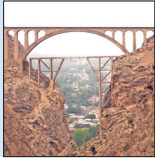




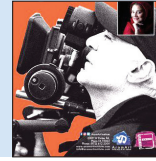
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Proper response

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Omani FM Yusuf bin Alawi (L) holding talks with Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council.

People’s expectation of nuclear deal not realized: Araqchi

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has said people’s economic expectations from the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, has not been realized. “The extent to which the people’s expectations have been right or not is another

issue. Many expectations from the JCPOA were not logical and unfortunately, all, including those who are against the JCPOA or for it, played role in raising the people’s expectations,” he told Mehr news agency in an interview published on Saturday. “We should pay attention to the fact that the JCPOA was supposed to remove some obstacles on our path, **→2**

EU trio proposes new Iran sanctions to mollify Trump

POLITICS Britain, France and Germany, known as the European Union trio, have proposed fresh EU sanctions on Iran over its ballistic missiles and its regional policy, according to a confidential document, in a bid to persuade Washington to preserve the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran. The joint paper, seen by Reuters, was sent to European Union capitals on Friday,

said two people familiar with the matter, to sound out support for such sanctions as they would need the support of all 28 EU member governments. Trump delivered an ultimatum to the European signatories of the Iran nuclear deal on January 12. It said they must agree to “fix the terrible flaws of the Iran nuclear deal” - which was sealed under his predecessor Barack Obama - or he would refuse to extend U.S. sanctions **→2**

U.S., UK, French forces directly involved in Syria war: Russia

INTERNATIONAL Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov says the United States, British and French special forces are “directly” engaged in the war on Syria and operating on the ground in the crisis-stricken country. “There are Special Forces on the ground in Syria from the U.S. – they no longer deny it – the UK, France and a number of other countries,” Lavrov said in an interview to

the Kazakh state broadcaster published on the Russian Foreign Ministry’s website on Saturday. “Thus, it’s not so much of a ‘proxy war,’ but rather a direct involvement in the war,” the Russian top diplomat said. He further said the U.S.-led coalition in Syria, which is purportedly fighting the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ Daesh) Takfiri terrorist group, **→13**



ARTICLE
By Sondoss Al Asaad
Political analyst from Beirut

Three years of Saudi heinous crimes in Yemen

Yemen a miserable isolated Arab country has been devastated by an ongoing Saudi bloody war. Since March 2015, Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies (PGCC) have launched a vicious military campaign against Yemen to re-install its former government. Recently, the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s visit to the UK has refocused attention on this silent conflict.

The collation has imposed a blockade on the port of Hodeida city, the main entry point for food and medicines and has been repeatedly accused of unlawful air-strikes on civilian targets which amount to war crimes. Obviously, the UK, U.S. and other Western governments back, supply weapons and provides training to the PGCC soldiers.

Amid the global silent and the mainstream media hypocrisy, the criminal collation systematically targets residential areas, claiming it would control arms transfer to the Houthi rebels. Saudi Arabia regards the Houthis as Iranian proxies and intervened to check their advance. These heinous massacres have prompted accusations by some Western opposition MPs and human rights groups of significant responsibility for civilian casualties. Thousands of Yemenis have been killed and the infrastructure has been thoroughly pulverized.

The PGCC collation has imposed a blockade on Yemen’s air, sea and land borders in November 2017 in response to Huthis firing missiles towards Riyadh airport, closing an aid lifeline to tens of thousands of starving Yemenis. The UK government denies that its forces are advising the Saudis on specific targets, though they admit that, after a raid, British officers can give advice on future targeting policy.

A UN panel of experts that reviewed 10 Saudi airstrikes found Saudi denials of involvement in these specific airstrikes were implausible, and individuals responsible for planning, authorising or executing the strikes would meet the standard for the imposition of UN sanctions. The panel reported early in January, “even if the Saudi Arabia-led coalition had targeted legitimate military objectives ... **→7**

Radicalism in White House

Hanif Ghaffari

TEHRAN — The dismissal of U.S. Secretary of State “Rex Tillerson” and appointing “Mike Pompeo”, CIA Director for his post means that serious changes are happening in the White House. In the domestic circles of the United States, and even with the traditional Republicans and Democrats, Tillerson was considered one of the few symbols of the political rationality in Trump administration. On the contrary, Pompeo has always been a symbol of extremism in the political and security structures of the United States.

Consequently, the domestic circles of America believe that Trump, by removing Tillerson from power, has practically expanded radicalism and extremism in his government. The U.S. President has ousted his Secretary of State while Washington-Pyongyang talks are still under way on the existing divisions. Donald Trump, on the other hand, is scheduled to make a final decision on the nuclear deal with Iran in about two months. In such a situation, the U.S. Secretary of State is about to make significant changes at the White House.

Although the American politi-

cal structure (especially in the field of foreign policy) is not about a particular person, Pompeo’s presence as a symbol of extremism at the top of U.S. foreign policy equations represents a more serious confrontation between Trump’s government and the international community. Here are some points that should be taken into consideration:

Firstly, Pompeo’s presence on top of the U.S. foreign-policy equations has raised a lot of concerns among Washington’s allies, especially the European politicians. One of the issues which both Pompeo and Trump agree on, is to confront the existence and nature of the European Union. Pompeo, as the CIA Director, has played an important role in supporting extremist right-wing and nationalist groups in Europe over the last year. Donald Trump, in some of his positions, has explicitly supported phenomena such as “Brexit” and called for other European countries to take it as a model. Europe’s return to nationalism is a major policy that Trump and Pompeo have been pursuing since the last year (especially in 2017). **→7**

Ex-FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe fired two days shy of his retirement

Attorney General Jeff Sessions fired former FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) Deputy Director Andrew McCabe late on Friday, less than two days shy of his retirement, ending the career of an official who had risen to serve as second-in-command at the bureau.

McCabe had more recently been regularly taunted by the United States President Donald Trump and besieged by accusations that he had misled internal investigators at the Justice Department.

In a blistering statement on Friday night, McCabe said his firing is part of a larger effort to discredit the FBI and the special counsel’s investigation.

“This attack on my credibility is one part of a larger effort not just to slander me personally, but to taint the FBI, law enforcement, and intelligence professionals

more generally,” McCabe said. “It is part of this Administration’s ongoing war on the FBI and the efforts of the Special Counsel investigation, which continue to this day. Their persistence in this campaign only highlights the importance of the Special Counsel’s work.”

Shortly after midnight, Trump tweeted.

“Andrew McCabe FIRED, a great day for the hard working men and women of the FBI - A great day for Democracy.” Trump said. “Sanctimonious James Comey was his boss and made McCabe look like a choirboy. He knew all about the lies and corruption going on at the highest levels of the FBI!”

McCabe had been expected to retire this Sunday, on his 50th birthday, when he would have become eligible to receive early retirement benefits. **→13**

Happy Iranian New Year 1397

You know full-well which bank I mean

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Leader to address nation in Mashhad

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei will make his Noruz (Persian New Year) speech on Wednesday at 3:00 pm in the shrine of Imam Reza (AS), Astan Quds Razavi announced on Saturday.

The Astan Quds Razavi invited the people to participate in the event, which will be held in the holy city of Mashhad, Tasnim reported.

Since 1989, Ayatollah Khamenei has delivered two Noruz speeches every year. The first is a recorded address known as his “Noruz message,” and the second is a public speech before massive crowds in the shrine of Imam Reza (AS).



Rouhani felicitates Chinese, Armenian counterparts

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — In two separate messages on Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani of Iran expressed congratulations to his Chinese and Armenian counterparts on their presidential victories.

Rouhani congratulated Xi Jinping on his re-election as the president of the People’s Republic of China and expressed the hope that Tehran-Beijing ties would develop in all fields based on mutual interest.

He also congratulated Armen Sargsyan on his election as the president of Armenia, wishing ties would develop with regard to cultural and historical ties between the two neighbors.



U.S. will regret if it exits nuclear deal, Jack Straw says

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The United States will regret it if it exits the Iran nuclear agreement, former British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw has said, highlighting the importance of the deal in reducing Western countries’ concerns over Iran’s nuclear program.

The U.S. president says he wants to be reassured about Iran’s nuclear motives and the nuclear deal, also known as the JCPOA, precisely does that, Straw told IRNA in an interview published on Saturday.

He also voiced concerns over new U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s anti-Iran stances, saying European countries should persuade Washington that withdrawing from the JCPOA is not wise.



Russia: Nuclear deal not requiring any supplements

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Russian ambassador to the international organizations in Vienna said on Friday that the Iran nuclear deal does not require any supplementary agreements.

Mikhail Ulyanov made the remarks after a meeting of political directors of the joint commission between Iran and the 5+1 group.

Ulyanov said the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), should be left intact as it is, since it embodies an extremely fragile balance of interests, TASS reported.



Squatters pushed out of former Iranian embassy in Bonn

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi says the squatters who had occupied the former Iranian embassy in the German city of Bonn since March 8 have been forced to leave the premises.

In a statement on Saturday, Qassemi said the German police have moved the squatters who had illegally occupied the former Iranian embassy, adding that the site has been handed over to the consulate of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Frankfurt.

“With our pursuits, the German police carried out a raid on the former Iranian embassy in Bonn and drove the squatters out,” he said.



Tehran Times dismisses fake account publishing propaganda

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Tehran Times on Saturday announced that a fake Telegram channel has been publishing fake news in its name, saying the daily’s only official Telegram channel can be accessed at @tehrantimes_com.

The announcement came after the Tehran Times was informed that a fake Telegram channel, @tehran_time, has been spreading propaganda in Farsi.

Mohammad Ghaderi, editor-in-chief of the Tehran Times, said the daily will follow up on the criminal act through legal channels.

It will be a ‘painful mistake’ if U.S. nixes JCPOA: Zarif

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — The Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif on Friday cautioned that the U.S. against scrapping the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the official name for the nuclear agreement, warning it will “definitely be a painful mistake” for Washington if it kills the multilateral agreement.

“Considering what has been envisaged in the JCPOA in the field of research and development and the Islamic Republic of Iran’s continued measures to develop its peaceful nuclear capability, if the U.S. makes the mistake of exiting the JCPOA, it will definitely be a painful mistake for the Americans,” Zarif told reporters after concluding a tour of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, Tasnim reported.

The chief diplomat said Iran has devised



Shamkhani: Iran will respond to U.S. nuclear deal breach

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said on Saturday that Iran will respond to U.S. violations of the 2015 nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

“Iran will respond to violations of the JCPOA by the U.S. at a proper time,” Shamkhani said during a meeting with Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, the Omani foreign minister, in Tehran.

The top security official added, “Iran will not accept any change or new action that restricts the JCPOA.”

Shamkhani went on to say that the U.S. “illegal behavior towards the JCPOA” and European countries’ “passivity” in this respect make it essential for the countries in the Middle East region to find “local solution” to problems and crises.

He warned the European countries not to “play in the U.S. and Zionist regime of Israel’s court”.

Commenting on Iran’s missile program, Shamkhani said, “The Islamic Republic of Iran’s defense capabilities, especially missile program, are deterrent and will be pursued with determination based on the national security obligations and will not be influenced by media and political propaganda.”

Elsewhere, Shamkhani said that Iran prioritizes expansion of relations with neighbors based on respect to mutual interests.

In an indirect reference to Saudi Arabia’s policies in the region, Shamkhani said, “Certain regional countries have distanced from logical governance and put hasty and arrogant behavior and remarks on agenda. They have created serious problems.”

The security official blamed these countries for exacerbating the “political and security” problems in the region.

Shamkhani said Iran is showing “self-restraint” toward development in the region.

Shamkhani also expressed concern over the situation in Yemen, saying Iran and Oman share common position on Yemen which is ending war in the country immediately, holding inter-Yemeni talks and sending humanitarian aid to the people.

For his part, the Omani foreign minister said that using military force for political objectives is an “unacceptable behavior”.

Alawi noted that violence should be replaced by dialogue.

The chief diplomat praised Iran’s role in helping establish regional security and stability.

The Omani foreign minister described Iran as “trusted neighbor and friend”.

Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larjani met separately with the Omani foreign minister.

People’s expectation of nuclear deal not realized: Araqchi

I → and today you do not see any sanction or nuclear related obstacle which was supposed to be removed by the JCPOA and has not been removed,” Araqchi explained.

He noted that a number of officials disappointed people by repeatedly saying that the U.S. deceived Iran in the JCPOA.

“We should pay attention to the feeling that is created among the people by saying repeatedly that we did not succeed in the JCPOA,” he said.

Iran, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - the U.S., UK, France, Russia, and China - Germany and the European Union struck the nuclear deal in July 2015. The deal went into effect in January 2016.

■ ‘Iran will hold no talks on its missile program’

Araqchi also said that Iran has not held and will not hold any talks with any country on its missile defense program.

“We hold no talks on the area of missile program which is related to our national security,” the deputy foreign minister insisted.

He added it is Iran’s right to boost its defense capabilities.

plans to enhance its nuclear capabilities to deal with every situation.

“It has been fully foreseen in the JCPOA what measures the Islamic Republic of Iran would carry out if it cannot reap its (the agreement’s) economic benefits.”

As regards the regional issues, Zarif pointed to the intensive talks he has held with top officials from the Republic of Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia, Russia and Kazakhstan during his 2-day tour of Baku and Astana, saying ministerial meetings were held to discuss the ways to settle the crisis in Syria through dialogue.

The Iranian minister also blamed an escalation of fighting in Syria over the past weeks on the “wrong U.S. policies”, expressing the hope that the Astana peace process would help restore peace to the Arab country.

Tehran also defended its missile program in the meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian who visited Iran on March 15.

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

■ ‘Iran will not remain in JCPOA if U.S. pulls out of it’

Araqchi went on to say that Iran will not remain in the JCPOA if the U.S. pulls out of it and sanctions rolled back.

Iran will remain in the deal as long as it is beneficial to the country, he noted.

The senior diplomat also said that the JCPOA is a strong agreement which has been endorsed by the UN Security Council.

The nuclear deal is also being supported by the international community and Trump should pay the costs if he wants to scrap it, he added.

Tehran calls EU’s proposed sanctions ‘big miscalculation’

POLITICS **TEHRAN** — Iran has rejected a recent decision by the European Union to propose new sanctions on Iran as “big miscalculation”.

On Friday, it was reported that Britain, France and Germany have proposed fresh EU sanctions on Iran over its ballistic missiles and its role in Syria’s to try to persuade Donald Trump to preserve a 2015 nuclear accord with Tehran.

Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said, “In case some European countries are seeking non-nuclear sanctions on Iran to appease the American president

are making a big miscalculation and they will see its direct impact on the JCPOA and its survival.”

He added, “It is better that European countries continue their current action to persuade America to keep its commitments based on the nuclear deal and for that country to effectively execute the deal in its entirety with good will and in a productive atmosphere.”

The senior diplomat stressed, “If America exits the deal and unilateral sanctions return, we will definitely not continue the deal because it will not serve our interests.”

Joint Commission insists on ‘effective implementation’ of nuclear deal

All countries signatory to the nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, issued a statement on Friday insisting on the need for an “effective implementation” of the nuclear agreement in “good faith”.

“All participants noted their continued adherence to JCPOA commitments and stressed the need to ensure its effective implementation in all its parts in good faith and in a constructive atmosphere,” the JCPOA Joint Commission said after a meeting in Vienna on Friday.

Following is the text of the statement posted on EU official website:

A regular meeting of the Joint Commission of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) took place in Vienna on

16 March 2018. This was the 8th meeting of the Joint Commission since JCPOA Implementation Day (16 January 2016). Under the terms of the JCPOA, the Joint Commission is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the nuclear deal. The Joint Commission was chaired, on behalf of EU High Representative Mogherini, by EEAS Secretary General Helga Schmid and was attended by the E3+3 (China, France, Germany, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) and Iran at the level of Political Directors/Deputy Foreign Ministers.

The meeting provided the opportunity to address the implementation of the JCPOA with regard to nuclear and sanctions-related commitments, as well

as Procurement Channel matters. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – the body charged with monitoring and verifying Iran’s compliance with its nuclear-related commitments under the JCPOA and UN Security Council Resolution 2231 – has just issued its 10th report. The parties welcomed the fact that again the IAEA has confirmed Iran’s continued adherence to these commitments.

Participants extensively reviewed the state of play as regards sanctions-lifting in the light of a meeting of the Working Group on the Implementation of Sanctions-Lifting, which was convened earlier in the week. Participants recalled the need for continued implementation

of nuclear-related sanctions-lifting to allow for the effective realisation of the benefits envisioned under the JCPOA, including notably as regards licences concerning commercial passenger aircraft. They recognised the continuing value of addressing any challenges in this regard in these fora.

The Joint Commission also discussed the implementation of Annex III of the JCPOA on civil-nuclear cooperation, and welcomed in this context the work done by a number of participants with Iran.

All participants noted their continued adherence to JCPOA commitments and stressed the need to ensure its effective implementation in all its parts in good faith and in a constructive atmosphere.

EU trio proposes new Iran sanctions to mollify Trump: report

I → relief on Iran. U.S. sanctions will resume unless Trump issues fresh “waivers” to suspend them on May 12.

“We will therefore be circulating in the coming days a list of persons and entities that we believe should be targeted in view of their publicly demonstrated roles,” the document said, referring to Iranian ballistic missile tests and Tehran’s backing of Syria’s government.

The steps would go beyond what a U.S. State Department cable seen by Reuters last month outlined as a path to satisfy Trump: simply committing to improving the nuclear deal.

European Union foreign ministers will discuss the proposal at a closed-door meeting on Monday in Brussels, diplomats said.

Analysts say the nuclear agreement could collapse if Washington pulls out.

The commission overseeing the nuclear

accord said on Friday in Vienna that Iran was meeting its obligations under the deal.

The joint document by Britain, France and Germany said they were engaged in “intensive talks with the Trump administration to “achieve a clear and lasting reaffirmation of U.S. support for the (nuclear) agreement beyond May 12”.

The proposal follows weeks of talks between the State Department and European powers as they try to mollify the Trump administration, which is split between those who want to tear up the agreement and those who wish to preserve it.

A U.S. State Department official declined to comment, adding, “We don’t want to get ahead of the EU’s decision-making process ... There is broad agreement on the areas that need strengthening, but how that’s done in each of the three areas is the subject of our negotiations.”

A different U.S. official cited “very good” talks with London, Paris and Berlin this week in Vienna on the issue.

The document referred to sanctions that would “target militias and commanders”. It proposes building on the EU’s existing sanctions list related to Syria, which includes travel bans and asset freezes on individuals, and a ban on doing business or financing public and private companies.

Still, the issue is highly sensitive because the 2015 pact between Iran and six major powers - Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States - lifted international sanctions on Tehran.

While the EU retains some sanctions on Iranians over alleged human rights abuses, it rescinded its economic and financial restrictions on Iran in 2016 and does not want to be seen to be reneging on the agreement.

Iran signed up to limits on its uranium enrichment activity, which it has repeatedly said is for peaceful power generation, not atomic bombs, but has refused to discuss its missiles.

The Islamic Republic has dismissed Western assertions that its activities in the Middle East are destabilizing and also rejected Trump’s demands to renegotiate the nuclear accord.

In the joint document, Britain, France and Germany set out questions and answers that seek to show that legally the European powers would not be breaking the terms of the nuclear deal. It said they are “entitled to adopt additional sanctions against Iran” as long as they are not nuclear-related or were previously lifted under the nuclear agreement.

The nuclear deal’s terms did not cover ballistic missile activity.



Araqchi (R) and the Secretary General of the European Union External Action Service (EEAS) Helga Schmid (L) attend a meeting among the JCPOA signatories at Palais Coburg in Vienna, Austria, on March 16, 2018. (Photo by AFP)

Trump wants to get the U.S. out of Syria’s war, so he asked the Saudi king for \$4 billion

In a December phone call with the House of Saud regime’s King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the United States President Donald Trump had an idea he thought could hasten a U.S. exit from Syria: Ask the king for \$4 billion. By the end of the call, according to the U.S. officials, the president believed he had a deal.

The money, it said, would be spent towards preventing the empowerment of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Syria’s allies, Iran and Russia. Washington would further the goal as far as bringing about “a political settlement of the war that ultimately includes the exit of both Assad and Iran,” it added.

It cited hawkish U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham as reminding Gen. Joseph Votel, head of the U.S. Central Command earlier in the week of “the negative long-term impact that a win for Iran, Russia and Assad would have on U.S. allies such as Israel and Jordan.”

The Islamic Republic has been successfully lending military advisory support to the Syrian government in its counter-terrorism operations against multiple foreign-backed militants wreaking havoc in Syria.

Russia also started lending its airpower to Damascus’ operations in September 2015.

The two have also been mediating talks between the Syrian government and opposition groups towards finding a political solution to the crisis.

“By the end of the call, according to US officials, the president believed he had a deal,” the paper said. It said Riyadh acknowledges that it partly shares Washington’s goals “particularly that of limiting Assad’s power and rolling back Iran’s influence.”

