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## Surprising spring snow

## Transit of goods via Iran up 24%

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Transit of goods through Iran rose 24 percent in the past Iranian calendar year, which ended on March 20, according to Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA). IRICA announced that more than 10.695 million tons of commodities were transited through Iranian borders during the past year, Mehr news agency reported on Monday.

The data released by IRICA and also Iran's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization (RMTO) indicate that transit of goods via Iran experienced an increasing trend in the preceding calendar year. This trend which shows importance of the country in regional trade is anticipated to continue in the current year through some underway development plans.

## Trump 'morally unfit' to be president: ex-FBI chief

The United States current President Donald Trump is "morally unfit" to be the U.S. president, says former FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) director James Comey, who has returned to the center of attention ahead of publishing a memoir recounting the controversies he was involved in during the run-up to the 2016 U.S. presidential election. "Our president must embody respect

and adhere to the values that are at the core of this country, the most important being truth," Comey told ABC News in an interview that was published on Sunday Night. "This president is not able to do that. He is morally unfit to be president." The former FBI chief dismissed rumors flying around about Trump's mental and physical incompetence to lead the White House. **→13**

## Amnesty calls for investigations about Israeli crimes

*By staff & agencies*  
The Israeli authorities must put an immediate end to the excessive and lethal force being used to suppress Palestinian demonstrations in Gaza, human rights NGO (non-governmental organization) Amnesty International said as fresh protests began. There have already been further reports of dozens of Palestinians being injured by Israeli gunfire earlier.

Following the deaths of at least 35 Palestinians — including three children and the photographer Yaser Murtaja — and the injuring of at least 3,078 others during protests on the past two Fridays, Amnesty has renewed its call for independent and effective investigations into reports that Israeli soldiers unlawfully used firearms and other excessive force against unarmed protesters. **→13**

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

## Plan of U.S. and Europe for JCPOA

Evidences suggest that the United States is likely to withdraw from the nuclear deal with Iran. The appointment of "John Bolton" as the U.S. National Security Advisor and "Mike Pompeo" as Trump's Secretary of State, have sent certain signals to those following the JCPOA news.

The two American officials share a common goal of withdrawing from the agreement by re-claiming the inefficiency of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

For example, the Guardian has recently quoted a European diplomat and wrote that the EU has no hope for Trump's government to remain in the nuclear deal with Iran. However, the main question is, what is the final plan of the United States and Europe for the JCPOA?

On the other hand, what kind of approach and strategy should be taken by our country against Washington's possible withdrawal from the nuclear deal?

**Trump's plan for JCPOA**  
Without a doubt, the U.S. President isn't going to put away his negative attitude towards the nuclear deal. Trump is still calling the nuclear deal as the worst deal ever. That was why he replaced his former Secretary of State "Rex Tillerson" with Mike Pompeo. Some of the Western analysts believe that Trump is after "winning more advantages over the JCPOA" through imposing pressure.

The appointment of John Bolton and Pompeo should also be regarded in the same vein. On the other hand, Trump plans to make the least possible costs in case of his possible withdrawal from the nuclear accord. It should be noted that John Bolton, before being appointed as the U.S. National Security Advisor, insisted on Washington withdrawal from the JCPOA.

He also said that in this regard, it is necessary for the U.S. European partners to join Washington, and that there should be diplomatic consultations between the White House and the European Union in this regard.

This is while some news sources and analysis have a different opinion. They believe it is possible that Trump doesn't announce the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal, but keeps to impose sanctions on Iran! Undoubtedly, this unilateral and sophisticated game will mean nothing but the U.S. breach of the nuclear deal. **→7**

## Iran can't count on Europe: professor

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
By Maryam Khormaei

TEHRAN — Alexander Azadegan, professor of global management and international political economy from South California University, says "Iran can't count on Europe."

Geopolitical analyst also adds that "at the end of the day, European ship sails in the same direction as Washington. They seem to be playing a good cop bad cop right now (European being the good cop, bad cop being Trump)."

Following is the full text of the interview:  
President Trump announced that the removal of time limitation of Iran's nuclear activities, unrestricted inspections to Iranian sites and



putting Iran's missile program in the JCPOA are all necessary for the U.S. not to withdraw from

the nuclear agreement. Will Europe accept the conditions? What about Iran?

A: As you are aware we had a bit of a coup d'état in the past few days with the firing of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and the coming into power of John Bolton an old neocon as the new National Security Advisor. We can predict a lot of patterns that are developing when it comes to JCPOA and Washington behavior in particularly Donald Trump's behavior towards Iran. By raising the threat of refusing to certify Iran nuclear deal, Trump's illogical and unreasonable expectations and demands such as removing time limits on the nuclear deal's restrictions which is believed to last for nearly 10 years until 2025 **→7**

## Persepolis advance to ACL knockout stage as Group C table-toppers

**SPORTS** TEHRAN — Persepolis of

Iran defeated Al Sadd of Qatar and advanced to the 2018 AFC Champions League knockout stage as Group C table-toppers.

The Iranian giants beat Al Sadd 1-0 in front of 60,000 spectators in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Al Sadd Iranian defender Morteza Pouraliganji scored the

only goal of the match just three minutes into the match.

Al Sadd were the better team in the second half and created several chances but lacked a cutting edge in attack.

With three minutes remaining, Al Sadd striker Baghdad Bounedjah hit the bar with a right footed shot from the center of the box.

Persepolis will play the Group A

second-placed team in Round of 16.

On Tuesday, Lokomotiv of Uzbekistan will host Iran's Zob Ahan in Tashkent in Group B and Iranian already-relegated Tractor Sazi meet Al Gharafa of Qatar in Group A.

The AFC Champions League, commonly known as the Asian Champions League, is an annual continental club football competi-

tion organized by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

Introduced in 2002, the competition is a continuation of the Asian Club Championship which had started in 1967. It is the premier club tournament in Asia, equivalent to the CONMEBOL Copa Libertadores, and the UEFA, CAF, CONCACAF and OFC Champions League competitions.

## Professor says theory is integrally and necessarily related to practice

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW**  
By Javad Heirannia

TEHRAN — Joanne K. Olson, professor of Texas A&M University, says "McKeon argued that theory is integrally and necessarily related to practice, and pointed out that "any problem pushed far enough is philosophic."

Author of "On Knowing-The Social Sciences" also adds that "This book is a compilation of the contents of a course McKeon taught to undergraduate students in 1965, and is the second course in a series of three: On Knowing: The Natural Sciences (published in 1994 by the University of Chicago Press), On Knowing: The Social Sciences, and On Knowing: The Humanities (in preparation)."

Following is the full text of the interview:  
What has been your main question in "On Knowing-The Social Sciences"?

A: Richard McKeon introduces readers to the whole field of the social sciences by demonstrating the act of philosophizing about how to do philosophy. To do this, he articulates four modes of thought that are used to understand, investigate, and develop knowledge in the social sciences. McKeon argued that theory is integrally and necessarily related to practice, and pointed out that "any problem pushed far enough is philosophic." McKeon saw the purpose of his scholarship as ultimately being a prospective cultivation of communication among the diversity of individuals and cultures worldwide. The purpose of the "Social Sciences" work is to provide an introductory view of McKeon's approach to preparing for the future by means of developing a set of abilities that can enable reflective individuals not only to navigate through but also to invent fruitful possibilities among the world's cultures and the philosophies of those cultures.

What was the necessity of writing this book?

A: Richard McKeon (1900-1985) was trained as a philosopher at Columbia University and in Europe just after World War I and spent most of his professional life, from 1934 to 1974, at the University of Chicago. McKeon was deeply involved with the founding of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and was a highly regarded philosopher and historian of philosophy. This book is a compilation of the contents of a course McKeon taught to undergraduate students in 1965, and is the second course in a series of three: On Knowing: The Natural Sciences (published in 1994 by the University of Chicago Press), On Knowing: The Social Sciences, and On Knowing: The Humanities (in preparation). The editors are committed to helping McKeon's work reach a broad audience given the importance of his work for these modern times.

 **ARTICLE**  
By Yuram Abdullah Weiler  
Analyst and journalist

## An arrogant autocrat's abortive surgical strike on Syria

"It's not the cigar, stupid. It's the cruise missiles launched to show the shame."  
— Christopher Hitchens

On April 14, 2018, the United States attacked the sovereign Arab Republic of Syria without justification or provocation in collaboration with Britain and France. It is disheartening, but unsurprising, to see the Washington regime is back to colluding with its colonial conspirators, all of whom lack the moral fortitude to forge an independent foreign policy direction for themselves. Instead, the once-mighty European powers appear resigned to follow the disastrous direction set by the United States, like so many railcars coupled to a derailed locomotive that is flying off the track.

It seems whenever the legitimate government of Syria manages to get an upper hand against the alphabet soup of mercenary forces funded by the Washington-Tel Aviv-Riyadh axis of aggression, a "chemical attack" conveniently occurs, the blame for which is inevitably placed on President Bashar al-Assad. Concurrent with Syria's progress in ridding itself of these western-backed terrorists, U.S. president Donald Trump has found himself enmeshed in an expanding web of intrigue woven around an investigation being conducted by special counsel Robert Mueller into certain improprieties, which may have been committed by members of his inner circle during the 2016 election campaign.

And then there are the revelations that the former New York real estate developer and reality TV show producer had an encounter in 2006 with a certain lady of questionable reputation named Stephanie Clifford, aka Stormy Daniels. While years of mathematical training may have influenced this writer's perception, nevertheless I think I see a pattern here: when a U.S. president is besieged with charges of corruption, incompetence and dalliance, he orders a missile attack on a benign foreign country to deflect attention from himself and his unsavory predicament.

Similarly, back in 1998, former U.S. president William Jefferson Clinton stood accused of having had an extramarital affair with aid Monica Lewinsky. **→13**

### Invitation for Bids No. 97.EXP.103

**Iranian Aluminum Company (IRALCO)** intends to invite eligible bidders to purchase 5000 MT +/-5% of Aluminum ingot (P1020) through Sealed Public Bidding in April 2018. Interested companies are allowed to send their competitive offers in sealed envelope until **23 April 2018, 4:00 PM** Tehran Time, based on our required instructions to following address:  
No.49, Mollasadra Ave., Vanak Square, Tehran, Iran postal code: 1991614581. Export dept., Iranian Aluminum Company. Attention of Ms. Farahani. In addition, sealed envelope should be addressed by the name of supplier, number of tender and stamp of company. Interested bidders may obtain further information through contacting us:  
Tel: +98 21 88049029 E-mail: [export@iralco.net](mailto:export@iralco.net) Tender Document is available in Iralco website, [www.iralco.ir](http://www.iralco.ir)  
**Public Relations Department of Iranian Aluminum Company**



**MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS**



**Basij plays important economic role: IRGC chief**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, the commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, said on Monday that Basij plays a very necessary role in economic and social areas.

“Basij has always made efforts in line with prosperity of the country and plays a very important role in various areas,” Jafari said in a ceremony.

He added Basij played important role in defense area and it is essential to provide opportunities for it to be more active in social and economic spheres.



**Zarif meets Tajik President Emomali Rahmon**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif who visited Dushanbe on Monday called for expansion of relations between Iran and Tajikistan in a meeting with President Emomali Rahmon, Mehr reported.

The two sides called for boosting bilateral relations and cooperation in various areas including politics, economy, culture, energy and technology.

Zarif visited Dushanbe to participate in the ECO ministerial meeting.

ECO members are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.



**Govt. waits Majlis approval to divide merged ministries**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Vice President of Parliamentary Affairs Hossein-Ali Amiri expressed the hope that the parliament would soon approve the new structure of the government, which would break up three ministries of industry, mine and trade, transport and urban development, and youth affairs and sports.

Speaking with Tasnim on Monday, Amiri said, “We are very hopeful that with God’s will, the Majlis would approve the new structure and pass it to the government for implementation.”

He also said the parliament has proposed the establishment of Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, which is under consideration.



**Iranian parliamentary team to visit Syria after U.S. attack**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — A few days after a U.S.-led attack targeted three sites in Syria a delegation of Iranian lawmakers are scheduled to visit Damascus on Tuesday.

Mohammad-Javad Jamali, a member of Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said on Monday that the team comprises of members of the committee, Tasnim reported.

Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the chairman of the committee, has said the attack was carried out to boost terrorists’ morale.

He also said the attack would have no impact on the axis of resistance and the Syrian nation.



**Large cargo of explosives seized in Sistan-Baluchestan**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — The Intelligence Ministry announced in a statement on Monday that security forces have seized a large cargo of explosives along the border province of Sistan-Balouchestan in southeast Iran, Fars reported.

The security forces managed to foil the plot of a terrorist group to transfer 80kg of explosives, 17 pedal booby-traps, 28 pistols, 2,100 rounds, 35 mortars, tens of electronic detonators and other explosive equipment, the statement said.

A sum of 580kg of narcotics have also been seized from the terrorists which were used to cover the explosives, it added.



**Iran hands over 66 illegal immigrants to Pakistan**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iran has handed over 66 Pakistani nationals to the country’s authorities at the Taftan border crossing in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchistan, IRNA reported, citing local media.

According to the report, the Pakistani nationals who held no valid documents were arrested in different cities of Iran.

Pakistanis living in Iran illegally are caught every year by security forces.

**Tehran says Syria raid won’t impact foreign policy**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Monday that the recent aggression against Syria, which is considered “warmongering”, will not impact Iran’s foreign policy, noting that Tehran will continue to follow the same principles that it has been pursuing over the past decades.

Qassemi said the U.S.-led attack against Syria is “contrary to all international norms”.

He added the current “abnormal” situation in the Middle East has its roots in Washington’s “strategic mistakes”.

“Such expansionist measures are contrary to international norms. The United States has shown that under its expansionist policies, it uses false pretenses and lies to carry out such measures time and again in order to achieve its goal,” Qassemi told a regular news briefing.

He further said such strategic mistakes will definitely lead to more problems in the region.

In the early hours of Saturday, the U.S., Britain and France launched airstrikes against three Syrian sites in response to an alleged chemical attack by the Syrian government



on the town of Douma near Damascus. “It seems one of the goals of the rash and unwise act of America and its two allies in breaching the sovereignty and territorial in-

tegrity of Syria was to create discord among the three guarantors of the ceasefire in Syria,” he said, referring to Iran, Russia and Turkey as brokers of the Astana peace talks and

guarantors of de-escalation zones in Syria.

The spokesman went on to say that the Astana peace talks have been fruitful in helping reduce conflict in Syria.

He said this achievement might be a source of “discontent” for the aggressors.

Qassemi emphasized that Iran, Russia and Turkey will continue cooperation in fighting terrorism and defending the territorial integrity of Syria despite minor disagreements.

■ **‘Israel’s hit and run policy shouldn’t be tolerated’**

Asked about Iran’s response to an Israeli attack on the Syrian T-4 air base near Homs earlier this month which left seven Iranians dead, Qassemi said the attack will be met with a response, emphasizing that Israel’s “hit and run” policy shouldn’t be tolerated anymore.

“Gone are the days when the Zionist regime would hit and run. The resistance forces and Syria can defend their territorial integrity and national sovereignty and will do so,” he stated.

“The occupying regime will sooner or later receive the necessary responses to its recent crime and aggression, and they will regret their misdeed,” the spokesman added.

**Macron: Talk with Iran, Russia, Turkey part of solution to Syria crisis**

French President Emmanuel Macron has said Paris considers a dialogue with Russia, Turkey, and Iran on Syria a necessary part of any settlement to the crisis in the country.

According to Sputnik News, Macron claimed on Sunday that the missile attack against Syria was “legitimate” and conducted within the international community framework.

“I have said from the very beginning that in order to reach a sustainable solution on Syria it is necessary to talk to Iran, Russia and Turkey. It is necessary to be engaged in dialogue with Iran, because of its presence in Syria.”

Macron also claimed that the military

strike against Syria which France was part of it was successful.

According to the Russian military, on Saturday the U.S., UK, and France fired over 100 cruise and air-to-surface missiles, most of which were shot down by the Syrian air defense.

Syrian authorities have repeatedly said they had previously destroyed all chemical weapons stockpiles.

Russia slammed the U.S.-led airstrikes as an act of aggression against a sovereign state, and President Putin said that the attack was conducted in violation of international law.

In the meantime, Macron confirmed that he would visit Russia in May.

**“It is necessary to be engaged in dialogue with Iran because of its presence in Syria” to settle the conflict, the French president says.**

**Iran Army unveils new chopper gear**

The airborne division of Iran’s Army Ground Force on Monday unveiled a series of homegrown equipment and achievements extending the capabilities of its helicopters.

In a ceremony in Tehran, high-ranking Army officials unveiled the latest achievements of the young experts serving in the Ground Force’s Airborne Unit.

The major item put on display in the event was a missile dubbed ‘Shafaq’ (Twilight), which is mounted on military helicopters.

The homegrown air-launched missile can hit targets within a range of 8 to 12 kilometers.

Another highlight of the ceremony was the launch of a program to equip all airborne unit choppers with night-vision cameras, which would enhance aircraft capabilities in nocturnal military missions.

Also highlighted at the event was the accomplishment of a plan to arm all reconnaissance, logistical and transportation helicopters of the unit with rocket-launchers and heavy machine guns.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sphere.

In comments in February 2018, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei called for efforts to maintain and boost Iran’s defense capabilities, hitting back at the enemies for disputing the country’s missile program.

“Without a moment of hesitation, the country must move to acquire whatever is necessary for defense, even if the whole world is opposed to it,” the Leader said.

(Source: Tasnim)

**Salehi says attack on Syria shows U.S. ‘political bankruptcy’**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said on Monday that air raids on Syria show the “political bankruptcy” of the United States.

“This attack shows the U.S. political bankruptcy. The U.S. and certain European countries that accompanied the U.S. committed crime without having a clear reason for what they did,” Salehi told reporters.

The U.S., Britain and France jointly carried out attacks on Syria on Saturday. The attack took place one week after a suspected chemical weapons attack in the Syrian town of Douma near Damascus. Western countries claimed the Syrian government was responsible for the attack. Syria rejected by the claim.

Salehi said the U.S.-led attacks were a “failure” for Washington and its allies.

Salehi who served as foreign minister from 2011 to 2013 also said, “The people awakened and realized the true identity of the hegemony”.



It has been revealed to the people that the U.S. politicians adopted an “unwise”, “cruel” and “brutal” policy, he added.

On Saturday, Ayatollah Khamenei strongly denounced the airstrikes as a “crime”, calling the leaders of the U.S., Britain and France are “criminals”.

**Wherever U.S. has made military intervention terror has emerged: Larijani**

**POLITICS** TEHRAN — Iranian Majlis Speaker Ali Larijani said on Monday that terrorist actions in the Middle East region have mainly resulted from U.S. interferences.

Larijani made the remarks during a meeting with Vietnamese National Assembly Chairwoman Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan in Hanoi.

“Terrorist movements have started their activities wherever the U.S. has made military intervention,” Larijani said in indirect reference to the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, where terrorists found opportunities for activities.

Larijani said that Iran has always been firm in fighting terrorism and has helped regional countries whenever they have requested.

He said that the U.S.-led strikes against Syria revealed that the West does not seek to help settle the conflict in the country.

“The Westerners use chaos in the region to sell weapons, but we are determined to make the region safe,” he added.

The U.S., Britain and France jointly carried out attacks on Syria on Saturday. The attack took place one week after a suspected

chemical weapons attack in the Syrian town of Douma near Damascus. Western countries claimed the Syrian government was responsible for the attack. Syria rejected by the claim.

For her part, the Vietnamese parliament speaker expressed concern over the U.S.-led airstrikes on Syria, saying that all countries should respect the UN Charter.

**Keeping nuclear deal in place vital for EU: Mogherini**

The European Union has reiterated its strong and unequivocal commitment to the full implementation of the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran by all sides, saying preserving the deal is vital for the EU.

“The Europeans have always made it clear, the European Union has always made it clear that for us, keeping the agreement in place is vital. It is a strategic interest for the European Union and we will stick to it,” EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini told reporters on Monday ahead of the bloc’s Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg.

Mogherini further said, “We are doing all we can to work with our American friends to make sure that all parties

stay fully committed to the full implementation of the agreement, as it is the case so far.”

She once again confirmed Iran’s full compliance with its nuclear commitments under the JCPOA, saying that the International Atomic Energy Agency has also verified the country’s adherence to the deal in 10 reports.

In a speech to a quarterly meeting of the IAEA’s Board of Governors in Vienna in March, IAEA chief Yukiya Amano, once again confirmed Iran’s compliance with the 2015 nuclear agreement, warning that any collapse of the deal would be a “great loss.”

“As of today, I can state that Iran is implementing its

nuclear-related commitments...If the JCPOA were to fail, it would be a great loss for nuclear verification and for multilateralism,” Amano added.

Mogherini also emphasized that preserving the IAEA’s credibility was “crucial” and said, “Work is ongoing and we believe it would be essential to stay united in this.”

She added that the EU did not foresee any decision to impose new sanctions against Iran on Monday.

“As you know, we have already sanctions in place on Iran; non-nuclear related. I do not expect [EU foreign] ministers to take decision on this today,” the EU foreign policy chief said.

(Source: Press TV)

**Spring snow catches Iranians by surprise**

**SOCIETY** TEHRAN — Spring snow which blanketed some provinces on Monday has surprised people across the country.

Except for a heavy snowfall in late January in some 17 provinces, over the past water year (September 23, 2017 to March 20, 2018) dry autumn turn into an even drier winter and many cities experienced lower-than-normal precipitation amounts compared to the long-term average.

Except for northern and northwestern provinces of Ardebil, West Azarbaijan,

Golestan and East Azarbaijan which received above-normal annual rainfall other provinces suffered low precipitation over the past six months.

And now snow and rain are coming down in some 13 provinces and significant temperature drop caught Iranians off guard. According to Iranian meteorological organization the current weather conditions will persist throughout Tuesday and Wednesday, ISNA reported.

Western, southwestern, northern, central, eastern and northwestern provinces of Iran are either blanketed with snow or poured

with rain on Monday. The report states that rain and snow will mostly fall in eastern and central Iran on Wednesday.

Following the rain and snow many roads linking various provinces are either closed by snow or flooded. As per a news piece by IRNA news agency 8 nomads in Izeh, southwestern province of Khuzestan, went missing on Sunday night. Three are found alive and search and rescue workers are still looking for the rest.

The rainfall and Climatological Research Institute of Iran has announced in late March

that much of the country should expect higher than average temperatures as well as less precipitation this spring. The announcement also predicted that rainfall patterns won’t change over the current Iranian calendar year ending on March 20, 2019.

While water shortage has become a matter of concern both for the government and people who are actually feeling the adverse effects of low precipitations we just have to cross our fingers and wish for heavier rainfall and snowfall to compensate for the past year shortages.

# Syrians rally in Damascus in support of Assad against U.S.-led strikes

## OPCW starts emergency talks on Syria 'gas attack'

By Nima Chitsaz

The controversy around the United States-led attack on Syria grows day by day. Critics blame Washington, London and Paris for taking a unilateral measure against a sovereign country and a member of the United Nations in a U.S.-led attack under what they claim to be a chemical attack on Syrian people.

