deep squat and jump up toward the sky as high as you can) and 20 burpees (where you jump up toward the sky, come down into a squat, kick your legs back behind you and then come back up). Repeat three or four times or until you’ve been moving for at least five straight minutes.

■ Don’t just wait in line

Whether it’s to buy tickets for a popular attraction or cue up to board a tour bus, waiting in line can be an inevitable. Instead of passively standing and waiting, however, Ms. Lang suggested using your time to do three exercises that your fellow bystanders won’t notice: calf raises, which strengthen the lower legs, glute squeezes, where you tighten your glutes and hold as long as you can before releasing, to tone your backside, and belly breathing, where you exhale as you pull your stomach in and keep inhaling and exhaling while pulling it in more, to boost core strength. You might garner some odd looks, but the result will be worth it.

(Source: The New York Times)

Search of soil microbiome turns up new class of antibiotics called malacidins

By scouring the content of soil microbiomes, researchers have uncovered a new class of antibiotic.

Chemicals produced by microorganisms have been a key source of antibiotics. Calcium-dependent antibiotics have been particularly helpful in treating multi-drug resistant infections, leading a Rockefeller University-led team of researchers to search for gene clusters linked to that function within a series of environmental metagenome samples.

As they reported today in *Nature Microbiology*, Rockefeller's Sean Brady and his colleagues uncovered and characterized a class of antibiotics they dubbed malacidins that are active against multi-drug resistant pathogens.

■ Still in their infancy

"While metagenome-based antibiotic discovery methods are still in their infancy, the scaling and automation of the pipeline described here should permit the systematic discovery of (natural product) antibiotics that have until now remained hidden in the global metagenome, providing a potentially powerful approach for combating antibiotic resistance," the researchers wrote in their paper.

Brady and his colleagues used a sequence-guided screen to search environmental DNA samples for biosynthetic gene clusters encoding calcium-binding motifs. They isolated DNA from 2,000 unique soil samples and used degenerate PCR primers targeting a conserved region of genes that



synthesize calcium-dependent antibiotics to generate amplicons. In particular, they targeted those genes' adenylation domains.

They analyzed these amplicons using a bioinformatics platform called environmental Surveyor of Natural Products Diversity

(eSNAPD).

Three-quarters of the soil samples contained natural product sequence tags that mapped to at least one adenylation domain from a known calcium-dependent antibiotic biosynthetic gene cluster, the researchers reported.

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If we found life on Mars, how would we know?

Finding evidence for life on Mars has been a decades-long ambition for NASA, which has spent billions of dollars to send machines wheeling over, poking and probing the Red Planet. But once the signs of life are found, how are those findings verified?

In early January, NASA's Curiosity Mars rover came across what some researchers thought might be trace fossils on Mars. Researchers first spotted the eye-catching, tiny, stick-like features in black-and-white imagery, but they were compelling and unusual enough for the rover science team to roll the robot back to further interrogate them.

A strictly mineral origin was deemed to be the most plausible. Still, for some, the features suggested bioturbation — a process through which organisms living in sediments can disturb the very structure of those sediments.

The oddities looked similar to Ordovician trace fossils here on Earth, which stem from an era more than 440 million years ago.

■ Fossils on Mars

Regarding trace fossils on Mars, "We don't rule it out," Ashwin Vasavada of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, and project scientist for the Curiosity Mars rover, told Space.com. "But we certainly won't jump to that as our first interpretation."

The event underscored the degree of difficulty in studying and analyzing such peculiar features, as well as the limits of robotically performed "Curiosity science investigations" (CSI). But it also begs a fundamental question.

No doubt, Mars is holding its secrets tight—but if the ongoing work of detecting life proves positive, what protocols are in place to confirm such a verdict?

"It has been a long time since we have visited the procedure for extraterrestrial life announcements," said NASA's Michael Meyer, program scientist for the Mars Science Laboratory and lead scientist for the space agency's Mars Exploration Program

in Washington, D.C.

"My presumption is that the finding and announcement would go up our chain-of-command, more than likely going all the way to the President," Meyer told space.com in an email.

■ Spacecraft failure

The "perceived rapidity with which the finding would go viral just changes the immediacy of the response. In some ways ... not too different from a spacecraft failure."

Green told space.com that while life-detection tools have limitations, instruments today are at various rungs on that ladder. "Current systems give us indications that tell us what to do next as we climb up that Ladder of Life," he said.

The ability to make a comprehensive set of measurements to detect life or past life on Mars is a complicated, evolving process, Green said, requiring a systematic approach. "So that's where we are. We've got the methodology, I think, to keep moving in that direction."

(Source: *Scientific American*)

No strong links found between ultrasound during pregnancy, autism: study

A new study was recently conducted to prove that there was a link between ultrasounds during pregnancy and the fetus developing autism later on in life. The study results, however, indicated that there are no strong ties between the two.

Ultrasound examinations are common during pregnancy and researchers recently analyzed whether an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis is more probable among kids exposed to the procedure while in the womb.

The new study results indicate that there is no link found between the duration or number of prenatal ultrasounds and autism diagnosis in the child later on. However, a research team has found a statistical link between autism and deep wave penetration ultrasound during pregnancy's first and second trimesters.

■ Ultrasound transducer

"Depth of penetration has to do with the distance between the ultrasound transducer

(probe) on the skin and the point at what you're looking at on the ultrasound," said study coauthor Dr. Jodi Abbott, who is a Boston Medical Center physician.

The depth of penetration is the farthest down reached by the ultrasound wave. It has no link with where the fetus or the parts are. For instance, the depth could show 20 centimeters whereas the fetus could be located at 12 centimeters.

The frequency increases the wave absorption moving through the tissue, so if the frequency is higher, the ultrasound will penetrate at a shallower level as per the Journal of Ultrasound in Medicine. The technician handling the ultrasound gets a leeway to adjust the frequency to get a clearer fetus photo.

The penetration depth also varies depending on the woman's size and the number of tissues she has on her abdomen between the fetus and the transducer, and it is not something she can



control.

According to Dr. N. Paul Rosman, a Boston Medical Center pediatric neurologist and lead author of the study, the research results show that ultrasounds do not cause autism. However, there are still deficiencies in the study and additional research is needed to know more about the matter.

■ Autism spectrum disorder

"This small study reports reassuring findings

that children with autism spectrum disorder were less exposed to prenatal ultrasound and that the ultrasound energy used during the examination was no different compared to children without autism spectrum disorder," stated Dr. Basky Thilaganathan, Britain's Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists spokesperson, who was not associated with the research.

Ultrasound can heat tissues, which is damaging and the procedure can also vibrate tissues. There have been concerns about whether a developing fetus is adversely impacted by ultrasound, especially in the brain area, which is delicate during the early stages of development.

"We think there are probably fetuses vulnerable to autism due to genetic errors and environmental factors," said Sara Jane Webb, who wrote the accompanying editorial to the study.

(Source: *Tech Times*)

Bank Mellat's Four New Products Unveiled

Four new products of Bank Mellat were unveiled in the presence of Chief Executive and members of the Board of Directors officially, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

"Bank Mellat Hamrah Plus", "E-Banking special of real entities and business owners", "Management of Local Interest-Free Loan Funds" and "E-Money Exchange" were of the four salient services of the bank which were unveiled in the presence of senior managers of the bank and Hadi Sepanloo Project Manager of the services.

"Bank Mellat Hamrah Plus" system provides the possibility of offering quality banking services to the holders of banking cards, member of SHETAB, using relevant software. In other words, this equipped system is not



merely used by the accountholders of the bank, rather, all customers with SHETAB Debit Card can also take advantage of this system.

For his part, Dr. Mohammad Bigdeli Chief Executive of Bank Mellat said that the first device will be installed and commissioned in Abbasi Guesthouse in Isfahan in the very near future.

He added: "Bank Shahr has been pioneer and leader in the field of e-banking and information technology (IT) and has tried to be a leader as compared with other banks."

To conclude his remarks, senior official of the bank said: "relying upon the assistance of the Almighty God, the bank will take giant stride in materializing most of its objectives in the current year."

Bank Shahr Belongs to All Citizens: CEO

Chief Executive of Bank Shahr Dr. Hossein Mohammad Pourzarandi said that his bank belongs to all citizens and fellow countrymen, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Over the past years, the bank has taken giant strides in development and progress of cities especially small-scale ones, he said, adding: "moreover, the bank offers quality banking services to the noble nation of Islamic Iran confidently."

Promoting qualitative level of living condition of citizens in small cities and metropolitans is the main task of the bank, he said, adding, "the bank uses all its capacities and potentials to materialize most of its economic objectives in this respect."

The bank has made huge investment, valued at 30,000 billion tomans, in recent years with regard to the development of urban infrastructures, Pourzarandi maintained.

Of total 30,000 billion tomans invested by the bank,

15,000 billion tomans of which has been funded for the development of public transportation system while the rest capital has been invested in cities' infrastructural projects, CEO of the bank reiterated.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he said that more than 70 percent of people of the country are living in urban areas, adding, "this issue burdens the responsibility of municipalities and the bank for developing cities and also creating welfare condition."

In the end, Pourzarandi pointed to the generation of employment and emphasized, "given the key role of the bank in contributing and completing construction operation of subway lines [including Line No.s 6, 7 and 8 in Tehran] as well as continuation of construction operation of Shahid Hemmat Highway, the bank has generated employment for over 50,000 job-seeking people in the country."

In the end, Chief Executive of Bank Shahr Dr. Hossein Mohammad Pourzarandi once again said: "Bank Shahr has



greatly contributed to the generated of new employment opportunities in the country as well."

NASA developing quieter supersonic alternative to Concorde

A new type of supersonic plane that is quieter and more efficient than Concorde, allowing it to fly at max speed over land for the first time, has moved a step closer to reality.

The Quiet Supersonic Technology (QueSST) experimental aircraft, which is being developed by NASA, would fly at speeds of Mach 1.4 – approximately 1,100mph – twice the speed of today's commercial airliners and nearly as fast as the Concorde.



Crucially, however, it would be much quieter than Concorde, meaning it could transport people at supersonic speeds over land, and not just the ocean.

Concorde was considered too noisy to fly over land because of the loud sonic boom it produced.

