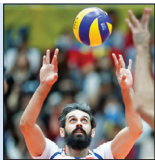




Iraqi FM says U.S. nuclear deal pullout is 'sheer stupidity' **2**



Igor Kolakovic announces Iran volleyball roster **15**



Football fans in Tehran to enjoy 2018 FIFA World Cup games live on silver screen **16**



Tehran Times greets Muslims on arrival of Ramadan



Rouhani wants world to pressure renegade U.S.

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Iranians march against massacre of Palestinians

POLITICS **TEHRAN** - Iranians held rallies outside the former U.S. embassy in Tehran (known as Den of Spies) on Wednesday to condemn the massacre of Palestinians at the hands of Israeli forces.

60 Palestinians, including children, were shot as they were protesting relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds (Jerusalem) on Monday.

It was bloodiest day in years in Gaza. At least 1,200 were also wounded in the shooting by the Zionist regime's forces.

The Iranian marchers were carrying Palestinian flags and photos of the children who were also martyred in the protests. An 8-month-old child was among those killed by Israeli snipers.

Amnesty International criticized the bloodshed as "another horrific example of the Israeli military using excessive force and live ammunition in a totally deplorable way".

While the entire world have condemned the brutality of Israeli forces, the U.S. has defended the Zionist regime.

EU planning to switch from dollar to euro in Iranian oil purchase: source

The European Union is planning to switch from dollars to euros when paying for the oil supplies from Iran, a diplomatic source told Sputnik. On Tuesday, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said that after talks with the foreign ministers of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Iran in Brussels that the sides had agreed to work

out practical solutions in response to the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known as the Iran nuclear deal, within the next few weeks.

In particular, the European Union and Iran would maintain and deepen economic ties, including in the area of oil and gas supplies. (Source: Sputnik)

Iran says U.S. is primary enabler of Israel's crimes

Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations issued a statement on Tuesday saying that the U.S. is the "primary enabler" of 70 years of Israeli crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories.

On Monday, Israeli snipers killed 60 Palestinians including children as they were peacefully marking the 70th anniversary of the expulsion of 700,000 people during

the creation of Israel.

There has been widespread international condemnation of Monday's violence and the UN Security Council met Tuesday in response. The U.S. ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, defended Israel and said: "No country in this chamber would act with more restraint than Israel has." **→2**



PERSPECTIVE

Rohollah Ghasemian
Journalist

How did Trump deceive European leaders?

Eventually, U.S. President Donald Trump announced his country's official withdrawal from a nuclear deal with Iran. The European troika (German, English, and French authorities) announced their regrets of the decision of the President of the United States in a joint statement, and stressed on their commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). However, European officials prefer not to talk about their direct play on Trump's ground at the moment!

But the fact that London and Paris couldn't benefit from the deal they made with Trump over the nuclear accord can't be anymore concealed, and this is what destroyed Theresa May and Emmanuel Macron's international credibility. This is also true of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel. The only difference is that she started her play on Trump's ground a bit later than her two European counterparts.

■ How was the deal made between Trump and Europe?

Donald Trump stepped at the White House in 2017. Theresa May, the British Prime Minister, was the first European official to travel to Washington to meet with the new president of the United States. During this visit, Trump informed Theresa May mind of his decision on "changing the nuclear deal". He emphasized that if the nuclear deal is not reviewed and redefined, the United States will no more remain as a part of it. It was during this visit and among American senators that Theresa May called the JCPOA a "controversial deal" for the first time since 2015. In this way, and indirectly, May announced her company with the United States for changing the JCPOA. Afterwards, it was time for the French President, Emmanuel Macron to take part in the joint game of London and Washington.

In July 2017, Macron assured Trump that he would do its best to include Iran's missile capability in the context of the nuclear deal, and thus limit the regional power of Iran. But Macron never imagined that he had practically turned to Trump's piece in his confrontation with Iran. **→7**

EU too weak to challenge U.S. hegemony: Prof. Entessar

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Chair of Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice at the University of South Alabama believes the EU is too weak politically to challenge America's global hegemony even if it decides to do so.

The U.S. president's decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) despite the U.S. key European allies' opposition has raised so many questions about the global weight of the EU. To shed more light on the issue, we reached out to Professor Entessar, who is the Chair of Department of Political Science and Criminal Justice at the University of South Alabama.

Following is the full text of his interview:

■ How can the EU protect the right of its companies working and investing in Iran? Is it feasible?

A: The EU can lodge a complaint against the

United States with the World Trade Organization (WTO) if the United States decides to impose secondary sanctions against European firms that trade with or invest in Iran. The EU can also invoke its own laws and/or pass additional legislation designed to protect European companies against American retaliation. In other words, there are legal and practical steps that the EU can take to protect its companies that have trade and investment agreements with Iran. The big question is: will the EU take these steps and risk a political and economic confrontation with the United States for the sake of protecting its trade with and investments in Iran? Given the vast discrepancy between Europe's economic ties with the United States compared with its economic relations with Iran, I am not very optimistic that the EU would do anything to jeopardize its relations with Washington. In other words, although it is feasible for the EU to take measures to protect its trade with Iran, it is not very likely that it would do so. The United States is just too important for

Europe, and the EU will not sacrifice its relations with the United States for Iran's sake. Besides, the European companies working and investing in Iran are private companies, and they cannot be forced by their governments to trade with a foreign country. The very threat of U.S. retaliation against these companies is powerful enough for them to refrain from dealing with Iran, as has been the case in recent years.

■ Despite being an economic superpower, the EU is not able to protect its interest against the U.S. unilateralism in recent year. Why?

A: The EU is a fractured entity with many competing political, economic and social entities. Notwithstanding its economic might, the EU has so far failed to develop into an independent political force on the global scale. The EU's many divisions and its internal rivalries have prevented it from acting as a deterrent against Washington's unilateralism. The EU is simply too weak politically to challenge America's global hegemony even if it decides to do so. **→7**

EU suffers lack of unity to guarantee its interests: Russian expert

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN — Maria Khorolskaya, a research fellow at the Moscow-based Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations, says lack of unity among the EU member states is a main obstacle in the way of the Union to protect its interests against the U.S. unilateralism.

The U.S. president's decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) despite the U.S. key European allies' opposition has raised so many questions about the global weight of the EU.

Despite many promises from EU key states to keep the JCPOA alive without the U.S., many believe even if the EU decides to do so the block

won't be able to challenge the U.S. President's decision due to its internal disunity and limitations.

To know more the issue was discussed with Maria Khorolskaya a research fellow in Moscow based Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations.

Here is the full text of the interview with her:

■ How can the EU protect the right of its companies working and investing in Iran? Is it feasible?

A: American sanctions will affect not only the Iranian economy, but also foreign companies and banks that have business with Iran. A number of politicians, including the German Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy Peter Altmaier, advocated for European support

to firms that might suffer from U.S. sanctions. Europe already had a mechanism to counteract American sanctions. In 1996, during the conflict with the United States over the Cuban sanctions, the European Commission had already adopted a "blocking statute", which prohibited European companies to obey the requirements of third countries unless non-compliance would seriously damage their interests, and also stipulated reparation for campaigns at the expense of person, causing the damage. But "blocking statute" has to be adapted to the new situation, that would require a unanimous decision of all EU member states. The German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas pessimistically assessed the chances of German companies to continue their business in Iran. **→13**



ARTICLE

Setareh Behroozi
Tehran Times journalist

Artificial Intelligence, everyday everywhere

May 17 marks the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day with the theme of enabling the positive use of 'Artificial Intelligence for All'.

The term artificial intelligence (AI) may conjure up science fiction stories or robots. However, you may be surprised if you find out that it is present in your everyday life.

Video games, online customer support, smart home appliances, promotional emails, as well as personalized and contextual digital advertising are some examples of AI.

In Iran, AI started to be taught as a university course 16 years ago. Iran is applying AI in mitigating traffic density, offering financial services and for military purposes.

Like all other parts of the world, Iran is developing AI as a necessary part of up-to-date technology and modern life.

Wherever you live, you are surrounded by AI whether you notice or not.

The smartphone in your hand, your bank credit card in your purse, and even appliances you use every day in your home, they are AI-based technology in your daily life. AI has a great impact on your life and without it, your life would be very different.

Like any other new types of technology, AI has positive and negative effects on our life and like other aspects of life, our awareness is the only way to benefit from facilities, which make our life easier if they are used in right way.

■ World Telecommunication and Information Society Day

According to UN, the purpose of World Telecommunication and Information Society Day (WTISD) is to help raise awareness of the possibilities that the use of the Internet and other information and communication technologies (ICT) can bring to societies and economies, as well as of ways to bridge the digital divide.

May 17 marks the anniversary of the signing of the first International Telegraph Convention and the creation of the International Telecommunication Union.

In recent years there has been significant progress in AI technology, made possible by tremendous advances in contributing fields, such as big data, machine learning, computing power, storage capacity and cloud computing, among others. **→12**



Rafting competition held in Chalus River

National rafting competition was held in Chalus River in the Mazandaran province on Tuesday.

Rafting and white water rafting are recreational outdoor activities which use an inflatable raft to navigate a river or other body of water.

This is often done on whitewater or different degrees of rough water. Dealing with risk and the need for teamwork is often a part of the experience.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS



Rouhani to Erdogan: U.S., Israel must be rebuked in unison

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – President Hassan Rouhani on Wednesday told his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan that the U.S. and Israel should be chastised in unison over their illegal moves.

Speaking over the telephone in anticipation of an emergency OIC meeting on Palestine in Istanbul, Rouhani said the relocation of the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to al-Quds (Jerusalem) has irritated Muslims, the presidential website reported.

Erdogan, for his part, condemned Israel's massacre of Palestinians who protested against the embassy relocation. He also invited Rouhani to the OIC meeting, saying, "It is time we live up to our role for our Palestinian brothers."



UN chief throws weight behind EU to save nuclear deal

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – The UN secretary general on Wednesday threw his weight behind the European Union in salvaging the landmark Iran nuclear deal after Washington announced walking away from it.

"We fully support the efforts the European Union is making in order to rescue the JCPOA," said Antonio Guterres at a joint press conference with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in Brussels.

"It is absolutely essential to preserve two things: multilateral governance institutions and the rule of law in international relations," he proclaimed.



Zarif talks to Italian, Bulgarian, Austrian, and Spanish FMs

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif has held separate phone conversations with his opposite numbers from several European countries, the Foreign Ministry said.

Zarif, who was in Brussels, conferred with Italian, Bulgarian, Austrian and Spanish foreign ministers on the necessity of preserving the JCPOA – the official name for the nuclear agreement – as a unique diplomatic accomplishment in the contemporary era.

The top Iranian diplomat said it is necessary to give diplomacy a chance in a limited period of time to give guarantees that the Iranian nation will be able to reap the benefits of the JCPOA.



EU facing important test on the nuclear deal: senior MP

POLITICS **TEHRAN** - Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Committee chief Alaeddin Boroujerdi said on Tuesday that the European Union is facing a historical test and should show commitment to the 2015 nuclear deal.

"The European countries are facing a historical test after the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran," Fars news agency quoted him as saying.

Trump announced on May 9 that the U.S. pulls out of the nuclear deal and reintroduce sanctions on Iran.

Iran has said if the Europeans do not give "guarantees" about the benefits of the agreement it will quit the deal and resume nuclear activities with a greater speed that predated the nuclear agreement.



Tehran condemns U.S. sanctions on central bank governor

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qassemi on Wednesday condemned the U.S. Treasury Department for imposing sanctions on Iran's central bank governor.

In a statement published on the Foreign Ministry website, Qassemi said the treasury's new ban on Valiollah Seif is aimed at making up for Washington's failure after it withdrew from the nuclear deal.

"Sanctions... at a time when Iran and Europe have kicked off talks and consultations on the JCPOA without the presence of the U.S., shows well that the United States has not yet been able to achieve its predetermined anti-Iran objectives by unilaterally pulling out of the JCPOA."

Qassemi said this "hostile policy" will make Iranians "more determined, more patient and more resistant than ever."



Austrian diplomat: Iran should benefit from nuclear deal

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – The Austrian Ambassador to Iran, Stefan Scholz, said on Wednesday that Vienna respects the 2015 nuclear deal as long as Iran continues to remain committed to its obligations.

During a meeting with Majid Khodabakhsh, governor of East Azerbaijan Province, Scholz said that Iran should benefit from the nuclear deal.

Since President Donald Trump announced the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal on May 9, Iran has threatened if the other members of the agreement, especially Europeans, do not give "guarantees" to Tehran about the benefits of the agreement it will remove cap on its nuclear activities.

EU tells Iran it will try to protect firms from U.S. sanctions

Tehran is being given assurances that European governments will seek to protect companies doing business in Iran from renewed U.S. sanctions, as foreign ministers prepare to meet in Brussels to salvage the nuclear deal.

Iran's foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, met Federica Mogherini, the EU external affairs chief, on Tuesday morning and will meet the foreign ministers of France, Germany and the UK – the three European signatories to the deal – in the evening. Iran wants assurances that EU trade with Iran will continue to grow, despite Donald Trump pulling the U.S. out of the nuclear deal.

Zarif said after his first meeting that talks were "moving in the right direction", adding that it was "a nice and constructive meeting".

Speaking after her meeting with Zarif,



Iraqi FM says U.S. nuclear deal pullout is 'sheer stupidity'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari has said that the unilateral withdrawal of the U.S. from the 2015 nuclear deal is a "sheer stupidity".

In an interview with IRNA published on Wednesday, Jaafari said that the U.S. has been discredited by quitting the nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Calling the U.S. decision as "wrong", the chief Iraqi diplomat said, "I hope that Washington would review its position and make up for its mistake."

U.S. President Donald Trump officially withdrew the U.S. from the nuclear pact on

May 9 and said he will reinstate economic sanctions on Iran.

Trump has come under international criticism by world leaders and international organizations for leaving the agreement. His decision has been called by some analysts as the "most stupid" decision being taken ever.

The JCPOA was signed in July 2015 between Iran, the European Union, Germany and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council including the U.S.

Since Trump announced his decision, Iran has threatened if the other members of the agreement, especially Europeans, do not give "guarantees" to Tehran about the benefits of the agreement it will remove cap on its nuclear

activities.

Germany Chancellor Angela Merkel has been a fierce critic of Trump for walking out of the international nuclear agreement.

"If we always say that something doesn't suit us, and we don't get a new international order, and everybody simply does what they want – then that's bad news for the world," she said.

Others in Merkel's government have suggested there is little basis for trust in any future talks with the United States. Deputy Foreign Minister Niels Annen recently told the German magazine Der Spiegel that the administration had shown "very little willingness to take the arguments of its allies seriously."

Mogherini said the EU had agreed to start work on a multi-level stream of work designed to keep the Iran deal alive. She said the work would cover:

- * the continued sale of Iran's oil and gas products
- * effective banking transactions with Iran
- * continued sea, land, air and rail transportation relations
- * new EU investments in Iran
- * financial banking, insurance and trade
- * a blocking mechanism aimed at nullifying U.S. sanctions on EU firms

The crisis, potentially plunging the U.S. and Europe into a sanctions war and raising serious questions about European economic sovereignty, will also be discussed at a meeting of EU heads of state on Wednesday in Sofia.

(Source: Guardian)



Trump is similarly unpopular in France, and President Emmanuel Macron's state visit to Washington – during which the two leaders exchanged a number of physical touches – was roasted in the French press, with Macron portrayed as an obedient child

Zarif calls meetings with Europeans 'constructive'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Wednesday that his meetings with Federica Mogherini, the EU's foreign policy chief, and the foreign ministers of France, Germany and the UK were "constructive".

"Constructive meeting with EU High Rep & E3 ministers in Brussels, following successful Beijing & Moscow visits. Positive start with solid political commitments. All agreed that much remains to be done in coming weeks to practically guarantee economic benefits for Iranian people," Zarif tweeted.

Zarif met with Mogherini and the foreign ministers of France, Germany and the UK, the three European signatories to the 2015 nuclear deal, in Brussels on Tuesday.

After withdrawal of the U.S. from the JCPOA on May 9, Iran wants assurances from the remaining parties that its interests are guaranteed or it will resume its

nuclear activities with a higher speed.

According to Guardian, speaking after her meeting with Zarif, Mogherini said the EU had agreed to start work on a multi-level stream of work designed to keep the Iran deal alive.

After the meeting with Mogherini on Tuesday, Zarif said the negotiations aimed at protecting the multilateral nuclear deal were "on the right track".

Government spokesman Mohammad Baqer Nobakht said on Tuesday that that Iran will exit the nuclear deal if remaining in it proves more "harmful than beneficial". Under the nuclear agreement, Iran agreed to put limits on its nuclear activities in exchange for termination of nuclear-related sanctions.

The deal, officially known as the JCPOA, was signed in July 2015 between Iran, the European Union, Germany and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council including the United States. The deal went into effect in January 2016.

Iran says U.S. is primary enabler of Israel's crimes

1 → The Iranian Foreign Ministry called the massacre of Palestinians a "war crime" that should be brought to the International Court of Justice.

"Yesterday (Monday), the U.S. and the Israeli regime jointly celebrated the shameful violation of international law, including both international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as many UN resolutions, showing again that the United States is the primary enabler of 70 years of Israeli crimes, including the ongoing bloodbath in Gaza," read the statement by Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

Following is full text of the statement published by IRNA: When the world cries over the massacre of dozens and the injuring of thousands of innocent unarmed Palestinian civilian protesters, including women and children, and while



the Security Council has convened an emergency meeting to address this terrible crime, the United States Permanent

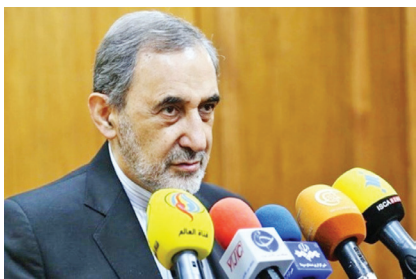
The Islamic Republic of Iran asks all nations to apply real pressure on the Israeli regime to immediately stop killing of the innocent protesters in Gaza, the world's largest prison.

Velayati: Renegotiating nuclear deal is an 'illusion'

POLITICS **TEHRAN** – Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy adviser to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, on Tuesday reiterated Tehran's position that renegotiating the 2015 nuclear deal is an "illusion".

Even after rejecting the nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the U.S. has called for a revision of the nuclear agreement.

"Iran will not accept adding anything to the JCPOA or reducing anything from it," Velayati told reporters on the sidelines of a



meeting with a number of Syrian university professors.

nuclear deal endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Addressing a session of his cabinet, Rouhani said it is "America and not Iran that has

violated international law, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, and its commitments under the deal."

On May 9, Trump withdraw the U.S. from

the nuclear deal and vowed to reinstate sanctions on Iran. However, Rouhani said, Iran will not give up under pressure, sanctions or threats.

North Korea says may reconsider summit with Trump, suspends talks with South

North Korea threw next month's summit between Kim Jong Un and U.S. President Donald Trump into doubt on Wednesday, threatening weeks of diplomatic progress by saying it may reconsider if Washington insists it unilaterally gives up its nuclear weapons.

The North's official KCNA news agency said earlier Pyongyang had called off high-level talks with Seoul, which had been due on Wednesday, in the first sign of trouble after months of warming ties.

Citing first vice minister of foreign affairs Kim Kye Gwan, KCNA later said the fate of the unprecedented U.S.-North Korea summit, as well as bilateral relations, "would be clear" if the United States spoke of a "Libya-style" denuclearization for the North.

"If the U.S. is trying to drive us into a corner to force our unilateral nuclear abandonment, we will no longer be interested in such dialogue and cannot but reconsider our proceeding to the DPRK-U.S. summit," Kim Kye Gwan said, referring to the North by its official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Trump and Kim are scheduled to meet in Singapore on June 12.

The vice minister specifically criticized U.S. national security adviser John Bolton, who has called for North Korea to quickly give up its nuclear arsenal in a deal that mirrors Libya's abandonment of its weapons of mass destruction.

North Korea clashed with Bolton when he worked under the Bush administration, calling him "human scum" and a "bloodsucker".

"We shed light on the quality of Bolton already in the past, and we do not hide our feeling of repugnance towards him," vice minister Kim said.

Tone from recent months when both sides embraced efforts to negotiate.

North Korea had announced it would publicly shut its nuclear test site next week.

■ 'Threats and blackmail'

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Sunday the United States would agree to lift sanctions on North Korea if it agreed to completely dismantle its nuclear weapons programme.

However, Kim Kye Gwan's statement appeared to reject that, saying North Korea would never give up its nuclear programme in exchange for trade with the United States.