After Israel, the House of Saud regime is the U.S.’s biggest regional ally. Trump visited the kingdom last May in his first foreign trip, signing \$110 billion worth of arms deals with Riyadh.

However, over the past two years, Syria and its allies have been making great strides against the militants, reclaiming one turf after the other.

Last December, Russia’s military chief said militants, including those with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist outfit, were receiving training at the U.S. bases in Syria, adding that the terrorists had been instructed to “destabilize” the country.

On March 1, a top Russian security official said the U.S. had set up around 20 military bases in areas controlled by Kurdish militants it supports in northern Syria.

In January, the U.S. revealed that it sought to create a 30,000-strong force, which uses the Kurds as its backbone, near the Turkish border in Syria. This prompted Turkey to begin attacking the Kurds in the northern region of Afrin.

The Saudis, whose crown prince arrives in Washington on Monday for extensive meetings with the administration, are part of the anti-ISIL but have largely withdrawn from the fight in Syria in recent years. They are questioning the



eye-popping sum even as U.S. officials at one point were drawing up line items totaling \$4 billion.

For Trump — who has long railed against insufficient burden-sharing by allies under the U.S. security umbrella — getting others to foot the bill for expensive postwar efforts is important.

At the same time, Trump is eager to get the United States out of a war in which he has already claimed that victory over the ISIL is near. Boasting of the ISIL defeat in a speech Tuesday to U.S. troops in California, he said, “We knocked the hell out of them.”

■ U.S. administration divisions

While Trump has approved the expansion of the U.S. forces in Syria since coming to office, he remains wary of any broader role and doesn’t want the Americans to stick around for long. The roughly 2,000 troops currently deployed train, advise and often assist the main U.S. partner, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), near the front lines. One U.S. official said that involvement should be reevaluated every 18 months.

Rex Tillerson was fired by Trump this week and turned State Department management over to his deputy while he remains in office until March 31. While it’s not clear whether

Assad’s fate or the longevity of the U.S. troops in Syria were points of contention between Tillerson and Trump, starkly different views about prospects for Assad and the peace process remain within the administration.

One senior official said the SDF should cut a deal with the Syrian regime, given that Assad is ascending and there is little U.S. appetite to expand the military mission. The SDF shares Assad’s goal of ridding Syria of opposition rebels, the ISIL and Turkish forces.

The United States also is relying on the strained SDF to hold some 400 foreign ISIL terrorists detained during the battle in Syria. Many of the detainees are being held together in large rooms, according to a U.S. official, raising concern that they will network and launch what some worry could become “ISIL 2.0.”

Some of the money the United States is requesting from allies such as the Saudi regime would be used to ensure that detainees are transferred to a facility with individual cells, a U.S. official said.

Representatives at the Saudi regime Embassy in Washington did not respond to a question about the \$4 billion request the U.S. officials say Trump made to King Salman.

(Source: agencies)

Russia expels 23 British diplomats as fallout over nerve agent attack grows

Russia’s Foreign Ministry ordered the expulsion of 23 British diplomats from Russia on Saturday in a tit-for-tat response to Britain’s decision to expel Russian envoys in connection with the poisoning of a former Russian double agent and his daughter on British soil.

The ministry also declared it was closing the British Consulate General in St. Petersburg and the British Council in Russia, in a step beyond the measures taken by Britain. The British Council is a cultural institute with artistic, language and educational programs.

The British diplomats have a week to leave, the Russian Foreign Ministry said, adding that its actions came “in response to the provocative actions of the British side and groundless accusations” against Russia over the Salisbury attack.

“The British side is warned that in case of further unfriendly actions against Russia, the Russian side reserves the right to take further retaliatory measures,” the ministry said.

Britain’s ambassador to Moscow, Laurie Bristow, was summoned to the ministry on Saturday morning to be told of Moscow’s decision. The British Embassy in Moscow told CNN it had been given a list of 23 specific individuals that were to be expelled from Russia.

Relations between the two nations have deteriorated rapidly since the March 4 nerve agent attack on Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in the English city of Salisbury. The pair remain critically ill in the hospital.

British Prime Minister Theresa May on Wednesday gave the 23 Russian diplomats — whom she described as undeclared intelligence officers — a week to leave, as she accused the Russian state of being “culpable” for the attack in Salisbury. Russia, which denies any involvement in the incident, condemned May’s decision as unacceptable and



vowed a swift response.

In comments to reporters after he left the Foreign Ministry, Bristow said the crisis had arisen because of “the attempted murder of two people using a chemical weapon developed in Russia and not declared by Russia.” He said Britain must defend itself.

“We have no dispute with the Russian people, and a very large part of the work of my embassy here in Russia has been, is, to promote those links, those mutually productive links, between Russia and the United Kingdom,” he said. “But we will always do what is necessary to defend ourselves, our allies, and our values against an attack of this sort, which is an attack not only on the United Kingdom, but upon the international rules-based system, on which all countries, all countries including Russia, depend for their safety and security.”

■ Britain: Russia in ‘flagrant breach’ of law

Russia’s response had been anticipated, a British Foreign Office spokesperson said in a statement, adding that Britain’s National Security Council would meet early next week to discuss next steps.

“Our priority today is looking after our staff in Russia and assisting those that will return to the UK,” the statement said. “Russia’s response doesn’t change the facts of the matter — the attempted assassination of two people on British soil, for which there is no alternative conclusion other than that the Russian State was culpable. It is Russia that is in flagrant breach of international law and the Chemical Weapons Convention.”

The British government was backed this week by allies France, Germany and the United States in its assessment that there was

“no plausible alternative explanation” than that Russia was responsible for the nerve agent attack.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, speaking to CNN, slammed that remark. “We have said on different levels and occasions that Russia has nothing to do with this story,” he said. “Any reference or mentioning of our President is nothing else but shocking and unpardonable diplomatic misconduct.”

Russia has insisted it is ready to cooperate in investigating the attack in Salisbury if Britain reciprocates by sharing the evidence it holds.

■ Glushkov murder investigation

In a dramatic twist on Friday, London’s Metropolitan Police said that the death of Russian businessman Nikolai Glushkov, who was found dead on Monday in his London home, was now being treated as murder.

A post-mortem exam on the Russian exile, who had links to compatriots who died in mysterious circumstances in Britain, “gave the cause of death as compression to the neck,” a police statement said. There’s no evidence at this stage that his death and the attack on the Skripals are linked, it said.

Russia’s Investigative Committee said it had launched its own criminal proceedings in connection with the “attempted murder of a Russian citizen, Yulia Skripal” in Salisbury and the “murder” of Glushkov in London.

The Kremlin has always denied the accusation.

Sergei Skripal was sentenced to 13 years in prison in 2006 for spying for Britain, according to Russian state media accounts of the closed hearing. Russian court officials at the time said he’d received at least \$100,000 for his work for MI6, the British intelligence service. He was granted refuge in Britain after a high-profile spy exchange between the United States and Russia in 2010.

(Source: CNN)

Over 1,300 Yemenis infected with diphtheria amid Saudi war: WHO

Three years into the devastating House of Saud regime-led war on Yemen, the United Nations health agency has voiced alarm over the rapid spread of a diphtheria outbreak in the country, saying some 1,300 Yemenis have contacted the highly infectious disease.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said in a statement on Saturday that diphtheria had spread to all regions across Yemen around six months after the outbreak was first reported in the war-torn country.

It said more than 70 people have died as a result of the disease, adding that most of those infected, around 80 percent, are children and young adults. The WHO said on Friday that around 2.7 million Yemeni children had been vaccinated in 11 provinces.

Diphtheria, a contagious disease which primarily infects the throat and airways, can rapidly spread in areas with poor health and hygiene situation. The disease can be fatal.

Yemen had already been grappling with a deadly cholera outbreak when diphtheria was first reported there in November 2017.

The WHO said in October last year that the cholera epidemic in Yemen, which has claimed about 2,000 lives, was the largest and fastest-spreading outbreak of the disease in modern history.

■ Roadside bomb kills over dozen Saudi regime mercenaries in SW Yemen

Elsewhere, more than a dozen Saudi regime-backed militiamen loyal to Yemen’s resigned president, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi, have been killed when a roadside bomb explosion ripped through their military vehicle in the country’s southwestern province of Ta’izz. A Yemeni military source, speaking on condition of anonymity, told Arabic-language al-Masirah television network that Yemeni troops and allied fighters from Popular Committees detonated a bomb as a vehicle was travelling north of Khailid military camp in the Mawza district, killing 14 Saudi regime mercenaries. The source added that Yemeni soldiers and their allies also launched a number of artillery rounds at the gatherings of the Saudi regime-backed militiamen in the same region, leaving scores of them killed and injured.

■ Yemeni snipers shoot dead Saudi regime soldier in Asir

Meanwhile, Yemeni snipers have shot and killed a Saudi regime trooper in the kingdom’s southwestern border region of Asir in retaliation to the Riyadh regime’s incessant aerial bombardment campaign against their impoverished and war-ravaged country.

An unnamed Yemeni military official said Yemeni forces fatally shot the Saudi soldier at Sahwa military base.

About 14,000 people have been killed since the onset of the House of Saud regime’s military campaign against Yemen in March 2015. Much of the Peninsula country’s infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and factories, has been reduced to rubble due to the war. The United Nations says a record 22.2 million people are in need of food aid, including 8.4 million threatened by severe hunger.

A high-ranking UN aid official recently warned against the “catastrophic” living conditions in Yemen, stating that there is a growing risk of famine and cholera there.

“After three years of conflict, conditions in Yemen are catastrophic,” John Ging, UN director of aid operations, told the UN Security Council on February 27.

He added, “People’s lives have continued unraveling. Conflict has escalated since November driving an estimated 100,000 people from their homes.”

Ging further noted that cholera has infected 1.1 million people in Yemen since last April, and a new outbreak of diphtheria has occurred in the war-ravaged Arab country since 1982.

(Source: Press TV)

Two Muslim women sue New York after police make them remove hijabs

Two arrested Muslim women who said the United States New York police department forced them to remove their religious head coverings and pose for mug shots sued the city on Friday to try to change the practice.

The women and an advocacy group, Turning Point for Women and Families, are seeking class action status with the Manhattan federal court lawsuit.

“Requiring a Muslim woman to remove her hijab in public is akin to demanding that a secular person strip naked in front of strangers,” said the lawsuit, which seeks unspecified damages and a declaration that the city’s handling of police photographs is unconstitutional.

The city’s law office said it would review the lawsuit. “But we are confident that the police department’s religious head covering policy passes constitutional muster. It carefully balances the department’s respect for the customs of all religions with the legitimate law enforcement need to take arrest photos,” the office said in a statement.

“Persons who do not wish to remove religious head coverings in front of others have the option of being taken to a separate, more private, facility to be photographed.”

According to the lawsuit, the New York police department policy failed miserably to protect the rights of Jamila Clark, of Cedar Grove, New Jersey, and Arwa Aziz, of Brooklyn. Clark was arrested on 9 January 2017, and Aziz was arrested on 30 August 2017.

The lawsuit said Clark sobbed at police headquarters with her hijab pushed down around her shoulders after she was arrested for violating a bogus protective order filed by her abusive ex-husband, who had fabricated the charges to secure immigration status as a purported victim of domestic violence. It said police officers had threatened to prosecute Clark if she did not remove the head covering.

“Like many Muslim women whose religious beliefs dictate that they wear a hijab, Ms Clark felt exposed and violated without hers — as if she were naked in a public space,” the lawsuit said, adding that a police officer openly mocked the Muslim faith.

The lawsuit said Aziz sobbed in a Brooklyn building with her head covering pushed down around her shoulders after she was arrested for violating a bogus protective order filed by a vindictive sister-in-law. It said Aziz felt broken when her picture was taken where a dozen male police officers and more than 30 male inmates could see her. It said the police policy violates the first amendment and federal and state laws.

Clark faces a hearing on 16 April. A hearing for Aziz was held on 28 February.

(Source: The Guardian)

At least 16 dead as refugee boat sinks off Greek island

At least 16 people, including six children, perished on Saturday after a refugee boat capsized in the Aegean Sea, the deadliest disaster in the area since a controversial deal between the EU and Turkey to try to stem the flow of migrants two years ago.

The boat was ferrying refugees from Turkey to Greece when it went down overnight off the island of Agathonissi.

Two women and a man who managed to swim to safety on the island sounded the alarm and port police said they believe two or three people are still missing.

A patrol boat, a military helicopter and three fishing



vessels are taking part in the rescue operation and officials are waiting for reinforcements from Frontex, the European border agency.

Another two refugees died on Saturday near the land border with Turkey when the truck they were travelling in overturned trying to avoid a police check, the authorities said.

The tragedy in the Aegean struck almost two years to the day since the EU and Turkey struck a multi-billion euro deal to curb the number of refugees trying to make their way to Europe.

(Source: AFP)

STOCK MARKET	
TEDPIX	95577.3
IFX	1079.64
Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir	

CURRENCIES	
USD	48,4100 rials
EUR	58,770 rials
GBP	68,800 rials
AED	13,250 rials
Source: mehrnews.com	

COMMODITIES	
WTI	61.32/b
Brent	65.02/b
OPEC Basket	61.97/b
Gold	\$1,318.15/oz
Silver	\$16.46/oz
Platinum	\$955.70/oz
Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com	

NEWS IN BRIEF



Above 15,000 production units received banking facilities by Jan. 20

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — According to the latest data released by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), 15,095 production units received banking loans during the 10 months ending to January 20, 2018, Tasnim news agency reported on Saturday.

The allocated loans were at the value of 109.80 trillion rials (about \$2.2 billion), the report said.

By March 20, 41,666 production units registered to get loans, among which 20,394 units were introduced to banks but 15, 095 ones became successful to receive the facilities.



Iran-China trade grows 20% in 2017

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — The value of trade between Iran and China stood at \$37 billion in 2017, indicating \$4 billion or 20.4 percent growth from the figure of its preceding year, Iranian ambassador to Beijing announced on Friday.

Al-Asghar Khaji said that despite the previous years, trade balance between the two countries was in favor of Iran for \$200 million, IRNA reported.

The envoy put the weight of Iran-China trade at 69.7 million tons in 2017 and said the figure shows 7.3 million tons rise from that of 2016.



Exports of home appliances stand at \$190m in 10 months

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iran exported \$190 million worth of home appliances during the 10-month period ended on January 20, according to an official in Trade Promotion Organization (TPO).

Masoud Kamali, director general of the exports development office of TPO, said while the figure shows three-percent fall from the same time span of the previous year, we had also exports to the European markets in this year”, ISNA reported on Saturday.

Hungary repatriating tons of gold from UK amid fears of economic crisis

The National Bank of Hungary (MNB) says it is bringing back three tons of the country’s gold reserves stored at the Bank of England in London, Gold Seek reported.

The move to repatriate 130 million dollars’ worth of gold from Budapest previously stored on British soil follows similar decisions made by Austrian, German and Dutch and Venezuelan central banks, which consider storing national gold reserves abroad a risky venture.

According to the Gold Seek media outlet, the decision to bring the gold home apparently reflects Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban’s desire to have the country’s assets close to home rather than in the hands of a foreign country which does not necessarily have Hungary’s best interests at heart.

Since 2010, central banks have been accumulating gold as a potential response to a financial crisis.

Indeed, when a country holds another country’s currency, this makes it vulnerable to rate fluctuations. Similarly, entrusting a nation’s gold reserves to another country could also be fraught with potential risk.

Russia, China and Turkey have each been building up their gold reserves in recent years with Russia having bought gold each month since 2015.

They have also been encouraging the use of gold in their foreign trade operations in a bid to move away from US dollar dominance and reduce the counterparty risk to their reserve assets.

(Source: Sputnik)

Gasoline consumption anticipated to rise 9% in a year

ENERGY **TEHRAN** — Consumption of gasoline in Iran is forecast to increase 8.8-9 percent to hit 87.8 million liters per day in the upcoming Iranian calendar year (starts on March 21), managing director of National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company (NIOPDC) announced.

In a press conference on Saturday, Mohammad-Reza Mousavikhah said that

gasoline consumption in the country stood at 80.3 million liters per day in the current calendar year, with eight percent rise from the preceding year, Shana news agency reported.

In mid-December last year, Oil Minister Bijan Namdar Zanganeh said Iran will reach a stable status in gasoline production once the second phase of Persian Gulf Star Refinery comes on stream.

The refinery in the southern province of

Auto industry constitutes 17% of domestic industrial production

ECONOMY **TEHRAN** — Iranian Industry, Mining and Trade Minister announced on Saturday that auto industry owns a 17-pecern-share of the total production of domestic industry in Iran, IRIB

news reported.

Mohammad Shariatmadari added that domestic auto industry could manage to manufacture 1.7 million cars during the present ending Iranian calendar year (ends on



Hormozgan is the first of its kind designed based on gas condensate feedstock.

Planned to have a total crude oil processing capacity of 360,000 barrels per day, Persian Gulf Star is projected to be complete by the end of the next Iranian calendar year 1397

(March 20, 2019).

Once fully operational, the refinery will add over 36 million liters of Euro-4 and Euro-5 quality gasoline to the country’s gasoline production capacity to increase it to 100 million liters per day.

March 21), which is 98 percent of its predicted production level in the said time.

According to Deputy Industry Minister Mohsen Salehinia, Iran’s car manufacturing in the first ten months of this year stood at

1.41 million and the figure has been more than the total car output of the past year which was 1.365 million.

Iran manufactured 1.3 million cars in the past calendar year.

The truth about Aramco’s \$2 trillion valuation

By Irina Slav

Two trillion dollars: this was the price tag Riyadh put on the jewel in its crown, state oil and gas giant Aramco. This is how much the company was worth, officials said, if you multiplied its proven reserves by a factor of \$8, which is the figure used to value oil and gas reserves.

There were doubts about that valuation from the start, and now these are deepening as the company crawls closer to the initial public offering. For starters Aramco’s opacity was very likely to make potential investors suspicious.

Aramco has never published financial reports. Although there were assurances that it will start doing so ahead of the IPO, to date the latest entry on Aramco’s Corporate Reports page is from July 20 last year, and includes production figures for 2016. Last year, sources had told Reuters the company was planning to start publishing financial reports early this year, but this has not happened yet.

Leaving these concerns aside, there is the bigger problem of the valuation methodology itself. In a blunt but very informative story for Bloomberg Gadfly, Liam Denning suggests that Aramco may need crude oil at \$80 a barrel to get the \$2-trillion valuation it claims it has. That’s in addition to making several wild assumptions along the way.

The oil world today is different from what it was just five years ago. The oil price collapse taught oil producers to be more economical and to pick their projects more carefully



to keep cash flows coming in and sharing them with shareholders. Yes, they had to sell additional stock, and some suspended dividends, but the lesson was learned, and the moment prices started perking up, dividends returned, and stock was bought back.

Yields are what investors want when they consider whether to invest in a company, Denning says. They don’t care about proven reserves and production costs as such. Instead, they care about how these can turn into dividends. It’s as simple as that, but this is where it stops being simple.

The average free cash flow yield of the global oil supermajors is between 5 and 7 percent. Russia’s Rosneft, while not a supermajor per se, sports the highest one, at 12.950 percent, while Exxon has the lowest at 5.194 percent. Based

Russia bond sales allow payment in alternative currencies

Unusual terms in the prospectus for Russia’s \$4bn issue of Eurobonds, which closed on Friday, have left analysts wondering whether financial markets really are — in the words of the Russian embassy in London — operating “business as usual”.

The embassy tweeted its confident message on Thursday after Gazprom, the state-controlled gas company, issued a \$750m Eurobond that the embassy said had been 3 times subscribed.

That the issue closed within hours of Theresa May, the UK prime minister, announcing measures against Moscow for its suspected involvement in last weekend’s nerve agent poisoning in Salisbury was seen as a show of defiance by the Kremlin.

Yet the terms of the much larger issue by the Russian Federation on Friday were anything but usual.

The issue came in two parts: \$1.5bn in a new bond maturing in 2029 with a yield of 4.625 percent, and \$2.5bn in a reopening of an existing bond maturing in 2047 with a yield of 5.25 percent. The sole bank on the sale was VTB Capital, part of state-run VTB.

One striking innovation is that both bonds are subject to a potential “alternative payment currency event”, described by Oleg Kouzman of investment bank Renaissance Capital in Moscow as “a totally new feature” in a sovereign bond sale.

The bonds’ 217-page prospectus, seen by the Financial Times, states that, in the case of the 2047 bond, if “for reasons beyond its control” the Russian Federation is unable to make payments of principal or interest in U.S. dollars, it will do so in euros, sterling or Swiss francs.

In the case of the 2029 bond, it opens the possibility of paying bondholders not only in those currencies, but also in roubles.

Analysts said the provision was designed to protect bondholders if the U.S., the UK or others put sanctions on Russia that would prevent payment in hard currency. Yet the prospectus gives no detail of what might trigger an alternative payment.

