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New generation more prepared to repel enemy: Leader

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Saturday that today's youth generation is more prepared than the earlier generation to repel enemy.

During a meeting with a group of teenagers and youths in Tehran, the

Leader described the sacred defense as "golden page" and "bright juncture" in history of Iran.

Iran refers to resistance against Saddam Hussein's war against Iran in the 1980s as sacred defense. The resistance against the invading Saddam Army started in 1980 and lasted until 1988. **→2**

Over \$4.5b of agricultural products exported in 10 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran exported over 4.7 million tons of agricultural products worth \$4.542 billion during the ten-month period ended on January 20, according to the deputy agriculture minister for planning and economic affairs.

Abdolhamid Bakhshandeh said the agricultural products accounted for 12.29 percent of the value and 4.5 percent of the weight of Iran's non-oil

exports during the mentioned time span, Mehr news agency reported on Saturday.

The official said that farm products accounted for the lion's share (62.36 percent) of the agricultural products exported during the ten-month period, while garden products constituted 22.88 percent and

livestock-poultry products accounted for 11.82 percent of the exports.

'U.S. claims of Syria chemicals meant to protect terrorists'

Damascus says the accusations leveled by the U.S. and its allies against the Syrian government regarding the use of chemical weapons in the Eastern Ghouta region are meant to protect the terrorist groups and block the army's advance against foreign-backed militants.

In an interview with Russia's Sputnik news agency, Syria's ambassador to the United Nations Bashar Ja'afari said the

parties supporting terrorism in Syria have "consistently" used the "false" allegations of chemical weapons use as a pretext to increase political pressure on the Syrian government.

In over 140 letters addressed to the UN Security Council and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Damascus has documented information on the possession of chemical materials by the countries **→13**

Poor Afghanistan dances to tunes of American menace

By Masood Chaudhary

PUNJAB —After 40 years of bloody conflict, six million homeless Afghans, devastation for three generations, thousands of innocents dead or wounded, and 16 years of boots on the ground, the American Menace may be preparing for another bloody war. If Afghans still think Uncle Sam can give them a decent future, then I am sorry to say, they live in Lala-land.

Today, this is crystal clear. A recent sit-in at Islamabad has taken a hit because of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's words. The Mehsood and Wazir tribes had three demands which were very close acceptance, but ended up getting an agreement with the Government of Pakistan over only two of them. This happened only because of Ashraf Ghani's words: "Afghans will get revenge" for the support of the Islamabad sit-in.

But this Afghani American puppet's show for

Pashtun nationals, and very smartly presenting Afghans, Pashtuns and Pakistani tribesmen as one single group was not without a specifics and reason. If I had spoken earlier, this might have jeopardized the tribesmen's ongoing campaign in Islamabad, but it is over now. Government of Pakistan and tribesmen have reached a mutual understanding and the sit-in is done. However, it is my journalistic responsibility to present some facts.

Before going deeper into we have to know some details about President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani who is called by the West a "Philosopher King". He was born in Afghanistan's Logar Province on May 19, 1949, into the Ahmadzai Tribe. In 1969 he graduated from Lake Oswego High School in Lake Oswego, Oregon, in the US. In 1973 he obtained his bachelor degree from American University in Beirut. In 1977

he did his masters at Columbia University in New York and completed a doctorate in 1983. During his study in Columbia University he met his wife Rula F. Saadah.

During the election campaign of 2014 she played a very important role getting Ashraf Ghani elected as President of Afghanistan. To honor her, Ghani thanked her and announced her Afghan name: Bi Bi Gul. Rula F. Saadah, or Bi Bi Gull or Rula Ghani belongs to an American-Lebanese Christian family. In 2015, Rula Ghani was named to the Time magazine 100 list of the world's most influential people. Her daughter Maryam Ghani is a Brooklyn based artist and her son, Tariq, is working with an American lobbying firm. Ashraf Ghani taught in several American universities such as the University of California, Berkeley and Johns Hopkins University. **→7**

New atheist writers tend to misread and misrepresent Islamic sources: prof.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Jalal Heirannia

TEHRAN — Professor Mohammad Hassan Khalil, Director of the Muslim Studies Program of Michigan State University says new Atheist writers also tend to misread and misrepresent Islamic sources.

Author of "Jihad, Radicalism, and the New Atheism" also adds that "In fact, their portrayals of Islam are sometimes even more extreme than those of violent radicals themselves."

Following is the full text of the interview:

■ What has been your main question in your new book, "Jihad, Radicalism, and the New Atheism"?

A: In the eyes of New Atheist writers such as Sam Harris, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and Richard Dawkins, Islam is fundamentally violent. As they see it, when violent radicals, including members of al-Qaeda and ISIL, engage in terrorism, they are acting in accord with Islamic scripture. My book scrutinizes this view. I show how violent radicals depart from Islamic tradition and how writers such as Harris, Ali, and Dawkins—who are extremely influential in certain Western contexts—misread this tradition.

■ What is your central argument?

A: My central argument is twofold: (1) Violent radicals cannot be considered "literalists" who adhere carefully to Islamic scripture and tradition. I offer various examples of radicals

diverging from and misreading Islamic sources. (2) Prominent New Atheist writers also tend to misread and misrepresent Islamic sources. In fact, their portrayals of Islam are sometimes even more extreme than those of violent radicals themselves.

■ What was the necessity of writing this book?

A: I noticed that various professors and students at my and other Western universities were deeply impacted by the writings of the New Atheists on Islam. Needless to say, I found these writings to be highly problematic. Furthermore, violent radicals are often on the news, and so the question of violence in Islam is often on my colleagues' and students' minds.



ARTICLE

By Sondoss Al Asaad
Political analyst from Beirut

The White Helmet Myth: A soft war propaganda

The White Helmets are repetitively described as volunteers and relentlessly depicted as heroes in the war zone. A suspicious Organisation backed by the British Government, known US regime change facilitators USAID, the US and NATO-backed 'Syrian National Council', a parallel government, which these pillars claim to represent the Syrian opposition. Their role has comes under increasing scrutiny, as they are allegedly "work with full impartiality and neutrality, sacrificing their lives for the sake of the Syrian People". Indeed, the majority of those same Syrian people have never seen those "heroes," except perhaps for those in the Takfiris or the dwindling "Free Syrian Army" held territories.

The British Foreign Office predominantly finances the White Helmets; a generated mythology by a hypocrite international mainstream media, overseen and driven by a George Soros collaborated by PR company; called Purpose. They have a strangely advanced public relation in terms of very professional websites, videos and PR strategy dropping stories at the right time. They use professional terminology and images, in the sense of conveying the message that they are performing a humanitarian mission.

James Le Mesurier, who has founded the White Hamlets in March 2013, in Turkey, is a former British army officer and military contractor with an impressive record of accomplishment in the most dubious NATO intervention theatres. He is an efficient student of Britain's prestigious Royal Military Academy of officer training at Sandhurst, who has served in various high-profile military deployments, at the United Nations, European Union, and U.K. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, over the past three decades.

Further, Le Mesurier is virtually a predominant figure in the UK's blood-soaked imperialist hegemony and partook in malign dirty wars, Yugoslavia in particular, Kenya, Aden, Ireland, Iraq, Libya, etc. He regards the so-called civil defence organisation as an "unarmed and neutral" group. Whilst the White Helmets are obviously biased, armed, a synthetic covert intelligence and forward-operating disinformation asset. **→7**



ARTICLE

Haniyeh Sadat Jafariyeh
Tehran Times journalist

Dollar in doldrums

Iranians have been dealing with an ever-increasing devaluation of the rial since the beginning of the present Iranian calendar (March 21, 2017) but the major and unexpected depreciation occurred almost a month ago, in mid-February, when is supposed to be the biggest crackdown on foreign exchanges in six years.

At the time, U.S. dollar broke all records and jumped to almost 50,000 rials in Tehran's currency exchange shops, while it used to be bought almost 37,500 rials earlier in past April, 38,000 rials in past September, 41,000 rials in past December and 43,000 rials in early January, 2018.

■ What has contributed to recent events?

Some critics discuss that since taking office in August 2013, Rouhani administration has tried to artificially keep the foreign exchange market at a level of stability in a bid to cover the inflationary impacts of rial devaluation, adding that the currency disturbances are due to a lack of clear monetary policy and mismanagement. The recent rial depreciation, as they further discuss, can be the result of government's decision to benefit from the difference between the official and free market rates as a temporary solution to compensate for the wide budget deficit.

Some, in addition, blame Central Bank of Iran (CBI) for the volatility, since the state-run body has a full control over the free currency market and interferes with balance supply and demand as well as the prices by pumping dollar whenever it decides. The issue, in their view, is also justifiable via CBI's short of funds to inject the needed hard currency to the market.

Besides, the recent decrease in banking interest rates made by CBI and the dominant stagnation in housing sector can also account for the forex market predicament. The two factors have increased Iranians' demand for purchasing Bahar Azadi gold coins and hard currency as new investment options, for they believe via changing their cash money into dollar or gold, they can prevent devaluation of their assets. **→4**



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Ali Asghar Khodadoust, Iranian legend of ophthalmology, passes away at 82

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Professor Ali Asghar Khodadoust, a world renowned ophthalmologist, passed away at the age of 82 on Friday.

Born in 1935 in Shiraz, Khodadoust was an Iranian eye surgeon specializing in corneal transplantation.

In 1952, he passed the entrance exam with high scores at Shiraz University of Medical sciences.

A government grant in 1959 sent him, along with a few other exceptional students, to the United States to continue his medical education. **→12**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Leader OKs conditions to grant clemency to convicts

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei authorized the Judiciary to pardon or commute the sentences of convicts under new conditions.

The conditions were proposed by Judiciary Chief Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani on the occasions of the birth anniversary of Hazrat Zahra (SA), the beloved daughter of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and Iran's New Year, due to begin on March 21.

Under the conditions, the Judiciary will reduce three fourth of the jail terms of convicts sentenced up to a year, half of the jail terms of convicts sentenced to between a year and 20 years, and the remaining of the jail terms of convicts sentenced to more than 20 years provided they have served at least 10 years of their sentences.



Regional tensions to arise if water crisis persists: Araqchi

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has warned of increased tensions in the region if water crisis remains unattended.

In an interview with the Hamsahri newspaper published on Saturday, Araqchi called on the country's officials to find a way to resolve the water shortage.

The senior diplomat said the region is being affected by severe droughts which could lead to more tension among regional countries and nations.

Araqchi also said that the water crisis is a problem for all of the countries in the region, urging unity among regional countries to resolve the issue.



‘West not qualified to talk about human rights’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The secretary of the High Council for Human Rights in Iran has condemned Western countries for supporting terrorists groups in the Middle East, saying they are not qualified to speak about human rights.

“In our view, American and Europe are not qualified to speak about human rights issues due to the crimes they have committed,” Mohammad Javad Larijani said on Saturday.

Pointing to the Yemen conflict, Larijani said those violating the rights of the Yemeni nation are extensively supported by the West, while human rights allegations are raised against the defenders of Yemeni nation.



New Lebanese ambassador meets Zarif

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The new Lebanese ambassador to Iran submitted a copy of his credentials to Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Saturday.

Also on Saturday, Zarif met new heads of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) offices in Tehran.

Also on the same day, the outgoing ambassadors of Zimbabwe and Vietnam to Tehran met with Zarif in separate meetings. During the meetings, which marked the end of the two ambassadors' terms in Iran, they made their farewells to the foreign minister.



Dervishi bus driver to go on trial for killing 3 policemen

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Salas, a dervish cult sympathizer who recently drove a bus into police ranks and killed three of them in Tehran, is expected to stand trial on Sunday, the Fars news agency reported.

The incident happened during last month's unrest in the Pasdaran neighborhood, where a group of Gonabadi dervishes held an unauthorized gathering near a police station and engaged in clashes with police.

Two members of the Basij volunteer force also lost their lives in separate car-ramming and stabbing attacks at the site.



ICRC's Peter Maurer lauds Iran's regional role

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Peter Maurer, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), on Saturday lauded Iran's effective role in establishing peace and security in the region.

Maurer made the remarks in a meeting with the Leader's senior advisor, Ali Akbar Velayati, in Tehran.

“We have had good relations with Iran since a long time ago, and the relations continue to go strong,” Mehr quoted Maurer as saying.

Welcoming further cooperation with Iran, the ICRC president said “developing relations with Iran requires closer cooperation and Iran's more active role in establishing peace in the region.”

Iraqi commander: Daesh would have captured Iraq without Iran's help

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Baghdad regards Iran as its most important partner in the fight against Daesh (ISIS), Deputy Chairman of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis has said.

Iran's assistance prevented the fall of Iraq into Daesh hands and also foiled all the plots aimed at fomenting flames of a sectarian war in the country, al-Muhandis said on Saturday.

Appreciating Iran's all-out support for Iraq in defeating Daesh, he said while Iraq was on the verge of collapse in 2014, arms supplies and advisory help by Iranian military officers prevented the fall of Iraq, he explained.

It also stopped new religious seditions and sectarian wars, al-Muhandis said.

Thanks to the presence of the Iranian military advisors and the Lebanese Hezbollah forces, military forces first secured Baghdad and then cleared the Samarra road of terrorists, since terrorists were trying to capture the city, he added.

If terrorists had reached Samarra and the holy shrines, similar to 2006, a religious sedition would have overwhelmed Iraq, he explained.

Al-Muhandis added despite a strategic security agreement between the U.S. and Iraq, Americans at that time refused to help the Iraqi government.

Iran was the only country that stood by Iraq, while Baghdad was short of weapons and military hardware and the Iraqi Army had lost two thirds of its forces.

The commander also referred to the so-called Arab Spring which aimed at destroying Syria, saying Iran was the only country that supported the Syrian government and people and prevented collapse of the Syrian political system.

Iran, despite leading an anti-terrorist war in Syria and Iraq, was a victim of terrorism itself, he added.

Al-Muhandis's remarks came a few days after Iranian First Vice President Es'haq Jahangiri paid a visit to Iraq to strengthen Iran's ties with the neighboring country.

Meeting Iraqi President Fuad Masum in Baghdad on Thursday, Jahangiri said that Iran is ready to stand beside the Iraqi government and people in post-Daesh time to help reconstruct the country.

Iran has stood beside the Iraq in difficult times, the vice president stressed.

Jahangiri noted that Iran considers Iraq's security



its own.

Elsewhere, the vice president attached great importance to protecting Iraq's unity and integrity.

Masum, for his part, said that unity is an important element to maintain Iraq's integrity.

He said that Iraq will not forget Iran's help in fighting terrorists and called for cooperation in reconstructing Iraq.

Iraq welcomes Iran's investment in economic projects, he added.

During a separate meeting with Iraqi Vice President Nouri al-Maliki, Jahangiri said that “domestic integrity” is the prerequisite to maintaining the Iraqi integrity.

“Foreigners will interfere in Iraq's affairs if there is no integrity and convergence in the country,” he noted.

Commenting on Iran-Iraq relations, he appreciated the fact that the two countries' ties are “growing”.

Maliki, in return, described bilateral relations as “strategic” and called for expansion of ties.

Also, in a Wednesday meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, Jahangiri said that a comprehensive economic document is required for Iran and Iraq to expand relations.

He stated that commonalities between the two countries can provide the grounds to expand relations.

He also said that Tehran and Baghdad have “strategic” political relations.

Abadi, for his part, said that Iran-Iraq ties cannot be weakened. He further asked for expansion of relations in political, economic and cultural areas.

Tehran strongly condemns attack on embassy in London

Foreign Ministry summons British ambassador in protest to the attack

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Foreign Ministry has strongly condemned attack on its embassy in London, calling for actions to counter the assailants.

“Dr. Araqchi, deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, immediately voiced the Islamic Republic of Iran's strong protest to British Ambassador to Tehran [Nicholas Hopton] and called for full protection of our country's diplomats in London and also asked for police's immediate action against the assailants,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Friday.

Qassemi said that the British ambassador to Tehran expressed his

government's apology for the incident.

Four people climbed on to a balcony of the Iranian embassy in London on Friday and took down the Iranian flag.

Iranian Ambassador to London Hamid Baeidinejad, confirming the assault in a post on his Twitter on Friday, said the assailants were carrying knives and sticks and chanted slogans against Iranian officials and using bad language against Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman (the caliphs of Mecca) and Aisha, the wife of Prophet Mohammad (S).

In another tweet on Saturday, the ambassador said, “The group attacking the Iranian Embassy in London represents

an extremist Shia community. They have a sectarian interpretation of Shia and insist on insulting the grand Sunni leaders. The UK government however has an unwavering commitment to assure the inviolability of the Embassy.”

The assailants were arrested after around three hours.

In protest to the attack on the embassy, the Iranian Foreign Ministry summoned the British ambassador to Tehran on Saturday.

Iranian government spokesman Mohammad Baqer Nobakht also condemned the attack.

“The issue that a number of armed

people illegally enter a place which should be protected by the country based on the international regulations and the police counter them a few hours later shows violation of the law. The Islamic Republic of Iran will give a firm response,” he told reporters.

Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, said on Saturday that the British government should be accountable to Iran for the attack.

“The British government and police could prevent a few number of mobs from attacking Iran's embassy and should be accountable for this,” he said.

France's Le Drian says Nuclear deal ‘must not be touched’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian has ruled out any changes to the 2015 nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers, saying that the agreement “must not be touched”.

“Today they (Iranians) are complying with it; they must carry on complying with it. I think I heard commitments from President Rouhani in this respect. He is very committed to the agreement, which he regarded as a historic agreement. It is important for the sake of the world's security for it to be maintained,” Tasnim quoted Le Drian as saying, citing the official website of French embassy in London.

“It must not be touched, it must be enforced, and that's what we'll be saying elsewhere too, it's what President Macron will tell President Trump, it's a dividing line be-

tween us...,” he added.

On March 5, the chief French diplomat paid an official visit to Tehran and held talks with senior Iranian officials, including President Hassan Rouhani and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif.

“In the meetings I had in Iran, there were points of disagreement, points of friction, where I set out France's position very clearly and where I questioned the Iranian authorities about their intentions, particularly in the ballistics field. The ballistics field means missiles, and there's a kind of capability-building frenzy on Iran's part to acquire more and more missiles,” Le Drian stated.

Iranian officials have repeatedly said that the country will not accept any changes to the nuclear deal and that there will be no talks on Iran's missile capability.



New generation more prepared to repel enemy: Leader

I → “The international power imposed the eight years' war on the Iranian nation to destroy the Islamic Revolution. However, the youths' altruism, faith, courage and insight resulted in ending war in favor of the nation and strengthening of the Islamic Revolution,” Ayatollah Khamenei noted.

He added, “Promotion of the culture of the Islamic Revolution in the region and among the Muslims in early years [after the revolution] made the domineering powers worried and they decided to destroy the revolution at any cost. So, they encouraged Saddam, who was cruel and selfish, to start the war and attack Iran.”

He noted that the U.S. and European countries, especially the UK, France, Germany, and the former Soviet Union provided money and arms to the former Iraqi dictator.

The Leader said France sold most advanced fighter jets and helicopters to Saddam and Germany provided poisonous

chemicals to him to be used against Iranian soldiers and civilians during the war.

Elsewhere, Ayatollah Khamenei said that the sacred defense should be commemorated for the “country's progress” and “national growth”.

Addressing the youths, Ayatollah Khamenei said, “Future belongs to you”.

Senior Iranian judge urges world to counter corruption

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — A senior Iranian judge, who had visited Japan, has urged the countries all over the world to cooperate in the fight against corruption.

All countries that boast as pioneers in the fight against corruption should increase their transparency likewise, Justice Naser Seraj, chairman of the General Inspection Organization of Iran, said in a meeting with Japanese Prosecutor General Katsuyuki Nishikawa on Saturday.

In the meeting, the Iranian official also said the inspection organization in Iran has taken effective measures towards countering corruption and has signed various agreements with global organizations and with other countries on the issue.

He called on the Iranian and Japanese officials to



share related experiences and make efforts to promote Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA).

Certain Western countries endeavor to damage the reputation of the developing countries in Asia and thereof to make the Middle East region insecure, he underlined.

Without the foreigners' influence and their hegemonic system, the region will not only witness peace and tranquility but also experience a situation far from corruption, Seraj added.

For his part, the Japanese official appreciated Tehran for attaching importance to developing ties with Tokyo from the outset of the establishment of the AOA in 1996.

Nishikawa also said Japan sees implementation of its related agreements with Iran as very important.

In warning to U.S., France says all sides will lose in trade war

U.S., EU, Japan trade chiefs to meet over steel tariffs

French President Emmanuel Macron has warned his U.S. counterpart Donald Trump against the implementation of planned tariffs on European steel and aluminum, saying that the controversial measure could provoke a mutually destructive "trade war."