"We have already stated our intention for denuclearization of the Korean penin-



sula and made clear on several occasions that precondition for denuclearization is to put an end to anti-DPRK hostile policy and nuclear threats and blackmail of the United States," Kim said.

North Korea has always defended its nuclear and missile programmes as a necessary deterrent against perceived aggression by the United States, which keeps 28,500 troops in South Korea, a legacy of the 1950-53 Korean War. North Korea has long said it is open to eventually giving up its nuclear arsenal if the United States withdraws its troops from South Korea and ends its "nuclear umbrella" security alliance with Seoul, though South Korean officials have said the North may be willing to compromise.

The United States has insisted on complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantling of North Korea's nuclear weapons and the facilities needed to build the weapons as soon as possible.

Asian stock markets dipped after North Korea called off the talks with the South. Cancellation of the Singapore summit could see tension flare again even as investors worry about China-U.S. trade friction.

"This will weigh on the Korean reconstruction beneficiaries that have had a strong run on peace and even reunification hopes recently," JPMorgan analysts wrote in a note.

South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-hwa spoke to Pompeo by telephone and discussed North Korea's postponement of the talks with the South, the foreign ministry

said in a statement.

Pompeo told Kang Washington would continue to make preparations for the U.S.-North Korea summit, bearing in mind the recent action by North Korea, it said.

Kim Kye Gwan's statement came only hours after North Korea denounced the U.S.-South Korean military exercises as a provocation and pulled out of the talks with the South.

Earlier KCNA denounced the "Max Thunder" air combat drills, which it said involved U.S. stealth fighters, B-52 bombers and "nuclear assets".

American stealth F-22 fighters were spotted in South Korea earlier in May, but a spokesman for the U.S. military command in South Korea said no B-52s were scheduled to take part in the drills.

Neither B-52s or B-1B bombers were present at last year's Max Thunder drills, according to a South Korean defence ministry official. The drills would go on as planned and were not aimed at any third party, the ministry said.

■ 'Miserable fate'

Cancellation of the first meeting between a serving U.S. president and a North Korean leader, would deal a major blow to what would be the biggest diplomatic achievement of Trump's presidency.

Trump has raised expectations for success even as many analysts have been skeptical about the chances of bridging the gap due to questions about North Korea's willingness to give up a nuclear arsenal that it says can

hit the United States.

Kim Kye Gwan derided Bolton's suggestion that discussions with North Korea should be similar to those that led to components of Libya's nuclear program being shipped to the United States in 2004.

"(The) World knows too well that our country is neither Libya nor Iraq which have met miserable fate," Kim said.

"It is absolutely absurd to dare compare the DPRK, a nuclear weapon state, to Libya which had been at the initial stage of nuclear development."

The outburst could be aimed at testing Trump's willingness to make concessions ahead of the summit, which is to be preceded by a visit to Washington next week by South Korean President Moon Jae-in.

A U.S. government expert on North Korea said Kim Jong Un may also be trying to gauge whether Trump is willing to walk away from the meeting.

Joshua Pollack, of the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in California, said Pyongyang appeared irritated by the U.S. administration's vow to maintain sanctions in spite of North Korean concessions.

"The North Koreans want a change in tone from the U.S., and at least so far, they're not hearing one," he said.

The doubt thrown over the summit comes a week after Trump abandoned the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and six world powers, under which Tehran curbed its nuclear programme in exchange for the lifting of most international sanctions.

China said on Wednesday all parties "should show goodwill and avoid mutual provocation" to create a conducive atmosphere for denuclearization on the Korean peninsula.

Chinese President Xi Jinping, in comments to a visiting North Korean delegation, said China supported North Korea's efforts to develop its economy, improve relations with the South and its dialogue with the United States, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

The North-South talks had been due to focus on plans to implement a declaration that emerged from an inter-Korea summit last month, including promises to formally end the Korean War and pursue "complete denuclearization".

South Korea described the North's decision as "regrettable".

(Source: Reuters)

Bahraini court jails 115 activists, revokes their citizenship



A Bahrain court has sentenced more than a hundred citizens to jail and revoked their nationality as the ruling Al Khalifah regime presses ahead with its heavy-handed clampdown on the majority community in the Persian Gulf kingdom.

Acting Head of Terror Crime Prosecution, Chief Prosecutor Hamad Shaheen, said on Tuesday that the Supreme Criminal Court found 115 Shia defendants guilty of forming of a "terrorist group" called Zulfiqar Battalions, possession of explosive devices and flammable materials, training in the use of munitions, attempted murder of police officers and communication with a foreign state. Fifty-three defendants received life imprisonment, three were sentenced to 15 years behind bars and fifteen others got seven years in prison. The rest of the defendants were sentenced to jail terms ranging from three to five years.

Thousands of anti-regime protesters have held demonstrations in Bahrain on an almost daily basis ever since a popular uprising began in the country in mid-February 2011.

They are demanding that the Al Khalifah dynasty relinquish power and allow a just system representing all Bahrainis to be established. Manama has gone to great lengths to clamp down on any sign of dissent. On March 14, 2011, troops from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were deployed to assist Bahrain in its crackdown.

Scores of people have lost their lives and hundreds of others sustained injuries or got arrested as a result of the Al Khalifah regime's crackdown.

On March 5, 2017, Bahrain's parliament approved the trial of civilians at military tribunals in a measure blasted by human rights campaigners as being tantamount to imposition of an undeclared martial law countrywide.

Bahraini monarch King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifah ratified the constitutional amendment on April 3 last year.

(Source: Press TV)

Taliban 'retreat' as U.S., Afghan forces hold western city



Afghan commandos and the US air force have driven the Taliban to the outskirts of Farah, officials said Wednesday, after a day-long battle to prevent the insurgents from seizing control of the western provincial capital.

The U.S. carried out more drone strikes overnight and the Afghan army is still clearing the city, Afghan and NATO officials said. Shops, offices and schools remain closed, with residents frightened to leave home after hours of heavy fighting. A NATO spokesman warned there could be more fighting Wednesday.

"The Taliban have retreated from the city and positioned their forces in the outskirts," provincial council member Dadullah Qani told AFP from Farah Wednesday.

Fighting continued late into the night, he said. "The city is still closed as people are in fear."

With internet and mobile networks patchy, casualty figures were difficult to verify. On Tuesday, the deference ministry said four soldiers and "dozens" of insurgents had been killed.

Reinforcements including special forces were rushed in from Herat and Kandahar as the fighting began late Monday.

Aref Rezaee, a spokesman for the Afghan army's 207th Corps, said that with their help the Taliban were forced from the city at around midnight, some 24 hours after residents told AFP the initial assault began.

"We have started a clearing operation. (NATO'S) RS (Resolute Support mission) forces are also deployed in Farah airport. They were involved in providing air support," he said.

A Resolute Support spokesman said the fighting had been "subdued" overnight but was likely to pick up again Wednesday.

"We conduct(ed) a number of additional drone strikes throughout the night and continue to enable the (Afghan military), who remain squarely in the lead," Lt Col Martin O'Donnell told AFP. "The 207th Corps commander is leading operations on the ground and the city remains in government control."

There had been reports that the militants were hiding in homes, meaning that the clearing operation was likely to be slow.

People remained fearful. "I want to open my shop today but they have planted land mines in some parts of the city," Abdul Samad said. Afghan forces, their numbers sapped by killings and desertions, have been struggling to hold back the resurgent militant group since the withdrawal of NATO combat forces at the end of 2014. The assault on Farah is the latest in a series of attempts by the Taliban to capture urban centers. Kunduz, Afghanistan's fifth largest city, fell briefly to the insurgents in 2015.

Farah province, a remote poppy-growing region that borders Iran, has been the scene of intense fighting in recent years, and there have long been fears that the city of Farah is vulnerable.

The Taliban, along with Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group have also stepped up their attacks in the capital Kabul, which the UN says has in recent years become one of the country's deadliest places for civilians.

(Source: AFP)

U.S. weapons handed over to al-Qaeda in Syria

Chlorine gas probably used in attack in Syria's Idlib: OPCW

The United States military equipment and ammunition, sent to Syria as part of a failed effort to arm "moderate" forces to battle the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist group, were instead handed over to an al-Qaeda group in the country, according to a report.

"I communicated with al-Qaeda's branch, al-Nusra, to protect and safely escort me and my soldiers for two hours from North Aleppo to West Aleppo," Maj. Anas Ibrahim Obaid, who said he brokered the deal, told Fox News from his home in the western Aleppo area.

"In exchange, I gave them five pickup trucks and ammunition," said the man, who is better known on the battlefield as Abu Zayd.

The U.S. issued those trucks and ammo to him in 2015 under the administration of former President Barack Obama, as part of a \$500 million program to "train and equip" a new "ideologically moderate" force to fight ISIL terrorists.

Zayd said the program, one of at least two designed to funnel arms to rebel groups in Syria, was rigged with inconsistencies and incompetency.

Zayd, who said he defected from the Syrian Army to the opposition in 2012, said that in order to be included in the program, he had to show proof of association with a group that had fought ISIL.

After receiving training in Turkey, the first group of 54 trained militants crossed back to Syria in July 2015 where they were almost instantly ambushed by al-Nusra (Jabhat al-Nusra/Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) terrorists, who kidnapped several of them and stole their U.S.-issued weapons.

Zayd said he was part of a second batch to be dispatched into Syria, but this time without proper firepower.

The U.S. trainers "wanted us to go into Syria without weapons because of the ambush, and said we could get the weapons inside instead. This was crazy," Zayd recalled. "We refused."

After the weapons issue was worked out, the militants began their journey to Syria on September 19, but were stopped by Turkish border guards, who found something else in their bags: Syrian government flags, rather than the flags of militants.

Zayd said militants charged back to their base in Turkey, demanding answers and the U.S. trainers took the blame for the "flag mistake." He added that the following day the militants continued back to Syria.

Zayd said his group of 72 shrank to just 25, adding, like other militants, he became quickly fed up with the program and decided to go back to his hometown in western Aleppo but that meant he would have to move through al-Nusra territory. That is when he called the al-Qaeda-affiliated leaders and made the arrangement to give them the five U.S.-issued trucks and scores of ammunition, in exchange for free passage and an armed escort home.

"The Americans were so angry when they found out, they cut my salary," Zayd said nonchalantly. "But this was our only option through their territory to get home without getting killed."

Syria has been gripped by foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. The Syrian government says the U.S., Israeli



regime and their regional allies are aiding terrorist groups that are wreaking havoc in the country.

A U.S.-led coalition has been conducting airstrikes against what are said to be ISIL targets inside Syria since September 2014 without any authorization from the Damascus government or a United Nations mandate.

■ Ninth round of Syria peace talks ends in Astana

The ninth round of crisis resolution talks between the Syrian government and armed opposition, mediated by Iran, Russia and Turkey, has come to an end in Astana, building a positive outlook for momentous follow-up negotiations.

At the end of the two-day talks in the Kazakh capital, the participants issued a joint statement, emphasizing the need to respect "the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity" of the crisis-torn country.

The trio has been mediating the negotiations in the Kazakh capital since January 2017, a month after they joined efforts and brought about an all-Syria ceasefire. The three states act as the guarantors of the truce.

The Astana peace process has helped significantly reduce the violence in Syria through the formation of four de-escalation zones in the country, setting the stage for Syria's warring sides to focus on negotiations on the political future of their homeland.

The final statement underlined the "key role" the four safe zones are playing in preserving the ceasefire regime, saying their demarcations, which were outlined in Astana last May, need to be respected.

It reminded that the zones were "temporary," and that their establishment was not to be misused towards undermining Syria's territorial integrity.

They also reaffirmed their resolve to keep fighting the Takfiri terrorist groups operating in Syria, especially ISIL and al-Qaeda-affiliated militants.

■ Chlorine gas

Meanwhile, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) says poisonous chlorine gas was "likely used as a chemical weapon" in an attack earlier this year in Syria's northwestern Idlib Province, the major stronghold of Takfiri militants active in the country.

In a statement released on Wednesday, the OPCW said its fact-finding mission had determined that "chlorine was released from cylinders by mechanical impact in the al-Talil neighborhood of Saraqib" city on February 4, 2018.

The Hague-based global arms watchdog also confirmed that environmental samples had "demonstrated the unusual presence of chlorine in the local environment."

The OPCW, however, did not say which side to the Syria conflict had used the banned munitions in Saraqib.

At least eleven people were treated for breathing difficulties in the Syrian city on February 4, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) said at the time.

The U.S. State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert blamed the incident on the Damascus government.

Syria's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva Hussam Edin Aala rejected the accusation, saying, "Syria cannot possibly be using chemical weapons because it very simply has none in its possession."

A separate OPCW fact-finding team is currently awaiting the results of a mission to the Damascus suburb town of Douma.

An alleged gas attack in Douma on April 7 was used as a pretext by the U.S., Britain and France to launch a coordinated missile attack against sites and research facilities near Damascus and Homs with the purported goal of paralyzing the Syrian government's capability to produce chemicals.

Syria and Russia accused volunteer rescue workers of staging the Douma attack at the behest of the U.S. and its allies.

(Source: agencies)

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	94940.2
IFX	1097.79

Sources: tse.ir, Ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	41978 rials
EUR	49671 rials
GBP	56676 rials
AED	11431 rials

Source: mehrnews.com

COMMODITIES

WTI	70.96/b
Brent	77.81/b
OPEC Basket	74.20/b
Gold	\$1,294.9 /oz
Silver	\$16.32/oz
Platinum	\$901.70/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

NEWS IN BRIEF



Over \$2.8b of loans to be paid for employment in rural areas

ECONOMY DESK **TEHRAN** — Some 120 trillion rials (about \$2.85 billion) of loans will be paid to the villagers in the current Iranian calendar year (March 2018- March 2019) in a bid to materialize stable employment in the rural areas, vice president for rural development and deprived areas announced. Abolfazl Razavi said the loans will be secured from National Development Fund (NDF) and the banks, IRNA reported. The Statistical Center of Iran has announced that 790,561 jobs have been created in the country during the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

The center reported that the number of employed people reached 23,378,613 people in the past year. The statistical center also put the country's unemployment rate at 12.1 percent, indicating 0.3 percent fall year on year. Meanwhile, according to Razavi, some 210,000 jobs were created in the rural areas in the past year. The official said the figure is tried to reach 300,000 in the current year. Iran's Sixth Five-Year National Development Plan (2016-2021) has envisaged creation of 384,000 jobs in rural areas per year, Razavi further announced.



Beijing hosts 1st meeting of Iranian, Chinese Traders Council

ECONOMY DESK **TEHRAN** — The first meeting of Iranian and Chinese Traders Council was held in Beijing with participation of the representatives of 170 Iranian and Chinese companies, the website of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) reported on Tuesday. Addressing the meeting, Ali-Asghar Khaji, Iran's ambassador to China, expounded upon his country's potentials and capabilities in agriculture, mining, industry, high tech, and foreign trade.

U.S. 'looking for a deal' with China on trade: White House adviser

The United States is seeking a trade deal with China, White House economic adviser Larry Kudlow said on Tuesday as talks between the world's two economic powerhouses resume in Washington this week.

Kudlow, speaking in a live interview with Politico news outlet, said he backed U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's efforts to reach an agreement with Beijing and that both countries must take action.

"He is looking for a deal, I support him on that, wholeheartedly, assuming it's a good deal. He has my support," Kudlow said, adding that no agreement had been reached yet.

"Both sides should try to lower tariffs as much as possible ... and to take down non-tariff barriers wherever they are," he told Politico. "Free and open trade, I think that's the solution. I think that's where we are as a group."

Trump has long-promised to crack down on China and raised close to resolving trade frictions.

Very far apart

Washington and Beijing have proposed tens of billions of dollars in tit-for-tat tariffs, fanning worries of a full-blown trade war that could disrupt supply chains and dent business investment plans, weighing on the global economy.

Branstad, speaking at a conference in Tokyo, said the Chinese appeared "taken back" by the significance of the list.

"The Chinese have said 'we want to see the specifics.' We gave them all the specifics in terms of trade issues. So they can't say they don't know what we're asking for," he said.

Branstad said China has not met pledges to open up its insurance and financial services area, as well as reduce auto tariffs, and that Trump would like to see a "dramatic increase" in food exports to China.

"We're still very far apart," he said.

Branstad said the United States could rescind the "Section 301" tariffs if China opened its agriculture and auto markets. Increasing U.S. exports of liquefied natural gas could also be an area where the two countries could agree, he said.

(Source: Reuters)

Petchem exports at over \$1.1b in a month

ENERGY DESK **TEHRAN** — Iran exported over 1.99 million tons of petrochemical products worth more than \$1.167 billion in the first month of current Iranian calendar year (March 21-April 20), Shana reported citing the data released by National Petrochemical Company (NPC).

The country produced over 4.7 million tons of petrochemicals during the first month, NPC data showed.

Production units in Assalouyeh and Mahshahr petrochemical zones, both in southwest of Iran, accounted for 2.038 million tons and

1.733 million tons of the one-month output, respectively, and 21 petrochemical units in other parts of the country accounted for 935,000 tons of the figure.

Iran exported over 22.41 million tons of petrochemical products worth more than \$12 billion in the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

Exports from Assalouyeh and Mahshahr petrochemical zones stood at 11.423 million tons worth \$5.977 billion and 6 million tons worth \$3.41 billion, respectively, during the past year.

Chinese firms hope to maintain Iran oil purchases

ENERGY DESK **TEHRAN** — Chinese firms hope to maintain purchases of oil from Iran, a source with direct knowledge of the discussion between the two sides told Reuters.

The sources told Reuters Saeed Khoshrou, director of international affairs at the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), met Chinese buyers this week to ask them to maintain imports after U.S. sanctions kick in.

Khoshrou held separate meetings in Beijing on Monday with top executives at Chinese oil giant Sinopec's trading unit and state oil trader Zhuhai Zhenrong Corp to discuss oil supplies and seek assurances from the Chinese buyers.

Khoshrou was accompanying Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in the first stop of a tour of world powers before traveling on to Europe.

"During the meeting, Mr. Khoshrou conveyed Mr. Zarif's message that Iran hopes China will maintain the levels of



imports," said one person briefed on the meetings. A second person with direct knowledge of the discus-

Oil dips on signs of ample supply despite OPEC cuts, Iran sanctions

Oil prices fell on Wednesday, weighed down by ample supplies despite ongoing output cuts by producer cartel OPEC and looming U.S. sanctions against major crude exporter Iran.

Brent crude futures, the international benchmark for oil prices, were at \$78.07 per barrel at 0024 GMT, down 36 cents, or 0.5 percent, from their last close.

U.S. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures were at \$71.02 a barrel, down 28 cents, or 0.4 percent, from their last settlement.

Despite the dips, both financial oil benchmarks remained close to their November 2014 highs of \$79.47 and \$71.92 a barrel respectively, reached the previous day.

But there are signs in physical crude markets that may give pause to financial investors.

Spot crude oil cargo prices are at their steepest discounts to futures prices in years as sellers are struggling to find buyers for West African, Russian and Kazakh cargoes, while pipeline bottlenecks trap supply in west Texas and Canada.

The bottleneck in North America likely contributed to a 4.9 million barrel rise in U.S. crude oil inventories, to 435.6 million barrels, that the American Petroleum Institute reported on Tuesday.

"The API inventory data in the U.S. fits with ... a topping pattern -- or at least a decent pause -- for oil prices at the moment," said Greg McKenna, chief market strategist at futures brokerage AxiTrader.

Despite Wednesday's dips and some



indicators implying the financial oil has overshot physical oil, overall crude market conditions have tightened since 2017 when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), started to withhold supplies to push up oil prices.

With renewed U.S. sanctions looming against OPEC-member Iran and oil demand strong, analysts said crude markets will likely remain relatively tight for much of the year.

Stronger oil prices are also spilling into other markets.

"A rising oil price brings upside price risk to all commodities," Morgan Stanley said in a note to clients this week.

The U.S. bank said rising diesel prices contributed 10-20 percent to cash costs in the metals and dry-bulk sectors, while the price of oil also significantly contributed to power generation.

"Finally, transport costs (5-20 percent of cash costs) will also rise in response, with the heaviest impact on bulk commodity producers," Morgan Stanley said.

(Source: Reuters)

Euro zone braces for month of truth from data in prelude to ECB



of growth," said Kristina Hooper, Invesco chief global market strategist. But they'll still have to acknowledge that there's "a heck of a lot of uncertainty out there which suggests caution."

ECB President Mario Draghi will get another chance to offer his view of the economy when he speaks in Frankfurt on Wednesday. Late last month, he said that growth is "solid and broad-based," while adding some indicators may suggest a "more durable softening in demand."