Many analysts find such claim very strange, arguing that after years of foreign instigated war the government of the Syrian Arab Republic President Bashar al-Assad had the upper hand in mopping out the Takfiri terrorists and people who were forced to flee their home and properties due to the massacre of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist outfit and the likes, were returning back to their hometowns with joy.

How come, just on the brink of the terrorists' total defeat another chemical attack takes place and gives the terrorists a momentum to flee or reinforce and why would the Syrian government forces gas their compatriots after what both sides had been through, the government forces fighting terrorist Wahabi outfits and the Syrian people were forced to leave behind everything, not just their home, car, shop, school, garden, flower boxes, family and loved ones, or a leg and arm or perhaps their precious life, they left their soul. The international community will burden the consequences for years to come.

Analyst also say why the conscience of the world was asleep when the slain Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein gassed the defenseless Iraqi people in Halabja.

The Halabja chemical attack also known as the Halabja Massacre or Bloody Friday, took place on March 16, 1988, during the closing days of the Iran-Iraq War in the Kurdish city of Halabja in Iraq. The attack killed between 3,200 and 5,000 people and injured 7,000 to 10,000 more, most of them civilians. The Halabja attack has been recognized as genocide conducted by the Iraqi regime under Saddam.

However and in defiance of what the biased media say the supporters of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad have poured into the streets in the capital Damascus in support of their government after the United States and its allies fired more than 100 missiles at Syria.

Honking car horns and waving Syrian flags the crowd cheered on Assad, celebrating what they see as a triumph in resistance to the U.S.-led airstrikes.

The airstrikes were carried out in response to an alleged chemical weapons attack in the Syrian town of Douma last week.

Meantime, the United Nations chemical watchdog has started emergency talks on the alleged chemical attack in Syria's Douma, diplomatic sources say.

The British, Russian and French ambassadors to the Netherlands are participating in the closed-door talks which are in session at the headquarters of the 192-member Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague.

The talks come as OPCW inspectors arrived in Damascus on Saturday at the request of the Syrian government to determine whether chemicals were used in Douma near the capital Damascus.

Monday's meeting of the body's governing executive council, which consists of 41 states, was called by its chairman, Bangladeshi ambassador Sheikh Mohammed Belal.

The alleged chemical attack was used as an excuse by the United States, Britain and France to launch an airstrike on targets near Damascus and Homs before any investigation was conducted.

The Western trio fired more than 100 missiles at Syria in the early hours of Saturday, for the declared purpose of crippling the country's chemical production facilities over the alleged gas attack.

**Russia vows 'not to interfere' in OPCW work in Syria**

Also on Monday, Russia vowed not to interfere with the OPCW fact-finding mission in Syria.

"Russia confirms its commitment to ensure safe (sic) and security of the mission and will not interfere in its work," the Russian Embassy in The Hague posted on its



twitter account.

The embassy also censured the U.S., noting that Saturday's bombing of the mission was a bid "to undermine the credibility" of the mission.

The Syrian government surrendered its chemical weapons stockpile during a process monitored by the OPCW in 2013.

**Assad's aide: Syrian defenses smarter than U.S. missiles**

The political adviser to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has praised Syria's air defenses for intercepting most of the missiles fired by the U.S. and its allies at the country on Saturday.

Bouthaina Shaaban said in remarks published on the Lebanon-based al-Mayadeen website that the victory marks the beginning of the end of the American empire.

"The breaking of their evil aggression is the beginning of the vanishing of their empire, which will be replaced by new forces which respects the humanity, sovereignty and safety of peoples," she said.

**Turkey rejects Macron's comments on Ankara-Moscow rift after Syria strikes**

Elsewhere, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdogan slammed remarks by French President Emmanuel Macron that a recent U.S.-led military operation in Syria drove a wedge between Ankara and Moscow.

"Turkey's Syria policy is not a policy of being on the same side or being opposed to another country," Bozdogan said on Monday.

The reaction came after Macron said the airstrikes by the United States, France and Britain on a number of Syria's military facilities had a tangible result and that was a separation between Turkey and Russia.

"With these strikes and this intervention, we separated the Russians and the Turks on this issue... the Turks condemned the chemical strike and supported the operation that we conducted," the French president said in reference to an alleged chemical attack on April 7 in Syria's Douma, which the West claims was carried out by the Damascus government. The Syrian government has rejected the allegation, saying the U.S. and its allies used the suspected chemical attack to launch airstrikes on Syria.

Bozdogan, however, said Turkey's policy on Syria remained unchanged even after the Saturday strikes, adding that Ankara differed with Russia and Iran, another major backer of Syria's fight against terror, and even the U.S. on the situation in Syria.

He told reporters in Qatar that Turkey "has different policies to Iran and Russia," adding, "Until now, has the policy put forward by Turkey changed? No."

**Cavusoglu: Turkey-Russia ties too strong to be broken**

In reaction to Macron's remarks, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu also said that Turkey's ties with Russia were too strong to be broken by France's president.

"We can think differently but they (our relations with Russia) are not so weak that the French president can break them," Cavusoglu said at a press conference with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Monday.

"We have strong relations with Russia," Cavusoglu added. "But our relations with Russia are not an alternative to NATO relations or our allies."

**British Labor Party declares Syria strike 'unlawful'**

Britain's opposition Labor Party also has released an expert opinion about the recent U.S.-led air strikes against Syria, describing them as unlawful.

Tom Watson, the deputy Labor leader, released the five-page legal opinion from Dapo Akande, a professor of public international law at Oxford University.

A summary of Akande's conclusions were published on Monday by the Guardian newspaper.

"Contrary to the position of the (British) government, neither the UN charter nor customary international law permits military action on the basis of the doctrine of humanitarian intervention," the opinion said.

"The legal position advanced by the government ignores the structure of the international law rules relating to the use of force," it added.

**EU FMs set to discuss Syria, tensions with Russia**

The developments follow as Foreign Ministers from the European Union (EU) are set to review the bloc's foreign policy on issues of common concern, including the Syria crisis, and possibly take a united stand against Russia amid diplomatic tensions between the two sides.

The foreign minister from the 28 EU member states gathered on Monday in Luxembourg to discuss the developments in Syria.

The EU foreign ministers are said to be divided in their views about the legality of the missile strikes on Syria, and reaching a unified policy in regard to the incident could be a tough challenge.

France and Britain have defended the attack on Syria, some were neutral, and those at the other end of the scale were opposed to the strikes, possibly due to worries regarding Russia's reaction.

Moscow, which has close proximity to Europe and supplies gas to the continent, has warned European leaders against unknown consequences of taking anti-Damascus measures.

(Source: agencies)

## German minister wants EU united front for de-escalation with Russia

German Europe Minister Michael Roth called for the European Union to adopt a united front against Russia with the aim of reducing tensions, warning that "anti-Russian reflexes" were as dangerous as naïveté about Russia's "nationalist" course.

Roth's intervention, in an article for Die Welt newspaper, came amid signs that under conservative Chancellor Angela Merkel and Social Democrat (SPD) Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, Germany's position towards Russia is hardening, especially since a poison attack in Britain, widely blamed on Russia.

Roth, in remarks that seemed designed to reflect the more pro-Russian views of the SPD's members, said Europe's sanctions against Russia should be maintained, but with the aim of bringing Russia to the negotiating table.

"Sanctions aren't a goal in themselves," he wrote. "They should encourage people back to the negotiating table to work on reasonable solutions ... Anti-Russian reflexes are just as dangerous as naïvely relativizing the nationalist-tinged policies of the Russian leadership."

**EU cool to U.S. plan for new Russia sanctions**

Meanwhile, EU foreign ministers looked unlikely to join the United States on Monday in imposing new economic sanctions on Russia or Syria.

Western leaders sought to emphasize



diplomacy, with an EU foreign ministers meeting in Luxembourg.

"It is very important to stress [the strikes are] not an attempt to change the tide of the war in Syria or to have a regime change," British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson told reporters on arrival at the meeting.

"I'm afraid the Syrian war will go on in its horrible, miserable way. But it was the world saying that we've had enough of the use of chemical weapons," he said.

In Luxembourg, ministers were set to

release a statement to keep open the option of new travel bans and asset freezes on Syrians the West accuses of links to the April 7 poison gas attacks on a rebel enclave outside Damascus. But diplomats foresaw no decisions on Monday, especially against Russians.

"We have to keep pushing to get a ceasefire and humanitarian aid through the [United Nations] Security Council and eventually a peace process," Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok told reporters.

(Source: agencies)

## Opposition could stop Mike Pompeo Secretary of State nomination

Mike Pompeo's nomination to become the United States Secretary of State has fallen into a state of flux after the loss of support in a Senate committee in the wake of President Trump's Syria strike.

The current CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) director was nominated to become the nation's top diplomat after the firing of Rex Tillerson, but he may be blocked by those who previously voted for him.

Virginia Democrat Sen. Tim Kaine said that he would not support Pompeo in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and claimed that he had an "anti-diplomacy" streak, meaning his process could stall.

"We have a President who is anti-diplomacy and I worry that Mike Pompeo has shown the same tendency to oppose diplomacy," Kaine said on "Face the Nation."

The announcement comes after the Trump administration fired rockets at Syrian government targets, an action Kaine opposed because there has been no congressional approval for the U.S. military action in the war-torn country.

Supporters say the attacks are covered by the Authorization for Use of Military Force against terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda, passed 17 years ago in the aftermath of 9/11.

Kaine had previously supported the nomination of Pompeo, seen as close to Trump, to be CIA chief. His opposition comes as the nominee has also faced scrutiny for the position, which is fourth in line to the presidency.

Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul slammed him for support of the Iraq War and statements saying that the U.S. should bomb Iran.

That leaves Pompeo short of the number of votes he needs for recommendation through the Foreign Relations Committee. New Hampshire Democrat Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, who voted for him as CIA director, has also voiced concerns about moving him to State.

Others among the 14 Democratic senators who voted yes for Pompeo before have also said they will vote against him this time around, with Paul's opposition and the medical absence of Sen. John McCain leaving a floor vote in doubt.

Beyond a general reputation as a hawk and concerns about the direction of the U.S. foreign policy after John Bolton became National Security Adviser, Pompeo was grilled on issues such as his ties to anti-Muslim figures.

Pompeo appeared frequently on the show of Frank Gaffney Jr., who has promoted the idea that Barack Obama is a clandestine Muslim and warns of Sharia law taking over the U.S.

(Source: New York Daily)

## Qatar emir boycotts Arab summit in Saudi Arabia

Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani will not be in Saudi Arabia to represent his nation in a summit of the Arab leaders.

Qatar's state news agency said that Doha's permanent representative to the Arab League, Saif bin Muqaddam al-Buainain, will represent the Qatari delegation to the Saudi regime-hosted summit. The report did not elaborate why the decision was made, but it showed that a nearly year-old dispute between Qatar on one side and Arab neighbors in the Persian Gulf region is still a long way from being resolved.

The dispute came in June 2017 when Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), along with Egypt and the Maldives, announced a halt to diplomatic and transport ties with Qatar in response to the alleged support of the country for terrorism. Doha rejected the allegations and said the boycott was meant to force it into concessions that it said would violate its sovereignty.

Among the concessions Qatar was supposed to make, as it was later announced in a list of demands by the boycotting countries to restore the ties, was for Doha to reduce ties with Iran and shut down its flagship television channel Al Jazeera. Qatari authorities rejected the demands.

Sheikh Tamim's boycotting of the summit comes as heads of state or government from most of the 22 other Arab countries are present in Saudi Arabia to attend the event. The emir was on top of Qatari delegation to the last year's Arab summit in Jordan.

The decision also comes right after Sheikh Tamim returned from a trip to Washington where he was reportedly urged to accept the Saudi regime demands.

The House of Saud regime's Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeiri said on Thursday the dispute with Qatar would not be on the agenda of the Arab summit.

(Source: Press TV)

## UAE ends Somali military training mission as tensions soar

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has decided to end its military training program in Somalia as the ties between the two countries deteriorated following a second security incident in recent days.

On Saturday, an Emirati plane was grounded in the African country for several hours after UAE officials refused to allow the search of suspicious luggage.

"The UAE has decided to disband its military training program in Somalia," said a government statement run on the UAE's WAM news agency on Sunday.

The decision was announced after Emirati military trainers were held for hours at Bosaso International Airport in Somalia's semi-autonomous region of Puntland, as they refused to allow security forces to check their suspiciously "heavy" luggage.

In an earlier incident, the Somali federal government had confiscated nearly 10 million dollars from a UAE Royal Jet at Mogadishu International Airport.

"The decision comes in response to Somali security forces' seizure of a UAE-registered civil aircraft at Mogadishu Airport and confiscation of money destined to pay the soldiers," WAM said.

The UAE's statement, however, came only after the Somali government announced it will disband Abu Dhabi's training mission in the country and "fully take over" the troops trained by the Persian Gulf state.

Somalia's Defense Minister Mohamed Mursal Abdirahman told state news agency Sonna last week that those troops would be integrated into various units of the national army.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	95506.3
IFX	1053.5

Sources: tse.ir, lfb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	51,800 rials
GBP	59,790 rials
AED	11,490 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	66.70/b
Brent	71.84/b
OPEC Basket	68.73/b
Gold	\$1,343.20 /oz
Silver	\$16.63/oz
Platinum	\$930.45/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



**Expansion of rail transport co-op stressed by Iran, Austria**

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — A 10-member Austrian trade delegation visited Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) on Sunday to discuss expansion of cooperation between the two countries in rail transport, TCCIMA portal reported.

In a meeting with Mohammad Reza Bakhtiari, TCCIMA's deputy for international affairs, the two sides called for mutual cooperation in different areas of rail industry services including innovative prefabricated concrete components used in platforms and buildings, insulation systems and electronic components, production and maintenance of rolling machines and disaster risk management.



**1,100 kilometers of freeways inaugurated in a year**

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — About 1,100 kilometers of freeways were inaugurated in Iran during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), according to Kheirollah Khademi, the managing director of Iran's Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company (CDTIC).

On March 10, CDTIC had signed 25 trillion rials (about \$595.2 million) worth of deals with the private sector for joint construction of 439 kilometers of freeways across the country. According to Khademi, domestic investors are going to finance the construction of six freeways which were the subject of the inked deals.

**There may be a way for India to achieve double-digit economic growth**

India surged ahead to become the world's fastest-growing major economy in the last quarter of calendar year 2017. But the South Asian giant can do even better, potentially even hitting double-digit growth rates, according to one business leader.

This argument rests on the background of "an already robust growth rate hovering around seven percent, supported by regulatory decisions that favour manufacturing" to create jobs as well as business-friendly policy more broadly. Anil Rai Gupta, chairman and managing director at Indian electricity giant Havells, said.

"To achieve GDP (gross domestic product) growth of 10 percent, India would need the service sector to grow close to 20 percent complemented by four and eight percent growth in agriculture and industrial growth," he told CNBC via e-mail on Tuesday, adding that India's economic fundamentals were strong enough to achieve that.

The "Make in India" campaign and the country's young demographics "will not just draw a better consumption pattern for the country but also push the overall growth rate towards the double digit mark," he explained. India is the world's second most populous nation after China, with approximately 1.3 billion people.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has implemented two major economic changes in the past 18 months — though the reforms' chaotic introduction initially hit economic growth. In November 2016, it was announced at short notice that 500 and 1,000 rupee notes were to be withdrawn from circulation in an attempt to curb counterfeiting. July last year marked the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax, unifying sales tax across all Indian states.

But, for another expert on India's economy, the ceiling on GDP growth is due to the country's management of its labor force.

"India certainly has the labor force to grow (its economy) that quickly ... and it is young," Derek Scissors, an expert on the Indian economy at U.S.-based think tank the American Enterprise Institute, told CNBC via e-mail in March. Still, he expressed skepticism that the population was being put to effective use.

"A very large chunk of the labor force is stuck on very small plots of land providing no value added," he said. "Labor laws requiring government approval for firing anyone from a medium-sized or large firm discourage hiring."

"India can grow faster than at present but there's no evidence (the country) can hold 9 percent GDP growth, and certainly not 10 percent," Scissors argued. "As soon as it gets into the 8s inflation spikes because supply capacity is inadequate to meet that pace of demand increases."

(Source: CNBC)

**Iran ships 2.1m bpd of oil to global markets in March**

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Iran's oil customers in Asia and Europe shipped in 2.1 million barrels per day (bpd) of Iranian crude during March, IRNA reported on Monday citing the oil ministry. China and India were top importers of Iranian crude oil in the mentioned period importing over one million bpd together. The oil ministry expects the imports by these

two buyers to reach 1.3 million bpd in April cementing their places as the two top buyers of Iranian crude.

Total, Shell, Eni, Hellenic Petroleum and Saras were also among the European customers of Iranian oil.

Iran exported 400,000 barrels of gas condensate on a daily basis in March, half of which was shipped in by South Korea mak-



ing it the top buyer of condensate from the country.

According to Iran's oil ministry, the country's average oil exports have increased by about 60,000 bpd in 2018 compared to the last year.

The country exported 2.13 million bpd of crude in last year, 62 percent of which was

shipped to Asian markets and the rest was received by European buyers.

During 2017, Iran also exported 180 million barrels of gas condensate, something about 490,000 bpd.

The average price for Iranian crude oil and condensate stood at near \$52 per barrel in 2017.

**FINEX 2018 hosting near 400 companies in Tehran**

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — The 11th edition of Iran's International Exhibition of Exchange, Bank and Insurance (FINEX 2018) kicked off at the Tehran Permanent International Fairground on Monday with participation of 392 Iranian and foreign companies.

The inaugural ceremony of the event was attended by Iranian Vice President for Science and Technology Sorena Sattari, Head of Iran's Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) Shapour Mohammadi and a number of senior officials of the country's financial and banking organizations, IRNA reported.

Companies from Iraq, Oman, Turkey, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Switzerland, Sweden, Britain and Russia are present in the exhibit which will run until Thursday.



The third edition of Iran's Finstars (Finstars2018) is also held on the sidelines of FINEX 2018.

Finstars is a series of financial events that brings together fintech startups and fintech experts to meet Iran's technological needs of the financial markets and share innovative ideas on fintech, Iran Fara Bourse Company (IFB) announced.

Panels and workshops mainly focusing on experiences of the successful teams at Finstars2016 and Finstars2017 will be held in the event for creating a platform to change good ideas into real startups.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony of FINEX 2018, Sorena Sattari put the country's startups income at 600 trillion rials (about \$14.28 billion) in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

**Zarif embarks for Dushanbe to attend ECO ministerial meeting**

**ECONOMY** TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif left Tehran for Tajikistan on Monday to take part in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) 23rd meeting of Council of Ministers (COM) in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe the next day, IRNA reported.

The 22nd Council of Ministers meeting

was held in Islamabad on February, 28, 2017.

ECO is an intergovernmental economic organization, created in 1985 by Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Since 1992, the activity of the organization has intensified with joining of Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

COM is the highest policy and decision-

making body of ECO. It comprises the ministers of foreign affairs of the member states who meet in regular, informal and extraordinary sessions. The Council of Ministers may, if deemed necessary, propose the convening of meetings of other ministers in the formulation of plans and projects in their respective fields through sectoral or joint ministerial meetings.



**Japan, China agree trade war will harm global economy**

Japan and China agree that a trade war will have serious consequences for the world economy, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono said on Monday after a high-level economic dialogue between the world's third- and second-largest economies.

Concern is growing about a trade row between China and the United States in which the two nations have threatened each other with tariffs. Japan has been criticized by U.S. President Donald Trump on trade and been hit with tariffs on steel and aluminum, but it has not yet threatened counter-tariffs.

"We have shared understanding that a trade war, no matter which country has brought it about, would have a very large impact on the prosperity of the international economy," Kono told reporters after the first such dialogue in more than seven years.

Kono and the Chinese government's top diplomat, State Councilor Wang Yi, co-chaired the Tokyo meeting. Wang is also foreign minister.

Financial markets have been roiled recently over fears that a full-blown U.S.-China trade war could shatter global trade and economic growth.



Trade issues will likely be at the forefront of a summit between Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and President Trump later this week. Tokyo is eager to avoid being pushed into talks on a two-way free trade agreement aimed not only at market access but at monetary and currency policies.

Kono also said it was possible that Japan works with

China on Beijing's Belt and Road projects.

"It is quite possible that Japan cooperates with China on various (Belt and Road) projects on a case by case basis where international standards are met," Kono said.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative, unveiled in 2013, aims at building a modern-day Silk Road connecting China by land and sea to Southeast Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

Abe and Xi pledged last year to reset the sometimes touchy relationship between Asia's two largest economic powers.

Wang, who spent eight years in Japan as a diplomat including three as ambassador, said the changing economic climate presented fresh opportunities.

"After reopening these talks, we're both standing at new starting points to discuss future cooperation that will, I hope, lead to fresh economic growth for both nations," Wang said at the start of the economic dialogue.

Wang is the first Chinese foreign minister to visit Japan in a bilateral context in nine years. He and Kono discussed a broad range of issues, including North Korea, on Sunday night.

(Source: Reuters)

**The mystery of the Eurozone slowdown**

By Gavyn Davies

The global economy entered 2018 apparently locked in a period of strong and synchronized growth, with all of the major geographical blocs breaking free of the constraints that had dogged previous growth spurts since 2010. While that may still be the case, optimism has been dented by a sudden and rather sharp downturn in activity in the Eurozone, a region that had until recently been leading the global expansion.

This started in February and has now become an event of sufficient importance to warrant further investigation, since the causes of such a large setback to growth in a large part of the global economy are not entirely clear.

Last year, the Eurozone surprised economic forecasters in entirely the opposite direction. After a long period in which the ECB had failed to ease monetary conditions in the face of the zero lower bound on interest rates, unconventional monetary easing finally gained traction in 2017. This, combined with global trade expansion, the end of EU fiscal tightening and rising business confidence led to a catch up in spending on capital equipment, housing and consumer durables that drove the sudden rebound in European growth.

According to the Fulcrum activity nowcasts, which identified the surge in growth very early last year, the Eurozone was still growing at a rate of 3.5 percent late in 2017. Each of the largest economies in the bloc was doing well: Germany 4 percent, France 3 percent, Italy 2 percent and Spain 3.5 percent. Economic forecasters and the central bank had become confident that this strong recovery phase would persist throughout 2018. But that has not happened so far.

The latest nowcast results for the Eurozone suggest that activity growth has dropped to only 1.2 percent in early April, with each of the major economies experiencing a sharp decline in growth. Even Germany, which was relatively



immune from previous European downturns has recorded a very sharp dip, with growth now down to only around 1 percent.

Overall, the risks to the euro area growth outlook were assessed to have remained broadly balanced. Downside risks continued to relate primarily to global factors, including rising protectionism.