Macron made the remark in a telephone conversation with Trump on Friday, days after Washington announced plans to impose 25-percent tariffs on steel imports and 10-percent tariffs on aluminum.

The French leader expressed his "deep concerns," and said the hefty tariffs due to come into effect in two weeks would "risk triggering a trade war, in which all affected countries would be losers."

Macron also said "such measures against allied countries, who respect international trade rules, would not be effective in fighting unfair practices," adding that the European Union (EU) would respond in a "clear and proportionate manner to all practices that are unfair or contrary to international trade rules."

A senior official with the EU said Brussels was prepared to retaliate against the tariffs but was still seeking talks with the US over the decision to settle the dispute.

European Commission Vice President Jyrki Katainen said that the 28-nation bloc stood ready to take Washington to the World Trade Organization (WTO) if necessary but expressed hope that it would not be "forced" to use rebalancing measures.

A day earlier, Trump had announced that the US tariff plan would take effect in 15 days and not initially apply to Canada and Mexico. The US president also said that Washington's close partners on security and trade could negotiate exemptions.

Trump believes the tariffs will safeguard U.S. jobs, but economists say the measures will destroy more jobs than they create and will hurt the very US companies and workers that Trump has said he aims to protect.

The tariff plan has sparked a flurry of criticism both at home and abroad. During his presidential campaign, Trump



repeatedly blamed what he called unfair trade deals and allegedly abusive practices by countries like China and Mexico for the massive US trade deficit and the loss of high-paying American factory jobs.

■ EU hopes for clarity from crunch U.S. trade talks

Meanwhile, top EU trade officials are set to hold crunch talks with their U.S. counterparts in Brussels on Saturday, expressing hope to get "clarity" on Trump's controversial import tariffs.

EU trade Chief Cecilia Malmstrom was scheduled to meet US Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer in Brussels on Saturday along with Japanese Economy Minister Hiroshige Seko.

Speaking to reporters before the meeting, Malmstrom criticized Trump's "wrong" approach on the imposition of the plan, hoping to get confirmation from the US that the bloc would be excluded from the tariffs.

Malmstrom said the EU was circulating among member states a list of iconic U.S. products to potentially target with tariffs, such as Harley Davidson motorcycles, Levi's jeans and bourbon, so that it could respond as quickly as possible.

The German government also threw its weight behind EU's plans to respond if Trump pressed ahead with the tariffs decision, calling for multilateral talks to address overcapacity in the steel sector.

Denouncing the tariffs as an "affront to close partners," German Chancellor Angela Merkel urged dialog and warned that "no one can win in such a race to the bottom."

According to the U.S. Census data, America annually imports more goods and products from Europe than the continent absorbs in U.S. goods, to the tune of a trade deficit worth over 11 billion dollars in 2017.

■ U.S., EU, Japan trade chiefs to meet over steel tariffs

The trade chiefs of the European Union and Japan held talks about U.S. President Donald Trump's plans to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum amid fears they could trigger a broader trade war.

EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom is meeting Saturday in Brussels with Japanese Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Hiroshige Seko.

U.S. trade representative Robert Lighthizer is expected to join the two for broader talks later Saturday.

The EU is seeking clarity from Washington about whether the 28-nation bloc will be exempt from the U.S. tariffs, like Canada and Mexico are. If not, the EU has threatened retaliatory tariffs on U.S. products.

Key U.S. trading partners and businesses have warned the tariffs could backfire, provoking a trade war and hurting allies more than China, their main target.

(Source: agencies)

UK-Saudi aid deal national disgrace: Minister

Britain's shadow aid secretary blasts London for inking a hefty aid deal with Saudi Arabia with the purported aim of creating infrastructure in poor countries at a time when the Riyadh regime is killing Yemeni people and has pushed their country, the poorest in the Arabian Peninsula, into the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

The £100-million (\$138-million) agreement, the first of its kind, was signed between the UK government and Saudi Arabia's KS Relief during a visit to London by the kingdom's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the British PoliticsHome website, which reports on parliamentary affairs, reported on Friday.

The government has defended the controversial deal as a "new long-term partnership" to promote economic development in some of the world's poorest countries.

However, the UK's opposition and aid sector have reacted angrily to the deal amid growing concerns over Saudi Arabia's war crimes in neighboring Yemen.

Kate Osamor, the shadow international development secretary, slammed the deal as "a national disgrace," saying Prime Minister Theresa May had said she would raise concerns over the Yemen situation in talks with bin Salman.

"Over 22 million Yemeni lives depend on permanent, full access for aid, food and fuel in Yemen. Instead, she has won no concessions and simply handed on a plate to Saudi Arabia a new humanitarian partnership and an endorsement from DfID [the Department for International Development], the world's best aid agency," she said.

"It will whitewash Saudi Arabia's reputation and role in



the war, and it is a national disgrace," Osamor.

She said Prime Minister Theresa May was "auctioning off Britain's credibility as a humanitarian power to the highest bidder."

"A Labour source noted concerns that the aid agreement had been signed with no guarantee of a permanent lifting of the blockade of goods into Yemen or a ceasefire in the region," the website, meanwhile, reported. "The source added that it was unclear what the £100m will be spent on, and whether the UK had attached any safeguards," it added.

Bin Salman, who was in London from Wednesday until Friday, is regarded as the architect of Riyadh's three-year

war on Yemen. More than 13,600 people have died since the onset of the war and the impoverished country has turned into the scene of the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according the UN.

The UK has been lending logistical support to the warfare. It has increased its weapons sales by around 500 percent since March 2015, The Independent reported last November. The military equipment sold to the kingdom ever since, including warplanes, precision-guided bombs, and missiles, are worth more than \$6.4 billion.

On Friday, Saudi Arabia signed a preliminary deal to buy 48 Typhoon jets from the UK despite widespread protests against London's arms sales to Riyadh.

Earlier, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn has accused the Government of "colluding" in war crimes by directing the war in Yemen - claims dismissed as false by Downing Street. Allan Hogarth, the head of policy and government affairs at Amnesty International's British chapter, also voiced concern over the deal.

He said, "British overseas aid is important in many ways, but at a time when the UK is arming a Saudi-led military coalition that's laying waste to homes, hospitals and schools in Yemen, this raises troubling questions.

Kevin Watkins, the chief executive of London-headquartered Save the Children, said, "It has become acceptable to operate humanitarian blockades which, if not explicitly designed to starve children and harm children, will have that inevitable consequence."

(Source: Press TV)

Modi, Macron sign key security deal with an eye on China

French President Emmanuel Macron Saturday said defense ties with India had reached a new high after the two nations signed a key security accord for the Indian Ocean to counter China's growing influence in the region.

"Defence cooperation between the two countries now has a new significance," Macron said as a gushing Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood by his side.

Under the deal, India and France will open their naval bases to warships from each other, a move seen as an attempt to undermine China's territorial ambitions.

"A strong part of our security and the world's stability is at stake in the Indian Ocean," Macron said.

"The Indian Ocean, like the Pacific Ocean, cannot become a place of hegemony," he added in an apparent reference to China.

Modi, who welcomed Macron with a bear hug on his arrival Friday, said the accord was crucial as the Indian Ocean region would play a "very significant role" in the days to come.

The comments from the leaders followed a slew of agreements signed by the two countries in the spheres of defense, space and clean energy.

"From the ground to the sky, there is no subject on which India and France are not working together," said Modi.

A technical agreement was also signed on the French-assisted nuclear power project at Jaitapur in western Maharashtra state.



Sources in the French presidency told AFP they were optimistic of a final agreement being signed before the end of the year.

The \$9.3-billion framework agreement for six nuclear reactors was signed during a visit to India in 2010 by then president Nicolas Sarkozy.

But the project has since run into stiff opposition from environmentalists concerned about seismic activity in the area and fears about the safety of nuclear power in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan.

- 'Good chemistry' - Earlier in the day, Macron talked about his personal rapport with Modi which was established after their meeting in Paris last year.

"I think we have very good chemistry, our two great democracies have a historic relationship," the French president said.

Modi broke protocol to receive Macron at the airport, exchanging warm hugs and robust handshakes.

"You welcomed me in Paris last year with an open heart and a lot of warmth. I am happy

that I have got an opportunity to welcome you in India," Modi said at the start of his speech Saturday.

On Sunday, Macron will attend a solar power summit designed to showcase India and France's commitment to fighting climate change, which both leaders have made a priority.

Travelling with his wife Brigitte, France's 40-year-old president will also visit the monument to love, the Taj Mahal, a few hours drive from the Indian capital on Sunday.

On Monday, he heads to the chaotic Hindu holy city of Varanasi on the banks of the river Ganges, which the Indian premier has promised to modernize and clean up.

Macron's visit comes after a somewhat misstep-laden visit to India by Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau.

Both he and Macron are often compared internationally because of their broadly similar political views, as well as youth and good looks.

But Trudeau's visit hit a series of embarrassing bumps and he received a fairly cool reception during his stay in India.

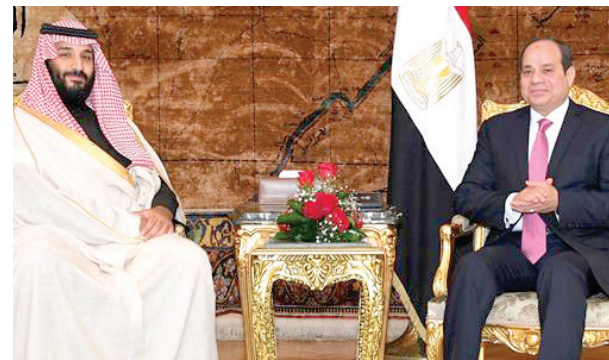
Trudeau was pilloried on social media and in the Canadian press for donning traditional Indian clothing at every opportunity.

And there were red faces when it emerged a former Sikh militant was invited to a dinner with him in Mumbai.

Macron has so far opted for more sober and predictable dress -- a dark suit.

(Source: AFP)

Israeli, Saudi officials hold Egypt-mediated meetings in Cairo



An official with the Palestinian Authority (PA) says top Israeli and Saudi officials held a series of secret Egypt-brokered meetings in Cairo, last week, as more signs emerge of warming relations between the two regimes.

The unnamed official, told Emirati daily Khaleej Times that the meetings were a "significant development" in the slowly warming ties between Tel Aviv and Riyadh.

The talks between Israeli and Saudi officials took place at a luxury hotel in Cairo, with Egyptian officials present, dealing with the economic interests of Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, particularly in the Red Sea region, the official said.

He also warned that the Israel-Saudi détente is harming the Palestinians.

"The warm relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia are damaging the Palestinian Authority," he said. "It seems that Israel is no longer the greatest enemy in the region anymore."

Israel and Saudi Arabia have no diplomatic relations, but they are widely believed to have secret liaisons.

Reports over the past few months say the two regimes are even working behind the scenes to establish formal ties.

On March 4-6, Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was in Cairo, where he met with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

Two advisers to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told Israeli i24news TV channel that bin Salman and Sisi had advised Abbas to accept the so-called "deal of the century" to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The U.S. peace plan is yet to be unveiled.

The Palestinian president, however, has insisted that he would not accept the U.S. initiative and denounced it as "the slap of the century."

Sidelining Washington, Abbas is instead pushing for a global multilateral approach to resolve the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In December 2017, he formally declared that Palestine would no longer accept the U.S. as a mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict due to its bias towards Tel Aviv.

The announcement came after U.S. President Donald Trump said that Washington was recognizing Jerusalem al-Quds as the "capital" of Israel and planning to relocate the American embassy from Tel Aviv to the city.

Separately on Friday, Egypt's privately-owned newspaper al-Shorouk reported that several Arab countries were advising Abbas to accept whatever plan the Trump administration put forth or risk "regretting" it later.

The Americans have notified some Arab countries that Trump's decision to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem al-Quds was "part of an American effort to persuade Israel, especially the hardliners, to agree to possible concessions to the Palestinians," according to the report.

(Source: Press TV)

Gunman, 3 hostages dead at California veterans center



A gunman and three female hostages have been found dead at a war veterans care facility in the US state of California, following a nearly eight-hour standoff with police, the state's police said.

The mass killing took place Friday at around 6:00 pm local time at the Veterans Home of California in Yountville, about 53 miles (85 kilometers) north of San Francisco.

The three female victims were employees of the state-run facility, the nation's largest veterans home which houses about 1,000 elderly and disabled veterans of wars dating back to World War II.

The bodies of the four were discovered nearly eight hours after the gunman slipped into the Pathway Home, a privately run program on the grounds of the veterans home, which treats combat veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars with post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Pathway Home, a privately run program on the grounds of the veterans home, treats veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars with post-traumatic stress disorder.

"This is a tragic piece of news, one that we were really hoping we wouldn't have to come before the public to give," Childs said.

Law enforcement officials have not determined a motive and declined to identify the victims and the gunman, saying family members still needed to be notified.

California state lawmaker Bill Dodd, who represents the area, gunman had been dismissed from a veteran's program at the facility this week. The incident comes as the the National Rifle Association (NRA) has become the focus of a growing movement by activists demanding enactment of tougher gun control laws in the wake of last month's mass shooting at a Florida high school that killed 17 people and injured 14 others.

The United States loses around 33,000 people to gun violence every year.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	96594.5
IFX	1084.4

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	44,920 rials
EUR	56,240 rials
GBP	69,000 rials
AED	13,570 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	62.04/b
Brent	65.49/b
OPEC Basket	61.85/b
Gold	\$1,324.30/oz
Silver	\$16.65/oz
Platinum	\$969.50/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Iran-Qatar
Joint Economic
Committee
meeting slated for
mid-April

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** – The 6th round of Iran-Qatar Joint Economic Committee meeting is due to be held on April 16-17, in Doha, the portal of Iran’s Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) reported.

Accordingly, an Iranian trade delegation headed by the country’s Industry, Mining and Trade Minister Mohammad Shariatmadari is going to visit the Arab country to attend the meeting.

Comprised of company representatives active in a variety of areas including, industry, mining, agriculture and foodstuff, the delegation will also hold talks with the Qatari counterparts to discuss cooperation and expansion of mutual ties.



Private sector to
fund \$556m for
construction of
freeways across
Iran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** – Iran’s Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company (CDTIC) signed 25 trillion rials (about \$556.3 million) worth of deals with the country’s private sector for joint construction of 439 kilometers of freeways across the country.

According to Kheirollah Khademi, the managing director of CDTIC, domestic investors are going to finance the construction of six freeways which were the subject of the inked deals.

Bitcoin prices fall below
\$9,000, a 24% decline
for the week

Bitcoin fell below \$9,000 during Friday afternoon Asia trade, extending losses seen earlier in the week when it dropped below the key \$10,000 level.

The cryptocurrency fell as low as \$8,370.80, down 24 percent for the week, according to CoinDesk’s bitcoin price index. Bitcoin recovered to near \$8,995 as of 8:02 a.m., ET.

That’s still a loss of about \$2,000 for the week. Bitcoin failed to break above a key level near \$12,000 on Monday that technical analysts were watching after a slew of negative headlines hit the cryptocurrency market this week.

On Wednesday, the head of Hong Kong-based Binance said there were trading irregularities and some accounts may have been compromised due to phishing, but later said all irregular trades were reversed.



Separately Wednesday, a report of a sale by the trustee of funds from collapsed Japanese crypto exchange Mt.Gox also contributed to the negative sentiment.

In a court document filed Wednesday, Tokyo attorney and bankruptcy trustee Nobuaki Kobayashi announced that he had sold roughly \$400 million in bitcoin and bitcoin cash and plans to consult with the court on «further sale» of those assets.

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission also said Wednesday that exchanges offering trading of «digital assets that are securities» would have to register with the agency. That statement followed subpoenas and information requests across the cryptocurrency industry.

Regulatory developments in the Asia Pacific region also likely put a dampener on prices this week.

Japan’s Financial Services Agency issued punishment notices to a number of exchanges in the country on Thursday, Reuters reported. Regulators also suspended operations at Bit Station and FSHO for a month, the news agency reported.

Regulatory scrutiny in the country increased after \$530 million worth of virtual tokens were stolen from Coincheck, a Tokyo-based cryptocurrency exchange, earlier this year.

(Source: CNBC)

Iran’s imports
form U.S.
down 40%
in 11 months

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Iran’s imports of goods from the U.S. during the 11-month period ended on February 19 fell 40 percent compared to the same period of time in the previous year, according to the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

The IRICA data showed that Iran has imported 31,000 tons of commodities

worth \$150 million from the U.S. during the 11-month period of this year, while the figure was \$215 million in the same time span of the previous year, Tasnim news agency reported on Saturday.

The value of Iran’s non-oil trade with foreign partners stood at \$89.347 billion in the 11-month period ended on February 19.

The country exported \$41.69 billion of non-oil commodities during the mentioned

‘Developing joint fields’ gets biggest
chunk of NIOC’s investment resources

ENERGY **TEHRAN** – A review by the consolidated planning department of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) showed that 56 percent of the company’s investment resources have been allocated to the development of joint oil and gas fields in the current Iranian calendar year (which ends on March 20).

As reported by IRIB news on Saturday, of the remaining 44 percent, 33 percent has been allocated to optimizing and maintaining production levels at the active oil and gas fields, 2 percent is used for infrastructure and construction projects in oil rich regions and final 9 percent is spent on other oil and gas projects.

Iran’s oil industry has been strongly focused on developing joint oil and gas fields, aiming to increase the seven-percent share of such fields in the country’s



oil production.

In August 2017, Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh put attraction of investment for development of Iran’s shared oil and gas fields as the main priority of the ministry.

Completing development phases of South Pars (the huge gas field Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf), rebuilding and renovating oil installations, second leap in the petrochemical output, and no natural gas flaring were also among the ministry’s top priorities.

Dollar in doldrums



moreover, has prepared a set of 19-sections policies as a blueprint to regulate the unsettlements of domestic monetary and foreign exchange markets, which is to be applied in near future.

Followingly, when currency prices cooled down a bit, CBI, which has always been seeking unification of the present dual forex regime in the market, issued permit for a limited number of currency exchange shops to sell foreign currency at official rate, less than the free market rate about 7,000 rials to 10,000 rials. The introduced exchange bureaus are allowed to sell up to \$5,000 to customers who present their ID cards or passports and travel tickets.

Addressing the 57th annual general assembly of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) on March 4, the central bank’s Governor Valiollah Seif announced that implementation of the described policies since mid-February has successfully curbed the fluctuations of Iran’s foreign exchange market and has restored confidence back.

Blaming the forex market fluctuations on currency traders, speculations in the market and the U.S. which was trying to destabilize Iran’s economy, Seif vowed that CBI will be able to manage the market not only by the current yearend but also by the end of the



period of time with five percent growth from the figure of the same time span in the past year.

Iran’s imports of the non-oil goods stood at \$47.657 billion in the 11-month period, showing 23 percent increase from that of the previous year, making the country’s trade balance negative for \$6 billion.

Gas condensate, liquefied propane, methanol and low-density oils were the

Exclusive expo of Indian products
starts operation in Tehran

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The exclusive exhibition of Indian products, “Source India”, became operational at Tehran Milad Tower on Saturday, IRIB news reported.

The opening ceremony of the three-day event, which is supported by the Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry, was attended by Indian charge d’affaire in Iran, the deputy head of Iran-India Joint Chamber of Commerce, and Iranian and Indian entrepreneurs.

India and Iran enjoy close and historical friendly relations. During recent visit of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to India the both sides agreed to further strengthen the bilateral relations particularly trade and investment cooperation between the two countries.

Source India would be the first major business event being held soon after the recent high level visit. Around 100 Indian



companies representing various sectors such as engineering machinery, food, IT, plastics, rubber and etc. are showcasing their products and services at this exhibition with an objective to find right Iranian partners for collaboration in trade and investment. This will perhaps be one of the largest Indian business event in Iran in recent years.

Iran-India trade value stands at \$12.8 billion per annum and the two sides are determined to increase the amount up to \$30 billion annually.

shops is another tranquilizer which has caused some major problems. Long queues are formed at the door of official foreign exchange bureaus and people are asked to stay in them since the sunrise. Some quarrels happen in the queues, which make the police interfere. A lot of non-official currency exchange shops are semi-closed; they do not sell dollar at all but buy if there is any. An amalgamation of customers has been created; some are fake ones i.e. the middlemen who sell the purchased dollar at the official rate in the free market for making benefit, some customers are those who do not need foreign currency but just prefer to save them at home, and some are the Iranian travelers to foreign countries who face difficulties with finding hard currency. Foreign currency prices still experience fluctuations and even an increasing trend. Dealers and middlemen are still active although worried about the interference of the policemen. More importantly, the foreign currency price increase has already had its impact on inflation and the situation will predictably get aggravated.