"The euro area slowed in 1Q but there are good reasons to think it will bounce back: Spain and Italy held up well -- it was the big economies with bad weather that suffered. And the labor markets had a good 1Q in both Germany and France -- there's no sign of the job shedding you might see if the slowdown were expected to last.

The data flow will soon sweeten and the clouds hanging over Mario Draghi and his colleagues will lift.



Iran's export of petrochemical products is anticipated to reach \$14 billion in the current Iranian calendar year, NPC Managing Director Seyed Reza Norouz-Zadeh said in early April.

The official also announced that through completing some petrochemical projects in this year, petrochemical production is expected to

hit 47 million tons, of which some 27 million tons will be exported.

NPC managing director further said that 60 petrochemical projects with the nominal capacity of 65.4 million tons are currently underway throughout the country with \$42.8 billion of investment.

sion, said Chinese firms "shared the same hope to maintain purchases", adding companies are still assessing the possible impact of the new sanctions.

The people familiar with the matter declined to be identified because they are not authorized to speak to media.

China, the world's top crude oil buyer, imported around 655,000 barrels a day on average from Iran in the first quarter of this year, according to official Chinese customs data - equivalent to more than a quarter of Iran's total exports.

Chinese executives did not make firm commitments but said as state oil companies they will fall in line with Beijing's wishes, the person said. The visit was the NIOC marketing chief's second to Beijing this year - he also met with Chinese customers about a month ago.

Sinopec and Zhuhai Zhenrong declined to comment. NIOC did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Gold prices edge up on short-covering

Gold prices recovered slightly on Wednesday on short-covering after sliding to the lowest level this year in the previous session on surging U.S. bond yields and a stronger dollar.

Spot gold rose 0.3 percent to \$1,293.89 per ounce at 0330 GMT, after shedding 1.7 percent and marking the lowest this year at \$1,288.31 in the previous session.

This was also the lowest price level for the yellow metal since Dec. 28.

U.S. gold futures for June delivery were up 0.2 percent at \$1,293.30 per ounce.

"Rising U.S. bond yields and a stronger dollar were factors behind gold's decline below the \$1,300 level. The slight pick up suggests that there might have been some opportunistic buying on the part of investors," said John Sharma, an economist with National Australia Bank.

A stronger dollar makes greenback-denominated gold more expensive for holders of other currencies, while rising U.S. yields tend to weigh on bullion's non-yielding appeal.

The dollar on Wednesday hovered near a five-month high against a group of major currencies, boosted by a surge in the benchmark 10-year Treasury yield after strong U.S. retail data on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Asian shares were under pressure after North Korea cancelled high-level talks with Seoul, denouncing military exercises between South Korea and the United States and throwing into question next month's unprecedented summit between Kim Jong Un and U.S.



President Donald Trump.

While global political tensions continued to provide safe-haven support to the metal, investors said the main price drivers would likely remain a stronger dollar and rising U.S. interest rates.

"There are lot of geopolitical risks but people are just used to it. Therefore it has not become a big driver for gold," said Helen Lau, analyst at Argonaut Securities.

Higher interest rates in the United States amid a rising dollar will continue to add downward pressure on gold, Lau said.

Spot gold may bounce to a resistance at \$1,302 per ounce, before falling again, Reuters technical analyst Wang Tao said.

In other precious metals, silver was up 0.4 percent at \$16.29 per ounce after falling about 1.6 percent on Tuesday in its biggest one-day percentage decline since April 23. Platinum rose 0.3 percent to \$895.74 an ounce, while palladium eased 0.1 percent to \$981.50 per ounce after recording the biggest single-day percentage loss in two weeks at 1.3 percent in the previous session.

(Source: Reuters)

Asset purchases are still likely to end this year, despite the bad start."

The latest questions over the outlook for the economy flared up on Tuesday, as numbers showed that growth in Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal all slowed more than forecast in the three months through March, while the euro-area expansion slipped to 0.4 percent from 0.7 percent.

"All in all, the economic growth in the euro zone and Germany is somewhat weaker than originally expected," German lender Commerzbank said in its interim earnings report. "The firm euro, slightly less lively global demand, rising interest rates and not least the risk of a trade war between the U.S. and China that emerged toward the end of the first quarter all had an impact."

Continental AG, the German maker of car parts, is among the companies to highlight the euro's level, saying said last week that its advance is taking a toll on profit. Volkswagen AG has also flagged the exchange rate as a risk to earnings.

But the IMF used a report on Europe to say the region is in a period of strong growth. It also noted medium-term risks that could disrupt global as well as euro-area expansion, including rising trade protectionism, a correction in overvalued markets and a deeper slowdown in China.

For Berenberg Chief Economist Holger Schmieding, Germany -- long the region's growth engine -- has merely had a "dent." While year-on-year rates have come off since reaching almost 3 percent last summer, that was an "extraordinary" pace.

"In terms of underlying strength, it has not peaked," he said in a Bloomberg Television interview. "We are seeing a bit of a soft patch."

(Source: Bloomberg)



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Turkey recalls envoys from U.S., Israel over Gaza violence

By Amberin Zaman

Turkey has recalled its ambassadors to the United States and Israel and asked the Israeli ambassador in Ankara to leave “for a while” in formal protest of Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip killed by Israeli forces while demonstrating against the U.S. administration’s decision to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was in the United Kingdom on an official visit, termed the Gaza killings “genocide” and called Israel a “terror state.” Ankara has declared three days of official mourning and offered to fly in wounded Palestinians for treatment. Erdogan is widely hailed in the Muslim world as one of the most vocal champions of the Palestinians. Arab heavyweights Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan have been visibly more restrained not least because of their aversion to the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Hamas, which governs Gaza. Erdogan called U.S. President Donald Trump’s decision to move the embassy to Jerusalem a “mistake” and “violation of international law.”

Washington, he argued, has thus forfeited its role as an honest broker in the Middle East peace process. Turkish government spokesman Bekir Bozdag said, “The blood of innocent Palestinians is on the hands of the United States.”

Tensions between Turkey and Israel continued to escalate as Israel told Turkey’s de facto ambassador in Jerusalem, Gurcan Turkoglu, to go home. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took to Twitter to air his anger. He called Erdogan one of Hamas’ “biggest supporters” and charged that there was “no doubt” the Turkish leader “well understands terrorism and slaughter.” He added, “I suggest he not preach morality to us.”

Erdogan riposted, “Netanyahu is the PM of an apartheid state that has occupied a defenseless people’s lands for 60+ years in violation of UN resolutions. He has the blood of Palestinians on his hands and can’t cover up crimes by attacking Turkey. Want a lesson in humanity? Read the 10 commandments.”

Erdogan’s stance will likely deepen the rift with Washington amid calls from the Hill to slap sanctions on Turkey over what several senators have termed the “unlawful” detention and “hostage-taking” of U.S. citizens and Turkish nationals working at U.S. diplomatic missions and its plans to purchase Russian S-400 missiles. But it will raise Erdogan’s stock on the Arab street and more critically back at home in the run-up to the June 24 presidential and parliamentary elections. Across Turkey, thousands of people chanting anti-Israeli slogans have taken to the streets to protest the Gaza deaths.

Soner Cagaptay, who runs the Turkish program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, believes that Erdogan’s rhetoric will do little to lighten the plight of Gazans. “Erdogan will nevertheless use the Gaza issue to the fullest extent in Turkish politics, starting with a massive protest in Istanbul on Friday, to rally his conservative base around him,” Cagaptay told Al-Monitor. “After 16 years of Erdogan rule, at least some of the conservatives in Turkey are showing signs of [ruling Justice and Development Party] AKP fatigue. Foreign policy matters with little domestic cost — such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and tensions with Greece — could help Erdogan bring his tired base back to his fold.”

But some may well question his sincerity. Today, AKP lawmakers voted down an opposition motion to scrap a raft of agreements with Israel, Republican People’s Party (CHP) parliamentarian Ali Seker revealed in a tweet. Critics point out that even after Turkish-Israeli relations hit a nadir over the Mavi Marmara flotilla incident in 2010 leading to the deaths of nine Turkish citizens at the hands of Israeli commandos, Turkish-Israeli trade continued to expand with Turkey exporting cars, iron, steel, jewelry and plastics to Israel, which sold fuel and oil in return. The volume of trade hit \$4.9 billion last year. In 2016, Erdogan suggested he had been opposed to the Mavi Marmara flotilla’s ill-fated mission to carry aid to Gaza, saying his permission had not been sought.

Turkey’s opposition leaders are in any case determined not to let Erdogan monopolize the Gaza tragedy. Sporting a Palestinian-style scarf, main opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu echoed many of Erdogan’s remarks, telling CHP members in the parliament that the United States had planted “a hand grenade in Jerusalem, the heart of the Middle East.” The Turkish people “will stand by the Palestinian brothers for eternity,” he vowed. Kilicdaroglu also lashed out at Arab governments, saying they had failed to unite in defense of the Palestinians. “There exists no greater shame in history,” he fumed.

In a rare sign of unity, the AKP, the CHP and far-right nationalists issued a joint declaration condemning Israel and the United States. Meanwhile, Selahattin Demirtas, the imprisoned presidential candidate for the largest pro-Kurdish bloc, the Peoples’ Democratic Party, called for a common stand among all the candidates against what he termed in a tweet the Israeli government’s “limitless barbarity.”

(Source: Al Monitor)

How will Europe act towards Palestine now?



Europe must determine its position on the policy of collective strangulation imposed, with international complicity, on two million Palestinians in a large prison isolated from the world; a prison called the Gaza Strip.

As they played a part in creating the Nakba. The Palestinian people paid a heavy price for the European policies during the first half of the 20th century, which led to their expulsion from their land and homes and turning most of them into refugees without a country.

As for the state built on the remains of Palestine, it had the European colonial experiences to rely on. It was distinguished by its denial of the Palestinian people’s existence and the denial of their basic rights, including their right to self-determination, the right for refugees to return to their country and homes, and the right to establish an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

According to the prevalent Israeli logic, the Palestinians should fade away or live under occupation forever, without protesting, screaming, or resisting. In order for the occupation to succeed in the test of existence, it must continue to oppress this nation by all means possible, as well as design advanced systems of land looting, resource theft, complete control, and Apartheid.

It must also exercise intimidation, imprisonment, exile, and murder. All of these

systematic practices did not stop some from complimenting this rogue government, including international charters, which described it as a shining democracy belonging to the civilized world. This propaganda is perfect for covering up the facts, concealing continuous war crimes and brutal killing of the Palestinian people.

However, when the Israeli leadership decided to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Nakba – the ethnic cleansing of Palestine – with the help of its ally, the Trump administration, it lost the ecstasy of the moment and failed to conceal reality.

The Palestinians are still at the heart of the issue, driving events, revealing undesirable facts and carrying the keys to their confiscated homes. The world saw the wound of the Palestinian Nakba, which has not healed and continues to bleed.

Even the American embassy celebration would not have succeeded if it weren’t for the hindrance of the Palestinians’ movement in Jerusalem and with the occupation forces’ violent chases in the city’s streets and camps, filled with the fumes and smoke of gas bombs.

The ceremony of smiles at the American

embassy ended and the Israeli spokespeople demanded that the Palestinian people recognize the status quo, i.e. surrender to the occupation. It seems that this unfunny joke is kind of like asking the world to recognize poverty, ignorance, and disease as a status quo that should not be contained or confronted. However, the status quo that the world is seeing today is the Palestinian people’s determination to gain back their rights, no matter how long it takes or what the sacrifices are.

Palestinian generations march in popular rallies, stripped of any weapons, in order to reach their lands and homes, located behind the big prison called the Gaza Strip. Did David Ben-Gurion imagine this when he supervised the ethnic cleansing program in Palestine? Did he imagine that the refugee population would continue to create events, raise their voices, and demand their land and homes even 70 years later?

Successive Israeli governments and their allies on both sides of the Atlantic mistakenly bet on the factor of time, assuming that it will erode the Palestinian cause, forsake the identity of its people, and that its generations would give up on demanding their rights. The 70th anniversary of the Nakba has shown that time has the opposite effect and that all of the tricks and plans used with this nation to exhaust them have failed. The result is the emergence of a new Palestinian generation unafraid of live ammunition and is generous with their sacrifices, despite the Israeli soldiers’ eager fingers on the trigger.

Europe must understand the messages that these extraordinary developments carry. It is the end of a phase filled with false promises and empty slogans that has lasted a quarter of a century. Europe must determine its position on the policy of collective strangulation imposed, with international complicity, on two million Palestinians in a large prison isolated from the world; a prison called the Gaza Strip.

These people were subjected to an immoral siege for political objectives, perhaps in the hope of causing an internal mass explosion within Gaza itself. However, this policy of collective punishment eventually led to a mass popular explosion in the face of occupation, not for loaves of bread or medication, but for rights and justice. Finally, is there a recommendation that Europe proposes to the Palestinian people other than to wait for another quarter of a century of worthless promises and slogans?

(Source: Middle East Eye)

North Korea is testing Trump

By Frida Ghitis

It should come as no surprise that North Korea has apparently just slammed the breaks on the peace train, which until a few hours ago seemed to be chugging happily along, on its way to a historic meeting between President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un next month in Singapore.

The meeting is not canceled, but the North Koreans shocked Washington and Seoul when they announced at the last moment that talks with South Korea, scheduled for Wednesday, were “indefinitely” postponed because of long-planned military exercises between the United States and South Korea.

The announcement from the North’s official news agency came with a message for Trump -- a threat, really -- that the United States, should “give serious thought” to the possible impact of the military exercises on the Kim-Trump summit, warning, “We will be closely watching the attitude of the United States and South Korean authorities.”

The jolting announcement is a test for Trump, who, despite his claim to great dealmaking prowess, has already committed one of the most basic mistakes of any negotiator. Trump tries to act nonchalant, but it’s no secret that a deal with North Korea would amount to a huge political win for an embattled President, who is already fantasizing about winning a Nobel Peace Prize. Just last week, when asked if he deserves the Nobel, he beamed, “Everyone thinks so.”

By Judson Phillips

When Democrats rule D.C., you have to hand it to them. They know how to take care of their fellow Democrats. When Republicans rule D.C., they take care of the Democrats, too.

Amazon is a left-wing company. Jeff Bezos, the CEO of Amazon, is a noted lefty. Amazon recently kicked out the conservative group Alliance Defending Freedom from its AmazonSmile charitable program. The program allows customers to contribute a small portion of their purchase price to a nonprofit. Now Amazon stands to benefit from a multibillion-dollar contract to put much of the Pentagon’s data on the cloud of a single contractor.

What could possibly go wrong? Mr. Bezos bought The Washington Post and has turned that old rag into the leading voice of the “Resistance.” Hysterically



Kim is trying to find out just how much Trump is willing to do to prevent the collapse of the summit.

The annual exercises are aimed at maintaining military coordination between the United States and its ally, to remain ready in case of a North Korean attack. After all, North Korea has attacked in the past.

Pyeongyang knew Max Thunder was coming. In fact, last March, shortly after visiting Pyongyang, the South

Korean national security adviser said in a statement that “[Kim] understands that the routine joint military exercises between the Republic of Korea and the United States must continue. And he expressed his eagerness to meet President Trump as soon as possible.” Kim is trying to find out just how much Trump is willing to do to prevent the collapse of the summit.

Not long after the surprise announcement, the Pentagon appeared to suggest it will not budge. We’ll see how Trump responds. Giving in to Kim on the exercises would constitute another concession in what are already lopsided pre-summit negotiations. North Korea has always wanted the military exercises to end. That should be an item for negotiation, not a concession ahead of the talks.

Already, Trump, whose administration has lost its top nuclear and North Korean experts, has given Kim much of what he wanted. For decades North Korea wanted a top-level meeting with U.S. officials. Trump has not only granted it in exchange for not very much but has also been praising Kim, calling him “very honorable” and “really excellent.”

So far, Kim’s main concession is a promise to dismantle a nuclear testing site, but many experts say the site is damaged from previous explosions and has already served its purpose, helping complete North Korea’s nuclear arsenal.

Trump has mocked his predecessors for making concessions that ultimately produced no results. He has vowed that he will accept nothing but a North Korea without nuclear weapons. Kim is testing him, and the world is watching.

(Source: CNN)

Protecting the Pentagon’s cloud data

crying “Democracy dies in darkness,” The Post is willing to regurgitate any anti-Trump talking point.

The Pentagon project has been estimated to be worth \$10 billion. Even in Washington terms, that is a significant chunk of change.

■ Pentagon computing services

Perhaps the Pentagon should simply buy an Alexa and ask it a simple question. Who besides Amazon could provide the Pentagon with cloud computing services? The question is not a hard one. IBM would love to do that.

Oracle would love to do that. Microsoft would love to do that. Alphabet, Google’s parent company, would also like in on that action. There are four competitors right there for a bid.

Perhaps the Pentagon should buy a Google Assistant and ask for help with competition.

Why would the Trump administration

reward Mr. Bezos and Amazon? Hillary Clinton would have done that but Hillary Clinton did not win the election. And as Barack Obama reminded Republicans in 2009, “Elections have consequences.”

President Trump has ripped Amazon for its practices, which he claims are costing taxpayers money. He referred to Amazon’s use of the post office as a “scam.”

Mr. Trump has accused Amazon of not paying the actual costs for shipping through the post office. If Amazon is defrauding the U.S. Postal Service, why is there even any consideration to allow it to have a monopoly on Pentagon cloud storage?

■ The Trump administration

Perhaps the Trump administration is thinking that with Amazon, whose web services are considered very good by those in the computing industry, they are getting the best protection for the sensitive data of the Pentagon.

According to The Wall St. Journal, Amazon is selling the very same software and cloud computing technology to the Chinese government. China is legendary for reverse engineering or simply stealing Western technology. What will it do since it has the same technology that the Pentagon wants to use.

No longer do Americans have to merely worry about Alexa cackling like Hillary Clinton, we might have to worry the Chinese now have the military codes to start a new war.

There are two things liberals never care about: National security and competition.

Didn’t Donald Trump write “The Art of the Deal?” Did Donald Trump ever take a no-bid, no competition contract on one of his buildings?

Why should the government take a no-bid, no-competition contract on something this big, and more importantly, something this crucial to our national defense?

(Source: The Washington Times)

Unveiling story of a radical senator and a controversial open letter

By Bahman Naghadeh

TEHRAN — Some 47 Republican U.S. senators wrote a controversial letter to Iranian leaders on March 9, 2015 to halt the Iran nuclear agreement. The letter specifically reads that after Barak Obama's presidential term, the deal will no longer be valid.

Senator Tom Cotton of Arkansas played a major role in drafting the letter which was signed by the Republican leader senator and Marco Rubio, a frontrunner candidate for the Republican nomination for President of the United States in 2016, Ted Cruz and Rand Paul.

Part if the letter states: Observing the nuclear negotiation, we feel that you haven't understood the legal structure of government. Any agreement without legislative approval could be reversed by the next president "with the stroke of a pen", and the next U.S. legislative body can change the provision of the agreement at any given time.

Even though three years have passed since the open letter was sent, the essence of the changes is still kept as a mystery by Republicans and senators involved. Although it has been claimed that Cotton was the mastermind behind the letter, few have talked about behind the scenes. But really, what is the story behind the letter, and what was Cotton's motivation to write such a letter.

The truth is we must search the answers among names like Robert O'Donnell, one of Tom Cotton's special advisers, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) lobbyist Jared Kushner, U.S. President Donald Trump's son-in-law, and Donald Trump himself. O'Donnell, a powerful media adviser in the Republican Party, played an important role in Cotton's victory in Arkansas and his seat in the Senate. O'Donnell's advice to Cotton comes directly from AIPAC, not to mention that Cotton's wife Anna Peckham who is in



indirect communication with the Israeli Intelligence Service Mossad and AIPAC.

In January 2015, when the Iran nuclear showed a possibility to go through, AIPAC decided to use the Republican senators as a tool to threaten Iran's foreign ministry officials.

The threat acted the same as the letter sent by the AIPAC lobby group by Cotton. O'Donnell was essential responsible for providing and regulating this letter (with influential literature) behind the scenes.

Shortly after the release of the letter, Cotton entered into negotiations with two Republican nominees for the 2016 presidential election, Ted Cruz and Donald Trump, and

their campaign team, for propaganda and their legal rights.

The negotiation was also led by O'Donnell, and above that, by the AIPAC lobby management.

Cotton, in a meeting with Kushner and a good number of Trump's campaign team, instructed the AIPAC lobby's direct order about the need for the cancellation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA, by Trump.