“I cannot understand why any foreigner would take the risk of being paid out in roubles,” said one London-based asset manager, adding that many foreigners were

likely to buy the bonds without reading the prospectus thoroughly.

A separate innovation, described by another London asset manager as “funky”, allows holders of the 2029 bonds to make of their own volition an “irrevocable election notice” to receive interest and principal payments in Russian roubles.

This feature, unlikely to be taken up by foreign investors, was seen as appealing to Russians with wealth in the UK or Europe willing to repatriate some of their money, and as a safeguard in case especially tough sanctions were to freeze their assets.

The size of the joint issue is in line with plans for foreign borrowing outlined in Russia’s budget for 2018 and in that regard the bonds are unsurprising. But their unusual features and their timing have raised eyebrows.

“We knew all along that this issue was nothing to do with the money and all about playing geopolitics,” said one asset manager. “They want to show that the west cannot stop them issuing and they want a PR win by showing that western finance houses

are still willing to fund Russia.”

Little information is made public about the identity of bondholders and analysts suspect that many buyers of Russian bonds in the UK and Europe are of Russian origin.

Yet this week’s bonds will also be aimed at foreign buyers and asset managers. S&P Global Ratings promoted Russia to investment grade in February, opening its bonds to an estimated \$1bn to \$3bn of additional money from investors whose mandates restrict them to investment-grade assets.

“Everyone will buy it,” said one asset manager. “Russia is one of the best stories from the macro and economic policy perspectives.”

However, he noted that President Vladimir Putin had promised wealthy Russians with money overseas in December that the government would issue bonds this year as a mechanism for repatriation of funds, and said the new bonds would serve this purpose while also functioning as portfolio assets for foreign investors.

(Source: Financial Times)

Product exclusions from U.S. metals tariffs may take 90 days: document

Steel and aluminum users that depend on imported products not available from U.S. producers may have to wait up to 90 days for an exclusion from the Trump administration’s new metals tariffs, according to a Commerce Department document.

The draft Federal Register notice, which is expected to be published later on Friday evening and was seen by Reuters, outlines procedures for companies to seek such exclusions.

The review period for such requests “normally will not exceed 90 days, including adjudication of objections submitted on exclusion requests,” it said.

The exclusion rules have been anxiously awaited by manufacturing companies since President Donald Trump announced the tariffs on March 7 to protect domestic steel and aluminum producers on national security grounds. U.S. allies, however, remain in the dark about country-specific exemptions.

A Commerce Department spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for additional details.

But steel- and aluminum-consuming industries that must import products, such as the high-strength steel rod used to make tire belts that is currently unavailable from U.S. steelmakers, may end up paying tariffs for a considerable period before being granted an exclusion.

The U.S. Customs and Border Patrol is expected to begin collecting the tariffs of 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminum at 12:01 a.m. (0401 GMT) on March 23, as determined in Trump’s proclamations.



“The request should clearly identify, and provide support for, the basis upon which the exclusion is sought,” the Commerce Department said in the notice. “An exclusion will only be granted if an article is not produced in the United States in a sufficient and reasonably available amount, is not produced in the United States in a satisfactory quality, or for a specific national security consideration.”

The Commerce Department notice said it estimated that about 4,500 individual requests would be filed for exclusions from steel and aluminum tariffs and about 1,500 of these would draw objections from interested parties.

The agency, led by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, an architect of the tariffs and a former steel industry investor, also said it would waive the normal 60-day comment period for the exclusions regulations because this would

cause delays that would be “impracticable or contrary to the public interest.”

Country exclusions

A spokeswoman for the U.S. Trade Representative’s office declined on Friday to provide any details regarding the process U.S. allies to request country exemptions from the tariffs.

Britain’s trade minister, Liam Fox, told Reuters in New York that he was optimistic about a positive resolution to a tariff exemption, despite the closest U.S. security ally’s dissatisfaction with the plan.

The European Union is seeking an exemption for all 28 of its member countries. And a Japanese embassy spokesman said Foreign Minister Taro Kono asked USTR officials for an exemption in meetings this week.

The steel tariffs also come as U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer is finalizing a package of trade sanctions on China over its intellectual property practices as part of a separate investigation.

Reuters reported this week that Trump was considering tariffs of up to \$60 billion on imports of Chinese information technology, telecoms and consumer products, a move that U.S. business groups say risks a damaging trade war with Beijing.

Lighthizer is due to testify before trade committees in Congress next Wednesday and Thursday to explain the Trump administration’s trade agenda.

(Source: Reuters)

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**BIG BANG
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Trump is creating a dangerous echo chamber around himself

By Julian Zelizer

President Donald Trump is shaking things up once again. He is using his deep experience on “The Apprentice” to jettison some high-profile administration officials who are rubbing him the wrong way. Trump seems eager to orchestrate a purge -- he said this week that there “will always be change.”

And a lot of change could be coming. CNN’s Jim Acosta reported a source close to the White House saying, “Everyone loves a season finale.”

This week, the first to go was Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. Although the timing is unclear, the next official facing possible replacement may be national security adviser H.R. McMaster, who like Tillerson, has never seemed to get along well with the commander in chief. As someone who has written a book about the failure of political and military leaders to be honest about Vietnam in the 1960s, McMaster didn’t appear to be a particularly good fit for this White House.

The shake-up is the latest in a series of rapid-fire departures that have taken place over the past few weeks, including Gary Cohn (National Economic Council director), Hope Hicks (White House communications director), John McEntee (personal aide to the President) and Josh Raffel (White House communications aide).

And these come on top of a number of other high-profile exits such as Steve Bannon, Reince Priebus, Anthony Scaramucci, Sean Spicer and Michael Flynn that have made this White House feel like a game of musical chairs.

The possible removal of McMaster, the firing of Tillerson and the resignation of Cohn are perhaps the most problematic. By ousting three voices who have been the most at odds with the style of the President and key parts of his policy agenda, Trump is in the process of creating a dangerous echo chamber. His inner circle will be filled with people who sound just like him or who are willing to carry out whatever he says.

Rather than broadening the range of voices who have a place at the table and who can provide him with diverse analysis about how to handle the crises that the nation faces, Trump seems instead to be getting rid of anyone who sings even a slightly different tune.

With any president, such insular thinking is a problem. President Lyndon Johnson banished critics of the Vietnam War such as his vice president, Hubert Humphrey, from his inner council of advisers. This was also evident when President George W. Bush only heard “yes” men and women as he dragged the United States into the disastrous Iraq War.

In Trump’s case, the problem could be even worse. This President is so lacking in experience and is so unstable it is triply urgent to have countervailing forces present at the table to help guide him through the rest of his presidency.

But there is no evidence that Trump recognizes this need, and these departures place the country in an enormously risky place. The United States has been lucky that we have not yet faced a major national security or economic crisis since 2017 that would require the President to figure his way through an explosive situation. The odds are this will happen at some point. During such moments as the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 or on 9/11, even the wisest president needs to hear all the options on the table and needs to hear from advisers who strongly disagree with him. The nation already got a taste for how things could go terribly wrong with Trump’s failed response to violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, and the hurricane in Puerto Rico.

Some of the greatest moments in presidential history have taken place when our top leader is forced to contend with advisers who challenge their basic worldview. Secretary of State George Shultz pushed President Ronald Reagan away from his hawkish default position and toward seizing the opportunity that emerged when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev showed interest in striking an arms deal. The hawks said Gorbachev was a tool of the Kremlin. Shultz and his allies said the possibility for change was real -- and they were right.

A president who lacks challenging voices in the Oval Office is also more likely to become downright Nixonian in responding to an investigation as serious as the one being conducted by Robert Mueller. The temptation for the President to take aggressive steps to stifle the process will only grow as he keeps finding fewer and fewer checks around him.

The dangers of Trump governing in an echo chamber are amplified by the state of Congress. Not only do we lack a condition of divided government that can check the President, but we have a Republican Congress fiercely loyal to its partisan cause and unwilling to push back against the President on almost anything.

This was clear when the House Intelligence Committee dropped the entire investigation about Russia without any real justification.

McMaster’s potential departure means that one more of a small handful of voices who don’t see eye to eye with this President would be gone. Trump, already in a circular conversation with Fox News, will only be able to see one way out of any jam. The voices in the room that are not coming from the television set will probably sound exactly like his.

The only possible solution at this point will come from Congress. Democrats can capitalize on the slim Republican majority in the Senate by blocking bad Cabinet nominations if they can pick off a handful of GOP votes.

If no Republicans in Congress will deal with the serious instability that we face with this President in office, the only viable alternative is for Democrats to gain control of the House and Senate in the 2018 midterms and take on this responsibility for themselves. The special election in Pennsylvania showed that the possibility of a Democratic wave is very real. In the meantime, the risks are grave.

(Source: CNN)

Pompeo’s challenge: After Tillerson, a consistent U.S. policy in the Middle East

By Seth J. Frantzman

On the eve of reportedly rolling out a new peace plan for Israel and the Palestinians, the Trump administration has ditched Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and tapped CIA Director Mike Pompeo to replace him. Trump and Tillerson rarely saw eye to eye, and Tillerson ran the State Department under a cloud from almost the start of his tenure in February 2017. He clashed with Trump’s policies on Iran and often appeared to be out of the loop on Middle East policies, or intentionally acting as the “good cop” to Trump’s more aggressive “bad cop” tendencies.

Pompeo now faces the challenge of coordinating more closely with the White House to have a consistent policy in the Middle East.

Tillerson had the shortest tenure of any Secretary of State since Lawrence Eagleburger in 1992. Yet despite its short length, for the Middle East his tenure was largely wasted as many crises unfolded in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and the Persian Gulf. Tillerson found the region to be his most challenging arena. In Turkey in February, he sought to smooth relations with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who wanted the United States to stop supporting the mostly Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces in eastern Syria. While Tillerson was glossing things over, the Pentagon instead was increasing its role in Syria.

A year later, Ankara and Washington have worse relations, in part because Tillerson was not frank about U.S. policy. In contrast, Pompeo has voiced concern in the past about Ankara becoming a “totalitarian Islamist dictatorship.” Turkey is likely to view Pompeo as a tough negotiator — and that is probably a good thing. Erdogan needs the United States to speak clearly about its role in Syria.

Tillerson seemed out of touch when he met Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in April 2017. He warned that the era of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a key ally of Russia, was coming to an end. He also claimed Russia risked “becoming irrelevant in the Middle East.” The opposite was actually happening. Russia was growing closer to Egypt, Turkey and other states and becoming a key player in the region, even working with Israel on Syrian policies. Here again, Pompeo seems likely to have a more realistic approach to Syria and Russia. He has included Russia in a list of foes who “want to undermine Western democracy.” He will be viewed as a more serious challenge by U.S. foes because of his CIA background.

The administration appeared to cut Tillerson out of dealing with the Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians on the peace



Secretary Tillerson Meets with Qatari Foreign Minister Al Thani.

Where Pompeo sees Riyadh as a partner, Tillerson was deeply frustrated by Saudi Arabia’s decision in June 2017 to cut relations with Qatar.

process, often managing relationships directly through the White House and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner. When Tillerson indicated in May 2017 that recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel would be connected to a peace deal, pro-Israel voices were outraged. Pompeo is considered to have views closer to those of Trump’s inner circle. Andrew Miller, a non-resident fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, tweeted Tuesday that “leaders in Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia and UAE are likely very pleased with the news.” In December, Pompeo praised efforts by Israel and Saudi Arabia to work together to confront terror.

Where Pompeo sees Riyadh as a partner, Tillerson was deeply frustrated by Saudi Arabia’s decision in June 2017 to cut relations with Qatar. The Saudis, and their allies in Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, felt that Trump’s May speech to the Arab Islamic American Summit gave them support to clamp down on Qatar, which they have accused of spreading instability in the region. Tillerson headed to the region in July to try to smooth things over but failed to patch things up.

During the September and October difficulties in northern Iraq over the

Kurdistan Region’s decision to hold an independence referendum, Tillerson again played catch-up. The Iraqi army was preparing to push Kurdish forces out of the strategic oil city of Kirkuk. On Oct. 13, Defense Secretary James Mattis said that Tillerson was “the lead” on dealing with the crisis and that the United States sought to “keep any potential conflict off the table.” Three days later, Iraqi forces clashed with the Kurds.

The Iraq trouble continued and Tillerson visited the region for meetings in Riyadh on Oct. 22. There, he encouraged Iraq’s Shiite militias that had been mobilized to fight ISIL to “go home.” The next day, Iraq’s Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi summoned Tillerson to Baghdad and told him that the militias were the “hope of Iraq and the region.” Pompeo, meanwhile, was warning the Trump administration about Iran’s threat to the region and Iraq.

When he made a major trip to the Middle East in February, Tillerson tried to tone down the administration’s aggressive tone. In Cairo, Ankara, Amman, Beirut and Kuwait, he held major meetings. But there was no follow up from the State Department or the administration, partly because the United States lacks ambassadors in many Middle Eastern

countries. At the time of his firing, the administration still had not appointed ambassadors to Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Libya, Morocco or Sudan. Without ambassadors, the State Department cannot be effective in many of these countries.

The reaction to Tillerson’s firing has been generally positive in the region among U.S. allies. Saudi Arabia, Israel, the UAE and Egypt will welcome Pompeo’s appointment. Turkey will be a larger challenge, since Pompeo’s first foreign trip as CIA director was to Ankara. At the least, Ankara will receive straight answers that correspond to the Pentagon’s policy. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu arrives in Washington on March 19 and likely will meet Pompeo.

Qatar is more hesitant about the change. Marwan Bishara, Al-Jazeera’s senior political analyst, praised Tillerson’s willingness to have different views than Trump, saying he was more “steady and more sober than the president.” Iran appears wary of Pompeo. The regime’s Press TV spotlighted an analyst who characterized Pompeo as “very negative ... and dangerous.” The era of Tillerson playing “good cop” to the White House’s more aggressive stance on Iran is over.

(Source: The Hill)

Fearing isolation in a turbulent region, Jordan and Turkey inch closer together

Jordan announced this week that it was suspending its free trade agreement with Turkey, in order to protect Jordanian companies from what it called “unequal competition” from industries supported by the Turkish government. It looks like a setback in ties between Amman and Ankara, yet the geopolitical picture is more complicated.

Two weeks ago, over consecutive days in late February, Turkey’s foreign minister, Mevlut Cavusoglu, and its highest-ranking military officer, Gen. Hulusi Akar, visited Jordan for meetings meant to signal both countries’ desire to upgrade their bilateral relationship in light of regional developments. A major impetus is undoubtedly the Trump administration’s decision in December to relocate the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, a move that unilaterally recognized the contested city as the capital of Israel.

Jordan is rightly concerned that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is entering a new phase that may leave its interests, long central to the moribund peace process, by the wayside. It fears a secret deal between the Trump administration and other Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt, that may have essentially traded the status of Jerusalem for greater containment of Iran. While such an agreement remains the subject of speculation in the Middle East — largely pieced together with the details of diplomatic visits and a proposal that Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reportedly presented to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Riyadh — the Jordanians are convinced that no American decision on Jerusalem and the embassy would ever have been made without first consulting Saudi and Egyptian officials.

There are reports in the Arab press that Jordan’s request to host an urgent Arab League meeting to denounce President Donald Trump’s Jerusalem announcement was turned down by the Saudis. There are also rumors that the Saudis have been twisting Jordan’s arm in an effort to get King Abdullah II to go along with Trump’s mooted peace plan between Israelis and Palestinians.

If all or just parts of this are true, it makes sense that Jordan would be leaning more on Turkey, a powerful regional player that also opposes America’s decision on Jerusalem. Amman and Ankara both call on Israelis and Palestinians to continue “serious negotiations” on the basis of the two-state solution, with East Jerusalem as the future capital of an independent Palestinian state.

Both King Abdullah and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan are personally invested in the Palestinian file. King Abdullah is officially the custodian of Muslim and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, a title for the Jordanian royal family that goes



Jordan and Turkey both see advantages in better relations, but they cannot risk getting too close.

back to the British Mandate period and was recognized in Jordan’s 1994 peace deal with Israel and a 2013 agreement with the Palestinian Authority. The unilateral U.S. decision on Jerusalem undermines that religious authority and with it the king’s prestige and that of the Hashemite dynasty, whose legitimacy has traditionally been intimately tied to the fate of Jerusalem. All that has translated into genuine fears for the kingdom’s political security. More than 2 million Palestinian refugees are registered in Jordan, and the majority of them have full Jordanian citizenship. More than half of Jordanians claim Palestinian descent. This is a powerful constituency that cannot be ignored in Amman’s strategic calculus, as King Abdullah’s father, King Hussein, found out in the 1970s.

As for Erdogan, Jerusalem is a powerful ideological rallying cry for his pan-Islamic rhetoric and political brand. The Turkish president has long attempted to position himself as a defender of Muslim rights in lands that were once part of the Ottoman Empire, both to feed his aspirations to be a Middle East powerbroker and to pander to his conservative, Islamist base at home.

On a wider regional scale, Turkey also needs Jordan as it attempts to rebuild its regional influence, which has crumbled since the Arab uprisings of 2011. Ankara’s hostility to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime ruptured its once thriving ties to Damascus, while its support for political and militant groups affiliated with the Muslim

Brotherhood created significant rifts with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Against this backdrop, high-profile Turkish visits to Jordan allow Erdogan to push back against the notion that his government is isolated in the Arab world.

But expectations should be measured. Jordan and Turkey both see advantages in better relations, but they cannot risk getting too close. Jordan can hardly afford to alienate Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf monarchies critical of Turkey, because they are important sources of foreign aid for the weak Jordanian economy; the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council has yet to renew a \$5 billion aid package that expired last year. There are also approximately 800,000 Jordanian expatriates working in the PGCC countries — 650,000 in Saudi Arabia and the UAE alone — who are crucial sources of remittances. Any Saudi or Emirati backlash that might lead to the expulsion of those workers would cripple Jordan economically.

The Jordanian government is also still wary of Turkey’s support for the Muslim Brotherhood across the region, including in Jordan where the Islamist group dominates the opposition. In 2016, King Abdullah reportedly told U.S. politicians that Erdogan had exported a “radical Islamic solution” to the Middle East’s troubles. Yet Erdogan’s Islamism may serve some purposes, if Jordan is warming up to Turkey in an effort to stave off potential anti-government pressure from Islamists in the kingdom at a time of harsh economic austerity.

There are also bilateral economic irritants, as the scuttled free trade agreement this week shows. Since that deal entered into force in March 2011, Turkey has run up a major trade surplus, and Jordan doesn’t feel the benefits have been equally shared so far. Pressure on King Abdullah’s government from Jordanian business interests clearly won out.

Ankara has previously said it is committed to reconsidering elements of the free trade agreement, including finding ways to boost Jordanian exports to Turkey and attract more Turkish tourists to Jordan. But in return, Turkey wants access to the Jordanian port of Aqaba, which it sees as a key export hub to reach markets in Africa, where it is aiming to grow its economic footprint.

At a time of continued regional flux, it’s clear that the relationship between Jordan and Turkey is evolving too, with new constraints and challenges. There may be political will on both sides to improve their ties, but Jordan will likely move slower, since it has more to lose than Turkey if they get too cozy.

(Source: WPR)

Three years of Saudi heinous crimes in Yemen



In 2002 Macaire returned to London to head the Counter Terrorism Policy Department in the Foreign Office in the immediate post 9/11 period. He served as Political Counsellor in New Delhi, India from 2004 to 2006, during which time he led a team responding to the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake

Macaire would officially take up his appointment in April 2018. Undoubtedly, in the near future, we will hear more about the new English Ambassador and his positions.



Medics have voiced alarm over the raging spread of the cholera epidemic in the impoverished country, saying that one child is infected every minute. Malnourished children, who number more than two million in Yemen, are greatly susceptible. Yemeni Health Ministry says that the Saudi aerial embargo has prevented patients from travelling abroad for treatment, and the entry of medicine into the country has been blocked. Over the following three years, the war has engulfed the entire country causing

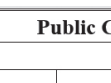
of major infectious diseases have been banned, amid the growth of the indicators of child malnutrition, and the spread of epidemics. In addition, more than 95% of doctors, nurses and consultants have been killed or fled the country. The lack of medicines has caused the deaths of many with Thalassaemia and Anemia who need a monthly blood transfusion. Dialysis centres have made an SOS to save the lives of more than 6 thousand patients with Renal failure by providing them with necessary medical supplies, pointing out that the number of deaths

However, the collusion has failed to achieve its geopolitical and ideological objectives regardless of spending billions of dollars and enlisting the cooperation of its vassal states as well as some Western countries. The world's largest humanitarian crisis caused by Saudi prolonged military onslaught has pushed millions of Yemenis to the brink of starvation. Unfortunately, the UN has not yet taken any effective measures to halt the humanitarian tragedy for the sake of the ultimate objective that Saudi Arabia is pursuing in the country, which is eliminating the threat of the Houthis. Obviously, the Saudis have not achieved their basic goals; hence, they are seeking revenge on the innocent Yemenis through their aimless bombardment.