The QueSST aircraft, meanwhile, will be designed to generate shock waves that produce a softer thump or rumble, rather than a huge boom.

The "Budget fully funds the Low-Boom Flight Demonstrator, an experimental supersonic (faster than the speed of sound) airplane that would make its first flight in 2021," the document states.

"This 'X-plane' would open a new market for U.S. companies to build faster commercial airliners, creating jobs and cutting cross-country flight times in half."

NASA says the QueSST aircraft's "distinctive shaping", including a long nose and "highly swept wings", will help keep the noise down.

"In the airline industry's current tube-and-wings model, shock waves largely roll off and then meld into a sonic boom," said lead contractor Lockheed Martin.

The "aerodynamic X-plane, however, is designed to scatter multiple shock waves and minimize their cumulative effect, producing only a rumble or soft thump."

(Source: *The Independent*)

The WHO warns we're officially on the path to a global pandemic

We have a problem. A serious one. At any moment, a life-threatening global pandemic could spring up and wipe out a significant amount of human life on this planet.

The death toll would be catastrophic; one disease could see as many as 100 million dead.

It sounds like a horrifying dream. It sounds like something that can't possibly be true. But it is. The information comes from Tedros Adhanom, Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO).

"This is not some future nightmare scenario," said Tedros (as he prefers to be called by Ethiopian tradition).

"This is what happened exactly 100 years ago during the Spanish flu epidemic." A hush fell across the audience as he noted that we could see such devastation again, perhaps as soon as today.

Tedros was equal parts emphatic and grave as he spoke: A "devastating epidemic could start in any country at any time and kill millions of people because we are still not prepared. The world remains vulnerable."

What is the cause of this great vulnerability? Is it our inability to stave off Ebola? Rising incidents of rabies in animal populations? An increased number of HIV and AIDS cases?

No. According to Tedros, the threat of a global pandemic comes from our apathy, from our staunch refusal to act to save ourselves - a refusal that finds its heart in our indifference and our greed.

The "absence of universal health coverage is the greatest threat to global health," Tedros proclaimed.

As the audience shifted in their seats uncomfortably, he noted that, despite the fact that universal health coverage is "within reach" for almost every nation in the world, 3.5 billion people still lack access to essential health services.

(Source: *sciencealert.com*)

Ants care for wounded comrades by licking their wounds clean

A species of ant has become the first known non-human animal to tend the wounds of its fellows. "Nurse" ants lick the wounds of fallen comrades, and this helps them survive.

Matabele ants (*Megaponera analis*) live dangerous lives. Several times a day, parties of 200-600 soldier ants set out to hunt termites, dragging them from their nests and carrying them home. The termites fight back, and their powerful jaws can administer lethal bites, so Matabele ants frequently lose one or more limbs.

In 2017, Erik Frank, then at the University of Würzburg, Germany reported that Matabele ants routinely carry their wounded back to the nest. This is odd, as social insects usually treat each other as expendable. The injured ants could "ask" for help by releasing a pheromone, which caused other ants to pick them up and carry them.

In a new study Frank, now at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland, and his colleagues have filmed what happens inside the nest when the injured are brought in. The footage shows "nurse" ants spend several minutes licking their fallen comrades' wounds.

An experiment in which some ants were denied this licking suggests it is a lifesaver. Without it, 80% of ants who had lost limbs died within a few hours. Of those that received medical care, 90% survived.

"We don't know yet if the ants are just cleaning the wound and removing debris, as we do with our wounds to prevent infection, or if they are also applying antimicrobial substances with their saliva," says Frank.

Either way, the treatment works. The "ants are able to reach running speeds similar to healthy ants, despite missing a leg or two," says Frank.

(Source: *New Scientist*)

“Social interest” demonstrates higher responsibility in Iranian society

By Sadaf Abbassi

Today, there are numerous NGOs in Iran active in various fields such as health, education, children, women, elderly, entrepreneurship, research, counseling and psychology, rehabilitation, etc.

This large number of voluntary works demonstrate Iranian tendency for philanthropic participations. The good-hearted men and women, all together endeavor to help the government in introducing social modifications. Such people put huge effort, time, energy and money into charitable or humanistic activities, without any expectations, only in order to live in a less deviant and more fruitful society. They are intelligently aware of how social issues can affect each citizen’s life, directly or indirectly.

But being concerned about social well-being is something far beyond mere humanitarian acts; this is what Austrian psycho-therapist, Alfred Adler has emphasized on his theory, known as individual psychology as a concept named “social interest”.

Social relationships are the cornerstones of Adler’s holistic theory in which he believed social forces form the personality and people’s interactions, and they are crucial for their psychological development.

Social interest is a common feeling among human beings and between the individual and the society which leads to cooperation and a mutual alliance. Social interest is an inborn gift, but it is the environment that flourishes it.

Alfred Adler’s theory evaluates all individuals’ actions from the social interests’ aspect. In fact, social interest, in Adler’s point of view is a significant indication of mental health. It means that the healthier and more mentally developed people are, the more willing they are to be useful in their society.

Their willingness toward social work is a witness of their maturity, sense of responsibility and dedication. And this is what can be seen in increased humanitarian work of Iranian people: respectful, determined and mature concerns for well-being of others.

Environmental bodies sign MOU to bolster co-op

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Department of Environment (DOE) and the Agriculture and Natural Resources Engineering Organization inked a memorandum of understanding (MOU) hoping to preserve the environment more sustainably, Mehr reported on Tuesday.



As per the MOU, the organization will cooperate on developing Health, Safety, and the Environment (HSE) units, managing animal species and facilitating the use of environment-friendly technologies.

Also a special attention has been paid to creating green jobs, Mehr highlighted without any further explanation.

According to the MOU, a special committee will be established to develop the required executive plans.

LEARN ENGLISH

Playing Chess

Daddy: Bobby! Come here, look what I got you!
Bobby: What is that?
Daddy: A **chess** board! Daddy is going to teach you how to play!
Bobby: Cool!
Daddy: Ok, each player gets 16 pieces. You can be the white ones and I’ll play with the black pieces. Now in the front, you **set up** the **pawns**. Those are the least **valuable** pieces and can only move one space forward. When you are about to **capture** another piece, it can move one space **diagonally**.
Bobby: What about all these other pieces?
Daddy: See this one that looks like a tower? It’s called the **rook**. The one with the tall hat is called the **bishop**. See this little horsey? This is called the **knight**, it’s a very important piece so it’s best to not let your **opponent** capture it.
Bobby: And these two? They are husband and wife?
Daddy: That’s right! That’s the **queen** and that’s the **king**. If the other player captures your king, he will say “**Check Mate**” and the game is **over**! Doesn’t this sound fun?
Bobby: Nah! This is **boring**! I’m gonna go play Killer Zombies on my PlayStation!
■ **Key vocabulary**
chess: a game in which each player moves 16 pieces across a board and tries to capture the opponent’s king
set up: make ready for use
pawn: the weakest piece in chess; a person or group without much power
valuable: very useful or helpful
capture: to take
diagonally: on a diagonal, forward and to the left or right
rook: a piece in chess that can only move along straight lines
bishop: a piece in chess that can only move diagonally
knight: a useful piece in chess
opponent: someone who you try to defeat in a competition, game, fight, or argument
queen: a very powerful piece in chess
king: the final and most important piece in chess
Check Mate: describes situation in which king cannot move
over: if an event or period of time is over, it has finished
boring: not interesting

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Dusty Khuzestan still in tight spot, out of breath

1 → Ahmad Joneidi, an official with Ministry of Health, has explained that the current unwelcomed fine particles are originating from external hotspots in neighboring countries are smaller in diameter so that they are more detriment to citizens’ health, IRNA news agency reported on Wednesday.

Khuzestan provincial chief of department of environment, Ahmadreza Lahijanzadeh, has told Fars news agency that drought spells as well as low precipitation in the area has exacerbated the situation.

The average precipitation level have decreased to two millimeters while it amounted to 220 to 250 millimeters in the past, Lahijanzadeh regretted.

On the same subject Mohammad Ali Tahmasbi, head of national project for fighting sand and dust storms, has said that average precipitation amounts have dropped by 60 percent this year (March 2017-March 2018) compared to the corresponding period last year.

MP Abbas Papizadeh also regretted the fact that some 22 provinces of Iran are affected by sand and dust storms and the fact that administrations is not seriously following up the issue and allocating limited budget to tackle it is worsening the situation. “This way the situations won’t improve in the next 10 years,” IRIB gouted Papizadeh as saying.

He further explained that while the province of Khuzestan is struggling with the sand and dust storm for 16 years the administration has just started addressing the issue since last year.

Despite the United Nations 2002 report warning about the future of the Khuzestan, no one bothered to take it seriously, he lamented.

Two years ago the bodies were reluctant to accept the fact that Khuzestan is dealing with a crisis which has internal sources, while now it is obvious that some of the sand and



© Tehran Times/ Mehdi Pedramkhoo

dust storms are originating from internal hotspots, he added.

Mismanagement of water resources as well as building numerous dams have intensified the current situation, he said, adding, some 80 percent of the oil revenues comes from the province of Khuzestan, it is only fair to spend some of it on the province to fight the destructive storms.

Hotspots for sand and dust storms (SDS) developed around Ahwaz, the capital of Khuzestan, cover more than

350,000 hectares of land.

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

Cleric lives in tent in sympathy with quake victims

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — A cleric in the western city of Sarpol-e Zahab, Kermanshah province, which was hit hard by a magnitude 7.3 earthquake on November 12, is still living in a tent in sympathy with the quake-hit victims.

Javad Fatemi-Nasab, Sarpol-e Zahab Friday prayer leader, is a young cleric who is refusing to move to a house or even a conex to show his sympathy towards the people who are still living in tents in some part of the quake-stricken areas in the province.

In his speech in Bahman 22nd (February 11) rallies, marking the anniversary of the Islamic revolution, Fatemi-Nasab highlighted that given the current unfavorable condition created by the earthquake the enemies might have thought people of Kermanshah would not participate in the rallies, however, people took part in

the rallies to show how faithful they are to their country.