Speaking on a televised program on Tuesday night, Seif admitted that dollar price should be matched with the reality of Iran’s economy. He criticized the opinion which accuses the government of controlling liquidity in an effort to reduce inflation, saying that despite the increase in liquidity, inflation is controlled and even decreased.

The central bank governor also discussed that the CBI act to reduce interest rates was an effort to convert short-term accounts into the long-term ones and to control inflation.

He underlined that the government’s monetary policies are not longstanding but flexible ones which can be changed in different conditions.

What is happening at the market does not entirely match with what is expected by the government to occur. Foreign currency rates are experiencing unsteadiness and the future seems murky but officials believe they have a good handle on the market.

Some economists suggest the CBI permit the rial to be devalued so that the economy can find a new balance, although the decision will be at the worth of another round of rampant inflation.

(Source: CNBC)

Global economy’s ‘Goldilocks’ conditions have ‘aged rapidly’ this year, fund manager says

The prosperous market conditions of high growth and low inflation will soon have run its course, according to the chief investment officer at Alliance Bernstein.

“We are still bullish on equities, although ‘Goldilocks’ has aged pretty rapidly this year,” Mark Phelps, CIO of global concentrated equities at Alliance Bernstein, said in an email to CNBC on Friday.

The so-called “Goldilocks” market refers to an economy growing at just the right speed to support stock prices but not so strong as to trigger a significant uptick in inflation.

Speaking to CNBC’s “Squawk Box Europe”

on Friday, Phelps said an increase in economic activity around the world since the start of 2018 had been a catalyst for stronger-than-anticipated corporate earnings growth. This could create a scenario in which the global economy starts “running too hot” for the central banks — thus prompting them to start hiking interest rates.

■ ‘Inflation scare’

Earlier this week, Dallas Fed President Robert Kaplan said raising U.S. interest rates would give the country the best chance to keep pushing the economy forward.

Kaplan forecast three rate hikes by the

U.S. central bank this year, a sentiment reflected in financial markets. Markets believe a March rate hike is almost a certainty judging by trading in the fed funds futures market, a key indicator of where investors think the Fed funds rate will move.

A subsequent hike is expected in June, with a third likely coming in September, according to the CME’s FedWatch tracker.

The European Central Bank (ECB) kept its interest rates unchanged at a meeting on Thursday, though it also removed a key commitment to increase the “size and/or duration” of its massive bond purchasing program. This

fueled expectations the central bank may soon normalize monetary policy in the euro area.

When asked whether he thought rising inflation would be the key risk to continued economic strength, Phelps replied that while he thought the frenzied market sell-off last month was triggered by an “inflation scare,” it would likely “cool off” again this year.

In December, Goldman Sachs echoed Phelps’ sentiment, saying that while it was “pro-risk” in equities this year, the investment bank’s top strategists expected time was “running out for Goldilocks.”

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‘Shocking, incredible’: What the experts say about a Trump meeting with Kim

By Benjamin Haas

Donald Trump has agreed to meet North Korean leader Kim Jong-un before May, a South Korean official said after a meeting at the White House. It would be the first time a sitting U.S. president has met the leader of North Korea.

■ ‘Shocking that Trump agreed’

Jenny Town, assistant director, U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins SAIS:

“It was a bit of a shock. It wasn’t shocking that Kim offered, it’s a bit of a shock that Trump agreed to it,” Town said. “Those of us who have been pushing for U.S.-North Korea talks, this isn’t what we had in mind.

“Trump needs to realize this will come with a lot of criticism, and Trump needs to be able to shoulder that. Clear, consistent messaging is going to be important and Trump has not been shown to be adept at that.”



While Trump will not be diving into the minutiae of what North Korea needs to do with its nuclear program, Town said he should push for “a continued moratorium on nuclear and missile testing, a moratorium on space launch vehicles, stopping fissile material production and allowing inspectors back into the country”.

■ ‘An incredible coup for Kim’

Jeffrey Lewis, director of the East Asia nonproliferation program at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies:

“This is literally the end of a North Korean movie – North Korea develops nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, compelling the U.S. president to come to Pyongyang,” said Lewis, referring to a series called The Country I Saw.

“It’s an incredible coup for Kim. The message is that Saddam and Gaddafi disarmed. They are dead,” he said. “Kim finished the nuclear weapons program. He gets a summit with the president of the United States.

“We should be talking to Pyongyang, but you don’t frontload the big concession.”

■ Guarded optimism

Alexandra Bell, senior policy director at the Center for Arms Control & Non-Proliferation and former state department official:

“We don’t have a lot of reasons to trust Kim, but we also want to avoid a disastrous conflict. We should look at this offer with guarded optimism and have realistic short-term goals,” Bell said.

“This offer was more than anyone was expecting and could have imagined and I will not deny that it seems a little too good to be true, but it is an offer worth pursuing in a careful and cautious manner. Maintaining a test freeze for as long as possible is in our interest.

“The hard work of real nuclear negotiations takes months, if not years,” she added. “The White House has to be prepared to endure a lot of long, slow-moving negotiations that may stall along the way.”

■ ‘Smile, nod, but don’t agree to anything’

Mintaro Oba, former U.S. diplomat who worked on North Korea policy:

“My advice to Donald Trump is this: nod, smile, and be open to any possibilities that help get us closer to denuclearization and peace. And don’t agree to anything – or rule anything out – without taking the time to consult trusted advisers, especially career diplomats.

“It would be a shame if President Trump didn’t come to the summit with a bold, creative proposal designed to put the ball in North Korea’s court and test Pyongyang’s willingness to make progress.”

China, which was a major force in previous rounds of negotiations, seems to be left out this time, but Oba said: “China has always been comfortable with the division of the Korean peninsula, but it wants to make sure the situation is stable and that tensions aren’t rising in a way that could endanger China’s security. Beijing will be happy with the latest progress.”

■ ‘Kim may offer more’

Frank Aum, senior North Korea expert at the U.S. Institute of Peace:

“Since Kim Jong-un has already made some concessions without getting anything in return, such as freezing nuclear and missile tests, and conceding that U.S.-South Korea military exercises need to continue as scheduled, I wouldn’t be surprised if Kim Jong-un is prepared to offer many things during a summit meeting.

“North Korea’s price for giving up its weapons may be too high for the U.S. to bear, such as the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea or the end of the U.S.-South Korea Alliance,” Aum said.

“Or North Korea may not provide enough reassurances on the monitoring and verification aspects of denuclearization. Or NK may agree to denuclearize over a longer period than the U.S. would find acceptable.”

(Source: The Guardian)

Putin’s nuclear-powered cruise missile is bigger than Trump’s

President Donald Trump’s Nuclear Posture Review proposed that the United States create two new nuclear weapons – a low-yield warhead for U.S. submarine-launched ballistic missiles and a new sea-launched cruise missile.

So, naturally, Russian President Vladimir Putin just asked the Federal Assembly to hold his beer.

Speaking before the Assembly in what is, more or less, Russia’s equivalent to the State of the Union address, Putin announced a series of new weapons systems, including four new or recent systems designed to defeat U.S. missile defenses. Each was accompanied with a short film that mixed real footage with animation. The fun bits are:

* A giant liquid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile called the Sarmat. Putin showed an animation of the Sarmat that made the point that it was powerful enough to travel over the South Pole and strike the United States, a route that would conveniently evade any missile defenses.

* A maneuvering re-entry vehicle that will arm Russia’s other ICBMs, allowing them to penetrate U.S. missile defense systems.

* A nuclear-powered underwater drone capable of traveling thousands of miles before detonating in a U.S. port, all the while staying submerged where there are no missile defenses.

* Last, but certainly not least, a global-range, nuclear-powered – that’s right, nuclear-powered – cruise missile that is externally identical to Russia’s X-101 cruise missile.

In a charming twist, Putin explained that the Russians have yet to choose names for the nuclear-powered cruise missile and unmanned underwater vehicle, asking the public to offer suggestions.

Ph.D. student Marty Pfeiffer is already suggesting the name Missile McMissile-Face. We already knew about some of these systems, including the Sarmat and the nuclear-powered doomsday torpedo. And we knew, generally, that Russia was developing a maneuvering re-entry vehicle to penetrate missile defenses. Still, Putin offered a lot more detail than was previously available.

■ That idea – again?

Oh, and then there’s that pesky nuclear-powered cruise missile! The U.S. developed a nuclear-powered cruise missile in the 1960s, but canceled it because, well, it was insane. The nuclear-powered ramjet was literally deafening to people on the ground and left a trail of radioactivity from the unshielded reactor. The United States couldn’t even find a suitable place to fight-test this monster. Officials worried that if it went off course from the Nevada nuclear test site, it might crash into Las Vegas.

Putin says Russia has already tested its version. The U.S. intelligence community, in return, says the Russian missile crashed



The United States’ allies, those with whom it needs to work to contain Russia, are just as worried about Trump as they are about Putin. This is an awful state of affairs.

in testing. Maybe the Russians have developed a new nuclear-powered turbofan engine that poses fewer problems than the United States’ ramjet. Or maybe, if you find yourself visiting Russia, you might want to consider lead underwear.

All of these Russian systems predated Trump and his Nuclear Posture Review. In fact, all of these systems were known to the Barack Obama administration – even the cruise missile, which I now realize in retrospect some U.S. officials had been hinting at for some time.

The real genesis of Russia’s new generation of bizarre nuclear weapons lies not in the most recent Nuclear Posture Review, but in the George W. Bush administration’s decision in 2001 to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and the bipartisan failure by both the Bush and Obama administrations to engage meaningfully with the Russians over their concerns about American missile defenses. Putin said as much in his remarks.

“During all these years since the unilateral U.S. withdrawal from the ABM Treaty,” Putin explained, “we have been working intensively on advanced equipment and arms, which allowed us to make a breakthrough in developing new models of strategic weapons.” Those technological breakthroughs are now here. Sadly, we never got the diplomatic ones we needed.

Still, a nuclear-powered cruise missile and a doomsday torpedo are, as reactions to missile defenses go, a bit over the top. It takes a special kind of Cold War nostalgia to conclude that it would be good to invest in a range of bizarre doomsday weapons.

So, it wasn’t merely that the United States withdrew from the ABM Treaty or that Washington failed to address Russian concerns. It is not surprising that, among these Soviet behaviors, we are also seeing a resurgent Soviet defense industry, with its priorities and prerogatives.

■ The endgame

Limiting missile defenses is the third rail of American national security politics and, even if the United States suddenly got very reasonable, the Russians are pretty taken with their new toys.

But this also means arms racing with the Russians is pointless. The Russians are arms racing with themselves.

The strategy the United States is left with is trying to raise the international cost that Moscow faces for developing these grotesque systems. The United States should engage with the people pushing to ban nuclear weapons – to increase the political price that Moscow pays for these programs. Instead, the Obama administration decided that arms control was something best done with the Russians, or perhaps the other nuclear weapons

states, and that everyone else could mind their own business. The problem with that strategy is that it created the impression of moral equivalence between modernization programs in the United States and Russia, encouraging America’s allies to make excuses for Moscow.

The recent Nuclear Posture Review, continues this trend. The tone of the document, as well as some of the more controversial proposals, gives the impression of enthusiasm for the arms race. The result is that the United States’ allies, those with whom it needs to work to contain Russia, are just as worried about Trump as they are about Putin. This is an awful state of affairs.

A coalition opposing Putin’s new nuclear weapons seems unlikely, at least as long as this U.S. president treats the country’s alliances like a protection racket while envying Putin’s “nuclear” for being “tippy top” and making sure the world knows his “button” is bigger than North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s. Rather than expect any condemnation of Russia’s new systems, I can only imagine how excited Trump will be when he’s told about the nuclear-powered cruise missile: how his eyes will grow wide when it is explained to him, and the temper tantrum he’ll throw when he’s told he can’t have one.

(Source: Foreign Policy)

Egypt’s Sissi gets a needed boost from the Saudi crown prince’s visit

By Omar H. Rahman

The arrival of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Cairo last week brought with it a flurry of diplomatic and economic announcements, including a \$10 billion joint fund for the development of a megacity stretching from Saudi Arabia to Egypt, and possibly even Jordan.

While the dollar amount is eye-popping, skepticism is warranted given the number of announced megaprojects in the region that have come to naught. But that doesn’t mean that the crown prince’s decision to stop in Egypt, on a tour that includes London and Washington, is not without importance.

For the past two years, Egypt’s relations with the kingdom have been patchy, as regional foreign policy differences and Saudi Arabia’s own economic recovery and reform effort have encouraged Riyadh to direct its financial largesse elsewhere. Yet Saudi support is still extremely welcome, if not essential, to Cairo’s efforts to jumpstart an economy that has been flagging for years. And Mohammed bin Salman’s visit signals a realization in Riyadh that it needs to bolster its struggling ally.

Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi is seeking re-election in upcoming polls later this month. While his victory is a foregone conclusion, given that he is running virtually uncontested after having purged the opposition, he still has his work cut out for him after the election. Real power in Egypt ultimately lies with the armed forces. Although Sissi has worked to protect the economic and political interests of the military brass, his inability to provide security and deliver an economic turnaround has weakened the stability of the country as a whole. Continued failure would put military officials’ positions, and their loyalty, at risk.

Delivering results on either front would be an immensely difficult task for any Egyptian leader, whether democrat or despot, and Sissi will need all the help he can get. Saudi Arabian aid has already proved vital over the past seven years in shoring up Egypt’s economy at its most desperate moments after the revolution that ousted Hosni Mubarak. Yet more recently, that help has not always been forthcoming.

The shift came not long after a visit by King Salman to Cairo in April 2016, during which another flurry of



Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman walks with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El Sisi at Cairo airport on March 4, 2018.

Sissi could be forgiven if he saw the Saudi crown prince as a modern-day Moses in reverse, parting the Red Sea to come back to Egypt to save the Pharaoh himself.

prospective deals were signed, including a five-year agreement to provide Egypt with \$23 billion in subsidized refined oil shipments. Cairo, for its part, agreed to transfer ownership of two strategic islands in the Red Sea – Tiran and Sanafir – to Saudi Arabia. The announcement set off a firestorm among Egyptian nationalists who believed Sissi was selling Egyptian territory in exchange for Saudi financial support to his regime, driving the largest protests against Sissi since he took power. A pair of opposing court rulings on the constitutionality of the transfer left the matter unresolved.

Six months after Salman’s visit, Saudi Arabia suspended the refined oil deal. While no official explana-

tion was ever given, analysts at the time chalked it up to a number of foreign policy squabbles, from Syria to Yemen, in which Cairo had not fallen in line with Riyadh’s policies.

Since then, Egypt has made sure to stand with Saudi Arabia whenever possible. It joined in the Saudi-led isolation of Qatar that began in June 2017 – although it’s worth noting that Egypt also has its own reasons for the move, given Qatar’s longstanding support of the Muslim Brotherhood. And both Cairo and Riyadh have mutual interests in containing extremism, maintaining stability and successfully reforming their economies.

Egypt has tried to use its proximity to Saudi Arabia and the kingdom’s oil resources in a bid to position itself as an energy hub in addition to being a transport hub. The country is building massive petroleum storage facilities on its Red Sea and Mediterranean coasts to capture more of the traffic transiting the Suez Canal. This is a major component of Cairo’s economic strategy and another area where Saudi Arabia has a role to play in Egypt’s future.

The two countries also announced in December a deal to connect their electricity grids to share power, a move that would help Egypt address electricity shortages that have plagued its manufacturing sector. Most recently, Saudi Aramco announced at the beginning of March that it had agreed to supply Egyptian refineries with 500,000 barrels of crude oil a month for six months, backdated to January 2018.

It was not surprising, then, that a day before Mohammed bin Salman’s visit, Egypt’s top court dismissed all outstanding legal challenges to the island transfers. Tiran and Sanafir were even incorporated into the plans for Neom, the \$500 billion megacity that Saudi Arabia has envisioned building.

The optics of the visit were also beneficial for both parties. Mohammed bin Salman was greeted by the Egyptian leader with genuine enthusiasm and all the fanfare he could muster. Sissi, for his part, received an endorsement from a key ally and its youthful leader who is making waves in the region. Given the scale of his country’s troubles, he can be forgiven if he saw the Saudi crown prince as a modern-day Moses in reverse, parting the Red Sea to come back to Egypt to save the Pharaoh himself.

(Source: WPR)

The White Helmet Myth: A soft war propaganda

➡ Le Mesurier left the British Army in 2000 and served as the deputy head of the Advisory Unit on ‘Security and Justice’, and Special Representative of the Secretary General’s security policy body within the UN mission in Kosovo. He went to Jerusalem to work on implementing the Ramallah Agreement, to Baghdad as a special advisor to Iraqi Minister of Interior, to the UAE to train their gas field protection force, and to Lebanon during the 2006 war. In Dubai, Le Mesurier was appointed as the Vice President for Special Projects at private mercenary firm Olive Group, in 2005, and in January 2008, as Principal for Good Harbour International.

Le Mesurier and other opposition protagonists such as Raed Saleh and Farouq al Habib’s military and intelligence associations drive us more cynical about the claims of impartiality and lack of bias of the White Helmets. In fact, Le Mesurier has been portrayed as a maverick hero, miraculously coincided with the formation of a Syria Civil Defence team in Istanbul, merely a few months prior to the discredited Ghouta ‘chemical weapon’ attack in August 2013. That alleged fake event has been proven beyond a doubt to be a fabricated attack, as well as the successive accusations levied at the Syrian Government, which narrowly failed to precipitate the NATO’s desired ‘No Fly Zone’.

Scott Ritter, former US Marine Corps intelligence officer and weapons inspector in Iraq, provides a forensic account of Le Mesurier’s background. Ritter confirms, “the organizational underpinnings of the White Helmets can be sourced to a March 2013 meeting in Istanbul between a retired British military officer, James Le Mesurier—who had experience in the murky world of private security companies and the shadowy confluence between national security and intelligence operations and international organizations—and representatives of the Syrian National Council (SNC) and the Qatari Red Crescent Society. Earlier that month, the SNC was given Syria’s seat in the Arab League at a meeting of the league held in Qatar.”

The Syrian Civil Defence, established in 1953, is registered with the International Civil Defence Organisation, since 1972. Other civil societies and humanitarian organisations inside Syria like the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and other children, women, peace, human rights, culture, concerned organisations have received no attention in flashy media appearance. However, within a surprisingly short period, the White Helmets have gained an unexpected attention and support from Western governments, mainstream media and ditto political elites.

For years now, there has been a malicious tsunami and round-the-clock allegations claiming that President Bashar Al-Assad is “targeting his own people indiscriminately,” by the White Helmets’ finance sources. The White Helmets state, “funding for their humanitarian relief work is received from the aid budgets of Japan, Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States.” They, seemingly, have an annual budget of \$300k and has raised a total support of well over US\$ 100 million. The Turkish Elite Natural Disaster Response Team (AKUT) has additionally provided logistical support.

Moreover, various investigations have revealed that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been a major shareholder in the White Helmet organisation. The USAID’s website writes, “our work supports long-term and equitable economic growth and advances U.S. foreign policy objectives by supporting: economic growth, agriculture and trade; global health; and, democracy, conflict prevention and humanitarian assistance.” Undoubtedly, The USAID serve a malicious role in the dismantling of sovereign nations and their reduction to Western hegemony vassal states, under the pretences of



The White Helmets’ propaganda is misleading and highly prejudiced, when in fact they are apparently paid mercenaries, impostors and agents...

freedom and democracy.

Richard Spencer of the London Telegraph has said, “The Foreign Office is currently the largest single source of funding. It is an irony that if Britain does effectively become an ally of Assad, and starts raids against ISIL in Syria, it will be bombing from the air and paying for the bodies to be dug out on the ground. The White Helmets are also operating in at least one ISIL-held area.”

Noticeably, the White Helmets have a clear agenda associated with the conspiracy of overthrowing the Syrian regime, proven through the financial and political support they have granted to the armed groups involved in the conflict. The White Helmet myth-building process as emphasised by their website maintains, “The volunteers save people on all sides of the conflict – pledging commitment to the principles of ‘Humanity, Solidarity, Impartiality’ as outlined by the International Civil Defence Organisation. This pledge guides every response, every action, every life saved – so that in a time of destruction, all Syrians have the hope of a lifeline.” The site adds, “The White Helmets mostly deal with the aftermath of government air attacks. Yet they have risked sniper fire to rescue the bodies of government soldiers to give them a proper burial.”

In addition, the White Helmets are claimed to be ordinary Syrian civil volunteers who save the civilians and are rightly altruistic “bakers, tailors, engineers, pharmacists, painters, carpenters, students and many more, the White Helmets are volunteers from all walks of life.” However, they are, virtually, executioners with a human face and part of the terrorist groups who serve Western intelligence and political propaganda. They are nothing but a political lobbying, a weaponised organisation who speaks toughly against the Syrian government, Iran, Russia and their allies. They receive massive funds from NATO and EU countries, which are militarily involved in the conspiracy against Syria.