Finally, in the same presidential campaign, influenced by Kushner and the young senator of the state of Arkansas, Trump decided to talk about the abolition of the nuclear deal on the first day of taking office at the White House in order to gain full support from the AIPAC lobby.

EU too weak to challenge U.S. hegemony: Prof. Entessar

1 → ■ The EU officials have talked about independent EU over the recent years. Considering the existing facts and EU potentialities, how feasible is it? What are the obstacles to this end?

A: I don't anticipate the EU's emergence as an independent political player in the near future. As I mentioned in my answer to the

previous question, the EU is a divided and weak political entity, and it is become even more divided in recent years. The rise of nationalism, especially in its right-wing and xenophobic manifestation, in many European countries in recent years will make it even more difficult for the EU to develop into a cohesive global force.

■ What measures can EU take to gain more independence? Can more cooperation with Russia balance the EU relation with the U.S.?

A: For reasons I mentioned in my previous answers, it is very difficult for the EU to take practical measures that would allow it to become a truly independent

global political player. Of course, more cooperation with Russia or China will be useful, but such cooperation will only be marginally helpful. Russia's economic weakness is a major obstacle, and China has its own economic priorities that require balancing its relations among several competing global forces.

IHRC condemns plans to force Sheikh Zakzaky to stand trial

IHRC condemns in the strongest possible terms preparations to forcibly remove the illegally detained leader of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria to an unknown location in readiness for him to be brought to trial on the trumped up charges recently levelled against him.

Since yesterday heavily armed soldiers have surrounded the premises where Sheikh Ibrahim el-Zakzaky is being held by the Nigerian secret services in what supporters believe is an attempt to transfer him to Kaduna prison in readiness for a scheduled court hearing tomorrow 15 May.

The sheikh has said he will not willingly attend the court which is due to hear charges levelled last month, the most serious of which is punishable by death. The authorities allege that the sheikh and supporters of his group abetted the commission of culpable homicide when they allegedly

blocked roads in the city of Zaria in December 2015.

The indictments follow the illegal detention of the sheikh and his wife for over two years without charge. They are all the more ridiculous for the fact that a higher court, the federal court, has previously ruled the pair's detention to be unlawful and unconstitutional and ordered the government to release them by January 16, 2017 and pay compensation.

The charges seemed to be designed to deflect government responsibility for a planned and systematic attack by soldiers on the Islamic Movement that left at least 1000 civilians dead in December 2015 which is now the subject of a preliminary investigation by the International Criminal Court.

The attempt to forcibly remove Sheikh Zakzaky should also be seen in the context of his worsening health. Nigerian authorities are not unaware of the precarious condition

of the sheikh, who has lost sight in one eye and the use of one arm in the 2015 massacre and more recently suffered a stroke. Any use of physical violence against the sheikh could easily be life-threatening.

Since the start of the year demonstrations involving tens of thousands of the sheikh's supporters have been staged daily in the capital Abuja as well as other towns and cities across northern Nigeria. Despite their totally peaceful nature the protests have been subject to sabotage and violent, often fatal, attacks by security forces intent on bringing the Islamic Movement into disrepute.

Since 8 January 2018 six protestors have been killed by security forces. Hundreds more have been arrested and sustained injuries from beatings during their detention. The majority of those released were freed without charge.

Tose'e Melli Mining & Industrial Co. Launches Largest Stone Crushing Unit

The largest mining stone crushing unit of the country will be inaugurated in Tose'e Melli Industrial and Production Unit in Sangan in the presence of minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mohammad Shariatmadari.

Mohammad Keshani CEO of Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) announced the above statement and said, "12-million ton stone crushing unit of the unit has been constructed by the domestic experts and engineers, costing more than 2,000 billion rials."

This giant project was put into operation after 26 incessant and nonstop efforts of industrious engineers of the country.

This type of stone crushing unit is of two stage type in a way that length of its conveyor belt reaches to more than 7.5 kilometers from mine to the factory which was unprecedented and unique of its kind in the country and West Asian region. He went on to say that new and unique stone crushing unit of the company has been constructed using the world most modern technology and equipment, adding, "This equipped stone crushing unit provided necessary feedstock for the production of six million tons of concentrate."

CEO of the company said that this equipped stone crushing unit will be commissioned in the very near future in the pres-

ence of CEO of IMIDRO (Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization) Mehdi Karbasian in Sangan, South Khorasan Province.

This equipped stone crushing unit has the highest capacity of grading and condensing iron ore in the country, he maintained.

It is worth mentioning that Khuzestan Steel Company is the second largest steel production company in the country which has been equipped with two pelletizing units with the annual production capacity of 6 million tons of conglomerates. The company is located in Southeast Ahvaz, Khuzestan Province.



KSC takes giant stride in steel export to international markets

In an unprecedented move, Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) took giant stride in the field of export of quality steel products to the target markets.

The company has currently benefited from the most experienced, competent and skilled manpower with worldly reputation and prestige in the international arena. This industrial and production unit has got the lion's share of steel export in the country in a way that Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) is considered as the largest steel producing and exporting unit in the country especially in recent years.

Bahman Tajalizadeh Deputy CEO of Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) for Sales and Marketing Affairs announced the above statement in the course of 3rd International Steel Price Conference in Tehran and added, "roaming various corridors at the market, growing trend of export of steel ingot and achieving the unprecedented records of foreign sales of steel for the first time have been cited as the main reasons behind success of this industrial and production unit in the international market."

With due observance to the said issue, largest export volume of the company hit a record high with the accurate prediction in the global markets, he maintained.

For the first time in the country, the Sales and Marketing Department of the company used specific methods for the prediction of terms and conditions at the global market.

He reiterated that Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) used specific methods of combined models at the market for the first time in the country, adding, "accordingly, the company managed to obtain noticeable results using the trend of changes of oil and copper price as well as other parameters."

It should be noted that 3rd International Steel Price Conference was held in Tehran at the venue of Tehran's Esteghlal



Hotel on Monday in the presence of Eng. Keshani Chief Executive of Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC), a number of senior managers and directors of Khuzestan Steel Company, some foreign experts and steel managers of the country.

The main topic of this prestigious Conference is as follows: "Outlook and Perspective of Steel, Pellet, Conglomerate, and Direct Reduction Iron (DRI), Sponge Iron in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), he maintained.

Mansour Yazdizadeh was the first speaker in 3rd International Steel Price Conference who raised the challenges and opportunities of steel industry in 2025 Outlook Plan.

In addition, Asadollah Farshad Chief Executive of Ghadir Iranian Steel and Iron Company also addressed the audience in this prestigious Conference.

Farshad pointed to the history of Direct Reduction Iron

(DRI) and prediction of its development trend in the country and added, "Khuzestan Steel Company is the main producer of Direct Reduction Iron (DRI) in Iranian steel industry."

He pointed to the history of Direct Reduction Iron (DRI) in the country and added, "the first Iranian developed direct Reduction Iron (DRI) was launched in 2001 in Khuzestan Steel Company with the name of ZAMZAM. In addition, the first sponge iron production unit was put into operation in 1977 in Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) using Pruffer method.

Then, Deputy CEO of the company for Sales and Marketing Affairs Tajalizadeh expounded on the predicted models in steel market of the country and added, "giant steps have been taken by the company in the field of boosting export and production volume of steel to abroad."

He pointed to the introduction of four models predicted in the steel market of the country and added, "constructive models were raised for steel market in West Asian region, MENA (Middle East and north Africa)."

Artificial intelligence or multiple artificial nervous network was the other model predicted for steel market that was raised by Mr. Tajalizadeh in the International Steel Price Conference. The model raised by Mr. Tajalizadeh in the International Steel Price Conference was highly welcomed by the managers and directors.

Sales and marketing experts of Khuzestan Steel Company (KSC) are of the opinion that the company is considered as the top and leading industrial and production unit among similar industries in the country, he maintained.

With due observance to the said issue, the company has he relied upon fruitful experiences of its competent and the most experienced manpower, he said, adding, "under such circumstance, the company managed to increase both sales

How did Trump deceive European Leaders?

1 → In September, 2017, and during the United Nations General Assembly meeting in New York, British and French officials were urged by the United States to attract Germany's positive stance to participate in the «West's joint effort to change the JCPOA.»

Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, surrendered to her Western counterparts much earlier than expected. As a result, by mid-2017, talks between American and European diplomats on changing the nuclear deal entered a new phase. A deal in which diplomats from the United States, Germany, France, and Britain, worked on a common goal called «complementary» or «secondary» agreement aimed at achieving Trump's four demands.

The shock that Trump had brought to European authorities Rex Tillerson's resignation from the U.S. State Department and the replacement of Mike Pompeo, created the right impression among European officials that perhaps Trump has made his final decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal, and the U.S.-Europe talks are merely a kind of psychological game to lead the process by the White House. However, Pompeo stressed on «reforming the nuclear deal» in telephone calls with his European counterparts. An issue that somehow put the simple minds of the European politicians at ease.

■ **The agreement was concluded between Americans and Europeans!**

Since March 2018, news was released by the American and European sources that a diplomatic agreement was reached on changing the JCPOA. Accordingly, the three European countries agreed on including Trump's four conditions in the nuclear deal. They even agreed on the only difference they had with the US President (which was the continuation of Iran's nuclear constraints after 2025). Thus the European troika preferred to ignore the so-called sunset clauses at the interests of Trump's government, and they didn't speak of it in their imaginary secondary agreement! However, the Western media spoke with enthusiasm about the agreement between American and European diplomats on changing the JCPOA.

The report said that according to the new agreement, Europe and America decided to put new sanctions on Iran's missile and regional activities instead of changing the nuclear deal. Even some Western media, such as the Associated Press, have announced the preparation of four documents relating to a new agreement between Washington and the European troika on the nuclear deal with Iran. Documents that were supposed to be signed by American and European leaders as «complementary» or «secondary» Clauses.

■ **Trump's uninvited guest!**

After a short while, reliable sources at the White House announced that Trump didn't basically read the terms of the so-called agreement between American and European experts on the JCPOA! Yes! He had made his decision on the JCPOA regardless of what the American and European experts' agreement. Afterwards, the authorities of the three countries of Germany, Britain and France, made visits to the United States to meet with Trump and encourage him to change his controversial decision. But it was already too late when they understood that they had been deceived by Trump. Even then, Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel, in their separate visits to Washington, promised Trump to make every effort to conclude a secondary agreement, and meet all the demands of the President of the United States! But this did not prevent Trump to complete his plan of «deceiving the Europeans» over the JCPOA.

While only four hours remained to the announcement of the US President final decision on the nuclear deal, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told his European counterparts that Donald Trump has opposed the recent agreements on Iran's nuclear deal. This was while Trump hadn't paid the slightest attention to the negotiations' results and documents from the beginning.

Well, now the «deceived Europe» is trying to maintain the nuclear deal with Iran. It seems that the European authorities don't intend to confess that they had been tricked by Trump right now.

Kids don't line up at the Mexican border to join MS-13

By Dora Schriro

Thousands of children have traveled north from Central America, with their mothers when they could, and alone when they could not, to flee gang-sponsored violence in their countries. They made their way to the southwest border of the United States, knocking on our golden door, seeking protection.

The numbers have varied year-to-year, up and down, with a high of 68,541 unaccompanied children under the age of 18 apprehended by Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents at the United States-Mexico border during federal fiscal year (FFY) 2014.

Most recently, during the first six months of FFY 2018 (October 1, 2017 - March 31, 2018), there were 21,720 unaccompanied youth apprehended, compared to the 28,593 during the same period in FFY 2017. Most fled El Salvador, Guatemala,

Honduras and then Mexico — from which fewer than one quarter (24%) originated.

They did not come here to join Mara Salvatrucha, better known as MS-13, or other gangs. They traveled thousands of miles on foot or riding the roof of "la bestia" (the beast), fast-moving freight trains from which many fell and others were pushed. They came here, boys and girls alike, seeking refuge from conscription in gangs, sex trafficking, slavery, and war in their countries.

■ Children don't join gangs

They came to the U.S. in search of economic opportunities and reunification with family members. They certainly did not come all this way, and under these circumstances, to join a gang in New York, California, Texas, Illinois or Florida.

Recently, a colleague, Michelle Brané with the Women's Refugee Commission, met Carlos,

a 14-year-old from Honduras, at a shelter for unaccompanied children. Gangs started trying to recruit Carlos when he was eight years old. His mother did not want him to travel on his own because she did not want to be separated from him, but Carlos told her, "Don't you prefer talking to me on the phone over seeing me on a slab? Leaving is my only choice."

In President Trump's State of the Union speech in January, he said gang members "took advantage of glaring loopholes in our laws to enter the country as unaccompanied alien minors. I am calling on the Congress to finally close the deadly loopholes that have allowed MS-13 and other criminal gangs to break into our country."

Why do some people begrudge others the very things we want for our own children? What is it about a country founded upon the rule of law that characterizes federal statutes, U.S. Supreme Court

(USSC) rulings, and federal consent decrees in which the U.S. government is a party, as "loopholes?"

People hoping to reach the U.S. ride atop the wagon of a freight train, known as La Bestia (The Beast) in Ixtepec, in the Mexican state of Oaxaca June 18, 2014. Thousands of young people are hoping to reach the U.S. from their impoverished and violent homes in Central America.

MS-13 gang members are being removed by our Great ICE and Border Patrol Agents by the thousands, but these killers come back in from El Salvador, and through Mexico, like water. El Salvador just takes our money, and Mexico must help MORE with this problem. We need The Wall!

■ Lacking lawful status

There are two federal statutes and one legal settlement that shape U.S. policy for the treatment and administrative processing of unaccompanied minors — children under the age of 18 who lack

lawful immigration status in the U.S. and are without either a parent or legal guardian in the U.S. or without one who is available to provide care and physical custody.

These are the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, and the Flores Settlement Agreement of 1997, each one specifically designed in part to protect other parents' children. Last September, the Department of Justice issued both a legal opinion and a memorandum that would reverse both Congress' and the Court's clear and consistent commitment to these children.

I have worked in the fields of corrections and criminal justice, immigration and law enforcement my entire career. I have led five agencies in three states and two cities and opened the Office of Detention Policy and Planning at DHS headquarters in Washington, D.C. ➔13

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Paleontology museum makes debut in Yazd

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN – A paleontology museum showcasing around 400 examples of fossil remains was inaugurated in the central city of Yazd on Monday, ISNA reported. “The museum exhibits remains of invertebrates such as echinoderms, trilobites, end stomachs, ammonites, amphipods and ammonites, and neutrophils,” said Sasha Reyhani-Moqaddam, a provincial tourism official. The museum also holds educational workshops on fossils and sedimentation as well as multimedia training courses for different age groups, he said. “We hope that this rich fossil treasure can cater to the scientific knowledge of students and even the general public.”



“Due to the unique nature of the samples, the museum can be the center for the exchange of information and research on macrofossils in the country. It is ready to cooperate with international authorities and universities as well,” the official explained. The oasis city of Yazd is wedged between the northern Dasht-e Kavir and southern Dasht-e Lut on a flat plain ringed by mountains. Its historical structure enjoys a very harmonious public-religious architecture that dates from different eras.


Madrid takes on Airbnb and overtourism

Madrid has become the latest city to confront overtourism, as the Spanish metropolis moves to drastically curb the Airbnb and home-share listings available in the destination. Secretary for sustainable urban planning José Manuel Calvo announced the proposed regulations last week, aiming to tackle the issue of mass tourism head on. The new regulations are in response to locals fearful of being priced out of their own neighborhoods. Officials in other destinations in Spain including Valencia and Mallorca – as well as in Venice, Italy – have also introduced drastic measures to control overtourism and encourage responsible vacationing. Proposed rules in Madrid will prevent apartments from being rented out to tourists for more than 90 days of the year – and entire apartment blocks will no longer be able to be solely visitor accommodation, unless the building is licensed as a hotel. Different restrictions will apply depending on which area of the city the apartments are in. Unsurprisingly, the more central you are, the more rules will be in place. Airbnbs in the Central zone will need a designated entrance to the street, independent of the entrance used by permanent residents of the building. This would eradicate the majority of apartments currently used as vacation rentals in the city and mark a drastic change for the city. The city reports that 23 times more tourists sleep in the Central district of Madrid than in all the other 20 districts of Madrid put together. (Source: CNN)

 ROUND THE GLOBE

Historic Centre of Siena

The Historic Centre of Siena in Italy is the embodiment of a medieval city. Historically, its inhabitants pursued their competition with the neighboring cities of Florence and Pisa right into the area of urban planning. Throughout the centuries, the city has preserved its Gothic appearance acquired between the 12th and 15th centuries. During this period, the work of Duccio, the Lorenzetti brothers and Simone Martini influenced the course of Italian and, more broadly, European art.



A view of the UNESCO-registered Historic Centre of Siena, Italy

The whole city of Siena was devised as a work of art that blends into the surrounding landscape. This Tuscan city developed on three hills connected by three major streets forming a Y-shape and intersecting in a valley that became the Piazza del Campo. The seven-kilometer long fortified wall still surrounds the 170-hectare site. Protected gates were doubled at strategic points, such as the Porta Camollia on the road to Florence. To the west, the walls embrace the Fort of Santa Barbara that was rebuilt by the Medici in 1560 and finished in 1580. Inside the walls to warehouses, palaces, churches and other religious structures survive. Also of note are the city's fountains that continue to be fed by an extensive system of original tunnels. Siena's distinctive Gothic style is illustrated by the quintessential Siennese arch, introduced to the city from the East during the Crusades. The arch dominated later building styles including the Renaissance era. Even when buildings underwent major renovations in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries (such as the Town Hall, the Chigi-Saracini Palace, and the Marsili Palace respectively), Gothic elements had preference. (Source: UNESCO)

Azerbaijan eases visa on arrival for Iranians

TOURISM d e s k TEHRAN – Citizens of 15 countries including Iran can obtain Azerbaijan visas via self-service terminals upon arrival at the Heydar Aliyev International Airport in Baku, IRNA reported. As of May 15, ASAN Visa terminals are providing services in seven languages of Azerbaijani, English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Persian and Russian. The terminals are also equipped with passport readers, POS-terminals as well as banknote receivers. “Currently 14 self-service terminals have been installed at the airport... and getting a visa costs \$20,” Azer News quoted Chairman of ASAN Service Ulvi Mehdiyev as saying on Tuesday. Along with self-service terminals, visa issuance and banking services will be arranged in four windows of the terminal. On average, the process of issuing visas will take two minutes, the report said. The ASAN Visa system also offers visas to group travelers of two to ten individuals. Other eligible applicants include citizens of South Korea, China, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Turkey and Japan. A total of 99,158 Iranian nationals visited the Republic of Azerbaijan during the first three months of 2018, Azer News reported.



A general view of the Heydar Aliyev International Airport in Baku.

Iron-Age collection takes center stage at Rasht museum

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN – An exhibition of Iron-Age artifacts, known as Marlik collection, has opened its doors to the public at a museum in the city of Rasht, northern Gilan province. The collection includes a magnificent gold cup and some 60 other artifacts, which are on loan from the National Museum of Iran, ISNA reported. Dating back to some three millennia ago, the Marlik artifacts were excavated in the early 1960s through several rounds of excavations supervised by prominent Iranian archaeologist Ezatollah Negahban. Situated near the city of Roudbar, Marlik used to be a royal cemetery. It yielded a handful of tomb chambers, skeletal remains and artifacts with amazing gold workmanship. The Iron Age is the final epoch of the three-age system, preceded by the Stone Age (Neolithic) and the Bronze Age. The exhibit will be running through June 3.



An Iron-Age gold cup excavated from Marlik

Meshgin Shahr to hold crafts sales exhibit

HERITAGE d e s k TEHRAN – A vast sales exhibit of handicrafts will be held in the city of Meshgin Shahr, a tourist destination in northwest Iran. “The exhibit will embrace some 70 stalls and is scheduled to be running from May 26 to June 1 on the premises of Aris Hotel,” CHTN reported. The exhibit is to showcase a variety of souvenirs, woodwork, miniature, textile printing, enamel, leatherwork, calligraphy, metalwork, mirrorwork, marquetry, illuminated manuscripts, potteries, ceramics, and rugs amongst others. In 2015, a massive suspension bridge was inaugurated near the city. At 345 meters long, 3 meters wide and 80 meters high, it is thought to be the largest of its kind in the Middle East. The city itself has numerous tourist attractions, including spa complexes, ancient bas-reliefs and Islamic structures. Meshgin Shahr is also one of the main jumping-off points into the towering Mount Sabalan.