Following the earthquake the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has provided the citizens with 8,000 conexes within less than three months and many volunteer groups have joined hands to rebuild the houses which were razed to the ground.

While volunteer groups are trying to help the areas which are affected by the powerful earthquake, there are still a great deal to accomplish to bring comfort back to the region.

The deadly quake of Kermanshah claimed over 500 lives and left more than 10,000 injured. Moreover the temblor was so strong that razed some 19,000 houses to the ground and caused damage to 56,000 others in 1,900 villages.

‘Some \$8b needed to retrofit schools nationwide’

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Retrofitting all schools across the country will need 400 trillion rials (nearly \$8 billion), said Mohammad Reza Hafezi, the head of a charity society active in building schools.

Calling for the cooperation of benefactors and administration in this regard, he noted that receiving this budget requires a national determination.

There are some 5,700 incomplete school building

projects across the country that entails the help of administration and benefactors to finish, Nasimonline quoted Hafezi as saying.

Hafezi went on to say that the budget allocated to complete incomplete school projects by the administration was around 2 trillion rials (nearly \$40 million) in [Iranian calendar] year 1396 (March 2017-March 2018), however, this budget has been reduced for the next year.

Germany plans to trial free public transport in cities suffering from air pollution

The German government is planning to trial free public transport in cities suffering from air pollution, as Angela Merkel’s administration scrambles to meet EU pollution rules and avoid fines.

Five cities – Bonn, Essen, Herrenberg, Reutlingen and Mannheim – will benefit from the trial “at the end of the year at the latest” according to proposals drawn up by the Federal government.

German and British ministers were among those countries’ summoned to Brussels last month to explain to the European Commission

why they had continued to break EU rules on toxic air pollution and what they would do to fix the problem.

“We are considering public transport free of charge in order to reduce the number of private cars,” a letter sent to the European Commission by German ministers says.

“Effectively fighting air pollution without any further unnecessary delays is of the highest priority for Germany,” the ministers added.

The letter also contains other proposals to cut pollution support for car-sharing schemes, low emissions zones in cities, and restrictions



on the emissions that fleet vehicles such as buses can produce.

Public transport is already significantly

more affordable in Germany than the UK. The state-run railway operator Deutsche Bahn sells an annual season ticket covering all trains running throughout the whole of Germany, the BahnCard 100, for €4,270 (£3,802) – lower than the price of many single line season tickets in Britain.

If the countries, which also include Spain, France and Italy, fail to come up with proposals they face infringement procedures from the European Commission, which could result in hefty fines for breaking EU law.

(Source: Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

Iran, Sweden discuss joint brain mapping projects

Iran and Sweden discussed possible cooperation on brain mapping projects during a meeting which was held at University of Tehran.

Swedish Minister for Health Care, Public Health and Sport Gabriel Wikstrom at the head of a delegation met with the university’s brain mapping lab director Mohammad-Reza Aye to negotiate possible future combined efforts on brain mapping projects, IRNA news agency reported on Tuesday.

The delegation comprising representatives of universities, research centers, and commercial companies also paid a visit to the lab which is equipped with modern technologies for analyzing brain function.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-ese”

- **Meaning**: a word ending that indicates a particular place
- **For example**: This page helps you to learn **Chinese**.

PHRASAL VERB

Fly at somebody

- **Meaning**: to suddenly rush towards someone and try to hit them because you are very angry with them
- **For example**: Robbie flew at him, fists clenched.

IDIOM

Blue-eyed boy

- **Explanation**: blue-eyed boy is someone’s favorite
- **For example**: He’s the director’s blue-eyed boy!

زمینه های همکاری مشترک ایران و سوئد در زمینه نقشه برداری از مغز بررسی شد

ایران و سوئد امکان همکاری مشترک در زمینه نقشه برداری از مغز را طی نشست‌ی در دانشگاه تهران بررسی کردند.

به گزارش روز سه شنبه خبرگزاری ایرنا گابریل ویکستورم وزیر سلامت، بهداشت عمومی و ورزش سوئد که در راس هیاتی به ایران سفر کرده بود با محمدرضا آی رئیس آزمایشگاه ملی نقشه برداری از مغز پردیس فنی دانشگاه تهران دیدار و زمینه های همکاری مشترک در پروژه های نقشه برداری از مغز را بررسی کردند.

هیات بازدیدکننده متشکل از یک گروه از نمایندگان دانشگاه ها و موسسات پژوهشی و همچنین شرکت های تجاری کشور سوئد همچنین از آزمایشگاه ملی نقشه برداری از مغز که مجهز به آخرین و به روزترین تجهیزات برای بررسی عملکرد مغز می باشد بازدید به عمل آوردند.

Russia could host future Israeli-Palestinian negotiations: Maliki

Palestinians have stepped up diplomatic efforts to find international partners that would replace the United States and undertake the role of mediator in a “peace process” involving Palestine and Israel. And Now Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki says Russia could play host to any future negotiations between the two sides.

In an interview with Russia’s Sputnik news agency published on Tuesday, Maliki suggested that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu meet in Sochi or Moscow.

“Absolutely, we are ready for direct talks through a third party, of course,” he said. “We think, you know, probably, coming to Sochi or maybe to Moscow could be the right one, if Netanyahu is willing to do so.”

The top Palestinian diplomat further advised the Israeli ambassador to Russia “to look into it (the proposal) and to show the positive attitude.”

Last December, the U.S. President Donald Trump angered Palestinians and the entire international community by declaring that Washington was giving al-Quds (Jerusalem) the U.S. government’s recognition as Israel’s “capital.”

The dramatic U-turn broke a longstanding international consensus that the status of the Israeli-occupied city be decided through Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, prompting Abbas to formally declare that Palestine would no longer accept the U.S. as a mediator in the decades-long conflict due to its bias towards Tel Aviv.

On Monday, Abbas visited Russian President Vladimir in Moscow to discuss a collective mechanism to mediate possible negotiations with Tel Aviv in place of Washington.

Abbas told Putin, “We state that from now on we refuse to cooperate in any form



with the U.S. in its status of a mediator, as we stand against its actions.”

Elsewhere in his interview, Maliki stressed that Palestine is considering legal options in case Tel Aviv and Washington derail the future talks, the last round of which collapsed in 2014 mainly because of Israel’s refusal to end its unlawful settlement expansion on occupied territories.

“We are asking the advice of many internationally recognized legal experts to help us also to focus on different specific legal tracks ..., if the negotiations track is closed by the rejection of Israel and the United States, that means that they are not leaving

us with many options but to focus on the legal one,” he said.

Maliki further noted that Palestine may ask the International Criminal Court (ICC) or the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to investigate Israel’s illegal activities and crimes in the occupied territories.

“First of all, Israel represents an occupying power... and this is something we should really address maybe through the ICJ. When it comes to the criminal actions ... then we could back to the ICC, when it comes to some actions taken by Israel like trying to sell settlement products, then we will go to the European court, or to the national

country courts,” he pointed out.

Israel occupied the West Bank and East al-Quds (Jerusalem) during the Six-Day War in 1967. It later annexed East al-Quds (Jerusalem) in a move not recognized by the international community.

Palestinians want the resolution of the conflict with Tel Aviv based on the so-called two-state solution along the pre-1967 boundaries.

However, Israeli officials insist on maintaining the occupation of Palestinian territories and press ahead with their settlement activities.

(Source: agencies)

German SPD leader invokes Europe to sell coalition deal with Merkel

Germany’s Social Democrats (SPD) must seize the opportunity to reform the European Union in a new governing alliance with Chancellor Angela Merkel, the party’s interim leader said on Wednesday in appealing to members to back their coalition deal.

The SPD’s 464,000 members vote in a postal ballot beginning on Feb. 20 on whether the party should go ahead with the agreement its leaders clinched last week to renew their power sharing alliance with Merkel’s conservative bloc.

Olaf Scholz, appointed SPD interim leader on Tuesday, said the European Union reform plans included in the coalition agreement were a strong reason to back the deal.

“The window of opportunity is now, not in five or 10 years - maybe then it won’t be there anymore,” he told party members gathered in a beer tent in Vilshofen, in the southern state of Bavaria. “We need to act now.”

The coalition deal envisages stronger Franco-German cooperation, allocating budget funds for economic stabilization in Europe, increased German contributions to the EU budget, and transforming the ESM bailout fund into a European Monetary Fund.

But EU reform, which has moved up the agenda with Britain poised to leave the bloc next year, is an issue that fails to resonate with many party members who are more concerned with jobs and working conditions.

SPD leaders, facing a slump in opinion polls, have their work cut out to convince rank-and-file to endorse the coalition deal with Merkel, a re-run of the power-sharing arrangement they began in 2013.

Many within the SPD harbor misgivings about sharing power with Merkel, believing the party should rebuild in opposition after

suffering its worst result in last September’s election since Germany became a federal republic in 1949.

Results of the SPD ballot are due on March 4. A “no” vote would likely lead to new elections, prolonging uncertainty in Europe’s most populous country and economic powerhouse.

The SPD has slid into disarray since its leaders struck the coalition deal last week, blighted by bitter divisions over whether to join the coalition, a loss of confidence in outgoing leader Martin Schulz and discontent over the succession process.

Seeking to restore order, Schulz resigned with immediate effect on Tuesday and party leaders installed Scholz as caretaker SPD chairman. They also confirmed that they recommended parliamentary floor leader Andrea Nahles as Schulz’s longer-term successor.

The manner in which Schulz originally anointed Nahles as his successor - without broad consultation - rankled with many in the party and resulted in Scholz being appointed as interim leader on Tuesday.

An extraordinary party congress will be held on April 22 to pick a new leader, likely Nahles.

Scholz played up the SPD’s achievements in coalition negotiations with Merkel’s Christian Democrats (CDU) and her Bavarian allies, at which the center-left party won the powerful finance ministry to the frustration of many in the CDU.

“One has only to look at the discussion in the CDU to know that we must have got it right somehow,” said Scholz.

“Not only has a Bavarian politician passed the pinnacle of his career, but probably a woman from the north too,” he added in a dig at Merkel and Horst Seehofer, leader of the arch-conservative Bavarian sister party (CSU) to Merkel’s CDU.

