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Leader: Foreign spies behind currency hype

POLITICS TEHRAN — Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday that foreign spies have been working behind the scenes to create a foreign currency crisis in Iran.

“The role of foreigners and their intelligence services was obvious in the recent chaos in Iran’s currency market,” Ayatollah Khamenei said in a meeting with thousands of Intelligence Ministry staff in Tehran.

Explaining the main strategies that the

espionage services of the enemies have devised to harm Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei pointed to plots to hack and steal the country’s information, change the policies of decision-makers, foment security problems, and disrupt the economy.

The Islamic Republic is facing a complicated war waged by a strong alliance of enemies that employ their espionage services as the pivot of doing harm to Iran in this encounter, the Leader stated. **→2**

Iran replaces dollar with euro in financial reporting

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The Iranian cabinet on Wednesday ordered all state-run organizations and companies to replace U.S. dollar with euro in reporting their financial statements, IRNA reported.

The government also put the central bank in charge of managing and announcing rial-to-euro exchange rate continually.

The decision is made as part of the country’s effort to reduce its reliance on the U.S. currency. Central bank governor Valiollah Seif said on April 9 that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had welcomed his suggestion to replace dollar with euro in Iran’s foreign trade.

“Dollar does not play a role in our foreign trade transactions,” Seif announced at the time.

OPCW experts enter Douma

By staff & agencies

A mission by experts with the UN chemical watchdog, who were supposed to enter the Syrian town of Douma to examine the circumstances surrounding an alleged chemical attack, has been once again delayed due to unexpected gunfire at the site near Damascus.

Upon the Damascus government’s request, inspectors of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

(OPCW) were initially supposed to begin the mission late last week, around a week after the alleged attack was reported in Douma.

That mission was postponed as the United States, Britain, and France launched more than 100 missiles against Syria-based targets, accusing the country of deploying chemical arms in Douma.

The investigation was supposed to begin on Wednesday. **→13**

Rouhani: Our military power no threat to neighbors

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ARTICLE
Hanif Ghaffari
Political analyst

Berlin and Washington consult over the JCPOA

Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, is to travel to the United States and visit Donald Trump, the controversial President of the U.S. The visit takes place at a time when the economic disputes between Washington and the United States have reached its pick because of the U.S. government announcement of imposing tariffs on the imported steel and aluminum. Furthermore, Merkel intends to negotiate with Trump trying to convince him to remain as part of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The deal was reached in 2015 among Iran, the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom and United States) plus Germany and the European Union. This is while Trump had announced the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal by May 12. According to some news sources in Germany, Merkel’s visit will take place on (April 27th). However, the German Foreign Ministry has refused to confirm this news.

In any case and regardless of the exact time of this visit, it will definitely take place before the end of April, since Trump has threatened to pull out of the agreement unless his European allies help “fix” the agreement with a follow-up accord. It should be noted that the Western media are trying to introduce this visit as an attempt by the German chancellor for saving the JCPOA, and have refused to address other disagreements currently raised between America and Europe. But the fact is that the European officials are stuck in a complicated position.

If Washington reinstates sanctions on Iran, European firms operating there will be hit with Washington-imposed fines, severely hurting a major part of their global revenues. On the other hand, Iranian Foreign Minister “Mohammad Javad Zarif”, responded on Twitter that the deal was not renegotiable and that Trump’s stance “amounts to desperate attempts to undermine a solid multilateral agreement.”

Last September, the Bloomberg reported that in the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, there was a controversy between Germany and the two other European countries (Britain and France) about how to deal with the nuclear accord. **→13**

American deep state, MI6 behind Syria strike: U.S. analyst

TEHRAN — A U.S. counter-terrorism analyst said the American Deep State and UK’s MI6 spy agency should be blamed for the recent U.S.-led strike against Syria, stressing that President Donald Trump is “under siege and surrounded by liars giving him false intelligence to fit their war agenda.”

“First of all President Trump seems to be surrounded by liars who are providing him with false intelligence, manipulating data, and essentially deceiving him to advance a political agenda that includes the continued deconstruction of the Middle East regimes targeted by the Israeli-Zionist and Neoconservative war-mongers...,” Scott Bennett, from San Francisco, told the Tasnim News Agency.

He added, “...due to the fact that there are constant attacks from the U.S. Bureaucracy, Military-Industrial complex, and DEEP STATE against Trump as being a “Russian sympathiz-

er” and insinuations of Trump “colluding with Russia” to influence the election of the American Presidency in 2016, Trump may be feeling compelled to distract America’s attention by launching this attack against Syria, and ignoring all of the common sense, scientific facts and testimony which contradict the claim of a chemical attack happening in Syria at all...”

“There is additional evidence showing that 1) the chemical action was staged by British Special Ops; 2) the action was funded by Open Society; 3) the gas was supplied by Merck and delivered by an MI6 op. This was kept from Trump.”

Scott Bennett is a U.S. Army Special Operations Officer (11th Psychological Operations Battalion, Civil Affairs-Psychological Operations Command), and a global psychological warfare-counterterrorism analyst, formerly with defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton. He received a Direct

Commission as an Officer, held a Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmentalized Information (TS/SCI) security clearance, and worked in the highest levels of international counterterrorism in Washington DC and MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida. He has developed and managed psychological warfare theories, products, and operations for U.S. Special Operations Command, U.S. Central Command, the State Department Coordinator for Counterterrorism, and other government agencies.

His educational background includes a Bachelor of Science in Advertising and Spanish Minor from San Jose State University in California, a Master of Arts in International Business and Public Policy from George Mason University in Virginia, and a Ph.D. (ABD) in Political Theory from the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C. He currently resides in California. **→7**

Iran’s ex-diplomat suggests JCPOA model for talks with North Korea

A former Iranian nuclear negotiator has suggested that the country’s historic nuclear deal be used as a model for talks with North Korea, as direct contacts between Pyongyang and Washington have been confirmed.

Hossein Mousavian put forward the suggestion through a speech that was delivered at the International Panel on Fissile Materials (IPFM), hosted by National Assembly of Republic of Korea on April 14-17 in Seoul.

During the recent weeks, there have been reports of contacts between some senior North Korean officials with Washington. President Don-

ald Trump Tuesday confirmed direct contacts between the United States and North Korea.

In the speech, Mousavian proposed using the Iran nuclear agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as a model for any future negotiation with North Korea.

Under the deal, Iran agreed to curb its nuclear program in exchange for the economic sanctions relief.

The full text of Mousavian’s speech is as follows: In July 2015, after 20 months of negotiations, Iran and six global powers, the EU3 +3 (France, Germany and the UK plus China, Russia and the

United States) agreed on a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) to resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis. The deal provided verifiable assurances that, even if Iran broke out of the agreement, it would take at least a year for it to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon. It is verified by the highest standards on nuclear transparency and inspections ever negotiated. In exchange, the U.S., other world powers and United Nations committed to lift their nuclear-related sanctions on Iran. The agreement was welcomed by the international community and endorsed by a UN Security Council resolution. **→2**



Maestro Loris Tjeknavorian unveils works in Tehran

The 80-year-old Iranian-Armenian maestro Loris Tjeknavorian (R) unveils a large selection of his works, which are now out on DVD, during a special ceremony organized at Tehran’s Vahdat Hall on April 17, 2018. His colleagues are also seen in the photo.

Syria strikes show Trump is under neocons’ thumb: expert

TEHRAN — An American political analyst said the recent airstrikes against Syria upon an order by the U.S. president proved that Donald Trump’s administration is “under the control of the neoconservative-controlled foreign policy establishment.”

“The attack on Syria indicates that the Trump administration is now fully under the control of the neoconservative-controlled foreign policy establishment, and that any inclination the Trump administration may have ever had toward altering US foreign policy has been abandoned...,” Keith Preston, the chief editor and director of attackthesystem.com, told Tasnim in an interview.

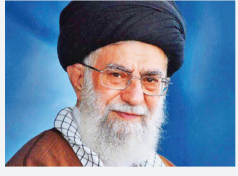
The following is the full text of the interview.

Multiple places in Syria came under attack by US, British and French military forces after US President Donald Trump ordered a military strike against the war-torn country. What’s your take on the attack?

A: The attack on Syria indicates that the Trump administration is now fully under the control of the neoconservative-controlled foreign policy establishment, and that any inclination the Trump administration may have ever had toward altering US foreign policy has been abandoned. The airstrikes against Syria are being touted as a punitive measure against the Assad government in retaliation for an alleged chemical weapons attack that occurred in Ghouta. However, no credible evidence has been found linking the Assad regime to the attack, and the evidence is stronger that a Daesh-linked rebel group in the region was responsible for the attack. It was only one year ago that the Assad government was falsely accused of a chemical weapons attack, and (it) was followed by airstrikes on Syria by the United States. Similar dubious allegations concerning chemical weapons were made against Syria in 2013 as well.

The incident in Ghouta is being used as a pretext for attacking Syria. However, a longstanding objective of the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia has been to replace the Assad government in Syria with a regime that will be subservient to the America-Israeli-Saudi axis. President Trump’s recently-appointed national security advisor, John Bolton, has been an advocate of creating a Saudi-like Salafist regime in Syria, for example. **→7**

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Leader, officials quit Telegram messaging app

POLITICS TEHRAN – Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s official website has stopped using the Telegram messaging app in a show of support for domestic equivalents in line with national interests.

The decision comes “in line with safeguarding national interests and breaking up the monopoly of the Telegram messaging app,” read the last message on khamenei.ir’s Telegram channel.

The Foreign Ministry has also announced that it had created a channel in Soroush domestic messaging app, similar to its Telegram channel, to expand its availability on the internet.



Zarif to attend UN peacebuilding meeting in New York

POLITICS TEHRAN – Foreign Minister Mohammad-Javad Zarif is scheduled to leave Tehran for New York on Thursday to attend the UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace on April 24-25, the Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi has said.

In a statement on Wednesday, Qassemi said the foreign minister, accompanied by his deputies, will deliver a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in New York as well, Mehr reported.

Zarif is also expected to hold meetings with his counterparts as well as a meeting with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres.



Iran, Turkey vow to boost fight against illicit drugs

POLITICS TEHRAN – Iranian anti-narcotics police chief Mohammad Massoud Zahedian and his Turkish counterpart Ibrahim Hakki Seydiogullari have agreed to promote cooperation in the campaign against illicit drugs.

Meeting in Ankara, the two officials exchanged views about a range of issues, including ways to boost Tehran-Ankara relations, Tasnim reported on Wednesday.

Zahedian and Seydiogullari also talked about different aspects in production of narcotics and drugs precursors in Afghanistan and ways to fight money laundering.

Iran, which has a 900-kilometer border with Afghanistan, has been used as the main conduit for smuggling Afghan drugs to narcotics kingpins in Europe.



Tehran: JCPOA monitoring body to respond to U.S. measures

POLITICS TEHRAN – Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi said on Wednesday that the nuclear deal monitoring body will respond to any U.S. measures aimed at destroying the nuclear agreement, also called the JCPOA.

Pointing out that the body has not made a statement on the issue yet, Qassemi said the body will take necessary measures at the right time and will report to the public, ISNA reported.

The JCPOA was struck on July 14, 2015 between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council – the United States, France, Britain, China, Russia – plus Germany.

Under the pact, Iran put some restriction on its nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.



Armed forces general staff hails IRGC for fighting terror

POLITICS TEHRAN – The General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces issued a statement on Wednesday hailing the IRGC for its effective role in fighting terrorism, boosting the security of the region and supporting the resistance front and the oppressed.

The IRGC was established as a public institution 39 years ago with the order of Imam Khomeini in order to protect the principles, values and ideals of the Islamic Revolution, the statement read, IRNA reported.

It also lauded the IRGC for its sacrifices during the Iran-Iraq war, saying the IRGC and the Army cooperated and defended the country’s territorial integrity and safeguarded the Islamic Republic’s achievements.



Iran sets conditions for foreign messaging apps

POLITICS TEHRAN – Abdolhamid Rezaee, secretary of the taskforce that screens online websites for criminal content, said on Wednesday there are a number of conditions which all foreign messaging applications are required to meet if they are willing to continue operating in Iran.

The first requirement, Khorramabadi said, is that all foreign apps need to acquire permission from Iran’s Ministry of Information and Communications Technology, Press TV reported.

The other conditions require foreign messaging apps to save and process all data pertaining to Iranian users inside the country, refuse to provide data pertaining to Iranian users to any foreign entities and ensure the users’ privacy and security.

Iran’s military capability no threat to neighbors, Rouhani says

Army holds military parade



5300 missiles on show during Wednesday parade in Tehran

influential at the international stage than ever, he said.

He also said the Iranian military commanders, like the political officials, have never been after tension and they have been seeking peace and stability in the region.

The Iranian president went on to say that

regional countries should not rely on foreign powers for their own security.

“The countries which rely on their domestic forces feel powerful while artificial power cannot bring a country glory. So, the regional countries should not seek power from the major powers or an illegitimate regime in the region,” the

“The countries which rely on their domestic forces feel powerful while artificial power cannot bring a country glory. So, the regional countries should not seek power from the major powers or an illegitimate regime in the region,” President Rouhani remarked.

president remarked.

■ Army holds military parade

Concurrent with marking Army Day, various units of the Army demonstrated a show of force by holding military parades across the country.

In Tehran besides President Rouhani, Army Commander Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, Armed Forces Chief of Staff Major General Mohammad Hossein Bageeri and other senior military officials as well as foreign diplomats and military attaches oversaw the parade.

The newest technological military equipment, including Aftabaz passive (phased array) radar system, rapid-reaction command and control combat system, and Kamin 2 and Seraj 1 missile systems, were unveiled during the ceremony

Among other defense hardware put on display were other missile systems, including S-300, S-200, Tabas and Sayyad, as well as radar systems, tanks, armored vehicles and sniper rifles, Press TV reported.

According to Tasnim news agency, a parade was held in the Persian Gulf which involved various naval vessels, such as warships, destroyers, frigates, corvettes, speedboats, and submarines.

Habibollah Sayyari the deputy army chief for coordination affairs, told reporters on the sidelines of the ceremony in the Persian Gulf that Iran sends the message of “peace and friendship” to the regional countries.

“Our power is to defend the countries’ borders. We have never been and will never be expansionist,” the navy chief remarked.

Leader: Foreign spies behind currency hype

The espionage services of the enemies play a pivotal role in their confrontation with Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei said.

However, he said, the intelligence organizations of the adversaries have failed to do

any major harm to the country despite all their facilities.

“We are in the middle of a big battlefield with the Islamic Republic establishment on one side and a large and powerful front of

enemies on the other,” the Leader noted.

He went on to underline that defense alone is not sufficient to counter the enemy’s intelligence war, underscoring the need for a “combative plan” in such a way that the

Iranian intelligence would choose the field.

Ayatollah Khamenei further called on the Intelligence Ministry personnel to stick to the basic tenets of the Islamic Revolution and avoid leaning towards any political party.

Iran masters nuclear fuel test loop

POLITICS TEHRAN – Iran has mastered nuclear fuel test loop in the Tehran research reactor, marking one of the most important projects that Iranian scientists completed in the field of nuclear fuel industry, ISNA reported.

The project on nuclear fuel test loop began in the Persian year 1395 (2016-2017) and was completed by the end of the year 1396 (March 20).

Following President Rouhani’s order more than a week ago, the technology was employed in the Tehran research reactor more than a week ago.

In addition to its usage in the test of nuclear fuel, the system can also be used in medicine, especially in

radiopharmaceuticals.

Earlier this month, Ali Akbar Salehi, director of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, said that Iranian experts have succeeded to reconstruct the Tehran research reactor.

“The Tehran reactor is 40 years old and it has been for over a year and a half that we are renewing its various parts,” Salehi, a nuclear physicist, explained.

He further said that for the first time a new nuclear fuel test loop has been built in the research reactor to test the resilience of the nuclear fuels used in power plants.

In recent years, Iran has made great progress in building equipment in nuclear technology.

Tehran, Baghdad hold defense cooperation meeting

The defense ministers of Iran and Iraq weighed plans for closer military interaction between the two Muslim neighbors in a meeting of a high commission on defense cooperation.

Iranian Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami and his Iraqi counterpart Erfan al-Hayali co-chaired the first session of the high commission on Iran-Iraq defense cooperation in Baghdad on Wednesday.

In the meeting, the Iranian minister praised Iraq’s victory over the Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group, assuring the Arab country of Iran’s continued support in the war against terrorism.

He also voiced Tehran’s willingness for constant defense and military cooperation with Baghdad at the highest level.

For his part, the Iraqi general expressed gratitude to Iran for its unwavering support for the Arab country in the battle against Takfiri terrorists, hoping that the cooperation would continue in the process of reconstruction of Iraq.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Brigadier General Hatami arrived in Baghdad on Wednesday for talks on defense ties with the Arab country.

In July 2017, defense ministries of the two countries signed an agreement to promote interaction and share experiences in the fight against terrorism and extremism, work together to ensure border security, and provide each other with training and logistical, technical and military support. (Source: Tasnim)

U.S., UK enjoying ‘blood business’ in Yemen: Iran

POLITICS TEHRAN – The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations issued a statement on Wednesday saying that the U.S. and UK are now enjoying a “blood business” in Yemen.

The United States and Britain are the chief arms suppliers to Saudi Arabia which started a war on Yemen in March 2015. According to the UN, the Saudi-led war on Yemen has created the worst humanitarian disaster in modern history.

“U.S. and UK complicity in the creation of the worst humanitarian crisis in the world in Yemen is reprehensible

and immeasurable,” the statement reads.

Following is full text of the statement posted on IRNA website: Permanent Representatives of U.S. and UK, during the Security Council open briefing on Yemen on 17 April 2018 repeated their derogatory allegations about Iran to cover up their own role in the disastrous situation created in Yemen. Iran categorically rejects those allegations as baseless propaganda.

The fact is that the war of aggression of Saudi Arabia in Yemen is the main underlying reason for the escalation of the crisis. It is regrettable that Saudi Arabia and its war mongers

supporters, as the main party responsible for such a catastrophic humanitarian situation, are trying to cover up their shameful crimes by introducing false charges against others or trying to spread the crisis beyond Yemen’s borders.

U.S. and UK are enjoying a blood business in Yemen now. U.S. is not only supplying bombs to Saudi planes to target civilians but recently has developed its role to formally participating in the planning this inhuman war too. U.S. and UK complicity in the creation of the worst humanitarian crisis in the world in Yemen is reprehensible and immeasurable.

Iran sees no serious threat, general says

POLITICS TEHRAN – Kioumars Heydari, commander of the Army Ground Forces, said on Tuesday that Iran sees no serious foreign threat.

“Today, the armed forces are ready and the enemies are aware of this preparedness. So, they [the armed forces] feel no serious threat against the system,” Heydari said in

a televised interview.

He said that the Western countries along with Saudi Arabia and the Zionist regime of Israel have failed in their plots against the Islamic revolution.

In their latest move they created the “cancerous tumor of Daesh” which Iran countered far away from its borders, he stated.

“Those who were defeated in this war seek to revenge, but this is a false dream. Our armed forces could protect the country’s geographical borders and also annihilate the cancerous tumor of Daesh outside the borders,” the commander pointed out.

Iran marked the national Army Day on Wednesday. Various units held military

parades across the country.

The latest military and defense achievements were also unveiled during the ceremony.

During his speech at the ceremony, President Hassan Rouhani said that Iran’s defense capabilities are for deterrence and pose no threat against the neighboring countries.

Iran’s ex-diplomat suggests JCPOA model for talks with North Korea

1 → The JCPOA was a win for the EU3+3 because it included robust monitoring, verification, and inspection of Iran’s nuclear program while increasing Iran’s breakout time to about a year. At the same time, it was a win for Iran because all unilateral and multilateral nuclear sanctions were lifted, Iran’s right to enrichment and heavy water production were respected, the international community would cooperate with Iran on peaceful nuclear technologies, and Iran’s foreign relations would be dramatically improved.

The following are the seven primary principles that led to the JCPOA that could be emulated in U.S.-North Korea negotiations:

1. A belief in diplomacy over war and sanctions. The perception that increasing pressure will result in the capitulation of the opposing side did not hold true for Iran nor will it for North Korea.
2. Negotiations should be serious and have

the aim of reaching a result based on mutual compromise. At the onset of the Iran nuclear negotiations, in 2013, both sides made clear their desired end state for the negotiations: for Iran, the removal of nuclear sanctions and respect for its right to uranium enrichment and the nuclear fuel cycle; for the U.S. and the other world powers that Iran does not build nuclear weapons.

Diplomats and leaders on each side also demonstrably displayed their commitment to make the negotiations a success. This was exemplified in the final round of negotiations, which saw U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry negotiating in Vienna with his counterpart Javad Zarif for 18 days straight—the longest consecutive stretch American diplomats had spent negotiating on foreign soil since the 1919 Versailles conference after World War I.

3. Dropping maximalist demands and seeking face-saving solutions. Any deal will have to be politically defensible for each side

back home. Both sides must be able to sell it domestically as a win.

4. A comprehensive diplomatic solution that is implemented in step-by-step, reciprocal fashion by all sides. One reason the JCPOA is faltering today is because the Trump White House has not abided by this principle. Iran implemented most of its concessions in the first stage of the JCPOA’s implementation: reducing its stockpile of low-enriched uranium, cutting the number of its centrifuges, and implementing the Additional Protocol to its IAEA safeguards agreement. Iran then had to wait for the other side to abide by its commitment for economic cooperation, which has been dwindling by the day under the Trump administration. In order to reach a long term agreement such as the JCPOA with North Korea that is not threatened in its first years, the reciprocal actions under a deal must be carefully coordinated and implemented in a phased, step-by-step fashion.