Trump explained: «When you look at the Iran deal, I think it's terrible. I guess he thought it was OK. ... So we were not

Just like Trump, Pompeo and Nikki Haley believe there should be changes to the nuclear deal and its content so that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) can have access to military sites in Iran, and the time limits included in the JCPOA (the so-called sunset clauses) should be removed and replaced by permanent constraints. The United States also wants Iran's missile program to be included in the nuclear deal.

In any case, we wait to see the consequences of Trump's recent action and the presence of Pompeo at the top of the U.S. foreign policy equations.



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Why gun culture is so strong in rural America

By Robert Leonard

As Democrats have fled rural America — or rural America has fled Democrats — many of them, living in cities, are left without an understanding of rural culture and its core values. If it isn't on abortion, our deepest cultural divide might be on guns. The guns issue also has a profound political dimension, reliably driving rural Americans into Republican arms.

It's been many years since I hunted squirrels and rabbits with my Grandpa Leonard. I grew up around guns and remember the pride I had when I completed my N.R.A.-sponsored gun safety training in Boy Scouts, back when the N.R.A. was a group primarily known for teaching gun appreciation and safety rather than lobbying.

I have come to understand and appreciate arguments for more gun control. But guns are important to the culture in my conservative community in Iowa, and people around here reject most gun control legislation. So I do my best to understand where they are coming from.

One morning after the mass shootings in Park-

land, Fla., I spoke about them with a police-officer friend. He has led active-shooter trainings in our schools. He believes that better background checks might help prevent some gun violence, and that people need to do a better job securing their firearms (especially from suicidal teenagers).

But he doesn't believe that significant gun control measures will ever meet approval in rural America, including a ban on AR-15-style semiautomatic rifles. He confided that many conservative police officers do not want more gun control and that other officers have told him that should they ever have to start taking guns away from people, they will quit their jobs. Like most rural conservatives, he truly believes that taking guns away from law-abiding citizens will never solve America's gun problems, including mass shootings. He says gun control has never stopped criminals from getting guns, and never will.

To understand why many conservatives in rural America believe this, you must start with first principles, because the argument ultimately isn't about guns; it runs even deeper than the Second

Amendment. At a 2015 campaign event during the Iowa caucuses, J. C. Watts, the former congressman from Oklahoma, spoke about perspectives on original sin. It helps illuminate the differences in worldview between many conservatives and liberals. Mr. Watts said Democrats think people were born basically good, so when good people did bad things, something in society (in this case, guns) needed to be controlled. Republicans think the fault lies with the person — the perpetrator of the evil. Bad choices result in bad things being done, in part because the perpetrator lacks the moral guidance the Christian faith provides.

■ Liberals blame guns, shooting

The reaction to mass shootings highlights this difference. Liberals blame the guns and want to debate gun control. For conservatives, the blame lies with the shooter, not the gun.

To my conservative friends, it's a matter of liberty and personal responsibility. Even after a horrific event like the school shooting in Florida, where 17 people were killed, more gun control would be compromising those first

principles. For them, compromising those principles would be even more horrific and detrimental to society than any shooting. What my conservative friends see is not gun control, but rather control, period.

Not everyone here is an N.R.A. nut, but they think the N.R.A. may be the last line of defense for the Second Amendment. The apocalyptic videos about gun control from the N.R.A. spokeswoman Dana Loesch are over the top, as my conservative friends here know, but they think they are fun for the basic reason that liberals grow faint after viewing them.

Many people own guns because they simply enjoy them — shooting them, the feel of them, their history, their role in protection. They want guns for the same reason you might want a particular kind of car. They also believe that having a gun makes them less likely to become a victim. Here, guns are tools. We hunt with them.

Because we live in a free country, we can have a great many things. But few of those things deserved special mention in our Constitution. Guns did.

Throwing around statistics on shooting deaths in America will not make rural gun owners give up their guns. Make no mistake: These statistics and the deaths behind them sadden rural gun owners just as much as they sadden you.

But again, where you might blame the guns, they don't. They blame the shooters.

I worry that the ready availability of guns contributes to the number of suicides in rural America. Nothing crushes a small town like a suicide, as nearly everyone knows the victim or a family member.

■ Gun debates not productive

I had a chat with a good friend the other day. He's another law enforcement officer. He thinks the gun debate isn't being framed in a productive way.

He asked: "What are you, Bob? Pro-gun or anti-gun? Pro-Second Amendment or anti-Second Amendment?"

"Pro-Second Amendment," I said. "All in favor of rifles, shotguns and handguns. Concealed carry makes me nervous, but I guess I'm for it, and I want AR-15s and their kin banned."

(Source: The NYT)

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Clothing festival to put luminaries in limelight

L I F E TEHRAN — Iranian luminaries is the main theme of the sixth edition of Naqsh Tanpoosh national festival, an event in apparel industry which focuses on Persian-style patterns on T-shirts.

The festival will be held on the main theme of Iranian luminaries in coming April in Tehran.

Several workshops and exhibitions will be held on the sidelines of the event, which aims to promote Persian-style patterns that are in line with Iranian culture and today's society.

The festival encourages artists to create patterns on T-shirts with the meaning of tanpoosh - clothing in Persian language - and to replace foreign patterns with national ones via printing them on Iranian-made clothes.

The event is sponsored by the Art Department of the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research (ACECR), a public non-governmental higher education institution.

The festival also creates an opportunity



for pattern designers to promote authentic Persian culture through modern methods of

visual arts and is a great chance for talented and creative artists to commercialize their art.

■ **University courses are not enough**
“The university courses are not enough for students. They should learn many things in the market,” the head of ACECR Art Department Behzad Rashidi said in a press release published by the Honaron-line website.

The festival encourages university students who studies textile design and apparel industry to introduce their ideas at the festival, he added.

T-shirt is common cloth amongst people especially young generation hence the festival choose this kind of clothing to promote Persian culture, he said.

“There are hundreds images, patterns and designs in Iranian civilization, which can inspire artistic works. By printing them on T-shirts, they can introduce Iranian culture and civilization,” he explained.

Unfortunately many Iranian luminaries are being forgotten, so we think that it would be a good choice for the theme of coming festival, he added.

Rashidi said that the festival connects artists with the domestic apparel industry.

How do Muslims treat the elderly?



Islam is a comprehensive way of life and one of the characteristics through which it is distinguished from many other religions is that it encompasses every aspect of a Muslim's life. Islam teaches Muslims to respect the elderly whether they are parents, relatives or any other old person. This is because caring for the elderly ones is considered an important obligation through which one seeks closeness to Allah.

■ Status of the elderly

There is no doubt that Islam has given the elderly a special status, as there are several texts, which urge Muslims to respect and honor them. An elderly person has a high status before Allah and His Prophet particularly if he is a believer.

In the Quran, Allah says:

“And whomever We give a long life, We cause him to regress in creation”(36:68)

From the verse, it is obvious that the inception of old age is a period of decline – decline comes partly from physical and partly from psychological factors. Thus, at this critical stage of life, Islam recommends adequate caring for them because they are like a prophet in a family and a blessing in the society. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said:

“The elderly among his family is like a Prophet among his community” Moreover, honoring the elderly is synonymous to honoring Allah and His Prophet. In this regards, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was reported to have said:

“Honor the elderly because honoring them is part of honoring Allah”

Meanwhile, Imam Sajjad (AS) while describing the right of the elderly in his book ‘Treatise on rights’ said:

“The right of him who is older than you is that you show reverence toward him because of his age and you honor him because he entered Islam before you. You leave off confronting him in a dispute, you do not precede him in a path, you do not go ahead of him, and you do not consider him foolish. If he should act foolishly toward you, you put up with him and you honor him because of the right of Islam and the respect due to it”.

Similarly, Islam commands a Muslim to honor and respect senior citizens because honoring the elderly will guarantee the protection against every calamity on the Day of Resurrection. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said:

“Whoever honors the grey hair due to an old age, Allah will definitely save him from the panic of the Day of Judgment”.

■ Manners of handling the elderly

Islam is the fountain of mercy, sentiments, and sympathy. Hence, it is not strange to see Islam paying attention to the elderly and instructing a Muslim to give them compassion. There are texts from the Quran, the sayings of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his pure Household (AS) on how a Muslim should treat an elderly person. These include:

Always honor and be merciful to the elderly. For respecting them is considered a form of worship in the sight of Allah while disrespecting them is absolutely rebuked and it is against the pristine teachings of Islam.

In case of necessity, always render assistance to the elderly.

Consult the elderly for guidance on personal and collective decisions, for they are guides in a family and in the society similar to a Prophet of God.

Never insult or scold an elderly. Because a disrespect to them is reprimanded by Allah, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his pure Household (AS). Allow our elderly to live with us. It is a bad habit to send them to nursing homes just because they are considered as nuisances to the society.

Respecting the elderly and honoring them are among the characteristics of a Muslim society. Therefore, it is expected of every Muslim to imbibe the culture of respecting old people whether they are parents, relatives or not. Likewise, we should always acknowledge and appreciate their presence within us especially our parents. The presence of the elderly either in the family or in the society is a blessing from Allah. Their presence will bring peace, happiness, concord, tranquility, mercy and reward from Allah. It is indeed an un-Islamic practice to consider our elderly a public nuisance and eject them from our midst.

(Source: salamislam.com)

Being generous really does make you happier

It doesn't take a neuroscientist to know that doing nice things for people feels good. But now, researchers say they've discovered that even thinking about doing something generous has real mood-boosting benefits in the brain.

In a new study published in Nature Communications, researchers from the University of Zurich in Switzerland told 50 people they'd be receiving about \$100 over a few weeks. Half of the people were asked to commit to spending that money on themselves, and half were asked to spend it on someone they knew.

The researchers wanted to see whether simply pledging to being generous was enough to make people happier. So before doling out any money, they brought everyone into the lab and asked them to think about a friend they'd like to give a gift to and how much they would hypothetically spend. They then performed functional MRI scans to measure activity in three regions of the brain associated with social behavior, generosity, happiness and decision-making.

Their choices—and their brain activity—seemed to depend on how they had pledged to spend the money earlier. Those who had agreed to spend money on other people tended to make more generous decisions throughout the experiment, compared to those who had agreed to spend on themselves. They also had more interaction between the parts of the brain associated with altruism and happiness, and they reported higher levels of happiness after the experiment was over.

(Source: time.com)

Little things everyone forgets to clean—but shouldn't

■ Refrigerator

Your fridge could make you sick if you don't clean it every once in a while.

First, unplug the fridge and empty it out. Toss old containers and expired food, and wipe everything down with multipurpose spray. Soak drawers in warm water and scrub them clean with dish soap. These are the foods you should never keep in a fridge.

■ Pillows

Yes, you can put down and fiberfill pillows in the washing machine. Wash two at a time following the instructions on the care label. Otherwise, warm water on a gentle cycle will do the trick. The same settings work for your comforter (which can also use a washing). Here are some other surprising things you

can clean in your washing machine.

■ Windowsills and window tracks

It's easy to tell when your windows are dirty, but windowsills and tracks often go unnoticed. Dust away any loose dirt and dead bugs (or use a vacuum with a brush attachment). Use a spray bottle of white vinegar to spray the area and let it sit for a minute. Wipe with paper towels and use Q-Tips for those hard-to-reach areas.

■ Kitchen drawers and cabinets

It's probably a good idea to keep the places you store all your food and dishes clean, right? Empty them out (preferably one at a time to avoid unnecessary clutter), toss expired food, and wipe everything down. Before returning everything to its rightful place, see if there's

any dishware you haven't used all year. It would probably be better off donated. Don't miss these ways you might be cleaning your kitchen wrong.

■ Patio furniture

As the weather warms up, why not make sure your patio furniture looks good as new before you actually start using it? The best part: You only have to clean it once a year.

■ Shower curtain

Soap scum and mildew stains are haunting your shower curtain, but it doesn't take long to clean them. Make sure you're not making these bathroom cleaning mistakes while you're at it.

■ All the cards in your wallet

You use them almost every day, probably

without thinking of how many times you touch them and how few times you've actually cleaned them (the answer: zero). A 2012 study found that one in 10 bank cards were contaminated with fecal matter. Wipe the card with a damp cloth or anti-bacterial wipe, then gently scrub the magnetic strip with an eraser.

■ Keys

Keys are another item you use daily, so they can definitely use a wash. To keep them clean and prevent rust, scrub with lemon and salt and rinse with dish soap. If they're already rusty, soak them in a vinegar and water mixture for 20 minutes, rinse, then put them back in for another 30 minutes. This ensures the rust comes out completely.

(Source: Reader's Digest)

28 simple and natural ways to detox your body



#21. Opt for a diet rich in whole foods that are free of additives and preservatives:

We've talked about just how important it is to keep a healthy diet and to focus on the right foods. Equally as important is to get the wrong foods out of your diet as well, and many people don't recognize this. Though you may be prone to turn to “diet foods”, those that are low fat, low calorie, or packaged for your convenience, this may be your demise.

Rather than turning to prepackaged foods, you want to opt for whole foods that come from the earth and are natural.

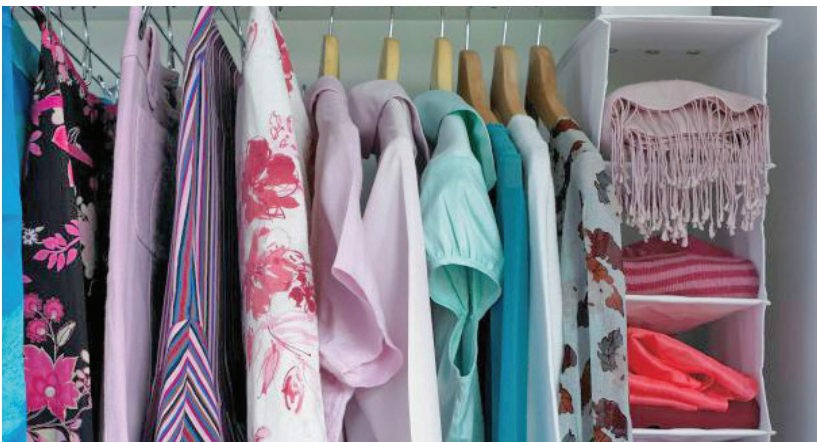
When you turn to packaged foods for convenience, they are normally loaded with additives and preservatives. Though you may be getting fewer calories and fat with these foods, their manmade ingredients are wreaking havoc on

your body.

Any type of packaged food, whether it seems healthy or not, is made with additives and preservatives of some type. Just like pesticides, these can and will build up in your intestines as toxins over time. You will feel slowed down and may exhibit other symptoms that make you sick. It's not a good scenario! Get rid of the obviously unhealthy packaged foods that are loaded with fat, but take it one step further. Just because a food appears to be healthy or “diet ready” doesn't mean that it's good for you. If it's loaded down with additives, preservatives, chemicals, or ingredients that you can't pronounce, that directly translates to toxins in your digestive system. Get rid of them and you begin to really cleanse your system immediately!

(Source: bembu.com)

How to organize the clothes closet in some simple steps?



■ Store by cluster

A clothing “cluster” is a core group of five to eight clothing pieces that work together.

Look at your culled closet with an eye to forming several clusters from your existing clothes. The main organizing principle is color, not season or style.

Group similar-colored garments together, and think, “What could I add to this group to form a cluster?”

Thinking “cluster” simplifies the process of buying clothes. No longer will you buy in terms of “outfit” — that's how you get in the position of having a closet stuffed with clothes and nothing to wear.

■ Simplify storage

*Make it easier to put away. Liberate your thinking about clothing storage. There's a principle here, too: in storage, it should be easier to put something away than it is to get it out. With this principle in

mind, put underpants in an open-topped plastic basket on a shelf, rather than confining them in a too-small lingerie drawer. Hang long nightgowns and robes from hooks and they'll be easy to find each bleary-eyed morning.

*Think cluster. If possible, hang clothing in clusters, rather than segregating it by shirts and slacks and dresses.

*Stay open. Stack jeans, shorts, and T-shirts on open shelves, and you'll never again lose a favorite pair in the dark corners of an over-stuffed drawer. Socks deserve their own open basket; store pantyhose by color, with each color confined to a separate large zipper food-storage bag.

*Hang it right. Finally, invest in proper hangers for the life of your clothing, and recycle those wire hangers at your local dry-cleaners.

(Source: hgtv.com)



101 ITEMS FOR YOUR BUCKET LIST!

48. Pack your bags and set off for a random location with no itinerary

If you have seen the movie “Yes Man”, you may remember the scene where Jim Carrey and Zooey Deschanel took a spontaneous trip to nowhere. Traveling on a spontaneous trip, with no itinerary planned, is not only exciting with friends, but also very romantic when done with a significant other / romantic prospect.

Rather than going on a tour package where everything is already pre-planned, why not create your itinerary on the fly and explore places without anyone directing you? Like backpacking, you will find this a highly memorable experience.

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 shop in Tajrish Grand Bazaar offers goldfish and Hyacinth, as optional items on the Iranian Haft Seen, an arrangement of seven symbolic items traditionally displayed during the Iranian New Year holidays, Noruz, days before the new year (Instagram/@danatripsiran)

More portions of mosque unearthed in central Iran

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Further sectors of Imam Hassan (AS) Mosque, a centuries-old monument in Zavareh, central Iran, has been brought to light through an ongoing archaeological project, Mizan reported on Thursday.



Detail shows a mihrab of the Imam Hassan (AS) Mosque in central Iran.

The mosque’s westward shabestan along with two mihrabs, once concealed behind the walls, have recently been unearthed, Fariba Saeidi who leads the archaeological season was quoted as saying. Shabestan refers to an underground hypostyle space which can be found in traditional mosques, houses, and schools while a mihrab is a semicircular niche that indicates the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca.

Sets of inscriptions and plasterwork indicate that the mosque dates from the Seljuk era (1037–1194) and Ilkhanid times (1256–1335), Saeidi added.

Standing tall in Ardestan county, Isfahan province, the mosque is also famous for having a brick minaret, which is one of the oldest of its kind in the country.

The archaeological project is being supervised by the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Research Center.

UK ends indefinite visa extensions for Turks

Anadolu Agency (LONDON) — Turkish businesspeople and their families in Britain under a popular visa program will no longer be eligible for a class of indefinite visa extensions, but will still be able to apply for multi-year extensions, the U.K. government announced March 16.

The U.K. will no longer accept applications for indefinite leave to remain (ILR) visas from Turkish citizens who are in the country on special ECAA business visas, Britain’s Home Office has said.

The office said they will introduce into the immigration rules “a new ILR category for current Turkish ECAA business persons.”

The latest update came after a U.K. tribunal ruling in a case related to an application from a Turkish national’s wife, Hacer Aydogdu, the Home Office said.

“The Home Office will no longer accept applications for Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR) under the Turkish European Communities Association Agreement (ECAA) Business Persons category,” the Home Office said on its website.

The tribunal’s previous decision said “the settlement of Turkish nationals and their dependents did not fall within the scope of a provision of the European Community Association Agreement with Turkey, called the ‘standstill clause.’”

The Home Office said applications until March 16 – today – would continue to be processed and those who would like to stay in the U.K. and carry on under the Ankara Agreement visa will be able to apply for extensions of “up to three years at a time, provided they continue to meet the relevant requirements.” Those applications will be free of charge as before, it added.

“Any ECAA settlement applications postmarked prior to 16 March will be processed under the same terms as before,” the updated guidelines said.



ROUND THE GLOBE

National History Park – Citadel, Sans Souci, Ramiers

In the northern part of Haiti, the National History Park – Citadel, Sans-Souci, Ramiers (NHP-CSSR) is located in the central zone of the northern massif that extends to the Dominican Republic.

The NHP-CSSR is located between the coastal plains and the mountainous interior of the region. The choice to build the Citadel on the summits responded to a strategy for interior protection, differing from the coastal defense strategy inherited from French colonization.



A view of the Citadelle Laferriere in Haiti

Created by presidential decree in 1978, to preserve the splendid natural scenery of the mountainous peaks covered with luxuriant vegetation, the NHP-CSSR covers an area of 25 km2. It includes the monumental ensemble of the Palace of Sans-Souci and its annex buildings, the Citadelle Henry and the Ramiers site, universal symbols of liberty, being the first monuments to be constructed by black slaves who had gained their freedom. For Haitians, they represent the first monuments of their independence.

On 1 January 1804, after fourteen years of struggle by the island’s black slaves against the colonists, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the principal leader of the revolution, proclaimed the independent Republic of Haiti. The “Emperor” Dessalines immediately entrusted to one of his generals, Henri Christophe, the task of constructing an immense fortress on the Pic Laferriere, to protect the young republic.

Both military installation and political manifesto, the Citadelle Henry, constructed to a height of 970 m, is one of the best examples of the art of military engineering of the early 19th century. (Source: UNESCO)

Iran seeks World Heritage listing for its railways

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iran’s cultural heritage body pursues possible inscription of cross-country railways, which includes arrays of bridges, stations and other historical monuments, on the UNESCO World Heritage list by 2019.