(Source: Reuters)

U.S. Defense Secretary pressed European allies on military spending

The United States Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis pressed European allies on Wednesday to stick to a promise to increase military budgets as the United States offers an increase in its own defense spending in Europe.

For the first time, NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) countries have submitted plans to show how they will reach a target to spend 2 percent of economic output on defense every year by 2024, after President Donald Trump threatened to withdraw support for low-spending allies.

Fifteen of the 28 countries, excluding the United States, now have a strategy to meet a NATO benchmark first agreed in 2014 in response to Russia’s annexation of Ukraine’s Crimea region, following years of cuts to European defense budgets.

It is unclear whether that will be enough to impress Trump when he attends a NATO summit in July.

“We cannot outsource Europe’s security obligations to the United States,” British Defense Secretary Gavin Williamson told reporters at the NATO defense ministers’ meeting.

NATO data shows that Britain, Greece, Romania and the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania meet, or are close to, the 2 percent goal, while France and Turkey are among those countries set to reach it soon.

France plans to increase its defense spending by more than a third between 2017 and 2025, but Spain has said it will not meet the 2024 target. Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Italy, Portugal, Norway and Denmark are also lagging, while Hungary expects to meet the goal only by 2026.

Germany, Europe’s biggest economy, plans a multi-billion euro increase in defense spending but this is not enough to take it up to the 2 percent target by 2024.

Mattis is expected to take a tough stance with allies at the lunchtime meeting, said Katie Wheelbarger, the U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs.

“He will address those who don’t have national plans to meet 2 percent and suggest they really need to develop those plans,” she told reporters.

Not just numbers

The issue of low defense spending in Europe has long been an irritant in the United States, whose new national defense strategy centers on countering Russia after more than a decade of focusing on battling militants.

Military analysts say Europe is now vulnerable to a range of threats, including Russia’s military modernization, militancy and electronic warfare on computer networks.

One area of tension lies in the language of the NATO spending pledge of 2014. Allies committed to “move toward” 2 percent, but Trump now says 2 percent is the “bare minimum.”

This week the Pentagon proposed its own increase of more than 30 percent in funding, primarily to deter Russia.

Some Europeans say focusing on the 2 percent figure is misleading as it does not take into account how money is spent.

Much of Belgian and British defense spending is set to be taken up by costly upgrades to fighter jet fleets, which military analysts say could come at the expense of other capabilities, such as sea patrols and infantry.

Germany is also one of the biggest troop contributors to NATO missions, from the Baltics to Afghanistan.

“It isn’t just about dry figures,” Germany’s Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen told reporters. “It’s also about who is ultimately doing what.”

(Source: Reuters)

Three shot near U.S. National Security Agency, one in custody

At least one person was shot and wounded at the United States National Security Agency’s (NSA) headquarters at Fort Meade, Maryland, on Wednesday and one person was in custody, but officials have secured the area and there was no continuing threat, local media reported.

A Fort Meade spokesman confirmed one person had been injured and transported and that a main highway was closed near the facility, a U.S. Army installation about 48 km northeast of Washington.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) confirmed on Twitter that its Baltimore office had sent agents to investigate the incident, its Baltimore office said on Twitter.

Local media quoted an NSA spokesman as saying the area was now secure.

“NSA police and local law enforcement are addressing an incident that took place this morning at one of NSA’s secure vehicle entry gate,” ABC News quoted the spokesman as saying. “The situation is under control and there is no ongoing security or safety threat.”

Earlier local media reports said that as many as three people had been wounded.

Local fire and police departments had said earlier on Twitter they were responding to a possible shooting incident.

CBS News broadcast images of a black sport utility vehicle with what appeared to be bullet holes in the front windshield at the gate of Fort Meade, the U.S. Army installation that is the home of the NSA, as well as the U.S. Cyber Command and Defense Information School. The vehicle was at the end of a dead-end lane marked by concrete NSA-stamped barricade blocks on one side and a chain-link fence on the other, near a guard booth and entrance gate, the CBS video showed.

The National Security Agency/Central Security Service is one of the U.S. government’s main spy agencies. The secretive agency focuses on using technological tools, including the monitoring of internet traffic, to monitor the government’s adversaries.

A White House spokeswoman said President Donald Trump had been briefed on the incident.

In March 2015, two people tried to drive their sports utility vehicle through the NSA’s heavily guarded gate. Officers shot at the vehicle when they refused to stop, killing one of the occupants. The people in the vehicle may have taken a wrong turn after partying and taking drugs, according to news reports.

(Source: Reuters)

Seven Israeli soldiers wounded after running over landmine

At least seven Israeli soldiers have sustained injuries when a anti-tank landmine exploded under their military vehicle near the Jordan River in the occupied West Bank.

The Israeli army announced in a statement that the soldiers were on a routine mission to repair a fence around a minefield in the Qasr al-Yahud area, south of Ariha (Jericho) on Wednesday afternoon, when their car ran over the ordnance.

The statement added that the injured troopers have been taken to a hospital in al-Quds (Jerusalem) for medical treatment, and that the circumstances surrounding the blast are being investigated.

The development came less than a day after two Israeli soldiers were killed and 10 others injured in a fatal car crash.

The accident occurred on Tuesday night when a truck driver lost control of his vehicle and collided into a convoy of Israeli military jeeps on the Nizanei Oz Interchange on Highway 6, east of Netanya.

On September 27, 2017, two Israeli soldiers were killed and four others wounded when their reconnaissance vehicle flipped over during the course of a military exercise in Syria’s occupied Golan Heights.

The Israeli military said in a statement that the accident occurred as the soldiers were conducting a maneuver in conjunction with other military vehicles.

Two Israeli soldiers have been killed and four others wounded during a military exercise in the occupied Golan Heights.

The driver of the M109 self-propelled howitzer took a wrong turn, and was blurred by the headlights coming from a convoy of vehicles opposite their vehicle.

He tried to turn in the other direction, but by doing so he drove the vehicle over a drop in the road and it overturned into a ditch of 6-8 meters deep.

The Israeli military identified the dead as 22-year-olds Lieutenant Avshalom Armoni and Sergeant Avinoam David Cohen.

Two of the wounded soldiers were evacuated to a nearby hospital in serious condition, suffering from internal and orthopedic injuries. The two other soldiers sustained moderate injuries.

(Source: Press TV)

Netanyahu defies opposition, vows to stay in office

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has defied fresh opposition calls for him to step down after police recommended that he be indicted for corruption charges.

Israeli police said on Tuesday that there was ample evidence for Netanyahu to be indicted for bribery, fraud and breach of trust in two separate cases. The final decision to indict the prime minister is with Israel’s attorney general, a process which could take weeks or months.

The indictment recommendation promoted calls among Israeli opposition leaders for Netanyahu to step down, with the head of the Labor Party, Avi Gabbay and Yair Lapid, who chairs the opposition Yesh Atid party, urging the premier’s coalition partners to leave his ranks.

Lapid said, “Someone with such serious accusations against them, many of which he does not even deny, cannot continue to serve as prime minister with responsibility for the security and well-being of Israel’s citizens.”

Gabbay told Israel’s army Radio, “I think it’s clear here that this government needs to go to elections. It can’t be that this government continues as is,” adding, “There’s really a government culture of corruption.”

Police Commissioner Roni Alsheich said officers investigating Netanyahu had been followed and put under pressure.

Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vows to stay in office just minutes after police recommended indicting him for bribery in two criminal investigations.

However, Netanyahu, who has invariably dismissed his corruption charges, remained defiant and said, “I am certain, as I have always been certain, and nothing has changed, that the truth will come to light and nothing will come of this.”

(Source: Press TV)

Trump threatens retaliatory actions against China, S. Korea

The United States President Donald Trump has threatened to impose sanctions on China while vowing to scrap a free trade deal with South Korea.

His threat of action against the two major Asian trading partners came on Tuesday in a speech to a group of Republican and Democratic lawmakers at the White House.

Trump accused Beijing of undermining the U.S. steel and aluminum industries, saying he was “considering all options,” including tariffs and quotas.

This comes after Trump received two Commerce Department reports about alleged Chinese subsidies for steel and aluminum exports, materials that are essential for industries such as construction, autos and the like.

Meanwhile, China, which produces nearly half of the world’s steel, is accused of flooding the market in order to keep its economy robust at home.

“I will make a decision that reflects the best interests of the United States, including the need to address over-production in China and other countries,” Trump said. “They’re dumping and destroying our industry, and destroying the families of workers, and we can’t let that happen,” he added.

Although the president has another two months to



make a decision on possible penalizing action, he strongly indicated that he wants to punish Beijing.

Experts, however, say that any such action will prompt China to do the same, raising the specter of a trade war between the world’s two largest economies.

Trump is under pressure at home as he has not been able to deliver on his campaign promise of being a champion of America’s Rust Belt.

Also, he has done nothing to fix the national trade deficit, which has widened even further during his first year in office, up 12 percent to \$566 billion.

On Tuesday, there were members among the group who expressed support for the president, but also others who warned that action against China could increase prices and hurt the U.S. manufacturing outside the steel and aluminum sectors.

“Mr. President, I think we do need to be careful here, that we don’t start a reciprocal battle on tariffs,” said Republican Senator Roy Blunt.

“You know, we make aluminum and we make steel” he said. “But we buy a lot of aluminum and we buy a lot of steel as well.”

Trump also took a shot at South Korea amid anger at signs of improvement in relations between Seoul and Pyongyang.

He described the 2012 free trade deal with South Korea as “a disaster,” saying that Washington would renegotiate a “fair deal” or scrap it altogether.

The Trump administration began talks to renegotiate the United States-Korea (KORUS) trade agreement in July, asserting that it was lopsided as America’s bilateral trade deficit had ballooned under it.

“We have a very, very bad trade deal with Korea,” Trump said. “For us it produced nothing but losses.”

(Source: Press TV)

Club fined for sick Chapecoense taunts

Nacional have been fined \$80,000 (£57,500) and their fans banned for three games after some taunted Chapecoense about the plane crash which killed 19 players and staff.

During a Copa Libertadores match in January, some fans of the Uruguayan club made gestures referring to the 2016 crash involving the Brazilian side.

Nacional said the “horrendous” incident brought a “deep sense of shame”.

