



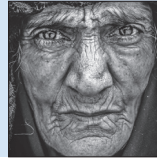
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Oil production preserving, boosting projects worth \$6b specified

ECONOMY **TEHRAN**— Iranian Oil Ministry has specified 30 projects worth \$6 billion for preserving and boosting oil production in the country, according to an oil official. Addressing the 2nd Iran International Exploration and Production Congress and Exhibition (Iran E&P 2018) in Tehran, Habibollah Bitaraf, the deputy oil minister for engineering, research and technology, said these projects will be handed over to the qualified companies based on \$50

million-\$300 million deals. Referring to the plan for supporting domestic production, the official said manufacturing of 10 groups of goods inside the country is being followed up and related contracts will be signed. Emphasizing the necessity of boosting quality of domestically-manufactured products, Bitaraf stated that Iranian manufacturers should promote the quality of their goods because the foreign competitors offer the same product with some lower prices.

Tehran confirms Zarif, Kerry met in Munich

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Tehran has confirmed that the Iranian foreign minister and his former American counterpart met during the Munich Security Conference on February 18. Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Saturday said Mohammad Javad Zarif and John Kerry's meeting was held "within the framework to en-

sure national interests". The New Yorker on Friday first reported the private meeting. It said "Kerry quietly urged the Iranians not to abandon the [nuclear] deal or violate its terms, whatever the Trump Administration does." Zarif and Kerry were leaders of the negotiating teams of Iran and the U.S. respectively.

Turkish warplanes hit pro-Syrian govt forces in Afrin, kill 36

Turkish warplanes have killed at least 36 pro-Syrian government forces in their airstrikes on Syria's northwestern Kurdish region of Afrin, a monitoring group affiliated to Syria's foreign-based opposition groups says. The Saturday attack was the third assault by Turkish jets against pro-government forces in Afrin over the past two days, the so-called Syrian Observatory for

Human Rights (SOHR) said. The pro-Syrian government forces entered Afrin last week to repel a Turkish offensive in Afrin against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militant group. This is the first time that Syrian government forces are deployed in the region since 2012 when the YPG held the area under its control. **→13**

Modern science is compatible with Islamic principles: professor

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Charles Taliaferro, a professor of philosophy at St. Olaf College in the U.S., believes that modern science is in agreement with Islamic principles. In an interview with the Tehran Times recently, Professor Taliaferro says: "The only problem in terms of epistemology and methodology is if one adopted what some today call scientism, the view that only science can provide reliable evidence for our beliefs about reality." Following is the text of the interview with Professor Taliaferro: Q: Is religious science possible or impossible? Basically, what are the confrontation and non-confrontation fields between religion and science? What about those sciences like physics

or biology, can they be put together with theology, social sciences or humanities in one group? A: The relationship of science and religion has historically and today been fluid. In the golden age of Islam from the 8th to the 13th century religion and science flourished together, and one can argue that in the modern age religion has been a positive source for the development of science, especially in the applied science of medicine. In the West, all the early modern scientists from Kepler to Newton were religious people. There was little conflict between science and religion except for the debate on the position of earth in our solar system, until the development of evolutionary biology with Darwin. Evolution per se was seen by some, such as Alfred Russell Wallace, the co-founder of evolutionary biology with Darwin, as how God created life, but in Darwin's later work nature was deemed to lack

all marks of purposive direction. And physics has developed in the modern era that some have taken to support the view that the cosmos is without meaning or purpose. The later is, in a sense, a peculiar claim as physics in the modern era has developed explicitly to only concern itself with the physical world in the absence of mind, values, purpose. In other words, even Newton, a devout believer in God, only specified that material bodies were attracted to each other in terms of force. As a person, I am sure he did not doubt that human bodies are attracted together by love, but as a scientist he bracketed these matters. In my view, nothing found in physics or biology or the social sciences rules out a religious worldview, and theology can draw on all sorts of recourses from the physical and social sciences, from Big Bang cosmology to the study of communal identities. **→7**

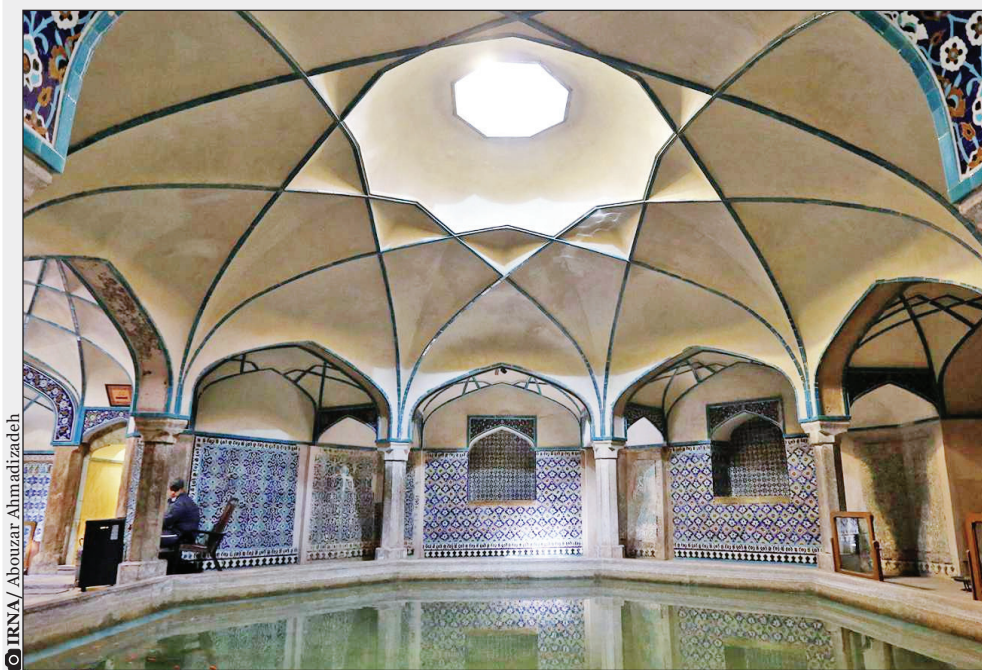
The deadliest nation on earth

By Jack Perry

ARIZONA — People around the world are shocked that the same weapon that has been used in nearly every mass murder event in the United States remains legal to purchase today after the last event in which 17 kids were shot and killed by a gunman using this weapon. This weapon is the AR-15 semiautomatic rifle. People who have encountered the United States military know that this weapon is carried by them. See, the AR-15 is the civilian version of the M-16 family of weapons from which the current military M-4 comes. Be that as it may, people should not be shocked

that this weapon remains legal to purchase in the United States. After all, the United States doles out weapons freely to regimes around the globe or terrorists trying to oust governments the United States does not like. The United States itself is awash in guns. There are roughly 300 million privately owned guns in the United States. That we know of. That doesn't count illegal guns or ones made before anyone started counting. Arms manufacturers in the United States count on both domestic and foreign sales to boost that bottom line and, indeed, it is buoyed by blood. The United States calls this "freedom". That means not just the alleged "right" to purchase this

weapon but also the "right" to use this weapon against people throughout the Middle East to allegedly defend that right. At this time, "freedom" in the United States means the use of horrifying levels of violence and excusing it when it colors outside of the lines with the blood-red crayon. That being, when a mass shooter opens fire on a school, the United States considers that "collateral damage" that goes along with the so-called right to own this weapon. Just like when the United States military blows up a school, hospital, or wedding party with its guns, that's also "collateral damage". I'm sure that brings comfort to the dead in both cases. **→7**



© IRNA / Abouzar Ahmadizadeh

A peek into atmospheric Ganjali Khan complex

Photo depicts an interior view of the historical Ganjali Khan bathhouse in Kerman, southeastern Iran, on March 2, 2018. The lavishly decorated structure is a subset of a vast complex named after a regional governor who ordered its construction in the early 17th century during the Safavid dynasty. Covering an area of 11,000 square meters, the complex also comprises a madrasa, a mosque, a caravanserai, a water reservoir and a labyrinth bazaar all centered on a large public square.



EDITORIAL
By Mohammad Ghaderi
Tehran Times editor-in-chief
@ghaderi62

Destroy your missiles then talk about ours!

These days, in an unprecedented way, the United States is rolling down the hill faster than ever towards some sort of societal collapse and the waning of its international hegemony. In reality, the White House "tenants", relying too much on behind the scene think tanks, has wrongly sought the solution in finding allies in the international arena, and not by confronting the actual problems.

To escape the apparent chaos, Washington has picked the Islamic Republic of Iran to blame for its ills. Thus, the western security services and their Arab allies in the Middle East have spared no effort to create internal division, turmoil and chaos in Iran and to criticize Iran's unrelated human rights, missile defense and alleged nuclear issues.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's actions at the Munich Security Conference last month, along with a British-drafted resolution against Tehran recently backed by U.S. Ambassador to United Nations Nikki Haley, have all aimed to demonize Iran.

At the conference, Netanyahu, with the blood of Palestinians on his hands, showed a piece of the wreckage of the Iranian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) that was shot down by Israel a month ago.

Recently, the UK drafted a UN Security Council resolution condemning Iran for violating the arms embargo on Yemen and calling for measures to address this alleged violation. U.S. demands to limit Iran's ballistic missile program are, however, an unreachable goal portraying Washington's failures in the region.

Meanwhile, Tehran has repeatedly declared that its defense capability is not up for negotiation and bargaining as it would put the country's security in a compromising position.

It is a given that the only way to reach peace and tranquility in the world is for the U.S. and its European allies to review and halt policies that have led to the bloodshed and killing of defenseless and innocent people in Palestine, Yemen, Bahrain, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and other countries.

Thus, I suggest that Washington end its long-range ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs so that the attitude of people in Iran and elsewhere towards the U.S. shifts towards trust and potential accord.



ARTICLE
By Ebrahim Fallahi
Tehran Times journalist

IP gas pipeline: A fading opportunity for Pakistan

Near 20 years after the initiation of talks over the peace gas pipeline, beginning as the Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project, and despite the fact that Iran has completed its part of the pipeline in its territory, Pakistan has fallen behind the target to take delivery of gas, initially scheduled for 2014.

Iran has repeatedly warned Pakistan about not being determined about completion of the project, and the disputes between the two countries seem to become more intense in recent years to an extent that Iran is considering taking legal actions in this regard or even the total cancellation of the high-profile, \$7-billion project over lengthy construction delays from the Pakistani side.

Whatever decision Iran makes, if it is not going through with the deal, would deprive energy-starved Pakistan of about 22 million cubic meters of gas a day it would have received from its neighbor.

Iran and Pakistan started negotiating the IP gas pipeline in 1995 and soon after a preliminary agreement was signed between the two countries. This agreement foresaw construction of a pipeline from Iran's South Pars gas field, in the southwest of the country, to Karachi in Pakistan.

Later India proposed joining the project to extend the pipeline from Pakistan into India. In February 1999, Iran and India also inked an agreement in this regard.

However India withdrew from the project in 2009, over pricing and security issues.

Three years later in September 2012, the IP gas pipeline project was announced to commence before October 2012 and be completed by December 2014.

The IP pipeline, would cover a distance of 1,900 kilometers, initially it would bring 750 million cubic feet of gas per day, which could later be enhanced to one billion cubic feet per day.

Pakistan was slated to begin Iranian gas imports in early 2015, but the country has not yet begun construction of the related pipeline. **→4**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani offers condolence to Azeri president

POLITICS TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani has offered his condolences to Azeri President Ilham Aliyev over a fatal fire in a drug abuse treatment center in Baku, IRIB news reported.

“I was deeply saddened by the news of the death of Azerbaijani citizens as a result of the fire in the Republican Drug Abuse Treatment in Baku. I extend my deepest condolences to you and the families of the victims,” Rouhani said in his letter of condolence.



Iran, Japan discuss regional, international issues

POLITICS TEHRAN — Japanese Deputy Foreign Minister Takeo Mori who had visited Tehran held talks on Saturday with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, discussing regional and international issues.

During the meeting, Zarif referred to good ties between the two countries in various fields, highlighting the growing economic cooperation between the two countries.

Bilateral ties, regional and international issues and the Iran nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), were among topics reviewed by the two officials.



Boroujerdi to attend economic forum in Russia

POLITICS TEHRAN — Head of Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Alaeddin Boroujerdi is scheduled to attend the international economic forum in Moscow on March 6-7.

Leading a delegation, Boroujerdi will attend the forum themed Future of Districts: Expansion of Cooperation in Moscow, IRNA reported.

The visit takes place upon official invitation extended by head of the Russian Duma.

The annual economic forum is to examine various topics, exchange views and experiences in developing districts, establish economic cooperation between companies, traders and investors in order to design a common plan to help resolve economic problems in those districts.



‘Majlis considering Islamic Azad University dismissals’

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Majlis Education and Research Committee will follow up on the Islamic Azad University (IAU) for dismissal of some professors as well as other issues, a committee member said on Saturday.

MP Fatemeh Saeidi said IAU chancellor Farhad Rahbar will be invited to the parliamentary committee to respond to questions regarding the recent controversies surrounding the university, ISNA reported.

On Rahbar’s possible resignation, Saeidi said as long as he is the president of the IAU, he will be held accountable.



Judiciary issues arrest warrant against Mortazavi

POLITICS TEHRAN — The Judiciary has issued a warrant for the arrest of former judge and prosecutor Saeed Mortazavi.

Mortazavi was officially sentenced on February 28 to two years in prison for his role in the deaths of inmates while in the Kahrizak detention center.

Citing judiciary officials, Mir-Majid Taheri, who represents one of the victims of the Kahrizak detention center, said on Saturday that the Mortazavi case is on the agenda of the Judiciary, Tasnim reported.

The appellate court session for Mortazavi was held on October 10 but due to his absence the session was canceled and it was postponed to November 21.



Ambassador rebuffs Australian politicians for insults

POLITICS TEHRAN — Two Australian politicians insulted Iranian immigrants on television while the Australian government has not answered to a draft of extradition law written by Iran, the Iranian ambassador to Canberra has said.

“According to the Sydney police, an Iranian couple was charged with selling crystal or ice in an immigrants camp,” said Andolhussein Vahaji, IRNA reported on Friday.

The incident was shown in a program titled “A Current Affair on 26th February 2018”. In the program, Senator Pauline Hanson claimed that Iran disagrees with extradition of criminals and Labor leader Mark Latham called them “trash”.

Iran’s defense program has nothing to do with France: Velayati

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said on Saturday that Iran’s defense program has nothing to do with any other country including France.

“Defensive preparedness is among basic rights of any nation. No country can decide for us or others. It is the Islamic Republic of Iran who should decide on the type of missile it can possess,” Velayati told reporters after a meeting with Japanese Deputy Foreign Minister Takeo Mori in Tehran.

His comments came as French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian is scheduled to visit Iran this week.

Velayati noted that the French foreign minister should avoid adopting negative position against Iran if he seeks expansion

of relations between Tehran and Paris.

He added Iran will not let interference in its affairs.

Le Drian’s trip was scheduled to take place in January 2018 but it was postponed for some reasons.

French President Emmanuel Macron said in February that the international community needs “to put Iran under surveillance over its ballistic missiles”.

“It’s indispensable for the security of the region and so we need a mechanism of sanctions and control adapted to that,” he claimed.

In remarks on Saturday, General Masoud Jazayeri, Iran’s deputy military chief, said Tehran will not negotiate on its missile program unless the West abandons its long range missiles and nuclear weapons.



No missile talks unless West gives up nuclear arms: Iranian general

POLITICS TEHRAN — Brigadier General Masoud Jazayeri, the deputy chief of the Iranian Armed Forces, says the Islamic Republic will not negotiate on its ballistic missiles until the United States and Europe give up their nuclear weapons and long-range missiles.

In remarks on Saturday, General Jazayeri denounced Washington’s anti-Iran remarks, saying the Americans’ rhetoric about restricting Iran’s missile power is only a “wishful thinking”.

“The precondition for negotiating Iran’s missiles is the destruction of the nuclear weapons and long-range missiles of America and Europe,” the top general said, ISNA reported. He said the U.S. is in a weak position in the face of Iran’s

missile capability, emphasizing that such a power could not have been achieved through talks.

Iran has repeatedly said that its missile program is only for defensive purposes. It has also refused calls for negotiations over its missile program.

Iranian officials also say the country’s missile program is not related to the 2015 nuclear deal it signed with six world powers which led to the lifting of sanctions against Tehran.

Ali Akbar Velayati, the senior foreign policy advisor to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, also told reporters on Saturday that “the Islamic Republic of Iran’s defense issue is not business of any other country”.

He added Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad

Zarif and President Hassan Rouhani share the united position that “our defense issue is not the business of foreign countries and they cannot say what kind of missile we can have.”

Velayati said Iran cannot remain “indifferent” as other countries in the region are arming themselves with sophisticated weapons.

The former foreign minister said, “Defense preparation is the basic rights of every nation and no country can decide for us or any other country.”

Foreign Minister Zarif has told the West that when Saddam Hussein was raining down missiles on Iranian cities in the 1980s no country sold a single missile to Iran to defend its civilians.

U.S. seeks to lessen Iran role in Syria: ex-diplomat

POLITICS TEHRAN — Ali Khorram, a senior analyst and former Iranian ambassador to U.S. bodies in Vienna, has said that the U.S. seeks to lessen Iran’s role in Syria.

In an interview with ISNA published on Saturday, Khorram said, “It seems that Syria has turned into a place for U.S.-Russia confrontation and the U.S. seeks to stay in Syria.”

He added, “They [the U.S.] make efforts to prevent the Bashar al-Assad government from gaining strength and also undermine Syria’s national sovereignty and territorial integrity; however, stopping Russia’s actions is another objective of them.”

Commenting on a resolution adopted by the UN Security Council demanding a 30-day truce across Syria, he said, “In fact, the U.S., Israel and Saudi Arabia coalition were trying to ask for the truce so that the terrorist groups would recover.”

He noted that the terrorist groups should leave east of Damascus and the Syrian government should promote its



sovereignty over the capital city and its suburbs so that terrorists would not be able to launch mortars at Damascus.

The UN Security Council adopted a resolution on February 24, demanding a 30-day truce across Syria.

The resolution does not cover militants from Islamic State, al-Qaeda, and the Nusra Front. Major General Mohammad Baqeri, chief of the Iranian armed forces, said on February 25 that the whole territory of Syria should be cleansed of terrorists in future months.

Trump will likely extend sanctions waivers on Iran: official

POLITICS TEHRAN — Amir Hossein Zamaninia, Iran’s deputy oil minister for international affairs, said on Saturday that U.S. President Donald Trump will likely extend sanctions waivers on Iran in May.

“I predict that Donald Trump will extend waivers on nuclear sanctions in May 2018,” he said in a conference arranged by the Oil Ministry in Tehran.

“After that,” he added, “the JCPOA [the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action] will be implemented in a better way.”

In a statement on January 12, Trump extended the waivers on sanctions; however he gave Europeans only 120 days to agree to an overhaul of the nuclear agreement and said if the text of the deal is not revised he would unilaterally withdraw the U.S. from 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 agreement on July 14, 2015.

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

Terrorists use civilians as human shield in Eastern Ghouta: Iran

Iran has criticized Western media for launching propaganda campaign against the Syrian army’s counter-terrorism operations, saying snipers stationed near designated safe passages are preventing civilians from leaving Eastern Ghouta near Damascus.

Addressing the Friday session of the UN Human Rights Commission, Iranian representative Mohsen Qanei said the brutalities of armed terrorist groups supported by some known countries against civilians over the past seven years have reached their climax, posing a serious threat to world peace and security.

Referring to close cooperation between the so called moderate groups and the terrorists belonging to Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra), the Iranian envoy said although the UN Security Council approved Resolution 2401 calling for immediate ceasefire in Syria, the terrorist groups are



continuing their attacks on residential areas in Damascus and other government-controlled regions. They even shoot

people trying to leave Eastern Ghouta, he added.

He said Iran is still of the belief that the Syria crisis is solvable through national dialogue in such a way that people’s choice can be respected, a national solidarity plan can be implemented with the support of the Syrian government and the civil society, calm and stability can return to many parts of the country and refugees can return to their homes.

The Friday emergency session of the UN Human Rights Council was held at the request of Britain to study the situation of Eastern Ghouta region, which lays on the outskirts of Damascus.

Since the beginning of the crisis in Syria, Eastern Ghouta has been under control of terrorists and because of the large number of civilians living there, the Syrian army has not managed to take control of the region.

(Source: IRNA)

IRGC says to help government counter goods smuggling

POLITICS TEHRAN — IRGC spokesman Ramazan Sharif said on Saturday that the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) would help the government to counter smuggling of goods.

Sharif said that countering smuggling would help creating jobs and boosting economy. The brigadier general also noted that Leader of the Islamic Revolution has criticized lack of determination in supporting domestic production and fighting smuggling.

“The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps is ready to solve problems in the country based on its mission and duty and has taken the critical responsibility to fight smuggling of goods in the Persian Gulf,” he explained.



Elsewhere, the IRGC official said that smuggling has negative political and cultural effects in addition to economic ones.

Experts say that every \$1b worth of smuggled goods costs 100,000 job losses.

Ambassador: Iran, Russia to continue military-technical co-op

Moscow and Tehran will continue to develop cooperation in the military-technical sphere, which is facilitated by the interaction of countries in the fight against terrorism in Syria, Iranian ambassador to Russia Mehdi Sanaee said in an interview with TASS agency.

He added that earlier the two countries also cooperated in the military-technical sphere and the supply of the S-300 missile defense system became an “important moment” in the military-defense cooperation between the two countries.

“Of course, cooperation between Russia and Iran in countering terrorism in Syria has also created a favorable basis for the development of military-technical cooperation between our countries,” Sanaee stated.

The sides cooperate in the military-tech-



nical sphere despite Western countries’ attempts to suspend it.

Iran and Russia have been supporting the government of Beshar al-Assad against militants mostly backed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, the United States and France.

Littoral states agree on Caspian legal status draft convention

The ministers of the Caspian littoral states have agreed on a draft convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a message on March 2.

“The 50th meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on drafting of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, dedicated to the implementation of the decisions made

at the meeting of foreign ministers of the Caspian states was held in Moscow,” the Foreign Ministry said.

Delegations from Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan attended the meeting.

Following the meeting, the draft Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea was agreed upon and the

texts of the draft convention were checked in Russian, Farsi and English in order to prepare it for signing as soon as possible during the forthcoming fifth Caspian summit.

The next meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group will be held in Kazakhstan.

(Source: Trend)

Iraq ‘will never allow U.S. bases on its soil’

Iraq says it will under no circumstances permit the United States to build permanent military bases on its soil, which would be a violation of its sovereignty.

“Baghdad firmly rejects the construction of U.S. military bases on its soil,” said Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim Jaafari at the end of an extended visit to Russia on Friday.