5. For North Korea, any deal must be designed based on complete distrust in the United States, especially since the JCPOA experience has shown that, due to changes in political leadership or policy, the United States cannot be trusted to follow through on its obligations in a nuclear agreement.

6. Negotiations must be multilateral. The negotiations leading to the JCPOA involved all five permanent members of the UN Security Council as well as Germany. While bilateral North Korea-U.S. negotiations are vital, South Korea, Japan and the other concerned powers must also be present. Any agreement between just the United States and North Korea would be less sustainable.

7. The UN Security Council must endorse any final agreement. A deal backed by the UN Security Council will bolster the confidence of all parties, especially North Korea, that the other side will implement its commitments. (Source: IRNA)

'UAE-backed militants torture, rape, kill refugees in Yemen'

UN envoy to present Yemen peace roadmap in 2 months

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has revealed that Yemen's UAE-backed ex-officials based in Aden detain and brutally abuse African refugees passing through the war-torn country's southern port city.

The New York-based rights group reported that the former Yemeni officials controlling Aden "torture, rape and execute" the refugees from the Horn of Africa in a detention center and forcibly deport them out to sea.

"Guards at the migrant detention center in Aden have brutally beaten men, raped women and boys, and sent hundreds out to sea in overloaded boats," said Bill Frelick, refugee rights director at HRW.

Several hundred Ethiopians, Somalis, and Eritreans have been held at the detention center since 2017, the group said. Separately, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) also reported the detention, abuse and forcible deportation of refugees in Yemen, without specifying the location.

"Survivors have described to UNHCR being shot at, regular beatings, rapes of adults and children, humiliations including forced nudity, being forced to witness summary executions, and denial of food."

HRW also accused Yemen's Houthi movement of arbitrarily detaining refugees in poor conditions and failing to provide access to asylum and protection procedures in the port city of Hudaydah.

The Houthi movement has been running state affairs and defending Yemen against the Saudi-led aggression, which is meant to reinstall the former Riyadh-friendly administration. Yemen's southern regions are mostly controlled by UAE-backed militants loyal to the former government.

Those areas have become a fertile ground for smugglers who vow to transfer refugees from the region to wealthier Arab states in the Persian Gulf. Most of them, however, leave the refugees at sea.

The United Arab Emirates is Saudi Arabia's key partner in its deadly war against Yemen, which has so far killed and wounded some 600,000 people, according to the latest figures.

Besides playing a significant part in aerial assaults and deploying troops to Yemen, Abu Dhabi has been training the pro-Saudi militants fighting on the ground against Yemeni armed forces.

The UAE also stands accused of running secret jails in southern Yemen, where the detainees are said to be facing brutal torture and abuse.

UN envoy to present Yemen peace roadmap in 2 months

Meanwhile, UN envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths says he



will present a plan to the UN Security Council for resumption of peace talks between the warring parties in Yemen.

"My plan is to put to the council within the next two months a framework for negotiations," Griffiths said on Tuesday at his first meeting at the Security Council since he assumed the position in March.

The UN envoy noted that a political solution to the conflict in Yemen is available, adding that both Houthi Ansarullah movement and the faction of former Yemeni president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi have expressed "constructive attitudes" and their desire for peace talks.

"A negotiated political settlement through inclusive intra-Yemeni dialogue is the only way to end the Yemeni conflict and address the ongoing humanitarian crisis," he added.

Griffiths, however, warned that intensified fighting between the warring sides in Yemen could "in a stroke, take peace off the table."

Years of UN mediatory efforts by the UN and other international players have failed to bring a peaceful resolution to the ongoing conflict in Yemen. Meanwhile, a Saudi-led military

intervention in the impoverished country has brought the country to the brink of a catastrophic humanitarian crisis.

The Saudi aggression was launched in March 2015 in support of Yemen's former Riyadh-friendly government of president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and against the country's Houthi Ansarullah 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-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: agencies)

Russia: our response to U.S. sanctions will be precise and painful

Valentina Matvienko, the speaker of the Russian upper house of parliament, said on Wednesday that Moscow's response to U.S. sanctions will be targeted and painful, Russian news agencies reported.

The United States this month added several Russian firms and officials to a sanctions blacklist in response to what it said were the Kremlin's "malign activities". Moscow says those sanctions are unlawful and has warned that it will retaliate.

"No one should be under any illusions," Matvienko, who is closely aligned with the Kremlin, was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

"Russia's response to the sanctions, our so-called counter-sanctions, will be precise, painful, and without question sensitive for exactly those countries that imposed them (the sanctions) on Russia," she was quoted as saying.

"Sanctions are a double-edged sword and those who impose them should understand that sanctions against countries, especially those like Russia, will carry with them risks of serious consequences for those who impose them."

Lawmakers in the lower house of the Russian parliament have drawn up legislation that would give the government powers to ban or restrict imports of U.S. goods and services ranging from medicines to software and rocket engines. However, the Kremlin has not yet said if it backs such measures.

A senior U.S. administration official said on Monday President Donald Trump has



delayed imposing additional sanctions on Russia and is unlikely to approve them unless Moscow carries out a new cyber-attack or some other provocation.

Haley hits back at White House over new Russia sanctions

U.S. Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley has hit back at the White House, rejecting a top adviser's claim that she was confused by saying President Donald Trump would impose new sanctions on Russia.

Haley had told CBS News that "Russia sanctions will be coming down," noting, Treasury "Secretary [Steven] Mnuchin will

be announcing those on Monday if he hasn't already."

However the White House denied the imposition of any new sanctions, with its economic adviser Larry Kudlow saying a day after that Haley "got ahead of the curve," and that "there might have been some momentary confusion about that."

Haley hit back with a stunning statement, saying, "With all due respect, I don't get confused."

According to a senior administration official, Trump was "annoyed" at the confusion in what seems to be one of the rare instances

in which Haley has drawn the president's ire.

Sources close to the White House said Trump, who has occasionally been hesitant to forcefully criticize Russia, has been unwilling to move forward with additional sanctions on Moscow.

Kudlow, who was speaking to reporters Tuesday, said that "additional sanctions are under consideration, but not been determined."

However, the Russian embassy in Washington received a letter from the Trump administration, saying the U.S. had no immediate plans to impose new sanctions on Russia, Interfax cited a diplomatic source.

"I can confirm that the United States has informed the Russian embassy that there will be no new sanctions for now," TASS cited a source in the Russian foreign ministry as saying.

Meanwhile, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker, a Tennessee Republican, called the recent happenings "standard confusion."

"How many other things do you want to mention have been rolled out that way?" Corker told reporters Tuesday.

"I didn't think much about it. You know, two weeks ago, we're moving out of Syria the next day, and then the next day we weren't. It's just sort of standard confusion."

Trump, who had planned to withdraw U.S. troops out of Syria, later changed his mind and ordered a coordinated attack against the war-ravaged country on Saturday. (Source: agencies)

Saudi in talks with U.S. over troop deployment in Syria

Saudi Arabia is holding talks with the United States about sending troops into Syria as part of a wider international coalition, the kingdom's foreign minister has said.

In his comments, Adel al-Jubeir said the deployment offer was "not new", adding that Riyadh had previously proposed the idea to former U.S. President Barack Obama.

"We are in discussion with the U.S., and have been since the beginning of the Syrian crisis about sending forces into Syria," al-Jubeir told reporters in Riyadh during a press conference alongside Antonio Guterres, the UN chief.

"We made a proposal to the [previous] Obama administration that if the U.S. were to send forces ... then Saudi Arabia would consider along with other countries sending forces as part of this contingent."

The kingdom announced its readiness to deploy ground troops in 2016 to fight the Islamic State OF Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist group in Syria.

While Saudi's air force partook in the aerial campaign aimed at defeating ISIL from the very beginning in 2014, the Persian Gulf kingdom stopped short of a full ground troop deployment.



U.S. forces in Syria

The news came a day after the Wall Street Journal reported U.S. President Donald Trump was looking to assemble an Arab force that would include Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to replace U.S. military presence in Syria.

The force, which Trump's new National Security Advis-

er John Bolton hopes will include Egypt, would be in charge of stabilizing the northeastern part of Syria, according to the report.

Al Jazeera's Patty Culhane, reporting from Washington, DC, noted that the U.S. defense establishment "is going to be very wary" of the Saudi plan.

"There's great concern among leadership inside the [U.S.] military about the ability of Saudi forces - just look at the war in Yemen that the U.S. has been helping them fight with intelligence and refuelling," said Culhane.

"There have been humanitarian catastrophes, numbers of schools and hospitals that have been hit, raising big concerns among human rights activists."

Another key question is what will happen to U.S. troops in Syria and whether they are expected to stay as part of an expanded mission, added Culhane.

"[It is] not at all clear that Trump is going to be OK with that," she added.

The U.S. has an estimated 2,000 troops stationed inside Syria, according to the Pentagon. (Source: Al Jazeera)

Cubans wary of future as lawmakers meet to replace Castro

Cuban lawmakers began two-day session on Wednesday to name the first non-Castro president in more than 40 years, ushering in younger Communist leaders who will be under pressure to bring greater prosperity and revitalize the creaking economy.

The replacement for President Raul Castro is widely expected to be First Vice-President Miguel Diaz-Canel, 57, an engineer who embraces technology and appears socially liberal but is considered a safe pair of hands to follow the elderly leaders who fought the 1959 revolution, as they retire.

The next president is likely to be cautious at first, seeking to consolidate support among conservatives despite a desire for faster development of an economy smaller than it was in 1985, when Cuba had the support of the Soviet Union.

Gathered at a convention center in a leafy Havana suburb, 605 legislators in the rubber stamp national assembly will select 30 other members of Cuba's state council along with the replacement for Castro, who took over from his brother, Fidel, in 2008.

Castro, 86, brought sweeping change, significantly thawing relations with the United States for the first time since rebels led by his brother overthrew a U.S.-backed dictator, and making cautious market reforms to one of the world's last Soviet-style command economies.

But with the economy suffering from a crisis in allied Venezuela and relations with the United States strained anew under President Donald Trump, some Cubans are pessimistic about their lives improving and feel nervous about what is to come.

"Right now, we don't know what the future holds," said Adriana Valdivia, 45, a teacher in Havana. "Raul is finished and Fidel is history."

"I can't see a way out to help Cubans live better, salaries are the same and don't make ends meet, and now Trump is tightening the screws with the blockade, imagine that," said Valdivia, who earns about \$24 a month. The next president should "increase the speed of change in Cuba while preserving the good things," said blogger Harold Cardenas, 32, adding that resistance to economic reforms brought in by Raul Castro had held the country back.

New generation, new ideas?

Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez, 60, is expected to get a senior role in the new government, after helping to nurture detente with the United States in 2014, and renewing Cuba's traditional defiance after Trump shifted policies.

Mercedes Lopez Acea, the 53-year-old head of the Communist Party in Havana, is also slated to take on a larger role.

While the assembly will promote younger leaders, Castro and other elders of the revolution will retain power through their grip on the Communist Party.

"Cuba is changing, but I don't expect dramatic changes as long as the revolutionary leaders continue to hold key positions in the government," said U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy, who has met Castro and Diaz-Canel.

"After that, a new generation may have other ideas."

Cubans ratified lawmakers chosen by party-controlled commissions last month in a process Cuba says is democratic, even though nearly all candidates are drawn from the Communist Party.

Diaz-Canel is not likely to challenge one-party rule and many Cubans say they feel distant from politics, preferring to focus on making ends meet within the limited economic opportunities that opened up as Castro allowed more small businesses in recent years.

"Politics is not my strong point," said Diadenis Sanabria, 34, working in a state-owned restaurant in Havana's Vedado district. "But I don't think a change of chief is going to change my life." (Source: Reuters)

Israeli fire injures five Palestinians near Gaza border



At least five people have sustained injuries in Israeli artillery shelling in the besieged Gaza Strip amid weeks-long anti-occupation demonstrations.

According to the Palestinian Health Ministry, the attack was carried out in an area in the city of Khan Yunis on Wednesday. One of the wounded is said to be in critical condition.

The Israeli military says it targeted a post belonging to the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas after a group of Palestinians approached the so-called buffer zone.

Four Palestinian men were killed and several others sustained injuries after Israeli battle tanks struck the southern part of Gaza on April 14. Gaza has seen mass protests against the Tel Aviv regime along the border between the Gaza Strip and Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories.

Tensions have been spiraling out of control in the besieged coastal enclave since Palestinians began staging anti-occupation protests, dubbed the Great March of Return, late last month.

Nearly three dozen Palestinians have been killed and more than 4,000 wounded by Israeli forces since March 30.

Palestinians say protesters are being shot while posing no threat to soldiers.

The Israeli military frequently bombs Gaza, with civilians being the main target of such attacks.

Israel has also launched several wars on the Palestinian coastal sliver, the last of which began in early July 2014. The military aggression, which ended on August 26, 2014, killed nearly 2,200 Palestinians. Over 11,000 others were also wounded in the war.

Gaza has been under an Israeli siege since June 2007. The blockade has caused a decline in the standards of living as well as unprecedented levels of unemployment and unrelenting poverty. (Source: Press TV)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	95523.9
IFX	1063.69

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	67.73/b
Brent	72.73/b
OPEC Basket	68.41/b
Gold	\$1,352.90 /oz
Silver	\$17.10/oz
Platinum	\$950.80/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Direct foreign investments running 88 industrial projects

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iranian industry, mining and trade minister announced that 88 industrial projects are being implemented in Iran using foreign direct investments, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

According to Mohammad Shariatmadari 49,916 projects related to his ministry are being implemented presently in Iran.

According to the Deputy Industry Minister Mahmoud Navvabi, during the 10-month period ended on January 20, some 4,616 industrial projects were inaugurated in Iran.



Over 1,000km of gas supply pipeline to become operational by next March

ENERGY TEHRAN — Over 1,000 kilometers of gas supplying pipeline will become operational by the end of current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2019), according to a gas official.

Mohsen Farsibaf, the director for planning and control of projects in Iranian Gas Engineering and Development Company, also said that 1,000 kilometers of pipeline was added to the country's gas supply network in the past Iranian calendar year, Shana news agency reported on Wednesday.

Karachi-Chabahar ferry service plan almost ready

Pakistan is giving final touches to its plans to launch Karachi-Chabahar ferry services to promote people-to-people contact.

Sources in the Ports and Shipping Ministry told The Nation that modalities including clearance from relevant departments were being worked out for launching Karachi-Chabahar ferry service.

The national flag carrier, Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC) is also busy finalizing its arrangements including acquisition of ferries.

"Karachi-Chabahar ferry service is being given priority because it is economically more viable. More than 200,000 Pakistani zaire'en (religious pilgrims), visit Iran each year," sources said.

A high-ranking Iranian delegation headed by Minister for Transport Abbas Akhundi has just concluded visit to Pakistan and is believed to have approved the ferry service plan.

During his visit to Karachi port, Akhundi also proposed to promote trans-shipment business through linkage between Karachi Port and Bandar Abbas as there was ample space of 204,000 hectares available at Bandar Abbas for promoting trans-shipment cargo handling facility.

(Source: nation.com.pk)

Euro-area inflation revised lower as ECB prepares policy meeting

Euro-area inflation accelerated less than initially estimated last month, a setback for European Central Bank policy makers as they consider winding down unprecedented stimulus.

Consumer prices in the 19-country bloc rose just 1.3 percent in March from a year earlier, according to the European Union's statistical office. While that's up from 1.1 percent the previous month, the reading falls short of a 1.4 percent initial estimate.

Core inflation, which strips out volatile components such as food and fuel, held at 1 percent for a third month.

A recent slowdown in economic data hasn't yet eroded confidence among ECB officials that inflation will return gradually to their goal of close to but below 2 percent. At the same time, there are different views among rate setters about when and how to scale back an asset-purchase program introduced more than three years ago to stoke price pressures.

While Germany's Jens Weidmann and Estonia's Ardo Hansson have expressed their preference for a faster exit, ECB Executive Board member Peter Praet is among those more cautious. He argued this week that an ample degree of stimulus remains necessary, given "subdued" inflation developments. Policy makers must be "patient, persistent and prudent," he also said.

(Source: Bloomberg)

PMO to reduce port, maritime tariffs noticeably in current year

By Mahnaz Abdi

TEHRAN — Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) will reduce tariffs on maritime and port activities significantly in the current Iranian calendar year (begins on March 21), the organization's managing director, Mohammad Rastad, announced in a press conference on Wednesday.

Saying that tariffs play some important role in pricing of maritime and port services, the official said reducing tariffs is done with the aim of promoting status of ports and increasing the services.

PMO has a key status in setting the price of port services and the organization has specified some short and long-term plans in this due and moves in line with the specified objectives, he said, adding that in this regard, some specific tariffs have been defined and categorized in a three-year plan.

Also, some memorandums of understanding have been prepared to be signed

with the shipping lines and port operators in order to offer them some special discounts with the aim of attracting more container ships to the region, Rastad further stated.

He mentioned promoting the performance of ports and quality of port equipment to attract large shipping lines, elevating the status of exporters and also reducing the end prices of imported commodities as some objectives behind reduction of tariffs.

New tariffs are simpler and clearer to meet the satisfaction of those operators who complained about complicated tariffs, the managing director noted, adding different affecting factors such as foreign currency exchange rate has been considered in specifying these tariffs.

Promoting competitive status of ports on agenda

Promoting competitive status of ports is an agenda of the PMO, managing director of the organization told the Tehran Times during the press conference and added



that system of pricing is just one of the mechanisms to materialize this objective.

In this due, one of our main strategies on which we are continuously working is promoting competitiveness through elevating the quality of performance in the ports, he noted.

Answering a question by the Tehran Times journalist about the organization's plan for attraction of private sector and also foreign investment to the ports and maritime projects, the official said: "We are preparing our contract mechanisms and also our investment packages in a way to motivate domestic and foreign investors."

"For example, the project of container terminal of Imam Khomeini Port (in southwestern Khuzestan Province) through private sector and foreign investment is now on the agenda; the call for contribution

has been made and we hope that there will be a proper joint between domestic companies and foreign ones on boosting the container capacity of this port, given that its potentials have not been still used properly", Rastad explained.

"Also in Shahid Rajaee Port (in southern Hormozgan Province), we are trying to attract more private sector's investment in operation contracts of terminals 1 and 2; some good negotiations have been fortunately conducted in this due with agreement between the two sides", he added.

"We are also pursuing promotion of work force, capital and energy in the ports and all these mechanisms are in line with the objective of motivating shipping lines, owners of goods and private sector investors to more activity in the ports", the PMO managing director concluded.

IMF sees Iran's GDP growth at 4% in 2018

ECONOMY TEHRAN — The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its latest World Economic Outlook titled "Cyclical Upswing, Structural Change" predicted a four-percent real gross domestic product (GDP) growth for Iran in 2018, down 0.3 percent from 4.3 percent in 2017.

The international body sees Iran's inflation at 12.1 percent in 2018, increasing 2.2 percent from its previous 9.9 percent in 2017.

The data presented indicates that Iran's GDP growth will outpace that of Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan which is going to be 3.4 percent in 2018 and 3.7 percent by 2019.

According to the IMF's current prediction, Iran's GDP will stay unchanged up to 2019, while the country's consumer price inflation is seen to fall



from 12.1 percent to 11.5 percent in 2019.

In its previous report published in March, IMF anticipated a real GDP growth of 3.8 percent for Iran in 2018.

According to the March report, Iran's inflation would decrease to 10.1 percent in 2018.

Iran, Russia mulling over renewal of oil-for-good pact

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran and Russia are negotiating the extension of the agreement on oil supplies to Russia under the oil-for-goods program for five years, Tass reported quoting Russia's oil minister as saying on Tuesday.

"The first supply has already been completed, the next ones are arranged. The agreement is effective; it has been extended. We generally believe that it should be renewed for five years and work on this matter," Alexander Novak said.

According to earlier reports, Iranian oil supplies under the program amount to 5 million tons per year. The first delivery was made in November 2017 and totaled 1 million tons.

In May 2017, Iran and Russia reached an agreement to begin oil supplies under the oil-for-goods program established back in 2014, when the anti-Iranian sanctions were still in effect. The volume of the deal was agreed to



stand at 100,000 barrels a day.

Earlier, Novak said that the oil-for-goods program was seen as a mechanism to boost trade between the two countries as proceeds from oil sales were meant to buy Russian-made commodity and services. According to Novak, Iranian oil would go for refining in those countries that buy such oil.

U.S.-China trade fight would not hit Chinese growth until end of this year, says JPMorgan

If China's economic growth were to be hit by trade tensions with the U.S., the effect would be felt only later in this year, JPMorgan said Wednesday.

That's because extensive negotiations have to be carried out by the two economic giants to iron out frictions that have seen both threatening tariffs on each other's products, according to Haibin Zhu, JPMorgan's chief

China economist. And they're likely to head off a trade war.

"We're expecting a bumpy road to negotiations, so probably not full-scale trade war. But we also don't expect the trade dispute between the two countries to be resolved very quickly," he told CNBC's "Capital Connection."