Conmebol, South American football’s governing body, banned Nacional fans for their next three continental away games.

“Unfortunately, many sick minds channel their irrationality to sporting scenarios”, Nacional said in a statement shortly after the incident on 31 January.

The taunts were made during Nacional’s 1-0 first-leg win at Chapecoense in the second stage of Copa Libertadores qualifying.

They won the second leg 1-0 at home on 7 Feb to complete a 2-0 aggregate victory. Chapecoense were due to play in the final of the Copa Sudamericana when their plane crashed on its approach to Medellin, Colombia, in November 2016, killing 71 people.

Colombian opponents Atletico Nacional asked for Chapecoense to be handed the cup, which was awarded to three surviving players when the team played their first game after the crash.

An investigation found human error was the cause of the disaster.

(Source: BBC)

‘Death threats’ for Canada’s Boutin after South Korean disqualification



Canadian short track speed skater Kim Boutin has received online threats and abuse after winning a bronze medal in Tuesday’s 500m final. Boutin took third place after South Korean athlete Choi Min-jeong was disqualified for interfering.

But the 23-year-old was forced to block her social media accounts on Wednesday after abuse from angry Korean fans.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) issued a statement asking the public to “respect the athletes”.

South Korea’s Yonhap news agency reported “angry” fans rushed to Boutin’s Instagram and Twitter accounts to attack her, with messages including death threats in Korean and English.

The Korean Herald said some became “especially angry after the overjoyed Boutin hugging her team-mates was broadcast live after she was informed that she had just won bronze”.

The newspaper added that at least 10,000 comments, many of them abusive, were posted on Boutin’s Instagram account.

Italy’s Arianna Fontana won a dramatic final, in which Britain’s Elise Christie fell after being clipped by Yara van Kerkhof with the Dutchwoman taking silver.

Christie, who regained her feet to finish fourth in Tuesday’s final, was the target of similar online treatment at Sochi 2014 after she collided with South Korean skater Park Seung-hi.

IOC spokesman Mark Adams said: “None of us can control social media and the public has the right to say what they want but we would ask anyone to respect the athletes and support their work.”

Canada’s Olympic Committee said in a statement team members’ safety was a top priority, adding: “We are working closely with Speed Skating Canada, our security personnel and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.”

Short-track speed skating is the host nation’s favorite winter sport, with South Korea having won 43 their 55 Winter Olympic medals in it.

(Source: BBC)

Higuain slams ‘armchair’ fans after Tottenham draw

Gonzalo Higuain has hit out at “armchair” fans following Juventus’ 2-2 Champions League draw with Tottenham on Tuesday.

The Argentina striker scored twice in the opening nine minutes of the meeting in Turin to put his side in a commanding position in the last-16 tie.

However, Higuain missed a good chance on the break before Harry Kane pulled a goal back, and then smashed his second penalty of the match off the crossbar with seconds left at the end of the first half.

Christian Eriksen’s free-kick completed Spurs’ comeback and gave them a slight advantage heading into the second leg, prompting a number of Juve fans to make their frustration plain after the final whistle.

Higuain has responded to that criticism with a pointed Instagram post, writing: “Hello everyone. How easy it is to talk after a game from an armchair at home.

“Until the 2-0, everything was perfect, after the 2-2 every opinion changed.

“It doesn’t interest us and we’re going to London to go through. A hug to all those who want the best for Juventus.”

Higuain has scored 20 goals in all competitions this season, but his missed chances at the Allianz Stadium led to more criticism of his performances in key games for club and country.

Argentina team-mate Lucas Biglia says the 30-year-old can be affected by negative comments made about his form.

“Higuain was very influenced by destructive criticism, not purely by football,” Biglia told Fox Sports about the forward, who has failed to earn a spot in the national team since Jorge Sampaoli took charge.

“I hope he can get a new chance.”

(Source: Goal)

Japan win Ice Hockey game but unified Korea enjoy special moment

Japan carried the day on Wednesday when the long-time national rivalry with North Asian neighbors North and South Korea spilled on to Olympic ice, beating Korea’s unified women’s ice hockey team 4-1 in a game of firsts for both teams.

For the Japanese, it marked their first Olympic win in women’s ice hockey. The Koreans, meanwhile, found the back of the net for the first time to send the arena wild.

Randi Heesoo Griffin took a pass from Park Yoonjung and fought her way up the right wing before sending the puck toward Japan goaltender Akane Konishi and watching it dribble between her pads.

“I’m definitely not a hero,” said Griffin, one of half a dozen North American players with Korean heritage in the team. “It was a pretty crappy goal that took a couple bounces and went into the net.”

When Korea finally scored almost exactly halfway through the game, the crowd erupted with a roar and waved thousands of white and blue unification flags.

“It was so loud after Randi scored, we couldn’t even hear each other talk on the bench,” Korea coach Sarah Murray said.

“We kind of gave each other a hug and then got refocused, ready for the next shift.”

It was easily the most evenly matched game the two teams have played, especially Korea who had been outscored by 8-0 margins in both previous games.

Japan opened the scoring a little over a minute into the game when Hanae Kubo one-timed a pass in front of the net past Korean goalie Shin So Jung.

AShoko Ono scored on the powerplay, knocking home a rebound on a shot from Shiori Koike, Japan’s Koike provided an insurance goal late in the third period and Rui Ukita put away an empty netter with about a minute left.

“It is very special to win against Korea, and I feel really great, especially considering the fact that we came here as an away team and we still won,” Japanese captain Chihō Osawa said.



More politics

The event was rife with political and cultural overtones, with fans waving flags depicting a unified Korea, some showing the disputed Japanese islands of Dokdo. Tensions have long simmered between the two countries following Japan’s colonization of the Korean peninsula between 1910 and 1945.

Japanese fans started chants of “Let’s go Japan”, only to be met with Korean chants of “You are doing great Korea” and “Let’s win Korea”.

”There’s a lot of history between our na-

tions, but this is sports. People have all been very friendly toward me. Let’s all just enjoy the game,” said Japanese spectator Osamu Funatsu, 46.

The Korean women’s team have become a showcase at the Olympics since it was decided to include 12 players from the North on the roster.

“It’s too bad that the joint team didn’t have much time to practice together, but the idea itself I thought was good,” said Ra Jong-tae, a South Korean public sector official from Sejong City.

North Korea’s cheerleading squad was on hand for a third straight game, scattered in groups of several dozen around the arena and clad in red tracksuits.

At the end, fans showered the ice with soft toys as the Korean players bowed to their coaches.

The game marked the end of the road for both teams’ quests for an Olympic gold medal. The two now proceed to the classification round, playing against losers of the quarter- final games.

(Source: Reuters)

Sky pay £3.6 billion to win bulk of new Premier League rights



Rupert Murdoch’s Sky will pay £3.58 billion to show 128 Premier League matches for three seasons from 2019/20, in a deal that brings to an end rampant inflation in the value of the domestic rights for English top-flight soccer.

Rival BT said it had agreed to pay £885 million pounds to show 32 games a season for three years, after five of seven packages were auctioned on Tuesday.

In total, the £4.46 billion the two companies agreed to pay for 160 games a season for three years is below the record £5.14 billion raised in 2015, albeit with two small packages of 40 games remaining to be sold.

Sky said its disciplined approach to the auction had paid off, with it spending 16% less per game than in its current package.

The Premier League, however, said it was “extremely pleased” that BT and Sky continued to view its matches featuring the likes of Manchester United, Liverpool and Chelsea as an important part of their offering.

“To have achieved this investment with two packages of live rights remaining to sell is an outcome that is testament to the excellent football competition delivered by the clubs,” said Executive Chairman Richard Scudamore.

Sky said its four packages, which include slots on Sunday, Monday, and Friday as well as for the first time Saturday evening matches, cost £9.3 million a game.

BT, which had been paying considerably less than Sky per game, will pay £9.2 million a match for the one package it has secured so far.

Sky’s UK chief executive Stephen van Rooyen said the broadcaster’s disciplined approach to the auction had paid off, leaving it with the flexibility to invest in more entertainment and other content.

“Not only do we remain the home of Premier League football but also the home of top quality drama, entertainment, comedy and other sports,” he said.

(Source: Eurosport)

Man City won’t ease up against Basel, says Kompany



Manchester City will not take their foot off the gas against Basel despite winning the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie 4-0 in Switzerland on Tuesday, according to club captain Vincent Kompany.

Pep Guardiola’s City slickers produced a superb performance with two goals by Ilkay Gundogan and one each for Bernardo Silva and Sergio Aguero making the second leg a formality.

But defender Kompany says the second leg will be all about making a statement for the rounds ahead as they look to win the competition for the first time having reached the semi-finals two years ago.

“In these kinds of situations, in my opinion, if we have this game at the Etihad and it’s a 3-2 or a 2-2 draw, that won’t give us a good feeling going into the next round,” he said.

“We have shown that we were the better team tonight and only for a lack of motivation and effort could we be not

that team again at the Etihad and that’s not permitted.”

City are in the enviable position of being 16 points ahead in the Premier League and virtually assured of a place in the quarter-finals of the Champions League.

Yet Guardiola is refusing to look too far ahead.

“My experience in the Champions League last 16 is it is only over after the second game,” he said.

“Of course, we will be focused against Basel at the Etihad, but with Arsenal and Chelsea to play (in the Premier League) it’s important to be focused there, too.

“If we are able to go to the quarter-finals, that’s better than last season. We are still in February. In the Premier League we are in an amazing position, 16 points in front.

“But nothing is won yet. Like we said in the beginning, game by game. We try to arrive focused and win the games.”

(Source: Mirror)

Snowboarding: White delivers again to win third halfpipe gold

American Shaun White cemented his legacy as the most successful snowboarder of all time as he delivered a stunning routine under massive pressure on the final run of a gripping halfpipe final on Wednesday to win his third Winter Olympic gold and a landmark 100th for his country.

White needed a big performance to overhaul Japan’s Ayumu Hirano and duly delivered with a spectacular display to earn a score of 97.75. His victory means the United States have won all four snowboarding gold medals awarded at the Games.

White, 31, triumphed in 2006 and 2010 and after a long wait for his score on Wednesday he roared with emotion, punching the air as his superstar status - briefly undermined when he failed in Sochi four years ago - was set in stone.