People cross a massive suspension bridge in Meshgin Shahr

How to avoid 8 travel scams that are costing you serious money

By Laura Begley Bloom

With 500 online hotel bookings happening every minute, technology is transforming the way people book travel — but it's also creating real problems. Travel fraud is on the rise, with one in four consumers being scammed, according to recent research from the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA). The accused? Third-party travel resellers. And shady online marketing practices by these companies have led to 28.5 million fraudulent and misleading hotel bookings — costing consumers a whopping \$5.2 billion in 2107 alone. In December 2017, the Federal Trade Commission settled a lawsuit with a third-party hotel booking reseller called Reservation Counter, LLC, which was accused of using call centers and websites to mislead consumers into believing they were booking — and even speaking — directly with a hotel. But it's not enough. “The constant flow of new companies entering the online travel market suggests we need to do more to protect consumers,” says Katherine Lugar, president and CEO of the AHLA. According to the AHLA's research, the numbers are grim: 23 percent of consumers say they have been misled by third-party travel resellers; 46 percent were charged extra fees on their credit card; 34 percent had their reservation lost and had to book another room, losing the cost of their original reservation; 44 percent made a special room request that was not relayed to the hotel. We caught up with Lugar, who has been in this role since 2013 and has been a victim of online hotel scams herself. She gave us her tips on some of the most pervasive scams and how to avoid them.

■ **The scam: high-pressure tactics**

The Solution: Look out for misleading messages. “Book now.” “Three rooms left.” “Other people are looking at this hotel right now.” “Sale ends tonight.” Messages such as these on a third-party travel website



could be misleading marketing tactics to pressure travelers to book immediately. Third-party websites are selling a portion of a hotel's rooms, but they do not have access to their entire inventory. If you're worried about a particular date filling up, call the hotel directly to get a sense of their availability.

■ **The scam: fake hotel website**

The Solution: Double check the website's URL. Some third-party booking sites will go so far as to use a hotel's brand name in the URL. Take an extra minute to make sure you're on the hotel's actual website, not a third-party vendor using a hotel's identity without permission. If you are unsure, call the company. You can always call and ask if the website you are on is the actual hotel or is affiliated with the hotel in any way. You'll also be able to ensure any special requests are being relayed directly to the hotel.

■ **The scam: identity theft**

The Solution: Make sure the site is secure before payment. Double check that the URL has a small lock within the search bar before providing your personal information. The URL should start with https:// with an “s” as opposed to just http:// without an “s.” Booking with a secure website provides an added layer of protection for your credit card and personal information. The absence of a secure connection is also a huge red flag that the company you are booking with may not be legitimate.

■ **The scam: sneaky policies**

The Solution: Know and understand the hotel's cancellation or trip change policy. Always confirm the cancellation or trip-change policy so that you know what you are entitled to if you need to cancel or modify your hotel arrangements. Some third-party websites don't properly

display the cancellation policy and do not provide refunds or allow you to modify your trip after you book your stay. Always confirm those important details before booking your hotel.

■ **The scam: lack of transparency**

The Solution: Do your research before booking your hotel online. An online search can help you find the right hotel to meet your needs, and research shows consumers visit 7-10 websites before booking a reservation online. Unfortunately, what many consumers don't realize is that when they're searching multiple websites, they're usually comparing just two companies, Expedia and Booking Holdings. Together, these two companies control 95% of the online travel market. That's why we encourage you to take an extra minute and look on the hotel's website. Oftentimes, you'll find the better value when booking directly with the hotel.

■ **The scam: extra fees**

The Solution: Look closely at the breakdown of the total cost of your stay before you pay. Some third-party travel sites will charge you a reservation/booking fee, in addition to the cost of your hotel room.

■ **The scam: lost reservations or requests**

The Solution: Booking through third-party booking sites can result in lost reservations and ruined vacations. Important information or requests may not be relayed to the hotel correctly either. That includes spelling on your name, which can create an issue when you go to check in, or requesting a specific type of room, such as one that is wheelchair-accessible.

■ **The scam: unsolicited phone calls**

The Solution: Be cautious if anyone contacts you unsolicited. They may be a legitimate business, but it's worth taking the extra time to investigate them if you didn't seek out the information. Check with the Better Business Bureau for more information about the company, and any unresolved complaints about them. (Source: forbes.com)

Eating yogurt may help reduce chronic inflammation, study says

A research team of scientists from the University of Wisconsin at Madison may have found a way to reduce chronic inflammation.

On Tuesday, May 15, The Journal of Nutrition published a study that showed how consuming yogurt can reduce chronic inflammation. Chronic inflammation is linked to several diseases such as arthritis, asthma, and bowel disease.

Led by the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Dr. Brad Bolling, the research team recruited 120 premenopausal women ages 21 to 55. The study participants were grouped into obese and non-obese categories. The research team first measured the participants' height, weight, blood pressure, and their waistline.

Bolling and his research team assigned one group to consume low-fat yogurt and the other group to consume non-dairy pudding for nine weeks.

■ Tumor necrosis factor

The research team also needed blood samples from their participants at random times. As they analyzed the blood work, Bolling and his team used biomarkers as benchmarks for the experiment. One biomarker was the tumor necrosis factor, a vital protein that could activate inflammation.

At the beginning and the end of the nine weeks, the team served participants a heavy meal consisting of two Jimmy Dean sausages, egg, cheese sandwich, and two hash browns. Before the participants could eat the meal,



they had to consume their assigned yogurt or pudding.

Bolling and his team found that the participants that ate the yogurt before their meals

A study also finds that if people consume one soda a day, the risk of getting cancer could increase. More than 35,000 men and women from Australia participated in the study. Of these, 3,283 developed obesity-related cancers due to their constant consumption of soda.

had several reductions in the biomarkers. They also found that the obese women who were in the yogurt group improved their glucose metabolism. The team hopes that in the future, they would be able to determine what parts of yogurt give out these benefits.

■ Inhibiting inflammation

"Ultimately, we would like to see these components optimized in foods, particularly for medical situations where it's important to inhibit inflammation through the diet. We think this is a promising approach," said Bolling.

On May 7, Journal Pediatrics released a study that a low-carb diet could help people diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. Among the food that could potentially help them are beef, broccoli, cauliflower, Greek yogurt, and salmon. The study stated that if people went on a diet, they could control their blood sugar levels and keep their hypoglycemia at low rates.

A study also found that if people consume one soda a day, the risk of getting cancer could increase. More than 35,000 men and women from Australia participated in the study. Of these, 3,283 developed obesity-related cancers due to their constant consumption of soda.

Earlier this year, the American Journal of Hypertension released a study that found evidence that higher yogurt intake could lead to a reduced risk for cardiovascular disease in hypertensive adults.

(Source: Tech Times)

Carbon-recycling system: Two-electron chemical reactions using light energy, gold

Scientists are one step closer to building a carbon-recycling system that can harvest solar energy to efficiently convert CO₂ and water into liquid fuels. By optimizing many parts of the system, the researchers say, they can now drive two-electron chemical reactions, a substantial advance over one-electron reactions, which are energy inefficient.

Under the right conditions, gold nanoparticles absorb light and transfer electrons to other reactants. This process can be used to convert CO₂ and water into hydrocarbons. In the graphic, carbon atoms are black, oxygen atoms are red and hydrogen atoms are white.

Scientists are one step closer to building a carbon-recycling system that can harvest solar energy to efficiently convert CO₂ and water into liquid fuels. By optimizing many parts of the system, the researchers say, they can now drive two-electron chemical reactions, a substantial advance over one-electron reactions, which are energy inefficient.

The research, reported in the journal Nature Chemistry, will aid those hoping to find a way to convert excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere into useful energy sources, said University of Illinois chemistry professor Prashant Jain, who led the new research.

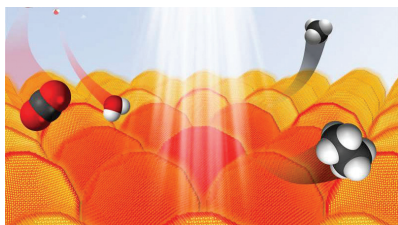
"Scientists often look to plants for insight into methods for turning sunlight, carbon dioxide and water into fuels," he said.

When solar energy hits plant leaves, it excites the electrons in chlorophyll. Those excited electrons ultimately drive the chemistry that transforms carbon dioxide and water into glucose.

"Many of these chemical reactions are multiphoton, multielectron reactions," Jain said.

■ Biodegradable plant pigments

But instead of relying on biodegradable plant pigments to convert light energy into chemical energy, scientists are turning to



something better: electron-rich metal catalysts like gold, which at specific light intensities and wavelengths can transfer photoexcited electrons and protons to reactants without being degraded or used up.

"In our study, we used spherical gold particles that are 13 to 14 nanometers in size," Jain said. The "nanoparticles have unique optical properties, depending on their size and shape."

When coated with a polymer and suspended in water, for example, the nanoparticles absorb green light and reflect a deep red color. Under light excitation, the nanoparticles transfer electrons to probe molecules, which then change color. This allows scientists to measure how efficiently the electron-transfer reactions are taking place.

"Researchers have managed in the past to use photochemistry and these light-absorbing materials to transfer one electron at a time," Jain said. "But in the new study, we've identified the principles and rules and conditions under which a metal nanoparticle catalyst can transfer two electrons at a time."

By varying the intensity of laser light used in the experiments, Jain and his colleagues discovered that at four to five times the intensity of solar energy, the gold nanoparticles in the system could transfer up to two electrons at a time from ethanol to an electron-hungry probe.

Two-electron reactions are far preferable to one-electron reactions, Jain said.

(Source: sciencedaily.com)

Here's what really happens in the skin when you have eczema

Scientists have pinpointed a bunch of processes that go wrong in the skin for people who have eczema (also known as atopic dermatitis), and it could help us finally figure out how to combat this chronic condition.

Back in 2006, researchers found a strong link between people lacking in a certain skin protein, and the risk of developing eczema. Last year, scientists built on those results to show exactly what goes wrong, and their results could even take us closer to an eczema cure.

Eczema is a common skin condition affecting up to 20 percent of children and 3 percent of adults worldwide. While there's no shortage of creams and lotions that help alleviate the chronic symptoms of eczema, we still haven't found a cure that can clear it up for good.

For the past decade, scientists have known that eczema is associated with a genetic lack of filaggrin (filament aggregating protein) in the skin. This protein helps shape individual skin cells, and plays an important role in our skin's barrier function.

■ Having a genetic mutation

If a person has a genetic mutation that prevents proper filaggrin supply, they can develop skin conditions such as eczema or ichthyosis vulgaris, where skin cells don't shed, and instead pile up in a pattern that looks like fish scales.

But until recently, researchers weren't sure how eczema actually develops when filaggrin is lacking.

Last year, scientists from Newcastle University in the UK in collaboration with GSK Stiefel tracked down a series of proteins and molecular pathways that lead to this insufferable skin problem.

"We have shown for the first time that loss of the filaggrin protein alone is sufficient to alter key proteins and pathways involved



in triggering eczema," lead researcher Nick Reynolds from Newcastle University explained at the time.

To track down these mechanisms, the team used a lab-created 3-dimensional living skin equivalent (LSE) model. They altered the top layer of this lab-made 'skin' to become filaggrin-deficient, just like in people who have the genetic mutation.

■ Molecular changes

They found that this deficiency alone could trigger a host of molecular changes in important regulatory mechanisms in the skin. This affected things like cell structure, barrier function, and even how cells got inflamed and responded to stress.

"Notably, for the first time, we have identified 17 proteins that are significantly differentially expressed after (filaggrin removal) in LSE cultures," the team wrote in their paper.

The researchers then verified their initial findings by analyzing proteins in skin samples from actual humans, comparing the results between participants with eczema and healthy subjects.

They found that several of the proteins they detected were similarly altered in only those with eczema - just like the lab-based model had demonstrated.

While this is just the next piece of the puzzle in terms of a deeper understanding of conditions like eczema, it's a really promising step.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

Use of 'Applied Research' considered long-term investment: official

In a get-together meeting held between Esfahan Steel Company (ESC) and branches of Isfahan Province's Islamic Azad University (IAU), Eng. Bahrami Deputy CEO of Esfahan Steel Company (ESC) for Social and Human Resources' Affairs said, "as a leading steel production hub in the country and chief exporter of steel products according to the international standards, Esfahan Steel Company (ESC) has always considered application of world's most modern technologies and technical knowhow in various divisions."

Given the above issue, the company has established very good and fair interactions with country's scientific and research centers, he said, adding, "the management of the company believes that applied research is considered as long-term investment."

He pointed to the water crisis and environmental issues as two important concepts in the company and added, "academic centers and universities play an important role in this field using their latest achievements and technical knowhow, because, applied and useful strategies can be presented with

focusing on the challenges."

Eng. Nasr Deputy CEO of Esfahan Steel Company for Planning and Development Affairs was the next speaker who said, "synergy and very close cooperation between industry and academic center can materialize most objective of any economic enterprise."

With long years of fruitful experience in the production of quality steel in the Middle East region, Esfahan Steel Company has paved suitable ways for fulfilling research projects in the country appropriately.



'Abiding by law' and 'professionalism', staff top priority: BSI

Dr. Seydi Chief Executive of Bank Saderat Iran (BSI) said that 'abiding by law' and 'professionalism' are of the two salient characteristics of staff and employees of Bank Saderat Iran (BSI), the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

Speaking in a ceremony to honor 500 top managers of the bank across the country, he said, "statistics show that the bank took giant strides in the past Iranian calendar year in 1396 (ended March 20, 2018) and we try to hold the General Assembly of the bank in July 2018 successfully."

He pointed to the sensitive economic condition of the country in the region and said, "gaining customers' satisfaction, paying due attention to the geography of branches, increasing speed in fulfilling clients' credit activities, minimizing customers' waiting time at branches of the bank, developing e-banking services, developing currency activities and using bank's high foreign potentials, etc. are of the salient objectives of the bank in the current Iranian calendar year in 1397 (started March 21, 2018)."

Bank Maskan announces prohibition of cryptocurrencies

In a directive issued by virtue of a letter issued by CBI Anti-Money Laundering and Banking Certificates and Regulations Department, application of 'bitcoin, cryptocurrency' and other similar currencies was prohibited, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank reported.

The directive is read as follows: "by

virtue of Letter No. 19777 issued on April 17, 2018 by Anti-Money Laundering and Banking Certificates Department of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), various types of cryptocurrencies are considered as a tool for laundering money, financing terrorism and relocating financial resources of criminals."

Accordingly, Supreme Council of Anti-Money Laundering has banned application of Bit Coin and other cryptocurrencies in all monetary and financial centers of the country.

Hence, Bank Maskan has strictly emphasized that transaction of any of the

currencies, which leads to the facilitation or promotion of the said currencies, has been banned by all banks in the country, otherwise, violators will be prosecuted within the framework of rules and regulations, the Public Relations Dept. of the bank concluded.

The era of big data is transforming astronomy

Earlier this year, astronomers stumbled upon a fascinating finding: Thousands of black holes likely exist near the center of our galaxy.

The X-ray images that enabled this discovery weren't from some state-of-the-art new telescope. Nor were they even recently taken — some of the data was collected nearly 20 years ago.

No, the researchers discovered the black holes by digging through old, long-archived data.

Discoveries like this will only become more common, as the era of "big data" changes how science is done. Astronomers are gathering an exponentially greater amount of data every day — so much that it will take years to uncover all the hidden signals buried in the archives.

Sixty years ago, the typical astronomer worked largely alone or in a small team. They likely had access to a respectably large ground-based optical telescope at their home institution.

Their observations were largely confined to optical wavelengths — more or less what the eye can see. That meant they missed signals from a host of astrophysical sources, which can emit non-visible radiation from very low-frequency radio all the way up to high-energy gamma rays. For the most part, if you wanted to do astronomy, you had to be an academic or eccentric rich person with access to a good telescope.

Old data was stored in the form of photographic plates or published catalogs. But accessing archives from other observatories could be difficult — and it was virtually impossible for amateur astronomers.

Today, there are observatories that cover the entire electromagnetic spectrum. No longer operated by single institutions, these state-of-the-art observatories are usually launched by space agencies and are often joint efforts involving many countries.

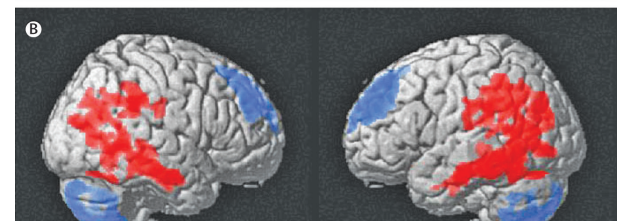
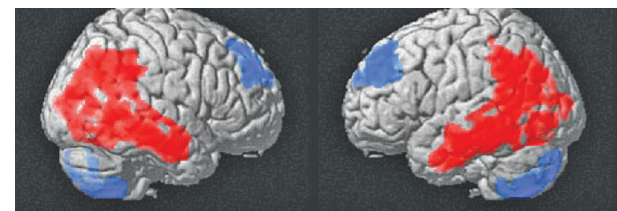
(Source: Newsweek)

Deep brain stimulation affects the activity of hundreds of genes

Even as patients with Parkinson's disease, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and other conditions turn to deep brain stimulation (DBS) to keep their symptoms in check, it's been unclear to scientists why the therapy works. Now, researchers in Texas report that in mice, the treatment dials the activity of hundreds of genes up or down in brain cells. Their results, published in eLife March 23, hint that DBS's use could be expanded to include improving learning and memory in people with intellectual disabilities.

The "paper is very well done ... it's really a rigorous study," says Zhaolan "Joe" Zhou, a neuroscientist at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine who reviewed the paper for eLife. Now that the genes and pathways DBS affects are known, researchers can home in on ways to improve the treatment, or perhaps combine the therapy with pharmacological approaches to boost its effect, he says.

In DBS, two electrodes are surgically implanted in a patient's brain (the area depends on the disorder being treated), and con-



nected to generators that are placed in the chest. Gentle pulses of electricity are then passed continuously through the electrodes. The treatment reduces motor symptoms in many people with Parkinson's, and allows some patients to reduce their use of medications, but it does not eliminate symptoms or slow the disease's progression.

In addition to its use in movement disorders, DBS is being explored as a potential therapy for a range of other brain-related disorders. For instance, as a way to boost learning and memory in people with Alzheimer's disease, researchers are looking into stimulating the fimbria-fornix, a brain region thought to regulate the activity of the memory-storing hippocampus.

Such studies made Huda Zoghbi, a neurogeneticist at Baylor College of Medicine, wonder what effect DBS might have on learning- and memory-related disorders that strike earlier in life.

(Source: the-scientist.com)

Some calories more harmful than others

While calories from any food have the potential to increase the risk of obesity and other cardiometabolic diseases, 22 nutrition researchers agree that sugar-sweetened beverages play a unique role in chronic health problems. The disease risk increases even when the beverages are consumed within diets that do not result in weight gain.

It's just one of the conclusions published today in Obesity Reviews in a position paper by a group of researchers who participated in the 2017 CrossFit Foundation Academic Conference. The task of researchers was to deliberate the question: Are all calories equal with regards to effects on cardiometabolic disease and obesity? The paper provides an extensive review of the current science on diets that can lead to obesity, cardiovascular disease and Type 2 diabetes.

The paper's sugar-sweetened beverage consensus is particularly relevant in light of a recent legal battle over warning labels on soda, which hinged on the 9th Circuit Court's determination of whether soda and other sweetened beverages are uniquely harmful to human health or one source of calories among many.

"What's new is that this is an impressive group of scientists with vast experience in nutrition and metabolism agreeing with the conclusion that sugar-sweetened beverages increase cardiometabolic risk factors compared to equal amounts of starch," said lead author Kimber Stanhope, a research nutritional biologist with the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of California, Davis.

"If you go on the internet and look up aspartame, the layperson would be convinced that aspartame is going to make them fat, but it's not," said Stanhope.

(Source: eurekalert.org)

Motorcyclists constitute one third of crash deaths in Tehran

SOCIETY **TEHRAN** — Figures are shockingly indicating that motorcyclists are more likely to lose their lives in crashes as they constitute 33 percent of fatalities in Tehran over the last Iranian calendar year 1396 (March 2017-March 2018), head of accidents department of Tehran Traffic Police has said. “As per the figures revealed by forensics some one-third of the fatal crashes resulted in deaths of motorcyclists,” ISNA quoted Ehsan Momeni as saying on Wednesday.

The data published on Iran’s forensics organization official website shows that last year some 1,025 men and 206 women lost their lives in accidents in Tehran.

Not wearing helmet is the major contributing factor in motorcyclists’ deaths and that’s why the traffic police is levying heavy fines on those who violate the law, Momeni explained, adding that the driver and passenger must both wear helmets of high quality standards.