"And it probably won't affect immediate

growth outlook, but it may have some net impact — say the end of this year or 2019," he added.

Among the issues that the two largest economies in the world have to negotiate, it's the non-tariff agenda — such as intellectual property protection and technology transfer — that would be more challenging, Zhu noted.

China on Tuesday claimed that it saw 6.8 percent growth in the first quarter, exceeding expectations of 6.7 percent.

"If you look at the first-quarter GDP report, the positive news is that China's growth momentum is still quite assuring at this stage," Zhu said. "Particularly domestic economic activity is on a very solid growth pace."

(Source: CNBC)

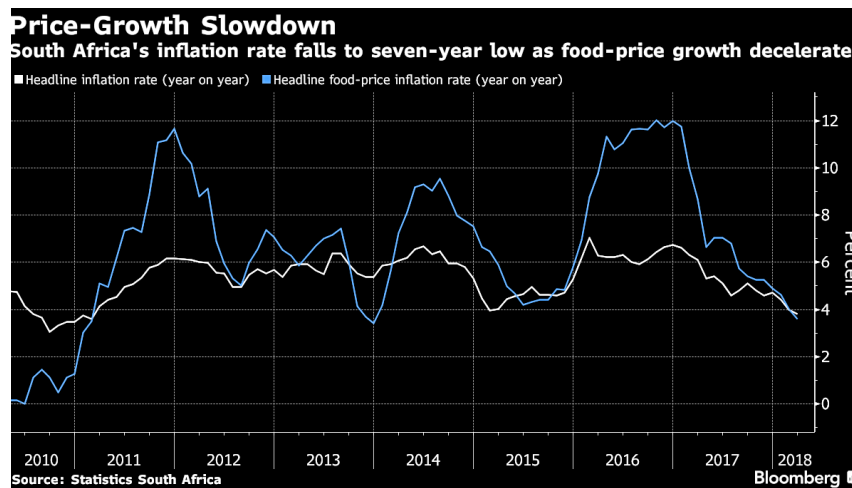
South Africa's inflation rate falls to 7-year low in Mar.

South Africa's inflation rate fell to seven-year low in March, moving further below the midpoint of the central bank's target range.

Inflation slowed to 3.8 percent from a year earlier compared with 4 percent in February, Pretoria-based Statistics South Africa said Wednesday in a report on its website. The median estimate of 20 economists was 4.1 percent in a Bloomberg survey. Prices rose 0.4 in the month.

Price growth has remained within the central bank's target range of 3 percent to 6 percent for a 12th consecutive month, the longest run since 2015. The Reserve Bank projects inflation will remain within the band until at least 2020, stabilizing at just more than 5 percent, according to the Monetary Policy Review released April 11.

Policymakers last month cut the repurchase rate by a quarter percentage point to



6.5 percent, the lowest level in two years, with Governor Lesetja Kganyago saying the bank wanted to see inflation close to the midpoint of the target.

Since President Cyril Ramaphosa's ascent to power following former President Jacob Zuma's scandal-ridden tenure, the rand has strengthened against the dollar, gaining 9.1 percent since mid-December when he was elected leader of the ruling African National Congress.

Food prices rose 3.6 percent from a year earlier, less than the 4 percent increase in February and the slowest rate of growth since December 2013.

Core inflation, excluding the price of food, non-alcoholic beverages, energy and gasoline, was 4.1 percent in March, matching February's figure.

(Source: Bloomberg)

World stocks at four-week highs as earnings rekindle risk appetite

Global stocks climbed to their highest in nearly four weeks on Wednesday as strong U.S. first-quarter earnings helped revive risk appetite, driving up equities and hauling the dollar out of its slump.

European stocks rose in early trading, pushing MSCI's index of world stocks up 0.2 percent to its highest since March 22. The top index of euro zone stocks rose 0.4 percent to its highest since Feb. 5, when a spike in volatility amplified a sell-off in global equity markets.

A gauge of volatility on the EuroSTOXX 50 fell to its lowest since Jan. 26, reflecting investors' renewed confidence in the resilience of equity markets. The S&P 500 volatility gauge hovered around a six-week low.

Analysts have downgraded their European earnings estimates ahead of the first-quarter results season, while U.S. companies are expected to deliver stellar results.

"Volatility has come down because expectations are very strong for the earnings season and the market is happy to see some hard data," said Laurent Godin, equity analyst at Indosuez Wealth Management.

Gains in Europe followed a strong bounce in Asian markets after four straight days of losses, while Chinese stocks tumbled even after the central bank unexpectedly announced it would cut the cash banks must hold as reserves.

S&P 500 futures climbed 0.3 percent as investors awaited the next batch of U.S. results, with all eyes on Morgan Stanley after Goldman Sachs reported a surge in profits on strong trading gains.

The dollar index climbed 0.3 percent.

An unexpected fall in British inflation to a one-year low weighed on the pound and pushed up the FTSE 100 stock index. The figures could lead investors to pull back bets that the Bank of England will raise interest rates in May.

While investors were refocusing on fundamentals after weeks dominated by geopolitical tensions, the latest Bank of America Merrill Lynch survey of fund managers showed signs of caution.

Investors cut their equity allocation to an 18-month low and increased their cash balances, while reducing



their exposure to the highly-valued tech sector.

"Just like they were chasing the market up in January, investors have gradually started to sell," said Clark Fenton, chief investment officer at Agilis Investment Management.

"I think that gives the market scope to rally a bit more as positioning has lightened up."

(Source: Reuters)

Oil prices rise on fall in U.S. crude inventories, global supply risks

Oil prices rose on Wednesday, lifted by a reported decline in U.S. crude inventories and by the ongoing risk of supply disruptions.

Brent crude oil futures were at \$72.07 per barrel at 0659 GMT, up 49 cents, or 0.7 percent, from their last close.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were up 49 cents, or 0.7 percent, at \$67.01 a barrel.

In the United States, crude inventories fell by 1 million barrels last week, to 428 million barrels, according to a weekly report by the American Petroleum Institute (API) on Tuesday.

Official weekly U.S. data will be published by the Energy Information Administration (EIA) on Wednesday.

Outside the United States, oil markets have been receiving general support due to a sense that there are high risks of supply disruptions, including a potentially spreading conflict in the Middle East, renewed U.S. sanctions against Iran and falling output as a result of political and economic crisis in Venezuela.

"Oil prices are holding near three-year highs (reached earlier in April) for the time being, and with inventories back in line



with normal levels, the supply glut of the last few years appears to be over," said William O'Loughlin, investment analyst at Australia's Rivkin Securities.

Beyond voluntary supply restrictions aimed at propping up prices led by the producer cartel of the Organization of the

Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) since 2017, O'Loughlin said falling output in Venezuela due to its political and economic turmoil was supporting prices.

"OPEC production is currently lower than expected as a result of large declines in Venezuelan output caused by a deterioration

in the economic situation there," he said.

The lower OPEC supplies come as demand is healthy, with China's refineries processing a record 12.1 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil in March.

Dutch bank ING said in a note to clients that Brent had risen back above \$70 per barrel in April "due to geopolitical risks along with some fundamentally bullish developments in the market".

It raised its average 2018 price forecast for Brent to \$66.50 a barrel from \$60.25, and its 2018 WTI forecast to \$62.50 per barrel from \$57.75.

For next year, however, ING expects lower prices due to rising U.S. crude output, which has jumped by a quarter since mid-2016 to over 10.5 million bpd.

The structure of the Brent and WTI forward price curve also points to a tighter market this year than in 2019.

The premium for June 2018 over June 2019 prices for Brent and WTI is \$5.50 and \$6 per barrel respectively, creating a market structure known as backwardation in which it is attractive to sell crude immediately instead of keeping it in storage for later sale.

(Source: Reuters)

OPEC-Russia talks set to keep oil cuts even as glut vanishes

OPEC and Russia will meet in Saudi Arabia this week after all but banishing a global oil glut. While looming political crises threaten to tighten supplies further, the group seems determined to keep its cuts in place.

Almost 16 months of output curbs by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and its partners have seen crude rally to a three-year high near \$70 a barrel. That's replenishing their coffers after the worst oil slump in a generation, encouraging the producers to extend their intervention even as Venezuela's petro-economy implodes and Donald Trump threatens Iran with sanctions.

"Would they declare victory now and stop? No way," said Mike Wittner, head of oil market research at Societe Generale SA. "They're happy to see inventories continue to go down, to see prices of \$70 or \$80. In the end, it's about revenues. The question is at what point do they become uncomfortable with higher prices?"

While analysts warn that price gains could backfire on OPEC by spurring rival U.S. supplies or crimping demand, ministers gathering in Jeddah on April 20 will focus on ways of prolonging their cooperation. That could include new inventory targets

that extend the cuts, and laying the foundations for an alliance that will last for years. Any recommendations this week would have to be ratified at the group's full meeting in June.

OPEC and Russia, for decades competitors in the oil market, forged an alliance in late 2016 to combat the surplus unleashed by a boom in American shale production. Though it's taken longer than expected, the strategy is paying off. With inventories subsiding to normal levels, the International Energy Agency says OPEC and its partners can declare "Mission Accomplished."

■ Cashing in

Saudi Arabia, says the curbs should continue at least until their scheduled expiry at the end of the year, and possibly into 2019. Energy Minister Khalid Al-Falih contends this is necessary to ensure markets have properly rebalanced, and that prices are high enough to encourage the global oil industry invests in future supplies.

Brent crude advanced 0.8 percent to \$72.15 a barrel in London and West Texas Intermediate climbed 0.8 percent to \$67.07 a barrel in New York, at 9:54 a.m. Dubai time. Last week, oil in New York and London jumped to the highest levels since 2014.

There are other incentives for sticking with the strategy: the

IEA estimates that in the first quarter, OPEC nations earned almost \$400 million a day more than a year ago because of stronger oil prices. Russia's budget gained about 1.2 trillion rubles (\$19.5 billion) last year, according to its Energy Ministry.

■ Petro politics

Saudi Arabia is said to seek a price increase to \$80 a barrel, according to people familiar with the matter, to cover weighty domestic spending needs and attract investors to a partial sale of its state oil company, Saudi Aramco.

Although Russia, less dependent on oil revenues, usually sounds more cautious about pushing on, Energy Minister Alexander Novak said he supports prolonging cooperation. Russian oil companies such as Lukoil PJSC have softened initial objections to the deal, which impedes their expansion plans, as the financial rewards become clear.

The accord also serves political objectives for Russia, cementing President Vladimir Putin's role as a power-broker in the Middle East, where his government maintains ties with the antagonistic regimes in Saudi Arabia and Iran, and supports Syria's President Bashar Al-Assad against a rebellion backed by western powers.

(Source: Bloomberg)

Canadian oil recovery faces new threat from possible rail strike

A potential strike by Canadian Pacific Railway Ltd. workers threatens to derail a recovery in Alberta's beaten-down heavy oil prices.

Canadian Pacific said on Friday that a new labor agreement with thousands of train conductors and other workers remains elusive as an April 21 deadline neared for when a work stoppage could begin.

A strike would come at a critical time for Western Canadian oil producers. The heavy crude they pump is selling for \$16.60 a barrel below the U.S. benchmark, from a discount of more than \$30 in February. Oil flows out of Alberta to the U.S. have improved after pipeline and rail bottlenecks earlier in the year stymied exports.

"Any reduction in rail capacity would not be good," Kevin Birn, a director at IHS Energy in Calgary, said by phone. "A rail strike would stretch or constrain CP, one of the major rail lines, at a time when its most needed."

New heavy oil production from Suncor Energy Inc.'s Fort Hills mine, combined with reduced pressure on the TransCanada Corp.'s Keystone pipeline after a November spill filled remaining export lines to capacity this year, forcing producers to ship by rail as an alternative. But the rail companies were also constrained by heavy demand for grain shipments and cold winter weather that slowed trains.

While the maintenance shutdowns of oil-sands upgraders, including Syncrude Canada Ltd.'s plant near Fort McMurray, combined with rail lines moving "a little more" crude has helped alleviate the logjam, the discount could widen back out to between \$17 and \$19 a barrel once Syncrude resumes operation, Birn said. That assumes that a rail strike doesn't happen.

CP is the second-biggest rail shipper in Canada after Canadian National Railway Inc. The carrier shipped 3,488 carloads of petroleum products the week ended April 14, up 28 percent from a year earlier, company data show.

The company said late Friday that "significant gaps" remain between the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. A work stoppage "will severely impact CP's ability to continue to provide safe and efficient freight and passenger and commuter service," Canadian Pacific said Friday. "All customers and commodities would be impacted at a time when demand is soaring."

The potential strike comes as the oil-producing provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan introduce legislation allowing them to cut oil shipments to British Columbia in retaliation for B.C.'s efforts to derail the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project. A move to turn off the taps to B.C. could further worsen the current glut by removing an export route.

"The oil industry is concerned about any further impact on the availability of rail capacity given the tight pipeline situation and is monitoring these new market developments as they unfold," Chelsie Klassen, spokeswoman for the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, said in an email.

(Source: Bloomberg)

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Talks about the Nile between Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia are deadlocked, so where to from here?

By Thembisa Fakude

Talks about the River Nile between Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia held in Khartoum on 5 April were deadlocked. The discussions revolved around Ethiopia's construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam. The \$4 billion hydroelectric project is on the Blue Nile, in the Benishangul-Gumuz Region of Ethiopia, about 15 km east of the border with Sudan. Egypt is concerned that the dam will have a damaging impact on the flow of the Nile and its share of water from the river.



Prime Minister of Ethiopia Hailemariam Desalegn (C), President of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (R) and President of Sudan Omar Al-Bashir (L)

After years of informal talks, tensions between Ethiopia and Egypt have intensified. On 29 January, Egypt's President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and his Sudanese counterpart Omar Hassan Al-Bashir met the former Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn on the sidelines of an African Union (AU) summit in Addis Ababa. The meeting was intended to kick start a process of engagement in respect of the Nile. According to Reuters, the three leaders "instructed their water and energy ministers to draw up in one month a report that will thrash out ways to resolve all outstanding issues regarding the dam."

The Nile flows from two tributaries; the White Nile is considered to be the headwater and the Blue Nile its main water source. The former rises in the Great Lakes of Africa between Rwanda and Burundi and the tributary of the Blue Nile is Lake Tana in Ethiopia, which contributes over 80 per cent of the Nile's flow. The White and Blue Niles converge in Khartoum and flow downstream to Egypt, which relies on the 55.5 billion cubic meters of water that it takes from the river; around 93 per cent of Egypt's 94 million citizens live along the banks of the great river.

There have been a number of treaties over the years between the countries which share the water of the Nile. Most of these agreements excluded the main player, Ethiopia, which for many years lacked political stability and muscle, leading to its neglect and isolation on key decisions regarding the river.

However, the economic and political fortunes of Ethiopia have changed, along with its geopolitical status. Egypt insists on referring to the 1959 agreement with Sudan for its share of water from the Nile. This was a supplement of previous agreements giving Egypt the right to its aforementioned share of Nile water every year and Sudan 18.5 bn cubic meters. The government in Addis Ababa argues that Sudan and Egypt divided the flow of the water without taking into account Ethiopia's needs.

Appealing to logic, often with little success, Egypt has in turn argued that Ethiopia receives over 510 mm of rainfall annually whilst it has to do with a meagre 200mm for its much larger population. Since the toppling of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, Egypt has changed its tone, upping its threats to Ethiopia. Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi told the Financial Times in December last year that "the Nile is a matter of life and death" for Egypt. His predecessor, President Mohammad Morsi, was less relenting on the subject: "If the Nile diminishes by one drop then our blood is the alternative," he vowed. Such inflammatory statements have not made the situation easier; instead, they have led to Ethiopia digging in its heels when dealing with Egypt on the subject.

Suffice to say that the horse has bolted regarding the building of the dam; it is now 60 per cent complete. There is also a heightened level of national pride in Ethiopia about the project, with the public mantra, "The dam was funded by Ethiopians for Ethiopians." These two factors alone make it hard to imagine Ethiopia ever reversing its plans. The dam will be built.

What, then, is the way forward? A senior Ethiopian official told me that the biggest challenge in negotiating with Egypt is its "attitude towards Africans." He mentioned the threatening tones from Morsi and Al-Sisi whilst negotiations were taking place. He also declared an incident which took place in May 2016 during the UN Environmental Assembly in Addis Ababa. The head of the African Diplomatic Corps instituted a formal protest to the assembly after the head of the Egyptian delegation, Mohamad Hisham Shoeir, is alleged to have called Africans "dogs and slaves".

The official went on to explain to me about Ethiopia's right to its national sovereignty, ownership of land and natural resources. "There is no question regarding the [oil and gas] resources of the Persian Gulf States, so why must Ethiopia enter into negotiations regarding its own natural resources and the use thereof?" he asked.

Ethiopia elected a new Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, on 2 April. There are doubts that he will be easy in the negotiation process.

Ahmed is from Oromia, a region which in October last year benefited from a 40 million Birr (\$1.5 million) donation for the rehabilitation of displaced people from the Ethiopian-born Saudi billionaire Mohammed Hussein Al-Amoudi. Notwithstanding his disagreements with some regional politicians at times, Al-Amoudi has vast business interests in the region and an entrenched relationship with its people. He was detained together with a number of Saudi princes and businessmen at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Riyadh on the orders of Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman last November.

The wealthy businessman is touted in Ethiopia and beyond as the biggest private investor in the Great Renaissance Dam project. Egypt has criticized Al-Amoudi continually and blames him for Ethiopia's ambitious project. Given these realities on the ground, the prospects of easing the negotiations between Ethiopia and Egypt seem remote, at least in the foreseeable future. (Source: Middle East Monitor)

The government in Addis Ababa argues that Sudan and Egypt divided the flow of the water without taking into account Ethiopia's needs.

Bombing Syria is a Saudi-sponsored adventure that will achieve nothing

To answer why the trio of Western powers attacked Syria now, we must look to the recent visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the three capitals



The bombs followed immediately after the Saudi crown prince's visits to the three capitals, where economic promises were made, and contracts to purchase more weapons were signed.

In the Arab world, even those who support Western military strikes on Syria remain skeptical about their timing, purpose and outcomes. Whether the objective was punishing Assad, protecting civilians, or mere revenge, it is highly unlikely that the strikes are destined to yield positive outcomes.

Notwithstanding how hastily the decision was taken in Washington, London and Paris to bomb Bashar al-Assad's forces, the legality of the strikes remains controversial. Without a UN consensus and a full report from chemical weapons inspectors, the Friday strikes will always remain suspicious and will no doubt fail to achieve any of their stated objectives.

■ A controversial endeavour

Under international law, military intervention for humanitarian reasons remains a controversial endeavour. But the three Western capitals went ahead without international or domestic debate about their legality, let alone a resolution authorizing them. Neither the U.S., Britain nor France sought serious consultations with their own parliaments or with the wider international community.

In the Arab world, Western military interventions from 1956 until now have a wretched history, achieving exactly the opposite of their stated objectives. Bombing Egypt in the 1950s, Libya in the 1980s, Iraq in the 1990s, and now Syria had always strengthened rather than weakened the agents they were meant to destroy.

From Nasser of Egypt, Gaddafi of Libya, to Saddam of Iraq, erratic Western bombs have prolonged the lifespan and boosted these leaders' domestic legitimacy rather than eliminated them.

When the objective was regime change such as in Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011, interventions resulted in upheavals unmatched in the history of the Arab world except for the displacement of Palestinians since 1948.

It is a rule of thumb that Western military interventions have strengthened non-state actors such as the militias that operate on the ground in countries where central authorities have disintegrated or been fatally weakened.

■ Why now?

Skepticism about the recent episode of military intervention in Syria has to be understood in the context of why Washington, London and Paris are only now ready to intervene in response to the Ghouta conflict

where chemical weapons have been resulted in the death of hundreds of civilians over several years.

To answer the question why now, we must look for the trio's troubled relations with Russia and the recent visit of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman to the three capitals where he promised investment utopias and lavish spending on Western goods.

During the visit, President Trump made it clear that he is ready to leave U.S. soldiers in Syria, a force estimated to be around 2,000 only - and only if someone pays for them.

The U.S. president has truly converted the so-called superpower's military might into a hired mercenary force ready to be deployed upon receiving cash. The Saudi crown prince won't hesitate to throw money at a thorny intervention by his own regime in Syria.

Saudi intervention has yielded zero gain. Seven years into the Syrian conflict, Saudi Arabia failed to cut Iran off from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, topple Bashar Assad and install a puppet Syrian regime.

With his Russian scandals unfolding in the U.S., President Trump needed to show that he is tough on Russia, hence his military strikes prove to his domestic audiences that he is ready and mighty when it comes to countering Russia's increasing influence in Syria.

Trump wants to punish Russia for the misdemeanour of its protegee, namely Assad of Syria, thus demonstrating to Americans that he is no ally of Putin.

■ A great opportunity

And what about Britain, the junior military interventionist? To understand the recent strikes, we must locate them in the current political situation in London where a Conservative government is desperate to unravel the consequences of the tension with Russia over the Salisbury attack.

This points to a government struggling with the intricacies of a major transformation following Brexit, and the nightmare of a shrinking economy that haunts British Prime Minister Theresa May.

She jumped at the opportunity to flex weakened and sagging muscles, and to bolster her fragile domestic political position. Bombing Syria was a great opportunity to show how tough London is on the Russians. Britain bombed Syria to assert its sovereignty against an intruding and Russia.