Last year, the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization in close collaboration with the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways submitted to UNESCO a preliminary dossier titled “Trans-Iranian Railway”.

And more recently, the CHHTO updated the dossier by providing additional information upon a request by the United Nations experts, Mehr reported on Saturday.

The industrial heritage, which dates from the World War I and II, contains expanded railway networks mainly stretched from south to north. It also includes a variety of monuments such as Tabriz railway station as well as Veresk and Sekhat-tala bridges built at hard-to-access points of deserts or highlands.

Such bridges are the first of their kinds in the country which were constructed based on modern technical and engineering calculations and from materials like metal and concrete.

From another point of view, it is deemed a turning point to comprehensive



Photo depicts the Veresk Bridge, a masonry arch railroad bridge in northern Iran. The 66-metre-long structure was nicknamed as that bridge of victory during World War II.

developments in Iran, catered to wide spectra of economical, commercial, social,

cultural and even political aspects.

Arasbaran Protected Area is the

country’s another candidate for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list for 2019.

Sadabad complex to host classic car show



A file photo shows classic car show in Tehran

HERITAGE d e s k **TEHRAN** – A classic car show will open its doors to the public at Tehran’s Sadabad Cultural-Historical Complex on March 22.

The show will include over 60 privately-owned vintage cars and motorcycles dating back to 45 years ago or earlier, Mehr reported. Touring & Automobile Club of the Islamic

Republic of Iran will organize the event, which will be running through April 18.

Sprawled on about 110 hectares of a mountainside parkland in northern Tehran, the Sadabad Cultural-Historical Complex is used to be a royal summer residence during the Qajar era (1789–1925) and subsequent Pahlavi era (1925–1979).

London tourism flatlined in 2017 due to terror fears, rail issues and cost

Northern Ireland and Scotland saw big increases, according to figures from Association of Leading Visitor Attractions

Rail problems, fears of terrorism, and the high cost of getting to and eating in London have contributed to a “flatlining” of tourism in the capital last year.

But the newly released figures from the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions (Alva) also show big tourism increases in Northern Ireland, and Scotland in particular.

The overall figures show an average increase of 7.3% on 2016 visitor numbers to UK attractions. In Scotland the increase is 13.9%, in Northern Ireland it is 6.5% and in

London 1.2%.

Bernard Donoghue, director of Alva, said: “There are lots and lots of amazing stories, some concerning stories, but overall we are really delighted about continued growth and the popularity of visitor attractions.”

One of the main concerning stories is in London where visitor numbers were “flat-lining”, he said.

There were many reasons including the “quite boring but fundamentally huge” issue of Waterloo being partially closed in August and the inconsistency of Southern Rail. Other factors are worries about terrorism and the high cost of travel, food and drink for families

coming to London.

The British Museum continues to be the most popular visitor attraction in the UK for the 11th year running, despite an 8% fall in numbers. Tate Modern was in second spot, down 3%, and the National Gallery was in third, down 16.5%. The biggest fall was at the National Portrait Gallery, partly because it had a great 2016 thanks to its Vogue and Picasso shows. It was down 35%.

The big climbers were the V&A in fifth place, up 26% thanks largely to the popularity of its Pink Floyd exhibition; Tate Britain, up 61% which can partly be put down to its David Hockney show; and Kensington Palace, up

62.4% thanks to its display of Diana dresses.

Donoghue said it was “particularly eye-catching” that visitor numbers to Scotland outperformed the rest of the UK for the sixth year running.

Among the reasons were an increase in flights from the US and Europe to Glasgow and Edinburgh; and the full reopening of all the galleries of the National Museums of Scotland.

For the first time, the most visited attractions outside London were in Scotland. The National Museum of Scotland was up from 15th to 11th spot with a 20% increase. Edinburgh Castle is in 12th place with a 16% increase. (Source: The Guardian)

How to plan a movie-themed vacation

By Shivani Vora

It’s easier than you may expect to find, visit, and enjoy the places where your favorite movies were made.

Whether it’s the “Lord of the Rings” trilogy in New Zealand or “Roman Holiday” in Rome, many noteworthy movies are filmed in appealing locales all over the world that travelers may want to visit and enjoy.

According to Angela Tillson, a film location manager in Kauai who has worked on the set of films including “Jurassic Park: The Lost World” and “The Descendants,” exploring a beloved movie set destination through the eyes of the film makes for an enjoyable vacation.

“Seeing a place with a focus on a movie you love will give you a perspective that the average tourist doesn’t usually get,” she said. Here are her tips to get started.

■ Choose your destination

If there’s a movie you love, you can find out where it was filmed by looking at the credits at the end of the film or by going online to The Internet Movie Database, also known as IMDb, which often lists filming locations. Once you know the locale, you can start planning your trip.

Or, consider doing what Ms. Tillson often does when deciding on where to vacation: pick a spot you’re interested in visiting, and find out what movies have been filmed there.

Then, plan an itinerary based around a film that you’ve seen and liked. “It’s fun to sometimes let a destination determine the movie you’re going to live rather than the other way around,” Ms. Tillson said.

There are even some books available on movies shot in certain destinations such as The Hawaii Movie and Television Book and New York: The Movie Lover’s Guide. Do an online search for more options.



■ Get in the mood

Before you head to your destination, be sure to rewatch the movie. A rewatch not only reminds you of identifiable spots to look out for during your trip, but it also adds to the excitement of your upcoming exploration.

If the movie is based on a book, considering reading the book, too. It may have details about the locale that the movie doesn’t touch on. Also, books often have scenes that don’t make it into the movie adaptations, which gives you

a deeper view of the destination. Ms. Tillson also recommended downloading the movie’s soundtrack or score, and listening to it throughout your trip.

■ Book a themed trip

Some travel companies sell itineraries focused on popular movies. Luxury tour operator Zicasso, for example, has an eight-day trip to Ireland inspired by “Star Wars: The Last Jedi” and Wild Frontiers has an 11-day trip to India inspired by “The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel.” Ms. Tillson suggested doing a web search or checking with a travel agent to find out about such trips.

Also, in some destinations, local tour operators and hotels sell movie-themed tours. For instance, The St. Regis Princeville Resort offers a tour that includes a private helicopter ride to Manawaipuna Falls, made famous in “Jurassic Park,” and an ATV tour of filming locations of movies such as “Raiders of the Lost Ark” and “Pirates of the Caribbean.” Lunch is even included. The cost is \$5,674 for two adults.

A more affordable option, in Rome, is the four-hour Roman Holiday themed excursion from HR Tours, where travelers ride a Vespa with a driver and see all the sites from the movie; the cost is 170 euros per person.

■ Hang where the movie crew did

When they’re not working, movie crews enjoy hitting local bars and casual restaurants that serve tasty local cuisine, Ms. Tillson said.

Find out where the behind-the-scenes staff of your film spent their time by asking your destination’s tourist board or your hotel’s concierge, and check out a few of the spots. “It’s another way to get entrenched in the film and spend time in bars and restaurants that you wouldn’t normally think to hit,” she said. (Source: The New York Times)

Potential RNA markers of abnormal heart rhythms identified in circulating blood

The irregular heart rhythm atrial fibrillation (AF) increases the risk of stroke and heart failure, but is often undiagnosed because of a lack of symptoms. Now, researchers have identified four short lengths of RNA (miRNAs) that show increased expression in the circulating blood of AF patients. These miRNAs could be used as potential biomarkers to predict the onset of AF disease.

Atrial fibrillation (AF) is a heart condition that causes an irregular, and often rapid, heart rate. It increases the risk of developing strokes, heart failure, and even dementia.

Although it can be associated with aging, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart valve problems, etc., about one-third of patients with AF have no symptoms until they suffer a stroke. Therefore, a means of identifying or predicting AF with the aim of starting preventative therapy is highly desirable.

AF is associated with several factors that maintain its progression, including inflammation, electrical disturbances, and structural changes in the heart's upper chambers (the atria).

Controlling gene expression

Moreover, several different short sequences of RNA known as microRNAs (miRNAs) have been linked with AF pathology. miRNAs control gene expression after the transcription stage, and have been suggested as possible markers for some cardiovascular diseases because of their stability in the bloodstream. However, it remains unknown whether the miRNAs shown to



be related to AF are suitable as predictive biomarkers of disease.

A team of researchers from Tokyo Medical and Dental University (TMDU)

addressed this issue by comparing miRNA expression in AF patients and healthy controls, and between control mice and those with a similar abnormal heart rhythm

Initially, human serum and mouse atrial tissue were screened for 733 and 672 miRNAs, respectively. These were eventually narrowed down to four by excluding non-detectable and non-specific miRNAs, and focusing on the quantification of their expression.

Super corals can help restore Great Barrier Reef by environmental change: study

Coral reefs are not simply lovely and cool — past Tourism dollars and rare plunging encounters, they give genuine utility to human culture. They give homes to about a fourth of the World's Fish, which numerous individuals depend on as a sustenance source. They can go about as an obstruction to rising Ocean levels, and they can shield coastlines from dissolving.

Be that as it may, because of all the carbon we've directed into the air, coral reefs are vanishing. Quick. Some portion of that is warm pressure, however CO2 can likewise impact coral's capacity to frame reefs in any case. Another examination gives us our first take a Gander at how much this influences a total reef biological community.

At the point when seas take up environmental carbon dioxide, they ferment. This thusly discourages the centralization of carbonate particles in the Water. At the point when there is a shortage of carbonate particles in seawater, coral reefs, made of carbonates, break down to reestablish the adjust. So it makes sense that expanding carbon dioxide stuck in an unfortunate situation for the Corals.

Genuine impacts

However, following the genuine impacts is strikingly testing. Trials have



been completed in controlled Research facility settings on secluded species yet not in the vast sea where the impacts of CO2 communicate with varieties in Light, Temperature, water stream rate, and the accessibility of Supplements.

Just in the vast sea would all be able

to of these variables be surveyed as one on the whole coral group. Our capacity to manage any Future harm to coral reefs relies on this learning.

A gathering of sea Life Researcher exploited the structure of a reef at One Tree Island in the southern Great Barrier Reef

to AF. They showed that four miRNAs not previously associated with AF were significantly upregulated in the serum of AF patients and diseased mice, indicating their potential use as AF biomarkers. The study results were recently published in Circulation Journal.

Initially, human serum and mouse atrial tissue were screened for 733 and 672 miRNAs, respectively. These were eventually narrowed down to four by excluding non-detectable and non-specific miRNAs, and focusing on the quantification of their expression.

Underlying mechanism of miRNA

"One of the miRNAs, miR-214-3p, is implicated in inflammation, so we wondered whether this might be the underlying mechanism of miRNA-induced AF pathology," first author Yu Natsume says. "We compared miRNA expression with levels of a serum inflammatory factor but found no correlation suggestive of an association."

Statistical analysis of diagnostic ability showed that miR-214-3p and miR-342-5p had the highest accuracy as individual biomarkers at predicting AF, but that a combined analysis of all four miRNAs slightly improved this accuracy.

The "same two miRNAs showed increased expression in a subset of patients with intermittent AF and another subset with chronic AF," corresponding author Tetsuo Sasano says. "The increases were in comparison both with healthy controls of the same age and young healthy controls, suggesting these miRNAs may predict AF regardless of the age of the individual."

(Source: Science Daily)

to set up an Investigation in a generally indigenous habitat.

At low tide, water streams over this reef from a higher tidal Pond to a lower one. The specialists percolated CO2 through a tank they set in the higher tidal pond to build the convergence of carbon dioxide in the seawater streaming over the reef, conveying it to levels anticipated to happen not long from now.

Coral reef

They at that point estimated the rate of coral reef calcification — i.e. the development of more reef—at a few destinations after the treated water ignored it. This was contrasted with rates estimated before the examination.

CO2 advancement brought down the coral reef's net group calcification by 34 percent contrasted with foundation. Past research facility tests had assessed the calcification affectability of corals to be in the vicinity of 15 and 28 percent.

The analysts who led this examination propose that their new outcomes may demonstrate a bigger effect as a result of the nearness of crustose coralline green growth in the biological system, which can adjust the adjust of carbonate particles.

(Source: weekfacts.com)

Bank Mellat releases 134 prisoners for unintentional crimes

On the occasion of advent of Iranian New Year in 1397 (to start March 21, 2018), Bank Mellat freed a number of 134 prisoners who were imprisoned for unintentional crimes, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

For this purpose, Bank Mellat inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Iranian Blood Money Headquarters.

The Memorandum of Understanding was inked between Chief Executive of Bank Mellat Dr. Mohammad Bigdeli and



Eng. Seyed Asadollah Joulaei Managing Director of Iranian Blood Money Headquarters, based on which, Bank Mellat allocated 20 billion rials worth of money for freeing 134 prisoners who have imprisoned for unintentional crimes.

Given the above issue, Bank Mellat deposited the amount into the account of Iranian Blood Money Headquarters.

However, Bank Mellat took giant steps in this regard and managed to release unintentional prisoners, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank concluded.

SHATEL Co. Mobile SIM Cards to Become Nationwide in All Network Technologies

Chief Executive of SHATEL Company Arash Karim-Beygi revealed the implementation of necessary technical measures for establishing nationwide coverage of SHATEL Mobile SIM cards throughout the country and in all technologies of mobile phone networks.

According to the Public Relations Dept.

of the company, nationwide coverage of mobile phone network for SHATEL's SIM cards will be spread throughout the country at the unsparing support of the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (ICT), chief executive of RighTel Company, Telecommunications Company of Iran and Hamrah Avval.

The senior official of the company said that SIM cards of mobile will be used in all parts of the country in various generations of G2, G3, G4, and G4.5 easily, he maintained.

Earlier, SIM cards of SHATEL Mobile were usable in 3-G and 4-G in about 580 cities of the country.

Of the salient capabilities and advantages

of these SIM cards, it should be referred to transferring the remaining package of internet depending on the next period, lack of restriction of time of using a part of package purchased in special hours of a day, special tariff of free internet services, etc., the Public Relations Dept. of the company concluded.

Production of 90% of Agricultural Produce Using Hydroponics: KWPA CEO

Chief Executive of Khuzestan Water and Power Authority (KWPA) Mohammad-Reza Shamsaei said that 90 percent of agricultural products of this province is produced using irrigated cultivation or hydroponics.

Islamic Republic of Iran is ranked 5th in the world in terms of irrigated farming land in a way that 90 percent (90%) of agricultural products of the country is produced using irrigated farming or hydroponics.

Speaking in 5th Nationwide Seminar on Irrigation and Drainage Networks Management, held in Ahvaz on Monday, and 3rd National Iran Irrigation and Drainage Congress, he said, "according to

the international standards, we should not use more than 40% of renewable resources."

Given the above issue, it is a matter of regret to say that approx. 74 percent of resources of the country are reused in a way that about 90 percent of this figure takes place in the agricultural sector, he maintained.

He put the inlet water input to ponds of this province over the past 15 years at about 32 billion cubic meters per annum, he said, adding, "since it is for many years that the country is grappling with drought, the average long term of this figure has hit about 26 billion cubic meters."

Khuzestan Province is a warm and dry

region in the country, he said and reiterated, "lands in Khuzestan Province can be cultivated for three times in a year normally."

This province is home to three ponds and 55 agricultural plains, he said, adding, "50 percent of current water reservoirs of the country exists in this southern province while 50 percent of which has been spread in other regions of the country."

He pointed to the construction of meteorological and hydrometric stations as salient measures taken by the company in the past year in 1395 (ended March 20, 2017) and said, "about 100 other stations have been added to the current stations in recent four years."



Brains of ancient sea monster found by scientists

Five-hundred-and-twenty-million years ago, a primitive and bizarre sea-predator known as Kerygmachela kierkegaardi roamed the seas in what is now North Greenland. The ancient arthropod — invertebrate animals with an exoskeleton and segmented body—had 11 pairs of flaps for swimming, two long appendages on its head and a long, spiky tail.

But it's another aspect of the animal's strange anatomy that has been the focus of a new study published in the Nature Communications journal.

Jakob Vinther — a lecturer in Macroevolution at the University of Bristol — and colleagues, describe the discovery of 15 fossilized K. kierkegaardi brains, which were found in North Greenland during expeditions conducted in 2011, 2016 and 2017.

Not only are the half-billion-year-old, well-preserved brains some of the oldest ever found, but they also shine a light on the evolutionary history of the organ in animals.

The researchers found the brain of K. kierkegaardi is composed of just a single segment unlike the more complex human brain — which has two segments — or the three-segmented brains of the animal's distant arthropod relatives — such as spiders, butterflies and lobsters.

This contradicts what many scientists previously thought: that the ancestor of all vertebrates and arthropods had brains with three segments.

The findings show that the "animal brain evolved to become large and complex" in independent sectors of the animal kingdom — arthropods and vertebrates, for example.

K. kierkegaardi's primitive eyes also provide intriguing insights into arthropod evolution, researchers said.

(Source: Newsweek)

Salmonella cases linked to kratom are increasing, CDC says

There's been an increase in the number of patients who've become ill with salmonella because of products containing kratom, a Southeast Asian plant.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 47 more individuals have contracted illnesses, bringing the total to 87 cases across 35 states.



For the uninitiated, kratom may come in the form of pills, capsules, or powders made from ground plant leaves. It is often used to treat pain and as an opioid substitute to ease withdrawal symptoms among addiction patients.

The illnesses accounted for include those who started between Jan. 21, 2017 up to Feb. 24, 2018, the CDC says. It affects a wide range of individuals, from six-year-olds to 67-year-olds. More than half of the affected individuals are male. Fortunately, there have been no reports of deaths due to the salmonella outbreak.

Symptoms of salmonella can start occurring between 12 to 72 hours after a person is affected. Symptoms may include diarrhea, abdominal cramps, and fever. The symptoms may last for up to a week, and the individual might not report it to a physician immediately, which is why there's a delay in pinpointing new cases, according to the CDC.

"Illnesses that occurred after February 20, 2018, might not yet be reported due to the time it takes between when a person becomes ill with Salmonella and when the illness is reported. This takes an average of two to four weeks," the CDC said.

Most individuals, when affected, are able to later recover without treatment. However, young people, very old people, or those with weak immune systems are at risk of contracting serious complications and severe illness.

For now, the CDC advises against consumption of Kratom in any form as officials investigate the issue. Health investigators are trying to determine where people purchased their kratom from and are sending supplement samples for further testing.

(Source: Tech Times)

The first SpaceX BFR should make orbital launches by 2020

Elon Musk has a reputation for pushing the envelop and making bold declarations. In 2002, he founded SpaceX with the intention of making spaceflight affordable through entirely reusable rockets. In April of 2014, his company achieved success with the first successful recovery of a Falcon 9 first stage. And in February of this year, his company successfully launched its Falcon Heavy and managed to recover two of the three boosters.

But above and beyond Musk's commitment to reusability, there is also his longer-term plans to use his proposed Big Falcon Rocket (BFR) to explore and colonize Mars. The topic of when this rocket will be ready to conduct launches was the subject of a recent interview between Musk and famed director Jonathon Nolan, which took place at the 2018 South by Southwest Conference (SXSW) in Austin, Texas.

During the interview, Musk reiterated his earlier statements that test flights would begin in 2019 and an orbital launch of the full BFR and Big Falcon Spaceship (BFS) would take place by 2020. And while this might seem like a very optimistic prediction (something Musk is famous for), this timeline does not seem entirely implausible given his company's work on the necessary components and their success with reusability.

To break it down, the BFR — formerly known as the Interplanetary Transport System — consists of a massive first stage booster and an equally massive second stage/spaceship (the BFS). Once the spacecraft is launched, the second stage would detach and use its thrusters to assume a parking orbit around Earth. The first stage would then guide itself back to its launchpad, take on a propellant tanker, and return to orbit.

(Source: Universe Today)

Shutting down EU ivory trade is a ‘personal priority’ for Boris Johnson

A government minister has promised that the UK will lead a fight to shut down the ivory trade in the EU, describing the issue as “a personal priority” for the foreign secretary Boris Johnson.

Speaking at a conservation summit in Botswana, the Africa minister, Harriet Baldwin, said: “The UK will lead by example. We will be shutting down our ivory trade. We will be working



a call for the EU to close its domestic ivory market, end all ivory exports and work towards a global ban.

“If the EU gives us money to train rangers but still allows the exit of the trophies to the EU, that to me is a hypocrisy,” said Botswana’s environment minister, Tshekedi Khama.

“Let’s stop the flowery approach that says: I’ve ticked a box and I look good. I’ve given so much, but I’m still allowing you African range states to be challenged by poachers because I haven’t closed the European gates.”

As the conference opened, the EU announced €1.5m of funding for a trans-frontier wildlife law enforcement network intended to cut poaching across Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe by 50% within three years.