This slowdown has come as a definite surprise to the ECB forecasters, who expected the growth rate to slow only slightly in the course of 2018. The latest ECB Economic Bulletin in March suggested that the annualized GDP growth rate in the first and second quarters of 2018 would be around 2.5 percent and the March Governing Council minutes expressed a high degree of confidence that the forces that had caused the upswing in 2017 would prove long lasting. They argued that the risks around their optimistic growth forecasts were balanced, although they did express some concern about the potential for a negative impact from global trade conflicts.

Why has this downside surprise happened? The fact that activity growth in the US and China have not experienced the same degree of slowdown as the Eurozone suggests that the global economic expansion probably remains broadly intact. Nor has there been any major

slowdown in export orders or sentiment that might indicate that the rising euro is mainly to blame for the slowdown.

Some observers think that the bad news stems from temporary special factors, such as extreme weather and the influenza outbreak. Others suggest that the outcome of coalition talks in Germany have dented business confidence.

But I have not seen any really firm evidence in favor of these views. The breadth of the slowdown across Europe, and the fact that survey data and hard economic data have both fallen, suggests that there might be something more important going on. Ben Breitholz of Bianco Research has kindly provided us with the following graph:

Up to now, there has been no compelling fundamental narrative that would account for the Eurozone slowdown. But there are two possible candidates.

The first is that the effects of the ECBs belated shift to quantitative easing in January 2015 have now started to wane. Although this policy change did not involve a large drop in real policy rates, it did succeed in reducing bank lending rates and bond yields throughout the Eurozone, and also restored the provision of bank credit in the troubled economies. It is conceivable that this impetus moved past its

maximum effect on the growth rate in 2017. Fulcrum economists estimate that the monetary impetus was adding about 1 percentage point to Eurozone activity growth in mid-2017, and this has now entirely disappeared. Furthermore, forward short rates in the Eurozone began to rise last year as the markets anticipated future ECB normalization of monetary policy.

A second possible explanation is that the growth rate during 2017 was simply too far above the long run growth rate for this situation to be sustainable indefinitely. Supply constraints may have started to bite. The Fulcrum nowcast models had anticipated a gradual return to trend occurring in 2018, and they now seem to interpret the data as being consistent with a much sharper return to trend than was previously expected.

**Conclusion**  
There is probably some truth in the weather-related hypothesis, in which case some improvement in growth is likely in the next couple of months. But if either of the two more fundamental explanations — waning monetary policy effects or supply side constraints — proves valid, then the growth rate in the Eurozone will disappoint both market and ECB projections this year. Already, we have seen consensus growth projections stabilizing, after a prolonged period of continuous upgrades.

The ECB will probably give the economy the benefit of the doubt at the next Governing Council meeting on 26 April. It has been very confident that a strong, above trend upswing will continue this year, and will be reluctant to change their assessment based on a couple of months' data.

The ECB has clearly been intending to end its program of asset purchases well before the end of 2018, but a combination of fading growth and stable inflation could make it increasingly difficult for it to achieve this objective.

(Source: Financial Times)

# Oil markets tense after western strikes on Syria, rising U.S. drilling weighs

Oil fell more than 1 percent on Monday as markets opened following western air strikes in Syria over the weekend, while a rise in U.S. drilling for new production also dragged on prices.

The United States, France and Britain launched 105 missiles on Saturday, targeting what they said were three chemical weapons facilities in Syria in retaliation for a suspected poison gas attack in Douma on April 7.

Brent crude oil futures were at \$71.78 per barrel at 0643 GMT, down 80 cents, or 1.10 percent, from their last close.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude oil futures were down 68 cents, or 1.01 percent, at \$66.71 a barrel.

Traders said markets in Asia began cautiously after the weekend strikes, with some relief that the move looked unlikely to escalate.

"In the wake of the coordinated attack on Syria, oil prices are significantly lower ... (but) the impact appears to be compact



and over," said Sukrit Vijayakar, director of energy consultancy Trifecta.

Oil markets also came under pressure from a rise in U.S. oil drilling activity.

U.S. energy companies added seven oil rigs drilling for new production in the week to April 13, bringing the total to 815, the highest since March 2015, energy services firm Baker Hughes said on Friday.

Despite this, Brent is still up more than 16 percent from its 2018 low in February, due to healthy demand and also because of conflict and tension in the Middle East.

Although Syria itself is not a significant oil producer, the wider Middle East is the world's most important crude exporter and tension in the region tends to put oil markets on edge.

"Investors continued to worry about the impact of a wider conflict in the Middle East," ANZ bank said.

(Source: Reuters)

## How significant is WTI's breakout?

Oil, after looking rangebound for a while, albeit at the highest levels since 2014, looks like it has broken out. When WTI futures challenged February's high of \$66.66 a few weeks ago, we reached \$66.55 before retreating rapidly, a pattern that reinforced the resistance level and suggested that we would head lower again. A couple of days ago, however, we broke through and have been trading above that point for three days now. That confirms that WTI has broken out of its range, but the lack of follow through since suggests that this may not be all that significant. An analysis of the reasons for the breakout and the price action since, however, suggest that it will be.

The first question that needs to be answered is how significant any technical signal is in the longer term. The answer is not very. Even big-picture, clearly visible technical analysis such as this can only take you so far. The break of a level often triggers stop loss orders clustered around it, so can cause a quick jump that traders can exploit intraday, but over time more powerful fundamental forces hold sway. It is those fundamentals that forced oil higher this week.

The demand factors that have been in play for nearly a year now are well known. Improving global and U.S. growth suggest higher oil demand and the market has reacted accordingly. What changed this week, however, was the supply side of the equation. Conventional wisdom

has held that that was a restricting factor for oil prices. The seeming ability of North American shale producers to turn production on and off in response to price moves suggested that the run up would prompt big increases in supply. That is still a possibility, but what changed this week was the supply picture elsewhere.

Middle East tensions and conflicts are nothing new for oil traders, nor for anyone else for that matter. They have existed for millennia and the occasional flare-ups are sometimes taken in stride by the market. The reaction to Syria's President Assad using chemical weapons against his own people, however, has the potential to be very impactful.

There are calls for a reaction greater than the targeted strikes employed by President Trump last time and that has traders worried. There has been talk from OPEC this week about extending their production cuts into next year, but if the proxy war in Syria heats up the prospect of a unified front by the signatories to that agreement are seriously reduced. If the Vienna agreement were to break down just as U.S. shale producers are ramping up production, it doesn't take a genius to conclude that oil will be hit hard.

All of that, however, is speculation, and if we return to the recent price action there are suggestions that the market is not worried. Even as Trump has been tweeting out contradictory signals this week and the IEA has issued a report that they



expect the signatories to the Vienna agreement to declare "mission accomplished", WTI has held above the previous highs. That indicates one of two things. Either traders are not worried about the effects should that be the case, or simply don't believe it will happen.

Overall, then, while technical levels and breakouts are not usually too significant in the long term, the lack of volatility following the initial push upwards suggests that this one may be. We are still close enough that a drop back below \$66 could come and return us to the previous range but forming a new range of around \$66-\$75 looks more likely.

(Source: oilprice.com)

## China to expand renewable energy development

With the U.S. opting out of the Paris Accords on Climate Change, many have turned their focus to China to spearhead efforts to curb greenhouse emissions and move from fossil fuel to renewable energy.

The potential for growth in the latter in China is great says a British Petroleum Energy Outlook report for 2018.

The report says that not only is reliance on coal as a major energy source declining in China – forecast to fall from 62 per cent consumption in 2016 to 36 per cent in 2040 – but it will also account for 31 per cent of the earth's renewable energy consumption by the same year.



The UN has commended China for leveraging decreased manufacturing costs and increased investment to boost trade in renewable trade products.

In addition to curbing the use of vehicles and applying stricter pollution controls to construction sites and those that use coal as an energy source, the government is fast-tracking the manufacturing of "green" cars.

In 2017, nearly 800,000 such "green" vehicles were sold on the Chinese market.

"New energy vehicle production jumped 53.8 per cent to 794,000 units last year, up 53.8 per cent from the previous year," the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers (CAAM) said.

This comes as the Chinese government seeks to adopt a two-tier approach to environmental safety and boost its automotive industry.

Beijing is also going to reclaim forests that have been transformed to agricultural lands

The New Development Bank (NDB) launched by the BRICS countries has been part and parcel of the bloc's drive toward clean and renewable energy.

(Source: thebricspost.com)

## Oman oil minister calls on all OPEC, non-OPEC to continue cooperation

Oman's oil minister Mohammed bin Hamad al-Rumhi called on all OPEC and non-OPEC producers who took part in the global supply cut pact to continue their cooperation to maintain suitable oil market conditions that encourage oil investments.

"Definitely now is better than yesterday, but the monkey is still on our shoulder," Rumhi told a news conference in Kuwait City on Monday. "It is not over yet."

(Source: Reuters)

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GENEVE

The tango 300 is an ideal timepiece to explore the ocean's depths, courtesy of its impressive 300m water resistance. Combining elegance with functionality, the unidirectional bezel upholds the tradition of diving watches.

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tango collection

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No. 1832, Dr. Shariati St., Next to Pol-E-Roomi, Tehran - Iran

Join the discussion #PrecisionMovements

## Did air strikes on Syria break international law?

By Peter Osborne

Jeremy Corbyn's battered leadership of the Labour Party has come under heavy fire in recent weeks. But he has emerged as the voice of sanity and common sense as Britain joined U.S. President Donald Trump's bombing raid on Syria.

Corbyn speaks for the majority of the British people in opposing the rush to war. So far, however, ministers have ducked confrontation with the knowledgeable and highly principled Labour leader.

As Corbyn took to the airwaves to set out his anti-war position late last week, Prime Minister Theresa May and her senior team were nowhere to be seen.

They can't run away from Corbyn's questions any longer. On Monday, May will go to parliament to make a statement about the weekend's events. This will give the Labour leader the opportunity to ask the questions that the prime minister — who looked frankly petrified in her press conference on Saturday morning — has so far avoided.

### Defying precedent

The first question is simple. Why wasn't parliament consulted? May has provided no good reason so far for this failure to defy recent precedent, which was followed over Libya and Iraq.

I hope that Corbyn will quote the inscription on the grave of Robin Cook, the Labour cabinet minister who resigned from the Tony Blair cabinet ahead of the Iraq invasion.

I was among the thousands of mourners who attended Cook's funeral — such a sad event — and the inscription on his grave reads as follows: "I may not have succeeded in halting the war, but I did secure the right of Parliament to decide on war."

Sadly, May avoided parliament and insulted the memory of Robin Cook ahead of Friday night's military action. The prime minister needs to explain why.

More important still, Corbyn also needs to ask why May ignored other very sober lessons from Iraq as set out in the report by Sir John Chilcot report nearly two years ago. Sir John spent millions of pounds and the best part of a decade reaching his conclusions, which have been completely ignored by May.

The first of these involves weapons inspectors. Chilcot made plain that Blair and George W Bush were mistaken to invade Iraq before the inspectors had finished their search for Saddam's alleged weapons of mass destruction.

May and Trump repeated exactly this mistake at the weekend. Inspectors from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) were actually in Damascus and preparing to travel to the area where the alleged chemical attacks took place.

The British and American media have virtually ignored this crucial OPCW mission over the last few days, claiming that Russia is blocking an investigation. It is not. The weapons inspectors are there doing their business in Damascus right now.

Corbyn should, however, ask that the remit of the inspectors be expanded in the light of Friday night's attack.

He should suggest that they should visit the facilities that have been bombed. They will then be able to confirm that Britain, France and America bombed chemical weapons factories, as has been claimed.

For example, they will be able to reach a judgment about President Bashar al-Assad's assertions that a research establishment targeted by the bombers was actually an engineering faculty.

### Legality of the attack?

Most important of all, Corbyn should concentrate on the legality of the attack. Some observers are saying that Britain and the United States have launched a fresh war of aggression, as we did 15 years ago with Iraq.

May has issued a legal opinion asserting the legality of the war. There are, however, glaring holes in this judgment which I hope that Corbyn exposes.

The former British ambassador Craig Murray has already drawn attention to the fact that the British government's legal argument "cites no authority. It does not quote the UN charter, any Security Council Resolution or any international treaty of any kind which justifies this action."

Corbyn should ask why not. But I would also suggest that the Labour leader takes a careful look at the justification May does give for war.

Her statement says that the UK "is permitted under international law, on an exceptional basis, to take measures in order to alleviate overwhelming humanitarian suffering".

The prime minister then goes on to set out "three conditions to be met". These are: extreme humanitarian distress; no practicable alternative to the use of force; the use of force must be necessary and proportionate.

Let's humor the British prime minister and assume she's right that a sovereign nation state can embark on war on humanitarian grounds in these special circumstances.

This doctrine at once raises a series of questions, the first of which concerns the ongoing tragedy in Myanmar.

Last autumn the Myanmar government launched on a campaign to eradicate the Rohingya Muslims.

At least 10,000 people were murdered, countless women brutally raped and hundreds of thousands driven from their homes in a campaign of state sponsored killing that some respected authorities have labelled genocide.

Throughout that period Britain was the "penholder" on Myanmar at the United Nations Security Council. May's new doctrine of humanitarian intervention would surely have entitled us to invade Myanmar. We did nothing.

The same applies to the situation in Yemen, where the bombing campaign from the Saudi led coalition is largely responsible for a dire humanitarian catastrophe which the United Nations estimates has affected approximately 20 million people.

Here too the British are penholders at the United Nations. We have used our influence to prevent an independent inquiry into Saudi war crimes.

So what's Britain's real motive in bombing Damascus at the weekend? Where has our sudden enthusiasm for a humanitarian military intervention come from? These are profound questions. Let's hope Jeremy Corbyn asks the right questions in parliament tomorrow.

**May has provided no good reason so far for this failure to defy recent precedent, which was followed over Libya and Iraq.**

(Source: Middle East Eye)

# Congress is giving Trump more war powers. Should we be scared?

By Rita Siemion

After years of more talk than action in Congress, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is poised to consider a new authorization for the use of military force (AUMF) that would replace the 2001 and 2002 war authorizations that have been in effect for more than a decade and half. Senator Corker, the committee's Chairman, announced on the Senate floor last month that the committee will hold a markup on April 19th of his proposed legislation to replace the 2001 AUMF passed after the 9/11 terrorist attacks to authorize force against those responsible for the attacks and the 2002 AUMF passed to allow the use of force to address the threat posed by Saddam Hussein.

Those following the AUMF debate over the years know all too well that the 2001 and 2002 authorizations have been stretched by successive administrations for purposes far beyond what Congress intended when they were passed. This includes the claim that those AUMFs apply to ISIS — a group that was not only not responsible for the 9/11 attacks but did not exist on 9/11 (nor three days later when Congress authorized the use of force). Despite fairly specific language and legislative history as to the purpose of the authorizations, the failure to specifically name who force was authorized against, to include an expiration date, or set clear geographic limits in either authorization has enabled creative executive branch lawyers to distort these authorizations far beyond what members of Congress voted to authorize.

The latest executive branch AUMF interpretation shows just how far it can and will go if Congress will let it. The Trump administration's unclassified March 12th update to the legal and policy framework report for the use of military force (required by last year's defense authorization bill), claims that the 2002 Iraq AUMF gives the administration the authority to use force in Syria, against ISIS, in 2018. As the Trump administration's memo explains, the 2002 AUMF's naively broad language authorizing the president to use necessary and appropriate force to "defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq" and the lack of any geographic limit has allowed the executive branch to use this authorization to justify a new war in a different country against a different enemy nearly 17 years later.

But what has most enabled this kind of distortion of Congress' intent is the lack of an expiration date in either the 2001 or 2002 AUMF. As I explained in recent testimony before Congress on the importance of including clear limits in any new AUMF, a sunset provision "sets a timetable for ensuring continued congressional approval and oversight as the conflict evolves, providing a safeguard against perpetual armed conflict or overly expansive executive interpretations." An expiration date does not (at 1:36-1:38), as some absurdly claim, mark when a particular conflict will actually end — something that can't be predicted in advance — or signal to our enemies that the U.S. will pack up and go home on a certain date. As former Department of Defense General Counsel Stephen Preston has explained, expiration dates do not signal to the enemy that "we're not committed to the fight but rather that we are committed to our democratic institutions



**If the president believes that military force is warranted against new groups or in new countries in the future, he should have to make that case to Congress and get its authorization.**

and we have set up a mechanism to fight this fight as long as we have to fight the fight."

Despite these hard lessons over 17 years of expanding war and eroding Congressional control over a power assigned to it in the Constitution, Senate Foreign Relations Committee chair Bob Corker (R-TN.) plans to unveil a new war authorization that would repeat these same mistakes and then some. Senator Corker announced earlier last week that he plans to release the text of his proposed new war authorization. But we already have a pretty good sense, based on what's been reported for months, that his proposal will not only sanction the executive branch's 17 years of unilateral expansions, it will provide no new constraints and give this and future administrations a blank check to continue even broader expansions indefinitely.

In addition to the contours of Senator Corker's proposal reported in Politico and The Hill, the above photo shows the bulleted outline of the bill as it's being sold to offices that don't want to set any limits on executive power and indeed want to pass off the hard decision about whether to use military force against future threats to the President. As these bullets note, the idea behind Corker's proposal is to:

1) Sanction the use of force against all groups that the executive branch has already started using force against (whether or not those groups reasonably fall within the scope of the 2001 or 2002 AUMFs) with no operational limits (i.e., no restrictions on the use of ground troops, which has been a redline for many members of Congress on both sides of the aisle);

2) Cede Congress' power to decide whether military force is warranted against new groups in the future to the president but provide a fig leaf of Congressional involvement by requiring the President to let Congress know when he gives himself authority to go to war with new groups. This "gives" Congress, as Corker noted on the floor last week, the opportunity to "weigh in" by providing expedited procedures to vote down the President's decision. But, of course, any such vote would have to pass with a veto-proof majority to stop any

such expansions by the President.

3) Authorize the use of military force with no geographic constraints, again subject only to reporting that is already required by statute and to a fairly meaningless opportunity for Congress to "weigh in" after an expansion as already occurred. Combined with the lack of any ground troops limitations and this administration's lack of concern for providing an international legal basis for using force in or against sovereign nations (sovereignty constraints that provided some meaningful geographic limits during the last administration), this is a permission slip from Congress for President Trump to embark on a new ground war in any nation where ISIS or an alleged "associated force" or "successor entity" of ISIS or any other group named in the authorization can be found.

4) Authorize the use of military force with no expiration date, with a fig leaf of Congressional control by requiring a report from the President every four years and expedited procedures for Congress to once again "weigh in" and make changes if it can get a veto-proof supermajority. Otherwise, the new expanded authorization with authority for continued expansion remains in place indefinitely.

### Why would members fall for this?

Given the history of the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs, why would members of Congress fall for making the same mistake all over again, but this time with express permission for the executive branch to expand to new wars in the future without a vote from Congress? The answer is that many won't make this mistake. But some will because they believe that Congress doing something, anything, is better than the status quo of letting the executive branch continue to stretch existing AUMFs without Congress acting.

To my mind, there would be something to that if the new proposal on the table actual was better in some way than the status quo. But sanctioning actions that currently rest on uncertain interpretations of existing AUMFs is not the status quo — that's an affirmative approval of all of those expansions. That approval with have significant

consequences for detainee litigation and Trump's ability to make good on his promise to fill up Guantanamo with a bunch of "bad dudes." Moreover, Corker's approval does not just authorize status quo operations — it provides authority to expand even further. Right now, the executive branch can get away with expanding to associated forces of those responsible for 9/11. But under Corker's new proposal, the executive branch will have authority to expand in the future to associate forces of all of the current associated forces that are named in the new authorization, including associated forces of and successor entities of ISIS. To actually make improvements in the status quo, any new authorization should have clearly defined limits, including an expiration date and Congressional control over future expansions. If the president believes that military force is warranted against new groups or in new countries in the future, he should have to make that case to Congress and get its authorization.

Some might also be inclined to support Corker's broad new authorization because it would require the president to report on future expansions. But such reporting is already required, not just under the War Powers Resolution but also under Section 1264 of last year's defense authorization bill noted above. In addition to the initial report submitted in March, the president is required to provide regular update to Congress of any changes it makes to the legal and policy framework governing military operations within 30 days. That includes any changes in the interpretation or application of existing AUMFs or Article II power to use military force. Public reporting on such expansions should also be required, but the Senate Foreign Relations Committee can pass a bill requiring additional reporting without giving the President expansive new war powers.

Bipartisan efforts to address the problematic status quo should be applauded. But without significant changes to what is reportedly in Corker's proposal, this new authorization would achieve just the opposite.

(Source: Newsweek)

## Germany is frustrating Macron's grand ambitions

The reality is that Paris and Berlin are no longer natural allies

By Wolfgang Münchau

The Franco-German honeymoon has ended. At the beginning of the year, Angela Merkel, German chancellor, and Martin Schulz, the former leader of the Social Democratic party, agreed that Germany would enter into a meaningful dialogue with Emmanuel Macron, the French president, on reform of the eurozone. As it turned out, the eurozone agenda was a personal project of Schulz's, not of the SPD. When he was ousted as leader in February, the party lost interest. The grand coalition is once again in power, but now without the only interesting project that would have justified its existence. Olaf Scholz, the SPD finance minister and the party's new strongman, is notably cool on the whole idea. On the important issue of a European deposit insurance scheme, he is as skeptical as his predecessor, Wolfgang Schäuble. The opposition to eurozone reform from inside Ms Merkel's party, the CDU, and its Bavarian sister party, CSU, is as strong as ever. The CDU/CSU group in the Bundestag rejects all but one of the items on Macron's reform agenda. They do not want an enlarged European Stability Mechanism, the rescue umbrella, nor a single eurozone budget.

And like Scholz they do not want a European deposit insurance scheme until the Italian banks have managed to get rid of most of the bad loans on their balance sheet. They do not want debt relief for Greece, either.

The only reform idea for which there is some lukewarm support is that of a fiscal backstop to the bank resolution fund, something that should have happened a long time ago. The message is clear: Germany is saying no to Macron on eurozone reform, at least in substance. There may still be some token deal, perhaps a tiny eurozone budget with no macroeconomic significance. To add insult to injury, Merkel also preemptively ruled out German involvement in military action against the Syrian regime.



**To add insult to injury, Merkel also preemptively ruled out German involvement in military action against the Syrian regime.**

I wonder how those two unrelated messages from Germany will be received. France is now in exactly the position Marine Le Pen, leader of the far-right National Front, has warned about: in a monetary union in which the voice of France counts for little and a geopolitical situation in which the UK is the more reliable partner. Macron's enthusiastic support for European integration contrasts with the unchanged political reality that France and Germany are no longer natural allies.

Unlike in France, the pro-European parties in Germany are in retreat. Merkel's party lost 111 votes to the Free Democrats and the Alternative for Germany, both of which advocate policies that would lead to the destruction of the eurozone. Sixty CDU/CSU MPs voted against the Greek support program in 2015. If faced with a similar rebellion today, the grand coalition would no longer have a majority. Does this make eurozone reform impossible?