The Zionist imperialist soft war relies upon its hypocrite mainstream media to disseminate its propaganda, propelling the MENA region into a sectarian conflict. Suspicious NGOs, such as the White Hamlets, are cynically instrumented to render vulnerable nations dependent upon foreign aid and donor support in order to facilitate “Democratisation,” the Zionist imperialist murky agenda. These doubtful NGOs cease to be the neutral and unbiased; they too publically purport to be ‘humanitarian organisations. Instead, they are covert tools for foreign interventions and regimes change’s conspiracies. The White Helmets’ propaganda is misleading and highly prejudiced, when in fact they are apparently paid mercenaries, impostors and agents; a drama, which is unfolding terrorist strongholds areas that are devoid of populations.

Currently, Terrorists in Syria’s Eastern Ghouta are hiding in civilians’ homes, taking away food and stealing instructions on how to pass through the humanitarian corridor. The terrorists are continuing their attacks despite the daily humanitarian pauses injuring the locals. The daily humanitarian pause was established on February 27. Earlier in February, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution proposing a 30-day humanitarian ceasefire in Syria. According to the Russian Center for Reconciliation, the terrorists deprive people of special brochures with instructions on how to pass through the humanitarian corridor. It has also warned that “jihadists are plotting mortar shelling of [the UN humanitarian] convoy and putting the blame on the government forces.”

Earlier, the Syrian government has gotten information on provocations prepared by the terrorist groups; including, Jabhat al-Nusra, Feylaq al-Rahman and Akhrrar al-Sham, using poisonous agents” in Eastern Ghouta. God forbid, a predictable chemical attack is being prepared by those murderers to give the West an opportunity to blame the Syrian government for using chemical weapons against its people.

Poor Afghanistan dance to tunes of American menace

➡ In 1991 he joined the World Bank and as we know very well that once you join World Bank you remain attached to it one way or the other even if you leave it and join other institutions. Your contacts and designations remain. This is the reason that when he returned to Afghanistan after 24 years, he was appointed as chief adviser to then president Hamid Karzai in 2002.

Everyone knows his journey after becoming Finance Minister of Afghanistan. I can say with certainty that he is no more than a pawn of Western powers, a puppet king who has the power to rule the whole nation but his American master America fails to inform him about progress and dealings with his opponents and allies.

As proof of this, take October 11, 2017, when a piece of news published in Pakistani newspapers revealed that talks at the Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Coordination Authority (APTTCA) had been suspended by Afghanistan unilaterally. Over this suspension a question was asked of the Afghan ambassador to Pakistan, Omar Zakhiwal, on October 16, 2017, in a TV interview. Surprisingly enough, he and his superiors were unaware of the matter, but he gave his word to a Pakistani journalist to address the suspension promptly. However, the talks remain suspended. Pakistan is still waiting for a reply from the US but the US is not answerable to anyone, it seems. So, Pakistanis and Afghans are still waiting, in suspension themselves. It’s as if the US is working underhandedly and secretly and making plans without even informing Afghan partners. It all smells of further American exploitation.

Boots have been on the ground for the last 17 years. The US has spent many billions of dollars in Afghanistan on its war. These expenses are in addition to than CIA expenditures on illegal Arms and the drug trade. Some 2,400 US soldiers have died, too, and many thousands more wounded, and very little if anything has been accomplished. These numbers are much higher according to claims of the Taliban, but in any case the Americans are losers in Afghanistan. And this is why America wants to leave, but still wants to control the drug trade emanating from the country. Readers may find these words annoying but I believe the real aim of the American presence was primarily to organize and control the international drug trade. If my honorable readers require some proof of this, I can provide it if requested.

The American Menace wants to do three things before leaving the country:

Firstly, the US wants to leave without shame. Americans are not eager to repeat the Vietnam War failures. The recent Chiefs of Defense Conference held in Kabul, ongoing military campaigns

and back door diplomacy are steps towards this goal. Pakistan is a very important strategic partner in this matter. This is the reason why COAS of Pakistan, General Qamar Jawaid Bajwa, presented the idea of a “collaborative and persistent approach” to deal with regional security challenges, with the consultation of Iran, Turkey and other stake holders. But the real decision making occurs in the White House and Pentagon instead of in Kabul, and the conference finished without any declaration. It is my personal belief that Americans would not take General Bajwa’s notion of stability of the region through Afghanistan because the US targets are not what Bajwa and others seek to realize. In fact, they are opposite to it.

Secondly, Americans don’t want fighters to target their own soil but to keep serving US interests in the region. For that, the American Menace has decided to leave Afghanistan in the hands of three groups: ISIL, the Taliban, and the Afghan government. Americans will take care of Afghan government forces. The CIA will take care of ISIL and make sure that this militant group keeps on serving US interests in the region as they are serving elsewhere in Asia, and will leave the Taliban to find partners to support their cause and territories and in the region. This is the reason why Donald Trump has denounced talks with the Taliban. When Ashraf Ghani came into power, in his first speech, he announced that his main objective is to bring all fighting groups in Afghanistan to the table. The stance of the “philosopher king” is opposite that of the US currently. Things have changed and the US is trying to do anything, supporting various groups in various ways, to maintain overall hegemony in the region.

Those who know Afghanistan well know that large militant groups usually remained attached to smaller warlords to secure their positions on the ground as well as to avert greater losses in case of all-out war with their opponents in some particular area. This is to control the area without losing men or spending yet more money. Increasing the ISIS presence in the area is pointing towards more pain for all parties, because the Taliban would have to fight on two fronts against government backed forces and ISIL. This would also benefit the US by its sale of more weapons and further expansion of the drug trade.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the US wants to maintain its influence in the region. For this, Ghani has started exploiting the Pashtun nationalism. Pashtuns of Iran and Pakistan are close with the Pashtuns in Afghanistan. These wolves want to spur more bloodshed in the name of ethnicity and nationalism, as they have often done in the past. Pashtuns of Iran and Pakistan are fully aware of the situation, and it is my belief that they will not become puppets to the Americans.

Trump may allow Riyadh to enrich uranium at low levels: Professor

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Prof. Nader Entessar is of the opinion that “The existing laws governing U.S. nuclear transfer technology must be modified or exemptions granted for the Trump administration to accommodate Saudi desires.”

“I think the Trump administration may be successful in getting the requisite exemptions to allow Riyadh to enrich uranium at low levels.”

Professor Entessar, who is the Chair of Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice at the University of South Alabama, also says that “However, allowing Riyadh to reprocess plutonium will deal a major blow to the international nonproliferation regime and may elicit reactions from not only Iran but also other regional countries.”

Following is the complete text of the interview with Professor Nader Entessar:

■ After a few years, U.S. administration announced it will sign a nuclear agreement with Riyadh. Why is the U.S. convinced to restart negotiation for a nuclear agreement?

A: Saudi Arabia, especially under the tutelage of Mohammad bin Salman (MbS) has become a cash cow for the United States. The nuclear agreement will satisfy MbS’s ego and will keep his country as a pliable client of the U.S. under the Trump administration. Also, the agreement with Saudi Arabia will be yet another leverage against Iran and its regional policies. Apparently, Saudi Arabia has hired King& Spalding, an international law firm headquartered in Atlanta to lobby the Trump administration to get U.S. approval for a Saudi nuclear program. The federal documents show that the Saudi government is paying the King & Spalding law firm up to \$450,000 for a 30-day period. It is interesting to note that this law firm has also advised President Trump’s real estate empire.

■ Two Kingdom’s desire for its nuclear plan are enriching uranium and reprocessing plutonium. Will the U.S. accommodate the Riyadh in these issues?

A: The existing laws governing U.S. nuclear transfer technology must be modified or exemptions granted for the Trump administration to accommodate Saudi desires. I think the Trump administration may be successful in getting the requisite exemptions to allow Riyadh to enrich uranium at low levels. However, allowing Riyadh to reprocess plutonium will deal a major blow to the international nonproliferation regime and may elicit reactions from not only Iran but also other regional countries.


■ Some argue that if the U.S. does not cooperate with the Saudis in its nuclear program, Russia and China may do so, and this will lead to reducing American nuclear influence in the region. What is your opinion?

A: I think there is certainly some validity to this argument, but the Iran dimension of this whole episode is more important to the U.S. than any other variable.


■ Which model for Saudi’s nuclear plan is likely, JCPOA or U.S. agreement with the United Arab Emirates?

A: I think if given a choice, the Saudis would prefer the UAE model to one similar to the JCPOA. The Iran nuclear agreement places significant and long-term restrictions on Tehran’s nuclear research and industry whereas the UAE model gives more leeway and freedom of action to the Saudis if they are given the choice of selecting between the JCPOA-type agreement or what the UAE has been able to garner from the West.

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D) The envelopes will be opened at 9:00 A.M On Sunday (May 20,2018)

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Want to understand what is wrong with Europe? Look at Italy

By Helen Thompson

Italy's election this week has destroyed any remaining hope that the center in European politics can prevail.

On the same day that members of the Social Democratic Party in Germany gave reluctant blessing to another "grand coalition" in Berlin, Italians went to the polls and delivered more than half their votes to anti-establishment parties. The center-right coalition that emerged when Silvio Berlusconi formed Forza Italia is now led by the League, a far-right party that threatens thousands of migrants with deportation. And as in nearly every recent European election, the principal center-left party lost a large number of voters. Given these results, the only possible government that can emerge in Rome will contain at least one of the two insurgent populist parties: either the League or the Five Star Movement, the single largest party in Parliament.

Italy's situation is particular, but not unique. Across the Continent, the old politics has shattered: The once-dominant parties of the center right and center left have been unable over the past two decades to secure support for policies

generated within the context of the European Union and the euro single currency.

Since the Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992, establishing the European Union and laying the groundwork for the creation of the euro, policy on a range of issues from budgets to asylum have been taken beyond the control of democratically elected national governments. An increasing number have become subject to majority-voting within the Council of the European Union, as with immigration. Sometimes, policy is just dictated by Germany's sheer exercise of power, as in the case of the refugee and migrant crisis.

At the same time, participation in the eurozone has required governments to forsake policy tools that their predecessors had used during times of economic crisis. Since 2010, eurozone membership can also demand acquiescence to the European Central Bank, which can essentially ask for and veto national economic legislation.

■ Influencing policy

The result? Much of Europe has become nearly ungovernable. As voters across the Continent see their ability to influence policy

taken away, they have lashed out, neutering the traditional center and giving rise to disruptive populists. Italy's election, in other words, says much about everything that's wrong with the European Union.

The center left has been hit especially hard. Germany's Social Democrats, France's Socialists and most recently, Italy's Democratic Party have lost millions of voters. Part of this is driven by a rejection of the immigration and refugee policies over which centrist governments have presided. In eurozone countries, voters have had extra reason to lose faith: Despite their rhetorical commitments to social welfare and redistribution, these parties have overseen cuts in welfare spending, loosened labor laws and reformed pensions. Over the past two decades, center-left parties have justified the elevation of a technocratic European ideal over the claims of both democracy and the actual, daily economic experience of millions of Europeans.

Italy is the epicenter of the problems facing establishment European politicians for both recent and more historical reasons. The external immigration pressures that have roiled politics

are especially acute in Italy, which is the first point of entry for migrants and refugees coming from North Africa.

Consequently, the League surged from 4 percent of the vote in 2013 to about 18 percent this week, thanks in large part to the party's campaign slogan: "Italians First."

■ Italy's particular tribulations

Above all, though, have been Italy's particular tribulations with the euro, which have struck at the heart of the country's democracy. In the fall of 2011, the European Central Bank wrote to Mr. Berlusconi, then the prime minister, saying that its purchase of Italian bonds was conditional on legislative reforms.

When Mr. Berlusconi refused to cut pensions, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany encouraged the Italian president at the time, Giorgio Napolitano, to end Mr. Berlusconi's premiership. Germany essentially strong-armed the president into appointing a cabinet of technocrats led by Mario Monti, a former European commissioner. Since then, Italy has not had an elected politician as minister of economy and finances. The role has been taken by Mr. Monti

himself, a former central banker and former official at the International Monetary Fund.

In the 2013 election — the first after Mr. Monti was installed as prime minister at Germany's insistence — the Five Star Movement, which presents the entire Italian political class as undemocratic and corrupt, took the single largest share of the vote. It had only formed four years earlier.

Italy's eurozone trials are nothing new. Before Italy had even joined the common currency area in 1999, its attempts to qualify for membership — by introducing the required "fiscal discipline" — had resulted in nearly a decade of rising unemployment. Moreover, no Italian government was ever in a position to exercise a meaningful choice about whether it was wise to join the eurozone. Unless Italy ended its membership in the European Union, it was politically bound to take on the currency by treaty obligations over which it had no consequential say.

Now Italian voters have responded by putting into office politicians who do not accept the legitimacy of European Union-wide rules. (Source: The New York Times)

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Simple ways to turn your home from toxic to green

Did you know that air pollution can lead to Alzheimer's and other degenerative diseases? Unfortunately, that's just how toxic the air that we breathe has become. Constant exposure to harmful air is bad for the health, but there are several simple measures that you can take to protect yourself and your family against toxic air at home, which gives you one less thing to worry about in this day and age.

With a few simple steps, you can make your home a truly healthier and safer place to live in by using eco-friendly household products. Educating your kids about green living also starts at home. Thinking of remodeling your home to make it green? You can try these eight environment-friendly home design ideas to improve indoor air quality and your quality of living, all while reducing your carbon footprint for a healthier planet:

Wooden furniture
Using natural materials, such as wood, for your furniture is both a sturdier and safer option than artificial materials like plastic. Be sure to look for woods that are sustainably harvested and finished with Earth-conscious varnishes, oils, and/or paints. This will ensure that the process is both healthier for the environment and your home.

This is perfect for purchases and projects big and small. From buying a new dining table to decorating your home.

You could even use wood or any similar material to create a DIY photo holder that will definitely fill your home with love for family and the environment. Wooden fixtures can be pricey, especially if you're choosing to support local artisans, but they can withstand time, making them a worthy long-term investment — perhaps they could even become an heirloom to pass down to the family one day.

Energy-efficient lighting
Instead of using incandescent light bulbs that produce large amounts of heat and carbon dioxide, switch to energy-saving LED lights at home. While compact fluorescent light bulbs are cost-friendly up front, they still contain harmful toxin and often do not last nearly as long as promised. LED lighting continues to come down in price and offers reliable lighting without the heat and other hazards of more traditional lighting.

Making the switch will keep your home from emitting harmful greenhouse gases and pollutants. On top of that, eco-friendly lights last longer—and are therefore more cost-efficient—than incandescent lights. Make sure to use lights with eco-friendly labels and pay attention to the need for special bulbs if you hope to use them in fixtures that offer



the ability to dim the lights; not all LED (or CFL) bulbs are dimmable.

Energy-saving windows
Achieve a bright, eco-friendly indoor space by installing energy-efficient windows that will let ample sunshine into your home and have large openings that will allow fresh air to circulate. Even a few minutes a day to allow for an exchange of air can do wonders to help improve indoor air quality.

Of course, environmentally the construction matters too, from materials to the energy savings that they provide.

Windows made of wood, vinyl, or fiberglass are among the most eco-friendly options. When it comes to energy-efficient window designs, you can choose from casement windows, double-hung windows, picture windows, and awnings.

Decorative plants
Of course, you'll need something literally green inside your home. Decorate your home with cute little plants such as peace lilies, bamboo palms, aloe vera, spider plants, Dracaena, snake plant, and chrysanthemum.

These plants can remove air pollutants like benzene (a leading cause of cancer and anemia), formaldehyde (that causes certain types of cancer and irritation of the skin, eyes, nose, and throat), and xylene (that causes headaches, dizziness, and breathing difficulty).

Aside from the physical health benefits, houseplants can also provide some great psychological benefits.

Keeping plants in your home help create a balance in it with their calming and soothing effects. Studies also show that having plants

around can increase concentration and memory retention by up to 20 percent.

Organic wool-stuffed materials
As for your bedding, pillows, mattresses, carpets, and other furniture items - consider the use products that are made of organic wool-stuffed materials. These can protect you and your family against dust mites or bed mites that can cause allergies and asthma.

Additionally, wool and some other materials are naturally fire retardant, preventing them from requiring chemical retardants that can be toxic to the skin and the air. While it is important, and often a legal requirement, to have items that are flame retardant, chemical additives used to make products more fire safe are extremely dangerous. While they may slow fires, some of the chemicals used even increase the danger of toxic gases during a fire, which is the leading cause of death in fires. Chemicals, like bromine, actually increase amounts of carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide released during fires.

These reasons, among others, make it all that much more important to seek out materials that meet fire retardant regulations and requirements naturally, without the addition of known and potentially unknown consequences.

Eco-friendly wall paint
If you plan on adding life to your walls by painting them, consider not just the color but also the chemicals and materials that the paint contains. Volatile organic compounds or VOCs, which are often used in making paints and even carpets, cause health issues

like dizziness, nausea, and headache.

Building a green home always translates to good health. Make sure that you use only low-VOC or no-VOC paints. Go for natural paints made of plant oil and other extracts that are good for the health and beautiful for the home. Thankfully almost all big building supply stores now offer, at least, low-VOC standard, but be sure to check the label to be sure — especially when painting rooms for infants, children, and those who may already have compromised health.

Solar-paneled roofs
Solar-paneled roofs are a must for every green home, as they don't create harmful emissions and wastes. Instead, they create clean and reusable energy without the need for excavation or combustion.

Not only that, solar-paneled roofs can also help you save a lot of money and give you tax rebates. It's an investment that can be used for about 20 years or more. Just imagine how healthier your family will become and how much money you can save in that span of time.

And you don't have to stop there! There are a variety of green energy solutions for the home. Compact wind turbines, geothermal energy systems, and others can help you to provide a cleaner environment for your home and the planet while offsetting costs over time. You may even be able to take advantage of tax credits and subsidies depending on the route you choose and what is available at the time.

Recycled glass tiles
If you want a practical use of glass tiles, install them on your kitchen and bathroom. Glass tiles don't soak up water or stains that breed bacteria, molds, and other disease-causing organisms like some other materials can.

Using glass tiles is also good for the environment, as it reduces the amount of glass products piling up in landfills. According to the Glass Packaging Institute, glass is 100% recyclable and can be recycled endlessly without loss in quality or purity. Recycled glass, unlike most other recycled materials, can be substituted for up to 95% of raw materials. Next time you decide on replacing your flooring or tiles, recycle glasses and install chic and stylish glass tiles all over your home. Win-win!

Half of America is exposed to polluted air, and it can lead to many adverse health effects in the long run. Working to improve your indoor air quality is the best place to start living healthy and safe. Start having a green lifestyle by using environment-friendly design ideas for remodeling your home.

(Source: thespruce.com)

Brainy habits of exceptionally wise people



Intelligence may be somewhat innate, but wisdom can most certainly be learned. Here's how to wise up at any age.

Wisdom vs. intelligence
Although people value intelligence—understanding, reasoning, the ability to learn—they also respect wisdom, or the knowledge and experience that we accumulate over a lifetime. Cognitive scientists call the former “fluid intelligence,” which does reduce somewhat during adulthood, and the latter “crystallized intelligence,” which generally improves with age.

In some ways, wisdom is like beauty: we value it, we desire it, we know it when we see it, but it is nearly impossible to pin down such an ethereal quality. But researchers have tried—and here's what they've found.

The definition of wisdom
In the late 1980s, the Berlin Wisdom Project at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development defined wisdom as having:

- Intellectual knowledge
- Factual knowledge
- Superior judgment
- Excellent problem-solving skills
- The ability to learn from experience
- Humility
- Emotional resilience, or the ability to rebound from a setback
- Openness, or the maturity to be comfortable allowing the world to see you as you really are
- A deep understanding of human nature, including empathy for people who are different or from other cultures

Don't have all these qualities? Almost everyone has the capacity to become wiser, especially if you strengthen these six habits that the wisest people all share in common.

They work at being social
Studies show that people who stay connected to others demonstrate higher levels of wisdom than those who are more isolated. Make an effort to join a new club, reconnect with far-flung friends on Facebook, or invite an old friend or new co-worker for coffee. Next time you're at a party or gathering, single out someone who's standing alone and strike up a conversation. People generally love to talk about themselves; you, on the other hand, have a harder job: to listen closely. Don't miss these words of wisdom from people who have led a full life.

They practice being open-minded



Wisdom involves being able to understand all sides of an issue without letting emotions or personal feelings get in the way. Being open-minded means finding empathy and realizing that everyone has a life story that influences their actions. During the course of every day, make a note of the issues that bug you, and take a moment to see them from the other side.