As for France, Emmanuel Macron is struggling against domestic forces which have proved to be stubbornly resistant to his new economic policies. From the recent strikes of the railway workers to those of the airlines, transportation in France has been brought to a halt by a series of civil actions against Macron's flagship policies to curb the power of trade unions.

In a country where no restaurant will serve you lunch after 2pm, working hours are the shortest in Europe, and concern with les vacances overrides any other important endeavour, Macron needs to rejuvenate a nation plagued by several crippling forces. From racism, Islamophobia, right-wing ultra-nationalism and unemployment, Macron needs to prove that France is still great, especially in the Levant, its historically cherished region. Bombing Syria is just a way of saying that France still matters.

■ Arab world's main problem

No matter how precisely this bombing was executed, erratic U.S., British and French strikes are really not about the Syrian people and their seven-year-old plight. Dispossession, displacement and death are not going to be ended after a few bombs are dropped here and there.

The bombs followed immediately after the Saudi crown prince's visits to the three capitals, where economic promises were made, and contracts to purchase more weapons were signed. Bombing Syria is a Saudi-sponsored adventure that won't resolve the conflict in Syria nor return refugees to their homes.

The Arab world has learned to take Western pledges to save the people with a pinch of salt. When this West has been a contributing force to prolonging the lives of dictators, selling them deadly weapons, and draining their resources in return for useless Western military arsenals that only protect such dictators, it is very difficult to take seriously Western pledges of this kind.

The Arab world's main problem is dictators who continue to be supported by foreign powers, and foreign powers bombing them when they cease to be useful. The problematic Western interventions, past and present, will remain controversial and dangerous.

When they are financed by Saudi petrodollars, they are even more problematic, serving the interest of a lethal repressive regime rather than the suffering people of Syria.

(Source: Middle East Eye)

Mar-a-Lago is a high-stakes summit for both Trump and Abe

By Jeffrey Hornung

This week's summit at Mar-a-Lago between President Donald Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe should be routine diplomacy allowing for two allies to catch up and reaffirm strategies. In reality, it represents a crucial moment: Trump and Abe need the summit to go well.

The two leaders have much to discuss, but two issues will likely dominate the agenda, one is North Korea. Coming just days before the summit between North and South Korea, and before Trump's own as-yet-unscheduled meeting with Kim Jong Un, the Trump-Abe summit is an opportunity to reaffirm a unified stance on keeping the "maximum pressure" sanctions intended to force Pyongyang to denuclearize and roll back its ballistic missile programs.

A second issue is tariffs. When Trump imposed tariffs on security grounds on steel and aluminum imports last month, he did not exclude Japan. After some discussions, he did, however, provide exclusions for South Korea, Australia, Canada and the EU, all U.S. allies. The meeting is an opportunity to discuss this potential flashpoint and find a resolution.

Behind the scenes, there is even more at stake.

For Abe, the meeting is critical for promoting Japan's interests in North Korea. Because Abe has no scheduled



For Abe, the meeting is critical for promoting Japan's interests in North Korea.

summit with Kim Jong Un, there is a risk Japan may be left behind. Meeting Trump is an opportunity to directly advocate for keeping Japan's interests on the list of priorities. This

includes ensuring that stopping the North's abduction of Japanese citizens remains a priority, along with denuclearization and abandonment of its ballistic missile program. At the bare minimum, it means getting Trump to agree that Japan needs to be present at any multinational negotiations.

Economically, Abe needs Trump to exclude Japan from the tariffs. Abe staked his administration on economic growth. Trump's tariffs threaten critical sectors. The summit is a chance for Abe to remind Trump of the value Japan brings to the American economy. Abe has already noted in parliamentary debate that Japanese steel products help U.S. auto makers become more competitive by keeping their products cheaper for American consumers.

Trump also has vital interests at stake. Trump needs Abe because Japan commands attention in the region. Through its diplomatic heft, economic clout, and soft power, Japan serves as a counterweight to China in an uncertain environment where many countries question America's commitment.

Strategically, given its robust military capabilities and hosting of approximately 50,000 U.S. military personnel, Japan remains a critical player for regional peace and stability. Although Japan is legally limited in how it can use its military forces, Japan is the most important U.S. regional ally. Its cooperation is needed for virtually any activity the U.S. seeks in the region. ➔13

Devote time for learning about nature of evil: Professor

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Jalal Heirannia

TEHRAN — Charles Taliaferro, a professor of philosophy at St. Olaf College in the U.S., believes that “Given the advances in technology and thus in the capacity for persons to bring about more destruction to others than has until now been unimaginable, I believe it is more important than ever to devote time to learn from the past about the nature, allure and our powers to resist evil.”

Following is the text of the interview with Professor Taliaferro:

■ What has been your main question in your book, “The history of Evil”?

A: My co-editor, Chad Meister, and I have been interested in a global, comprehensive study of what counts as evil, understood very broadly, to include the study of what counts as sin or harm or acting against the Dao or Karma or being hurtful. We contracted over 130 scholars from around the world to trace conceptions of what is involved in exploitation, wrong-doing or harmful ignorance from the very first forms of writing to today.

■ What Hypothesis did you use to answer this question?

A: We did not have an explicit hypothesis we were trying to establish or disprove, but in essence the whole project did lend some support to an historically significant thesis about evil to the effect that goodness is prior to or more fundamental than evil.

This may have been predictable given that all of the contributors are scholars in different areas of research from philosophy



and theology to history, are ourselves committed to understanding the nature of evil, using the tools of our disciplines to try to bring clarity and advance our education in what draws us to harm each other, commit acts of injustice, and so on.

In a sense, the very nature of our research had to involve commitments to intellectual

integrity, impartiality, fairness to the persons and topics we analyzed.

It would not have worked if we fell into envy, jealousy, unfairness, partiality, harmful rage, spite, and other vices. The very fact that the project has been completed is a testimony to the primacy, at least in the study of evil, of virtue.

■ What was the necessity of writing this book?

A: Given the advances in technology and thus in the capacity for persons to bring about more destruction to others than has until now been unimaginable, I believe it is more important than ever to devote time to learn from the past about the nature, allure and our powers to resist evil.

American deep state, MI6 behind Syria strike: U.S. analyst

1 → The following is the full text of the interview:

■ Multiple places in Syria came under attack by U.S., British and French military forces after President Donald Trump ordered a military strike against the war-torn country early on Saturday. What is your take on the attack?

A: There are two critical aspects behind this attack that need to be understood to explain why it happened, and what may come next.

First of all President Trump seems to be surrounded by liars who are providing him with false intelligence, manipulating data, and essentially deceiving him to advance a political agenda that includes the continued deconstruction of the Middle East regimes targeted by the Israeli-Zionist and Neoconservative war-mongers. These fanatical liars include John Bolton, the National Security Advisor who was a key figure in the invasion of Iraq and 18 years of continual war and who has an obsession with full-spectrum dominance and unchallenged U.S. control over the entire world; Nikki Haley, the U.S. representative at the United Nations, who has been constantly slandering Russia with false claims of chemical warfare in the United Kingdom and now Syria, and threatening to “slap” Russia, and whose husband is an Air Force General and committed to war as a means to a paycheck; and numerous people in the media like Sean Hannity and Sebastian Gorka who are viciously anti-Russian orthodox Christian due to their Zionist and Catholic prejudices. This is important to understand since it explains all of the “noise” that may be smothering any voices of peace, reason, reflection, or honest analysis of the Syria-Russian-Iran situation.

Secondly, due to the fact that there are constant attacks from the U.S. Bureaucracy, Military-Industrial complex, and DEEP STATE against Trump as being a “Russian sympathizer” and insinuations of Trump “colluding with Russia” to influence the election of the American Presidency in 2016, Trump may be feeling compelled to distract America’s attention by launching this attack against Syria, and ignoring all of the common sense, scientific facts and testimony which contradict the claim of a chemical attack happening in



Syria at all. Another reason for why Trump may have launched this attack to distract attention away from his domestic policy is because this week Trump’s personal attorney Michael Cohen had his office raided by Special Counsel Robert Mueller who is investigating Trump and has already criminally charged Trump’s associates Paul Manafort and former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn. The reason why Michael Cohen had his office raided was because he had received



Bin Salman will applaud this missile attack and seek to exploit the event by sending in more Wahhabi mercenaries and money and weapons to try and topple the Assad regime, and stop the victories of Russia and Iran and Syria.

materials disclosing the financing of terrorism involving Saudi Arabia, Union Bank of Switzerland, defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton, the Clinton Foundation, the U.S. State Department, and the Department of Justice during the Obama Administration, and that this financing was used to fund operations in Syria and Libya. Videos of the recordings of Michael Cohen’s involvement in this, was the reason for his targeting and investigation. This will be emerging in the coming weeks. I know this because I was personally involved in these operations involving Michael Cohen, and spoke with him personally in 2015 and 2016—and have the videos to prove it. More of this will follow in another article.

■ “It is Congress, not the president, which has the constitutional responsibility for making war. The international community must uphold the prohibition against the use of chemical weapons, but it is unclear how Trump’s illegal and unauthorized strikes on Syria achieve that goal,” Bernie Sanders Retweeted the New York Times. What is your perspective on this?

A: The Congress of the United States is the only body of the American government empowered to declare war, not the President or any military commander. The reason for this is to protect the people of the United States from a bloodthirsty President or madmen in the military who see war as a “money-making, career-building” exercise and profession, instead of a last resort to defend one’s country, family, and life. Unfortunately the United States, after the false flag attack of September 11, 2001, created the “Patriot Act” and the “Authorization for Military Force”, which was a way to get around this Constitutional law requiring Congress to declare war—and the world has been suffering ever since. If President Trump doesn’t immediately change his course and stop this illegal war, he very well

could find himself impeached, prosecuted as a war criminal, and end up as another failed one-term President with a legacy of a failed war that resulted in the greatest fall from grace America has ever suffered.

■ How do you see the role of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman in the attack?

A: The Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman will applaud this missile attack and seek to exploit the event by sending in more Wahhabi mercenaries and money and weapons to try and topple the Assad regime, and stop the victories of Russia and Iran and Syria. We will most likely see the Israeli-Saudi alliance unifying under the banner of this U.S.-UK-France coalition, which will embolden attacks against Lebanon and Syria by Israel and Saudi Arabia. It will also result in increases in violence against Yemen by Saudi Arabia, in order to use this Syria attack as “cover”.

■ Certainly, the attack was a flagrant violation of international law. How much respect do you think Trump and his allies have for the international law?

A: The legal reality is, this act of war declaration by a President is illegal, unconstitutional, and an international war crime. Russian-Iran-China should introduce a Security Council resolution to accomplish the following: 1) file a war crimes violation act against the United States, Britain, France for initiating this action, with specific request for the U.S. to be held to account for leading this attack. 2) Immediately set out to create an alternative to the UN for nations seeking «stability, peace, and prosperity» in the world, rather than U.S. Full-Spectrum Dominance; 3) Demand a summit between the leaders of China, Russia, Iran and Syria, with the U.S. in Reykjavik, Iceland, and use the historical significance of the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting to end the “Cold War” and achieve peace, to achieve the same now and stop the

globalist interventionist war-mongering policies infecting the West.

Trump said the purpose of his actions was to stop the production, spread, and use of chemical weapons, and “atrocities”. He said, military, economic, and diplomatic elements of national power will be used against Syria-Russia-Iran, which means a dramatic increase in propaganda will be following this attack in the media, in financial sanctions, at the United Nations, and in the use of secret black operations and false-flag attacks. Most likely you will see Israel’s Mossad engage in attacks in Europe and blame it on Muslims, claiming Muslims are outraged and standing up against the U.S. attacks against Syria. This will prompt the European and U.S. police and military to further crack-down on the civilian population and restrict information.

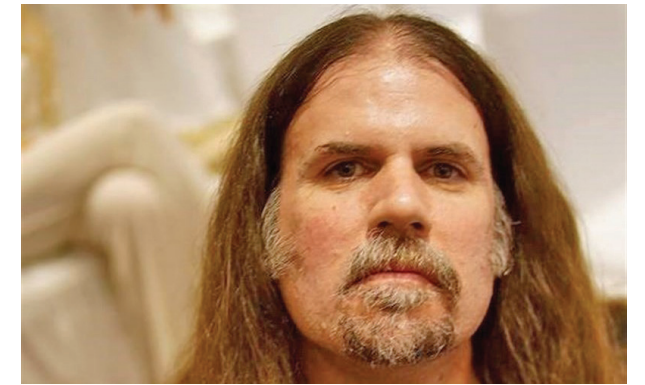
The truth is as follows: 1) no chemical attack was executed by Syrian President Assad, but most likely was performed by DAESH/ISIS Israeli-Saudi mercenaries as a «false flag» against Syria. This is apparent from the earlier intelligence of 40 tons of chlorine being found in Gouta a few weeks ago, which indicated the rebels/terrorists were planning such an attack; 2) the Israeli air strike would have been coordinated with U.S. intelligence; 3) the air strike was a declaration of War upon Syria by Israel, and legally is a war crime and should be prosecuted as such; 4) the goading of President Trump to bomb Syria by the Israelis is an attempt to manipulate Americans using «Christian Zionism impulses» into committing to fight another Iraq war using American lives, in an illegal war Congress has not declared, and could also be used to create a political trap to impeach Trump; 5) Democrats are pushing Trump to continue «regime change» in Syria, along with Lindsay «man-boy love» Graham, in order to abandon the «border wall» focus—which frees up democrats to continue their invasion and attempt to redefine the American voter population through illegal laws in CA; 6) War in Syria will result in Russia-Iran countering using military means, which will open the door for America to expand a larger conflict in Ukraine and Iran; 7) Russian countermeasures will trigger more sanctions and attempt to unify NATO into a larger posture of hostility against Russia.

What the major miscalculation will be is that when the needle goes from «yellow to red», and DefCon 2 goes to 1, at that moment Russia will follow its instincts developed from hundreds of years of enduring Napoleon, the Kaiser, Hitler, and the West, and «pull the visor down» and lunge forward with a ferocity Americans have never experienced, using weaponry American defenses cannot defeat. This, of course, will result in devastating military losses (Navy ships, aircraft), and mobilize China and Iran to liberate Syria and contain Israel, and hopefully capture Netanyahu and prosecute him for starting a war....ending him like Hitler, ironically enough. If Trump is not careful, the very same may apply to him. Time will tell.

There is additional evidence showing that 1) the chemical action was staged by British Special Ops; 2) the action was funded by Open Society; 3) the gas was supplied by Merck and delivered by an MI6 op. This was kept from Trump.»

(Source: Tasnim)

Syria strikes show Trump is under neocons’ thumb: U.S. analyst



1 → Bolton’s recent appointment indicates that the neoconservatives now have the upper hand on Trump’s foreign policy team. Since the attack on Syria on Saturday, Daesh has launched an offensive in southern Damascus. The actions against Syria by the US, Britain and France are already having the effect of emboldening Salafist forces in Syria. The Assad government, in collaboration with Russia, had achieved very significant victories in the war with the Salafist insurgents, and reclaimed much of the insurgent-held territory. The attacks on Syria are emboldening the insurgents who feel that the Western powers will provide air cover for them.

■ “It is Congress, not the president, which has the constitutional responsibility for making war. The international community must uphold the prohibition against the use of chemical weapons, but it is unclear how Trump’s illegal and unauthorized strikes on Syria achieve that goal,” Bernie Sanders Retweeted the New York Times. What is your perspective on this?

A: Bernie Sanders is correct from a technical, legal and constitutional perspective. But the United States has long since abandoned any pretense of waging war along constitutional lines. The United States Congress has not issued a declaration of war since World War Two, and the countless numbers of US military actions that have taken place since the beginning of the postwar era have been under the direction of the presidential branch of government, not the Congress. Not only has it not been established that Syria was actually involved in the use of chemical weapons, but the idea that the attacks on Syria by the Western powers are merely intended as retaliation for the alleged use of chemical weapons is false. The chemical weapons claims are merely a smokescreen that is being used as a pretext for attacking Syria as part of the wider geopolitical agenda of the US-NATO-Israeli-Saudi axis in the Middle East. At present, both Israel and Saudi Arabia are engaged in war crimes and massive human rights violations in Palestine and Yemen, respectively, including the use of phosphorus gases. The attacks on Syria have absolutely nothing to do with controlling the use of chemical weapons, or opposing regimes that engage in atrocities. The objective is to undermine and destabilize the government of Syria so that it will eventually fall and be replaced by a regime that is subservient to the US, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

■ How do you see the role of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman in the attack?

A: Since coming to power, Mohammad bin Salman has worked to strengthen Saudi ties to the West such as instituting surface level domestic reforms in Saudi Arabia, while escalating the Saudi war effort in Yemen and in Saudi Arabia’s own Eastern Province. The Salafist rebels that are engaged in terrorism throughout the region receive tremendous support from Saudi Arabia as a means of attempting to destabilize or attack Saudi rivals such as Iran and Syria. If the Western powers continue their actions against Syria, Saudi Arabia will continue to encourage the Salafist insurgent forces to escalate their insurgent efforts under the cover of Western air power. Saudi Arabia and Israel would be the primary beneficiaries of the collapse of the Assad government, and will certainly encourage any actions against Syria, whether by the West or by the Salafists.

■ Certainly, the attack was a flagrant violation of international law. How much respect do you think Trump and his allies have for the international law?

A: The Trump administration is controlled by the neoconservatives who have zero respect for international law. The neoconservative position is and always has been that international law is a hindrance to the advancement of US foreign policy objectives and should simply be ignored. The two dominant factions in the US foreign policy establishment are the liberal internationalists and the neoconservatives. The liberal internationalists, which are embedded in the Democratic Party, favor the use of international institutions such as the United Nations as a means of providing an aura of legitimacy for US imperialism, and the use of international law as a means of establishing a smokescreen through which the US can maintain unipolar hegemony by means of its control over international institutions. However, the neoconservatives, which are embedded in the Republican Party and the Trump administration, do not bother with such pretenses.

■ In a tweet after the attack, President Trump said, “A perfectly executed strike last night. Thank you to France and the United Kingdom for their wisdom and the power of their fine Military. Could not have had a better result. Mission Accomplished!” What was the mission?

A: Apparently, the “mission” that was being pursued in Syria was simply to create a symbolic display of “retaliation” that ultimately has no military purpose. The strikes against Syria do not yet appear to have reached any significant target. Instead, the airstrikes were largely done for cosmetic reasons in order to enhance a rhetorical point. Because many of the incoming rockets were intercepted by the Syrian air force, there may (be) some embarrassment on the part of the US administration as well. It appears that the function of the strikes has largely been to enhance the rhetorical position of the administration.

The attacks on Syria are emboldening the insurgents who feel that the Western powers will provide air cover for them.

A weakened Khalifa Haftar means more instability for Libya

By Guma El-Gamaty

After a week of speculations, claims and counter-claims, it looks like General Khalifa Haftar may have survived a serious illness and is currently recovering in a French military hospital. Initial rumors that he was dead went viral on social media and spread alarm and confusion among his supporters.

On Friday evening, a tweet by the UN Special Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) confirming that the UN special envoy to Libya Ghassan Salame had talked to him by phone dispelled these speculations.

Meanwhile, what became clear is that 75-year-old Haftar has health problems which could make him politically weaker and may even incapacitate him as time goes on. Judging by the panicked reac-

tions among his supporters, it is also clear that a weakened Haftar, possibly dependent on constant medical care, would bring instability within the ranks of the Libyan National Army (LNA) present mainly in the east of Libya.

The LNA is composed of a disparate mix-regular troops, tribal armed groups, and Salafists, which only Haftar could keep together with a degree of cohesion.

Playing the role of both a military and a political leader, the general rallied support for his "anti-terror" Operation Dignity from the main tribes of Cyrenaica in eastern Libya, as well as Salafi groups backed heavily by Saudi Arabia. He also enjoyed unlimited regional support from the UAE and Egypt, as well as

international support from France and to a lesser extent Russia.

■ Military leader

The dilemma all these stakeholders are facing is how to keep the Haftar's camp intact when the founding figure that has been holding all the strings together has been weakened. No military leader with the same level of authority and respect as Haftar has emerged to serve as an obvious replacement. This means that there will be a fierce competition for power among different LNA factions and support groups, which would have a destabilizing effect not only in the east, but the whole of Libya.

Haftar, who belongs to the Furjan tribe of western Libya, has promoted his own sons and many of his

cousins to leading command positions in the LNA.

On the other hand, he also purged leading figures, especially from the Awaqir tribe, based mainly in Benghazi and surrounding areas. Awaqir leaders offered him crucial support in setting up the LNA and the Operation Dignity four years ago.

Faraj Egayem, a key commander belonging to the Awaqir tribe, was among those who Haftar turned against. Egayem was working closely with the general, but fell out with him eventually and joined the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli as a deputy interior minister.

In November, Haftar rounded up Egayem and many of his followers and put them under arrest. This has precipitated much agitation and anger within the Awaqir tribe, who demand the release

of their people and may seek to take advantage of the uncertainty within the LNA and settle scores with Haftar's sons and cousins.

Haftar has never appointed a deputy that can take over command of the LNA after him. If and when the time comes for a replacement to be chosen, UAE and Egypt, along with the tribes which support Haftar (mainly the Magharba, Baraasa, Hasa and Obaidat) will have a final say on who gets picked.