I do not think so. The June deadline for eurozone reforms was chosen because Macron needs something concrete to show before the European elections in May 2019. As a long-standing advocate of eurozone reform, I am finding myself in the unusual position of favoring a tactical retreat.

It would be better to wait for a better moment to push the two issues that really matter, neither of which is on the agenda right now: the creation of a single safe asset, or a eurozone bond; and the legal and political separation of national governments and their banks. Reformers should exploit the fact that the large and persistent current account surpluses of the northern eurozone countries make them vulnerable to a sudden disruption of trade flows.

Only an existential crisis that threatens the very survival of the eurozone has the potential to concentrate minds in the northern eurozone. A very large current account surplus makes you strong in good times, but weak in bad. Now is not the moment to extract concessions from Germany or the Netherlands. The alternative is wasting scarce political capital on weak reforms.

We would also have to accept conditions that might add to financial instability, like Germany's demand for a semi-automatic debt restructuring or caps on bank holdings of sovereign bonds. If the alternative is a big leap in the wrong direction, standing still would constitute relative progress.

(Source: FT)

# Iran can't count on Europe: professor

➔ (please don't call me out on that but there is a limited restriction because this entire deal was based on distrust), then unrestricted inspection and also relating this to the Iranian missile deterrence capability are very very unlikely. You have to understand that the missile deterrence capability is the absolute red line of Iran that should never be crossed.

You cannot ask a country like Iran that is practically surrounded by enemies on the southern borders, I mean oil reach dictatorships especially the Saudi regime, to give away its deterrence capability. Such an expectation is illogical and idiotic. Nevertheless that is not going to stop Trump from expressing it.

That's since when that it has to not be exactly illogical but totally out of line. The firing of Rex Tillerson the one who was a supporter of the JCPOA even though he is a republican and the coming of a pro-Israeli person like John Bolton who was part of the Project For The New American Century a think-tank which were the brains behind 9/11 and whose aim has always been Iran.

My prediction is that we are not going to see any kind of cooperation from Washington and Trump is not going to recertify JCPOA as he does every 120 days. But he is not going to recertify this time in May. Israel's channel 10 which is the main Israeli channel and the only one that is on the cable line up in the North America and Europe is already predicting that this time Trump is not going to certify the JCPOA.

Over the last 3 months, European states made lots of efforts to convince the U.S. congress and administration that a better agreement with Iran cannot be possibly made on the ruins of the JCPOA. Will the



EU and the U.S. congress be able to reach an agreement on the JCPOA that can meet Trump's demands? What can such an agreement look like?

A: I have always said that Iran can't count on Europe. At the end of the day, European ship sails in the same direction as Washington. They seem to be replaying a good cop bad cop right now (European being the good cop, bad cop being Trump). But ultimately at the end they are not going to scarify Trillion dollar economic transactional activities over Iran which is a nation of only 80 million people.

I am going to go over the size the expenditure when it comes to Iranian economy. First and foremost, 25 billion dollars of goods are smuggled illegally to Iran every year. Official imports to Iran during past 11 years have tripled. 25 percent of this official import along with the entire 25 billion dollars' worth of

imports smuggled are consumer goods. Iran purchases 2 billion dollars' worth per year worth of smart phones. Iran is not the largest importer of cosmetic products in the world, again around 2 billion dollars per year. Iran also imports another 2 billion dollars' worth of luxury cars into the country. 5 billion dollars' worth of house goods per year. Iran even imports food items such as fruits, vegetables, tea and rice which can be easily produced domestically. Most of these imported products can be domestically produced or manufactured to save hundreds of thousands if not millions of Iranian jobs. But the trend seems to be in this Keynesian economy theory that is implemented by the new liberals in Iran and believes in the comparative advantage of good to services.

So we have that ironies policy going on at the cost of hundreds of thousands of Iranian

jobs. The Europeans are very well aware of this situation and pattern of Iranian elite preferring foreign products rather than domestic products. They are aware of that so it is seen as a growing market for them in decades to come. Especially the smaller European nations that are struggling, I need to mention here that the JCPOA was not a European-U.S. deal with Iran.

It was a deal that 3 European nations (Germany, Britain and France) independently signed with Iran along of course with Russia, China and the U.S. For us, we put too much weight on the EU mechanism especially the lobbying of the foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini that we are missing the whole point with that. Germany, Britain and France acted independently no matter how much Europeans at the level of Brussels and the European institutions are lobbying for this because at the end of the day it is going to come down to the specific countries in the Europe.

President Rouhani made a trip to Italy and France a few years ago and signed tens of billion dollars' worth of deal. But because of U.S.'s very intricate and complicated of banking transaction and financial agreements, these deals have not been implemented. Total signed a multi-billion dollar contract with Iran to further develop the South pars national gas field but nothing happened with that. Peugeot also whose second market outside of France is Iran in the whole world has not implemented the contracts that signed. The Italians have made some contracts.

So far we can count a little more on our Italian partners because their economy seems to be lagging further but Italy is not one of the signatories of the JCPOA. So we have to keep all these intricate things in mine when thinking about this project.

## U.S. bombs Damascus to prevent Iran, Syria, Russia, Hezbollah from racking up a win

**TEHRAN (FNA)** — On Saturday, the United Nations Security Council failed to adopt Russia's draft resolution condemning the recent joint airstrikes by the US, Britain and France on Syria, which came following an alleged chemical weapons attack on Douma.

The resolution was rejected at an emergency meeting of the Security Council that was convened at Moscow's request, with three votes in favor, eight votes against and four abstentions. The draft resolution condemned the military action against Syria and called on the three Western countries to "halt the aggression against the Syrian Arab Republic immediately and without any delay" and refrain from further use-of-force actions in violation of the UN Charter.

By now, it should be clear that the US is deliberately aggravating the humanitarian crisis in Syria, and derailing any talks that could actually restore peace and security.

Instead, it is aggravating sufferings to civilians and actually conniving at terrorists who were defeated by the allied forces of Iran, Syria, Russia and Hezbollah. Perhaps, the principal goal for the US is to prevent peace and prosperity from breaking out in post-ISIL Syria whose government is unfriendly to Washington.

Perhaps, that also says why foreign policy experts and global leaders continue to denounce the missile strikes ordered by President Donald Trump Saturday morning. They are also troubled to hear at the Security Council from US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley that "the US is prepared to attack the war-torn country again." This is while the airstrikes amounted to aggression against a sovereign state without allowing the UN's Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to investigate the suspected poison gas attack.

Nor is that all: The international civil society wants to see the seven devastating years of war in Syria wind down, and give the war-torn nation the much needed chance to begin rebuilding. The world supports peace and wants to see Syria reunited, its economy start to function again, and a measure of political stability to return. None of that, however, is likely to happen because American military and security planners are determined to prevent it. The specter of a peaceful and prosperous Syria terrifies Washington and its duped allies.

It is also in Israel's interest to keep Syria divided, unstable and impoverished. From Tel Aviv's perspective, peace in Syria is the horror scenario. Peace would mean what Israel sees as a win for its enemies: Iran, Syria and Hezbollah. Together with the United States and Saudi Arabia, the warmongers in Tel Aviv are determined to prevent that, regardless of the human cost and International Law. ➔13

## What Just Happened?

By Eric Zuesse

**MODERN DIPLOMACY** - What happened right after the second direct U.S.-missiles invasion of Syria, which had occurred on the night of April 13th, could turn out to have momentous implications — far bigger than the attacks themselves.

The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) was convened at Moscow's request, with three votes in favor, eight votes against and four abstentions. The draft resolution condemned the military action against Syria and called on the three Western countries to "halt the aggression against the Syrian Arab Republic immediately and without any delay" and refrain from further use-of-force actions in violation of the UN Charter.

By now, it should be clear that the US is deliberately aggravating the humanitarian crisis in Syria, and derailing any talks that could actually restore peace and security.

The OPCW has been working in close collaboration with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security to assess the situation and ensure the safety of the team.

This means that the effort by the U.S. and its allies on the U.N. Security Council, to squash that investigation, has failed at the OPCW, even though the effort had been successful at blocking U.N. support for that specific investigation.

The OPCW is not part of the U.N., nor of any country; it, instead (as introduced by Wikipedia): is an intergovernmental organisation and the implementing body for the Chemical Weapons Convention, which entered into force on 29 April 1997. The OPCW, with its 192 member states, has its seat in The Hague, Netherlands, and oversees the global endeavour for the permanent and verifiable elimination of chemical weapons.

In conformity with the unchallenged international consensus that existed during the 1990s that there was no longer any basis for war between the world's major powers, the Convention sought and achieved a U.N. imprimatur, but this was only in order to increase its respect throughout the world. The OPCW is based not on the U.N. Charter but on that specific treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, which was formally approved by the U.N.'s General Assembly on 30 November 1992 and was then opened for signatures in Paris on 13 January 1993. According to the Convention's terms, it would enter into effect 180 days after 65 nations signed it, which turned out to be on 29 April 1997.

So, although the treaty itself received U.N. approval, the recent Russian-sponsored resolution at the U.N.'s Security Council to have the U.N. endorse the OPCW's investigation of the 7 April 2018 Douma incident, did not receive U.N. approval. It was instead blocked by the U.S. and its allies.

Nonetheless, though without a U.N. endorsement, the OPCW investigation into the incident will move forward, despite the invasion. This fact is momentous, because a credible international inspection, by the world's top investigatory agency for such matters, will continue to completion, notwithstanding the effort by the U.S. and its allies on the U.N. Security Council, to block it altogether. This decision was reached by the OPCW — not by the U.N.

Among the 192 signers of the Chemical Weapons Convention are U.S., Russia, and Syria, as well as China, Iran, and Iraq, but not Israel, nor North Korea and a very few other countries. So: all of the major powers have already, in advance, approved whatever the findings by the OPCW turn out to be. Those findings are expected to determine whether a chemical attack happened in Douma on 7 April 2018, and, if so, then perhaps what the specific banned chemical(s) was(were), but not necessarily who was responsible for it if it existed. For example, if the 'rebels' had stored some of their chemical weapons at that building and then Syria's Government bombed that building, the OPCW might not be able to determine who is to blame, even if they do determine that there was a chemical attack and the chemical composition of it. In other words: science cannot necessarily answer all of the questions that might be legal-forensically necessary in order to determine guilt, if a crime did, in fact, occur, there.

If the investigation does find that a banned chemical was used and did cause injuries or fatalities, then there is the possibility that its findings will be consistent with the assertions by the U.S. and its allies who participated in the April 13th invasion. That would not necessarily justify the invasion, but it would prove the possibility that there had been no lying intent on the part of the U.S.-and-allied invaders on April 13th.

However, if the investigation does not find that a banned chemical was used in the Syrian Government's bombing of that building, then incontrovertibly the U.S.-and-allied invasion was a criminal one under international laws, though there may be no international court that possesses the authority to try the case.

So: what is at stake here from the OPCW investigation is not only the international legitimacy of Syria's Government, but the international legitimacy of the Governments that invaded it on April 13th. These are extremely high stakes, even if no court in the world will possess the authority to adjudicate the guilt — either if the U.S. and its allies lied, or if the Syrian Government lied.

For us historians, this is very important. And, for the general public, the significance goes much farther: to specific Governments, to their alleged news media, and to the question of: What does it even mean to say that a government is a "democracy" or a "dictatorship"? The findings from this investigation will reverberate far and wide, and long (if World War III doesn't prevent any such findings at all).



**N.I.O.C**  
1397.184



National Iranian  
Drilling Company

**Public Calls For Quality Evaluating Of Tender(First Publish/Seconed Publish)/ Retender**

**One-Stage(semi-pressed)**

TENDER GUARANTEE		ESTIMATED VALUE (Euro)	Subject of Tender	Tenders Portal Reg. No.	TENDER NO. / INDENT NO	No
Euro	Rial					
150,322	6,240,000,000	6,000,000	P/F Caterpillar	3,157,888	TenderNo.: FP/-96/061	1

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

**A) Qualitative evaluation of tenderer:**  
The evaluation is based on article (j) implementing regulations of the law of tenders and also carried out base on worksheets qualitative evaluation inquiry in the tender documents. Minimum acceptable point of quality is 60.

**B) Preparation of tender documents:**  
**Purchasing of documents:**  
In order to receive the tender documents, 510,000 Rials should be paid to account number 400111400420491 in central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran under the title of "centralized income funds" of National Iranian Drilling Company and providing the original deposit receipt.

**Receiving of documents:**  
Tenderers must be obtain the quality evaluation documents along with tender documents maximum 10 days after the date of second publication in person at the following address: Hall No.:113, 1thfloor, Foreign Procurement Dept., National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN  
Notice: Only the real or legal persons who apply to purchase and recieve tender ducments from foreign procurment department in due date and participates in tender will be known as tenderer from tender committee.

**C) Delivery of call quality evaluating:**  
Tenderers shall submit the completed documents including qualificaion worksheets in form of software in CD and documentary within 14 days from last day of document received deadline to the following address: Hall No.:107, 1thfloor ,Tender Committee, Building operations, National Iranian Drilling Company, Airport square, Ahwaz, IRAN.

**D) Tender Guarantee:**  
**Type of guarantee:**  
A) Bank guarantees or guarantees issued by non-bank institutions that have activities licensed by the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran.  
B) The original cash deposit receipt paid to the account number 4001114006376636 under the title of "centralized guarantee funds" of National Iranian Drilling Company to the central bank of Islamic Republic of Iran.

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

More on this & other tenders is accessible by click on [WWW.NIDC.IR](http://WWW.NIDC.IR)  
NIDC Telegram Channal: @nidc\_pr  
**National Iranian Drilling Company**  
**Foreign Procurement of Capital Goods**

تهران تایمز نوبت اول ۱۳۸۷/۰۱/۲۹ نوبت دوم ۱۳۸۷/۰۱/۲۹

# Serbia and Kosovo could clash amid increasing tensions

By Michael R. G. Lyons

On Thursday, Reuters reported that the Serbian military launched an assault on insurgent positions to the east of Belgrade in Pasuljanske Livade. These operations were presided over by the close supervision of President Aleksander Vucic and a handful of foreign observers. Fear not, this operation was all part of a military drill, aptly named Synergy 2018, and those insurgents under assault outside of the Serbian capital were only imaginary assailants.

But with this military exercise close on the heels of the Kosovo police using force on Serbs in the town of Kosovska Mitrovica, and the arrest and subsequent expulsion of an EU negotiator, the fear is that the exercise could be a harbinger of an

even darker chapter in the relationship between Pristina and Belgrade.

To make matters worse, back in January, an influential Kosovo-Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic, was killed in a drive-by shooting by unknown assailants in Mitrovica, the first assassination of a Serbian politician in over a decade. Vucic immediately called an emergency session of the National Security Council and declared the assassination to be an act of terrorism. The Ivanovic assassination highlights the recent progression of tensions between Serbia and Kosovo.

Reuters further explained that Vucic and his top Army commander, Gen. Ljubisa Dikovic, were quick to dismiss any notions that Thursday's training exercise was posturing towards Kosovo, stating

emphatically that Synergy 2018 had long been on the military calendar for the 2018 year.

#### ■ Military drills

Defense analysts have a tendency to grant too much importance to military drills and large-scale exercises. In recent memory, Western officials like Germany's Van der Leyen sounded the alarm about Zapad 2017, the joint exercise of Russia and Belarus, to practice defending against a NATO-like adversary. But in the former Yugoslavia, particularly between Pristina and Belgrade, these alarms may not be entirely unfounded, as things are going from bad to worse.

Since Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2006, Serbia has adopted a policy of formal neutrality. While members of NATO's

Partnership for Peace, Serbia has held ambitions of joining the larger European and International communities in the form of European Union membership. However, with the failures of Brussels over the last few years, regarding the refugee crisis, debt crisis, etc. many Serbs have begun to question if they will ever be allowed in to the elite club of European nations, or if they even want to be in that club.

While the Serbs retreat from Brussels, they fall into closer orbit with the Russian Federation, with whom they already share a set of commonalities: a largely orthodox population, Slavic heritage, and a coming to grips with the collapse of their former nation and loss of much of what was once their territory. Russia, seems a much more kindred spirit

and is likely more attractive to the population, particularly considering the air-campaign launched by NATO against Serbia. A recent example of this alignment with the Kremlin when following the unrest in Kosovo, Vucic is reported to have called Moscow for advice.

#### ■ Into the arms of Alliance

Kosovo on the other hand, has firmly retreated into the arms of the Alliance, and must rely on the political and military institutions of the Transatlantic system for their ambitions of statehood and regional peace. But Kosovo interrupted that peace, when their police force was mobilized against Serbs in their territory and detained a Serbian official. These disruptions could be a spark that starts a much larger fire. ➔13

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حدود ۳۰۰۰ متر بنا سند اداری در  
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مالکین محترم

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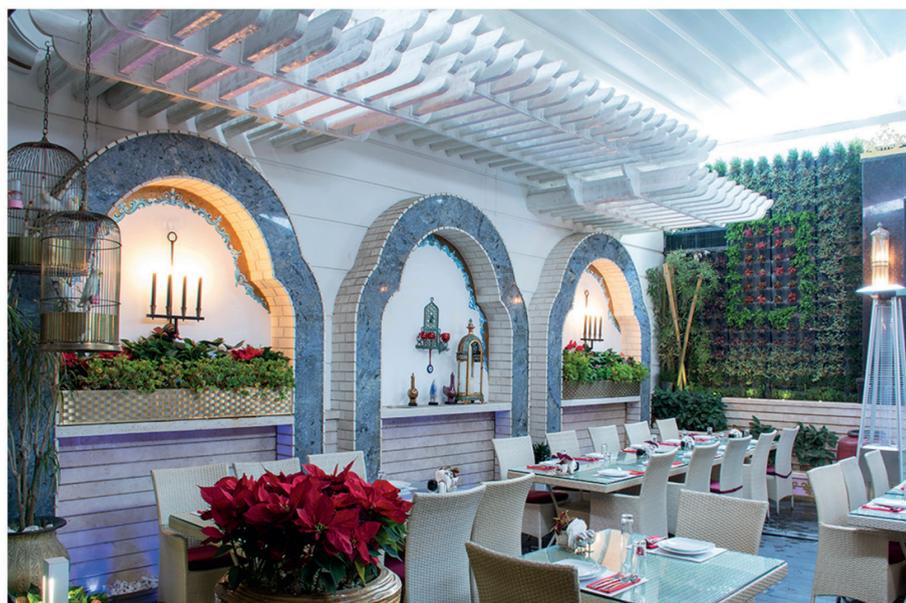
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## Sahebqaraniyeh Palace to undergo restoration

**HERITAGE TEHRAN** — The 19th-century Sahebqaraniyeh Palace in northern Tehran will undergo extensive restoration project after some 2.5 years of closure.

Heritage experts are about to commence a rehabilitating mission as related studies have been completed, ISNA quoted Rahmatollah Ra'ouf, head of the complex, as saying on Saturday.



An interior view of the Sahebqaraniyeh Palace in northern Tehran.

Speaking about deteriorating situation of the palace, Ra'ouf said: "In 2010, a crack appeared on the ceiling of its Hozkhaneh hall ... and one of its chandeliers fell down in 2013. Later in 2014, some cracks started to run on Talar-e Aineh (Mirror Hall) of the palace."

Beautifully decorated and fully-furnished interior spaces of the palace feature loads of art works including precious paintings and sculptures by Iranian and foreign artists.

The palace stands within the Niavaran Cultural-Historical Complex, which houses 19th- and 20th-century landmark buildings, museums and monuments in an area of about eleven hectares.

## Ancient relics seized in Ilam

**HERITAGE TEHRAN** — Iranian authorities have confiscated several centuries-old objects in western Ilam province, CHTN reported on Monday.

"The police has seized 13 artifacts that include coins, beads and rings made of gold, silver, bronze and glass, some of which date from the (early) Islamic era," said Abdolmalek Shanbehzadeh, the provincial tourism chief.

The historical objects have recently been handed over to Ilam's office of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization, the official added.



Shanbehzadeh speaks in an undated photo.

## ROUND THE GLOBE

### Tomb of Askia

A World Heritage, the Tomb of Askia is located in the town of Gao, Mali.

The site comprises the following elements: the pyramidal tower, the two flat-roofed mosques, the necropolis and the white stone square. The spectacular pyramidal structure was built by Askia Mohamed, Emperor of the Songhai Empire in 1495. The Tomb of Askia was built when Gao became the capital of the Empire and Islam was adopted as the official religion.

The Tomb of Askia is a magnificent example of how the local traditions have adapted to the exigencies of Islam in creating an architectural structure unique across the West African Sahel.



The Tomb is the most important and best conserved vestige of the powerful and rich Songhai Empire that extended through West Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries.

Its value is also invested in its architectural tomb/minaret shape, its prayer rooms, its cemetery and its assembly space that have survived and are still in use. From the architectural perspective, the Tomb of Askia is an eminent example of Sudano-Sahelian style, characterized by rounded forms resulting in the regular renewal of the layer of plaster eroded each winter by the rare but violent rains.

The pyramidal form of the tomb, its function as central minaret as well as the length and shape of the pieces of wood comprising the permanent scaffolding, give the Tomb of Askia its distinctive and unique architectural characteristics. (Source: UNESCO)

# Louvre show to run in Mashhad

**HERITAGE TEHRAN** — The city of Mashhad will be the subsequent destination of a landmark Louvre show, which is currently underway at the National Museum of Iran in Tehran.

Upon an agreement reached between the Louvre and the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization, the exhibit will be transferred to the Khorasan Great Museum in Mashhad, northeastern Khorasan Razavi province, after it comes to an end in Tehran, CHTN quoted Mohamadreza Kargar, director of CHHTO museums and historical properties, as saying on Sunday.

"The Louvre show has been warmly welcomed by culture aficionados in Tehran ... and it will be running through June 8", the official added.

"The collection will be on display for a span of two months at the Khorasan Great Museum."

Jebreil Nokandeh, director of the National Museum of Iran, has previously said: "A total of 104,047 people explored the exhibit from March 5 to April 2, which is a stunning figure ..."

The show is the first large-scale exhibition by a major Western museum in the country. It puts on show some 50 works including 2,400-year-old



People visit the Louvre exhibit at the National Museum of Iran

Egyptian sphinx, a bust of Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius and drawings by Rembrandt and Delacroix and other

artifacts linked to Greek, Egyptian and Mesopotamian culture, as well as objects from ancient Iran.

In parallel, a vast collection of Qajar-era (1785-1925) Iranian arts and handicrafts is currently on show at Louvre-Lens.

## Mashhad-Khaf tourism train in the pipeline

**TOURISM TEHRAN** — The Islamic Republic of Iran Railways plans to operate a tourism train, which will connect the cities of Mashhad and Khaf, northeastern Khorasan Razavi Province.

The train will pass by the cities of Sabzevar, Bajestan, Tabas and some others, CHTN quoted Abolfazl Mokarramifard, the provincial tourism chief, as saying on Monday.

The project is designed to foster tourism industry across the vast province, in particular (ancient) windmills that are scattered in Nashtifan region.