They've learned how to say, “I could be wrong”
A wise person understands that it is impossible to know everything and that life is capable of taking unexpected turns. Recognizing your errors can lead only to greater wisdom, and admitting that there are times when you could be mistaken will go a long way in solidifying your reputation as someone whose advice can be trusted. As the Roman philosopher Cicero said, “Any man is liable to err; only a fool persists in error.” Check out these words of wisdom that geniuses tell their kids.

They switch up what types of books they read
While current events are important, both fiction and nonfiction books can help you expand your worldview and allow you to explore new ideas and points of view. Mix up your bookshelf: Read histories, biographies and memoirs, funny reads, fictional books that expose you to new cultures and eras, and books that present a point of view or make a case about certain aspects of health/science, politics, and other subjects.

Don't miss these wise quotes from Will Rogers that will definitely stay with you.

They tap into their self-knowledge
You've learned a lot just by being alive, but have you taken the time to review all that you've learned? Try this exercise: write down your three biggest failures and three greatest successes. For each, review the events that led up to it and what lessons you took away from the experience. Look for patterns. This is not a time for regret or pride; the goal is to look at each experience, good or bad, as more fuel to enrich your wisdom. (Could you be a genius? This mensa quiz will tell you.)

They read the news
You cannot make balanced choices unless you understand world circumstances and the experiences of others. If you don't already read a daily paper or news online, start by going through a single front-page article from a major respected news source, such as The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, or Washington Post, from start to finish, every day. Don't just scan or skip around it; read every word. Eventually, try to get through the main articles of a full newspaper every day.

(Source: Reader's Digest)

28 simple and natural ways to detox your body



17. Turn to home remedies for illness rather than antibiotics:

The very medications that are intended to help your illnesses or health conditions may be contributing to toxins in the body. Though antibiotics and other medications are intended to help you to stay healthy, they also contain harmful substances that can build up in your intestines and digestive system over time.

Though some medications may be very necessary, it's always best to try home remedies whenever possible. If you can fight off a common illness using options

like ginger, garlic, a smoothie, or other natural herbs or plants, then you have a good chance at achieving better health and performing a cleanse in the process.

The natural home remedies help to get rid of the illness in the way that your body requires. So as they are fighting off the substances or viruses that are making you sick, you are also getting rid of all other harmful toxins in the body. You feel great as you are fighting off illness through natural means and performing a cleanse in the process-and that's good for everything!

(Source: bembu.com)

How to clean the outside of stainless steel tea kettle?



Stainless steel is a useful material for the outside of a tea kettle because it naturally repels both stains and rust. It also does not transfer heat easily, which will prevent it from getting as hot as the inside and bottom of the kettle. Stainless steel is a relatively soft metal that can scratch easily if you use metal utensils or scouring pads for cleaning.

Add just enough water to 3 tbsp. of baking soda to make a thick paste. Mix the paste until it is the consistency of toothpaste. Apply the paste to the outside of the kettle. Rub along the metal's grain.

Pay special attention to any stained areas or pieces of burnt foods.

Scrape burnt food with the back of a plastic spoon if the baking soda mixture did not completely remove the burnt food. Be careful not to scratch the kettle.

Slightly dampen a clean cloth in distilled white vinegar. Rub it on the surface of the kettle to remove the baking soda residue.

Buff the kettle dry with a clean, dry cloth. This will prevent any watermarks or streaks from drying onto the stainless steel surface.

(Source: Real Simple)



101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

#46. Go on a road trip

A road trip is a journey taken on roads, typically by automobile. While some would consider a road trip as tiring, a road trip can actually be fun, especially when accompanied by the right people — and perhaps, great music! Not only is it relaxing to go on a long, non-stop ride, it also provides a great view of the country/city (depends on where you are driving) and creates an opportunity for you and your companions to bond with each other.

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

(Source: personalexcellence.co)



#IRANIANLIFESTYLE

A stand offers pomegranate juice (ab-e anar) at Tehran Grand Bazaar in an undated photo (Instagram/@secretlipstick)



10 western Iranian villages gain national heritage status

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — A total of ten ancient Iranian villages, scattered across the western Kurdistan province, have recently been inscribed on the National Heritage List.



A view of the Uraman cultural landscape with rows of step-like houses

Halvan, Dulab, Takhteh, Vasi-ye Olya, Shian, Zhan and four other mountainous villages were added to the list by the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization on Wednesday, CHTN reported.

Some of the villages are within the Uraman cultural landscape which contains rows of dense and step-like rows of houses. Uraman is considered a cradle of Kurdish art and culture from the days of yore.

The CHHTO is following up on possible inscription of the cultural landscape on the UNESCO World Heritage list by 2018.

Hamedan to host UNWTO session in November

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — The Iranian city of Hamedan will play host to the 40th World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Plenary Session of the Affiliate Members from November 12 to 14.

Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization will organize the event, which is deemed a gateway for collaboration between the private and the public sectors in tourism throughout 2018 and beyond.

A memorandum of understanding on the event was signed by UNWTO Secretary General Zurab Pololikashvili and CHHTO Deputy Director Mohammad Moheb-Khodaei, during their Thursday meeting in Germany, IRNA reported.



CHHTO deputy director Mohammad Moheb-Khodaei (R) and UNWTO chief Zurab Pololikashvili shake hands on March 8, 2018

The event will bring together over 500 travel-associated companies, educational and research institutions and NGOs, the report added.

Its principal mission is to foster relationships among affiliate members and member states and promote the mission of UNWTO and exchange of knowledge among expert, the organizers say.



ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic Centre of Evora

The Historic Centre of Evora, capital of the Alentejo Province, Portugal, has been shaped by more than twenty centuries of history, going as far back as Celtic times.

It fell under Roman domination and still retains, among other ruins, those of the Temple of Diana. During the Visigoth period, the Christian city occupied the surface area surrounded by the Roman wall, which was then reworked.

Under Moorish domination, which came to an end in 1165, further improvements were made to the original defensive system as shown by a fortified gate and the remains of the ancient Kasbah.



A view of the Historic Centre of Evora, a World Heritage site in Portugal

There are a number of buildings from the medieval period, the best known of which is the Cathedral that was completed in the 13th century. But it was in the 15th century, when the Portuguese kings began living in Evora on an increasingly regular basis that Evora's golden age began.

Evora is also remarkable for reasons other than its monumental heritage related to significant historic events. The 16th century was a time of major urban planning and great intellectual and religious influence. While Evora also has many noteworthy 16th-century patrician houses (Cordovil house, the house of Garcia de Resende), the unique quality of the city arises from the coherence of the minor architecture of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

(Source: UNESCO)

Restoration of Takht-e-Marmar in final stage

HERITAGE **TEHRAN** — Restoration process of Takht-e-Marmar, a spectacular terrace within the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace in downtown Tehran, goes through its final stage.

Literally meaning "Marble Throne", the monument will be open to visitors from March 20, which marks the arrival of the Iranian New Year, CHTN reported.

A sum of 1.35 billion rials (roughly \$30,000) was channeled into the rehabilitation project that spanned over four months, said Masoud Nosrati, the director of the World Heritage site.

Takht-e-Marmar embodies the finest of Iranian architecture as it is adorned by paintings, marble-carvings, tile-work, stucco, mirrors, enamel, woodcarvings, and lattice windows.

The throne was built in the early 19th century upon the order of Fath Ali Shah, a Qajar monarch who reigned from 1797 to 1834. It bore coronations of several Qajar kings as well as Reza Shah Pahlavi who brought an end to Qajar rule in the country.

A masterpiece of the Qajar era (1785 to 1925), the lavish Golestan Palace embodies a successful integration of earlier Persian crafts and architecture with Western influences.



A view of Takht-e-Marmar within the UNESCO-registered Golestan Palace in downtown Tehran

36 Iranian companies joining ITB Berlin

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — A total of 36 travel-associated companies and businesses are taking part in the 52nd ITB Berlin -- Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin -- which will come to an end this evening.

Iran's pavilion has played host to various meetings, exhibits, workshops and live performances by state-run and privately-owned exhibitors under the auspices of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization.

The pavilion also turned the spotlight on indigenous costumes and dishes, traditional rituals, musical performances, handicraft products as well, Mehr reported on Saturday.

The ITB Berlin adopted "Experience & Experts" as the core theme of the five-day event, in which transport companies, hospitality businesses, tour operators, online booking portals from over 180 countries are attending.

Having a well-worn tourist circuit with 22 UNESCO World Heritage sites and soaked in deeply-rooted-in-time history and culture, Iran seeks to acquire greater share of the global tourism industry.



Iran, Serbia resume direct flights after 27-year gap

After a gap of 27 years, direct flights between Iran and Serbia resumed on Saturday, when an Iran Air jet touched down at Belgrade's Nikola Tesla airport, Serbian media reported.

Iran Air is offering a direct service between Tehran and Belgrade twice weekly, with all flights fully booked until the end of the summer, the reports said.

But the service, which was launched following a visa liberalization agreement between the two countries, has raised fears it could open up a new migrant route for those seeking to stay in the EU illegally, a Serbian charity has warned.

A second Iranian carrier, Qeshm Air, is also planning to launch a service between the two capitals starting from March 19.

In August 2017, Iran and Serbia agreed to liberalize visas for travel between the two countries, sparking a surge in interest on the part of Iranians. (Source: AFP)



Tabriz to host intl. conference on Silk Road archaeology

TOURISM **TEHRAN** — The Iranian city of Tabriz will play host to an international conference titled "Archaeology and Conservation along the Silk Road", IRNA reported on Saturday.

The Research Institute of Cultural Heritage & Tourism (RICHT) will organize the event in collaboration with China's Nanjing University and Austrian Academy of Science, the report said, without mentioning a specific date.

The scientific conference will also explore themes such as conservation and restoration of historical relics and structures which are dotted across the ancient Silk Road.

Tabriz used to be the melting pot of cultural exchange on the Silk Road.

The city holds the title of 2018 Islamic Tourism Capital, a privilege forecasted to draw over one million foreign travelers to the historic city.



A view of the historical Elgoli Park in Tabriz

Tourism bosses are testing ways to soothe local anger while keeping the visitors coming

The fury rippled across Europe during a summer from hell in 2017. In Barcelona, they held up a tourist bus and slashed bike tires. In Venice, they marched against the cruise ships and raised rents. In some Spanish cities, the writing was on the wall quite literally, as locals told travelers in the boldest fonts: "Tourists go home."

So now, with the summer season just around the corner, tourism bosses across Europe are frantically trying to implement new measures that will keep locals happy and economies afloat.

"Someone said there is no overtourism, only under management," said the World Tourism Organization secretary general, Zurab Pololikashvili, when asked how the industry could move forward.

"What we are facing is the clear need to step up the governance of tourist flows on the ground, especially if we look at growing tourist numbers in general and growing flows to urban destinations."

The range of solutions floated at a tourism conference in Berlin on Wednesday included tightening up on Airbnb rentals, better management of tourism flow and widespread use of digital tools.

Spanish officials have already introduced an online ticketing system for the fortified Islamic palace of Alhambra, offering its 2.7 million annual visitors pre-booked slots to balance the crowds.

There are hopes in Italy's Cinque Terre that a similar system could reduce the visitor masses pounding the venerable cliff paths every year. Although not obligatory, its capped entry cards include services such



Manarola in Italy's Cinque Terre. (Photograph: Darrell Gulin/Getty Images)

as rail connections and are linked with an app giving real-time information on the numbers of visitors in each pastel-hued village -- a subtle nudge to avoid bottlenecks.

Venice, Amsterdam and Dubrovnik are likewise trying to nudge visitors away from hotspots, while one veteran cruise ship destination shows how technology and community engagement can gel.

Gloria Guevara Manzo, World Travel & Tourism Council president and CEO, points to Miami, where residents receive SMS alerts if there is the chance of congestion from visitor arrivals. "Miami Beach residents can plan

accordingly and not be impacted."

At the ITB travel convention in Berlin -- the world's biggest gathering of industry insiders -- representatives from Dubrovnik, Barcelona and Amsterdam shared solutions with a packed conference hall.

Barcelona has cracked down on illegal unlicensed apartments for rent, though its tourism director, Joan Torrella, insists that authorities have to work with digital upstarts such as Airbnb, not just confront them.

Dubrovnik's mayor, Mato Franković, hopes 2018 will be an easier summer for visitors and local people because of a new

arrangement to stagger cruise ship arrivals.

"In previous years we had overcrowding in the old city, over 10,000 at the same time which we can't handle, so what we've done for 2018 is spread that," Franković said. "So actually we as a destination can handle more tourists from cruise ships than we previously had, which were before concentrated just on three days."

The Greek island of Santorini is also limiting the number of cruise passengers to 8,000 per day this year, while Venice is wrangling a ban on floating resorts in its lagoon by 2021.

Justin Francis, founder of the travel agency Responsible Travel, sees the "overtourism crisis" getting worse before it gets better, and doubts that tourism management on the ground will suffice in the face of the growth.

In 2017, there were 1.3 billion tourist arrivals around the world, half of them in Europe. More than two-thirds of international travelers go to just 20 countries.

"Managing tourism more responsibly can help, but some destinations may just have too many tourists, and Barcelona may be a case of that," said Francis.

"The world's a very big place, and the absolute numbers of tourist are manageable, but not if we all want to go to the same places at the same time."

Taxation, demarketing, limiting accommodation -- Francis says these ideas have been around for decades. While many destinations still need more visitors for their local economies, it's largely a question of where and when. Case in point, Iceland.

(Source: The Guardian)

China wants to send an X-ray telescope in space - prototype ready by 2022

In an effort to lead the space race, China has announced that it's going to launch an X-ray into space. It's called the eXTP, and it might be up there as early as 2025.

China wants to create a next-generation X-ray observatory that's designed to observe some of the most hostile and unstable phenomenon in space, such as black holes, neutron stars, and quark stars.

It's called the X-ray Timing and Polarimetry mission — or eXTP — and it's going to cost an estimated \$473 million. China hopes to have a prototype ready by 2022 and launch it by 2025.

It's no surprise that space is an important endeavor for China. Even before the rekindled interest in space exploration fueled in part by Elon Musk and SpaceX's series of successful rocket launches and landings, China has been trying to bolster its space exploration efforts and develop the country's image as a space innovator.

■ At the front of race

By its announcement of eXTP, China basically confirms that it's eager to be at the front of the modern space race. According to The Chinese Academy of Sciences, eXTP will be a successor to Hard X-ray Modulation Telescope launched in June last year. It is expected to make China a leading figure in the world's X-ray astronomy between 2025 to 2035, said principal eXTP investigator



Zhang Shuangnan.

"Since we have developed excellent technology and talent in X-ray astronomy,

it's highly possible that we can take a leading role in this field if we keep pursuing it with more advanced detection instruments," said

It's called the X-ray Timing and Polarimetry mission — or eXTP — and it's going to cost an estimated \$473 million. China hopes to have a prototype ready by 2022 and launch it by 2025.

Scientists keep lighting from hitting planes by charging them ahead of time

An unexpected bolt of lightning can easily startle you if it strikes the ground nearby, and high-flying planes aren't immune to the issue either. When lightning strikes an aircraft it can cause some serious havoc, especially with electronics, and it's obviously not pleasant for passengers either.

Now, researchers at MIT have come up with a plan that they say can significantly reduce the risk of a plane being struck by lightning, and it might sound a bit backwards at first.

In a new study published in the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics Journal, MIT scientists explain how they developed the lightning defense system by charging the plane with electricity ahead of time. It seems odd, but the results speak for themselves.

■ Ambient electrical field

The "idea stems from the fact that, when a plane flies through an ambient electric field, its external electrical state, normally in balance, shifts," MIT News writes. "As an



external electric field polarizes the aircraft, one end of the plane becomes more positively charged, while the other end swings towards a more negative charge.

As the plane becomes increasingly polarized, it can set off a highly conductive flow

of plasma, called a positive leader — the preceding stage to a lightning strike."

So, in order to offset that positive charge from prompting a lightning strike, the plane is temporarily given a negative charge. This fairly straightforward approach results in the

Zhang.

Unlike the Hubble Space Telescope and the forthcoming James Webb satellites, the eXTP will not focus on taking pictures of the space but will instead deliver unique observations of space via alternative filters, gathering data on light from many different areas of the spectrum that cannot be easily captured by conventional equipment.

■ A smart move

That seems to be a smart move since most ongoing experiments on astronomy — especially those that aim to discover more about black holes, distant galaxies, and similar space phenomenon — all in some way aim to observe what's beyond the visible light spectrum to find out what else can be detected.

Via focusing and collimating technologies, eXTP will study X-ray sources in the 0.5-30 keV energy range. It will carry four primary instruments: Spectroscopic Focusing Array, Polarimetry Focusing Array, Large Area Detector, and Wide Field Monitor.

"Our goal is to fly a truly large, flagship mission for astrophysics in the next decade," said eXTP international coordinator Andrea Santangelo, noting that he sees no technological hurdles ahead. The "mission's technical readiness is really high. And I'm not really worried about the timeframe. China has shown its ability to keep the schedule."

(Source: Tech Times)

aircraft becoming a much less likely candidate for lightning to be attracted to, significantly reducing the chances that lightning will hit the aircraft.

"We're trying to make the aircraft as invisible to lightning as possible," Jaime Peraire of MIT's Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics, and co-author of the study, explains. "Aside from this technological solution, we are working on modeling the physics behind the process. This is a field where there was little understanding, and this is really an attempt at creating some understanding of aircraft-triggered lightning strikes, from the ground up."

Thus far the system is little more than a proof of concept, tested on scale models in controlled conditions. However, the researchers plan to test their system in real-world scenarios soon by piloting drones into thunderstorms, which sounds like a lot of fun no matter what the results show.

(Source: BGR)

Many type 2 diabetics can relax their blood sugar control, according to doctors



Many of the nation's 29 million people with type 2 diabetes should relax their blood sugar control, an influential physicians group recommended Monday, arguing that the current standard is causing substantial harm without commensurate benefits.

But the American Diabetes Association, the leading organization in the fight against the condition, said it disagrees with the new recommendation from the American College of Physicians and would not change its advice that type 2 diabetics pursue tighter blood glucose control.

The conflict may prove confusing for health-care providers and people with type 2 diabetes, who make up 9.3 percent of the U.S. population.

"Yes, it will be," said Jack Ende, president of the American College of Physicians, which represents 152,000 doctors, most of them internal medicine physicians.

■ More harms than benefits

"But we really believe this is important enough that we have to get the message out, since we've seen more harms than benefits."

In type 2 diabetes, the body fails to use and store glucose properly because it is unable to produce enough of the hormone insulin or does not use insulin well.

Typically, this form of diabetes develops in adulthood, especially among people who are overweight, not physically active or have a family history of the disease, though it is increasingly appearing in younger people.

(In type 1 diabetes, which is much less common and often occurs in childhood, the pancreas completely stops producing insulin.)

The condition can lead to complications

that include strokes, heart problems, kidney disease, blindness and amputations.

In 2016, diabetes was the seventh-largest killer of Americans, with 80,000 deaths attributed to the disease, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

For decades, a main tenet of diabetes management has been the importance of controlling the amount of glucose in the blood. That, experts say, reduces the chances of complications.

Patients have been told to aim for a hemoglobin A1C of 6.5 to 7 percent, which is a measure of glucose over the previous two to three months.

But prompted by what it considered conflicting advice, the college of physicians decided to review the research on the subject and the reasoning of other groups.

■ Type 2 diabetics

It determined that the burdens of striving for the lowest score outweigh the benefits. The guidance issued Monday suggests that most type 2 diabetics and their doctors aim for scores of between 7 and 8, though all care should be "personalized".

For older people and those with other medical issues, the recommendation would not apply.

The physicians group said the harms include "hypoglycemic events", commonly known as low blood sugar, which, in the short term, can cause people with diabetes to feel woozy, lose track of their surroundings or lose consciousness.

The group also concluded that the burden of taking one or more medications to achieve tight glucose control can be greater than the benefit, in both side effects and financial cost.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

If the ocean continues to warm, fish may no longer be on the menu



Circling Antarctica at the bottom of our planet, the Southern Ocean probably seems a world away to anyone living far from its frigid waters. But as it turns out, this polar ocean has a strong influence on the global climate and worldwide ocean health. New research suggests that if this ocean continues to suck up carbon dioxide (and get warmer thanks to climate change), we could see a domino effect in marine ecosystems, with fisheries around the world seeing at least a 20 percent decline by the year 2300.

Scientists at the University of California, Irvine used simulations to project what impacts climate change would have on the world's oceans over the next few centuries, further out than climate change impacts are normally examined. Rather than looking at the usual cutoff of 2100, the team examined global warming feedback that may emerge more slowly, over the course of the next 300 years.