Between 20-30,000 African elephants are killed by poachers every year and while the pace of slaughter is thought to be slowing in the continent’s east, it continues apace in central Africa and in new hotspots such as northern Mozambique.

In October, the UK will be hosting a conference aimed at tackling the illegal wildlife trade.

Baldwin said British foreign secretary Boris Johnson had made the issue “a personal priority, and is dedicated to ending the illegal ivory trade. He wants 2018 to be the year that real changes are made.”

She added that Johnson was “particularly excited by your proposals to create a cross border safe space for wildlife,” she added. “Ambitious ideas like this are what is needed if real change is going to be achieved.”

The UK was itself the world’s largest legal ivory exporter between 2010-2015 but finally bowed to calls for a national ivory ban last October, albeit with some significant exemptions.

(Source: The Guardian)

LEARN ENGLISH

Parts of a Hospital

Jordan: Excuse me, my wife was brought into the hospital about two hours ago, but I can’t find her.

Admissions Clerk: Why was she brought into the hospital?

Jordan: I’m not sure. I got a call from her coworker, but she didn’t give me any details.

Admissions Clerk: If it weren’t an accident, then she wouldn’t be in the **emergency room** or the **trauma unit**.

Jordan: It may have been her heart. She has a **heart condition**.

Admissions Clerk: Then she might be in the **cardiology** department. If she is in severe condition, she’ll be in the **ICU**.

Jordan: It may also be the baby. She’s pregnant.

Admissions Clerk: Then she might be in the **obstetrics** and **gynecology** department. And if the baby has been born, it would be in the **neonatal** unit.

Jordan: I’m just not sure where to go. Maybe I’ll start in the cardiology department.

Admissions Clerk: That’s fine. Go past the **neurology** and **oncology** departments and it’s on your right. If you see the burn unit, then you’ve gone too far.

Jordan: You can’t **look her up** for me to see if she’s been **admitted**?

Admissions Clerk: I’m sorry, but our computer systems **are down** right now. If you wait until they’re up again, I can try to find her for you.

Jordan: And **go out of my mind** worrying? No thanks. I’m going to find her, even if I have to look behind every **bedpan**!

■ Key vocabulary

emergency room: a part of a hospital that immediately helps people who have been hurt in an accident or who are extremely ill; ER
trauma unit: a hospital equipped and staffed to provide care for patients suffering from major traumatic injuries such as falls, motor vehicle collisions, or gunshot wounds
heart condition: a medical condition affecting the operation of the heart

cardiology: the branch of medicine that deals with the diagnosis and treatment of diseases and disorders of the heart
ICU: intensive care unit; a department in a hospital that gives special attention and treatment to people who are very sick or badly injured

obstetrics: the part of medical science that deals with the birth of children
gynecology: the study and treatment of medical conditions and illnesses that affect only women, and usually relating to a woman’s ability to have babies

neonatal: relating to babies that have just been born
neurology: the scientific study of the nervous system and its diseases

oncology: the part of medical science that deals with cancer and tumors
burn unit: a ward or part thereof in which beds are used exclusively for treating patients with significant burns

look something up: if you look up information in a book, on a computer etc., you try to find it there

admit: if people at a hospital admit someone, that person is taken in to be given treatment, tests, or care

the systems are down: the computers, software, etc. are not working properly

go out of your mind: to become mentally ill or very worried, bored etc.

bedpan: a low wide container used as a toilet by someone who is too ill to get out of bed

(Source: eslpod.com)

Increased tax on cigarette to improve public health

SOCIETY

d e s k

TEHRAN

— The increased tax on cigarette will generate 8 trillion rials (nearly \$180 million) in the next [Iranian calendar] year 1397 (March 2018–March 2019) which will be invested in boosting public health, said the deputy health minister Ebrahim Golmakani.

Majlis [the Iranian parliament] adopted a law in February to increase tax on cigarettes by 20 percent of their retail price. Accordingly, the price of each locally produced cigarette will increase by 75 rials (0.16 cents) and jointly produced cigarettes and imported ones will experience 150 rials (0.33 cents) and 600 rials (1.3 cents) hike in prices, respectively.

The revenue earned from this increased taxation will be spent on different health related issues such as reducing and combating cigarette consumption, developing education and awareness towards tobacco dangers and promoting getting enough exercise, IRNA quoted Golmakani as saying on Saturday.

The price of cigarette in Iran is one of the cheapest in the world, he regretted.

Many researches demonstrate that the low price of cigarette is one of the major incentives to its consumption, the official added.

One of the most effective tools to reduce tobacco use is increasing their price and levying heavy taxes on them, he emphasized.



The deputy health minister went on to say that cigarettes damage public health and especially the youth and the country should move towards lowering its consumption rate.

Some officials express criticism against this tax hike and consider it as a cause for increasing smuggling and harming employment and domestic production, he regretted, adding, “Public welfare is the main priority

and it should never be overshadowed.”

Golmakani also touched on the fact that the amount of tax proposed by the administration for cigarettes was significantly higher than what was adopted by Majlis.

This is a minor step in improving public welfare, he said, adding, “We hope that this tax would be revised and reach the global tax rates so that high price of cigarette would become a deterrent to smoking.”

‘Iran ready to boost health co-op with Mexico’

SOCIETY

d e s k

TEHRAN

— In a meeting with the president of Mexico’s health commission

Senator Salvador López Brito on Saturday, the Iranian ambassador to Mexico Mohammad Taqi Hosseini expressed Iran’s readiness to enhance cooperation between the two countries in the health sector.

Referring to Iran’s achievements in drug manufacturing, Hosseini highlighted that Iran is ready to produce

drugs and vaccines in Mexico, IRNA reported.

López Brito, for his part, said that Mexico welcomes cooperation with Iran in all fields.

He went on to say that many international pharmaceutical companies are active in Mexico. However, the country wants to make this market more competitive so that price of drugs to be pushed down and all the people can easily access their required drugs.



Iran’s Ambassador to Mexico Mohammad Taqi Hosseini (L) meets the president of Mexico’s health commission Senator Salvador López Brito

Climate change could wipe out half of all plant and animal species from the Amazon

More than half of the wildlife in the world’s most biodiverse areas could face extinction by the end of the century if efforts are not stepped up to combat climate change, according to a new report.

The study, conducted by the World Wildlife Fund, University of East Anglia and the James Cook University, warns rising temperatures could have a disastrous impact on areas such as the Amazon, Galapagos islands and Madagascar, as well as European coasts and the Caribbean.

Researchers examined the impact of climate change on nearly 80,000 species of plants and animals in 35 of the world’s most naturally rich areas.

They explored three different climate change futures: a 2C rise in global temperatures – the threshold set out in the Paris Climate Agreement, a 3.2C rise – predicted for the end of the century, and a 4.5C increase – the forecast outcome if carbon emissions continue to rise unchecked.

The study suggests a global mean temperature rise of 4.5C would have a devastating impact on plants and animals, with the Amazon at risk of losing 69% of its plant species.

A temperature rise of 3.2C could lead to the loss of almost 50% of animal species in the Amazon.

Around 60% of all species would be at risk of local extinction in Madagascar – an island nation famed for its diverse wildlife – and up to 80% of mammals could



be wiped out in the Miombo Woodlands in southern Africa.

Increased average temperatures and associated phenomena such as erratic weather would also have a catastrophic impact, the study warns, with significantly less rainfall in the Mediterranean, Madagascar and the the Cerrado-Pantanal in Argentina.

This could lead to pressure on the water supplies of African elephants, which need to drink around 150-300 liters of water a day.

Rising sea-levels could also submerge the breeding grounds of tigers in the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world, situated on the coastline of India and Bangladesh.

Lead researcher Professor Rachel Warren, of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research at UEA, said: “Our research quantifies the benefits of limiting global warming to 2°C for species in 35 of the world’s most wildlife-rich areas.

“We studied 80,000 species of plants, mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians and found that 50% of species could be lost from these areas without climate policy.

“However, if global warming is limited to 2°C above pre-industrial levels, this could be reduced to 25%.

“Limiting warming to within 1.5°C was not explored, but would be expected to protect even more wildlife.”

The research was published ahead of Earth Hour, the world’s largest environmental event, in the journal Climatic Change.

Tanya Steele, chief executive of WWF, said: “Within our children’s lifetime, places like the Amazon and Galapagos Islands could become unrecognisable, with half the species that live there wiped out by human-caused climate change.

“Around the world, beautiful iconic animals like Amur tigers or Javan rhinos are at risk of disappearing, as well as tens of thousands plants and smaller creatures that are the foundation of all life on earth.

“That is why this Earth Hour we are asking everyone to make a promise for the planet and make the everyday changes to protect our planet.”

(Source: Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → چ

Some 6,800 clinics charge patients less than \$1 a visit: health minister

There are some 6,800 clinics nationwide in underprivileged districts which charge patients less than \$1 for medical fees, the Iranian health minister said on Tuesday.

Hassan Qazizadeh-Hashemi made the remarks over a meeting in Tehran chamber of commerce, industries, mines and agriculture here on Tuesday, Tasnim news agency reported.

These clinics are financed by the government and the patients pay a fee of less than \$1 instead of normal fee of some \$10, Qazizadeh-Hashemi noted.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-fold”

■ **Meaning:** a particular number of times

■ **For example:** The value of the house has increased **fourfold**.

PHRASAL VERB

Gear up

■ **Meaning:** to prepare for something

■ **For example:** Fast food restaurants are geared up to serve thousands of people daily.

IDIOM

Too big for one’s boots

■ **Explanation:** a person who is getting too big for their boots is behaving as if they were more important than they really are

■ **For example:** Tom’s really getting too big for his boots since he got a promotion - he hardly says hello anymore!

U.S., British, French forces directly involved in Syria war: Russia FM

Syria intercepts Ghouta-bound U.S., British arms

1→ is "illegitimate" from the standpoint of international law and the United Nations Charter.

"But we are realistic and understand that we wouldn't fight with them. So we coordinate actions at least to prevent unintended clashes," said Lavrov.

Moscow, he added, is in "permanent dialogue" with the U.S. General Staff commanders and communications officers "who actually lead the operation on the ground."

Lavrov also condemned attacks on the Syrian forces and their allies in the U.S.-controlled areas, which he said take place despite repeated pledges that the U.S. military's presence in Syria is aimed "exclusively" at fighting terrorists.

He denounced as "absolutely irresponsible" remarks by the U.S. ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley, who said last week that Washington was ready to unilaterally "act" against Syria just as it did last year when it bombed a Syrian government air base over allegations of a chemical weapons attack.

In line with the U.S., France and Britain have also said they would consider strikes on Syria if such gas attack claims are proven.

On Monday, Syria's envoy to the UN Bashar al-Ja'afari slammed the new U.S. military threats, saying Haley's comments are aimed at provoking a chemical attack by terrorists and fabricating evidence against Damascus.

The U.S. and its allies back militants fighting to topple the Syrian government. They have been bombarding what they call ISIL positions inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a UN mandate.

The strikes, however, have on many occasions resulted in civilian casualties and failed to fulfill their declared aim of countering terrorism.

Russia is also militarily involved in Syria, where its air force has been providing air cover to the Syrian army's ground operations against terrorists upon the Damascus



government's official request.

■ Syria intercepts Ghouta-bound U.S., British arms

Meantime, the Syrian army has intercepted a truckload of weapons, including American and British ones, heading to the militants holed up in Eastern Ghouta amid its operation to liberate the Damascus suburb.

Russia's Sputnik news agency cited an intelligence source on Friday as reporting the development, and incorporated a video featuring the intercepted weapons laid out on the ground.

The Syrian army stopped the truck, acting on an intelligence tip-off.

"We organized an ambush, as a result of which a large truck carrying ammunition and weapons has been intercepted; some of the equipment is made in America. Also there

were medicines and equipment for satellite communication there. All this was intended for militants in Ghouta," the source said.

The footage featured smoke grenades bearing the inscription "Salisbury England."

The successful operation, the source said, would deal yet another blow to the militants, who are on the back foot in the face of Syrian army advances.

According to the agency, the army had carried out a similar interception a few days earlier.

Multiple militant groups are controlling Eastern Ghouta, using the countryside to launch deadly attack against the capital.

Syrian armed forces, backed by the Russian air force, have been engaged in an operation to free the region.

During their advances, the Syrian forces

have, on several occasions, uncovered workshops there used for making chemical weapons.

■ Civilians' plight

Also on Friday, an AFP report showed how militants would gamble with civilian lives in Eastern Ghouta.

Syria and Russia have set up four humanitarian corridors, through which tens of thousands of civilians have in recent days fled to safe government-controlled areas.

Civilians fleeing through the Hush Nasri corridor described how militants would prevent their departure to use them as human shields.

One man said, "They fired at us, they did not want us to flee at all, they fired at the car wheels so that we could not flee."

(Source: Press TV)

Ex-FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe fired two days shy of his retirement

1→ But Friday's termination could place a portion of his anticipated pension, earned after more than two decades of service, in significant jeopardy.

The origin of his dramatic fall stems from an internal review conducted by Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz. That report -- the details of which have not been publicly released -- is said to conclude that McCabe misled investigators about his role in directing other officials at the FBI to speak to The Wall Street Journal about his involvement in a public corruption investigation into the Clinton Foundation, according to a source briefed on it.

CNN reported on Wednesday that the findings in Horowitz's report on McCabe were referred to the FBI's Office of Professional Responsibility, staffed with career officials, who recommended McCabe's termination. McCabe, accompanied by his lawyer, tried making a last-ditch effort on Thursday to avoid the firing, meeting with officials at the deputy attorney general's office at the Justice Department for several hours while Sessions was traveling, but to no avail.

"After an extensive and fair investigation and according to Department of Justice procedure, the Department's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) provided its report on allegations of misconduct by Andrew McCabe to the FBI's Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR)," Sessions said in a statement late Friday. "The FBI's OPR then reviewed the report and underlying documents and issued a disciplinary proposal recommending the dismissal of Mr. McCabe. Both the OIG and FBI OPR reports concluded that Mr. McCabe had made an unauthorized disclosure to the news media and lacked candor? including under oath? on multiple occasions."

Horowitz's office is continuing to investigate how the Justice Department and FBI handled sensitive investigations leading up to the 2016 presidential election -- including the probe into Hillary Clinton's private email server -- and a more global report is expected this spring. That closely watched report, which Trump has derided as "already late," could prove devastating for former and current top officials at the Justice Department and FBI depending on the findings, as the President has sought to weave a narrative of biased "deep state" holdovers from the Obama administration determined to undermine his presidency.



McCabe alleged that the report's release was sped up "only after" his testimony suggested that he would corroborate Comey's accounts of his conversations with Trump.

"Here is the reality: I am being singled out and treated this way because of the role I played, the actions I took, and the events I witnessed in the aftermath of the firing of James Comey," McCabe said in a statement. "The OIG's focus on me and this report became a part of an unprecedented effort by the Administration, driven by the President himself, to remove me from my position, destroy my reputation, and possibly strip

me of a pension that I worked 21 years to earn. The accelerated release of the report, and the punitive actions taken in response, make sense only when viewed through this lens."

A representative for McCabe said he learned from a press release that he had been fired by Sessions. A Justice Department spokesperson pushed back, saying, "Mr. McCabe and his attorney were informed in advance of any news media."

McCabe's representative said he received an email on his FBI account shortly before the Justice Department notified the media, but he was not regularly checking that account, since he was on leave from duties at the bureau.

While former FBI officials say a lack of candor is a death knell for an agent's career, Sessions' decision to fire McCabe presented unique political complications.

Trump often used McCabe as a political punching bag on the campaign trail given his wife's purported past ties to Clinton -- going so far as heckling Sessions over the summer for failing to fire McCabe -- despite the fact that Trump had interviewed McCabe just weeks prior about serving as FBI director after he ousted James Comey. In December, Trump made a cryptic reference to McCabe's approaching retirement, tweeting: "FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe is racing the clock to retire with full benefits. 90 days to go?!!!"

The full implications of McCabe's firing on his pension remain to be seen, but he could potentially stand to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars. Retirement benefits for federal employees are based on several variables in employment history, but McCabe's salary is not public and the FBI declined to release it to CNN.

(Source: CNN)

Taliban suicide bomber targets foreign contractors in Kabul

A Taliban suicide car bomber has detonated explosives near to a compound for foreign security contractors in the Afghan capital, Kabul, officials said.

At least three civilians were killed and two others wounded, with no casualties among the security contractors, when the bomb exploded in Kabul's Police District Nine, interior ministry spokesperson Najid Danish told Al Jazeera.

The Taliban immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, which occurred during Saturday morning rush hour.

The attack comes days after General John Nicholson, the top United States commander in Afghanistan, said that the security of the country would be "the main effort" for international forces helping Afghan security forces.

The Taliban and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group have launched a series of deadly attacks across the country, killing at least 200 people in Kabul alone since the beginning of 2018, according to an Al Jazeera tally.

President Ashraf Ghani called for a ceasefire last month and also explored a possibility of the Taliban group becoming a political party, if they accept the peace deal unconditionally.

There was no official response from the Taliban to Ghani's invitation to talks. The Taliban, however, invited the U.S. officials to its political office in Qatar to discuss a "peaceful solution" to end the bloodshed in Afghanistan.

The group also said that departure of American troops from Afghanistan remains a precondition for the group's talks offer.

But James Mattis, the U.S. defense secretary, said on Tuesday during an unannounced visit to Kabul that the elements of the Taliban are open to talks with the Afghan government.

In December, General John W. Nicholson Jr of the U.S. Army said his country would deploy more troops in an advisory role to Afghan forces in 2018, on top of the 14,000 American soldiers already stationed in the country.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Saudi regime meddling in Lebanon's affairs, pitting people against each other: Hezbollah official

A senior official of the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement has accused the House of Saud regime officials of interfering in Lebanon's domestic affairs and pitting people from various walks of life against each other.

"Saudi Arabia's latest interference in Lebanon's internal affairs is embodied in meddling in the country's upcoming parliamentary elections. Saudi interventions are pitting the Lebanese against each other, and creating divisions and political tensions among them," Deputy Chairman of Hezbollah's Executive Council Sheikh Nabil Qaouq said on Saturday.

He added, "Saudi Arabia wishes to change Lebanon's political equations through interfering in the elections, collecting information about composition of future electoral lists and supporting candidates that could challenge Hezbollah."

Commenting on the ongoing military drills between the United States and Israeli armies in the southern areas of occupied Palestinian territories, the senior Hezbollah official pointed out that "the maneuver officially documents Israel's recognition of the fact that Hezbollah can reach the depth of Israel, and that Israel has no ability to confront the resistance movement" rockets."

He stressed that Hezbollah is now the main obstacle to Israel's expansionist policies in the Middle East region.

On October 30 last year, the Saudi regime Minister of State for Persian Gulf Affairs Thamer al-Sabhan issued threats against Lebanon's government as well as Iran and Hezbollah via Twitter, stating that the movement needed to be "toppled" in Lebanon.

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

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

On November 4, 2017, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced his resignation in a televised statement from Saudi Arabia, citing many reasons, including the security situation in Lebanon, for his sudden decision. He also said that he sensed a plot being hatched against his life.

He returned to Beirut on November 21. All political factions in Lebanon had called on him to return back home.

Top Lebanese officials and senior politicians close to Hariri had earlier said that he had been forced to resign, and that Saudi authorities were holding him captive.

Lebanese President Michel Aoun had also refused to accept Hariri's resignation.

(Source: Press TV)

Myanmar leader's Australia visit draws protests

Activists have staged a protest in the Australian city of Sydney against a visit by Myanmar's Leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minority in her country.

More than 100 angry protesters gathered in Hyde Park in Sydney on Saturday, demonstrating against Suu Kyi's participation at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) special meeting.

Australia's Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull said on Friday that he would raise the issue of the Rohingya crisis with Suu Kyi during her three-day visit.

During the Saturday protest, a spokesperson for Australian Rohingya community urged the ASEAN leaders to help "find a durable and humane solution" to the Rohingya crisis.

"We hope that the ASEAN leaders, including Australian government will take the right decision to defend human rights and to work continuously with Myanmar leaders and with Rohingya leaders to include them in the discussion to find a durable and humane solution. Not just what suits them," Sujauddin Karimuddin said.

Backed by Myanmar's government and Buddhist mobs, the Myanmar's military launched a deadly crackdown against minority Rohingya Muslims in the western state of Rakhine in late 2016. It intensified that campaign in August last year.

Only in its first month, the clampdown, called by the UN and prominent rights group an "ethnic cleansing campaign," killed some 6,700 Rohingya Muslims, including more than 700 children, according to Doctors Without Borders (MSF/Médecins Sans Frontières).

About 700,000 Rohingya Muslims have also fled Rakhine to neighboring Bangladesh since August last year.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. training Syria militants for false flag chemical attacks: Russian cmdr.

A high-ranking Russian military commander has warned that the United States is training foreign-sponsored Takfiri terrorists in the hope that they would launch false flag chemical attacks in southern Syria to provide a pretext for Washington to carry out airstrikes on Syrian government troops and infrastructure.