Iran has put forward its cluster of Asbads - ancient vertical-axis windmills - as a candidate for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list.



Some ancient windmills are still operational in Nashtifan region.

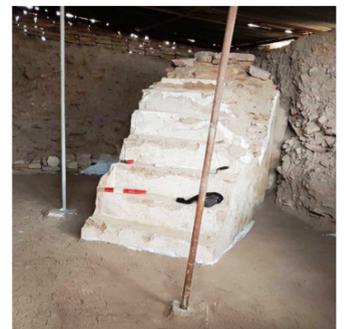
## Remains of centuries-old mosque unearthed in Fariman

**HERITAGE TEHRAN** — Vestiges of a centuries-old mosque have recently been brought to light during an archaeological excavation in Sang-Bast Rural District of Fariman County, north-east Iran.

Discoveries include stucco-ornamented columns, brick-flooring spaces and a minbar or pulpit, where prayer leader sits to deliver sermons, IRNA reported on Sunday.

The ancient mosque is adjacent to the ruins of a caravanserai, a public bathhouse, a bazaar and other historical sites in Razavi Khorasan Province.

Most of the architectural elements of the site date from the Ghaznavid era (977-1186). Sang-Bast is where Iran's earliest brick minaret stands, the report said.



The newly excavated pulpit in Sang-Bast

# Blockchain-based Airbnb rival has cut world hotel pricing by 20 percent

Lockchain (LOC) is the only blockchain company that has been aiming and succeeding at providing people with statistically significant discounts from booking prices. This European company is quickly gaining traction by providing their clients with a workaround for the exorbitant commissions that increase the hotel prices with (+20 percent on average) offered by booking oligopolists such as Agoda, Booking.com and Airbnb.

Just recently the team at Lockchain has announced that they were able to successfully cut hotel prices all over the world by an average of 20 percent, sometimes even more. Seems like Lockchain is not only talking the talk, but walking the walk as well.

### They've established themselves

Now that they've succeeded in gaining a significant amount of the entire industries' hotel and property portfolio, it's time to put their promises to a fair analysis. Cutting out middlemen and intermediaries, they've promised to be 20 percent cheaper than any of their current market competitors. Let's do some price analyses and see how well they are performing so far.

All results are based on the data in the following spreadsheet, which is open for anyone to peer review. More than 800 hotels are compared in the document, divided over Asia, Europe and the United States of America. Hotels that are rated 5, 4 or 3 stars are included. Point of view is based on Booking.com's cheapest room, then compared to Agoda and Lockchain. In their figures, they use the average of all hotels listed within one city or region.

### Asia: Four to 25 percent average cheaper

With a population of over four billion people, Asia is a truly big destination. Taking in account their current economic boom and social growth, they will become one of the largest travel destinations for work or leisure in the upcoming decades.

Offering prime locations in Tokyo, Bangkok, Bali and more Lockchain has already secured an important part of the market with their partnerships. Being between 25 to



29.5 percent cheaper than their competitors in Tokyo and Bali, they create an interesting offer for anyone willing to experience Asian culture or looking for an opportunity to become part of Asia's growing economy.

### Middle-East and Turkey: 11 to 20 percent average cheaper

Almost always warm in the Middle-East, it's a perfect location to get away from the cold and harsh winters you experience almost everywhere else in the world. Qatar and Dubai are the epicenter of middle-eastern culture and are a must experience for everyone.

Closer to Europe, Turkey, can still be considered nicely warm with average temperatures varying between six to 24 degrees celcius winter to summer. Hitting the 20 percent cheaper margin in Turkey is something Lockchain is especially proud of, as it is one of the more famous holiday locations for Europeans.

### Europe: Around 17 percent average cheaper

We cannot talk about cultures around the globe without mentioning Europe. The beauty of Europe is in the vast variety of cultures; move 300 kilometers in any direction and

you'll find yourself in a completely different environment. Many foreigners and Europeans alike start a round-trip in Europe to catch as many cities in as small amount of time as possible. With fairly cheap flights between cities and countries in Europe, the biggest expense has always been accommodation.

For those kind of explorers who love to hop countries, Lockchain takes away a big hurdle of expensive locations and free the explorer to truly focus on what he loves most: Capturing the romance in Paris, partying in Germany, laying on the coasts of Croatia and drinking beers in Eastern Europe. Life's too short not to catch it all, the guys at Lockchain will help you achieve it. A steady 17 percent cheaper average all around Europe shows they are on the right track. The most favourable tourist spots give even better results: Paris 27 percent, Amsterdam 18 percent and Rome 31 percent cheaper.

### United States of America: 22 to 25 percent cheaper

By far the biggest travel location is the US. Not because of their interesting offer of cities, wide range of beautiful nature, interesting design of architecture and vast amount of cultural hotspots. Although they surely contribute, they are not the prime reason of America's importance in the online booking industry. Americans tend to travel more inbound than outside of the US, spending a large part of their time in US hotels and properties for business or leisure.

With the global hotel industry valued at close to \$500 billion for 2015 and expecting to grow to one trillion in 2020, America's own industry takes two fifths of that value in account. That makes America the number one market for online booking companies looking to offer real value. Penetrating this market has been a real strategic benefit for Lockchain, enabling a steady amount of bookings on the platform. With a range between 22 and 25 percent cheaper over a large offer of hotels and properties they've secured their target in this market.

(Source: btcmanger.com)

# Sustainable travel: It's not just about the environment

A look at tours and programs that address the impact travelers have on the communities they visit.

The term "sustainable travel" has a green glow to it, connoting eco-friendly practices and environmental responsibility. But the human side of sustainability, as defined by the World Tourism Organization, addresses community impact, both social and economic, and is newly gaining traction among travel companies.

Social impact travel aims to ensure money spent on a tour or a trip stays in the community. A vital source of income to developing nations, travel is the first or second source of export earnings in 20 of the 48 least developed countries, according to the W.T.O., yet a 2013 report from the organization noted that just \$5 of every \$100 spent in a developing country stayed in that destination.

"There's a lot of people who think 'eco-tourism' when they hear 'sustainable tourism,'

but that's a piece of the puzzle," said Kelley Louise, the executive director of the Impact Travel Alliance, an industry nonprofit organization that focuses on sustainable travel. "Sustainability has a positive impact not only on the environment, but the culture and the economy of the destination you're visiting."

Among new developments, the Jordan Tourism Board created the Meaningful Travel Map of Jordan in March, highlighting 12 social enterprises in the country, including a Bedouin camp stay, a women's weaving group and village tours that support local entrepreneurs. Last fall, the tour company Collette launched Impact Travel Tours, which spend half of the time sightseeing and the other half visiting community-based improvement projects. Earlier this year, the safari company and Beyond launched philanthropic-focused itineraries in Tanzania, Kenya and South Africa.

Organizations promoting social impact

travel aim to emphasize not just big do-good trips, but to educate travelers about their smallest decisions, such as eating at a locally owned restaurant.

"Every time you have a meal, get accommodations or do activities, you can have a positive impact just by traveling," said Paula Vlaming, the chief executive of Tourism Cares, a nonprofit organization representing the tourism industry that, among other programs, trains Good Travels advisers, travel agents who specialize in socially responsible travel experiences. "Leaving money in the community is such an important way to have a huge impact. The ripple effect, particularly for women, girls and the environment, demonstrates the power of travel."

Some sustainable trips are priced like luxury vacations, a fact that prompted the 2015 launch of Giving Way, a platform linking volunteers directly with nongovernmental agencies, cutting out intermediaries that

link the two.

"Volunteering should be accessible to everyone, not just a rich man's privilege," said Orit Strauss, the founder and chief executive of Giving Way, which now works with nearly 1,900 organizations in more than 115 countries. About half are free and the other half charge nominal fees to cover food and lodging. Activities range from working on an organic farm in Costa Rica to mentoring youth in rural South Africa.

Assessing the claims of a social impact travel company requires asking where the money goes. "That information isn't readily available now," said Salli Felton, of the nonprofit Travel Foundation, which tests programs that benefit local communities. "What's critical is tracing the impact. If customers ask, they'll start doing it. If they can't answer that question, that should be a red flag."

(Source: The New York Times)

# Heart failure study shows protein blockage could improve cardiac function

An experiment conducted in mice showed that cardiovascular function can be improved just by blocking a particular protein in the heart. The therapy proved successful in mouse models, although further research is warranted in human heart cells.

An experimental study done in mice shows a potential for preventing heart failure and improving cardiac function by blocking a protein type.

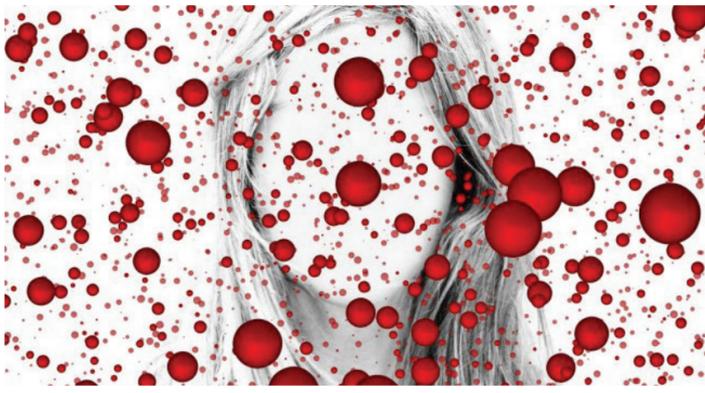
Researchers at the Cincinnati Children's Heart Institute experimented on a targeted molecular therapy that blocks fibronectin protein, which overreacts at the time of a heart attack.

Fibronectin functions as a cell adhesive that binds together collagen and other proteins essential for the migration, growth, and differentiation of heart cells.

Cell adhesion comes in the form of matrices that connect tissues, especially after an injury. Unfortunately, after a cardiac arrest, the fibronectin overreacts and overproduces connective matrices. It also causes clogging that eventually damage the heart.

## Deceased patients

Using a donated heart by deceased patients, the researchers manufactured a peptide called pUR4 to inhibit fibronectin from overproducing connective tissues.



"Our data are a strong proof of principle and the first to show that inhibiting fibronectin polymerization preserves heart function, reduces left ventricle remodeling, and limits the formation of fibrotic connective tissue," said lead author Dr. Burns Blaxall, director of translational research at the Heart Institute and the Center for Translational Fibrosis Research.

The researchers reported that inhibiting fibronectin from overproducing matrix tissues

can prevent heart failure and even improve cardiac functions.

Few effective options are available to treat heart diseases, especially for people who had previous attacks or have congenital conditions. Individuals who were born with congenital heart diseases require specialized care even when they reach adulthood.

Blaxall's team has opened the study to future investigations on the application of pUR4 in human heart cells. The study, which

was published in the journal *Circulation*, used mouse models in a simulated heart attack. The animals then developed fibrosis and eventually had heart failure.

## Ischemic heart disease

About 54 percent of mortality rate or 15 million deaths in 2015 are attributed to ischemic heart disease and stroke, according to World Health Organization.

Clinicians recommend lifestyle modification as one of the strongest forms of intervention in reducing risks of heart disease. Sedentary lifestyle, smoking, obesity, and other causative events are identified as adverse factors.

In a multicenter, randomized trial funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, 810 adults with Level 1 hypertension were admitted to a non-pharmacologic program.

Participants were involved in DASH diet and an established intervention group. The EST group gave individual advice on physical activities, weight loss, including caloric, alcohol, and sodium intake for a period of six months.

As a result, the DASH and EST interventions have lowered the probability of a 10-year risk for coronary heart disease by 12 to 14 percent.

(Source: *Tech Times*)

## "Algae forestry" could take CO2 straight out of the air

Through a mixture of algae, eucalyptus, carbon storage and bioenergy, researchers believe they have found the recipe to simultaneously provide food in many parts of the world while taking out CO2 from the atmosphere.

As the world struggles to keep global warming at manageable levels, scientists are exploring several avenues to reduce emissions.

Researchers from Cornell University, Duke University, and the University of Hawaii at Hilo have an idea that could prove extremely effective: they devised a system that can act as a carbon dioxide sink while also generating food and electricity.

They integrated algae production with carbon capture, in a system they call ABECCS (algae bioenergy carbon capture and storage).

## Sequestering carbon dioxide

Researchers have already set up a 7,000-acre ABECCS facility that can yield as much protein as soybeans produced on the same land footprint, while simultaneously generating 17 million kilowatt hours of electricity and sequestering 30,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year.

A portion of the captured CO2 is used for growing algae and the remainder is sequestered. Biomass combustion supplies CO2, heat, and electricity, thus increasing the range of sites suitable for algae cultivation.

"Algae may be the key to unlocking an important negative-emissions technology to combat climate change," said Charles Greene, Cornell professor of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences and a co-author of new research published



in Earth's Future, by the American Geophysical Union.

## Combining two technologies

"Combining two technologies — bioenergy with carbon capture and storage, and microalgae production — may seem like an odd couple, but it could provide enough scientific synergy to help solve world hunger and at the same time reduce the level of greenhouse gases that are changing. Often times, when an idea sounds too good to be true, it is.

In this case, the entire project hinges on the economic viability of the algae. Researchers describe two scenarios in which financial viability is achieved.

Clearly, the price of algal biomass is essential, but an economy that supports carbon credits is also required.

There's another issue with this type of project: In the ABECCS system, soy cropland is replaced by eucalyptus forests used for carbon storage that provides marine algae with CO2, heat, and electricity.

(Source: *zmescience.com*)

## Kip Thorne lectures on the Big Bang, black holes, colliding stars

Over a thousand people packed into Jadwin Hall on Thursday, April 12, filling five auditoriums, to attend the 43rd Donald R. Hamilton Lecture delivered by Kip Thorne, Professor Emeritus at the California Institute of Technology.

Thorne, who won the 2017 Nobel Prize in Physics along with Barry Barish of Caltech and Rainer Weiss of MIT, spoke of his momentous discovery of gravitational waves, detected by the Laser Interferometry Gravitational wave observatory from a black hole merger 1.3 billion light years away.

Thorne opened by narrating the events which led to this historic finding in 2015.

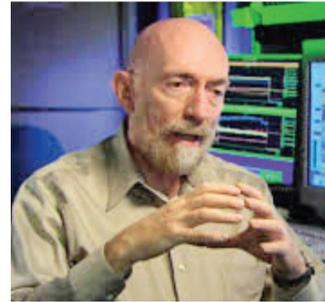
"When multi-cell life was just forming on Earth 1.3 billion years ago, but in a galaxy far, far away, two black holes crashed together, creating a giant burst of gravitational waves, that traveled out ... into the great reaches of intergalactic space," he said.

## Gravitational waves

These gravitational waves reached the outer edges of the Milky Way 50,000 years ago, during the age of the Neanderthals.

"On 14 September 2015, they reached the Earth. Touching down first on the Antarctic Peninsula, they traveled up through the Earth, unscathed by all the matter of the Earth, and emerged in Livingston, La., at one of two LIGO detectors," Thorne continued.

Gravitational waves such as the ones detected in 2015 are actually incredibly difficult to pick up, mostly because of their minute effect on space time. When cosmic monstrosities like black hole collisions and neutron star collisions occur, the gravitational interactions with the environment around them are so violent that they bend space time.



These ripples in space time travel enormous distances to be detected by LIGO, so much so that the ripples in space that we observe are minuscule compared to the ripples surrounding the collision.

## Intricate system

LIGO uses an intricate system called an interferometer, or a laser beam splitter reflected by 40-kilogram mirrors to find these tiny undulations in reality.

"Begin with the thickness of a human hair, divide by 100 and you get the wavelength of the light that is used to measure the (gravitational waves).

Divide by 10,000 and you get the diameter of an atom," said Thorne. "Divide by 100,000 and you get the diameter of a nucleus of the atom. Divide by another factor of 1,000 and you get the factor of the mirror motion."

Earlier that day, Thorne and Weiss paid homage to the late Robert Dicke, a former physics professor whose work on gravity was an integral precursor to Thorne's and Weiss's work on gravitational waves.

(Source: *The Daily Princetonian*)

## BMI to deliver 'travel currency' in six international airports

Member of Board of Directors of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) Gholam-Reza Panahi said that Bank Melli Iran (BMI) will deliver travel currency to travelers in six international airports of the country, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Outbound travelers can receive their travel currency through the selected branches of this bank based in six international airports, he maintained.

All the branches of the bank across the country are ready to sell travel currency to outbound travelers, he said, adding, "applicants of travel currency should deposit the amount and receive receipt against presentation of documents required in the branches of the bank."

With due observance to the said issue, branches of the bank in exit gates of Imam Khomeini International Airport (IKIA) based

in Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, Urmia and Ahvaz will embark on delivering the purchased currency to travelers.

Considering the vastness of branches of Bank Melli Iran throughout the country, suitable ground has been provided for passengers and travelers in the field of presenting suitable services to them all.

Therefore, travelers can refer to the branches of the bank four days before

travelling in order to supply their needed currency as considered by the government, Panahi emphasized.

In conclusion, Member of Board of Directors of Bank Melli Iran (BMI) Gholam-Reza Panahi said, "currency branches of the bank are ready to open exchange account of investment, ranging from one month to one year, with the suitable interest rate."

## Over 21,000 tons of products transacted at IME

In the first business day of the current week, more than 21,000 tons of products were transacted at Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), the Public Relations Dept. of the company reported.

Given the above issue, 21,719 tons of various types of goods were transacted in different sections of IME on Sunday April 15.

According to statistics, 5,949 tons of bitumen was traded in IME's oil and petrochemical products' hall while 2,910 tons and 2,000 vacuum bottom and lube cut were transacted at Iran Mercantile Exchange respectively.

Moreover, 922 and 50 tons of polymer products and slaps wax were traded at the market respectively in the same period. Agricultural Hall products of Iran Mercantile Exchange

also experienced a considerable growth in a way that 400, 7,600 and 120,000 colza oil, edible wheat and day-old chicks were traded on the same day at IME respectively.

It should be noted that 266 tons of metal wastes and one old wooden traverse consignment were sold at IME respectively, the Public Relations and Intl. Affairs Department of Iran Mercantile Exchange concluded.

## Strategy of IMI in a new horizon: CEO

A prestigious introduction ceremony of the new managing director of Industrial Management Institute (IMI) was held, based on which, Dr. Abolfazl Kiyani Bakhtiari was appointed as the new Chief Executive of Industrial Management Institute (IMI), the Public Relations Dept. of the organization reported.

In the beginning of the ceremony, Dr. Bakhtiari thanked senior manager of the Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) and said, "it is a great pleasure for me that I was trusted by the CEO of IDRO and also chairman of

the Board of Directors of IMI."

Helping boost industrial sector, promoting brand, compiling and developing reliable applied training in the international levels, etc. will be followed up strictly in the organization, CEO of IMI reiterated.

He went on to say that pathology of economic enterprises, setting up industrial clinics in order to correct structures of management and human resources are of paramount importance.

The organization which is responsible for granting Organizational Excellence Award and is duty bound to rank top and leading

companies should itself possess high industrial ranking in the country, he maintained.

The value of the organizations such as Industrial Management Institute (IMI) strictly hinges on its intangible capital and intellectual assets, he said, adding, "for this purpose, I will make my utmost effort to promote level of the Institute more than before."

In conclusion, the new chief executive of the Industrial Management Institute (IMI) said, "relying upon the assistance of the Almighty God, giant steps will be taken in the Institute in the current year."



## Tiny probe can see and take body temperatures

University of Adelaide researchers have invented a world-first tiny fiber-optic probe that can simultaneously measure temperature and see deep inside the body.

The probe may help researchers find better treatments to prevent drug-induced overheating of the brain, and potentially refine thermal treatment for cancers.

"With an outer diameter of only 130 microns, the probe is as thin as a single strand of human hair," says Dr. Jiawen Li, a researcher with the Adelaide Medical School, ARC Centre of Excellence for Nanoscale Biophotonics (CNBP) and the Institute for Photonics and Advanced Sensing (IPAS) at the University of Adelaide.

"This means it can be delivered deep inside the body in a minimally invasive way. It also allows us to see and record physiological data in real time that we weren't able to access before."

The miniaturized imaging and sensing probe has been developed to help study drug-induced hyperthermia.

"Using some drugs such as ecstasy can make certain brain regions overheat and then become damaged," Dr. Li says.

"Using the probe's imaging function during experiments, our medical collaborators would be able to see deep inside the brain of a living organism and guide the placement of the probe to the right brain region."

"Then, they can use the probe's built-in thermometer to monitor any changes to the local temperature of that region."

This will allow researchers to: better understand how hyperthermia develops; test new medical treatments; or investigate the toxicology impacts of drug-taking.

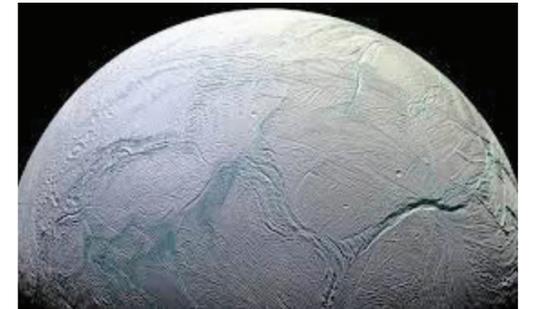
While the first generation of the probe can both take images and measure temperature, Dr. Li hopes future generations will take other measurements as well — such as pH values, oxygen saturation and accumulation of fat in arteries.

(Source: *eurekalert.org*)

## Scientists looking for life on Saturn's moon Enceladus

Enceladus, Saturn's sixth largest moon, is increasingly being recognized by scientists as the most promising place in the Solar System to search for life.

The brilliant white moon, which is about the size of England, has a global ocean of salty, liquid water below its frozen surface that this has existed for billions of years — plenty of time for life to emerge. Furthermore, the presence of hydrothermal activity and organic materials may provide the warmth and materials needed for organisms, as we understand them, to evolve.



Carolyn Porco, one of the world's foremost planetary scientists, is among those who thinks Enceladus should be our top priority in the search for extraterrestrial life. Speaking at the 2018 Breakthrough Discuss conference at Stanford University on Thursday, she outlined why Enceladus is so promising and how we could go about finding life there.

Porco has long been at the forefront of research into the moon. In the mid-2000s, for example, her team was responsible for sighting huge plumes of water vapor erupting from fractures on the surface of Enceladus' south polar region.

Furthermore, "there's a process that happens on every natural body on the Earth called 'bubble scrubbing', whereby organic materials and organisms, which are very hydrophobic, attach to bubbles as they rise through the water column," she said. "At the surface the bubbles break, they release their spray and that's what we think we're seeing on Enceladus."

But what kind of spacecraft would be most effective at finding life on Enceladus? According to Porco, a roving vehicle would not be useful because of the moon's rocky terrain, which is filled with huge blocks of ice. There's also no atmosphere, so using a drone would not be possible.

(Source: *Newsweek*)

## Birth defects linked to increased risk of childhood cancer

Children with non-chromosomal birth defects, such as congenital heart malformations or nervous system disorders, are more than twice as likely to end up with childhood cancer as kids without a birth defect, according to a study.