Haftar's sons, Khaled and Saddam, each of whom heads his own powerful and well-equipped brigade in the LNA, as well as his closest aide and cousin Oun Furjani, will try to hold on to the powers and privileges they accumulated over the last four years. →13

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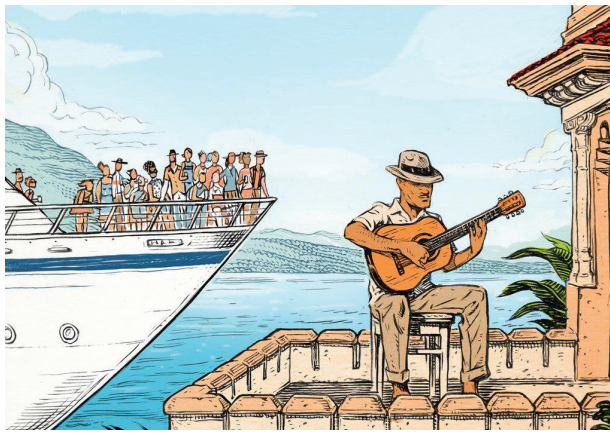
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Five ways to get some culture on your next cruise



By Shivani Vora

Culture lovers don't always think of cruising when planning a vacation, according to Doug Prothero, the managing director of The Ritz-Carlton Yacht Collection. "Cruises are stereotyped as getaways with lots of eating and drinking and little culture in sight," he said.

While that may be true for some cruises, Mr. Prothero said it's not the case all-around, and shared some tips to enjoy an enlightening cultural experience by boat.

■ Pick itineraries with longer stays at ports

Most cruise ships stop at a port in the morning and depart by late afternoon, but several cruise lines have itineraries where boats spend multiple days at a port, offering cruise-goers the opportunity to spend more time in port and to plan day-trips and other longer activities. They give travelers extra time to explore the destination and seek out its culture, whether it's the local museums, bars and restaurants or other public spaces.

■ Cruise on a smaller ship

Smaller boats and river cruises can often access ports that bigger cruise ships cannot, which allows them to visit more unusual and off-the-beaten path landmarks, Mr. Prothero said.

These intimately sized ships also give guests the opportunity to create bespoke, culture-focused itineraries, and many don't skimp on sleeping quarters or other onboard luxuries just because they're smaller. "Generally, the bigger the boat, the less flexibility you have in making your trip all about culture because big ships have to manage the needs of many more passengers," Mr. Prothero said.

■ Look to local educational and cultural institutions

Academic and cultural centers often host their own cruises that offer itineraries brimming with cultural activities. Many include onboard lectures and seminars from professors and historians about the destinations you'll visit, and walking tours at ports when you arrive.

■ On large ships, dive deeper

You can have a cultural trip on a large vessel, Mr. Prothero said, but it might take some legwork on your part to do so. "Many big boats have a variety onboard cultural events that they don't necessarily promote the way that they do other entertainment options," he said. These events can include lectures and small group dinners dedicated to cultural topics that pertain to your trip. Work with the onboard concierge team to learn more these choices. You can also find out about them ahead of your trip by calling your cruise company's planning center.

■ Skip the group tours

Unless your cruise line has shore excursions focused on culture, you might want to consider striking out on your own and prioritize the sights you most want to see.

Mr. Prothero encourages travelers to visit small museums and art galleries, dine at restaurants in non-touristy neighborhoods and even catch a daytime show at a local theater.

If your time is especially limited, consider hiring a local guide who can show you that destination's top cultural sites.

(Source: The New York Times)

Archaeological site of Volubilis



Volubilis contains essentially Roman vestiges of a fortified municipium built on a commanding site at the foot of the Jebel Zerhoun in Morocco.

Covering an area of 42 hectares, it is of outstanding importance demonstrating urban development and Romanisation at the frontiers of the Roman Empire and the graphic illustration of the interface between the Roman and indigenous cultures.

Because of its isolation and the fact that it had not been occupied for nearly a thousand years, it presents an important level of authenticity. It is one of the richest sites of this period in North Africa, not only for its ruins but also for the great wealth of its epigraphic evidence.

The archaeological vestiges of this site bear witness to several civilizations. All the phases of its ten centuries of occupation, from prehistory to the Islamic period are represented. The site has produced a substantial amount of artistic material, including mosaics, marble and bronze statuary, and hundreds of inscriptions.

This documentation and that which remains to be discovered, is representative of a creative spirit of the human beings who lived there over the ages. The limit of the site is represented by the Roman rampart constructed in 168-169 CE.

The features of the site reveal two topographic forms: a relatively flat sloping area in the North-Eastern part, the monumental sector and a part of the sector of the triumphal arch, where the Romans employed an urban hypodamian system, and a rougher hilly area covering the South and Western parts where a terraced plan was adopted.

(Source: UNESCO)

World's cheapest countries to travel: The 8 countries that are shockingly cheap to travel

Pretty much every traveler has experienced the mysterious disappearing bank balance. You do all of your budgeting sums, you save up the amount of money needed for your holiday, you head overseas, and then it just vanishes. Gone.

Like it never existed in the first place. What did you even actually do?

Travel is like that. You spend a lot more money than you think you will. You get caught up in the rush, in the excitement, in the "yolo" fever and you throw down far more cash than you'd budgeted for. You discover, too, that destinations are a lot more expensive than you thought they'd be. Food costs more. Accommodation costs more. The little expenses add up.

This is almost an unavoidable reality of travel. That is, until you happen to wind up in one of those rare countries where the opposite is true.

These are the places where your bank balance remains oddly in check. Everything here costs about as much as you thought it would. Sometimes, it costs less. These are the countries that are cheaper than you think. They make a welcome change.

■ Argentina

Sadly for travelers, the "Blue Dollar" no longer exists in Argentina. This unofficial exchange rate allowed anyone changing US dollars at dodgy cuevas to get a far better rate than people using regular banks, leading to Argentina's reputation as one very affordable destination. So with the end of the Blue Dollar, the country would become expensive, right? Well, not really. You can still get a dorm bed at a hostel in Buenos Aires for \$15; still book a fancy boutique hotel for about \$120 a night. A kick-arse steak will cost about \$15. This is still an eminently affordable destination.

■ Spain

It's reasonable, given most of Europe uses the same currency, to assume that every country involves the same costs. However, that's not even close to being the case. While countries such as the Netherlands and Germany are pretty pricey for travelers, those nations a little further south can actually be super cheap. Spain is a case in point. You can eat well in Spain for \$10-\$15. You can get a beer from the supermarket for \$1; a glass of wine from a bar for \$5. Top attractions like Barcelona's La Sagrada Familia cost just over \$20 to enter. Easy.

■ USA

Though the Australian dollar isn't quite at the parity level it achieved with the US a few years ago, it's still sitting around 78 cents, which makes the USA – particularly



People visit Imam Square, a UNESCO World Heritage in Isfahan, central Iran

outside of the large cities – a very affordable place to travel. Getting there in the first place is cheap. We're talking little more than \$1000 for return flights. And costs on the ground – food in basic restaurants, accommodation in motor inns and budget hotels, shops, attractions and experiences – are so low in many places as to be shocking.

■ Iran

Middle Eastern countries aren't always cheap – you'll throw down a surprising amount in places such as the UAE, Jordan and Oman. In Iran, meanwhile, a place that has been sadly crippled by economic sanctions that it still hasn't properly recovered from, travel is cheap. Very, very cheap. You almost need to take a briefcase to carry your cash when you go to exchange Euros for rials. Right now you get 52,000 rials to the Euro. Just a year ago it was about 35,000. That makes everything – great food at restaurants, accommodation in beautiful old hotels, plus all of the attractions – extremely affordable.

■ South Africa

Though the South Africa rand has bounced back recently – one Australian

dollar buys 9.3 rand right now; two years ago it was over 11 – South Africa is still a place that will surprise you with its affordability. You can camp in Kruger National Park for AUD15 per person per night. You can have the six-course tasting menu at the Shortmarket Club, one of Cape Town's best restaurants, for AUD85 a head. Drinks are cheap, hotels are cheap, and experiences are cheap. Even the flights over there are far more affordable than many people expect.

■ Italy

As with Spain, Italy is one of those European countries that offers surprising value for travellers who are expecting to be stung with large price tags. Sure, you stand the chance of being ripped off with an \$800 lobster if you're not careful in touristy spots such as Venice. However, the country as a whole is very cheap. A plate of pasta at a kick-arse Roman trattoria will cost about \$15. Add \$5 for a glass of wine. Coffee is \$1.50. Airbnb apartments across the country are shockingly cheap. You can live well on very little in Italy.

■ India

You probably don't even think India is

expensive. Even still, it will come as a serious shock to discover just how insanely cheap this country can be, particularly in the south of India, where you'll easily be able to get by on \$15-\$20 a day once accommodation has been paid for.

A good meal there costs a few bucks. A coffee is less than \$1. And even decent hotels won't set you back much more than about \$30 or \$40 a night in places such as Kochi.

■ Japan

Japan can be expensive, if you want it to be. If you want to stay in four- or five-star hotels and eat out at the best restaurants and take taxis everywhere, then the costs will blow out to a staggering degree. However, the country doesn't have to be like that. If you stay in hostels or family-run minshuku (traditional inns), or even Airbnbs; if you eat your meals from modest ramen bars or conveyor-belt sushi joints or even convenience stores; if you buy a Japan Rail pass and limit yourself to one or two attractions a day – if you do all those things, you'll find Japan very affordable.

(Source: traveller.com)

Sustainable travel: It's not just about the environment

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 (WTO), 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 WTO, yet a 2013 report from the organization noted that just US\$5 (\$6.50) of every US\$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 Ms Kelley Louise, 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 the time sightseeing and the other half visiting community-based improvement projects. Earlier this year, the safari company andBeyond 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 also opportunities 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 Ms Paula Vlamings, 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 Mr Orit Strauss, founder and chief executive of Giving Way, which 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 Ms 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."

■ Small acts

Doing good doesn't require traveling through multiple time zones or long stays. New initiatives like Kind Traveler, which launched in 2016, aim to make each trip, however short, an opportunity to improve local lives.

The hotel booking website offers discounted rooms to users who make a US\$10 donation to a charity affiliated with the hotel. Hotels are vetted for their sustainable practices, including environmental and community impacts.

The company offers hotels in 30 destinations in the United States, Mexico, Canada, Costa Rica and the Caribbean and plans to add hotels in Aspen, Colorado, Washington DC, and Richmond, Virginia, this spring.

Day trips that take place in communities often give back to them. Ninth Ward Rebirth Bike Tours in New Orleans, for example, donates US\$5 of its US\$65 fee to local charities. Oyster hauling or crabbing with Virginia Watermen Heritage Tours provides a secondary source of income to fishermen

in a string of coastal communities.

The tour booking site Visit.org allows users to search for experiences by interests, including women's empowerment and human rights.

When it launched its Experiences tours in 2016, Airbnb added social impact programs; 100 per cent of the fees go to nonprofits and entrepreneurs highlighted in each tour. They may include an outing in Venice with the founder of a community garden, an LGBTQ history tour of New York with an activist or an experience making notebooks in Prague with the founder of a nonprofit that works with artisans challenged by mental and physical disabilities.

■ Big trips

For those who have the time, tour operators offer myriad ways to contribute to social causes.

It's not uncommon for safari companies in Africa to add community tours to their itineraries, often to show off how they're spreading the wealth locally via education and health care. This year, andBeyond introduced Travel With Purpose trips, which spend more time visiting conservation and community projects based on the interests of millennial travelers interested in philanthropy.

"Only when you actually get your hands proverbially dirty by rolling up your sleeves and engaging in these projects and initiatives can you really learn and understand the issues and how we can make an impact, however small," wrote Ms Joss Kent, chief executive of andBeyond, in an email.

(Source: todayonline.com)

Study links depression to nearly 80 genes that could shed light on the condition

A new study suggested that depression could partly be a genetic disorder after analyzing more than 300,000 DNA datasets from 23andMe. Scientists said this widens the understanding on how to treat individuals with this condition. Depression is currently the leading cause of disability worldwide according to the World Health Organization, and recently researchers have found 78 genes that could further explain this condition.

Scientists at the University of Edinburgh analyzed patient data from UK Biobank, an international resource dedicated to the study cancer, diabetes, stroke, cardiovascular diseases, and other life-threatening conditions.

DNA records of 322,580 individuals were scanned to identify if certain genes can be linked to three major depression phenotypes: broad depression, major depressive disorder, and ICD-9 and ICD-10-related MDD. Broad depression is characterized as having "nerves, anxiety, tension, and depression."

They thought that the genes responsible for triggering depressive symptoms are related to synapses, the cell connectors, which transmit electrical and chemical signals.

Parallel study of genetics

To test their hypothesis, the scientists conducted a parallel study of genetics data from 23andMe, a genomics and biotechnology company based in Mountain View, California.

"Depression is a common and often severe condition that affects millions of people worldwide. These new findings help us better understand the causes of depression and show how the UK Biobank study and big



DNA records of 322,580 individuals were scanned to identify if certain genes can be linked to three major depression phenotypes: broad depression, major depressive disorder, and ICD-9 and ICD-10-related MDD. Broad depression is characterized as having "nerves, anxiety, tension, and depression."

data research has helped advance mental health research," said Dr. Andrew McIntosh,

a professor at the University of Edinburgh Center for Clinical Brain Sciences.

Of the identified genes in the study, 78 were associated with broad depression, two genes with probable MDD, and one gene with ICD-coded MDD. The researchers wrote that broad depression may include types of personality or psychiatric disorders, while MDD and ICD-coded MDD "offer more robust definitions for depression."

Lead author Dr. David Howard said their findings present a whole new perspective in understanding depression, adding that the research suggests the disease is "partly genetic."

The role of genes

In 2017, 23andMe recruited 15,000 individuals with depression and 10,000 people with bipolar disorder for genetic data pooling. The research is meant to understand the role of genes in specific neurological processes like decision-making, visual perception, and attention.

"By studying intermediate phenotypes such as cognitive function alongside genetics and other environmental variables on a massive scale, we hope to take a significant step forward in the study of depression and bipolar," said Dr. Emily Drabant Conley, VP of Business Development at 23andMe.

Similarly, a 2016 study published in Nature Genetics, in conjunction with Massachusetts General Hospital and Pfizer, pinpointed 15 genetic locations that are associated with major depression.

The study data came from 23andMe consenting clients of European descent, who were grouped based on self-reported history of depression.

(Source: Tech Times)

Diamonds from a lost planet found on Earth, says new study

On October 7, 2008, an 80-ton asteroid (2008 TC₃) entered the Earth's atmosphere and exploded into hundreds of smaller meteorites about 23 miles above the Nubian Desert in Sudan.

These meteorites — referred to as Almahata Sitta — belong to a rare type, known as ureilites — rocky meteorites with a unique mineralogical composition that contain diamonds.

According to a new study published in the journal Nature Communications, these diamonds originate from one of the early Solar System's lost planets, providing evidence for a hypothesis which describes how large proto-planets formed the basis of the terrestrial planets in the Solar System today.

Planetary formation models suggest that in the early Solar System, the terrestrial planets — Mercury, Venus, Earth and Mars — were formed after the gradual merger of tens of proto-planets in a series of high-energy impacts. These proto-planets varied in size from those as small as our moon today to those as big as Mars.

While no remnants of these proto-planets have ever been found, scientists have long thought that ureilites could be relics of them. However, until the latest study, no evidence from previously examined ureilites could show that they did, in fact, originate from a proto-planet.

A team of scientists led by Farhang Nabiei from the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne in Switzerland examined tiny crystals embedded within diamonds in the Almahata Sitta meteorites using a technique known as transmission electron microscopy — which creates an image of a specimen by beaming electrons at it.

The microscopy results showed that these diamonds must have been formed at pressures above 20 gigapascals.

(Source: Newsweek)

Researchers propose mission to intercept the next interstellar asteroid

The Solar System recently received its first interstellar visitor, 'Oumuamua, and researchers have now suggested a plan for a mission to meet the next guest from another star. This concept, formulated with SpaceX's Falcon Heavy rocket in mind, aims to send a spacecraft to rendezvous with an interstellar object and shoot it, so the probe can analyze the debris that gets kicked up.

The first known visitor from interstellar space, a cigar-shaped asteroid named 'Oumuamua, or A/2017 U₁, was detected on Oct. 19 using the Panoramic Survey Telescope and Rapid Response System (Pan-STARRS) at Haleakala Observatory on the Hawaiian island of Maui. Scientists deduced the origins of the chaotically tumbling 1,300-foot-long (400 meters) object from its trajectory, which suggests it may have come from another star, or perhaps two.

Astronomers have determined that 'Oumuamua, whose name means "a messenger from afar arriving first" in Hawaiian, whipped around the sun on Sept. 9 and made its closest pass by Earth on Oct. 14.

visitors like 'Oumuamua might zip through the solar system in the future, and first sought to see how capable we are of detecting such objects. They next calculated whether a mission from Earth could reach one and probe it before it flew back into interstellar space.

Previous work suggested that as stars form, they may hurl many objects like 'Oumuamua away from them into interstellar space — those objects would add up to about one-hundredth to one-thousandth the mass of Earth per star. The researchers suggested there may be about 10 quadrillion more 'Oumuamua-like interstellar objects than there are relatively young, metal-rich stars like the sun.

(Source: space.com)

Children with malaria smell more attractive to mosquitoes: study

Infection with the malaria-causing Plasmodium parasite makes children smell more enticing to Anopheles gambiae mosquitoes, which carry the disease. An increase in emissions of chemicals known as aldehydes accounted for much of the change in attractiveness, researchers reported on April 16 in PNAS.

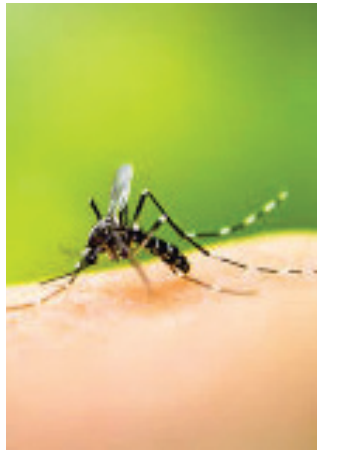
While it was already known that people with malaria are more attractive to mosquitoes than their healthy counterparts, the reason why has not been clear. The new study, therefore, "is very cool, and it's been needed for some time," parasitologist Audrey Odom John of Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis who was not involved in the study tells News from Science.

In the study, researchers tested the attractiveness of the odors of children with and without malaria by exposing A. gambiae mosquitoes to the children's socks. Given a choice between a sock worn by a child when he or she was infected and one worn by the same child weeks later, after the infection had cleared, the insects went to the malaria-associated sock 60 percent of the time.

To see which compounds might be responsible for the attraction, the scientists then placed plastic bags around the calves of children with and without malaria parasites to collect the surrounding air and used gas chromatography to analyze which chemicals the air contained. The team also attached dissected mosquito antennae to electrodes to measure their response to exposure to individual components of the odors.

The "malaria parasite is sort of manipulating the system both in the mosquito host and the human host," study coauthor James Logan, a medical entomologist at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, tells News from Science. "It's very clever."

(Source: the-scientist.com)



Studying oxygen, scientists discover clues to recovery from mass extinction

About 252 million years ago, more than 90 percent of all animal life on Earth went extinct. This event, called the «Permian-Triassic mass extinction,» represents the greatest catastrophe in the history of life on Earth. Ecosystems took nearly five million years to recover and many aspects of the event remain a mystery.

A research team, led by scientists from Arizona State University and funded by NASA and the National Science Foundation, is helping to understand why this extinction event happened and why it took life so long to recover. The study, published in Science Advances, was led by ASU School of Earth and Space Exploration graduate student Feifei Zhang, with direction from school faculty member Ariel Anbar.

For this study, the research team focused on marine ecosystems, which were decimated during the Permian-Triassic mass extinction. Previous studies demonstrated that the loss of dissolved oxygen in Earth's oceans, an effect called «marine anoxia,» played an important role in the mass extinction event. The team wanted to find out when the anoxia occurred, how widespread it was, and how long it persisted

after the extinction event.

Separate episodes of extinction

In particular, the team wanted to see if separate episodes of extinction that happened during the long period of recovery were driven by episodes of ocean anoxia and other environmental changes.

Typically, scientists determine ocean anoxia levels by looking at the abundance of pyrite, commonly known as «fool's gold,» and other elements and minerals in ancient mud rocks. But mud rocks only provide clues to what may have happened at a single location. Scientists need to sample dozens of sites around the world to infer the big picture from mud rocks.

To overcome this, the team pioneered a new and more efficient approach. By studying the variations of uranium isotopes recorded in carbonates, the team was able to infer global anoxia occurring throughout the ocean using samples from a single outcrop. These sediments, collected in modern day Iran, were deposited 252-246 million years ago in a relatively shallow tropical ocean near the equator.

Changes in ocean circulation

The resulting variations of uranium isotopes gave the team the answers they were looking for. They were able to show that episodes of extinction coincided with pulses of ocean anoxia, driven by changes in ocean circulation and nutrient levels.

«This finding,» says Zhang, «provides important insights into patterns of oceanic environmental change and their underlying causes, which were ultimately linked to intense climate warming during the Early Triassic.»

This team's discovery also calls attention to the possible effects of modern climate change, because global warming was the ultimate driver of marine anoxia in the Early Triassic period.