He went on to say that reckless lane changes, not having license, lane splitting, driving wrong direction up one-way streets, carrying heavy loads which can affect the stability and handling of your motorcycles, riding more than two people on a motorcycle, running red lights, and speaking on the cell phone are among other causes of fatal motorcycles’ accidents.

According to the website How Stuff Works cars and motorcycles share some similarities. They drive on the same roads, they can be equally powerful, and they both can travel fast. But motorcycles have a few major differences that make them inherently more dangerous.

Any motorcyclist will be quick to tell you skill and smarts are key to staying alive and in one piece. But all motorcyclists start out with some disadvantages. Because they have two wheels instead of four, the driver’s balance and driving abilities — including quick reflexes — play a more critical role. And a motorcyclist rides out in the open, rather than inside the steel cage of a car frame. The resulting sense of freedom makes motorcycles so appealing to so many people. Motorcycles are also good choices for delivery jobs as well as violating traffic rules without getting caught.

However, the advantages come with risks. And because motorcycles are more difficult to see than cars, they’re more likely to be hit by other drivers. Without a car’s structural protection, a motorcycle rider involved in a crash is more likely to suffer serious or fatal injuries.

Motorcycle accidents can result in serious consequences, including brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, broken bones, and more. These injuries can be life changing and may require a lifetime of medical treatment that can cost tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Meanwhile, even as automotive manufacturers develop new technology to make cars even safer, motorcycle manufacturers have fewer options. Motorcycle features such as mirrors with larger fields of view, brighter headlights and motorcycle airbags can help minimize risk of a crash or the severity of an injury. But in general, motorcycles aren’t marketed as safer than the previous year’s model or the competitor’s model, and they lack the technology-driven safety features available in new cars. Motorcycle drivers don’t have time to check out a rear-view camera, for example and motorcyclists can’t afford to be distracted by a lane-departure warning.

Just sitting on a motorcycle demands skill and alert driving, but motorcycle drivers face dangers out of their control — and they accept that risk every time they mount a bike.

Artificial Intelligence, everyday everywhere

1→ AI-based technologies are already emerging as a key component of proactive tools and applications being used to help people lead better lives by improving healthcare, education, finance, agriculture, transportation, and a wide range of other services.

The 2018 theme will focus on the potential of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to accelerate the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

LEARN ENGLISH

Fast Food

A: I’m hungry, let’s order up something to eat.
B: Ok, maybe we can order a soup and a **salad** from the restaurant down the street.
A: I was thinking of getting a **hamburger**, **fries** and a chocolate **sundae**.
B: You eat too much **junk food**. That sort of stuff **clogs** up your arteries and is very high in **cholesterol**.
A: Well I never seem to gain weight so I don’t mind.
B: It’s not only about getting fat or not, it’s about being healthy. You could really have some health problems later on.
A: **How about pizza** or maybe some **fried chicken**! Better yet, let’s order some **hot dogs**!
B: You are a **lost cause**.

■ **Key vocabulary**
salad: mixed vegetables served cold
hamburger: a type of sandwich with a beef patty
sundae: a dish of ice cream with added ingredients such as fruit, nuts, and syrup
fries: deep fried strips of potato
junk food: food that is not healthy
clog: to block or get in the way of something
cholesterol: a fatty substance found in animal tissue
how about: what do you think
pizza: bread with tomato sauce and cheese on top
fried chicken: chicken pieces cooked in hot oil
hot dog: a food with bread and a sausage in the middle
lost cause: a useless or hopeless situation
■ **Supplementary vocabulary**
Tofu: a protein-rich food coagulated from an extract of soybeans and used in salads and various cooked foods
MSG: a flavor enhancer used in food
Greasy: having a lot of grease or oil
take out: taking food away or having it delivered,
doggy bag: a bag or box used to take left over food home from a restaurant

(Source: irlanguage.com)

Iran to attend World Health Assembly next week



Iranian health minister who had been appointed as the World Health Organization’s commissioner for Independent Global High-level Commission on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) will also take part in proposing practical ways to fight the world-leading causes of death and illnesses.

cancers, diabetes and respiratory disease, and promoting mental health and well-being.

The commission is scheduled to provide actionable recommendations by June 1, Asadi

Wildlife poachers in Kenya ‘to face death penalty’

Wildlife poachers in Kenya will face the death penalty, the country’s tourism and wildlife minister has reportedly announced.

Najib Balala warned the tough new measure would be fast-tracked into law.

Existing deterrents against killing wild animals in the east African nation are insufficient, Mr Balala said, according to China’s Xinhua news agency.

So in an effort to conserve Kenya’s wildlife populations, poachers will reportedly face capital punishment once the new law is passed.

Kenya is home to a wide variety of treasured species in national parks and reserves, including lions, black rhinos, ostriches, hippos, buffalos, giraffe and zebra.

Last year in the country 69 elephants – out of a population of 34,000 - and nine rhinos – from a population of under 1,000 - were killed.

“We have in place the Wildlife Conservation Act that was enacted in 2013 and which fetches offenders a life sentence or a fine of US\$200,000,” Mr Balala reportedly said. “However, this has not been deterrence enough to curb poaching, hence the proposed stiffer sentence.”

The move could put Kenya in conflict with the UN, which opposes the death penalty for all crimes worldwide.

UN General Assembly resolutions have called for a phasing-out of capital punishment, and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights advocates its universal abolition. Kenya’s tourism chiefs say poaching has been on a downward trend largely thanks to enhanced wildlife law-enforcement efforts and investment in conservation.

“These efforts led to an 85 per cent reduction in rhino poaching and a 78 per cent reduction in elephant poaching, respectively, in 2017 compared to when poaching was at its peak in 2013 and 2012 respectively,” the ministry said.

Nevertheless, earlier this month two black rhinos and a calf were poached at Meru national park.

And the losses are still extremely high, virtually cancelling out the overall popula-



tion’s growth rate, according to the Save the Rhino organization. The charity points out many other African nations also suffer high rates of poaching.

The report of plans for capital punishment prompted sharply diverging reactions, with some social-media users applauding Kenya and calling it “fantastic news”, and others insisting it should never happen.

Some said authorities should go after kingpin traffickers rather than the “smallest animals in the criminal food chain”.

For years, many people angry at high levels of poaching, linked with lucrative organized crime, have called for the death sentence as a deterrent.

Gangs sell elephant tusks for ivory in the far East, where it is turned into trinkets; rhino horn is believed by some wealthy buyers there to serve as a medicine – even though it is made of keratin, the same substance as human fingernails, so has no health-giving properties.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, reposted the Xinhua report, saying “#SeriousAboutWildlifeCrime”.

The Independent has contacted the Kenya Wildlife Service to confirm Mr Balala’s plans and is awaiting a response.

Richard Vigne, head of Kenya’s Ol Pejeta Conservancy that was home to Sudan, the world’s last male northern rhino which was put down in March, said the animal would be remembered for ever as a signal to the world. While Kenya was a global leader in conservation, there are still many species across the planet that faced a similar plight, he said. (Source: Independent)

UK parliament to remove single-use plastics from Westminster

The UK parliament has unveiled a package of measures to “virtually eliminate” single-use plastics from Westminster in the next year.

The move will see a range of items – from coffee cups to straws, plastic bags to water bottles – removed from the parliamentary estate, to be replaced by compostable or reusable options by 2019.

The move was welcomed by Mary Creagh MP, chair of the environmental audit committee, who said it followed many of the recommendations set out in her committee’s reports (pdf).

But she called on the government to take firmer action to ensure similar programs were rolled out across the country.

“Parliament’s action stands in stark contrast to ministers who consult, announce and re-announce, but never seem to do anything to turn back the plastic tide,” she said.

“The government should follow parliament’s lead and introduce a ‘latte levy’ for coffee cups, a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles, and make sure that those who produce the packaging pay to recycle it.”

There is growing alarm at the damage plastic pollution is doing to the oceans and wider environment. Scientists have warned that it risks the near permanent contamination of the world with increasing evidence it is entering the food chain with unknown consequences for human health.

Several major retailers have announced they are taking measures to tackle plastic pollution but campaigners say ministers must go further to stop the problem.

Sir Paul Beresford MP, chair of the commons administration committee, which recommended the proposals for the House of Commons, said he was delighted parliament was taking a stand.

“The measures we are introducing are ambitious and wide ranging, covering not just coffee cups but an array of items from plastic bottles and straws to condiment sachets and stationery. Our aim is to remove, as far as possible, disposable plastic items

Lari noted. He went on to say that Qazizadeh-Hashemi is going to deliver a speech on HIV/AIDS prevention programs in Iran in the assembly.

According to WHO website World Health Organization was established to promote health and ease the burden of disease worldwide. The Organization takes direction for its goals and priorities from the 194 Member States it is designed to serve. Each year, senior health officials from Member States come to Geneva to participate in the World Health Assembly. It is at the Health Assembly that WHO’s work is reviewed, new goals are set, and new tasks assigned. Each year the World Health Assembly has a long and complex list of health challenges and responses to review.

At the Health Assembly 2 main types of meetings are held, each with a different purpose.

Committees meet to debate technical and health matters (Committee A), and financial and management issues (Committee B), and approve the texts of resolutions, which are then submitted to the plenary meeting.

Plenary is the meeting of all delegates to the World Health Assembly. The Health Assembly meets in plenary several times in order to listen to reports and adopt the resolutions transmitted by the committees. The Director-General and Member States also address the delegates at the plenary. In addition, technical briefings are organized separately on specific public health topics to present new developments in the area, provide a forum for debate and to allow for information sharing.



from the parliamentary estate.”

Parliament will stop purchasing non-recyclable disposable cups and plastic water bottles. The coffee cups will be replaced by a compostable alternative and to encourage a long-term move away from single-use items, a 25p charge will be added to hot drinks served in the new compostable cups. Reusable coffee cups will be available to buy, and incentives will be offered to customers who refill them.

Plastic bottles of water will no longer be on sale, with more water points installed. Condiment sachets and plastic cutlery and food packaging will be replaced by compostable alternatives.

As part of the plan, plastic carrier bags will be phased out in retail outlets next year to be replaced by paper carrier bags, alongside the branded fabric shopping bags which are already available to buy.

Lord Laming, chair of the House of Lords services committee, which agreed the proposals for the House of Lords, said: “Parliament has acknowledged the damaging effect single-use disposable plastic is having on the environment and that it must lead the way in valuing our environmental future over convenience.”

He added: “We all have a responsibility in this so it’s time to really start to think about the steps everyone can take to reduce their plastic use and I hope that the measures parliament will implement over the next 12 months will inspire other organizations and people to make changes in their everyday lives.”

(Source: The Guardian)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → €

Cadaster to help save national land areas from land grabbers

Initiating cadaster in Iran would save national land areas from land grabbers, an official at Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization has said.

Using cadaster is the first step in the fight against the land grabbers and would restrict activities linked with land grabbing in the country, ISNA news agency quoted Akram Toufiqi as saying on Friday. Forests, Range, and Watershed Management Organization is preparing a cadaster for all national land areas in the country, Toufiqi said, adding so far the cadaster of more than 30 million hectares of the national land areas are prepared.

محافظت اراضی ملی در مقابل زمین‌خواران با اجرای طرح کاداستر

مدیر کل دفتر ممیزی و جدنگاری اراضی سازمان جنگل‌ها گفت: اجرای طرح کاداستر زمینه ی محافظت از اراضی ملی در مقابل زمین‌خواران را فراهم می آورد.

اکرم توفیقی در گفت و گو با ایسنا درباره نقشه کاداستر (حد نگاری) گفت: اولین گام برای مبارزه با زمین‌خواری اجرای کاداستر است، گفت: تهیه و اجرای کاداستر امکان سودجویی از اراضی ملی را به حداقل می‌رساند.

توفیقی همچنین افزود: سازمان جنگل‌ها، مراتع و آبخیزداری در حال تهیه نقشه کاداستر برای کل کشور است و تاکنون برای بیش از ۳۰ میلیون هکتار از اراضی ملی نقشه کاداستر تهیه شده است.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

“-ion”

- **Meaning:** a word ending that indicates action or condition
- **For example:** A good lawn will prevent **erosion**.

PHRASAL VERB

Give yourself up to something

- **Meaning:** to allow yourself to feel an emotion completely, without trying to control it
- **For example:** He gave himself up to despair.

IDIOM

Break out in cold sweat

- **Explanation:** to begin to perspire a lot, usually from anxiety
- **For example:** I get nervous at the dentist’s and usually break out in a cold sweat.

Turkey-Israel row: Video of airport frisking deepens tensions

A diplomatic row between Turkey and Israel following the Israeli army's killing of dozens of Palestinians is showing no signs of slowing down amid reciprocal expulsions and heated exchanges.

In the latest episode, Israel protested on Wednesday over what it called Turkey's "unbecoming treatment" of its expelled ambassador, after he was shown on Turkish TV undergoing an airport security check in public view. The previous day, Turkey had summoned Ambassador Eitan Naveh to tell him it would be "appropriate" for him to return to Israel "for a while". In response, Israel ordered the Turkish representative in the country to return home for consultations.

Ankara's move came as it condemned the killing of demonstrators in the Gaza Strip on Monday, as well as the opening of the U.S. embassy in al-Quds (Jerusalem) on the same day.

At least 62 Palestinians, who rallied as part of the Great March of Return movement, were killed by Israeli forces during a protest near the fence with Israel. More than 2,700 others were wounded.

Accompanied by a personal security guard and several consulate officers, Naveh left for Tel Aviv from Istanbul's Ataturk International Airport at 08:30 GMT on a Turkish Airlines charter plane.



His security check was captured in a video that was aired on Turkish TV on Wednesday.

Later on Wednesday, Israel's foreign ministry said in a statement that it had summoned the Turkish embassy's charge d'affaires to protest over the expelled ambassador's security check.

Rights groups and activists have in the past accused Israeli airport staff of regularly violating Israeli law by subjecting Arab passengers, including Israel's own Palestinian citizens, to strip searches and other

degrading procedures.

Naveh had only been in his post since December 2016, after a reconciliation deal earlier that year ended a dispute over the 2010 deadly storming of a Turkish ship by Israeli commandos that saw relations downgraded for more than half a decade.

Rhetoric has been stepped up again recently, with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan accusing Israel of "state terror" and "genocide" over the killings in Gaza on Monday.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hit back at Erdogan, with a tweeted jibe in Hebrew saying that as a leading supporter of Hamas "there's no doubt he's an expert on terror and slaughter".

Responding on Twitter in English on Tuesday, Erdogan, a candidate in Turkey's upcoming presidential election, said: "Netanyahu is the PM of an apartheid state that has occupied a defenseless people's lands for 60+ yrs in violation of UN resolutions".

"He has the blood of Palestinians on his hands and can't cover up crimes by attacking Turkey," he added, suggesting that Netanyahu read the Ten Commandments if he wants a lesson in humanity.

(Source: Al Jazeera)

Malaysia: Anwar Ibrahim released from prison

Malaysia's former deputy prime minister Anwar Ibrahim, jailed for sodomy three years ago, has walked free from prison after receiving a royal pardon.

Anwar's release is the first big success of the newly elected governing coalition, Pakatan Harapan, led by 92-year-old Mahathir Mohamad, which was swept into power after a shock election victory last week.

At 11:30am on Wednesday, a frail but jubilant Anwar emerged from Cheras rehabilitation hospital in Kuala Lumpur, where he has recently been serving his sentence after an operation on his shoulder. He waved to the gathered crowds before getting into a car to go to the National Palace, where he met the king for an hour to formalize his pardon.

"Today is a new beginning. It is a new chapter in our country," he said.

Few in Malaysia have been persecuted for their political views and popularity like Anwar, a man with three prison sentences and 11 years in jail to his name. The pardon was filed on the basis of a "miscarriage of justice", thus clearing his name entirely. It was his first taste of freedom since 2015, following a prison sentence widely perceived as politically motivated; a maneuver by former Prime Minister Najib Razak to get rid of a feared political rival who had run against him – and won the popular vote – in the 2013 general election.

Speaking at a press conference at his home following his release, Anwar said he bore no personal malice towards either former Prime Minister Najib or Mahathir, who was responsible for his first prison sentence in 1999.

"I have forgiven him," said Anwar when asked about Najib. "But the issue of injustice towards the people, crimes committed against the people, endemic corruption that has become a culture in this country that he has to answer for."

Ensuring the full royal pardon of Anwar was a key part of the agreement between Mahathir and the opposition



when it was decided in January he would swap sides and run as their leader in the election, united by a joint desire to oust Najib. Mahathir's previous 22-year reign as prime minister was as head of the ruling party Umno.

A beaming Anwar, sitting next to his wife, Dr. Wan Azizah – who is now deputy prime minister – stressed he has no rush to return to politics, and would be spending some time with his family and speaking at Harvard, Stanford and Georgetown universities. Under the agreement with the opposition, Mahathir will serve as prime minister for two years, before handing power, finally, to Anwar.

"I don't need to serve in the cabinet for now," said Anwar. "I have informed Dr. Mahathir it is very kind to offer but I have said no, it is better that you and Azizah and the team continue and allow me to take some time with the family ... I think I need that time, that space."

The release also marks the next phase in Mahathir and Anwar's turbulent relationship, which has been a decisive part of Malaysian politics for over three decades.

Anwar was adamant that he and Mahathir had buried the hatchet, and said he trusted him to implement the opposition reform agenda.

Anwar began his career in politics as Mahathir's protégé in the early 1980s – having already spent almost two years in jail for political protest – and quickly rose through the ranks to become deputy prime minister in 1993.

His first downfall came in 1998, when he and Mahathir fell out over alleged cronyism and economic crisis, and Mahathir began to fear Anwar's vast popularity. Anwar was ousted from office and then found himself charged with sodomy and corruption.

The resulting court case, the longest in Malaysian history, was an exercise in humiliation for Anwar, who was accused of sodomy with his speechwriter and wife's chauffeur.

He was allowed out in 2004, having spent six years in solitary confinement, and was allowed back into politics in 2008, when he ran as opposition leader in the election. But his reappearance on the political scene was not without ramifications. In 2010, he was put on trial again for sodomy, in hearings that went on for two years. He was acquitted, then ran again as opposition leader in the 2013 elections, gaining more of the votes, but still losing to Najib.

But a year after Najib won the election, Anwar's acquittal was overturned and he was sentenced to five years in jail for sodomy, where he has remained since.

Throughout his ordeal, Anwar has remained a unifying figure for the opposition, and his release will be decisive for the Pakatan Harapan coalition, who are already grappling with tension among their divided ranks of Anwar's PKR party, Mahathir's party Bersatu, the DAP and Amanah.

His release was greeted with jubilation nationwide.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. Justice Dept., FBI investigating Cambridge Analytica: report

A new report says the United States Justice Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have launched an investigation into Cambridge Analytica, a now-defunct British company embroiled in the data scandal gripping Facebook.

Citing an American official and others familiar with the inquiry, the New York Times reported on Tuesday that prosecutors had told possible witnesses that there would be an open investigation into the company as well as "associated U.S. persons."

The paper said the probe was in its early stages and that investigators were questioning former employees and banks linked to the firm. Cambridge Analytica company whistleblower Christopher Wylie confirmed to the Times that he had been questioned by the FBI and Justice Department, noting, "We plan to meet again to provide substantive answers to the investigators."

The investigation by the Justice Department and FBI appears to focus on the company's financial dealings and how it acquired and used personal data pulled from Facebook

and other sources, according to the Times.

The FBI, the Justice Department and Facebook have so far declined to comment on the case.

It was revealed in March that the the political consulting firm had improperly obtained data on 87 million users on Facebook during Donald Trump's 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, whose team is under investigation for possible collusion with Russia.

Founded in 2013 by former White House chief strategist Stephen Bannon and Robert Mercer, a hedge fund billionaire and GOP (Grand Old Party) mega-donor, Cambridge Analytica said earlier this month that it would declare bankruptcy and cease all operations following the scandal.

Cambridge Analytica

Cambridge Analytica Ltd (CA) was a British political consulting firm which combined data mining, data brokerage, and data analysis with strategic communication for the electoral process. In 2016, CA worked for Donald Trump's presidential campaign as well as the Leave.EU-campaign for Britain's

referendum on European Union membership. CA's role in those campaigns has been controversial and is the subject of ongoing criminal investigations in both countries. Political scientists question CA's claims about the effectiveness of its methods of targeting voters.