Presently, the Southern Ocean drives ocean mixing; its active Antarctic and sub-Antarctic waters transport nutrients across the globe. But these simulations showed that — if current emissions levels stay the same — by 2300, westerly winds will grow stronger and shift towards the poles to limit this mixing.

■ Polar waters

The resulting change will make polar waters much warmer, dissolve sea ice, and most significantly, trap nutrients in the Southern Ocean.

The researchers, who published their study in the journal Science, found that cutting off this nutrient cycle had a sig-

nificant impact on global ocean health: decreasing primary production, the activity by marine plants on the first level of the food chain, by 24 percent. What's more, it decreases how much particulate carbon the deep sea stored by 41 percent.

Since these processes form the base of ocean ecosystems, it's not surprising the outcome is oceans with, well, a lot less food for fish to eat. Less for fish to eat means ultimately less fish.

The study predicts that the North Atlantic, western Pacific and southern Indian Oceans will feel these effects the worst, with North Atlantic fisheries seeing a whopping 60 percent drop.

■ The world's population

An ocean with fewer fish doesn't just mean less to look at on your next snorkeling trip. Already, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that the fishing industry supports the livelihoods of 10 to 12 percent of the world's population, and that almost 17 percent of the globe relies on fish as their primary source of protein.

The importance of fish as a food source will only grow more important as the global population rises, especially since the FAO estimates suggest we may have to double our food production in order to feed the global population by 2050.

Climate change is already had a serious impact on global food production — from making food less nutritious to messing with the growing season of plants, to even pushing some crop species towards extinction.

(Source: futurism.com)

Permanent artificial heart is playing for keeps

Although artificial hearts have been around for some time now, there's just one that's approved for human use in the U.S., and it's only intended to keep patients going until they can get a heart transplant. A device being developed by the Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU), however, is designed to be a permanent fix.



The OHSU artificial heart was invented by now-retired Dr. Richard Wampler, with spinoff company OregonHeart starting work on the device in 2014. That company has since ceased operations, so the university itself took over development last year.

In an effort to minimize the chances of mechanical failure, the device has been kept simple — unlike other artificial hearts, it has just one moving part, and no valves that could get stuck.

The moving part is a titanium alloy-coated hollow rod that shuttles back and forth inside a titanium tube, suspended within that tube on hydrodynamic bearings. This apparatus serves the same purpose as the two lower chambers of the heart (the ventricles), moving blood first to the lungs and then throughout the body.

Another thing that differentiates the OHSU heart from other devices is the fact that it creates a blood flow that mimics a natural human pulse, as opposed to a continuous flow. According to the university, this should minimize blood damage and clotting, plus it may also reduce the risk of gastrointestinal bleeding and stroke.

Power comes from a combined control unit/rechargeable battery pack that could be carried in a pocket or worn on a belt. It is hoped that the battery could ultimately be implanted under the skin, and then recharged using an external source.

(Source: New Atlas)

Three NASA satellites recreate solar eruption in 3-D

The more solar observatories, the merrier: Scientists have developed new models to see how shocks associated with coronal mass ejections, or CMEs, propagate from the Sun -- an effort made possible only by combining data from three NASA satellites to produce a much more robust mapping of a CME than anyone could do alone.

Much the way ships form bow waves as they move through water, CMEs set off interplanetary shocks when they erupt from the Sun at extreme speeds, propelling a wave of high-energy particles. These particles can spark space weather events around Earth, endangering spacecraft and astronauts.

Understanding a shock's structure -- particularly how it develops and accelerates -- is key to predicting how it might disrupt near-Earth space. But without a vast array of sensors scattered through space, these things are impossible to measure directly. Instead, scientists rely upon models that use satellite observations of the CME to simulate the ensuing shock's behavior.

The scientists -- Ryun-Young Kwon, a solar physicist at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, and Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, or APL, in Laurel, Maryland, and APL astrophysicist Angelos Vourlidas -- pulled observations of two different eruptions from three spacecraft: ESA/NASA's Solar and Heliospheric Observatory, or SOHO, and NASA's twin Solar Terrestrial Relations Observatory, or STEREO, satellites. One CME erupted in March 2011 and the second, in February 2014.

Each spacecraft's observations alone weren't sufficient to model the shocks. But with three sets of eyes on the eruption, each of them spaced nearly evenly around the Sun, the scientists could use their models to recreate a 3-D view. Their work confirmed long-held theoretical predictions of a strong shock near the CME nose and a weaker shock at the sides.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

A lifetime of regular exercise slows down aging, study finds

Researchers at the University of Birmingham and King's College London have found that staying active keeps the body young and healthy.

The researchers set out to assess the health of older adults who had exercised most of their adult lives to see if this could slow down ageing.

The study recruited 125 amateur cyclists aged 55 to 79, 84 of which were male and 41 were female. The men had to be able to cycle 100 km in under 6.5 hours, while the women had to be able to cycle 60 km in 5.5 hours. Smokers, heavy drinkers and those with high blood pressure or other health conditions were excluded from the study.

The participants underwent a series of tests in the laboratory and were compared to a group of adults who do not partake in regular physical activity. This group consisted of 75 healthy people aged 57 to 80 and 55 healthy young adults aged 20 to 36.

The study showed that loss of muscle mass and strength did not occur in those who exercised regularly. The cyclists also did not increase their body fat or cholesterol levels with age and the men's testosterone levels also remained high, suggesting that they may have avoided most of the male menopause.

More surprisingly, the study also revealed that the benefits of exercise extend beyond muscle as the cyclists also had an immune system that did not seem to have aged either.

An organ called the thymus, which makes immune cells called T cells, starts to shrink from the age of 20 and makes less T cells. In this study, however, the cyclists' thymuses were making as many T cells as those of a young person.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

Judge punishes minor crimes with tree planting not jail

ENVIRONMENT d e s k **TEHRAN** — Mohammad Reza Amuzad is a judge in Galikesh, northern Golestan province, who punishes minor crimes with alternative sentences such as planting trees in the province.

During the past one and a half year that he has judged in this rather small city, Amuzad has passed many cases of



alternative sentences since he believes they are more preventive than jail, Khabaronline reported on Saturday.

Totally, those who had conducted minor crimes are sentenced to plant some 10,000 saplings in the region, said Amuzad, adding that more than half of these saplings are being planted in fire-damaged forests of the region.

Offenders are required to buy saplings from Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization, he said.

This act will hopefully guarantee that trees which are being planted will not harm the environment by being invasive.

Also, offenders are tasked to care for the saplings for two years, the young judge highlighted.

He went on to say that if offenders escape the punishment, they will immediately face prison.

These kind of sentences have a positive effect on decreasing crimes, providing efficient services to the public and diminishing the stress imposed on the family of offenders, he concluded.

Relief foundation creates jobs, grants loans to the underprivileged

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — The Tehran Province Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation has created some 6,000 jobs and granted loans amounting to 700 billion rials (nearly \$15.5 million) to the financially struggling families in the province over the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2017 to March 20, 2018).

The foundation director general, Mohsen Valiee, has explained that the money was granted to the families to help them create jobs. “The sum is not very considerable but it has enabled some families to start small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).”

Some of those who have succeeded in establishing successful businesses using the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation loans are now helping the foundation to support other families who are in financial distress, ISNA news agency quoted Valiee as saying.

“In case some businesses fail we help them to get back on their feet by granting them loans again,” he highlighted.

The Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation is a charitable organization founded in March 1979 to provide support for poor families. The aim is to help such families regain financial stability.

LEARN ENGLISH

Being a Stay-at-Home Dad

Gladys: Hi, Dan. I'm surprised to see you here at the supermarket in the middle of the day.

Dan: Why?

Gladys: I thought you'd be working.

Dan: I am working. I'm a **stay-at-home dad** and I take care of the kids while my wife goes to work.

Gladys: Oh, did you get **laid off** from your job?

Dan: No, my wife works **full-time** out of the house and I work full-time at home.

Gladys: You mean that your wife is the **breadwinner** and you're a **househusband**?

Dan: If you want **put it that way**, yes. I'm the **caretaker** for the kids during the day and I do the **household chores**.

Gladys: Oh, your wife must be a **feminist**.

Dan: No, my wife is just a modern woman with modern **sensibilities**.

Gladys: Well, I know that some families like to live **radical** lifestyles these days, changing up **gender roles**.

Dan: We don't think of it as radical. In fact, it's quite common **nowadays**.

Gladys: if you say so. Tell your wife I'd be happy to share my **recipes** with her when you go back to work and she's a housewife again.

Dan: [sigh]

■ Key vocabulary

stay-at-home-dad: a dad who stays at home to look after their children instead of working outside the home

lay off: to stop annoying someone or hurting them

full-time: for all the hours of a week during which it is usual for people to work, study etc.

breadwinner: the member of a family who earns the money to support the others

househusband: a man who lives with a partner and carries out household duties traditionally done by a housewife rather than going out to work

put it that way: if you say it or explain it like that

caretaker: someone who looks after other people, especially a teacher, parent, nurse etc.

household chores: the regular or daily light work of a household

feminist: someone who supports the idea that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men

sensibilities: the way that someone reacts to particular subjects or types of behavior

radical: radical ideas are very new and different, and are against what most people think or believe

gender role: a set of societal norms dictating the types of behaviors which are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for people based on their actual or perceived sex

nowadays: now, compared with what happened in the past

recipe: a set of instructions for cooking a particular type of food

(Source: *eslpod.com*)

Ali Asghar Khodadoust, Iranian legend of ophthalmology, passes away at 82

1 → Four years later, on June 28, 1963, he became the first foreign resident of ophthalmology at the prestigious Wilmer Eye Institute (WEI), Johns Hopkins University (JHU). Graduating in 1964, he first worked as a lecturer for one year and in 1965 he became an assistant professor of ophthalmology.

In 1968, Khodadoust returned to Iran. For 12 years, from 1968 to 1980, Professor Khodadoust spent half of each year performing research at WEI. Additionally, he was invited to teach at an international level from Peru, Ecuador and China to Italy, Turkey, Syria and Oman.

Professor Khodadoust immigrated to the U.S. in 1980 where he continued his work as a Professor of Ophthalmology at WEI. Two years later, in 1982 he became Director of Ophthalmology at the University of Cecil.

Despite his immigration, Dr. Khodadoust never missed an opportunity to return to Iran, at least twice year, to serve and improve the educational and therapeutic curriculums in Iran.

Khodadoust is an icon of ophthalmology and an international pioneer of eye research. The global reputation of professor Khodadoust is rooted in his extensive studies on corneal diseases and transplantation biology.

Several world renowned, famous American ophthalmologists have recognized him as the world's best corneal graft surgeon. Due to his exceptionally impressive achievements in this field, a clinical finding has been named in his honor, the «Khodadoust rejection line», a sign indicative of a chronic focal transplant reaction.



Professor Khodadoust is delivering a speech at ceremony held on February 27, 2015 in the Grand Hotel in Shiraz to honor his life and a career that has spanned 53 years. The event, organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was attended by notable figures including the head of Iran's National UNESCO Commission, Mohammad Reza Saeed Abadi and former foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi.

Food and Drug Administration push to label genetically modified food

SOCIETY d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iran's Food and Drug Administration is pushing food producers and importers to label their products as containing or not containing ingredients which are derived from genetically engineered plants, ISNA reported on Saturday.

In an official letter to Iran's universities of medical sciences, Vahid Mofid, the caretaker of the department of food and beverages in Food and Drug Administration, asked for implementation of the guideline, developed some 3 years ago, for national genetically modified food labeling.

Deputy directors for drug and food affairs at universities of medical sciences have been tasked to inform food producers and importers to stick to the guideline.

The letter continues that if any producer or importer breaches the guideline, their licenses will be suspended and they will be handed over to legal authorities.

In an article titled “We Have the Right to Know What Is in Our Food” published in the Down to Earth website, genetic engineering of plants and animals, introduced in 1996, is recognized as one of the greatest and most intractable envi-



ronmental and health challenges of the 21st Century.

With promises of making more and supposedly “better” food, this new technology has invaded our farmlands, grocery stores, and our kitchen pantries by fundamentally altering some of our most important staple food crops.

While many in the scientific community assert that GMO foods are not toxic and are safe, a significant number of scientists are sounding the alarm. They say genetic engineering poses risks that scientists simply do not know enough to identify. In fact, based on what little is known about GMOs, many scientists have identified a variety of ways in which genetically engineered organisms could adversely impact both human health and the environment.

Toxic microplastics found in remote Scottish seawater threaten birds and fish

Microplastics – tiny plastic pieces that carry toxic additives – have been found in some of Scotland's most remote waters, threatening birds and fish stocks.

The pollutants were found in important feeding areas for basking sharks as well as gannets, puffins, razorbills and shearwaters.

Greenpeace, which analyzed the seawater samples, criticized the lack of planning to stop the problem from worsening.

Scientists collected samples in Scottish coastal waters last year, with a focus on the Hebrides. It was the first time such a large-scale study has been carried out.

A total of 49 samples were taken from waters around islands including Rum, Mull and Tiree as well as Loch Alsh, Loch Linnie, Loch Ness and the Firth of Forth.

The water samples were analyzed at a Greenpeace laboratory, where 31 were found to contain microplastics.

Microplastics can carry a range of chemical additives and contaminants because of their synthetic nature and ability to absorb chemicals from seawater onto their surfaces.

They are easily ingested, and scientists fear that a majority



of sea life has eaten them at some point.

Chemicals found in the samples include those used as additives in plastics such as phthalate esters, heavy metals and flame retardants – some of which have been classified as “toxic to reproduction” or are suspected to have hormone-disrupting properties.

Scotland is set to become the first UK nation to ban plastic

straws, as part of plans to cut down on single-use plastics.

The move follows the announcement that the Scottish Government is outlawing the sale and manufacture of plastic cotton buds, one of the most prevalent waste items found on beaches.

The charity's oceans campaigner, Tisha Brown, said: “Although microplastics were found in two out of three samples, this isn't all bad news.

“The concentrations are lower than in many other regions of the world's oceans, and hopefully Scottish marine life is at a proportionately lower risk than marine life in those areas.

“However, the results varied significantly in unpredictable ways and so we would need longer-term testing to be confident of average concentrations.

“The key finding here is that microplastics are present in some of Scotland's most remote and unspoiled waters.

“Threatened seabirds and other wildlife are already exposed to them, along with the fish stocks we eat, and there is currently no coherent process or even plan to stop this problem from getting worse.”

(Source: *Independent*)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → ج

Some 17,000 foreign nationals residing in Iran enroll for literacy

About 17,000 foreign nationals residing in Iran have enrolled for literacy schemes for the current school year starting on September 22, 2016, director of the Literacy Movement Organization of Iran has said.

Last year some 24,900 foreign nationals took part in literacy courses, Ali Baqerzadeh said, Fars news agency reported on Saturday.

This year 13,700 of the students are chosen by the Literacy Movement Organization and the rest by the United Nation Refugee Agency, he added.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“deka-, deca-, dec-”

■ **Meaning:** ten

■ **For example:** He taught at the university for nearly a **decade**.

PHRASAL VERB

Frighten somebody away

■ **Meaning:** to make a person or animal go away by making them feel afraid

■ **For example:** Terrorist activity in the area has frightened most tourists away.

IDIOM

Bone to pick with someone

■ **Explanation:** if you have a bone to pick with someone, you are annoyed with them and want to talk to them about it

■ **For example:** Mark wants to see the boss. He says he's got a bone to pick with him.

U.S. claims of Syria chemicals meant to protect terrorists

1 → that support terrorists, but the data was deliberately ignored, he pointed out.

Recently, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is sympathetic to the anti-Damascus militants, claimed a suspected chlorine attack had taken place in the militant-held al-Shifuniyah village of Eastern Ghouta on February 25.

Prior to the report, the Russian Defense Ministry had warned that militant groups in Eastern Ghouta were preparing a false flag attack in a bid to blame the Syrian government for using chemical weapons against civilians.

Russia rejected the allegations against the Syrian government as “unfounded,” stressing that only an international body can rule on the issue based on an “impartial” probe.

On March 5, The Washington Post quoted US officials as saying that the government was considering new military action against the Syrian government in response to reports of suspected chemical weapons use.



Britain and France have also said they would attack Syria if such claims are proven. This is while Syria turned over its entire chemical stockpile under a deal

negotiated by Russia and the United States back in 2013.

Elsewhere in his interview, Ja'afari accused Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well

as a number of Persian Gulf regimes of having worked to finance terrorist organizations in Syria and fuel the crisis in the Arab country.

He also said that the Turkish government has facilitated the entry of tens of thousands of terrorists via its border to Syria and armed and financed them.

Turkey also set up training camps on its territory for terrorists and facilitated their access to toxic chemicals, he added.

Referring to Turkey's military campaign on the Syrian district of Afrin, Ja'afari said, “Syria will not hesitate in defending every inch of its territory, whether against armed terrorist groups or the invading Turkish, US or Israeli forces.”

Ankara launched the Afrin operation on January 20 to eliminate Kurdish militants. Syria condemned the Turkish campaign as an act of aggression, which is meant to support terror outfits operating inside the conflict-plagued country.

(Source: agencies)

Deal with North Korea ‘very much in the making: Trump

U.S. seeks ‘concrete actions’ from North Korea before planned talks

U.S. President Donald Trump says an agreement is “very much in the making” with regard to resolving the existing dispute over North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

“The deal with North Korea is very much in the making and will be, if completed, a very good one for the World. Time and place to be determined,” Trump tweeted.

The remarks came hours after the White House announced that the U.S. president would not meet the North Korean leader if Pyongyang does not adopt “concrete steps.”

“The president will not have the meeting without seeing concrete steps and concrete actions take place by North Korea, so the president will actually be getting something,” White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders told a news conference on Friday.

Sanders did not specify what actions Washington expects Pyongyang to take, but a White House official later said the US does not intend to set new conditions for talks with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un.

■ **‘Don't give legitimacy to North Korea’**
Meanwhile, Senate Intelligence Committee Vice Chairman Mark Warner called on the White House to have calculated plans for any possible talks with the North Korean leader.

“The administration must go into any meeting with a plan to ensure that negotiations with Kim Jong-un produce real results, not a photo op that lends legitimacy” to North Korea, Warner said in a statement.

On Thursday, South Korean National Security Advisor



Chung Eui-yong, who was in Washington to hold talks with US officials on the North Korean nuclear crisis, said Trump had expressed willingness to sit down with Kim “as soon as possible.”

Chung, who had paid a visit to Pyongyang earlier this week, said he had passed on a message to Trump that Kim was “committed to demilitarization” and had “pledged that North Korea will refrain from any further nuclear or missile tests” if its security is guaranteed.

The summit would be the first between a North Korean leader and a sitting U.S. president. Trump and Kim have repeatedly traded insults and threats of military attacks that raised fears of war between the two countries in recent months.

No venue or date has been announced for the summit, which is expected to be held in May, but Switzerland

has expressed preparedness to facilitate the meeting.

The unexpected announcement has been welcomed by regional powers China and Russia as well as South Korea.

Tensions have been high between Washington and Pyongyang over North Korea's missile and nuclear programs.

Washington claims it prefers a diplomatic solution to crisis, but it has repeatedly threatened Pyongyang with military action.

After months of soaring tensions between the U.S. and the North, temperatures cooled dramatically as South Korea hosted the Winter Olympics.

South Korea used the recently-held Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang as a major opportunity to open the doors for dialogue with the North.

The games in fact came amid some unprecedented escalation of hostilities between the North on one side and the United States and allies in Asia on the other. There was even a risk of an all-out nuclear confrontation in the region late last year when Pyongyang carried out a series of massive nuclear and missile tests.

North and South Korea have been separated by a heavily-militarized border since the three-year Korean War came to an end in 1953. The conflict ended with an armistice rather than a formal peace treaty and left many families separated at the two sides.

North Korea, for its part, says its nuclear arsenal is a deterrent against potential U.S. aggression.

(Source: agencies)

Hashd al-Sha'abi inclusion in Iraq's security service helpful: Abadi



Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has defended his decree to formally incorporate pro-government fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) into the Arab country's security service, stressing that such a move would help establish security and stability.

Speaking at a security and defense exhibition in Baghdad on Saturday, Abadi stated that the integration of the volunteer forces, better known by the Arabic name Hashd al-Sha'abi, “preserves the identity of security forces.”

Abadi added that the move now meant that only members of state bodies could legally possess firearms.

According to the decree announced on Thursday, Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters will be granted many of the same rights as members of the military.

The decree added that Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters would be given equivalent salaries to those members of the military under the Ministry of Defense's control.

They will also be subject to the laws of military service, and will gain access to military institutes and colleges.

The fighters have played a major role in the liberation of Daesh-held areas to the south, northeast and north of the Iraqi capital Baghdad, ever since the terrorists launched an offensive

in the country in June 2014.

Iraq has repeatedly condemned allegations of sectarian nature against Hashd al-Sha'abi.