Iraq will “not stand on ceremony” when it comes to the protection of its sovereignty, he said. He said that, back in 2014, when Baghdad asked for international help in fighting the Takfiri terrorist group of Daesh, it said the potential contribution had to meet the requirements of Iraq’s sovereignty and independence.

Jaafari said Baghdad had made the matter clear that contributions to its counter-terrorism operations should not lead to the establishment of military bases or permanent foreign military presence in its territory.

“Iraq’s sovereignty is our red line,” the Iraqi foreign minister said.

He pointed to the presence of permanent U.S. military bases in “South Korea, Turkey, Japan, and many other world countries” long after the end of World War II and said the bases violated those countries’ sovereignty.

According to U.S. government data, there are about 9,000 American troops in Iraq. The U.S. Department of Defense, though,



puts the number at far lower.

In 2003, the U.S. invaded Iraq to topple the then-regime of Saddam Hussein, who the U.S. and Britain falsely claimed was in possession of weapons of mass destruction. Former U.S. President Barack Obama pulled out all U.S. combat troops from Iraq in 2011,

effectively ending the invasion and occupation of the Arab country.

But the destruction that the war had caused, including the decimation of the Iraqi security structure, allowed Daesh to emerge in 2014. In September that same year, the U.S. led a number of its allies in launching an aerial

bombardment campaign against purported Daesh targets in Iraq.

That coalition continues to be present in Iraq even as the Iraqi leadership announced the end of the war on Daesh in the country in December last year.

Last month, NATO even agreed to a U.S. demand to deploy a larger military mission to Iraq.

Earlier, on Tuesday, Jaafari told reporters in Moscow that Baghdad was thoroughly considering purchasing Russia’s surface-to-air S-400 missile defense systems.

“The issue is being studied in every detail,” he said. “All necessary decisions aimed at strengthening Iraq will be made after that.”

Late last month, the U.S. warned Iraq through State Department spokeswoman Heather Neuert of the consequences of extending military cooperation with Russia and striking deals to purchase advanced weaponry, particularly the S-400 systems.

Neuert said Washington had contacted Baghdad and many other countries to explain the significance of the Countering America’s Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) — which targets Russia, Iran, and North Korea — and possible consequences that would arise in the wake of defense agreements with Moscow.

(Source: agencies)

Saudi crown prince to visit Egypt, partner in Saudi adventures



Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is scheduled to travel to Egypt, a key partner in Saudi regional adventures whose president came to power after a coup staged with Riyadh’s blessing.

The office of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi announced in a statement on Friday that the Saudi crown prince was due in Cairo on Sunday for a three-day visit.

Bin Salman will then head to the United Kingdom on March 7 and to the United States on March 19.

Saudi Arabia and Egypt have strengthened relations since 2013, when Sisi took power following the military overthrow of Egypt’s first democratically-elected president, Mohamed Morsi.

Sisi, then the commander of the military, enjoyed Saudi support in staging the coup.

Egypt is also a key ally of Saudi Arabia in an ongoing war on Yemen and an economic and diplomatic standoff with Qatar, a fellow Arab country.

On both fronts, the Saudi-led countries have failed to achieve their objectives. The war on Yemen has so far killed more than

13,600 people and led to a humanitarian crisis in the impoverished state.

In a move seen as indicative of its obedience to the Riyadh regime, Egypt in April 2016 agreed to hand over two of its islands — the strategic Tiran and Sanafir islands in the Red Sea — to Saudi Arabia, triggering protests at home.

Egyptian opponents of the deal said Sisi effectively surrendered Egyptian sovereignty, especially as reports emerged saying that Cairo was receiving 20 billion dollars in aid from Riyadh in return for the handover of the islands.

According to the Israeli daily Haaretz, Israel had expressed its approval of the deal during talks with the Egyptian side provided that freedom of navigation for Israeli ships through the area would be guaranteed.

Bin Salman’s visit comes weeks ahead of Egypt’s presidential election, with Sisi expected to easily win a second term in office as all real challengers have been detained, prosecuted, or intimidated out of the race.

(Source: AFP)

Cambodia PM accuses U.S. of lying about aid suspension



Cambodia’s prime minister has slammed the U.S. administration for being dishonest about the “suspension” of aid to the Southeast Asian nation, saying Washington’s aid cut had actually taken place in 2016.

The White House announced Tuesday that it was suspending or curtailing several of Treasury, USAID and military aid programs aimed at supporting Cambodia’s military, taxation department and local authorities, claiming that they were all responsible for the country’s recent political instability.

Reacting to the announcement, Prime Minister Hun Sen said Washington’s ambassador to Phnom Penh, William Heidt, was lying and insisted that U.S. aid to Cambodia’s tax department was slashed back in 2016, Reuters reported.

“We, the 16 million people, didn’t receive American aid in the tax sector. This aid was already finished in 2016,” said the prime minister during a speech to thousands of garment workers in the country’s southern province of Preah Sihanouk.

He then added, “Please, U.S. Ambassador, answer this one question: why did you announce cutting aid while there is no aid?

Do you intend to distort the reputation of Cambodia?” The U.S. Embassy in Phnom Penh, however, refused to comment about the prime minister’s remarks.

According to the report, Washington’s decision to partially suspend its aid to Cambodia came amid an ongoing government crackdown on the nation’s political opposition, Hun Sen’s critics, as well as opposition lawmakers and non-governmental organizations months prior to a July general election.

Hun Sen, who the report describes as “a close ally of China,” has often criticized Washington publicly, specifically for dropping bombs on Cambodia during the Vietnam War, which concluded in 1975.

He has also accused the leader of the main opposition Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), who was detained and jailed last year, of conspiring with Washington to topple him.

Meanwhile, the White House has said the U.S. had spent over \$1 billion worth of aid for Cambodia and that its assistance to the country for health, agriculture and mine-clearing will continue.

(Source: Reuters)

Putin tells U.S. to send evidence of vote meddling

Russian President Vladimir Putin told Washington to send him hard evidence that his citizens meddled in U.S. elections, mocking accusations to date as “yelling and hollering in the United States Congress”.

The office of U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller charged 13 Russians and three firms last month with interfering in the 2016 presidential vote as part of what it called a conspiracy to support Donald Trump and disparage Hillary Clinton.

“I have to see first what they’ve done. Give us materials, give us information,” Putin said in an interview with NBC TV aired late on Friday, according to an English voice-over of his words.

“We can not respond to that if they do not violate Russian laws,” Putin told NBC’s Megyn Kelly, when asked whether Moscow would take action against the named individuals.

Kelly listed some of the accusations of Russian interference made by Mueller’s office and other U.S. officials, including the spreading of false information online.

“With all due respect for you personally, with all due respect for Congress, you must have people with legal degrees, 100 percent you do,” Putin said smiling.

He said U.S. authorities should send Russia’s general prosecutor an official request.

“This has to go through official channels, not through the press or yelling and hollering in the United States Congress,” Putin said.

The broadcast came a day after Putin announced an array of new nuclear weapons, in one of his most bellicose speeches in years, saying they could hit almost any point in the world and evade a U.S.-built missile shield.

Putin is standing in March 18 elections that polls indicate he should win easily.

(Source: Reuters)

North Korea threatens to “counter” U.S. over military drills

North Korea threatened on Saturday to “counter the U.S.” if the United States holds joint military exercises with South Korea, saying the drills would harm reconciliation efforts on the peninsula.

The United States is due to start joint exercises in early April, a South Korean presidential security adviser said this week according to Yonhap news agency - the latest in a series of drills that the north has regularly described as a threat.

“If the U.S. finally holds joint military exercises while keeping sanctions on the DPRK, the DPRK will counter the U.S. by its own mode of counteraction and the U.S. will be made to own all responsibilities for the ensuing consequences,” North Korea’s official KCNA news agency said in its commentary.

The DPRK is the acronym of the country’s official name, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.

On Feb. 23, the United States said it was imposing its largest package of sanctions to pressure North Korea to give up its nuclear and missile programs. President Donald Trump warned of a “phase two” that could be “very, very unfortunate for the world” if the steps did not work.

KCNA accused Washington of trying to “bring dark clouds of a war to hang over the Korean peninsula.”

“The U.S. is swimming against the trend for the detente on the Korean peninsula,” KCNA said.

South Korea plans to send a special envoy to North Korea in response to an invitation from leader Kim Jong Un, South Korean President Moon Jae-in told Trump in a phone call on Thursday.

The Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang last month gave a boost to recent engagement between the two Koreas after sharply rising tensions over the North’s missile program.

(Source: Reuters)

‘Syrian forces advancing methodically in Eastern Ghouta’

A Syrian commander reportedly says pro-government forces are advancing methodically against militants in the Damascus suburb of Eastern Ghouta, which anti-Damascus militants have been using to launch attacks on civilians in the Syrian capital.

The commander told Reuters on Friday that government troops had retaken some villages on Eastern Ghouta’s Maraj area and made “notable” advances on the western edge of the Harasta area. He said the forces were moving one neighborhood or village at a time.

An elite government unit known as the Tiger Force is involved in the Eastern Ghouta operations.

Meanwhile, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights confirmed that the pro-Damascus forces had recaptured a number of buildings in Harasta. The UK-based monitoring group also said that the Syrian forces had wrested control of the Eastren Ghouta villages of Hawsh al-Dawahra and Hawsh Zreika in addition to hills and farmland.

From inside Eastern Ghouta, foreign-backed militants have been launching indiscriminate mortar and rocket attacks on the capital, which have resulted in the death of a number of civilians.

But there are civilians in Eastern Ghouta, too, and the government has had to navigate with care. Russia, which is giving Syria advisory military help, has established humanitarian corridors to allow the civilians out.

Syria’s official SANA news agency reported on Friday that the al-Nusra Front and other terrorist outfits were preventing civilians from leaving Eastern Ghouta through the safe corridors.

Additionally, a Syrian military source told SANA that the United States, the United Kingdom, and other Western states had even given terrorist groups instructions to stage a chemical attack in Eastern Ghouta and pin the blame on the government.

Western countries have said they would attack Syrian government positions if it conducts chemical attacks, and false flag operations could be mounted to incriminate the Syrian government and trigger international military intervention.

This is while Syria, beginning in 2013, gradually gave up its entire chemical arsenal under a deal that included Russia and the U.S.

(Source: SANA)

Trump’s shift in gun stance baffles lawmakers

In his quest to tackle gun violence, President Donald Trump has ricocheted between calling for tougher laws and declaring his fealty to the Second Amendment’s right to bear arms, leaving a trail of befuddled lawmakers and advocates in his wake.

One thing he still has not done: clearly outline his legislative priorities.

Washington’s week closed Friday without further explanation from the president, the White House indicating that for now, at least, he is backing an incremental proposal on background checks and a bill that would provide new federal dollars to stem school violence.

Just what Trump would like to see in the “beautiful” and “comprehensive” bill he called for earlier in the week remained unclear. That comment came at a bipartisan meeting with lawmakers Wednesday, which was quickly followed by a private session with the National Rifle Association on Thursday. “Good (Great) meeting in the Oval Office tonight with the NRA!” Trump tweeted Thursday night.

He had outlined some of his preferences via Twitter earlier Thursday, saying that both good and bad ideas had come out of the bipartisan meeting. He said: “Background Checks a big part of conversation. Gun free zones are proven targets of killers. After many years, a Bill should emerge. Respect 2nd Amendment!”

Amid the confusion, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has shelved the gun debate for now, saying the Senate will turn next week to other measures.

Disagreement continues among legislators over the appropriate response after the Florida school shooting that left 17 dead. Republicans have largely backed away from stricter gun limits, while Democrats emboldened by Trump’s rhetoric are pushing for ambitious action, including expanded background checks and even a politically risky ban on assault weapons.

As is often the case, the president has been an unreliable negotiator.



Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat who is a leading advocate of tougher gun laws, predicted on Twitter: “The White House is going to bob and weave on guns. Accept it.” Still, he added: “Trump’s instinct on this issue is not wrong - if his party doesn’t get behind background checks soon, they’re cooked in 2018 and 2020.” And he argued that Trump’s “willingness to buck the gun lobby in public, rule out the NRA agenda and talk up background checks, has changed this debate nationally.”

White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Friday that Trump supports a limited proposal from Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, and Murphy that would boost participation in the existing federal background check program, as well as a bill that would provide new federal grant funding to stem school violence.

Sanders said Trump had not signed on to a more sweeping background check bill that would require the review of firearm purchases online and at gun shows. The measure, from Sens. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., and Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., has found new momentum since it was first introduced af-

ter the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut that left 20 children dead.

Sanders sought to clarify Trump’s comments earlier in the week expressing support for tougher background checks and interest in raising the minimum age to buy certain weapons. She said he was interested in improving background checks, but “not necessarily universal background checks.” And she said that while Trump “conceptually” supports higher age requirements to purchase certain weapons, “he also knows there’s not a lot of broad support for that.”

The president also wants to use an executive order to bar the use of bump-stock devices that enable guns to fire like automatic weapons.

After Republican anxiety about Trump’s comments seeming to express openness to tougher gun controls, the executive director of the NRA, Chris Cox was positive about their Thursday night meeting. He tweeted that Trump and Vice President Mike Pence “support the Second Amendment, support strong due process and don’t want gun control.”

As part of Trump’s efforts to consider various responses to gun violence, next week he plans to host members of the video game industry. He has repeatedly referenced the violence in movies and video games during conversations about guns and school safety since the Florida shooting.

Sanders said invitations started going out Thursday, and event details were being finalized. The Entertainment Software Association, a trade group that represents the video game industry, said Friday the group and its members had not been invited.

Nicole Hockley, who lost a child at Sandy Hook, has attended two White House meetings with Trump and said she remained optimistic.

“By listening to President Trump’s words I do feel he is committed to finding a way forward and he is committed to putting a plan together,” she said. “I don’t know what the content will be.”

(Source: AP)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	97388.7
IFX	1080.2

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	44,670 rials
EUR	54,910 rials
GBP	68,130 rials
AED	13,390 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	61.25/b
Brent	64.37/b
OPEC Basket	62.23/b
Gold	\$1,323.65/oz
Silver	\$16.56/oz
Platinum	\$969.75/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

Iran exports \$5.5b of non-oil goods to Iraq in 11 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — During the 11 months ending on February 19, 2018, Iran exported 12 million tons of non-oil goods to Iraq worth \$5.5 billion, the Public Relations Department of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) announced.



The figure shows 18 percent increase in comparison with the same period in the preceding year, the report added.

According to available data, 66 percent of Iranian goods have been exported to China, Iraq, South Korea, and Afghanistan in the said time, while China and Iraq are the major importers.

Britain’s May sets out Brexit vision for trade deal deeper than any other

British Prime Minister Theresa May set out her vision on Friday for a Brexit deal deeper and wider than any free trade agreement in the world, telling the European Union it is in their “shared interest”.

Below are the highlights from her speech and a follow-up question-and-answer session with reporters:

- **May on implementation period**
“We are close to agreement on the terms of the implementation period which was a key element in the December deal.”
“Both the UK and EU are clear this implementation period must be time limited and cannot become a permanent solution.”
- **May on complexity of task ahead**
“We are now approaching a crucial moment. There is no escaping the complexity of the task ahead of us. We must not only negotiate our exit from an organisation that touches so many important parts of our national life, we must also build a new and lasting relationship while, given the uncertainty inherent in this negotiation, preparing for every scenario.”
- **May on need for arbitration mechanism**
“We will need an arbitration mechanism that is completely independent, something which again is common to free trade agreements. This will ensure that any disagreements about the purpose or scope of the agreement can be resolved fairly and promptly.”
- **May on UK membership of EU agencies**
“We will also want to explore with the EU how the UK could remain part of the EU agencies, such as the chemicals, medicines and aerospace industries.”
“We would of course accept that this would mean abiding by the rules of those organisations and making an appropriate financial contribution.”
- **May on challenges of negotiation ahead**
“Yes there will be ups and downs in the months ahead. As in any negotiation no-one will get everything they want, we will not be buffeted by the demands to talk tough or threaten a walkout, just as we will not accept the counsels of despair that this simply cannot be done.”
“We will move forward by calm patient discussion of each other’s positions.”
“We have a shared interest in getting this right so let’s get on with it.”
- **May when asked whether the UK will think again on Brexit**
“No we won’t think again on Brexit. The British people voted for Brexit and I think it is incumbent on their politicians to deliver on the decision that we asked them to take. Parliament overwhelmingly voted for this to be a decision of the British people and I think it’s right that parliament and politicians now deliver on that.”
- **May on Northern Ireland**
“Successive British governments have worked tirelessly together with all the parties in Northern Ireland and with the Irish government to bring about the historic achievement of peace. This is an agreement that we have all worked hard to protect. That is why I have consistently put holding up the Belfast agreement at the heart of our approach.”
“Our departure poses particular challenges for Northern Ireland and for Ireland. We joined the EU together 45 years ago and it’s not surprising that our decision to leave has caused anxiety and a desire for concrete solutions.”

(Source: CNBC)

3 IPC deals to come close to signing by Mar. 20

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Three deals based on Iran’s new model of oil contracts (known as IPC) will get ready for final signing by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2018), IRNA reported on Saturday quoting an official at NIOC as saying.

According to NIOC Managing Director Ali Kardor, based on the new model the selected companies with which the deals are

to be signed will be in charge of operations at the awarded fields for a 20-year period.

Speaking at the 2nd Iran International Exploration and Production Congress and Exhibition (Iran E&P 2018) in Tehran, the official noted that North Azadegan will be the first field to be handed over in an IPC-based contract.

“10 technical groups are currently studying and negotiating new oil contracts with the foreign bidders; we hope to see

IP gas pipeline: A fading opportunity for Pakistan

1 → With Pakistan not being able to complete its part of the deal, in November 2016 China Petroleum Pipeline Bureau (CPPB) expressed readiness to work on the remaining portion of the gas pipeline from Gwadar to the Iranian border to implement the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project; however, seemingly the two countries didn’t reach an agreement.

Shortly after, in December 2016 Pakistan requested Iran for amendment in the Gas Sale Purchase Agreement (GSPA) for implementation of the pipeline project in the extended period.

Iran agreed to negotiate that along with some other amendments and Pakistani side promised funds would be allocated for the Project as per procedure in the due course of time.

However, after 15 months still there is no signs of any determination for completing the project from the Pakistani side.



stani side.

Indignant at ongoing delays from the Pakistani side,

Over \$1.8b allocated to SMEs, uncompleted projects in 9 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — According to the latest data released by Iranian Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade, some 82.13 trillion rials (about \$1.84 billion) has been paid to fund the activity of 707 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and their semi-finished projects in Iran in the first nine months of the current

Iranian calendar year (March 21- December 21, 2017), IRNA reported on Saturday.

According to the report, the semi-finished projects receiving the supplied finance had more than 60 percent of progress.

SMEs are some key drivers of economic growth in many developed and underdeveloped countries through high contribution to

production and job creation.

In Iran, unfortunately, lack of liquidity and also other barriers such as bureaucracy and red tape are impeding the fruitful role these enterprises can play in economic sector’s growth and employment.

Offering facilities besides providing banking loans, and offering tax exemptions to these

enterprises can pave the way for their activity.

Establishment of industrial clusters and making contacts between them, facilitation of advertisement condition for the SMEs to introduce their products and services, and appointing some representatives from these enterprises in the evaluation committees of the banks can be other strategies to support them.

‘Trade wars are good,’ Trump says defying global concern over tariffs

U.S. President Donald Trump struck a defiant tone on Friday, saying trade wars were good and easy to win, after his plan to put tariffs on steel and aluminum imports triggered threats of retaliation from trading partners and a slide in stock markets.

The European Union raised the possibility of taking countermeasures, France said the duties would be unacceptable, and China urged Trump to show restraint. Canada, the biggest supplier of steel and aluminum to the United States, said it would retaliate if hit by U.S. tariffs.

The S&P 500 ended another turbulent week on an upbeat note Friday but major indexes posted their worst week of losses since early February as Trump’s threat to impose import tariffs on steel and aluminum rattled investors. The dollar fell against most currencies, dropping to its lowest in more than two years against the yen, as Trump’s tariffs proposal raised prospects of a damaging trade war.

Trump said on Thursday that a plan for tariffs of 25 percent on steel imports and 10 percent on aluminum products would be formally announced next week.

“When a country (USA) is losing many billions of dollars on trade with virtually every country it does business with, trade wars are good, and easy to win,” Trump said on Twitter on Friday.

In a later social media post, the Republican president said his aim was to protect U.S. jobs in the face of cheaper foreign products, a familiar theme in the “America First” credo he campaigned on for the 2016 election.

“We must protect our country and our workers. Our steel industry is in bad shape. IF YOU DON’T HAVE STEEL, YOU DON’T HAVE A COUNTRY!” he wrote.

Trump earned some bipartisan support from lawmakers, mainly from America’s rust belt states.

“This welcome action is long overdue for shuttered steel plants across Ohio and steelworkers who live in fear that their jobs will

be the next victims of Chinese cheating,” said Senator Sherrod Brown, a liberal and populist Democrat from Ohio.

However, Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin, a fellow Republican, urged Trump to rethink the tariffs.

“If the president wants to protect good-paying, family-supporting jobs in America, especially here in Wisconsin, then he should reconsider the administration’s position on these tariffs, particularly on ultra-thin aluminum,” Walker said in a statement.

Many economists say that instead of increasing employment, price increases for consumers of steel and aluminum such as the auto and oil industries will destroy more U.S. jobs than they create.

■ **Retaliation likely**
Major U.S. trade partners are likely to hit back.

Europe has drawn up a list of U.S. products on which to apply tariffs if Trump follows through on his plan.

“We will put tariffs on Harley-Davidson, on bourbon and on blue jeans - Levi’s,” European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker told German television.

Trump’s threats to unleash a trade war over steel crushed any hopes of substantial progress in current talks with Canada and Mexico to rework the North American Free Trade Agreement, heightening fears for the trade deal’s future.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said any U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum would be “absolutely unacceptable” and vowed to continue to engage with U.S. officials on the issue.

The International Monetary Fund also expressed concern, saying the proposed tariffs would likely damage the U.S. economy and those of other nations.

Trump’s announcement came after what one person with direct knowledge described as a night of “chaos” in the White House due to frequent switching of positions in the ad-

ministration.

While Trump often lays out stark policy positions which he later rolls back as part of a negotiating tactic, White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said the levels of the planned tariffs were not expected to change.

Capital Alpha Partners, a policy research group in Washington, said a quick reversal by Trump was highly unlikely.

“We also don’t see a chance for fine tuning, exceptions, carve outs, or a country-by-country policy” in the short term, the group said in a research note. “We would be hopeful that the policy could be modified in time.”

The United States is the world’s biggest steel importer, buying 35.6 million tonnes in 2017.

Peter Navarro, a White House adviser with largely protectionist views on trade and author of a book entitled “Death By China,” brushed off the negative effects of tariffs on U.S. industry.

He said a 10 percent tariff on aluminum would add one cent to the cost of a can of beer, \$45 to a car and \$20,000 to a Boeing 727 Dreamliner. “Big price effects? Negligible price effects,” he told Fox News.