In March 2018, multiple media outlets broke news of Cambridge Analytica's business practices. The New York Times and The Observer reported on the Facebook and Cambridge Analytica data breach, in which the company used for political purposes personal information acquired about Facebook users, by an external researcher who claimed to be collecting it for academic purposes. Shortly afterwards, Channel 4 News aired undercover investigative videos showing CA CEO (chief executive officer) Alexander Nix boasting about using prostitutes, bribery sting operations, and honey traps to discredit politicians on whom it conducted opposition research, and saying that the company "ran all of (Donald Trump's) digital campaign". In response to the media reports, the Information Commissioner of Brit-

ain pursued a warrant to search the company's servers. Facebook banned Cambridge Analytica from advertising on its platform, saying that it had been deceived. On 23 March 2018, the British High Court granted the Information Commissioner's Office a warrant to search Cambridge Analytica's London offices.

The personal data of about 50 million Facebook users were acquired via the 270,000 Facebook users who explicitly chose to share their data with the app "thisisyourdigitallife". By giving this third-party app permission to acquire their data, back in 2015, this also gave the app access to information on the user's friends network; this resulted in the data of about 50 million users, the majority of whom had not explicitly given Cambridge Analytica permission to access their data, being collected. The app developer breached Facebook's terms of service by giving the data to Cambridge Analytica.

On 1 May 2018, Cambridge Analytica and its parent company filed for insolvency proceedings and closed operations.

(Source: agencies)

Indonesia: Sword-wielding men attack Sumatra police station

Four men armed with samurai swords and firearms have attacked a police station in the Indonesian island of Sumatra, killing one officer and wounding two others before being shot dead by security forces.

The attackers targeted officers after ramming a minivan into a gate at the police headquarters in Pekanbaru, the capital of Riau province, local media said on Wednesday.

A fifth man, who drove the vehicle, was arrested while attempting to escape.

"When the car broke through into the Riau police headquarters, it was blocked by policemen," national police spokesman Seyto Wasisto told a televised news conference.

"Then four of the men got out from the car and attacked police," he added.

Local journalist Doddy Vladimir, who was at the scene of the attack, said he saw a white Toyota Avanza van hit the headquarter's fence at around 9am local time (02:00 GMT).

The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Daesh) terrorist outfit claimed responsibility for the attack, the



terrorist group's Amaq website said.

Indonesia is on high alert after a wave of recent bombings in the country's second-largest city, Surabaya.

On Monday, a suicide bomb attack outside a police building, carried out by one family and claimed by ISIL, killed at least 10 people.

The bombing followed separate attacks on three churches, also carried out by one family, in the same city. At least 13 people were killed.

Police suspected Sunday's attacks on the churches were carried out by a cell of the ISIL-inspired group Jemaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD).

Just hours after the church bombings, a further three people in another family were killed and two wounded when another bomb exploded at an apartment complex about 30km from Surabaya.

That blast appeared to have been an accidental detonation that killed a mother and her 17-year-old child who was not identified, police said.

Police in Indonesia have raided several houses and killed several people in a nationwide hunt for more possible bombers.

(Source: agencies)

EU suffers lack of unity to guarantee its interests: Russian expert

Later, Altmaier

also noted that support of the affected businessmen from the state fund is impossible, but for export guarantees there is a proven Hermes cover, an export credit guarantee. But lack of sustained serious support measures can lead to the fact that the enterprises and banks will come to the conclusion that the American market is more important to them than the Iranian. It seems that European governments must find a solution that allows them to keep trade with Iran in order to convince Tehran that the deal is still beneficial for him.



Despite being an economic superpower, the EU is not able to protect its interest against the U.S. unilateralism in recent years. Why?

A: The main reasons of it appear to be lack of unity on this issue among the member states of the EU, as well as the desire of the EU leaders to maintain their Atlantic ties.

Due to the fact that the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries, especially Poland and the Baltic states, are traditionally pro-American, they do not support the complication of relations with the U.S.

However, for Germany, the informal leader of European integration, Atlanticism remains important, which is explained by historical cooperation (The USA has been the main ally of West Germany since the end of World War II) and by economic ties (The EU has the largest volume of total trade with the U.S. For Germany, the U.S. is the first export destination and the 4th in terms of imports to Germany). Therefore, even after the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, U.S. threats to free trade, the breakdown of the Iran Nuclear deal and the incorrect demands of the U.S. ambassador to German, the German political forces except for the Left party, remain modest in criticizing of America. It seems that the German establishment hopes that after Trump's end in office the relations with the U.S. will come out of the crisis. As the Free Democratic Party stated, criticism of Trump should not develop into anti-Americanism.

The EU officials have been talking about independent EU over the recent years. Considering the existing facts and EU potentialities, how feasible it is? What are the obstacles to this end?

A: Despite Macron's proposals and Merkel's declaration that Europe needs to take on more responsibility, it seems that in the near future the EU will not be able to achieve independence. This is due to a number of reasons.

First, the European Union, as before, has not found a way out of its own crisis, which is manifested in the support of populist parties, the growth of Euroscepticism in the CEE countries.

It is still not clear which development strategy the EU will choose and how it will be implemented in the context of political and economic differences within the European Union.

Second, the EU still needs military support from the United States. The annual defense budget of the EU member states is 3 times smaller than the U.S. annual defense budget. The Pooling and Sharing and PESKO are only the first steps towards military integration. The European army is not on the agenda at the moment.

Third, as noted above, European countries do not seek complete independence from the United States. In the CEE countries, pro-Americanism is strong, as they see the United States as the only defense against Russia. All German political parties, with the exception of extreme leftist and rightist ones, in their programs stressed that European integration in the military sphere does not mean competition to NATO, but the creation of a European pillar of defense for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The idea of German parties that NATO should remain an instrument of intimidation, overcoming military conflicts, and the EU will ensure the maintenance of peace and stability in the region mainly by political and economic means also does not contribute to the strengthening of EU independence. Thus, although there has been an increase in the independence of the EU, which was contributed not only by D. Trump's actions, but also by G. W. Bush's policies and B. Obama's statements, this is a time-consuming process.

How do you assess the Russia's stance toward collapse of the JCPOA?

A: The collapse of the JCPOA is unprofitable for Russia, as Russia is concerned about further destabilizing the situation in the Middle East, as well as about restoring the Iranian nuclear program. It seems that Russia's firm position for preserving the Iranian deal will allow it to prove itself in this matter as a reliable partner.

Kids don't line up at the Mexican border to join MS-13

Misstating the mission and the membership of violent gangs such as MS-13, which originated here, and suggesting youth who fled gang violence in Central America and Mexico now make up its membership in the U.S. does not help. Isolating youth targeted by gangs in their country and now in ours, is ill-advised.

Discouraging foreign-born youth from coming forward for assistance from law enforcement only serves to empower gangs such as MS-13. Misstating crime data is counterproductive. The fact is that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes and less likely to join gangs in the U.S. than U.S.-born individuals. Conflating unilateral immigration enforcement with advancing public safety does little to inform or improve upon important "what works" public policy decisions.

We can do better. We can honor our co-commitments to protecting children in need and preventing harm from those who present risk. Indeed, we must.

(Source: Newsweek)

Sporting director nabbed in graft probe, day after violence

Portuguese police detained a top official of Lisbon football club Sporting and three others linked to the club on suspicion of corruption, adding to Sporting's troubles a day after a group of fans attacked its players and coaches at their training ground.

Police said in a statement the arrests were made over alleged "active corruption in sports" in an operation code-named Cashball, and officers also searched the premises of one football club and various homes. It did not identify the club. But local television channels showed police working at Sporting's Alvalade stadium, and sports media said that police suspected some Sporting officials of game-fixing mostly in handball matches but also in some football events, by allegedly bribing referees and players.

One of those detained was Andre Gerales, the team manager for Sporting and right-hand man of Sporting President Bruno de Carvalho. He has previously dismissed allegations that Sporting may have bribed referees and players. A handball referee was also questioned by police in Porto.

On Tuesday, Sporting condemned "acts of vandalism and aggression" after forward Bas Dost was injured when a group of hooded supporters, armed with sticks and belts, attacked players and staff at the club's training complex. The club had a tumultuous season, including a spat between de Carvalho and the players over their performance in a Europa League match that culminated in his threat to suspend nearly the entire first-team squad last month.

Police have arrested 21 people after Tuesday's attack.

Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa said the escalation of violence and corruption around sports risked destroying football in the country.

(Source: Independent)

Chelsea's Courtois expects Mourinho 'surprises' in FA Cup final

Chelsea goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois said Manchester United boss Jose Mourinho "always has surprises" up his sleeve and the Belgian predicts another thrilling encounter when the two teams meet in the FA Cup final on Saturday.

Mourinho has switched to a back-three as well as used midfielder Ander Herrera to man-mark Chelsea playmaker Eden Hazard in the two teams the last few encounters.

Courtois, who won the Premier League title under the Portuguese in the 2014-15 season, said Chelsea are now better prepared for the challenge as they hope to finish the season with a piece of silverware.

"He always has surprises in the games he has played against us," Courtois told the London Evening Standard. "He has different systems to play. Sometimes he played three at the back, sometimes four. He will always find something.

"I think it'll be a good game, lots of familiar faces on both sides. I hope it'll be a good game with Chelsea as the winner.

"We can know a little bit how he set up in the last two years against us, but that's it."

A 3-0 defeat at Newcastle United on the final day of the league season ended Chelsea's hopes of Champions League qualification as they finished fifth in the standings.

However, Courtois is confident the recent results will have no impact on their preparations for the final at Wembley Stadium.

"The confidence is all right," he added. "It was not a good performance from us. But we've showed we can bounce back the game after. "This is a different cup, different to the Premier League and we just have to go for it. That's most important. After a season of ups and downs, we can finish on an up."

(Source: Guardian)

Don't expect massive City spending this summer, says Guardiola

Premier League champions Manchester City are targeting just one or two signings for next season, manager Pep Guardiola has said.

City, owned by billionaire Sheikh Mansour, spent more than 300 million pounds on players last season.

That heavy investment paid off with City winning the Premier League and League Cup, but Guardiola said fans should not expect similar spending.

"(We will sign) one or two more," Guardiola told Sky Sports, adding. "... maybe people don't believe me but we don't have the money to invest 300 million pounds every season.

"We invested a lot of money and will invest less in the future, because instead of doing it in two or three transfer windows, we did it in one.

"The fundamental success of this season is the quality of the players. People say you won because you invest a lot, they are right."

(Source: Goal)

Churchill Downs inks deal for online sports betting in New Jersey

U.S. gaming company Churchill Downs Inc said on Wednesday it signed a deal with the Golden Nugget Hotel to enter real money online gaming and sports betting markets in New Jersey.

The announcement comes two days after the U.S. Supreme Court allowed states to legalize sports betting by endorsing New Jersey's bid for such wagering and striking down a 1992 federal law that prohibited it.

The Kentucky-based company also signed a partnership with SBTech, a sports betting platform provider, which will allow its customers to place online bets in Mississippi and Pennsylvania.

SBTech will provide Churchill Downs a platform, consisting of a consumer website, mobile apps and back office systems to manage iGaming and sports wagering.

(Source: Reuters)

Could tennis as we know it be set to change?

The times are a changing in tennis -- and for those in charge of the sport it is a case of the quicker the better.

Rule changes -- such as towel racks, shorter sets and reduced warm-ups -- and other innovations such as a 25-second shot clock will be further trialed at November's Next Gen ATP Finals and could be introduced on the men's tour as early as 2019.

It is the serving clock which could potentially worry tennis' male procrastinators.

The 25-second clock was first used at last year's season-ending tournament for the best 21-and-under players and will be introduced at a grand slam for the first time at this year's US Open.

Time violation rules already exist in the sport, but the shot clock allows players and the crowd to see time ticking by.

The consequences of failing to serve within 25 seconds at the US Open has yet to be finalized, but the clock has already been used in this year's Australian Open qualifying and will be in place during French Open qualifying, which takes place later this month.

This year's US Open will also enforce a seven-minute warm-up period before each match -- players will have one minute from the time they walk on court to meet at the net for the coin toss. Players breaching this rule could be fined \$20,000.

Rafael Nadal, who famously takes his time between points, has voiced his opposition to the shot clock.

"If you want to play well, you have to let players breathe a little," the world No.2 has previously said.

"We're not machines. If you want to have matches like I played with Novak, you cannot expect to play 50-shot rallies and in 25 seconds be ready to play the next point. But if you don't want a great show, of course it's a great improvement."

The ATP, the governing body of the men's professional tennis circuits, said Tuesday that the Next Gen Finals, held from November 6 to 10, will continue to test first to four game sets, no advantage scoring and in-match player coaching via head-sets.

Warm-ups will further be reduced from five to four min-



utes and players will need to use a towel rack at the back of the court, removing the need for ball boys and girls to handle towels.

Chris Kermode, ATP executive chairman and president, said in a statement: "Tennis is a sport that is steeped in history and tradition, and there's no question that should be safeguarded.

"However, this new event has allowed us to look at some potential changes, and we received very positive feedback from our stakeholders on the format of last year's event.

Moyes departs West Ham despite keeping them up



West Ham United have parted company with manager David Moyes, who successfully kept the club in the Premier League after replacing Slaven Bilic on a short-term deal in November.

A statement on West Ham's website confirming Moyes's departure said the club wanted to take a "different direction".

Moyes took charge with West Ham in 18th place after a dismal start to the season in which they won two of their first 11 league games. Former Everton and Manchester United manager Moyes managed to steady the ship and Sunday's victory over the Toffees meant they finished the season in 13th place. The statement said Moyes's assistants Alan Irvine, Stuart Pearce and Billy McKinlay had also departed. "I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to David Moyes and his staff for achieving the target of keeping West Ham United in the Premier League," co-Chairman David Sullivan said.

"Throughout his time here, David has carried himself with dignity and honesty and we have all found him to be a pleasure to work with. He, Alan, Stuart and Billy accepted the

challenge and attacked it head on, turning around a difficult situation.

"They deserve great respect for the job they have done and they leave the Club with our best wishes."

Moyes had to work in a difficult atmosphere at the London Stadium, West Ham's unpopular new home since they left Upton Park in 2016. Fans have been increasingly disenchanted with the club's owners and protested at some home games.

However, despite keeping West Ham safe, Sullivan said Moyes was only regarded as a short-term fix. "When David and his team arrived, it was the wish of both parties that the focus be only on the six months until the end of the season, at which point a decision would be made with regards to the future," he said.

"Having taken stock of the situation and reflected now the campaign is complete, we feel that it is right to move in a different direction." The club said they would seek to recruit a "high-calibre" manager within the next 10 days.

(Source: Reuters)

Lionel Messi says Neymar joining Real Madrid would be 'terrible'



Barcelona's Lionel Messi says it would be "terrible" if his old team-mate Neymar joined rivals Real Madrid.

Neymar left Barcelona last year to join Paris Saint-Germain in a world-record £200m deal and has been tipped to return to Spain to sign for Madrid this summer.

Messi, who spent four seasons alongside Neymar at the Nou Camp, admits he would not like to see the 26-year-old at the Bernabeu.

He told TyC Sports: "It would be terrible, because of everything he means to Barcelona.

"Ney won important trophies here. He won the Champions League and La Liga. It would be a huge blow for everyone. It would make Real Madrid even stronger from a football point of view."

Messi also discussed his own future, insisting that he does not have to leave Barcelona to prove himself.

He added: "I am not tempted to leave Barcelona. I will not be better anywhere else, this is the best team in the world.

"Every year I fight to win everything.

I do not need to go to another team to prove anything."

Messi and Neymar will be rivals this summer as Argentina and Brazil chase World Cup glory in Russia.

Before that, though, Messi will have to watch on as another rival, Cristiano Ronaldo, tries to win the Champions League for a third year in a row with Real Madrid.

Asked about Ronaldo, Messi said: "I don't compete with him. It stimulates me to see Real Madrid again in the Champions League final, to see them winning leagues.

"I want to win the Champions League every year, to be a league champion every year. It's what we all want."

Asked about the upcoming World Cup, Messi added: "We deserve to be there because of our history, although it cost us a lot in the last World Cups to reach those rounds, but we have to be there again.

"It's more of a desire because of everything we've gone through, rather than an obligation. We're the first to want to be champions in Russia."

(Source: Sky Sports)

Allardyce sacked as Everton manager



"I'm shocked, disappointed and disgusted that the football club didn't have the decency to tell me, my Director of Football and my staff about the changes," he told the Liverpool Post.

"They must have been in the pipeline for a considerable time but no-one thought to tell me and my staff."

Since Moshiri took over the club in February 2016, Everton have spent around 300 million pounds in the transfer market but rather than mount a challenge to the top four

they are treading water in the Premier League.

Koeman was sacked with the club in 18th place, although by the time Allardyce took charge caretaker manager David Unsworth had steadied the ship and they were 13th.

Allardyce was in charge for 26 games in all competitions, winning 10, drawing seven and losing nine.

His final match in charge was a 3-1 defeat at one of his former clubs West Ham United on Sunday.

Including Unsworth, Everton have had four managers since Moshiri came in and former Watford and Hull City manager Marco Silva is favourite to become the fifth.

Everton first targeted Silva when they were seeking a replacement for Koeman but then appointed Allardyce after Watford refused to give them permission to approach the Portuguese who was subsequently sacked in January.

Watford accused Everton of unsettling Silva which they said led to a downturn in form.

"The club is convinced the appointment of Silva was the right one and had it not been for the unwarranted approach by a Premier League rival for his services we would have continued to prosper under his leadership," Watford said at the time.

(Source: Mirror)

Igor Kolakovic announces Iran volleyball roster

S P O R T S d e s k **TEHRAN** – Iran national volleyball coach Igor Kolakovic has named his 15-men roster for the training camp in Serbia.

Team Melli will hold a preparatory camp in the European country and will play two warm-up matches with Serbia.

Iran squad:

Farhad Salafzoon, Saeid Marouf, Mohammad Mousavi, Ali Shafiei, Saman Faezi, Amirhossein Tokhteh, Milad Ebadipour, Farhad Ghaemi, Mojtaba Mirzajanpour, Morteza Sharifi, Amir Ghaffour, Saber Kazemi, Meysam Salehi, Mohammadreza Hazratpour, Mehdi Marandi.

“My job is to support young players for the future of Iranian volleyball. It was entirely my choice which players would be invited to the national team camp. They all have high zeal and great potential. Efforts and performance in training will be the only criteria for who makes the A team. Team discipline is the first priority for me,” Kolakovic said.

“We will play two friendly matches with Serbia volleyball team. We have our own special dreams. I can assure you that we will play beautiful games and Team Melli do their best to win every match but it doesn’t mean we can beat all the teams,” the Montenegrin added. The 2018 FIVB Volleyball Nations League and the 2018 FIVB Volleyball Men’s World Championship in Italy and Bulgaria are the two most important competitions in the upcoming season for Iran.

The Asian Games also on the team’s 2018 calendar. The team currently sit in 8th place of FIVB’s senior rankings, ahead of much more experienced teams such as France and Serbia.



Hat-trick hero targeting a place in the final

Mame Thiam has insisted that Esteghlal are aiming for a spot in the 2018 AFC Champions League final after the striker’s treble in the 3-1 Round of 16 second leg win over fellow Iranian side Zobahan on Tuesday saw them advance to the quarter-finals 3-2 on aggregate. The Tehran side conceded in added time in last week’s first leg as a 1-0 defeat in Isfahan left them with plenty to do at Azadi Stadium, where more than 75,000 fans generated a fantastic atmosphere at the Islamic Republic of Iran’s national stadium.

Thiam put the hosts in front from the spot shortly after the 10-minute mark to level the tie on aggregate, before the Senagalese forward’s stunning left-foot effort from distance put them 2-0 on the night four minutes before the interval.

Eighteen minutes into the second half Thiam slotted home after being teed up by Server Djeparov to send the crowd into raptures, but there was stunned silence almost



immediately after when Ghasem Haddadifar pulled one back to ensure a nervy finish.

One more goal from Zobahan would have seen the 2010 runners-up progress and Robin Ataya so nearly grabbed it with

almost the last kick of the game, but the unmarked substitute fired over at the back post as Esteghlal held out.

“This is a very good win because we know that we are better than our opponent, so

we are very happy to achieve this victory,” said Thiam.

“We know we are a good team and now we have to give our maximum to get to the final.”

Thiam’s treble means the striker is now on seven goals for the campaign, after joining Esteghlal in February. He is just two behind the tournament’s joint top scorers Baghdad Bounedjah of Al Sadd and Youssef El Arabi of Al Duhail, with both sides also still in the competition.

It was the fifth time the Tehran side had appeared in the Round of 16, yet they had progressed just once beyond, back in 2013 when they went on to reach the semi-finals.