In December 2016, Baghdad warned Riyadh of the ramifications of meddling in Iraq's internal affairs, after Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir said Iraq could not realize unity with the presence of the Popular Mobilization Units.

Saudi Arabia has repeatedly labeled the PMU, which incorporates volunteer forces from different Iraqi factions and tribes, as a Shia movement and called for the dismantling of the group.

Hashd al-Sha'abi discovers bomb-making workshop near Syria border

Separately, Hashd al-Sha'abi fighters have uncovered a workshop used for making improvised explosive devices near the border with war-ravaged Syria.

The media bureau of the Iraqi pro-government forces, in a statement released on Saturday, announced that the site contained missiles and explosives, which were meant to be used against military and civilian targets. The statement added that Hashd al-Sha'abi forces had successfully defused the munitions, and completely vacated the workshop.

(Source: Press TV)

Merkel, Macron delay plan to present euro zone reforms



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron have postponed a plan to propose euro zone reforms at a summit of European leaders this month, Der Spiegel reported on Saturday.

“The thing has been canceled,” an EU official with direct knowledge of the summit preparations told the German magazine. “There's simply nothing that could be announced.”

Merkel and Macron held out the prospect in December of presenting Franco-German proposals to strengthen the 19-member single currency bloc at a European Union summit in March.

But German officials said Berlin needed more time to coordinate its euro zone plans with Paris due to the unusually long coalition negotiations after September's federal election, the magazine reported.

A German government spokesman said he could neither confirm nor deny the report, adding that Merkel was determined to work closely with Macron on euro zone reforms.

“I could imagine that some things may be postponed since the formation of our government took a bit longer. But it's still too early to confirm this,” spokesman Georg Streiter said.

European Council President Donald Tusk said on Wednesday EU lead-

ers would discuss global trade and the threat of a “serious trade dispute” at their summit on March 22-23.

Merkel and Macron have repeatedly vowed to deepen Franco-German cooperation and give the European Union a fresh push towards closer integration.

Without agreement between the two leaders, whose economies account for 50 percent of euro zone output, any ambition to upgrade Europe's economic and monetary union and help the bloc withstand future crises is unlikely to get off the ground.

This year is seen as a critical but narrow window, with the European Parliament holding elections and Britain's exit from the EU reaching its deadline in 2019.

The French government has singled out as priorities the completion of the euro zone's banking and capital markets union, and agreeing common rules in France and Germany for calculating corporate tax - ideally with an agreement by June.

Macron has in the past been even more ambitious, talking about a need for the euro zone to have its own budget and finance minister, and for the currency bloc's rescue fund, the ESM, to be turned into a mechanism for helping member states pre-empt threats of financial instability.

(Source: Reuters)

Putin says will not change constitution to cling to power

Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is expected to be reelected for a fourth term in an upcoming ballot, said Saturday he had no plans to change the constitution to stay in the Kremlin beyond 2024.

Asked by the U.S. television network NBC whether he would follow in the footsteps of China's Xi Jinping, who is eyeing a limitless tenure, Putin insisted he had no such intentions.

“I never changed the constitution, I did not do it to suit myself and I have no such plans to do so today,” he said in an interview whose transcript was released by the Kremlin on Saturday.

Critics accuse Putin, who was first elected president in 2000 and is running for a fourth term in March 18 polls, of harboring ambitions to stay in power indefinitely.

Putin has always prided himself on respecting the constitution, which bars him from serving more than two presidential terms in a row.

In 2008, Putin became prime minister but maintained his grip on power, with his protege Dmitry Medvedev serving as president until 2012 when Putin returned to the Kremlin in the face of huge opposition protests.

He rejected suggestions that he could not quit power because it would put him in danger, saying he heard “a lot of ravings on this subject”.

“Why do you think after me power in Russia will be necessarily taken over by people who are ready to destroy everything that I have done over the past years?” Putin said.

He said he had been thinking about his potential successor since 2000.

“It never hurts to think but at the end of the day it will be the Russian people who will decide that,” he added.

Putin will run against a motley crew of seven challengers, with his top critic Alexei Navalny barred from contesting the poll because of a criminal conviction his supporters call punishment for challenging the strongman.

Putin declined to say whether he could pardon Navalny.

“Any man can be pardoned if he deserves this,” said Putin. The Russian president, who never called Navalny by his name in public, referred to the 41-year-old opposition politician as “certain political forces”.

“What do I like in principle? It's that they expose problems and this is good, indeed it's right,” Putin said.

“But it's not enough for the country's positive development. Absolutely not enough. Because concentrating one's attention on problems, it's not only insufficient, it's even dangerous because it could lead to certain destruction and we need creation.”

(Source: AFP)

Qatar complains to UN after UAE ‘hijacks’ fishing boat

Doha has complained to the United Nations about a January incident, in which it said a United Arab Emirates (UAE) vessel hijacked a Qatari fishing boat with eight crewmen.

Qatar's UN Ambassador Sheikha Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al Thani informed Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Security Council of the kidnapping incident in a message, the official Qatar News Agency reported Friday.

The message said Qatar's marine surveillance saw a UAE naval vessel release a boat into the country's territorial waters. The Emirati boat then blocked a Qatari fishing boat and forced the eight crewmen onboard, all of them Indian nationals, “at gunpoint” to enter the UAE's economic zone.

The incident “constituted a kidnapping and is a dangerous precedent and a severe violation of international norms,” according to the message.

Doha further said Abu Dhabi is “fully responsible for the safety of the members of the Qatari fishing boat,” calling for pressure on the UAE to respect international regulations and release the abductees.

Following Saudi Arabia's lead, the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain abruptly imposed a trade and diplomatic embargo on Qatar last June, accusing Doha of supporting terrorism. Doha strongly denies the allegation.

The UAE has taken the lead in fueling the diplomatic crisis with Qatar.

In January, Qatar and the UAE traded accusations of airspace violations.

The latest report came a day after Qatar's Al Jazeera said an Emirati military transport plane had recently penetrated the country's airspace without permission.

A series of leaked documents revealed in November 2017 that the UAE had a stunning detailed plot to launch an economic war on Qatar.

Last month, Qatar's Defense Minister Khalid bin Mohammad al-Attiyah said Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates had planned a military invasion of his country at the beginning of a diplomatic crisis that erupted last year.

(Source: agencies)

Turkey's president slams NATO for lack of support in Syria

Turkey's president has criticized NATO for not supporting the country's ongoing military operation against Syrian Kurdish fighters in Syria.

Speaking to supporters Saturday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan asked, “Hey NATO, where are you?” and accused the alliance of double standards. Erdogan said Turkey sent troops to conflict zones when requested, but did not receive support in return.

Turkey launched a solo military offensive against the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units or YPG on Jan. 20 to clear them from Afrin in northwestern Syria. The country considers the YPG a terror organization but its NATO ally, the United States, backs the fighters to combat the Islamic State group.

Erdogan urged NATO to come to the aid of Turkey, saying its borders are “under threat right now.”

(Source: AP)

SPORTS

Bernardo Silva eyes ‘special’ Man City triumph against rivals United

Bernardo Silva is motivated by the tantalizing prospect of helping Manchester City to wrap up the Premier League title by beating Manchester United on April 7.

With a 13-point lead at the summit, it is a matter of when and not if Pep Guardiola’s men secure their status as champions, and next month’s derby day at the Etihad Stadium could provide the decisive moment.

It is a possibility that excites Silva, who would love to provide such a memorable occasion for the supporters.

“It would be special for the fans, because there’s a big rivalry between the two clubs,” said the midfielder, who will expect to be involved when the league leaders travel to Stoke City on Monday.

“We just want to win the competition because it means a lot, and if you can win it against a big rival, it’s even more special.

“If you’d told me in August we’d arrive in March with a 16-point advantage over second place, I wouldn’t have believed you.

“So it means we’re doing an amazing job.

“Normally the Premier League is so competitive, with six clubs fighting for the title. So to have so many points and be so far ahead of the other opponents is great.”

City’s well-funded rise to prominence in the top flight has seen them finish top of the pile in 2011-12 and 2013-14, but Silva now wants to see a period of sustained dominance.

“That is a big motivation,” said the 23-year-old. “It’s not easy, but we want to win the title this season, do it again next season and the next, and the next. “We have a good squad and an amazing manager, however our rivals will probably change a few things, so it will be very tough. “There’s United, Chelsea, Tottenham, Arsenal and also Liverpool, who are playing very well and building a good team as well. But we will try to build a legacy, because we feel we have the conditions to do it.”

Guardiola’s side suffered a surprise 2-1 home loss to Basel on Wednesday, though it did not prevent them from progressing to the last eight of the Champions League, having already won the EFL Cup. City won 2-1 at Old Trafford in December, when David Silva and Nicolas Otamendi were on target.

(Source: Daily Star)

Bienvenido Ciro! - Messi confirms birth of third child

Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi said he and his wife are “super happy” after the arrival of their third son.

Lionel Messi welcomed his third child into the world as his wife gave birth to a baby boy named Ciro on Saturday.

Barcelona confirmed on Saturday that the Argentina superstar would miss their trip to Malaga for ‘personal reasons’.

And he announced the joyous news on Instagram, writing: “Welcome Ciro! Thank God everything went perfect. He and Mom are very well. We are super happy!!!!”

Messi already has two sons from his relationship with Antonella Roccuzzo, with Thiago born in 2012 and Mateo arriving in 2015.

(Source: Goal)

Irrepressible Ronaldo strikes twice as Real beat Eibar



Cristiano Ronaldo struck late with a bullet header to give Real Madrid a 2-1 win at Eibar in La Liga on Saturday, taking his side to within four points of second-placed Atletico Madrid.

Ronaldo scored for the seventh successive game in all competitions by blasting into the net in the 34th minute after chesting down a long ball by Luka Modric, but eighth-placed Eibar pegged the champions back when Ivan Ramis outjumped Sergio Ramos to head home from a corner in the 50th.

Ronaldo was denied by an inspired save by Eibar’s Marko Dmitrovic, who clawed away the Portuguese’s header following a cross from Gareth Bale.

The irrepressible striker had the final say, however, meeting a cross from Dani Carvajal in the area and powering the ball beyond the Serbian goalkeeper in the 84th minute, scoring a 13th goal in his last seven games in all competitions.

Real are third in the Liga standings on 57 points, 12 behind runaway leaders Barcelona, who visit basement club Malaga later on Sunday. Atletico host Celta Vigo on Sunday.

(Source: Mirror)

Germany national team to face Netherlands at Schalke

The DFB has arranged the location for the Germany national teams three upcoming home games. The Germany national team will head to the VELTINS Arena on November 19th 2018 to take on the Netherlands.

The Germany national team’s first game after their World Cup exploits this summer will be on September 6th in Munich as they take on France in the UEFA Nations League.

Germany’s last two home games of the year take place in Leipzig on November 15th against World Cup hosts Russia followed by the clash in the VELTINS Arena on November 19th against Netherlands.

The German national team’s last game in Gelsenkirchen was on June 4th 2016 where Jogi Löw’s side won 2-0 versus Hungary.

(Source: Schalke04.de)

Australia, Poland and Japan could join England in boycotting the World Cup

England could organize a coordinated boycott of the football World Cup if it emerges that Russia was behind the attempted murder of Russian double agent Sergei Skripal.

Australia, Poland and Japan could join England in boycotting the World Cup if detectives conclude Russia was behind the poisoning the of ex-Russian agent in Salisbury.

Ministers have discussed stopping senior politicians and officials from attending the tournament, or even withdrawing the entire England squad, a move which could see England banned from subsequent tournaments such as the 2022 World Cup.

‘A boycott of the World Cup is definitely one of the options on the cards,’ a defense source told The Times.

‘A wide range of options are being discussed,’ the senior Whitehall source said.

The World Cup, which is widely viewed as a chance for Mr Putin to show Russian strength on an international stage, kicks off on June 14.

The source added that the UK’s response need to be measured and effective.

The case for an England boycott has been supported by Tom Tugendhat, chairman of the Foreign Affairs select committee, and Chris Bryant, chairman of the all-party Parliamentary Russia Group.

Mr Tugendhat said ministers should urge allies to join a coordinated boycott of the World Cup, as part of a wider package of reprisals against the Putin regime.

He said it was ‘extraordinary’ the tournament was being held in a country that used ‘murder as an instrument of state policy’, and said a boycott should be ‘kept on the table’.

Former Labour minister Chris Bryant



said it would be ‘very difficult’ for the England football team to compete in the event if Moscow is proved to be linked to the attack.

Dr Calder Walton of Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government said an England boycott of this summer’s World Cup would prevent Putin from getting away with attacks on British soil.

The British Government cannot allow Putin to escape reprisals over the attempted murder of Sergei Skripal in Salisbury, in the way he did when Alexander Litvinenko was

murdered in London in 2006, Watson argued.

But a boycott could see England banned from the Qatar 2022 World Cup. It would breach rules which state ‘all participating associations must play all of their matches until eliminated from the World Cup’.

Article 6 of the same rules states a withdrawing nation could face sanctions ‘including the expulsion of the association concerned from subsequent FIFA competitions’.

It took 10 years for an inquest to rule that Litvinenko was probably killed on the

Kremlin’s orders.

Dr Walton said: ‘There are grounds to say that much more must be done this time [if Putin is found to be behind the attack].

‘A boycott is possibly the kind of statement needed. There’s a good argument [to say that England’s participation in the World Cup] validates Putin and gives him credibility.’

Dr Walton said a more potent course of action may be sanctions, cutting off diplomatic ties and freeing of Russian assets in the UK.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Ronaldo: “Bayern Munich stronger than world champions Germany”



Brazil’s two-time FIFA World Cup winner Ronaldo has lavished praise on Bayern Munich, saying the record Bundesliga champions have a stronger squad than world champions Germany; although he does see Die Nationalmannschaft as favourites to defend their title in Russia this summer...

The 41-year-old, who starred for Barcelona, Inter Milan and Real Madrid among others in a glittering club career, scored twice for Brazil against Oliver Kahn’s Germany in the 2002 World Cup final in Yokohama as the Selecao lifted their record fifth trophy. He retains a keen interest in German football, and thinks Kahn’s former club Bayern currently outstrip even the world champions.

“Robert Lewandowski is a very quick player, and that’s good for them,” Ronaldo told Sport Bild. “Bayern have an extraordinary squad. They’re currently stronger than the German national team. I like players who score goals. That’s why I also like Thomas Müller very much. He moves a lot, is often in the right place, and has a strong instinct about where to move and what to do.”

Müller has scored 10 goals across two World Cup finals tournaments, leaving him five behind Ronaldo, who held the record until Miroslav Klose took his own tally to 16 when Germany won their fourth title in Brazil four years ago. Ronaldo was unsurprised by Germany’s success.

“German football does one thing particularly well,” he continued. “They train players from a very early age and give them a chance to play. That’s also true with the national team. Germany is setting the standard. They do what all the other nations should do: train young players and let them play.”

Whether that means they are guaranteed to defend their title is another matter, though.

“I think Brazil also have a good chance to win again. Even if Neymar is injured and we have to wait and see when he gets fit. Germany are also favorites: the defending champions and always able to put on a great performance. I also think Spain and Argentina are in the running.”

(Source: Bundesliga)

Struggling Maria Sharapova splits with coach



Former world number one Maria Sharapova said on Friday she had split with her coach Sven Groeneveld, two days after losing a third consecutive match for the first time since 2003.

The news comes after Sharapova, who said the decision to end their four-year partnership was “mutually agreed”, was beaten by 44th-ranked Naomi Osaka in the first round of the BNP Paribas Open in California on Wednesday.

After losing in the third round of the Australian Open to Angelique Kerber she was then beaten in the first round of the Qatar Open by Romanian qualifier Monica Niculescu.

She pulled out of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships.

Sharapova has struggled to recapture top form since her 15-month ban for taking the banned drug meldonium ended last April.

“After four successful and challenging years of collaboration together, I would like to thank Sven for his incredible loyalty, work ethic and most importantly

the friendship that we have formed that will go beyond this working partnership,” Sharapova said in a statement on her website.

“Although we have mutually agreed to part ways during this time, I have been incredibly fortunate to have a team leader like him in my corner for the past four years.”

Russian Sharapova won seven titles during her time with Groeneveld, most notably the 2014 French Open.

A two-time champion at Indian Wells, Sharapova, currently ranked 41st in the world, won the Tianjin Open in October for her first triumph since returning to the WTA Tour, but has not come close to challenging for a tournament victory since.

“Maria has been one of the most hard-working and professional players I have ever worked with,” Groeneveld said.

“Her strength and fighting spirit will continue to be a force to reckon with and I have the deepest respect for her as a player and person.”

(Source: Reuters)

Manchester United 2 Liverpool 1: Rashford double secures huge victory

Marcus Rashford emphatically marked his return to Manchester United’s starting XI with a double in a huge 2-1 Premier League victory over rivals Liverpool at Old Trafford on Saturday.

In the line-up for the first time since Boxing Day as Jose Mourinho made three changes with Paul Pogba ruled out through injury, Rashford scored a first-half brace to boost United’s hopes of finishing second to runaway leaders Manchester City.

The England international ended a run of 10 Premier League matches without a goal to send United five points clear of third-placed Liverpool in the 200th competitive meeting between the sides, though Tottenham could close to within four by beating Bournemouth on Sunday.

Jürgen Klopp made five alterations to the side that secured progression to the Champions League quarter-finals against Porto on Tuesday, with Virgil van Dijk, Andy Robertson and Trent Alexander-Arnold reinforcing the defence, while Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain and Mohamed Salah returned further up the pitch.

But that backline was bullied by Romelu Lukaku, who proved a magnet for the long balls from which he helped create Rashford’s goals - the first of which came after a delightful change of direction in the 14th minute.

An own goal from Eric Bailly on his first start since November having been sidelined with a knee injury gave Liverpool hope during an improved second-half display, but the Red Devils held on for a potentially crucial victory.



Klopp on Friday said the clash was not “an attacking team against a defending team” but that was exactly how the opening stages played out, with United sitting back and Liverpool controlling possession.

It was the hosts who took the lead, though. David de Gea’s goal-kick was flicked on to Rashford by Lukaku, and he brilliantly chopped inside of Alexander-Arnold and fired inside the far post.

Van Dijk wasted a glorious chance to equalise in the 23rd minute, his shoulder rather than head connecting with a corner from James Milner - wearing the captain’s armband as Jordan Henderson sat out with a dead leg - as he missed

the target from inside the six-yard box.

United made the most of that reprieve by doubling their advantage just 62 seconds later, again from a long pass from deep.

Van Dijk’s challenge on Juan Mata after brilliant work from Lukaku inadvertently sent the ball to Rashford, who guided it beyond an out-of-position Loris Karius with the help of a nick off Alexander-Arnold.

It should have been three when Alexis Sanchez picked out the unmarked Mata in the middle of the area before half-time, but the Spain international sent his overhead kick wide. Liverpool stepped up a gear after the restart and saw penalty claims for Ashley Young’s foul on Salah and a handball by Antonio Valencia turned down by referee Craig Pawson. They were rewarded in the 66th minute when Sadio Mane beat Scott McTominay for pace down the left and sent in a cross that Bailly approached with the wrong foot and sent into the back of his own net.

There were boos when Mourinho replaced Rashford with Marouane Fellaini to add an extra body in midfield with 20 minutes remaining, and the Belgium international was fortunate not to concede a penalty when he sent Mane to ground.

Klopp sent on Georginio Wijnaldum and Dominic Solanke as Liverpool fought to restore parity, but Salah sliced a wild volley over in the sixth minute of stoppage time as United held on for a third successive league win.

(Source: Four Four Two)

Taking part in the NBA was my boyhood dream: Hamed Haddadi

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national basketball center Hamed Haddadi says that playing in the National Basketball Association (NBA) was once his dream.

Then came the year 2008, when the Memphis Grizzlies signed free-agent Haddadi, and he remained a member of the NBA team for five years.

“Playing in the NBA was my boyhood’s dream. I recall waking up at 6 am to watch the NBA matches. One day my coach told me that he has received a three-year contract from the Memphis Grizzlies for me. I couldn’t believe that my dream had come true. My first year in America was spent in a perplexed state of mind. I could not believe that I was living my dream, playing against my childhood’s super stars,” Haddadi said.

Iran basketball team have yet to win the Asian Games, however, Team Melli have already claimed one silver and three bronze medals in those games.

“There is no guarantee to win the gold medal, but we are determined to end the title drought in the Asian Games,” Haddadi stated.

“We lost to South Korea in the final match of the 2014 Asian Games. This time, though, we want to collect the title in Jakarta,” the 2.18m Iranian basketball player noted.

Haddadi has also played in Chinese basketball club Sichuan Blue Whales in the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA).