Approximately 3 percent of children born in the United States have a birth defect, either due to chromosomal anomalies, single-gene syndromes, or another cause. The majority — 86.5 percent — are the latter. While previous studies have looked at the connections between specific defects and the risk of any cancer, or specific cancers and birth defects generally, "what's missing (are) good, population-based estimates of the risk of specific cancers and associations with specific birth defects," says coauthor Jeremy Schraw, a postdoctoral pediatric cancer researcher at Baylor College of Medicine, during a press conference at AACR. "That's because what's needed ... are very large, population-based studies that allow for estimation of those risks."

To obtain that kind of large dataset, Schraw and his colleagues collected data from birth defect and cancer registries in Texas, Michigan, Arkansas, and North Carolina for the years 1992-2013. "We were able to form a retrospective birth cohort of over 10 million live births," Schraw says. Their goal was to find associations between specific cancers and particular non-chromosomal defects, he explains. The researchers ultimately examined 60 birth defects and 31 childhood cancers, and identified 539,891 children with non-chromosomal defects, 14,773 kids with cancer, and 1,787 with both.

Schraw and his colleagues found that the risk of developing any cancer was 2.6 times higher in children with non-chromosomal birth defects than in those without a defect. And certain birth defects had much higher associations with particular cancers.

(Source: *thescientist.com*)

## Women's share of Majlis approvals

**W O M E N** TEHRAN — The Iranian parliament (Majlis), demonstrating a colorful presence of female representatives, has taken great steps to fulfill women's demands. It has passed supportive regulations for security and contribution of women to social activities in the past Iranian calendar year which ended on March 20.

The Majlis deals with the problems regarding breadwinner women, insurance coverage for housewives, equal job opportunities for educated women, granting Iranian nationality to children of



Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers, improvement of situation of married women's departure from the country as a woman must have the permission of her husband, father, or other male relative to obtain a passport, as well as healthcare services and maternity leaves, IRNA reported.

It has made the administration duty-bound to provide grounds for strengthening a society based on family. In this regard, the ground is provided for decreasing the age of marriage by 10 percent.

Providing facilities for achieving population growth to about 2.5 children per woman at the age of fertility, active and skillful opposition with soft wars in families are also performed in order to strengthen the foundation of families.

In order to control and decrease the divorce rate by 20%, the social emergency centers along with psychological and consultation centers are providing the ground to prevent family crisis and prevent divorce.

The women commission of Majlis has allocated 0.27 percent out of 9 percent tax equaling 13 trillion rials (\$310 million) for developing sports for women and youths.

The women's committee of the Majlis is paving the way for women to become healthy enjoying eminent culture, humanitarian honor and financial security by 2020.

## RECIPE OF THE WEEK

### French spring soup

"I make this during asparagus season when my husband's patch is producing a lot. It is very fresh tasting, and the longer it sits, the better it is."



#### Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup butter
- 1 pound leeks, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 quarts water
- 3 large potatoes, chopped
- 2 large carrots, chopped
- 1 bunch fresh asparagus, trimmed and cut into 1 inch pieces
- 1/3 cup uncooked long-grain white rice
- 4 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 pound fresh spinach
- 1 cup heavy cream

#### Directions:

Melt the butter in a large pot

over medium heat. Stir in the leeks and onion, and cook until tender.

Pour water into the pot. Mix in potatoes, carrots, asparagus, and rice. Season with salt. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer 30 minutes, until vegetables and rice are tender.

Stir spinach and heavy cream into the soup mixture, and continue cooking about 5 minutes before serving.

## LEARN ENGLISH

### Boxing Day

A: What do you think of this one?

B: Eh, so so.

A: And this one? Too **flashy**?

B: Nah, not too flashy.

A: Ugh! And this sweater from my aunt? Isn't it hideous?

B: I guess.

A: Are you even listening? I'm trying to have a conversation with you.

B: And I'm trying to watch the game, but you're **yapping** on about your new clothes!

A: Well I have to decide which gifts to keep and which to **exchange** for better ones when I go to the Boxing Day **sales** this afternoon!

B: Well could you do me the **favor** of making this quick? It's the third quarter and you've been blabbering on since the first!

A: Oh, your precious game. You watch the same game every year, and each year beloved hometown team loses by at least three goals!

B: Oh no you didn't. You didn't just insult the Salisbury Seals, did you? Why don't you just go and return all of those stupid clothes and not come back until the sales are over?

A: I might just! Enjoy your stupid game!

B: And Merry Christmas!

A: Merry Christmas!

#### Key vocabulary

**flashy**: smart and noticeable, but in a rather vulgar way

**yap**: bark in a high-pitched tone, nag

**exchange**: give something and receive something in return

**sale**: an occasion for buying at special price

**do someone the favor**: help someone

**Supplementary vocabulary**

**craziness**: wild excitement, the act of being crazy

**discount**: an amount deducted from the usual list price

**flier**: a pamphlet for mass distribution

**merchandise**: the manufactured goods bought and sold in any business

**jam-packed with people**: crowded

(Source: irlanguage.com)



## Without earth no birth!

# VP Ebtekar calls for women to wear colorful traditional outfits

**W O M E N** TEHRAN — Iranian traditional clothing embraces a variety of colors, beauty and chastity, Masoumeh Ebtekar, the vice president for women's and family affairs, said, adding the traditional outfit can become a pattern for girl's clothing as well as female university students.

The traditional elements and effects and the variation of colors applied in traditional clothing creates visual hope and happiness, IRNA quoted Ebtekar as saying on Sunday.

The effects of using colors on wellbeing and freshness of human is scientifically proved, she noted.

Although, wearing traditional and tribal outfits is highly forgotten, wearing traditional dresses creates national pride and social happiness which is driven from the rich Iranian culture, she stated.

Policies have been taken by the presidential office for women and family affairs for revival of traditional outfits, Ebtekar announced.

Ebtekar further went on to say that in order to develop the art of making traditional dresses the presidential office for women and family affairs is cooperating with the working group of fashion and dress of the Ministry of Culture of Islamic Guidance.

Although the majority of Iranians are Persian, Iran has a varied population that includes different ethnic groups, each with their own language, tradition, and clothes, all of which add to the richness of the country's culture. Traditionally marked in women's clothes, it's easy to identify which region or tribe the person belongs to based on the colorful fabrics, embroidered patterns, decorative jewelry, and style of hijab.

Bakhtiari The clothes of the Bakhtiari



nomadic tribe are rather versatile, accounting for the extreme weather conditions they may encounter during migration. Colorful, layered skirts paired with matching vests are common for women. Their long scarves are embellished with hand-stitched designs or ornaments.

#### Qashqai

The Qashqai are another nomadic tribe. Women are distinguished by their voluminous, multi-layered, colorful skirts and long headscarves pinned under the chin, which allow loose pieces of hair to frame their face.

#### Baluchi

The southeastern Sistan and Baluchistan Province borders Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the traditional clothes of this region therefore resemble the typical shalwar kameez of these neighboring countries. Along with pants and colorful embroidered

knee-length dresses, women adorn themselves with gold bracelets, necklaces, and brooches, and a second, longer shawl often covers their head and shoulders.

#### Turkmen

Earthy tones dominate the traditional dress of Turkmen men and women. Wearing long dresses with open robes, women often conceal part of their face with a cloth hanging just below the nose.

#### Kurds

Kurds have varying styles, as reflected by their residence in different regions. Both men and women tend to wear baggy clothes shaped at the waist by a wide belt. Men wear matching jackets, and women decorate their headscarves with dangling coins and jewels.

#### Lur

In contrast to Lur men, who favor neutral colors in their baggy clothes, wom-

en lean towards bright, feminine colors, with the trademark stripes hemmed on the pant cuffs. A vest reveals the sleeves of the long dress worn over the pants. After wrapping the headscarf around the head, neck, and shoulders, a long piece is left hanging down the back.

#### Gilaki

Worn with long shirts and matching vests, floor-sweeping skirts with colorful horizontal stripes at the bottom are the discerning features of the traditional Gilak wardrobe in the northern Gilan Province.

#### Mazani

With pants worn underneath, the traditional skirts of the northern Mazandaran region (north of Iran) are known to be much shorter and puffier than in other regions.

#### Village of Abyaneh

In the village of Abyaneh, Isfahan Province, the aging population has maintained their traditional clothes. Women continue to don airy, below-the-knee skirts and their signature long, white floral scarves that cover the shoulders.

#### Southern cities of Bandar Abbas and Qeshm

The women in the southern port town of Bandar Abbas and the island of Qeshm are notable for their brightly colored, floral chadors and niqab, which come in two types. The first gives the impression of thick eyebrows and a mustache from afar, a ruse used in the past to fool potential invaders into mistaking women for men. The other is a rectangular embroidered covering revealing only the eyes. Many women choose not to wear the niqab today, but it is part of a centuries-old tradition that helped protect the face from the wind, sand, and scorching sun in these areas.

## Hijab: A very French obsession

An angelic voice emanating from millions of television screens captivated audiences across France on February 4. A contestant on the popular talent show, The Voice was singing Leonard Cohen's cult anthem, Hallelujah. The spellbinding performance caused all four members of the show's jury to turn their chairs around in a mark of approval. The young candidate, Mennel Ibtissem, was an instant favorite.

But Mennel was not just another successful candidate on the show - her photogenic face was framed by a headscarf worn turban-style. Also, she sang the second verse of the song in Arabic.

This detail was enough to rattle some members of the audience who were not comfortable with the presence of a visibly Muslim woman in a mainstream entertainment program. Of course, some viewers were not at all bothered by the faith of the candidate - they only focused on her voice. But others, shaken by Mennel's "audacity" to appear on the show wearing a hijab, embarked on a demonization campaign. They started dissecting her social media presence. They went through her Facebook posts and discovered that a couple of years ago she showed support of conspiracy theories about terror attacks in France. No doubt, she was making some serious assertions in these posts - but nobody bothered to remember that she was only 20 years old when she wrote them. Nobody bothered to think about what other French 20-year-olds put on their private social media pages on a regular basis.

People started calling for her dismissal from the show. The campaign against her swiftly snowballed into a nationwide witch-hunt, and the young singer was eventually forced to announce her decision to leave the singing contest.

But what do we know about the ideas of the dozens of other candidates who have participated in The Voice since 2012? Nothing. Did we dissect their social media profiles the way we did Mennel's? Of course not. Because in France we do not expect singers to be perfect in every aspect of their lives before they find fame and success. French artists are allowed to make mistakes in their youth.

As long as they are not Muslim women wearing hijabs. In France, we are not accustomed to seeing hijabi women on prime-time television. Their presence still causes shock and anxiety.

The question of hijab (The hijab is a headscarf worn by many Muslim women who feel it is part of their religion.) is omnipresent in French public discourse, yet hijabi women are very rarely granted opportunities to express themselves in public. Mennel's expulsion from The Voice is yet another sign that our hijab-obsessed country is not ready to hear the voices of the women who choose to wear it.

Why is a piece of fabric causing such virulent and irrational reactions in France? Why are we not able to accept that hijabi women can be regular members of French society?

The hijab controversy in France started in September 1989, when three Muslim school girls were suspended for refusing to remove their headscarves in class in a middle school in Creil, a suburb of Paris. A month later, the state council, the highest administrative body in the country, ruled that the girls' headscarves were compatible with the "laicite" (secularism) of French public schools. But the controversy did not end there. At the end of that year, Education Minister Lionel Jospin issued a statement declaring that it was



French-Muslim singer Mennel Ibtissem was forced to pull out of a singing competition following backlash over old social media posts in February

educators, and not the state, who had the responsibility of accepting or refusing the wearing of the hijab in classes on a case-by-case basis.

After 15 years of recurrent debates about whether hijabs are acceptable or not in French schools - and public life in general - French parliament passed a law in 2004 banning women from attending classes while wearing it. In 2010, France passed another controversial law that banned the wearing of the full-face veil anywhere in public (even though at the time there were only 367 women in the entire country that wore such attire).

Since then, several other controversies about the Muslim headscarf - and Muslim women's clothes in general - have emerged in France.

The summer of 2016 was marked by an epidemic of "anti-burkini decrees", with mayors across the country trying to ban Muslim women from wearing swimsuits that cover their bodies completely. It began with the cancellation of a "burkini" event at a water theme park in Marseilles. Then the Riviera town of Cannes banned the full-body swimsuit on its public beaches. The then Prime Minister Manuel Valls expressed his support for the bans, saying the swimsuit represents what he calls a "provocation" and "an archaic vision". Later, photographs have emerged of armed French police confronting a woman on a beach in Nice and forcing her to remove some of her clothing to make her comply with the "burkini ban". The state council eventually put an end to these anti-burkini decrees when it ruled that they were a "serious and manifestly illegal violation of fundamental freedoms".

These controversies highlight France's colonial and Islamophobic obsession with the hijab. The incapability of French intellectuals and politicians to accept Muslim women's right to take control of their bodies is symptomatic of the French brand of "secularism" that has made the fight against the visibility of Muslims its priority.

The dominant discourse in France is that the hijab is an oppressive tool used by Muslim men to hide and silence Muslim women. This is why, when French Muslim women come out and say that they choose to cover their heads in public spaces, their agency to make this decision is being questioned.

In France, discussions surrounding the hijab are frequently shaped by the circumstances of other - fundamentally different - countries. In these discussions, hijabi women in

France are compared with their foreign counterparts, even though they are as French as any other citizen of the country. The hijab does not carry a single meaning that can be used in any given context. How can a piece of clothing carry the same meaning in France as it does in another country where women are officially oppressed by the law? In one context, for some women, the hijab can be a tool of oppression used by men in general and the state in particular to make them comply with the rules imposed on them by society. But in a country like France, where it is not the norm, the hijab can be a tool to make the Muslim identity visible.

Of course, one can legitimately question the origins and patriarchal character of the wearing of the hijab. It is perfectly acceptable to debate the ways in which femininity is expressed; but French hijabi women - and no one else - should be the ones defining the meaning of the hijab in France. However, they are rarely invited to express their opinion on this subject. The media do not give them the opportunity to join the discussion as full-fledged French women with reason.

But hijabi women are not being removed from the discussion just because they are Muslim.

France has a problematic relationship with women in general. For example, there has been fierce opposition to the #MeToo movement by such emblematic figures as Catherine Deneuve and Brigitte Bardot. Deneuve was among the signatories of an open letter - in which a collective of 100 women tried to defend men's right to "annoy" women - in response to the #MeToo movement. This text, which placed the desire of men at the center of a debate that aims to promote the liberation of women, is symptomatic of a culture that reduces women to objects of desire that should constantly seek the approval of men. This mentality is not unrelated to the rejection and condemnation of women who voluntarily choose to hide their hair and wear modest clothing.

In a country that views "the seduction of women" as an important aspect of its national identity, it is easy to understand why hijabi women can attract criticism. In France, men who "seduce" are adored and admired as "Don Juans"; in such a context, one can imagine that women who voluntarily decide to withdraw parts of their bodies from public view can be perceived as subversive.

In a country where society tolerates everyday harassment and even protects men's right to harass, it is easy to see that hijabi women are perceived as a challenge to implicit gender norms. As a result, the hijab controversy in France cannot be viewed only in the context of Islamophobia. To understand the French obsession with the hijab, society's relationship with women and different expressions of femininity also needs to be questioned.

France decided long ago that Islam has somehow become "problematic", and consequently adopted particular behaviors to hide Islam and Muslims from society's field of vision. Mennel Ibtissem was only one victim of a problem that affects the lives of millions of French citizens. Today, the concept of "laicite" is being used by the French state to make expressions of Muslim identity illegal. However, secularism is and must remain a principle based on equality and not prohibition. Its vocation is to enable every citizen to freely express his or her faith without fear of being stigmatized.

(Source: aljazeera.com)

## Women's unpaid work is the backbone of the American economy

On Equal Pay Day, it's also important to recognize the unpaid work women do.

Women in countries that are members of the intergovernmental economic group, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, spend about 271 minutes or about 4.5 hours per day on average doing unpaid work, according to the OECD. That's compared with 137 minutes, or slightly more than two hours, for men. In the U.S., that division of labor is just slightly more equitable, with women doing an average of 242 minutes of unpaid work compared with 148

minutes for men, the OECD found.

If women's paid participation in the formal economy was equivalent to that of men, it would add \$28 trillion or 26% to global GDP, according to McKinsey.

That balance has gotten more equal over time, said Kim Parker, the director of social trends research at the Pew Research Center. In 1965, when the government began keeping track of how Americans spend their time, women devoted the bulk of their waking hours to unpaid work and men barely did any of it. That's changed. But, even as women are increasingly taking

on a larger role in the paid workforce, they're still expected to take on the bulk of chores, like laundry, cooking, cleaning and child care that allow households to function.

"It's become much more equal, but with women still doing more unpaid work," Parker said. The result: Whether by choice or not, men still end up doing more paid work. "Women, even full-time working women, spend fewer hours on average doing paid work than their husbands or partners do. That may be due in part to the fact that there's this expectation or default arrangement where they are doing

more of the child care or housework."

That dynamic is costing the economy, as philanthropist Melinda Gates noted in her annual letter earlier last year. If women's paid participation in the formal economy became identical to men's, we'd add \$28 trillion or 26% to global gross domestic product, according to a September 2015 report from McKinsey, a consulting firm. But the time women spend on unpaid work is affecting their individual careers and families as well.

(Source: marketwatch.com)

# Fresh Saudi regime aerial aggression kills at least 6 people across Yemen

At least six civilians have been killed and several others wounded when the House of Saud regime warplanes conducted multiple airstrikes against residential areas across war-ravaged Yemen as the Saudi regime continues with its atrocious bombardment campaign against its impoverished neighbor.

Yemen's official Saba news agency, citing an unnamed military official on Monday, reported that at least two women and one man were killed after the Saudi regime fighter jets pounded a residential area in the Manakha district of the western province of Sana'a, adding that a child was also injured in the raid.

Yemen's Arabic-language al-Masirah satellite television network, however, raised the number of people wounded to five, excluding the child. It added that another child was wounded in a separate airstrike in Sa'fan district in the same province.

Meanwhile, Saba news agency, in another report, said that at least one child was killed and her mother and sister were injured after the Saudi regime warplanes hit their house in Bakil al-Mir district in the northwestern



province of Hajjah.

Additionally on Monday, at least two civilians lost their lives after Saudi snipers

mortally injured them in Manba border district in the northern province of Sa'ada, Saba further reported, citing an unnamed

security official.

The House of Saud regime aggression was launched in March 2015 in support of Yemen's former Riyadh-friendly government and against the country's Ansarullah (Houthi) movement, which has been running state affairs in the absence of an effective administration.

The offensive has, however, achieved neither of its goals despite the spending of billions of petrodollars and the enlisting of Saudi Arabia's regional and Western allies.

The Yemeni Ministry of Human Rights announced in a statement on March 25 that the Saudi regime-led war had left 600,000 civilians dead and injured during the past three years.

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 was a growing risk of famine and cholera there.

(Source: Press TV)

## Iraqi security forces kill 22 ISIL remnants in Nineveh offensive

Iraqi security forces have killed nearly two dozen members of the Takfiri Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group during a clean-up operation in the country's northern province of Nineveh as government troops and allied fighters from Popular Mobilization Units (PMU/Al-Hashd Al-Sha'abi) are engaged in offensives to purge the entire war-ravaged country of the extremists.

Commander of Nineveh Liberation Operations Major General Najim Abdullah al-Jubouri said on Monday that security forces staged an ambush and killed 22 ISIL Takfiris west of Mosul, located some 400 kilometers (250 miles) north of the capital Baghdad, after a tip-off that a group of militants had infiltrated into the area.

The development came only three days after Iraq's

Interior Ministry announced in a statement that six ISIL terrorists, including a woman, had been arrested in the same Iraqi province.

The statement noted that the extremists were all on the Iraqi Interior Ministry's list of wanted terrorists.

Two of them were captured in Abu Maria village near Tal Afar, located 63 kilometers west of Mosul, while the rest were nabbed in different parts of Mosul.

Last week, Iraqi security forces announced that more than 20 ISIL terrorists had been killed in several security operations west of Mosul.

On December 9, 2017, Iraq's Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared the end of military operations against the ISIL terrorist group in the country.

"Our forces are in complete control of the Iraqi-Syr-

ian border and I therefore announce the end of the war against Daesh (ISIL)," Abadi told a conference in Baghdad then.

The Iraqi prime minister said on August 31 that Tal Afar and the entire Nineveh province had been purged of the ISIL Takfiri terrorist group.

The recapture of Tal Afar was made possible with the help of the Iraqi army, Federal Police, Counter-Terrorism Service units, pro-government fighters from the Popular Mobilization Units and the Interior Ministry's elite rapid response forces, Abadi stated.

On July 10, Abadi formally declared victory over ISIL terrorists in Mosul, which served as the terrorists' main urban stronghold in the conflict-ridden country.

(Source: Press TV)

## Trump 'morally unfit' to be president: Ex-FBI chief

➔ "He strikes me as a person of above average intelligence who's tracking conversations and knows what's going on. I don't think he's medically unfit to be president. I think he's morally unfit to be president," he added.

Accusing the Republican head of state being an indiscriminate liar, Comey said, "sometimes he's lying in ways that are obvious, sometimes he's saying things that we may not know are true or false, and then there's a spectrum in between."

The interview was recorded last week, before Comey's upcoming book "A Higher Loyalty" was leaked to the media, according to ABC.

The memoir revolves around the two high-profile investigations that the ex-FBI chief led before and after the face-off

between Trump and his Democratic rival Hillary Clinton.

Democrats blame Comey's handling of a probe into Clinton's use of an illegal email server as the main reason for Clinton's surprising defeat.

Comey's FBI also ran a controversial investigation into Trump and his team's alleged "collusion" with Russia. The prolonged probe, which went on to involve Special Counsel Robert Mueller, eventually prompted the president to kick Comey out.

"When I decided to just do it, I said to myself, I said 'you know, this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story, it's an excuse by the Democrats for having lost an election that they should have won,'" Trump said in May last year, a few days after firing Comey.

Following his firing, Comey wrote to Congress in a letter that Trump had asked him for his personal royalty during a dinner prior to his following. Trump, however, rejected the claim.

The former FBI chief told ABC News that the title of his book was a direct reference to that meeting. He also accused Trump of actively seeking to "stain" people around him.

"The challenge of this president is that he will stain everyone around him," he argued.

He then suggested that Trump was afraid Russians knew his secrets.

"I think it's possible. I don't know," Comey responded. "These are more words I never thought I'd utter about a president of the United States, but it's possible."

(Source: agencies)

## Amnesty calls for investigations about Israeli crimes

➔ Eyewitness testimonies – as well as videos and photographs taken during the demonstrations – point to evidence that in some instances unarmed Palestinian protesters were shot by Israeli snipers while waving the Palestinian flag or running away from the fence separating the Gaza Strip from Israel.

■ Israel uses stun grenade against draft protesters

Elsewhere, Israeli forces have fired stun grenades and clashed violently with protesters rallying against conscription in the army.