"We have reliable information at our disposal that U.S. instructors have trained a number of militant groups in the vicinity of the town of At-Tanf to stage provocations involving chemical warfare agents in southern Syria," Russian General Staff spokesman General Sergey Rudskoy said at a news briefing in Moscow on Saturday.

He added, "Early in March, the saboteur groups were deployed to the southern de-escalation zone to the city of Dara'a, where the units of the so-called Free Syrian Army are stationed."

"They are preparing a series of chemical munitions explosions. This fact will be used to blame government forces. The components to produce chemical munitions have been already delivered to the southern de-escalation zone under the guise of humanitarian convoys of a number of NGOs," Rudskoy commented.

The senior Russian military official further noted that the planned provocations would be widely covered in Western media outlets, and would ultimately be used as a pretext by the U.S.-led coalition to launch strikes on Syria.

Rudskoy warned that another false flag chemical attack was being prepared in Syria's northern province of Idlib by members of the Jabhat Fateh al-Sham Takfiri terrorist group, formerly known as al-Nusra Front, in coordination with the White Helmets.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. Senate warns Russia of sanctions if S-400 sold to any foreign nations

A group of the United States lawmakers led by Senator Bob Menendez told the State Department in a letter that any sale of Russian S-400 air defense system should lead to new punitive measures as stipulated in the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

"We are writing today to specifically inquire about reported negotiations between Russia and certain countries over sales of the Russian government's S-400 air defense system and whether these reported deals could trigger mandatory CAATSA sanctions," the letter said on Friday. "Under any circumstance, a S-400 sale would be considered a 'significant transaction' and we expect that any sale would result in designations."

The lawmakers also requested that the State Department provide detailed analysis on the current status of Russian S-400 talks with China, Turkey, India, the House of Saud regime, Qatar, and any other country.

The senators based their letter on a report produced by the Congressional Research Service, which showed that

Russia has been working on potential defense deals with different countries.

Menendez and co-signers demanded information on how the State Department is trying to prevent the sales of S-400 being finalized and reiterated Washington's accusations of Russia's aggression in Ukraine and meddling in democratic process in foreign states.

The request comes just a day after the Treasury Department used the CAATSA legislation, along with an Executive Order that was amended by CAATSA, to impose sanctions on five entities and 19 individuals.

Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), Main Intelligence Directorate and six Russian individuals were sanctioned under the CAATSA legislation.

The U.S. Congress passed CAATSA last summer in response to allegations that Russia sought to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Trump signed it into law on August 2.

Russia has repeatedly denied all allegations of interference in the US election, calling the accusations "absurd."

(Source: Sputnik)

Sharapova withdraws from Miami Open with injury

Maria Sharapova’s troubled start to the season has continued with the Russian having to withdraw from the Miami Open due to a left forearm injury, tournament organizers said on Friday.

The five-time grand slam winner and former world number one has failed to rediscover her best form after returning from a doping ban last year and split with coach Sven Groeneveld following a first-round exit at the BNP Paribas Open last week.

The loss in California marked the first time that Sharapova, whose 15-month ban for taking the banned drug meldonium ended last April, had lost three consecutive matches since 2003.

“I am really sorry that I have to withdraw from one of my favorite tournaments with my left forearm injury. I am doing everything possible to return to the tour as soon as possible,” Sharapova said in a statement.

The 30-year-old, who has yet to win a title this year, will be replaced by American Jennifer Brady in the Miami tournament, which is scheduled for March 21 to April 1.

“We were looking forward to seeing her play Wednesday, but unfortunately injuries are part of the game. We hope she recovers quickly and is back on the court soon,” Tournament Director James Blake said.

Top men’s players, including Rafa Nadal, Stan Wawrinka and Dominic Thiem, have also withdrawn due to injuries.

Despite the pull outs, the event still boasts a strong field including world number ones Simona Halep and Roger Federer. *(Source: Reuters)*

Villarreal defender Semedo denied bail on attempted murder charge

Villarreal defender Ruben Semedo had an appeal for bail rejected as he awaits trial on a number of charges, including attempted murder.

Semedo was arrested last month and was also charged with “illegal detention, illegal possession of weapons and robbery with violence”. He denies the allegations.

A judge at Valencia’s Superior Court of Justice turned down an appeal for bail made by the Portugal Under-21 international’s lawyer on Thursday due to “an obvious risk to the integrity” of the alleged victim, while casting doubt on the version of events presented by the accused via video conference from prison in Picasent.

Villarreal have suspended Semedo without pay. They signed the defender from Sporting CP in a €14million deal last June but he has only made five appearances this season.

(Source: Goal)

Messi: I´m a less selfish player

Lionel Messi believes he has become more of a team player than he was earlier in his career.

The Barcelona superstar has been in typically incredible form this season, scoring 34 goals in all competitions for Ernesto Valverde’s LaLiga leaders.

Three of those came over the course of a 4-1 aggregate victory against Chelsea in the last-16 of the Champions League that concluded with a 3-0 win at Camp Nou this week, where Messi also supplied a wonderful assist for Ousmane Dembele.

In an interview with America TV’s La Cornisa programme, the 30-year-old explained he has given greater attention to the latter side of his game over recent years.

“Before, I tried to steal the ball and make my play,” he said. “Now, I try to make the team play more, pass the ball more and not be so defining or selfish.

“I try to move the team from another position. I run the same as I always did, but in a different way.”

Barca host Athletic Bilbao on Sunday, protecting an eight-point advantage over Atletico Madrid at LaLiga’s summit, and have been drawn against Roma in the quarter-finals of the Champions League.

(Source: Daily Star)

People listen to idiots, Mourinho

During a remarkable news conference on Friday, Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho turned his ire on the pundits who dismissed the threat posed by Sevilla in the Champions League.

Some media commentators wrote off Vincenzo Montella’s side before the round-of-16 tie, former United and Chelsea player Ray Wilkins notably claiming the Andalusian team, who won the Europa League three times in succession between 2014 and 2016 and are fifth in LaLiga, would struggle to avoid relegation were they to play in the Premier League.

In an impassioned and wide-ranging confrontation with journalists, Mourinho made no attempt to hide his disgust at those who underestimated the Copa del Rey finalists, Sevilla having won 2-1 at Old Trafford on Tuesday to progress to the last eight, where they will face Bayern Munich.

The United boss said: “Do you think Sevilla do not have players that would play direct in my team?

“I cannot name them, because if I name them, their agents will jump of happiness. In Sevilla, there are many players that will play in my team.

“So the fans, they read what people write, they listen to what people say. And the people that write and the people that say are people with a lot of ideas. I used to call people with a lot of ideas idealists or idiots. They can be both.

“In my dictionary, which is the dictionary of life, the people, they listen to the ideologists and they also listen to the idiots.”

Having this week emphasized United’s poor recent record in the Champions League, Mourinho strongly denied suggestions he has encouraged supporters to lower their standards.

“The fans have to be sad about being out and the players have to learn to cope with that level of expectation, that level of pressure,” he said.

(Source: Guardian)

VAR will be used at Russia World Cup, says FIFA

Video assistant referees (VARs) will be used at the World Cup for the first time in this year’s finals in Russia, FIFA president Gianni Infantino said on Friday, and teams will be allowed a fourth substitute in matches that go to extra-time.

The use of the VAR system was approved earlier this month by the rule-making body IFAB, despite controversy in some of the competitions in which it has been trialled over the time taken to make decisions and lack of information for spectators.

“We are going to have our first World Cup with video assisted refereeing,” Infantino told reporters after a meeting of the FIFA Council.

“It’s an essential decision, very important and historical decision.”

The system allows the referee or the video assistant to review decisions where a “clear and obvious” error is spotted. It has been trialled in Germany’s Bundesliga and Italy’s Serie A this season and some English FA and League Cup games, among others.

Infantino said VAR had been shown to reduce the number of refereeing mistakes in matches where it has been used and would help football become “a fairer and more transparent sport”.

“It’s not possible that, in 2018, everyone in the stadium and their living room knows if a referee has made a big mistake or not, and the only one who doesn’t know is the referee,” Infantino added.

Infantino had repeatedly promised that VAR would be used at the June 14-July 15 World Cup and has made it one of his priorities since being elected FIFA chief in February, 2016.

FIFA later said in a statement that, where matches went to extra-time, teams would be allowed a fourth substitute, a rule change also approved by IFAB.

■ NO CONCERNS

Infantino said the hosts for the 2026 World



Cup, to be decided at the FIFA Congress in Moscow in June, would be chosen in an open vote by its member national associations and details of how they voted would be published.

He confirmed that there were two candidates — Morocco against a joint bid from the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Both bids will be evaluated first by a task force and disqualified if they did not meet FIFA’s technical criteria.

Infantino also said he did not have any concerns surrounding political issues involving Russia.

Relations between Britain and Russia have crashed to a post-Cold War low after over

an attack involving a military-grade nerve agent on English soil.

Moscow has denied any involvement in the attempted murder of former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter.

However, Britain, the United States, Germany and France on Thursday jointly called on Russia to explain the attack.

Some officials have said Britain may reconsider the attendance of official representatives at the World Cup, with England having qualified for the tournament.

“We are not worried at all, we are here to organise a football tournament,” Infantino said.

Karren Brady apologizes for West Ham trouble



West Ham vice-chairman Karren Brady has apologised for the scenes that marred the 3-0 defeat by Burnley last weekend.

There were four separate pitch invasions at London Stadium and fans also protested in front of the directors’ box, with joint-owner David Sullivan being hit by a coin. Brady, in her Sun newspaper column, called the events “one of the most painful days” in the club’s history.

She added that “nothing comes” before the safety of supporters.

“The board take full responsibility”

The Hammers have struggled since moving from Upton Park to London Stadium this season and are three points and two places above the Premier League relegation zone.

Their next game is at home to fellow strugglers Southampton on 31 March.

“The board of West Ham United would like to offer our sincere apologies to the vast majority of our supporters who turned up to support their club - lots of them with young children - who sat and tried to continue to support their team,” Brady said.

“I also pledge to you that nothing - and I mean nothing - is more important to us now than ensuring that you are able to come

and support the team safely in all future games. “The board takes full responsibility for our predicament.”

Last summer, West Ham signed forward Marko Arnautovic for £20m, striker Javier Hernandez for £16m and midfielder Sead Haksabanovic for £2.7m, as well as signing defender Pablo Zabaleta for free and keeper Joe Hart on loan.

In January, the Hammers brought in striker Jordan Hugill for £10m, midfielder Joao Mario on loan from Inter Milan and left-back Patrice Evra on a free transfer, while departures included Andre Ayew for £18m and Diafro Sakho for £8.8m.

“We are in the process of entirely restructuring our player recruitment. This will change the way we handle transfers, giving the control to the manager and the football staff. “I feel I must address issues around investment in the squad. Spending on transfers and wages has doubled over past five years. A club-record £80m was spent on players in 2016-17.

“Our wage bill of £105m compares with top-flight Premier League clubs. Some may argue that the money has not been invested well enough, but it has been invested.”

(Source: BBC)

Big money, big names and big problems for Wolfsburg ahead of Schalke visit

Injuries, disciplinary problems and mutinous fans aren’t making life easy for Bruno Labbadia, Wolfsburg’s third coach this season. The Wolves are fighting for their lives again as they welcome high-flying Schalke.

“Wolfsburg’s squad consists of big names and a lot of quality,” said Schalke coach Domenico Tedesco ahead of the Royal Blues’ trip to the Autostadt this Saturday, which is why he is surprised that VfL Wolfsburg find themselves in a relegation battle for the second year in a row.

It has been a dramatic fall from grace for Wolfsburg. German Cup winners in 2015 and Champions League quarterfinalists a year later, Wolfsburg dared to be a new force in German football. A team that in 2015 recorded the 14th highest wage bill in Europe and the second highest in the Bundesliga though, has been anything but daring since.

■ Bruno Labbadia

After Dieter Hecking, Valerian Ismael and finally Andries Jonker preserved Wolfsburg’s top-flight status via the relegation play-off last season, Jonker was replaced by Martin Schmidt who in turn made way for Bruno Labbadia this season. For the second year in a row, the Wolves have had three head coaches in one campaign.

Labbadia – a man with more experience in relegation battles than he would like – led Stuttgart to safety in 2011 and rescued Hamburg in dramatic fashion in 2015. It’s clear why



Wolfsburg feel he was the right man to appoint. But having failed to win any of his first three games with Wolfsburg, the 52-year-old faces perhaps his toughest challenge yet.

Injuries aren’t helping. John Anthony Brooks, Yannick Gerhardt and Jakub Blaszczykowski are long-term absences while Admir Mehmedi has suffered a rare ligament tear in his foot and faces a few weeks out. Daniel Didavi and Divock Origi are also battling for fitness while French midfielder Josuha Guilavogui will miss the game against Schalke with a back injury.

“We don’t have a huge number of options in certain

Absence of ‘best in the world’ Busquets makes Rakitic key for Barca



Ernesto Valverde believes Barcelona can cope without Sergio Busquets, despite believing the midfielder to be the world’s best in his position.

The Spain international hobbled out of the last-16 Champions League win against Chelsea and a toe injury will now keep him out of Sunday’s clash with Athletic Bilbao, while Luis Suarez is also missing.

Valverde is hopeful Busquets will return after the subsequent international break, but he is also confident in Ivan Rakitic’s ability to occupy a deeper role and counteract the World Cup winner’s absence.

“This is the first time [Busquets] is not going to be with us - other than maybe a game he missed due to yellow cards,” Valverde told a pre-match news conference.

“We have other players who can help us - Rakitic has played that role very well and we have other players - but I think Sergio is probably the best player in the world in his position. Replacing him is not an easy thing to do.

“[Rakitic] has had an extraordinary season. He is completely reliable. He helps us bring the ball up the field, he gets into

the final third.

“He played both in central midfield and attacking midfield with Sevilla. Sergi Roberto has played [in midfield] and at the back. [Nelson] Semedo has played as a winger and at the back.

“Players move around. They do not necessarily play in the same positions they start out playing. Rakitic has moved around. He is a very important player for us.”

Barca are coming towards a key time in the season as they continue a treble bid, meaning Valverde has a nervous wait to see if any more stars are injured on international duty.

“Everybody looks out for themselves,” the coach said. “With players on the national teams, it’s tough. Some players have little knocks - like [Thomas] Vermaelen, we hope it’s nothing big.

“The World Cup is coming up, they [the national teams] need their players. I was asked to recommend players for different federations. They want results too.

“The most important thing is that the players use their heads and they keep themselves injury-free so we can win titles.”

(Source: Four Four Two)

positions,” said Labbadia. “We have to rely on a lot of team spirit.” But even that appears to have been undermined after four players were fined for turning up late for training ahead of last week’s 3-0 defeat to Hoffenheim.

“They’ve been punished and we had a very clear discussion with the team,” confirmed Labbadia.

■ Big money, big names, small returns

According to this year’s UEFA licensing benchmarking report, Wolfsburg had the 16th highest wage bill in all of Europe for the 2016 financial year – more than England’s Everton and Italy’s Inter Milan.

This season, only Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund in the Bundesliga have spent more than Wolfsburg’s €67.25m (\$82.9 million). The front four that started against Hoffenheim cost a combined total of €27m, not including the highly-rated Daniel Didavi who arrived on a free transfer from Stuttgart. They are eye-watering figures for a team sitting joint 16th in the Bundesliga – but money doesn’t guarantee goals. While Didavi has contributed six goals and six assists this season, Divock Origi, Yunus Malli and Admir Mehmedi have only managed another 11 between them.

Collectively, Wolfsburg have only managed 28 goals this season – the fifth weakest attack in the Bundesliga. Nowhere near good enough for this group.

(Source: Deutsche Welle)

Team Melli start World Cup preparation with win over Sierra Leone

S P O R T S **TEHRAN** — Iran national football team, known as Team Melli, defeated African minnow Sierra Leone 4-0 here at the Azadi Stadium on Saturday.

Mohammad Reza Khanzadeh opened the scoring for Iran and two minutes later Ali Gholizadeh made it 2-0 with a long range shot that that the keeper absolutely should have kept out.

Kaveh Rezaei was on target in the 35th minute with a header into the six yard and Gholizadeh scored for the second time just two minutes into the second half.

“We had a good match. I would like to thank Sierra Leone national football team because they came here to play us. It was a long trip for them,” Queiroz said after the match.

Sierra Leone sit in 98th place in FIFA rankings while Iran are the best Asian football team and 33rd in the world.

The reports emerged that the African team came to Iran with just four main players.

“I didn’t care what others say. They want to undermine me,” the former Real Madrid coach said.

Carlos Queiroz’s men prepare for the 2018 FIFA World Cup, where they have been drawn with Spain, Morocco and Portugal in Group B.

Iran will open the campaign with a match against Morocco at Saint Petersburg on June 15.

Team Melli, meanwhile, face Spain in Kazan on 20 June before meeting Cristiano Ronaldo’s Portugal in Saransk five days later.



BSWW announces Hosseini as Beach Soccer Ambassador

S P O R T S Iranian goalkeeper Peyman Hosseini has been named by the Beach Soccer Worldwide (BSWW) as the ambassador of the 2018.

A total of 20 players, both men and women, begin the beach soccer’s ambassadors program this year, beachsoccer.com reported.

Players are undoubtedly one of the main assets beach soccer has, and BSWW believe that they are a truly solid way to help boost the sport’s promotion on a global scale.

They are the ones doing the tricks, scoring the goals, making the saves... They are the ones everybody want to see play. They are

our true stars.

This is why we are launching the ambassadors program, including 20 players, both men and women, which are some of the main recognizable faces within our sport.

These ambassadors have been selected through a set of criteria, including their public projection, the way they interact with their fans and with beach soccer and the way they communicate, also following geographical considerations.

As beach soccer ambassadors, they will represent beach soccer worldwide in their original territories, and they will also take active part in some of the events organized

by BSWW such as clinics, presentations, draws, press conferences.

The list of this 2018 Beach Soccer Ambassadors goes as follow:

Aaron Clarke (ENG) - @aaronclarke10
Alba Mellado (ESP) - @albiitamee
Anastasia Osinovskaia (RUS) - @anastasia_osinovskaia
Boris Nikonorov (RUS) - @boris_nikonorov
Dario Ramacciotti (ITA) - @dario_ramacciotti
Dejan Stankovic (SUI) - @deki_stankovic
Elinton Andrade (POR) - @elintonandrade

Evita Stefanopoulos (GRE) - @evita_stef
Fernando DDI (BRA) - @fernandoddi
Filipe (BRA) - @filipesilvabs
Dona (ESP) - @dona_beachsoccer
Kalila Komisarczyk (POL) - @kamcia_19
Leticia Villar (BRA) - @lelevillar
Llorenç (ESP) - @llorenç_enzo10
Madjer (POR) - @madjer_official
Natalia Murillo (COL) - @natyymc
Noel Ott (SUI) - @noelott
Peyman Hosseini (IRN) - @peyman-hosseinii

Rodrigo (BRA) - @rodrigocostaaa
Rui Coimbra (POR) - @ruicoimbra

Zidane criticizes international break

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane has questioned the timing of the upcoming international break and hopes his players return fit and healthy after playing with their countries next week.

Almost all of Madrid’s players will head away for friendlies with their countries following Sunday’s La Liga game at home to Girona -- including Wales international Gareth Bale, who is likely flying to the Far East for the China Cup despite missing some training with his club earlier this week.

On their return, Madrid face a La Liga trip to struggling Las Palmas followed immediately by the Champions League quarterfinals, with a La Liga derby at home to Atletico Madrid between the two legs against Juventus.

Zidane said at a news conference that he had to respect the calendar, even if he appeared not to agree with it.

“We cannot change this,” Zidane said. “We have 24 players, everybody fit, and 19 now go with their national teams. But in the end I cannot say anything. It is important for the player to represent their country. I don’t know if this is the best date on the calendar, but we must respect that. I would like them all to return healthy, without any problems.”

Bale appears to have dropped down the pecking order at

the Bernabeu in recent weeks, beginning both Champions League round-of-16 games against Paris Saint-Germain on the bench, but Zidane denied that the €101 million summer 2013 signing from Tottenham Hotspur was unhappy with his current situation.

“Bale is not unhappy, not at all,” Zidane said. “He is a different player, maybe, but he is not unhappy, he is with us, he is happy to be at this club, and has shown that he is an important player in this squad.”

Madrid were drawn against Juventus, one of Zidane’s former clubs, in the Champions League quarterfinals. They beat Juve 4-1 in last year’s final in Cardiff, Wales.

“I see Juve strong as last year, competitive as always,” Zidane said. “It will be a difficult tie, 50-50. They are a great opponent, but at this stage of the competition they all are. I was there for five years, and it was an important club for my career. I would have preferred to avoid it, for many reasons. But the draw is made and I will leave aside the past and just think about the game.”