«One of the most interesting and worrying things about the Permian-Triassic extinction is how similar those events are to what is happening today,» says co-author Stephen Romaniello. «Similar to what happened during the Permian period, the Earth's modern oceans are facing rapid climate warming and enhanced nutrient fluxes.»

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Peugeot 301 on Its Way to Iran's Market

Having got the approval of the most prestigious test centers in Europe in terms vehicle's body and parts, Peugeot 301 is set to be mass produced in the current Iranian calendar year, said the CEO of IKAP Company – the JV between IKCO and Peugeot.

Mohammad Reza Motamed also said over 50 percent of the production process of Peugeot 301 would be carried out in Iran and added localization of the car production is among the main conditions set by Iranian government for the car manufacturers which are willing to enter Iran's market.

"Accordingly by the end of this Iranian

calendar year, 40 percent of IKAP production is set to be carried out by Iranian side," he noted.

He underlined that at least 150 sets of auto components used in IKAP vehicles are made inside Iran and added Iran began the process of localization of its joint vehicles in 2008 with 21 percent but the figure is expected to reach 40 percent by the end of current Iranian calendar year.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he noted that the production of Peugeot 301 has been localized by 95 and 85 percent in body and engine respectively.

"In overall, Peugeot 301 with 50 percent localization of its parts and components will be soon produced in Iran," Motamed added.

He noted that IKAP has played a leading role in the thriving of Iranian auto parts manufacturers and noted, "We put our trust in the capabilities of the local parts manufacturers; to this end we have done our best to prepare an appropriate ground for their growth."

The CEO of IKAP said the production of two new and modern European vehicles in Iran reveal the high capabilities of Iranian auto parts manufactures in localizing the

auto industry.

He said Peugeot management has praised Iranian car manufactures for their high quality products and said some of Iranian parts manufacturers working with IKAP have already been invited to Algeria to work with Peugeot's site there.

"The invitation has come mainly due to their high quality products and competitive prices," he opined.

He concluded that the Iranian car manufactures are set to either export their products to Algeria or launch a production line in the African country.

Iran opens 1st L/C to implement natl. currency swap agreement with Turkey

Bank Melli Iran has opened the first LC for providing trade finance using Iran and Turkey's national currencies swap agreement in Turkey.

The step has been realized as a move to support using national currencies in foreign trade between the two countries.

Upon the agreement, there is no need for third-party currency, often the USD and Euro, to settle foreign exchange transactions, and the purchases, transfers and financial transactions will be transferred to the banking system through currency operations, minimizing possible risks for the businessmen of the two countries.

Also, according to the arrangements made by this pact, credits will be provided for Iranian traders to Turkish lira and through the sources provided by the swap contract.

Given the high volume of trade with Turkey at about

six billion dollars, the use of national currencies under the currency swap agreement will significantly help facilitate banking and trade issues between the two countries.

A year earlier, following the visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Iran and several rounds of negotiations between Iranian and Turkish officials, and as part of a CBI mission to Ankara headed by Valiollah Seif, the central banks of Iran and Turkey signed a rial-lira currency swap agreement with the goal of preparing the ground for expanding economic and trade ties.

According to the agreement, the central banks of Turkey and Iran have allocated a credit of 5 billion lira (\$1.4 billion) and its equivalent in rial to their respective agent banks to be used as letters of credit (LC) with a repayment period of one year for both countries' traders.



Official predicts rosy and bright future for housing sector in current year

Member of Parliament Plan and Budget Commission Mohsen Biglari pointed to the necessity of capital increase of banks and said, "it is predicted that housing sector will experience a bright and rosy future in the current Iranian calendar year in 1397 (started March 21, 2018)."

Iranian Parliament will support banks' capital increase, he said, adding, "with the coordination made in this regard, housing sector of the country will be more dynamic in the current year (started March 21, 2018)."

As one of the important and influential sectors in Iranian economy, housing sector should be backed duly, he said, adding, "many economic activists are of the opinion that several economic variables such as manpower index is affected by the stagnation or boom at the housing market of the country."

He emphasized, "the fact is that unemployment situation



has created many problems in the country, so that boom in development projects can be considered as one of effective

strategies in generation of employment."

Elsewhere in his remarks, he urged the governmental officials to pay serious attention to the housing and building sector in the country, adding, "it is regrettable that housing sector in the country has experienced a severe backlash especially in the recent years due to the illogical and incorrect policies taken in this respect."

Representative of people in 10th Majlis pointed to the positive policy of the government on reducing interest rate of deposits over the past years and added, "after considerable reduction of interest rate of banks, many capitals of people were steered towards housing and real estate transactions."

In conclusion, Member of Parliament Plan and Budget Commission Mohsen Biglari urged responsible officials of the country to take effective steps in line with booming housing sector in the country.

No cancer tsunami in Iran: deputy health minister

SOCIETY TEHRAN — As per the figures and data collected in Iran on cancers, certainly cancer tsunami is not happening in Iran, Deputy Health Minister Reza Malekzadeh, a gastroenterologist, has said.

The “population-based cancer registry of the Islamic Republic of Iran” which is the first reliable and official data collected on cancer incidence in Iran was included in World Health Organization’s “Cancer Incidence in Five Continents (CI5)”, Tasnim news agency quoted Malekzadeh as saying on Wednesday.

CI5 is published approximately every five years by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the International Association of Cancer Registries (IACR) and provides comparable high quality statistics on the incidence of cancer from cancer registries around the world. Volume XI contains information from 343 cancer registries in 65 countries for cancers diagnosed from 2008 to 2012.



Cancer registries are valuable research tools in the etiology, diagnosis, and treatment of the disease, Malekzadeh said, adding collecting data on cancer incidence also plays a significant role in planning screening schemes as well as preventing the disease.

Unfortunately while cancers are more prevalent in developing countries such population-based cancer registries are more common in developed countries and only a few developing countries are included in such comprehensive data collection, he regretted.

Malekzadeh further said most population-based cancer registries in developing countries are incomprehensive.

Malekzadeh who was a recipient of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) Medal of Honor in 2018 for his outstanding contribution to advancing the understanding of the biology or of the epidemiology of cancer explained that “population-based cancer registry of the Islamic Republic of Iran” shows a cancer incidence rate of 158 per 100,000 of the population and 143 per 100,000 of the population (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) in 30 provinces of Iran annually.

In the Iranian calendar year 1393 (March 21, 2014 to March 20, 2015) some 112,000 individuals were diagnosed with cancer, he added.

The database indicates that the rate for all cancers (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) for men and women combined was 182 per 100,000 in 2012 which means that the rate of cancer in Iran is well below the world average, he highlighted.

The rate for all cancers (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) in Turkey is 205 per 100,000 and 174 in China, he stated, adding, “So all the rumors about cancer tsunami in Iran are not true and we can certainly say that cancer incidence rate is comparatively low.”

As per the data collected by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), an independent population health research center at UW Medicine, part of the University of Washington, some 54,000 Iranians died of cancer in 2016 constituting 14.9 percent of all deaths (360,000), Malekzadeh noted.

The IHME data also indicates that age-standardized rate of death caused by cancer per 100,000 people per year in Iran was 104 in 1990 which has decreased to 97 in 2015, Malekzadeh said, noting plans for early diagnosis of cancers has helped in preventing the disease.

‘Without restoration plan, Lake Urmia would have been fully drained by now’

ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — If there had not been any plan to restore Lake Urmia, it would have been completely drained by now, Department of Environment chief Isa Kalantari said on Wednesday.

Situated in northwestern Iran, Lake Urmia was once called the “turquoise solitaire of Azarbaijan”, but now it has turned into a great challenge for Iran’s environment.

The lake drainage is associated to factors such as climate change, water management policies and inefficient agricultural practices among others.

The extent of drainage is so vast in some parts of the lake that some people may prefer to use “Urmia salt pan” instead of “Lake Urmia.”

Various reasons such as low precipitation has led the volume of water to shrink to just 2 billion cubic meters in Iranian calendar year 1392 (March 2013 – March 2014) compared to 22 billion cubic meters in the year 1387, Kalantari said in a meeting with the members of the Parliament environment and sustainable development group.

Lake Urmia’s water level has decreased 40 centimeters per year since 18 years ago, Mehr quoted Kalantari as saying.

President Hassan Rouhani has insisted on stabilizing its condition since its full restoration is impossible.



A view of Shrafkhaneh port, northeast coast of Lake Urmia.

Kalantari went on to say that the short term plan was to deter any salt storm in the region as the water level has greatly decreased. Criticizing the slow pace of receiving the

lake’s restoration budget, the environment chief said that only some 35 percent of the total budget (nearly \$450 million) allocated to lake restoration programs has been

received by now.

He went on to say that the permission for raising foreign finance has been granted by the administration, however he cast doubt on the success of the plan.

The restoration will not be successful without reforming water consumption patterns in the area, he emphasized.

MP Ali Mohammad Moradi said laws have been passed to stop illegal wells, but currently some 67,000 illegal wells are active in West Azerbaijan Province, criticizing lack of legal surveillance over these acts.

Parliamentarian Nader Qazipour, for his part, said that it is expected from the Department of Environment to deter the inflow of untreated wastewater to the lake.

Mohammad-Reza Tabesh, chairman of the parliament environment and sustainable development group, said climate change and low precipitation have caused the same problem for many wetlands in Iran.

One of the viable plans to restore the lake is to transfer water from Little Zab river in western Iran to the lake via tunnels, Tabesh said, adding that some 650 million cubic meters of water can be added to the lake accordingly.

However, he said, a full restoration of Lake Urmia is very challenging and even impossible.

5 million Iranians on verge of getting diabetes



SOCIETY TEHRAN — Some 5 million individuals in Iran are on the brink of catching diabetes, Deputy Health Minister Mohammad-Hadi Ayyazi warned on Wednesday.

Ayyazi said these individuals can prevent the disease by changing their lifestyles, ISNA reported on Wednesday.

Currently, some five million Iranians suffer from diabetes, he regretted.

Diabetes mellitus, or simply diabetes, refers to a group of diseases which influence the use of blood sugar (glucose) in the body. Glucose

is a source of energy and is vital for health. Suffering from diabetes means having too much glucose in blood which can lead to serious health problems. Chronic diabetes conditions include type 1 diabetes and type 2 diabetes.

According to the World Health Organization the number of people with diabetes has risen from 108 million in 1980 to 422 million in 2014. The global prevalence of diabetes among adults over 18 years of age has risen from 4.7% in 1980 to 8.5% in 2014. Diabetes prevalence has been rising more rapidly in middle- and low-income countries.

‘No to plastic bags’



ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Iran’s Department of Environment announced ‘no to plastic bags’ as the national theme of this year’s International Mother Earth Day, April 22, Nasimonline reported on Wednesday.

The day is observed to promote public awareness towards planet earth by encouraging action on preserving its environment and the species that live on it. The global theme for Mother Earth Day 2018 is “End Plastic Pollution.” Iran’s Department of Environment

has decided to introduce the central theme of “no to plastic bags” to gain more tangible results as well as addressing the detriment effects of plastic bags in the country.

The world annually celebrates International Mother Earth Day on April 22. The day was established in 2009 by UN General Assembly in a bid to achieve a balance among the economic, social, and environmental needs of present and future generations, to promote harmony with nature and the Earth.

Most people still do not care about buying plastic bottles, say campaigners

Most British people are still happy to purchase disposable plastic bottles of water, and only a third of the population drink from reusable bottles when out and about.

These findings emerged from a survey in which people were asked about their attitudes to plastic waste and water consumption.

They run contrary to the increased awareness of plastic pollution that appears to have pervaded the nation.

The results were based on a YouGov survey of more than 2000 people conducted for Keep Britain Tidy in the wake of the BBC’s screening of Blue Planet II.

Bringing heartbreaking scenes of the impact of plastic pollution on marine life into the nation’s living rooms, the Sir David Attenborough-fronted show was the most watched television program in 2017.

In its wake has come a raft of highly publicized measures to tackle the “scourge” of plastic pollution – including the recent announcement of a bottle deposit return scheme and the government’s pledge to eliminate avoidable plastic waste by 2042.

However, despite media coverage and local initiatives

across the country to deal with plastic waste, the survey suggests there is still a lag in the nation’s behavior change.

In all, only 44 per cent of those surveyed admitted to feeling bad for the environment if they bought bottled water, and a fifth still purchased bottled water to use at home.

Lack of access to water at transport hubs like airports and bus stations was highlighted as a major problem by participants, as many said they relied on bottled water when starting long journeys.

The survey revealed people generally blame inconvenience or forgetfulness for their over-reliance on disposable plastic bottles, and suggested a major cultural shift will be required to cut down on numbers.

“There has been encouraging progress in the past year to address litter levels from single-use plastic, but this report demonstrates that we are not there yet,” said Keep Britain Tidy chief executive Allison Ogden-Newton.

“Too many people still find it challenging to fill up on the go, while many more are still embarrassed to ask for tap, worried about the safety of water fountains, or just unwilling to go the extra mile and carry around a reusable bottle.

“We’ve simply got to get to a situation where topping up in glass or refillable bottle is the norm.”

The research, which is being launched in parliament today, is part of a wider campaign by water filter company Brita in association with Keep Britain Tidy that aims to help eradicate the use of single-use plastic bottles.

“The damage single-use plastic is doing to our marine and wider environment and marine life has been well documented, and it is clear many people are committed to tackling this,” said Sarah Taylor, managing director of Brita UK.

“At the same time, this research shows that old habits are ingrained and that often the ‘hassle factor’ outweighs concern about the environment.”

The campaign’s goal is to encourage people to make small lifestyle changes that can have a significant impact on the environment.

It also encourages businesses to capitalize on the anti-plastic sentiment and help people cut down on bottle use by offering free, easily available refills in-store.

(Source: Indoentent)

LEARN ENGLISH

Buying A New Mobile Phone

A: Hello sir, may I help you?
B: Yeah, I **accidentally** dropped my phone in the toilet.
A: I see. Well, you have come to the right place. We have over one hundred models of more than twenty **leading** mobile phone manufacturers.
B: Sounds good. I don’t want it to be too expensive, maybe something mid-range.
A: We have this new **smart phone**. It comes with the **Android OS** so you can download **applications**. It also has a built-in camera, mp3 player and touch screen. It works on the 3G **network** so you have fast access to the internet wherever you are.
B: What about Wi-fi?
A: Of course! You can access the internet from any **hotspot** as well as from home.
B: One last thing. Is it waterproof?
A: **Key vocabulary**
accidentally: by accident
leading: fashionable
smart phone: a phone with wireless internet capacity
Android OS: management system
application: software program
network: a tele-communication system
hotspot: place with internet connectivity
Supplementary vocabulary
device: instrument
SIM card: “Subscriber Identity Module;” card used in cell phones to place and receive calls, messages
to surf the web: to use the internet

(Source: irlanguage.com)



ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

Rangers, locals join hands to save hundreds of flamingo chicks

Flamingo chicks which were stranded in the briny shallow waters of Bakhtegan Lake in Fars province have been saved by the help of rangers and the local people.

In a collaborative effort the villagers and the rangers prevented death of 1,000 flamingo chicks which were stuck in the extremely shallow briny leftover water of the lake.

Nabiollah Moradi, the caretaker of the department of environment in Fars province, said rangers soon spotted that flamingo chicks, unable to fly, were dying one after another.

نجات ۱۰۰۰ جوجه فلامینگو با همکاری مردم و مأموران محیط زیست انجام شد

جوجه فلامینگوهایی که در میان شورزارهای دریاچه بختگان در استان فارس گرفتار شده بودند توسط محیط بانان و مردم محلی نجات یافتند. در یک اقدام جمعی با همکاری محیطبانان و مردم محلی ۱۰۰۰ جوجه فلامینگو که در میانه شورزار گرفتار شده بودند از مرگ نجات یافتند. نبی‌الله مرادی سرپرست اداره کل حفاظت محیط زیست استان فارس گفت: مأموران محیط زیست بلافاصله گزارش دادند که جوجه فلامینگوها به دلیل غلظت بالای نمک گرفتار شده و یک یکی در حال جان باختن هستند.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“encephalo-, encephal-, encephali-”

■ **Meaning:** brain
■ **For example:** Electrical brain responses are measured non-invasively through **encephalograph** headband sensors.

PHRASAL VERB

Get in on something

■ **Meaning:** to become involved in something that other people are doing or planning;
■ **For example:** Quite a few companies would like to get in on the project.

IDIOM

No-brainer

■ **Explanation:** a decision or choice that requires little or no thought, because the best option is so obvious
■ **For example:** The choice was between a cash refund and having the amount credited to my account - it was a no-brainer. I took the cash!

Erdogan declares early elections on June 24

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday met with his key ally and leader of Turkey's main nationalist party for critical talks on a proposal to hold snap elections this August.

Devlet Bahçeli, who leads the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), stunned Turkish politics observers on Tuesday when he urged the government not to wait for November 3, 2019 to hold presidential and parliamentary elections.

Bahçeli told MHP lawmakers that the elections, which are due to be held at the same time next year, should in fact be held on August 26, 2018.

The comments surprised commentators since the government led by Erdogan has repeatedly insisted there will be no early elections.

The eagerly-awaited meeting with Erdogan at his presidential palace lasted only half an hour, the presidency said.

Then Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said at 1230 GMT that the elections will in fact be held on June 24, more than a year earlier than planned, saying the country urgently needed to make the switch to an executive presidency.

The elections are significant as a new executive



utive presidency, agreed in a 2017 referendum and denounced by the opposition as giving the head of state authoritarian powers, will come into force.

The government on Tuesday indicated it would consider Bahçeli's request. But Erdogan

refused to make any direct comment on the situation until he met with the MHP leader.

Erdogan has established a formal alliance with the MHP to fight the elections, making it hard for his party to dismiss Bahçeli's call out of hand.

MHP leader since 1997, Bahçeli is seen as a kingmaker in Turkish politics and has played a role in some key moments of its modern history.

He precipitated the 2002 snap polls that brought Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) to power. The AKP has ruled Turkey ever since.

Abdulkadir Selvi, a pro-Erdogan columnist in the Hurriyet newspaper, wrote on Wednesday that there were different scenarios possible from the meeting.

He said the first scenario could be early elections on August 26 as Bahçeli proposed, or Erdogan could insist that elections take place on the dates already established.

Selvi added said a third situation could arise in which a new date was put forward, which is what ended up occurring.

Analysts have said that the state of the Turkish economy could tempt the government to consider the early election call and hold polls before there is any serious deterioration.

While growth in Turkey was 7.4 percent in 2017, double-digit inflation, a wide current account deficit and the need for debt restructuring at top companies could be harbingers of trouble ahead.

(Source: AFP)

OPCW experts enter Douma

Gunfire' delays UN chemical mission in Syria's Douma

1 → A UN security team, however, reported gunfire at the location a day earlier, sources briefed on the team's deployment told Reuters on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Syrian Ambassador to the world body, Bashar al-Jaafari told a meeting of the UN Security Council that the "Syrian government did all that it can do to facilitate the work of this mission."

Syria has denied ever conducting any such attack. The Arab country and Russia have suggested that the raid may have been a false flag aimed at justifying the Western military raids.

■ **Russia says Syria gas attack inquiry senseless as U.S., allies have already acted**

Russia has said that there is no need for establishing a

new inquiry into chemical weapons use in Syria as Washington and its allies have already taken up the role of judge and executioner.

Russian UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia made the remarks on Tuesday while addressing the Security Council which has been deadlocked over establishing a joint United Nations and Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) inquiry which ended in November.

"The idea of creating a mechanism on attributing responsibility for the use of chemical weapons no longer makes any sense when Washington and its allies have already determined who's guilty and in essence are already acting like self-appointed executioners," said Nebenzia.

In the early hours of Saturday, the U.S., Britain and France launched a barrage of missile attacks against Syria in response to what they claim to have been a chemical attack by the Syrian government in Douma.

Syria rejected the accusations as "chemical fabrications" made by the foreign-backed terrorists in the country in a bid to halt advances by pro-government forces.

Initial talks were held on Monday over the adoption of a draft resolution forwarded by France, the United States and Britain.

Last week, rivaling US and Russia drafted UNSC resolutions aimed at creating a new inquiry into chemical weapons attacks in Syria have both failed to garner votes at the council.

CIA chief met Kim Jong Un in North Korea: Trump

U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday confirmed his CIA director had met with North Korea's Kim Jong Un on a secret visit to Pyongyang, ahead of a planned summit meeting between the two leaders.

"Mike Pompeo met with Kim Jong Un in North Korea last week. Meeting went very smoothly and a good relationship was formed. Details of Summit are being worked out now," tweeted Trump.

"Denuclearization will be a great thing for World, but also for North Korea!" he added.

Pompeo became the most senior U.S. official known to have met Kim when he visited Pyongyang to discuss a planned summit with U.S. President Donald Trump.

Pompeo's visit and the Tweet provide the strongest sign yet about Trump's willingness to become the first serving U.S. president ever to meet a North Korean leader, amid a protracted standoff over the North's nuclear and missile programs it pursues in defiance of UN Security Council resolutions.

At the same time, old rivals North Korea and South Korea are preparing for their own summit, between Kim and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, on April 27, with

a bid to formally end the 1950-53 Korean War a major factor in talks.