“Man, that was awful and amazing at the same time,” White said of the long wait for his score. “I knew I did a great ride and I was proud of that and I could walk away with my head high, but when they announced my score and I’d won, it crippled me.”

Nineteen-year-old Hirano, who edged into first place after his second run and then posted 95.25 on his third, could not hide his disappointment as he trudged away from the finish area having matched his silver from Sochi 2014.



Australian Scotty James, the 23-year-old world champion, took bronze.

It was an emotional day for White, who as the “old man of the sport” was being questioned, with some observers

feeling his marks benefited from his reputation.

Nobody can question the American’s dedication, however, as he fought back from a crash in October that left him with 62 stitches in his face.

“I was so overwhelmed with happiness, I’ve been through so much to get here. I had this crazy injury in New Zealand where I busted my face open,” he said.

“I actually did the same trick that injured me here in the halfpipe today. So there were a lot of obstacles to overcome and now it’s all worth it.

“Honestly it’s one of the most challenging runs I’ve ever done. I didn’t even link the combination, the 14 to 14 (back-to-back 1440s) until I got here, today, this morning. So, honestly, I’m just so happy with my performance. I’m proud of the other riders for pushing me this whole time.”

James, who fell on his final routine, said: “It could have gone either way between first and second. If you look back at some details, I mean it would be interesting to see.

“He (White) just comes out and he knows these moments and he just delivers. I know he’s been working hard, so credit to him for being able to put it together today.”

(Source: Reuters)

Iran know rivals at Freestyle World Cup

S P O R T S **d e s k** Iran freestyle team discovered their opponents at the upcoming Men's Freestyle World Cup in the United States in Iowa City, Iowa.

Iran have been drawn with the U.S., Japan and Georgia in Group A in the dual-meet based event.

The United States freestyle team, who won their first team gold in 22 years at the 2017 Wrestling World Championships, will lead a loaded Group A into the 2018 World Cup in Iowa City, Iowa.

Group B consists of Russia, Kazakhstan, Cuba and Azerbaijan, unitedworldwrestling.org wrote.

Team USA has hosted the event four of the last five years, but hasn't won since 2003. Iran, who hosted the event in 2017, is the defending champion and has won six straight World Cups.

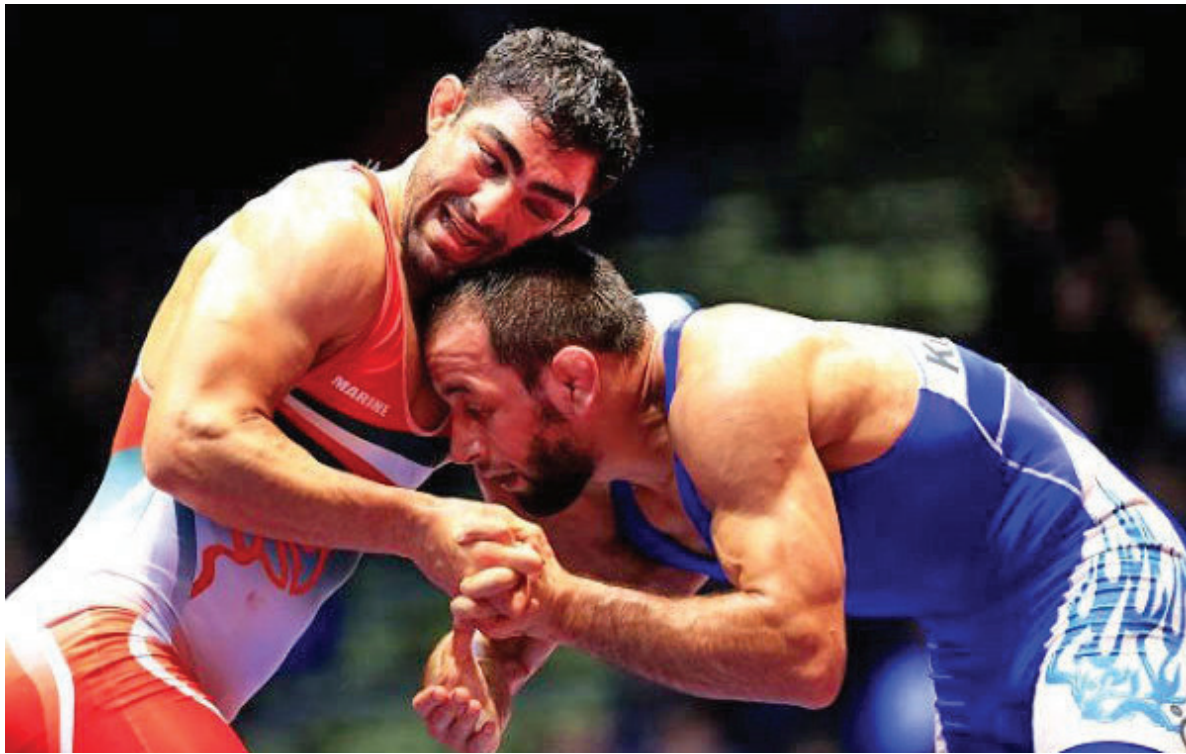
The United States will bring all their top wrestlers to Iowa City including Olympic champion and two-time defending world champion Kyle SNYDER (97kg), five-time world title hold Jordan BURROUGHS (74kg) and recent Ivan Yarygin winner David TAYLOR (86kg).

Despite the draw, Iran Wrestling Federation announced it will not send the team to the competition.

The former Soviet Union has the most World Cup team titles with 15 team, followed by the United States with 13 and Iran with 8.

Russia has won five titles since 1998 and six overall. Azerbaijan captured titles in 2004 and 2009, while Cuba took gold in 2005 in Uzbekistan.

The Freestyle World Cup will be hosted April 7-8 at Carver-Hawkeye Arena in Iowa City, Iowa.



Saman Ghoddos extends with Östersund

S P O R T S **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Iranian international striker Saman Ghoddos has signed a two-year extension to remain in Swedish top flight team Östersund for another two years until 2020.

"I really like everyone knows about it. I will continue my adventure here," Ghoddos told Östersund's website.

"I have to perform even better in the future. There will be a better bid than it has been so far in my time in Östersund. Right now, I'm focusing on making a great season here," he added.

La Liga team Celta Vigo has been reportedly linked with Iranian international striker Saman Ghoddos.

The 24-year-old was also linked with a move to English

teams Wolves, QPR and Fulham.

Ghoddos has been OFK's standout player in the Europa League this season.

On Thursday, Östersund will host Arsenal in the Europa League round of 32 first-leg.

"I hope our fans support us as they always have done it. We will try our best to get a good result against Arsenal," said Ghoddos.

Östersund coach Daniel Kindberg is pleased that Ghoddos is staying in their team.

"Ghoddos has already shown that he plays at the highest European level. Now, he can continue to develop with us," says Kindberg.

Mehran Shahintab appointed Iran basketball coach

S P O R T S **d e s k** Mehran Shahintab has been named as new head coach of Iran national basketball team on Wednesday.

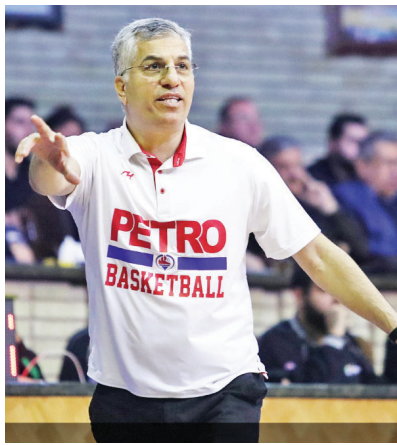
The 51-year-old coach replaced Mehran Hatami, who was in charge of Team Melli from last year.

Shahintab was assistant of German coach Dirk Bauermann who cancelled his contract with the Asian giant in January 2017.

Shahintab led Petrochimi Bandar Imam to third place in Iranian Basketball Super League (IBSL) Finals on Tuesday.

He is former player of Iran national team and as a coach has led Saba Battery BC to Asian championship at the 19th Asian Clubs Basketball Championships in Kuwait in 2014.

Shahintab has invited 15 players for the



match against Kazakhstan in the Asian Qualifiers for FIBA Basketball World Cup 2019, slated for Feb. 22.

Larestan to represent Iran at West Asian Women's Handball Championship

S P O R T S **d e s k** **TEHRAN** — Larestan handball team will participate at the second edition of the West Asian Women's Handball Championship.

The round-robin competition will be held in Amman, Jordan from Feb. 15 to 21.

The Iranian team will open the campaign with a match against Iran on Thursday.

The 2018 West Asian Women's Handball Championship is the second edition of the championship held under the aegis of the Asian Handball Federation.

The championship will be hosted by the Jordan Handball Federation at Princess Sumaya Hall, Amman (Jordan) from 15 to 21 February 2018.

The competition was previously awarded to Bahrain and scheduled to take place in December 2017 but



due to unavoidable circumstances the championship was postponed and then awarded to the Jordan.

Alireza Jahanbakhsh: The Iranian breaking new ground in Europe

Throughout history, Iranian sports was all body-building and freestyle wrestling. Persian kids bragged about flesh. Some didn't, however. Today, football has taken over. Alireza Jahanbakhsh, the torch-bearer for football in Iran.

Iranian football is at its highest point ever. Although they've fallen considerably short on the continent, global recognition seems a better motivation. Team Melli was among the earliest birds to build a nest in Russia, no doubt foes will be scared of how they pulled through. Played 18, lost none; a fantastic record. Cadres lower, they're equally as dominating.

As a unit, Carlos Queiroz's men are formidable. Individually, however, they are somewhere around English third-tier. Bereft of big names. Bulk shuttles home and neighboring nations to make a living. While few who break that circle are lost in obscure leagues. Skipper Ashkan Dejagah is picking pieces left in his career at Nottingham Forest. But Jahanbakhsh is proving an exception to the rule while out in the Netherlands.

Like most of his compatriots, Jahanbakhsh's charity began at home with local side, Damash Gilan in 2008. Three years later, he was trawled by affiliate team, Gilan. Two seasons was enough for European scouts to start cowering before him.