But home appliance maker Electrolux (ELUXB.ST) said it was delaying a \$250 million expansion of its plant in Tennessee as it was worried U.S. steel prices would rise and make manufacturing there less competitive.

Trump’s administration has imposed a series of trade duties on a range of goods from solar panels to washing machines.

It is even studying whether America’s rubber band makers need protection as Trump seeks to boost domestic manufacturing and employment. The decision on steel and aluminum was the most wide ranging and provocative to date and there is the prospect of more to come, with the government holding an investigation into alleged theft of U.S. intellectual property by China.

Trump made his tariff announcement as Chinese President Xi Jinping’s top economic adviser, Liu He, was visiting Washington.

Liu held a second day of talks at the White

House with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, White House economic adviser Gary Cohn and Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, and the U.S. officials stressed concerns about the U.S. trade deficit with China, market access and unfair treatment of U.S. companies.

“We held frank conversations,” a White House spokeswoman said. We continue to be open to an exchange of ideas on how to resolve these concerns.”

White House officials said Trump himself did not stop by the meeting with Liu as he sometimes does when senior foreign dignitaries, including Chinese officials, are visiting.

China, which Trump frequently accuses of unfair trade practices, earlier called for restraint.

“China urges the United States to show restraint in using protective trade measures, respect multilateral trade rules, and make a positive contribution to international trade order,” Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying said.

Although China accounts for only 2 percent of U.S. steel imports, its massive industry expansion has helped produce a global steel glut that has driven down prices.

The EU, which sees itself as a global counterweight to a protectionist-leaning Trump, spoke of countermeasures conforming with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules.

Safeguard measures, last deployed by Europe in 2002 after then-U.S. President George W. Bush imposed steel import duties, would be designed to guard against steel and aluminum being diverted to Europe from elsewhere if U.S. tariffs come in.

But to conform with WTO rules such measures would have to apply to imports from all countries and could also hit producers including China, India, Russia, South Korea and Turkey.

Economists say that Trump’s own expansionary budget policies will fuel ever larger trade deficits, essentially defeating his stated aim of having “balanced trade” with individual countries.

(Source: Reuters)

Faced with U.S. tax cuts, France, Germany hasten harmonisation

Germany and France will bring forward plans to introduce a common corporation tax system in response to tax cuts announced by the Trump administration, Chancellor Angela Merkel said.

The announcement comes amid unprecedented tensions between the U.S. under President Donald Trump and its long-standing European allies over Washington’s planned introduction of steel tariffs that Europe fears will distort global trade.

“We have decided, with more emphasis than in the past, to push on with the ‘Common Corporation Tax with France’ project,” Merkel said in her regular weekend video podcast when asked how Germany’s relative competitiveness could be maintained.



“That means when we decide on a joint corporation tax assessment basis for France and Germany, we will also consider the realities that are unfolding in America,” she added in response to questions by a business studies student.

At the end of last year, the Trump administration floated a tax plan that envisaged slashing the corporation tax from 35 percent “very high”, according to Merkel - to 21 percent, prompting protests from European finance ministers.

The Europeans fear that international tax competition will increase because of the U.S. moves. So EU members, especially Germany and France, see the need for more tax policy cooperation among themselves to make their markets more competitive.

(Source: Reuters)

Reports of oil demand’s death have been greatly exaggerated

By Chris Midgley

It’s far too early to be thinking about the near-term demise of fossil fuels. To misquote Mark Twain, “reports of oil demand’s death have been greatly exaggerated”.

Many commentators have failed to factor in strong “demand stickiness” for fossil fuels in the near term when considering the trajectory for oil consumption. Yet three years of low oil prices have stimulated strong car sales, while growing urbanization and a buoyant global economy have boosted demand in various forms of transportation.

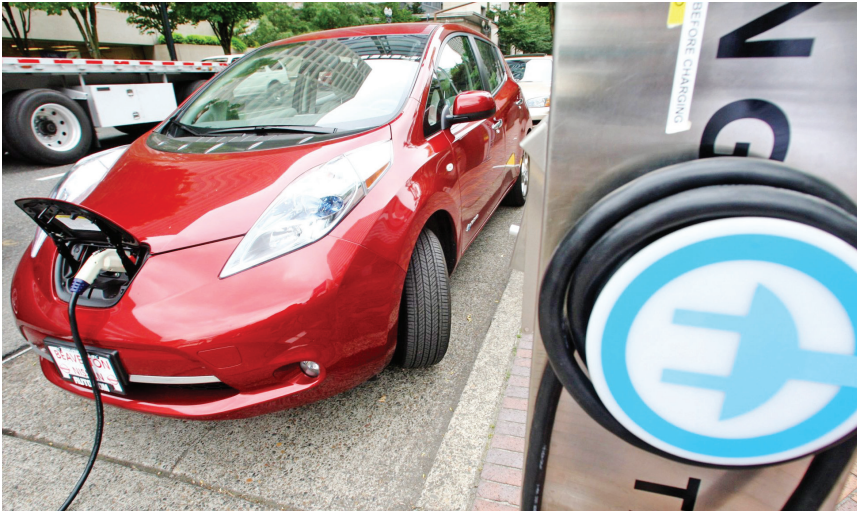
■ So does this hasten the shift from oil to cleaner sources of fuel?

About two-thirds of oil consumption comes from transportation, with about 40 percent of that demand coming from cars. In the passenger vehicle sector all the hype is around electric vehicles (EVs), but despite 55 percent sales growth last year, the actual number amounts to less than 2 percent of new car sales, and less than 0.2 percent of the total fleet.

Today’s 3m EVs displace less than about 60,000 barrels a day of oil consumption, or less than 0.06 percent of total global demand.

Unlike the transition in the early 1900s from the horse and buggy which took just 13 years for the internal combustion engine to wipe out almost all the buggies, EVs do not represent the same marked improvement in convenience or quality of life, and in fact have drawbacks in costs, range and ease of refueling.

The cost of batteries has certainly come down significantly over the past seven years (from \$1000/kWh to about \$200/kWh) but



achieving further cost reductions when the price of lithium and cobalt tripled last year is looking challenging without a leap in innovation.

Government subsidies have driven EV demand yet they hit the Treasury coffers twice via the cost of subsidies and loss of fuels duty revenue.

The UK generates \$30bn a year from road taxes and duties and addressing the budget balance will be an issue. If governments are serious about EVs doing more to curb fossil fuels, they need to be investing in the charging infrastructure not subsidies.

Recent government focus has been on improving air quality. Old diesels have high nitrogen oxides and particulates emissions, but new Euro 6 diesels have roadside emissions

comparable to EVs.

As such, the debate on air quality should not be about new cars but about removing the old fleet: scrap page schemes would have a far greater impact on air quality and fuels efficiency than bans on internal combustion engines, kicked down the road to 2040.

In addition, the electrical grid must first be decarbonized to avoid charging vehicles with “dirty electrons” produced from coal and other fossil fuels. Solutions to energy storage must be found to manage the intermittency of renewable supply.

S&P Global Platts Analytics’ projections are that oil production will have to increase from about 100m b/d today to just under 125m b/d in 2040 under the “most likely” reference case to meet rising demand from transport.

Libya’s oil gushing again as output, exports hit multiyear highs

Libyan oil is gushing again with production and exports surging to the highest in years.

Despite unresolved domestic conflicts that first erupted after the ouster of dictator Muammar Qaddafi, Libya has somehow found a way to get its crude flowing. Already this year, it’s secured commitments from some of the world’s biggest energy companies, including at least three new annual cargo-lifting contracts and a \$450 million oil-field investment from France’s Total SA.

Shipments from the holder of Africa’s biggest oil reserves last month jumped to 1.19 million barrels a day, the highest since Bloomberg began tracking tankers from the country in July 2014, and 22 percent up from January. Production jumped to the highest in 4 1/2 years.

“There are always some issues, but if you look at the term contracts being signed, Total coming back, the trend is for the return of more Libyan crude,” said Olivier Jakob, an analyst at Petromatrix GmbH in Zug, Switzerland. “On the way, there will always be some issues with protests, but the medium-term is that they will increase their production level.”

The country’s observed exports jumped from 969,000 barrels a day in January. February’s outflow would actually exceed production for the month, which stood at a 1.05 million barrels a day, the highest since June 2013, according to a Bloomberg survey. While it’s rare, an individual country’s shipments can sometimes briefly rise above its output due to the timing of when vessels leave, or if cargoes are loaded from storage.

Further growth in Libyan oil supplies would take the country to a level that could test a pledge it made to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries to help limit a global crude glut. Alongside Nigeria, the two African nations are meant to cap their combined output at 2.8 million barrels

Even with aggressive penetration of EVs it will take until late in the next decade before an inflection in oil demand is observed, with most demand destruction in the next 10 years coming from fuel efficiency rather than EV displacement.

However, while all the focus is on passenger vehicles, we believe commercial road transport could be the game changer through faster turnover of the fleet.

Heavy duty trucks and long distance coaches are less feasible for EVs yet do the largest chunk of road miles travelled. This means that a switch to a zero emissions fuel such as hydrogen could be a bigger disrupter to oil demand projections.

Hydrogen produced at retail sites could solve distribution cost issues and energy storage by utilizing cheap renewable energy sources during low-price periods.

Public and corporate pressure in the aviation and chemicals sectors are potentially other significant disrupters, demanding the use of renewable fuels and reduction in plastics use respectively.

While oil demand is expected to keep growing, there is no denying that we are at the start of a transition. Big oil companies are already adapting fast by investing heavily into the production of cleaner fuels, including liquefied natural gas and by installing charging points into their service station networks.

Some are going a step further by investing in power generation and distribution. But to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement, we need to focus our minds not just on electric mobility but more disruptive areas impacting future oil demand growth.

(Source: Financial Times)



a day. Libya’s share of that was reported as being about 1 million barrels a day.

“The higher Libyan production goes, the more market participants will see that there is no cap for Libya and Nigeria,” said Giovanni Staunovo, commodity analyst at UBS Group AG. “The political situation is still an issue so production is likely to stay wobbly.”

PetroChina agreed an annual contract to buy Libyan crude earlier this week, the Chinese producer’s first such deal with Libya’s National Oil Corp. since 2013, according to people familiar with the matter. This followed BP and Shell who both agreed similar annual deals in January.

Total on Friday completed a purchase of Marathon Corp.’s assets in Libya for \$450 million. These include a stake in the Waha Concessions, which recently increased output to 300,000 barrels a day.

Still there are risks to the growth story in Libya, said Luke Parker, a corporate analysis vice president at Wood Mackenzie.

“In recent times production has been constrained for prolonged periods due to shut-ins at export terminals,” he said. “Stability has improved, but the lack of central government means the risks of tribal disputes and labor strikes blockading critical infrastructure remain acute.”

(Source: Bloomberg)

UK’s oil and gas production predicted to increase

The oil and gas industry regulator has raised its forecast of what can be recovered from the waters around the UK over the next three decades.

Changes in the way the sector operates are thought to have unlocked the potential for a further 2.8 billion barrels of oil or the gas equivalent.

It is now estimated that 11.7 billion barrels could be recovered between 2016 to 2050. More than 43 billion barrels have been extracted from UK waters so far. Peak production was achieved at the turn of the century.

While the oil price was high, in the first half of this decade, oil companies approved a series of major investment programs that gave the UK offshore sector a second wind.

The new report suggests that spending was greater than previously reported. It also shows operating cost per barrel of oil produced has halved since 2014, at least in US dollars, reaching just above \$15.

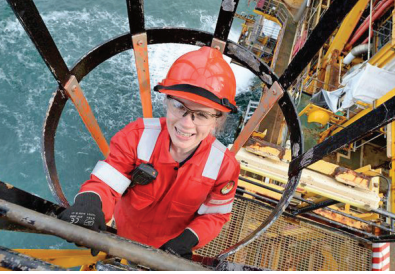
Some of this spending was for developing so-called brownfield sites, where fields were mature and new technology was required to pump more from the rock formations. Most expenditure was in new fields, many of them to the west and east of Shetland. The last of that phase of new fields is expected to come on stream in the next few months.

As a result, the industry’s production total rose from 1.4m barrels of oil equivalent per day to 1.63m barrels in 2016 - returning to the level seen in 2011.

That rate was repeated in 2017, and would have been higher if the Forties Pipeline Network had not been closed down in December because of a leak.

Production during 2018 is expected to be higher than last year, but to start declining from 2020.

In 2014, having been commissioned by Whitehall, industry veteran Sir Ian Wood produced a report which set out a



plan for maximizing economic recovery of oil and gas.

Setting up the Oil and Gas Authority as the new regulator, based in Aberdeen, was part of his plan. It was given powers to require co-ordination by oil producers, and to ensure they did not close down assets prematurely.

The authority’s report of projections of production also extends to expenditure. It expects to see investment continue further into the future than it had previously expected, but that there will still be a decline.

Capital expenditure has continued to fall significantly, and will continue to do so, says the authority.

Operating costs rose marginally last year, but they are still 27% below the high reached in 2014, when the high oil price began its slide.

Spending on decommissioning was up by 4% last year. Future annual spending on breaking up and recycling platforms, rigs and pipelines is expected to be lower than previously forecast.

Andy Samuel, chief executive of the OGA, commented: “The extra 2.8 billion barrels identified shows the future potential of the basin which could be boosted further through investment and exploration successes.”

“Last year, 2017, continued to be a productive year and production levels are set to rise in 2018 as more new fields come on-line.”

(Source: BBC)

China pushes for bigger role in Iraq’s oil industry

China is ramping up its role in Iraqi reconstruction, reflecting its growing reliance on oil from the war-ravaged country, but geopolitical factors are also at play, according to a new report.

A paper compiled by consultancy BMI Research, and released first to Arab News, said: “On the one hand, China will look to direct investment into infrastructure assets

associated with Iraq’s oil industry, which has emerged as an increasingly important export partner over the past decade. On the other, China will aim to garner geopolitical influence by participating in broader reconstruction efforts in a country lying along a key artery of its Belt and Road initiative.”

The burgeoning Iraq-China partnership was said to be anchored by a dramatic increase in oil trade. Iraqi oil exports to China rose from zero in 2007 to 270 million barrels annually by 2017, accounting for roughly 8.8 percent of total Chinese oil imports.

China’s growing investment role in Iraq’s oil sector was highlighted in January when Iraq disclosed that it intended to construct an oil refinery at the port of Fao on the Persian Gulf with two Chinese companies. Iraq’s ministry of oil named the firms as Power China and Nercor Chinese. The ministry said that the refinery would have a capacity of 300,000 barrels per day. Similarly, Baghdad has awarded a contract to China-based Zhenhua Oil to further develop the East Baghdad oilfield.

“Given the growing importance of China as an oil export market vis-a-vis traditional export destinations like the United States, Baghdad will remain keen on deepening partnerships with Chinese companies as bilateral interests align,” BMI said.

The geopolitical research consultancy added that China would also gain indirect exposure to Iraq’s infrastructure sector by extending bilateral loans aimed at rebuilding Iraq’s economy.

In February, international donors pledged \$30 billion to reconstruction efforts in Iraq, and while individual country contributions have not been divulged, reports indicated that China had been a key donor with billions committed by Chinese state-controlled enterprises over recent years.

BMI said China’s motives were also driven by its wider geopolitical ambitions. “Iraq lies along a key route of the China-backed Belt and Road initiative, which seeks to foster growing East-West overland trade by promoting greater logistical connectivity.”

BMI also highlighted the planned Bas-

ra-Aqaba oil pipeline, where the China Petroleum Pipeline Bureau is slated to play a construction role.

Yu Jie, head of China Foresight at the London School of Economics, told Arab News that “China is the world’s biggest importer of oil and the Middle East is a region for market access.” She flagged media reports that Chinese state-owned oil company Sinopec could acquire a shareholding in Saudi Aramco following the planned IPO later this year.

A recent report by the International Energy Agency said that the Middle East, which accounts for about \$200 billion worth of trade, makes the region China’s fourth largest trading partner after the US, Japan and South Korea.

That said, getting the funds needed to rebuild Iraq is no easy task. At the close of an international donor conference in Kuwait last month, Iraq secured only about a third of the \$100 billion that Iraq said the country needed, and much of the money pledged was in the form of investment loans (not direct aid).

(Source: arabnews.com)

Why the next oil boom will be fueled by blockchain

By Meredith Taylor

The world’s most important industry has been carrying on without any significant changes in its day to day routine for far too long. But now, the new tech on the block has its sights set on the multi-trillion-dollar oil and gas sector.

The blockchain technology, which creates secure ledgers for digital transactions and rapidly accelerates the pace at which transactions can be made, has the potential to disrupt every major industry: real estate, shipping, banking and healthcare.

In an industry that has used technology to reduce breakeven costs to all-time lows, create gigantic drilling rigs run by robots, and even tap reserves located 10 miles below the sea, the oil and gas sector has been slow to jump on the blockchain bandwagon... until now.

According to a report from the World Economic Forum from 2017, a digital transformation has already swept across the energy industry.

Majors like BP and Shell are making headlines with plans to utilize blockchain tech to completely transform how energy is bought and sold.

Smaller players with big ambitions like Canada’s Petroteq are preparing to revolutionize the day to day operations of potentially every oil operation on the planet. Petroteq could utilize new technologies to tap massive new reserves of energy, such as the Utah oil sands, while radically reducing environmental risk.

With U.S. President Donald Trump planning a trillion dollar infrastructure program, the possibilities for upgrading American oil and gas systems throughout the country are immense.

BP began experimenting with blockchain technology in 2017. David Eytton, BP’s head of technology, noted: “There are uses for blockchain that could give us a competitive advantage.”

In BP’s pilot program, the company began working with Italian supermajor Eni, and Austria’s Wien Energie on a trading platform using blockchain technology.

“The commodity finance industry is hampered by nature by inefficiencies and outdated procedures. By applying blockchain technology, we expect that we can eliminate a lot of these”

And in November, BP joined a blockchain consortium with fellow industry heavyweights Shell and Statoil, in addition to commodity trading houses – Gunvor, Koch Supply & Trading, and Mercuria, with the financial backing of Dutch ABN Amro, ING, and French Societe Generale.

Patrick Arnaud, Managing Director for Trade & Commodity Finance, ING, said: “The commodity finance industry is hampered by nature by inefficiencies and outdated procedures. By applying blockchain technology, we expect that we can eliminate a lot of these, making the overall process faster and more cost effective.”

Royal Dutch/Shell is taking it a step further, investing in a minority stake in the distributed ledger startup Applied Blockchain. The blockchain firm has created platforms across a range of sectors including telecom, manufacturing, and more.’

While the supermajors are focused on trading, others are looking to the tech for far more creative endeavors.

Petroteq, a company that made waves in the sector with its revolutionary patented oil sands tech, has set out on a mission to completely overhaul the industry’s inefficient and error prone supply chain management protocols.

Petroteq was recently cited by Geoffrey Cann, a Director at Deloitte specializing in the oil and gas industry, as a contender for blockchain technologies in the energy arena.

With the development of new energy sources such as shale gas, tight oil, oil sands, and coal seam gas reaching a critical mass, it’s more important now than ever to rethink traditional supply chains

Oil and gas is a global endeavor in which huge inventories are held, ordered, transported, and distributed through multiple channels all over the globe. When things go wrong, productivity is slowed, production levels fall, and cargo is lost. This means billions in profit is potentially taken off the table.

And with the development of new energy sources such as shale gas, tight oil, oil sands, and coal seam gas reaching a critical mass, it’s more important now than ever to rethink traditional supply chains.

This is the path on which Petroteq has embarked. And with the help of blockchain technology, the company is positioning itself as a leader in this race.

Petrobloq, Petroteq’s very own blockchain consortium, is looking to reshape the industry. From drilling, to a finished petroleum-based product and everywhere in between, Petrobloq aims to track, monitor, and account for every drop of petroleum on a transparent, immutable, and secure blockchain.

The first member of the Petrobloq consortium is Latin America’s second largest energy company, PEMEX, which made headlines as the first petroleum company to allow cryptocurrency as a payment option in participating gas stations. In joining the consortium, the company looks to soar to new heights.

Utilizing Petroteq’s technology, Mexico’s national oil company will become one of the world’s largest non-publicly traded companies to introduce a blockchain-based supply chain management platform. An endeavor which is set to bring PEMEX’s processes from production to sale to an entirely new level, ushering in a new era of efficiency and profitability.

(Source: theenergycollective.com)

Trump administration weighs plan to lower offshore oil and gas royalty rates

The Trump administration is considering an industry-backed recommendation to cut royalty rates for all leases in federal waters by one-third, a proposal aimed at boosting offshore oil and natural gas production.

Under the recommendation, unanimously approved by the Department of Interior’s Royalty Policy Committee on Wednesday, rates for offshore oil and gas leases in U.S. waters would fall from 18.75 percent to 12.5 percent.

This rate cut could boost interest in drilling U.S. waters, where interest has stagnated recently as output in onshore shale plays has climbed to historic highs.

“As companies determine where to spend their limited capital money for exploration, the 12.5 percent rate may be the tipping point for deciding whether to invest in U.S. waters,” Nicolette Nye, a spokeswoman for the National Ocean Industries Association, said Friday.

Interior has offered a lower, 12.5 percent royalty rate for leases in depths of less than 200 meters in order to generate more interest in drilling in shallow waters.

(Source: Platts)

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In Europe, political parties would rather stay out of power

By Anne Applebaum

“All political careers end in failure,” a British politician once said: Sooner or later everybody gets voted out, overthrown or forgotten. Even knowing that, four months ago nobody would have put Angela Merkel on a list of world leaders most likely to be knifed in the back. Back in September, the German chancellor was elected to a record-breaking fourth term. The formula she had relied on for years — project the image of a safe, frumpy housewife; take decisions slowly and carefully, if at all — defeated all rivals once again.

But although her Christian Democratic Party won more votes than any other, the result was still its worst ever. Since then, Merkel’s first attempt to build a coalition with three smaller parties failed, after the liberal Free Democrats dropped out. The second attempt — a “grand coalition” with the main opposition party, the center-left Social Democrats — is grinding toward a conclusion, with zero enthusiasm and no applause.



The scale of the collapse is notable: A few months ago, Merkel, master of the center ground, was lauded as the last hope of the West. Now she is toxic: Nobody wants to share power with her party. What happened?

The answers don’t lie solely in Merkel’s controversial refugee policy, though that argument is made repeatedly. In fact, the unilateral and uncharacteristically spontaneous decision she made in 2015 to open Germany’s borders to refugees from Syria, has been quietly reversed. The numbers of people allowed to enter have dropped dramatically, and last year were only a third of what they had been in 2016.