Madrid on Sunday will welcome Girona to the Bernabeu for the first time and are looking to avenge the Catalans’ 2-1 victory in the reverse fixture in October.

“La Liga is very competitive. Here there are no small teams. They are all good teams who play good football,” Zidane said. “Girona are having a very good season. We saw what they did and what they are doing. But we always look at the details of the opponent, but the most important is what we do ourselves on the pitch. We have worked well this week, and are looking forward to the game.”

That defeat at Girona is among the reasons why last year’s La Liga champions sit third in the table, 15 points behind leaders Barcelona with 10 games remaining.

Zidane did not completely deny a suggestion that his players found it more difficult now to get themselves up for each domestic fixture.

“When you look at the table, maybe it looks more difficult as the gap is so big,” Zidane said. “But we must think that every game we have is important, to prepare. We are third now, and we must get up to second, back above Atletico. That is a very important objective for us.

“The players might think it is more difficult to motivate yourself for La Liga, but our players always want to play and tomorrow, we have a chance for another great game.”

(Source: Soccermet)

Analysis: Esteghlal and Al Ain remain unbeaten

Tehran: A late strike from outside the box broke Esteghlal’s resilience as they settled for a 1-1 draw against Al Ain in the AFC Champions League Group D on Monday.

Esteghlal maintained a low block to keep their visitors at bay for extended periods of the game, but continued pressure from Al Ain finally delivered an equalizer as the two sides kept an unbeaten record in the competition.

■ Al Ain take the long line

In the first half, Al Ain relied a great deal on long shots to find a way past a compact Esteghlal defense. Omar Abdulrahman’s 24th minute effort that was saved by goalkeeper Seyed Hosseini was the only shot on target Al Ain mustered all half.

Four of the visitors’ first-half-shots sailed off target while their only attempt from inside the box was blocked by Esteghlal’s unwavering defense.

After the break, Al Ain managed to break into the box on multiple occasions but they found their equalizing goal with a shot from outside of the box, when Tsukasa



Shiotani curled the ball past the opposition goalkeeper.

■ Esteghlal defend deep

Al Ain resorted to long shots due to Esteghlal’s ability to cover the central areas and force Al Ain either to strike the ball from

long or move to the flanks.

This was a common feature of Al Ain’s play, with strikers Marcus Berg and Ahmed Khalil moving to the flanks in an attempt to draw Esteghlal defenders away from the center.

However, Esteghlal’s full back and wide midfielder on each flank managed to make 26 recoveries throughout the matches they prevented Al Ain from crossing the ball into the box with ease. This was evident by the fact that Al Ain made no successful open play crosses in the match, with 14 failed attempts.

■ Shiotani efficient on the left

Tsukasa Shiotani, a right-footed player who was played at left-back against Esteghlal, played an effective role for Al Ain in breaking through to the final third.

Instead of simply sticking to the flanks in the midfield area such as the right back Mohamed Ahmed did, Shiotani made a variety of runs, overlapping and underlapping the winger and creating very effective combinations to break past Esteghlal’s good flank coverage.

Indeed, Al Ain’s goal came through this movement, when Shiotani received the ball on the flank before combining with Rayan Yslam to move into the central areas and strike to score the equalizer.

statement added.

Iraq has largely been starved of international matches on home soil since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, when FIFA banned them citing security concerns.

The ban stayed in place after the U.S.-led invasion of 2003, which toppled Saddam Hussein. It was intermittently lifted only to be reimposed, because of enduring security concerns, most recently the war against Islamic State.

Iraq has played its home matches in Iran, Jordan or Doha. However, the country has held a handful of friendlies, including a Feb. 28 exhibition match against Saudi Arabia in Basra.

Iraq will host Qatar and Syria for a friendly tournament on March 21 in Basra.

Saman Ghoddos plans to move in the summer: Report

Ostersund forward Saman Ghoddos has told the Swedish media his plan is to get a move in the summer transfer window. The Iran international has in recent weeks been linked with a move to West Ham United and Crystal Palace.

Ghoddos was asked about his future with OFK, following links with Premier League clubs: “The goal is to move this summer. It’s the best window, but there’s no stress either. What happens, happens.”

Last month, West Ham sent a scout to the game between Arsenal and OFK, with the intention to get a lowdown on Ghoddos.

It was well documented West Ham was keen to bring in a forward during the last transfer window after Andre Ayew and Diafra Sakho left the club, and Ghoddos could be an option in the next window. In the past week, there have been reports Crystal Palace is also interested in the Swedish born player.

Crystal Palace recruited Scandinavian players in the last window, and could again do likewise in the summer.

(Source: Fotbolldirekt)

Iranian shooter bags bronze in World University Shooting Championships

Press TV — Iranian female sports shooter Najmeh Khedmati has put on a fine display of skills at the 2018 International University Sports Federation (FISU) World University Shooting Championships, and managed to take home a bronze medal.

On Saturday, the 21-year-old 2014 Asian Games gold medalist vied for the top honor in women’s 50-meter rifle 3 positions individual competitions in the Malaysian capital city of Kuala Lumpur, and recorded a score of 441.2 points to claim the bronze medal.

Two contestants from the Czech Republic received the gold and silver medals, having accumulated 553.5 and 551.2 points respectively.

The 2018 FISU World University Shooting Championships kicked off on March 14, and will wrap up on March 18, 2018.

Warriors Durant to miss two weeks with rib fracture

Golden State Warriors forward Kevin Durant will miss at least two weeks of the NBA season after an MRI on Friday revealed a fractured rib in the latest injury setback for the shorthanded defending champions.

The team said the reigning NBA Finals MVP “will be re-evaluated in two weeks,” making it unclear exactly how long the squad will be without the sharpshooting small forward, who leads the team in scoring.

The Warriors are already playing without two-time league MVP Stephen Curry, whose right ankle sprain will keep him sidelined until at least March 20, and All-Star guard Klay Thompson, who is out until at least March 22 with a fractured right thumb.

The Warriors, who currently sit second in the Western Conference, host the Sacramento Kings on Friday in Oakland before taking on the Suns in Phoenix.

(Source: Reuters)

Klopp knows how Liverpool can beat Man City

Jurgen Klopp believes Liverpool can overcome Manchester City in their Champions League quarterfinal tie if his players impose their “specific style” and are “brave” across two legs.

Man City, who sit comfortably top of the Premier League, suffered their only league defeat of the season at Anfield in January.

“Two very intense games,” Klopp told the Liverpool Echo of the quarterfinal draw. “If they are not intense from our point of view, we have no chance.

“If we can put our specific style, philosophy and mix it up with our attitude and stuff like this, being brave, then there is something in it for us.

“I love these games. They are fantastic for me as a manager and you know if you play City they do what they do at the highest level. They don’t defend the result, they go again.

“It’s cool. For sure, the first one will be a really exciting game to watch.”

As a result of the draw, Liverpool’s game at Everton has been brought forward to Saturday April 7 with a 12.30 p.m. kick-off -- much to the anger of Klopp, who will have less than 72 hours to prepare his side for the Merseyside derby after the first leg of their City tie. The Liverpool manager added: “So a really intense game and you give us the worst moment for a game against Everton, which we cannot say to our supporters: ‘I know it is Everton but we play on Tuesday again.’

“What’s that? If we had Tuesday-Wednesday [it would be fine] but no, we have the Wednesday-Tuesday rhythm. In between, Everton. Right!”

Under Klopp, Liverpool have only lost one out of their seven meetings with City -- a 5-0 defeat in September after Sadio Mane was controversially sent off. They were also runners-up to City in the EFL Cup final last year on penalties after the game finished as a draw.

Klopp believes Man City director of football Txiki Begiristain was less than impressed about drawing Liverpool when the camera panned to the Spaniard during Friday’s draw.

“They didn’t want us,” Klopp said. “We all know about that. Our record is not too bad against City. Yes it was a close game here and stuff like that. “We are not the team they love to play constantly, let me say it like this. But are we their nightmare? No, I don’t think so. When you think about the draw, the team around the corner you can go by bus, you don’t want it. Everybody is a little like this.

“When we play Everton, they play United. Maybe they are not concentrating [too much on] that game because then they can be champions a week later and Man United can win a game at Manchester City which would not help us as well.”

City, though, will actually win the title against United if they win their next two games.

(Source: ESPN)

BAGHDAD (Reuters) — Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi welcomed a decision from soccer’s world governing body FIFA to lift a ban on hosting competitive international soccer matches at stadiums in three Iraqi cities.

Abadi congratulated the Iraqi people and the sports public on the lifting of the ban, which he said in a statement was the result of the “security and stability” of the country.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino announced the ban’s lifting on stadiums in Basra, Karbala and Erbil at the FIFA Council Meeting in Bogota on Friday.

“In these three cities, international matches will be allowed to be played as far as FIFA is concerned,” Infantino told reporters.

The three cities had been hosting friendlies throughout the last year as a test run.

But FIFA has not yet approved an application by Iraq to host matches in the capital Baghdad. Infantino said the request needed further study.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) also welcomed FIFA’s decision on Saturday.

“This is a significant moment in shaping the future of football in Iraq,” AFC president Shaikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa said in a statement.

Earlier this month, two AFC Cup (the region’s second tier knockout competition) matches involving Iraqi clubs were postponed until next month in the hope of playing them in the country should FIFA lift the ban. The AFC Cup matches involving Al Zawraa and Bahraini side Manama Club and Air Force Club’s home game against Malkiya of Bahrain could now be played in April, the AFC

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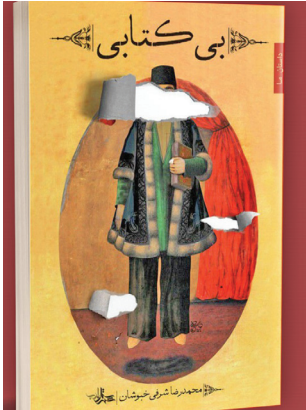
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Indian, Albanian publishers keen on “Booklessness”

A R T TEHRAN — Publishers from India and Albania are eager to acquire the rights to “Booklessness”, an acclaimed Persian novel by Iranian writer Mohammadreza Sharafi-Khabushan that acknowledges the place of books in modern Iranian history.



A copy of the Persian novel “Booklessness” by Mohammadreza Sharafi-Khabushan

Albania’s Fan Noli Publishing House and India’s Rajpal & Sons have reached an initial agreement with Shahrestan Adab, the Iranian publisher of the book, at the Paris Book Fair, the Iranian publisher announced on Saturday.

The deal is scheduled to be finalized at the Tehran International Book Fair, which will be held during May.

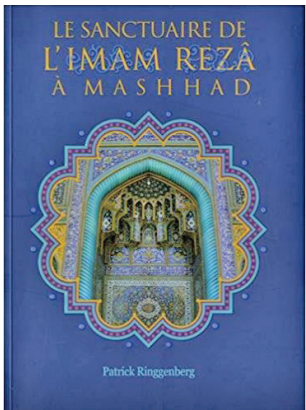
The story of “Booklessness” is set in the Qajar period (1796-1925) and it tells the tale of an antique dealer who is deeply interested in rare Persian manuscripts.

“Booklessness” and “This Street Has No Rumble Strip” by Maryam Jahani shared the best novel prize of the 10th Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards, Iran’s most lucrative literary prize, in January.

Dozens of Iranian publishers are participating in the Paris Book Fair, which opened on Friday and will run until Monday.

Candle and Fog offers French versions of new Persian books at Paris fair

CULTURE **d e s k** TEHRAN — Eight new books from Iranian writers, which have recently been published in French by Candle and Fog, are on display at the pavilion of the London-based Iranian-British publisher at the Paris Book Fair.



Front cover of “Le sanctuaire de L’Imam Reza a Mashhad” by Patrick Ringgenberg.

Children’s writer Hushang Moradi Kermani’s autobiography “You’re No Stranger Here” are among the books, Candle and Fog director Afshin Shahnetabar told the Persian service of Tasnim on Saturday.

The publisher is also showcasing “Do Not Change Your Name” by Majid Qeisari, “The Cat Graph” by Hadi Taqizadeh and “The Legend of King and the Mathematician” by Naghmeh Samini and Mehdi Behzad at the fair.

Two books by Iranologist Patrick Ringgenberg, including his “Le sanctuaire de L’Imam Reza a Mashhad” that is his travelogue of Mashhad are displayed at the book fair.

Two other books are poetry by Shabnam Samiean and Mehran Mokhtarpur. The Paris Book Fair runs from March 16 to 19.

“Life of Pi” actor Irrfan Khan reveals battle with tumor

NEW DELHI (Reuters) — Indian actor Irrfan Khan, whose roles in Bollywood films such as “Slumdog Millionaire”, “The Amazing Spider-Man” and “Life of Pi” have brought him fame, has been diagnosed with a tumor and is traveling overseas for treatment, he said on Friday.



Indian actor Irrfan Khan arrives for the screening of the film “Dabba (The Lunchbox)” at the 38th Toronto International Film Festival September 8, 2013. (Reuters/Mark Blinch)

Khan did not comment on whether the tumor was cancerous, but dismissed Indian media reports that had speculated he was suffering from brain cancer. He did not say where he would be seeking treatment or for how long.

“Learning that I have been diagnosed with neuroendocrine tumor has admittedly been difficult, but the love and strength of those around me, and that I found within me, have brought me to a place of hope,” he said in a Twitter message.

Tumors originating in the cells of the neuroendocrine system are rare. They can develop in the intestines or pancreas, and may prove cancerous.

Khan had sparked speculation with a revelation on Twitter this month that he was suffering from a rare disease.

“To those who waited for my words, I hope to be back with more stories to tell,” he said on the social network on Friday.

Iranian Artists Forum to welcome Noruz with spring festival

A R T **d e s k** TEHRAN — The Iranian Artists Forum in Tehran will celebrate Noruz, the Iranian New Year, with its spring festival opening on March 22, the second day of Noruz.

Entitled “Tehran, City of Art”, the festival will organize exhibitions of paintings, photos, graphic designs, illustrations and handmade ceramic works at all the galleries of the center.

Regional music groups from around the country will give concerts during the festival at the courtyard of the forum.

Danub Music Band led by guitarist Ashkan Mokhtarband will also be giving concerts.

Honar-o-Andisheh, a troupe by director Kermat Rudsaz, will be performing a number of comic plays at the forum.

Rudsaz will also stage a kheimeh shab-bazi performance, and Sara Abbaspur and Mohamamdreza Majuni will put on a naqqali performance.

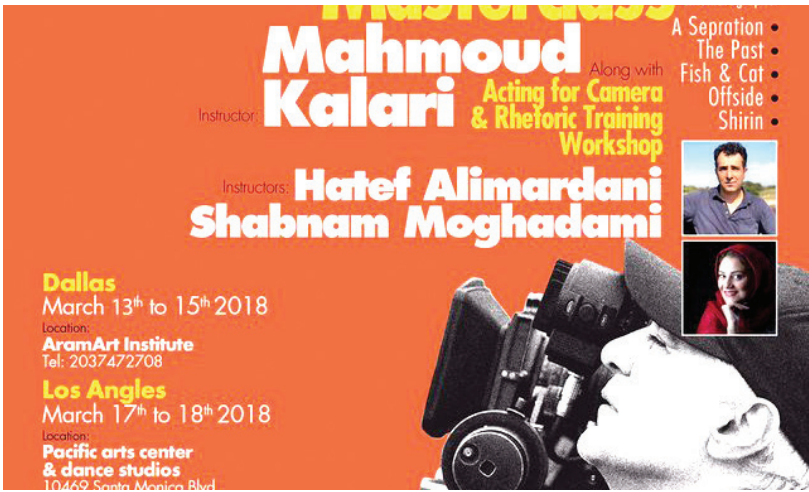
Naqqali is a style of storytelling dedicated to Shahnameh epic stories, and kheimeh shab-bazi is a traditional Persian puppet show performed in a small chamber by a musical performer and a person called a morshed (mentor). The dialogue takes place between the morshed and the puppets.

The festival will be running until March 31.



Sara Abbaspur puts on a naqqali performance at the Rassam Arabzadeh Carpet Museum in Tehran at Shab-e Chelleh (Yalda Night) celebration on December 20, 2016. (Honaronline/Saed Rabiei)

Iranian cineastes hold educational programs in U.S.



A poster Iranian cineastes’ educational programs in Dallas and Los Angeles

A R T **d e s k** TEHRAN — Three renowned Iranian cineastes are in the United States to hold several master classes and workshops in the cities of Dallas and Los Angeles.

Cinematographer Mahmud Kalari, mostly known for his collaboration on director Asghar Farhadi’s “A Separation” and “The Past”, held a master class at the AramArt Institute in the Dallas suburb of Plano, Texas from March 13 to 15.

Director Hatef Alimardani and actress

Shabnam Moqaddami also held workshops at the institute at the same time.

They left the city to organize classes and workshops at the Pacific Arts Center and Dance Studio in Los Angeles on Saturday.

The educational programs, which are being organized by the Sheed Film studio in Dallas, will continue today at the Pacific Arts Center and Dance Studio.

The studio is also the organizer of the Sheed Persian Film Festival in Dallas.

Filmmaker George Lucas breaks ground on LA narrative museum



Director George Lucas poses at the American Film Institute’s (AFI) 44th Life Achievement Award honoring composer John Williams at Dolby theatre in Hollywood, California U.S., June 9, 2016. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — “Star Wars” filmmaker George Lucas broke ground on his new \$1 billion story-telling museum on Wednesday, saying it will embrace art of all kinds.

The museum, near the University of Southern California in south Los Angeles where Lucas studied film, will feature some of the director’s collection of paintings, illustrations and digital art from the “Star Wars” movie franchise he started in 1977.

The self-funded Lucas Museum of Narrative Art will be a non-profit enterprise and is expected to take about four years to build.

It will showcase traditional and popular art, including animation, digital and comic art and will also house dining space, theaters, lecture halls, classrooms and a public research library.

“I believe in all kinds of art. And I believe all kinds of art have a right to

exist. I think it’s important to have a museum that I used to jokingly say, supports all the orphan arts that nobody else wants to see, but everybody loves. So that’s my dream for this,” Lucas said at the groundbreaking ceremony.

“Popular art is an insight into a society and what they aspire to, what they really want, what they really are, because it’s telling that narrative of their story, their history, their belief system,” he added.

Lucas has donated several items from his personal art collection, which includes paintings and film memorabilia.

Luke Skywalker’s first light saber, Darth Vader’s helmet, and pieces from “Casablanca,” “The Ten Commandments” and “The Wizard of Oz” are set for display at the museum, Variety reported. Lucas sold his “Star Wars” franchise to Walt Disney Co. in 2012 for \$4 billion.

Movies from Iran to compete in Annecy festival



A scene from “Run, Rustam, Run” by Hossein Molayemi

A R T **d e s k** TEHRAN — Two Iranian animated films will be competing in the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, which will run in the French city from June 11 to 16.

“Run, Rustam, Run” by Hossein Molayemi will be competing in the perspective short films category, and “Mr. Deer” by Mojtaba Musavi is an entry in the short films category.

The animation “Run, Rustam, Run” tells the story of Rustam, a main character of Persian poet Ferdowsi’s epic masterpiece Shahnameh, who travels into the future and comes to Tehran in 2017.

The story of “Mr. Deer” is set in an unknown period of history in a ruined subway station that is similar to those found in modern European cities. People in this society have animal faces and have forgotten humanity.

High-end art sales boom in 2017, but it’s only a partial market rebound



Members of Christie’s staff pose for pictures next to Leonardo da Vinci’s “Salvator Mundi” painting in London, October 24, 2017. (Reuters/Peter Nicholls)

ZURICH (Reuters) — The works of great artists buoyed the art market last year and none did more than Leonardo da Vinci, whose ‘Salvator Mundi’ sold to great fanfare for \$450 million in New York in November.

Global art sales grew 12 percent to an estimated \$63.7 billion after two years of falling sales, said a report published by UBS and Art Basel on Tuesday.

That still fell short of the record of over \$68 billion set in 2014 and below \$66 billion achieved in 2007 before the art market plummeted during the financial crisis.

“Industry-wide gains were driven by sales at the top end of the market,” said cultural economist Clare McAndrew, who wrote the report.

Over the past decade, auction sales have fallen for works priced under \$1 million, making investment purchases a risky gamble for the lower and middle price segments.

But purchases of ultra-expensive artworks soared in value, with the study finding a 148 percent increase in total sales value of works sold for over \$10 million at auction over the last ten years, and a 125 percent increase over just one year.

Indeed, the study found that just 1 percent of artists whose works were offered at auction accounted for nearly two-thirds of the total auction sales.

Art experts remain wary of speculative purchases at a time when the world’s wealthy, waylaid by political and economic uncertainty, are eager to place cash.

The research indicates that, like wealth — half of which remained in the hands of the top 1 percent in 2017 — the art market has become top heavy.

The Salvator Mundi painting was only recently rediscovered after being sold at auction for 45 pounds, attributed to one of Da Vinci’s students, in 1958.