Tuesday’s win carried extra significance in what was an emotional day for the club. Part of their starting line-up in 2013 was former Aston Villa and Bolton Wanderers defender Jilloyd Samuel, who died earlier on Tuesday after being involved in a car crash in England. (Source: the-AFC)

Two Sherpas break Everest summit records



Two Nepali Sherpas broke their own world records for the most Everest summits by a man and a woman Wednesday, reaching the world’s highest peak for a 22nd and ninth time respectively.

Kami Rita Sherpa, a professional guide, and Lhakpa Sherpa, who works in a supermarket in Connecticut, reached the summit from opposite sides of the 8,848 meter (29,030 feet) mountain.

Kami Rita, 48, was one of six sherpas who took seven clients to the summit from the Nepali side, Mingma Sherpa of Seven Summit Treks, who organized the expedition, told AFP. A guide for more than two decades, he broke the previous record of 21 summits that he shared with two other Sherpas.

Kami Rita first reached the top of Everest in 1994 when working for a commercial expedition. “I did not start climbing to set a world record,” he told AFP last month before setting out for the mountain. “It wasn’t for any competition.” (Source: AFP)

Lhakpa Sherpa, 44, reached the peak for a ninth time via the northern, Tibetan route, her brother Mingma Gelu Sherpa said.

The US-based Lhakpa has repeatedly broken her own record for the most Everest summits by a woman. The next most accomplished female Everest climber is American Melissa Sue Arnot, who has reached the top six times.

The daughter of a yak herder, Lhakpa worked as a porter and kitchen hand on trekking and mountaineering expeditions, before becoming a climber herself.

She moved to the United States 16 years ago and says she plans to continue climbing, while keeping her job in the supermarket.

“I keep going to encourage other Nepali women to climb,” the 44-year-old told AFP last month. The twin records come on the heels of Australian Steve Plain becoming the fastest person to summit the highest mountains on all seven continents. (Source: AFP)

World Cup-bound referee Al Mirdasi banned for life



The Saudi Arabian Football Federation (SAFF) has asked FIFA to remove referee Fahad Al Mirdasi from the upcoming World Cup in Russia after he received a lifetime ban from the SAFF for offering to accept a bribe to influence the outcome of a match.

World Cup-bound official Al Mirdasi, 32, was hit with a life-long suspension by the SAFF having confessed to offering to fix Saturday’s King’s Cup final between Al-Ittihad and Al-Faisaly in Saudi Arabia.

Denied from participating in any football-related activity for life, the SAFF has also called on FIFA to withdraw Al Mirdasi from next month’s World Cup, while approving his life ban on an international level.

“Following the appointment of the referee, Fahad Al Mirdasi, to manage the match between Al-Ittihad and Al-Faisaly in the Cup final, Mr. Hamad Al-Saniaa, the president of Al-Ittihad club, addressed the Saudi football federation,” a statement from SAFF read. “He confirmed that he

had evidence which highlights Al Mirdasi offering help for money.” After the president of Ittihad club presented what was in his possession to the Federation of Football, the Saudi Federation sent this conversation to the Chairman of the General Directorate of Sport, who in turn informed the competent authorities in all details.

“Al Mirdasi was in custody and had been presented then to the administrative investigation. Following the investigations, the Saudi Federation received the report of the competent authorities, which proved the charge against the referee under his personal confession of the request for bribery.”

Al Mirdasi was among the referees for last year’s Confederations Cup in Russia, where he oversaw the third-place match between Mexico and Portugal, having also officiated at the 2016 Olympic Games.

It is now up to FIFA to determine what action should be taken on the global level. (Source: Goal)

Mame Thiam leads Esteghlal into quarter-finals

A Mame Thiam hat-trick earned Esteghlal the final West Asia AFC Champions League quarter-final ticket as they defeated fellow Islamic Republic of Iran side Zobahan 3-1 in Tuesday’s second leg, securing a 3-2 aggregate win.

After a tense start, Esteghlal were awarded a penalty kick inside 11 minutes and Senegalese forward Thiam fired from the spot into the bottom left corner, taking the tie back to square one.

Hamid Bouhamdan came close to levelling the score for Zobahan in the 29th minute but his shot from the left cannoned off the woodwork.

As the first half neared its end, Thiam was on target again, this time from outside the box as he curled a left-footed effort that left goalkeeper Mohammad Rashid Mazaheri helpless to put Esteghlal in front four minutes before the break.

Thiam had more in store for Zobahan’s defenders as he took his tally in the competition to seven goals, completing his hat-trick in the 64th minute. The striker, who joined Esteghlal in February, received Server Djeparov’s pulled back pass and applied a composed finish from inside the box.

Zobahan captain Ghasem Haddadifar restored some hope for the visitors one minute later with a thunderous drive from outside the box that tricked Esteghlal goalkeeper Mehdi Rahmati. The Tehran based side held tight for the rest of the match to earn a victory on the night and joined their city rivals Persepolis in the quarter-finals.

The two Iranian sides are joined by Qatari duo Al Sadd and Al Duhail in the West Asian quarter-finals which will take place in August and September. (Source: the-AFC)



Dejagah to leave Nottingham Forest this summer



S P O R T S d e s k **TEHRAN** — Iranian international midfielder Ashkan Dejagah will leave championships side Nottingham Forest.

Forest finished the season in 17th place with 53 points, two points better off than a year ago.

At the top, Wolves secured promotion and an impressive 99 points, followed by Cardiff, with Fulham, Aston Villa, Middlesbrough and Derby settling for places in the play-offs.

Dejagah, who is out of contract this summer, signed a short-term deal until the end of the season when he joined as a free agent during the January window.

Nottingham Forest have published their retained list following the end of the 2017/18 campaign – and officially confirmed that Chris Cohen, David Vaughan, Jack Hobbs and Ashkan Dejagah will not be offered new deals.

Alireza Mansourian linked with Zob Ahan

PLDC — Former Esteghlal coach Alireza Mansourian has been linked with Zob Ahan hot seat.

Mansourian stepped down as Esteghlal coach in last year’s September following poor results with the Iranian giant.

Mansourian now is a candidate to replace Amir Ghalenoei in Isfahan-based football team.

Under coaching of Ghalenoei, Zob Ahan finished runner-up in the Iran Professional League and advanced to the AFC Champions League Round of 16.

On Tuesday, Zob Ahan failed to book a place in AFC Champions League quarter-final after losing to Esteghlal 3-2 on aggregate.

Iranian media reports suggest that Ghalenoei bade farewell to his players in the locker room.

Ghalenoei will reportedly take charge of Sepahan.

Charleroi eye Iran’s Omid Noorafkan: Report

TASNIM — Royal Charleroi Sporting Club (RCSC) have reportedly interested in signing Iranian prodigy Omid Noorafkan.

The 21-year-old midfielder said goodbye to Esteghlal fans Tuesday night after 3-1 win over Zob Ahan in the AFC Champions League Round of 16.

Noorafkan started his career with Esteghlal in 2015 and at the time became the youngest ever player to play a game for the club at the age of 18 years and eight months and 12 days.

Noorafkan is an Iranian international, having represented his nation at under-17 and under-20 level. He made his senior international debut in March 2018, aged 20, in a friendly match against Sierra Leone.

Noorafkan will reunite his countryman Kaveh Rezaei in the Belgium top-flight club.

Esteghlal’s Khosro Heydari dedicates victory to Jilloyd Samuel

PLDC — Esteghlal defender Khosro Heydari has dedicated victory over Zob Ahan to his former teammate Jilloyd Samuel, who died earlier on Tuesday after being involved in a car crash in England. Jilloyd Samuel played for Iranian football team Esteghlal for three years and helped the Blues win title in Iran’s Hazfi Cup in 2012 and Iranian league in 2013.

Esteghlal defeated fellow Zob Ahan 3-1 Tuesday night and advanced to the 2018 AFC Champions League quarter-final.

“Thanks God for the win in a difficult match. We dedicate this win to our fans. This victory also is for Jilloyd Samuel, our friend who was in a car crash,” Heydari posted on his Instagram account.

Ralph Hasenhuttl leaves RB Leipzig by mutual consent

RB Leipzig and coach Ralph Hasenhuttl have parted ways after failing to agree on a contract extension beyond 2019.

The 50-year-old leaves the Bundesliga side after finishing sixth in the club’s second season in Germany’s top tier. On Wednesday, Leipzig and Hasenhuttl signed a mutually agreed contract termination, the Bundesliga club announced.

“I would have liked to go into the new season with Ralph Hasenhuttl as our head coach,” RB sporting director Ralf Rangnick said in a statement on the club’s official website. “And I informed him of this wish in personal talks. But contrary to the winter, I had come to the conclusion that one year for now would have been enough.

“But there was no alternative to a contract extension for Ralph. And that’s why he expressed the wish to terminate the contract. Reluctantly, we accepted this wish.”

Leipzig CEO Olaf Mintzlaff thanked Hasenhuttl for his services but added that “a contract extension at this time would not have been the right step for this club.” (Source: ESPN)

Football fans in Tehran to enjoy 2018 FIFA World Cup games live on silver screen

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Several movie theaters across Tehran are planning to screen the 2018 FIFA World Cup games live for football fans, a spokesman for the Screening Council has said.

“Those theaters that are willing to screen the games need to apply to the council,” Gholamreza Faraji noted.

“We believe the plan will increase the number of filmgoers, while helping to prevent a drop in box office receipts during this major event,” he added.

“The theater owners are also requested to seek the approval of the producers of the onscreen movies to avoid any decline in their box-office receipts,” he remarked.

The council will decide on ticket prices at its next meeting.

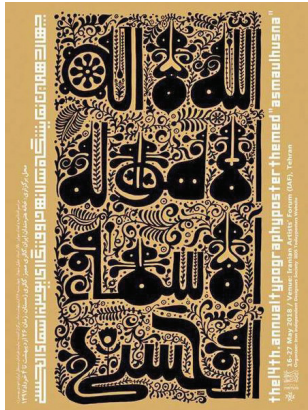
Team Melli, Iran’s national football team, under the guidance of Carlos Queiroz, has drawn a place in Group B of the 2018 World Cup along with Spain, Morocco and Portugal. The Iran national football team will open the campaign with a match against Morocco at Saint Petersburg on June 15.



This file photo shows Iranian football fans watching a live broadcast of a match from the 2013–14 UEFA Europa League at Tehran’s Milad Tower. (Tabnak/Ali Alizadeh)

Asma-ul-Husna exhibition opens at Iranian Artists Forum

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – The 14th Asma-ul-Husna Annual Poster Exhibition that displays



A poster for Asma-ul-Husna exhibition.

typographical works featuring the names of Allah opened at the Iranian Artists Forum (IAF) in Tehran on Wednesday.

44 works selected from over 1000 submissions have been put on view at the IAF galleries of Momayyez and Zemestan, the IAF announced on Wednesday.

A group composed of the veteran artists Masud Nejabati, Mohammad Khazai, Nasser Tavusi, Mohammadreza Doostmohammadi and Alireza Hesarakhi selected the works for the exhibit, which will run until May 27.

NEWS IN BRIEF



New secretary appointed to Fajr Intl. Theater Festival

CULTURE d e s k **TEHRAN** — The director of Iran’s Dramatic Arts Center, Shahram Karami, has appointed stage director Nader Borhani Marand as secretary of the 37th Fajr International Theater Festival.

Borhani Marand replaces Farhad Mohandespur who took the position in June 2017.

The Fajr International Theater Festival usually runs in Tehran in January.

New “Solo” charms critics after “Star Wars” filmmaking drama

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) — Movie critics welcomed a new Han Solo into the “Star Wars” galaxy, giving generally positive marks to Walt Disney Co’s origin story for one of the sci-fi franchise’s most popular characters.



Director of the movie Ron Howard poses for a portrait while promoting the movie “Solo: A Star Wars Story” in Pasadena, California, U.S., May 12, 2018. (Reuters/Mario Anzuoni)

“Solo: A Star Wars Story” received a 71 percent positive score on film website Rotten Tomatoes on Tuesday, the day the first reviews were released. The movie starts rolling out in international theaters on May 23.

The film endured a rocky path to the screen. Original co-directors Phil Lord and Chris Miller were fired midway through production, and Disney asked Oscar-winning “A Beautiful Mind” director Ron Howard to come in to oversee extensive reshoots.

Critics who liked the movie said Howard had succeeded in making a fun film that should satisfy the franchise’s fervent fans.

“While ‘Solo’ hasn’t completely overcome the long odds, those harboring a love of the franchise should come away, ultimately, with a good feeling about this,” wrote Brian Lowry of CNN.com.

Alden Ehrenreich, 28, stepped into the role of Solo, made famous by Harrison Ford in the original “Star Wars” trilogy that began in 1977. Ehrenreich plays a younger Solo at the start of his pilot training when he becomes involved in a dangerous mission.

Ehrenreich won praise from many critics for making the role his own without imitating Ford.

“Things do feel shaky at first, but there’s spunk to Ehrenreich’s delivery and, once he settles in, a twinkle in his eye,” said Bob Mondello of National Public Radio.

Brian Truitt of USA Today said Ehrenreich “does the character justice, mainly because he’s a different Han than previously seen.”

“This guy’s all wide-eyed gumption and smirking confidence - not the cynic who gets a crash course in the Force later in life,” Truitt said.

Other critics felt Ehrenreich did not meet the high expectations for the part.

Tehran theatergoers welcome monolog “Hedgehog”



Bahram Afshari acts in “The Hedgehog” at the Samandarian Hall of the Iranshahr Theater Complex in Tehran. (Tiwall/Zia Safavian)

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – “The Hedgehog” has scored a stunning success at the box office by selling over 2000 tickets in the week following its premiere at the Samandarian Hall of the Iranshahr Theater Complex in Tehran, the Persian service of ILNA reported on Wednesday.

The monolog, which is directed and performed by Bahram Afshari, is about a young man who leaves his hometown to pursue his dream of becoming an

actor in Tehran.

Critics link the success with his strong performance in “Paytakht 5”, the popular Iranian TV series that was broadcast on IRIB’s Channel 3 during the Noruz holidays in March.

Mohammad Qods is the producer of the play, which was also written by Afshar.

“The Hedgehog” is scheduled to embark on a tour of Europe during June.

“Bonfire of the Vanities” author Tom Wolfe dead at 88

WASHINGTON (Reuters) — Tom Wolfe, an early practitioner of “new journalism” who captured the mood and culture of America across five decades with books including “The Bonfire of the Vanities”, “The Right Stuff”, and “The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test”, has died at the age of 88, his agent said.

Wolfe, who had a knack for coining phrases such as “radical chic” and “the me decade,” died on Monday of an unspecified infection in a New York City hospital, his agent, Lynn Nesbit, said in a phone interview on Tuesday.

Wolfe’s works - fiction and non-fiction alike - looked at realms ranging from the art world to Wall Street to 1960s hippie culture and touched on the issues of class, power, race, and corruption.

“I think every living moment of a human being’s life, unless the person is starving or in immediate danger of death in some other way, is controlled by a concern for status,” Wolfe said in a Wall Street Journal interview.

Wolfe came up with “radical chic” to brand pretentious liberals, the “me decade” to sum up the self-indulgence of the 1970s and the “right stuff” to quantify intangible characteristics of the first U.S. astronauts and their test pilot predecessors.

He was never deterred by the fact that he often did not fit in with his research subjects, partly because he was such a sartorial dandy, known for his white suits.

Wolfe was in his mid-70s while hanging out with college kids and working on the novel “I Am Charlotte Simmons,” and was a fairly conservative drug-free observer in a coat and tie while traveling with Ken Kesey and his LSD-dropping hippie tribe known as The Merry Pranksters for “The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test” in the ‘60s. By looking so out of place, he figured people would be more prone to explain things to him.

Wolfe started his writing career at the Springfield, Massachusetts, Union newspaper and also worked for the Washington Post, New York Herald-Tribune and New York magazine.



Author Tom Wolfe stands with U.S. President George W. Bush while receiving the National Humanities Medal in Washington, U.S., April 22, 2002. (Reuters/Larry Downing)

He was present at the birth of what was known as “new journalism,” a loose style that featured lots of dialogue and detail and allowed reporters to narrate and develop characters in a way more often associated with fiction.

One of the genre’s defining moments came when Wolfe was having trouble meeting a deadline for a 1964 magazine story on the hot-rod car culture. In frustration, he sent his editor a letter with his thoughts and reportage. The magazine ran it verbatim as “There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby.”

That led to a compilation of Wolfe’s magazine pieces, followed by “The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test,” which captured the spirit of the psychedelic era during his time with Kesey, author of “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” and his band of pranksters who helped spread the popularity of LSD in California. Written in a wild free-association style that disregarded rules of punctuation, it was filled with sentence fragments and used words like “skakkkkkkkkkkkkkk” and “wowwwwwwww.”

Former IRIB anchor Qasem Afshar dies at 67



Former IRIB anchor Qasem Afshar in an undated photo

A R T d e s k **TEHRAN** – Former TV anchor Qasem Afshar who worked at the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting for three decades died of heart failure at his home in Tehran on Wednesday. He was 67, Persian news media announced.

He began his career in the early 1980s and soon turned out to be one of the major announcers of TV and radio news programs at the time when news coverage of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war was the main part of IRIB’s news programs.

He retired in 2009, and contrary to many

of his colleagues’ decisions to continue working after retirement, he never pursued his career afterwards.

He was the manager of the Bent ol-Hoda Charity Organization that he founded after the death of his little daughter.

In a letter published several hours after his death, IRIB Managing Director Abdolali Ali-Asgari offered condolences to his family and IRIB staff.

“His face and voice evoke nostalgia among the Iranian people for the numerous memorable days of the past,” he wrote.

Stomach-turning slasher marks Von Trier’s uncompromising Cannes comeback

CANNES, France (Reuters) — Lars Von Trier received a standing ovation when he arrived at the Cannes Film Festival, seven years after being thrown out for quipping that he was a nazi who sympathized with Hitler.

But if anyone was expecting the Danish provocateur to rein in his impulse to offend, he soon put them right with “The House That Jack Built”, an extremely dark comedy about a serial killer who uses mutilated corpses to create art.

Matt Dillon plays Jack who fills his walk-in freezer with dioramas of human flesh, with Uma Thurman his first victim, giving him a taste for murder and torture.

Throughout the film, a voiceover is played of a meandering conversation between Jack and the mysterious Verge, a wise and kind-sounding old man (Bruno Ganz) who is leading him down a long path to what we rightly imagine is Hell.

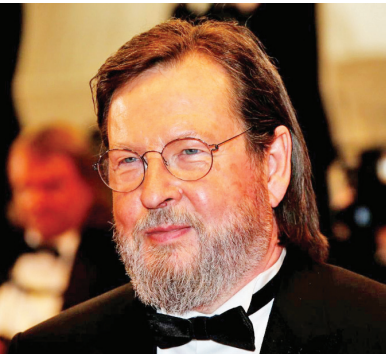
Rather than steering clear of Hitler, Von Trier includes clips of the German dictator as well as newsreel footage of his worst crime: decaying corpses piled up in a concentration camp, as Jack muses on the “noble rot” fungus.

Speaking to Reuters the day after the premiere, Von Trier said the point he had been trying to make in the fateful news conference in 2011, was that the world remained fascinated by Hitler, proving “there’s some magic in real terror”.

Of the film’s intense cruelty, particularly to women, he said: “Yes, but the whole thing is kind of ironical”. Asked if that was not just an excuse, the 62-year-old replied: “Yes, it is just an excuse, but I’m old enough now for excuses.”

As the viewer has to assume that there is some of Jack in Von Trier, obsessed with creating art that many would find disturbing, does he consider he might himself be a psychopath?

“After reading a lot about psychopaths, I think not,” he said. “But also,



Director Lars von Trier arrives in the screening of the film “The House That Jack Built” out of competition at the 71st Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France May 14, 2018. (Reuters/Jean-Paul Pelissier)

psychopaths would say the same: Certainly not!”

For Dillon, some of the murders were: “the toughest days I have ever had doing movies”.

“I almost didn’t do the film because of that,” he said.

“It wasn’t so much the graphic nature of it. For me, the most troubling thing about it was the humiliation, the cruelty, but ... with Lars you have to take the good with the bad.”

“He goes to very dark places in the films, obviously, and I don’t think you could get much darker than what he has done here, although Hell has trap doors, as we see in this film,” Dillon said, referring to a spectacular final sequence.

IndieWire called “The House That Jack Built”: “an often-horrifying, sadistic dive into a psychotic internal monologue (... that is) also possibly brilliant”, while The Guardian dismissed it as “a smirking ordeal of gruesomeness”.

The Cannes Film Festival runs from May 8 to May 19.