More to the point, this piece of history might help explain some of her lost electoral support, but it doesn’t entirely explain why no one wants to govern with her. The situation is much weirder: It appears that in Germany, as almost everywhere else in Europe at the moment, the way to build your party and gain voters is not to hold power or to make decisions, but to attack those who do. Compromise and coalition, once the heart and soul of Continental politics, are losing their attraction. Besides, the public’s trust of everybody in government is at an all-time low — so much so that it seems better not to be in the government at all. When Christian Lindner, the liberal party leader, dropped out of coalition talks with Merkel, he declared that it was “better not to govern than to govern in a wrong way.” He also seems to have calculated that his party, which won more than 10 percent of the vote in September, will do even better next time if it stays out.

Now the Social Democrats are facing the same dilemma. With every passing week, as a decision on the coalition agreement draws closer, they lose ground in the opinion polls. Like the liberals, the Social Democrats are afraid that if they join the government their voters might disappear altogether. Next this week the party will announce results of members’ votes on the coalition deal, and may well be against it — in which case Merkel’s second attempt to form a government will fail. But for some of the party’s members, even a few ministries aren’t worth the price. Better to stay as far away from real power as possible.

This strange truth has already given birth to strange politics in other countries. In the last British general election, all major political parties ran populist, “anti-elitist” campaigns. The Labour Party ran against the Tory “establishment”; the Tories ran against the pro-European “establishment”; the Scottish National Party ran against the English “establishment.” It was as if nobody wanted to admit that their party actually sought to wield power and become the establishment itself — which is, presumably, the only real reason to enter politics at all.

In its way, the victory of Emmanuel Macron in the last French presidential election was evidence of the same thing. Both he and his main opponent, Marine Le Pen of the National Front, made it into the final round of the election by attacking the traditional parties of the center left and center right, all of which suffered an unprecedented collapse. Then he took power — and his popular support immediately sank. Although more recently his support has once again begun to climb, the numbers suggest that French voters liked the idea of Macron as a candidate, but disliked the idea of Macron in power.

But then, voters nowadays dislike the idea of anybody in power. All political careers end in failure — but most of them now begin in failure, too.

(Source: The Washington Post)

It appears that in Germany, as almost everywhere else in Europe at the moment, the way to build your party and gain voters is not to hold power or to make decisions, but to attack those who do.

Saudi Arabia faces ‘certain defeat’ in Yemen, says Tory ex-minister

A former Conservative cabinet minister has said that Saudi Arabia faces “certain defeat” and humiliation in Yemen and has called on Theresa May to use the upcoming visit of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to pressure the kingdom to halt its bombardment of the country.

In an interview with Middle East Eye, the former secretary for international development Andrew Mitchell said it was now clear Saudi Arabia would “not win a war from the air” and warned that the “human misery and heartache” in Yemen would continue unless UK and international pressure was used to force Saudi Arabia to return to the negotiating table.

A Saudi-led coalition has conducted bombing missions in Yemen since 2015 with arms and military support from the U.S., UK and other countries. At least 10,000 civilians have been killed in the conflict, though the true death toll is potentially far higher as few organizations on the ground have the resources to count the dead.

“Saudi Arabia will not win a war from the air and the certainty of its defeat is underlined by the small scale of the Saudi forces on the ground in Yemen,” Mitchell said.

The visit by the powerful Saudi crown prince to London next month, during which he will meet senior royals and the prime minister, Theresa May, is set to highlight the UK’s close relationship with Saudi Arabia and its conduct in the three-year Yemen civil war.

“We are supporting of bin Salman’s domestic agenda, which is really significant and vital for Saudi Arabia’s future, but we would be failing in our duty as a candid friend and close ally if we didn’t spell out our very clear concerns over Saudi policy in Yemen,” Mitchell said.

He added that ministers must take a firm line with the crown prince over Yemen to steer him away from a “failed policy that has brought misery and heartache” to Yemen.

His comments come after shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry demanded that May stops “bowing and scraping” to the crown prince and halts the sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia.

‘Innocent men, women and children’ Mitchell does not support an arms embargo and says Riyadh has legitimate self-defense concerns, but his intervention will again put the focus on the UK’s increasingly close defense relationship with Saudi Arabia, where bin Salman is driving a modernization and reform project, known as Vision 2030, to wean the kingdom off its dependence on oil.

The UK move will likely be welcomed in Riyadh, but has prompted allegations from Mitchell that the UK, which has licensed the export of more than \$6.4bn of arms to Saudi Arabia since 2015, is not



Andrew Mitchell viewing the damage from Saudi-led coalition strikes in the old quarter of Saada in January 2017

Former senior minister Andrew Mitchell says the UK must press Riyadh over Yemen bombardment ahead of bin Salman visit.

being “even handed”.

Mitchell said: “In the same way we condemned the Houthi attack on Riyadh airport, we must not be afraid to condemn the nightly attacks on Yemen by the Saudi air force that have killed and maimed innocent men, women and children.”

He added that the UK must be “even handed” and work towards the goal of negotiations without conditions to end the conflict.

The British government insists it is pressing Saudi Arabia to boost the flow of humanitarian aid to Yemen, and is lobbying for a peaceful solution to the conflict, which has allowed militant groups, including al-Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIL), to flourish in the chaos of war.

The UN report found that all sides in the Yemen conflict have committed violations of international humanitarian law, including Saudi-led air strikes on civilian targets.

The report lists 10 incidents in which Saudi-led coalition air strikes killed 157 civilians, including at least 85 children. The strikes targeted residential building, factories and civilian vessels, prompting the UN experts

to find that Saudi-led forces had failed to adhere to “principles of international law of proportionality and precautions in attack”.

It also describes measures taken to minimize child casualties by Saudi-led forces as “largely ineffective”, in comments that are likely to prove embarrassing to officials in Westminster who have defended Saudi Arabia’s targeting process, and the continued sale of UK-made weapons.

Ending the crisis

Andrew Smith, the spokesman for Campaign Against Arms Trade, or CAAT, said the Saudi-led bombing campaign has created one of the “worst humanitarian crises in the world”.

“Thousands of people have been killed and vital infrastructure has been destroyed all across Yemen,” he said.

“If Boris Johnson is serious about ending the crisis, then he and his colleagues must stop arming and supporting the Saudi regime.”

In one case, the report’s authors found evidence that UK-made Paveway IV bombs were used in a series of strikes on an industrial complex in September 2016.

The report found that while there were no

civilian casualties, the strikes did not comply with international humanitarian law.

“There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the factory complex had become a legitimate military objective or that the Saudi Arabia-led coalition complied with IHL principles,” the report found.

Arms control experts say this is the first example of UK weapons being so directly linked to alleged breaches of international law by UN experts.

Oliver Feeley-Sprague, Amnesty International UK’s arms control director, told MEE: “There have already been a series of cases in Yemen where UK weaponry - including cluster munitions - sold to the Saudi Arabia-led coalition has been used in breach of international humanitarian law, but the UN report is a significant reminder to the UK government that its reckless arming of the coalition is not going unnoticed.

“The UK should cease supplying weapons to all parties to this terrible conflict where there’s a risk those weapons could be used to carry out further human rights violations.”

(Source: Middle East Eye)

The two-state solution is still the only game in town

Even after Donald Trump’s Jerusalem decision, there is no feasible alternative to the two-state solution in Palestine

By Arafat Shoukri

U.S. President Donald Trump’s announcement on December 6 last year of his decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel was a real shock not only for Palestinians but also for the international community as a whole.

For many people, this decision was the final nail in the coffin for the two-state solution. But even before Trump’s controversial announcement, some western politicians were arguing that a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no longer feasible due to Israel’s expansionist policies in the West Bank.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas reacted to Trump’s Jerusalem decision with fury and went so far to say that the Palestinians would no longer accept the United States as a mediator in the peace process. Abbas also refused to meet with U.S. Vice President Mike Pence when he visited the region.

The international community joined Abbas in condemning Trump’s decision, with a resounding majority of United Nations member states voting to declare the U.S. president’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital “null and void”. But in the end, neither Abbas nor other world leaders were successful in convincing Trump to reverse his decision.

After the storm of anger dissipated, the world came to its senses, and most leaders realized that no peace process in the Middle East could ever advance without the support and approval of the U.S. This was clearly put by European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini when she said “Nothing without the United States, nothing with the United States alone”.

Despite attempts by the EU to change the current mechanism and create a negotiations framework that would involve multilateral brokers, the Palestinians were disappointed to find out that this was nothing more than wishful thinking - especially after senior Palestinian officials, who were dispatched to Moscow, Beijing and several Arab capitals after the Jerusalem announcement to find new international sponsors for negotiations, returned home empty-handed. This meant that the role of the U.S. is and will be very central to any peace process in the Middle East regardless of Palestinians’ perception of the U.S. as a dishonest broker.

■ Palestinian Authority did not abandon the two-state solution

Even though the Palestinian Authority (PA) said it would not accept U.S. mediation after Trump’s Jerusalem decision, it did not renounce the two-state solution completely. Instead, the Palestinian leadership tried to limit the damage caused by the announcement and strengthen their position within the existing framework. The same tactic was adopted by other political parties involved in the peace process, such as the EU.



The EU has already invested huge amounts of money, time and energy to make the two-state vision a reality and it is finding it very hard to change direction after all these efforts.

Thus, many people, who thought the Jerusalem decision was the end of the two-state solution, now wonder why most stakeholders of the peace process still have hope for this approach, despite its failure to bring about sustainable peace decades after its conception.

The answer to this question is simple: It is unbearable and costly for all stakeholders - albeit for different reasons - to abandon this solution. Currently, there are only three alternatives to the two-state solution, formation of a single democratic state with a one-man-one-vote system, formation of an Apartheid state like the one existed in South Africa in the eighties, or abandonment of all state-building efforts, which would undoubtedly result in a political vacuum.

Obviously, the first option means the end of Israel as we know it. In this scenario, the demographics of Israel would change drastically, with Palestinians becoming the majority in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. There are around two million Palestinians in Israel and the same number of Palestinians in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Therefore, this option is vehemently rejected by Israel. Far from considering accepting Palestinians as equal citizens, Israel’s far right-parties are currently working hard to drive them outside the borders of Israel.

On the Palestinian side, this idea has also not been taken seriously or discussed properly among the current Palestinian leadership or other prominent political factions. The PLO’s strategy since the 1960’s has been to establish an independent state. Some Palestinian players, such as Hamas, do not even believe in a peace process in the first place.

On the European side, the EU has already invested huge amounts of money, time and energy to make the two-state vision a reality and it is finding it very hard to change direction after all these efforts. Also, trying to implement a democratic one-state solution would be hard for the EU, as Israel is strongly against this strategy. Many European states do not have the will or courage to have a full-blown confrontation with Israel, a state they view as an indispensable ally in the Middle East. And let’s not forget that the EU is not a government, but a union, and it needs the consensus of all its 28 member states to adopt a new foreign policy. This necessity slows down the decision-making process in the EU and limits the union’s capabilities when significant policy shifts are needed.

The second alternative to the two-state solution is an Apartheid state. Although this strategy is already de-facto implemented in the West Bank and even inside the state of Israel, no one is recognizing it as a real option to end the conflict and achieve peace between the two parties. It is morally and politically costly, and would most certainly be strongly condemned by the international community.

The final alternative to the two-state solution is to do nothing. But, if the international community denounces the two-state solution without offering an alternative, a major political vacuum, which would undoubtedly be filled with “extremist” non-state actors like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS), will materialize. Obviously, no one can afford this to happen.

All in all, the two-state solution is still the only game in town. However, the rules of the game seem to be changing in Israel’s favor. Both Israel and the U.S. still theoretically accept this solution, but they want to shape it in a way that would benefit Israel and further victimize Palestinians. They have already laid the foundations for their version of the two-state solution by taking Jerusalem off the table. They will likely continue with abolishing the right of return for Palestinian refugees, permanently condemning them to Bantustans in the West Bank. All this can be done under the umbrella of the two-state solution.

For Palestinians, there is no way out of the two-state solution. What everyone needs to focus on now is not unlikely alternative solutions, but the shape the two-state solution is going to take under Trump’s leadership.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Modern science is compatible with Islamic principles: professor



A: Actually, in the West, the very latest forms of anthropology and sociology are more open to the reality of values and moral truth-claims than in the late 1940s and 50s. While there are those who will use cognitive science to seek to explain away the evidential force of religious experience, the majority of cognitive scientists working today are neutral about the truth or falsehood of religious claims. I suggest that the natural and social sciences today are largely tools that may be used to serve a variety of philosophies and religious interpretations of the world.

A: I believe modern science is compatible with Islamic principles. The only problem in terms of epistemology and methodology is if one adopted what some today call scientism, the view that only science can provide reliable evidence for our beliefs about reality. A great many of us in higher education today, scientists and non-scientists, believe in a broader view of inquiry. We do well to recall that the sciences themselves rest on a philosophy, a philosophy of reason, inquiry, the nature of explanation, and so on. As such, full inquiry requires philosophical reflection and not just a narrow appeal to empirical data and experimentation.

A: There is a great variety of views to consider. At one end, there are instrumentalists who think that science is not chiefly concerned with truths about reality, but with control and prediction. And then there are those who espouse scientism, as just described. I suggest that the natural and social sciences are, like almost all modes of human experience and inquiry, subject to abuse and can be used to manipulate people. I believe that what is most needed today, culturally and personally, is a sense of humility and a higher regard for the good, freedom, and rights of individual human persons. From such a perspective the sciences can be used for human flourishing and the wellbeing of the planet, but in the hands of more tyrannical forces, the sciences can be used in the service of dehumanization and destruction.

A: As I suggested, I believe we need a robust affirmation of the good, freedom, and rights of individual human persons, and I should add, communities. When we talk about functions or non-functionality, I suggest we will always have some framework in mind. If we define functionality in impersonal terms such as the projection of military power or the accumulation of material wealth, we may be functioning well but lose our souls.

It has become far, far, too easy to kill people. For one thing, at the time the Second Amendment was written, the ability to lay waste to entire cities did not exist. Cannons of the era could shell cities but the difference between 1700s era cannon and United States cruise missiles is as enormous as the difference between a crack in the sidewalk and the Grand Canyon. The difference between a Brown Bess musket and an AR-15 is the same comparison. If anyone claims these are the same--and gun rights advocates do--I dare them to fight a duel armed with said Brown Bess musket against a trained gunman with an AR-15.

For that matter, to those who say the United States has some authority or right to intervene in the Middle East, I dare them to go live in a Middle Eastern city that sits in the bulls-eye of American airstrikes. Let's see them assure themselves that because they're civilians, the airstrikes will miss them. Just like the right of people to buy AR-15s won't result in the deaths of kids in a school, right? These things are linked. When you justify or excuse killing for any reason, it becomes that much easier to do it or overlook it next time. When you do not react with shock and



It was said in Ancient Greece: «Boys throw stones at frogs in sport, but frogs die in earnest.» In the United States, AR-15s are sold as rights, but children die in earnest. The United States launches airstrikes as foreign policy, but innocent civilians die in earnest. No, I don't see a difference between dead children in the United States or the Middle East. Both are crimes of horrifying regularity caused by the action of the United States government over there and the lack of action by it here. Millions are dead and the world is far from the perfection promised by the United States government trying to justify all those deaths it inflicted. Hundreds are dead in the United States thanks to the AR-15 rifle being a «right» and, yet, genuine human rights within the United States have drastically decreased, not increased. The only thing that increases in both cases is the death toll.


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There is another word for individualism and that word is this: selfishness. It is nothing but selfishness to sit atop \$100 billion dollars


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And similarly, efforts to combat those who support terrorism in places like Syria are yet to be seen at the Security Council. This is not to deny that the UN doesn't want to fight terrorism. The question is how come despite the evidence and the reports by international aid agencies and human

As long as the structure of the Security Council remains outdated - with just five permanent members that have veto power - it will continue to be a venue for adopting unfair, unjust, false, and self-serving resolutions by certain permanent members. This in itself will only lead to further egregious abuses of the UN system, greater wars of aggression and deceit, and eroding respect for fundamental rights across the globe.



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Guns, Churchill and electoral politics

By Ralph Z. Hallow

Winston Churchill was right. Democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others.

President Trump, who could go down as one of our best presidents ever but has to work a bit harder at it, picked a 2020 campaign manager on Tuesday. In virtually the next breath he holds a White House gun-violence session with lawmakers and manages to make eyes cross and eyebrows arch among tens of millions of staunch supporters.

The dizzying effect of electoral politics?

Florida Gov. Rick Scott, a Republican running for the U.S. Senate, opposes Mr. Trump's smartest recommendation on school-gun killings.

Mr. Trump rightly wants every teacher, administrator, principal and janitor who has the needed firearm-safety training to be able to carry a concealed pistol. Where? Strapped to an ankle or tucked under a blouse, shirt or

jacket. Why? To kill a school shooter before he kills students, teachers, administrators, principals and janitors.

A homicidal maniac with a gun in a school won't stand a chance if he doesn't know who's armed in the school and who isn't.

But no. Mr. Scott the candidate wants one paid armed guard at every school. He wants metal doors and special windows and all kinds of things that will do zero to stop a nonexistent school-shooting epidemic. He wants things that will cost billions of dollars that already strapped school districts can't afford. And don't need.

Consider this: There are 50 million primary and secondary school students in 90,000 elementary and 37,000 secondary schools in the U.S.

■ Inevitable scams

If you paid "armed resource officers" \$40,000 a year, the bill would be over \$5 billion every year, a cost that would double once healthcare, retirement and other benefits get folded in. Labor, materials

and the inevitable scams for hardening schools would run many times that.

For what?

Since 1996, until the Douglas High shooting, there had been just 14 school shootings that have killed at last two people besides the gunman, according to a Northeastern University study.

Allowing firearm-trained school employees to volunteer to carry concealed handguns to protect their schools is the only way to protect schools.

Any homicidal shooter smart enough to load his gun will walk up to the school resource officer, say "hi," blow the guy's head off and then freely start mowing down unarmed, utterly defenseless students, teachers, administrators, principals and janitors.

Yet Mr. Trump stepped on his school-safety brilliance by handing gun-controllers the keys to the gun-confiscation kingdom. Confiscate suspicious guns first then worry about due process

afterward, he said.

Not in my America, Mr. President, though I hugely respect what you've accomplished in office and want to see all your agenda realized.

I also want an armed citizenry to protect the Constitution and its freedoms, not to burn down the village in order to save it.

Appealing to the left in America will not get you re-elected. And if it does, it's not worth violating the commitments on which you ran. Not for me. Not for you. Not for America.

In what appears to be an uncharacteristic lapse into re-election-itis, Mr. Trump spoke about adding to a broader gun bill another measure to ensure that if you have a permit to carry a concealed weapon in your own state, you can do so in other states too.

He said he'd oppose that, explaining that such interstate reciprocity would make the broader bill unpassable.

What?

■ Carrying weapons

I am sure the president understands how im-

portant it is for good citizens to be able to carry their weapons from states that favor concealed-carry permits into states that, despite a Supreme Court ruling, make it virtually impossible for a citizen to get a permit.

A black female cop and white male cop came to my house years ago after an attempted break-in. They asked whether I had a gun. "No," I said. They separately said this: The next time this happens, Mr. Hallow, we're not going to be here.

I thanked them, got a license, bought a gun and have kept it at home ever since.

I can't carry my .38 revolver outside my home to protect me at gas-station stops in shady neighborhoods because my state's lawmakers insist only cops should carry weapons.

Like my nation, my state is a representative democracy that nonetheless keeps me from defending myself and others.

Mr. Churchill, your face-squinting observation about democracy lives on.

(Source: The Washington Times)

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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
کمیانی اروپایی، فوری نیازمندیم.

خانم دبیا: ۰۹۱۲۸۱۰۳۲۰۶

دفتر: ۲۸۱۴۱ - ۲۲۶۶۲۴۵۴

مالکین محترم

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Tehraners to welcome New Year with tree planting

L I F E Tehran Mayor Mohammad Ali Najafi has called on Tehran citizens to plant a tree while they are growing sabzeh for their Haft Seen.

Iranians grow wheat, barley, mung bean or lentil sprouts in a dish and put it on Haft Seen (an arrangement of seven symbolic items traditionally displayed at Noruz, Iranian celebration of the New Year, as a ritual done since long time ago.)

He made the remarks days before Iran's National Tree Planting Day, which is annually celebrated on the fifteenth day of the last month on Iranian calendar month of Esfand, which usually corresponds with March 5.

This day is the first day of the Natural Resources Week, which is celebrated March 5 to 12. On this day, the saplings of the all kinds in terms of different climates of different parts of Iran would be planted by the people.

"Let's plant a tree while growing Sabzeh for Haft Seen and transplant it to your yard after Noruz Holiday," he proposed.

Tehrani citizens who don't have yard to transplant the tree can transfer their plant to 12 hectare greenbelt, which was established by the Tehran Municipality and will be inaugurated in coming days.

He urged Terhani citizens to help municipality to preserve the urban vegetation and NGOs to support activities of municipality to promote green areas in the city.



Plant trees to grace Vali-e Asr Street again

Tehran Municipality began to plant 740 15-year-old plane trees in Vali-e Asr Street from March 2 to 20 from Bozorgmehr intersection to Taleqani intersection.

The project was started on Friday with a ceremony attended by Najafi.

During the event, Najafi called tree as the 'God blessing' and pointed to the important role of trees in the city of Tehran, which was previously known as 'Chenarestan', which literally means 'plane tree field'.

"The Vali-e Asr Street, one of the longest streets in the Middle East, was known for its 18,000 street plane trees. The number of trees were decreased to 16,000 during recent years and Tehran Municipality tries to save others by scientific studies," Najafi explained.

Mismanagement kills Tehran's trees

The main problem with plane trees on Vali-e Asr Street is the absence of urban management to preserve them, Professor in urban & environmental horticulture told the Persian service of ISNA.

He said that concrete and blacktop limit the roots of trees.

Skyscrapers and high buildings limited the light for photosynthesis of plants in the city and groundwater depletion by mismanagement of water resources in Tehran makes the trees dries, he lamented.

May be thinking twice about planting trees and urban green spaces brings another chance to Tehrani citizens to benefit from more trees in different parts of the metropolitan and to enjoy from bird songs and clean air in coming year.

Healthy Eating: All about quinoa



Most folks call quinoa (pronounced "keen-whah") a grain, but it's actually a seed — one that originated thousands of years ago in the Andes Mountains. Dubbed "the gold of the Incas," it's treasured because of its nutritive value (more protein than any other grain or seed!). I love it for its yummy, nutty flavor.

Why you should try it

Quinoa actually has more protein than any other grain or seed and offers a complete protein, meaning it contains all the essential amino acids our bodies can't make on their own. It's also a great source of calcium and is high in lysine, the B vitamins and iron. Better still, the seed is easy to digest and gluten free.

The different kinds

You'll usually find quinoa in its tan or yellow form — though it comes in many colors: orange, red, pink, purple and black. Look for any color quinoa in your local health food stores; they all work — and taste — great in dishes. I always stock up in bulk to keep costs down. Stored in an air-tight container in the fridge, quinoa keeps for several months.