"As one of the plans, we are looking at a possibility of shifting the Korean peninsula's armistice to a peace regime," a top South Korean presidential official told reporters in Seoul earlier on Wednesday when asked about the North-South summit.

■ **South Korea 'mulling over peace deal' with North**

South Korea is considering changing a decades-long armistice deal with North Korea to a peace agreement, as the leaders of the long-time rivals prepare for a historic summit later this month.

"As one of the plans, we are looking at a possibility of shifting the Korean Peninsula's armistice to a peace regime," a high-ranking South Korean presidential official said on Wednesday. "We want to include discussions to end hostile acts between the South and North."

The two Koreas have been separated by a heavily-militarized border since the end of the Korean War seven decades ago. When the three-year war ended in 1953, the two countries agreed to a truce agreement but not a peace treaty. As a result, while they



haven't been at war, they haven't been at peace either for the last 68 years.

The two neighbors started unexpected overtures to one another in January, when Pyongyang announced its willingness to participate in the Winter Olympics in the South. South Korean President Moon Jae-in is now scheduled to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in the South Korean village of Panmunjon on April 27.

Kim would become the first North Korean leader to cross the border since the

Korean War.

Meanwhile, a possible meeting between Kim and U.S. President Donald Trump is being planned to be held in late May or early June.

In groundbreaking news, The Washington Post reported on Wednesday that U.S. Secretary of State nominee and CIA Director Mike Pompeo made a secret visit to Pyongyang over the Easter weekend, in a historic development that had been kept secret at the time.

Washington and Pyongyang have no diplomatic relations. The U.S. has imposed many rounds of sanctions on North Korea, has substantial military presence near the country, and has numerous threats to invade it over its weapons programs.

If held successfully, the Trump-Kim summit — a first between a North Korean leader and a sitting U.S. president — would not only mark a sudden change in America's posture toward North Korea but could also potentially lead to the easing of restrictions on North Korea.

In Pyongyang, Pompeo reportedly discussed preparations for the summit.

(Source: agencies)

Berlin and Washington consult over the JCPOA

1 → Accordingly, Paris and London were trying to convince Berlin on "the necessity for reforming the nuclear deal." However, Germany has recently taken a different approach from its two European partners over limiting the missile power and putting regional sanctions against Iran.

During a recent European Council meeting in Brussels, the European troika, in a united position, sought to convince other EU member states on the need for limiting Iran's missile power and imposing regional sanctions against Iran. The European troika has argued that the sanctions are necessary to keep the JCPOA going.

However, some European countries, including Italy, Spain and Austria, opposed this argument and have declared that there is no guarantee that Trump will remain as part of the nuclear deal even with the EU's sanctions against Iran. In this case, the European Union's credibility will be put under question by its new sanctions against Iran. This is while the Iranian authorities has formerly emphasized that our country's nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes and that Tehran will stick to the accord as long as the other signatories respect it.

In any case, Merkel may ask Trump to put off his decision on imposing nuclear sanctions on Iran once again, providing EU with more time to come to an agreement over this issue. However, it is quite possible that Trump and Macron are going to simultaneously discuss other approaches and strategies to confront Iran.

As emphasized, the type of cooperation between the French President and the German Chancellor, and the issues that the two intend to discuss on their visit to the United States, will enormously affect the U.S. and the EU's decision on how to deal with the nuclear accord. The German Chancellor is deeply worried to be a victim of Trump and Macron's bargain over the JCPOA. This is what has happened before in 2017.

At that time, Trump first made a deal with the French on a change in the content of the JCPOA, forcing German authorities to cooperate with him in this way. Can this experience be repeated during the separate visits of Merkel and Macron with?

Mar-a-Lago is a high-stakes summit for both Trump and Abe

6 → The U.S. cannot afford to lose Japan as a trusted ally. Economically, Trump needs Japan. Although Trump pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, he has asked U.S. officials to explore the possibility of joining the 11-country modified version that Japan is leading. Once implemented, this pact will serve as a foundation for building a broad free trade area. If Trump seeks fairer and more reciprocal trade and investment relations with Japan, including a bilateral free trade agreement, Trump could take this opportunity to move the ball forward on trade.

And for both, politically, a summit could not have come at a better time. Both are dogged by political scandals at home and desperately could use a success in international diplomacy to show their electorate their leadership skills. But these stakes are higher for Abe.

While other foreign leaders distance themselves from Trump's rhetoric, Abe has publicly backed Trump on many issues, even as Trump complains about Japan. With Trump's actions now appearing to come at the expense of Japan, Abe faces a situation where he is expected to capitalize on his relationship with Trump.

What is most surprising is that this is even an issue. The two have developed a close relationship. Not only was Abe the first foreign leader to meet Trump after his November 2016 victory, he was the first to meet Trump at Mar-a-Lago after becoming President. They also have frequent phone conversations and give each other gifts as signs of their friendship. The fact that Trump is treating Abe in a manner that creates an atmosphere in which the summit needs to go well is something few would have predicted even a few weeks ago.

It is hard to argue that the dynamics of the U.S.-Japan relationship have not changed. After a year and half of relative stability, the allies are now forced to talk about difficult issues in which they have vested interests. As allies, and close friends, they could both benefit from reconfirming common goals and establishing a set of strategies to deal with the region's challenges.

(Source: CNN)

A weakened Khalifa Haftar means more instability for Libya

8 → On Friday, a possible contender for Haftar's position, the current Chief of General Staff Abdul Razek al-Nadori denied rumors that head of the Tobruk-based House of Representatives Aguila Saleh has already appointed him as the general commander of the LNA.

Within the top ranks of the LNA, there have been speculations that General Abdussalam al-Hasi, the current commander of special operations, has also been put forward as a possible replacement.

In the end, whoever is picked as Haftar's successor would have a hard time filling the political vacuum after him and keeping the various competing factions together. A split within the ranks of the LNA is almost inevitable.

■ **Destabilizing effect on Libya**

Although Haftar's succession troubles could have a destabilizing effect on Libya, they could give a necessary push to the ongoing peace process.

The general never really wanted a political solution and his strategy was always to extend his control from the east to the south and west, where he wished to take control of the capital Tripoli and install his own regime.

He refused to recognize the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) signed in Morocco in December 2015 or the authority of the GNA that emerged as a result of it. Haftar pressed the House of Representatives in Tobruk not to ratify the agreement or agree to any amendments.

Once pressure from Haftar disappears, the Tobruk-based legislators will have more room to maneuver for a political compromise and deal with the Tripoli side. Recently, it was announced that the head of the House of Representatives, Saleh, accepted an invitation to meet Khaled Mishri, the newly elected head of High State Council (HSC) in Tripoli, for talks on how to clear the impasse.

(Source: aljazeera.com)

Bahraini court gives prison sentences to four anti-regime activists

A court in Bahrain has handed down prison sentences to four anti-regime protesters as the ruling Al Khalifah regime presses ahead with its heavy clampdown on political dissidents and pro-democracy activists in the kingdom.

On Tuesday, Bahrain's Fourth High Criminal Court sentenced three of the defendants to five years in jail, while the fourth received three years in prison, Arabic-language Bahrain Mirror news website reported.

The court found the anti-regime activists guilty of "damaging public property, spreading terror in the hearts of citizens, creating chaos and deliberately setting fire to a number of containers" through a gas cylinder explosion in Sitra Island, located five kilometers south of the capital Manama.

On March 27, Bahrain's Supreme Criminal Court sentenced eight defendants to seven years in prison after convicting them of attacking a police patrol with Molotov cocktails in the town of A'ali, situated about three kilometers southeast of the capital Manama.

A judicial source and activists said the ninth was a minor, who received a three-year jail term.



The Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy later named the teenager as 19-year-old Sayed Nizar Alwadaei, adding that he is the brother-in-law of London-based Sayed Ahmed Alwadaei, who is the head of the Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD).

(Source: Press TV)

Egypt army says killed militant leader in Sinai

Egypt's military said Wednesday it had killed a militant leader in the Sinai Peninsula, where the ISIL terrorist group is carrying out an insurgency.

During an operation in mountainous areas, Egyptian forces "killed Nasser Abu Zaql, the central Sinai commander of the terrorist group, after significant exchanges of fire," the army said in a statement.

The military said it found a rifle, two grenades and a large quantity of ammunition

with the slain insurgent leader.

Egypt's army launched a major offensive against the militants on February 9 in the northern Sinai Peninsula, in an attempt to neutralize a local branch of ISIL.

More than 100 of the rebels and at least 30 government troops have been killed since the operation, dubbed "Sinai 2018," was launched, according to official figures.

Egypt has been hit by significant militant attacks in recent years, especially after the

army toppled former president Mohamed Morsi in the summer of 2013, amid mass protests against his government.

Hundreds of soldiers, police and civilians have been killed in the attacks.

In late November, President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi gave three months for his security forces to re-establish control in Sinai, a deadline since extended.

Sisi secured a second term with an overwhelming victory in a presidential poll last

month with 97.1% of the vote.

On Saturday the president extended a nationwide state of emergency originally declared in April 2017 by a further three months.

It is the fourth extension of the measure, imposed in the wake of attacks against Coptic Christian churches in the cities of Tanta and Alexandria, which killed 45 people.

A regional state of emergency has already been in place in Sinai for several years.

(Source: AFP)

Inter teenager Karamoh reprimanded for showboating

Inter Milan coach Luciano Spalletti has chided teenager Yann Karamoh for showboating in Tuesday's 4-0 win over Cagliari in Serie A even though he recognises the Frenchman is a crowd pleaser. Karamoh, 19, has been used sparingly since joining on loan from Ligue 1 side Caen in the close season but has already scored a stunning goal in the 2-1 win over Bologna in February.

He enjoys playing to the crowd but a backheel in front of Cagliari's Leandro Castan in the first half was too much for Spalletti and also angered the Brazilian.

"He's a strong player with flair and a good turn of pace. The fans like him although the backheel he did is a gesture which should not be repeated if he wants to become a champion," said the shaven-headed coach.

"In terms of finishing and the overall balance of the team, he can improve but he's a lad of real quality. With the right focus and through hard work, he could become a great player."

Spalletti added: "He is very creative and that means that collaborating with team mates is tricky for him but he mustn't get into bad habits."

Karamoh made no apologies for the trick but said: "I often do these things, it is what football is all about."

"I had a lot of chances, I missed them but I will have more in the future," he added.

"The applause from the crowd at the San Siro gives me a lot of satisfaction and helps my self confidence to grow with every chance and opportunity I get to play."

(Source: Football Italia)

England to face Switzerland and U.S. in autumn friendlies

England will play friendlies against Switzerland and the U.S. as part of their autumn schedule later this year, the Football Association announced on Wednesday.

The Swiss are scheduled to visit on Sept. 11, with a venue for that game still to be decided, before the U.S. travel to Wembley Stadium on Nov. 15.

England last played Switzerland in a qualifier for Euro 2016 in September 2015, when goals from Harry Kane and Wayne Rooney settled a 2-0 win for the hosts.

The U.S. team, who failed to qualify for this year's World Cup in Russia, last travelled to England in May 2008 when they suffered a 2-0 defeat, with goals from John Terry and Steven Gerrard.

Gareth Southgate's England will also feature in the inaugural UEFA Nations League programme, which gets underway with a home match against Spain at Wembley on Sept. 8.

The Three Lions will then travel to Croatia on Oct. 12 before a return trip to Spain on Oct. 15.

Following their meeting with the U.S., the 2018 calendar will conclude with Croatia at Wembley on Nov. 18.

(Source: Mirror)

Manchester City dominate PFA Team of the Year

Players from newly-crowned Premier League champions Manchester City dominated the Professional Footballers' Association's (PFA) Team of the Year announced on Wednesday, occupying five out of 11 spots.

City defenders Kyle Walker and Nicolas Otamendi, midfielders David Silva and Kevin De Bruyne as well as all-time top scorer Sergio Aguero were named in the side.

Tottenham Hotspur had three players on the list, including England striker Harry Kane, who made the team for a third straight year along with Manchester United goalkeeper David de Gea.

Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah, who has 40 goals across all competitions this season and was nominated for the PFA Players' Player of the Year award, also made the team.

Chelsea had a lone representative in defender Marcos Alonso.

PFA Team of the Year: David de Gea, Kyle Walker, Jan Vertonghen, Nicolas Otamendi, Marcos Alonso, David Silva, Kevin De Bruyne, Christian Eriksen, Harry Kane, Mohamed Salah, Sergio Aguero.

(Source: Daily Star)

Scorer of half-time penalty says VAR 'is not football'

Video assistant referee (VAR) "is not football", says the Mainz midfielder who scored a penalty during half-time in his side's Bundesliga win over relegation rivals Freiburg on Monday.

Argentine Pablo De Blasis has scored two penalties from VAR this season but said players "lose the emotions".

Referee Guido Winkmann called both sides back from the dressing room after consulting the VAR system and penalising Freiburg for handball.

"I don't like it," said De Blasis, 30.

"I like the old football, with more emotions, without the referee on the video stopping the emotions."

Mainz initially had the penalty appeal turned down after right-back Daniel Brosinski's cross deflected off Freiburg centre-back Marc-Oliver Kempf's hand and was saved by keeper Alexander Schwolow.

As the players departed the pitch, Winkmann was told to consult VAR and ran over to the other side of the pitch to watch the replay on a monitor.

Winkmann overturned the decision and awarded the hosts a penalty before having to recall the entire Freiburg side and the handful of Mainz players who had left the pitch.

"[The Freiburg players] were angry. They didn't understand why the referee decided after some minutes to check the video and they probably didn't want to come back out but the rules are the rules," said De Blasis.

(Source: BBC)

Zlatan Ibrahimovic: I'm going to the World Cup

Zlatan Ibrahimovic has declared he will be going to the World Cup – although he refused to state whether he will play at the tournament.

It has been speculated for some weeks that the LA Galaxy star will come out of international retirement to play at the finals in Russia, where Sweden begin their campaign against South Korea in Nizhny Novgorod on June 18.

Ibrahimovic tweeted last week to say his chances of going to the tournament were "sky high", with his three goals in three appearances since moving to MLS showing he has recovered well from the knee injury that blighted his second season at Manchester United.

The 36-year-old has now confirmed he will be heading to the finals in two months' time, even if the exact details of his participation remain to be seen.

Speaking on the Jimmy Kimmel Live! show, he said: "I'm going to the World Cup, yes. If I say more, they will hang me, so I have to be careful what I say."

"A World Cup without me wouldn't be a World Cup."

Ibrahimovic made an instant impact in the United States, scoring twice on his Galaxy debut to help them to a 4-3 derby win over Los Angeles FC, with his first goal a spectacular 40-yard effort. The former Barcelona, Inter and Paris Saint-Germain forward thinks he has already made his mark on American football and culture.

"I had a vision before I came," he said. "I know there are some earthquakes in Los Angeles, but this is me stepping in Los Angeles. I wanted to make a statement. Every movie has a good start."

"In Europe, football is huge, so people get crazy and they told me, 'when you come to Los Angeles, you can walk on the street'. But it's my own fault: if you play the way I do, I mean..."

"My confidence is very high. I chose football. I'm sorry for the fans cheering for other sports, because it would be the same thing."

"People are very kind with me. Football is the biggest sport in the world. Imagine when you play football, and



you're on the top, how you feel."

Ibrahimovic was also asked about the root of his nicknames and explained why he would prefer to be called his full title.

"My name in the Balkan language means 'gold', so I would prefer that, but I know people have difficulty pronouncing

that," he said. "So, somebody was like 'Ibra', and now it's 'The Lion'."

"I'm not a typical Swedish guy but I put Sweden on the map."

(Source: Eurosport)

UEFA president 'worried' over use of VAR at World Cup



UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin has expressed concern over the decision to employ the video replay system (VAR) at the 2018 World Cup, saying the technology still needed more testing before it can be considered for use in the Champions League.

Global soccer body FIFA voted in March to deploy VAR at the June-July tournament in Russia, only two weeks after its use was approved by IFAB, the organisation responsible for rule changes in the sport.

"I have some fear for the World Cup, where we will have referees who have never officiated with the VAR," Ceferin told Italian paper Gazzetta dello Sport in an interview.

"I hope there are no scandals or problems." Ceferin has already said that VAR would not be used in the Champions League next season.

"The Champions League is like a Ferrari or a Porsche: you cannot drive it right away, you need training, offline testing. And everyone has to understand how it works," he said.

"It's too early for VAR. That doesn't

mean we will never have it as the process is inevitable... We'll have it one day in the Champions League but there's no rush."

VAR is already being used in Serie A, the Bundesliga and Portugal's Primeira Liga this season, among others.

IFAB insists it has reduced refereeing mistakes but critics say there has been confusion in a number of matches.

Goals have been annulled several minutes after being scored – with the teams waiting to restart – and penalties revoked with the ball on the spot.

Another criticism is that the spectators are not kept informed of what is happening when a decision is reviewed.

Ceferin said that VAR would not have made any difference in last week's Champions League quarter-final between Real Madrid and Juventus, where a soft stoppage-time penalty led to the Spanish side advancing 4-3 on aggregate.

"What would have changed with VAR? Nothing. There are those who have watched it 20 times, I've watched it 50, but for half the people it's a penalty and for the other half, it isn't."

(Source: Guardian)

Neymar hoping for World Cup return after recovery from broken foot



Brazil international Neymar hopes to be fit for this summer's World Cup and says he will return to training from a broken foot on 17 May.

The Paris St-Germain forward needed surgery on a broken metatarsal bone after being injured in a league game on 25 February.

Brazil play their World Cup opening fixture against Switzerland on 17 June, a month after his expected return.

"I hope to get there in great shape," said the 26-year-old.

Neymar became the world's most expensive footballer when he joined PSG from Barcelona last August, and has scored 25 goals with 16 assists for the French side this season.

"I get my final examination on 17 May and then I'll be free to play," he told a news conference in Sao Paulo, where he has been receiving treatment.

"I had an examination last week, it is all perfect, evolving well, so I hope that continues so I can get back as soon as possible."

"I am having treatment every day, and from the moment I start training

I am going to work harder than I ever worked because this is a dream that's coming up."

It's a World Cup. I've waited four years for this chance, it's close."

Brazil go to Russia as joint favourites alongside champions Germany. After their opener against Switzerland in Group E, they face Costa Rica on 22 June and then Serbia five days later.

Neymar, who joined PSG for a fee of 222m euros (£200m), said he was apprehensive about kicking a ball again after almost three months out.

"Of course, doubts exist and I feel them too sometimes," he said.

"But that's normal for a guy who has had the first surgery of his career."

It's very difficult for me not playing and not training."

"I have to work even harder but I am going to have enough time to arrive in form for the World Cup, to prepare."

It was horrible getting injured but I am more rested, that's the upside. We have to see the positive side of things."

(Source: BBC)

Ricciardo wants two-year deal because of F1 uncertainty

Daniel Ricciardo says he does not want his next Formula One contract to tie him down for the next four years due to the uncertainty over the sport's future and instead wants to sign a two-year deal.

The 28-year-old Australian, winner in China at the weekend and one of the hottest properties on the market, is out of contract with Red Bull at the end of the year.

"I don't want to sign anything too long because I don't know where the sport's going," The Times newspaper quoted him as saying on Wednesday.

"I feel like life is happening pretty fast. Each year something might change so I don't want to tie myself down for four more years and then I'm like, 'I don't want to do this any more'."

"Ideally I'd sign a two-year contract. I think two years I can definitely be comfortable with and then see it from there," he added. "That third year will be the rule change so I will probably wait and see what happens then."

Formula One's current engine regulations last only to the end of 2020, when team agreements also expire, and



the sport is deciding how the future should look and what kind of engines will be used.

Ferrari have already warned that they could walk away if they do not like what is on offer.

Red Bull could have a new engine partner as early as next season, with the team weighing up whether to stay with Renault or switch to the improving Honda units used

by their Toro Rosso team.

Mercedes have yet to announce a new deal for four times world champion Lewis Hamilton, who is also out of contract at the end of this season and has said he wants to see what the future holds before committing.

While Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel and Red Bull's Max Verstappen have long-term deals, there is uncertainty about the futures of Kimi Raikkonen at Ferrari and Valtteri Bottas at Mercedes. Ricciardo would be a strong replacement for either but the Australian told the newspaper that neither team had been in touch so far.

"I kind of feel like if they want me to race for them they should contact me, but they haven't," he said.

Ricciardo has said consistently since last year that he just wants to be in the fastest car and would be happy to stay at Red Bull if they can provide it.

"If we win this year then I'm staying with Red Bull. It's pretty simple," he said. "It's really just about performance at the moment."

(Source: Reuters)

Should Celtic look at Sardar Azmoun again this summer?

Celtic may have previously been glad that they did not move for Sardar Azmoun, but he has now found some serious form.

Based on how Sardar Azmoun began the season with Rubin Kazan, Celtic fans may have been delighted that the Hoops did not follow up on their initial interest in the striker.

The Scottish Sun reported in June 2017 that the Scottish Premiership champions were keen on Azmoun - a player that Brendan Rodgers previously had his eye on while he was at Liverpool. Ultimately however, Celtic would keep Moussa Dembele and thus, not pursue a deal for the Iran international.

And with the 23-year-old scoring no goals before December, it certainly appeared that Celtic had made the right call not making a move. However, his recent form has been hugely impressive, and should perhaps tempt the Hoops to consider having another look during the summer.

Including the final game before the winter break in Russia, Azmoun has now scored five goals in his last six appearances - including three in his last two games - while he also contributed three assists in that time.