Ten goals in 42 appearances, along with a number of eye-catching performances for his country's youth teams,



including five goals in four games in the qualification for the 2012 AFC Under-19 Championships, particularly interested N.E.C. He was promptly signed in 2013; Iran's third export to the Netherlands.

While the club struggled on the pitch, ultimately relegated at season's end, Jahanbakhsh thrived, scoring six times and providing five assists in 33 matches. Playing in the second-tier only hastened his development as he helped N.E.C. return swiftly, doubling his proficiency at the final third. Holland's top sides were on red-alert.

A five-year deal with AZ Alkmaar followed. There, he has

become the Eredivisie's most exciting creative midfielder. Crafting goals for pleasure while burying them if need be. So much pace to burn on the flanks, Jahanbakhsh is far from a one-trick-pony flanker. With poise aplenty, he has great game awareness and knows what to do in the right moments. For a player who only stands at 5'9, his aerial ability is surprisingly strong, making him a weapon all over the park.

It took a while for these attributes to spring forth in Alkmaar, though. But when it did, it came pumping like adrenaline. Last season, he notched 11 goals as AZ finished sixth and reached the Cup final. For his telling contributions, Jahanbakhsh was named the division's best winger. A first from Persia.

This season, however, is proving more productive. He's surpassed last season's tally already and more influential in attack with eight assists. Just Hirving Lozano and Steven Berghuis have contributed more to their respective teams after 23 matches. Alongside both, the 24-year-old is an early favorite for Player of the Year. For obvious reasons, Alkmaar will be praying he doesn't. Just one of the last 16 recipients stayed put at their clubs.

That will be inevitable should Jahanbakhsh maintain his fine form until the season's end, even worse if he carries it further to Russia.

(Source: *Itsroundanditswhite.co.uk*)

Di Maria open to Barcelona move, Real Madrid connection 'over'

Paris Saint-Germain's Angel Di Maria said that he would have no problem playing for Barcelona if the opportunity presents itself despite having already played for Real Madrid in the past.

The Argentina international was at the Santiago Bernabeu from 2010 to 2014 and won the 2013-14 Champions League in his final season.

Speaking with So Foot ahead of the first leg of PSG's Champions League round-of-16 tie with Madrid, Di Maria admitted that the idea of playing for their rivals does not pose a problem.

The 30-year-old added that the only club he will not sign for is formative club Rosario Central's bitter rivals Newell's

Old Boys.

"My relationship with Real is over," Di Maria said. "I completed my cycle there a long time ago.

"Honestly, I would have no problem playing for Barca -- the contrary, in fact. The only club that I will never sign for is Newell's because I am a Central fan." Lionel Messi, the Barca star and Di Maria's Argentina teammate, has spoken in the past of his desire to play for Newell's before he finishes his career.

Di Maria harbours the same sort of ambition but longs for a Central return instead, which would make the pair rivals if their paths were to cross there.

"I want to play for Central because I

love the club," Di Maria said. "I was raised there and taught football there. Central is where it all began for me.

"Leo can do what he wants but in Rosario, football evokes such passion and I want to feel that again."

Di Maria also said it was upsetting to receive a letter from Madrid on the day of the 2014 World Cup final that informed him that his club would take no responsibility for any injuries he sustained if he played.

The winger had picked up an injury in the quarterfinal against Belgium and missed the semifinal against the Netherlands. Di Maria did not appear in the final and the episode pushed him toward a

move to Manchester United that summer.

"[The letter] was difficult to read and the I tore it up," Di Maria said. "The letter stated that the Argentina national team were to take responsibility for me in case anything happened to me in the event that I featured in the final.

"Right then, I started to look for a new club. I do not need to remember this letter to be motivated to play against Real, though. Playing against Real is already motivation in itself."

Despite his superb form in 2018, Di Maria is not certain to be part of Unai Emery's starting XI for the game at the Bernabeu on Wednesday.

(Source: *ESPN*)

Iran Football Federation parts company with Marco Octavio

TASNIM — Football Federation Islamic Republic of Iran (FFIRI) has parted company with Brazilian beach soccer coach Marco Octavio.

Marco Octavio had been appointed as Team Melli coach for the fourth time in July 2017 but he leaves the Iranian team ahead of Persian Beach Soccer Cup due to personal problems.

Team Melli came first under tutelage of Octavio's assistant Abbas Hashempour after beating Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Spain.

The Iranian media reported that the Brazilian coach has traveled to Brazil without FFIRI's permission.

Faghani to officiate Suwon Bluewings, Shanghai Shenhua match in ACL

TASNIM — Iranian international referee Alireza Faghani will take the whistle the match between Suwon Bluewings from South Korea and China's Shanghai Shenhua in Group H of the AFC Champions League.

The match has been scheduled for March 7 at the Suwon World Cup Stadium, in Suwon, South Korea.

Faghani will be assisted by his countrymen Reza Sokhandan and Mohammadreza Mansouri.

The fourth official will be a referee from the Philippines. Alireza Faghani is an Iranian football referee who has been on the international list since 2008.

He has refereed important matches such as the 2014 AFC Champions League Final, 2015 AFC Asian Cup Final, 2015 FIFA Club World Cup Final, and the 2016 Olympic football final match.

Iran beat Syria in FIBA Asia U18 WABA qualifier

Press TV — The Iran men's national under-17 basketball team have recorded their third victory at the Fédération Internationale de Basket-ball (FIBA) Asia U18 West Asian Basketball Association (WABA) qualifier 2018 in Jordan, after trouncing Syria in the continental tournament.

The Iranian team clinched a 106-47 victory over the Syrian squad at Prince Hamza Arena in the Jordanian capital city of Amman.

The Iranian outfit defeated Lebanon 85-46 in their opening match on Sunday.

The Iranian basketball players maintained their composure and propulsion in the second fixture, and took it by 109 points to 50 the following day.

Iran's national men's basketball team are slated to face Jordan on Thursday.

The FIBA Asia U18 WABA qualifier 2018 started in Amman, Jordan, on February 11, and will run through February 15, 2018.

The tournament has brought together teams from the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Referee who booked Balotelli after alleged racism criticised

The referee who booked Mario Balotelli for making a gesture toward Dijon fans after being subjected monkey chants is "doubly guilty" in the alleged racist abuse, a French body defending black rights has claimed.

The Representative Council of Black Associations (CRAN) has made a complaint to police over the actions of referee Nicolas Rainville, who showed Balotelli the yellow card during Nice's Ligue 1 defeat at the weekend.

Balotelli had reportedly told Rainville he had reacted after he had been the target of racism from the home fans.

"The footballer suffered twice: racist chants and the punishment that followed," a CRAN press release stated. "The CRAN would like to remind everyone that racism is a crime, laid down in the penal code. The referee who does nothing in the face of racism is complicit.

"When he punishes the victim, he is doubly guilty. He deserves to be hauled before the courts and receive an exemplary punishment."

The French Football League (LFP) has said its Disciplinary Commission will look into the matter when it sits for the first time since the incident on Thursday.

CRAN, however, wants the French government to act.

"The world is upside down," CRAN president Louis-Georges Tin said. "Once again, it's the victims who are punished. We ask the Minister for Sport to intervene in this matter with all the necessary severity."

Nice president Jean-Pierre Rivere has assured Balotelli of the club's full support, stating: "We are all convinced of the same thing, racism has no place in a football stadium, nor anywhere else."

(Source: *Soccernet*)

Hearts sorry after racism allegations

Hearts will apologize to former striker Isma Goncalves and have promised to ban and report to police any fans found guilty of racially abusing the striker.

The 26-year-old left Hearts last month after clinching a £350,000 switch to Uzbekistan outfit Pakhtakor Tashkent.

Goncalves now claims the driving factor behind the move was the alleged racially-motivated taunts aimed at him by a minority of the Jambos support during his 12-month stay at the capital club.

The former St Mirren forward told the Edinburgh Evening News: "I didn't want to leave Hearts at first, but the problem was that my family were no longer coming to the games."

(Source: *Sky Sports*)

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Theater complex names gallery after graphic designer Qobad Shiva



A poster for the inauguration of Qobad Shiva Gallery at the Tehran Theater Complex

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Tehran Theater Complex will open a new gallery named after veteran graphic designer Qobad Shiva today.

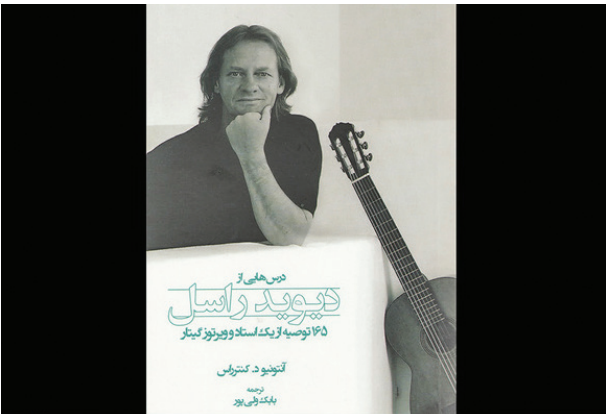
The gallery is displaying a collection of works by the master and several other artists to celebrate the 77th birthday of Shiva, the complex announced on Wednesday.

Shiva is a graduate of painting from the University of Tehran. He has also studied graphic design in New York.

The graphic designer is a member of the Society of Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) and is the founder of the Qobad Shiva Art and Cultural Institute.

The Tehran Theater Complex is located in the Mahallati neighborhood, near the Khavaran Cultural Center.

Lessons from master guitarist David Russell published in Persian



Front cover of the Persian version of “The Technique of David Russell: 165 Pieces of Advice from a Master Guitarist”

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — “The Technique of David Russell: 165 Pieces of Advice from a Master Guitarist” by Antonio de Contreras has been published in Persian in Tehran.

The book has been translated into Persian by music teacher Babak Valipur, announced the publisher, Nakisa.

“The book is like a report from several master classes by David Russell, a consistent, in-depth report from a guitarist,” Valipur wrote in an introduction to the book.

Born in Glasgow, Russell is one of the most distinguished and accomplished classical guitarists in the world. He won a Grammy Award for best instrumental soloist in classical music for his album “Aire Latino” in 2005.