How to cook quinoa

It may seem foreign, but cooking quinoa is simple. First, rinse the quinoa. It has a natural soapy coating that helps protect the seed from pests but there's no need to eat it. To clean, just place the quinoa in a strainer and rinse with cold water for a minute or two.

Next is the cooking. Use one part quinoa to two parts liquid. Plain water works fine, but you can experiment with a vegetable or chicken broth for extra low-calorie flavoring. Place both the quinoa and the liquid in a saucepan, and bring it to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer, cover and let the seeds cook for 10 to 15 minutes — or until the water is absorbed, the seed is translucent and the germ is partially detached (it will look like a little feather or spiral).

When cooked, quinoa has a crunchy, nutty flavor. It works great in savory side salads, mixed into veggie burgers and more.

Quinoa salad

• Servings: 8

• Ingredients:

4 cups cooked quinoa* (or whole-grain couscous if you can't find quinoa)

1/2 cup red onion, diced

1 cup bell peppers (use red, orange or yellow), chopped

1 cup cucumber (leave skin on for green color), chopped

1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved

1 cup black beans

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon vinegar

Juice of one lime (zest is optional)

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1/4 cup parsley (or cilantro), chopped

Salt and pepper to taste

• Directions:

Mix all ingredients together in a bowl and serve. That's it!

(Source: foodnetwork.com)

Respond to nosy people with grace

We've all been asked rude questions that are no one else's business. Although everyone slips up now and then, some nosy people seem to have a knack for always sticking their foot in their mouth or making some social faux pas. You may answer the question and move on to another topic, but you don't have to.

Take the high road

These people are often unaware that they're exhibiting bad etiquette, but even if they know what they're doing, you should never stoop to getting back at them with bad manners. It's up to you whether or not you want to give them an answer, ignore them, or ask why they need to know whatever it is. Your comeback should be said with a smile and an even tone. If possible, use humor to soften your response, and then change the subject.

Be prepared

For times that you find yourself in the awkward position of being interrogated by a rude person, you need to arm yourself with some answers that will let him or her know that you consider the questions rude. There are several ways to handle these people: with the answer they are looking for, with a quippy comeback, or with a way of letting them know that you consider them boorish for asking such a question.

Set boundaries

Certain rude questions tend to come up more frequently than others. Before you walk out the door, make the decision to maintain good manners and not be that nosy person. If you are on the receiving end, be prepared with answers that let the other person know what you think of his or her nosiness with



as much poise as you can manage.

If you have children, start early and teach them questions not to ask. Most kids are naturally inquisitive, so direct them to the more appropriate conversation.

How much money do you make?

This question about money is quite common, even though it is considered rude and nosy to ask. You have several options on how to deal with it. Your answer will be different if the person asking is a coworker than if the question is coming from someone sitting next to you on an airplane.

The simplest answer is to say that you never discuss money with anyone but your spouse. Most people will accept that, but others who are extremely rude might press or insult you to get their answer. Don't fall for it.

Another thing you might do is answer with a quippy, "Enough

to pay my bills and have a little fun," or "Not nearly enough to do everything I'd like to do. How about you?"

How much did you pay for that house?

Here is another money question that doesn't deserve an answer. However, being the polite person you are, you might answer with something like, "I paid the going market value for houses in the neighborhood. It's a very comfortable house that felt like home the minute I walked in the door." Quickly change the subject to let the person know you are finished discussing house prices.

Are you still single?

Many single men and women in their late twenties and early thirties have heard this one. It's a question asked by a well-meaning relative or close friend who wants you to be happy. However, hearing it over and over will make you anything but happy.

If you are still single, tell the person that you haven't found someone you want to spend your life with, but if you ever do, you'll get the word out to everyone who needs to know.

Have you gained (or lost) weight?

If the person comes out and asks about your weight change, it is probably obvious, and chances are you have put on (or lost) a few pounds or more. When someone comes right out and makes this terribly insensitive remark, smile and say, "I'm feeling wonderful. How about you?" That should get the point across that you don't want to honor the rude question with an answer.

(Source: thespruce.com)

How to have a happier home in some simple steps?



Make the bed every morning. Make it a habit to start your morning by accomplishing this task.

Piles of dirty clothes around the house create chaos before bedtime. Get ready for bed an hour before you plan to go to sleep so that you have the mental and physical energy to file away clothes.

Wipe bathroom and kitchen surfaces immediately. Hard, dried food particles and old toothpaste chunks are not only gross, but are also harder to clean after

they have been drying for some time.

If you use something up, write it down on the shopping list. Save yourself from going without your needed supplies and make sure it's purchased on the next run to the grocery store.

Dishes get washed after every meal, or at least before bed. Make it a team effort so you can tackle the task together.

Fill up what's empty. Don't leave a finished roll of cardboard next to the toilet—change it out for a new one.

(Source: Real Simple)

28 simple and natural ways to detox your body



#14. Learn to incorporate superfoods into each meal:

The great thing about superfoods is that they contain important nutrients and antioxidants which our bodies need to fight off infections. The presence of these antioxidants and nutrients in the body help to fight off harmful toxins and substances that may compromise our immune system and our overall health—so the inclusion of them in our diets is critical. Superfoods are a delicious and nutritious group of foods including foods rich in Omega 3 fatty acids like salmon,

tuna, avocado, walnuts, almonds, olive oil and flax Seeds. You can also turn to fruits and vegetables that are bright in color as that means that their dark hue contains plenty of antioxidants. Options such as blueberries, raspberries, spinach, kale, eggplant, tomatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, apples, oranges and butternut squash. Try to incorporate super foods into every meal and enjoy how beneficial they are. They not only make for healthy and low fat food choices, but they also help you to boost your antioxidant intake.

(Source: bembu.com)



101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

#43. Further your education

No matter how long ago you've graduated, learning never ends. If you already have a diploma/degree, consider getting a second diploma/degree in a different field. Not only will it expand your knowledge and give you the competitive edge in the workplace, it'll also be the perfect tool if you wish to transition to a different career. If you are eyeing for a promotion within the same career field, then a Master's degree may be more relevant for you!

If you are not sure on what further education to pursue, map out your ideal life first, then identify your ideal career. Pick the educational path that will assist you in your ideal career the most!

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



Two women in Southern Khorasan Province sort saffron (Instagram/ @inspiredbypersia)

Simple lifestyle changes that reduce risk of disease



Even without expensive personalized services, you can reduce your risk of future illness with a few lifestyle tweaks. Here's how to own your wellness.

Manage your microbiome

"By and large, 50 percent (of disease risk) is due to our choices and 50 percent is due to our genetics," says Dr. Pare.

Your body's bacteria play an important and little-recognized role in the management of chronic diseases. Noshing on probiotic-rich foods and limiting antibiotic use are some ways to start improving yours. Don't miss these silent signs your microbiome might be in trouble.

Get regular screenings

Ensure you discuss age-appropriate screening tests with your doctor—and be sure to mention any family history. From a Pap test to a colonoscopy, many medical tests can catch potential problems before they start.

Maintain a healthy weight

Staying on top of your waistline helps reduce your risk of diabetes, heart disease and many types of cancer. Check in with your doctor if you're not sure what a healthy weight for your body is.

Hit the gym

Not only does exercise help you manage your weight, it's also beneficial for long-term disease prevention and your metabolism, and it can substantially increase the length of your life. Plus, exercise is important for maintaining your mental health, which is also key to improving your life expectancy.

(Source: Reader's Digest)

Weak media coverage damaging Iran’s tourism sector: official

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iran’s tourism industry is suffering from “weak” media coverage for promoting the country’s realities, facilities and capacities in terms of traveling and historical heritage, a cultural official says.

“Neither domestic media can make good in the field of tourism nor any other platform exists for promoting the country’s capacities,” Hamid Ziaieparvar said on Thursday.



An undated photo shows people visiting the ruins of Persepolis, a UNESCO World Heritage site in southern Iran.

Though Iran’s tourism infrastructure, such as transport system and hospitality industry, does not meet global standards, the main shortcoming is the lack of adequate marketing, he explained.

Despite having a wide range of attractions, Iran only attracted five million foreign tourists in 2017, ranking 46th among top 50 popular countries, the official added.

Ziaieparvar is the director for media studies and planning at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

Iran expects to reap a bonanza from its numerous tourist spots, including 22 ones that have been placed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, it aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

Iranian arrivals in Azerbaijan seen slowing if taxes rise

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Iranian tourist arrivals in Azerbaijan is expected to face a slower pace this year if Iran levies sharp departure taxes.

The number of tourists coming to Azerbaijan from Iran is growing every year, but unlike previous years, no growth is expected this year due to possible increase in taxes, Trend quoted Chairman of the Azerbaijan Tourism Association Nahid Bagirov as saying on Friday.

Bagirov added that according to the information gathered from Iranian travel companies, the taxes will rise from March 20.

“If this decision comes into force, there may be some problems with the arrival of tourists from Iran to Azerbaijan. Therefore, no increase is expected in the number of tourists from Iran this year,” Bagirov said.

Based on previous reports, the departure tax has been proposed to reach 2.2 million rials (about \$52) from the current 750,000 rials (about \$17), yet the fee will jump for those who would make their second or third trips over a one-year period.

Around 320,000 Iranians toured Azerbaijan in the first 10 months of 2017, an increase of 64 percent year on year, IRNA reported.

Russian, Georgian, Iranian and Turkish tourists accounted for the highest number of visits to the country.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara

A World Heritage, the Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara bear exceptional witness to the evolution of Japanese architecture and art and vividly illustrate a critical period in the cultural and political development of Japan, when Nara functioned as its capital from 710 to 784.

During this period, the framework of national government was consolidated and Nara enjoyed great prosperity, emerging as the fountainhead of Japanese culture.



A view of Todai-ji, a Buddhist temple associated with the Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara, Japan

Located in the modern city of Nara, the property includes eight component parts composed of seventy-eight different buildings covering 617.0 ha, which is surrounded by a buffer zone (1,962.5 ha) and the “historic environment harmonization area (539.0 ha)”.

The site of Heijo-kyo was carefully selected in accordance with Chinese geomantic principles. A grand city plan, based on Chinese examples such as Chang’an, was laid out, with palaces, Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines, public buildings, houses, and roads on an orthogonal grid.

The palace itself, located at the northern end of the central avenue, occupied 120 ha. It comprised the official buildings where political and religious ceremonies took place, notably the Daigokuden (imperial audience hall) and Chodo-in (state halls), and the imperial residence (Dairi), together with various compounds for administrative and other purposes.

(Source: UNESCO)

Khorasan Razavi hosts 1.7m foreign tourists in 11 months

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – Some 1.7 million foreign nationals visited Khorasan Razavi province, northeast Iran, during the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2017).

A total of 28.5 million travelers and pilgrims arrived in the province during the period, IRNA quoted Abolfazl Mokarramifard, the provincial tourism chief, as saying on Wednesday.

He explained that 31,527 people in the province are directly involved and 42,052 people are indirectly involved in the tourism industry.

Mokarramifard added: “Each traveler can generate one job opportunity directly so that tourism is considered as a key to tackle unemployment.”

Over 900 hotels, apartment hotels and guest houses are catering to travelers across the province, Mokarramifard added.

The province’s capital city, Mashhad, attracts thousands of pilgrims each day. The raison d’être is the holy



Pilgrims visit the holy shrine of Imam Reza (AS), the eighth Shia Imam, in Mashhad, northeast Iran.

shrine of Imam Reza (AS), the eighth Shia Imam.

Dozens of five-star hotels and hostels are dotted around the holy shrine. The city has also the highest

concentration of water parks in the country, and it also embraces variety of cultural and historical sites which are generally crowded.

Intl. car rally to cross major Iranian cities

TOURISM **TEHRAN** – An international car rally will traverse Iran during its cross-country expedition of 22,000 kms, connecting India’s Bhilai to Russia’s St. Petersburg.

The excursion will be flagged off on February 20 to celebrate 70 years of diplomatic ties between India and Russia, the Hindu reported.

Some 20 cars comprising of 60-70 participants from India, Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia will join the completion that is being organized by Kalinga Motor Sports Club.

The first leg of the rally will culminate in Delhi on March 13 where a Russian ambassador will flag off the second part.



A poster for India-Russia Friendship Motor Rally

Cape Town’s drought has shown us the future of travel

By Ekhart Yoga

I’m staring at the murky, jaundiced toilet bowl. I reach for the flush but stop and pull my hand back.

“If it’s brown flush it down, if it’s yellow let it mellow.”

Sorry to be crude, but that would be as much as 13 liters of water gone, a fifth of my daily allowance in a Cape Town struggling to manage the precious resource during the city’s worst drought in living memory.

Only I’ve returned from the South African city and am stood not on the southernmost tip of Africa but in my flat in north-east London.

“This is the new normal in terms of responsible tourism and travel,” said South African Tourism’s UK head Tolene van der Merwe, of the guidance and restrictions put in place on residents and visitors over the festive period, at a time when the city was concerned it did not have enough water to last its summer.

Avoid flushing the toilet, no baths, keep showers to three minutes (later cut to 30 seconds). Why not wash in the sea? Tourists were asked to save water like a local, while locals were to told to get “creative” in how they slashed their consumption.

Back from the Western Cape, it’s clear staying in Cape Town at the height of the drought in January has left an indelible impression on my own water usage, at home and abroad.

When I was there, the city had as little as three month’s left of water. Hotels removed plugs from baths, car hire firms stopped washing their vehicles, restaurants refused tap water. It felt like every drop mattered, and myself and the friends I was with behaved thus. We kept showers to three minutes, shamed anyone who did not, and, coming from a country where water is too often in unwelcome abundance,



Cape Town is served by six major dams, the levels of which are running low (Credit: AP/Bram Janssen)

attempted to comprehend what it was like to live somewhere where its presence was so fragile.

Since returning home, I’ve become much more aware of the length of my showers, the water it takes to fill a bath, and, yes, thought twice about flushing the toilet.

Although such diligent water management is not the norm in the UK and nor so in the majority of places to which British holidaymakers travel, it is surely not too far off.

By now, we are familiar and comfortable with keeping towels off the floor in hotels so that they might be used again the next day, saving water on laundry. And in the same way the national conscience on single-use plastic is changing, our approach to sustainable travel is poised to undergo a revamp, with Cape Town guiding the way.

Last year, the World Travel and Tourism Council launched

its Is It Too Much To Ask? campaign, encouraging tourists to sign up to any of 10 pledges that encompass all elements of environmentally friendly and responsible travel. Among them was a three-minute limit on showers in water-scarce destinations, a vow to offset the CO2 impact of a trip and to demand to see the environmental credentials of any tour operator before booking. Indeed, the ubiquity of plastic in hotels featured in Telegraph Travel’s very own campaign to improve the way we travel.

“For decades, the travel and tourism sector has been trying to make sustainable and responsible practices more mainstream,” the WTTC said. “It shouldn’t be called ‘sustainable tourism’ as a niche, but rather just ‘tourism’.”

The need for such habits is not reserved to far-off sun-scorched lands, but includes popular, mainstream destinations.

Mexico City, Tokyo and Delhi are all among dozens of cities classed as water-stressed by the Nature Conservancy. In Los Angeles, the most water-stressed city in the US, last winter ended a six year drought, during which the government instituted mandatory water restrictions.

In Europe, too, the EU’s environmental agency, has identified Cyprus, Bulgaria, Spain and Malta as countries at risk of drought at current consumption rates.

Prior to travelling to Cape Town I struggled to believe what I read about the city’s crisis, assuming that Day Zero could never happen in such a global city, such a key tourism destination.

But having spent a fortnight, seeing the cracked, bone-dry river beds, feeling the practical impact of water restrictions and imagining the hurt should the taps run dry, I appreciate environmental responsibility should no longer be a niche way to travel, but the norm.

(Source: The Telegraph)

Digital money has made it harder to tip the hotel housemaid

Hotel cleaners lose out from app-based charging

Last summer, Uber at last started allowing its customers to tip their drivers. There was nothing actually preventing them from tipping before. At the end of the ride a passenger could have pulled out his wallet, fished around for change and handed the driver a few dollars.

But it would have seemed absurd to do so, when everything else about the transaction was handled through a few taps of the app. The app didn’t enable tipping, so riders didn’t tip.

All of this highlights the conundrum for hotel housekeepers. Increasingly, people book hotel rooms through their computers or phones. They pay, and often pre-pay, with their credit cards. They get around town with app-based ride-hailing. There’s a good chance they don’t even carry cash. And yet to tip the housekeeper—or the bellhop or concierge—there’s no option but cash.

It is probably no coincidence, then, that tips are tight for housekeepers. According to the New York Times, fewer than one in three hotel guests in America now leave tips for the people who clean their rooms. It’s not as if hotel guests can’t afford them. The

American Hotel and Lodging Association, which represents hotel owners, recommends tipping \$1 to \$5 per night. For a \$200-a-night hotel stay, that’s the equivalent of taking a bag of M&Ms out of the minibar.

Hotel pay varies widely, but some housekeepers rely on tips for their livelihood. The median housekeeper last year made \$11.37 per hour, but in some cities it can be as low as \$10 an hour. An extra few dollars a day in tips from a handful of additional guests could represent a substantial boost to those earnings. After the Marriott chain started leaving envelopes in 160,000 rooms for housekeeper tips, tipping seemed to have increased, according to the Times. But Marriott ended the practice a few weeks later, finding it to be unpopular with guests, some of whom felt pressured into tipping.

A better solution would be to go the Uber route. Upon checkout (or electronic checkout), guests could be asked if they’d like to tip their housekeeper. This would be similar to what happens at the end of a ride on ride-hailing apps, or on receipts or tablet



screens in restaurant and retail transactions. For guests who pre-pay, they could even be asked in advance.

People in the service industry sometimes prefer cash tips, since they can be claimed quickly and directly, whereas credit-card tips

don’t get processed until the next paycheck and can sometimes get fees deducted. But everyone prefers a slower, smaller tip to no tip at all. And in our increasingly cash-free world, those are becoming the realistic options.

(Source: The Economist)

Recycled carbon fiber can improve permeable pavement, researchers find



A research team is solving a high-tech waste problem while addressing the environmental challenge of stormwater run-off. The researchers have shown they can greatly strengthen permeable pavements by adding waste carbon-fiber composite material. Their recycling method doesn't require using much energy or chemicals -- a critical factor for recycling waste materials.

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Unlike the impermeable pavement that is used for most roads and parking lots, pervious concrete allows rainwater to freely drain and seep into the ground underneath. Because

of increasing concerns about flooding in urban areas and requirements for controlling stormwater run-off, several cities have tried using the pervious concrete in parking lots and low-traffic streets. But because it is highly porous, it is not as durable as the traditional concrete that is used on major roads.

Carbon-fiber composites

Carbon-fiber composites, meanwhile, have become increasingly popular in numerous industries. Super light and strong, the material is used in everything from airplane wings to wind turbines and cars. While the market is growing about 10 percent per year, however, industries have not figured out a way to easily recycle their waste, which is as much as 30 percent of the material used in production.

Led by Karl Englund, associate research professor, and Somayeh Nassiri, assistant professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, the researchers added carbon-fiber composite scrap that they received from Boeing manufacturing facilities to their pervious concrete mix. They used mechanical milling to refine the composite pieces to the ideal sizes and shapes. The added material greatly increased both the durability and strength of pervious concrete.

"In terms of bending strength, we got really good results -- as high as traditional concrete,



Dr. Somayeh Nassiri

and it still drains really quickly," said Nassiri.

In composite form

The researchers used inexpensive milling techniques instead of heat or chemicals to create a reinforcing element from the waste carbon-fiber composites. They maintained and made use of the original strength of the composites by keeping them in their cured composite form. Their mix also required using a lot of the composite material, which would be ideal for waste producers.

"You're already taking waste -- you can't add a bunch of money to garbage and get a product," said Englund. The "key is to minimize the energy and to keep costs down."

While they have shown the material works at the laboratory scale, the researchers are beginning to conduct real-world tests on pavement applications. They are also working with industry to begin developing a supply chain.

(Source: Science Daily)

The researchers used inexpensive milling techniques instead of heat or chemicals to create a reinforcing element from the waste carbon-fiber composites.

Pecans, almonds, and walnuts may help improve colon cancer survival

Colon cancer patients who regularly eat nuts have been found to have lower risk of cancer recurrence. Colorectal cancer is the third most common cancer in the United States.

In a new study published in the Journal of Clinical Oncology, Charles Fuchs, the director of Yale Cancer Center, and colleagues followed more than 800 stage III colon cancer patients after their surgery and chemotherapy.

The researcher found that colon cancer patients who ate at least two 1-ounce servings of nuts per week showed 42 percent improvement in disease-free survival and 57 percent improvement in overall survival.

Cancer recurrence

They also found that those who consumed nuts had significantly reduced odds for cancer recurrence and death compared with those who did not eat nuts.

"We assessed associations of nut intake with cancer recurrence and mortality," the researchers wrote in their study. "Diets with a higher consumption of nuts may be associated with a significantly reduced incidence of cancer recurrence and death in patients with stage III colon cancer."

Further analysis of the results showed that disease-free



survival improved by 46 percent among nut consumers who ate tree nuts instead of peanuts.

Peanuts are botanically legumes but they are often considered as nuts. They also grow underground while walnuts such as hazelnuts, cashews, pecans, walnuts, and almonds

grow on trees.

Earlier studies have shown that nuts may help reduce insulin resistance. The condition can lead to unhealthy blood sugar levels and development of type 2 diabetes and other illnesses.

Colon cancer patients with lifestyle factors such as sedentary lifestyle, obesity, and a diet high in carbohydrates that increase insulin resistance and quickly elevate blood sugar levels are known to have worse outcomes.

Eating nuts

"Behaviors that make you less insulin-resistant, including eating nuts, seem to improve outcomes in colon cancer," Fuchs said.

It is not yet clear what it is about nuts that make them beneficial. Nonetheless, Fuchs suggested that nuts may help satiate hunger even with less intake of food.

The findings add to a growing number of benefits linked to nuts. A 2016 study showed that men who eat tree nuts at least five times a week have 34 percent reduced risk of dying from prostate cancer. Another study showed that consuming nuts daily may lower risk of coronary heart diseases by 30 percent.

(Source: Tech Times)

Crowdsourced family tree yields new insights about humanity: new study

Thanksgiving gatherings could get bigger -- a lot bigger -- as science uncovers the familial bonds that bind us. From millions of interconnected online genealogy profiles, researchers have amassed the largest, scientifically-vetted family tree to date, which at 13 million people, is slightly bigger than a nation the size of Cuba or Belgium. Published in the journal Science, the new dataset offers fresh insights into the last 500 years of marriage and migration in Europe and North America, and the role of genes in longevity.

"Through the hard work of many gene-

alogists curious about their family history, we crowdsourced an enormous family tree and boom, came up with something unique," said the study's senior author, Yaniv Erlich, a computer scientist at Columbia University and Chief Science Officer at MyHeritage, a genealogy and DNA testing company that owns Geni.com, the platform that hosts the data used in the study. "We hope that this dataset can be useful to scientists researching a range of other topics."