Israeli authorities describe the protesters as "ultra-Orthodox extremists" who are against military draft, arguing that their so-called religious endeavors do the regime as much service.

Conscription is mandatory for both men and women in Israel, which is in a continuous war with regional countries

and clashes with Palestinians in the occupied territories.

"Several hundred ultra-Orthodox extremists" joined the Sunday rally outside an enlistment office in al-Quds (Jerusalem), The Jerusalem Post reported. The demonstration came after it became known that the military police sought to arrest a girl, who was being held in the office, it added.

"Police used stun grenades and water cannon against rioters," police spokesman Micky Rosenfeld told AFP. A police statement said four officers were slightly injured in scuffles.

The protesters even object to reporting to the military. Previous rallies have seen scenes of exceptional violence, with the police tussling with the participants and dragging those blocking roads forcibly away.

The organizers vowed during one pro-

test to "fight in every way the edict that has felled thousands in the spiritual ruin" of the Israeli military.

Last month, "ultra-Orthodox" politicians threatened to leave the ranks of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's ruling coalition unless a law was passed preventing conservative youths from conscription.

The crisis was resolved with a compromise, in which Netanyahu promised to give coalition MPs (MK/Member of Parliament/Member of Knesset) freedom on how to vote on a future bill on draft exemptions.

Draft-dodging is not a new phenomenon in Israel whose occupation and settlement expansion policies are a cause for continuous conflict with Palestinians.

However, the human toll and the vague and shifting military objectives of the Israeli regime are spurring many among a new gen-

eration of Israeli soldiers to question orders.

Last year, 63 draft age youngsters from around Israel sent a letter to Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, declaring their refusal to enlist in the army due to their belief that it serves to oppress the Palestinian people.

"The military carries out a racist government policy that violates basic human rights and imposes one version of law for Israelis and another for Palestinians – on the same territory," wrote the draft refusniks.

In the letter, they accused the regime of instigating the Israeli population against Palestinians and Arab citizens.

The zenith of Israel's refusal movement came during the 1982 Lebanon war, particularly after the massacre at the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps sparked widespread public revulsion at the conduct of the invasion.

## U.S. bombs Damascus to prevent Iran, Syria, Russia, Hezbollah from racking up a win

➔ The warmongers know fully well that the elected governments of Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon are on good terms, and the new partnership among them – which proved successful in the war against Daesh (ISIL or ISIS) and Al-Qaeda – could also lay the foundation for a new Middle East, which would not be submissive to the American-Israeli-Saudi coalition. For that reason, the warmongers attacked Syria on Saturday morning, determined to prevent it from emerging – and to prevent Iran, Syria, Russia and Hezbollah from racking up a win.

At any rate, the United States wants a war now, and it's not just talk. The strikes proved beyond any doubt that the hypocrites in Washington have chosen war over diplomacy and International Law. And if Trump at times says "let's wait", that's because he wants to get France and Britain on board as well – and certainly not because he is waiting for



information from UN chemical-weapons inspectors in Douma. The fact is that the US is already at war in Syria, and

has been since day one. There are at least 2,000 US troops already on the ground, and the US, working with its terror proxies, Israel and Saudi Arabia, has been conducting air and drone attacks against pro-Syrian government forces on an almost daily basis. The regime change war has already killed plenty of Syrian civilians. According to the British monitoring group Airwars, US and US-backed coalition air and artillery strikes have killed between 3,940 and 5,937 Syrian civilians, maybe more, since August 2014.

As per International Law and UN Charter, however, there is no legal justification for the current US troop presence in Syria, let alone additional air strikes that Ambassador Haley says are coming. Equally important, these unlawful strikes would do nothing to provide real justice or protection for the victims of America's open-ended war. Post-ISIL Syria needs peace, not war.

## Serbia and Kosovo could clash amid increasing tensions

➔ In such a once hot area, the fear is that this old flashpoint in the Balkans is brewing back up. What has changed in the equation this time is a Russian nation deeply at odds with the West and as seen in the recent Montenegrin elections has a willingness to intervene in the Balkans, and to exert their

influence. Russia's dangerous and reckless behavior could embolden the Serbians to react to one of Kosovo's provocations, and considering the presence of Alliance soldiers in region, the West could quickly be drawn in to another conflict it does not want in the former Yugoslavia.

Time will tell but an exercise of this nature, just days after Kosovo used force against Serbs, is a clear signal to Pristina, whether intended to be or not. Thus, the hope is that this rapidly escalating situation was just an inconvenience of scheduling and not the signs of a coming proxy war in Europe, which would

rapidly involve outside forces.

Rather than panic over a denigrating situation, defense analysts should see the progression as a controlled escalation through a symbolic powerplay, and not as an omen of impending doom.

(Source: nationalinterest.org)

## An arrogant autocrat's abortive surgical strike on Syria

➔ which was being investigated by special counsel Kenneth Starr. In order to deflect attention from the sordid matter, Clinton launched a cruise missile attack on the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Sudan under the pretext of retaliation against the country for having connections to Al Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden. The claim by the Clinton administration was that Al-Shifa was producing VX nerve gas.

Now, over 20 years later, another U.S. president has plagiarized this theme for the same reason: to divert public attention from an alleged extramarital affair with a woman who has refused to remain silent despite the hush money paid out to her by Trump's personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, who himself is the target of a criminal investigation. This time, of course, the pretext for the missile bombardment was an alleged chemical attack in Douma, in the eastern Ghouta region. The target, once again was a pharmaceutical research facility in Barzeh, the Pharmaceutical and Chemical Industries Research Institute, which specialized in cancer medicines. Trump even used George W. Bush's "mission accomplished" slogan after the deed was done.

The parallels between these two lethal escapades are uncanny. Clinton was accused of having an extramarital affair; so is Trump. Clinton launched a cruise missile attack on a Muslim-majority country, which had not attacked or in any way threatened the U.S.; Trump followed suit. Clinton's attack destroyed a pharmaceutical plant; ditto for Trump. In both cases, the presidents claimed production and use of chemical warfare agents justified the attacks.

Now, the U.S., as a member of the United Nations, had agreed to "refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state," as is stated in the United Nations Charter. Two missile attacks totaling 162 missiles would appear at a minimum to constitute "use of force" in violation of the U.N. Charter, and could be construed as an act of war. Incidentally, the U.N. Charter, ratified by the U.S. Senate in July 1945, constitutes a binding agreement under international law and the U.S. constitution. Of course, this is merely opinio juris, since U.S. state practice is frequently contrary to customary international law.

It is fascinating that gun-happy Americans tend to go nonlinear over any perceived threat to their "right" to bear arms under Amendment 2 of the U.S. constitution, which, incidentally, was originally added for the benefit of slave owners who feared a rebellion. However, if we concede the two missile attacks were acts of war, then there is a clear violation of Article I Section 8 of the U.S. constitution, which, inter alia, specifically states that the U.S. congress has the power to declare war. No such congressional declaration of war has been passed.

Consequently, in the absence of such a congressional decree, the chair of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, its members and even the officers of the U.S. military could be accused of having abdicated their duty to support and defend the U.S. constitution. At a minimum, they are in blatant violation of their oath of commission, which each officer specifically states: "I, \_\_\_\_\_, having been appointed an officer in the Army of the United States, as indicated above in the grade of \_\_\_\_\_ do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic...."

Nor are U.S. legislators demanding of their arrogant autocrat an accounting of this action in lieu of a declaration of war. Such notification is required by law within 48 hours whenever U.S. military forces are introduced by the president:

(1) into hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances;

(2) into the territory, airspace or waters of a foreign nation, while equipped for combat, except for deployments which relate solely to supply, replacement, repair, or training of such forces; or

(3) in numbers which substantially enlarge United States Armed Forces equipped for combat already located in a foreign nation.

So even if one were to argue that two missile attacks ordered by the American president do not constitute an act of war by the U.S. against Syria under the U.N. Charter, and that such an attack would not require a declaration of war by the U.S. congress, then there still exists the legal responsibility on the part of the members of that august body to demand a full written report from the so-called commander-in-chief, explaining:

(A) the circumstances necessitating the introduction of United States Armed Forces;

(B) the constitutional and legislative authority under which such introduction took place; and

(C) the estimated scope and duration of the hostilities or involvement.

None of this has taken place as of this writing, lending one to believe that the members of congress are purposefully shirking their responsibilities.

Thankfully, the "surgical strike" appears to have been largely nullified by Syrian air defenses. According to the Syrian Arab News Agency and confirmed by the Russian defense ministry, only about one quarter of the missiles reached their targets. Using Soviet made S-125, S-200, Buk and Kvadrat units, as well as Osa Syrian air defense systems, the Syrians managed to bring down an amazing 71 out of 103 cruise missiles fired at them by axis of aggression forces. All missiles launched at Damascus International Airport, Al-Dumayr airbase, Bley airbase and Shayarat airbase were blown out of the sky; five out of nine fired at Mezzeh airbase were hit; 13 out of 16 shot at Homs airbase were destroyed; and seven out of 30 aiming at targets near Barzeh and Jaramani were neutralized. Unfortunately, the Pharmaceutical and Chemical Industries Research Institute in Barzeh was hit.

Given that the United States spends some \$600 billion each year on its military, consider the humiliation of having 71 out of 103 Tomahawk cruise missiles knocked out by Syrians using 30-year-old Soviet-era anti-missile technology. Cruise missiles are estimated to cost about \$832,000 each, so while Trump locked and loaded \$85.7 million worth of them, he lost about \$59 million. In contrast, the Soviet-designed SA-3 surface-to-air missile used with the S-125 system only costs about \$20,300 each. Likewise, Syria has effectively humiliated Donald "The Art of the Deal" Trump, too, since by losing \$59 million on his high-tech missiles, he clearly came out on the short end of this deal.

## Monaco to reimburse travelling fans after PSG thrashing

Monaco will reimburse supporters who travelled to Parc des Princes for Sunday's 7-1 demolition at the hands of Paris Saint-Germain.

Unai Emery's side reclaimed the title from Monaco with a devastating victory, in which Giovanni Lo Celso and Angel Di Maria scored twice, alongside strikes from Edinson Cavani and Julian Draxler and a Radamel Falcao own goal.



Monaco confirmed via their Twitter account that they would offer refunds to fans who made the long trip from the Principality to the French capital.

The result put PSG 17 points clear at the top of the table with only five games remaining, while Monaco remain four points above Lyon and Marseille in third and fourth.

Vice-president Vadim Vasilyev described the defeat as a "disaster scenario", adding: "The only ones who were up to the task were our supporters and I thank them."

"They backed the team, but we couldn't do anything. We'll do everything to make them proud in the next match."

(Source: Four Four Two)

## Arsenal boss Wenger criticizes Premier League's VAR delay

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger has said the Premier League's decision to delay the implementation of the video assistant referee system (VAR) means the English top flight is being left behind.

The 20 top-flight teams voted against introducing the system for the league's 2018-19 season after trial runs in the cup competitions received mixed reviews.

"The Premier League has been created with people who had a progressive mind..." Wenger told reporters after Arsenal's 2-1 league defeat by Newcastle United on Sunday. "Overall, I believe that with that decision we are behind the rest of the world."

"The young generation is used to (VAR) and worldwide they might move away from us because they see that in other countries they do it."

"Unfortunately the Premier League has again decided not to go for VAR and personally I believe that is a very, very bad decision," Wenger added.

"Every big game this season has been decided by mistakes that could have been avoided with VAR, especially in the Champions League with Manchester City and Liverpool."

Arsenal host West Ham United on Sunday.

(Source: Daily Star)

## Bayern's Vidal needs knee surgery, ruled out for short-term-club

Bayer Munich midfielder Arturo Vidal will undergo minor knee surgery after picking up an injury during training and will be out for a short period of time, coach Jupp Heynckes said on Monday.

The 30-year-old Chile international is now sidelined for Tuesday's German Cup semi-final against Bayer Leverkusen and is also unlikely to make their Champions League semi-final first leg against Real Madrid next week.

Bayern are chasing a treble of titles having already secured the Bundesliga crown.

"He slipped and turned his knee," Heynckes said of Vidal's injury in training on Sunday.

"I talked with the doctor. He did a scan. Arturo will need to undergo a minor arthroscopic surgery. He is already on his way to Augsburg. He is now ruled out for the short-term for sure."

(Source: Reuters)

## Jose Mourinho tells Manchester United: I know how to win

Jose Mourinho has not lost faith in his managerial qualities after Manchester City were crowned Premier League champions.

The Manchester United boss called his players "masters in complication" after they got carried away by their 3-2 win over City last week only to hand their rivals the title with a home defeat to West Brom on Sunday.

But Mourinho is in no doubt he is the right man to lead United's title challenge next season.

"I trust in my work, that's for sure," said Mourinho. "I have no reason not to trust - eight titles are eight titles and three Premier Leagues are three Premier Leagues."

"The last Premier League was not 20 years ago, it was three years ago."

"I know how to win."

Mourinho insisted the title was not lost with defeat to West Brom at Old Trafford on Sunday, calling City "deserved" champions because they only lost two games all season.

The United manager remains confident in his own ability but said his side must replicate City's consistency next season.

"I believe in myself, but I don't play," said Mourinho. "With my experience you don't win titles with inconsistency."

(Source: Sky Sports)

# Guardiola proves 'Pep's Way' can work in England too

During Pep Guardiola's first season in England there were plenty of pundits wondering if the Spaniard could translate his success in Spain and Germany to the more physical demands of the Premier League without diluting his football philosophy.

On Sunday, Guardiola's Manchester City won the Premier League title with five games remaining, having built up a 16-point lead and scored 93 goals but the numbers tell only part of the story.

City may be different to his Barcelona and his Bayern Munich but the style with which they won the title was the proof that Guardiola could indeed do it his way in England.

His first season at City ended with the club finishing 15 points behind champions Chelsea and with a number of question marks over his team.

But his success in turning his team into the best in the country was not purely down to some astute moves in the transfer market, generously backed by the clubs Abu Dhabi owners.

Guardiola's commitment to a style of play based not only on exceptional ball-retention but also a sophisticated understanding of space and timing took time to embed in the habits of the players.

An approach to the game which has a lineage back to the Dutch 'total football' of the early 1970s, taken to Barcelona by Johann Cruyff and which Guardiola has adapted and evolved, requires not only a top skillset from the players but a change of mentality.

Guardiola believes that top-quality footballers can play anywhere on the field, whatever their formal role, and expects his defenders to be comfortable on the

ball and his forwards to be able to work hard off it in order to be in the right places for an eventual transition.

This season, the Spaniard has gone beyond encouraging defenders to pass the ball out of defence rather than launch long balls by bringing his goalkeeper Ederson into the passing game, transforming City into an 11-man passing machine, playing with precision over the full length of the pitch.

One of his summer signings, Kyle Walker, was already a proven attacking wing-back when Guardiola brought him from Tottenham, but he now looks at home playing as a more central defender and in Guardiola's clever approach of moving fullbacks into holding midfield roles when the team is in possession.

### ■ "Not as easy as it looks"

One of the Premier League managers who has had to take on Guardiola this season, Huddersfield Town's German David Wagner, admires the way the City manager has convinced his players to change.

"As well as finding the players you also have to explain to them how to do it and they have to commit and follow. It isn't as easy as it looks — it's not just get the best players and then they do it. He has done something exceptional," he told Reuters in an interview.

"In my point of view it's more difficult to explain to attackers how to defend than to explain to defenders how to attack," he said.

"Attackers are individuals and defensive players feel more part of a team. They feel more responsibility for everything and it's easier to explain how to attack

and how to play out from the back," he added.

While few doubt Guardiola is capable of continuing his revolution at City, it is questionable whether his approach will have a broader influence on tactics and coaching across the Premier League.

Guardiola may have set a new standard but as Liverpool showed in their three victories this season, there are other successful modern approaches to the game and the 'Pep way' may be for Pep only.

Wagner had a brief spell of trying the approach with Borussia Dortmund's reserve team and cut short his experiment.

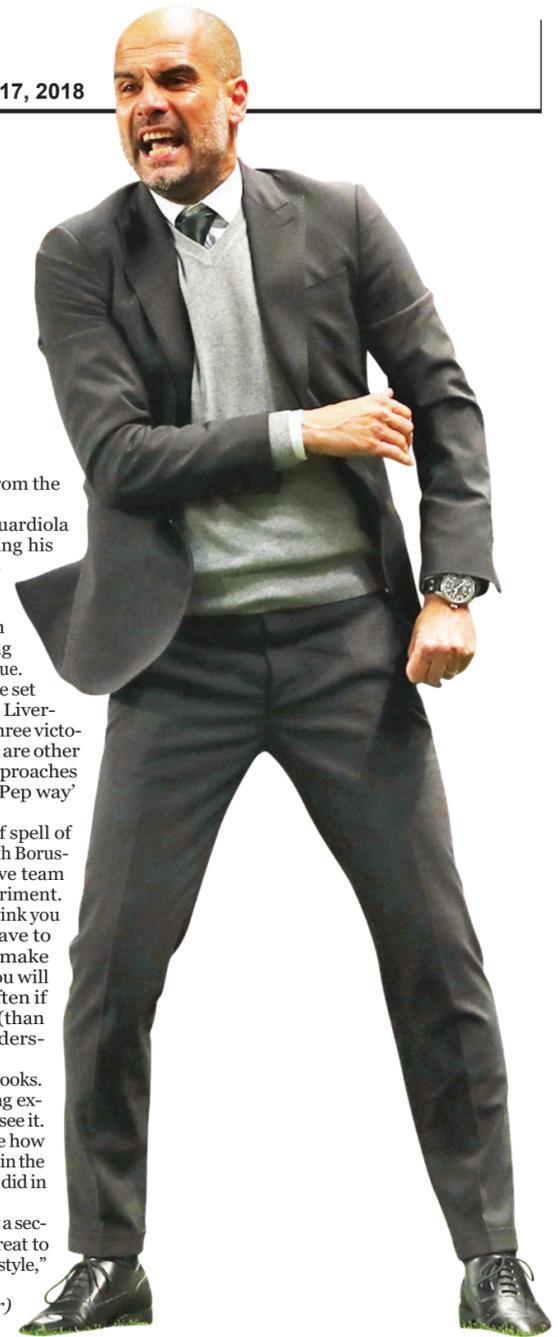
"We tried it and I think you can do it, you only have to accept that you will make more mistakes and you will get smashed more often if you have less quality (than him)," said the Huddersfield manager.

"It isn't as easy as it looks.

He has done something exceptional. It is great to see it. It is unbelievable to see how he influenced Man City in the Premier League like he did in Munich with Bayern.

"He has done it now a second time. It really is great to watch his team and his style," he added.

(Source: Mirror)



## Lewis Hamilton says it will be 'very tough' to win F1 2018 title



Lewis Hamilton has admitted it will be extremely difficult to win a fifth F1 world championship this season after conceding Mercedes are currently the "second or third-fastest team" on the grid.

After a promising start in Australia, only missing out on victory due to a Virtual Safety Car, Hamilton has been well off the pace at the following two races and described his China weekend as a "disaster".

With Ferrari and Red Bull showing improved pace in 2018, it is the first time Mercedes, double title-winners for the last four years, have failed to win any of the season's first three races since the hybrid era began.

And although Hamilton cut Sebastian Vettel's championship lead to nine points in Shanghai, he believes the tricky start has proved this season is going to be his and the team's hardest test yet.

"Who knows what the season holds?" the reigning world champion told reporters. "If it continues the way it is it is going to be very tough to win,

"But if there is an opportunity and we were to finish on top it would mean even more as it's an even tougher season than before."

Hamilton claimed he was in "no man's land" and "racing a different race" after labouring to fourth at the Chinese GP, with Daniel Ricciardo taking a stunning come-from-behind victory for Red Bull.

Hamilton's Sunday struggles followed a huge qualifying deficit to Ferrari, finishing more than half a second off Vettel's pole-setting pace.

"My goal is still the same," said the Mercedes driver. "But it is clear from this weekend we are not the quickest."

"We have lost performance since Melbourne and even more so this weekend. We are the second or third-fastest team at the moment so we've got improving to do, but that's not impossible."

"What this team has shown over the years we are great at staying united and continue to barrel on and keep working."

(Source: Sky Sports)

## Social media debate won't dent Kane's Golden Boot bid - Alli



Dele Alli is backing Tottenham teammate Harry Kane to ignore the social media debate that surrounded his goal against Stoke City and hunt down Mohamed Salah in the race for the Premier League's Golden Boot.

Christian Eriksen was originally awarded the goal in the 2-1 beating of the Potters this month, but Kane was adamant he had got a touch on the Dane's free-kick.

A subsequent appeal ruled in favour of Kane and left the England striker on 25 league goals for the season, which is five behind Liverpool forward Salah, who added to his tally in the Reds' 3-0 victory over Bournemouth on Saturday.

Kane's appeal has led to plenty of japes on social media, but Alli thinks Kane — who beat Romelu Lukaku to the prize last season — may have the last laugh.

"I wouldn't put it past him to beat Salah to the Golden Boot," he told reporters.

"He finished last season really strongly and ended up getting there ahead of Romelu Lukaku."

"He is an unbelievable player and he is a great person as well. If it was me and I touched the ball, I would try to claim it as well."

"I don't know how he is going to take it [the social media jokes], but I think it gives some people a chance to put him down."

"He's a striker and every striker wants goals, so he has just got to ignore the criticism and focus on himself which I am sure he will do."

Spurs saw a 14-match unbeaten league run ended in a 3-1 loss at the hands of champions Manchester City on Saturday, with their last top-flight loss also coming against the Citizens in December.

But Alli says there is no time for Spurs to dwell on the defeat.

"We have got to pick ourselves up and try and finish [the season] off," he added.

"City are a great side and if you are going to start slowly against a team like that then they are going to punish you. We have got to pick ourselves up and go again."

(Source: Soccerway)

## Pele backs Neymar for World Cup redemption

Former Brazil star Pele has backed Neymar to inspire the team to redemption at the 2018 World Cup finals.

The Paris Saint-Germain forward was injured in the quarter-final win over Colombia on home soil four years ago and therefore missed the 7-1 destruction at the hands of Germany in the last four.

Tite's side have been tipped to make amends at this year's tournament in Russia, though, after they breezed through qualifying to top the South American section with 12 wins and one defeat from 18 matches.

And Pele, a three-time winner of the World Cup, hopes Neymar takes advantage of "a great opportunity" for international glory.

"He already has a second chance because, unfortunately, what happened in Brazil — disaster," Pele, speaking courtesy of Hublot, told Omnisport.

"The last World Cup in Brazil, he got the injury, and Brazil lost. I think this is a great, great opportunity for him to recover. I think he's a good player. Let's see if he

can help Brazil [win] this World Cup."

Pele believes Brazil boast the best collection of individual talents in the world and now hopes Tite can fit them into a strong system in time for their first group game against Switzerland on June 17.

"Everybody knows Brazil have the best individual players in Europe," he said. "I think our coach, Tite, has had little time to set up the team. We have three months to set up the team. Tite is a very good coach, but he doesn't yet have the team working together. This will be a short time for them."