“From 1992 to 1998, David Russell was given an annual course in Seville,” wrote CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, the publisher of the original book that was published in English.

“His last visit encouraged us to look back over the notes we have been accumulating since his first visit and the idea emerged of presenting a summary of the most outstanding ideas. Our aim is to use them as a basis for reflection and as the beginning of a deeper analysis of the technique of this famous concert performer.”

“Damascus Time”, “Lost Strait” to screen at European Film Market

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Owj Arts and Media Organization, a Tehran-based institution producing revolutionary works in art and cinema, announced on Wednesday that its latest productions, “The Lost Strait” and “Damascus Time”, will be screened at the European Film Market (EFM) of the 68th Berlin International Film Festival on Friday.

“The Lost Strait” by Bahram Tavakkoli 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.

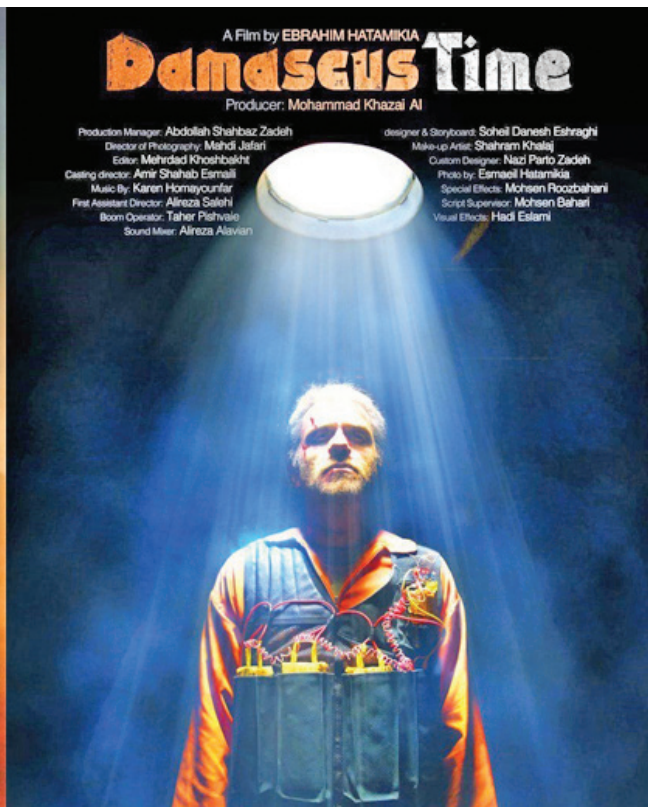
Ebrahim Hatamikia’s Daesh drama “Damascus Time” tells the story of an Iranian pilot and his son as copilot who are seized by the Daesh forces in Syria when they are in the country to deliver a cargo of humanitarian relief supplies to people in a war-torn region.

Both movies were acclaimed last week at the 36th Fajr Film Festival, Iran’s major cinema event.

Hatamikia and Tavakkoli shared the award for best director at the festival.

In addition, “The Lost Strait” received awards in six other categories including best film. It also earned the awards for best makeup artist, best sound engineer and best practical special effects supervisor.

The film also won the best composer award and the award for best sound effects engineer.



This combination photo shows the posters for “The Lost Strait” and “Damascus Time”.

“The Elephant King” producer laments brush off from Fajr festival

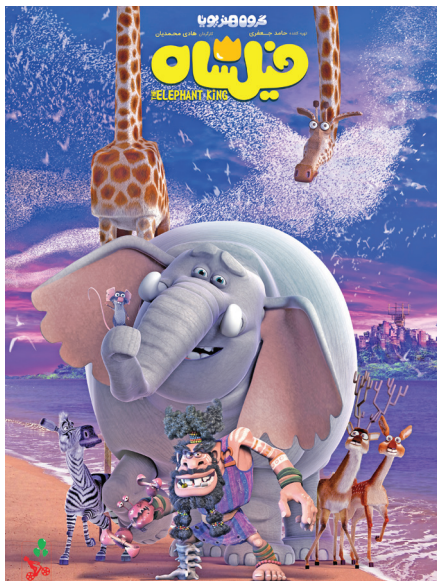
A R T **TEHRAN** — The Honar Pooya Group, the producer of director Hadi Mohammadian’s animated movie “The Elephant King”, has criticized the organizers of the 36th Fajr Film Festival for their dismissal of the movie.

The complaint was made in a statement published on Tuesday after the movie got a brush off from the festival jury as they ignored it in their assessment.

“This is one of the most bizarre incidents of the 36-year-long history of the Fajr Film Festival that a film was admitted into the official competition, however, the jury decided not to judge it,” the statement read.

The company also expressed its concern that the disregard for “The Elephant King” continues in the screening of the movie and asked the cultural officials to put it the Noruz screening schedule.

“The film is able to draw an audience into the theaters that other film would not,” the statement read.



A poster for “The Elephant King”

Tehran exhibit to hang drawings of cultural elites

A R T **TEHRAN** — An exhibition of drawings featuring Iranian cultural elites will open at the art gallery of the Behnam Daheshpur Charity Organization in Tehran today.

Eighteen drawings by Saeideh Vasheqani will be showcased at the two-day exhibit.

“I mean to put the spotlight on the position and value of great Iranian poets, writers and actors who have turned into great personalities through their works,” Vasheqani said in a press release published

by the organization.

“I started the project two years ago and began with the image of legendary wrestler Gholamreza Takhti, then I thought I would add the figure of actor Fardin. I liked the work and when I showed the completed drawing to others, they liked it as well,” she added.

“Most of the figures are those whom I personally like, both themselves and their works,” she added.

The gallery is located at 13 Marmari Alley, off Masjedi Alley, Jabarian St. in the Farmanieh neighborhood.



A poster for exhibition of Iranian elites by Saeideh Vasheqani

Weinstein Co deal should include more funds for victims: New York AG

NEW YORK (Reuters) — New York’s attorney general said on Monday a deal for the Weinstein Company should include a bigger compensation fund for victims of ex-chairman Harvey Weinstein, speaking a day after the state’s lawsuit scuttled a deal.

The film and TV studio was close to inking a deal on Sunday to sell itself for more than \$500 million to an investor group led by Maria Contreras-Sweet, a former official in President Barack Obama’s administration, when New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman filed a civil rights lawsuit against the company. People familiar with the matter said the lawsuit put sale negotiations on hold.

Schneiderman said he wants the “facts of our complaint factored into whatever deal is structured going forward.” The lawsuit does not block the sale but creates liabilities that make it difficult to finalize. A sale to Contreras-Sweet is now unlikely to advance, sources told Reuters.

The Weinstein Company did not immediately return a request for comment. A representative for Contreras-Sweet declined to comment.

The Weinstein Company has been seeking a deal that would spare it from bankruptcy after more than 70 women accused Harvey Weinstein, once one of Hollywood’s most influential men, of sexual misconduct including rape. Weinstein denies having non-consensual sex with anyone.

Schneiderman said at a press conference on Monday



Harvey Weinstein, Co-Chairman of the Weinstein Company, kicks off the Film Finance Circle conference with an informal discussion at the inaugural Middle East International Film Festival in Abu Dhabi, October 15, 2007. (Reuters/Steve Crisp)

that he wanted to ensure a dedicated victim’s compensation fund that would not be gobbled up by legal fees and other expenses. Contreras-Sweet had proposed about \$30 million for victims in her initial bid made late last year, Reuters reported.

A sale should also not reward executives including Chief Operating Officer David Glasser, who supervised the human

resources department and was in charge of handling dozens of complaints, Schneiderman said. Contreras-Sweet’s offer called for Glasser to be the CEO of the new company, Schneiderman said.

The company never launched an investigation into any of the complaints, he said. The lawsuit says that the Weinstein Company’s board and executives failed to take action after receiving complaints about harassment and discrimination from employees.

“The Weinstein Company repeatedly broke the law,” Schneiderman said on Monday. “It is clear to us that the company’s management was complicit. Not only did they fail to stop it, they enabled it and covered it up.”

Other bidders for The Weinstein Company have included Lions Gate Entertainment Corp (LGFa.N) and production company Killer Content Inc. Killer Content said in January that bankruptcy may be the best option for The Weinstein Company.

The New York Times first reported in October on multiple allegations of sexual misconduct by Weinstein. Reuters has not been able to independently confirm the allegations.

Since then, similar allegations have been leveled against many powerful men in business, politics and entertainment, and the #MeToo movement has emerged of victims using social media to share their stories of harassment and abuse.

Marvel takes New York fashionistas to Black Panther’s Wakanda

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Marvel Studios transported New York fashionistas to the mythical African nation of Wakanda where its highly anticipated superhero movie “Black Panther” takes place.

Under a blue sky and surrounded by greenery, designers who were inspired by the film’s characters and themes showcased their work as part of “Welcome to Wakanda,” an event meant to celebrate the film’s fierce African flair.

While Wakanda may be fictional, the film’s costume designer Ruth E. Carter drew from

real people and places, traveling across Africa to study the patterns, bead work and silhouettes of various tribes and peoples.

“We took elements of Africa and we were inspired by it and we designed it in a futuristic way,” Carter said. “When it all came down, it was all about Wakanda and a futuristic world - a better world.”

The New York Fashion Week presentation is the first of its kind for Walt Disney Co, which owns Marvel. It has been involved in high-end collaborations before, but it’s the first time it

has put on a fashion event of this scale ahead of a Marvel movie. Winston Duke, who plays villain M’Baku in the Ryan Coogler-directed movie, spoke about the importance of seeing black fashion and culture portrayed in film.

“It connects you to your family, it connects you to your roots,” Duke said. “And knowing that your sense of fashion and the culture it’s connected to is valid really makes it a stronger thing for you.”

Designers presented their one-of-a-kind ensembles meant to pay homage to the film,

which features a predominantly black cast including Michael B. Jordan, Lupita Nyong’o and Angela Bassett.

Following the event, the looks will be auctioned off in support of Save the Children, an international humanitarian organization.

New York-based designer LaQuan Smith was one of the designers chosen to present an ensemble for the collection. The look featured trendy Matrix-style sunglasses and a black sequined jumpsuit finished off with a floor-length trench coat.