Public profiles

The researchers downloaded 86 million

public profiles from Geni.com, one of the world's largest collaborative genealogy websites, and used mathematical graph theory to clean and organize the data.

What emerged among other smaller family trees was a single tree of 13 million people spanning an average of 11 generations. Theoretically, they'd need to go back another 65 generations to converge on one common ancestor and complete the tree. Still, the dataset represents a milestone by moving family-history searches from newspaper obituaries and church archives into the digital era, making population-level

investigations possible.

"It's an exciting moment for citizen science," said Melinda Mills, a demographer at University of Oxford who was not involved in the study "It demonstrates how millions of regular people in the form of genealogy enthusiasts can make a difference to science. Power to the people!"

The dataset details when and where each individual was born and died, and mirrors the demographics of Geni.com individuals, with 85 percent of profiles originating from Europe and North America.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Bank Pasargad Awarded with FFI Entrepreneurship Badge

Chief Executive of Bank Pasargad of the Islamic Republic of Iran was awarded by the French Federation of Intellectuals with the Entrepreneurship Badge of Honor, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Given the above issue, the Badge of Entrepreneurship of French National Federation of Intellectuals, which is regarded as the highest honorary badge, was awarded to Dr. Majid Ghasemi CEO of Bank Pasargad, the report added.

After evaluating measures in an expert-level committee in the field of innovative management related to the financial and banking technologies, the Badge of Entrepreneurship and Honorary Certificate of Management was awarded to the senior official of



the bank.

It should be noted that managerial stability, creative and innovative approach in management, initiating and presenting new economic and employment strategies are of salient characteristics and distinctive features of the bank, he said, adding, "up to the present time, Bank Pasargad has been awarded Badge of Merit and EU Grand Officer Innovative Management Trophy as well as International Badge of Banking Industry Knight by the European Research and Innovation Center."

It is worth mentioning that Iran Banking Industry's Eternal Figure was awarded to Dr. Majid Ghasemi Chief Executive of Bank Pasargad, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank concluded.

Gilan Reg. Power Co. Wins 1st Rank in Protective Sys.

Gilan Regional Power Company (P.J.S) ranked first in the accurate performance index of protective system, the Public Relations Dept. of Gilan Regional Power Company maintained.

With due observance to the said issue, Gilan Province Regional Power Company stood at the first rank in the accurate performance index of protective system with 32.94 percent on average in the first six months of the 5th Five-Year Socioeconomic and Cultural Development Plan (from 2013 to 2017).

Eng. Hassan Qanbarzadeh Manager of Department to Supervise and Monitor Instrumentation and said, "according to a report on the events at power transmission grid of the country, Gilan Regional Power Company managed to win the first rank

among other regional power companies in the country in the same period."

Turning to the performance and function of the Department to Supervise and Monitor Instrumentation, he said, "this success has been achieved at the unsparing support of senior management of organization and co-operation of different technical and logistics units and also accurate planning made by expert engineers."

It is obvious that various stages of designing and commissioning substations precisely, repairing, maintaining and operating probable incidents accurately for preventing their repetition and accountable performance of contractors in repair and maintenance services, etc. are taken into consideration in the accurate performance

of protection system, he opined.

Given the development of network and important role of system in protecting the safe operation of power network, the balanced development of network's performance indicators requires the attention and strengthening instrumentation and protection units throughout the country, the report added.

It should be noted that protective systems will prevent spread of problem to other parts of the network with sidelining parts and equipment which have faced with faults and defects, he said, adding, "the correct performance of protective systems will reduce unwanted power outages and improve performance and maintain stability of power transmission networks."



How a little bit of anxiety may improve memory

Something as simple as running out to grab a coffee may not be a memorable experience -- but anxiety could change that. A new study suggests that people with higher anxiety levels might remember certain events better than people with lower anxiety levels.

That's because, researchers say, higher anxiety may make people more susceptible to negative feelings, putting them in a more negative state of mind. That, in turn, may make certain events seem more memorable.

Consider this scenario: If a person is having a bad day and then goes to Starbucks, where the barista asks a neutral question, such as "Would you like milk in your coffee?" this may be interpreted as something negative if someone is in a bad frame of mind. Later, an individual may remember this trip for coffee as a negative experience because of this negative mindset, said co-study author Christopher Lee, a doctoral candidate in psychology at the University of Waterloo in Canada.

In the study, the researchers started by giving 80 undergraduate students an anxiety test. They found that the people who scored highly on that test -- which measured anxiety experienced in the two weeks prior -- were more susceptible to negative feelings than people with lower levels of anxiety. The people in the study didn't have a diagnosed anxiety disorder.

Then, to test memory, the participants were shown a series of neutral words, one at a time, overlaid onto either a photo of a negative scene -- meaning something that could affect their emotions, such as a car accident or a cemetery -- or a neutral scene, such as a lake or trees.

(Source: Live Science)

An Alzheimer's drug to help teeth repair cavities naturally

Dental fillings may soon be left in the ash heap of history, thanks to a recent discovery about a drug called Tideglusib.

Developed for and trialed to treat Alzheimer's disease, last year scientists found the drug also happens to promote the natural tooth regrowth mechanism in mice, allowing the tooth to repair cavities.



Tideglusib works by stimulating stem cells in the pulp of teeth, the source of new dentine. Dentine is the mineralized substance beneath tooth enamel that gets eaten away by tooth decay.

Teeth can naturally regenerate dentine without assistance, but only under certain circumstances. The pulp must be exposed through infection (such as decay) or trauma to prompt the manufacture of dentine.

But even then, the tooth can only regrow a very thin layer naturally - not enough to repair cavities caused by decay, which are generally deep. Tideglusib changes this outcome because it turns off the GSK-3 enzyme, which stops dentine from forming.

In the 2017 research, the team inserted small, biodegradable sponges made of collagen soaked in Tideglusib into cavities. The sponges triggered dentine growth and within six weeks, the damage was repaired.

The collagen structure of the sponges melted away, leaving only the intact tooth.

Thus far, the procedure has only been used in mouse teeth. Yet as King's College London Dental Institute Professor and lead author Paul Sharpe told The Telegraph at the time, "Using a drug that has already been tested in clinical trials for Alzheimer's disease provides a real opportunity to get this dental treatment quickly into clinics."

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Could this bold new technique boost gravitational-wave detection?

Gravitational waves that we can detect here on Earth are generated by the most energetic events in the cosmos, from colliding black holes to merging neutron stars.

To spot these space-time ripples, which have traveled billions of light-years in some cases, scientists must build some of the most sensitive equipment the world has ever seen. But the very sensitivity of this gear means that vibrations, turbulence and even gas molecules in our atmosphere can drown out even the most powerful gravitational-wave signals in a crescendo of background noise.

Ingenuous engineering solutions are therefore needed to pull the weak signal of gravitational waves out of the noise. In new research published in the journal Physical Review Letters, physicists describe a potentially powerful new method that could, theoretically, be used to remove a key component of noise from gravitational-wave detectors and, in doing so, remove the requirement of having to build costly and complex vacuum chambers.

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(Source: space.com)

Iranian celebs named ambassadors of rare diseases foundation

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The Rare Diseases Foundation of Iran chose some well-known national athletes and artists as the ambassadors of rare diseases to raise public awareness about the least prevalent illnesses.

Honored athletes such as Ali Daie, Hamid Sourian and Behdad Salimi and also some distinguished singers and actors including Khashayar Etemadi and Bahareh Afshari were among the chosen ambassadors, Khabaronline reported.



This was part of the 9th International Conference on the Occasion of Rare Diseases Day, held in Tehran on Wednesday.

Established in 2008, the Rare Diseases Foundation of Iran is a non-profit institution which aims to improve the living conditions of patients suffering from various rare diseases.

The World Health Organization (WHO) issued a provoking statement for 'Rare Disease Day' on Wednesday which states:

The vision of the Sustainable Development Goals is a world in which no one is left behind, including people who suffer from rare diseases. Just because a disease affects a small number of people does not make it irrelevant or less important than diseases that affect millions.

Rare diseases present fundamentally different challenges from those of more common diseases, especially for diagnosis. The small number of patients, the logistics involved in reaching widely dispersed patients, the lack of validated biomarkers and surrogate end-points, and the lack of clinical expertise and expert centers all present significant barriers.

Tehran's green startup weekend announces winners

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Winners of the first 'environment and urban management' startup weekend were announced on Friday.

Organized by Tehran Municipality, the three-day event was held in Shahid Beheshti University.

Twelve teams put forward their startup ideas in topics related to environment and urban management such as traffic management, air pollution and waste management.

According to the official website of Tehran Municipality, the idea of turning waste into decorative material won the first place. The second praised idea was a mobile application which educates how to grow plants and facilitate plants buying and selling. And the third rank went to the idea of selling fruits and vegetables online.

LEARN ENGLISH

Solving a Mystery

Jane: You have to watch this movie. It's so good!

Hercule: I'm not really into **mysteries**.

Jane: But this is a really good **whodunit**.

Hercule: I prefer action movies.

Jane: Listen, the movie gives you plenty of **clues**, and the **detective** follows **hunch** after hunch, **lead** after lead, but the movie is full of **red herrings**. Everybody seems to have an **alibi** and the **witnesses** aren't reliable.

Hercule: I don't know. It seems kind of confusing to me. I don't really want to use my brain when I'm watching a movie.

Jane: But that's the fun part of it. The true identity of the **victim** is a mystery, the **suspects** all **have skeletons in their closets**, and the detective isn't what he seems.

Hercule: Yeah, well...

Jane: And just when you think you're **getting to the bottom of it**, the **rug gets pulled out from under you**. It **keeps you guessing** until the very end. Hey, where are you going?

Hercule: I'm going to find an action movie where all my brain has to do is handle the **sensory overload**!

■ Key vocabulary

mystery: an event, situation etc. that people do not understand or cannot explain because they do not know enough about it
whodunit: a book, film etc. about a murder case, in which you do not find out who killed the person until the end
clue: an object or piece of information that helps someone solve a crime or mystery

detective: a police officer whose job is to discover information about crimes and catch criminals

hunch: if you have a hunch that something is true or will happen, you feel that it is true or will happen; guess

lead: a piece of information that may help you to solve a crime or mystery; clue

red herring: a fact or idea that is not important but is introduced to take your attention away from the points that are important
alibi: something that proves that someone was not where a crime happened and therefore could not have done it

witness: someone who sees a crime or an accident and can describe what happened

victim: someone who has been attacked, robbed, or murdered

suspect: someone who is thought to be guilty of a crime
a skeleton in one's closet: an embarrassing or unpleasant secret about something that happened to you in the past

get to the bottom of something: to find out the cause of a problem or situation

rug gets pulled out from under someone: to suddenly take away something that someone was depending on to achieve what they wanted

keep someone guessing: make someone continue guessing about something

sensory overload: a condition of receiving too much information or stimulation via visual or audio sources; overstimulation of one or more senses

(Source: eslpod.com)

New Year pet trade pushing Kaiser's mountain newt toward extinction

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — The upward and disturbing trend of trading Kaiser's mountain newt (*Neurergus kaiseri*), specially as the Iranian New Year is getting closer, is driving the precious species to extinction.

Also known as Lorestan mountain newt, the animal is listed as vulnerable by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Its population is considered to be severely fragmented, and there is a continuing decline in the extent and quality of its habitat, as well as a decline in the number of mature individuals due to overharvesting for the illegal pet trade.

Over the past few years, with the Iranian New Year holidays approaching, some harvest and trade the rare species illegally as pets and many other would purchase it to use it for ornament for their Haft Seen (an arrangement seven items on the table which start with 'S' in Persian language as well as gold fish, colorful eggs, candle and mirror).

Additionally some have even replaced the gold fish with Lorestan newt, while the animal cannot be kept in captivity and would soon die. There is no exact, official estimate for the number of Lorestan newt pet trade, however, it seems to be one of the main reasons for the species to be threatened with extinction.

Just recently, head of Tehran's Department of Environment Mohammad Hossein Bazgir has called on law enforcement bodies



Over the past few years, with the Iranian New Year holidays approaching, some harvest and trade the rare species illegally as pets and many other would purchase it to use it for ornament for their Haft Seen while the animal cannot be kept in captivity and would soon die.

to take action to prevent the illegal trade of Kaiser's mountain newt.

According to the Red List provided by IUCN, the species is endemic to the central

Zagros Mountains of Iran with a circumscribed distribution area in the Lorestan and Khuzestan provinces is western and southwestern Iran. This species was believed to be relatively rare. When it was last assessed in 2008, it was thought that a dramatic decline has taken place between 1998 and 2008, when the population was estimated to number fewer than 1,000 mature individuals. Red List reported that the population has dropped by 80 percent in less than a decade due to the collection for the pet trade.

Kaiser's mountain newt lives in water, in springs, streams, water troughs and waterfalls. It does not leave the water for long. The streams are mostly surrounded by open patches of woodland with rock outcrops.

The major threat to this species is uncontrolled overharvesting for the national and international pet trade. Every spring an unknown number of this species is harvested for national trade. Habitat degradation and destruction present the other major threat caused by deforestation, utilization of habitats for livestock, dam construction and water abstraction for domestic and agricultural uses, introduced fish species, the use of some habitats for recreational purpose and mountaineering, eco-tourism, disturbance and pollution. All sites are more or less threatened by drought.

The stunning, marvelous species are native to small parts of Iran and losing them would cause their global extinction.

Electric buses may hit Iran's metropolises



The first electric bus in southern city of Shiraz, June 2017

ENVIRONMENT **TEHRAN** — Special researches will be conducted to determine the feasibility and efficiency of using electric buses in Iran's metropolitan areas.

Isfahan City Council has been tasked with conducting studies, said Tehran City Council Chairman Mohsen Hashemi who is also the head of metropolises council's public transportation workgroup.

Besides its environmental and health

threatening impacts, air pollution has some negative social and economic consequences which become visible gradually, Mehr quoted him as saying on Friday.

Referring to the major share of transportation in air pollution, Hashemi called for adopting policies and plans which would concentrate essentially on decreasing the need for trip (through e-government services) and then, guiding citizens to take their trips by public transportation, bicycle and walking.

Fajr Fashion and Clothing Festival intl. section opens in Tehran



SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — The international section of the 7th Fajr International Fashion and Clothing Festival opened in Tehran on Saturday.

The opening ceremony was marked with officials as well as fashion designers and those active in the fashion industry worldwide in attendance.

Two workshops on fashion and clothing thought by faculties at French and Italian universities are of the spotlights of the 2-day event.

Motivating the designers to enter world markets, bridging the gap between the fashion designers active in the field worldwide along with recognizing the capacities in Islamic clothing and fashion are of the purposes of the international event.

The Fajr festivals, are held annually in different fields including cinema, theater and visual arts. The 7th Fajr International Fashion and Clothing Festival runs from February 25 to March 4.

Pollutionwatch: wood burning is not climate friendly




With snow on the ground, many people will have been huddling around a wood fire, but researchers are questioning if wood burning is really climate neutral. Burning wood is not CO2 free; it releases carbon, stored over the previous decades, in one quick burst. For an equal amount of heat or electricity, it releases more CO2 than burning gas, oil and even coal, so straight away we have more CO2 in the air from burning wood. This should be reabsorbed as trees regrow. For logs from mature Canadian woodland, it could take more than 100 years before the atmospheric CO2 is less than the alternative scenario of burning a fossil fuel and leaving the trees in the forest.


This matters to prevent climate tipping points such as an ice-free Arctic or shifting monsoon patterns before the wider decarbonisation can take place following the trajectories of the Paris and Kyoto agreements. Critics of this view say that the trees would never have been left to grow, but would instead have been chopped down for wood or paper. It seems that wood burning is not climate neutral in the short term and requires an increase in forested area to be climate neutral in the longer term.

(Source: The Guardian)

Second Announcement



N.I.O.C
1396.5633



National Iranian
Drilling Company

Public Call Of Tender						
One-Stage						
TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE (Rial)	Subject of Tender	Tenders Portal Reg. No.	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial					
2,604	120,000,000	2,229,945,600	P/F "MALBRANQUE" SAFETY GATE VALVE	3,154,087	Tender No.:FP/20-96/039 Indent No.: 08-22-9645019	1

Brief discription of subject:
National Iranian Drilling Company(NIDC) address pasdaran Blev., Airport Sqare, Ahvaz, Iran hereby intends to purchase its requirements from qualified and interested tenderers through one-stage public tender upon following **terms and conditions**:

A) Competence of tenderers:
The tenderers should not have legal restrictive to participation govermental to tenderers , also they should provide statute or business license related to subject of the tender.

B) Preparation of tender documents:
Purchasing of documents:
In order to receive the tender documents, **510,000 Rials** should be paid to SIBA account number 2174652205004 of NIDC in Bank Meli Iran and providing the original deposit receipt.

Reciving of documents:
Tenderers must be obtain the tender documents maximum ten days after the date of second publication till 17-April-2018. in person at the following address: Hall No.:113, 1thfloor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN
Notice: Only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and recieve tender ducments from foreign procurement department in due date and participates in tenderwill be known as tenderer from tender committee.

C) Delivery of bids envelopes:
Tenderers shall submit simultaneously envelopes of bids including (A) Tender bank guarantee, (B) stamped and signed of tender documents, (C) The priced signed and stamped of the same Technical-Commercial sheets maximum till 14March2018 to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1thfloor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN.
Notice: The deadline for the refusal of bidders participation in the the tender is the last day of determined for submission of bids.

D) The envelopes will be opened at 9:00 On 18-April-2018

E) Tender Guarantee:
Type of guarantee:
A)Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activites licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to National Iranain Drilling Company.

Duration of credit guarantee & quotation:
This duration should be valid for 90 days and extendable maximum For one time in initial credit amount.

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on. WWW.NIDC.IR

Foreign Procurement Dept
National Iranian Drilling Company

تهران تایمز : نوبت اول ۹۶/۱۲/۱۲نوبت دوم ۹۶/۱۲/۱۳

New faces and old hands battle it out in Italy's election

With Sunday's Italian election potentially giving birth to a deeply divided parliament, here is a look at some of the key players in what could be a long and laborious process to form Italy's next government.

He may be only 31, but Luigi Di Maio has his eyes set on becoming the populist 5-Star Movement's first premier.

The son of a local official of a now defunct neo-fascist party, Di Maio ran unsuccessfully in 2010 for the city council in Pomigliano d'Arco, his hometown near Naples. Since his election to Parliament in 2013, he has served as vice president of the lower Chamber of Deputies.

His pre-political resume is skimpy, too. He says that before being consumed by politics, he was launching a web marketing start-up - "I'll go back to it," he insists. He has also served as a steward in Naples' stadium "welcoming the VIPs."

He always seems to be smiling - even when listening to speeches about dismal events.

Unlike his facial expression, his stance on issues shifts. He has backed seeking a referendum on Italy's use of the euro currency, but has since hedged his bets, saying a vote might not be needed as he doesn't expect the currency to last.

Silvio Berlusconi, the 81-year-old former three-time premier can't take the helm again should Forza Italia, the party he created a quarter-century ago, triumph.

That's because a tax fraud conviction bans him from holding public office. But neither the ban, nor an array of corruption and sex scandals can keep Berlusconi away.

He's dueling with campaign coalition partner Matteo Salvini, who heads the right-wing anti-migrant League party, for dominance of Italy's center-right bloc.

Berlusconi is clearly relishing the prospect of being a potential kingmaker and milking a role as a familiar face to reassure European Union partners.

That's some turnaround. After all, in 2011, Berlusconi reluctantly stepped down as premier after markets lost faith in him.

Berlusconi is no longer Italy's richest man.



Chipping away at his fortune have been mega-sized legal fees to a stable of lawyers defending him. Also denting are the big alimony awards to his second wife, a former actress who sought divorce following revelations of his "bunga-bunga" parties and dalliances with women a good half-century younger.

Matteo Salvini is in a battle to dominate the center-right, and wants to upstage Berlusconi's Forza Italia party.

He has never held public office in Italy, taking over as head of the Northern League in 2013, when the party was engulfed in a scandal over the misuse of funds. While frequently bashing the EU, once calling it "a cage of crazies," his sole political office has been as a deputy in the European Parliament, a post he has held since 2004.

Salvini, 43, has been anti-migrant, while claiming to support legal immigration. He leveraged for political gain the recent shooting of six African migrants by an unsuccessful local Northern League candidate in a local election. The gunman was allegedly motivated by the arrest of a Nigerian in the gruesome murder of a young Italian woman.

In Europe, he has cozied up publicly with France's far-right leader Marine Le Pen and has praised Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In a bid to broaden the party's base, Salvini has rebranded the party by dropping "Northern" from its title, which was central to the party's earlier secessionist platform that scapegoated the south.

He is divorced from the mother of his two children. He is romantically involved with a TV starlet, who upstaged him in an appearance at the San Remo musical festival in a transparent gown with sequin accents over a lace teddy.

Like his fellow Florentine, Niccolò Macchiavelli, Matteo Renzi relishes political calculation. In 2014, Renzi ruthlessly engineered a meteoric rise from Florence mayor to the premiership, in the process making enemies in the Democratic Party, and becoming, at 39, the country's youngest leader.

But he miscalculated in his assessment of how committed Italians were to ambitious economic and political reforms. After voters rejected constitutional reforms in a referendum, Renzi kept his word and, fighting tears,

resigned the premiership in December 2016.

A chastised-looking Renzi was an unusual sight. But his humility was short-lived.

Brash and sharp-tongued, Renzi battled to retain his grip on the Democrats, which, since 2013, have been the main partner in the coalition government. But old rancor combined with his drive to steer the party to the center cost him dearly.

More left-leaning factions in the party, especially former Communists, bolted and formed a new grouping and refused to ally with the Democrats in the election.

Recent opinion polls are indicating that the Democrats have steadily lost support, with some previous voters opting for the populist 5-Stars, or even Berlusconi's center-right party.

A Roman from a noble family, Paolo Gentiloni, 63, cut his political teeth at a classics high school considered the choice of Rome's bourgeois class, assuming the role of as a leader of left-wing students during Italy's hot years of youthful dissent.

Turning to journalism, he wrote for, among others, a magazine headed by one of the founders of the communist daily Il Manifesto and later became director of an ecology magazine.

His jobs helped him become spokesman for Rome Mayor Francesco Rutelli, a former Radical and Greens Party leader who later forged close ties with the Vatican.

Though his own candidacy to be Rome's mayor in 2013 flopped, Gentiloni was available for bigger roles. When Renzi resigned, the Italian president tapped Gentiloni, who had become foreign minister, to be premier.

A tennis player known for a mean drop shot, Gentiloni has finessed talk of extending his premiership. Under Democratic Party rules, the party secretary is the de facto candidate for the premiership - Renzi's the secretary.