"But individual players, no doubt Brazil has a team to get to the final of the World Cup."

The 77-year-old suspects there could be some surprises in store, though, given the shock of Italy's failure to qualify for the tournament.

"Always we select the biggest names [as favourites], like Argentina, Italy, England, Spain," he said. "But football is a box of surprises and it's difficult to say. This World Cup,

the teams are very even. You wouldn't have one big team."

"Then you have some surprises. Italy is out. For football, it's not good. Then you have two or three great teams who didn't qualify. As I mentioned, football is always a box of surprises."

This year marks the 60th anniversary of Pele's first World Cup triumph and the former Santos forward still remembers the emotion of being called up to the squad as a 17-year-old.

"I played four World Cups. The first one always is a little special, because I didn't expect it, because I was 17 years old," he added.

"My father was a football player too and when my father came to my house after work, he said 'listen, you have been selected for the national team of Brazil'. I said 'Daddy, don't make a joke'. He said 'no, no, no, it's not a joke, it's true'. I started to cry, because it was a big surprise to me."

(Source: Goal)

# Marco Octavio returns to Iran national beach soccer team

**S P O R T S** TEHRAN — Marco Octavio Simoes Barbosa (or simply Marco Octavio) resumes his coaching career in Iran national beach soccer team.

Marco Octavio returned for a fourth stint in charge of Team Melli in August 2017 but traveled to his homeland Brazil ahead of Persian Beach Soccer Cup in April due to personal problems.

"I am waiting for my visa to travel to Iran. I miss so much my players and also Iranian people. I am very motivated to start our preparation for the next World Cup," the Brazilian coach said in an exclusive interview with Tehran Times.

Marco Octavio also wished Iran national football team all the best.

"I want to congratulate my friend Carlos Queiroz for advancing to the 2018 FIFA World Cup as the first Asian team. Team Melli have been drawn in a tough group along with Spain, Portugal and Morocco but I believe in capacity of Iranian players and I think they will overcome the difficulties," he said.

Octavio first took charge of Iran in 2007, before returning for further spells in 2010 and 2012, with the coach having taken Iran to two FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup quarter-final in 2013 and 2015.

Octavio replaces Mohammad Hossein Mirshamsi as Iran boss after he ensured a third-place finish at this year's FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup in The Bahamas.

Team Melli has to prepare for the 2019 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup.

The 2019 FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup will be the tenth edition of the FIFA Beach Soccer World Cup, the premier



international beach soccer championship contested by men's national teams of the member associations of FIFA. Previous editions before 2005 were not governed by FIFA and were held under the title Beach Soccer World Championships.

Overall this will be the 20th edition of the World Cup since its establishment in 1995. This will be the fifth tournament to take place under the biennial basis; the World Cup now takes place once every two years, after taking place annually between 1995 and 2009.

## Iranian female javelin thrower dreams of medal at Asian para Games



**S P O R T S** TEHRAN — Iranian female javelin thrower Hashemeh Motaghian is dreaming of winning medal in the 2018 Asian Para Games.

Motaghian, who represented Iran at the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio, claimed a silver medal at 2017 World Para Athletics Championships in London.

She finished in second place in Women's Javelin Throw F56 Final with 20.66m.

Now, Motaghian is preparing for winning a medal in Jakarta.

"I will participate in both javelin and discus throw events in the Asian Para Games. After the World Para Athletics Champion-

ships, I am training hard because I want to win a gold medal in the Games," Motaghian told Paralympic.ir.

"I think I will have a tough task in javelin throw in the Asian Para Games but I want to break record," she added.

The 2018 Asian Para Games, also known as the 3rd Asian Para Games, parallels the 2018 Asian Games, as a multi-sport event for Asian athletes with disability.

This event will be held in Jakarta, Indonesia from October 6 to 13.

Iran came fourth in the first and second editions held in Guangzhou, China and Incheon, South Korea respectively.

## Bosnia seek revenge on Iran at World Super 6: Sadegh Bigdeli



**S P O R T S** TEHRAN — Iranian national sitting volleyball player Sadegh Bigdeli says that Bosnia & Herzegovina sitting volleyball team will come to Tabriz for taking revenge on Iran in the 2018 World Super 6.

The 2018 World Super 6 will be held in Tabriz, Iran from April 19 to 24.

The competition will bring Iran, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Russia, Ukraine, Germany and the U.S. together.

"We are determined to win the title in our home but we have a difficult task ahead since Bosnia are seeking revenge on Iran. Team Melli defeated Bosnia in the 2016

Paralympic Games twice and we know that they want to beat us," Bigdeli said in an interview with Paralympic.ir.

"The 2018 World Super 6 is a preparatory competition for the 2018 Sitting Volleyball World Championships. We are preparing for the prestigious competitions which will be held in the Netherlands in July," the wing spiker added.

"Russia also are a favorite to win the title. They've progressed in the recent years and defeated Bosnia in the European championship final. I think the 2018 World Super 6 will be a real test for the world championships," Bigdeli concluded.

## Michy Batshuayi's World Cup in doubt

Michy Batshuayi's World Cup could be over after the Chelsea loanee picked up a long-term injury in Borussia Dortmund's loss to Schalke on Sunday.

Belgium international Batshuayi was taken off on a stretcher late on in the Ruhr derby, having appeared to roll his ankle.

Dortmund subsequently confirmed that the forward had suffered an ankle injury and will now miss the reason of the season.

Batshuayi tweeted: "Well its not good news for now, my season is probably over, and i wont be able to pay @BVB back for their confidence ... Thank you all the amazing amount of love I received since yesterday. Wishing my teammates the best for the final days. See you soon"



The injury raises concerns that he could miss the World Cup as Roberto Martinez's Red Devils begin their campaign in two months' time.

"I didn't think it looked like the kind of injury that he would be back from quickly," manager Peter Stoger said.

"I hope, of course, that I'm mistaken. I can't yet say anything specific, other than the fact that he's in pain and will now be examined in more detail. Hopefully it's not as bad as it looks."

Batshuayi has scored nine times in 14 games since joining Dortmund on loan in the winter transfer window in a deal that runs out at the end of this campaign.

(Source: Independent.co.uk)

## Preview - Group A: Tractorsazi v Al Gharafa



Tabriz: The bottom two sides in Group A of the 2018 AFC Champions League will close their continental campaigns on Tuesday as Tractorsazi Trabriz host Al Gharafa at Yadegar-e Emam Stadium.

Tractorsazi have endured a miserable campaign and have yet to pick up a win, with a 2-0 reversal against Al Ahli on Matchday Five finally confirming their elimination.

Al Gharafa's 3-2 home defeat to Al Jazira two weeks ago ended the Qatari side's hopes of progressing to the knockout rounds be-

cause of an inferior head-to-head record against the Emirati team.

The hosts' form domestically has been equally disappointing as Friday's loss to Sepidrood Rasht was their 10th game without a win, while Al Gharafa's last game was a 3-0 win over Qatar SC.

Al Gharafa will be without Assim Madibo after his red card against Al Jazira as the sides aim to end the competition on a high having won just one game between them.

(Source: the-afc)

## Preview - Group B: PFC Lokomotiv v Zob Ahan



Tashkent: It's do or die for Lokomotiv and Zob Ahan on Tuesday when the second and third-placed sides face off in Group B of the 2018 AFC Champions League with the winners to advance in second place.

Sardor Mirzaev netted a brace as Lokomotiv claimed an excellent 4-1 win away at Al Wahda on Matchday Five to move level on six points with Zob Ahan, who lost 1-0 at home to Al Duhail.

With the teams going into the final game on the same points, it will be Zob Ahan

who progress with a draw after the Iranian side defeated the Uzbek team earlier in the competition.

Lokomotiv, who lost 2-1 to Nasaf in their last domestic league game, welcome Oleg Zeev back from suspension but are without the banned Ikromjon Alibaev.

Zob Ahan, meanwhile, drew 1-1 with Foolad Khuzestan and currently occupy third place in the Iranian Pro League as they chase a spot in next season's continental competition.

(Source: the-afc)

## Iranian beat Ukraine women futsal team

**TASNIM** — Iranian women's national futsal team defeated Ukraine in a friendly match in Tehran on Sunday.

Team Melli beat the European rival 5-2 at the Handball Hall. Arezoo Sedghianizadeh, Fatemeh Etedadi, Fereshteh Karimi, Sara Shirbeigi and Fahimeh Zarei were on targets for the Iranian team.

Iran will again play Ukraine on Tuesday.

Iran are preparing for the 2018 AFC Women's Futsal Championship which will be held from May 2 to 12 in Thailand. Iran have been drawn in Group D along with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Hong Kong, Indonesia, Macau and Thailand are in Group A. Group B consists of Bangladesh, Chinese Taipei, Malaysia and Vietnam.

Bahrain, China, Japan and Lebanon are drawn in Group C. Team Melli claimed the title of the first edition which was held in Malaysia in 2015.

## Iran could surprise rivals at World Cup: Jesualdo Ferreira

**Persian League** — Al Sadd Portuguese coach Jesualdo Ferreira predicts Iran national football team could surprise its rivals in the 2018 World Cup.

Iran have been drawn with Portugal, Spain and Morocco in Group B of the World Cup.

"First of all, I would like to congratulate Iran national football team and Carlos Queiroz for advancing to the World Cup. I wish you all the best in Russia," Ferreira told the reporters in Tehran ahead of Persepolis match.

"Iran have been drawn in a difficult group but could be a surprise in the World Cup. I have to train Morteza Pouraliganji to stop Cristiano Ronaldo," he said.

"I watched Iran and Portugal match in the 2006 World Cup from the stands. Portugal defeated Iran 2-0 but it was not an easy match for them," Ferreira stated.

"We can see big surprises in these tournaments. I hope Iran have a good tournament in Russia," the Portuguese coach added.

## Zahra Nemati receives World Archery 2017 Athlete of the Year award

**TASNIM** — Iranian para-archer Zahra Nemati, who won the World Archery 2017 Athlete of the Year award in February, received her prize on Monday.

The online vote decided the best athlete from the recurve men, recurve women, compound men, compound women, Para-men and Para-women categories.

"I am very happy to win the award with the help of my country's people. They have always inspired me. This prize belongs to my people because they helped me to win the award," Nemati said.

She received her award from Reza Salehi Amiri, President of the National Olympic Committee (NOC), in Tehran's Olympic headquarters.

Stretton Jessica (GB), Gogel Jane Karla (Brazil), Tatiana Andrievskaia (Russia) and Jiamin Zhou (China) had been also nominated for the prestigious award.

Nemati claimed a gold medal at the 2017 World Archery Para Championships held in Beijing, China in September after beating Merve Nur Eroglu of Turkey, 6-2, in the final and finishing with a perfect 10-10-10.

## Saman Ghoddos scores goal with long-range stunner

**Persian League** — Iranian striker Saman Ghoddos scored a stunning goal in the match against IFK Göteborg on Sunday.

Östersunds FK defeated Göteborg 2-1 in week 3 of the Swedish league, Allsvenskan. Östersunds has lost its first two matches in the new season.

Curtis Edward opened the scoring in the 58th minute and Iranian international made it 2-0 in the 64th minute, hitting the ball from outside the box, with the shot going in off the post.

Mix Diskerud pulled a goal back in the 73rd minute.

"After we defeated Arsenal in Europa League, all Swedish teams want to beat us," Ghoddos said after win over Göteborg.

"The opponents make it difficult for us. Last year, there were a lot of teams who were back home with loss and now they make it even harder for us. Today we found a solution for that and we scored two goals," said Ghoddos.

## Hasay out of Boston Marathon with heel injury

American Jordan Hasay, one of the top women's challengers in Monday's Boston Marathon, has withdrawn with a heel injury, officials said on Sunday.

Hasay, third in the race last year, was advised by her doctor and team on Sunday that she needed more time to recover fully so there would be no long-term injury, the marathon said in a statement.

She had been running pain-free in recent weeks but an MRI scan revealed a stress reaction.

"Despite my team working around the clock to give me every chance to make the starting line, on this occasion it will not be possible," the 26-year-old said.

Hasay, New York City Marathon winner Shalane Flanagan and fellow Americans Desiree Linden and Molly Huddle had been expected to challenge Kenyan defending champion Edna Kiplagat to end the nation's 33-year wait for a home winner in the women's race.

(Source: Reuters)

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## Rouhani sends message to Attar conference

**A R T** TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani has sent a message to an international conference on the Persian poet and mystic Farid ud-Din Attar Neyshaburi (c. 1145-1221).

The message was read by Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi during the closing day of the meeting at the Iranian Society of Cultural Works and Luminaries, which was the organizer of the conference.



President Hassan Rouhani in a file photo

In his message, Rouhani said, "The Persian language is both part of Iran's life, and the culture and civilization of the Muslim world."

"Persian has been the language of knowledge, religion, art and literature in the wide world of thought and a deep contemplation of [Attar's] mystical works would support this claim."

He noted, "Attar's poetry and literature promote the language of dialogue," and added that those who are seeking a moral life need the language.

The conference opened last Friday in Neyshabur, the birthplace of Attar, to commemorate Attar National Day.

## Tehran halls to host Italian music festival next week

**A R T** TEHRAN — An Italian music festival will open at various halls across Tehran next week.

Organized by the Embassy of Italy, the five-day festival will start with a piano recital by Emanuela Piemonti at Rudaki Hall on April 23, the embassy announced in a press release on Monday.



Pianist Emanuela Piemonti in an undated photo.

The performance is also part of the program arranged for the Tehran Contemporary Music Festival.

In addition, composer Alessandro Solbiati will hold a master class and several lectures during the festival.

The Grand Hall of the Interior Ministry in Tehran will be hosting a series of piano concerts by Italian maestro Ludovico Einaudi from April 24 to 27.

In addition, Italian film score composer Nicola Piovani is scheduled to perform a selection of his film scores during a concert at Vahdat Hall on April 25.

Piovani, who has been invited to the 36th edition of the Fajr International Film Festival, will only perform for the festival guests.

Piovani is the winner of the Oscar for Best Original Dramatic Score in 1998 for Roberto Benigni's film "La Vita è bella", better known to English-speaking audiences as "Life Is Beautiful".

## NEWS IN BRIEF



### Franck Evrard's book on French theater published in Persian

**A R T** TEHRAN — French writer Franck Evrard's book "The French Theater of the 20th Century" ("Le théâtre français du XXe siècle") that chronicles the history of his country's theater during the 20th century has been published in Persian in Tehran.

Ruhollah Qasemi is the translator of the book, which has been published by the Tehran University of Art and Shahid Beheshti University.

The book originally was published in Paris in 1995 and ten editions of the book were published through 2002.

# Iranian cinema receives nominations at Love Intl. Film Festival

**A R T** TEHRAN — Several Iranian movies have received nominations at the Love International Film Festival, which was held in Beverly Hills, Los Angeles from April 7 to 16.

"Immortality" by Mehdi Fardqaderi and "Temporary License" by Afshin Hashemi are competing with four others for the award for best feature film, the organizers have announced.

"Limit" by Javad Darai and "The Rainy Love" by Mahdieh Shirin have been nominated for the best foreign short film award.

In the short animated films category, "Swan Lake" by Ali Nikfar and "Blows with the Wind" by Hazer Asadi have received nominations.

Esmail Mehrabi for his role in "Temporary License" and Misaq Zare' for his role in "Immortality" have been nominated in the best actor category

In the best supporting actor category Arman Arianasab, for his role in "Immortality", and Masud Keramati, for his portrayal of Aqa Bazmi in "Temporary License", have received nominations.

Faqihev Soltani is competing for the best actress award for her role in "Immortality" and Maral Farjad, Anahita Nemati and Sudabeh Beizai have been nominated for the best supporting actress award for their roles in the film.

Afshin Hashemi for "Temporary License" and Mehdi Fardqaderi for "Immortality" have been nominated for the best screenwriter award.

In the best cinematographer category, Asghar Rafijam for "Temporary License" and Amin Jafari for "Immortality" have received nominations.



Masud Keramati (L) and Esmail Mehrabi act in a scene from "Temporary License".

Ramin Rezapur has also received the nod for the best composer award for his collaboration in "Immortality".

Winners will be announced during a

special ceremony in July.

The festival puts its spotlight on movies that are supposed to bring "the world closer together, and promotes love and healing

through cinema."

All proceeds for the 2018 LIFF are scheduled to be given to the Lotus Light Children Charity in Los Angeles.

## ECO Cultural Institute hosts art exhibition

**A R T** TEHRAN — The Cultural Institute of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in Tehran is playing host to an exhibition of paintings and illustrations by artists from across the world.

Over 50 works selected by curator Adele Refai are on view at the exhibit, which opened on Thursday, the institute announced in a press release published on Monday.

Hossein Mahjubi, Abbas Mashhadizadeh, Reza Hedayat, Reza Bangiz, Mojgan Javidan and Solmaz Nabati are among the Iranian artists whose works have been picked for the showcase.

The exhibit also displays works by Raouf Karray from Tunisia, José María Lema de Pablo from Spain and many other artists from Italy, Japan, Russia, Turkey, Algeria, Germany and Slovenia.

Co-organized by the Faculty of Arts at Az-Zahra University in Tehran and Iran's



An illustration by José María Lema de Pablo.

Scientific Association of Visual Arts, the exhibition will run until April 22.

## Andy Warhol paintings coming to Tehran exhibit

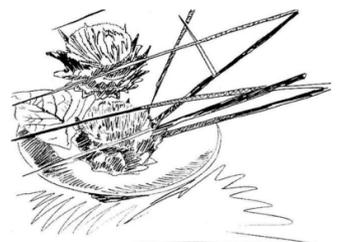
**A R T** TEHRAN — Works by American pop artist Andy Warhol will go on display in a group exhibition entitled "Black and White" at Tehran's E1 Gallery on Friday.

The artworks have been selected from a collection owned by Iranian private collector Fereydun Ave, the gallery announced on Monday.

Andy Warhol was an American artist, director and producer who was a leading figure in the visual art movement known as pop art. His works explore the relationship between artistic expression, celebrity culture and advertising.

The selection also features works by over 20 celebrated Iranian artists, including Abbas Kiarostami, Sadeq Tirafkan, Farhad Moshiri, Kambiz Sabri, Mahsa Tehrani, Rana Farnud and Kurosh Shishegaran.

The exhibition will run until May 4 at the gallery located at 1 Hamid Dead



فریدون آو  
سیاه و سفید  
Fereydoun Ave  
BLACK & WHITE  
30 April - 4 May 2018

A poster for the Black and White exhibit.

End, off Lesani Alley, Jebbeh St., off Mahdieh St. in the Elahieh neighborhood.

## "Rampage" sneaks up on "A Quiet Place" to win weekend box office

**LOS ANGELES, (Variety.com)** — After a weekend of fluctuating projections, Dwayne Johnson (just barely) owned the North American box office after all.

Though earlier estimates looked like the second frame of "A Quiet Place" would take the weekend, New Line Cinema and Warner Bros.' "Rampage" snuck up to take the top slot with \$34.5 million from 4,101 theaters.

Jeff Goldstein, president of domestic distribution at Warner Bros., attributed the weekend's numbers to Johnson's star power.

"Dwayne Johnson is a closer," Goldstein said. "He's got an incredible connection with his fanbase. He's a global draw unlike anybody else today."

Though the sci-fi actioner has an impressive A-CinemaScore and 80 percent audience approval on Rotten Tomatoes, "Rampage", which opened under initial predictions, will need to rely heavily on overseas to carry its costly \$120 million budget. The video game adaptation earned \$114.1 million internationally, with a worldwide total of \$148.6 million.

Still, its opening was enough to just narrowly take the box office crown from "A Quiet Place", which earned \$32.9 million in 3,589 locations. "A Quiet Place" has been riding high with rave reviews, only dropping 34 percent. That brings its cumulative domestic gross to an impressive \$100 million.

"The speed with which 'A Quiet Place' has raced to the \$100 million mark is a testament to the film's ongoing appeal and



Cast member Dwayne Johnson poses at the premiere for the movie "Rampage" in Los Angeles, California, U.S., April 4, 2018. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

a result of terrific word of mouth," said Paul Dergarabedian, a film analyst at comScore.

Also benefiting from the Friday the 13th weekend was Universal and Blumhouse's collaboration "Truth or Dare." The supernatural thriller debuted in third place with \$19 million from 3,029 theaters. The pic, starring Lucy Hale and Tyler Posey, made \$2.6 million internationally, combining for a

global total of \$21.7 million off its budget under \$5 million.

"This is an outstanding debut considering the competitive landscape," Jim Orr, head of domestic distribution at Universal, said. "For original horror, Blumhouse has defined the genre for many years. They built a model that is just terrific."

The third frame of Steven Spielberg's "Ready Player One" made \$11 million from 3,661 locations, lifting its domestic gross to \$114.5 million.

Rounding out the top five is the sophomore weekend of Universal's "Blockers". Kay Cannon's raunchy comedy starring John Cena, Leslie Mann, and Ike Barinholtz dropped 50 percent to take in \$10 million from 3,418 locations. In total, the pic has made \$37 million.

The wide release of Wes Anderson's "Isle of Dogs" made \$5 million from 1,939 locations. The stop-motion animated film, which has grossed \$18.5 million, opened in limited release at the end of March with the best per screen average of 2018 to date.

Another newcomer, Entertainment Studios' canine-themed "Sgt. Stubby: An American Hero," made \$1.1 million in 1,633 locations. Directed and co-written by Richard Lanni, "Sgt. Stubby" features the voices of Logan Lerman, Helena Bonham Carter and Gerard Depardieu.

The 2018 box office is down 2.4 percent compared to 2017, according to comScore. The same weekend last year, where "The Fate of the Furious" opened with \$98.8 million, is down 15.5 percent.

## Country stars return to Vegas for ACM awards after 2017 mass shooting

**NEW YORK (Reuters)** — Singer Carrie Underwood returned to the stage on Sunday after a serious face injury as country stars went back to Las Vegas for the first time since a mass shooting there last October.

Opening the three-hour Academy of Country Music (ACM) awards show at a hotel less than a mile from the scene of the Oct. 1 shooting that killed 58 people and wounded more than 850, singer Jason Aldean paid tribute to the victims and invoked the healing power of music.

"We wanted to open the show with something that sums up what it's like for our country music family to be back in Las Vegas for the first time since October 1," said Aldean, who was performing on stage when a gunman opened fire on the Route 91 Harvest country festival from

the window of a hotel on the Vegas strip.

"We thought about starting with a song, but it's a lot bigger than a single song. It's everything you'll hear tonight," said the "You Make It Easy" singer, who was later named entertainer of the year.

In the most anticipated performance of the night, Underwood emerged from five months of isolation following a fall at her home that required 40-50 stitches to her face.

Performing her new single "Cry Pretty", her face seemed well recovered and Underwood was welcomed back with a long standing ovation that left the former "American Idol" winner overcome with emotion.

"I'm still kinda shaky right now," Underwood said afterward, fighting back tears.