With Rodgers clearly a big fan of the forward - who, The Scottish Sun reported last year, has been dubbed the Iranian Zlatan Ibrahimovic - it would be little surprise if his current run of form had caught his eye once again.

With Odsonne Edouard only on loan, and questions likely to surround Moussa Dembele's future during every single window that he remains at Parkhead, signing a new striker may well be on Rodgers' wishlist when the season concludes.

Azmoun surely needs to maintain his current run for a while longer before he puts his barren spell earlier in the campaign behind him completely - but the signs certainly suggest that he is getting back to his best.

(Source: HITC)



Loko claim Eurasia Beach Soccer Cup title

S P O R T S BSC Lokomotiv Moscow defeated Iran's Moghavemat Golsapoosh to claim the 2018 Eurasia Beach Soccer Cup title in Yazd, Iran on Tuesday.

A tight 2-1 win had Loko prevailing over the hosts. After a goalless first leg, tournament's MVP and top scorer Lucão swept the Russian side ahead, but Hamidreza hit back for the Persian side to equalize five minutes later.

Before the second period was over, Catarino had Lokomotiv ahead again, and, this time, for good. The Iranian side were unable to equalize again, despite the remaining

time and the Muscovite confirmed that they are back.

After clinching the Mundialito de Clubes last December, Loko claim another international honor, getting ready to get to the Euro Winners Cup as one of the toughest sides in the world.

Levante UD also defeated Catania BS to snatch the third place in the competition, beachsoccer.com reported.

An stunning performance by Farid Boulokbashi had the Spaniards storming past the Catanesi, who could only equalize Levante's first advantage in the first minutes.

Persepolis extend Rabikhah's contract



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Persepolis football club extended Mohsen Rabikhah contract by one year.

Rabikhah's current contract expires at the end of Iran Professional League season but he will stay at the club for one more year.

The 30-year-old player suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee in the match against Pars Jonoubi last week.

He will have to undergo surgery within the next few days.

Rabikhah, who won back-to-back titles with Persepolis in Iran Professional League, will be sidelined for six months.

The Iranian media reports also suggest that Persepolis are not interested in extending Mohsen Mosalman's contract.

Persepolis are not allowed to sign new player in the summer transfer windows.

Omid Alishah rejoins Persepolis



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Omid Alishah rejoined Persepolis football team on Wednesday.

Alishah, who ran out his contract with Tractor Sazi in February, joined his former club once again.

The 26-year-old midfielder had joined Tractor Sazi due to his military service.

Alishah cannot accompany Persepolis

in the 2018 AFC Champions League but has no problem to join the team in the next season.

Alishah joined Persepolis on June 2013 but was transferred to Tractor Sazi in the winter of 2017, to spend his conscription period at the club.

It's a good news for the fans because Persepolis are not allowed to sign player in the summer transfer windows.

Football 'miracle' offers shared goal for Yemen

Aden: A "miracle" winning streak has propelled Yemen's senior and youth football teams to the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 and AFC U-16 Championship 2018, catching the war-torn nation's attention and offering a common goal to a divided country.

Qualification is a first ever for the senior team, currently based in Qatar, and a rare achievement for the Under-16s who still train in Yemen.

"Qualification has brought Yemenis together - they're doing us proud," said Ahmed Sabahi, a fan in the southern port city of Aden.

"All Yemenis are behind their team," he said. Yemen's war entered its fourth year in March.

"We hope the team will honor Yemen and give Yemenis some relief," said Sabahi.

The senior team beat Nepal 2-1 on March 27, reaching the AFC Asian Cup 2019 to be contested in January-February in the United Arab Emirates - for the first time in Yemen's history.

The U-16 tournament is to take place in Malaysia in September-October.

To build the youth team, selectors travelled the length of the country, including war zones and sectors controlled by rival factions.



Ranked 125 in the world by FIFA, Yemen's senior team has never won a single match in the Gulf Cup against its neighbors since the competition was launched in 1970.

Yemen's media used to congratulate the team for an "honorable defeat" if they avoided a hammering. Asian Cup qualification was hailed as nothing less than a "miracle".

Due to the war, the senior players relocated to a training camp in Qatar, which has the most up-to-date facilities as it builds up to hosting the 2022 World Cup.

For football fans back home, Yemen's successful qualification offers a glimmer of hope and a distraction from everyday life.

It has "helped put a smile on the face of Yemeni youths, who need reasons to be happy and to forget", said Saleh Hanash, another fan in Aden.

More than half of Yemen's 27-million-population are aged under 18.

After a three-year hiatus, football is making a return to Aden, which Yemen's internationally-recognized government has declared its provisional capital.

The national league has been suspended but football matches are being played in the southern port city, with local tournaments organized between districts.

Football in Yemen "doesn't gather the crowds you see next door in Persian Gulf states", said Fadel al-Wasabi, one of a handful of fans seated on green plastic chairs as two clubs battled it out on a dirt pitch beside a wall pocked by shellfire.

"Maybe that's because Yemenis are preoccupied with securing their basic needs," he said, glancing over at a nearby stadium, bombed out and filled with debris, its stands reduced to a heap of rubble.

(Source: AFC)

Maksimovic appointed Iran shooting coach

S P O R T S Goran Maksimovic has been named as new head coach of Iran shooting national team.

The contract is until the 2018 Asian Games but there is a possibility to extend until 2020 Tokyo Olympics based on performances.

The 55-year-old coach signed his contract in a session attended by Ali Dadgar, head of Iran Shooting Federation president, on Wednesday.

He is a Serbian sports shooter and Olympic Champion for Yugoslavia. Maksimovic won a gold medal in the 10 meter air rifle event at the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul.

At the 1996 and 2000 Olympics he competed for Serbia and Montenegro.

His daughter, Ivana Maksimovic is a 2012 Olympic silver medalist.

Tractor Sazi General Manager Mostafa Ajorloo sacked

TASNIM — Tractor Sazi General Manager Mostafa Ajorloo was sacked by Board of Directors of the Iranian football club following poor results in Iran Professional League and AFC Champions League Tuesday night.

Tractor Sazi are fighting for survival in the Iranian league.

The Tabriz-based team also ended up at the bottom of the group the AFC Champions League.

Abbas Elyasi, a member of Board of Directors, has been named as acting president of Tractor Sazi.

Ajorloo replaced Saeid Abbasi in June 2016.

Persepolis to play Al Jazira of UAE in ACL Round of 16

Persian League — Persepolis of Iran will meet Emirati football team Al Jazira in Round of 16 of the AFC Champions League.

Al Jazira lost to Al Ahli of Saudi Arabia 2-1 on Tuesday in Group A of the ACL in the UAE.

The result means Al Jazira will host Persepolis, who topped Group C, on May 7 in Dubai's Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium ahead of the return leg a week later in Tehran's Azadi Stadium.

Al Ahli will play 2011 champion Al Sadd in this stage.

Iranian football teams Esteghlal and Zob Ahan will also meet together in Round of 16.

Zob Ahan will host Esteghlal in Isfahan's Fooladshahr Stadium on May 8 and the second leg will be held at the Azadi Stadium on May 15.

Minister of Youth and Sports takes part at OIC in Baku

TASNIM — Iran's Minister of Sports and Youth Affairs Masoud Soltanifar left Tehran for Baku, the Azerbaijan Republic on Wednesday to participate at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Baku will host the fourth OIC Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers on April 18, 19 under the theme "Solidarity in Action for Youth Development."

About 40 delegations representing OIC countries, youth and sport ministers, chairpersons of state agencies and committees, as well as leading international organizations are expected to take part in the two-day event.

The fourth OIC Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers will be held by Azerbaijan's Ministry of Youth and Sports with the joint organization of the OIC, the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (ICYF-DC) and the Islamic Solidarity Sports Federation (ISSF).

Women futsal team held by Ukraine

TASNIM — Iranian women's national futsal team were held by Ukraine in a friendly match in Tehran on Tuesday.

Team Melli, who had defeated the European rival 5-2 at the Handball Hall on Sunday, drew 2-2 in the second match.

Fereshteh Karimi and Sara Shirbeigi scored for Iran in this warm-up match.



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.

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Iranian reciter Mehdi Gholamnejad honored at Kuwait Quran competition

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian reciter Mehdi Gholamnejad has won the second prize at the 9th Kuwait International Award for Quran Memorization.



Iranian reciter Mehdi Gholamnejad in an undated photo

He received the prize in the reciting category, in which Malaysian and Moroccan reciters took first and third places respectively, the Persian service of FNA reported on Wednesday.

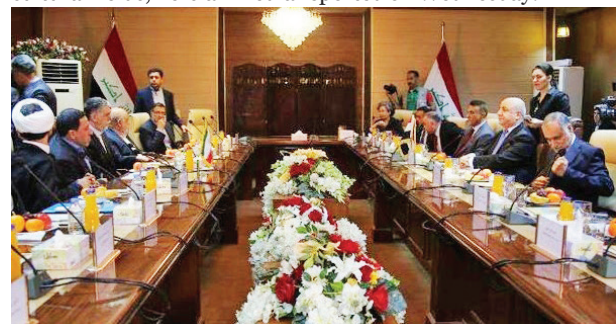
The contest opened on April 10 and came to an end by awarding the top Quran reciters and memorizers on Wednesday.

Mohammad-Javad Delfani, another Iranian reciter who attended the event, failed to win a prize.

Iran's culture minister meets Iraqi counterpart in Baghdad

CULTURE TEHRAN — Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Abbas Salehi met Iraqi Culture, Tourism and Antiquities Minister Fryad Rwandizi in his visit to Baghdad on Tuesday.

In the course of the talks, Salehi expressed his hope that the meeting would help boost bilateral cooperation in social and cultural fields, Persian media reported on Wednesday.



An Iranian delegation led by Culture Minister Abbas Salehi meets a group of Iraqi cultural officials in Baghdad on April 17, 2018.

Rwandizi for his part pointed to the huge number of Iranian pilgrims who visit the Iraqi city of Karbala during Arbæen and said that the deep cultural affinities could promote tourism between the two countries.

Salehi arrived in Baghdad at the head of a delegation on Monday for a four-day visit with Iraqi cultural officials.

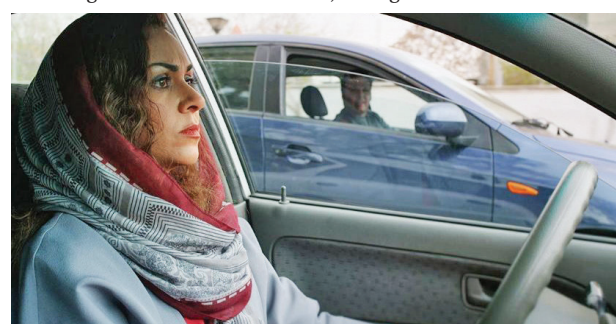
He also met Iraqi Vice President Nouri al-Maliki and the head of Iraq's Islamic Supreme Council, Humam Hamoudi.

Hamoudi said that his country is eager to cooperate with Iran on film projects on the Daesh terrorists.

Salehi also met Ammar al-Hakim, the head of the National Wisdom Movement, and Hamid Al-Husseini, the secretary-general of the Union of the Iraqi Radio and TV Networks.

Tripoli festival to screen Iranian films

A R T TEHRAN — The Tripoli Film Festival running in the Lebanese city from April 19 to 26 will be screening a selection of Iranian films, the organizers have announced.



A scene from "Horn" by Qasideh Golmakani

"No. 17 Soheila" by Mahmud Ghaffari will be competing in the official section of the festival while "Pet Man" by Marzieh Abrarpaidar and "Light Sight" by Seyyed Moslem Tabatabai will be screened in a section for animated films.

"Horn" by Qasideh Golmakani will also compete in the short film section.

Movies coming from Egypt, Ukraine, Mexico, Russia, Sweden and several other countries have also been selected for screening at the event.

The Tripoli Film Festival is scheduled to pay tribute to Randa Chahal this year by organizing a retrospective of the famous Lebanese filmmaker.

Fajr Intl. Film Festival to kick off today

A R T TEHRAN — The 36th Fajr International Film Festival will open at Tehran's Charsu Cinema today with screening Iranian director Majid Majidi's "Beyond the Clouds".

The film, which was filmed in India in 2017, revolves around the life of a young boy, Amir, and his sister, Tara, in Mumbai. When on the run from the cops, Amir finds his estranged sister, who, in a bid to protect her brother, lands in jail. Their entire lives are clouded by despair when, unexpectedly, the light shines on them from beyond the clouds.

A diverse lineup of movies will be screened in Cinema Salvation, the official competition section of the festival; Eastern Vista, a section dedicated to Asian filmmakers; and Cup of Divination, a section dedicated to screening films acclaimed at various international events as well as in several other categories of the festival.

Polish director Joanna Kos-Krauze, Macedonian director Milcho Manchevski, Greek filmmaker Dimitri Athanitis, Indian director and producer Adoor Gopalakrishnan, and Italian producer Giovanni Spagnoletti, as well as cinematographer Mahmud Kalari and actress Merila Zarei from Iran are members of the Cinema Salvation jury.

"A Phone Call to Father" by Seric Apromov from Kazakhstan, "Little Tito and the Aliens" by Paola Livia Randi from Italy, "Little White Lie" by Tomas Alzamora from Chile, "Night Accident" by Temirbek Birnazarov from Kyrgyzstan, "Beyond the Clouds" by Majid Majidi from India and "The Silent Revolution" by Lars Kraume from Germany are some of the foreign films scheduled to compete in the official competition section.

"Forty-Seven" co-directed by Ahmad Otrachki and Alireza Ataollah Tabrizi, "Hattrick" by Ramtin Lavvafi, and "The Lost Strait" by Bahram Tavakkoli are the Iranian movies in this section.



A scene from Majid Majidi's "Beyond the Clouds".

The festival organizers will also host a number of guests from across the world.

Oscar-winning American filmmaker Oliver Stone will be attending the festival, while Palestinian director Rashid Masharawi will promote his latest movie "Writing on Snow" at the event.

Italian film score composer Nicola Piovani and his fellow actor Franco Nero who is best known for his role in "Django", Sergio

Corbucci's 1966 spaghetti western, have also been invited to the event.

In addition, the festival will be hosting representatives from the FIAP (International Federation of Film Producers Association) and FIPRESCI (The International Federation of Film Critics).

Other foreign guests are coming from a number of Asian festivals in Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and several

other countries.

Students from international film schools in 50 countries have applied to attend the festival's Dar-ul-Fonun educational course this year.

Dar-ul-Fonun aims to discover emerging talents among film students in Iran and other countries.

The festival will be running in Tehran until April 27.

Davud Mirbaqeri to make TV series on Salman Farsi

A R T TEHRAN — Iranian director Davud Mirbaqeri who is most famous for his serials on distinguished personalities from early Islamic history plans to make his new project on Salman Farsi, the Iranian companion of the Prophet Muhammad (S).

In a press release published on Wednesday Mirbaqeri said he hopes to launch the pre-production of the series in March 2019. "Salman Farsi" will be one of the largest projects of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting," he added.

Salman Farsi was one of several individuals of Persian origin residing in Arabia, probably as a consequence of Sassanid involvement in Yemen. He was among the freedmen (mawali) of the Prophet Muhammad (S) and became the model of Persian converts and the symbol of the role that Persia and Persians would play in the future of Islam.

According to certain traditional sayings, Salman Farsi was the first who translated parts of the Holy Quran into Persian during



Davud Mirbaqeri (R) directs Farborz Arabnia in a scene from "Mokhtarnameh".

the 7th century.

The story of the series will be recounted in three seasons, the first of which will be set in the Sassanid cities of Gabae, modern Isfahan, and Ctesiphon located about 35 kilometers southeast of present-day Baghdad.

"The second season covers the period of Salman Farsi's life when he lived in the Byzantine Empire and the third season is about the rise of Islam and the life of Salman in Mecca and Medina where he was in company with the Prophet (S),"

Mirbaqeri said.

His team will make the necessary sets for the first season, and the second season will be shot on location in Armenia, Turkey and Morocco, where Mirbaqeri is scheduled to hire a local cast.

The third season will be shot on a set where Majid Majidi's "Muhammad, the Messenger of God" was filmed.

Mirbaqeri described the last season of the series as difficult and said that the shooting of all three seasons will commence at the same time.

He estimated that the series would take about five years to complete.

Mirbaqeri is the director the 40-episode "Mokhtarnameh", which chronicles an uprising organized by Mokhtar Saqafi after the events of Ashura to take revenge against the killers of Imam Hussein (AS).

He has also made "Imam Ali (AS)", a blockbuster TV series that centers on Imam Ali's fight against ignorance after the demise of the Prophet Muhammad (S).

Broadway's "To Kill a Mockingbird" may be scrapped in legal flap

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — The producers of a Broadway adaptation of Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird" on Monday sued the author's estate saying the premiere cannot go ahead as scheduled and the production may have to be scrapped entirely unless a legal dispute is settled soon.

"To Kill a Mockingbird" is set to officially open on Dec. 13 with previews beginning on Nov. 1 in New York. But a representative of Lee's estate sued last month claiming Oscar-winning writer Aaron Sorkin's script deviates too much from the beloved 1960 novel about race relations in the Depression-era U.S. South.

The lawsuit "has rendered it impossible for the play to premiere as scheduled in December 2018, and unless this dispute is resolved in the immediate future, the play will be canceled," the court documents filed in U.S. District Court in Manhattan said.

Rudin's countersuit accuses Lee estate representative, Tonja Carter, of not raising objections to the script until six months after it was submitted to Lee's literary agent in August 2017. It also asks for damages of no less than \$10 million and says Carter's lawsuit has "rendered it impossible" to raise the millions in funds it says it needs before the play opens.

Carter did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

In her March lawsuit, Carter alleges Sorkin, the creator of Emmy-winning TV series "The West Wing," added two characters to the script and that he told trade magazine Playbill that the book as written "doesn't work at all" as a play.



Director Aaron Sorkin arrives at the 90th Oscars Nominees Luncheon in Los Angeles, California, February 05, 2018. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

The script also "did not present a fair depiction of 1930s small-town Alabama" by tying it to today's social climate and portrayed protagonist Atticus Finch as initially naive to racism, according to the lawsuit.

In response, Rudinplay argues the play is defined by its live stage production and not its script.

It offered to perform its adaptation at the courthouse with full cast that stars Jeff Daniels as Finch so a judge could determine if the play departed from the spirit of the novel.

Rudin, who paid \$150,000 for the stage rights to the novel, is a major Broadway and Hollywood producer, having won an Oscar and multiple Tony Awards.

Lee died in 2016 at age 89.

"To Kill a Mockingbird" was met with high praise on its publication, winning the Pulitzer Prize and earning Gregory Peck an Academy Award for best actor in an acclaimed 1962 screen adaptation.

Jack White, Nick Cave, N.E.R.D. booked at Montreux jazz festival

MONTREUX, Switzerland (Reuters) — Jack White, Nick Cave and Jamie Cullum join Massive Attack and punk icon Iggy Pop at the 52nd edition of the Montreux Jazz Festival this July, where the eclectic line-up also includes hip hop and electronic music, the organizers said on Tuesday.

Pharrell Williams returns to the famed stage with N.E.R.D., while veterans Van Morrison, Gilberto Gil, and Deep Purple are also booked at the prestigious Swiss event from June 29-July 14.

"I've been waiting a long time to have Nick Cave in the Stravinski (Auditorium). His music is so in touch with the acoustics of that hall. His universe is fascinating, with softness, musicality," festival director Mathieu Jatton told Reuters after announcing the line-up.

Australian Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds perform on July 12.

Snagging Jack White, who plays on July 10, is "very rare", Jatton said. "There's great anticipation since his last album. It's his first time solo in Montreux, he previously came with Dead Weather and The Raconteurs."

"Jack White is the passion of sound. He records everything in analog, still records on vinyl. These music freaks who are so attached to the quality of the music and of the performance."

Montreux programmers, whose annual budget is 28 million Swiss francs, like to pair up artists for unique shows.

"The goal is to create an experience that puts artists together. That is our passion in the programming," Jatton said.

"Nine Inch Nails has never been to Montreux before. What's great again is this billing with Gary Numan and Nine Inch Nails who have collaborated, they have mutual respect for each other's music."

Van Morrison and Steve Winwood play



Montreux Jazz Festival Director Mathieu Jatton speaks during an interview with Reuters after announcing performers booked for the 52nd annual edition of the famed Swiss jazz festival in July, in Montreux, Switzerland, April 17, 2018. (Reuters/Pierre Albouy)

back-to-back on July 11, while Young Fathers and Massive Attack play on July 2.

Aloe Blacc opens for Zucchero. "American soul with an Italian soul crooner, that creates something interesting," Jatton said.

Alice Cooper, Joe Perry and actor Johnny Depp team up as "Hollywood Vampires" on July 5.

The Montreux Jazz Club is moving to the Petit Palais, to be known as "House of Jazz", but still an intimate setting with small tables.

"We'll have 600 places, doubling our capacity. There was so much demand. Stanley Clarke, Brad Mehldau, Chick Corea, all the big jazz names will be there," Jatton said.

American Grammy-winning pianist Robert Glasper and his band R+R=NOW perform there on July 8 at a special show featuring former Montreux co-director Quincy Jones, he said. "An evening that really touches me, with beautiful surprises and a jam."