But with Renzi's popularity among Democrats in question, Gentiloni is a potential candidate to lead a grand coalition. Even Berlusconi has professed admiration.

(Source: AP)

Pakistani lawmakers begin secret vote for senate elections



Pakistani lawmakers on Saturday began casting votes in secret for new senators in parliament's upper house in an election that looks set to boost the ruling party, as it tries to revive the political fortunes of ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

Winning control of the Senate could enable the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to change the constitution to make former prime minister and party leader Sharif eligible to hold office again when the party contests a national election due later this year.

While PML-N has not spoken to amending the constitution in such a way, the party has been on a collision course with the country's judiciary since July when the Supreme Court ousted Sharif from power by disqualifying him over undeclared assets.

Last month the top court again disqualified Sharif by removing him as head of PML-N, the political party he founded.

A total of 135 candidates, which includes 25 women, are contesting the 52 senate seats. The elected senators would serve a six year term.

The opposition Pakistan Peoples Party

(PPP) currently controls the 104-seat senate but is expected to be replaced by the PML-N as the single biggest party. With its allies in the senate, PML-N is tipped to take control of the chamber.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, the speaker of the National Assembly, cast the first vote in the elections in capital Islamabad, the parliamentary media wing said on Saturday morning.

Polling is taking place in Pakistan's four provincial assemblies and the federal parliament, with officials expecting final results to be announced later in the afternoon.

The final results will not immediately show how well PML-N has done because a number of candidates were barred from running under the party's banner following Sharif's disqualification by the Supreme Court last month.

Those candidates, who will be running as "independents", are expected to pledge their allegiance to PML-N if they are elected to the senate, PML-N party officials say. Under Pakistan's constitution a bill cannot become law unless it is passed by both upper and lower houses of parliament.

(Source: Reuters)

China delays U.S. request against North Korea at UN Security Council



China has postponed a U.S. request for a UN Security Council committee to blacklist dozens of ships, companies and a Taiwanese individual over violation of sanctions against North Korea.

Diplomats said on Friday that China placed a hold on the U.S. request, Reuters reported, adding that Beijing did not provide any specific reason.

A hold, which is often used by UNSC members to obtain more information, can either be lifted or sometimes lead to a permanent blocking of a proposal.

Last week, the U.S. requested the Security Council to subject 33 ships, 19 of which are North Korean, to a global port entry ban and freeze the assets of 27 shipping companies and the Taiwanese individual over interactions with Pyongyang.

Washington said the proposal was aimed at shutting down North Korea's "illicit maritime smuggling activities to obtain oil and sell coal."

Since 2006, the Security Council has intensified sanctions against North Korea over its nuclear and ballistic missile programs, banning Pyongyang's exports of coal, iron, lead, textiles and seafood,

and the country's imports of crude oil and refined petroleum products.

In late February, the U.S. Treasury black-listed more than 50 North Korea-linked shipping companies, vessels, and trade businesses, imposing an asset freeze and barring U.S. citizens from dealing with them.

U.S. President Donald Trump described the measures as the "heaviest sanctions ever" levied on Pyongyang.

The North Korean Foreign Ministry censured the U.S. sanctions as an "act of war."

Tensions have been high between Washington and Pyongyang over the latter's missile and nuclear programs.

Although the U.S. administration says it prefers a diplomatic solution to the crisis, it has repeatedly threatened Pyongyang with military action.

North Korea, already under numerous sanctions, has refused to halt its weapons program, pledging to keep up development of its military capabilities in response to the U.S. military presence in the region.

(Source: Daily Star)

Big freeze grips UK

By staff & agencies

Britain's military was deployed to central and western England to help get hospital employees to work and to assist police in rescuing people from snowbound vehicles as unusually cold weather gripped Europe.



The big freeze caused travel chaos throughout the country with hundreds of flights cancelled at Heathrow Airport, Europe's largest air hub. Trains broke down, stranding some passengers in frosty conditions for hours. "This is particularly unusual weather," Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said. "It's something that happens very rarely in this country."

Several deaths have been attributed to the late-winter Siberian cold snap that stretched across Europe. The fatalities include a man in his 60s who was pronounced dead after being pulled from a frozen lake in London on Wednesday, the city's ambulance service said.

Trains, planes stalled

One train travelling from London's Waterloo Station to Weymouth ground to a halt outside New Milton, stranding motorists for hours.

Thousands of homes are without electricity as temperatures remain below freezing, with bitter winds.

Heathrow Airport tweeted Friday that it was working with airlines to consolidate the flight schedule "to provide more certainty around departing flights," as extreme winter conditions were expected across the U.K. and Europe. More than 350 flights were cancelled. Gatwick, London City, Edinburgh and Glasgow airports also reported cancellations.

Other European airports closed down entirely. Authorities at Geneva's airport in Switzerland have suspended air traffic for a second straight day amid heavy snowfall.

The airport says on its website that departing and arriving flights have been barred until further notice "because of the prevailing weather conditions." It advised passengers to contact their airlines to find out if their flights were still scheduled for departure.

Around 340 flights were cancelled at Ireland's Dublin Airport, which posted images of swirling snow together with the hashtag #BeastFromTheEast. It doesn't plan to open until Saturday.

Meanwhile, after one of the coldest starts to the meteorological spring, it looks like temperatures will recover a little over the coming days, especially in the south.

Northern parts of the UK will hold onto the very cold conditions over the weekend, with further snow showers likely, especially over northern and eastern Scotland.

Early next week, temperatures will improve a little, but it will stay cold for the time of year. Temperatures will range from 2 C to 5C (35F to 41F) on Monday.

Southern parts of the UK will see less cold air moving in over the weekend, with temperatures close to average across south-west England on Sunday.

Showers will turn increasingly to rain and the main hazards will be dense fog and icy stretches overnight.

Next week, there will be a gradual improvement on temperatures, so it won't be as cold as it has been, but there is little sign of any spring warmth. Temperatures will range from 5C to 9C (48F) on Monday.

Turkish warplanes hit pro-Syrian govt forces in Afrin, kill 36



Turkey strikes also claiming civilian lives

Meanwhile, Syria's official news agency SANA reported that Turkish tanks shelled al-Hujaila village in Afrin on Friday night, killing eight civilians and injuring 12 others, mostly women and children. The Turkish army and its allied anti-Syrian government militants also targeted the villages of Sharran and Jandaris in Afrin, causing damage to residential units and public infrastructure.



The Syrian government has already condemned the "brutal Turkish aggression" against Afrin, rejecting Ankara's claim about having informed Damascus of the operation.

Turkey has been waging "Operation Olive Branch" against Syria's Afrin region since January 20 in a bid to eliminate the YPG, which forms the backbone of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which is backed by the U.S. The Turkish government views the YPG as a terror organization and the Syrian branch of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The latter has been fighting for an autonomous region inside Turkey since 1984.

This is while U.S. officials regard the YPG as the most effective fighting force against the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in northern Syria, and have substantially increased their weaponry and technology support to the group.

Turkey has warned that the Afrin offensive could expand to the nearby Syrian city of Manbij.

In a separate development, Ankara said Saturday that 41 of its soldiers had been killed in Afrin.

Turkish Defense Minister Nurettin Canikli made the announcement in a speech delivered at Istanbul National Defense University on Friday, adding that 95 villages or hamlets had come under their control during the Afrin operation.

(Source: agencies)

Iraq arrests, kills 25 ISIL remnants near Mosul

Iraqi media reports say more than two dozen ISIL (Daesh) terrorists have been killed and arrested in an army operation west of Mosul, which was once the Takfiri terror group's main stronghold in the Arab country.

"Security troops arrested, today, 17 Daesh members in al-Rayhanna village and seized the weapons in their possession in Badush, west of Mosul," an Iraqi security source told Baghdad Today news website on Friday.

The source, speaking on condition of anonymity, added that "eight members including three [Daesh] leaders were killed in an airstrike against al-Atshana Mountain, in the wake of their attack against a checkpoint in Badush and fleeing to mountainous areas."

Iraqi security forces had repelled a terrorist attack on a checkpoint in Badush a day earlier. The assault perpetrated

by the Takfiri group claimed the lives of two soldiers and left three others injured.

Daesh unleashed a campaign of death and terror in Iraq in 2014, overrunning vast swathes in lightning advances in the northern and western parts of the country. Iraqi army soldiers and allied fighters then launched operations to eliminate Daesh and retake lost territory.

Last July, Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi formally declared Mosul free of Daesh terrorists, in a major blow to the terrorist outfit that helped the armed forces to speed up their liberation operation.

Daesh's territorial rule in Iraq came to an end months later in December 2017, when Abadi announced an ultimate victory against the Takfiri group.

(Source: Press TV)



Nadal pulls out of Indian Wells, Miami with injury

Rafael Nadal has pulled out of the Indian Wells and Miami Open tournaments after aggravating the leg injury that forced him out of the Australian Open in January, the Spanish world number two said on Friday. Nadal, a three-times winner at Indian Wells and five-times finalist at Miami, suffered his latest setback during a training session on Tuesday that forced him to pull out of this week's Mexican Open in Acapulco.

"Unfortunately, the injury I suffered in Acapulco before starting the tournament is in the same area as the one suffered in Melbourne," Nadal said on his Facebook page. "I won't be able to play in Miami or Indian Wells as I need to recover."

"It was very painful to retire from Acapulco and it's very hard as well to not play in the USA. I will miss you and I will do everything that's possible to be back there in 2019."

This marks the latest setback for the 31-year-old Spaniard, who has not competed since retiring from his quarter-final against Croatia's Marin Cilic in Melbourne and recently lost the world number one ranking to Roger Federer.

The BNP Paribas Open at Indian Wells begins next week while the Miami Open follows two weeks later.

Nadal is the second high-profile player in as many days to withdraw from the tournaments as former world number three Stan Wawrinka said his recovery from a persistent knee injury would keep him from competing at both events.

(Source: Reuters)

Guardiola heaps praise on 'master' tactician Conte

Antonio Conte is a "master" tactician and the Chelsea manager has already changed the way clubs play in the Premier League, according to the Italian's Manchester City counterpart Pep Guardiola.

Conte won the Premier League title in his debut season in England last year but the London outfit are currently struggling down in fifth place, 22 points behind runaway leaders City.

Chelsea are also two points behind Tottenham Hotspur in the race for a top-four finish that will ensure qualification for next season's Champions League.

"I think Conte is going to leave something to English football. I am sure of that," Guardiola told reporters as his side prepare to heap more misery on the champions in Sunday's clash at the Etihad Stadium.

Guardiola's side will go into the match on the back of a 3-0 league victory over Arsenal on Thursday, while Chelsea lost their last league fixture 2-1 to Manchester United at Old Trafford last Sunday. Conte, who led Italy to the Euro 2016 quarter-finals before joining Chelsea later that year, has been the subject of persistent British media reports suggesting he will leave the club after criticizing their transfer policy this season.

Guardiola, however, feels the former Juventus boss has already left his mark on English football.

"What Antonio has done here in the Premier League, maybe the people don't realize," the former Barcelona boss said.

"He introduced another way to attack with five at the back, another system. A lot of teams, even Arsenal, had to do a lot of imitating to do that. "Tactically, he is a master. He did it amazingly with the national team with Italy and when he went to Turin."

(Source: Guardian)

No Pogba-Mourinho war at Man United – Raiola

Mino Raiola insisted there is no issue with star client Paul Pogba and Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho at Old Trafford.

Pogba has dominated headlines amid a reported feud with Mourinho, who benched the £89million-rated midfielder for the first leg of United's Champions League last-16 tie against Sevilla last week. The 24-year-old France international was brought on in the 17th minute for injured team-mate Ander Herrera, having been substituted in Premier League defeats to Tottenham and Newcastle United, before starting and starring in the club's 2-1 victory over Chelsea. Asked about Pogba amid speculation he could move to Spanish and European champions Real Madrid, agent Raiola told Rai Sport: "I don't take anyone anywhere, I'm not a taxi or a plane. "Of course, if things weren't going well than I'd be ready to do my job, which is to find other solutions for the club and the player."

"There's no war with Mourinho though, Paul wants to win with Manchester United."

Pogba and United are back in action on Monday, when the Red Devils travel to lowly Crystal Palace.

United are second in the table, 16 points behind runaway leaders Manchester City and two clear of Liverpool.

(Source: Soccerway)

Icardi 'more than ready' to face Milan – Spalletti

Luciano Spalletti confirmed Mauro Icardi will line up against Inter's fierce rivals AC Milan as he chases his 100th Serie A goal on Sunday. A knee injury has prevented the Argentine striker from starting a game for Inter since their 1-1 draw with SPAL on January 28 but Spalletti's men managed two wins from four games without their most potent goal threat.

Fourth-placed Inter are seven points and three places above Milan in the Serie A table, and victory on Sunday could see them leapfrog Lazio into third place.

The return of Icardi, who has 18 league goals this season, comes as a significant boost. "Icardi is not just ready, he's more than ready," Spalletti told a pre-match media conference.

"The derby brings special sensations to those who are strong. The points say we are ahead of Milan and in order to earn those points, we must've put in strong performances."

"The most difficult thing will be to play and take the game to them with our qualities."

A run of seven winless league games in December and January tarnished Inter's hopes of mounting a title challenge, but two wins from their last three has left Spalletti in determined mood to see out the season with a run of form.

"If we want to qualify for the Champions League, we can't wait or allow slip-ups," he said.

(Source: Goal)

Video replays set to be used at World Cup after IFAB approval



Video assistant referees are set to be used at this year's World Cup in Russia after football's lawmakers voted to approve the technology.

VAR has been trialled in some domestic English cup games this season, and has been used in Germany and Italy.

The International Football Association Board (Ifab) "unanimously approved" its introduction on a permanent basis after a meeting in Zurich on Saturday.

Leagues and competitions must now apply to Ifab to implement the technology.

Fifa president Gianni Infantino said a decision on whether VAR will be used to the World Cup will be taken at a meeting on 16 March.

"As of today, video assistant refereeing is part of football," he said.

"We hope and encourage a favourable decision in this respect because we are very positive about VAR."

Ifab is made up of the Football Associations of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as Fifa.

Each FA has one vote, while world football's governing body has four votes and six are required for a change in the laws.

The decision over VAR was made after they were presented with the results of the independent analysis of the use of the system conducted by Belgian university KU Leuven since March 2016.

"I would say to the fans, players and coaches that it will have an impact, a positive impact," said Infantino. "That is what the results of the study show."

"From almost 1,000 live matches that were part of the experiment, the level of the accuracy increased from 93% to 99%. It's almost perfect."

He added: "I was pretty much against it a couple of years ago but I studied it."

"We have looked into all the details and

benefits it can bring. Of course, we need to speed up the reviews and the communication to the referees that are applying it but also for the general public."

Despite Ifab's decision, the Premier League is not expected to introduce VAR next season, and Uefa has already said it will not be used in the Champions League next season.

France's Ligue 1 is to introduce it from next season.

"In all my discussions with people in the Premier League, they can all see benefit of VAR," said English FA chief executive Martin Glenn. "If they do choose to not implement it then it won't be a fundamental rejection of VAR - it will be a case of giving it more time."

Diego Simeone: No plan to stop 'impossible' Lionel Messi vs. Barcelona



Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone said there is "no strategy" you can use to stop Barcelona star Lionel Messi, although insisted his own in-form attackers Antoine Griezmann and Diego Costa can also make an impression in Sunday afternoon's top-of-the-table La Liga clash at Camp Nou. Second-placed Atletico have been closing the gap on leaders Barcelona in recent weeks and it now stands at five points.

Messi scored a superb free kick in Thursday's 1-1 draw at Las Palmas and has 31 goals and 16 assists in all competitions this season, as well as a record of 27 goals in 35 meetings with Atletico.

Simeone told a prematch news conference that one could not design a plan to stop his fellow Argentine, however his side would look to control the game in a way that limited Messi's influence.

"[Messi] is extraordinary form," Simeone said. "There are no strategies which can control something which is impossible. Many things can happen during a game. We will need to bring the game to where we believe we can do them damage."

(Source: ESPN)

Star gymnast sues U.S. Olympic Committee over Nassar sex abuse

U.S. gymnast Aly Raisman has sued the U.S. Olympic Committee and USA Gymnastics over decades of sexual abuse by former national team doctor Larry Nassar, saying they put "money and medals" before the safety of athletes.

Raisman, a three-time Olympic gold medalist, said in November that she was sexually abused by Nassar, who pleaded guilty last year to molesting female athletes under the guise of medical treatment for nearly 20 years.

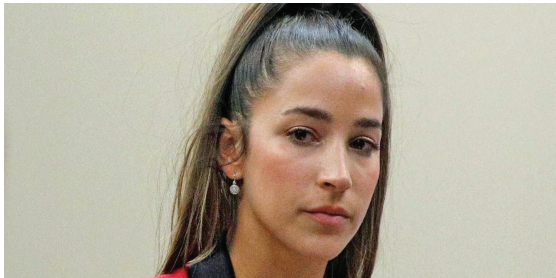
"I refuse to wait any longer for these organizations to do the right thing. It is my hope that the legal process will hold them accountable and enable the change that is so desperately needed," she said in a statement on Friday.

According to her lawsuit, which seeks unspecified damages, Raisman still suffers from "depression, anxiety and fear" stemming from the abuse. It was filed on Wednesday in California state court in Santa Clara County.

The 23-year-old athlete was among nearly 200 gymnasts, including several Olympic medalists, who spoke out during Nassar's televised sentencing hearings about decades of abuse.

In January and February, in separate sentencing hearings in Michigan, Nassar received prison terms of 40 to 125 years and 40 to 175 years. He is also serving a 60-year federal term for child pornography convictions.

The lawsuit contends that the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC), USA Gymnastics and former executives of the sport's governing body had the authority and mandate to



discipline Nassar but never intervened.

The lawsuit said the defendants, including two former USA Gymnastics officials, could have prevented the molestation if they had been serious about their duty to protect young athletes but instead they "put their quest for money and medals above the safety" of the plaintiff and other athletes.

The USOC did not immediately return requests for comment. USA Gymnastics declined to comment on the lawsuit, but reiterated that it first learned in June 2015 that an athlete had "expressed concern about a procedure by Larry Nassar" and that it reported it to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The Nassar scandal prompted the entire board of directors at USA Gymnastics to resign, along with the president and athletic director at Michigan State University, where Nassar

■ 'Minimum interference - maximum benefit'

Ifab said the "philosophy" of VARs is "minimum interference - maximum benefit" with the intention of reducing "unfairness caused by clear and obvious errors or serious missed incidents".

It added the incidents that referred to would be in relation to:

.....Goal/no goal

.....Penalty/no penalty

.....Direct red card (not second yellow card/caution)

.....Mistaken identity (when the referee cautions or sends off the wrong player)

VAR was first used at the Club World Cup

in December 2016, and trialled in the 2017 Confederations Cup.

The system was described as "comical" and "embarrassing" after Tottenham's 6-1 FA Cup win over Rochdale on Wednesday, when a goal was disallowed and a converted penalty overturned.

Any domestic league or competition would have to adopt VAR protocols for every game.

On Friday, the Premier League it was "monitoring closely the video assistant referee trials being conducted in other competitions".

It added: "The evidence and learning provided by those trials will inform further discussions with our clubs later this season."

(Source: BBC)

Antonio Conte questions Chelsea's ambition



Chelsea manager Antonio Conte has questioned whether the English champions share his ambition as he prepares for Sunday's match at runaway Premier League leaders Manchester City. Conte, who joined Chelsea in 2016, led them to the league title in his first season but they have failed to challenge this term and sit fifth in the standings, 22 points behind City. Chelsea's struggles have not been helped by their transfer dealings after they missed out on some of their targets to their Manchester rivals as well as Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur.

"It's very important to have the coach and the club with the same ambition: to improve the team, the idea of football and the quality of your players," Conte told reporters. "If you find this situation, probably the season will finish with success..."

"I have great ambition but I don't have money for Chelsea. The club knows very well what is my idea, what is my ambition... When you decide to work with this type of coach, you must understand that you take a coach with great ambition."

Chelsea are battling for Champions League football next season but defeat at City would

leave Conte's side five points adrift of the last qualifying spot if their fourth-placed London rivals Tottenham Hotspur beat Huddersfield Town on Saturday. Conte believes Chelsea have failed to sufficiently improve the squad after last season's triumph, saying that City had wrapped up the title in the first half of the current campaign.

"Last season we did a fantastic job. We were a great surprise... But then you have to continue to build something important with the coach," Conte added.

"Manchester City won it (this season's title) in that first part of the season. This must be a great frustration for me, for my players, for my club. If your name is Chelsea, you have to try to fight until the end."

The 48-year-old Italian also backed big-spending City to strengthen further under manager Pep Guardiola.

With Conte's future uncertain at Chelsea as he struggles to repeat the success of his first season, Italian Football Federation (FIGC) vice-commissioner Alessandro Costacurta has said he is the primary choice to return to the national team.

(Source: Mirror)

also worked. It spawned several lawsuits and criminal and civil investigations. Raisman's lawsuit was the latest civil complaint filed by California attorney John Manly on behalf of former Olympic gymnasts and national gymnastics team members concerning the Nassar abuse.

Manly also filed a lawsuit against the USOC and other defendants in December on behalf of McKayla Maroney, a 2012 Olympic gymnastics gold and silver medalist.

Attorney David Mittleman represents 90 of the 256 plaintiffs already suing USA Gymnastics in federal court in Michigan. On Friday he said the plaintiffs had yet to decide whether to broaden the lawsuit to include the USOC.

The USOC, which has faced months of criticism over the scandal, said on Wednesday that its chief executive officer, Scott Blackmun, was resigning for health reasons. It did not say if the scandal had played a role in Blackmun's departure.

In its statement, USOC outlined reforms aimed at protecting its athletes from abuse. Raisman said in her statement on Friday that the organizations were still "unwilling to conduct a full investigation, and without a solid understanding of how this happened, it is delusional to think sufficient changes can be implemented."

Last month, USOC Board of Directors Chairman Larry Probst said the U.S. Olympic system had "failed" the hundreds of young female athletes who were sexually abused by Nassar.

(Source: Reuters)

Alihosseini:I deserved to win Laureus World Comeback of the Year

S P O R T S Iranian super heavyweight weightlifter Saeid Alihosseini says that it could be a great honor for his nation if he would win the Laureus World Comeback of the Year.

Roger Federer was the big winner at the 2018 Laureus World Sports Awards on Tuesday night, picking up the Sportsman of the Year and Comeback of the Year awards at the ceremony in Monaco.

The Swiss tennis icon, who reclaimed the world No 1 ranking after overcoming a serious knee injury and winning his 20th Grand Slam title at the Australian Open last month, fought off competition from Cristiano Ronaldo and Rafael Nadal to land the Sportsman of the Year award.

Now, the Iranian weightlifter says he deserved to win the prestigious award.

Alihosseini returned to action in December in the 2017 World Weightlifting Championships after eight years due to doping suspension and won a silver medal.