“Basketball is the first sport in China, nevertheless, the Chinese football clubs are among the highest-paid teams,” Hadaddi concluded.



Weightlifter’s seven-day journey from hell has happy ending as Iranians take three gold medals

Iran had senior and junior World Championship medalists on the podium in the 94 kilograms, one of three events they won on day two of the Fajr Cup.

But if anybody deserved a gold medal it was the man who finished a long way back in third place, Hasan Ali from Yemen.

Hasan spent about two days on buses, four days waiting for a transit visa in a remote border town, and more than 24 hours waiting at airports during a journey that took seven whole days.

“It was very, very hard,” said the 20-year-old.

“No good sleep, no good food, bad roads, stress, no training. I am very happy to win a medal after that.”

He started from Aden, travelled hundreds of miles by bus, and was then holed up with the rest of the Yemen team waiting for a transit visa to the airport across the border in Oman.

When the visas, which should have been a formality finally arrived the team flew to Doha, had 16 hours in transit, then flew to Tehran for another long wait before the final leg here.

The journey, about the same as London to Moscow, would have taken four hours by direct flight, but there are no direct flights



out of Yemen while it is under attack from Saudi Arabia.

“Hasan is a good lifter but what chance does he have?” Abdullah Al-Jarmal, President of the Yemen Weightlifting Federation, who

sits on the International Weightlifting (IWF) Federation Technical Committee, said.

“He hasn’t trained properly for four years because of war, and because he couldn’t train for a week before this competition his weight

increased and he had to move up from 85 to 94.”

That may have been a blessing in disguise, though, as other weight classes had more competitors and by ending up in a field of three Hasan was guaranteed a medal.

He will now head for Tehran for a training camp with the Iran team before flying to Bahrain for the West Asian Championships, due to start next Thursday (March 15).

Hasan made six good lifts but his total of 195kg was less than his two Iranian rivals made in the clean and jerk.

The winner was Seyed Mousavi, 22, third behind world record holder and fellow Iranian Sohrab Moradi at the IWF World Championships in Anaheim last November.

Mousavi made five good lifts for a total of 380kg, beating 20-year-old Rahman Ourameh, the Asian junior champion and third-place finisher in the 2017 IWF Junior World Championships, who lifted 368kg.

Iran’s other winners were Mohammad Alipour in the 77kg, with a total of 305kg, and Ali Makvandi, whose 347kg put him way ahead of his rivals in the 85kg.

Georgia’s Goga Chkheidze won the 69kg by a huge margin on 300kg.

(Source: *Insidethegames.biz*)

Matchday Four: West Zone Preview

Kuala Lumpur: The 2018 AFC Champions League has reached the midway point of the group stage and the 16 teams in the West Zone will immediately renew acquaintances with each other as Matchday Four sees the reverse fixtures of the Matchday Three encounters. Groups B and D are first up when they play their fourth games of the campaign on Monday, before Groups A and C return on action on Tuesday, after which the fate of some of the sides may have been decided.

■ Group B

After claiming a 3-2 victory over Lokomotiv on Matchday Three, Al Duhail will confirm their passage to the AFC Champions League knockout rounds if they defeat the Uzbek champions in Tashkent on Monday.

Lokomotiv have lost two on the bounce on the road but are a different proposition at home, where they defeated Al Wahda 5-0 in their opening game of the competition.

It’s do or die for Al Wahda, who, after losing 2-0 away at Zobahan in what was their third successive defeat, must beat the Iranian side to have any realistic hope of qualifying for the last 16.

Zobahan’s win over Al Wahda propelled them three points clear in second place and a third successive positive result would see them dreaming of a spot in the next round.

- Lokomotiv (UZB) v Al Duhail (QAT)

Venue: Lokomotiv Stadium, Tashkent

- Al Wahda (UAE) v Zobahan (IRN)

Venue: Zayed Sports City Stadium, Abu Dhabi

■ Group D

Esteghlal will take to the Azadi Stadium pitch for the first time in Group D when they host Al Ain on Monday after the sides played out a gripping 2-2 draw last week.

The Iranian team are two points clear at the top of the standings and are the only side to have won a game in the group, while Al Ain sit two points back, having drawn three from three.



Al Rayyan’s 1-1 draw with Al Hilal in Saudi Arabia meant they have also drawn all three of their matches, but a home victory in the reverse fixture would leave the Qatari side in a strong position with two games left to play.

Last year’s runners-up Al Hilal are currently at the foot of the table after two draws and one loss, but a win over Al Rayyan would mean a 10th successive knockout stage berth would be well within their sights.

- Al Rayyan (QAT) v Al Hilal (KSA)

Venue: Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Doha

- Esteghlal (IRN) v Al Ain (UAE)

Venue: Azadi Stadium, Tehran

■ Group A

Al Ahli will all but secure their place in the last 16 with a home win over Al Gharafa in Group A on Tuesday when the sides face off once more after their 1-1 draw last week.

Al Gharafa left it late to level against the Saudi side on Matchday Three and the Qatari team would leapfrog Al Ahli

if they could claim victory in Jeddah as the group moves towards the business end.

Elsewhere, Tractorsazi Tabriz gained their first point of the campaign after a scoreless draw with Al Jazira in the United Arab Emirates, and now return home to the Islamic Republic of Iran targeting a first win when they take on the same opposition.

Having won their opening game of the tournament, Al Jazira have now picked up just one point from two matches and will be looking for a reversal of fortunes when they visit Tabriz.

- Tractorsazi Tabriz (IRN) v Al Jazira (UAE)

Venue: Yadegar-e Emam Stadium, Tabriz

- Al Ahli (KSA) v Al Gharafa (QAT)

Venue: King Abdullah Sports City, Jeddah

■ Group C

Three teams sit on six points apiece in Group C ahead of a crucial Matchday Four that sees Al Sadd host Nasaf and Persepolis travel to Al Wasl.

Nasaf secured an impressive 1-0 victory over Al Sadd last week as the Uzbek side moved level on points with the Qatari club ahead of the return meeting in Doha on Tuesday.

Persepolis had few problems in overcoming the group’s bottom side Al Wasl 2-0 in Tehran and will now look for back-to-back wins against the Emirati side with two tough fixtures still to come.

The Iranian team and 2017 semi-finalists currently top the standings on goal difference from Al Sadd and Nasaf, while Al Wasl remain in search of their first point of the campaign.

- *Al Sadd (QAT) v Nasaf (UZB)

Venue: Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Doha

- *Al Wasl (UAE) v Persepolis (IRN)

Venue: Zabeel Stadium, Dubai

(Source: *the-afc*)

Iran women’s wheelchair basketball win gold at Central & East Asia Qualifying Tournament



The women’s Gold medal game saw unbeaten Iran and hosts Thailand on court. With a noisy crowd behind them, Thailand jumped to an early four-point lead, but Iran settled and held a 2 point lead at the end of the first period.

Iran’s pressed hard in the second and third period causing Thailand to struggle offensively. A 15 point lead at the final break was enough for Iran to relax a little and allow Thailand to run some offensive strategies, but they still went on to a comfortable win 43-27 and take home the gold medal.

For Iran Mahsa Saadatzeinadanloo was dominant throughout with 20 points, ably supported by captain Fattaneh Pourat (12).

Thailand’s leading scorer for the week, Natnapa Ponin was kept quiet, but also missed most of the third period due to an injury. Tananya Keawmak and Pawarati Jala with 8 points each tried to take up the slack but it wasn’t enough on the day.

Iran, Thailand, Afghanistan and Laos secured their place at the Asian Para Games in October.

(Source: *IWBF*)

Davoud Mahabadi named Iran’s Siahjamegan coach

TASNIM — Davoud Mahabadi has been named as new head coach of Siahjamegan football team on Saturday.

Mahabadi replaced Reza Enayati in the Mashhad-based team.

He is Siahjamegan’s fifth coach in the current season after Akbar Misaghian, Alireza Marzban, Reza Enayati and Armin Rahbar. Mahabadi most recently served as the head coach of Iranian second-tier Nassaji Mazandaran and parted company with the team in late February.

Siahjamegan sit bottom of the Iran Professional League table with 15 points from 25 games.

Shojaei may be close to Team Melli return

IFPNews.com — ATHENS, Eight months after being dropped out of Iran’s national football team because of playing against an Israeli club, Iranian midfielder Masoud Shojaei is now highly likely to return to the Team Melli.

Shojaei, who plays for the Greek club AEK Athens FC, was left out of the coach Carlos Queiroz’s team after violating an undeclared law in Iran which bans all Iranian athletes from playing against Israeli rivals.

Now the presence of Queiroz in Greece has sparked speculations about the return of Shojaei to the national football team, a Farsi report by Khabar Online said.

Queiroz’s Facebook post about Shojaei has also contributed to the speculations. In his post after watching directly the AEK and Olympiacos match in Greece, the coach wrote: Good job Masoud! You are the top player of Greece Super League.”

It seems Quiroz has good reasons to once again invite Shojaei to his team.

Nottingham Forest’s Ashkan Dejagah has undergone surgery on an injury and is understood to be facing up to two months on the sidelines. On the other hand, the 24-year-old Saman Ghoddos playing for Östersunds FK in the Swedish Allsvenskan is too young and has not yet managed to settle in the national team.

Today given the ongoing dispute in Iran’s wrestling federation over forcing athletes to forfeit matches against Israeli opponents, it seems Queiroz will face no strict opposition for inviting Shojaei to the national team.

Iran does not recognize Israel and forbids its athletes from competing against Israelis at international sports events.

In several interviews following his ban, Shojaei underlined that he was forced to play against the Israeli club.

Now eight months after being left out of Queiroz’s squad, Shojaei has become too popular among the Iranians and his return to the national team has turned into a public demand.

If invited to the national team, Shojaei would set a historical record because he will be the first Iranian football player who has appeared in world cups for three times.

Shojaei, 33, has represented the national Iranian football team over 70 times, including at World Cups and Asian Cups.

Top of Group A in Asia, Iran has already qualified for next year’s finals in Russia.

Hong Kong’s Liu Kwok Man to officiate Esteghlal v Al Ain

IRNA — Liu Kwok Man from Hong Kong has been chosen to officiate the match between Iran’s Esteghlal and the UAE’s Al Ain.

The 39-year-old referee will be assisted by his countrymen.

Liu Kwok Man has been a full international referee for FIFA. He also refereed at the regional league such as 2014 FIFA World Cup qualifiers, AFC Champions League, AFC Cup and 2012 AFC U-19 Championship.

Esteghlal will host Al Ain in Group D of the AFC Champions League Matchday Four in Tehran’s Azadi Stadium on Monday.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympics Committee (IPC) have signed a landmark long-term partnership deal until at least 2032, the governing bodies said on Saturday.

The new deal adds to the existing co-operation agreements that were signed before the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games in London, with the IOC continuing to make

it obligatory for Olympic hosts to also stage the Paralympics.

The two organizations will also work towards increasing visibility for the Paralympic Games along with the development and implementation the Olympic Agenda 2020, which dictates a strategy for the future of the Games.

“Enhancing the cooperation between the Olympic and Paralympic Movement was one of

the key recommendations of Olympic Agenda 2020,” IOC President Thomas Bach said a day after the 2018 Paralympic Winter Games kicked off in PyeongChang.

“Therefore, the IOC is pleased to strengthen its substantial support to the IPC and the entire Paralympic Movement because we share so many of the same values and objectives.”

The IOC will continue to provide financial

stability for the IPC, benefiting Paralympic athletes and organizers for the next 14 years.

“Strengthening the relationship with the IOC and securing the future of the IPC and the Paralympic Movement was my number one priority when I was elected as IPC President last September,” IPC President Andrew Parsons said.

(Source: *Reuters*)

INTERNATIONAL DAILY
www.tehrantimes.com

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» www.eshterak.ir Distributor: Padideh Novin Co.
Tel: 88911433
» Webmaster: webmaster@tehrantimes.com
» Printed at: Rooztab - ISSN: 1017-94

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Fajr Broken Olive Branches to spotlight wars in Syria, Yemen, Myanmar

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Broken Olive Branches, a section at the Fajr International Film Festival that focuses on the upheavals in today's Muslim world, will put its spotlight on the wars in Syria, Yemen and Myanmar this year.

A lineup of over ten feature and documentary films by directors from Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Iran and Turkey will be screened in the section, the organizers announced on Saturday.

The section will also pay special attention to films on the themes of sectarianism, humanitarian crises and genocide in Yemen and Myanmar.

Experts and critics from around the world have been invited to attend the sessions, which will be held after the screenings of the film in this section.

The 36th Fajr International Film Festival will be held in Tehran from April 19 to 27.

Comedy-thriller “Thoroughbreds” wows critics

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Comedy-thriller “Thoroughbreds” may star two relative newcomers and an unknown director but it arrives in U.S. movie theaters on Friday to the kind of reviews enjoyed by veterans.



Actress Olivia Cooke poses at the AMD British Academy Britannia Awards in Beverly Hills, California, U.S. October 27, 2017. (Reuters/Danny Moloshok)

The film also marks the final performance by American actor Anton Yelchin, who died in a 2016 accident in Los Angeles. He plays Tim, a hapless drug dealer.

The movie, first seen at the Sundance film festival, got an 89 percent approval rating on review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes.

Variety called director and writer Finley “astonishingly gifted” while the Daily Beast said the film was “terribly funny, wild as a hell and aggressively grotesque.”

“The Sopranos” to make a comeback - in a big screen prequel

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — A prequel to hit U.S. mafia drama “The Sopranos” is being developed as a movie, possibly reuniting some of television's most beloved characters, New Line Cinema said on Thursday.

New Line, a unit of Time Warner Inc's Warner Bros, said it has purchased the screenplay “The Many Saints of Newark” from series creator David Chase and fellow “Sopranos” writer Lawrence Konner.

The script is set during the social and racial tumult of 1960s Newark, New Jersey, and will focus on tensions between ethnic Italians and African-Americans.

New Line said the film is expected to include some characters from the Emmy-winning series that ended in 2007. The show was credited with ushering in TV's new golden age of complicated characters and challenging storylines, as well as turning HBO into an industry behemoth.

There was no set release date and no casting announcement. “Sopranos” star James Gandolfini died in 2013 of a heart attack at age 51, and supporting actor Frank Vincent, who played mob boss Phil Leotardo, died last year.

“David is a masterful storyteller and we, along with our colleagues at HBO, are thrilled that he has decided to revisit, and enlarge, the Soprano universe in a feature film,” Emmerich said in a statement.

No director is attached to the film yet, New Line said.

Mohammad-Hossein Velayati tops at Image of the Year Celebration

A R T **TEHRAN**
d e s k

Mohammad-Hossein Velayati was selected as the best photographer of the year at the 15th edition of the Image of the Year Celebration on Friday.

He received the Vahid Abad Photographer of the Year award during the closing ceremony of the festival at the Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran.

The award has been named after photographer Vahid Sohrabi Abad who was electrocuted in June 2017 at the age of 28.

The award was handed to Velayati on stage by Abad's sister and young son.

Winners in the various categories were also honored.

In the cartoon section, the best award went to Sahar Fattah, and in the poster section, Ali Modiri won the best award.

In the photo section for photographers under 25, Armin Karami received the award in the news category. In addition, Mohammad Safarpur won the award for the social documentary category and Maryam Razavi was honored for her works in the art category. Mohammad Mohsenifar received the award in the other outlook category.

In the less than 15-minute film category, the best award went to “Blue Sky, Clean Earth” by Mahyar Mandegar. “Shadow of Elephant” by Arman Khansarian won the best award in the above 15-minute film category.

Cinematographer Soroush Alizadeh was also honored for his three short films, “I am Happy, Delighted and Weary”, “Blue



Mohammad-Hossein Velayati (C) holds the Vahid Abad Photographer of the Year he won at the 15th Image of the Year Celebration in Tehran on March 09, 2018. Seifollah Samadian (L), the secretary of the event, and Vahid Abad's sister are also seen in the photo. (Mehr/Mehran Riazi)

Sky, Clean Earth” and “Barcelona”.

In addition, Qasideh Golmakani,

daughter of journalist and film critic

Hushang Golmakani, was introduced as

a phenomenon of filmmaking for having made eight short films in a year.

“Kupal” star Levon Haftvan dies at 51



Levon Haftvan acts in a scene from “Kupal”.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Iranian actor Levon Haftvan who played roles in acclaimed movies such as “Kupal” and “Parviz”, died of heart attack on Saturday. He was 51.

Haftvan suffered a heart attack on Friday night while acting in a scene in the TV series “Bride of Darkness” and was taken to the hospital where he passed away the next day, Persian media reported.

Haftvan lived in Canada for several years and returned home in 2010 to act in “Parviz”, a dark comedy drama directed by Majid Barzegar.

He was selected as best actor for the

role at the 13th Dhaka International Film Festival in 2014.

The film won the Silver Apricot at the 10th Golden Apricot International Film Festival in Yerevan, Armenia in 2013.

Haftvan also received the award for best actor for his role in director Kazem Mollai's drama “Kupal” at the Hamilton Film Festival in 2017.

He also acted in “The Man Who Became a Horse” by Amir-Hossein Saqafi, “Dracula” by Reza Attaran and several other acclaimed films.

He will be buried in Tehran's Armenian graveyard.

Writer Necip Tosun asks Persian translators to consider Turkish stories

CULTURE **TEHRAN** — Turkish writer Necip Tosun has asked Persian translators to consider stories from his fellow writers as candidates for translation.

Tosun and his fellow writers Naime Erkovan and Ismail Özen along with a number of Iranian literati, including Mohammad Keshavarz and Behnaz Alipur, attended a session organized by Turkey's Yunus Emre Institute in Tehran on Thursday to discuss contemporary Turkish short stories.

“If works by Turkish writers are translated in Iran, Persian readers will welcome them because Iran and Turkey have a lot in common,” said Tosun who is the author of “Thirty-Third Bay” and “Today's Story”.

“We have the same fate in this region... and Turkish people could also find themselves in the stories by Iranian



Turkish writers Naime Erkovan (1st L), Necip Tosun (4th L) and Ismail Özen (5th L) and Iranian literati attend a session at the Yunus Emre Institute in Tehran organized on March 8, 2018 to discuss the contemporary Turkish short stories.

CNN takes a historical look at the Kennedy family

NEW YORK (AP) — In the Trump era, the story of the Kennedys has never seemed so distant or, one family member believes, more urgent to tell.

“It's important for people to know that there is another way,” said former U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy, son of the late Sen. Edward Kennedy. “What people understand to be the paradigm of today, that doesn't have to be the narrative for our country.”

He's also interviewed in CNN's new six-part series, “American Dynasties: The Kennedys,” that debuts at 9 p.m. EDT today. Coupled with the premiere of a new series about popes, it's an example of CNN's new approach to historical programming now that it is running out of decades to celebrate.

The Kennedys are one of the most documented families

in modern American life, and CNN hopes that its work in the series offers new looks at a familiar story. Sunday's first episode focuses on family patriarch Joseph Kennedy, who wanted to be president himself until his poor performance as U.S. ambassador to Britain during World War II ended that ambition. He transferred that drive to his large family, which culminated in the election of second son John F. Kennedy as president in 1960.

Through the episodes, the series continues through John and brother Bobby's assassinations, Ted Kennedy's long career in the Senate and the varied paths of new Kennedy generations, including the plane crash that killed John F. Kennedy Jr.

While it discusses the family's achievements, the project is not a hagiography. The series discusses JFK's womanizing,

the disastrous decision to lobotomize the young Rosemary Kennedy and, in a later episode, Ted Kennedy's involvement in a deadly car accident in Chappaquiddick, Massachusetts.

Producers sought archival material that went beyond familiar clips, said Amy Entelis, who oversees CNN's film and original series units. For example, the first episode shows Joseph Kennedy's family greeted by photographers upon his arrival in Britain, where young Bobby and Ted gave media interviews.

“That was footage that was really new to me — to see them as children and already, as children, on the public stage,” she said. “We really made an effort to dig deeply and find not only new angles to the story, but new ways to illustrate the story.”



A photo from Maryam Zandi's series “The 1979 Islamic Revolution” shows demonstrators celebrating after the Shah left Iran on January 16, 1979.

A R T **TEHRAN** — The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has purchased a collection of photos from Iranian photographer Maryam Zandi's series “The 1979 Islamic Revolution”.

The collection is scheduled to go on display during an exhibition at the museum in May, the organizers have announced.

“The collection mostly reflects the happiness of people when the Shah left Iran,” Zandi said in a statement published on Sunday.

The photos also depict the reactions of people to the pictures of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi during demonstrations against his regime, she added.

“There are also photos portraying people on Enqelab Street near the University of Tehran, where major demonstrations took place,” she added.

The photos bearing Zandi's name and signature have been developed by her for the museum.

She said that the museum has been working on the exhibition project over the past two years.