Reigning Olympic champion Lasha Talakhadze claimed the gold medal and the bronze medal went to Behdad Salami.

“To win the Laureus award is a great honor and I liked to win the honor as an Iranian. I won a medal after eight years absence and I think it I did a good job,” Alihosseini said.

“From now on, I will not be an easy opponent for Talakhadze. I won a silver medal in Anaheim with just three months training,” he went on to say.



Iran, Algeria friendly confirmed at UPC-Arena

S P O R T S Iran national football team will face Algeria on March 27 at the UPC-Arena in Graz, Austria.

Carlos Queiroz’s men will take on the African powerhouse at 18:00 local time.

The friendly will be held as part of Team Melli’s preparation for the 2018 World Cup.

Iran selected Algeria because the African team have the same style of football as that of Morocco.

A friendly match between Iran and Libya, scheduled

for March 14 was cancelled after the Libyan federation announced their foreign-based players have not been allowed to join their national team.

Queiroz’s team have been drawn in Group B along with Spain, Morocco and Portugal.

Iran will open the campaign with a match against Morocco at Saint Petersburg on June 15.

Team Melli, meanwhile, face Spain in Kazan on 20 June before meeting Cristiano Ronaldo’s Portugal in Saransk five days later.

Coleman stutters before breezing into 60m semis

BIRMINGHAM, England (Reuters) — Christian Coleman, the man fancied to lead sprinting into the post-Usain Bolt era, gave a glimpse of his searing ability after a brief alarm as he breezed into the 60 meters semi-finals at the world indoor championships on Saturday.

Coleman, the U.S. sprinter who set a world record of 6.34 seconds last month, stuttered on his third stride while easing into cruise control but still had no problems as he then motored away from the field to win in a modest 6.71 seconds.

“My start was decent, but I tripped,” Coleman said. “But I stayed calm and made

it through. I’m really excited and feel well prepared. The crowd here is great so far and I think it will be electric this evening.”

Thanks to his mistake, Coleman, who turns 22 on Tuesday, was only the 16th fastest qualifier for the semi-finals scheduled for the evening session before the final which is the climax of Saturday’s program.

The quickest man in the heats was Coleman’s U.S. team mate Ronnie Baker, who clocked 6.57, while other impressive winners were Turkey’s Emre Zafer Barnes (6.58) and China’s Su Bingtian (6.59).

The biggest cheer in the morning session was reserved for 41-year-old former world

100m champion Kim Collins, the popular Saint Kitts & Nevis athlete who finished third in Coleman’s heat in 6.77 to battle into the semis in his final competition.

In a happy coincidence, Collins, the oldest man in the championships, lined up next to the youngest competitor, Malta’s 16-year-old Jacob El Aida, and made light of the 25-year age gap as he beat the awe-struck youngster by 0.32 seconds.

“I feel young but it is time to say goodbye. This is it. I can’t do it any more,” said Collins, who won a silver medal in the event when the championships were last staged in Birmingham 15 years ago.

“The body isn’t able to do what it is sup-

posed to do. But I am going out in peace — no low notes, no high notes. There will be no comebacks.

“I keep telling the youngsters that I am old enough to be their father and that they should show me respect.”

El Aida certainly did that, hardly able to credit that he had been sandwiched in lane five by Collins on one side and Coleman on the other.

“I saw the list of heats when I was in the stands and I didn’t stop smiling for 30 minutes,” beamed the man from an island that has no indoor track.

“Kim is a legend — I hope I am still running when I am 41.”

Matchday Three: West Zone Preview

Kuala Lumpur: After a week without AFC Champions League action, the 16 teams in the West Zone return for Matchday Three on Monday and Tuesday.

Group A

After recording back-to-back wins to lead the way in Group A, Al Ahli will look to edge closer to the knockout rounds when they travel to Al Gharafa on Monday.

Al Ahli’s 2-1 win over Al Jazira two weeks ago saw the Saudi team open up a three-point lead at the top of the standings, while Al Gharafa bounced back from an opening-day loss to see off Tractorsazi Tabriz 3-0.

Al Jazira have now won one and lost one ahead of the visit of Iranian side Tractorsazi and they will look to return to winning ways to make a push for knockout stage qualification.

Tractorsazi, meanwhile, will be desperate to put their first points on the board as a third successive defeat would almost certainly end their chances of making the next round.

■ Al Gharafa (QAT) v Al Ahli (KSA)

Venue: Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, Doha

■ Al Jazira (UAE) v Tractorsazi Tabriz (IRN)

Venue: Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium, Abu Dhabi

Group C

Pacesetters in Group C, Al Sadd are aiming for their third successive win when they travel to Uzbekistan to face Nasaf on Monday.

Al Sadd defeated 2017 semi-finalists Persepolis 3-1 last week, but Nasaf are also going into the game off a win, having posted a 1-0 victory over Al Wasl on Matchday Two.

Persepolis have a reputation for strong home form and



they will look to maintain that when they welcome Al Wasl to Tehran for their third match of the campaign.

Al Wasl are currently propping up the standings and will need to avoid defeat if they are to have any realistic hope of advancing to the knockout phase.

■ Nasaf (UZB) v Al Sadd (QAT)

Venue: Qarshi Markaziy Stadium, Qarshi

■ Persepolis (IRN) v Al Wasl (UAE)

Venue: Azadi Stadium, Tehran

Group B

After seeing off Al Wahda 3-2 last week, Al Duhail will look to continue their perfect start in Group B ahead of the visit of Lokomotiv on Tuesday.

The Uzbek champions began their campaign with a 5-0 win over Al Wahda but suffered a 2-0 defeat away at Zobahan on Matchday Two and have not won away from home since the 2016 group stage.

Zobahan will be seeking back-to-back home wins when they host Al Wahda, in the knowledge that victory would put them in a strong position at the midway point of the group stage.

Opponents Al Wahda have endured a disappointing start to their campaign, having lost their first two games, and will hope for an upturn of fortunes in Isfahan.

■ Zobahan (IRN) v Al Wahda (UAE)

Venue: Foolad Shahr Stadium, Isfahan

■ Al Duhail (QAT) v Lokomotiv (UZB)

Venue: Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium, Doha

Group D

Esteghlal moved two points clear at the top of Group D following their 1-0 win over Al Hilal two weeks ago and next travel to Al Ain on Tuesday.

The Emirati side have drawn each of their first two games, having seen Al Rayyan leave Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium with a point on Matchday Two, and will be seeking a first three points in front of home support.

The 2017 runners-up Al Hilal have yet to score in the current campaign and, with just a point to their name, will be looking for a first win on Tuesday when they host Al Rayyan.

Two draws from two represents a solid start from Al Rayyan in what looks like being a compact group and, should they avoid defeat in Riyadh, the Qatari side will be in a reasonable position after three games.

■ Al Ain (UAE) v Esteghlal (IRN)

Venue: Hazza Bin Zayed Stadium, Al Ain

■ Al Hilal (KSA) v Al Rayyan (QAT)

Venue: King Saud University Stadium, Riyadh

Iranian teams learn rivals at Asian Club Volleyball Championship

TASNIM — Iranian men’s and women’s teams have learned their rivals at the Asian Club Volleyball Championship.

The Iranian men’s volleyball club have been drawn in Pool A along with Japan and Qatar.

Pool B consists of Kazakhstan, Iraq and China while Chinese Taipei, Vietnam, Myanmar and Thailand are in Pool C.

The competition will be held in Myanmar.

Iranian women’s team have also learned its rivals in the competition.

Iran have been pitted against host Kazakhstan, Chinese Taipei and Vietnam in Pool B.

Pool A consists of Thailand, Japan and China and the Philippines, Indonesia, Fiji and Sri Lanka are in Pool C.

The AVC Club Volleyball Championship is an international sports competition for club volleyball teams, currently held annually and organized by the Asian Volleyball Confederation, the Asian volleyball federation.

From the year of 2004, the names of AVC Club Tournaments changed from “AVC Cup Men’s/Women’s Club Tournaments” to “Asian Men’s/Women’s Club Volleyball Championship”.

Beckham: Many players I know are asking to join Miami

David Beckham says many players he knows from his career have already reached out to him to express interest in playing for his new Miami team.

Major League Soccer officially awarded Beckham and his partners an expansion franchise in January, nearly four years after the former England star first announced plans to start a team in south Florida.

Beckham returned to Miami this week for planning meetings, and though he says it’s a too early to start planning a squad for a team that won’t play before 2020 at the earliest, he’s still been getting plenty of phone calls.

“In a year’s time, we can have those talks, I don’t think it’s before then,” Beckham told the Miami Herald.

“I’ve been approached by many different players from many different teams I’ve played with or against, and there’s interest there, but you can’t really have those conversations yet until closer to next year.”

As for a manger, Beckham said that he hoped to “have one coach for many, many years,” but that any potential hire would be expected to follow a “team philosophy.”

Beckham also told the newspaper he will have news on a team name, logo, and colors by early April, while plans for a youth academy will be announced in the summer.

On Friday, Beckham took the time to visit a pair of Florida high schools to congratulate them on winning the state soccer titles.

He stopped at Palmer Trinity to present the boys’ champions with their trophy, and he got an even louder reception when honoring the girls at Our Lady of Lourdes Academy.

Beckham told The Associated Press the outreach is one key part of his plan to start building a fan base in Miami.

“How can you not enjoy these moments?” Beckham said. “For me, it’s always been important to go to different schools around the world, luckily, and I’ve seen some amazing kids and some amazing young talented kids as well. It’s obvious, but kids are our future.”

(Source: SoccerNet)

Vogel claims record-equaling 11th world title

Germany’s Kristina Vogel claimed a record-equaling 11th world title as she powered to victory in the individual sprint at the UCI track championships in Apeldoorn on Friday.

Vogel followed up her victory in the team sprint to move level with Australia’s Anna Meares on the all-time women’s list.

The 27-year-old was taken to a deciding sprint by Australia’s Stephanie Morton, the fastest qualifier in the heats, but once again the Olympic champion showed her quality when the pressure was on.

“At the moment and on this day I’m not counting,” Vogel, who sat on the track draped in a German flag after her victory, said of matching Meares. “It was very hard at the end and it took me three final heats to get the gold medal.”

“Today it took everything to make it to the finish line. I’m just proud to make this world title.”

There were more home celebrations as Kirsten Wild claimed her second gold medal of the week to make it three wins for the Dutch so far.

Wild, who delivered Dutch gold on the opening day of the event when she topped the podium in the scratch race, won the last sprint of the points race in the multi-discipline omnium to secure the title in style, delighting the home crowd.

It was an eighth world championships medal for the 35-year-old but first gold in the omnium, having won silver last year.

Amalie Dideriksen of Denmark was second with Rushlee Buchanan of New Zealand third.

Earlier in the day Australia’s Cameron Meyer controlled the men’s points race to win his fifth world title in the event and ninth rainbow jersey in total.

“It’s special,” Meyer, who won five intermediate sprints and took two laps on the field, said. “Every one of them is special when you win a gold medal in the world championships.”

“To win today was not easy. To be one of the favorites every time is a lot of pressure, but I enjoy it.”

Jan Willem van Schip won silver, adding another medal to the hosts’ total, with Britain’s Mark Stewart third.

Italy’s Filippo Ganna won the men’s individual pursuit, storming back to beat Portugal’s Ivo Oliveira in a nailbiter.

(Source: Reuters)



The Paralympic Heritage Flame has been lit at a ceremony in Stoke Mandeville, the birthplace of the Movement, with a week to go until PyeongChang 2018.

A lone archer shot an arrow at the start of proceedings, a nod to the archery competition at the Stoke Mandeville Games in 1948, the forerunner of the Paralympic Games.

The archer launched the first in a sequence of fireworks, before the history of the Paralympic Movement and its links to

Stoke Mandeville were highlighted.

Eight-time Paralympic equestrian gold medallist Sophie Christiansen took the Torch to the stage, where she was joined by fellow Paralympics GB athlete Ali Jawad.

The Rio 2016 silver medalist then lit the Heritage Flame, prompting another burst of fireworks.

The Flame will now be sent “virtually” to PyeongChang, where it is set to merge with a series of regional flames in South Korea.

These were lit in South Korea’s capital, Seoul; Jeju Island, Anyang, Nonsan, Gochang and Cheongdo.

The events coincided with the first full moon of the Lunar New Year and started a Torch Relay building towards the Opening Ceremony on March 9.

A total of 800 Torchbearers will carry the Torch to complete a total of 2,018 kilometers, marking the year of the Games.

(Source: Paralympic.org)



INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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» Subscription & Distribution Dept.: Tel: (+98 21) 43051603

» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433

» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com

» Printed at: Rooztab - ISSN: 1017-94

No. 18, Bimeh Alley, Nejatollahi St., Tehran, Iran

P.o. Box: 14155-4843

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Iranian photographers honored at Bristol Salon of Photography

A R T TEHRAN — Three Iranian photographers have been honored at the Bristol Salon of Photography 2018 in England, the organizers announced last week.



“Eyes” by Negar Aqa-Alitari won the FIAP Bronze Medal at the Bristol Salon of Photography 2018 in England.

The contest is organized by the Photographic Society of America (PSA) and the Federation Internationale de l’Art Photographique (FIAP).

Negar Aqa-Alitari won the FIAP Bronze Medal for her photo “Eyes” competing in the Monochrome Section. “Eyes” is a portrait of an elderly Iranian woman.

Amir-Ali Navadeh-Shahla with his photo “Iron Seller” depicting three Iranian men at a workshop received an honorable mention in the Photo Travel Section.

“Crossing” by Ehsan Nikfarjam, which features an Iranian woman and several children in a historical passage, also won an honorable mention in this category.

“Cape” writer denies racism

A R T TEHRAN — Hamidreza Bababeigi, the writer of Hossein Kondori’s movie “Cape”, has denied that any racist attitude exists in the film, which has provoked accusations of racism from a group of Afghan refugees living in Iran.

“Those people who have viewed ‘Cape’ as racist and dislike it should know that I’m the first in the line of people who hate racism or ethnocentric attitudes,” he said in a statement published on Saturday.



Reza Behbudi (L) and Baran Kowsari act in scene from “Cape”.

The Afghan refugees have found some swearing in the film by an Iranian character at an Afghan woman offensive to their people.

Bababeigi said that the Afghans have had a misunderstanding with the film’s story.

“This film is neither anti-Afghans nor anti-Iranians, neither anti-men nor anti-women, it provides a new insight to some problems emigrants face in Iran,” Bababeigi noted.

Starring Baran Kowsari and Reza Behbudi, “Cape” tells the story of an Afghan woman who begins a struggle to save her child in a strange society.

The film has recently been released on Iran’s home video network.

Two Iranian shorts to compete in Busan festival

A R T TEHRAN — The Iranian movies “Maned & Macho” by Shiva Sadeq-Asadi and “The Distance” by Yusef Kargar will compete in the 35th Busan International Short Film Festival, which will run in the South Korean city from April 24 to 29.

“Maned and Macho” is about a girl’s repressed emotions and instincts, which are embodied in some animals that come out of her dreams.



A scene from “The Distance” by Yusef Kargar

“The Distance” is about Yashar who returns to Iran after several years to give news to his friend’s family, unaware of the news he would hear from that family.

A lineup of 42 films from 35 countries has been selected to screen at the Busan festival.

Schiller to perform “Berlin-Tehran” at Tehran concerts

A R T TEHRAN — The German electronic music band Schiller plans to perform “Berlin-Tehran” in its repertoire arranged for the Tehran concerts opening tonight, composer Christopher von Deylen said during a press conference in Tehran on Saturday.

Iranian rhythms characterize the piece, but no Iranian instruments will be used in the performances, Von Deylen stated.

Schiller will give performances for three nights at the Grand Hall of the Interior Ministry in Tehran.

This is the second time the band has given concerts in Tehran. Earlier in December 2017, the band gave performances at the Grand Hall of the Interior Ministry. The performances were warmly received by Iranian concertgoers.

Von Deylen said that he is happy that Iranian audiences like his music.

He also added that in his previous trip to Iran he got to know more about Iranian music but he still does not know any Iranian musicians.

Von Deylen also mentioned that he discovered that Iranian audiences like more rhythmic pieces and that is why he has chosen some more upbeat and rhythmic pieces for his second concert in Tehran.

Ritmeno, an Iranian music news agency that is the organizer of the performances, has arranged the second concert for three nights.



Schiller performs a concert at the Grand Hall of the Interior Ministry in Tehran on December 12, 2017. (YJC/Mitra Samavaki)

“Emoji Movie” swoons below Cruise, Gibson at ‘worst in film’ Razzies

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Animated “The Emoji Movie” stunk up the annual Razzie awards on Saturday, tanking below all contenders for worst achievements in film, while Tom Cruise and Mel Gibson were also roasted for 2017’s most ignoble performances.

“The Emoji Movie”, Sony Pictures children’s film about talking emoticons, earned four Golden Raspberries, including worst picture, director and screenplay.

In its 38th year, the Razzies serves as a tongue-in-cheek response to the Sunday’s Academy Awards by handing out \$4.97 gold spray-painted berry trophies.

Cruise won worst actor for his leading role as a U.S. Army sergeant who accidentally unleashes mayhem by disturbing an ancient grave in the much-



Cast member T.J. Miller attends the premiere for “The Emoji Movie” in Los Angeles. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

maligned action reboot “The Mummy.”

Gibson was bestowed the worst supporting actor for his comedic turn in “Daddy’s Home 2” alongside John Lithgow, Will Ferrell and Mark Wahlberg.

Tyler Perry, a perennial Razzie punching bag, took home the worst actress raspberry for his popular drag character Madea in “Boo 2: A Medea Halloween.”

Oscar-winning actress Kim Basinger earned the Razzie dishonor for her supporting role in “Fifty Shades Darker,” while the big screen adaptation of TV series “Baywatch” won the fan-voted award of “nominee so bad you loved it!”

The Razzies are chosen by more than 1,000 voting members from more than 26 countries, organizers said.

Jimmy Kimmel’s mission impossible - Oscar host in midst of #MeToo



Construction welders work on a building next to billboards showing Academy Awards host Jimmy Kimmel who will host 90th Academy Awards in Hollywood, Los Angeles, California U.S. March 1, 2018. (Reuters/Mike Blake)

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - Jimmy Kimmel is in therapy. Last year’s Oscar best picture blunder is giving the Academy Awards host nightmares - or so goes one of the comedian’s video promotions for Sunday’s ceremony.

But the 2017 backstage envelope mix-up that saw the top prize in the movie industry briefly being awarded to “La La Land” rather than actual winner “Moonlight” may pale in relation to the task facing Kimmel when he returns as Oscar master of ceremonies for a second year.

Kimmel must navigate the #MeToo misconduct scandal that has rocked Hollywood in front of a live audience of A-list celebrities, many of whom say they are victims, as well as millions watching at home.

He is also expected to throw in jokes about U.S. President Donald Trump, last year’s best picture flub, the biggest pop culture moments of the past year, and the movies and performances up for the highest honors in show business.

“This year, the casting couch is the target

of Hollywood. That’s going to be the theme of the night, from the jokes told by Jimmy Kimmel to the winners who are announced,” said Tom O’Neil, founder of awards website GoldDerby.com.

“He can’t avoid the subject of #MeToo and he must treat it with delicacy and sensitivity while at the same time being fearless and lampooning it. So he has a very difficult role,” O’Neil said.

Kimmel, 50, has said little about his plans and is ambiguous about whether he will address the elephant in the room.

“This show is not about reliving people’s sexual assaults,” Kimmel told ABC News earlier this week. “It’s an awards show for people who have been dreaming about maybe winning an Oscar for their whole lives.”

In January Kimmel told reporters that he was “sure that it (the misconduct scandal) will be part of the subject matter of the show.”

Kimmel, known for his genial but deadpan delivery, got high marks as last year’s Academy Awards host when then-newly elected Trump and his policies became a running gag.

Time’s Up to receive official moment on Oscars stage



An Oscar statue is seen in a souvenir shop at the Dolby Theatre during preparations for the Oscars in Hollywood, Los Angeles, California, U.S. February 28, 2018. (Reuters/Lucy Nicholson)

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — The Academy Awards show has set aside a moment to feature the Time’s Up campaign against workplace sexual misconduct during Sunday’s Oscars ceremony.

Organizers of the campaign said they have worked with the producers of Sunday’s ceremony to bring attention their cause, Hollywood trade publications Variety and The Hollywood Reporter said on Friday.

“There’s a moment that’s been carved out,” Variety quoted film director Ava DuVernay as saying.

The organizers did not give details, and producers of the Oscars show did not respond to a request for comment.

The sexual misconduct scandal has dominated Hollywood’s awards season and forced dozens of actors, filmmakers and agents to step down, be fired or dropped from creative projects.

The Oscars ceremony today will give the Time’s Up campaign its biggest public moment, reaching an audience of A-list celebrities and millions watching on tel-

evision worldwide.

Time’s Up, launched on Jan. 1, is a legal defense fund which aims to support people reporting sexual harassment in the entertainment industry and beyond.

It has the support of some of Hollywood’s biggest female stars, including Reese Witherspoon, Natalie Portman, DuVernay and “Grey’s Anatomy” producer Shonda Rhimes.

Celebrities wore black en masse at the Golden Globe awards ceremony in January to signal support for victims of sexual harassment, and at music’s Grammy Awards in January many artists held or pinned white roses to their clothes.

Time’s Up on Friday also announced a partnership with the U.S. oral history project StoryCorps to document experiences by women about discrimination and abuse in the workplace.

Actresses Jane Fonda, Ashley Judd and Rashida Jones are among a first group of women, including domestic workers and human rights activists, to record their stories, organizers said in a statement.

Musical “Evita” kicks off Asian tour in Singapore

SINGAPORE (Reuters) — Forty years after opening in London’s West End, the musical “Evita”, about Argentina’s legendary first lady, Eva Peron, made its Asian debut in Singapore this month.

Directed by Broadway’s Harold Prince and produced by Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, the show charts the rags-to-riches story of former President Juan Peron’s wife, whose death, at the height of her popularity, cemented her status in Argentina.

The story is still relevant today, say cast members and

the musical’s director.

“There are themes about love, and a woman’s determination, and essentially a woman’s strength in politics, which I think we are wanting more of in the world,” said British actress Emma Kingston, who plays Evita, as she was affectionately known.

In an interview, Prince agreed, saying, “The other thing, of course, is the larger message, because that pertains to all of us. Who are our icons? And are they appropriately our icons? Or are they dictators?”

The musical and its hit songs, such as “Don’t Cry For Me, Argentina” and “High Flying Adored”, was inspired by the image of Evita raising her hands at the microphone addressing huge rallies, with her blonde hair drawn back into a chignon.

The 1996 film based on the musical starred the singer Madonna opposite Antonio Banderas.

“Evita” originally opened in 1978 at London’s Prince Edward Theatre, where it ran for eight years.

The current version is to run in Singapore until March 18, before traveling to Hong Kong, Taiwan and Tokyo.